

# Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board

## Child Exploitation and Missing Children Update

March 2026

Child Exploitation Team Manager –  
Children's Services

# Update on Service Delivery – Exploitation Team from September 2025

- Increase of 3 Family Help Lead Practitioners – highly skilled and experienced in different areas
- Statutory duties for Return Home Conversations (within 72 hours)
- Piloting direct interventions with children to reduce missing episodes and vulnerability
- Increase of availability to develop existing and new relationships across the partnership; including:

SPOCS for schools

Representation across all Panels where contextual safeguarding could be discussed

Child Centred Policing colleagues

## What does Ofsted think?

*“Children who are potentially at risk of exploitation are recognised early, with key factors such as dips in school attendance or changes in peer groups triggering a cohesive response that focuses on reducing risk from medium to low rather than responding to critical incidents.*”

*Risk assessments are thorough, showing a strong understanding of the child’s needs and risk factors. When children go missing, skilful engagement by members of the exploitation team builds a wider view of the child’s lived experience, leading to effective safety plans.”*

**Youth Anti  
Social  
Behaviour  
Forum**

**Everyday good  
practice –  
thinking and  
sharing  
infomation**

**Transition  
Panel**



**Family Help  
Panel**

**Youth  
Homeless  
Panel**

**Peninsula Peer  
Groups**

**Risk of  
Exclusion  
Panel**

**Networking  
through  
Training and  
Development**

**MAPPA/MARA  
C**

**Torbay  
Safeguarding  
Children's  
Partnership**

**Everyday good  
practice**

**MACE  
(monthly)**

**Peer Group  
Mapping**

**CEMOG  
(monthly)**



**Location  
Mapping**

**Triage (weekly)**

**Exploitation  
Local Profile**

**Adult Network  
Mapping**

## However, there is still much work to do:

- Increasingly complex forms of exploitation
- Refocus on sexual exploitation (national and local learning indicates this is needed)
- Impact of poor mental health, school attendance and conflict at home for children who are repeatedly missing
- Ability to respond and be as 'ruthless' as organised exploitative networks
- Identification younger for prevention rather than response
- Victim outcomes and support (particularly where there are Court cases taking months/years)
- Continued training for the Safeguarding Partnership

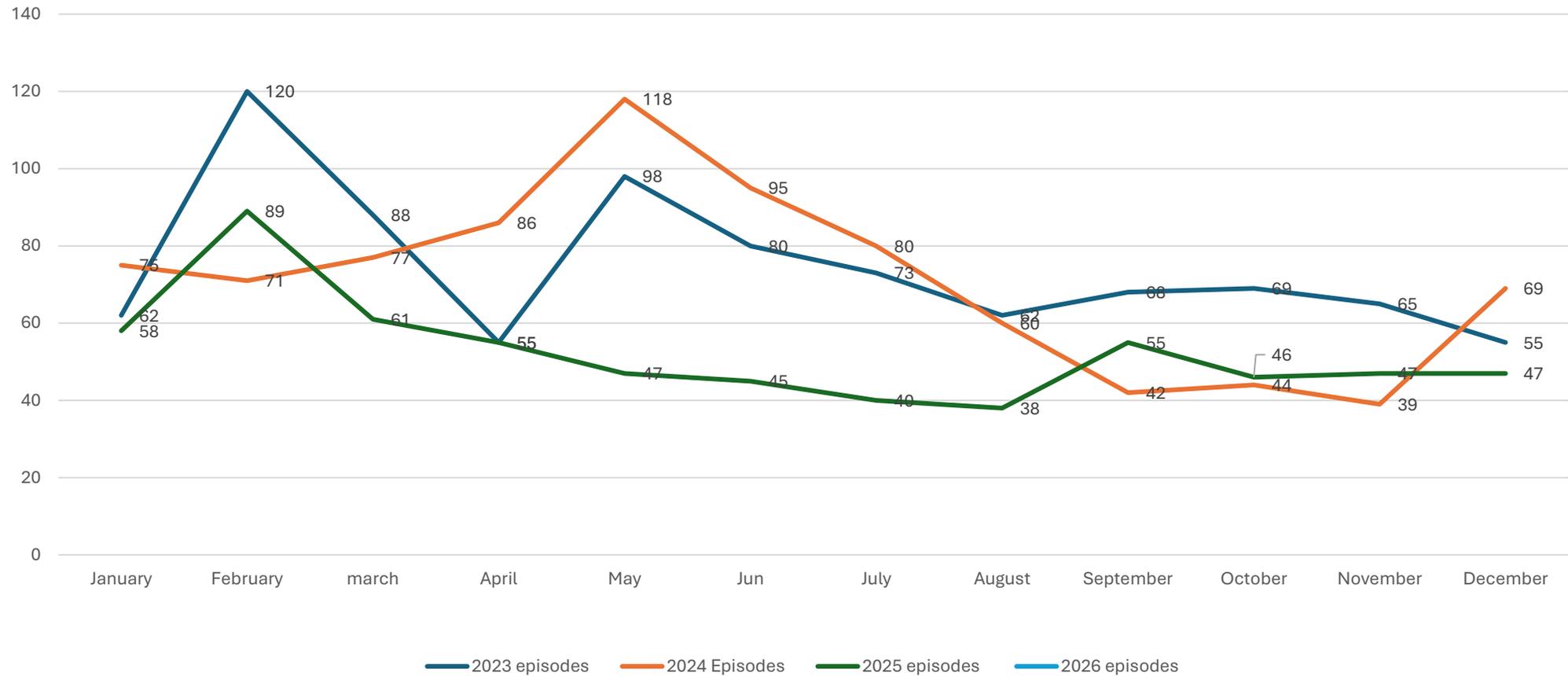
# Missing Children 2025

- Total Missing episodes= 532
- Individual Missing Children = 181

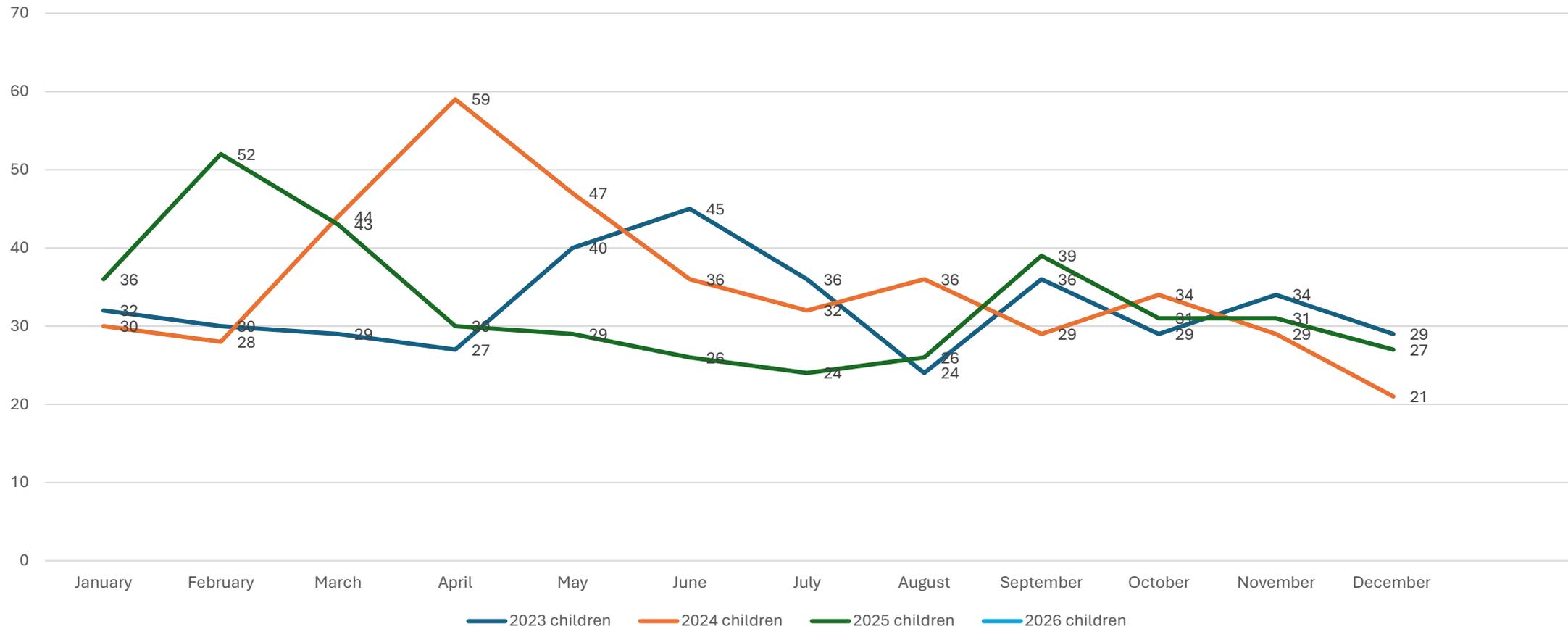
Multiple repeated missing children – most missing child 60+ episodes (reduced in 2026 so far)

Main themes from RHC's: Mental health, conflict with parents/carers, reduced timetables or suspected/excluded from school

# Missing episodes– Overview – 3 year comparable



# Individual missing children – overview – 3 year comparable



# Example: Repeatedly missing child

16 year old male with Autism and intrusive thoughts which result in high conflict with his mum and self harm  
Repeatedly missing and located in unsafe places (railway, bridges)

## **Approach/intervention:**

- Multi agency planning with Social Work Team, Learning Disability Team, Building Futures (supporting mum), School and police
- Consistent member of the Exploitation Team offering weekly appointments for RHC's
- Weekly vulnerability management meetings instigated
- Appointment planning is trauma informed and informed by specialist advice
- Philomena (missing) protocol written with his mum for fast information sharing with police, including risks and vulnerabilities

## **Achievements from this approach:**

Mum is regaining confidence in trauma informed parenting and boundary setting, as well as following agreed protocols for missing episodes and return to home

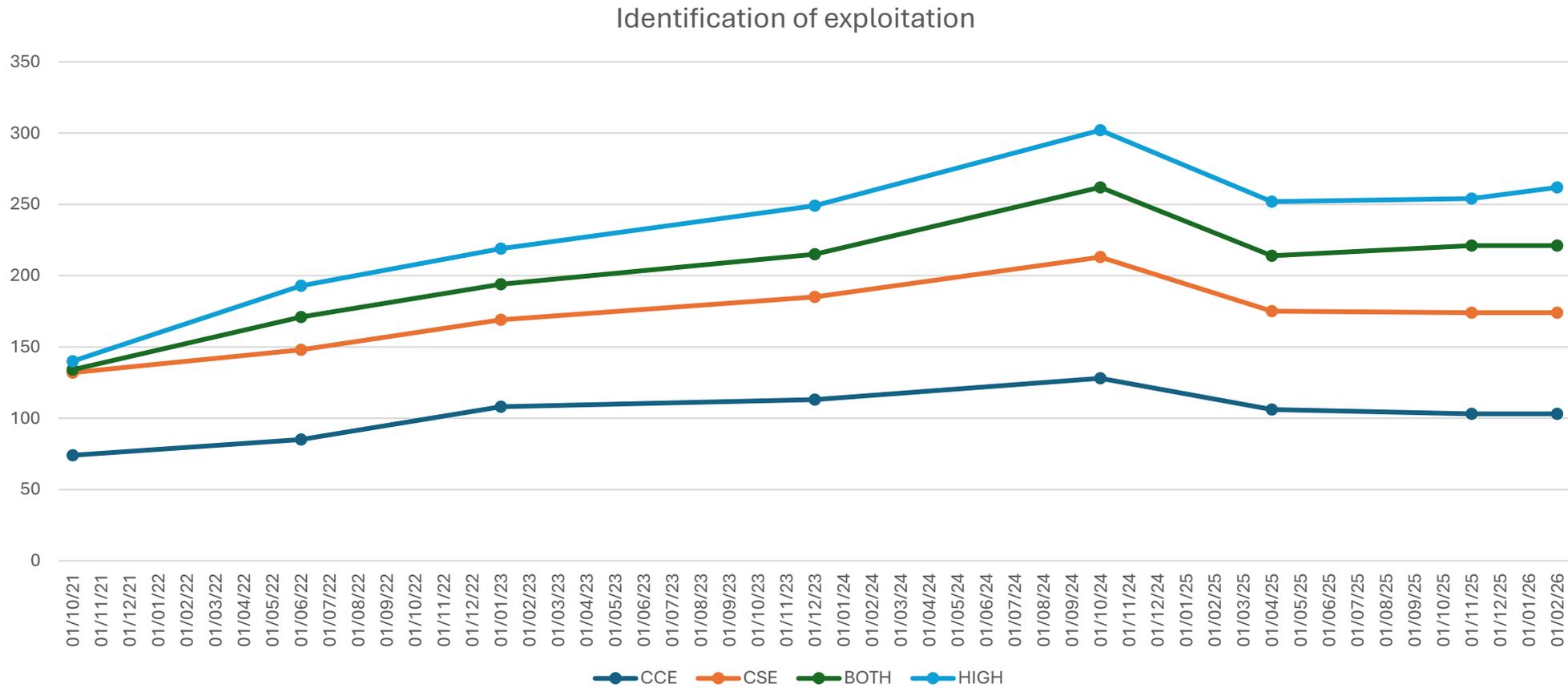
Young Person has actively sought out safe places when feeling overwhelmed (including Children's Services offices)

Communication and co-ordination with police has reduced his flight responses and being held for repeated mental health assessments or arrests

Increased self regulation and ability to express how he is feeling with safe adults who are in close communication with his mum.

Last reported missing episode now over 3 weeks ago and last police intervention shortly after that.

# Identification of child exploitation in Torbay



## Local practice messages

- Open mindedness to sexual exploitation – aware of becoming de-sensitised
- Early prevention – including active assessment of younger siblings of exploited children
- Mapping of locations and peer groups is working – leading to earlier interventions and targeting vulnerable groups for prevention and protection
- Disrupting adults/networks can be time consuming and frustration but we can have success through working together to gather evidence and make statements to Court
- Our forums work for information sharing and shared responsibility for taking action

# Example: Exploited child

- 14 year old– has entered into a relationship with a 17 year old
- Mapping/sharing information on their missing episodes evidenced them being together when both denied this
- Timely and inquisitive information sharing between accommodation providers/care staff, police and Social Work Team to identify and assess exploitation (for them both)
- Previous exploitation toolkits and chronology for the 17 year old male has helped to understand his profile and behaviours
- Joint strategy meeting for both children when both were subject to a violent attack in Exeter
- Exploitation Team have allocated 2 workers – 1 to focus on the male and 1 to focus on the female
- Child Abduction Warning Notice served by police on the 17 year old and his grandmother
- Address of the 17 year old raised and being monitored by Torbay MACE for disruption and protection of grandmother and any other child visiting

## **Results so far:**

Excellent information sharing between support/care teams for both children to respond to changing risks and their relationships

Female has been given safe space to explore the concerns that professionals have and has talked about the impact of the incident in Exeter

Whilst the male is declining offers of any support and feels that services are intrusive, he is in social media communication with his Social Worker = small win.



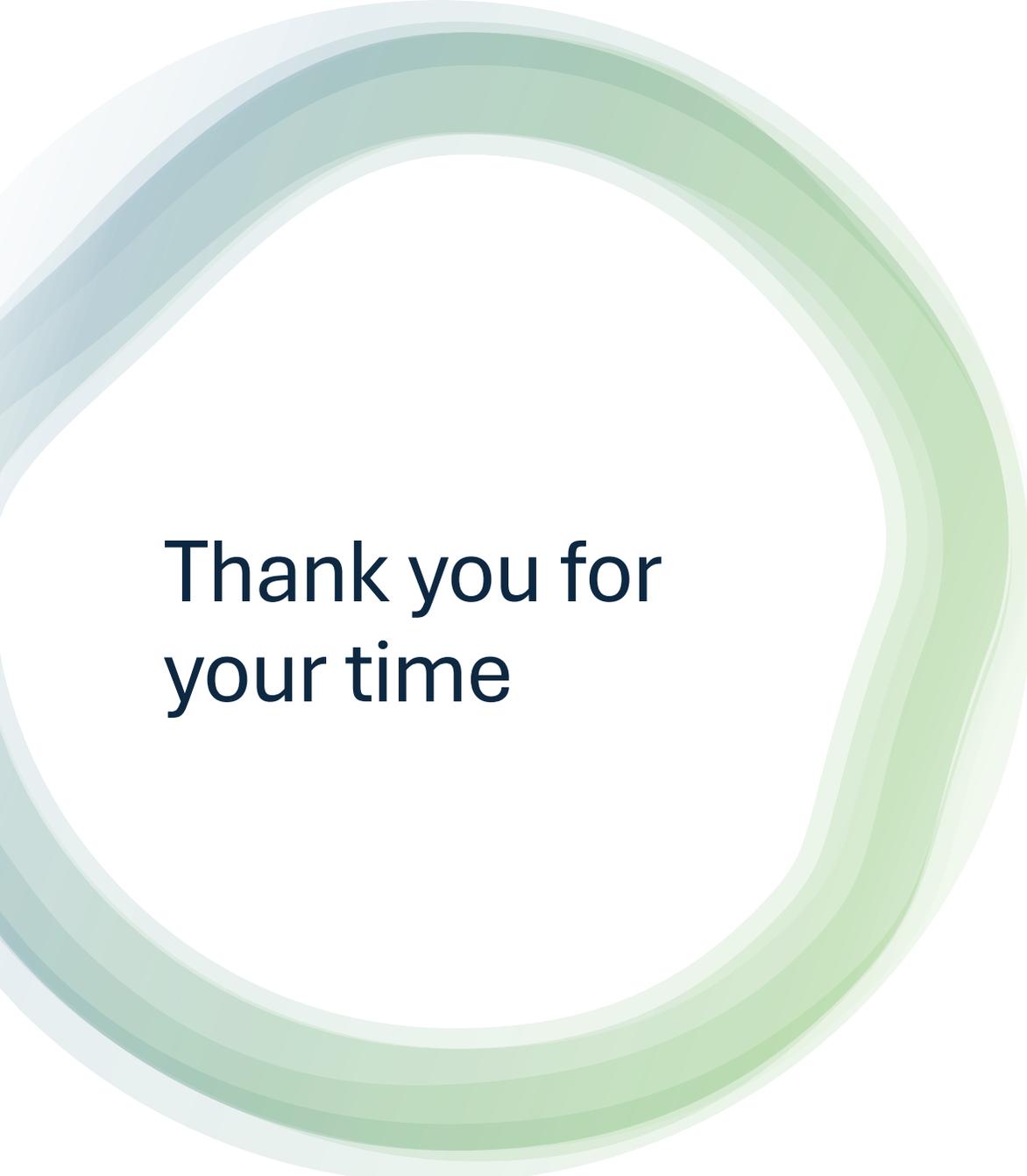
## 2026 – keep building positive work (next steps)

- Policy to support good practice: Finalising of updated missing and NRM policies and procedures – including upload to Tri Ex and TSCP web pages
- Consolidation of the offer from the Exploitation Team – identifying most effective use of limited resources
- Continued Integration and joint working between Exploitation Team and Child Centred Policing Team – joint training and team development with some time co-located?
- Exploitation into development of Multi Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT development)
- Enhancing ethos and practice values of ‘keeping children local’ via placement sufficiency and ‘wrap around safety plans’ with a focus disrupting perpetrators instead



## 2026 – keep building positive work (next steps)

- Training: renewed TSCP module “Tackling Child Exploitation in Torbay” – 1<sup>st</sup> session fully booked with positive feedback
- County Lines training programme - 2x trainers accredited to run this on behalf of Ivison Trust and National County Lines Co-Ordination Centre
- Review and renew attendance and engagement with MACE
- Integrated disruption of exploitation and organised crime – NWG Disruption Toolkit – ‘Faces, Spaces and Places’
- Extend established , strong links with Peninsula Exploitation Leads (Devon, Cornwall, Plymouth) further afield into Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire.



Thank you for  
your time

- Any questions/comments
- Look forward to seeing you again in 6 months