



GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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Shocking number of charges in rape cases

Only one in five are sent to court

BY EMMA TILLEY

DAMNING police figures have revealed only around one in five reported rapes result in a person being charged.

There were 132 reports of rape in Gloucestershire between September 1 last year and August 31 this year. But just 25 resulted in an offender being charged.

Last night Cheltenham Mayor Barbara Driver branded the figures, which came to light under a Freedom of Information request made by the *Echo*, as "dreadful". She said: "I find it terribly disappointing."

She suggested businesses

could be encouraged to provide more CCTV in the town centre, particularly in alleyways.

"It is very bad and the figures are dreadful," she said. "There are no ifs and buts about it, everyone needs to talk openly about this problem and find a way of getting these charges."

Of the 132 reports of rape, 107 remain unsolved. And it seems the situation has not improved. Last year, during the same period, there were 176 reported rapes. Of these 26 resulted in a charge.

Landlady of St Paul's Tavern Nichola Morrison was horrified when a friend was

sexually attacked outside her pub a few months ago.

She believes that if she had not been available to let the woman inside the pub, the assault would have been a lot more serious.

The landlady said the police came to the scene within 15 minutes, but still no-one has been caught for the terrifying incident.

She said: "The problem is evidence. I was tempted to have more CCTV cameras put up outside the pub. I know it is a bit 'Big Brother', but it gives me so much more peace of mind."

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Since the attack Nichola has either paid for a taxi to get her bar staff home or walked them home herself with her two dogs in tow. She said: "Everyone needs to be a bit more careful at night. The first rule is don't walk home on your own."

Detective Superintendent Simon Atkinson said there were challenges when investigating sexual assaults. He said the majority of cases involve people who knew each other, and, without forensic evidence or signs of physical abuse, it could be one person's word against another.

He said often victims decided not to pursue a complaint. When the alleged incident was some time ago, forensic opportunities were limited, he added.

The police, he said, took any allegation of rape seriously and investigated vigorously with the help of "one of the best sexual assault referral centres in the country".

He said: "I don't want any of that to discourage victims coming forward. My message to victims of sexual assault in Gloucestershire is that I hope you are encouraged to come forward and if you do report something to us we will thoroughly investigate it and provide the support you need."

Councillor Klara Sudbury, cabinet member for housing and safety, said the borough council was working with police on making best use of CCTV in Cheltenham.

She said of the figures: "These numbers are really worrying and the fact that there are so few charges being brought is alarming. But I imagine that behind that there are a lot of issues such as lack of evidence or false accusations. But if an accusation is true, we would want convictions as a result."

Chairman of Gloucestershire Police Authority Rob Garnham said: "We do charge people with rape, but we are very careful with how we do that," he said.

"It would appear the rate of detection is low but the important thing is to make sure we have a strong enough case to convict.

"It is something that we are always working on and these figures have not come out of the blue."