

# Continuing to Protect the Public and Support Businesses in the Cost of Living Crisis

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

The Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (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 the fourth report for England & Wales and this document contains a summary of the highlights of work done in 2023/24.

This year, across all areas of work, the risks associated with the cost of living crisis on consumers and businesses is apparent. The need for effective business advice and a level playing field for legitimate businesses is going to be crucial to keep them afloat in difficult times. Risks to consumers around the safety of cheap or illicit goods and false claims relating to prices, costs and energy efficiency are growing and the impact of losing money to scammers is bigger than ever.

### In 2023/24 local Trading Standards Services have:

- Prevented over £905 million of detriment to consumers.
- Saved scam victims almost £59 million.
- Provided over 22,000 hours of advice to businesses through primary authority partnerships, similar to last year.
- Seized over 1.5 million disposable vaping products.
- Almost 72,000 compliance checks to ensure businesses meet their legal responsibilities and to provide them with advice on site.

## TACKLING DETRIMENT AND PREVENTING HARM

One of the key functions of Trading Standards is to prevent consumer and business detriment (financial and non-financial), tackle the criminal behaviour that leads to it and support victims. The Government's 2022 Consumer Protection Study estimated that there was £54 billion in unaddressed detriment across Great Britain.

### Key statistics for 2023/24 included:



**839 defendants** were prosecuted.



**Prison sentences** of over **446 years** were handed down. This includes both immediate and suspended sentences.



Defendants were ordered to pay almost **£9.2 million in Proceeds of Crime**.



Local authority Trading Standards provided support to almost **12,800 scam victims**.



Work to disrupt mass marketing fraud mailings, stop outgoing payments, mail etc **saved consumers about £59 million**.



Over **£2.7 million compensation** being awarded to victims by the courts.



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## SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

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Businesses have always needed advice and support from Trading Standards to help them navigate the range of laws that ensure they trade fairly and their products are safe. This year, as businesses continue to recover from the impacts of Covid, and face supply chain and energy cost issues, the ability to access the correct advice and have confidence has never been more important.

### Key statistics for 2023/24 included:



Responded to almost **13,500 requests** for advice from businesses that were not part of the Primary Authority scheme, similar to pre-pandemic levels.



Almost **27,000 businesses** were subject to an intervention, such as advice, investigation or referral.



Over 72,000 visits were carried out to businesses to ensure they comply with the law and provide advice to help them fix any non-compliance.



Over **250,000 counterfeit products** with a market value of **£41 million**, which breach the intellectual property of legitimate businesses, were seized.

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## PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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Trading Standards undertake a wide range of activities to protect and promote the health and well-being of local communities including ensuring that products people buy are safe, that food is correctly labelled, and that the health and welfare of livestock is assured.

Age restricted products, including vaping products, tobacco, alcohol, and knives, are also a significant area of focus for many authorities. Trading Standards enforce and advise on a very wide range of age restricted sales legislation to help to keep young people safe.

### Key statistics for 2023/24 included:



Nearly **2.9 million unsafe or non-compliant products** were seized or removed from the market place following Trading Standards' interventions.



**1400 premises** were tested for the under age sale of alcohol; the average failure rate was **23%**.



The savings to society, in terms of product value and injuries and fires prevented, is over **£114 million**.



**650 premises** were tested for the under age sale of tobacco; the average failure rate was **19%**.



Over **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.



Over **4,300 premises** were tested for other products, including vaping products; the average failure rate was **25%**.



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



Over **19.1 million illicit cigarettes** were seized, together with **5.1 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco** worth a combined street value of **£11.8 million**.

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## SUPPORT FOR ENVIRONMENT, NET ZERO AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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The Net Zero and Climate Change agenda are becoming more important each year, with the majority of local authorities seeing this issue as a key corporate priority.

Claims associated with energy usage and energy efficiency are going to be a real marketing point as energy costs rise so quickly and households will be looking to save money. More broadly "greenwashing" and green claims have become a concern and the Competition and Markets Authority issued a report on this.

There is no separate data collected on Trading Standards work to support this agenda, they will be included within the compliance checks, business advice and prosecution figures in the above figures.

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## COST OF LIVING

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The continuing cost of living crisis has been a major influence on all of the work done by Trading Standards. In some localities specific projects have been undertaken to address issues such as pricing on groceries, accuracy of fuel deliveries and extra support to consumers who have been ripped off.