The BRC is the trade association for UK retailers, representing around 70% of the UK retail industry by turnover. Together, our members employ over 1.5 million colleagues. BRC’s purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future.

Retail is an exciting, dynamic and diverse industry. It represents 5.2% of the UK’s economy and contributes £99.5 billion GVA. It is the largest private sector employer in the country, providing around three million jobs, and supports the government’s levelling up agenda, offering well paid jobs and career progression in all parts of the UK. The industry is at the forefront of digital retailing globally, and is an integral part of communities the length and breadth of the country.

Retail has been transforming, with new technologies and changing consumer shopping behaviour forcing businesses to adapt the way they operate. The nature of retail jobs is also changing. Between Q1 2016 and Q4 2019, retail experienced an increase in productivity of 11.4%, while productivity in the UK economy improved by 1%. Covid-19 has accelerated this transformation.
THE BRC CRIME SURVEY IS ABOUT THE STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE OF THOSE BUSINESSES AS THEY FACE UP TO THE IMPACT OF THE COST OF CRIME BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY IT IS ABOUT THE WELFARE OF THOSE EMPLOYEES WHO FACE EVER MORE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE – EVEN ONLINE.

Whether retailers are online, offline or omnichannel; in town or out of town; in retail centres or local high streets; small stores or larger stores – all suffer the effects of crime one way or another.

This year’s crime survey is published slightly later than usual due to the pandemic and a resulting delay in gathering the statistics. It covers the period from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 and is based on responses from a group of members representing around one fifth of turnover and employment in the industry. We make no apologies for once again placing a heavy emphasis on violence and abuse towards retail staff, which continues to grow – but there are also key facts on the growing cost of customer theft and cyber-crime, for example.

The survey represents the single largest and most reliable barometer of the state of play for crime affecting retail.
In February 2020, the Prime Minister announced, “we should not tolerate crimes of violence against shopworkers”. Yet almost a year down the line, little progress has been made: all the while, hardworking shopworkers suffer. This survey should serve as a call to action for politicians, police and officials, to turn these words into action, and tackle the scourge of retail crime head on.

Five months later, the Home Secretary echoed this sentiment, saying “I will not tolerate violence and abuse against any shopworker”. Yet almost a year down the line, little progress has been made: all the while, hardworking shopworkers suffer. This survey should serve as a call to action for politicians, police and officials, to turn these words into action, and tackle the scourge of retail crime head on.

Too often, retail workers have faced threats, abuse and assault as they go about their jobs. While not measured in this year’s survey, our members report that this has only got worse since the onset of the pandemic. No one should have to face violence or threats in the workplace. Those colleagues who are attacked at work are not mere crime statistics, they are our parents, our partners, our children, who needlessly suffer, just for doing their job.

The scale of the problem is huge. The frequency of violence and abuse rose from 424 incidents to 455 incidents, every single day. That’s over 150,000 incidents of abuse and violence every year. Our Shopworkers’ Protection Pledge, signed by over 50 cross-party MPs, called for politicians to stand with retail workers to support legislation to better protect them. That is why we have called for a standalone offence of assaulting a shopworker, deterring would-be criminals, and providing our colleagues with the protections they need. It has happened in Scotland – and now the Government must follow their lead in England.

But violence isn’t the only challenge retailers and their staff face. The cost of crime rose to a record £1.3bn in 2019/20, of which customer theft accounted for £935m. Retailers are not standing idly by, having spent over £1.1bn on fighting crime. And this brings the total cost to retailers to almost £2.5bn. These are not victimless crimes. This represents money which could otherwise be used to improve facilities, raise wages, and improve the offer to consumers.

As an industry, we have not stood still and left it to others – but we need the Government, Parliament and the police to play their part in overcoming these issues. In that spirit, we have not only called for a new law to protect shopworkers and responded to key Government consultations and Select Committee inquiries, but we have also worked with partners to produce materials to promote a better understanding of the issue among customers; issue among customers; for example we worked with the Suzy Lampugh Trust on training for shopworkers on how to de-escalate a potentially violent situation.

Above all we believe that a partnership approach with police, unions, and retailers is the only way to secure a better future for retail employees and businesses. We will continue to play our part – now Government and the police need to do the same. On behalf of all those who work in retail; their families and their communities, there is one simple message: doing nothing is not an option.

Foreword by Helen Dickinson, Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium

Topline Results

- **Violent or Abusive Incidents a Day**: 455
- **Total Loss to Crime**: £1.3 BN
- **Loss to Customer Theft**: £1 BN
- **Total Cost to Retail**: £2.5 BN
- **Fair or Good Police Response**: 40%
- **Cyber Attacks Increase Over 50% on Last Year**
- **Prosecutions of Violence or Abuse**: 6%
HEADLINES

THE COST OF RETAIL CRIME

The overall cost of crime, taking into account both losses and crime prevention costs for retail, has risen year on year and now stands at £2.5 billion, up from £2.2 billion last year. This includes crime prevention spending of £1.2 billion and losses to crime of £1.3 billion, of which customer theft makes up £935 million.

Violence and abuse against staff is up at 455 incidents a day, this includes 114 incidents of violence each day. If we were to take a 9 hour shopping day as typical that makes over 50 incidents an hour or almost one a minute. This includes 11 violent incidents every hour or roughly one every 5 minutes. The overall figure last year was 424 incidents a day - with the increase mainly attributable to an increase in abuse.

Violence and abuse against staff continues to lead the way as the single most important issue for retailers with nearly nine in ten placing it in the top three issues and seven in ten as the top issue. This was followed by customer theft nominated by eight in ten as a top three issue.

Prosecutions remain stubbornly low. Only 6% (6 in 100) of incidents of violence and abuse ended in prosecution and only 3% were dealt with as aggravated.

In other words, in 94 out of 100 cases, the employee was let down by the system - that is over 420 victims each day ignored.

Views of the police response to retail crime overall have improved, with 40% now ranking it as fair or good, up from 30% last year and 20% the year before. Nonetheless, this is well below the 76% positive response received in 2013-14.

Just under 40% of retailers regard cyber attacks as a top three issue. Since 2017 nobody has reported a decrease in attacks and over the last year 54% reported an increase. Over 10% of the budget for crime prevention (£160 million) was spent on cyber security.

THE BRC RESPONSE

The BRC approach to dealing with the issues raised in the survey is outlined in the individual sections. Some of the key approaches include:

- Co-chaired the National Retail Steering Group with the Home Office to produce action focused proposals on the need to report all crime; support victims; communicate with the public; and share data;
- Produced an animation for shop workers with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust on how to de-escalate a potentially violent situation;
- Produced a cyber-security toolkit with the NCSC targeted to non-experts who need to take responsibility on Boards or as managers for tackling cyber criminals;
- Secured an Inquiry into violence and abuse of retail staff by the Home Affairs Select Committee;
- Worked with the ICO to strengthen data security;
- Responded to the Call for Evidence on abuse and violence and Sentencing Guidelines;
- Worked with USDAW and others on a Shopkind campaign;
- Worked with the Home Office as part of the Joint Fraud Taskforce.
WE HAVE CALLED FOR

- Legislation for a separate offence for a crime of violence or abuse against a shopworker in England as in Scotland – to improve the prosecution and reporting of such crimes especially when shopworkers are enforcing the law e.g. age restricted sales checks
- A better understanding of the use of shoplifting by organised crime and drug and alcohol addicts – with an appropriate response both on actual incidents and on the causes
- MPs to turn their pledges to fight retail crime into legislative action
- Improved Guidelines on Sentencing for crimes of violence and abuse from the Sentencing Council
- Retail crime to form a key plank in Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Strategies
- Better statistics from improved reporting and ensuring all retail crime to be recorded as such
- Extension of digital age verification to alcohol sales to bring them into line with other products
- Improved police response
- Allocation of some of the time of extra officers to retail crime
- An inquiry into the approach by the police to retail crime
- Clear guidelines from the ICO on data sharing about criminals and crime within the confines of GDPR
- Greater recognition by the police that shop theft is a crime as much as any other – it should not be regarded as part of the cost of retailing
- Prosecutions to rise from the current 6% for violence and abuse and more prosecutions for all retail crime including offences below £200 as the best deterrent
- Greater prosecution of retail violence as aggravated offences so it goes beyond the current 3%
- Better sharing of best practice among forces
- A single online reporting tool to boost reporting
The overall cost of crime – taking both actual incidents and crime prevention costs into account – has risen to nearly £2.5 billion from £2.2 billion last year and up from nearly £1.7 billion in 2016-17.

The cost to retail of criminal incidents has risen to over £1 billion for the first time - from just over £0.7 billion in 2016-17 to nearly £1.3 billion in 2019-20.

£935 million was lost to customer theft in the latest year representing over 70% of the total cost and a massive 96% of actual incidents. Customer theft has increased year on year since 2016-17.

Employee theft was the second highest in terms of cost at nearly £285 million – but it represented very few actual incidents.

Robbery and burglary taken together saw a reduction to £25 million.

Crime prevention spending was relatively static at almost £1.2 billion. Of this 13.5% (just over £160 million) was spent on cyber crime prevention.
Retail crime is not only a cost to retailers, but also to consumers and employees.

It reduces the capacity to bear down further on prices, to improve terms and conditions for staff, to invest in skills, to improve the overall customer experience both in revamped stores and online and to increase efficiency and boost innovation both in the back office and for customers.

Retailers are reluctant to undermine the overall customer experience by over policing their premises, but they cannot turn a blind eye to the growing incidence of customer theft.

The increase in such theft, particularly in terms of the number of incidents, is significant in that challenging customers while preventing theft is one of the major contributors to violence and abuse towards shop workers. It may both have contributed to an increase in such violence and abuse while at the same time produced a reluctance by shop staff to approach apparent shoplifters.

It may also be explained by improved detection through improvements to CCTV; a better understanding of the information that can be shared with other retailers and the police under data protection and privacy rules; and tagging of goods of a lower value, including food items. There may even be a link to the decline in the use of free plastic bags and receipts resulting in a retailer being less able to determine whether goods have been stolen or purchased elsewhere, while walk-offs from self-service tills both intentional and unwittingly when a customer believes their transaction has been approved, may also contribute if classified by a retailer as theft.

A perceived lack of police response to low-level theft, the perception by some that shop theft is not criminal activity and even the lack of police response to crime of violence associated with theft (our survey shows crimes of abuse and violence are only prosecuted 6% of the time) might encourage criminals to turn to shop lifting as easy pickings. It has also led retailers not reporting crime, believing it is a waste of time as the evidence may not be sufficient by the time the police arrive.

This includes the often mistaken perception that theft under £200 is not of interest to the police following the changes to legislation. A significant proportion of shoplifters are repeat offenders who are willing to take the risk because they believe they will not be prosecuted. Even if they are, the sentence will be insignificant however often they appear in court.

Theft by organised gangs to make a profit by selling goods online, or to fuel drug and alcohol addiction is also an issue. There is evidence that an increasing number of addicts are turning to retail crime to support their habit.

The rise in employee theft year on year – with dramatic rises in 2018-19 and again in 2019-20 is difficult to explain, though the small percentage number of incidents suggests that there may be some higher value cases compared with customer theft.

The increase in theft by others may reflect a rise in the use of agency workers.

Overall cost of crime has risen to nearly £2.5 billion

2.5bn

from £2.2 billion last year and up from nearly £1.7 billion in 2016-17.
**BRC APPROACH**

**TO COMBAT THIS SCOURGE, THE BRC CONTINUES TO URGE A RANGE OF ACTIONS ON POLICE AND THE INDUSTRY:**

We promote a better understanding of the potential to legally share information and effective CCTV, while respecting the rights of individual customers to privacy under the protections offered by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Too often retailers take an unnecessarily limited view of the ability to share data under GDPR rules. Indeed the implementation of GDPR with its heavy fines may have produced a reluctance to share data and it may explain some of the increase in customer theft.

We continue to encourage the Information Commissioner’s Office to ignore some of the suggestions by the European Data Protection Board on the use of CCTV and to be clear about information that can be shared externally. CCTV can be very effective while respecting the privacy and rights GDPR guarantees.

We welcome police encouragement to report all crime and would look to the police to simplify and standardise the reporting system across all forces so that it can be accomplished through a one step system online.

This is important for a better understanding of retail crime which may be underestimated when it is recorded simply as theft without any reference to the retail context. It is also important to enable the police to better target their resources and to develop an effective strategy to combat particularly bad areas.

In this context we are urging that some of the working hours of the extra 20,000 police should be specifically set aside to deal with retail crime.

Police and Crime Commissioners also have a role to play by including retail crime as a specific target in their overall strategies. So far, very few have made this a specific priority.

The Home Office should fully fund a review of retail crime policing with a view to identifying and spreading good practice. In this context the National Business Crime Partnership as well as local partnerships can and do have a significant role in exchanging information on best practice and current issues.

The Inspectorate should focus more on the success or otherwise of forces in combatting crime and less on headcount and financial issues.

**“POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONERS ALSO HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY BY INCLUDING RETAIL CRIME AS A SPECIFIC TARGET IN THEIR OVERALL STRATEGIES.”**

The police should not ignore retail crime under £200 in value - and indeed should make it clear that they do not do so. With repeat offenders, there can be an attraction in committing multiple offences just under this limit to avoid prosecution. We are encouraged that police forces do not subscribe to a policy of non-prosecution under this limit and would encourage them to demonstrate this clearly in word and deed.

County lines and their use by organised gangs should not be an excuse for inaction - and if the law or structure of policing needs to be reviewed or some retail theft dealt with as part of an approach to serious organised crime, then that needs to be assessed and actioned.

Sentencing is also an issue. We earlier referred to the Review of Sentencing Guidelines where violence or abuse are involved. We would also urge that the effectiveness, scope and targeting of community sentences should be reviewed to ensure they are not seen as a soft option and we welcome the opportunity presented by the Sentencing Bill to ensure that sentences are appropriate and dissuasive.

Finally, dealing with retail crime is not just a policing issue but a community issue. The underlying causes of such crime need to be addressed, from alcohol and drug addiction to the grooming of underage children to undertake the theft and other social issues.
More prosecutions

Stiffer sentences

No low value theft exemptions

Official retail crime review

Better guidance on data sharing

PCCS strategy for retail crime

Better statistics

Simplified reporting

Cost of crime to business

Crime prevention spending
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT THREATS TO RETAIL

THE HEADLINES

 Violence against staff is by far the most significant threat over the next two years

 7 out of 10 retailers place it number 1 in their ranking of threats, with nearly 90% placing it in the top 3

Theft by customers is a close second with just over 80% placing it in the top 3

Fraud, cyber attacks, burglary and robbery taken together – are all nominated by around 40% - just half of customer theft and violence

THE SURVEY FINDINGS

» When asked about the three most significant threats for their business over the next two years the vast majority of retailers nominated violence against staff as the number one issue. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) placed this as their top threat – with an overwhelming 88% placing it in the top 3.

» Cyber attacks, fraud, and customer theft were the only other threats nominated as top of the list – but they were all way down at 13% for customer theft and cyber attacks and just 6% for fraud.

» Overall, taking into account the top three issues, customer theft rose to 81%, placing it close behind the overall 88% for violence as an overall top 3 issue.

» Cyber attacks and data theft combined; fraud; and burglary and theft combined were the other main contenders in the top 3 at 44%.

CUSTOMER THEFT ROSE TO
81%
Clearly for retailers, employee welfare comes above any monetary consideration when thinking about the key threat to their business over the next two years.

Given the incidence of violent and abusive attacks on employees at 455 a day, and the very small number of prosecutions at just six out of every 100 incidents, this concern is not surprising. It has been a consistent theme in our annual Crime Surveys.

It is equally not surprising that customer theft also appears close behind in the top three issues taken together. While it is a number one issue for only a handful of retailers, this mainly demonstrates the heavy emphasis on violence against employees as the issue. The rise in the cost of customer theft to nearly £1 billion for the first time and far in excess of any other cost (taken alongside positive perceptions of the police response standing at under 50%) cannot be set aside in overall thinking. This is confirmed by it being nominated in the top three issues by eight in ten retailers (81%) – in overall terms a close second to violence.

Given the move to online retailing, concerns over cyber security at just 38% as a threat might have been expected to be higher. Yet despite high fines for data theft under GDPR, only six in 100 had concerns. The figure is much lower than for customer theft. We note in the section on cyber security that attacks have risen year on year so this likely reflects a high confidence in data security and cyber security on the part of retailers rather than a false sense of security.

Given the move to online retailing, concerns over cyber security at just 38% as a threat might have been expected to be higher. Yet despite high fines for data theft under GDPR, only six in 100 had concerns. The figure is much lower than for customer theft. We note in the section on cyber security that attacks have risen year on year so this likely reflects a high confidence in data security and cyber security on the part of retailers rather than a false sense of security.

The key approach on customer theft involves a better police response so that the approval rating grows to well over 50% (currently only 40%).

It also requires a better understanding of the rules of data sharing within the framework of data protection; and effective but proportionate use of modern technology including CCTV and tagging of lower value goods.

For violence towards retail staff we want a standalone offence for the 455 crimes a day of abuse and violence against retail workers. We believe this would strengthen the police response; enable a better understanding of the scale of the problem through the collection of data against this specific offence; and would boost prosecutions from a shocking six in 100. Furthermore, separate action in the Sentencing Council Guidelines to reflect such a standalone offence would strengthen the will to prosecute and sentence these crimes as aggravated offences well beyond the three in 100 today; offences well beyond the 3 in 100 today.
9 out of 10 retailers say violence and abuse is the most significant threat to retail.

Over 110 incidents a day with violence – about one every five minutes during normal opening hours.

455 incidents of violence and abuse a day – nearly one every minute of a typical nine hour shopping day.

Violence and abuse up from 424 incidents last year.

Only 6 in 100 incidents of violence and abuse prosecuted.

Over 9 out of 10 victims a day failed by the justice system.
THE SURVEY RESULTS

» Violence and abuse in 2019-20 stood at 455 incidents a day. That is over 165,000 a year - or one every 75 seconds if we take a typical trading day as 9 hours.

» Violence and abuse have grown year on year since 2016-17, rising from 350 daily incidents in 2016-17 to 455 in 2019-20.

» 45 incidents a day involved a weapon.

» The increase is almost entirely down to an increase in abuse – though compared with last year there were over 4,500 additional people attacked violently.

» Abuse has increased with 341 incidents a day in 2019-20 (over 120,000 a year) compared with 224 in 2016-17 – an increase of over 50% in 3 years. In other words, over 40,000 more workers have experienced abuse in 2019-20 than in 2016-17 and over 6,500 more than last year. Every 1.5 minutes during an average trading day in 2019-20 a shopworker somewhere was abused.

» Of all the incidents of violence and abuse only 54% ended up being reported to police and only 6% (6 in every 100) ended in prosecution. Around 155,000 a year were never prosecuted.

» Only 3% were prosecuted as an aggravated offence with the potential for a stiffer sentence.

THE SURVEY RESULTS

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST SHOPWORKERS HAS BEEN A MAJOR CONCERN FOR THE BRC AND ITS MEMBERS FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

The impact – and indeed concerns over the potential for an attack – affects not only retail workers who are attacked but also those who witness the attack, their families and customers of all ages who witness the violence or abuse.

Violence can take many forms – attack with an actual weapon (45 incidents a day in our survey), a threat to cough or spit or use a syringe, or a simple aggressive shove or push.

Likewise abuse takes many forms – ranging from patently illegal racial or sexual abuse, for example, to an aggressive altercation. It is possible that the recorded increase in abuse is related to a wider recognition that certain forms of abuse are illegal – but the failure to prosecute most incidents suggests that even abuse that is illegal is not pursued in the courts.

Separate research by a number of retailers shows 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.

COMMENTARY

Violence and abuse against shopworkers has been a major concern for the BRC and its members for several years.

Shopworkers are often in a vulnerable situation, sometimes alone in a store late at night or with only one other colleague, possibly quite young and in their first job, facing intimidation from someone potentially carrying a weapon and possibly suffering the effects of alcohol or drugs.

Nobody should have to deal with such incidents as part of their job - but all too often retail workers have come to see it as just that – part of the job. A retail worker must return to the scene day after day to do their job, always wondering if the incident may be repeated – even by the same person – and suffering stress as a result. In some cases, threats are made to follow the worker home or wait for when they leave the store to follow up on the original attack.

Two of the more common triggers for such attacks are:

- Stopping someone who is attempting to steal goods – and as can be seen elsewhere in the survey, customer theft has risen considerably – perhaps to fund an addiction or as a member of an organised gang

- Asking someone for their age ID to verify an age restricted sale – where failure to carry out the check can result in a criminal conviction for the employee while the perpetrator goes free
Against this background, it is disappointing that only 6% of cases ever reach the courts, and only 3% ever get prosecuted as aggravated offences. That is one reason for under-reporting with only 54% of cases reported to police in the first place. While sometimes lack of evidence may be the reason, failure to prosecute or take the time even to investigate properly leaves victims believing their experience does not matter to the authorities and leaves the perpetrators to strike again, sometimes in the same store in the same circumstances.

This is coupled with a perception that the police believe that theft under £200 is just part of the cost of doing business and that, even if prosecuted, the sentence will be relatively light. Some even appear to think that it is a problem for shops themselves to overcome rather than for any law enforcement.

Our own evidence from the survey is strongly supported by the submissions to the Government’s Call for Evidence on retail violence and abuse. Lack of police response; lack of prosecution; a perception in the media that low level crime would be ignored by police; the lack of police resources and numbers; a greater willingness by gangs and addicts to use violence in pursuit of a theft; general societal issues – all featured in the responses.

BRC Approach

FOR SOME YEARS THE BRC, ALONG WITH USDAW AND OTHERS, HAS CALLED FOR A SEPARATE STANDALONE OFFENCE OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE TOWARDS RETAIL WORKERS IN THE COURSE OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT.

Such a law has been introduced in Scotland since the Survey was completed and we presented evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee and asked them to examine the issue, which they have done.

To date the UK Government has resisted the proposal arguing that current laws on violence and abuse covering the general population, together with the potential for sentencing perpetrators with an aggravated offence, are sufficient. We reject that.

Our survey clearly shows that approach is not working. Only 6% of attacks ever result in prosecution and an even smaller handful of 3% in prosecution as an aggravated offence. Interestingly attacks resulting in injury represent 6% of all attacks. We do not have evidence as to whether these alone are prosecuted – but if that is the case all other attacks are ignored and even these are not prosecuted as aggravated offences. We also note that the introduction of a standalone offence for Emergency Workers has succeeded in ensuring such crimes are prosecuted. It would seem that even clearly illegal abuse for racial or sexual orientation is not being taken before the courts. Failure to prosecute means the victims do not ever get the opportunity to make a victim impact statement.

A standalone offence would also help to ensure that the true extent of the problem is understood by police and officials as statistics would be recorded against this offence rather than against general offences without mention of the retail connection. Failure to prosecute undermines confidence in the police which is reflected in the statistics on perceptions of the police response. While these have improved they still stand at less than 50% approval.

That could well be one of the reasons for the low level of reporting incidents – busy people cannot see the point of reporting an incident if there is a perception that nothing will happen as a result. Nevertheless, the BRC strongly believes that all crime, not least crimes of abuse and violence, should be reported. Without that reporting, police strategies and resources cannot be targeted effectively on the real problems in society. A simplified reporting mechanism through a single efficient online interface would also make a positive.
For similar reasons we have called for the Sentencing Council Guidelines to stress more strongly that offences against retail workers can be dealt with as aggravated. A separate standalone offence would improve the understanding of the courts that this is both possible and necessary if it resulted in a separate entry in the Guidelines on the same basis as for Emergency Workers. Even without a separate offence, we believe the Guidelines could be strengthened if the situation of retail – and other public facing – workers was separately and more specifically mentioned.

While pointing to greater police action as the key to better reporting – and the key to a reduction in such attacks through a greater certainty of being caught, prosecuted and sentenced – we also recognise that retailers themselves need to improve the level of reporting of these incidents. We also support campaigns directed at the wider community to act more considerately towards shop workers and to call out abuse.

The BRC supports improvements in CCTV and exchanges of data among retailers while respecting the rules on data protection and privacy. There can be a misunderstanding of what is allowed which the ICO should clarify.

Many incidents are related to age verification requirements for age restricted sales such as alcohol. We feel even more strongly that retail employees should have special protection when being required to enforce the law – and indeed being subject to a criminal record where they do not do so. Not even the police are in that situation – it is unique to retail workers.

Customers can become abusive and aggressive when asked for their ID in one shop but not another or if they know they are well above the minimum age for a purchase. Digital age verification seems to reduce the irritation because it seems that it is a machine rejecting a purchase rather than a shop assistant. A high proportion of these incidents is for the sale of alcohol, so it is disappointing that the Home Office has failed to act on using age verification and age estimation for the sale of alcohol when it is accepted for all other sales of such goods including knives.

With some of this technology, British businesses such as are world leaders and given the current objective of promoting the UK as a digital leader there is a need for words and actions to be aligned. Likewise, we have long called for effective standards to be recognised by the Government so that retailers and others know which products meet the necessary tests – this is another area of Government delay.

Subsequent to the period covered by the Survey, the BRC has also worked with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to produce de-escalation training for use by all retail staff and has engaged actively with the Home Office by co-chairing the National Retail Crime Steering Group which has focused on responding to retail violence through better reporting; removing data barriers; communicating with the public; and supporting victims. All of these reflect BRC policy proposals from earlier years.

Other more detailed policies that the Government should adopt include:

- Set up a fund for innovative solutions for tackling violence in the retail sector
- Include retail crime as a strategic policing priority with appropriate resourcing and prioritisation
- A Home Office led strategic review of best practice for retail partnerships
- A single online reporting tool
- A Review of retail violence by the Police Inspectorate
- Using the College of Policing to improve understanding of retail crimes of violence
- Better recording of retail crimes of violence
- Review of out of court disposals
- Removal of reports of abuse and violence as a reason to reject a licence renewal
- Increased penalties and sentences
- Police and Crime Commissioners to make provision for retail violence in their Police and Crime Plans, making it a priority in their strategy

“Customers can become abusive and aggressive when asked for their ID in one shop but not another or if they know they are well above the minimum age for a purchase.”
1. SEPARATE STANDALONE OFFENCE
2. BETTER GATHERING OF STATISTICS
3. ACCEPTANCE OF DIGITAL AGE VERIFICATION FOR ALCOHOL SALES
4. BETTER SENTENCING GUIDELINES
5. MORE PROSECUTIONS AND STIFTER SENTENCES

![Graph showing Violence & Abuse per 1000 Workers]

- 2016-17
- 2017-18
- 2018-19
- 2019-20

- Violence
- Abuse
THE SURVEY FINDINGS

» 40% of retailers rated the police response positively as good or fair with 60% rating it poor or very poor.

» 13% of retailers rated the police response as good with 27% saying it was fair. While this means the majority rated it as poor or very poor, this showed an increase in satisfaction from last year when only 30% were positive.

» While overall negative views were 60%, only 14% rated the response as very poor.

» There has been a gradual increase in satisfaction following a big drop to 20% positive satisfaction in 2017-18 when 80% rated it poor or very poor.

» The last time anyone gave an excellent rating was in 2012-13 when the overall positive response was 75% including 8% excellent. Figures then declined, hitting their lowest point in 2017-18.
A good police response to tackling and responding to retail crime is vital not only in itself but because:

- It encourages reporting by retailers which is currently as low as 54% in the case of crimes of violence and abuse.
- It provides the opportunity for victim support statements when crimes of violence or abuse are prosecuted.
- It is the most effective deterrent.
- It facilitates a more accurate collection of statistics and data by the police themselves.
- It enables police forces to prioritise their activities and resources more in line with the actual needs of communities based on their own understanding of crimes in any given area or community.

It is encouraging to see a marked improvement in the perception of the police response, even if it has not yet reached a majority view. However, the fact that with 60% still in negative territory, far more needs to be done.

The collapse in confidence in 2017-18 may reflect the jump in the costs of crime in 2017-18 of over 27%. However, this was below the 30% increase seen this year. Since then, there has been a commitment to provide 20,000 extra police officers which may have improved perceptions of the police response.

Perceptions of the police response in recent years may also reflect the response to issues that retailers see as the biggest threat - violence and abuse against retail staff and customer theft. Theft by customers is the biggest single source of loss at nearly £1 billion and accounts for over 95% of the incidents, yet it is often perceived as a matter for retailers themselves to deal with rather than the police, not least where the theft is of low value and not seen as related to wider issues of gangs or addiction, as is often the case.

Similarly with violence and abuse against staff, the number one issue for retailers by far, with only 6% of cases leading to prosecution, the perception of the police response is likely to be low.

At the same time, it is these sort of incidents (rather than fraud or cyber security, which require specialist responses both from the police and others) that are viewed as a local policing responsibility and shape public and retail perceptions of the police.

We continue to co-chair the National Retail Crime Steering Group with the Home Office to emphasise the importance of the police response and to identify and solve issues that undermine an effective response, including reporting systems, and data sharing.

For example, Police and Crime Commissioners should include a specific section on retail crime in their strategies – few currently do so. With the commitment of 20,000 extra police officers, some of their efforts should be specifically allocated to retail crime.

It is only by ensuring incidents are clearly recorded as retail crime, rather than general theft or aggressive behaviour as so many seem to be, that a clear and accurate picture can be obtained. Our proposal for a standalone offence for violence or aggression towards retail staff would make an important contribution to assist accurate recording in that area.

The BRC also promotes exchanges on best practice at a local level between police and retailers through helping to promote the exchange of successful practices nationwide.
Increased attacks and breaches for 54% of retailers.

Ransomware and malware have the highest increases.

Increase every year since 2015.


Cyber attacks top 3 issue for 40%.
The Survey Results

- Over half of retailers (54%) noted an increase in attacks and threats compared with the last year. This follows a pattern of increases year-on-year since 2015.
- For 46% of retailers, attacks and threats stayed the same and there has been no decrease for anyone since 2016.
- Ransomware was seen as the highest threat facing their business by over 70% of retailers with nobody seeing it as a low threat. Malware was close behind with 70% also seeing that as a high risk and only 7% as a low risk.
- Theft of data was seen as a high or medium threat by 86%. This likely reflects the introduction of the GDPR with its potential for very high fines for a breach, with phishing, whaling, credential stuffing and web app-based threats close behind.
- Asked the most significant causes of concern in retail crime over the next three years, 38% of retailers nominated cyber security, with 13% suggesting it was their highest concern, double that for fraud.
- Spending on cyber security at £160 million was slightly down on last year but still represented 13.5% of retail spending on crime prevention.

Commentary

The importance of cyber security for retail, as for other sectors, will only grow as a result of digitisation, remote working, online retailing, digital marketing and advertising all of which require retention of considerable amounts of personal data.

Online retailing - not only by pureplay retailers but also by the majority of wider retailers – has grown immensely, both in response to consumer demand and more recently since the survey was completed of necessity in the pandemic lockdowns. Indeed, it is likely that the importance of cyber security as a prominent threat to a retailer will have grown and will continue to grow. Even businesses without an online presence often have considerable potential for cyber threats to their supply chains and their online records.

It is also widely recognised that small businesses can not only be under threat themselves but can be the entry point for cyber criminals to larger businesses who they supply, for example.

The threat levels of different types of attack have changed over time. While ransomware and malware are currently at the top, that was the case for phishing and theft of data in previous years, reflecting the breaches and attacks at the time.

BRC Approach

The common view is that it is not whether a business will be subject to an attack but when.

The first step to dealing with the problem is recognition of its growing existence and the need for responsibility for devising a strategy and action programme to combat any threat should be at the highest level of any business.

The BRC is committed to working with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) to alert all retailers to the potential cost, both monetary and reputational, of a cyber breach and involvement at the highest levels in cyber security issues. Having a plan for when an attack happens is vital – once it has happened it is too late.

To that end we have worked with the NCSC to produce a cyber security toolkit aimed at Board level directors and those in smaller companies with responsibility for cyber security. We believe that it is not only important for professional experts to understand the issues – and in their case devise security walls – but that there should be a broad understanding by Boards and those responsible of the issues so that appropriate resources can be allocated to building and maintaining defences. We will continue to work with the NCSC as threats grow and change – ideally to provide early warning of emerging trends.
1. RECOGNITION OF THREAT

2. EFFECTIVE PREPARATION

3. BUY IN FROM BOARD AND MANAGERS

4. SECURE BY DESIGN

5. COLLABORATION WITH NCSC

---

**BLACK HAT HACKER**
A computer hacker who breaks into an information system or digital network with the purpose of inflicting malicious intent.

**DATA BREACH**
The ICO defines a personal data breach as “a breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, unauthorised disclosure of, or access to, personal data transmitted, stored or otherwise processed in connection with the provision of a public electronic communications service”.

**DENIAL OF SERVICE ATTACK (DOS)**
A method of taking a website out of action by overloading or ‘floodling’ the server.

**DOXING**
Discovering and publishing the identity of an internet user, obtained by tracing their digital footprint.

**HACTIVIST**
A combination of ‘hacker’ and ‘activist’, someone who uses computers and computer networks to promote a political agenda.

**LOCKED ACCOUNTS**
Where customers are (usually temporarily) unable to log into their accounts as a result of criminal activity on systems such as, for example, DOS attacks.

**MALWARE**
A program or malicious software that consists of programming, for example code or scripts, designed to disrupt the performance of PCs, laptops, handheld devices, etc.

**PHISHING**
A method of accessing valuable personal details, such as usernames and passwords, often through bogus communications such as emails, letters, instant messages or text messages.

**PORT SCANNING**
A technique employed to identify open ports and services on a network, potentially with a view to exploiting weaknesses illegally.

**PHARMING**
A method of deceiving an individual into ending up at a fake website, even though the correct URL has been entered.

**RANSOMWARE**
A type of malware that prevents the use of a system, either by locking the system’s screen or by locking the users’ files unless a ransom is paid.
**Social Engineering**
In a cyber security context, the general art of manipulating people online so they give up confidential information.

**Spear Phishing**
As per phishing, except that it is a directed attack against a specific target.

**Spoofing**
Masquerading as another individual or entity by falsifying data, thereby gaining an illegitimate advantage.

**Web Application Based Attacks**
For example SQL injection attacks (SQL injection is a code injection technique, used to attack data-driven applications, in which nefarious SQL statements are inserted into an entry field for execution (e.g. to dump the database contents to the attacker).

**Theft of Data**
Stealing computer-based information from an unknowing victim with the intent of compromising privacy or obtaining confidential information.

**Whaling**
A type of spear phishing (i.e. specifically directed) attack, such as an e-mail spoofing attempt, that targets senior members ('big fish') of a specific organization, seeking unauthorized access to confidential data.

---

### Key Organisations

**NCSC**
Established in October 2016, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) aims to be the authoritative voice on information security in the UK.

**NCCU**
The National Crime Agency’s National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) leads the UK law enforcement response to cyber-crime, including by coordinating the national response to the most serious threats.

**ICO**
The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) is the UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights. The organisation takes action to change the behaviour of organisations and individuals that collect, use and keep personal information.
The BRC’s purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future.

Retail is an exciting, dynamic and diverse industry which is going through a period of profound change. Technology is transforming how people shop; costs are increasing; and growth in consumer spending is slow.

The BRC is committed to ensuring the industry thrives through this period of transformation. We tell the story of retail, work with our members to drive positive change and use our expertise and influence to create an economic and policy environment that enables retail businesses to thrive and consumers to benefit.

Our membership comprises over 5,000 businesses delivering £180bn of retail sales and employing over one and half million employees.