

# Corporate Parenting Board

11 December 2025

LADO Annual Report April 2024 – March 2025

Choose an item.

## For Information Only

### Cabinet Member:

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

### Local Councillor(s):

### Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

**Report author and job title:** Megan Cameron-Brown, Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships

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### Statutory Authority:

**Report status:** Public Choose an item.

## 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 2024 and 31 March 2025. 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 All agencies have a duty to contact the Designated Officer directly or make a referral through the Family Support and Advice Line if there is a child protection concern or an allegation made that a criminal offence may have been committed or related to a child.

2.4 Allegations are considered in the context of five main categories of abuse: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and Transferable Risk (safeguarding concerns arising in a person's private life).

2.5 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 Family Support and Advice Line, Multi-Agency partners, Children's Services Teams, and Police when child protection or criminal 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.

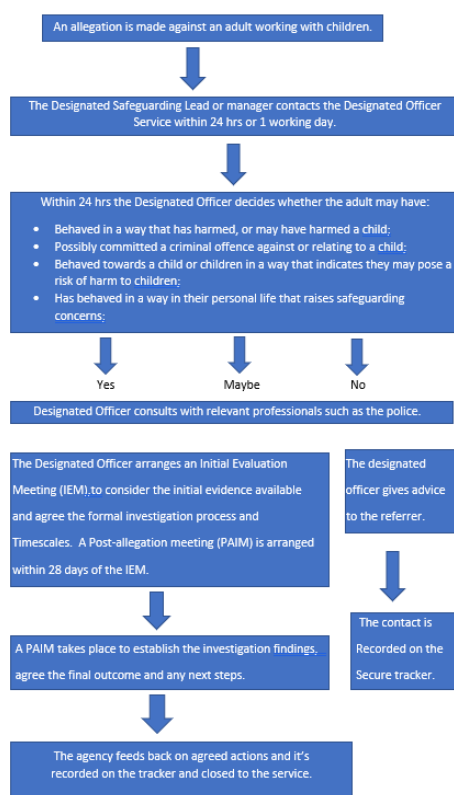
### **3 Service Structure and Supervision**

- 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 Standards Service Manager. We currently have an interim service manager covering this post, following the permanent service manager moving roles.

- 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.

## 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.



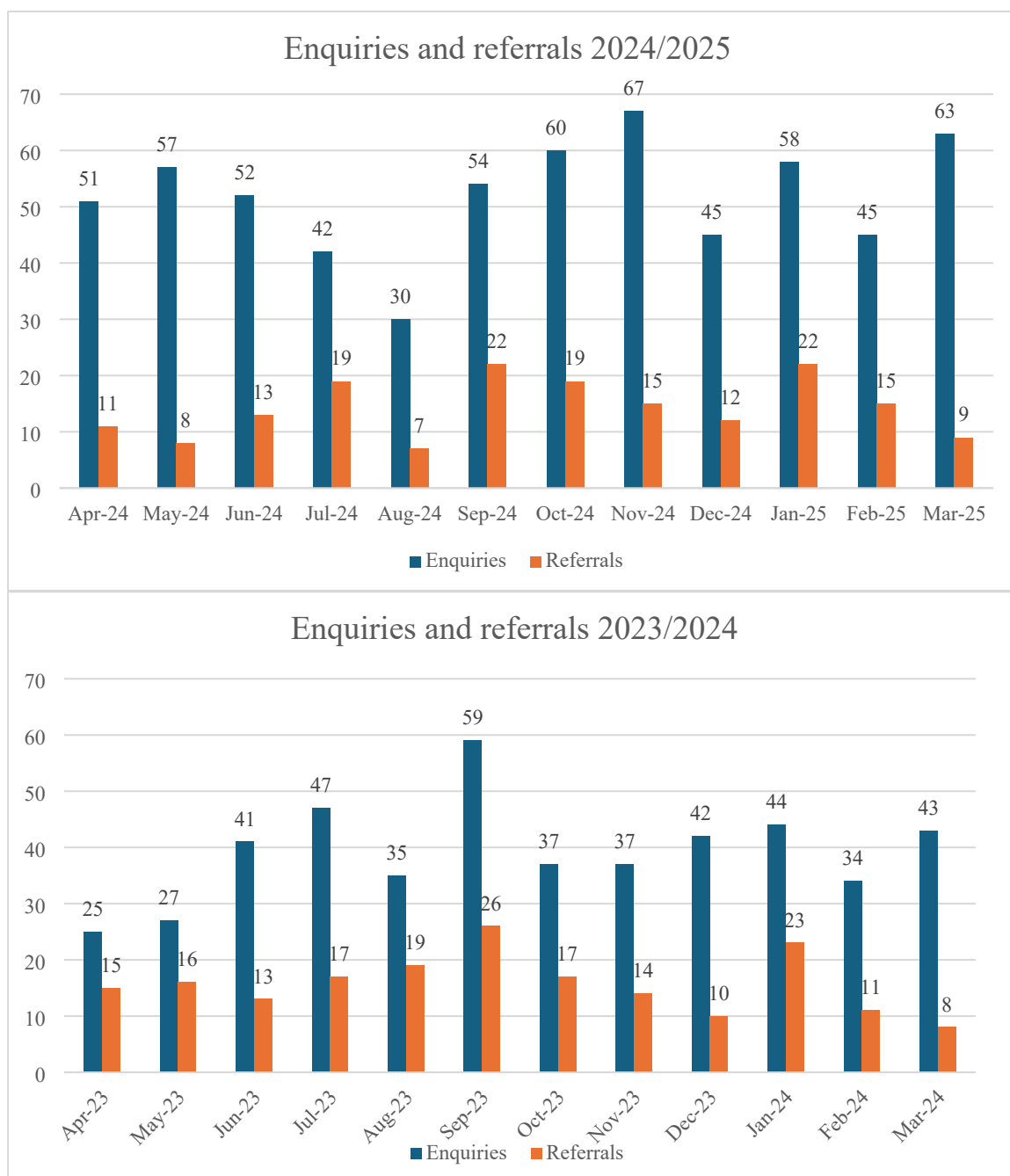
- 4.2 All referrals continue to be recorded on our case management system (MOSAIC) where details of allegations, minutes of meetings and outcomes are recorded, including where necessary referrals to DBS. We also record all contacts on mosaic; these are referrals that do not progress to an Initial Evaluation 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.
- 4.4 The Ofsted report commented on police attendance at allegation meetings. We do have good police attendance and engagement when police investigations are being led by the Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT), Police Online Investigation Team (POLIT) or the Professional Standards Unit. In cases involving transferable risk—such as domestic abuse, sexual offences against adults, rape, and fraud—we need to see enhanced attendance and engagement by the investigating police officer. While we recognise these offices work shift work and cases can take a long time to reach an outcome, increasing the engagement of police in the allegation meetings will significantly support timely and informed decision-making and conclusions of the allegations process, ensuring safety for our children.

## 5 Enquiries and Referrals (2023/24)

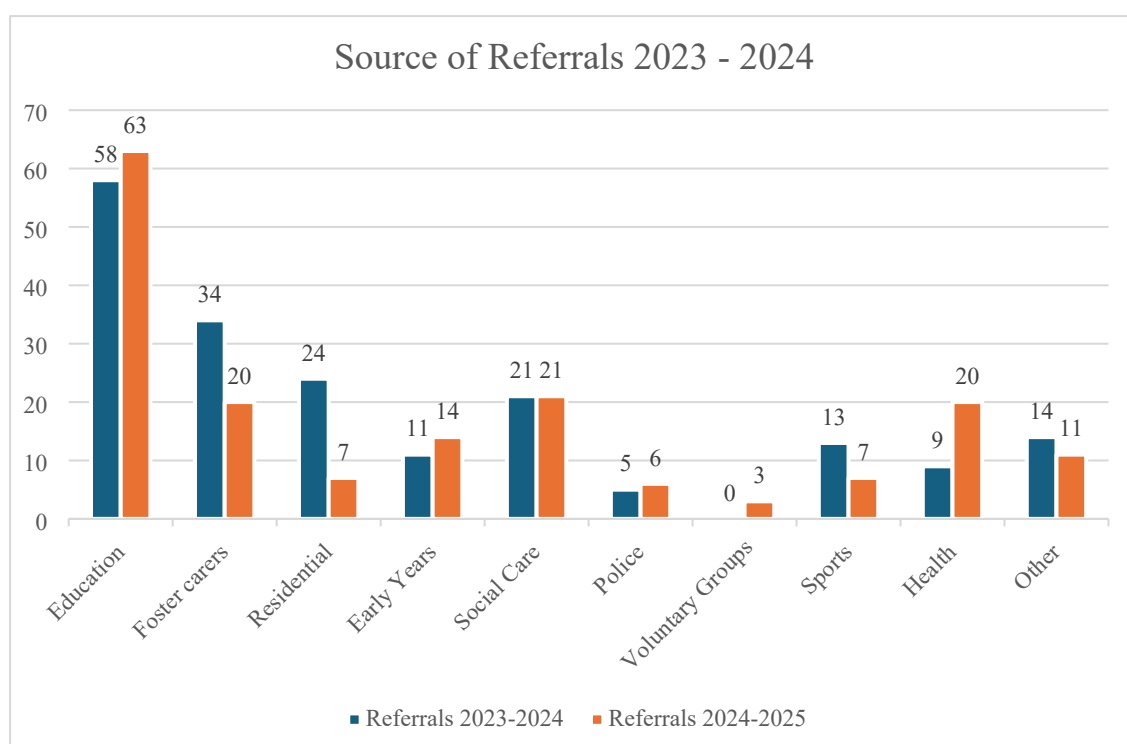
- 5.1 There were 796 contacts with the Designated Officer Service during 2024-2025, which marks another increase compared to the 658 contacts during 2023-2024. The Designated Officers continue to provide training to a variety of different agencies, and this has likely contributed to the increase in people seeking advice and guidance from the service.
- 5.2 Out of the 796 contacts with the service during 2024-2025, 172 progressed to referrals and Initial Evaluation Meetings which is around 22%, this is slightly lower than previous years which had a conversion rate of around 30%. The graph below shows the enquiries and referrals to the Designated Officer during 2024-2025. As can be seen below the highest number of contacts with the service was in November, where there was a total of sixty-seven contacts with the service, fifteen of which progressed to referral. August was the quietest month, with only thirty contacts with the service in this month. However, it should be noted that this figure is still higher than April 23, which was the quietest month in 2022-2023, so the demand for support and guidance regarding allegations/concerns about staff continues to increase.



## 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 sixty-three this is 37% of all referrals, this is a slight increase from last year, though within expected numbers, as our children spend the most time at school. This is still lower than 2022-23 where education represented just under 50% of all referrals. The LADO service continues to see referrals from a diverse range of settings. Indicating an impact on referrals through training.

- 6.2 The number of referrals for those working in the sports sector, has dropped slightly from 23/24. The figures remain low considering the number of sports clubs and 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.
- 6.3 Referrals from faith groups remains at 0. This indicates we are not reaching Faith groups when it comes to training regarding the managing of allegations.
- 6.4 The number of referral against police officers remain low, despite a slight increase in 2024-2025. The Designated Officers relationships with police professional standards is an area for ongoing development.

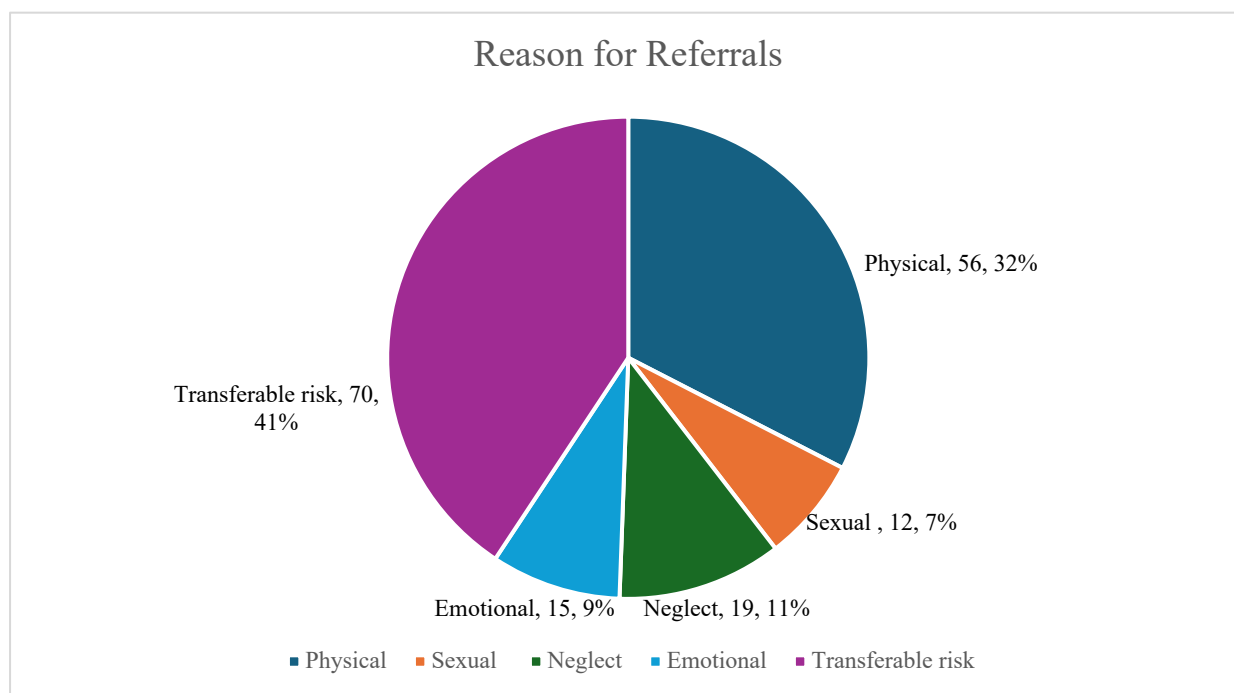


## 7 Reason for referrals

- 7.1 Between 2024-2025 the most common reason for referral relates to transference of risk, 41%. 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 the same as 2023-2025, where transferable risk was also the highest reason for a referral. This would continue to indicate that there is a 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 32% of referrals relating to this category. Physical abuse is easier to identify, and this is reflected in the referral rate.

- 7.2 For 2024-2025, Emotional Harm, Neglect and Sexual Abuse have all seen a slight decrease in the number of referrals.



## 8 Foster carers

- 8.1 In 2024-2025 we had twenty referrals regarding foster carers living in Dorset. The Designated Officer has case management responsibility for all carers that live within Dorset, even if they are foster carers not employed by Dorset Council. In looking specifically at those carers employed by Dorset Council, during this last year we have had seventeen referrals to the service which progressed under the management of allegations process. This is slight decrease on last year.
- 8.2 Of the seventeen referrals that progressed under the management of allegations process, eight were Substantiated, eight were Unsubstantiated and one was Unfounded. Following this process those foster carers that were substantiated have been presented back at foster panel for review of their approval.
- 8.3 Allegation referrals concerning foster carers who care for Dorset children but reside outside the county are managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in the foster carer's home local authority. The child's allocated

Dorset social worker is responsible for ensuring that any such allegations are appropriately overseen by the external LADO. If there is any uncertainty regarding the decisions or actions taken by the external LADO, the Dorset social worker may seek guidance from the Dorset LADO service. In such cases, the Dorset LADO will liaise directly with the external LADO to support resolution and ensure appropriate oversight. Where deemed necessary and appropriate, a Dorset LADO may also attend allegation meetings convened by the external LADO to support the process and advocate for the child's best interests.

- 8.4 The Designated Officers and the fostering management team continue to 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:

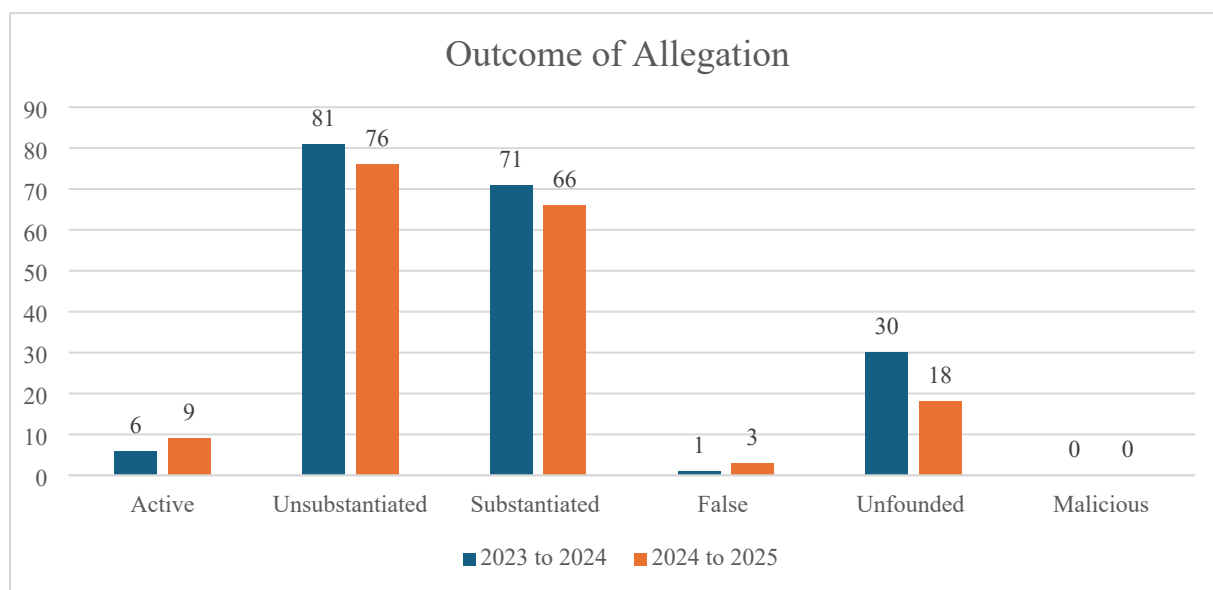
**Substantiated** – which means there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove an allegation.

**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 2024/2025 and how this compares to 2023/2024.

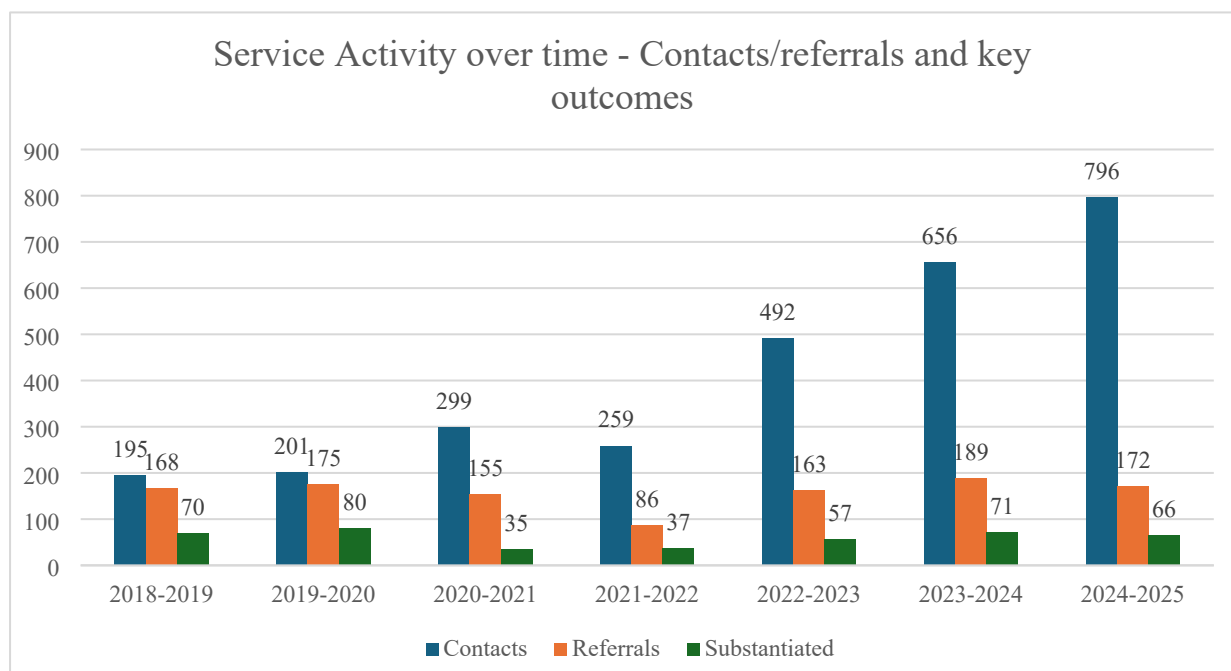
9.3 For the reporting year 2024-2025 all outcome areas have decreased on last year's numbers. We have completed the year with a slight increase of active cases still open, these are police investigations, which can take some time to conclude.

9.4 There was a total of 66 Substantiated allegations from 172 referrals, which is around 38% of referrals concluding with a Substantiated outcome, this is consistent with last year, which was 37%.

## 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 between 20 and 30%.



## 11 Key Performance indicators

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

### Activity

An Initial Evaluation meeting should be held within ten working days of the referral.

The Post-Allegation Investigation (PAIM) meeting should be held within 28 days.

### Progress

On average over the reporting period of April 24 to March 25 we met this target 96% of time.

The majority of cases have a PAIM held within the 28 days. 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 devices.

## 12 **Multi-agency Practice Development**

- 12.1 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.

## 13 **Training**

- 13.1 The designated officer service has continued to deliver management of allegations training to schools virtually via MS Teams and this has been well received.
- 13.2 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.
- 13.3 During 2024-2025, 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.

## 14 **Self-employed service providers**

- 14.1 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.

## 15 Professional collaboration

- 15.1 The Designated officer has developed good links with the designated officers in our neighbouring local authorities. The regular Southwest Regional LADO meetings also support those links and also provides some valuable peer support.
- 15.2 The Designated officer continues to be in in regular communication with Ofsted, particularly where there have been investigations relating to early years providers or child minders.

## 16 Updates on priorities set 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 | Martha                                   | <b>Completed and embedded.</b>                        |
|                                                                                             | This will free up designated officers time, chasing for required information.                                            |                                          |                                                       |
| Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness & professional development | The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training                                                    | Martha<br>(supported by Lynne and Laura) | <b>Not completed carried to 2025-2026 priorities.</b> |
|                                                                                             | Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer.                                       |                                          |                                                       |

|                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                       |                                       |                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| External validation of the service                                                           | Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO.<br><br>Feedback to be used for further service development | New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25) | <b>Carried forward to 2025-2026 due to neighbouring LA availability.</b> |
| Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented. | Further work required to embed this action with the team.                                                                             | New Service Manager.                  | <b>Not completed carried to 2025-2026 priorities.</b>                    |

## 17. Priorities for 2025-2026

| Action                                                                                      | Expected Outcome                                                                                                                                                | Project Lead                                 | Due Date                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Continue to deliver training bespoke training to raise awareness & professional development | The newly formed family help teams to receive LADO awareness training<br><br>Family Help colleagues will understand what meets LADO threshold and how to refer. | Martha<br><br>(supported by Lynne and Laura) | Dec 2025                |
| External validation of the service                                                          | Regional partner to be invited to undertake audit activity of Dorset LADO.<br><br>Feedback to be used for further service development                           | New Service Manager (starts 06/01/25)        | 2025-2026.<br>Date TBC. |

|                                                                                              |                                                                                                         |                               |                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Develop a system for tracking that recommendations following investigations are implemented. | Further work required to embed this action with the team.                                               | New Service Manager.          | Dec 2025                                                           |
| Reviewing and updating process for evaluation meetings.                                      | To have a more streamlined process and less meetings for the LADO service.                              | Head of QA with LADO Service. | Currently Trialling new process. New process embedded by Dec 2025. |
| Creating a regular internal audit process for the LADO service.                              | To regularly quality assure our thresholds and process.                                                 | Head of QA and Interim SM.    | Embedded by Dec 2025                                               |
| Increased attendance by police for all relevant allegation meetings.                         | Police attend and engage in the allegation meeting for all LADO cases that have met criminal threshold. | Interim SM and Head of QA     | Improved by November 2025                                          |

## **18. Alternative options considered**

18.1 Not applicable.

## **19 Legal considerations**

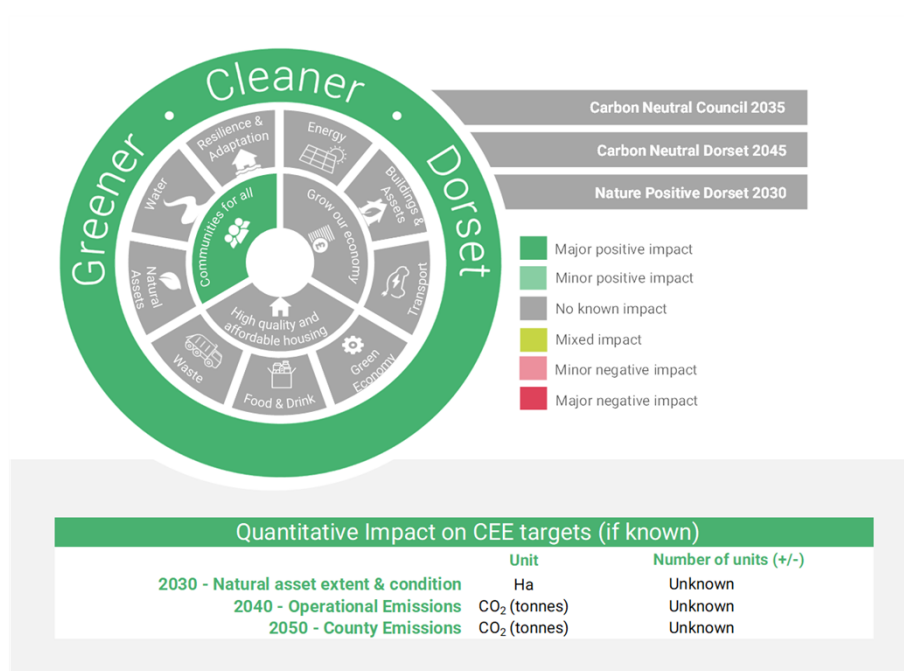
19.1 Not applicable. Statutory Report.

## **20. Financial implications**

20.1 The LADO services is embedded within the children services budget.

## 21. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

### 21.1



## 22. Well-being and health implications

22.1 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 the staff and volunteers behaviour of said organisation is considered at every meeting.

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

22.3 The wellbeing of the LADO's dealing with what can be complex allegations is managed via regular supervision and support from their service manager and head of service. Staff also have access to Dorset Council's wellbeing offer.

## 23. Other implications

23.1 None

## 24. Risk implications

24.1 There is no decision needing to be made, this report is for information only. No risk.

**25. Equalities**

- 25.1 The LADO service plays an essential role in promoting equality by ensuring safeguarding concerns are managed consistently across all sectors and professional groups working with children. Through its commitment to fair and proportionate investigation processes, the service helps protect both children and professionals, ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, role, or sector.

**26. Appendices**

- 26.1 Appendix 1: Dorset LADO Annual Report 24.25

**27. Background papers**

- 27.1 None.

**28. Report sign-off**

- 28.1 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)