

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Violence and abuse towards retail workers, HC 1147](#)

Wednesday 28 April 2021

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Dehenna Davison; Laura Farris; Simon Fell; Andrew Gwynne; Dame Diana Johnson; Tim Loughton; Stuart C McDonald.

Questions 47 - 109

Witnesses

[I](#): Amanda Blakeman, Deputy Chief Constable, Gwent Police; Ian Dyson, Commissioner of the City of London Police; Patrick Holdaway, Chief Inspector, Hampshire Police; and David Jamieson, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[David Jamieson VTR0031](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Amanda Blakeman, Ian Dyson, Patrick Holdaway and David Jamieson.

Q47 **Chair:** Welcome to this evidence session for the Home Affairs Select Committee as part of our inquiry into violence against retail workers. We are very grateful to our witnesses for joining us this morning. We have David Jamieson, the retiring West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner; Ian Dyson, the Commissioner for the City of London Police; Patrick Holdaway, the Chief Inspector from Hampshire Police, who has previously been working at the National Business Crime Centre; and Amanda Blakeman, the Deputy Chief Constable of Gwent Police. Welcome to everyone.

As we are in the final run-up to the police and crime commissioner elections, we are very grateful to have David with us, who is standing down at these elections. We wish you well for the future. That is obviously the reason why we do not have other police and crime commissioners with us this morning.

We have heard evidence from shopworkers, retailers from convenience stores, major retailers and the shopworkers' trade unions all testifying to a significant increase in violence and unacceptable abuse against shopworkers, telling us about the impact that has on people, not just in the awful incidents themselves but also the impact of the stress and fear that it can create for colleagues. There is also their concerns that this is not being taken seriously enough, including not being taken seriously enough by the police.

I will ask each of you in turn: what would you say to the shopworkers and retailers about the violence that they are facing and about the police response to it?

Amanda Blakeman: Thank you very much. We recognise very much the critical role that retail has played over the last year in the response to Covid. In fact, we have worked very closely across retail during this period to create a more inclusive and better information-sharing environment, which has worked incredibly positively.

I recognise that violence against shopworkers not only relates to acquisitive crime, the area I have responsibility for nationally, but also to incidents of public harm, public order, antisocial behaviour and other behaviours that we have seen during the time of Covid.

On our response to violence against shopworkers, from a Gwent perspective and looking locally, I am satisfied and I confirm that if there is an instance where violence occurs, a good response goes into that to ensure that we maintain a safe environment for our retail partners to work in. I recognise that there is more work to do and more that we can do on a joined-up partnership and the environmental factors that sit around the antisocial behaviour.



Ian Dyson: Good morning. I took over the business crime lead at the end of 2018, January 2019, and in that time before lockdown I met with retailers, I met with the British Retail Consortium at a roundtable, and I heard the stories from those businesses. I also met with the Association of Convenience Stores at the launch of its report into the horrific volume of incidents that its workers are experiencing. I understand and I share the concern that they have about the levels of violence against workers in the retail sector.

We are not complacent. The challenge that we have had with Covid, where clearly shopworkers have been at the forefront of keeping the economy going, keeping people fed and watered and providing essential services, has meant that we have done a significant amount of work with the retail sector during the Covid period. Patrick Holdaway, who you will hear from in a minute, has been leading on that.

I am working to look at how we can get a better picture within policing of the police response. Where violence is part of the call into policing, I am confident that forces are using proper risk assessment models to determine the response of policing. We have that from a survey we did during last year. I think the challenge is being able to, at the national level, provide accurate data on where violence against shopworkers is teased out from the broader figures on violent crime. I am not complacent about that and later, Chair, I can talk about some of the stuff we are doing in trying to improve the data position.

I want to emphasise that, as the national business crime lead in policing, I am very concerned and share the concern of retailers. I want to work to make sure that we address those concerns.

Patrick Holdaway: Good morning. Without trying to repeat what my colleagues have said, I would like to use the opportunity today to explain that a vast amount of work has taken place, much of which is in partnership with the retail sector and beyond, to work together to try to reduce this challenge around shopworker violence. A lot of work has taken place through Talla and previous to that, and a lot of work will continue and in the next few weeks will start to come out. Together we will continue to work to try to reduce the challenge in this area.

David Jamieson: Thank you for your well wishes on my retirement—a fortnight today.

It is certainly the case that many shopworkers don't feel that this is being taken seriously. It is partly a resource problem; the blue line is much thinner than it used to be. We have lost a quarter of our officers in 10 years, so the ability to respond to as many events as we would have previously done has somewhat reduced. The feeling that people have about violence towards shopkeepers has been very much heightened during the pandemic. Ordinarily, people who are working in shops have had to enforce things like age-related criminality. Now they are not only doing that, but they are enforcing the Covid regulations to do with masks



and keeping a distance. That has given an opportunity for some people to abuse shopworkers.

There has been a particular challenge in the pandemic. The figures we have of actual reports of violence against shopworkers in the West Midlands—an area of just under 3 million people or thereabouts—are 781 in 2019 and 934 in 2020. We imagine that they are very low figures. Much of this crime is underreported or not reported at all. It does not actually reflect the true picture. I praise USDAW for the work it has done. The work it has provided to your Committee and the discussions that I have been having with them locally paint a picture of underreporting, particularly of the persistent abuse that many shopworkers get.

What we see reported as a force are the more serious incidents where there may have been serious abuse, verbal abuse or physical abuse. I think what lies underneath that is an enormous amount of low level constant abuse, which is wearing down the people who work in our shops.

If you look at the pandemic, we have quite rightly praised the health workers, the police and other people in the public sector who have done a first class job during the pandemic, and they deserve our praise. But the shopworkers have provided a vital service, not least providing us with our food during the pandemic, and they too deserve our praise—and you may want to come on to this later in this session—and they also need our protection.

Q48 Chair: Paul Gerrard from the Co-op told us, “Bearing in mind that we report only the most serious offences to the police because we do not want to report every incident of shoplifting, two times out of every three the police did not attend for those serious offences”. The Co-op are only reporting the most serious offences—they are only reporting the ones that they think are serious—and the police are not attending in two out of three of those incidents. Do you think that figure is accurate for forces across the country? Patrick Holdaway, is that what happens in Hampshire?

Patrick Holdaway: It is very difficult to get an accurate level of data. You are right in what you say—that it will reflect differently across different forces. When any call comes in the control room will make an assessment on the facts they are given. The first challenge is making sure that the retailers give the right level of information that will help elicit a police response if it is required.

There is some work taking place with the BRC. We have worked with them to develop some guidance for retailers to highlight things such as if violence has been used, if there is some vulnerability, because those are the issues that policing will look at to determine whether a police response needs to take place. The challenge is, of course, if an offence has taken place, the offender has left and we can capture that data at a later time. The police force may look at it and decide to send a police



resource or look to deal with it in a different way without immediate deployment.

- Q49 **Chair:** He described a situation where someone came in at 5 o'clock in the afternoon wanting to buy more paracetamol than you are allowed, was refused, threats were made, he began to get aggressive and abusive, assaulted people, was removed from the store, stayed outside the store and then made personal threats against the female manager. A colleague called the police and heard nothing back until the next day when the police rang to see if everything was okay. Do you think that is an acceptable response?

Patrick Holdaway: No, not at all. Part of the role that I played at the National Business Crime Centre is as that intermediary. I would get calls such as this, go back to the force—we have points of contact within each force—and go down to that level of detail and understand what the issue is. Sometimes it was that there were just no other units to deploy or there was a breakdown in communication. There are occasions that police can get it wrong and they did seek to redress that issue and do that service recovery.

It is really sad to hear, but given the number of deployments and the calls that come in, these occasions will occur and we do what we can to reduce them.

- Q50 **Chair:** The Co-op is a major national group that has put a lot of investment into security and so on, so it knows what it is doing. It is reporting cases and two-thirds of the cases that it is reporting are not getting police attending. Is that what is happening in Gwent, Amanda Blakeman?

Amanda Blakeman: Unfortunately, on occasion that does happen when we receive a call for service, as Patrick has said, when we have done a risk assessment of using threat, harm, risk, if the offender has left the store and there are no other units able to deploy. I would very much like to make it clear that while I am not comfortable with that, sometimes it is the resources we have available to be able to respond.

Patrick is absolutely right in what he is saying. We do our very best to try to ensure that we get to the calls where we are needed, where there is threat, harm, risk to individuals, but if the person has left the store and there is not anybody available to send, sometimes those are being dealt with either later on in the evening or the next day.

I have personally been in a Co-op off duty when I have seen somebody verbally threatening a member of staff and have intervened off duty, and I have called the police and have had a response to that. From that point of view, I have no reason to disbelieve what the Co-op are saying.

As I said in the first instance, there is a position here that is not acceptable for shopworkers. We are working incredibly hard, via Mr Dyson and the Business Crime Unit, to be able to understand how we get



a better response for people so that they are feeling protected as they work in one of the critical pieces of infrastructure for keeping us moving as a country.

Q51 Chair: Ian Dyson, what was striking was the unanimity in the evidence we have been getting from shopworkers, and from retailers big and small, all saying that they think the police are not taking this seriously enough. Do you think not attending two out of three such calls is acceptable?

Ian Dyson: No, it is not. The example that you described—and I do not know the circumstances—does not look to me like a service provided to victims of crime. I think there is a challenge around many forces prioritising their response and it does not necessarily mean that as a collective we don't take this worrying level of violence against shopworkers seriously. We do. My conversations with fellow chief constables are that we do.

As David Jamieson said earlier, a number of areas have seen some challenges with the volume and level of resourcing that they can provide to local policing, for example. The 20,000 uplift will help with that. It is too early to say nationally where all those resources will be deployed because, at the moment, a lot of them are probationary constables doing their training. Certainly in the City of London we have been able to increase our local policing response.

It is really important that the retailers raise these issues locally. The majority of forces have Business Crime Reduction Partnerships. It is those forums that should be unpicking some of the pretty unpalatable examples that you have described. In the City we are doing an initiative, and these are happening elsewhere in the country, where we are working in partnership with Tesco and their security staff are wearing body-worn video. We have seen a 28% reduction in the amount of violence or threats of violence involved in shoplifting cases. The volume of shoplifting cases is fairly static at the moment. It is very early days—it has only been running for a couple of months—but we have seen that quite dramatic reduction.

It is those sorts of initiatives that will get us to the point where the violent element of this, which is the really concerning piece for both us and retailers, will be able to be addressed. That is one of many that we are doing.

Q52 Chair: We want to come on to some of those positive initiatives in a second. Finally, David Jamieson, does that two out of three calls not getting a response reflect what happens in the West Midlands?

David Jamieson: I don't think the West Midlands would be much different from other areas. That probably reflects what is going on in our area, although I have put in place an emergency chapter to my police and crime plan and in that I stressed that there are two particular sectors



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of workers that needed special attention. That was a health worker—you will remember at the time people were attacking nurses, trying to grab their identity badges and so on—and I included shopworkers and retail workers as well. The reason for that is we could see very rapidly, after the shutdown of a large number of shops, a smaller number of shops were then dealing with the people who were trying to do shoplifting and people who were being abusive to shopkeepers. They concentrated on a smaller group of people and I recognised that they needed our very special attention.

As the police officers on this call have said, there is a difficulty with always prioritising the work they are doing. I know we have had to prioritise domestic abuse in the West Midlands, which has gone up hugely in this period and has drawn police resource away.

In each of our areas—we have seven neighbourhood policing areas, two in Birmingham and one in each of those other boroughs of the West Midlands—during the pandemic we have had Covid cars in place, which have been taking up reports of Covid breaches but also then are able to take up cases where people have been attacking shopkeepers or antisocial behaviour—sometimes it is Covid-related—in shopping areas or in public space. That has helped. The other thing we have done is upped the amount of police presence in shopping centres

Chair: I am just going to interrupt you there, David, sorry, because other Members want to come in and ask you about some of those things. We will come back to that in a second.

Q53 Laura Farris: Thank you very much to all our witnesses for coming before us this morning. I want to ask a few more question—really, they are questions of fact and there is no judgment here at all.

Amanda Blakeman, you gave some helpful evidence a moment ago saying that—there are two answers I have so far—one of the reasons why the police might not attend a reported incident of violence against a retail worker is either because of a resourcing issue or because the perpetrator has left the store. Are there other reasons that you are aware of that might influence a police decision, for example if the violence occurred around a theft of some low-value items? I would be very grateful to get a steer from the police as to other reasons that might lead a force not to come out.

Amanda Blakeman: From a violence point of view—we are talking violence against shopworkers rather than a shoplifting offence—that the offender has been into the store, perhaps removed something and left but has not been stopped, has not offered any violence and so on.

Q54 Laura Farris: Sorry; I am talking in the generality. Some of the evidence we have heard before is that perhaps somebody gets confronted in the store because that is suspected and then some violence transpires. I am not separating the two but I am trying to find out why the police might not come, beyond what you have said.



Amanda Blakeman: From a violence point of view, if the offender is in the store, as I have said, I would expect an immediate police response. If they are offering violence, if that shopworker is in a position where they are being threatened with immediate violence, I would expect an immediate response. I have done some checks myself to ensure that happens within Gwent.

If the offender has left the store, as in the example that was given about the Co-op, and there is not an available resource to send, to redeploy from something else because we are attending other matters—domestic abuse, whatever it is—those are the two instances that I see. In each instance there will be a statement to take from the individual who was offered violence—

Q55 **Laura Farris:** I am just asking about attendance. Could I ask about your threshold, then? Would it have to be actual violence to elicit a police response?

Amanda Blakeman: No, it is on the basis of threat, harm and risk. Where somebody is being threatened rather than being physically assaulted, those are the instances that I would expect to see.

Q56 **Laura Farris:** I just want to press you slightly on “expect to see”. Are you satisfied that you get a 100% response where violence has either been threatened or executed?

Amanda Blakeman: I am satisfied for Gwent. I can’t speak for the rest of the country, because obviously police forces use different assessment mechanisms for that.

Q57 **Laura Farris:** Could I pick up with one other police officer, perhaps Ian Dyson? I want to make clear what I am asking. We have heard from the unions who said that they are concerned when these events are reported that people do not come out. I want to ask you about thresholds and the empirical basis you have for believing that these are responded to. For example, do you agree that in every single case where violence is threatened there would always be police attendance on site?

Ian Dyson: The direct answer to that is that I am not sure. What I can say is that pretty well every force adopts a model of assessment. Most forces, or a significant number of them, adopt what we call the THRIVE model. Any call coming in, whether it is about violence or any other request for police assistance, will be assessed against THRIVE. THRIVE stands for threat, harm, risk, investigation opportunities, victim vulnerability and the engagement level required to resolve it. What I mean by that is there are a number of incidents where there may not need to be a police attendance. All forces adopt some form of assessment; that is a popular model. It is assessed and inspected as part of the HMICFRS inspection process to see that forces are adopting those risk assessment models to determine prioritisation.

Q58 **Laura Farris:** On victim vulnerability, do you think there is a perception



that a retail worker who is in a big store, where there might be a security guard, a line manager and other members of the team on site, would be categorised in a lower level of vulnerability according to the police matrix than if they were a person on the street?

Ian Dyson: To be candid, yes, there is a possibility that that is the case. What struck me when I met with retailers is the impact on individual shopworkers of the violence and the threats of violence that are causing significant psychological stress, welfare issues and in fact leading to a number of people leaving retail. I don't underestimate that, and part of my job is to make sure that is embedded into the processes that forces are undergoing.

Being candid, I suspect in a balance between a shopworker and an individual, for example a vulnerable person on their own, yes, of course that is where that prioritisation choice—and they are not easy choices. I don't underestimate the choices that supervisors in force control rooms are making in prioritising a limited resource.

Q59 **Laura Farris:** Could I ask one other thing about community remedy powers? I hope I have understood this correctly. I think it is right to say that these are shop bans that are backed up by court order; is that correct?

Ian Dyson: I believe so, yes. I will confess to not having a hugely detailed understanding of them but they are part of a suite of resolutions and outcomes that can be used.

Q60 **Laura Farris:** At first blush, would you agree that looks like a more muscular approach to persistent offenders? It is not just the role of the shop security, or indeed one of the shop retail workers, to make decisions about banning people. It is backed up by a court order and, therefore, becomes a criminal offence if it is breached. If you have no experience, please don't worry. I was just reading about it and thought it seemed quite a robust tool.

Ian Dyson: I think it is a useful tool. I don't have direct experience of it, but it is very important that all of us—society, policing, retailers—get to a position where it is unacceptable and the person committing the offence realises and is made to understand that it is unacceptable to all of us that they can go into a store, take property and threaten the people who are working there doing their jobs. I am in support of whatever tools we can use to emphasise that.

Q61 **Laura Farris:** Finally, to put the same question about community remedy powers to David Jamieson, is that something you have experience of or can you comment on them?

David Jamieson: No, I haven't direct experience of that but I am certainly aware where there are particular problems police are then following up, sometimes with the business improvement districts—they are working together. Wolverhampton is a good example where the



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shopkeepers, police, fire brigade and other services are working together to help protect the shopworkers, and of course to protect the customers in some cases as well, from violence. There are some very good examples of excellent practice but it does tend to be different in each area.

The real challenge is those shopkeepers who are out in what I call remote urban places. There is a single shop that is probably remote from other shops and may only have one, maybe two, people working in it. That is a particular challenge.

Q62 Laura Farris: Do the police forces store centrally any information that suggests vulnerability about a specific shop or would it be a case of the person reporting having to describe the shop each time?

David Jamieson: In our case, yes. Where we know there are particular problems, the police will put in extra presence. In my head I can think of a couple of areas where shops that are quite isolated from other shops are in very challenging areas of the West Midlands and police put on extra presence in those areas.

On your question about the priority, I regularly hold our force to account for how they attend to what we call priority 1 calls. They are all on a priority, of course; you would expect that. A priority 1 call would usually involve, as Amanda was saying, something happening and a person there on the premises proffering violence of some sort to the shopkeeper. I do hold them to account for that and generally I have noticed that our response has been very good to those. Are there some cases where we don't make it? Of course there are. This is not a perfect science. I hold them to account for the priority calls that they get from all sorts of crimes, including crimes against retailers.

Chair: Thank you. I will come back to you, Amanda Blakeman, to follow up on some of those points later on if you want to.

Q63 Andrew Gwynne: I want to pursue police responses to retail crime further with David Jamieson. As I understand it, in the West Midlands you have encouraged the police to take a zero tolerance approach to retail crime. Can you explain how that works? Does this mean that the police will respond to all reports of verbal abuse and low-value theft?

David Jamieson: We do take a very positive response and the zero tolerance approach is what we have used. Does this mean that we attend every single incident? Of course not; that would not be expected at all. I am saying that where a serious incident is happening, that is given a very high priority. In West Midlands Police, when somebody is at that moment under attack is given great priority. The accounts I have had back from the force in my holding-to-account role have been generally very good.

The real problem comes as you get further down to something that has occurred but the perpetrator has now left the premises and there is no longer an immediate risk. How you follow that up is very important. That



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is what I was saying earlier. We put these extra patrols on, the Covid cars and so on. They have all been part of that work to protect shopworkers. The other thing is that we have to get the law to recognise business crime and crime against shopworkers, and offer them particular protection.

Q64 Andrew Gwynne: I absolutely agree. Following on from that, David, can you explain what kind of resource implications tackling retail crime in the West Midlands is having on your force?

David Jamieson: I said earlier that the blue line is thinner than it used to be. However, during the pandemic some crimes reduced substantially. House burglaries reduced very substantially and that gave us an opportunity to move resource to where the crime was happening. I have covered domestic violence, but shops and shopping centres are also areas where we had to do a lot more work than we had previously done.

We have upped patrols in some of those areas of vulnerability and we have been able to create partnerships with some of the people, like the business improvement district teams and other associations who represent shopkeepers. We have been able to do a lot more work with them in helping to protect the shopworkers. Some of the resource has shifted. The real challenge is where we go from here. All the shops are open and there is more movement around. We are seeing other crimes now coming back up again. We have to keep that effort up in the new situation we find ourselves in as this year unfolds.

Q65 Andrew Gwynne: Absolutely. If I can turn to Amanda Blakeman, we have talked about Usdaw and the Co-op and the work they are doing in this area but they have proposed a thematic review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services of particular forces' responses to retail crime. What contribution might this make towards understanding and allowing for action on this issue?

Amanda Blakeman: The thematic reports the HMIC do are really useful to police across the board in being able to understand the issues in greater detail and understand the complexity that sits behind this. The triggers we see for violence in stores against shopworkers go beyond shoplifting. They are very much relative to things like challenges around age. Co-op use the examples of the sale of paracetamol. We also see the triggers associated with hate crime. There is a vast array of triggers that are very impactful for the victim, as we have already discussed. I see it as a positive, as I see all the thematics the HMIC do as a positive, because they generally bring out additional areas across the country with national recommendations that allow us to be able to deliver a better response.

Q66 Stuart C McDonald: I will turn now to the National Business Crime Centre, something I confess I do not have a great deal of knowledge about. How do we measure the effectiveness of the National Business Crime Centre since its inception in 2017? How is that effectiveness



measured and, after four years, are there any changes that need to be made to how it works?

Ian Dyson: The NBCC is a small unit. We have to be realistic about the scale of it. It is three or four people working within policing, but the key piece about the NBCC is the link and engagement with the business sector. Its ambition is to get more traction around best practice, sharing good practice across the business sector, because business crime is more than just the retail sector, although that is the focus today. It is about initiatives, supporting forces in initiatives and trying to be a more consistent and coherent voice of policing.

It is a small unit. We had Government funding for three years, so now we are dependent on my own force as the national lead on business crime. The Metropolitan Police are very supportive and we work closely with, for example, Amanda Blakeman who is the national lead on acquisitive crime. We work closely with her portfolio and a lot of the work she is doing around offenders. Although Patrick has now left the NBCC, he is still linked into us, thankfully, and has a vast amount of experience.

I will ask Patrick to follow on with the assessment of progress so far. We have to use the NBCC as the vehicle for activity elsewhere. What I mean by that is very close engagement with the National Business Crime Solution. Apologies, that is another acronym that is confusing, but that is the industry's intelligence base and we are working with it to look at how we can share intelligence better with policing. We are just signing a national information-sharing agreement with it that will help in getting a much richer picture for both sides on intelligence. Maybe I could ask if Patrick wants to add more details to what I have just said.

Patrick Holdaway: Thank you, Mr Dyson. It is a good question because the NBCC's remit is very wide. While retail is really important to us, a lot of our touchpoints are with the BRC, Association of Convenience Stores and so on, but the work we did last year to support Op Talla was a really good example. The breadth of work included the tourism sector, the couriers and the large companies delivering parcels, of which there are estimated to be 25 billion a year; that shows the breadth of it. We also do a lot of work to support vulnerability in hotels and other areas. Last year, you may remember, we had a scenario where a number of 5G masts were being set alight. We supported the National Crime Agency in the response to that.

It is easy for me to say we are really important. However, what is the view of retailers? A good example of that is that we did a survey on the back of the work of Op Talla that came in at about 90%-plus for satisfaction. I think you will find in recent reports in the BRC and the Association of Convenience Stores that all of them requested continued funding of the NBCC. As Mr Dyson said, initially we had some Government funding but now it is down to a couple of forces to support it from a national perspective. The breadth of our work is really wide. We have been doing a lot recently to support the Police Minister with the



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National Retail Crime Steering Group and we are the voice of policing on that work going forward.

- Q67 **Stuart C McDonald:** Thank you very much. You spoke about various initiatives the NBCC takes forward. I will ask about a couple of them and whoever wants to come in, I am happy to hear from you. One is the network of single points of contact or SPOCs. What exactly is their role and how effective have they been? Secondly, how well developed are the Business Crime Reduction Partnerships in geographic spread and how effective have they been? Does anyone want to speak about either of those?

Patrick Holdaway: I will take that. On the single points of contact, we have a point of contact in every force. In the scenario that we heard earlier, if that comes through to us and we are the point for retailers come to us, we go out to them they are our conduit to resolve that local issue. That works really well. We do a regular newsletter. We get the points of contact into training. We get retailers in together and we have an update, so they are our group of people that we drive and inspire to help roll out that best practice nationally.

There are in excess of 100 Business Crime Reduction Partnerships. You also have business improvement districts, which are a similar scenario funded somewhat differently. The NBCC has been pioneering some accreditation for BCRPs. We work with a couple of organisations that accredit BCRPs and make sure they are delivering the service they need for local retailers. We, as a unit, hold that, so I am regularly in contact with the National Association of Business Crime Partnerships, as we are among the business improvement districts as well. We work very closely with them and they are the feet on the ground for local delivery.

- Q68 **Stuart C McDonald:** The NPCC has recently agreed a new definition of business crime. Can anyone tell me what was the reasoning behind that and what are the implications of that change?

Patrick Holdaway: There was a previous definition that I believe was designed in 2015. It was very wide, to the extent that I think it said that if a crime took place on or near a business, it was going to be a business crime. It was very difficult to see the wheat from the chaff, from that perspective. The new business crime definition was proposed and went out to a number of key NPCC leads who added a bit of consultation around it. It pretty much says that a business crime is where a business or someone who works in that business in the course of their employment is a victim of crime. It has been specifically designed to capture the violence against shopworkers.

There are a number of markers that police use. There are some mandatory ones that are set by the Home Office, and the others are voluntary for forces to do. There is no mandatory marker set for business crime. However, we did put some guidance around exactly what business crime is. For forces and PCCs that have developed some business plans,



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it gave them a bit of direction of what to look at. For instance, we excluded public sector and places of worship because they were picked up in other areas.

- Q69 **Stuart C McDonald:** That brings me on to the final question about possible changes or improvements that can be made. First, should there be mandatory recording of business crime? Secondly, is there a need for specific training by the College of Policing on business crime, and how should police respond to that? It is open to anyone who wants to chip in.

Patrick Holdaway: Mr Dyson, you were talking about that earlier. Do you want to pick up on that point?

David Jamieson: Could I make a comment on that? The problem here is that business crime is not defined as such. There is no such thing as a business crime, as I understand it. There is theft, fraud, abuse of various sorts but there isn't any crime that is just business crime.

- Q70 **Stuart C McDonald:** But we use that definition, and the National Business Crime Centre has just come up with one.

David Jamieson: We do, but I am saying in law it does not exist as a crime. One example of the success we have had is the joining together of businesses not just in retail but also in other parts of the business sector on one of our industrial estates in our area. They joined together and funded a co-ordinator to work on this in their area. Working with police and the work they did themselves, they reduced crime by about 70% in their area. That was a really good partnership arrangement with the local authority and others as well. To define business crime may be something that the Committee wants to look at, and you may want to get some more expert assistance with that than I can give.

Ian Dyson: David is right; there is not a criminal offence per se of business crime. The definition of business crime we talked about is a definer that helps to describe crime to more accurately capture the extent to which businesses are affected by crime. The ambition of that definition was to simplify, as Patrick said, and it was agreed through all the NPCC governance and has gone out to forces.

The next stage of that work is to improve our data capture, because at the national level I cannot at this point give accurate data on the amount of, for example, assaults, violent crime or thefts that are necessarily related specifically to retail crime or business crime. That is the next piece of work that we are working on. It is, as in many things around data, not a straightforward piece, given the variety of intelligence and crime reporting systems across policing. We have been talking with the Home Office around specific flags on crime recording, but understandably there are probably a dozen other fellow NPCC leads who have responsibility for specific crime targets and also would want to have that flagging, and you start to make this a very complex piece for forces.



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We are continuing. We are working with Single Online Home, which is the project that started a universal front page for the police website and making it simpler to report crime. We are talking with them about how we can get business crime so that businesses can report, because crime reporting in policing is geared very much towards the individual victim. We want to enable businesses to be able to report at scale.

We are working with an initiative called the National Data Quality Improvement Service, looking at using analytics to get a better reflection of true crime. Their focus has been on knife crime and serious violence. We are talking with them, but they are working through other areas. They are going through the Home Office annual data return at the moment.

We are not complacent on that. To go to your initial question on what more we need to do, I think we need to do more in policing, and we are doing, around capturing a more accurate record of data. That leads into the work we are doing through the NBCC with the National Business Crime Solution and the data-sharing agreement we have just about signed. We are doing a pilot in London looking at data sharing with the police national database. That is a six-month pilot with a start in July. We are doing a lot of work on that to get an accurate picture that will enable us to make sure that we in policing are truly acknowledging and reflecting the very real concern of retailers about this crime.

Q71 Stuart C McDonald: That is helpful, but does anyone want to pick up very briefly on the training aspect of things? Are we happy with where training is for business crime or is there a need for specific training from the College of Policing or anywhere else?

Ian Dyson: I will make the first comment and Patrick may have a view. For me, violence against retail workers is violence—end of—and the more we can train and ensure our officers are responding appropriately to instances of violence, then there will be that benefit to businesses. The training for officers is a local issue that is more about training officers within a force about the relationships, the partnerships and the crime prevention initiatives that exist in that area so that their response to any incident is couched in the understanding of the local picture about where priorities are and that sort of thing.

I think Patrick has been talking with the College, but I would say the solution is more about ensuring we get the best response to whatever crime, and the retailers will benefit from that. Patrick, do you want to add anything?

Patrick Holdaway: Yes, thank you, Mr Dyson. I totally agree and I think training is always a challenge in policing because there is always so much training we want to put in. I think the focus needs to be—and it was picked up earlier—around the community remedy. Let us make sure we make the best use of our resources in dealing with prolific offenders. We find, certainly with prolific offenders for shop theft, that sending them to



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prison is not always the best solution. They will go away for six or seven weeks and come back out and start again.

We need to look at other options. Things like the community remedy, criminal behaviour orders, community protection notices, which are ancillary orders that we can use, are a better measure to mitigate that behaviour and allow them to get into some other work, particularly if there is an addiction issue that may be driving the offending. I know that Mr Jamieson is doing some good stuff in these areas.

Chair: Dehenna, I hope you are there. We know you are on audio. We cannot hear you.

Q72 **Dehenna Davison:** My apologies. I think you all have the better end of the stick not being able to see me this morning. Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us today.

I want to come back to the point about the confidence of retail workers in police response to offences in the store. I was fortunate in spending three happy years working in retail and I vividly remember the first time we had a case of shoplifting in store. I said to my manager, "We saw the guy. We know who he was. Shall we ring the police? Will they get him?" I distinctly remember my manager saying, "There is no point. They won't do anything". That is indicative of a broader view among retail workers that sometimes the police response does not necessarily reflect what they feel is appropriate.

My question to the panel is: how can police forces rebuild the confidence of retail workers that crimes instore, be it petty theft like shoplifting or more serious offences, will be taken seriously? Patrick, can I come to you first, please?

Patrick Holdaway: It is a really good point, and of course we know why they do not report. There are obviously barriers, and we are working around that, such as ease of reporting and so on. I come from a force that has probably the least number of police officers per 100,000 population, so we have some particular challenges in where we put our resources. But the uplift of new resources coming online presents a really good opportunity to realign that.

We do a lot of work in our own force. We have a business partnership group chaired by our local PCC office that includes a number of retailers. We use them as our critical friends and work with them to develop plans to make sure we get that message out there. The reporting is so key because that allows us to determine the regular offenders and put plans in place. We are currently working with the CPS around better use of our criminal behaviour orders to target the particularly difficult cohort of offenders that regularly commit crime.

There are other things such as captured digital evidence. A system has been rolled out and 14 forces have it nationally. We have been working with some national businesses. We have just got Boots on board and



there are a number of other national businesses. That allows businesses to upload their CCTV into the cloud, which means the days of sending in a disc or a USB pen are gone and they can get the data really quickly. That allows the police to be able to put packages together and target the prolific offenders and not wait for them to commit other crimes before we get the data together.

With all these things, it is not one simple answer. It is a combination of some really good partnership work to deliver that response.

Q73 Dehenna Davison: I want to ask you a little bit more about the business partnership group; specifically, what does the membership of that look like? Is it largely bigger retailers or do you get a lot of other stores in there as well?

Patrick Holdaway: We have the Association of Convenience Stores, and there is a member of the Southern Co-op that turns up. All the Business Crime Reduction Partnership or business improvement district managers come in, so there are nine of those across Hampshire. They are able to represent all the other big retailers. We have a couple of national retailers that play a part.

We have just extended it to the rural business community as well because ultimately, as Mr Dyson said, a violent crime is a violent crime, so the service we give to the victim needs to be dealing with their issues and their concerns. Invariably they are very similar, but we can broaden that reach and use that to try to share and get best practice and try to improve things.

Q74 Dehenna Davison: Thank you. Amanda, can I ask you the same question about how best to rebuild confidence and trust?

Amanda Blakeman: Thank you very much. Confidence and trust are built out of fair and appropriate treatment. We have already heard about some of the very clear and fair concerns the retail community has. The way I am seeking to tackle it locally in Gwent is through the investment in our neighbourhood policing teams and in problem solving. We are trying to identify the repeat locations that are targeted, the repeat victims in those locations and the repeat offenders, so that we have a clear and comprehensive plan of how to tackle all three of those areas together.

That is not rocket science, but it is about gaining the confidence and trust of shopworkers and retailers, to be clear about what we are doing about a particular problem and the information we need to know. I know we were asked an earlier question about how we identify vulnerability. When a call comes in for service to our first point of contact control room, it is not only the direct information the individual is giving us over the phone that we check. We also check against the intelligence system we have and any other information we have about either the location or the potential offender so we can make a correct assessment, not only of the



vulnerability of the victim but of the seriousness of the offender they are being confronted with. Those things and the appropriateness of us being able to respond to those are all factors that make up an increase in confidence and trust and that is where we are concentrating our efforts locally.

Nationally, Patrick has already spoken about the work that is going on with the National Business Crime Centre and the wider partnerships that allow us to be able to tackle the more prolific offenders who are part of a more organised type of criminality that is seeking to identify and explore opportunities around retail criminality for their own profit.

From a national point of view, police chiefs have funded a stronghold of 10 analysts, field intelligence officers and officers, who are working nationally across all acquisitive crime. We work very closely with that intelligence team, with the national business crime consortium, to understand the scale and nature of that criminality, whether that is locally based offenders or organised travelling criminality that is seeking to carry out theft at scale and use violence as part of that.

Q75 Dehenna Davison: Thanks, Amanda. Ian, the same question on confidence to you, please.

Ian Dyson: In addition to the points my colleagues have made, there are five very quick points. First, focus on prevention. By the same token as we in policing are not perfect in how we respond at times, as you heard earlier, I think there are still some more opportunities for working with the retailers to build in prevention. A lot of retail stores are, by nature, open to the public to come in and see the goods. There are still examples where stores are putting very high value, highly desirable goods in very obvious, prominent positions, and I think there is a little bit of work to be done. It frustrates policing when we are called constantly to the same products being taken and the violence is a consequence of the theft.

Secondly, I think the work we talked about with crime reduction partnerships should be looking at the instances the Chair described in opening about the poor response and some examples of police not attending. Those should be looked at in crime reduction partnerships and for the partnership to understand why the police response was not where it should be, and also to support the initiatives like the one I described we are doing in the City with Tesco that leads to a reduction in crime.

I think a greater understanding of the THRIVE model I described, or the risk assessment model used by all forces to determine whether police will respond to an incident, would be helpful in crime reduction partnerships so that retailers understand some of the challenges we face and why there are cases where they did not get a police response. We in policing inform victims—not just retailers but anyone—where we do not attend in a case where they may expect an attendance, and we need to make sure they understand that.



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

Finally, a huge message to policing, which is: where it is appropriate to respond, where the risk assessment methodology says we should attend, we should attend and we must attend. That is something for us to work on.

- Q76 **Dehenna Davison:** Thank you, Ian. David I will come to you with a similar question with a slightly different slant. What work can police and crime commissioners do to help facilitate work between police forces and retailers to try to improve that trust and those relationships?

David Jamieson: That is a very good question. What we have done in my area—and I am sure other areas have done similar things—is set up roundtables with business, including retailers, with police, and also working with the local authority to create place-based activity where there are particular problems that we can focus on what the local authority, fire, rescue, police—all the services—can do together to tackle some of this serious criminality. That is one way we have been doing that.

I was struck by your initial question about how we rebuild confidence in shopworkers. I contend that one way of doing that is to make it an aggravated offence of attack against a shopworker, because that would create a much greater focus in the eyes of the offenders and it would also focus more police activity and help the criminal justice system. Perhaps we could have sentences that were more appropriate to the harm the shopworker felt has been perpetrated upon them. Those are some of the things I would suggest.

More controversially, one area that has come up very often is using artificial intelligence, facial recognition, particularly in shopping centres, where you can identify earlier people who are known offenders—people who have created problems in the past—so the police can come in and do prevention work rather than just reacting after the crisis. It is a contentious area, but nevertheless one that we will have to consider.

- Q77 **Dehenna Davison:** Brilliant. Thanks, David. You must have read my mind, because the next question was going to be about whether it should be made into an aggravated offence. We have heard your view on this. Patrick, I will come to you. British Retail Consortium and other bodies have been pushing for increased sentencing, particularly around aggravated offence, for any assault on retail workers. Is that something that you support?

Patrick Holdaway: I think our role is to enforce it. I suppose the first element that is being looked at at the moment is the guidance from the



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sentencing guidelines. The guidance already talks about an offence against an employee. I think it is probably more implicit and it needs to be more explicit. I deal a lot with retailers but equally I deal with many in the banking sector as well—another element—and we also have other groups. Customer services groups say they are seeing an increase in abuse and so on. There is a challenge that if you go down one route, what do you do for someone else? Potentially it is for others to make that decision. But I think the sentencing guidelines make it more explicit about somebody being assaulted, and making it an aggravating offence if they are doing it through a workplace may be one of the options.

Q78 Dehenna Davison: Thanks, Patrick. Amanda, what is your view on this?

Amanda Blakeman: Thank you. I support Patrick there. The sentencing guidelines are the place to start and to make sure that what we have in place already is being appropriately used and appropriately applied in sentencing. Being more explicit on that, there is a real challenge in this. I am not for one minute suggesting that a violent attack against a shopworker is not a serious matter or should not be taken seriously, but there are other sectors that we see through the calls to service that are coming in that would have a similar view. That would then somewhat dilute the very purpose of looking at aggravating circumstances of an assault. The place to start is being more explicit in the sentencing guidelines.

Q79 Dehenna Davison: Thanks, Amanda. Finally, Ian, to you on this one.

Ian Dyson: Yes, thank you. I do not have any more to add that my colleagues have not said. I recognise the symbolic significance of this for the retail sector, but for the reasons my colleagues have articulated, my position is with them on starting with the aggravating factors in sentencing and disposal.

Chair, if I may very quickly add to what David said on your earlier question on the role of PCCs, the APCC, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, last year set up a business crime portfolio chaired by Katy Bourne, the PCC for Sussex, who cannot be with us today. They had their first meeting, attended by, I think, every force or represented by the PCC in every force. They are certainly looking at focusing on the victims of business crime as part of the commissioning process that PCCs are going through for commissioning local victim support services. That is a really important initiative in the role that PCCs can play in this challenge. Thank you.

Q80 Dame Diana Johnson: Good morning to all the panel members. I want to ask about Government action and get your views. The Government have set up the task and deliver teams to improve data sharing between the police and retail sector and produce guidance on the reporting process. What are your views about how effective these resources have been and what more could be done? I don't know who to start with, sorry.



Patrick Holdaway: That is fine, I am happy to jump in. I am on two of the four groups, so of course I might say they are great, mightn't I? One group is about the reporting, the issue we have been talking about here, and that is twofold. The first part is guidance for retailers: what do they report and how do they report? One of the other barriers is online reporting. We are doing lots of work with Single Online Home and recently we had a stakeholder event. We have had some retailers talking to the Single Online Home team that designed their website to see how we can improve that. That is a system that is going to develop greatly over the next two to three years, so it is great that we have the opportunity to help influence that. It is in only about half the forces at the moment. There is definitely some really good work taking place on that.

The other part is the information sharing. I think the introduction of GDPR has caused some concerns among businesses, mainly because of the fines they are liable for if there is a mistake somewhere along the line. I think we have been really quite audacious with that. I have a lot of good NPCC support through Mr Dyson on the national information-sharing agreement that we are looking at putting in place for the National Business Crime Solution. Once we have that in place and we understand the nuances of how that works, we can then look to extend that across other retail sectors and other businesses to improve upon it. That is very good.

I have been involved in this for a number of years and I have been involved quite a bit with the National Retail Crime Steering Group. The Minister for Policing has really grasped it. We did the call for evidence. It was an unfortunate set of circumstances with re-election and all sorts of other issues, and the results were delayed in coming out. Having got the results out, Mr Malthouse was very quick to address some of the issues with chief constables and PCCs, and then the four task and finish groups were put in place. A product of the first group around the comms was the Shop Kind initiative, which is hosted on our NBCC website. That has been taken up by at least 100 retailers and is consistently growing. I think there are some real, tangible benefits of the work that has taken place. There is a meeting later on this afternoon that will report on that and some further stuff to take place. I think it is really quite good.

Q81 Dame Diana Johnson: How long is it planned for the task and finish groups to sit? How often are they meeting and what is the timescale for them to finish their work?

Patrick Holdaway: They started in September and a lot of it was about determining the terms of reference of what they were going to deliver. We are pretty much at the point where a lot of that work is about to be delivered. As I understand it, the next stage of the call for evidence is to look at the issue of prolific offenders that we have picked up. We know a lot of it is driven by addiction in some cases. It becomes bigger than policing. It is about what other parts of the Government and society could do to try to help support that. The groups have been meeting



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independently. It is also of note that they are all industry-led, with support from Home Office and policing. It is very much the retailers that have been saying what they want to do and what the outcome should be.

Q82 Dame Diana Johnson: They started in September. When do you think they will have completed their work?

Patrick Holdaway: The group for the comms was the Shop Kind initiative that has already been launched. On the work for the data protection, we have a national information-sharing agreement coming out in place. That is a longer-term piece of work, as you can imagine. The bits around the reporting and the victims are all being tied up to work we have been doing in conjunction with the British Retail Consortium, which will be going on its website, which talks about the guidance on how to report crime and says that if you are a victim of crime, these are the services you can access even if you do not report it to police. We understand that is really important. There was a question earlier about the confidence, and some of that is about what more we can do to support a person as a victim.

Q83 Dame Diana Johnson: Just so I understand this, are you saying that the first two task and finish groups have completed their work; the second two are ongoing and are likely to go on for some time?

Patrick Holdaway: The comms have delivered their piece on Shop Kind. The reporting of the victims part is due to come to a culmination very soon. The website is being designed and is due to be released imminently. On the part about information sharing, there is further work that we can do with the Information Commissioner's Office to help develop that guidance and give businesses confidence to share information.

Q84 Dame Diana Johnson: Thank you. You just spoke very warmly about the National Retail Crime Steering Group and the involvement of the Minister, and how he has a grip on it. Could you tell me when the steering group last met?

Patrick Holdaway: In January.

Q85 Dame Diana Johnson: Yes. I have a note in the written evidence that the Minister had talked about it meeting very quickly. I think that was the end of last year. It met in January?

Patrick Holdaway: Yes, and this afternoon as well.

Dame Diana Johnson: This afternoon as well?

Patrick Holdaway: Yes. He has increased the frequency of the meetings to make sure that pace is kept with the work taking place.

Q86 Dame Diana Johnson: Is that a quarterly timetable?

Patrick Holdaway: It is, yes. It certainly has worked to follow the quarterly crime programme.



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Q87 **Dame Diana Johnson:** That has stepped up from the past?

Patrick Holdaway: Yes.

Q88 **Dame Diana Johnson:** How often did it meet before?

Patrick Holdaway: I think it was six-monthly.

Q89 **Dame Diana Johnson:** Explain to me who is on that steering group. I know the industry is on it. Are you on it as well?

Patrick Holdaway: Yes, myself, and Mr Dyson has also attended previously. It is jointly chaired by the Minister and the British Retail Consortium, and then you have a number of others: British Independent Retailers Association, British Retail Consortium, Association of Convenience Stores, and so on.

Q90 **Dame Diana Johnson:** What would you say it has achieved? What is its biggest achievement, in your opinion?

Patrick Holdaway: It is twofold. First, it has coalesced the retail sector together to share information, share best practice and give a common voice to deliver some of this work. I also like to think it gives them some reassurance, because they can see from the work that I have been doing, led by Mr Dyson, that we have listened to them and we have put some work in place to address some of those concerns.

Q91 **Dame Diana Johnson:** Can you tell us what the agenda is at the moment, what they are specifically looking at?

Patrick Holdaway: The agenda from this afternoon is very much focusing on the wash-up of the work that we have been delivering to make sure that we are where we need to be. The next bit will be understanding where the next stage is going to be, where it is going to go from there.

Q92 **Dame Diana Johnson:** Are the minutes available for these meetings? In the evidence it looked like there were no minutes available for the meetings on the website.

Patrick Holdaway: I can come back to you. I will check that one for you.

Q93 **Dame Diana Johnson:** Thank you very much. Do any of the other witnesses want to say anything? Mr Dyson, do you want to say anything about your involvement with this group?

Ian Dyson: Yes, thank you. To support what Patrick has said, there is something very important about ministerial-level interest in an issue. The fact that the Minister has increased the frequency and he has attended all of these is a really positive indication, not least for the retail sector. We talked earlier about their confidence in the judicial system, frankly, and the Government support their concerns. It is a little early, as Patrick said,



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to really assess the impact of the task and finish groups, but there are two other things I would add.

One is that the steering group was pretty key in making sure the call for evidence and the outcome of that has been acted upon. That is an important plus. The other thing is the Minister wrote to forces back in September, highlighting the areas that he wanted policing to focus on. One was the response, which we discussed earlier in this session. The other was a concern—it was perhaps more a fear of something that may happen rather than something that was happening—about what might happen if retailers are reporting concerns or incidents involving alcohol. Age-related crime and theft was, certainly pre-Covid, a real driver of some of the antisocial behaviour, as retailers were quite properly challenging people on age. There are concerns that if you had a store that had a regular series of incidents, that would play adversely into their licensing applications and review of licences, so there was a check with forces to be aware of that.

There is an issue about a threshold—that under £200, the police will not attend. We know from the survey we get as a result of the task and finish group that that is not the case—forces are not applying a £200 limit—but the Minister wrote to reinforce that that is not something he was supporting. Then it is encouraging the use of business impact statements, which are now a tool that can be used to play into the judicial system the concern of businesses and the impact of this violence and threat of violence upon their retailers.

Reinforcing the letter helped the task and finish groups that are reporting. As I say, it is probably too early to say the true impact of those, but I think that the direction that steering group has gone in is very encouraging.

Q94 Dame Diana Johnson: Amanda, do you want to say anything on this? I do not know if you are involved with this at all.

Amanda Blakeman: I am not involved in the group, so I do not think it would be appropriate.

Q95 Dame Diana Johnson: David, as a PCC have you had any involvement with the steering group or does the Association of PCCs have any involvement?

David Jamieson: I am not sure about the actual steering group, but the APCC has set up a particular group, and my deputy has taken a particular interest in this. He has been translating some of the work we have been doing locally, working on that national group. I am not sure what the representation is in those particular groups. I take it that the main thrust of what you were saying, Diana, is that data sharing is absolutely essential. This is where I think the Government can help oil the wheels of data sharing by providing and approving appropriate resource—it does not need to be a huge resource—that allows that to happen so that we



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get a proper grip nationally on the size of the problem. Once you have a grip on the size of something, you can often then decide what you are going to do about it.

Q96 Simon Fell: Thank you to our witnesses for bearing with us for this long. I have a couple of questions on evidence gathering and prosecution, building on some of the questions that Dehenna and Diana have just been asking you. First, we have heard through our evidence sessions, and also through written evidence, about retailers spending tremendous amounts of money on CCTV, body cameras and putting things in their store so they can monitor the height of customers and potential offenders coming in, so they can supply as much evidence as they possibly can if something does occur, but prosecution rates are remaining low. I am interested in your views as to why that is and what can be done to improve them.

Patrick Holdaway: Yes, I think you are right. CCTV has become really important, because it captures the whole offence. It has also been really useful in court, particularly where there is violence. I am thinking of a case recently in Hampshire where a pharmacist was assaulted. The video was quite compelling in demonstrating what had taken place. We really use it.

I think the rates reducing is really important, and it comes back to the reporting part. We need to know about these offences. I understand the challenges for retailers, but from a police perspective we need to know and understand the size of the picture. There is more that we could do, certainly. We are linking up with prolific offenders. I think there are some really good examples in my own force where they have done a lot of work and linked up some of the offenders who have committed a lot of offences, and on the basis of that they got some really good sentences, using impact-on-business statements and individual victim impact statements. There is definitely more we can do from that perspective, and certainly that is a project we are working on at the moment.

Q97 Simon Fell: Thank you. Would anyone else like to come in on that?

Ian Dyson: I think technology is a way to improve our collective response to this, frankly. We have heard all about the data sharing, and I think technology sits behind that, using analytics to home in on the real challenges. There is a massive investment in CCTV. There is a deterrent factor to CCTV, as well as evidential, and I think both of those are really important. The early indications of the work that we are doing in the City, and that I know is being done elsewhere, are that security staff wearing body-worn cameras has reduced violence and threats of violence in these cases. I think there is real opportunity to work with the sector on the intelligent use of technology.

On the other piece about prosecutions, nationally there has been a drop in prosecutions through the system. There is probably a correlation between that and the reduction in police officer numbers that we saw. I



think the increase in numbers will help to increase the number of prosecutions that we see, as well as using all of the out-of-court disposals that we can, providing we make sure that we explain to our retail partners and colleagues why disposals are used in certain instances. I do not want people to think that an out-of-court disposal is somehow not dealing with the issue. Those are my observations. I am optimistic about how we can move forward on this.

Q98 Simon Fell: Would anyone else like to come in on that, or shall I move on to my next question?

Amanda Blakeman: I want to support what colleagues have already said, but also add to that picture that dismantling and disrupting individuals who are carrying out large scale shop thefts and offences in retail across the board is incredibly important. We have moved on hugely in understanding that picture, understanding the type of organised criminality that is involved, the amount of exploitation of vulnerable people that happens as part of that, and also the scale and nature of the criminality. We can quickly get ahead of the crime spikes that we see and work with forces to share that intelligence, disrupt the individuals and dismantle the crime groups. Obviously that is a big part of prevention.

My personal view is that we have more work to do on outcomes, but there is a suite of disposal methods available to us in policing. I support what Mr Dyson has said. We need to make sure that the retailers understand that an outcome is not less because it is an out-of-court disposal. We need to understand what is going to work to prevent the offender coming back into the criminal justice system, especially if they are prolific by nature of their own levels of addiction, and so on.

Q99 Simon Fell: Thank you. David, you look like you want to come in as well.

David Jamieson: Yes. I have a number of observations. CCTV has a good preventative role. It also has an evidence-collecting role. The technology is now improving, so we have much better quality pictures. Often the police were working with very fuzzy pictures that were very difficult. Of course, mask wearing during the pandemic has added to the problem of identifying people in shops, and I hope there will be a resolution to that soon.

I also argue that for a small shopkeeper, in particular, getting involved in a prosecution of somebody who has committed an offence in their shop takes a huge amount of resource and time. Very often there is a reluctance to go forward with that because the cost of going forward with the prosecution could be greater than the loss of the goods from their shop. Most shopworkers live very close to where they work and sometimes there is a reluctance because the perpetrators live in the area. That is where we really have to look at how the law treats shopworkers and how we identify them as particular individuals who are at risk. I am sure you want to come on to this. In the West Midlands we have looked at all the issues to do with how we deal with the criminality and then



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asked: who is doing this criminality, why is it happening and how do we prevent it? That is where we put a lot of our emphasis.

Q100 Simon Fell: You have touched on one of the points I want to bring up. We have had evidence that around 40% of small retailers think there is essentially too much hassle in reporting crime. The cost of them doing so is going to be higher than what they would lose through the crime anyway. Patrick, you were talking earlier about streamlining and reforming the reporting system. What does that look like, to your mind, and how can that be improved, especially for the smaller retailers? How do you come to a response that supports some of the smaller stores and the people who work in them? A large retailer, one maybe in a shopping centre, potentially has quite a lot more resource behind them. It is easier for them to share CCTV data, capture information about people who are entering the shopping centre and share that information around as a preventative measure. That is harder to do for a one-man band. What sort of solution are you working on in your working group that might help those sorts of institutions as well?

Patrick Holdaway: The reporting is clearly a real issue. On average, policing has about 360,000 shop thefts reported each year. The last Home Office survey was in 2018. They are looking to do one running at the current time. They estimate true shop theft is in the region of 6 million to 7 million crimes. You can see potentially what the disparity is. It is really difficult because we need that full amount of information. Just to say, "We have had a shop theft" is not enough for policing. We need people to explain and put the detail down, because without that it is very difficult to do anything about it. We are working, as I say, with Single Online Home on the online reporting capability to try to reduce that and make it as slick as possible.

There are other instances. For example, Sussex is doing some work with the Co-ops on one-touch reporting, using the National Business Crime Solution. There are different methods that we are trying to identify. As Single Online Home develops, I think there is opportunity for better IT integration, designing accounts and so on. There is a lot of work taking place, it will get better and we are working through it.

On our engagement, I have presented to a couple of National Federation of Retail Newsagents conferences. The Association of Convenience Stores covers that small group and we talk to them about vulnerability, certainly in my force. They will be seen as more vulnerable because they are on their own and sometimes they are subject to hate crimes. That is where local neighbourhood policing also plays a part with local engagement. It is very much on our radar, but we are driven by the reporting. It is really critical for us.

Q101 Simon Fell: Thank you. Ian, you have your hand up.

Ian Dyson: Yes, thank you. Patrick has articulated really well the intelligence and the data sharing and the importance of that. The other



area where we can help all retailers, but also the smaller retailer and the single owner, is our work focusing on offenders. The same offenders will be targeting those shops as well as the bigger retailers. We are working around three broad areas of offending. One is the organised crime that we know sits behind some of it. Another is the exploitation, and that is work that is in the fairly early stages of unpicking. There are people who are being exploited, probably by organised crime, to commit shoplifting and other crimes. Then there is what I would describe as the chaotic individual, the drug user who is fuelling their habit.

Maybe ask Amanda to talk about this in a second. She is the national police leader on acquisitive crime and she has done a lot of work across the broader piece on OCGs and exploitation of vulnerable people. She may helpfully touch on that. On the drug user piece, there are initiatives in policing looking at rehabilitation and working with offenders. It is broader than just retail crime, but certainly we are keen to exploit the opportunity. Durham, for example, has a really good model that it has been working on over the last few years about diverting offenders away from their habits and giving them incentive to improve. Those are the three areas that will benefit all of them.

What I certainly want to do is to avoid what has probably happened in the past—and may well still happen, frankly—which is a bit of a binary discussion that says to an individual owner of a shop who is worried about retaliation or hate crime and all those other factors, “If you don’t provide us with a statement, we can’t take it forward”. It is a very binary conversation that is really hard for that individual, to say, “Am I going to put myself on offer, head above the parapet?” There are lots and lots of factors to consider around that, whereas we should be working to look at where the offenders are operating and tackling those. I think Amanda might be able to provide some more useful information on that.

Q102 Simon Fell: Thank you. That is a brilliant handover. Amanda, do you have anything to say on that? I am interested in particular about building confidence in retailers as well—they having faith in this process.

Amanda Blakeman: Absolutely. To demonstrate some of the work that we are doing together, we have worked with the police national database and with the security industry that provides security for some of our big retail outlets to really understand the data that they hold from individuals that are being stopped in store, banned or dealt with by the store instore. With the information that we have on PND, what does that look like? We brought that together to understand how many of those individuals are part of organised crime groups that we have registered. Also, how many of those do we have intelligence on that supports them being subjects of modern-day slavery and human trafficking? The numbers were there for us to start on a piece of work to understand that, really unpick it and get to the point of being able to share that information.

That is why the work that Patrick has been doing with the National Business Crime Centre and how we share information is critical. It is



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really difficult, from an exploitation point of view, to try to understand whether people are being forced or coerced into offending or not. From the back end of 2018 into early 2020 we saw offences up and down the country that targeted phone dealers for iPhones and iPads. They were particularly nasty robbery offences. We have done work on that to identify the organised crime group that was behind it and individuals that were being coerced and forced into that activity.

We are working closely with the Home Office's crime strategy unit on the property, because if we remove the property from this—if we understand and identify where the property is going—we have some chance of being able to start to cut off the lines of activity. Important outlets for stolen property include online services, where we find huge stocks of, for instance, stolen printer cartridges or stolen toiletries. Understanding that and being able to regulate those outlets is important in dealing with this area.

Over Covid there has not been any international travel and we have seen a reduction in foreign-national offenders but we work very closely with the Border Agency in this area. From a national intelligence point of view, putting resource into that, understanding the picture that is sitting behind and driving this type of criminality has been important. The relationships that have been built during the Covid pandemic with Op Talla, and also prior to that with the business crime consortium, have been important in increasing the confidence of the retail community.

We are trying to tackle this issue at root level from the point of view of what is sitting behind it, what is driving it, which is very much what Mr Jamieson was talking about: who is committing this crime; what is motivating it; how can we dismantle it? A huge amount of work and effort is going into this, in partnership, and I would like to think it is building confidence and trust within the retail community. We plan to carry on with that work. We have work to do around the police national database, information that came out. We have some staffing challenges to sort through, but it is important work for us to continue with.

We have prolific offenders, individuals whose drug habits lead them to a lifestyle of committing this type of crime. We have seen the Minister for Policing to be very tough about tagging. In Gwent, we are currently part of a tagging pilot involving offenders who are coming out of prison, having committed robbery or burglary offences. They are going to be tagged for a period to allow us to understand if they are returning to criminality. That should give confidence to the retail community.

Q103 Simon Fell: David, do you have anything to add?

David Jamieson: We have moved to a system of online reporting where an account of an incident can be put online and footage, whether from a CCTV camera or a mobile phone, can be included. Police looking at it, instead of concentrating on individual crimes, can start concentrating on individual offenders. Over a period of time you will see a pattern of things



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happening, probably at a number of shops, where an offender is moving from place to place, taking away the emphasis on one shopkeeper or shopworker making the report and giving the evidence and the police the opportunity to tackle that offender for a range of offences. That obviates the need for every individual shopkeeper to spend a lot of time and money, and spares them the worry about what the consequences might be to them. That type of technology is moving on at pace and we are using it in our area very effectively.

I say again that we have to look at why some people are committing the crimes. Amanda has talked about organised crime. I think we need to be looking at the disorganised crime as well, people living chaotic lifestyles and committing crimes, very often people who are taking substances. They are the people who are generally more likely to be assaulting or harming shopworkers.

Q104 Chair: Thank you. We only have a final few more minutes. I have a final, quick follow-up question and ask if you could give short answers in response.

You are the people who focus specifically on issues of retail crime, business crime, violence against shopworkers and so on, and many of the things that you have talked about today sound extremely worthwhile and valuable things to do. However, the reality of what the shopworkers, the retailers and the unions and so on are telling us sounds a very long way away from some of the things that you are talking about. Clearly, there is an issue about how you make this an issue that is taken seriously right across the country, especially when we are talking about the focus of this inquiry, which is the violence against shopworkers.

Wouldn't it help you if it was made a specific offence, as they have done in Scotland, as a way of indicating to your colleagues, to police officers across the country and also to the courts that violence against shopworkers should be taken seriously—just making it nice and simple and making it a specific offence? Ian Dyson, can I come back to you on that?

Ian Dyson: I mentioned this in my response earlier. I understand the almost symbolic element, that it makes a very clear statement that this is unacceptable and we will not tolerate it. My slight step back from it is: does it lead to requests from other sectors that may be equally subject to violence or the threat of violence also wanting legislation? That is a matter for legislators. The important thing for all members of this Committee to understand is that I—we collectively—take this seriously and therefore will be interested in looking at anything that would support our mission.

Q105 Chair: You have made very clear to the Committee that you take this seriously, but shopworkers and retailers do not think that their local police are taking this sufficiently seriously. Given that a lot of our discussions have been about retail crime more widely, what they also



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want is for there to be a particular understanding of the impact of this on the people who are working in the shops, and the experiences they have—the violence and the abuse that they face.

Amanda, I put this to you. On being able to make sure that there is an emphasis on the people, and given that many of those people are doing age-related restrictions—they are enforcing the law, effectively, on behalf of Parliament and the country—is there not a case, in recognition of that, for having the specific offence to show that this is about violence against people, not just about the theft of goods?

Amanda Blakeman: Covid has been extraordinary, our shopworkers have responded in an extraordinary manner and they are now in a position where they see themselves looking at some types of enforcement engagement. I very much appreciate where you are coming from on that. I would also say, though, that other sectors are finding themselves in a not dissimilar position. I think we give confidence to the shopworkers. I think it is important, though, that sentencing is right.

Q106 **Chair:** Is your only objection to it that it might be a slippery slope to other groups? Is that your only concern about it?

Amanda Blakeman: That is one of my main concerns, and also making sure that the sentencing for it is right. Clearly, the identification of an offence has to have with it the disposal that matches it. Those are my areas of concern.

Q107 **Chair:** David Jamieson, would you support a new offence of violence against shopworkers?

David Jamieson: Yes, I would, for the reasons I have given. I think it would send out a message and give shopworkers the confidence that something is going to be done about it. In the end, however, this is one of those problems where you don't arrest your way out of it, just getting tougher and tougher. Although I support that, just getting tougher is not the answer, because in the end what the shopworker wants is for the abuse and the violence to stop and the shoplifting to stop. I don't think they are particularly interested in how that happens.

One of the things that we have focused on particularly is the people who are abusing substances and going into shops. They tend to be the more abusive people, who are stealing. I came across an example of a woman who needed £200 a day to pay her drug dealer. She was committing £100,000-worth of theft every year just to feed that habit. If we don't tackle the issue of drug taking and how we deal with people on drugs, and if we don't start treating people who are addicted to drugs as having a medical problem rather than a criminal problem, the harm and damage will go on. If we just talk about being tough, changing the law, doing this, doing that, we are not getting to the heart of the problem. Remember that the Home Office says that 50% of offences in shops are around substance abuse. I think the Co-op, which sponsored a piece of research,



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said it was nearer 70%. From anecdotal evidence in our area, I think it is between 50% and 70%.

Q108 Chair: Can I ask for a one-sentence answer from everybody to this question? Of all the different measures you have talked about, from data sharing to tackling drug abuse to potential changes to the law, if you had one thing to push heavily right across the country that you would want all forces, all police officers and so on—or all employers; whatever you think it should be—to take seriously, what would be the one thing that you would put at the top of your list? Can I ask Patrick first?

Patrick Holdaway: Consistent recording across forces to better identify the crime types.

Ian Dyson: Strong local Business Crime Reduction Partnerships that understand this issue.

David Jamieson: To start treating people who are addicted to serious drugs, who are committing most of these crimes, as having a medical problem and for Government to allow some of the money we seize from the big drug dealers to be used for those rehab programmes.

Amanda Blakeman: Improvement in prevention, from the point of drug use and so on.

Q109 Chair: My final question is to all of you, and I am similarly looking for a one-sentence answer. I put this question to the retailers: did they think that on current trends, and given all the work that was under way, things were going to get better or worse over the next 12 months? Boots told us that we had just scratched the surface and, “We can’t see things getting better quickly, not in the short term”. The BRC told us that at best it will be the same without the additional interventions that we have talked about and that there is a risk that it will get worse. The Co-op told us, “The momentum means I think it will get worse”.

How much confidence do you have? Over the next 12 months, given everything you have got going, do you think things will get better or worse?

Ian Dyson: Without a doubt, it will get better. I think Covid has distracted us from our journey.

Amanda Blakeman: We are on a very clear path towards understanding these issues and putting prevention in place, so I think it will get better.

Patrick Holdaway: I agree. I think it will get better.

David Jamieson: I am glad to disagree a bit here. I think that unless we tackle some of the issues of the huge number of people, particularly young people, who are going to become unemployed when the furlough scheme ends, we could see further problems and some of those could also spill over into this sector. The problem with drug addiction will carry



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on, and it will carry on influencing what we are doing. Unless we tackle that, things will not get better.

Chair: Thank you. Patrick Holdaway, I think you said you had a meeting with the Minister this afternoon. I think it would be very helpful if you could convey to the Minister, and to the group, that while I think everybody would welcome all the work that you are all putting into this, there is a very big gap between what you are saying about what is happening and the trajectory and what the retailers are saying. They will be aware of all of this work, but the retailers and the shopworkers are saying something very different and they clearly want much greater urgency and much stronger action to happen much more swiftly.

Thank you very much for your evidence. Thank you very much for the work that you are doing in this area. We will continue to look at this, but we very much appreciate your time today.