



## Child arrests in England and Wales 2014

### Research briefing

# the Howard League for Penal Reform

## Key points

- In 2014 there were 112,037 child arrests in England and Wales
- The number of child arrests has reduced by 55 per cent since 2010
- There were 19,377 arrests of girls in 2014. Arrests of girls have fallen at a faster rate than that of boys. The number of arrests has reduced by 22 per cent since 2013 and by 58 per cent since 2010
- The number of arrests of white children decreased from 98,014 in 2013 to 81,768 in 2014. The number of arrests of BME children decreased from 28,861 in 2013 to 26,070 in 2014
- In 2014 BME children accounted for 23 per cent of all child arrests
- Every force in England and Wales has reduced the number of child arrests between 2010 and 2014, with one force achieving a 75 per cent reduction
- This analysis is based on freedom of information data from 43 police service areas and the British Transport Police in England and Wales. Data was provided on the number, age, gender and ethnicity of child arrests in the study period

## Introduction

The Howard League for Penal Reform has been campaigning for improvements in the policing of children for a number of years and has been publishing annual data on the number of child arrests in England and Wales since 2008. The indication in the early years was that there were approximately a third of a million child arrests annually.

In the intervening period there has been a real change in monitoring and a real change in practice. Police improvements in monitoring mean that the Howard League has robust figures on child arrest data from 2010 to 2014 and has chosen not to include the data from 2008 and 2009, where there were significant gaps. This is a success for our campaign and the welcome commitment from forces to understand the situation in their local area.

At a time of straitened public resources, policing practice has developed in local areas to reduce the number of child arrests and deal with misbehaviour more expeditiously, effectively and cheaply. Evidence from Howard League correspondence and visits to police services indicate an increase in the use of diversionary and restorative justice practices. There has also been a focus on the training of staff; trusting and investing in the discretion of front-line officers; the role of custody sergeants in challenging arrest decisions; and practice developing within local areas that responds to local needs.

As gatekeepers to the system, police forces across the country have reduced the number of children arrested, which has led to huge reductions in the number of first-time entrants and, ultimately, the number of children in prison. Since January 2010 the number of children in prison has fallen by 56 per cent.

This briefing paper shows a good news story. The Howard League is concerned, however, that too many children are still being brought into conflict with the criminal justice system, with negative implications for their future lives at the expense of their communities and the taxpayer. 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. We will continue to work with police forces across the country to develop their good work and reduce the number of child arrests to an absolute minimum.

Reducing the time that police spend on dealing with childish misbehaviour saves taxpayers money and releases the police to respond to serious crimes that are of public concern. It is for parents and schools to take responsibility for their children.

## Child arrests

The data obtained by the Howard League shows that in 2014 there were 112,037 child arrests. This constitutes a reduction of 55 per cent since 2010 and a 15 per cent reduction compared to 2013.

Overall, there has been steady progress year-on-year across the country - every force in England and Wales has reduced the number of child arrests between 2010 and 2014, with one force achieving a 75 per cent reduction. This positive trend across all police forces is to be welcomed and commended.

While there was an overall decline in the number of child arrests nationwide in 2014, there were some variations in practice, with six forces reporting an increase in figures compared to 2013.

## Ethnicity

Due to improvements in recording practices, for the first time the Howard League is able to include a robust breakdown of child arrests by ethnicity for 2013 and 2014.

The number of arrests of white children decreased from 98,014 in 2013 to 81,768 in 2014. The number of arrests of BME children decreased from 28,861 in 2013 to 26,070 in 2014. In 2014 the arrests of BME children accounted for 23 per cent of all child arrests.

Since publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999, a light has been shone on discriminatory practice within the police service. Our research indicates that progress is being made on the front line.

The proportion of BME children in penal custody is increasing, however, and now stands at 42 per cent, compared to 23 per cent of child arrests. The disparity between the proportion of BME child arrests and the incarceration rate raises questions for both the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Youth Courts.

There are further questions raised by the figures provided by the Metropolitan Police, who have provided robust ethnicity data for the last five years. Although the Metropolitan Police has halved the number of child arrests, from 46,079 in 2010 to 23,402 in 2014, the proportion of those arrests which were of BME children has remained steady at 57 per cent.

There are also some issues with the recording practices within a minority of forces. Although there will be occasions where ethnicity is recorded as 'unknown', in one force half of the ethnicity figures were recorded as such. The Howard League would also suggest that the use of 'Oriental' and 'Dark European' by another force is inappropriate. A further force records ethnicity by 'English', 'Welsh', 'Scottish' and 'Irish'. The Howard League has excluded all these recordings from its analysis of ethnicity.



**Table 1: Number of child arrests 2010-2014 by police service area**

Police force	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Avon & Somerset Constabulary	7,255	5,608	4,321	2,929	2,342
Bedfordshire	1,853	1,692	1,770	1,390	1,290
British Transport Police	*	*	1,461	1,399	1,366
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	3,440	2,099	1,473	1,067	1,060
Cheshire Constabulary	1,870	1,904	1,508	1,269	1,266
City of London	273	192	136	122	77
Cleveland Police	4,367	3,368	2,407	1,862	1,527
Cumbria Constabulary	1,274	1,864	1,263	1,125	1,073
Derbyshire Constabulary	4,194	3,938	**	1,930	1,840
Devon & Cornwall Constabulary	4,132	3,363	2,398	1,431	1,470
Dorset Police	2,310	1,053	1,252	815	770
Durham Constabulary	3,658	2,841	1,767	1,445	1,493
Dyfed Powys Police	2,307	1,643	1,584	1,165	687
Essex Police	7,739	5,870	4,237	3,931	3,718
Gloucestershire Constabulary	1,516	1,412	1,268	920	861
Greater Manchester Police	***	10,903	7,807	6,144	2,517
Gwent Police	2,503	2,163	1,698	1,569	980
Hampshire Constabulary	8,267	6,533	5,091	6,058	3,192
Hertfordshire Constabulary	3,948	1,809	2,478	1,776	1,753
Humberside Police	5,751	2,067	2,732	2,008	1,460
Kent Police	7,505	6,409	4,412	4,602	3,752
Lancashire Constabulary	9,779	5,476	4,158	3,201	2,887
Leicestershire Constabulary	3,322	2,685	2,252	1,670	1,553
Lincolnshire Police	***	1,911	1,290	1,027	990
Merseyside Police	10,197	8,421	6,213	5,066	5,295
Metropolitan	46,079	39,901	30,155	26,442	23,402
Norfolk Constabulary	2,510	2,201	1,316	1,384	1,561
North Wales Police	3,420	2,596	2,022	1,780	1,554
North Yorkshire Police	4,525	3,644	1,152	1,556	1,445
Northamptonshire Police	2,594	2,177	1,660	1,289	1,270
Northumbria Police	11,407	9,280	6,983	5,990	5,280
Nottinghamshire Police	5,743	4,640	2,989	2,189	2,319
South Wales Police	5,659	2,551	3,166	3,245	2,978
South Yorkshire Police	6,235	5,094	3,344	2,693	2,285
Staffordshire Police	4,163	3,316	2,491	1,741	1,418
Suffolk Constabulary	3,716	1,684	1,383	1,092	1,005
Surrey Police	1,955	1,974	1,483	1,524	1,624
Sussex Police	5,779	4,564	4,423	4,018	3,220
Thames Valley Police	8,012	6,539	2,531****	3,808	3,225
Warwickshire Police	1,419	1,050	673	623	563
West Mercia Constabulary	5,491	3,442	2,664	1,758	1,418
West Midlands Police	14,387	10,487	7,484	7,123	5,803
West Yorkshire Police	12,947	10,600	7,492	6,148	5,417
Wiltshire Constabulary	2,262	1,997	1,596	1,079	1,031
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>245,763</b>	<b>202,961</b>	<b>149,983</b>	<b>131,403</b>	<b>112,037</b>

\*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 \*\*\*\* 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

## Gender

There were 19,377 arrests of girls in 2014. Arrests of girls have fallen at a faster rate than that of boys. The number has fallen by 22 per cent since 2013 and by 58 per cent since 2010.

### United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37(b)

No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

## Case studies

### Greater Manchester Police

The Howard League has been working closely with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) to develop good practice to reduce child arrests. In 2014 it achieved a reduction of 59 per cent in the number of child arrests compared to 2013, exceeding any other force in England and Wales.

The force has prioritised local restorative resolutions, which were used 4,176 times for children in 2014, rather than officers arresting them, which would result in a more formal criminal justice sanction. GMP also analyses reoffending rates relating to these low level solutions compared to sanctions and shares them with officers so that they understand the value of their impact, which in turn encourages an increase in their use.

Custody sergeants at GMP staff a central command suite on a 24/7 basis to ensure that the “necessity to arrest criteria” (Pace Code G) has been met. They travel to custody suites and challenge officers’ decisions and will refuse unnecessary detentions. As one custody sergeant reported: *“Custody Sergeants have been brutal with this (in my experience) in particular any late evening arrests. You find that you only need to tell people once or twice at the most that they ARE dealing with the case and the detainee is NOT getting bedded down, and all of a sudden you see a drop in all but the most deserved of child arrests.”*

## Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Cambridgeshire Constabulary has used a number of initiatives to improve the policing of children and reduce the number of children arrested and detained in their area. Between 2010 and 2014, they successfully reduced the number of child arrests by 69 per cent.

One focus has been on the training of staff. All staff receive regular training in line with Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and custody sergeants are trained to challenge the arrest of children at any time. Staff are also trained to support and follow the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child.

### West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police

West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police have been working in partnership to improve the policing of children in their areas. One focus has been working with local care homes to identify alternatives to bringing children in care into custody. This arose from concern that children within care homes, on occasion, were being arrested for behaviour that would more appropriately be dealt with informally by care home staff. They are also developing local protocols to reduce the number of children coming into custody.

On a broader level, they have also created a new Children and Young Person’s Strategic Oversight Board to provide a strategic focus to the issues of children entering the criminal justice system. In addition, they have formed a Regional Group, which meets quarterly, to identify common themes and share best practice across the region.

## 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.

## the Howard League for Penal Reform

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