

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Protecting Consumers
Safeguarding Businesses

ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020-2021

Foreword

I am pleased to present the National Trading Standards (NTS) Business Plan for 2020/21. NTS has been in operation since 2012. The NTS Board is made up of senior heads of local government Trading Standards from England and Wales with an independent Chair. We aim to protect consumers and safeguard legitimate businesses by tackling serious national and regional consumer protection issues and organised criminality and by protecting food supplies by ensuring the animal feed chain is safe.

Our main funding is the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) grant of £12.02 million. This has reduced for 2020/21 as the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) now commissions ports and borders work direct.

NTS works with other Government partners such as HMRC, the Home Office, DCMS and Defra on specific projects that relate to Trading Standards work, utilising our commissioning model with local authorities. We are working with the Home Office on plans for them to fund additional work to tackle the underage sales of knives. We also have £2 million funding from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to deliver our feed programme. The Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funds NTS to provide lead Teams for Estate Agency and Letting Agency issues. The grant for this is £1.17 million.

Besides our routine work, we will be working with partners to address any issues arising from EU Exit. We are awaiting the expected Consumer and Competition Command Paper and the potential changes that it may bring for NTS. We also fully recognise the ongoing problem with stretched resources in local authorities meaning increased demand and expectations of NTS. I would like to extend my thanks to all those organisations and individuals, and in particular the local authorities, that NTS has worked with, for all their support.

Given the current situation in relation to Covid 19, we are very aware that plans may need to be revised during the year as the impact of the situation develops.



Lord Toby Harris
Chair



Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives remain similar to those in 2019/20, as they were all long term objectives and functions of NTS. The underpinning activities for each objective change as progress is made.

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 in relation to serious consumer protection crime (including knife crime ¹ , eCrime and business to business fraud) and mass marketing scams.	Deliver a programme of animal feed and food hygiene enforcement to help ensure the safety of the food chain and protect the UK export market.	To deliver a programme of national enforcement, advice and support for local authorities in relation to the property market, in particular the activities of Estate and Letting Agents

Figure 1 – Strategic Objectives 2020/21

All work is underpinned with constructive governance arrangements, which also enable us to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of NTS to our partners and to Government. This will include:

- Engaging with Government to influence them and raise the profile of the work of Trading Standards and to offer the NTS model for the commissioning of those elements of Trading Standards’ work that are best delivered regionally and nationally.
- Working closely with the Local Government and Welsh Local Government Associations to ensure we support their activities where appropriate.
- Ensuring very close working relationships with regional Trading Standards groups who are crucial to the success of NTS’ work.
- Maximising the support for and benefits of membership of the Consumer Protection Partnership (CPP).

¹ Subject to funding from the Home Office

- Creating a comprehensive national picture of the achievements of NTS and communicating these effectively.
- Providing appropriate access to NTS' information via a public website and via a secure website for local authority officers.
- Being open to scrutiny via agreed mechanisms and reporting against agreed performance outcomes that are set by our funding partners.
- Being responsive to external factors when developing policy and approach.

A national Strategic Assessment was undertaken and using the evidence provided from that, and the work specifically commissioned by Government, the Board agreed that key priorities for 2020/21 would be:

- Mass Marketing Scams
- Lettings
- Doorstep Crime and Cold Calling
- Energy Related Fraud
- Tackling underage sales of knives
- Used Cars
- Fair Trading – Misleading Practices
- Intellectual Property
- Estate Agency
- Integrity of the food chain by ensuring the safety of animal feed

NTS will respond positively, wherever appropriate, to requests from Government Departments and Agencies should they want new areas of Trading Standards related work undertaken and where the NTS model would be effective.

Whilst NTS operates in England and Wales, we will continue to work with our counterparts 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.

We have developed a series of objectives 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. NTS hopes the National Strategic Assessment and Control Strategy will assist Regional Trading Standards Groups and local authorities when they are determining their own priority areas for the year.

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 capturing, analysing and using all the information and intelligence that is available to us and promoting the use of the Intelligence Operating Model, nationally, regionally and locally.
- Actively sharing intelligence with CPP and other partners including the Government Agencies Intelligence Network.
- Ensuring that information sharing is carried out under the expedited processes agreed for CPP partners to monitor EU Exit related matters.
- 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, a network of Regional Intelligence Analysts and ensuring each local authority can have direct access to a Trading Standards intelligence database.
- Producing a National Strategic Assessment and Control Strategy ready to be used to plan NTS' work for 2021-22.
- Ensuring relevant NTS Teams and regions can access the Police National Database.
- Using Organised Crime Group mapping and national flagging to target and tackle criminals engaged in consumer protection crime.

Objective 2 - Ensure effective delivery and co-ordination of enforcement in relation to serious consumer protection crime focussed on the agreed priorities (including knife crime, eCrime and business to business fraud).

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, energy scams, supply of illicit goods in key markets, and doorstep crime.

- Developing knowledge, tactics and methods in dealing with serious and organised crime.
- In partnership with the Intellectual Property Office, undertaking research into the volume and type of counterfeit goods available in key markets.
- Providing a NTS eCrime Team to tackle consumer and business detriment caused by eCrime, in particular taking down unlawful websites.
- 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 working with local authorities and other partners to support safeguarding of victims and to disrupt the supply of scam mail.
- Expanding the “Friends Against Scams” initiative.
- Progressing the Home Office Joint Fraud Task Force, Victims and Susceptibility work to improve practices amongst financial institutions, law enforcement and Government to better protect those most vulnerable to becoming fraud victims.
- Participating in Government cross fraud initiatives with the National Economic Crime Centre and others, such as Operation Otello.
- Providing the Advertising Standards Authority with a backstop enforcement regime to ensure the continued success of their self-regulation model.
- Delivering a programme of work to tackle the supply of knives and corrosives to children.²
- 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 to help 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.

² This is dependent on grant funding from the Home Office.

- Providing resources at key ports to protect the integrity of the food chain by undertaking surveillance on the quality and safety of imported animal feed.
- 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.
- Supporting local authority expert panels on feed to develop guidance and help ensure consistency and best practice in feed enforcement.
- Overseeing a programme of food hygiene at primary production (farms) inspections to ensure compliance with standards at the start of the food supply chain.
- Delivering improvement and intelligence projects to support the FSA's policy aims.

Objective 4 - to deliver a programme of national enforcement, advice and support for local authorities in relation to the property market, in particular the activities of Estate and Letting Agents.

We will do this by: -

- Providing an NTS Estate and Letting Agency Team to fulfil the statutory functions under the Estate Agents Act 1979 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.
- Issuing guidance and advice for the public, businesses and enforcement authorities on estate agency work in the UK and relevant letting agency work in England.

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