



**Somerset
Council**

**Allegations Management Annual
Report**

2023 – 2024

**Local Authority Designated Officers
Service**

Organisation	Somerset Council
Title	Allegations Management Annual Report
Author	LADO service
Date	2023 - 2024

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 742 notifications of allegations during 2023/24¹ consisting of ²:

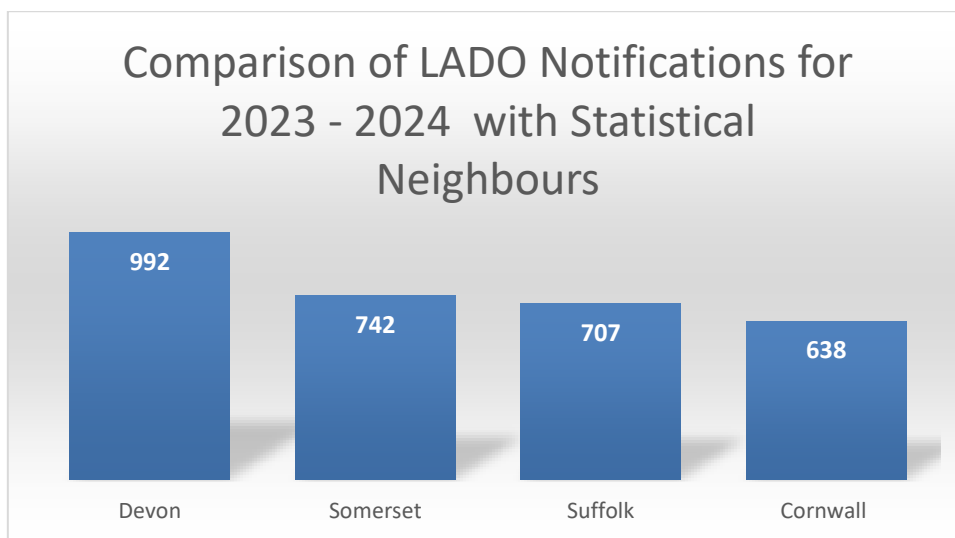
- 262 allegations of physical abuse (35% of all allegations, the same percentage as the previous year)
- 133 allegations of sexual abuse (18% of all allegations, same percentage as the previous year)
- 218 allegations of neglect (in duty of care) / inappropriate behaviour (29% of all allegations, a decrease of 2% from last year)
- 129 allegations of emotional abuse (17% of all allegations, an increase of 1% from last year)

This compares to 747 notifications reported in 2022/2023.

The number of notifications into the LADO service this year has remained consistent from the previous year. The Children's Services Statistical Neighbour Benchmarking Tool (updated 7 March 2024), reports that Devon, Cornwall, and Suffolk are extremely close statistical neighbours to Somerset, therefore we have utilised this for data comparison. In the year 2023- 2024 the Devon LADO service reported that they received 992 notifications. Cornwall Council LADO service reported 638 notifications to the LADO service. Suffolk received 707 notifications into their LADO service.

¹ See Appendix 1

² See Appendix 2



In 88% of notifications³, the statutory timescale of one working day to report concerns to the LADO was met. This is a 2% increase on last year, whereby 86% 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 that this data is either not available or not routinely reported on.

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.

³ See Appendix 3

Number of Notifications by Organisation

The emphasis of the LADO Service is oversight of allegations regarding adults who work with children and young people in either a paid or voluntary capacity⁴, who may present as a risk to children and young people. Working collaboratively with partner agencies, in a joined-up approach, ensures active oversight of the investigative processes to address concerns. This is integral to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

Educational settings have made the highest number of notifications in 2023/2024, specifically, academies and independent schools.

Compared with last year, the LADO Service has seen a decrease of 38 notifications from academies and a decrease of 16 notifications from independent schools. Maintained schools sent 10 more notifications than the previous year.

There has been a significant increase in notifications from residential care settings with a total of 239 notifications made (214 from independent homes and 25 from LA homes). This is an increase of 67 notifications.

Police

The LADO service received 9 (1.2% of total) allegations relating to police officers. This is 3 more than last year.

As noted in previous reports, the LADO Service has worked closely with Avon & Somerset Police and its Professional Standards Department (PSD) to consider the low number of allegations reported to the LADO Service in relation to police officers.

Given the large area covered by the A&S Police, and the number of officers regularly engaging with the public, there is a concern about under reporting from this organisation.

⁴ See Appendix 5

This could be due to a number of factors. One hypothesis is that allegations are less likely to be made against Police Officers due to children and young people being more exposed to other professionals such as teachers. However, this remains pure speculation and would require research to determine specific barriers.

The National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) wrote a letter to the National LADO network in February 2023, to highlight that all forces understand the role of the LADO and the LADO criteria and will make a referral when relevant.

There is, however, ongoing consideration within the Southwest LADO Group as to why notifications might remain low despite reassurances from the NPCC. The South West LADO group has a working group in place to consider how each LADO service in the South West can work alongside Police and safeguarding partners to raise awareness of the LADO criteria and offer training and development opportunities to Policing Standards. Further work is required to improve communication and gain reassurance from the Police that the LADO is notified, even when a risk may not in the first instance relate directly to a child.

It's important to note that while the number of notifications relating to Police officers is low, Somerset LADO Service's engagement with A&S Police, and in particular the Lighthouse Safeguarding Unit (LSU), is excellent. The LSU frequently contact us to share information and notify of incidents/allegations, as well as regularly making themselves available to attend Allegation Management Meetings. Additionally, they are helpful in providing relevant intelligence and completing a quarterly update of all Police cases open to the LADO Service.

Outside of schools and residential homes, the Police have made the most notifications about individuals working with children (outside of their organisation) at **48 notifications** this reporting period. The LADO Service continues to engage with the Police to ensure that their understanding and application of the managing allegations procedure is kept up to date.

Social Care

The LADO Service received 6 (0.8%) allegations against social workers (up from 4 last year).

The LADO Service attended Continuing Professional Development training with social workers in June 2023 to raise awareness about the managing allegations procedure and the role of the LADO Service within this. The LADO service has attended individual team meetings with assessment teams, children with disabilities and fostering. To support team managers, the LADO service presented a short training session at a middle managers' forum and has attended operational managers' meetings to raise awareness of the LADO service and the threshold for when a notification may be required.

The LADO Service has liaised with HR colleagues to ensure a joined-up approach to supporting staff teams internally.

The LADO Service recorded a presentation which is available to staff across Somerset Council via The Learning Centre. Between the 1st April 2023 and the 31st March 2024, 118 individuals attended the training including Family Assessment and Support Team carers, Homes and Horizons Carers, Pre-Approved Carers and Connected Persons Carers.

Training, Development and Promotion

Training and development are essential to support partner agencies in complying with reporting timescales. The LADO Service attends briefing sessions with registered managers of residential 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, A&S Police, Early Years professionals and Social Workers to educate and promote LADO statutory frameworks and timescales.

The LADO Service has completed a video and audio presentation which is published on The Learning Centre for all Somerset Council staff to access at their convenience. The Children's Improvement bulletin on 8th September 2023 featured an update on the LADO service, including how to access the presentation and information via the Learning Centre to further raise awareness of the LADO Service and criteria.

The Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) has uploaded this presentation to YouTube which enables further distribution to organisations to share as part of their own CPD and induction programmes. The LADO Service have also worked with the SSCP to feature on a podcast released in April 2024, sharing the role of the LADO and discussing the LADO criteria and Allegation Management process.

The LADO Service has partnered with the SSCP to deliver four training sessions for education providers regarding how low-level concerns should be managed (as outlined in the statutory guidance – 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' 2023). An additional session was completed with the designated safeguarding leads from independent schools across Somerset in January 2024. These sessions were well attended and received positive feedback. This has resulted in the LADO Service

reviewing the training and offering six sessions in 2024 -2025, which will be accessible to Designated Safeguarding Leads from Education, Health, and Social Care providers.

The LADO Service has delivered two CPD training sessions to frontline staff within Children's Social Care. These sessions were designed to support the understanding of the procedure for managing allegations, including the role of the LADO, the criteria to make a notification and the various investigative processes, as well as how to make a notification to the LADO service.

The LADO service has delivered a training session to all the managers within Homes and Horizons, who provide residential care for looked after children in Somerset.

The LADO Service continues to deliver training sessions to Somerset Council foster carers as part of the 'Safer Care and Allegations' training provided by the Fostering Service. On 12th September 2023, the LADO Service attended the Foster Panel development day to share the Allegation Management process to panel members.

The LADO Service delivered Safer Recruitment training to the Family Intervention Service in August 2023. This is a nationally accredited training course which covers:

- Safer recruitment and the wider context of safeguarding.
- Prevalence of abuse and profile of abusers.
- How abusers operate within organisations.
- Features of a safer recruitment process.
- Planning a safer recruitment process.
- Making the right decisions: interview and selection.
- Setting acceptable standards of behaviour.
- Maintaining an ongoing culture of vigilance.

The LADO Service is committed to supporting local events in the area which may employ a large number of people who work with children. This has included meeting

with the welfare lead for Glastonbury festival and ensuring the team have access to consultations from the LADO Service during the upcoming festival in June 2024.

The LADO service has created information sheets for the SSCP, which are accessible to partners through the SSCP. The information sheets offer support and information regarding Allegations Management. A guidance document to support partner agencies to reflect and consider the LADO criteria has also been updated and is available on the SSCP webpage for Allegations Management.

Outcomes from Investigation Processes

When considering outcomes from investigation processes, 60 cases were closed as substantiated (down from 80 last year), which equates to 8% of all notifications received ⁵.

50 cases were closed as unsubstantiated (down from 64 last year), which equates to 7% of all notifications received.

A high number of notifications (59%, up 1% from last year)⁶ 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. The LADO Service have sought to achieve this by delivering training sessions to partner agencies across Somerset.

⁵ See Appendix 6

⁶ See Appendix 4

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 2023 – 2024

- A. 69% of cases resolved within one month.
- B. 78% of cases resolved within three months.
- C. 84% of cases resolved within twelve months.

In comparison to the closure rates for the year 2022 – 2023

- A. 63% of cases resolved within one month.
- B. 77% of cases resolved within three months.
- C. 85% of cases resolved within twelve months.

Statistically there has been an increase in closure timescales in two areas, indicating 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. Public sector procedures require the time to investigate, produce and present a report to a senior manager/management committee/panel of governors, and convene a disciplinary hearing. It is therefore unrealistic to expect the process to be fully completed within one month whilst maintaining the quality required to ensure due process is followed.
- 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 and sickness.

To ensure closure rates continue to improve, the LADO service holds a monthly reflective case monitoring meeting to assess open cases and ensures a robust review process 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 four thematic dip reviews this year. The reviews have covered:

1. The quality of LADO decision making (13 cases).
2. The quality of assessment when notifications identify the child harmed as either having mental health issues, educational special needs, emotional, social, and behavioural needs, or a learning disability (6 cases).
3. Categories of Harm being reported to the LADO Service (12 cases).
4. Thematic review of notifications from the NHS (6 cases).

Dip review analysis has highlighted significant strengths in the LADO Service's response to allegations. These have been highlighted as:

- The LADO Service provides timely and excellent communication to organisations making notifications to the LADO Service.
- The LADO Service is child focused when responding to allegations; this is demonstrated through assessments of risk that ensure the child / young person's voice is evident in investigation reports.
- The LADO Service works collaboratively with multiple agencies and professionals, and there is clear rationale for decision making made in partnership with agencies and organisations.
- The LADO Service completes effective initial and concluding assessments which review the needs and experiences of children and young people.

- Where applicable there is good evidence that the child or young persons' social worker has been engaged throughout the Allegation Management process.
- The LADO Service keeps detailed records of all allegations received, enabling cross-referencing to previous concerns which may evidence an emerging pattern of concerning behaviour in relation to the individual of concern.
- The LADO case records show timely intervention by the LADO Service, with clear and purposeful advice and guidance that is communicated appropriately to relevant parties.
- There is evidence that the LADO Service appropriately challenges partner agencies and organisations to ensure children and young people are safeguarded.

Areas for Development

- Ensuring, where relevant, that the nature of the child or young person's disability and relating risks are explicitly stated in the assessment of risk and consideration as to how this informs any decision making.
- Ensuring information that is recorded relating to allegations, the process followed to investigate, and the outcome is shared with the child or young person's allocated Social Worker.
- Consideration to the support that can be put in place for the child or young person by the organisation as part of a culture of safety.
- Ensure LADO Service database checks have been completed and recorded on all notifications.

Impact

The areas of development identified by the dip reviews have informed actions within the LADO Service team action plan. The team action plan is monitored monthly by the LADO Service and reviewed within team meetings to ensure that actions are reviewed and progressed. This is also shared with the Quality Assurance Team to feed into wider service development. The LADO Service holds monthly 'peer reflection meetings,' where the service monitors the progress of actions to ensure they are embedded.

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

South West Regional LADO Group Peer Reviews

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

This group reviews and reflects on LADO processes and practice across the South West and offers reflective case discussions alongside annual peer case audits. A peer audit was completed in March 2024 with the LADO Service in Torbay and South Gloucestershire. The audits 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 58 notifying organisations. Alongside this feedback, in Q4 Child Protection Chairs sought verbal feedback from organisations who had made a notification to the LADO Service.

Areas of Strength

- Feedback identified that 100% of service users agreed that the LADO Service provided helpful advice.
- 86% of service users felt that they were frequently updated by the LADO Service during the investigation process.
- 97% of service users commented that they felt confident, or very confident, in their understanding of the managing allegations procedures.
- 90% of service users reported that the quality of the LADO service was excellent. The remaining 10% reported that the quality of the service was good.

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 importance of ongoing training on a continuous basis for organisations.

Areas for Development

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

Qualitative Feedback

“Whether it be Anthony or Stacey responding, the same advice and guidance has always been warmly received; a very supportive approach by both professionals, to which I am always grateful.”

“As a new headteacher, I was pleased to be given excellent advice and guidance throughout the process.”

“I received a phone call the same day and the LADO had read the ARF form and was well aware of its content.”

“Excellent; a timely response, very approachable service and always measured and candid advice given.”

Feedback from Training Provided by the LADO Service

Feedback was gathered from training sessions delivered by the LADO Service from Q2 – Q4. The LADO Service delivered:

- Safer Recruitment training.
- Training to Care Home Managers.
- The LADO Service received feedback via the SSCP from 4 training sessions completed with designated safeguarding leads from educational settings.
- Feedback was provided from independent schools via MS Forms from participants who attended the Low-Level Concerns Workshop in January 2024.

Feedback demonstrated that 97% of attendees who attended the training sessions felt the knowledge of the trainers was excellent with the remaining 3% commenting that the knowledge of the trainers was good.

100% of attendees reported that they felt more knowledgeable about either safer recruitment or the allegations management process after attending the sessions.

100% of attendees reported they felt confident to apply the learning in their workplace.

100% of attendees at the training sessions delivered by the LADO Service felt that the training met their expectations.

Qualitative feedback “What is one thing that was most helpful about this training?”
(Safer Recruitment)

Informative with really useful content and plenty of interaction and discussion between trainers and attendees.

The lovely LADO's delivering our training was really helpful

Interactive and set at a good level

Qualitative feedback “What is one thing that was most helpful about this training?”
(Allegation Management)

The scenario work: break out rooms and then back into whole group was hugely informative and beneficial.

Really useful training, full stop...certainly underpinning the importance of an open, transparent, and proactive approach within your culture to LLC's and self-referrals.

Knowledge from the trainers and experience and ability to apply to audience.

Areas for Development

Feedback from the session has been incredibly positive, with areas for development noted as more time for scenario work, longer sessions, and some minor comments regarding technology.

In response to the feedback, the LADO Service alongside the SSCP has increased the training to six sessions for the next year with the aim of including health and care home providers.

The LADO service continually review the content of the training to ensure there is a balance between sharing information and guidance and enabling participants to complete scenario-based work to improve confidence and understanding.

Impact

Regular and consistent quality assurance through dip reviews and feedback enables the LADO Service to evidence the positive impact that the service has on safeguarding children and young people. The evidence highlights timely responses, efficient advice and partnership working, thus supporting organisations to focus on the needs and safety of children as paramount to decision making. Areas for development are taken seriously and used to formulate actions for the service which are timebound, measurable and regularly reviewed to ensure positive impact. These actions are commented on each quarter within the LADO team action plan, enabling the LADO Service to hold themselves to account and track development over time.

The use of quality assurance has informed training and promotion that the LADO team has delivered over the past year with the aim to raise awareness of the managing allegation procedure, the remit of the LADO Service and the work it undertakes jointly with partner agencies to support their understanding of the process. Furthermore, quality assurance enables us to understand the most effective way of sharing

information with partner agencies and has led to the LADO Service working closely with the SSCP as identified in service user feedback.

Quality assurance has been integral in enabling the LADO Service to reflect on its performance and the overall effectiveness of the service, furthermore the LADO Service has been able to consider systemic development and learning for partner agencies to create robust safeguarding cultures within organisations. The LADO Service has incorporated this into training sessions, to enhance organisations' understanding of safer recruitment processes and impact positively on protecting children and young People from contextual safeguarding risks.

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 gather verbal feedback with the CPC's and IRO's twice a year which will enable the gathering of 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.”

South West Regional LADO Group/ National LADO Network

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 keeps abreast of national developments within the LADO network. Following the criminal trial and sentencing of Lucy Letby, a paediatric nurse who worked in Chester and was convicted of murdering seven babies and attempting to murder a further six babies. The LADO service has reflected on how we can work alongside health colleagues in Somerset to raise awareness of the LADO Service, the Allegations Management criteria and whistleblowing procedures. This has included a newsletter written by the LADO service and published by the SSCP, alongside

recording a podcast in March 2024. Whilst we await learning from the statutory inquiry which commenced in November 2023, the LADO service in Somerset has proactively completed quality assurance activities in relation to notifications received from health services which will inform the training programme the LADO service delivers in 2024 – 2025.

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 services locally, regionally, and nationally.

In response to this, the LADO service in Somerset has embedded the use of recording on LCS, which supports wider oversight and data management of all notifications reported to the LADO Service. This is particularly important as it allows accurate review and analysis of patterns and themes.

Additionally, recording on LCS allows the implementation of Microsoft Power BI software which indexes data recorded on LCS and automatically produces a monthly dashboard.

The LADO Service in Somerset advocates for the importance of safer working cultures that not only protect children responsively and dynamically but also preventatively. As such, both LADOs within the service are trained trainers in safer recruitment and can provide high quality, accredited 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 skill and knowledge set extends to the LADO Service quality assuring investigation processes and outcomes. The service has offered 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

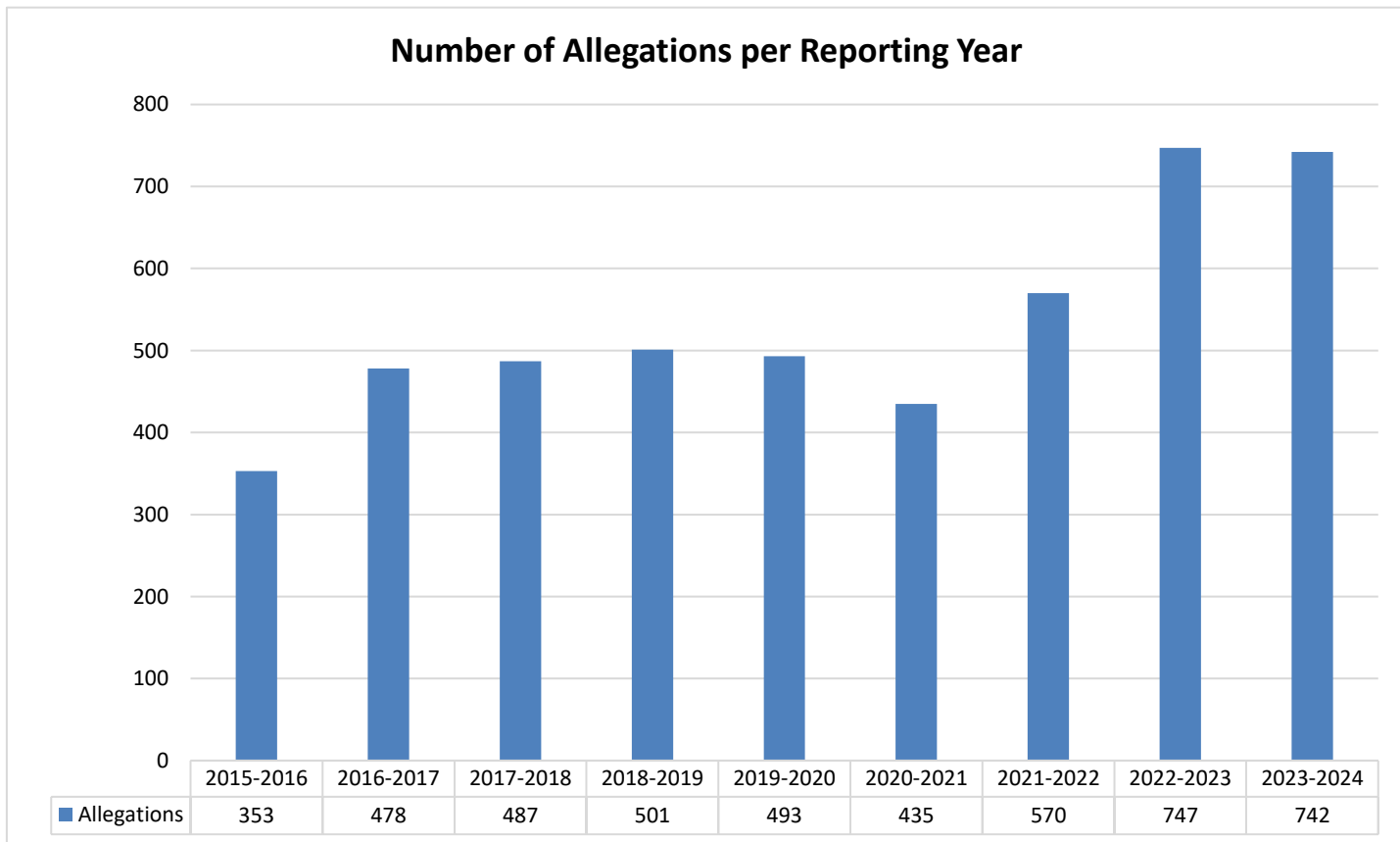
The LADO Service will continue working with partners through training, briefing sessions, and publications, to reduce the number of inappropriate notifications whilst increasing the reporting of allegations that are appropriately considered to meet the threshold.

The LADO Service attend a monthly peer discussion where open cases are reviewed and tracked to ensure timely updates to notifiers. This will continue to address the feedback received from service users to ensure timely responses and progress for all cases open to the LADO service.

The LADO service will liaise with Policing Standards to follow up on the training provided by the Gloucester LADO service.

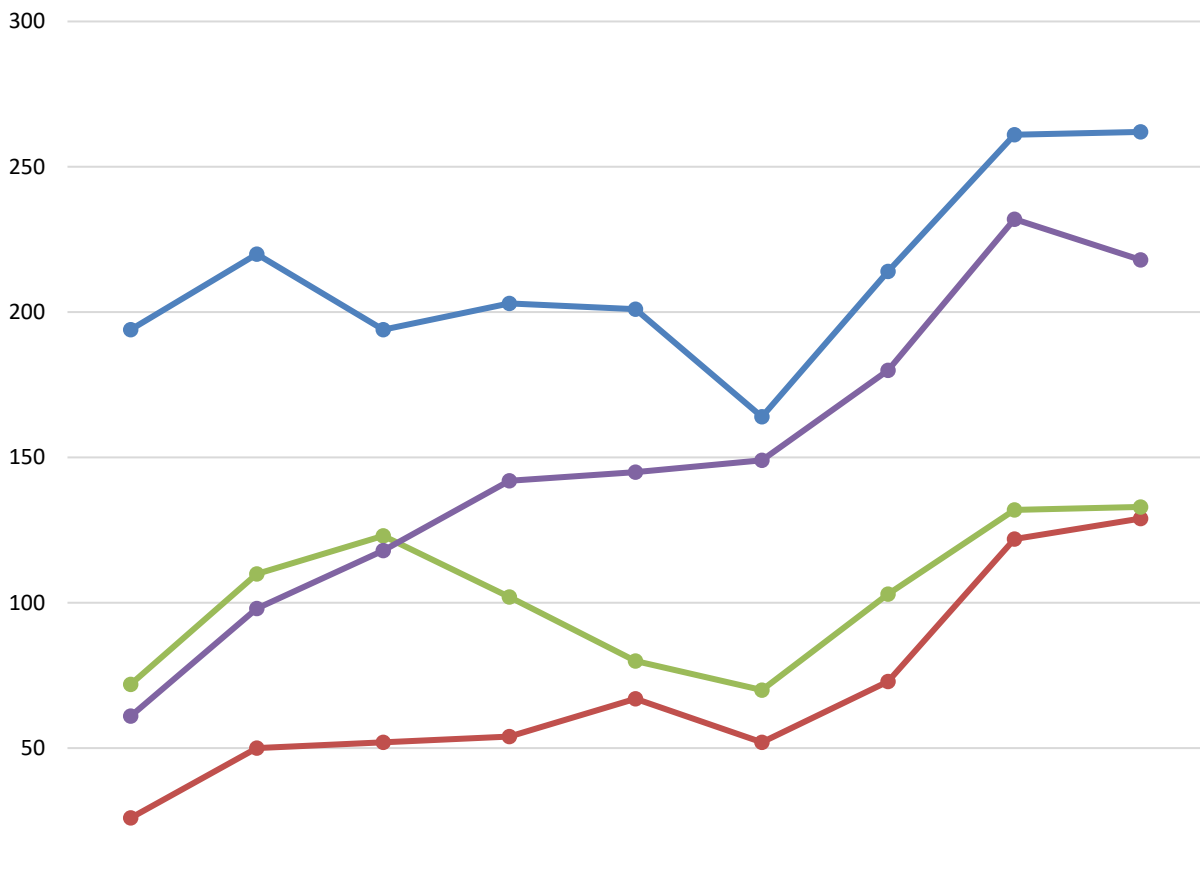
Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Category of Allegations Across Reporting Years

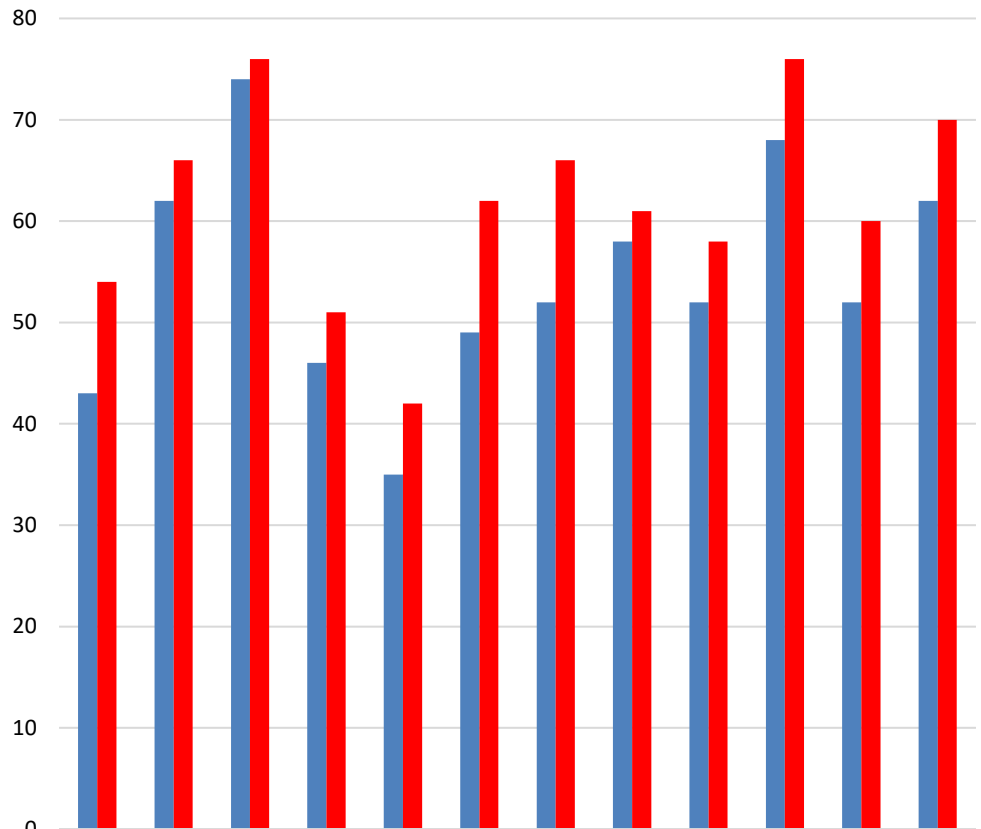


	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2023 - 2024
Physical	194	220	194	203	201	164	214	261	262
Emotional	26	50	52	54	67	52	73	122	129
Sexual	72	110	123	102	80	70	103	132	133
Neglect (in duty of care)	61	98	118	142	145	149	180	232	218

● Physical
 ● Emotional
 ● Sexual
 ● Neglect (in duty of care)

Appendix 3

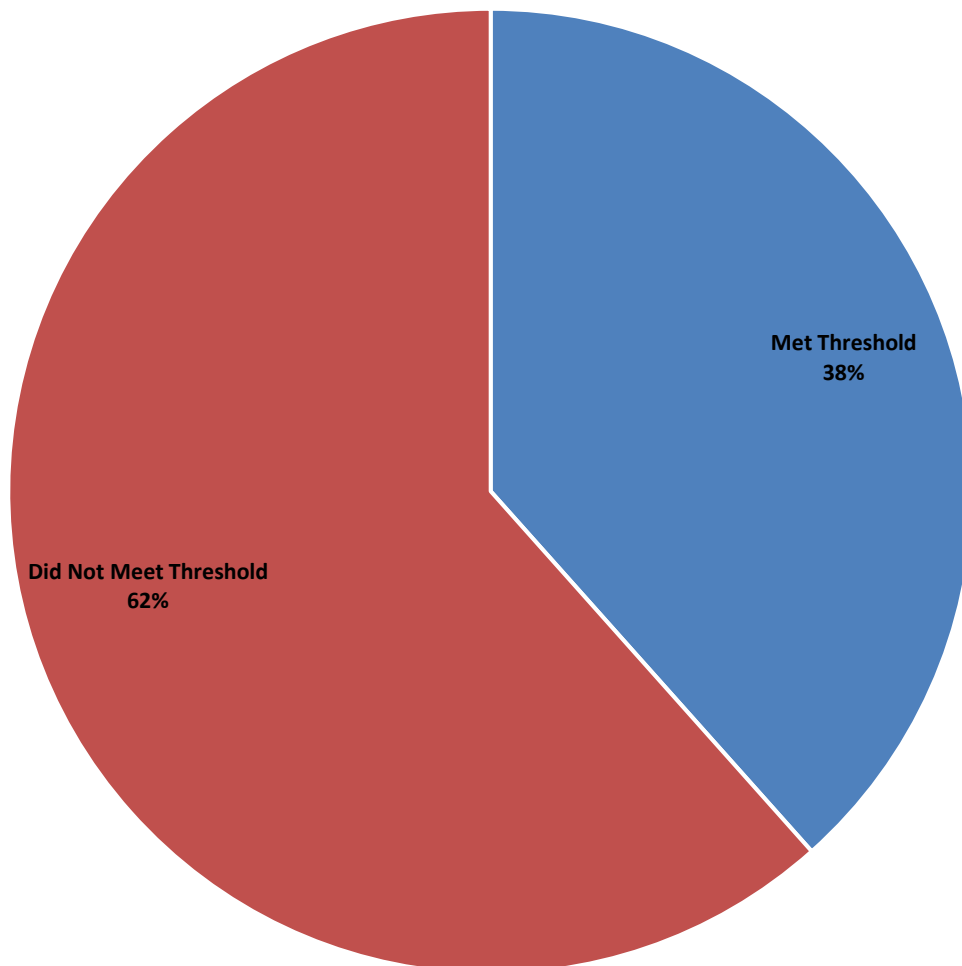
The Number of ARFs Received Within One Working Day in Comparison to the Total Number Received Each Month



	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
ARFs received within one working day	43	62	74	46	35	49	52	58	52	68	52	62
Total number of ARFs received	54	66	76	51	42	62	66	61	58	76	60	70

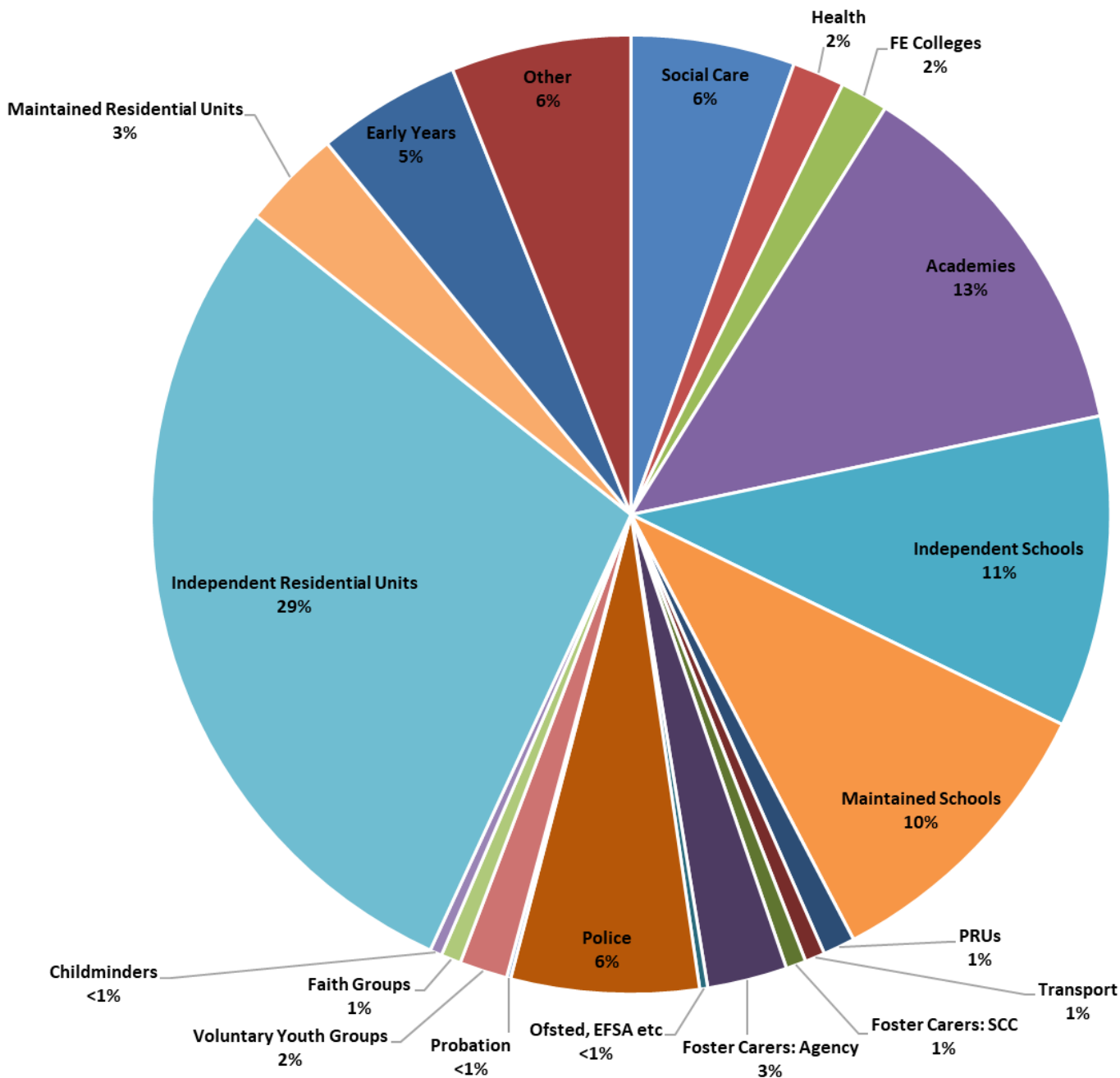
Appendix 4

Percentage of Notifications That Met/Did Not Meet the Threshold



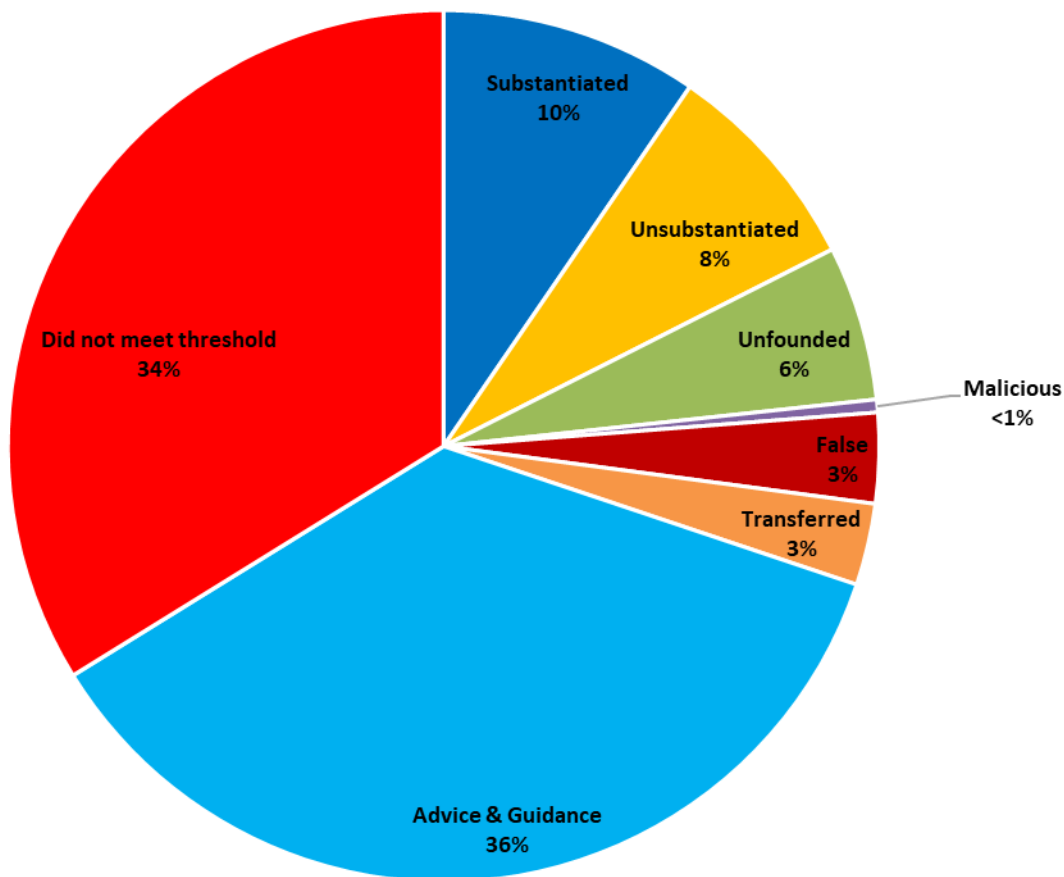
Appendix 5

Number of Notifications by Organisation



Appendix 6

Notification Outcomes



- Substantiated
- Unsubstantiated
- Unfounded
- Malicious
- False
- Transferred
- Advice & Guidance
- Did Not Meet Threshold

Document Notification

Approval	Name	Date
Quality Assurance Service Manager: Safeguarding, Fostering Review and Allegations Management	Jade Hill	29/07/2024