



Meeting	Policing Performance Committee
Date	6 December 2023
Location	Video Conference
Title of Paper	National Approach to Missing Persons, Prevention Strategies and Problem Solving
Presented By	ACC David Duncan
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	Yes – Appendix 1: Statistical data for 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

PURPOSE

The purpose of this briefing note is to update the SPA regarding the national approach to missing persons investigations and demand.

Members are invited to discuss the contents of this paper.

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2022, Police Scotland recorded 20,096 reports of missing people on STORM (Police Scotland's incident database). Following assessment, 17690 missing person investigations were recorded on Police Scotland National Missing Persons Application (NMPA).
- 1.2 Appendix 1 provides statistical data for 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. The data demonstrates the number of missing person investigations by type (e.g., adult/child) and by age group. The data also provides information on the types of location where missing episodes occur from, including care and NHS settings.

2. Definition

- 2.1 A Missing Person is defined as anyone whose whereabouts is unknown and:
 - Where the circumstances are out of character
 - The context suggests the person may be subject to crime; or
 - The person is at risk of harm to themselves or another.
- 2.2 In all investigations they will be considered missing until located and their wellbeing or otherwise is established.
- 2.3 Risk Levels:
 - High Risk: the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the missing person is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
 - Medium Risk: the risk posed is likely to place the missing person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.
 - Low Risk: the apparent threat of danger to either the missing person or the public is low (a child should not be graded as low risk).
- 2.4 The current Definition and Risk Gradings were set in 2014 following on from the creation of the single Police Service.

3. Investigations

- 3.1 Most Missing Persons Investigations are recorded on the National Missing Person Application (NMPA), introduced in 2019.

- 3.2 There are exceptions, detailed by NMPA business rules; however, where an NMPA entry is not raised a clear rationale must be recorded by a supervisory officer on STORM.
- 3.3 The NMPA is an internally developed application for the recording of Missing Person Investigations. Attending officers record the nominal details of the missing person, complete a question set to establish the risk level and a detailed synopsis of the known circumstances. The attending officers' supervisor then records their assessment of the risk and circumstances. Investigative priorities are recorded and actioned.
- 3.4 NMPA can be accessed by officers via desktop computers within police stations. As with all applications, NMPA must be updated to provide the best possible platform to enhance the efficacy of investigations.
- 3.5 Currently, there is no mobile specific application, and although the desktop version is accessible via officers' mobile device this has proven problematic in terms of reliability and usability. There is no auto-save function availability and issues exist with connectivity means that reports can be entirely lost prior to completion. At present, the use of the mobile device to create missing person reports sits at a low 8%.
- 3.6 The ability to record missing person details at the scene of a missing person report is extremely valuable in that it allows for early risk assessment work to be carried out by supervisory officers, key actions to be instigated and PNC markers to be placed at an early stage of the enquiry.
- 3.7 The risks associated with the functionality of the mobile device version of the Application have been recorded and remains on the Risk Register. Although this has opened some dialogue with IT to establish solutions going forward, the work required is not currently a priority project for their department.
- 3.8 NMPA has improved the management of missing person investigations, particularly in respect of repeated missing episodes involving an individual as investigating officers can quickly find details of previous risk, medical background, circumstances, triggers, family and associates, as well as the location where the person was last found. Crucially, details of any return home interviews are also recorded, and these can help inform potential future missing episodes.

4. Governance and Quality Assurance

- 4.1 The National Missing Person Unit (NMPU) is responsible for ensuring National Standards for all Missing Person Investigations. This is achieved supporting territorial divisions and specialist support departments at both tactical and operational levels, ensuring Police Scotland adheres to the National Missing Person Framework Strategy.
- 4.2 The NMPU is staffed by 1 Police Inspector, 1 Police Sergeant and 2 Detective Constables. They are supported by an operational coordinator and a tactical coordinator in each of the territorial divisions. At a national level, the NMPU provides the conduit between all internal and external partners and stakeholders. This allows best practice to be sought and shared, learning points to be addressed and promote partnership work.

5. HMICS Thematic Inspection of Police Response to missing persons in Scotland

- 5.1 HMICS have commenced a thematic inspection of Police Scotland's management and response to missing persons and have recently published the [Terms of Reference](#) for the inspection.
- 5.2 In preparation for the HMICS Inspection of Missing Person Investigations, a divisional health check was conducted, the three areas of focus being:
- NMPA and Dashboard
 - Quality Assurance
 - Partnership working
- 5.3 Going forward it is anticipated this will provide a consistent approach to missing person investigations and partnership working across Scotland.

6. Prevention Strategies and Problem Solving

- 6.1 There is higher missing person investigation demand in relation to individuals aged 17 and under and from the children's care setting and NHS facility locations. The following initiatives demonstrate where prevention activities are in place, improving the safety and wellbeing of our communities and reducing demand.

Greater Glasgow Division – NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

- 6.2 Since the start of 2023, Police Scotland has delivered a series of inputs to NHS establishments in Greater Glasgow. These inputs provide guidance and advice regarding the missing patient protocol. A flow chart provides NHS staff with guidance and actions to take in relation to persons in their care, prior to reporting them as missing to police.
- 6.3 There has since been a 15 % decrease in the number of missing persons reported to Police Scotland from NHS establishments in Greater Glasgow. Support and engagement continue through collaboration with NHS partners and Greater Glasgow Division.
- 6.4 The table below shows the number of Missing Person reports from NHS establishments, per subdivision, and demonstrates the decrease.

Investigations/Locus	1st June 2022 – 30th June 2022	1st June 2023 – 30th June 2023
QEUH & Leverndale Hospital	92	107
Stobhill Hospital	75	69
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	53	32
Gartnavel Hospital	46	18
Total	266	226

- 6.5 The NMPU will now use the above work to inform and develop National Policy and Guidance with the vision to introduce this best practice nationally.

Not at Home Policy and Philomena Protocols

- 6.6 ‘Not at Home’ can be used by Local Authorities and other care providers in cases where there are grounds to believe that the child’s current circumstances involve no apparent risk, or the level

of risk does not meet the threshold for a police-led missing person investigation.

- 6.7 For example, a child failing to return from contact with family and staff/carers know the child is still in the family home, or the child is staying with others without consent and where there are no concerns for their wellbeing or safety.
- 6.8 In these types of circumstances, it is permissible to have a single-agency response and there is no need for the police to be contacted.
- 6.9 A child should usually only be considered as 'Not at Home' if previously agreed within their Prevention Plan. If the child is 'Not at Home' then the carer/residential staff will take whatever action has been previously agreed and recorded in the Prevention Plan and there is no requirement to contact the Police.
- 6.10 Relevant parties must record decisions and actions. All episodes of being 'Not at Home' must be recorded and form part of the regular risk assessments. The use of 'Not at Home' can only be applied where it is deemed appropriate by the Local Authority and other providers.
- 6.11 Whilst the protocol is available for all to use, it has not been adopted across all Local Authorities.
- 6.12 The Philomena Protocol was introduced by Police Scotland in 2023 and further supports care providers for children and young people who may go missing.
- 6.13 The protocol is for safeguarding children and young people who are at risk of going missing and is designed so the carer, or whoever has responsibility for the child or young person, has all information available to, not only ascertain that the child or young person is missing from home, but also work with the police to locate them safely.
- 6.14 Working alongside partner agencies, it encourages the child or young person, carers, staff, families and friends to compile information which could be used in the event of a child or young person going missing.
- 6.15 The Protocol compliments the 'Not at Home' policy and, when the risk is deemed to be intolerable, all relevant information may be

swiftly given to the police to ensure the child or young person is found safe and well as quickly as possible.

- 6.16 Further good partnership practices are evident in the organisation where formal structures have been implemented to support care experienced children and maximise the opportunities provided by 'Not at Home' policy and Philomena Protocols.
- 6.17 These involve regular engagement with Local Authority, Education, Social Work and advocacy agencies to ensure all children and young people who have been missing are discussed and safeguarded.
- 6.18 This is supplemented by quarterly awareness sessions and CPD events with partners in the NHS and Social Services and regular visits to public and private care providers, providing training to staff, whilst promoting the National Missing Framework for Scotland.

7. Other Initiatives

Dementia Safeguarding Scheme

- 7.1 In 2021, Police Scotland launched the Herbert Protocol to pro-actively support members of the public who are living with Dementia.
- 7.2 The Protocol entails a standardised form being completed and records information specific to the individual.
- 7.3 This negates the need for Police to spend critical time obtaining this information, at a time of distress, and allows immediately investigation and searching for the missing person.
- 7.4 The initiative is governed through the National Steering Group, which is comprised of partners from the Scottish Government, Alzheimer Scotland, and The Health and Social Care Partnership.
- 7.5 More recently, in collaboration with Alzheimer Scotland, a pilot study has taken place, in respect of missing persons living with Dementia, whereby a dementia advisor conducts the return discussion following a missing person episode, rather than a police officer.
- 7.6 Evidence of its success has resulted in extension of the pilot in two further divisions with the ambition of a phased roll out nationally.

- 7.7 During 2022/23, Argyll and West Dunbartonshire Division piloted the Safe Connect Fob initiative, a device which can be used to reunite a person living with dementia with loved ones when necessary.
- 7.8 The fob is a small keyring which is pre-programmed with an individual's first name and emergency contact.
- 7.9 Should a person be found distressed and possessing the fob, they can tap it on a smart mobile phone and obtain the aforementioned details, allowing the safe return of the person.
- 7.10 The fob has proved very successful at pilot and, as such, Alzheimer Scotland provided funding for the purchase of 13,000 fobs to be distributed amongst Alzheimer Scotland Support Centres situated across Scotland.
- 7.11 The Herbert Protocol and Safe Connect Scheme will be brought together under the Dementia Safeguarding Scheme, scheduled for launch in February 2024. The scheme is a collaboration between Alzheimer Scotland and Police Scotland. It will incorporate further strands, such as the Return Discussion pilot and the Purple Alert App, developed by Alzheimer Scotland.
- 7.12 The Scheme will benefit from a communications strategy to promote awareness of the scheme and ensuring its use is maximised.

8. Academic Research

- 8.1 Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has a *Cold Case Unit*, where undergraduate criminology students examine open-source information, with a view to establishing the identity of unknown deceased persons found in Scotland.
- 8.2 Abertay University is conducting a PhD study to produce a new risk assessment tool to equip frontline officers to assess the risks associated with missing episodes more effectively. This study is on target to be completed in summer 2024.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

10. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no personnel implications in this report.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

12. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There is an opportunity to enhance Police Scotland's reputation with the work highlighted in this report.

13. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The 'Not at Home' Policy supports The Promise and the Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-24 which has the ambition "to contribute to a care system which prioritises a child's need for a happy childhood and results in positive experiences and outcomes."

14. COMMUNITY IMPACT

14.1 Providing a proportionate, but flexible response, to episodes where a person's current whereabouts are unknown, whilst operating within the parameters of our definitions, policies and guidance should result in enhancing community confidence.

15. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no equality implications in this report.

16. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

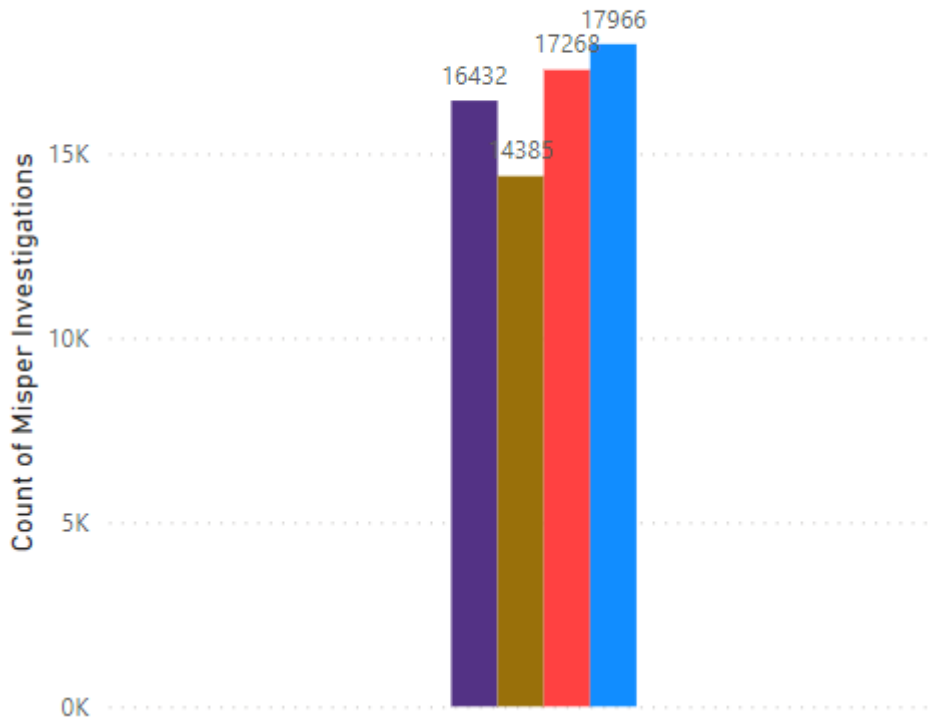
RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the content of this paper, particularly:

- The value of carrying out a review of the definition and risk grading for missing persons, set over 9 years ago.
- Support the continued development of the NMPA on the desktop version, to maximise its potential to provide functionality and search ability, as well as establishing momentum for the work required to ensure mobile device capability for frontline officers.
- National support to provide the further embedding of the 'Not at Home Policy', where appropriate, within Local Authority care home settings.
- National Health Board support for the Greater Glasgow approach to providing training and guidance for staff on reporting missing persons from NHS facilities.

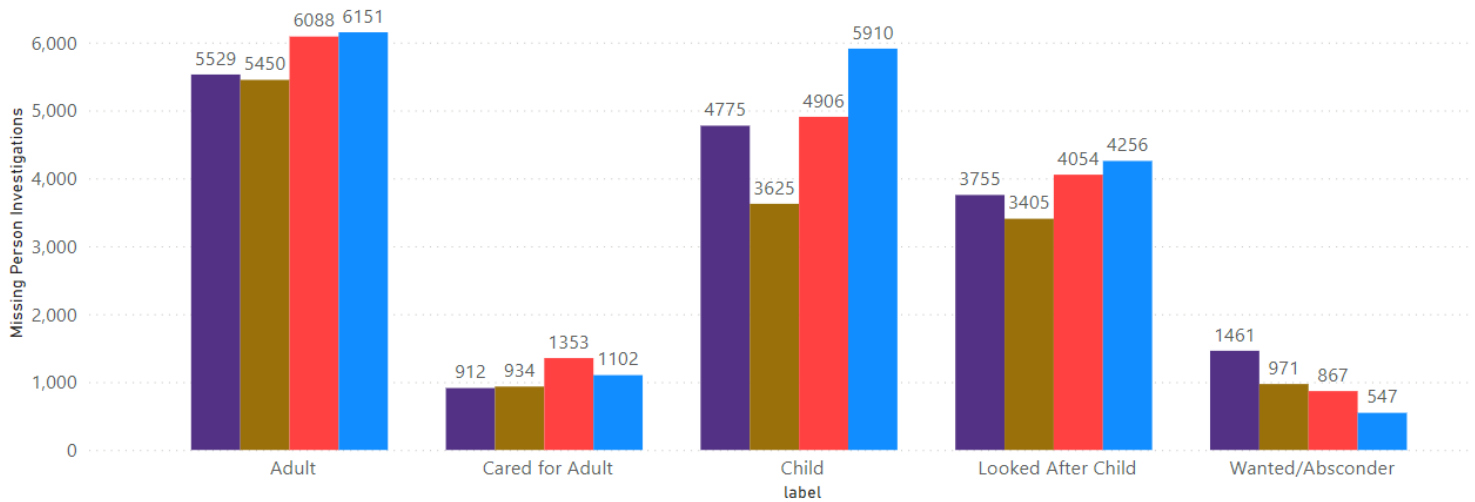
Missing Persons Investigations

Fiscal Year ● FY2020 ● FY2021 ● FY2022 ● FY2023



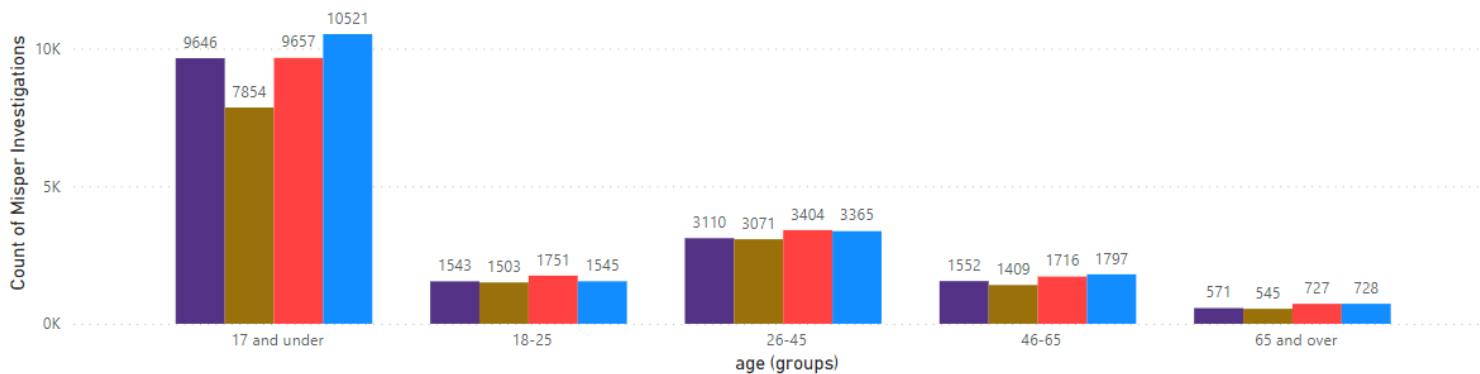
Number of Missing Person Investigations - By Type

Fiscal Year ● FY2020 ● FY2021 ● FY2022 ● FY2023



Number of Missing Persons Investigations - Age Groups

Fiscal Year ● FY2020 ● FY2021 ● FY2022 ● FY2023

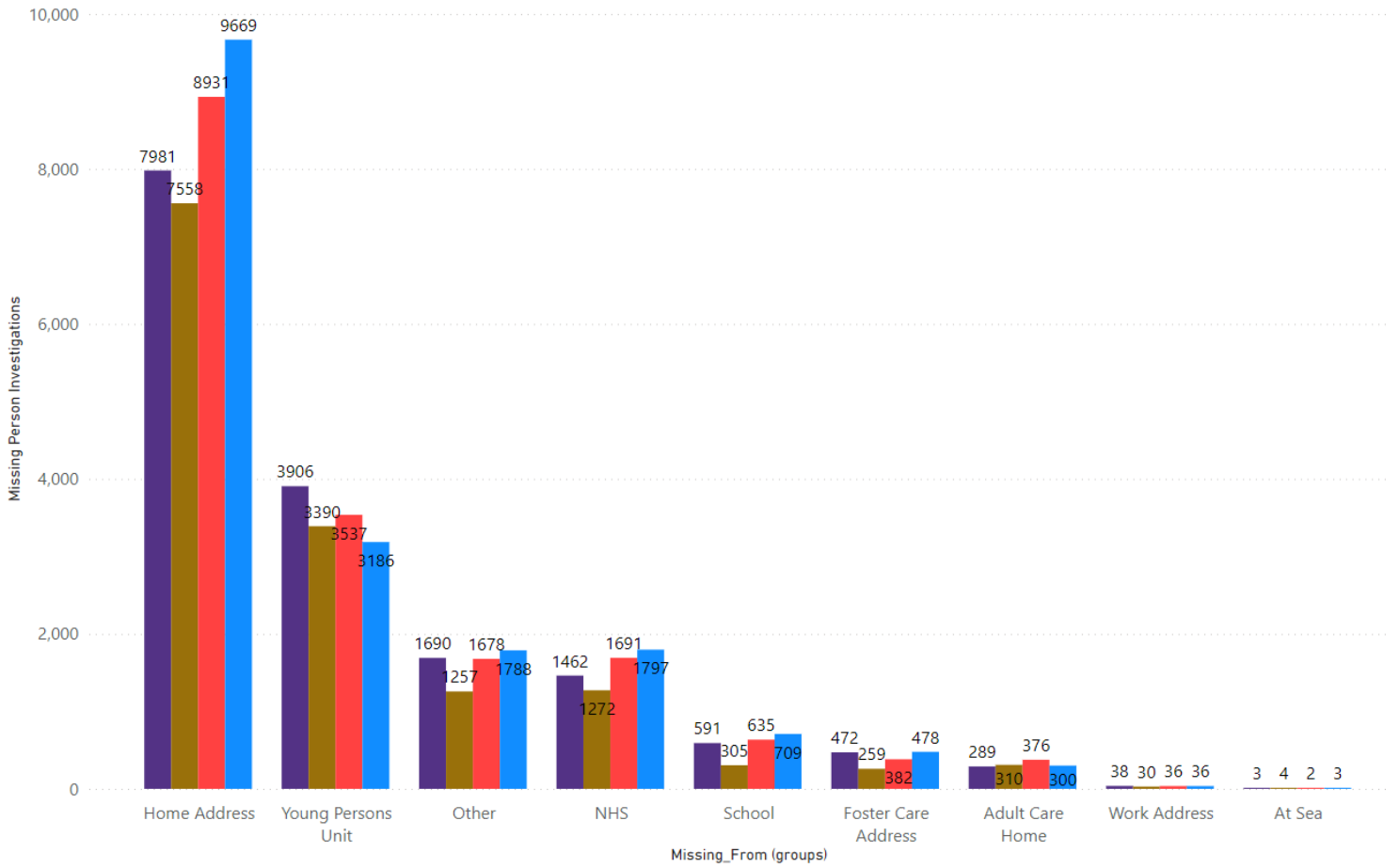


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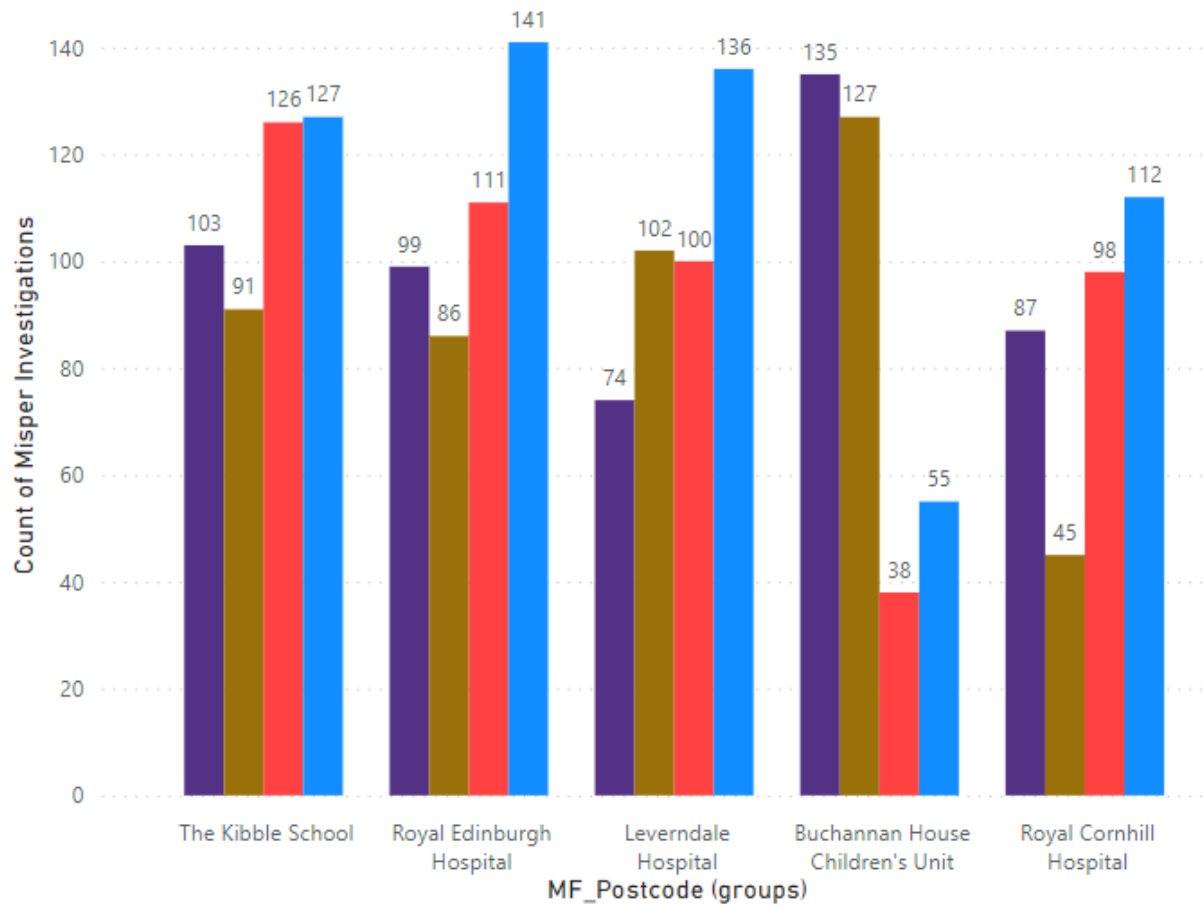
NUMBER OF MISSING PERSON INVESTIGATIONS - MISSING FROM

Fiscal Year ● FY2020 ● FY2021 ● FY2022 ● FY2023



Missing Persons Investigations- Top 5 Missing From Postcodes by 4 Fiscal Year total

Fiscal Year ● FY2020 ● FY2021 ● FY2022 ● FY2023



Missing Persons Investigations - Top 5 Traced Location Postcodes by 4 Fiscal Year total

Fiscal Year ● FY2020 ● FY2021 ● FY2022 ● FY2023

