



House of Commons  
Home Affairs Committee

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# Violence and abuse towards retail workers

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**First Report of Session 2021–22**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
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## Home Affairs Committee

The Home Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Home Office and its associated public bodies.

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## Summary

The last 5 years has seen a shocking rise in attacks on retail workers. The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) found that 89% of individuals working in local shops had experienced some form of abuse. The British Retail Consortium reported that the number of incidents recorded last year amounts to the equivalent of one a minute during a typical shopping day. The appalling truth is that for millions of shop workers verbal abuse and physical violence is becoming a too frequent reality, fuelled by organised crime and substance abuse, which is not being taken sufficiently seriously, and where a stronger police response is needed.

Shop workers are the lifeblood of local high streets and communities. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic those in essential retail continued to work and kept our communities going. So it is appalling that abuse and assaults against shopworkers went up during the pandemic and staff faced abuse for enforcing Covid restrictions. It is completely unacceptable that violence and abuse towards retail workers is becoming endemic in British society.

The Committee has heard repeatedly that the policing response to retail crime is failing to match the rising tide of violence and abuse against shop workers. On far too many occasions retail workers are being left alone to manage dangerous situations which put both their physical and mental wellbeing at risk. When the police fail to attend or follow-up serious incidents it undermines trust and confidence in them, discouraging reporting and weakening the deterrent for repeat offenders, leaving shopworkers more vulnerable.

Improvements in reporting and responding to violence and assaults against shopworkers are urgently needed. We welcome the Government's work to provide better guidance on reporting retail crime. We agree that you cannot manage what you do not measure. However, we also need a much stronger and more serious response from the police when these incidents are reported. We recommend that it is made mandatory for the police formally to flag offences committed in a retail environment, including assaults on retail workers, to give a consistent indication of the scale of the problem to help improve the police response and to allow police forces better to understand patterns of local crime.

Local police leadership on this issue is also urgently required. As local representatives Police and Crime Commissioners are well placed to understand the specific issues facing the retail community in their area. We call on them to work with local retailers to establish or strengthen Business Crime Reduction Partnerships in every area. Chief Constables need to ensure that all forces are taking violence against shopworkers much more seriously and improve their response to retail crime.

The lack of capacity in neighbourhood policing teams to build relationships with retailers, identify prolific offenders and respond swiftly to incidents of retail crime has damaged the confidence of retail workers. We call on Chief Constables to ring-fence a proportion of their additional policing capacity to expand neighbourhood teams.

As well as improving the response to retail crimes when they do occur, there must also be renewed focus and action on the causes of retail crime. Drugs play a significant role in a large number of these crimes and fuel a cycle of prolific offending. Sustainable increased funding is urgently needed for local drug rehabilitation services.

Retail workers are placed at an increased risk of violence and abuse compared to members of the general public. They are responsible for enforcing laws with regard to age-restricted sales and restricted goods, and conflict over these types of sales is a key trigger for violence and abuse. Other categories of workers, such as emergency workers and customs officers, have rightly been afforded extra protection by the law in recognition of the service they provide to the public and the responsibility placed upon them by Parliament. We believe that retail workers must also be recognised, and that offences against them must be treated with additional seriousness, with extra protection from the law.

Violence and abuse towards retail workers is a complex issue and any meaningful solution will involve a package of measures from Government, the police, employers, retail workers and the public. However, we found that the patchwork of existing offences for prosecuting incidents of violence and abuse against individuals is not adequate to address the escalating scale of offences. The Government should consult urgently on the scope of a new standalone offence. A clear message must be sent that nobody should feel unsafe at work.



# Introduction

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1. We launched this inquiry into violence and abuse towards retail workers on 18 December 2020. Since then we have published over 35 pieces of written evidence and received 12,667 responses to our public survey asking retail workers about their lived experiences. The survey asked about the frequency of incidents, how these were reported, what action was taken by the police or employers and what should be done to prevent abuse in future. We have also taken oral evidence from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), the British Retail Consortium, the Association of Convenience Stores, Boots UK, The Co-op, representatives of the police and Kit Malthouse MP, the Minister for Crime and Policing. We are very grateful to all those who took the time to fill in the public survey or to provide written or oral evidence to the inquiry.

2. The first chapter of this report seeks to set out the scale of the problem by highlighting the escalating trend of violence and abuse towards retail workers, examining the triggers for this abuse and addressing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the second chapter, we examine the policing response and consider issues with reporting and recording of retail crime. In the third chapter, we will examine how employers are supporting retail workers and look at the preventative measures which can be taken in store. In the fourth chapter, we will discuss the link between addiction and prolific offending. In chapter five, we examine the legal framework and consider the case for introducing a new criminal offence for assaulting or threatening a retail worker.

# 1 The scale of the problem

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## *Rising levels of violence and abuse towards retail workers*

3. In the last 5 years the level of physical violence and abuse directed towards retail workers has increased significantly. Data gathered by individual businesses, trade associations, trade unions and the Home Office all confirm this is a growing problem. In May 2021 the British Retail Consortium (BRC), which represents around 70% of the UK retail industry, published a report which found that the frequency of incidents of violence and abuse rose by 7% from 424 incidents per day in 2018/2019 to 455 in 2019/2020. This amounts to the equivalent of over 50 incidents an hour or almost one a minute during a typical 9-hour shopping day also including an average of 11 violent incidents every hour or roughly one every 5 to 6 minutes.<sup>1</sup>

4. The retail sector includes any business or individual involved with selling products directly to consumers. The economic output of the retail sector in the 2019/20 financial year was £97 billion, 5.2% of the UK's total economic output, a 2.5% fall on figures for 2018/19.<sup>2</sup> Employment in the retail sector was around 3 million in 2019, representing 9.3% of the UK total.<sup>3</sup> Retail jobs, in over 310,000 retail businesses, are fairly evenly distributed across most regions and counties of the UK.<sup>4</sup>

5. The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), which represents over 33,500 local shops, found that 89% of individuals working in local shops had experienced some form of abuse. Its members recorded 1.26 million incidents of verbal abuse and 40,000 incidents of violence, of which 19% resulted in injury and 10,345 involved a weapon.<sup>5</sup> Since 2007, USDAW has surveyed between 1,500 and 7,000 shop workers each year to gather first-hand accounts regarding levels of violence and abuse. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of workers experiencing verbal abuse increased from just over half to around two-thirds, whilst the number threatened during the course of their duties increased by around a third.<sup>6</sup> The scale of the abuse was also reflected in responses to the Committee's public survey: 70% of the 12,667 retail workers that responded had both witnessed and experienced violence and abuse whilst working.

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1 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021

2 In terms of Gross Value Added (GVA). ONS, [GDP low level aggregates data](#), 31 March 2021 (Gross value added, current prices, series KK7F, KKP5)

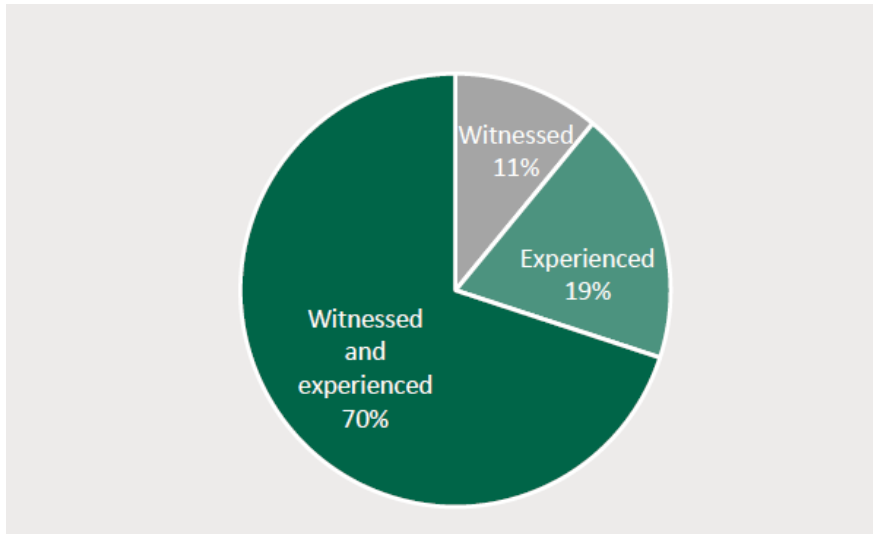
3 ONS and NISRA, [Business register and employment survey](#), 2019

4 Businesses: BEIS, Business population estimates 2020 (data as of 1 January 2020).

5 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

6 [USDAW](#) (VTR0016)

Figure 1: Response from 12,667 retail workers to the question 'Have you experienced violence and abuse whilst working?'



6. Businesses that submitted evidence to the inquiry have helped illustrate what these national figures and trends look like at shop level. The Co-op informed us that they have seen a fourfold rise in incidents of violent crime between 2014 and 2020. In addition, levels of verbal abuse, including threats, have increased by over forty times in the period Q4 2015 (215 incidents) to Q4 2020 (10,083 incidents).<sup>7</sup>

Figure 2: Co-op levels of violent crime

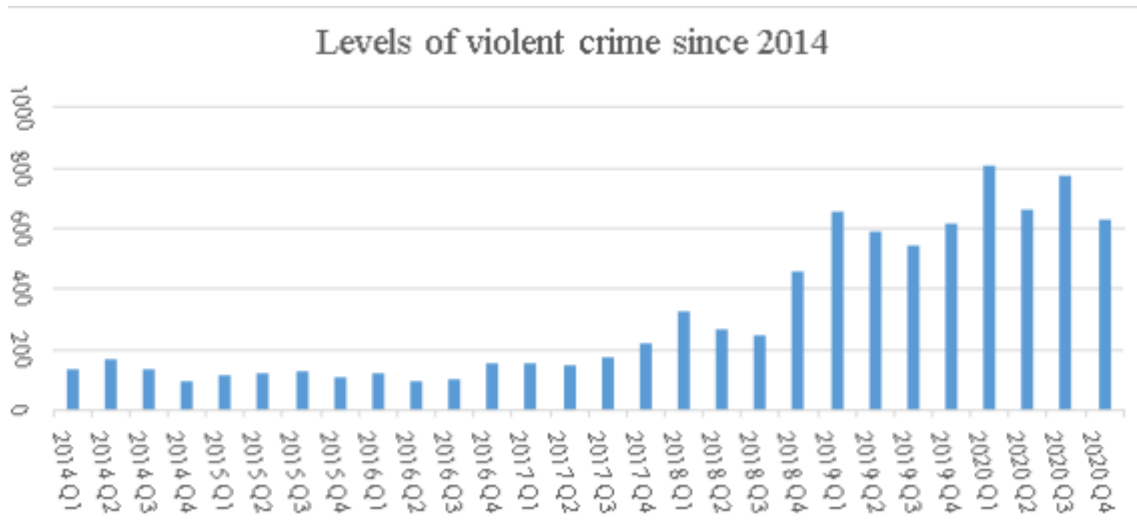
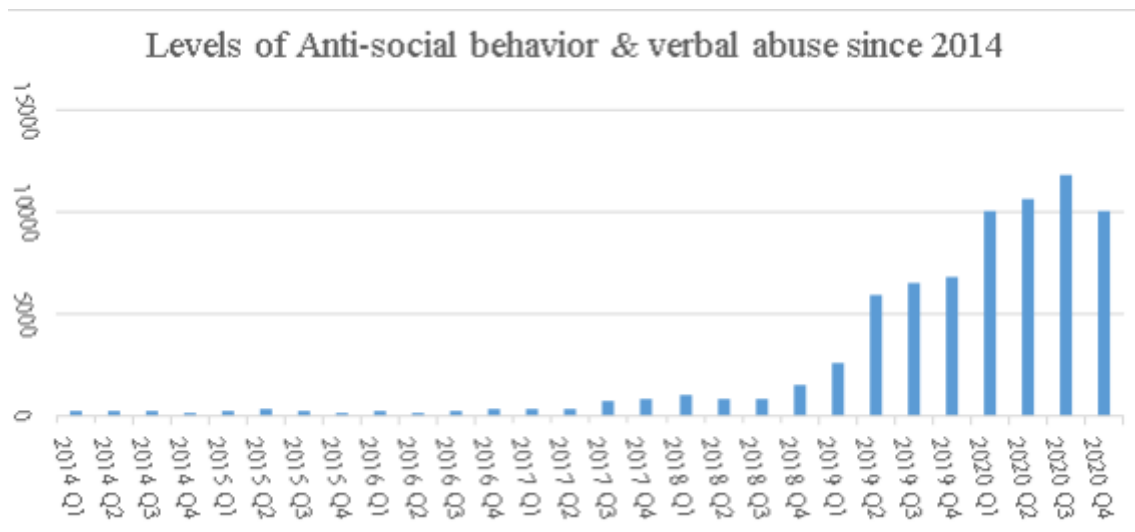


Figure 3: Levels of anti-social behaviour and verbal abuse



Source: Written evidence submitted by Co-op (VTR0027)

7. Paul Gerrard, giving evidence on behalf of the Co-op, put these figures into context when he said that in 2019/20 “this means that across 2,600 stores in the Co-op group we saw something like 43,000 incidents of violence or abuse. That equates to 110 of my colleagues being abused or threatened every single day, 10 being attacked, and 5 of those attacks involving weapons.”<sup>8</sup> He concluded “we are in a position now where it has become normalised in society to go in and abuse and attack shop workers, often with weapons.”<sup>9</sup> Marks and Spencer told us that they have seen a “steady increase” in the number of verbal and physical assaults, with physical assaults taking place at a rate of just under 2 per day across their 1,519 stores.<sup>10</sup> Morrisons described its colleagues facing “violent confrontation on a daily basis” and also noted “rising numbers of incidents involving weapons such as firearms, knives and syringes.”<sup>11</sup> Sainsbury’s also told us that “violence and aggression are increasing year on year, with serious physical assaults trending upwards”. In 2020, there were over 4,500 violent incidents involving a weapon across the Sainsburys estate, an increase of more than a third on last year, continuing an already upward trend. They told us the most common weapons reported included “knives, machetes, blades, needles, scissors, and screwdrivers”.<sup>12</sup>

8. The Home Office’s 2018 Commercial Victimization Survey, the latest survey which has been conducted,<sup>13</sup> also recognised “the rising trend” in assaults and threats against retail workers, noting an increase from 500 incidents per 1,000 premises in 2016 to 1,600 per 1,000 premises in 2018. The 2018 Survey estimated that larger business premises (with 50+ employees) experienced 13,800 incidents per 1,000 premises a rate around 28 times higher than that experienced by smaller sized premises (1–9 employees) and around

8 [Q30](#)

9 [Q38](#)

10 [Marks & Spencer \(VTR0029\)](#)

11 [WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC \(VTR0028\)](#)

12 [Sainsbury’s \(VTR0019\)](#)

13 The survey was paused for 2019 while a review was undertaken to consider whether changes were needed to better meet user needs. Following feedback from stakeholders, the survey was scheduled for September 2020 but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey is expected to start interviews with businesses in the first half of 2021; Home Office, ‘[Crime against businesses statistics](#)’, 13 October 2020

three times higher than medium sized premises (10–49 employees).<sup>14</sup> In April 2019, the Government launched a call for evidence on violence and abuse towards shop staff.<sup>15</sup> The Government’s response, published in July 2020, acknowledges that “the available evidence highlights that there has been an increase in incidents of violence and abuse toward shop staff” and outlines the Government’s plans to tackle this crime.<sup>16</sup> Four ‘task and finish groups’ were created to take forward the Home Office’s work in response to the call for evidence. The groups were tasked with:

- Developing communications for both employees and employers to make clear that violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated;
- Developing a best practice guide that aims to support staff in reporting these crimes when they occur to ensure that a suitable response can be delivered;
- Looking at barriers to effective data sharing between businesses and the police to ensure that information can be used to better understand the problem; and
- Looking at how better to provide support to victims.<sup>17</sup>

9. These resources, developed in concert with the National Retail Crime Steering Group, are now published on the British Retail Crime website.<sup>18</sup> The National Retail Crime Steering Group brings together Government, police and industry representatives to focus on the response to crimes affecting the retail sector.<sup>19</sup> The Government response also referred to the introduction of legislation for community penalties, the white paper ‘A Smarter Approach to Sentencing’ was subsequently published in September 2020.<sup>20</sup> The Minister for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse MP, has also written to Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners about working with local business, the use of Victim and Business Impact Statements, prosecution of low value theft and licensing issues.<sup>21</sup> We discuss the Government’s response throughout the report.

**10. No one should encounter violence at work. The last 5 years has seen a shocking rise in attacks on retail workers. We find it very disturbing that violence and abuse towards those working in the retail environment is becoming endemic in British society. The appalling truth, exposed comprehensively by data from the industry, is that for millions of shop workers verbal abuse and physical violence is becoming a too frequent reality. We are particularly alarmed by evidence of the increased use of weapons during incidences of theft. A robust response led by Government is urgently required to break this escalating cycle of violence. Shop workers are often the lifeblood of local high streets and communities. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, those in essential retail continued to work and kept our communities going. It is unacceptable that they should regularly face abuse and violence at work.**

14 [2018 Commercial Victimization Survey](#) [latest available data], Home Office, September 2019

15 [Call for evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff](#), Home Office April 2019

16 [Government Response – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff](#), Home Office, April 2019

17 [Home Office \(VTR0035\)](#)

18 [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

19 [Speech to the Annual Retail Fraud Conference](#), Home Office, 14 April 2011

20 [A Smarter Approach to Sentencing](#), 16 September 2020

21 [Ibid](#)

## The human cost

11. Several stakeholders told us that retail crime is seen as a “victimless crime” because it is perceived as a crime against businesses, rather than against individuals.<sup>22</sup> Many others told us that retail workers have come to view violence and abuse as “just part of the job” or “the norm.”<sup>23</sup> During our inquiry, the Committee has heard many accounts of violent and distressing incidents and the terrible impact this can have on the health and wellbeing of retail workers.

12. The British Retail Consortium report found that even what may seem like a mild argument can have a significant emotional impact on a staff member who is not accustomed to “being placed in a position where they are expected to just stand by and accept any abuse”. Attacks without injury or violence are “no less attacks for that reason—they can leave unseen impacts on the people affected”.<sup>24</sup> Sainsbury’s told us that after an incident, regardless of the severity and irrespective of whether it was related to a verbal attack or being victim of an armed robbery, colleagues described feeling “frightened’, ‘scared’, and ‘fearful’”.<sup>25</sup> Dixons Carphone told us that violent thefts have caused its colleagues to suffer “long-term illnesses, such as depression, anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).”<sup>26</sup> Pets at Home told us about “numerous cases” of abuse having a detrimental effect on the mental health of its employees and disrupting “personal lives outside of their working environment.”<sup>27</sup> Commissioner Ian Dyson, National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) lead for business crime, told us he had been struck by the impact on individual shopworkers of the violence, and the threats of violence, which is “causing significant psychological stress, welfare issues and in fact leading to a number of people leaving retail”.<sup>28</sup>

A male youth attempted to buy an energy drink and when challenged for age identification punched a colleague in the jaw causing a facial injury. This colleague was psychologically affected by the incident and was unable to continue in their current role. They have now left the business as a result.

Source: Morrisons (VTR0028)

13. Many stakeholders emphasised that these incidents can lead retail workers to have anxiety and fear about returning to work because of the possibility that the offender will return to the shop or another incident will take place.<sup>29</sup> Joanne Cairns, representing USDAW, told us:

it is not even just experiencing the incident; it is the anxiety of knowing that the next incident could be just around the corner. Going into work every day not knowing what could happen has a massive impact on people in their daily life.”<sup>30</sup>

22 [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#) (VTR0032), [Anonymous](#) (VTR0008), [Boots](#) (VTR0026), [National Federation of Retail Newsagents](#) (VTR0020)

23 [Dixons Carphone](#) (VTR0012), [Anonymous](#) (VTR0025), [Wickes](#) (VTR0010), [WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC](#) (VTR0028), [Nationwide Building Society](#) (VTR0024), [National Federation of Retail Newsagents](#) (VTR0020), [USDAW](#) (VTR0016)

24 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021

25 [Sainsbury’s](#) (VTR0019)

26 [Dixons Carphone](#) (VTR0012)

27 [Pets at Home Plc](#) (VTR0009)

28 [Q58](#)

29 [Pets at Home Plc](#) (VTR0009), [Anonymous](#) (VTR0017), [USDAW](#) (VTR0016)

30 [Q6](#)

14. The British Retail Consortium told us that some of its members have reported instances of threats from offenders who live in the local area and “claim they know where a store worker lives and will go after them”. Others have reported incidents of “psychological intimidation such as stalking shopworkers when they leave the premises at lunchtime” which is causing significant distress.<sup>31</sup>

A female shoplifter was stopped by our security guard with medicines that she hadn't paid for when he asked to look in her bag as she was leaving the store. She refused and stabbed him with a needle, leaving the store before returning with her boyfriend who pushed, shoved and verbally abused the security guard before finally leaving.

Source: Co-op Group (VTR0027)

15. **The appalling abuse suffered by retail workers on a daily basis is completely unacceptable. Abuse should never be “simply part of the job” or accepted as a “norm” in any workplace. The unique vulnerability of retail workers, who face being confronted with repeat offenders who live in their local area, compounds the severity and regularity of these offences.**

### What is driving rising levels of violence and abuse?

16. In this section we will first consider evidence on the long-term causes of rising violence and abuse towards retail workers then look at how the nature of these offences has changed under the exceptional conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

17. In September 2019, Professor Emmeline Taylor published a report which identified four main scenarios in which violence and abuse are becoming prevalent:

- encountering shoplifting (the number one trigger for violence and verbal abuse);
- enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods and other prohibited sales;
- hate-motivated incidents; and
- armed and unarmed robberies.<sup>32</sup>

18. Respondents to the Home Office's 2019 call for evidence described “an increase in shop theft and greater willingness among offenders to use violence and abuse” and “an increase in drug and alcohol abuse among offenders” as key causes of the increase in violence.<sup>33</sup> The ACS 2021 Crime Report also found a “direct link” between acquisitive crime and violent crimes with shop theft offences “the biggest trigger point” for incidents.<sup>34</sup> The BRC Crime Survey 2021 identified “theft by organised gangs” who make a profit by selling goods online and an “increasing number of addicts” who are turning to retail crime to support their habit.<sup>35</sup> These themes were clearly reflected in the evidence submitted to

31 [British Retail Consortium](#) (VTR0015)

32 Dr Emmeline Taylor, [‘It's not part of the job’: Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers: A review of evidence and policy](#), September 2019

33 [Call for evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff](#), Home Office, April 2019

34 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

35 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021



this inquiry. Commissioner Ian Dyson, business crime lead for the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), told us that with regards to retail crime there are three broad areas of offending:

- Organised crime;
- Exploitation (people who are being exploited, probably by organised crime, to commit shoplifting); and
- The chaotic individual, such as drug users fuelling their habit.<sup>36</sup>

### **Organised crime**

19. The British Retail Consortium told us that incidents “appear to be increasingly linked to the activities of organised criminal gangs. These criminals are targeting retail as a stable income stream and are prepared to use violence or threats of violence to get their way ... Over 90% of our members have seen an increase in the amount of gang related crime they witness.”<sup>37</sup> Morrisons told us that while some offenders are “opportunistic” others are “organised groups who are well equipped and often armed with weapons, such as crow bars and hammers, which they will use to threaten colleagues.”<sup>38</sup> Tom Ironside, representing the British Retail Consortium, said “retailers frequently report seeing an increasingly sophisticated, premeditated, well-planned element to some shop theft” where criminals target high-value consumer goods, which are likely to be tradeable.<sup>39</sup> We heard that tackling this small number of professional criminals, who are members of organised violent gangs, “could significantly reduce harm.”<sup>40</sup> Deputy Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman, NPCC serious organised acquisitive crime lead, told us about a series of “nasty robbery offences”, taking place across the country, which targeted phone dealers for iPhones and iPads. The robberies were the work of an organised crime group who had also “coerced” individuals into their activity.<sup>41</sup>

[Store X] has been targeted twice in the last 2 months. The first incident there were no weapons seen or abuse towards anyone. They grabbed Apple stock and ran. Reported to Metropolitan Police but no arrests. On the second occasion, 4 suspects forced their way into the store past colleagues manning the front door and proceeded to take Apple stock again. Threatened to stab anyone who tried to stop them.

[Store X] Three suspects entered the store just after 10am. They were verbally aggressive to colleagues demanding that they stand back. One suspect had a broken snooker cue. Suspects targeted Apple and Samsung stock. Net loss was over £10000.

Source: Dixons Carphone (VTR0012)

### **Theft, addiction and prolific offending**

20. Professor Emmeline Taylor’s report identified a strong relationship between substance misuse, shop theft and the use of violence and aggression by drug-affected offenders.<sup>42</sup>

36 [Q101](#)

37 [British Retail Consortium \(VTR0015\)](#)

38 [WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC \(VTR0028\)](#)

39 [Q31](#)

40 [Anonymous \(VTR0025\)](#)

41 [Q102](#)

42 [Dr Emmeline Taylor, 'It's not part of the job': Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers: A review of evidence and policy, September 2019](#)



An offender enters a store under the influence of alcohol. Upon being escorted out by security, the offender threatened to bite and hit the security officer. Outside the store the offender punched the windows and threatened colleagues and security. Colleague dialled 999 but there were no units available.

Source: Central England Co-operative (VTR0014)

21. Paul Gerrard, Campaigns and Public Affairs Director at the Co-op, said “we have seen increasing numbers of prolific offenders who either use shop theft to fund personal substance misuse or are being used by organisations.”<sup>43</sup> James Lowman, Chief Executive of the Association of Convenience Stores, said the reason for the level of violence and abuse that comes with the act of theft is that “many of the people committing those crimes have problems with addiction. Many of them are in a heightened state” which means they escalate very quickly to acts of violence and abuse.<sup>44</sup> Iona Blake, representing Boots UK, told us:

It has been an increasing picture over the last five years. There are a couple of factors in that. There is desperation around shop thefts and people looking to fund substance abuse habits or even to fund a style of living. Some individuals are in situations of real poverty. We definitely see that theft is one big driver of incidents of violence and abuse across all our 2,500 stores.<sup>45</sup>

An offender concealed alcohol with intent to steal, and noticed a female colleague completing daily tasks near the exit. The offender walked up and unprovoked punched her in the stomach, causing her to fall into the barriers. The colleague was eight months pregnant at the time of the attack.

A known offender entered the store, recognised by a manager who waited at the exit doors for them to leave. The offender went behind them, placed a carrier bag over her head and pulled her to the floor.

Source: Sainsbury's (VTR0019)

### **Gender and race**

22. The retail workforce is 58% female and has a high proportion of black and minority ethnic workers.<sup>46</sup> This means that incidences of violence and abuse against retail workers disproportionately affect individuals in these groups. Joanne Cairns told us that women are “more likely to face abuse at work than their male colleagues” with 70% of female workers surveyed by USDAW reporting abuse from customers compared with 62% of their male colleagues.<sup>47</sup> James Lowman, ACS, noted that just over 40% of independent retailers running convenience stores identify as Asian or British Asian and “themselves, and unfortunately their families are often the victims” of racist abuse.<sup>48</sup>

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43 [Q31](#)

44 [Q2](#)

45 [Q31](#)

46 [Q10](#)

47 [Ibid](#)

48 [Q20](#)

“A man came into the store and became angry with my colleague who was trying to enforce the social distancing rules. The man began shouting at [my colleague] at which point the security guard came over to assess the situation. The man told the security guard to ‘F\*\*k off, you monkey. F\*\*k off you p\*\*\*y’. Both [my colleague] and the security guard were shocked by this language and told the man they would not serve them. The man attempted to shoplift some items when the security guard asked him to put them back. The man responded with ‘you dare stop me you monkey, I will f\*\*king kill you, me and you, let’s fight outside. I will kick your f\*\*king head in and I will kill you, you f\*\*king monkey’. The security guard continued to ask him to put the items back, and the man continued his threats and abuse.”

Source: Co-op Group (VTR0027)

23. In her 2018 report, Professor Emmeline Taylor expressed concern that when a hate incident occurs in a shop and, in particular, as part of a theft incident, that “its seriousness is missed.” She recommended that future iterations of the Home Office’s Commercial Victimization Survey include questions to measure levels of hate-motivated offences.<sup>49</sup> Wickes told us that between 1 June and 30 November 2020, 10% of the incidents it recorded were “discriminatory” but that hate crimes are “not deemed serious enough to deploy resources” by the police.<sup>50</sup> Detective Inspector Patrick Holdaway said that when local convenience stores, whose workers are often on their own, report that they are subject to hate crimes they will be seen as more vulnerable by the police and therefore become “very much on our radar.” He emphasised that the police are driven by reporting which “is really critical for us”.<sup>51</sup> However, Commissioner Ian Dyson acknowledged that:

what has probably happened in the past—and may well still happen, frankly—which is a bit of a binary discussion that says to an individual owner of a shop who is worried about retaliation or hate crime and all those other factors, “If you don’t provide us with a statement, we can’t take it forward”. It is a very binary conversation that is really hard for that individual, to say, “Am I going to put myself on offer, head above the parapet?”

24. We discuss the police response and reporting in greater depth in Chapter 2.

A female threw carrot cakes at the store manager and pushed the security guard and called a BAME colleague a “Chinese Bitch”. The suspect threatened the store manager, saying she would wait for the manager outside the store.

Source: British Retail Consortium (BRC) (VTR0015)

**25. Where shopworkers are confronted by hate-motivated abuse in the course of their employment this should be taken seriously by employers and reported to the police. It is vital that the police, in dealing with these incidents, manage them with sensitivity and give them the attention that they deserve. We support calls for future iterations of the Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey to include questions on incidents of hate related violence and abuse to help build a clearer picture of the prevalence of this form of abuse.**

49 Dr Emmeline Taylor, [‘It’s not part of the job’: Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers: A review of evidence and policy](#), September 2019

50 [Wickes](#) (VTR0010)

51 [Q100](#)

## Age-restricted sales

26. Age-restricted sales were among the “top three triggers” reported in the ACS 2021 Crime Report.<sup>52</sup> The Co-op told us that within its business 15% of incidents resulted from age-restricted ID verification. In addition, it found that “the refusal of alcohol sales to those who are already under the influence” can also cause “a heightened degree of violence and abusive incidents towards our colleagues”.<sup>53</sup> In its 2019 survey, USDAW found that the highest ranking triggers for abuse were shoplifting (30%) and age restricted sales (29%), which had consistently been the case for many years of surveying.<sup>54</sup> The 2021 BRC Crime Survey said its members found “asking someone for their age ID” was a common trigger for attacks and noted that “failure to carry out these check can result in a criminal conviction for the employee while the perpetrator goes free.”<sup>55</sup>

“A young male was refused alcohol due to being underage, he made threats to the colleague. A couple of hours later the youth returned to the store, approached the colleague and struck him with a house brick causing a head injury.”

Source: Morrisons (VTR0028)

## The police response

27. Finally, several stakeholders identified the lack of response from the police as a factor driving the increase in violence and abuse. Iona Blake, representing Boots UK, told us “the risk of prosecution and being caught has deteriorated so much that people are seemingly prepared to take more risks more frequently. There is definitely an increase around prolific and persistent offenders.”<sup>56</sup> Paul Gerrard, the Co-op, said “the risk associated with these crimes has disappeared because the police response is, at best, variable ... We see reducing risk because there is little police presence”.<sup>57</sup> James Lowman, ACS, told us that there is a group of offenders who are “armed robbers” which the police take very seriously. However, the other group of offenders are people “who may start off stealing, may then add more aggression into that behaviour, and might then bring a weapon. They move up, effectively, into armed robbery, but from a point of desperation around theft.” He told us that he wanted to see earlier interventions with regards to this latter group, which made up “the majority” of cases.<sup>58</sup> Dunelm Soft Furnishings observed an escalation in threats with perpetrators trying to intimidate shop workers which they attributed to “the person doing this knows there is little chance of being caught and no consequence even if they are caught”.<sup>59</sup> The National Federation of Retail Newsagents said they thought “a strong police response” to simple shop theft “might serve to stop future, more serious incidents, but it is here that the police response is weakest”.<sup>60</sup> Marks and Spencer told us starkly:

In terms of the reasons for this increase, we have seen that local police forces have struggled to respond to reports of assaults in our stores. As a result, colleagues have become less inclined to report assaults to the police,

52 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

53 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027)

54 USDAW, [Campaign to end violence and abuse towards retail workers](#), Survey Results 2020,

55 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021

56 [Q31](#)

57 [Q31](#)

58 [Q15](#)

59 [Dunelm Soft Furnishings](#) (VTR0001)

60 [National Federation of Retail Newsagents](#) (VTR0020)

as they believe that there is ‘no point’ when it is likely that no action will follow. In turn, perpetrators become aware of the lack of reporting and feel more confident that they will not suffer any consequences for their actions.<sup>61</sup>

28. A 2018 report from the Centre for Social Justice described shop theft as “extremely attractive” due to its low risk of detection and the ability to generate cash quickly from the sale of largely untraceable property. It quoted the words of one prolific offender who stated: “I can honestly say I have gotten away with thousands and thousands of shoplifts, thousands.”<sup>62</sup>

**29. There are several factors driving the increase in violence and abuse towards retail workers over the last 5 years. However, the primary factor appears to be increasing levels of acquisitive theft which are linked to both organised crime and prolific offenders with substance addiction problems. By comparison, conflict over the sale of age restricted products has been a consistent trigger for violence and abuse over a much longer period. We are particularly concerned by evidence which suggests failures in the police response are fuelling the increases in offending.**

## The impact of Covid-19

30. The UK went into lockdown for the first time between late March and June 2020. Across the UK, non-essential high street businesses have been intermittently closed whilst essential retailers, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, have remained open throughout the pandemic. Research from USDAW, published in the summer of 2020, found that during this period enforcement of social distancing measures replaced age-related sales and shoplifting as the most frequent cause of incidents in stores.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, USDAW’s interim crime survey, published in November 2020, showed that 76% of shop workers said that abuse has been “worse than normal” during the pandemic.<sup>64</sup> Flashpoints for abuse have centred on customers’ frustrations with queuing, limits on stock, mandatory mask wearing and social distancing in store.<sup>65</sup>

“I’ve been screamed at when I told a customer we didn’t have an item in stock, had members of the public cough on me as I was stacking shelves.” “I had somebody pull my mask off and call me a sheep.” “Since the pandemic, I’ve had abuse nearly every day, even been coughed on twice.” Those are just some of the comments that we have had from members, and these sorts of things are happening all the time.

Source: Joanne Cairns, USDAW Q6

31. Paul Gerrard told us that in the last year Covid has become “the prominent trigger” for violence and abuse.<sup>66</sup> Wickes told us it experienced a sharp increase of 84% in the number of incidents reported in 2020 compared to 2019 with “two spikes which directly correlated with the first and second national lockdown periods”.<sup>67</sup> Marks and Spencer told

61 [Marks & Spencer](#) (VTR0029)

62 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), [Desperate for a Fix: Using shop theft and a Second Chance Programme to get tough on the causes of prolific drug-addicted offending](#), June 2018

63 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027), [Covid-19 is now a bigger flashpoint for abuse of shopworkers than shoplifting and age ID an Usdaw survey finds](#), USDAW, 23 September 2020

64 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027), [Three-quarters of retail staff say abuse has been worse during the pandemic](#), USDAW, 16 November 2020

65 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner](#) (VTR0031)

66 [Q32](#)

67 [Wickes](#) (VTR0010)

us that in 2020 it saw a 36% increase in assaults and a 27% increase in violent assaults. That is the difference between 1 in every 13,215 customers assaulting one of its employees, compared to 1 in 17,582 customers before the pandemic started.<sup>68</sup> Pets at Home said that during 2020, incidents involving violence, threats of violence and verbal abuse have “increased threefold.”<sup>69</sup>

32. Data collected by UK Finance, which represents major high-street banks, shows that in the 12-month period to the end of March 2021 serious assaults and abuse against frontline staff increased by nearly 80 per cent compared to the previous 12-month period. The worst incidents have resulted in one UK Finance member ending its relationship with customers and closing 775 accounts.<sup>70</sup> Nationwide Building Society told us that between December 2019 and July 2020 the number of incidents logged “rose by a shocking 300%” with the number of incidents recorded in December 2020 at 86% higher than in December 2019. These incidents included; 34 threats to kill, 26 members of staff assaulted and 26 Covid related incidents where members of the public “spat at colleagues”.<sup>71</sup> David Jamieson, then PCC for the West Midlands, told us that some shops advised staff “not to rigidly enforce mask wearing and social distancing rules” in order to protect them against abuse.<sup>72</sup> The Central England Co-operative captured the outrage expressed by many stakeholders to this inquiry when it told us:

Throughout the pandemic, shopworkers have been on the frontline and continue to serve their local communities tirelessly, despite the increased risk of contracting COVID-19. They deserve to work free of abuse and threat.<sup>73</sup>

33. They also provided the following comparison table to illustrate how violent crime had increased during this period:

**Box1: Violent crime 2019 v 2020**

	2019	2020	Increase/decrease
Assaults	106	144	35.80%
Verbal Abuse	259	693	167.50%
Threats and Intimidation	415	485	16.80%
Anti-Social Behaviour	236	329	39.40%
COVID	0	312	N/A

Source: Central England Co-operative (VTR0014)

34. An overwhelming number of stakeholders reported incidents of deliberate spitting or coughing by members of the public. Sainsbury’s told us about a number of physical assaults in which offenders “claimed to have COVID-19” and spat or coughed on workers who were trying to enforce Government guidelines.<sup>74</sup> Tesco told us that the “horrific trend” in offenders spitting made it necessary for them to invest in “DNA spit kits” to

68 [Marks & Spencer \(VTR0029\)](#)

69 [Pets at Home Plc \(VTR0009\)](#)

70 [UK Finance \(VTR0037\)](#)

71 [Nationwide Building Society \(VTR0024\)](#)

72 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner \(VTR0031\)](#)

73 [Central England Co-operative \(VTR0014\)](#)

74 [Sainsbury’s \(VTR0019\)](#)

provide evidence to help police identify offenders.<sup>75</sup> Another British Retail Consortium member provided all its in-store security staff with “plastic shield face coverings” due to the number of threats and actual cases of coughing and spitting.<sup>76</sup> On 27 May 2021, the Sentencing Council published new guidelines for sentencing common assault which include “a new aggravating factor of ‘deliberate spitting or coughing’ in the common assault and assault causing Actual Bodily Harm offences.” The guidelines will come into effect on 1 July 2021.<sup>77</sup>

“I was threatened with a customer spitting in my face if I didn’t get him an item.”

“We had a shoplifter threaten to give us the Covid19 by spitting on our faces.”

“A member of staff has had a customer threaten to spit in their face for being asked to follow the one-way system.”

Source: Usdaw [Coronavirus impact survey](#)

35. We also heard a lack of clarity regarding the rules contributed to difficulties experienced by shopworkers during the pandemic. James Lowman told us “different customers have different interpretations or different views and confront one another about their compliance with social distancing and face coverings” which means his colleagues are spending a lot of their time “refereeing challenges between customers”. He asked that for any future changes to restrictions the Government provide “real clarity” about the rules: otherwise, he said, it will be retailers who are “having to try to interpret them” and to deal with customers who have a different view.<sup>78</sup>

**36. It is unconscionable that violence and abuse towards retail workers has further increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. These are individuals who have been working on the frontline and have put their lives at risk to ensure that the public could access essential items such as food and medicine. At a time when they have most deserved our respect and gratitude they have instead faced violence and abuse.**

**37. We welcome the revised guidance from the Sentencing Council which makes the despicable act of deliberate spitting or coughing an aggravating factor for common assault. However, we note that incidents of offenders threatening to spit or cough would not be covered by its terms and regret that the sentencing guidelines took over a year from the start of the Covid crisis to be introduced.**

**38. A lack of clarity with regards to Government guidelines on mask wearing and social distancing exacerbated an already difficult situation for retailers in the early days of the pandemic. *If in future new public health restrictions are required the Government must learn the lessons from this pandemic, and work with retailers to ensure there are workable systems in place and clear guidance for the public.***

75 [Tesco](#) (VTR0033)

76 [British Retail Consortium](#) (VTR0015)

77 Sentencing Council, [New guidelines for sentencing common assault and attempted murder published](#), 27 May 2021

78 [Q14](#)



## 2 The policing response

39. In the first part of this chapter we will examine the policing response to incidents of violence and abuse against retail workers. We will discuss evidence which suggests retailers lack confidence in the police response and the perception that retail crime is ‘low priority’; we will look at the vicious cycle of underreporting for these offences. In the second part of the chapter, we will discuss proposals for how the policing response could be improved. This will cover: prioritisation of retail crime by police forces, improving crime recording practices and partnership working with local communities to tackle repeat offending.

### Problems

#### *A crisis of confidence*

40. There is evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of retail businesses and retail workers have lost confidence that the police will respond to incidents of violence and abuse or that perpetrators of these crimes will be brought to justice. The ACS 2021 Crime Report found that:

- 68% of retailers were “very dissatisfied” with police investigation of incidents;
- 36% had “no confidence that the police would investigate the crimes they report”; and
- 73% were “very dissatisfied” with sanctions given to offenders.<sup>79</sup>

41. The BRC 2020–21 Crime Survey found that 60% of retailers rated the police response as “poor” or “very poor.” However, this showed an increase in satisfaction from 2019–20 when 70% of retailers rated the police response as “poor” or “very poor.” The police’s approval rating was lowest in 2017–18 with 80% of participants in the survey rating the police response as “poor” or “very poor” that year. The last time any of the BRC’s members gave an excellent rating was in 2012–13: 8% of respondents rated the police response excellent and only 25% rated the response “poor” or “very poor”.<sup>80</sup>

42. The majority of evidence submitted to this inquiry reflected dissatisfaction with the policing response to retail crime. A survey by the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, conducted over the summer of 2020, found “a frightening lack of confidence in the police response” with 50% of respondents saying they did not bother reporting thefts in their shops to the police.<sup>81</sup> Paul Gerrard told us that the Co-op “only report the most serious offences to the police” but “two times out of every three” the police did not attend even for those serious offences.<sup>82</sup> He described the following incident:

An individual came in at 5 o’clock in the afternoon wanting to buy more paracetamol than you are allowed to, was refused, made threats, began to get aggressive and abusive, assaulted people, was removed from the store, stayed outside the store and then made personal threats against the female

79 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

80 [British Retail Consortium \(VTR0015\)](#)

81 [National Federation of Retail Newsagents \(VTR0020\)](#)

82 [Q39](#)

manager. My colleague called the police and heard nothing back until the next day when they rang to see if everything was okay... the police do not come even when there is a threat to the life of a woman at night.<sup>83</sup>

43. He concluded that “I cannot overstate the position of my colleagues in the Co-op that, at the minute, the police and the courts do not care.”<sup>84</sup> Dunelm Soft Furnishings told us that “it has reached the stage now that unless we dial 999 or press our Personal Attack Buttons store colleagues are left to take the abuse and threats until the abuser gives up and leaves the store”.<sup>85</sup> The British Retail Consortium said a key driver for this lack of confidence is the frequency with which potentially serious crimes are “NFA’d” (no further action taken) by the police. They obtained data from a Freedom of Information request which showed that across over 800 reports to the Metropolitan Police, 85% were NFA’d and only 9% charged.<sup>86</sup> Iona Blake, speaking on behalf of Boots UK, gave the following example:

A pharmacist was struck to the floor twice in the face and then spat on several times while the offender was trying to steal goods. That individual was known, was named and has not yet been arrested several months later. There has been no further action. As far as the colleagues in the store are concerned, the case has been closed.<sup>87</sup>

44. Stakeholders were particularly frustrated by the policing response with regards to repeat offenders. We heard even “when colleagues report persistent offenders, where they are known and CCTV and witness evidence is available” there is a “reluctance in taking any action” and “it is as if the officers don’t know what action to take.”<sup>88</sup> The ACS said that “repeat offenders are often not only known to retailers but also the police, other businesses, housing associations and other sectors experiencing violence in the community”; they estimated that 63% of offenders are repeat offenders.<sup>89</sup> Sainsbury’s told us:

Stores are plagued by ‘repeat’, ‘regular’ offenders who habitually instigate violence and abuse towards our colleagues. More than half of the violent incidents that occur in our stores are carried out by known offenders and banned shoplifters. Many of them targeting our stores are known to have violent tendencies or carry weapons such as knives and needles, making colleagues feel scared to enforce banning procedures.<sup>90</sup>

45. On the other hand, some of our stakeholders presented a more positive picture of the policing response. Wickes said that of the 241 incidents it had reported to police since 2014, 68% were subsequently responded to and supported and 16% led to an arrest and prosecution. They told us that “we have historically been happy with the levels of police response” but have noticed that “as the number of cases has steadily risen, the police response rate has not”.<sup>91</sup>

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83 [Q39](#)

84 [Ibid](#)

85 [Dunelm Soft Furnishings \(VTR0001\)](#)

86 [British Retail Consortium \(VTR0015\)](#)

87 [Q40](#)

88 [Anonymous \(VTR0008\)](#)

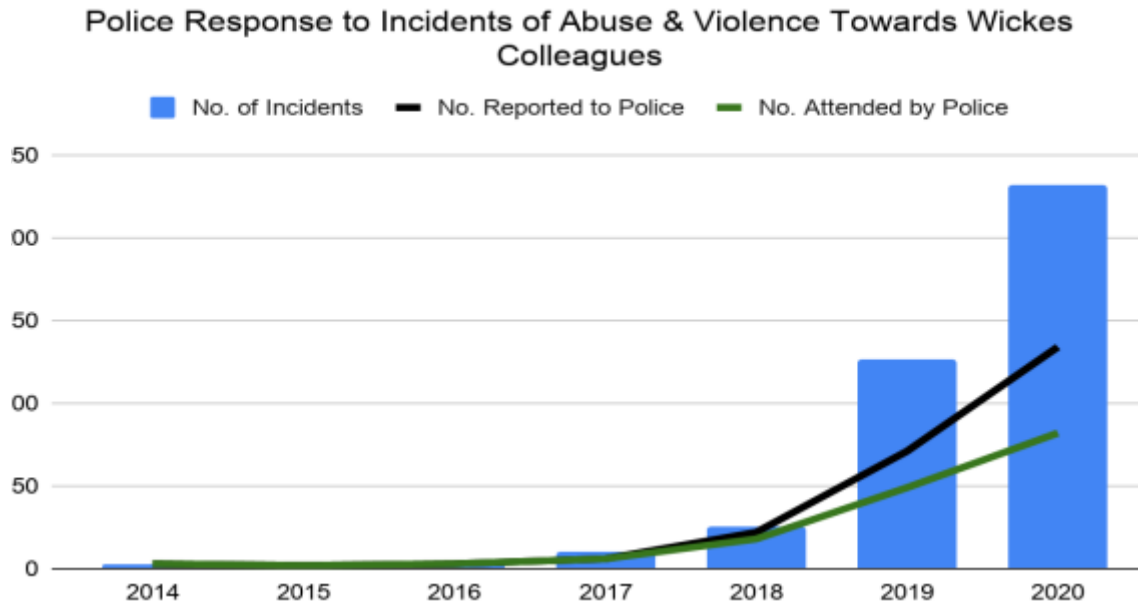
89 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

90 [Sainsbury’s \(VTR0019\)](#)

91 [Wickes \(VTR0010\)](#)



Figure 4



Source: Wickes (VTR0010)

46. Pets at Home told us that the “response from police forces across the UK has been reasonably well received” and “in the majority of cases it is evident that the police want to do a good job and in numerous cases often do.”<sup>92</sup> However, they described significant inconsistencies in the response between police forces:

Some forces have attended the scene and investigated allegations promptly, have provided follow up detail where required and often made arrests. This has reassured our retail colleagues that the behaviour they have experienced is not going to be tolerated and that we as a business, and their local police force will support them through what is a very stressful and potentially dangerous situation. Other forces however, have been extremely slow to react to serious incidents such as physical assaults, or have shown very little interest helping out with others.<sup>93</sup>

47. Pets at Home said that they thought where the response was poor it was because “resource has to be prioritised and it seems as though retail is less of a priority.”<sup>94</sup> Tesco told us that while its central teams have a constructive relationship with the police, in some local areas the responsiveness of the police “is not consistently positive”. They described instances where their employees “have felt that their concerns and calls for support have not been answered in good time” or that “incidents are not followed up, or progressed through the legal system effectively” which can lead to a lack of a clear consequences for the offender.<sup>95</sup> Iona Blake, representing Boots UK, also told us that the “consistency of police response across all 43 police forces absolutely needs to be addressed”.<sup>96</sup> However, the Nationwide Building Society said that in their experience “the police have overwhelmingly been helpful and efficient when dealing with instances of abuse in branch, both at first

92 [Pets at Home Plc \(VTR0009\)](#)

93 [Pets at Home Plc \(VTR0009\)](#)

94 [Ibid](#)

95 [Tesco \(VTR0033\)](#)

96 [Q45](#)

response, and during subsequent investigation of potential offences”. They told us “the issue is not the police response” but the “current sentencing guidelines” which do not recognise retail workers as “targets for abuse”.<sup>97</sup>

48. Violence and abuse towards retail workers takes many forms, from verbal abuse and threats to grievous bodily harm. There is an acknowledgement in the evidence from retailers that an immediate police response may not be appropriate in all cases. However, it is clear that stakeholders do not think the police are currently prioritising retail crime appropriately. Joanne Cairns, USDAW, told us:

We have been told that sometimes workers have been advised to ring the non-emergency 101 number for any incident of a retail crime, even while the crime is still taking place. There needs to be clear guidance that those crimes should be treated as an emergency when it is an emergency situation, particularly when there is potentially a threat to people of physical assault. We understand that the police do not necessarily have the resources to send the emergency response to every single incident of abuse, but there needs to be some dialogue between retailers and the police, obviously involving the workers as well, about what an appropriate response should be to different types of incidents.<sup>98</sup>

49. Wickes told us “the police themselves are to be considered a barrier to justice” because they do not think “low level volume crimes” are “serious enough to deploy resource”.<sup>99</sup> Morrisons said there are a number of “minor retail-setting crimes” which they understand would draw police resources unnecessarily from more important work but that “physical and verbal assaults on shopworkers” should never fall into that category. They told us that there are numerous examples of both types of incidents when the police have failed to attend or have attended in the following days long after the offenders have left the premises.<sup>100</sup> Dixons told us that the “complete non-response” to the majority of incidents of verbal abuse is “unacceptable” and drives the perception “that this type of retail crime remains a fairly low priority to most police forces”.<sup>101</sup> James Lowman, ACS, told us “it is not just a perception; it is absolute fact and reality that shoplifting offences are not met with a police response” and also raised the issue of vastly different crime types being “lumped in together”. He said:

Where there are instances of violence, or if it is currently taking place, we need an urgent response to that, because people’s livelihoods and, even more importantly, their welfare is at stake in that situation. There should be that triaging and differentiation using all the methods: online reporting, 101 reporting, 999 reporting, and building relationships with the police and setting expectations of what should be reported and how so that it can be effective and efficient from everyone’s point of view, including the police’s.<sup>102</sup>

50. The Home Office and NRCSSG reporting guidance, published on the British Retail Consortium website, states that when a crime is in progress “the most important thing

97 [Nationwide Building Society](#) (VTR0024)

98 [Q28](#)

99 [Wickes](#) (VTR0010)

100 [WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC](#) (VTR0028)

101 [Dixons Carphone](#) (VTR0012)

102 [Q53, Q54](#)

to think about is safety for all those at the scene” and advises retail workers “do nothing that would provoke the offender, if possible, get to a safe place and only if safe to do so dial 999”.<sup>103</sup>

51. The guidance also sets out the following criteria for calling 999 in an emergency:

- A serious offence is in progress or has just happened;
- Someone is in immediate danger of harm;
- You need help right away;
- Property is in danger of being damaged; or
- There is the likelihood of a serious disturbance to the public peace.<sup>104</sup>

52. The next section of the guidance advises retail workers to call 101 in a “non-emergency” and sets out a list of risk factors (presence of vulnerable people, threats, injury at the scene, the risk that evidence will be lost, if the offender is in the local area, alcohol, drug or mental health issues suspected, young people or foreign nationals are involved) which retail workers should notify to the police to enable them to “decide on the most appropriate policing response”.<sup>105</sup>

53. We raised the issue of retail worker confidence and prioritisation of retail crime directly with representatives of the police during oral evidence. Chief Inspector Patrick Holdaway told us the “challenge is making sure that the retailers give the right level of information” which “will help elicit a police response if it is required”.<sup>106</sup> Deputy Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman, Gwent Police, told us that:

From a violence point of view, if the offender is in the store [ ... ] I would expect an immediate police response. If they are offering violence, if that shopworker is in a position where they are being threatened with immediate violence, I would expect an immediate response [ ... ] but if the person has left the store and there is not anybody available to send, sometimes those are being dealt with either later on in the evening or the next day.<sup>107</sup>

54. Commissioner Ian Dyson said that most police forces use the THRIVE risk assessment model (threat, harm, risk, investigation opportunities, victim vulnerability, engagement level) to assess whether police attendance is required at an incident<sup>108</sup> He told us that the decisions made by supervisors in force control rooms are not easy and involve “prioritising a limited resource”. He concluded by saying that “where the risk assessment methodology says we should attend” then “we must attend” and acknowledged that is “something for

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103 Reporting, Summary, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

104 Section 2, Reporting a crime in an emergency, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

105 Section 3, reporting in a non-emergency, Reporting a crime in an emergency, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

106 [Q48](#)

107 [Q54](#)

108 [Q57](#)

the police to work on”.<sup>109</sup> David Jamieson, the former West Midlands PCC, identified resourcing as “partly” to blame for why shopworkers do not feel retail crime is being taken seriously. He told us:

The blue line is much thinner than it used to be. We have lost a quarter of our officers in 10 years, so the ability to respond to as many events as we would have previously done has somewhat reduced.<sup>110</sup>

55. The Policing Minister said that he does not think the policing response is “adequate” but that the “primary responsibility” for dealing with these localised issues lies with the Police and Crime Commissioners.<sup>111</sup> He told us “the thing that has the most potential” to deliver a step change in the policing response is “really strong and comprehensive reporting” that gives police forces a clear picture of the problem.<sup>112</sup> We discuss reporting in more detail in the next section.

**56. The Committee has heard overwhelming evidence that the policing response is simply failing to match the rising tide of violence and abuse against retail workers. The evidence also suggests that the response varies significantly between police forces: while there are examples of good practice, on far too many occasions retail workers are being left alone to manage dangerous situations which put both their physical and mental wellbeing at risk. We recognise that policing has been increasingly overstretched and that officers are working hard to respond to rising demand with constrained resources. Nevertheless, police forces and the Home Office need to ensure that officers are better able to respond to rising threats and crimes against shopworkers. The police’s failure to attend or follow-up serious incidents undermines trust and confidence, discourages reporting crime, and weakens the deterrent for repeat offenders leaving shopworkers more vulnerable and letting down victims of crime.**

57. We welcome the guidance for retail workers on when to use emergency and non-emergency numbers when seeking a police response and, in particular, setting out risk factors which will help the police respond appropriately to incidents. However, we do not believe that two A4 pages of guidance is a sufficient response to tackle the damaging perception that the police “don’t care” about retail crime.

### *The vicious cycle of under-reporting*

58. During this inquiry we have heard accounts of a vicious cycle in which retail workers do not report incidents of violence and abuse to the police, as they do not believe the police will respond, and the police in turn do not prioritise attending retail crime as they are unaware of the scale and nature of the problem.<sup>113</sup> The BRC 2021 Crime Survey estimates that just 54% of cases are reported to the police.<sup>114</sup> Dunelm Soft Furnishing told us “our experience has been that our stores had stopped reporting these issues as it was seen as a waste of time as the police response was seen as poor.”<sup>115</sup> Alison Hernandez, serving PCC for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, told us “I am acutely aware that [large super

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109 [Q58](#)

110 [Q47](#)

111 [Q232](#), [Q231](#)

112 [Q247](#)

113 [Association of Convenience Stores \(VTR0021\)](#)

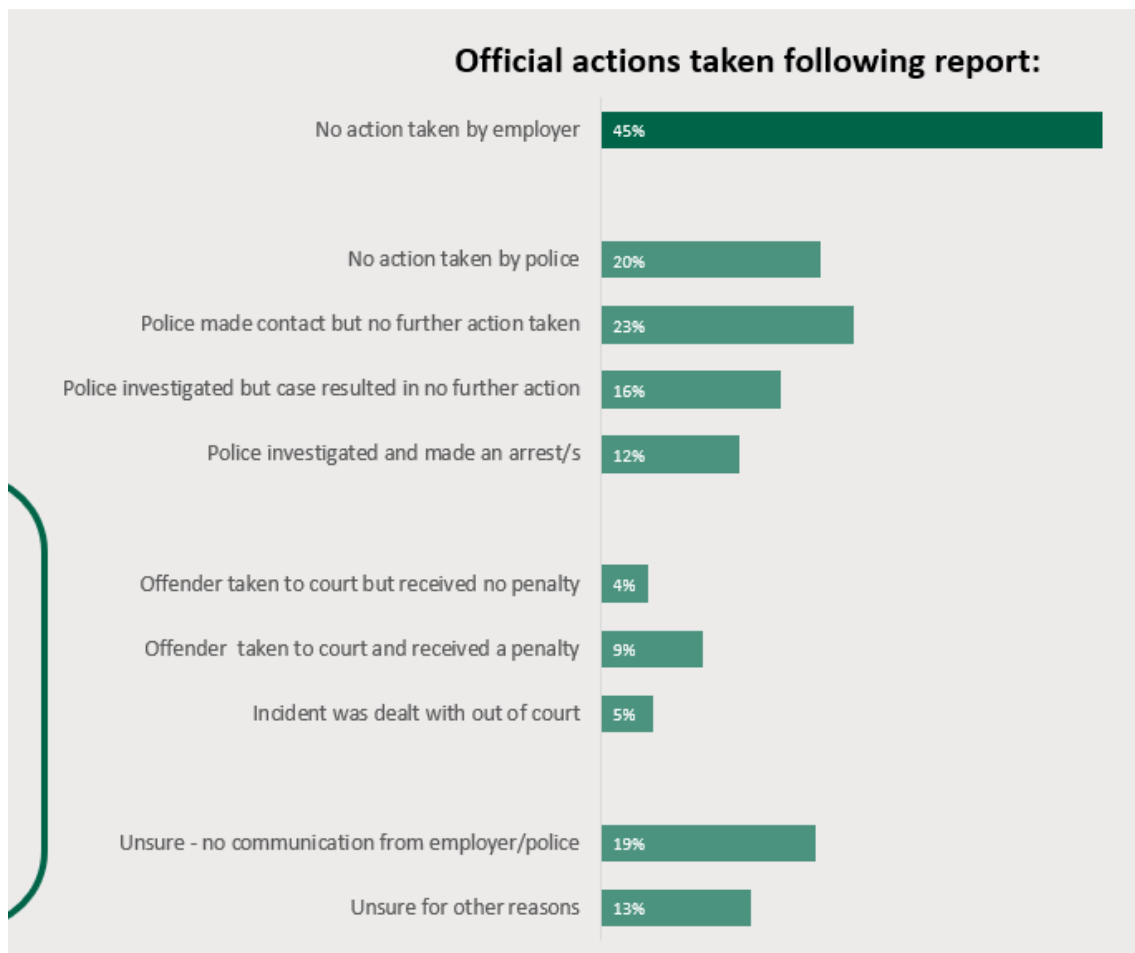
114 [Crime Survey, British Retail Consortium, May 2021, Q41](#)

115 [Dunelm Soft Furnishings \(VTR0001\)](#)

markets] do not report every offence to the police, only those with an aggravating factor” which means “we do not have a real picture of all retail crime recorded in our statistics”.<sup>116</sup> David Jamieson, former PCC for the West Midlands, agreed that “much of this crime is underreported or not reported at all” and the data does not “reflect the true picture”. He also believed that only the “more serious incidents” are reported to police and what lies underneath “is an enormous amount of low-level constant abuse.”<sup>117</sup>

59. Our public survey of 12,667 retail workers found that 72% of respondents had reported incidents. Of the 8,742 retail workers in the public survey who said they had reported an incident, 87% reported it to their employer and 53% to the police. However, when we asked what “official actions” were taken as a result we received the following responses:

Figure 5



60. The written evidence we received suggests that the main factors contributing to underreporting are:

- The perception that internal and external reporting processes are too complex and time consuming;<sup>118</sup>

116 [Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly \(VTR0034\)](#)

117 [Q47](#)

118 [Pets at Home Plc \(VTR0009\)](#), [Dixons Carphone \(VTR0012\)](#), [Central England Co-operative \(VTR0014\)](#), [Anonymous \(VTR0025\)](#), [Nationwide Building Society \(VTR0024\)](#)

- The perception that the police will not take any action, and the offender will not be punished, which means reporting is not worthwhile;<sup>119</sup>
- Fear of reprisals from offenders who may live locally and pose a personal threat to retail workers;<sup>120</sup> and
- A perception that the abuse is simply ‘part of the job.’<sup>121</sup>

61. It is interesting to note that the top answer from retail workers in our public survey, in relation to under-reporting, was because “I did not believe my employer would do anything about it.” Responses to the Government’s 2019 call for evidence found that “employers discouraging their workforce from reporting incidents” was a significant factor in under-reporting.<sup>122</sup> The majority of written evidence to this inquiry was submitted by businesses on behalf of retail workers.

Figure 6



Source: 3,444 survey respondents were asked why they had not reported an incident.

## Solutions

### *Improved reporting and recording*

62. The Government has said it “expects all crimes to be reported to police and for them to be investigated accordingly.”<sup>123</sup> The Home Office and NRCSG reporting guidance, published on the British Retail Consortium website, explains why it is important for retail workers to report crime, provides advice on how to report a crime in emergency and non-

119 Wickes (VTR0010), [Dunelm Soft Furnishings](#) (VTR0001), [British Retail Consortium](#) (VTR0015), [Central England Co-operative](#) (VTR0014)

120 [UK Finance](#) (VTR0037)

121 [Anonymous](#) (VTR0008), [Dixons Carphone](#) (VTR0012), [Wickes](#) (VTR0010), [WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC](#) (VTR0028), [Institute of Customer Service](#) (VTR0022)

122 [Home Office](#) (VTR0035)

123 [Home Office](#) (VTR0035)

emergency situations and how to report a crime online. In full, it comprises just under two A4 pages of text which is targeted at improving how retailers and retail workers report crime.<sup>124</sup> The Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse MP, told us:

We have got ourselves into a situation where people do not think it is worth reporting or they do not know how to report. That means that it is quite hard for modern policing, which is very data driven, to see the true picture of what is happening in a particular neighbourhood. We believe that encouraging reporting will help to bring greater focus and priority.<sup>125</sup>

63. During this inquiry, stakeholders have used the terms “retail crime” and “business crime” interchangeably to describe a range of offences committed against retail workers in the course of their employment. The term “retail crime” has no formal definition whereas the term “business crime” was formally defined by the National Police Chiefs’ Council in June 2019 (updating an earlier definition from 2014). It is defined as follows:

Any criminal offence where a business, or person in the course of their employment, and because of that employment, is the victim.<sup>126</sup>

64. College of Policing guidance states that police forces should use the definition “when assessing local crime data to understand the nature and extent of business crime.”<sup>127</sup>

65. Considering this much needed drive for data, and the increased pressure on retail workers and businesses to report incidents, we found it surprising that there is no mandatory process for recording crimes against retail workers, as a specific group, within police force crime statistics. The College of Policing website states that some forces apply a “business crime flag” to relevant crime reports but it is the underlying offence—such as burglary or assault—which is officially recorded by police forces in the crime statistics.<sup>128</sup> It was clear from the evidence we received that if “business crime flags” were used consistently across forces, including for assaults on retail workers, it would enable the police better to measure the number of assaults reported in a business or retail setting. Without that consistency across forces, however, these flags fail to give an accurate indication of the scale of the problem.

66. Commissioner Ian Dyson, NPCC lead for business crime, admitted that “I cannot at this point give accurate data on the amount of, for example, assaults, violent crime or thefts that are necessarily related specifically to retail crime or business crime.”<sup>129</sup> He told us that he has been talking to the Home Office about specific flags on crime recording but there are “probably a dozen other fellow NPCC leads” who have responsibility for specific crime targets and would also want flagging which risks making it “very complex” for forces”.<sup>130</sup> Paul Gerrard, representing the Co-op, expressed his frustration:

I was speaking to one of the biggest police forces in the country three weeks ago. They do not even have in their system a tag that can identify business

124 Reporting, Summary, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

125 [Q218](#)

126 [Enforcing business crime](#), College of Policing

127 [Enforcing business crime](#), College of Policing

128 [Q218](#)

129 [Q70](#)

130 [Q70](#)



crime. When we put in the freedom of information request, they could not find it because they do not record it. You will know better than me that if you do not measure things, you certainly do not manage them. There is a real issue about the seriousness with which the police take this.<sup>131</sup>

67. David Jamieson, former PCC for the West Midlands, told the Committee that the problem is that there is “theft, fraud, abuse of various sorts but there isn’t any crime that is just business crime”.<sup>132</sup> Alison Hernandez, PCC for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, told us that the requirement to “manually flag” an offence in the police recording system meant there was “room for error” and “along with the inconsistent application of the definition” meant that crimes of this type are “inaccurately recorded in policing.”<sup>133</sup> She also told the committee:

In my view, years of pushing the responsibility on to businesses to carry out most of the crime recording processes, such as taking statements and supplying the evidence, has diminished this ability to capture intelligence. It often simply gets recorded for internal purposes only.<sup>134</sup>

68. The Association of Convenience Stores said “the lack of a standardised process for the police recording of business or retail crime” is disguising the scale of the problem. They told us that police forces should be “required to record retail crime as a category within their force’s crime statistics.”<sup>135</sup> The National Federation of Retail Newsagents have also called for “retail crime” to be recorded by police forces as a specific category within the statistics.<sup>136</sup> Commissioner Ian Dyson told us:

I think the challenge is being able to, at the national level, provide accurate data on where violence against shopworkers is teased out from the broader figures on violent crime.<sup>137</sup>

69. We also heard from many stakeholders that the policing response often focuses on the business aspect of the crime, rather than the impact on victims of violence and abuse. The Co-op said retail crime is “far too often” presented as “principally an issue of financial loss” when it should be about “the impact on our colleagues.”<sup>138</sup> In the first chapter we discuss the perception that retail crime is a “victimless”, because it is often perceived to be an offence against a business rather than against individuals, in more depth.

**70. We welcome the Government’s work to provide better guidance and support for retail workers on reporting retail crime. However, it is deeply disappointing that the main thrust of the Government’s response to shopworkers, who have lost confidence in the police response, is to demand increased reporting to the police without also requiring the police to improve its response. It is a serious problem that police forces could not even tell us the scale of reported assaults against shopworkers because they do not currently record the data in a way that allows it to be measured, nor do they keep effective records regarding retail or business crime. We agree that you cannot**

131 [Q39](#)

132 [Q69](#)

133 [Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly \(VTR0034\)](#)

134 [Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly \(VTR0034\)](#)

135 [Association of Convenience Stores \(VTR0021\)](#)

136 [NFRN accuses government of failing to protect shopworkers](#), Talking Retail, 25 March 2021

137 [Q47](#)

138 [Co-op Group \(VTR0027\)](#)



manage what you do not measure. The police must play their part in ensuring the scale and nature of the problem is fully understood by improving their own crime recording practices.

71. *As a starting point, we recommend that it is made mandatory to add a “business crime flag” to offences committed in a retail environment, including assaults on retail workers. This simple step would give an important early indication of the scale of the problem and allow police forces better to understand patterns of local crime and the risks shopworkers face.*

72. However, we recognise that the current broad definition of “business crime”, which encompasses cybercrime, fraud or theft at an unoccupied business premises has limitations when it comes to tackling assaults on shop workers. The broad definition does not distinguish between crimes which result in financial loss to businesses and crimes of violence towards individual retail workers, meaning the immediate human cost is not always recognised. We are concerned that the perception of “business crimes” as “victimless crimes” disguises the hugely damaging impact of violence and abuse on individual retail workers.

73. *We therefore recommend that the National Business Crime Centre work with the National Police Chiefs’ Council to agree a better long-term way to identify and properly measure the violence and abuse suffered by retail workers in the crime statistics gathered by local police forces. We appreciate that the definition of business crime is not the most appropriate for the offences that have been reported to us in evidence. We therefore urge the Government to look at a more appropriate flag, such as retail business crime, which more accurately reflects the nature of the abuse we have described in this report.*

### **Local prioritisation of violence and abuse against shopworkers**

74. Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables are responsible for the priority given to responding to retail crime and to attacks and abuse against shopworkers. Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were created by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to replace police authorities in England and Wales. Their core functions are to appoint the chief constable, set the budget and to set local policing priorities. Many stakeholders to this inquiry have suggested that Police and Crime Commissioners should include action on retail crime in their police and crime plans to ensure it is properly prioritised by police forces.<sup>139</sup> In 2018, the Centre for Social Justice found that 63% of police and crime plans made no reference to business crime and 83% made no reference to the business community.<sup>140</sup> The National Federation of Retail Newsagents told us that before the 2021 elections “only two of the 42 force plans” made any mention of retail crime and “only 17 referred to business crime or shop lifting.”<sup>141</sup> Former PCC David Jamieson, who submitted evidence to this inquiry, told us that in April 2020 he launched “an emergency chapter” to his police and crime plan requiring that “robust action” should be taken against those targeting retail staff. To help build local relationships he also “set up roundtables” with retailers, police and the local authority to create “place-based activity”

139 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027), [Tesco](#) (VTR0033), [Anonymous](#) (VTR0025), [Boots](#) (VTR0026), [Association of Convenience Stores](#) (VTR0021), [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

140 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), [Desperate for a Fix: Using shop theft and a Second Chance Programme to get tough on the causes of prolific drug-addicted offending](#), June 2018

141 [National Federation of Retail Newsagents](#) (VTR0020)

and identify local problems.<sup>142</sup> However, he also told us that police resourcing pressures meant that “the impact our prioritisation has on the confidence of retailers” can only go so far.<sup>143</sup> PCC Alison Hernandez told us her crime plan included the following steps to tackle retail crime:

I have invested nearly £300,000 to support town councils and business improvement districts to establish new or enhanced CCTV systems linked to several central monitoring hubs. These systems [ ... ] provide a visible deterrent, and support the police in preventing and investigating anti-social behaviour and crime including that directed at businesses and retail.<sup>144</sup>

75. Elections were held on 6 May 2021 for 39 Police and Crime Commissioners, 4 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners and three Mayors who took up their posts on 13 May 2021. All PCCs must publish a five-year police and crime plan for their force.<sup>145</sup> PCCs typically publish their police and crime plan in the year following their election and they tend to cover the PCC’s entire term. The PCC’s police and crime plan must include details on: their objectives for their force, the financial resources available to their force and how they will measure the performance of their force.<sup>146</sup> Many PCCs measure performance by setting local targets for their force. Some PCCs set targets based on recorded crime levels, public satisfaction and/or output measures (like emergency call response times).<sup>147</sup> All PCCs are also members of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC).<sup>148</sup> In 2020 the APCC established a Retail and Business Crime Portfolio, chaired by Katy Bourne PCC, whose objectives are:

- To seek more efficient ways to report crime to the police and address under-reporting of retail crime.
- To improve evidence capture for improved investigation outcomes.
- To raise awareness and combat violence and abuse against shop workers.
- To share ‘good practice’ amongst PCCs and the wider partnerships.
- To ensure victims are receiving adequate support.
- Prioritising prevention and enabling businesses to protect themselves from retail crime.<sup>149</sup>

76. In Sussex, where Katy Bourne is the Police and Crime Commissioner, the police have launched a pilot ‘one-touch’ reporting process that feeds reports of crime directly into police systems and simultaneously shares with accredited Business Crime Reduction Partnerships.<sup>150</sup> This has enabled the police to gather together a photo gallery of prolific offenders from a range of businesses and shared those using a GDPR compliant process, internally in the police and across participating businesses. As a result, a number of

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142 [Q76](#)

143 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner \(VTR0031\)](#)

144 [Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly \(VTR0034\)](#)

145 s7, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

146 s7, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

147 House of Commons Library briefing, Police and Crime Commissioners, No.6104, 2 June 2021

148 [ABOUT THE APCC](#)

149 [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners \(VTR0032\)](#)

150 *Ibid*

individuals have been arrested by the police having been identified in the community. In addition, businesses have been able to manage their engagement with these offenders and proactively reduce the risk to their colleagues.<sup>151</sup> Paul Gerrard, representing the Co-op, told us that the early success of this pilot one-stop reporting process proved that the problems “can be fixed” but it needed “the police to take it seriously”.<sup>152</sup>

77. Chief Constables are responsible for operational decisions, including allocation of resources to high street or neighbourhood policing and the priority given to responding to attacks and abuse against shopworkers or to retail crime. We heard that police Chief Constables have funded a team of 10 analysts and field intelligence officers who are working at a national level to understand the scale of acquisitive crime and the use of violence as part of that crime.<sup>153</sup> The Government and NRCSSG guidance, published on the British Retail Consortium website, defines the characteristics of good data sharing and provides three short examples (PCC Katy Bourne’s pilot above, the National Association of Business Crime Partnerships and the Co-op’s partnership with Nottinghamshire police).<sup>154</sup> The content is general and high level with the guidance emphasising that “we should not try and set a one size fits all in terms of what data would be helpful to share”.<sup>155</sup>

**78. As local representatives Police and Crime Commissioners are well placed to understand the specific issues facing the retail community in their area and to ensure police forces focus attention on this critical issue. Collaboration between police and retailers to identify repeat offenders is a powerful tool in crime prevention. We welcome early reports regarding the pilot one-touch reporting process introduced by Katy Bourne in Sussex. We encourage all Police and Crime Commissioners to use their unique position to help improve data sharing, build trust and bridge the gap between local businesses and police forces. We call on all Police and Crime Commissioners to work with local retailers to establish or strengthen Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and to develop local retail crime reduction plans, including arrangements for local reporting, identifying patterns of crime and prolific offenders to be targeted, and re-building confidence in the police response to violence and abuse against shopworkers.**

**79. We strongly support calls for Police and Crime Commissioners to make action on violence and abuse towards retail workers a priority in police and crime plans. We are very concerned how few appear to have prioritised this in past plans, or to have recognised the human cost of retail crime. The resetting of police and crime plans, following the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2021, presents a valuable window of opportunity to ensure that this previously neglected crime is properly prioritised in future. We also encourage Police and Crime Commissioners to set out in their police and crime plans how they will measure their police force’s performance in response to violence and abuse towards retail workers. A particularly effective approach for building confidence would be for local police forces, retailers and Police and Crime Commissioners to discuss and agree a performance metric for the policing response which is tailored to the challenges faced in their local area.**

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151 [Characteristics of good data sharing](#), NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, BRC website.

152 [Q45](#)

153 [Q74](#)

154 Good data sharing, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

155 *Ibid*

**80. Chief Constables must do much more to demonstrate that they recognise the human cost of escalating violence and abuse against shopworkers. They need to ensure they have proper systems in place for monitoring and recording. Most importantly, they need to ensure that officers are not underestimating the seriousness of these crimes because they take place on business or retail premises. All forces should review the response priority given to these kinds of crimes in line with the new Government guidance to make sure they are taking it seriously enough. All forces should conduct an assessment of the level and patterns of violence and abuse against shop workers in their areas, and identify a lead officer to work with local businesses and local authorities in partnership on reducing crime.**

### ***Neighbourhood policing***

81. Increasing policing resource, and neighbourhood policing resource in particular, was identified by many stakeholders to this inquiry as a key factor for improving the police response to retail crime. Central government funding for policing was reduced by 22% in real terms between 2010 and 2019, resulting in 21,000 fewer police officers in addition to 18,000 fewer police staff and 6,800 fewer police community support officers.<sup>156</sup> Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire Services' (HMICFRS) Integrated PEEL Assessments for 2018/19 found that police forces are providing services under the twin pressures of rising demand and falling resources.<sup>157</sup> With regards to neighbourhood policing the report concluded:

We continue to find a lack of capacity in neighbourhood policing to analyse and use intelligence. A lack of analysis and sharing of best practice reduces how effective neighbourhood policing is at keeping people safe.<sup>158</sup>

82. In September 2019, the Government launched a campaign to recruit 20,000 new police officers.<sup>159</sup> Paul Gerrard, representing the Co-op, told us that some of the new policing resources “needs to go into neighbourhood policing teams” because it is “neighbourhood policing teams that will help address these issues”.<sup>160</sup> The British Retail Consortium also asked that some of the new policing resource “be diverted to focus specifically on retail crime to tackle the growing rate.”<sup>161</sup> The Association of Convenience Stores told us that the Home Office must “focus funding on community policing to provide a visible presence in the community” and improve the ability of officers to respond to retail violence.”<sup>162</sup> James Lowman, ACS, gave the following example of the benefits of effective local partnerships with the police:

Some of the best things, which are very effective, are in trying to engage with neighbourhood policing to say, “We see you here every Thursday night.

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156 Dr Emmeline Taylor, [‘Breaking the cycle](#), May 2021, Police Service Strength, Commons Library briefing paper CBP-0664, 27 March 2018

157 Noticeable differences between police and the service they provide, HMICFRS, 7 February 2020

158 PEEL spotlight report, Diverging under pressure, 7 February 2020

159 [National campaign to recruit 20,000 police officers launches today](#), Home Office, September 2019

160 [Q45](#)

161 [British Retail Consortium \(VTR0015\)](#)

162 [Association of Convenience Stores \(VTR0021\)](#)

If you could be here every Wednesday night, that is when we get more of our problems,” because there might be particular local dynamics that mean that that is when issues might tend to present ”.<sup>163</sup>

83. Deputy Chief Inspector Amanda Blakeman told us that her force in Gwent were tackling low retail worker confidence and trust through “investment in neighbourhood policing teams and problem solving”. She set out the focus of these teams as the following:

Trying to identify the repeat locations that are targeted, the repeat victims in those locations and the repeat offenders, so that we have a clear and comprehensive plan of how to tackle all three of those areas together.<sup>164</sup>

84. The Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse MP, told us the Home Office is “well ahead of schedule at nearly 9,000 officers recruited in the first 12 months” and that improving capacity would improve the response to retail crime.<sup>165</sup> This view was echoed by Commissioner Ian Dyson who told us:

the uplift in police officers in the next few years will help boost local policing so that there can be, if not an immediate attendance, follow up by community officers to make sure the retailers and their staff realise we do care and we are concerned, even if there was not an immediate response.<sup>166</sup>

**85. The lack of capacity in neighbourhood policing teams to build relationships with retailers, identify prolific offenders and respond swiftly to incidents of retail crime has damaged the confidence of retail workers. It has made it harder to maintain close relationships between the police and local high street retailers, or to pursue community relationships, which has had a significant impact on crime prevention work. These teams play a vital role in identifying and addressing the specific challenges facing retailers on their local high street. We believe it is extremely important that neighbourhood policing teams are prioritised for new resource as part of the 20,000 police officer uplift programme. Both Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables should make neighbourhood policing a priority. Chief Constables should examine their current resourcing arrangements and ring-fence a proportion of their additional policing capacity to expand neighbourhood teams.**

### ***Leadership from the National Business Crime Centre***

86. The police response to retail crime is managed on a force-by-force basis. However, in 2016 the National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) was created to provide strategic oversight. It does not offer a proactive or investigative capability but supports the police and business communities and acts as a conduit for sharing advice and trends nationally. It describes its areas of work as the following:

- Supporting and co-ordinating communications between all UK police forces and the business community;

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163 [Q9](#)

164 [Q74](#)

165 [Q221](#), [Q224](#)

166 [Q75](#)

- Supporting and initiating exciting and bold crime prevention projects and demand specification for policing resources;
- Violence Reduction plan for businesses and their staff;
- Safeguarding advice, links to training and promotion of best practice;
- Supporting our National policing teams and working together with national intelligence partners to tackle travelling criminality and Organised Criminal Networks;
- National Standards and accreditation for Business Crime Reduction Partnerships;
- Investigating & promoting research into criminological trends;
- Fraud/Cyber messaging to businesses where appropriate on behalf of specialist units; and
- Assisting with Counter Terrorism messaging to businesses on behalf of Cross Sector Security & Safety Communication network.<sup>167</sup>

87. The NBCC website contains links to guidance for retailers and it maintains a list of identified business crime single points of contact (SPOCs) for each police force area. The SPOCs are networked nationally and aim to introduce good practice in their area. Force SPOCs are expected to work with business head offices located in their force area to agree common operating procedures, including issues such as timeliness of crime reporting, evidence gathering and the content of witness statements to improve consistency.<sup>168</sup> The NBCC has also developed a set of standards for Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs) which aims to promote better working between police and the partnerships. The NBCC believes that by demonstrating accredited partnerships meet the national standard, police forces will be more confident to ‘dare to share’ information and act on the information they receive from BCRPs, fostering a culture of collaborative working.<sup>169</sup>

88. The centre received its initial funding from the Home Office Police Transformation Fund in 2016 via a grant for £1 million awarded to Nottinghamshire Police across 3 years to set up a national hub that would address business crime in a more consistent way across the UK. However, Commissioner Ian Dyson told us that the NBCC is a small unit of “three or four people” which, now the three years has elapsed, is dependent on the City of London Police for funding.<sup>170</sup> Iona Blake, Boots UK, told us “the support that we have had from the National Business Crime Centre, throughout the Covid pandemic in particular, has helped us move things forward for our colleagues in stores”.<sup>171</sup>

**89. There is clearly an issue with the consistency of the policing response to retail crime across the country. In light of this finding, the Committee was disappointed to learn that the Government is no longer directly funding the work of the National Business Crime Centre. The National Business Crime Centre is well placed to ensure the sharing of best practice approaches, improve links with the business community**

167 [National Business Crime Centre](#), September 2019

168 [National Police Business Crime Single Points of Contact \(SPOCs\)](#), February 2019

169 [BCRP National Standards Home](#), December 2019

170 [Q66](#)

171 [Q35](#)



and drive up consistency. At a time when violence in retail and business settings is increasing rapidly, the decision to discontinue direct funding for an established and well-respected body tasked with strategic oversight of the issue seems nonsensical.

90. The Home Office work to tackle violence and abuse against shopworkers over the last twelve months has been welcome. But the temporary working groups they set up to draw up new guidance are not sufficient to deliver sustained change or provide continual national leadership. *We recommend the Home Office provide central funding for the continued operation of the National Business Crime Centre.*

### **Business Crime Reduction Partnerships**

91. Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRP) are not-for-profit partnerships which bring together businesses, local authorities and the police to prevent crime. At its simplest, a BCRP is an intelligence gathering and information sharing system. The National Association of Business Crime Partnerships (NABCP) is the national organisation which represents 126 BCRPs across the UK reaching out to over 20,000 retailers. BCRPs have had many titles (for example, Crime Initiatives, Partnerships Against Crime) but the principles they employ are broadly similar:

- Collating intelligence on known trouble-makers.
- Excluding from private premises on a ‘banned from one banned from all’ basis.
- Working with local police to enforce those exclusions and prevent further offences.
- Assist with the rehabilitation of offenders.<sup>172</sup>

92. David Jamieson, former PCC for the West Midlands, told us that creating partnerships with shopkeepers and business improvement districts enabled the police to identify “areas of vulnerability” and provide extra patrols which help to protect shopworkers.<sup>173</sup> The Co-op also found that BCRPs with links to local forces can help “tailor patrols” in their local area and “allow colleagues to keep in contact with other retailers in the local area and make them aware of offenders”.<sup>174</sup> Detective Inspector Patrick Holdaway described his local BCRP as “critical friends” who the force work with “to develop plans”, identify “regular offenders” and get the message out that reporting is key.<sup>175</sup> Commissioner Ian Dyson, in his closing remarks, said that the one measure he thought would be most effective at tackling retail crime is “strong local Business Crime Reduction Partnerships that understand this issue”.<sup>176</sup> Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse MP told us:

I hope police and crime commissioners will adopt business crime partnerships, as they have in Sussex and elsewhere across the country, to allow them to bring that shared picture in focus.<sup>177</sup>

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172 [National Association of Business Crime Partnerships](#) (VTR0036)

173 [Q64](#)

174 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027)

175 [Q71](#)

176 [Q51](#)

177 [Q249](#)

93. The Government’s call for evidence on violence and abuse towards shop workers stated “we know that schemes such as ShopWatch, which works to improve communication between retailers and the local police, can help prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. In addition, arrangements such as multi-agency Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs), which bring together businesses, the police, and council, can help to ensure a coordinated approach to preventing and tackling these crimes.”<sup>178</sup> In his evidence to the Committee, Policing Minister Kit Malthouse MP also listed encouraging BCRP “in particular geographies where chief constables and police and crime commissioners can concentrate their fire” as an important strand of work.<sup>179</sup>

94. In January 2020, the Home Office launched the Safer Streets fund. It enables Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales to bid for extra money to increase crime prevention measures in their local area.<sup>180</sup> The fund is specifically designed for areas that need to tackle theft, robbery and burglary—known as acquisitive crimes. Possible measures include: increasing street lighting, installing better locks, gating alleyways, training community wardens and delivering local crime prevention advice to residents or Neighbourhood Watch schemes. The first tranche of funding comprised a total of £25 million with successful areas receiving grants of up to £550,000.<sup>181</sup> In January 2021, the Home Office announced a second round of funding for £20 million which would be specifically focussed on the prevention of burglary, robbery, theft from the person and vehicle crime. The second round also enabled local authorities to bid.<sup>182</sup> Forty areas across England and Wales were awarded a total of £18.4 million as a result of the bidding process.<sup>183</sup> On 3 June 2021, the Home Office announced another £25 million for the Safer Streets fund, to run in parallel with the second round in 2020/21. The objective of the third round is to “improve the safety of public places for all” with a particular focus on reducing violence against women and girls (VAWG). The prospectus for applicants states that all bidders are encouraged to “devise innovative and inventive proposals” to reduce VAWG crime and “do not require bidders to stick to traditional Safer Streets investments such as CCTV or street lighting”. Although, these interventions are still eligible for investment, “bidders are strongly encouraged to think creatively”.<sup>184</sup>

**95. Business Crime Reduction Partnerships have huge potential to improve communication and collaboration between the police, local retailers and local authorities on the issue of retail crime. Tailoring the policing response to areas of particular vulnerability, identifying repeat offenders, and developing joint preventative plans are effective measures for improving the police response. Closer collaboration may also have a positive impact on retailer confidence and reporting of incidents. Smaller retailers in particular, who do not have the security support and expertise that bigger corporations do, are particularly reliant on support through local partnerships. There is considerable potential for these to do far more on every high street including better investment in CCTV and communication networks, supporting small shop owners who may be working alone. We recommend that the Government provides greater support for the creation of Business Crime Reduction Partnerships including**

178 Home Office, [Call for Evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff](#), 5 April 2019

179 [Q227](#)

180 [Launch of Safer Streets Fund](#), Home Office, 26 January 2020

181 [Launch of Safer Streets Fund](#), Home Office, 26 January 2020

182 [Safer Streets Fund \(2021–2022\) Prospectus](#), Home Office, January 2021

183 [Millions more funding for projects to make our streets safer](#), Home office 3 June 2021

184 [Safer Streets Fund Round Three Protecting Public Spaces Guidance for Bidders](#), Home Office, June 2021



*actively encouraging partnerships to cover smaller town centres and areas where there are many independent shops with less capacity to organise local security and crime prevention. We also recommend involving shopworkers themselves as well as major employers in crime reduction partnerships as they will often have the clearest idea both of the human cost of crime and of the local measures that could make a difference.*

96. *We welcome the additional money available to local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners to spend on preventative measures via the Safer Streets Fund. However, we note that none of the funding rounds have placed any emphasis on preventative measures for violence and abuse towards retail workers. We recommend that the Home Office make clear that they welcome bids to the current Safer Streets Fund for measures that will improve the safety of shop workers, and actively encourage local councils, communities and business partnerships to draw up bids which directly tackle violence and abuse in retail settings and on high streets. We also recommend that a future round should set this as a priority.*

### 3 The role of employers

97. The Home Office identified that a “common theme throughout” responses to its 2019 call for evidence was the lack of support shop workers receive from their employer. The Government Response highlighted:

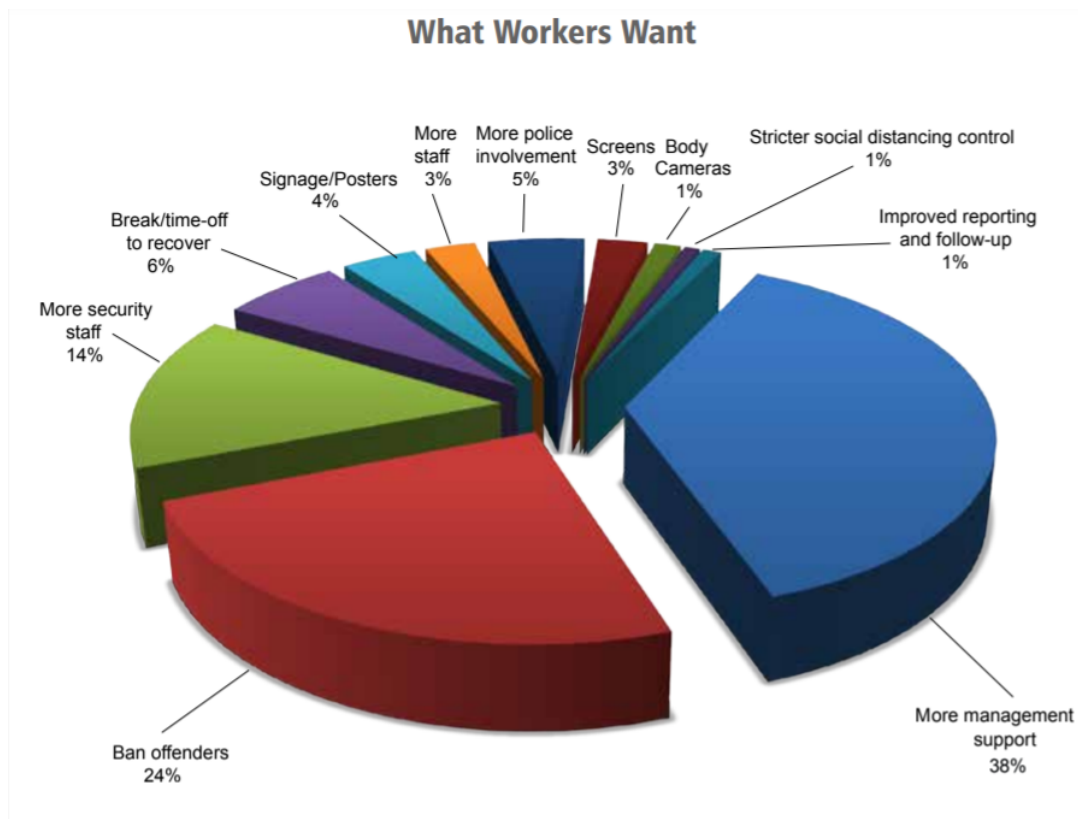
Individuals reported being told ‘to get on with the job’ after reporting instances of verbal abuse and a culture in which managers tended to side with customers rather than employees, potentially as a result of believing that the customer ‘is always right’. Some respondents also felt that managers tended to focus on preserving the reputation of the store and did not always challenge unacceptable behaviour by customers.<sup>185</sup>

98. As a result of the consultation, the Government committed to work with the National Retail Crime Steering Group to develop communications for both employees and employers to make clear that violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated.<sup>186</sup>

#### What do retail workers want?

99. The USDAW 2020 survey included the following graphic highlighting what retail workers want from employers with regards to retail crime:<sup>187</sup>

Figure 7



185 [Government response to call for evidence: violence and abuse toward shop staff, July 2020](#)

186 [ibid](#)

187 [USDAW, Campaign to end violence and abuse against retail workers, Survey Results 2020](#)

100. Joanne Cairns, USDAW, told us that it is very important workers are properly supported after an incident. She highlighted that USDAW has good agreements with some employers who have put in place proper support arrangements but “that is not the case everywhere” and “there are many non-unionised employers where this is not necessarily happening”.<sup>188</sup> She also told us that what retail workers wanted most was for employers “to back them up” when they are dealing with an abusive customer. She noted that it is also difficult to ensure managers at ground level, who may not have the necessary knowledge or training to support retail workers, actually implement policies. In this context, the old adage that ‘the customer is always right’ can be detrimental to workers getting the support they need.<sup>189</sup> Professor Emmeline Taylor also found that it is important victims are provided with the right support following a violent attack. She recommended access to specialist counselling services and reassurance that steps would be taken to prevent future incidents and address security deficits.<sup>190</sup>

101. The Institute of Customer Services told us there is a responsibility on CEOs and senior leaders to protect their staff while they are at work and ensure customer-facing staff are given support and continuous training to be able to cope with new pressures and responsibilities.<sup>191</sup> However, data gathered by the Institute in September 2020 showed that 63% of workers say they have not had additional training from their employer since the start of the pandemic. In July 2020, the Institute launched a ‘Service with Respect’ campaign in conjunction with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Customer Service which asked organisations to:

- Support the campaign by displaying the logo and spreading the word on social media;
- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to hostility and abuse against your employees;
- Hold regular catch ups with your front-line staff and keep close to what is happening in their day; and
- Invest in appropriate training and tools for staff to handle the new (and increasingly challenging) duties they are being tasked with, and to deal with potential conflict as it arises.<sup>192</sup>

102. The campaign has seen 164 employers, with a combined workforce of 1,158,437, sign up to calls for action.<sup>193</sup> The majority of respondents (68%) to our public survey said that no further help was provided to them following official report of an incident:

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188 [Q26](#)

189 [Q22](#)

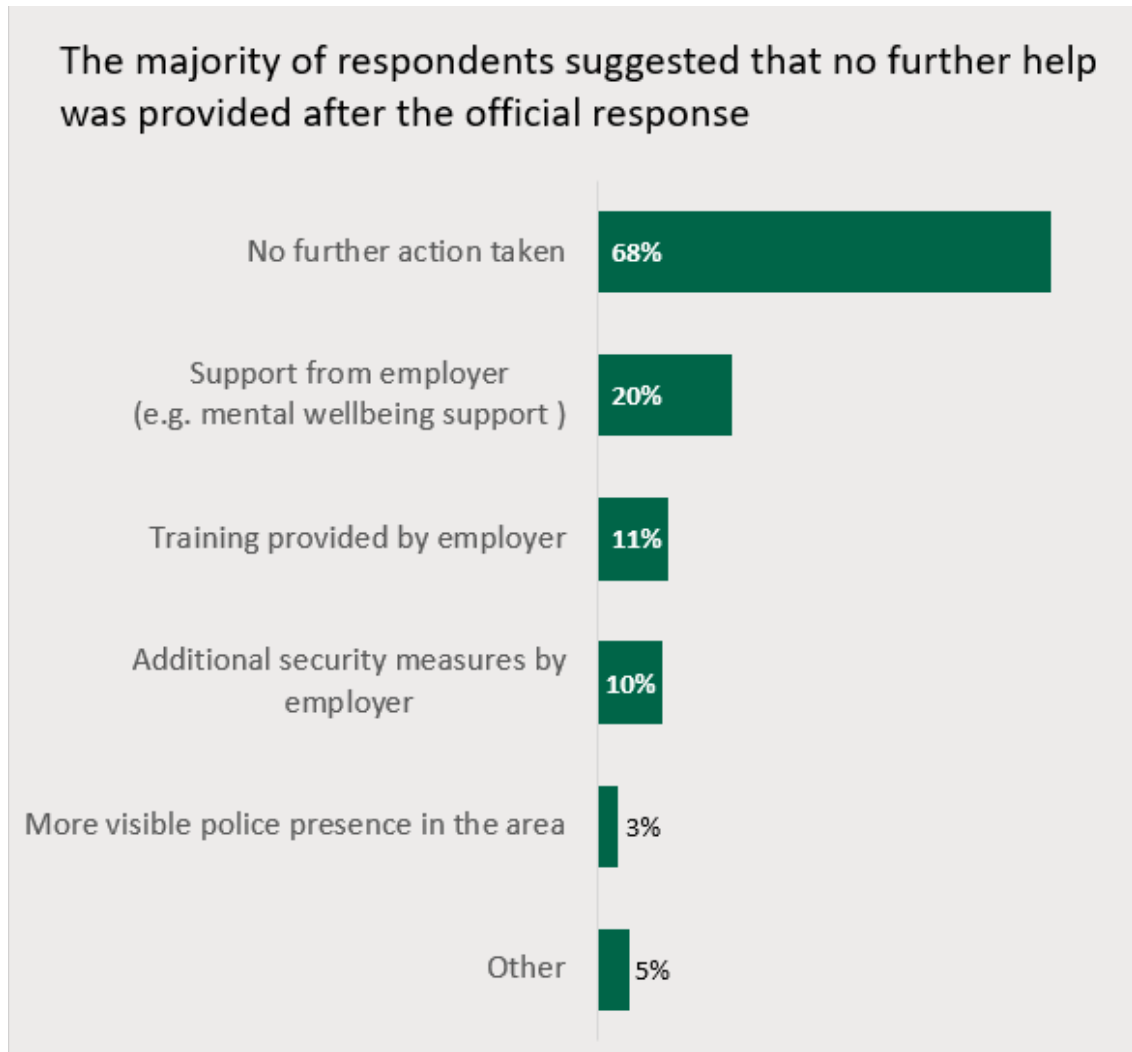
190 [Dr Emmeline Taylor, ‘It’s not part of the job’: Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers: A review of evidence and policy](#), September 2019

191 [Institute of Customer Service \(VTR0022\)](#)

192 [Service with Respect](#), The Institute of Customer Service

193 [ibid](#)

Figure 8



103. The Home Office and NRCSG guidance, published on the British Retail Consortium website, informs retail workers that support “may be provided by the business you work for” and lists examples of support some employers offer. A link to the Suzy Lamplugh ‘Charter for Workplace Safety’ which “can be used to benchmark what your business has in place to keep colleagues safe” is also provided.<sup>194</sup> Suzy’s Charter provides a “personal safety framework that can help organisations become fully compliant with excellent personal safety policy and protocols,”<sup>195</sup> it covers the following key points:

- Embed a workplace personal safety culture: regular consultation with staff about risks, ensuring employees follow safety policies.
- Implement robust risk assessments; regular reviews and updates, consideration of the mental health implications on workers.
- Provide robust reporting procedures; enable anonymous reporting by employees, clear incident follow-up procedures, sign-posting to support services.

194 Section 1, Victim Support, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#), BRC Website

195 [Suzy’s Charter](#), Suzy Lamplugh Trust website

- Provide personal safety training and prearranged systems for covertly raising the alarm.
- Implement a tracing system with details of colleagues who are lone working.<sup>196</sup>

104. In this context, we noted with interest the Department for Education’s introduction of the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter in May 2021.<sup>197</sup> It is described as a “declaration of support for, and set of commitments to, the wellbeing and mental health of everyone working in education”. The Charter sets out principles of shared understanding on the meaning and importance of wellbeing and everyone’s roles and responsibilities and provides a tool for schools and colleges to create, and publicly commit to, their own wellbeing strategies.<sup>198</sup> A package of resources is also provided.

105. The Government’s commitment to develop “communications for both employees and employers to make clear that violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated”<sup>199</sup> as one strand of the four ‘task and finish’ groups has evolved into the #ShopKind campaign. It is important to note that this campaign is targeted at the public, rather than employers and employees. The British Retail Consortium guidance page contains a link to downloadable “media campaign materials” which are hosted on the National Business Crime Centre website. Resources include posters, badges, till screen graphics, Instagram and Facebook templates and four 20 second videos.<sup>200</sup>

**106. Employers have a duty of care and play a vital role in ensuring their employees have the confidence to report incidents, and the appropriate support to deal with difficult situations. Evidence from our public survey, and the Government’s 2019 call for evidence, suggests that many retail workers are not getting the support they need from their employers.**

**107. We welcome the Government’s creation of downloadable digital assets for the #ShopKind campaign which we hope will raise awareness amongst the public about retail crime and its impact on shop workers. However, we think this action completely fails to address the problem of employers who do not support their workers to report abuse, ban repeat offenders or access counselling or training. The language around “options that may be provided” by your business will be of little use to the many retail workers whose employers do not provide those services. We recommend the Government sets out clearly in its guidance, addressing itself directly to employers, the actions they should be taking to support retail workers in the context of retail crime. This should state:**

- **The employer’s responsibility for ensuring retail crime is reported and recorded effectively.**
- **The employer’s responsibility proactively to analyse and mitigate risks to retail workers.**
- **The employer’s responsibility to ensure appropriate training and counselling services are available or to signpost its employees to relevant resources.**

196 [SUZY’S CHARTER FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY](#), 2019

197 Department for Education, [The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter](#), May 2021

198 [Guidance](#), Education staff wellbeing charter, May 2021

199 Home Office, [Call for Evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff](#), 5 April 2019

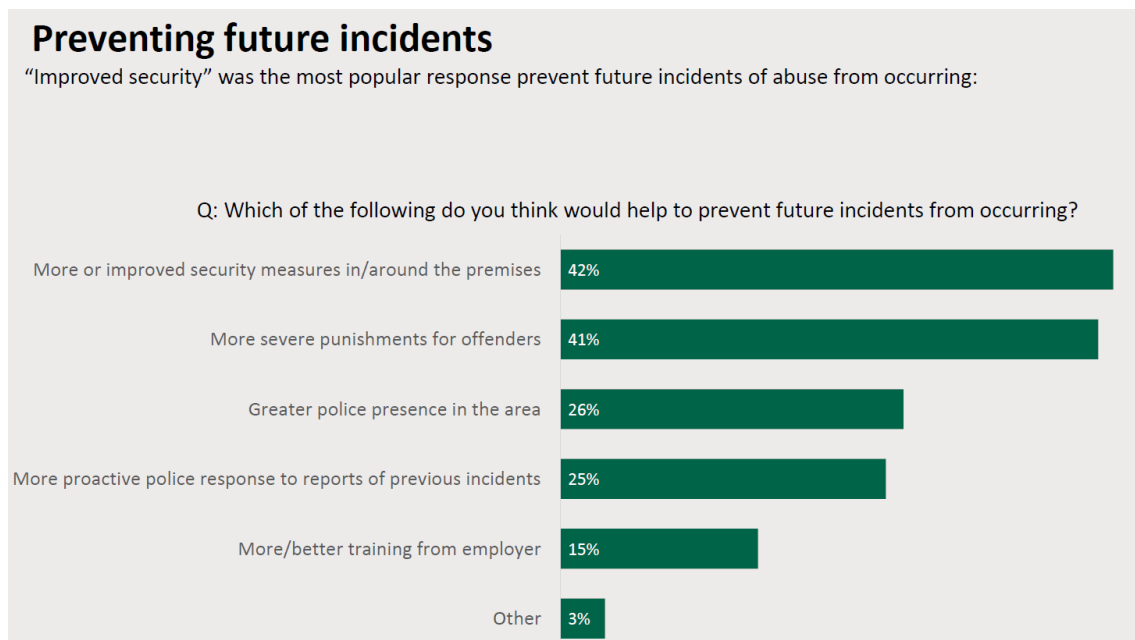
200 [#ShopKind](#), National business Crime Centre

108. We applaud the work of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust in creating Suzy’s Charter, a far more effective and useful tool than the Government’s guidance for securing the safety of retail workers. The Government’s lacklustre endorsement of the Charter, a fleeting reference that “this could be used to benchmark what your business has in place” with a link to the website is very disappointing. *We recommend that the Home Office strengthen its action by working with the National Retail Crime Steering Group to agree an Employers Charter using Suzy’s Charter as a template, which is specifically targeted at retail workers and retail crime. This approach would help drive best practice, it would ensure that retail workers know what they should expect and can put pressure on employers who do not meet these standards.*

## Preventative measures

109. The British Retail Consortium estimates that in 2020 the total cost to retailers of crime prevention measures was £1.2 billion.<sup>201</sup> The Association of Convenience Stores estimates that its members have spent £175million or £3,724 on average per store in 2020.<sup>202</sup> Despite these record sums, we found the most popular action for preventing future incidents, selected by 42% of the 12,667 retail workers we surveyed, was “more or improved security measures in and around premises.”

Figure 9



110. Several stakeholders to this inquiry told us about the innovative preventative measures they are putting in place to support their workers. UK Finance members reported taking the following measures:

- Providing bespoke conflict resolution training for frontline staff;
- encouraging staff to report incidents;

201 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021

202 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

- improving and simplifying the reporting process;
- trailing the use of body worn cameras; and
- installing announcement systems at some branches where abuse has previously been reported.<sup>203</sup>

111. Dixons Carphone told us that they had spent “significant sums” on deterring theft and reducing incidents of violence, both physical and verbal, towards colleagues. This investment included CCTV, G7 clamps to better secure high value goods and the trial roll out of panic alarms. The company also solicits a range of services offering victim support or counselling post-incident (Mind, Calm and an Employee Assistance Programme line supported by Care First and Wellbeing-4 Life).<sup>204</sup> The Central England Co-operative has implemented the following new measures:

- Centrally monitored CCTV system fitted which allows colleagues to call for assistance at the touch of a button.
- Increased use of security officers and store detectives in stores.
- New colleague training on how to deal with situations involving violence or aggression.
- Working with offenders to help them beat their addiction and support their integration back into the community.<sup>205</sup>

112. The Co-op told us that between 2016 and 2022 it has committed to invest £140m in security, crime prevention and colleague safety measures. Key measures include the roll-out of headsets in all stores which enables colleagues to stay connected to each other, tablet devices which enable more colleagues to spend time on the shop floor and personal safety devices for colleagues in stores with one-to-one working. They have recently completed a trial of body worn cameras with results showing “a really strong deterrent impact.” The most sophisticated new technology they are implementing in 1000 stores is a CCTV collaboration with a specialist company which provides a “command and Control Centre” response when employees press their panic buttons. The company then communicates and supports employees during the incident and produces a package of video and witness statement evidence after the incident for the police.<sup>206</sup>

113. In 2020, the Co-op told us this system has helped it provide evidence to the police regarding 146 case files which has led to 183 arrests and 25 prosecutions.<sup>207</sup> Wickes told us it has identified “some historical reluctance” toward the reporting of incidents of both physical and verbal abuse and launched an internal ‘Let’s Care for Each Other’ campaign which included:

- Internal and external facing messaging such as in-store radio, poster, t-shirts, badges etc.

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203 [UK Finance](#) (VTR0037)

204 [Dixons Carphone](#) (VTR0012)

205 [Central England Co-operative](#) (VTR0014)

206 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027)

207 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027)



- A focus on reporting ‘every’ instance of abuse on one internal system to help the business build an accurate record of the extent of the issue. This led to a “significant rise” in incidents reported, confirming Wickes’ supposition that there was previously reluctance.
- Ensuring there was adequate support in place for any victims (training, counselling, procedural etc).
- Development of training on how to defuse potentially difficult situations that might otherwise lead to incidents of violence and abuse.<sup>208</sup>

114. The John Lewis Partnership has also rolled out Body Worn Video technology to “priority locations” across all John Lewis and Waitrose stores which colleagues report “adds to a feeling of safety in store” and has had a noticeable deterrent effect with regards to threatening behaviour. The company also provides a mandatory training package advising how to handle an abusive customer and encourages Partners to “to report all incidents of abuse either to their Line or Duty Manager, or via a confidential helpline”. As part of its “zero tolerance approach” it actively supports completion of victim impact statements and employs communication in store to inform all customers about the zero-tolerance approach.<sup>209</sup> Finally, Boots told us it had spent around £100m over the last 5 years to support “colleague safety, security and loss prevention”. Measures include:

- Guarding in larger loss or high-risk stores;
- Creating a CCTV Monitoring Centre to provide real-time support to colleagues during incidents;
- Body worn video in high risk stores for colleagues and security guards;
- Physical security enhancements (including Electronic Article Surveillance barriers) to reduce opportunistic crime during trade and outside of trading hours;
- Public display monitors (PDMs) to visually highlight the use of CCTV in stores; and
- Lone-working devices pilot into ‘late hour’ trading shops.

115. The Home Office and NRCSG guidance, published on the British Retail Consortium website, includes a 5-minute video, co-created with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, on how to de-escalate violence.<sup>210</sup> It also includes a link to a detailed tool kit for sharing personal data with the police, provided by the Information Commissioner’s Office.<sup>211</sup> We note in this context that the National Business Crime Centre has also collated resources on preventative measures for retailers on its website. These include advice from the Metropolitan Police entitled ‘How secure is your shop’, the Lancashire Police ‘Business Crime Prevention Guide’ and the ‘Lone worker safety guide’.<sup>212</sup>

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208 [Wickes \(VTR0010\)](#)

209 [John Lewis Partnership \(VTR0030\)](#)

210 De-escalation training, [NATIONAL RETAIL CRIME STEERING GROUP, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS](#)

211 [Can I share personal data with a law enforcement authority](#), such as the police? ICO

212 [Crime Prevention](#), National business Crime Centre

116. Smaller retailers are much less likely to have access to security expertise or investment in technology and, as many have been heavily affected by the pandemic, they may also struggle to find additional funds to invest in the area. Small local high street shops sometimes have only one member of staff and we heard from the Association of Convenience Stores about the added vulnerability of workers in small local stores. Those shopworkers are in even greater need of the kind of technological and organised support.

117. The Committee was impressed by this range of solutions and the potential of new technology to improve both the safety of retail workers and the ability to gather evidence about incidents of retail crime. The methods described above, such as body worn video cameras, headsets for internal communication, counselling services and central command and control systems, represent a best practice approach. However, we acknowledge that many of these solutions will not be financially viable for many businesses.

118. The guidance provided by the Government and the National Retail Crime Steering Group, published nearly 10 months after the response to the call for evidence, amounts to eight A4 pages of highly general advice followed by 10 pages of example statements and reports. While elements such as the short de-escalation training video and links to tool kits and guidance provided by the Information Commissioner's Office are certainly useful, we feel these resources reflect a distinct lack of urgency on the part of Government to address the scale of problem. *We recommend that the Government's resources, which would be particularly beneficial for independent shops and small businesses, additionally include specific 'tool kit' style material to support all employers to take the following actions:*

- *An internal communication campaign to encourage staff to report all incidents of violence and abuse;*
- *Guidance and templates for employers on creating internal and external reporting processes which are as simple, accessible and quick as possible;*
- *Guidance on procedures for banning repeat offenders from stores;*
- *Further online training resources for retail workers on managing conflict and dealing with difficult situations; and*
- *Guidance for employers on how to assess the vulnerabilities of their shop and suggestions for appropriate measures such as changing store layout, erecting protective barriers or adding signage to manage specific risks.*

119. We also encourage large national retailers to play a leading role in local business partnerships, working with local councils and the police to encourage and include small independent high street retailers in security measures including CCTV or local communication networks for sharing intelligence on incidents or repeat offenders. We welcome the further rounds of the Safer Streets Fund which should also be used to help improve safety and support for staff working in small and independent retailers. *We recommend that local authorities work with local retailers and with the police to*

*identify smaller high streets and areas with many small independent shops which have less capacity to tackle security issues and draw up plans including bids to the Safer Streets Fund to support shopworkers in those areas.*

## 4 The link between addiction and prolific offending

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120. In her 2019 report ‘It’s not part of the job’, Dr Emmeline Taylor concludes there is a strong relationship between “substance misuse, shop theft and the use of violence and aggression by drug-affected offenders who are desperate not to be detained”. Shop workers and perpetrators who contributed to her report overwhelmingly identified drug addiction as a direct cause of violence in shops.<sup>213</sup> A report by the Centre for Social Justice estimated that 70% of shop theft is committed by frequent users of Class A drugs. It further calculated that:

Offenders with 36 or more previous convictions or cautions are responsible for an increasing proportion of theft offences dealt with by the criminal justice system – growing from 39 percent in 2010 to more than 60 per cent in 2017. Over the same period, the even more prolific cohort of offenders, with more than 60 previous convictions, has doubled.<sup>214</sup>

121. In February 2019, the Home Office appointed Dame Carol Black to undertake an independent review of drugs.<sup>215</sup> The first part of that review, published in February 2020, includes the following conclusions:

- More than a third of people in prison are there due to crimes relating to drug use (mostly acquisitive crime). These prisoners tend to serve very short sentences, have limited time in prison treatment and poor hand-offs back into the community. They are very likely to re-offend.
- Treatment in the community is the responsibility of local authorities. Spending on treatment has reduced significantly because local government budgets have been squeezed and central Government funding and oversight has fallen away. There is significant local variation, with some local authorities having reduced treatment expenditure by 40%.<sup>216</sup>

122. The British Retail Consortium’s 2021 Crime Report cited evidence that “an increasing number of addicts are turning to retail crime to support their habits.”<sup>217</sup> The ACS 2021 Crime Report identified drug and alcohol addiction as the number 1 motivation for repeat offending, followed by organised crime and then poverty. ACS retailers also believe that 63% of all shop thieves are repeat offenders.<sup>218</sup>

123. Many stakeholders who submitted evidence to this inquiry identified offenders with addiction issues as a root cause of theft and shoplifting in stores.<sup>219</sup> David Jamieson, former West Midlands PCC, told the Committee there is a “demonstrable link” between

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213 [Dr Emmeline Taylor, ‘It’s not part of the job’: Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers: A review of evidence and policy, September 2019](#)

214 [Centre for Social Justice \(CSJ\), Desperate for a Fix: Using shop theft and a Second Chance Programme to get tough on the causes of prolific drug-addicted offending, June 2018](#)

215 [Review of Drugs, Dame Carol Black, February 2020](#)

216 [Review of Drugs, Dame Carol Black, February 2020](#)

217 [Crime Survey, British Retail Consortium, May 2021](#)

218 [Crime Report 2021, Association of Convenience Stores](#)

219 [Central England Co-operative \(VTR0014\), David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner \(VTR0031\), Transform Justice \(VTR0011\)](#)

violence against shopworkers and the social and health determinants of abuse in the lives of offenders which “cannot be ignored”. He argued that the evidence demonstrates a strong case for “a prevention-led approach that tackles the drivers of abuse against shopworkers” which is within offenders themselves”.<sup>220</sup> Iona Blake, from Boots UK, said “we cannot arrest ourselves out of the problem” because many of these individuals are coming “straight back out when they are released and committing offences on the very same day. We see that on a regular basis across the country.”<sup>221</sup> James Lowman said:

It is not just about custodial sentences and that full process of going through the courts; it is also about using some of those out-of-court powers, particularly around rehabilitation, second chance programmes, banning orders and other community remedies that have a chance of tackling the root cause of the problem. Much as my members, when they are victims of crime, quite rightly want to see the person punished—as I would; we would all, understandably, probably start from that point of view—what we are trying to achieve here is to stop reoffending. That is the only way we will make an impact on the problem.<sup>222</sup>

124. However, the Institute for Customer Services told us “framing the problem only as a result of people with mental health issues or drug and alcohol addiction misses the reality of the situation”.<sup>223</sup>

## Funding rehabilitation

125. The Home Office acknowledges that “drugs play a significant role in a large number of crimes” and that respondents to its call for evidence thought drugs play a significant role in the abuse suffered by shopworkers.<sup>224</sup> Consequently, as part of its July 2020 action plan following the call for evidence, the Government committed to:

build a better understanding of what role drugs, as well as alcohol and other factors, play in driving violence and abuse towards shop workers. We will therefore work closely with members of the National Retail Crime Steering Group to further develop the evidence base. The Government will work closely with those members looking at opportunities around targeted drug treatment to try and address the needs of prolific offenders over the coming year to better understand the impact of the work they do to address the needs of prolific offenders and, if successful, how they may be replicated elsewhere in the country.<sup>225</sup>

126. In evidence to the Committee in May 2021, Policing Minister Kit Malthouse MP said that “prolific offending” driven by addiction to drugs and alcohol is “an area of strong concentration for me because it drives so much crime.”<sup>226</sup> However, when asked about

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220 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner \(VTR0031\)](#)

221 [Q31](#)

222 [Q25](#)

223 [Institute of Customer Service \(VTR0022\)](#)

224 Home Office, [Call for Evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff: Government Response, July 2020](#)

225 [Ibid](#)

226 [Q231](#)

progress towards the Government's commitment to develop the evidence base he said "we are about to start that work now on alcohol and drugs" looking particularly at "where they are pushing people towards acquisitive crime."<sup>227</sup>

127. The Policing Minister did tell us about Project ADDER (which stands for Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery) which combines targeted policing with enhanced treatment and recovery services to tackle drug misuse. The project, launched in January 2021, will run for 3 financial years and brings together the police, local councils and health services to target 5 areas with the highest rates of drug misuse.<sup>228</sup> BBC analysis found that funding for drug treatment services reduced by £162m (18%) between 2013/14 and 2017/18 and figures from Public Health England show that during the same period there was a 7% reduction in the number of people accessing drug treatment.<sup>229</sup> UK Addiction Treatment Centres, a privately run service, found that "two thirds of the councils in England that responded to a Freedom of Information request planned to make further cuts to spending on treatment services for the financial year 2018–19".<sup>230</sup> However, the Home Office has recently secured an extra £80 million for drug treatment services. The money is intended to increase the number of treatment places for prison leavers and offenders diverted into community sentences.<sup>231</sup>

128. During this inquiry the Committee repeatedly heard about a programme in Birmingham called "Offender2Rehab" which is run by a West Midlands police officer. The programme's strategic aims are to:

- Reduce reoffending, by addressing long-term drug addiction and causal factors in prolific offenders against businesses (therefore removing the cause of their offending);
- Reduce high volume crime and harm caused to business staff;
- Improve lives by giving offenders the means to turn their lives around; and
- Building trust and confidence by using effective responses to, and management of, prolific offenders resulting in greater satisfaction with police services.<sup>232</sup>

129. Former PCC David Jamieson told us that, so far, the programme estimates savings in retail crime in the region of £1,000,000 in the Birmingham East Neighbourhood Policing area and has prevented £350,000 being spent on drugs. In addition, aggression and violence used by offenders against shopworkers (which cannot be quantified as easily) will have been accordingly prevented. Paul Gerrard, representing the Co-op, described an offender treated by the programme who had a 20-year, £3,000-a-week habit of cocaine and heroin use funded through theft, often accompanied by abuse and violence. She had to get £150,000 a year to fund her habit. Over 20 years, that equates to £3 million. Following treatment and effective rehabilitation she had not offended for 18 months and had become a mentor for people who are in a similar position.<sup>233</sup> Transform Justice acknowledged that the programme is "relatively expensive" but "given that each prolific shoplifter may

227 [Q227](#)

228 Home Office, [£148 million to cut drugs crime](#), January 2021

229 [Drug and alcohol services cut by £162m as deaths increase](#), BBC, 11 May 2018

230 [Drug and alcohol services cut by £162m as deaths increase](#), BBC, 11 May 2018

231 Home Office, [£148 million to cut drugs crime](#), January 2021

232 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner \(VTR0031\)](#)

233 [Q31](#)

take goods worth £250,000 each year, if it works for a significant proportion of offenders, it is ‘cost-effective’.<sup>234</sup> The Policing Minister has described the project as “inspirational” and credited it with having “a huge impact in the area.”<sup>235</sup> Iona Blake, from Boots UK, highlighted that “it is only the West Midlands police” doing it and “they are tripling their capacity” but also sounded a note of caution in saying that “it has had mixed results because this is not a one-fix-all solution for everybody”.<sup>236</sup>

130. Former PCC David Jamieson told the Committee that he is able to provide funding for the Offender2Rehab programme by using the proceeds of crime returned through the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS).<sup>237</sup> Currently, Police and Crime Commissioners are allocated 18.75% of the proportion of proceeds of crime from confiscation orders and 50% of money recovered from cash seizures. He has proposed that pilots for similar schemes could be partly funded by temporarily increasing the proportion of money Police and Crime Commissioners get under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.<sup>238</sup>

**131. The Government has acknowledged that drugs play a significant role in a large number of crimes and with prolific offending in particular. Yet, one year on from the Government’s response to the call for evidence on violence and abuse toward shop staff, work to develop the evidence base regarding the role of drugs and alcohol in retail crime is only just beginning. We welcome the work the Government is undertaking to address drug addiction via the five ADDER programmes. However, the Minister has admitted that it will be years before these programmes could be rolled-out at a national level. This intervention lacks urgency and fails to address the gravity of the escalating violence and abuse faced by Britain’s retail workers on a daily basis. Retail workers need action now to break the escalating cycle of abuse.**

132. We welcome the new funding the Home Office will be providing for drug treatment. However, it is only for one year, when sustainable increased funding is needed for ongoing services. *We recommend that the Government makes central funding available for rehabilitation programmes such as the Offender2Rehab model adopted in Birmingham. We further recommend that until national drug rehabilitation programmes have been comprehensively rolled out, the Government should provide additional ring fenced funding, under the Police and Crime Act 2002, to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to work with local councils to restore drug rehabilitation services in their local area.*

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234 [Transform Justice](#) (VTR0011)

235 [Q225](#)

236 [Q45](#)

237 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner](#) (VTR0031)

238 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner](#) (VTR0031)



## 5 The legal framework

133. A variety of existing criminal offences can be used to prosecute violence and abuse towards retail workers. Key examples include the following:

- theft, robbery or burglary under the Theft Act 1968;<sup>239</sup>
- assault, unlawful wounding or grievous bodily harm under the common law or the Offences Against the Person Act 1861;<sup>240</sup>
- harassment or putting people in fear of violence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997;<sup>241</sup> and
- affray or threatening or abusive behaviour under the Public Order Act 1986.<sup>242</sup>

134. Sentencing guidelines also require that the courts treat offences committed against those working in the public sector, or providing a service to the public, as an aggravating factor, making the offence more serious. On 27 May 2021, following a public consultation, the Sentencing Council published new guidance for sentencing common assault which included a revised aggravating factor of “offence committed against those working in the public sector or providing a service to the public, or against a person coming to the assistance of an emergency worker” which provides for increased sentences for assaults on an individual providing a service to the public.<sup>243</sup> The Sentencing Council’s expanded explanation of the factor further clarifies the wide scope of its application:

The factor reflects:

- the fact that people in public facing roles are more exposed to the possibility of harm and consequently more vulnerable and/or
- the fact that someone is working in the public interest merits the additional protection of the courts.

This applies whether the victim is a public or private employee or acting in a voluntary capacity.

135. In its response to the public consultation, the Sentencing Council said:

A significant proportion of responses were from representatives of workers not covered by the recent statutory provisions relating to emergency workers, who argued that higher sentences should be applicable to non-emergency workers in public facing roles. This would already be possible with the existing guideline which provides for an assault on a person providing a service to the public to be treated as an aggravating factor.<sup>244</sup>

239 [Theft Act 1968](#); Crown Prosecution Service, ‘[Theft Act Offences](#)’, 25 November 2019

240 [Offences against the Person Act 1861](#); Crown Prosecution Service, ‘[Offences against the Person, incorporating the Charging Standard](#)’, 6 January 2020

241 [Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#); Crown Prosecution Service, ‘[Stalking and Harassment](#)’, 23 May 2018

242 [Public Order Act 1986](#); Crown Prosecution Service, ‘[Public Order Offences incorporating the Charging Standard](#)’

243 [New guidelines for sentencing common assault and attempted murder published](#), Sentencing Council, 27 May

244 [Assault Offences Guidelines, Response to consultation](#), May 2021

## Calls for legislative change

136. The overwhelming majority of the stakeholders who gave evidence to this inquiry support the introduction of greater protections in legislation for retail workers. Helen Dickson, CEO of the British Retail Consortium, has called for “a standalone offence of assaulting a shopworker” which would deter would-be criminals and “provide our colleagues with the protections they need”.<sup>245</sup> The Association of Convenience Stores is “campaigning for the Government to introduce tougher penalties for attacks on shopworkers in the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Bill.”<sup>246</sup> The Institute of Customer Service told us the “introduction of a simple stand-alone offence of assaulting a customer-facing worker is required to really send a message to workers, police, courts and offenders that this will not be tolerated”.<sup>247</sup> In July 2020 USDAW launched a parliamentary petition calling for “new legislation to protect retail workers from abuse, threats and violence”. Over 100,000 people have signed the petition for legislation to “create a specific offence of abusing, threatening or assaulting a retail worker”.<sup>248</sup>

137. In the 2019–21 parliamentary session, a Private Member’s Bill entitled the ‘Retail Workers (Offences) Bill 2019–21’ was introduced by Alex Norris MP. It would have made certain offences—including malicious wounding, grievous or actual bodily harm and common assault—aggravated when perpetrated against a retail worker in the course of their employment. The Bill was unable to complete its consideration by the end of the parliamentary session and therefore did not become law. There was also debate on whether an offence of assaulting a member of shop staff should be created during the passage of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019. Those in favour argued that shop staff were often at the forefront of efforts to enforce the law.<sup>249</sup> More recently, campaigners have highlighted the Scottish Parliament’s unanimous passing of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act which became law on 24 February 2021.<sup>250</sup> The Act created a new statutory offence of assaulting, threatening, abusing, obstructing or hindering a retail worker and allows for aggravation of that offence where the retail worker is enforcing a statutory age restriction.

138. The policy memorandum noted that although the Scottish Parliament’s Act criminalised obstruction or hindering of a retail worker for the first time, other elements of the new offence overlapped with existing offences. These included assault, breach of the peace and threatening or abusive behaviour.<sup>251</sup> The memorandum also noted that potential benefits of the Act may include:

- an increased awareness of the issues posed by the physical and verbal abuse faced by many retail workers;
- a possible increase in the reporting of such crimes to the police; and

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245 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021

246 [Crime Report 2021](#), Association of Convenience Stores

247 [Institute of Customer Service](#) (VTR0022)

248 [Closed petition](#), Protect Retail Workers from Abuse, Threats and Violence

249 Home Office, [Call for Evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff: Government Response](#), July 2020

250 Scottish Parliament [Protection of Workers \(Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services\) \(Scotland\) Act](#), passed 24 February 2021

251 Scottish Parliament [Policy Memorandum](#) Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Bill SP Bill –58–PM

- a reduction in the number of occasions on which retail workers would have to face this type of verbal abuse or assault.<sup>252</sup>

139. It noted a further benefit in that the existence of statutory offences relating to specific classes of victim could “make it easier to identify how many individuals had been charged with and prosecuted for relevant offences”, and that this could “provide an indicator of progress made in reducing the instances of retail crime”.<sup>253</sup> Describing the Bill on its third reading in January 2021, Daniel Johnson MSP said:

It will act as a clear signal of the seriousness with which such crimes will be regarded and it will ensure that we are able to measure such crimes, which it is currently difficult to do. We are able to do so through the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005, which is used on average 300 times every single year, but it cannot stand alone, so I was pleased to hear confirmation from the Minister for Community Safety [...] that the Scottish Government is committed to developing an awareness-raising campaign to coincide with the implementation of the bill.<sup>254</sup>

140. Giving evidence to the Committee, Policing Minister Kit Malthouse MP told us he had an “open mind” about introducing a new offence.<sup>255</sup> Previously, the Government has said that it does not consider “the case is yet made out for a change in the law” and that the existing legislation that may be applied to violence and abuse committed against shop workers is “sufficient”.<sup>256</sup> In its written evidence to the Committee in January 2021, the Home Office further stated that “a wide range of offences already exist which cover assaults against any worker” and highlighted that the “current guidelines for assault offences specify that it is an aggravating factor for an offence to be committed against a person who works in the public sector or who is providing a service to the public, such as a shop worker”.<sup>257</sup>

141. However, many stakeholders to this inquiry cited the sheer number of offences and the escalating nature of violence and abuse as a clear statement that the current legislation is not sufficient to ensure the police and courts take it seriously enough.<sup>258</sup> USDAW told us that the Government’s response lacked “urgency” and was “inadequate” given clear evidence of the scale of the problem.<sup>259</sup> Joanne Cairns highlighted that “far too many incidents just don’t reach the point where the aggravating factor is considered” as there is not enough reporting and not enough prosecutions.<sup>260</sup> The Association of Convenience Stores told us that with incidents of verbal abuse, threats and physical violence continuing to rise “existing penalties and sentencing guidelines” are “quite simply” not sufficient.<sup>261</sup>

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252 Scottish Parliament [Policy Memorandum](#) Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Bill SP Bill –58–PM

253 Scottish Parliament [Policy Memorandum](#) Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Bill SP Bill –58–PM

254 Scottish Parliament, [Stage 3 debate](#), 19 January 2021

255 [Q233](#)

256 [Government Response](#), Call for evidence – Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff, July 2020

257 [Home Office](#) (VTR0035)

258 [Anonymous](#) (VTR0017)

259 [USDAW](#) (VTR0016)

260 [Q19](#)

261 [Association of Convenience Stores](#) (VTR0021)

British Retail Consortium analysis found that of the 54% of incidents of violence and abuse reported to the police only 6% reach the courts, and only 3% get prosecuted as aggravated offences.<sup>262</sup> They told us the system is “clearly failing.”<sup>263</sup>

142. The Co-op shared data relating to a small sample of offences taken successfully through the courts in 2020. It showed that three offenders, with a long history of theft and violence, committed 65 offences between them (including violent assault) and received sentences which in total amounted to 91 weeks—around 10 days per offence.<sup>264</sup> They told us such sentences “do not provide any kind of deterrence or punishment”, “nor do they address the underlying reasons for the offending.”<sup>265</sup> Dixon’s Carphone also told us it was frustrated with “low rates of capture and prosecution” and the “relatively low penalties” that are served on successful prosecution.<sup>266</sup> Dunelm Soft Furnishings said the experience of shopworkers across the UK is that the current legal framework does not provide adequate redress. They told us the situation has “deteriorated to the point that only a new aggravated offence will stop the perpetrators.”<sup>267</sup> Pets at Home said:

The escalation in violence, whether that be physical or verbal, is unacceptable. The COVID19 pandemic has undoubtedly escalated the frequency and the severity of offences and the current sanctions are obviously not a credible deterrent.<sup>268</sup>

**143. The everyday experiences of retail workers show that the current framework is too often failing to protect them from abuse, provide justice for victims or a deterrent for offenders. With prosecution rates vanishingly small, the existence of an aggravating factor in the sentencing guidelines is not sufficient to deal with the scale of the challenge.**

### Are retail workers a special case?

144. Stakeholders to the inquiry raised the existence of dedicated offences, designed to protect specific groups of workers, as evidence that the Government accepts the existing legislative framework is not always sufficient:

- Section 22 of the UK Borders Act 2007 makes it an offence to assault an immigration officer. A person found guilty under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for up to 12 months, or to a fine of up to £5,000, or both.<sup>269</sup>
- Section 31 of the Commissioners for Revenue and Customs Act 2005, makes it an offence for anyone to obstruct HMRC officers whilst they are performing their duties. Section 32 gives HMRC officers further legal protection from assault to supplement the common law offence. The maximum penalty for these offences is imprisonment for up to 51 weeks or a fine (of up to £5,000 for assault or £1,000 for obstruction), or both.<sup>270</sup>

262 [Crime Survey](#), British Retail Consortium, May 2021

263 [British Retail Consortium](#) (VTR0015)

264 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027)

265 [Co-op Group](#) (VTR0027)

266 [Dixons Carphone](#) (VTR0012)

267 [Dunelm Soft Furnishings](#) (VTR0001)

268 [Pets at Home Plc](#) (VTR0009)

269 UK Public General Acts [UK Borders Act 2007](#) 30 October 2007

270 UK Public General Acts [Commissioners for Revenue and Customs Act 2005](#) 7 April 2005

145. Emergency Service workers are given extra protection under the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018. This provides for a new offence and covers offences which would previously have been classified as common assault or assault on a constable which are summary offences. Crown Prosecution Service guidance makes clear that police and prosecutors should “cease charging the existing offences of common assault, battery, assaulting a police officer in the execution of their duty and other existing similar offences” where the complainant is an emergency worker and instead charge under the provisions of the 2018 Act.<sup>271</sup>

146. Industry and union representatives called for a similar approach to be taken to assaults on shopworkers. However, the police representatives we spoke to raised concerns about the long list of workers in other sectors who may feel they should also be afforded similar protections if a new offence is introduced for retailers. Patrick Holdaway, Chief Inspector, Hampshire Police told the Committee:

I deal a lot with retailers but equally I deal with many in the banking sector as well—another element—and we also have other groups. Customer services groups say they are seeing an increase in abuse and so on. There is a challenge that if you go down one route, what do you do for someone else?<sup>272</sup>

147. Many stakeholders told the Committee that the nature of the work carried out by retail workers puts them in a position of increased risk relative to members of the general public.<sup>273</sup> The National Federation of Retail Newsagents highlighted that its members work in their stores from early in the morning until late in the evening, often with only one or two members of staff on duty and, lacking the security back up that would be found in larger stores, they are “extremely vulnerable to those who would rob the store or attack the staff”.<sup>274</sup> The British Retail Consortium told us shopworkers are in a “different situation from many other victims” because their job requires them to return to the same situation day after day and face the “fear that the next customer could be violent or abusive”. Worse still, some of its members have reported instances of threats from offenders who live in the local area and claim to know where a store worker lives and incidents of psychological intimidation such as stalking shopworkers when they leave the premises at lunchtime.<sup>275</sup> In some cases, workers are too traumatised by an assault to be able to return to the workplace which means they lose their jobs and their livelihoods as a result of the abuse.<sup>276</sup> USDAW told us:

Many staff are put in the way of danger by their work. Retail workers frequently have to deal with people who are drunk, aggressive or trying to break the law. They can be working late at night, sometimes on their own, and in areas of anti-social behaviour, which most people voluntarily avoid for their own safety. Retail workers at shops in these areas do not have this option.<sup>277</sup>

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271 Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, Crown Prosecution Service, 26 February 2021

272 [Q77](#)

273 [Pets at Home Plc \(VTR0009\)](#)

274 [National Federation of Retail Newsagents \(VTR0020\)](#)

275 [British Retail Consortium \(VTR0015\)](#)

276 [USDAW \(VTR0016\)](#)

277 [USDAW \(VTR0016\)](#)

148. The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners said:

When a retail worker becomes a victim of violence and abuse, it is largely unique to other forms of violence due to the proximity of where they are—the incident has happened in their workplace where they spend the majority of their working life to make a living and provide for themselves. In many instances, for smaller and independent retailers, violence and abuse against them in their store also takes place in their home from which they cannot escape.<sup>278</sup>

149. We heard another key aspect which sets retail workers apart is the requirement to enforce legislation as part of their role. Retail workers must obtain proof of age for a number of products which are subject to age-related sales legislation. Their role has further expanded during the Covid-19 pandemic in which retail workers were given responsibility for ensuring adherence to Covid-19 safety measures such as social distancing and wearing of face coverings. We have repeatedly heard that these checks can be triggers for abuse, threats and violence. If staff fail to obtain proof of age for age restricted sales, they may be liable for prosecution resulting in a heavy fine, loss of a job or possible loss of licence for the workplace.<sup>279</sup> USDAW highlighted to us that police officers have the discretion to only enforce the law providing it does not present a clear and present danger to their own safety. This discretion is not provided to retail workers.<sup>280</sup> Paul Gerrard, representing the Co-op, said there is a point of principle that “if Parliament expects individual groups of people to uphold the law that Parliament makes, Parliament should also give those people additional protection.” He told us that, pre-Covid, a quarter of all the incidents in Co-op stores were related to age-restricted sales.<sup>281</sup> Other workers such as hospitality or transport workers may also be drawn into enforcement roles. The Institute for Customer Service told us it believed protection under any new offence “needs to be expanded beyond retail” as its research had “clearly shown that instances of hostility span multiple sectors.” It proposed using an offence of assaulting “a customer-facing worker.”<sup>282</sup>

**150. Retail workers, by the very nature of their employment, are placed at an increased risk of violence and abuse compared to members of the general public. They are vulnerable to repeat offenders who are able to return time and again to stores, compounding abuse and leaving them feeling trapped and fearful in their place of work. The uniquely local nature of their employment means that retail workers face the terrifying prospect of offenders following them home or extending abuse into other parts of their lives in the local community.**

**151. Retail workers are responsible for enforcing laws with regard to age-restricted sales and restricted goods such as medicines or weapons. It is well established that conflict over these types of sales is a key trigger for violence and abuse. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen retail workers take on even more responsibility, enforcing Government legislation on social distancing and mask wearing, while putting their lives at risk working in public facing roles on the Covid frontline. Other categories of workers, such as emergency workers and customs officers, have rightly been afforded extra protection by the law in recognition of the service they provide to the public and**

278 [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners](#) (VTR0032)

279 [Usdaw](#) (VTR0016)

280 *Ibid*

281 [Q38](#)

282 [Institute of Customer Service](#) (VTR0022)



**the responsibility placed upon them by Parliament. We believe that retail workers must also be recognised, and that offences against them must be treated with additional seriousness, with extra protection from the law.**

152. *We believe there is a strong case for extra protection in law for retail workers through a specific offence. The Government should consult urgently on the scope of the offence, recognising the particular pressure on those in different occupations who are asked to enforce the law.*

## Strengthening the legal framework

153. Policing bodies we spoke to favoured focusing on sentencing provisions, including strengthening sentencing guidelines for aggravated offences against shopworkers rather than introducing a new offence. Patrick Holdaway, Chief Inspector, Hampshire Police told the Committee:

The [sentencing] guidance already talks about an offence against an employee. I think it is probably more implicit and it needs to be more explicit.<sup>283</sup>

154. Amanda Blakeman, Deputy Chief Constable, Gwent Police said:

I am not for one minute suggesting that a violent attack against a shopworker is not a serious matter or should not be taken seriously, but there are other sectors that we see through the calls to service that are coming in that would have a similar view. That would then somewhat dilute the very purpose of looking at aggravating circumstances of an assault. The place to start is being more explicit in the sentencing guidelines.<sup>284</sup>

155. Ian Dyson, Commissioner of the City of London Police, said:

I recognise the symbolic significance of this for the retail sector, but for the reasons my colleagues have articulated, my position is with them on starting with the aggravating factors in sentencing and disposal.<sup>285</sup>

156. Alison Hernandez, Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly said she was “not convinced of the need for this at this time” instead recommending prioritising “improvements in reporting and recording practices” so that we can get “a clearer picture of the scale and scope of the problem”.<sup>286</sup> Transform Justice also felt “there is not a good case for a new offence of assaulting a shop worker” and cited research showing that “more punitive responses do not aid deterrence and can actually have higher reoffending rates.” Instead they supported preventative measures such as “use of out of court disposals including rehabilitative programmes instead of prosecution.”<sup>287</sup>

157. Policing Minister Kit Malthouse MP, told us he did not think that introducing a new offence would “particularly focus the mind” because “the challenge for policing does not necessarily change” and they will still have to make “awful decisions about demands,

283 [Q77](#)

284 [Q78](#)

285 [Q79](#)

286 [Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly \(VTR0034\)](#)

287 [Transform Justice \(VTR0011\)](#)



what they respond to on an immediate basis and where the most harm is likely to be.”<sup>288</sup> However, industry bodies were united that a new criminal offence would send a clear message to the public and the police that abuse and violence towards shop workers is unacceptable and cannot be committed with impunity.

158. The British Retail Consortium told us that introducing a new criminal offence would “increase the number of incidents reported” and “make it easier to identify how many individuals have been charged with, and prosecuted for, relevant offences” and therefore would help the Government to monitor progress in reducing this type of crime.<sup>289</sup> The Association of Convenience Stores said a specified offence would “provide confidence and assurance to retailers”, give them a “layer of protection when carrying out their statutory duty” and help “secure an appropriate response from police forces and the justice system”.<sup>290</sup> James Lowman, ACS, said:

I think that that a specific offence would have the effect of drawing more of these offences through into the criminal justice system, motivating colleagues and businesses to report and the police to take them forward into the criminal justice system. At the moment, so many cases seem to fall out at each stage. It is only by having more decisions made about how to tackle those offenders that I think we will start to see some progress.<sup>291</sup>

159. The Nationwide Building Society said a new offence would “embolden and encourage” retail workers and give them confidence that their complaints would be taken seriously.<sup>292</sup> Paul Gerrard, of the Co-op, told us that legislation is often used to “reset expectations in society” and this his colleagues “wonder at times whether Parliament cares about the fact that they are being abused and attacked every single day.”<sup>293</sup>

160. We also saw evidence that targeted legislation on specific groups has worked to increase the police and prosecution focus on those crimes and also to increase prosecutions. We heard that since the creation of a specific offence of assault on emergency workers, there has been a significant increase in prosecutions. In 2019, the first full year in which data was available for this offence, there were 11,300 prosecutions, 9,400 convictions and 9,100 offenders sentenced. As a result, violence against the person was the offence group with the largest increase in prosecutions—up 26%. Previously, these offences would have been classified as ‘common assault’ or ‘assault on a constable’ which are summary offences. In comparison, between 2018 and 2019 there were large falls in the number of defendants prosecuted for theft offences (13% decrease to 65,900 defendants). The Ministry of Justice statistics state that this continues a downward trend observed since 2014.<sup>294</sup>

161. Several stakeholders acknowledged that new legislation would not be a “panacea” for all the issues facing retail workers.<sup>295</sup> James Lowman described the legislation in Scotland as “a template” for bringing legislation in Westminster but also stated “it is not a solution

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288 [Q233](#)

289 [British Retail Consortium \(VTR0015\)](#)

290 [Association of Convenience Stores \(VTR0021\)](#)

291 [Q25](#)

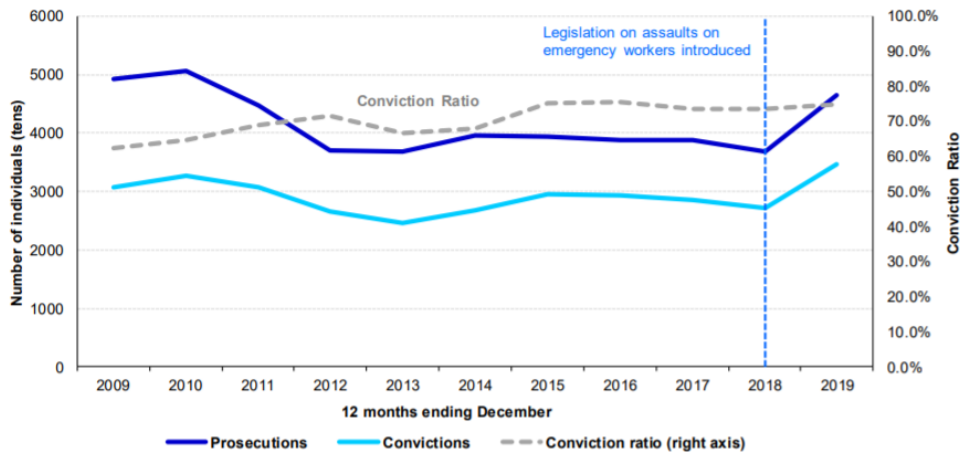
292 [Nationwide Building Society \(VTR0024\)](#)

293 [Q38](#)

294 [Criminal Justice Statistics quarterly, England and Wales, year ending December 2019](#), MOJ, published 1 May 2021

295 [Q38](#)

Figure 10: Prosecutions, convictions and conviction ratio for violence against the person offences, 2009 to 2019



Source: Table: Q3.2a, Q3.2b and Q3.3 **Criminal Justice Statistics quarterly**

in itself” but would broaden the options available to the courts and the police for pursuing cases.<sup>296</sup> Similarly, Paul Gerrard told us a new offence would have to “work in concert with other things”<sup>297</sup> and David Jamieson, former West Midlands PCC, said:

Legislation is part of the solution, but it is not a silver bullet. Violence and abuse in these space does not exist in a vacuum, and any serious response to abuse of shopworkers cannot be considered in isolation from its drivers. Be they addictions, substance abuse, or mental health in offenders, steps must be taken in tandem with enhanced legislative protections to address the root causes of offending within offenders themselves.<sup>298</sup>

162. Violence and abuse towards retail workers is a complex and multi-faceted issue and any meaningful solution will involve a package of measures from Government, the police, employers, retail workers and the public. Legislation can only ever be one part of the picture. However, we believe that the introduction of a new standalone statutory offence would play an instrumental role in resetting expectations among the public, retail workers and the police. It would send a clear, powerful, and long overdue message that abuse and violence towards retail workers will not be tolerated.

163. Early data following the introduction of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 suggests that the creation of a new offence is having a positive impact on prosecution rates for that crime. We note that even though it was possible previously to prosecute assaults on emergency workers using other offences such as common assault, in practice the fact of creating a distinct offence appears to have been effective in getting the police, courts and agencies to take incidents and assaults against emergency workers much more seriously and to make it simpler to bring them before the courts. Retail workers deserve the same kind of focus to protect them from growing violence and abuse.

296 [Q25](#)

297 [Q38](#)

298 [David Jamieson, former West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner \(VTR0031\)](#)

164. The patchwork of existing offences for prosecuting incidents of violence and abuse against individuals is not effective enough to address the escalating scale and nature of offences committed in the retail setting. Introducing a new statutory offence would bring the following benefits:

- Communicate to the police, retail workers, their employers and the wider public that the Government takes this issue seriously and that violence and abuse towards retail workers is unacceptable and cannot be carried out with impunity.
- Improve the police's ability to collect data on reported incidents, rates of arrest and prosecutions for assaults on shop workers, so that the issue does not get lost among a wider consideration of retail or business crime.
- Increase reporting of incidents by retail workers which would in turn ensure the Government has a clearer understanding about the scale of the problem and type of offenders involved.

165. The text of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act, having undergone lengthy consultation and close scrutiny, provides a potential starting point. *As we have previously recommended, the Government should consult urgently on the scope of a new standalone offence. A clear message must be sent that nobody should feel unsafe at work.*

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## The scale of the problem

1. No one should encounter violence at work. The last 5 years has seen a shocking rise in attacks on retail workers. We find it very disturbing that violence and abuse towards those working in the retail environment is becoming endemic in British society. The appalling truth, exposed comprehensively by data from the industry, is that for millions of shop workers verbal abuse and physical violence is becoming a too frequent reality. We are particularly alarmed by evidence of the increased use of weapons during incidences of theft. A robust response led by Government is urgently required to break this escalating cycle of violence. Shop workers are often the lifeblood of local high streets and communities. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, those in essential retail continued to work and kept our communities going. It is unacceptable that they should regularly face abuse and violence at work. (Paragraph 10)
2. The appalling abuse suffered by retail workers on a daily basis is completely unacceptable. Abuse should never be “simply part of the job” or accepted as a “norm” in any workplace. The unique vulnerability of retail workers, who face being confronted with repeat offenders who live in their local area, compounds the severity and regularity of these offences. (Paragraph 15)
3. Where shopworkers are confronted by hate-motivated abuse in the course of their employment this should be taken seriously by employers and reported to the police. It is vital that the police, in dealing with these incidents, manage them with sensitivity and give them the attention that they deserve. We support calls for future iterations of the Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey to include questions on incidents of hate related violence and abuse to help build a clearer picture of the prevalence of this form of abuse. *We support calls for future iterations of the Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey to include questions on incidents of hate related violence and abuse to help build a clearer picture of the prevalence of this form of abuse.* (Paragraph 25)
4. There are several factors driving the increase in violence and abuse towards retail workers over the last 5 years. However, the primary factor appears to be increasing levels of acquisitive theft which are linked to both organised crime and prolific offenders with substance addiction problems. By comparison, conflict over the sale of age restricted products has been a consistent trigger for violence and abuse over a much longer period. We are particularly concerned by evidence which suggests failures in the police response are fuelling the increases in offending. (Paragraph 29)
5. It is unconscionable that violence and abuse towards retail workers has further increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. These are individuals who have been working on the frontline and have put their lives at risk to ensure that the public could access essential items such as food and medicine. At a time when they have most deserved our respect and gratitude they have instead faced violence and abuse. (Paragraph 36)

6. We welcome the revised guidance from the Sentencing Council which makes the despicable act of deliberate spitting or coughing an aggravating factor for common assault. However, we note that incidents of offenders threatening to spit or cough would not be covered by its terms and regret that the sentencing guidelines took over a year from the start of the Covid crisis to be introduced. (Paragraph 37)
7. A lack of clarity with regards to Government guidelines on mask wearing and social distancing exacerbated an already difficult situation for retailers in the early days of the pandemic. *If in future new public health restrictions are required the Government must learn the lessons from this pandemic, and work with retailers to ensure there are workable systems in place and clear guidance for the public.*

### The policing response

8. The Committee has heard overwhelming evidence that the policing response is simply failing to match the rising tide of violence and abuse against retail workers. The evidence also suggests that the response varies significantly between police forces: while there are examples of good practice, on far too many occasions retail workers are being left alone to manage dangerous situations which put both their physical and mental wellbeing at risk. We recognise that policing has been increasingly overstretched and that officers are working hard to respond to rising demand with constrained resources. Nevertheless, police forces and the Home Office need to ensure that officers are better able to respond to rising threats and crimes against shopworkers. The police's failure to attend or follow-up serious incidents undermines trust and confidence, discourages reporting crime, and weakens the deterrent for repeat offenders leaving shopworkers more vulnerable and letting down victims of crime. (Paragraph 56)
9. We welcome the guidance for retail workers on when to use emergency and non-emergency numbers when seeking a police response and, in particular, setting out risk factors which will help the police respond appropriately to incidents. However, we do not believe that two A4 pages of guidance is a sufficient response to tackle the damaging perception that the police "don't care" about retail crime. (Paragraph 57)
10. We welcome the Government's work to provide better guidance and support for retail workers on reporting retail crime. However, it is deeply disappointing that the main thrust of the Government's response to shopworkers, who have lost confidence in the police response, is to demand increased reporting to the police without also requiring the police to improve its response. It is a serious problem that police forces could not even tell us the scale of reported assaults against shopworkers because they do not currently record the data in a way that allows it to be measured, nor do they keep effective records regarding retail or business crime. We agree that you cannot manage what you do not measure. The police must play their part in ensuring the scale and nature of the problem is fully understood by improving their own crime recording practices. (Paragraph 70)
11. *As a starting point, we recommend that it is made mandatory to add a "business crime flag" to offences committed in a retail environment, including assaults on retail*

*workers. This simple step would give an important early indication of the scale of the problem and allow police forces better to understand patterns of local crime and the risks shopworkers face. (Paragraph 71)*

12. However, we recognise that the current broad definition of “business crime”, which encompasses cybercrime, fraud or theft at an unoccupied business premises has limitations when it comes to tackling assaults on shop workers. The broad definition does not distinguish between crimes which result in financial loss to businesses and crimes of violence towards individual retail workers, meaning the immediate human cost is not always recognised. We are concerned that the perception of “business crimes” as “victimless crimes” disguises the hugely damaging impact of violence and abuse on individual retail workers. (Paragraph 72)
13. *We therefore recommend that the National Business Crime Centre work with the National Police Chiefs’ Council to agree a better long-term way to identify and properly measure the violence and abuse suffered by retail workers in the crime statistics gathered by local police forces. We appreciate that the definition of business crime is not the most appropriate for the offences that have been reported to us in evidence. We therefore urge the Government to look at a more appropriate flag, such as retail business crime, which more accurately reflects the nature of the abuse we have described in this report. (Paragraph 73)*
14. As local representatives Police and Crime Commissioners are well placed to understand the specific issues facing the retail community in their area and to ensure police forces focus attention on this critical issue. Collaboration between police and retailers to identify repeat offenders is a powerful tool in crime prevention. We welcome early reports regarding the pilot one-touch reporting process introduced by Katy Bourne in Sussex. We encourage all Police and Crime Commissioners to use their unique position to help improve data sharing, build trust and bridge the gap between local businesses and police forces. We call on all Police and Crime Commissioners to work with local retailers to establish or strengthen Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and to develop local retail crime reduction plans, including arrangements for local reporting, identifying patterns of crime and prolific offenders to be targeted, and re-building confidence in the police response to violence and abuse against shopworkers. (Paragraph 78)
15. We strongly support calls for Police and Crime Commissioners to make action on violence and abuse towards retail workers a priority in police and crime plans. We are very concerned how few appear to have prioritised this in past plans, or to have recognised the human cost of retail crime. The resetting of police and crime plans, following the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2021, presents a valuable window of opportunity to ensure that this previously neglected crime is properly prioritised in future. We also encourage Police and Crime Commissioners to set out in their police and crime plans how they will measure their police force’s performance in response to violence and abuse towards retail workers. A particularly effective approach for building confidence would be for local police forces, retailers and Police and Crime Commissioners to discuss and agree a performance metric for the policing response which is tailored to the challenges faced in their local area. (Paragraph 79)



16. Chief Constables must do much more to demonstrate that they recognise the human cost of escalating violence and abuse against shopworkers. They need to ensure they have proper systems in place for monitoring and recording. Most importantly, they need to ensure that officers are not underestimating the seriousness of these crimes because they take place on business or retail premises. All forces should review the response priority given to these kinds of crimes in line with the new Government guidance to make sure they are taking it seriously enough. All forces should conduct an assessment of the level and patterns of violence and abuse against shop workers in their areas, and identify a lead officer to work with local businesses and local authorities in partnership on reducing crime. (Paragraph 80)
17. The lack of capacity in neighbourhood policing teams to build relationships with retailers, identify prolific offenders and respond swiftly to incidents of retail crime has damaged the confidence of retail workers. It has made it harder to maintain close relationships between the police and local high street retailers, or to pursue community relationships, which has had a significant impact on crime prevention work. These teams play a vital role in identifying and addressing the specific challenges facing retailers on their local high street. We believe it is extremely important that neighbourhood policing teams are prioritised for new resource as part of the 20,000 police officer uplift programme. Both Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables should make neighbourhood policing a priority. Chief Constables should examine their current resourcing arrangements and ring-fence a proportion of their additional policing capacity to expand neighbourhood teams. (Paragraph 85)
18. There is clearly an issue with the consistency of the policing response to retail crime across the country. In light of this finding, the Committee was disappointed to learn that the Government is no longer directly funding the work of the National Business Crime Centre. The National Business Crime Centre is well placed to ensure the sharing of best practice approaches, improve links with the business community and drive up consistency. At a time when violence in retail and business settings is increasing rapidly, the decision to discontinue direct funding for an established and well-respected body tasked with strategic oversight of the issue seems nonsensical. (Paragraph 89)
19. The Home Office work to tackle violence and abuse against shopworkers over the last twelve months has been welcome. But the temporary working groups they set up to draw up new guidance are not sufficient to deliver sustained change or provide continual national leadership. *We recommend the Home Office provide central funding for the continued operation of the National Business Crime Centre.* (Paragraph 90)
20. Business Crime Reduction Partnerships have huge potential to improve communication and collaboration between the police, local retailers and local authorities on the issue of retail crime. Tailoring the policing response to areas of particular vulnerability, identifying repeat offenders, and developing joint preventative plans are effective measures for improving the police response. Closer collaboration may also have a positive impact on retailer confidence and reporting of incidents. Smaller retailers in particular, who do not have the security support and expertise that bigger corporations do, are particularly reliant on support through local partnerships. There is considerable potential for these to do far more on every



high street including better investment in CCTV and communication networks, supporting small shop owners who may be working alone. *We recommend that the Government provides greater support for the creation of Business Crime Reduction Partnerships including actively encouraging partnerships to cover smaller town centres and areas where there are many independent shops with less capacity to organise local security and crime prevention. We also recommend involving shopworkers themselves as well as major employers in crime reduction partnerships as they will often have the clearest idea both of the human cost of crime and of the local measures that could make a difference.* (Paragraph 95)

21. *We welcome the additional money available to local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners to spend on preventative measures via the Safer Streets Fund. However, we note that none of the funding rounds have placed any emphasis on preventative measures for violence and abuse towards retail workers. We recommend that the Home Office make clear that they welcome bids to the current Safer Streets Fund for measures that will improve the safety of shop workers, and actively encourage local councils, communities and business partnerships to draw up bids which directly tackle violence and abuse in retail settings and on high streets. We also recommend that a future round should set this as a priority.* (Paragraph 96)

### The role of employers

22. Employers have a duty of care and play a vital role in ensuring their employees have the confidence to report incidents, and the appropriate support to deal with difficult situations. Evidence from our public survey, and the Government's 2019 call for evidence, suggests that many retail workers are not getting the support they need from their employers. (Paragraph 106)
23. We welcome the Government's creation of downloadable digital assets for the #ShopKind campaign which we hope will raise awareness amongst the public about retail crime and its impact on shop workers. However, we think this action completely fails to address the problem of employers who do not support their workers to report abuse, ban repeat offenders or access counselling or training. The language around "options that may be provided" by your business will be of little use to the many retail workers whose employers do not provide those services. We recommend the Government sets out clearly in its guidance, addressing itself directly to employers, the actions they should be taking to support retail workers in the context of retail crime. This should state:
  - The employer's responsibility for ensuring retail crime is reported and recorded effectively.
  - The employer's responsibility proactively to analyse and mitigate risks to retail workers.
  - The employer's responsibility to ensure appropriate training and counselling services are available or to signpost its employees to relevant resources. (Paragraph 107)

24. We applaud the work of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust in creating Suzy's Charter, a far more effective and useful tool than the Government's guidance for securing the safety of retail workers. The Government's lacklustre endorsement of the Charter, a fleeting reference that "this could be used to benchmark what your business has in place" with a link to the website is very disappointing. *We recommend that the Home Office strengthen its action by working with the National Retail Crime Steering Group to agree an Employers Charter using Suzy's Charter as a template, which is specifically targeted at retail workers and retail crime. This approach would help drive best practice, it would ensure that retail workers know what they should expect and can put pressure on employers who do not meet these standards.* (Paragraph 108)
25. Smaller retailers are much less likely to have access to security expertise or investment in technology and, as many have been heavily affected by the pandemic, they may also struggle to find additional funds to invest in the area. Small local high street shops sometimes have only one member of staff and we heard from the Association of Convenience Stores about the added vulnerability of workers in small local stores. Those shopworkers are in even greater need of the kind of technological and organised support. (Paragraph 116)
26. The Committee was impressed by this range of solutions and the potential of new technology to improve both the safety of retail workers and the ability to gather evidence about incidents of retail crime. The methods described above, such as body worn video cameras, headsets for internal communication, counselling services and central command and control systems, represent a best practice approach. However, we acknowledge that many of these solutions will not be financially viable for many businesses. (Paragraph 117)
27. The guidance provided by the Government and the National Retail Crime Steering Group, published nearly 10 months after the response to the call for evidence, amounts to eight A4 pages of highly general advice followed by 10 pages of example statements and reports. While elements such as the short de-escalation training video and links to tool kits and guidance provided by the Information Commissioner's Office are certainly useful, we feel these resources reflect a distinct lack of urgency on the part of Government to address the scale of problem. (Paragraph 118)
28. *We recommend that the Government's resources, which would be particularly beneficial for independent shops and small businesses, additionally include specific 'tool kit' style material to support all employers to take the following actions:*
- *An internal communication campaign to encourage staff to report all incidents of violence and abuse;*
  - *Guidance and templates for employers on creating internal and external reporting processes which are as simple, accessible and quick as possible;*
  - *Guidance on procedures for banning repeat offenders from stores;*
  - *Further online training resources for retail workers on managing conflict and dealing with difficult situations; and*

- *Guidance for employers on how to assess the vulnerabilities of their shop and suggestions for appropriate measures such as changing store layout, erecting protective barriers or adding signage to manage specific risks.* (Paragraph 118)
29. We also encourage large national retailers to play a leading role in local business partnerships, working with local councils and the police to encourage and include small independent high street retailers in security measures including CCTV or local communication networks for sharing intelligence on incidents or repeat offenders. We welcome the further rounds of the Safer Streets Fund which should also be used to help improve safety and support for staff working in small and independent retailers. *We recommend that local authorities work with local retailers and with the police to identify smaller high streets and areas with many small independent shops which have less capacity to tackle security issues and draw up plans including bids to the Safer Streets Fund to support shopworkers in those areas.* (Paragraph 119)

### The link between addiction and prolific offending

30. The Government has acknowledged that drugs play a significant role in a large number of crimes and with prolific offending in particular. Yet, one year on from the Government's response to the call for evidence on violence and abuse toward shop staff, work to develop the evidence base regarding the role of drugs and alcohol in retail crime is only just beginning. We welcome the work the Government is undertaking to address drug addiction via the five ADDER programmes. However, the Minister has admitted that it will be years before these programmes could be rolled-out at a national level. This intervention lacks urgency and fails to address the gravity of the escalating violence and abuse faced by Britain's retail workers on a daily basis. Retail workers need action now to break the escalating cycle of abuse. (Paragraph 131)
31. We welcome the new funding the Home Office will be providing for drug treatment. However, it is only for one year, when sustainable increased funding is needed for ongoing services. *We recommend that the Government makes central funding available for rehabilitation programmes such as the Offender2Rehab model adopted in Birmingham. We further recommend that until national drug rehabilitation programmes have been comprehensively rolled out, the Government should provide additional ring fenced funding, under the Police and Crime Act 2002, to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to work with local councils to restore drug rehabilitation services in their local area.* (Paragraph 132)

### The legal framework

32. The everyday experiences of retail workers show that the current framework is too often failing to protect them from abuse, provide justice for victims or a deterrent for offenders. With prosecution rates vanishingly small, the existence of an aggravating factor in the sentencing guidelines is not sufficient to deal with the scale of the challenge. (Paragraph 143)
33. Retail workers, by the very nature of their employment, are placed at an increased risk of violence and abuse compared to members of the general public. They are

vulnerable to repeat offenders who are able to return time and again to stores, compounding abuse and leaving them feeling trapped and fearful in their place of work. The uniquely local nature of their employment means that retail workers face the terrifying prospect of offenders following them home or extending abuse into other parts of their lives in the local community. (Paragraph 150)

34. Retail workers are responsible for enforcing laws with regard to age-restricted sales and restricted goods such as medicines or weapons. It is well established that conflict over these types of sales is a key trigger for violence and abuse. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen retail workers take on even more responsibility, enforcing Government legislation on social distancing and mask wearing, while putting their lives at risk working in public facing roles on the Covid frontline. Other categories of workers, such as emergency workers and customs officers, have rightly been afforded extra protection by the law in recognition of the service they provide to the public and the responsibility placed upon them by Parliament. We believe that retail workers must also be recognised, and that offences against them must be treated with additional seriousness, with extra protection from the law. (Paragraph 151)
35. *We believe there is a strong case for extra protection in law for retail workers through a specific offence. The Government should consult urgently on the scope of the offence, recognising the particular pressure on those in different occupations who are asked to enforce the law.* (Paragraph 152)
36. Violence and abuse towards retail workers is a complex and multi-faceted issue and any meaningful solution will involve a package of measures from Government, the police, employers, retail workers and the public. Legislation can only ever be one part of the picture. However, we believe that the introduction of a new standalone statutory offence would play an instrumental role in resetting expectations among the public, retail workers and the police. It would send a clear, powerful, and long overdue message that abuse and violence towards retail workers will not be tolerated. (Paragraph 162)
37. Early data following the introduction of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 suggests that the creation of a new offence is having a positive impact on prosecution rates for that crime. We note that even though it was possible previously to prosecute assaults on emergency workers using other offences such as common assault, in practice the fact of creating a distinct offence appears to have been effective in getting the police, courts and agencies to take incidents and assaults against emergency workers much more seriously and to make it simpler to bring them before the courts. Retail workers deserve the same kind of focus to protect them from growing violence and abuse. (Paragraph 163)
38. The patchwork of existing offences for prosecuting incidents of violence and abuse against individuals is not effective enough to address the escalating scale and nature of offences committed in the retail setting. Introducing a new statutory offence would bring the following benefits:

- Communicate to the police, retail workers, their employers and the wider public that the Government takes this issue seriously and that violence and abuse towards retail workers is unacceptable and cannot be carried out with impunity.
  - Improve the police's ability to collect data on reported incidents, rates of arrest and prosecutions for assaults on shop workers, so that the issue does not get lost among a wider consideration of retail or business crime.
  - Increase reporting of incidents by retail workers which would in turn ensure the Government has a clearer understanding about the scale of the problem and type of offenders involved. (Paragraph 164)
39. The text of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act, having undergone lengthy consultation and close scrutiny, provides a potential starting point. *As we have previously recommended, the Government should consult urgently on the scope of a new standalone offence. A clear message must be sent that nobody should feel unsafe at work.* (Paragraph 165)

## Annex: Summary of Government actions in response to the call for evidence on violence and abuse towards shop staff

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1. The Government will work closely with members of the National Retail Crime Steering Group to further develop the evidence base regarding the role drugs, as well as alcohol and other factors, play in driving violence and abuse towards shop workers (paragraph 45).
2. The Government will work closely with members of the NRCSG over the coming year to better understand the impact of the work they do to address the needs of prolific offenders and, if successful, how it may be replicated elsewhere in the country (paragraph 47).
3. Government will work with the NRCSG to develop communications for both employees and employers to make clear that violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated. We will take account of best practice from across different sectors and make use of the NRCSG's membership to develop and test messaging before supporting any national roll-out (paragraph 49).
4. The Government, working with members of the NRCSG, will develop a best practice guide that aims to support staff in reporting these crimes when they occur to ensure that a suitable response can be delivered (paragraph 50).
5. The Government will work with the NRCSG and the National Business Crime Centre to look at barriers to effective data sharing between businesses and the police to ensure that information can be used to better understand the problem, including premises selling alcohol not feeling disadvantaged, particularly in relation to tracking prolific offenders (paragraph 51).
6. The Government will work with the NRCSG to understand what may be discouraging business from reporting crimes (paragraph 52).
7. The Crime and Policing Minister will write to all PCCs and Chief Constables highlighting the issue of violence and abuse towards shop staff and asking them to continue to work closely with local businesses to understand the scale of the issue locally and to develop suitable responses to it (paragraph 55).
8. The Crime and Policing Minister will write to PCCs and Chief Constables setting out that the theft of goods valued up to £200 from a shop should be prosecuted as a criminal offence and therefore should not constrain the ability of the police to arrest or prosecute someone in the way they feel is most appropriate (paragraph 58)
9. The Government will also look at the issue of the effectiveness of s176 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing 2014 Act as part of the post-legislative scrutiny of the Act (paragraph 59).
10. The Government will introduce legislation for community penalties that offer an

appropriate level of punishment, so that the public can have confidence in them, while tackling the underlying drivers of offending and addressing issues such as mental health or drug or alcohol addiction (paragraph 61).

11. The Government intends to publish a White Paper ahead of sentencing legislation, which will include proposals for tougher community sentences (paragraph 62).

12. The Crime and Policing Minister will write to all Chief Constables reminding them of the need for their officers to provide victims the chance to use either or both these impact statements (paragraph 64).

13. The Government will consider legislating to ensure that where agencies have failed to provide victims with their entitlements, they are held to account. The law will also strengthen the powers of the Victims' Commissioner, already a powerful voice for victims (paragraph 66).<sup>299</sup>



## Formal minutes

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**Tuesday, 22 June 2021**

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper, in the Chair

Dehenna Davison	Dame Diana Johnson
Ruth Edwards	Tim Loughton
Laura Farris	Stuart C. McDonald
Simon Fell	

Draft Report (*Violence and abuse towards retail workers*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 165 read and agreed to.

Annex and Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 23 June.]

# Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Wednesday 14 April 2021

**Joanne Cairns**, Head of Research and Economics, Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW); **James Lowman**, Chief Executive, ACS (The Association of Convenience Stores)

[Q1–29](#)

**Iona Blake**, Security and Incident Manager, Boots UK; **Paul Gerrard**, Campaigns and Public Affairs Director, The Co-op; **Tom Ironside**, Director, Business and Regulation, British Retail Consortium (BRC)

[Q30–46](#)

## Wednesday 28 April 2021

**Amanda Blakeman**, Deputy Chief Constable, Gwent Police; **Ian Dyson QPM**, Commissioner, City of London Police; **Patrick Holdaway**, Chief Inspector, Hampshire Constabulary; **David Jamieson**, Commissioner, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner

[Q47–109](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

VTR numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Anonymous, ([VTR0008](#))
- 2 Anonymous, ([VTR0017](#))
- 3 Anonymous, ([VTR0018](#))
- 4 Anonymous, ([VTR0025](#))
- 5 Anonymous, ([VTR0002](#))
- 6 Association of Convenience Stores ([VTR0021](#))
- 7 Association of Police and Crime Commissioners ([VTR0032](#))
- 8 Booksellers Association ([VTR0023](#))
- 9 Boots UK ([VTR0026](#))
- 10 British Retail Consortium (BRC) ([VTR0015](#))
- 11 Central England Co-operative ([VTR0014](#))
- 12 Co-op Group ([VTR0027](#))
- 13 Dixons Carphone ([VTR0012](#))
- 14 Dunelm Soft Furnishings ([VTR0001](#))
- 15 Home Office ([VTR0035](#))
- 16 Institute of Customer Service ([VTR0022](#))
- 17 Jamieson, David (Police and Crime Commissioner, West Midlands Police) ([VTR0031](#))
- 18 John Lewis Partnership ([VTR0030](#))
- 19 Marks & Spencer ([VTR0029](#))
- 20 NFRN ([VTR0020](#))
- 21 National Association of Business Crime Partnerships ([VTR0036](#))
- 22 Nationwide Building Society ([VTR0024](#))
- 23 Pets at Home Plc ([VTR0009](#))
- 24 Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly ([VTR0034](#))
- 25 Sainsbury's ([VTR0019](#))
- 26 Tesco PLC ([VTR0033](#))
- 27 Transform Justice ([VTR0011](#))
- 28 UK Finance ([VTR0037](#))
- 29 Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw) ([VTR0016](#))
- 30 Wickes ([VTR0010](#))
- 31 Wm Morrison PLC ([VTR0028](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (Coronavirus): Policing	HC 232
2nd	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (Coronavirus): domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home	HC 321
3rd	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (coronavirus): immigration and visas	HC 362
4th	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (Coronavirus): institutional accommodation	HC 562
5th	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): management of the borders	HC 563
6th	Appointment of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration	HC 1024
1st Special Report	Serious Youth Violence: Government Response to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–2019	HC 57
2nd Special Report	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19 (coronavirus): domestic abuse and risks of harm: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 661
3rd Special Report	Home Office preparedness for Covid-19: coronavirus: policing: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 660
4th Special Report	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): immigration and visas: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 909
5th Special Report	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): institutional accommodation: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 973
6th Special Report	Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (coronavirus): management of the borders: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 974