

OUR IMPACT IN 2025/2026

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers
Supporting Business



Lord Michael Bichard
Chair of National Trading Standards

FOREWORD

This report shows the huge impact that Trading Standards has in protecting the most vulnerable consumers, dealing with illicit markets and helping to tackle the ever increasing presence of Organised Crime both on our high streets but also in other markets such as property repairs.

NTS has tackled a whole range of consumer frauds and scams, taken down illegal websites and prevented the sale of illicit goods on social media. NTS supports both the Advertising Standards Authority and the Office for Students by providing a legal backstop to support their self-regulatory functions. Teams have also helped ensure that letting and estate agents and animal feed suppliers maintain high standards. There has also been a high priority given to tackling illicit tobacco and the importation of illegal vapes.

Working together at a local, regional and national level, Trading Standards makes a real difference to the lives of consumers and supports legitimate businesses in what are difficult times for many.

**PROTECTING
CONSUMERS
SUPPORTING
BUSINESS**

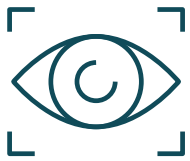


For more information about the work of National Trading Standards, please visit:
www.nationaltradingstandards.uk

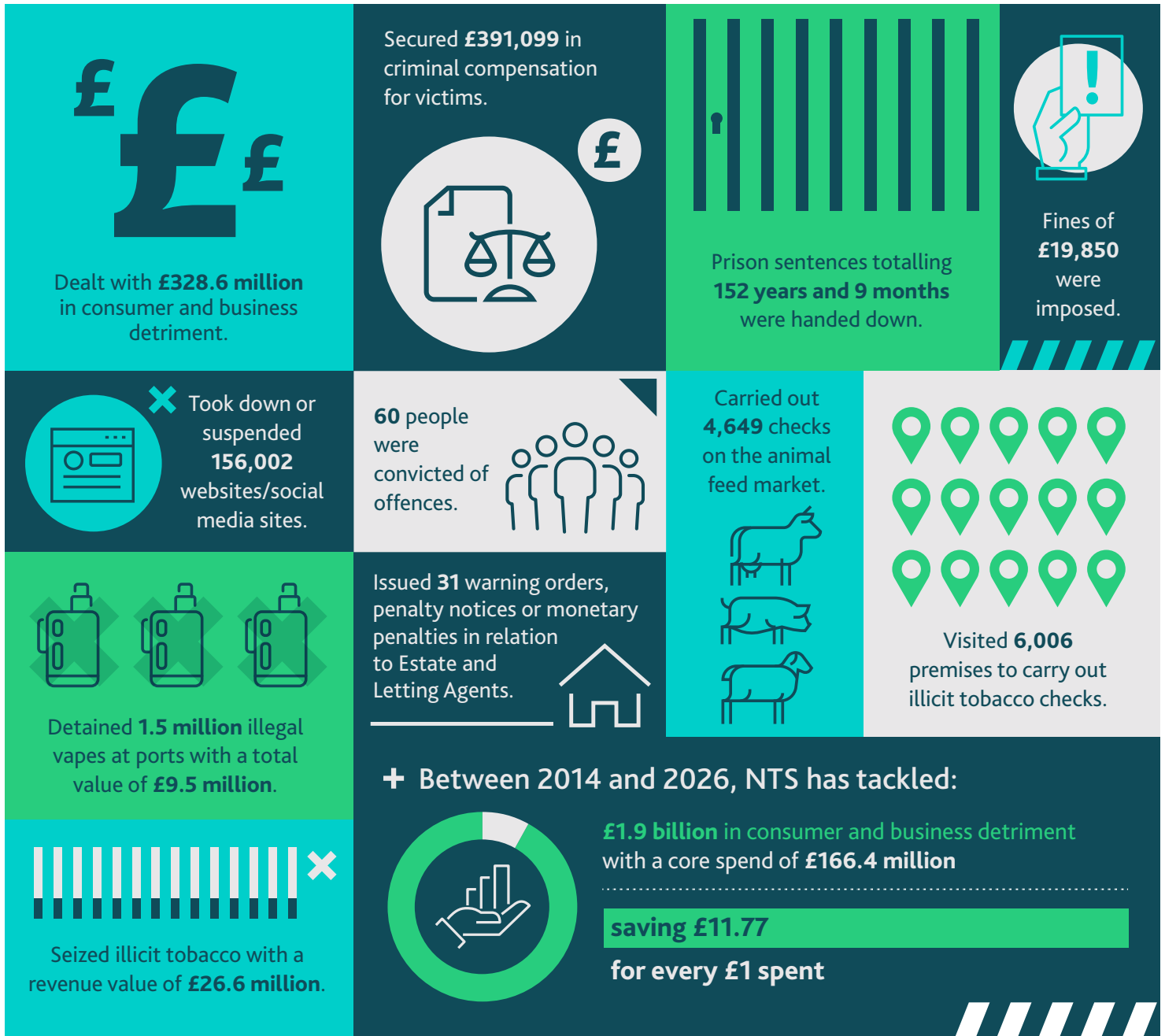
HOW WE WORK

This document provides a snapshot of the work of National Trading Standards in 2025/2026. We allocate Government funding to tackle high priority national and regional Trading Standards issues in England and Wales. Our vision is to protect consumers and support businesses through cross-boundary, intelligence-led enforcement. We do this by:

- Supporting specialist teams that cover a range of issues
- Funding local authority Trading Standards colleagues to deliver specific programmes of work in priority areas



A SNAPSHOT OF OUR WORK IN 2025/2026

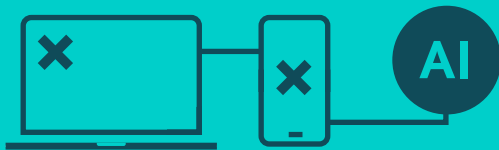


NTS FUNDING 2025/26

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)	Illegal tobacco – local disruption
£2,147,000	Department for Health and Social Care	Vaping enforcement and compliance work at ports and online
£94,607	Office for Students	Legal Backstop
£200,000	Home Office/NECC	Funding for various Scams related support and research

2025/2026 AT A GLANCE

eCRIME



125,321 website and social media takedowns and interventions. This included dealing with a large number of seemingly AI generated websites based overseas presenting as legitimate UK-based retailers and targeting UK consumers.

7 active investigations focusing on the non-supply of goods bought online, fake qualification certificates and frauds linked to social media advertising.

FAKE



The Digital Forensics laboratory supported **43** new investigations and forensically examined **211** devices.

Following confirmation of funding from the NTS Board's reserves, a new team was created to deliver a training and development programme to enhance support for local online investigations.



NTS IN ACTION



Tackling ticket touts

Proceeds of Crime proceedings took place for two defendants involved in the second of the major secondary ticketing investigations which concluded in 2024. One defendant was ordered to pay £1,972,552 and the other £995,278.

Pursuing the proceeds of a large scale modelling fraud

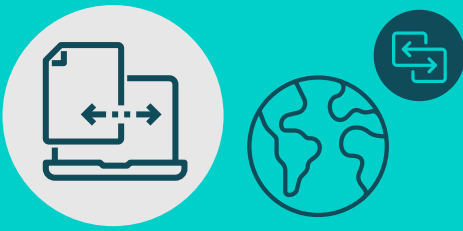
Following a lengthy investigation into fourteen defendants perpetrating a large scale modelling fraud through social media, the main defendant had a confiscation order of £1,648,732 made against him. He had already been sentenced to 8½ years' imprisonment to be served once he returned to the UK.

Bringing copycat website fraudsters to justice

Criminals who generated over £2.25 million by operating over 40 misleading websites linked to road charging schemes such as the Dartford Crossing and the London ULEZ were jailed and disqualified from acting as company directors. The company misled consumers into believing their sites were the official place to pay the relevant charge, with consumers 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.

In a separate case, another copycat website fraudster was jailed for three years and three months for operating a website which sold fake degree and professional qualification certificates to people who did not have the appropriate qualifications.

SCAMS



The Scams Team 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 Friends Against Scams website.

1,617 delegates received training on identifying, supporting, and responding to fraud and scam victims from the Coercive Control (No Blame No Shame) campaign and Taskforce.



The Team continued to support Multi-Agency Approach to Fraud (MAAFs) across 26 police force areas.

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 NTS on the alert system to reach the wider banking community.

NTS IN ACTION



Disrupting large scale cold-calling fraud

A long running operation to disrupt multimillion-pound cold-calling frauds has resulted in over 1,303 phone numbers being taken down and 100 criminal enterprises having their payment services removed.

Two call centres in India that were targeting the UK were raided by law enforcement leading to 62 arrests, five charged, and gold, high end cars and cash seized.

A partnership with the Information Commissioner's Office and a major telecom firm also had telecom services removed from a provider that was spoofing UK numbers.

In a separate operation, which is estimated to have saved £12.1 million and was focussed on disrupting call centres accessing the UK telecoms network, an alert scheme helped telecoms providers identify fraudulent activity and criminals using their services. This resulted in 122 million phone calls being stopped, 2,992 phone numbers taken down and over 850 victims identified.

ESTATE AGENTS

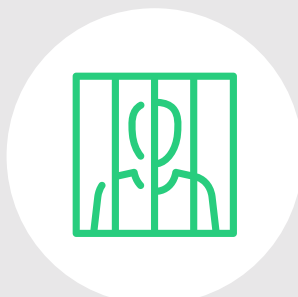


The NTS Estate Agency Team worked with the Leasehold Advisory Service to ensure that consumers who had issues with information provided by agents, in relation to short leases, were directed to use the property agent checker to identify the redress scheme to whom they should make a complaint.

Work was carried out with MHCLG to ensure that The Property Ombudsman works to reduce its backlog of cases and provides resolution within agreed timescales. The Team has also worked with redress schemes to assess preparedness for the Renters' Rights Act.



After Tower Hamlets Trading Standards secured convictions against rogue letting agents who targeted and misled vulnerable tenants who were often newcomers to the UK, the Team issued five Notices of Proposal under the Estate Agents Act.



The Team dealt with 362 requests for advice and brought 54 estate agency businesses into compliance.

LETTING AGENTS

The NTS Letting Agency Team, working with local authorities, brought 359 businesses into compliance and dealt with 994 requests for advice.



The Team worked with the six Client Money Protection schemes to develop a data sharing agreement to allow the Team to better audit and ensure membership for letting agents and thus better protect tenants.

MHCLG



Supporting the preparation of the Renters' Rights Bill, the Team assisted MHCLG with its review of its statutory guidance in preparation for the implementation of the new prohibition on rent in advance.



The Team also assisted local authorities by collating and publishing summaries of letting agency legislation case law decisions and worked with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to update tribunal document templates.



NTS IN ACTION



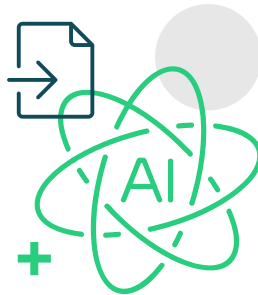
Protecting tenants' money

North East Trading Standards Services undertook an enforcement project to identify and bring into compliance agents without Client Money Protection or redress scheme membership. All businesses have been brought into compliance – with £3.3 million of clients' money having been at risk due to previously non-compliant businesses.

Central England Trading Standards Services concluded their region's three-year project to raise compliance levels for Client Money Protection, Tenant Fees Act, redress scheme membership and Consumer Rights Act requirements. The project prevented detriment of £11,122,584 which equated to £68.54 saved for every £1 spent.

INTELLIGENCE

The NTS Intelligence Team produced an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Report. This was shared with Trading Standards and explored the evolving landscape of AI, looking at its applications, benefits, and associated risks, particularly within law enforcement and the public sector.



Intelligence staff from regional and national intelligence teams across the NTS Intelligence Network published an Aide Memoire and Minimum Standards on Intelligence Reporting to help improve and make Trading Standards intelligence reporting more consistent.



A new Government Agency Intelligence Network Referral Process for Trading Standards was published in November 2025. This provides an agreed process for GAIN referrals to Trading Standards Services in England and Wales.

OCG Training

The NTS Intelligence Team delivered two training events, for 420 officers, on the importance of Organised Crime Group mapping to improve Trading Standards' staff confidence and understanding of the process.



The Team carried out over 10,000 searches of the Police National Database to support Trading Standards investigations.



REGIONAL CASES

NTS has eight regional investigation Teams which work on the most complex consumer fraud cases across England and Wales. Currently they have 109 live investigations. This year these Teams had:

8 REGIONAL INVESTIGATION TEAMS



24 successful prosecutions.



28 defendants received custodial sentences totalling 102 years.



54 convictions.

26

defendants received suspended sentences of over 39 years.



Awards for Proceeds of Crime and costs amounted to £138k and £309k, respectively.



£357k compensation was awarded to victims.



£12.2 million in consumer and business detriment avoided.

NTS IN ACTION



Disrupting counterfeit operations

As part of Operation Beorma, a lengthy Central England Regional Investigation Team investigation into Birmingham-based organisations that import and supply counterfeit goods to traders nationwide, several prosecution cases led to nine convictions. Six defendants were jailed for a total of more than 18 years, with one paying back £75,000 following Proceeds of Crime action.

NTS IN ACTION



Preventing fraudulent builders from trading

Following a North East Regional Investigation Team investigation, a fraudulent builder who repeatedly failed to carry out or complete plastering and renovation work was jailed for five years. 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 and continuing to work to recover financially.

NTS IN ACTION



Hertfordshire Trading Standards, supported by the Tri Region Investigation Team, investigated a large scale wine investment fraud. 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.

41 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, 3 defendants were convicted of fraudulent trading and sentenced to a combined total of 14.5 years.



NTS IN ACTION



Green energy fraud

Kent Trading Services, supported by the Tri Regional Investigation and eCrime Teams, uncovered a scheme mis-selling unnecessary and overpriced solar energy products. The operation targeted elderly and vulnerable people using misleading scripts and high-pressure sales tactics, with victims charged thousands of pounds for equipment costing a fraction of the price. One victim paid £4.2k for an inverter and optimisers that cost the company less than £800. As a result of the investigation, one defendant was jailed for three years and a further two were handed suspended sentences totalling 39 months.

NTS IN ACTION



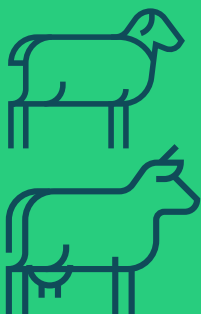
Disrupting doorstep crime

A prosecution at Bristol Crown Court, supported by the South West Regional 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.

Separately, the NTS eCrime Team carried out an investigation into bogus approved trader scheme websites, finding hundreds of connected websites that were associated with suspected rogue traders and believed to have been designed by the same business. The business has been issued with a warning letter.

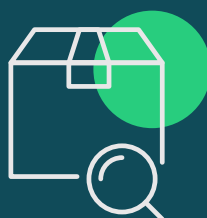
ANIMAL FEED

The UK has to ensure that there are adequate compliance levels in the animal feed market to protect human health, animal health and the viability of export markets.



4,649
ACTIVITIES

This year NTS commissioned local authorities to carry out 4,649 compliance checks, including:



214 imported animal feed consignments checked at port.



275 samples taken.



3,692 inspections.



141 manufacturers of animal feed checked for labelling 'claims'.

Inland authorities continued to receive referrals from Border Control Posts about 'illegally' imported feed containing animal by-products, with NTS and the expert Panel providing support directly to local authorities.



NTS, in partnership with the Food Standards Agency, published guidance on handling feed incidents. Training was provided for 260 feed officers.

NTS supports two expert panels (the National Agricultural Panel and the National Animal Feed at Ports Panel) to produce practical guidance to help local authorities provide effective and consistent advice to animal feed businesses.



ILLCIT TOBACCO



A network of Regional Illegal Tobacco Officers was introduced this year to help ensure regions have access to the intelligence, data and resources required to tackle illegal tobacco and infringements effectively.

NTS provided funds to local authorities to support a range of work to tackle the retail supply of illicit tobacco.

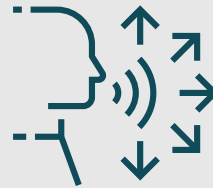


Over 33.6 million illicit cigarettes and almost 10 tonnes of hand rolling tobacco were seized.

135 local authorities signed the MoU required by HMRC for Tobacco Track and Trace referrals to be made for civil sanctions to be applied.



Local authorities visited 6,006 premises and made seizures from 3,260.



807 referrals have been made to HMRC since launch.

HMRC has issued £2,395,000 in penalties.



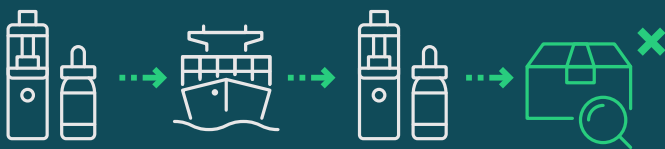
NTS IN ACTION



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.

The NTS eCrime Team removed 8,924 listings offering illicit tobacco online. 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.

ILLEGAL VAPES



NTS ensures that checks are carried out at relevant ports and border points to tackle the importation of illegal vapes. 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%).

This prevented detriment of £9,535,170.



Work is ongoing with DHSC and Border Force to try to improve the intelligence which would improve the identification of incoming consignments.

NTS IN ACTION



The NTS eCrime Team began a pilot project to research the supply of illicit vapes online.

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.

19,985 listings were flagged with the relevant platforms. All listings were promptly removed.