

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers
Safeguarding Businesses

ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022

Foreword

I am pleased to present the National Trading Standards (NTS) Business Plan for 2021/22. NTS has been in operation since 2012. The NTS Board is made up of senior Heads of Trading Standards from England and Wales with an independent Chair. We aim to protect consumers and safeguard legitimate businesses by tackling serious national and regional consumer protection issues and organised criminality and by protecting food supplies by ensuring the animal feed chain is safe.

Our main funding is the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) grant of £12.03 million. We also have £1.87 million funding from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to deliver our feed programme; £1.13¹ million from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to provide the NTS Estate and Lettings Agency Team and £800,000 from HMRC to support local disruption work on illicit tobacco.

NTS will work with other Government partners such as HMRC, the Home Office, DCMS and Defra on specific projects that relate to Trading Standards work, utilising our commissioning model with local authorities.

I would like to extend my thanks to all those organisations and individuals, and in particular the local authorities, that NTS has worked with, for all their support. 2020/21 was a difficult year for all and I have been most impressed with the response of the Trading Standards profession to the Covid emergency. This has had, and will continue to have, an impact on local, regional and national Trading Standards work.

One of the impacts of Covid is that we are still awaiting the anticipated Consumer and Competition Command Paper and the potential changes that it may bring for NTS. We also fully recognise the ongoing problem with stretched resources in local authorities meaning increased demand and expectations of NTS.



Lord Toby Harris
Chair



¹ There may be additional funds for lettings training. Yet tbc.

Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives remain similar to those in 2020/21, as they were all long term objectives and functions of NTS. The underpinning activities for each objective change as progress is made.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4
Provide a framework for the effective sharing of intelligence to identify and tackle emerging threats, and support Trading Standards across England and Wales.	Ensure effective delivery and co-ordination of enforcement in relation to serious consumer protection crime, mass marketing scams and illicit tobacco.	Deliver a programme of animal feed and food hygiene enforcement to help ensure the safety of the food chain and protect the UK export market.	To deliver a programme of national enforcement, advice and support for local authorities in relation to the property market, in particular the activities of Estate and Letting Agents

Figure 1 – Strategic Objectives 2021/22

NTS will continue to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of NTS to our partners and to Government. This will include:

- Engaging with Government to influence them and raise the profile of the work of Trading Standards and to offer the NTS model for the commissioning of relevant elements of Trading Standards' work.
- Working with the Local Government and Welsh Local Government Associations to ensure we support their activities where appropriate.
- Ensuring very close working relationships with regional Trading Standards groups who are crucial to the success of NTS' work.
- Maximising the support for and benefits of membership of the Consumer Protection Partnership (CPP).
- Creating a comprehensive national picture of the achievements of NTS and communicating these effectively.
- Providing appropriate access to NTS' information via a public website and via a secure website for local authority officers.
- Being responsive to external factors when developing policy and approach.

A national Strategic Assessment was undertaken and using the evidence provided from that, and the work specifically commissioned by Government, the Board agreed that key priorities for 2021/22 would be:

- Mass Marketing Scams.
- Energy related fraud.
- Lettings
- Doorstep and cold calling.
- Intellectual Property
- Other Fair-Trading Issues
- Used cars.
- Estate Agents
- Animal feed
- Illicit Tobacco

NTS will respond positively, wherever appropriate, to requests from Government Departments and Agencies should they want new areas of Trading Standards related work undertaken and where the NTS model would be effective. In particular, NTS will support work to address the underage sales of knives if the Home Office decide to commission further work.

We will continue to work with our counterparts in Northern Ireland and Scotland and with other enforcement partners across the UK to ensure that the consumer protection regime is as successful as it can be.

We have developed a series of objectives that underpin our strategic objectives.

Detailed actions to address the priorities are contained in our National Control Strategy which determines how NTS funds will be allocated to deliver specific outcomes and activities.

Objective 1 - Provide a framework for the effective sharing of intelligence to identify and tackle emerging threats, and support Trading Standards across England and Wales.

We will do this by:

- Making informed decisions by capturing, analysing and using all the information and intelligence that is available to us and promoting the use of the Intelligence Operating Model, nationally, regionally and locally.

- Actively sharing intelligence with CPP and other partners including the Government Agencies Intelligence Network.
- Developing intelligence products to help inform tasking and intelligence led enforcement.
- Identifying emerging threats and gaps in consumer protection enforcement and working with partners to address them.
- Providing a NTS intelligence network that includes our National Intelligence Team, a network of Regional Intelligence Analysts and ensuring each local authority can have direct access to a Trading Standards intelligence database.
- Ensuring relevant NTS Teams and regions can access the Police National Database.
- Using Organised Crime Group mapping and national flagging to target and tackle criminals engaged in consumer protection crime.
- Using Serious and Organised Crime System Tasking to help assess regional and national threats consistently and to help with prioritising tasking,
- Providing access to a range of updated eLearning training material including the Intelligence Operating Model, eCrime etc.

Objective 2 - Ensure effective delivery and co-ordination of enforcement in relation to serious consumer protection crime, mass marketing scams and illicit tobacco.

We will do this by:

- Providing a network of NTS Regional Investigation Teams and resourcing other enforcement activities to tackle regional and national consumer and business detriment and ensuring those engaged in criminal activities are punished and/or their activities disrupted.
- Supporting a programme of enforcement activities in relation to used cars, energy related fraud, supply of illicit goods in key markets, doorstep crime and the local disruption of the supply of illicit tobacco.
- In partnership with the Intellectual Property Office, undertaking research into the volume and type of counterfeit goods available in key markets.
- Providing a NTS eCrime Team to tackle consumer and business detriment caused by eCrime, in particular taking down unlawful websites.
- Providing national expertise in the investigation and prevention of eCrime and a national digital forensic capability to support Trading Standards related cybercrime enforcement.

- Providing a NTS Scams Team to tackle consumer detriment caused by mass-marketing scams by working with local authorities and other partners to support safeguarding of victims and to disrupt the supply of scam mail.
- Expanding the “Friends Against Scams” initiative.
- Participate in the Government’s cross cutting fraud agenda (Operation Otello) with the National Economic Crime Centre and other partner agencies to deliver a ‘step change’ in the response to fraud and to better protect those most vulnerable from becoming victims thereof.
- Providing the Advertising Standards Authority with a backstop enforcement regime to ensure the continued success of their self-regulation model.
- Supporting the regional Trading Standards’ infrastructure to enable them to co-ordinate Trading Standards’ activities at a regional level.

Objective 3 - Deliver a programme of animal feed and food hygiene enforcement to help ensure the safety of the food chain and protect the UK export market.

We will do this by:

- We will do this by:
- Overseeing a programme of animal feed inspections and sampling to ensure compliance with standards across the animal feed supply chain.
- Protecting the integrity of the food chain by undertaking surveillance and official controls on imported animal feed at points of entry in England.
- Overseeing the collection and analysis of compliance data from feed and food official controls to support the FSA assessment of the effectiveness of the control system.
- Overseeing a programme of food hygiene at primary production (farms) inspections to ensure compliance with standards at the start of the food supply chain.
- Developing a risk based approach for the delivery of required official controls on EU feed imports following EU exit at points of entry.
- Supporting local authority expert panels on feed to develop guidance and help ensure consistency and best practice in feed enforcement.

Objective 4 - to deliver a programme of national enforcement, advice and support for local authorities in relation to the property market, in particular the activities of Estate and Letting Agents.

We will do this by: -

- Providing an NTS Estate and Letting Agency Team to fulfil the statutory functions under the Estate Agents Act 1979 and to tackle consumer and business detriment caused by unacceptable practices in the sector.
- Working with the Estate and Letting Agents industries to improve standards in the sectors.
- Taking enforcement action where required to tackle serious consumer and business detriment in this sector.
- Issuing guidance and advice for the public, businesses and enforcement authorities on estate agency work in the UK and relevant letting agency work in England. Provide a single, online information portal for consumers and enforcement partners to check the membership status of property businesses against the mandatory member organisations.
- Support and encourage best practice in the enforcement of Estate & Letting agency enforcement through the provision of training and guidance, maintaining relevant enforcement toolkits and e-learning platforms to promote uniformity of approach.
- Allocate grant funding to appropriate projects or investigations that will enhance lettings enforcement in England.
- Working with industry partners to increase the level of basic and material information available to consumers via property portals, enabling them to make better informed decisions about buying or renting property.

Published 16/4/21.

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