

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers
Safeguarding Businesses

**National Trading Standards
National Strategic Assessment
October 2023
Summary Briefing Document**



DOCUMENT HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

This document has been produced by the NTS Intelligence Team. It is classified as **OFFICIAL** when completed, as defined by the Government Security Classifications Policy (July 2023).

1. Foreword

This document summarises the key findings from the National Trading Standards (NTS) Strategic Assessment from October 2023. This will be used to prioritise NTS work for 2024-25.

A great privilege of my first full year in this role has been to witness the skill and determination of Trading Standards' colleagues, to protect consumers and honest businesses. However the environment remains tough. Financial constraints continue to impact NTS and local Trading Standards Services. The ongoing cost of living crisis feeds a steady supply of victims into the hands of criminals ready to exploit their financial worries. The trade in counterfeit goods, flourishing as shoppers seek to spend less on items such as clothing, electrical products and tobacco, remains a key focus as we seek to halt the flow of money into organised crime groups. And as winter looms, we know doorstep criminals will renew their approaches to vulnerable householders, pressuring them to pay vast sums for shoddy 'energy saving' home improvements.

New issues have arisen. For example, we have seen a huge increase in intelligence reports on underage sales of disposable vapes, and this will be a new priority for NTS in the coming year, following the provision of new funds by DHSC.

With the cost of living crisis making people more vulnerable than ever before, I believe it's never been more important to have a well-funded Trading Standards' service. NTS continues to deliver incredible value for money, with the taxpayer having saved £11 for every £1 we've spent since 2014. Our wider impact, in identifying, supporting, and protecting victims, and in preventing more people from coming to harm, is much harder to measure, but perhaps even more valuable.

This briefing summarised the key issues from our strategic assessment, the full assessment, and a more detailed account of our 2022/23 activity is available at www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/documents.

Lord Michael Bichard
Chair of National Trading Standards

2. Introduction

The NTS 2023 Strategic Assessment uses data from 1/4/22 to 31/3/23, to identify the key national threats, emerging issues, and priority areas for NTS. It is used to make recommendations on how to develop policies and tackle national problems. A wide range of information sources have been used, including intelligence from local and regional Trading Standards, partners, Citizens Advice Consumer Service and open source data.

3. Key Findings

- Over 39000 intelligence logs were recorded on IDB by Trading Standards Services in England and Wales. (Up 0.2% from the previous year).
- Tobacco and cigarettes, Doorstep Crime and Cold Calling, and Fair Trading have the highest number of intelligence logs recorded on IDB.
- The biggest increase in intelligence logs related to underage sales of vaping products.
- Over 573,000 Citizens Advice consumer service database incidents were recorded (down 1.8% from the previous year).
- National Fraud Intelligence Bureau Fraud and Cyber Crime Dashboard reports over 4,200 door to door sales and bogus callers (across the UK) with reported losses of £31.8 million. There were over 18,300 other consumer non-investment frauds (across England and Wales) with reported losses of £154.7 million.
- Cross cutting issues or enablers affecting all areas of Trading Standards' work have been identified as eCrime, serious and organised crime and the cost of living crisis.
- Trading Standards currently have 36 active Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) mapped on the Police National Database.

Whilst there has been a drop in the number of intelligence reports and incidents in some areas (such as doorstep crime), these will remain a priority for NTS due to the impact on vulnerable individuals.

ECrime and mass marketing fraud/scams figures have also reduced, but still show the huge scale of internet and digital based scams that are expected to continue to grow. Underreporting in this area is well recognised, specially where products are purchased online and where other mechanisms are often used to try and resolve problems, such as social media sites, online review forums etc.

4. MoRiLE

NTS uses the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement process (MoRiLE) to assess its threats, risks, and harm. This is a recognised system, across all law enforcement and takes into account

- **IMPACT/HARM** – The level of harm to victims, the wider community, and the environment?
- **LIKELIHOOD** – The scale of activity, predicted trend and forecast?
- **CONFIDENCE** – What do we know or not know? Is it a true reflection of the risk?
- **ORGANISATIONAL POSITION** – How well placed is NTS to deal with the risks. For NTS, in practice, this will mean whether or not the conditions of the relevant grant agreements permit us to use funds to tackle the issue. For example, NTS is not permitted to carry out work in relation to product safety but receives specific funding to carry out work in relation to animal feed. As such priorities for Trading Standards, as shown below, are split between those where NTS can act, and those where it cannot because no resources have been provided and/or another Government agency leads, but where issues are a high priority for most local Trading Standards services.

5. NTS priority areas

The NTS priorities for our national Control Strategy for 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 will be:

- Doorstep crime and cold calling (including energy fraud).
- Lettings (England only).
- Mass marketing fraud/scams.
- Illicit and underage sale of vapes (England only).
- Illicit tobacco.
- Used cars.
- Intellectual property.
- Other fair trading issues.
- Estate agency.
- Animal feed work.

NTS will also have the following cross cutting themes and enablers, as they impact on each priority area:

- eCrime and the use of social media/online platforms.
- Serious and organised crime.
- The cost of living crisis.

NTS undertake work on specific activities, where direct funding is provided for a programme of work to be delivered, such as the Animal Feed work that is funded by the Food Standards Agency.

6. Other Trading Standards Priorities

The analysis of intelligence and the MoRiLE scoring also identified the following as priorities within local and regional Trading Standards and will likely be a high priority for many Trading Standards Services. NTS cannot deliver work in these areas as it is not funded to do so.

- Animal Disease Control
- Product Safety
- Age Restricted Sales (excluding vapes)
- Food Standards
- Metrology

Please contact the NTS Programme Office (nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk) if you have any questions or need any further information.