



ALLEGATIONS AGAINST STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ANNUAL REPORT

1st APRIL 2021 to 31st MARCH 2022

Contents

Page

1. Introduction	3
2. The role of the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer)	4
3. Breakdown of allegations for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022	5
4. Outcomes	8
5. Summary	10
6. Recommendations	11

1.Introduction

- 1.1 The role of the LADO was best defined in the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Govt) in 2010 and is referenced in subsequent revisions. All Local Authorities should have a designated officer(s) and new appointments should be Social Worker qualified as of 2018.
- 1.2 Keeping Children Safe in Education updated in September 2020, sets out the legal duties educational establishments must follow to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It includes guidance around the management of allegations against the children's workforce.
- 1.3 Safeguarding procedures on managing allegations against staff or volunteers who work with children in Gateshead can be found at:
https://www.proceduresonline.com/nesubregion/p_alleg_against_staff.html#
- 1.4 The procedures are applicable when there are concerns, or it is alleged that an adult who works with children, either as an employee or in a voluntary capacity, has:
 - behaved in a way that has harmed a child 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 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.
- 1.5 The procedures should be applied with common sense and judgement. Many cases may either not meet the criteria set out above or may do so without warranting consideration of either a police investigation or enquiries by the local authority children's social care services. Although it might not be clear whether an incident constitutes an 'allegation'. An allegation must be sufficiently serious as to suggest that harm has or may have been caused to a child/ren, or that the alleged behaviour indicates that the individual may pose a risk of harm to children. Issues that do not meet this threshold may constitute conduct or disciplinary issues and should be addressed by employers using the appropriate organisational procedures.
- 1.6 This report covers the work of the LADO over the period of 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 and sets out the role, function of the LADO as well as an analysis of the work completed.
- 1.7 The LADO sits within the Safeguarding Childrens Unit which consists of ten IRO's a practice lead and a service lead, who directly manages the LADO. The LADO has a small caseload of children in our care and child protection cases.

2. The role of the LADO

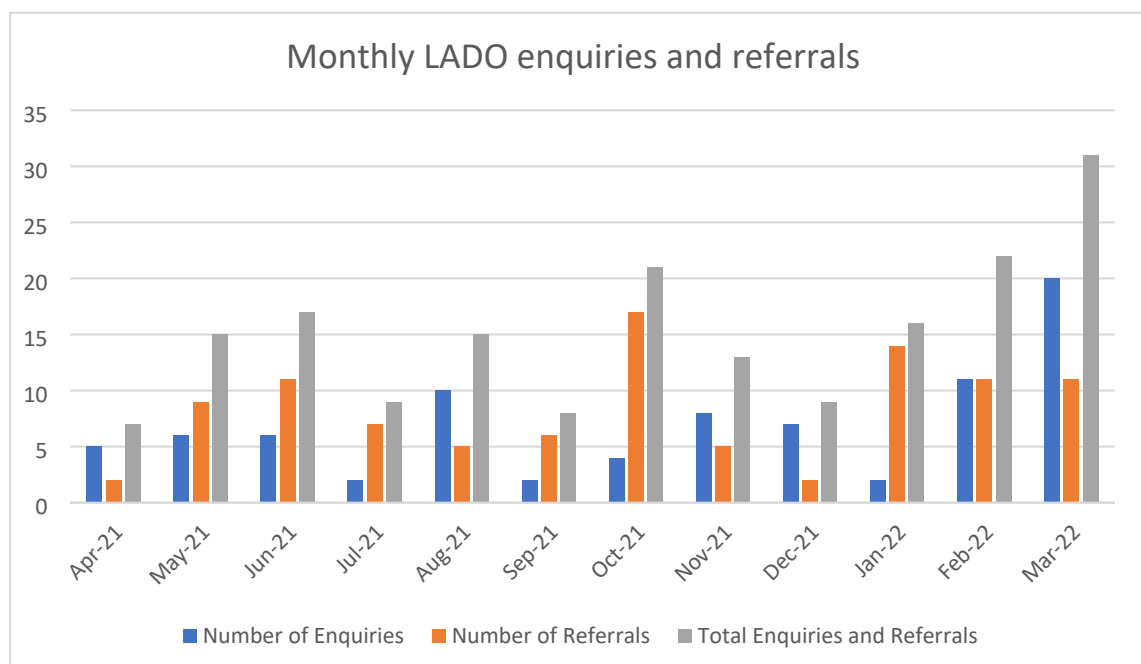
2.1 LADO will;

- * provide advice, information and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations around allegations and concerns regarding paid and unpaid workers;
- * manage and oversee individual cases from partner agencies, chair allegation meetings;
- * ensure there is a consistent, fair and thorough process for all adults working with children and young people against whom an allegation is made;
- * monitor the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with fairly, robustly and as quickly as possible;
- * recommend a referral to Children's Services and attend any subsequent section 47 strategy meeting in cases where the allegation requires investigation by police and/or Childrens services.
- * provide training, and information to the wider workforce to be confident that agencies are working efficiently in reporting allegations and managing the immediate concern to ensure the safety of children, as well as considering their duty of care to their employee.

3. Breakdown of allegations for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

3.1 Enquiries constitute advice, requests for information sharing, assistance and guidance for partner agencies and does not result in actual referrals to the service. Whereas, referrals require greater intervention and investigation.

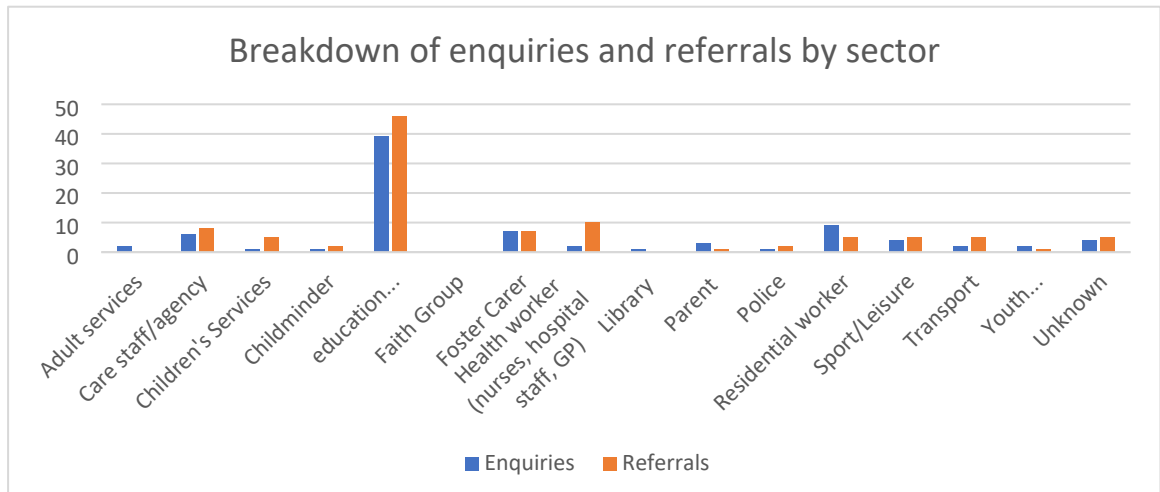
3.2 The chart below shows there were 83 enquiries and 100 referrals made to the LADO during this period, the monthly breakdown is as follows:



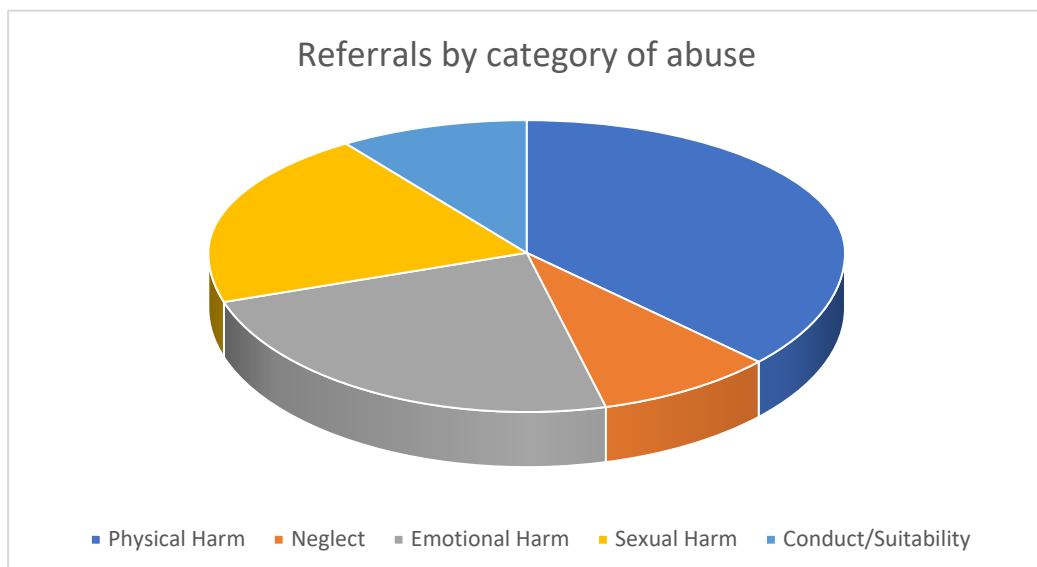
3.3 Like the last two years there has been a further decrease in the number of enquiries and increase in the number of referrals as shown below:

	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Enquiries	83	97	123
Referrals	100	61	48

3.4 It's unclear as to why this is the case, but one could speculate that the guidance and advice offered, may be landing, and increasing local understanding and confidence in managing low level concerns without the need to seek advice from the LADO. In addition the impact of COVID and lockdown is likely to be a factor.



3.5 Just under half the total number of referrals related to staff that work within the education sector, which includes early years. Education continues to be a significant source of referrals to the LADO. There were no enquiries or referrals during this period in relation to faith groups which is a decrease from previous years. A category titled unknown has been created to capture the 2 referrals and 1 enquiry made in respect of Gateshead Council employees who do not work directly with children or adults, 1 referral for a staff member working in a COVID testing centre, 1 enquiry about a security guard with his employer being unknown, 1 referral about a transcriber and lastly 2 records about unemployed individuals with no roles.



- 3.6 37% of all referrals related to allegations of physical abuse. This has always been the most frequent reason for referral, which could be due to Gateshead having several children's homes, in addition to specialist educational provisions where restrictive physical interventions are used. Even though many of the investigations identify no intent by the member of staff to cause harm to a child/young person, the use of such interventions can often be misinterpreted as abusive by the child/young person involved or lead to accidental harm being caused.
- 3.7 There has been an increase of emotional harm compared to previous years, which could correlate to the training that IRO's (who have been on a duty rota covering periods for the LADO) have received in relation to child protection thresholds, and what constitutes emotional harm, therefore they've a greater understanding of this category and may have referenced it more.
- 3.8 Neglect remains the lowest category with 9% and has been consistently the lowest over recent years.
- 3.9 Conduct/Suitability has not been explicitly referenced in previous reports, but the term "other" has been used which defined such circumstances where there are concerns about a person's behaviour in their personal life that may suggest the individual poses a risk to children or young people. Within the reporting year 2019 to 2020 7 were reported as other. In December 2020 Working Together to Safeguard Children was updated, and in relation to Positions of Trust (following an earlier update to Keeping Children Safe in Education) an additional criteria requiring a LADO referral to be made has been added:
- A person has behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children*
- 3.10 This change has therefore widened the threshold for referrals, and during this report period there has been 11 referrals. It's likely that this category will continue to increase, possibly leading to this being the most common reason for referral, given that this addition was intended to capture a broader range of behaviour which may indicate risk where an incident occurs outside of their employment and does not involve children but could have an impact on their suitability to work with them. At present, the new threshold has had limited impact on this years figures as it's only become operational at the end of the reporting period.
- 3.11 Where allegations meetings have been held, as a means to evaluate information or to directly plan interventions, these have been wholly held virtually using MS Teams. As meetings have been held virtually significant benefits have been seen; less cancellations as agencies have found it easier to attend within the 5 working days (2 days if allegation about a foster carer) and reviews have been more regularly attended. To establish whether meetings should

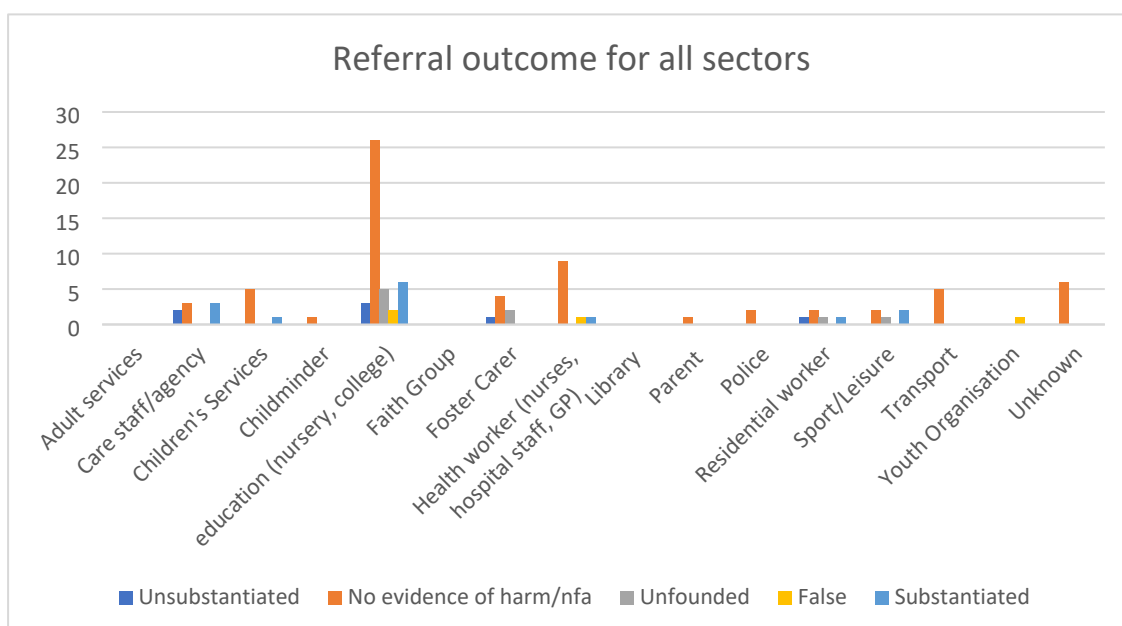
remain virtually or revert back to in person, feedback will be sought from partner agencies about their experiences and the best way moving forward will be determined.

4. Outcomes of Investigations

- 4.1 Outcomes are defined against two thresholds, where harm or the risk of harm has been caused, and where the standard of care fell below that which could be reasonably expected. In cases where the harm threshold is met, criminal prosecutions are normally considered and referrals to DBS and professional regulatory bodies take place. Whilst compiling this report it has been difficult to track the outcome of these actions, therefore a lesson learnt is that the current recording system used to record all enquiries and referrals to the LADO has needed to be adapted to include columns on whether a referral has been made to a regulatory body or DBS, who by and when.

Outcome	Total
No evidence of abuse	66
Unsubstantiated	7
Substantiated	14
FALSE	4
Unfounded	9
Malicious	0
	100

- 4.2 Over the last twelve months 14% of cases which met the harm threshold were substantiated. During this period there has been 2 individuals who have challenged the LADO's decision. By making a complaint to the Local Authority and making a freedom of information request. In situations where disputes or complaints arise, they should firstly be resolved informally in discussion with the LADO. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the informal discussion, then the complaint should progress to the first formal stage of making a complaint by addressing the complaint in writing to the LADO. The LADO will then attempt to resolve the complaint with the complainant by responding with a written response and decision of the resolution within 10 working days of the complaint being received. If the complaint remains unresolved the LADO will inform the complainant, the complaint is escalating to the second formal stage and they'll inform the service lead of the Safeguarding Children's Unit who will undertake their own independent investigation. In the 2 cases that the LADO's decision has been challenged, the service lead has investigated to verify the effective decision making of the LADO, and no evidence of LADO decision making has been overturned.
- 4.3 Most LADO referrals were discussed with the police to consider whether the referral was an allegation of abuse, a complaint or related solely to professional standards. In the few cases where a discussion did not take place this was because the criminal threshold was clearly not met from the outset.



- 4.4 The number of referrals relating to foster carers has dramatically reduced this year to only 7, compared to last year 2020 – 2021 when there was 26 and the year prior 2019 – 2020 there was 20. This is a significant decrease particularly as this workforce continued to accommodate children throughout the pandemic and the number of children in care in Gateshead has increased by 14%. This cohort has always been recognised as being one of the highest sectors to refer in comparison to the other sectors. It is unclear whether this reporting period is an anomaly and standards have been improved, or whether additional training is required for the fostering department on what constitutes a referral to the LADO. Over the coming year training will be delivered to the fostering department on the role of the LADO, responsibilities of the service to refer when concerns are identified. Regular communication sessions will be held with the fostering team’s manager in relation to the number of standards of care meeting’s held and a record of the final outcomes will be developed in order to monitor any theme’s or areas that require further training.
- 4.5 There are four Local Authority children’s homes in Gateshead, which provide mid to long term residential care for young people aged 12 – 18. There is also a residential home which provides short break care for disabled children who live at home with their families.
- 4.6 There are 11 independently run children’s homes in Gateshead and the LADO has been contacted by the registered managers appropriately when required. Over the coming year contact will be made with the independent homes by the LADO to raise the services profile and review their arrangements on how enquiries and referrals are made in relation to an allegation against someone working with a child.

5. Summary

- 5.1 There has been a steady increase in the number of referrals over the years and a slight decrease in enquiries. Which could be linked to a positive impact from the LADO training sessions for partner agencies, however, further curiosity will be given to this, to establish whether this is what's happening, whether its similar for other area's or whether there is another explanation.
- 5.2 In most cases, where an allegation has been made it was not found to have resulted in harm to a child/young person. Out of the 100 referrals 66 found no evidence of abuse, compared to only 14 that were substantiated.
- 5.3 There has been a constant presence from the Gateshead LADO at the national LADO conferences and regional LADO meetings. These meetings continue to be held virtually and discuss a range of topics such as training, reflection on the role and any local issues arising.
- 5.4 A permanent LADO was recruited in July 2022, and a decision was made that they would not hold any children in our care cases. This is to prevent the LADO from being comprised should there be a cross over with LADO referrals regarding foster carers. The LADO will, however, continue to hold a small caseload of child protection cases.
- 5.5 There has been a number of experienced staff members undertaking the role of the LADO as Gateshead said a fond farewell to Nicholas Leon during this reporting period. As previously highlighted the IRO team operate a duty rota in the absence of the permanent LADO and there may have been some associated differences in practice and / or recording, which could have impacted on these figures. Now that a permanent LADO has been recruited the IRO team should not need to cover, as the service lead and practice lead within the Safeguarding unit would be sufficient to cover any absences/leave of the LADO between them thus creating a more consistent approach. However, as the LADO attends the fortnightly IRO team meetings continuous updates and learning will be shared with the IRO's about the LADO process, should they ever need to cover again.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 It has been another challenging year for services working with children due to Covid 19, and the LADO service was no exception. This may explain the decrease in enquiries to the LADO. To be confident upon the return to the “new normal” and to ensure the LADO is responsive to organisations, an increased awareness raising of the LADO role will be required.
- 6.2 Plans are therefore, in place for the LADO to raise awareness of the LADO process with the social work teams, education establishments and the Queen Elizabeth hospital over the coming year. Further planning is needed however by the LADO in regards to an annual programme in widening the LADO profile and awareness of the LADO process across all sectors in Gateshead.
- 6.3 The LADO will have regular communication with the fostering team manager and explore professional curiosity regarding the reduction in referrals from this service.
- 6.4 There will continue to be a presence at the National and regional LADO meetings in order to maintain close links, which will help to inform consistency of thresholds, trends and an awareness of wider LADO practice developments.
- 6.5 Over the next 3 months the LADO will seek feedback from partner agencies following the allegation management meetings. This feedback will determine whether a virtual or in person meeting is more effective and whether any areas could be improved.
- 6.6 Continue to strengthen recording and monitoring measures used by the LADO.

Michelle Farry, Local Authority Designated Officer, Safeguarding Childrens Unit.