



**Somerset
Council**

**Allegations Management Annual
Report**

2022 – 2023

**Local Authority Designated Officers
Service**

Organisation	Somerset Council
Title	Allegations Management Annual Report
Author	LADO service
Date	2022 - 2023

Local Authority Designated Officer Service

The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) service is to be involved in the management and oversight of allegations of harm against people who work with children in a paid or voluntary capacity.

Any allegation or concern that an employee or volunteer 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 in a way that indicates the person is not suitable to work with children.

For this report the above points will be referred to as the 'criteria' (when to notify the LADO).

All notifications are sent to Somerset Direct; the initial point of contact for the public and professionals to report child protection and welfare concerns. This ensures that allegations against people who work with children are not dealt with in isolation by Children's Social Care and / or the Police and that a co-ordinated approach is taken to ensure the safety of children, and to ensure their welfare needs are identified and met.

What has been achieved?

The service managed 747 (570 in 2021/22) notifications of allegations during 2022/23¹ consisting of ²:

- 261 allegations of physical abuse (35% of all allegations, increase of 2% on previous year)
- 132 allegations of sexual abuse (18% of all allegations, same percentage as last year)
- 232 allegations of neglect (in duty of care) / inappropriate behaviour (31% of all allegations, decrease of 1% from last year)
- 122 allegations of emotional abuse (16% of all allegations, increase of 3% from last year)

There has been a year-on-year increase³ in the number of notifications being managed by the LADO Service in Somerset. By comparison, the Gloucestershire LADO Service reported 968 contacts. However, this is not a direct comparison as Gloucestershire log all contacts within their service, which may also include Ofsted requests for information whereas Somerset's figures only consider the number of notifications made. The Devon LADO service received 884 notifications and an additional 432 contacts for consultation.

In 86% of notifications⁴, the statutory timescale of one working day to report concerns to the LADO was met. This is a 5% decrease on last year, whereby 91% of notifications were made within the statutory timescale of one working day. Comparative data was requested from LADO services both regionally and nationally in relation to this statistic, however, feedback indicates this data is not available either not routinely reported on or not currently available.

¹ See Appendix 1

² See Appendix 2

³ See Appendix 1

⁴ See Appendix 3

There is appropriate challenge where the timescale is not met. On occasions there can be legitimate reasons for an allegation not being reported within one working day and therefore it is unlikely to ever reach 100%. For instance, the organisation may choose to discuss the alleged incident with the child's social worker before notifying the LADO Service. This would allow them to consider additional details and provide context specific to the individual child and their needs. The organisation itself may not consider an incident to meet the criteria, whereas a partner organisation/ agency working with the same child who are also aware of the matter may challenge this and prompt a notification to be made.

Number of Notifications by Organisation

The emphasis of the LADO Service is very much immersed in managing adults who work with children and young people in either a paid or voluntary capacity⁵, who may present as a risk to children and young people in their experiences outside the family home. Working collaboratively with partner agencies, in a joined-up approach, ensures active oversight of the investigative processes to address concerns which is integral to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

The highest number of notifications has been made by schools; specifically, academies and independent schools. Compared with last year, the LADO Service has seen an increase of 38 notifications from academies and an increase of 41 notifications from independent schools. Maintained schools remained steady with 65 notifications being made last year and 64 this year.

The number of notifications from residential care arrangements remains unchanged from last year at 172.

⁵ See Appendix 5

Training, Development and Promotion

Training and development are essential to support partner agencies in complying with timescales. The LADO Service attends briefing sessions with registered managers of children's homes and shares updates with the education safeguarding team for dissemination to designated safeguarding leads across Somerset. Furthermore, the managing allegations procedures is covered in the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) child protection and advanced child protection training which is accessible to Designated Safeguarding Leads, Police, Early Years professionals and Social Workers to educate and promote LADO statutory frameworks and timescales.

Outcomes from Investigation Processes

When considering outcomes from investigation processes, last year 80 cases were closed as substantiated, which equates to 13% of all notifications received ⁶. 64 cases were closed as unsubstantiated, which equates to 10% of all notifications received. A high number of notifications (58%)⁷ have been assessed as not meeting the LADO criteria. This indicates the need to support our partner agencies to better understand the managing allegations procedure and the application of the criteria.

To offer additional training and support, the LADO service has developed a 'managing allegations' session which has been rolled out to the SSCP as part of its child protection training. A recorded version of this training has been shared with the Learning and Development Team who are developing a TLC (The Learning Centre) page for Somerset Council staff to access which gives an oversight of the Allegation Management process. Once this has been finalised on The Learning Centre, staff across the Somerset Council can access a virtual session to support their understanding of the LADO service, criteria and when to make a notification. Alongside the virtual support, the LADO service has increased the promotional and

⁶ See Appendix 6

⁷ See Appendix 4

training sessions offered to partner agencies, including independent fostering agencies, residential settings, and education settings.

Last year the LADO Service provided training and promotion internally within social workers' CPD sessions, County Managers meetings, and to individual teams across the workforce. The LADO Service has supported Somerset Council commissioned services such as Homes and Horizons.

The LADO Service attends an hour's session with Local Authority foster carers as part of the safer care training to provide an overview of the allegations management process. Within these sessions the LADO provides support with how to create a safer caring environment for foster carers and the children and young people in their care. The LADO Service is committed to providing a further 6 sessions with Local Authority foster carers across the year.

Timescales for conclusion

The statutory guidance requires that all notifications are resolved as quickly as possible consistent with a fair and thorough investigation. To this end, a key aspect of the role of LADO is to be involved in the management and oversight of all notifications ensuring that the processes followed by agencies and organisations are completed quickly, and unnecessary delays are avoided.

The following target timescales outlined in the statutory guidance for school notifications are also used for all notifications from across the children's workforce. These timescales are useful in measuring the effectiveness of notifications being closed expeditiously:

- A. 80% of cases to be resolved within one month.
- B. 90% to be resolved within three months.
- C. All but the most exceptional cases to be closed within twelve months.

Closure rates for the LADO service 2022 – 2023

- A. 58% of cases resolved within one month
- B. 72% of cases resolved within three months
- C. 89% of cases resolved within twelve months

In comparison the closure rates for the year 2021 – 2022

- A. 52% of cases resolved within one month
- B. 62% of cases resolved within three months
- C. 67% of cases resolved within twelve months

Statistically there has been a significant increase in closure timescales in all areas and indicates that with an increase in LADO service capacity the rate of closures has increased. The LADO service acknowledges that there are several factors that make meeting these timescale targets challenging including:

- The timescales outlined in the disciplinary procedure of many public sector employers makes it very difficult to conclude a case within one month. As this will involve the time to investigate, produce and present a report to a senior manager / management committee / panel of governors, and convene a disciplinary hearing.
- The length of time a case may take to work through the criminal justice process to conclusion.
- Employers awaiting the outcome of a criminal investigation before formally investigating the concerns under its disciplinary procedures.
- Practical considerations such as the unavailability of people for interview including witnesses to an incident due to shift patterns; holidays; sickness.

To ensure closure rates, continue to improve the LADO service holds a monthly reflective case monitoring meeting to assess open cases and ensure robust review and progress for all cases open to the LADO service.

Quality Assurance

The LADO Service is committed to service development. To achieve this, it has utilised dip reviews, and service user feedback to analyse the service and identify areas for development.

Thematic Dip Reviews

The LADO service has completed three thematic dip reviews this year. The reviews have covered:

- Advice and Guidance Allegations Reporting Form (ARFs) (15 cases)
- ARF's open for longer than 3 months (14 cases)
- Quality of LADO decision making (13 cases)

Dip review analysis highlights significant strengths in the LADO Service's response to allegations, these have been highlighted as:

- Assessments of risk are clear, completed in a timely manner and consider holistic risks to safeguard children and young people, organisations, and staff/volunteers.
- Timely responses from the LADO Service when receiving a notification.
- Positive communication between the LADO Service and partner agencies.
- Duty LADOs provide a good quality service when needed to cover the LADO.
- Clear and robust analysis which considers cumulative risk from individuals working or volunteering with children and young people. With analysis being child and young people focused

Areas of development have included:

- Regular scrutiny of cases to ensure any time delay is minimised.
- Ensure records clearly state how the LADO has escalated delays being experienced with practitioners / organisations / agencies.
- Ensure LADO checks in relation to previous concerns specific to the person of concern are clearly recorded on all notifications.
- Record information that has been shared with the child's social worker, so this is clear when concluding the ARF.
- Reference the investigation report within the concluding risk assessment.
- Consideration to the support that can be put in place by the organisation for the child, as part of a culture of safety.

The areas of development within the LADO Service, as identified by the dip reviews, have been set as actions and integrated into the LADO Service team action plan to ensure that actions are monitored and reviewed. This is also shared with the Quality Assurance team to support team development.

To ensure team development, the LADO's receive monthly supervision and attend monthly group supervision to support reflection and shared learning within the wider Quality Assurance Service.

Furthermore, the LADO Service holds monthly 'peer reflection meetings', whereby the service monitors the progress of actions to ensure they are embedded and effective.

Regional Audits

The Somerset LADO Service is a member of the regional LADO group alongside Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire, Swindon, South Gloucestershire, BANES, Bristol, Gloucestershire, Plymouth, Torquay and Cornwall.

This group reviews and reflects on LADO processes and practice and offers reflective case discussions alongside annual peer case audits. A peer audit was completed in March 2023 with the LADO Service in Devon. The audit highlighted areas of strength consistent with the thematic dip reviews completed by the LADO Service:

- Timely management of allegations.
- Clear planning.
- Evidence that the voice of the child is captured
- Creating SMART plans that safeguard children and young people.
- Working effectively with partner agencies.

Feedback

This year the LADO Service gathered solicited feedback from sixteen organisations who have notified the LADO service. Alongside this feedback, duty IRO's and CPC's sought verbal feedback from nine organisations who had used the LADO Service between October and December 2022.

Areas of Strength

- Feedback from the twenty-five service users identified that 100% of service users agreed that the LADO Service provided helpful advice.
- 96% of service users felt that they were frequently updated by the LADO service during the investigation process.
- 100% of service users commented that they felt confident, or very confident, in their understanding of the managing allegations procedures.

This feedback is incredibly positive and highlights the success of the promotional training that the LADO service has provided to partner agencies throughout the year and demonstrates the significance of ongoing training on a continuous basis for organisations.

Areas for development

- One service user (across the year making up 4% of service user feedback) reflected that they felt the quality of the LADO Service was poor. They were concerned about a delay in managing the concerns.

In response to the concerns raised, the LADO Service reflected on this case within a 'Peer Reflection' session to ensure learning was consolidated and actions taken forward to avoid future situations. On further analysis of the issue the LADO Service was able to identify that this time delay occurred prior to the appointment of the second LADO and during a time of annual leave. Therefore, to address time delays the LADO Service has put in place training for duty LADOs via one-to-one sessions and group sessions at a team away day to increase capacity. Furthermore, the LADO Service now undertakes a monthly review of cases that have been opened within the last three months to ensure a timely response, in addition to reviewing all cases open to the LADO service.

Actions identified from the service user feedback are developed into actions which are included within the LADO Service team action plan to ensure they are reviewed and monitored.

Unsolicited feedback

Headteacher

Julian was very supportive and considerate on the phone and supported me with making a notification. Julian was responsive and helpful.

Teaching agency

Thank you again for all your help and support, it's reassuring to know we are on the same page. By far the best support I have had from LADO over the last few years.

Early Years setting

I really appreciate the support you have given me through this case.

Moving forward with Quality Assurance

Regular feedback cycles are important to support development in the LADO Service and we will continue to seek solicited and record unsolicited feedback each quarter to inform our Team Action Plan and team development.

The LADO Service would like to complete a further round of verbal feedback with the CPC's and IRO's twice a year which will enable the LADO Service to gather a range of feedback from service users to support team reflection and development.

Ofsted

The strengths of the service were commented on in the most recent Children's Services inspection in July 2022 and published within the report on 21 September 2022:

"The local authority designated officers provide a timely and robust response when there are allegations against professionals. They are capable and experienced, and recent additional capacity has helped to strengthen the service further".

LADO handbook

In response to a national review of safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings in Doncaster, the Hesley Group identified the importance of safer recruitment and improvements in policy and practice to protect vulnerable children. Areas for development highlighted by the Hesley Group include acknowledgement that as LADO services have developed, they have in the main been based upon local interpretation of guidance which has resulted in a lack of a consistent

approach nationally in how allegations are managed. In response to this, a LADO handbook (currently in draft) has been developed. The purpose of this handbook will be to provide a clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of the LADO and how these should be applied when allegations and serious concerns have been raised against people who work with children.

The LADO Service in Somerset has participated in both local and national LADO Networks to review the draft handbook and contribute reflections on how this guidance can be embedded within our services locally, regionally, and nationally.

In response to this, the LADO service in Somerset is progressing with the development of its recording system on LCS. Consideration is being given to the integration of this new system to ensure that it can work alongside pre-existing recording systems to provide insight into the cumulative harm from an individual, and/or developing trends within organisations. The LADO Service has developed mechanisms for this, which includes proactively working closely with Children's Services Commissioning, The Home Team, and our regional partners to ensure information and concerns are addressed in a systemic and timely manner to protect children and young people.

The LADO Service in Somerset advocates for the importance of safer working cultures that not only protect children dynamically but also proactively; ensuring safer recruitment practices are adhered to and advocating for all within organisations. As such, both LADOs within the service are trained trainers in safer recruitment and can provide high quality advice to organisations to consider risk and allegations as they occur, as well as supporting organisations to improve their recruitment process and develop a safer working culture for the children and young people that use their services.

This extends to the LADO Service quality assuring investigation processes and

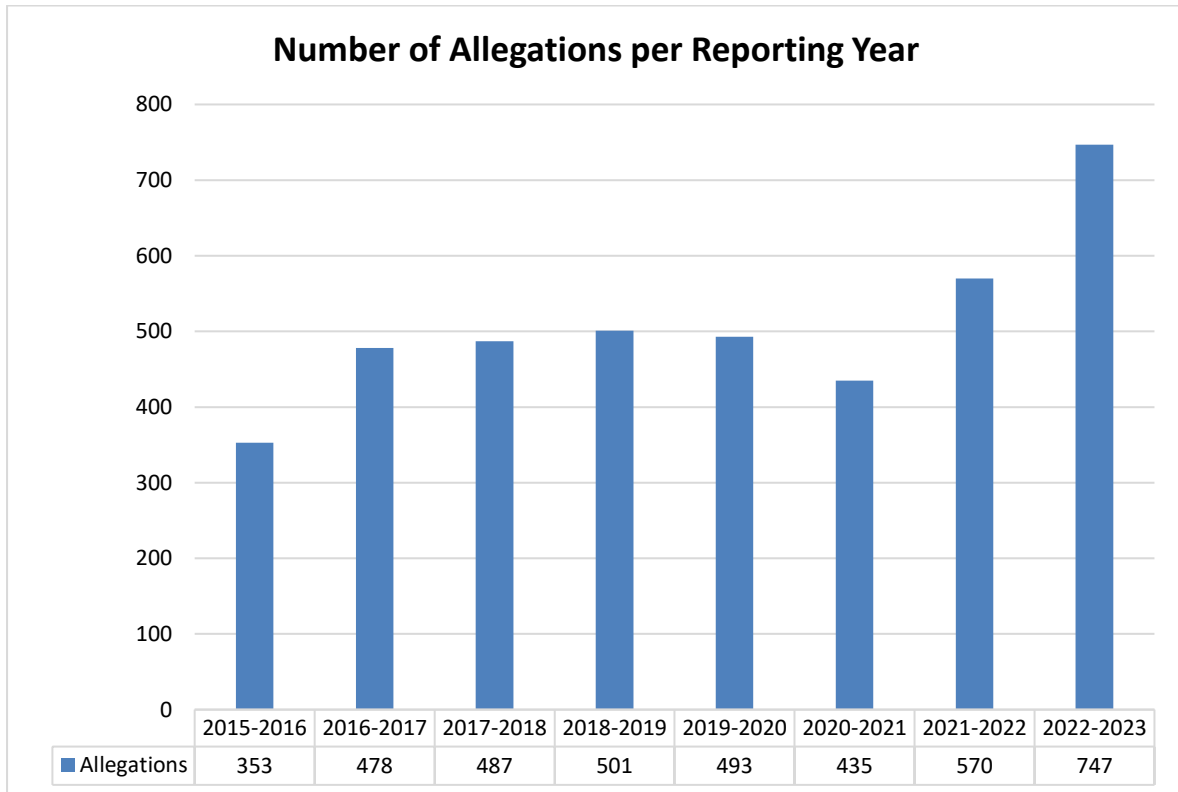
outcomes. This has enabled the service to offer support to organisations around training and development, whilst also working with registering bodies, employers, and partnership agencies to review how change has been implemented systemically.

Next Steps

- Working with partners through training, briefing sessions, and publications, to reduce the number of inappropriate notifications whilst increasing the reporting of allegations that are appropriately considered to meet the threshold.
- Transferring to the LCS system to promote collaborative working and better opportunities for data capture and analysis.
- Commitment to embedding the Quality Assurance framework in place for dip reviewing case work and seeking feedback to inform service development. A view to undertake a team diagnostic within the service this year for further review and analysis of service delivery.

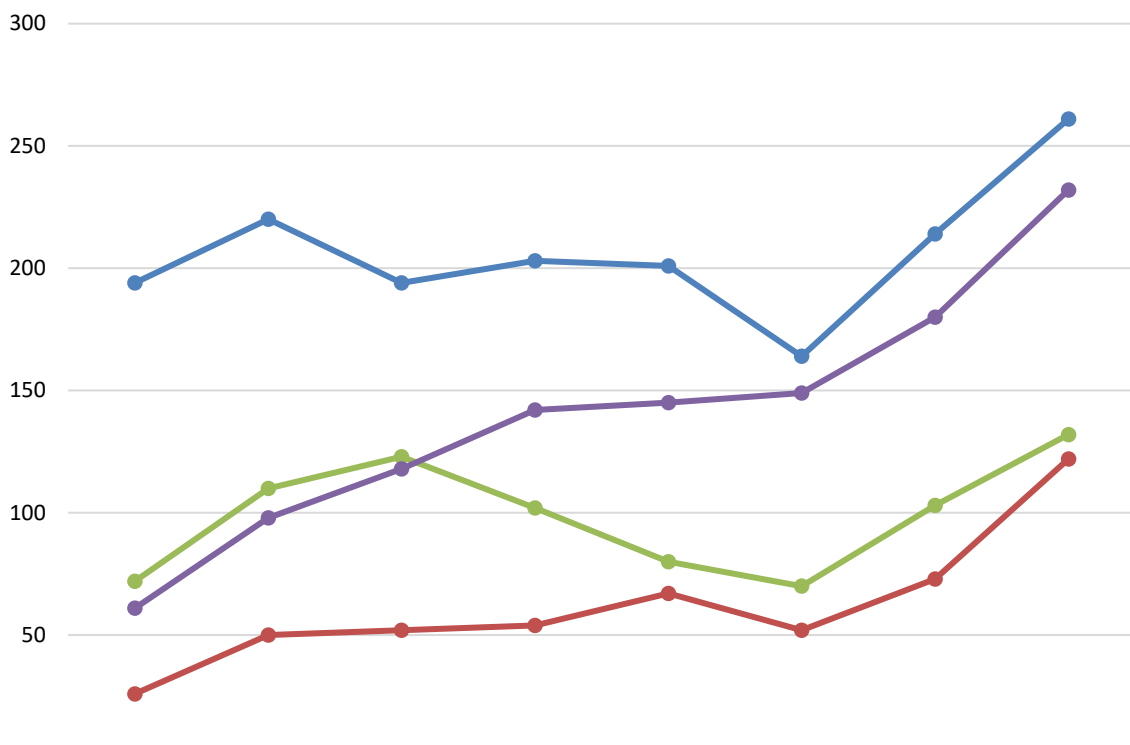
Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Category of Allegations Across Reporting Years

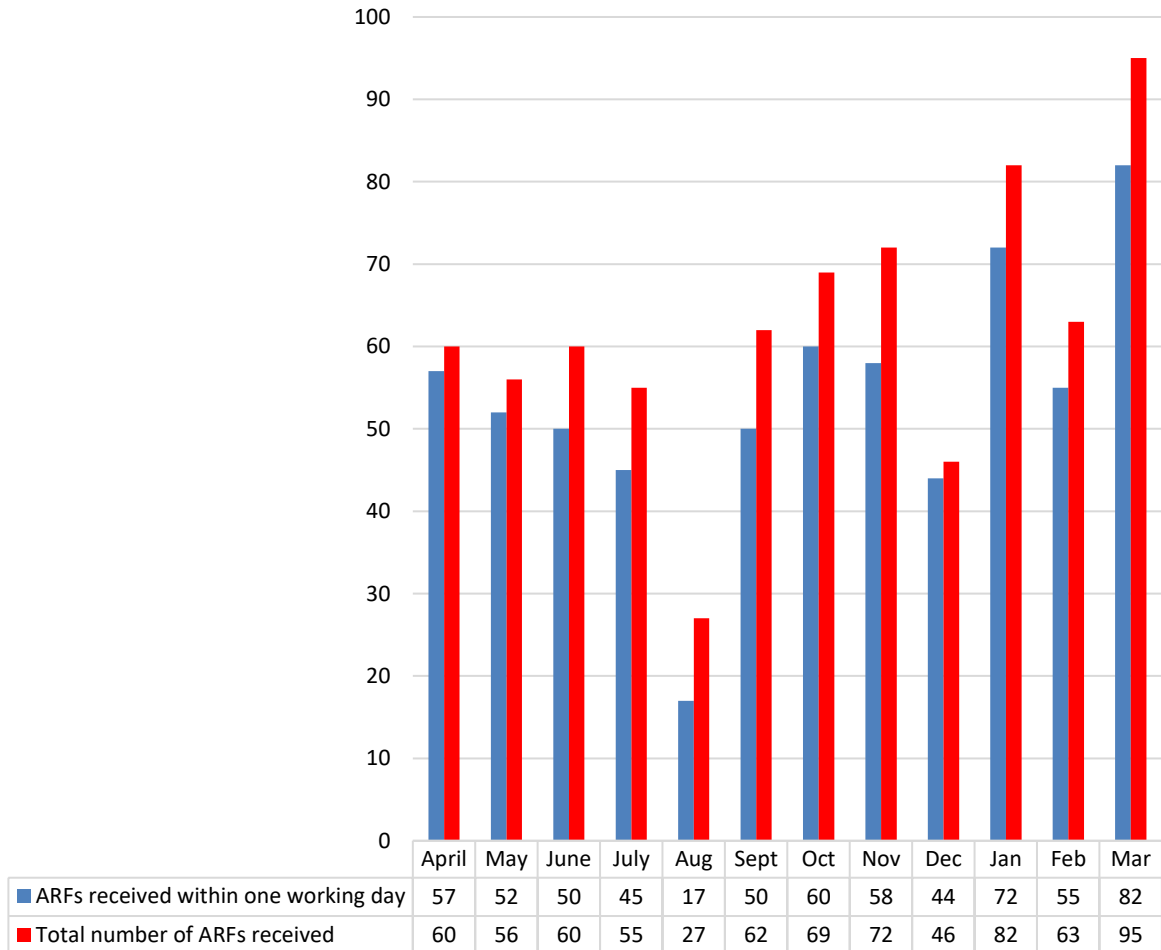


	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
Physical	194	220	194	203	201	164	214	261
Emotional	26	50	52	54	67	52	73	122
Sexual	72	110	123	102	80	70	103	132
Neglect (in duty of care)	61	98	118	142	145	149	180	232

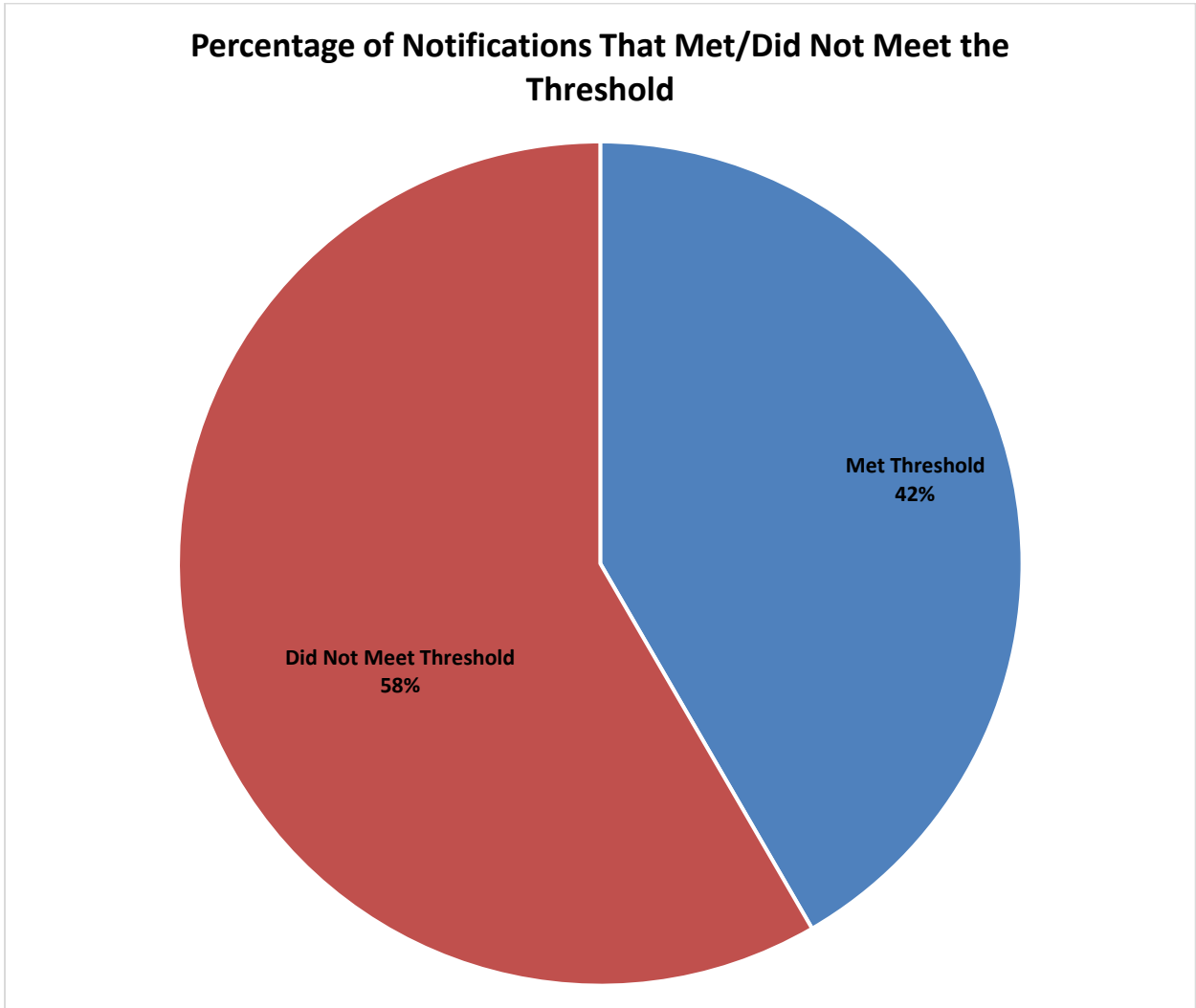
Physical Emotional Sexual Neglect (in duty of care)

Appendix 3

The Number of ARFs Received Within One Working Day in Comparison to the Total Number Received Each Month

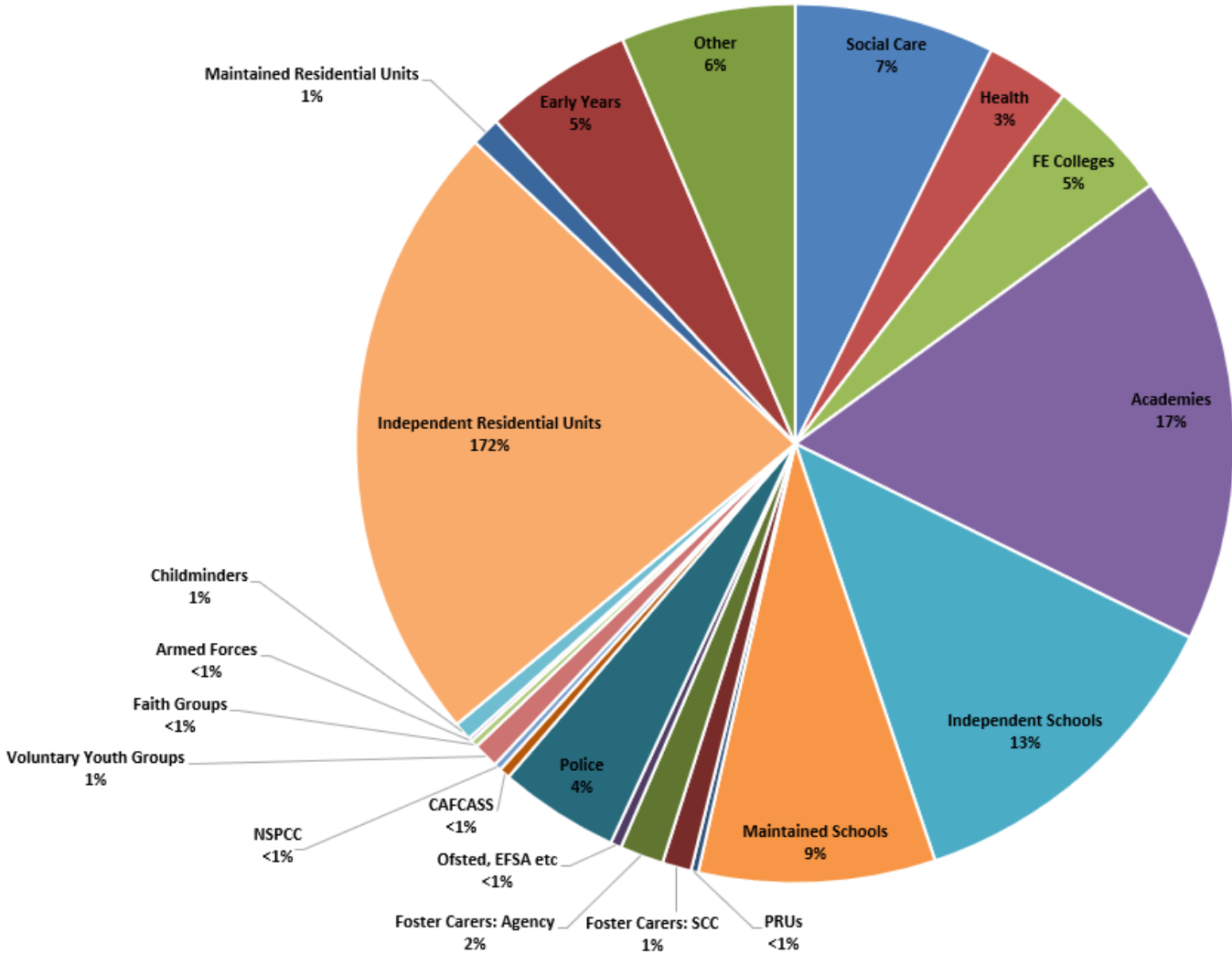


Appendix 4



Appendix 5

Number of Notifications by Organisation



Appendix 6

Notification Outcomes

