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Children and Young People's Contact with the Police – Public Briefing

Briefing No. 21



May 2023



Summary

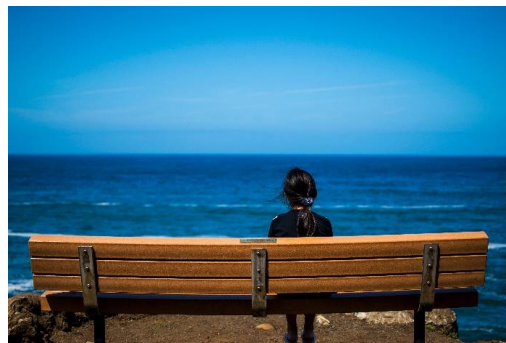
Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are committed to fostering a strong bond of trust between children, young people and the police, and taking steps to build on our efforts to achieve better outcomes for all.

This public briefing provides an overview of the views of policing within Scotland, case studies of engagement initiatives undertaken by Police Scotland and comparison with England and Wales in terms of use of proportionate police powers.

Background

The [Children and Young People's Commissioner](#) defines a child or young person as someone who has not yet reached 18 years of age, or 21 if they are care experienced. There are over 1 million children and young people in Scotland.

By the age of eight, two-thirds of Scotland's children will have experienced one or more Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)-related factors and one in ten will have experienced three or more ACE-related factors ([Scottish Health Survey 2019](#)). There is a growing body of evidence that links childhood adversity to increases in both victimisation and criminality in adulthood.



Caveats on the Data Used and Notes on Comparability

This exercise was conducted by Scottish Police Authority officers based on a limited data set. Data used were mainly publically available from Police Scotland and forces in England and Wales, and a 'member of the public' approach was taken while reviewing and analysing. Different time periods have been used for different measures, in line with the data available. Data sets have not been validated by Police Scotland.

Views of Policing

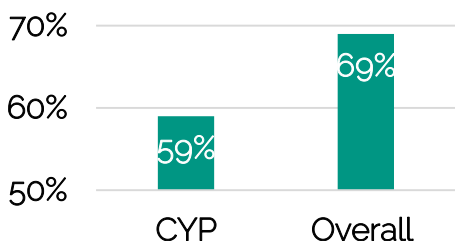
An essential component of upholding the rights of children and policing by consent is listening to, and learning from, the children and young people that Police Scotland serve. Police Scotland frequently engages with children and young people in varying forms to understand their thoughts and opinions.

The User Experience Survey is undertaken monthly by an independent market research agency via SMS, contacting a random sample of individuals who have contacted the police each month. The survey is only sent to people aged over 16.

Alongside this, the Your Police Survey is a continuous annual survey designed to measure and improve understanding of public confidence in policing. The sample is representative of Scotland's population – in age, gender, region and disability.

Key findings* (Apr 20-Jul 22)

Lower satisfaction in policing for children and young people (CYP) than other age groups:



Concern about crime appears to be linked to the age of respondents

Over 16s were more likely to say their concern about crime had increased than younger respondents.

The youngest were more likely to say "don't know"

This suggests that there is an opportunity for targeted engagement with children aged 10-15.

(*Comparisons with England and Wales are not possible in this area due to engagement methods differing.)

41% of CYP report low satisfaction with being kept informed about progress with their incident

Higher confidence in police among those aged 16-18 (57%), with this decreasing for 19-24 year olds (51%)

CYP generally feel safe in their local area - 76% of 10-24 year olds feeling either "very safe" or "fairly safe."

Current or planned activity

Police Scotland have initiatives planned to support the needs CYP

- Developing accessible digital reporting methods for CYP to their report.
- Improving communication with CYP ensuring needs are met and rights protected.
- Enhancing approach to involve CYP in decision making and service delivery, including lived experience.
- Working with partners in local communities to improve poor relationships.

Police Scotland Engagement with Children and Young People

Police Scotland recognises that engagement with children and young people in a variety of forms not only helps to better inform the organisation and shape its approaches but allows for better understanding of the issues that affect young people. By using this learning to influence the way Police Scotland works, they aim to create positive social change for the future.

Police Scotland develops and delivers a number of educational campaigns within education settings across Scotland. These campaigns cover a range of different topics including substance harm, cyber harm, hate crime, consent and domestic abuse and are delivered to children and young people by specially trained police officers and staff. These engagements not only build positive relationships between the police and children and young people but also raises young people's awareness, knowledge and understanding of relevant topics, empowering them to make positive choices and better understand the impact crime can have on our communities.

For example, Police Scotland works with the [I am Me Scotland](#) charity to collaboratively develop and deliver educational resources which cover a range of important topics such as Hate Crime, Substance Harm and Mental Health. The resources are designed to raise awareness and encourage conversation with children and young people regarding crime and its impact on our communities.

Police Scotland also promote the I am Me Keep Safe Initiative amongst children and young people. The initiative works with a network of local businesses to create 'Keep Safe' places in the community for anyone feeling lost, frightened or who has been a victim of crime.

The Police Scotland Youth Volunteering programme (PSYV) aims to strengthen relationships with young people, break down barriers and promote ways to make Scotland's communities safer. PSYV is open to young people aged 13-18 across Scotland, providing them with the opportunity to volunteer with Police Scotland. The youth volunteers undergo a structured training programme and can achieve SCQF Level 4 Certification.

The Pitchin' In programme was developed by Police Scotland and Glasgow City Council in 2014-15 following a large scale incident of football-related youth disorder. Together with footballing organisations, Police Scotland deliver the Pitchin' In programme in schools and colleges with the aim of tackling youth offending behaviour.

By proactively developing young people's decision making skills and promoting positive citizenship, it is hoped this will reduce the likelihood of them being drawn into criminality. This collaborative programme focuses on prevention, diversion and education ensuring the youth participants build sound decision making skills and resilience and promoting individual and community wellbeing.



Interactions with Policing

Whilst Police Scotland proactively engages with children and young people to foster positive relationships and positive outcomes to communities, Police Scotland and the Authority understand that police officers may have to use certain powers, in a proportionate manner, when interacting with children and young people. The use of police powers will only be used to protect the child, a victim or the wider public. However there is recognition that certain interactions can have a negative, and often lasting, impact on children and therefore the utmost care is taken to adopt a trauma informed approach.

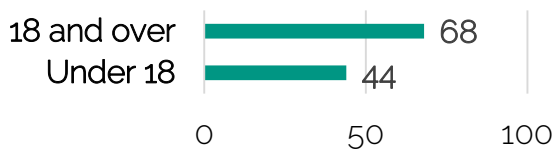
Stop and Search

A stop and search is conducted by a police officer in the course of their duties where a person who is not in police custody is searched using a specific statutory provision or in accordance with a search warrant issued by a court.

The [Code of Practice on the use of stop and search](#) has been in place since 2017. The Code governs all situations in which officers stop and search a person without first making an arrest. While there are procedural guidelines in place in England and Wales, the Code of Practice applies only to Scotland.

Key findings (Apr 17-Dec 2021)

Fewer searches of under 18s compared to those 18 and over

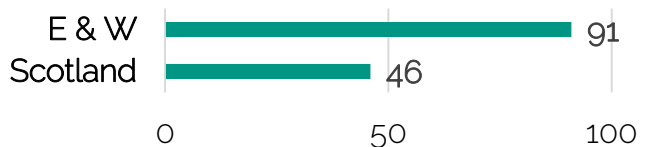


■ Searches per 10,000 population

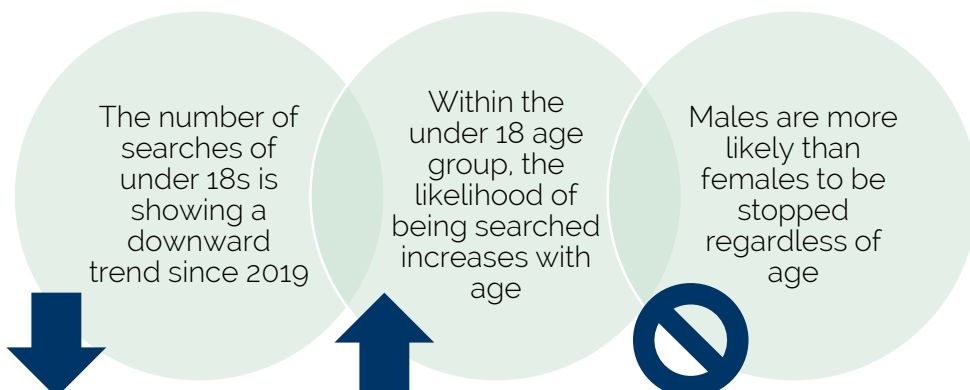
The proportion of positive searches was lower for under 18s

Age group	Positive searches (%)
Under 18	31%
18 and over	38%

In Scotland there were fewer searches of under 18s per 10,000 population than in England and Wales



■ Searches per 10,000 population

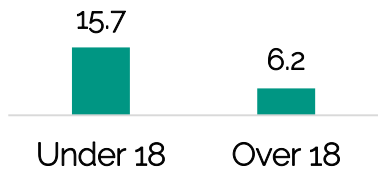


Use of Force

Use of Force is defined as any physical use of force, except compliant handcuffing and come along hold / escort hold. It includes use of empty hand techniques, batons, irritant sprays and leg restraints.

Key findings (Apr 19 - Mar 21)

Under 18s are more likely to be subject to use of force than over 18s



Use of force forms per 10,000 population



The use of force on under 18s increased by **11%** from 2019/20 to 2020/21.

In Scotland there were fewer instances of use of force on U18s than in England and Wales

Country	Use of force forms per 10,000 population
Scotland	15.7
England and Wales	41

The most common types of force for under 18s in Scotland during the period were (incident counts):

- Handcuffing stacked to the rear (678).
- Empty hand takedown (477).
- Empty hand restraint (454).

Taser Use

A Taser device can be used by an officer as a deterrent by pointing a laser beam at a dangerous individual (known as "red-dotting"). On the occasion when red-dotting does not resolve an issue, the Taser can be discharged with one of two functions: 'fired' or 'drive stun'. When a Taser is fired, this means that the trigger is squeezed and the cartridge is deployed from a distance. Drive stun is when the Taser is applied by hand directly to somebody in close quarters. Both approaches can be used to control a situation whilst minimising injury and harm.

Key findings (Jun 18 - Nov 21)

Taser was used on under 18s a total of 54 times during the period, but only discharged in 7.4% of incidents (4 times).



96% of Taser use and 99% of discharges are on persons over the age of 18.



PIRC determined that the 4 counts of Taser discharge on under 18s were deemed to be proportionate.

Trends show increased use of Taser and increased severity of tactical uses in relation to under 18s.

- Taser tactic 'red dot' saw the greatest increase during the period - 400%.
- Solely 'drawn' tactic saw a 44% decrease.

Taser uses per 10,000 of under 18s population for Scottish and England & Wales:

Country	Taser uses per 10,000 under 18s population
Scotland	0.14
England and Wales	2

Arrests and Custody

To arrest an individual, Police Scotland warranted officers need reasonable grounds to suspect involvement with a crime. This can include suspecting an individual of committing a crime and wanting to question them further, possessing sufficient evidence to charge an individual with a crime, and arrest warrants having been issued for an individual.

Police custody is when an individual is held in a secure location, typically at a police station, and is under the supervision of police officers or staff.

In November 2022 the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland hosted a roundtable event with a wide range of civic and civil society partners to discuss how we can work together to reduce the number of children under 18 who are held in police custody as the only available place of safety.

There was full agreement at the event that holding children in police custody cells is not an appropriate setting and not in the interest of the child. However there was also recognition that there is currently a lack of suitable alternatives.

Key findings* (Jan 18 - Mar 21)

Between 2018 and 2020 the average number of under 18s arrested each year was 5,116.

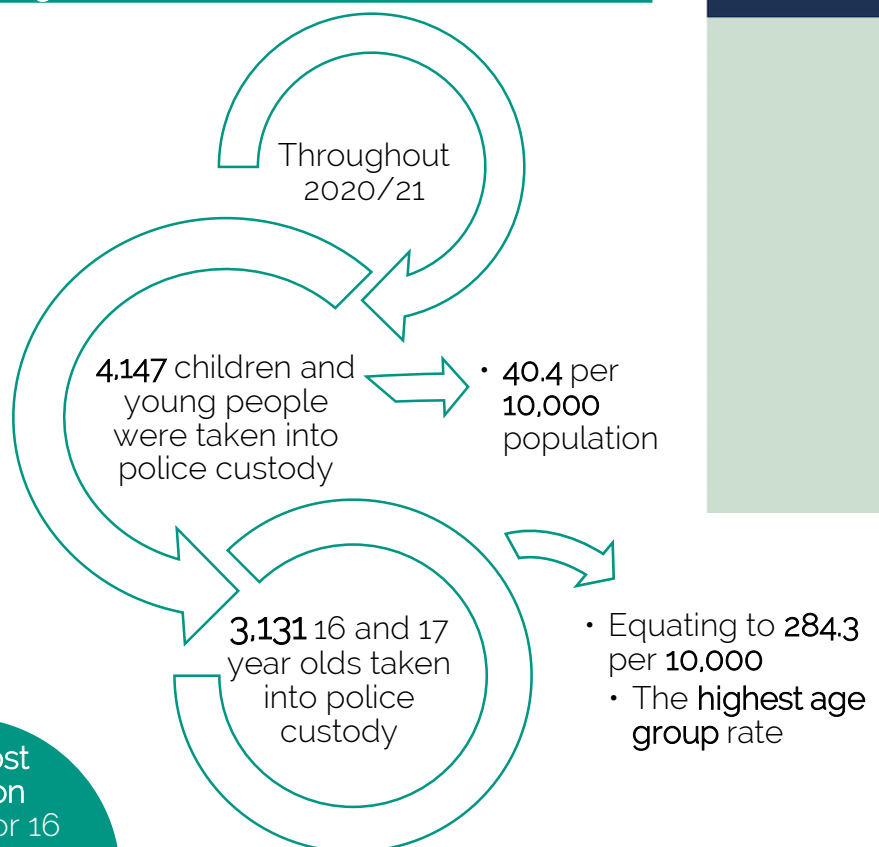
A rate of 49.8 arrests per 10,000 population.

This compares to 180 arrests for every 10,000 of the whole Scottish population in 2020/21.

Overall the number of under 18s arrested and in custody has **decreased** over recent years.

The most common offence for 16 and 17 year olds was threatening or abusive behaviour.

Accounting for 20% of overall offences followed by assault.



(*No England and Wales comparisons due to differing recording practices and insufficient publically available data.)

Conclusion and Next Steps

It can be seen from this analysis that while Scotland's figures compare well in many areas to England and Wales, there are still a range of areas where improvements could be made to prevent children and young people experiencing negative contacts with the police, and to achieve better outcomes for this age group.

A proposal for a new Youth Co-design Group is currently being developed after initial positive feedback from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Service Delivery Group. The proposal involves the recruitment of professional youth work and youth engagement staff into the service to support the organisation to develop in this area. The proposal would bring Police Scotland in line with NHS 24 and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service who already do similar work with children and young people.

Further work is ongoing to develop our approach to evidence-led policing, which ties local and national initiatives to strategy, and will enable effective policing which meets the needs of all children and young people growing up in Scotland.

Keeping up to date

To keep up to date with our work, please keep an eye on the Scottish Police Authority's [website](#) where you can find papers and watch livestream committee discussions, and follow us on Twitter:

@ScotPolAuth @policescotland

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Purpose of these Public Briefings

The Strategic Police Plan commits to the provision of Policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. This requires designing and maintaining services which meet rising and evolving demands in a constantly changing environment. To meet these demands, now and in the future, Scotland's police service must adapt and proportionately adopt the necessary technologies which will enable them to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities (as outlined in the Policing Principles - Section 32 of Police and Fire Reform Act 2012).

This series of public focused and user-friendly public briefings has been developed to provide an overview of the benefits of emerging technology and upcoming developments within policing, the policies that will govern them, and the ethical, privacy and human rights implications.