

## County Council - 19 March 2021

### Item 13(e) - Notice of Motion from Cllr M Jones on Romance Fraud

#### Amendment from Cllr Crow

This Council recognises that romance fraud has been a growing problem since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, with many people experiencing loneliness potentially being targeted.

Romance fraud is the engineering of a supposed friendship or relationship for fraudulent, financial gain. Criminals invest significant amounts of time into socially engineering their victims – knowing that as they gain the victim's trust, their chances of extracting considerable funds from them simultaneously increase.

This Council notes that Sussex Police indicated in October 2020 that nearly £3m had been lost by victims of romance fraud in 128 incidents, with a total of 195 reports of romance fraud being received from January to September 2020. It is concerned to note that this was a 56% rise on the previous year from the same period and that there are estimates that this could be only a fraction of the true extent of the crime, with many victims either too embarrassed to report it, or simply unaware that they have been deceived. Moreover, in 2020 the Times newspaper described Sussex as "the nation's dating fraud capital".

This Council welcomes the work undertaken so far by the Council's Community Safety Team **and the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner** to promote awareness and educate on the risks of romance fraud to residents of West Sussex, but calls on the Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities to continue to commit to supporting the Get Safe Online initiative as well as putting ~~stronger~~ stronger energy, capacity and resource into efforts to support the Sussex Police campaign to provide a seamless solution, through continuing to reach potentially vulnerable residents via virtual means while restrictions on movement remain in place during 2021.