

Cabinet

17 December 2024

Designated Officer Annual Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr. C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

All

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, 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 2023 through to March 2024. 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: To provide understanding of the management of allegations process and the impact of Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) service.

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 2023 and 31 March 2024. The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 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 2024.
- 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.

2. The Role of the Designated Officer

- 2.1 Working Together (2023) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) 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.

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

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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).
- 2.4 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.

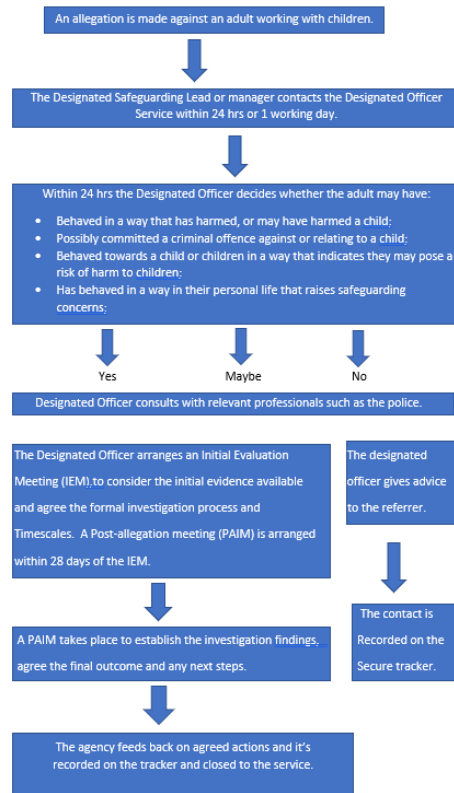
- Liaison with other local authority Designated Officers when there are cross-boundary issues, including Adult Safeguarding in Dorset when risks are linked to a role with adults.
- Maintaining confidential case records on the secure database (MOSAIC), tracking systems and the Designated Officers database
- 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.

3. Service Structure and Supervision

- 3.1 The Designated Officers are located within the Quality Assurance and Partnership Service based at County Hall, Dorchester. There are two full time Designated Officers and a further 0.5fte supplement from a Safeguarding Standards Advisor who works flexibly across both roles.
- 3.2 All three Designated Officers are qualified social workers with a background in child protection work. They are managed by a Safeguarding Education Service Manager. The creation of this role has enabled greater focus and oversight on the development of the service.
- 3.3 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. 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.

4. Allegation Process

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

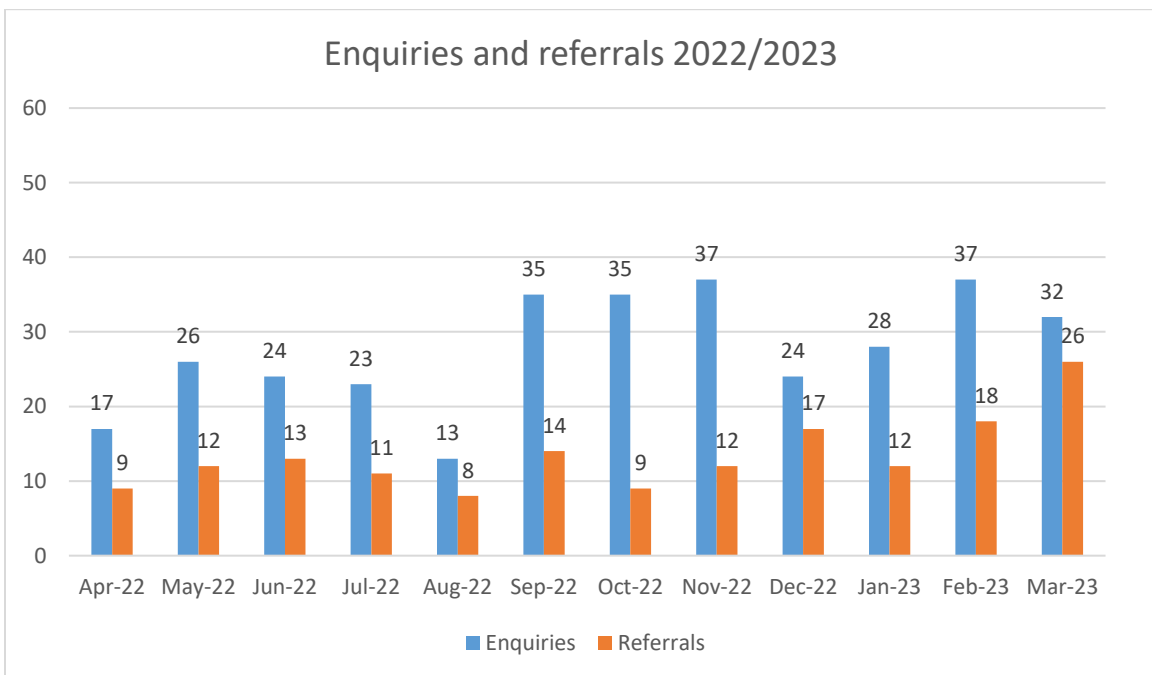
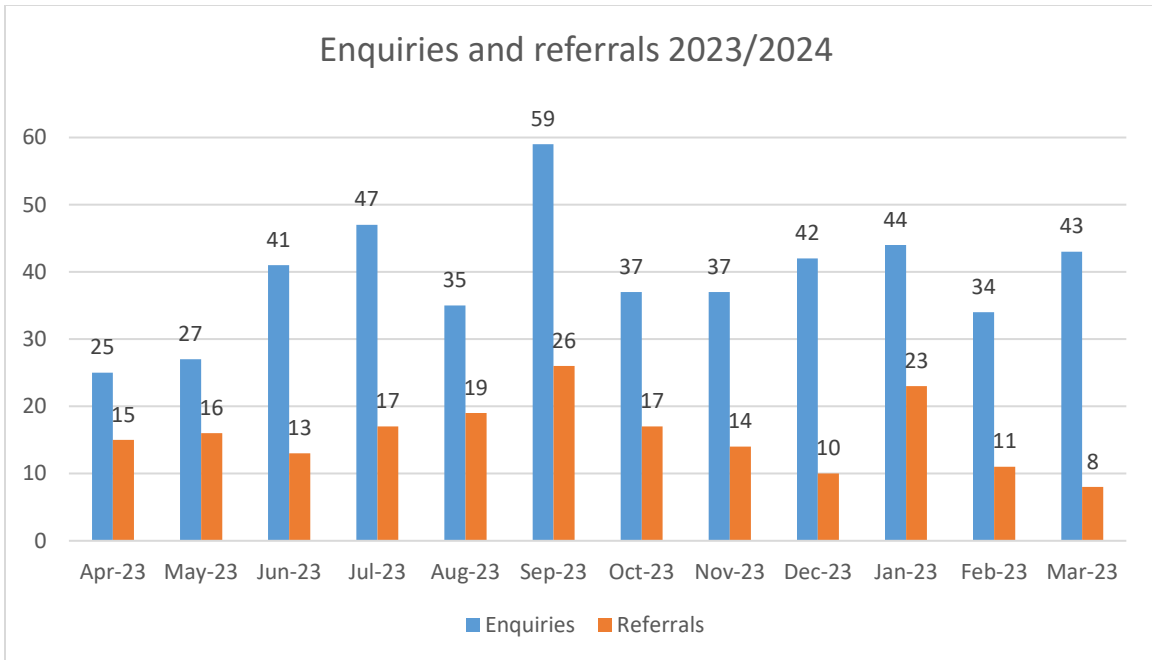


4.2 All referrals continue to be recorded on our case management system (MOSAIC) where details of allegations, minutes of meetings and outcomes are recorded, including where necessary referrals to DBS. We also record all contacts on mosaic, these are referrals that do not progress to an Initial Evaluation 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.

4.3 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.

5. Enquiries and Referrals (2023/24)

- 5.1 There were 658 contacts with the Designated Officer Service during 2023-2024, which marks another increase compared to the 492 contacts during 2022-2023. The Designated Officers have provided training to a variety of different agencies, and this has likely contributed to the increase in people seeking advice and guidance from the service.
- 5.2 Out of the 658 contacts with the service during 2023-2024, 189 progressed to referrals and Initial Evaluation Meetings which is around 28% and is fairly consistent with previous years in terms of the conversion rate of around 30%. The graph below shows the enquiries and referrals to the Designated Officer during 2023-2024. As can be seen below the highest number of contacts with the service was in September, where there was a total of 85 contacts with the service, 26 of which progressed to IEM and further work. April was the quietest month, with only 40 contacts with the service in this month. However, it should be noted that this figure is nearly double the number of contacts received in August 2022, which was the quietest month in 2022-2023, so the demand for support and guidance regarding allegations/concerns about staff continues to increase.
- 5.3 In previous years the Designated Officer Service has received fewer referrals during periods where the schools are closed, which has been linked to the high number of referrals received from and about those working in education. However, during the 2023-2024 reporting period, there continued to be a high number of referrals/contacts during the month of August despite the schools being closed during this month. This is likely due to the impact of training having been delivered to a broader range of employers and agencies.

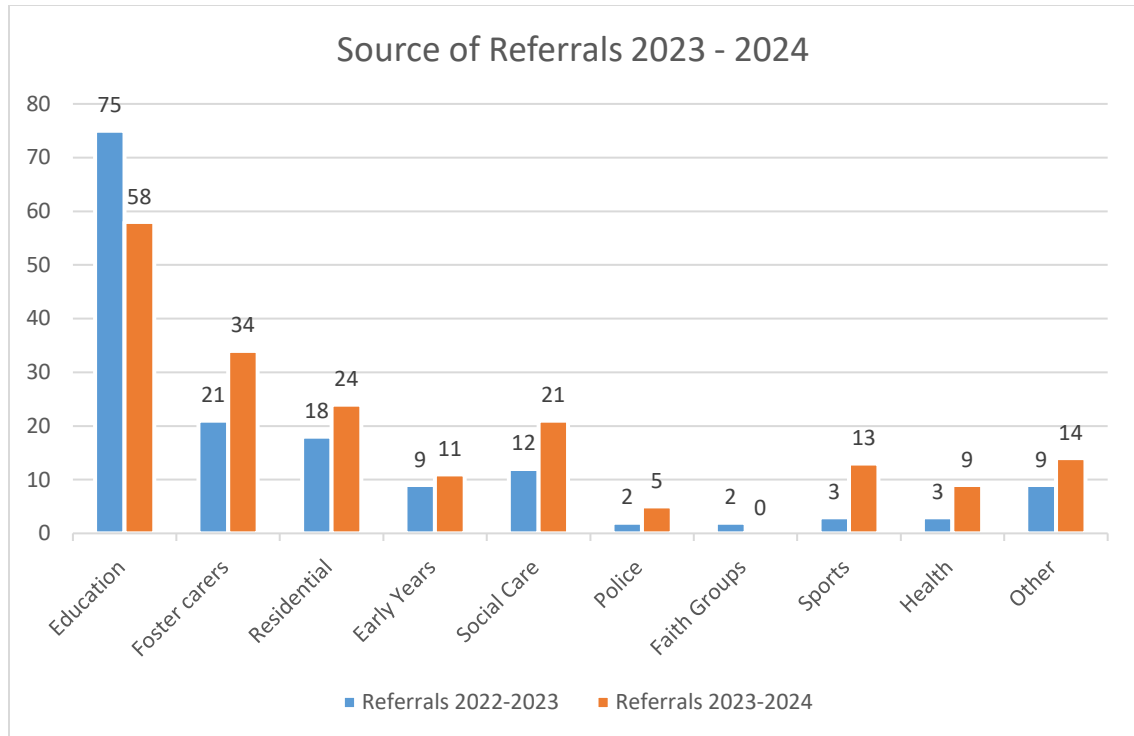


6. Source of referrals:

6.1 The below chart shows the agency where the adult was working when the allegation was made about them. The number of referrals relating to those employed in education was 58 this is 30% of all referrals, which although the highest, is a reduction proportionately compared to 2022/2023 where those working in education represented just under 50% of all referrals.

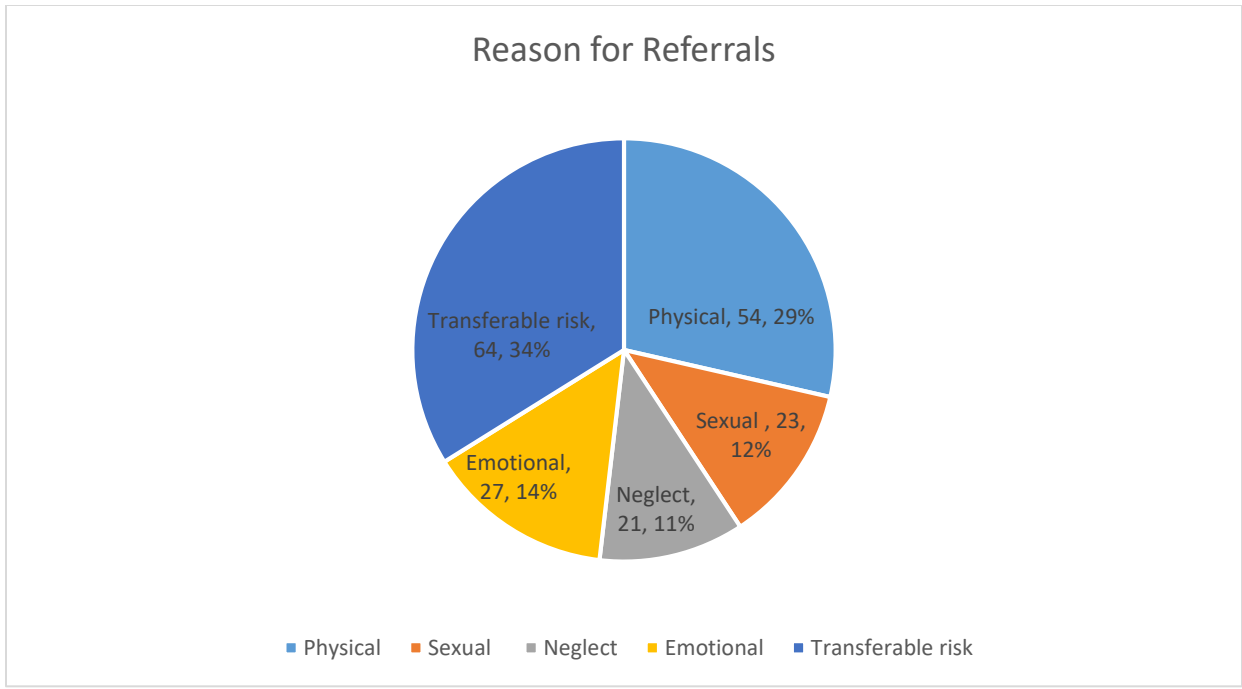
The LADO service has seen an increase in referrals from a more diverse range of settings. For example, referrals relating to people who work in the social care and fostering, indicating an impact on referrals through training.

- 6.2 While it is encouraging that we have received a higher number of referrals for those working in the sports sector, the figures remain quite low considering the number of sports clubs/groups that are operating within Dorset. There continues to be some barriers to hearing about concerns relating to sports activities and this is largely because many clubs are set up by self-employed individuals, with no external oversight. Some attempts were made during 2023-2024 to link in with sports clubs locally, to offer/deliver training but there was limited response to the Designate Officers attempts to engage businesses locally.
- 6.3 During 2023-2024 the LADO service has been working on strengthening relationships with the Police and meeting with them regularly. The Designated Officers have been focusing on two areas, improving awareness amongst the police force of the role of the LADO and developing links with professional standards within the police. The Designated Officers delivered five online training sessions to approximately 75 police officers, which formed part of their continuing professional development, this focused on the role and how they could support our work. The Designated Officers relationships with police professional standards is an area for ongoing development, while there has been an increase in the number of referrals relating to police officers during 2023-2024, the figures still appear to be fairly low.



7. Reason for referrals

- 7.1 Between 2023-2024 the most common reason for referral relates to transference of risk, 34%. This is where there are concerns about someone's behaviour outside of the workplace that may present a risk to children they work with. This is a change from previous years, where most referrals have related to allegations of physical harm. There appears to be greater understanding regarding transferable risk amongst our colleagues now, specifically in the police and social care and it is likely that training has contributed to this increase. The number of referrals relating physical abuse remains high, with 29% of referrals relating to this category. Physical abuse is easier to identify, and this is reflected in the referral rate.
- 7.2 For 2023-2024, Emotional Harm, Neglect and Sexual Abuse have all had a similar number of referrals. There has been an increase in those referrals related to allegations of Emotional harm, from 9% last year to 14% this year. This is an improvement as this has been an under reported area and something that can be overlooked in terms of child impact. Examples of this could include singling a child out and using derogatory language, shouting and swearing at children who they are responsible for.



8. Foster carers

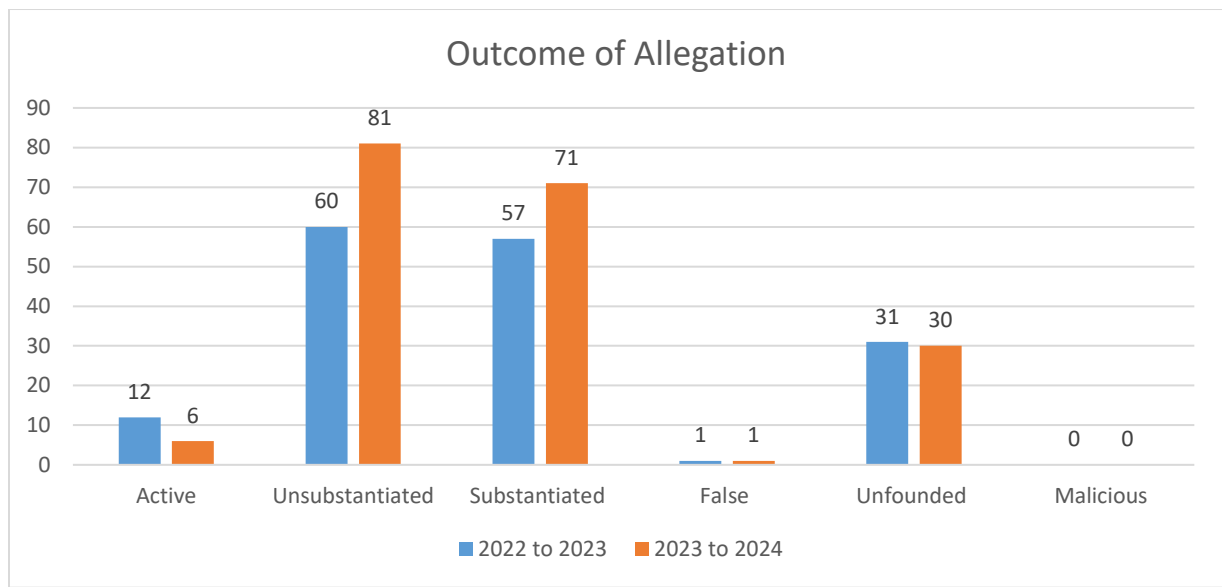
- 8.1 There is a clear process for managing allegations relating to foster carers. The Designated Officer has case management responsibility for all carers that live within Dorset; whether they are employed by another local authority but reside within our area, an independent fostering agency or Dorset Council. In looking specifically at those carers employed by Dorset Council, during this last year we have had 22 referrals to the service which progressed under the management of allegations process. This is a significant increase compared to last year where there were only 10. In looking at the reason for referrals to the Designated Officer relating to foster carers, the most common reasons relate to physical and emotional harm, some of which have related to non-recent allegations.
- 8.2 Of the 22 referrals that progressed under the management of allegations process, 8 were Substantiated, 13 were Unsubstantiated and 1 was Unfounded. Following this process each of these carers have been presented back at foster panel for review of their approval.
- 8.3 The Designated Officers have provided in-person training on the management of allegations process to the fostering team and support has been provided in how to respond to and manage allegations about carers. The Designated Officers and the Fostering Management Team meet on a regular basis to discuss cases that are being managed under the

management of allegations process and look to identify areas of learning for carers.

9. 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.



9.2 The above graph provides an overview of the outcomes of those referrals which were dealt with through the management of allegation process during 2023/2024 and how this compares to 2022/2023.

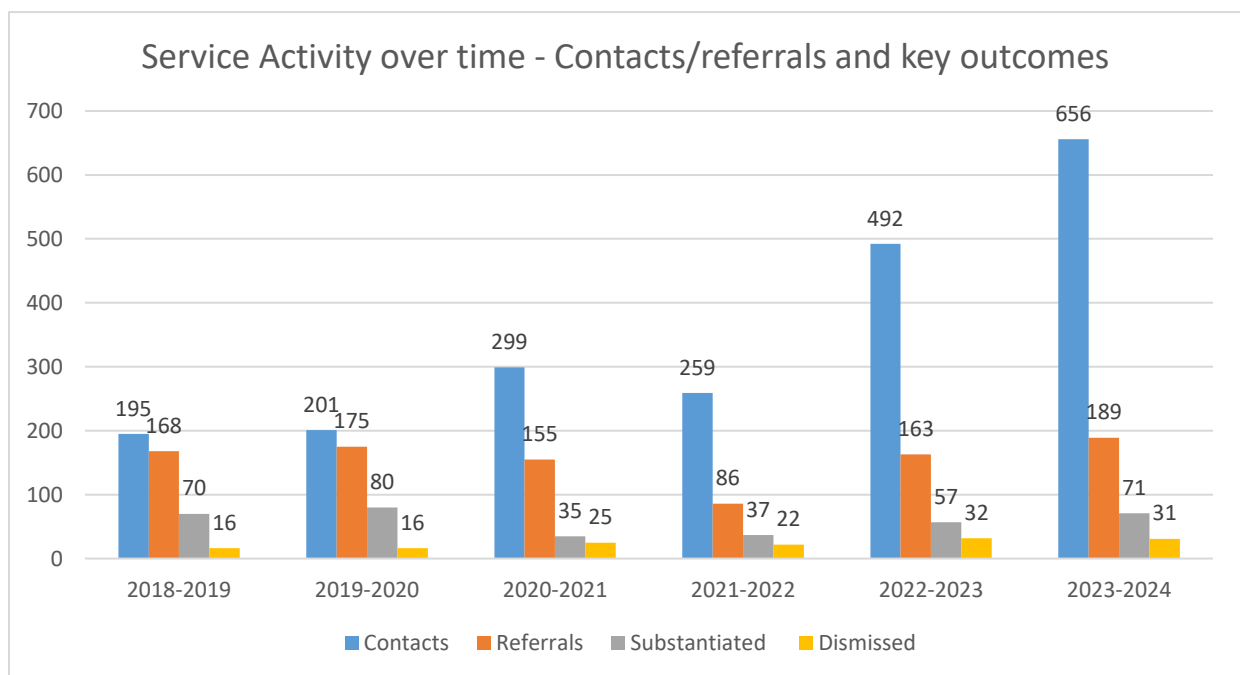
9.3 For the reporting year 2023-2024 there were a higher number of unsubstantiated outcomes 42% compared to 35% last year, these are cases where there may be insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the concern being raised. This can be for example cases where there is one

word against another and no other witnesses to corroborate either account, often these cases require the LADO oversight of the investigation because of the nature of the allegation, yet it may be difficult to determine what actually occurred.

- 9.4 There was a total of 71 Substantiated allegations from 189 referrals, which is around 37% of referrals concluding with a Substantiated outcome, this is a slight increase compared to last year, around 3%.
- 9.5 It is worth noting that during 2022-2023 there were 12 cases awaiting an outcome at the time of completing the report, whereas only 6 cases this reporting year 2023-2024 have not yet been concluded and these are all police investigations.

10. Service Activity

- 10.1 The below graph shows service activity over time.
- 10.2 The chart shows that the number of contacts with the service continues to increase, not just in terms of referrals that progress under the process, but also in terms of seeking advice and guidance on concerns being raised about staff. While there has been an increase in contact with the service the conversion rate in terms of those cases that progress under the LADO process remains around 30%, albeit this has reduced slightly compared to last year.



11. Quality and Performance

Action	Expected Outcome	Update
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 3. This is to be reviewed in Q3 Jan 2024 report. 	<p>1. The timeliness of IEM's is being reported on in performance data. Performance is achieving 94% success in completion of IEM in 10 days.</p> <p>2. The Corius report for the LADO needs further attention to enable the data to be reliable for % conclusion of LADO involvement within 28 days.</p>
Professional Relationships	Meetings between Fostering and LADO scheduled monthly.	This is now embedded and has reinforced the close relationships between the two service areas
Management Information	Automate reporting and develop a dashboard to facilitate easier tracking of activity and management oversight.	This is now operational however needs further work to ensure that the data being produced is reliable.
Service Quality	Introduce a regular programme of auditing to understand quality of service being offered and to identify	Auditing undertaken in Q4 of the work of two of the team, positive observations of practice.

	themes to share with multi-agency partners to inform learning and development.	
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12. 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 10 working days of the referral.	On average over the reporting period of April 23 to March 24 we met this target 94% of time.
The Post-Allegation Investigation (PAIM) meeting should be held within 28 days.	The majority of cases have a PAIM held within the 28days. Exception to this is usually in relation to police investigations that may take an extended period of time due to further investigatory work, such as forensics on devises.
The length of time between the receipt of a contact and reaching outcome, needs to be reduced.	<p>Progress has been made in this area.</p> <p>122 referrals concluded within 28 days which is 64.5%, an increase from last year which was 54%.</p> <p>A further 30 concluded within 8 weeks (15.8%).</p> <p>12 concluded within 12 weeks (6.3%)</p> <p>Another 12 concluded with 6 months (6.3%)</p> <p>7 cases took over 6 months to concluded and a further 6 have yet to be concluded, these relate to ongoing police investigations.</p> <p>Overall, this is an improving picture.</p>

13. Multi-agency Practice Development

13.1 The Designated Officer has continued to work closely with the Safeguarding Standards advisors. 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. 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.

14.2 The Designated Officer has also developed some shorter training presentations which have been delivered to a range of services and provisions, particularly providers where there have been either repeat referrals or referrals which have raised concerns about their understanding of the process or safeguarding procedures.

14.3 During 2023-2024, alongside regular training delivered to our education colleagues, we have also delivered management of allegations training to; residential services, police, social care teams, the military and fostering. There has been a mix of some in-person sessions and some online training, with positive feedback having been received.

15. 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. However, referrals of this nature have been received this past year and have been managed through the Designated Officer communicating directly with the subject giving advice and guidance where necessary to reduce risk.

16. Professional collaboration

16.1 The Designated officer has developed good links with the designated officers for Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, Wiltshire and Somerset where cross boundary issues have arisen. There has also been good communication with Designated Officers Hampshire also. The regular Southwest Regional LADO meetings also support those links and also provides some valuable 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. Priorities for 2024-2025

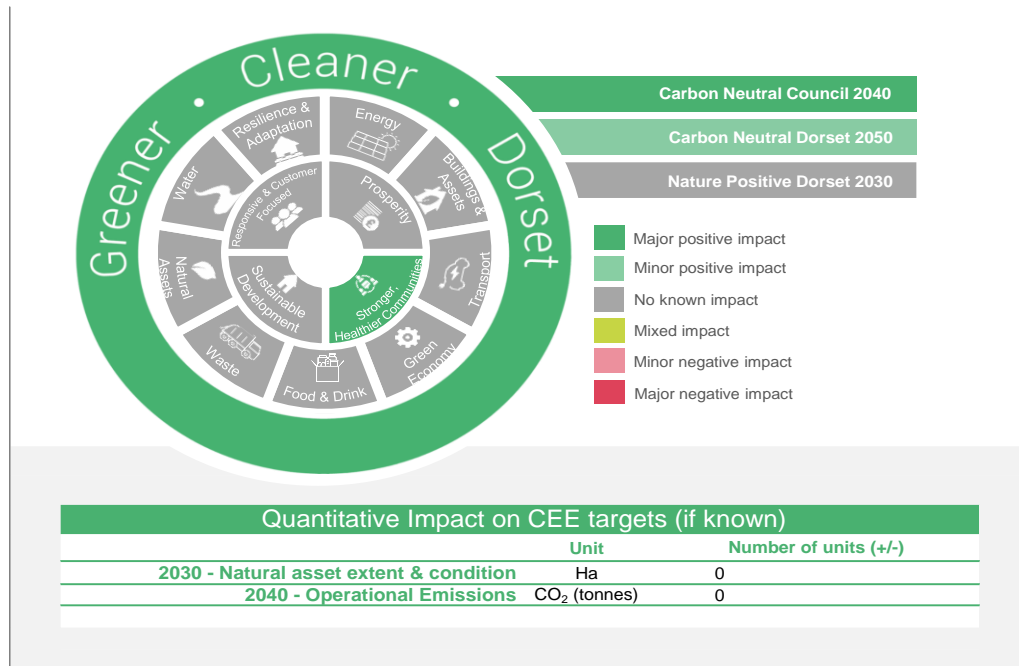
Action	Expected Outcome	Project Lead	Due Date
Review and update referral form.	Creation of a more detailed referral form that will seek all of the information that is needed by the designated officer This will free up designated officers time, chasing for required information.	Martha	31/01/25
Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness &	The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training	Martha (supported by Lynne and Laura)	Booked in by 31/12/24

professional development	Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer.		Delivered to all teams by 28/02/25
External validation of the service	Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO. Feedback to be used for further service development	New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25)	Booked in by 30/04/25 Audit undertaking might not occur to 25/26.
Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented.	Further work required to embed this action with the team.	New Service Manager.	Embedded by 30/04/25

18. Financial Implications

Not applicable

19. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications



20. Well-being and Health Implications

- 20.1 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.
- 20.2 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.

21. Other Implications

None identified

22. Risk Assessment

The risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

23. Equalities Impact Assessment

Not applicable

24. Appendices

None

25. 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.

26. Report Sign Off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)