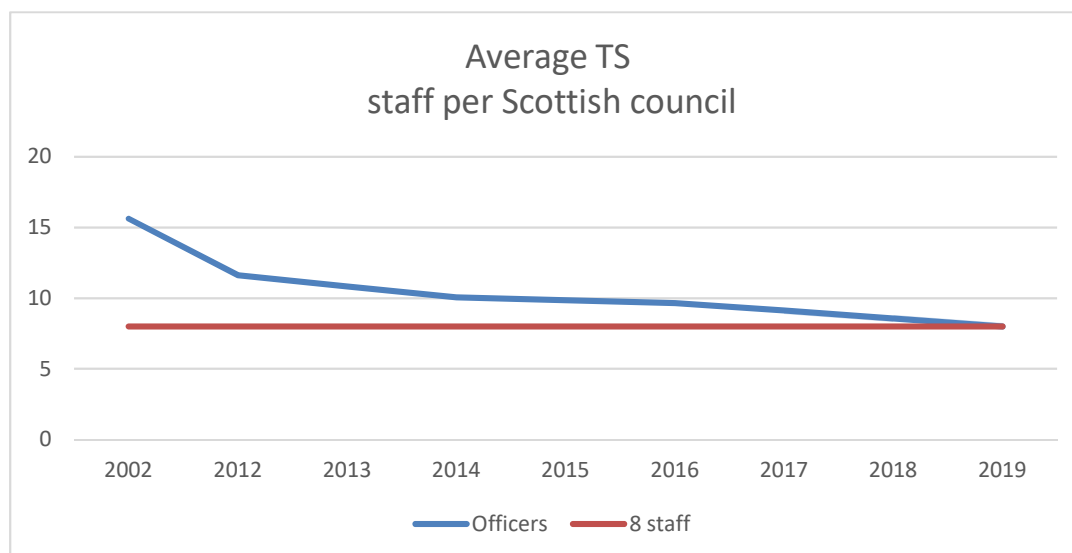




Trading Standards workforce survey 2019

The Society conducts a regular workforce survey to identify trends and give an overall picture of the officer resource deployed by Scottish local authorities in trading standards services, this is a 100% return from all Scottish councils.

In summary, there have been further reductions in capacity to the end of July 2019, an all-staff drop of 12.3% from the 2017 survey, and a drop of 31% in the last seven years, despite a £3m funding package for new devolved tobacco and NVP duties from the Scottish Government over that period. The fall in numbers is across all officer types, and there is no sign that councils are attempting to fill the gap through training or new starts, with vacant posts more than doubling in the past three years.



In 2002 Audit Scotland carried out a performance audit across all Scottish Trading Standards services and used a benchmark of 8 or fewer staff to categorise 'small' services. It found that small trading standards services performed worse overall than larger services and had little capacity to improve or develop their services. At that time there were 10 'small' services, and in 2013 when Audit Scotland revisited the service, warning that there was a real risk to the viability of trading standards services, there were 15 Scottish councils with 8 or fewer staff.

In 2019, the number of Trading Standards services with 8 or fewer staff has increased to 21 councils, showing an accelerating trend to small services that do not have the capability to provide good quality service across the range of statutory functions, risking inadequate consumer protection for Scottish consumers.

In 2002 Audit Scotland found that Scottish councils had a complement of over 500 staff in trading standards. That number has halved in 2019.

In addition to simple numbers, the age demographic has worsened since 2017 with over 45% of all staff now over the age of 50 (2017: 40%), and again nearly half of all TSOs are over 50 years old. Clearly the loss of experienced staff is accelerating, and councils will face a crisis situation within a few years unless immediate action is taken. SCOTSS is pleased to have engagement from COSLA as part of a Workforce Strategy and has presented a proposal to the Scottish Government for support in adding professional workforce over the next ten years to help prevent further erosion in capacity. But more needs to be done now, to fill vacant posts and get more frontline staff working in this key area for consumers and businesses.

1 - DTS or equivalent officers (TSOs)

<i>Age</i>	<i>2012 survey</i>	<i>2014 survey</i>	<i>2016 survey</i>	<i>2017 survey</i>	<i>2019 survey</i>
<i><= 24 yrs</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>25 to 29 yrs</i>	5	3	1	1	3
<i>30 to 39 yrs</i>	34	20.7	24	22.2	20.3
<i>40 to 49 yrs</i>	78	64.5	55	46.45	39.41
<i>50 to 59 yrs</i>	45	56.2	51	54.39	51.96
<i>60 plus yrs</i>	3	2	5	6	5.73
<i>Total</i>	165	147.2	136	130.04	120.4

The professional officer resource has fallen by over 26% in seven years. This core resource includes a fair percentage (up to a quarter) of non or semi operational management staff, so the active body of day-to-day frontline operational officers is significantly smaller.

With the 50-59 year-old cohort making up by far the biggest slice, there is a real risk that a significant number of experienced officers will leave the service in the next 4-5 years, with insufficient numbers to backfill these posts. The additional trend more recently, for central government funded teams and agencies to draw experienced staff from local authority teams does nothing to help the situation in local authorities.

2 - Other enforcement and advice staff (non-DTS)

<i>Age</i>	<i>2012 survey</i>	<i>2014 survey</i>	<i>2016 survey</i>	<i>2017 survey</i>	<i>2019 survey</i>
<i><= 24 yrs</i>	0	2	2	3	2
<i>25 to 29 yrs</i>	18	10	8	8	7
<i>30 to 39 yrs</i>	33	22.2	23	23.83	22.74
<i>40 to 49 yrs</i>	71	58.7	62	52	38.1
<i>50 to 59 yrs</i>	43	42.4	44	44.6	46.71
<i>60 plus yrs</i>	6	7	9	9.5	6.86
<i>Total</i>	171	142.3	148	140.73	123.41

The complement of non DTS qualified enforcement officers has decreased this year by over 12% despite the additional grant funding for new Nicotine Vaping Products duties of £1.5m from Scottish Government in 2017/18.

There is an opportunity to upskill this officer base to the Trading Standards Officer level, however it appears that this process has stalled, perhaps through a lack of finance, or a lack of capacity to develop and support these staff inhouse.

3 - Other staff (officers with no direct enforcement role)

<i>Age</i>	<i>2012 survey</i>	<i>2014 survey</i>	<i>2016 survey</i>	<i>2017 survey</i>	<i>2019 survey</i>
<i><= 24 yrs</i>	0	1	1	2	2
<i>25 to 29 yrs</i>	3	3.6	6	3	1
<i>30 to 39 yrs</i>	11	11	3	1	1
<i>40 to 49 yrs</i>	12	8.2	7	9	1
<i>50 to 59 yrs</i>	5	6	5	5	5.033
<i>60 plus yrs</i>	5	3	3	1	1
<i>Total</i>	36	32.8	25	21	11.033

This category of staff (e.g. intelligence officers, technical assistants) has seen a dramatic reduction of 50% over the past two years. It may be that some of these officers have been successful in moving into a more enforcement-based role, but more likely that enforcement officers are taking on more office-based duties as lower grade posts are lost or go unfilled.

4 - Total staff resources

<i>Year</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2019</i>
<i>Staff numbers</i>	372	322.1	309	291.77	255.84
<i>Vacant posts</i>	n/a	23	15	25	32.8

Staff numbers overall have continued to decline as outlined above, despite the profile given to capacity issues within the trading standards service nationally. There is a significant increase in the numbers of established posts which are vacant, for two main reasons, either a reluctance by councils to fill the posts for savings purposes, or an inability to fill advertised posts because of the real scarcity of qualified officers that are available.

5 – Trainees and staff development

<i>Year</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2019</i>
<i>Trainees in post</i>	2	2	7	7	7.75
<i>Other staff in qualification route</i>	25	21	22	18	19

Numbers of trainees and other staff studying toward the CTSI qualification remains low, and we can only hope that recent changes to the qualification framework stimulates some additional demand.

SCOTSS is taking on a role as a training partner with CTSI for delivery of competence framework training, but if support given to training and development by councils continues to decline, then there is little chance in maintaining even current levels of enforcement staff in councils, given the existing age demographic.

Any queries about this report can be directed to

Ken Daly
SCOTSS National Coordinator
coordinator@scotss.org.uk
07720538349
@socotss
www.tradingstandards.scot

The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS), is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC047951). Our members are professional trading standards managers representing every Scottish local authority trading standards service.