

Sinn Féin admits police spokesman removed wheel clamp on his car

Assembly member allegedly caught on CCTV using bolt cutters before driving away

Henry McDonald

A Sinn Féin member of the Northern Ireland assembly and former member of Northern Ireland's policing board has been reported to the police for allegedly removing a wheel clamp from his car.

Gerry Kelly, an ex-IRA bomber who is now Sinn Féin's policing spokesman, was filmed by CCTV in Belfast on Friday using a bolt cutter to apparently cut off the device.

A Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) spokesperson confirmed yesterday that it had "received a report of criminal damage" in relation to an incident in the Exchange Street area of central Belfast on Friday afternoon.

The PSNI spokesperson added: "It is believed that damage was caused to the wheel clamp of a car."

Sinn Féin said the incident, close to the Belfast Mac arts centre, is now being dealt with by Kelly's solicitor.

A party spokesman said: "Gerry Kelly MLA returned to his car after an early morning gym session to find that his car had been made immobile by a clamp just after 7.20am.

"He removed the clamp from the front wheel. He left the device nearby and drove off to prearranged meetings ... His solicitor is dealing with

the matter and he will be making no further comment at this time."

The North Belfast Sinn Féin assembly member was once a member of the policing board that holds the PSNI to account.

The Ulster Unionist assembly member Roy Beggs said the incident took place in a no-parking area. Beggs said: "Is Gerry special, above the rules that apply to you and me?"

Kelly, one of Sinn Féin's two MLAs for North Belfast, is deputy chief whip and formerly held the position of junior minister at Stormont.

During the Troubles the veteran republican was convicted for his part in the IRA bombing of the Old Bailey in 1973. Ten years later he took part in a mass escape from the Maze paramilitary prison.

The wheel clamp incident comes as Sinn Féin seeks to deal with an embarrassing row south of the border between a Dublin member of parliament (TD) and a city councillor.

Sinn Féin confirmed at the weekend that their party councillor, Noeleen Reilly, had been suspended and the Dublin North-West TD, Dessie Ellis, had been "censured" over an internal row in the constituency.

The party said the action was taken after Reilly made comments about Ellis to the Dublin media.

Ellis has now apologised for comments he also made against Reilly to the press.

The row comes just a week before Mary Lou McDonald replaces Gerry Adams as party president.



▲ Gerry Kelly by his car, with bolt cutters lying on the ground PHOTOGRAPH: BBC

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