

Waitrose boss reveals high-value item that brazen shoplifting gang were looking for

Brazen shoplifters looking for a brand of gin warned Waitrose staff they would return when it was back in stock.

The supermarket's boss, Dame Sharon White, says organised gangs are stealing high-value items to order – and described the trend as “profoundly shocking”.

Dame Sharon – chair of the [John Lewis Partnership](#) – has previously warned retail crime is reaching “epidemic levels”, with the business facing a £12m hit from shoplifting.



Image:
Dame Sharon White. File pic: JLP

Incidents [rose by 25%](#) in the year to June, according to police data for England and Wales released last week.

Speaking to the Policy Exchange think tank, Dame Sharon said: "It feels in the last year we have moved from 'I'm going to put an extra six eggs in my basket, I haven't paid for them but actually my family's struggling' to organised gangs shoplifting to order in a way that I have found profoundly shocking.

"I was in a store a few weeks ago and they spoke about a gang coming into the store and they were after a particular brand of gin, and we were sold out ... They said: 'Don't worry we will be back on Monday because we know you're going to be replenished over the weekend.'"

Her comments came after the government announced the launch of a new national intelligence unit to tackle organised shoplifting gangs.

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Thirteen major retailers – including Tesco, the Co-op, John Lewis and Marks and Spencer – are contributing £60,000 over two years, and the Home Office £30,000, to fund the new squad.

Police also made renewed commitments to attend the scene of more shoplifting incidents where there is violence or security staff have stopped a suspect.

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Dame Sharon said that while there has been “more conversation” and “good intent”, this hasn’t made any “material impact on the ground” yet.

She told the audience that a poor police response to shoplifting – as well as home burglaries and car break-ins – represented a “profound break in the social contract”.

Dame Sharon has backed the introduction of a law in England and Wales that would make it a specific crime to attack or abuse a shop worker – similar to legislation enforced in Scotland.

The former Ofcom chief, who joined the joined the employee-owned business at the start of 2020, recently announced she will [step down](#) when she completes her five-year term in February 2025.