

Trading Standards: A Briefing for Local Authority Leaders

What is Trading Standards?

Trading Standards is the local authority service responsible for protecting consumers, supporting legitimate businesses, and ensuring fair and safe trading. It enforces a wide range of laws designed to keep people safe, prevent fraud, and maintain confidence in local and national markets.

Trading Standards officers work across communities, businesses, borders, and sectors — often behind the scenes — to prevent harm before it occurs.

What Does Trading Standards Do?

Trading Standards services typically enforce around 300 pieces of legislation, covering areas such as:

Protecting Consumers

- Tackling scams, fraud, rogue traders and doorstep crime
- Investigating unsafe or illegal goods (including online sales)
- Supporting vulnerable residents who are disproportionately targeted
- Preventing short measures of goods sold
- Ensuring items are correctly described and priced

Protecting Public Health and Safety

- Product safety (toys, electrical goods, cosmetics, furniture, fireworks, illegal and counterfeit goods)
- Food safety (Food labelling, information, allergens, composition, imported food)
- Agriculture and animal health and welfare (including disease control, feed safety and hygiene)
- Underage sales of age-restricted products (alcohol, tobacco, vapes)

Supporting Legitimate Businesses

- Advice and guidance given to help businesses comply with the law
- Primary Authority partnerships that provide assured regulatory advice
- Creating a level playing field so responsible businesses can thrive

Supporting Wider Council Priorities

- Reducing health inequalities and preventing harm
- Safeguarding vulnerable people and communities
- Contributing to economic growth, fair competition, and community safety

How Trading Standards Works

Trading Standards is increasingly intelligence-led and partnership-based, working with:

- Police and national enforcement bodies
- Public health, safeguarding and housing teams
- National regulators and government departments
- Other local authorities, local regulators and regional services

Much of its work is preventative — stopping harm before it escalates into crime, ill-health, or financial loss.

Why Trading Standards Matters

1. It Protects Residents — Especially the Most Vulnerable

Older people, people with disabilities, and those facing financial hardship are more likely to be targeted by scams and unsafe trading practices. Trading Standards prevents exploitation and serious harm.

2. It Saves Public Money

Early intervention prevents costly consequences for social care, health services, housing enforcement, and the criminal justice system.

3. It Supports Local Economies

Effective enforcement reassures consumers and protects honest local businesses from being undercut by rogue traders and illegal operators.

4. It Delivers Statutory Duties

Councils have a legal responsibility to enforce consumer protection and product safety legislation — Trading Standards delivers this on their behalf.

5. It Responds to Rapid Change

Unsafe products, disease outbreaks, online marketplaces, social media scams, and complex supply chains mean Trading Standards is more important than ever in the modern economy to respond to local and national crises.

What You Can Do

You play a vital role in enabling effective Trading Standards services. Practical actions include:

- **Champion the service locally**
Promote the role and achievements of Trading Standards within your communities and council discussions, helping residents understand where support is available.
- **Include Trading Standards in strategic decisions**
Ensure Trading Standards is considered when setting priorities around safeguarding, public health, economic development, community safety and tackling inequality.

- **Support sustainable resourcing**
Recognise Trading Standards as a statutory, preventative service and consider the long-term impact of funding decisions on resident protection and council risk.
- **Encourage partnership working**
Support joined-up approaches between Trading Standards, public health, safeguarding, housing, licensing, and external partners to maximise impact.
- **Use intelligence and insight**
Ask for regular, clear updates on risks, emerging scams, unsafe products, and enforcement outcomes to support informed decision-making.

Key Message for Decision-Makers:

Trading Standards is a vital, preventative frontline service that protects residents, supports responsible businesses, and underpins public confidence in local markets — often at a fraction of the cost of dealing with the harm after it occurs.