

# Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

## Annual Report

2024-2025

## Children's Services



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## Frequently Used Acronyms

LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
WBC	West Berkshire Council
BWCSP	Berkshire West Children Safeguarding Partnership
CAAS	Contact, Advice and Assessment Service
QAAS	Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
NLN	National LADO Network
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
TVP	Thames Valley Police
CAIU	Child Abuse Investigation Unit
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service

## DEFINITIONS USED WITHIN THIS REPORT

Child:	Any person under the age of 18 years
WBC LADO service:	Local Authority Designated Officer service, operating within Children's Services, responsible for overseeing and managing allegations against staff and volunteers working with children
LADO allegation:	<p>The thresholds for an allegation or concern are where any person who works with children, in conjunction with his/her employment in either a paid or unpaid capacity, or voluntary activity has;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child.</li><li>• possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child.</li><li>• behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children; or</li><li>• behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may be unsuitable to work with children</li></ul>
LADO consultation:	Where a concern discussed with LADO does not meet the allegations management thresholds, a confidential record is kept regarding any advice given about how to manage the concern
LADO role	<p>The BWSCP procedures set out the role of the LADO as to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Receive reports about allegations and to be involved in the management and oversight of individual cases.</li><li>▪ Provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations.</li><li>▪ Liaise with police and other agencies.</li><li>▪ Monitor the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with as quickly as possible, consistent with a thorough and fair process.</li><li>▪ Provide advice and guidance to employers in relation to making referrals to the DBS and regulatory bodies such as Ofsted.</li></ul>

## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In 2024-2025, the year-on-year trend of increasing numbers of contacts into the LADO service has continued. This year there were 651 LADO contacts, which was an increase of 29%. The rate of increase this year has slowed compared to the previous two years, but it is still significant.
- 1.2 Reading and Wokingham LADO services have also noted a significant increase in notifications in 2023-2024 (see Table 1, page 7). Anecdotal feedback from other Local Authorities in the South-East Regional LADO group was that most regions had noted an increase in contacts into LADO in 2024-2025, which shows that the experience in West Berkshire is in line with local trends.
- 1.3 This report will show that the increase in contacts does not indicate a marked increase in harmful behaviour and practices by those working with children in West Berkshire. Rather there are several factors, which have made it more likely that employers will require advice and guidance from LADO. These factors include:
  - Ongoing LADO awareness-raising activity with schools and early years sector
  - Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance including guidance around low-level concerns about conduct
  - Increasing complexity of children's needs in nurseries, schools and colleges following Covid-19 lockdowns and ongoing effects of this on children and families
  - An increase over the past six years in the number of children's homes and specialist education facilities operating in West Berkshire
  - An increase in contacts from police and Children's Services involving suitability and transferrable risk due to conduct in people's personal lives
  - An increase this reporting year in direct contacts to LADO from parents and members of the public
- 1.4 The significant increase in LADO contacts since 2018 has had an impact on capacity for other activities, such as awareness raising. The LADO had intended to develop online awareness raising modules for staff and for managers in partner agencies, to access as part of their induction training, when capacity to do so allowed. However, given current levels of LADO contacts, this has not yet been achieved.
- 1.5 In recognition of the sustained increase in LADO contacts, the QAAS service made a successful bid in 2024 for a six-month temporary increase in LADO hours from 0.6 FTE to 1.0 FTE from June 2024. In December 2024 this was made a permanent arrangement.
- 1.6 LADO priorities for 2025-2026 are set out within section 11 of this report and include plans to develop and embed LADO audit and feedback programmes alongside increased awareness-raising activity.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the management of allegations made against the children's workforce in West Berkshire, and other LADO activity over the period of 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 2.2 Legislation and statutory guidance (*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, Section 11 of The Children Act 2004, Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024*) and the BWSCP Procedures set out the procedures for managing allegations against staff/volunteers who work with children, and the role of the LADO. These are in place to safeguard children and to ensure that adults subject to an allegation are treated fairly, with responses to allegations being consistent, reasonable and proportionate.
- 2.3 The WBC LADO is line managed by the Service Manager for the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service and currently sits within Children's Services as part of the People Directorate. There are cover arrangements in place when the substantive LADO is on leave via the Child Protection Conference Chairs/ Independent Reviewing Officers.
- 2.4 This report will summarise and analyse the LADO contacts received into the WBC LADO service during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This report will also outline progress against the recommendations made within the 2023-2024 LADO annual report and set out the action plan for LADO in 2025-2026. Anonymised case studies have been used to provide an illustration of the complex and diverse nature of the role.

## 3 UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### Awareness-raising activity

- 3.1 The LADO has continued to maintain links with education partners through the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training events. The DSL training is attended by school/college staff and has also included representatives from nurseries and children's homes.
- 3.2 The sustained and significant increase in LADO contacts in recent years has had an impact on the capacity for the LADO to provide any additional awareness raising activity. The action to produce an e-learning module for WBC staff and partner agencies has not been achieved due to this. This has been set as an action in the 2025-2026 plan.

### Review and update internal LADO processes

- 3.3 This work has been completed and these processes are accessible by WBC staff and partner agencies on the internal and external WBC websites.

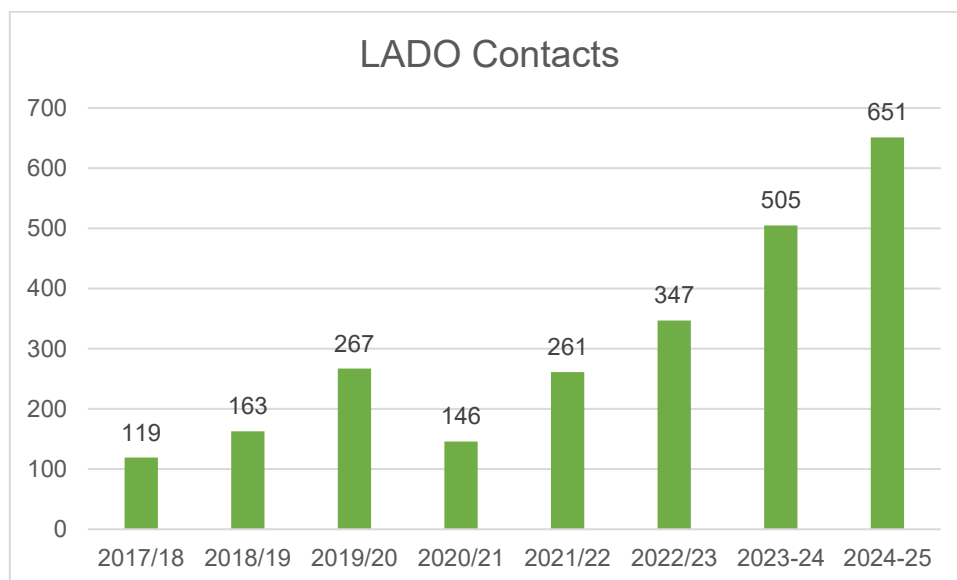
### Maintain strong links with Berkshire LADO network, South-East Regional LADO network and National LADO Network:

- 3.4 The WBC LADO has continued to be an active participant within the Berkshire LADO network throughout 2024-2025. Regular network meetings have continued, which has provided the Berkshire LADOs opportunities to discuss local themes and concerns and to consider how to consistently apply the procedures and guidelines across Berkshire. The LADOs in Berkshire regularly consult with each other and provide informal support with more complex cases, which helps ensure consistent application of the threshold criteria.
- 3.5 In addition the WBC LADO has continued to attend and contribute within the quarterly South-East (SE) regional LADO network meetings. This has ensured that the WBC LADO has kept abreast of current best practice, recommendations and developments from the National LADO Network (NLN).

#### 4 LADO CONTACTS

- 4.1 The total number of LADO contacts during 2024-2025 was 651, which is the highest number since 2017 when records commenced. These allegations related to employees/volunteers who work or volunteer within the West Berkshire area.
- 4.2 Chart 1 clearly shows the year-on-year increase of contacts into LADO since 2018. The decrease in 2020-2021 was due to the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns as would be expected given the reduction in direct contact with children across the children’s workforce.

**Chart 1: Number of LADO contacts 2017-2025**



- 4.3 Since 2017 LADO contacts have increased by nearly 450%.
- 4.4 Several reasons lie behind this increase in contacts:
- continued awareness-raising events, which included bespoke sessions within some sectors, had raised awareness and confidence for partners to seek advice from LADO

- Changes to the guidance around allegations management in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023, which now includes guidance around low-level concerns about conduct
- Unlike WBC’s neighbouring local authorities, WBC has a high number of children’s homes and specialist education provisions within its locality
- A continued high number of suitability consultations, which raise concerns about how an employee or volunteer has behaved in their personal life
- Increase in emotional and behavioural difficulties for children attending schools and nurseries post Covid
- A change this reporting year to record contacts into LADO that don’t fall under allegations management procedures or consist of low-level concerns about conduct – these are recorded as advice and guidance, which is addressed in Section 7 below
- A recent significant increase in numbers of LADO contacts from data subjects and parents/carers

**Table 1: LADO comparison data**

<b>Berkshire Unitary Authority</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>
Bracknell-Forest	271	295	381	<b>373</b>
Reading	121	322	676	<b>802</b>
Slough	-	-	300	-
West Berkshire	261	347	505	<b>651</b>
RBWM	178	-	243	-
Wokingham	199	344	487	<b>765</b>

4.5 Table 1 shows the total number of LADO contacts during 2024-2025 across Berkshire. It demonstrates that Berkshire West (Reading, Wokingham & West Berkshire) has continued to see significant increases in LADO activity year on year. The reasons for this are likely to be complex, but since the Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership was developed the Berkshire West LADOs have worked closely to achieve parity in recording and reporting.

4.6 554 (85%) of the West Berkshire LADO contacts received during 2024-2025 did not meet the threshold criteria for an allegation. This proportion is largely consistent with 2023-2024. The LADO has been recording all LADO activity since 2023-2024, including work not related to allegations and low-level concerns about staff. This activity is recorded as Advice/Guidance. During 2024-2025 there were 191 contacts into LADO which came under this category. This accounts for 34% of the total LADO contacts and is discussed in more detail in Section 7 below.

4.7 The remaining 363 (56% of total contacts) of contacts which did not meet LADO thresholds were mostly related to concerns about staff conduct or practice. In

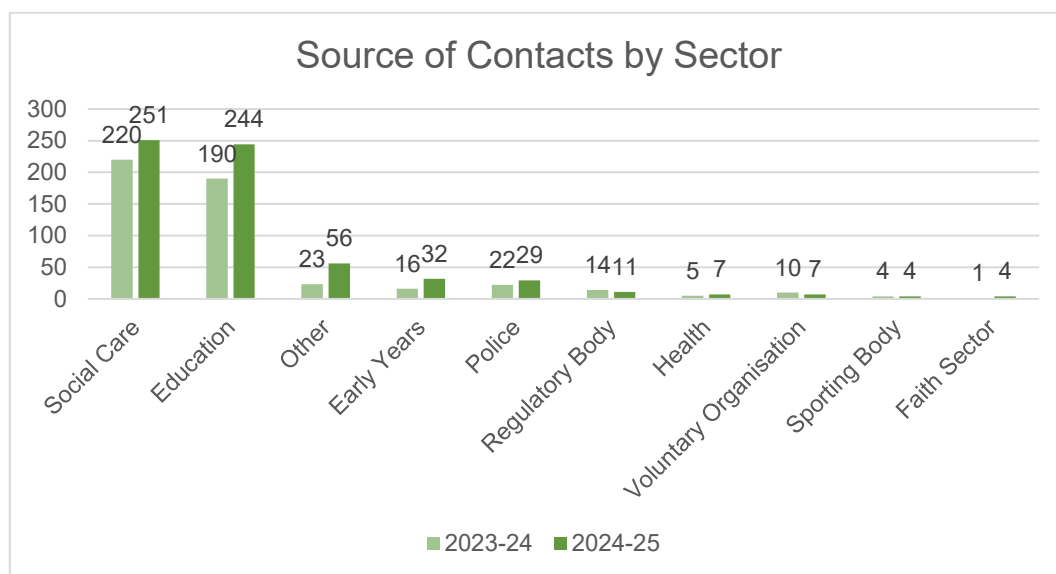
these cases, the LADO provided advice to the employer where appropriate about how best to manage these situations – see Section 7 for details.

- 4.8 In 2024-2025, 98 (15%) LADO contacts met the threshold criteria for LADO involvement, but were not complex and therefore did not require multi-agency investigation. These were investigated and managed internally by the employer following LADO advice.
- 4.9 There were 52 contacts (10%) which were sufficiently serious or complex for the LADO to convene a multi-agency Allegations against Staff/ Volunteers (ASV) meeting. The aim of an ASV meeting is to share initial information and plan and coordinate any investigations required by the police, children’s services and/or the employer. Some of the referrals required more than one ASV meeting. This is discussed in more detail in Section 7 below.

## 5 ALLEGATIONS BY SECTOR

5.1 Chart 3 shows the source by sector of all contacts into LADO:

**Chart 3: Source of Contacts by Sector 2024-2025**



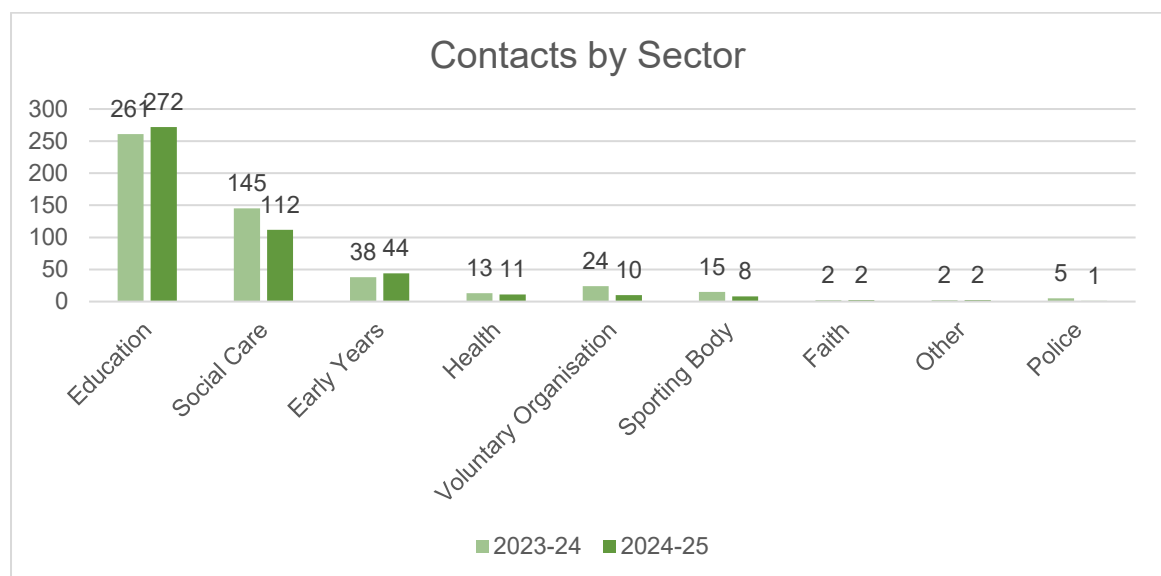
5.2 The Education and Social Care sectors continue to be the main source of contacts into LADO. A significant number of the contacts from the Social Care sector come via the Contact, Advice and Assessment Service (CAAS). There continues to be an effective working relationship between CAAS and the LADO service. In 2024-2025 a protocol was developed for how LADO and Children’s Services teams, including CAAS, would work together, to ensure that the LADO is always notified when there are allegations or concerns about persons working with children and where it is appropriate for the LADO to take the lead.

5.3 Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2023 has detailed guidance for schools around managing allegations and low-level concerns about staff conduct. Schools and colleges also work with a large number of children and have many staff members and volunteers. It is therefore unsurprising that they would account

for a significant number of the contacts to LADO. This also demonstrates that continued awareness-raising activity within the DSL training has been effective and many schools and colleges are aware of their responsibilities.

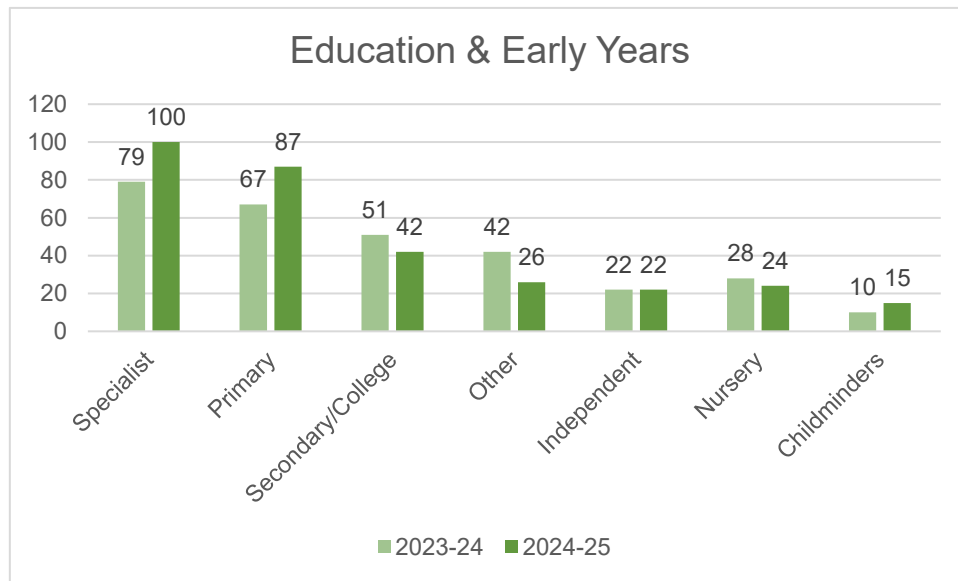
- 5.4 There has been a marked increase during 2024-25 in LADO contacts made by parents of children in specialist schools and foster care/residential care. The LADO received 14 separate contacts from one parent, whose child was placed by another local authority in a local specialist residential school. This parent raised several different complaints and allegations about their child’s care at this provision. Most of these didn’t meet allegations management thresholds and were judged to be complaints about the provision. The LADO worked closely with the provider and other agencies to ensure that children were safeguarded where necessary and the correct services were involved.
- 5.5 Charts 4 to 6 give more information about the sectors the adults subject to allegations work in. Please note that this data doesn’t include contacts in the Advice/Signposting category. This data analyses the remaining 460 LADO contacts.

**Chart 4: Contacts by Sector 2024-25**



- 5.6 Although I have included the previous reporting year data in Chart 4, a direct comparison cannot be drawn with this year’s figures. This is because in 2023-2024 the analysis of data included the Advice/Signposting category data. However, this year I have exempted the Advice/Signposting contacts from this data. Despite this, Chart 4 shows that in 2024-25 allegations or concerns about adults working or volunteering in the Education/Early Years and Social Care sectors has continued to generate the largest number of contacts into LADO.
- 5.7 Nearly 70% of the contacts involved those working or volunteering within the education and early years sectors. In 2024-2025, 23% of qualifying contacts involved staff/volunteers in the social care sector.

**Chart 5: Breakdown of education sector and early years 2024-2025**



5.8 Chart 5 shows a continued high number of LADO contacts about staff at specialist schools over the past two years. The high numbers are in part due to two new specialist school provisions opening in West Berkshire in the past two years.

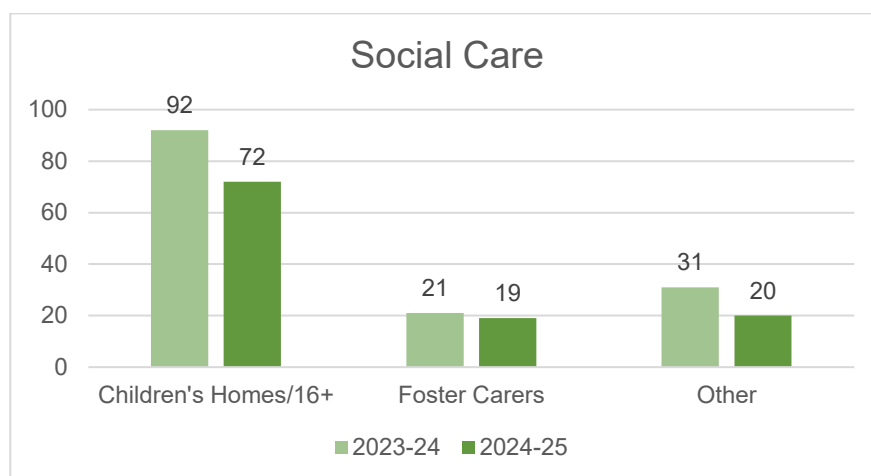
5.9 These are independent school for provisions for children with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and/or disabilities, who cannot be accommodated in mainstream schools. Research has shown that disabled children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect, due to a number of factors such as ability to communicate and having complex needs. In addition, many children who attend SEMH schools have experienced trauma and can find it difficult to regulate their emotions. This can manifest in behaviour that challenges the adults working with them, which in turn can make it more likely that an allegation or concern about staff conduct could be made.

5.10 In 2024-2025, the LADO worked closely with Education Services regarding allegations and wider safeguarding concerns that were raised about three small independent specialist SEMH schools in West Berkshire. Joint work by Education Services and LADO has helped ensure that the local authority has strong links with these providers and has challenged and supported them to achieve good outcomes for children. This has helped to ensure that safer working practices were embedded and safeguarding was effective in terms of reducing the likelihood of adults causing harm to children in their settings.

5.11 As previously noted there were 14 LADO contacts received in February and March 2025 from the parents of one child attending a specialist residential school. The LADO evaluated each concern raised and determined that the majority of these didn't meet the threshold criteria for allegations management procedures. This provision is currently undertaking several internal reviews into specific concerns raised by the parents and the reports from these will be shared with the LADO. The LADO will evaluate whether the reviews have identified any allegations or concerns about specific staff members and decide on next steps.

5.12 The 'Other' category includes allegations and concerns about drivers and passenger assistants providing home-school transport, and private tutors.

**Chart 6: Breakdown of social care sector 2024-2025**



5.13 Chart 6 shows that, similar to previous years, most contacts about social care staff were about staff in residential children's homes, supported living provisions or respite care provisions. There are at present 11 registered children's homes in West Berkshire, with one provision having 12 separate homes on site. This means in reality there are 22 children's homes in West Berkshire, each caring for between two and six young people. In addition to this there are seven 16-25 years supported living establishments in WBC for young people moving on to independence.

5.14 The level of contacts about staff working within children's homes is not surprising, as they are caring for some of the most vulnerable children in care. Many of these children have experienced trauma and/or have emotional or behavioural difficulties. These factors can lead to an increased likelihood of children being dysregulated and getting into conflict with residential childcare staff. There is sometimes the need for physical intervention by staff members to prevent harm to the child and others. This further increases the likelihood of allegations of harm.

5.15 As noted in previous reporting years, there continue to be fewer notifications from large sectors of employees and volunteers, such as the health, police, sporting bodies and the faith sector. Anecdotal feedback from the South-East Regional and National LADO networks indicates a similar position nationally. This indicates a continuing need for awareness-raising activity within these sectors to ensure that they are clear about when and how to seek advice or to make a referral to the LADO

5.16 The police service has its own internal procedures for investigating allegations of harm against police officers, which have not been routinely reported to LADO. In 2023-24 a new protocol was agreed between Thames Valley Police and the local authority LADOs covering this region. A programme of training has been underway with TVP to raise awareness with police staff about when to notify LADO. It was hoped that the number of contacts into LADO regarding serving

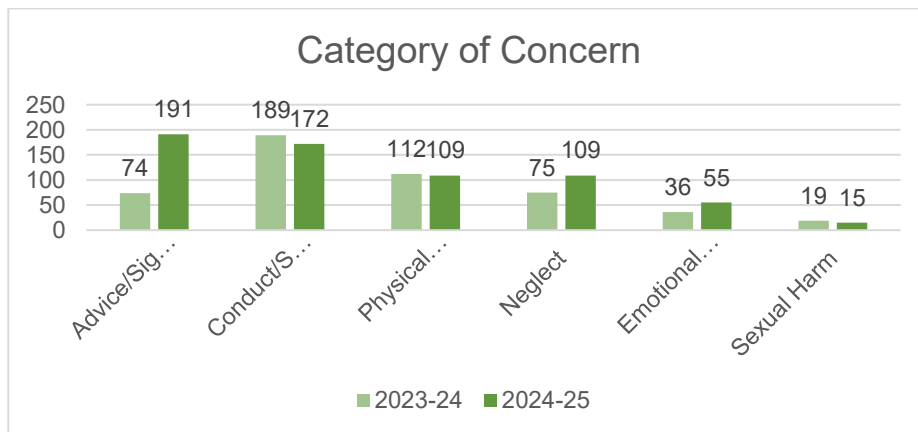
police officers and other staff would increase once this protocol was in place. However, currently we have yet to see the impact of this. The West Berkshire LADO is coordinating with the LADO Service Leads in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and the programme of training with police continues. There is a meeting arranged in June 2025 when all the Thames Valley LADOs will review and plan further awareness-raising activity with Thames Valley Police.

5.17 The relatively low number of health notifications is likely to be due at least in part to the fact that staff and volunteers in health sectors work with all population groups and not only children. Their interaction with children tends to be less intensive and long-term than adults employed within education, early years and social care sectors and they are often accompanied by their parent/carer. However, there remains the need to continue to raise awareness within this sector regarding their responsibilities in relation to reporting and managing allegations.

## 6 NUMBER OF ALLEGATIONS BY NATURE OF CONCERN

6.1 Chart 7 shows that during 2024-2025, 288 (44%) LADO contacts were received about concerns that a child was harmed by an employee/volunteer (physical harm, sexual harm, emotional harm or neglect). There were 172 (26%) contacts related to concerns about staff/volunteer conduct at work, or their suitability to work with children, based on their behaviour in their personal lives. There were also 191 (30%) LADO contacts which were not related to allegations or conduct concerns where advice and signposting was provided.

**Chart 7: Category of concern, 2024-2025**



6.2 The increase in Advice/Signposting contacts this year is due to the LADO ensuring that all work carried out by the LADO is accounted for. This year has seen more contacts about adults working in other local authority areas, requests for information from partner agencies completing pre-employment checks, and general requests for safeguarding advice, which has contributed to the increase in this category. See Section 7 below for further information. Whilst these activities did not meet LADO threshold, they still involved a significant amount of work.

- 6.3 The analysis of the remaining LADO contacts excludes the 191 contacts that were for Advice/Signposting. Physical harm continues to be a significant reason for contacting the LADO. Of the 109 contacts regarding suspected physical harm, 21 (19%) involved instances of restrictive physical intervention (RPI). The majority of RPIs involved staff working in children's homes, where physical intervention is more likely to be required due to the complexity of the needs of the children they are caring for, most of whom have experienced significant trauma and disruption and/or have significant developmental difficulties or disabilities.
- 6.4 Of all the contacts relating to alleged physical harm, 43 out of the 109 received (39%) were deemed by the LADO to have met the allegations management threshold criteria. Of those 43 contacts, only three (7%) have been substantiated so far, although three are still awaiting an outcome. There were 27 which were unsubstantiated and 10 categorised as being unfounded or false. This demonstrates that the instances of substantiated physical harm caused to children by those working or volunteering with them in West Berkshire was very low.
- 6.5 Setting aside Advice/Signposting contacts, the Conduct/Suitability category continues to account for the highest number of LADO contacts. This category refers to situations where there are concerns about whether an individual working with children poses a risk of harm to children, or is unsuitable to work with children, because of their conduct. This includes both their conduct in their work/volunteering role and their conduct outside of work. In cases where the allegations management threshold criteria were met, the LADO considered with the employer (consulting other agencies where relevant) whether there was transferrable risk from the staff member's/volunteer's conduct in their personal life to their role working with children and gave advice about how best to manage this risk.

## 7 RESPONSES TO CONTACTS

- 7.1 KCSIE 2024 states that the procedures for dealing with allegations needs to be applied with common sense and judgement. Many situations may well either not meet the criteria [see page iii] or may do so without warranting consideration of either a police investigation or enquiries by local authority children's social care services. However, there are occasionally allegations which are so serious that they require immediate intervention by children's social care and/or police.
- 7.2 Initially it may not be clear whether an incident constitutes an allegation, or should be considered a concern about conduct, or a complaint. Issues that do not meet the threshold criteria should be addressed by employers according to their policies and procedures. However, employers are required to contact the LADO about any incident or concern that *could* meet the threshold criteria, to ensure that these are being applied appropriately and consistently, and for independent contribution to decision-making.
- 7.3 All contacts into LADO are grouped into the following three categories:

1. Allegations – these are allegations or concerns that clearly meet the allegations management threshold criteria and require LADO involvement.
2. Consultations – these are concerns about staff conduct that, after initial consideration with the LADO, are judged not to meet threshold criteria.
3. Advice/signposting – this refers to contacts to LADO that aren't about allegations or low-level conduct concerns about staff conduct. Whilst not an exhaustive list, examples of these would include:
  - complaints received via Ofsted about safeguarding practice in schools and nurseries
  - requests for advice about other safeguarding issues (e.g. peer-peer abuse allegations, wider safeguarding system concerns, etc)
  - requests for information, such as from regulatory bodies, DBS, pre-adoption checks, etc
  - concerns about the adult workforce
  - allegations about staff working in other local authority areas
  - complaints from parents about safeguarding in schools
  - subject access requests from people subject to allegations

7.4 In 2024-2025 there were 54 (12%) contacts which led to an ASV meeting due to the seriousness and/or complexity of the allegation. This demonstrates that only a small proportion of notifications into the LADO in West Berkshire involved serious concerns about abuse or staff conduct. This is likely to be due in part to the effectiveness of safer recruitment and safer working practices employed by our partner agencies. This helps to prevent people posing a risk of harm to children from entering the children's workforce and ensure that any practice of concern is identified and responded to early on.

Case example – allegation of physical abuse

In May 2024 a manager of a nursery contacted the LADO after a 3-year-old child [Child A] said that a staff member [Staff B] had hurt his arm. Child A had been outside with a group of children and the children needed to come inside for lunch. Child A didn't want to come inside and Staff B remained outside with him, to encourage him to come inside. Child A sat down on the decking. The staff member took his arm, lifting him up and led him inside. When Child A came inside he was upset and told another staff member that Staff B had pulled and squeezed his arm.

The nursery called his parents after noticing he wasn't using the arm. Parents collected him early and took him to hospital where it was found that he had a pulled elbow.

A children's services strategy discussion and Allegations against Staff/ Volunteers meeting was held. After sharing all relevant information about the incident, Child A and Staff B, Thames Valley Police concluded that it would not be proportionate to investigate the matter as an alleged assault.

Children's Services didn't consider Child B to be at risk of significant harm or in need, so there was no further role for statutory children's social care.

It was decided that the nursery would complete an internal investigation into the incident. Child B's parents also complained to the nursery about how they responded to the incident, so the nursery undertook a wider investigation into this.

The nursery shared with the LADO the outcome of the internal investigation into the incident, and the action plan from the wider investigation into the handling of the incident.

The investigations concluded that it was likely that Child A's arm was injured when Staff B physically intervened to bring him inside, but this injury was likely to have been caused accidentally. There was no indication from witnesses that Staff B was angry or upset with Child A, which might have led them to use excessive or inappropriate force when handling him. There were also no independent witnesses who observed Staff B handling Child A. Therefore, the allegation that Staff B behaved in a way that harmed Child A was unsubstantiated, meaning that the harm couldn't be proved or disproved. However, there was also no evidence from the investigations to indicate that Staff B continued to pose a risk of harm to children.

The investigations did find that Staff B's handling of Child A was not in accordance with the nursery's policies and procedures for behaviour management and physical intervention. The investigations made recommendations for further guidance and training for Staff B, and wider training for the staff group on positive behaviour management and physical intervention.

- 7.5 In 39 (8%) cases, the threshold criteria for allegations management procedures were met, but the allegation was straightforward and didn't require multi-agency investigation/ASV meeting. Following advice from the LADO, the employer undertook an internal investigation, reporting the outcome to LADO.

#### Case example – concerns about patterns of conduct

In July 2024 a different local authority [Locality C] Children's Services team notified LADO about concerns about a staff member [Staff D] working at a children's home in West Berkshire [Home E]. Staff D was also a foster carer for Locality C and a child she fostered made allegations of physical harm about Staff D and her husband.

Locality C held a children's services strategy discussion and the outcome was for Section 47 enquiries for the foster child. A joint ASV meeting was held between West Berkshire and Locality C's LADO teams, attended by a manager from Home E.

Following this, Home E completed an assessment of transferable risk for Staff D. The outcome of this was that the evidence of transferable risk to their work role was low. However, due to ongoing investigations, changes were made to Staff D's work role, to include increased supervision and observations at work, and a reduction in level of responsibility.

Further Review ASV meetings were held to review the progress of the Section 47 enquiries and other investigations for Staff D and their partner. The Section 47 enquiries concluded with no further action. Locality C's fostering team's assessment concluded that the allegation of physical harm by Staff D was unsubstantiated.

Following this, Home E reviewed and updated their assessment of transferable risk with Staff D. This concluded that the transferable risk to their work role was low-negligible. The increased monitoring and supervision for Staff D was removed and her usual working pattern was resumed. The allegations judgement outcome for transferable risk was recorded as unsubstantiated.

- 7.6 In 363 (79%) cases after initial discussion between the LADO and the employer, the threshold criteria was deemed to have not been met. These contacts led to advice being provided by the LADO and the employer managing these cases internally. The LADO does not routinely monitor the outcomes of cases where threshold has not been met. These are recorded as LADO Consultations.

#### Case example – consultation about low-level concern

A Headteacher from a local primary school consulted the LADO after a Year 6 child [Child F] had reported concerns about a teacher in the school [Staff G]. Child F is in the same class at school as Staff G's daughter [Child H]. There was an incident where the two children argued resulting in Child F hitting Child H on the arm. The two children had previously had arguments and didn't get on.

At lunchtime after this incident, Staff G was walking through the lunch hall and saw Child F. Child F said that Staff G shouted and said to them; "it's not okay to punch anyone". This was witnessed by another staff member, who agreed that Staff G had raised their voice at Child F.

The following day, Child F reported that Staff G had "barged" past them in the hallway. Child F's parent made a complaint to the school.

The Headteacher confirmed that Child F didn't have any physical injuries but was upset about the alleged incidents. There hadn't been any previous allegations or concerns about Staff G's conduct. The LADO asked the headteacher to complete fact-finding enquiries with all involved in both incidents, as well as any witnesses.

After completing fact-finding enquires, the headteacher and LADO had a further conversation to evaluate whether the allegations management threshold criteria were met and consider next steps. There was no evidence to support Child F's

assertion that Staff G had deliberately barged past with an intent to cause her harm. There was indication that Staff G had acted unprofessionally following Child F hitting their child and there had been a blurring of their professional and personal roles (teacher and parent). However there was concern their conduct had not met the standards required by the school. Although Child F was upset by what had happened, this didn't meet the threshold to be considered emotional harm, as defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

The LADO and Headteacher concluded that the allegations management threshold criteria weren't met. It was agreed that the school would manage this internally according to their policies and procedures for complaints and staff conduct.

- 7.7 Consultation with LADO is important to determine whether the threshold criteria has been met and to agree the proportionate response. It is a key function of LADO as described in the BWSCP safeguarding procedures (see page 3). Although most notifications to LADO in 2024-2025 did not meet the allegations management threshold criteria, statutory guidance stipulates that employers should notify the LADO of any allegations which appear on the face of it to meet the threshold criteria. This is to ensure that consistent thresholds are applied and that there is a level of independence in decision-making regarding allegations at all levels.
- 7.8 The high number of consultations also demonstrates the complexity of professional judgement and decision-making in the management of allegations and concerns about conduct. It also demonstrates the awareness among partner agencies of the need to consult the LADO where it appears that a person in a position of trust might pose a risk of harm or be unsuitable to work with children.
- 7.9 Actions taken following consultations could include:
- provision of management advice
  - ensuring clarity about a conduct or behaviour management issue, which needs the employer to investigate under their internal processes; or
  - recommendation for additional training for the staff member/volunteer. Recommendations for training over this period have included reviewing safeguarding procedures, behaviour management strategies, specific safeguarding training and specialised de-escalation and physical intervention training for staff.

## **8 ACTION IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS MEETING THRESHOLDS**

- 8.1 The possible actions for allegations judged to meet the threshold criteria include:
- Action by Children's Services, such as Section 47 enquiries
  - A criminal investigation
  - Referral back to the employer to investigate internally
  - No further action

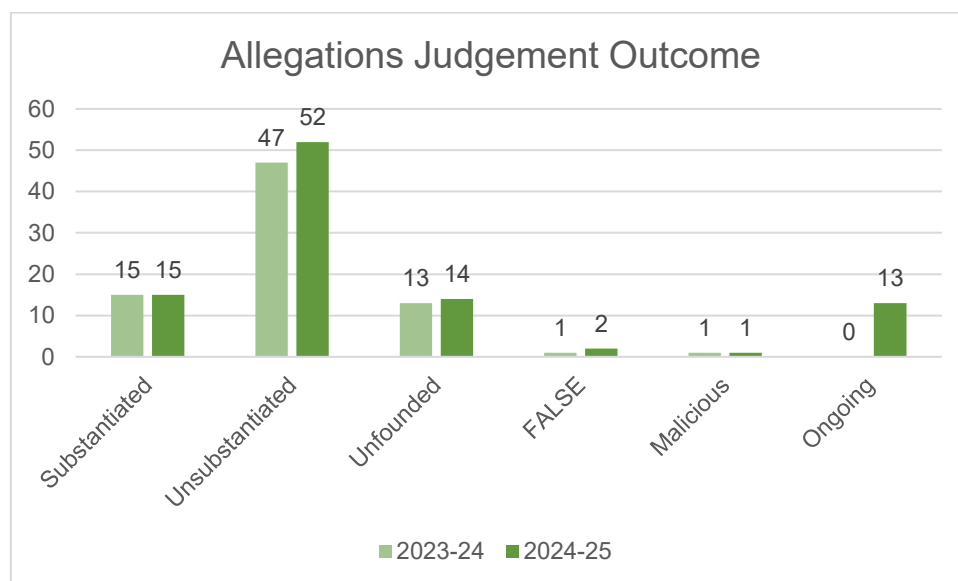
8.2 It is possible to have more than one of these actions in a case. During an ASV meeting the participants will discuss and agree how the allegations will be investigated. One case could result in investigation, or assessment, by Children’s Social Care, investigation by police and internal investigation by the employer, or a combination of all of these.

## 9 ALLEGATION JUDGEMENT OUTCOME

9.1 The judgement outcomes for the allegations made in 2024-2025 are set out in Chart 8. The terms used to define the judgement outcomes are:

- **Substantiated:** The allegation of harm/risk of harm is supported or established by evidence or proof.
- **Unsubstantiated:** There is insufficient identifiable evidence to prove or disprove the allegation of harm. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.
- **False:** There is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation of harm.
- **Unfounded:** There is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made, or there is evidence to prove that the allegation is untrue.
- **Malicious:** The allegation is false and, either wholly or in part, has been made with a deliberate intent to deceive or cause harm to the person subject to the allegation.

**Chart 8: Allegation judgement outcome**



9.2 Chart 8 shows that there was one malicious allegation in 2024-2025. The allegation was found on balance of probabilities, to have been false and to have been made deliberately with the intent to cause harm to the staff member. The

allegation was made by the child's family members and not directly by the child. It is rare for a child to fabricate an allegation with the intent to cause harm.

- 9.3 The majority of the allegations were found to be unsubstantiated. This means that the investigation couldn't prove or disprove the allegation of harm, on balance of probabilities. The proportion of unsubstantiated allegations has slightly increased again this reporting year. In these cases, time is taken to consider how best to resolve the situation to ensure that the child is, and feels, safe and the member of staff is supported. The actions arising from these outcomes could include mediation and restorative work for the child and the member of staff, and training/mentoring for staff.
- 9.4 Thirteen cases are currently still awaiting conclusion. Most of these are awaiting the outcome of criminal investigations or disciplinary proceedings. Some were opened in March 2025 and at the time of writing this report the outcomes hadn't been received. The LADO aims to ensure that most cases are resolved within one month. However, where there is a disciplinary process and/or criminal investigation, the outcome can be delayed. Criminal investigations can take many months to conclude. These timescales are beyond the control of LADO, but LADO endeavours to keep in regular contact with the police and employing agencies to monitor the progress of investigations and to minimise any potential drift in resolving cases. This work would include ensuring the person subject to the allegation has appropriate support.

## **10 OTHER LADO ACTIVITY**

- 10.1 In addition to managing the allegations process for individual cases, part of the LADO role is to increase sector knowledge and awareness of the allegations management procedures. However, the significant increase rise in contacts to the LADO, has meant there has been a reduction in capacity for awareness raising activity. To address this need, it had been identified for the LADO to develop an e-learning module as an introduction to allegations management, for partner agency staff and for managers as part of their inductions. Pressure of increasing numbers of LADO contacts and other work, such as developing LADO processes and protocols, has meant that this aim hasn't yet been achieved. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the end of December 2025.
- 10.2 The LADO has sought feedback from partner agencies during 2024-2025 through sending a questionnaire to those who contacted the LADO service. Twenty-five questionnaires were returned. The majority of these provided positive feedback, especially about the timely responses and clear advice and guidance given, although one agency wasn't contacted within 1 working day. There were two agencies who reported that they had a delay in receiving written records after seeking LADO advice. The timeliness of sending consultation records and outcome letters for some cases has been affected by the increase in contacts into the LADO service. The recent increase in LADO capacity will help to improve timeliness of sending follow-up reports.
- 10.3 Some sample feedback has been included below.

### Sample feedback about LADO service 2024-2025

LADO is very approachable and has a good understanding of the challenges in caring for complex and highly traumatized young people. This is balanced with an approach that is very child centered and allows the voice of the child to be heard and listened to. [Children's Social Care Provider]

Fiona and the team are fantastic in their role and supporting others. Very approachable and supportive, and knowledgeable... [Early Years Provider]

Having to contact the LADO over the Christmas period was difficult with staff leave etc, however I cannot fault the cover LADO or Fiona for their support and guidance at what was a difficult time for all involved. [Primary School Headteacher]

Every time I have contacted the LADO I receive a timely response, if not instant. They are always supportive and work alongside me to manage and achieve the right outcomes. [Secondary Headteacher]

Fiona consistently responds to our enquiries in an open, empathic and considered manner. She also is clear about what actions we should take and refers us to the right processes if we haven't already been aware of them. We value her support and clear direction enormously. [Specialist School Headteacher]

If have sought advice many times from the LADO team in a range of circumstances. I have found the support I have received invaluable. It has provided real clarity and reassurance in terms of next steps, and has always been followed through. Thank you [Primary School Headteacher]

Previously ... I was subject to an investigation ... Being on the other side of the investigation was so scary despite my innocence but I remember how clear and effective the investigation process was through the communication from my headteacher to myself. Everything happened in a timely manner. This helped to manage my own emotions during this awful time. [Primary School DSL]

We have valued Fiona as our LADO incredibly highly. Her wisdom and advice are always appreciated. We have not always received the follow-up paperwork but that has been on balance less important compared to the approachability and thoughtful consideration. [Independent School DSL]

I cannot fault our LADO she is amazing. When an incident happens, or an allegation is made it becomes a very worrying time for all involved. Fiona has amazing knowledge and is on hand at every point to help and guide. I have nothing but great things to say. [Nursery manager]

11. **WEST BERKSHIRE LADO ACTION PLAN AND RECOMMENDATIONS 2026-2026:**

Identified Action:	Who by:	When by:
<p>1. Strengthen links with all departments within WBC, with partner agencies and voluntary sector, to raise awareness of allegations management procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued participation in Education DSL training events</li> <li>- Development of an e-learning module for partner agencies</li> </ul>	WBC LADO	To be in place by December 2025
<p>2. Further develop and embed the LADO quality assurance and audit programme, including Berkshire West peer audits, and learning from feedback.</p>	WBC LADO	September 2025
<p>3. Maintain strong links with Berkshire LADO network, South-East Regional LADO network and National LADO Network, to ensure local practice is aligned with the latest national guidance and developments.</p>	WBC LADO	March 2026