



# East Sussex Fraud Report

## October - December 2021

Date	28/01/2022	Reference	RAD-5832-2022	Version	1.0
Requesting Officer	PC Bernadette Lawrie DL148				
Author(s)	Rachel Goddard 03440, Neighbourhood Intelligence Researcher				
Department	East Sussex Neighbourhood Support Team				

### Scope Note

Action Fraud is the national recording place for all fraud. They do not investigate fraud but where a suspect is identified the report is sent to the local UK force for allocation. Operation Signature ensures that all vulnerable fraud victims receive a visit from a uniformed officer or PCSO, who provides reassurance, advice and support, and makes referrals to, or signposts, other agencies who can help.

The data used in this report is taken from the Sussex Police Fraud Power BI dashboard. This uses data taken from Action Fraud reports and SCARFs (single combined assessment of risk forms) as part of Op Signature. In order to focus on vulnerable victims, this report uses Op Signature data unless stated otherwise. In addition, 'None of the above' has not been included within the fraud category sections of the report.

The data in this report covers the period 01/10/2021– 31/12/2021. All sections include data for individual fraud only except Force Overview.

### Force Overview<sup>1</sup>

#### Individual

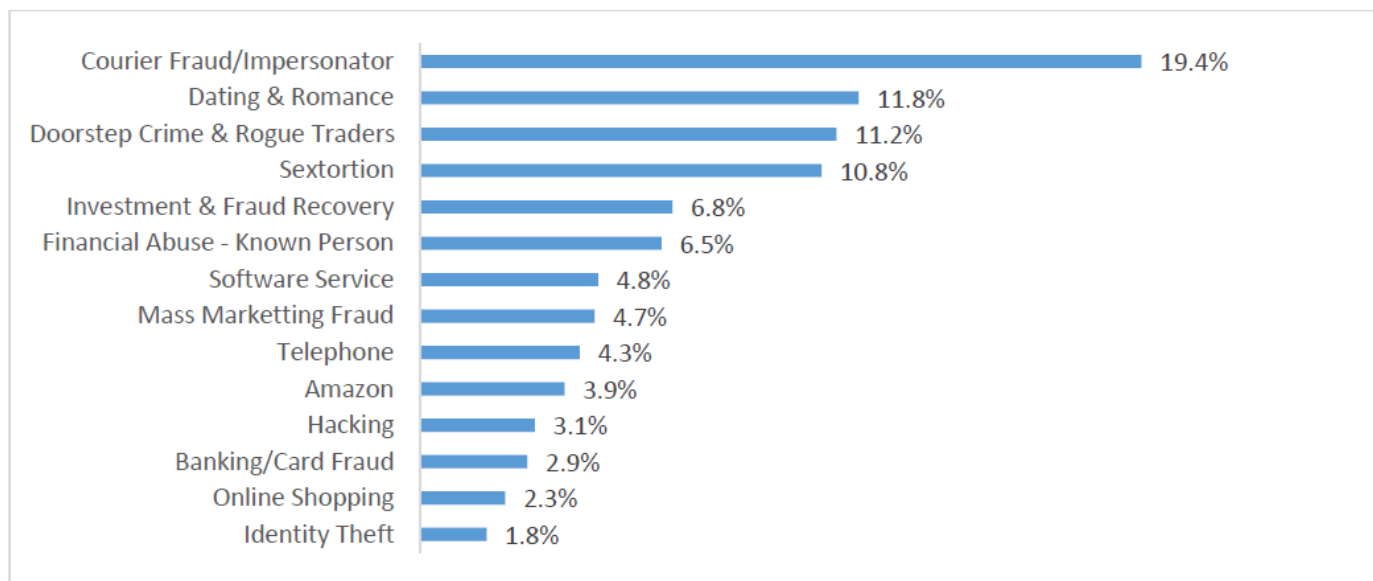
There have been 2,214 individual Action Fraud reports in Sussex between October 2021 – December 2021. This is a decrease of 21% (586 actual) compared to the same 3 month period the previous year. All divisions saw a decrease. The ratio of Action Fraud reports to Op Signature SCARFs was 3:1. West Sussex reported the highest number of Action Fraud reports (1,125) and Brighton & Hove reported the lowest (387).

	Action Fraud				Op Signature			
	Oct - Dec 21	Oct - Dec 20	Diff (+/-)	% Change	Oct - Dec 21	Oct - Dec 20	Diff (+/-)	% Change
Brighton & Hove	387	556	-169	-30%	113	120	-7	-6%
East Sussex	702	900	-198	-22%	259	316	-57	-18%
West Sussex	1125	1344	-219	-16%	397	400	-3	-1%
Force	2214	2800	-586	-21%	769	836	-67	-8%

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from the West Sussex Fraud Report October-December 2021, produced by Olivia Meadows 37986.

### Op Signature SCARFs

- A total of £6.58 million was lost. West Sussex had the highest amount lost (£3.51 million) and Brighton & Hove had the lowest (£547,780).
- The most common reported loss amount was between £1,000-£9,999<sup>2</sup> and the most common payment method was bank transfer (37%).
- The majority of victims were aged 75+ (45%) and most victims lived alone (51%). More females than males were victims of fraud.
- The highest reported type of fraud across Sussex was Courier Fraud/Impersonator (19.4%) followed by Dating & Romance fraud (11.8%) and Doorstep Crime and Rogue Traders (11.2%).



### Business

There have been 114 business Action Fraud reports in Sussex between 01/10/2021 – 31/12/2021.

- This is a reduction of 21 reports (16%) when compared to the previous three months (July to September 2021) which recorded 135 reports.
- A reduction of 42 reports (27%) when compared to the same three-month period the previous year (October to December 2020) which recorded 156 reports.

Division	No. of Reports 01/10/2020 – 31/12/2020	No. of Reports 01/07/2021 – 30/09/2021	No. of Reports 01/10/2021 – 31/12/2021
Brighton & Hove	20	18	16
East Sussex	46	42	44
West Sussex	90	75	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>114</b>

- West Sussex reported the highest number of Action Fraud reports (54) across Sussex, this is also reflected in the figures for the preceding three-month period and for the same three-month period in 2020.
- Brighton and Hove reported the lowest volume of reports (16).
- Two of the divisions have seen a reduction in reports when compared to the prior three months (Brighton & Hove and West Sussex), whereas East Sussex has seen a slight increase.
- A total of £1.94 million was lost, East Sussex had the highest amount lost (£955,222) and Brighton & Hove had the lowest (£28,054). The median amount lost between October 2021 and December 2021 was £3,490.

<sup>2</sup> Not including reports where there was no loss (applicable to all overviews)

OFFICIAL

- The most common reported loss amount was between £1,000 - £9,999 (31%)
- The highest reported type of fraud across Sussex that contributed over 5% was other consumer non-investment fraud (18.3%), followed by cheque, plastic card and online bank accounts (13.19%), social media and email (11.91%), retail fraud (10.21%), online shopping and auctions (9.36%) and mandate fraud (8.94%).

East Sussex Overview

East Sussex recorded 702 Action Fraud reports between October and December 2021. This is a decrease of -22% (198 actual) compared to the same three month period the previous year. All districts recorded a reduction.

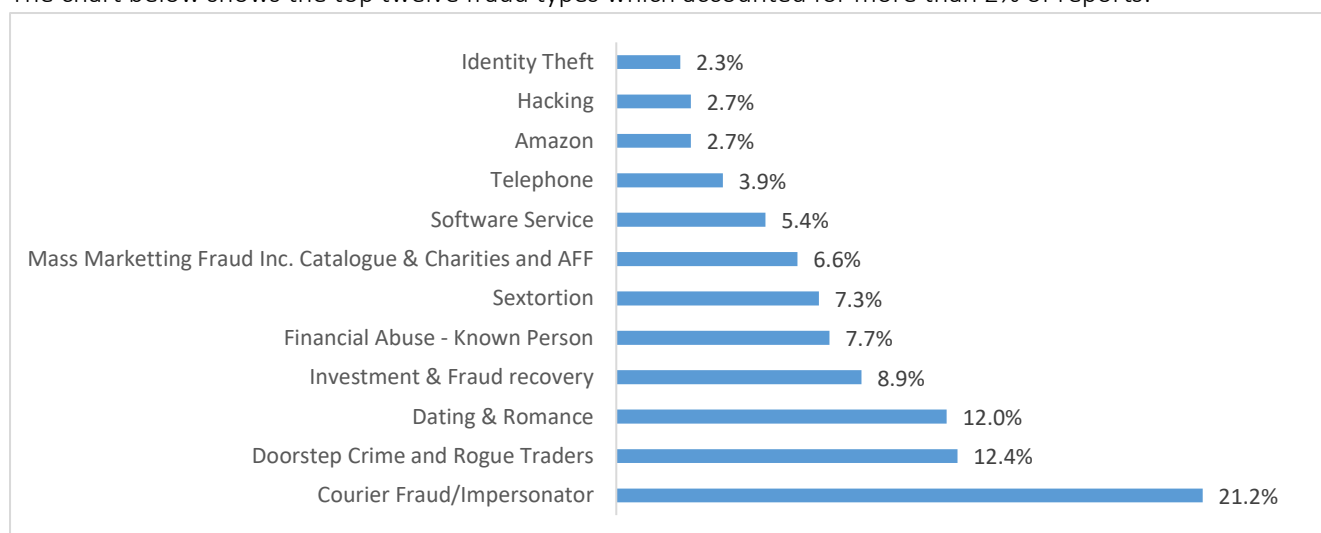
Wealden district saw the highest volume of Action Fraud reports and the lowest reduction in offences compared to the same time period in 2020. This is also reflected in the Op Signature reports where Wealden recorded the highest volume of reports but also the lowest reduction in comparison to the same three month period during 2020, apart from Rother district where the volume of Op Signature offences remained static. Rother district saw the lowest number of Action Fraud reports and Lewes the largest reduction in Action Fraud reports. Hastings district recorded the lowest number of Op Signature reports and also the highest reduction in reports compared to 2020 along with Lewes district with these two areas both recording a reduction of 20 (actual) reports.

	Action Fraud				Op Signature			
	Oct - Dec 21	Oct - Dec 20	Diff (+/-)	% Change	Oct - Dec 21	Oct - Dec 20	Diff (+/-)	% Change
Eastbourne	143	182	-39	-21.4%	50	65	-15	-23.1%
Lewes	111	165	-54	-32.7%	49	69	-20	-29%
Wealden	216	233	-17	-7.3%	73	75	-2	-2.7%
Hastings	130	177	-47	-26.6%	41	61	-20	-32.8%
Rother	102	143	-41	-28.7%	46	46	-	-
Total	702	900	-198	-22%	259	316	-57	-18%

Op Signature SCARFs

- A total of £2.08 million was lost. Eastbourne district saw the highest amount lost (£822,440) and Hastings the lowest (£72,980).
- The most common reported loss amount was between £100-£999 (15.1%) closely followed by £1,000-£9,999 (14%) and the most common payment method was bank transfer (33.3%), followed by bank card (28%).
- The highest reported type of fraud was Courier Fraud/Impersonator (21.2%) followed by Doorstep Crime & Rogue Traders (12.4%) and Dating & Romance fraud (12%).

The chart below shows the top twelve fraud types which accounted for more than 2% of reports:



OFFICIAL

- The majority of victims were aged 75+ (55.21%) and a slighter higher proportion of victims lived alone (54%). More females (53.28%) than males (46.72%) were victims of fraud.
- In relation to the top four fraud categories depicted in the above chart Wealden district recorded the highest volume of reports for the courier/impersonator, doorstep/rogue trader and investment/recovery fraud reports. Hastings and Lewes districts recorded the highest number of reports in relation to dating/romance fraud reports.

Type Of Fraud	This Year	Last Year	%age change	Amount Lost Total - This Year	Difference from Last Year
Courier Fraud/Impersonator	192	228	-15.8%	£702,428.0	↓ -£57,741.0
Dating & Romance	130	85	52.9%	£1,619,680.0	↑ £500,931.0
Doorstep Crime and Rogue Traders	120	154	-22.1%	£230,555.0	↓ -£17,481.0
Investment & Fraud recovery	105	60	75.0%	£4,376,575.0	↑ £1,870,229.0
Telephone	83	163	-49.1%	£8,540.0	↓ -£63,488.0
Mass Marketing Fraud Inc. Catalogue & Charities and AFF	74	54	37.0%	£32,820.0	↑ £5,990.0
Software Service	73	64	14.1%	£149,246.0	↑ £54,041.0
Amazon	68	13	423.1%	£122,705.0	↑ £115,091.0
Financial Abuse - Known Person	62	43	44.2%	£1,544,717.0	↑ £1,371,011.0
Sextortion	58	13	346.2%	£10,293.0	↑ £9,643.0
HMRC	55	56	-1.8%	£23,583.0	↓ -£3,085.0
Banking/Card Fraud	25	1	2400.0%	£39,605.0	↑ £39,605.0
Hacking	23	3	666.7%	£28,756.0	↑ £28,667.0
On-line Shopping	23	25	-8.0%	£20,747.0	↑ £12,889.0
Identity Theft	16	21	-23.8%	£17,790.0	↑ £17,376.0

East Sussex fraud categories; year on year comparison.

National Crime Trends<sup>3</sup>

The following emerging threats have been observed from November 2021 data; Pyramid/Ponzi schemes (increase of 44%), Other Consumer Retail Fraud (increase of 13%), Hacking – Social Media (increase of 24%), Application Fraud (increase of 6%) and Telecom Industry Fraud (increase of 25%) all show increases from the previous month, and all apart from online shopping remain higher than the overall baseline average for the fraud type. Telecom Industry Fraud shows the highest level of reporting since February 2019.

Other Advance Fee Fraud reports have increased for the second month in a row after seeing a drop in reporting since July. Reporting is still below the year average. Online Shopping and Auction fraud has begun increasing again after a drop in reporting over the past few months. It is expected reporting will continue to increase. The increase in reporting for Cybercrime is mainly due to a 24% increase in Hacking – Social Media reporting which is the highest volume for this fraud type since June 2020.

Courier Fraud/Impersonator Fraud Overview

Courier fraud occurs when a fraudster contacts victims by telephone purporting to be a police officer or bank official. To substantiate this claim, the caller might be able to confirm some easily obtainable basic details about the victim such as their full name and address.

<sup>3</sup> Monthly Threat Update – MTU Law Enforcement – December 2021, City of London Police which was included in the West Sussex Fraud Report October-December 2021, produced by Olivia Meadows 37986.

There were 55 Op Signature reports under the courier fraud/impersonator category across East Sussex between October and December 2021, recording a decrease of 39 reports (-41.5%) compared to the same three month period during 2020 which saw 94 reports. A total of £322,400 was lost and the median amount lost (where a loss was recorded) was £7,350. The most common payment method was bank transfer (44.4%), followed by bank card (27.78%) and the most common contact method was by telephone (83.64%).

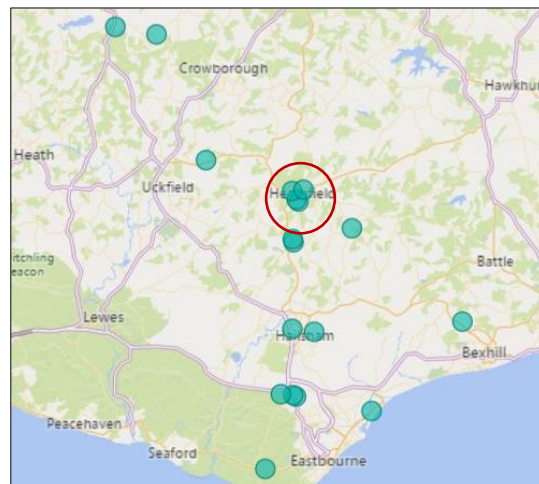
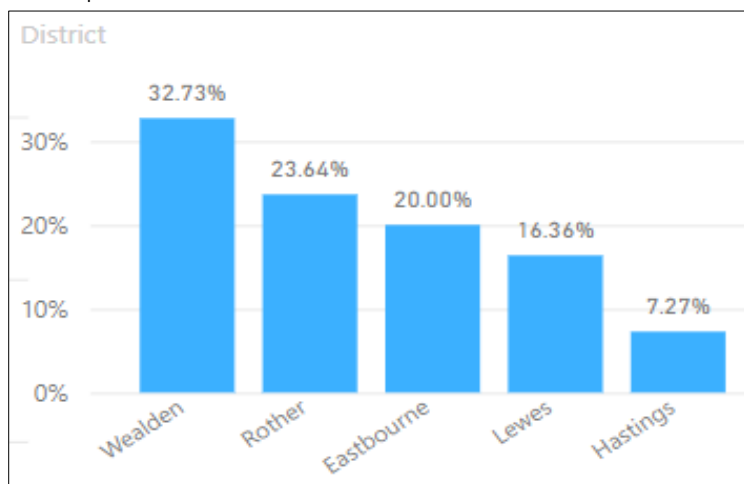
Nationally there have been reports of victims being told by fraudsters on the phone to call the number on the bank of their bank cards. Unbeknown to the victim the call has not ended and the suspect then pretended to be from the bank. Action Fraud have also received a report stating that the caller had a man attend their address who claimed to be a police officer but was not in uniform. The suspect asked the caller for information regarding the previous phone call reported to Action Fraud. The suspect knew the details of the report/phone call previously reported<sup>4</sup>.

#### Demographics

- Age: 63.64% of victims were aged 75+, 23.64% were 60-74, 10.91% were 30-59 and 1.82% were 0-29.
- Gender: 65.45% of victims were female and 34.55% were male.
- Lives Alone: 54.55% of victims lived alone and 45.45% did not.

#### Locations

Wealden district saw the largest volume of reports accounting for 32.7% (18 actual). Hastings district recorded the smallest volume of reports, accounting for 7.3% (4 actual). The hotspot in Wealden district was Heathfield, which saw four reports.



#### Doorstep Crime and Rogue Trader Fraud Overview

Bogus tradesmen, door-to-door sales or doorstep fraud involves fraudsters trying to scam victims after knocking at their door. Such frauds involve promoting goods or services that are either never delivered or are of a very poor quality. Fraudsters may also bill for work that was not agreed to. Bogus salespeople will provide false identity or contact information, making it impossible to identify or contact them.

There have been 32 Op Signature reports related to doorstep crime and rogue traders in East Sussex between October and December 2021. This is an increase of 33.3% (8 actual) reports when compared to the same three month period in 2020. A total of £55,300 was lost and the median amount lost (where a loss was recorded) was £895. The most common payment method was cash (41.18%), followed by bank card (35.29%).

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from the West Sussex Fraud Report October-December 2021, produced by Olivia Meadows 37986.

## OFFICIAL

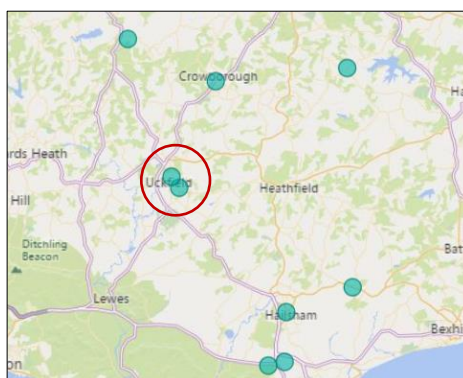
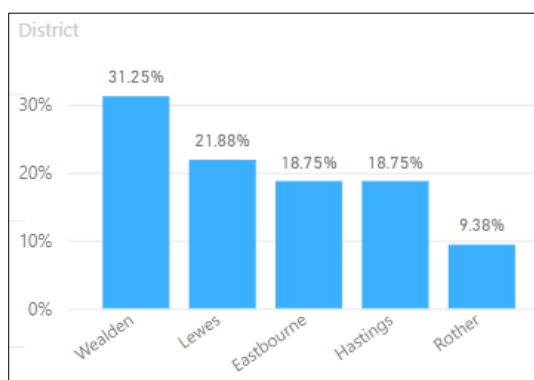
Fraudsters have been using the fact more people are staying at home as an opportunity to exploit the vulnerable by operating doorstep scams including rogue traders and impersonators<sup>5</sup>.

### Demographics

- Age: 78.13% of victims were aged 75+, 15.63% were aged 60-74 years and 6.25% were aged 30-59 years.
- Gender: 56.25% of victims were female and 43.75% were male.
- Lives Alone: 40.63% of victims lived alone and 59.38% did not.

### Locations

Wealden district recorded the highest volume (10 actual) of doorstep crime and rogue trader (31.25%) reports whilst Rother district recorded the lowest (3 actual) accounting for 9.38%. Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings districts accounted for similar proportions of reports (ranging between 18.75% and 21.88%). Uckfield saw two of the ten reports in Wealden district.



## Dating & Romance Fraud Overview

Romance scams involve people being duped into sending money to criminals who go to great lengths to gain their trust and convince them that they are in a genuine relationship. They use language to manipulate, persuade and exploit so that requests for money do not raise alarm bells.

There were 31 Op Signature reports relating to dating & romance fraud in East Sussex between October and December 2021. This is an increase of five reports (+19.2%) in comparison to the same three month period in 2020. A total of £401,780 was lost and the median amount lost (where a loss was recorded) was £4,500. Bank transfer was the most common payment method type (38.46%) and the most common contact method was made via WhatsApp (29.03%), followed by telephone (19.35%).

### Demographics

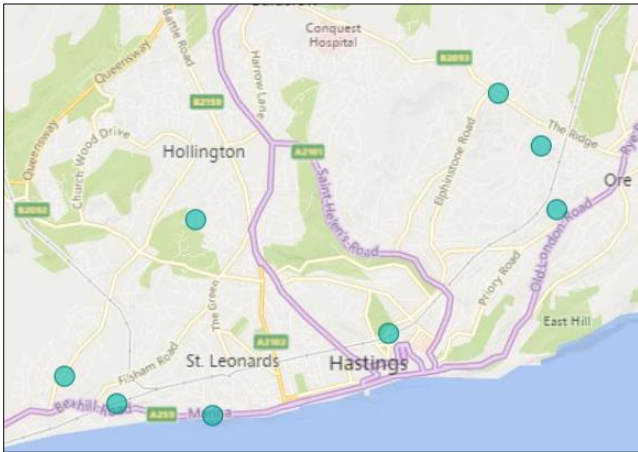
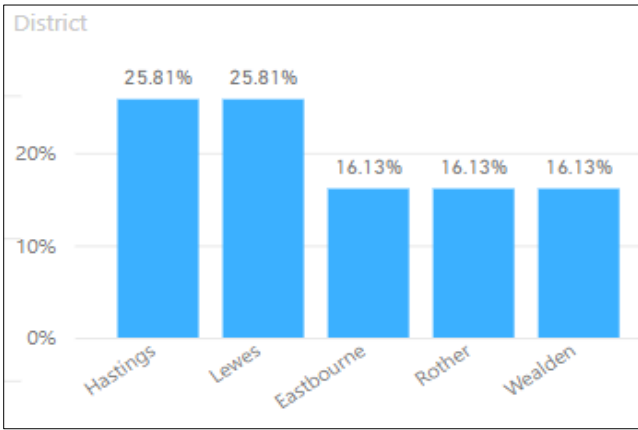
- Age: 38.71% of victims were aged 30-59, 35.48% were aged 60-74 and 25.81% were aged 75+.
- Gender: 58.06% of victims were female and 41.94% were male.
- Lives Alone: 70.97% of victims lived alone and 29.03% did not.

### Locations

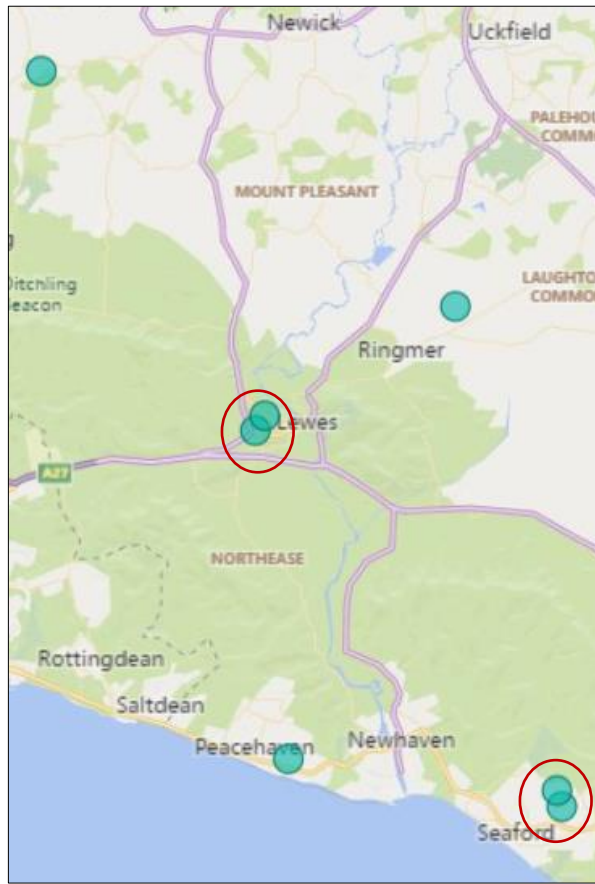
Hastings and Lewes districts both accounted for 25.81% each of dating & romance fraud (8 actual each); whilst Eastbourne, Rother and Wealden districts accounted for 16.13% each.

<sup>5</sup> Extracted from the West Sussex Fraud Report October-December 2021, produced by Olivia Meadows 37986.





Hastings District



Lewes District

Lewes town and Seaford were the key areas for dating & romance fraud in Lewes district.

Investment & Fraud Recovery Overview

There are many different types of investment fraud. They usually involve criminals contacting people out of the blue and convincing them to invest in schemes or products that are worthless or do not exist. Once the criminals have received payment, they cease contact with the victim. The majority of investment frauds are run out of offices known as boiler rooms.

Fraud recovery fraud is when someone who has been a victim of fraud in the past is contacted again by fraudsters. They pretend to be a government, police or law agency that can help recover the money that was lost but ask for a fee to get it back.

There have been 23 Op Signature reports related to investment & fraud recovery in East Sussex between October and December 2021. This is an increase of 91.7% (11 actual) when compared to the same three month period the previous year. A total of £516,310 was lost and the median amount lost (where a loss was recorded) was £13,750. The most common payment method was bank transfer (46.67%), followed by bank card (33.33%). Telephone was the most common contact method (43.48%), followed by website/online (13.04%).

There have been reports nationally relating to individuals being contacted through social media or instant messaging and persuaded to invest. These relate to reported increases in younger people investing and people looking to invest outside the mainstream banking system which is currently offering low interest rates<sup>6</sup>.

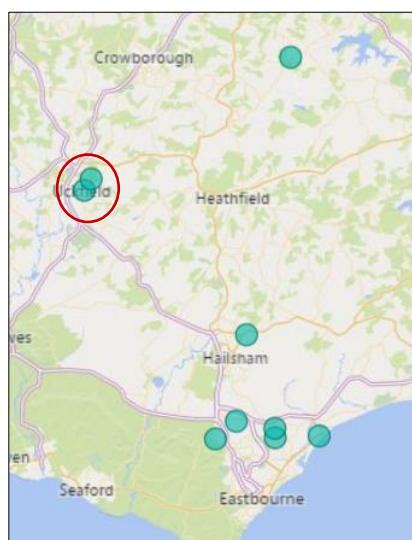
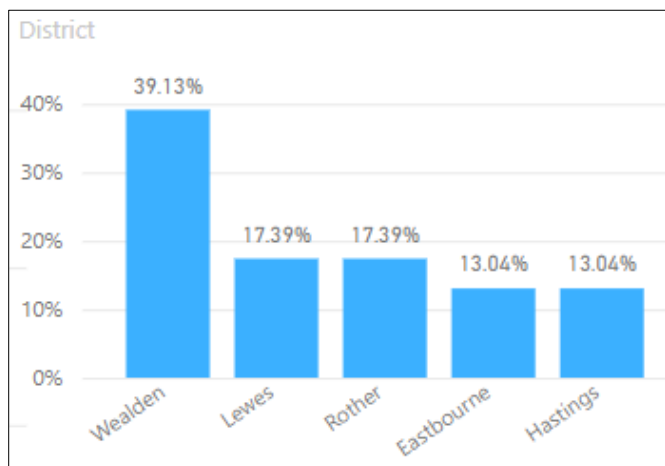
<sup>6</sup> Extracted from the West Sussex Fraud Report October-December 2021, produced by Olivia Meadows 37986.

## Demographics

- Age: 60.87% of victims were aged 75+, 13.04% were 60-74, and 26.09% were 30-59 years.
- Gender: 26.09% of victims were female and 73.91% were male.
- Lives Alone: 60.87% of victims lived alone and 39.13% did not.

## Locations

Wealden district recorded the largest proportion of investment & fraud recovery frauds accounting for 39.13% (9 actual) with Eastbourne and Hastings districts recording the lowest volume each contributing to 13.04% (3 actual each) The key area in Wealden district was Uckfield.



## Other Emerging Issues & Threats<sup>7</sup>

### Covid-19

Online fraudsters have quickly reacted to news of the new COVID-19 variant Omicron, with a carefully crafted phishing campaign. These new phishing emails are designed to appear as if they are sent from the NHS and urge recipients to get an 'Omicron PCR test' for the new variant. The bogus emails falsely claim that the new variant requires a new test kit. They feature a link, legitimate looking 'get it now' button and are sent from 'NHS Customer Service'. The emails also invite readers to visit a site.

However, clicking the link takes you to a phishing site, which then asks users to enter their full name, date of birth, address, mobile number, email address and their mother's maiden name – which scammers could use to craft follow-on identity fraud attacks. It also asks for a payment of £1.24 for 'delivery'. Presumably, if users proceed with this, they will also have their bank card details stolen. Any confusion around the new variant and new PCR testing rules is likely to be exploited by scammers.

We would also expect fraud reports relating to Covid Passes to continue to be received over the coming months, particularly as fraudsters look to take advantage of people booking holidays for next year. We may also see an increase in scams in relation to booster injections. The implementation of Plan B measures due to the new variant could also lead to an increase in demand for counterfeit certifications or other fraud reports relating to Covid passes.

<sup>7</sup> Monthly Threat Update – MTU Law Enforcement – December 2021, City of London Police which was included in the West Sussex Fraud Report October-December 2021, produced by Olivia Meadows 37986.



### **Spiking Reports linked to Fraud**

There has been a lot of media coverage nationally around a reported increase in females being spiked or injected. In addition, there has been some further reporting around people being spiked and then having their bank or other accounts compromised where a significant amount of money is then taken.

A quick check of Action Fraud reports shows that twenty-nine reports that mentioned 'spiking' or being 'spiked' were received between September and mid-December. All victims believed that they were spiked prior to debit cards and Sim cards being stolen and then money being transferred out of their bank accounts. Some victims recall being escorted to a cash point. Other victims report that their PayPal was also hacked, and cryptocurrency purchased. All these incidents took place at licensed premises or at house parties.

### **Changing Methods**

The Telegram App has been reported to be an increasingly popular choice for cyber criminals due to its apparent lack of moderation and encryption. The app is being used to share cyber hacking tips and to buy and sell stolen data with anecdotal evidence suggesting it is easier to use for these purposes than the dark web.

There have been reports that cyber criminals are specifically recruiting native English speakers to make their scams seem more genuine. Current advice is to be wary of communication with poor grammar and spelling mistakes, however, recruitment may make it trickier to identify these scams.

There have been reports of scammers on fraud forums discussing attempts to apply for roles in telecommunications and banking sectors to act as insiders for other fraudsters as they are able to access customer data.