

# Understanding National Trading Standards Governance and accountability

## 1. What is National Trading Standards (NTS)?

National Trading Standards (NTS) was established in 2012, by the Government, as part of its changes to the bodies responsible for consumer protection and advice. The primary role of NTS is to undertake those consumer protection activities, best done via Trading Standards, but which require a cross border, regional or national focus. The support offered by NTS built upon the existing communication routes and working relationships between local authorities, but it also put in place structures to make transparent decisions about how funds are spent on regional and national work and provide robust financial monitoring. The work of NTS does not impact on trading standards activities that relate to local threats and issues, which remain wholly governed by local authority decision-making and processes. This work is done on behalf of the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

NTS is at the core of a ground breaking partnership between central government, local authorities and professional bodies that has been created in response to shrinking public funds. NTS helps to deliver grant funding to local authorities for cross border working and specified central priorities, while still using and supporting local expertise and structures. The model has been so successful that NTS is now also responsible for working with local trading standards services in England to deliver feed hygiene enforcement at the request of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), lead authority work in relation to Estate Agency on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and coordination of local authority work in England on animal health and contingency planning on behalf of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

NTS is a member of the Consumer Protection Partnership (CPP)<sup>1</sup>. The Partnership comprises all the key national bodies involved in consumer protection, including the Competition and Markets Authority, the Financial Conduct Authority and Citizens' Advice. The Partnership provides a mechanism through which members work together to maximise the use of resources across the Partnership to tackle concerns.

## 2. Governance arrangements for NTS

### **Political oversight**

Bi-annual meetings are held between the relevant Minister for the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Chair of NTS to discuss work relating to consumer protection and fair trading. This political engagement is supported by a Political Oversight Group containing officials from BEIS, NTS, DCLG, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). This Group is chaired and managed by BEIS and meets at least twice a year.

### **Strategic oversight**

The NTS Board provides specialist teams and helps local authority trading standards services work together to enforce consumer law against national and regional threats to fair trading and provides support for strategic decision making in other areas of work that NTS have been commissioned to have a role.

Specifically in relation to consumer protection, the NTS Board is responsible for allocating funding received from Government to ensure that local authorities are effectively responding to national and regional threats. To enable them to carry out this role effectively, the Board also acts as the key decision making body for the development and agreement of national strategic priorities for consumer protection work, agrees the most effective delivery mechanisms and carries out performance management against the agreed activities. An annual business plan and detailed control strategy is put in place to support this role.

---

<sup>1</sup> Consumer Protection Partnership priorities report 2015 and update on work is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consumer-protection-partnership-priorities-2014-to-2015>

The Board meets on a quarterly basis and contains Heads of Trading Standards representation from each English region and Wales. It operates to the Terms of Reference attached.



Terms of Reference  
National Trading Stan

The Board is also responsible for nominating membership and overseeing the activities of specific governance groups.

Up to date details of members and the current business plan are available on the [NTS website](#).

## **Delivery oversight**

A number of governance groups operate to make decisions about specific areas of delivery and funding, which are –

- Estate Agents Governance Group
- Illegal Money Lending Team Governance Group
- Intelligence Governance Group
- Safety at Ports Governance Group
- E Crime and Investigations Governance Group
- Scams Governance Group

Each of these groups is responsible for setting the priorities and principles against which delivery is carried out, and allocating grants for their workstreams. They are also responsible for overseeing financial and performance monitoring, maintaining awareness of capacity and competency, ensuring best value for money and promoting effective communications to secure successful delivery.

Each governance group provides regular updates to the Board and can put forward matters to the full Board where strategic input is required.

Each of these groups contains at least two NTS Board nominees and representatives from the relevant government departments or agencies where appropriate. Full terms of reference are available for each governance group upon request.

## **Technical support**

The NTS Programme Office also receives funds from some central government departments and agencies to operate specified national groups that provide technical support to local authorities on specific policy areas. Each of these groups contains representation from the relevant government body, each local authority region in England and relevant Devolved Administrations, alongside delivery partners where appropriate. Guidance produced by the groups is specifically for local authorities and is approved by the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO).

## **3. Accountability**

### **3.1 NTS decision making**

The NTS Board and governance groups detailed above are responsible for making decisions about the allocation of funding and delivery for specific government grants in accordance with the grant or funding agreements issued by Government. Decisions made by either the NTS Board or governance groups can be queried by local authorities through their regional NTS Board member.

Should individual businesses, members of the public or other bodies have queries about NTS work or decision making then they should contact [nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk](mailto:nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk)

### **3.2 Local authority activities**

All activity undertaken by local authority Trading Standards Services is governed through existing local policies and processes, whether the funding for the activity is received through the Revenue Support Grant, local funds or national grants such as those provided through NTS. As such, any queries about any activity carried out by individual Trading Standards Services should be raised directly with the relevant local authority.

Information about local Trading Standards Services can be found on the relevant local authority website, including their enforcement policy and contact details. If businesses or members of the public are unhappy with the response they have received and do want to complain further then all local authorities will have a

corporate complaints procedure in place and contact can also be made with local councillors if problems remain unresolved.

Ultimately, once these processes have been exhausted then complaints can be raised with the relevant Ombudsman. For complaints about local authorities in England, this is the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). LGSCO's powers to investigate will depend on the exact nature of the complaint. For more details, see <http://www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint/fact-sheets/other-topics/trading-standards>. For complaints about local authorities in Wales this is the Welsh Public Services Ombudsman <http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk>

#### **4. Understanding the role of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)<sup>2</sup> and Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO)<sup>3</sup>**

As it is not a “public body”, in order for NTS to operate, a company is required to facilitate the receipt and onward allocation of funds and to enable the employment of staff and contractors to deliver NTS central functions. The finance and audit function is provided by CTSI and the Programme Office is run by ACTSO Limited.

Information, guidance and documentation relating specifically to NTS funded activities and supporting processes will be issued under the NTS badge, however, it has been agreed that technical guidance developed for local authorities that relates to local activities will use ACTSO endorsement to ensure it has credibility and authority within the trading standards sector.

#### **5. National Trading Standards (NTS) policies**

NTS makes every effort to ensure that it operates in a transparent and fair manner in all circumstances, including the employment of staff, procurement, complaints and sharing information. We have policies in place to govern all these areas, which are available on request to [nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk](mailto:nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk)

---

<sup>2</sup> CTSI is a membership body that represents trading standards professionals across both the public and private sectors. Further information can be found at <http://www.tradingstandards.uk/home.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> ACTSO is a professional body specifically for Heads of Trading Standards in England and Wales.

## **6. How to contact National Trading Standards (NTS) for more information**

Further information about National Trading Standards can be found on their website at [www.nationaltradingstandards.uk](http://www.nationaltradingstandards.uk). Should you have any queries about the information in this document please do not hesitate to contact us directly -

National Trading Standards  
1 Sylvan Court  
Sylvan Way  
Southfields Business Park  
Basildon  
Essex SS15 6TH

Telephone number: 0345 608 9515

Email: [nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk](mailto:nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk)