

## **DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Meeting with Cabinet Member – Health and Communities**

**7<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

#### **Report of the Strategic Director Cultural and Community Services**

### **TRADING STANDARDS CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS**

#### **1. Purpose of the report:**

To advise the Cabinet Member – Health and Communities of the results of the 2012-13 trading standards consumer satisfaction survey.

#### **2. Information and analysis:**

- 2.1 According to a report published by Consumer Focus,<sup>1</sup> UK consumers experienced 15.7 million problems with goods and services purchased in 2012 and the total amount of consumer detriment was £3.08 billion. On a *pro rata* basis, this equates to some 180,000 problems in Derbyshire amounting to £37 million pounds of consumer detriment. The research also suggests that most problems incur little or no financial loss and that for 65% of problems the detriment is less than £5, however, there is still the potential for a large number of Derbyshire residents to suffer significant financial loss as a result of faulty goods or unsatisfactory services.
- 2.2 In partnership with local Citizens Advice Bureau, the Trading Standards Service provides advice and information to local residents about consumer law issues. Since September 2005 the majority of requests for assistance were received by Consumer Direct – a national telephone and e-mail advice service funded by central government. Since April 2012 this service has been provided by Citizens Advice. The Citizens Advice Consumer Service receives the vast majority of requests for advice via its telephone support service. Any breach of trading standards criminal law is referred to the relevant local authority in which any illegality may have occurred. Derbyshire Trading Standards Service also still provides contract law advice to local consumers considered to be vulnerable and to those who have a dispute with a Derbyshire Trusted Trader. We also monitor all notifications about Derbyshire based traders that are the subject of a complaint to consider whether there is a need to intervene with regards to those generating the most complaints in accordance with the provisions of the Enterprise Act.
- 2.3 In anticipation of the last divisional restructuring and in response to the need to make efficiency savings, the trading standards division introduced a new

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<sup>1</sup> Consumer Detriment 2012, Report by Consumer Focus:  
<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2012/10/TNS-for-Consumer-Focus-Consumer-Detriments-2012.pdf>

process for monitoring and assessing complaints referred by the Citizens Advice Consumer Service in April 2011. Twice weekly all referrals are considered by trading standards managers and categorised according to subject area; whether there has been a breach of criminal legislation; and the level of consumer detriment. Complaints about local traders are then allocated to team members for further investigation as appropriate. Not all referrals are allocated for action; some will be recorded on to the divisional database for reference pending any further intelligence suggesting trading malpractice or non-compliance. All requests for assistance from the public are given initial civil law advice by Citizens Advice. Any request for advice or complaint about non-compliance where the consumer is considered vulnerable – for example a complaint about a doorstep trader from an older resident – will be prioritised for further action. In addition, if the complaint involves a member of the Derbyshire Trusted Trader Scheme, to maintain the integrity of the scheme, all complaints will be followed up and brought to resolution if possible.

- 2.4 The table below provides details of the different types of complaints received by the division over the past three years. The authority has a statutory duty to enforce the vast majority of trading standards legislation, but is not obliged to provide civil law advice. Although the total number of complaints has remained relatively stable over the past four years, there has been a sharp fall in the number of ‘civil only’ complaints dealt with reflecting the need to prioritise statutory services. There has been a significant increase in complaints about Trusted Trader members; doorstep complaints and breaches of weight restrictions. The latter is one of the few areas of legislation that the local authority does not have a duty to enforce.

<b>Consumer Complaints</b>	<b>2010 - 2011</b>	<b>2011 - 2012</b>	<b>2012 - 2013</b>
Complaints about Derbyshire Trusted Trader member	121	298	257
Agriculture Complaints	17	17	24
Animal Health Complaints	433	372	424
Civil Only Complaints	1,693	1,002	576
Fair Trading Complaints	2,226	2,858	2,648
Food Complaints	145	190	191
Metrology Complaints	49	72	60
Weight Restriction Complaints	358	413	478
Safety Complaints	373	396	350
Doorstep Complaints	54	152	192
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,375</b>	<b>5,613</b>	<b>5,284</b>

- 2.5 The increase in complaints about Derbyshire Trusted Trader Scheme members reflects the increased popularity of the scheme and the continuing rise in consumer expectations. There are some 1,300 traders on the scheme representing over 80 different trade sectors – the biggest proportion of which

are in the home improvements/repairs, building, electrical, plumbing and painting and decorating sectors. Based on an estimate of the annual turnover of scheme members, it has been calculated that the total annual turnover of Trusted Trader members is some £130 million pounds. This is therefore the value of consumer transactions in Derbyshire that are covered by the protection from the scheme. To ensure the integrity of the scheme, all complaints about Trusted Trader Members are scrutinised and appropriate advice given to seek to resolve any justified complaints. A requirement of the scheme is for members to leave feedback cards with their customers which are returnable to the Trading Standards Division. Since April 2012 we have received some 11,003 comments about trusted trader members of which 10,922 (99%) were positive. However, not all scheme members are perfect and eight have been removed from the scheme for a variety of reasons including poor workmanship.

2.6 Although national performance measures no longer require the Division to carry out satisfaction surveys, feedback from service users plays an important part of continuous improvement of service delivery and is essential for the Division's quality assurance system and Excellence in Consumer Service procedures. Accordingly, the Division has regularly carried out customer surveys and during the past year we sent out some 208 survey forms; 71 of which were returned – a response rate of 34%. The key results of the survey are provided below.

- 93% of respondents found it easy (59% very easy) to make contact with the service. This is in line with previous years.
- 98.5% found our staff courteous which was slightly higher than in previous years.
- 96% found the advice or information we provided in response to their complaint easy to understand.
- At the time of the survey 47% said that following our advice they had successfully resolved their complaint which was on a par with previous years, whereas 22% had partially resolved their dispute.
- 91% found the advice or information helpful with 78% saying it was very helpful. This is a significant improvement on previous years.
- However, there was a drop in those people who felt that they had been kept informed about the progress of their complaint, perhaps reflecting the significant time required to prosecute some of the mis-selling of mobility aids complaints.
- 75% said that they felt better equipped to resolve a similar issue in the future – which was in line with previous years.
- When asked if we could have done more to help, 23.5% said yes whilst 60% said no, which although is slightly higher than the previous year, is consistent with recent years.
- 90% indicated that they felt they had been treated fairly at all times.
- 84% said that they would use the service again in the future.

- 2.7 On the whole, service users who have sought our advice or assistance as a result of buying goods or services from Derbyshire traders, appear to be satisfied with the service that we provide. **88%** of respondents were either very satisfied (**72%**) or fairly satisfied (**16%**) with the overall level of service. The proportion of very satisfied customers has increased significantly from recent years where the average proportion of very satisfied respondents has been 61%.
- 2.8 Charts depicting the service user feedback including trend analysis from previous surveys are shown in appendix 1 to this report. Full details of the 2012-13 Trading Standards Customer Survey Results are available on the County Council website via the link below.
- [http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/business/trading\\_standards/About\\_us/consultation/casurvey/default.asp](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/business/trading_standards/About_us/consultation/casurvey/default.asp)
- 2.9 As well as seeking feedback on the services we provide, we also sought feedback from service users about our current priorities which are shown below.

**Derbyshire Trading Standards focuses its work on the following priority areas:**

1. Taking effective action against businesses that deliberately or persistently break the law
2. Providing support and advice to Derbyshire businesses and consumers to maintain a fair and safe trading environment
3. Taking effective action in relation to the storage and supply of dangerous goods
4. Maintaining food standards and helping people to make informed, healthy choices
5. Preventing the spread of animal disease and taking action in cases of unnecessary suffering of livestock
6. Restricting the access of children and young people to harmful age-restricted goods

79% responded that they thought that the priorities 'were about right'; 8% thought that they 'could be improved'; and the remainder (13.6%) felt 'unable to comment'. Some additional comments relating to the accessibility and powers of the trading standards service that were made by the respondents are contained within Appendix 2.

- 2.10 As part of the departmental equality monitoring, respondents were asked to provide information about their gender, age, ethnicity and mobility. Interestingly the age profile of respondents does not reflect that of the Derbyshire population as a whole. 69% are aged over 60 and just under a half of respondents stated that they had some form of disability. This is consistent

with the policy of targeting those consumers who are considered to be vulnerable due to age or disability and also reflects the feedback from users of the trusted trader scheme. However, the proportion of respondents from the BME communities suggests that this sector is under-represented. A full breakdown of the equality profile of respondents is provided within Appendix 3.

**3. Other considerations:**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered; financial, legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and environmental, human rights, health, human resources, property and transport considerations.

**4. Background papers:**

None

**5. Key Decision:**

No

**6. Call-in:**

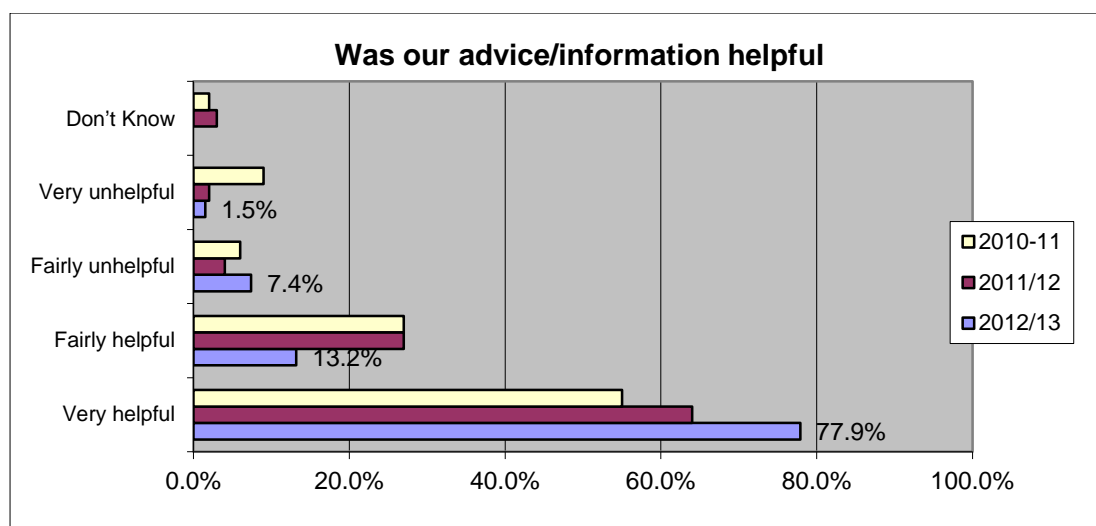
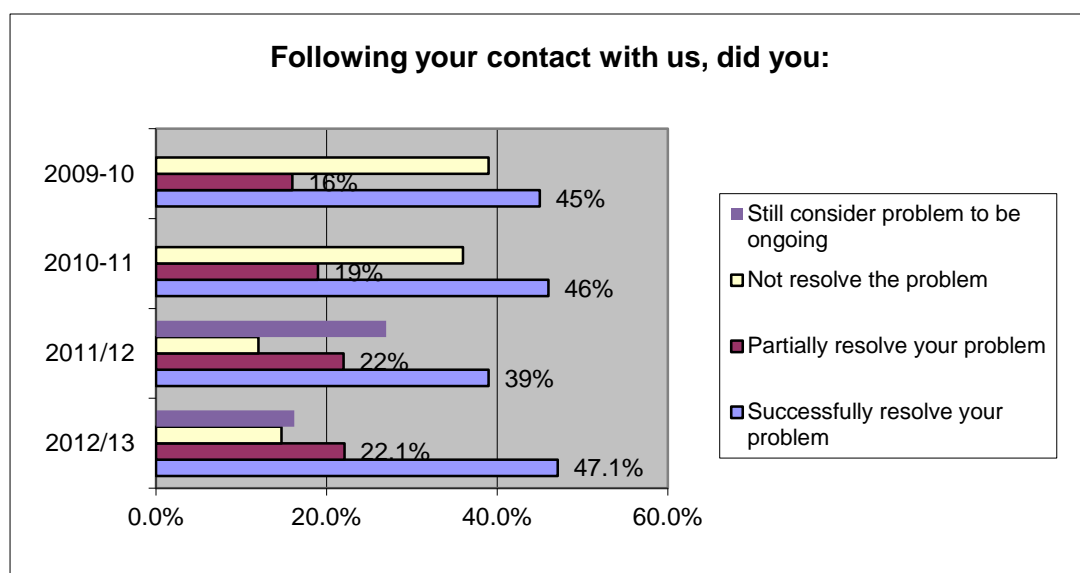
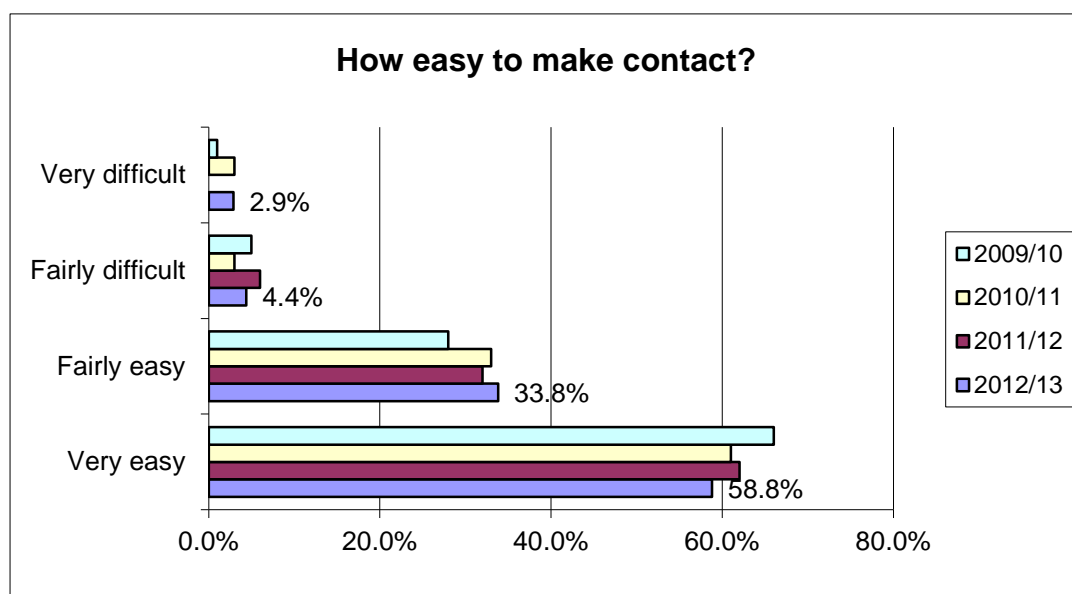
Is it required that call-in be waived for any decision on this report?  
No

**7. Strategic Director's recommendation:**

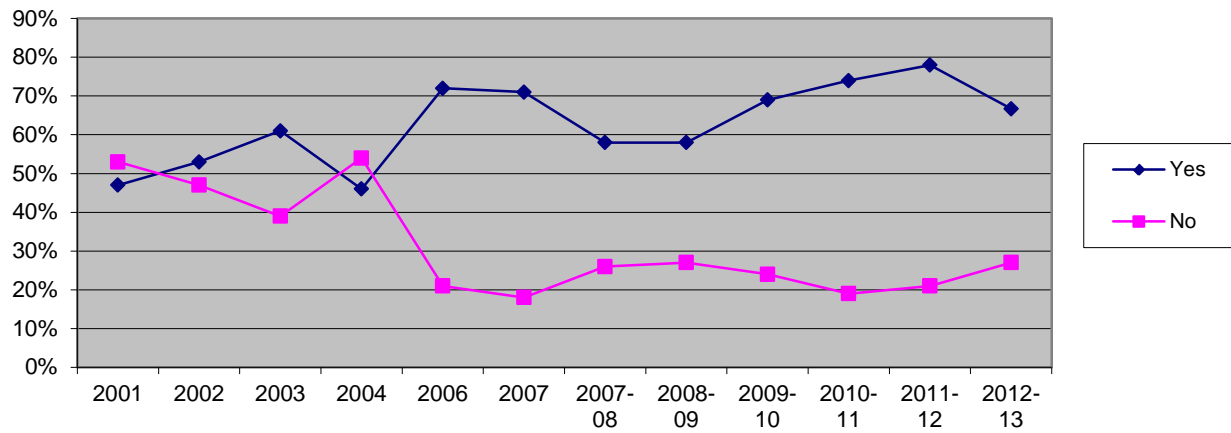
That the Cabinet Member – Health and Communities notes the 2012-13 trading standards consumer satisfaction survey.

**Martin Molloy**  
**Strategic Director**  
**Cultural and Community Services**

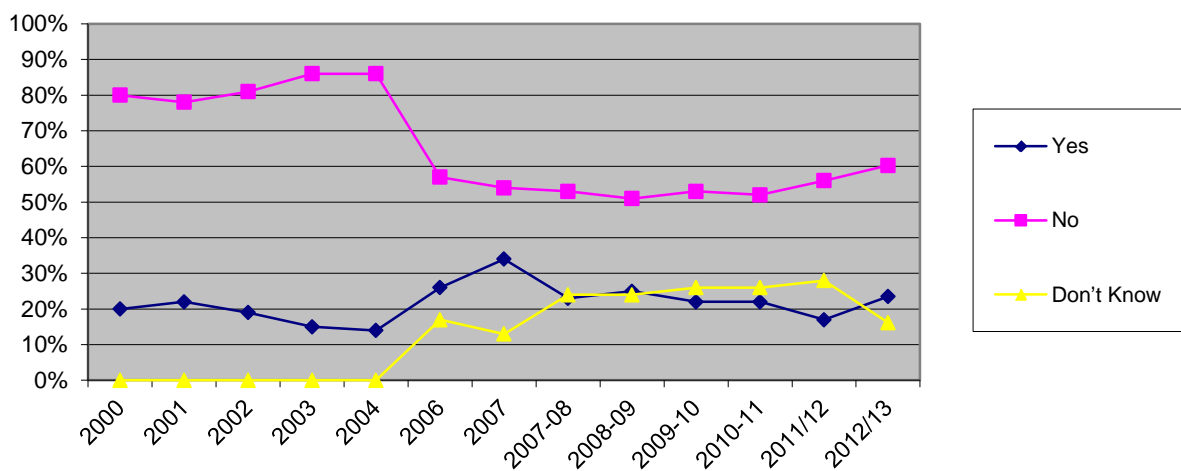
## Graphical representation of key service user feedback

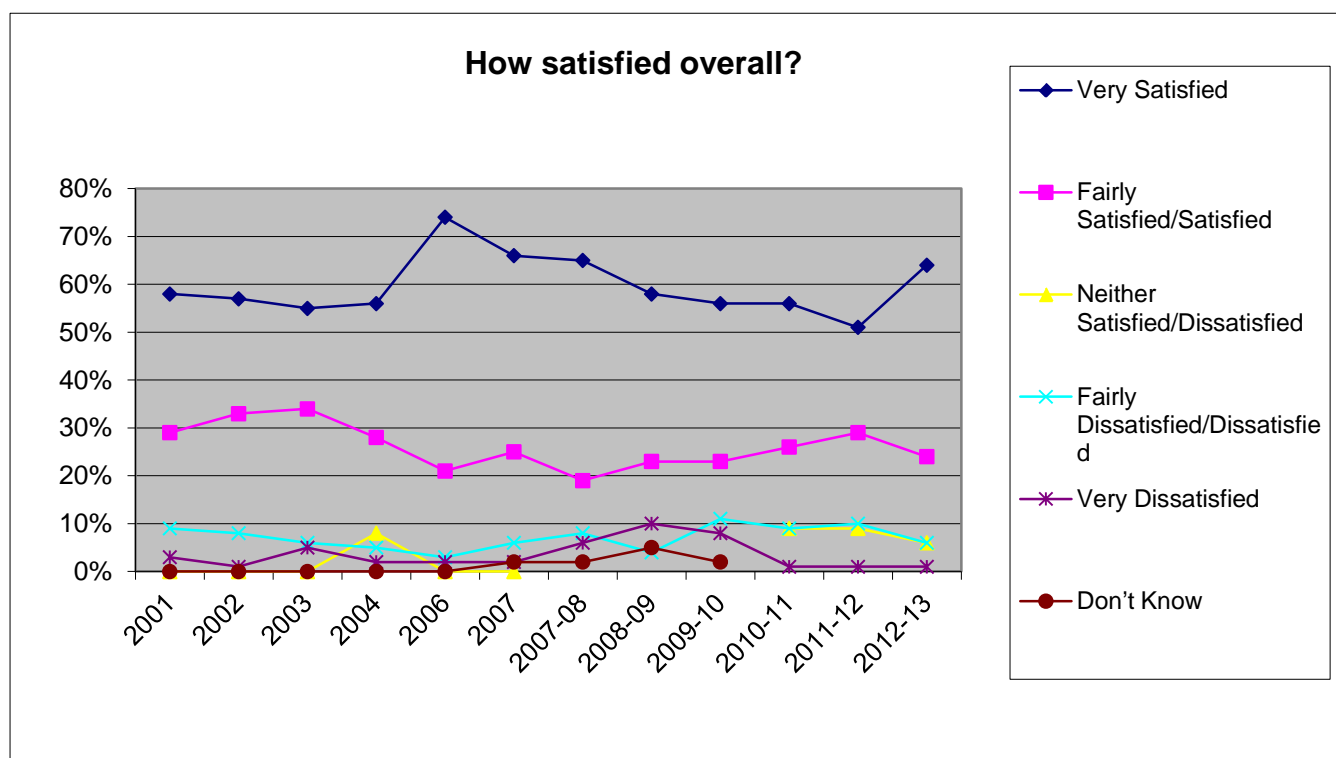


### Were you kept informed of progress?



### Could we have done more?





## Appendix 2

### Feedback on trading standards service priorities

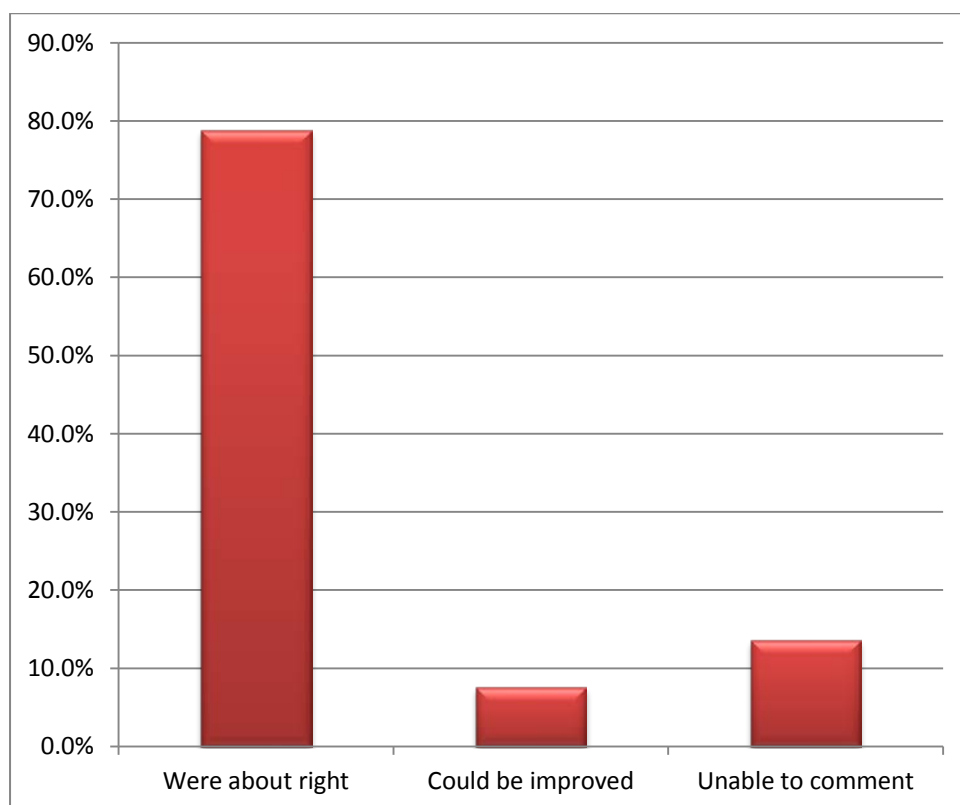
**Q13 - Derbyshire Trading Standards focuses its work on the following priority areas;**

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**Looking at these priorities, would you say that they:**

Were about right	78.8%	52
Could be improved	7.6%	5
Unable to comment	13.6%	9





As well as indicating whether they thought the existing priorities ‘were about right; could be improved or felt unable to comment’, respondees were also invited to expand on their thinking and provided the following further information.

#### **Comments from those who selected "were about right"**

"I think that trading standards should have more power to act against these unscrupulous traders. I was told from the offset by one of your advisors that you could only advise the company on its actions. Surely trading standards should have the power to take action against these companies"

"If there is a known problem with a company, this information should be available to your clients and not refused under "Freedom of Information Act""

"It would be nice if trading standards had a service that could be a bit more local. Matlock is such a long way from Long Eaton"

#### **Comments from those who thought they "could be improved"**

"Identification of an organisation that would have carried out an inspection would have helped"

"It would be helpful if you had the power to order the owner of livestock to fence these animals within their property. We live on a 17 acre site and for the past 3 yrs I have walked my dogs on leads because I'm terrified of them picking up ticks or other diseases from these animals"

"Someone should contact me to advise me of any actions if any taken to prevent this person from being in a position to repeat his crimes. Fraud and blackmail are very serious and the public have a right to be protected. YYY is not a fit person to hold a credit broker's licence"

"The public need to be informed of the now purpose of trading standards so that a democratic debate takes place widely across the county as to why the public is

denied access to help”
<b>Other comments</b>
"Do have difficulty in finding the right office to go to so your info should be easily found in phone directory or local news”
"I have no comment to make in relation to this question. I agree there are more pressing matters than what I reported to you, but feel very let down that you weren't more open and HONEST from the start as to what was ACTUALLY possible, given the current financial squeeze"

### Appendix 3

#### Equality and Diversity Profile of Trading Standards User Respondents

##### Gender

Male	30	42.9%
Female	40	57.1%

##### Age on last birthday

31 to 40	3	4%
41 to 50	7	10%
51 to 60	12	17%
61 to 70	25	35%
71 to 80	19	27%
81 +	5	7%

##### Disability:

No	36	54.5%
Yes, affecting mobility	18	27.3%
Yes, affecting hearing	6	9.1%
Yes, affecting vision	4	6.1%
Yes, a learning disability		
Other (please specify)	2	3.0%

##### Ethnicity

Which of these groups do you belong to?

White	67	98.5%
Mixed		
Black or Black British		
Asian	1	1.5%
Chinese and other ethnic groups		