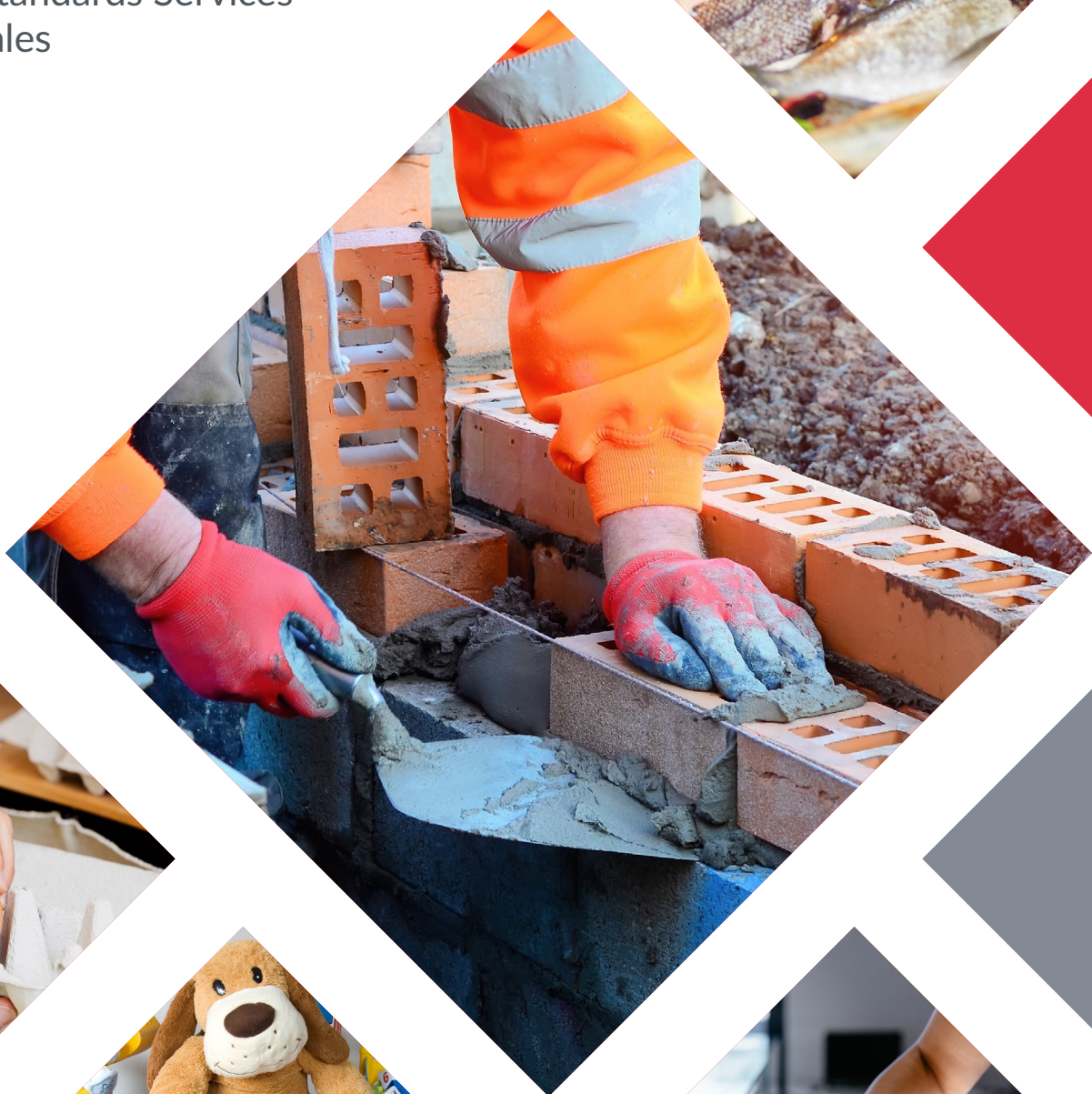


# Protecting the Public and Supporting Businesses – Trading Standards improving compliance and tackling crime

**ACTSO**  
Association of  
Chief Trading Standards Officers

Safonau Masnach Cymru  
Trading Standards Wales

The Impacts and Outcomes of  
Local Trading Standards Services  
2024/25 in Wales



## FOREWORD

The Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) represents heads of Trading Standards across England & Wales and currently 97% 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 the fourth report for Wales.

During 2024/25, Trading Standards services in Wales have prevented over £43 million of detriment to consumers and legitimate businesses.

The year 2024/25 was yet another busy one for Trading Standards Services in Wales with further increases in activity around illicit tobacco and vapes. Cheap, unsafe and counterfeit goods appearing to be a “good deal” continued to pose risks to consumers. The focus was on preventative measures to address consumer detriment which revealed consistent failures in relation to age restricted products together with an increase in non-compliances around food labelling. This shows the continued importance of providing good quality advice to support legitimate businesses and promote fair competition.

The report focuses on the three themes of Tackling Detriment and Preventing Harm, Supporting the Local Economy, and Promoting Health and Wellbeing. While Local Trading Standards Services remain stretched in terms of demand and pressures, they continue to have a big impact in protecting consumers and helping businesses. The headlines from this year’s report are:

- **Over £43 million detriment was prevented by Trading Standards’ actions.**
- **Revenue budgets were approximately £15.5 million.**
- **Overall staff numbers were 294.**
- **Referrals from Citizens Advice rose by nearly 38% to 25,263 compared to 2023/24.**
- **This year 164 people or businesses were convicted of offences.**
- **The amount of money saved for scam victims was over £2.5 million.**
- **Trading Standards provided over 1,700 hours of advice to businesses through primary authority partnerships.**

- **Over 18,800 compliance checks were carried out to ensure that businesses meet their legal responsibilities and to provide them with advice on site.**
- **Over 21,900 unsafe or non-compliant products were seized or removed from the marketplace.**
- **Almost 1,990 food premises were found to be in breach of food standards legislation and almost 2,900 businesses were found to be non-compliant with animal health and welfare requirements.**
- **Over 280 premises were checked to ensure they were not selling age-restricted goods, such as alcohol, tobacco and vapes to children.**
- **Over 747,000 illicit cigarettes, over 0.859 tonnes of illicit hand-rolling tobacco and over 28,000 illicit vapes were seized.**

Ongoing investment into the Trading Standards Profession in both the short and the long term, helps to support the Government’s aims of innovation and economic growth.

Trading Standards services in Wales provide a vital consumer protection role, tackling unscrupulous businesses who undermine consumer and market confidence. Officers work collaboratively and in partnership with other agencies and regulators to play their part in responding to serious organised crime and other priorities, related to safeguarding, the cost-of-living crisis, unsafe products and food safety. By sharing information and intelligence, they work dynamically to meet new and emerging issues.

In summary, Trading Standards provides a crucial link, on consumer and fair trading issues, between local communities across England and Wales. It has a unique regulatory infrastructure that can operate at local, regional, and national levels, which is key to its success. This means that regional investigations are effectively coordinated and delivered via and alongside the work of National Trading Standards. This includes a joined-up approach to scams, eCrime, estate agents and letting agents.

The impact of the work that Trading Standards has in Wales and the results and outcomes that are achieved are highlighted throughout this report. It demonstrates the huge value in protecting consumers, legitimate businesses and supporting public health.

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 across Wales.

Special thanks go to the 16 services covering 20 local authority trading standards services in Wales that submitted their data return. This covers almost 80% of all local authorities in Wales.

**Valerie Simpson**  
Chair of the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers

**Jacqui Thomas**  
Chair of Trading Standards Wales

## BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Local authorities in Wales were asked to submit data for the financial year 2024/25. The indicators measure demand and resourcing alongside key outputs and outcomes from Trading Standards' activity.

A total of 16 trading standards services contributed, covering 18 of 22 local authorities in Wales.

The responses cover an area with a population of over 2.5 million, or 79.6% 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 over **£15.5 million**, a 28% increase from last year.

Trading Standards Services received over **£845,000** in income from a variety of sources including National Trading Standards' grants, and Primary Authority income and metrology work, a 1.2% increase from last year.

Approximately 294 full-time employees were employed on Trading Standards work in Wales, of which over 90% (267) were operational staff.

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service referrals and notifications to Trading Standards rose by almost 38% to 25,263. This shows how many members of the public are seeking advice and support from Trading Standards on consumer related problems and issues. In addition, Trading Standards also received over 8,200 referrals from other partners. Whilst the demands on Citizens Advice has increased in the region, the level of frontline trading standards capacity has not increased to meet the extra demand on the service.

## SECTION ONE: TACKLING DETRIMENT AND PREVENTING HARM

Trading Standards' work can include providing information 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 to both consumers and legitimate businesses.

The Competition and Markets Authority's 2024 Consumer Detriment Survey, commissioned from the National Centre for Social Research estimated overall detriment to consumers across Great Britain at £71.2 billion.

### 1.1 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 2024/25, it is estimated that the actions of Trading Standards Services resulted in:

- **Almost £300,000** compensation being awarded to victims by the courts.
- **Over £1 million** prevented from being handed over to criminals.
- **Over £650,000** gained for victims through other processes, e.g. advice and intervention.

Despite reductions in direct compensation for victims and money prevented from being returned to criminals, when compared to last year, Trading Standards services in Wales continue to make a significant and growing impact. Compensation secured for victims through alternative routes has grown by 42.5%, demonstrating adaptability and a strong commitment to securing justice and redress. **Overall, Trading Standards actions in Wales prevented over £43 million of detriment to consumers and businesses.**

### 1.2 Stopping Fraudulent, Illegal and Unfair Trading

Trading Standards Services enforce almost 300 pieces of legislation. Trading Standards legislation carries a variety of penalties including imprisonment, fines, forfeiture of assets and undertakings to stop future non-compliance. Formal enforcement action is usually taken where people deliberately break the law, have caused serious harm, or have repeatedly ignored advice from officers. Serious investigations are complex, lengthy and can take several years to bring to trial.

In 2024/25:

- **Approximately 164** defendants were prosecuted. This is a 53% increase in the number of people or businesses convicted of offences, compared to 2023/24.
- **Prison sentences totalling almost 142 years** were handed down.
- **Defendants were ordered to pay over £60,000** in fines, a slight increase of nearly 18% compared to 2023/24.

- **Defendants were ordered to pay almost £1.4 million** in Proceeds of Crime confiscation orders, an increase of over 52% compared to last year.

Prosecutions have risen by 53%, reflecting increased enforcement activity, while proceeds of crime orders have increased by 52%, ensuring offenders face greater financial consequences for illegal trading. This rise is likely driven by more complex, higher-value cases, improved financial investigation capability, and greater multi-agency use of asset recovery powers, alongside a stronger emphasis on preventing criminals from profiting, and the prosecution of more asset-rich offenders. Together, these results highlight strong investigative performance, increased disruption of criminal activity, and a determined focus on protecting consumers and communities across Wales.



## 1.3 Protecting and supporting people experiencing fraud-related harm

Fraud is the most common crime in the country, accounting for 31% 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 shares intelligence with the National Trading Standards Scams and eCrime Teams who undertake disruption work such as removing telephone or payment systems and taking down websites. Most scams emanate from overseas where formal legal action by Trading Standards is not possible.

In 2024/25, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Local authority Trading Standards Services in Wales provided support to over 7,000 scam victims.
- Work to disrupt mass marketing fraud mailings and stop outgoing payments and mail saved consumers over £2.5 million.

The large percentage increase in scam victims supported compared with last year is mainly due to Anglesey Trading Standards' extensive preventative work with their local No Cold Calling Control Zones and widespread home visits providing advice and deterrent stickers - meaning far more residents are now identified, engaged, and protected from potential scams.

### Public Protection Partnership Working

**Neath Port Talbot Trading Standards** continues to play a key role in preventing harm and reducing detriment within the community through targeted engagement, intelligence-led enforcement and strong partnership working. Officers regularly deliver talks on fraud, scams and rogue trading to raise awareness and build consumer resilience, while close collaboration with the Community Safety Partnership, Serious and Organised Crime Board and other multi-agency groups helps ensure early identification of emerging risks. Following intelligence that drugs were being supplied from vape premises, Trading Standards has worked alongside the police on joint operations targeting illicit vape and tobacco sales - directly disrupting criminal activity and safeguarding local residents.

Protecting vulnerable people is central to this work. After concerns were raised about safeguarding failures within hotel and B&B accommodation, officers carried out follow-up visits to all 29 known premises alongside colleagues from policing, licensing, social services and The Children's Society. Businesses received guidance on recognising risk indicators for child sexual exploitation, now reinforced through a new online training resource developed with Trading Standards input.

### Metrology/Cost of Living

Around a quarter of Welsh households live in fuel poverty, with rates rising to over 40% in rural West Wales, where many homes rely on expensive, off-grid fuels such as heating oil or LPG - unprotected by Ofgem's price cap.

To protect these vulnerable households, **Pembrokeshire Trading Standards** tested 29 bulk fuel tankers over the past year to ensure accurate delivery and fair trading, preventing overcharging and supporting honest local suppliers.

As part of a wider all-Wales Trading Standards "fuel poverty" project, **Gwynedd Trading Standards** officers also checked prepacked coal sold in retail outlets and found some sacks to be over 5% short in weight.

Accurate weights and measures are vital to consumer fairness, especially for households struggling with rising energy costs. By tackling short-weight and unfair fuel sales, Trading Standards services safeguard rural consumers, protect limited household budgets, and promote trust and integrity in the Welsh energy market, contributing to the Welsh Government's Health & Wellbeing priorities.



During 2024-2025, **Gwynedd Trading Standards** also undertook a campaign specifically targeting grocery stores within the Authority to check for compliance in relation to the Price Marking Order 2004. A total of 116 inspections were undertaken, and 19 businesses were deemed not to comply with the Price Marking Order 2004 - either not displaying a price or displaying an incorrect price when checked at point of sale (16% failure rate).

### **Consumer Protection and Protecting Communities**

During 2024-25, **Anglesey Trading Standards** strengthened its prevention-led approach to tackling doorstep crime by expanding and reinforcing No Cold Calling Zones across the island. Through home visits, distribution of “No Uninvited Callers” stickers and community engagement under the DoorSmart/ DoorSafe initiative, officers helped residents feel more confident in refusing cold callers and identifying rogue traders. Working closely with North Wales Police, the service also supported joint enforcement activity where concerns were raised, ensuring that vulnerable people are protected and criminals cannot operate unchecked. This proactive programme is helping to reduce risk, empower communities, and stop harm before it occurs.

In addition, five criminal investigations led to five successful prosecutions in 2024/2025, demonstrating effective enforcement and positive outcomes for consumer protection in Anglesey.

**Carmarthenshire Trading Standards** is delivering significant protection for vulnerable residents through its trueCall© telemarketing fraud prevention programme. By combining call-blocking technology with monthly monitoring via Seraphimbeta© - an innovative system developed in-house - officers are able to identify early signs of contact with fraudulent callers and intervene before harm occurs. During 2024/25 alone, the programme blocked 31,374 nuisance calls, including 6,756 linked to known telemarketing criminals, resulting in 2,421 monitoring reviews and 74 direct welfare interventions where the team stepped in to protect individuals at risk. This proactive approach is estimated to have prevented around 40 fraud attempts and generated £184,554 in direct savings to vulnerable households, as well as a further £109,297 reduction in public service costs (NHS, Social Care & Policing). These outcomes demonstrate the powerful impact of Carmarthenshire’s prevention-led strategy - safeguarding residents, reducing financial loss, and easing pressure on frontline services.



**Rhondda Cynon Taf Trading Standards** has delivered strong results in tackling criminal traders and protecting residents from substantial financial harm. In January 2025, two brothers running a building company were sentenced to 32 months in prison and banned from acting as directors for 10 years after leaving multiple homes unsafe and consumers out of pocket by almost £125,000. One victim alone lost over £61,000 and was left living in an uninhabitable property without heating, a kitchen or basic security for over a year. This successful prosecution not only secured justice for those affected but sent a clear message that traders who exploit consumers, breach trust, and profit from poor or incomplete work will be held to account.

The service has also identified a concerning shift in offending patterns - with complaints now frequently involving traders with no previous adverse history and victims who would not traditionally be viewed as vulnerable. This evolving landscape makes the work of Trading Standards even more vital, and this case demonstrates the critical impact of early investigation, robust enforcement and the protection the service provides to households across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

**Torfaen Trading Standards** secured a three-year prison sentence after almost 300 accident-damaged vehicles were found to have been sold to unsuspecting buyers across the UK. The offender used fake social media profiles and false identities to register vehicles, hiding the fact they had been previously written off - a fraud valued at around £165,000. The case began when a 17-year-old buyer reported to Torfaen Trading Standards that a recently purchased car had broken down within minutes of leaving the seller. Faced with repair costs of over £1,300 and no refund offered, officers investigated and discovered the vehicle's accident history and launched a wider investigation.

Trading Standards officers later traced nearly 300 vehicles linked to the operation and identified that many buyers had no idea they were purchasing previously written-off cars. In one instance, a customer returned a faulty vehicle for repair only for it to reappear for sale a week later. Persistent investigation work, evidence gathering and consumer intelligence ultimately secured a conviction at Cardiff Crown Court under the Fraud Act 2006. The case illustrated the dangers associated with undisclosed accident-damaged vehicles and demonstrated the essential role Trading Standards played in protecting motorists and preventing unsafe cars from circulating on the market.



**SRS Trading Standards** successfully brought a rogue builder to justice after homeowners were left with losses exceeding £200,000 and months of stress, unfinished building work and unresolved disputes. Despite presenting himself as a reputable tradesperson, the builder engaged in fraudulent and misleading business practices, taking large upfront payments, failing to complete contracted work, and using money from new customers to placate existing ones - a classic 'rob Peter to pay Paul' pattern of deception.

Through a detailed investigation led by SRS Trading Standards, evidence was gathered showing the use of multiple trading names, new companies created to escape liability, and the use of stock photographs taken from online sources to falsely portray previous work. Witness statements demonstrated the scale of harm caused - unfinished projects, goods paid for but never supplied, substandard workmanship and failure to obtain planning or building control approval where required. As a result of the case built by SRS Trading Standards, the defendant pleaded guilty to 11 counts of fraud, one count of fraudulent trading and one unfair commercial practice offence. He received a custodial sentence of 43 months (3 years and 7 months). This case highlights the significant

role Trading Standards plays in protecting residents, tackling fraud, and preventing further financial harm in the community.

**Rhondda Cynon Taff Trading Standards** brought a successful prosecution after an unsafe second-hand car was sold to a consumer and later broke down within just 20 miles of delivery, causing a dangerous incident in peak-time traffic. The buyer reported severe mechanical faults, braking failure and smoke from the engine, later confirmed by an expert to be caused by a fractured suspension spring that left the vehicle un-roadworthy and at significant risk of causing a serious accident. Officers also found discrepancies between the vehicle's advertised description and its true specification, alongside failures to provide mandatory cancellation rights - all breaches of consumer protection law.

Following investigation and court action, the seller pleaded guilty to three offences, including misleading descriptions and supplying an unsafe vehicle. The case demonstrated clear public protection outcomes: unsafe trading practices were exposed, a dangerous car was removed from the road, and a conviction was secured.





A long-running investigation by **SRS Trading Standards** led to the conviction of a builder who faced 13 charges under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 and the Fraud Act 2006. Evidence showed a pattern of dishonesty, including grossly overcharging customers, exaggerating the urgency of work, recommending unnecessary repairs, and delivering construction of an unacceptably poor standard. The impact on victims was significant - with total losses of **£175,000** - and one of the individuals targeted was a 93-year-old woman. The court heard how vulnerable residents were exploited for financial gain, leaving them distressed, out of pocket and in some cases with homes left in a dangerous or deteriorated condition.

The offender was sentenced to **5 years and 2 months in prison**, reflecting the severity of the fraud, and a **10-year Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO)** was imposed to protect the public. The order prevents him from obtaining or carrying out any building, maintenance, gardening or home-improvement work

- directly or through others - anywhere in the UK. This case demonstrates the continuing value of Trading Standards enforcement in exposing rogue traders, safeguarding homeowners and preventing repeat harm long after sentencing.

**Ceredigion Trading Standards** successfully prosecuted a local individual for producing and selling counterfeit DVDs over a number of years through multiple websites and payment accounts. The operation involved the unauthorised use of major brand names including Netflix, Amazon, Disney, Sony and Universal, with the estimated market value of equivalent genuine goods totalling around **£150,000**. The defendant pleaded guilty to offences under the Trade Marks Act 1994 and received a 20-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months, along with a four-month curfew order and 15 Rehabilitation Activity Requirement days. Proceeds of Crime proceedings also took place to recover the financial benefit gained from the offending.

## SECTION TWO: SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Economic growth is a key priority of the Government and local authorities. To maximise economic growth, businesses need access to good advice about regulatory requirements, fair competition and to be confident that others will not be able to undercut them by breaking the law.

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

The importance of achieving economic growth means that Trading Standards' role in providing advice and support to businesses remains important.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, **81** organisations were benefiting from a direct primary authority partnership in Wales.

In **2024/25**, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Almost **1,700** hours were spent by Trading Standards advising Primary Authority businesses.
- Trading Standards responded to almost **1,200** requests for advice from businesses that were not part of the Primary Authority scheme. This is a reduction of over 30% from 2023/24. This may be because there is more information available online through sites such as Business Companion.

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

Unfair competition from those who fail to meet legal standards puts consumers at risk, can cause legitimate businesses to close and damages the prospects for growth.

Trading Standards Services follow a risk based and intelligence-led model. They will take action proportionate to the risk. This may include providing advice, seizing unsafe or illegal products, issuing fines and taking formal enforcement action.

In **2024/25**, it is estimated that across Wales:

- Over **18,800** 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. This is a 40% increase compared to 2023/24.

- Almost **4,900** businesses were subject to an intervention, such as advice, investigation, or referral. This is a 32% increase from 2023/24.
- Over **38,500** counterfeit products with a market value of over **£6 million**, which breach the intellectual property of legitimate businesses, were seized.

There was a 273% increase in the removal of counterfeit goods from 2023/24. However, we know this figure fluctuates due to local demand and has been higher in previous years.

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





## Business Advice

Following on from previous years, **Gwynedd Trading Standards** continue to make contact with all new businesses that come to their attention. It is their procedure to make contact with each trader - either from a distance or through an inspection in person - encouraging businesses to comply with regulations and follow good business practice. Gwynedd Trading Standards responded to a request from OPSS to take part in the E-bike/E-scooter project due to product safety concerns. 13 inspections to relevant businesses were undertaken, providing advice and guidance on Legislation with issues identified with one business in particular. Officers took part in the 'tick box' campaign in partnership with the Intellectual Property Office (IPO). As part of the project, 5 storage facilities were inspected, undertaking a full audit at 3 of those facilities. The purpose of the work being to improve industry standards, awareness and engagement with law enforcement agencies to deter counterfeit and illicit goods being stored at such facilities.

## Working Together for a Stronger Local Economy

**Neath Port Talbot Trading Standards** has an established relationship with NPT Economic Development (a business support service) and is consulted on businesses seeking grants for support and attends a business support event almost every month. Due to the presence of other organisations at these events, it leads to a wider network of contacts and raises the profile of the service.

**Blaenau Gwent Trading Standards** play an active role attending Blaenau Gwent Enterprise Partnership Group meetings which bring together business support groups such as Business Wales, Careers Wales, Development Back Wales and many more. Organised and facilitated by the Council's Regeneration and Innovation Officers, the forum aims to provide support to new businesses within Blaenau Gwent.

**Caerphilly County Borough Council's** annual Business Satisfaction Survey showed strong, consistent praise for Trading Standards engagement over the past year. Local businesses reported that support was professional, approachable and delivered with respect – but, crucially, also practical and useful. Many highlighted that the advice received helped them improve compliance, solve problems and operate more confidently, with several implementing recommendations that led to real, positive changes.

The results reflect the important role Trading Standards plays not only in ensuring fair, safe trading practices, but also in helping businesses grow, adapt and thrive within regulatory requirements. By maintaining strong relationships and offering clear, actionable guidance, the service is directly contributing to the stability of local enterprises and the strength of the wider Caerphilly economy.

## SECTION THREE: PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Trading Standards have a vital part to play by ensuring consumer products are safe, food is correctly labelled and animal health and welfare standards are maintained. This supports the health and well-being of communities which is a key priority in most local authorities.

Trading Standards also enforce a wide range of age restricted sales legislation to help to keep young people safe from vapes, cigarettes, alcohol, and knives.

### 3.1 Ensuring the Safety of Consumer Products

Product safety laws ensure that products do not cause fires, injuries or deaths. This is particularly important for goods such as electrical items, toys and cosmetics. Trading Standards will advise businesses and check goods at manufacture, import, wholesale and retail level.

In 2024/25, it is estimated that across Wales:

- **Almost 21,900 unsafe or non-compliant products were seized or removed from the marketplace.** This was a 227% increase on last year.
- **The savings to society, in terms of product value and injuries and fires prevented, is over £780,000.**

### 3.2 Protecting the food chain

Food prices remain high which 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 2024/25, it is estimated that across Wales:

- **Almost 1,990 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.** This was an 13% increase on last year and nearly 42% higher than in 2021/22. This is likely to relate to new allergen requirements for smaller businesses with an increased focus by local authorities on these issues.

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

In 2024/25, it is estimated that across Wales:

- **Almost 2,900 businesses were found to be in breach of animal health and welfare legislation.**

This represents a 129% increase from last year. Increased enforcement activity in Wales reflects a combination of factors, including the national drive to tackle illegal dog breeding, economic pressures affecting animal care standards, rising public reporting, and stronger multi-agency intelligence and intervention. While illegal breeding remains a major area of focus, wider welfare concerns linked to hardship and farm-level neglect are also contributing to the volume and seriousness of cases being brought forward.





### 3.3 Reducing the risk of children accessing age restricted products

Trading Standards Services play an important role in ensuring that children cannot buy products that have age restrictions, such as knives, alcohol, vapes, tobacco and fireworks. They also provide businesses with advice on how to comply.

In 2024/25, it is estimated that across Wales:

- **95 premises** were tested for alcohol sales.
- The average failure rate for alcohol test purchases was **12%**.
- **65 premises** were tested for tobacco sales.
- The average failure rate for tobacco test purchases was **2%**.
- **124 premises** were tested for vape sales.
- The average failure rate for tobacco test purchases was **5%**.

Overall, Trading Standards activity across Wales shifted in focus compared with the previous year. Alcohol compliance checks increased, with 95 premises tested compared to 72 in 2023/24, and the failure rate fell from 15% to 12%, indicating an improvement in responsible retailing. Tobacco testing was also undertaken, with a low failure rate of just 2%. In contrast, vape enforcement activity was much more extensive in 2023/24, when more than 422 premises were tested and 14.5% failed. In 2024/25, vape checks were far fewer at 124 premises, but compliance was significantly higher, with only 5% failing. The reduced scale of test purchasing work in some areas may also reflect operational challenges, particularly the ongoing difficulty in recruiting underage volunteers for controlled test purchase exercises - a common limitation reported by Trading Standards teams across Wales.

### 3.4 Reducing the availability of illicit products

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 which maintains pressures on local health systems. Packs of illicit cigarettes are often between a third and a half the price of legitimate products.

Illicit tobacco, vapes and alcohol can contain undeclared contaminants. Illicit vapes can also contain higher than permitted levels of nicotine including those that claim to be nicotine free. Tests on vapes identified other illegal substances, such as the drug, Spice.

The amount of tobacco and vape products seized has continued to increase significantly in recent years. This reflects the prevalence of vaping problems and the priority this work is being given within English local authorities reflected in the new Department of Health and Social Care funding to local authorities from 2025/26. To achieve comparable impact and to address the scale of illicit vape activity in Wales, Trading

Standards services require similar funding support from Welsh Government.

In 2024/25, across Wales:

- Over **747,000** illicit cigarettes were seized, together with **0.859 tonnes** of illicit hand-rolling tobacco worth a combined street value of over **£856,000**.
- Over **28,000** illegal vapes were seized by local authorities.

The Licensing Act 2003 has four objectives (preventing crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm). The Act allows for a review, and potential removal of a licence, by a local authority where there are failures to comply with the objectives. Activities by Trading Standards have resulted in **6 Licence Reviews** being carried out, an increase of 50% from last year which recognises the benefits of the regime as an effective enforcement tool.



## Illegal Tobacco and Vapes

Anglesey Trading Standards secured a forfeiture order in January 2025 for the destruction of **54,560 illegal vaping devices**, valued at more than **£750,000**, after they were discovered concealed behind sliced beef in a refrigerated wagon at the Port of Holyhead. The vapes were undeclared, undocumented and significantly non-compliant with UK regulations, including excessive tank capacity and missing mandatory warnings. Following seizure and investigation, the company responsible failed to provide evidence to support claims that the products were loaded in error and later withdrew cooperation when informed of the forfeiture application. The Court granted the order, enabling the devices to be destroyed and preventing them from reaching the UK market. The business was also ordered to pay £4,725.82 in costs. This case demonstrates the continued commitment of Anglesey Trading Standards to tackling illegal vape imports and highlights the value of collaborative work with UK Border Force in intercepting high-risk products that would otherwise reach consumers.

As part of a multi-agency operation involving **Pembrokeshire County Council Trading Standards**, Regional Investigators and local police the seizure of illegal tobacco, non-compliant vapes and vehicles from two retail premises took place in March 2025. Illegal products were found both on-site and concealed in vehicles used to replenish shop stock, and a substantial amount of cash believed to be linked to criminal activity was also recovered. Police additionally impounded one vehicle for having no tax or insurance. The operation formed part of an ongoing crackdown on the illegal tobacco trade, which is known to target children and low-income communities with cheap, unregulated products. Counterfeit vapes and cigarettes pose significant health risks due to excessive nicotine levels and toxic contaminants, including arsenic, lead and formaldehyde. Since Operation CeCe began four years ago, more than six million cigarettes have been

seized in Wales, with further enforcement planned. This action demonstrates the continued commitment to preventing youth access to tobacco products, safeguarding public health and disrupting organised criminal supply chains.

**Shared Regulatory Services (SRS)** continued to tackle illegal tobacco supply across Cardiff, Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan through joint operations supported by tobacco detection dogs. In 2024–25, officers seized **86,540 illegal cigarettes and 30kg of illicit hand-rolling tobacco** with an estimated street value of **£110,500**. While seizures disrupt availability at retail level, SRS recognises that organised supply chains can restock quickly, and therefore a more strategic approach is required to prevent ongoing harm.

This approach has already delivered major results. A long-running investigation - Operation USK - into the organised distribution of illegal tobacco and nitrous oxide culminated in the seizure of **£600,000 worth of tobacco and £12,500 of canisters**, and the successful prosecution of 11 defendants. Due to the scale and complexity of the case, it was heard through two Crown Court trials, with sentencing concluded in July 2024. In total, **six offenders received custodial sentences amounting to 27 years and 4 months**, while **five others received suspended sentences totalling over nine years, alongside 500 hours of unpaid work requirements**. The case demonstrates the scale of criminality linked to illicit tobacco and the critical role SRS plays in dismantling supply networks rather than just removing products from sale.

Since October 2023, **Newport Trading Standards** has led Operation Firecrest to tackle the supply of illegal tobacco and vape products across the city. Around 25 premises were actively trading in illicit goods. One enforcement tool used was the 3 month closure of premises under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. However, availability in the Magistrates' Court impacted the timely granting of orders.



To address this, Operation Frost was launched in late 2024 to increase the speed and volume of closure applications, aiming to disrupt the illegal retail supply chain. Working with the Council's Legal Team and Court administrators, dedicated weekly court slots were secured, enabling strategic planning and efficient preparation of evidence. From December 2024, closures were planned at a rate of two per week.

Following a closure, it was usual for a new shop to open nearby. A rapid response meant officers were able to close these too within a week, sometimes based solely on test purchases. This caused significant disruption, with offenders struggling to find suitable alternative premises. In some cases, illegal sales moved to the streets, with products stored in stash vehicles. These were robustly dealt with by Gwent Police, resulting in arrests and vehicle seizures.

By March 2025, 23 closure orders had been granted, two extended, and the estimated financial detriment to offenders reached £250,000. Eleven premises became vacant or changed use following enforcement or landlord intervention. The number of illegal shops was cut by up to 50%, with some areas seeing no illicit shops operating.

Operation Frost's success has been driven by strong collaboration with Gwent Police and the South Wales ROCU team. The operation continues alongside investigations, prosecutions, and landlord engagement. Public support has been strong, with improved intelligence including video footage and early alerts on new activity.

### Food Safety and Standards

This period saw an increase in investigations and convictions for exposing for sale of food past its use by date for **Rhondda Cynon Taff Trading Standards**. In one case, a local store was convicted for fourteen items, up to eight days past their durability date, despite an attempt to claim daily checks, and items being purchased by the store on a sale or return basis. Another prosecution related to the owner of a

village convenience store for placing unsafe food on the market, contrary to the General Food Regulations 2004. The case followed a complaint and subsequent inspection, during which officers found multiple products on display significantly past their use by dates - including items 132 and 153 days out of date. Additional stock was also found beyond best before dates, raising concerns about date-checking practices and stock rotation within the business. The business owner pleaded guilty and received a total financial penalty of over **£1,800**, comprising a fine, costs and victim surcharge.

**Blaenau Gwent** faces some of the highest deprivation levels in Wales, with low incomes, high child poverty, and rising costs for essentials like food, energy, and housing. As residents struggle to make ends meet, the work of Trading Standards has become increasingly vital.

**Blaenau Gwent Trading Standards** Officers are playing an important role in supporting residents through the cost of living crisis, while prioritising the protection of public health. Officers have visited local food banks to provide free advice, guidance and education on food safety compliance, ensuring donated food is safely labelled with allergens, "use by" and "best before" information. This proactive work helps prevent foodborne illness, safeguards vulnerable residents, and ensures that food banks can continue to support the community with confidence and safety at the forefront.

**Powys Trading Standards** inspected a number of premises to check that allergen systems are sufficiently rigorous to prevent a health risk. The findings were concerning, with 16% of food labels found to be incorrect and 13% of allergen systems checked were found to be inadequate. In addition, 6.4% of allergen notice requirements and 16% of menu descriptions were found to be absent or incorrect. Officers helped the businesses become compliant which reduced the risk to Powys's residents and also the many visitors to the area.



## Children's Safety

**Gwynedd Trading Standards** were actively involved in undertaking test purchase exercises across the county throughout 2024-2025, these products having an age restriction for reasons including harm to children's health - mostly vapes and tobacco products. Out of 54 test purchase attempts, 96% of the businesses were compliant in that they refused to sell the product without valid proof of identification. Gwynedd Trading Standards continuously reviewed intelligence reports submitted through various sources including North Wales Police, Crimestoppers and other local agencies as they play their part in combating the sale of dangerous products including illegal tobacco and vapes.

**Swansea Trading Standards** led a major multi-agency operation, Operation Grinch, targeting four toy warehouse sites on an industrial estate in Southall, London. The operation followed the seizure of thousands of counterfeit toys in Swansea over Christmas 2024, which prompted further investigation and intelligence-gathering to identify the wider distribution network supplying unsafe products across the UK. Officers from multiple councils and police forces supported the London raid, alongside brand representatives from major licensed toy manufacturers.

Several of the toys seized in Swansea had been packaged to resemble well-known brands, including Pokémon, Peppa Pig, Star Wars and Marvel, and were later found to contain banned phthalate chemicals linked to hormone disruption and increased cancer

risk. By tracking the supply chain beyond local retail outlets, Swansea Trading Standards played a pivotal role in disrupting large-scale distribution of dangerous counterfeit toys, protecting children and consumers nationwide and safeguarding legitimate businesses from brand infringement.

**Rhondda Cynon Taff Trading Standards** noticed an increase in (normally compliant) local traders purchasing items from online marketplaces, to meet demands in trends. Officers seized more than 100 counterfeit and unsafe toys from one local business after an inspection revealed a lack of required labelling, manufacturer information and safety assurance. Although the products carried CE markings, officers determined these were likely false and that the toys had not undergone appropriate safety testing. The items were sourced online via TEMU and were voluntarily surrendered, with the business owner expressing concern that the goods could have posed a risk to children.

Trading Standards officers provided full guidance on toy safety requirements, emphasising that businesses using overseas suppliers are classed as importers and must ensure products comply with UK law before sale. In recognition of the owner's cooperation, no enforcement action was taken, and the items were safely destroyed. The case highlights the risks associated with low-cost online imports, the importance of verifying product safety beyond CE/UKCA markings, and the value of early engagement between Trading Standards and local businesses to prevent harm.





## Safety at Ports

Work at Holyhead Port by **Anglesey Trading Standards** is ongoing to identify areas of work needing attention e.g. import/exports, live animals (including dogs) etc. Continuing to analyse manifest data and referrals from UKBA has been key to shape the delivery model and engagement with various businesses implicated and affected is ongoing.

## Animal Welfare

A woman from Cefn Fforest was sentenced at Merthyr Crown Court in October 2024 following an investigation by **Caerphilly Trading Standards** into unlicensed dog breeding, animal welfare, and misleading advertising offences. She received a 16-week prison sentence suspended for 52 weeks for causing unnecessary suffering to one of 29 dogs in her possession, alongside further convictions under animal welfare and breeding laws. She was also disqualified from dealing with animals for seven

years, and subject to Proceeds of Crime proceedings to recover the financial gain that she made from her criminal activities. The investigation revealed she had continued selling puppies online after her breeding licence expired in 2020. The dogs were rehomed through Hope Rescue, a South Wales-based animal welfare charity that provides care, rehabilitation and new homes for dogs in need.

**Ceredigion Public Protection** secured a strong enforcement outcome in November 2024 after over 500 sheep were found neglected across two holdings, deprived of water, left untreated for lameness and kept in sheds so deep with manure that their heads touched the roof. Despite 40 visits and repeated advice from officers, the owners failed to act, resulting in serious unnecessary suffering. Both defendants received custodial sentences, a four-year ban on keeping livestock, and financial penalties - a decisive response reflecting the severity of the neglect.