

# PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION AND INTEGRITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Findings from a survey of local government employees

The Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) conducted a survey of local government employees to:

- assess perceptions of corruption and integrity in the local government sector,
- identify corruption risks impacting local government,
- pinpoint barriers to reporting corruption and suspected wrongdoing among local government employees and
- inform opportunities to prevent, detect and deal with corrupt conduct in the local government sector in Queensland.

## WHAT WE DID



**Collaborated** with partner integrity agencies to measure perceptions of corruption



**Administered** an online survey to more than 35000 local government employees in Queensland<sup>1</sup>



**Analysed** survey responses from over 6500 local government employees across 68 councils



**Raised** awareness among local government employees about corruption risks in local government and ways to report corruption and suspected wrongdoing



**Identified** opportunities to build corruption resistance in the local government sector.

## WHAT WE FOUND<sup>2</sup>

There was a high level of interest in the online survey which was open for a three-week period between mid-May and early June 2020.<sup>3</sup> About one in four local government employees viewed or answered parts of the survey.



**8600+**

local government employees viewed the survey



**6515**

responded to questions in the survey

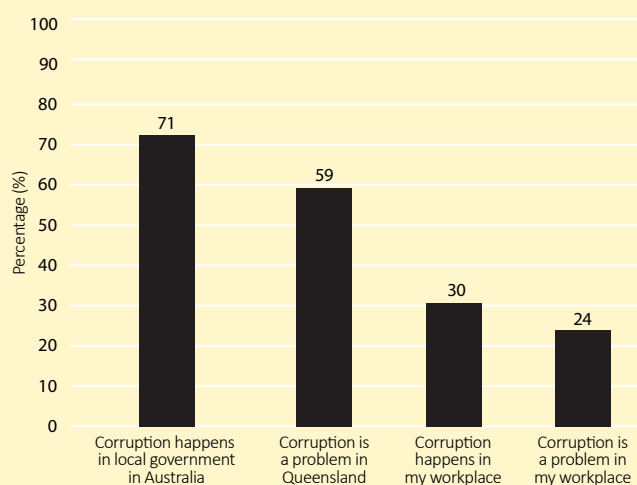


## PREVALENCE OF CORRUPTION

*Most local government employees identified that corruption occurs and is a problem in the broader local government sector. However, substantially fewer reported it occurs or is a problem in their workplace.*

- One in six council employees believe that the level of corruption in local government has increased in the last three years and one in ten believe it has increased in their workplace.
- Generally, the impact of the current health pandemic (COVID-19) and the March 2020 local government elections does not appear to have substantially changed perceived corruption risks within local government.

**Table 1:** Perceived prevalence of corruption



<sup>1</sup> The survey was reviewed by the CCC's Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel to ensure it met the highest ethical standards.

<sup>2</sup> "Valid" percentages are reported throughout – that is, the percentages of those who responded to each item rather than the total sample. Cases with missing data were excluded on an analysis by analysis basis; as a result, the total sample sizes vary between analyses.

<sup>3</sup> Most local councils across Queensland participated in the survey. No survey responses were received from a small number of councils (n = 9).



## WHAT WE FOUND (continued)

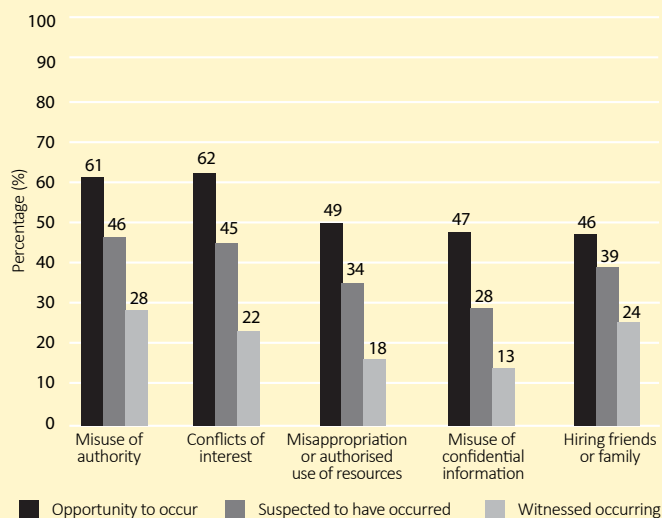


### CORRUPTION RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

*One-third of respondents have never witnessed any of the behaviours listed in the survey in their council and almost 40 per cent have never witnessed any of those behaviours in other local governments.*

- Misuse of authority and conflicts of interest were consistently identified by local government employees as being the behaviour most likely to occur or have occurred in their council.
- The recruitment of personnel, procurement processes and partnerships with the private sector were frequently identified by local government employees as activities that pose corruption risks.

**Table 1:** Perceived corruption risks and vulnerabilities



### REPORTING CORRUPTION

*There is a high level of willingness among council employees to report corruption. However, very few have ever made a complaint to the CCC or the Queensland Ombudsman.*

- More than 90 per cent of respondents identified they know what constitutes corrupt conduct.
- Almost one-quarter of respondents identified that they do not know how to report corruption.
- Over three-quarters of respondents reported they would definitely report corruption if they witnessed it and more than two-thirds believed their direct supervisor would be supportive if they chose to report corruption.
- **A number of barriers to reporting corruption** were identified by local government employees:
  - » More than one-third of respondents identified that they would not report corruption because they believed senior management would not do anything about it.
  - » 31 per cent stated they would not report because they would need to have evidence to back up the allegation.
  - » One-quarter of respondents would not report corruption because they believed it could affect their career.
  - » 41 per cent reported that making a report could affect their relationships with other council employees.
- **Concerns were raised about existing mechanisms** to protect people who report corruption:
  - » 30 per cent disagreed that the protections for people who have reported corruption are adequate
  - » 30 per cent disagreed that employees who report corruption are protected from victimisation or reprisal
  - » 67 per cent agreed that more should be done to protect people who have reported corruption.

## WHAT WE FOUND (continued)



### CULTURE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*Individual ethics and organisational culture were generally perceived as high among local council employees.*

- **Almost all respondents** (98 per cent) agreed that behaving with honesty and integrity is important to them and the vast majority (89 per cent) agreed that behaving with honesty and integrity is important in their workplace.
- **Almost three-quarters** (72 per cent) of respondents agreed that the culture within their organisation encourages people to act with honesty and integrity.
- **More than half** (52 per cent) of the respondents reported that their council has strong corruption prevention policies in place and more than two-thirds believe their council supports anti-corruption behaviour (67 per cent).
- **More than half** (57 per cent) of the respondents agreed that managers in their organisation model ethical behaviour.



### PREVENTION AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

*Council resources are a primary source of information for local government employees who are looking for information about preventing or reporting corruption.*

- **There was a high level of awareness and engagement** among local government employees in preventing corruption:
  - » 89 per cent agreed they support corruption prevention activities in their workplace
  - » 72 per cent agreed that preventing corruption is their responsibility
  - » 59 per cent identified they are confident they know how to prevent corruption
  - » 55 per cent find it easy to identify corruption risks.
- **The level of awareness about role clarity, governance frameworks and reporting obligations varied:**
  - » 73 per cent feel informed about the frameworks, policies, procedures and rules associated with their role in local government
  - » 67 per cent feel informed about their obligations to report corruption
  - » 52 per cent feel informed about where to access information about local government, their obligations and how to report corruption.
- Despite a high level of willingness to report and prevent corruption, less than half of the respondents reported that their organisation regularly communicates information about reporting corruption.



**Local government employees were asked about their preferences for receiving information from the CCC and its partner agencies:**

There was a clear preference among council employees for information to be received via their council's CEO or Liaison Officer or through an email or e-Newsletter.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE?



Although the results from this survey demonstrate encouraging levels of awareness about corruption risks and behaviours, and a willingness among council employees to prevent corruption and report suspected wrongdoing, there is room for improvement.



There is a strong perception that corruption occurs in local government in Queensland and prevailing concerns about the repercussions for reporting suspected wrongdoing. Although these concerns have been raised in similar surveys in the past, it is clear that more needs to be done within this sector to encourage and support employees to report suspected wrongdoing.



On the one hand, it is encouraging that most respondents reported feeling informed about how to report corruption and where to access information about how to do so. However, of concern is that almost one in four respondents do not know how to report corruption, highlighting the need for more targeted education and awareness raising about ways to report suspected wrongdoing.



There is a preference among local government employees to report suspected wrongdoing to a manager, supervisor or other areas or people within their council. Education targeted at managers and supervisors about how to deal with complaints and support their employees through this process could help encourage local government employees to report suspected wrongdoing if they witness it and allow local councils to intervene early to detect and prevent corruption and corruption risks.



Council resources are a primary source of information for people looking for advice about how to prevent or report corruption. The results from this survey suggest that more needs to be done to inform local government employees about where to access information about local government, their obligations and how to report corruption. Local governments should ensure their internal resources are accessible, up-to-date and provide clear and practical advice to their employees.



The CCC, in conjunction with its partner integrity agencies, will continue to work with local governments across Queensland to raise awareness about corruption risks in this sector and to help local councils build a culture that is resistant to corruption and supports employees who report suspected wrongdoing. The results from this survey will be used by the CCC and its partners to inform and target prevention and education strategies for the local government sector.



As well as assisting local governments to build their capacity to prevent and deal with allegations of corruption and other forms of serious misconduct, this survey will enable the CCC and its partner agencies to track changes in the perceptions of corruption over time and assess how local councils are managing and responding to the risks confronting them.



### Further information and resources

- [CCC Corruption Allegations Data Dashboard](#)
- [Prevention in focus: Conflicts of interest — are you managing yours appropriately?](#)
- [Prevention in focus: Risks in recruitment — are you adequately vetting your staff?](#)
- [Prevention in focus: Personal relationships, professional boundaries: how to manage potential corruption risks?](#)
- [Prevention in focus: Role clarity in councils: understanding the roles of Mayor and CEO](#)
- [Corruption prevention advisory: Gifts and benefits](#)
- [Corruption prevention advisory: Procurement and contract management](#)
- [Corruption prevention advisory: Use of official resources](#)

For further information about how to make a complaint to the CCC and access corruption prevention material visit the CCC's website at: [www.ccc.qld.gov.au](http://www.ccc.qld.gov.au).