



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Simon Roberts – Chief Executive, Sainsburys
Ms Shirine Khoury-Haq – Chief Executive, CoOp
Mr Sebastian James – Chief Executive, Boots
Mr Richard Walker – Chief Executive, Iceland
Mr Peter Goldstein – Chief Executive, Superdrug

Sent via email

Monday 4 March 2024

Dear Chief Executive,

Clear, Hold, Build - Shoplifting Crackdown in Harold Hill

We are jointly writing to you, the Chief Executives of major retailers with a presence in Harold Hill, to seek your support for work to crackdown on persistent crime in the Farnham Road area.

We are grateful for the support that some of your businesses offered at a Downing Street summit with the Police Minister in the autumn to tackle shoplifting. Since that time, we have secured funding for a Home Office pilot in Harold Hill, led by Met Police officers, to try to stamp out retail and other organised crime. This work has the wholehearted support of the community, including a group of shopkeepers who are absolutely committed to improving the area for the decent majority.

As you may be aware, for some time now shopkeepers and retail staff have reported that their premises have been targeted by criminals. Not only has this led to substantial direct losses from theft but, more seriously, threats and violent assault against staff. This activity is dissuading customers from visiting the area, compounding the losses already sustained by traders and making people feel unsafe in their own community.

Local police officers in Havering have now launched the Clear, Hold, Build operation in partnership with Havering Council and local community stakeholders to root out persistent crime, including shoplifting. Focusing on the area around Harold Hill shopping centre, officers will 'clear' the area of criminal activity via targeted operations, then work with partners to 'hold' the area and then 'build' with community programmes to tackle problems that help drive criminal activity.

The operation has been running since December, and we have both visited the area to check on progress. Targeted action has already seen one of the most prolific shoplifters given a custodial sentence. However, discussions with traders and store managers revealed a desire for major retailers in the area to do more to support their staff and customers alike by taking a range of measures to help deter shoplifting and ensure that any thefts are promptly reported to the police.

We are aware as retailers you have invested resources and money in training staff in your stores and implemented changes which improve crime prevention while still allowing for a good customer experience. We ask that you constantly review these measures and reduce the opportunities for offenders to target you by thinking about how and where your valuable stock is displayed and secured. Are your security team



trained appropriately and empowered to approach and deal with offenders? Is your CCTV system appropriate? Has it got AI capability to identify potential harmful individuals entering your stores? Do you use security DNA sprays and mists to help identify offenders? Is there way a to modify entrances to make harder for offenders to evade capture?

We are aware that there is a huge underreporting of offences to the police and when you do report it is clear that you expect support with the prosecution. Following feedback from retailers in October 2023, the Metropolitan Police launched Op Retail across London. Op Retail is about simplifying and standardising the process of submitting evidence to the police. Without this the police cannot effectively investigate and progress cases. Each time a report is made the informant will receive a unique link to access and upload CCTV and a pro forma statement, they are also informed that without doing this then their report cannot be progressed and will be closed. Your Security Operation Centres and Stores need to understand that this is now the process and have the confidence and capability to return the evidence to the police when requested. Regrettably, some of your staff have informed officers that store managers have frequently claimed that they are “too busy” to do this which is disheartening for staff as well as frustrating for us. This also helps foster a sense of impunity in offenders which is likely to drive further reoffending.

This Clear, Hold, Build project is a major community initiative and provides a real opportunity for the area to rid itself of issues that have blighted it for too long. The initiative follows a Home Office developed programme which has delivered impressive results in other locations, a similar scheme in West Yorkshire saw a 57% reduction in burglary, 27% reduction in drug offences and a 38% reduction in antisocial behaviour. While we hope for a similar impact in Harold Hill, during the formal launch event a representative of the Home Office was clear that, in order to have the greatest impact, it would be crucial to have the full buy-in from all stakeholders in the area. As the major retailers on Farnham Road, we hope that the local community will be able to count on your support in this vital project.

To this end, we would be grateful if you would be able to instruct a senior representative within your organisations to review your security arrangements in Harold Hill stores and engage formally with the Clear, Hold, Build project. To help with this, we would like to invite you to send a senior representative to a meeting with Julia Lopez MP, Inspector Charlie Routley, operational lead for the project, and other local traders at [redacted] on Thursday 28 March, at 10am.

Of course, shoplifting is not confined to Harold Hill so, in the interests of ensuring the safety and security of your staff and customers in other branches, we would also welcome confirmation if your organisation has signed up to the Retail Crime Action Plan to help tackle shoplifting nationwide.

With best wishes,

Member of Parliament for
Hornchurch & Upminster

Superintendent Neighbourhood
Policing
East Area BCU – Havering Borough