

DRUGS SURGE STRIKES FEAR INTO ELDERLY



Elderly residents in the Ballybricken/'Top of the Town' area of Waterford city are living in fear following an unprecedented series of drug-related incidents on four different streets, The Munster Express has learned.

According to a source working in the area, at least four specified properties (the exact locations of which cannot be detailed for potential legal and data protection reasons), have, over the past two years, become synonymous with alleged drug dealing and a range of other anti-social problems.

Both Waterford Gardaí and the City & County Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit are aware of the ongoing problems at these addresses, which have become a source of significant local unease.

"The level of drug dealing has just exploded, and it's causing a great deal of upset for residents - you're talking about a lot of people who are now retired and have lived in the area since their childhoods," the source added.

The Garda Drugs Squad are monitoring the activities of individuals associated with these addresses for a sustained period, in a bid to crack down on the alleged drug dealing, in addition to late night partying and the intimidation and physical threatening of several neighbours.

The Gardaí are also aware of a late-night fight involving the extended family of one such occupant, and have visited that property on at least three separate occasions. "Some people living near these particular houses are almost at the end of their tether," said the source, "and they're left wondering where this is all going to lead to". In a separate incident, another resident in the area who has been described as "problematic", has left his privately-owned house uninhabitable due to his burning wooden pallets inside the property for several months.

According to our source: "Some of the staff in Power's Pharmacy have gotten a hard time off him when they've been going home after work...there was no door on the house at one stage and there have been tea towels hanging up there ought to be windows. "But the house is unusable now, which is obviously unwelcome when you consider all of the people who'd gladly live there - or in any house in the city for that matter. It's worth pointing out that there is, in all likelihood, at least one significant issue at play when it comes to this particular individual and that has to be acknowledged. But at the same time, the unease that this sort of behaviour has caused for local residents is also entirely understandable on their behalves."

Gardaí are also familiar with this individual, while Waterford City & County Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit have also been liaising with the force and relatives of the occupant on this particular matter.

It's also understood that several of the suspected dealers (and customers) in question have moved into Waterford from other parts of Munster and Leinster, with some knowing each other's acquaintances from those previous residences. Those living in privately-owned residences are believed to be recipients of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and moves to withdraw this benefit have been put to the local authority through various representations in recent weeks.

Meanwhile, those living in Council-owned properties have also "had more pressure put on them" as part of its own ongoing investigation into these worrying developments, with landlords also being asked to take Council-backed action. "One of these individuals, who is in his mid-20s, relapsed pretty hard in the last while," the source stated. "He eventually had to leave Waterford as he and his friends were having parties to such an extent that the front door of the house he was living in ended up with the imprint of an axe embedded in it, with chunks taken out of the door. The two windows at the front of the house are also boarded up now and one of them was smashed in. Well, to the best of my knowledge, that guy has now done a runner back home to Limerick and the landlord is threatening to follow him up for criminal damage."

According to the source: "Elderly women have been threatened on the streets by some of these people. In other instances where people have been threatened, many of them are living on their own and they're terrified that things would remain as they have been over the past two years, or that it might get even worse - and all of this has been fuelled by the (alleged) sale

of drugs, including cocaine, at a few different houses across the top of the town." While at least one arrest in relation to publicly witnessed dealing was made over the past 12 months, drug dealing of this kind appears to have simply shifted location due to sustained Garda monitoring.

"There's now a huge level of concern among residents in the area," said the source. "You're talking about people in their 60s and 70s who are now scared out of their wits of people much younger than them who've been introduced into their neighbourhoods and brought all of their problems with them. The problems we are talking about are not traditionally associated with this part of the city, and hopefully the moves which the Council are taking, in addition with the best efforts of the Guards, will allay the fears that many local residents have made known to various agencies over the past 18 or so months."