



House of Commons
Home Affairs Committee

Violence and abuse towards retail workers: Government Response to the Committee's First Report

**First Special Report of Session 2021–
22**

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Home Affairs Committee

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First Special Report

The Home Affairs Committee published its First Report of Session 2021–22, [Violence and abuse towards retail workers](#) (HC 141), on 29 June 2021. The Government's response was received on 31 August 2021 and is appended to this report.

In the Government response the Committee's recommendations are shown in **bold** and *italic* type; the Government's response is shown in plain type.

Appendix: Government Response

This is the Government's response to the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) report, '*Violence and Abuse Towards Retail Workers*' published in June 2021. The report made a total of 13 recommendations, including those on:

- consulting on the scope of a specific offence to provide extra protection in law for retail workers;
- identifying and measuring the violence and abuse suffered by retail workers in the crime statistics gathered by local police forces;
- working with the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) to agree an Employers Charter to ensure that retail workers know what they should expect from their employers; and
- providing additional 'tool kit' style materials to support all employers.

The Government is grateful to the HASC for their consideration of this important issue. Our responses to the recommendations posed to Government and its partners are set out below. For ease, these have been numbered in line with the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the report itself (from page 61 onwards.)

Gender and race

Recommendation 3 (Page 61)

Where shopworkers are confronted by hate-motivated abuse in the course of their employment this should be taken seriously by employers and reported to the police. It is vital that the police, in dealing with these incidents, manage them with sensitivity and give them the attention that they deserve. We support calls for future iterations of the Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey to include questions on incidents of hate related violence and abuse to help build a clearer picture of the prevalence of this form of abuse. (Paragraph 25)

The Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS) is an annual survey run by the Home Office to monitor crime against businesses and their staff. The last survey was undertaken in 2018 and published in September 2019. The CVS was paused following the 2018 CVS publication to review and consult with stakeholders on how the survey could be improved.

A survey was due to be held in 2020, but was delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Fieldwork for the 2020/21 survey is now underway, with results due to be published in March 2022.

The 2020/21 survey already includes questions on incidents of hate related violence, as recommended by Professor Emmeline Taylor in her 2018 report *‘It’s not part of the job: Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers: a review of evidence and policy’*, and echoed by HASC in this recommendation. We agree a clearer picture of the prevalence of hate related incidents is needed, and the CVS provides an opportunity for the Home Office to do so. The new survey will cover the Wholesale and Retail sector only and will include new questions, with more focus on measuring the impact of crime against businesses in this sector, in terms of the financial impact as well as the impact on staff wellbeing.

Previous surveys have collected data on numbers of incidents of assault against workers. However, the 2020/21 survey has greater focus on the impact of crime. It asks about types of violence (e.g. verbal or physical, and whether weapons were used), financial costs and whether the employee was injured or subsequently took time off work. It also asks about reasons for the attack, for example whether it occurred when asking a customer for ID when buying an age-restricted product, and/or whether the incident was motivated by any of the following factors:

- Disability
- Transgender
- Race, Ethnicity or Nationality
- Religion, Faith or Belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Don’t think it was motivated by anything in particular
- Other
- Don’t know

The survey also includes questions aimed at assessing whether levels of violence increased during the Covid-19 pandemic and whether reasons for violent offences changed during that time.

The questions for the survey are reviewed each year. An Expert Reference Group (ERG) is consulted in the development of the survey to ensure it is up to date with developments in policy or practice in respect of business crime, and to ensure the questionnaire covers relevant areas. The ERG includes retailers, retail associations and unions, academics and representatives from other Government departments.¹ The ERG will next meet in spring 2022 to review the findings from the 2020/21 survey and consider whether the survey adequately covers the issue of hate-related violence and abuse.

¹ The Expert Reference Group includes the following retailers and retail associations: British Retail Consortium (BRC), Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), National Farmers’ Union of England and Wales (NFU), Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), National Federation of Retail Newsagents (NFRN), Co-op.

The Home Office has also recently sought the views of the British Retail Consortium and members of the NRCSG to support the development of the next steps for the Government's strategic response to hate crime.

The impact of Covid-19

Recommendation 7 (Page 62)

It is unconscionable that violence and abuse towards retail workers has further increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. These are individuals who have been working on the frontline and have put their lives at risk to ensure that the public could access essential items such as food and medicine. At a time when they have most deserved our respect and gratitude they have instead faced violence and abuse.

We welcome the revised guidance from the Sentencing Council which makes the despicable act of deliberate spitting or coughing an aggravating factor for common assault. However, we note that incidents of offenders threatening to spit or cough would not be covered by its terms and regret that the sentencing guidelines took over a year from the start of the Covid crisis to be introduced.

If in future new public health restrictions are required the Government must learn the lessons from this pandemic, and work with retailers to ensure there are workable systems in place and clear guidance for the public. (Paragraph 38)

In response to the pandemic, in April 2020 the Sentencing Council issued interim sentencing guidance that clarified, when sentencing common assault offences involving threats or activity relating to transmission of Covid-19, courts should treat this as an aggravating feature of the offence, meriting a more severe sentence.

In addition, the Council published revised sentencing guidelines for assault offences in May 2021. As acknowledged by the HASC, the revised common assault guideline lists 'deliberate spitting or coughing' as an aggravating factor. The guideline also includes a new high-culpability factor of 'intention to cause fear of serious harm, including disease transmission', which will allow for common assault offences involving threats or activity relating to the transmission of Covid-19 to be assessed at the highest level of culpability.

The Government agrees with HASC that it should work closely with retailers to ensure any continued restrictions and guidance on Covid-19 are workable and clear. The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) holds responsibility for the regulations regarding the wearing of face coverings, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) worked closely with retailers and supermarkets throughout the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the Government published safer working guidance that is kept under review and updated to reflect changes in Government policy. *The Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)* guidance, includes specific guidance for people who work in or run shops, branches, stores or similar environments on how to make their workplaces Covid-secure for their employees, visitors and customers. BEIS officials worked with businesses to support these activities, including how to encourage the use of face coverings. The sector welcomed the engagement and support from Government departments, and

retailers were able to lead the way in ensuring the safety of their customers in line with the guidance. BEIS and DEFRA will continue to work closely with retailers on any guidance needed in future.

Improved reporting and recording

Recommendation 11 (Page 62)

We welcome the Government's work to provide better guidance and support for retail workers on reporting retail crime. However, it is deeply disappointing that the main thrust of the Government's response to shopworkers, who have lost confidence in the police response, is to demand increased reporting to the police without also requiring the police to improve its response. It is a serious problem that police forces could not even tell us the scale of reported assaults against shopworkers because they do not currently record the data in a way that allows it to be measured, nor do they keep effective records regarding retail or business crime. We agree that you cannot manage what you do not measure. The police must play their part in ensuring the scale and nature of the problem is fully understood by improving their own crime recording practices.

As a starting point, we recommend that it is made mandatory to add a "business crime flag" to offences committed in a retail environment, including assaults on retail workers. This simple step would give an important early indication of the scale of the problem and allow police forces better to understand patterns of local crime and the risks shopworkers face. (Paragraph 71)

Recommendation 13 (Page 63)

However, we recognise that the current broad definition of "business crime", which encompasses cybercrime, fraud or theft at an unoccupied business premises has limitations when it comes to tackling assaults on shop workers. The broad definition does not distinguish between crimes which result in financial loss to businesses and crimes of violence towards individual retail workers, meaning the immediate human cost is not always recognised. We are concerned that the perception of "business crimes" as "victimless crimes" disguises the hugely damaging impact of violence and abuse on individual retail workers.

We therefore recommend that the National Business Crime Centre work with the National Police Chiefs' Council to agree a better long-term way to identify and properly measure the violence and abuse suffered by retail workers in the crime statistics gathered by local police forces. We appreciate that the definition of business crime is not the most appropriate for the offences that have been reported to us in evidence. We therefore urge the Government to look at a more appropriate flag, such as retail business crime, which more accurately reflects the nature of the abuse we have described in this report. (Paragraph 73)

It is essential incidents of violence are reported to police. We know these crimes are under-reported at present, as highlighted in the responses received to the Call for Evidence on

Violence and Abuse Towards Shop Staff, and in the HASC report. This remains a key issue, which will give police forces a more accurate picture of the problem in their area, enabling police forces and businesses to work together to provide an appropriate response.

When violence has been used or someone has been physically or verbally threatened, the victim or their employer must report this fact first and foremost to police, and not report it as a shop theft. The Government agrees with HASC that this is not an issue of financial loss; and as heard in the evidence submitted to the Committee, where someone has been assaulted the police will assess the risk and vulnerability of the victim and respond accordingly. It is therefore crucial the information provided to police accurately reflects what the victim has experienced.

There is no mandatory recording process for business crime, or for violence and abuse toward shop staff. Some forces do seek to identify such crimes by asking staff and officers involved in managing crime reports to add a marker to the relevant record. However, it is known there are concerns about data quality where a system relies on an individual remembering to tick all the relevant boxes on a crime record. Further, making apparently simple changes to force IT systems can be challenging given forces use different record management systems.

The Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) for police recorded crime currently allows the identification of shoplifting and robbery of business property of which the latter includes the use or threat of force of violence to attempt to steal property. We will work with the National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) to consider options to add more granularity. Before such changes are made, consultation with the police service will be needed to assess the possible administrative burden on forces of making a change against the added value such granularity can bring.

The definition of business crime has been established by the NBCC for forces to use when assessing local crime data to understand the nature and extent of business crime. The NBCC consulted on a definition of business crime, which was subsequently agreed with the NPCC and came into effect of 1 June 2019. The definition is: “Any criminal offence where a business, or person in the course of their employment, and because of that employment, is a victim.”

We continue to work with policing on content changes to online reporting services on the Single Online Home to include references to business crimes; however, the subsequent handling of any report is an operational matter for the police.

Leadership from the National Business Crime Centre

Recommendation 19 (Page 64)

There is clearly an issue with the consistency of the policing response to retail crime across the country. In light of this finding, the Committee was disappointed to learn that the Government is no longer directly funding the work of the National Business Crime Centre. The National Business Crime Centre is well placed to ensure the sharing of best practice approaches, improve links with the business community and drive up

consistency. At a time when violence in retail and business settings is increasing rapidly, the decision to discontinue direct funding for an established and well-respected body tasked with strategic oversight of the issue seems nonsensical.

The Home Office work to tackle violence and abuse against shopworkers over the last twelve months has been welcome. But the temporary working groups they set up to draw up new guidance are not sufficient to deliver sustained change or provide continual national leadership. We recommend the Home Office provide central funding for the continued operation of the National Business Crime Centre. (Paragraph 90)

National leadership in the response to retail crime is provided by the NRCSG. The NRCSG is an ongoing forum which brings together Government, the police, retailers and others to help ensure the response to retail crimes is as robust as it can be. The NRCSG meets approximately every six months and is co-chaired by the Minister for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse, and Tom Ironside, Director of Business and Regulation at the British Retail Consortium.

The Task and Finish groups were project groups tasked with addressing specific actions from the Government's response to the Call for Evidence on Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Staff. The objectives agreed with the NRCSG were achieved, and the outcomes met the actions in the Call for Evidence. The resources produced by the four Task and Finish groups established in June 2020 were published in April 2021 and will be kept under review by the Home Office working with members of the NRCSG, and will be updated as needed. The four Task and Finish groups produced the following resources:

- **The communications group:** the #Shopkind communications for both employees and employers to make clear violence and abuse of shop workers is not tolerated;
- **The reporting group:** a best practice guide to support staff in reporting these crimes when they occur and to ensure a suitable response can be delivered;
- **The data sharing group:** good practice on effective data sharing between businesses and the police to ensure information can be used to better understand the problem; and
- **The victims' group:** resources to support victims, and to assist employers in supporting their employees.

In June 2021 we set up two new Task and Finish groups:

- **Substance misuse:** to look at the causes of retail violence, such as drug and alcohol addiction, and what can be done to address these in the retail setting;
- **Information sharing:** to take forward issues identified by both the Reporting and Data Sharing Task and Finish groups, to provide greater clarity on data protection standards under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and explore the development of a national Information Sharing Agreement.

The Home Office provided £1m of funding for the NBCC over three years (2016–2019). This funding was provided through the Police Transformation Fund to get the NBCC up and running. The NBCC is exploring additional funding streams such as commercial funding and income generation. The NBCC is now an established specialist function, it is therefore

appropriate that ongoing funding is provided from police forces. The Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police are committed to funding the posts which make up the NBCC.

The Home Office considers the NBCC to be a valuable asset to policing and the business sector and we are committed to working closely with the NBCC on all aspects of business crime. Although the NBCC will not be directly funded by the Home Office, it will receive appropriate Government support to ensure it can fulfil its national co-ordination role. The NBCC website is hosting the Shopkind resources and received a small amount of Home Office funding to add this to the website. The website is promoting Shopkind and the broader work of the NRCSG, and has the appropriate resources to do so.

The Home Office is working with the NBCC and the Digital Public Contact (DPC) Programme to scope options and timescales for business crime reporting services, including violence towards retail workers, to be hosted online through a single platform. If a viable option is identified, the Home Office will consider providing funding to set up this online reporting service.

The Government is delivering on the people's priorities by recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers by March 2023. This sends a clear message that we are committed to giving police the resources they need to tackle the scourge of crime. As a result of their hard work and commitment, police forces in England and Wales have recruited 9,814 additional officers and have therefore exceeded the first target of 6,000 additional officers by March 2021.

This year (year two of the programme) we are providing £425m to spend on the recruitment of 6,000 additional officers by 2022. Of this, PCCs will receive £415m for territorial policing and Regional Organised Crime Units.

Business Crime Reduction Partnerships

Recommendation 20 (Page 65)

Business Crime Reduction Partnerships have huge potential to improve communication and collaboration between the police, local retailers and local authorities on the issue of retail crime. Tailoring the policing response to areas of particular vulnerability, identifying repeat offenders, and developing joint preventative plans are effective measures for improving the police response. Closer collaboration may also have a positive impact on retailer confidence and reporting of incidents. Smaller retailers in particular, who do not have the security support and expertise that bigger corporations do, are particularly reliant on support through local partnerships. There is considerable potential for these to do far more on every high street including better investment in CCTV and communication networks, supporting small shop owners who may be working alone. *We recommend that the Government provides greater support for the creation of Business Crime Reduction Partnerships including actively encouraging partnerships to cover smaller town centres and areas where there are many independent shops with less capacity to organise local security and crime prevention. We also recommend involving shopworkers themselves as well as major employers in crime reduction partnerships as they will often have the clearest idea both of the human cost of crime and of the local measures that could make a difference.* (Paragraph 95)

Business crime reduction partnerships (BCRPs) play a vital role in facilitating work between businesses and police to tackle local crime priorities. There are over 250 BCRPs operating in the UK. They range in size from small schemes operating in small towns to city wide operations with several staff and hundreds of members.

The National Association of Business Crime Partnerships (NABCP), the umbrella body representing BCRPs at a national level, sits on the NRCSG and is playing a key part in our work to reduce violence and abuse toward shop workers.

The Home Office will continue to work with NABCP, NBCC and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners to consider what more we can do to encourage the creation of BCRPs.

Regarding the recommendation to involve shopworkers themselves as well as major employers in crime reduction partnerships, this recommendation is for the NABCP and individual BCRPs to consider.

Recommendation 21 (Page 65)

We welcome the additional money available to local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners to spend on preventative measures via the Safer Streets Fund. However, we note that none of the funding rounds have placed any emphasis on preventative measures for violence and abuse towards retail workers. We recommend that the Home Office make clear that they welcome bids to the current Safer Streets Fund for measures that will improve the safety of shop workers, and actively encourage local councils, communities and business partnerships to draw up bids which directly tackle violence and abuse in retail settings and on high streets. We also recommend that a future round should set this as a priority. (Paragraph 96)

At the time of the HASC inquiry, the bidding process was underway for the second round of the Safer Streets Fund. The first round of the Safer Streets Fund in 2020/21 was aimed at preventing acquisitive and neighbourhood crimes, such as burglary, robbery, and vehicle crime. Funding was provided to 35 Police and Crime Commissioners to invest in a range of physical and situational crime prevention measures, such as alleygating, CCTV, street lighting and home security, across 52 high crime areas (evidenced to be disproportionately impacted) in England and Wales.

The Safer Streets Fund round two was launched on 26 January 2021, and the deadline for placing bids was 25 March 2021. This second Safer Streets Fund was expanded to allow Police and Crime Commissioners and Local Authorities, across England and Wales, to invest in a wider range of crime hotspot areas, including commercial areas, such as busy high streets, and more disparate rural locations. Successful bids for round two were announced on 3 June 2021 and funding has been allocated to 50 projects. Of these projects, 23 identified that their interventions would tackle crime in a commercial setting. Four projects with funding totalling £1,726,000 have identified they will exclusively focus on commercial settings, just shy of 10% of the total funding of Safer Streets round two allocated. These projects include interventions such as: Business Watch; providing crime prevention advice and equipment to businesses; improving local CCTV and street lighting;

and proving environmental improvements (such as the removal of graffiti and improving plantings). Funded interventions are expected to help improve security on highstreets to increase safety for all, supporting and empowering communities and businesses.

This Government is fully committed to supporting businesses and communities respond to the impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak. Now more than ever, it is vital we continue to help our local economies by supporting town centres and high streets to recover, adapt and evolve. The Government is providing longer-term structural interventions and funding to support high streets and town centres, including through the £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund which will support communities across the country. On 15 July 2021, the Government published its long term plan to support the evolution and regeneration of high streets: Build Back Better High Streets which will help create jobs and build more resilient local economies and communities as we begin to recover from the impact of coronavirus.

On 19 May 2021, the Communities Secretary announced confirmation of funding for all 57 places that previously received provisional offers from the Future High Streets Fund in December 2020. In total, 72 places will share over £830 million from the Future High Streets Fund. All 72 places are beginning to deliver their ambitious plans, which will support their towns and high streets to reopen and recover from the effects of the pandemic.

The Government is also providing support to local leadership with a High Streets Task Force, giving high streets and town centres expert advice to adapt and thrive. Over five years this is providing hands-on support to local areas to develop data-driven innovative strategies and to connect local areas to relevant experts. The High Street Task Force, hosted by a consortium led by the Institute of Place Management, is also providing training and help to improve coordination between different groups working to improve their high streets.

On 20 March 2021, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced the next 70 local authorities that will receive targeted, in-person support from high street experts. This support will include a one-day diagnostic visit by a Task Force expert and, depending on the result of this diagnostic, may then include further support through expert advice on a specific issue, such as planning or design, workshops to develop a high street's vision, and mentoring or training.

This builds on the Task Force's offer to all local authorities and place leaders, which includes online training modules, data dashboards, webinars and a repository of best practice and research at <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/>.

Places can register to be kept up to date with High Street Task Force products and find resources and webinars to support their Covid-19 recovery on their website <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/>.

What do retail workers want?

Recommendation 24 (Page 66)

Employers have a duty of care and play a vital role in ensuring their employees have the confidence to report incidents, and the appropriate support to deal with difficult

situations. Evidence from our public survey, and the Government's 2019 call for evidence, suggests that many retail workers are not getting the support they need from their employers.

We welcome the Government's creation of downloadable digital assets for the #ShopKind campaign which we hope will raise awareness amongst the public about retail crime and its impact on shop workers. However, we think this action completely fails to address the problem of employers who do not support their workers to report abuse, ban repeat offenders or access counselling or training. The language around "options that may be provided" by your business will be of little use to the many retail workers whose employers do not provide those services. We recommend the Government sets out clearly in its guidance, addressing itself directly to employers, the actions they should be taking to support retail workers in the context of retail crime. This should state:

- The employer's responsibility for ensuring retail crime is reported and recorded effectively.
- The employer's responsibility proactively to analyse and mitigate risks to retail workers.
- The employer's responsibility to ensure appropriate training and counselling services are available or to signpost its employees to relevant resources.

We applaud the work of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust in creating Suzy's Charter, a far more effective and useful tool than the Government's guidance for securing the safety of retail workers. The Government's lacklustre endorsement of the Charter, a fleeting reference that "this could be used to benchmark what your business has in place" with a link to the website is very disappointing. *We recommend that the Home Office strengthen its action by working with the National Retail Crime Steering Group to agree an Employers Charter using Suzy's Charter as a template, which is specifically targeted at retail workers and retail crime. This approach would help drive best practice, it would ensure that retail workers know what they should expect and can put pressure on employers who do not meet these standards.* (Paragraph 108)

The work of the NRCSG has a strong focus on providing support those who are victims of violence and abuse in the course of their work in a retail setting. On 22 April 2021 the British Retail Consortium hosted a webinar event to launch the resources produced by the Task and Finish groups; the webinar opened with a video of a retail manager speaking about her experience of violence and abuse at work. The impact on victims have also been captured in case studies on the NRCSG webpage hosted on the British Retail Consortium website.

The resources developed by the Task and Finish groups to support victims include a link to Suzy's Charter. Further work is ongoing to explore other ways to support victims, for example the Home Office is currently working with restorative justice charities to include further information on the NRCSG webpage about how restorative justice interventions can be used, where appropriate, in relation to incidents experienced by retail workers.

The Home Office, working with the NRCSG, will review the resources provided on the webpage to consider what additional advice, training and support victims and employers would like to see. We will consult the members of NRCSG about whether they would support the creation of an Employers Charter, working with the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

Preventative measures

Recommendation 28 (Page 66)

Smaller retailers are much less likely to have access to security expertise or investment in technology and, as many have been heavily affected by the pandemic, they may also struggle to find additional funds to invest in the area. Small local high street shops sometimes have only one member of staff and we heard from the Association of Convenience Stores about the added vulnerability of workers in small local stores. Those shopworkers are in even greater need of the kind of technological and organised support.

The Committee was impressed by this range of solutions and the potential of new technology to improve both the safety of retail workers and the ability to gather evidence about incidents of retail crime. The methods described above, such as body worn video cameras, headsets for internal communication, counselling services and central command and control systems, represent a best practice approach. However, we acknowledge that many of these solutions will not be financially viable for many businesses.

The guidance provided by the Government and the National Retail Crime Steering Group, published nearly 10 months after the response to the call for evidence, amounts to eight A4 pages of highly general advice followed by 10 pages of example statements and reports. While elements such as the short de-escalation training video and links to tool kits and guidance provided by the Information Commissioner's Office are certainly useful, we feel these resources reflect a distinct lack of urgency on the part of Government to address the scale of problem.

We recommend that the Government's resources, which would be particularly beneficial for independent shops and small businesses, additionally include specific 'tool kit' style material to support all employers to take the following actions:

- *An internal communication campaign to encourage staff to report all incidents of violence and abuse;*
- *Guidance and templates for employers on creating internal and external reporting processes which are as simple, accessible and quick as possible;*
- *Guidance on procedures for banning repeat offenders from stores;*
- *Further online training resources for retail workers on managing conflict and dealing with difficult situations; and*
- *Guidance for employers on how to assess the vulnerabilities of their shop and suggestions for appropriate measures such as changing store layout, erecting protective barriers or adding signage to manage specific risks. (Paragraph 118)*

The NRCSG and the Task and Finish groups have created useful resources for retailers in accordance with the actions set out in the Government response to the Call for Evidence on Violence and Abuse Toward Shop Workers. However, the Government recognises there is still more to do. The Home Office, working with the NRCSG, will review the resources already produced and give full consideration to the HASC's recommendation when considering how to take the work forward.

Recommendation 29 (Page 67)

We also encourage large national retailers to play a leading role in local business partnerships, working with local councils and the police to encourage and include small independent high street retailers in security measures including CCTV or local communication networks for sharing intelligence on incidents or repeat offenders. We welcome the further rounds of the Safer Streets Fund which should also be used to help improve safety and support for staff working in small and independent retailers. *We recommend that local authorities work with local retailers and with the police to identify smaller high streets and areas with many small independent shops which have less capacity to tackle security issues and draw up plans including bids to the Safer Streets Fund to support shopworkers in those areas.* (Paragraph 119)

This recommendation is for local authorities.

The response to recommendation 21 above sets out the scope and timescales of the bidding process for the Safer Streets fund.

Funding rehabilitation

Recommendation 31 (Page 67)

The Government has acknowledged that drugs play a significant role in a large number of crimes and with prolific offending in particular. Yet, one year on from the Government's response to the call for evidence on violence and abuse toward shop staff, work to develop the evidence base regarding the role of drugs and alcohol in retail crime is only just beginning. We welcome the work the Government is undertaking to address drug addiction via the five ADDER programmes. However, the Minister has admitted that it will be years before these programmes could be rolled-out at a national level. This intervention lacks urgency and fails to address the gravity of the escalating violence and abuse faced by Britain's retail workers on a daily basis. Retail workers need action now to break the escalating cycle of abuse.

We welcome the new funding the Home Office will be providing for drug treatment. However, it is only for one year, when sustainable increased funding is needed for ongoing services. *We recommend that the Government makes central funding available for rehabilitation programmes such as the Offender2Rehab model adopted in Birmingham. We further recommend that until national drug rehabilitation programmes have been comprehensively rolled out, the Government should provide additional ring fenced funding, under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to work with local councils to restore drug rehabilitation services in their local area.* (Paragraph 132)

The Government is absolutely committed to tackling drugs as a driver of crime, including the theft and violence driven by drug misuse. Dame Carol Black's review of drugs highlights that approximately half of all acquisitive crimes (excluding fraud) are linked to drug misuse and that this is primarily driven by people dependent on opiate and crack cocaine who commit crime to fund their habit. Part two of Dame Carol's review, which was published on 8 July 2021, provides concrete recommendations on improving the treatment and recovery system and covers a range of important issues, including local commissioning practices, accountability and transparency, funding for treatment services, as well as the role of wider health, employment and housing services in helping people achieve and sustain recovery.

Our initial response to parts one and two of the review, published on 27 July, is clear that we must take a genuinely whole-system approach in order to tackle both the supply of drugs and demand for them together. This includes a focus on developing a high-quality treatment and recovery system which offers people with a drug dependency a route to a healthy, productive life and which prevents further drug-driven offending. As our response notes, a range of work is already underway to address these challenges, including £80m of investment in drug treatment and recovery for 2021–22 focusing on support for those in the criminal justice system, additional funding for treatment services for those who sleep rough, an extension of the Individual Placement and Support programme to help get those with a drug and alcohol dependence back into work, and an expansion of our innovative pathfinder programme Project ADDER to an additional eight local authorities (new ADDER Accelerator sites). Project ADDER is delivering change in some of the worst affected neighbourhoods, while building the evidence base to inform the development of our long-term strategic response. We have also strengthened national leadership through the establishment of a new Joint Combatting Drugs Unit to ensure we coordinate and drive activity across the full range of departments who contribute to this agenda.

However, the Government recognises that there is more to do, which is why we have committed to publishing a Drug Strategy later this year after the Spending Review, which will set out our longer term plans to tackle drug misuse in the coming years. Further activity to raise the quality and capacity of the treatment system will be a vital element of our longer-term approach.

With regards to the funding of treatment services, we have no plans to prescribe how enforcement partners use their receipts from the proceeds of crime. Under the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS), half of the receipts from the recovered proceeds of crime are retained by the Home Office as part of its funding settlement and are already accounted for in Home Office budgets. This is also used to directly tackle crime. The remainder of the receipts are distributed to the Proceeds of Crime Agencies based on the powers used. The Home Office does not prescribe what ARIS funds must be spent on, the guidance states that ARIS funds should be used for asset recovery or fund local crime fighting priorities.

Are retail workers a special case?

Recommendation 35 (Page 68)

Retail workers, by the very nature of their employment, are placed at an increased risk of violence and abuse compared to members of the general public. They are vulnerable to repeat offenders who are able to return time and again to stores, compounding abuse and leaving them feeling trapped and fearful in their place of work. The uniquely local nature of their employment means that retail workers face the terrifying prospect of offenders following them home or extending abuse into other parts of their lives in the local community.

Retail workers are responsible for enforcing laws with regard to age-restricted sales and restricted goods such as medicines or weapons. It is well established that conflict over these types of sales is a key trigger for violence and abuse. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen retail workers take on even more responsibility, enforcing Government legislation on social distancing and mask wearing, while putting their lives at risk working in public facing roles on the Covid frontline. Other categories of workers, such as emergency workers and customs officers, have rightly been afforded extra protection by the law in recognition of the service they provide to the public and the responsibility placed upon them by Parliament. We believe that retail workers must also be recognised, and that offences against them must be treated with additional seriousness, with extra protection from the law.

We believe there is a strong case for extra protection in law for retail workers through a specific offence. The Government should consult urgently on the scope of the offence, recognising the particular pressure on those in different occupations who are asked to enforce the law. (Paragraph 152)

Strengthening the legal framework

Recommendation 39 (Page 69)

The text of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act, having undergone lengthy consultation and close scrutiny, provides a potential starting point. As we have previously recommended, the Government should consult urgently on the scope of a new standalone offence. A clear message must be sent that nobody should feel unsafe at work. (Paragraph 165)

The Government completely understands and sympathises with all workers who serve the public that face violence and other forms of abuse.

A wide range of offences already exist that cover assaults against any worker, including retail workers. Such offences include common assault, actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, harassment and other public order offences, all of which criminalise threatening or abusive behaviour intended to harass, alarm or distress a person. In addition, courts have a statutory duty to follow sentencing guidelines, which are clear that the fact an offence has been committed against those working in the public sector or providing a service to the public should be treated as an aggravating factor during sentencing, meriting an increased sentence.

However, the Government is not complacent about ensuring criminal law is fit for purpose. In response to an amendment tabled to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill on 5 July 2021, the Minister for Safeguarding, Victoria Atkins MP committed to consider an amendment in the Lords if appropriate.²

We will take into account the text of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021 in our consideration.

2 Column 606 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-07-05/debates/24D0FCFD-C6AB-4854-A9A0-2629FA4AEE20/PoliceCrimeSentencingAndCourtsBill>