

WARWICKSHIRE TRADING STANDARDS Business Plan 2021-2024



“To create a fair and safe trading environment, supporting growth of legitimate businesses, and protecting consumers”

What is the Warwickshire Trading Standards Business Plan 2021-2024?

The coronavirus pandemic has fundamentally altered our lives: how and where we work, how we shop, buy goods, manage our relationships and finances, both in our home and working lives.

For the United Kingdom, our relationship with our trading partners has also fundamentally changed. Preparing for these changes during an international pandemic has tested many businesses.

Warwickshire Trading Standards recognises that helping to support businesses through this period, whilst being aware of the new and emerging opportunities for unscrupulous operators, requires a long-term approach.

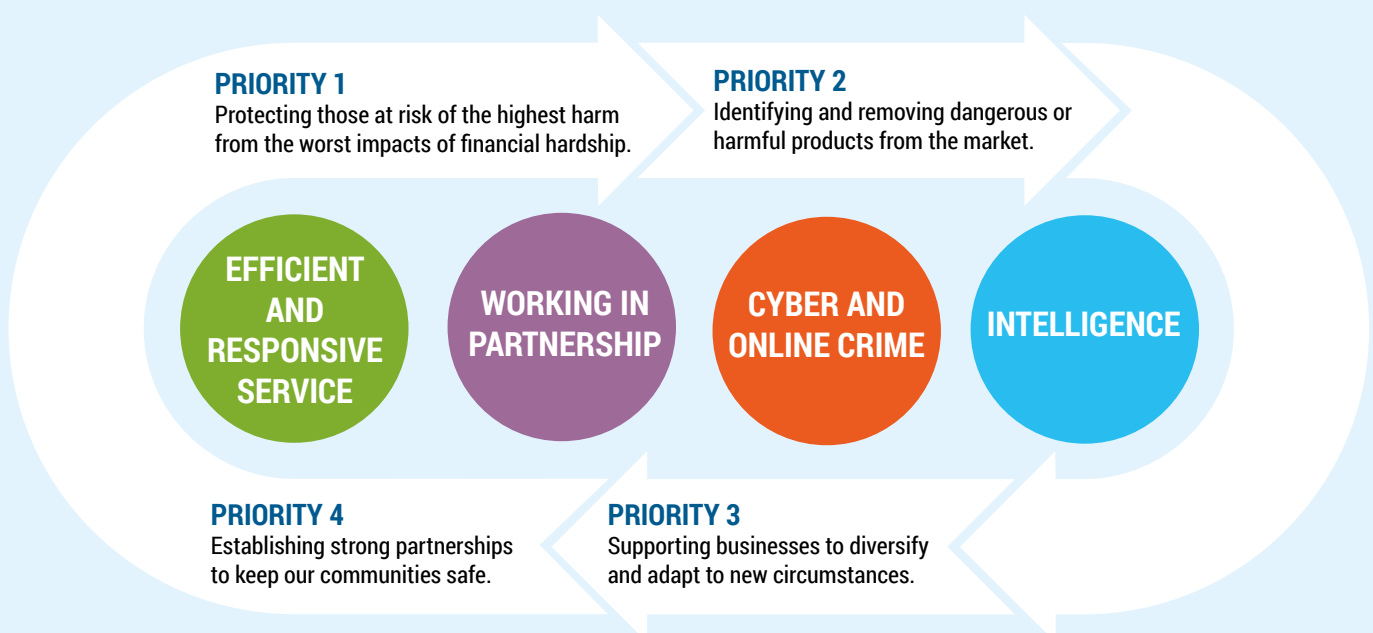
The Warwickshire Trading Standards Business Plan 2021-2024 sets out that approach. It aims to get the balance between providing legitimate businesses with the best, professional advice to meet the challenges ahead, and ensuring we are innovative in enforcing against individuals and

business operators who exploit our citizens or place them at risk.

We recognise the value of working in partnership with other regulatory bodies in our District and Boroughs, other enforcement bodies, and through our regional and national Trading Standards profession. This includes using our combined intelligence to focus our partnerships where they will have the greatest impact.

Most importantly, our success is built on a foundation of providing the best service to our residents and local businesses. Their safety and the safety of business customers is at the heart of the ambitious priorities that we have set ourselves.

Our Priorities



PRIORITY 1

Protecting those at risk of the highest harm from the worst impacts of financial hardship

Why is it a priority?

Protecting our citizens and businesses from the risk of fraudulent activity remains a core element for Trading Standards. We know that those involved in fraudulent activity often target the most vulnerable people in our communities. The impact on financial and psychological wellbeing for those affected can be long-lasting both for individuals and businesses.

What does it cover?

Doorstep crime and rogue trading

This includes pressure selling, unfair contracts, overpriced or substandard home improvements, phony consumer surveys and bogus charity collections.

Scams

Scams are defined as activity carried out by telephone, mail, online or in person that defrauds consumers by taking money or other goods from an unsuspecting person. This can involve a business or a consumer.

Cyber crime

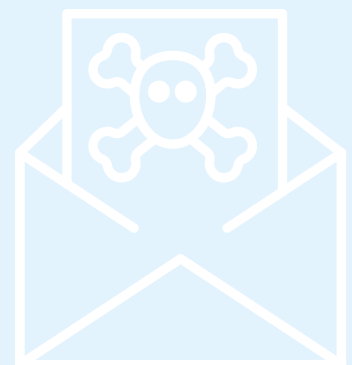
Cyber crime is a criminal activity which targets or uses a computer or network device. Trading Standards focuses its resources to prevent consumer and business fraud driven by cyber crime.

Unfair terms and cancellation rights

Working with consumer protection partners and business to keep contracts fair and ensure consumer rights are upheld.

Pricing and legal metrology

Accurate information on pricing and weights and measures ensures that consumers get what they pay for, so they can make informed, value-for-money choices.



What does the data tell us?

- Doorstep Crime continues to be a priority nationally, regionally and locally in Trading Standards. Locally, in both 2019 and 2020, Doorstep Crime and Cold Calling was one of the most reported business areas. 45% of residents in the West Midlands are cold called in a typical week; rising to over 50% in the 'over 65' age category.

45%

of residents in the West Midlands are cold called in a typical week



- According to Which?, Criminals often use bank transfer scams to con victims out of their money. A recent current estimate shows that the UK public lost £317m through these scams – approximately £860k a day.
- A recent BBC article stated that local councils have reported a 40% increase in reported scams since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; Citizen's Advice say 1 in 3 people have been targeted by a COVID-19 scammer.

40%

increase in reported scams since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic



- In the latest Warwickshire Cyber Crime Survey, 59% of people feel at risk on the internet; with over 21,000 victims of online fraud and other web based criminality.

How we will make a difference

Education

- Taking the best practice from schemes such as No Rogue Traders Here and explore the opportunities for a Warwickshire trusted trader scheme, to maximise the skills of local traders in the county.
- Working in partnership to reinvigorate No Cold Caller zones.
- Increase our awareness campaigns on scams, identity theft and online fraud.
- Running cyber awareness sessions for businesses and consumers.

Compliance

- Continue to dedicate resources to remove illegal advertising opportunities.
- Review the cyber footprint of Warwickshire businesses.
- Continue to invest and promote the trueCall service to prevent financial fraud and scams.

Enforcement

- Use our powers to prosecute or take alternative action against those individuals and businesses where there is clear evidence of intent to commit fraud, as set out in our Enforcement Policy.
- Use our powers to act against those who trade unfairly and prosecute where appropriate.
- Invest in Financial Investigators to increase our capacity to recover monies related to any criminal benefit.
- Take a proactive stance in closing down websites connected to fraudulent activity.

PRIORITY 2

Identifying and removing dangerous or harmful products from the market

Why is it a priority?

The risk to consumers due to unsafe, untested and unregulated products is significant, with devastating consequences. Recent cases of products that are not tested or rigorously reviewed, can lead to life changing impacts and in some cases, can result in death.

We are committed to working with businesses to ensure the best information is available to advise consumers, through clear labelling, that businesses respond to emerging concerns or new medical research, and we use our powers to remove harmful products at the earliest opportunity to protect our citizens.

What does it cover?

Food safety including allergens

Preventing harm to consumers by ensuring that accurate information is provided on food products for sale. From October 2021 the introduction of Natasha's Law means that all prepacked, ready-to-eat food will need to provide full allergen labelling. This will include fast food establishments and takeaway premises.

Animal health and disease control

This includes monitoring animal health, preventing animal disease outbreaks and contingency planning to respond to an outbreak. Our teams provide expertise on the safety of the animal feed chain and the welfare of animals from farm to fork.

Food Hygiene

This covers the protection of food and feed hygiene to minimise harm and maintain the integrity of all food and feed for consumption by humans and animals.

Used cars and vehicle safety

We undertake investigations of a criminal nature regarding issues including clocked mileometers, the sale of unsafe vehicle-related products, and unroadworthy vehicles.

Healthcare products (including PPE)

This includes beauty and homeopathic products, face coverings, masks and sanitisers.

Product safety

This includes toys, imported goods through the Ports Project, homemade products, electrical products and testing. We will continue to horizon scan to identify new products as they emerge.



What does the data tell us?

- Since the start of 2020, we have received 132 farm animal related complaints, these include concerns for animal welfare, deceased livestock and animal health issues.
- From January 2020, we have received 112 food related complaints and over 30 animal feed complaints.

112 food related complaints received



- As part of the Allergen Sampling Project in 2020, 28 takeaway premises were sampled to test for allergens, 15 of which produced adverse results.
- According to the OPSS (Office for Product Safety and Standards), COVID-19 has caused changes in consumer behaviour. As companies respond to increased demand, it is likely that new technology, such as 3D printing, will be utilised to place products on the market quickly. This has resulted in significant challenges for maintaining product standards when suppliers are rapidly adapting to the demand.
- As part of the Safety at Ports Project, which included working with two Warwickshire based importers, over 800,000 items of PPE were repurposed for consumer purchase.

Over

800,000

items of PPE were repurposed for consumer purchase



- UK Product Safety Database 2020: the top three notified products in the UK were toys, cars and electrical equipment, with electric shock and choking the biggest risks.

How we will make a difference

Education

- Working with partners to ensure consumers are given the right advice and information about the use of a product and their rights.
- Communication campaign on allergen awareness for both businesses and consumers.
- Communicating the changes of legislation that affect products and product safety.

Compliance

- Target those food businesses where there is a history of non-compliance or where there is a food hygiene rating score of 3 or less.
- Work with regulatory bodies to assess the level of businesses compliant with the new legislation.
- Undertaking testing on Origin Labelling.
- Recalling PPE products that do not meet the required standards for which they are being used.
- We will focus on businesses or events that have a high volume of traders, such as markets, car boot sales, and social media, including Facebook groups.

Enforcement

- Taking enforcement action against those who do not comply with the law, including formal action for the most serious or persistent breaches.
- To review our enforcement powers in partnership with other regulators to ensure action is taken to protect the welfare of animals.

PRIORITY 3

Supporting businesses to diversify and adapt to new circumstances

Why is it a priority?

The impact of COVID-19 has meant that businesses have had to adapt how they deliver their services and how they interact with consumers. In addition, many businesses are assessing how the changing EU Exit legislation will impact on them. These significant challenges means that Trading Standards has a pivotal role in supporting businesses to ensure they get the best advice, and can respond and comply to the new frameworks that they are operating in.

What does it cover?

The impact of COVID-19 and the changing economic environment

There will be a need to review the needs of businesses as the full impact of COVID-19 emerges. This includes supporting businesses with new models of operating, whether it is through diversification, online platforms or new models of providing services and products.

Exiting the EU

We will provide support, advice and guidance to businesses through the transition period and as new legislation and opportunities emerge.

Compliance with consumer protection legislation

Ensuring a level playing field by making sure all businesses comply with Trading Standards laws.

Working with businesses to achieve climate change requirements

Ensuring businesses comply with climate change requirements such as Energy Performance Certificates, environmentally sustainable products, emissions, and environmental pollution levels. This includes the impact on financial support for the farming and agriculture community, following the introduction of the Agriculture Bill.



What does the data tell us?

- During 2020, Trading Standards received over 300 COVID-19 related complaints and enquiries.

Over

300

**COVID-19
related complaints
and enquiries received**



- After the creation of the Intelligence and Tasking group with agencies across Warwickshire, over 3,650 COVID-19 complaints and enquiries have been collated.
- The British Chamber of Commerce's recent Brexit survey (which received 1,000 responses) found that half of exporters to the EU (49%) were facing difficulties in adjusting to the changes in the trade or movement of goods and a quarter of exporters were considering decreasing activity in the EU market over the next 12 months.

25%

**of exporters were
considering decreasing
activity in the
EU market**



- To reduce carbon emissions from public buildings including hospitals, schools and council buildings, £932m has been directed to 429 projects across England. The Confederation of British Industry states it is a vital step to cut out almost all carbon emissions by 2050 in the UK.

How we will make a difference

Education

- Establish a Warwickshire Trading Standards Business Advice Service, providing practical information for businesses and business sectors on EU and COVID-19 regulations.
- Education and awareness on the risks to businesses and consumers from fraudulent activity connected to the EU Exit and COVID-19. This will include webinars, business sector advice, and published advice through webpages and blogs.
- Provide advice for businesses who are seeking new opportunities through diversification, home manufacturing and home importing.

Compliance

- Ensuring compliance with, and enforcement of, new rules.
- Making sure products are properly labelled to meet certification requirements for where the product is made and where it is sold.
- Working with the farming community to maintain standards, advise on diversification and access direct support from organisations who can offer it.

Enforcement

- In line with our Enforcement Policy, our focus will be on providing advice and achieving compliance. Where there is clear evidence that a business fails to take appropriate steps, or a non-compliance has a severe detriment to consumers, we will use appropriate formal action.
- Our intention will be to publicise formal action to raise awareness with consumers.

PRIORITY 4

Establish strong partnerships to keep our communities safe

Why is it a priority?

Trading Standards plays a vital role in working in partnership to keep our communities safe. This includes leading on projects that deliver the priorities set out in the Safer Warwickshire Agreement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased close-working relationships with other regulatory bodies, including the Police, Public Health and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue. This provides long-term partnership programmes to address county-wide, regional and national priorities.

We provide a Primary Authority role to give advice for specific businesses as well as working with other Primary Authorities to keep our communities safe.

What does it cover?

Landlords and letting agents

To work in partnership with rented sector colleagues to ensure that letting agents, property managers and landlords are legally compliant.

Age-restricted sales

Our service has a lead role in preventing age-restricted sales including knives. Our aim is to ensure this is well regulated, and there are robust measures in place across the retail sector as well as online purchases.

Intellectual property

Tackling and disrupting the supply of counterfeit products from the marketplace is a core part of our service. This includes those products sold online. Our aim is to use an intelligence-led approach to focus on areas of the market that cause the highest risk to consumers.

Petroleum and explosives

We are responsible for licensing for petroleum storage, and the storage and use of explosives, including fireworks.



What does the data tell us?

- According to the Office of National Statistics, knife crime is at its highest recorded level in the past 10 years, with 46,000 offences involving a knife or a sharp instrument in England and Wales in the year ending March 2020.



Knife crime is at its highest recorded level in the past 10 years

- Data from National Trading Standards (NTS) showed that of 1614 test purchases carried out in stores between 2019-2020 retailers failed to prevent the sale of a knife to a child on 210 separate occasions (13%). The proportion of knives sold at independent stores to children jumped to 68% in 2019-2020, up 17% from 2018-2019.
- As part of an Age Restricted Sales Project in 2019, 75 premises were visited and 24 sales of alcohol to a person under the age of 18 were made; this is over 30% of test purchases carried out. This suggests there is still more work to be done regarding age verification when selling age-restricted items.

24 sales of alcohol to a person under the age of 18 were made



- NTS has identified an increase in Consumer Complaints regarding Estate Agents and House Purchasing Services, as stated in their 2019/20 Strategic Assessment.
- NTS has also identified Organised Crime Group (OCG) activity in relation to rented properties, for uses involving modern slavery, child trafficking, cannabis farms, and counterfeit goods storage as an emerging issue.

How we will make a difference

Education

- Working with landlords and letting agents to provide advice and information on best practice in relation to rented properties.
- We will ensure that we provide the current, most up-to-date advice on emerging psychoactive substances such as Nitrous Oxide.

Compliance

- In Warwickshire, we will continue to use our influence in a Primary Authority role to ensure that the Landlord and Letting sector is well regulated.
- Working in partnership with our District and Borough colleagues, to expand our online test purchase capability to ensure retailers are complying with their legal obligations related to all age-restricted sales.
- Working with major event organisers to ensure that brand protection is maintained.

Enforcement

- Publicising formal action against letting agents or landlords who have been fined or prosecuted.
- Pursuing prosecution action against businesses consistently selling age-restricted goods.
- Taking formal action against all businesses who fail to keep our communities safe.

Measuring our impact

A core part of the Trading Standards strategic assessment is to identify Emerging Trends from the combination of partnership information, Insight Data and intelligence data information. Emerging Trends includes issues that have the potential of impacting consumers and businesses or create an environment which can be exploited to the detriment of citizens or legitimate businesses.

Cross-cutting themes



Get in touch

Warwickshire Trading Standards: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards>

Citizen's Advice: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Citizens Advice consumer helpline: 0808 223 1133

CEnTSA Hotline: <https://centsa.org.uk/anonymous-hotline/>