



HM Government

# Fighting Retail Crime

## More action

April 2024



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## Foreword

**The Home Secretary, Rt Hon James Cleverly MP**

**Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, Rt Hon Chris Philp MP**

Wherever we live, whatever our circumstances, we all rely on shops. From big chains to smaller stores, our country could not function effectively without the service these businesses provide.

This was brought home in stark fashion during the pandemic. Even as much of society was closing down, retailers remained open so that people could continue buying food and essential goods. During crises and normal times, on weekdays and at weekends, shops are there when we need them.

That is in no small part thanks to the dedication of shopkeepers and staff, who work hard to ensure customers can access the products they need. Their contribution to our communities must never be taken for granted. We must show them all the respect they deserve, and that means sending the clear and unequivocal message that violence or abuse against shopworkers will never be tolerated. Just as importantly, we must create an environment that gives these businesses every possible opportunity to prosper.

Since 2010, neighbourhood crime in England and Wales is down by 48% according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, but shoplifting and violence and abuse towards retail workers has been increasing. We must adopt a zero-tolerance approach to retail crime. That is why, alongside key partners, this government is taking concerted action to address the menace of retail crime, which is a blight on our high streets and imperils the livelihoods of traders.

When it comes to responding to these offences, the police are on the front line, and we have bolstered forces by recruiting 20,000 additional officers in England and Wales.

A recent police pledge to follow all reasonable lines of enquiry when investigating crimes is another very welcome step forward, as is the National Police Chiefs' Council's Retail Crime Action Plan. Published in October 2023, that plan contains important commitments regarding attendance at the scene of a retail crime and dealing with prolific shoplifters. Police remain steadfast in their commitment to this, and this pledge is already having an impact.

The National Retail Crime Steering Group monitors the implementation of the Retail Crime Action plan, meeting quarterly to discuss its impact.

All of these are substantial and worthwhile measures. But the ever-evolving nature of criminality demands that we adopt a flexible, proactive stance.

We have heard the concerns of the public and businesses, and we are taking decisive action to strengthen our approach.

That is why we are launching “Fighting Retail Crime” today, to build on what has already been achieved by the Retail Crime Action Plan.

We are taking further, concrete action – including via legislation – to crack down on shop theft and violence and abuse against retail staff. Alongside this, we are setting out new measures that will make it easier for police and businesses alike to deploy new technology and techniques to catch perpetrators and prevent new offences.

The key measures set out in this plan are:

- A new offence of assaulting a retail worker;
- Expanding the use of electronic monitoring for prolific shoplifters;
- Maximising the use of new technologies for the prevention and detection of retail crime;
- Designing out crime, reducing the opportunities to steal and sell stolen goods; and
- Making it easier to report crime and share information between businesses and police.

As Home Secretary, and the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, we are spearheading the government’s ongoing mission to crush crime and keep the law-abiding majority safe. We have achieved a great deal on that score. But there is more to do and, as this new plan demonstrates, when we identify ways to ramp up our efforts, we will not hesitate to act.

**Rt Hon James Cleverly MP**

Home Secretary



**Rt Hon Chris Philp MP**

Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire



April 2024

## The problem

1.1 This Government is committed to law and order. We recognise the significant impact crime has on businesses, communities and consumers. Shops are a key part of the fabric of our society and help communities to thrive; shop theft threatens the financial viability of shops and puts the prices up for law abiding citizens. Shopworkers, like everyone else, have the right to undertake their employment without fear and harassment and assaults are completely unacceptable.

1.2 We have invested significantly in reducing crime and the results are clear to see with crime generally, and acquisitive crime down since 2010. The Crime Survey for England and Wales shows neighbourhood crime is down 48% compared to the year ending March 2010 (Figure 1)<sup>1</sup>

1.3 Figure 1: Volume of neighbourhood crime as estimated by the Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2010 to September 2023 (vehicle-related theft, domestic burglary, theft from the person and robbery)



1.4 However, the picture is different for retail crime, including shop theft and violence towards retail workers.

1.5 Retail crime encompasses a range of offences but there has been particular concern around recent reported rises in shop theft and violence towards retail staff.

1.6 Shoplifting offences have been increasing, with the latest police recorded crime data (for the year to September 2023) showing an increase of 32% compared to the previous year and up by 12% since the pre-pandemic period (year to

<sup>1</sup> [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

March 2020).<sup>2</sup>See Figure 2. Some of that is down to increased reporting, which we welcome, but we are clear we need to do more to deal with this crime. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of retail crime does not come to the attention of the police, and recorded crime data provide only a partial picture. Wider sources of the scale of the issue refer to a greater scale of shoplifting. The latest British Retail Consortium (BRC) survey from a sample of retailers, estimates the number of shoplifting incidents are in the millions, and estimates the overall cost of retail crime (including crime prevention measures) was £3.3bn-almost double the previous year.<sup>3</sup>

1.7 Figure 2: Police recorded shoplifting offences, quarter ending December 2019 to September 2023



1.8 Evidence from the Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS), 2021 indicates that some types of retail premises experienced notably higher prevalence of theft by a customer. For example 77% of supermarkets experienced customer theft according to the CVS, 2021 which is much higher than the wider Wholesale and retail sector (25%). The two most commonly stolen items by customer theft were ‘food or groceries’ and ‘alcohol’ (an estimated 39% and 25%, respectively).<sup>4</sup>

1.9 Another area of concern is the rise in violence towards retail workers. Encountering a thief in store is the most common trigger for violent crime incidents in retail stores (cited by 26% of victims of violence, CVS 2021). Estimates show that 10% of premises in the sector experienced at least one incident of assault or threat, and that the majority of such incidents are verbal threats rather than physical assaults (CVS, 2022).<sup>5</sup> Industry survey data also

<sup>2</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/crimeandjustice/crimeandjusticearticles/crimeinenglandandwales-appendix-tables)

<sup>3</sup> [brc-crime-survey-report-2024.pdf](https://www.brc.co.uk/media/1222/brc-crime-survey-report-2024.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [Crime against businesses: findings from the year ending March 2021 Commercial Victimization Survey - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92424/crime-against-businesses-2021-findings.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [Crime against businesses: findings from the 2022 Commercial Victimization Survey - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92424/crime-against-businesses-2022-findings.pdf)

estimates that these incidents of violence and abuse towards retail staff are increasing.<sup>6</sup> The British Retail Consortium Crime Report 2024 showed there were around 475,000 incidents of violence and abuse in 2022-23 or 1,300 incidents a day; an increase from 870 a day in 2022-23. The majority of these incidents were abuse; but 41,000 of them were classed as violent incidents by those responding to the survey. While this data is less robust than the CVS, it nevertheless gives an indication of what retail workers are experiencing.

- 1.10 There has also been a rise in police recorded Robbery of Business property, with a 34% increase (for year to September 2023).<sup>7</sup>
- 1.11 Evidence from the Commercial Victimization Survey suggests the most common reason for not reporting a crime incident to the police in the Wholesale and retail sector was because the crime incident was deemed to be too trivial (37%). However, the proportion of premises reporting customer theft to the police is more likely when high value goods are stolen (64%), or there is violence towards staff (26%). When crimes are reported to the police, the majority of cases are closed without the offender being identified, with only 14.5% of recorded shoplifting offences resulting in a charge/summoned outcome, although this is higher than the overall charge rate for crime (5.9%, excluding fraud and computer misuse) in the year ending September 2023.<sup>8</sup> CVS estimates from 2021 indicate that, of the Wholesale and Retail premises that had reported any form of crime to the police, 53% were dissatisfied with the police response.
- 1.12 Shoplifting is a common offence in the criminal careers of prolific offenders. Shoplifting offences alone made up 14% of all sentencing occasions for prolific offenders.<sup>9</sup> Evidence suggests drugs is an important driver of prolific offending, with an estimated 70% of shop theft being committed by frequent users of heroin or crack cocaine/cocaine powder.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [BRC Crime Survey 2023; Crime Report 2024 | ACS | The Association of Convenience Stores](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Characteristics of Prolific Offenders, 2000-2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Understanding organised crime: estimating the scale and the social and economic costs \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)



## What we've already done

2.1 Shops are at the heart of our communities and neighbourhoods, and it is important businesses are free to trade without fear of crime or disorder. The Government is clear that shop theft is not a minor crime, it involves serious organised criminal gangs as well as prolific offenders and opportunistic thieves. Violent and abusive behaviour towards any worker, particularly those who provide a valuable service to the public, is never acceptable. This Government has given the police more resources to deal with crimes such as these and, thanks to our successful uplift programme through which we recruited over 20,000 additional officers, we now have more police officers across forces in England and Wales than in the previous peak in 2010. In response to concerns from the retail sector, the Government has taken significant steps to improve the police response to retail crime.

### Retail Crime Action Plan

- 2.2 In October 2023, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) published the Retail Crime Action Plan, which Minister Philp commissioned, and we strongly endorse. All police forces across England and Wales have made a significant commitment to prioritise police attendance at the scene of a retail crime incident where violence has been used towards shop staff, where an offender has been detained by store security, or where evidence needs to be secured and can only be done by police personnel.
- 2.3 Where CCTV or other digital images are secured, the police will run this through the Police National Database, as standard, to aid efforts to identify prolific offenders or potentially dangerous individuals. This builds on the NPCC commitment for police forces across England and Wales to follow up on all lines of enquiry, where there is a reasonable chance it could lead them to catching a perpetrator and solving a crime, including crime against retailers and wholesalers.
- 2.4 The plan also recognises that there are cohorts of prolific offenders who commit a majority of retail theft and pledges a proactive approach to identify and target resources at these individuals. Local policing teams are working with retailers to identify the offenders who cause the most harm and developing joint plans to target their offending.
- 2.5 Figures published by the NPCC show early signs of progress. A dip-sample of data from 31 police forces of over 1,500 crimes show police attended 60% of incidents reported by retailers where violence had been used, with 16% of forces sampled reporting 100% attendance to this type of incident<sup>11</sup> and the Co-op has already reported "green shoots of improvements in police response rates" since the introduction of the Action Plan<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> [Policing Retail Crime Action Plan shows early impact \(npcc.police.uk\)](https://www.npcc.police.uk)

<sup>12</sup> [Stealing with Impunity – new report sets out ten-point plan to curb career criminals and prolific offenders as Co-op reveals record levels of theft and violence - Co-op \(co-operative.coop\)](https://www.co-operative.coop)

- 2.6 In 2014 the Government introduced measures to allow low-value shoplifting to be dealt with as a summary offence, through a police-led prosecution, via section 176 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- 2.7 Police-led prosecutions were introduced to improve the efficiency of the criminal justice system by allowing for a simpler, more proportionate police-led process in high-volume, lower value, uncontested cases.
- 2.8 It does not constrain the ability of the police to arrest or prosecute someone in the way they feel is most appropriate. There has been a misconception that this meant low-value shoplifting had essentially been decriminalised: this has never been the case. The recent NPCC commitments on pursuing all reasonable lines of enquiry and prioritising attendance at retail crime will further ensure this route enables cases to be handled more speedily, ensuring swift justice for victims.

#### Pegasus

- 2.9 October 2023 also saw the launch of Pegasus, a unique private-public partnership, spearheaded by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex, Katy Bourne. Through Pegasus, retailers are providing data, intelligence and evidence to Opal, the national police intelligence unit on organised acquisitive crime, to develop a strategic picture, and build intelligence packages to help forces crack down on serious organised offenders.
- 2.10 Financial contributions from 14 major national retailers, the National Business Crime Solution and the Home Office will fund a new dedicated team in Opal for two years. Retailers will provide data, intelligence and evidence to the dedicated organised retail crime team in Opal. The Opal team will develop a national strategic picture of this crime and operational intelligence packages to help forces crack down on serious offenders. The team has been recruited and will soon be operational.
- 2.11 The work of Pegasus will radically improve the way retailers are able to share intelligence with policing, to better understand the tactics used by organised retail crime gangs and identify more offenders. It represents a step-change in how police forces can respond to this offending, benefitting all retailers.

#### National Retail Crime Steering Group

- 2.12 The Home Office Minister for Crime and Policing chairs quarterly a National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG), with the British Retail Consortium, allowing Government to continue to work closely with retail businesses, security representatives, trade associations and policing. Through this group the Minister holds policing to account for delivery of the Action Plan through a standing agenda item on attendance data from police and data from a selection of retailers giving an indication of police response to reported incidents. This work is supported by the Minister for Small Business and Retail at the Department for Business and Trade; retail crime is also a standing agenda item for the Retail Sector Council.
- 2.13 Over recent years the NRCSG has overseen work to reduce violence and abuse towards retail workers, through a series of task and finish groups made

up of members of the group. The Group championed the development of the Shopkind campaign, led by the Association of Convenience Stores on behalf of the Home Office. Shopkind aims to remind customers to consider their behaviour towards retail workers and shop with kindness. Over 130 retailers and other organisations have supported the campaign, uniting the retail sector to tackle this issue.

2.14 In addition, the upcoming programme of inspections by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services will hold the police to account for the quality of investigation and the commitment to respond to all reasonable lines of enquiry; this was discussed at the National Policing Board on 31 January 2024.

2.15 The National Police Chiefs' Council recruited a new national lead for retail crime, Assistant Chief Constable Alex Goss, who took up post in September 2023. He is working with retailers to develop a new NPCC strategy, to be agreed and overseen by the NRCSG. The strategy will sit alongside this action plan to provide a cohesive programme of ongoing work.

#### Aggravated sentences for assaults against those who are serving the public

2.16 In 2022, this Government took the significant step to introduce a statutory aggravating factor for assault against those who are serving the public (which includes retail workers). Section 156 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 inserted section 68A into the Sentencing Act 2020 to provide that the public-facing nature of a victim's role will be considered an aggravating factor when it comes to sentencing for assault offences, allowing the court to give a longer sentence within the statutory maximum for the offence.

2.17 This applies to any incident where the court considers this factor to be relevant. For example, it could be used in cases of threatening behaviour where cases are severe enough to go to court. Where an assault takes place against a public-facing worker, the courts are required by law to consider this aggravating factor.

#### Hotspot Patrols and Immediate Justice

2.18 The Government's flagship Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Action Plan was published on 27 March 2023.

2.19 As part of measures to increase the use of hotspot patrolling, dedicated funding is currently supporting Police and Crime Commissioners to target enforcement in the areas where anti-social behaviour, including shop theft-related ASB, is most prevalent in their communities. This approach has already been piloted in ten areas since July 2023, and by the end of January 2024 there have been over 100,000 hours of patrols completed, nearly 800 arrests, close to 2,000 stop and searches, and around 1,000 uses of (ASB) powers such as community protection notices and public protection orders<sup>13</sup>. In some areas particularly at risk of ASB where hotspot policing has been piloted, there have been drops in ASB of almost 50%<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> [Anti-social behaviour hotspot response programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/anti-social-behaviour-hotspot-response-programme)

<sup>14</sup> [Southend: Anti-social behaviour drops by 49% across the district | Essex Police](https://www.essexpolice.co.uk/news/southend-anti-social-behaviour-drops-by-49-across-the-district)

2.20 From this April, the Government will support a hotspot approach across every police force area in England and Wales, which will see thousands of additional patrols taking place in places blighted by anti-social behaviour and serious violence.

2.21 The ASB Action Plan also introduced immediate justice schemes whereby perpetrators of ASB will rapidly undertake work that restores the community that they have damaged. Again, this has been trialled in ten police force areas ahead of being rolled out across England and Wales later in 2024 and shop theft, where it has a detrimental impact on a community, is within scope of the scheme.

#### Safer Streets Fund

2.22 The Safer Street Fund was established in 2020 and has provided funding to local projects across England and Wales to protect communities from neighbourhood crime, ASB and violence against women and girls.

2.23 Round Two and subsequent rounds have encouraged interventions on high streets and busy city centres. Of the current 121 Round Five projects being delivered, at least 26 projects expect the interventions to have an impact on shop theft.

#### Community Payback

2.24 Community Payback plays a vital role in punishing offenders in the community, repaying their debt to society by cleaning up our neighbourhoods. As part of the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan, Community Payback teams are working in partnership with Local Authorities on 'Project Clean Streets', an initiative in which dedicated teams of offenders are rapidly deployed to clean up visible Anti-Social Behaviour in the community within a 48-hour window.

2.25 The project was piloted from July 2023 and has been successful with thousands of hours of reparative work completed by people on probation, all within 48-hours of notification from the local authority, allowing the public to see justice being done. There are plans to expand the project to all 12 Probation Service regions later this year.

2.26 Project Clean Streets enables people on probation to swiftly support communities to tackle antisocial behaviour in public spaces. For example, in Norwich, the City Council made a referral to remove litter and fly tipping which had been dumped in a public alleyway. A team of people on probation were quickly mobilised and removed hundreds of kilograms of waste. This work generated lots of positive feedback from local residents. Similarly, in North Northamptonshire the Council made a referral to clean up litter in a residential area. Hundreds of bags of rubbish and large items were collected by people on probation delivering improvements for local people.

2.27 The public nominations [website](#) on Gov.uk has been relaunched to make it easier for the public and community organisations to suggest potential Community Payback placements that address local needs.

## Fraud Strategy

2.28 Tackling fraud requires a unified and co-ordinated response from government, law enforcement and the private sector. In May 2023, the Government published a Fraud Strategy with commitments under three pillars:

- to block scams at source
- to pursue more fraudsters
- to empower people to avoid fraud.

2.29 The Strategy set an ambition to cut fraud by 10% from 2019 levels, down to 3.33 million frauds by the end of this Parliament. The latest Crime Survey for England and Wales shows we have met this target, with fraud down by 13% in a year, demonstrating the positive impact of our strategy.

2.30 Further actions completed include the publication of the Online Fraud Charter in November 2023, a voluntary commitment taken by 12 of the biggest tech companies to tackle fraud on their platforms.

2.31 In practice, signatories have committed to doing more to filter out and remove fraud, deploy measure to make sure people are who they say they are, raise awareness and support for users, and improve collaboration with law enforcement. Signatories have agreed to implement these actions within six months of signing the Charter.

## What more we're going to do

- 3.1 Retail crime is unacceptable, and though we have taken significant steps as outlined above, we are determined to do more. We will build on the existing police-led Retail Crime Action Plan in five key areas to further drive down shop theft, violence and abuse against retail workers.

### **Standalone offence for assaults on retail workers**

- 3.2 We will introduce a new bespoke offence of assaulting a retail worker, via the Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament. This will send a strong message that assaults against retail workers are completely unacceptable and will be met with tough consequences. A standalone offence allows us to do two key things to crack down on this crime, enable the courts to address the underlying causes of the offender's behaviour, and ensure that perpetrators face appropriate justice.
- 3.3 Firstly, there will be a presumption that on conviction for this new offence, the court will make a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) under section 22 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, to prevent an offender from visiting specific premises. Breach of a CBO is a criminal offence which carries a maximum custodial penalty of five years' imprisonment.
- 3.4 Secondly, there will also be a presumption that for a third or subsequent sentencing occasion for an offence of assaulting a retail worker the offender will be electronically monitored as part of any community sentence. Repeating this crime will not be tolerated.
- 3.5 Importantly, a specific offence will also ensure that assaults of retail workers are separately recorded by the police so that we have better understanding of the scale of such crimes and therefore better placed to improve our response further.

## Expanding the use of electronic monitoring for prolific shoplifters

- 4.1 Our strategy to reduce reoffending is central to the government's commitment to cut crime. We are focusing on the interventions that are known to work: a home, a job and access to treatment for substance misuse. We work with other government departments to deliver targeted interventions to tackle reoffending, making the full use of diversionary opportunities in the Criminal Justice System to tackle the underlying causes of offending behaviour, and cut crime.
- 4.2 Prolific offenders account for a disproportionate amount of crime: 9% of the offending cohort (around 525,000 individuals) received 52% of convictions between 2000 and 2021. Tackling this cohort is therefore critical to crime prevention<sup>15</sup>.
- 4.3 We will therefore go further when individuals are repeatedly perpetrating retail crime.
- 4.4 We will develop a retail theft electronic monitoring (EM) 'package', to offer sentencers starting in a pilot area, a clear community sentence pathway for repeat retail theft offenders. This could, for example, include a combination of GPS monitored curfews and exclusion zones – preventing offenders from returning to the places they are offending - combined with rehabilitative activity designed to tackle the drivers of repeat offending even including drug treatment or alcohol treatment or monitoring requirements. By packaging up these requirements into a single pathway, we will provide sentencers a more bespoke approach for persistent retail theft.
- 4.5 Following release from custody prolific offenders will be individually assessed for the most appropriate additional licence conditions, focussed on reducing reoffending and protecting the public, this will include the option of electronic monitoring.
- 4.6 We will also bring forward legislative changes to introduce a presumption towards electronic monitoring as part of a sentence served in the community for those who repeatedly steal from shops. This legislative change will provide that on the third sentencing occasion, an offender would be electronically monitored as part of any community sentence or post-release for the duration of any licence period. This will strengthen our efforts to expand the use of Global Positioning System tagging.
- 4.7 In addition, we will work with national policing bodies including the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners to co-ordinate national concentrated action to tackle prolific retail crime offenders.
- 4.8 This will build on the approach described in the NPCC Retail Crime Action Plan, whereby a proactive approach is used to identify and target resources at prolific offenders who do the most harm. This will use the good practice already established through the Immediate Justice pilots, and NBCC's Safer Action

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<sup>15</sup> [Characteristics of Prolific Offenders, 2000-2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-prolific-offenders-2000-2021)

Business days and work to professionalise Business Crime Reduction Partnerships



## Greater use of facial recognition

- 5.1 We are enabling the police to maximise the use of new technologies, such as facial recognition, for both the prevention and detection of retail crime. At Spring Budget 2024, the government announced investment of over £230 million over 4 years to improve police productivity. During 2024/25, we will invest over £17.6 million specifically to enhance facial recognition capabilities for law enforcement, including up to £4 million to support the procurement of purpose-built live facial recognition mobile units, building on existing capability. The investment we have already made in this capability makes a difference. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Metropolitan Police deployed facial recognition in real-time 62 times, which resulted in over 150 arrests and other positive outcomes. When deployed in Croydon between December 2023 and March 2024, this resulted in over 80 arrests for a wide range of offences including rape, burglary, grievous bodily harm, fraud, robbery, drug supply, animal cruelty and criminal damage. We intend to increase the numbers of these specialist mobile units significantly over the coming year, enabling police to tackle a wide range of offenders, including prolific shoplifters.
- 5.2 Where criminals are caught stealing on retailers' CCTV, the police can and do use retrospective facial recognition to search the images captured against their national database of facial images on the Police National Database, although often these thieves are already known to the police. We are encouraging police forces to maximise the use of this technology to identify prolific shoplifters. Police forces are significantly increasing their use of this tool across all crime types, and we have a plan to upgrade this tool over the next two years so that it is even more accurate, ensuring that policing have access to the most up to date and accurate facial matching algorithms, as soon as is feasible.
- 5.3 We are working with retailers to ensure that they are using facial recognition to its fullest potential to prevent retail crime. We will work continue to work with retailers and trade associations, who represent small retailers and wholesalers, as well as large national chains, through the National Retail Crime Steering Group to ensure retailers have information about the lawful and appropriate use of retrospective facial recognition and watchlists. The National Retail Crime Steering Group will continue to be a place for proactive and productive discussion to explore facial recognition technology. This will include signposting the potential benefits to retailers of live systems that allow them to access shared watchlists and receive alerts when known thieves enter their premises, and providing case studies to show the potential benefits of using these systems.
- 5.4 The British Retail Consortium has already worked closely with the Information Commissioner's Office to ensure the extensive guidance they have already issued to retailers is well promoted, and we will do more to identify and eliminate any knowledge gaps. We will share this guidance within the National Retail Crime Steering Group for all members to have and will share it with the Retail Sector Council chaired by the Department for Business and Trade. We will also continue to encourage the sharing of this guidance at national events such as the Retail Risk Conference.

## Designing out crime

### Sharing good practice

- 6.1 Across the retail sector, many businesses have invested in crime prevention measures to design out crime, that make it harder to commit retail crime, including reducing theft and violence against employees. This includes technological developments such as audio headsets to better communicate with colleagues, body-worn video, select placement of items in stores and staff training on personal safety, de-escalation and crime management.
- 6.2 Sharing best practice is key to achieving and enabling effective processes and allows for more local-level learning to be implemented on a larger scale. We will continue to use the National Retail Crime Steering Group to champion the sharing of best practice, knowledge and learning, as well as using this forum to pilot innovative approaches from members and wider relevant stakeholders.
- 6.3 We will reach out to insurance companies and invite them to a meeting of the National Retail Crime Steering Group to discuss retail crime, what they can do to support innovation that tackles retail crime, and to allow for further consideration of how to better align incentives between insurers and retailers in the fight against shop theft, allowing for the possibility of more collaboration and innovative new products.
- 6.4 The National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) hosted a Safer Action Business Days (SABA) national month of action in March 2024, with over 200 SABA days taking place across 30 police forces. Results and learning from the week of action will be disseminated by NBCC via their monthly newsletter and published on the NBCC website. In addition, the NBCC publishes crime prevention guidance for retailers and other businesses on its website.
- 6.5 The National Business Crime Centre plays a central role in linking policing and businesses, supporting each other to prevent and combat crime, and sharing good practice. We will work with the National Police Chiefs' Council and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners to ensure the NBCC is sustainable going forward.

### Training opportunities

- 6.6 The Police Crime Prevention Initiatives (PCPI) provide key training opportunities to support crime prevention and demand reduction for policing. We will provide support and explore additional funding opportunities for PCPI to develop training and raise awareness of how police officers and Police Community Support Officers can work with retailers to prevent and respond to retail crime; this will include practical measures to design out crime, such as shop layout to reduce opportunities for theft.
- 6.7 We will encourage police forces to partake in the course through the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for acquisitive crime Chief Constable Amanda Blakeman and lead for retail crime Assistant Chief Constable Alex Goss. We will explore whether further resources or training is needed for retailers on

crime prevention, in addition to guidance and advice currently provided by trade associations and National Business Crime Centre.

#### Prize fund for innovation in crime prevention for small independent retailers

6.8 There are a number of industry-led conferences which showcase crime prevention products, where there has been incredible innovation in crime prevention for retail crime. We want to see what more ideas people have to help develop crime prevention, particularly for small independent retailers. We will fund a cash award for anyone who wishes to develop an innovative crime prevention system for small, independent retailers via a national conference or award ceremony.

#### Online sales of stolen goods

6.9 Stolen goods are often offered for sale on online platforms, where sellers can remain anonymous or difficult to trace. This Government is making it harder to sell goods online anonymously and tightening up the requirements for online platforms to make it harder to sell stolen goods online.

6.10 Tax changes brought in from 1 January 2024 require digital platforms to collect and report seller information and income to HMRC. Anyone earning over £1,000 in any tax year will be required to pay tax on their profits. To comply with this, online sales platforms must obtain the identity of sellers, and this information can be shared with police for the purpose of investigating crime, we want to ensure all relevant platforms are in scope.

6.11 Online platforms also have new responsibilities under the Online Safety Act 2023. Online platforms which provide a service for users to generate 'user-to-user' content, such as adverts or postings for items for sale, have a responsibility to have policies and processes in place to prevent users encountering illegal content, including adverts for stolen goods. We are working with Ofcom, the regulator which oversees these requirements, to ensure stolen goods is covered in Codes of Practice under the Act.

6.12 The Home Office agreed an Online Fraud Charter with the largest companies in the tech sector in November 2023, to ensure urgent action ahead of regulation. It includes commitments to do more to block fraud at source and remove fraudulent adverts. This includes making sure people are who they say they are online, with greater verification of marketplace sellers and enhanced measures to verify adverts and advertisers. The Charter has been signed by Amazon, eBay, Google/YouTube, LinkedIn, Match Group, Facebook/Instagram, Microsoft, Snap Inc., TikTok and X, with actions due to be implemented within six months.

6.13 We will also focus efforts to tackle the sale of stolen goods online, where sellers are able to remain anonymous and are difficult to trace. We will engage with sales and social media platforms, through a meeting of the National Retail Crime Steering Group, to encourage them to actively look for the tell-tale signs that goods are stolen, take down adverts and material encouraging shop theft.

## **Easier reporting of crime to catch more offenders**

- 7.1 It is key that businesses report all incidents of retail crime where they occur, gather relevant evidence, including available digital images captured through CCTV, and work closely with the police to ensure any further evidence is provided to allow incidents to be dealt with appropriately. Reporting crime to the police is the first crucial step in ensuring an appropriate police response.

### The next stage of the Pegasus partnership

- 7.2 Pegasus is a unique private-public partnership that will radically improve the way retailers are able to share intelligence with policing, to better understand the tactics used by organised retail crime gangs and identify more offenders.
- 7.3 Through Pegasus, 14 national retailers, the National Business Crime Solution and the Home Office, have funded a specialist analysis team within Opal, the national police intelligence unit for serious organised acquisitive crime, benefitting all retailers nationwide. Retailers will provide data, intelligence and evidence to the dedicated organised retail crime team in Opal. The Opal team will develop a national strategic picture of this crime and operational intelligence packages to help forces crack down on serious offenders.
- 7.4 This initial funding period, focused on the serious and organised nature of shop theft, will last for two years. Subject to the impact felt by retailers and the outcomes, we will look to support a continuation of this activity and explore ways to go further to tackle retail crime. Contingent on the outcomes of the first phase, we will support a further phase of work - continuing to tackle the threat of organised criminal gangs, as well as potentially considering how Pegasus' analytical power can be used to tackle prolific shoplifters.

### Digital Evidence Management Systems

- 7.5 Building on the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) commitment to pursue all reasonable lines of enquiry, the NPCC Retail Crime Action Plan provides a commitment from all forces in England and Wales that police attendance will be prioritised where evidence needs to be promptly secured which can only be done in person by police personnel. The NPCC Action Plan advocates the use of Digital Evidence Management Systems (DEMS) as the quickest, most effective and secure way to share CCTV and images.
- 7.6 DEMS are platforms that allow businesses to report and access information about crimes, including uploading CCTV evidence and witness statements. Having a centralised evidence base is effective at saving retailers and the police time, meaning quicker and more effective investigations, and shorter times to wait for victims.
- 7.7 We know investment in DEMS systems is a commitment, and as businesses consider whether to invest your time and resources, they need to know the benefits it can bring. The National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) has hosted workshops for police and retailers, to understand how best to provide data to the different DEMS systems; these have been well received. We will therefore fund a series of new workshops across the country, provided by the NBCC, to bring together police, and retailers of all sizes to understand the systems, learn

the key benefits and increase sign up. We will encourage police forces to invest in DEMS systems, highlighting the benefits of using the systems.

#### Sharing information to identify offenders

7.8 Retailers and security companies have a wealth of data about crime and information about offenders, including images from CCTV and body-worn video cameras. We will explore how to more effectively share this information to help police identify the offenders who are stealing from multiple retailers in local areas and to link offences, using retrospective facial matching technology to eliminate thieves. This will enable partner agencies to target action and interventions at the most prolific thieves, who are responsible for a high volume of shop theft offences. It will also mean that police are able to arrest these identified offenders, quickly and more effectively.

7.9 Importantly, this will help to ensure crime is not merely displaced from one retailer to another, or onto smaller independent retailers.

#### Tools for smaller retailers

7.10 Small, independent businesses are often least able to find time or resources to report shop theft to police or to work with the local Business Crime Reduction Partnership to tackle crime. We will work with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners to undertake a regional pilot of technology aimed at small, independent retailers to make it easier to report crime to their local police force. This could include enabling retailers to provide photos and video footage directly from a mobile phone into the police reporting system, making reporting simpler and quicker for retailers who otherwise struggle to find the time to report crime to the police.

7.11 We will share information and good practice on the tools that can help support retailers report crime, through the National Retail Crime Steering Group. We will also look to fund workshops to discuss the various tools that could be used by smaller retailers, and work with trade associations such as the Association of Convenience Stores to host forums with smaller retailers, policing and suppliers to encourage reporting and inspire adoption of successful tools.

#### Business Crime Reduction Partnerships

7.12 Partnership working is essential to combat retail crime. Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs), these are business-led partnerships, working with police and local authorities to tackle and reduce crime affecting businesses. BCRPs are often managed by a dedicated manager, who facilitates work between the local businesses and police in a local area such as a town centre, often to identify and tackle prolific offenders. They are funded by businesses which are members of the partnership and can be part of a Business Improvement District (BID) or run independently.

7.13 We encourage retailers to join their local BCRP or BID to support local community efforts to reduce crimes. BCRPs and BIDs across the country

including Northamptonshire, Derbyshire and Dorset<sup>16</sup> have made huge impacts on retail crime in their local areas.

- 7.14 We encourage Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to set up BCRPs in their force area, where these do not already exist, and recommend that PCCs play an active role, for example by chairing local BCRP meetings, or becoming standing members.
- 7.15 We will work with the National Business Crime Centre, National Association of Business Crime Partnerships and the newly-formed BCRP Standards Board to professionalise BCRPs and increase the effectiveness of data sharing.

#### Witness and evidence providing

- 7.16 We expect retailers, who are able to, to make or reaffirm commitments to provide staff with time during the working day to engage with police during the initial evidence-gathering and investigatory stages, for example to provide CCTV evidence, and provide witness statements, personal impact statements and business impact statements as needed. Retailers should ensure that front-line store managers know about and are able to act on this commitment.
- 7.17 Impact statements allow the person, and business to share the effects the crime has had on them, and the retailer. Business impact statements are used as part of the evidence and will be taken into consideration by the court when sentencing.
- 7.18 It is crucial that when cases go to court, staff who are witnesses are given time off work to give evidence in court if needed. This will help ensure that criminals are dealt with appropriately through the criminal justice system. We encourage retailers to facilitate this, as whatever the short-term impacts, ensuring that those who commit retail crime are brought to justice has longer term benefits for providing a healthy and thriving retail sector.

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<sup>16</sup> [apccs.police.uk/media/9544/in-focus-tackling-business-and-retail-crime-070324.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2GE72G2D6b56GtZqZqdPtuBFvoxctTTk1Upl7YZAzIMNYvt8ut9wAZg2c](https://apccs.police.uk/media/9544/in-focus-tackling-business-and-retail-crime-070324.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2GE72G2D6b56GtZqZqdPtuBFvoxctTTk1Upl7YZAzIMNYvt8ut9wAZg2c)

## **Sussex Case Study**

Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Katy Bourne and Sussex Police set up the Safer Sussex Business Partnership (SSBP) with a range of retailers including national chains and small independent businesses, to provide a partnership advisory group on business crime. This works in tandem with Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and Business Improvement Districts in Sussex. The aims of the SSBP are to enable businesses to report crime more easily, improve intelligence sharing on prolific offenders, and improve police understanding of business crime to inform the police response. Police officers also work with the business community to discuss areas of concern and focus. Alongside this, Sussex Police have a dedicated Business Crime Team of nine trained investigators, paid for by the PCC. The BCT review around a third of reported incidents in Sussex a year with a solved rate of nearly 70% (compared to a rate of 22.7% for incidents they do not review).

By developing relationships with retailers, sharing intelligence and using the latest technology, the dedicated Business Crime Team (BCT) build case files on prolific offenders by working with the District Policing Team to link offences of prolific offenders, through Operation Apprentice. Almost 50,000 businesses in Sussex use the Disc online reporting system to share information with police about incidents and offenders; this system enables the identification of unknown offenders by securely sharing images across the BCT, partnerships and businesses.

As part of this approach, Sussex's Business Crime Reduction Partnership provides information to help with the police investigations, including statements and CCTV evidence; they also assist identifying prolific offenders.