

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

TRADING STANDARDS BUSINESS ADVICE AND EDUCATION POLICY

Introduction and Mission Statement

The Trading Standards Service of Perth and Kinross Council is located within the Environment Service, Pullar House, 35 Kinnoull Street, Perth PH1 5GD. Trading Standards carry out a wide range of statutory duties in the sphere of consumer protection. The legislation enforced is aimed at ensuring a fair, safe and equitable trading environment in which responsible businesses can succeed and consumers are protected from unfair and irresponsible trading practices.

The service aims to: -

- Increase business confidence
- Improve business awareness of consumer law
- Ensure uniformity of enforcement
- Promote the concept of a fair and safe trading environment
- Provide information, advice and assistance, where appropriate, on consumer law.
- Monitor trading practices
- Provide verification and calibration of metrological equipment

Core Values

The following core values underpin service provision: -

- The service will be available to all businesses within Perth and Kinross
- The advice provided will cover all aspects of consumer law, your obligations to customers and your rights as a provider of goods and services.
- Where the advice or information requested is outwith the scope of the service we will endeavour to direct you to the appropriate agency/organisation who can provide it.
- The service will focus on the needs of local businesses. We will analyse service usage and consult businesses and other relevant stakeholders to help us identify these needs.

Links with Enforcement

The Trading Standards Service has a statutory duty to enforce a wide range of criminal consumer protection laws. Provision of business advice by Trading Standards on all consumer law issues, both criminal and civil, is vital because:

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- Well-informed, compliant businesses generate fewer complaints for the service and require less frequent inspection.
- Businesses may not be aware that non-compliance with consumer law may include a criminal element that can be investigated formally resulting

in enforcement action being taken in accordance with our Enforcement Policy.

Accessibility

Trading Standards will endeavour to make its business advice service as easy to access as possible as far as resources permit. We will give consideration to: -

- The needs of businesses in rural areas or those without business premises.
- The use of new technologies to improve access whilst bearing in mind the needs of those who are uncomfortable with using such technologies.
- Visits to premises when requested.
- The need to provide an equal service regardless of age, gender, infirmity, disability or ethnic origin in line with the policies of the Council.

Partnership Working

Trading Standards is committed to working in partnership with other organisations to achieve a more joined-up approach to service delivery.

- We will lead the development of the Perth and Kinross Consumer Support Network with the aim of co-ordinating and enhancing local business advice.
- We recognise that that the service is not the best agency to deal with all issues and will refer enquiries to other agencies when they are outwith the scope of the service.
- We will work closely with the Society of Chief Trading Standards Officers in Scotland (SCOTSS) and the Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) to channel complex legal issues for expert interpretation/opinion.
- We will adhere to the 'Home Authority Principle' thereby ensuring that local businesses with national business interests will have one point of contact for advice and complaints.
- We will network with local business organisations to provide advice, information and training to their members.
- We will work closely with neighbouring Trading Standards Services to provide a comprehensive weighing and measuring equipment testing and calibration service.

Description of Services Provided

The Trading Standards Service will provide the following business services: -

- New business advice – if someone is considering setting up in business for the first time or perhaps expanding into a new area of business, the service will be happy to provide comprehensive business advice on all aspects of the relevant consumer civil and criminal law.

- Business advice – the service will provide all local businesses with free advice and information about all aspects of consumer law, including the businesses obligations to customers and their rights as a provider of goods and services.
- Verification and calibration service – in relation to weighing and measuring equipment we can, as well as verifying a wide range of trade equipment, provide a testing and certification service to National Standard accuracy. Calibration to a higher standard can be arranged if requested.
- Business education and promotional activity – the service will provide business education opportunities to businesses and business organisations on demand and will endeavour to promote the work of the Trading Standards Service by : -
 - Regularly providing topical information to local business organisations
 - Giving talks, staff training and holding business seminars for local businesses.
 - Providing a wide range of business advice and information leaflets

Service Planning

The Trading Standards Service produces an annual Trading Standards Team Plan. This plan is linked to the Environment Service Business Management and Improvement Plan, Corporate Plan and Community Plan.

Service Standards

Trading Standards have standards of customer service, which are specific to our business advice work as follows: -

- All staff will respond to clients in a courteous, helpful and positive manner and will make their identity known to the client.
- If a visit to premises or staff training is requested, arrange a mutually suitable appointment.
- If an enquiry is outside our remit we will advise of other possible sources of assistance.
- 100% of metrology certification requests completed by quoted date
- Keep businesses regularly informed if an enquiry is protracted i.e. referred to LACORS or SCOTSS legal panels.

Every business advice enquiry will be allocated to a named officer who will, whenever possible, handle that enquiry from start to finish.

On the rare occasions where there are conflicts of interest between the client's interests and Trading Standards aims, the client will be informed immediately and given the option of seeking advice and assistance elsewhere.

Officers will not deal with an enquiry if they have a personal involvement or other conflict of interest.

When requested, we will make arrangements to meet with a client in private.

We will always provide legal advice in writing on request.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the fundamental principles of the Trading Standards Service. All staff actively involved in the delivery of the service have signed a declaration of confidentiality.

In general, confidential information must not be disclosed except in the following circumstances: -

- As required by law
- As authorised by the Council
- When there is a perceived danger to clients or others
- Where the referral/disclosure is made with the knowledge and consent of the client.

People Management

Relevant Trading Standards staff will possess the skills and knowledge required to meet clients' needs.

We will ensure clients get advice from the most appropriate source taking account of staff skills and knowledge.

Staff will receive support and supervision appropriate to their level of skill and knowledge.

Training will be provided in accordance with the Environment Service policy.

Commitment to Quality and Continuous Improvement

We will continue to look for ways of improving the service and will regularly assess our performance, seek feedback from service users and review procedures.

Complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction will be viewed as opportunities to identify possible weaknesses in service delivery. The service does not have a 'blame culture'. When things go wrong, it is rarely the fault of one officer and is much more likely to be a combination of factors, many of which are determined by the systems operated by the section. Where a client makes a complaint or expresses dissatisfaction with the service, the Trading Standards Manager will be notified as soon as possible. This information will be used to examine possible action to improve service provision.

The client will be given the opportunity to utilise the Council's corporate complaints procedure.

Public Performance Information

As a public service, Trading Standards believe that it is important to let the public and other stakeholders know how well we have performed, and how much our service costs.

As a section of Environment Services our statutory performance indicator results will be published annually in accordance with Council policy.