
Designated Officer (LADO) Annual Report 2022/23

**Colette Morris
Team Manager
Allegations Management Unit**

September 2023



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the management of allegations in Oldham, and the role of the Designated Officer between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 sets out the requirements for all agencies providing services for children to have procedures in place for reporting and managing allegations against staff and volunteers. This is mirrored in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020 (KCSIE). The guidance highlights the need for a Designated Officer to oversee the process, by giving independent advice on thresholds and the other aspects of safeguarding when an allegation is made. This will include a range of measures, in consultation with the employer, including risk assessment, the use of suspension for more serious conduct matters or criminal investigations, alongside other issues including managing duty of care to the employee and proportionality to ensure the process is concluded fairly and as soon as possible.

The procedures for the management of such allegations are contained in the Greater Manchester Child Protection Procedures - Allegations against Staff.

The role of the LADO

The LADO role is designed to manage all allegations against all professionals who work with children (both employed and voluntary) and to assist professionals, to create safer environments for children to access services. Therefore, if the LADO is effective then children and young people can confidently access services safely.

The definition of an allegation is:

- 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 that indicated he/she would pose a risk of harm if they work regularly or closely with children.
- Behaved in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children.

Allegations are considered in the context of four main categories of abuse, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect and there is also consideration of areas including professional conduct and safeguarding concerns arising in a person's private life. Transferable risk is a continuing consideration, this means that when the behaviour of staff or volunteers outside a setting is of concern, there is consideration of the impact of this upon their suitability to work with children and vulnerable young people.

The duties of the LADO remain to:

- Manage and oversee individual cases
- Provide advice and guidance
- Liaise with Police and other agencies
- Monitor progress of cases for timeliness, thoroughness and fairness

The LADO will also provide liaison with other local authority LADOs where there are cross-boundary issues. The service collects strategic data and maintains a confidential tracker in relation to allegations. The LADO Service disseminates learning from LADO enquiries throughout the children's workforce and wider groups, including safeguarding forums across the Borough. The LADO will also attend children's social care and police strategy meetings held under child protection procedures where there are concerns regarding the children of those working within the children's workforce.

Service Structure and Supervision

The LADO service is located within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. The service is provided by one Designated Officer with one Allegation Management Co-ordinator. In 2022 the funding for a second permanent LADO post was agreed and the recruitment process for this post commenced.

The LADO is an experienced qualified social worker registered with Social Work England. The LADO attends the annual national Designated Officer conference and monthly regional LADO forum where practice themes are discussed. The National Designated Officer network is currently working with the DfE to produce a LADO handbook to be included in Working Together 2024. This was a recommendation of the national review – children with complex needs and disabilities (Doncaster review)

Since 1st April 2020 all Initial Evaluation meetings and LADO meetings have been arranged via Microsoft Teams, and this has allowed colleagues who wouldn't normally be able to attend these meetings due to distance involved, to attend virtually and contribute, hence improving the quality of information shared. This is evidenced through meetings not being required to be rearranged and an improvement in the timeliness of Initial Evaluation Meetings and Post Allegation Investigation meetings.

The LADO service participated in a regional peer audit exercise in January 2023. This involved auditing several cases and files from a neighbouring authority and then the process reciprocated. The outcome of the Oldham Audit was one outstanding case (clear recording and easy to understand with the involvement of all the agencies and timescales adhered to) and one case deemed as good (clear recording and easy to understand).

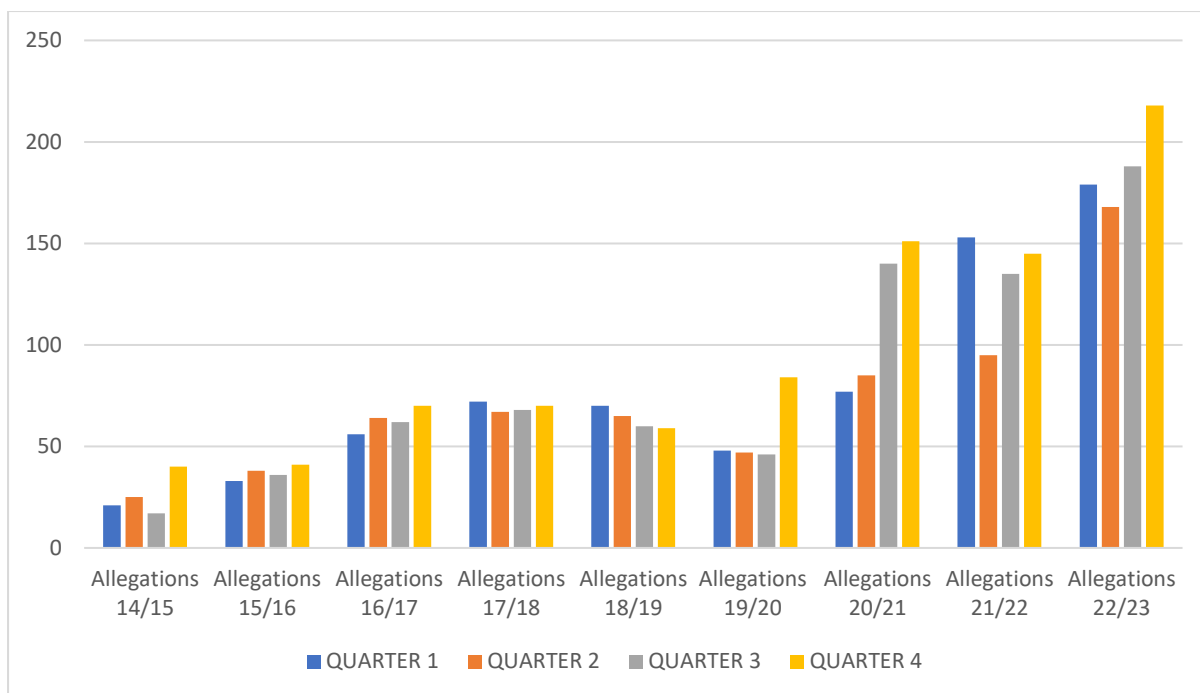
Number of Allegations

Breakdown of allegations by year

YEAR	Number of allegations
2007	44
2008	77
2009	71
2010	73
2011	74
2012	69
2013	98
2014	101
2015	147
2016	223
2017	277
2018	265
2019	221
2020	356
2021	543
2022	679

Over the years the understanding of the role of the LADO both locally and nationally has increased and this is reflected in the steady rise of referrals. The significant increase in referrals since 2020 is linked to several factors:

1. Several complex cases that have multiple lines of enquiry and have generated multiple referrals.
2. An increase in non-recent allegations of abuse.
3. In September 2020 the DfE included a Fourth Threshold for referral to LADO within Working Together guidance and KCSIE. This significantly increased the number of contacts to LADO regarding unsuitability.
4. Increase in the number of parents/members of the public reporting concerns directly to Ofsted and or LADO service.



The referral data above includes all contacts with the LADO, regardless of whether they have met the threshold for a formal response. Of the 730 referrals, 158 (which is equivalent to 22%) progressed to an Initial Allegations management meeting. There are a high number of requests for support and advice which the LADO will scrutinise even if they do not meet the formal thresholds for intervention. It has become apparent that not all institutions are equipped to assess thresholds and therefore welcome the support such consultations make. In these cases, the employer is responsible for acting upon advice, implementing local conduct or performance processes and making recommended changes to their local practice or policy. It is these borderline or complex situations that require careful attention.

Recording is robust for all cases, whether or not they meet the LADO threshold for involvement and files are kept for reference. The system now has the following stand-alone documents in a dataflow system within MOSAIC :

- LADO referral
- Initial consideration meeting
- Allegations management meeting
- Review allegations management meeting
- LADO Oversight (ability to record all e-mails and discussions in a chronological order)

All the steps have been reviewed and updated so that more data can be extracted for data analysis and the completion of FOI requests.

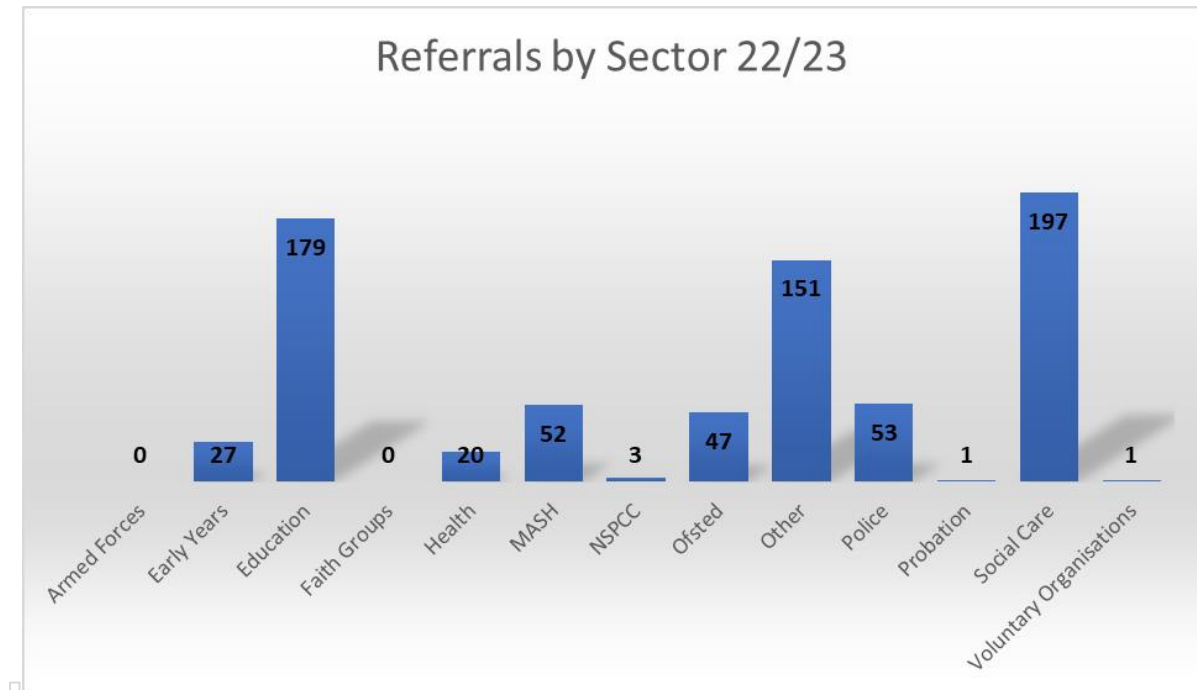
It is important that cases where the LADO has only provided advice and information are recorded as such, as whilst on their own may not require a LADO response, they may in the future demonstrate concerns with the practice of individuals or settings.

Careful attention is paid to the requirements of the Data Protection Act and, if settings call for advice regarding a particular staff member, they are advised to share this with the staff member.

The LADO may receive requests from those who are the subject of allegations for a copy of LADO records through a subject access request and all parties are reminded of this during the allegation management meeting. Third party or organisation sensitive information may be redacted by the LADO as appropriate.

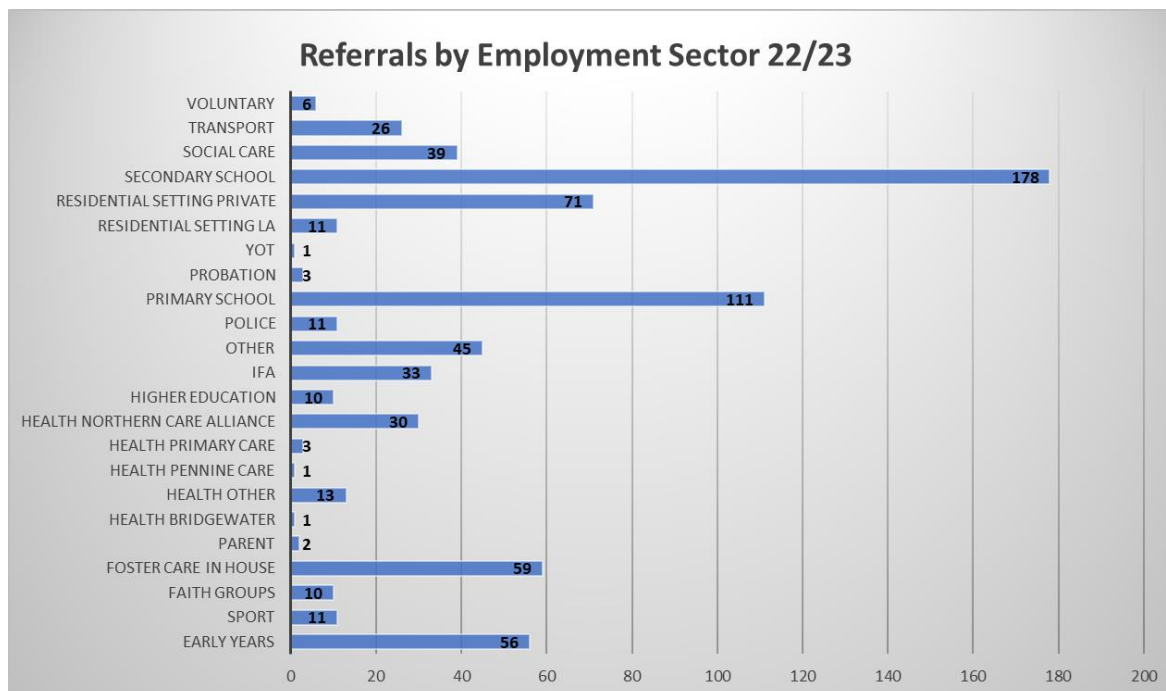
Referral sector

Referrals come from a variety of settings and sources. It is not always the setting that makes the referrals themselves, as demonstrated in the following graph.



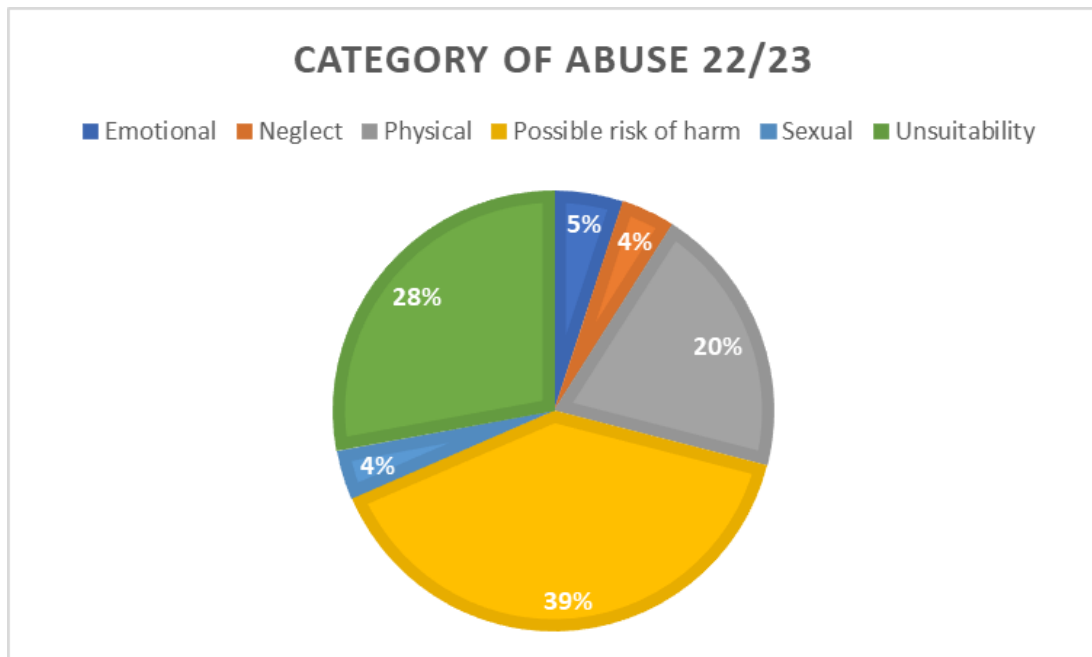
As with LADO colleagues in neighbouring boroughs, the greatest proportion of contacts and referrals come from social care and the education sector. This is in line with national statistics and indicates a good level of understanding of Safeguarding and the LADO role. The LADO received a significant number of referrals from other local authority Social care departments due to the increasing number of children from other local authorities placed in Oldham in either IFA's or Residential homes. Work has been undertaken with the planning department and commissioning teams to highlight the number of homes in a specific area and to have careful consideration for any future planning applications.

Employment sector



A significant number of referrals are within the education sector, but this is in line with regional and national data. The number of referrals made directly to Ofsted has significantly increased with the LADO receiving on average 5 referrals a month. As set out in KCSIE, schools are now required to identify and record incidents where staff do not follow expected codes of conduct in working with children. Incidents such as inappropriate contact, and poor behaviour management which do not meet the allegations threshold should be recorded and patterns of behaviour considered. The intention was for schools to develop a safeguarding culture where inappropriate behaviours could be identified and addressed before they became harmful. However, initially schools struggled to differentiate between low level concerns and harmful.

Category of abuse



The most common type of referral this year relates to staffing, this is primarily related to professional boundaries and inappropriate professional behaviour.

Most of the allegations of sexual assault have been in relation to non-recent allegations of abuse. There has been an increase over the years of allegations relating to emotional abuse and neglect and this demonstrates the increasing understanding of safeguarding across the sectors and also therefore the identification of these harmful behaviours. The increase in possible risk of harm is connected to the increase in allegation around unsuitedness whereby the person has not caused harm within their role, but consideration is needed regarding the transferable risk/unsuitedness.

Timescales for completion of cases

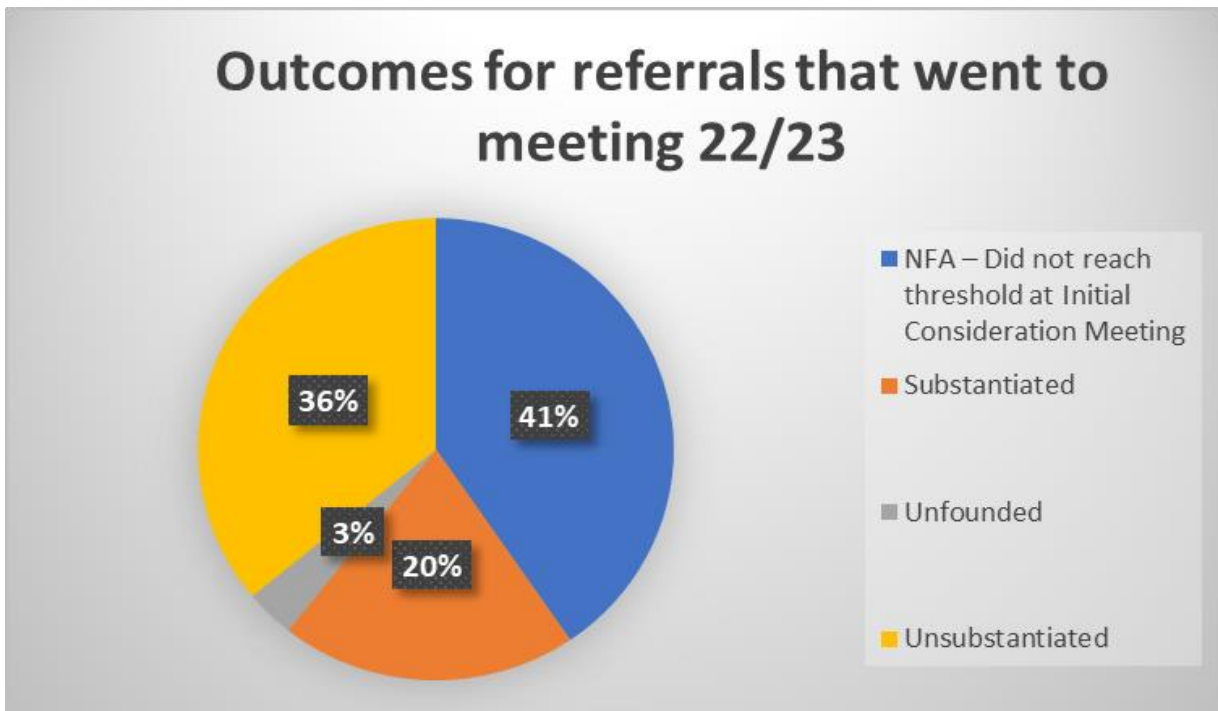
Timescales depend on nature, seriousness, and complexity of allegations though in general, in Oldham for cases that have reached the threshold for an Allegations management meeting we strive to meet the following timescales:

- 80% of cases should be resolved within one month;
- 90% within three months;
- All but the most exceptional should be completed within twelve months (it is unlikely cases requiring a criminal prosecution or complex Police investigation can be completed in less than three months)

Cases concluded within 1 month	-	72%
Cases completed within 3 months	-	87%
Cases completed within 12 months	-	93%

As can be seen we have not been able to reach the targets for the timeliness of completion of cases. It is hoped that with the recruitment of a second LADO the cases concluded in 1 month will reach the target of 80%. Whilst it is no longer an indicator required to be reported on by the Department of Education, where an investigation is initiated, investigations can be stressful for all concerned and clearly the quicker they can be concluded appropriately, the better. Where allegations are investigated by employers, oversight by the LADO can ensure that the matter is concluded in a timely manner. However, there remain some cases where investigations take longer, and these are primarily as a result of police investigations where the “beyond reasonable doubt” threshold requires lengthier processes.

Outcome of referrals



We have seen an increase in allegations about professional boundaries/ inappropriate behaviour and unsuitability allowing issues to be considered at an initial consideration meeting but not progressing to a formal investigation.

Multi-agency Practice Development

The LADO provides managing allegations training. Training delivery was consistently delivered virtually and well received by those who attended. The virtual delivery of training worked very well, and 15 sessions of training was delivered to partner agencies. This included early years, education, elected members, social workers, MASH team, adult social care and fostering service.

Residential Managers Providers panel – A quarterly meeting is held with all providers of residential care within the Oldham area. This allows statutory agencies to discuss trends and concerns and assist the providers to meet their Ofsted requirements.

Education settings - The Designated Officer works closely with the School Safeguarding Advisor to discuss concerns in practice and learning arising from LADO referrals and complaints. Joint work is carried out where appropriate

Foster carers - The LADO attends the 6 weekly 'prep' groups for prospective foster carers and provides a bespoke training session for cares about the role of the LADO using case examples to illustrate the importance of communication, recording and the scrutiny of low-level concerns. In 2022/23 the LADO has attended a fortnightly meeting with the HOS and Team manager of the fostering team to discuss the fostering referrals that have been recover and tracking them through the system. This has proved effective and has addressed some drift.

National LADO Network

The NLN meets virtually on a monthly basis, providing similar support to LADOs across the country. In addition, the NLN meets regularly with national organisations such as the Department of Education, Social Work England, and the Disqualification and Barring Service, acting as an advocate for LADOs and local authorities in relation to allegations management and safer recruitment practises. The network organised an annual virtual conference which was open to all LADOs and was positively received by over 180 participants. The Oldham LADO chairs the training group and facilitates the NLN conference.

Priorities for 2024

1. Integrate the additional LADO post (commencing November 2023)
2. Work with the Mosaic Team to implement changes to the documents to reflect the changes in guidance e.g. unsuitability. Also to adapt the episodes to allow further data capture e.g number of non-recent allegations and number of meetings held within 5 working days. This can then be submitted quarterly via the OSCP dashboard.
3. Introduce a regular programme of auditing to understand quality of service being offered and to identify themes to share with multiagency partners to inform learning and development.
4. Develop the safe out of school programme.