

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers
Safeguarding Businesses

**National Trading Standards
National Strategic Assessment
October 2024
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 2024. This will be used to prioritise NTS work for 2025-26.

As we face the ongoing cost of living crisis, the work of Trading Standards is more vital than ever. Criminals are exploiting the most vulnerable among us, but ever-stretched Trading Standards teams continue to disrupt and tackle some of the most challenging risks to consumer safety, despite increasingly tight budgets.

This year, we've seen a rise in illicit tobacco and cigarettes, doorstep crime, and cold calling – driving a 5% increase in recorded intelligence logs. According to Citizens Advice used cars, roofing scams, dodgy MOT and service repairs and botched house renovations by rogue traders remain some of the most prominent issues that consumers experience. Behind these scams are real people left devastated.

Our #NoBlameNoShame campaign tackles the underreported issue of mass marketing scams, which often leave victims isolated and ashamed. We're determined to change that. These scams – such as fake prize drawers and clairvoyant scams – will remain a top priority as we work to disrupt criminal networks and encourage victims to speak out.

Doorstep crime and cold calling are not just annoyances, they're strategic lifelines for criminals who steal millions from the most vulnerable in our society. The rise in fake lettings deposit schemes and energy scams – with consumers being tricked into unnecessary and costly renovations – is equally alarming. These crimes hit people where it hurts most – at home, where they should feel safest.

We're also making strides in the battle against illicit tobacco and vapes, with nearly 1.2 million illegal vapes seized and £11.8 million worth of illicit tobacco removed from sale thanks to local Trading Standards teams. This isn't just about stopping the sale of illicit goods; it's about protecting today's youth from dangerous products. However, our essential work needs continued investment. NTS will continue its work on illicit vapes until March 2025, but further funding is needed to ensure our fight against this growing industry doesn't end next year.

At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to protecting people and honest business – these are real people with real lives and businesses – from the financial and emotional devastation caused by fraud and illicit sales. As we prepare to work alongside the new Government on its plans for national renewal, my colleagues and I are driven by a renewed sense of purpose – to amplify the impact of Trading Standards and to stand as a powerful force against those who threaten the safety and well-being of our communities.

Lord Michael Bichard
Chair of National Trading Standards

2. Introduction

The NTS 2024 Strategic Assessment uses data from 1/4/23 to 31/3/24, 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 Services (in England and Wales), partners, Citizens Advice consumer service and open source data.

This briefing summarises the key issues from our Strategic Assessment. The full assessment, and a more detailed account of our 2023/24 activity is available at:

www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/documents.

3. Key Findings

- Over 41,000 intelligence logs were recorded on IDB by Trading Standards Services in England and Wales (up 5.4% from the previous year).
- Tobacco and cigarettes, doorstep crime and cold calling, and age restricted sales have the highest number of intelligence logs recorded on IDB.
- Over 428,000 Citizens Advice consumer service database reports were recorded (down 25.2% from the previous year). Whilst the figures have dropped they still provide essential complaint data that informs NTS and Trading Standards.
- National Fraud Intelligence Bureau Fraud and Cyber Crime Dashboard reports over 5,700 door to door sales and bogus callers (across the UK) with reported losses of £34.5 million. There were over 22,000 other consumer non-investment frauds (across England and Wales) with reported losses of £112.6 million (as at 31/03/24).
- Cross cutting issues affecting all areas of Trading Standards' work have been identified as eCrime, serious and organised crime and the cost of living crisis.
- Trading Standards have 24 active Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) mapped on the Police National Database.(as at 30/09/24).

It is positive that the total number of intelligence logs recorded has increased. However, complaints remain under-reported, especially where other mechanisms are used to try and resolve problems. Social media sites, financial institutions, Action Fraud and other mechanisms may be used to resolve problems. Almost a quarter of Citizens Advice consumer service reports (103,325) relate to online purchase methods. This reflects the continued growth in consumers buying products and services online via trader websites and apps, continuous purchases (e.g., subscriptions), and internet auctions.

The top five Citizens Advice consumer service database areas that consumers are complaining about are: (1) used cars, (2) roofing, roof sealing and chimney repairs, (3) car MOT, service and repairs, (4) women's clothing and (5) major renovations (including lofts, conversions and extensions). However, there has been a drop in the number of Citizens Advice consumer service database reports. This may be due to a number of reasons, in particular capacity and funding are becoming the greatest challenges for the service, Where there has been a drop in the number of complaints (such as doorstep crime and tobacco) these will still be NTS priorities, due to the impact on vulnerable individuals, the cost of living crisis and HMRC funding for illicit tobacco work.

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 2025 – 31 March 2026 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 if additional government funding provided).
- Illicit tobacco.
- Used cars.
- Intellectual property.
- Other fair trading issues.
- Estate agency.
- Animal feed work.

NTS will also have the following cross cutting issues, 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 undertakes 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

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

NTS values the support that has been provided by Trading Standards Services, Regional Groups, NTS Teams and Citizens Advice to help produce the NTS 2024 Strategic Assessment.

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