

Did you know that the National Audit Office estimated that £10 billion was lost to scams and fraud in 2016 and the Crime in England and Wales Survey found that they are one of the most frequently occurring crimes? That's why this month Citizen's Advice are running their annual scams awareness month. Research from Citizens Advice has found that almost three-quarters of people have been targeted by scammers in the last two years and this year's campaign is encouraging people to make sure they 'don't miss a trick'. Scams Awareness Month is focusing on reducing underreporting and stigma, which we have identified as two of the biggest issues in tackling scams and fraud. Under-reporting is a serious issue when it comes to dealing with scams with official statistics suggesting that less than one-fifth of incidents of fraud either come to the attention of the police or are reported to Action Fraud.

Not only does this mean that victims may not be supported, but we know very little about the full scale of the problem. I have seen this in my own casework with victims being too upset or embarrassed to come forward. However reporting helps to inform the work of advice or enforcement agencies like Citizens Advice and the Trading Standards services; this in turn helps to prevent future scams by helping the authorities to shut down criminal operations and spread awareness to the public about new and emerging scams. Reducing this stigma will help overcome the barriers to tackling these crimes and reduce the opportunity for others to fall victim to scams. There is some really good advice out there to help combat scams including from Citizens Advice, Trading Standards and Action Fraud but the most important thing to remember is if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.