

## **Statistics update: Trends in violence affecting children**

This is an update to the statistics published in our Beyond the Headlines report. This update includes latest data on core indicators for knife crime, policing, health, children's services and the youth sector in England and Wales.

January 2025

## Summary

In July 2024, we launched a series of 11 indicators that we'll use to track changes in violence affecting children and in the sectors that are key to supporting children at risk of violence. For more information, see our [core indicators and report](#). Since our last update, new annual data for 2023/24 has been published on five of these indicators: knife crime, policing, health, children's services and the youth sector. This briefing summarises how they've changed.

Taken together, the latest data shows a mixed picture. The indicators for knife crime, health and the youth sector deteriorated in the past year: more children were admitted to hospital for knife assault and more have been referred to mental health services, while the small increases in spending on young people's services from the last two years stalled. But there have been improvements in policing and children's services: more crimes were successfully investigated by the police and fewer children were being looked after by local authority children's services.

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	10 years ago (2013/14)*
<b>Knife crime</b> 0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife assault	<b>Mixed</b> [previously: mixed]	509	+ 9%	- 8%	+ 58%
<b>Policing</b> Successfully investigated crimes	<b>Mixed</b> [previously: worsening]	10%	+ 0.8%pt	- 0.8%pt	- 15.1%pt
<b>Health</b> Referrals to mental health services	<b>Worsening</b> [previously: worsening]	1,139,355	+ 3%	+ 49%	+ 105%
<b>Children's services</b> Children looked after	<b>Mixed</b> [previously: worsening]	83,630	- 0.2%	+ 4.5%	+ 21.6%
<b>Youth sector</b> Local authority expenditure for youth services	<b>Mixed</b> [previously: mixed]	£474m	- 0.3%	+ 7.0%	- 49.5 %

\* Referrals to mental health services data only goes back to 2016/17, so the ten-year comparison is to 2016/17 in this case.

## How ratings have been assigned

For each of the indicators, we've compared the last available annual figures with three different time points: the previous year (2022/23); the year before the Covid-19 pandemic (2019/20) and 10 years ago (or the longest available period if 10 years of data is not available).

The first indicator provides a view of how the indicator has performed in the most recent period. The second indicator provides a sense of how the measure has performed since the pandemic. Covid-19 had a significant disruptive effect on many areas of society – how the indicator performs today relative to where it was before Covid-19 provides a sense of whether or not it has recovered or surpassed levels prior to the pandemic-related disruption. The third indicator provides a view of how the indicator is currently performing against the longer-run trend.

We've assigned ratings as follows:

### Improving

For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has shown improvement.

### Worsening

For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has got worse.

### Mixed

For indicators where there is no clear trend based on the three time points (i.e. some point to improvement while others have got worse).

## 1. Knife crime

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	10 years ago (2013/14)
<b>Knife crime</b> 0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife assault	<b>Mixed</b>	509	+ 9%	- 8%	+ 58%

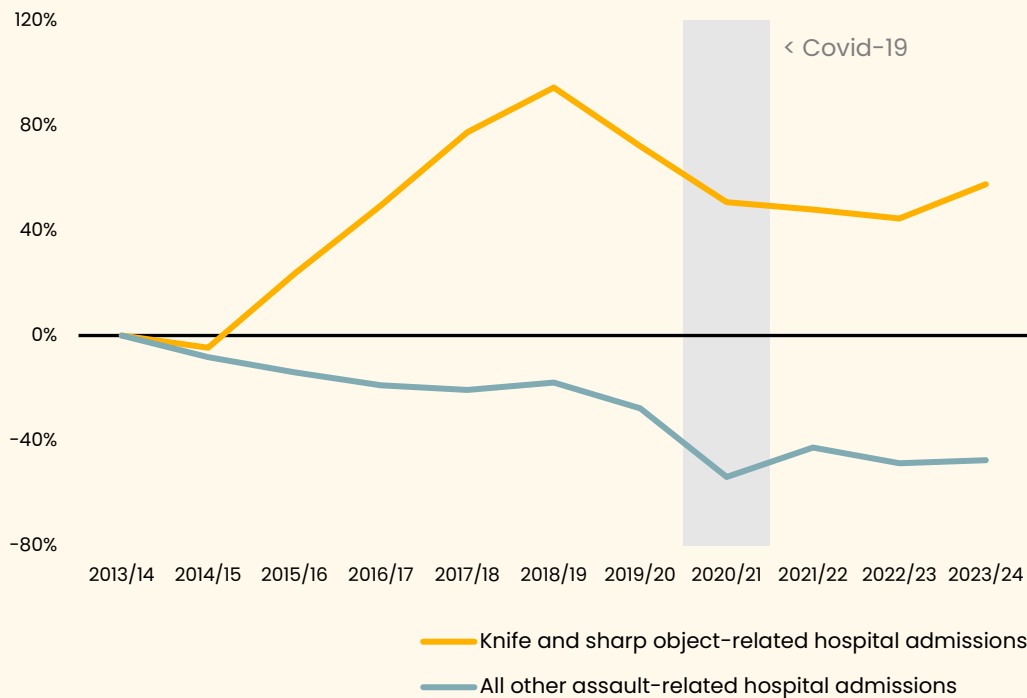
To measure changes in knife crime affecting young people, we use the number of [0-17-year-olds admitted to hospital](#) per year, where the cause for admission was assault with a sharp object. Hospital admissions data can be a more reliable guide to trends in knife violence than police or justice figures, as the data is less susceptible to changes in recording, reporting or sentencing practices over time.

### Knife crime was up in the latest year.

Following four consecutive years of falling numbers of children admitted to hospital following knife assault, the latest year saw admissions increase. In 2023/24, 509 children aged 0-17 were admitted to hospital for knife assault – 9% up on the year before. The number of hospital admissions for knife assault also rose for adults – up 2% on 2022/23. Hospital admissions for both children and adults for other forms of assault also rose in 2023/24.

In the last briefing, our knife crime indicator had a **mixed** rating – the number of children admitted to hospital in 2022/23 was lower than in the previous year (2021/22) and the year before Covid (2019/20) but 47% up on ten years previously (2012/13). This latest update shows the picture is still **mixed** – the number of admissions in 2023/24 was up compared to the previous year (2022/23) and ten years previously (2013/14). However, knife-related hospital admissions still remain 8% lower than the year before Covid (2019/20).

**Figure 1. Number of hospital admissions of 0-17-year-olds due to assault with a knife or sharp object and other forms of assault (England)**



## 2. Policing

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	10 years ago (2013/14)
Policing	Mixed	10%	+ 0.8%pt	- 0.8%pt	- 15.1%pt
Successfully investigated crimes					

We use the [proportion of crimes that are successfully investigated by the police](#) as our core measure for policing. We consider a crime to be successfully investigated if it resulted in (1) a charge or summons or (2) a formal or informal out of court disposal. We chose this measure because investigation of crime is one of the primary duties of the police and it's one of the key measures cited in the constabulary inspectorate's most recent [annual assessment](#) of policing.

**The proportion of crimes successfully investigated by the police has risen, but remains low.**

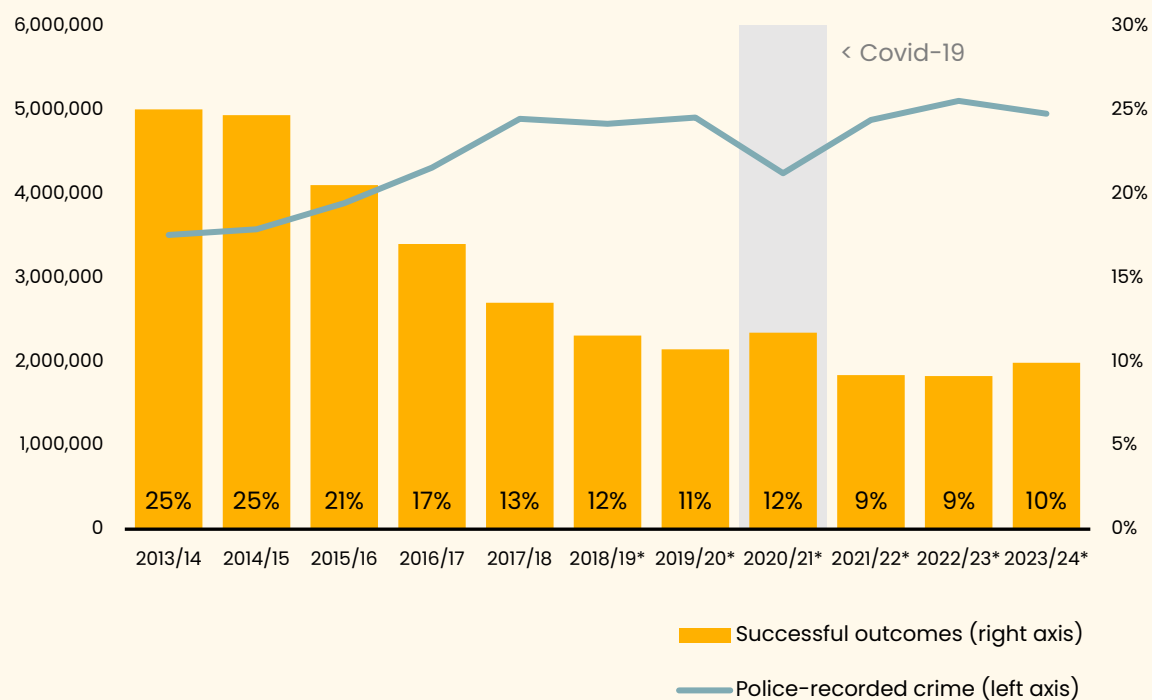
Over the past decade, the number of crimes recorded by the police annually has risen, while the total number of those crimes that are successfully investigated has fallen. As a consequence, the

proportion of crimes successfully investigated by the police has also fallen. However, this pattern has reversed slightly in the last year. In 2023/24, the total number of police-recorded crimes fell while the total number that resulted in a charge, summons or out of court disposal rose. This meant that the proportion of police-recorded crimes that were successfully investigated rose 0.8 percentage points – from 9.1% to 9.9%. But overall this improvement is modest and the total proportion of successful outcomes remains low.

Violent crimes show a similar pattern to those of all offences. In 2023/24, 8.7% of violence against the person crimes recorded by the police had a successful outcome, up from 8.0% in 2022/23. Robberies and sexual offences are less likely to result in a successful outcome. The proportion of police-recorded crimes resulting in a charge, summons or out-of-court disposal in 2023/24 falls to 7.0% for robberies (vs. 7.1% in 2022/23) and 4.7% for sexual offences (vs. 4.1% in 2022/23).

In the last briefing, our policing indicator had a **worsening** rating – the proportion of recorded crimes that resulted in a successful outcome in 2022/23 was lower than in the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13). This latest update shows the picture is now **mixed** – the proportion of successful outcomes in 2023/24 was up compared to the previous year (2022/23), but remains down compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2013/14).

**Figure 2. Total number of police-recorded crimes and the proportion with successful outcomes (England and Wales)**



\*These years exclude data from Greater Manchester Police and Devon and Cornwall.

### 3. Health

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	Earliest data (2016/17)
Health	<b>Worsening</b>	1,139,355	+ 3%	+ 49%	+ 105%
Referrals to mental health services					

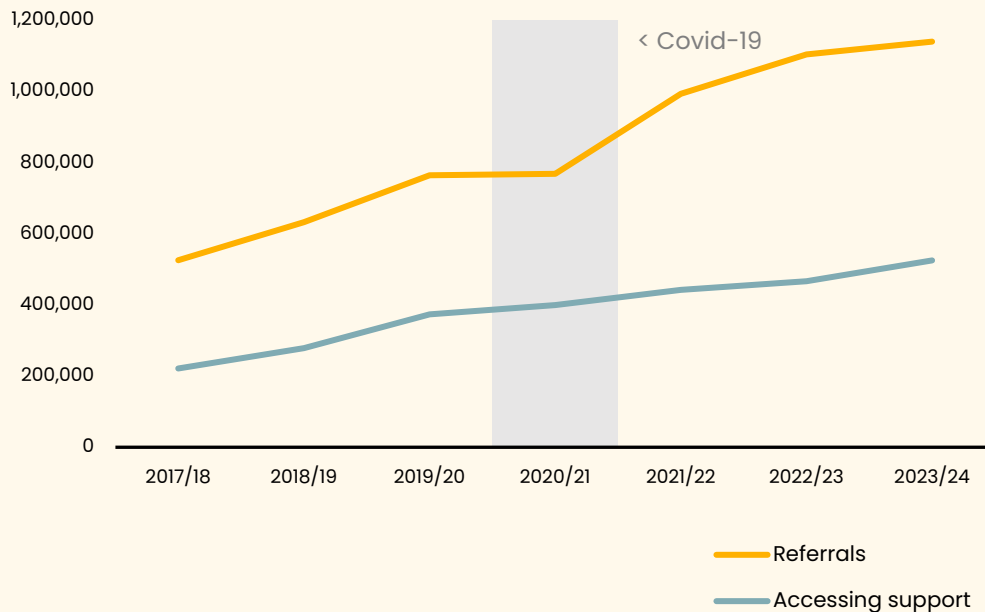
We've used the total number of [children in contact with NHS-funded secondary mental health, learning disability and autism services](#) as our core measure for health. This captures children who have been referred to these services by their GP or another healthcare professional and includes both those who have received services and those who are still waiting to be seen. By using this measure, we aim to capture the children most likely to need professional help.

#### Pressures on children's mental health services continue to increase.

Following five consecutive years of increases, the number of children referred to NHS-funded mental health services has again risen in the latest year. In 2023/24, 1,139,355 children were referred – a 3% increase from the year before. This increase is less stark than those in the previous two years, and the rate at which the number of referrals is rising seems to be slowing down compared to the first year after Covid; in 2021/22 it rose by 29% on the previous year. In 2023/24, we estimate the number of children accessing services post-referral has increased by 13% to over half a million (524,805 children with a recorded second contact). This means that the gap between referrals and access has shrunk, but it remains substantial – the number of children who appear to be accessing support in 2023/24 is still less than half the number of those referred (46%).

In the last briefing, our health indicator had a **worsening** rating – the number of children referred to mental health services in 2022/23 was up compared to the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13). This latest update shows the picture is still **worsening** – the number of referrals in 2023/24 was again up compared to the previous year (2022/23), as well as the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2013/14).

**Figure 3. Number of children referred to and accessing support from NHS-funded mental health services (England)**



## 4. Children's services

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	10 years ago (2013/14)
Children's services Children looked after	Mixed	83,630	- 0.2%	+ 4.5%	+ 21.6%

One group of children particularly at risk of harm is those looked after by the local authority, who also show significantly [higher rates of serious violent offending](#) compared to the general child population. For this reason, we are using the number of [children looked after by the local authority](#) as of 31<sup>st</sup> March of each year as our core indicator for this sector. A child is considered looked after if they are provided with accommodation for longer than 24 hours or a court has ordered them to be placed in the care of the local authority or for adoption.

### The number of children looked after has fallen for the first time in over a decade.

The number of children looked after as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 was very slightly (0.2%) below where it was at the same time the previous year. This is the first time since 2008 that this number has fallen. But

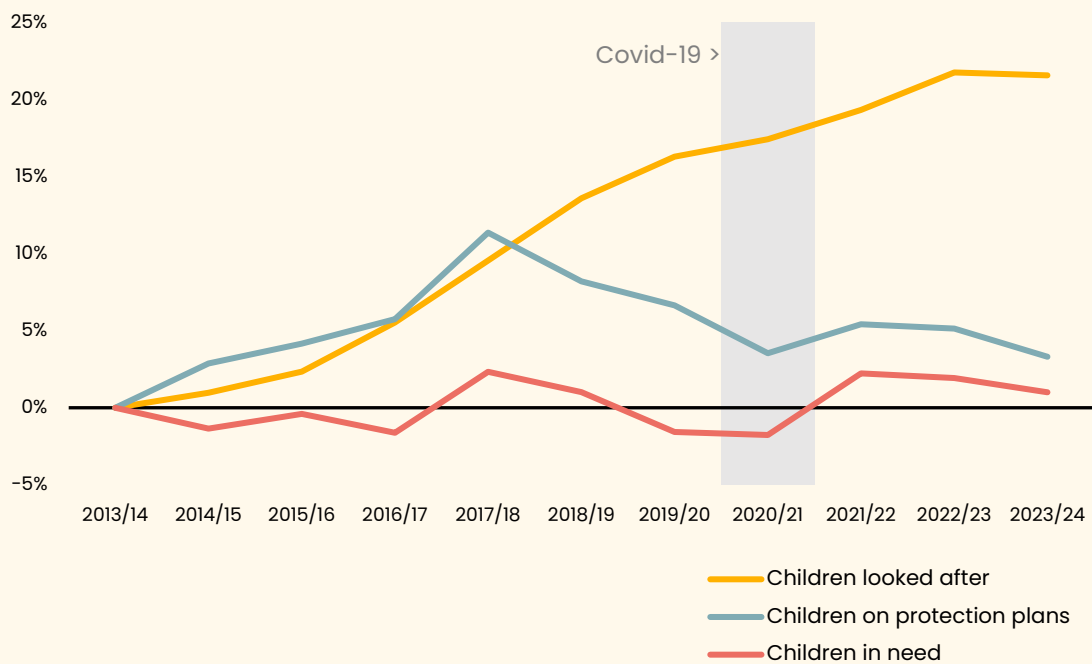


the difference represents less than 200 children, and in total, 83,630 children were still being looked after by the local authority in England at the end of 2023/24.

Other groups of children known to local authority children’s services has also shrunk slightly in the latest year, although these groups haven’t shown such steady increases in the past decade. The number of children thought to be in need of help fell by 0.9% in 2023/24 – to 399,460 children in England. The number of children on child protection plans – a higher level of intervention set up when a child is judged to be at risk of harm – has fallen by 1.7% in 2023/24 to 49,900 children.

In the last briefing, our children’s services indicator had a **worsening** rating – the number of children looked after in 2022/23 was up compared to the previous year (2021/22), the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2012/13). This latest update shows the picture is now **mixed** – the number of children looked after in 2023/24 was down slightly compared to the previous year (2022/23), but remained up compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and ten years previously (2013/14).

**Figure 4. Number of children in need, on child protection plans and looked after as of 31<sup>st</sup> March – percentage change since 2013/14 (England)**



## 5. Youth sector

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2023/24)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2022/23)	Pre-Covid (2019/20)	10 years ago (2013/14)
<b>Youth sector</b> Local authority expenditure for youth services	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>£474m</b>	<b>- 0.3%</b>	<b>+ 7.0%</b>	<b>- 49.5%</b>

Youth services can provide young people with important spaces and sources of support outside of the home. We also know that budget cuts have led to increasing pressure on youth workers and the closures of many spaces for young people, such as youth centres. For this reason, we've chosen [spending on young people's services](#) as our core measure to give us a broad picture of what's happening in the youth sector. This includes universal provision (e.g. leisure, cultural and sports-based activities, often based in youth centres) and targeted provision (e.g. substance misuse or teenage pregnancy services). We've adjusted these numbers to account for inflation using [GDP deflators](#) published by ONS and present all spending in real terms based on that adjustment.

### Spending on services for young people remains low.

For more than 10 years, spending on services for young people has continually fallen in real terms. The past two years (2021/22 and 2022/23) showed slight increases, but in the latest year spending has stalled again. The total spending on youth services in England was £474 million in 2023/24. This was up 6% on the previous year's spending in cash terms, but, once inflation has been taken into account, real spending is down 0.3% compared to the previous year (2022/23). And it remains half what it was ten years ago (2013/14).

In the last briefing, our youth sector indicator had a **mixed** rating – the total local authority expenditure on youth services in 2022/23 was more than half what it had been ten years previously (2012/13) but up compared to the year before Covid (2019/20) and the previous year (2021/22). This latest update shows the picture is still **mixed** – the number of admissions in 2023/24 was still up compared to the year before Covid (2019/20), but down compared to the previous year (2022/23) as well as ten years previously (2013/14).

**Figure 5. Total yearly expenditure on services for young people in real terms (England)**

