

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

## Public Bill Committee

### CRIME AND POLICING BILL

*Fifth Sitting*

*Thursday 3 April 2025*

*(Morning)*

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CLAUSES 14 AND 15 agreed to.

CLAUSE 16 under consideration when the Committee adjourned till  
this day at Two o'clock.

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

**not later than**

**Monday 7 April 2025**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chairs:* SIR ROGER GALE, MARK PRITCHARD, EMMA LEWELL, † DR ROSENA ALLIN-KHAN

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|--|--|
| † Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex ( <i>Cardiff West</i> ) (Lab)                                     | † Platt, Jo ( <i>Leigh and Atherton</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)              |
| † Bishop, Matt ( <i>Forest of Dean</i> ) (Lab)   | † Rankin, Jack ( <i>Windsor</i> ) (Con)                            |
| † Burton-Sampson, David ( <i>Southend West and Leigh</i> ) (Lab)                           | † Robertson, Joe ( <i>Isle of Wight East</i> ) (Con)               |
| † Cross, Harriet ( <i>Gordon and Buchan</i> ) (Con)  | † Sabine, Anna ( <i>Frome and East Somerset</i> ) (LD)             |
| † Davies-Jones, Alex ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice</i> )         | † Sullivan, Dr Lauren ( <i>Gravesham</i> ) (Lab)                   |
| † Johnson, Dame Diana ( <i>Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention</i> )          | Taylor, David ( <i>Hemel Hempstead</i> ) (Lab)                     |
| Jones, Louise ( <i>North East Derbyshire</i> ) (Lab)                                       | † Taylor, Luke ( <i>Sutton and Cheam</i> ) (LD)                    |
| † Mather, Keir ( <i>Selby</i> ) (Lab)  | † Vickers, Matt ( <i>Stockton West</i> ) (Con)                     |
| † Phillips, Jess ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department</i> ) | Robert Cope, Claire Cozens, Adam Evans,<br><i>Committee Clerks</i> |
|  | † <b>attended the Committee</b>                                    |

# Public Bill Committee

Thursday 3 April 2025

(Morning)

[DR ROSENA ALLIN-KHAN *in the Chair*]

## Crime and Policing Bill

11.30 am

**The Chair:** Before we begin, I have a few preliminary reminders for the Committee. Please switch electronic devices to silent. No food or drink is permitted during sittings of the Committee, except for the water provided. Hansard colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to [hansardnotes@parliament.uk](mailto:hansardnotes@parliament.uk) or pass them to the Hansard colleague in the room.

### Clause 14

#### ASSAULT OF RETAIL WORKER

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**The Chair:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 29, in clause 15, page 25, line 11, at end insert—

“(4) If the offender has previous convictions for an offence under section 14 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of a retail worker) or for shoplifting under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968, the court must make a community order against the offender.”

*This amendment clause would require the courts to make a community order against repeat offenders of retail crime in order to restrict the offender’s liberty.*

Clause 15 stand part.

New clause 20—*Assault of wholesale worker*—

“(1) A person who assaults a wholesale worker at work commits an offence under this section.

(2) ‘Wholesale worker at work’ means a person who—

- (a) is working on or about wholesaler premises, and
- (b) is working there for or on behalf of the owner or occupier of those premises, or is the owner or occupier of those premises.

(3) In subsection (2), ‘wholesaler premises’ means—

- (a) premises used in any way for the purposes of the sale of anything by wholesale, and here ‘working’ includes doing unpaid work.

(4) A person who commits an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the maximum term for summary offences or to a fine (or both).

(5) In subsection (4), ‘the maximum term for summary offences’ means—

- (a) if the offence is committed before the time when section 281(5) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (alteration of penalties for certain summary offences: England and Wales) comes into force, 6 months;
- (b) if the offence is committed after that time, 51 weeks.

(6) In section 40(3) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (power to join in indictment count for common assault etc), after paragraph (ac) insert—

‘(ad) an offence under section 14 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of wholesale worker);.’”

New clause 26—*Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third assault of retail worker offence*—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In section 208 (community order: exercise of power to impose particular requirements), in subsections (3) and (6) after ‘and sections 208B’ (inserted by section (Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third shoplifting offence) of this Act) insert ‘and 208B’.

(3) After sections 208B insert—

‘208B Community order: requirements for third or subsequent assault of retail worker offence

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of an offence under section 14 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of retail worker) (“the index offence”),
- (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 committed when the offender was aged 18 or over, and
- (c) the court makes a community order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The community order must, subject to subsection (3), include at least one of the following requirements—

- (a) a curfew requirement;
- (b) an exclusion requirement;
- (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

- (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
  - (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
  - (ii) justify the court not including any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
- (b) neither of the following requirements could be included in the order—
  - (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
  - (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be included in a community order if it could not otherwise be so included.’

(4) After section 292A (inserted by section (Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third shoplifting offence) of this Act) insert—

‘292B Suspended sentence order: community requirements for third or subsequent assault of retail worker offence

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of retail worker) (“the index offence”),
- (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 committed when the offender was aged 18 or over, and
- (c) the court makes a suspended sentence order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The suspended sentence order must, subject to subsection (3), impose at least one of the following requirements—

- (a) a curfew requirement;
- (b) an exclusion requirement;
- (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—
- (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
    - (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
    - (ii) justify the court not imposing on the offender any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
  - (b) neither of the following requirements could be imposed on the offender—
    - (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
    - (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be imposed by a suspended sentence order if it could not otherwise be so imposed.”

*This new clause imposes a duty (subject to certain exceptions) to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement or an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement on certain persons convicted of an offence under section 15, where the offender is given a community sentence or suspended sentence order.*

**The Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson):** It is good to see you in the Chair, Dr Allin-Khan. Clause 14 provides for a new criminal offence of assaulting a retail worker. This will send a clear message to retailers and perpetrators alike that we take any form of violence in a retail setting extremely seriously, and it fulfils our manifesto commitment.

I know that all Members will have experiences and information from their constituencies on the unacceptable rise in assaults on retail workers. I visited a shopkeeper on Beverley Road in my constituency who had been assaulted by a customer who was buying some alcohol and disputed its price. The customer hit the shopkeeper around the head around 50 times in an unprovoked assault, which was recorded on CCTV, so I was able to see it. It was really shocking to see. Many shop workers go to work every day with the fear of that happening. I pay tribute to Navin Sharda, that shopkeeper who was so badly assaulted.

Police recorded crime figures show that shoplifting offences increased by 23% in the 12 months to September 2024, and the British Retail Consortium’s 2025 crime report showed that there were around 737,000 incidents of violence and abuse—about 2,000 a day—in 2023-24. Figures published by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers in March 2025 show that 77% of workers said that they had been verbally abused in the 12 months to December 2024, 53% had received threats of violence, and 10% were physically assaulted during the year. Those statistics demonstrate that there are unacceptably high levels of retail crime across the country, and more and more offenders are using violence and abuse against shop workers to commit those crimes.

As well as carrying out their role of selling goods, retail workers are in some cases asked by us to restrict the sale of dozens of age-restricted items. That is an act of public service. In carrying it out, they are putting themselves at risk, as a declined sale may, sadly, cause someone to become violent and abusive.

**Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con):** It is obviously the case that retail workers have to stop the sale of certain products at times, whether it is because the customer is under age or for other reasons. Of course,

delivery drivers have to do exactly the same thing if they get to a house and, for example, an under-18-year-old would be in receipt of alcohol or a knife, even if it is for legitimate purposes. Does the Minister therefore agree that delivery drivers face the same risks as retail workers?

**Dame Diana Johnson:** What we do know, from the statistics that I have just read out, is that there is a wide body of evidence to confirm what is happening to retail workers on retail premises. We know that, because that information and evidence has been collated for some time. I accept that there are questions and concerns about delivery drivers, but I do not think we are in the position to know the extent of assaults on delivery drivers. I am not disputing that they take place—they do—but we have been very clear, and it was our manifesto commitment, that we will deal with assaults on retail workers by legislating for that. The clause is about that.

Everyone has the right to feel safe at work. The new offence, which is for retail workers and premises, sends a strong message that violence and abuse towards retail workers will not be tolerated. In a later debate, perhaps, I will come on to some of the other protections that all workers have, and how they can be used. This new offence will carry a maximum prison sentence of six months and/or an unlimited fine.

Reflecting on the need to take a tough stance with meaningful criminal justice consequences, clause 15 provides that the new offence will come with a presumption for a court to make a criminal behaviour order. Such an order may prohibit the offender doing anything described in it, which might include a condition preventing specific acts that cause harassment, alarm or distress, or preventing an offender from visiting specific premises. Breach of a criminal behaviour order is in itself a criminal offence, attracting a maximum penalty of five years’ imprisonment.

Clauses 14 and 15, taken together, will significantly help better protect retail workers. On that basis, I am sure that they will be welcomed across the Committee. The hon. Member for Stockton West, who leads for the Opposition, has tabled amendment 29 and new clause 26 in this group. I plan to respond to those when winding up the debate.

**Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan.

The Bill rightly seeks to improve protections for our amazing retail workers and looks to tackle retail crime. I pay tribute to the amazing retail workers across the country for their work, and to the many people who have been involved in the campaign to provide greater protections for them.

Retail is the biggest private sector employer in our economy. It directly employs nearly 3 million people and sits at the heart of all our communities. Clause 14 amends section 40 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and creates a stand-alone offence of assaulting a retail worker in their place of work. It defines “retail premises” as a place

“used wholly or mainly for the purposes of the sale of anything by retail,”

including not only buildings, but stalls and vehicles. It also defines what it is to be a “retail worker at work”, which is

“working on or about retail premises, and”

[*Matt Vickers*]

being there

“for or on behalf of the owner or occupier of those premises”.

It confirms that a person who commits the offence will be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the maximum term for summary offences. I am glad that the offence also includes those doing unpaid work in a retail setting.

Clause 15 amends part 11 of the sentencing code to create a duty to make a criminal behaviour order for the offence of assaulting a retail worker. It confirms that that will apply where someone is convicted of the new offence under clause 14; where

“the prosecution makes an application to the court for a criminal behaviour order to be made against the offender”;

and where

“the offender is aged 18 or over at the time the prosecution makes the application”.

It also sets out that such an order will not apply where the court imposes a custodial sentence, or makes a youth rehabilitation order, a community order, or a suspended sentence for that specific offence or

“any other offence of which the offender is convicted by or before it”.

Until this point, police have had to rely on several criminal offences through which to prosecute violence and assault against retail workers, including assault, unlawful wounding or grievous bodily harm under the common law or the Offences against the Person Act 1861; harassment or putting people in fear of violence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; and affray, or threatening or abusive behaviour under the Public Order Act 1986. Things changed and progress was made by section 156 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, as a result of debates on this important subject during the Act’s passage through Parliament. That added section 68A to the Sentencing Act 2020, requiring the courts to treat an offence as aggravated if the victim of the offence had been

“providing a public service, performing a public duty or providing services...goods or facilities”

to the public.

In recent years, a variety of businesses and organisations have called for a stand-alone offence. In July 2020, USDAW launched a petition calling for a specific offence of abusing, threatening or assaulting a retail worker. The petition received 104,354 signatures, which triggered a Westminster Hall debate. As a member of the Petitions Committee, I had the privilege of leading the debate and speaking on behalf of the petitioners. At that time, we were gripped by the pandemic, which helped to focus minds on the incredibly important role that our retail workers were performing as a result of it. The debate was well attended, with Members from all parties speaking passionately in support of our retail workers.

Several retailers were in support of a stand-alone offence, including Morrisons, Sainsbury’s, Tesco and the Co-op. In May 2021, Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, called for a stand-alone offence to provide colleagues with the protections they needed. In June 2021, the Home Affairs Committee held its own inquiry on violence and abuse towards

retail workers, concluding that the patchwork of existing offences did not provide adequate protection. The Committee said:

“The Government should consult urgently on the scope of a new standalone offence.”

As hon. Members may know, having served as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the future of retail and as a former Woollies worker, I have been very involved in the campaign to protect our retail workers. It was a privilege to join the likes of the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris), Paul Gerrard from the Co-op, Helen Dickinson and the team at the British Retail Consortium, Edward Woodall of the Association of Convenience Stores, USDAW, numerous retailers and others who have campaigned over recent years to deliver more protection for our retail workers.

When I first arrived in the House, in my slightly rebellious phase, I tabled an amendment on this issue to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill—now the 2022 Act—which was supported by Members from both sides of the House. As I have mentioned, that helped us to make assault on a person providing a service to the public a statutory aggravating offence. More recently, in April 2024, alongside a suite of measures designed to tackle retail crime, the last Government agreed to create a stand-alone offence of assaulting a retail worker. The stand-alone offence aims to protect our retail workers by providing a deterrent to those who might commit retail crime, and it also has an important role to play in increasing transparency and accountability, which I will say more about later.

The changes to sanctions and recording are not the only answer to this problem; it is important that the police and retailers take action more broadly to tackle it. The last Government introduced a retail crime action plan in October 2023. My right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who was then the Policing Minister and is now the shadow Home Secretary, launched it at a meeting of senior police leaders and 13 of the UK’s biggest retailers.

The plan included a police commitment to prioritise urgently attending the scene of a shoplifting incident where it involved violence against a shop worker, where security guards had detained an offender, or where attendance was needed to secure evidence. Attendance was to be assessed on risk, with prolific or juvenile offenders being treated with elevated priority. The police reaffirmed their pledge to follow up on any evidence that could reasonably lead to a perpetrator being caught, and forces stepped up targeted hotspot patrols in badly affected areas.

The plan set out advice for retailers on how to provide the best possible evidence for police to pursue any case. They are required to send CCTV footage of the whole incident and an image of the shoplifter from the digital evidence management system as quickly as possible after the offence has been committed. Where CCTV or other digital images are secured, police are required to run them through the police national database, using facial recognition technology to further aid efforts to identify and prosecute offenders, particularly prolific or potentially dangerous individuals.

The plan also created a specialist police team to build a comprehensive intelligence picture of the organised crime gangs that drive a huge number of shoplifting incidents across the country, in an effort to target and dismantle them. This initiative was branded Pegasus and is a business and policing partnership that has improved the way in which retailers are able to share intelligence, with the police gaining a greater understanding of the approach being taken by these organised crime gangs and identifying more offenders.

The initiative was spearheaded by Katy Bourne, the business crime lead for the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. It is the first national partnership of its kind, and was backed financially by the Home Office, John Lewis, the Co-op, Marks & Spencer, Boots, Primark and several others, which pledged more than £840,000 to get it off the ground. Pegasus helped to identify high-harm offenders who were linked to organised crime groups, and has resulted in numerous arrests of individuals who are often responsible for tens of thousands of pounds in thefts.

11.45 am

Assistant Chief Constable Alex Goss, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for retail crime, suggested that the initiative has been a success and has made a real impact. He said that the NPCC

“worked with the Government to develop the retail crime action plan, which sets out clear guidelines for the response to retail crime, including following all reasonable lines of inquiry. Police forces have embedded the plan in their operational work and we have already seen positive results and increased retailer confidence. This renewed focus, working alongside Opal's highly effective intelligence work in tackling organised retail crime, is showing a marked improvement in our response, dealing robustly with offenders and supporting retailers of all sizes.”

In April 2024, the then Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), went further still, announcing alongside other measures the then Government's plan to create a stand-alone offence of assaulting a retail worker. It aimed to send a clear message that there would be tough consequences for this unacceptable behaviour. Perpetrators could have been sent to prison for up to six months, received an unlimited fine, and been banned from going back to the shop where they committed their crimes, with criminal behaviour orders barring them from visiting specific premises. Breaching an order would have been a criminal offence carrying a five-year maximum prison sentence. For the most serious cases of assault, such as causing grievous bodily harm with intent, offenders faced a life sentence.

The then Government also committed to stepping up action to clamp down on offenders who repeatedly target the country's high streets. Serial offenders would have been forced to wear tags to track their movement. That would have been a constant and physical reminder to offenders, and the Probation Service could have found out where they had been and when, with offenders risking being sent to prison if they refused to obey the rules. Under an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, if an offender was found guilty of assaulting staff three times or was sentenced for shoplifting on three separate occasions, they were to be made to wear a tag as part of any community order.

The then Government also ramped up the use of facial recognition technology to help catch perpetrators and prevent shoplifting and abuse in the first place, which was to be backed by a £55.5 million investment over four years. The police then could have rolled out this new, state-of-the-art technology further. The investment included £4 million for bespoke public mobile units that can be deployed to high streets across the country, with live facial recognition that can be used in crowded areas to identify people wanted by the police, including repeat shoplifters and those who would do our retail workers harm. The mobile units can take live footage of crowds in towns and on high streets and compare the images to those of specific people wanted by the police or banned from the location. Police in the area can then be alerted so that they can track down offenders.

**Harriet Cross:** Does my hon. Friend agree that that sort of approach is important in tackling repeat offenders with whom retail workers will be very familiar? They know who the offenders are in their area, because they see them every day. That sort of approach would help tackle those offenders and give reassurance to retail workers that they will not see these people back time and again.

**Matt Vickers:** The use of facial recognition in this setting is incredible. Anybody who has been out with the police force in their area and looked at it will know that the benefits are huge. It delivers great efficiency to the police, who can check thousands of people in minutes. The ability to take a face and work out who the person is and what they have done or have not done is game-changing in this and many other settings.

**Jack Rankin (Windsor) (Con):** I have lots of sympathy with my hon. Friend on that point, but will he comment on the tension with civil liberties?

**Matt Vickers:** We have talked about the failure rate of modern facial recognition technology, and the number of instances in which it gets it wrong is minute. Every study we do on modern kit tells us that it results in very little error. It is virtually foolproof. There have been all sorts of noises about previous incarnations of the technology, but the most modern technology that we are using with our police forces now comes with very little fault and can be game-changing for the police.

The commitment to invest in facial recognition was a four-year investment. We have now seen a change of Government, but I know the Minister understands the huge value that facial recognition can have to the police, so I wondered whether the incumbent Government will continue with the specific funding commitment in full. Yes, lots of work has gone in and this offence will not solve all problems or necessarily have an immediate impact, but it represents a huge and important step forward. I am glad it has been taken forward by the incumbent Government and hope it will have a real impact to improve the lives of those important key workers in high streets and stores across the country.

Our retail workers define what it means to be a key worker: essential to the everyday lives of everyone. They often work the longest hours, not necessarily for the best pay, but are relied on by the public to keep their lives and the country going. For those living alone and

[*Matt Vickers*]

isolated, they may be the only regular interaction they have. Our stores and town centres sit at the heart of our communities and give us a sense of place and identity. When they become dangerous and lawless, it is the saddest of signs and has real consequences for society.

According to the British Retail Consortium crime survey 2025, there are 2,000 incidents of assault on retail workers—not every month, not every week, but every single day. That figure has gone up by 50% in the last year, totalling 737,000 incidents in a year. More worryingly, 45,000 of those incidents were violent—equivalent to more than 124 incidents a day. There were over 25,000 incidents involving a weapon—that is 70 a day—and, devastatingly, that figure was up by 180% on the previous year. The survey went on to say,

“61% of retailers rate the police response to retail crime overall as poor or very poor, the same as last year, but over a third (39%) rated it as fair, good or excellent, including 3% as excellent for the first time in some years”.

In response to the report, British Retail Consortium chief exec, Helen Dickinson said,

“Behind these numbers lies a harsher truth for the people who work in our industry. Colleagues have been punched, stabbed, spat on, while having racist, misogynistic, and generally vile abuse hurled at them. These incidents can inflict serious mental and physical trauma that lasts a lifetime. The idea that any retail workers might be going to work fearing for their safety, never knowing the next time another incident may occur, should deeply concern all of us. Violence and abuse should never be part of the job.”

A colleague survey by the Association of Convenience Stores found that 87% of store colleagues had experienced verbal abuse, with over 1.2 million incidents, and 59% of retailers believe that antisocial behaviour, in or around their store, has increased over the past year. The association's crime report also found that only 36% of crime is reported by retailers. Retailers said that they do not always report crime, and the top three reasons were, first,

“No confidence in a follow up investigation”,  
secondly,

“The time it takes to file and process reports”  
and thirdly,

“Perceived lack of interest from police”.

Retail workers are ordinary people going to work to earn a living, and they should be able to do so without fear of crime. Very often, they are students getting their first job stacking shelves or the semi-retired keeping themselves active, topping up their incomes to get something nice for their grandkids. To demonstrate the impact and consequences of retail crime and the value of the measures being debated, I want to share the views of some of those amazing frontline retail workers. Joshua James, an independent retailer, said:

“The high levels of verbal abuse and antisocial behaviour we are experiencing in store is both upsetting for our team members and negatively impacting their morale. Our main priority will always be their safety and that is why we have had to resort to tactics including implementing safety and preventative technologies and adjusting procedures to help the team feel safer at work. The sad truth behind this is it's a selfish approach, as we know when these individuals stop targeting us, it's only because they have moved onto another store.”

Amit Puntambekar from Nisa Local in Fenstanton described how he feels about the support he does not receive from the police:

“When your staff are threatened with a hammer, when someone threatens to kill you who lives near your shop and the police don't take it seriously, what's the point?”

In recent years during this campaign, I have had people ask me, “Why should things be different if you assault a retail worker as opposed to any other member of the public?” Retail workers are not assaulted because they wear a Tesco uniform or an Aldi shirt. They usually get assaulted for upholding the rules, which are often set by Parliament, but if they do not uphold those rules, they can face serious sanctions and consequences—for example, for failing to verify age for the purchase of knives or alcohol. Parliament and the Government impose statutory duties on our retail workers, and it is only right that we back them with statutory protections.

The Association of Convenience Stores 2025 crime survey found the top three triggers for assaults on retail workers were: encountering shop thieves; enforcing an age-restricted sales policy; and refusal to serve an intoxicated customer—which, of course, is another responsibility imposed on them by Parliament.

**Joe Robertson** (Isle of Wight East) (Con): My hon. Friend paints a disturbing picture of this significant problem, in many cases using the statistics. I worry that perhaps there is not the awareness within the general public—although there certainly will be among some people—of this crime compared with other crimes. Of course, this law will help to address that, but does he agree that we all share responsibility to ensure that there is better public awareness of this issue so that we can all play our small part in better supporting retail workers?

**Matt Vickers:** Hugely so. The likes of the BRC have run many campaigns to try to get people to shop in a more friendly and responsible way. The reality is that these places are at the heart of the community. If things are going to pot in the high street and the local shop, that undermines all the societal norms that young people might see when they go to the shop—and they then start to live in a different kind of world. There are obviously huge consequences. My hon. Friend is right; it is down to everybody to see this issue for the problem that it is.

Retailers and people who work in the sector say that it does not feel like the police see this problem as a priority. It always seems to be the last on the list. We understand that the police have a huge number of competing priorities on their time and energy, but when it comes down to it, this is a really big deal to the people who get assaulted in their workplace and have to go back there the next day, knowing that they might have to face that self-same crime.

Assaulting a retail worker, alongside assaulting the many other workers who provide a service to the public, is already a statutory offence. New clause 20 makes the case for wholesale workers to be added to the protections in the Bill. Many of us will have heard the case for similar protections for retail delivery drivers who face assault. The Federation of Wholesale Distributors is leading that campaign, stressing the urgent need for the inclusion of all wholesale workers in the stand-alone offence of assaulting or abusing a retail worker.

The Federation of Wholesale Distributors is the member organisation for UK food and drink wholesalers, operating in the grocery and food service markets, supplying retail and caterers via collect, delivery and online. Its members

supply to up to 330,000 food service businesses and 72,000 retail grocery stores, supporting local high streets and businesses, large and small, across the UK.

The wholesale sector generates annual revenues of £36 billion, employs 60,000 people, and produces £3 billion of gross value added to the UK economy annually. Approximately £10 billion of that trade goes through cash and carry depots, where staff are increasingly vulnerable to criminal activities, particularly involving high-value goods, such as alcohol and tobacco. According to the FWD's most recent crime survey, 100% of wholesalers surveyed identified crime as one of their foremost concerns, primarily attributed to what they perceive as "inadequate police responsiveness". It argues:

"Despite substantial investments in crime prevention measures, wholesalers require stronger support from both the Government and law enforcement."

Although it welcomes the Government's commitment to tackling retail crime, it remains

"deeply concerned that the Bill does not extend protections to the majority of wholesale workers."

The Bill's current definition excludes 98% of wholesalers—those operating on a business-to-business basis—from the proposed protections. As a result, a significant number of wholesale workers remain unprotected.

Wholesale workers play a vital role in local economies and essential supply chains, ensuring the distribution of food and drink to businesses, hospitals, schools and care homes. It is argued that by leaving them out of the protections in the Bill, their safety, and the sector's resilience, are compromised. They suggest a more inclusive definition under the stand-alone offence would better safeguard vulnerable workers and strengthen the wholesale sector. I am very keen to understand whether the Minister has considered the proposal on wholesale workers, what her perspective and thoughts on the matter are, and whether she will consider adding it during the passage of the Bill.

12 noon

I turn to the assault on retail workers when delivering items, which USDAW has campaigned on. As the economy has shifted, the scope of retail has expanded; it is not merely contained within premises in the way that it used to be. Many of the most effective retail companies have a strategy that encompasses the high street and online sales, and consequently those who conduct home delivery are part of the retail landscape. A serious and broader question is whether those who deliver need greater protection. We may need to emphasise the need for prosecution when those individuals are assaulted; alternatively, we may need to introduce further laws. I am again keen to understand whether the Minister has considered the proposal on delivery drivers, what her perspective and thoughts on the matter are, and whether she would consider adding it during the passage of the Bill.

**Joe Robertson:** Of course, I agree with my hon. Friend's comments about delivery drivers. I do not wish to criticise the Minister this early in the day, but it seems to me that the excuse for not extending the provisions is that this was not in the Labour manifesto. I am not sure she needs to worry about that; it is not something that the public worry about. If it is the right thing to do, she should include them. Does my hon. Friend have anything further to say on that?

**Matt Vickers:** I very much agree. Delivery drivers go out to alien environments—they could be delivering at the end of some lane in the middle of the countryside somewhere with no one in sight—so they are at substantial risk. I am sure the Minister will tell me that the proposal was not in the previous Criminal Justice Bill, but it has come forward and USDAW has made a good case. We should definitely listen and consider it, and I hope the Minister will give us her thoughts about where we should go with that.

As well as suggesting widening the scope of the provisions to include retail home delivery drivers, USDAW has submitted written evidence suggesting that the Bill could be improved in other ways by widening its scope to include incidents of abuse and threats, and an aggravating factor for incidents following retail workers enforcing statutory requirements, such as age-related restrictions. That would mirror what USDAW considers to be the successful Scottish provisions. Will the Minister comment on those ideas—in particular, an aggravating factor for incidents that come as a result of the enforcing of statutory requirements, and the inclusion of abuse and threats?

During evidence, we heard some queries about whether the inclusion of the assault clause in the Bill is necessary. The former Lord Chancellor highlighted that there has been a departure from what he described as a

"rather interesting amendment tabled in the previous Session to the 2023-24 Criminal Justice Bill by, I think, the hon. Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris)".

He said:

"It sought to amend the law to increase protections for shop workers, but with an important expansion: the offence would be not just an assault, but a threatening or abuse offence as well, which would encompass some of the public order concerns that many of us have about shop premises, corner shops and sole proprietor retail outlets. Yet, we have gone back here to a straight assault clause, which in my mind does not seem to add anything to the criminal code at all."—[*Official Report, Crime and Policing Public Bill Committee, 27 March 2025; c. 18, Q28.*]

That lack of a significant change is noted in the economic note, which states:

"The impact of this new offence is limited as assault on retail workers is already an offence covered under wider assault charges and these cases would have been prosecuted, processed, and determined in the same way without the new offence. Increased costs are only expected through the additional consequence of CBOs for offenders and their possible breaches...There is no definitive evidence that the creation of this new offence will lead to an increase or decrease in the number of assaults on retail workers. The timing of any possible effects is also uncertain".

That is not to speak against the measure.

**Joe Robertson:** Does my hon. Friend agree that delivery drivers are particularly vulnerable, given that they often work on their own in an unfamiliar place, and go to addresses they have not been to before, so there are some very strong stand-alone arguments for including them within the protections of the Bill in a stronger, more effective way?

**Matt Vickers:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. People often order stuff to be delivered to their house; an Uber Eats driver might turn up at whatever time of the night. The people who arrive tend to turn up when people are not at work, so they could be there of an evening, when it is dark or at inconvenient times, when

[*Matt Vickers*]

the risk is probably higher. They could be in any setting, and it will be unfamiliar to them but familiar to whoever they happen to be visiting. We have to give some thought to this issue, and I am interested in what the Minister will have to say on it.

This is not to speak against the measure, but is the Minister confident that it is drafted in a manner that will reduce assaults against shop workers, as well as abuse and threats? Could it be broader, to encompass antisocial behaviours that have no place on our streets? I am delighted that the incumbent Government are continuing with the proposals of their predecessor in creating this stand-alone offence, but we wish to make some proposals for improving it.

First, amendment 29 would require the courts to make a community order against repeat offenders for retail crime in order to restrict the offenders' liberty. A huge amount of such crime is committed by repeat offenders. I would be grateful if the Minister could give us her perspective on the proposal.

We are grateful that the proposals from the last Government's Criminal Justice Bill are being brought forward in this Bill, but I was disappointed that the new legislation does not include the mandatory requirement for a ban, electronic tag or curfew to be imposed on those committing a third offence of either shoplifting or assaulting a retail worker. Many retailers believe that this would ensure that the response to third offences would be stepped up, and would provide retail workers with much-needed respite from repeat offenders. To this end, we tabled new clause 26. Again, I would be grateful for the Minister's view on it, and for her rationale for what some might consider a watering-down of the sanctions.

I note that clause 15 sets out that those under the age of 18 will not be subject to a criminal behaviour order. Will the Minister comment on the frequency of involvement in retail crime by under-18s? Why are criminal behaviour orders not necessary to deter them?

One of the points made about the stand-alone offence, over and above the sanction and the consequence, is that it is about increasing police response time, as well as accountability and transparency. By having a stand-alone offence, we will have data on where and how often these things occur, and we can then measure where the police are and are not taking the required action. On that basis, has the Minister given any thought to how to manage that data, how we might hold to account police forces with the greatest volume of such offences and how we can look at ensuring that all police forces have a consistent response?

**Anna Sabine** (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): I will make a slightly shorter speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear!"] I welcome the Government's measures to protect retail workers against assault. I have seen the evidence of this challenge at first hand in my constituency. In Frome, we have an amazing small independent shop and art gallery that has been repeatedly targeted by groups of young people who are spray painting graffiti on the windows and shouting abuse at retail workers and shoppers. This is part of a wider picture of antisocial behaviour that is happening on our high streets, and

that neighbourhood police are working so hard to tackle. As we said in previous discussions, we need to support neighbourhood police and resource them to do so.

Retail workers are on the frontline of the much wider antisocial behaviour we see in our towns and cities. As we know, high street businesses are critical not only to our economic success, but to the wellbeing of the places we live and work in. It is vital that they can recruit and retain staff who can come to work without fear of being threatened or assaulted. However, the Minister should consider that it is not only retail workers who are victims of assaults; bank branch workers in customer-facing roles should have the same level of protection.

At a recent constituency breakfast, I spoke with a representative from Barclays bank. He told me that there were more than 3,500 incidents of inappropriate customer behaviour against Barclays staff in 2024, with more than 90% involving verbal abuse, as well as many other incidents of smashed windows and graffiti. Bank branch staff across the UK would be grateful if the Minister could extend to them the protections being provided to retail workers.

**Jo Platt** (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I rise to speak briefly to clauses 14 and 15. I draw the Committee's attention to the fact that I am a Co-operative member and a Labour and Co-operative MP who has long campaigned for stronger protection for retail workers.

Retail crime is not just a statistic; it has real and lasting consequences for workers, businesses and our communities. In Leigh and Atherton I have seen at first hand the toll that it takes. This month I visited one of our anchor stores in Leigh town centre and spoke to a security guard who had been threatened with assault while simply doing his job protecting staff, stock and the business. He told me it is not just about one incident, but the daily reality of intimidation, threats and the fear that one day those threats will turn into something worse. And he is not alone.

With my office based on the high street, I see the challenges up close. Local businesses have told me they face verbal abuse, harassment and physical threats daily. Many have even stopped reporting incidents because they feel they are not being heard.

**Dr Lauren Sullivan** (Gravesend) (Lab): Building on what my hon. Friend was just saying about the town centre, I had an incident in a village convenience store in my area. The member of staff often works on their own and they were assaulted fairly recently when over £1,000 was taken. Those workers are cornerstones in our communities and drive people to hospital if necessary. Violence is seen too often in our communities, and we need to send a strong message to those who seek to cause harm and those who need protecting.

**Jo Platt:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Threats, abuse and violence should never be accepted as part of the job. Nationally, the scale of the problem is alarming. USDAW's latest survey found that 69% of retail workers had been verbally abused in the past year, 45% had been threatened and 17% had been assaulted. Some have been hit with trolleys and baskets, and female staff have reported appalling levels of harassment, which cannot go on. That is why clauses 14 and 15 are so

important. They will provide retail workers with the legal protections they deserve and ensure that those who abuse, threaten or assault face real consequences.

Crucially, the Bill also extends the protections to volunteers, many of whom play a vital role in the Leigh and Atherton charity sector. No one who gives their time to help others should have to fear for their safety. The campaign started on the shop floor and now it has reached the Floor of Parliament. As a Co-operative member, I welcome the provisions as the result of years of determined campaigning. With this Bill we take an essential step towards making our town centres safer and showing shop workers that they are respected, protected and valued. Tackling retail crime is a vital step in rebuilding pride and belonging in all our communities.

**Joe Robertson:** It is a pleasure to serve on the Committee under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. There is agreement in this room about the problem that the Bill seeks to address. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton West for his excellent but all too brief speech a few moments ago. If I may, I will start by citing Matthew Barber, the police and crime commissioner for Thames Valley police. Referring to the legislation that already exists, he rightly states:

“It is an offence to assault a retail worker. In the same way that it is an offence to assault any member of the public. Indeed current legislation already allows for someone’s role as a retail worker to be considered as an aggravating factor”.

There are four areas of law whereby a retail worker who has been assaulted might currently have protection. There is assault, unlawful wounding or grievous bodily harm under the common law or the Offences against the Person Act 1861—notice how old that law is; I do not think this room has changed much since then—harassment or putting people in fear of violence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; affray or threatening or abusive behaviour under the Public Order Act 1986; and robbery under the Theft Act 1968.

The point that retail workers are in a particularly vulnerable situation has been clearly articulated. That is why these laws, which are good at achieving the aims that they were originally passed for, can leave defects when it comes to ensuring the protection of retail workers.

12.15 pm

As we have heard, retail workers are required to help us, as lawmakers, to help the police, as law enforcement, and to help society enforce rules—largely rules around age restrictions on buying certain products. We put them in a vulnerable position, and they are willing to do it and do it very well, but we should be prepared to give them the protection and the police the tools to ensure that they can do their job without feeling under constant fear and under the threat of violence.

I go back to Matthew Barber, the Thames Valley police and crime commissioner, who poses the question:

“So will this provide any great protection for shop workers or tougher penalties for criminals? Seemingly not. If someone is convicted under this legislation it appears that the penalties will be the same as for common assault, so the outcome will be unchanged for both victim and offender”.

There is one simple way to deal with all that: increase the penalties for the criminal provisions that the Bill brings in. He is saying that the penalties for the new

criminal provisions in the Bill are not strong enough, so I urge the Government to increase the powers of the police and the sentencing powers under the provisions we are debating.

It is plainly obvious to everyone that something is wrong when shops have to employ security guards to stop people threatening their staff and volunteers and everyone else who is on the premises. That is a clear, visible demonstration of a societal issue. Lord Kirkham, speaking in the other place, put it very well when addressing the stretched nature of policing. He said:

“The police are overstretched, and too often they are unable to attend stores when they are called. Security guards are legally constrained: they are shackled in their inability to search or detain offenders before the police arrive, and thieves always seem well informed of their legal rights. Where prosecutions ensue, the punishments handed down seem to offer little deterrent.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 December 2024; Vol. 841, c. 1367.]

The second point I am making to the Government is that although the Bill will help, the police need all the support they can get to tackle these crimes and respond in a timely way. As we have seen elsewhere, good law is all very well, but it is useless if police do not have the resources, ability and support to enforce it. That is not controversial to say. If we have a big backlog in the courts—which is something offenders would know about—it will make them more likely to offend, knowing that their case may not come to court for some time and the Crown Prosecution Service may believe that prosecuting is no longer in the public interest. This is a whole-system issue that fits around the provision in the Bill.

I will conclude with some comments on retail crime, with Assistant Chief Constable Alex Doss leading efforts to keep it high on the policing agenda. His approach ensures that tackling retail crime remains a priority at both strategic and operational levels. The National Police Chiefs’ Council’s retail crime action plan, which was introduced a year ago, is up for review, and that presents a crucial opportunity to assess its impact, refine strategies and strengthen enforcement measures. While the Bill progresses through this place, I urge the Government to focus and remain aware of what is going on, in case they need to table further amendments to ensure that the Bill serves its purpose.

I would again like to address the idea that, just because something is not in the Labour manifesto, it cannot go in the Bill. Tell that to somebody who has been beaten up. Tell them that there was an argument for that crime to be met with greater criminal sanctions, but unfortunately the Government said, “We did not put it in the Labour manifesto in July 2024, so I am afraid that it didn’t become law.” That is plainly nonsense. This Government will do lots of things that were not in their manifesto, as they already have in cutting winter fuel payments, so I will throw that argument back at the Government with great pleasure, if they use that as an excuse not to table amendments to the Bill.

I will finish by saying something about my constituency of the Isle of Wight East.

**Jack Rankin** *indicated assent.*

**Joe Robertson:** I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor, from a sedentary position, has endorsed my constituency, which is not only a tourist destination but a place that has a much higher population

[Joe Robertson]

in summer, and retail workers are at the frontline in towns such as Ryde, Sandown, Shanklin and Ventnor. Although we are a small coastal community—we do not have big towns or a big population centre—retail crime is still a problem. It is a crime that I imagine affects all constituencies in the UK to a greater or lesser extent, and we certainly should not think of it as a city or large town-only issue. In fact, I ponder whether it can be, in some cases, more impactful in smaller communities, where people might be more likely to know each other and there is a sense of intimidation from such behaviour.

Retail crime can also lead to a more destructive environment or a sense of lawlessness if it goes unchecked, as well as all sorts of knock-on effects with antisocial behaviour. We definitely see some of that in my constituency, where certain prolific individuals feel that if the police have not responded the first few times, they are likely not to respond again. Certainly in my anecdotal experience, it is actually a few prolific offenders who are particularly responsible for a large number of these incidents. I urge the Government to take all views of the Committee into account, as we all want to achieve the same objectives.

**Luke Taylor** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): As I am interested in moving on, because I was sent by my residents to get on with business, I will not be eking this out because we did not do our homework or table our amendments in time.

I agree with the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan about delivery workers and retail workers, in the broader sense of the word. There is an opportunity here to reflect the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021, which covers retail workers when they are in people's homes. We heard evidence from Christopher Morris and Graham Wynn that there is a really good chance to do that here. I understand the Minister's explanation that there is a lot in the Bill, and that we need to ensure that it is neat and firm and delivers what it is supposed to deliver, but I again urge us to take this opportunity if we can.

I will now mention something that is very important to my residents, and that we have been looking at—tool theft, and how we can stretch the definition of retail workers and place of work. Again, I understand the Minister's reluctance. I am sure that it is not because she has any lack of desire to solve issues in that space; the question is just about the Bill's ability to do so. I understand that, but given the campaigning that a number of her colleagues have done in that space, I think there is a real opportunity here to do what we can to include the protection of hard-working tradespeople, and not only when they are in people's homes.

The example that I gave in the evidence session was of retail workers delivering a dishwasher and installing it in somebody's home. The question was whether, in somebody's home, they would be classed as a retail worker under the measures in the Bill. There is a real opportunity to include those people and, if possible, to extend the provision to tradespeople who are doing work in people's homes and then have tools and equipment necessary for their jobs subject to theft. They are also, as we are hearing, quite often subject to assault while defending their tools, and there is a real risk that they are criminalised for acting to protect their livelihood,

because obviously this is not just theft—I mean “just” in the broadest possible terms. It is not having one's phone stolen or, as heartbreaking as it is—I have suffered it myself—having one's bike stolen. This is someone's livelihood—their ability to support their family; so whatever we can do to extend the scope of the measure to protect those incredibly hard-working tradespeople and workers, we should do.

**Jo Platt:** The hon. Gentleman is making some good points, especially on tool theft. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Amanda Martin) is leading a campaign on tool theft; it would be great if he got involved.

**Luke Taylor:** Absolutely, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth North on that. I was at the reception that she held on the Terrace last week, and it was good to see the backing of industry for that campaign.

**The Chair:** Order. We need to stick within the scope of the Bill. If we could stay on topic, that would be brilliant.

**Luke Taylor:** I will finish my remarks by again encouraging the Minister to consider what we can do, and to take every opportunity available to include in the Bill the measures that I have mentioned.

**David Burton-Sampson** (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I refer Members to my declaration of interests.

I will keep this brief. The abuse of shop workers is simply unacceptable. People who are at work and offering an essential service to the public, and who are normally at the lower end of the salary scale, should not be subjected to such violence and intimidation when simply doing their job. USDAW's “Freedom From Fear” report shows that in the last 12 months 77% of shop workers were verbally abused, 53% were threatened and 10% were assaulted. I know about this issue from my early career, when I was a store manager for a food store. I was abused on a number of occasions and once had a blade pulled on me when I was attempting to stop a shoplifter. This has been going on for years and it needs to stop.

During the pandemic, as we all know, we started off clapping the doctors and nurses and we eventually spread that out to everybody who was keeping our essential services going, including our shop workers. It is shameful that despite the petition launched in July 2020 and signed by 104,354 people, which the hon. Member for Stockton West pointed to, and the Westminster Hall debate, the former Conservative Government refused to recognise abuse of a shop worker as a separate offence until they were dragged, kicking and screaming, by the industry and the Labour Opposition at the time. It is therefore interesting to hear the Conservatives waxing lyrical about this issue today, despite the fact that we had to pull them to this point. It is equally admirable to see the Government bringing this action forward.

Many shop workers are pleased that the Government's respect orders will support this new legislation and give them more protection. As a package, this is a positive move forward that will support my former colleagues and all retail workers. I fully support clauses 14 and 15.

12.30 pm

**Jack Rankin:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan, but not quite as much of a pleasure as listening to something akin to the Gettysburg address from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton West.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips):** That was short.

**Jack Rankin:** That was the joke. I am sure that my wife, who will be listening in, will be delighted that I will not be home for dinner tonight.

I welcome this legislation and congratulate the Government on bringing it forward. I understand that it is similar to the Bill brought forward by the previous Conservative Government, so I am glad that we can speak on a cross-party basis in support of making assaults on retail workers and shopkeepers a specific offence in the law. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight East talked about the current legislation, but it is nevertheless an important signal to make it a specific offence.

The National Police Chiefs' Council, supported by the previous Government, introduced a retail crime action plan, and a group of retailers made considerable resources available for Project Pegasus to address organised crime. Although I am hearing from my local retailers and local police that there are early signs that those initiatives are beginning to deliver results, it is clear that we need to go much further to achieve the objectives set out in the RCAP. Clauses 14 and 15 are an important step in that direction.

As the Minister said on Tuesday, it is important that we listen to experts in this area. Committee members have been inundated with written evidence, alongside the oral evidence we heard, from people directly affected. It is worth getting some of that on the record, because they are the experts and we should take a steer from them. Paul Gerrard, the campaigns and public affairs director of the Co-op Group, said:

"The Co-op sees every day the violence and threats our colleagues, like other retail workers, face as they serve the communities they live in.

We have long called for a standalone offence of attacking or abusing a shopworker and so we very much welcome the government's announcement today.

The Co-op will redouble our work with police forces but these measures will undoubtedly, when implemented, keep our shopworkers safer, protect the shops they work in and help the communities both serve."

That is a thumbs-up from the Co-op.

Simon Roberts, the chief executive of Sainsbury's, said something similar:

"There is nothing more important to us than keeping our colleagues and customers safe."

I am sure we all second that. He went on:

"Alongside our own security measures like colleague-worn cameras, in-store detectives and security barriers, today's announcement is a vital next step in enabling our police forces to clamp down further.

We fully endorse and support this legislative focus and action on driving down retail crime."

The Minister and the Government can be confident that these measures are hitting the spot and have the support of experts.

I want to draw out some statistics, particularly from the British Retail Consortium, for which I have a lot of respect. Helen Dickinson, the chief executive, said:

"After relentless campaigning for a specific offence for assaulting retail workers, the voices of the 3 million people working in retail are finally being heard."

However, she went on to say:

"The impact of retail violence has steadily worsened, with people facing racial abuse, sexual harassment, threatening behaviour, physical assault and threats with weapons, often linked to organised crime."

That is not something that any of us should tolerate. As well as giving police forces and the justice system more powers, it is important that we in this House speak with one voice to say that that is unacceptable.

The British Retail Consortium's most recent annual crime survey covers the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024. The BRC represents over 1.1 million employees, and the businesses they work for have a total annual turnover of over £194 billion. Therefore, that survey really is, in a meaningful sense, one that covers the entire industry.

The statistics are awful, to be honest. Violence and abuse have clearly spiralled, rising by over 50% in that year, which was part of an overall rise of 340% since 2020. Indeed, there are now over 2,000 incidents every single day, which is the highest figure ever recorded in that crime survey. Of those 2,000 incidents daily, 124 are violent and 70 include the use of a weapon.

That means that 70 shop workers a day in this country are being threatened with a weapon. We should just think about that; I cannot imagine how I would feel if a member of my family was threatened in that way. It means that 70 people—each one a constituent of one of us—are threatened every single day. Only 10% of incidents of violence and abuse resulted in police attendance, and only 2% resulted in conviction. Only 32% of incidents of violence and abuse were reported to police by retailers, which I am afraid to say speaks to people's lack of faith in the effectiveness of the current system.

I am sure it is true that Members on both sides of the House hear about these incidents happening on all our high streets through our surgeries, our other contact with constituents and our correspondence. My constituency is a cross-county constituency. Matt Barber, who we heard from last week and who has been quoted a couple of times in today's debate, is the police and crime commissioner for Thames Valley, an area that includes about two thirds of my constituency. It covers Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, which obviously is a relatively prosperous area.

Nevertheless, Matt Barber published a retail crime strategy and one of his top priorities was acknowledging the importance of the issue. He set out a series of actions to tackle shoplifting, retail crime and violence towards shop workers, including bolstering the operational capacity of Thames Valley police through the creation of a business crime team within the force to identify prolific offenders and improve investigation. That action, combined with an increase in the visible presence of police officers and police community support officers in retail spaces through Operation Purchase, is paying some dividends. We have seen an increase of over 90% in charges for shoplifting in the Berkshire part of my constituency.

[Jack Rankin]

Acknowledging how difficult and time-consuming it can be for retailers to report retail and shoplifting offences, Mr Barber also rolled out Disc, which is an information-sharing and reporting platform that allows retailers to report and access information about crimes such as shoplifting and antisocial behaviour. The Disc app has been rolled out quite effectively, particularly in Windsor town centre. It is available free of charge for businesses across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes, and I urge the businesses in the Berkshire part of my constituency to use it. Frankly, any local businesses in that geographical area should use it, because the more retailers that use it and feed in that vital intelligence, the better the policing response will be. That will be even more important once this critical legislation is passed, because it will give police the specific powers to deal with such offences.

The other third of my constituency is in Surrey, where there is a different police and crime commissioner; that is a bit of a ball-ache for a constituency MP, but we plough on. The police and crime commissioner for Surrey, Lisa Townsend, and the chief constable of Surrey police, Tim De Meyer, who we heard from at the evidence session last week, are currently asking members of the Surrey business community to have their say on the impact of retail crime. They have launched a retail crime survey, which is open for responses until 14 April. I urge businesses in Virginia Water and Englefield Green to contribute to that important initiative. I therefore welcome clauses 14 and 15.

I turn to the two amendments tabled by the Opposition. Amendment 29 requires courts to make a community order against repeat offenders of retail crime to restrict the offender's liberty, and new clause 26 imposes a duty to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement, or an electronic monitoring device on people convicted of assaulting retail workers where they have been given a community or suspended sentence. Given what we have heard Committee members, and in written and oral evidence, about the scale and impact of these crimes, ensuring that repeat offenders are given a real deterrent, as put forward in these provisions, seems like an infinitely logical improvement to the Bill. The provisions work hand in glove with the Government to give retail workers the real protections they need.

The BRC's crime survey calls specifically for dissuasive sentences, as there is an intrinsic link between the police response and the response of the courts. Sentencing is an issue when, I am afraid to say, those involved are repeatedly given light sentences.

I have a couple of questions for the Minister to respond to when she touches on these provisions. We have heard about the cost of crime prevention measures that retailers are incurring, some of which includes hiring private security guards to protect stores. Can the Minister confirm that those workers will also be covered by the legislation, including when they do the very difficult job of trying to apprehend people who are committing offences?

I second what the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset said; it is my understanding that the legislation excludes those who work in high street banks. Like other Committee members, I am frequently contacted

by constituents who are worried about the loss of banks on the high street. I am concerned that excluding that group of people will result in the loss of yet more face-to-face banking services on our high streets. Presumably, that group has been affected by similar rises in violence and in the number of assaults on staff. For example, Barclays bank reports that in 2024 there were over 3,500 instances of inappropriate customer behaviour against its staff, with more than 90% involving verbal abuse.

I commend the Opposition's amendments to the Committee, and encourage the Government to consider them so that we can tackle the important crime of assaulting shop workers.

**Dame Diana Johnson:** I thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stockton West, for his extensive speech in this short debate, setting out in great detail the background and history of how we have reached the position that we are in today. I feel that with some of the contributions we visited every retail outlet in the country. As the shadow Minister asked me a number of questions, I will deal with those at the outset. It is a shame that, despite what he said, the fact is that in 14 years the previous Government did not deliver on introducing this provision.

On what the hon. Member for Isle of Wight East said, the reason I pointed out that this was a manifesto commitment was to show that this Government, in our first Home Office Bill, are actually delivering on what we said we would do. I will go on to deal with some of the points that he and other hon. Members raised.

**Joe Robertson:** I wish to clarify for the Minister that I am criticising not the Government's commitment to bring forward the Bill but the suggestion that something cannot go into the Bill because it was not in the Labour manifesto. I am sure that she is about to address that point.

**Dame Diana Johnson:** The hon. Member is right that I will address that point in due course.

The shadow Minister referred to live facial recognition, but there are some provisions on that—new clauses 19 and 29—which I think will provide the best opportunity to discuss those points. He will know of my commitment to using live facial recognition where appropriate, with the necessary policing safeguards.

In response to the remarks about the offence set out in Scottish legislation on abuse, threats and aggravating factors, it is fair to say that, as the Minister, I am looking carefully at what other countries have legislated for. I keep that under review and will continue to do so throughout the course of the Bill's passage.

12.45 pm

The shadow Minister referred to the need for good-quality data. That is exactly why there will be a performance unit, housed in the Home Office, to obtain from the 43 police forces the information that allows the centre to have a grip on what is happening across the country, and to make legislation and policy based on that evidence and data. Sadly, the performance unit that we had in the Home Office was scrapped in 2010. That is why the Government are going to reinstate the important ability to know what is happening, what offences are being

committed and, more importantly, which police forces are dealing with them in the most effective way. I am sure the shadow Minister will welcome that.

There was a point raised about abuse. Common assault is an act by which a person intentionally or recklessly causes another to suffer or apprehend immediate unlawful violence. To be clear, verbal threats are included within that, but it will be a matter for the police to decide whether to take cases forward, along with the CPS.

**Matt Vickers:** That point has been mentioned several times. We heard what Rob Buckland thinks about extending the offence beyond assault, because the Bill refers specifically to assault. The hon. Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley had tabled an amendment to the previous Bill to provide a broader definition that would cover abuse as well as assault. Does the Minister feel that there is a question mark around that point, or does she feel that it has been misunderstood by the people commenting on it?

**Dame Diana Johnson:** I will come on to that point in more detail in a moment; I just want to deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Windsor about security staff. The offence will cover security staff who are employed directly by retailers and those employed by a third party on behalf of a retailer.

I want to move on to amendment 29 and new clause 26 tabled by the shadow Minister, which seek to make further provision on the sentencing of repeat offenders convicted of assaulting a retail worker. As I have tried to set out repeatedly, we take prolific offending extremely seriously, and it is helpful to have this opportunity to set out our approach.

As the Committee will be aware, sentencing in individual cases is a matter for our independent judiciary, which takes into account all the circumstances of the offence and the offender, and the statutory purposes of sentencing. The courts have a broad range of sentencing powers to deal effectively and appropriately with offenders, including discharges, fines, community sentences, suspended sentences and custodial sentences where appropriate. Previous convictions are already a statutory aggravating factor, with sentencing guidelines being clear that sentencers must consider the nature and relevance of previous convictions, and the time elapsed since the previous conviction, when determining the sentence.

The Ministry of Justice continues to ensure that sentencers are provided with all tagging options, to enable courts to impose electronic monitoring on anyone who receives a community-based sentence, if the courts deem it suitable to do so. Additionally, although electronic monitoring is available to the courts, it may be not the most appropriate requirement to be added to an offender's sentence. Many prolific offenders have no fixed abode and live complex, chaotic lifestyles. Imposing an electronic monitoring requirement would likely set up those individuals to fail, instead of helping to improve outcomes for perpetrators of crime and the public.

We cannot consider this issue in isolation. That is why the Government have delivered on a manifesto commitment—we are really quite keen on that—to bring sentencing up to date and ensure that the framework is consistent by launching an independent review of sentencing, chaired by the former Lord Chancellor, David Gauke. The review is tasked with a comprehensive

re-evaluation of our sentencing framework, including considering how we can make greater use of punishments outside prison, and how sentences can encourage offenders to turn their back on a life of crime. The review has been specifically asked to consider sentencing for prolific offenders, to ensure that they commit fewer crimes. We look forward to considering the recommendations of the review, following which we will set out our plans for the future of sentencing. It is vital that we give the review time to finalise its recommendations, including on prolific offenders, and that we consider them.

We had quite a lot of discussion about wholesale workers, delivery drivers and bank workers. However, despite the Opposition raising those issues, they did not table any amendments on them. New clause 20, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Neath and Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), relates to wholesale workers, and I will discuss it in a moment, but first, a number of Members raised the issue of delivery drivers. We know the really important, dedicated work that delivery drivers do, particularly when we recall what happened during the pandemic. These drivers often deliver items to the most vulnerable in our society, including the elderly, frail and disabled. However, my approach in the Bill is that we must be sure that the new offence that we are creating is proportionate and can be used without creating legal ambiguity.

Any ambiguity in identifying whether an individual is a retail worker will lead the courts to take the case forward as a common assault, as happens at the moment, meaning that the specific recording that the shadow Minister is keen on would, importantly, not be attributed to a retail worker. Delivery drivers cover a wide range of sectors and roles, which is likely to cause issues with defining what a delivery driver is, and therefore with the courts' ability to use the Bill as we want them to. However, we will use this parliamentary process to scrutinise the provisions in the Bill, as we are doing today, and will consider carefully any amendments that are tabled, as well as any evidence that is put forward in support of them.

On bank staff, it is worth the Committee knowing that officials in the Home Office are meeting with Barclays next week. I am happy to look into what comes out of that meeting. Again, I think we can all agree that bank staff do important work in our communities. As I have said, they are protected by other legislation and a statutory aggravating factor, as public workers. I will come on to discuss that in a moment.

New clause 20 would provide for an offence of assaulting a wholesale worker. Of course, violence and abuse towards any public-facing worker, including wholesale workers, is unacceptable. Everyone has a right to feel safe at work. I, like others present, know the dedicated work that many in the wholesale sector do to ensure that goods are in our supermarkets, so that we always have access to the things that we need in a timely way. However, I do not agree that the offence of assaulting a retail worker provided for by clause 14 should be extended to all wholesale workers.

As we heard in oral evidence—we also have clear evidence from the British Retail Consortium, USDAW and the Association of Convenience Stores' report—there has been a very worrying increase in violence and abuse towards retail workers. The police have already taken action to assist in tackling retail crime, and I welcome

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

the positive impact that has had on charge rates, with a 52% increase in charge volumes for shop theft in particular. In 2023, as has been referred to already, the National Police Chiefs' Council published the retail crime action plan. Through that plan, all police forces in England and Wales have committed to prioritise police attendance at a scene where violence has been used towards shop staff, where an offender has been detained by store security, and where evidence needs to be secured and it can only be police personnel. Clearly, that commitment, and other work undertaken by retail, is not preventing this crime, so we want to go further. This new offence of assaulting a retail worker will send the very strong message that violence and abuse towards retail workers will not be tolerated.

On wholesale workers, bank staff and others, assault is already a crime. Everyone is protected from assault; it is criminalised under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, in which common assault has a sentence of six months in prison. The Offences against the Person Act 1861 covers more serious violence, such as actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm. However, this new offence will help to ensure that assaults on retail workers are separately recorded so that we know the true scale of the problem, enabling the police to respond accordingly.

Going back to why I am concerned about wholesale workers and others, any ambiguity in identifying whether an individual is a retail worker will likely lead the courts to take the case forward as common assault, meaning the specific recording attributed to a retail worker will not occur, which again goes back to the issue of data and recording. I stress that wholesale workers who are working in premises that provide retail sales to the public will be covered by the new offence in clause 14.

In order to help those in the wholesale sector, banking and other areas, including delivery drivers, there is the statutory aggravating factor for assaults against any public-facing worker in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. That aggravating factor ensures that the courts treat the public-facing nature of a victim's role as an aggravating factor when considering the sentence for an offence, and it sends a very clear message that violence and abuse towards any worker will not be tolerated.

In order to have a proper picture of what is happening, it is critical that incidents of violence and abuse are always reported to the police, no matter in what sector. I encourage businesses to raise awareness of the legislative changes that have been introduced to their organisations to encourage that reporting. I think it is fair to say that the reason the retail sector has been so powerful in making the case to both the previous Government and this Government is because they have that information and data, as they are reporting it. That is why they have been able to get to the point where this clause is now in the Bill.

I think new clause 20 on wholesale workers is currently unnecessary, although I absolutely recognise the intent of my hon. Friend the Member for Neath and Swansea East in tabling it. Again, I echo how unacceptable violence and abuse is towards anybody. In the light of the explanation that I have given in response to the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Stockton West, I hope that he will agree not to press them to a vote.

**Matt Vickers:** I welcome the Minister's comments, which were thoughtful, considered and knowledgeable, as ever. I also welcome her commitment to further the use of facial recognition technology, as well as data, to maximise its benefits. I did not get a commitment on whether the funding would continue, as it was set aside in previous years.

**Dame Diana Johnson:** I am happy to confirm that the £3 million allocated for the financial year 2024-25 has been continued. We have used that to buy 10 vans to help us with the roll-out of live facial recognition, about which I understand the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Croydon South, is particularly concerned and anxious, so I can reassure him on that. We are now going through a spending review, and bids will be made for the technological tools that we want our police forces to have to catch criminals and keep us safe and secure.

1 pm

**Matt Vickers:** I am confident that the Minister understands the huge value that this equipment can have, and I am sure that she will put up a good fight in any Treasury discussions.

Clearly, this is a huge issue to communities across the country. Some of the experiences faced by retail workers are horrific, and MPs are all too familiar with them. There are 2,000 incidents a day involving somebody's mother, father, daughter, son or grandparent—ordinary people wanting to earn a living, and having to return to the scene of a crime day after day. It is easy to see the challenge the Minister faces in determining the breadth and limits of the Bill, with bids for the inclusion of high-street bank workers, delivery drivers and wholesale workers. I hope that, despite the competition, she will continue to look at how those workers can be better supported and protected.

Regarding tool theft, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Portsmouth North and the Gas Expert, Shoaib Awan, for leading a huge campaign. I do not quite understand how the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam was planning to slot the issue into the Bill, but he will be glad to know that some of us have done the homework, and there are some meaningful amendments to be considered later in the Committee's scrutiny. In fact, I declare an interest: my dad is a builder.

Amendment 29 and new clause 26 seek to strengthen the Bill to deter those who would do harm to our retailers and retail workers, and we intend to divide the Committee on them—although I understand that the new clause will be decided on later.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 14 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 15

ASSAULT OF RETAIL WORKER: DUTY TO MAKE  
CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR ORDER

*Amendment proposed:* 29, in clause 15, page 25, line 11, at end insert—

“(4) If the offender has previous convictions for an offence under section 14 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of a retail worker) or for shoplifting under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968, the court must make a community order against the offender.”—(*Matt Vickers.*)

*This amendment clause would require the courts to make a community order against repeat offenders of retail crime in order to restrict the offender's liberty.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 9.*

### Division No. 9]

#### AYES

Cross, Harriet  
Rankin, Jack

Robertson, Joe  
Vickers, Matt

#### NOES

Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
Bishop, Matt  
Burton-Sampson, David  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
Johnson, rh Dame Diana

Mather, Keir  
Phillips, Jess  
Platt, Jo  
Sullivan, Dr Lauren

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Clause 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

### Clause 16

THEFT FROM SHOP TRIABLE EITHER WAY IRRESPECTIVE  
OF VALUE OF GOODS

*Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.*

**The Chair:** With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 25—*Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third or subsequent shoplifting offence*—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In section 208 (community order: exercise of power to impose particular requirements), in subsections (3) and (6) after ‘subsection (10)’ insert ‘and sections 208A’.

(3) After that section insert—

*‘208A Community order: requirements for third or subsequent shoplifting offence*

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of adult shoplifting (“the index offence”),
- (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting or an equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence, and
- (c) the court makes a community order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The community order must, subject to subsection (3), include at least one of the following requirements—

- (a) a curfew requirement;
- (b) an exclusion requirement;
- (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

- (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
  - (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
  - (ii) justify the court not including any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
- (b) neither of the following requirements could be included in the order—
  - (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
  - (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) In subsection (1)(b), the reference to an occasion on which an offender was sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting does not include an occasion if—

- (a) each conviction for adult shoplifting for which the offender was dealt with on that occasion has been quashed, or
- (b) the offender was re-sentenced for adult shoplifting (and was not otherwise dealt with for adult shoplifting) on that occasion.

(5) In this section—

“adult shoplifting” means an offence under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968 committed by a person aged 18 or over in circumstances where—

- (a) the stolen goods were being offered for sale in a shop or any other premises, stall, vehicle or place from which a trade or business was carried on, and
- (b) at the time of the offence, the offender was, or was purporting to be, a customer or potential customer of the person offering the goods for sale;

“equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence” means—

- (a) in Scotland, theft committed by a person aged 18 or over in the circumstances mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) of the definition of “adult shoplifting”, or
- (b) in Northern Ireland, an offence under section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 committed by a person aged 18 or over in those circumstances.

(6) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be included in a community order if it could not otherwise be so included.

(7) Where—

- (a) in a case to which this section applies, a court makes a community order which includes a requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2),
- (b) a previous conviction of the offender is subsequently set aside on appeal, and
- (c) without the previous conviction this section would not have applied,

notice of appeal against the sentence may be given at any time within 28 days from the day on which the previous conviction was set aside (despite anything in section 18 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968).’

(4) After section 292 insert—

*‘292A Suspended sentence order: community requirements for third or subsequent shoplifting offence*

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of adult shoplifting (“the index offence”),
- (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting or an equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence, and
- (c) the court makes a suspended sentence order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The suspended sentence order must, subject to subsection (3), impose at least one of the following requirements—

- (a) a curfew requirement;
- (b) an exclusion requirement;
- (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

- (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
  - (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
  - (ii) justify the court not imposing on the offender any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
- (b) neither of the following requirements could be imposed on the offender—

- (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
- (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) Section 208A(4) (occasions to be disregarded) applies for the purposes of subsection (1)(b).

(5) In this section “adult shoplifting” and “equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence” have the meaning given by section 208A.

(6) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be imposed by a suspended sentence order if it could not otherwise be so imposed.

(7) Where—

- (a) in a case to which this section applies, a court makes a suspended sentence order which imposes a requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2),
- (b) a previous conviction of the offender is subsequently set aside on appeal, and
- (c) without the previous conviction this section would not have applied,

notice of appeal against the sentence may be given at any time within 28 days from the day on which the previous conviction was set aside (despite anything in section 18 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968).”

*This new clause imposes a duty (subject to certain exceptions) to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement or an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement on certain persons convicted of shoplifting, where the offender is given a community sentence or suspended sentence order.*

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Davies-Jones):** I thank the hon. Member for Stockton West for tabling new clause 25. As he will be aware, under the previous Government shop theft was allowed to increase at an alarming rate—it was up 23% in the year to September 2024—and more and more offenders are using violence and abuse against shop workers, as we have just debated.

This Government have committed to taking back our streets and restoring confidence in the safety of retail spaces, which is why we have brought in measures to address what is essentially immunity for so-called low-value shop theft, which the previous Conservative Government introduced. Shop theft of any amount is illegal, and by repealing section 22A of the Magistrates’ Courts Act 1980, we will help to ensure that everyone fully understands that.

Under section 22A, theft of goods worth £200 and under from shops is tried summarily in the magistrates court. The previous Government argued the legislation was introduced to increase efficiency, by enabling the police to prosecute instances of low-value theft. However, it has not worked. Both offenders and retailers perceive this effective downgrading of shop theft as a licence to steal and escape any punishment. Clause 16 therefore repeals section 22A.

Let me be unequivocal: shoplifting of any goods of any value is unacceptable, and it is crucial that the crime is understood to be serious. With this change, there will no longer be a threshold categorising shop theft of goods worth £200 and under as “low-value”. By removing the financial threshold, we are sending a clear message to perpetrators and would-be perpetrators that this crime will not be tolerated and will be met with appropriate punishment. The change also makes it clear to retailers that we take this crime seriously and they should feel encouraged to report it.

I turn to the shadow Minister’s new clause 25. The Government take repeat and prolific offending extremely seriously. I remind the Committee that sentencing in individual cases is a matter for our independent judiciary, who take into account all of the circumstances of the offence, the offender and the statutory purposes of sentencing. The courts have a broad range of sentencing powers to deal effectively and appropriately with offenders, including discharges, fines, community sentences, suspended sentences and custodial sentences where appropriate. In addition, as the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention has already said, previous convictions are already a statutory aggravating factor. Sentencing guidelines are clear that sentencers must consider the nature and relevance of previous convictions, and the time elapsed since the previous conviction, when determining the sentence.

The Ministry of Justice continues to ensure that sentencers are provided with all tagging options, to enable courts to impose electronic monitoring on anyone who receives a community-based sentence if they deem it suitable to do so. It is important to note that electronic monitoring is already available to the courts when passing a community or suspended sentence. However, it may not always be the most appropriate requirement for an offender’s sentence. We believe that the courts should retain a range of options at their disposal, to exercise their discretion to decide on the most appropriate sentence and requirements.

We cannot consider this issue in isolation. This is why we have launched an independent review of sentencing, chaired by former Lord Chancellor David Gauke, to ensure that we deliver on our manifesto commitment to bring sentencing up to date and ensure the framework is consistent. The review is tasked with a comprehensive re-evaluation of our sentencing framework, including considering how we can make greater use of punishment outside of prison and how sentences can encourage offenders to turn their backs on a life of crime. The review has been asked specifically to consider sentencing for prolific offenders, to ensure that we have fewer crimes committed by those offenders. It is vital that we give the review time to finalise its recommendations, including on prolific offenders, so that we are able to set out our plans for the future of sentencing in the round.

On this basis, I commend clause 16 to the Committee and ask the hon. Member for Stockton West not to move his new clause when it is reached later in our proceedings.

**Matt Vickers:** Shop thefts are on the increase, with recorded crime data showing 492,124 offences in the year—a 23% increase on the previous year. The British Retail Consortium 2025 retail crime report suggests that despite retailers spending a whopping £1.8 billion on prevention measures, such crime is at record levels, with losses from customer theft reaching £2.2 billion.

As things stand, shop theft is not a specific offence but constitutes theft under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968. It is therefore triable either way—that is, either in a magistrates court or the Crown court. Section 22A of the Magistrates’ Court Act 1980, inserted by the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, provides that where the value of goods is £200 or less, it is a summary-only offence. Clause 16 amends the 1980 Act, the 2014 Act and others to make theft from a shop triable either way, irrespective of the value of the goods.

**David Burton-Sampson:** It was actually former Prime Minister Theresa May, when Home Secretary in 2013, who said that the new low-level threshold would “free up resources” and that

“Having to pass low-level offences to the Crown Prosecution Service wastes police time.”—[*Official Report*, 10 June 2013; Vol. 564, c. 75.]

I am not sure how shop workers and owners who have been subject to low-level crime over the last 10 years would feel about that. How does the hon. Gentleman feel about it?

**Matt Vickers:** I will probably come on to this later, but quick justice is effective justice. We do not want prolific offenders waiting for court dates in the Crown court, when we could be dealing with them more quickly.

There are two big debates about how this should play, and I am sure we will hear them at length in the Committee. There is a real issue with whether something that goes to the magistrates court is dealt with quickly or otherwise, but a lot of this is about perception and the £200. According to the impact assessment produced by the Government for the Bill, 90% of the offences of shop theft charged are for goods with a value under £200, so it is a myth that people are not being charged for offences under £200. Maybe we need to be telling retailers and police that, but people are still being charged for offences relating to goods of low value, and rightly so. If someone steals, there should be consequences, but it should be dealt with more quickly than waiting for a date in the Crown court.

We heard during the evidence sessions concerns about the impact that making theft from a shop triable either way will have. Giving offenders a choice between the Crown court and magistrates court will mean that they can opt for delays, and it will potentially result in a lower conviction rate. There are huge concerns that that could add to the backlog and further frustrate the system, and that the individuals concerned could continue to commit such crimes while awaiting justice. Oliver Sells KC said:

“Speedy justice is much more effective than slow justice.”—[*Official Report, Crime and Policing Public Bill Committee*, 27 March 2025; c. 20, Q29.]

A number of our witnesses seemed to share the perspective that delays to justice could come at a great cost. Does the Minister agree that, should the change lead to lengthy delays in justice, it could be counterproductive? Will she commit to reviewing the impact of the measure after a given time?

The change seems to be based entirely on a misperception that action is not taken on shoplifting of goods under £200 in value. The Government’s own impact assessment for the Bill confirms that the vast majority of shoplifting offences charged—in fact, 90%—are for goods under £200 in value. Matthew Barber, police and crime commissioner for Thames Valley, has submitted written evidence to the Committee on specifically this issue, in which he states:

“The current legislation means that in most circumstances theft below £200 will be dealt with at Magistrates Court. The idea that below £200 the police do not investigate or prosecute, let alone the courts convict, has been described as an urban myth. It is actually a clear message that has been promoted by the Home Secretary herself, despite evidence to the contrary. Many cases of shoplifting below £200 will be investigated by the police, arrests made and charges brought. Magistrates can convict and sentence for these offences and they do. Within current guidance there are also provisions that allow a case to be referred to the CPS for prosecution in the Crown Courts. This helps to deal with prolific offenders in particular.

So what is the problem that the Government is seeking to solve? If it is one of perception, then surely that is a perception in large part of their own making. At the time the changes were brought in it was estimated that it would remove approximately 50,000 cases from the CPS and Crown Courts. I do not know if the Home Office or the Ministry of Justice have made an assessment of the expected increase in cases going to the higher courts, but with the passage of time, increased reporting, and better policing of this crime it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that this proposed legislation could put 100,000 additional cases into an already overheated Crown Court system. In the majority of those cases I would hazard that offenders are likely to receive sentences that could have been delivered more swiftly and cost effectively by magistrates.

I am not suggesting that the proposed law will directly hinder the police in their work or directly lead to worse outcomes, however I can see no likely benefit to come from additional cost and delays being introduced to the system.”

*Ordered*, That the debate be now adjourned.—(*Keir Mather.*)

1.15 pm

*Adjourned till this day at Two o’clock.*

