

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Annual Report and Work Plan



Dorset
Council

April 2020 - March 2021

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Our Mission

‘Together we will make Dorset the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be.’

The Management of Allegations (MoA) service is integral to protecting children. This safeguarding message is conveyed throughout the MoA casework, training, and staff briefings. The Designated Officer provides a single point of contact within Dorset Council for allegations regarding people working in the children’s workforce in statutory and non-statutory organisations.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the management of allegations in Dorset, and the role of the Designated Officer between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018¹ sets out the requirements for all agencies providing services for children to have procedures in place for reporting and managing allegations against staff and volunteers. This is mirrored in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020². The guidance highlights the need for a Designated Officer to oversee the process, by giving independent advice on thresholds and the other aspects of safeguarding when an allegation is made. This will include a range of measures, in consultation with the employer, including risk assessment, the use of suspension for more serious conduct matters or criminal investigations, alongside other issues including managing duty of care to the employee and proportionality to ensure the process is concluded fairly and as soon as possible.

The procedures for the management of such allegations is contained in the Pan- Dorset Child Protection Procedures [Pan Dorset Multi Agency Safeguarding Procedures - Allegations against Staff](#).

This report summarises the key activity and themes in the past year. Case examples have been used to provide an illustration of the diverse nature of the role.

2. The Role of the Designated Officer

Working Together (2018) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) states the criteria for Designated Officer involvement applies when an individual working or volunteering 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;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

All agencies have a duty to contact the Designated Officer directly or make a referral through the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CHAD) if there is a child protection concern or an allegation made that a criminal offence may have been committed or related to a child.

Allegations are considered in the context of four main categories of abuse, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect and there is also consideration of areas including professional conduct and safeguarding concerns arising in a person's private life. Transferable risk is a continuing consideration, this means that when the behaviour of staff or volunteers outside a setting is of concern, there is consideration of the impact of this upon their suitability to work with children and vulnerable young people.

The role of the Designated Officer is varied, but key tasks include:

- Providing independent support and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations regarding allegations or when a pattern of conduct concerns arises.

¹ Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children July 2018; HM Government

² Keeping children safe in education (2020) – Statutory guidance for schools and colleges. Update – January 2021 (Post EU Exit); Department for Education

- Liaison with the Children's Advice and Duty Services (CHAD) and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Children's Services Teams and Police when child protection concerns become known about at the point of referral or during an investigation.
- Participation in strategy meetings and chairing of meetings involving Dorset Council employees or foster carers.
- Chairing of evaluation meetings and professional meetings when the evidence for 'significant harm' for strategy meetings are not met, but where a meeting is needed to consider complex issues and plan to reduce future risk.
- Monitoring progress of referrals and investigations to ensure progress on actions identified are all fully completed.
- Ongoing advice and guidance throughout the process, including organisational learning if gaps in practice are identified.
- Liaison with other local authority Designated Officers when there are cross-boundary issues, including Adult Safeguarding in Dorset when risks are linked to a role with adults.
- Maintaining confidential case records on the secure database (MOSAIC), tracking systems and the Designated Officers database
- Liaison with partner agencies and other departments to improve practice, including police, education, health, transport and Ofsted and contribution to meetings and supporting the development of policies and procedures to improve safeguarding.
- Ongoing practice development and delivering of allegations management training.

3. Service Structure and Supervision

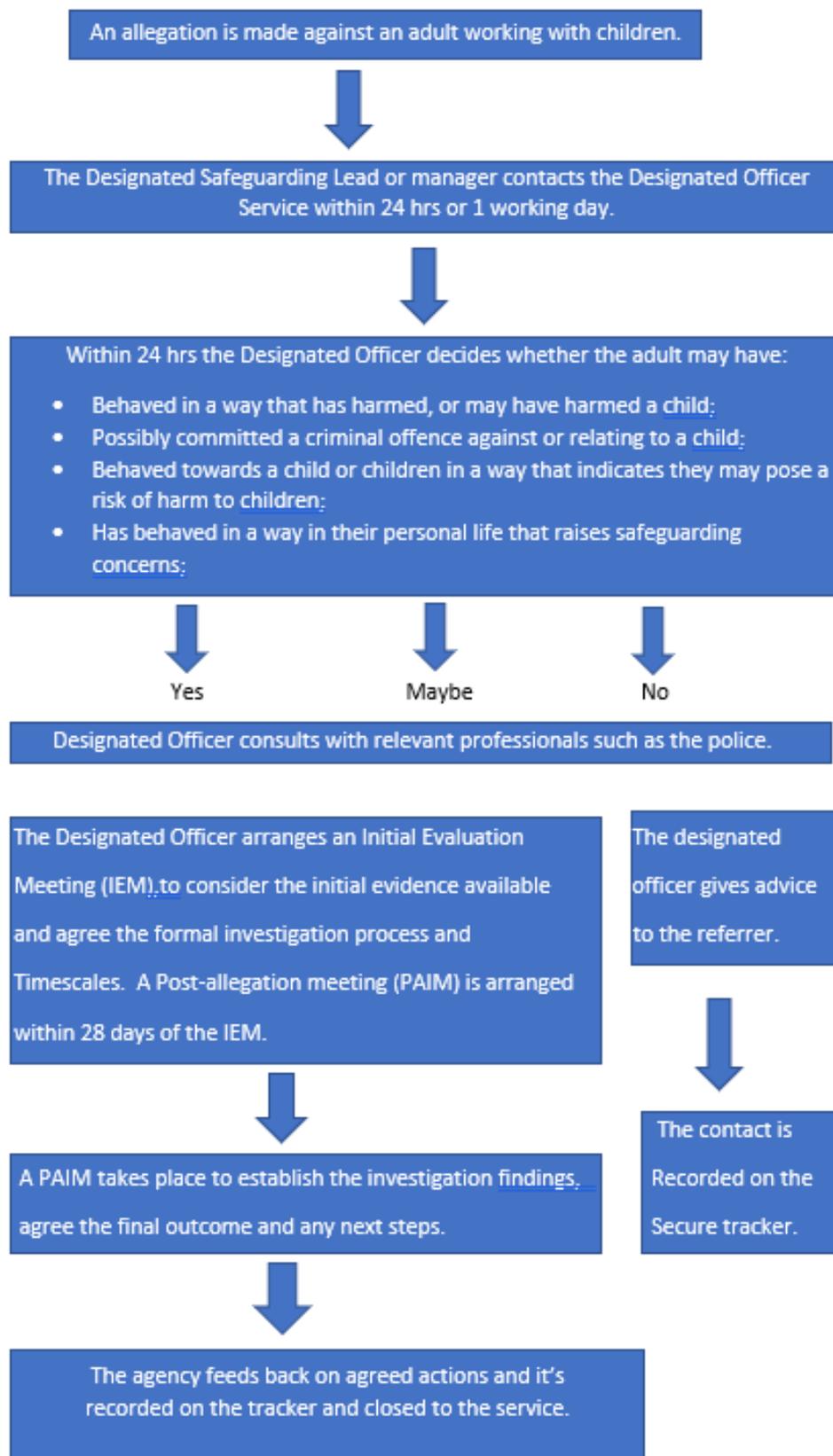
The Designated Officer Service is located within the Quality Assurance and Partnership Service based at County Hall, Dorchester. The service is provided by one Designated Officer with some business support.

The Designated Officer is an experienced qualified social worker registered with the Social Work England with extensive experience at team manager level. The Designated Officer is managed by a Quality Assurance Manager who is also a qualified social worker with considerable social work management experience in child protection.

The Designated Officer attends the annual national Designated Officer conference and monthly regional Designated Officer forum where practice themes are discussed. The National Designated Officer network is currently devising guidance for Designated Officers with a view to setting minimum standards for good practice as this varies across the country. This includes cross boundary working, common language and dealing with specific issues including unregulated and self-employed adults.

4. Process

The flowchart below describes the local process used when an allegation is made against an adult working with a child.



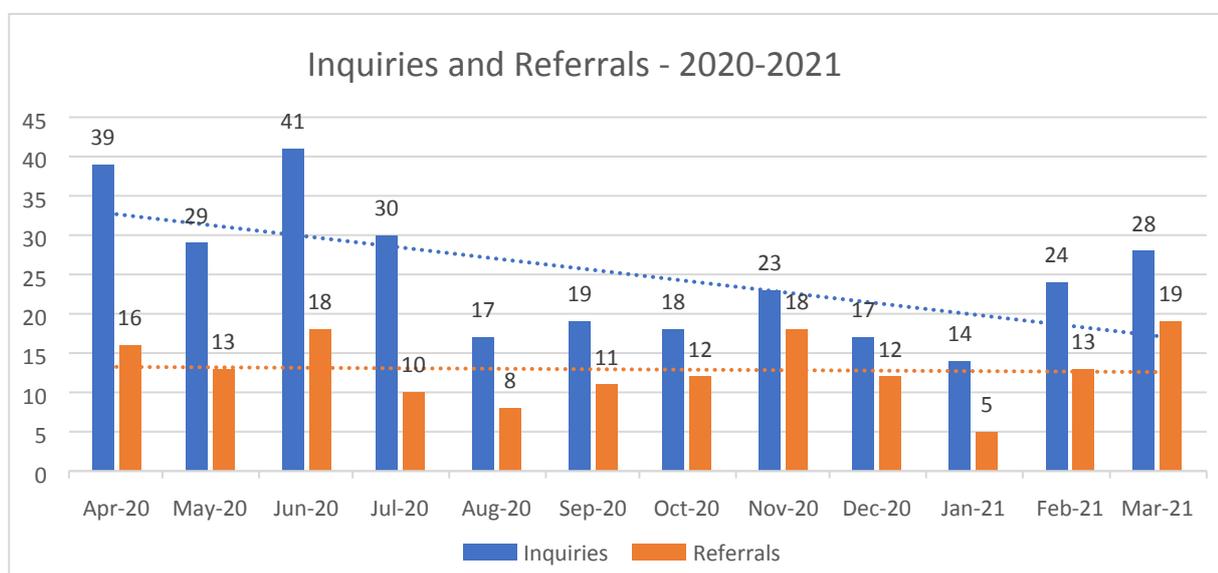
A secure database is used to record information about allegations and the service response. Analysis of the information from the database enables the identification of patterns of referrals and allegation types and enables tracking of the timeliness of the responses.

5. Service Activity

The Management of Allegations Service was carried out online throughout 2020/21, with good participation from key partners. Since 1st April 2020 all Initial Evaluation meetings and Post-Allegation Investigation Meetings have been arranged via Microsoft Teams, and this has allowed colleagues who wouldn't normally be able to attend these meetings due to distance involved, to attend virtually and contribute, hence improving the quality of information shared. This is evidenced through meetings not being required to be rearranged and an improvement in the timeliness of Initial Evaluation Meetings and Post -Allegation Investigation meetings.

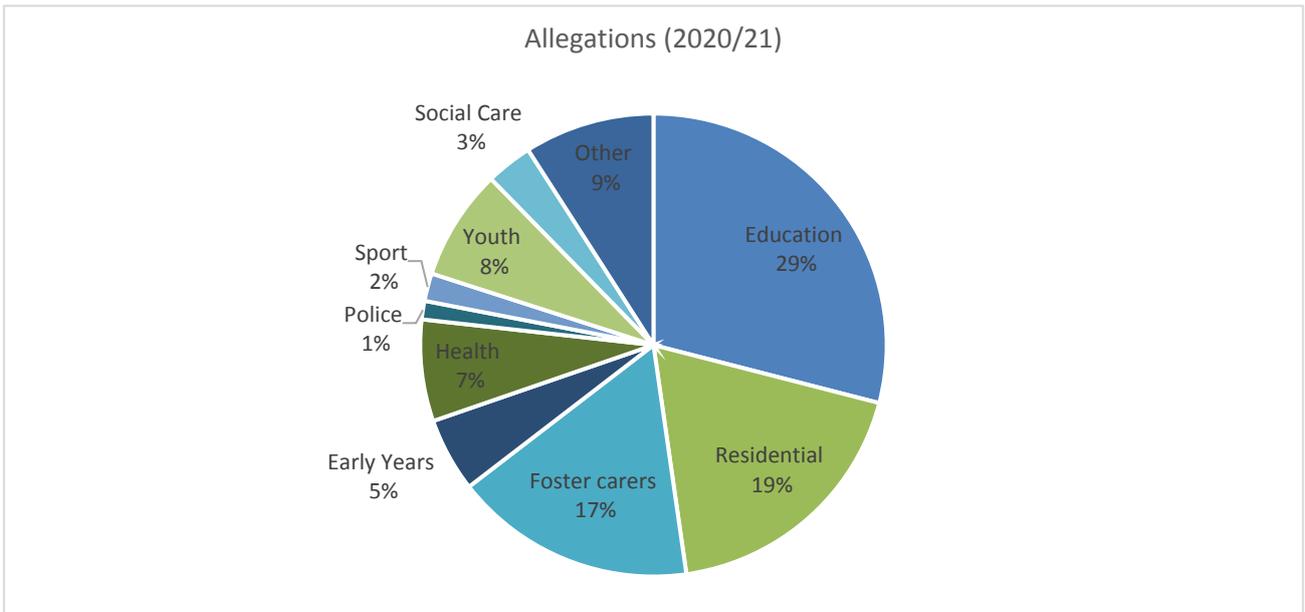
5.1 Inquiries and Referrals (2020/21)

There were just under 300 inquiries resulting in 155 referrals to the Designated Officer Service. The graph below shows the inquiries and referrals made to the Designated Officer over the past 12 months. There was an increased number of inquiries in the early part of the year, but this decreased over the year and became more in line with previous years. The number of referrals per month remained reasonable steady.



5.2 Source of referrals

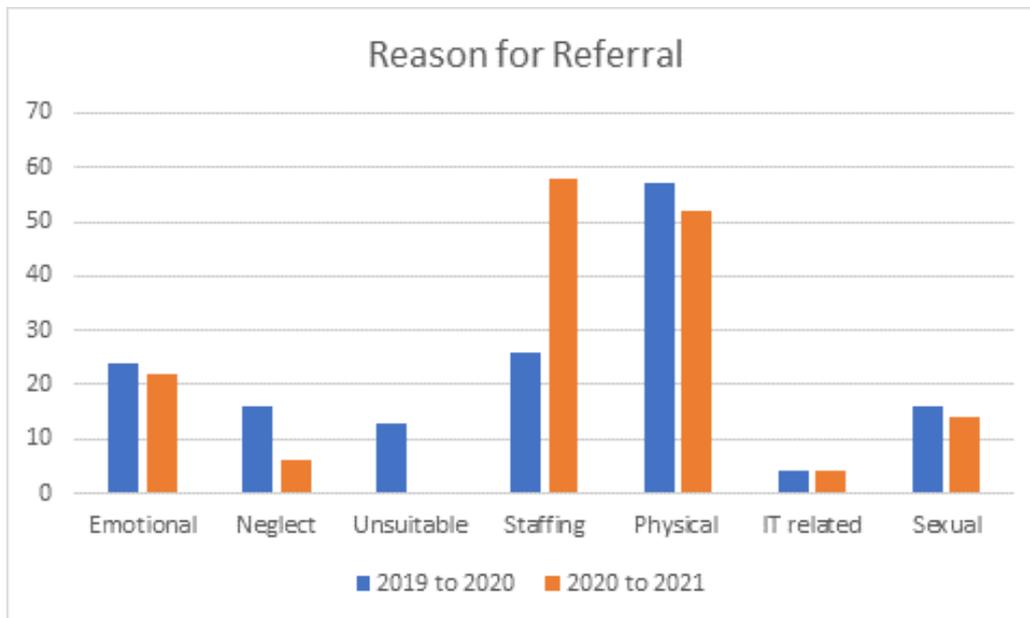
The Pie chart below details the agency where the adult works when the allegation was made about them. The largest group of referrals relate to employees working in education (45, 29%) and are related to concerns regarding physical contact with a child young person. The second largest groups which are in line with previous years relate to employees working in residential care (29) and foster carers (26). The low level of referrals relating to Police staff, is not unique to Dorset and continues to be discussed in regular liaison meetings with Dorset Police to ensure that they understand and refer appropriately when allegations are made against police staff.



5.3 Referral Type

The most common type of referral this year relates to staffing, this is primarily related to been related to professional boundaries and inappropriate professional behaviour during the pandemic period, at a time when online learning and engagement with young people has become embedded in everyday lives.

Over the last year 'physical' referrals have reduced, this is in line with our neighbours and very likely to be due to a reduction in face to face education and service delivery.



5.4 Referral Outcomes

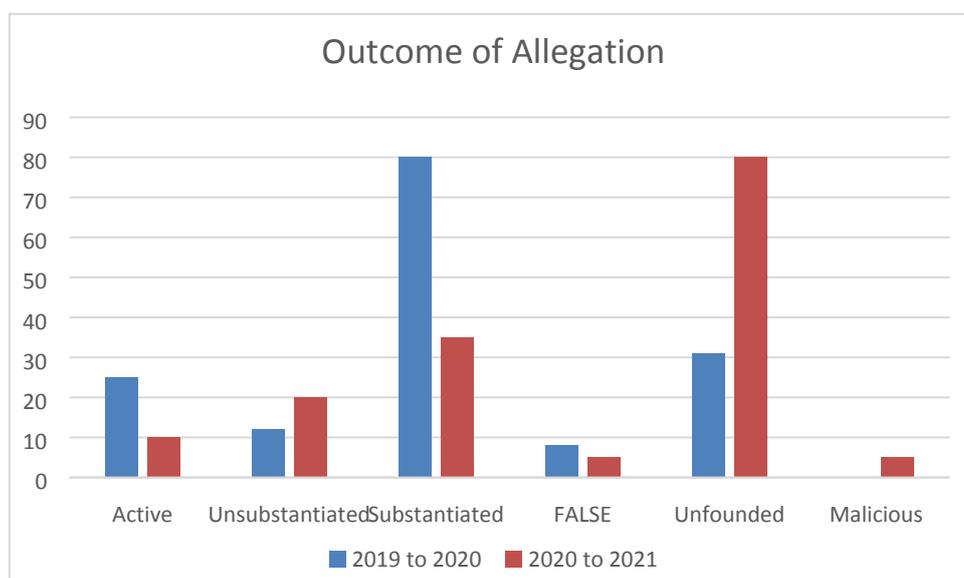
The outcome of investigation of allegations are categorised as follows:

- Substantiated – which means there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation
- Not true – which means there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation

- Malicious – which means that there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false
- Unsubstantiated – which means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation
- Unfounded – which means there is no evidence or proper basis to support the allegation being made.

In 2020/21 there were 35 substantiated allegations and following the Management of Allegations process, 25 adults were referred to the DBS due to the potential risk posed to young people compared to 16 last year. A total of 60 others have been the subject of formal disciplinary processes in their employment and provided with additional training and support.

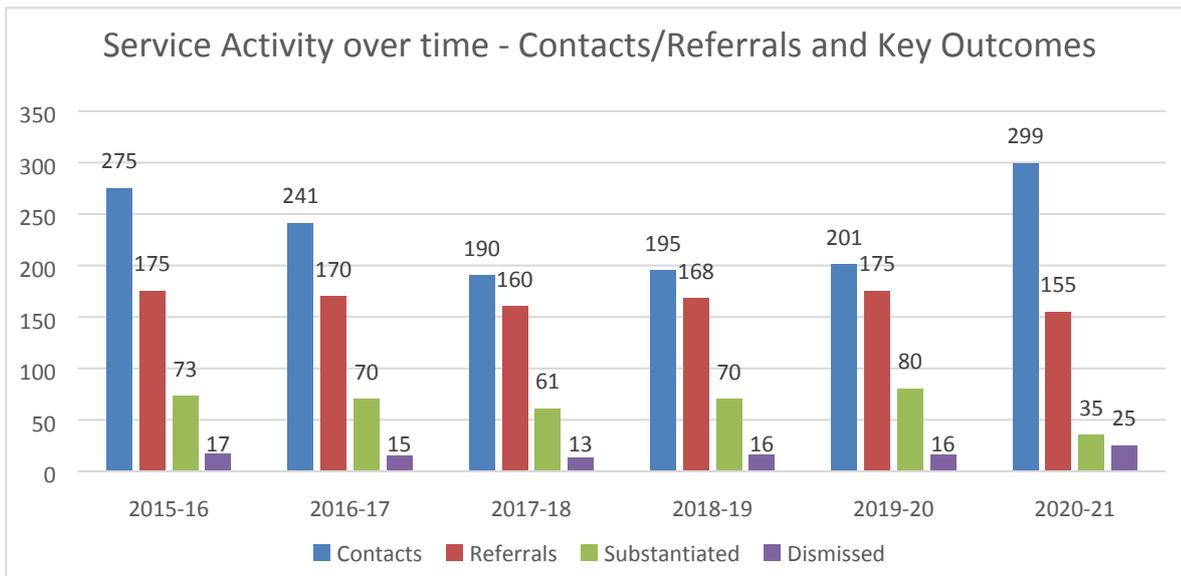
The graph below details the outcome at conclusion of the investigation compared to the previous year.



In 2020-21 there was a decrease by 45 in allegations that were substantiated compared to 80 last year most likely due to the pandemic and fewer children attending school. We have seen an increase in allegations about professional boundaries and inappropriate behaviour but because there was insufficient evidence to support this in many cases, the outcome has resulted in a finding of 'Unfounded'.

Service Activity over time

The graph below shows service activity over time.



The number of contacts from professionals has remained consistent for the last 4 years about 200, with a substantial increase this year to almost 300. This is very likely due to improved scrutiny of recording with the requirement to record all contacts.

6 Quality and Performance

6.1 Internal Audit

During April 2020 an internal audit was carried out with a focus on the tasks linked with the Management of Allegations process. There were some specific issues identified to be strengthened within the service and below is the agreed action plan and update following the audit.

Action	Update
Standards relating to timeliness of Designated Officer referrals from receipt of information and subsequent date which they are recorded on MOSAIC need to be clear. The date recorded should be the date information was received.	This is now happening in 84% of referrals that are recorded onto MOSAIC.
Where there is an initial discussion and no investigation of any type, language should be clear in relation to whether something is a concern or allegation and that the threshold for MoA was not met.	This is now always recorded clearly on the Management of allegations tracker.
Timeliness between referral and IEM needs to be improved in line with the expectations of procedures that state 5 working day and/or reasons why this has not been achieved and clearly recorded.	This is completed in 90% of cases.
Where there is confusion or inability to make a decision as to whether the information constitutes an allegation or concern, the IEM should be utilised as decision for threshold.	This now always happens in these circumstances and is recorded on the MoA tracker.
Professionals within meetings should be reminded/provided with clarity over each outcome and when it should be used.	This is routinely happening in all meetings and discussed at the start of meeting, with possible outcomes clarified.

There needs to be improved scrutiny of information available within meetings. This should include the availability, timeliness and quality of Designated Officer reports and an expectation that the Designated Officer report is complete and available for the PAIM.	This is improving, with this always happening when the referral is regarding a foster carer or educational professional and increasing with voluntary organisations.
Learning points from meetings should be centrally collated and reviewed for action and impact. Where recommendations are made to internal teams, such as fostering, the Designated Officer should consider following these up to ensure impact on practice.	The MoA database now allows for this type of information to be captured and drawn out from it. The Designated Officer will follow up recommendations and has a quarterly meeting with the fostering service to undertake this within that service.
Consideration should be given to the development of a Designated Officer threshold matrix that sets out levels of response and examples across the categories of harm	This is completed and will be updated to Tri-X within 4 weeks
Consideration should be given to the development of local Designated Officer practice standards – this would allow for some detail that is not included in wider procedures i.e. clarity of timescales, decisions etc (when is information a concern or an allegation for an example)	This is completed and will be updated to Tri-X within 4 weeks.
Quality Assurance needs to be evidenced within the Designated Officer process. This should take the form of a regular audit schedule and dip sampling of cases.	Dip sampling has started in respect of dates and timeliness of referrals, this will continue bi-monthly.

In addition to the actions identified above, monthly meetings were implemented with the fostering service to improve the timeliness between allegations being made about foster carers and being taken to Foster Panel where required. These meetings have seen a positive improvement in actions being progressed in a timelier way.

6.2 Key Performance Indicators

A set of Key Performance Indicators were developed for the service following the above internal review, these are as follows:

Activity	Progress
The decision between initial contact and referral should take place within 24 hrs	When reviewing all data over the past 12 months this has occurred in 250 (83%) of the contacts made, out of a total of 299
An Initial Evaluation meeting should be held within 5 working days of the referral.	There have been 215 (72%) Initial Evaluation Meetings held on time out of a total of 299 this year.
The Post-Allegation Investigation (PAIM) meeting should be held within 28 days.	135 (87%) Post-allegation Investigation meetings have been held within the prescribed timescales out of 155.
The length of time between the receipt of a contact and closing of the designated officer services should be reduced.	65% of referrals have been closed within 4 weeks, 25% have been closed within 8 weeks and 8% have been closed within 12 weeks, with 2 % being within 6 months.

There is an ongoing challenge to managing and concluding investigations involving children in care, foster carers and residential staff in a timely way and a priority for 2021/22 is to continue to work with Dorset Police to address this. Challenges are associated with obtaining evidence from victims, witnesses or delays in forensic analysis from seized devices. Requests for updates on the

progress of investigation are responded to with support from police based in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and there are discussions with officers in charge of investigations on a case by case basis.

7 Multi-agency Practice Development

7.1 Awareness Raising

Managing Allegations effectively and appropriately has been promoted through training, liaison with colleagues in the school safeguarding team and early years settings with visits where required to other agencies including independent and specialist schools. Proactive support has been offered to agencies or professionals who contact the Designated Officer most frequently. This year there has been a particular focus on religious bodies who appear to be under-represented in contacts. A publicity campaign was undertaken this year to support raising awareness of Management of Allegations and the role of the Designated Officer.

The Designated Officer and a colleague from the Safeguarding partnership have provided 6 briefings over the year. The feedback from this has been positive and will be collated in a similar way to the wider training in the future. 50 representatives from different groups attended.

7.2 Training

The Designated Officer provides managing allegations training. Training delivery was consistently delivered virtually and well received by those who attended. The virtual delivery of training worked very well, and 10 sessions of training was delivered to partner agencies.

The most recent training was held 1 March 2021 and was well attended by health and education colleagues.

Provision of safeguarding training to the voluntary sector, particularly in relation to the Management of Allegations and Safer Working practice was placed on hold due to the Covid Pandemic but will be restarted in September 2021.

7.3 Education settings

The Designated Officer works closely with the School Safeguarding Advisors who are also based in the Quality Assurance and Partnership Service in order to discuss concerns in practice and learning arising from Designated Officer referrals and complaints. Joint work is carried out where appropriate

7.4 Foster carers

The Designated Officer meets monthly with managers in the council's fostering service to track the progress of investigations and monitor progress of any actions agreed following the Managing Allegations meeting outcome. This includes the fostering review process and presentation at fostering panel where appropriate. This increases the level of understanding and enables learning from specific case work.

Case Example – Foster carers

An accumulation of concerns relating to use of inappropriate, critical language, attitude towards a young person was reported by the social work and fostering teams who were concerned about the emotional impact on the young person. The allegation was substantiated and a training package was put in place including attending Management of Allegation briefings for carers. The foster carers engaged in the package of training and the fostering panels provided oversight with on-going monitoring by Fostering SW.

7.5 Self-employed service providers

A continuing area of work for all Designated Officers is the issue of self-employed service providers (sometimes referred to as 'headless organisations'). These are groups or activities where there is little or no structure or any evidence of lines of accountability. These are groups or services set up by an individual that are not affiliated to any agency. In the absence of accountability this is an additional challenge for Designated Officers. The Designated Officer provides support when required with safeguarding practice reviews where there are shortfalls in allegations management and safer recruitment practice.

Case Example

Repeated concerns raised about the owner of an Early Years setting regarding the performance of staff (e.g. lack of supervision of children) resulting in a potential risk to children. In the absence of specific allegations, the Designated Officer has worked alongside colleagues in Early Years to address concerns and hold the owner to account and, ultimately to make sure the appropriate agency (in this case Ofsted) are aware of the issue

7.6 Professional Collaboration

The Designated Officer attends quarterly pan-Dorset meetings with Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) to discuss complex cases and cross-boundary issues. This could be further strengthened by strengthening relationships with Designated Officers in other border counties, including Hampshire, Somerset, Wiltshire and Devon, given the number of Dorset children who may go to school in those areas or who are in care provision in those counties.

There have been increased links established with Ofsted over the last year, including a regional Designated Officer meeting held with Ofsted in Somerset to consider the management of allegations and reporting concerns in children's homes. Further meetings are planned and will continue at regular intervals.

8 Priorities for 2021-2022

Capacity	Strengthen the support and cover arrangements for the Designated Officer
Timeliness	Work with partners who are standing members of the Initial Evaluation Meetings to strengthen timeliness so that all are achieved on time

	Amend the process for arranging Post Allegation Meetings to review progress to ensure these always take place within 28 days even if the final outcome of an investigation has not been received, providing an opportunity to review progress and check on any outstanding actions at an earlier stage
	Continue to work with the police to reduce any unavoidable delay in investigations affecting timeliness
Raising awareness & professional development	Review the virtual training offer and implement on ongoing evaluation framework for briefing and training
	Analyse themes and proactively identify sectors, organisations, and themes for the delivery of training to the sector to prevent harm
	Reinstate training and awareness sessions for voluntary and community sector organisations
Professional Relationships	Move fostering meetings from monthly to quarterly
	Further develop relationship with Designated Officers from border counties
Management Information	Automate reporting and develop a dashboard to facilitate easier tracking of activity and management oversight
	Share quarterly reports on Key Performance Indicators at the Quality and Performance Management Conferences
Service Quality	Introduce a regular programme of auditing to understand quality of service being offered and to identify themes to share with multi-agency partners to inform learning and development
	Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented