
Designated Officer (LADO) Annual Report 2023/24

September 2024



1. 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's between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

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.

2. 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 LADO's key role is to provide advice and guidance to employers or voluntary organisations when there has been an 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 process of investigating allegations. The LADO will provide oversight of the investigative process through to its conclusion.

The LADO service will also chair allegation management meetings and establish an agreed format to an investigation, whilst facilitating the resolution of any inter-agency issues. 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 database 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 via Briefing sessions, case discussions, and the provision of this annual report. 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.

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.

3. Service Structure and Supervision

The LADO service is located within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. In 2022 the funding for a second permanent LADO post was agreed and the post was successfully recruited to in November 2023. The LADO Team Manager as well as managing the LADO service manages the subject access request (SAR) and disclosure service comprising of two SAR officers.

The LADOs are experienced qualified social workers 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 Consideration meetings and subsequent LADO meetings have been arranged via Microsoft Teams. This has allowed professionals 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 Consideration Meetings and Allegation Review meetings.

The LADO service publicising its role, there has been an increase in public recognition of the role in allegations management and as a result, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of contacts received from members of the public, or parents wishing to raise complaints or concerns directly with the LADO. Such calls are managed sensitively, and parents are invited to raise their concerns directly with the employer, with the LADO checking this has been done. There is, however, a need to update Oldham Children's Safeguarding Partnership's website to greater reflect the need for this impartiality and to provide some advice to parents and carers as to appropriate steps when they are concerned.

In May 2024 Ofsted completed the inspection of Oldham Children’s Services and as part of the inspection reviewed several LADO cases and conducted an interview with the LADO manager. The feedback was as follows:

The local authority designated officer (LADO) service provides a thorough response when there are allegations made against adults working with children. Allegations against professionals are swiftly and robustly managed.

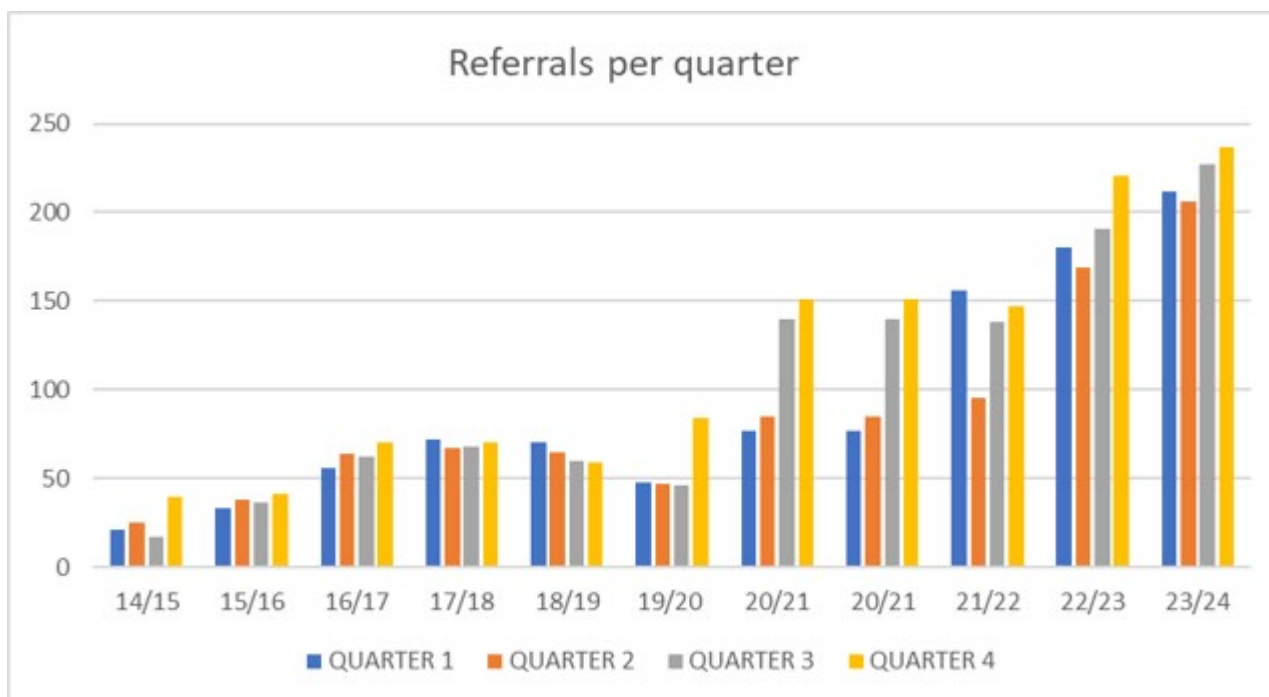
4. Number of Allegations

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
2023	863

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 874 referrals, 133 (which is equivalent to 16%) progressed to an Initial Allegations management meeting. Of the 133 cases; 60 cases are viewed as complex as in they have had to have more than two allegation management meetings. Some cases have had more than 8 meetings due to the complexity of the case. The LADO team are also managing 25 complex cases that commenced in previous years.

Through the National LADO Network Haringey LADO has developed a Tier approach which illustrates the differentiation between consultations and referrals.

Tier 1	Incident that does not need LADO action but may be a conduct issue or require more general advice
Tier 2	Incident or concern which might require logging with LADO but will be 'No Further Action'
Tier 3	Incident or concerns which indicate significant concerns re standards of care provided to an individual child or group of children Behaviour in Personal Life which raises concerns regarding the persons Suitability to work with children
Tier 4	Incident which requires consideration of referral to other agency such as police or Ofsted
Tier 5	Incident which requires immediate suspension/ police referral/ arrest/ immediate action to protect child.

Tiers 1 & 2 constitute consultations and Tiers 3-5 referrals.

There are a high number of requests for support and advice / consultations which the LADO will scrutinise even if they do not meet the formal thresholds for intervention. It is an integral part of the LADO role to provide advice and guidance. 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 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)

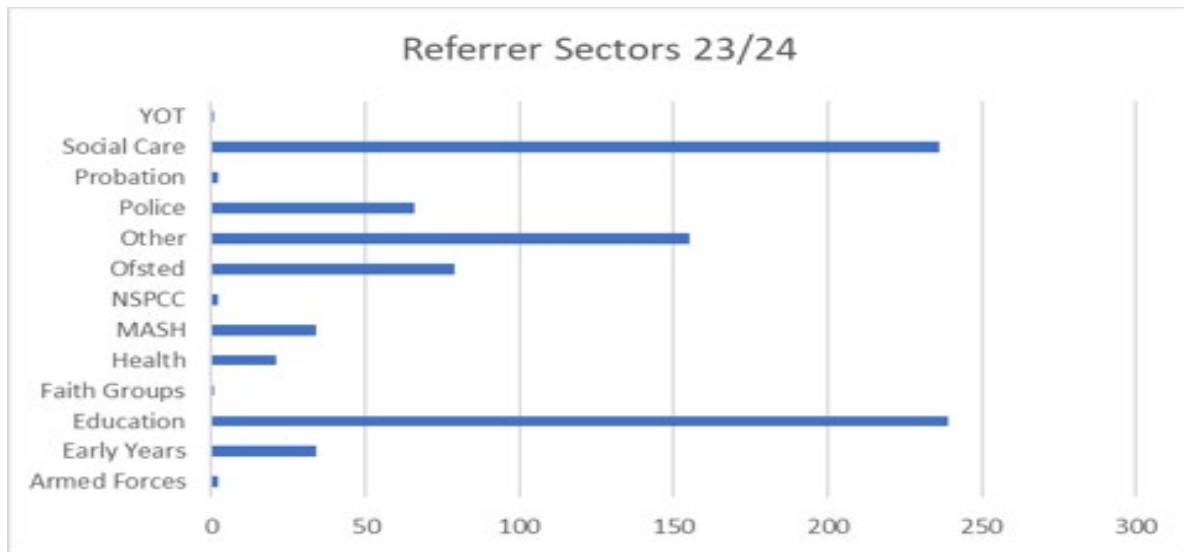
All the steps have been reviewed and updated so that more data can be extracted for data analysis and the completion of FOI requests.

It is important that cases where the LADO has 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 (SAR) 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.

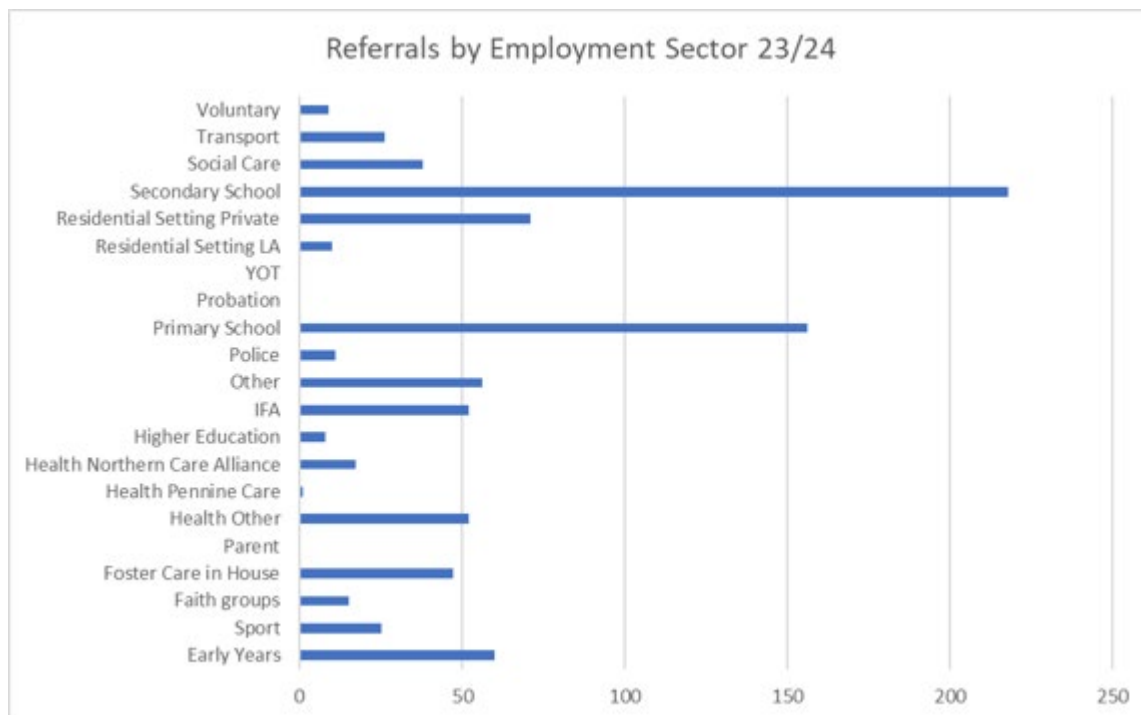
5. Referral sector

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.

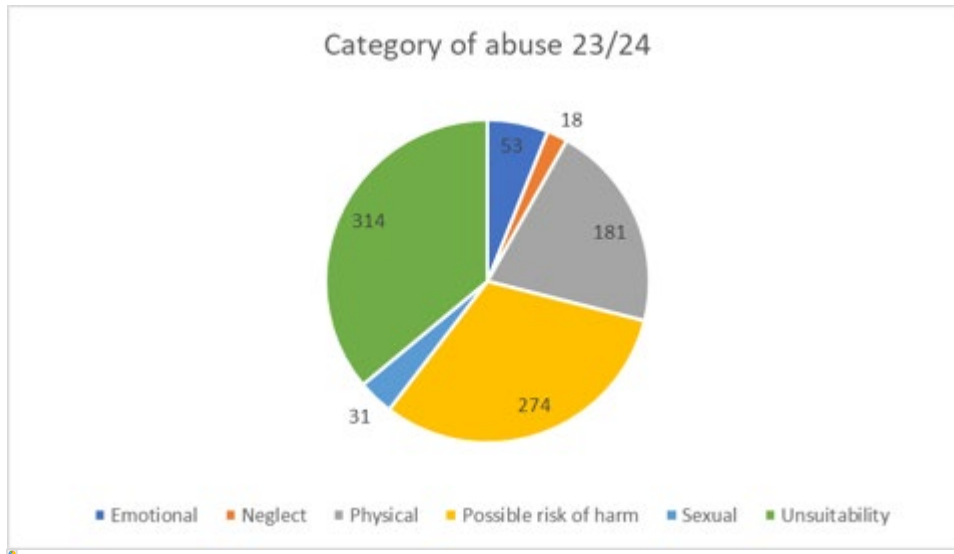
6. Employment sector



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 team receiving 76 referrals regarding schools from Ofsted. These all need careful consideration and detailed feedback to Ofsted but from the 76 referrals no case has progressed to an investigation by police, social care or internal investigations.

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.

7. Category of abuse



The most common type of referral this year relates to unsuitability, 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. However, this year there have been several referrals regarding female perpetrators of sexually inappropriate behaviour towards young people.

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 the identification of these harmful behaviours. The increase in possible risk of harm is connected to the increase in allegation around unsuitability whereby the person has not caused harm within their role, but consideration is needed regarding the transferable risk/unsuitability.

8. Timescales for completion of cases

Timescales depend on nature, seriousness, and complexity of allegations. In Oldham 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	-	64.5%
Cases completed within 3 months	-	79.5%
Cases completed within 12 months	-	93.5%

Cases completed over 12 months - 6.5%

As can be seen we have not been able to reach the targets for the timeliness of completion of cases. 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. Due to the introduction of the unsuitability threshold to LADO oversight the cases have become increasingly complex and therefore concluding within one month has not been achievable. There has also been an increase in referrals from the voluntary, faith and sports sector and they do not all have the infrastructure i.e. a HR advisor to complete an internal investigation in a timely manner as they rely on volunteers.

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 because of police investigations where the “beyond reasonable doubt” threshold requires lengthier processes.

To address the delays in cases when they involve criminal investigations, the LADO has successfully sought agreement with the Police on a number of cases to enable employers to commence their investigations alongside the Police investigation, with pre-agreed questions and conditions being applied.

9. Outcome of referrals

Many consultations to the LADO by employers can be managed immediately and employers can be supported in managing such concerns in a proportionate manner. As a result, concerns can often be addressed and resolved quickly with the LADO providing advice, perspective, and suggested actions to address the concerns without them becoming allegations. This space, provided by the LADO service allows employers a sounding board for managing staff behaviour as well as a sense check on concerns. Indeed, feedback from employers suggests that such consultations can prevent concerns from developing and can address complaints early.

Of the cases (133) that progressed to investigation from either police, social care and or internal processes the outcome are as follows:



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.

There have been 14 referrals to the DBS for barring.

10. Safer recruitment issues

One of the key foundations of safe organisations is ensuring that staff are recruited to positions of trust with children using the concepts of safe recruitment. The LADO manager has completed the accredited Safer Recruitment consortium training as trainers, the LADO service has provided regular safer recruitment training throughout the 23/24 period training to Early Years managers, Headteachers and Governors as well as multi-agency via the OSCP training calendar. This is in addition to advising employers on issues around recruitment such as appropriate references, recruitment processes and previous criminal record information.

11. Multi-agency Practice Development

The LADO service 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 has been delivered to partner agencies. This included Early Years, Education, Elected Members, social workers, MASH team, Adult Social Care and the Fostering Service.

Residential Managers Providers panel – The LADO service hosts a quarterly meeting 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.

Early Years safeguarding sector – Twice a year the LADO service facilitates training and briefing for the early years sector focussing learning for Serious Case Reviews and LADO case studies

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 carers about the role of the LADO, using case examples to illustrate the importance of communication, recording and the scrutiny of low-level concerns. In 2023/24 the LADO team has attended a fortnightly meeting with the HOS and Team Manager of the Fostering Team to discuss the fostering referrals that have been received and tracking them through the system. This has proved effective and has addressed some drift.

11. National LADO Network

The NLN meets monthly, providing 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 Disclosure 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 120 participants. The conference focussed on the learning from the Doncaster review and Operation Alpha-Lemur. The Oldham LADO Team Manager Chairs the training group and facilitates the NLN conference.

12. Priorities for 2025

1. Alongside the National & Regional priorities we will review and analyse appropriate data capture
2. Auditing – engaging in peer audit
3. LADO Team will continue to develop the safe out of school programme
4. Continue to deliver training to partner agencies

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