



RED FLAG

WEEKLY

ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

EDITION
22

MONDAY
26 OCTOBER 2026

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THIS WEEK'S BRIEFING

New Powers Arrive as Frontline Abuse Becomes Routine

The evidence this week points in one direction. Abuse of public-facing staff is being treated as part of the job, whether at GP reception desks, council offices, on buses or in shops. Research published this week describes general practice staff being punched, stalked and threatened with murder. A security guard at a council headquarters was punched and kneed in the head after stepping into a domestic argument. Unions representing bus and shop workers say new government measures help passengers and customers but leave staff exposed.

Two legal changes are arriving within days. Respect Orders and new anti-social behaviour powers for social landlords come into force on this cover date, followed by harassment reforms under the Employment Rights Act 2025 on 30 October. Both increase the importance of how employers assess, record and respond to aggression towards their staff.

HEALTH

GP practice staff describe punches, stalking and threats to kill.

01

COUNCILS

A security guard is assaulted at a council headquarters while separating an arguing couple.

02

TRANSPORT

Bus fines arrive, but Unite says drivers remain unprotected.

03

RETAIL

Shoplifting dips, yet Usdaw presses for the shop worker assault law to be brought into force.

04

HOUSING

Respect Orders and landlord closure powers come into force today.

05

01
HEA

HEALTH / GENERAL PRACTICE / VIOLENCE AND STALKING

GP Practice Staff Face Assaults, Stalking and Threats to Kill

A University of Nottingham study found that almost half of the staff interviewed felt unsafe at work, while reception teams described abuse as a daily occurrence.

INTERVIEWS

23 general practice staff, 15 non-clinical and 8 clinicians

FELT UNSAFE

11 of 23 (48%)

SAW AN INCREASE

18 of 23 (78%) since the pandemic

WIDER SURVEY

93.7% of 1,152 staff encountered violence or abuse, 2020 to 2023

On 20 October 2026, GPonline reported new research describing extreme abuse of general practice staff by patients and the public. The qualitative study, by Shihning Chou, Edward Tyrrell, Emma Rowe and Julie Bryant of the University of Nottingham, was published early online in the British Journal of General Practice on 16 October 2026.

Funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research, the study followed a survey of 1,152 staff in which 93.7% had encountered violence and abuse between 2020 and 2023 and 62.3% perceived an increase since COVID-19. Researchers then interviewed 23 staff between August and December 2023. Eleven said they felt unsafe at work, six felt unsupported after an incident, and 18 had seen abuse increase since the pandemic.

Reception staff described verbal abuse as a daily event. Participants reported being punched, headbutted and dragged across reception, receiving death threats, and being stalked by patients who turned up at their homes or waited in car parks. One patient made between 20 and 240 calls a day to a practice. One participant said a patient had threatened to follow them home and "murder me". Another, punched in the back after turning away, asked "Why do these people get away with this?" because nobody did anything. Staff also described how abuse had become normalised, alongside moral injury, staff turnover and anxiety about dark winter evenings when staffing was reduced to a skeleton crew.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires GP partners, as employers, to protect staff from foreseeable violence so far as is reasonably practicable. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. For a practice, that should cover reception design, staffing at closing time, lone working at the end of the day and the route staff take to their cars.

The Health and Safety Executive defines work-related violence as any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. This includes threats made by telephone and behaviour that follows staff off the premises. Where harassment relates to a protected characteristic or is sexual, the Equality Act 2010 is also engaged.

VINCE'S VIEW

The detail that stands out is the staff member who was punched and felt that nobody did anything. That is how abuse becomes normalised. Reception teams are the front door of the NHS, yet many practices still treat abuse as a customer service problem rather than a safety risk.

Repeat callers, patients waiting in car parks and threats to follow staff home are warning signs. They should lead to a plan, not a shrug of the shoulders. Our Managing Challenging Phone Calls and Conflict Management courses are designed for teams facing these situations. When a patient's behaviour follows a member of staff out of the building, it becomes a Lone Worker Safety issue too.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Log every threat, including telephone abuse, and flag repeat callers and repeat attenders.
- Review closing-time staffing so nobody locks up or walks to a car park alone on winter evenings.
- Agree a clear post-incident process: report to police, support the staff member, and decide on warnings or removal.
- Train reception staff to set boundaries early and withdraw from the desk when behaviour escalates.

02
CNL

COUNCILS / SECURITY STAFF / COURTS

Security Guard Punched and Knead in the Head at Council Headquarters

A woman received a suspended sentence after attacking a guard who intervened to separate her and her partner inside council offices.

LOCATION South Holland District Council headquarters, Spalding	INCIDENT 22 June 2026, inside the council's Priory Road offices
CHARGES Assault by beating; assault by beating of an emergency worker	SENTENCE Six weeks' custody suspended for 12 months, £50 compensation each

On 20 October 2026, Lincs Online reported that Katie Langridge, 37, had been given a suspended sentence at Boston Magistrates' Court on Wednesday 14 October 2026.

The court heard that on 22 June 2026 Langridge was arguing with her partner at South Holland District Council's Spalding headquarters on Priory Road. A security guard stepped in to separate the couple. Prosecutor Fiona McClelland told the court that after he pushed the defendant away she called him a "woman beater", struck him to the head with a substantial punch, flailed her arms, hit him and kneed him in the head.

Langridge was escorted from the building and arrested. While police officer Sgt Callum Corder helped her into the cell of a police van, she trapped his fingers against the metal edge of the cell, causing pain and two small cuts. She pleaded guilty to assault by beating and assault by beating of an emergency worker. Her defence said she had been experiencing drug problems and mental health issues at the time. Magistrates imposed six weeks' custody suspended for 12 months and ordered £50 compensation each to the security guard and the officer.

A council reception or customer service centre is a workplace like any other. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the employer of the guard, whether the council itself or a security contractor, must protect them so far as is reasonably practicable. The council must also not expose others working on its premises to risk.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers sharing a workplace to co-operate and co-ordinate on risk. That means any contracted guard's role in intervening in disputes should be agreed, documented and covered by training, not left to improvisation. The security guard was not an emergency worker in law, so the higher charge applied only to the police officer. That is a distinction frontline staff often find difficult to accept.

VINCE'S VIEW

This guard stepped between two people who were arguing, something many people would instinctively try to do. He was punched and kneed in the head for it.

Public buildings attract people who may be in crisis, and a domestic argument in a council foyer can quickly turn against whoever intervenes. Employers and their security contractors need to agree in advance what a guard is expected to do, when to create distance and call the police, and how reception staff will be protected while that happens.

Our Conflict Management and Scenario-Based Frontline Training sessions give staff the opportunity to work through this type of third-party dispute. The first few seconds can make the difference between a situation being contained and someone getting hurt.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Agree written intervention rules with security contractors, covering when to step in and when to call police.
- Make sure reception staff can summon help discreetly and move behind a secure line.
- Record assaults on contracted staff in the council's own incident data, not only the contractor's.
- Provide debriefs and welfare support to guards and reception staff after any assault.



TRANSPORT / ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR / UNION RESPONSE

Bus Fines Arrive, but Unite Says Drivers Are Left Exposed

Government guidance allows councils to fine nuisance passengers up to £100, while the union representing bus and tram workers calls the plans inadequate.

ANNOUNCED 19 October 2026, Department for Transport and No. 10	BUS FINES Fixed penalties of up to £100 under local byelaws
ENFORCEMENT Authorised officers and police, not bus drivers	RAIL WORKFORCE 11,289 reported assaults on staff in the year to March 2026

On 19 October 2026, the government launched measures to tackle anti-social behaviour on buses and trains. New guidance supports local transport authorities in England in using byelaw powers, in force since 5 August 2026 under the Bus Services Act 2025, to tackle loud music, littering, vaping and threatening behaviour on buses, with fixed penalties of up to £100.

Each byelaw needs sign-off from the Secretary of State before it can be enforced. The government stated that bus drivers will not be responsible for enforcement. Authorised officers, including transport safety officers and police, will follow a three-step approach of engaging, explaining and then enforcing.

On rail, a national campaign asks passengers to "share the carriage, not the noise". Those who refuse to comply when asked by authorised staff can be removed at the next station or fined up to £1,000.

The same day, Unite, which represents tens of thousands of bus and tram workers, described the plans as "well meaning" but "inadequate". General secretary Sharon Graham said: "Bus and tram workers are facing an avalanche of escalating abuse at work." She called for bus workers to receive the same protection from violence as emergency workers.

The background figures are stark. Office of Rail and Road figures reported by the BBC on 24 September 2026 recorded 11,289 reported assaults on the mainline rail workforce in the year to March 2026, up 12%, including 2,487 physical assaults.

Keeping drivers out of enforcement is a sensible control, but it does not remove the risk. A passenger challenged by an officer over loud music may take their frustration out on the next lone driver they encounter.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require bus operators to assess that risk and keep their assessments current when the operating environment changes. That includes the introduction of local byelaw enforcement. Health and Safety Executive guidance on work-related violence expects employers to involve staff, record incidents and review controls such as cab screens, CCTV and communication with control rooms.

VINCE'S VIEW

Unite is right to highlight the gap. Fines for vaping and loud music may make journeys more pleasant, but they do not prevent a driver being spat at or punched when alone in the cab late at night.

The government's decision to keep drivers out of enforcement is welcome. Operators now need to ensure drivers have a clear procedure for the moment a passenger becomes aggressive, together with full backing to remain behind the screen and call for help.

Our Conflict Management and Lone Worker Safety courses address that moment directly.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Brief drivers that enforcement sits with authorised officers, and that they are not expected to challenge offenders.
- Review cab protection, CCTV coverage and how quickly control rooms respond to driver alerts.
- Track assaults and abuse by route and time of day, and share that data with local authorities and police.
- Revisit risk assessments when local byelaw enforcement starts, in case confrontations increase.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/share-the-journey-not-the-noise-government-launches-measures-to-prevent-noise-and-antisocial-behaviour-on-transport>
<https://sharepoint.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2026/october/unite-response-to-government-s-public-transport-anti-social-behaviour-plans>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c6z0z5dz884lo>
Department for Transport, published 19 October 2026. Share the journey, not the noise: government launches measures to prevent noise and antisocial behaviour on transport. Unite, published 19 October 2026. Unite response to government's public transport anti-social behaviour plans. BBC News (context only), published 24 September 2026. Katy Austin and Lucy Hooker. Reported assaults on Britain's rail services rise by more than a third.



RETAIL / SHOP THEFT / LEGISLATION NOT YET IN FORCE

Shoplifting Falls, but Usdaw Says Shop Workers Still Await Their Protection

The union is urging ministers to bring the protection of retail workers offence passed in April into force, as two-thirds of attacks on staff are triggered by theft.

SHOPLIFTING 519,516 offences in the year ending June 2026, down 2%	VERBAL ABUSE 78% of 8,980 retail staff surveyed in 2025
THREATS 54% threatened	ASSAULTS 11% assaulted

On 22 October 2026, Usdaw responded to police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales, which showed shoplifting falling 2% to 519,516 offences in the year ending June 2026, compared with 530,336 the previous year.

The union's survey of 8,980 retail staff found that in 2025, 78% were verbally abused, 54% were threatened and 11% were assaulted. Usdaw said two-thirds of attacks on retail staff are triggered by theft or armed robbery.

General secretary Joanne Thomas said retail crime "remains at epidemic levels" and that persistent offending "can cause issues beyond the theft itself, like anxiety, fear and physical harm to retail workers on the frontline."

She said the Crime and Policing Act 2026, passed in April, "delivers a much-needed protection of retail workers law, which still needs to be brought into force", and urged ministers to do so as soon as possible. Usdaw welcomed the start of Respect Orders, which the union described as a tool to tackle repeat offenders.

Employers need to distinguish between duties already in force and legislation that is still planned. The protection of retail workers offence in the Crime and Policing Act 2026 has been passed but is not yet in force, and no commencement date had been set in the regulations reviewed for this edition.

The current duties sit under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. These require retailers to assess the risk of violence linked to theft and put appropriate controls in place. A fall in recorded shoplifting does not remove that duty.

Usdaw's own data shows that the theft incident is where most violence starts. Policies on challenging shoplifters are therefore a safety control, not simply a loss-prevention rule.

VINCE'S VIEW

A 2% fall in shoplifting is welcome, but it will mean little to the shop worker threatened for asking someone to put a bottle back.

When two-thirds of attacks are linked to theft, the most important safety policy in a shop is a clear instruction that staff must not physically intervene. Staff need to know that management will support them if they allow goods to leave the shop rather than risk injury.

Our Conflict Management training helps retail teams recognise the early warning signs, choose their words carefully and step away before a confrontation becomes physical.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Make a clear, written rule that staff should not physically detain or chase shoplifters.
- Record every incident of abuse, threat and assault alongside theft data, so the safety picture is visible.
- Brief managers on the difference between the law in force today and the retail worker offence still awaiting commencement.
- Work with local police and councils to identify repeat offenders who may be suitable for Respect Orders.



HOUSING / ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR / NEW POWERS IN FORCE

Respect Orders and Landlord Closure Powers Come into Force Today

From 26 October 2026, councils, housing providers and police can seek Respect Orders, and registered social housing providers gain powers to close problem premises they own or manage.

COMMENCEMENT 26 October 2026, this cover date	STATUTORY INSTRUMENT SI 2026/960, regulation 4
RESPECT ORDERS Adults aged 18 and over; prohibitions and positive requirements	BREACH Criminal offence, up to 2 years' imprisonment on indictment

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 (Commencement No. 3 and Saving Provisions) Regulations 2026, made on 2 September 2026, bring a package of anti-social behaviour measures into force on 26 October 2026 in England and Wales.

These include section 1 (Respect Orders), section 2 (youth injunctions and housing injunctions), section 4 (fixed penalty notices) and section 5 (closure of premises by registered social housing providers). Section 6 (reviews of responses to complaints about anti-social behaviour) was originally listed but was removed from the 26 October commencement by amending regulations made on 21 October 2026 (SI 2026/1111), and will be brought into force at a later date.

Section 1 inserts a new Part A1 into the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The High Court or county court may make a Respect Order against a person aged 18 or over where it is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that they have engaged in or threaten to engage in anti-social behaviour, and it is just and convenient to make the order.

An order can prohibit conduct and can require the person to do something, with a named supervisor responsible for any requirement. Applications can be made by a local authority, a housing provider, the police, British Transport Police, Transport for London and others, including NHS security management functions in England and Wales.

A housing provider can apply only where the behaviour relates to or affects its housing management functions. An order can exclude a person from their home only where the behaviour involves violence or threatened violence, or there is a significant risk of harm to others, and the application is made by the council, the local police or the housing provider that owns or manages the home. Breach without reasonable excuse is a criminal offence, with up to two years' imprisonment on indictment, and a conditional discharge is not available. Failing to comply with a requirement to do something is an offence only if the person was given a written warning about it within the previous 12 months.

Section 5 enables registered social housing providers to close premises they own or manage that are associated with nuisance and disorder.

These powers are now in force. They are tools for dealing with perpetrators, not a replacement for employers' health and safety duties. Using them will put housing officers, anti-social behaviour teams and tenancy enforcement staff into more contested situations: gathering evidence, serving papers, visiting homes subject to orders and supervising requirements.

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, risk assessments should be reviewed now that this work is changing. Background figures from Inside Housing Management, published on 2 September 2026, recorded 4,403 assaults on council housing staff in 2025, up 16%.

VINCE'S VIEW

New powers change the conversation on the doorstep. An officer gathering evidence for a Respect Order or a closure is no longer simply seen as a support worker by the resident. They are the person trying to restrict someone's life or close their home. That is when the risk can rise.

Before these powers are used, I would expect to see an updated risk assessment, a clear rule on double-crewing for enforcement visits, police liaison for the highest-risk cases and lone worker procedures that have been tested rather than simply assumed to work.

Our Lone Worker Safety, Conflict Management and Professional Boundaries courses help housing teams prepare for that change. Where visits involve dogs at the property, Dangerous Dogs Awareness should also form part of the plan.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO NOW

- Review lone working and visit risk assessments for anti-social behaviour, tenancy enforcement and closure work.
- Set a clear rule for when enforcement visits must be double-crewed or accompanied by police.
- Flag addresses and individuals linked to orders on your warning marker system, and keep markers current.
- Brief staff on what the new orders do and do not allow, so they do not promise or threaten outcomes on the doorstep.

Four Days to the Harassment Reforms. The Steps Must Be Documented.

4

DAYS FROM THIS COVER DATE TO
30 OCTOBER 2026

The current statutory duty sits under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which inserted section 40A into the Equality Act 2010 on 26 October 2024. Employers must currently take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their employees. This is a sexual harassment prevention duty, not a general work-related violence duty.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional and Saving Provisions) Regulations 2026 (SI 2026/1065) bring the following into force on 30 October 2026:

- Section 20 of the Employment Rights Act 2025, which raises the sexual harassment duty in the Equality Act 2010 from reasonable steps to all reasonable steps.
- Section 21 of the Employment Rights Act 2025, which introduces employer liability for harassment of employees by third parties, such as customers, clients, service users, contractors and members of the public, where the harassment happens in the course of employment and the employer has not taken all reasonable steps to prevent it.
- Section 22 of the Employment Rights Act 2025, which inserts section 40B into the Equality Act 2010. It gives a power to specify by regulations the steps that count as reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. Bringing the power into force does not itself set any steps; that needs separate regulations.

These reforms are not in force on this cover date of 26 October 2026. Live duties remain under the Equality Act 2010 section 40A, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2026/1065/made>

<https://www.acas.org.uk/employment-rights-act-2025/harassment-law-changes>

Acas guidance says third parties can include customers, clients, service users such as school students or healthcare patients, contractors and members of the public, whether interactions happen face to face or online.

This week's stories show why the timing matters. Patients abusing reception staff, passengers abusing bus drivers and customers abusing shop workers are all third parties. From 30 October, where that harassment relates to a protected characteristic, employers will need to show that they took all reasonable steps to prevent it.

Risk assessments, incident logs, published behaviour policies, staff training and clear withdrawal rules are all part of the evidence.

[legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) · [Acas](https://www.acas.org.uk)

The Employment Rights Act 2025 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional and Saving Provisions) Regulations 2026, made 1 October 2026. Acas, Third party harassment: harassment law changes (guidance page, undated).

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WEEKLY

ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

Training Built Around What Your Staff Actually Face

Safety Solutions Training Ltd delivers practical, role-specific training for housing associations, councils, charities, social care providers, the NHS and the third sector, delivered by experienced associate trainers.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

LONE WORKER SAFETY

DANGEROUS DOGS AWARENESS

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

SCENARIO-BASED FRONTLINE
TRAINING

MANAGING CHALLENGING PHONE
CALLS

DISCUSS TRAINING

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