



Home Office

Kit Malthouse MP
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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 7 May to the Home Secretary on behalf of your constituents who are also Co-op employees and have concerns about the levels of violence and abuse they have experienced in Co-op stores. I am replying as the Minister of State for Crime and Policing.

I am very concerned about the continuing violence faced by shop workers whilst doing their jobs, and I recognise the damaging impact that these crimes often have on individuals, businesses, and the wider community. I am committed to keeping our retail environments safe by driving down violence and abuse towards shop staff.

The Government conducted a call for evidence on violence and abuse toward shop staff, to further understand the extent of the issue and how the Government can work with the retail sector to prevent these crimes. The formal response was published on 7 July 2020 and is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/violence-and-abuse-toward-shop-staff-call-for-evidence>.

The Home Office is continuing to work with retail stakeholders through the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) to ensure the response to these crimes is as robust as it can be. The Co-op is a member of this group and the expertise provided has been invaluable, and I would like to thank them for their continued engagement and commitment to it. From the NRCSG membership, four Task and Finish groups were established to deliver on the actions from the call for evidence. They have developed resources to assist retailers to report crimes when they occur, resources for shop staff who are victims of violence and abuse, and the #Shopkind communications campaign. The downloadable resources are free to use and are available here: <https://brc.org.uk/nrcsg-against-shop-worker-abuse-and-violence/>.

This work has been developed with the benefit of industry knowledge and experience and I am confident it will have a positive impact, in the short and longer-term, on making shop staff feel safer. I encourage all retailers to make use of these resources.

Your constituents refer to the upcoming Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, calling for an amendment to the Bill to provide greater protection for shopworkers. I understand and am sympathetic to the motivations behind this request, however, my position remains that existing legislation is sufficient to deal with assaults against shop workers in England

and Wales.

There are already a series of offences such as common assault, actual bodily harm (ABH) and grievous bodily harm (GBH) which cover assaults against anyone, including shop workers. Furthermore, the independent Sentencing Council's sentencing guidelines for assault offences require courts to treat the fact that an offence was committed against those working in the public sector or providing a service to the public as an aggravating factor, making the offence more serious. In April 2020, the Council also published interim guidance which clarifies that, when sentencing common assault offences involving threats or activity relating to the transmission of COVID-19 (such as spitting), the courts should treat this as an aggravating feature of the offence, meriting a more severe sentence.

You may also be interested to know that in December, the Home Affairs Select Committee launched an inquiry into violence and abuse towards retail workers. Retailers and retail associations presented their evidence to the committee on 14 April, which included the Co-operative Group. Recordings and transcripts of the Committee sessions can be viewed here: [Violence and abuse towards retail workers - Committees - UK Parliament](#). The Committee will publish its conclusions in due course.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff across all Co-operative stores and the wider retail sector who during the coronavirus pandemic worked tirelessly to keep the nation fed while implementing social distancing measures to keep the public safe.

I hope this information reassures you and your constituents that the Government is working with the retail sector, police and other partners to take action on this important issue.



Kit Malthouse MP