






# Trading Standards




## Summary of performance indicators April- September 24-25

### Priority Area 1: Protecting the most vulnerable





### Priority Area 2: Helping businesses thrive and grow

### Priority Area 3: Improving wellbeing and public health

Description	2023-24 totals	YTD	progress
Financial impact of scam interventions with vulnerable people	£3,191,024	£2.168.405	
No. of vulnerable residents supported	952	402	
No. of people who have engaged with webinars & associated YouTube content	New indicator	766	
Estimated financial impact of disruptive activities	New indicator	Calculator under development	
No. of disruptive activities undertaken	New indicator	New indicator. Minimum 27	

Description	2023-24 totals	YTD	progress
Number of Primary Authority Partnerships	162	152	
Business Satisfaction	New indicator	100%	
% of requests for business advice completed within 10 working days	69%	77%	



Description	2023-24 totals	YTD	progress
No. of premises tested for selling age restricted products (failures)	124 (16)	127 (44)	
No. of illegal goods seized	119,589	110,481	
No. of unsafe or non-compliant imported goods prevented from entering the Country (time lag)	71,641	66,004	
Percentage of food businesses that improve or maintain their compliance score after being subject to an official control.	New indicator	New indicator	





## Service Priority Area 1: Commentary

Protecting the most vulnerable. Tackling fraudulent, illegal, and unfair trading practices with a particular focus on disruptive activities

### **Commentary**

As a result of a diverse range of innovative interventions undertaken by the Service, residents saved over £2.1 million in the first half of the year (compared to just over £3.1m in the whole of last year). Since April 402 individuals targeted by unscrupulous criminals received tailored one to one support (see case study below).

The very strong start to the year was supported by a public campaign designed to raise awareness of our offer of free call blockers and to encourage greater take up. One outcome of this campaign was identification of a significant opportunity to improve our resident experience, moving away from a time-consuming paper-based process to an automated system. Anyone, be they a resident, carer, family member, fire officer or charity worker can now request a call blocker and/or door camera with the click of a button. This, combined with automation of the back office, means we can process requests in a more timely manner. We have installed 22 door cameras in the past 6 months which is more than in the whole of last year. There are now a total of 75 door cameras installed by the Service in the homes of our most vulnerable residents. We have also installed 80 call blockers this year, with a total of 710 active call blockers at the end of September preventing over 43,000 thousand scam and nuisance calls from reaching vulnerable residents.

Our quarterly webinars continue to go from strength to strength with over 700 people attending and being educated in topics such as AI & Cyber-crime, Courier Fraud and Doorstep Crime. Similarly, our YouTube channel for those unable to attend on the day has been viewed 1,934 times. All our webinars utilise live British Sign Language interpretation and subtitles and similarly our easy read resources (such as credit card sized pre-shopping advice) is proving incredibly popular.

We are fortunate to have a strong cohort of eager, enthusiastic and passionate volunteers who continue to be active within their communities, contributing over 4,000 hours of their time helping spread anti-scam messages through talks, writing articles for community and special interest publications and sharing their knowledge through local radio. They are integral to making their local communities more confident and resilient to frauds.

Surrey County Councillor Kevin Deanus, Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue, and Resilience, and Dan Quin, Surrey Chief Fire Officer, Surrey Fire and Rescue became SCAMBassadors. Formal recognition of how they use their profile and influence to help spread critical messages and champion the work of Trading Standards. The leadership of Kevin and Dan has also meant that the entire Surrey Fire and Rescue Service recently received recognition as a SCAM Organisation. Our next campaign is Safeguarding Adults Week (w/c 18 Nov). Our various social media channels continue to deliver effective and efficient communications to local communities, residents and partners, from product recalls which pose a risk of injury or death, to alerting the Neighborhood Watch Alert Network to criminals operating within their areas. Our most popular posts are those which give a glimpse into the workings of Trading Standards. A recent post highlighting how we use traditional methods to test petrol pumps for accuracy generated almost 21,000 impressions (see picture in priority area 3).

## Commentary Continued

The Service is developing its' use of **disruption** as a tool to address criminality and has restructured to deliver disruption activity more effectively across the range of our work. We are now developing ways to record and report disruptions, and on definitions that can be used to consistently measure the impact of these disruptions, working with partners in the police and across our profession nationally to ensure robustness of our approach. Whilst the numbers are likely to increase once we have a robust recording/reporting system in place, at least 27 disruptions have occurred in the first half of the year. They include 19 seizures of illegal tobacco +/- vapes; and several multi-agency operations where multiple types of criminality of concern to different partners is approached at the same time to have more appropriate impact. In one operation suspects known to us for doorstep/home improvement fraud were arrested for this and benefit fraud alongside their vehicles being seized. In July the Service provided evidence enabling Buckinghamshire Council to seek court orders to close two businesses for three months who were repeatedly supplying illegal tobacco. The closure orders were granted and both businesses at those premises remain closed. The action was positively welcomed by local communities and based on a very conservative methodology in use by Newport Trading Standards the financial impact of those two disruptions is estimated to be £90,000.

The first half of the year has seen some signs of progress within the **court system**, unfortunately countered by capacity issues within the prison service affecting sentencing options for judges. By the end of September, the two longer trials scheduled had both started, with one defendant being found guilty after trial and the other pleading guilty on the first day of his trial (despite the four-year wait from the original trial date).

**Prosecution outcomes:** To the end of September, six defendants have been convicted (compared to a total of 4 last year) coming from five guilty pleas and one person being found guilty following a five-day trial. The convictions relate to the supply of illegal tobacco, money laundering, fraud and unfair trading offences. Not all sentencing has been completed but sentences to date include 9 months suspended imprisonment, 200 hours of community orders, 20 rehabilitation days and fines.

41 **investigations** have been completed in the first half of this year into a range of illegal and unfair trading practices including unfair trading, fraud, underage sales, money laundering, supplying illegal tobacco and vapes.

**Case study of tailored support:** The Trading Standards Prevention Team were contacted by concerned neighbours of an older resident who was being targeted by a trader without any valid identification or documentation. The resident required a fuse box replacement, for which the trader demanded a total payment of £5920.20. The trader did not replace the fuse box and the resident was left without any electricity to his property. In addition to this doorstep fraud the resident was also targeted by online criminals who had obtained access to the resident's home computer. Due to a series of life changing events the resident was finding it difficult to resolve these issues independently. Following assistance and interventions by the Trading Standards team remedial electrical work has been completed to make the property safe and a call blocker installed to prevent nuisance and fraudulent telephone calls.





## Service Priority Area 2: Commentary

Enabling businesses to get the help and support they need to thrive and grow. Delivering public protection through supporting businesses to comply with their legal responsibilities and ensuring a level playing field.

## Commentary

There were currently 152 live **Primary Authority Partnerships** at the end of September, we now have 156 (October 2024). The Business environment continues to change with businesses merging, moving and being mindful of their expenditure. Within our Single point of Contact Network, we have retained Woking Environmental Health for 3 Partnerships and completed the transition of the remainder. Although we have recruited West Northamptonshire and Eastleigh Environmental Health to join the network spare capacity in this regulatory area remains limited. Surrey Fire and Rescue are in the process of reviewing their Primary Authority provision to determine their path for the future.

In the meantime, we have been reviewing the existing partnerships to ensure they deliver benefit and actively recruiting to trading standards partnerships. Four further partnerships have been revoked since the beginning of April for a variety of reasons (business finances, receiverships, non-responsive). Since April we have welcomed Capello Ltd, The Foodservice Packaging Association, Quantum Solutions Group Ltd and QA Schemes Support Services Ltd. We continue to negotiate with other businesses and are confident that we will meet the year target for numbers of partnerships.

The Association of Convenience stores was proud to mark 10 years of our Primary Authority Partnership, reflected in a changed the branding on their assured advice:



We are reducing the number of Pay As You Go (PAYG) partnerships (unless there are exceptional circumstances) through the promotion of our minimum 5 hours option at renewal. To date this had reduced the PAYG partnerships from 42% to 27% of the overall group which helps us with budget forecasting.

The business team continues to work with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to provide a legal backstop service with 1 new referral and 4 currently under investigation. We continue to participate in the ASA Pricing in Advertising Expert Group and have met with the ASA and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute to discuss the planned Digital Markets, Competitions and Consumers Act 2024. We have also provided opinions relating the advertising of offensive weapons, mystery shopper pharmaceutical purchases and claims relating to the Cancer Act 1939.

# Commentary Continued

Following a successful pilot of a legal backstop arrangement with the Office for Students, Last year the funded contract has been confirmed for 24/25. To date the referred establishments have positively worked with us delivering improved contract terms and conditions for students. Since April, we have received 5 new referrals and the Office for Students has published the first 3 cases which received industry media attention.

[Trading Standards referrals see terms in student contracts changed at three higher education providers - Office for Students](#)

## Case study 1:

A company supported by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards since its inception through the Primary Authority scheme recently sought advice on placing its digital vending machines in a national pub chain. These machines are equipped with cutting-edge digital age verification software to ensure only eligible individuals can purchase age-restricted products. After evaluating the technology in pub environments and considering suitable placement options, the decision was made to initially launch the vending machines with non-age-restricted items such as playing cards, sunglasses, and games. With this innovative pivot, the area manager for the pub group was highly impressed with the concept and facilitated an introduction to key decision-makers at the national chain. As a result, the chain immediately requested an additional 50 machines. With the support of trading standards, this development has paved the way for a future rollout of potentially thousands of machines nationwide.

*"Protecting young people from accessing age-restricted products has always been central to our mission. The expertise and guidance provided by Bucks and Surrey Trading Standards have been instrumental in our journey, allowing us to explore new opportunities with confidence and a strong foundation of compliance. By working closely with the officers, we've been able to innovate and scale our business while ensuring compliance in an agile, rapidly evolving market,"* said **Harry Maitland**,

Some examples of our social media posts targeted towards businesses are shown below:





### Service Priority Area 3

Improving wellbeing and public health; tackling the supply of unsafe, dangerous or age restricted products and working to maintain the integrity of the food chain, including food quality, nutrition, and animal health.

## Commentary

**Age restricted sales** – 127 underage test purchases have been made, with the priority remaining on vapes (93) but with a number of test purchases of other products, sometimes at the request of or alongside partners (police, fire, and licensing teams) including alcohol (33% sales), knives (10% sales) and 1 gaming machine (where the underage volunteer was able to get access to the machine). Where sales are made to the underage volunteers, these are followed with investigation and licence reviews are requested when appropriate. Since April, 11 warnings have been given to premises who have sold vapes to under 18's. All will be re-tested to ensure that they have taken on the advice given.

We are continuing to tackle the sale of **illicit tobacco** focusing on disruptive activities, including locating and seizing illegal stock, with over 80,000 cigarettes and over 23kg of hand rolling tobacco seized in the first half of the year. For the first time the Service, working in collaboration with partners, pursued Closure Orders as a way of disrupting the illegal tobacco trade. In two cases where illegal tobacco (and illegal vapes) were repeatedly being supplied over a sustained period of time and the illegal tobacco was hidden in a variety of sophisticated hides, the businesses were shut for 3 months by court order. One of the local news articles that ran about it can be accessed here: [Two shops selling illegal vapes shut down by council | Bucks Free Press](#). Following a separate investigation, a business and it's Director pleaded guilty and were fined for supplying illegal tobacco. A local news article about this case, including pictures of the hide used for the tobacco can be found here: [High Wycombe shop owner fined £1,000 for selling illegal cigarettes | Bucks Free Press](#)

**Preventing unsafe items being imported through Heathrow:** We have stopped over 66,000 unsafe and non-compliant items entering the UK market since April 2024, these included cosmetic products, nutritional supplements without compliance documentation and unsafe electrical goods.

With high energy prices continuing to put household budgets under pressure **electric blanket safety testing** was undertaken in September with 5 venues across Buckinghamshire and Surrey. Test days were completed at Walton-on-Thames, Farnham, Epsom, High Wycombe and Aylesbury. 55 blankets were tested with a failure rate of 49% which is an improvement on the previous failure rates of around 70% - 80%, but still remains unacceptably high. We were able to replace failed blankets due to a donation from our Primary Authority Partner Dreams.

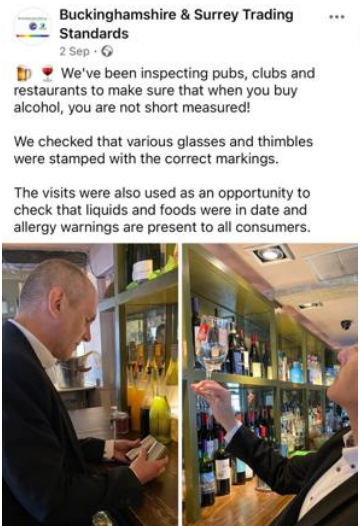
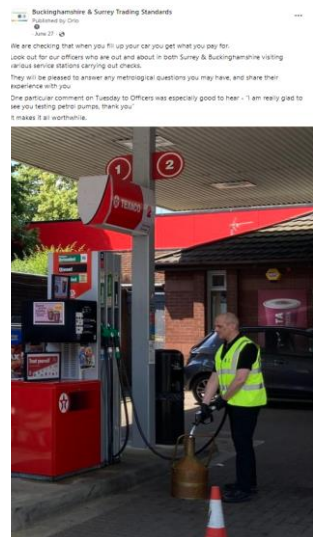
# Commentary Continued

**Ensuring people get what they pay for** is important whilst household budgets remain under pressure and the Service has been testing petrol pumps and pub measures for accuracy. We will shortly also be testing more weighing machines used for selling food by weight. As well as getting a lot of feedback whilst our officers are out doing this type of work, our social media posts also generate positive curiosity with comments including “What are those?” referencing our brass check pump measures, “What are you doing” and “It’s really good to see you out testing petrol pumps, thank you”.

**Food work** – Following the Food Standards Agency issuing new industry guidance, we conducted a project to look at the safety of slushie drinks and candy floss showed that very few sellers were following voluntary labelling advice. Slushies contain glycerol to create the slush effect and prevent complete freezing. Whilst of low toxicity, large quantities of glycerol consumed by young children over a short period of time can lead to glycerol intoxication, causing shock, hypoglycaemia and loss of consciousness, in two cases this has led to hospitalisation, so it is important that parents, especially of very young children, are aware. We are working with the retailers concerned to improve their labelling.

**Animal Health & Welfare** – In September Surrey was brought into the **Bluetongue** ‘restricted zone and infected area’. This was shortly followed by Buckinghamshire being brought into the area which now covers most of the eastern area of England and is gradually spreading west. The aim of the zone is to contain and slow the spread of the disease, which is spread by an infected midge biting an animal. The disease affects cattle, sheep and camelids (Alpacas and Lamas). Trading Standards are using materials provided by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) on our website and via social media to provide information and guidance to livestock keepers on what it means to be in this zone and what symptoms to look out for in their animals. Using APHA information ensures we are providing current and consistent information.

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