



Trading Standards Workforce Survey 2025 – Policy Briefing

Prepared by the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS)

Executive Summary

Trading Standards services in Scotland are facing an unprecedented crisis in capacity and sustainability. The 2025 biennial workforce survey, with a 100% return rate from all Scottish councils, confirms:

- **Total staffing has fallen below 250 FTE for the first time** – over 50% drop since 2002.
- **Qualified Trading Standards Officers (TSOs)** have decreased by 2.3% since 2023 and over 25% since 2012.
- **Aging workforce** – 58% of qualified TSOs and 60% of all officers are over 50 years old; only 11% of TSOs are under 40.
- **Service viability risk** – 22 out of 32 councils now operate with 8 or fewer staff, up from 15 in 2013, meaning they perform worse than larger services and have little capacity to improve [*Audit Scotland](#).
- Recruitment and training pipelines remain inadequate, with Scotland lagging behind the rest of the GB in Modern Apprenticeship provision.

Without urgent government intervention, Scotland risks losing the local authority trading standards service as an effective consumer protection and business support mechanism.

Key Findings

1. Workforce Size and Composition

- **Total establishment (2025):** 249.97 FTE (down from 511.6 in 2002).
- **Vacancies:** Low (20 posts), but this masks the fact that posts are often deleted upon retirement rather than filled and recruitment is difficult from a low officer base.
- The **professional officer base** includes up to 25% in non-operational management roles, reducing active frontline capacity.

2. Aging Workforce and Recruitment Challenges

- **TSOs:** Half are aged 50-59, with a further 8% aged over 60.
- **Other enforcement staff:** Half are aged 50-59, with a further 14% aged over 60.
- Very few younger officers: no qualified TSOs under 25, and only 3 aged 25-29.

- External recruitment from central government and agencies offering better terms is depleting local authority teams.

3. Service Viability and Capability

- In 2002, Audit Scotland classified services with ≤8 staff as “small” and at higher risk of underperformance.
- By 2025, **22 councils** fall into this category (69% of all councils).
- Larger services have collapsed in size — the two biggest councils combined had over 100 staff in 2002; today they have 37 FTE between them.

4. Training and Development

- Modern Apprenticeship in Regulatory Services launched through SCOTSS support in 2025 (12 apprentices across two colleges).
- While positive, apprentices are years away from qualification and require significant supervision from already stretched officers.
- In contrast, England’s scheme has significant government backing with £5m per annum committed over four years from new Tobacco & Vapes legislation funding, to recruit an additional 80 apprentices.

Risks

- **Loss of statutory enforcement capability** across areas such as product safety, fair trading, Weights & Measures, health protection, and economic crime.
- **Reduced business support**, especially for SMEs navigating increasingly complex regulation.
- **Accelerated retirements** with no succession planning or recruitment pipeline.
- **Service fragmentation** as collaborative models come under budgetary pressure.

Recommendations for Government Action

1. Immediate Workforce Investment

- Fund a targeted recruitment programme to replace and expand the qualified officer base.
- Provide salary parity with central government regulatory bodies to retain staff.

2. Training and Apprenticeship Expansion

- Match England’s investment in Modern Apprenticeships to secure at least an extra dozen extra apprentices in the next year.
- Develop a national training framework to accelerate qualification routes.

3. Structural Reform and Collaboration

- Explore a national or regionalised service model to pool resources and expertise, SCOTSS has recently commissioned an external independent [Options Appraisal](#) on this from CIPFA.
- Strengthen collaborative agreements between councils with guaranteed funding and governance.

4. Statutory Protection of Trading Standards Capacity

- Introduce minimum staffing or service standards for local authority Trading Standards functions.

Conclusion

Scotland's Trading Standards service is at a tipping point. The loss of capacity since 2002, combined with an aging workforce demographic and weak recruitment pipeline, threatens the service's viability. Without urgent and sustained government action, Scotland risks leaving consumers unprotected and businesses unsupported at a time of growing regulatory complexity.

SCOTSS calls on the Scottish Government, COSLA, and all relevant stakeholders to commit to immediate intervention and long-term reform to safeguard this essential public service.

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Appendices

Figure 1 total establishment by local authority.

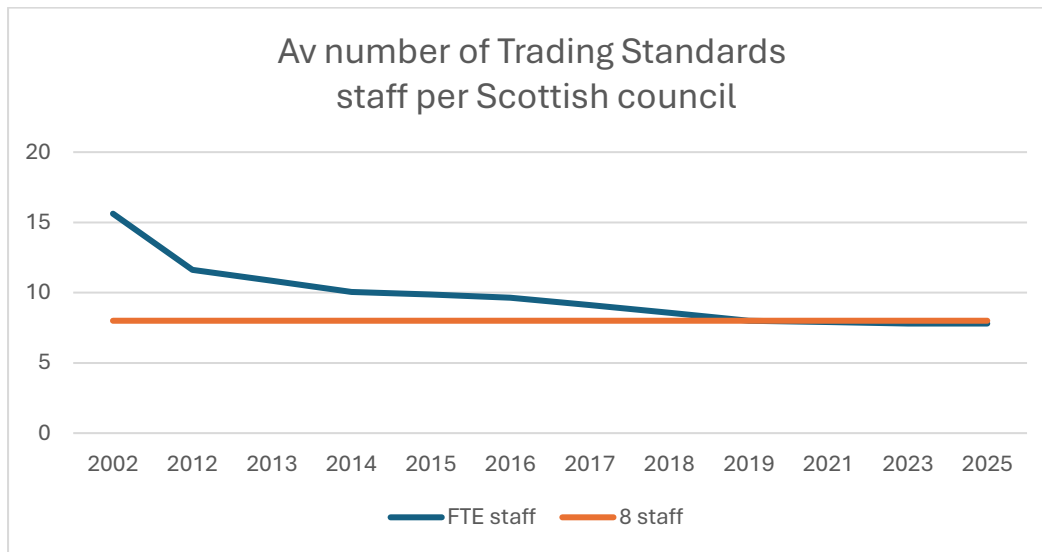


Figure 2 total trading standards staff 2012-2025



Table 1 - DTS or equivalent officers (TSOs)

Age	2012 survey	2014 survey	2016 survey	2017 survey	2019 survey	2021 survey	2023 survey	2025 survey
<= 24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25- 29	5	3	1	1	3	1	1.00	3.00
30- 39	34	20.7	24	22.2	20.3	15.6	11.71	10.44
40- 49	78	64.5	55	46.45	39.41	34.52	37.86	37.03
50- 59	45	56.2	51	54.39	51.96	63.56	65.08	58.91
>60	3	2	5	6	5.73	6.73	6.60	10.10
Total	165	147.2	136	130.04	120.4	121.41	122.25	119.48

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

Age	2012 survey	2014 survey	2016 survey	2017 survey	2019 survey	2021 survey	2023 survey	2025 survey
<= 24	0	2	2	3	2	1	1	3
25-29	18	10	8	8	7	8	8.10	4
30-39	33	22.2	23	23.83	22.74	21.4	14.60	16.6
40-49	71	58.7	62	52	38.1	28.51	22.10	21.5
50-59	43	42.4	44	44.6	46.71	48.32	56.84	57.46
>60	6	7	9	9.5	6.86	11.55	13.45	17.2
Total	171	142.3	148	140.73	123.41	118.78	116.09	119.76

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

Age	2012 survey	2014 survey	2016 survey	2017 survey	2019 survey	2021 survey	2023 survey	2025 survey
<= 24	0	1	1	2	2	1.5	2	3.00
25-29	3	3.6	6	3	1	2	0	0
30-39	11	11	3	1	1	1.6	0.30	0.50
40-49	12	8.2	7	9	1	2.25	2.33	1.83
50-59	5	6	5	5	5.033	2.75	4.28	1.00
>60	5	3	3	1	1	2.55	2.96	4.40
Total	36	32.8	25	21	11.033	12.65	11.87	10.73

Table 4 - Total staff resources

Year	2002	2012	2014	2016	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Staff numbers	511.6	372	322.1	309	291.77	255.84	252.84	250.20	249.97
Vacant posts	n/a	n/a	23	15	25	32.8	25	18.1	20.5

Table 5 – Trainees and staff development

Year	2012	2014	2016	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
Trainees in post	2	2	7	7	7.75	12.8	11	12
Other staff in qualification route	25	21	22	18	19	10	10.5	12