

RETAILERS, POLICE AND INDUSTRY EXPERTS SHARE CRIME FIGHTING EXPERIENCES AT MAJOR CONFERENCE IN BELFAST



The devastating impact of shoplifting on staff and the value of intelligence sharing to tackle the ongoing problem were highlighted at a major retail crime conference.

The Retailers Against Crime (RAC) conference in Belfast brought together retailers, police and industry experts to share experiences and strengthen their united front in the fight against retail crime.

Speakers discussed the detrimental effect shoplifting has on retail staff, its economic impact on businesses and the burden it places on retailers while offering practical advice and insights aimed at tackling the problem.

Information sharing, partnership working and ensuring all retail crime incidents are reported were the key messages to delegates from a panel of experts which included police officers, fraud prevention advisers and managers working in retail security.

Stephanie Karté is CEO of retail crime partnership Retailers Against Crime which organises the annual conference and collaborates with retailers daily to tackle the scourge of shoplifting.

She said: “Our Belfast conference was a real success, bringing together retailers, police and partners to strengthen how we work collaboratively to tackle retail crime. By improving partnership working and encouraging the consistent reporting of incidents, we are building a clearer intelligence picture and helping to create safer retail environments for everyone. Together we are stronger.”

Ms Karté spoke about the need to “*put words into action*” and ensure every incident of retail crime is reported to police.

She said: “*Underreporting continues to hold us back. If we work together and ensure consistent and timely reporting of all incidents, we can make a meaningful difference. The conference showed a genuine determination to tackle retail crime, now we must turn that energy into action. Above all, the key message is simple: ensure consistent and timely reporting of all incidents.*”

RAC’s 2025 statistics, collated from figures reported by members across the UK, show RAC members experienced 13,369 incidents of retail crime across the year – up 12% on 2024.

Overall losses dropped by 12% to £1.53M while many more unknown suspects were identified – a total of 2684 which is an increase of 45% compared to the previous year.

The rise in identifying suspects is down to increased reporting by RAC members who utilise their database - powered by SentrySIS (Secure Intelligence System) - to report crime incidents.

The crime-fighting tool sees users share real-time information about thefts with fellow retailers, RAC and the police and is used by RAC intelligence analysts to circulate data about offenders and identify crime patterns.

Meanwhile, the number of incidents involving violence against or abuse towards shop workers was down by 15% with 1,411 such instances reported by RAC members.

Ms Karté added: “*Our partnership statistics reflect the incidents our members faced on the ground during 2025. And while we’re pleased to see a reduction in the number of violent incidents, any instance of violence against a staff member is too many and cannot be tolerated.*”

“*We’re clear that there must be consequences when this happens because behind every violent crime statistic, there is a real person who must deal with what has happened to them.*”

“*We need to work together collectively to keep staff safe and interacting and sharing intelligence with our partners is vital to tackling this problem.*”

The one-day conference, at the Titanic in Belfast, was opened by the PSNI and attended by over 130 delegates, speakers and exhibitors.

Superintendent Pete Cunningham, Police Service of Northern Ireland Business Crime Team lead, said such events are vital for policing as engagement with partners across business, retail and associated sectors is central to shaping and developing how the service responds to the issue of retail crime and business-based crime in a meaningful and impactful way.

He said: *“We know retail crime is not a low-level crime. With rising trends in shoplifting, growth in reports of violence and intimidation of staff and increasing evidence of organised retail crime groups emerging, it is clear these issues gravely affect local retail businesses, however, they cannot be addressed by policing or business sectors working in isolation - instead, a shared societal response is needed.*

“We are making strides in this area as a collective through the Business Crime Partnership providing improved intelligence flows and agile response to emerging issues, as a group we have developed a more consistent focus on repeat offenders and are achieving better and more timely evidence capture through innovative tech solutions and PSNI’s Video Officer Attendance Team.

“This year’s conference also heard how women in spaces disproportionately experience harassment, intimidation, and abuse. In PSNI we are working hard as part of our wider Violence Against Women and Girls strategy to ensure women and girls feel safe in all aspects of public life and this includes working with business to ensure retail environments are safe for staff and the public - particularly women and vulnerable groups.

“The impact retail crime has is significant for business owners and retailers, their staff and the wider local community at large. Events like the RAC NI Conference are a wonderful opportunity for all of us with a vested interest in tackling this issue to come together to explore how we can all work together to make our towns and cities even safer places to work and do business.”

Among the conference speakers was Chris Wynne, Fraud & Scam Prevention Manager at Danske Bank.

He said: *“The Belfast conference provided a valuable and thought-provoking insight into the challenges facing retail businesses across Northern Ireland and the UK. It highlighted the importance of collaboration and shared learning in tackling these obstacles.*

“Much like the fraud risks faced by businesses across industries, the retail sector benefits greatly from a united approach to addressing threats. By working together, businesses can not only overcome these challenges but also create safer environments for their operations and the colleagues who are vital to their success. The conference truly underscored the power of collective action and the positive impact it can have in safeguarding the retail community and fostering resilience in the face of adversity.”

The event also featured networking opportunities with professionals from across the sector and exhibitors showcasing the latest innovations and services aimed at fighting retail crime.

These included Facewatch - the UK’s leading live facial recognition security technology which helps retailers prevent crime through a cloud-based system which alerts staff the moment a known offender enters the premises.

Facewatch director Liam Ardern praised the way RAC works to connect all the different partners involved in targeting retail crime.

He said: *“RAC continues to play a vital role in bringing together retailers, law enforcement and technology partners around a shared objective, and it is clear that this collective approach is making a meaningful difference.*

“By working together, sharing learnings and adopting innovative solutions, the industry is far better positioned to protect staff, customers and communities.”

Marc McCabe, a Senior Loss Prevention Investigator, attended the conference.

He said: *“Attending the Retailers Against Crime conference in Belfast was highly valuable, bringing together retailers, police, and security partners to share intelligence and best practice. The event provided strong insight into current retail crime trends, alongside practical strategies to prevent loss and protect staff. The quality of speakers and collaborative discussions made it a worthwhile and engaging experience.”*

Another delegate – a retail expert who works for a major supermarket said: *“I wanted to share how valuable the Retailers Against Crime conference in Northern Ireland was. The discussions reinforced the importance of stronger cross-sector collaboration, clearer intelligence sharing, and consistent approaches to tackling organised retail crime.*

“There were also some really practical insights that will directly inform how prevention, enforcement, and partnership working can be aligned more effectively going forward to tackle the ongoing issue of retail crime.”

One of the conference sponsors was Pinnacle Response Ltd who have supported RAC for the past eight years.

CEO Colin Stanford said: *“With the recent increase in retail crime and abuse towards retail staff, the conference presentations were very relevant and informative including coverage of the use and effectiveness of body worn video cameras. We look forward to many more opportunities to challenge retail crime together.”*

Retailers Against Crime is a national retail crime partnership, established in 1997, which aims to detect and prevent crime by sharing information on local and travelling offenders with members and partners throughout the UK.

More information is available on the website - www.retailersagainstcrime.org