

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Leisure & Sport's Decision Meeting
Date of meeting:	9 th July 2024
Subject:	Trading Standards: 'Threats, Challenges and Opportunities 2024 to 2026'
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure, and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	All
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	No

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Leisure, and Sport as to how Regulatory Services (Portsmouth Trading Standards [PTS]) will approach service delivery challenges for 2024-2026. This report provides a comprehensive update since the previous report presented in September 2022.

1.2 PTS' role is to protect consumers from adverse transactional experiences. This requires a transparent consumer protection system for businesses, with consumers aware of their rights alongside robust law enforcement. This is increasingly difficult to maintain due to newly emerging and complex markets, and demand pressures facing the service.

1.3 Businesses also rely on advice from PTS. This area of service is also under increasing pressure as a result of high levels of enforcement necessary, particularly, to tackle rogue practices in this burgeoning area of unfair business activity as they emerge.

1.4 This report highlights the current demands, service capacity and identifies the forecasted threats and challenges and implications presented by new burdens.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Leisure & Sport:

- i. **Acknowledges the increasing duties and pressures facing Portsmouth Trading Standards.**
- ii. **Acknowledges the level of resourcing currently available to Portsmouth Trading Standards is challenging when providing the protections the public should reasonably expect.**

- iii. **Approves the way Portsmouth Trading Standards proposes to mitigate the growing threats as set out within the report, including the use of alternative enforcement measures.**

3. Background - A brief overview of Portsmouth Trading Standards

3.1 PST is a consumer protection service that operates across an extremely diverse regulatory (criminal/civil) landscape. The aim of the service is to secure compliance with the legislation for which we are responsible. Whilst this report does not seek to give a comprehensive description of such, the paragraphs below provide a useful synopsis of the responsibilities.

3.2 In short, trading standards functions are government lead services which seek to that ensure consumers are protected from unfair trading and in doing so support legitimate businesses.

3.3 The definition of unfair trading is wide, concerning both civil and criminal breaches and applies to businesses in relation to both goods and services. For instance, unfair trading can apply to such distinct (non-exhaustive) issues as: food standards, the laws on metrology, the sale of age restricted products, intellectual property rights, product safety and regulations governing contracts for estate / letting agents, travel and consumer credit.

3.4 PTS service is almost exclusively intelligence led, meaning it responds to 'complaints' which fall within its remit. Complaints derive from various sources but the vast majority (circa >95%) are referred by Citizens Advice who provide a consumer service (CiTA) and acts as a first-tier centralised consumer complaints and advice hub for the whole UK. On receipt of this intelligence trading standards officers decide on the appropriate courses of action i.e., if investigation is warranted. Citizens Advice will refer cases subject to where the business and consumer concerned are based.

3.5 As stated above, the list of duties is extensive and is getting longer all the time. At the time of writing there are circa 270 pieces of legislation by which PTS either have a statutory 'duty' or a 'power' to enforce. A significant aspect of this paper draws attention to the ever-growing 'burdens' on this service whilst highlighting the financial regime in place.

4 Local demands on Portsmouth Trading Standards

4.1 In 2023-24 PTS service received 705 complaints from Portsmouth consumers with a total indicative financial detriment of £4.1 million. For the same period PTS received 646 complaints about Portsmouth businesses with an indicative financial detriment of £4.6million. This represents a slight increase on the previous year.

4.2 Perhaps unsurprisingly, not all complaints or contacts received are viable investigation opportunities. Some are purely civil by nature and therefore best served by referring the complainant to CiTA for assistance. Some are complaints about matters either out of PTS jurisdiction, or best served by another authority, or deemed to be outside

trading standards remit altogether. Some are for intelligence only with no commitment to action.

4.3 Notwithstanding the above, all complaints or contacts are reviewed and either researched and resolved, or referred to a decision meeting as to what next steps can or should be taken. It is concerning that since September 2022, approximately 150 complaints that were considered viable of investigation were declined or not actioned, primarily due to lack of capacity / high demand. It has never been the case that we investigate all complaints, but the trend of declining investigations is of growing concern.

4.4 The decision to investigate includes both an objective and subjective review. The former involves a mathematical matrix measuring factors such as how the complaint fits with our priorities, the prevalence of the breach, potential or actual harm factors such as physical and financial harm, the vulnerability of the complainant, enforcement options open to PTS and the complainant and whether a realistic outcome can be achieved. Subjective factors which also relate and impact on the decision derive from our experience as to whether success is more likely than not and whether its proportionate when balanced against available resources. All decisions are documented.

5 National / Regional influences on Portsmouth Trading Standards

5.1 National Trading Standards (NTS) fund national teams focused on national issues affecting all local authorities. To a greater or lesser extent PTS regularly engage with all these teams which are hosted within local authorities and cover the following work streams:

5.1.1 **eCrime:** Hosted by North Yorkshire County Council and the City of York, the NTS eCrime team monitors online consumer and business frauds including website dating scams, misleading websites, subscription traps and online shopping frauds. The team provides national support to all local authority areas in England and Wales to help tackle the increasing threats to businesses and consumers from internet scams and rip-offs. The team provides advice and forensic support and undertakes intelligence-led investigations.

5.1.2 **Feed:** This project funds specific officers to deliver the Food Standards Agency's 'Feed Delivery Programme'. This concerns the safe and compliant production and supply of feed used in the animal food chain.

5.1.3 **Estate Agency and Letting Agency Team:** Funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC); letting agency regulation (covering England) is led by Bristol City Council and estate agency enforcement (across the UK) is operated from Powys County Council. The team work closely with local authorities who have local enforcement responsibilities.

5.1.4 **Intelligence:** Hosted by Suffolk County Council. The team provides technical expertise to help identify and analyse national trends and emerging threats, informing tasking and prioritisation processes. NTS has also provided funding to support a network of regional intelligence analysts and local authorities have been encouraged to have local intelligence liaison officers.

5.1.5 **Scams:** Hosted by Surrey County Council, the NTS Scams Team helps tackle mass marketing scams and disrupts the operations of perpetrators behind mail scams. It works in partnership with agencies across the country to identify and support victims of mass marketing fraud. The team provides guidance, best practice and establishes a centre of excellence to assist local authorities in supporting local victims and taking local enforcement action.

5.1.6 **Regional Investigations Teams:** NTS has established a network of eight seasoned criminal investigators teams that can operate across all ten regions in England and Wales. Local Authorities, via a tasking process, can utilise these teams when investigations spread outside their local jurisdictions and typically are deployed in the areas of doorstep crime, counterfeiting, consumer, and business fraud.

6. Portsmouth Trading Standards - Performance summary

6.1 The overriding objective governing PTS is ensuring compliance with relevant legislation which of course can take many forms. The city council's enforcement policy dictates that this should be achieved by the least impactful means, dictating that formal actions such as prosecutions should be the last resort, or when no other action is appropriate. Taking this into consideration plus the fact that no two cases can be directly comparable in their size or complexity, it should be highlighted that mere statistics are an overly simplistic measure of illustrating performance.

6.2 At the time of writing PTS are actively investigating around 30 criminal investigations in the following categories:

- 18 x Illicit tobacco / Illicit Vape
- 3 x Counterfeit consumer goods (not alcohol/tobacco)
- 8 x Rogue builder / home improvements companies
- 1 x rogue holiday / events management company

6.3 Three of these investigations (with another due) are supported by the Regional Investigation team who provide officer support, computer forensics and financial support for commissioning expert witnesses. This is because the alleged offending is regional as well as in Portsmouth.

6.4 Nine of these investigations are currently in the court system with two listed for crown court trial this year.

6.5 In addition to the above, parallel financial investigations are also undertaken for both PTS matters and for other local authorities/ agencies. However, PTS's financial investigator left the authority in November 2023. Finding a replacement has been difficult but will join us in July 2024. This has inevitably caused some disruption and hindered our progress in respect to such activities.

6.6 **Illicit Tobacco/Vape work:** Whilst being a high national and local priority, this work supports Public Health objectives of mitigating the availability of counterfeit and other tobacco products to adults and children alike. PTS receives annual funding of circa

£52,500 to help fund a dedicated resource. Below is a summary of the enforcement work that has taken place on this theme in the 2023-4 year:

6.6.1 Test Purchasing: The use of test purchasing operations are a common way in which we corroborate the intelligence we receive. In 2023-4 we conducted 86 test purchase operations across the city with an average 54.6% failure rate which suggests both the criminality and associated harm is significant and the intelligence sources are reliable.

6.6.2 Enforcement Visits: On the back of this, we have conducted several enforcement visits to business premises. These days involve significant planning and resources. tobacco detection dogs and officers from partner agencies such as Police and Immigration enforcement. The objective of these enforcement days is to test the intelligence received, attend the relevant premises, sometimes with warrants if residential or private vehicles are involved, and search and seize illicit products and cash.

2023-2024 totals	Quantity seized Cigarettes (sticks)	Quantity seized Hand Rolling Tobacco (Kg)	Quantity seized Shisha (Kg)	Quantity seized Vapes	
Total seized	247,180	103.85kg	49.85kg	5,611	
Total value	£157,196	£40,531	£4,250	£68,575	Approx. £270,553

6.7 Recent enforcement successes include:

Date	Offence(s) type	Outcome
December 2022/January 2023	Illegal tobacco seller	Guilty following trial- 18 months imprisonment (suspended for 18 Months), Confiscation Order - TBC
February 2023	Illegal tobacco seller	Guilty Plea- 9 months imprisonment (suspended for 2 years) Confiscation Order granted for £30,000
February and July 2023	Illegal tobacco seller	Guilty Plea- 12 months Community Order (100hrs of unpaid work)- Confiscation Order granted for £13,000
September 2023	Persistent illegal tobacco / vape sales	Premises Closure Order for 3 months
November 2023	Persistent illegal tobacco / vape sales	Extension of closure order for a further 3 months
February 2024	Counterfeit goods seller	Guilty plea, awaiting sentencing and Confiscation

March 2024	Rogue trader	Guilty Plea - 5 Years immediate custody, a 10 year Criminal Behaviour Order
March 2023	Rogue trader	1 x guilty plea and awaiting sentencing, 1 x awaiting trial
April 2024	Illicit tobacco seller	Guilty verdicts following 6-day trial at Portsmouth Crown Court - 3 x defendants awaiting sentencing - Confiscation to follow

7 Portsmouth Trading Standards - Staffing capacity

7.1 The PTS establishment is currently 5.54 FTE, a reduction of 1 FTE since the last report. This includes staff members that have specific roles including a full-time financial investigator, and a primary authority/safety specialist. 1 FTE within this team is also currently funded by Public Health to deliver a programme concerned with the reduction of harm associated with the illegal supply of alcohol and tobacco. In addition to the 5.54 FTE referenced above, the PTS budget also funds a Regulatory Services solicitor who technically sits within Legal Services.

7.2 To enforce such a diverse spectrum of legislation not only requires significant professionalism which only comes with investment in staff by development of skills and competencies, it also requires a 'minimum critical mass' of staffing resource.

7.3 In view of the demands upon the service, PTS is under pressure with respect to its critical mass to provide a resilient service capable of responding to current and future demands.

8 Immediate and future threats

8.1 **Additional Burdens:** Legislative reforms continue to add, or threaten to add, additional enforcement duties for PTS. In addition to those cited in our previous report, below are some current examples which vary in their potential impact:

8.1.1 **Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.** Notably affecting some food regulations but also listed as it may impact on officer authorisations.

8.1.2 **The Cosmetic Products (Restriction of Chemical Substances) Regulations 2023.** New restrictions on a type of compound found in fragrances, shampoos, soaps, and many other types of cosmetics.

8.1.3 **The Environmental Protection (Plastic Plates etc. and Polystyrene Containers etc.) (England) Regulations 2023.** On 1st October 2023 regulations came into force banning the sale of single-use plastic plates, trays or bowls, balloon sticks and cutlery. It also prohibits the supply of single-use polystyrene food or drink containers and cups.

8.1.4 **Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023.** When in force will significantly reform the Companies House role in formation of companies will reform the Companies Act, Proceeds of Crime Legislation in relation to crypto-assets.

8.1.5 Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024. This legislation will provide significant reform of consumer protection legislation.

8.1.6 Smoke Free Generation. The government has published its plans to create a 'Smoke Free generation' in the form of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill 2024. This will phase out the legal supply of tobacco products by making it a criminal offence to supply such products to anyone born after 1st January 2009, criminalise the proxy sale of tobacco products as well as radically reform the vaping market to reduce the appeal of nicotine products to our younger generation.

8.1.7 Product Safety. One area of recent interest is the proposed changes to the law governing lithium-ion batteries and particularly increasing the current capacity limits for e-bikes and scooters. Nationally there has been a number of high-profile safety incidents involving non-compliant or unsafe batteries exploding so increasing the potential yields of such items is of concern. The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) have recently written to Chief Executives and are currently asking local trading standards departments to conduct compliance visits to all retailers/distributors within their respective jurisdictions to ensure compliance.

8.1.8 Funeral Directors. Another recent ask of Local Government in response to issues that arose at Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire councils has meant a national compliance campaign being undertaken to ensure the industry is operating as expected. This project will require site visits to all premises by trading standards and or environmental health officers to provide assurance to central government that standards are 'as expected'. New legislation is promised at a later date to formally sharpen regulatory oversight in this sector.

8.1.9 Product Safety at our Port. Portsmouth's long awaited boarder control post is now operational and Regulatory services' Port Health team' have made a promising start to a new and uncharted function. Whilst the focus presently is providing oversight to the bio-security regime governing food and feed products, it is anticipated that greater oversight at the port will lead to detection of attempts to import other regulated products. It is therefore anticipated that PTS will have to consider how they might respond to demand to inspect documents, consignments and where necessary detain or prevent importation of non-compliant products. Currently there is no available resource within the PTS establishment.

8.1.10 New Burden Funding is often provided by government departments to facilitate new duties, new powers, and capacity in dealing with such. The key definition of a 'burden' is a change that could lead to an increase in council tax if it were not additionally funded by central government. Compliance with the New Burdens procedure requires the government to identify specific areas of work which local authorities would stop undertaking to fund the additional work. If this were to occur grant payments may be made to pay for policy changes implemented in respect to trading standards. Where additional expenditure is increased to implement new PTS burdens such funding will be applied to offset such. The contribution received is, however, seldom sufficient to offset the actual operational impact of such and therefore are required to reprioritise our use of resources to cover such.

8.1.11 Green Energy and Net Zero. Whilst not necessarily a new phenomenon; rogue traders' have for some time sought to exploit consumers in domestic solar and roof / wall insulation products often under the auspices of government backed schemes. At one end of the spectrum the exploitation concerns the gross mis-selling of products that are either inappropriate for the consumers' needs or concern false or inflated claims about their performance to close the sale. At the other end, the tactics employed result in criminals extracting large sums of money for products and services that simply never materialise.

8.1.11.1 Rapidly increasing costs of gas and electricity will continue to fuel the renewable or 'green energy' sector in both commercial and domestic markets. Mass retrofitting of traditional gas boilers, for instance, will present fresh opportunities for exploitation of vulnerable consumers. This will undoubtedly drive-up service demand for local authority trading standards services to intervene and provide protection to those residents and take enforcement action against the fraudulent businesses.

8.1.12 Rising Cost of Living impacts on Consumer vulnerability. Much like the impact of climate change mentioned above, the cost-of-living crisis will lead to fresh opportunities for rogue traders and fraudsters to immiserate a financially desperate public, especially the most vulnerable. Some of the likely consequences listed by consumer protection experts include an increase in loan shark activities and energy tariff mis-selling by doorstep sellers, alongside other questionable money-saving schemes. It will also, of course inject fresh demand for the more established black / grey markets to provide illicit goods (and services) due to the high costs of legitimate goods becoming unaffordable. It is anticipated therefore that demand for stolen / smuggled and counterfeit tobacco and alcohol products will increase which again will put greater pressure on the trading standards service to provide protection in this area. In a similar vein it is anticipated consumers will be susceptible to purchasing counterfeit and poor / unsafe products based on their lower cost. This again will present increased demand on PTS.

8.1.12.1 On behalf of the profession, the NTS Scams Team has recently fed into a consultation proposing a ban on cold calling for consumer financial services and products, home improvements including green energy products and services.

9 Mitigation Measures to tackle service vulnerabilities

9.1 The current pressures on PTS and pressure upon resources are manifesting in the team declining to take on new work that would otherwise be pursued. These difficult decisions are necessary and reasonable with regard the legal and financial risks of failing to secure successful enforcement outcomes, but they are not good outcomes for residents or businesses. Furthermore, the welfare of staff is extremely important and the current environment, if not acknowledged and addressed further risks the strained wellbeing of staff and may even impact on retention. Below is a summary of positive initiatives:

9.1.1 **Apprenticeships:** During 2021 we have collaborated with the apprenticeship and procurement teams to add the Regulatory Compliance Officer (RCO) level 4 apprenticeship to the available levy funded courses offered at PCC. This has since enabled one junior member of the service to complete the 18-month course which has

provided valuable new knowledge, skills and behaviours for the officer concerned and compliment the wider service. March 2023 saw the profession launch the level 6 Trading Standards apprenticeship which again is levy funded. PTS will continue, where possible, to utilise these apprenticeships to upskill competencies and knowledge.

9.1.2 Traded Services - Primary Authority Partnerships: PTS continue to provide 'paid for advice' to a small number of businesses based in Portsmouth. These Primary Authority Partnerships (PAPs) are governed by a central government scheme, underpinned by legislation, and enable relationships with a single regulator, regardless of where that business trades in the country. This provides consistency of advice for such businesses and therefore reduces the cost burden of regulation.

9.1.2.1 PTS currently has four partnerships which generates circa £23,500 in annual income. This has decreased in recent years so presents a risk if further partnerships come to an end. Again, with the current level of resource, growing the portfolio is becoming more challenging.

9.1.3 Traded Services - Financial Investigations. PTS has long demonstrated the benefits of financial investigation and the part it plays in a modern investigative team. Simply put to some degree it features in nearly all investigations that PTS embarks upon. As a byproduct of successful forfeiture/confiscation proceedings (the latter requiring a conviction) PTS can benefit from a percentage of funds recovered. In addition to this PTS frequently conducts work on behalf of other local authorities and agencies that don't possess the expertise or capacity. This presents a fragile balance however between servicing PTS needs and that of contracted partners, which if not managed carefully can have an adverse impact on resources, despite the potential income available.

9.1.4 Home Office Grant funding. Opportunities to secure external grant funding continue to be pursued. A recent example is that PTS has secured funding from the Home Office. The purpose of the grant will secure PTS as a single point of contact for local authority financial investigators to access to important investigative tools hosted by the National Crime Agency. The level of funding for 2024/5 is circa £150,000 and will allow PTS to employ 3 x FTE to perform a specific intelligence function on behalf of other local authorities. A second-year funding (2025/2026) will be possible, and the figures for this have been presented to the Home Office and we await confirmation of continued support later this year. If successful a longer term, more permanent funding solution is built into the project forecast and is considered reasonably viable based on the presumption of delivering the requisite return on investment.

9.1.4.1 Whilst this funding is significant within the context of the PTS budget, the main benefits are 'operational' rather than financial. Therefore, given the temporary nature of the immediate funding model, this cannot and should not be seen as a significant vehicle for alleviating budget pressures.

9.1.5 Alternative Enforcement Measures. There are a number of alternative enforcement measures being developed to disrupt and deter criminality associated with the illicit trade in tobacco whilst focusing on reducing burdens on PTS. One is the appropriate use of closure orders, traditionally used to combat anti-social behaviour but

recently has been deployed with success around the country to deal persistent suppliers of illicit tobacco.

9.1.5.1 In September 2023 PTS decided to pursue such an action for the first time. We were successful in obtaining a closure order for 6 months which resulted in removing the operator from the business. With respect to such successful initiatives and similar enforcement actions, PTS will continue to engage with our communication teams to ensure that they are publicly available. The full press release in respect to these alternative enforcement measure can be found here: [North End shop Kingstion Mini Market shut after peddling illegal vapes and selling cigarettes to children](https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/2023/09/27/north-end-shop-mini-market-shut-after-peddling-illegal-vapes-and-selling-cigarettes-to-children) ([portsmouth.co.uk](https://www.portsmouth.co.uk))

9.1.5.2 The second example relates to HMRC and The Tobacco Products (Traceability and Security Features) Regulations 2019 which provides a framework for PTS to refer evidence of illicit tobacco trading. HMRC can then consider imposing financial penalties and or the removal of the businesses removal of the Tobacco Track & Trace Economic Operator ID (EOID) which would impact the economic viability of the business concerned. This has now been implemented in Portsmouth and HMRC can receive referrals from PTS. Penalties of between £2,500 and £10,000 are therefore now possible without the need to prosecute offenders.

9.2 More generally, alternative options to traditional enforcement must be embraced if PTS has a chance of mitigating both the growing gap in demand for service and available resources, exacerbated by the stagnant pace and high costs of engaging the criminal justice system. Disruption methods or alternatives are high on the agenda nationally and PTS will continue to contribute and adopt best practice that serves our residents and protects budgets.

10 Portsmouth Trading Standards and National Trading Standards

10.1 PTS continues to help build back safer and stronger communities with place-based enforcement. In recent years the NTS has called for additional central government funding to equip local trading standards services with the tools needed to keep the public safe. There are so many examples of what happens when trading standards regulation fails. It is therefore no understatement to say that investing in trading standards protects the public and benefits the economy by enabling effective, robust, and sustainable place-based enforcement, which in turn prevents failures and tragedies from occurring which, when such do occur, they can be counted in human lives and livelihoods, not just pounds and pence.

11 Reasons for recommendations

11.1 In an environment of widening financial challenges, increasing demand and new responsibilities the PTS highlights its considerable successes in tackling criminal behaviours to date.

11.2 Effective and appropriate regulation has a positive impact on consumer confidence and in turn provides the fertile environment for businesses to thrive and economies to flourish. It is also long established that such prosperity attracts investment in infrastructure,

creates jobs and improves standards of living, improves public health, and opportunities for young people. Safeguarding consumer protection is therefore analogous to the Council Plan 2023-2024.

11.3 It is appropriate for the relevant Cabinet Member to understand the challenges and threats facing a service within their portfolio when approving significant strategic and enforcement decisions.

12 Integrated impact assessment

12.1 The functions of trading standards are considered neutral in relation to those people who have one or more protected characteristics. However, people recognised as being more vulnerable to predatory or exploitive practises such as older people and those with disabilities will continue to be regarded as a priority during investigative processes. It is not envisaged that the report impacts negatively on any environmental factors relevant to the integrated impact assessment.

13 Legal implications

13.1 Much of the consumer protection laws referred to in this report place a legal duty on the City Council to provide enforcement remedies for our residents. Failure to do so will not only mean increasing financial and other detriment for our residents but potentially both reputational and legal consequences should we be seen to be failing.

13.2 It is therefore essential that a sufficient trading standards resource is maintained for capacity and competencies to keep pace with the increasing size and complexity of consumer markets.

14 Director of Finance's comments

14.1 The activities proposed within this report are expected to be funded from the existing service portfolio budgets, as approved by Full Council. Where there are any activities which have additional financial requirements, funding will need to be identified prior to their commencement.

15 Service Director's remarks

15.1 As is evidenced within this report PTS service is obliged to provide statutory functions across a diverse range of regulatory themes. This requires a great deal of knowledge and technical skill. The team's work is central to ensuring robust consumer protections are available to our residents and especially the most vulnerable. It is therefore crucial that sufficient investment is secured if we are to maintain sufficient consumer protections and confidence, whilst enabling the necessary capacity to adapt, at pace to fast changing markets and the challenges they present.

15.2 Trading standards enforcement remit is increasing and in the last two years a diverse range of new responsibilities, in addition to those already stated above, have been added with the ban on microbeads in cosmetics; the sale of materials for wood burning

stoves; the proposed ban on plastic straws, drink stirrers and cotton buds; the ban on tenant fees; the requirement for electrical safety certificates for privately rented homes; a ban on energy drinks; the introduction of calorie labelling in restaurant chains, the sale of knives and acids and the administering of botulinum toxin.

15.3 The PTS lead officers report the need to 'raise the threshold' on the cases they can take. This necessarily creates a lower standard of accepted business behaviour with all the inherent risks to increased consumer detriment this implies. We see this as a direct risk to consumers in Portsmouth, with trading standards services potentially being unable to adequately serve the communities within which they sit.

15.4 In order to secure additional funding, NTS need to be pro-actively aligning their service delivery plans to meet current government priorities such as 'Build Back Better', 'Net Zero' and reducing organised crime, particularly where there are time limited additional resources which can be claimed to support these objectives.

15.5 The Chartered Trading Standards Institute Chief Executive, John Herriman, has stated: "The cost-of-living crisis risks a significant rise in consumer detriment that the UK has not seen for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic warned us about the depths some will sink to through the scams that emerged out of it. For the unscrupulous, crises are opportunities to make a dishonest profit from the most vulnerable. Local trading standards services, working in partnership with other agencies, have continually risen to the challenges of protecting consumers, but this has become increasingly difficult after funding cuts of 50% over the past decade. Gaps in consumer protection are emerging, and whilst trading standards professionals are doing their utmost to protect the public, we are worried about the potential for significantly increased levels of harm. CTSI is in an ongoing dialogue with the UK Government and other stakeholders about how best to protect consumers. These concerns illustrate the need for a consumer protection strategy that recognises these deep impacts and that will mitigate them as effectively as possible".

15.6 Local authority infrastructure is however crucial for the delivery of trading standards and the local knowledge, links with other local authority services and democratic accountability is important if the recent successes of the PTS are to be maintained to protect the vulnerable and tackle criminality. I believe this is what our residents want and is very much in line with our council's vision for a prosperous city.

Signed by: Stephen Baily, Director of Culture, Leisure, and Regulatory Services

Appendices: Integrated Impact Assessment

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
N/A	N/A

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by Councillor Lee Hunt on 9th July 2024.

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Signed by: Councillor Lee Hunt, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Leisure & Sport's Portfolio Decision Meeting