



Child arrests in England and Wales 2018

Research briefing

Photo credit: Andy Aitchison

Howard League for Penal Reform

Key points

- In 2010 the Howard League for Penal Reform launched its Programme to Reduce Child Arrests
- In 2018 there were 70,078 child arrests in England and Wales, a 71 per cent reduction from the 245,763 child arrests in 2010¹
- Between 2010 and 2018, every force in England and Wales has reduced their number of child arrests, with 18 forces achieving reductions of 75 per cent or more over this period
- There were 383 arrests of primary school age children in 2018, a reduction of 38 per cent from the previous year
- There were 10,880 arrests of girls in 2018. Arrests for girls have fallen at a faster rate than for boys since 2010
- The number of children in prison fell by more than 63 per cent between 2010 and 2018 as fewer children were drawn into the penal system
- This analysis is based on freedom of information data from 43 police service areas in England and Wales and the British Transport Police.

¹ NB the 2018 figures do not include data from South Yorkshire Police or City of London Police

Introduction

In 2010, the Howard League launched a programme to reduce the high number of child arrests in England and Wales. We have worked closely with police forces around the country to reduce the number of children coming into the criminal justice system and to prevent children's lives being blighted by criminal records and unnecessary police contact.

In 2018, there were 70,078 child arrests in England and Wales,² down year-on-year from 245,763 in 2010. This represents a decrease in child arrests of 71 per cent between 2010 and 2018. The reductions in child arrests have been pivotal to falls in child custody levels of over 63 per cent between April 2010 and March 2018 (YJB, 2019).

Notable successes in 2018 are the 22 per cent decrease in child arrests achieved by the Metropolitan Police and a 12 per cent reduction in arrests made by Greater Manchester Police. It is impressive to see such sizeable reductions in these large urban police forces. Their achievements demonstrate how progress is possible even in complex policing environments.

In some areas 2018 saw a plateauing of reductions of child arrests and in a worrying number of force areas there has been a small creep upwards. Political pledges to dramatically increase the numbers of new police officers on the street should not divert forces from continuing to target resources intelligently, or derail the tremendous success achieved in reducing child arrests over the last decade. Discussions with police forces suggest that each arrest of a child costs the police a minimum of £500. There is therefore a clear pressing financial incentive for forces to continue the excellent work that has resulted in such significant progress since 2010.

The work of Chief Constable Olivia Pinkney, the National Police Chiefs' Council portfolio lead for Children and Young People, has contributed greatly to the reductions in child arrests and improvements generally in the policing of children. Her *Child-Centred Policing Strategy* (2015) has been embraced by senior and child-specialist police officers and provided the foundations for training and good practice all over the country. We hope that her emphasis

on keeping children out of the system will continue as she hands over the reins at the end of this year.

The 2018 child arrests performance chart does not include any data from City of London Police or South Yorkshire Police. City of London Police did not respond to our Freedom of Information request and South Yorkshire Police were unable to run the report we had asked for. It is absolutely essential that forces are recording and analysing relevant data in order to monitor their performance and identify issues.

Areas for continued improvement

In last year's child arrests briefing, we identified three groups of children who were being disproportionately and unnecessarily criminalised: children living in residential care; child victims of criminal exploitation, including by criminals operating 'county lines'; and children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Children living in residential care

For the last four years we have been working on a programme to end the criminalisation of children in residential care. We have published six briefings as part of this programme, including, in July 2019, a report titled '*Know your numbers: Using data to monitor and address criminalisation*' (Howard League, 2019). In this document we reported that the proportions of children being criminalised in residential care had reduced from 15 per cent in 2014 - when we started the programme - to ten per cent in 2018. We have been working closely with forces all over the country on this issue and we know that a great deal of this success is down to the efforts of police forces who have identified and addressed the causes of unnecessary criminalisation within their areas. It is important that the police continue to use data available within their force to monitor police contact with children living in residential care so that this progress continues.

To read the briefings, visit the programme web page at <https://howardleague.org/our-campaigns/programme-to-end-the-criminalisation-of-children-in-residential-care/>.

² NB the 2018 figures do not include data from South Yorkshire Police or City of London Police

Table 1: Number of child arrests 2010-2018 by police service area

Police force	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Avon & Somerset Constabulary	7,255	5,608	4,321	2,929	2,342	1,767	1,533	1,342	1,251
Bedfordshire	1,853	1,692	1,770	1,390	1,290	1,175	1,085	943	682
British Transport Police	*	*	2,077	1,645	1,336	1,014	130**	865	1,160
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	3,440	2,099	1,473	1,067	1,060	979	1,013	821	715
Cheshire Constabulary	1,870	1,904	1,508	1,269	1,266	1,292	1,187	1,025	1,007
City of London	273	192	136	122	77	80	51	140	*
Cleveland Police	4,367	3,368	2,407	1,862	1,527	1,358	1,206	936	760
Cumbria Constabulary	1,274	1,864	1,263	1,125	1,073	1,034	900	554	405
Derbyshire Constabulary	4,194	3,938	*	1,930	1,840	1,573	797***	1,038	994
Devon & Cornwall Constabulary	4,132	3,363	2,398	1,431	1,470	1,297	994	895	884
Dorset Police	2,310	1,053	1,252	815	770	916	447	459	495
Durham Constabulary	3,658	2,841	1,767	1,445	1,493	1,193	1,157	1,009	830
Dyfed Powys Police	2,307	1,643	1,584	1,165	687	625	501	341	398
Essex Police	7,739	5,870	4,237	3,931	3,718	2,635	2,588	1,923	1,942
Gloucestershire Constabulary	1,516	1,412	1,268	920	861	725	663	649	580
Greater Manchester Police	*	10,903	7,807	6,144	5,969	4,587	3,714	3,197	2,799
Gwent Police	2,503	2,163	1,698	1,569	980	1,172	930	747	466
Hampshire Constabulary	8,267	6,533	5,091	6,058	3,192	2,295	1,711****	3,960	4,044
Hertfordshire Constabulary	3,948	1,809	2,478	1,776	1,753	1,632	1,558	1,480	1,656
Humberside Police	5,751	2,067	2,732	2,008	1,460	1,300	1,409	1,385	1,202
Kent Police	7,505	6,409	4,412	4,602	3,752	2,976	2,900	2,683	2,070
Lancashire Constabulary	9,779	5,476	4,158	3,201	2,887	3,074	2,775	1,893	1,826
Leicestershire Constabulary	3,322	2,685	2,252	1,670	1,553	1,103	806	1,129	1,104
Lincolnshire Police	*	1,911	1,290	1,027	990	1,117	913	779	745
Merseyside Police	10,197	8,421	6,213	5,066	5,295	3,273	2,570	2,336	2,151
Metropolitan	46,079	39,901	30,155	26,442	23,402	22,328	20,387	17,672	13,791
Norfolk Constabulary	2,510	2,201	1,316	1,384	1,561	1,602	1,261	1,083	1,374
North Wales Police	3,420	2,596	2,022	1,780	1,554	1,577	1,532	1,040	791
North Yorkshire Police	4,525	3,644	1,152	1,556	1,445	1,317	1,291	1,034	1,077
Northamptonshire Police	2,594	2,177	1,660	1,289	1,270	1,115	885	880	918
Northumbria Police	11,407	9,280	6,983	5,990	5,280	3,829	2,838	2,440	2,136
Nottinghamshire Police	5,743	4,640	2,989	2,189	2,319	1,840	1,466	1,466	1,357
South Wales Police	5,659	2,551	3,166	3,245	2,978	2,854	2,499	1,820	1,728
South Yorkshire Police	6,235	5,094	3,344	2,693	2,285	1,812	1,396	1,302*****	*
Staffordshire Police	4,163	3,316	2,491	1,741	1,418	1,808	1,350	1,081	1,105
Suffolk Constabulary	3,716	1,684	1,388	1,118	1,030	1,011	858	903	1,034
Surrey Police	1,955	1,974	1,483	1,524	1,624	1,338	889	730	751
Sussex Police	5,779	4,564	4,423	4,018	3,220	2,679	2,185	1,893	1,766
Thames Valley Police	8,012	6,539	2,531***	3,808	3,225	2,872	2,446	2,482	2,525
Warwickshire Police	1,419	1,050	673	623	563	619	597	447	411
West Mercia Constabulary	5,491	3,442	2,664	1,758	1,418	1,354	1,247	805	655
West Midlands Police	14,387	10,487	7,484	7,123	5,803	5,438	5,244	4,674	4,049
West Yorkshire Police	12,947	10,600	7,492	6,148	5,417	5,045	4,663	3,953	3,697
Wiltshire Constabulary	2,262	1,997	1,054	1,122	991	1,048	953	778	747
TOTAL	245,763	202,961	150,062	131,718	115,444	101,678	87,525	79,012	70,078

*Data unavailable **Data limited to the period from 1 January 2016 to 20 February 2016 as crime recording system was changed ***Limited data – some data was lost when a new system was introduced ****Police force provided data for number of children arrested not number of arrests. 2017 and 2018 data relates to number of arrests and is therefore not directly comparable with previous data *****Does not include data from 6 December 2017 onwards when a new recording system was implemented

Victims of child criminal exploitation

We know that many forces have greatly improved the identification and safeguarding of child victims of exploitation. Over the last twelve months we have witnessed a very significant shift in the recognition that these children are victims not criminals. However, we believe that more work needs to be done to ensure that child victims are not arrested in the first place. We are concerned that some of the upward creep in child arrests figures result from efforts to tackle county lines. Whilst such efforts are to be expected, it is important that children are not unnecessarily criminalised as a result of police work to tackle this issue.

Children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds

Of the 70,078 child arrests made in 2018, ethnicity was not recorded or was not known in nearly 4,000 cases. Analysis of this characteristic was further hampered by the fact that there is still inconsistency and local variation in the recording of ethnicity. Given the hugely disproportionate numbers of children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds in the criminal justice system, it is essential that forces are able to provide accurate data on the ethnicity of the children they arrest. We note Recommendation 1 of the *Lammy Review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System* (2017) which stated that: 'A cross-CJS approach should be agreed to record data on ethnicity. This should enable more scrutiny in the future, whilst reducing inefficiencies that can come from collecting the same data twice.'

Summary of child arrests data

The data obtained by the Howard League shows that in 2018 there were 70,078 child arrests in England and Wales. This constitutes a reduction of 71 per cent since 2010 and a decrease of 11 per cent compared to 2017.³

Every police force in England and Wales has reduced the number of child arrests between 2010 and 2018, with 18 forces achieving reductions

of 75 per cent or more. All but four forces have reduced the rate of child arrests in their areas by more than 50 per cent since 2010.

Thirteen forces have reported a rise in child arrests in 2018 from the previous year. We will be working with these forces to understand the reasons for these increases. Monitoring and analysis of even small rises in child arrests can highlight areas of concern, which can then be addressed.

Gender

There were 10,880 arrests of girls in 2018. Arrests of girls have fallen at a faster rate than of boys, decreasing by 76 per cent since 2010, compared to 70 per cent for boys.

Primary school-age children

In 2018, there were 383 arrests of primary school aged children. This represents a welcome 38 per cent reduction in the number of arrests in this very young age group since 2017. We commend forces for their efforts in reducing arrests of primary school aged children.

The low age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales – just ten years – has been criticised by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child as being too low. The Committee recommends that countries should raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years and commends countries that have a higher minimum age of 15 or 16 years (UNCRC, 2019).

About the Howard League

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 www.howardleague.org

³ NB the 2018 figures do not include data from South Yorkshire Police or City of London Police

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