



**Local Authority
Designated Officer
(LADO)
Annual Report
April 2024 – March 2025**

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1. Introduction

This is the Annual Report from the Shropshire Council Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the effectiveness of the management of allegations in Shropshire for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 as well as to evidence compliance with statutory guidance and procedures.

The LADO role is underpinned by legislation which includes Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024. The West Midlands Regional Child Protection Procedures, National LADO Network principles and minimum standards and Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership all guide the Shropshire LADO's practice. The role is mandated by the Local Authorities duties under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

2. Summary

The Shropshire LADO service has continued to operate with two part time LADOs and one part time Business Support employee. During the past year there has been a consistent number of contacts made into the LADO service as well as frequent calls for general advice and consultation. During this period a Business Support Review was undertaken – the LADO service retained a dedicated Business Support Officer role which reflects the essential nature of consistent support for a service managing highly confidential information.

Shropshire are due an ILACS inspection by Ofsted. The previous inspection was in 2022 there has been no external inspection of the effectiveness of the LADO service since then. However, feedback has been collected periodically from those accessing the service.

In this year's report we have included some data for the past 5 financial years as opposed to focusing only on this last period compared to the previous. This is to enable us to have a clear overview in terms of demand management and identify any themes or trends which will assist us in identifying where action is needed.

3. The Role of the Local Authority Designated Officer

The role of the LADO and criteria for referrals is outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children. This notes that:

The LADO should be informed within one working day of all allegations where it is alleged that a person who works with children 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; or*
- *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.*

When considering an allegation there are up to three different pathways which can be utilised:

- *a police investigation of a possible criminal offence.*
- *enquiries and assessment by Children's Social Care about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services; and*
- *consideration by an employer of possible disciplinary action in respect of the individual.*

The LADO is responsible for:

- Providing advice, information and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations around allegations and concerns regarding paid and unpaid workers.
- Managing and overseeing individual cases, including chairing Position of Trust meetings.
- Ensuring that children are safeguarded and that the voice of the child is heard throughout the process.
- Ensuring there is a consistent, fair and thorough process for all adults working with children and young people against whom an allegation is made.

- Monitoring the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with fairly, robustly, and as quickly as possible.
- Ensuring that relevant referrals are made to Children's Social Care and where necessary, attending any strategy meetings in cases where the allegation may require investigation by police and/or social care.
- Provide training, leaflets, and information to the wider workforce to be confident that agencies are working efficiently in reporting allegations and managing the immediate concerns to ensure the safety of children, as well as considering their duty of care to their employee.

In Shropshire, the LADO also attends Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings as the representative from Children's Services. The LADO also reviews the Risk to Children (RTC) markers on LCS as well as Hazard markers (HZD). These markers are predominantly added from Persons Posing a Risk to Children (PPRCs) that have been received over the years or from information provided by criminal justice agencies/via MAPPA. The reviews of the markers must be carried out in a multi-agency forum and therefore are dependent upon Police resources and time to assist with them.

4. Feedback

Although there is currently no formal method of seeking regular feedback from agencies who use the LADO service, we have sought views from internal and external partners in order to assess our impact and ensure that partner agencies feel that their views and experiences are valued. Some of the comments received are noted below:

"My experience of reporting concerns via the LADO in Shropshire is positive. The expertise and knowledge the LADO holds is invaluable. The guidance given to multi agencies is prompt and seamless. Follow up is always provided by the Team."

"I find the LADO referral process really helpful and supportive. I have made numerous referrals and the service is always professional. I get responses to any concerns very promptly, I also find that the context to concerns is taken into account when making decisions which I don't always see in all external services."

“Always found the LADOs very approachable. Even if not making a referral they are available for advice. Minutes of meetings attended are sent out in a timely manner and any referrals made are followed up by the service frequently.”

“I cannot speak highly enough about the service I receive from LADOs. The LADOs always respond to my queries without delay. The LADOs are very knowledgeable and approachable and will always offer advice and guidance as requested. This has been very much appreciated as often we have some complex situations, and I have greatly valued their insight and feedback”.

“In my experience the Shropshire LADOs have always responded to referrals in a timely manner and have proven procedures in place, collaborating fairly with those involved. The agency evidences a balanced and constructive approach whilst keeping children’s welfare at the centre of the process”.

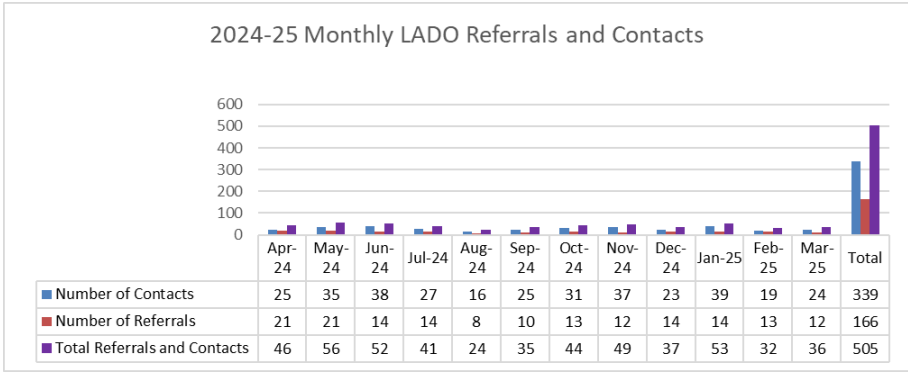
“My experience has always been positive with Shropshire LADO with quick responses and good communication for updates and outcomes. I feel supported by the team who I contact and feel comfortable to seek advice if needed”.

“I often consult with the LADOs in relation to Ofsted complaints and for advice regarding potential LADO referrals. Both are always available to offer support. Their advice, knowledge and expertise is really appreciated and both are so approachable, and I really value their input”.

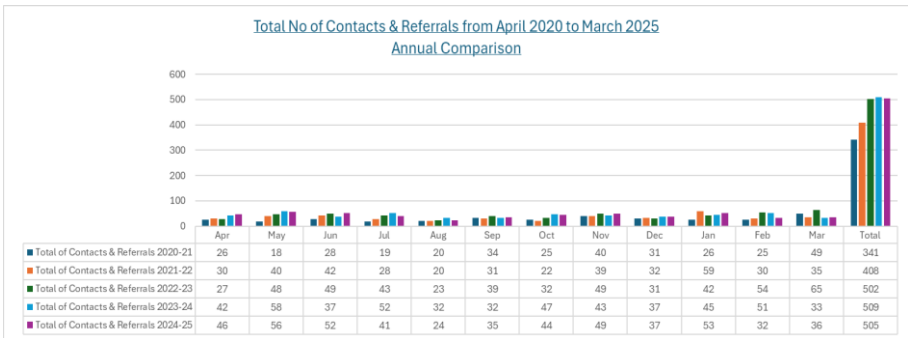
“We find the Shropshire LADO Service provides an essential and accessible service. We find the officers knowledgeable, experienced and provide helpful advice when required”.

“I find the approaches of the LADO measured, professional and always supportive. Their knowledge is invaluable, and I value the positive working partnership I have but also leaders within my services have commented on. Reports/records are also shared promptly and accurately by the service. Thank you for all the work you do”.

5. Activity data



The number of contacts received in the 2024-2025 year was 505. This compares to 509 contacts received in the previous year. In this latest period, 166 of the LADO contacts received progressed to investigations. This is a 6% increase in the numbers of contacts being accepted as referrals in the previous year. This could be indicative of the positive impact that regular awareness raising training and meetings with providers has had in order to promote an understanding of the threshold in line with statutory guidance.

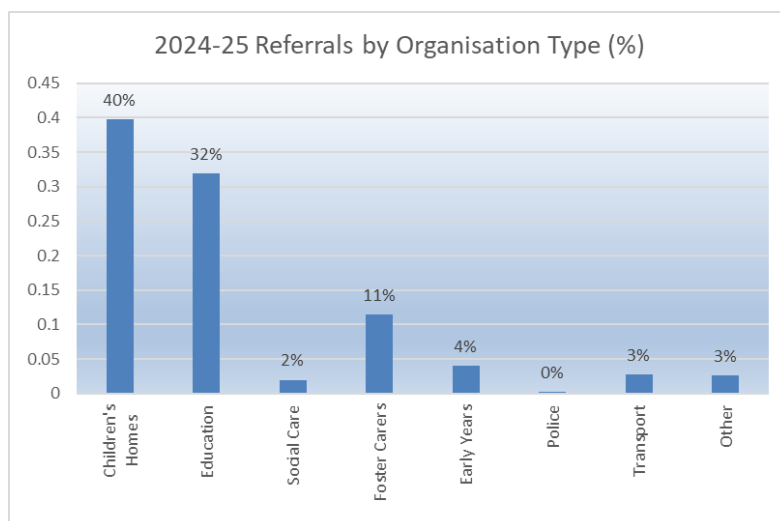


In the first financial year following the Covid 19 pandemic, the number of contacts and referrals increased by around 20%. This has remained a consistent trend over the subsequent three years that have followed, and it is not anticipated to change. A high proportion of contacts detail concerns which emanate from a person's private life and are therefore considered under the 'Suitability' criteria and the transferable risk that this may pose in the workplace. This criteria

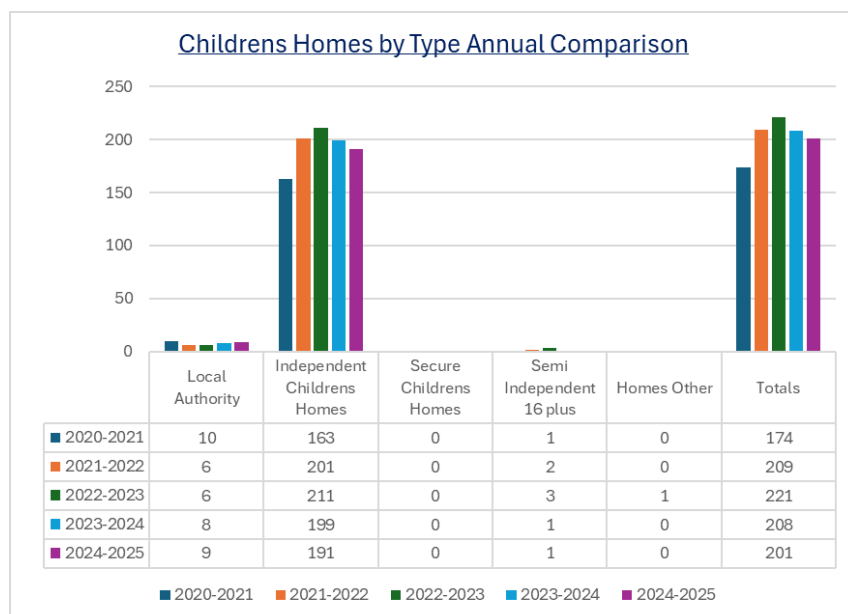
was only formally introduced to the LADO criteria early in 2021 which we believe explains the increase in contacts since this date. We have noted an increase in contacts relating to domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues – this is hypothesised to be a symptom of post pandemic as well as economic issues which are affecting families.

The busiest month for the last two years has been May and the least busy has been August. The quiet period over the summer when schools are shut is not surprising. Whilst it is difficult to hypothesise for the reasons why May appears busier; it is a new financial year and some awareness raising may have been delivered by specific providers which could account for this increase.

6. Allegations by agency



Contacts from Children's Homes continue to make up the largest proportion of referrals received into the LADO service. Within the 2023-2024 reporting period there were 208 contacts and referrals from Children's homes which equatable to 2024-25 period's total of 201. This has been a consistent trend over several years (see chart below) and is attributed to the large number of independent care homes which operate within Shropshire.



Referrals relating to Children’s Homes in Shropshire equate to 40% of all referrals. Most of these referrals relate to staff who work in privately owned and managed residential settings, with less than 5% relating to staff employed in Shropshire Council run homes. However, it is acknowledged that there are only 6 internal care homes which is a small minority of the overall number of homes in the authority area.

Although over the last 5 years many privately run care homes have shut, many more are being opened or reopened by new companies; therefore the number of homes in the area remains broadly the same. It has been a consistent issue that privately run care homes tend to refer a high number of cases/concerns which do not progress to investigations. Whilst LADO support and advice provided to care homes to manage this, we receive feedback that many providers feel that referrals to LADO are necessary even if at a lower level, in order to demonstrate to Ofsted inspectors that these homes are fulfilling their safeguarding obligations. Some referrals can relate to very minor medication errors or driving offences which LADOs can advise are practice issues that can be dealt with by single subject supervision and training, or via the employer’s own disciplinary policies. LADOs remind employers of their responsibility to capture and collate the number of practice issues and assess if these are significant enough to suggest a pattern of behaviours indicating wider safeguarding issues that could meet the LADO threshold.

OFSTED consistently seek information from the LADO service ahead of residential care home inspections as well as providing feedback afterwards. This is an extremely valuable 'communication partnership' as this allows us to monitor specific providers, identify particular concerns regarding their management of allegations and consider how we can best offer support and guidance to those setting.

The second largest referrer to LADO is the education sector which is also a similar trend to that of previous years. Referrals are evenly split between mainstream schools (46%) and specialist provisions (44%), however referrals alleging physical abuse account for 60% of the referrals from specialist provisions, compared to only 37% of mainstream school referrals. Many schools are demonstrating that they are keen to seek LADO advice and guidance before managing low level concerns internally which is positive. Our regular meetings with school's HR teams ensures this continuity and positive networking.

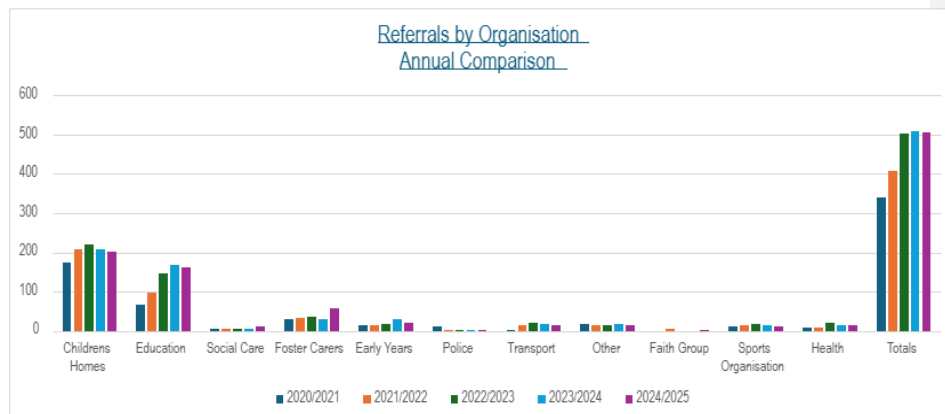
There has been an increase in the number of foster carers referred this year – up from 6% last year to 11% this year. Further work is needed to understand this rise. For the LADO service we will seek to amend our current recording format to more easily identify if carers about whom allegations are made are either Connected carers or mainstream Foster carers. This will assist to more easily identify issues or emerging trends – for instance, reviewing the quality of fostering assessments, access and quality of training and readiness to foster.

The referrals pertaining to people working within social care has risen from 5 to 10 over the last year. This is felt to be linked to the expansion of social care services, including recruitment into the Stepping Stones service, internal residential care homes and Early Help Service, which has created a larger workforce about whom referrals can be made. There have been no themes of concern or systemic issues identified within the increased number of referrals.

LADO have consistently seen a low number of contacts from the Police despite attempts to engage them over recent years. The Police Professional Standards Department (PPSD) takes the lead in allegations about members of their force. We would expect, according to the LADO criteria, that LADO would also be made aware of these cases. However currently it remains rare that we are made aware, unless these are reported to us via another agency, for instance, by care homes or social workers. There is some indication that allegations across the force are being reviewed following a serious incident in the Metropolitan Police area.

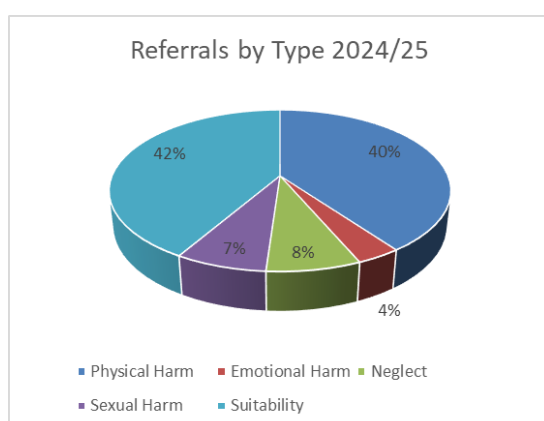
From conversations with regional colleagues, this appears to be a national trend. A letter had been sent by the National Police Chief's Council in February 2023 to remind Police colleagues

of their statutory duties. Whether this leads to changes locally is yet to be determined. LADO will continue to try and engage the PPSD.

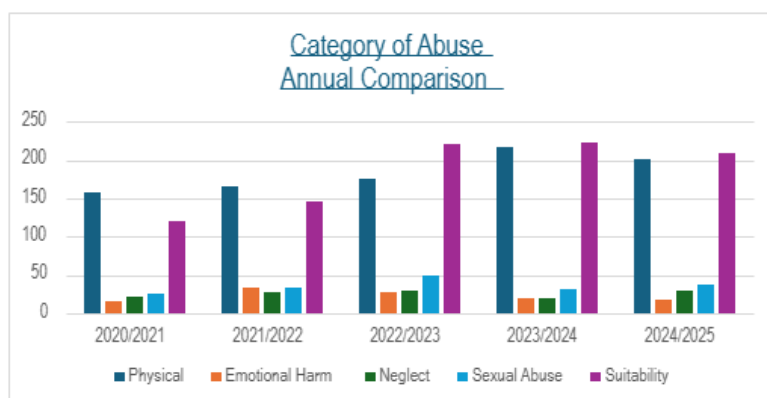


The chart above demonstrates the organisations referred over the past five years, which highlights the consistency in terms of the sectors of employees being brought to our attention. The slight decrease in figures relating to Children’s Homes over the past three years may be representative of the consistent messages that managers are being given regarding thresholds, both directly and via awareness raising sessions.

7. Categories of abuse

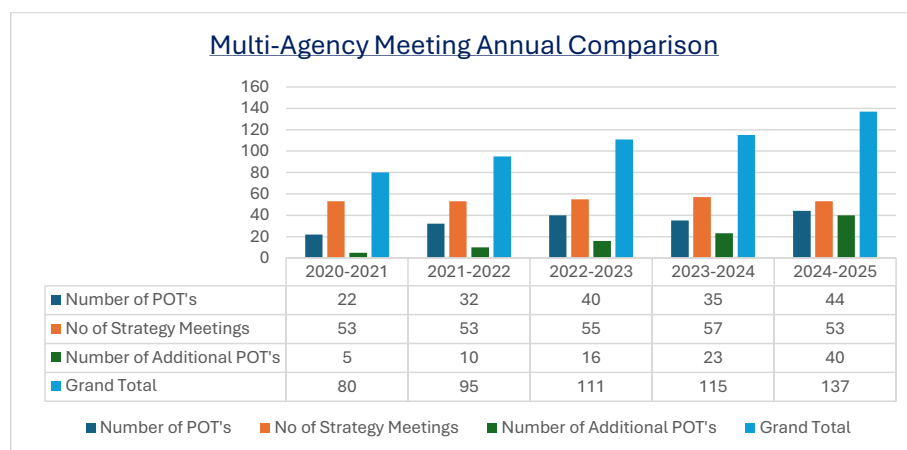


The main categories of concern have remained consistent with last year's figures. Suitability and physical abuse still account for over 80% of all referrals. A significant number of physical abuse allegations are made by young people in care homes and specialist education provisions who do not feel that restraints used were proportionate or carried out correctly. Likewise, suitability allegations are increasing as the formal identification of this category has become embedded into the LADO criteria. The category is used by many different agencies, and it is therefore unsurprising that it is now used appropriately to reflect the transferable risks that employers are identifying. We are now receiving increasing numbers of referrals direct from the police under this category.



The above chart demonstrates the rising use of referrals relating to suitability issues in the past three years, which is highlighted in the increased overall number of referrals during the same period.

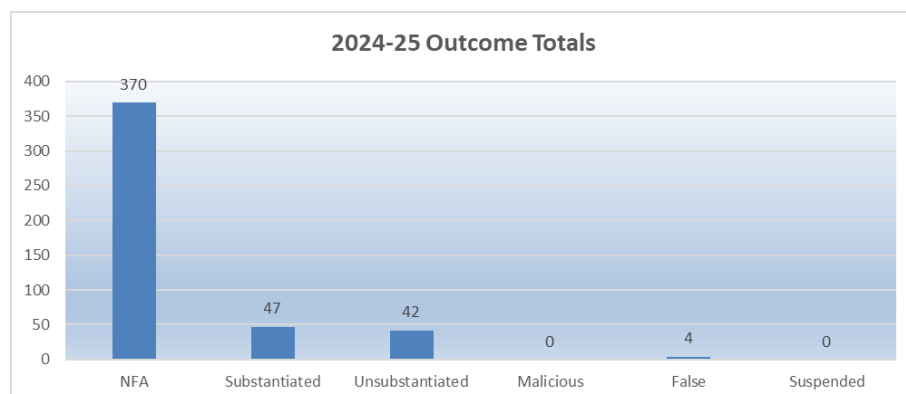
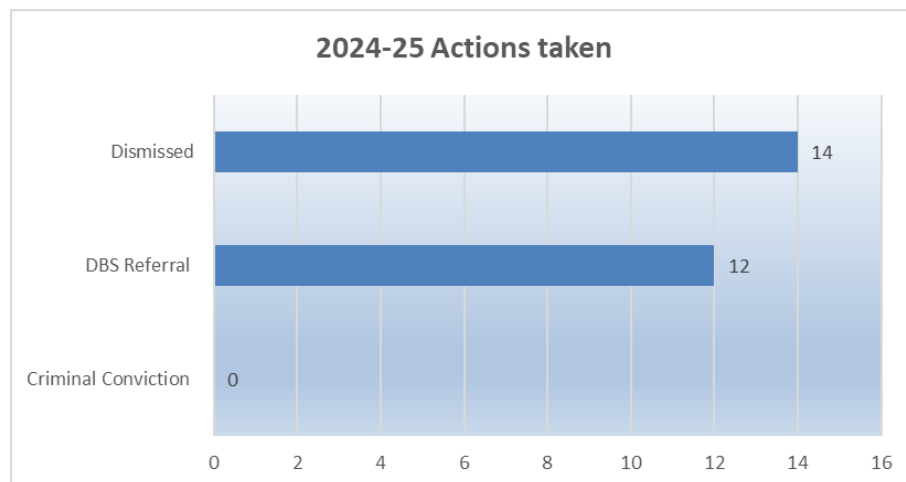
8. Multi agency meetings



During the 2024/2025 year there have been Position of Trust (POT) meetings held on 44 cases. There have been an additional 40 review POT meetings held. This is a 45% increase over one year in the amount of POT meetings being held. This demonstrates the complexity of the cases being taken forward as referrals. Additionally, more review POTS are needed as Police investigations are increasingly taking longer to conclude – we are advised that this is owing to lengthy investigations but also CPS and Courts who, since the Covid 19 pandemic, have struggled to progress prosecutions in a timely manner. Having review POT meetings on these cases ensures that all relevant professionals are kept up to date with actions and progress so that they can make appropriate safeguarding decisions in line with their own procedures.

In addition to POT meetings, 53 cases referred to LADO have resulted in Strategy Meetings being convened by the Local Authority in relation to the child / children concerned, evidencing appropriate safeguarding considerations being made specifically in relation to any child involved in the allegation. This number has remained consistent over the past 5 years. Where possible, the LADOs endeavour to attend any strategy meetings held to ensure that all available information is provided and received to support robust decision making.

9. Outcomes of allegations



Outcome Totals	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
NFA	170	200	323	383	370
Substantiated	69	93	78	57	45
Unsubstantiated	88	95	89	57	41
FALSE	11	16	6	4	4
Still open at year end	2	4	6	8	45
Grand totals	340	408	502	509	505

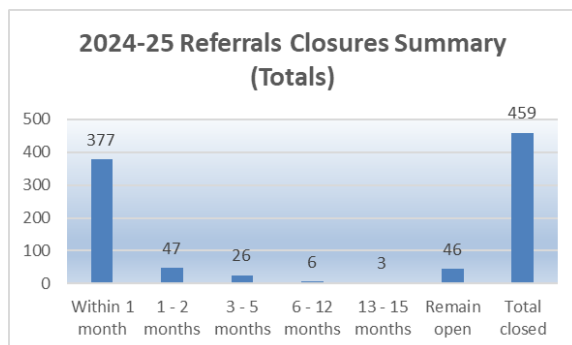
The number of cases resulting in a substantiated outcome have decreased from previous years, however there are still a significant number of cases yet to be concluded at the time of writing this report, and therefore the number is likely to increase as those cases are closed. Despite 45 cases concluding that the allegation was substantiated, only 14 were so serious that they

required the employee to be dismissed from their role. 12 cases required a DBS referral to be made. This indicates that some cases can be dealt with by other disciplinary outcomes, such as formal warnings. In addition, some cases will result in learning needs being identified, which could be additional training for the individual, but also organisation wide training.

Whilst the chart does not identify any cases where criminal convictions have occurred, this is because all the cases involving a criminal investigation in this reporting year are still ongoing. In some cases where there is no remit for a criminal investigation, information is still formally shared with the police so that they can record the concerns as intelligence, in case of a similar matter arising in the future.

In addition to referrals being made to the DBS to consider barring an individual from working in positions of trust with children, referrals are also made to regulatory bodies where relevant. Unfortunately, those referrals also take a significant amount of time to process, which is another issue that has led to LADO cases remaining open for a disproportionate amount of time on occasion.

10. Timeliness of investigations



The majority of cases are concluded within one month of referral. The most lengthy case which is ongoing was initially referred in May 2019 – this is still awaiting a court hearing to take place. The next longest case still open has been open since September 2020 and is with the TRA awaiting a decision. In order to ensure that we retain regular oversight of these long running cases, we will either diarise regular dates to chase or if multiple professionals are still involved, a review Position of Trust Meeting will be held in order for updates to be communicated.

Commented [SC2243401]: @Elle Jones @Michelle Taylor you've mentioned before that some LADOs in other LAs close down long running cases? And I think they just rely on the Police updating them ad/when? It might be worth adding in here that you are aware that some colleagues across the region don't keep cases open but explain why you do and how you feel that manages the risk well.

Commented [EJ2R1]: @Jannie Lowe - all done.

The most frequent cause of delays in finalising cases are as a result of issues with the criminal justice system. Often cases involve forensic analysis of devices which is a lengthy process. In addition to the protracted nature of police investigations, CPS decision making often elongates this process further. Once a person has been charged with an offence there is usually then a significant delay in obtaining a court hearing. In some cases it is possible to make a “balance of probabilities” decision prior to the conclusion of the criminal justice process, to enable employers to progress their internal disciplinary procedures, however this is not always possible.

From discussions with colleagues across the region and nationally, we are aware that not all LADOs keep these types of cases open if the individual has already been removed from their employment. However in Shropshire we choose to keep the case open until conclusion in order to ensure that if the criminal justice outcome does not result in a conviction, there is a process in place which can still manage the wider risks. It also allows us to maintain some contact with a previous employer to warn them when a case is reaching its conclusion, if there is likely to be some potential media interest as a result.

11. Information and advice

In addition to the number of contacts and referrals identified above, the LADOs continue to provide informal advice and guidance to internal and external colleagues.

Data was collated in the first month of the 24/25 reporting year which demonstrates that in addition to the formal LADO contacts received, the LADO service dealt with 33 informal enquiries to provide support, data, advice and consultation. The frequency of these informal conversations has been a regular feature in the work of the LADO service throughout the year and a significant amount of time is spent each week responding to these enquiries. Going forwards we plan to start to collate this information again so that we can target those agencies most likely to seek support and therefore those most in need of training or support going forwards.

12. Training and Awareness raising

The induction for new Social Care staff within Shropshire Council includes a LADO session to ensure that all new employees are aware of LADO procedures and are confident about how to seek LADO advice or make a referral. There is a plan to record this session so that it is more accessible to all.

LADO information sessions are still regularly provided to many care providers in addition to regular meetings being arranged with other larger organisations. For example, termly meetings are held with one of the biggest Academy Trusts in Shropshire, to ensure high levels of understanding, communication and decision making across different schools. Regular meetings are also held with Shropshire Council Education colleagues to ensure a joined-up approach in dealing with safeguarding concerns involving schools.

LADO also offers awareness raising to external agencies such as care home providers and this has been provided on a targeted basis where the number of referrals from an individual organisation are disproportionate. Through the collection of data that we have, we are also able to identify if there are spikes in allegations from individual children. This often leads to us suggesting and attending a planning meeting with the home and the child's Social Worker. In some cases, individual risk management plans are made for that child and shared with LADO so that we can take this into account in decision making.

13. Challenges

A significant challenge experienced by the LADO team over this reporting period relates to our communication with the Police. Investigating Officers are often unavailable to attend Position of Trust meetings and can be slow to respond to update requests. This has a significant impact on employers as well as employees under investigation. In addition, the Harm Assessment Unit (HAU) are no longer co-located within Children's Services, and with some changes in personnel, the relationship between the LADO team and HAU has been negatively impacted.

It is worth noting however that having a Detective Sergeant overseeing HAU has been of immense support. She has been consistently proactive in following up on Police issues. She will chase Investigating Officers on our behalf, seeks out information for us, engages in case

discussions to consider how best to progress cases and is invaluable in terms of the knowledge that she brings to Position of Trust meetings.

A further challenge is the increase in referrals and requests for advice since 2020 however LADO hours have not yet increased in line with these, resulting in higher workloads.

There are cases open to the LADO service which still open from as long as five years ago. This demonstrates the complexity of some cases and need to juggle active management of old cases alongside responding to new referrals / requests for advice can at times be challenging.

14. Why it matters

The data collated regarding the LADO contacts received during 2024/25 in addition to the feedback received from those using the LADO service means we are able to demonstrate we are consistently responding appropriately to safeguarding concerns for children in Shropshire, in line with statutory guidance. Responses to contacts are timely, the LADOs have positive relationships with internal and external colleagues, and we are engaged with a programme of awareness raising and training.

We recognise there are some challenges, many of which are out of our control – e.g. criminal investigations not being concluded over extended periods, but as LADOs we are committed to addressing those which we can have some influence over.

15. Actions for 2025/26

- 1) Over the course of the coming year, the LADOs will continue to engage with partner agencies, monitor patterns (contact/referral nature and source) to ensure appropriate targeting of organisations to raise their awareness of the LADO process, ensure appropriate referrals are made, and to consider the relevance of their referrals rates (high and low).
- 2) We have seen a large independent care home company take ownership of multiple care homes in Shropshire, making them by far the biggest local provider. In 2025/26 LADOs will make contact with the new management team to offer to revisit the training we have

undertaken in those homes previously, in recognition of personnel and leadership changes.

- 3) We will continue to work positively with Police colleagues, applying appropriate challenge where investigations are ongoing.
- 4) Given the increase in referrals regarding 'foster carers', we will ensure that our LADO data differentiates between referrals on mainstream foster carers and connected carers. This will enable more informed conversations with our colleagues within Fostering teams (recruitment and development) around any identified need for increased awareness of repeat risks or issues.
- 5) We will add a section to our data collation to identify which cases are NFA'd due to the LADO threshold not being met, and which are as a result of the allegations being unfounded. This will allow us to scrutinise the reasons for the high NFA numbers we have consistently seen in the service.
- 6) We will create a more formalised mechanism to seek feedback from agencies. This will likely be a form attached to our closure emails.
- 7) We will work with our colleagues in Workforce Development to develop and record a training video for staff inductions (and refreshers) to raise awareness and understanding of the LADO role and responsibilities.

Commented [SC2243403]: @Ellie Jones @Michelle Taylor please add your names as authors and the date of completion of the report - at the end of the report

Ellie Jones and Michelle Taylor – Shropshire LADOs

Quality & Assurance Service

Date report finalised: 21/5/25