

the role

The Head of Retail role, however it plays out in practice, is central to the success – or otherwise – of almost every charity retail operation. Its breadth and scope will vary between charities, particularly those of different sizes, but this resource highlights some of the key factors that may form part of your role.

1.1 How retail sits within your charity

One of the first priorities for a new Head of Retail is to develop a clear understanding of the role retail currently plays within the charity. We will explore later how retail supports the mission of its parent charity, but as a starting point it is valuable for the Head of Retail to spend time with senior colleagues, to understand how retail is perceived across the organisation.

This may include understanding prevailing attitudes towards retail and identifying which aspects are considered most important within your charity, such as income generation, social value or cause-related marketing. Gaining this insight, and aligning your approach with the organisation's expectations and priorities, will be key to delivering the retail objectives the charity aims to achieve.

1.2 Understanding the breadth of the role

The Head of Retail role can span a wide range of disciplines and often requires you to balance strategic and operational responsibilities, particularly in smaller chains.

In addition to developing strategic and/or operational plans, the role may also include some or all of the areas listed below. Here we provide an overview, with more detail on many of the areas later in the resource.

Managing teams

From shop floor and warehouse staff to ecommerce and leadership teams. People management is often cited by our members as the most significant part of the role. This is explored in more detail later in this resource.



Stock acquisition and management

Including collaborating with fundraising colleagues to approach corporate donors, encouraging individual donations, managing and maximising Gift Aid, curating offers and layouts across the chain, establishing pricing structures, and overseeing logistics operations.

Marketing and engagement

Internal and external communication is a key part of the Head of Retail role.

Retail can sometimes be viewed as a separate or distinct part of the organisation, despite often being the charity's most visible presence within local communities. For this reason, it is vital to maintain strong internal relationships and open, effective communication across the organisation.

As noted at the beginning of this section, retail can play multiple roles within a charity. Ensuring that these roles are understood, recognised and valued throughout the organisation is therefore essential.

"I don't think I really understood the span of control for a Head of Retail. The job description focuses heavily on the commercial development of the business, however in my role I go from looking at the varying UK waste disposal options/legislation to shop acquisitions, HR to Procurement and everything in between.

I don't think there are many elements within the Retail business that the Head of Retail is not involved in at some level so the level of collaborative working is very high."

LOCAL HEALTH CHARITY, 1-3 SHOPS

Keeping teams and supporters engaged, sharing stories, creating content, and shaping the look and feel of stores all fall within this remit too. Depending on the organisation, you may lead marketing within your team or work alongside a dedicated Communications team.

Our joint venture with The Charity Retail Consultancy - Charity Retail Learning - [has a range of courses around marketing and engagement](#), including an [online charity retail marketing course](#).

Property management

Cited as one of the biggest challenges for new Heads of Retail, particularly if they have little previous experience in this area. Responsibilities may include engaging surveyors and lawyers, negotiating leases, drawing up shop-fitting specifications, procuring and managing contractors, overseeing health and safety programmes, and managing waste disposal contracts. In larger charities, in-house teams may provide support with some of these tasks.

As this is an area that can be very new to Heads of Retail, support can be gained through other resources.

The CRA has some great insights and information on Property that you can find [here](#). It includes information on policies, business rates, energy performance certificates and more.

The [Property Special Interest Group](#) is free for members to join and previous meeting notes are also available via the link.

Charity Retail Learning property-related courses include:

[Taking a charity shop lease: what to look out for in advance and once you have your lease - Charity Retail Learning](#)

[Improving Accessibility for Disabled People in Charity Shops - Charity Retail Learning](#)

There are also several corporate members of the CRA who specialise in this area and may be able to offer support. [You can browse their services here](#).

Managing budgets

Setting and overseeing budgets, often across multiple sites while supporting others to do the same, is a core responsibility of the Head of Retail. Effective collaboration and strong negotiation skills are essential throughout the budgeting process.

Once budgets are agreed, the Head of Retail must inspire, lead and support the team to deliver the income required to meet those targets. Close and consistent monitoring, combined with swift action when income falls behind expectations, is critical.

Reforecasting may also form part of the budgeting process, depending on the organisation. Some organisations reforecast quarterly, while others only do so when there is a significant variance between targets and actual performance. Effective reforecasting helps manage organisational expectations, provides early and ongoing visibility of financial performance, and enables spending plans and service delivery to be adjusted where necessary.

Board and senior leadership relationships / Governance

Heads of Retail often contribute to (or sit on) senior executive teams, as well as Trading Boards, and/or Trustees. Understanding governance structures, reporting lines, and the level of strategic or operational detail required for each audience is essential. You may also be responsible for creating and reviewing retail policies and procedures.

Trading Boards are used by some charities to manage and govern their trading activities. This can be either as part of the overall charity, or via a separate Trading Subsidiary, which is a legal entity. These formal structures are usually established by senior leadership teams and trustees, and will be influenced by several factors, such as the type and level of trading activity the charity undertakes, preferred Gift Aid processes, risk, profits levels and so on.

You can find out more about Trading Subsidiaries here:

[Charities and trading - GOV.UK](#) (England & Wales)

[OSCR | Charities and trading: guidance](#) (Scotland)

[Setting up a charitable trading - NICVA](#) (Northern Ireland)

The CRA has guidance on the pros and cons of using a Trading Subsidiary here:

[Pros and cons of using a trading subsidiary · Charity Retail Association](#)