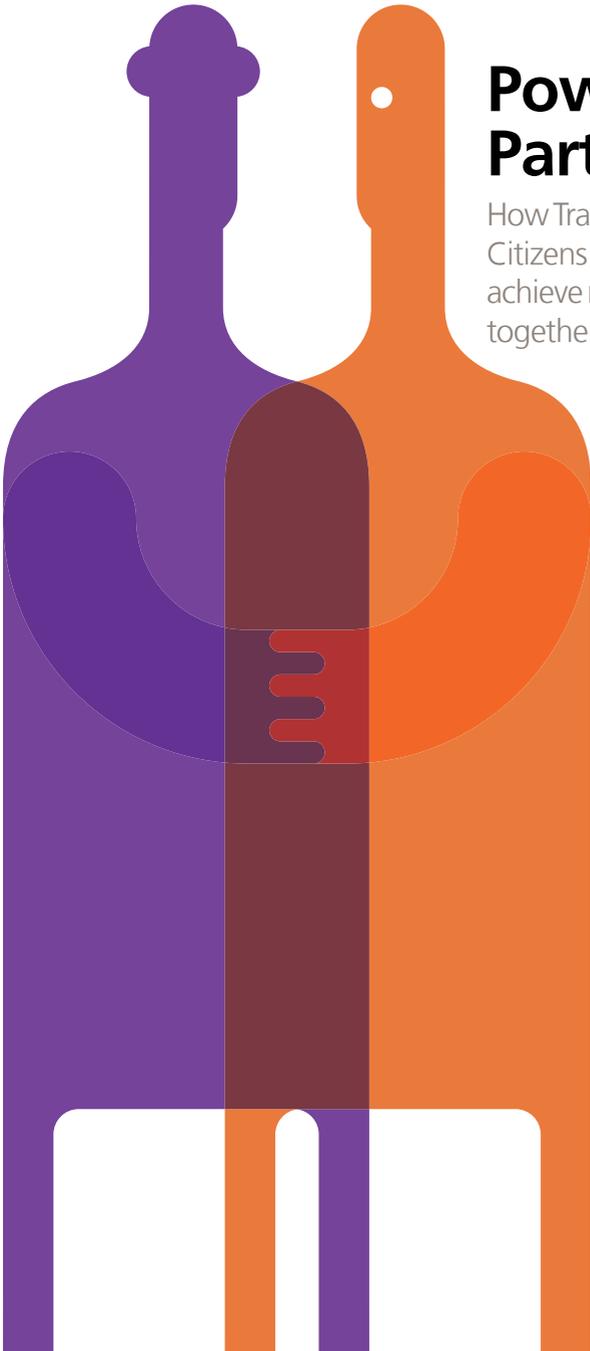




Powerful Partnerships

How Trading Standards and Citizens Advice Bureau can achieve more by working together for consumers



About Consumer Empowerment Partnerships

Consumer Empowerment Partnerships (CEPs) are networks led by a Citizens Advice Bureau. They provide local leadership and work closely with partners, in particular the Trading Standards Service, to improve consumer protection and empowerment through shared information on consumer problems, education and advocacy. There are eleven CEPs across England.

North West – Cheshire West CEP; North East – Newcastle CEP;
Yorkshire and Humber – Hull CEP; Central (regional lead) – Coventry CEP;
Central – BRANCAB CEP; East Midlands – Northampton CEP;
East – Cambridgeshire CEP; London – Citizens Advice-led CEP;
South East (regional lead) – Kent CEP; South East – Oxfordshire CEP;
South West – Plymouth CEP

For more on CEPs visit
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/ceps

Working together for the same consumers

Trading Standards and Citizens Advice Bureau are working to help the same local people – those being scammed, targeted by doorstep fraudsters, ripped-off by rogue traders or struggling to get a fair deal.

The Citizens Advice service

- offers individual **advice** on consumer problems;
- runs consumer **education** workshops and awareness-raising campaigns;
- undertakes **advocacy** campaigning to get consumers a fair deal.

Trading Standards can take tough enforcement action against criminals and bring rogue businesses into line. In many areas, they can also offer advice to consumers and engage in preventative education work.

Both Trading Standards and Citizens Advice Bureau are part of a national network, but the services are different in every area reflecting local needs and pressures. Together we have an unparalleled understanding of what local consumers need to feel both empowered and protected.

A local bank branch referred an elderly customer to Hereford CAB when she attempted to make repeated large cash withdrawals. She told the adviser the money was for 'home maintenance' being provided by people who knocked at her door.

Thanks to a strong local partnership, the bureau was able to quickly alert Herefordshire Trading Standards, who were able to be at the woman's home that afternoon when the tradesmen arrived to collect the cash.

Two individuals were arrested on suspicion of fraud and the woman did not lose a further £4,000, in addition to the £10,000 she had already paid out.

The Citizens Advice service: empowering consumers

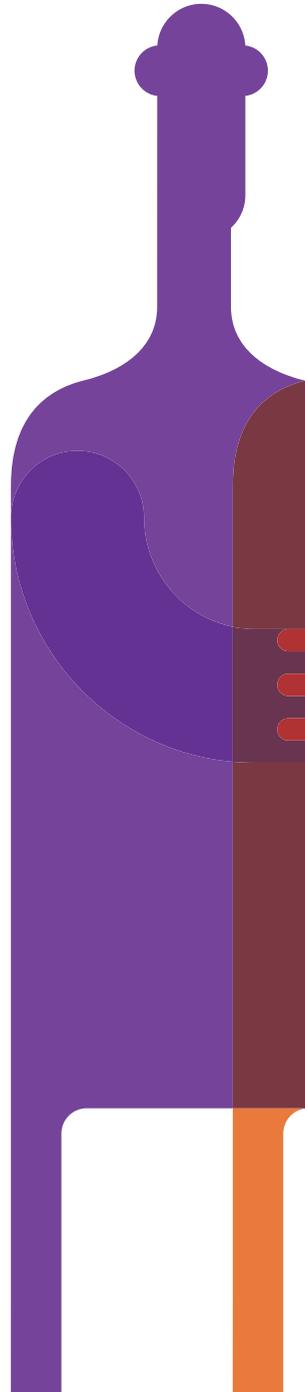
Quality advice, quality intelligence

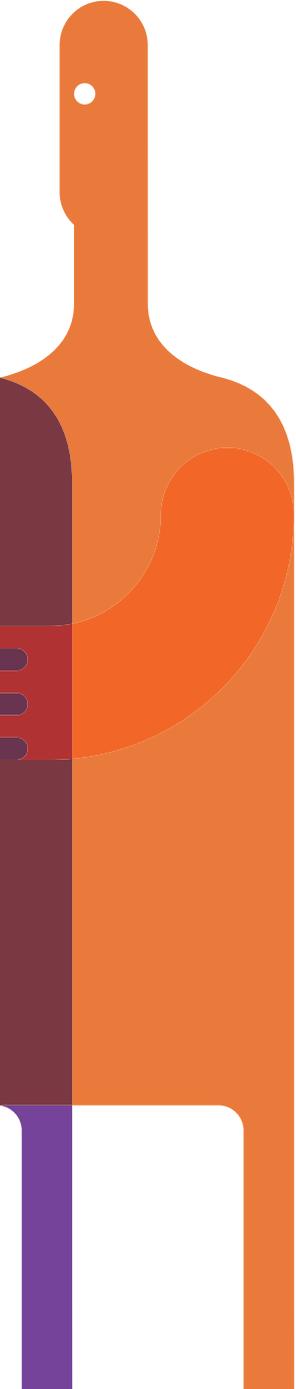
Citizens Advice runs a national consumer helpline and many bureaux offer face-to-face advice for more complex problems or people who prefer not to use the phone.

Records of clients' cases are kept on a common database, which allows local and national trends to be identified whilst maintaining absolute confidentiality. Bureaux can enter into partnership agreements to share evidence gathered from their advice sessions to inform Trading Standards enforcement work.

Did you know?

- All CAB advisers, whether paid staff or volunteers, undergo a robust training programme, which for a generalist adviser takes around a year.
- All advisers receive on-going support from a highly experienced supervisor.
- Each bureau's quality of advice is regularly assessed to a robust quality standard.
- Advisers draw on the latest information on consumer protection, through a nationally updated information system.





Education and awareness-raising

Many bureaux are involved in consumer education work. Specially trained volunteers work in partnership with a range of local community groups to offer engaging workshops where local consumers already meet. Topics can range from getting the best deal from your energy supplier to avoiding common scams.

Awareness-raising campaigns are effective locally. Bureaux build links with local newspapers, radio and use social media to get their message across. Volunteers go out into busy shopping centres or local events to tempt busy consumers with a freebie or a quiz to find out about consumer issues.

Advocating for a fairer deal

But sometimes the current rules simply aren't getting consumers a fair deal. The Citizens Advice service campaigns nationally and locally to change legislation, regulations and codes of practice to get better protection and more power for consumers.

Citizens Advice put in the first super-complaint about Payment Protection Insurance rip-offs a decade ago and more recent campaigns are focusing on payday lenders and the used car market.

Intelligent partnerships

Citizens Advice bureaux gain a valuable insight into local consumer issues through their advice work. Nationally, intelligence from the Citizens Advice consumer phone line is shared confidentially with Trading Standards, but local face-to-face advice sessions also provide valuable information.

Bureaux can enter into partnership agreements to share individuals' cases with Trading Standards to inform their enforcement work. There are important mutual concerns about data sharing but these have been overcome with template agreements, briefing sessions for bureau advisers and Trading Standards officers on each others' work and data sharing forms which highlight who the trader is, rather than the person receiving advice.

When both organisations are committed to work through these issues, both managers and frontline staff build positive working partnerships to better protect consumers in their area.

Targeting compliance advice

Charnwood CAB and Leicestershire CAB have shared information which enabled Leicestershire Trading Standards to make advice visits to smaller local traders, such as used car dealers, who weren't previously on their radar.

Daily scam alerts

Kingston Trading Standards pass on information about new local scams to the bureau. The advisers are updated at the bureau's daily team talk so they can better warn people who come in for advice.

Rooting out the rogues

Coventry Trading Standards were able to take enforcement action to stop a rogue letting agent ripping off more consumers, thanks to information passed to them through their partnership with Coventry CAB.

Joint advice sessions

East Riding Trading Standards offer specialist consumer advice sessions in five outreach locations managed by Hull & East Riding CAB, allowing consumers to get advice in a place they can easily reach in what is a large rural area.

Adviser awareness

Redbridge Trading Standards provided training sessions for CAB advisers on how to support victims of door-step crime, as well as how to feed into their wider work.

More advice, more intelligence

Havering Trading Standards funds a consumer advice project at the Citizens Advice Bureau, which allows Trading Standards to focus on its primary enforcement role.

The bureau adds value by supporting volunteer consumer advisers, equating to an added value of £14,250, and integrates the service with holistic advice for those who have multiple problems. Awareness-raising is integrated into the project with the bureau taking the lead on organising initiatives, which Trading Standards participate in.

“Trading Standards have been able to make a required cost saving, whilst losing none of the vital intelligence flow needed to carry out effective enforcement work. . . and with increased access for consumers to obtain expert local advice.” **Richard Whight**, Specialist Fair Trading officer, Havering Trading Standards.

The bureau is able to feed into consumer working groups and Trading Standards is represented on the Citizens Advice Bureau board of trustees. The project was commended at the MJ Local Government Achievement Awards 2013.

Knowledge is empowerment

Empowering consumers with the knowledge and confidence to make savvy choices is an important part of both Citizens Advice Bureaux and Trading Standards work. By combining resources, we can reach more consumers – whether face-to-face in workshops or at community events, through local and regional media, online or with a trusty leaflet.

Trading Standards and Citizens Advice Bureaux can work together to select the topics that will be most relevant to consumers in their area. This might build on nationally identified hot topics, such as Scams Awareness month, complement a focus area of Trading Standards enforcement work or come from Citizens Advice service data on common enquiries.

For example

The Warwickshire Citizens Advice Bureaux work with Warwickshire Trading Standards to select monthly topics for joint awareness-raising work. By co-ordinating their efforts, and working with other partners in their CEP network like Neighbourhood Watch, they reach far more consumers than they could hope to alone.

Westminster Trading Standards and Westminster CAB delivered scams awareness training to front-line workers who support people at risk of scams on how to spot the signs a vulnerable person may be falling victim. This approach means people get information from a support worker they already know and trust.

Tonbridge and Malling CAB and Kent Trading Standards have successfully worked together to get high-profile media coverage on door-step selling. Trading Standards supported a consumer to share their story on air and the bureau explained how to avoid similar problems. This winning combination got significant air time on Kent radio.

Plymouth CAB is working to raise the profile of Plymouth Trading Standards 'buy with confidence' scheme to consumers, which will increase the incentives for traders to join. The bureau will also promote it directly to traders through advertising with posters in wholesalers and other business suppliers.

Merton Trading Standards and Merton and Lambeth CAB organised joint scams awareness events in the local civic centre and supermarket, reaching several hundred consumers. They also gathered substantial anecdotal information on local scams through their conversations with the public. Merton Trading Standards continue to use the quiz and materials in their on-going education workshops.

Oxford CAB and Oxford Trading Standards' use BBC Radio Oxford's monthly consumer slot to spread key messages on their chosen theme and secure a range of interesting speakers, from consumers who have come to the bureau for advice to national policy experts.

Newcastle CAB joined with the city council Trading Standards and the Illegal Money Lending team to empower consumers to avoid and report loan sharks. They helped staff a stand in a local one-stop shop and shopping centre, together with the attention-grabbing loan shark mascot.

Cheshire West Trading Standards and CAB work through a diverse partnership to reach vulnerable groups with their awareness raising work. Housing associations, police, councillors, drug and alcohol organisations and schools all get behind campaigns covering scams, loan sharks and more.

Going further to campaign for change

As independent charities, Citizens Advice Bureaux have an important role in advocating for consumers to politicians and other decision makers.

Citizens Advice co-ordinates national campaigns asking central government, regulators or trade bodies to improve how consumers are treated, offer fairer deals, tighten up regulations or strengthen redress schemes.

Local Citizens Advice Bureaux and individual consumers can get involved in these campaigns in a number of ways. They can also run their own campaigns on issues affecting people in the local area.

For example

Camden CAB achieved a 39 per cent reduction in a local tenant's water bill by successfully negotiating for Thames Water to apply a tariff which was equivalent to a water meter, as installing a meter was not possible for technical reasons. The bureau then started a campaign which has resulted in fifty other local households moving tariff, with a combined annual saving of about £6,800.

The Citizens Advice service regularly submit evidence on clients' experience of payday lenders to the regulator as part of a wider campaign to clean up the industry. Fourteen payday lenders have already left the market, which is under increasing scrutiny.

Citizens Advice contributed to the strategy group guiding Office of Fair Trading (OFT) research on the home repairs and improvements sector, and persuaded the OFT to take action based on the findings.



The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, impartial consumer advice for everyone. Through our consumer education and awareness raising work, we empower people to make the right choices. We use our evidence base to campaign and influence on the issues that matter most to consumers.

Find out more at
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer

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Compiled by Citizens Advice London Consumer Empowerment Partnership (CEP), with support from the CEP network.
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/ceps