### REQUEST

# 1. How many reports of 'romance fraud\*' has your police department received in the last year?

We have interpreted "last year "as Jan 2021 to Dec 2021.

359 - these data have been supplied to us by Action Fraud

# 2. How much money did the victims of romance fraud lose as a result of the scams?

£3.1 Million - these data have been supplied to us by Action Fraud

### \*Romance fraud is when a person is tricked into an online relationship where the other party is just trying to extort money fraudulently.

\* Our Corporate communications team recently released the following information. Please note the data provided in this news release is different to what we have released to you as this covers slightly different time scales.

#### Beware of online dating scammers

We're urging online daters to be aware of scammers after West Midlands loveseekers were conned of at least £2.8 million in just 12 months.

Family members are also being asked to play a part and help protect relatives from romance fraud - particularly in the lead up to Valentine's Day.

There were 347 reported victims in our region between November 2020 and October 2021 as people were duped by online trickers using fake profiles and stories. This covered a range of ages with the most common targets being between 20 and 29 where there were 74 victims. There were also 68 between the ages of 40 to 49. Romance fraudsters will typically spend weeks building up trust and an emotional attachment with their target.

These manipulative criminals will then use a range of often believable stories to get victims to transfer them money without raising suspicion.

This includes funds to visit their 'love interest', money to pay for emergency medical expenses and pretending to be military personnel or working overseas. We're supporting a national two week-long campaign from today (10 Jan) to help online daters and their families spot the signs of romance fraud - led by City of London Police who are the UK lead force for fraud.

Anyone speaking to somebody they don't know, or haven't known for a long period of time, is urged to follow the Take Five To Stop Fraud advice. This includes: \*Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe.

\*Could it be fake? It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.

Family and friends can also play an active role to help protect people they know are online dating.

\*Ensure they have adequate privacy settings on their social media accounts to ensure strangers don't have access to their personal information.

\*Stay in regular contact with your friends and family who are online dating to help spot any changes in behaviour or things that don't seem right.

\*Make friends and family aware of the signs of romance fraud so that they are conscious of the tactics criminals use to carry out these scams. Reiterate that you should never transfer money to someone that you have never met in person.

\*Encourage people to report to Action Fraud and the police if they have become a victim of romance fraud and not to be embarrassed about doing so.

Khatija Nichols, from our Economic Crime Unit, said: "While most online daters are genuine, there are unfortunately fraudsters who look to exploit the search for love for financial gain.

"These criminals are manipulative and are prepared to prey on people's emotions. It's important to stop and think and not be seduced by a profile.

"We'd encourage daters to keep in contact with trusted family and friends and update them. They can watch for any change in behaviour while also flagging any warning signs.

"Other advice includes staying on a dating platform which has processes in place to protect users and spend time getting to know the person. Never disclose personal information until ready and never send money to someone you've only been in contact with online."

If you think you've been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud. You can do this online at actionfraud.police.uk or by calling 0300 123 2040.