

**WORKING
TOGETHER
TO TACKLE BRITAIN'S
RETAIL CRIME
CRISIS**

The Crime Report 2024

A report by the Association of Convenience Stores
[#ACSCrimeReport](#)

ACS | the voice of
local shops

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Foreword

The surge in media stories on retail crime over the past year tells us two things. Firstly, the problem has got worse and the statistics and stories are more striking than ever. Secondly, this is an issue the public cares about because it impacts people – the 437,000 who work in local shops, their families, and the wider community who use those stores and value the role they play. Stores being looted and shelves cleared is sadly not new for retailers and shopworkers, but it was a shock to the public.

Our Crime Report tracks the crime committed against these people and their businesses, and it is vital in informing the debate on how to tackle this serious problem. We take no pleasure in reporting these difficult findings. However, previous reports have helped to jolt politicians and police forces to look more closely at their response to crimes against local shops. We are encouraged by the publication of the National Retail Crime Action Plan. It highlights that police forces need to prioritise attendance at incidents where violence is used, follow up on lines of enquiry where evidence is available and implement a prolific offender strategy to address the small number of offenders that account for most of the crime and anti-social behaviour in communities.

I hope that the 2024 report, released just before the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May, gives the evidence to make retail crime feature more prominently

in the Police and Crime Plans of current and future PCCs. While local shops cannot vote in the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, their customers do, and they see that crimes against their local shop or on their high streets has an impact on their whole community. For Police and Crime Commissioners seeking re-election or standing for the first time, we urge you to make crimes against local shops a priority.

This message also extends to our national politicians. High streets and local parades are a barometer for how people feel about the success and safety of their community. To that end, we need new police resources focused on visible neighbourhood policing, targeting crime hotspots. We also need police and retailers working more closely together, using the best technology to detect and deter criminals, harnessing the impact of the enormous levels of investment being made by retailers in tackling crime.

We need the findings of this report and our recommendations to maintain the focus on crimes against local shops. The fight against crime needs everyone to commit, every day, to playing their part.

James Lowman
Chief Executive, ACS

Cost of crime to convenience stores

Crime against convenience retailers costs an estimated

£245m to the sector

£4,946 per store

10p crime tax per transaction



ACS is proud to have co-ordinated the retail sector's support for ShopKind on behalf of the Home Office.



EVIDENCE FOR ACTION – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations for the UK Government

- 1 Deliver justice for shopworkers and effective sanctions for offenders**
The courts must use effective penalties for retail crime offenders including rehabilitation orders, community sentences and custodial sentences. The Government should formally review the impact of the aggravating factor for attacks on shopworkers, introduced as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022). If evidence suggests that the factor has not had an impact on sentencing outcomes, then the Government must implement a standalone offence for attacks on shopworkers.
- 2 Additional police resources must be focused on neighbourhood policing**
Commitments to increase the number of police officers are welcome, but only if this delivers a rise in neighbourhood policing patrols in hot spot areas, like high streets and local shopping parades. When we ask voters how they would invest funding in their communities two thirds (67%) want money spent in neighbourhoods on enhancing public spaces, community projects and community policing.
- 3 Support investment in technology to deter and detect criminals**
The Government should introduce incentives for investment in crime prevention equipment. The Home Office should co-ordinate a working group to increase the synergy between retailers' and police forces' use of technology to tackle retail crime. CCTV, facial recognition, and evidence sharing platforms can be powerful tools to detect and deter criminals. However, there is a lack of guidance on the use of facial recognition services. Further, online reporting platforms need to be compatible with retailers' own data systems to reduce time and friction in reporting crime.



Recommendations for Police and Crime Commissioners

- 1 Include the National Retail Crime Action Plan in your Police and Crime Plan**
All Police and Crime Commissioners should commit to deliver the National Retail Crime Action Plan in their Police and Crime Plans. This means prioritising police attendance at shops where violence is used or threatened, following reasonable lines of enquiry where CCTV footage is available and delivering hot spot patrolling.
- 2 Develop a prolific offender strategy**
Every Police and Crime Commissioner should have a strategy in place to identify prolific offenders that target high streets and local shopping parades. The majority of shop theft offences are committed by a small number of prolific offenders that often have drug addiction issues. Targeting this small group of offenders and supporting them to access rehabilitation services would have a huge impact on the level of shop theft and anti-social behaviour that blights communities.
- 3 Make it easier for retailers to report crime and share evidence online**
It is difficult and time consuming for retailers to report crime and share evidence with the police. Investing in consistent online reporting platforms would increase reporting levels and evidence shared with the police. This would ensure that police resources are allocated appropriately to meet the levels of crime in communities.



"The rising levels of shop theft, violent crime and abuse threatens the wellbeing of retail staff. We have been equipping our colleagues with increased protection measures to help them feel safer at work. CCTV, security staff and intruder alarms have a significant impact on the security of convenience stores. We need government to support investment in crime prevention equipment to protect colleagues."



Paul Gerrard, Campaigns, Public Affairs and Board Secretariat Director, The Co-op

For more information go to acs.org.uk

"As a shop owner in Croydon, I've witnessed firsthand the escalating challenge of shop theft. This issue not only affects our business' already strained finances, but it also puts our staff and customers in distress. We've had to implement significant security measures to protect our premises and people. However, I believe that, beyond these measures, there's a need for greater awareness, community involvement, and support from law enforcement to tackle this growing concern effectively. Together, we can create a safer retail environment."



Benedict Selvaratnam, Owner, Freshfields Market

For more information go to acs.org.uk

£339m
invested in crime prevention across the sector over the last year

On average each store spent
£6,838
on crime prevention measures over the year

67% of retailers believe the cost of living crisis has led to an increase in theft

5.6 million incidents of shop theft over the last year



Top areas of support for colleagues

- 1 Counselling services
- 2 Support helpline made available
- 3 Additional training on crime management

Retailers' investment priorities

- 1 CCTV
- 2 Security staff
- 3 Staff training on crime management
- 4 Intruder alarms
- 5 Internal radios

Profile of shop thieves



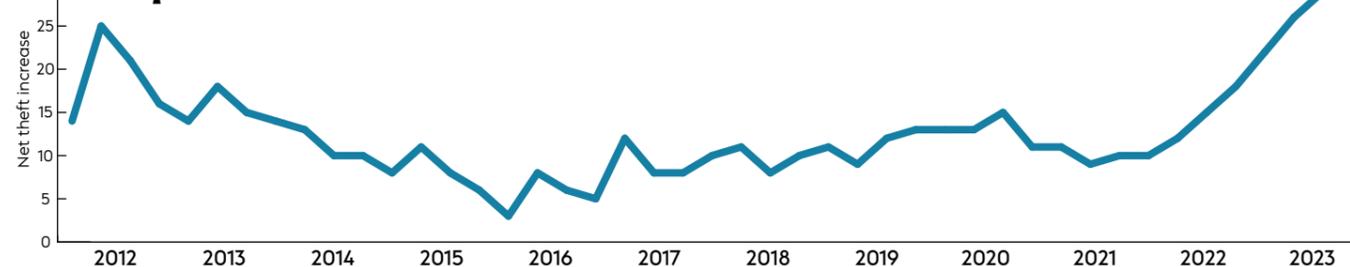
Motivations for repeat offending

- 1 Drug or alcohol addiction
- 2 Organised crime
- 3 Opportunist

Most commonly stolen items

- 1 Meat
- 2 Alcohol
- 3 Confectionery

Shop theft index



Source: ACS Voice of Local Shops polling 2023

What we need

Retailers are investing record amounts in their businesses to prevent crime and protect colleagues and customers. Their priority is working with store colleagues to improve safety by providing training, employing dedicated security staff, and delivering protective equipment such as CCTV, body worn cameras and internal radios.

Retailers are increasing their investment despite rising overhead costs driven by inflation and increased energy bills. We want the Government to support investment in crime prevention equipment, whether through tax relief or direct funding. We also need police and regulators to provide clarity on how to use new technologies such as facial recognition, to deter criminals.

What we need

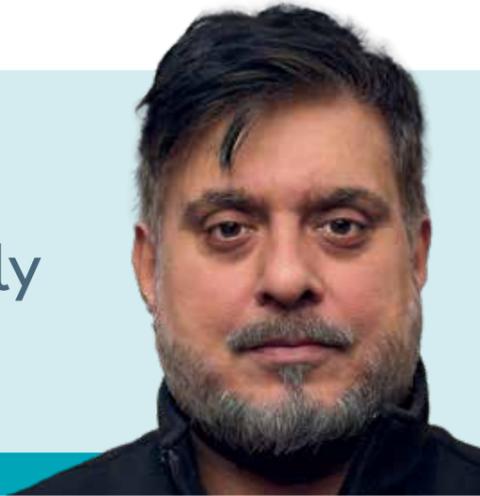
Most shop theft is committed by a small number of offenders known to retailers, communities and the police. Every police force must prioritise identifying and tackling prolific offenders. Retail businesses should be able to access simple and effective systems to report crime and share evidence. We need to break the cycle of under reporting by investing more in police reporting systems and encouraging retailers to report all crime. ACS has created a dedicated guide for retailers on how to report crime, available at www.acs.org.uk

There also need to be effective sanctions for criminals. Prolific repeat offenders are often not even being taken to court, and when they are, the penalties they receive are not effective and can lead them to re-offend. The courts need to reflect the impact of retail crime in their sentencing decisions, and to look not just at custodial sentences but also rehabilitation orders and community sentences to break the cycle of re-offending.



“Too often shopworkers have to deal with violence. No one should be physically attacked at work.”

Mohammed Rajak, Director, Buywell Day Today



For more information go to acs.org.uk

“Convenience stores are the heartbeat of local communities. Verbal abuse and anti-social behaviour frightens customers and can make our communities feel unsafe.”

Sue Nithyanandan, Owner, Costcutter Epsom



For more information go to acs.org.uk

Number of incidents of violence estimated in the sector

76,000+

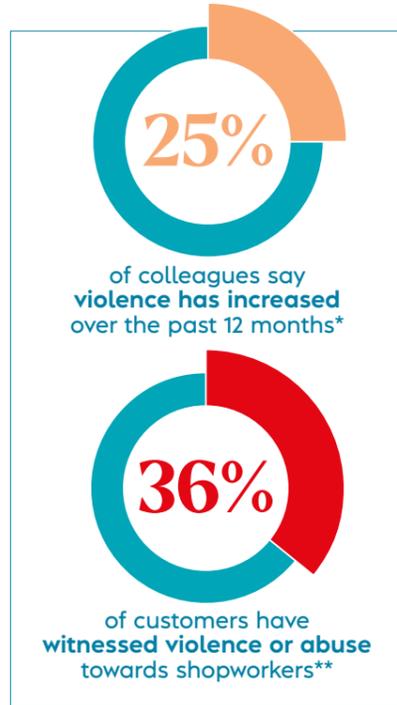
Number of incidents of robbery estimated in the sector

6,100+

Top triggers for violence

Of crimes where a weapon was present

ACS Crime Report 2023



* Source: Colleague Survey 2023 ** Yonder polling, 2023

What we need

Retailers tell us that the volume and severity of violent incidents in their stores is unprecedented. There is a strong correlation between rising incidents of shop theft and violence towards shopworkers. Shop thieves increasingly use violence and abuse to intimidate shopworkers so they can get away from the scene.

We welcome the ongoing debate about the introduction of a standalone offence for attacks on shopworkers. The Government must lead an assessment into the impact of the aggravating factor for assaults on public facing workers in sentencing guidelines. We want to prioritise police attendance for incidents where violence is used or threatened in shops, and ensure evidence is gathered to support cases being heard in court.

87% of store colleagues have experienced verbal abuse

*Source: ACS Colleague Survey 2023

Over 1.2 million incidents of verbal abuse

34% of verbal abuse incidents are hate-motivated, according to retailers

61% of retailers believe anti-social behaviour in or around their store has increased over the past year

Top anti-social behaviour concerns

- 1 Rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour
- 2 Loitering
- 3 Littering
- 4 Begging
- 5 Vandalism



What we need

Anti-social behaviour blights communities and make vital services, including shops, feel unsafe. 61% of retailers tell us that anti-social behaviour, including rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour, loitering, littering, begging and vandalism, has increased over the past year.

Police should use the anti-social behaviour powers that are already available to them and deliver the National Retail Crime Action Plan by conducting hot spot patrolling in areas with high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. Community police must be provided the resources necessary to deliver these initiatives.



"Convenience stores are increasingly targeted by gangs stealing to order and looting. We share evidence, and I would encourage retailers to report crime every time, but we need to have faith that the police will investigate offences and use that data - particularly to target these organised groups."



Susan Connolly, Connolly Spar, Sales & Marketing Director

For more information go to acs.org.uk

76% of retailers believe incidents involving organised crime groups have increased in the last 12 months

Burglary



Number of incidents of burglary estimated in the sector =

7,100+

The cost per incident =

£4,385

Total cost to the sector =

£31m

Fraud



Retailers' top fraud concerns



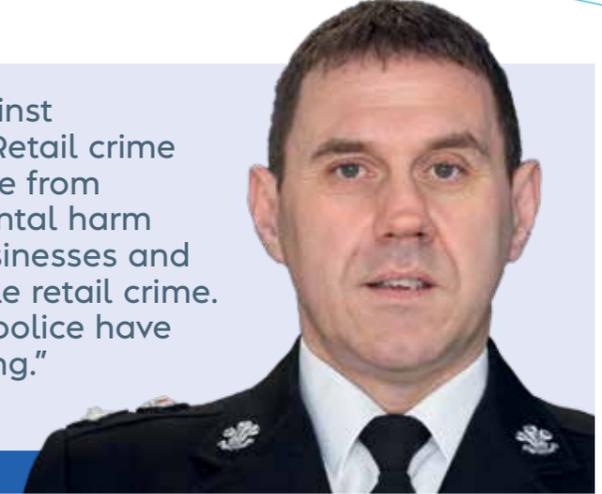
What we need

Organised criminals impact the convenience sector through localised gangs stealing to order from stores, often exploiting vulnerable people with addiction problems to steal on their behalf. Some gangs operate across police force boundaries. 76% of retailers tell us that they believe that incidents in their businesses involving organised crime groups have increased in the last year.

We welcome the development of Operation Pegasus, which is delivering important action against these groups. However, there is still more to do. Police and government need to make it easier for all retailers to share evidence with the authorities and report incidents.



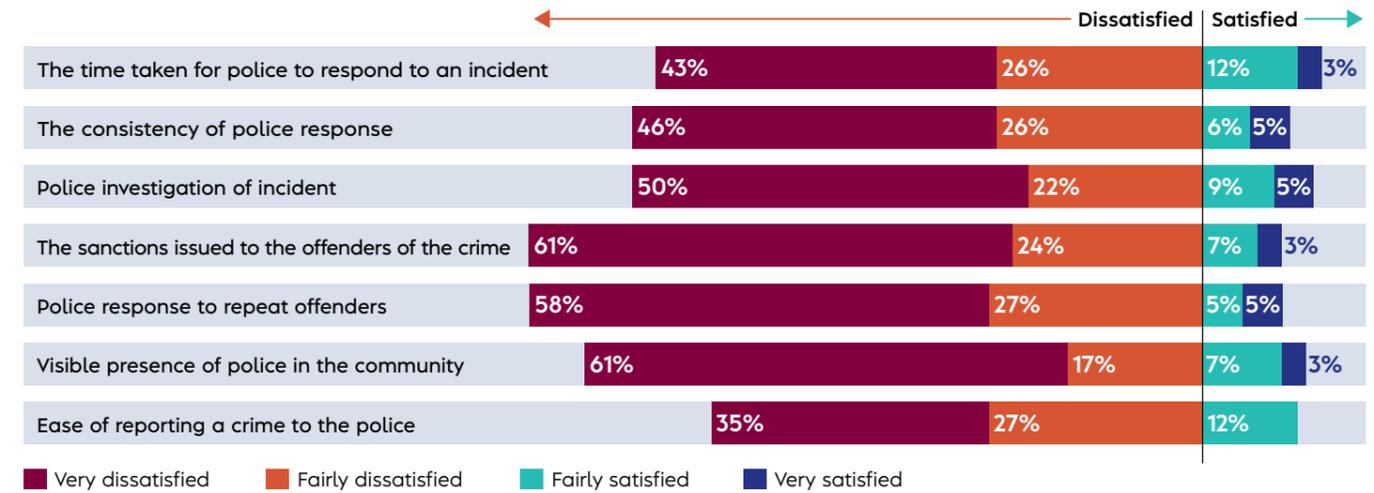
"Retail Crime, verbal abuse and violence against shopworkers are issues in our communities. Retail crime can damage finances already under pressure from inflation and cause serious physical and mental harm to both store colleagues and customers. Businesses and the police are working closely to better tackle retail crime. Retailers should always report crime so the police have the best possible picture of what is happening."



Alex Goss, Chief Superintendent, North Wales Police

For more information go to acs.org.uk

Retailers' satisfaction levels with police



ONLY 42% of all retail crime is reported by retailers to the police



What we need

We welcome that the vast majority of Police and Crime Commissioners now reference business crime in their Police and Crime Plans. However, much more progress is needed. Retailers are dissatisfied with the ease of reporting incidents to the police, which leads to underreporting.

When retailers do report incidents, the majority do so online. It is important that all police forces make available simple online reporting for retailers. We have launched the Stop Shop Theft Campaign to campaign for forces to tell retailers how they should be reporting incidents and who their single point of contact for business crime is. The campaign is available here: <http://tinyurl.com/bdherr2z>

Crime is one of the biggest operational challenges for retailers and the illustration below outlines some of the key considerations for managing crime.

Assessing the vulnerabilities of your business to crime and planning a proportionate response is essential, whether it is installing CCTV or providing additional training for staff.

An example risk assessment for a convenience store is available from the Health and Safety Executive website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/pdf/newsagent.pdf>

External security



Where reasonably practicable, advertising on shop windows should be restricted to allow for clear viewing into and out of the premises.

Ensure that all doors and windows are secured to prevent burglaries.

For high-risk stores, consider the installation of external shutters (this may require planning consent).

Anti-social behaviour

If you are experiencing anti-social behaviour contact your local police or community safety partnership via www.police.uk or your local police website

If you are experiencing persistent anti-social behaviour you can use the Community Trigger power to force a response from local agencies. To find out how to activate the Community Trigger in your area visit: <https://asbhelp.co.uk/asb-help/>

ATMs

If you have an ATM located outside, ensure that you have CCTV with a good view of the ATM. This will help with the police investigation in the event of an ATM ram raid.

Colleagues and customers



Store colleagues

Make sure you consult with store colleagues on risks assessment and provide regular training on:

- Security measures such as panic buttons and CCTV.
- Internal and external crime reporting processes.
- Dealing with abusive customers.

ACS has developed the following materials to support store colleagues:

- ACS' Managing Violence and Abuse in Convenience Stores. The animation is available on ACS' YouTube Channel.
- The Suzy Lamplugh Trust in association with ACS has developed 'Suzy's Charter for Workplace Safety'.

Customer service

Be attentive, acknowledge all customers as they enter the store, so that potential thieves know that you are watching them.

Display ShopKind materials in your store to promote positive behaviour towards store colleagues.

If you think you have spotted someone concealing goods, avoid direct confrontation, instead, offer them a basket or help with carrying their goods.

In-store security



CCTV

Ensure one camera provides quality images of everyone entering your premises and a second that covers the till. Identify other frequently targeted areas of the store for camera location and consider the angle of view and lighting.

When operating CCTV in your premises you need to display signs telling people CCTV is in operation. You must also keep a record of your policy for protecting your customer's and employees' privacy for example not using audio recording or putting cameras in private areas. Do not keep CCTV footage for longer than you need. More information is available on the Information Commissioner's Office website: ico.org.uk

Any company using CCTV for crime prevention purposes is required to pay an annual data protection fee to the Information Commissioner's Office. To find out more about how to pay your annual data protection fee visit: ico.org.uk/fee

Self-Scan Tills

ACS created dedicated guidance on preventing theft from self-scan tills that is available on the ACS website: acs.org.uk/crime-report-2022

Cyber crime

Retailers can protect themselves from the most common cyberattacks by backing up data, keeping smartphones and tablets safe, preventing malware damage, avoiding phishing attacks, (e.g. emails asking for sensitive information such as bank details), and using passwords to protect your data.

For more information on ways to improve cyber security in your business see the National Cyber Security Centre's guidance for small businesses here: ncsc.gov.uk/smallbusiness

Till position

Place high-value goods or targeted products (meat, cheese, alcohol, confectionery) in view of the till.

Ensure that the front of the store is visible from the till, so staff can see customers approaching.

Age restricted sales

Ensure you have visible Challenge 25 signage at the entrance, till and near all age-restricted products in your store. This will remind customers they will be challenged for proof of Age. You can download and print Challenge 25 materials here: acs.org.uk/challenge25



Make sure staff know the store policy and acceptable proof of age documents.

When asking for ID think about the following as ways to prevent confrontation: deflect, flattery, being constructive. For more information about ways to mitigate violence from enforcing age-restricted sales, see ACS' Preventing Underage Sales Guide here: acs.org.uk/advice/age-restrictions

Managing cash

To reduce the risk of burglary and robbery decrease the amount of cash held in tills and on your premises and consider using counter drop safes. Regularly change the routine of banking procedures so they are not easily observable.

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Internal theft

- Check references of any new employee.
- Highlight internal investigation procedures in staff meetings or staff newsletters.
- Implement training processes for Store Managers and Supervisors to help them identify staff theft.
- Train staff to make them aware of the security features in-store.

Identifying staff theft

- Monitor till processes carefully and review individual end of day reports.
- Use till overlay systems to allow CCTV to combine with 'real-time' till receipt images.
- Monitor voids and refunds transactions closely
- Analyse till, cash management and inventory data to identify trends - look for anything out of the ordinary.
- When carrying out internal theft investigations, ensure you establish how and why the offence happened. This enables you to tackle the motive and presents an opportunity to prevent future incidents.

Reporting staff theft

- Report incidents to the police using the 101 number.
- Only using civil action means that the offender can move into another business and repeat the offence.



1. ACS Crime Survey 2024

Unless otherwise stated all data in this report comes from ACS' Crime Survey 2024: an online survey conducted between 13th November 2023 and 12th January 2024 capturing incidents of crime experienced by convenience retailers over the last 12 months.

The survey had 47 valid respondents, representing over 8,200 convenience stores in total. The survey gathered responses from independent, multiple and co-operative retailers and the data has been weighted to represent these store types in the same proportion as they are represented in the overall market. Data regarding the overall number of stores in the convenience sector, as well as a breakdown by store type, can be found in ACS' 2023 Local Shop Report.

2. Why retailers don't always report crime

Information on why retailers don't always report crime was captured through the following open-ended question; 'What, if anything, prevents you from reporting crimes to the police?'. Responses were categorised into themes using an inductive coding approach, resulting in the themes represented in the report.

3. ACS Voice of Local Shops survey (VOLS)

The VOLS survey is a telephone survey with a sample of 1,100 independent retailers, including unaffiliated, symbol group and independent forecourt retailers.

The Shop Theft Index was created from the following VOLS question:

Which of the following best describes your experience of violence in the last year?

- I have experienced an increase in shop theft
- I have experienced a decrease in shop theft
- I have experienced the same level of shop theft
- I have not experienced any shop theft
- Don't know

The index number is the percentage of retailers who experienced an increase minus the percentage who experienced a decrease.

4. ACS Colleague Survey 2023

An online survey looking at the demographics, experiences and situations of staff working within the convenience sector. Fieldwork was carried out between 26th January and 10th March 2023. The percentage of staff experiencing verbal abuse was based on the following question within the Colleague Survey:

Over the last twelve months, how often (if at all) have you been a victim of the following in the workplace?

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Every few months
- Monthly
- Don't know
- Daily or almost daily

Those who responded with any option other than 'never' were considered to have experienced some form of verbal abuse in the last year.

5. Shopper Polling

A survey of 1,072 UK adults conducted by Yonder. Fieldwork was carried out between the 29th and 30th of March 2023. The percentage of customers who have witnessed violence or abuse towards shopworkers was based on the following question:

Have you ever witnessed shopworkers being verbally or physically abused by another customer?

- Yes I have
- No I haven't
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Those who answered 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' were excluded for analysis.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the retailers who took the time to complete our 2024 Crime Survey and share their crime data with us, without which this report would not be possible.

Additional resources

For more information about retail crime and wider crime trends please see the following websites, reports and statistics:

ShopKind campaign

<https://nbcc.police.uk/crime-prevention/shopkind-webpage>

British Retail Consortium

<https://brc.org.uk/making-a-difference/priorities/crime/>

USDAW Freedom From Fear campaign

<https://www.usdaw.org.uk/freedomfromfear>

Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS) 2022

The CVS is a telephone survey where respondents from a representative sample of business premises in England and Wales are asked about crimes experienced at their premises in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Estimates for the 2022 CVS are based on 390 interviews with respondents at premises in wholesale and retail.

<http://tinyurl.com/y72t5bp6>

Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime in England and Wales

ONS publish quarterly their Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletins which are produced in partnership with the Home Office. The statistics are based on police recorded crime data and look at trends in overall police recorded crime.

<http://tinyurl.com/5ky82ymk>

