

# NATIONAL TRADING STANDARDS PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND SAFEGUARDING BUSINESSES

## FOREWORD

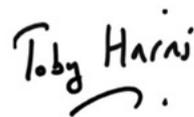
The Trading Standards community works hard to protect consumers and support legitimate businesses. Our investigations – often complex and time consuming – continue to successfully disrupt criminal activity and put the perpetrators in prison.

During the COVID-19 pandemic Trading Standards officers have confronted new challenges to support and protect their communities. The flexibility of the Trading Standards workforce has been extraordinary. Many local authorities are using the expertise of their Trading Standards teams to enforce the new regulations around emergency business closures and ensuring consignments of PPE and other goods are safe and compliant.

Before COVID-19 transformed Trading Standards work, we saw some major successes over the past year. We've outlined key highlights in this leaflet, including the first

ever prosecution and sentencing of online ticket touts. This year NTS has reached a significant milestone; tackling over £1 billion in business and consumer detriment since being established eight years ago, delivering a return on investment of over £12.50 for every £1 spent.

This is a landmark achievement and I would like to express my personal appreciation to everyone in the Trading Standards community and consumer protection partners who have supported our activity over the past eight years.



Lord Toby Harris, Chair, National Trading Standards

## HOW WE WORK

We allocate grants that come from Government 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 the country.

Our vision is to protect consumers and safeguard businesses through cross-boundary, intelligence-led enforcement. We also act as a safety net by helping ensure that products entering the UK and the food chain are safe. We do this by:

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



## A snapshot of our work in 2019/20

Dealt with over  
**£219,442,873**  
consumer and  
business detriment



Prison sentences  
totalling **91**  
years and **5**  
months were  
handed down



**64** people were  
convicted of  
offences



Took **5,256,377**  
unsafe and non-compliant  
goods out of the supply chain



Fines of  
**£413,915**  
were issued

Delivered  
**6,603**  
feed interventions



# 2019/20 AT A GLANCE



eCrime



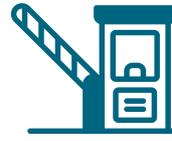
Estate and Letting Agency



Scams



Intelligence



Safety at Ports & Borders



Regional Investigations

## REGIONAL CASES:

Our Teams are investigating approximately **90 live cases** of consumer and business detriment at any one time.



## eCRIME AWARENESS:



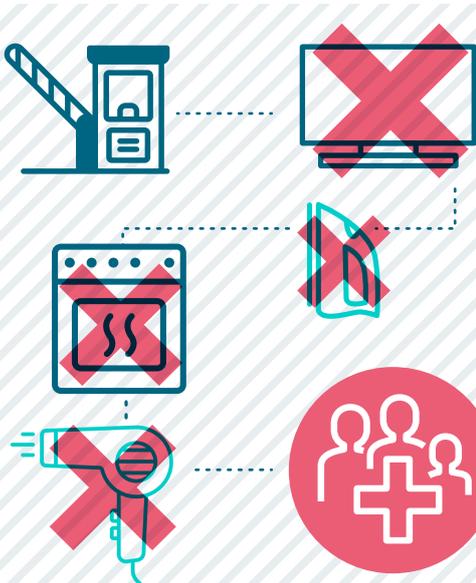
The NTS eCrime Team has taken down **856 websites**.

**60 local authorities** have signed up to take part in the 'Real Deal' Online to educate social media group admins about their ethical and legal responsibilities regarding pirate, counterfeit and other illicit goods.

**REAL DEAL**

## PRODUCT SAFETY:

We prohibited more than **1.1 million unsafe** and over **4.1 million non-compliant** items from entering the UK supply chain, saving **£174 million** in costs to society and prevented **3,681 serious injuries**, **3,155 fires** and saved **11 lives**.



## SCAMS:

The NTS Scams Team has saved consumers **£22,703,586** through its investigations and disruption work and the savings made through local authority support. This year the team stopped **389,648 mailings** and provided more than **3,500 free call blockers** to consumers.



**Ten** energy, water and telecoms companies have signed up to the Utilities Against Scams, a new initiative that provides training and a toolkit especially designed for utility companies.

We recruited **201,795 Friends Against Scams**, taking the total to more than **414,144**.



## INTELLIGENCE:

Our NTS Intelligence Team mapped 44 active organised crime groups and flagged 146 nominals for Trading Standards Services in England and Wales and NTS Teams.



## KNIFE SALES TO UNDER 18s:

100 online test purchases were made as part of the project to tackle the underage sale of knives, resulting in 41 underage sales. 17 prosecutions took place and 15 defendants were found or pleaded guilty and were fined a total of £161,255.



## ESTATE AND LETTING AGENCY WORK:

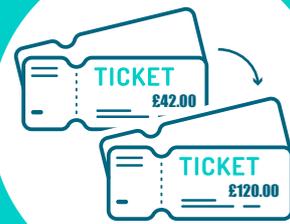
16 Notices of Proposal to prohibit/warn were given to estate agents in the UK and we handled more than 1,275 complaints.

## FEED HYGIENE:

We continue to support a programme of work to ensure the integrity of the animal feed chain and protect food safety and UK meat exports. We delivered 6,603 activities in 19/20 including ports checks, sampling, visits to farms and inland inspections.

## SECONDARY TICKETING:

The first secondary ticketing fraud trial resulted in prison sentences of over 6 years. The financial value of the fraud exceeded £3.5 million.



## DOORSTEP CRIME:

Seven doorstep crime cases were completed either by NTS Teams or with NTS' support. Four new cases are under investigation by Regional Investigation Teams. These crimes include aggressive business practices, unnecessary work and inflated costs. In each case elderly and vulnerable people have been targeted.



## ENERGY:

We are supporting five large, fraud cases into energy related fraud and six Regional Investigation Teams led investigations relating to energy. In 2019/20 we completed Operation Comfort, which led to three custodial sentences totalling 12 years (see NTS in action).



## ASA BACKSTOP:

We continue our role as the Advertising Standards Authority legal backstop with 12 live cases. Our support relates to health claims, copycat websites and property raffles.



# NTS IN ACTION

## Operation Comfort

The Judge commended the Team in this advance fee energy fraud investigation.

In August 2019, five defendants were found guilty and sentenced to a combined total of 12 years' imprisonment, one suspended sentence, 200 hours community service and one conditional discharge for conspiracy to commit fraud and fraudulent trading offences. The main defendant, Steven Ricardo, 45, absconded before sentencing but was caught just before Christmas 2019 and given an additional three months. The benefit determined by the Court was £1.6 million.

Over a period of four years Corporate Energy Saving Solutions Ltd (CESS) made unsolicited calls to small businesses offering a free audit of energy bills. After auditing, the businesses were told they had been overcharged by thousands of pounds by their energy suppliers.

With the promise of the recovery of overpayments and VAT from UK energy suppliers, small businesses and consumers paid an advance fee to the company, but the recoveries never occurred.

## Operation Willow

Earlier this year a building company director from County Durham was sentenced to 17 months in prison and disqualified as a company director for 7 years after pleading guilty to 14 counts of using misleading and aggressive commercial practices.

Between 2016 and 2018 Neil Trotter traded under the business name NEIL (North East) Ltd to carry out building work on people's homes. The defendant moved from being a professional electrician into managing teams of workers appointed by him to carry out major building works to customers' properties, such as house extensions and full property renovations. He often took money ahead of schedule – including payments in full – and then failed to complete the building work.

An investigation carried out by National Trading Standards Regional Investigation Team (North East), Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the National Trading Standards eCrime team, found that the money handed over by customers for the contracted work was then not used for this purpose.

The defendant's medical/personal circumstances and early guilty plea were taken into account and his sentence was reduced to 8 months for all aggressive charges.

## Operation Eiffel

In February 2020 two 'ticket touts' from London were found guilty of fraudulently reselling tickets on a large scale. Peter Hunter was sentenced to four years in prison and David Thomas Smith was given a custodial sentence of 30 months following an investigation by the National Trading Standards eCrime Team.

The pair ran BZZ Limited, a multi-million pound limited company that fraudulently and dishonestly bought and resold hundreds of tickets at inflated prices for high-profile music and entertainment events.

The pair made a net profit of £3.5 million in the last 32 months of the fraud. There were thousands of people who were denied the opportunity to purchase tickets at face value, as well as those who were sold invalid and overpriced tickets. Despite multiple warnings to desist and measures imposed to prevent fraudulent purchases, the offences were only brought to an end following the intervention by National Trading Standards.

**NATIONAL  
TRADING  
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers  
Safeguarding Businesses

For more information about the work of National Trading Standards, please visit: [www.nationaltradingstandards.uk](http://www.nationaltradingstandards.uk)