

Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service  
Medway Council & Gravesham Borough Council

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# Counter Fraud Satisfaction Survey 2023

Medway Council



## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service was established on 1 March 2016 to provide internal audit assurance and consultancy, proactive counter fraud and reactive investigation services to Medway Council & Gravesham Borough Council.
- 1.2 As part of our commitment to continually improve the Service, surveys are undertaken to gauge the level of satisfaction from client services. The previous survey combined internal audit & counter fraud and was sent to a limited distribution but as the officers no longer work in multi-disciplinary roles, it was felt appropriate to undertake a survey solely on counter fraud services, which was issued to all council employees and elected Members.

## 2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 The level of response to the survey was good with 88 responses received, although perhaps not as impressive as the 200 received in 2022. There was a good spread across all divisions of the council, including some from elected Members. The results however still indicate that there is further work to be done in certain areas of activity.
- 2.2 Of the 88 responses received, 61 (69%) were aware of the council's counter fraud and corruption strategy, which is an improvement on 2022, but only 20 (22.7%) had seen/read it. In addition, 27 (30.7%) provided a negative response when asked about their awareness of the counter fraud team and the services available, and 73 (82.9%) indicated that they have not had any fraud awareness training in the last twelve months.
- 2.3 These results clearly demonstrate a need for the strategy to be promoted more as all staff should be aware of it, which in turn would help to raise awareness of the team and its services. There remains a clear desire across the organisation to have fraud awareness training, with 37 respondents providing their details of their team/service. While the counter fraud team have done a significant amount of work in relation to fraud awareness training, the pace at which services can be reached is slow due to the resources available and this is reflected in the results. The service is already working on a greater range of options for awareness training and is liaising with Workforce Development as part of the process.
- 2.4 The lack of awareness of the team seems to be a compounding issue, with large percentages of people seemingly unaware of all the areas where the fraud team may be able to investigate concerns, which may be a lack of knowledge outside their own area of work, and the fact that over 50% of respondents are still indicating that they do not know how to report their concerns. The fact that only nine respondents had reported concerns to the team in the last twelve months could indicate that opportunities to address things may be being missed, purely because people don't know how to report it.
- 2.5 The core principles adopted by the team were expressed as statements with respondents asked to indicate how much they agreed the team demonstrated compliance. The vast majority of respondents provided positive responses in relation to the statements, but there were still far higher numbers providing a negative response than in 2022. Based on some of the comments received, the lack of a neutral option meant that those who knew little or nothing about the service, were disagreeing purely because they didn't know rather than it being their true opinion.
- 2.6 Overall, the satisfaction with services available received a neutral score, with an average of 6.70 out of ten but the twelve who had received services from counter fraud within the twelve months gave an average score of 8.25 out of ten with positive feedback in 66% of responses and neutral scores in the remaining 34%.
- 2.7 Due to the significant difference in volume of responses, comparisons to the previous year's results may not be truly reflective of the work that has been undertaken in response to the previous survey, however, it is clear there is still work for the team to do in order to raise their profile and general awareness of fraud across the council.

### 3 Survey Results

3.1 The survey was designed to focus on six keys areas, which are listed below,

- Awareness of available services and the Counter Fraud team,
- Fraud Awareness,
- Counter Fraud activity
- Compliance with core principles/values, and
- Overall Satisfaction with the Counter Fraud team.

3.2 There were 88 responses on behalf of Medway, compared to 200 in 2022, and a breakdown of the respondent's roles and the area of the council they work in are shown in the tables below.

Role	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Chief Executive / Director / Assistant Director / Chief Officer / Service Manager	5	4
Other Manager / Supervisor / Team Leader	62	23
Other Council Employee	127	61
Elected Member	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>88</b>

Division	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Adults	24	6
Childrens	42	12
Communications	N/A	1
Culture & Communities	13	6
Education	8	7
Finance & Business Improvement	34	18
Front Line Services	25	8
HR	11	5
Legal & Governance	2	4
Public Health	14	6
Regeneration	21	12
N/A - Elected Member	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>88</b>

3.3 It should be noted that not all respondents have answered all questions, so the detailed results that follow are not all based upon 88 responses. Where the same questions were asked in the 2022 survey, those results have been included for comparison.

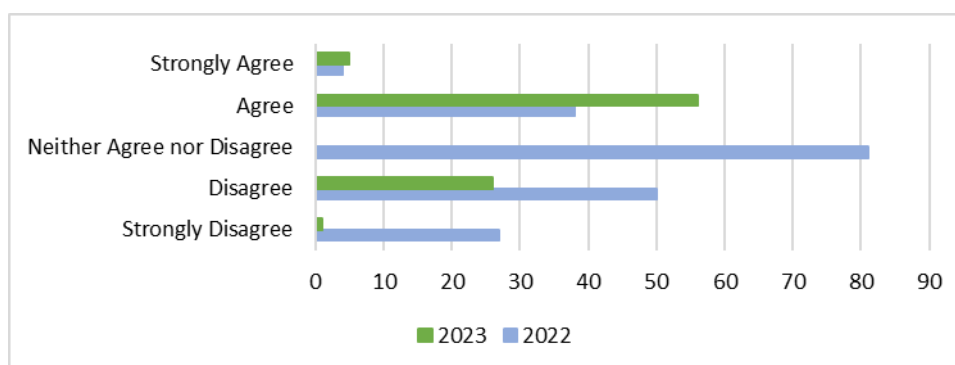
#### **Awareness of available services and the Counter Fraud team**

3.4 The work undertaken by the counter fraud team is underpinned by the council's counter fraud and corruption strategy. Respondents were asked the following,

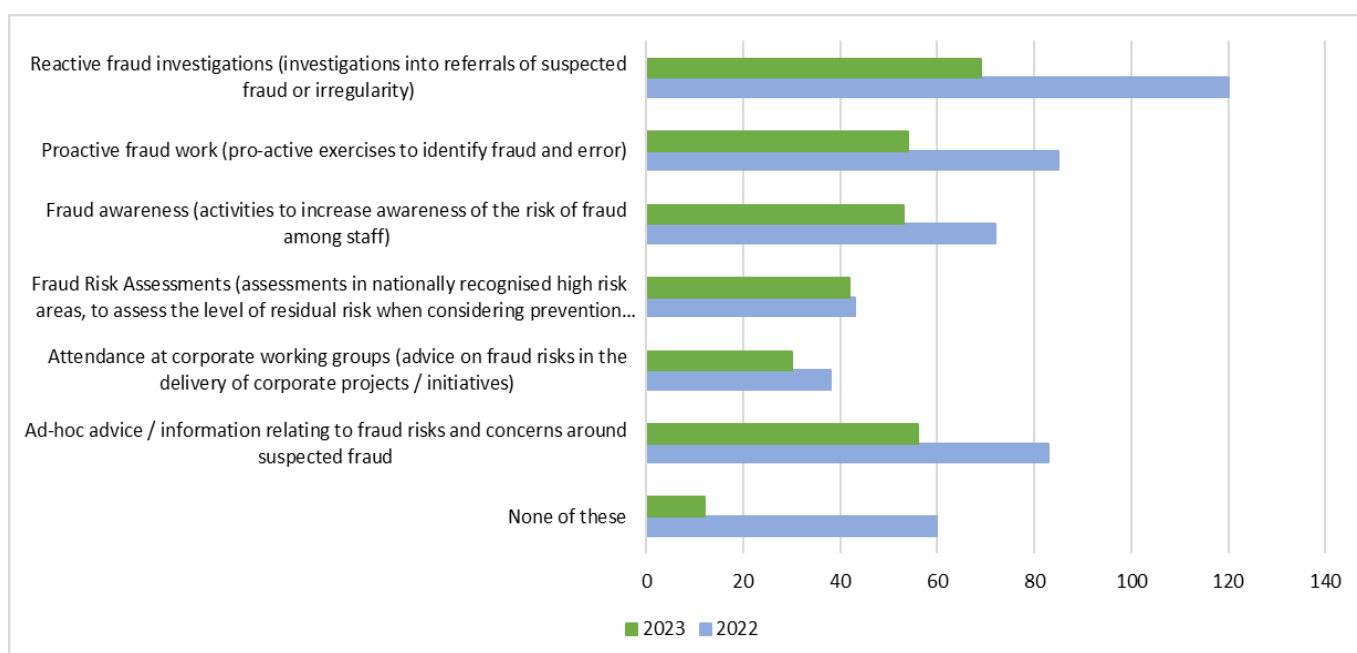
Question: Were you aware that the council has a Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy?	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	103	61
No	97	27

Question: Have you seen / read the Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy?	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	19	20
No	181	68

- 3.5 There was a significantly higher number of respondents in 2022, 51.5% of which were aware of the strategy but only 9.5% had seen/read it. There is a slight improvement in awareness of the strategy with 69.3% of respondents confirming they knew of it but only 22% having seen/read it. This suggests that more work is needed to make staff aware of the council's strategy and we will liaise with ICT to distribute it via Metacompliance.
- 3.6 Several questions were asked aimed at identifying whether respondents had a good understanding of the role of counter fraud and the services.
- 3.7 Respondents were asked: How much do you agree that you have a good understanding of the role of the Counter Fraud Team?
- 3.8 The results show that five (6%) strongly agreed and 56 (64%) agreed that they had a good understanding of the role of counter fraud. However, 26 (30%) disagreed and one (1%) strongly disagreed. This is in comparison to 2022 when four (2%) strongly agreed, 38 (19%) agreed, 81 (40.5%) provided a neutral response, 50 (25%) disagreed, and 27 (13.5%) strongly disagreed.



- 3.9 Respondents were provided with a list of services and were asked to indicate which of the services they were aware that counter fraud provided.

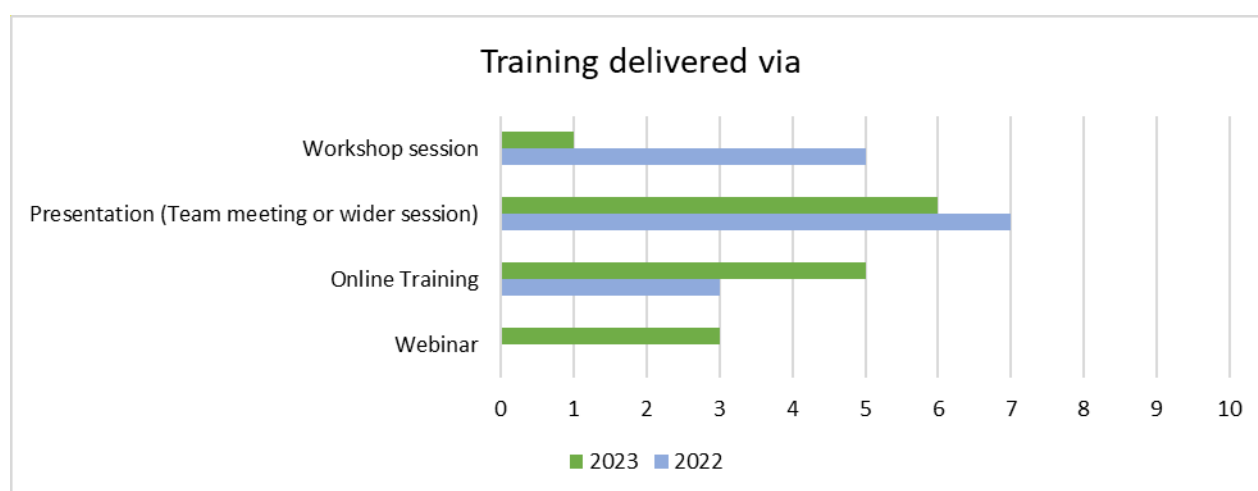


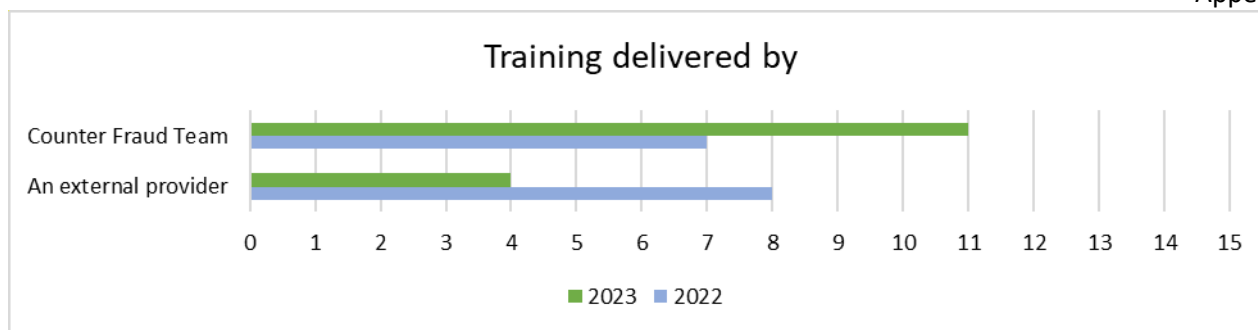
- 3.10 As mentioned in the report relating to the 2022 survey, prior to the shared service resources were focused only on the investigation of housing benefit fraud, so there would have been minimal interaction with other services within the council and various impacts on counter fraud work, including covid, had limited the amount of fraud awareness work that had been undertaken. This explained the lack of awareness amongst staff and the responses received.
- 3.11 There has been a significant amount of effort by the counter fraud team in the last year to improve awareness across services and the results indicate some positive impact from this work. Overall, the percentage of people stating they do not have a good understanding of the team is lower and despite it still being higher than we would like, the fact that respondents were unable to leave a neutral response, means we now have a much clearer picture than we did in 2022.
- 3.12 It's clear that there is still more work to be done and the new annual counter fraud plans include dedication of resource to awareness activity, which we believe will lead to further improvements.

### Fraud Awareness

- 3.13 As well as awareness of the service, it is important that staff across the organisation have a good understanding of fraud risks within their own services and the organisation as a whole, and how this potentially impacts on the council's ability to deliver services.
- 3.14 Following the 2022 survey, there have been a number of team meetings within various services across the council where the counter fraud team have introduced themselves and explained what the team does. These have also led to more detailed fraud awareness sessions in a number of areas.
- 3.15 The next series of questions were centred specifically around whether the respondents had had any fraud awareness training, who it was delivered by and how it had been delivered, to try and gauge a general level of awareness across the organisation.

Question: Have you had any fraud awareness training in the last twelve months? *	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
*In 2022 this question focused on the previous five-year period		
Yes	28	15
No	172	73





3.16 Respondents were then asked whether they felt their service would benefit from awareness training.

<b>Question:</b> Do you feel that you / your team / service would benefit from fraud awareness training?	<b>Number of respondents</b>	
	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Yes	143	47
No	57	41

3.17 Direct comparison in this area is difficult as the number of responses received this year is so much lower than in 2022 but it is clear that fraud awareness is still limited. As mentioned in paragraph 3.14, a significant amount of effort has gone into fraud awareness work, but this has been at team meetings rather than generic sessions, and it is possible that people from those services have not responded.

3.18 What is pleasing is that of those indicating that they have had awareness training, most of them had that training delivered by the counter fraud team rather than an external provider, which is an improvement on 2022.

3.19 The team continue to develop fraud awareness training and are currently working on more generic awareness materials for iShare training sessions and potential online materials that staff can view at their own pace. While this will not replace the service specific sessions, it will increase the reach across the council at a faster rate.

### **Counter Fraud Activity**

3.20 The vigilance of staff is key to identifying potential fraud and concerns should be reported to the counter fraud team for consideration of investigation. A series of questions were asked to establish the level of understanding around what could be reported, and for those that had reported concerns in the past, whether feedback had been received.

3.21 Respondents were first asked questions to determine their understanding of what concerns could be reported.

<b>Question:</b> Are you satisfied that you know what type of concerns can be reported to the Counter Fraud team?	<b>Number of respondents</b>	
	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Yes	85	52
No	115	36

3.22 Respondents were then provided with a list of areas that the counter fraud team may be called upon to investigate fraud / irregularity and asked to indicate which, if any, of them they were aware of prior to the survey.

Area	Number of respondents replying 'Yes'				Number of respondents replying 'No'			
	2022		2023		2022		2023	
Council Tax	161		77	87.5%	39		11	12.5%
Business rates	128		59	67%	72		29	33%
Housing Allocations	98		54	61.4%	102		34	38.6%
Homelessness	54		31	35.2%	146		57	64.8%
Housing tenancy	115		55	62.5%	85		48	37.5%
Right to Buy	67		33	37.5%	133		55	62.5%
Procurement	113		62	70.5%	87		26	29.5%
Insurance	110		61	69.3%	90		27	30.7%
Finance	157		76	86.4%	43		12	13.6%
Internal staff matters	110		50	56.8%	90		38	43.2%
School admissions	55		36	40.9%	145		52	59.1%
Blue Badge	120		59	67%	80		29	33%
Social Care	87		49	55.7%	113		39	44.3%

- 3.23 These results suggest a slight improvement over 2022 but despite a much higher level of respondents indicating they know what types of concerns can be reported, there was still high percentages who indicated that they were not aware that the counter fraud team conducted investigations in a number of areas within the council. This would suggest that they have a good understanding of what can be reported in their own area of business but possibly not the wider council.

Question: Do you know how to report concerns / suspicions of fraud / irregularity to the Counter Fraud team?	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	65	39
No	135	49

Question: Over the last twelve months have you reported any concerns / suspicions of fraud / irregularity to the Counter Fraud team? *	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	10	9
No	190	79

\*In 2022 this question focused on the previous two-year period.

- 3.24 As with 2022, more than half of respondents have indicated that they did not know to report concerns to the counter fraud team and a similar number of respondents confirmed having submitted a referral in the last year. The fact that so many are still unclear on what can be reported and how to do so, continues to be an indicator that there may be a number of potential issues that have not been reported simply because people did not know they could.
- 3.25 As mentioned in the previous section relating to fraud awareness, steps have been taken to improve knowledge of the counter fraud team and all information available on the staff intranet has been updated, however this could be pushed out to staff more as a source of information.
- 3.26 For those that had reported concerns further questions were asked about how they did so, and the feedback received.

Question: Did you receive feedback in relation to your referral? (Within the limits of what is permitted to be disclosed)	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	5	5
No	5	4

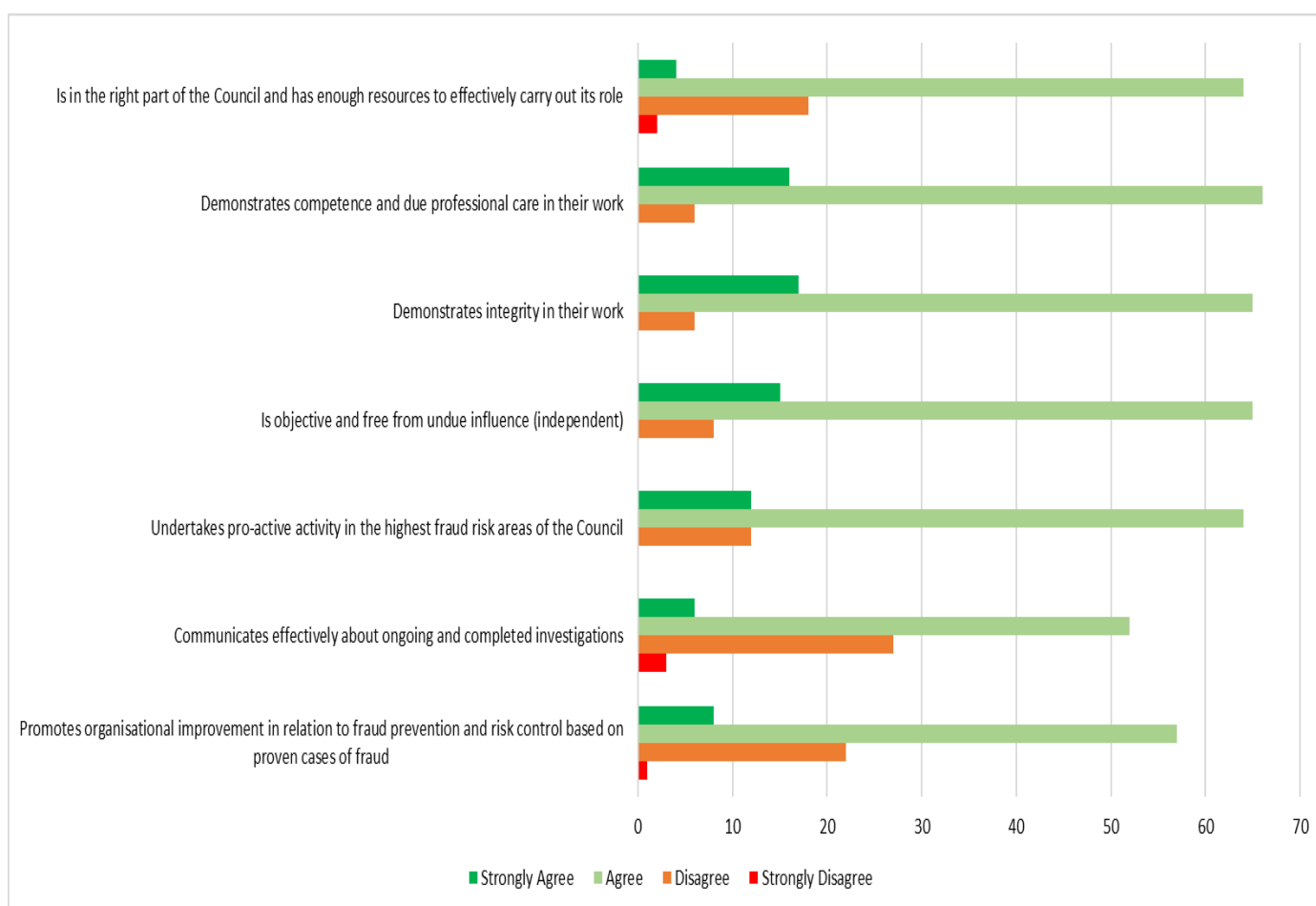
Question: If Yes, had you specifically requested such feedback?	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	1	2
No	4	3

Question: Even if you hadn't specifically requested it, would you have expected to receive feedback in relation to your referral? (Within the limits of what is permitted to be disclosed)?	Number of respondents	
	2022	2023
Yes	8	7
No	2	2

- 3.27 Communicating effectively about ongoing and completed investigations was an area highlighted in the 2022 survey, as was feedback on referrals, and this year's results demonstrate that improvement is still required in relation to referrals. The team will be looking at how this can be improved further to try and ensure that more people receive appropriate feedback.

### Compliance with Core Principles

- 3.28 The Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) specify ten core principles that internal audit teams must comply with at all times. While these are not directly applicable to the counter fraud team, a number of those principles have been adopted (with some minor change as necessary) by the counter fraud team. These principles were expressed as statements and respondents were asked to confirm to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement.



- 3.29 The vast majority of respondents provided positive responses in relation to all ten statements, which is an improvement on 2022 where most people provided neutral responses. However, there were also far higher

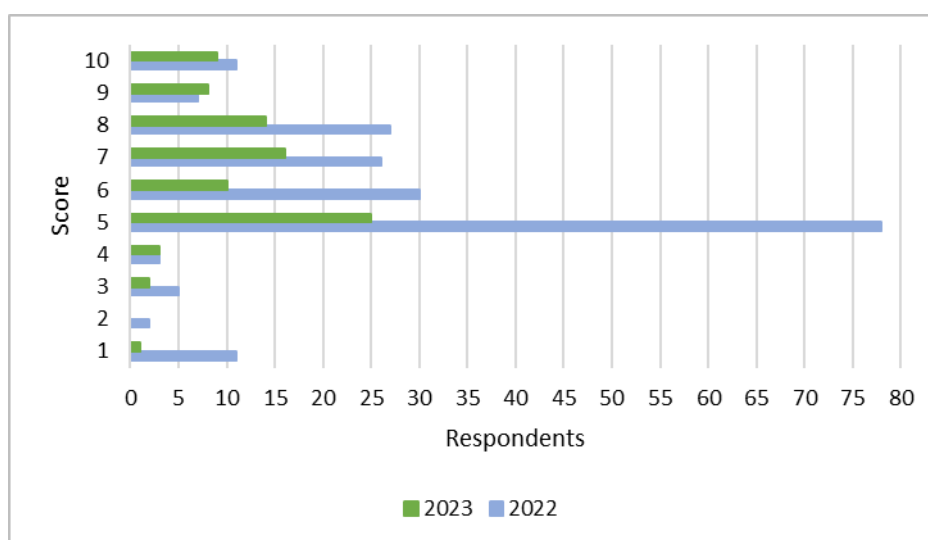


numbers disagreeing with statements than in 2022 and unlike 2022, those negative responses applied to all statements rather than just a few.

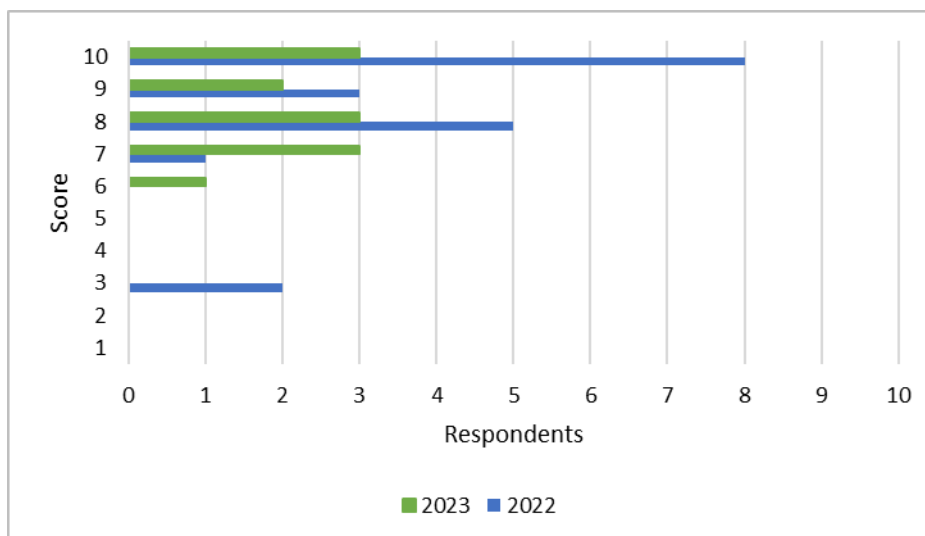
- 3.30 Based on some comments received where people have indicated they gave a negative response purely because they didn't know enough about the service, it suggests that the decision to remove a neutral response from this particular question was not the best approach. It appears it would be better to include a 'don't know enough about the service to give an opinion', which would give a genuine view of feeling within the organisation and further indication of levels of service awareness.
- 3.31 Where respondents have given negative statements and also provided their name, we will look to ask further questions to better understand the reasons behind each response as this will help us identify how we can improve perceptions.

### Overall Satisfaction with Counter Fraud

- 3.32 Questions relating to overall satisfaction asked respondents to score from one (completely dissatisfied) to ten (completely satisfied). Any scores of eight or above are considered to be positive satisfaction.
- 3.33 As it was possible that not all respondents would have interacted with counter fraud during the previous 12 months, respondents were first asked to provide a satisfaction score in relation to the support and services that are available from counter fraud.



- 3.34 The average score across the 88 responses was 6.70 out of ten and represents positive satisfaction from 35% of the responses received. This is in comparison to an average of 5.92 and positive satisfaction of 22.5% from the 200 responses received in 2022.
- 3.35 The twelve respondents who confirmed having received services from counter fraud in the last 12 months were asked to score their overall satisfaction with the service received.



- 3.36 Scores ranged from six to ten, giving an average score of 8.25 and representing positive satisfaction from 66.7% of the responses received. This is compared to an average of 8.42 and positive satisfaction of 84% from the 19 responses received in 2022.

### Other Feedback

- 3.37 At the conclusion of the survey respondents were asked: Do you have any other comments that may help us improve / develop the service?
- 3.38 A number of comments were received, some of which were to suggest that having 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' as a response to some of the questions would have been helpful, as well as some comments about having no knowledge of the team. Any such comments relating to the structure of the survey or not knowing about the team have not been included. The remaining comments have been grouped into compliments, which were all gratefully received, or suggestions for improvement. A response from the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud (HIACF) on behalf of the service has been included where appropriate.

#### Compliments

<b>Comment received:</b> Keep up the good work - much appreciated.
<b>Comment received:</b> KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK :)
<b>Comment received:</b> Team members always helpful and supportive.
<b>Comment received:</b> I was unaware of the full extent of the role the counter fraud team play within Medway Council until they attended our team meeting on 10 May 2023. Although I have not had any cause to contact them in an official capacity, the staff all seem friendly, knowledgeable, and very proactive in offering support to other services. I'm very glad that we had an opportunity to meet them and hear more about their team and what they do.

#### Suggestions

<b>Comment received:</b> General awareness raising rather than actual training was helpful for my team and would be helpful going forward.
<b>Comment received:</b> We need more information about what this team does, key contacts within the service and what to do if fraud is suspected.
<b>Comment received:</b> I think there needs to be more information about what they do in general.
<b>Comment received:</b> I think it would be beneficial for the team to do some road show type meetings where they explain their role and how to access their services if required.
<b>Comment received:</b> more awareness
<b>HIACF response:</b> All these comments relate to awareness of the counter fraud team, what they do, and awareness of fraud in more general terms. There is general information about fraud, the team and how to contact them available on Medspace, although we probably need to do more to promote that it is available.

We are already working on generic workshop awareness sessions that can be made available via iShare as well as potential online video information that people can view at their leisure to increase the options available and reach as many people as possible. We will of course continue with service specific sessions as well, but this is a small team, so we won't be able to reach every service as quickly as we might like.

**Comment received:** Like many council department - under resourced to make a big enough impact - not enough spend to save activities.

**HIACF response:** While every service would love to have more staff, mine included, we know we have to be realistic about what can be achieved. While increasing our resource would guarantee we could look at more cases, it doesn't necessarily guarantee that will result in more savings. The team has identified over a million in fraud savings in the last two years and continues to look at ways of pro-actively identifying potential fraud and error, including activities that may require upfront investment. I would be more than willing to receive any suggestions for areas where people think it may be of benefit for us to target some resource.

**Comment received:** I think the services you offer are important and your staff carry out their work very competently and professionally. The only reason I didn't rate the team higher than six was that it can sometimes take a long time to get a response to our referrals. I think that's because we're not a high priority, for reasons that have been politely explained to me. I understand and have no complaint about that but equally it does affect my overall rating.

**Comment received:** it was a bit difficult to answer a couple of questions because we have only just referred a case so have had no feedback yet.

**HIACF response:** I must stress that we deal with hundreds every year and that feedback will sometimes fall through the cracks. However, I fully acknowledge that it is still an issue, and the team are working on improving communication about the referrals we receive. Our limited resource also means that, as much as we would like to, we cannot investigate every referral we receive and have to risk assess them all, targeting resources to the highest priority cases.

**Comment received:** Please can you clarify the best way to report concerns? I can see that there is an 'Audit and Counter Fraud' distribution list on Outlook, but as this is presumably shared with several officers, is this the correct way to report to the team?

**HIACF response:** The officer leaving this comment has provided their name, so we will be reaching out directly to provide all necessary information on how to report concerns to the team.