

VERBAL ABUSE  
THREATS  
VIOLENCE  
BURGLARY  
FRAUD  
SHOP SECURITY  
PERSONAL SAFETY  
SHOP THEFT  
REPEAT OFFENCES  
ROBBERY



# EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

## The Crime Report 2021

A report by the Association of Convenience Stores  
#ShopKind

**ACS** | the voice of  
local shops



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Foreword

The findings from our Crime Report show that action is needed urgently from the government and police forces to tackle acquisitive and violent crimes committed in local shops. There remains a direct link between these two crime types: the estimated 1.1 million shop theft offences are still the biggest trigger point for almost 40,000 incidents of violence against people working in shops. This should be a stark reminder to policy makers that we cannot tackle violence and abuse without addressing the repeat offenders that commit these crimes.

The Crime Report provides a snapshot of retailers' experience of crime in the last year and of course this have been drastically impacted by Covid-19. Reminding customers to wear face coverings and managing social distancing in stores has been a major flash point for abuse and violence, but it has also illustrated retailers' commitment to keeping their colleagues safe. Retailers have invested £175m in crime prevention measures, like Perspex screens and additional guarding support in stores.

In the year of the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections across England and Wales, the report continues to present evidence for action to change the unacceptable situation faced by colleagues, retailers and communities. We want every Police and Crime Commissioner to recognise in their Police and Crime Plan the crimes retailers and their store colleagues face every day. We have set out some actions that newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners can undertake in their first months of office to better engage and support retailers to meet these challenges.

James Lowman, Chief Executive, ACS

Cost of crime to convenience stores

Crime against convenience retailers costs an estimated



Police and Crime Commissioners Elections: Evidence For Action

We want all Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) across England and Wales to recognise the challenges faced by local shops and shopworkers from acquisitive crime, violence and abuse.

PCCs should consider the following actions in their Police and Crime Plans:

1

**The creation of police led business engagement teams in every force area in England and Wales, with dedicated resource to engage with the retail sector**

If we are going to tackle crime against local shops, we must work together locally to understand the challenges we face and share intelligence. There is already a network of business crime single points of contact in each force, but these officers need more time and resource to engage with the business community, especially the retail sector. Better engagement between retailers and the police could address the concerns of *one third of convenience retailers that have no confidence that police will response and investigate to crimes they report.*

2

**Provide funding for 'Second Chance Programmes' to deal with offenders that repeatedly target local shops because they are suffering from addiction issues**

Retailers indicate that **63%** of offenders in their stores are repeat offenders and many of whom are motivated to commit crime due to a drug addiction. To break the cycle of offending we need to target repeat offenders that are known to retailers and the police, giving them the help they need. PCCs should fund Second Chance Programs\* for the most prolific drug-addicted offenders, providing immediate crime reduction benefits and addiction recovery of incapacitation through a Secure Phase followed by an intensive community-based Residential Recovery Phase and Supportive Phase.

3

**Using Community Remedy Powers to ban repeat offenders from local shops**

We want PCCs to use their Community Remedy Powers to tackle repeat victimisation of local shops. PCCs can do this by including an option in their Community Remedy document for banning repeat shop thieves from entering shops. When Police consult with retailers about shop theft offences, retailers should be able to request that offenders are banned from entering their stores in future and are supported by the police to enforce the ban.

4

**Supporting victims of violence and abuse in local shops**

Although PCCs cannot deliver on tougher penalties for attacks on shop workers, they can ensure that victim support services are directed towards people that experience the **40,000** incidents of violence in local shops in the last year. Shopworkers are required by law to enforce age restriction and refused to serve intoxicated customers, when they are attacked for enforcing the law they should get all the support the policing and justice system can offer.



“Customers have threatened to cough on colleagues and ‘give them Coronavirus’ and further threats of assaults because people have had to queue to enter stores, social distance or simply because they do not have a specific product.”

“We will continue to work closely with local police forces to showcase that we have a zero tolerance approach to any violent or threatening behaviour towards our colleagues.”

**Craig Goldie, Loss Prevention Manager, Central England Co-op**



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

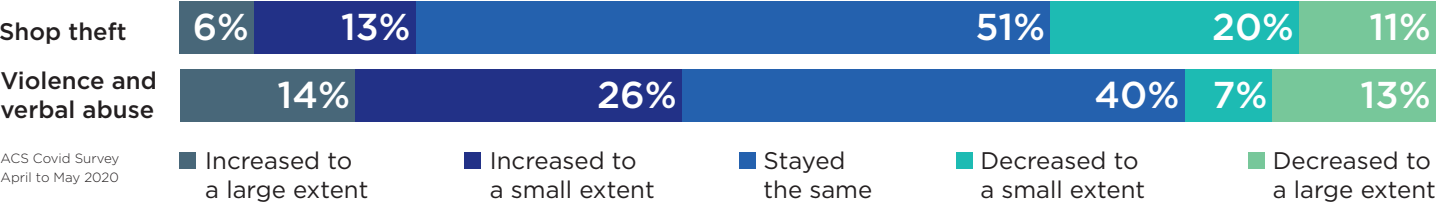
“The same offenders are responsible for repeat incidents of minor theft in-store, but we are seeing less police officers and slow response times to call outs.”

**Aman Uppal, One Stop Mount Nod**



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

How has covid-19 impacted the following?





**65%**

of respondents have seen Covid related threats toward staff



**Perspex screens** are one of the top Covid secure measures

**Most common causes of Covid related abuse:**

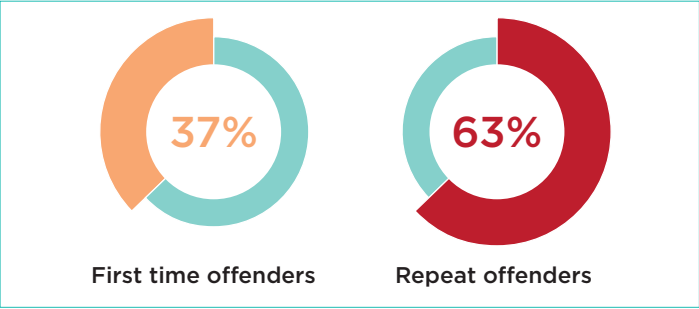
- 1 Reminding customers to wear face coverings
- 2 Reminding customers of social distancing measures
- 3 Queueing outside stores
- 4 Requesting removal of face coverings for ID checking

**Analysis**

Convenience stores are essential businesses that have remained open during the coronavirus pandemic to feed their communities. Unfortunately, retailers and their staff have still faced abuse, including horrific incidents of Covid related threats where staff members have been coughed and spat at.

The main trigger for Covid related abuse is linked to reminding customer to wear face coverings. It is the role of police, not retailers and store colleagues, to enforce face covering regulations, but where customers have been reminded this has led to abuse and violent behaviour.

Profile of shop thieves



**Motivations for repeat offending**

- 1 Someone motivated by a drug or alcohol addiction
- 2 An organised group of criminals
- 3 Other (eg poverty)

**Analysis**

Shop theft incidents have remained level over the past year, but this is more likely to reflect a real terms increase in offending when we account for under reporting. With non-essential retail premises closed offenders have targeted essential businesses that have remained open in communities, including convenience stores. The feedback that we have received from convenience retailers reinforces this view with many reporting new offenders targeting their stores.

We continue to see the pattern of retailers attributing the majority of shop theft activity to repeat offenders with addiction issues that are clearly not getting the help they need from the justice system. Alcohol, confectionery and meat remain the most commonly targeted item for their easy resale value.

“Violence and abuse is just getting worse ... I was threatened with a syringe – a shoplifter was stealing cheese, and said if I didn’t get out of the way he would stab me.”

“It has a huge effect on mental health – it is the thought that it could flare up, and happen at any time, the fear of the unknown.”

**Craig, Store Manager**



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

Number of incidents of **violence** estimated in the sector =

**40,000**

**19%**

of violent incidents result in injury



**1.26m**

incidents of verbal abuse

## Top triggers for violence



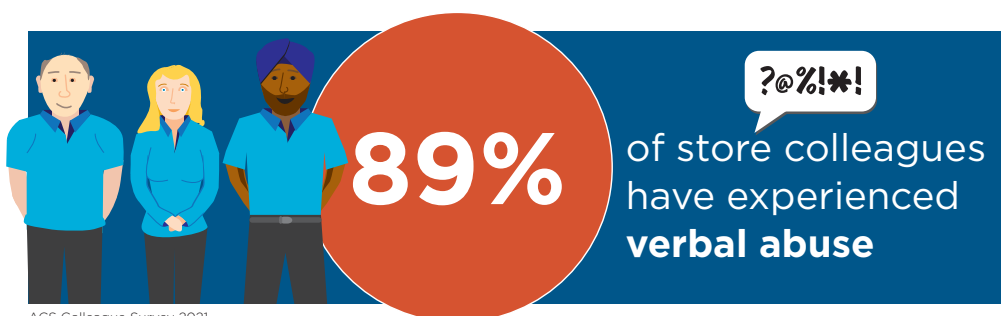
**1**  
Encountering shop thieves



**2**  
Customers not following Covid secure guidelines

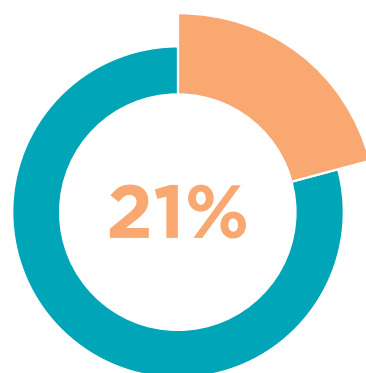


**3**  
Enforcing an age restricted sales policy



ACS Colleague Survey 2021

Retailers estimate that:



of verbal abuse incidents are **hate motivated**

(motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on their race or ethnicity, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity)

## Analysis

The number of violent incidents reported in the report has declined this year but remain at abhorrent levels, with an estimated 40,000 incidents of violence and 89% of colleagues experiencing verbal abuse in stores. We believe that one of the contributing factors to the reduced number of reported violent attacks in the survey this year could be the use of perspex screens in stores. Retailers have invested in these screens to protect colleagues from the spread of Covid, but they have also put a physical barrier between store colleagues and customers.

Shop theft remains the top trigger for abuse, but it is not surprising that customers not following Covid secure guidelines now takes the number two spot. We are campaigning for the Government to introduce tougher penalties for attacks on shopworkers in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill that is currently progressing through Parliament.

“You don’t expect small issues to be violent, it makes me question whether to continue the job I love.”

**Anita, Independent Retailer**



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

Number of violent incidents where a weapon was used

**10,345**

**23%**  
of independent retailers have experienced **violence** over the past year

ACS Voice of Local Shops Survey 2020

## Of crimes where a weapon was present

**53%**

Knife



**47%**

Other weapon (e.g. axe, hammer or syringe)



Number of incidents of

**robbery**

**17,123**

**£8m**  
cost to the sector

## #ShopKind

This year, we are co-ordinating a retail industry wide campaign to raise awareness of violence and abuse and encourage the public to #ShopKind. The campaign, which is endorsed by the Home Office, calls for positive action from customers and encourages colleagues to report any abusive incidents.

You can download the ShopKind campaign materials from the [www.nbcc.police.uk](https://www.nbcc.police.uk) website to use in your store.





“During Covid-19 we have invested in a £10k CCTV system with facial recognition and outside ANPR cameras. The facial recognition works with people wearing masks and will find historic footage of every time that person has been in-store. We are prepared for when we have to use this, unfortunately not if.”

Susan Connolly, Connolly SPAR

For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)



“Crime should always be reported, even if an immediate response isn’t expected. Reported crimes help the police understand the true extent of the problem, which informs the police response to protect retailers.”

Chief Inspector Patrick Holdaway, Business Crime Lead, Hampshire Constabulary

For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)



£175m

invested in crime prevention across the sector over the last year

On average each store spent

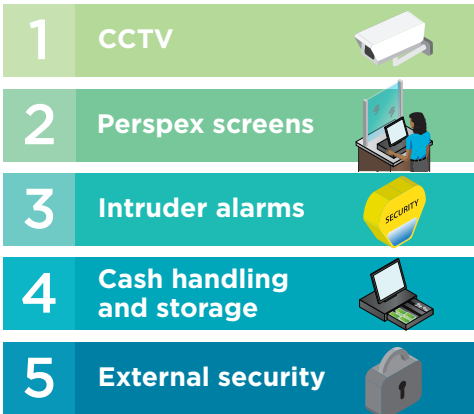
£3,724

on crime prevention measures over the year

Top areas of investment



Top features in-store



TACKLING ORGANISED CRIMINALITY

8,329

Incidents of burglary (excluding ram raids)

£1,791

The average cost of burglary per incident

£15m

The total cost of burglary to the convenience sector



There were **over 800 ATM ram raids** in the last year

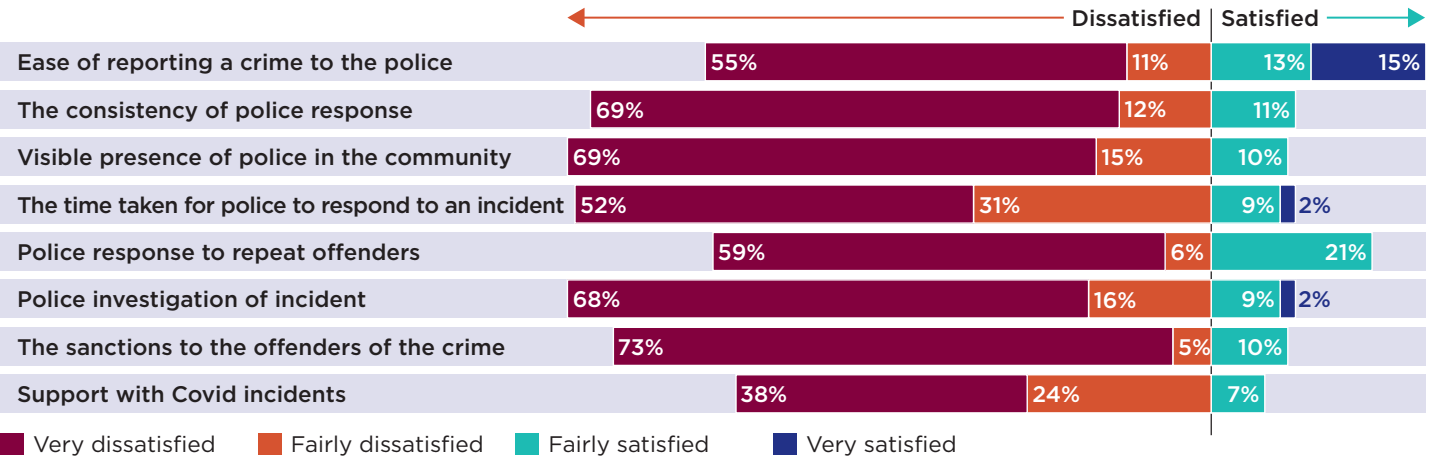
Analysis

Serious and organised crime including burglary and ATM ram raids are extremely costly for convenience retailers. Overall, organised crime has fallen slightly in the last year which can be attributed to Covid-19 lockdowns.

Retailers continue to invest huge amounts in keeping their colleagues and customers safe with £175m spent on crime prevention equipment, including more investment in security staff, intruder alarms and external security.

18 out of 42\* Police and Crime Commissioners reference business crime in their Police and Crime Plans

Retailers’ satisfaction levels with police



ONLY 30% of all retail crime is reported by retailers to the police

Why retailers don’t always report crime

(Based on open-ended responses)

36%

No confidence in a follow up investigation

32%

Perceived lack of interest from police

28%

The time it takes to file and process reports

Analysis

As set out in our Manifesto for PCCs, we need action at local level to tackle the challenges retailers are facing from acquisitive crime, violence and abuse. We want to see all PCCs recognise retail crime in their Police and Crime Plans and provide resource for officers to engage with retailers through police led business engagement teams.

We encourage retailers to report all incidents of crime using the crime reporting guidance we have produced on page 3 of ACS’ Crime Guidance. However, retailers still report that monetary thresholds for shop theft are in operation at force level and undermine confidence that theft offences will be acknowledged by police forces.

Police forces need to focus on addressing the root causes of offending by prolific shoplifters that repeatedly target local shops. PCCs can support retailers and offenders by funding Second Chance Programs which help the most prolific drug-addicted offenders through addiction rehabilitation, providing immediate crime reduction benefits.



Crime is one of the biggest operational challenges for retailers and the illustration below outlines some of the key considerations for managing crime.

Assessing the vulnerabilities of your business to crime and planning a proportionate response is essential, whether it is installing CCTV or providing additional training for staff.

An example risk assessment for a convenience store is available from the Health and Safety Executive website: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/pdf/newsagent.pdf>

## Acid and knives

- There has been an increase in the number of attacks where acid and knives are being used as a weapon to injure someone.
- The Offensive Weapons Act has introduced an age restriction of 18 for corrosive substances. It is illegal to sell corrosives or knives to anyone under 18.
- The National Business Crime Centre website hosts a good practice guide and training modules for retailers on the storage and sale of knives. <https://nbcc.police.uk/guidance/knife-retailers-toolkit>
- For more information, see ACS' Preventing Underage Sales guidance here: <https://www.acs.org.uk/advice/age-restrictions>

## ATM

- If you have an ATM located outside, ensure that you have CCTV with a good view of the ATM. This will help with the police investigation in the event of an ATM ram raid.

## External security

- Ensure that all doors and windows are secured to prevent burglaries.
- For high risk stores, consider the installation of external shutters (this may require planning consent).
- Where reasonably practicable, advertising should be restricted to allow for clear viewing into and out of the premises.

## Anti-social behaviour

- Contact your local police or community safety partnership.
- You can use the Community Trigger power to force a response from local agencies. To find out how to activate the Community Trigger in your area use the following link to search for local authority: <https://asbhelp.co.uk/community-trigger-directory/>

## Self-scan tills

- Ensure you have sufficient staff to authorise items during busy periods.
- Ensure staff are trained to support customers to scan difficult items through tills correctly such as fruit and vegetables.

## Staff

- **Make sure staff have been informed about:**
  - Security measures such as panic buttons and CCTV.
  - Internal and external crime reporting structures.
  - Dealing with abusive customers.
- ACS has developed an animation to help retailers and their staff identify and manage the triggers of violence and verbal abuse. The animation is available on ACS' YouTube Channel.

## CCTV

- Ensure one camera provides quality images of everyone entering your premises and a second covers the till.
- A minimum of six frames per second should be used on your camera. Ensure recorded images are similar quality to live images and all images have a time and date.
- Identify the most important areas of the store for camera location and consider the angle of view and lighting.

- If you plan to share your CCTV footage, you must ensure you comply with GDPR regulations. To find out more, visit the Information Commissioner's Office guidance on CCTV, here: <http://bit.ly/CCTVGDPRGuidance>
- Any company using CCTV for crime prevention purposes is required to pay an annual data protection fee to the Information Commissioner's Office. To find out more about how to pay your annual data protection fee visit: [ico.org.uk/fee](http://ico.org.uk/fee)

## Customer service

- Be attentive, acknowledge all customers as they enter the store, so that potential thieves know that you are watching them.
- If you think you have spotted someone concealing goods, avoid direct confrontation, instead offer them a basket or help with carrying their goods.

## Cyber crime

- Retailers can protect themselves from the most common cyberattacks by backing up data, keeping smartphones and tablets safe, preventing malware damage, avoiding phishing attacks, (e.g. emails asking for sensitive information such as bank details), and using passwords to protect your data.
- For more information on ways to improve cyber security in your business see the National Cyber Security Centre's guidance for small businesses here: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/smallbusiness>

## Internal theft

- Regularly monitor stock levels and stock rooms to deter theft by employees.
- Theft by an employee is a serious offence and breach of trust, it should be reported to the police.

## Till position

- Are high value goods or targeted products (meat, cheese, alcohol) in view of the till?
- Ensure that the front of the store is visible from the till, so staff can see customers approaching.

## Age restricted sales

- Ensure you have visible signage at the entrance, till and shelf edges of your store.
- Make sure staff know the store policy and acceptable proof of age documents.
- When asking for ID think about the following as ways to prevent confrontation: deflect, flattery, being constructive. For more information about ways to mitigate violence from enforcing age restricted sales, see ACS' animation on 'Managing Violence and Abuse in Convenience Stores'. The animation is available on ACS' YouTube Channel.

## Cash

- Reduce the amount of cash held in tills and on your premises.
- Change the routine of banking procedures so they are not easily observable.
- Think about using counter drop safes to reduce cash in tills.



1. ACS Crime Survey 2021

Unless otherwise stated all data in this report comes from ACS' Crime Survey 2021. An online survey was conducted between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 and captures incidents and cost of crime experienced by convenience retailers over the last 12 months.

The survey had 50 respondents, representing 6,014 convenience stores. 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' 2020 Local Shop Report.

**Why retailers don't always report crime (page 9)**  
Information on why retailers don't always report crime was captured through the following open-ended question; 'What, if anything, prevents you from reporting crimes to the police?'. Responses were categorised into themes using an inductive coding approach, resulting in the themes represented in the report.

2. Police and Crime Plan review

ACS reviewed Police and Crime Commissioner Police and Crime plans using the following search criteria: 'retail crime', 'business crime', and 'shoplifting'.

Please note the review was conducted in February 2021 and Police and Crime plans may have been modified since this date. For more information about your local Police and Crime Plan, see the Police and Crime Commissioner website for your area. To find more information about which local policing area you belong to see <https://www.police.uk/>

3. ACS Voice of Local Shops survey (VOLS)

The VOLS survey is a quarterly telephone survey with a sample of 1,210 independent retailers, including unaffiliated, symbol group and independent forecourt retailers.

Data on the percentage of independent retailers who have experienced violence in the last year was taken from the following VOLS question:

*Which of the following best describes your experience of violence in the last year?*

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

Don't know responses were excluded for analysis. Those who recorded experiencing an increase, decrease or the same level of violence in the last year were considered to have experienced some form of violence over the last year.

4. ACS Colleague Survey 2021

An online and paper survey looking at the demographics, experiences and situations of staff working with the convenience sector. Fieldwork was carried out between 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020 and

15<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021. The percentage of staff experiencing verbal abuse (see page 6), 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 – Never, hardly ever, every few months, monthly, weekly, daily or almost daily*

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

5. Covid Impact Survey

Online survey conducted between 13<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May, distributed via email and ACS communications. Sample was self-selecting (not random). Number of participants was 87, representing 4,896 stores and 64,504 staff.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the retailers who took the time to complete our 2021 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>

**British Retail Consortium**  
<https://brc.org.uk/making-a-difference/priorities/crime/>

**USDAW Freedom From Fear campaign**  
<https://www.usdaw.org.uk/freedomfromfear>

**Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS) 2018**  
The CVS is a telephone survey where respondents from a representative sample of business premises in England and Wales are asked about crimes experienced at their premises in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Estimates for the 2018 CVS are based on 2000 interviews with respondents at premises in wholesale and retail.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/829399/crime-against-businesses-2018-hosb1719.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/829399/crime-against-businesses-2018-hosb1719.pdf)

**Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime in England and Wales**  
ONS publish quarterly their Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletins which are produced in partnership with the Home Office. The statistics are based on police recorded crime data and look at trends in overall police recorded crime.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2019>

CONTACT

For more details on this report and guidance, contact Rosie Wiggins at ACS by emailing [rosie.wiggins@acs.org.uk](mailto:rosie.wiggins@acs.org.uk)

Staff theft

Preventing staff theft

- Check references of any new employee.
- Highlight internal investigation procedures in staff meetings or staff newsletters.
- Implement training processes for Store Managers and Supervisors to help them identify staff theft.
- Train staff to make them aware of the security features in-store.

Identifying staff theft

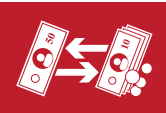




- Monitor till processes carefully and review individual end of day reports.
- Use till overlay systems to allow CCTV to combine with 'real-time' till receipt images.
- Monitor voids and refunds transactions closely
- Analyse till, cash management and inventory data to identify trends – look for anything out of the ordinary.
- When carrying out internal theft investigations, ensure you establish how and why the offence happened. This enables you to tackle the motive and presents an opportunity to prevent future incidents.

Reporting staff theft

- Report incidents to the police using the 101 number.
- Only using civil action means that the offender can move into another business and repeat the offence.

Protecting your business from scams

Retailers may experience scams in their stores. These are the top scams that retailers should be aware of to prevent them in-store:

	<b>Cash swapping</b>	The scam works as an attempt to confuse retailers and their staff by trying to swap bank notes for other bank notes or coins repeatedly. Often the scammer is known to ask for change or purchases a small value item with a large banknote.
	<b>Distraction theft</b>	Two or more people enter the store, one distracts a staff member by asking questions, being loud or noisy. Sometimes the staff member may be led to the back of the store. The other person goes unnoticed and selects and steals goods.
	<b>Refund requests</b>	A person selects a high value item from the shelf and takes it straight to the till asking for a refund (although they have never purchased the item). The person may attempt to use an old receipt or no receipt.
	<b>Credit cards</b>	Fraudulent card transactions which occur in store could risk retailers being required to pay this money back. Offenders often use fraudulent credit cards to purchase high value items with a card that bypasses pin verification and produces a signature slip.
	<b>Bag swap</b>	Two people enter the store with the same bag. One of the offenders selects products off the shelf and put them in their bag, while the other offender walks around selecting nothing. Before leaving, the offenders switch bags. Upon being checked on the way out, the offender has nothing in their bag. However, the other offender leaves with the products unchallenged.

£30m

the total cost of staff theft to the sector

16,663

Incidents of staff theft in the sector

Most common internal thefts

- 1 Cash directly from tills
- 2 Consumption of products in-store
- 3 Price overrides