

## Robberies at the Coop – correspondence with BRRA

**From:** Samaira Amfaliss Exec <crexec@coop.co.uk> via zyzg8gsofxgqmmkn.x0g4h86.2-peggea2.eu28.bnc.salesforce.com

**Sent:** Thursday, 28 Sept 2023, 12:26

**To:** barkingriversideresidents@gmail.com <barkingriversideresidents@gmail.com>

Dear Pete,

Thanks for your email to Shirine Khoury-Haq, Co-op Chief Executive, my name is Sam and your email has been passed onto the Executive Resolution Team to reply on her behalf.

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to share your concerns about our Co-op, Fielders Crescent, Barking Riverside estate, I can understand why you wish to raise this with us. Equally, we are genuinely concerned about the issues you have witnessed and we recognise our colleagues are facing challenging times with all the anti-social behaviour you have described and this really is heart-breaking. Please be assured that we take your concerns seriously as customer, colleague and community safety is of the utmost importance to us.

We are working closely with the police to provide evidence and to have a safe challenge policy in our stores which is in line with the vast majority of other retailers. We further have a guarding proposition at our disposal, this is under continual review to ensure resource is deployed in the right way. Whilst guarding has benefits, regrettably we see many examples of crime dispersal or incidents of heightened intensity as a result. As a community retailer, it is important to us that we break the cycle of crime rather than move it around within the community.

I can assure you that at the Co-op, the safety of our customers and colleagues in our stores is of utmost importance to us and we are deeply committed to creating a secure environment for all. Indeed, over the last 5 years, the Co-op has spent £200m on measures in store over the last five years to keep colleagues and stores safe which is four times the sector average per store. As part of this £200m investment, we have invested in a suite of provisions in our stores including Body Worn Cameras and Intelligent Close Circuit Television (iCCTV) can be activated at any point by the store team, both are remotely monitored around the clock by a Security Operations Centre (SOC) managed by Mitie, footage from either platform can be obtained directly by the police.

However, the retail sector is facing a significant rise in incidents in shops. We recently published data which showed that when compared to the first six months of 2022, we had seen 35% more incidents of crime in the first six months of 2023 with nearly 1,000 incidents every day in our 2,300 stores nationwide. We have also seen a 30% increase in violence towards our colleagues and a 20% rise in verbal abuse. This is not a problem that is unique to the Co-op and the ONS published data recently which showed a 24% increase in shoplifting across UK in year to March 2023 while the Association of Convenience Stores recorded in their Crime Report for 2023 that their Theft Index was at the highest level ever with 63% of offences committed by repeat offenders and 65% of its members seeing an increase in organised crime involvement.

Our priority is the safety of our colleagues, customers and the store and our experience tells us that there is considerable risk if we seek to intervene with offenders and the rise in violence against my colleagues is grim evidence of the consequences of doing so. Therefore, like the vast majority of retailers in the UK, we advise our colleagues and our security contractors not to put themselves at unnecessary risk by engaging with offenders because product can be replaced whereas their well-being and health cannot.

On discussing your concerns with our Regional Manager we are really appreciative of the support the Police have given regarding offenders and Police presence. Our store have implemented several preventative measures to retain stock which include decanting targeted products, limited fill on high value items and

reduction in shelf display, which has significantly help to reduce theft in our store. In addition, we are aware of the impact this is all having on our customers as well as our staff, last month we organised councillors to visit our store with an aim to support colleagues mental well-being. Our colleagues have been instructed to contact the police and log all incidents on their online portal. We do encourage our staff to keep themselves safe at all times and keep away from the shoplifters as we are focused on Colleague Safety like most retailers. Unfortunately, we have found that security guards are not the solution as they are unable to physically stop shop lifters, they are a deterrent to occasional shoplifters but not to repeat offenders or organised gangs/individuals. We have also agreed to review the possibility of installing ICCTV, which would support with sending CCTV directly to the MET police and work with them to identify the individuals.

Beyond these investments, if our colleagues feel unsupported and further support at any point is required, this can be provided by our Risk and Operations field teams who will hold safety and welfare meetings at the store, where they openly discuss crime incidents, the crime reporting process, conflict avoidance, and policies on how to deter and deal with incidents when they occur. We know we cannot solve this alone, we are campaigning for urgent change in Police response by asking all Forces to address retail crime and anti-social behaviour to reverse the existing environment in many communities where criminality occurs exempt from consequence.

Our Regional Manager has highlighted we are having some ongoing issues with shoplifting in the area unfortunately and this has picked up in recent weeks and we want do everything possible to support our store colleagues as we want them to feel safe at all times. Please be assured that we are taking your feedback seriously and exploring appropriate solutions to ensure the safety of local community and our stores. Once again, we very much welcome you bringing these matters to our attention. Your input is invaluable to helping us improve our operations and maintaining a secure environment.

Please be assured that we are working closely with the store to help bring positive changes over the next few months and we want to do everything possible to tackle this issue to help provide a safer environment for our colleagues and customers.

In the meantime, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us by replying to this email if there's anything else that we can do.

Kind Regards,

Sam  
Executive Resolution Team  
Co-op Service Centre  
[www.coop.co.uk](http://www.coop.co.uk)

Here is a link to our privacy notice : <https://www.coop.co.uk/privacy-notice>  
Letters: Executive Resolution Team, The Co-op, Freepost MR9473, Manchester, M4 8BA  
Parcels: Co-op Group, care of Swiss Post Solutions Ltd, Unit 550, Metroplex Business Park, Broadway, Salford Quays, Manchester M50 2UE

Case Reference: 12733161 - ref:\_00D20pEGG.\_5003WRayzA:ref

**From: Lukman Ahmed**

**Sent: Tuesday, September 26, 2023 1:37 PM**

To: Sarah McCreedy <[smccready@barkingriverside.london](mailto:smccready@barkingriverside.london)>, shirine.khoury-haq@coop.co.uk, John Jones <[jjones@tandem-property.com](mailto:jjones@tandem-property.com)>

cc: Sarah Phillips <[sphillips@barkingriverside.london](mailto:sphillips@barkingriverside.london)>, Venilia <[veniliabatista@yahoo.com](mailto:veniliabatista@yahoo.com)>, Emma Walker L&Q <[EWalker@lqgroup.org.uk](mailto:EWalker@lqgroup.org.uk)>, Gemma Houghton <[ghoughton@tandem-property.com](mailto:ghoughton@tandem-property.com)>

Dear Sarah, Shirine, John,

As the first item here is the robberies at the Coop, which are distressing residents at Barking Riverside, I've taken the liberty of addressing this email to Co-op chief executive officer Shirine Khoury-Haq, as well as John Jones, Senior partner at Tandem, to set out the issues.

And Sarah is head of placemaking and Communication at Barking Riverside Ltd.

Sarah and I briefly discussed the Coop robberies and other issues below, which was very helpful. I'm also cc-ing Sarah Phillips as I'm sure some of not all of these concerns fall into her remit.

Robberies at the Co-op, Fielders Crescent, Barking Riverside estate, Barking, Essex

Residents discussed the ongoing Coop robberies at our Barking Reach Residents Association monthly residents meeting on Wednesday 20th September.

I reported to our meeting the response Sarah gave to the police, who say that the robberies there are no less frequent than elsewhere: she made the point that while this may be so, it ignores the nature of the robberies, which are brazen, including sweeping shelves of their contents, and that the newly developing community on Barking Riverside, partly a building site, naturally feels a sense of isolation, which is aggravated by these crimes.

This is our only shop on phase two, so residents naturally feel vulnerable and they want to defend it from any abuse.

I believe that the Co-op has no model for the appointment of bouncers who will physically deal with robbers.

Residents felt that the Co-op must make an exception in this case in order to establish its reputation on the estate and discourage theft. We want security to be beefed up to deter the criminals.

A question raised was in relation to the temporary nature of the structure, which may contribute to a sense of vulnerability to crime: when is the Coop going to get a permanent structure?

I welcome a response.

Cheers

Pete Mason

Chair

Barking Reach Residents Association