

Written evidence submitted by the Co-op Group (VTR0027)

[Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. “***” represents redacted text. Text in square brackets has been inserted where text has been redacted.]

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1. The Co-op is the UK’s largest consumer co-operative, with 4.6 million active members and a presence in every postal district in the country. We’re a major food retailer with 2,500 stores of our own and a major food wholesaler servicing a further 5,300 stores made up of 1,300 shops owned by independent co-operative societies and 4,000 more independents including NISA and Costcutter shops. We are also the largest funerals provider in the UK; the largest probate provider; and we provide life planning services and sell insurance products. In 2019, we launched a new business – Co-op Health. Our businesses are all UK-based and our main support centre is in Manchester.

2. Since 1844 the Co-op has promoted business with a clear social purpose. We exist to create value for our members and the communities in which we trade and can only achieve this by running a successful business. How we run our business is important to us and we set ourselves high standards for responsible retailing and service. We have a responsibility to be a campaigning business speaking out on the issues that matter to our millions of members from Fairtrade and water poverty to loneliness and slavery.

3. Our Co-op’s ambition is to create a Stronger Co-op and Stronger Communities. We have noted with great concern the unprecedented levels of violent, weaponised attacks on Co-op colleagues in stores throughout the UK which reflect wider trends in society that are so tragically highlighted far too often.

4. We welcome the Home Affairs Inquiry into the issue of Violence and Abuse toward retail workers and this submission sets out:

- The scale and nature of the problem;
- The impact of the problem;
- The impact of COVID-19 in 2020;
- The Co-op’s response to that problem; and

- The action the Co-op believe should be taken.

5. This is an issue that the Co-op and its members are concerned about. In December 2018 the elected representatives of our 4.6m members – the National Members' Council – voted for the Co-op to campaign on the issue through the **Safer Colleagues Safer Communities** campaign. We have attached to this evidence the Year 2 report on this campaign.

The Scale and Nature of the problem

A Growing Problem

6. It is clear to us that violence and abuse towards shop workers is at levels never seen before and has been rising for a number of years. There is a wide range of data from a variety of sources covering different business sectors including shop workers that support this view.

- in 2019, we commissioned Dr Emmeline Taylor to look at the impact of violence on shop workers and the motivations of offenders. This research shows that this abuse is having lasting effects on the lives of workers, both mentally and physically. It shows that because of the frequency of violence and abuse, shop workers are now suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - that research can be found [here](#);
- The Association of Convenience Store (ACS) who represent 33,000 convenience stores reported in its Crime Report 2020 that 83% of people who work in the convenience sector have been subjected to verbal abuse over the last year and there were over 50,000 incidents of violence estimated in the sector, with 25% of incidents resulting in injury;
- The British Retail Consortium (BRC) Retail Crime Survey 2020 which included the responses of businesses representing just under one the retail market shows that every day there are 424 violent or abusive incidents which is an increase of 9% on the previous year; and
- The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) survey of violence and abuse against shop staff 2019 which received 6,457 responses showed that over 400 retail staff are assaulted every day.

7. These industry and sector wide views are corroborated by the experience and data from the Co-op. We report crimes targeting our colleagues and committed in our stores in the following categories:

- Anti-Social – the types of crimes that are included in this category are: anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, fraud and staff theft;
- Violent – the types of crimes that are included in this category are hate crimes, robbery and physical assault.

Reporting

8. USDAW's Survey of violence and abuse against shop staff 2019 report states that over half of the shopworkers who experienced violence, threats, or abuse at work did not report the incidents to their employer including 17% who were physically attacked.

9. We have always asked our store colleagues to report all incidents, but we recognised that, like in the rest of the sector, under-reporting was an issue because of a range of factors including ease of reporting and likely response.

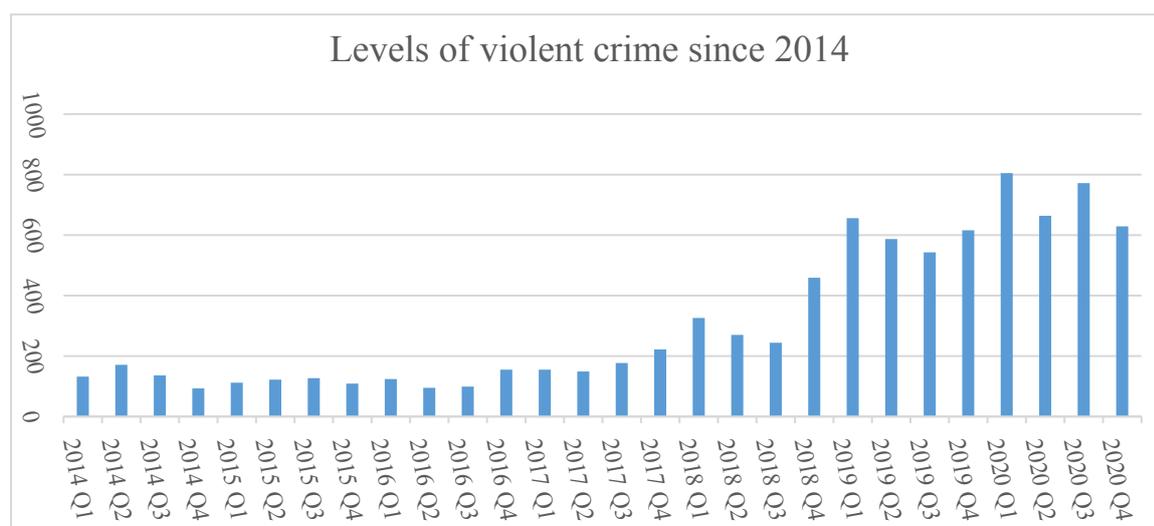
10. In September 2018 we introduced a new system for colleagues called My Safety to make it easier for colleagues to report crime. Colleagues can report to us through My Safety from their own device, the store tablet or the store computer.

11. In addition, we simplified the data input as much as we can to enable our colleagues to share the information we need. My Safety allows us to respond more effectively to individual incidents and to analyse our issues so that we can make effective investments on where best to put in place preventive solutions and support colleagues affected.

Incidents in the Co-op

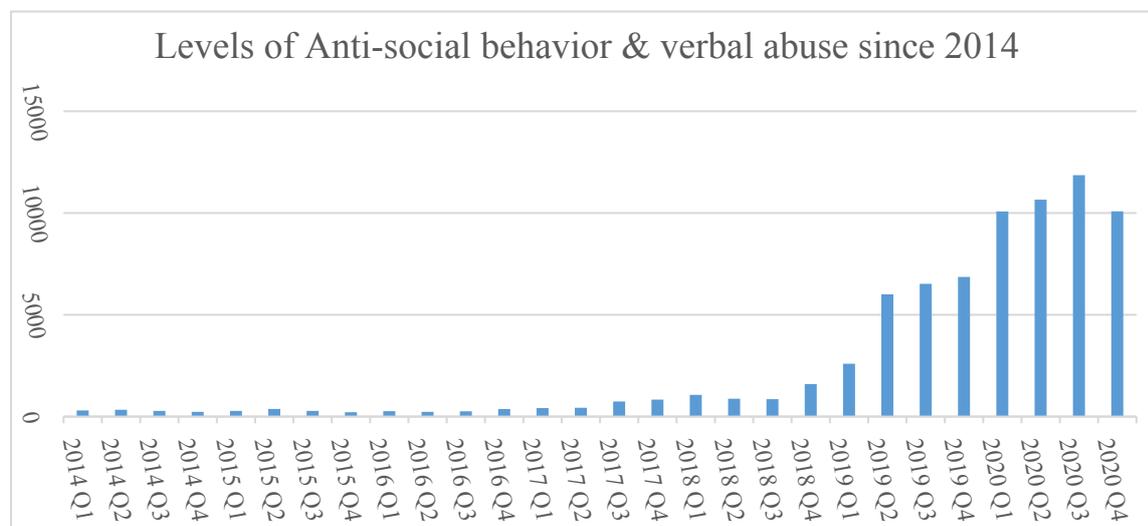
12. The industry and sector wide experience of rising violence and abuse towards colleagues (para 6) is corroborated by the experience and data from the Co-op. In terms of violent crime, we have seen in our stores a rise of over 450% in five years from 109 violent crimes in Q4 2015 to 629 crimes in Q4 2020 as set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Levels of Violent Crime



13. In addition, we have seen levels of verbal abuse – including threats - increase in our stores in the same period by over 4600% between Q4 2015 (215 incidents) and Q4 2020 (10,083 incidents) as set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Levels of Anti-social behaviour and verbal abuse



14. Improved reporting and awareness put in place at the end of 2018 has played a part in the sharp rise. However, it is important to note that this was an increase which began in 2016 and 2017 and predates the improved reporting. Moreover, the levels of violent crime and abuse recorded since Q1 2019 does, we believe, reflect the most accurate picture of the scale of the issue our colleagues face in store.

Triggers for Violence and Abuse

15. USDAW's survey of violence and abuse against shop staff 2019 report shows the rise of shop theft as a trigger to abuse towards shop workers. It has grown from 15% of incidents in 2016 to 21% in 2017 to 25% in 2018 and 30% in 2019.

16. Our experience confirms this and violent behaviour, sometimes exacerbated by drugs and alcohol, is often triggered if colleagues challenge or engage with shoplifters. This violence can be of varying levels, from pulling out a weapon to physical injury. If there are customers in the stores at the same time, they can often inflame the situation as they do not understand the risk of violence. Our experience is that before COVID-19, 75% of violent incidents were related to shoplifting.

17. USDAW's research also suggested that age-restricted sales continue to be a key trigger for violence with 29% of violent incidents being accounted for by it. At the Co-op, we see a similar pattern and estimate that before COVID-19, 15% of violent incidents escalated from shopworkers challenging the sale of age-restricted goods.

Police, Criminal Justice System and Sentencing

18. It is clear that police forces are stretched as resources reduce and demands upon them increase which has resulted in a drastic reduction in the law enforcement response:

- At a strategic level, 63% of police and crime plans make no reference to business crime and 83% make no reference to the business community. (Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) (2018))
- a Freedom of Information request by the Co-op at the start of 2020 to which 75% of constabularies responded showed that the police did not attend two times out of three when incidents in store were reported and it should be kept in view that only the most serious incidents were reported; and
- in answer to a Parliamentary Question from Laurence Robertson MP by the Ministry of Justice which showed the percentage of shop theft being dealt with by the justice system stands at 13% just 1 in 8 incidents and that is down from 36% in 2010

19. The BRC 2020 Crime Report states that 70% of respondents describe the police response to retail crime as poor or very poor, with opinions generally better for violence than customer theft or fraud.

20. All of this has reduced colleagues' trust that they will receive a quality service from the police and can, of course, be an obstacle to future reporting of incidents. Indeed, police forces now use 101 to report incidents that are not considered emergency situations such as when the offender has left the scene. It is not uncommon for colleagues reporting incidents to be on hold for 20-30 minutes at a time.

21. All of this it increases their fear of attack and its consequences because should there be an incident while they are at work there will be little support from the police. Again, this then reduces the likelihood of incidents being reported in the future due to lack of support.

22. Dr Emmeline Taylor of City University noted in her '*It's Not Part of the Job*' report in 2019 that:

'According to the Home Office CVS (2017), wholesale and retail premises experienced an estimated 8.1 million crimes (a substantial increase on the 5.2 million estimated the previous year). Of these, 81% of incidents were thefts and, specifically, nearly two thirds (63%) were theft by customers. This equates to 5.1 million incidents of shop theft – approximately 14,000 incidents a day. While this figure itself should be concerning, by all accounts it is a gross underestimate – some sources calculate a more realistic figure to be 38 million shop theft offences in 2017. Yet, at the same time, the number of arrests for shoplifting has fallen by 17%, and the number of perpetrators charged has plummeted by 25%.'

23. Finally, it is clear to us that where offenders are charged and successfully prosecuted the criminal justice system does not, in the view of us, our colleagues or the sector provide an appropriate sentence for the individual offences nor provide a deterrent to such attacks and, finally, does nothing but increase the anxiety and fear shopworkers face.

24. We have looked at the data relating to offences which have been taken successfully through the courts since April 2020. This is a small sample – reflecting the low number of prosecutions and the impact of COVID-19 on the courts - but it shows that three offenders with a long history of theft and violence committed 65 offences between them including violent assault across a number of different business and premises received sentences which in total amounted to 91 weeks – around 10 days per offence.

25. We believe that such sentences do not provide any kind of deterrence or punishment but nor do they address the underlying reasons as Dr Taylor again noted:

‘In the few cases that are prosecuted and proceed to court, offenders describe receiving sentences that do nothing to address the underlying reasons for their offending behaviour. Drug-affected offenders report a string of short custodial sentences with no rehabilitation component. Missed opportunities to intervene characterise the criminal justice system. It is clear that the way in which the criminal justice system responds to crime in the retail sector requires significant and urgent change...

Drug-affected offenders are being dealt with by inappropriate community orders or short custodial sentences of less than six months. At present, most offenders cycle through the criminal justice system repeatedly – passing from being sentenced back to arrest. The revolving door of prison is spinning at a dizzying pace for some of these offenders and custody offers little by way of deterrence and nothing in terms of rehabilitation. Many offenders admit that they will engage in criminal activity as soon as they leave court in order to get drugs because they do not have access to rehabilitation.’

26. The lack of a police response and the ineffective sentencing by the courts further re-enforces the fear that shopworkers feel in the face of their daily experience of violence and abuse in their place of work.

Impact of COVID-19

27. Like in so many areas, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the reality for food retail shopworkers to their every day working lives. Since the first lockdown, shopworkers in supermarkets and local convenience stores have been ensuring the nation can continue to buy food and be fed. Workers in food supply, including in retail, were classified as key workers in March and they have been thanked for their service by Government and society on a number of occasions. In January 2021, for

example, Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, called them the 'hidden heroes of the pandemic'.

28. Notwithstanding this, we have seen in Co-op stores an increase in violent incidents and verbal abuse since the start of COVID-19 related restrictions. We saw a 36% increase in incidents of anti-social behaviour between January and October 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, with panic buying and other customers not keeping their distance are now flashpoints for anti-social behaviour.

29. USDAW's interim crime survey results were published in November 2020 and these results show that 76% of shopworkers say that abuse has been worse than normal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

30. The requirement to ensure social distancing such as limits on customers in shops, one-way systems and the wearing of face masks have become flashpoints leading to abuse and violence towards shopworkers. Indeed, we have also seen the weaponization of the virus in threats and assaults on shopworkers.

31. Research from USDAW in the summer of 2020 showed that the five most frequent causes of incidents in store were the enforcement of social distancing measures rather than the long-standing flashpoints of age-related sales and shoplifting (paras 15 to 17).

32. Public attitudes to the issue is complex. Nationally representative research carried out by the Co-op in November 2020 showed that almost 40% of public have witnessed abuse, violence or threats directed towards retail workers, yet 90% of the British people feel that shopworkers have provided an essential service.

33. The same research showed that 84% of the public saying it's unacceptable for shopworkers to put up with any form of violence or abuse and 82% are calling for greater sentencing for offenders. Nonetheless, 20% of the public admitted to being verbally or physically aggressive during COVID-19.

Impact – Colleagues not Finances

34. It is self-evident that abuse and, particularly, violent incidents results in financial cost to businesses whether it be from lost products, colleagues being absent, stores being closed, or the subsequent investment made in store security.

35. The BRC Retail Crime Survey 2020 shows that the cost of business crime overall has increased to over £1bn. Together with the £1.2bn spent on prevention, crime now accounts for around £2.2 billion in losses to the industry. The ACS 2020 report that crime against convenience retailers costs an estimated £211m to the sector which averages at £4,543 per store. This is, in effect, a 7p crime tax per transaction in convenience stores.

36. Between 2016 and 2022, the Co-op has committed to invest £140m in security, crime prevention and colleague safety measures as set out at paras 41 to 62 the

measures we have taken as part of our strategy to keep colleagues safe, with more detail in the attached *Safer Colleagues Safer Communities – Two Years On* report.

37. However, we believe that the true, long-term cost for our Co-op is in the impact on colleagues of abuse and violence not the financial costs. Far too often retail crime is presented as principally an issue of financial loss. At the Co-op, this is not the case. **For us this is about our people and our priority is the impact on our colleagues not our balance sheet.**

38. The Co-op believes that to really understand the issue of violence and abuse towards shop workers the voices of our colleagues – the people subject to daily abuse, threats and violence everyday – need to be heard as part of this Inquiry and we welcome the Committee including a questionnaire for those retail workers.

39. We have included at Annex A some of the first-hand testimonies of violence and abuse that Co-op colleagues provided to the Home Office’s Call for Evidence in 2019; they remain a graphic account of what life is like for a shopworker in modern Britain. We have also encouraged colleagues to complete the survey the Committee has issued.

40. The following five stories are extracts from a selection of the stories that have been reported by our colleagues during 2020:

“A female shoplifter was stopped by our security guard with medicines that she hadn’t paid for when he asked to look in her bag as she was leaving the store. She refused and stabbed him with a needle, leaving the store before returning with her boyfriend who pushed, shoved and verbally abused the security guard before finally leaving.”

“A man came into the store and became angry with my colleague, [***], who was trying to enforce the social distancing rules. The man began shouting at [my colleague] at which point the security guard came over to assess the situation. The man told the security guard to ‘F**k off, you monkey. F**k off you p***y’. Both [my colleague] and the security guard were shocked by this language and told the man they would not serve them. The man attempted to shoplift some items when the security guard asked him to put them back.

The man responded with ‘you dare stop me you monkey, I will f**king kill you, me and you, let’s fight outside. I will kick your f**king head in and I will kill you, you f**king monkey. The security guard continued to ask him to put the items back, and the man continued his threats and abuse.

I realised that the situation was escalating and called the police. When I was on the phone, the man grabbed the security guard from behind, choking him. A scuffle broke out and the man bit my security guard and poked him in the eye. Eventually a customer broke up the fight and

the man left the store.”

“A regular customer came in for a Costa coffee, but we were unable to give him a wooden stirrer. He became abusive and was asked to leave. He then became more aggressive and spat in my face. He then left the store, before returning 5 minutes later on his motorbike, revving around the car park and showing obscenities.”

“Customers were queuing outside, in line with the social distancing rules when a man came to the door asking to use the cash machine. We told him he would need to join the queue and he began to become verbally aggressive with colleagues, telling us all that we are c**ts and to f**k off and die. He then spat towards us, but luckily did not hit anyone.”

“I was working at the front door when a guy who had been banned in the past tried to come into the store. I told him he was not allowed in so he left. He came back and again I asked him to leave, whilst ensuring my body worn camera was on and calling for my colleagues. Again he left and went to the back of the queue. When he came back to the door, he told me he was going to beat me up and swung for me. I tried to get back into the store when he followed me and attacked me from behind, hitting my forehead causing swelling and my right eye. He also caught my hand and fractured it. The police were called and they did arrive quickly and arrested him.”

The Co-op Response

41. Between 2016 and 2022, the Co-op has committed to invest £140m in security, crime prevention and colleague safety measures. However, we are aware that increasing investment can simply ‘displace’ the crime and we are, therefore, constantly seeking ways to improve safety in our stores.

Interventions in Store – Technology

42. Our internal reporting system enables us to understand which stores and which colleagues need what kind of support and protection and we are constantly looking at ways to protect colleagues.

43. A key area for the Co-op has been **in-store connectivity** which enables colleagues to talk to each other in different parts of our stores and to others who can help in circumstances where there is an incident. We spent £4.5m on new headsets which are now in all of our stores.

44. These headsets give colleagues the opportunity to communicate effectively across the shop to highlight possible concerns and to allow colleagues to make the right decisions to keep themselves and others safe. We have had robberies in which

some colleagues have been able to stay out of the situation and keep themselves in the back office, as a result of them being made aware via the headsets.

45. In addition, we have rolled out tablet devices to all of our stores which allows colleagues to spend more time on the shop floor rather than the back office. Of course, this allows us to provide a better service to our members and customers on the shop floor, but it also helps our colleagues feel more connected. This has also meant that colleagues are able to log any incidents whilst remaining on the shop floor.

46. In 2019, we completed a trial of body worn cameras and the initial evaluation from these trials showed a really strong deterrent impact as we expected. These cameras work when a colleague feels threatened by aggressive or violent behaviour, they can operate the camera with a simple one-push activation, instantly recording footage to the camera itself, and streaming live video to our security operations centre, allowing for a quick response from security personnel or police. We have now rolled out body worn cameras to the 250 stores that report the most crime, with a continued roll out during 2021.

47. As a convenience retailer, we have a small number of stores that have one-on-one working. In these stores we have completed the roll out of Personal Safety Devices (PSD's) for colleagues to use when on shift. Colleagues can press these covert devices and they will link live to our security provider, Mitie who can have a two-way conversation with the colleague or contact the Police if required.

48. CCTV is a legal requirement for all stores to have and it is shared with police following incidents to allow us to help in the conviction of offenders. We also use the CCTV screens in the high value areas such as those selling high value items like protein (meat, fish, etc.) and alcohol which ensures those considering theft know they are being monitored on CCTV.

49. However, we have recognised that traditional CCTV does not provide the proactive support of our colleagues we want to provide. Therefore, we have developed a partnership with the security business MITIE that specialises in technological innovation in security including iCCTV. It is one of the most sophisticated and leading-edge approaches to protecting colleagues. We have installed iCCTV in around 1000 stores which represents 40% of our estate.

50. When our stores use the iCCTV panic buttons during an incident, such as shoplifting, anti-social behaviour, a violent incident or robbery the feed from the cameras is immediately viewed by MITIE's dedicated Command and Control Centre. At this point, the Command and Control Centre essentially take over the store communicating with colleagues through audio speakers and support store colleagues through the ongoing incident as required. They contact the police if it is a live incident that is putting colleagues at risk.

51. MITIE have developed a streamlined evidential process which allows them to supply full evidence packs after an incident. When there has been a serious incident in one of our stores, MITIE take witness statements from our colleagues, liaise with

the police and work with the Crime Prosecution Service to build a case for prosecution particularly in cases where multiple crimes have been committed by the same individual or group. It is important to note the insight from ACS Crime Report 2020 which recorded that 77% of offenders were perceived by shop owners to be repeat offenders.

52. In 2020, together with MITIE, we have supported the police with 146 case files with evidence that we have shared which has led to 183 Mitie influenced arrests and 25 prosecutions.

Interventions in Store – Physical

53. We use a flexible guarding model which means that we can move guards as and when to the area needing them the most. We recognise that a guard will only prevent opportunistic theft which is often not the problem we face today. Many of the offenders we face today are unlikely to be deterred by the presence of a guard and are more likely to use violence.

54. A typical guard in the UK does not have any additional powers and is, therefore, limited in the action they can take which will not further put colleagues and customers at risk should any restraint take place. Indeed, there is nowhere in our stores to hold a shoplifter if we believed police would respond, which consequently puts our colleagues in more danger.

55. For those stores that have suffered more serious verbal abuse, regular anti-social behaviour and continuous violent incidents, we have supplied the stores with more highly trained guarding support. These are guards that are trained to remove members of the public or prevent access to the store if required.

56. Where stores have experienced multiple burglaries, we have installed fog cannons. Once activated, a smoke cloak is released which prevents perpetrators from stealing products. Once a fog cannon has been installed our evidence suggests that it can break the cycle. For example, a store was burgled four times during 2018 which resulted in theft and damage. The installation of a fog cannon at the end of last year meant that during an attempted burglary the fog cannon was activated, and the offenders left empty handed. These fog cannons are only triggered out of hours.

57. We are currently working with SmartWater and security specialists PROTECT to roll out an additional forensic deterrent across our food stores. The fog systems are mainly located close to the entrances of our stores and are really effective in the kiosk areas, which are typically targets of crime. Once it is activated, a dense fog obscures the intruder's vision making it increasingly difficult for them to leave the store. It also covers the criminal in a spray containing SmartWater's unique forensic signature. Guaranteed to last at least five years and invisible to the naked eye, this signature spray helps police to track criminals and stolen goods which can then lead to increased conviction rates.

Supporting our Colleagues

58. In 2018 the Co-op established a dedicated Retail Resilience and Response team whose key role is to support store colleagues following incidents. They ensure colleagues are supported post incident in whatever means is appropriate for the individual. This team also looks to help fix and identify root causes where possible to prevent incidents occurring. Following any incident in our stores we:

- secure post-incident guarding and review guarding coverage in our local stores;
- encourage and support our colleagues to contact Lifeworks, our counselling team who assist and colleagues impacted and ensure they receive the right level of emotional support; and
- review store processes to make sure we are securing the safety of our colleagues learning any lessons from the incident for the store affected and others.

59. We provide our store colleagues with conflict resolution training to help them avoid involving themselves in situations that may result in injury. We are building and trialling a toolkit with an aim to equip our operations managers with the knowledge to support any stores that are suffering high levels of crime by engaging in local partnerships and with the police. The toolkit will ensure that these operations managers come away with an action plan to improve the quality of the working conditions in stores, ensuring that their teams are feeling safe at work and supported by the Co-op and local police.

Partnership Working

60. We believe that our interventions are making colleagues safer, but we recognise that the consequences of what we can often only displace and disrupt crime. It is, therefore, critical that businesses work together in locations to make those places resilient to crime. There are a number of organisations that we work with to achieve this:

- National Business Crime Solutions work with us and many retailers to provide information on offenders that are currently active to allow us to communicate to stores for awareness and to install preventative equipment more tactically; and
- when effective, Business Crime Reduction Partnerships do allow colleagues to keep in contact with other retailers in the local area and make them aware of offenders in the area. Some BCRPs will also have a link to the local policing teams, allowing them to tailor their patrols in areas that are required.

61. We believe that while the police response continues to be so variable and, in places, poor, our colleagues will feel that there is little point in reporting crime. Regardless of what the police do, we will continue to encourage colleagues to report crime.

62. We are currently working in partnership with two police forces, Nottingham and Sussex, to develop new innovative models to encourage our colleagues to report all crimes to the police. We know this is important because the fuller the reporting the more the police can build up their intelligence picture and understanding of levels of crimes within our Co-op stores to ensure that the right resources are deployed to tackle violence, abuse and crime in stores. We will see the outcome of these trials in 2021 and we hope to take the learnings from them to build and expand to find local solutions that may work in our different stores.

Co-op Recommendations for Action

63. As the evidence in this submission makes clear the issue of violence against shop workers has escalated in recent years. It is resulting in thousands of shop workers suffering verbal abuse and violent attacks which should not be part of their job.

64. We recognise that we have a primary responsibility to ensure we do all we can to make sure our colleagues are safe when they are at work in our shops. We are always looking for ways to improve how we keep our colleagues safe as they serve our members and customers.

65. However, it is clear to us that businesses need help from those outside our shops to help keep our colleagues safe. Too many shop workers believe that the issue of abuse and violence towards shop workers is not taken seriously by Government, the police or the criminal justice system.

Legislation and Sentences to Protect Shopworkers

66. We have made the case for a number of years that there needs to be a new offence created to afford greater protection to shopworkers. We have, therefore, supported Alex Norris MP's current Private Members Bill which is awaiting Second Reading and Daniel Johnson MSP's legislation in Holyrood which, we are delighted to see, has now passed into law..

67. We were disappointed that the call for a new offence has summarily rejected by Government in its response to the Call for Evidence. However, we continue to believe the case for new legislation carrying tougher sentences is strong for two reasons.

68. Firstly, there is a point of principle that where Parliament puts specific obligations to uphold or implement the law on a specific group of people, they should provide additional protection over and above existing offences. This is what Parliament did to provide additional protection for police officers and also to officials in HM Revenue and Customs in 2005 in section 31 of the Commissioners of Revenue and Customs Act.

69. As set out before it has long been the upholding of the law in relation to age-related sales and shoplifting that has been the flashpoint for abuse and violence. However, over the period of the pandemic lockdown, it has been upholding the rules

and guidance in relation to social distancing that has led shopworkers to face even more abuse and violence.

70. New legislation can very often can signal what the country believe is acceptable. It can reset our societal norms. It is clear that there needs to be a reset in society and the experience of COVID-19 where shopworkers have seen even more violence and abuse despite providing a vital and essential service to communities underlines this.

71. Daniel Johnson MSP's Bill has been through rigorous and lengthy scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament and, shopworkers in Scotland now have greater protection in law in Scotland than they have in England, Wales or Northern Ireland despite the fact that they face the same risks across the UK.

72. Therefore, **we recommend that a new offence is created which makes it an offence to assault, threaten, abuse, obstruct or hinder a retail worker who is doing their job will become a new offence and if such an offence is committed because the worker is applying an age-restriction, by asking for proof of age, it will count as aggravation potentially making the offence more serious.**

Police Prioritisation of Violence Toward Shop Workers

73. We know that new legislation and offences will not change the experience of shopworkers on their own. We also know that when the police can engage properly and deal with incidents, they not only often address the issue but also provide reassurance to our colleagues, members and customers. We know that they are stretched and have had to take tough decisions in terms of prioritisation.

74. We recommend that a higher priority should be given by police to tackling abuse and violence toward shop workers and that resources should follow that higher prioritisation. Critically, **we recommend:**

- **a thematic review carried out by HM Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) of forces' response to retail crime and particularly abuse and violence toward shop workers violence;**
- **the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and Police Chief Council should work collectively to deliver a more consistent, improved and effective response to retail crime including abuse and violence toward shop workers subject to any HMICFRS review;**
- **as a result, all Police and Crime Commissioners should include retail crime with a focus on abuse and violence toward shop workers in their Police and Crime Plans and should report against it annually; and**
- **the resources available to police forces should reflect a greater priority for tackling retail crime and especially abuse and violence toward shop workers to deliver a more effective response.**

75. In, addition we would welcome a new impetus to police and retailers working together at a local level to support each other to deliver better outcomes in the handling of incidents. Therefore, we **recommend that Government set ambitious targets to support the delivery of comprehensive coverage of business crime reduction partnership across England and Wales by 2025.**

76. As a national business we see very clearly the different ways individual forces respond to the issue of abuse and violence against shop workers. We understand that local circumstances will shape local responses, but we recommend greater standardisation in a number of areas.

77. Some forces have developed online mechanisms to report incidents and we believe this route can help ensure all incidents, even those which are not serious, are recorded so there is a complete picture of the threat. However, at present forces do not have a single, common way of doing this and **we would recommend a single portal for reporting incidents is created for national consistency.**

Investment in tackling the causes of crime

78. We have seen in the communities we serve the impact of tightening public sector resource envelopes, especially Local Authority budgets, in recent years on the provision of services for young people. We are also aware of, and are looking to see how we can support, the preventative work the Home Office are undertaking.

79. We hope that the forthcoming multi-year Spending Review will provide sufficient funding to support the thousands of local groups, many of whom we have funded through our Local Community Fund, who support individuals to take opportunities which can lead to positive, constructive lives. Our work with the Damilola Taylor Trust, the Rio Ferdinand Foundation and many others are set out in *Safer Colleagues Safer Communities – Two Years On* report.

80. In developing the strategy which will underpin a multi-year Spending Review funding, **we recommend that Government engage with businesses to understand and develop effective ways for businesses to use their assets to help individuals, groups and communities.**

January 2021