

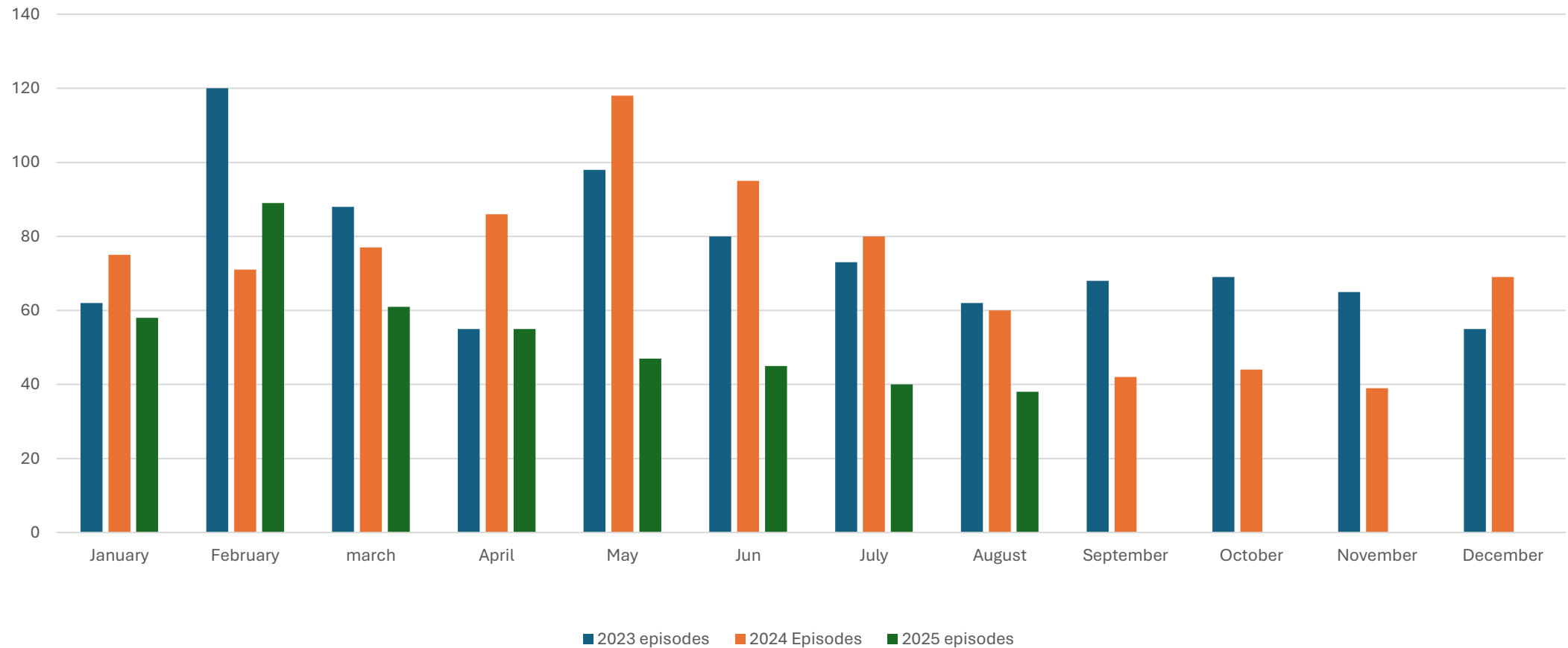
Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board

September 2025

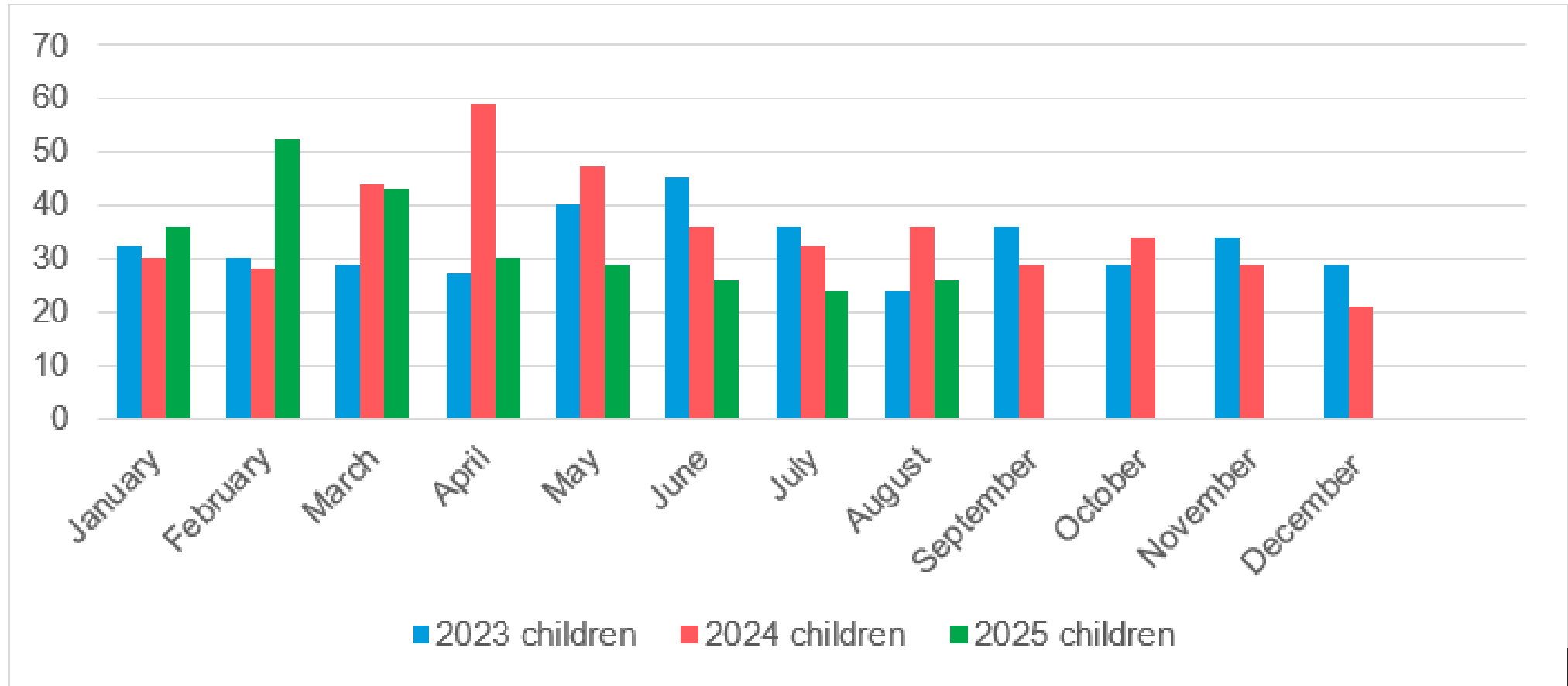
Child Exploitation and Missing Children Update

Child Exploitation Team Manager
– Children's Services

Missing Episodes – Overview – 3 year comparable



Individual missing children – Overview – 3 year comparable



Missing children – how many?

Month	Number of Missing Episodes	Number of individual children
January 2024	75	30
February 2024	67	28
March 2024	77	27
April 2024	99	44
May 2024	118	45
June 2024	95	36
July 2024	80	32
August 2024	60	34
September 2024	42	29
October 2024	44	34
November 2024	39	29
December 2024	28	21
January 2025	58	36
February 2025	31	22
March 2025	61	43
April 2025	55	30
May 2025	47	29
June 2025	45	26
July 2025	40	24
August 2025	38	26

Why a reduction in children being reported missing? (theories and feedback)

**We know that children are out overnight as they are being reported by public, being arrested, or intelligence received*

We refer to this as 'hidden missing'.

- Lateness of curfews even for younger children
- Uptake in social media apps to track children and use of social media to locate children
- **Hidden missing to avoid arrest (parents not reporting as it will result in breach of bail)**
- **We know that there are multiple children who are hidden missing and only reported by professionals**
- Repeated missing children now with electronic tags and high scrutiny – many of these have now ended and have started to be missing in September 2025
- Police call handlers setting higher expectations on carers and families
- Feedback regarding the time it takes to report to the police and the negative impact of the response on families

Missing Children - SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Multi Agency communication and triage of ALL missing children – in Torbay and across borders
- Contextual mapping – locations and networks
- Linking missing episodes with key themes impacting on children – mental health, substance misuse, relationship challenges in school or at home
- Children's voices – including those living away from Torbay
- Missing strategy meeting – 72 hours and repeated missings
- Patterns are not dissimilar to neighbouring authorities

Weaknesses:

- Moving repeatedly missing children out of the area (Cared For) due to placement sufficiency
- Improving the reporting of hidden missing children
- Roll out of Philomena Protocol so far
- Professional views that 'moving a child away' will reduce risk (not all, but enough to be a problem)
- Police and Children's Data appearing different (policing systems cannot differentiate Torbay at this time – included with South Devon data)

Opportunities:

- New police initiative for Early Intervention (meeting on 22nd September to explore)
- Increase capacity of Exploitation Team for Return Home Conversations
- Keeping Cared For Children closer to Torbay
- Philomena Protocol – now endorsed
- Substance Misuse Service
- Child Centred Policing Team – disruption of adults and addresses using civil orders
- New RHC format – gathering extensive data

Threats:

- Lack of update of Philomena Protocol
- Organised Crime/Exploitation – each network disrupted is replaced by another
- Repeatedly missing children from other areas being placed in Torbay
- Trafficked children being located in Torbay (county lines) – local co-ordinated response
- Missing From Education or post 16 NEET

Child Exploitation – 2025 so far -Childrens

STRENGTHS:

- Hard work to improve performance on exploitation toolkit reviews (from 17% to 56% in date)
- Tracking Financial Exploitation
- Modern Slavery/National Referral Mechanism decisions
- Some great practice and responses to increasing needs
- Contextual mapping (multi agency) and information sharing
- Responses to children previously unknown, or have quickly escalated
- Barnardo's (CSE) and Youth Justice prevention (CCE) and intervention pathways
- Neighbouring authorities adopting practice from Torbay
- Increasing capacity of Exploitation and Missing Team

CHALLENGES:

- Complexity and keeping up to date with trends – including use of AI for sextortion, alternative 'currencies', constant movement of county lines
- Recalibrating/tracking through restructure (will be resolved quickly thought)
- Data from Return Home Conversations – plan to resolve by end of 2025
- Complex 'family' breakdowns which escalate vulnerability
- Capacity of current services to meet need

Child Exploitation – 2025 so far - TSCP

STRENGTHS:

- Continued communication and problem solving – quick and (mainly) easy contact with each others
- Escalations and responses from senior managers across agencies when needed
- Learning from local and national SPR's and inspections
- MACE – chaired by police now/supported and administered by Childrens

CHALLENGES:

- Each agency being faced with challenges relating to SPR's and inspections
- Staff welfare – maintaining the speed and complexity of work that is needed in this area
- Online and AI exploitation
- Professional differences for children with high risk/complex needs
- Consistent attendance from agencies and growth of MACE forum – continuing to improve its 'worth' and 'outcomes' for children
- Finishing the Contextual Safeguarding Framework

Child Exploitation – Next Steps

Children's Services:

- Recruitment into Exploitation/Missing Team – enhancing RHC and exploitation response
- Return Home Conversation data
- Earlier intervention and awareness raising via Family Hubs, Community outreach and Family Help model
- More outreach/consultation into schools and any other agencies
- Some focus on siblings and primary schools for early identification
- Internal training – missing processes, exploitation toolkits
- Roll out/embed Philomena Protocol
- Foster Carer/SGO training
- Prepare for inspection – Annexe A information, positive examples of practice, policy updates

TSCP:

- Final version of Exploitation work plan 2025 - 2028
- Finalising of updated missing and NRM policies and procedures – including upload to Tri Ex and TSCP web pages
- Integration and joint working between Exploitation Team and Child Centred Policing Team
- Continuing to review national SPR's and research and apply to local practice
- 'Front loading' services and interventions to embed Family Help model
- Partnership Training Plan
- Attendance and engagement with MACE
- Integrated disruption of exploitation and organised crime – NWG Disruption Toolkit – 'Faces, Spaces and Places'

Thank you for your time

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