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To: Council Leaders in Wales and Scotland

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Dear Council Leader

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On 21 March, the UK Government published a research report - **The Impact of Local Authority Trading Standards in Challenging Times**.

I would be grateful if you would share the report with senior officers in your authority and your own local trading standards teams. The report highlights examples of best practice, where local authorities have found new ways of working to improve efficiency, but it also contains important messages for the future about the adverse impact of budget cuts on trading standards services.

You can find everything you need here www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-trading-standards-a-review and I also attach a summary of the key recommendations. Recommendations 4 to 6 are particularly relevant to you as council leaders as they describe what action you can take to ensure trading standards services are delivered in a viable and sustainable manner. Whilst I appreciate that not all of you lead councils that have responsibility for trading standards, there are examples in this report involving other services, and all councils have a role in delivering services focused on public protection.

The report was commissioned jointly by BIS and the Trading Standards Institute (TSI), and compiled by Professor John Raine, Catherine Mangan and Peter Watt at the University of Birmingham's Institute of Local Government Studies.

I am copying this letter to Leon Livermore, the Chief Executive of the TSI, who stands ready to work with you to ensure that the future safety and security of consumers across the country is safeguarded.

JO SWINSON MP
Minister for Employment Relations and Consumer Affairs

The Impact of Local Authority Trading Standards in Challenging Times - research report commissioned jointly by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) and the Trading Standards Institute (TSI)

Summary of the key recommendations

Recommendation 1: Local authority trading standards services should devise and roll out more campaigning programmes, ideally with the support of national bodies, to raise the public profile of their work, and particularly of the contribution it makes to local public protection and community safety.

Recommendation 2: Given the prevailing uncertainty about the value of routine inspections in trading standards, and the dearth of reliable and comprehensive evidence in this respect, a national project should be commissioned to sample and measure levels of compliance with legislative requirements across the range of trading standards activities. This project might be undertaken in a single week, and ideally would be repeated each year to enable the compilation of a growing data-base of patterns and trends. This would then ensure that the outcomes and impact of trading standards interventions are better understood and that calculations could be made of the benefit-cost ratios for each of the different activities.

Recommendation 3: The Departments for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and for Communities and Local Government (CLG), together with the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) should collaborate on a project to devise a national framework of measures of outcomes and impact covering the range of trading standards activities, and should propose an appropriate framework for data collection and reporting on a national, as well as local, basis.

Recommendation 4: Local authorities should plan budget allocations for trading standards departments on the basis of good information as to workloads, performance (efficiency and effectiveness) and the likely outcomes and impact of any proposed changes in provision. Ensuring the availability of such information to all involved in council budget decision-making should be a key responsibility for each chief trading standards officer.

Recommendation 5: Local authority trading standards departments should give careful consideration to the advantages and disadvantages of different organisational models for the future of trading standards provision, including shared service arrangements with neighbours, working in wider regional groupings for certain specialist functions, with private sector service providers, or buying in services from other councils/agencies, and other funding options such as making joint appointments and secondments with other agencies. Whatever the favoured model, priority should be given to ensuring that governance arrangements are such as to engage councillors as actively as possible, both in determining the priorities for trading standards and in overseeing their realisation.

Recommendation 6: Local authority trading standards departments should ensure that the pursuit of corporate performance targets, particularly in the on-going challenging financial times, does not unduly conflict with the important goals of supporting and facilitating professional development, and nurturing commitment among staff through the encouragement of initiative-taking, and the sharing of ideas about how best to promote fair and legal trading and so provide better public protection for all.