



Retailers
Government
Police



Retail Crime: Turning Point



Consistent reporting ↗

+ Targeted interventions ↗

Breaking the cycle of reoffending ↗



The Crime Report 2026

A report by the Association of Convenience Stores
#ACSCrimeReport

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local shops

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Foreword

Tackling retail crime is the top priority for convenience store retailers. While recent steps have been taken to secure better protections for shopworkers, boost the priority of retail crime response, and put more police on the street in communities, persistent reports of theft, abuse and violence throughout the convenience and wider retail sector demonstrate that there is still more to be done.

The 2026 ACS Crime Report sets out the experiences of retailers and colleagues working across the UK's 50,000 convenience stores. Over the past twelve months alone, retailers recorded an estimated 950,000 incidents of verbal abuse and 67,000 incidents of violence. For shopworkers, these are not isolated events but daily realities that can cause life changing mental and physical harm. At the same time shop theft continues to blight stores, with over 5.8 million shop thefts reported across the sector - highlighting the significant gap that still exists between crimes recorded by retailers, and those that are recorded by the police. Retailers are increasingly forced to divert investment away from growing and improving their businesses and into preventing crime and protecting their staff. The challenge extends beyond theft: 85% of retailers report that the sale of illicit products in their area has increased, undermining legitimate businesses and exposing communities to unsafe, unregulated goods.

For those working in the sector, these figures will feel all too familiar. But that familiarity makes it even more important that we continue to highlight the real and growing harm caused by retail crime.

Encouragingly, this year's report reflects important areas of progress through collaboration between retailers, policymakers and the police. Two-thirds of retailers now say they are reporting more crime to their local police force than in previous years, and a similar proportion of independent retailers say they have a positive relationship with their local neighbourhood policing teams. This shows that partnership working can make a difference.

By sharing these findings, we aim to highlight the progress that can be made when retailers, police and policymakers work effectively together to improve safety and security in our communities. We also remain laser focused on tackling the root causes of theft, violence and abuse across the convenience sector, and are committed to working with the Government to ensure that the incoming Crime and Policing Bill acts as a turning point for retail crime.


Ed Woodall, Chief Executive, Association of Convenience Stores

Cost of crime to convenience stores

Crime against convenience retailers costs an estimated




Policy recommendations

- 

RESET THE NARRATIVE ON RETAIL CRIME THROUGH THE CRIME AND POLICING BILL

For too long shop theft and abuse of shop workers has become an accepted part of life in Britain. The passage of the Crime and Policing Bill must mark a turning point in how retail crime is treated.


The Bill's provisions, including stronger penalties for assaults on shopworkers and a renewed focus on neighbourhood policing, coupled with ever increasing investment from local shops, must lead to visible enforcement against shop thieves and violent offenders.

Clear communication from the Home Office and police that retail crime will be taken seriously will be critical in rebuilding confidence among retailers, shopworkers and the communities they serve.
- 

INCREASE INVESTMENT IN ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TO TACKLE ILLICIT TRADE ON HIGH STREETS

Trading standards teams across the country are chronically underfunded and this has given black market operators the green light to trade illicit goods, such as tobacco and vaping products, brazenly in communities.

Trading standards teams require additional funding to effectively enforce new regulations and disrupt the sale of illegal goods. We estimate that at least £140 million in additional funding will be required over the next five years simply to keep pace with enforcing new vaping regulations.

The means reporting illegal activity by a business is limited to the Citizens Advice helpline, or an online reporting form only available at weekends.
- 

REMOVE BARRIERS TO NEW TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION TO DETER PROLIFIC SHOP THIEVES

We continue to campaign for CCTV systems to be exempt from the business rates system. Government should exempt CCTV systems from business rates so that retailers are not penalised for investing in infrastructure that protects their businesses, colleagues and communities.

There is also a need for clearer guidance for retailers on the implementation of facial recognition technology to identify prolific offenders who repeatedly target local shops. Clearer guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office and a review of the relevant legal frameworks would support responsible deployment while ensuring strong privacy protections.



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ACS is proud to have co-ordinated the retail sector's support for ShopKind on behalf of the Home Office.






"Retail crime drains thousands from our business and takes a real toll on staff. Facial recognition has helped us identify offenders and provide stronger evidence to police, but we need clearer backing so we can use it confidently and consistently."

Fiona Malone, Tenby, Tenby Stores and Post Office



For more information go to acs.org.uk



"We're losing significant sums of money to theft each year, and it's our colleagues who bear the brunt of the abuse and intimidation that often comes with it. Retailers want to work with police, but we need to see stronger engagement to break the cycle of repeat offending."

Steve Bassett, South West, Bassett Holdings



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£313m
invested in crime prevention across the sector over the last year

On average each store spent
£6,213
on crime prevention measures over the year

519,381 incidents of shop theft recorded by police



5.8 million incidents of shop theft estimated in the last year



Source: ONS

Retailers' investment priority is CCTV

Other key investment priorities

Facial recognition technology

22% of retailers surveyed have facial recognition technology in their business
35% further plan to invest in facial recognition technology

Of those that don't plan to invest in this technology, their top concerns are:

Analysis

Retailers continue to invest significantly in making their stores safe for colleagues, customers and communities. Updating CCTV systems is the clear front-runner in the fight against crime, while other preventative measures like security colleagues and product tagging are valued options for deterring thieves repeatedly targeting high value items. These investments represent major financial commitments for retailers. On average they are investing £6,213 per store per year, demonstrating their absolute commitment to reducing crime and increasing store safety.

Retailers are also exploring emerging technologies to strengthen store security, with over a fifth of stores in our survey using facial recognition systems. Wider adoption is limited by upfront costs along with uncertainty around effective implementation in stores. Feedback from retailers suggests that use of facial recognition can have a material and positive impact, but retailers desire clearer and authoritative guidance on the deployment of facial recognition technology.

Find out more



Analysis

Shop theft remains at a critical level in 2026, with retailers continuing to indicate that a small number of repeat offenders are responsible for the majority of shop theft offences. While this year's data suggests a slight easing of overall shop theft, it is essential that this progress is built on. ACS will continue to press government, police and local partners to ensure that tackling shop theft remains a priority, so stores continue to be safe, secure and viable places to work and shop.

Encouragingly, more incidents are being reported to the police, which is a positive step towards improving visibility of the problem and strengthening the evidence base for action. Despite this, significant underreporting still exists across the sector, meaning the true scale of shop theft is likely far greater than the figures suggest.

Find out more



Shop theft index



Source: ACS Voice of Local Shops polling 2020-2025



“Violence against shopworkers isn’t just ‘part of the job’. It’s frightening, personal, and can leave lasting effects on staff and businesses alike.”

Natalie Lightfoot, Glasgow, Londis Solo Convenience store



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“Convenience stores are at the heart of our communities. Anti-social behaviour and verbal abuse not only intimidate our staff, but also make customers feel unsafe, undermining the sense of community our stores are meant to support.”

Veer Patel, Clacton-on-Sea, SPAR



For more information go to acs.org.uk

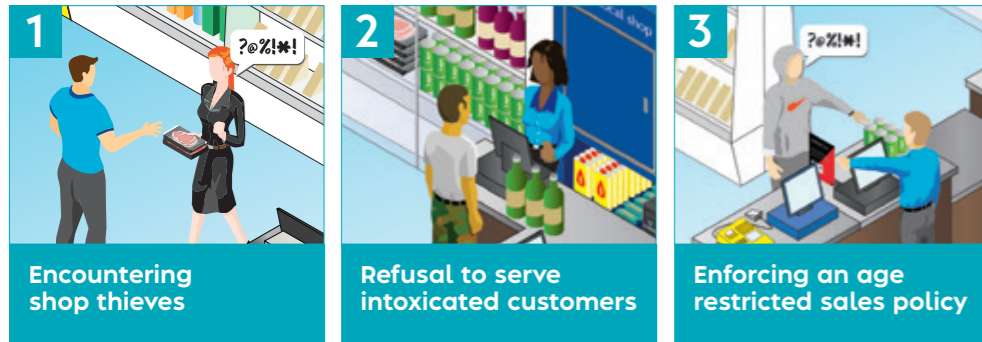
Number of incidents of violence estimated in the sector

67,000+

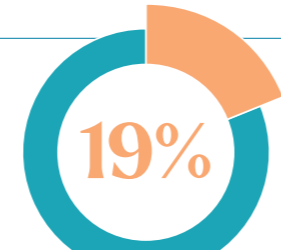
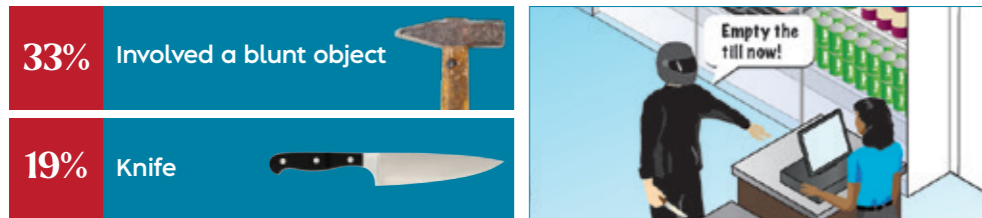
Number of incidents of robbery estimated in the sector

5,900+

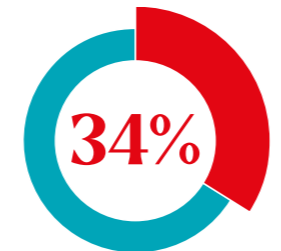
Top triggers for violence



Of crimes where a weapon was present



of colleagues say violence has increased over the past 12 months



of colleagues have experienced actual physical violence

Analysis

Violence and abuse against shopworkers remain at unacceptable levels. Experiencing violence have a profound impact on both colleagues and store owners, affecting not only their physical safety but also their mental wellbeing. This year’s report highlights that the most common triggers for violent incidents are encountering shop thieves, refusing service to customers, and enforcing age-restricted sales policies.

Government policy must not increase the risk of confrontation in stores. Any new regulations should be carefully assessed to ensure they do not place additional enforcement burdens on frontline colleagues. The take-up of digital age verification for age-restricted purchases has the potential to reduce friction at the till by removing some of the direct confrontation involved in age verification.

Find out more



*Source: ACS Colleague Survey 2025

Over 954,000 incidents of verbal abuse

39% of verbal abuse incidents are hate-motivated, according to colleagues

61% of retailers believe anti-social behaviour in or around their store has increased over the past year

Top anti-social behaviour concerns

- Rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour
- Rough sleeping
- Vandalism
- Street drinking
- Littering



Analysis

The evidence is clear that convenience stores, pharmacies and Post Offices are among the most essential services on high streets and neighbourhood parades. When people no longer feel safe visiting shopping areas, it reduces footfall, weakens business confidence and ultimately limits the range of services and goods available to local communities.

Tackling anti-social behaviour is therefore fundamental to maintaining vibrant high streets and neighbourhood communities. Retailers cannot address these issues alone. Government and local police forces should ensure that tackling anti-social behaviour forms a central part of its Safer Streets Mission and forthcoming high streets strategy, supporting retail businesses and helping to restore community confidence in local shopping areas.

Find out more





"On the ground, it feels like illicit traders are always one step ahead. With enforcement teams overstretched, they shift locations and tactics constantly. Meanwhile, legitimate businesses like ours are left to deal with the fallout."

Priyesh Vekaria, Salford, One Stop Carlton Convenience



For more information go to acs.org.uk

"Our relationship with local police is improving, and we're starting to see more support for tackling crime in stores. There are still gaps in response and follow-up, and more needs to be done to ensure incidents are addressed consistently and effectively."

Benedict Selvaratnam, Croydon, Freshfields Market



For more information go to acs.org.uk

85%

of retailers say the sale of illicit products has increased around their business

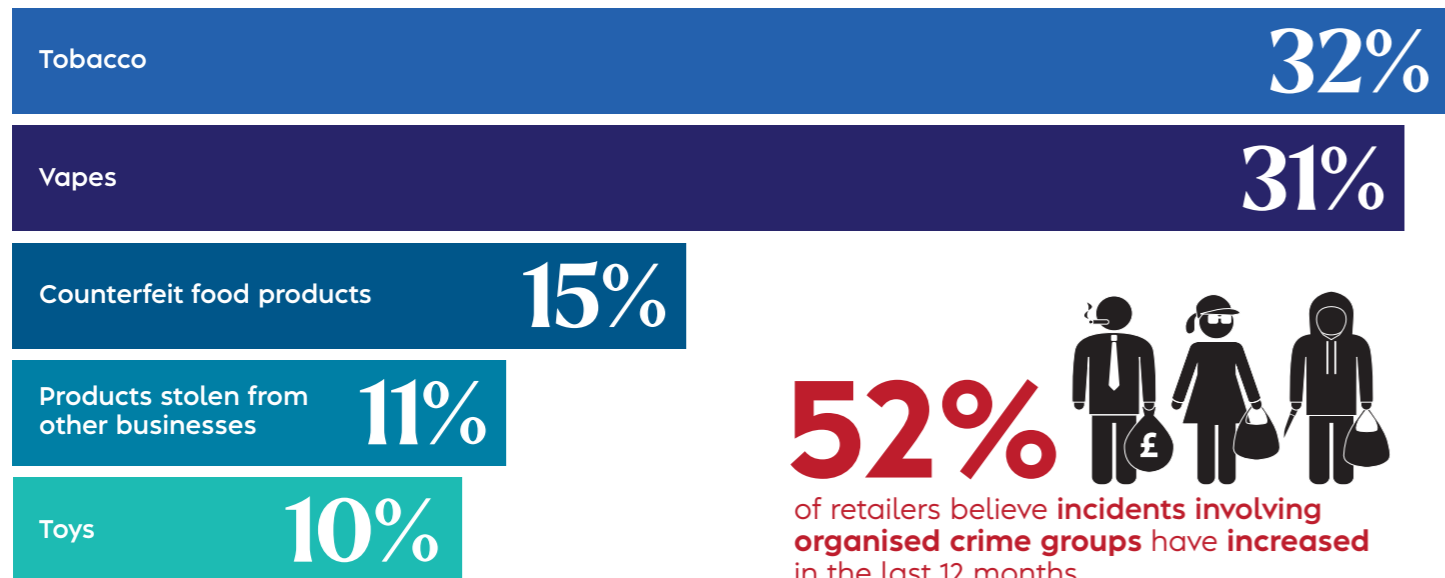
25%

of independent retailers have noticed products stolen from their store being resold in their area

Impact of illicit trade in the community

- 1 Reduction in legitimate sales
- 2 Community safety at risk
- 3 Trigger for abuse

Of those who've observed the sale of illicit goods in their area, the most frequently sold items are:



Analysis

Illicit trade includes the sale of non-duty paid products and items that fail to meet regulatory requirements. These products are distributed through rogue retailers, online platforms and other non-traditional sales channels. Years of underfunding for Trading Standards have created a significant enforcement gap, resulting in illicit goods becoming increasingly visible in communities. Which? research found that 57% of Trading Standards services have fewer than four staff per 100,000 people. Trading Standards play a critical role in supporting legitimate retailers and protecting consumers, but they need sufficient resources to operate effectively. ACS analysis indicates £140.4 million is required over the next five years to properly enforce new regulations in the vaping market. Investing in Trading Standards would help level the playing field between legitimate and rogue businesses and keep communities safe.

Find out more



64% of retailers are reporting more crime to the police than last year



62% of independent retailers describe their relationship with neighbourhood police as good or very good

Analysis

We welcome the renewed focus on neighbourhood policing and the early signs that additional resources are beginning to reach local policing teams. Independent retailers report encouraging engagement, with 62% saying they have had a positive experience with their neighbourhood policing teams. Strong relationships between retailers and local officers are essential for building trust and improving responses to retail crime. It is vital that this progress is built on. The government's next step must be the delivery of additional policing officers, as promised under the neighbourhood policing guarantee, to ensure all areas have adequate resources to respond to issues quickly and consistently. Continued investment in neighbourhood policing will strengthen engagement with businesses, improve reporting and intelligence sharing, and support a safer environment for retailers, their colleagues and the communities they serve.

Find out more



Convenience retailers invest millions of pounds in crime prevention equipment to keep their shops, communities and colleagues safe. Here are some of the most common types of crime prevention equipment that retailers use in their stores.

Headsets

We have had headsets in our store for two years, the headsets are great for improving communication throughout the store, making colleagues feel less isolated and safer. I think the return on investment for the headsets has been great.
Judith Smitham Independent Retailer in Truro, Cornwall

Body worn cameras

We introduced body-worn cameras across all our stores. After evaluating several models, we selected small cameras with front-facing screens, which act as an additional deterrent – abusive customers can see their own reflection. This helps our colleagues feel empowered in the face of abuse, knowing the business is fully committed to their safety.
Mark Foulds Security Manager, Lincolnshire Co-operative

CCTV

We have been investing in CCTV improvements a lot over the past few years, I am able to livestream the CCTV footage directly to my phone which helps to make colleagues feel safer. The footage from the CCTV cameras is very useful when reporting crimes to the police.
Natalie Lightfoot Independent Retailer in Glasgow

Central information hub

We are implementing a central information hub into our stores over the coming months, this is basically an iPad where all store information like training and staff records, CCTV video and stock information can be kept. Colleagues will be able to report crimes and store evidence on the iPad, the hope is that with the correct training staff will feel more confident to report crimes.
Chloe Taylor Green Independent Retailer in Stafford

Defensive merchandising

We have been working to implement bespoke stickers on high-risk items that identify the original location that the item was stolen from. This method of fighting shop theft disrupts the disposal chain for stolen items we have found it to be very effective and is extremely cost effective.
Gareth Lewis Loss Prevention & Security Services Manager at Southern Co-op

Facial recognition software

We have put facial recognition software into our store to monitor repeat offending beyond what store staff are capable of, meaning colleagues have better awareness and oversight when an offender returns to store. It also provides clearer images for police to use.
Dave Pickford Director, James Hall & Co. Ltd

Gareth Lewis
Loss Prevention & Security Services Manager at Southern Co-op

Problem: Prolific shoplifting / resale theft

Solution: Defensive Merchandising - branded stickers

One of our major challenges is the bulk theft of merchandise, which is then resold through other outlets. Our solution has been to disrupt the offenders' supply chain. While we've experimented with various defensive merchandising methods, such as nets and alarms, the most successful strategy has been using tagged and branded stickers on high-value items. These stickers display the original point of sale, are extremely difficult to remove, and aid in prosecution by making stolen goods easily identifiable. Additionally, this approach allows us to recover stolen items, as the origin is unmistakable. In trial stores, we've seen a significant reduction in theft, with each sticker costing just 2p—providing a strong return on investment compared to other defensive merchandising methods. In 2023-2024, we defied the trend by reducing theft value, a direct result of focusing on disrupting the supply chains of repeat offenders.

Judith Smitham
Independent Retailer in Truro, Cornwall

Problem: Colleague safety and isolation

Solution: Headsets for internal communication

In our area, we're fortunate not to face the challenges of large organised crime gangs, but shoplifting remains a near-daily issue. While our colleagues are trained to spot potential thieves, it can be isolating to handle a situation alone on the shop floor. Our colleague headsets have helped to provide a sense of connection and support—allowing staff to call for assistance wherever they are in the store. We've been using these headsets for two years and are pleased with the return on investment, as colleague safety is our top priority. Additionally, we've received positive feedback from regular customers, who appreciate the added safety measures for our staff.

Natalie Lightfoot
Independent Retailer in Glasgow

Problem: High value shoplifting, particularly alcohol

Solution: CCTV coverage and training

In our stores, we often encounter theft driven by addiction, which can pose significant risks to staff. Balancing staff safety with effective theft deterrence is challenging; we want to ensure staff can engage with shoplifters without putting themselves in harm's way. To address this, we regularly review our CCTV to ensure it provides the highest quality footage and coverage possible. We're also collaborating with local police to expand coverage beyond our immediate premises. Crucially, we train our staff to use the CCTV systems daily, enabling everyone on the shop floor to access footage and submit evidence to the police. I also have live CCTV access on my phone, so in emergency situations, my colleagues can contact me, and I can immediately view the store. Our goal in tackling theft is to build a reputation for being a difficult target, and ensuring our CCTV is extensive and easily accessible is essential.

Chloe Taylor-Green
Independent Retailer in Stafford

Problem: Managing training and records

Solution: Streamlined recording and reporting

Recruiting and training colleagues is a challenge for any business, but it becomes even more difficult when staff feel unsafe due to rising retail crime. We are supporting our colleagues by prioritising their safety and streamlining the way we record and report crime. We have a dedicated internal system for reporting crime in our stores. Colleagues log incidents of theft, abuse, or violence directly onto a store tablet as they occur, with the ability to upload reports to the local police force in real-time. Additionally, we can backdate paper records to gain better insight into crime trends over time. The tablet also serves as a training hub, allowing us to track which modules colleagues have completed and ensuring they have access to the support and guidance needed to handle crime effectively. While the tablet required a larger upfront investment, it quickly paid for itself by saving valuable admin hours.



Retail Crime: Turning Point

Methodology

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1. ACS Crime Survey 2026

Unless otherwise stated all data in this report comes from ACS' Crime Survey 2026: an online survey conducted between 27th November 2025 and 16th January 2026 capturing incidents of crime experienced by convenience retailers over the last 12 months.

The survey had 43 valid respondents, representing almost over 11,000 convenience stores in total. The survey gathered responses from independent, multiple and co-operative retailers and the data has been weighted to represent these store types in the same proportion as they are represented in the overall market. Data regarding the overall number of stores in the convenience sector, as well as a breakdown by store type, can be found in ACS' 2025 Local Shop Report.

2. Which? Report on Trading Standards Resources and Activities

Which? sent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all 187 services in England, Scotland and Wales in July 2024. Which? collected data on their resource levels, demand for their service, prioritisation of issues and enforcement activities, receiving responses from every service, though they varied in completeness.

The full report is available at <https://tinyurl.com/36frf9d6>

3. Crime in England and Wales, ONS

ONS publish their quarterly Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletins which are produced in partnership with the Home Office. The statistics are based on police recorded data and look at trends in overall police recorded crime. You can find more information here: <https://tinyurl.com/3srruyd5>

4. ACS Voice of Local Shops survey (VOLS)

The VOLS survey is a telephone survey with a sample of 1,100 independent retailers, including unaffiliated, symbol group and independent forecourt retailers.

The Shop Theft Index was created from the following VOLS question:

Which of the following best describes your experience of shop theft in the last year?

- I have experienced an increase in shop theft
- I have experienced a decrease in shop theft
- I have experienced the same level of shop theft
- I have not experienced any shop theft
- Don't know

The index number is the percentage of retailers who experienced an increase minus the percentage who experienced a decrease.

5. ACS Colleague Survey 2026

An online survey looking at the demographics and experiences of staff working within the convenience sector. Fieldwork was carried out between January and March 2026. The percentage of staff experiencing verbal abuse was based on the following question within the Colleague Survey:

Over the last twelve months, how often (if at all) have you been a victim of the following in the workplace? - Verbal Abuse.

Those who responded with any option other than 'never' were considered to have experienced some form of verbal abuse in the last year.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the retailers who took the time to complete our 2026 Crime Survey and share their crime data with us, without which this report would not be possible.

Additional resources

For more information about retail crime and wider crime trends please see the following websites, reports and statistics:

ShopKind campaign

<https://nbcc.police.uk/crime-prevention/shopkind-webpage>

USDAW Freedom From Fear campaign

<https://www.usdaw.org.uk/freedomfromfear>

Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS) 2023

<https://tinyurl.com/fpbmacj2>

Contact

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For more details on this report and guidance, contact Rosie Wiggins at ACS by emailing rosie.wiggins@acs.org.uk

For more details on ACS:
[@ACS_localshops](https://www.acs.org.uk) on X, TikTok and Instagram
Association of Convenience Stores on LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube