

Annual Report of the
Birmingham LADO (Local
Authority Designated
Officer)

2023/2024



**BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST**

INTRODUCTION

This report gives a summary of how allegations against staff who work with children in Birmingham are handled and how the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) helps with managing and investigating these allegations and complaints. The report covers the LADO Team's work from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 and explains the role and function of the LADO, as well as an analysis of their work .

All organisations that work with or care for children, or provide staff or volunteers for this, need to have a procedure to manage and report allegations against staff, that follows the government guidance laid out in 'Working Together' (2023). This guidance says that the LADO needs to be contacted and oversee the process, to make sure it protects children and treats staff fairly and reasonably.

Keeping Children Safe in Education updated in 2024, advises educational

The role of the LADO

The LADO's key role is to provide advice and guidance to employers or voluntary organisations when there has been a concern or allegation against a member of staff or volunteer. The LADO will liaise with the police and other agencies, including Ofsted and professional bodies and monitor the progress of referrals to ensure that they are dealt with consistently, fairly and in a timely manner. The LADO ensures organisations operate a thorough and fair

establishments about their specific responsibilities with regards to handling allegations within the children's workforce. The details of how Birmingham LADO manage allegations against people who work with children is contained within the West Midlands Child Protection Procedures.

The Department for Education (DfE) is working on developing national guidance on the management of allegations against adults in positions of trust and it is hoped that this will aid more consistency with the LADO function across the country.



process of investigating allegations. The LADO will provide oversight of the investigative process through to its conclusion. The LADO service will also chair, where appropriate allegation management meetings (AMMs). The LADO will liaise with other local authority LADOs where there are cross-boundary issues. The service maintains a confidential database in relation to allegations.

Statutory guidance requires that the LADO is involved where it is suspected that a member of staff has

- *behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child*
- *possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child*
- *behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that they may pose a risk of harm to children*
- *behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.*

Staffing, including administrative support

The LADO Team consists of three Principal Officers all of whom are qualified and experienced social workers. It is assisted by two business support staff. The LADO Team reports directly to the Head of Service for CP&R and LADO.

Information Systems

We use the same case management system as the Trust; however, we have a dedicated LADO workflow for recording information about the management of allegations. All the LADO case recording is restricted to the LADO Team. The system does not currently lend itself to recording advice; so, we are developing a solution that will enable us to record and report on

Allegations: Consultations and Referral

The LADO offers consultation and immediate evaluation with the employer when someone reports or raises concerns about the conduct or behaviour of an adult working with children. We review and respond to referrals within 24 hours. We undertake an initial evaluation discussion on receipt of a referral, and generally the allegation is coordinated by different allegation management discussions to avoid delay. We reserve the use of formal allegation meetings (AMM) for the most complex of allegations. This equates to about 10% of referrals, which is in line with our West Midlands neighbours.

The LADO helps the employer determine how serious the concerns are. If the concerns do not need LADO oversight, the

The Principal Officers mainly focus on handling allegations and delivering training to various settings. We are considering establishing a senior LADO/Assistant Head of Service role to enhance the support for the team.

advice sought, advice given, and the outcome of the advice. Our record management system is not currently fit for purpose meaning that our current reporting is unable to demonstrate much of the good work that is happening within the service.

Our performance dashboard is in the process of being revised and improved.

service will advise and support the employer on what actions to take next.

Sometimes, the concerns do not show harm as defined above, but they do show a poor level of care or professional conduct. In these cases, the LADO will oversee the investigation of the allegations. If the concerns need LADO oversight, a referral is made, and the LADO will decide the next steps, including the level of investigation and the involvement of police and Children's Social Care. If the cases are complex or involve multiple agencies, a formal allegation management meeting (AMM) is held to review the concerns and plan the interventions.

I needed advice/support from the Birmingham Lado. Principal Officer was brilliant and helpful in every way. Her response was timely, supportive, and informative. Principal Officer kept in regular contact, offered feedback, and gave clear recommendations. Principal Officer was professional and diligent in carrying out her duties and as HT dealing with a challenging situation, I felt listened to, supported, and had clarity about the process because of Principal Officer. She is a credit to the service **Head Teacher, Sandwell School**

The number of initial consultations requested has increased month by month. After the pandemic the LADO phone line was re-established, and this has made it easier for professionals to seek advice from the LADO. Advice can be dealt with by emails or direct conversations.

Our recording system for advice is not currently sophisticated enough to break down which agencies are seeking advice.

Outcomes from Consultations

The bulk of contacts with the LADO service are dealt with and resolved without the need for formal LADO intervention. These are often contacts where staff conduct, or behaviour is of concern or where a complaint has been received relating to safeguarding concerns. Many can be resolved quickly with advice/guidance or referrals to Human Resources. We get

From a manual count residential and education are easily the largest areas that seek advice from LADO followed by external foster care agencies.

We are unable to report on the conversion rate from consultation to referrals.

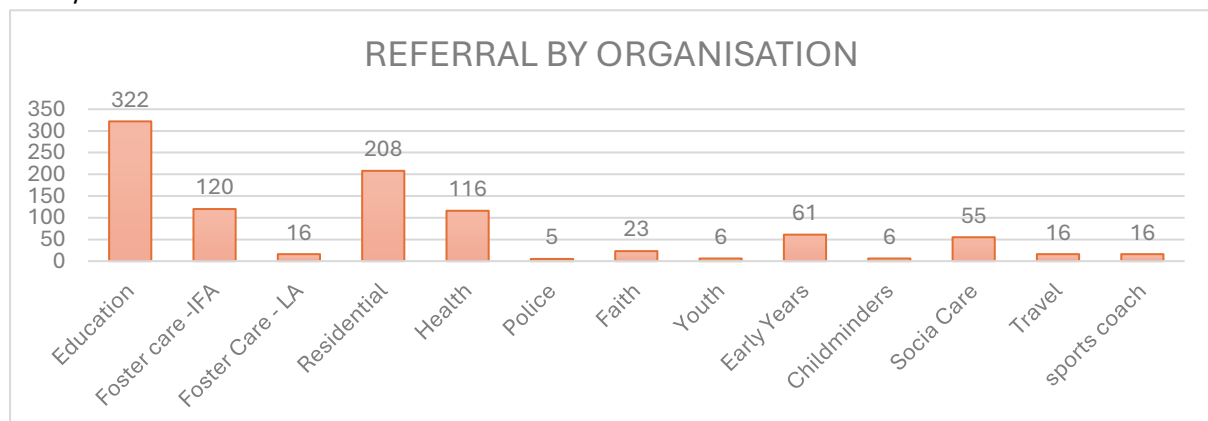
On an average month we are getting 427 per month. In June we dealt with 550 advice consultations.

many what could be described as low-level concerns, as per definition Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024. We are looking at solutions to capture the number of low-level contacts and from which agencies these are related to.

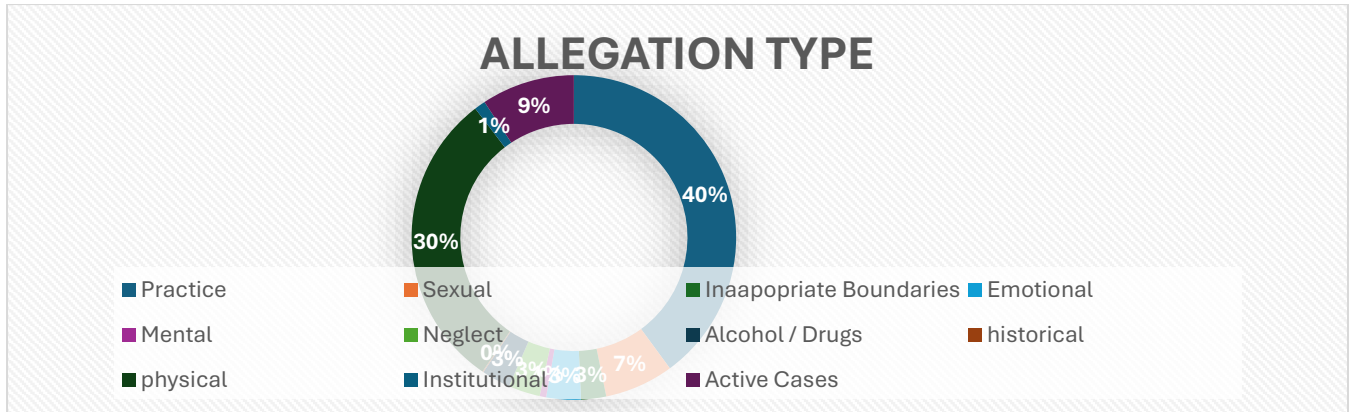
LADO was interested in the referral and asked for pertinent information to forward her enquiries. The LADO was clear about her role and purpose. I feel that I could approach her to discuss issues further if I needed to do this. The meeting was clear about risks and allegations. All issues relevant to the referral were discussed. The LADO was clear about the aim and the purpose of the meeting when it started and gave a timeframe for the minutes/action plan to be sent out to those attending. **Independent Fostering Agency**

Referrals

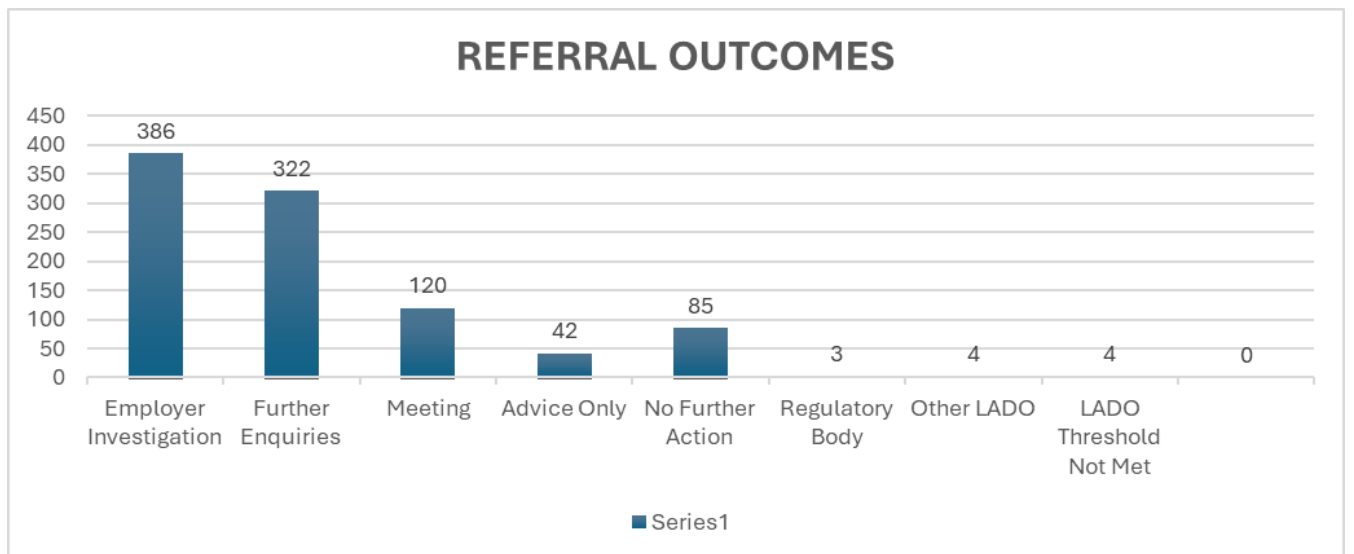
The number of referrals for 2023/2024 has remained stable at 1185 compared to 1224 for 2022/2023.



The majority of allegations related to physical abuse and then issues related to practice, then inappropriate boundaries is high which does correlate with our concerns about quality of inductions and in some case the need for improvements in safe recruitment. We have a relatively small number of allegations categorised under sexual abuse, but these are some of our our most complex and sensitive allegations to manage.



In most cases, a Police investigation is not needed although they are consulted on most LADO referrals. We strive to be balanced and fair when evaluating referrals, generally most referrals only require liaison with other agencies before employers take the lead for investigating and then feedback to the LADO Team.



Investigations overseen by the LADO

The number of investigations that the LADO oversees has gone up in recent years. These are cases where only the employer investigates, and the police are not involved. This is partly because the LADO role has changed from only handling harm issues, to also dealing with serious care standards and transferable risk issues.

It is also because of a good partnership between the police and LADO.

Where allegations are investigated by employers' oversight by the LADO can ensure that the matter is concluded in a timely manner. 73% of referrals are resolved within six weeks. However, there remain some cases where investigations

take longer, and these are primarily because of delays to police investigations.

Previous delays tended to be related to waiting for forensic investigations of electronic equipment, but during the past year it appears more related to what must be recorded as a crime. Obviously, the Police must prioritise more serious offences, but this does impact on their capacity to deal with some lower-level concerns in a timely manner; resulting in some staff being suspended from work longer than is necessary.

This particularly impacts on schools and residential settings who must incur costs for additional staff to cover the member of

staff who is suspended from work. On a positive note, the Police have increased the number of staff to their Public Protection department this financial year. It is worth noting the West Midlands LADO forum report similar challenges across the region and this is across four different Police Force Areas.

Particularly around practice issues, it is worth noting that some organisations are good at investigating concerns about a specific incident, however, we need to ensure that patterns regarding practice are reviewed and subsequently learning is applied across the organisation, so we close the loop.

I find the LADO service in BCT responsive, helpful, and always a timely response. The information sharing is proportionate and relevant for partners and allows for safeguarding processes for both individual, children and employer

Health Safeguarding Lead Nurse

KEY PRACTICE THEMES

Agency staff in education settings-

The LADO service receives several concerns mainly about practice raised about agency teaching and non-teaching staff and the common theme relates to quality of the training they have been

provided with for the type of school setting they are working in. The quality of induction and training provided by the agencies tends to be online and rather than being in person training.

Supported Accommodation-

We have been concerned about some private residential and supported accommodation providers and their recruitment of staff from outside of the UK and the fact they are not being provided with a proper induction and support. Some of the children and young people have

experienced complex trauma and some staff recruited have had difficulty communicating with the children and young people. This is something that we have raised with commissioning and OFSTED.

Unregulated tuition centres -

Registering with Ofsted is voluntary, but we feel that this should be mandatory for tuition centres to ensure the tuition centre

maintain certain standards and regulations set by Ofsted. These regulations focus on ensuring the safety, welfare, and well-

being of children under their care of the tuition centre.

Regulation would ensure periodic inspections would be conducted by Ofsted to assess their compliance with the required standards. This would also emphasise the importance of safeguarding children in the centre's care. We have shared some examples with Ofsted of where we have concerns about adults providing tuition resulting in the tuition centre closing and then opening in another area. Ofsted have raised this with the DFE

Feedback on the service

Feedback from consultations from a variety of organisations indicates the LADO service within Birmingham is well received and valued. Although this is reassuring, we feel

Oversight of practice

Wolverhampton LADO completed a peer audit of our LADO service in 2023. The main learning from the peer review related to how we record and store pre-referral advice.

We have got agreement from the West Midlands Regional Safeguarding Network for another round of Peer audits for 2024/2025.

Training and briefing sessions

As part of its remit to support the children's workforce in Birmingham to ensure the safety of children and young people with whom they engage, the LADO service provides a variety of training support to employers in relation to allegations management as well as safer organisational culture for working with children.

and used some of our examples to illustrate the point.



that we need to analyse and utilise the feedback collectively rather than on an individual basis. This is an area that we want to improve during 2024/2025.

It was also felt that we needed to utilise our business support to help track and chase up outcomes from employers and the Police more effectively - we have implemented this recommendation.

In addition, we are prioritising undertaking more auditing and quality assurance of our work during 2024/2025.

Over the last 12 months the LADO Service has provided training input across a range of settings and sectors, including PGCE Teacher Training, Faith-based settings (in

collaboration with Birmingham years, newly qualified social workers and Safeguarding Children Partnership), early residential and fostering services.

After this briefing, I will be taking it back to the settings and going through this with the senior management team for them to deliver the importance of professional development and the 'Trust', professional boundaries and understanding responsibilities **Early Years Professional**

Progress in respect of 2023-24 priorities

- Continuing to offer awareness and training including online delivery to raise awareness about the role of the LADO and promote safer working practices and organisational cultures – we will review the training offer to ensure that it is fit for purpose, relevant and reflective of updated guidance and legislation. [Due to capacity as a result of demand, we have provided more targeted awareness and training to promote safe working practices.](#)
- Targeted training will be provided to faith-based organisations and sports settings as a matter of some priority given that these are the most vulnerable sectors. We will dovetail this work with schools through themed coffee mornings to raise awareness with parents about safeguarding in the out of school sector and their responsibilities in ensuring that they have done due diligence enquiries regarding staff and wider health and safety considerations. [In collaboration with the Safeguarding Children Partnership, we have developed and delivered a training package to several faith-based settings. We have also taken the opportunity to link in with some schools when the opportunity has been there.](#)
- Produce LADO leaflets for employers. [This remains an outstanding task and is being developed as an e-resource available on the Trust website.](#)
- Strengthen our quality assurances processes through peer audits with Wolverhampton LADO service. [Wolverhampton completed a peer audit in 2023 and we are in the process of implementing the recommendations.](#)
- Conduct targeted work in relation to children's engagement and participation particularly in those situations where children do not have the ability to make their wishes and feelings known. [We explored this with our colleagues from the Children with Disabilities service and were reassured that they use a variety of methods to engage and encourage children participation.](#)
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CONCLUSION

Triangulating evidence from performance and activity data, partner feedback and peer audit provide a high level of assurance about how the LADO service in Birmingham is performing in fulfilling its statutory duties

and supporting the children's workforce in safeguarding children and young people. Our audits and feedback show that we offer prompt and proportionate advice. We provide a thorough response to contacts

and respond within 24 hours. The LADO Team provides a consistent point of contact for employers for advice and more serious concerns. We have strong working relationships with key agencies

The demand during 2023/2024 has, however, stretched the capacity of this small team. The Principal Officer/ LADO are on duty on average twice a week.

We have identified a few areas that need to be strengthened. Whilst we have delivered some training, due to volume of work, we have not been able to deliver as much training as we would have liked to have done.

The LADO Team responds promptly to requests for advice and guidance; however, we have noticed an increase in requests for consultations with a LADO. We are working on developing a better way to capture advice and guidance given; that would enable us to report on the nature of the query, advice given and what the agree

outcome was. We would then be able to identify how many were low level concerns and whether targeted training could reduce the demand for some advice and guidance.

The number of referrals has remained consistent compared to 2022/2023. Referrals are dealt with promptly, but with a small number there are long delays before there is a clear outcome. These usually relates to the delays in police investigations or criminal court proceedings. This is particularly frustrating for the employee and the employer.

The LADO service has identified some recurring issues and areas of concern, such as the quality of training and induction for agency staff in education settings, the recruitment and support of staff from outside of the UK in some private residential and supported accommodation providers, and the lack of regulation and safeguarding policies in some unregulated tutors and tuition centres.

Areas for further development

Our key areas for development during 2024/05 are:

Implement a solution around recording of advice, so we can report on the nature of advice, organisations who requested advice, outcome type including whether a referral is needed **by October 2024.**

Need to record capture the number and frequency of low-level concerns are reported to LADO; so, we can deliver targeted training and ensure these are signposted appropriately **by October 2024.**

Arrange for a Peer Audit to be conducted **by January 2025.**

Develop a Training delivery plan around the Managements of Allegations for 2024/2025 **by September 2024.**

Andrew Tombs - Head of Service for Child Protection & LADO

July 2024