

Protecting the Public and Supporting Businesses – Trading Standards making an impact on your local community

The Impacts and Outcomes of Local Trading Standards Services 2023/24 in Wales



FOREWORD

The Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) represents heads of Trading Standards across England & Wales and currently 95% of local authorities are members. ACTSO created the Impacts and Outcomes Framework in 2018/19 to provide national data for England and Wales on work done by local authority Trading Standards Services. This is its fourth report.

During 2023/24, cost of living issues remained high on everyone's minds. Cheap dangerous, illicit, and counterfeit goods appearing to be a "good deal" posed risks to consumers. Misleading price claims could cause consumers to miss out on fair deals, and businesses remained at risk from being undercut by unfair competition and businesses selling illegal goods and services.

As well as the usual three themes of Tackling Detriment and Preventing Harm, Supporting the Local Economy, and Promoting Health and Wellbeing, we have devoted specific sections to environmental regulation and work to support consumers and businesses with the cost of living crisis.

While Welsh local Trading Standards Services remain stretched in terms of funding and staffing, they continue to have a big impact in protecting consumers and helping businesses. The headlines from this year's report are:

- **Over £38 million detriment was prevented** by Trading Standards' actions. This equates to **£12.13 saved for every £1 spent**.
- **Revenue budgets were over £12 million**, a 1% increase from last year.
- **Overall staff numbers are 258**, almost identical to last year.
- **Notifications and Referrals from Citizens Advice reduced from 24,838 in 2022/23 to 18,343 in 2023/24**. This would appear to be part of a post pandemic trend.
- This year **107 people or businesses were convicted of offences**, compared to 70 in 2022/23 a significant **65% increase** on 2022/23.
- The amount of **money saved for scam victims was £893,000**, a significant reduction from the 2023/23 figure of £2.8 million. This could be attributed to the success in stopping scam mail reaching victims by working with partners to tackle the issue at source

- **Trading Standards provided over 1,900 hours of advice to businesses through Primary Authority partnerships**. The total number of Primary Authority partnerships also increased slightly from 75 to 79.
- **Almost 13,000 compliance checks** were carried out to ensure that businesses met their legal responsibilities and to provide them with advice on site. This is an increase from 11,000 last year and represents a 19% increase.
- **Almost 6,700 unsafe or non-compliant products** were seized or removed from the marketplace representing a saving to society of almost £114 million.
- **Around 474 premises were subjected to a test purchase check** to ensure they were not selling age-restricted goods, such as alcohol, vapes, knives, fireworks and corrosive substances to children. 14% were found to have sold to an under age person
- **Over 1.3 million illicit cigarettes, over 0.220 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco and over 376,000 illicit vapes** were seized.

In summary, Trading Standards continues to demonstrate its huge value in protecting consumers, legitimate businesses, public health, and the environment. The impact of this work, alongside that which is delivered via National Trading Standards, highlights the results that Trading Standards achieves. Trading Standards is unique in having an infrastructure that can operate at local, regional, and national levels in this way and this is key to its success.

We want this report to inform Government's policy development, including funding for services, and to raise the profile of Trading Standards' work within local authorities.

Special thanks go to the 17 services covering 20 local authority trading standards services that submitted their data return. This covers 85% of all local authorities in Wales.



Jacqui Thomas,
Chair, Trading
Standards Wales



Valerie Simpson
Chair of the Association
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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Local authorities in Wales were asked to submit data for the financial year 2023/24.

A total of 17 services contributed, covering 17 of 20 local authority trading standards services in Wales.

The responses cover an area with a population of over 2.7 million, or 86.7% of the population of Wales.

To illustrate the estimated national impact of Trading Standards, figures have been adjusted to account for both population and the response rate for each question. These figures estimate impact and activity levels for the whole of Wales.

DEMAND AND RESOURCING

The approximate revenue budget allocated to Trading Standards was close to £12 million, a 1% increase from last year.

In the region of £357,000 was received in income from a variety of sources including metrology, National Trading Standards' grants and Primary Authority income.

Of the **258 full time employees** employed on Trading Standards' work, 89.5% are "operational" staff.

Trading Standards services received just over 18,000

referrals and notifications to their services from the Citizens Advice Consumer Service. This shows how many members of the public are seeking advice and support from Trading Standards on consumer related problems and issues. However, it is lower than the 24,838 in 2022/23 which might suggest that the cost of living is not hitting consumers quite as much now as it was then. Whilst the demands on Citizens Advice remain relatively high, the resources remain the same to address new and emerging challenges. In addition, trading standards services received nearly 9,000 referrals from other partners.

SECTION ONE: TACKLING DETRIMENT AND PREVENTING HARM

One of the key functions of Trading Standards is to prevent consumer and business detriment. Trading Standards' work can include providing advice and support to the public on how to avoid being ripped off, as well as disrupting and taking enforcement action against criminal behaviour, to prevent harm and financial detriment. The former may be limited due to the financial constraints faced by local services and the need to focus on statutory activity.

The Consumer Protection Study 2022 estimated that there was £54 billion in unaddressed detriment across Great Britain.

1.1 Stopping Fraudulent, Illegal and Unfair Trading

Trading Standards Services will usually take formal enforcement action where people deliberately break the law, have caused serious harm, or have repeatedly ignored advice from officers. Trading Standards legislation carries a variety of penalties including imprisonment; fines; forfeiture of assets; fixed penalties; and undertakings to stop future non-compliance. Serious investigations are complex, lengthy and can take several years to bring to trial. This is being exacerbated by ongoing delays in the Crown Court system. Government is continuing to increase options for the use of monetary penalties by Trading Standards.

In 2023/24:

- Approximately 107 defendants were prosecuted and convicted.
- Prison sentences totalling over 46 years were handed down.
- Defendants were ordered to pay over £51,121 in fines.
- Defendants were ordered to pay almost £1 million in Proceeds of Crime confiscation orders, a significant increase on last year as a result of one particularly large order.

1.2 Detriment and Redress

Trading Standards can ask for the Court to issue a compensation order for victims as part of a prosecution process or get redress for victims through a variety of other means. In 2023/24, it is estimated that the actions of Trading Standards Services resulted in:

- £375,800 compensation being awarded to victims by the courts.
- Over £1,207,000 prevented from being handed over to criminals.
- £462,418 gained for victims through advice and intervention.

Overall Trading Standards actions in Wales prevented over £38 million of detriment to consumers and businesses.

This shows that Trading Standards continues to offer a cost effective and important service to local communities and individuals and demonstrates the seriousness of the offending being tackled by local services.

1.3 Supporting Scam Victims

Fraud is the most common crime in the country, accounting for 40% of crime in England and Wales, and affecting millions of people, at risk of substantial financial losses. Trading Standards Services play a key role in tackling fraud and protecting people from scams.

Trading Standards support victims to get the help they need to stop them from being scammed again. This includes the installation of call blocking devices and doorstep cameras alongside working with safeguarding agencies. Trading Standards can also make referrals to the National Trading Standards Scams and eCrime Teams to undertake disruption work such as getting telephone or payment systems removed and taking down websites. Most scams

emanate from overseas where formal legal action by Trading Standards is not possible.

In 2023/24, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Local authority Trading Standards Services provided support to almost 1,600 scam victims.
- Work to disrupt mass marketing fraud mailings, stop outgoing payments and mail, saved consumers almost £900,000.

In Wales, the number of scam victims supported has increased from 1301 in 2022/23 to 1579 this year.

Blaenau Gwent CBC: Supporting scam victims

In addition to undertaking 100% of visits to all scam victims identified as vulnerable when referred from the National Scams Hub, Blaenau Gwent Trading Standards supports local communities by providing advice on scams to vulnerable groups where possible. In 2023, a presentation was undertaken to enable the local Salvation Army to provide advice on scam awareness, doorstep crime, and advice about rogue traders.

The service also identifies chronic scam victims who have suffered repeated scams, so that additional follow up visits can be made to check on their welfare, ensure that no further scam activity has taken place and provide target hardening when funding is available.

Isle of Anglesey: Safeguarding & Scam Prevention Initiative

A project with Call Blockers has experienced good uptake, with users reporting a large reduction in calls. Due to the success of the project, work will continue throughout the next financial year, working with partners such as the Citizens Advice Consumer Service, Friends Against Scams and local Social Services to identify potential vulnerable victims.

Caerphilly CBC: Prosecution of Unscrupulous tradesmen

Since Covid, the traditional perpetrators of doorstep crime itinerant traders have been joined by builders and similar traders who had previously run compliant local businesses but were tempted by the opportunity to earn big money and take on large scale projects that they were incapable of undertaking, lacking the expertise required. Often, these large scale jobs involved consumers paying out huge amounts of money only to be left with work that was incomplete, misdescribed, dangerous and of very little value and faced with not only financial hardship but also with the shame and mental anguish that goes hand in hand with such scams. The victims were not the typical vulnerable victims associated with this type of crime, but often much younger and savvier, who had not entered into contracts without conducting research. Many of the victims had young families and the damage to properties also had adverse effects on the children. Three incidents that led to prosecution resulted in consumers spending just over £200,000 for little in return. Compensation was awarded in two cases and POCA confiscation is proceeding in a third, but the stress and suffering on the victims is unquantifiable.



Pembrokeshire County Council: Supporting Vulnerable Scam Victims

A vulnerable couple with learning difficulties requiring minor roof repairs were charged £800 to refit a single slipped tile. The trader then made false claims regarding the safety of their chimney stack and subsequently spent 30 minutes on the roof and

charged the couple £4,500. This work was unnecessary, substandard, and the couple had been grossly overcharged. Pembrokeshire Trading Standards Service prosecuted the trader who pleaded guilty to four offences under the Fraud Act. He received a 15-month suspended prison sentence and a compensation order for £900 was awarded to the victims.



Neath Port Talbot CBC: Working in collaboration to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

NPT's Trading Standards service has been working with the local Police, Social Services and its Licensing service on an initiative to educate local hotels and accommodation providers on the tell-tale signs of child sexual exploitation (CSE). This initiative was known as Operation Oakham. Whilst Trading Standards does not have a specific duty as such in relation to CSE, the service does have information on the relevant businesses that might witness CSE. The project delivered training and advice to a number of establishments in the NPT area, along with carrying out "test purchasing" exercises to see if the businesses checked would query adults booking themselves rooms with children for short periods of time. Furthermore, the service is a member of the local Police led Serious Organised Crime Group, a forum for identifying targets of mutual interest with partners and for sharing intelligence.

Carmarthenshire County Council: Seraphimbeta© trueCall Integrated Victim Risk Analysis

272 Scams victims are subject to ongoing interventions under the CCC Seraphim trueCall Nuisance and Scam Call Intervention Programme.

Using the Seraphimbeta© inference engine, (an innovative software solution created by CCC) to automate the monitoring of trueCall call log metadata and notify programme officers where trueCall users are, suspected of engaging with telemarketing fraud approaches, behaving in such ways that puts them at increased risk of telemarketing fraud victimisation and identify non-operational/ malfunctioning trueCall devices, 2752 automated monitoring actions were undertaken for the period 2023/24.

Monitoring actions for the period resulted in the generation of 76 intervention alerts, resulting in direct officer welfare interventions. Outcomes from these intervention activities have been the identification of unreported telemarketing fraud victimisation, redress for victims, enhanced ongoing victim support and the reinstatement of non-operational/ faulty trueCall devices to protect the most vulnerable residents.

For the period 2023/24, CCC trueCall devices blocked 20,921 nuisance calls, of which 3,922 were identified as being scam phone calls and prevented approximately 34 scams. Estimated savings of this activity saved vulnerable households £157,373 and led to a reduction of £93,201 in public service costs (NHS, Social Care & Police).

SECTION TWO: SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Local economies and economic growth can only flourish where businesses have a level playing field and are not subject to unfair competition by those who break the law, and by being able to access good advice on how to meet regulatory requirements.

2.1 Businesses Get the Help and Support they need to Thrive and Grow

Having a thriving local economy is crucial for local authorities and for Government. Trading Standards' role in providing advice and support to businesses has never been more important.

There are currently 79 **Primary Authority partnerships** across Wales. These partnerships enable assured advice is given to a business with multiple shops or sites via a single local authority. There was an increase in activity of 8% from 2022/23.

In 2023/24, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Over 1,900 hours were provided by Trading Standards advising Primary Authority businesses.
- Trading Standards responded to almost 1,700 requests for advice from businesses that were not part of the Primary Authority scheme.

2.2 Creating and Maintaining a Level Playing Field for Safe and Fair Competition

Fair competition underpins economic growth. Unfair competition from those who fail to meet legal standards damages the economy and can cause legitimate businesses to fail, as well as putting consumers at risk.

Trading Standards Services follow a risk based and intelligence-led model. They will take action proportionate to the risk. Actions may include providing advice, seizing unsafe, counterfeit, and illicit products, and taking formal enforcement action where required.

Compliance visits have increased by **19%** from 2022/23. This could be the result of the Food Standards Agency's requests for more food inspections.

In 2023/24, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Over 13,000 visits were carried out to businesses to ensure that they comply with the law and to provide advice to help them fix any non-compliance.
- Over 3,700 businesses were subject to an intervention, such as advice, investigation, or referral.

- 59% of Welsh Trading Standards Services operate an assured trader scheme to help increase consumer confidence. These tend to be targeted at specific trade sectors. This has remained steady but the number of participating businesses has significantly decreased year-on-year. Some 168 businesses participate in these schemes.
- Over 10,350 counterfeit products with a market value of over £1.1 million, which breach the intellectual property of legitimate businesses, were seized.

This is much less than what it has been in previous years. The reason is unknown. This may be partly due to a shift of focus to vapes and tobacco work. It may be that counterfeit goods are being sold through social media groups rather than from physical premises, making large scale seizures less likely and intervention more difficult. We will monitor this in future years.

The illegal trade in counterfeit goods funds organised crime and damages legitimate businesses who manufacture, distribute, and buy licences to sell legitimate products.



Shared Regulatory Services (Bridgend, City and County of Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan): Supporting SME's

Home Improvement sector webinars for new businesses - SRS provide numerous services to support businesses within its area including the Buy with Confidence trusted trader scheme, Primary Authority services, business advice and numerous training courses. One business in its area entered into a Primary Authority scheme with SRS in 2019 and due to the positive benefits and growth that they have seen from this partnership, they also became members of the Buy with Confidence scheme a couple of years ago. The business has also been exploring how its partnership working with Trading Standards Services can benefit its students, who are training to be home improvement professionals, e.g., plumbers, electricians, gas engineers, kitchen fitters, etc. Many of these students are likely to set up their own businesses once they qualify and these types of traders can often be difficult for Trading Standards services to identify and engage with until something goes wrong. SRS has been providing live webinar sessions in conjunction with the company, covering key areas of trading standards legislation including paperwork and cancellation rights, consumer rights and redress, how to deal with complaints, contract law and how to avoid business scams. These have been delivered to hundreds of students across the UK, as well as made available to partners in training centres. The webinars have also highlighted the services offered by Trading Standards services for businesses, as well as other sources of advice and support, to help educate the new businesses on the range of advice and support that Trading Standards can offer. The intention is to give new businesses more confidence in understanding their legal obligations, thereby reducing the amount to unnecessary breaches of legislation due to a lack of knowledge, which can have significant economic impacts on both businesses and consumers.

Newport City Council: Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Food Training:

Newport's Trading Standards service maintains successful business support programmes and continues to provide support at the hundreds of visits and interactions it has with businesses. A compliant business is a successful business, therefore, the support provided helps the delivery of a strong city economy. Key projects include the SPF supported Food Safety work, Primary Authority work, licensing activity, and assured trader schemes.

Neath Port Talbot: Food Standards Workshop for Takeaway Businesses

In conjunction with the local Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) coordinator, Neath Port Talbot's Trading Standards Service ran a free food standards workshop for takeaway businesses. The BAME coordinator used their contacts to invite relevant businesses. The morning workshop session provided advice on all aspects of food standards, with a particular focus on allergens. It is hoped to continue this as a programme for forthcoming years.

Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC: Providing early support to new businesses

When notified of new business, or new businesses are observed, the Trading Standards service will visit to provide initial advice on all relevant legislation. If the local authority is notified prior to set-up, then initial set-up advice is provided, which can result in potential new businesses changing their business model once they understand the costs associated with legal compliance, especially in the safety and food sector. The local authority is seeing an unprecedented number of new businesses; its monthly notification figures align with pre-pandemic annual figures. This year, new businesses have included: car traders, a feed / dog treat manufacturer, honey producers and a business producing and supplying microgreens.



Gwynedd Trading Standards create a unique premises file for each new trader that operates in Gwynedd and comes to its attention. Gwynedd's procedure is to make contact with each new trader, either remotely or through an inspection in person. The decision whether to inspect or make contact remotely will depend on the activity/business risk. This encourages businesses to comply with regulations and follow good business guidance. Officers evaluate intelligence received and

undertake targeted inspections to sector specific businesses to offer advice, guidance and to ensure they comply with relevant regulations. During 2023/24, officers inspected 48 on-licence premises to ensure they were trading fairly and conducted 64 inspections to retail premises known to sell e-cigarettes, combining such inspections to cover the sale of age restricted products, the legalities of e-cigarettes as well as other fair trading matters such as pricing and product safety.

SECTION THREE: PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The health and well-being of local communities is important to all local authorities and Trading Standards have an important part to play by ensuring consumer products meet safety standards, food is correctly labelled and animal health and welfare standards are maintained.

Trading Standards, in particular, enforce a very wide range of age restricted sales legislation to help to keep young people safe. Stopping the supply of age restricted products, such as vapes, cigarettes, alcohol, and knives, are a key priority in many local authorities.

3.1 Ensuring the Safety of Consumer Products

Product safety laws are in place to ensure that products do not cause deaths or personal injuries. Unsafe consumer goods such as cosmetics, toys and electrical goods can cause serious injuries, fires and even risk lives. As well as checking goods at retail and wholesale level, Trading Standards identify, check, and seize unsafe products at ports.

In 2023/24, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Over 6,700 unsafe or non-compliant products were seized or removed from the marketplace following Trading Standards' interventions.
- The savings to society, in terms of product value is over £265,000.

3.2 Protecting the food chain

There has been an increased focus on food safety to protect consumers. The Food Standards Agency has increased its focus on the local authority role in ensuring food standards are maintained. This is likely to be reflected in the increase in interventions as mentioned earlier in this report.

Food prices are higher than ever. This can increase the temptation for unscrupulous businesses to adulterate or falsely label food to enhance profits or gain a competitive advantage. Consumers need to be able to trust food labels and get good value for money. They also need to have clear, reliable information about food allergens which can cause serious injury or even death.

In 2023/24, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Over 1,750 businesses were identified as supplying food that was misdescribed, did not correctly declare allergens, contained toxic or illegal components, or was involved in food fraud.

Ensuring proper animal health and welfare standards, and protecting animals from suffering, helps the rural economy and protects the food chain.

In 2023/24, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Over 1,250 businesses were found to be in breach of animal health and welfare legislation.

Animal disease outbreaks create risks to the UK economy and the farming industry. It should be remembered that the Foot and Mouth Outbreak of 2001 cost the UK economy £8 billion, and caused problems affecting tourism, farming, rural wages, and food production for many years afterwards.

In 2023/24, there were far fewer avian influenza cases than in the last few years.

3.3 Reducing the risk of children accessing age restricted products

Trading Standards Services conduct test purchases to ensure businesses do not sell age-restricted goods to children, as well as providing businesses with advice on how to comply. Legislation outlaws the sale of age-restricted products, such as vapes, alcohol, cigarettes, knives, and fireworks to children, to protect them and their local communities from harm. This year there has been a continued national focus on the problems caused by the sale of vapes to children.

- 72 premises were tested for alcohol sales.
- The average failure rate for alcohol test purchases was 15%.
- Over 422 premises were tested for illegal vape sales.
- The average failure rate for vapes was 14.5%.
- Over 103 premises were tested for other products.
- The average failure rate for other products was 16%.

Resources have been shifted towards vapes testing, resulting in less under age testing on other products including illegal tobacco.

3.4 Reducing the availability of illicit products

Illicit tobacco, vapes and alcohol can contain undeclared contaminants. Illicit vapes can also contain higher than permitted levels of nicotine.

Smoking remains a significant driver in health inequalities. Price has been shown to be a critical factor in determining whether people quit smoking. The presence of cheap illicit tobacco undermines attempts to get people to cut down and quit smoking. Packs of illicit cigarettes are often between a third and a half the price of legitimate products.

The amount of tobacco and vape products seized has increased enormously since 2022/23. This reflects the prevalence of vaping problems and the priority this work is being given within local authorities. The work is supported with funding from National Trading Standards and the Welsh Government.

In 2023/24, across Wales:

- Over 1.3 million illicit cigarettes were seized, together with 0.220 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco, worth a combined street value of over £735,000.
- 376,500 illicit vapes were seized by local authorities.
- 99 test purchases were made to check on the authenticity of tobacco and tobacco products

The Licensing Act 2003 allows for a review, and potential removal of a licence, by a local authority Licensing Committee, where failures to comply with any of the four licensing objectives occur. These objectives are preventing crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm. Activities by Trading Standards have resulted in 4 Licence Reviews being carried out





Isle of Anglesey: Working in partnership with North Wales Police and UK Border Force (UKBF) to tackle illegal vapes

The Isle of Anglesey Trading Standards service's partnership working with North Wales Police resulted in a 3 month Closure Order on a vape shop on the island which resulted in a reduction in antisocial behaviour and underage sales to children which was shown to be affecting their health/school work. Working with UKBF at the port in Holyhead resulted in 118,011 vapes being prevented from entering the market whilst 2,824 were removed from sale in retail shops. The street value of these vapes was determined to be £1,463,569.92. So far, 232,307 vapes have been destroyed.

Newport City Council: Disrupting Illegal Tobacco

Operation Osprey relates to illegal tobacco. The team enhanced the disruption tactics of seizure, prosecution, and closure. The problem was scored under the Serious Organised Crime MORILE system and submitted to the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU). Directed surveillance was carried out using the Council's CCTV system and links were established between several shops on the city's main street. Surveillance showed the same people delivering tobacco to the shops and always leaving and entering the area from the same road. CCTV was not available to identify the route further. The ROCU were able to take on an aspect of the investigation and provided expertise in 'foot-follow'

surveillance, and very quickly intelligence was provided relating to the residential address where the individuals were based. There was a coordinated action involving the execution of a warrant, arrest, seizures, closures, and suspect charging, all on one day. The result of the day of action was the seizure of 23,000 cigarettes, 2,000 vapes, 4.9 kg of tobacco as well as cash and cannabis. The suspects were subsequently convicted of fraud.

Neath Port Talbot Council: working with the Youth Service to tackle illicit vapes

NPT's Trading Standards Team regularly deliver seminars on topical trading standards issues to elected members to keep them apprised of its work. For the e-cigarette / vape seminar, Trading Standards worked with a member of the Education Department's Youth Service. This then led to the Youth Service and Trading Standards working together to establish a panel to share information and promote joint working on vapes. This panel has been running since September 2023, it includes members from the Health Board, Social Services, ASH Wales, Swansea City Council services (TS, Social Services) and the local Police. The group has sourced training on vapes for partners and members, is a forum for sharing information between partners and has developed a project plan to promote information on the use of vapes and the dangers of using illegal vapes.

SECTION FOUR: NET ZERO, ENERGY COSTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Net Zero and Climate Change agenda continues to be important to local authorities. Many have this issue as a key corporate priority. The cost of living crisis has also meant that claims associated with energy efficiency and costs are attractive to consumers as they look to save money. While there is no specific data collected on this issue, figures will be included within the totals for compliance checks, business advice and prosecution figures in previous chapters. For example, some Trading Standards carry out work in relation to:

- Misleading claims on green energy products such as heat pumps and solar panels.
- Ensuring compliance with Energy Performance Certificates and Minimum Energy Efficient Standards.
- Misleading “greenwashing” claims.
- Enforcement of single use plastics bans.

Denbighshire & Flintshire County Councils' collaborate in relation to greenwashing and green claims

Denbighshire CC worked with Flintshire CC and its own grants services in relation to 'green businesses' registered on the Authority's scheme. All were written to after claims in relation to Central Government Department approval, selling techniques and approaches to consumers. The organisers of the scheme in Flintshire were approached and following discussions, all businesses were written to and advised of sales practices/ claims and marketing.

Blaenau Gwent CBC: Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2012. Display of Energy Certificate. Compliance begins at the office!

In addition to the private sector, the Regulations require Council buildings which are open to the public (and caught by the provisions of regulation 10 and 14) to display an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) in a prominent position.

Following an Annual Strategic Assessment of all relevant data, Blaenau Gwent Trading Standards worked closely with the Council's "Corporate Landlord" over a period of time to advise on the legislation and prepare a plan to check compliance of Council buildings. This was followed up by a series of inspections to check compliance in February/March 2024 on 25% of the Authority's public buildings. The results highlighted that EPC's were displayed in a prominent position in all of the buildings inspected (100% compliance).

Blaenau Gwent has also established a reciprocal agreement with Torfaen County Borough Council to enforce provisions under Regulation 34A regarding Council owned buildings.



Newport: Energy Efficiency

Work by Newport Trading Standards Services resulted in eight illegally marketed domestic properties brought into compliance from their failing F and G ratings. This will result in an annual reduction of 30.2 tonnes of CO₂ and savings to residents of £2,428 per year. Three entirely unrated domestic properties were identified and brought up to standard, resulting in a further reduction of 23 tonnes of CO₂ and savings to residents of £3,787 per year. 11 homes were made more energy efficient resulting in a saving of £6,215 per year, potentially leading to a warmer, healthier environment in which to bring up a family. The team also saw 22 illegally marketed commercial properties brought into compliance from their failing F and G ratings, resulting in an annual reduction of 576 tonnes of CO₂. The amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere was the equivalent of planting 56,000 trees.

Shared Regulatory Services (Bridgend, City and Council of Cardiff, and Vale of Glamorgan): Energy Efficiency

Trading Standards contacted owners, agents, and landlords of private rented homes across the three local authority areas to remind them of their duties under the Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations (MEES). The team also signposted them to funding that may be available to assist in improving the energy rating of homes.

The focus was properties appearing to fall into the forbidden F and G energy efficiency ratings, together with those for which there was no published rating. By the end of the year, a total of 138 properties were sufficiently improved to take them out of the F and G energy efficiency rating to become E rated or better. Also, some 127 previously unrated private rented homes now hold Energy Performance Certificates ranging from B to E. This resulted in a reduction of 406 tonnes in the amount of CO₂ produced at the improved properties and a reduction of almost 425,000 kWh needed to heat the improved homes.

SECTION FIVE: COST OF LIVING CRISIS

As referenced throughout this report, the cost of living crisis has continued to influence the work done by Trading Standards this year. Similarly to net zero, there is no specific data collected on this issue as figures will be included within the totals for compliance checks, business advice and enforcement activity.

Carmarthenshire County Council: Farmer Welfare Initiative

Carmarthenshire Trading Standards' Animal Health Team has responded to an increasing number of animal welfare complaints on farms only to find that farmers are struggling financially and/or mentally. They brought together the Citizens' Advice Bureau (to offer debt/financial advice), and charities, Tir Dewi (offering practical support to farmers) and the DPJ Foundation (mental health charity for the farming community) so there are now mechanisms in place for four-way referrals between each of the organisations, ensuring farmers receive the support they need.

As an example, officers responded to one complaint and during a joint visit with the Animal and Plant Health Agency, found evidence of carcasses scattered throughout the property, a large quantity of slurry and very little grass, hay or straw. The farmer told officers that he was struggling, had no money or support and was a carer to his elderly mother who had recently attempted suicide. Initially, he was too proud to accept help, but after numerous visits by an officer, he agreed to meet with Tir Dewi and CAB who were able to provide practical and financial assistance, which allowed the farmer to resolve non-compliance and become more financially and emotionally stable.

Isle of Anglesey: Imposition of additional charges for paying by card results in donation to local food bank

An Anglesey business was prosecuted for charging customers an additional amount if they paid by card resulting in a '£6000 donation' to the local Food Bank; further information and context can be found by clicking on the press release;

www.journaloftradingstandards.co.uk/consumer/anglesey-ts-secures-food-bank-donation/



Trading Standards Wales Week: “The Cost of Living”

The cost of living was the overarching theme for Trading Standards Wales Week.

Press releases, media messaging, LinkedIn messaging, podcasts on community radio and short videos highlighted the work of Trading Standards Wales in areas that seek to support some of the challenges associated with the cost of living crisis. Information was also shared locally by individual local authorities. An advert promoting TSW Week was played across a range of community radio stations: Each station has about 20,000 listeners, based on their own research.

Specific days were dedicated to food, fuel, loan sharks, misdescriptions and unsafe products.

TSW highlighted the good work of partners and partnership working, including some joint podcasts with national regulators.

Trading Standards Wales X (previously Twitter) data showed that during TSW Week impressions rose to 6,500, representing a 1,700% increase over previous months. The top impressions were on the themes of Loan Sharks and Fuel.

Powys County Council: Bulk Fuel Deliveries

Powys Trading Standards Service carried out bulk fuel tests finding one tanker was delivering 14 litres short measure in every 1,000 litres of central heating fuel. The cost to the individual consumer is estimated at a loss of approximately £10 per delivery of 1,000L. The trader is estimated to have gained approximately £8,250 over the year from short measure deliveries.