

Corporate Parenting Board

23 November 2023

Designated Officer Report

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: This report provides an overview of the activity of the Designated Officer for the year of April 2022 through to March 2023. This involves any activity that involves a person working with young people under the age of 18 years in a position of trust, whereby an allegation has been made against them.

Recommendation: This report is for information

Reason for Recommendation:

Report

1. Introduction

1.1 This report will provide an overview of the management of allegations in Dorset, and the role of the Designated Officer between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 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 2023.

1.2 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 assessments, 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.

1.3 The procedures for the management of such allegations are 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.

1.4 The Role of the Designated Officer

1.5 Working Together (2018) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023) 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.
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

1.6 This last bullet point refers to situations that arise in a professional's personal life, which give may give rise to concerns about their suitability to work with children, this is known as transferable risk.

1.7 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.

1.8 Allegations are considered in the context of four main categories of abuse; 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).

1.9 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.
- 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 evaluation meetings and professional meetings when the evidence for 'significant harm' for strategy meetings has not been met, but where a meeting is needed to consider complex issues and plan to reduce future risk.
- Ensuring the child's voice is heard.
- 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.

2.0 Service Structure and Supervision

2.1 The Designated Officers are located within the Quality Assurance and Partnership Service based at County Hall, Dorchester. The permanent Designated Officer started at the end of February 2022, and this has provided some stability. Service demand has significantly increased since this time,

this has led to the appointment of one additional full time Designated Officer and a further 0.5fte supplement from a Safeguarding Standards Advisor who works flexibly across both roles.

2.2 All three Designated Officers are qualified social workers with a background in child protection work. They have previously been managed by one of the Quality Assurance Service Managers, but in December 2022 a new Safeguarding Education Service Manager was appointed to manage the Designated Officers, this has enabled greater focus and oversight on the development of the service.

2.3 The Designated Officers attend the regional designated officer meetings and the annual national designated officer meetings, and this enables an opportunity for peer reflection and discussion around key issues and challenges within the role. Dorset have been part of the peer audit completed with one of our neighbours in the southwest region, which provided some helpful learning. The Designated Officers have also been consulted about the Designated Officer Handbook that is currently being drafted. It is hoped that this will provide a clear framework for the role, and an agreed way of working nationally to ensure there is greater consistency in how allegations against professionals working with children are managed.

3.0 Process

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

An allegation is made against an adult working with children.



The Designated Safeguarding Lead or manager contacts the Designated Officer Service within 24 hrs or 1 working day.



Within 24 hrs the Designated Officer decides whether the adult may have:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or relating to a child;
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children;
- Has behaved in a way in their personal life that raises safeguarding concerns;



Yes



Maybe



No

Designated Officer consults with relevant professionals such as the police.

The Designated Officer arranges an Initial Evaluation Meeting (IEM) to consider the initial evidence available and agree the formal investigation process and Timescales. A Post-allegation meeting (PAIM) is arranged within 28 days of the IEM.



A PAIM takes place to establish the investigation findings, agree the final outcome and any next steps.



The agency feeds back on agreed actions and it's recorded on the tracker and closed to the service.

The designated officer gives advice to the referrer.



The contact is Recorded on the Secure tracker.

3.2 All referrals continue to be recorded on our case management system (MOSAIC) where details of allegations, minutes of meetings and outcomes are recorded, including where necessary referrals to DBS. We are also now routinely recording all contacts on mosaic; these are referrals that do not progress to an Initial Evaluation Meeting and may require an internal investigation without Designated Officer oversight. Recording contacts on mosaic ensures that there is a clear record of enquiries undertaken and decision making. A secure database is also used to record all enquiries/contacts/referrals that agencies make with the designated officer and the outcome, whether this is a referral or a low-level enquiry. The database enables information to be easily accessed so patterns and repeat concerns about an individual can be identified. It also provides the ability to track the number of contacts/referrals and progress which enables easier analysis of service effectiveness and areas for development and improvement.

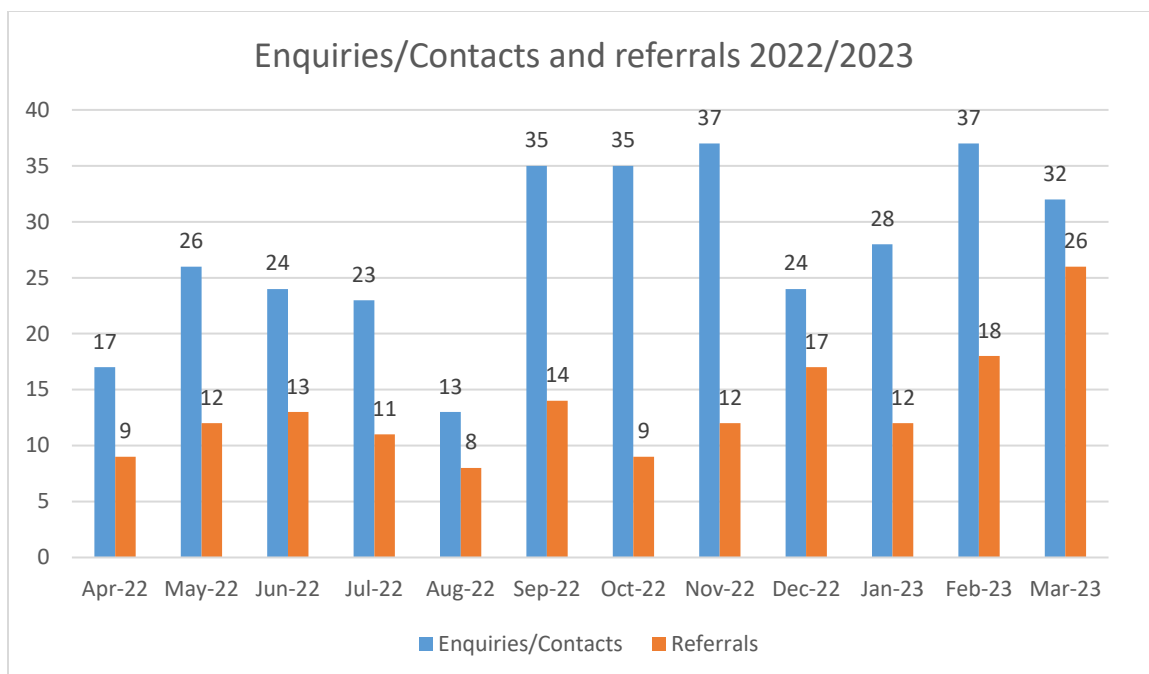
4.0 Service Activity

4.1 The Management of Allegations Service is carried out online and this continues to be effective in securing a good level of participation from our key partner agencies, such as HR, fostering, social care and schools. All Initial Evaluation meetings (IEM's) and Post Allegation Investigation Meetings (PAIM's) have been held via Microsoft Teams, there continues to be a high level of attendance at meetings, and this remains an effective way of co-ordinating investigations and sharing information.

5.0 Enquiries and Referrals (2022/23)

5.1 There were 492 contacts with the Designated Officer service this year, which is a significant increase from last year, where there were 259. It is likely that this is in part due to greater awareness of the Designated Officer role and training that has been delivered locally, however it is also noted that there has been an increase in referrals to designated officers nationally again with no clear explanation for this at present.

5.2 Out of the 492 contacts, 163 progressed to referrals and Initial Evaluation Meetings, which is almost double the number of active cases compared to last year. The graph below shows the enquiries and referrals made to the Designated Officer over the past 12 months. As can be seen below August was the quietest month, this is likely to be due to schools being closed for the summer. The number of enquiries has continued to increase from September onwards, with 58 contacts with the service in March alone, 26 of which progressed to an Initial Evaluation Meeting and further work.



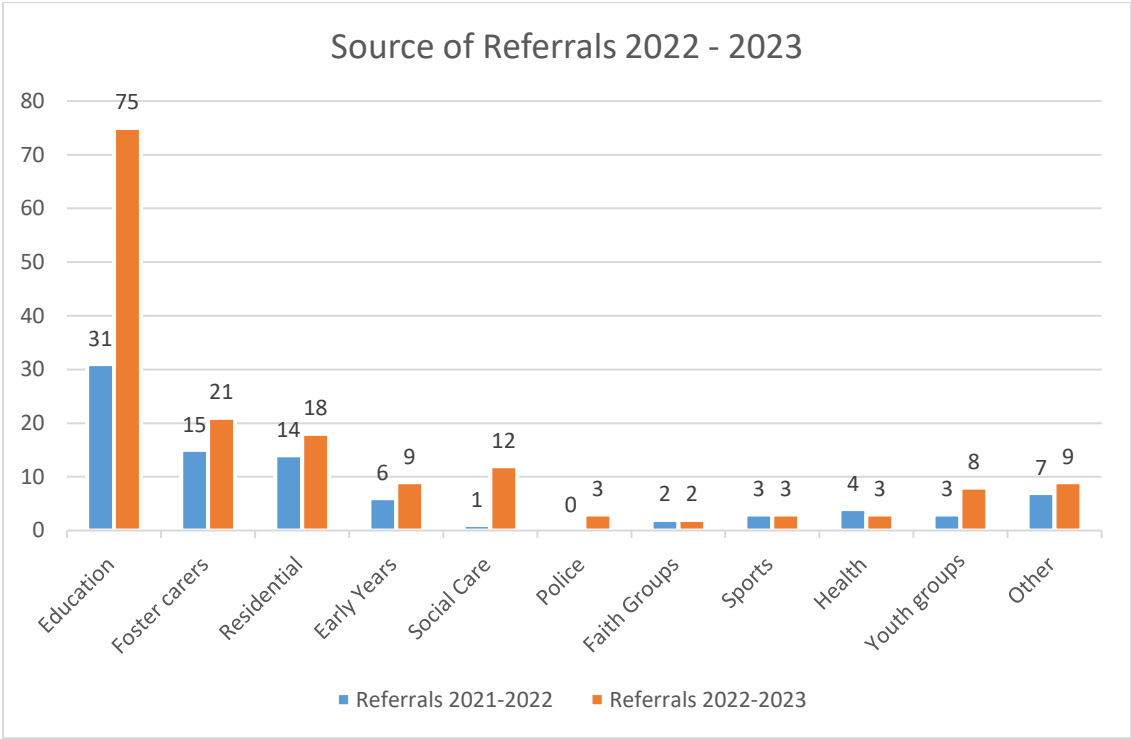
6.0 Source of referrals

6.1 The below chart shows the agency where the adult was working when the allegation was made about them. Just under half of all referrals open to the service this year related to people employed in education, this is a significant increase, just over 10% compared to last year. There have been a lot of concerns about two local independent residential school provisions which has resulted in a higher level of oversight and scrutiny and therefore an increase in referrals and seeking advice by these provisions. The number of referrals relating to foster carers and residential workers has increased slightly during this last year, but overall is proportional with last year.

6.2 There remain certain service areas that are underrepresented, we continue to have a low number of referrals from the sports sector. This is likely attributed to the way in which these clubs are set up, with many self-employed or small business with limited oversight. This coming year we will be rolling out training specifically targeted at sports clubs, with the aim of increasing awareness and understanding of the designated officer role.

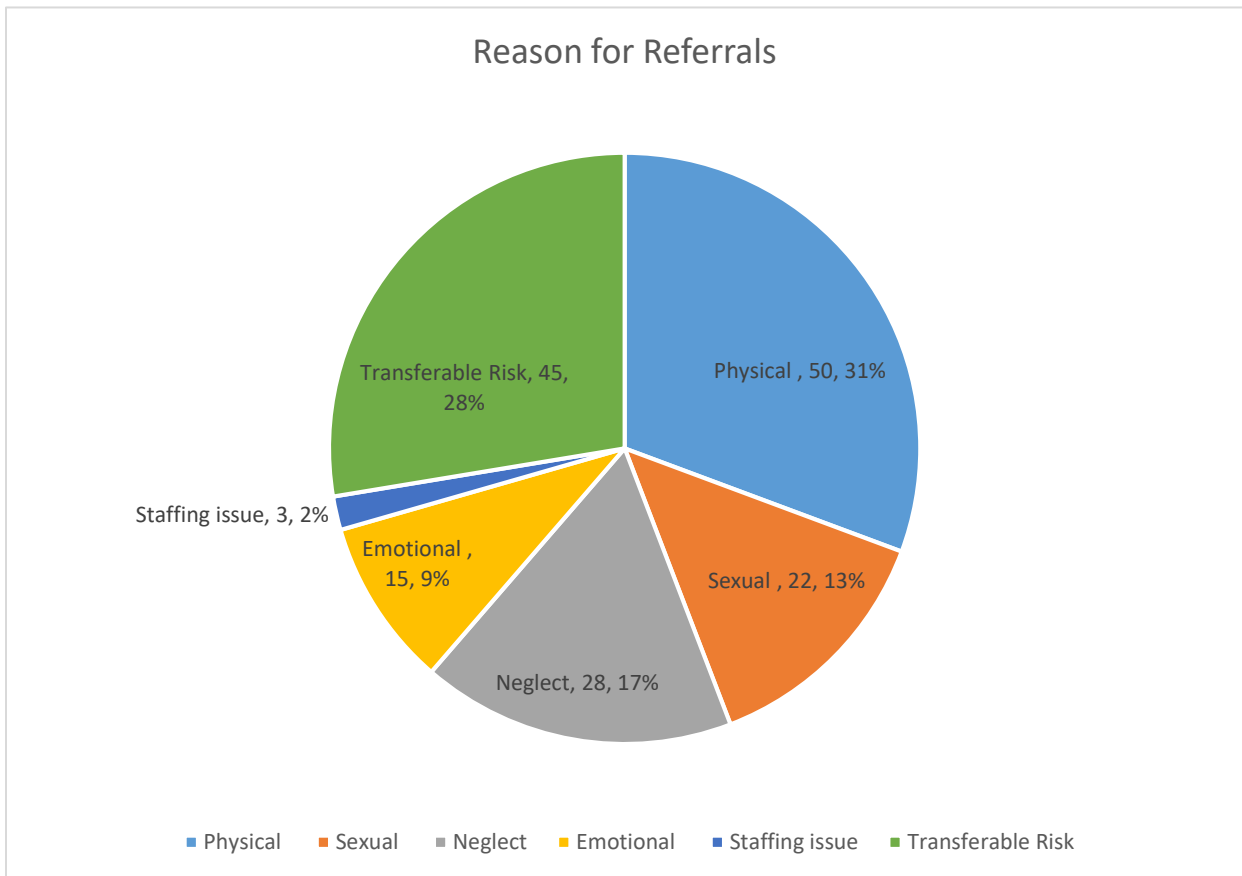
6.3 This last year we have been working on strengthening our relationships with the Police and now meet with colleagues on a regular basis. There have been three referrals relating to serving police officers this past year and although still low in numbers, this is an improvement from last year where we did not receive any. We are also in the process of organising training events for police officers as part of their induction and ongoing professional

development. It is hoped that this will increase understanding of the role within the police and hopefully improve better information sharing about those who work with children and come to the attention of the police.



7.0 Reason for referrals

7.1 The most common reason for referral this year is the same as last year and relates to reports of physical harm, this is closely followed by referrals relating to transference of risk. The number of referrals within this category has increased significantly compared to last year, this was expected and is likely due to amendments to the referral form and now being able to select this category. The number of referrals relating to Emotional Harm and Neglect have reduced this year and this supports the theory that this is due to amendments in recording. This will have affected those cases where for example a member of staff's children may be on a child protection plan and there are now being categorised as transference of risk, rather than neglect or emotional harm. There has also been a significant reduction in referrals with a category of staffing issues, this reduction is a positive, generally concerns relating to staffing issues should not be progressing to referral and should be dealt with by the employer, this evidence the impact of the training and relationship built by the LADO with services to understand the criteria for referral into the LADO.



8.0 Foster carers

8.1 There is a clear process for managing allegations relating to foster carers. The Designated Officer has case management responsibility for all carers that live within Dorset; whether they are employed by another local authority but reside within our area, an independent fostering agency or Dorset Council.

8.2 In looking specifically at those carers employed by Dorset Council, during this last year we have had 19 contacts with the service. 9 were dealt with under fostering care standards through training and support and 10 of these progressed to referral and further work. Of the 10 referrals that progressed through the management of allegations process, over half (6) related to connected carers, often these concerns have related to risks and vulnerabilities that have previously been identified.

8.3 In looking at the reason for referrals to the Designated Officer relating to foster carers, the most common reason relates to physical harm. Reasons for

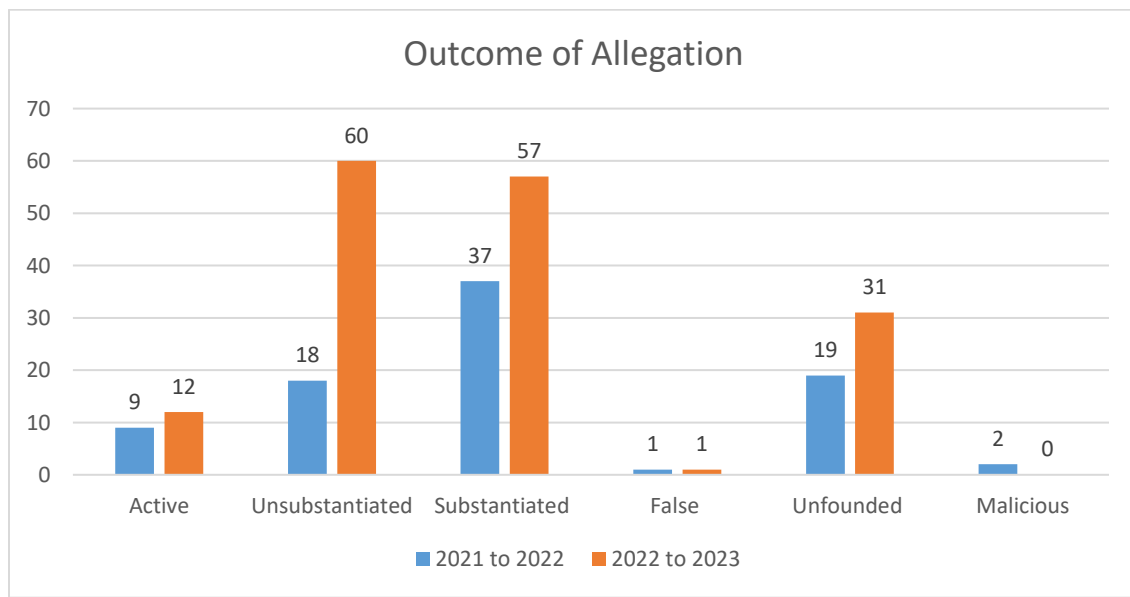
referrals for connected carers, have tended to relate more to concerns about emotional harm and neglect, typically not providing the level of care expected by foster carers and concerns about harm being caused to the child in their care.

8.4 In total 6 of these investigations for Dorset carers have resulted in an unsubstantiated outcome, 2 were unfounded and 2 were substantiated. All carers returned to panel for further consideration/oversight, regardless of the outcome.

9.0 Referral outcomes

9.1 The outcome of investigations of allegations are categorised as follows:

- Substantiated – which means there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove an allegation.
- False – 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.



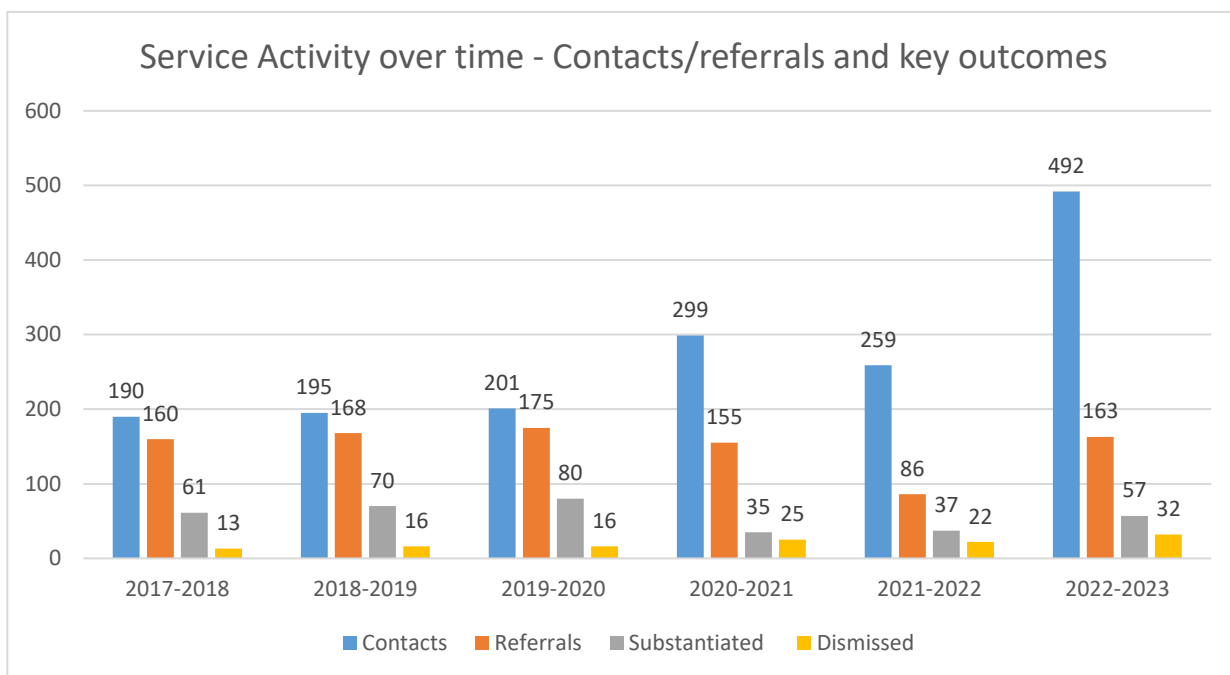
9.1 The above graph provides an overview of the outcomes of those referrals which were dealt with through the management of allegation process during 2022/2023 and compares this to 2021/2022.

9.2 This year there were a higher number of unsubstantiated outcomes, these are cases where there may be insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the concern being raised. This can be for example cases where there is one word against another and no other witnesses to corroborate either account. While the outcome itself may result in an unsubstantiated outcome, often the concerns are serious enough to warrant the oversight of the Designated Officer, and this also provides additional scrutiny from a safeguarding perspective, which benefits the employer with guidance provided around future actions to reduce risk, implement changes and learning. Although, there appears to be a higher number of Unfounded outcomes, proportionately there was actually a slight reduction in Unfounded outcomes, from 22% to 19% this year.

9.3 There was a total of 57 substantiated allegations from 163 referrals, which is around 34% of referrals concluding with a substantiated outcome, proportionately this has reduced by around 10% this year.

10.0 Service Activity

10.1 The below graph shows service activity over time.



10.2.1 The number of contacts with the service has significantly increased this year. Interestingly, the percentage of contacts that progressed to referral has remained consistent, at 33%.

11.0 Quality and Performance

11.1 The Designated Officer completes the QPAG quarterly reports and within this has identified themes and areas to focus on. Through this we have been able to identify particular provisions who are frequently referring to the designated officer and work with them alongside safeguarding standards to reduce areas of concern and risk.

11.2 The Designated Officer took part in a peer review with another local authority, which has provided some positive independent feedback. This involved sharing a case, reviewing the steps taken and identifying any areas for learning and development. Through this review, it was identified that the Designated Officer's work could have been further strengthened, by considering the support needs of the child during the process and also planning on how the child would be informed of the outcome of the management of allegations process, this is now something that is being considered within post allegations meetings.

12.0 Key Performance indicators

12.1 Below is a review of the Key Performance Indicators for the Designated Officer Service, over the last year.

Activity	Progress
An Initial Evaluation meeting should be held within 5 working days of the referral.	There have been 140 (85%) Initial Evaluation Meetings held on time out of a total of 163 this year. This is an increase of 10% compared to the previous year.
The Post-Allegation Investigation (PAIM) meeting should be held within 28 days.	158 (96%) of Post-allegation Investigation meetings have been held within the prescribed timescales out of 163. This is a slight increase from last year.
The length of time between the receipt of a contact and reaching outcome, needs to be reduced.	<p>When looking at referrals that progressed to IEM, the percentage of cases that were concluded within 4 weeks was 54% (which is an increase of 20% compared to last year), 15% were concluded within 8 weeks, 12% were concluded within 12 weeks and 12% of cases were concluded within 6 months or longer. 7% of cases that have not yet concluded and reached an outcome.</p> <p>Overall, this is an improving picture, there remain cases that cannot be concluded because of outstanding police investigations. However, there are also some provisions that take a significant length of time to conclude investigations, and this creates delay in reaching outcome.</p>

13.0 **Multi-agency Practice Development**

13.1 The Designated Officer has continued to work closely with the Safeguarding Standards advisor which has consequently strengthened Dorset LADO's oversight across the education sector in Dorset. For example, where there are complaints or concerns regarding safeguarding within schools there are at times also elements that meet the criteria for the managing allegations process and therefore this close working relationship is important. The safeguarding standards advisor provides valuable support for schools and has helped to address more broader safeguarding concerns and learning which may arise through the managing allegations process.

14.0 Training

- 14.1 The designated officer service has continued to deliver management of allegations training to schools virtually via MS Teams and this has been well received. There have been some amendments to the training presentation, and this now includes case examples which enables group participation and discussion.
- 14.2 The Designated Officer has also developed some condensed training presentations which have been delivered to a range of services and provisions, particularly providers where there has been either repeat referrals or referrals which have raised concerns about their understanding of the process or safeguarding procedures.
- 14.3 Looking to the future, there is a plan to deliver training to the army training centre, the police and sports clubs. There is also a plan to increase awareness of the Designated Officer role more broadly and among parents of children who access groups and activities in the community, to ensure that any concerns about people who are working with children are reported.

15.0 Self-employed service providers

- 15.1 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.

16.0 Professional collaboration

- 16.1 The Designated officer has met regularly with the designated officers for Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, where cross boundary issues have arisen. There has also been good communication with Designated Officers in Wiltshire and Hampshire also, alongside attending the regional southwest designated officer meetings which provides peer support.
- 16.2 The Designated officer is in regular communication with Ofsted, particularly where there have been investigations relating to early years providers and they are being invited to attend meetings and provided with copies of the minutes where appropriate.

17.0 The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: Safeguarding children with Disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings

17.1 In October 2022, a national review was undertaken into how and why a significant number of children with disabilities and complex needs came to suffer very serious abuse and neglect whilst living in three privately provided residential settings in the Doncaster area. This review is being undertaken in two phases and this phase 1 report identified that there were major failings in operation of the LADO function, resulting in allegations about the conduct of staff in the residential settings not being investigated to a satisfactory standard in Doncaster.

17.2 The review identified urgent action for all Local Authorities across the country to take, specifically:

- That the host authority LADO for each individual establishment reviews all information on any LADO referrals, complaints and concerns over the last 3 years relating to the workforce in such establishments to ensure these have been appropriately actioned.
- The host authority LADO should then contact any local authorities who currently have children placed in the establishments in their area if there are any outstanding enquiries being carried out regarding staff employed in the home.

17.3 Action was taken to address the findings of the enquiry. There was a significant amount of work and oversight by the Designated Officer of local provisions and linking in with placing authorities during this last year, much of which stemmed from this national review.

17.4 Findings from Phase 2 of this Review are to be published in April 2023 and will be included in priorities for the forthcoming year.

18. Priorities for 23/24

Action	Expected Outcome	Project Lead	Progress Update Lead	Project Completion Due Date
Capacity	Strengthen the support and cover arrangements for the Designated Officer.	Kelvin Connelly	Kelvin Connelly	Completed – we now have 2.5 post holders

				covering LADO.
Timeliness	<p>Improve the length of time, duration and through-put of cases. This will be measured by KPI:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 100% of Initial Evaluation Meetings being held within 10 days and 2. Conclusion of LADO involvement within 28 days in 85% of cases. 3. This is to be reviewed in Q3 Jan 2024 report. 	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	30.1.24
Raising awareness & professional development	<p>Review the virtual training offer and implement an ongoing evaluation framework for briefing and training through feedback being sought from training delivered across different sectors.</p>	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	30.1.24
	<p>Analyse themes and proactively identify sectors, organisations, and themes for the delivery of training to the sector to prevent harm.</p> <p>This will be achieved through Q3 report analysis of the training needs of different sectors.</p>	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	30.1.24
Professional Relationships	<p>Meetings between Fostering and LADO scheduled monthly. This</p>	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	30.4.24

	<p>is to review and evaluate referral and decision making. This is to ensure LADO and Fostering agree proportionate response and safe decision making. Annual evaluation of all referrals relating to LADO to be focus of specific report completed April 2024</p>			
Management Information	<p>Automate reporting and develop a dashboard to facilitate easier tracking of activity and management oversight.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KC to work with Chloe Grier on the development of this with proposed commencement Feb 2024 	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	30.1.24
Service Quality	<p>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.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. KC to commence this in November 2023, findings to be shared in Q3 report Jan 2024. Timetable of further auditing likely to be 6 monthly thereafter but maybe required sooner 	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	30.1.24

dependent on initial audit activity			
<p>Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New LADO spreadsheet with dedicated column for recording actions to be implemented by 3.11.23 2. Quarterly review with LADO of tracker actions to ensure progression of actions 	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattra-Hall	30.1.24
<p>Implementation of Standard Operating Manual for Dorset LADO.</p> <p>To include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of template for structuring investigations and risk assessments to assist and improve standards of employer investigations and risk assessment 2. Development of a LADO Referrals Indicator Matrix to assist with consistency of decision making 	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattra-Hall	31.12.23

	3. SOM to be approved in PPP			
External validation of the service	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO. 2. Feedback to be used for further service development. 3. Outcome to be shared in QPAG March 24 	Kelvin Connelly	Sunita Khattrra-Hall	29.2.24

19. Financial Implications

Not applicable

20. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

Not applicable

21. Well-being and Health Implications

The well-being and health of all children in Dorset is at the centre of the work undertaken by the Designated Officer, the child's voice and understanding of the impact of adult behaviour is considered at every meeting.

There is always consideration of the well-being of adults being considered by the designated officer, and the support available to them is a standard consideration as part of the meeting agenda.

22. Other Implications

None identified

23. Risk Assessment

a. HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

24. Equalities Impact Assessment

Not applicable

25. Appendices

None

26. Background Papers

None

Footnote: Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

