

Future of Trading Standards - Terms of Reference for Consumer Scotland

1. Background

Trading Standards services in Scotland are facing significant challenges that threaten their long-term viability. Over the past decade, staffing levels have declined sharply – with a 25% drop in qualified Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) since 2012 and a further 2.3% fall since 2023. The workforce is ageing, with 58% of qualified TSOs over 50 years old and only 11% under 40, raising concerns about succession planning and skills retention. A 2024 report by the Improvement Service explored the challenges facing the Local Government workforce and found that 53% of councils report having a critical workforce gap amongst TSOs.¹

Consumer protection has evolved significantly over the past five to seven years, with more consumers purchasing online and facing new risks and challenges as a result. However, trading standards services have not kept pace, and roles and responsibilities are complex given the interplay between reserved and devolved competencies. Other regulatory functions such as Environmental Health, Building Standards, and Licensing, are facing similar challenges.

Under section 3 of the Consumer Scotland Act 2020, the Minister for Public Finance has asked [Consumer Scotland](#) to make proposals that will inform the Scottish Government's approach to supporting the future of trading standards and consumer enforcement in Scotland. These proposals should focus on the actions required to ensure trading standards services can deliver positive outcomes for consumers in Scotland.

2. Objectives

Consumer Scotland has been asked:

- to assess what is needed to deliver positive outcomes for consumers through effective and efficient trading standards services in Scotland; and,
- to provide evidence based proposals to Scottish Ministers on the future of trading standards services in Scotland in a way which is cognisant of the following contexts:
 - the devolution settlement;
 - local government delivery models;
 - the public service reform (PSR) strategy;
 - wider regulatory and enforcement challenges facing the public sector; and,
 - changing consumer behaviours and their engagement in evolving markets and trading platforms.

3. Scope

Proposals will relate to the future of Trading Standards services in Scotland and how they can deliver positive outcomes for consumers. Addressing the challenges facing other regulatory and enforcement spheres are not in scope of these proposals.

¹ [Scotland's Local Government Workforce Report 2024](#)

4. Reporting and Outcomes

Consumer Scotland will provide advice to Scottish Ministers in the form of a report which will later be published on the Consumer Scotland website.

The report should be succinct and summarise key findings and insights, taking into account but not duplicating the focus or content of previous reviews regarding trading standards, and will make proposals on how to secure the future of robust trading standards services and provision across Scotland.

5. Timeline

Consumer Scotland will provide a report to Scottish Ministers by no later than June 2026.