

OUR IMPACT IN 2023/2024

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers
Safeguarding Businesses

FOREWORD

Protecting consumers and honest businesses sits at the heart of everything we do across Trading Standards. It is clear consumers need us more than ever as financial pressures push innocent victims into the hands of unscrupulous criminals looking to profit from their worries. However, I'm pleased to say the work of my Trading Standards colleagues has not faltered. Despite a financial squeeze on operational budgets, they've built on last year's successes to provide even more consumer and business protection at the same cost to the taxpayer.

In the past year, NTS teams and workstreams dealt with £92.1 million in consumer and business detriment. As a result of the hard work of Trading Standards colleagues, prison sentences totalling just over 103 years were handed down - more than double last year's. Courts awarded victims £363,900 in compensation. And we are still saving taxpayers £11.60 for every £1 we have spent since 2014.

But that's not all. This year we were able to reap the reward for several years of chasing down criminals operating a complex energy contracts scam of small businesses. This landmark investigation, which involved a powerful and high-profile individual in the North West, saw the defendants sentenced to a combined total of 26 years imprisonment. A truly outstanding result for our colleagues in Trading Standards North West, who led on the investigation.

Add to this our work to disrupt a multimillion-pound fraud involving interconnected call centres selling misleading white goods warranties, insurance, home improvement products and loss claim management schemes. In this case, our work led to over 11,800 cancelled direct debits with estimated savings of £2.8m.

This year, illicit and underage sales of vapes remain a priority and we are proud of Trading Standards' work so far to disrupt this industry. Data collected as part of Operation Joseph, a

National Trading Standards initiative funded by the Department for Health and Social Care, revealed that England's local authority Trading Standards services seized almost 1.2 million illegal vapes in 2023-2024 – an increase of 59% on the previous year.

There is no doubt that we will face challenges as we continue to disrupt the illicit tobacco trade here in the UK. Operation CeCe, a project funded by HMRC, saw local authorities seize £11.8m of illicit tobacco showing the scale of the problem. Alongside this, mass marketing and cold calling scams, doorstep crime, fair trade issues, estate and lettings, eCrime and animal feed work will remain among our top priorities.

Now more than ever, as we continue to navigate financially challenging times and prepare for a new Government, we are committed in our efforts to identify, support and protect consumers against those who seek to exploit them. As I have said previously, measuring our impact here is harder but it is the most valuable thing we do.



Lord Michael Bichard
Chair of National Trading Standards

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR WORK IN 2023/24



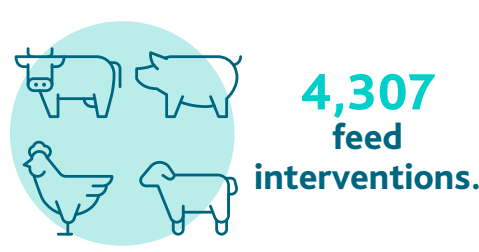
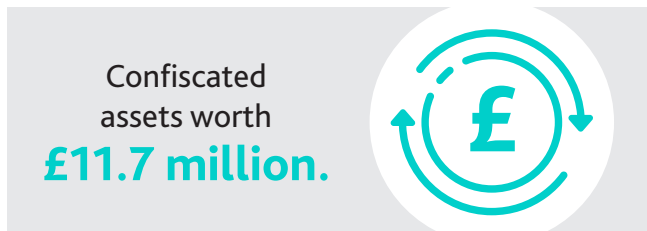
HOW WE WORK

This document provides a snapshot of the work of National Trading Standards in 2023/2024. We allocate Government funding to tackle high priority national and regional Trading Standards issues in England and Wales. This is separate to the bulk of day-to-day Trading Standards activity delivered by local authorities across England and Wales. Our vision is to protect consumers and safeguard businesses through cross-boundary, intelligence-led enforcement. We do this by:

- Supporting specialist teams that cover a range of issues
- Funding local authorities to deliver specific work in priority areas



Prison sentences totalling
103 years and five months
were handed down.

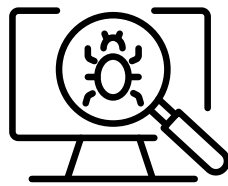
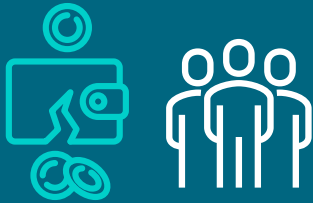


Between 2014 and 2024 NTS tackled £1.4 billion in consumer and business detriment with a core spend of £126.9 million – **saving £11.60 for every £ spent.**



eCRIME

£12,917,646
avoided in consumer
and business detriment.



Took down or
suspended **545**
websites/social
media accounts.



10 active investigations
focusing on secondary ticketing,
'copycat' web sites, technical
support helplines and social
media advertising fraud.

**Supported 21 local
authority/agency investigations.**

SCAMS



**Made savings of
£44,880,545
through
investigations
and disruption
work.**



Over **43,500** pieces of mail were
returned to the sender or otherwise
disrupted this year, each containing an
estimated average of **£37**.



Friends Against Scams recruited a
further **21,490 'friends'** to help in the
fight against scams – supporting them
educate themselves and those around
them on how to spot a scam.

£1

£66.31

For every **£1**
spent the team
have saved
£66.31.

NTS IN ACTION



Disrupting fraud

The Scams Team disrupted a multimillion-pound
fraud operated by interconnected call centres
selling misleading white goods warranties,
insurance, home improvement products and loss
claim management schemes.

The Team's disruption strategy resulted in the
removal of office, banking and tax filing facilities
from a number of companies, leading to over
11,800 cancelled direct debits with estimated
savings of £2.8m. Refunds were secured for eight
consumers amounting to £67,800.

Work with telecoms providers led to 740
telephone numbers being barred. These numbers
had been used to make 7.8 million mass
marketing fraud calls in one quarter – costing
consumers an estimated £7.8 million.

INTELLIGENCE

The NTS Intelligence Team set
out the priorities for the NTS
strategic assessment, including
doorstep crime and cold calling,
lettings (England only), mass
marketing fraud/scams, illicit and
underage sale of vapes (England
only), illicit tobacco, used cars,
intellectual property, other
fair-trading issues, estate agency
and animal feed work.



Produced **four** tactical
assessments, **four**
intelligence reports, **four**
scoping/research documents
and **one** briefing document.



ESTATE & LETTING AGENCY



Launched the final tranches of the material information guidance for industry in November 2023, helping to ensure more people have all the necessary information they need before buying or letting a property.

Issued **five warning orders** under the Estate Agents Act and **six penalty charge notices** for non-compliance with Redress Schemes.



Supported **nine** projects seeking to improve letting enforcement in England, liaising with **49** authorities across **six** regions.



Responded to **over 1,300** requests for advice and assistance.



10 fines were issued under the Tenant Fees Act.

845 people completed Estate and Letting Agency Team training on property crime and intelligence.



REGIONAL INVESTIGATIONS TEAMS

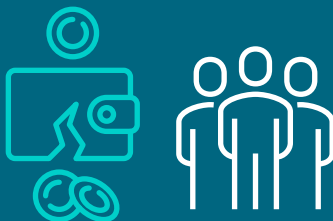


At the end of 2023/2024, the Regional Investigations Teams had **109** open cases, having brought 39 cases to a conclusion during the year.



47 defendants were convicted.

The consumer and business detriment avoided was **£34.3 million.**



21 custodial sentences totalling 81 years and nine months were handed down.

£360k compensation was awarded to victims.



ILLICIT TOBACCO

As part of Operation CeCe, a project funded by HMRC, local authorities seized illicit tobacco with a revenue value of **£11.8 million.**



Seized **19 million** illicit tobacco sticks and **5.1 tonnes** of illegal hand rolling tobacco.

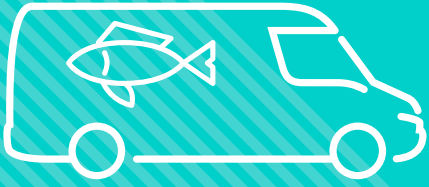
ILLEGAL VAPES

Data collected as part of Operation Joseph, a National Trading Standards initiative funded by the Department for Health and Social Care, reveals that England's local authority Trading Standards services seized almost **1.2 million illegal vapes** in 2023-2024 – an **increase of 59%** on the previous year.



Local TS teams made **3,385 underage test purchases of vapes** with a sales rate of **26%** - representing a **174%** increase in underage vapes test purchasing.

DOORSTEP CRIME



A door-to-door fish seller who made **£100,000** by ripping off elderly and vulnerable people was sentenced to **two years and four months** in prison.

A criminal who misled customers into paying for building works by giving false information was sentenced to five years in prison and given an indefinite Criminal Behaviour Order. The investigation team identified 60 victims who between them lost **£660,000**.



USED CARS



A renowned car clocker was jailed for reducing displayed mileages on 33 vehicles by 2.75 million miles and falsifying service histories to hide it. The criminal benefitted by **£585,600**, received 57 months imprisonment and was ordered to pay **£64,853** in compensation to victims.

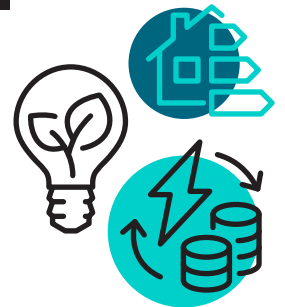


Two criminals received a total of 22 months imprisonment for their part in a **£350,000** car clocking scam. Judge Edwards thanked those involved for the "monumental amount of work on the case".

ENERGY RELATED FRAUD

Eight energy-related cases were heard in court.

25 defendants were sentenced for their role in the mis-selling of energy contracts and energy saving products/services to vulnerable customers.



NTS IN ACTION



Cracking down on energy related fraud and securing compensation for victims

A landmark investigation that ran for several years concluded with more than 26 years of prison time handed to four defendants for their role in a complex scam that saw small business owners deceived into signing long-term energy contracts at vastly inflated prices. Three were banned from being company directors for a total of 31 years. Nine more received suspended sentences totalling more than seven years and were ordered to carry out 650 hours of unpaid work. The successful result was secured by the National Trading Standards Regional Investigation Team (North West) and Trading Standards North West. **£99,787** in compensation for victims was secured.

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For more information about the work of National Trading Standards, please visit: www.nationaltradingstandards.uk