

# Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board

## Child Exploitation and Missing Children Update

September 2026

Child Exploitation Team Manager – Children's Services



# Update on Service Delivery – Missing and Exploitation Team

- 3x Practitioners + 1x Co-Ordinator - large range of experience and skills – directly engaging with children who have been reported missing or who have complex vulnerabilities including exploitation
- Supporting best practice in identifying and assessing vulnerability to exploitation and missing episodes
- Leading on completion of Philomena Protocols for repeatedly missing children
- Small number of co-allocations to children with complex vulnerabilities and needs

## IMPACT:

Relationships built with children and families – focused on acknowledging trauma but working in a solution focused way

Understanding and identifying local peer group networks, locations of concerns, patterns of behaviours

Mapping and reporting adults and locations of concern

Excellent coverage across operational multi agency Panels



## 2026 So far.....

- Continued building of multi agency relationships and information sharing
- Building relationships with children and families to understand their lives and experiences
- Supporting appropriate use of civil legislation to disrupt perpetrators and locations
- Completion of Contextual Safeguarding Policy and Practice Framework (awaiting sign off)
- Return of initial information from Torbay for Operation Beaconport (National Review of Child Sexual Exploitation)
- Taxi driver awareness – October 2026

**Youth Anti  
Social  
Behaviour  
Forum**

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

**Transition  
Panel**

**Family Help  
Panel**

**Youth  
Homeless  
Panel**

**Peninsula Peer  
Groups**

**Risk of  
Exclusion  
Panel**

**Networking  
through  
Training and  
Development**

**MAPPA/MARAC**



**Torbay  
Safeguarding  
Children's  
Partnership**

**Everyday good  
practice**

**Peer Group  
Mapping**

**Location  
Mapping**

**Adult Network  
Mapping**

**Exploitation  
Local Profile**

**Triage (weekly)**

**CEMOG  
(monthly)**

**MACE  
(monthly)**





However, there is still much (hard) work to do:

- Keeping up with emerging forms of exploitation (including AI and crypto banking)
  - Ability to respond and be as 'ruthless' as organised exploitative networks whilst remaining lawful and ethical in our work
  - Identification younger for prevention rather than response
  - Supporting families and communities to do the same
  - Keeping our children 'local' against challenges of placement sufficiency and quality
  - Disrupting perpetrators/bringing them to justice alongside prison and probation reforms which counteract this
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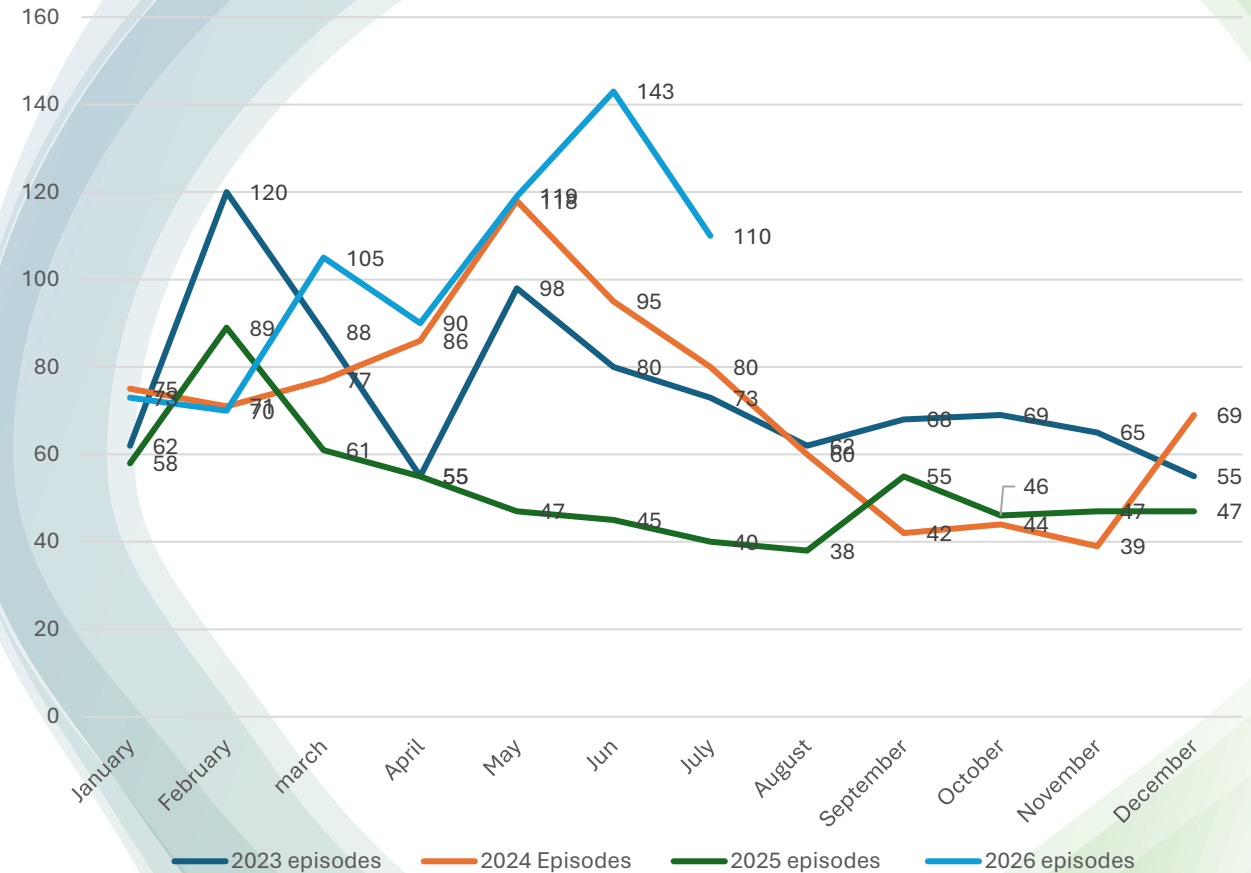
# Missing Children

- Significant increase in missing children reported to police
- Across all localities, social groups and social care status

| Month       | Number of Missing Episodes | Individual Children |
|-------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| April 2025  | 55                         | 30                  |
| April 2026  | 90                         | 38                  |
| May 2025    | 47                         | 29                  |
| May 2026    | 119                        | 49                  |
| June 2025   | 45                         | 26                  |
| June 2026   | 143                        | 61                  |
| July 2025   | 40                         | 24                  |
| July 2026   | 110                        | 58                  |
| August 2025 | 38                         | 26                  |
| August 2026 | 79                         | 44                  |

# Missing episodes– Overview – 3 year comparable

- Why?
- Parental awareness of contextual risk – advice and information being provided
- High media coverage re: deaths of missing children (Nationally)
- Positive/helpful intervention following a missing episode
- Parental concerns re: mental health, self harm and neurodiversity
- Cared For Children – reporting by carers and placements in line with protocol





## Children vulnerable to exploitation – September 2026

Missing and Exploitation team are tracking 151 children with exploitation toolkits:

69 males                      81 females              1 transgender child

Aged 10 -17

44 children with HIGH vulnerability/BEING EXPLOITED

107 child with MEDIUM vulnerability

Vulnerability across all types of child exploitation and abuse

25 children with active Modern Slavery (National Referral Mechanism) referrals being assessed by the Home Office – for a combination of sexual, criminal and financial exploitation – including being trafficked for the purposes of exploitation/abuse

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# Example: Exploited child

15 year old Cared For Child – living in a fostering placement

Extensive trauma from being exposed to parental substance misuse and domestic abuse

Associations with peers of concerns and exposure to adult drug suppliers via parental addiction

Had been ‘adultified’ by her family and blamed for disclosing what was happening at home

Young carer for her brother – for whom the Local Authority proposed a plan of permanence in another family

Missing and exploitation concerns due to being in ‘flight’ mode from foster care

Intervention:

- Consistent and persistent approach from the same worker following missing episodes to complete Return Home Conversations
- Weekly appointments (sometimes 2x weekly) to provide emotional support, a listening ear and good advice/information about staying safe
- Support to attend appointments with important professionals regarding health and wellbeing
- Lots of ‘coffee’ and ‘snacks’ as well as drives around the local area to assist ‘talking’
- Supporting the child’s attendance at Court (Court determined that brother would remain local and that their sibling relationship should be promoted).



# Example: Exploited Child – cont.....



## OUTCOMES/IMPACT:

- Missing episodes have stopped – the child will reach out with problems
- Stability in education (creative arts focused education plan)
- Stability in fostering placement
- Understanding and reflection from the child about parenting capacity and reduction of self blame
- Supported to attend youth groups locally (still a work in progress)
- Ability to make positive decisions about self safety
- Creating poster for the upcoming girls group – was given a brief and created an excellent advertisement for other girls (see next slide)

## Into the future:

- Supporting positive aspirations and achievement in education
  - Supporting a safe role for her to take part in her brother's care
  - Supporting continued recovery and positive relationships with family and peers
  - Transition from Missing/Exploitation Team into youth work services (alongside Cared For status)
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# Example – Repeated Missing Child:



15 year old boy

Parental separation – acrimonious; both parents want him to live with them and blame the other

Neurodiversity – waiting for Autism assessment (currently 2 years waiting)

Quick escalation to repeated missing episodes away from both parents

Experimentation with alcohol and cannabis

Quickly developed associations with other missing and vulnerable children

Escalated into Anti Social Behaviour through ‘urban exploring’ and shoplifting

## Intervention:

- Allocation to a consistent member of the team for Return Home Conversations
  - Return Home Conversations recorded the child’s view about parental behaviours and his reasons for continually leaving home
  - Initial safety planning achieved
  - Philomena Protocol completed with mum (missing persons trigger plan)
  - Child In Need Single Assessment completed with Child In Need planning agreed
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# Example – Repeated Missing Child continued...

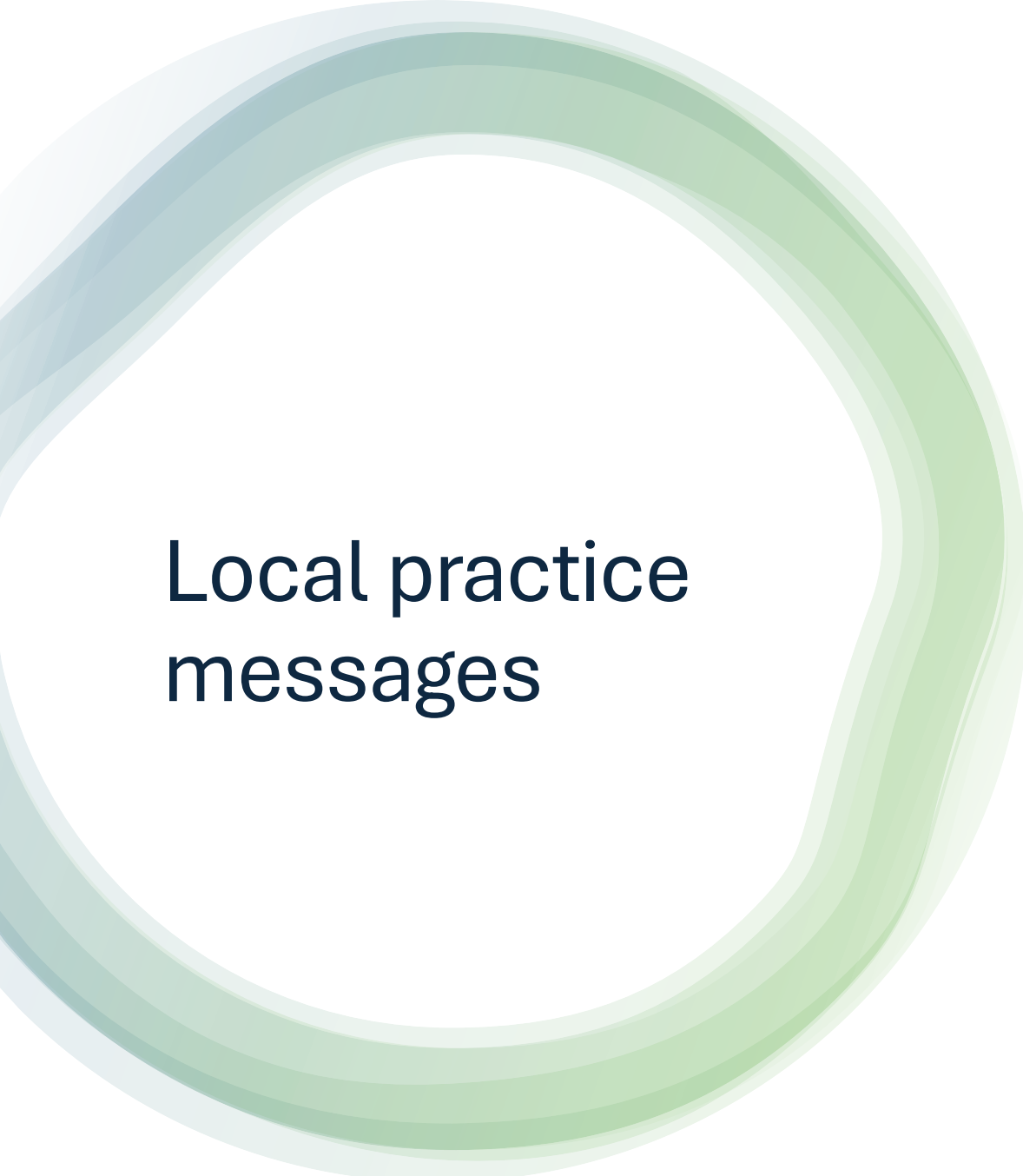


## OUTCOMES/IMPACT

- Child In Need planning – child's voice and experiences at the centre
- Small network of well connected professionals providing support and advice to mum
- Child feeling able to choose who he will work with
- Understanding and disruption of adult perpetrators and monitoring local peer network
- Reducing missing episodes

## Into the future (via Child In Need Planning):

- YJS pathways (Out of Court) for offending/anti social behaviours – diversion focus
  - Stabilising living arrangement
  - Recovery work for mum to strengthen her confidence
  - Support to achieve in education and promote aspirations
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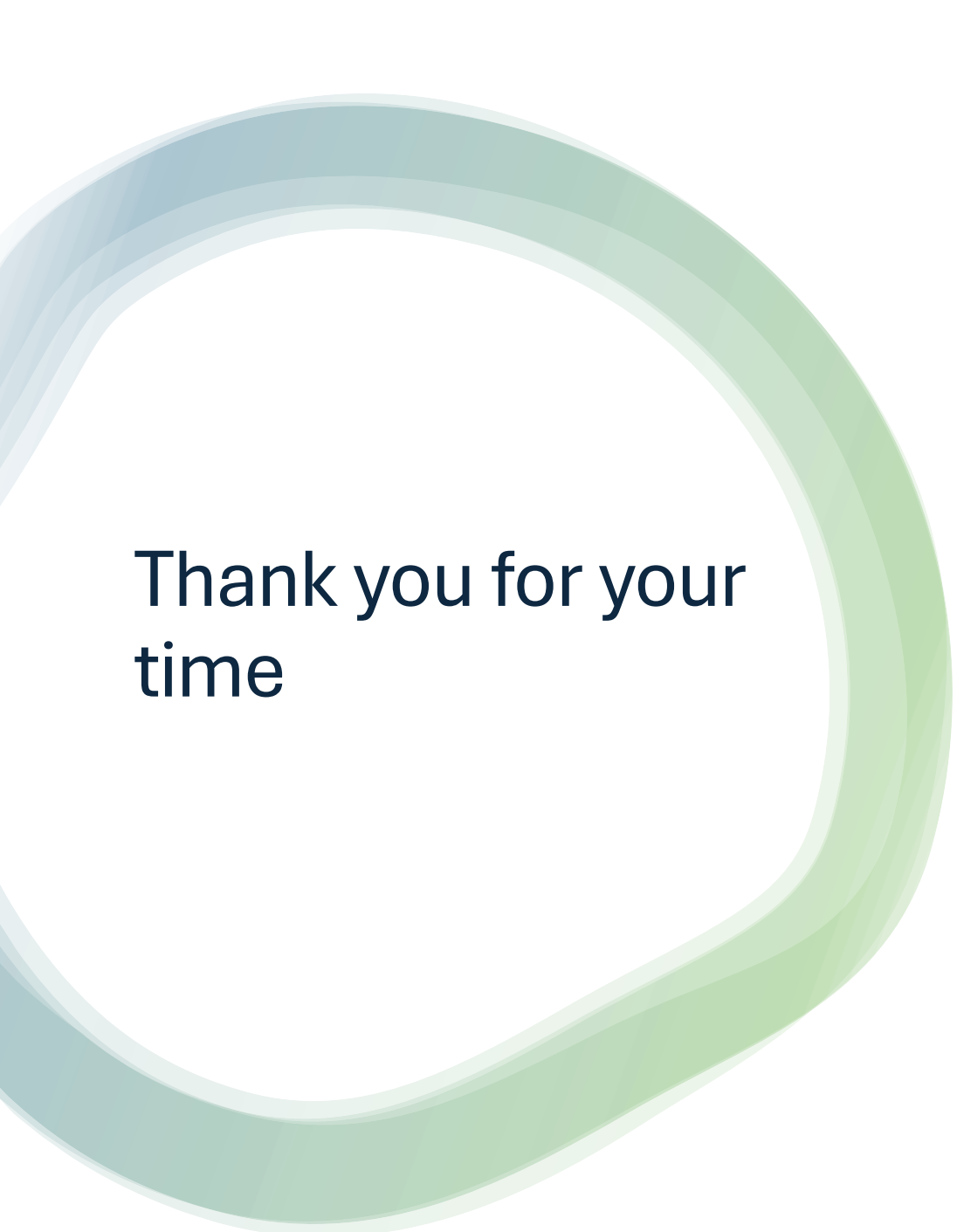
# Local practice messages

- ‘Stay the Course’ – this is hard work and we cannot give up on our children and young people – **Persistence and Consistency**
- **Mapping of locations and peer groups is working** – leading to earlier interventions and targeting vulnerable groups for prevention and protection
- Our local forums work for information sharing and shared responsibility for **taking action**
- **Early prevention** – including active assessment and intervention of younger siblings of exploited children
- Use the new **victim support services** and **commissioned services** in the most effective way for children and families
- Learning from national Safeguarding Reviews in relation to serious violence and organised crime/abuse of children and acknowledge that Torbay is not immune to this – **PREPARE for this with good policies and practice**



Into 2027.....

- Review and update of ‘Out Of County’ procedures and practice – multi agency working group
- Integration of contextual safeguarding into MACPT and Families First Reforms
- Integration of contextual safeguarding into new youth services and police practices
- Focus on girls and young women who are exposed to violence and harm – girl’s groups and safe spaces
- Listening to the experiences of children and families and align services accordingly
- TSCP Conference 2027



Thank you for your  
time

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