

5 CONSUMER PROTECTION (AN122-2013)

Audit Scotland, on behalf of the Accounts Commission, published their 'Protecting Consumers' report on 31 January 2013. This report examined the operation of Trading Standards and Food Safety services across all Scottish councils and found that:

- 1.3 million consumers in Scotland think they have reason to complain about goods and services every year, but many do not know where to go for help;
- 35,000 consumer complaints and advice requests were dealt with by councils' trading standards services in 2010/11;
- the long-term viability of councils' trading standards services were under threat and action is required to strengthen the protection for consumers; and
- the lack of any national priorities, standards and reporting in trading standards services in Scotland has led to variations in how different councils regulate businesses.

Examples of current good practice are noted within the report and these include the Scambusters service which is jointly hosted by Dundee City and North Lanarkshire Councils. In addition, other formal shared service arrangements also currently exist between Dundee, Perth, and Angus councils, for example for the maintenance of 'local standards' legally required of councils under the Weights and Measures Act 1985.

In response to Audit Scotland's report, COSLA's Consumer Protection Task Group are undertaking a critical evaluation of specific areas of Trading Standards services, to assess potential service improvements including workforce planning, consumer expectations, and national priorities. Dundee City Council is represented on this task group.

In the meantime, Dundee City Council are working with Angus and Perth & Kinross Councils to consider ways to further improve the effectiveness of these services through more joined up working at a local level.

The outcomes of these initiatives will be reported to committee as appropriate in due course and Committee is asked to note the current position.