

BRC CRIME REPORT

2026

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BRC

FOREWORD

Crime has been a growing problem for retailers over the past decade. Despite billions being spent by retailers on prevention, shop theft continued to rise and violence and abuse spiralled. So it's a relief to see early signs of progress in this year's report.

Incidents of violence and abuse fell by a fifth to 1,600 per day. This is still far too high, but it is a step in the right direction and a success to build on. The toll these incidents take on hardworking retail colleagues cannot be overstated. Whether it is verbal abuse, physical assault or a threat involving a weapon, the mental and physical scars can last a lifetime affecting the victims, their families, friends, colleagues, and customers. The hard work must not stop until the number of incidents is zero, and no one goes to work fearing for their safety.

Retailers have been working hard to turn the tide, investing billions of pounds, and working with police and Government on joint initiatives including Project Pegasus and the Retail Crime Action Plan. The police are attending more incidents. These collaborations are starting to make a difference thanks to more dedicated resourcing and better intelligence sharing.

Violence and abuse are not the only challenges. Theft has become endemic, costing retailers hundreds of millions and pushing up prices for honest shoppers. The role of organised criminal gangs is particularly concerning, with brazen incidents becoming increasingly more terrifying for those who bear witness, and increasingly costly for retailers.

The report also shows that delivery theft has emerged as a major issue, as criminals look for new avenues to get a fast buck. Customers are left with the frustration of delayed deliveries and confusion over who bears the responsibility of reimbursement or replacement.

For too long, organised criminals and other prolific offenders have operated with little consequence. But the data shows things are beginning to change.

Legislative reform is crucial. We will soon see the passage of the Crime and Policing Bill, a significant step forward. It will introduce a standalone offence for assaulting a retail worker, something the BRC and many others campaigned to secure for many years, which will strengthen sentencing, and give the police a clearer picture of the scale of the problem so resources can be better targeted. It will also remove the £200 threshold of low level theft, which sends a clear message that all theft will be taken seriously. The £7 million investment announced in the Policing White Paper to tackle organised retail crime is another welcome and important step toward delivering real progress on theft.

This report reflects our improved methodology to enhance accuracy and consistency, including changes to how the cost of retail crime is calculated and updated classifications of crime types and incident categories.

Finally, I would like to thank our members for taking part in our survey, as well as our partners, Sensormatic Solutions, for their contribution.

Finally, for the sake of every one of our hard working colleagues, I hope we continue to see retail crime trend downwards, and let's build on the progress so far to make this happen.



Helen Dickinson OBE
CEO of BRC

FOREWORD

The 2026 Crime Report shows what retailers know all too well – that retail crime has not gone away. It remains a significant and costly challenge, one that retailers have spent over £5 billion in the last five years to tackle. And while there are reasons for cautious optimism, the need for continued vigilance and smart investment remains.

For more than six decades, Sensormatic Solutions has been dedicated to helping retailers combat loss and enhance safety across their operations. What began as a focus on traditional loss prevention has evolved into a sophisticated, data led discipline responding to an ever changing retail environment. Theft methods have grown more organised, more agile, and more technologically advanced. In parallel, the tools available to retailers to detect, deter, and respond to these threats have progressed significantly. Today, retailers stand at an inflection point - where innovation, insight, and collaboration are more crucial than ever.

Technology and data can provide retailers with a clearer picture of retail loss. Understanding the cause of such losses, from internal or external theft to administrative errors or process inefficiencies, is vital to resolving them. With the rise in organised crime made clear in the report, finding patterns of theft within and between stores has never been more vital. Since the pandemic eased in 2022, these combined pressures have intensified, creating challenges for retailers of all sizes. Over the last three years in particular, retail loss has become a board level priority, shaping strategic decisions and prompting investment in new ways of working.

As a global leader in loss prevention technology, Sensormatic Solutions has been at the forefront of supporting retailers through this critical period, helping to transform Total Retail Loss into total retail opportunity. We have been called upon not only to evaluate existing security measures, but also to help define what the next generation of loss prevention should look like. Retailers are seeking holistic approaches that provide visibility into what is being lost, when incidents occur, and where vulnerabilities exist. By bringing together real time data insights, AI enabled analytics, and at risk inventory modelling, we continue to help retailers strengthen margins while protecting their people, products, and brand.

The report shows customer theft remains a persistent challenge, with technology increasingly adopted across the sector to mitigate these risks. Retailers are redesigning their loss prevention strategies, integrating connected solutions, and deploying innovative tools that improve both security and operational efficiency. This includes everything from enhanced electronic article surveillance and video analytics to intelligent store monitoring platforms and advanced reporting dashboards. The foundation for a more resilient retail environment is now firmly in place.

However, the pace of change demands ongoing attention. Threats continue to evolve, and so must the industry's response. It is essential that retailers maintain momentum, build on recent progress, and stay ahead of emerging risks. This year's report shows delivery theft is an increasing concern, ranking as the second-most common retail crime and increasingly linked to organised and repeat offending, highlighting the need for new strategies and technologies to address new risks beyond the shop floor. Encouragingly, the investments made over the last few years are beginning to deliver measurable results. The reported 20% decline in incidents of violence and abuse this year is a positive signal that coordinated efforts - across technology, strategy, and collaboration - are starting to make a difference.

Sensormatic Solutions is proud to stand alongside the British Retail Consortium and retailers across the country as they continue their work to reduce crime and prevent abuse in retail environments. And while technology provides powerful tools to detect and deter loss, it is important to recognise that a retailer's greatest asset in preventing crime remains its in store colleagues. Their vigilance, expertise, and exceptional customer service play a vital role in creating safe, welcoming, and well protected shopping environments. Together - with empowered colleagues, innovative technology, and a united industry - we can continue to build safer stores and a more secure future for retail.



Sean Lee
Regional Vice President and General Manager
EMEA
Sensormatic Solutions

BACKGROUND

THIS REPORT COVERS THE PERIOD FROM 1ST SEPTEMBER 2024 TO 31ST AUGUST 2025.

During this time, the government launched the Crime and Policing Bill, which will introduce a new specific offence for assaulting a retail worker and remove the £200 shoplifting limit. The Tackling Retail Crime Together strategy was also launched by the National Business Crime Centre, supported by £2 million in Home Office funding.

The report provides the largest and most reliable measure of retail crime in the UK, based on a sample of retailers representing over one million UK store employees and over £252 billion market turnover (total UK retail spending was £492 billion in 2025). This data has been used to estimate crime figures for the entire industry.

This year, several changes were made to the survey to better capture the issues most relevant to the retail industry. As a result, some summary measures, particularly in the 'Cost of Retail Crime' section, are not directly comparable with previous years. Wherever this is the case, it is clearly highlighted in the text.



TOPLINE RESULTS

The impact of violence and abuse on the welfare of retail workers

Over 1,600 incidents of violence and abuse per day (590,000 a year), down from 2,000 the previous year

43,000 physically violent incidents (118 a day), down from 45,000 the previous year

13,000 incidents involving a weapon (36 per day), just under half compared to the previous year's figures

The cost of crime prevention both online and in store to retail businesses

Total known theft and damage cost £583 million

Customer theft accounted for the vast majority of recorded criminal incidents

Losses from delivery theft cost over £100 million

Spend on crime prevention measures totalled £985 million

Almost £5.5 billion spent on crime prevention in the past 5 years



The response of the overall justice and police systems

13% of retailers rated the police response to retail crime overall as good or excellent (up from 9% last year)

38% of retailers rated it as fair (up from 29% last year)

50% of retailers rated it as poor, an improvement on 61% last year

15% of total incidents were reported to police by retailers, and officers attended around one in three of those reported incidents (31%)



TURNING THE FOUNDATIONS INTO LASTING IMPACT

The past year has demonstrated that progress is achievable, but this hard-won progress remains fragile. Long-term improvement will depend on continued commitment from government, police, and retailers to turn early success into consistent practice.

Violence and abuse towards shopworkers remains a serious issue for retailers, and while there are some early signs of improvement, there is clearly a long way to go. Evidence shows that better outcomes are possible when the right resources and partnerships are in place. Joint working between government, the police and retailers is starting to lead to practical change. Retailers also continue to invest heavily, focusing on prevention, improving reporting and supporting police action. Even so, the scale of the problem remains significant. The impact on staff is profound, affecting wellbeing, confidence, and retention, and underlines the critical need to maintain momentum and focus.

Police response is a key factor in retailer confidence and wider deterrence. Inconsistent attendance and limited follow-up over a number of years have led many retailers to disengage from reporting, contributing to chronic under-recording of retail crime. This year's report has some encouraging signs, with around half of retailers reporting a positive police response. To sustain this improvement we need increased attendance, more consistent enforcement, and clearer, better-aligned reporting, supported by straightforward and practical evidence from retailers. It is positive that the most serious offences are reported and attended, but we must see the same for all levels of crime.

Customer theft has become an established challenge across the industry. Alongside opportunistic shoplifting, organised retail crime groups are increasingly targeting high-value, easily resold goods and exploiting gaps in enforcement, online resale platforms and prosecution thresholds. A widespread belief that theft is unlikely to result in prosecution has encouraged repeat and more open offending. The removal of the £200 threshold in the Crime and Policing Bill is an important step, but on its own it will not be enough. Consistent enforcement, better intelligence sharing and targeted action against prolific offenders and organised groups will be essential.

Through continued focus on enforcement, partnerships, and meaningful consequences for offenders, we can finally start to see a consistent decline in retail crime. This is essential to protect shopworkers, deter crime and create a safer retail environment for everyone.



KEY CONCERNS – BUSINESS IMPACT

Retailers' first priority remains the safety of colleagues and customers, and they are unwavering in their efforts to tackle the challenges in this area. This year, questions on priority concerns were structured to focus on issues with direct financial impact. Retailers identified customer theft as their biggest financial concern related to crime, followed by cyber crime and robbery.

1. CUSTOMER THEFT (54%)
2. CYBER CRIME (32%)
3. ROBBERY (7%)

Customer theft

Customer theft remains the number one concern for retailers and has consistently ranked at or near the top in past surveys. Incidents that may seem minor or isolated can quickly add up to significant financial losses, putting further pressure on already tight margins and leading to higher prices for customers. Retailers continue to invest heavily in security measures such as CCTV, security guards and locked cabinets in an effort to tackle the issue. Theft is also a major trigger for violence and abuse of staff, while also negatively affecting the shopping experience for honest customers.

Cyber crime

Cyber crime has steadily moved up the risk agenda for retailers, driven by an increase in both the volume and sophistication of attacks. The last year has seen a number of high-profile incidents against retailers highlighting how cyber attacks can disrupt trading, supply chains and in-store operations for extended periods, with significant business impact. These incidents have demonstrated the need for companies across all sectors to take cyber security seriously.

In an increasingly digital retail environment, cyber security is fundamental to retailers' day-to-day operations and their ability to meet customer expectations. As the distinction between physical and online channels continues to blur and customer journeys become more complex, retailers rely on apps, social media commerce, AI tools and a range of delivery and return options. This is coupled with an increasing reliance on digital tools in procurement, logistics, HR, and other key back-office functions. While digitisation brings efficiency and convenience, it also increases the potential scale and impact of cyber incidents. This is especially important as retailers hold increasing amounts of personal data on both staff and customers. Against this backdrop, a reactive approach to cyber security is no longer sufficient.

As a result, retailers are increasing investment to prevent attacks, build resilience and prepare for potential incidents, alongside closer engagement with organisations such as the National Cyber Security Centre, both at an operational and board level. This reflects a growing recognition that cyber risk goes beyond an impact on technology itself and has real implications for business resilience.

Robbery

Robbery presents a serious risk to staff safety. Unlike customer theft, robbery involves the use or threat of physical violence, making incidents particularly serious for employees and even customers. Beyond the financial losses, these incidents can have severe consequences, including physical harm, emotional distress and long-lasting impacts on staff wellbeing and confidence while at work.

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Incidents of violence and abuse averaged over 1,600 per day (590,000 over the year) in 2024–25. While this represents a slight decrease from last year, when incidents exceeded 2,000 per day (737,000), it remains higher than the 1,300 per day (493,000) recorded two years earlier. Although this is the first year-on-year decline in some time, levels are still significantly above the last pre-pandemic figure of 455 incidents per day in 2019–20.

Figure 1: Number of incidents

	2023 Crime Survey covering on 2021/22	2024 Crime Survey covering 2022/23	2025 Crime Survey covering 2023/24	2026 Crime Report covering 2024/25
Abuse & Threat Incidents vs retail staff average per day			1,896	1,499
Abuse & Threat Incidents vs retail staff			692,000	547,000
Physically Violent Incidents vs retail staff average per day			123	118
Physically Violent Incidents vs retail staff			45,000	43,000
Total Incidents vs retail staff average per day	**867**	**1,300**	**2,019**	**1,617**
Total Incidents vs retail staff	**316,000**	**475,000**	**737,000**	**590,000**

**Due methodological changes, total incidents prior to 2023/24 cannot be broken down by the current categories*

**In 2026, the BRC Crime Survey was renamed the BRC Crime Report to reflect a new and improved methodology.*

Violence and abuse against shopworkers is a very significant concern for the BRC and our members. For many retailers the day-to-day reality is still very challenging. However, the improvement in the daily average this year to 1,617 incidents per day suggests there has been some genuine progress in how the issue is being recognised and addressed.

The issue of retail crime has continued to gain visibility at a national level over the past year, with a clear recognition of the harm caused by violence and abuse directed at retail workers. There is broad acknowledgement of the impact on the safety and wellbeing of frontline staff, who too often bear the brunt of unacceptable behaviour. While awareness alone does not solve the problem, it has contributed to more focused action, clearer expectations around enforcement, and pushed retail crime higher up the national agenda.

We have identified three factors that may help explain the reduction in violence and abuse over the past year. These include improvements in police responses, strengthened partnerships between retailers, government and police, and the impact of continued investment by retailers.

1. Police response is improving

One of the most encouraging developments in the past year has been the growing commitment from law enforcement to work closely with retailers and address retail crime more effectively. Under the Retail Crime Action Plan launched in October 2023, police forces across England and Wales committed to prioritise attendance at incidents involving violence or where shoplifters had been detained. In Scotland, Police Scotland established a dedicated Retail Crime Taskforce to stop, identify and prosecute retail crimes including assaults on staff, with continued funding of £3 million confirmed in the January 2026 Budget, demonstrating a clear commitment to tackling retail crime.

An effective police response is key to protecting retail workers from violence. When police attend incidents promptly and prioritise retail crime, it makes it far more likely that offenders will be identified and prosecuted, which helps prevent repeat incidents. In areas where relationships between retailers and the police have improved, regular contact and information sharing means incidents of violence and abuse are addressed more quickly, and patterns of repeat offending can be identified earlier. Neighbourhood policing teams are increasingly engaging directly with retail businesses, shifting the focus from reactive enforcement to prevention. Visible policing and proactive patrols help create safer retail environments, improving worker safety and confidence. This approach also gives workers confidence to report incidents and not dismiss them as 'part of the job'.

Unfortunately, this level of collaboration is not happening everywhere, but it shows what can be achieved when police dedicate the necessary resources and attention. The focus for the year ahead must be to ensure that these effective approaches become the standard practice everywhere, to build on the strong foundations of the past year.

2. The value of partnerships

Over the past year, closer collaboration between government, police and retailers has played a key role in more effectively tackling retail crime. In bringing a range of different stakeholders together, these partnerships represent a shared commitment to tackling the issue and demonstrate the power of collective action, strengthening the sharing and use of information and intelligence and helping to build a comprehensive national picture rather than addressing isolated cases.

Launched in October 2023, Project Pegasus was set up to improve how police and retailers work together to tackle organised retail crime, a major driver of theft, and the resulting violence and abuse faced by retail workers. The initiative has helped close the gap between retailers and the police, allowing for a more coordinated and effective response to the organised criminal activity behind many incidents. Since its launch, Project Pegasus has helped identify organised crime groups, secured over 100 arrests, and reduced repeat offending across the country.

While these partnerships are still evolving, they have demonstrated the value of a more joined up approach. The Tackling Retail Crime Together strategy, developed collaboratively by the Home Office, police, retailers, the security industry and academia, aims to unify the response to shoplifting, organised offending and violence against retail workers by bringing all key stakeholders together under a shared delivery plan. As it develops, it has the potential to strengthen coordination on other retail crime issues and better protect retailer workers, with an impact similar to that seen through Project Pegasus. In particular, the upcoming development of a 'retail crime fusion cell' which will bring together real-time intelligence from across policing and the retail sector would create a shared picture, strengthening understanding, coordination and decision-making.

By working together, more effective responses to retail crime can be achieved. Ongoing collaboration will be vital to maintaining progress and improving worker safety.

3. Retailer investment is starting to pay off

Investment by the retailers themselves is also having an impact. Over the past few years, many businesses have spent significant time and money on security technology, physical measures, and staff training to help tackle retail crime and keep workers safe. CCTV and body-worn cameras can act as an important deterrent and provide useful evidence when incidents occur. The presence of visible security staff in stores, alongside measures such as screens and discreet alarm devices, can also help staff feel and be safer. Practical changes to store layouts, including controlled exits and more secure displays, reduce opportunities for theft and lower the risk of situations escalating into abuse.

Investment in staff training has been a key focus, giving employees the skills to deescalate incidents and manage aggressive behaviour safely. There has also been more emphasis on improving how incidents are reported, with clearer guidance on the process, how incidents are categorised, and encouragement for managers to submit impact statements on behalf of staff. Alongside investment in digital crime reporting tools, this training has made it easier in practice for retailers and the police to work together. If incidents are more likely to be reported and evidence is clearer, this allows police to act sooner and helps reduce the risk of the same individuals returning to cause further harm.

Implementing these measures comes at a significant cost and they are not a solution on their own, but they are making incidents easier to prevent and report. In doing so, they are creating safer working environments and enabling a better police response.



REPORTING TO POLICE

Figure 2: Reporting to police

% of total incidents of abuse, threats and physical violence reported to police	15%
% of total incidents of abuse, threats and physical violence attended by police as a share of total incidents reported to police	31%

Although this year's figures suggest a low level of reporting to the police, this is likely due to the level of reporting being understated in our data. This is caused by differing methods now being used for reporting incidents to the police. More retailers are using new systems that make it easier for colleagues to log incidents internally, while also changing how incidents are reported to the police. As a result, some activity is likely not captured in the reporting data provided to the BRC. This means the figures do not fully reflect what we are hearing anecdotally - that working with the police is starting to improve. Improving how this data is collected is something we will look to address in future reports.

Despite this, there are still key barriers to retailers reporting incidents, particularly perceptions of the value of reporting, the staff time required and ongoing uncertainty around reporting processes.

It is encouraging that, where incidents are reported, the police attend almost one in three cases. However, police should attend all reported retail crime incidents, particularly those involving violence or where a suspect is being detained. A more consistent response would improve support for victims and enforcement, and help address the current lack of attendance, which can discourage reporting and embolden offenders.

MORE MUST BE DONE

While there are the first indications of positive progress, it is clear that the issue of violence and abuse of shopworkers is far from solved - any level of abuse or assaults against retail colleagues is too high. Despite the efforts of police, government and retailers, the findings of this survey show that there are still 1,617 incidents a day. The human cost is profound, with staff absence caused by physical and mental health issues affecting individuals, operations and finances. The threat of abuse casts a shadow over retail teams and damages morale across the industry.

Physically violent retail crime, while less common than verbal abuse or theft, remains a serious concern. The number of physically violent incidents remained largely unchanged at 43,000 incidents, compared with 45,000 in 2025. Although the slight decline is welcome, levels have remained worryingly consistent over recent years. It is encouraging that retailers are now reporting the majority of these incidents (55% of incidents), and that police attend just over two in five cases.

Incidents involving weapons, which have more than halved in the past year from 68 to 36 per day, significantly increase the risk to both staff, customers and others nearby and can also affect family members and loved ones who worry about their safety at work. These incidents can have lasting emotional and psychological effects, even when no physical injury occurs.

Figure 3: Use of a weapon

Physically Violent Incidents vs retail staff	43,000
% of incidents of Physically Violent incidents reported to police	55%
% of incidents of Physically Violent incidents attended by police as a share of Physically Violent incidents reported to police	43%

In line with previous years, the majority of the violence and abuse experienced by retail staff is non-physical with nearly 1,500 incidents of abuse or threats each day. This can include harassment based on race or gender, threats, and intimidation, all of which can have serious consequences for those working on the shop floor. Even incidents that might appear minor, such as an argument or verbal confrontation, can leave a lasting emotional and psychological impact, contributing to stress, anxiety, and longer-term mental health challenges. Over time, repeated abuse can undermine confidence, increase absence from work and make it harder to retain staff. No retail employee should feel unsafe or threatened at work, and addressing the physical and emotional impacts of abuse and threat is essential to maintaining a safe, sustainable workforce.

Overall, the past year has seen more engagement than ever with the issue of retail crime, greater collaboration among those affected and some practical improvements on the ground. Crucially, there is growing recognition that everyone has a part to play, from retailers investing in prevention and staff support, to police prioritising attendance, and government setting the right framework needed to tackle retail crime effectively.

The passage of the Crime and Policing Bill into law later this year will mark another significant step in the right direction. The introduction of a standalone offence for assaulting a retail worker is a crucial development we have been pushing for a number of years, with the potential to increase sentencing and improve the visibility of these crimes to ensure the police can better target resources. It is important that the final Act extends protections to all retail workers in customer facing roles, such as delivery drivers, recognising that violence and abuse is not restricted to those working in stores.

The key focus now is to turn this momentum into consistent, long-term change, ensuring that the commitments made over the past year by all parties result in safer retail environments across the country.



THE COST OF RETAIL CRIME

Our methodology for costs of retail crime has been changed to improve accuracy and consistency. Notably, costs of loss are categorised as 'known loss' this year, whereas they were previously recorded as both 'known' and 'unknown loss'. This means the cost of theft relates only to verified incidents, rather than 'undetected' incidents of theft (where goods are missing, but there was no verified incidents of theft). The true number of incidents and total cost of retail theft in the UK is likely to be much higher.

This change was introduced to ensure greater consistency and transparency year to year, while ensuring not all loss of goods was conflated with theft. We have also made changes to market scaling, this year splitting into Food and Non-Food to improve accuracy, and classifications of crime types and incident categories have been revised, meaning that many summary measures are not directly comparable with previous years.

Known incidents of crime and loss

- Total theft & damage incidents: **7,159,000**
  - Customer theft incidents: **5,451,000**
  - Delivery theft incidents: **1,538,000**
  - Other incidents: **171,000**

Financial cost of crime (of known incidents)

- Total known theft & damage cost: **£583m**
  - Customer theft cost: **£408m (70%)**
  - Delivery theft cost: **£107m (18%)**
  - Other costs: **£68m (12%)**

Total cost of crime & prevention

- Total cost: **£985m**
  - Physical loss prevention costs: **£923m**
  - Online loss prevention costs: **£62.2m**

Retail crime imposes significant financial costs on businesses. These losses go beyond stolen goods including higher operating costs, disrupted operations, and increased investment in security. Over time, these pressures feed through to higher prices and reduced availability for customers, ultimately affecting both consumers and the wider economy. This year's data shows that customer theft is far and away the biggest source of losses from crime while delivery theft is the second-largest challenge. In response, retailers spent just under £1bn on loss prevention measures across both stores and online last year, bringing their total investment over the past five years to just under £5.5bn.



CUSTOMER THEFT

Customer theft remains a significant challenge for retailers, accounting for most incidents of crime and loss. However, it is also the category most likely to be underestimated, as many thefts occur undetected, and will not show up in the incidents. Either way, customer theft overwhelmingly represents the largest source of crime-related losses.

Theft is a persistent problem in stores, placing growing pressure on staff and store operations and contributing to wider concerns around safety, stock loss and business costs. For many retailers, theft is no longer an isolated incident but a routine problem that affects day-to-day trading and the experience of both workers and customers.

Retail theft is often portrayed as being isolated, opportunistic incidents, but this picture is increasingly outdated. A significant and growing share of retail losses now result from organised retail crime. These are not random or isolated acts but coordinated efforts by groups who deliberately target stores across the country with the intention of stealing large volumes of goods for resale. Organised offenders typically focus on high-value, easy-to-move items such as alcohol, cosmetics, meat, baby formula, and medicines. Their activity is organised and deliberate, meaning a relatively small number of individuals can be responsible for a large share of retail losses over time.

Another key development in retail theft has been the growth of online resale. Goods that might once have been sold informally are now often listed and sold quickly through online marketplaces, raising concerns about the link between organised retail theft and the ease with which stolen items can be moved on. Details of stolen goods can be uploaded quickly and anonymously, and verification processes are not always seen as strong enough to deter repeat offenders.

A key reason customer theft has become so common is the perceived lack of consequences. Many thefts involve individual transactions that are treated as low-value offences, which allows organised groups to exploit the system by committing frequent, low-value thefts that collectively amount to major losses. This is made worse by the expectation among offenders that police will not attend, that reports will not lead to action, or that any response will be delayed or minimal. Even when individuals are identified, the likelihood of prosecution or any real consequence is often perceived as low. As a result, theft is increasingly treated as a low-risk activity.

Over time, this leads to normalised repeat offending. Organised thieves and habitual offenders grow increasingly confident, stealing more frequently and more openly, sometimes in full view of staff and other customers. This visibility reinforces the idea that rules are not being enforced, creating an environment where criminal behaviour appears tolerated. The impact goes far beyond stolen stock, contributing to increased intimidation of staff and higher prices for honest customers.

The Crime and Policing Bill will remove the £200 threshold that has been used to define so-called 'low-level' theft. This important change sends a clear signal that all customer theft is taken seriously and is unacceptable, regardless of value. By removing this distinction, the legislation aims to strengthen the response to this type of crime and reinforces the message that it will not be tolerated. The £7 million in funding to tackle retail theft set out in the Home Office's policing White Paper is another important step in supporting the police and retail businesses to tackle this issue.

However, legislative change alone will not resolve the problem. Organised crime is more likely to take hold where enforcement is inconsistent, and the risk of consequences is low. Without collective action and effective information sharing to help identify and prosecute repeat offenders and restore a sense of deterrence, retail theft will continue to be seen as low risk and high reward by a highly damaging minority, with the costs felt by workers, businesses and communities alike.

DELIVERY THEFT

Delivery theft, whether it occurs during transit, at the point of delivery, or shortly after a parcel is dropped off, has become a growing problem across retail supply chains. This is the first year retailers were explicitly asked about the impact of delivery theft, which emerged as the second-most common crime, costing the industry over £100 million. What might once have been seen as isolated loss is increasingly linked to organised and repeat offending. Its inclusion in this year's survey reflects growing concern about risks beyond the shop floor.

In some cases, theft happens before goods reach the customer, with parcels taken from vans, depots, or sorting hubs by individuals who understand delivery processes and vulnerabilities. In other instances, offenders exploit predictable delivery routines, intercepting goods at the doorstep or removing them shortly after delivery, before the customer can retrieve them. The rapid growth of doorbell cameras has increased visibility of delivery theft, but their deterrent effect remains limited.

Delivery theft often relies on knowledge of how the delivery system works. During transit, offenders may target particular routes, high-value parcels or poorly secured vehicles. At the point of delivery, they may follow vans or rely on unattended drop-offs to take goods quickly and with little resistance.

The way modern deliveries are organised can also make theft easier to carry out. High parcel volumes, tight delivery windows, and reliance on proof-of-delivery systems can make deliveries more vulnerable to criminal activity. Once a parcel is marked as delivered, responsibility can become unclear between courier, retailer, and customer, particularly when theft occurs minutes later. This blurred accountability reduces the likelihood of thorough investigation and creates an environment where losses are absorbed as operational costs rather than treated as criminal activity.

Offenders understand that theft during transit or shortly after delivery is difficult to trace, especially when parcels pass through multiple hands or are left unattended. Individual losses are often relatively low in value, making police response and prosecution unlikely. Even when patterns of repeat theft are evident, action is often slow or inconsistent, reinforcing the perception that the risk of being caught or punished is minimal. Over time, this can normalise such thefts, with the same routes, buildings, or delivery windows targeted repeatedly and offenders growing more confident as incidents go unchallenged.

The impact extends beyond financial loss, undermining customer trust, increasing costs across supply chains, and adding pressure on delivery staff. Without stronger deterrence and coordinated responses that address both internal and external theft, delivery theft will continue to be treated as a low-risk activity with predictable rewards.



POLICE RESPONSE

Figure 4: Retailers' rating of police response

	2023 publication on 2021/22	2024 publication on 2022/23	2025 publication on 2023/24	2026 publication on 2024/25
Poor	44%	61%	61%	50%
Fair	56%	32%	29%	38%
Good	0%	6%	6%	10%
Excellent	0%	0%	3%	3%

Effective police response is a key factor in maintaining the confidence of retailers and workers that crimes will be taken seriously and acted upon properly. When police respond promptly and consistently, retailers are more likely to report incidents, provide evidence and support investigations which help secure prosecutions and convictions. Reliable reporting also provides a more accurate picture of retail crime. Without it, the scale and nature of the problem is underestimated, which can lead to poor assessments of risk and the misallocation of policing resources. Historically, under-reporting has contributed to retail crime being treated as a low priority at both local and national levels.

For many years, retailers have raised concerns about inconsistent attendance, limited follow-up investigations, and low outcomes for reported incidents. This created a cycle in which reporting was seen as ineffective, incidents went unreported, recorded crime levels stayed artificially low, and retail crime remained deprioritised. The result was a loss of confidence among retailers and frontline staff, alongside limited deterrence for offenders.

Against this backdrop, this year there are signs that police response to retail crime is beginning to improve. Half of respondents rated the police response as poor, a notable improvement from 61% over the previous two years. Conversely, 50% now view the response positively, classifying it as excellent, good, or fair - up from 39% last year.

Top rated police services

- West Midlands Police
- City of London Police
- Kent Police

Top obstacles to reporting incidents to police

- Doubt that anything will come of reporting
- Staff time
- Process clarity

The Retail Crime Action Plan has helped clarify expectations for police attendance, particularly in cases involving violence or detained suspects. While progress is not universal, it marks the start of a shift away from previous approaches that treated retail crime as a low-priority issue. Collaboration between police forces and the retail industry has also grown, with retailers and forces increasingly working together to share intelligence, identify prolific offenders, and coordinate enforcement.

GOOD PRACTICE

Some of the highest-rated police forces in the country - West Midlands, City of London, and Kent - have been taking proactive steps to tackle shop theft and protect retailer workers. West Midlands Police have a dedicated business crime officer to develop best-practice approaches for preventing and tackling shop theft. City of London Police and Kent Police have both used targeted patrols in retail hotspots, with City of London Police proactively patrolling repeat locations and Kent Police deploying foot patrols and plain-clothes officers in town centres, contributing to reductions in reported shoplifting in areas such as Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells.

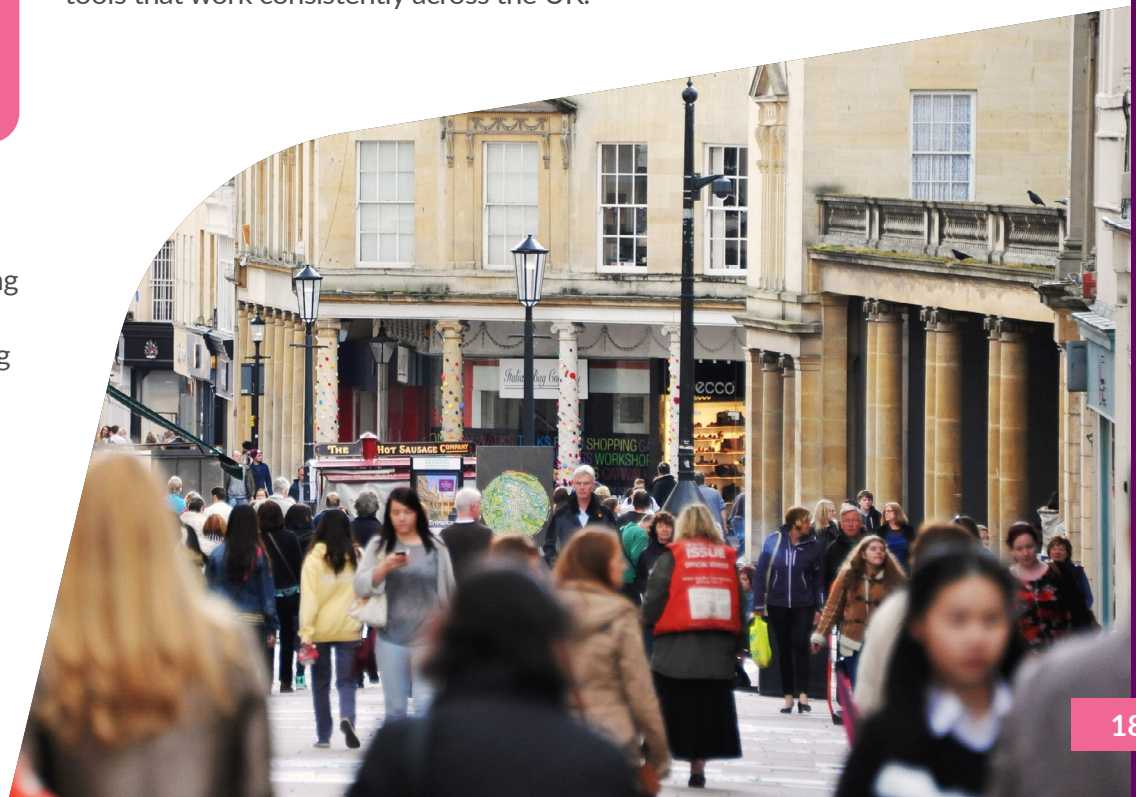
However, progress is uneven and fragile. Retailers still experience significant variation in police response depending on location, with differences in attendance thresholds, investigative follow-up, and cases being closed even when evidence is available. Improvements in some areas have not yet become a consistent national standard, and confidence in reporting therefore remains cautious.

Police response appears to be moving in a more positive direction, and the improvements so far should be commended. However, while these improvements are welcome, they are only the beginning. The upcoming legislative changes will only have an impact if they are matched by consistent enforcement, meaning continued attention and action will be needed to ensure retail crime remains a policing priority.

It is also important to recognise that effective policing and effective reporting go hand in hand. Without police response, reporting feels futile but without reporting, policing lacks the intelligence to act. Retailers have an important role to report incidents reliably and provide evidence wherever possible.

Retailers report that the biggest barrier to reporting incidents is the belief that there is doubt that anything will come of reporting, often due to past experiences of limited action or follow-up. The next major obstacle is staff time, with busy teams struggling to balance reporting with operational demands. Finally, unclear reporting processes create additional friction, leaving colleagues unsure about what to report or how to report it.

However, many retailers have improved how they report incidents, using digital tools and providing clearer evidence such as body-worn camera footage. Police remain under pressure, and response times can be frustrating, but better-quality reporting is helping investigations progress more effectively. Aligning reporting systems across forces is vital to ensure retailers can implement tools that work consistently across the UK.



WHAT THE BRC HAVE BEEN DOING

1. Securing major legislative progress on retail crime

The key measures in the Crime and Policing Bill, including a standalone offence and the removal of the £200 shoplifting threshold, follow years of extensive lobbying across the retail industry. We have continued to advocate for a broad definition of retail workers to ensure protection for all customer-facing staff, recognising that violence and abuse extend beyond store-based roles. We also successfully pressed the Scottish Government to commit multi-year funding for Police Scotland's Retail Crime Taskforce. Following our advocacy in Northern Ireland, the upcoming Sentencing Bill will introduce a new offence of assaulting anyone delivering a public service or providing a service to the public, strengthening legal protections for shop workers.

2. Police prioritisation

We have pressed for police prioritisation of retail crime, particularly in terms of attendance and resourcing. In 2025 we saw several positive initiatives to tackle shoplifting including Operation Zoridon and Operation Baselife, and secured a £7 million government investment to combat organised retail crime.

3. Raising the profile of retail crime

We have maintained high-profile engagement on retail crime through coordinated media activity, using our data to reinforce clear messages that violence and abuse against shopworkers is unacceptable, organised crime drives theft, and enforcement must be fair but firm. Seasonal campaigns, including 'Tis the Season to ShopKind, promoted respectful behaviour towards retail workers during peak trading periods.

4. Supporting our retail members

Alongside policy and campaigning, we have prioritised practical support and coordination for retailers. This includes regular briefings, forums, and member calls on crime trends, police response and best practice. We have also continued to work closely with partners such as USDAW and the Retail Trust to support colleague safety, wellbeing and victim support.

RETAIL TRUST

The Retail Trust's Let's Respect Retail campaign has been calling on the industry to unite against retail worker abuse and last year urged shoppers to change their behaviour in the run up to Christmas. The retail industry charity provides dedicated resources to help staff stay safe at work and recover from aggression and violence, including training, counselling and a 24-hour wellbeing helpline. Colleagues can find out more and access the Retail Trust's in-the-moment support at ***retailtrust.org.uk***



KEY RETAILER PRIORITIES FOR 2026

1. Offence for assaulting a retail worker in England and Wales to become law

As part of the Crime and Policing Bill, assaulting a retail worker will become a specific criminal offence. This recognises the seriousness of violence and abuse against shopworkers, strengthens consequences for offenders and improves the visibility of these crimes so police can allocate the necessary resources. The final Act should protect all customer-facing retail workers, including delivery drivers.

2. Minimum value threshold for investigating a retail crime removed

By removing the £200 threshold, retail crime will no longer be deprioritised based on the value of stolen goods. This sends a clear signal that all shoplifting is unacceptable and enables police to investigate all offences, helping to tackle repeat and organised crime.

3. Consistent police response to retail crime

Greater prioritisation and resources for police are essential to tackling retail crime effectively. Police must attend retail crime incidents, particularly where violence has occurred or a suspect is being detained. A consistent response will improve victim support and enforcement, while addressing the current lack of attendance that discourages reporting and emboldens offenders.

4. Retailers playing their part by reporting all incidents, giving the police the full picture

Retailers must play their part by reporting all incidents, giving the police the full picture. By consistently reporting every offence, not just the most serious, this will help ensure that crime data accurately reflects what is happening on the ground, enabling police to allocate resources more effectively and respond more consistently.



The BRC is the lead trade association for UK retail. Our purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future. Retail is the 'everywhere economy', a vital part of the socio-economic fabric of the UK.

The industry makes up 5% of the UK GDP and is the largest private sector employer, providing 3 million direct jobs and 2.7 million more in the supply chain. Retail has a presence in every village, town and city across the country.

Over 200 major retailers are members of the BRC, with thousands of smaller, independents represented by BRC's trade association members. Together, these businesses operate across all retail channels and categories and deliver over £350 billion of retail sales per year.

We build the reputation of the retail industry, work with our members to drive change, develop exceptional retail leaders, and use our expertise to influence government policy so retail businesses thrive and consumers benefit. Our work helps retailers trade legally, safely, ethically, profitably and sustainably.



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