NATIONAL TRADING STANDARDS

Protecting Consumers
Supporting Business

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026

Version 2

Between 1/4/14 and 31/3/26, NTS has tackled £1,951,158,410 in detriment for a spend of £166,483,360: **£11.77 impact for every £1 spent.**

Value For Money figures are calculated by detriment prevented against spent from those grants where detriment figures have been calculated and include revenue value of seized tobacco and value of seized illicit vapes.

Between April 2025 and March 2026, National Trading Standards:

- Dealt with **£328,685,693** in consumer and business detriment.
- Had **60** people convicted of offences.
- Had prison sentences totalling **152 years and 9 months** handed down.
- Secured **£19,850** in fines.
- Secured **£391,099** in compensation for victims[1].
- Took down or suspended **156,002** websites/social media sites.
- Did **4,649** feed interventions.
- Visited **6,006** premises to carry out illicit tobacco checks and seized illicit tobacco with a revenue value of **£26,641,447.**
- Detained **1,537,172** illegal vapes at ports, in England. This has a total value of **£9,535,170.**
- Issued **31** warning orders, penalty notices or monetary penalties in relation to Estate and Letting Agents.

Money figures are calculated by detriment prevented against spend from those grants where detriment figures have been calculated. It includes RIT, E Crime, Scams, NTG funded work, EAT, LAT, OfS, revenue values of tobacco and vapes.

NTS Funding 2025/26

Total Funding Received	Funding Body	Purpose
£13,251,415	Department for Business and Trade (DBT)	Serious and cross border consumer protection
£2,401,490	Food Standards Agency (FSA)	Safety of Animal Feed
£588,000	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)	Estate Agency
£753,000	MHCLG	Letting Agency
£3,090,000	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	Illicit Tobacco local disruption days
£2,147,000	Department for Health and Social Care	Vaping enforcement and compliance work – funding period Jul 23-Mar 25
£94,607	Office for Students	Legal Backstop
£200,000	Home Office/NECC	Funding for various Scams related support and research.

Table 1- NTS Funding

Intelligence

[1] Includes only where linked to court or criminal proceedings via RIT and eCrime Teams.

The **NTS Intelligence Team** produced:

- three tactical assessments and three activity reports.
- two short reports on spray foam installation and removal, and approved trader recommendation platforms.
- two briefing/scoping documents on Operation Derdap.
- two briefing/scoping documents on Operation Gizmo for the Government Agencies Intelligence Network (GAIN) disruption team, and work on the Letting Agency Team's threat assessment.
- one research report on the use of Artificial Intelligence within law enforcement and Trading Standards for NTG, with presentations to ACTSO and the East Midlands.
- three research pieces of work: one on quarantined and unsanitised IDB logs (prior to onboarding to PND), one for Operation Ironwood (an immigration led enforcement initiative across the North of England with links to mapped Organised Crime Groups and Trading Standards' investigations), and one on the revised NTS' Tactical Assessment template.
- two enquiries from NTS Letting Agency Team to assist with the location of individuals in order that official documents could be served.

The NTS National Control Strategy for 2025-26: This was published in July 2025. It informed and directed the work NTS funds across its key priority areas.

Intelligence Data	Apr–Jun 25	Jul–Sep 25	Oct–Dec 25	Jan–Mar 26	Total 25/26
Intel logs recorded on IDB	9760	13325	11374	13479	47938
% change from last year	-10%	17%	3%	24%	10%
Citizens Advice complaints (civil/criminal breaches only)	69616	81847	74165	78430	304058
Active Organised Crime Groups	23	22	22	20	20
Total Active National Flags on individuals	183	176	163	192	192
National Flag alerts (trips)	880	607	863	680	3,030
Referrals for PND searches to NTSIT	51	64	56	81	252
Individual PND searches by NTSIT[2]	2486	2385	2124	3328	10,323
Total SOC system tasking submissions	122	124	127	134	134

Table 2 – Intelligence Data

The 2025 NTS Strategic Assessment: This was agreed in October 2025. It uses data from 01/04/24 to 31/03/25 and identifies the NTS key national threats, emerging issues, and priority areas for the 2026/27 NTS Control Strategy. These are doorstep crime and cold calling, lettings (England only), mass marketing fraud/scams, the importation of illicit vapes

[2] One referral may result in numerous searches for separate names, addresses, vehicles, phone numbers etc. Each individual search is required to be recorded separately for auditing purposes. Similarly numerous additional searches are done on the Non-Standard Service channels on PND, but these cannot be quantified.

(England only), illicit tobacco, used cars, other fair trading issues, intellectual property crime, estate agency work, and animal feed work. eCrime and the use of social media/online platforms, serious & organised crime and the cost of living crisis are cross cutting issues, impacting on each priority area. NTS will also undertake work on specific activities, where direct funding is provided for a programme of work to be delivered.

Report Fraud data: The Programme Office undertook a Trading Standards' survey in October 2025. This was to see if Trading Standards and NTS Teams were interested in direct access to the City of London Police's new database National Crime Analysis Service (N-CAS). This includes Report Fraud and National Fraud Intelligence Bureau data. Based on the feedback received, the NTS Board agreed direct access and full use of the data was the best option. The Programme Office submitted an interoperability questionnaire to the City of London Police in February 2026. More information will be shared with Trading Standards following further discussions with the City of London Police during 2026/27.

Access to Motor Insurance Data: The Programme Office submitted a business case to the Home Office in June 2025. This was developed with input from Regional Groups and NTS teams to seek Trading Standards' direct access to Motor Insurance Bureau (MIB) data. The police can directly access this data via the Police National Computer (PNC) for traffic offences but Trading Standards have no direct access and have to make individual requests for this data. The Home Office is exploring the potential for wider access, but no decision has been made on whether this will be granted.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Report: This report was produced by the NTS Intelligence Team in August 2025. It was considered by NTG and was shared with Trading Standards. The report explores the evolving landscape of AI, looking at its applications, benefits, and associated risks, particularly within law enforcement and the public sector. It looks at the current use, potential opportunities, and implications for local authority Trading Standards Services and similar agencies. The report provides examples of AI use and a slideshow generated by AI. Presentations were delivered via ACTSO and in the East Midlands. They were informative and well received.

Aide Memoire and Minimum Standards on Intelligence Reporting: This guidance was circulated in September 2025. It was produced by regional/national intelligence staff from the NTS Intelligence Network and has been endorsed by NTS. It is a reference guide for officers who have already received some instruction on intelligence processes. It is intended to support IDB users and super-users when they complete intelligence reports and capture information from sources. It helps clarify some common questions about the structure of intelligence reports.

GAIN Referral Process for Trading Standards: This was published in November 2025. GAIN (the Government Agency Intelligence Network) is a collaboration of law enforcement partners, government agencies and partners who work together to combat serious and organised criminality, sharing intelligence, exchanging information and undertaking joint work for a single whole system approach. This document provides an agreed process for GAIN referrals to Trading Standards Services in England and Wales.

Organised Crime Group Mapping Training: The NTS Intelligence Team delivered two events in February 2026. Serious and organised crime is a cross-cutting issue for Trading Standards. It impacts on all areas of Trading Standards' work. However, there has been a drop in the number of Trading Standards' mapped groups. The Board asked the Intelligence Team to deliver this online training to ensure that Trading Standards' staff had confidence and understood how the process worked, what benefits and outcomes it can provide, how it could help services and what work they and the Intelligence Team have to do to map a group. The two sessions were well received with 420 delegates attending.

Revised NTS Tactical Assessment Template: This template, which was agreed by the NTS Intelligence Governance Group, was published in March 2026 following extensive consultation with regional/national intelligence teams and tasking groups. It includes sections that NTS considers essential, alongside others that are optional. Regional Tasking Groups may decide whether to include the optional sections in their assessments. All regional and national intelligence teams were asked to use the template as soon as possible after 1st April 2026.

eCrime

The **NTS eCrime Team**[3] has seven active investigations. The focus of these is the non-supply of goods bought online, fake qualification certificates and frauds linked to social media advertising. Two POCA cases commenced and six cases closed this year. One previously closed case was briefly resurrected when an absconded defendant returned to the UK and was finally brought to justice.

Overall this year the Team began three new investigations and closed six. There were three successful prosecutions with five defendants convicted. Of these, four defendants received custodial sentences of 9 years and 7 months, and one defendant received a two-year suspended sentence with 200 hours community penalty. There was one Rehabilitation Order of 20 hours, three Company Director bans totalling 22 years and one Written Warning. There were two POCA Confiscation Orders amounting to £1,773,126 and one Compensation Award of £33,258.

This year the Team made 125,321 website and social media takedowns and interventions. The value of **consumer and business detriment avoided through enforcement and disruption activities was £27,515,100.**
As a result of the Team's disruption activities, they have fulfilled several media engagements this year, including appearances on *Watchdog, Morning Live* and various BBC radio stations.

[3] Where the Team's work related specifically to doorstep crime, used cars, ASA or estate agency and lettings fraud, detail is contained in those chapters.

Digital Evidence Forensics: Provided support to 43 new investigations and forensically examined 211 devices. The Unit's rebuild was completed.

Online disruption – fake/misleading reviews: Following earlier work with the Competition & Markets Authority on fake and misleading online reviews a provisional agreement was reached with Amazon. Further engagement will set out how the process will work in practice, considering the existing Primary Authority relationship between Amazon and Hertfordshire Trading Standards.

eCrime	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25-26
Operations commenced	2	1	0	0	3
Live Operations	13**	11	10	7	7
Operations concluded	1	1	1	3	6
Operations where the eCrime Team assisted another local authority/agency	13	9	11	10	43
No of website/social media takedowns or suspensions, or other successful interventions outside the courts	552	121,399	3,048	322	125,321
Consumer and business detriment identified through enforcement and disruption activities	£2,968,940	£13,707,233	£6,390,000	£4,448,927	£27,515,100
Operation CeCe takedowns	510	742	610	8,924	10,786
Operation Joseph takedowns	0	0	0	19,895	19,895
No of defendants convicted	0	0	2	3***	5
Total £ fines	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total custodial sentences imposed (months)	0	0	1 (2yrs 3m)	3*** (7 yrs 4m)	4 (115m/9 yrs 7m)
Total suspended sentences imposed	0	0	1 (2yrs)	0	1 (2yrs)
Compensation awards	0	0	0	1 (£33,257.54)	1 (£33,257.54)
POCA Confiscation Orders *(in default prison sentence)	£0	£124,394 *(12m)	£0	£1,648,732 *(12yrs)	£1,773,126
**adjusted due to error in Q1 figs ***inc Op Judy (Saunders)					

Table 3 - eCrime Team Data

Online disruption – AI generated websites: This year the Team dealt with a large number of seemingly AI generated websites based overseas presenting as legitimate UK-based retailers and targeting UK consumers. The sites are highly professional in appearance, giving the clear impression of being UK-based boutique suppliers of high-quality products. In practice, goods are either of poor quality or not supplied, whilst

some may not have the appropriate safety certifications. Upon lodging a complaint with the company it becomes apparent that the consumer has bought from an overseas company and finds it almost impossible to return the product or get other satisfactory resolution with the company. The Team is working alongside the NTS Intelligence Network and several local authorities to disrupt these sites. For example, the Team worked closely with Herefordshire Trading Standards to tackle websites that were affecting a legitimate hearing aid supplier in their area. They used an almost identical trading name but offered significantly cheaper products. The legitimate supplier received numerous complaints from consumers believing they had dealt with their company. Despite Herefordshire's attempts to engage with the trader, they would not comply. The Team took action to remove two websites and, following further intervention by Herefordshire, the trader is now compliant.

National Training and Development Programme: Following confirmation of funding from the NTS Board's reserves, a new team has been created to deliver a training and development programme to enhance support for local on-line investigations. This Team has developed a proposed approach for initial communications to local authorities and KPIs. Following recruitment it is hoped that the Team will start operations in summer 2026.

Closed cases:

Operation Zebedee (POCA): This is the second of the major secondary ticketing investigations for which the criminal case concluded in 2024. The POCA proceedings took place for two of the four defendants. One defendant was ordered to pay £1,972,552 and the other £995,278.

Operation Toffee (POCA): This joint Yorkshire & Humber RIT, eCrime Team and FACT investigation was reported in 2024-25. Sunny Kumar Kanda sold modified TV fire sticks to provide unauthorised access to premium film, television, and live sports content. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In September 2025, the defendant agreed a benefit figure of £124,394.

Operation Gilbert (POCA): This was a lengthy investigation into fourteen defendants perpetrating a large scale modelling fraud through social media. Over 6,000 victims were duped into thinking they could earn money as professional models by attending a "free" photoshoot. Twelve defendants were prosecuted resulting in three prison sentences, six suspended sentences, two undertakings and a simple caution. The two main defendants failed to attend the sentencing hearing and extradition proceedings have been issued against them. In January 2026, Philip Foster, the main defendant, had a confiscation order of £1,648,732 made against him. This is in addition to the 8½ years' imprisonment that will have to be served once he is located and returned to the UK.

Operation Kayo: This investigation concerned a company operating over 40 misleading websites linked to road charging schemes such as the Dartford Crossing and the London ULEZ. The company misled consumers into believing their sites were the official place to pay the relevant charge. Consumers were unaware they were paying additional charges

over and above the official charge. Almost 800 consumers also received Penalty Charge Notices when the defendants failed to pass on the consumers' payments to the official provider. The operation generated over £2.25 million. The defendants pleaded guilty and were sentenced as follows:

- Thomas Gall - 2 years and 3 months' imprisonment and a 10-year company director disqualification.
- Shazad Parvez - 2 years' imprisonment, suspended for two years, a 6-year company director disqualification, 200 hours of unpaid work and 20 Rehabilitation Activity Days.

Proceedings against a third defendant were discontinued following the first defendant's guilty plea.

Operation Archie: Two defendants operated a website over the course of 14 years, via which consumers would order fake degree and professional qualification certificates, paying between £399 and over £1,000 per certificate. There were significant safeguarding concerns relating to qualifications/certifications required for certain trades (plumbers, electricians etc.) that may have then been used by tradespeople carrying out work in consumers' homes. In this case, the detriment was to those students who had studied and paid for a genuine qualification and to the integrity of the qualifications system as a whole. As such there is an unlimited number of victims. David Grundy pleaded guilty to fraudulent trading and was sentenced to 3 years and 3 months' imprisonment in March 2026. He was ordered to pay £33,257 in compensation to the Joint Qualifications Council and £45,739 in prosecution costs. The other defendant is subject to an international arrest warrant to have him extradited and brought back to the UK from Myanmar to face trial.

Operation Bess (Yolmo): This case involved overseas scam call centres that were targeting UK consumers with search engine advertising claiming to be official customer helplines for Microsoft, HP and other well-known computer brands. The prosecution focused on the UK "front" businesses that were set up to take payments from consumers for the supposed support services provided. Six defendants had already been convicted for money laundering in 2024-25). The seventh defendant, Gyaltse Yolmo, who laundered the proceeds of a computer services fraud, was sentenced, in February 2026, to 3 years 2 months' imprisonment. This brings the total sentences for Operation Bess to 12½ years, with the consumer harm calculated at over £1.7 million.

Operation Judy (Saunders): This case was originally reported in 2017-18 when three defendants were found guilty of fraud and/or money laundering in relation to bogus recruitment and Disclosure and Barring Service checking services. Nearly 900 jobseekers responded to the ads for non-existent jobs; many were conditional on applying and paying for an "express" DBS check. The consumer detriment was £102,000. A fourth defendant absconded, Ashton Kevin Fredrick Saunders, fled to Thailand. He was detained after being deported from Thailand and, in February 2026, he pleaded guilty to money laundering and was sentenced to 14 months' imprisonment.

Regional Investigation Teams and National Tasking

The **National Tasking Group (NTG)** supported 50 cases and two projects during the year. **Annual NTG Planning Meeting**: In March, NTG reviewed a total of 48 submissions (including five new cases) and agreed to provide further funding for these cases for the 2026/27 financial year. The total funding allocated to these submissions amounted to £3.6 million.

Case Reviews: NTG conducted case reviews throughout the year and approved the subsequent written reports for the following operations: Pargetter, Derdap, Calabar, Archer, Bronze, Deveux, Merlin and Kayo. The recommendations from these reviews have been integrated into the learning documents for each case.

Enforcement and Training Initiatives: Progress has been made with the Alternative Enforcement Options initiative, including the introduction of concise training sessions for trading standards staff. During 2025/26 these sessions focused on website take downs, removal of card payment facilities and the work of the Information Commissioners Office.

Revised NTG Protocol and Application Process: Throughout the year, the NTS Programme Office devised and implemented a revised and simplified NTG application process for use in 2026/27. The revised forms were well-received by all regions. To reflect these changes, the NTG protocol document was updated, with unnecessary content, which had been duplicated from elsewhere, removed. The revised protocol was subsequently approved and distributed via an NTS update.

The **Regional Investigation Teams** have 109 open cases, of which 40 are ongoing investigations, 15 are at report stage, 49 are awaiting trial and five are POCA cases.

Rogue traders in property maintenance, especially roofing, dominated the 38 new cases started this year. Areas cover driveways and patios, rendering and coatings, double glazing, energy scams, and foam insulation installation or removal. Many of these rogue traders target older consumers. Other rogue traders included two doorstep crimes and emergency plumbers and locksmiths that offer a call out fee then increase the cost significantly. Other scams included tax rebates, debt collection, a model agency, two motor traders (car sales and engine refurbishment), a misdescription of fuel, a ULEZ/Toll website, double glazing/eco rogue trader, lettings fraud and four counterfeiting cases.

The Teams closed 33 cases. There were 24 successful prosecutions leading to 54 convictions. Of these, 28 defendants received total custodial sentences of 102 years and 26 suspended sentences of over 39 years. Two fines totalled £19,850. Other penalties included:

- over 117 days of unpaid work.
- five Criminal Behaviour Orders (three indefinite).
- three Company Director bans totalled 22 years.
- One Seize & Destroy Forfeiture Deprivation Order for £805,000-worth of goods.
- one Electronic Tag.

- one Curfew.
- one Enterprise Act Undertaking.
- one Alcohol Rehabilitation Order.
- one Drug Rehabilitation Order.
- one Mental Health Treatment Requirement.
- one ban on keeping dogs for 10 years.

Seven Compensation Orders amounted to £357,842 and the awards for POCA and costs amounted to £138,591 and £309,028, respectively.

The **value of consumer and business detriment avoided** by the activities of the Regional Investigations Teams this year is **£12,276,263.**

Investigations	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25-26
Operations commenced	14	9	11	5	38
Live Operations	115	120	113	109	109
Operations concluded	13	3	17	8	41
Consumer and business detriment	£2,566,841	£1,280,144	£8,028,508	£400,771	£12,276,263
No. of defendants convicted	14**	5	32	4	55
Total £ fines	0	0	2 £19,850	0	2 £19,850
Total custodial sentences imposed	9 (28yrs)	0	16 (68yrs 6m)	3 (4yrs 3m)	29 (102yrs)
Total suspended sentences imposed	5 (8yrs)	5 (6yrs 4m)	15 (23yrs 4m)	1 (1yr 6m)	26 (39yrs 2m)
Compensation awards	3 (£53,949.52)	0	1 (£32,521)	3 (£271,371.44)	7 (£357,841.96)
POCA proceedings concluded	2	0	0	3	5
POCA Confiscation Orders (*3m in default)	3 (£138,590)	0	0	0	3 (£138,590)
**** error in figures**					

Table 4 – Regional Investigation Team Data

Examples of closed cases

Operation Driver: The **Tri Region Investigation Team** supported **LB Barking & Dagenham Trading Standards'** investigation into the activities of a building company that generated a high volume of complaints across London and the South East. Arron Lee Taylor advertised on various websites offering home improvement works. Over a two-year

period, he took on six building jobs, accepted payment, then demanded additional funds before abandoning the work having completed little or nothing. Victims were left out of pocket and faced substantial repair bills; some homes were left barely habitable. Taylor used various aliases and created multiple companies to give an impression of legitimacy.

In January 2026, the Court convicted him, in his absence, of three counts of Fraudulent Trading. He was sentenced to three years' immediate imprisonment on each count to run concurrently. A warrant has been issued for his arrest.

LB Barking & Dagenham are pursuing confiscation proceedings. Criminal benefit: £100,000.

Operation Scroll: The **South West Team** supported the **Heart of the South West's** investigation into G M Geeco Limited t/a (The) Mobility Furniture Company, which provided bespoke furniture such as rise-and-recline chairs and adjustable beds and had a turnover of £30 million. The company was a member of the TSI Approved Code and of the British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA). Complaints from across the country, included failure to provide pre-contract information, refusal to permit cancellation and aggressive commercial practices by sales staff. Criminal benefit: £65,000.

In September 2025, Peter Jonathan Kitson pleaded guilty to obtaining money from customers by:

- Falsely claiming that goods were subject to sales discount.
- Providing misleading information as to the price to be charged.
- Making misleading claims.
- Falsely claiming that cancellation rights did not apply.
- Falsely claiming stock products had been made to order.

He was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment on 5th September 2025.

James Mitton signed an undertaking under the Digital Markets Consumer and Competition Act for a period of five years.

Operation Starr (POCA): This **Yorkshire & Humber investigation Team's** case saw seven defendants convicted in January 2025 of fraud and money laundering relating to defective home improvement services while claiming to be part of the Government's 'Green Deal' initiative. In March 2026, POCA confiscation proceedings concluded. Confiscation Orders were made as follows:

- Rehan Yousa: £205,384 but available amount was £0.
- Jonathan O'Grady: £41,288 but available amount was £0.
- Zulkernan Mahmood: £314,409 with £26,696 available amount which was restrained and will be distributed to consumer victims as compensation.

Operation Beorma: This is a lengthy **Central England Regional Team** investigation into Birmingham-based organisations that import and supply counterfeit goods to traders across many markets nationwide. Several prosecution cases led to nine convictions.

- **Case 1:** Inderjit Sangu: 4 years' imprisonment and POCA of £75,000 paid.
- **Case 2:** Saqlain Nawaz: 27 months imprisonment and a nominal POCA order.
- **Case 3:** Usman Sikander: 12 months imprisonment, suspended for 2 years, 20 days rehabilitation, a curfew and £25,000 in POCA. Wasim Mahmood: a community order of 12 months, 25 days of rehabilitation and 50 hours of unpaid work.
- **Case 4:** Mohammed Shafiq: 4½ years' imprisonment
- **Case 5:** Mahroof Hussain: 5 years. Basharat Hussain: 18 months. Mohammed Hawre Saleh: 12 months imprisonment. Nadeem Mohammed: 18-month community Order and 25 days unpaid work.

Operation Cabal: This **Wales Team** case relates to the illegal puppy trade with evidence of a large-scale English and French Bulldogs breeding operation (120 litters in a 10-year period) and false use of DEFRA/APHA claims and unauthorised Kennel Club logos on websites. Leighton Burrows was sentenced to a 2-year suspended prison sentence, 200 hours unpaid work and banned from holding a dog breeding licence for 10 years. Proceeds of Crime is ongoing. In a linked case, which originated from a BBC undercover investigation, the Team prosecuted Moheiz Adam, a Newport dog breeder, for mutilating puppies' ears to "give them a striking look" and make them stand more upright. He pleaded guilty to nine charges, including causing an animal to suffer. He had previous drug and knife related convictions. He was sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment, suspended for two years; 240 hours unpaid work; 15 days rehabilitation; and £2,000 in costs. He was disqualified from owning or keeping animals and dealing in animals or transporting animals for 15 years.

Operation Titus: This **Wales Team** investigation concerned rogue builders, Jeremiah, Simon and Ronald Connors. They conned customers in the Newport and Bristol areas out of thousands of pounds after carrying out shoddy work that was left incomplete and in a dangerous condition. Several retaining walls collapsed and customers spent thousands of pounds to repair the inferior work. At the time of the offences, Ronald Connors was subject to a 10-year Criminal Behaviour Order which prevented him from approaching a residential address occupied by someone over the age of 50. He pleaded guilty to four offences and breach of a criminal behaviour order. The court heard he had previous convictions for engaging in aggressive commercial practices and fraud. He was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment. Jeremiah and Simon Connors were given a 55-week prison sentence suspended for two years and 23 months suspended for two years respectively, after pleading guilty to five counts relating to false representation and professional diligence. They were also ordered to do unpaid work and rehabilitation days.

Operation Gazelle – Boiler Service Plan Case: In 2018, the **Tri Region Team** assisted **Croydon Trading Standards** with a company trading as *The Gas Board Ltd*. The company cold called consumers offering boiler service and breakdown plans for around £200. The majority of customers received no service despite payment. Many victims were over 65 years of age and felt deliberately misled. British Gas had previously sent two cease and desist letters. The case was heard in June 2025. Three defendants pleaded

guilty to regulation 8(1) of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. The value of the consumer detriment was £756,858. They were sentenced as follows:

- Steffan Smart and Arkin Almaajoun each received 12 months, suspended for two years; 140 unpaid hours; an indefinite Criminal Behaviour Order; and to pay costs of £15,000.
- Ali Almaajoun received eight months, suspended for two years; 80 unpaid hours; 25 days Rehabilitation Requirement; a 10-year Criminal Behaviour Order; and to pay £9,000 costs.

Operation Mandolin – Rogue Trader: This **North East Regional Investigation Team** case involved James Bell, 51, who operated a plastering and renovation business. He repeatedly failed to carry out or complete work. His actions had a severe impact on numerous, often vulnerable, victims. Victims included a woman undergoing chemotherapy whose home adaptation was abandoned after a £4,700 payment. Victims described feelings of shame, helplessness and loss of trust, with some delaying retirement or continuing to work to recover financially. Bell was arrested and admitted to five counts of fraud and one of theft. In October 2025, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, with no prospect of compensation for victims or confiscation as he had no assets.

Operation Bronze – Wine Investment Fraud: Hertfordshire Trading Standards, supported by the **Tri Region Investigation Team**, investigated a large-scale wine investment fraud operated by Imperial Wines of London Ltd. The business falsely portrayed itself as a reputable, family-run investment house with international offices and exclusive access to suppliers in the esteemed chateaux and vineyards of Bordeaux. Using scripted cold-calling, high-pressure tactics and luxury inducements, staff targeted often bereaved or isolated consumers, falsely claiming profits were only taken on resale. Forty-one victims lost £6 million, with an estimated £37 million passing through company accounts over a decade. The emotional impact was severe, with many victims losing life savings; one vulnerable victim lost over £440,000 and could not recall the transactions due to dementia.

Following a 15-week trial concluding in August 2025, three defendants were convicted of fraudulent trading and sentenced as follows:

- Ben Cazaly, 43: 6½ years.
- Greg Assemakis, 40: 3½ years.
- Dominic D'Sa, 45: 4½ years.

Hertfordshire Trading Standards will pursue POCA.

Operation Cara – Property Sourcing Fraud: The **Tri Region Investigation Team** supported **West Berkshire Shared Trading Standards Service's** investigation into a property sourcing fraud. For over three years, the defendant targeted individuals seeking to invest in let-to-let serviced accommodation, inducing them to pay non-refundable fees for properties that failed to materialise. Victims and landlords were misled using forged documents, tenancy agreements and WhatsApp messages, while proceeds funded a lavish

lifestyle. Following a nine-week trial, Jason Paul Cunningham, 39, from Cardigan, Wales, was convicted on 6th August 2025 of fraudulent trading and using false instruments. In November 2025, he was sentenced to 4½ years' imprisonment. The judge noted his history of dishonesty offences dating back to 2015. Victims' losses exceeded £113,000, and a POCA confiscation table was set.

Operation Pargetter – Rogue Traders (roofing): The **Wales Investigation Team** successfully prosecuted a father and son team of rogue traders who operated a sophisticated network of sham roofing companies. They used numerous trading names, addresses and telephone numbers across England and Wales. Evidence showed that the defendants offered their, often unnecessary, roofing services to unsuspecting members of the public and, having secured a small job, claimed they had discovered extensive damage and dramatically inflated their costs. They often left the roof in a worse condition than when they started. One victim was forced to sell his home after being unable to cover the costs. A couple were charged over £12,000 for essential repairs that turned into repeated demands for further payments. Their home was left uninhabitable. One partner, suffering terminal cancer was compelled to use his medical retirement funds to pay the roofing costs. He died before the dispute was resolved, leaving his partner financially devastated and with an unsafe home, believing that the ordeal had hastened the loved one's death. The value of the fraud was £500,000.

In August 2025, Jim Janes and Thomas Michael Jim James, pleaded guilty to fraudulent trading and money laundering. Money laundering charges related to the concealment of criminal proceeds by transferring large sums to family members' bank accounts. These family members subsequently purchased property and land on the defendants' behalf, with assets placed in their names to avoid detection by authorities. Both defendants were sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment, with POCA and Criminal Behaviour Orders pending.

Operation Clementine – Energy Fraud: Kent Trading Services, supported by the **Tri Regional Investigation and eCrime Teams**, uncovered a systematic scheme by Clear Renewables Ltd and Efficient Homes SE Ltd to mis-sell unnecessary and overpriced solar energy products. Consumers were charged thousands of pounds for equipment costing a fraction of the price. For example, one consumer paid £4,200 for a Solar Edge inverter and optimisers that cost the company less than £800. They targeted elderly and vulnerable victims using misleading scripts and high-pressure sales tactics. In November 2025, three defendants were sentenced:

- Jesse Hitchings: 3 years' imprisonment for fraudulent trading and money laundering, and a 7-year company director disqualification.
- Ian Hitchings: 23 months' imprisonment suspended for 2 years, 10 rehabilitation days, 240 hours unpaid work, and a 7-year company director disqualification, for fraudulent trading and money laundering.
- Mathew Kyte: 16 months' imprisonment suspended for 2 years (concurrent for all five counts of fraud), 10 rehabilitation days, and 180 hours unpaid work.

A timetable has been set for outstanding matters relating to costs, compensation and POCA confiscation.

Doorstep Crime

Spray Foam Insulation Short Intelligence Report: This was produced in August 2025 by the NTS Intelligence Team. An OFFICIAL document was circulated to Trading Standards Services. This identified the scale of the issues, intelligence and complaint figures, key trends, locations, and some suggested recommendations. An OFFICIAL SENSITIVE document was circulated by the Team to regional/local intelligence teams and Trading Standards Services. This contained more sensitive information with details of the most complained about traders, links between traders and enforcement activities. The report was considered by NTG who commended the report and agreed it should be shared with Government departments and interested parties. This has been done to demonstrate the scale of the problem and the fact it needs a national working group and a strategic approach to deal with these issues. This was suggested in the NTS Energy Fraud position paper, published in April 2025.

Approved Trader Platform Intelligence Short Report: This was circulated in September 2025. It was produced by the NTS Intelligence Team. It analyses intelligence reports relating to approved trader platforms (since the CMA guidance was issued in November 2024). A number of regional/national groups had spoken about the difficulties they are still seeing from these platforms at the NTS Doorstep Crime working group meetings. The report was shared with the CMA and Trading Standards via the regional/local intelligence teams.

Operation Elliot: This investigation, by the **NTS eCrime Team**, concerned bogus approved trader scheme websites. A significant proportion of the traders listed on the sites are believed to be prolific doorstep crime offenders. There are hundreds of connected websites associated with the suspected rogue traders, also believed to have been designed by the same business. The business has been issued with a warning letter setting out where it is believed offences may have been committed. If the business does not comply, the Team will consider takedowns for the bogus trader scheme websites and the websites connected with the suspected rogue traders.

Unlicensed asbestos businesses: The NTS eCrime Team is conducting some operational activity into unlicensed asbestos businesses under Operation Kalos, alongside disruption work targeting rogue trader websites that reuse identical stock images and fabricated reviews.

NFIB Action Fraud report: The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau released a report which analysed the ‘door to door sales and bogus tradespeople’ crime reports to Action Fraud in 2024. It highlighted a total of 6,736 crime reports, marking an 8.3% increase from 2023. Financial losses rose significantly, with a total reported loss of £48.3 million, up

19.6% from the previous year. Notably, the average loss per incident increased by 35.7%, from £6,495 in 2023 to £8,815 in 2024. Builders were the most widely referenced profession, followed by roof and gutter workers. Online trader recommendation platforms were used to check traders before hiring them in 377 (5.6%) of the reports. Social media platforms were referenced in 21% of the reports.

NTS Doorstep Crime Working Group: The group met in April and October 2025. It comprises regional/national Trading Standards' leads on doorstep crime across the UK, CTSI, and the NTS eCrime, Scams, and Intelligence Teams. They discussed the evolving tactics of rogue traders. There continues to be a rise in roofing and building fraud and scams. The Authorised Push Payment fraud reimbursement rules may lead to scam 'claim companies', while banks' inconsistent handling of fraud claims risks further victimisation and financial exclusion. It is hoped the NTS eCrime Team's Trusted Flagger status with Google, will enable faster takedowns of fake reviews that consumers rely on. The Renters Rights Act could unintentionally lead rogue traders to exploit emergency repair rights.

APP reimbursements: Trading Standards experts on the NTS Doorstep Crime Working Group report that victims of doorstep crime are struggling to obtain reimbursement from banks under the Payment Systems Regulator's Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud reimbursement regulations. APP fraud occurs when victims are deceived into authorising a bank transfer to a rogue trader. Some claims are being rejected on the basis that the trader carried out some work, despite evidence showing that in most doorstep crime/rogue trader cases the work is unnecessary, poor quality or incomplete. This should not prevent the reimbursement, when the trader had no intention of completing the work to a good standard and instead intended to make a gain for themselves. The NTS Scams Team is developing training for Payment Service Providers, Banks and Building Societies and guidance to help consumers to seek redress.

Examples of cases completed this year.

Operation Mallard (POCA): This successful **East Midlands Investigation Team's** investigation saw six defendants receive custodial sentences totalling 22½ years for a prolific fraud related to the sale of "energy saving" home installations. Confiscation Orders totalling £341,970 were made as follows:

- Jason Rowan: Benefit £1,292,141 - available amount £44,827.
- David Beeson: Benefit £63,261 - available amount £63,261.
- Christopher Simpson: Benefit £137,184- available amount £2,001.
- Bohdan Zacharko: Benefit £137,184 - available amount £1.
- Philip Eremenko: Benefit £82,914 - available amount £42,021.
- Stephen Tomlinson: Benefit £277,127 - available amount £91,365.

POCA proceedings ordered that available funds be used to compensate the victims featured in the case. The overall benefit exceeds £1.9 million and will be subject to future reviews. One defendant has requested a contested hearing to agree benefit figures.

Operation Trumpet: Christopher Wase, a salesman involved with companies identified under Operation Durable was investigated by the **North East Investigation Team** in connection with allegations of fraud relating to payments taken for work that was not started and/or where no refunds were given. Following arrest, he pleaded guilty to five fraud and CPRs offences. In March 2026, he was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment suspended for 18 months with 210 hours unpaid community work and £1,200 compensation to four of his five victims.

Operation Lute: Durham County Council and the **North East Investigation Team** investigated a sole trader who agreed to carry out building or roofing work, took payments and then failed to return to complete the work or provide refunds or compensation. Much of his work was shoddy and overall his customers were £30,065 out of pocket. One community association was quoted £3,200 but they paid over £13,000 for a small amount of work. The defendant quoted £1,446 to repair the roof of a children's home, they paid £3,000 but no work was carried out.

John McGrath pleaded guilty to eight Fraud Act offences. A further 11 counts were laid on file. The Judge said that this was a "series of cynical frauds that went on unabashed for about five years". The court noted that some of the money was spent on materials, some had been returned/repaid and the defendant had since taken some steps to repair the damage. He was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment. Confiscation was not pursued as the defendant had no realisable assets.

Value of fraud £30,065.27.

Operation Pinewood: The **Wales Investigation Team** worked with **Anglesey** and **Lancashire Trading Standards** on a fraud involving a Blackpool-based window repair company targeting elderly victims across North Wales since 2017. Offenders used misleading cold calling to claim warranties were expiring and government grants were available, inducing victims to pay around £1,200 for poor-quality or unnecessary servicing, followed by repeat visits and inflated home improvement work totalling over £790,000. Joseph Anthony Oliver was sentenced to 4 years 9 months' imprisonment and made subject to a Criminal Behaviour Order. The defendant is prohibited indefinitely from being involved in any capacity in any business that engages in any sort of "cold calling" and from any business that sells any home improvement products or warranties or similar where it may involve direct engagement with any consumer at their home address. Due to prison overcrowding, the defendant was released early on curfew and probation, having served 12 months.

The criminal benefit was assessed at £1.23m but the available assets were only £7,612.61 which were allocated as compensation to three victims who suffered the biggest losses.

Operation Elliot: The **eCrime Team** investigated fraudulent "approved trader scheme" websites that falsely endorsed traders, many linked to doorstep criminality. The sites misled consumers into trusting rogue traders and facilitated further offending. Hundreds of interconnected websites were identified as part of the network. A formal warning has been

issued, with enforcement action, including takedowns, under consideration if offending continues. No prosecution at this stage.

Operation Kiwi – Rogue Trader (Roofing): The **East Midlands Investigation Team** led a multi-agency investigation into an organised crime group carrying out roofing fraud. Offenders cold called vulnerable victims, falsely claimed urgent repairs, and in some cases deliberately caused damage to justify further work, used false identities, regularly changed business names and laundering proceeds through associates. Confirmed losses exceeded £133,000. The fraud was supported by a network of six family members and associates whose bank accounts were used to launder proceeds. In September 2025, the investigation resulted in the conviction of nine individuals for fraud and money laundering. As well as the sentences below, a range of rehabilitation, community and other orders were imposed:

- Arthur Draper, currently serving time in custody: 6 years and 4 months' imprisonment.
- John William Smith: 22 months' imprisonment, suspended for two years.
- Jake William Garrigan: 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for two years.
- Adam Gary Pegg: 4 months' imprisonment, suspended for two years.
- Natasha Power: 14 months' imprisonment, suspended for two years.
- Colin Paul Bell: 4 months' imprisonment, suspended for 12 months.
- Bradley Freeman: 4 months' imprisonment, suspended for 12 months.
- Wendy Clare Pegg: 16 months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months.

William Delaney pleaded guilty and was sentenced in December 2025 to 3 months' imprisonment suspended for 18 months. Proceeds of Crime is ongoing.

Operation Silver – Rogue Trading: A prosecution at Bristol Crown Court, supported by the **South West Investigation Team**, resulted in five offenders being sentenced to over 13 years' imprisonment for fraud and money laundering. The group lured victims with low-cost guttering work before making false claims of serious roof damage to extract large payments for unnecessary work, using aliases and mule accounts to conceal proceeds. One pensioner lost over £80,000 and another victim, aged 86, lost over £86,000. The total fraud was estimated at £370,000. POCA proceedings are ongoing. Sentences as follows:

- Carl Davies: 4 years and 6 months' imprisonment and a Criminal Behaviour Order permanently banning him from property maintenance work.
- David Chalk: 3 years and 2 months' imprisonment and a Criminal Behaviour Order permanently banning him from property maintenance work.
- Vincent Allsopp: 3 years' imprisonment.
- Stuart Woodward: 1 year and 10 months' imprisonment suspended.
- Callum Taylor: 1 year 4 months' imprisonment suspended for 2 years, 200 hours unpaid work and a curfew.

Used Cars

The **National Used Car Group** met in May. It was noted that the Consumer Protection Partnership undertook consultation with various parties as part of their review of the used car market. Their report has not yet been finalised.

Online disruption – sale of used cars on social media: The **eCrime Team** undertook a widespread disruption exercise. This identified and disrupted listings linked to the misleading and fraudulent sales of used cars, working alongside all regions to ensure maximum impact.

NTS is continuing to fund two **large scale car clocking cases**, one in the East Midlands and one in the North West. These should both conclude in 2026/27.

Two regional projects were undertaken. The National Tasking Group will consider these reports, in the summer, alongside a report to be published by the NTS Intelligence Team.

Scams

The NTS Scams Team saved £36,399,753 this year through its investigations, prevention and disruption work, whilst the savings made through local authority support delivered £34.01 for every £1 spent[4].

Telecoms: The Team continue to develop intelligence around the TrueCall platform. The Team is liaising with a USA telecoms regulator to scope use of technology to improve the alert system and identify calls used by criminals to carry out fraud. Following the release of the Telecommunications Fraud Sector Charter in November, the Team will be creating a utilities-against-scams style project for telecommunication providers. OFCOM asked the Team to provide its investigation and intelligence packages regarding a major provider of scam calls with a view to securing a prosecution. Total savings £515,592.

Friends Against Scams (FAS): The Team has provided a wide range of organisations with information on the *Young Friends Against Scams* and SCAMchampion initiatives, the *No Blame, No Shame* campaign, and research into financial literacy and neurodiversity. In collaboration with *Targeted Help*, scams awareness materials were made available for international students on the FAS website. The Team created 20-minute interactive training sessions for secondary schools, focussing on a different scam for each Year group.

The FAS App was launched in November 2025 during BBC Scams Safe Week. There is an interactive training module and *Ask Silver*, an AI tool that can run checks on potential scams and websites. New features include notifications for *Which? Scam Alerts* sent directly to users' mobile phones and a monthly scams quiz to increase users' awareness.

Collaboration with the Cyber Helpline raised awareness of cyber fraud. A factsheet and blog on cyber-crime and harms will be a downloadable resource on the website and app.

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[4] [VfM total savings ÷ total investment over year] £36,399,753 ÷ £1,070,262 = £34.01for every £1 spent.

Scam Marshals/newsletter: There are 2,769 Scam Marshals who continue to submit scam mail. A Scam Marshal panel of nine volunteer members was established and will meet every six weeks to work with the Team on new projects. Scam Marshall newsletters raised awareness of TV licensing scams, fake lotteries, fraudulent DVLA messages, mandatory reimbursement and how fraud victims can claim from their bank, Direct Debit fraud and links to AI voice cloning. Readers were also asked to complete a survey so the Team can assess current involvement and activity levels to help determine how to progress the project.

Utilities Against Scams: This was relaunched in early December in collaboration with *Ask Silver*, several utility companies and the charity *SCOPE* with 117 attendees, leading to ten new companies signing up.

SCAMnesty: In June, the Team ran its fourth SCAMnesty social media campaign to encourage scam mail recipients to send mail to the Team via freepost to help improve intelligence.

Scams	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25-26
Value for money (estimated & actual consumer savings/every £1 of budget)	£19.88	£98.12	£25.43	£26.72	£34.01
No. of pieces of mail returned to sender/disrupted	4,500	0	0	0	4,500
No. of telephone numbers taken down	304	1,640	3,619	599	6,162
No. of phone calls stopped (estimated)[5]	625,000	20,370,000	60,910,000	12,050,000	93,253,000
No. of LAs supported with advice & guidance	15	17	16	14	62
Total savings from Scams interventions	£3,879,323	£19,140,589	£6,230,966	£7,148,855	£36,399,753

Table 5 – Scams Team Data

Multi-Agency Approach to Fraud (MAAF): There are 26 police force areas who either have a MAAF or have a view to launch one. The Team received several enquiries following the launch of the Fraud Strategy, with the inclusion of MAAFs, and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) asking forces about their multi-agency working to support victims of fraud. Examples of work include:

- The Essex MAAF being officially recognised in an inspection by HMICFRS who recommended the work be submitted to the College of Policing's National Best Practice Bank.
- Kent MAAF members received a Chief Constable's commendation.

[5] Changes in disruption tactics provide numbers of telephone numbers taken down and resultant no of calls stopped (estimate)

- West Mercia launched its first newsletter.
- Gloucestershire MAAF launched the first public facing MAAF website.
- Several MAAFs were finalists in the Tackling Economic Crime Awards and the Scams Team received an “Outstanding Team” category nomination.
- One MAAF now operates at a regional level covering Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia, and West Midlands.

The team completed four successful training sessions with 140 attendees and recordings of all the sessions were made available to all MAAF partners. Coercive control training across MAAFs and partners continues.

Coercive Control (No Blame No Shame) campaign and Taskforce: This year 1,617 delegates received the interactive training on identifying, supporting, and responding to fraud and scam victims. The *FAS* website now includes a dedicated coercive control section containing campaign materials. A language best practice guide focusses on words and phrases that should or should not be used when speaking to or about scam victims. A bespoke apprentice training package was launched in July, attracting over 100 attendees with positive feedback. Twenty-eight organisations have signed up to the Fraud and Scams Victim Charter.

Safer Communities Financial Fraud Advocate Initiative: This initiative was discussed with the NTS Doorstep Crime Group in November and then shared with all local authorities. This is a Tees Valley charity, funded by police, local authorities and other partners that supports vulnerable victims who are trying to seek compensation from financial institutions. Between its launch in January 2025, and October 2025 they had supported 66 people aged between 23 and 97 who have been victims of a range of frauds including romance and investment scams. There has been £473,343 recovered with a further £420,000 held in bank accounts and subject to Financial Ombudsman determinations.

Cyber Defence Alliance: This organisation works with seventeen major banks to provide fraud identification and protections to its members and their customers. The Alliance monitors telecoms and online material that targets customers with frauds and highlights issues to its members. Joint working and information sharing between the Cyber Defence Alliance and the Team has proved beneficial. A more formal agreement will be put in place to strengthen disruption activity. The Alliance is partnering the Team on Operation Henhouse.

Financial Conduct Authority: The Team provided evidence of abuse within the direct debit regulations which allows criminals to present and reissue direct debit instructions without customers’ knowledge as well as bypassing banks’ own fraud systems. The Financial Conduct Authority has agreed to tighten guidance for payment processors and work with the Team on the alert system to reach the wider banking community.

Royal Mail and Border Force: Joint work resumed on acquiring scam mailings entering the UK as well as continuing with mail responded to by victims. The first tranche of approximately 5,000 pieces of mail was processed by the Team, in the autumn.

Investigations

Operation Juojarvi: The Team investigates the enablers of mass-marketing mailings and telephone calls and disrupts fraudulent mailings being sent to or returned to the criminal entities. The Team works with the serviced office industry, including alerts to Companies House when serviced office providers disengage with companies.

In spring 2025, the Team and UK Border Force undertook **a day of action at the Heathrow Royal Mail depot** and identified the mailings awaiting entry into the UK mail stream. Border Force detained the mailings, **with estimated savings of £93,555** based on three months' figures and an average loss. The inbound mailings are suspected of being targeted at previous victims.

The Team helped one victim recover £3,000 and a second £12,000 and prevented further engagement. The Team identified a UK-based criminal that is using Cyprus as a mailing and response centre for illegal lottery mailings.

Operation Derdap: This operation began in 2022 to disrupt multimillion-pound cold-calling frauds. These frauds have expanded to cover areas such as non-existent home repair and white goods cover plans, green energy, solar maintenance, spray foam insulation removal, personal alarms, cost of living discount membership, debt management, will writing and funeral plans. They primarily target elderly victims, some in cognitive decline.

The criminals are now charging higher one-off payments to avoid continuous payments which is a red flag to the payment processors. A new trend is fraudsters obtaining services using counterfeit and fake documentation as well as AI tools to deceive legitimate enablers. They use false companies, bogus and/or offshore directors and/or third parties.
There are often offshore directors with direct links to data and call centre providers.
Several offshore call centres, operating on behalf of UK-based criminals, have been identified.

Some examples of the work this year:

- Over 100 criminal enterprises have had payment services removed.
- 20 alerts to scheme members.
- Seven victims' details were flagged from direct debit alerts and had refunds recovered. Banks were made aware via UK Finance. Notably, those victims had the same companies targeting them.
- This led to a pilot with a major bank to identify other potential victims who were paying the same companies by direct debit.
- One previous Derdap nominal was discovered acting as an introducer for five newly formed companies through two Direct Debit providers. The companies had bogus addresses and no financial history. The companies were disengaged.

- Two call centres in India that were targeting the UK with Derdap type frauds were raided by law enforcement leading to 62 arrests, five charged, and gold, high end cars, and cash seized.
- A company providing fraudulent heating repair cover plans had direct debit and registered office facilities closed down.
- A partnership with the ICO and a major telecom firm had telecom services removed from a provider that was spoofing UK numbers.
- Secured a Winding Up Order against a Derdap nominal with assets seized and directors disqualified for six years with POCA action pending.
- 1,303 phone numbers were taken down.
- 42,609 victims were identified.

Estimated savings: £12,683,923.95.

Operation Narva: Criminals offer fall/emergency alarm pendants and watches, many of which do not work, with charges much higher than legitimate UK companies' or local authorities' fees. The frauds originate from offshore call centres run by UK-based criminals using UK bank accounts and a web of telecoms providers, making detection difficult. The Team worked with the industry on consumer messaging and with payment processors to identify these rogue companies. The Team collaborates with partners and issues alerts to providers to have telecoms facilities and card payment services withdrawn from fraudulent entities.

Some examples of the work this year:
- Identified a service provider to several fraudulent entities that continually phoenix, leaving hundreds of thousands of pounds of debts and unpaid HMRC taxes.
- Identified three newly formed companies linked to known criminals.
- Three entities were refused membership to a UK trade body which will disrupt the companies' ability to trade.
- A telecoms company removed telecom facilities and blocked entities' phone numbers from a newly formed company whose directors were linked to several other fraudulent companies. The Direct Debit provider also disengaged.
- A company, actively engaged in providing medical pendant alarms and using fraudulent claims that they were calling from NHS and the USA as a health care provider, had direct debit removed and a suspicious activity report issued.
- 3,150,000 phone calls were stopped.
- 223 phone numbers were taken down.
- 6,720 victims were identified.

Estimated savings: £3,727,484.

Operation Malaran: This concerns mass marketing calls from offshore call centres offering housing disrepair payouts to UK consumers, demanding upfront fees of hundreds of pounds. Many entities are unregulated and the telephone numbers used relate to other frauds. Consumers' data is harvested to UK-based unregulated claims companies. The

Team works with Telecom providers to identify the entities involved and with other partners to take disruptive action.

Some examples of work this year:

- Shut down the telecom services of at least five claims management companies.
- Under the telco alert scheme a major provider brought to the Team's attention a UK-based entity of concern. The number was blocked and the company disengaged.
- Shut down the telecom services of a claims management fraudster making over 1,200 calls per day to victims.
- Identifying three new companies linked to offshore data brokers and call centres offering non-existent and unregulated health monitoring services.
- 15,388,000 phone calls stopped.
- 1,396 phone numbers taken down.

Estimated savings: £2,794,176.

Operation Puula: This focuses on disrupting call centres accessing the UK telecoms network by working with UK and overseas law enforcement, UK telecoms providers, the ICO and OFCOM. An alert scheme helps telecoms providers identify fraudulent activity and criminals using their services.

Examples of work this year:

- Identifying a telecoms service provider who had been approached by an Operation Puula nominal to provide UK digital telecom services. A range of numbers were blocked on the UK network. The numbers were linked to a claims management fraud.
- Engaging with two US-based telecoms analytical providers who work with the US and Canadian regulators to provide data. They signed up to the telecoms alert system and have provided positive feedback.
- Detecting AI generated calls that mimic victims to authorise fraudulent payments being used by six UK criminal companies.
- Took down a lottery scam business telecom facility that has targeted UK victims for many years.
- Identified a number purporting to be a large UK retailer used to offer bank loans to consumers. It was traced to a suspect based in Eastern Europe. Details passed to law enforcement for action.
- Made several enquiries to OFCOM and the ICO regarding a previous Derdap company that had been shut down. The criminals now appear to be using different company names and operating centres from North Africa and one in the USA (details have been passed to the Federal Trade Commission for action). Payment services were removed from two of the identified companies.
- A telco provider gave details of an offshore telecom's reseller. Investigations identified the entity was actively involved in mass marketing fraud. The business was disengaged and an alert issued.
- 122 million phone calls stopped.

- 2,992 phone numbers taken down.
- Over 850 victims identified.

Estimated savings: £12,134,877.

Operation Kalvi: Working with many partners, this operation targets mis-selling of foam insulation removal by criminal entities using offshore call centres to contact consumers previously mis-sold roof insulation and using illegally obtained data and aggressive selling practices, poor workmanship and over charging.

Some examples of work this year:
- Provided evidence to an ombudsman who awarded one victim £7,000.
- Identified a company which is now subject to an Insolvency Service investigation to remove directors and initiate potential criminal proceedings, supported by Trading Standards East Midlands colleagues. Registered office facilities have been removed and a referral made to Companies House.
- Provided intelligence, and victim and witness statements to secure a successful police prosecution.
- Engaged with a victim to stop a £5,400 fraud.
- Identified new claims management companies where criminals mimicked genuine companies and targeted vulnerable consumers with offers of no win no fee financial redress against foam installers and removers. Identified 30 victims with losses of over £100,000 collectively. Recovered £8,700 for consumers and identified the payment processor who immediately disengaged.
- Identified 14 victims.

Estimated savings: £244,314.

Operation Henhouse: This is an NCA-led multi-agency exercise to tackle fraud that has delivered over £67 million in seizures and disruptions by the members. The latest operation took place between January and March 2026. The Team participated and worked with the UK Telecom industry under the Telecoms Fraud Charter and they:
- Identified six offshore call centres who were targeting UK consumers with mass marketing scams.
- Blocked 283 numbers on the UK network.
- Blocked approximately 6.5 million calls from targeting UK consumers.
- 14 criminal companies disengaged and payment services withdrawn.
- 5,288 victims identified by the payment processors and payments reversed.
- Identifying three new payments processors, who the Team are engaging with to identify newly set up companies.

Estimated savings £2,080,000.

Operation Athens: A new operation focusing on illegal data brokers and data miners operating illegally in the UK or with offshore entities who supply “suckers” lists to target UK

consumers with mass marketing frauds. The Team is working with the ICO and the Direct Marketing Council.

Advertising Standards Authority Support (ASA)

NTS has commissioned Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards to perform the legal backstop function for the ASA's role as the "established means" for consumer protection and misleading advertisements regulations.

ASA have commenced a routine 360 degree review of the backstop function.

Examples of referrals received from the ASA include:

- A tax avoidance scheme, where HMRC is providing support.
- A bio-resonance device that claims to destroy viruses.
- Repeated claims relating to a prostate serum has resulted in MHRA agreeing to take on the referral.
- Essay Mills.
- Fake driving licences.
- A Bio-resonance device which may have excess phthalates.

	Apr–Jun 2025	Jul–Sep 2025	Oct-Dec 2025	Jan-Mar 2026	TOTAL
Referrals received	3	1	4	0	8
Referrals closed	0	1	1	0	2
Referred to another agency	1	0	0	0	1
Total under investigation	**5**	**5**	**8**	**8**	**10**
Other ASA enquiries received	1	2	2	3	8

Table 6 – ASA referrals

All referred cases appear on the ASA website.

In addition to formal referrals, the Team supports the ASA with advice to assist them to fulfil their broader functions. Examples of referral and advice work included: aesthetic products and treatments, CBD supplements, cancer claims, offensive weapons and loot boxes. The Team has also worked with the ASA in relation to irresponsible claims in paid advertisement for "Brazilian Butt Lifts". Advice was provided on options for enforcement via prohibition orders via environmental health colleagues.

Estate Agents

The **NTS Estate and Letting Agency Teams** underwent significant change in 2025/26. From 1st May 2025, the Teams operated separately but with close communication. The Teams have worked together to ensure a smooth transition. This does not affect the legal

status of the Team. Powys County Council remains as the nominated “Lead Authority” for Estate Agents.

Material Information Guidance: The material information guidance, originally published in November 2023, was withdrawn following a judicial review. MHCLG has now launched a consultation which seeks views on how government issued guidance could support estate agents to provide potential buyers with relevant information (material information), as well as views on what should be considered material information for buyers. NTS responded to this consultation to underline the significance of the issue, many of the consumer cases the teams encounter involve elements of missing or misleading material information.

Estate Agents	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25/26
Request for Advice / inputs	93	62	43	111	**362**
Number of investigations referred and taken by Local Authorities	2	1	9	21	**12**
Numbers of businesses brought into compliance	12	17	13	12	**54**
Sales: Investigations commenced	4	3	19	8	**34**
Sales: Investigations active	19	21	44	38	**-**
Sales: Investigation concluded	7	5	9	12	**33**
Prohibition & Warning Orders Issued (Estate Agents)	4	5	3	5	**17**
Penalty Charge Notice for Non-membership of a redress scheme (Estate Agency)	0	1	1	1	**3**

Table 7 – NTS Estate Agents Team Data

A key element of each Team’s role is the provision of a **backstop function** for their relevant legislative areas. This provides for the Teams to undertake enforcement work instead of the individual local authority where appropriate. The Estate Agents provided this backstop function in seven cases.

Bringing Business into Compliance is a key function of the Teams. A case is marked “BIC” when the team have completed their part of the work to bring that business back into compliance. The Team brought 54 businesses into compliance through their direct activities.

New website: Powys uploaded a new website aimed at consumers, estate agency businesses, and enforcement authorities. It includes an overview of the team and the redress approval guidance for potential ADR schemes. The Property Agent Checker is also

now available for use by local authorities and the public on this site. The Team has started to update all public-facing information and advice.

Leasehold Properties: The Team worked with the Leasehold Advisory Service to ensure that consumers with issues relating to information provided by agents, in relation to short leases, were directed to use the property agent checker to identify the redress scheme to whom they should make a complaint.

Redress Schemes in Jersey: The Team advised Jersey Trading Standards on operational matters relating to their new law which requires Jersey property agents to join a redress scheme (mirroring the UK rules).

Scotland: The Team undertook a programme of work in Scotland in 2025/26. This included a workshop with local authority officers and the signing of a new data sharing agreement with Consumer Advice Scotland.

Having examined the differing process of buying and selling houses north of the border it appears that, in Scotland, the consumer is given more information prior to making an offer, and the use of missives and the absence of 'Gazumping' in Scotland leads to greater protection for Scottish home buyers. With the process in Scotland using legal advice, including a home buyers report, at a far earlier stage than elsewhere in the UK, purchases seem to run more smoothly with quicker completion times, and much lower dropout rates. Compared to the rest of the UK, the conclusion is that the greater sanctions and regulations faced by Solicitor Agents, puts them under a far more onerous burden to protect their clients than an Estate Agent faces via a standard redress membership.

The Team will maintain dialogue with the relevant parties; and continue to involve Scottish Trading Standards and Consumer Advice Scotland helpline data to establish the volume of complaints being received.

Redress scheme oversight: As approval body for the Statutory Estate Agent redress schemes for England and Wales, the Team have worked this year with MHCLG to ensure The Property Ombudsman works to reduce its backlog of cases and provides resolution within agreed timescales. They have also worked with redress schemes to assess preparedness for Renters' Rights Act which they anticipate may further increase the volume of complaints received.

Auctioneers: The team have commenced an investigation into suspected shill bidding and fake sales at an auctioneers in conjunction with the NTS eCrime team and HMRC. This is part of a two year project investigating the auction sales sector which aims to develop clear and evidence-based recommendations to address issues and clarify expected standards of conduct within the auctioneering sector. This investigation will assist the team in understanding market practices and whether certain behaviours are standard practice within the auction industry.

Multiple Prohibition Orders imposed: Tower Hamlets Trading Standards secured convictions against rogue letting agents who targeted vulnerable individuals, particularly newcomers to the UK, misleading tenants. The Team developed Intelligence through open-source research to build a clearer understanding of the case. As a result of this work, five Notices of Proposal under the Estate Agents Act were issued.

Trigger Offences: The Team successfully defended an appeal at the First-tier Tribunal in relation to a Prohibition Order issued under the Estate Agents Act 1979. The appeal challenged the decision to impose an unlimited and unrestricted order on an individual, who had been convicted of serious criminal offences, including assault occasioning actual bodily harm, and possession of a prohibited weapon. The outcome of the tribunal was to uphold the prohibition order as the offences were deemed to be "trigger offences" and agreed that maintaining public confidence in the sector required decisive regulatory action.

Prohibition of a Violent Offender: An estate agent from Ilford violently attacked and injured a woman in her own home, leaving her with severe injuries. He was found guilty of grievous bodily harm with intent and sentenced to four years in prison. The Team imposed a Prohibition Order on him in December 2025. This lifetime ban will protect potential future consumers by preventing the agent from practising in the estate agency sector.

Letting Agents

The **NTS Estate and Letting Agency Teams** underwent significant change in 2025/26. From 1st May 2025 the Teams operated separately but with close communication. The Teams have worked together this year to ensure a smooth transition.

This does not affect the legal status of the Team. Bristol City Council remains as the nominated "Lead Authority" for Letting Agents. This does not affect the legal status the two teams as the nominated "Lead Authority" for the two functions. Bristol City Council remains the National Trading Standards Letting Agents Team.

Lettings	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25-26
Request for Advice / inputs	233	254	270	237	994
Number of investigations referred and taken by Local Authorities	80	91	118	47	336
Numbers of businesses brought into compliance	70	89	88	112	359
Lettings: Investigations commenced	13	18	24	14	69
Lettings: Investigations active	43	39	23	14	-
Lettings: Investigations concluded	12	1	27	2	42

Monetary penalties issued under Tenant Fees Act 2019 and other relevant lettings legislation	5	2	1	3	11

Table 8 – NTS Letting Agents Team Data

A key element of each team's role is the provision of a **backstop function** for their relevant legislative areas. This provides for the Teams to undertake enforcement work instead of the individual local authority, where appropriate. The Team provided this backstop function for 80 cases.

Bringing Business into Compliance is a key function of the Teams. A case is marked "BIC" when the team have completed their part of the work to bring that business back into compliance. The Team brought 359 businesses into compliance through their direct activities in 2025/26.

Local Authority guidance review: The Team reviewed and streamlined all its guidance. The lettings toolkit was re-published on the Team KHub, including relevant amendments from the Renters Rights Act. The e-learning course was updated, upgraded and repromoted. An in-depth review of the NTSLAT Bristol website was undertaken and the pages now includes template letters for tenants to write to their landlord/letting agent in the first instance, should they wish.

Monitoring use of the backstop function: The Team is now recording direct requests originating from local authorities as part of their backstop function. This is to better understand numbers where local authority makes a direct referral to the Team as this is expected to rise following the implementation of the Renters Rights Act amendments to The Tenant Fees Act in May 2026.

Preparation of the Renters Rights Bill amendments to the Tenant Fees Act: The Team assisted MHCLG with its review of its statutory guidance in preparation for the implementation of the new prohibition on rent in advance.

Supporting Local Authorities to enforce Tenant Fees Act: In addition to assisting authorities with advice on specific queries the Team created and published a spreadsheet summarising relevant letting agency legislation case law decisions, as well as a selection of general case law decisions on the KHub. A summary of each case is included on the spreadsheet, together with a link to the online decision for officers to consider in full.

As part of its LEA duties under the Tenant Fees Act to provide information and advice to relevant authorities in England, the team this year begun to **review First Tier Tribunal decisions.** They will refer case decisions where an order has been made against the respondent (landlord/agent) to the relevant local authority for their information. As tenants can make their own application to the Tribunal for return of a prohibited payment/holding deposit, local enforcement teams are not always aware of a breach of the TFA.

Such referrals ensure that local authorities are aware of proceedings against agents in their area and allow the team to offer appropriate advice and guidance for the Local Authority to ensure that non-compliance does not occur again.

Threat assessment/strategic assessment: Officers undertook a local authority survey to assist a better understanding of work carried out by local authorities, and to establish what obstacles, if any, local authorities face. This has been used to identifying future priority areas of work for the Team as part of its annual threat assessment. The assessment will be shared with authorities on publication.

Support for Local Authorities to resolve issues with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS): In December 2024, the Team were alerted to concerns that changes in the appeals tribunal system were jeopardising local enforcement actions. The functions had been transferred from the General Regulatory Council to the Residential Property Chamber in December 2024 and there were discrepancies in the appeal form. The Team discussed this with HMCTS and provided updated wording for a new form, which was published in May 2025.

Improving Client Money Protection (CMP) schemes: The Team worked with the six CMP schemes via MHCLG Governance arrangements to develop a data sharing agreement to share details of Letting Agents known to be operating without CMP scheme membership. This information is used to drive proactive work to improve levels of membership for letting Agents.

Holding Deposits: The Team worked with the National Residential Landlords Association to clarify the legal requirement to give written notice to tenants about retention of holding deposits.

Early termination fees under the Tenant Fees Act 2019: The Team worked with a primary authority for a large national letting agent brand to clarify that charging more than their advertised fees for the early termination of a tenancy is prohibited. Work is ongoing with the primary authority to clarify the interpretation of the early termination provisions.

Enforcement case study: In 2024/25, the Team had issued a fine of £16,500 against an agent for breaches of **CMP requirements**. In March 2026, the agent still remained without CMP membership. The CMP Regulations allow for further penalties so the relevant local authority Trading Standards Service was informed. Following their intervention, the agent has alternative arrangements for the handling of client money and this information is now published on their own website, providing transparency for its customers.

Holding Deposits: A local authority referred a complaint regarding the non-return of a holding deposit when a tenancy did not go ahead due to the tenant withdrawing. The Team contacted the landlord who said they had sought guidance from the National Residential Landlords Association who had confirmed the holding deposit could be retained. However, it appears they had not informed the landlord of the legal requirement to give written notice

to the tenant. Following further advice, the landlord returned the £100 holding deposit to the tenant. A penalty was not imposed due to the co-operation of the landlord.

Regional Lettings enforcement projects: There were three funded projects in 2025/26.

- **CEnTSA** concluded their region's three-year CMP project to raise compliance levels for CMP, Tenant Fees Act, membership and Consumer Rights Act legislative requirements. This final year tackled detriment in a third tranche of authorities, including in Birmingham, its largest. The full project report is available on the ACTSO website. The project **prevented detriment of £11,122,584 which equated to £68.54** saved for every £1 spent.
- **North East Trading Standards** undertook a short Enforcement project to identify and bring into compliance, agents without CMP or Redress scheme membership. All but one of the north east Trading Standards services participated. Whilst they found 60% non-compliance with requirements, only one business was found without CMP and Redress scheme membership. All businesses have been brought into compliance without recourse to enforcement action. The project estimates that **£3,313,440 of clients' money was at risk to the detriment of the clients in non-compliant businesses.**
- **Liverpool City Council** undertook a project to assess the use of Student retainer fees. Liverpool Trading Standards made good contacts with Liverpool student housing, ensured advisors have up to date information and set up a referral scheme for students who have relevant issues. Several enforcement cases have been launched as a result of this new relationship. Unfortunately, due to some internal issues within Liverpool, they have been unable to claim any funds nor produce a final report.

Office for Students (OfS) Backstop

The OfS is the independent regulator for Higher Education in England. Its role is to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers. Within this remit, the OfS protects students by ensuring that Higher Education establishments comply with the Consumer Protection legislation. NTS has commissioned Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards to support the OfS with compliance advice.

The majority of the current referrals relate to reliance on unfair terms with a force majeure clause to exclude the impact of industrial action by their own staff.

Other referrals have been considered and advice offered in relation to the following areas:

- Unfair terms relating to sums payable in the event of a change to the courses available.
- Unfair terms on timescales for complaints procedures.
- Misleading advertising relating to student loans.
- Mis-selling relating to the nature of a qualification.

- Whether a previously advised provider had reverted to non-compliance.

Seven referrals, relating to potentially unfair terms, received in the last three months of the year, have been paused due to a relevant matter which is being appealed to the High Court in early 2026. Other unrelated matters within the terms and conditions are being discussed where those providers are keen to issue amended terms prior to the next intake.

The Team has also advised the OfS in its regulatory statement regarding industrial action in education and its medium term strategy for consumer protection and longer-term aspirations.

	Apr–Jun 2025	Jul–Sep 2025	Oct-Dec 2025	Jan-Mar 2026	TOTAL
Referrals received	1	3	8	1	13
Referrals closed	0	2	0	4	7
Referred to another agency	0	0	0	0	0
Total under investigation	**1**	**2**	**9**	**5**	
Other OfS enquiries received	2	0	4	1	6

Table 9 - OfS referrals

The total potential detriment prevented by work completed on the seven closed referrals totalled £202,050,206[6].

NTS Animal Feed Delivery Programme

Official controls delivery: The national delivery picture is one of good and increasing performance. Full results for each activity can be found in Table 9.
Local authorities delivered 4,649 activities. This was an increase of 4% increase from 2024/25 which in itself was 4% from 2023/24. These activities included:

- 214 imported animal feed consignments checked at port.
- 275 national priority samples taken.
- 141 manufacturers of animal feed checked for national priority on labelling ‘claims’.

All England	Allocated activity 25/26	Delivery	
		Jan-Mar 26	Total 25/26
Inland feed inspections	*2651*	*1041*	*2593*
Primary Production premises inspections	*1173*	*455*	*1099*

[6] This is calculated via estimating how many students were impacted, the cost per head per year and an estimate of the impact of the Team’s intervention for each referral once it has been completed. Where other data is unavailable, the Team is credited with achieving 25% of the potential detriment prevented.

High Risk Food	*151*	*61*	*150*
Inland samples taken	*477*	*86*	*453*
Local intel-led samples	*Budget only*	*[15]*	*[92]*
Ports activity (3rd country imports)	*454*	*71*	*354*
Ports sampling and analysis	*Budget only*	*[12]*	*[55]*
Overall delivery (exc. inland and ports samps)	*4906*	*1714*	*4649*

Table 10 – NTS Feed Data

Local Authority feed incidents guidance: This guidance was developed in partnership with FSA incidents team and published in April 2025. NTS delivered two training sessions for 260 delegates on this guidance in June.

Local Authority feed intelligence guidance: NTS also worked with the FSA intelligence unit to review and republish the NTS feed intelligence guidance to ensure it aligned with FSA principles. This was published in November 2025 on the NAC KHub.

Compliance Reporting: NTS published its combined compliance report for 2024/25 on the national agriculture KHub. As of 2025/26, the FSA no longer require NTS to collect detailed compliance data nor provide this report.

Collated raw data from the Nationally Coordinated Inspection Priorities and National Sampling Priority projects have been shared with the FSA for the programme going forward. FSA will use these data to inform their intelligence portfolio and policy decisions in future.

Reducing local authority reporting burdens: As part of ongoing work to reduce reporting burdens for NTS, non-compliance reporting has been removed entirely and will be replaced with the sharing of local authority level desk top model compliance data with FSA. In addition, the accrual process was removed and replaced by an enhanced Q3 claim. Finally, FSA officials have asked that all sampling reporting by authorities in 2026/27 is via UKFSS, this has been incorporated in planning for next year, again reducing reporting burden.

Technical Policy support

NTS provides secretariat support to the National Agricultural Panel (NAP) and National Animal Feed at Ports Panel (NAFPP).

NAP and NAFPP have pursued discussions with Government departments to resolve ongoing issues that impact both local authority effective enforcement and business resources, including:

- Inland authorities continue to receive referrals from Border Control Posts about ‘illegally’ imported feed containing animal by-products. NTS has provided support

directly to local authorities and regularly updated NAP guidance as changes take place. NAP involvement has led directly to all Government partners working together to update processes.

- The Memorandum of Understanding between NAP/local authorities and APHA and VMD has been refreshed. It provides the gateway for VMD and APHA to share lists of programmed inspections to support joint visits, training opportunities, sharing of intelligence and to minimises the burden on businesses.
- NAP continues to hear evidence of the strain a growing raw pet food sector places on local resources and confusion about the role and guidance from the FSA and APHA, particularly in response to incidents. NAP wrote to both agencies to request a single piece of joined up guidance for raw pet food producers, including the practical steps that can be taken to minimise the risk of Salmonella and Entero in an inherently high-risk sector.
- The Panels have developed a formal Issues Log to track feed delivery concerns raised with Government and partner delivery bodies. It provides transparency and governance about when and why issues have been raised, their impact on local authority enforcement and proposed solutions.

NAP and NAFPP have produced practical guidance aimed at ensuring local authorities can support feed businesses, including:

- NAP members have developed a template letter to contact Environmental Health colleagues that might have knowledge of primary producers in a local area and food businesses that have diversified into feed activities.
- NAP has updated well used guidance on 'doggy menus' and 'puppucinos' to reflect current APHA guidelines.
- NAP continues to support feed officers by discussing technical queries, such as registration of livestock markets as feed businesses, use of PO Box addresses, sharing information via QR codes and use of silica gels on pet treats. All answers are maintained in the NAP Technical Queries document.

NAP and NAFPP continue to work in partnership with Government departments and agencies and industry bodies:

- NAP produced guidance on information sharing with Red Tractor (RT) to support the FSA Earned Recognition which, for the first time, gives local authorities information on why a member has been removed from the RT scheme. This allows local authorities to focus resource at higher risk issues.
- NAP have also provided coordinated input and feedback to the FSA on National Enforcement Priorities (NEPs), National Sampling Priorities (NSPs) and annual statutory returns.

NAP and NAFPP agendas and minutes are available on the KHub.

Illegal Vapes - Imports

This year NTS commissioned work to tackle illegal vapes at ports in England (£2 million) and in the second part of the year, some work by the NTS eCrime Team to research on-line markets (£115k) with an additional sum to cover national intelligence (£32k).

A total of 40 consignments which included **1,537,172 illegal vaping products were prevented from entering the UK**. The majority of the illegal items were e-liquids (69%) with parts/packaging comprising 22% of the total items. Single use vapes made up 7% and less than 1% were reusable vapes.

While this is a 25% increase on last year, **significant barriers to more interventions have continued**: Trading Standards teams' lack of accurate information about incoming goods, lack of access to databases and minimal referrals received from UK Border Force. This resulted in a significant underspend of the budget. Following liaison with HMRC and DHSC, in relation to the application of a duty to vaping products from October 2026, there are hopes, but no guarantees, of increased referrals of vaping products for Trading Standards to inspect.

The detriment prevented by detaining and seizing illegal vapes at ports was £9,535,170.

It is not only the numbers of vapes seized or detained that is a consideration. Some funding this year has been applied locally to explore possible routes for illegal vapes, in previously unexplored points of importation and External Temporary Storage Facilities (ETSFs).

	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25-26
Illicit vapes detained and redirected/ seized	522,287	173,440	702,017	139,428	1,537,172

Table 11 – Tackling illegal vapes at ports

On Line Sales: The NTS eCrime Team began a pilot project to undertake open-source research relating to the supply of illicit vapes online. The work had two strands: assessment of the range and volume of illicit products available and a desktop only exercise relating to online age verification checks.

This initial research identified over 95,000 listings of illicit products, the majority of which were social media based. Widespread use of messaging services (WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat etc.) was also identified. For almost all social media and website based sales there appeared to be either no, or very ineffective, age verification in place. There also appeared to be links to wider offending including the potential cloning of payment details and the supply of controlled drugs.

To test the effectiveness of social media based removal processes a representative sample of 19,985 listings were flagged with the relevant platforms. All listings were promptly removed.

A series of recommendations were made to DHSC who have agreed to fund further work in 2026-27.

Illicit Tobacco – Operation CeCe

Regional Illegal Tobacco Officers (RITOs): The RITO roles were introduced this year to help ensure regions have access to the intelligence, data and resources required to tackle illegal tobacco and infringements effectively. Officers were recruited by regions to support local TS' activity to enforce legislation and disrupt behaviour in relation to illegal tobacco sales and help ensure a wider geographical spread of activities. The roles have been introduced across England and Wales, with only one region being unable to recruit an officer into post during the year. At year end, three posts were vacant with steps being taken to recruit to these positions.

These officers have provided a valuable link between HMRC and local authorities, with a series of liaison meetings as well as a second successful Illegal Tobacco Conference in February to bring RITOs, lead HMRC officers and selected local authority representatives together to discuss current key issues.

Seizures, Visits, Referrals and Brands

New information has been collated for 2025-26 which includes details of the number of different seizure events and the number of premises visited where no illicit tobacco was found. This data is a key part of the overall picture as to how the activities of Operation CeCe are having an impact on the retail sale of illicit tobacco and how this is supporting HMRC's Illicit Tobacco Strategy.

- Seizures were made from a total of 3,260 premises.
- A further 2,746 premises were visited where no illicit tobacco was purchased or seized.
- Total number of premises visited for Operation CeCe: 6,006.
- Approx 57% of premises seized from had been subject to a seizure previously.
- At end of March 2026: 135 LAs had signed the MoU required by HMRC for Tobacco Track and Trace referrals to be made for civil sanctions to be applied.
- 807 referrals have been made to HMRC since launch; with 72 different LAs making these. This year alone there were 2,838 potential referrals that could have been made by TS, there is therefore scope to increase the number of referrals being made.
- Total penalties issued by HMRC: £2,395,000.

- Outcome data is being collected for 2025-26 to assess what actions are being taken post seizure. This will routinely be collected from April 2026 via the quarterly returns.
- Brands: Marlboro and Amber Leaf remain the most frequently seized tobacco brands. Platinum 7, Manchester, Top Gun NZ and ESSE remain brands of interest to HMRC (no legal market in the UK). These were seized in every region.

On-Line Sales: The **NTS eCrime Team** removed 8,924 listings. These included 65 online profiles, 120 entire pages and 117 "buy and sell" groups that had over 20,000 followers/ friends. A potential network of fraudulent profiles was disrupted. The MO centred on a series of linked accounts that seemed to offer illicit tobacco for sale, however, findings indicated that it was simply a fraud and that no tobacco products were ever supplied. There appeared to be linked efforts to recruit new "sellers" in regions across the UK. All identified accounts were reported to the appropriate platform and have been removed.

Forensic device examination pilot: Funding was allocated to a pilot to establish the value of having digital devices examined that have been seized in the course of local illicit tobacco operational activity. This covers both the value to local authorities for their intelligence and investigative opportunities and value to HMRC for intelligence opportunities in relation to wider supply chain and links to serious and organised crime. A total of 44 devices were submitted for examination. Initial intelligence reports have been shared with HMRC and are currently being assessed. The remaining devices continue to be processed in line with identified priorities. An evaluation report is due in Summer 2026.

Communications Plans: A 2025-27 communications plan was developed for the expanded Op CeCe work. Changing behaviour through communications has been identified as a key aim in reducing the demand for illegal tobacco, to complement the enforcement disruption. The overall communications plan objectives are:

- To reduce the number of people buying illicit tobacco (adult smokers and children).
- To highlight the risks to retailers of selling illicit tobacco.
- To raise awareness about the harms caused to communities and wider society.
- To support HMRC's ultimate goal, which is to drive illicit tobacco out of retailers.
- To equip and empower local Trading Standards teams to deliver their own communications activity that supports these objectives.

A survey of Local Authorities explored the most useful and effective means of supporting local communications on illegal tobacco, with a follow up webinar, allowing further evaluation of the most appropriate initiatives to develop nationally for local use. Barley will continue to engage with LAs on proposed activity.

The first major Op CeCe linked communications campaign launched in January. This targeted businesses who may be tempted to get involved in the illicit market. It attracted widespread coverage in trade publications with industry support expressed for the NTS' approach. Preparatory work for a second campaign was done, due for launch early in 2026-27, focussing on highlighting the criminality associated with sales of illicit tobacco and the damage done to local communities. This has included engagement with social media influencers, use of focus groups and the initial production stages of a video.

The **Citizens Advice consumer service** has responded positively to making the consumer route to reporting illegal tobacco a more obvious and smoother one, with adviser briefings and updated protocols outlining the role and response of TS.

	Apr-Jun 25	Jul-Sep 25	Oct-Dec 25	Jan-Mar 26	Total 25/26
Total Sticks Seized	5,482,683	8,218,015	11,843,094	8,075,122	33,618,914
Revenue Value of Sticks Seized (£)	3,152,543	4,725,358	6,809,779	4,643,195	19,330,875
Total Hand Rolling Tobacco seized (kg)	1282	2023	2741	3913	9959
Revenue Value of HRT (£)	787,148	1,242,269	1,683,097	2,402,791	6,115,305
Total Shisha Seized (kg)	1369	539	578	1844	4330
Revenue Value of Shisha Seized (£)	251,198	154,693	165889	529188	1,100,968
Other items seized (kg)	55	30	181	82	348
Revenue Value of Other Items (£)	10,092	8,610	51,944	23,652	94,298
Total Revenue Value Seized (£)	4,200,981	6,130,931	8710709	7,598,826	26,641,447
Total No of Seizure Events	652	834	958	816	3260
Total No premises visited where no illicit tobacco was purchased or seized.	476	658	798	814	2746

Table 12 – Operation CeCe Illicit Tobacco Seizures

Published 28th May 2026. For any enquiries about the content of this report or if you require any further detailed information, please email nationaltradingstandards@actso.org.uk or call 0345 608 9515. Alternatively, you can write to National Trading Standards, 1 Sylvan Court, Sylvan Way, Southfields Business Park, Basildon, Essex SS15 6TH.