WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Allegations against adults who work or volunteer with children

Designated Officer (LADO) Annual Report

2022-2023

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Date for next report: May 2024

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Executive summary

Purpose of this report
This report provides a summary of the activity relating to the management of allegations against adults who work and volunteer with children in Wokingham Borough for 2022-2023. This report also provides analysis of the data and highlights the themes identified by the Designated Officer (LADO).

Highlights:

Volume of work:

- There has been a 72% increase in contacts received by the LADO in 2022-23 in comparison to the previous year. There have been 344 contacts received in 2022-23 in comparison to 199 in 2021-22.
- The number of contacts that met the criteria for a LADO Allegation also increased but not disproportionately to the level of contacts. 59 contacts met the criteria for a LADO Allegation representing a conversion rate of 17%. In conversation with LADO's in our local network, a conversion rate of around 20% is typical. This has also been historically in Wokingham.
- There was a large increase in contacts that required consultation with the LADO, due to issues that fell below the Allegation Criteria, that required employer investigation and potential for disciplinary action. These consultations can involve similar levels of work to Allegations, at times including evaluation meetings, advice giving and tracking, in a similar way to those contacts that reach the Allegation criteria.

Capacity of the service:

- Over the course of 2022-23 Wokingham has had one permanent LADO in post and this has meant the strengthening of relationships between the employers of adults working with children in the Wokingham area and the LADO Service. In addition, it has meant that a more robust and planned provision of training and awareness raising has been offered, through general training sessions open to all, bespoke training for certain groups or organisations and attendance at DSL and Safeguarding Lead Meetings.
- Despite the increase in contacts received by the LADO, over 80% of all contacts have been concluded within 1 month.
- Inter-agency working arrangements remain strong with Thames Valley Police, neighbouring LADO's, the DBS Service and regulatory bodies, such as the Football Association, Rugby Football Union and British Gymnastics. The LADO attends all Early Years DSL meetings, Education Safeguarding Lead Meetings and the Education Engagement Panel. Internally the LADO has regular interactions with the MASH, Referral and Assessment Teams, Here4U and Placements Teams, The Early Years and Childcare Development Advisory Service, School Improvement Team and Human Resources.

Origin of referrals:

- In 2022-23 the highest level of contacts has been received by the education sector, who are also the largest employer of adults who work with children. This has remained consistent. Over the course of the year the breadth of schools who have made some contact with the services has increased with close to 60% of all schools having made some

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form of contact. The LADO's attendance at Safeguarding Lead meetings continues to raise awareness with those schools who have not made contact during this year.

The adult subject of allegations/concerns:

- The highest volume of contacts that did not meet the threshold for a LADO Allegation related to staff in education settings and in particular where there were low level concerns about conduct, professional boundaries and the management of challenging behaviour. School's sought some advice and guidance from the LADO but these concerns were often dealt with by the school's internal procedures.
- Allegations against staff who work with complex or vulnerable young people remain proportionately higher than in mainstream settings, due to their unique challenges. Allegations against residential staff remains comparatively high given the size of that workforce in Wokingham but this could also be viewed in light of 3 residential homes in Wokingham closing over the course of 2022-23, due to safeguarding concerns.
- In contacts where the LADO Allegation Criteria has been met, advice has been given in terms of risk whilst investigations are ongoing and on outcomes which may have led to disciplinary, dismissal and a referral to the DBS.

Nature of concerns:

- The highest level of overall contacts to the LADO have related to concerns for "unsuitable behaviour". Within this category are concerns for issues within a staff members home life that might impact their ability to work with children and also concerns about a professionals conduct that does not reach the criteria for a LADO Allegation but is a breach of the employer's Code of Conduct or the staff member's Professional Standards.
- Out of those contacts that met the criteria for a LADO Allegation, incidents involving physical harm to children or incidents within the staff members personal life in which there might be transferrable risk to the work place, are the most frequent.
- Allegations of sexual harm have increased in 2022-23, with 5 allegations of non-recent sexual abuse and 10 allegations of recent sexual abuse or grooming type behaviours.
- Eight allegations that required a criminal investigation were made during the course of this year.

Themes/lessons arising from the activity in 2022-23:

- The LADO Service has benefited from the stability and relationship building achieved by having a permanent LADO in post over the course of the year.
- It is clear that additional awareness raising from the publication of updating legislation "Keeping Children Safe in Education" in September 2022, has prompted a increase in contacts. This will be monitored over the course of the year and "bite sized" training offered to schools within the Safeguarding Lead's sessions in order to increase confidence around managing their "low level concerns" policies. Often incidents that fall into this arena can be complex and the lack of definition in the LADO Allegations Criteria, can lead employers to rightly seek advice.
- A high level of contacts received have related to behaviours that fall under an employers Code of Conduct / Standards of Practice. Often these relate to a breach of professional boundaries and within learning from Serious Case Reviews, they are frequently seen as a potential pre-curser to incidents of serious abuse. The LADO has started to deliver bespoke training to some settings around the importance of professional boundaries and

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is looking into whether a webinar around this topic could be created for all settings to access as part of their induction / training programmes.

- The LADO continues to be contacted by some parents raising complaints with schools and the LADO will provide school and settings with advice around the investigation and need to remain open to learning when complaints are received.
- The highest level of contacts that meet the threshold for a LADO Allegation remain consistently around incidents of physical harm, with pushing, pulling or grabbing causing either injury or a report to the police. Included in these contacts are also incidents of restraint which have resulted in injury or allegation. There are also a high number of LADO Allegations that relate to concerns from within a staff members home life, including mental health or alcohol abuse concerns, concerns arising from arrest for serious offences and concerns that have led the staff members own children to be made subject to a Child Protection Plan. These cases are opened in order for assessment of any transferrable risk to the workplace to be considered.
- There has been a rise in 2022-23 of allegations relating to sexual abuse. There is no clear pattern or cause to this, however incidents of online sexual abuse activity have reduced.
- There has been a robust delivery of awareness raising and training offered by the LADO over the course of the year. The LADO attends all Early Years DSL meetings and Education Safeguarding Leads meeting where she provides both updates and bite sized training. The LADO has been in person to visit all the specialist schools in the Wokingham area and has extended the same offer to residential settings. There has been a programme of general training and training for foster carers offered in the Learning and Development library and the LADO has also provided bespoke training for settings who have a complex cohort. The LADO is currently supporting a residential provider to re-open through providing bespoke in person training to staff.
- Processes within the LADO Services have been strengthened over the course of 2022-23 – there are clear systems in place for responding to contacts and monitoring outcomes, the online directory for the LADO service is updated and advice leaflets for both employers and employees have been created to provide greater clarity and transparency to the service.
- A peer audit completed between West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham LADOs provided a positive opportunity for learning and process development.
- The LADO was involved in Wokingham Borough Council's response to the National Review of Children in residential care with complex disabilities and has developed systems with the Pan-Berkshire LADO group in response to the concerns raised within the national review in terms of sharing information.
- Inter-agency working arrangements remain strong with good ongoing relationships between the LADO, Thames Valley Police, regulatory bodies and associations for different work groups and internally with other Wokingham Borough Council teams.

Author's key recommendations and areas for development 2023-24:

1. To maintain core business, providing a robust process for managing allegations and other safeguarding concerns which require the involvement of the LADO, and to retain the option of virtual meetings, as they are efficient and working well.
2. To ensure that in all allegations, the child voice and needs are clearly considered and set out.
3. To continue to monitor any themes emerging out of the contacts received and consider if a bespoke training response might be required.
4. The LADO will consider alongside themes in allegations, whether information can be gathered in respect of equalities and any protected characteristics of those who allegations are made against.

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5. Exploration into whether training webinars could be created in order respond specific issues, eg: professional boundaries.
6. To continue to raise awareness and deliver training to promote and educate organisations, employers and carers across the children's workforce about how to report and manage allegations.
7. Bite size training to be delivered to education settings in managing low level concerns.
8. To develop awareness of the LADO services in settings which under report – eg: faith, some sports groups.
9. To promote training to residential settings, attending their meetings if required to increase awareness of the LADO and the referral process.
10. To share themes from the annual report in relation to education settings, so that there is an opportunity for colleagues in education to consider if there is specific training that would benefit their staff.
11. To repeat the LADO peer review with West Berkshire and Reading, to promote learning and consistency between the areas.
12. Work to continue to create a Local LADO Handbook for the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership with West Berkshire, Wokingham Borough Council and Reading LADOs, in order to create consistency between the areas.
13. To continue to attend the Berkshire LADO Network, the South East Regional LADO Group and link in with the National LADO group to keep up to date and share good practice.
14. To improve resilience within the team, for when the named LADO is on annual leave.

1.Purpose

1.1. This report provides a summary of the management of allegations against adults who work and volunteer with children in Wokingham Borough, specifically including the activity and outcomes for 2022-2023.

2. Background and context

2.1. Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 requires all organisations that provide services for children or employ staff, contractors or volunteers who work with children to have a procedure for handling allegations against staff. More detailed guidance is set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022.

2.2. Local Authorities are required to 'have designated a particular officer, or team of officers to be involved in the management and oversight of allegations against people that work with children'. The 2015 guidance changed the title from Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to Designated Officer, but there has been no change to the overall function and both terms continue to be used throughout legislation. In line with most Local Authorities in the South East, Wokingham has continued using the title of 'LADO' as it is a well-established and understood term.

2.3. The LADO has the responsibility to oversee the allegations management process, to ensure it remains effective and meets the dual demands of both protecting children and ensuring staff subject to allegations are treated fairly. The LADO is also responsible for ensuring that the investigative response is consistent, reasonable and proportionate.

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2.4. In addition to managing those contacts that reach the criteria for an "allegation", the LADO provides guidance and advice to those who employ adults on a range of issues including safer staffing cultures and recruitment. The LADO is required to raise awareness of how to manage allegations throughout the settings in its area and provide relevant training.

2.5. In Wokingham, the LADO function is situated within the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service. The role is carried out by a named designated officer. There is one LADO in Wokingham, whose role also includes some chairing of child protection conferences (approx. two days per week). Over the course of 2022-2023 the LADO, appointed in April 2022 embedded practices and procedures, following a period of instability of LADOs in post over 2021-2022.

2.6. Allegations Criteria: The Allegations procedure applies whenever it is alleged that a person who works with children has, in any connection with her/his employment or voluntary activity has:

- Behaved in a way that has 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 he or she would 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.

2.7. The fourth point in the criteria (above) which was added to the 'Working Together' guidance in 2020, provides a framework for managing concerns arising about a person's behaviour within their own family or personal life outside of work, which suggests they could pose a risk of harm to children in their care or workplace.

2.8. Meetings: If the criteria for an allegation, as set out above in 2.5, is met, the LADO would convene an Allegations Against Staff and Volunteers (ASV) Meeting in order to gather information, evaluate risk and decide on actions required going forward. This meeting was historically known as a LADO Strategy Discussion, but the term was changed in 2019 to distinguish it from a child strategy meeting.

2.9. There are three strands to the management of an allegation:

- A police investigation of a possible criminal offence.
- Enquiries and assessment by children's social care about whether a child needs protection or services.
- Investigation and consideration of disciplinary action by the employer or regulator in respect of the individual.

3. Statistical Data: April 2022-March 2023

Overall Activity

3.1. This report provides statistical data on the number and nature of contacts received by the LADO Service, alongside those contacts that reach the allegations criteria and their outcomes. It also provides analysis on themes and trends relating to the children's workforce who operate within Wokingham Borough and the effectiveness of inter-agency working arrangements.

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3.2. The report provides historical statistics, so that data can be compared. Whilst the level of contacts to the LADO fell considerably over the course of 2020-21 when the services to children were impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic, all services had by 2021-22 resumed normal levels of services.

Total Number of Contacts:

Table 1: Number of Contacts:

Total number of contacts received by the LADO	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21 (Covid Lockdown)	2019-20
	344	199	167	220
Contacts which met the criteria for a LADO Allegation.	59	44	38	41

3.3. In 2022-23 there was a 72% increase in the number of contacts received from the previous year. In order to understand this increase, it is useful to consider quarter by quarter how and when this increase occurred:

Table 2: Contacts received each quarter:

Overall Activity	Q1 2022-23	Q2 2022-23	Q3 2022-23	Q4 2022-23	Total for Year 2022-23	Comp 2021-22
Total number of contacts passed on to LADO	62	66	101	115	344	199
Contacts which progressed under the allegations process.	21	11	13	14	59	44
Conversation Rate	33.87%	16.66%	12.87%	12.17%	17.15%	22.11%

3.4. Over the course of 2022-23, the LADO has delivered a consistent programme of awareness raising in terms of the LADO service and employers' duties to report concerns. This resulted in a more consistent level of contacts over the first two quarters of 2022-23 in comparison to previous years where contacts over the course of the year were more variable.

3.5. Research over the course of 2022, explored later in this report, has also suggested that there is an increase, following the COVID 19 pandemic regarding the social, emotional and behavioural development difficulties of some children, and the impact of this on their behaviour. Increased challenges might contribute to some of the increasing contacts in which staff have become entangled in physical interactions with pupils or when unfounded allegations are made.

3.6. It is clear from the data however that the awareness raising caused by the publication of the revised "Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022" had the most significant impact on the level of contacts to the LADO. The revised legislation contained a section regarding allegations against staff, each school's need to a have a "Low Levels Concerns Policy" and the need to consult with the LADO when there is either a concern that clearly meets the Allegation Criteria or when advice and guidance is required regarding whether a concern reaches threshold.

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3.7. The number of incidents occurring in the Wokingham's Childrens Workforce that reached the criteria for an Allegation has also increased from 2021-22 but not disproportionately to the increase in contacts. The conversion rate of Contacts to Allegations remains largely in line with previous years which normally fall around 20%. Over 2022-23 the conversion rate was 17.15%.

Overall Activity Comparison to other Local Authorities:

Table 3: Local Authority Activity Comparison

Area	Total Contacts 2022-23	Total Contacts 2021-22	Number of LADOs / FTE
Wokingham	344	199	0.6
Bracknell	295	271	1.0
Achieving for Children (RBWM)		178 *	1.5
Brighter Futures for Children (Reading)	350 (to be confirmed)	121 *	1.0
West Berkshire	348	261	0.6
Slough Children's Trust	259	219	1.0

** There were differences between Reading, RBMW and other areas, in terms of what was being recorded and reported on for this year. Wokingham, West Berks, Slough and Bracknell all reported total contacts received by the LADO Service.*

3.8. The above information has been shared by the neighbouring boroughs. The LADOs for Reading and West Berkshire, who we are grouped with under the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership, WB, WBC and Reading, have shown similar increases to the Wokingham area. All areas are reporting increases in activity and generally a combination of individual and national awareness raising is thought to be the primary contributing factor.

Initial Evaluation of all Contacts:

3.9. On receipt of each contact, the LADO evaluates the information against the Allegations Criteria. All contacts fall under one of the following three initial outcomes:
Enquiry: there is no further actions for the LADO, the contact is signposted to another area / Team, or the contact relates to a request for information from Ofsted, ISI or DBS.
Consultation: these contacts might require an Evaluation Meeting, might need ongoing advice about risk from the staff member and need to be tracked to conclusion. Consultations often relate to standards or practice /Code of Conduct issues. Consultations can involve a similar level of work to an Allegation.
Allegation: the Allegations Criteria is met and the multi-agency allegations process is followed.

The following table shows the outcome of the evaluation of all contacts received:

Table 4: Outcomes of Initial Evaluations:

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Q1 Outcome of Initial LADO Evaluation of contacts:	Q1 2022-23	Q2 2022-23	Q3 2022-23	Q4 2022-23	Total 2022-23	Comparison Total for 2021-22
Total number of contacts	62	66	101	115	344	199
Enquiries:	12	18 NFA:8 Sign: 2 Info:8	54 NFA:19 Sign:19 Info:16	62 NFA:26 Sign: 26 Info:10	146	83
Consultations:	29	36	35	40	139	71
Allegations:	21	11	13	14	59	44

3.10. The most significant increase in contacts to the LADO in 2022-23, are those that have required consultation, advice or signposting. The impact of awareness raising, through both the LADO's work and the impact of updating legislation, shows that employers of adults who work with children are using the LADO Service for guidance and advice, as directed in that legislation. There has been a high level of contacts that relate to the breaching of an employers Code of Conduct or Professional Standards, where professional boundaries have been overstepped, for example using inappropriate language or "banter" with or about children, using inappropriate levels of physical contact when not necessary, inappropriate use of social media, inappropriately responding to challenging behaviour etc. Whilst in isolation these incidents have not caused harm to a child, settings are reminded that these types of professional boundary issues are often seen as pre-cursers to more serious incidents. In response to these rising contacts, the LADO has started to deliver bespoke training to settings around the vulnerability of children, especially those in high need groups, to abuse, the role of staff in advocating for children and reporting concerns and the need for strong professional boundaries in keeping children safe from abuse and staff safe for misinterpretation and allegations.

3.11. The processes for allegations and consultations, can require similar work levels: they may require an initial meeting, require advice around investigations and suspensions and require tracking to conclusion, so that patterns of both serious and low-level concerns can be monitored.

3.12. Over the course of 2022-23 the level of serious incidents occurring in the children's workforce has increased on previous years. This is largely due to a spike in the first quarter, which related to a number of issues when the new LADO came into role: the escalation by agencies of some allegations from the previous quarter, but also how allegations were being recorded when an initial meeting was held to gather information. It had previously been agreed across all LADOs in the Pan Berkshire area, that evaluation meetings would not be held, and any concern where a meeting was held, would be recorded as a LADO Allegation. In consultation with the other Berkshire LADOs, this has changed, and since the end of the 2nd quarter all local LADOs have reintroduced the use of "evaluation meetings", which are not recorded as allegations unless they progress.

Source of all enquiries and allegations by referring agency

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Table 5: Source of all enquiries/referrals

Referring Agency	**Q1 2022-23**	**Q2 2022-23**	**Q3 2022-23**	**Q4 2022-23**	**Total 2022-23**	**% of all contacts 2022-23**	**Comp % of all contacts for the year 2021-22**
Cafcass	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0%
Early Years / Pre-School.	6	8	4	7	25	7.26%	12%
Education	24	19	36	42	121	35.17%	39.6%
Faith Groups	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	1%
Foster Carers	0	0	0	1	1	0.29%	0%
Health	1	0	2	2	5	1.45%	1%
NSPCC	0	1	0	0	1	0.29%	1%
Ofsted	3	3	10	14	30	8.72%	4%
Other (incl. parents)	8	11	11	19	49	14.24%	13.9%
Police	4	4	10	5	23	6.68%	3%
Probation	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0%
Residential	3	1	3	4	11	3.19%	4%
Social Care	11	18	24	21	74	21.51%	18%
Sports	2	1	1	0	4	1.16%	2.5%
Voluntary	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0%
Youth Offending	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0%
Total	62	66	101	115	344		

3.13. The source of contacts in terms of percentage of overall business has remained ~~relatively~~ comparable to 2021-23. As the largest employer of adults who work with children, the highest level of contacts come from the education sector. What is seen in contrast to 2021-22, is that the spread of contacts is much broader within this sector, with a wider range of schools contacting the LADO. This is likely in response to the awareness raising set out in this report. Our specialist education settings, who have more complexities in the cohort of children they care for, continue to work closely with the LADO.

Category of Concern in Contacts Received for Evaluation:

Table 6: Category/ Nature of Concerns in all contacts:

Type/Category of all enquiries evaluated by LADO	2022-23	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Emotional	20	6	6	5

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Online Sexual Activity Offences	0	3	8	9
Neglect	17	11	20	8
Physical	69	45	45	37
Sexual	31	20	28	31
Unsuitable Adult Behaviour	151	95	60	89
TOTAL	288	180	167	179

3.14. Not all contacts that are received by the LADO can be categorised, if for example they do not relate to LADO business or are requests for information. Whilst the level of concerns have all increased, the pattern has remained largely similar to those in previous years, with the exception of online sexual abuse activity. Contacts regarding unsuitable behaviour have been the highest category of contact received.

3.15. In the contacts received, the following has been seen in the different categories:

The concerns around emotional harm have related to behaviour that is considered to be persistent and emotionally harmful, such as bullying or feeling picked on repeatedly, shouted at or belittled.
The concerns for neglect centred around standards of care in terms of physical provision of food, clothing, safe spaces or medical attention.
The concerns for physical harm normally involved some element of pushing, pulling or grabbing of a child or concerns about how restraint has been used.
The concerns for sexual harm have related to either behaviours that could be interpreted as grooming and sexual abuse.
The concerns for unsuitable adult behaviour related either to concerns from within the persons own personal life, was a practice issue or a behaviour that went against an employer's Code of Conduct or Professional standards.

Allegations

Subjects of LADO Allegations by Profession:

3.16. Contacts received by the LADO, where the concerns for adults who work with children have met the LADO Allegation Criteria, have been employed in the following sectors:

Table 7: Subjects of allegations by profession

Role/profession of person subject of an allegation	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Education staff – Total	**26**	12	11	24
I. Primary	*13*			
II. Secondary	*7*			
III. Specialist School	*9*			
Early years staff	5	15	8	4
Foster carers	6 (3 x WBC)	9	10	5
Residential care staff	9			
Health staff	0	1	7	2
Social Care Staff	1	1	0	0
Police	0	1	0	0

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Other including vol sector, sport and faith groups	9 (*7 x Sports 2 x other)*	5	2	6
Total	59	44	38	41

3.17. The number of adults subject to allegations that met the criteria for a LADO Allegation increased on the previous year and was comparable to the increase in referrals.

3.18. Whilst the level of allegations against adults who work in Primary Schools is higher this year than those who work in Secondary Schools, it is important to note that 5 of those related to allegations of non-recent abuse in the 1980's. The police have been unable to substantiate any of these allegations due to lack of ongoing contact/support from the alleged victims.

3.19. The level of allegations against staff working in residential homes has also increased and should be considered in light of three of the Children's homes in the Wokingham area closing during the course of 2022-23 due to concerns of serious safeguarding failures.

3.20. It is generally the case, that those settings who provide service to the most vulnerable children, who have additional needs often receive a higher level of allegations, as there are additional challenges to working with children who might have their own regulation/behavioural issues.

Nature of concerns in LADO Allegations

Table 8: Categories of concern – all allegations.

Category of Concern	2022-23	2021-23	2020-21
Emotional	4	1	5
Online Sexual Activity Offences	0	2	5
Neglect	1	0	4
Physical	20	14	14
Sexual	15	9	6
Unsuitable Behaviour	19	18	4
Total	59	44	38

3.22. It has been seen historically that the highest level of allegations against adults who work with children in Wokingham usually relates to either behaviour that has caused or risked causing physical harm or behaviour by the adult that suggests they might be unsuitable to work with children. This pattern has been repeated in 2022-23. There has in 2023-23 been a higher level of allegations relating to sexual abuse. This rise will continue to be monitored in order to consider any arising trends.

3.23. Allegations of **physical abuse** have continued with similar themes to previously and relate mostly to instances of pushing, pulling and grabbing – but to an extent that injury was caused or where a pupil or parent has reported the incident to the police as an assault. Allegations have also included concerns for inappropriate restraint or restraint resulting in injuries.

3.24. Allegations of **unsuitable behaviour** have included concerns within an employees personal life that might have transferrable risks to the workplace including: concerns for mental health, alcohol abuse, arrest for serious offences or the employees own children being made subject to Child Protection Plans.

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3.25. Allegations of **sexual abuse** have included 5 allegations of non-recent sexual abuse, alongside allegations of recent sexual abuse or grooming of children.

Cases with a Criminal Investigation:

3.26. Criminal cases continued to be reviewed by the LADO bi-monthly. There are currently 11 open criminal cases that are awaiting conclusion. Eight new allegations were made this year where a criminal investigation was required, two of which have already closed due to lack of victim contact. In addition, there are five investigations that remain open from previous years. Progress has been made this year in closing some of the longer standing allegations which started during the Covid 19 Pandemic and experienced significant delay.

3.27.Cases which have a criminal component, can take significantly longer to conclude due to often lengthy criminal investigation. Investigations that involve non-recent allegations of sexual harm can take in excess of a year to investigate and come in front of the courts. The police take a cautious approach with victims, who can withdraw support quickly.

3.28. Delay can also occur because of the requirements at times for organisations to risk assess following court outcomes, in order to consider risks that did not reach the test for criminal conviction but remain a safeguarding concern.

Table 9 – Overview of Ongoing Criminal Cases:

Nature of concern	Subject of allegation and status of investigation
Physical	0
Online Sexual Abuse Offences	1 x education: investigation ongoing 1 x sport: investigation ongoing.
Sexual Abuse	1 x education: awaiting CPS charging decision. 1 x education: awaiting trial. 4 x education: investigation ongoing. 1 x sport: investigation ongoing
Emotional	0
Neglect	0
Suitability to work with children (an arrest for a matter occurring outside of the work place where there may be a transferrable risk to working with children).	1 x social care: investigation ongoing 1 x education: investigation ongoing

Outcomes

3.29. Guidance requires that all cases should be tracked to conclusion with a final outcome recorded to show whether the allegation has been substantiated or not. This outcome should then be fed back to the member of staff and the child or parents concerned. The outcome categories are defined in Working Together and Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance.

Table 9: Outcomes for the 59 allegations:

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Outcome of allegations following investigation	2022-23	2021-2022	2020-21
Substantiated	10	14	9
Unsubstantiated	15	10	4
False / Malicious	3	6	0
Unfounded	14	3	8
Other - inconclusive or not yet concluded	11	5	17
No role for LADO	6	11	Not Recorded
Total	59	44	38

3.30. There were a significant number of allegations that were concluded quickly in 2021-22. This was positive for both the referrer but also for the member of staff, for whom the allegation was dealt with swiftly.

3.31. The majority of allegations have been concluded this year as either Unfounded (there being no basis or evidence for the making of the allegation) or Unsubstantiated (there being no evidence to either prove or disprove an allegation). The LADO process needs to listen to young people and children and also ensure that investigations are balanced, fair and evidence based for employees. In these cases, there is often learning for the setting in terms of their practice and how this can be improved to avoid these types of situations or allegations in the future, for example re-considering the behaviour management plan of a young person, providing advice to the staff member about their practice or thinking about whole setting learning around professional boundaries.

3.32. The outcomes for those allegations that are substantiated can in some cases lead to criminal conviction, employee disciplinary or dismissal. It is the LADO's role to provide guidance to employers on making appropriate referrals to the DBS to ensure that the Children's Workforce is kept safe from those not suitable to work within it.

3.33. The table above notes some outcomes as 'no role for LADO.' There are some contacts that are received by the LADO that have a level of complexity and a multi-agency approach is used to understand the issues and risks and determine if there should be actions under the Allegations Process.

Timescales for conclusion

Table 10: Timescales for conclusion of all contacts:

Timescale for conclusion	**2022-23**	**2021-22**	**2020-21**
Within 1 month	298 (86%)	175 (87%)	137 (82%)
1-3 months	19	11	16
4-6 months	1	0	3
6-12 months	2	0	0
Still ongoing/unresolved	25	13	11
Total	344	199	167

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3.34. The LADO monitors contacts to conclusion. The conclusion of contacts within 1 month has remained high, over 80%. Those contacts that have fallen outside of this timescale involved a lengthy criminal investigation or where an allegation or consultation demanded a complex internal employer investigation or complaints process. The LADO continues to monitor and chase all contacts to conclusion.

4. Themes from the activity in 2022-23

4.1. The LADO Service has benefited from the stability and relationship building that comes from having a permanent LADO in post over the course of the year. This benefit can be seen in the programme of training being delivered and consistency of the LADO in attending multi-professionals' meetings. The LADO has built relationships with settings that means they feel able to seek early advice when necessary and this contributes to a swift and safe response to concerns being raised.

4.2. The level of contacts received by the LADO over 2022-23 has increased significantly. There are a number of potential causes identified for this:

4.3. It is clear that awareness raising, predominantly from the publication of updating legislation "Keeping Children Safe in Education" in September 2022, has prompted a high increase in contacts. The legislation has prompted school leaders and DLS's in considering their "low level concerns policy" and the need to seek LADO advice in complex cases. Schools will often contact the LADO for advice regarding those incidents that do not clearly meet the Allegation criteria but equally do not present without risk. The LADO will over the course of this year, offer "bite sized" training to schools within the Safeguarding Lead's sessions in order to increase confidence around managing their "low level concerns".

4.4. In addition to the awareness raised nationally by this publication, the LADO has also been raising awareness throughout the year, visiting specialist settings, attending organisational meetings and those meetings arranged through the Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Board. In addition the Wokingham LADO Directory Page has been updated and guidance leaflets have been developed and shared with settings.

4.5. A theme to some of the increase in LADO contacts could be considered in research published over 2022 regarding the longer-term impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, particularly in respect of the social and emotional development of children. There is a potential connection between the increasing trends of LADO enquiries, the increasingly complex behaviour and wellbeing of students and the stressors in the private lives of those who work with children.

4.6. Research is variable in parts, studies showing some signs of resilience and improvement for some children over the course of the pandemic, however the gap between the most disadvantaged of children and their peers in particular appears to be widening. The Nuffield Trust Org (2022) quotes that the number of children waiting to start mental health treatment has quadrupled between 2019-2021 and the NSPCC (2022) reports that the Co-Space study, surveying over 8000 families found an increase in behavioural and emotional difficulties in children. The NSPCC also cited stressors on families including the police recording domestic abuse related contacts as increasing by 6% in the year ending 2021. The combination of increasingly complex behaviours in children, and stressors in the workforces' own lives, could account for some of the ongoing increase in LADO enquiries.

4.7. Of those contacts received by the Wokingham LADO over 2022-23, a high level related to concerns that professional boundaries had not been maintained by staff. These concerns often, fell

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under an employer's Code of Conduct / Standards of Practice and whilst no harm had been caused to children in most of these instances, the LADO has been mindful that often within Serious Case Reviews relating to harm caused by those who work with children, the breaching of professional boundaries is often seen in advance of serious abuse occurring. It is clear in guidance and legislation therefore that low level concerns need to be promptly logged, addressed, monitored and referred back to the LADO if a pattern of concerns develops. The LADO has now delivered bespoke training to a school and a residential setting, around the vulnerability of children who are in care or have disabilities to abuse, and the need for strong professional boundaries to keep children safe, and also staff safe from having their behaviour misinterpreted and allegations made. The LADO is also supporting a residential home in Wokingham who are seeking to re-open, through delivering this training as part of their new training programme. The LADO is considering whether the development of a webinar around this topic could be created for all settings to access as part of their induction / training programmes.

4.8. The LADO continues to be contacted by some parents raising complaints with schools and the LADO will provide school and settings with advice around the investigation and need to remain open to learning when complaints are received.

4.9. The highest level of concerns in incidents that meet the threshold for a LADO Allegation remains consistently around incidents of physical harm. There are also a high number of LADO Allegations that relate to concerns from within a staff members home life, including mental health or alcohol abuse concerns, concerns arising from arrest for serious offences and concerns that have led the staff members own children to be made subject to a Child Protection Plan.

4.10. There has been a robust delivery of awareness raising and training offered by the LADO over the course of the year. The LADO attends all Early Years DSL meetings and Education Safeguarding Leads meeting, and has provided both updates and also started to deliver bite sized training. The LADO has been in person to visit all the specialist schools in the Wokingham area and has extended the same offer to residential settings. There has been a programme of general training and training for foster carers offered in the Learning and Development library and the LADO has also provided bespoke training for settings who have a complex cohort. The LADO is currently supporting a residential provider to re-open through providing bespoke in person training to staff.

4.11. A peer audit was undertaken with the West Berkshire and Reading LADOs, and it is hoped to repeat this annually. The audit was a good opportunity for learning, particularly around consistency. Since this time all the LADO's have made adjustments and improvements to their own systems and processes as a result of seeing each other's work and the development of a Local LADO Handbook is underway to improve consistency and provide assistance to new LADO's coming into post or cover LADOs during annual leave.

4.12. During 2022-23 a National Review of all care settings for children with complex disabilities was commissioned in response to widespread safeguarding failures in Doncaster. The LADO was involved in Wokingham Borough Council's response to this, visiting the settings alongside other members of the QAST Team and developing the reports for these. Whilst Ofsted had inspected and rated the settings as "good" during the time of the abuse occurring, the National Review pointed towards failures of the settings, placing authorities and LADOs in terms of information sharing.

4.13. In response to this review the LADOs within the whole Pan Berkshire Safeguarding Partnership area, are meeting quarterly to discuss any systemic concerns for providers of services to children who span our areas and the LADO has also been in contact with the Commissioning and Care Quality Team in terms of creating information sharing streams for concerns that arise in settings in the

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Wokingham area. When systemic concerns arise in Wokingham Settings, the LADO will also be requiring the sharing of this information with all placing authorities.

5. Author's key recommendations and areas for development in 2023-2024:

Author's key recommendations and areas for development:

1. To maintain core business, providing a robust process for managing allegations and other safeguarding concerns which require the involvement of the LADO, and to retain the option of virtual meetings, as they are efficient and working well.
2. To ensure that in all allegations, the child voice and needs are clearly considered and set out.
3. To continue to monitor any themes emerging out of the contacts received and consider if a bespoke training response might be required.
4. The LADO will consider alongside themes in allegations, whether information can be gathered in respect of equalities and any protected characteristics of those who allegations are made against.
5. Exploration into whether training webinars could be created in order respond specific issues, eg: professional boundaries.
6. To continue to raise awareness and deliver training to promote and educate organisations, employers and carers across the children's workforce about how to report and manage allegations.
7. Bite size training to be delivered to education settings in managing low level concerns.
8. To develop awareness of the LADO services in settings which under report – eg: faith, some sports groups.
9. To promote training to residential settings, attending their meetings if required to increase awareness of the LADO and the referral process.
10. To share themes from the annual report in relation to education settings, so that there is an opportunity for colleagues in education to consider if there is specific training that would benefit their staff.
11. To repeat the LADO peer review with West Berkshire and Reading, to promote learning and consistency between the areas.
12. Work to continue to create a Local LADO Handbook for the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership with West Berkshire, Wokingham Borough Council and Reading LADOs, in order to create consistency between the areas.
13. To continue to attend the Berkshire LADO Network, the South East Regional LADO Group and link in with the National LADO group to keep up to date and share good practice.
14. To improve resilience within the team, for when the named LADO is on annual leave.

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Progress Against Action Plan from Annual Report 2021-22

Action	Progress
1.To continue to provide a robust process for managing allegations and other safeguarding concerns which require the evaluation of the LADO. Due to the efficiency of holding virtual meetings, allegations meetings will continue to be held virtually or as hybrid meetings for the foreseeable future.	The LADO has spent considerable time this year reviewing, updating and making clear the LADO process, including creating an internal flow chart and two guides for employers and employees. Online meetings continue to be offered for the LADO process, as this continues to be an efficient way to ensure that all parties required can access meetings at short notice. This is particularly useful when organisations who cover Wokingham have safeguarding bodies located elsewhere in the country, eg: FA and Rugby Union.
2.To continue to monitor the impact on enquiries/volume of work following the creation of the fourth category for an allegation, relating to the personal circumstances of adults who work with children. To also monitor whether there is any noticeable change to the type of referrals to the LADO as the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is known.	The LADO continues to log and analyse patterns of referrals in terms of subject, source and setting and has identified themes in terms of enquiries received. The LADO attended the DSL meetings for both Primary and Secondary School DSL's, to share and seek the views of enquiries and the impact of Covid 19 and also consider the challenges in terms of professional boundaries. Training going forward will consider the need for advice and guidance around professional boundaries.
3. To improve links and provide advice to those schools and settings who request additional support around referrals or with those settings who have a high referral rate.	The LADO has visited each of the specialist schools in the Wokingham Area in person this year, in addition to visiting SWAAY. There have been a high number of residential home closures in Wokingham however there is a training visit planned in 2023-24 with one setting which seeks to re-open. The LADO will need to continue to raise awareness in the semi-independent settings.
4. To promote training to foster carers and residential settings – attending their meetings if required to ensure that awareness of the LADO and the referral process increases.	Two training sessions have been offered for foster carers online this year. Attendance overall covered around 25 carers. The feedback from the session was positive and carers noted that it would have been useful to undertaken as part of their induction. I have fed this back to the Placements Team.

	Due to the closure of 3 residential homes over the course of this year, awareness raising with them has lowered, however a training visit is planned for one home that plans to re-open shortly.
5. To promote training to Early Years Settings and work closely with the Early Years Advisory Service.	The LADO continues to collaborate with the Early Years and Childcare Development Team, regularly sharing information and passing over training needs/enquiries. The LADO promoted and delivered a general training session, which was attended by some Early Years Settings. The LADO has attended the Early Years DSL Group Meeting, a delivered bite size training in one session, to provide a reminder of the lessons from Serious Case Reviews where a child was harmed by a member of staff in an early year's settings.
6. To improve links to the Wokingham Secondary Federation; the Primary Headteacher Group and the Independent Schools Safeguarding Leads Group to raise awareness about the allegations process; and to share highlights and themes from the annual report in relation to education settings - such as gaps in safer recruitment and managing historical allegations.	The LADO has attended the Secondary and Primary School DSL Groups and worked individually with the members of the Wokingham Secondary Federation, Primary and Independent Schools. The DSL meetings have now changed in structure and include safeguarding leads for all settings. It is the intention that the LADO will continue to attend the Safeguarding Lead and Education Engagement meetings which are held quarterly to both provide feedback, raise awareness and provide bite size training sessions.
7. To improve links to sporting organisations and faith groups in the Wokingham area to promote the LADO service.	Links and working relationships have continued to develop with the Football Association, Rugby Union, British Gymnastics, Athletics UK, a large provider of Karate in the area and Judo UK. The LADO has also met with "Get Berkshire Active". The LADO has been in contact with the Scouts and Girl Guides Safeguarding teams and also worked alongside the Oxford Anglican Safeguarding team. It continues to be the goal to create a database of sporting and faith groups in the Wokingham Borough to promote the LADO service more widely.
8. To work with learning and partnership colleagues to review the process and pathway for managing referrals	The LADO has taken part in a peer audit with the West Berks and Reading LADO's in order to learn in terms of each others processes and to create consistency.

which relate to school complaints to make sure concerns are dealt with effectively and within the correct process.	The LADO has also reviewed the MASH/LADO interface flow chart and this system appears to work well.
9. To monitor progress on the Foster Carer Allegations Policy and its implementation within Wokingham Children's services to ensure all cases are concluded and outcomes documented and offer training for the members of the fostering panel.	"Managing Allegations Against Foster Carers Policy" was updated in quarter one. Over the course of 2022-23, its has been implemented and appears to be working well. This should be reviewed in 2022-23.
10. To continue to attend the Berkshire LADO Network, the South East Regional LADO Group and the National LADO Network to keep up to date and share good practice.	The LADO has attended the Pan Berkshire LADO Network Meeting, South East Regional LADO Meeting and the National LADO Network meeting. The Pan Berkshire group has met in person on one occasion and the links and relationships between the LADO's has been strengthened with the LADOs seeking advice and sharing systems and processes. The LADO will continue to strengthen relationships within these groups.