



# Safer Colleagues Safer Communities

One year on



Safer Colleagues,  
Safer Communities

# VIOLENCE

v#rba!

@buse!

towards shop

Assaults and  
threats to  
retail staff

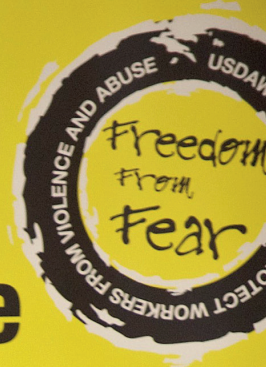
highest

20

70%  
frequent

42,

## Violence and abuse are not part of the job



## Shopworkers deserve respect and need the protection of the law



CHURCH  
HOUSE

WESTMINSTER

U  
Union

0 30  
uk/f



# Introduction

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In December 2018, our National Members Council voted for Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities to become an official Co-op campaign focussed on tackling crime and violence and protecting our colleagues.

This report looks at what we have done operationally in our stores, locally in our communities and nationally when lobbying elected Politicians since this campaign launched.

In common with the rest of the sector, we have seen the problem getting worse. The British Retail Consortium (BRC) and the Association of Convenience stores (ACS) will report on this later in 2020.

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# Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities

## One year on

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**One year on, we've taken a moment to reflect on everything we've achieved this year. I have been so proud to see the changes that we have been able to make in supporting stores and the progress that has been made both locally and nationally. There is still so much that we need to do but I wanted to share some of my key reflections on the start we have made.**

One of our focus areas in the campaign is to change the conversation on Retail crime. Taking the conversation away from it being a crime against businesses and their financial losses, to powerfully describe it as a crime against shopworkers. To be really clear in the describing of the problem to show the impact it has on their physical and mental wellbeing. That's why I was overwhelmed when 600 of our colleagues shared their personal stories in response to the Home Office call for evidence. Each time I am told about another account of a colleague being either physically or verbally abused, I'm shocked and saddened. I know it can't be easy to have to relive these horrific incidents, so I thank our colleagues for bravely sharing their stories.

I have spent a lot of time this year increasing the awareness of shopworker violence with politicians, both at a local and at a national level and in September, I launched a piece of Co-op commissioned research with Dr Emmeline Taylor at the House of Commons. This research looks at the motivations of offenders and the impacts of crime. Understanding the motivations behind those who offend is key to understanding the root causes of crime, which in turn is key to tackling the terrible impact on society.

Dr Taylor and I also spoke at panel events at both the Labour and Conservative Autumn Party conferences where we shared the stage with Usdaw, Co-op Party, ACS, MPs and Police and Crime Commissioners. We all came together to raise awareness of shop worker violence.

We continue to support Usdaw's Freedom from Fear campaign, and this year I was delighted to co-host a summit to launch their Respect for

Shopworkers week in November. This event was in London and we were supported by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who was able to join us alongside other businesses who are following our lead to prioritise shop worker violence. We will continue to build from this event and encourage other businesses to continue to work to protect their shop workers, both locally and nationally as we do.

At the AGM this year we committed to maintaining our investment into colleague safety over the next three years. In 2020 we'll be investing in new technology and support in the stores that are most affected by crime. I also shared the stage with Richard Taylor OBE, the father of Damilola Taylor who was tragically killed 19 years ago. We proudly announced a partnership with the Damilola Taylor Trust and I am delighted that we have also agreed to be the first business sponsor of the 2020 year of Hope which will run until the 20th Anniversary of Damilola Taylor's death in November 2020.

Businesses have a critical role to play in tackling the root causes of crime in society and in March, I wrote to the Home Secretary, asking him to remember the role private businesses can play both to create an environment which deters violence, but also how we can help communities and individuals take different choices.

Our campaign is moving forward and gaining momentum, but there is still so much to do. We will continue to campaign for Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities because abuse and violence is Not Part of the Job.

**Jo Whitfield,**  
Food CEO





# We're investing in making our colleagues feel safer

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We're doing all we can to help colleagues in our shops feel safer. We're investing £70 million over the next 3 years on equipment, training and innovation and here are some of the things we've put into our shops that have started to make a difference.

## Headsets that connect all colleagues

As well as improving customer service and making things a little bit quicker in our shops, headsets also help colleagues feel more connected to each other – especially when not everyone is on the shop floor. The headsets mean that colleagues can talk to each other when they're in different parts of the shop and can call for help if needed. We've invested £4.5m into making sure every single colleague in all of our shops has access to a headset.

## More time on the shop floor

We've rolled out tablets to all of our stores which allow colleagues to spend more time on the shop floor, rather than in the back office. This allows us to provide a better service to our members and customers on the shop floor, but it also helps our colleagues feel more connected.

## Intelligent CCTV

We've recognised that traditional CCTV does not provide pro-active support to our colleagues, so we developed a partnership with a third party supplier that specialises in technological innovation in security including intelligent CCTV (iCCTV). Stores are monitored by a central monitoring station that colleagues can talk to, and can talk to potential offenders live in-store.

This iCCTV is one of the most sophisticated and leading-edge approaches to protecting colleagues as it allows us to proactively target persistent shoplifters and work with the police to reduce the impact on our colleagues. We've now got iCCTV installed in 1,000 of our stores.

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We recently experienced a terrifying incident where a shoplifter seriously assaulted a colleague. Thanks to quick thinking and the use of our headsets, we were able to isolate the colleague suffering from a head injury and make them feel comfortable while waiting for help to arrive. When help arrived, one of us stayed with the injured colleague while the other spoke to the emergency services operator, and thanks to the headsets, we all stayed in constant communication giving regular updates to each other. I'm pleased to say; our colleague has made a full recovery and is back at work....I can't imagine life without headsets. At the time of this incident, they allowed us to act fast, work efficiently, but most importantly reassured everyone in that terrifying moment that they weren't alone and that help was on its way.

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## Making a statement

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### Making a statement

We want to make it clear to everyone who visits our shops, that verbal and physical abuse is not part of our colleagues' job and won't be tolerated. That's why we've put eye-catching point of sale in prominent places in all our shops.





## Tests and trials

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There's so much new technology and equipment out there to choose from, we want to make sure that when we're investing in our colleagues' safety, we're spending our money on the right things and putting it into the shops that need it most.

### Monitoring our Assisted Serve Tills

To reduce the risk of shoplifting at our Assisted Serve Tills (ASTs) we've been trialling the installation of CCTV monitors at the kiosks not just cameras above the tills that monitor and record customer behaviour.

In the shops we've trialled this in, we've seen a reduction in product loss and we'll be installing this in shops with the highest product theft at these tills throughout 2020.

### Body Cameras

We have trialled body cameras in a number of our stores during 2019, with a view to a 2020 roll out to our stores that are most affected by crime.

Matthew Fernley, Store Manager at Manchester High Street store, has been part of the trial and told us: "I feel much more comfortable than when I first started here in February. Like many city centre stores, we see real problems with anti-social behaviour; we were logging up to 60 security incidents a week.



We've now got an extra layer of security and protection for our colleagues and customers, complementing our CCTV, physical guarding and headsets. But unlike CCTV, there's HD video and sound from the cameras and potential evidence is transmitted and banked if we need it. We've had the odd question from customers, but to be honest, when we explain why we've got them, it does help educate and reassure them.



# Tests and trials

## Fog cannons

Where stores have experienced multiple burglaries we have installed fog cannons. Once activated, vision obscuring fog is released which prevents perpetrators from stealing products. Once a fog cannon has been installed, our evidence suggests that it can break the cycle. We also know that where we have placed fog cannons into our stores above the tobacco gantry (most targeted area by criminals) that it has mitigated loss. They leave with nothing as they cant see.



A store was burgled 4 times during 2018 which resulted in theft and damage. The installation of a fog cannon at the end of 2018 meant that during an attempted burglary in 2019, the fog cannon was activated and the offenders left empty handed. The fog cannons are only triggered out of hours.

SmartWater™ fog systems are mainly located close to the entrances of our stores and are really effective in the kiosk areas, which are typically targets of crime. Once activated, a dense fog obscures the intruder's vision making it increasingly difficult for them to leave the store. It also covers the criminal in a spray containing a unique forensic signature. Guaranteed to last at least 5 years and invisible to the naked eye, this signature spray helps police to track criminals and stolen goods, which can then lead to increased conviction rates.

## Protecting our products

We're trying and testing a number of product protection tools in our stores to stop shoplifters attempting to steal products in store.

**Examples include Koala Bottle tops and product protection through meat cases.**





# Training and support

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## Guards - a flexible model that works

Many of the offenders we see today are unlikely to be deterred by the presence of a guard and are more likely to use violence. A typical guard in the UK doesn't have any additional powers and is limited in the action they can take. There's also limited space in our stores to hold a shoplifter if we believed police would respond. This could all put colleagues in more danger.

However, we do know that guards prevent opportunistic theft and can make colleagues and customers feel safer. That's why we use a flexible guarding model. Our security guarding provider takes the incident data from our stores and ranks the estate every four weeks based on risk. This drives when and where guards should be placed and allows us to move guards as and when to the area that needs them the most.

## Helping colleagues understand what they can do

**We have conducted listening groups across the country to understand what colleagues want and the issues they face in relation to crime and violence. This has led us to understand what our colleagues want to feel safe.**

- Our colleagues have had training to help them with the increase in abuse and anti-social behaviour they experience on a daily basis. This has included launching crime support tool kits for our area managers to assist them with shoplifting issues. There are further modules that will follow in 2020, including post incident support and anti-social behaviour.
- We know most forms of physical violence happen when colleagues confront shoplifters, that's why we've made sure all of our store colleagues have access to conflict resolution training.
- Our customer service team has been re-trained to make sure they support store colleagues when they are faced with abuse.

- We have increased the communication channels to allow us to share updates with colleagues and to raise awareness of what's coming in the future.

## Support for colleagues

We encourage and support our colleagues to contact Lifeworks, our counselling team who assist and aid colleagues impacted and ensure they receive the right level of emotional support. This is in addition to the dedicated Response and Resilience Team based within our support centre who are on hand to provide post-incident support to our colleagues.

**30,722** colleagues have read stories about the Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities campaign.



# Keeping our communities safe

As a member-owned organisation with a presence in nearly every community in the UK, every day we see the problems that communities face first-hand. It's right that we have to try to do something to support these communities, to keep them safe. We don't have all the answers, but community partnerships will help.

We believe that businesses have assets that can be used to address the issues communities and societies face. Those may be financial, professional expertise, leveraging supply chains or advocacy support.

## The Local Community

Since the launch of our Local Community Fund, we have provided significant levels of community investment to local causes directly targeting crime or supporting activity that we know addresses its causes.

To date, we have given over £5.5m to over 1,600 causes across the UK who are tackling the causes of crime. We've recently announced the next round (round 5) of the Local Community Fund, which will see us build on this investment, with a further 650 projects that support activities tackling the causes of crime. Some examples of the new Round 5 causes are shown below.

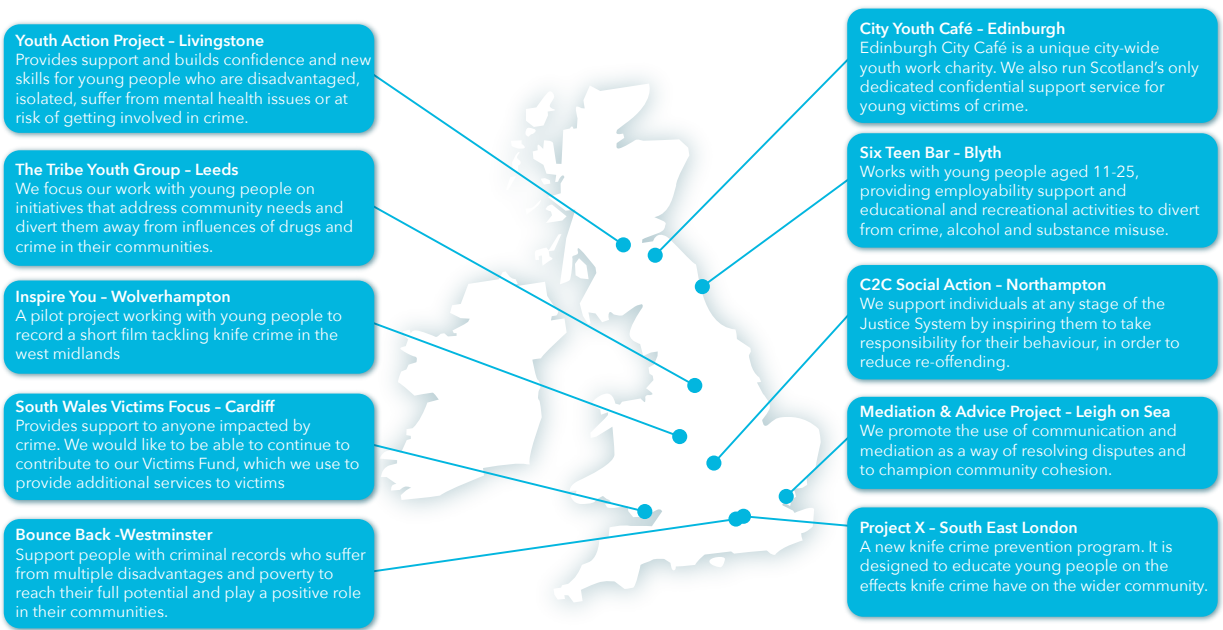
## Community partnerships

Two pilot locations were announced as part of the Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities campaign, to see how we can tackle the causes of crime and violence in communities by working with others in the area who may be facing the same issues as us, and potentially working on making a difference. These pilots were in Greenwich, London and Chorlton, Manchester.

These pilots started with listening groups with local members, colleagues and local causes to begin to understand the problems faced with crime in the area.

Through these listening groups, and speaking to local schools and other local stakeholders, it became clear that we should be working towards running some skills bases programmes in the areas. The feedback suggested that this would be an invaluable way to make a difference to people's lives.

The 3 projects that we are running these skills-based activities with are the Damilola Taylor Trust, the Archway Project and the Edge Theatre Group.





# Working with projects that make a difference

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The partnership of Co-op and the Damilola Taylor Trust was announced at the 2019 AGM with Damilola Taylor's father, Richard Taylor OBE on the stage with Jo Whitfield. The programme that is run by the trust will help young people to acquire skills to help them find employment.

This programme supports young people who may be far from work and helps them develop the skills to be able to work and realise their potential. The funding we will provide will enable delivery of the Career Search and Skills Development Programme (CSSD). The CSSD is a 3 month course that uses a range of learning tools that help young people improve their skills in job-searching, CV writing, presentation, communication, team working and self-management so they can stand a good chance of securing jobs. This funding will be complemented by additional pro-bono support from our professional services and from colleagues who are volunteering on the programme. This funding is in addition to the funding already provided through our Local Community Fund.

**Richard Taylor, founder and trustee of The Damilola Taylor trust said:**



One of the factors that causes disadvantaged inner-city youths to be isolated from society is unequal access to opportunities. Access to opportunities for training and gainful employment is the strongest enabler of productive participation and integration into society for anyone. We are therefore delighted that our Career Search and Skills Development Programme will be delivered again this year to provide young people with the opportunity to acquire crucial skills for competing effectively in the jobs market. We are grateful to Co-op for supporting us to deliver this programme again in 2019.



The Archway Youth Project is a non-profit organisation that operates as a social enterprise. The organisation aims to enrich the lives of young people through a range of educational workshops and recreational activities. Archway Youth Project offers a unique learning experience that uses cars, motorcycle and bicycle maintenance as instruments for engaging young people. The organisation has a proven track record for minimising social exclusion, engaging and empowering at-risk young people, providing meaningful qualifications, as well as reducing crime rates.

# Working with projects that make a difference

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In June 2019 we announced a partnership with the Edge Theatre Company in Manchester to support a cohort of people through skills passes programmes that include managing group conflict, literacy skills, confidence and self-esteem, which provide an alternative to negative activity. This will help tackle the root causes of crime as the people who are supported by the programme have a range of complex needs including severe mental health issues, drug and alcohol addiction or homelessness.

The funding from The Co-op has allowed us to work with people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and people with drug or alcohol issues, delivering singing and acting workshops which develop essential life skills to help people change their lives and feel a sense of pride about their achievements.

The work supports resilience building, critical thinking and provides an alternative to negative activity. And it's a great way to have fun!

## A participant in the project said:



**My confidence has really improved. I am now going back to university to study film. I've got a bounce back in my step and a smile on my face, it feels like I've found myself again.**



We are confident that by supporting these programmes, we'll help tackle the root causes of crime. We're supporting people who have a range of complex needs that can include mental health issues, drug and alcohol addiction or even homelessness, or sometimes, they just need to be shown the right direction at a young age and be provided with skills to help them on the right path.

In Chorlton, we have also built good relationships with the Greater Manchester Police and Chorlton High School. This gives us the opportunity to work with young people who were shoplifting, to educate them through restorative justice rather than criminalising individuals at a young age. Our relationship with the police has allowed us to use the resources of the local policing team to provide police patrols, including police vehicles, in the vicinity of stores.



# Working with projects that make a difference

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## Ex-Offender Pilots

Working with Catch 22 and The Prince's Trust, we will be running pilots in around 30 of our stores that will include a 2 week work placement. An employability day will also take place, developing career awareness, employability skills around CVs, applying for roles and interviews.

## Steel Warriors

Our 2019 AGM saw us launch a partnership with knife-crime charity Steel Warriors. This multi-million pound investment was launched following our decision to stop selling single pack kitchen knives in our stores. We donated our existing knives to Steel Warriors so they could be used for these gyms.

Steel Warriors is an anti-knife crime organisation that creates free community gyms in places impacted by knife crime. The gyms are made of knives that have been surrendered or seized from the streets and melted down.

The Steel Warriors gyms focus on promoting calisthenics, a trending sport in the UK that uses your own body weight to perform a variety of movements to enhance strength and flexibility.

The gyms focus on teaching skills, as well as improving mental and physical health. They're designed to give young people a free space where they can develop confidence. The spaces will be accessible for all and aim to boost health and wellbeing by enhancing strength and flexibility. We're confident this initiative will also help tackle the root causes of crime.

We have now opened 2 gyms, one in Ruskin Park in Lambeth and one in Finsbury Park. We are aiming to help Steel Warriors build 20 open air, free to use gyms across the UK. Alongside these gyms, we will also provide certified personal trainers who will offer 3 training sessions a week for a variety of abilities to all of the community. These personal trainers will offer mentorship and support

to young people within the local community while promoting the anti-knife crime message.



**Steel Warriors are really excited to be working with Co-op to build more knife steel gyms around the UK. The partnership will allow us to bring calisthenics to a significant number of communities, providing a fantastic free facility in areas that have been hit hard by knife crime. We are looking forward to growing the Steel Warriors community with Co-op's help, using training and technology to support people wherever we can and showing that lives should be built on steel, not destroyed by it.**



## Foodshare

At the end of each day, our stores give products that are going out of date to local community groups. This scheme is called Foodshare. Through Foodshare, we are helping to tackle the root causes of crime linked to poverty by maximising our reach to communities. This allows focus to be spent on helping more people.

## Raising the profile

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### Over 600 Co-op colleagues shared their personal testimonies with the Home Office

The key engagement activity for the Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities campaign in 2019 was the Home Office Call for evidence. This was published in April 2019, and it asked for the views of organisations and individuals to aid their understanding of violence and abuse towards shop staff in England and Wales.

"As a store manager, I've been punched in the face, threatened with a dirty needle and spat at more times than I can remember. Recently a man threatened to bite my nose off. You become accustomed to it, think it is part of the job, but why should it be?"

"They held me hostage. The safe was open, but they wanted more. They broke my nose and eye socket. I have nightmares still to this day and I'm close to losing my family because I am not the same person anymore."

"I've witnessed many horrific incidents. The worst was when a masked criminal fired a sawn-off shotgun because we couldn't open the safe. On another occasion, a colleague was struck with a medieval mace. It tore apart her cheek and she lost her sight in one eye."

Alongside these powerful and shocking testimonies that our colleagues submitted, the Co-op submitted a business response that included 10 recommendations to the government.

# Setting out our recommendations

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## The recommendations are:

**A thematic review carried out by HM Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) of forces response to retail crime and particularly abuse and violence towards shop workers violence**

The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and Police Chief Council should work collectively to deliver a more consistent, improved and effective response to retail crime including abuse and violence toward shop workers

**All Police and Crime Commissioners should include retail crime with a focus on abuse and violence toward shop workers in their Police and Crime Plans and should report against it annually**

Resources available to police forces should reflect a greater priority for tackling retail crime and especially abuse and violence toward shop workers to deliver a more effective response

**Government set ambitious targets to support the delivery of comprehensive coverage of business crime reduction partnership across England and Wales by 2025**

Resources to be increased for the 101 system to ensure calls from businesses reporting urgent incidents are answered with a reasonable time frame

**A single portal for reporting incidents is created for national constituency where not urgent incidents can be reported**

A specific offence for circumstances where a shop worker is attacked when carrying out the law in relation to age restricted sales and that that offence should be aggravated one carrying longer sentences

**A review of sentencing guidelines for assaults on shop workers which are not related to age-restricted sales with a view to longer custodial sentences being handed down**

Government engaged with businesses to understand and develop effective ways for business to use their assets to help individuals, groups and communities

Alongside the submission of our Co-op evidence to the Home Office, Jo Whitfield appeared on the BBC breakfast sofa in June to talk about the reality of what our colleagues face day-in day-out, detailing what we are doing at the Co-op to take action and how we are investing in the safety of our colleagues. Jo used this opportunity to call on the government to prioritise retail crime, to better protect our colleagues through tougher sanctions for offenders and community investment to tackle the root causes of crime.

At the time of writing of this report, we have still not seen a response to the Call for evidence, but Jo Whitfield has used opportunities to call on the government to respond. During the 2019 General Election campaign, she wrote an open letter to all party leaders, asking that whoever formed the next government to commit to taking action to protect shop workers. This letter was printed in the Times Newspaper.

Jo's letter was covered in 6 titles which reached over 7 million people

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**I urge all those hoping to form the next government to commit to taking action to protect shop workers because suffering abuse and violence is not part of the job including prioritising the response the police are able to give and the sanctions available to the courts. My colleagues matter. Shop Workers matter. Enough is enough.**

Jo Whitfield

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## It's not part of the job

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**On 10 September 2019, we published academic research from Dr Emmeline Taylor, Associate Professor of Criminology at City, University of London, on the impact of abuse and violence on shop workers.**

This research which was launched at the House of Commons, for the first time ever, shows the impact and motivations of violence in the retail industry. It shows that this abuse is having lasting effects on the lives of workers, both mentally and physically. She found that because of the frequency of violence and such abuse, shop workers were now suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

This research is key to our understanding behind the motivations of offenders, and the impact that this these crimes have on shopworkers, and we will continue to use this evidence to build our campaign.

With Dr Emmeline Taylor, we hosted fringe events at both the Labour and Conservative Party conferences, to ask both the opposition party and the party of government to take shop worker violence seriously. We were joined at these events by politicians from both parties, the ACS, BRC NFRN, the Police, Co-op party and other retailers, and used these opportunities to raise awareness of the issue, highlight Dr Taylor's report and talk about our Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities campaign by speaking on behalf of our colleagues.







# **'It's not part of the job': Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers**

**A review of evidence and policy**

**September 2019**



Research Report



# Freedom from Fear

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## Freedom from Fear

In November 2018, we were delighted to support Usdaw's Respect for Shop Workers Week. As part of this, we hosted just under 50 Politicians around the UK in our Co-op stores to share stories from our colleagues of their experiences of abuse in stores first-hand. These visits helped us understand the realities our colleagues face and highlighted our determination to protect those colleagues.

Throughout 2019, we have continued to use our leading position that we have built to influence parliament and the government to provide greater protection for shop workers. One of these opportunities was in April when Rt Hon David Hanson MP tabled a Westminster Hall debate into retail crime. The debate had a specific focus on shoplifting as well as aggressive and violent behaviour, and we wrote to over 60 MPs with a tailored, constituency specific briefing note. This included stories of abuse that had taken place in Co-op stores within the MP's constituency.

When an incident takes place in one of our Co-op stores and a colleague is affected, we update the local politicians to ensure they are aware of the violence that goes on in their constituency.

## Respect for shop workers 2019

Part of our campaign is the support for Usdaw and their Freedom from Fear campaign, particularly their Respect for Shop workers week. This year, we were able to support this with a joint summit to launch their week in Westminster. London Mayor, Sadiq Khan joined our Retail CEO, Jo Whitfield and Usdaw's Deputy General Secretary, Dave McCrossen to launch the summit, which was attended by over 70 people from other Co-op societies, 30 leading businesses and the police.

Respect for Shop workers week 2019 fell during a General Election campaigning period, and due to Co-op policy, we did not host any candidates in our stores. We invited a number of Police and Crime commissioners into our stores to try to

encourage them to include retail crime in their local crime plans. Over 25% of all Police and Crime Commissioners visited Co-op stores in their police force area during Respect for Shop workers week





# Freedom from Fear

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## Respect for Shopworkers week



We reached over  
**410K+ people**  
on **social media**  
**channels**

Other attendees were law enforcement agencies, health and education and the voluntary sector. A number of heartbreaking and humbling stories were told from young people with experience in communities impacted by serious violence. Chris Whitfield, Chief Operating Officer, used this opportunity to again share with the Minister how we believe that businesses have a role to play and real contribution to make in helping give these young people different choices.

We have been keen to show the government that they have our full support to tackle crime in the community. Jo Whitfield has written to the Home Secretary offering our support, explaining that as a community-based business, we see the impact of social issues in our shops and the threat of weaponised attacks against our colleagues had grown. We know that with collaboration across society, we could tackle the root causes of crime.

## Government engagement

We have used regular engagement opportunities throughout this year to share detail on our campaign with the government, and we have offered our support where we feel we have the assets to address the crime that we see in all of our communities.

The Prime Minister held a summit on Serious Youth Violence and we were invited to join a roundtable meeting with the Minister, Victoria Atkins MP.



Co-op mentions  
dominated with  
**89% of the**  
**conversation on**  
the **#respect19**  
**hashtag**

# 2020 Commitments and Conclusion

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## What you'll see in 2020

- We will focus operational support on the 150 'safety focus' shops that account for 48% of all crimes committed across our estate
- The Co-op will be the business partner for the 2020 Year of Hope national poetry/spoken word competition which would be judged by panel of national figures. The winner will read their piece at the anniversary service in 2020.
- We will launch 6 new Steel Warriors Gyms
- We will support Daniel Johnson's Proposed Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-Restricted Good and Services) (Scotland) Bill. The Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee are currently seeking evidence, which we will be providing
- We will continue constituency based engagement with politicians from Westminster, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and invite at least 100 to visit our Co-op stores during 2020 to understand the abuse that our colleagues face
- We will continue to pressurise the government to respond to the Home Office Call for evidence
- We will continue to support Usdaw's Freedom from Fear Campaign and build on this year's summit to encourage other retailers to move forward with their retail crime plans
- We will continue engagement with the current and future Police and Crime Commissioners in order to encourage them to include retail crime in their police plans. The Police and Crime Commissioner elections take place in May 2020



We'd not long opened up when 3 men burst into the store, one armed with a handgun. They shouted at us to put our hands up and pointed the gun right at me. We were behind the till at the time and they screamed at us to take them out the back, I grabbed Barbara and quickly walked us out the back and into the office where we were made to lie on the floor. I was trying my best to protect Barbara so pushed her towards the corner in the office out the way.

They kept pointing the gun in my face and shouting "Do what you're told or you'll get shot", they made me open the safe which they quickly emptied including the charity money we'd raised. Once they'd finished they split up, 2 marched me out the front to get cigarettes from the gantry while the other stayed out the back filling up on the cigarette back stock. While all this was going on a customer walked in the store, I yelled at her to run away. This spooked the 3 of them and they ran out the back door. My immediate thoughts were to get help for myself and Barbara, I ran out the back and pressed the panic alarm before helping Barbara up off the floor. Not long later the police arrived, we gave statements and they collected finger prints.

Just before lunchtime I left the store, everything had happened so quickly this morning and my main concern was looking after Barbara so this was the first time the magnitude of what had happened hit me. I was on the way to pick my kids up and the thought hit me that if I'd been shot I might not have ever seen them again - I broke down.

My manager was in contact with me every day to see how I was but I just couldn't face the thought of going back to work, after speaking to the doctor I was signed off for a month. It wasn't just me that was effected though, the impact it's had on my family is huge. My wife suffers with anxiety and to be honest it's had a bigger impact on her than me. The thought of me coming back to work drove her to a breakdown but there comes a point when you've just been at home too long. My young son was in tears with worry I'd get shot.

Some days I still find it hard to come into work, especially if I am opening up the store in the morning. When I'm in store I feel so vulnerable being in the eyes of the public all the time. The police caught 3 suspects who all pleaded not guilty in court, so we're waiting to see if we need to give evidence in court.

**Enough is enough, this is not part of the job.**



**Safer Colleagues,  
Safer Communities**

One year on