

**NATIONAL  
TRADING  
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers  
Safeguarding Businesses

# **ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2024-2025**

## Foreword

I am very pleased to present the National Trading Standards' (NTS) Business Plan for 2024/25.

The NTS Board comprises senior Heads of Trading Standards from England and Wales. We use Government grants and funding to prevent or investigate the more serious attempts by criminals to defraud consumers and legitimate business in relation to counterfeiting, scams, clocked cars and rogue builders. We also help protect food supplies by ensuring that the animal feed chain is safe. The cost of living crisis continues to impact consumers seeking out "deals" in attempts to keep their costs down, making this work crucial.

This year NTS will receive £12.03 million from the Department for Business and Trade, £2.3 million from the Food Standards Agency to deliver our feed programme, £1.3 million from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to support work relating to estate and letting agencies, £800,000 from HMRC to disrupt the supply of illicit tobacco and £1.5 million from DHSC to complete a two year programme of work in relation to illicit vapes. All of these are the same level as 24/25, and in some cases have been at the same level for several years. This creates ongoing challenges for the Board as costs continue to rise.

NTS will also work with other partners including the Home Office, the Intellectual Property Office, and the Office for Students on relevant trading standards' activities.

The Trading Standards system is unique in having an integrated system that operates locally, regionally, and nationally. We are grateful for the support we receive from local authority Trading Standards Services and regional coordinators and our other partners.



Lord Michael Bichard  
Chair National Trading Standards



## Strategic Objectives

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

**Figure 1 – Strategic Objectives 2024/25**

A national Strategic Assessment was undertaken and, using this information and the work specifically commissioned by Government, the Board agreed that the key priorities for 2024/25 will be:

- Doorstep crime and cold calling (including energy fraud).
- 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.
- Animal feed work.

NTS will also have the following cross cutting themes and enablers, as they impact on each priority area:

- eCrime and the use of social media/online platforms.
- Serious and organised crime.
- The cost of living crisis.

We have developed a series of activities that underpin our strategic objectives. Detailed actions to address the priorities are contained in our National Control Strategy which determines how NTS' funds will be allocated to deliver specific outcomes and activities.

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

We will do this by:

- Making informed decisions by using all available information and intelligence, and promoting the use of the Intelligence Operating Model, nationally, regionally and locally.
- Actively sharing intelligence with enforcement partners.
- Developing intelligence products to inform tasking and intelligence led prevention and enforcement.
- Identifying emerging threats and gaps in consumer protection enforcement and working with partners to address them.
- Providing a NTS' intelligence network that includes our National Intelligence Team and a network of Regional Intelligence Teams/Units.
- Ensuring each local authority can have direct access to a national Trading Standards intelligence database and the Sanctions Information Database.
- Providing relevant NTS Teams and regions access to various databases such as the Police National Computer.
- Undertaking appropriate Police National Database searches via the NTS Intelligence Team.
- Using Organised Crime Group mapping and national flagging to target and tackle criminals engaged in consumer protection crime.
- Using Serious and Organised Crime System Tasking to assess regional and national threats consistently and to prioritise tasking.

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

We will do this by:

- Providing a network of NTS Regional Investigation Teams and resourcing other enforcement activities to tackle regional and national consumer and business detriment and ensuring those engaged in criminal activities are punished and/or their activities disrupted.

- Supporting a programme of enforcement activities in relation to used cars, fair trading scams, doorstep crime, mass marketing fraud and the supply of counterfeit goods in key markets.
- Supporting regional IPO officers and working with the IPO to review and expand the provision in other regions.
- Providing a NTS eCrime Team to tackle consumer and business detriment caused by eCrime, in particular, taking down unlawful websites and digital content.
- Providing national expertise in the investigation and prevention of eCrime and a national digital forensic capability to support Trading Standards' related cybercrime enforcement.
- Providing a NTS Scams Team to tackle consumer detriment caused by mass-marketing scams by disrupting the mechanisms scammers use to target victims, and to work with local authorities and other partners to support safeguarding of victims.
- Coordinating a programme of work to disrupt the supply of illicit tobacco in local communities by seizing illicit tobacco.
- Supporting the system to enable local authorities to make referrals for civil sanctions to HMRC.
- Tackling the supply of illegal vapes through key ports.
- Undertaking market surveillance and testing of vape products, and examine online underage vape sales.
- Supporting the work local authorities do in their localities to deal with the supply of illicit vapes and supply of vaping products to children, by providing professional training and business guidance; sharing of best practice; enhanced available data and intelligence, and assisting with the costs of illegal vapes disposal.
- Participating in the Government's cross-cutting fraud agenda with the National Economic Crime Centre and other partner agencies to better protect those most vulnerable from becoming victims of fraud.
- Providing the Advertising Standards Authority with a backstop enforcement regime to ensure the continued success of their self-regulation model.
- Providing the Office for Students with a business case to extend the pilot provision of backstop enforcement role.
- Supporting the regional Trading Standards' infrastructure to enable them to co-ordinate Trading Standards' activities at a regional level.

### **Objective 3 - Deliver a programme of animal feed and food hygiene enforcement in England<sup>1</sup> to ensure the safety of the food chain and protect the UK export market.**

We will do this by:

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

### **Objective 4 - Deliver a programme of national enforcement, advice and support for local authorities in the property market, in particular the activities of Estate and Letting Agents<sup>2</sup>.**

We will do this by:

- Providing a NTS Estate and Letting Agency Team to fulfil the statutory functions under the Estate Agents Act 1979 and relevant lettings legislation, and to tackle consumer and business detriment caused by unacceptable practices in the sector.
- Working with the estate and letting agents' industries to improve standards in the sectors.
- Taking enforcement action where required to tackle serious consumer and business detriment in this sector.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar programme of enforcement by Local Authorities in Wales delivers similar work but this is not delivered by NTS.

<sup>2</sup> Work in relation to estate agents is UK wide. Work in relation to letting agents is delivered for England only. Similar work is undertaken in Wales but not delivered via NTS.

- Issuing guidance and advice for the public, businesses and enforcement authorities.
- Providing an online portal for consumers and enforcement partners to check the membership status of property businesses against the mandatory member organisations.
- Supporting and encouraging best practice in the enforcement of estate & letting agencies through the provision of training materials, courses and guidance.
- Support better intelligence sharing between Trading Standards and Housing officers in local authorities.
- Allocating grant funding to appropriate projects or investigations that will enhance lettings enforcement in England.
- Working with industry partners to increase the level of basic and material information available to consumers via property portals, enabling them to make better informed decisions about buying or renting property.
- Support the Government and Local Authorities on the implementation of relevant parts of the Renters Reform legislation.

## Partnership working

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

- Ensuring close working relationships with partners and, in particular, with regional Trading Standards groups who are crucial to the success of NTS' work.
- Supporting the Consumer Protection Partnership.
- Engaging with Government to influence them in relation to Trading Standards matters and to offer the NTS' model for the commissioning of relevant elements of Trading Standards' work.
- Continuing to work with Trading Standards colleagues in Northern Ireland and Scotland and with other enforcement partners across the UK to ensure that the consumer protection regime is as successful as it can be.
- Creating a comprehensive national picture of the achievements of NTS and communicating these effectively.

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