

Trading Standards Annual Report

To: Communities, Social Mobility, and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 16 January 2025

From: Executive Director of Place and Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides the committee with an update on Trading Standards service delivery over the last twelve months, focusing on the key areas of activity, performance, and outcomes.

In addition, the report provides assurance around the delivery of the statutory duties and responsibilities of the service.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

Note the contents of the report.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer, and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 This report details proposals that would impact on the following ambitions of the Council.

Ambition 1 - Net zero emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

1.2 Preventing and reducing environmental harm through the oversight of petrol tank installations and through vapour recovery inspection work at petrol forecourts.

Ambition 3 - Health inequalities are reduced.

1.3 Tackling the illegal sale of tobacco and alcohol products to children, helping to improve long-term health outcomes.

Ambition 4 – People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs.

- 1.4 The Service supports this ambition through a range of activities including:
- Food standards inspections and sampling in respect of areas such as allergen labelling requirements.
 - Removal of unsafe consumer products from sale
 - Licensing of petroleum sites and explosives storage
 - Raising awareness of current consumer safety issues
 - Ensuring regulated sports grounds are inspected and certificated as safe.
 - Intervening in rogue trading matters, helping to protect the independence of older and vulnerable residents in their own homes

Ambition 6 – Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services, and social justice is prioritised.

1.5 Contributing to economic resilience through helping local businesses with their legal compliance through advice and guidance to enable them to have the confidence to grow and invest, whilst also tackling problem businesses and criminal entities to ensure a level playing field within the local economy. In addition, ensuring animal disease control measures are in place within the farming sector, helps protect the rural economy from the devastation of a major animal disease outbreak.

2. Background

2.1 This report is the annual update on Trading Standards service delivery and provides assurance around the delivery of the statutory duties and responsibilities of the service. There are no decisions required by the committee resulting from this report.

- 2.2 On 1 April 2017, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) entered a collaboration with Peterborough City Council (PCC) to form a shared Trading Standards service. As part of this arrangement, PCC hosts the delivery of the Trading Standards function. The Service Director for Regulatory Services oversees the delivery of this service.
- 2.3 In 2021, the Committee agreed to extend this collaboration arrangement, and for it to be moved to a rolling term now that arrangements are well embedded, with an option for either party to terminate, should they choose to, having given the requisite notice. With the decoupling of most collaborative arrangements between CCC and PCC, the future service delivery arrangements for Trading Standards remains more uncertain than it did previously.
- 2.4 The service remains rooted in Cambridgeshire's local communities, with most officers based in Cambourne and carrying out inspections, sampling, and business compliance work across the county daily. Partnerships with Cambridgeshire's district councils remain strong, with close working in respect of areas such as illicit tobacco sales, food law compliance, licensing, and intelligence sharing.
- 2.5 The trade sector areas in Cambridgeshire generating the most complaints in respect of Trading Standards criminal breaches are:
- Transport (car sales and servicing)
 - Housing (home improvements and appliances)
 - Personal goods and services
- 2.6 The legislative areas enforced by Trading Standards which feature most frequently linked to complaints about trading practices are:
- Fair trading
 - Food Standards
 - Animal welfare and disease control
 - Age restricted sales
 - Consumer Product Safety
 - Doorstep crime (rogue trading)

3. Main Issues

3.1 Local Service Delivery

Age Restricted Products

- 3.1.1 The impact of early consumption of alcohol and tobacco products on children's future health and educational attainment are well documented, and as such, Trading Standards is committed to disrupting the illegal trade of underage sales of age restricted products.
- 3.1.2 During 2024, there has been a greater focus on the prevention of the sale of vapes to underage persons given the prevalence of vapes and their child-appealing flavours and designs. This contributing to Ambitions 3 and 4, helping to keep people safe. Premises were targeted based on their legislative compliance history and intelligence in respect of suspected underage sales. Four multi-premise test purchasing operations have been

conducted to date, resulting in three underage sales. One of the premises visited had already been prosecuted for underage sales of alcohol. Sanctions for sales have included warnings, a licence suspension following a licence review and prosecution.

Animal Health

- 3.1.3 Trading Standards has a role in helping protect the rural community. Farm inspections are conducted each year to check registration and movement records to ensure traceability in the case of an outbreak, and when diseases do occur, the team plays a key role in supporting the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) to contain and eradicate it. This year, a disease affecting cows, sheep, goats, alpacas, and llamas called Bluetongue has been in circulation, spread by midges. Trading Standards has been supporting APHA with local communications to ensure disease controls are adhered to. The service has also responded to four illegal dog importations – vital interventions to ensure Rabies do not enter the UK.
- 3.1.4 Trading Standards has responsibility for animal welfare standards on farms, tackling issues of neglect. Two welfare prosecutions have been brought by the Service this year, one resulting in a lifetime livestock ban for two animal keepers in Whittlesey for welfare and tuberculosis breaches, and one resulting in an 18-month conditional discharge following sixteen welfare offences.

Food Standards

- 3.1.5 Undeclared allergens pose a high risk to those with food allergies and intolerances, consequently improving legislative compliance in this area has been a priority for the service and contributes to Ambition 4. Recognising the risk to consumers with food allergies when they eat out, and the difficulties restaurants face with high turnover of staff, the service welcomes the profile raised by the Council's motion earlier this year. The motion encouraged restaurants and food counters to adhere to the principles of Owen's Law, which has not yet been enacted. This would require all such businesses to provide comprehensive allergen information on menus or as part of an allergen matrix on a food counter to avoid sole reliance on communication between serving staff and the kitchen. That does not negate the need for conversations with customers about allergies which remains important, and officers are now encouraging this dual approach when talking to businesses as part of the service's food inspections.
- 3.1.6 Two allergen complaints were received and investigated, one relating to almonds being present in a food described as 'nut free' and one relating to gluten being present in gluten-free sausages. As a result of this, a series of inspections took place at butchers, again checking the availability and accuracy of the information provided to customers. The team responded to a nationwide alert issued by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) relating to peanut contamination in a range of mustard products, contacting businesses and undertaking visits to ensure they are aware of product recalls and have removed affected products from sale.
- 3.1.7 Sampling of food has taken place from a variety of premises including restaurants, cafes, takeaways, butchers, and a baker to check for the presence of allergens. Of the sixteen samples taken, four were found to be unsatisfactory, in that they contained an allergen.

Where samples were found to be unsatisfactory, visits were conducted to inform businesses of the results and provide advice to ensure they are clear as to their legal obligations.

Illicit Sales

- 3.1.8 This year, the service has seized 8,500 illegal vapes from 14 Cambridgeshire businesses and 26,000 illicit cigarettes across the county. The team successfully prosecuted a premises in Fenland for the sale of non-compliant vapes and secured a Closure Order for a premises which had persisted in selling illicit tobacco despite three successive raids. The police were assisted to secure a Closure Order for a premises in Whittlesey. These operations are multi-agency, collaborating with the police, HM Revenue and Customs and district council teams. The relationships forged with these partner agencies by the service is recognised as best practice and as such the service was asked to present to a National Enforcement Team, which was keen to learn about developing this level of engagement with local partners. The collaboration has contributed towards Ambition 6, the provision of good quality public services, while supporting Ambitions 3 and 4 with regards to health.

Licensing Regimes

- 3.1.9 Trading Standards administers the explosives (fireworks) storage licensing regime, ensuring the grade of fireworks offered for sale are stored safely and legally for consumers to purchase. Two separate seizures of fireworks have taken place so far this year, with rockets seized from a licensed premises in Chatteris due to unsafe storage arrangements, and the second from a premise in Whittlesey due to it being unlicensed.
- 3.1.10 A further licensing regime is administered in respect of petroleum storage and site safety at petrol stations. The service is also involved when new petrol stations are being built or redeveloped. One of the duties is ensuring that the approach to construction prevents leakages of fuel into the ground to avoid resulting contamination and environmental damage. Two sites are currently under construction in Cambridgeshire and officers are involved at every stage of the process. The service delivers the vapour recovery function for three district councils while at forecourts in their areas contributing to Ambition 1, ensuring fuel vapours are being captured on site rather than released into the atmosphere. This is done on a chargeable basis.

Product Safety

- 3.1.11 A range of product safety warnings have been shared through the Council's media channels and school's newsletter on products posing a particular risk to young children. These have included water beads, magnetic balls, and a recall of cargo bikes. In respect of students, social media has been used to provide allergen advice when ordering fast food.
- 3.1.12 E-scooters and e-bikes, in particular their batteries and chargers, continue to pose a significant risk to consumers. The tragic house fire in Cambridge in 2023, which resulted in the loss of three lives, is a stark reminder of the risk that batteries can pose. A particular issue is the prevalence of unsafe/counterfeit chargers and replacement batteries being sold online, as well as the use of incompatible chargers. The Council has issued a range of communications to warn residents about these risks, some of which have been in

conjunction with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue. Fires caused by unsafe e-bike conversions are also a concern, and as a preventative measure supporting Ambition 4 officers have visited all businesses in Cambridgeshire that modify bikes to provide them with guidance on their legal responsibilities and safety requirements.

- 3.1.13 Lithium-Ion batteries are posing problems not just for e-scooters and bikes, but for other household appliances, such as cordless vacuums. The service participated in a regional test purchasing project sampling products from well-known online platforms. Every product tested by the Trading Standards authorities within the region failed. The Cambridgeshire product was a replacement battery and charger falsely branded with a well-known vacuum brand. The charger was found to be dangerous, and the battery was non-compliant. The charger was purchased via an online platform and the seller purported to be based in England, but further investigation revealed it was a direct import from China, with no UK importer. The web platform was required to withdraw the products from their website and contact all purchasers. Current legislation does not make online selling platforms responsible for goods fulfilled and distributed by them. Such is the scale of the problem, a Council motion recently called for a better regulatory framework for these products, backing a campaign being led by Lord Foster in the House of Lords.
- 3.1.14 Referrals in relation to local businesses importing or retailing consumer products continue to be received from the Office of Product Safety and Standards and Trading Standards located at ports where these goods enter the country. In the past year, the service has received referrals about cosmetic products, electrical items, toys, and nursery goods, all suspected of being non-compliant with legislative requirements. Among these was a referral concerning a baby bouncer that lacked paperwork demonstrating UK compliance and latterly it transpired had been tested against the wrong standard. The business received advice as to the corrective action required before they could be sold.

Primary Authority Business Advice

- 3.1.15 The Primary Authority Scheme is a national scheme whereby businesses can form partnerships with local authorities for chargeable business advice on legislative compliance. The service's Primary Authority business advice team provides advice to both major UK businesses and small local businesses, helping to support innovation through the interpretation of complex legislation.
- 3.1.16 The service has been supporting a new growth industry, insect protein for use as both animal and human food. This has involved extensive liaison with Government departments and led to a member of the team being invited to present at a trade conference held at the University of Cambridge on the current regulatory framework. The service has also become recognised for its expertise on age verification software, supporting the development of the latest Artificial Intelligence (AI) age verification software through liaison with Government departments on the current regulatory framework. The service currently has 137 Primary Authority business clients. This work supports the Council's Economic Development Strategy.

Rogue Trading

- 3.1.17 Following a criminal investigation, the service successfully prosecuted a plumber from Hardwick for fraudulent trading. He had taken thousands of pounds from customers and

then failed to do the work, leaving many vulnerable people without essential facilities. He was given a three-year custodial sentence and ordered to pay compensation to his victims. This contributes to Ambition 4.

Safety at Sports Grounds

3.1.18 The Service is responsible for issuing safety certificates for regulated sports grounds and stands, and for inspecting them to check compliance with safety requirements. There has been close working with Cambridge United Football Club on its forthcoming plans to redevelop the ground, including the rebuilding of two stands which would improve facilities and increase capacity by 50%. Similarly, officers have been involved in the early stages of Cambridge City Football Club's development of its new stadium in Sawston. The service has been collaborating with the Jockey Club regarding the July Racecourse in Newmarket and Huntingdon Racecourse, as each course requires a safety certificate for the stands.

Weights and Measures

3.1.19 Trading Standards has during the year checked the accuracy of bulk fuel lorries which deliver domestic heating oil and found compliance to be good. In respect of fuel dispensers on petrol forecourts, accuracy overall was good, though on one forecourt most of the dispensers were inaccurate, meaning that the equipment could not be used for trade purposes until retested and found to be within the legally allowed tolerances.

3.2 National Picture

Protect Duty

3.2.1 The Service has been tracking the development of the 'Protect Duty' or Martyn's' Law. The Bill, which is before parliament, is intended to ensure public premises and events are better prepared for terrorist attacks, requiring them to take reasonably practicable steps to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack and reduce physical harm. Though there was the potential for the Government to give the responsibility for enforcement of the legislation to local authorities, it has been decided that it will be managed at a national level by the Security Industry Authority. It is anticipated that the legislation is unlikely to come into force for a couple of years and will be preceded by national guidance and training events.

Food Standards Delivery Model

3.2.2 The FSA is revising the delivery model for regulators in respect of food standards and food safety, with changes expected to be implemented in spring 2025. It is food standards that is relevant to Trading Standards. There is to be a focus on visiting those businesses deemed to present the highest level of risk and which have the lowest record of compliance, using intelligence received or generated, rather than basing annual inspection plans on the inspection frequencies detailed in the national Food Law Code of Practice. As a principle, this will align with how the service operates currently for non-food standards work. All new food businesses (several hundred register in Cambridgeshire each year) will also need to be contacted within a specified time to prioritise a visit or other intervention at the premises.

Single Use Vapes

3.2.3 The national ban on single use vapes comes into force in June 2025, followed by a Tobacco and Vapes Bill which restricts flavours, packaging, display, proxy sales and gradually increases the age to buy. Trading Standards work in this area will contribute towards Ambition 3 and 4.

Funeral Homes

3.2.4 There is expected to be a public consultation in respect of legislative controls to regulate the funeral sector, this being largely unregulated at present, and was the subject of a police investigation in Hull earlier in the year, following serious concerns in respect of dignity of the deceased, traceability, and the selling of funeral plans.

3.2.5 Trading Standards services nationally report impacts and outcomes data to the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers to enable a national perspective in the [ACTSO Report](#). During 2023, Trading Standards prevented over £905m of detriment to consumers, which equates to £8.39 saved for every £1 spent. Almost 72,000 compliance checks to ensure businesses meet their legal responsibilities were carried out, and over 1,500,000 illegal disposable vaping products were seized. Over 22,000 hours of advice to businesses were provided through Primary Authority partnerships and almost 2,900,000 unsafe or non-compliant products were seized or removed from the marketplace.

3.3 Performance and Resources

3.3.1 The service met all its 2023/24 annual national performance reporting requirements. Due to the breadth of the Trading Standards service's remit, the work of the service is overseen by several national bodies, each with the ability to raise performance concerns in respect of their areas should they not be satisfied with the performance of the service. No concerns have been raised. The oversight adds a level of reassurance to the Council. Key national partner agencies include:

- Animal Health
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Food Standards Agency
- Office of Product Safety and Standards
- Sports Grounds Safety Authority

3.3.2 Performance in respect of business compliance levels for Q1 and Q2 is higher than last year, and above target. Chargeable services income through the Primary Authority Scheme has increased during 2024 compared to Q1 and Q2 of last year and is expected to exceed both the target and last year outturn at the end of the year.

3.3.3 Table 1 provides an outline of some of the outputs and outcomes of the service for 2023/24.

Incoming service demands	
Complaints of criminal conduct received from the public via Citizens Advice Consumer Service (each of which is assessed for criminality, evidential threshold, and prioritisation against a matrix)	2,278
Referrals from external agencies requiring action (e.g. police, HMRC, Licensing, OPSS, FSA)	431
Requests for chargeable business advice from small businesses	103
No. of Primary Authority Partnerships who have signed up to ongoing compliance advice from the team (tend to be larger national/international businesses)	125
Outputs and outcomes	
Hours of Primary Authority business advice provided	976
No. of inspections	641
No. of convictions	3
No. of months imprisonment (immediate and suspended)	134
No. of formal Cautions	4
No. of food written warnings	67
No. of feed written warnings	16
No. of animal keeper banning orders	1
No. of fair-trading written warning	63
No. of improvement notices (food standards and animal welfare)	4
No. of counterfeit products removed from sale	1,746
No. of vapes seized (units)	9,947
No. of illicit cigarettes seized (sticks)	86,540

Table 1 - Trading Standards outputs and outcomes 2023/24

- 3.3.4 The Cambridgeshire Quality of Life Survey findings for 2024 rated the satisfaction level for the Trading Standards service as 70%, which represented 3% down on 2023. The range of satisfaction levels for the Council's services resulting from the 2024 survey is 21% to 85%.
- 3.3.5 The CCC budget for Trading Standards service delivery in 2023/24 was £715,248, and the financial outturn at year end was within budget. The predicted outturn for 2024/25 is also predicted to be within budget. Gross service costs are offset by licensing revenue from petroleum and explosives (fireworks), weights and measures testing, Primary Authority chargeable business advice, chargeable vapour recovery services and recovered proceeds of crime income.
- 3.3.6 In respect of staffing, there are 14.48 full time equivalent posts servicing Cambridgeshire Trading Standards service delivery, including within which are 1.26 full time equivalent vacancies. This number includes trainees, back-office staff, and management. The service has a programme of trainee and apprentice recruitment in place to mitigate the risk presented by significant numbers of staff retirements in the coming years. Training and development of staff is supported by a regional training coordinator along with low-cost training developed for the needs of Trading Standards services across the region.
- 3.3.7 Procurement of a replacement database will be necessary in the next financial year as the

current database is being phased out by the supplier. PCC will be leading this procurement, and potential new suppliers are being explored.

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 The Trading Standards service continues to operate in an evolving regulatory landscape, where flexibility and adaption are necessary to meet future requirements. The regulatory remit of the service is wide, bringing with it both resourcing challenges but also opportunities for the service to positively contribute to a significant number of the Council's Ambitions.
- 4.2 Collaboration with partner agencies has been key to securing successful outcomes to many areas of the service's regulatory activity and will remain equally important in the future, especially in sectors where organised crime is prevalent.

5. Significant Implications

There are no significant implications resulting from this information report.

6. Source Documents

- 6.1 Reports on referenced cases:
 - [Suspension of Alcohol License](#) (Cambridge Independent)
 - [Prosecution of Licenced Premises](#)
 - [Lifetime Livestock Ban](#)
 - [Prosecution of Plumber](#)
- 6.5 [Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers Impacts and Outcomes Report 2023-24](#)