



CRIME SURVEY

2024 REPORT



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THE BRC AND RETAIL



The BRC is the lead trade association for UK retail.

Our purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future.

Retail is the ‘everywhere economy’, a vital part of the socio-economic fabric of the UK.

The industry makes up 5% of the UK GDP and is the largest private sector employer, providing 3 million direct jobs and 2.7 million more in the supply chain. Retail has a presence in every village, town and city across the country.

Over 200 major retailers are members of the BRC, with thousands of smaller, independents represented by BRC’s trade association members. Together, these businesses operate across all retail channels and categories and deliver over £350 billion of retail sales per year.

We build the reputation of the retail industry, work with our members to drive change, develop exceptional retail leaders, and use our expertise to influence government policy so retail businesses thrive and consumers benefit. Our work helps retailers trade legally, safely, ethically, profitably and sustainably.

“Retail is the ‘everywhere economy’, a vital part of the socio-economic fabric of the UK.”

FOREWORD



Our 2024 Crime Survey lays bare the escalating crisis at the heart of our communities. A crisis that demands immediate attention and action.



Helen Dickinson OBE
Chief Executive of BRC

“Over the last decade our survey has shown a steady rise in violence and abuse - even the temporary drop after the pandemic was a rise on the last pre-pandemic figure and now we are back at the level of incidents we saw during the pandemic.

There has been a surge in violence and abuse, up from almost 870 cases per day, to a staggering 1,300. Shoplifting has also soared to unprecedented levels, with losses to retailers doubling in the last year to £1.8 billion. It is not just an issue of scale; retailers tell me how the nature of these thefts has changed. Thieves have become bolder and more aggressive, and the impact on retail workers is severe, extending far beyond the workplace, affecting their physical and emotional well-being.

The industry is understandably frustrated. While retailers have spent record sums on crime prevention to protect their colleagues, the response from government and law enforcement has been inadequate. In the face of overwhelming evidence and increasing demands for action, measures taken by government have so far have been woefully inadequate.

Retailers report police response as overwhelmingly poor. This inaction undermines the safety of retail colleagues, and effectively gives perpetrators a license to offend.

But, there is some hope. The debate around retail crime has begun to shift. The Government's Retail Crime Action Plan may help bring new focus to the police's response to retail crime. Recently, the Labour Party publicly supported our calls for a standalone offence for violence against retail workers. This law is desperately needed as a clear signal that such behaviour will not be tolerated. It would also improve visibility of all incidents of retail crime, allowing for better allocation of police resources to the issue.

Surely retail crime is an issue that all parties can get behind. A bipartisan approach could be a turning point in ensuring the safety and dignity of retail workers, paving the way for a more secure and respectful working environment for all.

We will continue to campaign for better protections for retail workers until the law is changed, and the police treat it with the seriousness it deserves. We hope the insights from our survey will help to prompt action that is so desperately needed to protect our colleagues.

THE BRC CRIME SURVEY



This crime survey covers the period from 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023. This was before the Retail Crime Action Plan was launched by the government and any positive impact of that plan in reducing the number of incidents or improving the police response would not be picked up until next year's survey. Although the period is slightly adjusted from previous surveys to ensure it is more up to date, it nevertheless covers a full 12-month period and the results can be compared to the previous year.

The survey represents the single largest and most reliable barometer of the state of play of crime in retail and is based on a sample from retailers representing over 1.1 million employees and nearly £200 billion market turnover.

“The survey represents the single largest and most reliable barometer of the state of play of crime in retail...



TOPLINE RESULTS



Once again, the crime survey shows a massive increase in violence and abuse, reaching the levels experienced during the pandemic at nearly half a million incidents a year. It also shows a massive increase in customer theft, doubling to just shy of £2 billion; a lack of confidence in the police response, with 60% rating it as poor or very poor; and a continuation of the rise in cyber crime.

It provides clear evidence of:

The impact of violence and abuse on the welfare of retail workers



Just over **1,300** violent or abusive incidents a day, up from almost 870

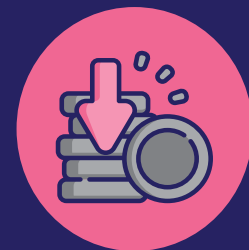


475,000 incidents in 2022-23, up from 316,000 including 41,000 violent incidents, equivalent to over 100 a day

The cost of crime and crime prevention both online and in store to retail businesses and, indirectly, the customers they serve



Overall cost of retail crime including crime prevention measures was **£3.3bn**, almost double the previous year



Losses from customer theft reached **£1.8 billion** – the highest ever – up from £950 million

The response of the overall justice and police systems



Incidents of customer theft rose to 16.7 million, up from **8 million**



Crime prevention measures cost **£1.2 billion**, up from **£720 million**



61% of retailers rate police response as poor or very poor, up from 44% last year



Only **8%** of reported incidents of violence and abuse were prosecuted



Only **36%** of incidents of violence and abuse were reported to police by retailers

57% of retailers report an increase in cyber attacks and breaches, with 33% reporting they stayed at the same level



Whether businesses are online, offline, or omnichannel; in town or out of town; small stores or larger stores – they all suffer the effects of crime one way or another.

THE FINDINGS



Violence and abuse; customer theft; concerns with the police response and rate of prosecutions; and the growth in cyber crime remain the overriding issues.



VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

The 2024 survey shows yet again retailers' concern over high levels of violence and abuse – which continues to trend upwards and is now back to the exceptional levels seen during the pandemic lockdowns. Colleagues suffered 475,000 incidents of some sort of violence or abuse over the course of the year – and all the evidence shows that both violence and abuse can have a long term and dramatic effect on a member of staff.

- Incidents of violence and abuse stood at over 1,300 incidents a day (over 475,000 during the year) in 2022-23, up from 867 last year and at the same levels as at the height of the pandemic. It was nearly treble the last pre-pandemic figure of 450 in 2019-20, confirming a steady increase from survey to survey.
- Of the overall total, there were 113 violent incidents a day (41,000 in total) slightly down on the previous year's 145 a day and much the same as in the last pre-pandemic year. Of note, was that 8,800 of these incidents resulted in injury.
- The huge increase has been in abuse, which now stands at 434,000 incidents in 2022-23 or 1,190 a day, up from 340 a day pre-pandemic.
- Of the incidents of violence and abuse, just over a third (36%) (171,000) were reported to police and just 8% (38,000) resulted in a prosecution with 19,000 resulting in a conviction. The main reason cited for failure to report was lack of expectation that it would make any difference, along with lack of staff time. Prior to 2021-22 over 50% were reported to police but fewer resulted in a prosecution.
- Incidents of violence and abuse increased in all locations – with 87% reporting an increase in inner cities and town centres; 65% in shopping centres; and 81% in retail parks and out of town shops.
- 1.07 million anti-social behaviour incidents were recorded, or over 2,930 a day.



MONETARY CRIME

Turning to the bottom line, customer theft has doubled to 16.7 million incidents a year, up from 8 million – at a highest ever cost of £1.8 billion, the first time it has risen above the £1 billion mark. Taken together with crime prevention, the cost of retail crime now stands at £3.3 billion. With tight margins across the industry, this is money that is not available to invest in lower prices or make improvements to stores. In the end everyone suffers the cost of crime.

- The overall monetary cost of crime, taking into account both actual losses and crime prevention costs, stood at £3.3 billion, up from £1.8 billion the previous year.
 - This included £1.2 billion for crime prevention, up from £720 million and £2.15 billion loss to crime itself, up from £1.05 billion.
 - £1.8 billion was lost to customer theft (just under £5 million a day) in 16.7 million incidents (45,750 a day) compared with £950 million and just under 8 million incidents the year before. This confirms a rising year on year trend.
- 53% of retailers reported an increase in online theft, with online fraud increasing over threefold to £99.7 million from £30 million
- Retailers reported little police interest in online theft.



The overall monetary cost of crime ... stood at £3.3 billion...



POLICE AND JUSTICE

After reported improvement among some retailers last year, businesses have once again lost confidence in the police response to retail crime, including incidents of violence and abuse. Failure to attend a crime, a belief that nothing will happen to perpetrators and a lack of staff time have undermined the case for always reporting incidents.

- 61% of retailers reported that the police's response to retail crime they experienced was poor or very poor. Only 32% said it was fair and just 6% said it was good.
- This was a decline from last year when 44% said it was poor or very poor and 56% said it was fair, the first year since 2014-2015 that over 50% had rated it as positive – though it is important to note that larger retailers had still rated the police response as poor or very poor.
- Only 36% of incidents of violence and abuse were reported to police, slightly up on last year's 32%, but down on previous years when over 50% were reported. Only 8% resulted in a prosecution with just 4% (19,000 out of 475,000) resulting in a conviction.
- 55% of retailers said that the main reason for failure to report was lack of belief that anything would happen as a result, with 87% reporting this as one of the top two reasons. The other main reasons were lack of staff time (38% indicating it as a top two reason) and difficulties with the reporting system (58% as a top two reason).
- As retailers felt obliged to take action in the absence of police, over 164,000 banning orders were issued over the year.



CYBER CRIME

Cyber crime and cyber security have increased in importance over the years. Retailers are spending more on cyber security as it increasingly affects both online and offline operations, given the amount of data retailers store.

- 57% of retailers reported an increase in cyber attacks, while 33% said it remained the same as the year before. Just 10% saw a decrease.
- At least 90% of retailers have now reported that cyber attacks have either stayed the same or increased every year since 2015.
- The main threat going forward is phishing, which 60% see as a high threat and 37% as a medium threat. Ransomware comes next with 53% seeing it as a high threat, and 37% as medium with denial of service a high threat for 40%.
- Taking high and medium threats together there is concern right across the spectrum with 50%+ of retailers seeing nearly all forms of cyber attacks as threats - including whaling, malware, data theft, credential stuffing, web apps, spoofing, pharming, and social engineering.
- 29% (38% if you include theft of customer data) of retailers see cyber security as one of the top three threats to their business, behind only violence and abuse, customer theft and fraud. This is down on 40% (plus 12% for data theft) last year.
- Expenditure on cyber crime prevention was £177 million, up by 17% (£25 million) from the previous year, almost the highest ever and representing 15% of all expenditure on crime prevention.



Looking at the top three threats, violence and abuse was identified by 87% of retailers...



LOOKING AHEAD

- Looking ahead, violence and abuse against staff continued to lead the way as the single most important issue for retailers by far, with 68% placing it as the number one issue – customer theft was next but placed at number one by 16%.
- Looking at the top three threats, violence and abuse was identified by 87% of retailers, customer theft by 74%, and fraud by 35%. This represents a slight decline from 96% for violence and abuse, 77% for customer theft and 46% for fraud in the previous survey.

COMMENTARY

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

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE– A STAGGERING INCREASE



Violence and abuse against shopworkers has been a major concern for the BRC and its members for many years – a concern shared with other retail organisations and USDAW, which have also reported a significant increase.

This is clearly reflected in the number of retailers (87%) placing violence in their top three threats for the next two years – with nearly 68% placing it as number one, well ahead of customer theft and fraud. This has further been reflected in the rising level of media interest in violence and abuse in retail, with more and more retailers of all sizes reporting increasing concern.

The staggering rise in incidents of violence and abuse to 475,000 incidents (or over 1,300 a day) – back to Covid levels – must be a cause for alarm. As the survey indicates, retailers noted an increase in incidents across all retail locations.

Some may seek solace from the fact that the vast majority were for abuse rather than violence. However, the impact of abuse is not victimless. It can take many forms – ranging

from racial or sexual abuse to an aggressive or abusive altercation. As with violence, all abuse is unacceptable.

Separate research by a number of retailers shows that even a seemingly mild argument can have a significant emotional impact on staff members who should not expect to go to work fearing they will be attacked or abused.

Shopworkers are often in a vulnerable situation, facing intimidation from someone potentially carrying a weapon and possibly under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A retail worker has to return to the scene day after day to do their job, always wondering whether the incident may be repeated, even by the same person, leading to considerable stress and anxiety.

“ Shopworkers are often in a vulnerable situation, facing intimidation from someone potentially carrying a weapon and possibly under the influence of alcohol or drugs...

Greater willingness to turn to abuse and then violence

Respondents to the survey noted a range of issues of concern in regard to violence and abuse:

- 1 > shoplifters have become more violent and more likely to threaten violence;
- 2 > many shoplifters do not appear to care if they injure colleagues in the process;
- 3 > some shoplifters taunt colleagues saying they cannot stop them;
- 4 > the lack of consequences for offenders;
- 5 > the impact of the cost of living crisis which some report has changed the nature of shoplifting from one or two items to many;
- 6 > increases in threats to attack staff outside the store;
- 7 > increases in anti-social behaviour;
- 8 > increased elevation of an argument to violence or threat of violence.



Two common triggers for such attacks are asking for ID for age verification (where failure to carry out the check is a criminal offence for the employee but not for the perpetrator of an under-age sale) and stopping someone who is believed to be stealing goods (which as the survey shows is a key cost for retailers) in one of the 16.7 million incidents.

How many incidents of the following were recorded against your staff?

Incidents of violence and abuse per day	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Violence with injury per day	51	30	23	30	21	29	115
Violence without injury per day	75	85	78	84	104	116	
Abusive behaviour per day	224	273	323	341	1176	721	1191
Total Incidents of violence or abuse per day	350	388	424	455	1301	867	1306

Of the incidents recorded what percentage do you estimate was?

Proportions Reported	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Reported to Police	54%	57%	32%	36%
Resulted in Prosecution	6%	4%	7%	8%
Resulted in a Conviction				4%
Prosecuted as Aggravated Offence	3%	3%	1%	1%

For the following locations, have instances of Violence & Abuse increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Inner City / Town Centre	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Increased	71%	57%	87%
Decreased	18%	13%	3%
Static	12%	30%	10%
Shopping Centre	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Increased	59%	48%	65%
Decreased	12%	17%	6%
Static	24%	35%	29%
Retail Park / Out of Town	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Increased	82%	70%	81%
Decreased	6%	13%	0%
Static	12%	17%	19%

No point in reporting it to the police

The slight increase in the actual percentage of prosecutions (to 8%) is welcome but with over 40,000 incidents of violence a year, (quite apart from abuse) there is still significant room for improvement. This lack of action is cited by 87% of retailers as a top two reason for not reporting incidents - which now stands at a disappointing 36%.

We believe that it is important that retailers report all incidents. Clearly, steps must be taken to improve rates of reporting. At the same time, it is very clear that an improved police response and prosecution rate would be the most effective measure to encourage them to do so.

Background issues to the rise of violence and abuse:

Lack of reporting of incidents

Lack of police response

Lack of prosecutions

A perception that low level crime often accompanied by violence or threats of violence will not attract police attention or commensurate sentences

Lack of police resources

A greater willingness of gangs and addictions to engage in shop crime

An upswing in anti-social behaviour in and immediately outside stores

THE COST OF RETAIL CRIME



Everyone suffers

It is not only retailers who suffer from the effects of retail crime but also consumers and employees.

Unfortunately, official reports do not always distinguish between retail crime and other crime so the BRC survey is the most reliable indicator of retail crime and crime reporting.

Retailers operate on low margins, so losses to crime and expenditure on crime prevention reduce the capacity to invest further on prices, improve terms and conditions for staff, as well as the overall customer experience in store and online, and to increase efficiency.

Customer theft nearly £2 billion

Customer theft is the biggest source of financial loss. Given that this figure has doubled over a year, now costing retailers over £1.8 billion, this issue cannot be ignored. Retailers recorded 16.7 million incidents of customer theft. Inevitably, the number of repeat offenders will be high. Police representatives believe the official statistics may in fact only record 10% of retail crime in part because records do not necessarily distinguish the retail element.

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

Please provide details of the total recorded theft and damage							
Financial Cost	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Customer Theft	£502.8 million	£663.2 million	770.7 million	£935.5 million	£663.4 million	£953.1 million	£1,794.4 million
Other losses	£43.4 million	£69.0 million	207.0 million	£342.2 million	£122.6 million	£87.2 million	£358.4 million
Total	£546.2 million	£732.2 million	£977.7 million	£1,277.7 million	£786.0 million	£1,040.3 million	£2,152.8 million

Number of Incidents	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Customer Theft	2,916,700	3,864,900	3,936,100	7,691,100	8,551,500	7,906,800	16,741,100
Other losses	53,900	65,300	51,400	328,100	39,900	43,700	109,500
Total	2,970,600	3,930,200	3,987,500	8,019,200	8,591,400	7,950,500	16,850,600



Theft leads to violence and abuse

Theft is also linked to violence and abuse in store. One of the key triggers of violence and abuse is when colleagues challenge customers they believe to be committing theft – which impinges their willingness to challenge potential shoplifters.

Retailers have taken steps to improve detection with improvements to CCTV; a better understanding of the data that can be exchanged and shared with other retailers and the police; and tagging of goods of a lower value including food items.

Belief Nothing will happen

There remains a perception among some retailers that some police forces do not regard shop theft as a ‘real’ crime, particularly if it is under £200 in value (often perceived as the lower limit before action is taken).

A perception that nothing will happen is probably held not just among retail staff, but also among repeat offenders, who account for a significant proportion of the total, and who are willing to take the risk.. There is a strong belief among some of them – supported by ad hoc reports - that even if they appear in court multiple times, the sentence will be so light it will hardly make a difference. In Scotland, however, over 20% of people charged with shoplifting received custodial sentences in 2021-22, though the proportion proceeding to court (just under 3,000 people) is probably very low given the figures in the BRC survey or indicates a lack of reporting.

What was the total cost of crime							
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Value	£546.2 million	£732.2 million	£977.7 million	£1,277.7 million	£786.0 million	£1,040.3 million	£2,152.8 million
% Change		+34%	+33%	+31%	-38%	+32%	+107%

How much was spent on crime prevention?							
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Value	£995.0 million	£1,024.3 million	£1,217.4 million	£1,188.0 million	£714.7 million	£721.8 million	£1,194.0 million
% Change		+3%	+19%	-2%	-40%	+1%	+65%

...of which how much was on other crime prevention measures?							
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Value	£856.1 million	£862.1 million	£1,030.4 million	£1,027.7 million	£646.7 million	£570.8 million	£1,017.3 million
% Change		+1%	+20%	+0%	-37%	+12%	+78%

...of which how much was on cyber crime?							
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Value	£138.9 million	£162.2 million	£187.0 million	£160.4 million	£68.0 million	£151.0 million	£176.7 million
% Change		+17%	+15%	-14%	-58%	+122%	+17%









“ Theft is also linked to violence and abuse in store. One of the key triggers of violence and abuse is when colleagues challenge customers they believe to be committing theft...

THE POLICE RESPONSE IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH



Confidence in an effective police response to retail crime is important because

-  It encourages more comprehensive reporting by retailers, which has gone down even in the case of crimes of violence and abuse.
-  It enables accurate statistics of overall retail crime to be maintained and hot spots to be identified.
-  It enables police forces to prioritise their activities and resources more in line with the needs of communities.
-  It is essential for effective prosecutions.
-  It will enable the mandatory aggravated offences to be assessed as to whether they are effective as a deterrent.
-  It is an effective deterrent in itself if potential criminals know there is a high chance they will be caught and prosecuted

“ Only 8% of incidents of violence and abuse resulted in prosecutions...

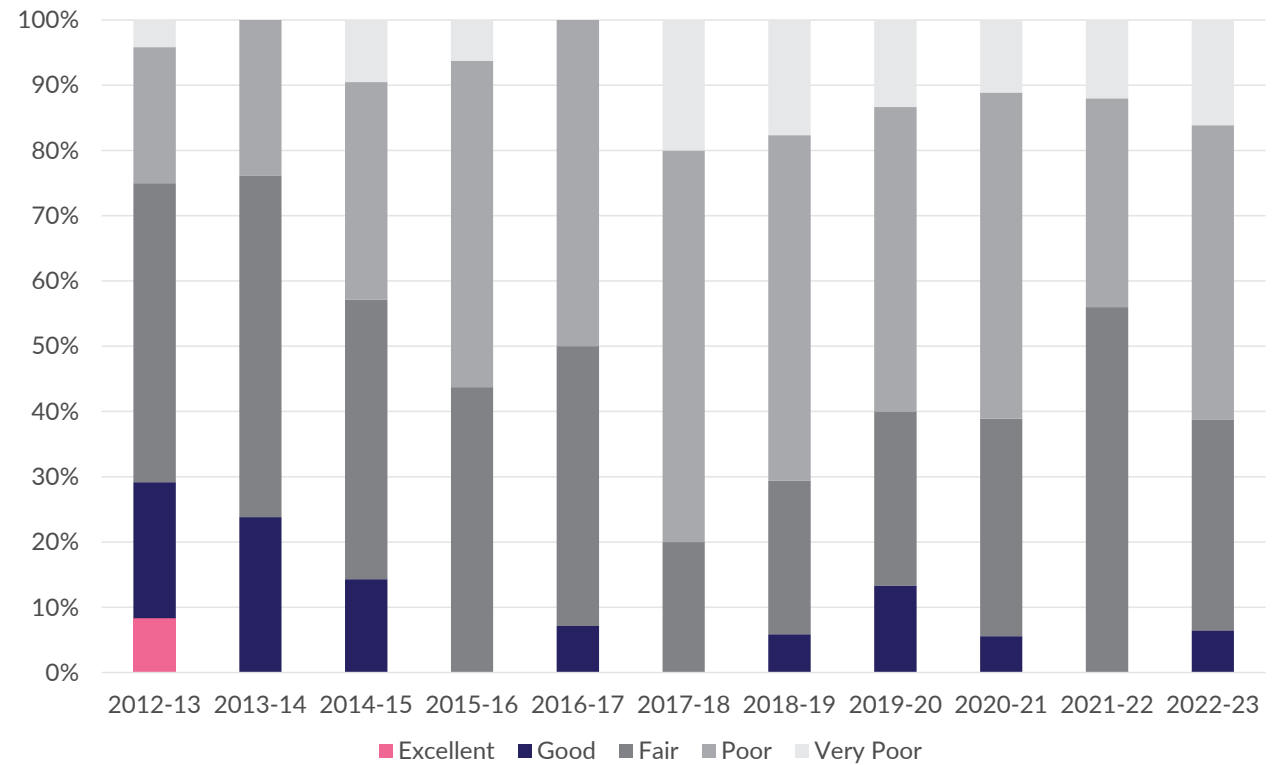


Police response not good enough

Only 8% of incidents of violence and abuse resulted in prosecutions.

It is possible the lack of satisfaction reflects a reduction in police resources or, even worse, a perception that retail crime – particularly low value theft or abuse - is not particularly important for policing and is seen as part of the cost of doing business or part of the job.

How good a job do you think the police do to tackle and respond to the retail crime which you experience?



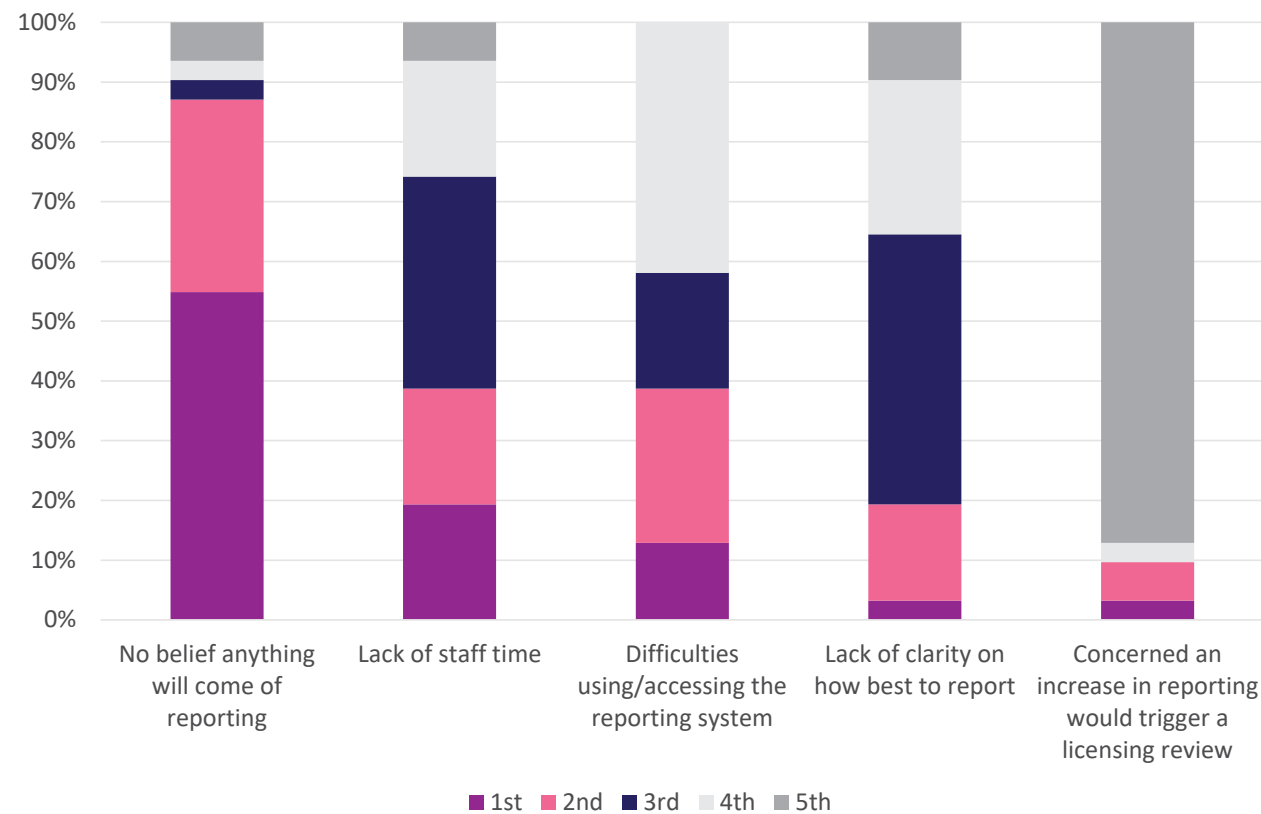
Shop theft is theft like all other theft

Indeed, it seems retail theft of low value items is often regarded as an issue for retailers themselves to respond to rather than the police. However, without police follow-up nobody can know the underlying causes, such as the extent to which the incidents are related to gang activity or the overall extent of the problem.

While fraud, cyber security and online theft are also all issues of concern, they require specialist responses. It is customer theft and physical or verbal assaults that most retailers particularly associate with a good or poor police response.

“ ..it seems retail theft of low value items is often regarded as an issue for retailers themselves to respond to rather than the police.

What are the biggest obstacles to reporting retail crime to the police?



CYBER SECURITY



The importance of cyber security for retail, as for other sectors, will only grow as a result of digitisation, cloud storage, remote or hybrid working, online retailing growth, digital marketing and advertising – quite apart from threats by state actors to major systems.

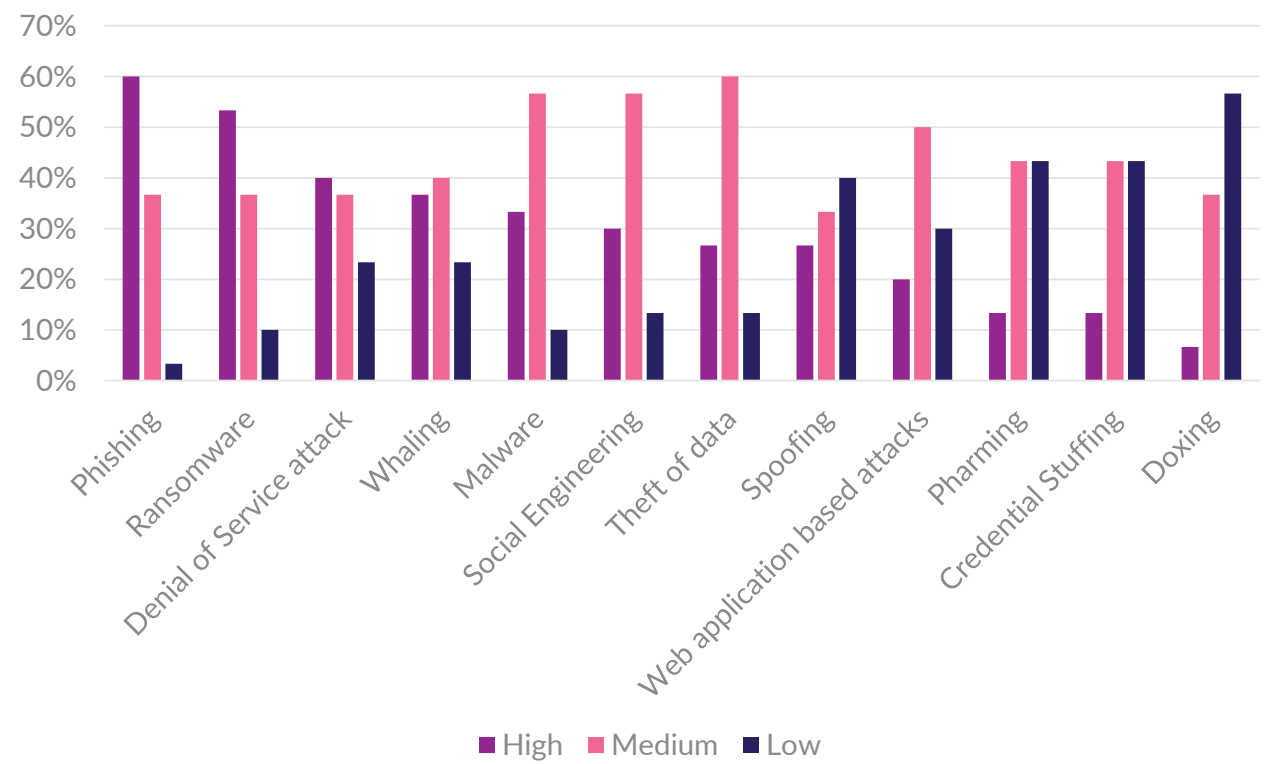
A threat to people and business

Cyber threats relate not just to personal data that is stored in the cloud or on internal systems - but also to business systems and data which require a computer network to function and for storage of key data.

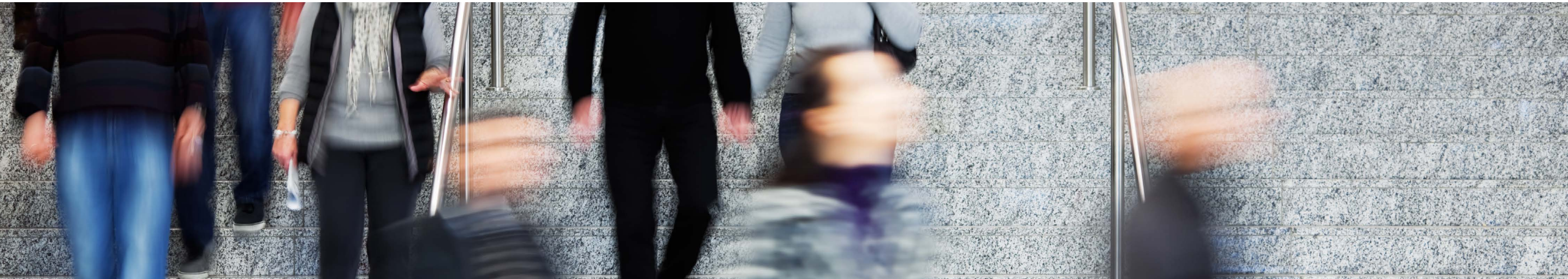
The threat applies to small and large businesses and to the supply chain as a whole, where an unprotected small business can be the entry point to the system of a larger business with which it works.

Online retailing was growing at pace prior to the pandemic – but with lockdowns and the closure of many physical stores, it expanded even more. That expansion was even more rapid than anticipated or planned for – and extended to many businesses that had never before engaged in online retailing in a major way.

Which of the follow do you consider high, medium or low cyber security risks facing your business?



“The threat applies to small and large businesses and to the supply chain as a whole...”



Overall, would you say that the number of cyber security attacks and breaches suffered by your business has increased, decreased, or remained static?



Did online theft increase during the pandemic?			
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Yes	57%	60%	53%
No	43%	40%	47%

Did you increase spending on security to tackle this?			
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Yes	29%	47%	43%
No	71%	53%	57%

“ 57% of retailers noted an increase in cyber security attacks and breaches suffered by their businesses.

Everyone has a role to play

At the same time many employees were working from home and many continue to work in a hybrid fashion. This brought consequent risks to a business where employees connected to business systems but their cyber protection was minimal or non-existent. Some can be compromised by the use of personal equipment being connected at the same time to the same WiFi etc.

It was for these reasons that the NCSC embarked on a major programme to remind businesses of the potential threats of informal arrangements.

Growing recognition of the threat

The surveys over the past several years have shown that retailers have recognised the importance of the threat, with nearly 30% this year nominating cyber threats as a top three threat, the assessment of the priority no doubt reflecting the nature of their business.

Cyber threats are still ranked well below violence and customer theft perhaps reflecting the continuing prevalence of physical stores not least in terms of the threat of violence.

57% of retailers noted an increase in cyber security attacks and breaches suffered by their businesses.

Against this overall background expenditure on cyber security increased to £176.7 million.

While the specific types of cyber-attacks attracting most concern do change their order from time to time, ransomware, malware and phishing have retained the premier positions.



LOOKING AHEAD -THE MOST SIGNIFICANT THREATS TO RETAIL



For retailers, employee welfare remains the number one concern – above any monetary considerations – when looking at the anticipated threats over the next two years.

Violence, abuse and customer theft

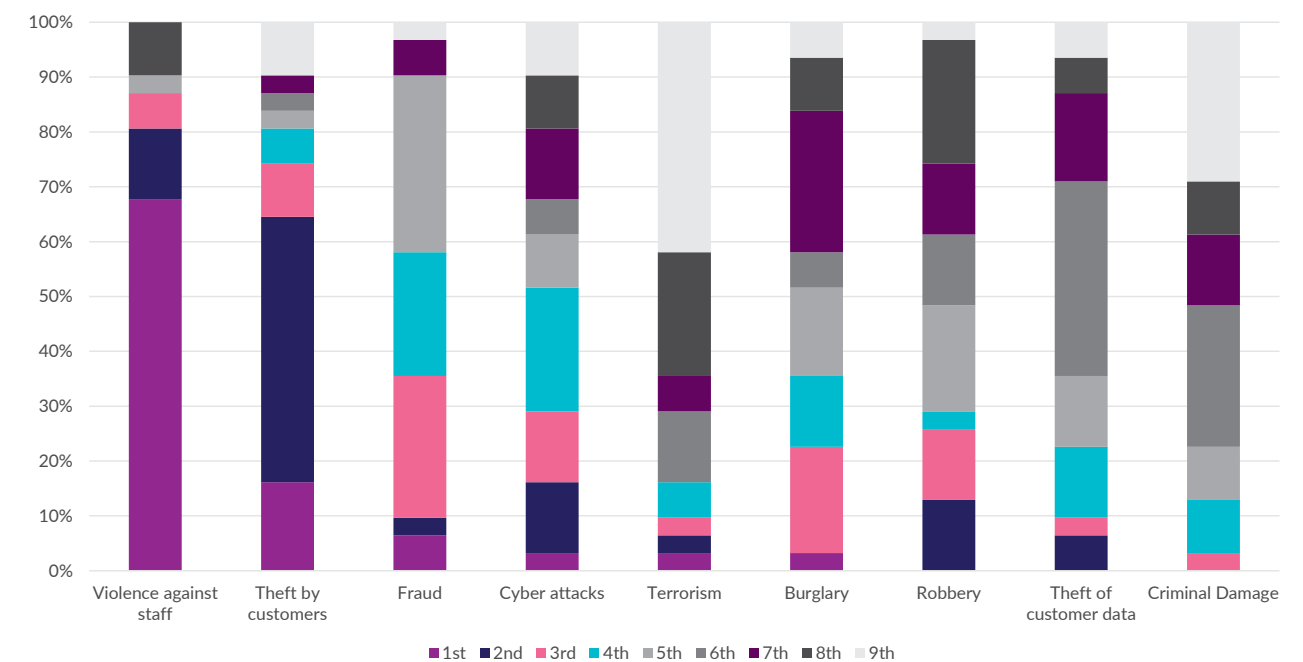
Once again violence and abuse towards retail staff were ranked well ahead of any other significant threat. With nearly 90% of retailers placing it in the top three, it is clearly causing considerable concern across the industry and has been consistently high in previous surveys.

Given the incidence of violent and abusive attacks running at over 1,300 a day – and the low prosecution rate – it is clear that meaningful law enforcement action is necessary.

Given the cost of customer theft at nearly £1.8 billion is by far the highest loss to crime on record, it is equally unsurprising that customer theft remains a top three serious concern for 74% of retailers.

“ Once again violence and abuse towards retail staff were ranked well ahead of any other significant threat.

Which do you consider will be the 3 most significant threats to your business over the next 2 years?



BRC APPROACH

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With just 8% of incidents of violence and abuse prosecuted, the current system is clearly not working well.

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE



We have called for

- A standalone offence for a crime of violence or abuse against a shopworker.
- More prosecutions of crimes of violence and abuse against shopworkers, with a rise in prosecutions and ensuring offences are treated as aggravated.
- A better understanding that abuse can be frightening and upsetting and should not be dismissed as part of the job.
- Sentencing Council Guidelines making it clear that violence and abuse against shopworkers must be treated as aggravated offences.
- Better recording of retail crimes of violence in the statistics.

A standalone offence needed

With just 8% of incidents of violence and abuse prosecuted, the current system is clearly not working well.

For some years the BRC, along with USDAW and others, have called for a separate standalone offence of violence and abuse towards retail workers in the course of their employment, along the lines of the Emergency Workers Offence.

Some positive action was taken by the UK Government acting for England and Wales in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, to require the courts to treat certain existing offences against people serving the public as aggravated. Previously the aggravated status was included in the Sentencing Council Guidelines but was not mandatory. Success requires the Government to stress to all the actors in the police and justice system in

England and Wales that such crimes should be prosecuted and the courts must treat them as aggravated and sentence accordingly.

The industry supported the amendment but regrets that it has not been possible to obtain statistics on whether or not it is being implemented in relation to people serving the public and the results of any implementation. These are vital to assess its effectiveness, and in their absence and against the evidence from the survey we can only conclude that it has not been effective.

Consequently, with others, we have resumed the campaign for a standalone offence which would enable the magnitude of the problem to be clear and proper statistics to be collected.

The evidence from Scotland supports our approach – and we regret the UK Government has so far refused to follow the Scottish lead when it introduced a standalone offence.

The Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2020, which came into force in August 2021, created a statutory offence of threatening, abusing or assaulting a retail worker, ensuring that the seriousness of that behaviour is highlighted through a specific offence. From August 2021 to March 2023, 543 charges that were brought under the Act led to a conviction in criminal court.

The Act led to changes in how crimes were recorded by the police. Before its

implementation, an assault of a retail worker would have been recorded as an assault. After implementation, such cases were specifically recorded as assault of a retail worker. The same change applied for cases of threatening or abusing a retail worker.

Over two years (noting 2021/22 was a partial year) the police recorded 5,695 crimes and offences under the Act, of which 3,236 (or 57%) were threatening/abusing a retail worker and 2,459 (43%) were assaulting a retail worker.

Over those two years the police cleared up (though this did not necessarily mean they prosecuted) around six out of every ten cases (or 61%), recorded under the Act, 63% for assault and 60% for threatening or abuse.

Digital age verification reduces aggression

Many incidents of violence and abuse are linked to the legal requirement for retail employees to enforce the age restricted sales law by asking for ID – and to be subject to prosecution if they fail to do so. We continue to propose that Government should permit the use of digital age verification and estimation for age checks for alcohol (the largest single age sale category) on the same basis as they are allowed for other

age sales. We note the success of a limited experiment and call on the Home Office to finally take action.

The BRC has worked with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to produce an animation for use by any retailer that wishes to show retail workers how to defuse a potentially violent situation.

BRC/Home Office National Retail Crime Steering Group

The BRC co-chairs the National Retail Crime Steering Group with the Home Office. This has focused on responding to retail violence through better reporting, removing data barriers, communicating better with the public, supporting victims, assessing substance misuse as a factor; assessing organised crime links; and examining the effectiveness of out of court settlements. We support the NRCSG funded #Shopkind campaign.

We note below the links between monetary crime and violence and aggression. Issues of reporting, exchanges of data, and police response and our approaches to those are as relevant to dealing with violence and aggression as to dealing with monetary crime.

MONETARY CRIME



As we noted above, acquisitive crime and violence, abuse and aggression are inextricably linked. When a potential shoplifter is challenged, events can often turn to aggression or violence – a tendency that retailers noted in the survey was increasing.



We have called for

- Clarity on the exchange of data among retailers
- Clarity on the legal use of CCTV and facial recognition
- Retailers to report all crime to ensure its extent is recognised
- A single online reporting tool
- Examination of the role of organised crime against retailers
- Support for the National Police Chiefs’ Council’s Retail Crime Action Plan



BRC/Home Office/police co-operation

The BRC continues to support initiatives to reduce retail crime and the cost of crime. We co-chair the NRCSG – National Retail Crime Steering Group – with the Home Office Policing Minister which provides the context for regular exchanges among retailers, government and police.

Following discussions in the steering group, Project Pegasus has been developed by a number of retailers and the police to fund research into organised crime and its impact on retail. Meanwhile, the NPCC (National Police Chiefs’ Council) has produced its Retail Crime Action Plan with the support of the Government. It includes a commitment to prioritise urgently attending the scene of shoplifting instances involving violence against a shop worker, where security guards have detained an offender or where attendance is needed to secure evidence; a pledge to follow up on any evidence that could reasonably lead to catching a perpetrator; and to step up targeted hotspot patrols in badly affected areas.

The BRC has welcomed both these initiatives and trusts that the words will lead to action.

Dissuasive sentences

Linked to the police response is the response of the courts. Sentencing is an issue when those involved in theft are repeatedly given light sentences.

The effectiveness, targeting and scope of all sentences should be kept under constant review to ensure they are appropriate and dissuasive.

Simplified reporting

While pointing to greater police action as the key to better reporting and thus prosecution – and the key to a reduction in crime through a greater certainty of being caught, prosecuted and sentenced – we also recognise that retailers themselves need to improve the level of reporting. This would allow police resources to be better targeted and help the courts recognise the seriousness of the situation. With just 36% of incidents reported to police, there is clearly room for improvement

A simplified reporting mechanism common to all forces could help. Given the lack of understanding of the reporting process is another key reason for failure to report. We understand the police are working on this through a project with the National Business Crime Centre.

Clear rules on exchanges of data and use of visual images

Some retailers take a very limited view of the ability to share data under the GDPR rules, no doubt being concerned by the very heavy penalties that can apply to offences. However, it is important to understand the potential for legally shared information and the legal use of CCTV to assist in crime prevention and detection. The action plan sets out advice for retailers on how to provide the best possible evidence for police to pursue in any case, making clear they should send CCTV footage of the whole incident and an image of the shoplifter via the digital evidence management system as quickly as possible after an offence has been committed. Where CCTV or other digital images are secured, police will run this through the Police National Database using facial recognition technology to further aid efforts to identify and prosecute offenders – particularly prolific or potentially dangerous individuals.

The BRC supports exchanges of information among retailers, while respecting the rules on data protection and privacy. More clarity is needed on the legitimate use of CCTV and facial recognition in the retail context. The BRC hosted a member meeting with the ICO to enable members to understand the considerations they need to undertake when considering its use. Advice on such considerations was subsequently posted on the BRC website.

Citizens Arrests best left to trained security personnel

While we recognise the potential for citizens arrests, we do not encourage their use by regular staff because it both puts them at risk and opens staff up to risk of prosecution. They should be left to trained security staff who understand the limitations and requirements to ensure they are used within the law.

PCC role

Police and Crime Commissioners have an important role to play by including retail crime specifically in their strategies – and we note the improvement in that regard. For maximum effectiveness, and greater accuracy, it is important that retail crime is recorded as such rather than merely as part of the overall theft or violence and abuse statistics. PCCs must give greater priority to retail crime in their plans.

“ Once again violence and abuse towards retail staff were ranked well ahead of any other significant threat.

All theft should lead to police action

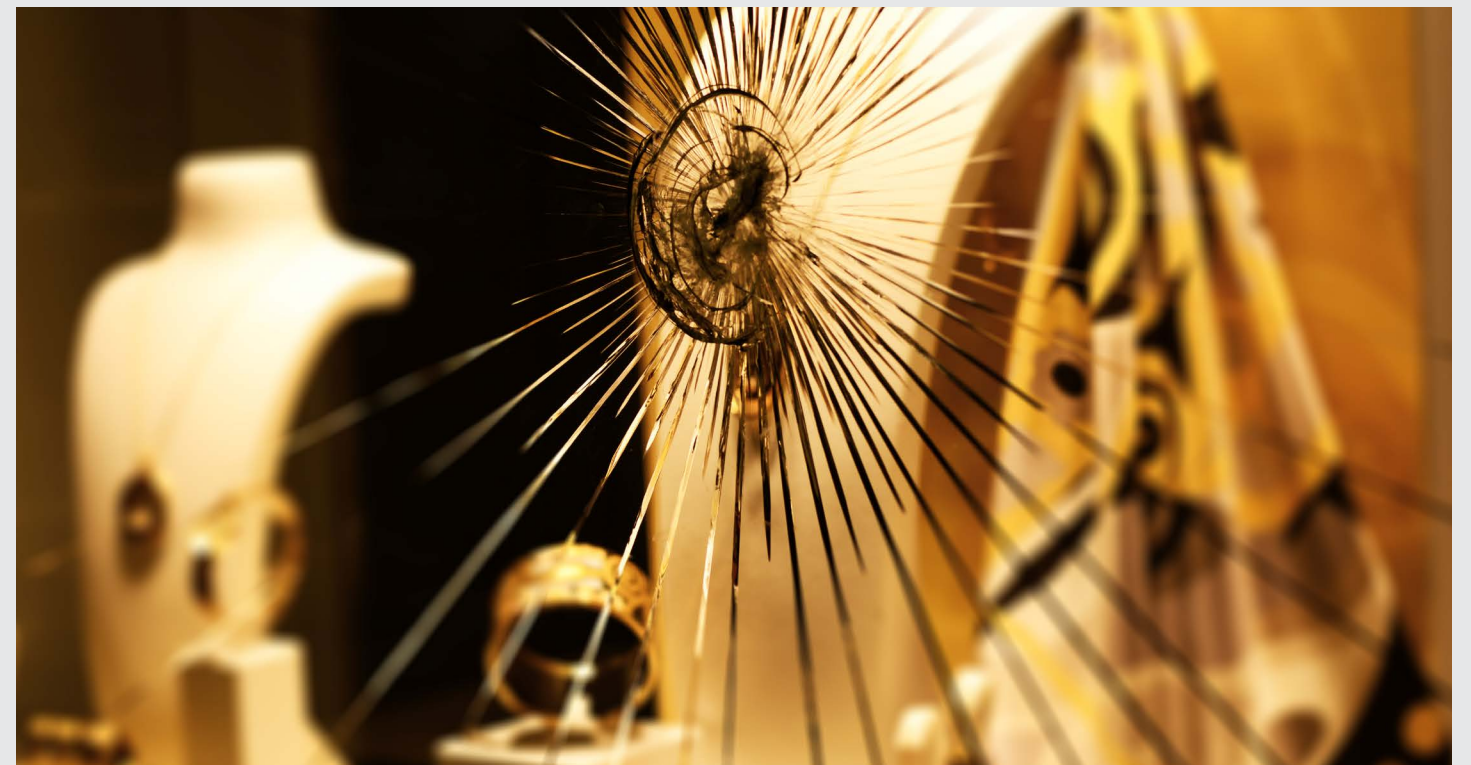
While we are encouraged that police forces do not subscribe to a policy of non-prosecution for retail theft below £200, in spite of some differences in how it is treated, it is important this is followed in word and deed and made abundantly clear to offenders who could be tempted to commit multiple offences just under the limit.

Role of organised crime not fully understood

Retailers have reported that organised gangs are playing a more prominent in retail crime. One has noted from CCTV records that the same people are turning up in different areas of the country. The role of organised gangs in retail crime including shop-lifting needs to be understood and county lines should never be a barrier to action. Project Pegasus should result in an improved understanding.

The underlying context

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 links to organised crime. The work of the Task and Finish Groups of the NRCSG to audit and map out various local approaches to targeting substance misuse in the hope of identifying best practice is clearly a positive contribution. However, it is essential that Government dedicates sufficient resources to effectively tackle these underlying causes.



POLICE RESPONSE



We have called for

- More resources to fight retail crime
- Clarity in the statistics where crime is retail related
- Police to respond to all incidents and especially where a perpetrator is being held or violence is involved to do so rapidly
- A much improved prosecution rate
- Police to implement the Retail Crime Action Plan as a matter of priority



Better statistics that recognise retail crime as a category

The BRC strongly believes that retail crime needs to be clearly recognised and addressed as a category in itself in strategic plans and in the statistics if the police response is to improve.

Without an effective police response for all retailers and without the police compiling a full record of all the incidents specifically under a retail banner, it is likely levels of satisfaction across the board will not improve as criminal activity is seen to pay. Only by ensuring incidents are clearly recorded as retail rather than general theft or aggressive behaviour, as so many currently are, can a clear picture be obtained officially.

Police and retailer mutual responsibility

Low level reporting of retail crime is not going to lead to an effective response – while the lack of an effective response is one of the reasons that reporting is still low. A low reporting rate and a very low prosecution rate are the enemies of a high regard for the police response.

It is important that forces are clear, and widely communicate, that there is no policy of not prosecuting low value theft. That should be made widely known and acted upon if criminals are not to ‘work the system’. A simple, single reporting tool would help to ensure crimes are reported.

The BRC continues 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 resolve issues that undermine an effective response – and undermine full reporting by retailers themselves.

We welcome Police and Crime Commissioners responding to our call to include retail crime within their strategies – a move that could potentially ensure that the police response is kept under review.

“...lack of an effective response is one of the reasons that reporting is still low.

CYBER SECURITY



The action that is required to counter the cyber threat mainly falls upon businesses themselves.



We have called for

- Recognition of threat
- Buy in from Board, management and staff
- Effective preparation
- Secure by design
- Collaboration with NCSC on imminent and changing threats
- Exchanges among professionals
- Use of BRC cyber security toolkit



When not whether- everyone has a role

The generally held view is that it is not a question of whether a business will suffer a cyber-attack or breach but when.

The first step to reducing the likelihood or severity of any such attack is acceptance of the potential for an attack right across the business from the top to all levels.

There needs to be an acceptance of responsibility by the Board, or the CEO in a small business, to approve and implement a strategy, to have a plan of action for what to do in the event of an attack or breach and to regularly assess the supply chain to try to ensure that it is also secure.

Every member of staff with access to a computer needs to understand their own personal responsibility not to access unauthorised material or open suspicious emails, for example.

BRC Forum

The BRC provides a forum for discussions and exchanges for professionals and those generally responsible in its Technology Community. Through webinars and meetings on specific issues such as cyber insurance or securing the supply chain, the BRC is committed to reaching a wider audience, particularly among small and medium businesses.

Co-operation with NCSC

The BRC works with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) to alert retailers to the potential cost, both monetary and reputational, of a cyber breach and the need for a plan of action - as once an attack has happened it is too late. The NCSC also provides information about emerging threats and trends such as maladvertising.

Our cyber security toolkit was prepared with input from the NCSC and continues to provide a ready-made resource on the BRC website.



There needs to be an acceptance of responsibility by the Board, or the CEO in a small business, to approve and implement a strategy...

ABOUT THE BRC

The BRC is the lead trade association for UK retail.

Our purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future.

Retail is the 'everywhere economy', a vital part of the socio-economic fabric of the UK.

The industry makes up 5% of the UK GDP and is the largest private sector employer, providing 3 million direct jobs and 2.7 million more in the supply chain. Retail has a presence in every village, town and city across the country.

Over 200 major retailers are members of the BRC, with thousands of smaller, independents represented by BRC's trade association members. Together, these businesses operate across all retail channels and categories and deliver over £350 billion of retail sales per year.

We build the reputation of the retail industry, work with our members to drive change, develop exceptional retail leaders, and use our expertise to influence government policy so retail businesses thrive and consumers benefit. Our work helps retailers trade legally, safely, ethically, profitably and sustainably.



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