

Minutes of the AGM For the APPG On Retail Crime - 14th May 2018

In attendance:

- MP's (in alphabetical order): Mark Francois MP, Stephen Hammond MP, David Hanson MP, Steve McCabe MP, Damien Moore MP
- Public (in alphabetical order): Steve Archer, Julie Byers, Fiona Cuthbertson, Muntazir Dipoti, Mike Mitchelson, Ray Monelle, Stuart Reddish, Adrian Roper, Linda Sood, Peter Wagg

1. Welcome by the Chairman, Stephen Hammond MP

SH welcomed everyone who was there and said that he was very pleased to be able to be chair for such an exciting and important new APPG.

2. Apologies for absence

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- Nigel Adams MP
- Rushanara Ali MP
- David Amess MP
- Stuart Andrew MP
- Henry Bellingham MP
- Richard Benyon MP
- Mhairi Black MP
- Roberta Blackman-Woods MP
- Graham Brady MP
- Tom Brake MP
- Ronnie Campbell MP
- Alex Chalk MP
- Jim Cunningham MP
- Nic Dakin MP
- Jeffrey Donaldson MP
- David Drew MP
- Jim Fitzpatrick MP
- Kelvin Hopkins MP
- Pauline Latham MP
- Ian Liddell-Grainger MP
- Guy L'etang (Office of Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson)
- Neil O'Brien MP
- Laurence Robertson MP
- Virendra Sharma MP

3. Election of Officers

a. Chairman

Stephen Hammond asked if there was anyone else who wished to stand for Chair. Everyone agreed he should be unanimously elected.

b. Vice-Chairs

Co chairs elected were

- Jeffrey Donaldson MP (in absentia)
- David Drew MP (in absentia)
- Steve McCabe MP
- Damien Moore MP

4. Update on current campaigns

- a. retail theft
- b. violence against shop workers

Linda Sood kicked off the discussion with this introductory speech:

Thank you very much for agreeing that we can come along this evening. My name is Linda Sood and I am National President of the NFRN. We are one of Europe's largest employers' associations with over 15,000 members including: newsagents, convenience stores, confectioners, florists, petrol forecourts, news deliverers, off-licences, post offices, coffee shops, and card & stationery shops. We exist to help the independent retailer compete more effectively in today's highly competitive market by providing practical help and assistance, commercial support, deals and buying opportunities, training, expertise and services. We also look to represent our members' interests by engaging with Parliamentarians, and its within this context that we are here in front of you today.

Retail crime, whether shop theft or violence against retail staff does not have a high profile within Parliament. Our monitoring has shown that until recently, it was one of those subjects that was hardly ever mentioned - seen as a victimless crime. We, however, want to show you that this is not the case. The retail sector may be huge but it's made up of many small independent businesses - all vying for their place in the market.

It is estimated that the value of shop theft is 1.2% of UK sales turnover, and that it rose 11% from last year to this. Thinking about that for a moment, that 1.2% represents £4.3 billion, and such theft is often from one of the 400,000 shops with rateable values of less than £18,000. Businesses that are often working on a 5 - 10% margin.

It's soul destroying for hard working businesses to have their livelihood literally stolen away in some cases, especially as opposed to holding guilty parties to account, many police forces are now rolling out their use of The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 that allows anyone accused of shoplifting anything under £200 to plead guilty by post. Use of this legislation is often sited as a cost saving exercise, but the truth is, it does not save money. In fact it does the opposite. Everyone pays, whether it be customers who are hit by higher prices, or employees that lose their jobs when the businesses go under.

Of course, the reality is that it is not just businesses that are being hurt. Industry figures also show that 20,000 shop workers are physically attacked each year, whilst an even greater number are exposed to threats of violence and verbal abuse, especially as they often work alone, late at night and are dealing with valuable commodities like alcohol and cigarettes.

However, from talking to victims it is obvious that many are disheartened by the response times of police forces to such incidents and therefore they often choose to not even put in a report. Instead they look to move on - even if such violence has lead to injuries or death

in store. A few cases are publicised but not many, and to those at the coal face, they feel like they are on their own.

We are grateful that the Government is running a high profile campaign against the use of knives by young people, and this does certainly need mention. However, extrapolating the last available figures from the National Crime Survey shows that of the knife crimes that occurred, only a fifth were undertaken by young people. The Government must therefore work out how to tackle the wider problem and work alongside businesses to guard against such incidences. Otherwise the situation will only get worse, popping up more and more in your constituency mail bag as your constituents get increasingly desperate.

It's with this in mind we want you know that we are here, and that we are campaigning on these issues that will affect your constituents - our members. We would like to therefore work alongside you to further raise the profile of these issues, as well as provide you with statistics of the problem and information and best practice techniques so your constituents and your businesses have the help they need should such an incident arise.

With all this in mind, we are very grateful to Stephen Hammond MP for setting up this APPG, and getting cross party support from those that have pledged to be co-chairs, namely Steve McCabe, Jeffrey Donaldson, Damien Moore and David Drew. Hopefully, we can all work together to get these issues the profile they deserve and members of the the public and business community the help that they need.

Following on from this, the following points were made:

- Mark Francois MP - Retail crime is an important issue. He has often noticed that many of these crimes are undertaken by a small number of addicts who do not fear the justice system. Instead they view a fine as a just a career risk meaning they will re-offend. He asked the group what they felt could be done.
 - MM responded that the first objective is to increase awareness in government departments and to lobby for tougher sentences. At the moment, staff don't feel safe when they open their shops because of the blasé view taken by criminals and the lack of support from the police. With this in mind, they support severer sentences and would support the USDAW campaign
 - SR responded that often independent retailers don't even involve the police as they don't see the point. For example, on one occasion a repeat offender was caught, promptly told the police that he was having a heart attack meaning that he was escorted home by the police - along with the goods he had stolen.
 - MD responded that in his area, some are prolific offenders, but others are just chancers that know it is not a crime that is taken seriously.
 - PW said that as the Chair of The Retail Mutual many businesses he spoke to felt that whilst they used to find their properties burgled during the night, the criminals are now much more brazen. This means that they rob the shop during the day and that there has been a spike in violence against shop workers as they are now there when the crime has happened.
- David Hanson MP was clear that as the chair of USDAW he feels that violence against shop keeps should be an aggravated offence, in the same way that there is extra protection for hospital workers. With that in mind, he proposed that the Parliamentarians

within the APPG try and get a debate on this issue and the APPG as a whole forges links with USDAW. He also re-iterated that for either of these initiatives to be as successful as they should be, the APPG need to concentrate on making sure that retail crime has a much higher profile. At the moment, retail theft is not even on the radar of the police minister. He also questioned what statistics the Home Office actually keeps on retail crime, and that it would be worth finding out. He also suggested writing a letter for Parliamentarians to forward onto their PCC to establish how they use the £200 limit for “guilty by post” verdicts. After all, it’s their constituents that will be paying more as shops have to increase their prices. Finally, he proposed that the APPG look at the current Private Members Bill (proposed by Chris Bryant MP) that has set a precedent regarding extra safeguards for hospital workers and that the APPG could look at wording for such legislation to be proposed to cover retail workers not that the precedence has now been set.

- Steve McCabe MP reiterated all the points that DH had made. He made the further point that it would be very interesting to know how many PCC’s have retail crime as a specific issue within their Police and Crime plans. He also raised the possibility that as the APPG was obviously increasing interest in these issues (as witnessed by the large number of apologies), the APPG took advantage of this and looked to plant a number of Home Office questions that the Ministers would have to respond to during the September 2018 session
- Damien Moore MP commented that in his local area, many small businesses weren’t reporting the crime, and that he would encourage everyone at the meeting to make sure that their colleagues in this industry did report such crimes. He said that since he has actively encouraged reporting in his area, the police have had to take notice and now have a dedicated patrol which has made his local businesses feel protected.
- Stephen Hammond MP closed the debate by thanking everyone who was there and expressing his pleasure that the issue was being taken seriously. He asked Keystone Consulting to write up the notes of the meeting, including actions. He also specified that the date of the next meeting should be on an occasion that the APPG can be joined by the Police Minister for questioning

Actions to take further to the above:

- PCC letter campaign to be initiated
- Connection with USDAW to be established
- Request for Police Minister to attend next meeting to be made and engagement with the department to be continued
- Assessment of current legislation around safeguarding hospital workers to establish how this could be adapted in the future to protect retail workers

5. Any Other Business

None

6. Date of Next Meeting

As above in the actions to be taken

