



**NFRN**  
*The voice of the independent retailer*

Mr Alastair Ross MLA  
Chairperson  
Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Justice  
Room 242 Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

19<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Dear Mr Ross,

I read with considerable interest the Committee for Justice's latest press release on a recent stakeholder meeting discussing business crime and its effect on local businesses.

The National Federation of Retail Newsagents (NFRN) represents 15,000 independent retail members across the British Isles and increasingly crime is becoming an inescapable daily reality for many of them.

I have enclosed our latest briefing on retail crime which you may find useful. We would be pleased to assist you should you require any further information on the issues affecting our members or would like to discuss the points we raise further.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Mercer  
NFRN Northern Ireland District President



**NFRN**  
The voice of the independent retailer

# Briefing



## Retail Crime

Whether directly, or indirectly, independent retailers often fall victim to criminal activity. Either being targeted by criminals through anti-social behaviour and retail crime, including shop theft, or losing business due to consumers being taken in by illicit suppliers, retailers are forced to contend with many pressures to their businesses whilst maintaining their role of legitimate supplier of goods and providing a safe environment, and products, for their customers.

The National Federation of Retail Newsagents' (NFRN) members' businesses are open from early in the morning until late at night, and often as owner operators with few additional staff members on duty. As a result, they are sadly seen as an 'easy target' by criminals with problems ranging from shop theft, vandalism, anti-social behaviour, robbery and even murder.

At present, there is no comprehensive measure of crime committed against businesses in the UK. However, the British Retail Consortium's (BRC) 2014 Retail Crime Survey<sup>1</sup> has revealed that the direct cost of crime to the UK retail sector was £603 million in 2013-14, up 18 per cent on the previous year. The BRC also found that customer theft accounted for 81 per cent of all retail crime by volume in 2013-14.

Following a number of shocking incidents involving Federation members, including the death of Eastleigh newsagent Mr Choudhry Zishan, the NFRN conducted a survey of its members in conjunction with Policy Exchange. The results found that over half of all respondents had been a victim of two or more shoplifting incidents in the preceding three months.

Policy Exchange's report<sup>2</sup>, written by David Lammy MP, found that property crimes, such as shoplifting, have now become so common that they have almost become accepted by society. The report supports the NFRN's findings that small local businesses, operating on small margins, are least able to absorb the costs of theft and are obliged to pass these costs on to their customers through increased prices. However, this puts them at a competitive disadvantage, diminishing their ability to compete with larger national chains.

Despite many members reporting to the NFRN that they have been a victim of a crime, few of those when asked say that they have reported the incident to the police. Members explained that they often do not report shoplifting as they feel that their complaint will not be dealt with seriously. These concerns have most recently been confirmed in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for England and

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.brc.org.uk/brc\\_policy\\_content.asp?iCat=48&iSubCat=646&sPolicy=Retail+Crime](http://www.brc.org.uk/brc_policy_content.asp?iCat=48&iSubCat=646&sPolicy=Retail+Crime)

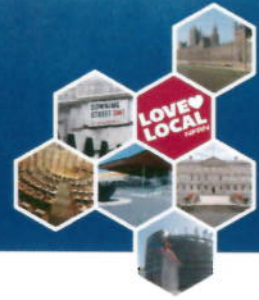
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/publications/category/item/taking-its-toll-the-regressive-impact-of-property-crime-in-britain>





**NFRN**  
The voice of the independent retailer

# Briefing



Wales' (HMIC) report<sup>3</sup>, published in September 2014, that found 37 out of 43 forces in England and Wales were using a system in which a call-handler assessed whether an officer should attend the scene of an incident. Consequently, the NFRN believes that retail crime is being considerably underreported.

Unfortunately, for our members property crime is only one of the numerous problems they have to deal with in their public facing role. Usdaw's latest Freedom from Fear survey<sup>4</sup> found that violence remains an unacceptable threat to the retail sector's employees, with on average 241 shop workers assaulted every day last year (2014).

An element of this threat can be linked to alcohol, with it fuelling crime and anti-social behavior. Usdaw found that 33 per cent of shopworkers questioned were threatened by customers and over half were verbally abused. This has a major impact on our members and their staff. Therefore, despite them selling alcohol responsibly, they still suffer the effects of alcohol fuelled violence due to supermarkets selling cheap own brand, high strength alcohol.

Our greatest concern is that if the sector feels that criminal actions such as shoplifting are not taken seriously by the police retailers may not have the confidence that they will not receive the same response from police when they are a victim of violence in the workplace.

## The NFRN's Position

The NFRN provides advice and support to all of its 15,000 independent retail members, through its website, on the ground field force who visit members and provide advice on how to avoid becoming a victim of crime and by encouraging members to report any crime they suffer to our helpline.

The NFRN wants trust to be restored in the police forces that serve our country. We want them to work with organisations like ourselves. We hope to harvest our data from the helpline to assist the police in identifying crime patterns and hotspots.

We are calling for the government to create a specific offence for violence against a retail worker in a public facing role, but believe much can be done to tackle this problem by introducing a minimum unit price.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publication/core-business/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2015/January/Violence,-threats-and-abuse-against-shopworkers-is>