

TRADING STANDARDS RISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF COVID-19



Introduction

This infographic sets out the ways in which trading standards services across the UK helped respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite resources being cut by 50% in under a decade, trading standards services were able to quickly mobilise, retrain and regroup to protect the public from specific COVID-19 related consumer detriment issues and work with environmental health and other local government colleagues to step in wherever needed to support the COVID-19 response. Due to the strain on business and the UK economy as a whole, trading standards worked collaboratively with business to provide support, advice and guidance, only using formal enforcement as a last resort.



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England

English data has been extrapolated based on returns provided by 41 authorities as Government data was unavailable. The data shows that during the pandemic trading standards supported local authorities with:

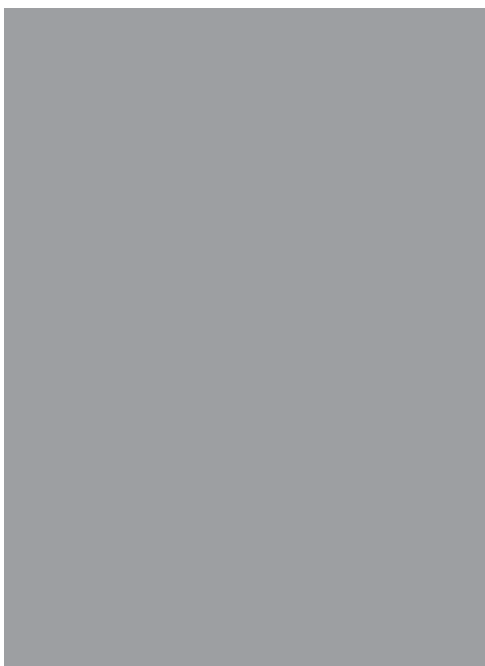
- 1,227,281 Covid-secure compliance checks either by visual inspection or written contact
- 97,879 complaints about non-Covid secure business settings or business closure requirements
- 222,742 Covid-secure/business closure compliance visits or checks. Of these visits or checks, 35,545 non-compliant businesses were identified
- 41,161 requests for business closure guidance or advice.



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Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing

During the pandemic, trading standards formed networks with other regulatory organisations to provide an efficient and targeted response to COVID-19 issues. They also worked to publicise what they were learning as the pandemic continued, to help other agencies and warn consumers to prevent potential harm.

Case Studies – Regulatory Networks

Salford Regulatory Services including trading standards and working in partnership with Greater Manchester Police delivered COVID-19 related business compliance activity on a weekly basis. They worked with their audit team reviewing businesses that applied for business support grants and flagged suspected fraudulent applications and businesses that breached COVID-19 regulations. They assisted the grants team in communicating funding opportunities to businesses.

From March 2020, the Heads of East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils' Trading Standards Services became quickly aware that enforcement and compliance needed to be co-ordinated across Sussex in order to avoid disjointed and fragmented enforcement which could have resulted if departments kept to their traditional boundaries. As a result, a weekly liaison group was formed, a protocol was designed and intelligence sharing established. The group gained representation on the Public Health Operational Cell weekly meeting ensuring that updates on enforcement and compliance were shared and discussed in a timely manner – this led to a clear protocol for considering the issuing of Directions.

Case Study – Publicising Key Learnings

With the establishment of a joint expert group by the two societies, Chief Officers of Trading Standards (SCOTSS) and Environmental Health (SOCEHoS), to provide a source of expert advice and interpretation on closure regulations issued by the Scottish Parliament, it was agreed that it would be helpful to also publicise what these services did alongside dealing with pandemic issues. A video was produced



Conclusion

CTSI has compiled this infographic to highlight the ways in which trading standards stepped out of its usual functions, responding to the needs of local authorities, business, consumers and the public at large and swiftly adapted to help deal with the multifaceted challenges caused by a global crisis. We have seen this reaction by trading standards time and time again, such as in the fuel crisis in the 1970s, the BSE crisis in the 1990s, the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001, and latterly the Grenfell Tower tragedy bringing unsafe electrical and construction products into focus. We hope that trading standards' dynamic, agile and dedicated response to the pandemic shown here highlights the importance to Government on maintaining a strong and robust local trading standards infrastructure. Trading standards has proven itself as crucial, working smartly and collaboratively, to deliver the protection that local authorities, consumers and businesses need in a rapidly changing world.

CTSI would like to thank all of the authorities that responded to our call for evidence. We hold more information which we couldn't fit into this infographic, and so a full list of case studies can be viewed on the membership area of our website www.tradingstandards.uk.