

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Report highlights Scotland's consumer protection workforce is at risk.

SCOTSS (the Scottish trading standards chief officers' organisation) has today released its biennial Workforce Survey Report for the two years to 31 July 2021, which includes a return from every local authority trading standards service in Scotland. The report highlights ongoing concerns around severely reduced staff resources at a time when enforcement issues remain at their highest and, in particular, the immediate risk from an age demographic where 58% of Trading Standards Officers officers are over the age of 50.

The survey finds that the average number of staff in each Scottish council has reduced to under 8 FTE (full time equivalent), less than half the establishment recorded by Audit Scotland in 2002. In 2002 Audit Scotland also found that the two largest services had 50 or more staff each, but in 2021 those same two councils only have 36FTE between them.

Trading standards officers play an essential role in areas such as consumer protection, public safety, the Economy, and the Environment, by ensuring the things we buy are safe, are in the correct amounts, and are as described. That price displays are fair and we are not scammed by the many fraudsters operating across the country, and that environmental claims are genuine. Trading Standards Officers also played a key role in the Covid emergency, and will have an increasing role in the post-Brexit trading environment both domestically and with international imports.

The report also gathers demographic data that highlight serious concerns over sustainability and viability. With almost 2/3 of trading standards officers over the age of 50, an ageing trading standards workforce is perhaps the biggest threat to professional capacity as the critically low level of qualified officers makes it even more difficult to train the next generation.

SCOTSS Chair, Graeme Paton said: This year's survey highlights the concerns that SCOTSS members and others have had for many years around the viability of Scotland's trading standards services. Unsurprisingly, reduced numbers of trading standards officers means fewer investigations and makes law enforcement much more difficult and patchy, bringing real risks to consumers and legitimate business.

"Despite this, trading standards officers have done a fantastic job on the frontline working with Scottish Government on the Covid pandemic, but I am deeply concerned about the future of our service and ask that the local authorities and government works much harder to put trading standards on a sustainable footing."

CTSI CEO, John Herriman, added:

"The report adds weight to the importance of securing proper resources for the profession. The challenges for budgets, training, networks and staffing capacity all continue to persist, and action is required to secure the future sustainability of trading standards services, for the benefit of consumers, businesses and both the Scottish economy and the UK economy as a whole."

The latest report can be found on www.scotss.org at www.scotss.org/files/scotssworkforce2021.pdf

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Notes for Editors:

For press queries, email coordinator@scotss.org.uk

1. The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS) represents the 31 local authority Trading Standards services in Scotland. SCOTSS was established in 1996 and helps support and coordinate the activities of Scotland local authority trading standards teams. It is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC047951 and works closely with other governmental and regulatory organisations, such as the Competition and Markets Authority, the Office of Product Safety and Standards, Trading Standards Scotland, and the Scottish Government

2. Trading Standards Officers in Scottish councils advise on and enforce laws that govern the way we buy, sell, rent and hire goods and services. Local authorities carry out inspections and monitor or investigate complaints, they work with businesses to help achieve compliance but ultimately, can instigate prosecutions or take civil actions against those who break the law. TSOs have been deeply engaged in work around the Covid pandemic, and are also at the frontline in dealing with the changes arising from Brexit.

3. Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)

CTSI is a training and membership organisation that has represented the interests of the Trading Standards profession since 1881 nationally and internationally. We aim to raise the profile of the profession while working towards fairer, better informed and safer consumer and business communities.