

# **North Somerset Council Children's Services: LADO Annual Report 2023 to 2024**



## Introduction

This report provides data on the referrals that have been received by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) during the year 01.04.23 - 31.03.24 and a brief analysis of the information.

## The role of the LADO

The LADO manages allegations against professionals and volunteers who are involved with children.

North Somerset has a statutory duty to effectively manage allegations against people who work with children under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and this is further highlighted in [the Working Together 2023 guidance](#), and the Department of Education guidance, [Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2024](#).

The LADO must be contacted without delay and within one working day in respect of all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works 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; or
- 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 they may not be suitable to work with children

There may be up to three elements in the consideration of an allegation:

- a police investigation of a possible criminal offence;
- enquiries and assessment by Children's Social Care services about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services; and
- consideration by an employer of disciplinary action in respect of the individual.

The LADO is responsible for:

- Providing advice, information and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations around allegations and concerns regarding paid and unpaid workers.
- Managing and overseeing individual cases from all partner agencies.
- Ensuring the child's voice is heard and that they are safeguarded.
- Ensuring there is a consistent, fair and thorough process for all adults working with children and young people against whom an allegation is made.
- Monitoring the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with as quickly as possible.
- Referring matters to children's services or the police and chairing the strategy meeting in cases where the allegation requires investigation by police and/or social care.

## Local perspective

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) post in North Somerset is currently filled by a full-time locum Social Worker, with limited business administrative support. The

LADO sits in the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service and is line managed by the Safeguarding and Reviewing Manager.

In June of 2023 the long-standing LADO retired and the post was absorbed by the medium term financial plan (MTFP) as a saving. The intention being for ISRO's to undertake this duty, however with staff capacity issues experienced within this service due to increased demand this was not realised. Over July and August LADO was covered between Safeguarding Team Manager and Head of Service, however it was recognized that this was not sustainable and the current LADO took up post in late August 2023. A permanent full-time LADO post and a full-time coordinator role has now been agreed. Both these posts are currently in the early recruitment stages.

The LADO also acts as the representative for North Somerset at Level 3 Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings and has led investigations of complaints on behalf of the council. Over the last year we have concentrated on continuing to develop a consistent and rigorous approach to managing safeguarding concerns and improving our recording systems while attempting to raise awareness of the LADO role in the community.

## Independent audit

An independent audit of the LADO service took place in January and February 2024. The audit concluded that the service offered 'reasonable assurance' that the systems are satisfactory, but went on to highlight areas that required improvement:

- The development and full implementation of LCS as the central recording system for all referrals and consultations.
- Increased and improved dedicated business support capacity to assist with key administration tasks (e.g. case logging, recording, tracking, monitoring, follow-up etc).
- Dedicated LADO, with strong 'cover' arrangements in place

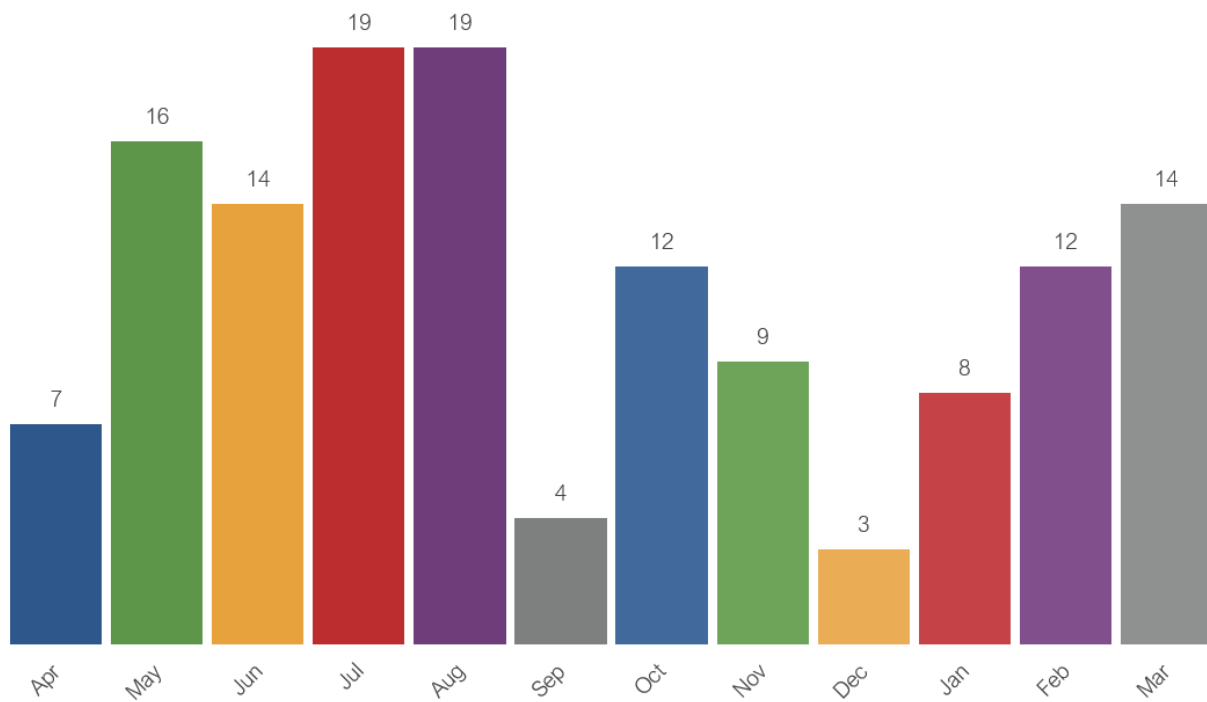
The audit process was extremely helpful; it confirmed that there was a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses, and has helped to inform the service level development plan.

Significant progress has been made with the LCS development and all LADO information is now recorded on LCS, enabling us to track and monitor referrals consistently and accurately provide performance data.

## Referrals and outcomes

In 2023 to 2024, a total of 137 referrals were made to the LADO. 25 of those required an ongoing involvement. This is a decrease on the number received the previous reporting year when 171 referrals were received, 34 of which required an ongoing involvement. By comparison, two of our nearest statistical neighbours Solihull and Merton, received 409 and 443 referrals respectively during 2022 to 2023. We compared ourselves to those two authorities because they have similar populations, each with a similar number of children, and a similar level of deprivation.

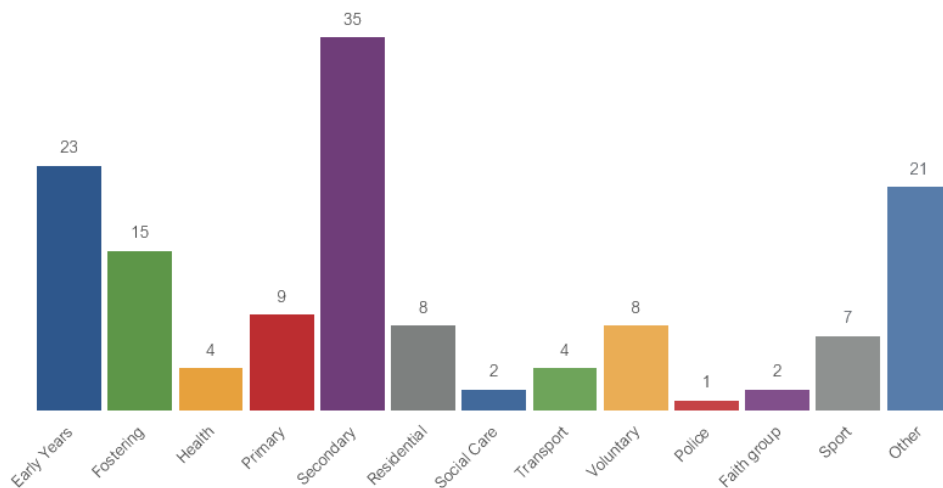
Month	Number of Referrals
April 2023	7
May 2023	16
June 2023	14
July 2023	19
August 2023	19
September 2023	4
October 2023	12
November 2023	9
December 2023	3
January 2024	8
February 2024	12
March 2024	14



The number of referrals received by North Somerset appears low. North Somerset has about 48,000 children aged between 0-19. There are 64 primary schools, 11 secondary schools, 5 schools for children with special needs and 1 college of further education. In addition, there are 92 registered childminders, 48 nurseries, and some 59 faith-based groups, including churches and activity-based groups. This is without all the hobby-based groups that run, of which there will be hundreds.

We are curious as to why the referral numbers are as they are and question if the number of referrals that we receive reflects the true level of safeguarding issues that are being raised over the course of the year.

Source of Referrals	Number of Referrals
Early Years	23
Fostering	15
Health	4
Primary	9
Secondary	35
Residential	8
Social Care	2
Transport	4
Voluntary	8
Police	1
Faith Group	2
Sport	7
Other	21



## Actions

To address this from January 2024 we started to offer monthly training sessions to partners via the Safeguarding Partnership to increase awareness of the role, the LADO has attended recent Safeguarding meetings within education. Going forward once we have a permanent LADO and Co-Ordinator there will be a stronger physical presence available to attend face to face meetings and build relationships in the community, promoting the work of the LADO and offering support, guidance and advice.

## Source of referrals

77 different agencies made a referral to the LADO, with 24 of them referring twice or more.

## Type of concern

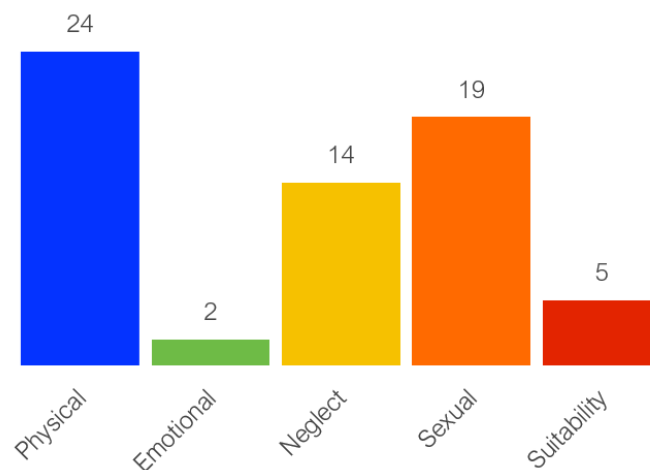
Most referrals, some 35% (24) of them, involved allegations of physical abuse. This appears to be largely in line with the number of referrals of physical abuse received by Solihull and Merton, which were 35% and 41%, respectively.

## Actions taken

In response to the referrals, since April 2023, 17% progressed to Allegation Management Meetings (40 meetings in relation to 24 people), and ongoing LADO involvement. This is lower than the rate for last year where 34 (24%) met the threshold. In some cases, it was necessary to hold several meetings to review and monitor the progress being made for a single case.

81% (112) of referrals to the LADO reached an outcome within two weeks, and a total of 92% (127) reached an outcome within 12 weeks.

Type of Concern (August 2023)	Number of referrals
Physical	24
Emotional	2
Neglect	14
Sexual	19
Suitability	5



The LADO continues to monitor the progress of cases until their final resolution, which in some cases can be for a number of months until employer disciplinary processes are complete, and the worker is referred to the Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS), or through to the outcome of criminal court proceedings.

The LADO received ten referrals that are still ongoing as they are the subject of Police criminal investigations. There are currently no cases in court.

## LADO outcomes

There are six possible outcomes to the LADO process:

**Substantiated:** where there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation.

**Unsubstantiated:** this is not the same as a false allegation. It means that there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation; the term therefore does not imply guilt or innocence.

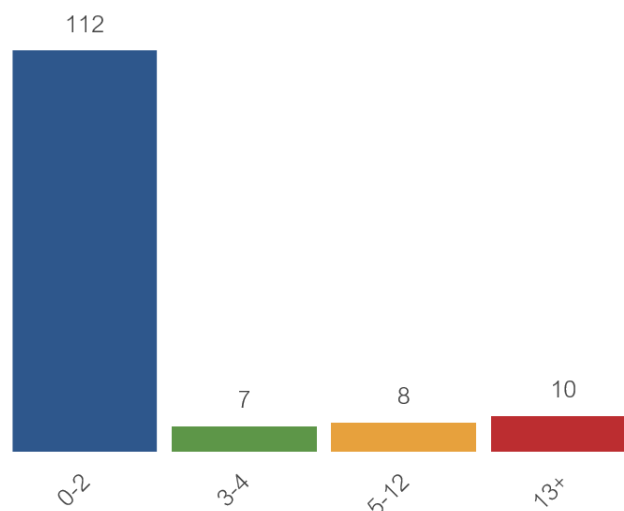
**Unfounded:** where there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made. It might also indicate that the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw. Alternatively, they may not have been aware of all the circumstances.

**Malicious:** where there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false.

**False:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.

**No Further Action:** after multi-agency consideration of the evidence.

Number of weeks to outcome	Number of referrals
0 to 2	112
3 to 4	7
5 to 12	8
13 or more	10



## Substantiated allegations

12 (50%) LADO processes concluded with a substantiated outcome during 2023-24.

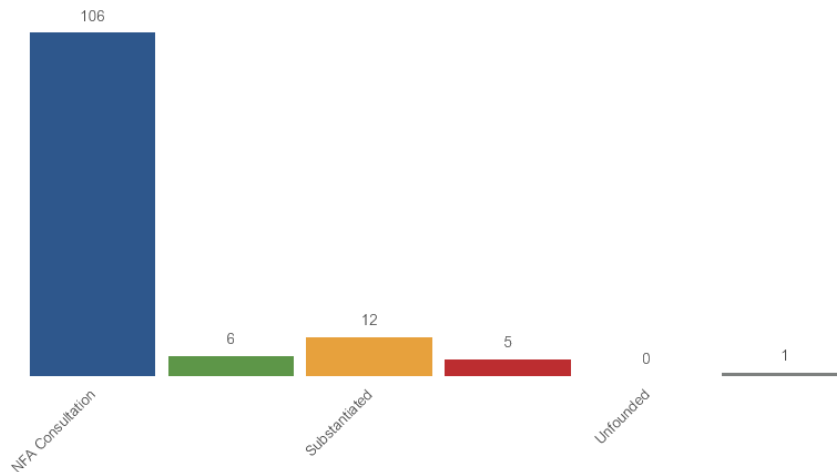
Most of our work involves offering advice and support through consultations.

## Fostering

This year there were 15 referrals concerning Foster Carers. Seven referrals involved North Somerset carers, while six referrals involved Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers, and two involved carers from other Local Authorities who lived in the North Somerset area.

Of the 15 referrals only two (13%) reached a formal outcome during the LADO process. One involved carers from North Somerset, and the other was an IFA carer, both led to substantiated outcomes. There has been a significant amount of development work regarding our Standards of Care policy within the fostering service. With clearer differentiation between what constitutes a standard of care concern and a LADO referral. With this newly published policy and the upcoming appointment of a permanent LADO in the coming months the working relationship between the two services will benefit from close working relationship and clearer delineation.

Outcomes	Number of Referrals
NFA Consultation	106
Unsubstantiated	6
Substantiated	12
Malicious/False	5
Unfounded	0
No further action	1



## Faith groups

There are some 59 faith-based groups, including churches and activity-based groups in North Somerset and yet the LADO did not receive any referrals this year from any of these groups. This is an ongoing national issue. Neither Merton or Solihull received any referrals from faith groups in 2022-23 (they have not reported for this year yet). LADOs in the South-West and Nationally are aware of this issue and still struggle with this issue with little headway being made. We have no intelligence over this so working on assumptions believe this to be about under developed working relationships and the lack of understanding of their responsibilities and our offer of support.

We plan on writing to all the faith groups in North Somerset introducing the work of the LADO over the summer of 2024, there are also conversations required with the Business Manager and the Learning and Development subgroup as to how do they reach these wider partners in their offer of support as partners of the safeguarding partnership.



## Professional development

The LADO continues to attend the South West LADO Network group that has proved helpful in sharing common cross boundary concerns, and has been able to participate in the discussions around the development of a national handbook for LADOs, which should be published by the DFE in the coming months.

## Progress during 2023 to 2024

The appointment of a full-time dedicated LADO in North Somerset last year has strengthened our efforts to safeguard children. The LADO is now able to offer a more consistent approach to managing allegations and, importantly, is more available to provide support to partner agencies by offering advice and guidance.

The work of the LADO this year has been about promoting the role of the LADO within Children's Services and with our partner agencies and consolidating the changes that have been made during the last year to help offer a more consistent approach to dealing with allegations against people who work with children.

The LADO has designed and established monthly multi-agency training sessions. These began in January 2024 and will run throughout the year. In addition, the LADO has attended all three of the Early Years DSL briefing sessions recently and delivered a brief introduction to around 100 professionals and has also begun attending the School Designated Safeguarding Meetings.

The LADO was invited to talk to a group of newly recruited Foster Carers for an Independent Fostering Agency and used this as an opportunity to begin the process of increasing awareness amongst this group. The success of this work will be seen in an increase in referrals received by the LADO and the increase in the number of different agencies who have made referrals and sought to consult with the LADO.

## Feedback from professionals

Feedback from professionals that use our service is essential to help us develop effective systems. The LADO has designed a feedback form for the professionals who attend Allegations Management meetings, which was introduced in recent weeks. The new QA Co-ordinator once in post will oversee the co-ordination of this process ensuring we listen to the views of those who utilise the service and shape the future offer.

## Continued development of the LADO role in 2024 to 2025

The LADO will continue to promote the responsibilities and the processes involved in managing allegations against professionals and volunteers with partner agencies, with a particular focus on local schools, independent fostering agencies and local faith groups. This ongoing work will be done by directly liaising with those agencies, participating in training events and making presentations to professionals and volunteers about the role, alongside regular correspondence to continue to raise the profile of the LADO role in safeguarding children. In addition, the LADO will liaise with North Somerset's communities lead with a view to establishing whether there is scope for promoting the role of the LADO by participating in events within the wider community.

The LADO service has developed over the last year and has responded to the challenges well. With recent investment in both a permanent full time LADO with coordinator support many of those developments suggested in the recent internal audit will be realised. Our recent improvement in recording on LCS and related performance data is already assisting us in being more precise with reporting our performance and enabling us to develop a more robust tracking system. This will be reflected in more detail in the 24/35 annual report produced.