

# Trading Standards Workforce Survey

## Report of the TSS 2014 Survey

### March 2014

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## Executive Comments

The nature of local government can make it difficult to maintain an accurate picture of local service resources across the 163 trading standards services in England and Wales. In this time of financial challenge for government, citizens and business alike it is all the more important that we have accurate data to help us plan for the future. The results of the 2014 workforce survey show that cuts to trading standards services in some areas have become unsustainable. Individual service budgets have been slashed by up to 86% over the lifetime of this parliament. With more pain expected in the next two years, many services are unable to predict their budgets for 2015-16. The picture is uneven across the country, showing variations across regions and council structures. Numbers of trading standards officers per service range from 0.5 to 48, with apparently little reference to the population size of the areas they serve or the number of businesses. Trading standards officers are expressing a sense of crisis and look to government to take urgent action.

The National Trading Standards Board and the Trading Standards Institute aim to use this data to inform local and central government and to support them in finding solutions. We must maintain an effective service that is capable of meeting current and future expectations, a service that can make a full contribution to economic growth, public health, safer communities and protecting the environment.

Our thanks to all those heads of service who have taken the time to provide the data, and to colleagues across the trading standards community who have contributed. We must work together to use the information to best effect and to support evidence based policy making both locally and centrally.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Toby Harris' with a small flourish underneath.

**Lord Toby Harris**  
Chairman, NTSB

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Leon Livermore'.

**Leon Livermore**  
CEO, TSI

## Introduction

This report provides an overview of headline messages coming out of the survey of local authority trading standards services (TSS) conducted in early 2014. The survey was conducted in partnership between the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) and the National Trading Standards Board (NTSB), with the cooperation of many individual TSS and the support of ACTSO and WWhoTS. Where applicable the report shows comparisons to the previous workforce survey conducted in 2009.

## Responses

126 responses (78%) were received from local authorities in England and Wales with a TSS function. However, there were low response rates from some regions so care should be taken with regional breakdowns. (The 2009 survey had a similar response rate of 76% across the UK.)

### Response by region

Region	Response
CenTSA	13/14
EETSA	11/11
LoTSA	27/32
NETSA	12/12
SWERCOTS	7/14
TSEM	4/8
TSNW	15/22
TSSE	14/17
WWhoTS	13/22
YAHTSG	10/11

### Response by authority

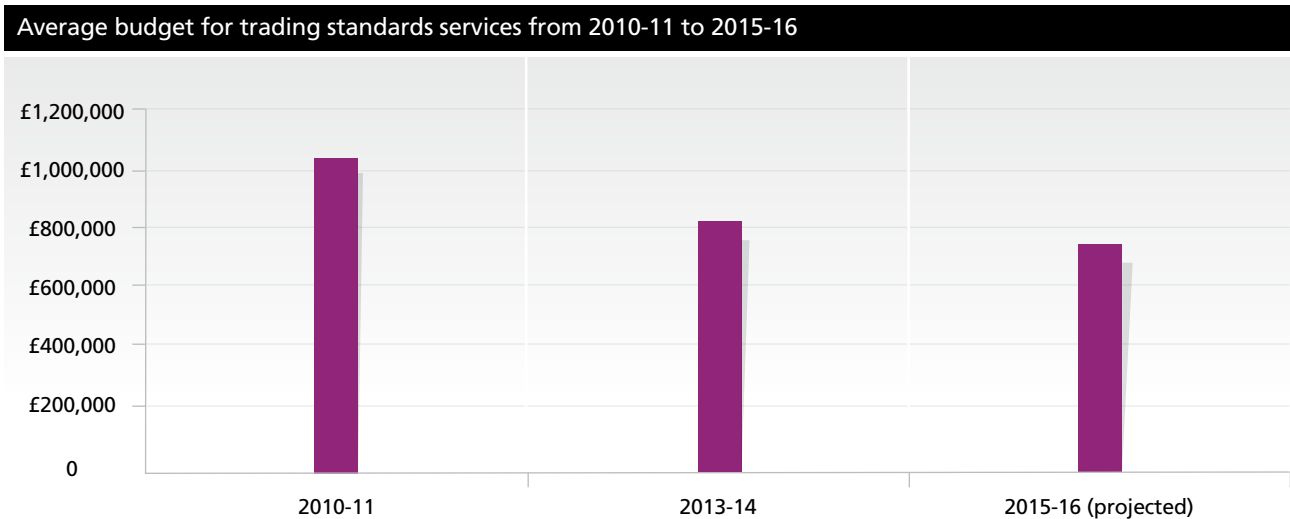
Authority type	Response
County councils	28/33
Metropolitan boroughs	25/31
London boroughs	27/32
English unitary	33/45
Welsh unitary	13/22

TSI and NTSB would like to express their thanks to everyone who took part in this survey. In order to give a reliable and comprehensive picture of TSS and to provide essential information in support of evaluating the impact of TSS, it is important that we continue to achieve a high response rate to this survey.

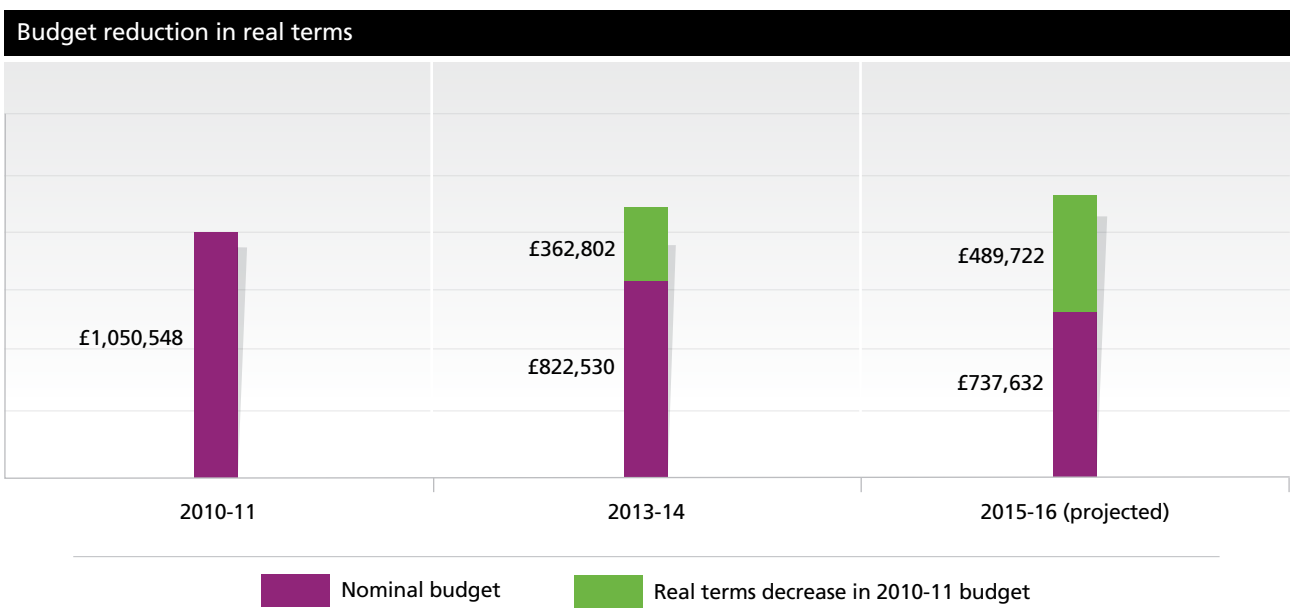
## 1. Resources

### 1.1 Budgets over the current parliament

The average budget for trading standards services across England and Wales has fallen by 21.7% between 2010-11 and 2013-14. The majority of services that were able to estimate their budget in 2015-16 expect further reductions in budget, with an average fall of 29.8%. These average figures conceal significant variation between regions and authorities, which are explored in the regional breakdown below.

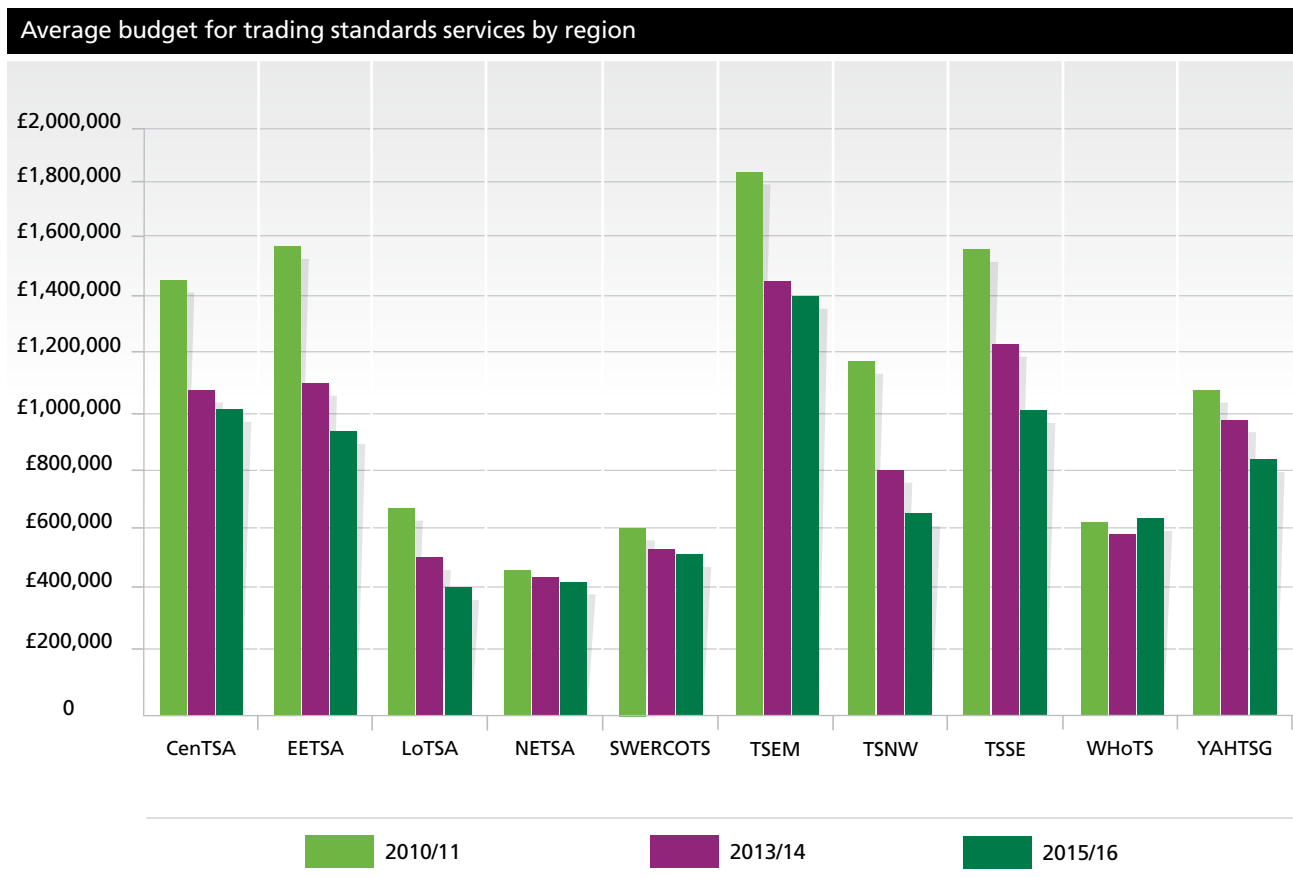


Taking account of inflation, the real terms decrease in average budgets for 2010-11 to 2013-14 was 30.6%, an average of £362,802 per authority. The projections for 2015-16 show an overall fall of 39.9% over the lifetime of this parliament, equivalent to £489,722 per authority. According to the 2009 OFT study on trading standards impact, every £1 spent on trading standards saves £6 to the consumer. For the 163 TSS in England and Wales, this reduction translates to approximately £355m lost to consumers in 2013-14, projected to be £478m in 2015-16.



## Regional breakdown

The average budget figures obscure variations between authorities and regions. Of the eighty-six authorities able to predict budgets for 2015-16, thirty expected reductions of more than 30% as compared to 2010-11, and eight of these anticipated their budgets to be more than halved. Some of the authorities with the deepest cuts between 2010-11 and 2013-14 were unable to predict their budgets for 2015-16.

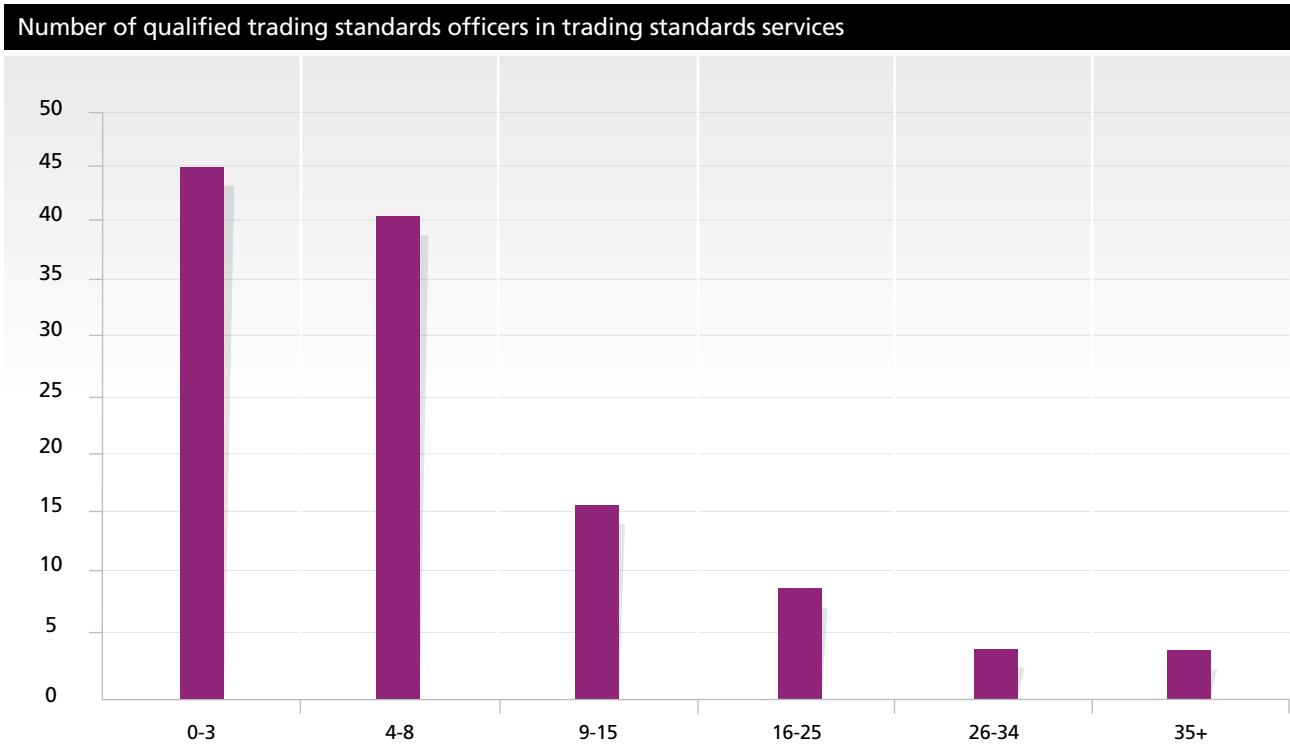


One authority will see their budget decrease in real terms by 86% between 2010-11 and 2015-16. Some services are yet to see the impacts of local authority budget reductions set by this parliament, with one authority experiencing a 58% cut between 2010-11 and 2015-16, with 94% of this falling in the next two years.

The region with the most severe cuts is the North West (TSNW), where almost half of the services have already been cut by more than 30%. The average cut over the lifetime of parliament in real terms in the region is 52%. While the graph appears to show an increase in average nominal budget for Wales, less than 30% of Welsh authorities were able to provide figures for 2015-16. Moreover, the figure is inflated by a small number of authorities that predict an increase in budget due to restructuring. The figures shown represent a 12% cut in real terms.

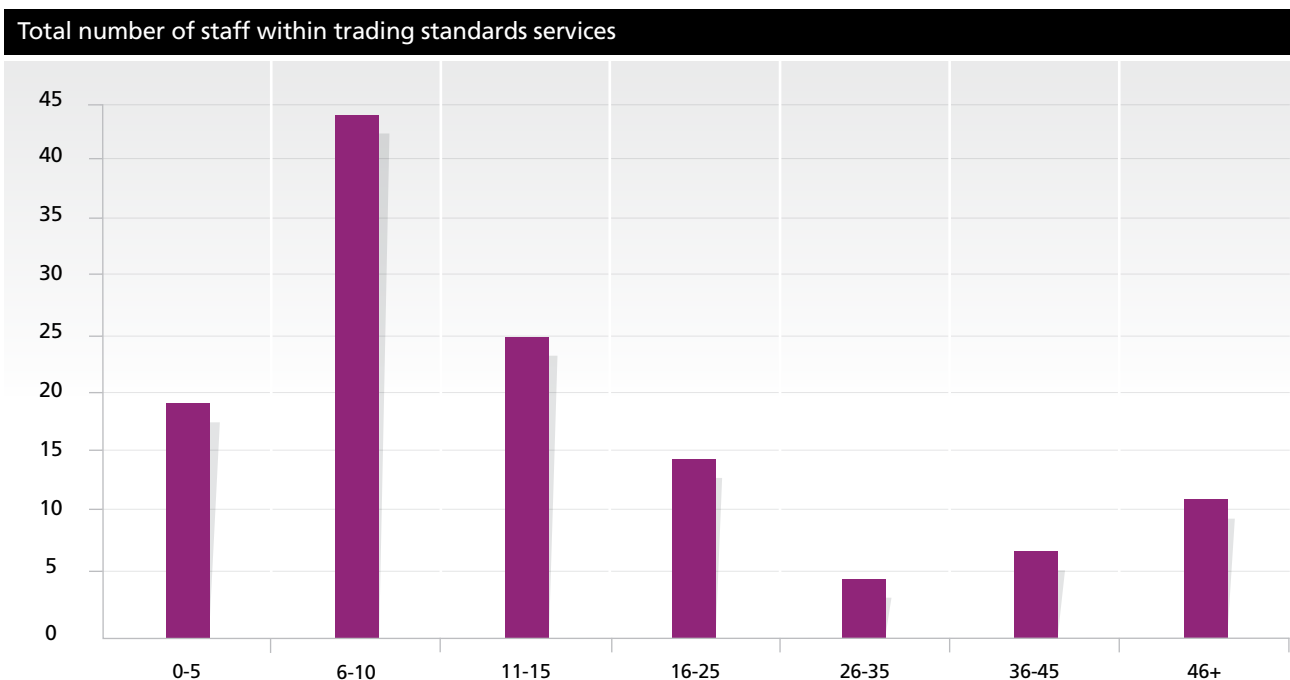
## 1.2 Staff numbers

The survey identified a total of 889.9 FTE trading standards officers across 126 services in England and Wales, and 1995.4 FTE total staff. This represents a sharp decrease from the 2009 survey which identified 3534 FTE staff working in 122 trading standards services in England and Wales.

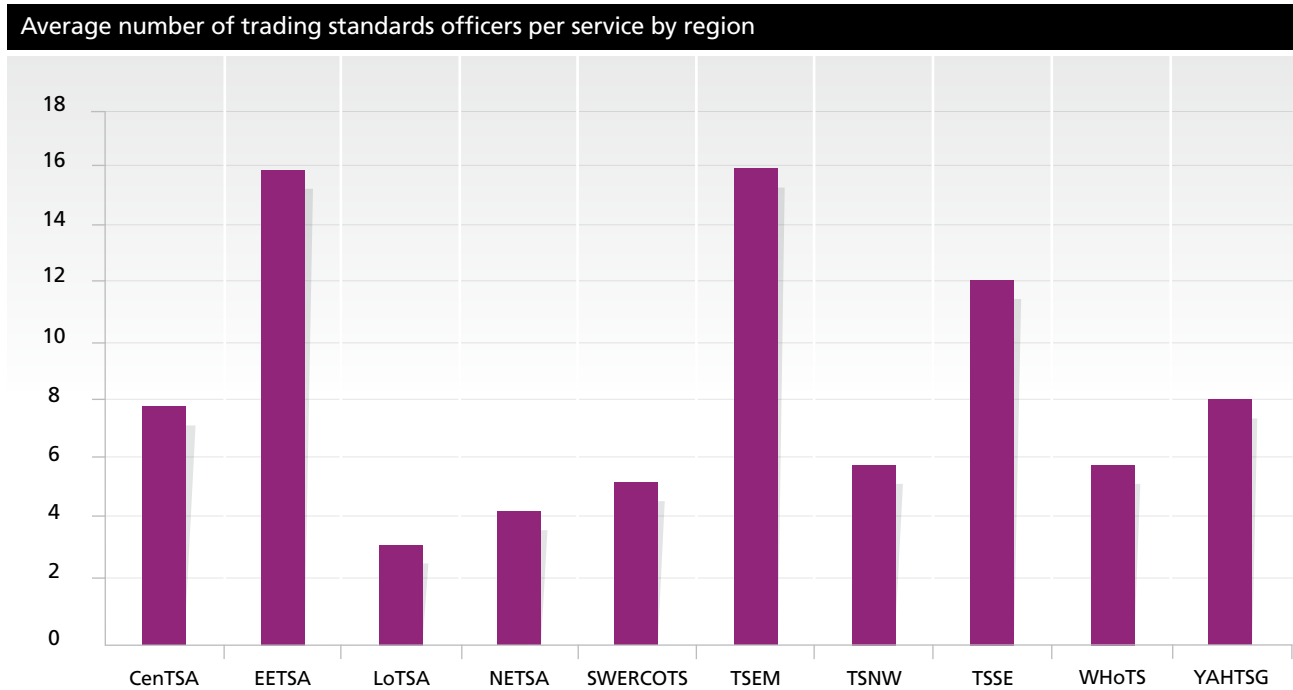


Fourteen authorities had fewer than 2 FTE qualified trading standards officers, with eight of these in the London boroughs. Two authorities employ only 0.5 FTE trading standards officers.

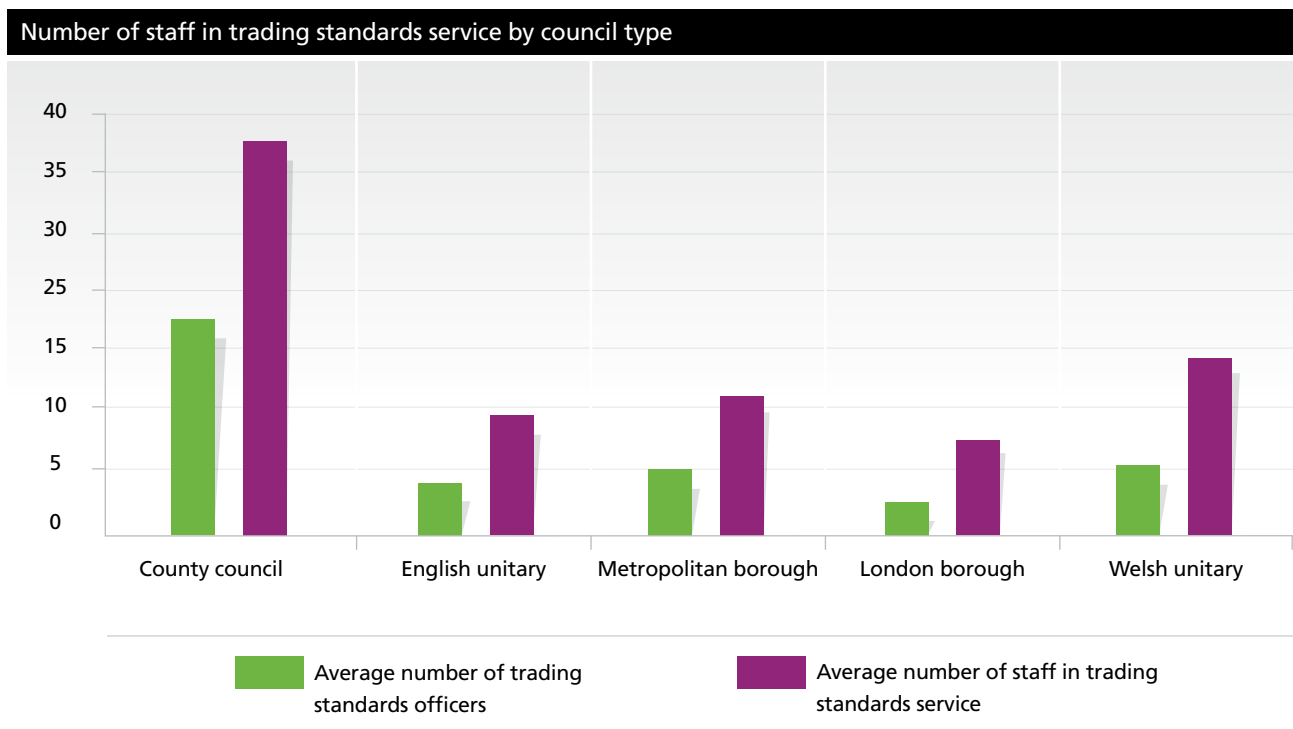
On average, trading standards services spend 80% of their budgets on staff costs.



As expected, the number of staff in each service varies by council type. There is also significant variation in the number of trading standards officers per region.



It is clear that staff numbers have been falling in trading standards services over recent years. One service has lost its deputy and three full time trading standards officers with over 70 years of experience between them in the last five years. They have been replaced by a part time trainee fair trading officer.

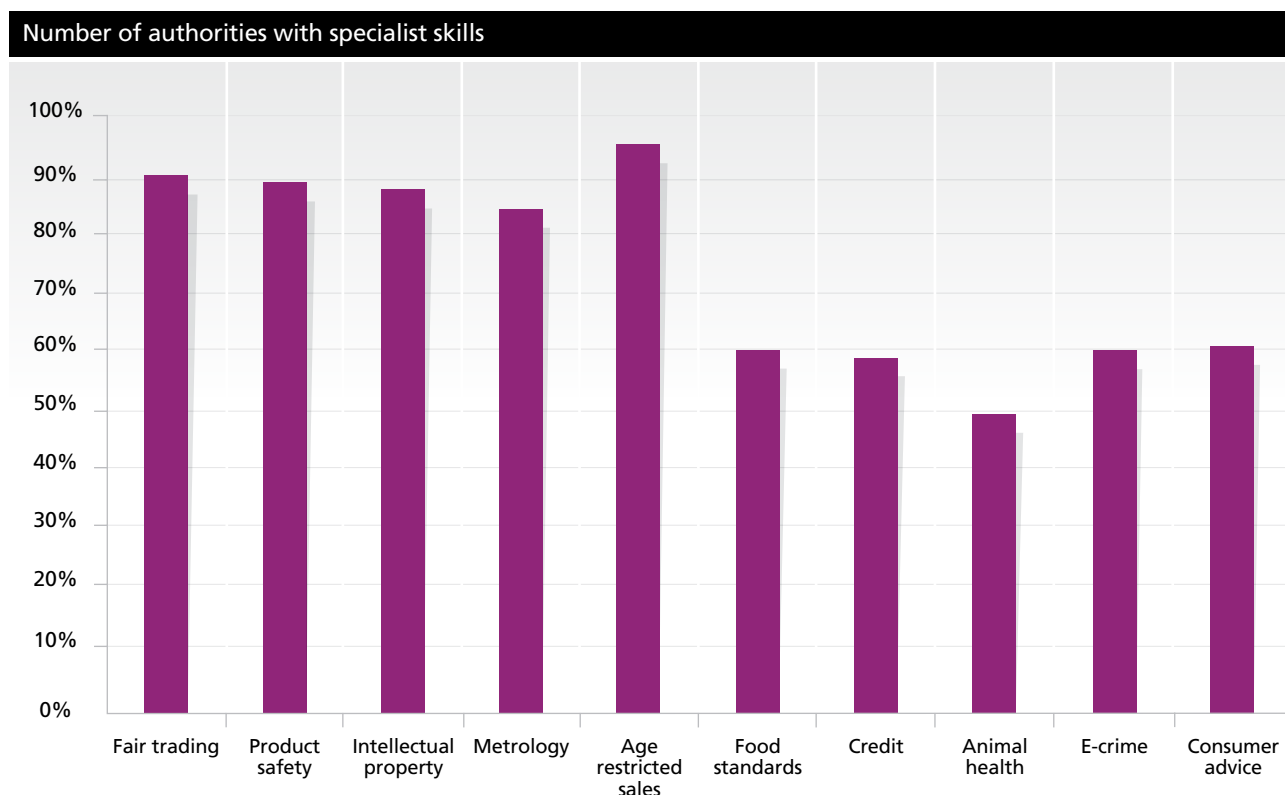




## 2 Services

### 2.1 Service areas and skills

Respondents were asked whether their staff had specialist skills in a number of areas. The majority were confident in the areas of fair trading, product safety and age restricted sales, but a significant number of services do not have specialist skills in other areas – for example fewer than 50% had specialist animal health skills.



Fewer than 30% of authorities said that they were not planning to stop any services, with several of these mentioning reviews after 2014/15. More than 30% specifically mentioned stopping or limiting civil and second tier advice to consumers. Nearly all respondents stated that service provision would be reduced, with most proactive work ceasing, and some services will only provide the statutory minimum.

The functions under review vary widely, with credit, under-age sales work, intellectual property, food sampling and animal feed all under threat in some authorities. Non statutory community projects like No Cold Calling Zones and trusted trader schemes, as well as the provision of free business advice, are also at risk. Several authorities will be introducing a system to respond only to complaints from vulnerable consumers or those with immediate risk to safety.

## 2.2 Shared services

A number of authorities share specialist skills and areas, including feed enforcement, metrology and calibration laboratories, petroleum licensing and animal health work. The survey identified only four shared services in England: West Yorkshire Joint Services (which covers five metropolitan districts), West Berkshire and Wokingham, the bi-borough team of Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea, and Brent and Harrow trading standards. Worcestershire Regulatory Services shares licensing, environmental health and trading standards for Worcestershire County Council and its five districts.

Several respondents stated that they were exploring the possibilities of shared services, notably in London and Wales. A few respondents have been frustrated in their attempts to establish shared arrangements.

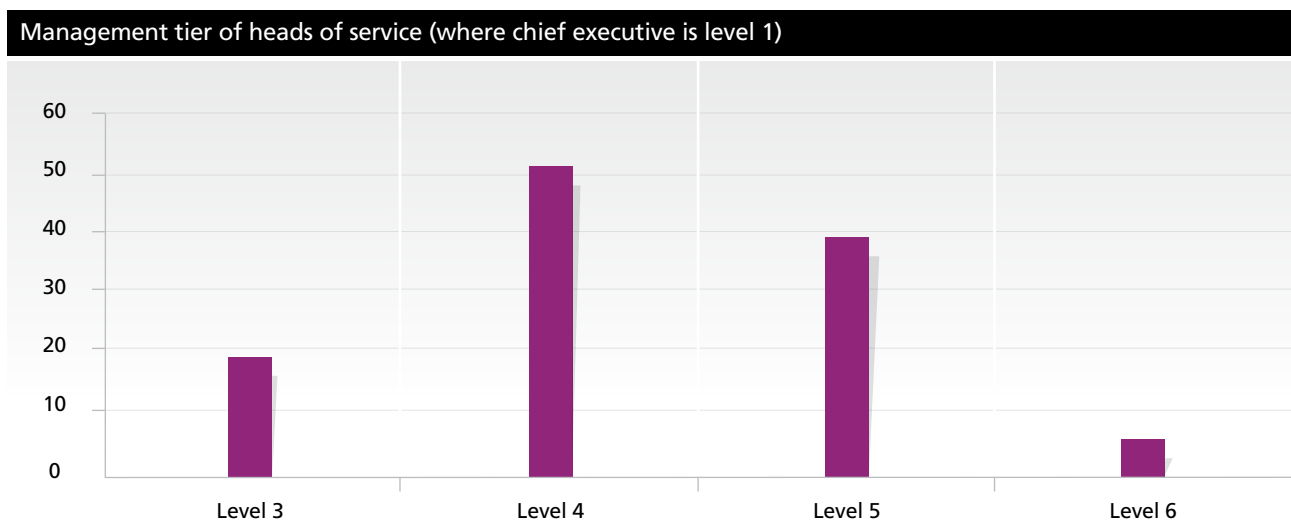
## 2.3 Service function and status

The majority of trading standards services are situated within larger departments which typically include licensing and environmental health, with some Heads of Service managing these functions as well as trading standards. Most departments are known as Regulatory Services, Community Safety or Public Protection. Several respondents were unable to definitively separate their trading standards budget and staff from the overall figures for the department as trading standards is not treated as a separate function.

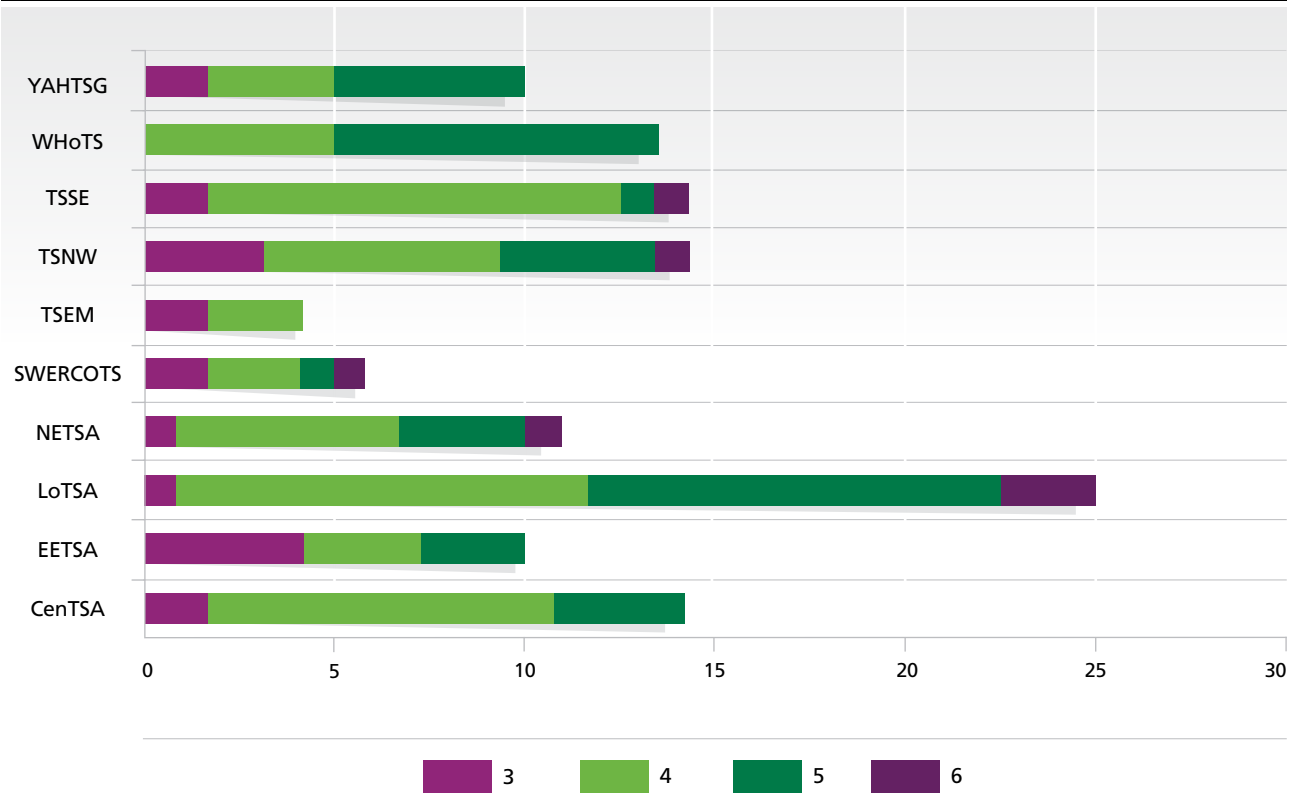
# 3 Management

## 3.1 Management tiers

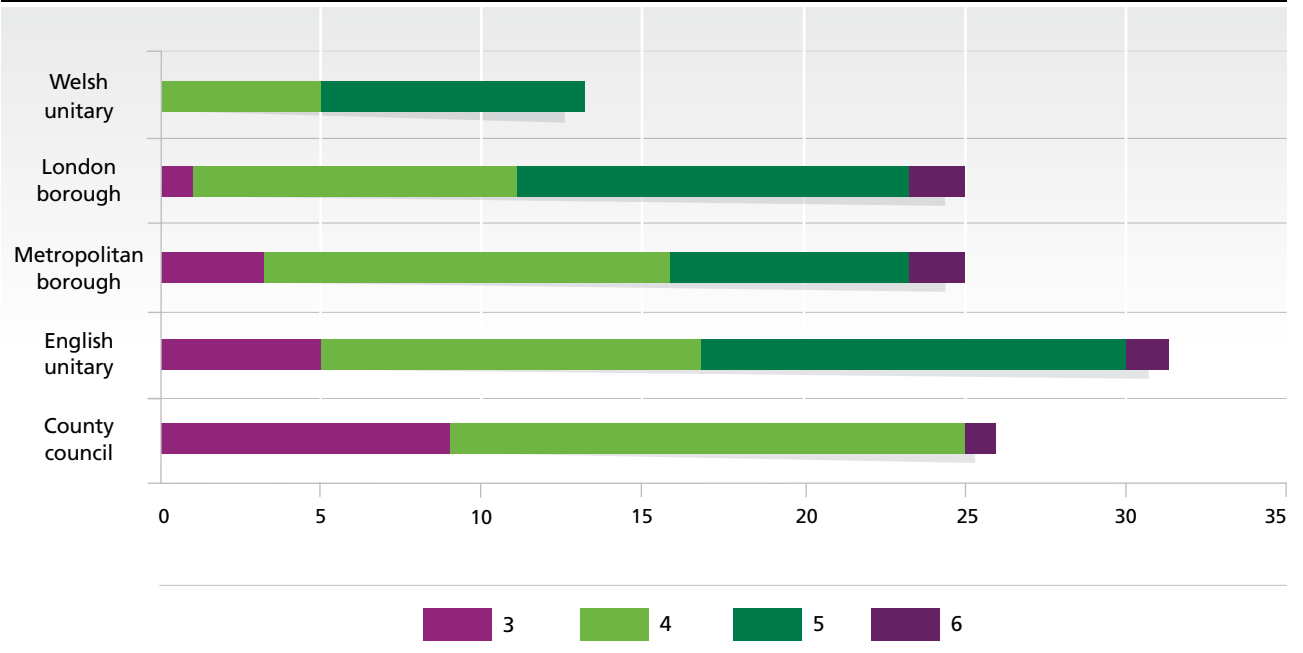
Heads of service sit at third tier and below, with most at fourth or fifth tier. This is in contrast to 2009, when several heads of service were at second tier. The number of heads of service at third tier has also reduced substantially in this period, while the number at sixth tier has increased from one to six.



**Management tier of heads of service by region**



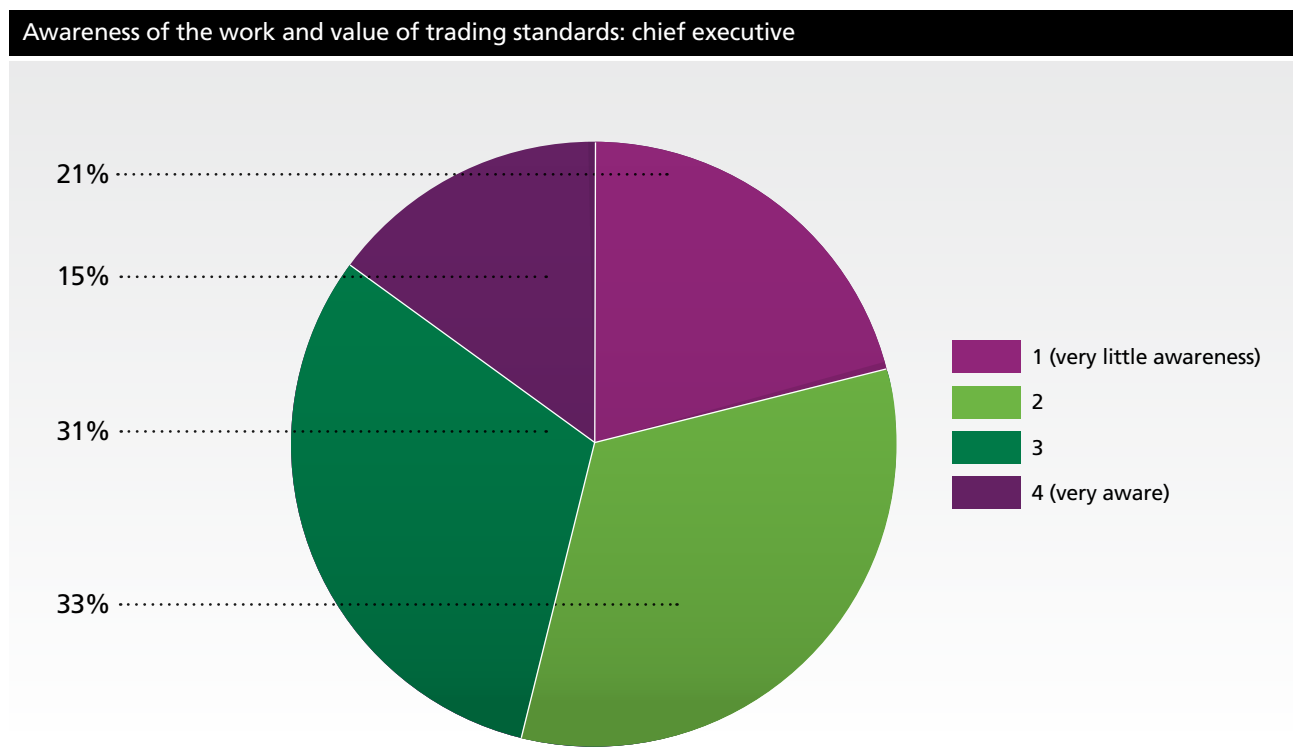
**Management tier of heads of service by council type**



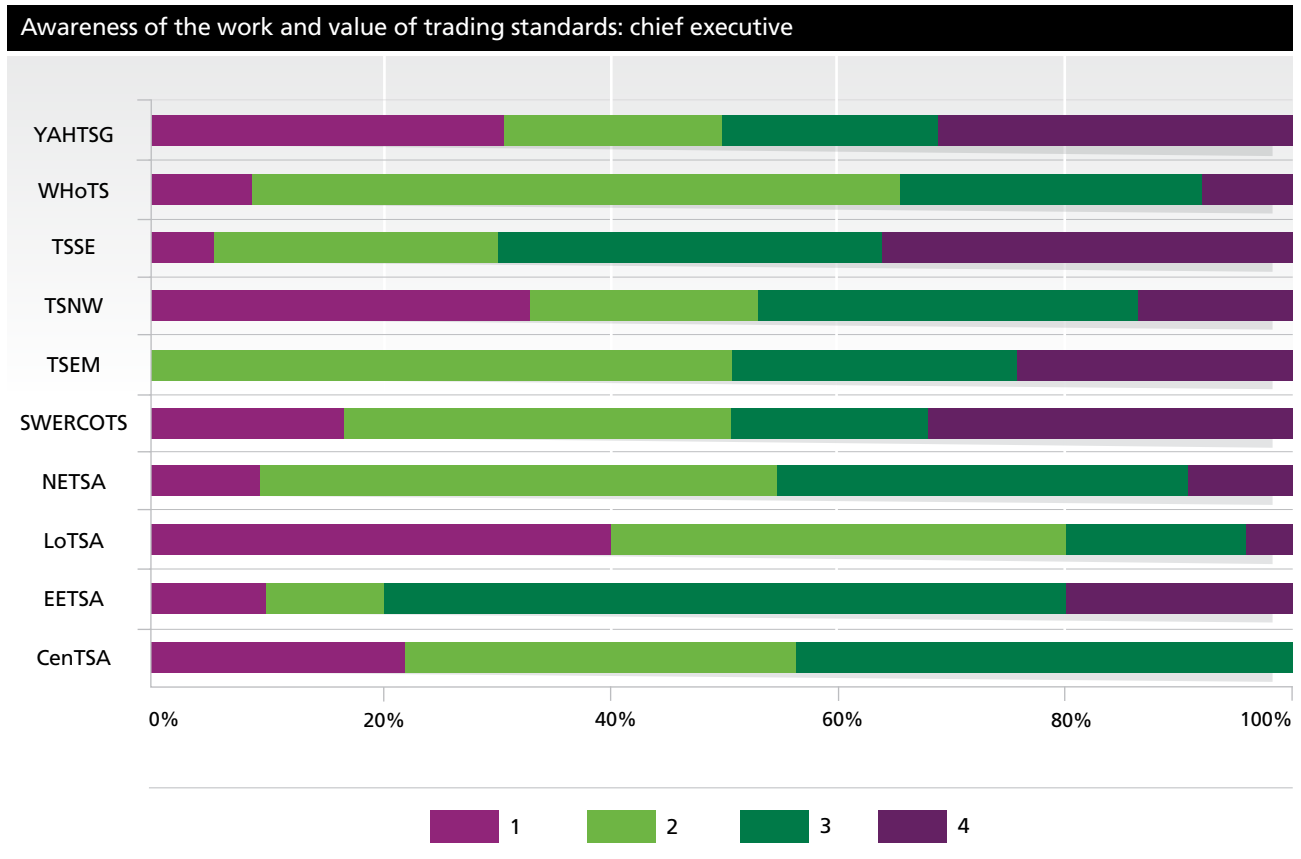
## 4 Engagement

### 4.1 Chief executive

More than half of respondents rated their chief executive's awareness of trading standards as low (1 and 2 on a scale of 1-4).

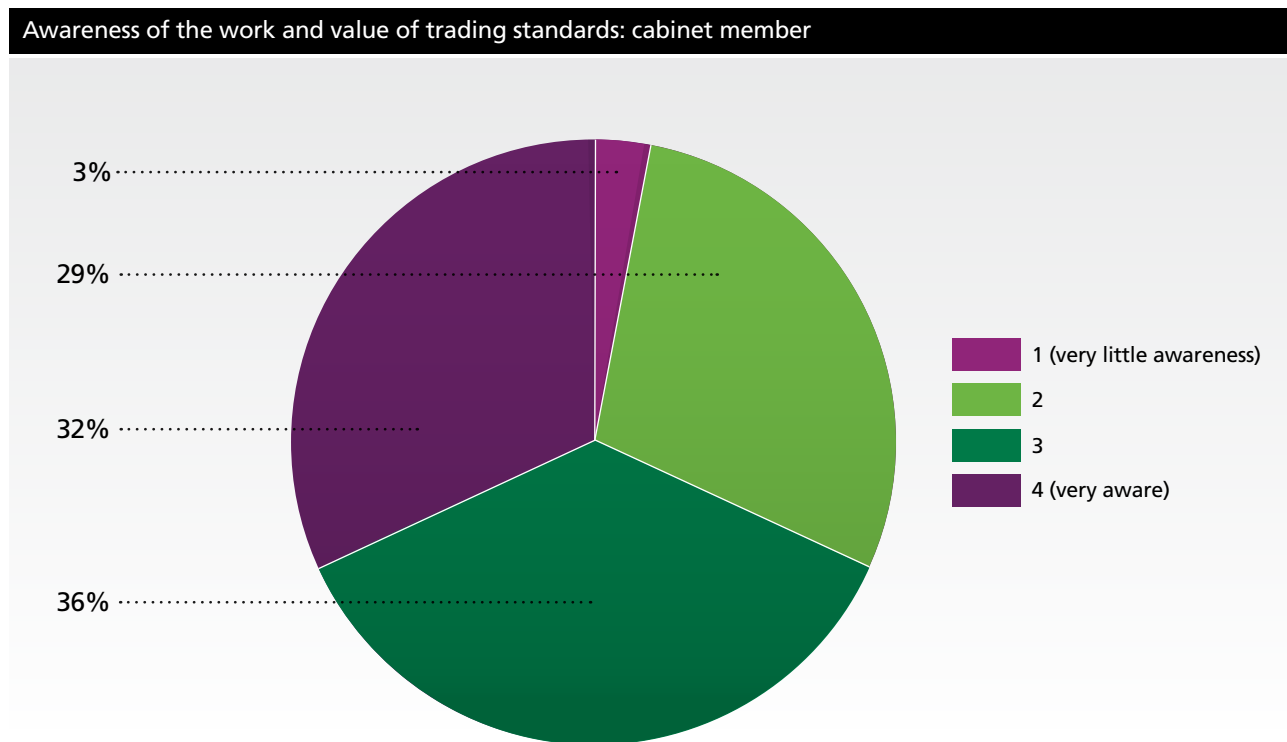


Results varied by region, with a particularly poor level of engagement in London and Wales (80% and 65% respectively). By contrast the East of England had a relatively high level of engagement, with 80% of respondents rating their chief executive highly for their involvement and interest in trading standards.

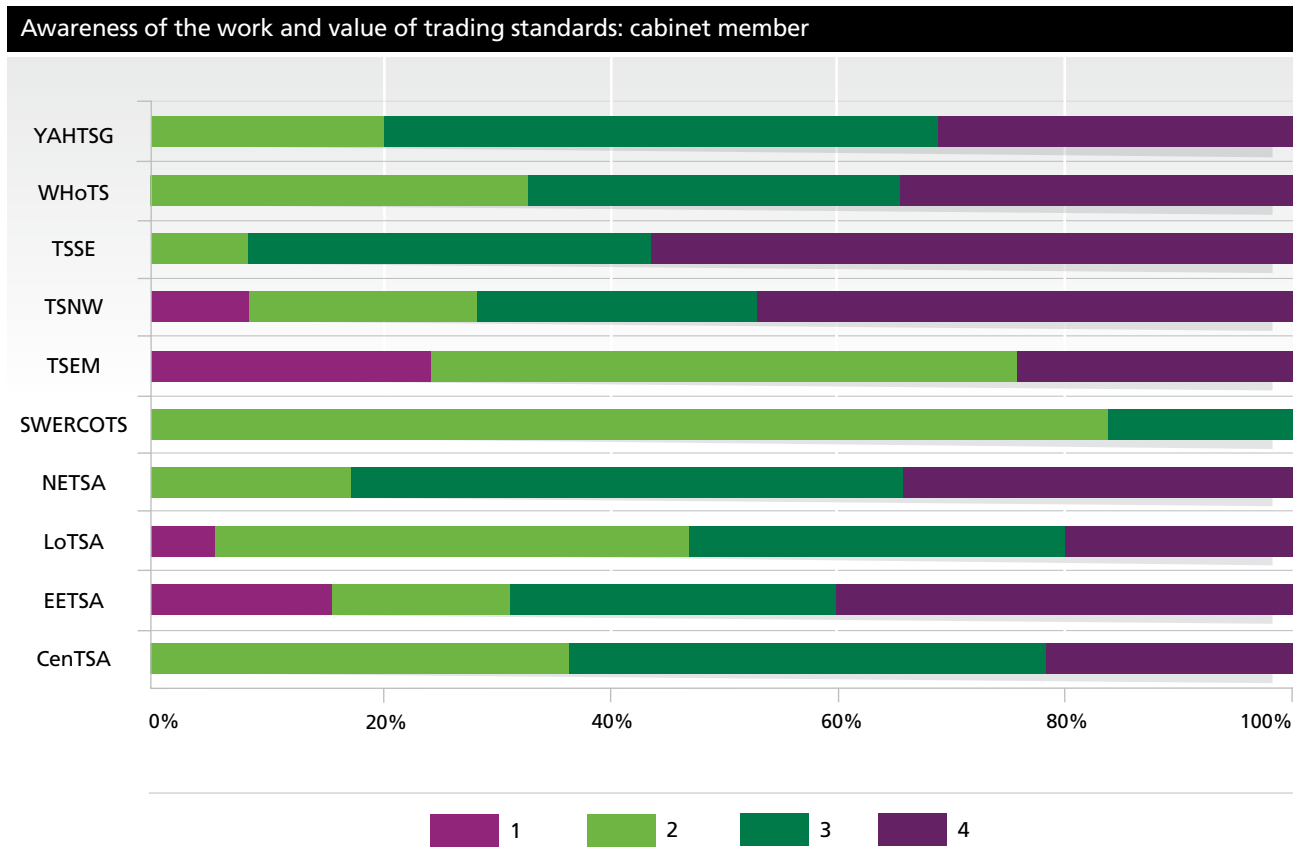


## 4.2 Cabinet member

On balance, respondents were more positive about the engagement of their cabinet member or portfolio holder with responsibility for trading standards, almost 70% rating their elected member as involved and interested.



However, responses varied by region, with a particularly low level of engagement in the South West region (83%). Care should be taken with these results though as only half of the authorities within this region responded to the survey. By contrast authorities in the North East and the South East were confident about the interest of their cabinet members.





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