

measuring up

consumer perceptions of weights
and measures legislation

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1 Executive summary

Weights and Measures – one of the oldest areas of consumer regulation – dates back to the Magna Carta. Complex UK and European Union rules specify how particular products are to be sold (and even the quantities in which some products may be sold), and the required accuracy and tolerances of measuring instruments; businesses are required to demonstrate a high degree of precision in their compliance with these rules. But there are now some concerns about whether this detailed regulation really does help shoppers.

Although the real justification of all these rules is to protect consumers, there has not been any recent attempt to engage them in discussion about their needs and expectations. Regulatory Impact Assessments have assessed recently introduced elements of the regulations, but little has been done in terms of a holistic assessment of the impact of existing rules on either businesses or the local authorities, and whether the cost of these (ultimately borne by consumers

and council taxpayers) is proportionate to consumer benefits.

With this in mind, and against a backdrop of government commitment to better regulation, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) commissioned the National Consumer Council (NCC) to explore the possibility of simplifying and streamlining the current approach to enable consumer choice while minimising the impact on businesses and local authorities.

Our research

The NCC's research approach had three stages. Initially a small number of Weights and Measures stakeholders were consulted, to help scope the key issues; then a series of eight discussion groups were held with consumers around England; and finally a collaborative workshop gave consumers, and Weights and Measures stakeholders such as Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) and retailers, a chance to enter into dialogue.

Markets and regulation

In the course of this project we found that consumers are more confident and relaxed than many might predict. They understand how markets work and the power they have within them through the exercise of choice. They generally trust retailers to give them what they pay for: although they expect some 'skulduggery' from market traders, they talk about how they might respond to a perceived rip-off by choosing to shop elsewhere – and they believe that large shops will generally seek to behave appropriately because of the damage that negative publicity causes to their brand. Similarly, the consumers we spoke to felt that local independent shops know they have to win their customers every day, and do so by offering quality, service and value for money. There was little to suggest that people want protection and regulation per se.

None of this means that consumers are not interested in Weights and Measures regulation. Few are aware of it on a day-to-day basis; but once they do focus on it they recognise both its importance and the 'nightmare' scenario that would emerge if the system were to unravel. Consumers do not routinely worry about 'short measures' because they assume someone else is looking after their interests. (This contrasts with fears among many of the stakeholders we spoke to, who worry that local authorities can give too low a priority to metrology as a result of budgetary pressures, the rising cost of keeping up with the new technology used by packers and retailers, and the absence of statutory inspection levels.)

Consumers were relatively demanding in what they expect from the inspections and enforcement regimes. They thought that inspections would be more frequent than is the case. For instance,

consumers believe that petrol stations should be inspected every 3–6 months, while official guidelines suggest every 1–2 years. But this demand for intervention is not because people think markets currently fail them – rather, they believe that in the absence of intervention they would fail them.

A risk-based approach

One repeated theme to emerge in our research was the need for consistency. Many people were “horrified” at the wide variation between councils’ inspection rates. But they did not want a uniform approach to regulation. They recognised that regulatory resources are limited (and said that they did not want to face increased council taxes to pay for extra enforcement), and considered that the system should reflect varying degrees of risk – another key theme of the project.

Consumers consistently prioritised the potential value of non-compliance over the likelihood

of it occurring. Thus petrol stations were prioritised ahead of market stalls: people may feel market scales are more likely to be inaccurate than petrol pumps, but forecourts enjoy a greater share of the weekly spend, and so they represent the proportionately bigger ‘risk’. This in turn leads to a view that petrol stations should be inspected more frequently than market stalls – and supermarkets more frequently than corner shops, even though in many cases supermarkets enjoy higher levels of trust than corner shops.

Assessing the current rules

Consumers and stakeholders agreed that Weights and Measures legislation should be modernised, to create a lighter, more focused and nimble system. Many stakeholders praised the simplification that has already been carried out by the DTI and National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML), but still felt the current approach was archaic and distant from the modern retail environment.

Prescribed quantities

Much of the criticism centred on ‘prescribed quantities’ – the rules that govern the volumes or weights in which around 30 goods (ranging from tea and bread to chocolate and pasta). These rules were seen by most people as overly complex, out of date and unnecessary. Consumers were unaware of their existence (and by implication had no conscious enjoyment of any protection offered by them); few saw a benefit in them, and many picked out inconsistencies.

Our consumers told us that the potential benefit of prescribed quantities – the ability to make simple, fair comparisons between products – is of little value in practice. The choices shoppers make around value are complex, and are mostly made far before the unit price decision is reached. First the shopper has to decide whether to shop at a supermarket or a smaller local retailer; then whether to go to retailer A or retailer B; then whether to go for a brand or own label,

whether to buy a large packet or small packet, and finally whether there are any obvious differences in terms of value for money. By this final stage, consumers say it is relatively unimportant whether a box of tea bags is packaged as 250g or 240g – all the main choices have already been made. Consumers obviously do not want to be deceived, but they believe that other factors influence perceived value for money more than precise weights or volumes. For this reason, they also felt that unit pricing, although occasionally useful, was not so important that it needed to be imposed on small shops.

Accuracy

Our groups of consumers were just as pragmatic when it came to accuracy and tolerances. They accepted that scales and other measuring instruments could not all be absolutely accurate to the nth degree, and to a large extent did not care about total discrepancies of a few pence. However, four themes did

emerge as influencing their attitudes: the value of the goods, the nature of the retailer, any impact if 'grossed up', and any intent.

First, they were more relaxed about tolerances for lower-value goods such as fruit and vegetables, and even meat. In these instances, so long as any differences were less than 2-3 per cent (in effect, a few pence) they were not seen to be worth bothering about. For higher value goods greater accuracy was required – in the case of petrol, around 0.5 per cent. Attitudes also varied by retailer, with national chains generally held to higher standards than local retailers. Partly because it was thought that their equipment was capable of greater accuracy, and partly consumers were concerned about possible 'grossing up' effects. Consumers took a harsh view of systematic errors that could be repeated either nationally (in the case of chains) or over time. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, consumers were influenced by

intent, viewing inadvertent inaccuracies much more leniently than deliberate ones.

Moving forward

Stakeholders, and especially consumers, welcomed proposed changes to the current system. A more formal move towards risk-based assessments was welcomed by retailers and supported by consumers who saw it as logical and sensible. In particular, 'earned autonomy' – where retailers demonstrating good quality control would be spared repeated inspections – was seen by consumers as a way of rewarding law-abiding retailers while allowing resources to be focused more effectively. There was a caveat, though, that even with earned autonomy a retailer should still face the possibility of inspection, "to keep them on their toes".

The licensing of certain measuring instrument manufacturers to verify scales themselves received strong but less unanimous support. There were

concerns among some Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) and consumers about the loss of independent inspections, and TSOs feared cherry-picking and a loss of income to their departments.

Risk-based assessment and, to a lesser extent, self-verification were seen by consumers as a means of bridging the gap between expectations (frequent inspections) and reality (limited funding by local government). In fact, people showed an appreciation of the cost of regulation by scaling back their expectations of inspection frequencies in view of any likely impact on council tax budgets. The compromise was seen to be in using tools to focus current inspections and resources more effectively, offering consumers higher levels of protection on limited budgets.

Involving consumers in better regulation decision-making

Consumers who took part in the research told us that they found the experience interesting and relevant to their lives, and stakeholders said that they had benefited from finding out more about what the public think about this topic. Most consumers said the general public should play a greater role in making decisions about this kind of regulation, where it affects their daily lives. We found that consumers engaged well with the topic and demonstrated thoughtful and challenging perspectives; the dialogue between consumers and stakeholders was particularly productive. The Better Regulation Commission's five principles of good regulation (proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting) regularly emerged from discussion even though the consumers we spoke to were unaware of the formal list.

2 Background

Weights and Measures is one of the earliest examples of consumer-focused regulation – the Magna Carta proclaims the need for “one measure throughout the land”. It remains a highly regulated aspect of business activity, both in UK legislation and at European Union level. Detailed rules control the sale of goods by quantity, even specifying the quantities in which some products must be sold; and specify the required accuracy and tolerances of measuring instruments. Businesses are required to demonstrate to a high degree of precision their compliance with these rules.

The main piece of legislation is the Weights and Measures Act 1985, which builds on the provisions of not just the previous 1963 Act but also legislation enacted in the 1800s and early 1900s. However, the legislative position remains complex and piecemeal, with numerous Statutory Instruments also made under the Act. It has been suggested

by some that the costs to business of compliance are unnecessarily high, while others argue that some of the rules no longer reflect the needs of consumers. The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) has noted that “The existing legislation... has been recognised as overly complex and burdensome, and both the National Audit Office and the Committee on Public Accounts have recommended reform.”¹

But though the real justification for these rules is to protect consumers, there has not been any recent attempt to engage them in any broadly-framed discussion about their needs and expectations. Nor has there been a wide-ranging assessment of the impact on either businesses or the local authorities charged with enforcing the rules, and whether the cost of this (ultimately borne by consumers and council taxpayers) is proportionate to the consumer benefits.

With this in mind, and against a backdrop of the government’s commitment to better regulation, the DTI commissioned the National Consumer Council (NCC) to examine the current arrangements from the viewpoint of the consumer.

This report therefore aims to identify opportunities to simplify and streamline the current approach, so that it meets the needs of consumer protection while enabling consumer choice and minimising the impact on businesses and local authorities.

The project hopes to provide the basis for a model to involve consumers in what can seem to be arcane and inaccessible debates about better regulation.

Our approach

Both consumers and other stakeholders were involved in the research, which was conducted in three stages. Initially we consulted a small number of Weights and Measures stakeholders to help scope the key issues. Then we ran a series of eight discussion groups with consumers around England – these were held in Devon, Birmingham and Wimbledon, and involved people from different socio-economic groups. Discussion particularly focused on packaged goods, loose goods, drinks including alcohol, and fuel (for both domestic heating and vehicles). The research culminated in a collaborative workshop with consumers, Trading Standards Officers, retailers, and other stakeholders – this aimed to develop a consensus about options for change. Full details of our approach are set out in Appendix 1.

3 Do consumers care about Weights and Measures?

Our research suggests strongly that the regulation of Weights and Measures does matter to consumers, although people may not be conscious of it on a day-to-day basis. As one respondent said, it is not the sort of thing you should think about regularly:

“It’s important but to be honest I thought it was, I would have expected it to be a given. It’s the kind of thing that you shouldn’t have to think about – ooh, have I got to check the quantity I am buying?”

In fact, consumers base their trust of grocery retailers on other issues: the quality and freshness of food, cleanliness and hygiene, and competitiveness of prices (though not simply the lowest prices).

However, Weights and Measures are still of prime importance to their lives, as a sure basis for trading, and once consumers understand what Weights and Measures represent, they do care about them.

The value that people attach to Weights and Measures is evident in their prioritisation of various elements of Trading Standards’ responsibilities, in Figure 1. While all the elements presented were felt by consumers to be important, some were said to be of more importance than others.

Consumers certainly do not see Weights and Measures as a legislative technicality or as a throwback to the

past. Many felt that the rules prevent serious consumer detriment:

“(If Weights and Measures were not controlled) everybody would be doing it, all the supermarkets would be doing it. They’d be ripping you off left, right and centre.”

An assumption of trust

Throughout the group discussions it was clear that consumers do not feel at everyday risk of receiving short measures – that is, of receiving less than they are paying for. They do not worry about this issue and do not believe that retailers regularly provide short measures. In fact, on the few occasions when they may experience short measures, they often accept it as part of that shopping experience.

“If you go to the market you expect a little bit of skulduggery”

This confidence is based on an assumption of trust. People assume that retailers play by the rules, which they in turn ascribe to a belief among retailers that non-compliance will be identified and

penalised. Consumers feel they don’t have to think about it because they trust that someone else is.

However, these high levels of trust are based on relatively low levels of knowledge. Awareness of the proactive role of Trading Standards Officers was minimal, with consumers often more likely to think of them as reacting to specific consumer complaints. While a handful of consumers were aware that Trading Standards Officers do actively enforce Weights and Measures legislation, the majority just believe that ‘someone’ – ranging from ‘mystery shoppers’ to the shops themselves – is checking up on retailers.

In contrast to these high levels of trust are the views apparent among some of the stakeholders we interviewed. They feared that Weights and Measures was falling down the agenda of a number of local authorities, as a result of various pressures on funding and the

Figure 1: Consumer prioritisation of Trading Standards responsibilities

Of vital importance	Medium importance	Lesser importance
Product safety	Fair trading	Consumer advice
Under-age sales	Consumer credit	Business advice
Food standards	Licensing of firework sales	Animal health/welfare
Weights and Measures		Road traffic monitoring

perceived absence of any statutory requirements about levels of inspection.²

“In some local authorities authorities it’s dropped off the scales.”

The concern is that if retailers begin to realise that enforcement is being relaxed, the ‘assumption of trust’ would be undermined and short measures would become more common. While no consumers

expressed these fears, some stakeholders did express a concern that unless the issue is addressed (through funding or structural solutions such as regionalisation of Trading Standards), a crisis point could be reached in 5-10 years’ time.

“Nobody ever thought Local Government wouldn’t do it (W&M inspections)... but that idea is being challenged.”

4 What consumers want in terms of Weights and Measures protection

Three broad themes emerged in terms of consumer perceptions of Weights and Measures:

- They initially have high expectations of enforcement levels;
- They are prepared to see risks as relative; and
- They feel that a fair degree of protection is afforded by competitive markets themselves.

At a time when the alleged dominance of some supermarkets has led to a new Competition Commission inquiry into the groceries market,³ and given recent comment about uniformity in the wider retail landscape,⁴ consumer trust of competition in the marketplace may seem surprising. However, there were repeated references in the groups about the effects of healthy competition, with consumers exercising free choice about where they shop, and even of the benefits of perfect information or transparency

within transactions (or rather the disadvantages when this is missing). The most prevalent view was a belief in the value of a company's brand, and the protection this affords.

“Can’t say I look at whether it rips you off. At Asda I suppose that’s fair competition so it’s not in their interest to rip you off.”

“I think it’s the same with market stalls - if you start going to one regularly that you trust and you know that they are good and you get good value and you get good fruit, they’re not going to spoil themselves and damage that by giving you rotten fruit, because the customer will just turn away.”

“We can’t control that (measures of petrol) ourselves. We are having to put our trust into the company or whatever and that is the big difference. We can’t use our own judgement on it.”

A perception/inspection gap

In some respects, inspections are seen in the same light as neighbourhood policing – the more bobbies on the beat, the less risk the public think there is of falling victim to crime. Consumers believe inspections are commonplace, or at least that retailers live under the threat of them happening at any moment, and so they feel short measures on the high street are unlikely.

Thus they have very high expectations. In both the group discussions and the workshop, consumers were asked how often they thought various retailers should be inspected by Weights and Measures. The results are outlined in Figure 2 below, alongside one Trading Standards Officer's view of how often inspections are actually likely to occur.⁵

There is clearly a substantial gap between what consumers think should happen and what is actually

Figure 2: Consumer expectations of inspection intervals

Retailer	Consumers' 'ideal' frequency of inspections	Trading Standards 'actual' frequency of inspection
Petrol station	monthly – 3 months	1–2 years
Supermarket	3 months – yearly	1–2 years
Market stall	3 months – 6 months	1–2 years
Local quality butchers	6 months – yearly	1–2 years
Pub/bar/club	6 months – yearly	2–3 years
Corner shop	6 months – yearly	1–5 years

happening. Similarly, consumers tend to assume that far more resources are invested in Weights and Measures enforcement than is in fact the case: participants in our research guessed that a typical district council might have 5-20 full-time Weights and Measures inspectors.

Not all risks are equal

Encouragingly, in light of government commitment to Better Regulation (a key element of which is targeted assessments), consumers were more than willing to differentiate between risks, and did not feel that inspection regimes should be equal for all. They acknowledged some retailers as directly affecting their day-to-day lives more than others, and perceived some as posing a higher risk of short-measure than others.

Crucially, they consistently prioritised the value ahead of the simple likelihood of potential non-compliance. As an example, supermarkets (which represent

a relatively high share of the weekly or monthly spend) were repeatedly prioritised for inspection ahead of market stalls, even though they were often assumed (rightly or wrongly)

to take more care over accuracy. Consumers considered the impact to be much greater if a supermarket, rather than a local market stall, is providing short measures.

In a hierarchy of Weights and Measures responsibilities based on relative risk, consumers placed importance on a number of different issues. Figure 3 shows an approximate ordering of where consumers said they would like to see inspections focused, along with an explanation for the positioning of each one.⁶

“If you are only doing a small proportion of your shopping in the corner shop you feel the chances are that you’re not going to lose out a great deal.”

People do not perceive the risk of receiving short measures in, say, a corner shop to be zero. Instead, they believe there are mitigating factors (only occasional purchases, of limited value, usually in a ‘distress’ situation, with higher prices anyway).

Figure 3: Consumers’ Weights and Measures priorities

Serious risk	Petrol Stations	High value, high volume, ‘invisibility’
	Supermarkets	High value, high volume, till scales vulnerable
	Corner shops	Lower levels of trust
	Stamping	Addresses the issue ‘at source’
	Packers	Addresses the issue ‘at source’ also high volume
	Pints and shorts	Low share of spend, ‘visible’ (less so for shorts)
	Market stalls	Mixed views, but mostly lower risk – low value
	Units of measurement	Irrelevant, not sure situation would change if law weren’t there
	Prescribed quantities	Irrelevant, unaware of it, pick up on inconsistencies
Minimal negative risk	Weighbridges	Varied greatly across groups – on ‘safety’ issues

5 Views on the current Weights and Measures regime

“Overall it works... it’s just very complicated.”

This comment from one of the stakeholders sums up most of the insiders’ views of the legislation.

The long history of the legislation is both a strength and a weakness – the centuries-old focus on creating a fair basis for trading does give the Weights and Measures Act 1985 some credibility, but at the same time this rich legislative past is perceived as making it rather archaic.

“There’s loads of detail in it that doesn’t match the modern world.”

“We [Trading Standards] are always aiming at a moving target (as technology moves on).”

These views are most obvious among stakeholders, almost all of who feel updating and modernisation is needed (as is already happening in some cases), but even the odd consumer commented on how outdated some of the legislation looks.

The role of prescribed quantities

One part of the law that causes more vexation than possibly any other is specified, or prescribed, quantities. It sets out specific volumes or weights in which almost 30 goods must be sold. Selling pre-packaged goods in quantities outside of these specifications contravenes the Act and in principle could result in prosecution (though usually goods would just be withdrawn from sale).

The rationale for prescribed quantities is to allow easy, straightforward price comparisons for a number of basic goods. A consumer should be able to pick up a bag of sugar in any shop and from sight know that it is 500g – not 480g or 520g. This then allows the consumer to compare the prices of different bags of sugar, whether within one shop or between different shops, without the worry that they are not comparing like with like. It is argued that this is

particularly useful for people with poor sight, who might find the labels difficult to read.

Supporters also argue that it protects consumers from product downsizing – where the amount of the product is gradually cut without the customer necessarily realising. This is not a hypothetical issue – real cases include Walkers, who gradually reduced the quantity of crisps contained in packs within multipacks from 28g to 27g and then to 25g whilst keeping the price the same.⁷

Critics, though, say it stifles innovation, is archaic and introduces unnecessary complexity to the legislation. The DTI has already signalled an intention to simplify current requirements for prescribed quantities, but is waiting for the outcome of current negotiations on a radical simplification of EC law in this area.

Prescribed quantities in daily life

From the moment you get up in the morning and have something to eat and drink, you are likely to be affected by prescribed quantities. If you have some cornflakes, they will come from a packet weighing 125g, 250g, 375g, 500g, 750g, 1 kg or 1.5kg.

If you want some toast instead, the loaf of bread will probably have to be 400g or 800g, the pack of butter will weigh 50g, 125g, 250g or 500g; and your jam, marmalade or honey will come from a jar weighing 57g, 113g, 227g, 340g, 454g or 680g.

If you make a cup of tea too, rules govern the size of the packet, whether you use teabags or loose tea; there are also rules on the container that you pour the milk from and the packet that the sugar comes in. If you make yourself a mid-morning coffee, that’s the subject of detailed rules, as is the packet of biscuits you open.

If you have pasta for lunch, it will come from a packet weighing 125g, 250g, 375g or 500g, and if you put salt on it then there are rules governing the size of this packet as well. If you fancy a bit of chocolate afterwards, it can be bought in bars weighing up to 85g, then only 100g, 125g, 150g, 200g, 250g, 300g, 400g and 500g.

If you start thinking about dinner and buy some wine and potatoes, the size of the bottle and weight of the bag are both laid down in law.

“The people who wrote the prescribed quantities legislation have long since retired, so no-one knows what the point of the entry was in the first place.”

It was seen earlier that consumers consistently viewed prescribed quantities as having the lowest priority within Weights and Measures legislation. They generally failed to see the relevance of them – partly because they weren’t aware of the legislation in the first place, partly because they could not relate it to their everyday lives, and partly because they spontaneously picked out what they saw as inconsistencies.

“It is just irrelevant, it is all very Brussels.”

“So what about stotties – like a northern round, pitta bread but bigger? They sell them in one, two, threes, and they don’t have the weight on.”

“Can I just make an observation – the inconsistency of it? You have just mentioned tea in set multiples

of 250g, which is a quarter of a kilo, but then earlier you were talking about the standard weights for bread being 400g and 800g, why make those particular weights? Why not 500g? Why not 750g for the other?”

On prompting, some consumers do see some of the benefits it can offer in terms of basic commodities – but even this minority of people want a drastic reduction in the current number of categories, with some focusing only on bread and perhaps more surprisingly wine (which isn’t usually seen as a basic good). It is worth noting that among the consumers we spoke to, critics were much more vehement in their criticism than supporters were in their support.

A similar picture was found among stakeholders. This aspect of Weights and Measures regulation attracted few supporters, although most found it irritating rather than a pressing business issue.

“It’s bizarre that dried fruits need to come in particular sizes.”

Retailers argued that it limits innovation and restricts their freedom to trade, while other stakeholders noted that the UK’s rules on prescribed quantities do not cover goods imported from other EU countries: a loaf that would be legal if imported from France would be illegal if baked in the UK.

Why don’t consumers value prescribed quantities?

The case in favour of at least some prescribed quantities – to enable consumers to make quick but informed value for money (VFM) comparisons – might initially appear persuasive. If some packs of tea bags were 250g, but some were 240g or 260g then consumers might not be able to easily calculate which offered best VFM. However, our research indicates that in making purchase decisions there are a number of

other trade-offs that are seen to be more important, making the calculation of VFM to the nearest penny almost redundant.

This is seen in the form of a ‘decision tree’, outlined in Figure 4.

The research showed that consumers make a number of decisions when they purchase (in this instance) groceries. These decisions are listed in order not of importance, but of sequence.

First, there is the decision of whether to shop at a supermarket, which offers everything in one place, or smaller independent shops (often felt to offer a more friendly service).

Within this there is which actual supermarket, or butchers or bakers. For some consumers this will not be a choice – they may have only one supermarket nearby – but there are still a number of the other decisions to work through. No one works

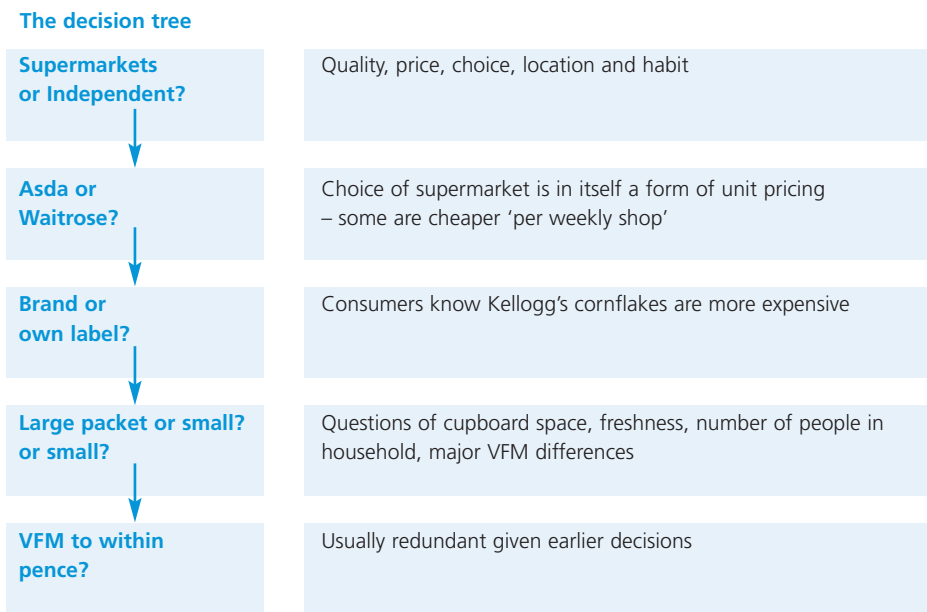
through this process afresh for every item every week; this process is how consumers form their general habits.

By the time they have made their decisions about where to shop – say, supermarket A – there is unlikely to be much real choice left per item, and hence the issue of whether, say, a loaf of sliced white is 800g or 850g or 750g becomes less important.

That is not to say that value for money calculations are irrelevant. Major VFM differences are apparent without the protection of prescribed quantities; with minor differences passed over in favour of other decision points, effectively consumers were saying they rarely find themselves in a position where they care enough about any possible minor differences to need protection from them. They would rather have the benefits of innovation.

Furthermore, those people within society for whom VFM to the

Figure 4: Consumers' purchase decision tree



nearest pence might matter more (those on lowest incomes) were usually found to:

- Incorporate VFM information into their shopping habits at a macro level – shopping where they know the prices will be generally lower than elsewhere; or

- Shop where there is unit pricing information already provided; or
- In the case of people who are less mobile, shop at local, smaller stores where the range is narrower and so there is less scope (and therefore less need) for comparisons between similar-sized packs anyway.

The benefits of unit pricing

Some have argued that prescribed quantities are no longer necessary, as unit pricing – that is, information (often displayed on shelves) about the cost per 100g, or some other relevant weight – gives consumers protection through cost comparison. Our research indicates, however, that the benefits in practice are less clear-cut.

When we touched on this issue, we found that real-life use of unit pricing was far from universal. A show of hands suggested that only around half of consumers were aware of it, and only around one-third actually used it. This was partly ascribed to shoppers being too busy and time-poor to pay attention, but some people commented that the print was too small to read easily, while many others said that they make the same rough calculations in their head.

“Obviously if the one portion of prawns is tiny I’ll get the bigger one, but it’s generally just looking at it and looking at the price and seeing which one is going to work out better value for money.”

In an echo of our findings about prescribed quantities, many consumers felt that the extra information gained from unit pricing was of little relevance once other decisions had been taken, such as the choice between own-label and branded goods or the need for a particular amount of the product.

Much of this is about instinct and habit, rather than arithmetic. Consumers generally know that own-label cornflakes are cheaper than branded ones; which they buy depends on whether they think there is a difference in terms of taste or quality.

It is worthy reiterating that the choice of supermarket is often, in itself, a form of unit pricing. Making

that one big decision spares the consumer from making a series of smaller ones.

Ironically, it was also apparent that often the consumers most in need of protection – vulnerable groups such as people on low incomes or older people – were the ones making least use of unit pricing, despite knowing it was there.

Earlier conclusions around prescribed quantities were put into context by insight into people’s actual use of unit pricing. Those who do use it were most likely to do so in certain situations – special offers, where there is a plethora of choice; when making high value purchases; making new (product or brand) purchases.

We found beer to be an excellent example of this. As a grocery it perfectly fulfils each of the earlier requirements, especially as consumers often experiment with a new brand

if it is on special offer. A similar analogy was apparent with washing detergent – which can also be relatively expensive, often on special offer, with a wide array of choices.

Together these scenarios suggest that precise VFM information is actually least likely to be used for the types of products currently covered by prescribed quantities.

“It’s generally like the cans, for special offer. It’s like ‘six cans of pop, buy one get one free’, and then you will look and you will work out how much you would pay if you went to the corner shop. But I wouldn’t look at it for beans or anything because there’s not really much point, beans are beans.”

In a further example of how consumers were seen to take a practical approach, they roundly rejected the suggestion that small retailers should be forced to provide unit pricing information.⁸ Their view was that it would be an unnecessary burden for small businesses, and that

as small local shops seldom sell more than one type of each product and size, there is no need for price comparisons.

How accurate is accurate?

The concept of accuracy was also explored, to see whether the current legislation matches consumers’ needs and expectations. We found that consumers were remarkably pragmatic. They did not expect every scale or petrol pump always to be absolutely accurate to the nth degree. They accepted the need for a small level of tolerance on a day-to-day basis.

That said, consumers were emphatic about the importance of Weights and Measures, and clearly differentiated between acceptable and unacceptable short measures. Four elements came into play in terms of where they felt legislation and enforcement of tolerances and accuracies should focus:

The value of the goods

When working through practical examples, consumers sought tighter control of high value goods, such as petrol, than of lower value goods such as fruit and veg. The comment below might not apply to everyone (some still abide by the maxim ‘see a penny, pick it up...’), but its spirit was evidently shared by many consumers:

“I wouldn’t care [about minor inaccuracies]. I mean, if you dropped three pence on the floor you wouldn’t pick it up would you?”

The retailer

It was felt that national chains could reasonably be held to a higher standard than local, independent retailers. This is partly a reflection of the more advanced technology employed in national chains but also a reflection of the point of ‘grossing up’, outlined below.

“If I bought (short-measure grapes) in Marks & Sparks I would be really hacked off but if I bought them down the market I wouldn’t care.”

Grossing up

Consumers were conscious of the benefits to a major retailer if a short measure were replicated around the country or over a prolonged period of time. An error of 2p for one consumer could become an error of £100,000 nationwide, and thus have a more serious impact.

Intent

Consumers argued that businesses intentionally introducing discrepancies should feel the weight of enforcement action ahead of those making similar, but unintentional, mistakes.

“It depends whether you are cynical and assume that the company is doing it deliberately – if you just assume it is a mistake you wouldn’t bother.”

The result of the discussions resulted in a consensus that differentiated between types of goods. Figure 5 sets out what consumers perceived to be acceptable tolerances for food and petrol, and the extent to which they tend to focus on the amount of money rather than the percentage of inaccuracy.

There are clearly other factors to be considered here, not least some technical metrological issues. However, it is worth noting the extent to which consumer attitudes and expectations diverge from the current approach to regulation, and considering the possibility of a new approach in which the two are more closely aligned.

Figure 5: Consumers’ needs regards accuracy

Item	Limit at which inaccuracy becomes unacceptable	Difference in terms of pence
Food items, for example 1kg of lamb at £7	2-3 per cent	14p -21p (being charged £7 for £6.79 worth of lamb)
Petrol for example 35l at £30	0.5 per cent	15p (being charged £30 for £29.85 worth of petrol)

6 Embracing better regulation

In the wake of the Hampton Report,⁹ there is a commitment within government to “make inspection and enforcement more effective”. Various initiatives are aimed at shifting the emphasis away from compliance with (often complex) sets of rules – which may represent a significant burden for businesses affected but achieve relatively little in terms of outcomes – towards a more priority-based approach, focused where problems are most likely to arise. Underpinning this is the idea that it is possible to cut the number of routine inspections without reducing the level of consumer protection.

This approach is clearly relevant to Weights and Measures, and it found widespread support within our research. Trading Standards Officers commented that this is what they have always done to a greater or lesser extent; the large retailers welcomed it since they believed

they pose a smaller risk and so would benefit from such a regime; and consumers immediately saw logic in it too.

Consumer perceptions of risk-based assessments

Consumers in particular viewed this approach as a way of bridging the gap between the inspection levels they thought were necessary and those actually afforded under current funding and prioritisation.

We have already noted that consumers assumed far more frequent inspections than currently happen; risk-based assessment was seen as a way of making existing resources work more effectively.

Such assessment of risk was considered in two ways:

- Generic;
- Retailer-based.

When we brought consumers and stakeholders together, examples were

given of the outcomes of past inspections. This included the example set out in the Hampton Report, that there are more Trading Standards inspections of alcohol measures than of the weight of items sold by traders, even though alcohol measures show a lower rate of inaccuracy. Consumers told us they were happy for this kind of historical or statistical data to be used in deciding where to focus inspections.

In addition, the concept of earned autonomy (earlier referred to as retailer-based risk assessment) was discussed. This practice would see retailers with a proven track record of compliance being spared repeated inspections as long as they maintained a sufficient degree of ongoing quality control. This also had the support of consumers:

“It’s like a no claims bonus isn’t it really? It’s a good idea.”

“It sounds reasonable actually... it sounds like common sense.”

The one caveat is that even retailers with earned autonomy should face the possibility of random inspections. For consumers, this represented ‘light touch’ regulation – a low day-to-day burden but with powerful consequences for deliberate non-compliance.

“I’d still like there to be some sort of inspection that they didn’t know about, so they’ve always got to be on their toes.”

Self-verification

One approach apparently embodying the spirit of better regulation has been in place for a number of years. Called ‘self-verification’, it allows certain measuring instrument manufacturers to become licensed to verify scales themselves – before this was allowed, verification could only be done by the local authority.

A number of major retailers now build verification services into the management and maintenance contracts they have with their measuring equipment providers.

This has been criticised by some in Trading Standards on the basis that it permits cherry-picking, cutting local authority income while leaving councils to check the more 'uneconomical' sites, and reduces the independence of inspections. Many consumers were unconvinced by this argument, believing that since only trusted companies are given license to self-verify, verification is in safe hands. Others, though, took a more sceptical approach:

“What would be the penalties if one of the equipment manufacturers falsified the information? Imagine there’s an inspector that works for the scales company and his brother-in-law has got a retail outlet, where would the big stick come in?”

In the collaborative workshop where both sides of the argument were presented, consumers developed an acceptance of self-verification as long as there were strong audit measures in place.

The consumers’ regulation/cost trade-off

Consumers want high levels of inspection, carried out independently by local authorities, with greater frequency than at present, and a comprehensive ‘net’ that means all retailers should be prepared to face inspections at any point. This represents a fairly expensive wish list, especially given the budgetary context of local government.

However, we found consumers to be willing to take a practical view, and (to a degree) to acknowledge the cost of regulation to the taxpayer. The bottom line was that few if any were prepared to see council

taxes rise to accommodate higher inspection levels, and so they were willing to work within reasonable limits – though it was not within the scope of the research to discuss whether the share of local authority spending devoted to Weights and Measures should change.

In this context, initiatives such as earned autonomy, and risk-based assessment had consumer appeal. After being exposed to all the evidence consumers had less desire to see all retailers inspected per se, and more to see existing inspections targeted at those risks that consumers prioritise:

“If they are calling at over 100% of premises there are other (things they could be doing). And that may be to the detriment of the local taxpayer who actually funds their wages.”

Modernise, simplify and lighten

The project found strong support across all audiences to improve the legislation further. Among the stakeholders there was approval for steps already taken by the DTI and NWML to consolidate and simplify, but the feeling is that this should be the start of the journey. They urge:

- Modernise the legislation – a feeling shared by all audiences;

- Simplify the legislation – again, a feeling shared by everyone:

“If you say 2kg the customer should get 2kg – you don’t need a lot of complicated definition around it.”

- Lighten the regulatory burden – unsurprisingly, most popular among retailers:

“Routine inspections are not something they should be doing (since we check ourselves).”

Interviews with retailers and others in industry suggested that the larger proportion of the burden was the need for people within the organisation to understand the complexities of the legislation, rather than the inspections themselves. Modernising and simplifying the legislation would itself lighten the regulatory burden.

Five principles of good regulation

It is now almost 10 years since the Better Regulation Task Force (now Commission) first set out five principles of good regulation: proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting.¹⁰ These have since gained wide currency in the UK as a template against which all regulation should be judged.

We did not set out to test explicitly these principles in our research, but it is striking how often they did emerge in discussion, even though

the consumers we spoke to were unaware of the formal list. Other stakeholders similarly embraced the principles, though they rarely referred to them by name.

Proportionality

Consumers were happy for smaller retailers to be exempt from unit pricing, feeling that costs would be out of proportion to the benefits. The retailers we spoke to cited prescribed quantities as an example of regulation that is out of all proportion to the problem it is intended to remedy.

“We once packed a kilogram loaf and the howl of protest from the enforcement community took years to die down.”

Accountability

Some of the consumer groups spontaneously argued for greater public scrutiny, suggesting that local authorities should publish details of their inspection activity and results.

Consistency

Consumers were shocked at the differences in inspection rates across local authorities. One key criticism that cropped up in stakeholder interviews was regional inconsistency in how regulations are enforced.

Transparency

Consumers, Trading Standards professionals, retailers and policymakers all wanted simplification of the legislation on Weights and Measures, with much clearer and more straightforward rules.

Targeting

As noted consumers were comfortable with a risk-based approach to regulation and enforcement. Business and people also argued that routine inspections are inappropriate, and that the high profile of major chains means that the inspections they are subjected to are often unrelated to real risk.

Retailers told us:

“It’s easier for a Trading Standards Officer to go into Tesco, but harder to prosecute the local hot dog stand.”

“Routine inspections are not something they should be doing (since we check ourselves).”

Earlier in this report consumers were found to argue for supermarkets being included in the targeting – rather than excluded, as the supermarkets themselves might hope. This apparent conflict can be resolved through consumer support both for targeting premises where they spend most money and for the concept of earned autonomy – supermarkets must initially be targeted, but the compliant ones with proven quality standards could subsequently enjoy less frequent inspections.

7 A consumer-driven Weights and Measures Act

The culmination of our research was to ask participants to generate their own Weights and Measures Act – driven by consumers’ needs, but also taking into account the views and experiences of stakeholders. This output supports the findings of the earlier consumer discussion groups, and makes for a unified front across consumers.

The consumer agenda for action

• Simplify the legislation

Even consumers, who don’t need to understand the intricacies of every piece of legislation, perceive that it is overly complicated as it stands.

They endorse stakeholders’ calls to modernise, simplify and, as a result, lighten the burden.

• Focus resources on where we spend our money

Trading Standards Officers should relate their efforts where most consumers’ spending occurs – for example, supermarkets and petrol stations. The chance of a short measure may be felt to be higher at a market stall, but the potential impact is higher on a petrol forecourt.

• Deploy resources efficiently using risk-based assessment

Consumers accept that within the confines of local government funding, it is unreasonable to expect every retailer to be inspected regularly. Therefore, manage the risk by recognising good behaviour, and penalising bad. A supermarket should initially be a focus of inspection (as consumer spending there is high), but if it can prove it poses minimal risk, then reward continued high standards and protect consumers elsewhere.

• Leave every retailer knowing they face the possibility of inspection

Risk-based assessments and focused inspections aside, every retailer should be kept on their toes by a real risk of inspection. Good habits can easily slide.

• Drastically reduce, or abolish, prescribed quantities

Consumers do not feel they need such protection, a view supported by their behaviour. They would rather enjoy the benefits of greater innovation.

• Take a practical approach to accuracy and tolerance

Consumers can bear inadvertent tolerances of up to 2-3 per cent for lower value items (fruit and veg, meat), and 0.5 per cent for fuel, and so within these limits other financial, technical or practical considerations should hold sway on legislation.

Appendix 1 Detailed methodology

The research itself was conducted in three stages – an initial scoping phase, the main fieldwork, and a final collaborative workshop bringing together consumers as well as Weights and Measures stakeholders.

The initial scoping phase covered desk research into existing literature as well as a handful of in-depth interviews with stakeholders to help highlight topical issues and set the context for the resulting consumer work. It aimed to highlight the key issues consumers should explore, get a sense of what industry and government views were on the same subjects, and of course generally inform the later stages of the project. In all, eight stakeholders were interviewed between

23 March and 10 April 2006:

- 2 representatives of national retailers;
- 1 lecturer in metrology;
- 1 trading standards officer;
- 4 representatives of Government agencies involved in metrology.

After the key issues were highlighted, the main fieldwork was undertaken, comprising eight consumer discussion groups and a further five stakeholder interviews. The consumer group participants covered a range of household incomes, age and geography. In particular we included Crediton, Devon, to incorporate a non-urban location. Gender was mixed within the groups, and a range of ethnicity was also included.

In this second stage of research a further five stakeholders were interviewed:

- 1 representative of a supermarket retailer;
- 1 representative of a convenience store retailer;
- 1 small independent retailer;
- 1 representative of a Government agency involved in metrology;
- 1 representative of a national ‘packer’ (manufacturer of pre-packaged goods).

In the final stage, a collaborative workshop was held in Maidenhead on 7 July 2006. As well as a number of observers, the 15 participants of the workshop were made up of:

- 10 consumers (a mix of age, household income and ethnicity);
- 1 lecturer in metrology;
- 1 representative of a supermarket retailer;
- 2 Trading Standards Officers;
- 1 representative of a Government agency involved in metrology.

Figure 7: Structure of consumer groups

Group	Date		Age	Household income
1	Wed 31 May	London	21-34	Medium
2	Wed 31 May	London	35-54	High
3	Thur 1 June	Newcastle	Pensioners	Medium
4	Thur 1 Jun	Newcastle	21-34	Low
5	Tue 6 Jun	Crediton, Devon	Pensioners	Low
6	Tue 6 Jun	Crediton, Devon	35-54	Medium
7	Thur 8 Jun	Birmingham	Pensioners	High
8	Thur 8 Jun	Birmingham	35-54	Low

Appendix 2 Definitions of Weights and Measures responsibilities used in the discussion groups

Monitoring petrol pumps	ensure that they deliver fuel accurately.
Monitoring pints and shorts	ensure that pubs serve a full pint or spirit measure.
Inspecting supermarkets	ensure that their scales are working, and that their packages are accurately labelled.
‘Stamping’ scales and weighing machines	verify that they are accurate before they are put into use.
Inspecting market stalls	ensure that scales are working and accurate, and that prices are clearly and correctly marked.
Inspecting corners shop	ensure that scales are working and accurate, and that packages are accurately labelled.
Inspecting packing companies	ensure that packs are correct weight and size.
Prescribed quantities	ensuring that certain goods are only sold in specific sizes – for example, bread in 400g or 800g loaves.
Units of measurement	ensuring that goods are sold in correct units, for example ice cream sold by volume and not weight.
Public weighbridges	ensure that lorries do not travel with excess loads.

Appendix 3 Consumer Groups – Discussion Guide

Introduction – 5 minutes

- Introduce subject and explain that client is the National Consumer Council.
- Explain client presence (in London), confidentiality, tape recording etc
- Ask respondents to introduce themselves to the group – first name, bit of info on their household, their favourite film, and one item they always put in their shopping trolley or basket

Exploring participants' shopping habits – 10 minutes

- Briefly describe your grocery shopping habits:
Define grocery shopping as shopping for food, drink, toothpaste, washing up liquid and similar household items
Explore which shops, how often, big monthly shop versus daily, et cetera
- How do you feel about the shops you go to, why do you go there – in terms of satisfaction, value for money, and most importantly trust

(showcard: various sorts of shops)

- Get spontaneous ratings of trustworthiness of a variety of outlets
- Explore concept of trust in retailers – how do retailers generate trust, where do they get trust from, what do you trust retailers to actually do?
- Link into awareness of Trading Standards Officers – is there anyone making sure retailers are trustworthy?

The concept of regulation – 15 minutes

Introduce idea of regulation – that in all areas of life there need to be some rules and regulations to ensure everything works for the benefit of others – for example, licensing laws, planning laws, food hygiene for restaurants and cafes.

- Introduce role of Trading Standards Officers – they are local council employees working in the area of consumer protection.

They have a number of responsibilities, such as: (display showcards) (and read out explanation of each)

- Ask respondents as a group to prioritise these from a consumer's point of view: all are important, but which are most important?
- Ensure that participants describe priorities in their own words: unimportant, still vital, et cetera

Importance of Weights and Measures – 20 minutes

- How important, in the overall scheme of things, is Weights and Measures regulation? How would our day-to-day life change, if at all, if it wasn't there?
- Compare rational responses here with previous prioritisation, and resolve any differences

Shopping exercise:

- Arrange various packages (including large and small) of bread, tea bags and cereal with accompanying prices
- Ask each respondent to imagine they are doing their main shop:

which packet would they be most likely to buy, and why? Ask each to note down their answer before discussing as a group

Probe for each of the three goods

– how much does it weigh or hold? How long would it last – days, meals, servings?

Do you think about value for money? If so, how do you work out which offers better value for money? Probe any mention of unit pricing.

- Discuss linkage between price and volume/weight/size – are participants always able, in all shops, to make fair comparisons easily between goods?
- Why? Why not? What helps them?
- What hinders them?
- Discuss value of unit pricing (explain if necessary):
Which shops do you notice have it (company, size etc)
How useful is it to them?
In what ways?

- How do you feel about the argument that for small shops it's too big a burden and takes too much time – where would you strike the balance? (actual limit is 280m² – Tesco Metros don't need to use unit pricing, but do so for convenience)

Weights and Measures regulation – 20 minutes

Read out various elements of Weights and Measures regulation (see annex), with short explanation of intended benefits:

- What are your reactions as I read through the rules? Is it what you expected Weights and Measures regulation would include? Not what you expected?
- Ask each participant in turn – how does this help you in your day-to-day lives? Is it helpful? What are the downsides, if any? If you were a lawmaker would you include it?
- Measure each of these against a 'riskometer' – ranging from severe risk, need to keep as law to no

risk at all, can drop from the lawbooks, plus a negative 'it actually works against consumers'.

Explore issue of tolerance towards inaccuracy:

- Thinking about, say, 1kg of grapes, costing around £1.50, weighed in a supermarket, how would you feel if you took it home and found it only weighed 999g (a difference worth around 1/5th of 1p)? Probe extent of annoyance or outrage.
- What about if it only weighed 990g (a difference worth around 1p)?

Probe around perceptions of pennies adding up to pounds over time:

- Similarly, what if you bought a leg of lamb from a butchers, at say £7/kg, and you got it home and found it only weighed 999g, a difference worth around 1p?
- What if it only weighed 990g, a difference of around 7p? How would you feel? What would you do?

- What if you filled up your car with petrol, and the read-out said it had delivered 35 litres of petrol costing £30. A local report in the paper that day said their petrol pumps were inaccurate, and actually under-delivered by 1ml for every litre (0.1 per cent out) – so when you paid £30, you should have only paid £29.97. How do you feel? What do you do?
- And if the story was that the pump was out by 5ml for every litre (0.5 per cent out), so you should have only paid £29.85. What would you do?

Discuss prescribed quantities in particular – read out pros and cons:

Pros: consumers buy on sight, know what they are getting, can't be misled by packaging, those with poor eyesight can make fair comparisons.

Cons: stifles innovation, limits consumer choice, confusing legally for instance with '10% extra' offers.

- As consumers how do you feel about this law? What might happen without it?
- Do you see it in a different light to before this session? Do you want to review how big a risk it poses?

Weights and Measures inspections – 20 minutes

Remind participants that Weights and Measures inspections are carried out by their local council's TSOs:

- How many Trading Standard Officers do you think your local council has carrying out Weights and Measures inspections? Bear in mind they are paid out of council tax, so do have a cost. Wimbledon – London Borough of Merton
Newcastle – Newcastle City Council
Moseley – Birmingham City Council
Crediton – Devon County Council
- Why do you say that?
- How often would you expect the scales at, say, your local supermarket to be checked for accuracy by an outside body?

- And how often would you expect, say, the local fruit and veg stall to be checked?

Explain the concept of self-verification within approved quality standards and explore reaction to it:

- How do you feel about the idea of manufacturers checking their own scales before a shop starts using them, and possibly checking them every few years as well? Advantages of this approach versus council TSOs checking them? Disadvantages? Probe for levels of public confidence.

Show chart from *Measure for measure* showing percentage of high-risk premises inspected by various councils:¹¹

- How would you feel if your council was at the far left (all high risk premises inspected, some more than once)? Why? What are benefits and drawbacks to consumers? And council tax payers?

- What might they argue as the reason they are there?
- And how would you feel if your council was at the far right (small percentage of high risk premises visited)? Why? Benefits and drawbacks to consumers? And council tax payers?
- What might participants argue is the reason they are there?
- Where, ideally would you like your council to be? Why?

How comfortable would you be with the idea of firms being rewarded for having a clean record – for instance, if Tesco is inspected every six months and each time it passes with flying colours, then it might only be inspected every couple of years instead?

- Now revisit prioritisation of Trading Standards services – are you still happy with the order, or do you want to change any?

A people's Weights and Measures law – 15 minutes

Recap flipchart of desired regulation; display elements of law that participants wanted to keep:

- Now, imagine you are lawmakers for the day, and are coming up with a new Weights and Measures Act to benefit consumers such as yourselves. It should protect the consumer, while allowing traders some freedom to introduce new products or packages. Break into two groups and think about what you would like included in the law.
- Get the two groups to feed back their results.

- Overall, how do you feel about this evening's discussions? More boring subject than you thought? More interesting than you thought? Covered things you already knew? Talked about new things? Important to your day-to-day life? Irrelevant?

Explain next steps – NCC report on consumer involvement in Weights and Measures policy – thank participants, and close the session.

Appendix 4 Collaborative workshop agenda

9.30–9.40am	Intro to workshop	Vanilla
9.40–9.55	Presentation on consumer protection	NCC
9.55–10.10	Presentation on benefits of better regulation	DTI
10.10–10.30	Prioritisation of elements of W&M law	In groups
10.30–10.50	VFM and ease of price comparability – unit pricing, prescribed quantities, and suggested remedies or solutions	In groups
10.50–11.00	Present back findings on comparability	Together
2 minutes silence for the 7 July bombing victims		
11–11.15	Coffee break	
11.15–11.25	The theory of and need for W&M	NWML
11.25–11.35	The practicalities and possible levels of accuracy	M Tumelty
11.35–12.05	Public's tolerance of inaccuracies versus reasonable enforcement of accuracies	In groups
12.05–12.15	Present back findings on tolerances	Together
12.15–12.45	Risk assessment and inspection prioritisation – mapping Impact versus likelihood of risk	In groups

12.45 – 1.30pm	Lunch	
1.30 – 1.40	Outline rest of the afternoon	Vanilla
1.40 – 2.00	Ideal frequency of inspections (including earned autonomy and self-regulation)	In groups
2.00 – 2.30	Council tax trade off – cost versus frequency of inspections; the burden to TS departments	In groups
2.30 – 2.40	Present back findings	Together
2.40 – 2.55	Coffee break	
2.55 – 3.00	Setting the parameters for a consumer-driven W&M law	NCC
3.00 – 3.45	Generating a consumer-driven law	In groups
3.45 – 4.10	Discuss the public's expectations of involvement in such regulations or law. Develop whether there is a need for it, and if so a model for moving forward.	In groups
4.10 – 4.30	Present back findings	Together
4.30 – 4.45	Thank and close	Vanilla and NCC

Notes and references

- 1 *Weights and Measures*: Consultation on draft regulations to replace Part V of the Weights and Measures Act 1985 and the Weights and Measures (Packaged Goods) Regulations 1986', DTI, 8 July 2005
- 2 The Weights and Measures Act 1985 awards Local Authorities the responsibility for enforcing the Act, but with few prescriptions as to how rigorously they should do so.
- 3 <http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2006/grocery/index.htm>
- 4 The think tank nef calls this 'Clone Town Britain' - <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/clonetown.aspx>
- 5 LACORS has developed guidelines, tailored to specific types of premises. In this instance, the TSO has indicated how she thinks the guidance would apply in general terms. It is worth noting in passing that some of the stakeholders queried whether all local authorities adhere to the guidelines – so the real gap may be even wider than suggested here.
- 6 Full definitions are provided in Appendix 2
- 7 *Daily Mail*, 19 February 1998.
- 8 Current legislation makes unit pricing compulsory only for stores with internal sales floor space of 280m² or above.
- 9 Reducing Administrative Burdens; HM Treasury March 2005
- 10 The most recent summary can be found here: Better Regulation Taskforce, *Principles of Good Regulation, 2003* – <http://www.brc.gov.uk/downloads/pdf/principlesleaflet.pdf>
- 11 *Measure for measure – the best value agenda for trading standards services*; Audit Commission 1999



About the National Consumer Council

The NCC makes a practical difference to the lives of consumers around the UK, using its insight into consumer needs to advocate change.

We work with public service providers, businesses and regulators, and our relationship with the Department of Trade and Industry – our main funder – gives us a strong connection within government.

We conduct rigorous research and policy analysis to investigate key consumer issues, and use this to influence organisations and people that make change happen.

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