

Protecting the Public and Supporting Businesses – Trading Standards making an impact on your local community



The Impacts and Outcomes of Local Trading Standards Services 2023/24 in England and Wales



FOREWORD

The Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) represents heads of Trading Standards across England & Wales and currently 95% of local authorities are members. ACTSO created the Impacts and Outcomes Framework in 2018/19 to provide national data for England and Wales on work done by local authority Trading Standards Services. This is its fourth report.

During 2023/24, cost-of-living issues remained high on everyone's minds. Cheap dangerous, illicit, and counterfeit goods appearing to be a "good deal" posed risks to consumers. Misleading price claims could cause consumers to miss out on fair deals, and businesses remained at risk from being undercut by unfair competition and businesses selling illegal goods and services.

As well as the usual three themes of Tackling Detriment and Preventing Harm, Supporting the Local Economy, and Promoting Health and Wellbeing, we have devoted specific sections to environmental regulation and work to support consumers and businesses with the cost-of-living crisis.

While Local Trading Standards Services remain stretched in terms of funding and staffing, they continue to have a big impact in protecting consumers and helping businesses. The headlines from this year's report are:

- Over **£905 million detriment was prevented** by Trading Standards' actions. This equates to **£8.39 saved for every £1 spent**.
- **Revenue budgets were £108 million**, a 1% increase from last year.
- Overall **staff numbers are 2,034** a 4% reduction on last year.
- Referrals from **Citizens Advice reduced from 2022/23, by 16% to just over 476,000**. This is now lower than pre pandemic levels.
- This year **839 people or businesses were convicted of offences, an 18% increase on 2022/23**. This is possibly due to the reduced backlog placing fewer pressures on the Magistrates Courts, making the progress of simpler and less serious cases more straightforward.
- Trading Standards obtained almost **£9.6 million in non-scams related redress** for consumers.
- The amount of **money saved for scam victims was almost £59 million**, a reduction of 15% from 2023/23. This could be attributed to the

success in stopping scam mail reaching victims by working with partners to tackle the issue at source.

- Trading Standards provided over **22,000 hours of advice to businesses through primary authority partnerships**. This was an increase of 3% from last year. The total number of primary authority partnerships also increased by 7%.
- Almost **72,000 compliance checks** were carried out to ensure that businesses meet their legal responsibilities and to provide them with advice on site. This is an increase of 10%, most likely a result of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) asking local authorities to increase the number of compliance checks on food businesses.
- Almost **2.9 million unsafe or non-compliant products** were seized or removed from the marketplace representing a saving to society of almost **£114 million**.
- Almost **6,600 premises** were checked to ensure they were not selling age-restricted goods, such as alcohol and vapes to children.
- Over **19.1 million illicit cigarettes**, over **5.1 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco** and over **1.5 million illicit vapes** were seized.

In summary, Trading Standards continues to demonstrate its huge value in protecting consumers, legitimate businesses, public health, and the environment. The impact of this work, alongside that which is delivered via National Trading Standards, highlights the results that Trading Standards achieves. Trading Standards is unique in having an infrastructure that can operate at local, regional, and national levels in this way and this is key to its success.

We want this report to inform Government's policy development, including funding for services, and to raise the profile of Trading Standards' work within local authorities.

Special thanks go to the 111 services covering 123 local authorities that submitted their data return. This covers over 70% of all local authorities in England & Wales.



Valerie Simpson
Chair of the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers



BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Local authorities in England and Wales were asked to submit data for the financial year 2023/24.

A total of 111 services contributed, covering 123 out of 173 of local authorities in England and Wales. The responses cover an area with a population of almost 50 million, or 82.6% of the population of England and Wales.

To illustrate the estimated national impact of Trading Standards, figures have been adjusted to account for both population and the response rate for each question. These figures estimate impact and activity levels for the whole of England and Wales.

DEMAND AND RESOURCING

The approximate revenue budget allocated to Trading Standards was close to £107.9 million, a 1% increase from last year.

Over £20 million was received in income from a variety of sources including metrology, National Trading Standards' grants and Primary Authority income, a 10% increase from last year.

Of the **2,034 full time employees** employed on Trading Standards' work, over 87% are "operational" staff.

Trading Standards received just over 476,000 referrals and notifications to their services from the Citizens Advice consumer service. This shows how many members of the public are seeking advice and support from Trading Standards on consumer related problems and issues. This was a 17% decrease from 2022/23. Whilst the demands on Citizens Advice remain relatively high, the resources remain the same to address new and emerging challenges. In addition, they received almost 107,000 referrals from other partners.



SECTION ONE: TACKLING DETRIMENT AND PREVENTING HARM

One of the key functions of Trading Standards is to prevent consumer and business detriment. Trading Standards' work can include providing advice and support to the public on how to avoid being ripped off, as well as disrupting and taking enforcement action against criminal behaviour, to prevent harm and financial detriment. The former may be limited due to the financial constraints faced by local services and the need to focus on statutory activity.

The Consumer Protection Study 2022 estimated that there was £54 billion in unaddressed detriment across Great Britain.

1.1 Stopping Fraudulent, Illegal and Unfair Trading

Trading Standards Services will usually take formal enforcement action where people deliberately break the law, have caused serious harm, or have repeatedly ignored advice from officers. Trading Standards legislation carries a variety of penalties including imprisonment; fines; forfeiture of assets; fixed penalties; and undertakings to stop future non-compliance. Serious investigations are complex, lengthy and can take several years to bring to trial. This is being exacerbated by ongoing serious delays in the Crown Courts system. Government is continuing to increase options for the use of monetary penalties by Trading Standards.

In **2023/24**:

- Approximately 839 defendants were prosecuted.

- Prison sentences totalling over 446 years were handed down.
- Defendants were ordered to pay over £3.7 million in fines, a significant increase, almost four times the amount of last year, partly due to several exceptionally large fines in a handful of cases.
- Defendants were ordered to pay almost £9.2 million in Proceeds of Crime confiscation orders, an increase of 36%.
- Almost 230 penalty notices were issued for Trading Standards offences.

1.2 Detriment and Redress

Trading Standards can ask for the Court to issue a compensation order for victims as part of a prosecution process or get redress for victims through a variety of other means. In **2023/24**, it is estimated that the actions of Trading Standards Services resulted in:

- Almost £2.7 million compensation being awarded to victims by the courts.
- Over £4.5 million prevented from being handed over to criminals.

- Almost £2.4 million gained for victims through advice and intervention.

Overall Trading Standards actions prevented over £905 million of detriment to consumers and businesses.

This shows that Trading Standards continues to offer a cost effective and important service to local communities and individuals and demonstrates the seriousness of the offending being tackled by local services.

1.3 Supporting Scam Victims

Fraud is the most common crime in the country, accounting for 40% of crime in England and Wales, and affecting millions of people, at risk of substantial financial losses. Trading Standards Services play a key role in tackling fraud and protecting people from scams.

Trading Standards support victims to get the help they need to stop them from being scammed again. This includes the installation of call blocking devices and doorstep cameras alongside working with safeguarding agencies. Trading Standards can also make referrals to the National Trading Standards Scams and eCrime Teams to undertake disruption work such as getting telephone or payment systems removed and taking down websites. Most scams emanate from overseas where formal legal action by Trading Standards is not possible.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- **Local authority Trading Standards Services provided support to almost 12,800 scam victims.**
- **Work to disrupt mass marketing fraud mailings, stop outgoing payments and mail, saved consumers almost £59 million.**

While the number of scam victims supported has reduced by 12% this year, this could be attributed to the success in stopping scam mail reaching victims by working with partners to tackle the issue at source.

LB Islington: Tackling Mail Forwarding Businesses

Islington Trading Standards Service identified 274 new businesses using a single mail forwarding business (MFB) address. Of those, 57% were not clients of that MFB, and were falsely claiming to be based at that MFB address. Trading Standards took down 21 websites of those falsely using an MFB address, 13 traders removed the false address and, upon Trading Standards' advice, the MFB withdrew services from six that were clients but were breaching trading standards legislation.

Ongoing liaison is necessary to get the local authority, where the actual trader is based, to engage with or enforce the law against problem businesses using an MFB. To put this into context, one MFB alone can host around 40,000 businesses making it impossible for a single Trading Standards Service to tackle them all, simply because of the use of a mail forwarding address in their area.

Gateshead Council: Supporting Consumer with Civil Disputes

Gateshead Trading Standards Service has a highly active civil advice team of two officers, and they work to help complainants resolve their issues. In the last year, this advice team gained redress to the total of £130,505. Examples include:

Mr A had contracted with a business for a holiday that had to be cancelled due to Covid. He wanted a refund. The trader kept prevaricating and then went into administration. For two years no progress was made and attempts to claim via the bank and trade associations failed. The service engaged in numerous communications with the Travel Trust Association and

finally they agreed to refund the full £2,727.

Mrs B had a complaint against a furniture retailer. Her suite was faulty. Finally, after much negotiation, the business finally disclosed the contents of the complaint report. Following a faulty replacement, after five months Trading Standards obtained a full refund of £2,800 for Mrs B.

Gateshead Trading Standards Service was contacted by the son of a lady with dementia. She had contracted with a Company for roof repairs. The lady was encouraged to waive her cooling off period to allow the work to immediately commence. She had no recollection of the work being done. It was unclear the extent of any work completed. At Trading Standards' request, her GP sent a letter stating that she had dementia and would be unable to understand or have the capacity to enter complex contracts. Trading Standards had several conversations with the Company. They agreed to waive all payments and refunded the £550 already paid.



Pembrokeshire, Heart of the South West and Buckinghamshire & Surrey: Supporting Vulnerable Scam Victims

A vulnerable couple with learning difficulties requiring minor roof repairs were charged £800 to refit a single slipped tile. The trader then made false claims regarding the safety of their chimney stack and subsequently spent 30 minutes on the roof and charged the couple £4,500. This work was unnecessary, substandard, and the couple had been grossly overcharged. Pembrokeshire Trading Standards Service prosecuted the trader who pleaded guilty to four offences under the Fraud Act. He received a 15-month suspended prison sentence and a compensation order for £900 was awarded to the victims.

A social worker contacted Heart of the South West Trading Standards Service about a client who had lost £22,000 to scammers as he believed he was in a relationship with ITV's Good Morning presenter Susanna Reid. The deputy editor agreed to write a letter on Susanna's behalf saying that Susanna would never enter into a relationship with someone she had not met and would never ask anyone to send her money. The bank refunded his money which is now under a Court of Protection Order.

Mrs C had been cold called by a man giving his name as 'DC Tony Andrews' claiming to work for Action Fraud. He persuaded Mrs C to share substantial personal information and to transfer £130,000 to him. Once her savings had gone, he instructed her to obtain a loan. At this point bank staff alerted Mrs C, Trading Standards, and the police to the scam. Her bank cards were cancelled. Following an immediate safeguarding intervention, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards

Service arranged for a call blocker and door camera to be installed. They secured a full refund from the bank. They also assisted Mrs C with preventative measures, including Protective Registration with the Identity Protection Service of Cifas and notifying HMRC that scammers have her National Insurance number. Repeat visits were necessary to help restore her confidence and increase her resilience to future fraud attempts. She said *"your help ... was very much appreciated. ... I received a full refund from Barclays without questions or a fight. Your visit ... was a great comfort at a really horrible time."*

LB Southwark and Stoke-on-Trent Council: Use of Call Blockers to protect Vulnerable Citizens from Scams

An elderly dementia sufferer was provided with a free call-blocker by Southwark Trading Standards Service, funded via National Trading Standards. For years, the resident had fallen victim to telephone scammers offering clairvoyant services. Estimated losses were over £20,000 but the spending was kept secret from his family. The device now blocks all such calls and the spending ended.

Stoke-on-Trent Trading Standards Service arranged for a call blocker to be fitted for a consumer after they attended a scams awareness talk. The consumer had expressed concern as their spouse had recently been diagnosed with dementia and they were receiving a high number of scam calls. The call blocker was fitted in October 2023 and, up to the end of March 2024, the consumer received 701 incoming calls, of which 437 were blocked as scam calls: 62% of those calls were scam calls. The consumer said *"It's the best thing I have had, if the phone goes off now it's someone we know. Its brilliant - no more nuisance phone calls at all."*



West Yorkshire Financial Exploitation and Abuse Team: Protecting Vulnerable Adults from Financial Abuse and Early Intervention in the Home Improvement Market

The West Yorkshire Financial Exploitation & Abuse Team is a specialist, multi-disciplinary team based within West Yorkshire Trading Standards Service. It was established in 2016 to tackle financial exploitation from rogue traders and other doorstep crime and was expanded in 2018 to undertake criminal investigations involving financial abuse of adults at risk, on behalf of the five West Yorkshire councils. Last year it dealt with 237 referrals, bringing the total number to 1,894, with a value of fraud of £14,726,000. Interventions have recovered or preserved over £5 million to date.

Operation Artemis is an early intervention and prevention initiative, by West Yorkshire Trading Standards Service, aimed at 'nipping in the bud' illegal trader behaviour that does not currently warrant large scale legal intervention but where vulnerable consumers have fallen victim to rogue tactics in the home improvement market. Early disruption helps prevent future offending. Information is gathered from the sector through a combination of business

engagement and site visits, alongside intelligence-based research. This assists with implementing short term proactive interventions when consumer complaints are received, and to identify malpractice or breaches of legislation. This may be by way of advice to assist the business in identifying common problems in their trading model or a more intensive disruption to prevent continuing offending. So far, 27 businesses have been identified and over £20,000 has been refunded to consumers.

Dorset Council: Counterfeit Vinyl Records

In April 2023, a longstanding investigation by Dorset Trading Standards Service, delayed due to Covid, was finally concluded. Vinyl Groove UK was convicted of 14 offences relating to the sale and distribution of counterfeit vinyl LP records. The case came to Trading Standards' attention after a purchaser made a complaint about poor quality records and refusals to give a refund. The defendant was sentenced to 4 months' imprisonment suspended for 2 years. He was ordered to do 250 hours of unpaid work, electronically tagged for 3 months with a curfew order, and ordered to pay £373,598 following a Proceeds of Crime Order. The outcome was published in several national newspapers including the Guardian, Independent and Daily Mail.

SECTION TWO: SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Local economies and economic growth can only flourish where businesses have a level playing field and are not subject to unfair competition by those who break the law, and by being able to access good advice on how to meet regulatory requirements.

2.1 Businesses Get the Help and Support they need to Thrive and Grow

Having a thriving local economy is crucial for local authorities and for Government. Trading Standards' role in providing advice and support to businesses has never been more important.

There are currently **1,978 Primary Authority partnerships**. These partnerships enable assured advice is given to a business with multiple shops or sites via a single local authority. There was an increase in activity of 8% from 2022/23.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over 22,000 hours were provided by Trading Standards advising Primary Authority businesses.
- Trading Standards responded to almost 13,500 requests for advice from businesses that were not part of the Primary Authority scheme. This is a reduction of one-third. The reasons for this are unclear but it may be because Trading Standards have been more proactive in undertaking compliance checks and inspections that would enable businesses to ask for advice on site.

2.2 Creating and Maintaining a Level Playing Field for Safe and Fair Competition

Fair competition underpins economic growth. Unfair competition from those who fail to meet legal standards damages the economy and can cause legitimate businesses to fail, as well as putting consumers at risk.

Trading Standards Services follow a risk based and intelligence-led model. They will take action proportionate to the risk. Actions may include providing advice, seizing unsafe, counterfeit, and illicit products, and taking formal enforcement action where required.

Compliance visits have increased by 9% from 2022/23. This is largely because of the Food Standards Agency's requests for more food inspections.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Almost 72,000 visits were carried out to businesses to ensure that they comply with the law and to provide advice to help them fix any non-compliance.
- Over 27,000 businesses were subject to an intervention, such as advice, investigation, or referral.

- 58% of Trading Standards Services operate an assured trader scheme to help increase consumer confidence. These tend to be targeted at specific trade sectors. This has remained steady but the number of participating businesses has significantly decreased year-on-year. Approximately, 12,000 businesses participate in these schemes.
- Almost 250,000 counterfeit products with a market value of over £41 million, which breach the intellectual property of legitimate businesses, were seized.

This is less than one-tenth of what it has been in previous years. The reason is unknown. This may be partly due to a shift of focus to vapes and tobacco work. Counterfeits may be being sold through social media groups rather than from physical premises, making large scale seizures less likely and intervention more difficult. We will monitor this in future years.

The illegal trade in counterfeit goods funds organised crime and damages legitimate businesses who manufacture, distribute, and buy licences to sell legitimate products.



Staffordshire County Council: Local Business Support

Staffordshire Trading Standards Service refreshed their support to local businesses and now offer all businesses free initial access to discuss their needs and receive next-step suggestions. They have implemented an online contact form that businesses can use to access:

- Free initial access to business support.
- Trading Standards' bite-sized bespoke guidance, payable in advance in 30-minute blocks, to receive advice about product and service-specific matters, including labelling, standards, and regulations.
- Primary Authority Partnerships for businesses that supply goods and services, both within Staffordshire and beyond, to receive 'Assured Advice' and ongoing support.

Essex County Council: Border Checks

Essex Trading Standards Service undertook work with Harwich International Port to ensure readiness for the new border checks required from 30th April 2024. Documentary and physical checks now apply on medium risk animal products, plants, plant products, and high-risk food and feed of non-animal origin from the EU. Trading Standards will be undertaking checks on any high risk non-animal origin feed entering the UK through the port's new Border Control facility. Working with representatives from the port, Feed Officers have undertaken training sessions at the Border Control Point to familiarise themselves with the checks required, as well as the physical equipment necessary to unload roll on/roll off vehicles and the data systems used to move freight through the port.

Cheshire East Council: Support for Food Business Expansion

Cheshire East Trading Standards Service undertook visits and provided guidance to local traders looking to expand products on a larger footprint. One grateful business owner fed back: *"Thank you for your email, and for our meeting earlier in the week. Whilst I am still mortified that any products were able to leave me lacking in labels, there is a part of me that is also glad it happened because the time you have invested in speaking to me has been invaluable for me as a small business. It was apparent that the labels I use still weren't quite right and I have already amended them to reflect the following wider actions..."* and *"I wanted to take the time to thank you again for the time you spent with me. It was clear that you are both very knowledgeable and passionate about this area – with good reason. But your approach in the first instance is one of support, guidance, and engagement with business owners, and I think that is an excellent approach. Allergens and labels etc. are a complex area and a tricky one for small businesses to navigate. I think it is very commendable the efforts you are going to, to not only protect consumers but also to help small business to survive, thrive and ultimately be safe and compliant."*

Neath Port Talbot: Food Standards Workshop for Takeaway Businesses

In conjunction with the local Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) coordinator, Neath Port Talbot Trading Standards Service ran a free food standards workshop for takeaway businesses. The BAME coordinator used their contacts to invite relevant businesses. The morning workshop session provided advice on all aspects of food standards, with a particular focus on allergens. It is hoped to continue this as a programme for forthcoming years.



Kent County Council: Outcome Based Cooperative Regulation

Kent Trading Standards Service works with their Primary Authority business partners to deliver cost efficient compliance and the highest levels of consumer protection. One food business, identified by another local authority as marketing a range of non-compliant products, withdrew all those bearing non-compliant health claims from supermarket chains nationally. Trading Standards assisted in reworking the range, bringing it into compliance before returning it to the market with minimum financial and reputational harm. Without this support, the total annual consumer detriment would have equated to almost £150 million.

Cornwall Council: Business Regulatory Support

Cornwall Council offer a dedicated Business Regulatory Support service that provides free signposting and chargeable services for advice, training, and support. This is based on full cost recovery across a range of disciplines and includes specific Trading Standards' elements such as bite-size advice, bite-sized guides, auditing, and bespoke training. The Council has close links with the

Chamber of Commerce, Growth Hub, and other local business partnerships to help build trust and confidence. Feedback included:

"I have a small natural skincare business and recently branched out into making skincare products. Trading Standards have been a real help, popping out to see me and advising me about labelling and helping me check my wording on products. They even saved me £1,000 with their advice on packaging of one of my products! Invaluable!"

"We asked the officer about T1 and T2 weights and he advised us where we could increase our tolerances. This has saved us a substantial amount of money due to rejecting less bars. There is no doubt that our business has benefited from our trading standards' visit and I am very happy to recommend the service to other businesses."

"We would like to share our appreciation for the help and assistance we have received from our local Trading Standards officer. Shortfalls in our compliance record keeping were highlighted which we have now worked on and rectified. We also now have peace of mind that as new directives, consumer rights and rules and regulations change with Brexit looming that we have the support we need as and when we need it."

SECTION THREE: PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The health and well-being of local communities is important to all local authorities and Trading Standards have an important part to play by ensuring consumer products meet safety standards, food is correctly labelled and animal health and welfare standards are maintained.

Trading Standards, in particular, enforce a very wide range of age restricted sales legislation to help to keep young people safe. Stopping the supply of age restricted products, such as vapes, cigarettes, alcohol, and knives, are a key priority in many local authorities.

3.1 Ensuring the Safety of Consumer Products

Product safety laws are in place to ensure that products do not cause deaths or personal injuries. Unsafe consumer goods such as cosmetics, toys and electrical goods can cause serious injuries, fires and even risk lives. As well as checking goods at retail and wholesale level, Trading Standards identify, check, and seize unsafe products at ports.

This year the number of items removed from the market has decreased by 40%. The reasons for this are unclear. It may be, partly, because figures on vapes are collected separately but this would not explain the full decline.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Almost 2.9 million unsafe or non-compliant products were seized or removed from the marketplace following Trading Standards' interventions.
- The savings to society, in terms of product value and injuries and fires prevented, is almost £115 million.

3.2 Protecting the food chain

There has been an increased focus on food safety to protect consumers. The Food Standards Agency has increased its focus on the local authority role ensuring food standards are maintained. This is likely to be reflected in the increase in interventions as mentioned earlier in this report.

Food prices are higher than ever. This can increase the temptation for unscrupulous businesses to adulterate or falsely label food to enhance profits or gain a competitive advantage. Consumers need to be able to trust food labels and get good value for money. They also need to have clear, reliable information about food allergens which can cause serious injury or even death.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Almost 9,500 businesses were identified as supplying food that was misdescribed, did not correctly declare allergens, contained toxic or illegal components, or was involved in food fraud. This was a 3% increase on last year and a 35% increase from 2021/22.

Ensuring proper animal health and welfare standards, and protecting animals from suffering, helps the rural economy and protects the food chain.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over 6,300 businesses were found to be in breach of animal health and welfare legislation.

This has remained relatively constant in the last four years.

Animal disease outbreaks create risks to the UK economy and the farming industry. It should be remembered that the Foot and Mouth Outbreak of 2001 cost the UK economy £8 billion, and caused problems affecting tourism, farming, rural wages, and food production for many years afterwards.

In 2023/24, there were far fewer avian influenza cases than in the last few years, however Bluetongue disease became an issue. In 2023/24, local authorities dealt with 27 suspected and 76 confirmed cases of Bluetongue. In addition, they dealt with 34 suspected and 18 confirmed cases of avian influenza and one suspected case each of rabies and swine fever.

3.3 Reducing the risk of children accessing age restricted products

Trading Standards Services conduct test purchases to ensure businesses do not sell age-restricted goods to children, as well as providing businesses with advice on how to comply. Legislation outlaws the sale of age-restricted products, such as vapes, alcohol, cigarettes, knives, and fireworks to children, to protect them and their local communities from harm. This year there has been a continued national focus on the problems caused by the sale of vapes to children.

In **2023/24**, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over 1,400 premises were tested for alcohol sales.
- The average failure rate for alcohol test purchases was 23%.

- Over 650 premises were tested for tobacco sales.
- The average failure rate for tobacco test purchases was 19%.
- Over 4,300 premises were tested for vape sales.
- The average failure rate for vapes was 25%.
- Over 1,200 premises were tested for other products.
- The average failure rate for other products was 20%.

Resources have been shifted towards vapes testing, resulting in less testing on other products.

3.4 Reducing the availability of illicit products

Illicit tobacco, vapes and alcohol can contain undeclared contaminants. Illicit vapes can also contain higher than permitted levels of nicotine.

Smoking remains a significant driver in health inequalities. Price has been shown to be a critical factor in determining whether people quit smoking. The presence of cheap illicit tobacco undermines attempts to get people to cut down and quit smoking. Packs of illicit cigarettes are often between a third and a half the price of legitimate products.

The amount of tobacco and vape products seized has increased enormously since 2022/23. This reflects the prevalence of vaping problems and the priority this work is being given within local authorities. The work is supported with some funds from National Trading Standards.

In **2023/24**, across England and Wales:

- Over 19.1 million illicit cigarettes were seized, worth an estimated £9.5 million. This is a huge 34% increase from 2022/23.

- Over 5.1 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco were seized, worth over £2.3 million. Again, this is a very large increase of 59% compared to 2022/23.
- Almost 1.5 million illicit vapes were seized by local authorities inland. This was, again, a significant increase of 59% on the previous year.

The Licensing Act 2003 allows for a review, and potential removal of a licence, by a local authority Licensing Committee, where failures to comply with any of the four licensing objectives occur. These objectives are preventing crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm. Activities by Trading Standards have resulted in 183 Licence Reviews being carried out, an increase of 24% from last year.





London Trading Standards Authorities: Illicit Tobacco and Vapes Enforcement and Work with Schools

A range of work is going on across many London Boroughs. Examples include:

Croydon Trading Standards Service has received Public Health funding to employ a specialist illicit tobacco and vapes lead officer. This enhanced the enforcement capability of a small team and ignited a new workstream with schools in the borough through the safeguarding lead. Trading Standards have contributed towards a safeguarding toolkit for young people, creating advice on disposable vapes for parents and schools and a 'scam alert' link service with bite-size warnings and information aimed at young people and their parents. This successful relationship has led to the offer for 2024/25 of funding for two more posts.

Haringey Trading Standards Service have collaborated with Public Health on a School Superzone Project. Their primary role is to ensure that businesses within 500m of specific schools are responsible retailers in relation to age restricted products. In 2023/24, Trading Standards carried out 40 visits within the superzone, with a failure rate of 18% (7 sales). They also produced a leaflet for business on the sale of vapes.

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Trading Standards Service have worked in partnership with their Public Health team and local schools to devise a document that could become a roadmap for schools dealing with vape incidents. The document signposts to partners like the drug and alcohol partnership, school nurses and Trading Standards. As part of a Schools Superzone, Trading Standards undertook a targeted project of advice for sellers of age restricted goods, culminating in vape visits and an underage sales operation with the police. There were no sales in the 10 premises tested.

Staffordshire County Council: American Candy

In a pilot project funded by the Food Standards Agency, Staffordshire Trading Standards Service seized 3,378 items of American sweets and fizzy drinks with known links to hyperactivity and cancer in children. The products were found in small local retailers as well as larger retailers and supermarkets. They were also available through social media. American Candy has grown in popularity over the last few years due to its promotion on social media channels. Last year, £25m worth of US sweets were imported, a 70% increase from 2017. London alone has seen stores pop up in their hundreds across its high streets.

Consumers that buy them could be at risk from a lack of allergy labelling, or the inclusion of ingredients, in particular additives, which do not meet UK food safety standards. Several items were seized and there was significant local, regional, national, and international media coverage. The BBC ran an item in Morning Live featuring an investigation by Dr Punam Krishan. The project significantly raised consumers' understanding of the health risks associated with these products.

Hertfordshire County Council: Dairy Allergens in Vegan Food

Hertfordshire Trading Standards Service took over 300 samples for examination and testing. Over half had unsatisfactory results. In particular, 45% of sampled vegan food was found to contain an animal-based allergen; the most common being milk. Not only does this mislead those who wish to choose vegan food but also risks serious allergic reactions.



Derbyshire County Council: Protecting the Public from Allergens and Unsafe Pet Food

Derbyshire Trading Standards Service received eight complaints regarding allergen incidents in hospitality businesses, resulting in consumers becoming unwell. Officers supported the businesses to identify the cause and implement corrective actions.

Improvements were made to their allergen management procedures, staff training and signage/labelling.

A project to sample and test plant-based drinks for the presence of dairy milk proteins in barista style coffee was carried out at 10 businesses. Cross contamination can cause severe reactions for a person with a milk allergy. There has been a recent tragic case highlighted in the media where a teenage girl died. Five samples failed, with one containing 22.6mg/kg of casein (over 100 times the reference dose). Primary Authorities were advised and follow up visits were made to discuss findings and offer advice on the handling of allergens to prevent any further cross contamination and reduce risk to consumers with a milk allergy.

There has been a dramatic increase in the quantity of raw pet food for sale. Hospital admissions of pet owners who handle raw pet food have increased substantially, due to risks associated with salmonella and other bacterial infections. Trading Standards have worked with a large manufacturer of raw pet food to ensure that the feed that they supply is safe. The company in question manufactures around 4,200 tonnes of pet food per year. Due to Trading Standards' intervention in respect of a failed sample of raw pet food the company recalled a batch worth £32,000.

Lancashire County Council: Recipe for Health Scheme

"Recipe 4 Health" is a Lancashire Trading Standards Service's scheme for caterers. The Recipe 4 Health Award promotes businesses that focus on healthy eating, environmental issues, and social responsibility.

At each level, businesses have to show they are compliant with food safety, food standards, licensing, and age restricted sales legislation. In 2023/24, 15 Gold, 20 Silver and 47 Bronze Awards were given.

Manchester City Council: Prosecution for Unsafe Jewellery and Toys

Manchester Trading Standards Service were alerted to a consignment of toys imported by a Manchester-based business. They carried out an inspection of the importer and took a range of samples of products. Seized items included 422 'poppy' pins, 110 items of jewellery, 200 light up toys, 136 counterfeit "Marvel" toys and a further 73 toys that lacked the correct labelling. Jewellery was found to contain dangerous levels of heavy metals, including a ring containing 1,300 times the safe amount of lead. Light up toys had plastic caps and battery boxes that were not fitted properly which could have resulted in a child gaining access to the internal wiring. Other elements were found to pose a choking hazard. A prosecution was taken and the director pleaded guilty to various safety and counterfeiting offences. In total, fines of £8,000 were issued and costs of £4,300.

Isle of Anglesey County Council: Imported Vapes

Successful partnership working with North Wales Police resulted in a three-month Closure Order on a Vape Shop that resulted in a reduction in antisocial behaviour and underage sales to children affecting their health/school work. Anglesey Trading Standards Service also worked with UK Border Force at Holyhead, resulting in over 118,000 illegal vapes being stopped from entering the market. Over 2,800 were removed from sale in retail shops. The total street value of these vapes was almost £1.5 million.

SECTION FOUR: NET ZERO, ENERGY COSTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Net Zero and Climate Change agenda continues to be important to local authorities. Many have this issue as a key corporate priority. The cost-of-living crisis has also meant that claims associated with energy efficiency and costs are attractive to consumers as they look to save money. While there is no specific data collected on this issue, figures will be included within the totals for compliance checks, business advice and prosecution figures in previous chapters. For example, some Trading Standards carry out work in relation to:

- Misleading claims on green energy products such as heat pumps and solar panels.
- Ensuring compliance with Energy Performance Certificates and Minimum Energy Efficient Standards.
- Misleading “greenwashing” claims.
- Enforcement of single use plastics bans.

Suffolk County Council: Lorrywatch Scheme

Suffolk Trading Standards Service operate a “Lorrywatch” scheme with around eight member communities. This enables residents, in volunteer groups, to report the registration details of Heavy Goods Vehicles travelling through their villages or on bridges in apparent breach of vehicle environmental weight restrictions. The driver is identified and usually provided with advice in the first instance. The haulage company, if identified, is also provided with advice and intelligence is shared with the Transport Commissioner, where relevant. Hundreds of reports are received and subsequent advice letters are sent out every year. Generally, this is very successful and welcomed by the communities and politicians in which the scheme operates, with very low rates of re-offending. The scheme helps protect the environment of local villages by reducing noise and air pollution and damage to the natural and historic built environment.

Bath and North East Somerset: Road Weight Restrictions

Bath and North East Somerset Trading Standards Service dealt with reports of 30 potential breaches of vehicle weight restrictions. Five vehicles were exempt and warning letters were sent to the remaining offenders. In addition, Cleveland Bridge uses Automatic Number Plate recognition to send notices to vehicles appearing to breach the weight limit. Last year 569 notices were sent, with 51 cases being formally investigated by Trading Standards, resulting in 37 formal warnings and four prosecutions with other cases still being investigated.

Isle of Wight Council: Wood Fuel

Isle of Wight Trading Standards Service has been contacting local suppliers of wood for burning in domestic houses to ensure compliance with “Ready to Burn” requirements. These requirements are designed to reduce air pollution caused by the burning of unseasoned or wet wood. Follow up physical visits are planned for 2024/25.

Leicestershire County Council: Green Claims

Trading Standards East Midlands carried out intelligence work in respect of green claims. Government run schemes bring in an opportunity for businesses to exploit consumers. Often this involves fraudulently completing eligibility criteria applications and completing work that is often unnecessary. In partnership with colleagues across the region, Leicestershire Trading Standards Services is looking at some of these claims and issues brought about by past work in this area, such as loft insulation being substandard and unsuitable, leaving consumers unable to mortgage the property and experiencing issues when coming to sell.



Newport: Energy Efficiency

Work by Newport Trading Standards Service resulted in eight illegally marketed domestic properties brought into compliance from their failing F and G ratings. This will result in an annual reduction of 30.2 tonnes of CO₂ and savings to residents of £2,428 per year. Three entirely unrated domestic properties were identified and brought up to standard, resulting in a further reduction of 23 tonnes of CO₂ and savings to residents of £3,787 per year. The Team also saw 22 illegally marketed commercial properties brought into compliance from their failing F and G ratings, resulting in an annual reduction of 576 tonnes of CO₂. The amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere was the equivalent of planting 56,000 trees.

Shared Regulatory Services (Bridgend, Cardiff, and Vale of Glamorgan): Energy Efficiency

Trading Standards contacted owners, agents, and landlords of private rented properties across the three local authority areas to remind them of their duties under Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations. The Team also signposted them to funding that may be available to assist in improving the energy rating of properties. The focus was properties appearing to fall into the forbidden F and G energy efficiency ratings, together with those for which there was no published rating. By the end of the year, a total of 138 properties were sufficiently improved to take them out of the F and G energy efficiency rating to become E rated or better. Also, some 127 previously unrated private rented properties now hold Energy Performance Certificates ranging from B to E. This resulted in a reduction of 406 tonnes in the amount of CO₂ produced at the improved properties and a reduction of almost 425,000 kWh needed to heat the improved properties.

Worcestershire County Council: Spray Foam

Worcestershire Trading Standards Service has been warning residents to be on their guard against those looking to supply insulation products, in particular, spray foam. Trading Standards saw a rise in doorstep and cold-call scams that seek to persuade householders to buy spray-in insulation. The trader either argues that spray foam is better than traditional methods of insulation, or that existing spray foam insulation in the property is either likely to cause damage or is soon to become illegal. People are then persuaded that they should opt for an alternative “spray-in” insulation which is sold at an inflated price. Residents have been advised to seek expert advice before agreeing to any work. It is also important to ensure that spray foam insulation is applied by trained professionals and that adequate ventilation in lofts and roof spaces is provided. Spray foam insulation has been known to lead to problems when the homeowner wants to sell, re-mortgage or release equity from their property.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council: Vape Disposal

Redcar and Cleveland Trading Standards Service have provided advice and guidance to all vape retailers to provide appropriate waste facilities in their premises. This legislation is designed to increase recycling and reduce environmental damage caused by discarded vapes.

SECTION FIVE: COST OF LIVING CRISIS

As referenced throughout this report, the cost of living crisis has continued to influence the work done by Trading Standards this year. Similarly to net zero, there is no specific data collected on this issue as figures will be included within the totals for compliance checks, business advice and enforcement activity.

Carmarthenshire County Council: Farmer Welfare Initiative

Carmarthenshire Trading Standards Service's Animal Health Team have responded to an increasing number of animal welfare complaints on farms, to find farmers are struggling financially and/or mentally. They brought together the Citizens' Advice Bureau (to offer debt/financial advice), and charities, Tir Dewi (offering practical support to farmers) and the DPJ Foundation (mental health charity for the farming community) so there are now mechanisms in place for four-way referrals between each of the organisations, ensuring farmers receive the support they need.

As an example, officers responded to one complaint and during a joint visit with the Animal and Plant Health Agency, found evidence of carcasses scattered throughout the property, a large quantity of slurry and very little grass, hay or straw. The farmer told officers that he was struggling, had no money or support and was a carer to his elderly mother who had recently attempted suicide. Initially, he was too proud to accept help, but after numerous visits by an officer, he agreed to meet with Tir Dewi and CAB who were able to provide practical and financial assistance, which allowed the farmer to resolve non-compliance and become more financially and emotionally stable.

Derby City Council and LBs of Brent & Harrow, Haringey, and Kingston: Ensuring the Accuracy of Scales and Prices in Shops

A range of work is going on across many local authorities to reassure consumers that they are getting what they pay for, especially on staple items. Examples include:

Derby City Trading Standards Service inspected 52 retailers. They tested 227 scales: 94% had the required markings and 3% were outside of the permitted limits of error, meaning a consumer could be given short weight. They checked over 5,300 individual packs of staples. Of these, only 0.6% packs were found to be below the "T2" permitted weight limit. They included ready meals, bread, noodles, and cheese. Over 4,700 shelf edge price labels were checked to ensure required pricing information was present and 94.6% were found to be correct. Compliance was higher (at 98.6%) in major

supermarkets. In total, 912 prices were scanned, of which 885 (97%) matched the price advertised on the shelf. Of the 27 that differed, seven were in the consumer's favour and 10 were to the consumer's detriment. Unit Pricing was checked in 32 retailers. Of 859 prices checked, 8.6% were found to be misleading. Overall compliance was high with unit pricing being the area with most problems.

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Service tested the scales in local shops: 88 weighing scales were tested and 32 were found to be non-compliant.

Haringey Trading Standards Service checked pricing and weighing scales to ensure consumers received value for money: 98% of businesses inspected were compliant or brought to compliance within 30 days.

Kensington & Chelsea Trading Standards Service undertook visits to premises and a high number of non-compliances were found with weighing equipment. These have been dealt with through advice, with premises being brought back into compliance.

Buckinghamshire & Surrey Trading Standards: Car Boot Sales

Physical car boot sales are still a popular way for consumers looking for bargains. Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service carried out visits to car boot sales. It is estimated that 40% - 50% of all sellers at car boot sales were found to be businesses rather than members of the public selling second hand items. Trading Standards found 18% of stall holders appearing to sell goods with potential safety concerns. These goods included electrical items, toys, cosmetics and vapes.



Stoke-on-Trent City, Buckinghamshire & Surrey and Redcar and Cleveland Council: Electric Blanket Testing

Stoke-on-Trent Trading Standards Service reintroduced free electric blanket testing for residents, partnering with the Office for Product Safety and Standards to cover testing costs, and the Electrical Safety Council and their Council Beat the Cold and Groundworks partners to provide free replacement blankets. Sessions took place at Council Community Lounges, set up as a response to the cost of living crisis, and at Council Markets.

Funded by Electrical Safety First, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service tested 63 blankets of which 45 failed. One was 55 years old. All consumers whose blankets failed, were given free replacements, donated by Dreams, a Primary Authority Partner.

Redcar and Cleveland Trading Standards Service conducted two electric blanket/electric appliances (heaters, Irons, etc) testing and provided free replacements with the assistance of a £5,000 grant from Electrical Safety First.

LBs Brent & Harrow: Part Worn Tyres

Purchasing part worn tyres can seem a very tempting way to reduce costs. Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Service conducted compliance checks

at retailers and publicised information to educate consumers on key points they should look for when buying part worn tyres and the increase in risks to the safety of drivers and passengers where part worn tyres are fitted.

Derbyshire County Council: Petrol Pumps

As part of a Cost-of-Living Project, Derbyshire Trading Standards Service tested 147 petrol pumps across the county. These pumps on average dispense 22 million litres of fuel per year, at a net value to the consumer of £33 million. All the pumps tested were found to be delivering fuel within permitted legal tolerances thus providing reassurance to residents.

Powys County Council: Bulk Fuel Deliveries

Powys Trading Standards Service carried out bulk fuel tests finding one tanker was delivering 14 litres short measure in every 1,000 litres. The cost to the individual consumer is estimated at a loss of approximately £10 per delivery of 1,000L. The trader is estimated to have gained approximately £8,250 over the year from short measure deliveries.