

Protecting the Public and Supporting Business During the Pandemic



The Impacts and Outcomes of Local
Trading Standards Services 2020/21 in
England and Wales



FOREWORD

The Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) created the Impact 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 third report and contains the highlights of work done in 2020/21. It demonstrates the huge impact that Trading Standards makes and how impacts have changed during the pandemic.

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 a specific section to the Covid specific work carried out by Trading Standards, alongside their local authority colleagues.

Local government austerity has hit many Trading Standards Services hard over previous years. However, Trading Standards officers across England and Wales continue to have a big impact in protecting consumers, helping businesses and supporting the Covid response. The headlines from this year's report are:

- Over £588 million detriment was prevented by Trading Standards' actions.
- Revenue budgets increased by 5% - likely due to short term funds on Covid and EU exit. Overall income sources dropped significantly by 14%.
- Total revenue budgets were £104 million.
- Overall staff numbers remained largely unaltered at 2004.
- The demand on the service measured by the number of referrals from Citizens Advice increased by 20% - we believe this increase largely related to notifications about issues such as holidays and events cancellation and refund issues.
- Almost all non-Covid enforcement activity dropped, mainly due to many Courts closing and very large backlogs caused by Covid. The number of fixed monetary penalties increased but this is likely due to Covid restriction based Fixed Monetary Penalties.
- Linked to this, non-scams related redress dropped by 36% as Covid restrictions meant very limited Court compensation awards and no seizures of money from traders.
- The number of scams victims supported increased by 26%.
- Support for businesses, outside the formal primary authority scheme, increased by 28%. Trading Standards provided a lot of advice for new start-ups and those needing to change operations to click and collect or on-line delivery. Some local authorities also waived business advice fees as part of its pandemic response.

Unsurprisingly, non-Covid compliance checks were only at one-third of pre-pandemic levels. This was due to restrictions on carrying out visits and redeployment of staff into Covid related duties. This had a knock-on effect with lower levels of test-purchasing and lower levels of seizures of illicit goods.

One area where checks did not reduce related to animal health and welfare. We believe this was driven by visits that had to be carried out due to infectious disease outbreaks and also animal health and welfare issues that arose due to Covid.

Trading Standards were a key part of the local authority Covid response, along with other colleagues in regulatory services. In England, Trading Standards supported local authorities with over 1.2 million Covid-secure compliance checks, dealt with almost 98,000 Covid related complaints and carried out over 220,000 visits. In Wales, Trading Standards supported local authorities with over 42,000 enquiries and carried out over 48,000 visits.

In summary, this was an exceptional year due to the pandemic and thus not directly comparable to previous years. However, Trading Standards continued to demonstrate its huge value in focussing support on protecting and supporting the most vulnerable, and supporting local businesses through very difficult times. Trading Standards services were, and continue to be, crucial to the local authority response to Covid, and to delivering public health and central government led controls protecting people and businesses from harm – always our core purpose.

We hope this report can help local managers to advocate for their services at a local level, as well as showing the national impact of Trading Standards to all partners and stakeholders and, in particular, to help inform Government when they are developing policy that will impact on Trading Standards. When we consider the impact of this work, alongside what is delivered via National Trading Standards, it highlights the results that can be achieved using the Trading Standards system.

Special thanks go to the 110 services covering 123 local authorities that submitted their data return. This is the biggest response to date and is especially impressive given the pressures of Covid-19 work.



Steve Ruddy
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 2020/21. The indicators measure demand and resourcing alongside key outputs and outcomes from Trading Standards' activity.

One hundred and ten services contributed, covering 123 out of 172 (72%) of local authorities in England and Wales. The responses cover an area with a population of 47,698,900, or 80% 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. The resultant figures estimate impact and activity levels for the whole of England and Wales.

DEMAND AND RESOURCING

It is estimated that the approximate revenue budget allocated to Trading Standards is £104 million. This has increased by 5% from 19/20 but this year many local authorities received additional one-off grants for work relating to EU Exit and Covid, which will have been used to support various elements of regulatory delivery.

Other sources of income were National Trading Standards' grants for various activities including animal feed inspection and sampling, funds to support investigations and Primary Authority work income.

It is estimated that approximately 2,000 full time employees are employed on Trading Standards' work. This has not changed from last year. Of those, 87% are "operational" staff.

Trading Standards received almost 800,000 referrals and notifications to their services. The majority are from Citizens Advice and these increased by 20% compared to last year. We believe this increase largely related to notifications about issues such as holidays and events cancellation and refund issues.

SECTION ONE: 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 National Audit Office estimated in 2015 that the true value of consumer and business detriment was around £14.8 billion per year. The Government plans to publish an updated Consumer Detriment Survey in 2021.

1.1 Stopping Fraudulent, Illegal and Unfair Trading

Where individuals deliberately break the law, repeatedly ignore advice, or cause significant harm, Trading Standards Services will prosecute. Trading Standards legislation carries a variety of penalties including: prison; fines; forfeiture of assets; fixed penalties; and undertakings to stop future non-compliance.

Many of the investigations tackling serious criminality are complex, time-consuming, and can take several years to bring to trial.

In 2020/21, due to the pandemic, very few cases were taken through the Courts system as most Courts were closed for long periods and significant backlogs have built up. For example, the number of defendants convicted, prison sentences and fines were around half that in 19/20. However, Proceeds of Crime confiscations actually increased, most likely because confiscation hearings are carried out post-conviction and can be done administratively or remotely so were not as heavily impacted by Court closures. The numbers below are very low and will change in future years.

The use of Enterprise Act undertakings is low with only 24 being implemented. This year there was a breach rate of 20% on undertakings given. Undertakings can only be used for specified breaches rather than for all Trading Standards work. Also, as services increasingly focus scarce resources on the highest levels of detriment, this will often mean that the use of criminal proceedings is the most appropriate route for enforcement.

- Over **650 defendants** were taken through the prosecution process
- **Prison sentences** of over **203 years** were handed down. This includes both immediate and suspended sentences
- Defendants were ordered to pay over **£1.02 million in fines and over £890,000 in costs**
- Defendants were ordered to pay over **£14.2 million in Proceeds of Crime**

1.2 Detriment and Redress

Redress and compensation for victims of crime can be secured as part of the prosecution process or through a variety of other means. Again these were much reduced from 19/20 due to the closures and backlogs in the Courts as outlined above.

In addition, activities such as in person rapid responses to reports of doorstep crime and other fraud, designed to prevent customers handing over money, were also limited due to Covid restrictions.

Prosecuting and disrupting criminal behaviour, and providing advice and support to the public on how to get a fair deal, prevents further harm and financial detriment. In 2020/21, it is estimated that the actions of Trading Standards Services resulted in:

- Over **£2.4 million compensation** awarded to victims by the courts
- Over **£3.7 million prevented from being handed over to criminals**
- Over **£1.07 million gained for victims** through advice and intervention
- Over **£588 million of detriment prevented** by Trading Standards' actions

1.3 Supporting Scam Victims

Fraud remains one of the most prevalent crimes in the UK. Through investigative and disruptive work, Trading Standards identify and support victims of scams. Officers will reach out to these victims, especially the most vulnerable and often elderly victims of fraud. Trading Standards usually visit them at home, but this year these visits have been very limited due to Covid restrictions. Trading Standards sought to use different ways of contacting victims. This year the number of scams victims supported by local authorities increased by 26%.

The increase shows the commitment Trading Standards had to support the most vulnerable, even during the pandemic. The increase is probably partly due to telephone calls being made rather than personal visits. However, it is recognised that face to face contact provides the victim with support and gains a better intelligence picture in relation to their lifestyle e.g. piles of scam mail in the house or other signs of neglect.

This is evident in the cases studies and Compass feedback received by the NTS Scams Team. Consumers that are visited at home made significant savings and fully understood the scale of the victimisation. The aim is to ensure they get the support they need to stop them responding to scams; and this will help to improve their wellbeing. In some cases Trading Standards install call blockers to prevent scam calls from reaching vulnerable individuals and work with other safeguarding agencies if required. The NTS Scams Team supports local authorities with this work.

In 2020/21 it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Local authority Trading Standards provided support to over **27,300 victims**
- Work to disrupt mass marketing fraud mailings, stop outgoing payments, mail etc saved consumers over **£42.5 million**



Birmingham City Council Trading Standards - Used Car Rip-offs

Birmingham Trading Standards helped consumers who had purchased faulty used cars. In one case a trader told the consumer that they could not take it for test drive due to Covid and delivered it to the consumer's home. The car was faulty and broke down. The trader refused to honour a refund but after Trading Standards intervened the consumer received a refund of £2,500. In another case a consumer purchased a car online. Various faults were identified. The car lost power on the motorway which could have been very dangerous. The seller told the consumer to go via the warranty; the warranty company said the faults were not covered. With Trading Standards' intervention, the consumer received a full refund of £7,000.

London Trading Standards - Knives

London Trading Standards Services participated in test purchasing to prevent the sale of knives to children. London Trading Standards and the Police launched London Responsible Retailers Agreement aimed at independent knives retailers. A Pan-London Challenge 25 test purchasing operation identified high risk retailers. Retailers were then encourage to attend a training event delivered by the Police, before follow up underage tests. Training animations and materials were developed with partners, including the Police and the London Mayor's office, along with a good practice guide and other material for use by knives retailers to improve training and management. Training animations aimed at online sellers, couriers and click and collect distributors will be added soon.

Continued on page 6

Durham County Council Trading Standards – Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

Durham Trading Standards carried out work to secure compliance with Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards. They were part of a BEIS pilot programme. This identified 1,500 private rented properties below an E rating. This led to engagement with landlords, letting agents, tenants and students across this sector.

Nottinghamshire County Council Trading Standards – Scams Partnerships

Nottinghamshire Trading Standards are attending Adult Social Care and Health team meetings to raise awareness of scams and fraud amongst their staff. Virtual sessions were hosted for carers and those who use memory clinics, along with work with Country Enterprise Foods to distribute scams awareness messages to vulnerable adults.

Cheshire East Council Trading Standards - Older Persons Scams and Doorstep Crime

Cheshire East Trading Standards arranged virtual scams seminars for 103 care workers and adult safeguarding staff. Working with partners, Trading Standards developed the Older Persons Scams/Doorstep Crime Awareness & Aftercare Project. This included 49 one-to-one sessions with vulnerable adults. Eight newsletters were produced with preventative information provided to 6,203 older people and 26 local press releases on the subject further spread the messages.

Manchester City Council Trading Standards – Rogue Builders

Manchester Trading Standards prosecuted a trader under the Fraud Act. They completed work on a basement with false documentation claiming the work had been inspected by a building inspector. The consumer had paid £30,000 and then had to pay out more money to get the work rectified and appropriately certified. At the hearing, two similar cases were taken into account and the defendant received a custodial sentence of 3 years 9 months.

Pembrokeshire County Council Trading Standards - Intimidation of Vulnerable Persons by Rogue Traders

Pembrokeshire Trading Standards dealt with a doorstep trader who made numerous visits to a vulnerable adult who had learning difficulties. They demanded payments without carrying out work or doing very shoddy work. The person was intimidated and confused by a number of traders suspected of being linked. The trader tried to take photos of the victim and there were suggestions of 'cuckooing', whereby criminals use the vulnerable victim's home for nefarious purposes. An investigation by local police and the assistance of a local councillor led to the prosecution of the trader who received a restraining order preventing any further approach to the victim.

Swansea Council Trading Standards - False Description of Food

Swansea Trading Standards took a case against a major national pub chain for falsely describing food. Dishes sold at a premium rate were said to be lobster but when examined were actually a combined product containing only 35% lobster. Following the case, the chain removed all these products and sent a clear message to other retailers that it is not acceptable to falsely describe food to consumers.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Trading Standards - Fraudulent Furniture Trading

East Riding Trading Standards carried out a significant investigation against a fraudulently operated furniture company. The company was taking 50% deposits for furniture advertised on the internet and frequently failed to deliver the goods or delivered goods of very poor quality. Over £220,000 was taken from consumers. Complaints made to the defendants often resulted in abuse and threats. The main offender was sentenced to 30 months in prison, a 5-year Criminal Behaviour Order and a 5-year ban from being a company director. The second offender was sentenced to 12 months in prison suspended for 18 months, a 60-day curfew and a 4-year ban from being a company director.

SECTION TWO: SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Businesses need 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 was particularly crucial this year when businesses needed to respond to Covid legislation and many needed to change their businesses to on-line or different market sectors to survive during the pandemic.

It is also important for an effective functioning market that legitimate businesses know that their competitors will comply with the law and there will be a level playing field and that those refusing to comply will be punished.

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

Economic growth is a key priority for all local authorities, providing advice and support to businesses is more important than ever. This has been especially important this year. Trading Standards Services provide advice to businesses on the legislation they cover. Many authorities offer some free advice to new businesses, but most authorities charge a small amount for advice to cover costs. This year some local authorities chose to waive some business advice fees in order to better support local businesses during the pandemic.

Primary Authority Partnerships enable assured advice to be given to a business with multiple shops or sites via a single local authority. Trading Standards Services provided over 21,000 hours of this advice. This was a reduction of 37% from 19/20. Most primary authority businesses, which tend to be larger ones, were focussed on issues relating to the pandemic such as Covid safe operations, grants and furlough and therefore demands for Trading Standards specific advice reduced.

Conversely, requests for advice by businesses not in primary authority partnerships, increased by 28%. Trading Standards provided a lot of advice for new start-ups and those needing to change operations to click and collect or on-line delivery.

In 2020/21, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Trading Standards responded to over **28,000 requests for advice** from businesses
- **3,475 Primary Authority Partnerships** are in operation, covering over **108,000 businesses**
- Over **21,000 hours** were spent by Trading Standards **advising Primary Authority businesses**

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

Trading Standards Services follow an intelligence-led model where action is taken against the highest risk businesses. This can include visits to provide advice and information, seizure of counterfeit or unsafe products, or starting an investigation in the most serious cases.

Trading Standards also support legitimate businesses through good trader schemes that help promote their businesses.

Unsurprisingly, given the pandemic, compliance visits were at only about one-third of 19/20 levels. This was due to restrictions that prevented or limited visits, and because the Trading Standards workforce was diverted onto Covid compliance checks.

In 2020/21, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over **26,000 visits** were carried out to businesses to **ensure they comply with the law and provide advice** to help them fix any non-compliance. This does not include Covid compliance which is dealt with later in this report.
- Over **10,500 businesses** were subject to an **intervention**, such as advice, investigation or referral
- **58%** of Trading Standards services operate an **assured trader scheme**
- Over **1.2 million counterfeit products with a market value of £40.6 million**, which breach the intellectual property of legitimate businesses, were seized,

Supplying counterfeit goods can be seen as a "victimless" crime but the reality is that counterfeiting is run by international organised criminal gangs. Profits from sales fund other criminal activity while hurting legitimate businesses who manufacture, distribute and buy licences to sell legitimate products.



Hertfordshire County Council Trading Standards – Business Support

Hertfordshire Trading Standards have a dedicated business-facing team and operate a business advice hotline. The service also hosts Hertfordshire's Better Business for All co-ordinator and, in conjunction with other County regulators, a wide variety of business advice is published via the Local Enterprise Partnership website. EU Exit and Covid have been key themes when supporting businesses this year. Trading Standards participated in a number of training events on these topics, including training of Growth Hub advisors; and presenting at business advice webinars.

One attendee said "it was one of the most informative sessions I have attended. The presenters were so knowledgeable and keen to share information with the attendees."

Suffolk County Council Trading Standards – Growth Hubs

Suffolk Trading Standards' partnership with New Anglia Growth Hub and its Business Support and Advice Workstream Group means advisors can receive guidance on specific client issues. In addition to the Growth Hub and its workshops, new businesses are signposted to other business support services. Suffolk Trading Standards are able to react to any trends and be pro-active with advice and signposting by analysing business enquiry data each quarter. Businesses are advised of latest business scams via messaging from the Trading Standards' run Business Champion scheme. Social media is increasingly used to publicise these scams and disseminate reports from other partner agencies such as the Pensions Ombudsman.

Derbyshire County Council Trading Standards – Trusted Trader Scheme

Derbyshire Trading Standards operates a Trusted Trader scheme with around 1,100 members from a broad range of trades. Of members surveyed, 85% said that being a Trusted Trader had helped their business by giving them more work and giving customers more confidence. Some had taken on more staff and expanded operations as a result. Members also report that membership had saved them advertising costs, whilst 98% of customers reported they were very satisfied with the traders they used. In 20/21, Trusted Trader annual fees were waived for the year. This initiative was Council funded to support local businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Buckinghamshire & Surrey Council's Trading Standards – Working with Convenience Stores

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards' support of businesses is exemplified through their close work with the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS). ACS is one of the Services co-ordinated Primary Authority Partnerships, with over 30,000 members nationally. Working with partners in Environmental Health and Wales and Scotland, a new range of Covid related guidance for convenience stores was developed. This guidance (amongst other things) enabled small businesses to safely support local residents who were isolating via new home delivery and kerbside collection.

Kent County Council – EU Exit preparedness

As part of its EU Exit preparedness campaign, Kent Trading Standards worked with the Institute of Directors and participated in a nationally broadcast expert panel Q&A.

This event attracted 152 businesses with experts from UK, Belgium and the Netherlands. Follow-up emails reached a further 27,690 businesses in Kent. The Service has developed content for "Trading Standards - UK Transition business advice", a dedicated site hosted by Kent County Council.

Here, businesses can access guidance notes, videos, and a series of EU Exit Q&A events. An infomercial was developed by Trading Standards and produced in partnership with Kent Messenger TV. This aired 36 times between 8th – 31st December 2020 and received 86,000 views.

Bath & North East Somerset Council Trading Standards – Trust a trader/Export certificates

Bath and North East Somerset Trading Standards run a Buy with Confidence scheme for businesses that have been trading for at least 6 months.

"We feel it is an added bonus for consumers to know they are dealing with a company that is Trading Standards Approved and therefore they will be purchasing products and services from a company they can trust." Local trader.

The Service also provides a range of chargeable business advice products including bitesize advice (30 mins), a business health check (3 hours) and Primary Authority Partnerships. Trading Standards undertake sampling at a manufacturer of a 'high risk food not of animal origin' (HRFNAO) which is exported to Europe. Samples are submitted and the Service endorses health certificates required by Border Authorities of the importing countries.

Devon, Somerset & Torbay Councils Trading Standards – Lettings Compliance

As part of a wide package of business support and advice, Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards audited 81 letting agents' websites, of which 70% were non-compliant. All businesses were provided with advice and guidance to bring them back into compliance. A targeted media campaign has now commenced for 21/22.



SECTION THREE: PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Trading Standards undertake a wide range of activities to protect and promote the health and well-being of local communities. This includes ensuring that products people buy are safe, that food is correctly and clearly labelled to help them to make healthy choices and avoid allergens. Trading Standards also ensure the health and welfare of animals which has an impact on the integrity of the food chain.

Age restricted products, including tobacco, alcohol, and knives, are also a significant area of focus for many authorities, helping to keep young people safe.

3.1 Ensuring the Safety of Consumer Products

Legislation enforced by Trading Standards is designed to ensure that products are safe. There continue to be issues with the safety of consumer white goods and cheap imported goods such as electric lights, phone chargers and cosmetics that are unsafe. Officers use intelligence to direct sampling exercises and projects to detect and seize unsafe products at both ports of entry and on sale within England and Wales.

This year the number of items checked has increased eightfold. This is because Trading Standards were checking very large numbers of items of PPE to ensure they complied with safety standards. This was crucial during the pandemic to keep everyone, and especially key workers, safe when supply chains were under enormous pressure.

In 2020/21, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Nearly **43 million unsafe or non-compliant products and PPE were seized or removed from the market place** following Trading Standards' interventions.
- The **savings to society**, in terms of product value and injuries and fires prevented, is almost **£330 million**

3.2 Protecting the food chain

Food fraud, substitution of sub-standard ingredients, undeclared allergens and misdescribed food can all cause damage to health and cause consumer detriment. In the most serious cases, there has been loss of life in relation to undeclared allergens.

In 2020/21, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over **4,600 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 lower than in 19/20 but reflects the lower number of compliance checks due to Covid

Animal health and welfare legislation enforced by Trading Standards Services has a key role in protecting the integrity and quality of the food chain, supporting rural communities and preventing the spread of animal diseases which do pose a risk of mutating to cross-infect humans.

This year of all years, this risk should be better recognised than it has been in the past.

In 2020/21 it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over **7,200 businesses** were found to be in **breach of animal health and welfare legislation**

This is the only area where levels of compliance checks were the same as pre-Covid and levels of breaches higher. This is partly due to the rise in animal welfare concerns linked to the impacts of the pandemic and also there were numerous avian influenza outbreaks which required local authorities to carry out compliance checks in all relevant premises in the surrounding areas to any infected premises.

3.3 Reducing the risk of children accessing age restricted products

Rules that prevent children from buying age-restricted products, such as alcohol, tobacco, knives and fireworks, are designed to protect them and their local communities from both immediate and long-term harm. Trading Standards Services provide training and advice to businesses and conduct test purchases, using volunteers under 18, targeted at the highest risk premises. This year there was no additional funding provided by the Home Office, via NTS, for extra knife test purchasing. The levels of all test purchasing were hugely reduced due to Covid restrictions. On average levels were less than 10% of those conducted in 19/20.

In 2020/21 it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- Over **210 premises** were tested for **alcohol sales**
- The average failure rate for alcohol test purchases was **25%**
- Over **210 premises** were tested for **tobacco sales**
- The average failure rate for tobacco test purchases was **39%**
- Over **230 premises** were tested for **other products**, including knives
- The average failure rate for other products was **32%**

3.4 Reducing the availability of illicit products

The presence of illicit tobacco in local shops undermines government attempts to help people to cut down and quit all together as price is a critical factor in pushing people to give up and illicit tobacco is usually significantly cheaper to buy.

Illicit alcohol may contain large quantities of methanol or other contaminants which can cause injury.

Often, counterfeit cigarettes are not designed to self-extinguish when left unattended which poses a serious risk of causing fires.

As from January 2021, local authorities were provided with some additional funds via HMRC and NTS for extra work on illicit tobacco. As such premises visited and seizures were still reduced by about 40% as compared to 19/20, but not as heavily impacted as some other areas as significant work was carried out between January and March 2021.

In 2020/21, it is estimated that across England and Wales:

- **Illicit tobacco was seized** from over **760 premises**
- **Over 12.6 million illicit cigarettes** were seized, worth an estimated **£2.8 million**
- Over **2 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco** were seized, worth over **£370,000**
- Over **86,000 niche tobacco products** (including shisha) was seized, worth over **£25,000**





LB Barking and Dagenham Trading Standards – Illicit Shisha Premises

Barking and Dagenham Trading Standards participated in a Planning Enforcement led reactive project in response to several illicit shisha premises in the Borough. Use of illicit shisha in confined spaces subjects patrons and employees to significant levels of carbon monoxide and other harmful gases. Community disturbance is caused by shisha from unauthorised premises. Where shisha premises use illicit tobacco further risks to health and the fair-trading environment are presented. This project has led to a reduction in number of illicit shisha premises in the Borough.

Stoke on Trent Council Trading Standards – Unsafe Tools and Children's Furniture

Stoke on Trent Trading Standards responded to a complaint in relation to a table top electric saw, where the consumer lost part of their thumb. Samples were tested. These revealed an engineering fault on the clamp, which enabled it to move. Working with the primary authority, a product recall was initiated for two models (2,400 items). A further 460 items were withdrawn from sale.

In another case, Trading Standards received a referral identifying a new Stoke based business who, due to Covid, had diversified into manufacturing flatpack children's furniture for online sale. The company was unaware of product recall procedures, conformity assessment, and general product safety requirements. Following Trading Standards intervention, £370,000 of product (such as children's bunkbeds) was reworked and relabelled. Additional advice was given to enable them to continuing trading in safe products.

Middlesbrough Council Trading Standards – Alcohol Reduction

Middlesbrough Trading Standards worked with the multi-agency Alcohol and Crime group and the Responsible Authority Group which led to the 'Cumulative Impact Alcohol Policy' which restricts the number of on and off licenced premise that can trade, and places strict criteria on any new premises. This includes the removal from sale of beers, lagers, ciders with a strong alcohol content and the introduction of a minimum unit price.

South Tyneside Council – Unsafe punchbags

South Tyneside Trading Standards worked in partnership with Border Control (Port of Tyne) following the discovery of 176 punch bags found to contain sharp items. The products were seized, with this quick reaction preventing a risk to public safety. Following an interview with the company, who sold the products nationally, the punch bags were destroyed; the company immediately reviewed its compliance procedure and was issued a warning letter.

Lancashire County Council – Community Alcohol Partnerships

Lancashire County Council have always taken an innovative approach to underage drinking. Within their Trading Standards team they have an alcohol and tobacco team that consists of two members of staff who work on policy and strategic approaches to tackling alcohol and tobacco harms as well as enforcement. In acknowledgement of their "innovation, hard work and commitment to Community Alcohol Partnerships (CAP)", Lancashire Trading Standards won the CAP Chairman's Award recognising their 'rapid response and innovation during the pandemic'. "That's true integration and ownership by the area and fantastic recognition that CAP is a force for good in Lancs." Senior Board Member and Senior Manager for a multi-national retailer.



Gloucestershire County Council Trading Standards – Allergens in Food

Gloucestershire Trading Standards found significant failure rates when surveying declarations of additives in the advertisement and supply of fast food. For some consumers with allergies, the potential for harm from undeclared additives may be life threatening. One business was prosecuted for supplying a lamb doner kebab containing milk protein despite the purchaser clearly identifying a milk allergy. Further investigation revealed the presence of non-declared meat species; the absence of declared meat species; and falsification of the food hygiene rating score.

Wiltshire Council Trading Standards – Rural Community Mental Health and Animal Health

Wiltshire Trading Standards have undertaken work to support health in rural communities, providing mental health support packs for farmers that offer advice and signposting to services. They also supported containment efforts during an outbreak of Avian Influenza originating from a farm just over the border in a neighbouring authority. The restriction zone passed into Wiltshire, so officers undertook door to door enquiries to locate backyard poultry keepers and advise as necessary. Following this work the disease was successfully controlled and further spread prevented.

SECTION FOUR: TRADING STANDARDS SUPPORT FOR THE COVID RESPONSE

Trading Standards were a key part of the local authority Covid response, along with other colleagues in regulatory services. The information below reflects the local authority wide response to Covid not just the input from Trading Standards as, whilst they played a key part, their input cannot be separated from that of other colleagues, especially within Environmental Health.

In England Trading Standards supported local authorities with:

- Over **1.2 million Covid-secure compliance checks** either by virtual inspection or written contact
- Dealing with almost **98,000 complaints about non-Covid secure business settings or business closure requirements**
- Over **41,000 requests for business closure guidance** or advice.
- Over **35,500 non-compliant businesses were identified** and required follow up actions to bring them into compliance and in some cases involved the issue of fines

Covid 19 also meant that there were different opportunities for criminals to participate in scams such as spraying driveways to remove covid, fraudsters offering a shopping service for the vulnerable and then absconding with money and many others.

Covid Testing services have also been causing consumer detriment and the Government is introducing new minimum standards legislation which Trading Standards will be enforcing.

In Wales, Trading Standards supported local authorities with:

- Providing **pro-active advice** to almost **53,000** business premises
- Dealing with over **42,500 enquiries**
- Over **48,000 business visits**
- Over **3,200 enforcement actions**



Doncaster Council Trading Standards - PPE Safety

Doncaster Trading Standards created a close relationship with their Procurement Team which has refined and expanded their due diligence system for procuring PPE. Trading Standards analysed declarations of conformity and test certificates for inconsistencies. This led to dozens of suppliers and millions of PPE items being rejected. The intelligence was also shared with partner agencies.

Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Trading Standards – PPE Supplies

Trading Standards supported procurement of masks when stocks were running critically low in April 2020, by providing technical assistance to safeguard the supplies of compliant PPE for key workers. In Suffolk, in three months, 56 technical product assessments were completed, with 80% revealing problems such as incomplete, missing or fake documentation. Essex and Suffolk developed checklists to assist with assessing compliance consistently which was shared with Ports and Borders Teams across the country and was used to support training by the Office for Product Safety and Standards.

Westminster City Council Trading Standards – Price Gouging

Westminster Trading Standards worked with eBay to place restrictions on certain items to stop panic buying online. eBay prohibited non-business sellers from reselling and thereby profiteering from the pandemic. Restrictions were placed on the sale of baby formula, milk, toilet paper, tampons, baby wipes and nappies. Utilising their Disaster Tragedy Policy, eBay were able to combat price gouging introducing new policy specifically for Covid-19. eBay also gave customers the ability to report price gouging through a dedicated page and a separate 'price gouging' option in the 'report this item' tool.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council – Flexible Professional Workforce

Trading Standards staff portrayed their flexibility during the pandemic as they were redeployed in multiple areas where local authorities needed professional support. They acted as emergency death registrars and Track and Trace advisors. A Covid Enforcement Team was set up and managed by Trading Standards who advised internal council departments throughout. This included working with Procurement in respect of face masks and sanitisers; and advising on Covid-safe elections.

Staffordshire County Council Trading Standards – Flexible Professional Workforce

Trading Standards staff in Staffordshire took up multiple roles, including delivery of food parcels, ensuring vulnerable members of society are protected and in the darkest moments staff were trained and prepared for mortuary management. Officers worked in partnership with all responders to the disease, sharing intelligence between districts and county, and aiding the police in ensuring compliance and enforcement.

Salford City Council Trading Standards – COVID-19 Business Grants

Salford Regulatory Services including Trading Standards worked with Greater Manchester Police to deliver Covid-19 related business compliance activity. They reviewed businesses that have applied for business support grants and flagged suspected fraudulent applications and businesses that have breached coronavirus regulations. They also assisted the grants team in communicating funding opportunities to businesses.

Bristol City Council Trading Standards – Nuisance COVID-19 Mail

Bristol City Council's Trading Standards Service received complaints about a flyer that was being posted through residents' doors. It stated "National Removal of harmful bacteria that attracts Covid-19. All UK homes (kitchen and bathroom areas need to be officially checked and passed for risk of bacteria that can attract the Covid-19 virus. Appointed Corona removal officers are trained to removed and dispose of harmful and deadly bacteria". Officers carried out a swift investigation and identified online adverts and social media posts. The business and individual responsible were identified and immediate contact was made. They were brought into compliance. The flyers were disposed of and the online adverts were amended.