

Retail Joint Group (Retail Crime)

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Sent by e-mail to ministervcs@gov.scot

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1st May 2024

Dear Minister,

**Joint letter from members of the Retailers Joint Meeting on the prevalence of
Retail Crime in Scotland**

Thank you for your previous engagement with the Scottish Grocers Federation on the matter of Retail Crime. In this instance, we are writing to you on behalf of members of the Retailers Joint Meeting, hosted by Police Scotland's Business Crime Prevention Unit. Please see the full list of signatories to this letter below.

As you are aware, the recent upsurge in retail crime and anti-social behaviour across Scotland, over the past year, is having both a significant impact on business viability and, moreover, a damaging and harmful effect on the wellbeing of retail staff, their families, and their communities.

To illustrate the seriousness of the issue at hand, we enclose recent information and gathered evidence provided by Retailers Against Crime, Co-op and the Scottish Grocers' Federation, including:

- **Case studies of criminal activity across retail in Scotland (RAC Impact Statement)**
- **Research Report: Stealing With Impunity - *The policing of prolific local offenders and the impact on our shops and communities* (Co-op)**
- **Retail Crime Report & Safer Business Guide 2023/24 (SGF)**

- **RAC Brochure 2024**

Co-op alone have reported 24,000 incidents of shoplifting, 257 assaults and 8,700 incidents of verbal abuse in the past year. Meanwhile the SGF report highlights that the cost of retail crime has now reached an approximate average of £12,000 per convenience store per annum.

Meanwhile, RAC members' losses are the highest in years and there are no signs of this decreasing. The statistics show that there has been a 37% rise in losses during 2023, compared to 2022, with the actual amount rising to £1,468,409.00. A total of 12,567 incidents were reported, analysed and processed by RAC in 2023, which is a 25% rise on incidents reported in 2022. Included in the above figures are 1,066 incidents which involved violence/assault, verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, and possession of an offensive weapon. There is also an increase in youth crime with groups travelling regionally in Scotland.

Various members of the Joint Retailers group have also carried out independent research on this matter, reaching similar conclusions across a wide range of retail categories. Much of which is available either online or upon request. For example, the recent publication of the British/Scottish Retail Consortium Crime Report confirms that customer theft has now doubled to 16.7 million incidents a year (across the UK), at a highest ever cost to the sector of £1.8 billion.

The studies enclosed highlight not only the depth and prevalence of retail crime and the significant escalation in cases in Scotland, but also the cost to people and businesses. As one of Scotland most important employers and areas of economic value, crime is now the single most impactful issue across retail. Accounting for potentially hundreds of millions in lost revenue through shop theft and vandalism and severely impacting the mental health and wellbeing of many retailers and staff.

As discussed previously, we welcome the significant progress that was made in 2021, with the introduction of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-Restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act and, in addition, the uplift in funding for Police Scotland in the Scottish Budget 2024/25.

However, we are deeply concerned that Police Scotland, the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service and the wider Scottish justice system simply do not have the resources or capacity required to reverse the current trend in retail crime. Likewise, we are concerned that the Scottish Government is not taking the urgent actions required to curb the situation before matters worsen.

While we strive to ensure that all crimes are reported, unfortunately, our findings show that underreporting appears to be notably higher now than in previous years, as retailers are unsatisfied with the level of support they receive from the Scottish justice system. Noting increased delays to police response times; a perceived lack of action and feedback once a crime has been reported; and the unlikelihood of the offender being convicted/prosecuted.

This further exacerbates the lack of deterrent and the perception that there are no consequences for the individuals and groups that regularly commit shop theft, anti-social & threatening behaviour, vandalism, and abuse & violence toward staff .

As a result, many businesses are seeking to implement their own measures to protect staff and property, at additional cost. Such as the use of body cameras and encouraging officers to attend their store with incentives such as free hot drinks.

It is our view that the first role of government should be to protect its people and their property and therefore we are calling on the Scottish Government to implement an emergency plan of action. Providing the adequate resources to Police Scotland and the Scottish justice system and ensure that the current upsurge in retail crime is reversed.

We do hope this information has been useful and we would be very pleased to meet you to discuss these issues in more detail, at a time of your convenience.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Pete Cheema OBE - Chief Executive, Scottish Grocers' Federation

Maxine Fraser - Managing Director, Retailers Against Crime CIC

Paul Gerrard - Campaigns, Public Affairs and Board Secretariat Director, Co-op

David Lonsdale – Director, Scottish Retail Consortium

Alastair Waghorn - Group Security Manager, CJ Lang and Son Ltd

Michelle Douglas - National Retail Risk Business Partner, River Island

Fiona Wilson - Culture and Capability Partner, Tesco

Darren Jackson - Operations Support Partner, Tesco