



Child arrests in England and Wales 2015

Research briefing

Picture Alamy

the Howard League for Penal Reform

Key points

- In 2010 the Howard League for Penal Reform launched the Programme to Reduce Child Arrests
- In 2015 there were 101,926 child arrests in England and Wales
- The number of child arrests has reduced by 59 per cent between 2010 and 2015
- The number of children in prison reduced by 58 per cent between 2010 and 2015
- There were 16,918 arrests of girls in 2015. Arrests of girls have fallen at a faster rate than that of boys
- Every force in England and Wales has reduced the number of child arrests between 2010 and 2015, with one force achieving a 77 per cent reduction
- There were 871 arrests of primary age children in 2015. Arrests of 10 and 11-year-olds have reduced at a faster rate than that of all children between 2014 and 2015
- This analysis is based on freedom of information data from 43 police service areas in England and Wales and the British Transport Police.

Introduction

The Howard League has worked closely with police forces around the country to stem the flow of children entering the criminal justice system and the charity publishes annual data on the number of child arrests. Once again, this briefing paper shows a good news story. In 2015 there were 101,926 child arrests in England and Wales. The number of children arrested has reduced by 59 per cent between 2010 and 2015.

As gatekeepers to the system, every police force across the country has reduced the number of children arrested, which has led to huge reductions in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system and the number of children in prison. Between 2010 and 2015 the number of children in prison in England and Wales fell by 58 per cent (YJB, 2016). The rate of reduction in arrests and custody shows a clear relationship – if we reduce entrants to the system we stem the flow into custody.

Improvements in policing practice means that thousands of children have not had their life chances blighted. The majority of childish misbehaviour is best dealt with by parents, carers and schools. An arrest has the potential to affect a child's life adversely in many ways, from the immediate traumatic experience of being detained overnight in the police station, to the uncertainty of a criminal trial and even the potential to be imprisoned far away from their families and communities. It can also blight their futures, for example through Disclosure and Barring Checks that can result in a job offer or university place being withdrawn. The evidence shows that the more contact a child has with the formal criminal justice system, the more entrenched they are likely to become, which increases reoffending rates, crime and victimisation (McAra and McVie, 2007). For the majority of children the youth justice system is unnecessary, harmful and a wasteful use of taxpayers' money. A discretionary approach also releases the police to respond to serious crimes that are of public concern.

This positive trend across police forces can be attributed to better use of resources to solve problems, removal of national targets, improved staff training and support from communities.

Police are reviewing arrest procedures and evidence gathered by the Howard League from correspondence, meetings with the police and visits to police stations indicates an increase in the use of restorative approaches and conflict resolution principles and practice.

As well as improvements at a local level, for which forces are to be commended, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has provided impressive leadership in setting the tone and priorities around the policing of children. In 2015, the NPCC published the 'National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People', which emphasises the importance of a proportionate and consistent response and avoiding unnecessary criminalisation – especially where the behaviour can be dealt with more appropriately through other means.

There is much to celebrate. There is still much further to go, however, to reduce the number of children unnecessarily coming into contact with the police and the youth justice system. The Howard League will continue to work with police forces across the country to develop their good work and reduce the number of child arrests to an irreducible minimum.

Child arrests

The data obtained by the Howard League shows that in 2015 there were 101,926 child arrests in England and Wales. This constitutes a reduction of 59 per cent since 2010 and an eleven per cent reduction compared to 2014.

Every police force in England and Wales has reduced the number of child arrests between 2010 and 2015, with one force achieving a 77 per cent reduction.

Whilst, as to be expected, the year on year national reduction rate has slowed in accordance with the reduction of numbers, it is of concern that eleven forces reported an increase in child arrests compared to 2014.

Gender

There were 16,918 arrests of girls in 2015. Arrests of girls have fallen at a faster rate than that of boys. The number has fallen by 12 per cent since 2014 and by 63 per cent since 2010. Between 2010 and 2015 the number of girls in prison in England and Wales correspondingly reduced by 63 per cent (YJB, 2016).

Primary age children

There were 871 arrests of primary age children in 2015. Arrests of 10 and 11-year olds have fallen at a faster rate than the reduction of all child arrests in the same period.

Regions

The rate of reduction in child arrests varies across the country. The North East, East Midlands and South East have all achieved reductions in the number of children arrested significantly above the national rate.

Table 1: Number of child arrests 2010-2015 by police service area

Police force	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Avon & Somerset Constabulary	7,255	5,608	4,321	2,929	2,342	1,767
Bedfordshire	1,853	1,692	1,770	1,390	1,290	1,175
British Transport Police****	*	*	2,073	1,643	1,335	1,014
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	3,440	2,099	1,473	1,067	1,060	979
Cheshire Constabulary	1,870	1,904	1,508	1,269	1,266	1,292
City of London	273	192	136	122	77	80
Cleveland Police	4,367	3,368	2,407	1,862	1,527	1,358
Cumbria Constabulary	1,274	1,864	1,263	1,125	1,073	1,034
Derbyshire Constabulary	4,194	3,938	**	1,930	1,840	1,573
Devon & Cornwall Constabulary	4,132	3,363	2,398	1,431	1,470	1,297
Dorset Police	2,310	1,053	1,252	815	770	916
Durham Constabulary	3,658	2,841	1,767	1,445	1,493	1,193
Dyfed Powys Police	2,307	1,643	1,584	1,165	687	625
Essex Police	7,739	5,870	4,237	3,931	3,718	2,542
Gloucestershire Constabulary	1,516	1,412	1,268	920	861	725
Greater Manchester Police	***	10,903	7,807	6,144	5,969	4,587
Gwent Police	2,503	2,163	1,698	1,569	980	1,172
Hampshire Constabulary	8,267	6,533	5,091	6,058	3,192	2,295
Hertfordshire Constabulary	3,948	1,809	2,478	1,776	1,753	1,632
Humberside Police	5,751	2,067	2,732	2,008	1,460	1,300
Kent Police	7,505	6,409	4,412	4,602	3,752	2,976
Lancashire Constabulary	9,779	5,476	4,158	3,201	2,887	3,074
Leicestershire Constabulary	3,322	2,685	2,252	1,670	1,553	1,103
Lincolnshire Police	***	1,911	1,290	1,027	990	1,117
Merseyside Police	10,197	8,421	6,213	5,066	5,295	3,273
Metropolitan	46,079	39,901	30,155	26,442	23,402	22,328
Norfolk Constabulary	2,510	2,201	1,316	1,384	1,561	1,602
North Wales Police	3,420	2,596	2,022	1,780	1,554	1,577
North Yorkshire Police	4,525	3,644	1,152	1,556	1,445	1,317
Northamptonshire Police	2,594	2,177	1,660	1,289	1,270	1,115
Northumbria Police	11,407	9,280	6,983	5,990	5,280	3,829
Nottinghamshire Police	5,743	4,640	2,989	2,189	2,319	1,840
South Wales Police	5,659	2,551	3,166	3,245	2,978	2,854
South Yorkshire Police	6,235	5,094	3,344	2,693	2,285	1,812
Staffordshire Police	4,163	3,316	2,491	1,741	1,418	1,808
Suffolk Constabulary****	3,716	1,684	1,388	1,118	1,030	1,011
Surrey Police	1,955	1,974	1,483	1,524	1,624	1,338
Sussex Police	5,779	4,564	4,423	4,018	3,220	2,679
Thames Valley Police	8,012	6,539	2,531*****	3,808	3,225	2,872
Warwickshire Police	1,419	1,050	673	623	563	619
West Mercia Constabulary	5,491	3,442	2,664	1,758	1,418	1,354
West Midlands Police	14,387	10,487	7,484	7,123	5,803	5,438
West Yorkshire Police	12,947	10,600	7,492	6,148	5,417	5,045
Wiltshire Constabulary	2,262	1,997	1,596	1,079	1,031	1,389
TOTAL	245,763	202,961	150,600	131,673	115,483	101,926

*British Transport Police was not sent FOI requests in 2010 or 2011 **Half of the 2012 figures lost when new system was introduced *** Police force did not supply data **** Revised data provided for 2012-2015 ***** Data limited to the period 15 May to 31 December 2012 – the introduction of a new custody management database meant the force was unable to extract data from the system

Case study – Humberside police

Humberside police have achieved a 77 per cent reduction in the number of children arrests, making it the most successful force in the country.

In 2009, the Hull Youth Crime Partnership launched an innovative triage assessment scheme, sited within the police custody suite in Hull. The aim was to identify children who admit an offence and who might be dealt with effectively by a short voluntary intervention with the Hull Youth Justice Service. The objective of the scheme was to reduce unnecessary formal criminal prosecutions, and thus reduce numbers of children and young people entering the youth justice system.

The idea of embedding workers from the local youth offending team in the police station offered police officers, engaged in charging decisions, a wide range of social care and youth justice information. This was seen as key to tackling formerly high numbers of children and young people entering the formal youth justice system.

Between July 2009 and March 2016, 8,863 children have been interviewed and assessed by staff from the Youth Justice Service. Of this group, no further action was taken against 43 per cent of young people, 26 per cent received an out of court disposal and an intervention from the local Youth Justice Team and 31 per cent were charged to court. This partnership has resulted in a 60 per cent reduction in the first time entrants to the formal criminal justice system. The triage scheme ensures that children are well supported in custody and receive an appropriate intervention to meet their needs. The reoffending rate for those young people who were diverted from charge and participated in a voluntary intervention has remained low starting at 18 per cent in the first year and decreasing to a

record low of 13 per cent in the past year.

This highly acclaimed scheme has created considerable interest from a number of police forces and youth offending teams, including a delegation from Northern Ireland. It has been well supported across the partnership and is considered a crucial part of joint working between Humberside Police and the Hull Youth Justice Service.

Good links across a range of local supporting services provide targeted and constructed interventions and restorative justice is integral to the process with an emphasis on responsibility and remorse. Further objectives to support the scheme include continued work and training to support and strengthen the relationship between Humberside Police and the Hull Youth Justice Service. New Joint Protocols have been incorporated into the Service Level Agreement to offer crisis intervention from the local Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

About the Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison.

We campaign, research and take legal action on a wide range of issues. We work with parliament, the media, criminal justice professions, stakeholders and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change.

A full list of references is available on our website at www.howardleague.org/what-you-can-do/children-and-policing/

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