

**Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit
Children's Social Care and Early Help Division
Social care and Education Services**

Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO)

**Annual report
1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021**



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1. Introduction

The role of the LADO is set out in HM Government guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) Chapter 2 Paragraph 4 and is governed by the Authorities' duties under section 11 of the Children Act 2004. Further statutory guidance brought by Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2020 (last updated January 2021) added a further "harm threshold" to LADO responsibilities.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is employed by Leicester City Council and its function is set out in Leicester City Children Safeguarding Partnership Inter-Agency Policy and Procedures.

The work of the LADO focusses on managing the process of investigation into allegations of harm made against adults who work in positions of trust with children and young people. The overall aim is to ensure all allegations however small are followed up thoroughly to ensure a safe and fair process for all involved.

The LADO has the following "harm thresholds", ie responds in situations where there are grounds to believe that adults working in positions of trust have:

- 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 he or she may pose a risk of harm to a child
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates that they may be unsuitable to work with children (KCSIE Sept 2020, now aligned with Working Together).

The LADO annual report is aimed to provide an overview of the management of allegations against the children's workforce and the role of the LADO in Leicester City for the period 1 April 2020 to 31

March 2021. It also provides opportunities for reflection to a wide audience and potentially influence/ inform future plans of actions and development of services across agencies, to prevent children and young people being harmed by adults in positions of trust.

2. Impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on LADO service delivery

The LADO service has maintained a consistent service in terms of availability and staffing over the last 12 months against the background of the COVID 19 pandemic. Interagency working transferred seamlessly online with use of MS Teams meetings and skype calls. Training opportunities offered by the LADO have also been effectively adapted to online delivery. The pandemic has inevitably had impact on the nature and volume of referrals and contacts to the service as detailed in the body of the report below.

4. Overview of LADO activities: performance data analysis

a. Number of LADO contacts

The LADO maintains a database of all allegations and concerns received which allows for targeted analysis and annual or thematic reporting.

Over the last 12 months, the LADO Service has continued to promote use of an accessible telephone advice line and generic mailbox to ensure advice and guidance has been readily available to employers and referring individuals from the duty LADO representative.

The table below reflects a breakdown of contacts received by the service in the past 5 years:




Period	Number of contacts
2016-2017	329
2017-2018	450
2018-2019	378
2019-2020	304
2020-2021	288

The decrease in the number of contacts to the LADO, during the reporting period was more notable in the early months of the pandemic when there were reduced opportunities for contact between children and adults in regulated activity i.e. as a result of school closures, lack of access for children to sports and leisure activities, faith based activities. Month on month reporting has shown that after the early months of the pandemic, LADO contacts resumed to a similar pattern as prior to the pandemic.

Overall figures reflect that employers and organisations continue to appropriately seek safeguarding advice for organisations and children in their care.

b. Outcome of LADO contacts

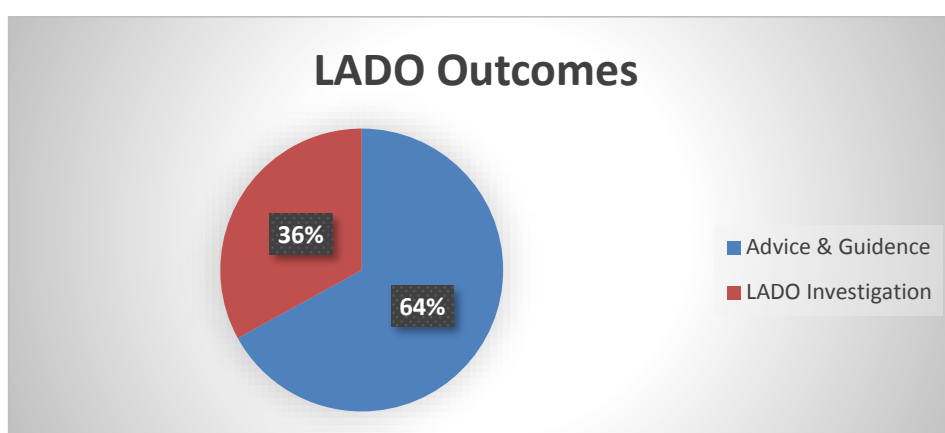
Review of the outcomes of LADO contacts is important in helping us to

-  understand potential themes or patterns of concern
-  ensure our service delivery is appropriate for the needs of our referrers
-  plan how we might best meet training needs across the children's workforce.

A breakdown of the outcomes of LADO contacts both for the last 4 years and for the year 2020 is given on the charts below.

	Number 2017/ 18	% of total	Number 2018/ 19	% of total	Number 2019/ 20	% of total	Number 2020/ 21	% of total
Number of contacts with the outcome of advice and guidance to employer/organisation	255	57%	248	65.7%	204	67%	185	64%

As evident, similar patterns in relation to conversions from contacts have been maintained for the past few years, indicating thresholds consistency and confidence across the partnership.



Our duty system is designed to enable direct and timely discussion between the LADO representative and referrer, whereby **64%** of initial contacts have concluded with **advice and guidance** to the employer. Advice and guidance include where concerns have not meet thresholds for harm / risk of harm and resulted in no further LADO action after initial consideration. The advice and guidance can include advice about internal investigations, managing practice, organisational systems, signposting to other Local Authority LADO’s or adult safeguarding services, hearing and feeding back to children.

*“thanks for dealing with this so professionally and effectively, whenever I ring you I always know that I will get a thought through response, no question ever feels like a silly question”
 (email from Headteacher received in February 2021)*

The accessibility of the duty advice line engages many different agencies and voluntary sector leaders and gives an opportunity for the LADO to explore concerns with employers in depth and to share knowledge and expertise about risk in organisations and from individuals in order to assist employers to deal with individual issues and consider wider safeguarding needs within organisations.

The data shows that **34%** of initial LADO contacts led to the **LADO coordinating further investigation**. In these circumstances, the LADO will facilitate multi-agency information sharing in order to determine harm threshold and ensure employers have all relevant evidence for well-informed risk assessments and management. The safety of a child and /or children and the support to the adult is integral to this process.

To support this process, the LADO service works closely with colleagues within the Local Authority e.g. safeguarding in education officers, adult safeguarding services and adult principal social worker, social care and family placements teams, independent foster home review officer, early education development team. The LADO will also liaise as required with a range of external colleagues that support safeguarding activity for example,

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), OFSTED, Police, Schools compliance / safeguarding leads for bodies in sports, faith, voluntary organisations and so on.

Below is a breakdown of referral outcomes where the LADO has coordinated further investigation:

Outcome of LADO investigation	2019/20	2019/20	2020/21	2020/21
	100	35.5%	103	36%
Unfounded <i>(there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation)</i>	33	33%	26	25%
Unsubstantiated <i>(there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation)</i>	22	22%	21	20%
Substantiated <i>(there is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation balance of probability)</i>	38	38%	29	28%
Malicious	0	0%	1	1%
False	0	0%	4	4%
Ongoing cases	7	7%	22	22%

The outcomes above are in relation to the following categories of harm: neglect and sexual, physical and emotional harm. They reflect, as indicated, conclusions reached within the LADO process as to whether thresholds of harm or risk of harm have been met based on "balance of probability" decision making. Further comment:

- An **unsubstantiated** outcome is only reached when it is concluded that, after all enquiries have been made, the allegation cannot be proven or disproven. This outcome is used with caution as it can result in a less clear conclusion.
- All **substantiated** allegations of harm/risk of harm will be considered further to identify potential for ongoing risk of harm to children and the need for further action to safeguard children in the longer term.
- For all **substantiated** allegations, consideration is given to referrals to regulatory bodies and the DBS. In the period under review 8 referrals have been recorded as warranting referrals to DBS and 14 referrals recorded as requiring referral to an appropriate regulatory body. There is a need to be robust with respect to referrals to DBS and regulatory bodies to ensure ongoing and wider safeguarding can be actioned and recorded: this also reflects learning from serious incidents.

There is an increase in ongoing cases at this time reflecting the complexities in progressing some cases in a timely way due to external influences: for example, enquiries led by other agencies are known to have been hampered this year by difficulties in accessing and interviewing witnesses and the alleged perpetrators of harm due to COVID related restrictions, self-isolation, delays within the wider criminal justice systems.

The LADO role includes ensuring wider safeguarding is robust and this has led to a more robust tracking of LADO cases that are in the criminal justice process, awaiting complex disciplinary processes and ensuring DBS and regulatory body referrals are made. This can impact on the amount of ongoing case open.

c. Contact by category

Type of contact	Number 2017/18	% of total	Number 2018 /19	% of total	Number 2019 /20	% of total	Number 2020/21	% of total
Total	450		378		304		288	
Neglect	90	20%	42	11%	47	15%	67	24%
Sexual harm	104	23%	100	26.5%	72	24%	79	27%
Physical harm	183	41%	191	50.5%	142	47%	104	36%
Emotional harm	52	11%	45	12%	43	14%	38	13%

Breakdown of contacts by type of harm shows a not dissimilar picture from previous years, with the contacts about risk of **physical harm** to children once again representing the highest number of referrals.

This category includes contacts relating to direct and deliberate physical harm, physical intervention or restraints, mismanagement of behaviours e.g. in educational or residential care settings, situations where adult behaviour has been misinterpreted (adults may have felt they were guiding a child whereas a child may perceived that they were pushed. "grabbed" or "shoved").

Sexual harm is the next most frequent category and an analysis of the LADO investigations indicate an increase in awareness across the partnership around the identification of concerns relating to social media contacts between adults and children. There is also a documented increase UK wide in the frequency and detection of direct 'online' sexual harm of children, grooming type behaviours and sexual communication, and exploitation of children from adults who work with children. Additionally, historic allegations of harm are often of a sexual nature.

d. Who are contacts about?

	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Total contacts	450	378	304	288

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Foster carers	20%	18%	20%	25% <i>*see breakdown below</i>
Education (non-teaching)	6%	6%	6%	4%
Education (teaching / learning support assistants)	9%	9%	7%	7%
Education (teaching)	19%	23%	20%	13%
Sport	3%	4.7%	2%	3.5%
Social Work	1%	1.3%	2%	2.5%
Health	3%	2.6%	6%	8%
Day care	5%	9.7%	7%	5.5%
Transport	5%	6%	6%	6%
Youth Work	1%	0.5%	3%	2%
Faith	8%	4.2%	3%	3%
Residential Care	7%	10%	13%	19% <i>** see breakdown below</i>
Police	1%	0.7%	0	0.5%
Probation	0%	0.2%	0	0
Volunteers	2%	1.8%	1%	1%
Other	11%	1.8%	2%	
Historical / previously working with children			2%	

* 72 contacts relating to foster carers include:
7 contacts about kinship carers
23 contacts about IFA carers (i.e. non-Local Authority)
42 contacts about Local Authority foster carers

** 56 contacts relating to residential care settings include:
8 contacts about Local Authority residential settings
48 contacts about private sector settings

Overall patterns of contact remain broadly similar to previous years with some variation.

Past years have shown that the highest numbers of contacts and referrals relate to **education settings**, unsurprisingly so given that education supports a large employee base and daily contacts with large numbers of children. As noted earlier in the report, schools' closures over a period of several months during the COVID 19 pandemic is likely to have resulted in the reduced contacts to the LADO.

Interestingly the number of contacts relating to **transport** providers (notably taxi drivers and passenger assistants involved in the transport of vulnerable children e.g. to school and family contact sessions) has remained static although fewer journeys have been taken as a result of the pandemic.

Contacts in relation to **foster carers** have increased. It may be that this is related in part to the impact of COVID 19 and its attendant stresses on carers who may already be experiencing challenges in their care of Looked After Children. The levels of contacts relating to this group are being evaluated to consider any underlying themes identified and shared with the family placements service to support

the quality of foster carer assessments and monitoring processes. As such information gained from LADO processes will be used positively to aid learning and help improve services.

With respect to **residential placements**, this report has highlighted that contacts relating to the conduct of residential workers are higher from external providers than from in-house provision within the Local Authority. A positive development in this regard is the enhanced communication between LADO and Local Authority external placement commissioning team and now routine notification of every LADO concern to the team. Targeted work will be a focus of the next year's training for the unregulated and private sector placements locally.

Research and learning from case reviews around the UK tell us children more vulnerable to harm in organisations include **Looked After Children (LAC) and children with disabilities**. 40% of all contacts to the LADO this year have related individuals involved in the care and support of our Looked After Children: this is an increase of 10% on last year's figures. This data could indicate that social workers and others are increasingly keenly attuned to seeking out and hearing the voice and experiences of children and / or that children themselves are feeling more empowered and able to share worries and concerns. However, 10% of all contacts relate to those caring for children with disabilities: this is a decrease of 3 % on last year's figures suggesting perhaps that children with disabilities remain "less visible" and "more vulnerable."

e. Who makes contact with the LADO?

Contacts from	2019/2020	%	2020/2021	%
Total contacts	304		288	
Family members/ members of the public / anonymous	12	4%	9	3%
Education	70	23%	34	12%
Health (including EMAS)	4	1%	3	1%
Local authority (not social care e.g. transport, EWO, HR)	12	4%	10	3.5%
External social care providers (e.g. LA LADO's, private sector fostering and residential care)	47	15.5%	28	10%
Local authority social care (internal social care services Leicester city)	108	35.5%	119	41%
Regulatory and legal services including voluntary sector (e. g CAFCASS, OFSTED, NSPCC)	11	4%	50	17.5%
Police	35	11 %	35	12%

It is important that we understand where contacts to the LADO service originate and where we do not receive contacts, so that we can plan future awareness raising. Occasional 'spikes' in contacts from partner agencies and employers are indeed more noticeable following targeted training.

There have been fewer referrals from colleagues in education settings – as noted above this reflects the situation engendered by COVID 19 where children have been less present at and less visible in education.

Contacts from social care services within Leicester City have increased: it is felt that this is a positive repercussion from awareness raising events with social workers and in particular newly qualified social workers where there has been a focus to their attendance in person and online training events over the last 1 – 2 years.

Increase in referrals from the police are partly linked to the numbers of contacts which relate to sexual harm such as online sexual offences as the police are most often the agency first involved in or made aware of such concerns.

2.6 Timescales for conclusion of LADO contacts

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
% cases closed in 4 weeks	71.5%	52%	70%
% cases closed in 12 weeks	86%	80%	91%

There are no statutory timescales around the completion of LADO processes. However locally we have set our own standards and expectations around timescales.

This is because we are very much aware of the levels of anxiety and distress caused by the processes of investigation to individuals involved and the need to conclude these processes in a timely way. Sometimes the LADO process can be protracted where there are complex enquiries or a need to rely on expert advice – for example where there are parallel police investigations relating to online or historical abuse.




The data above reflects an improvement in timeliness of throughput in the last 12 months. Quality assurance processes and management oversight routinely explore the timeliness of throughput.

It is noted that the LADO continues to track some cases after LADO processes have concluded to ensure that key safeguarding tasks are actioned e.g. employer referrals are made to the DBS for a barring decision. This can extend the length of LADO involvement however equally adds value in terms of the wider safeguarding context.

3. The voice and experience of children

Children’s voices and views are essential across all LADO processes. We recognise how important it is to understand as fully as we can the experience of children when we are assessing the potential impact of harmful or inappropriate behaviour towards them by adults in positions of trust.

Our expectations of our service are as follows:

-  We actively promote listening to and hearing children and their experiences to enable safe decision making.
-  We are questioning and curious about the views of children and the impact on them of allegations or concerns.
-  We challenge “blameful” language and attitudes such as scepticism towards or disbelief of children.

- ✚ We recognise the vulnerability of children in our society overall and consider the impact of factors such as age, gender, sexuality, race, culture and heritage, religion, past experiences and in particular past harms.
- ✚ We take account of the additional vulnerability of Looked After Children and children with disabilities and take all opportunities to advocate on behalf of these children.

Feedback to children is routinely recommended within LADO processes so that children are helped to understand that they have been heard and taken seriously to give them confidence to raise future worries and to build resilience in help seeking. This applies irrespective of whether children's allegations are upheld or not. Bespoke "age appropriate" letters to children from the LADO are sent through social workers, schools or sometimes directly. We also consider with involved professionals if there is scope for adults to acknowledge or apologise directly to children if their behaviour was wrong or unacceptable.

4. Partnership working and training

The LADO maintains **positive working relationships** with colleagues within the Local Authority and with other Local Authority LADOs and there is close liaison with many partner agencies, statutory and voluntary groups. This assists our promotion of case specific and wider safeguarding and assists in the development of safer organisations.

'Thank you for your time today on the telephone. I have to say the support and reassurance as I told you on the phone has been exceptional. I can't thank you enough. The last 24 hours has been horrible and you have helped me through a very dark time' (January 2021)

Through service realignment, clear pathways and strong working relationships, we have developed strong partnerships within the Social Care and Education Department – from links to the Principal Education Officer, to the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer, Placements and Commissioning Teams and scrutiny panels (Adoption and Fostering)

The LADO is an active member of the **regional LADO group** which continues to meet quarterly "online" during the pandemic. These sessions enable reflection on practice and benefit good cross authority working in complex cases. The LADO prioritises attendance at the annual LADO conference to ensure the service is continually learning and considering any updated information.

Quality assurance work across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland has also developed over the period under review: this is reported in **7. Quality Assurance Activity** below.

One of the LADO's core responsibilities is to provide **training and awareness raising** sessions to partner agencies and other service provisions who work or come in contact with children.

The training and briefing sessions held in 2020 / 21 included:

- ✚ Training session to the designated safeguarding leads (DSLs)
- ✚ Presentation at the DSL forum
- ✚ Three generic training sessions for employers from range of settings via LSCP
- ✚ One briefing session to transport staff
- ✚ Two sessions to newly qualified social work staff

The training sessions focus on LADO processes, understanding harm thresholds, hearing children's experiences, and the impact on children and adults, learning from serious case reviews and developing safe and healthy organisational cultures.

Safeguarding in education colleagues also promote the LADO role in all whole school training and DSL training and have been linked with a number of faith organisations to undertake bespoke training and safeguarding learning where concerns have been brought to the attention of the LADO about these settings.

7. Quality Assurance (QA) of LADO activity

We recognise the LADO practice is a niche expertise that is limited within the local authorities. Therefore, continuing the work started in 2019, when we joined forces with our colleagues from Leicestershire and Rutland, to progress and embed QA activities of LADO work across LLR. The work undertaken through this group has included "dip sampling" of LADO initial contacts and "deeper dive" audits of more extended LADO work. Internal quality assurance activity has also been ongoing.

Quality assurance activity has shown that good to excellent quality advice provided to employers in their safeguarding practices, with timely decision making and robust multiagency safeguarding arrangements initiated.

Strengths identified

- ✚ LADO responses at the point of initial contact and referral are timely
- ✚ The need for interim safeguarding arrangements where allegations have been made are considered consistently and at an early stage for children, arrangements are fair and proportionate with consideration given in discussion between employers and LADO to all appropriate measures
- ✚ Rationales for decision making and LADO harm threshold considerations are clearly recorded, and next steps are also clear
- ✚ History for adults of concern, children and employing organisations is consistently considered and informs decision making.
- ✚ Case recording is thorough and timely
- ✚ There are very positive examples of a focus on children's experiences and voices
- ✚ The LADO is appropriately involved in initial strategy discussions regarding children
- ✚ Direction, advice and guidance to referrers is clear
- ✚ There is evidence of good consideration of other children who may be at risk from adults
- ✚ Adults' views are considered and taken into account
- ✚ There is evidence of consistent liaison and information sharing with regulatory bodies such as OFSTED, DBS, TRA, GMC, etc with professional bodies that oversee standards and compliance such as sports councils etc
- ✚ There is earlier consideration of the experiences of other children linked to adults of concern alleged perpetrators (eg formerly fostered children)
- ✚ Employee "managing allegations" information leaflets, revised meeting agenda and guide to LADO process outcome definitions have been devised and have been well received
- ✚ There is more consistent feedback to children
- ✚ There is more consistent consider of support to adults of concern / employers duty of care
- ✚ There is more consistent cross referencing to children's social care records

Areas for improvement

- ✚ There are at times delays in administrative tasks being completed in a timely way (minutes, action plans and cases being tracked)
- ✚ There is at time delay in escalation that has then resulted in drift.

- ✚ While regular feedback received from referrers in relation to the advice line and overall LADO involvement is positive, with good levels of confidence around the advice and guidance provided by the LADO, there is a need for more routine and systematic gathering of user feedback about LADO processes and LADO led multi agency meetings in particular: this has declined over 2020 – 2021 with all meetings taking place online

8. Conclusions and next steps

We very much see our role within the LADO service as just one element of a cycle of good practice which works towards a safer workforce and safer organisational cultures and environments for children. During the review period, and despite the challenges posed across all services by the COVID pandemic, we have continued to benefit from a stable and experienced LADO service which works effectively within this cycle.

We have maintained its good reputation across the partnership: this is reflected in the positive QA and feedback received regarding the advice and guidance provided, in the timely responses made and in streamlined LADO processes.

We continue working with many agencies and individuals to maintain positive working relationships and a heightened awareness of the LADO role. We are particularly pleased to report that at the heart of our work is an emphasis on considering the experiences of children and ensuring that they are heard.

Next steps for 2021 – 2022

We aim to continue delivering a trusted service that has the confidence of all stakeholders across the partnership, with particular focus of the experiences of children and families. To achieve this aim:

- ✚ We will continue to review our training offer on a regular basis to ensure it is fit for purpose, relevant and reflective of updated guidance and new developments in the field. Targeted training will be provided to the voluntary sector including faith, sports settings, faith settings, voluntary groups, services to children with disabilities and the private sector. Plans are already in place to develop training with a specific focus on developing safer organisations for delivery during 2020 - 21.
- ✚ We will work with the children's engagement and participation service to gain a children's perspective and critique of our work and our quality assurance processes.
- ✚ We will gain user feedback about LADO processes.
- ✚ We will robustly escalate any delays in cases at an early stage to avoid drift.
- ✚ We will continue to promote the support of colleagues within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit to the LADO role to ensure continuity and sustainability of the LADO service

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May 2021