



Safeguarding & Reviewing Service  
Local Authority Designated Officer

# **Allegations against adults who work or volunteer with children**

**Annual Report 2017/18**

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## **1. Purpose**

This annual report analyses allegations reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for the year 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

## **2. The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer**

### **Initial consideration of an allegation by the designated safeguarding lead and the LADO**

All concerns reported to the LADO should be assessed to decide if the threshold for an allegation has been met. In cases where it is not clear whether the threshold has been met, it might be necessary to have a discussion (by phone or in a meeting) to evaluate whether the threshold has been met, sometimes referred to as an evaluation meeting.

Considering an allegation. There are up to four strands in the consideration of an allegation:

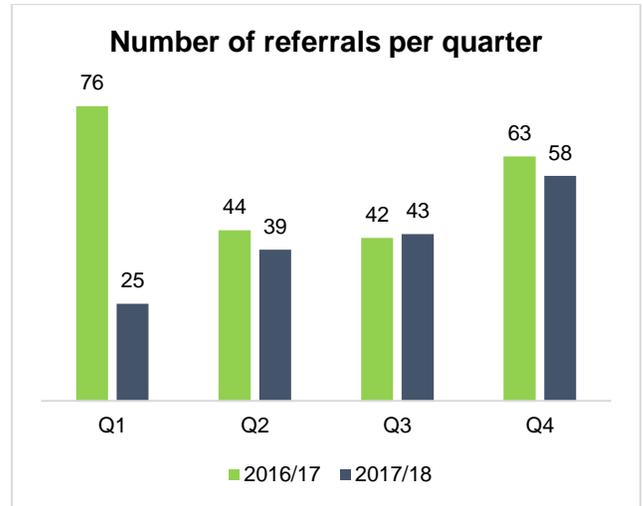
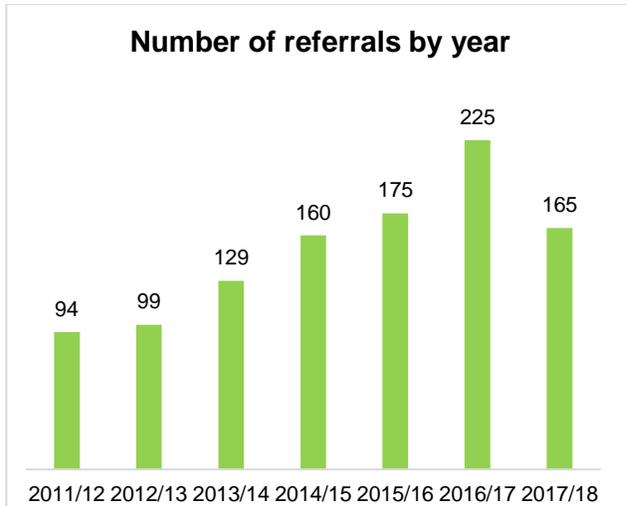
- A police investigation of a possible criminal offence
- Enquiries and/or assessment about whether a child has been or is at risk of being harmed through the actions of a worker/volunteer
- Consideration by an employer of disciplinary action in relation to possible performance or conduct issues
- Whether action in regards to the person making the allegation should be considered where the action has no foundation and may be malicious

## **3. Key information, trends and analysis of LADO activity 2016/17**

### **Allegations resulting in referrals**

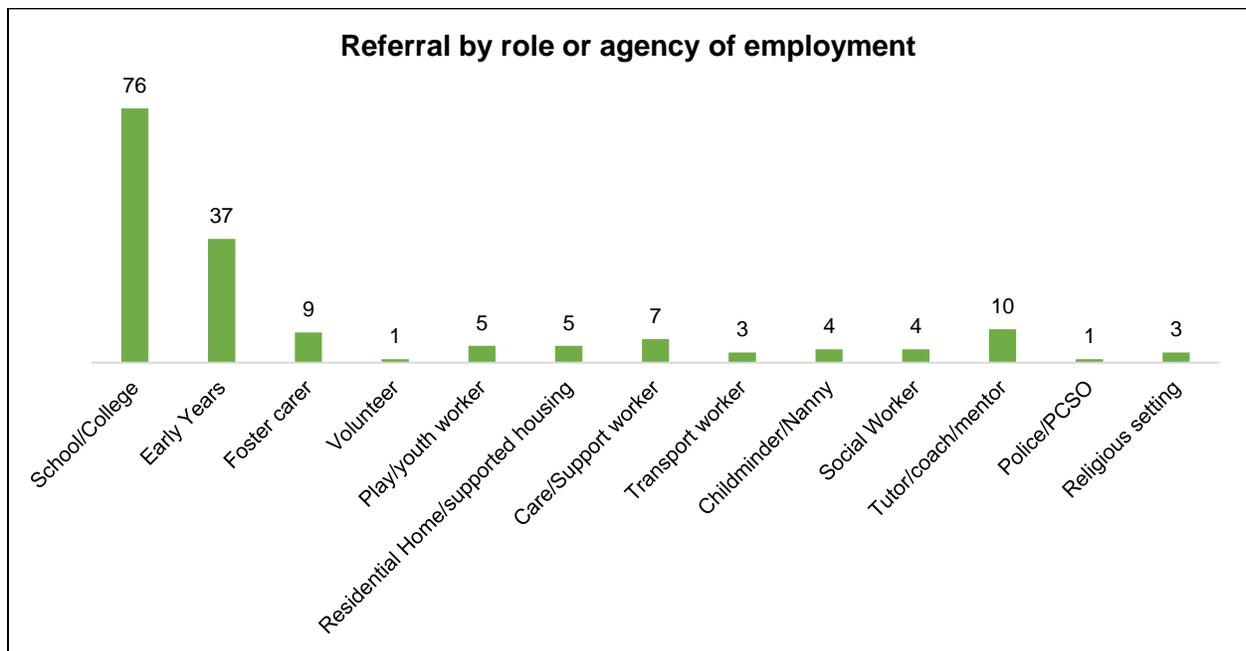
Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, a total of 165 referrals or enquiries were made with the LADO. This represents a 27% decrease on 2016/17 figures, but is more in line with the figures for the two previous years. Q1 of 2016-17 was an anomaly in terms of the high number of contacts which has not been seen again since. It was noted in that period that 35% of these referrals came from social workers, however a majority were advice only. There was no particular pattern as to which units/services these referrals came from, and it was hypothesised that it was in response to a reminder going out to the units to discuss concerns with the LADO.

During the year, consultations about cases which did not meet the LADO threshold were not recorded, where they had been recorded previously. A final decision around recording of information, informed by discussion with data protection colleagues has been to record all consultations, as this evidences the breadth of work of the LADO and provides thematic information about individuals and employers which is valuable in the case of future allegations.



## Categories of abuse

During 2017/18, referrals concerned staff from the following roles/agencies:



Allegations against teachers and school support staff continue to be the largest category of referrals to the LADO, comprising 46% of all referrals in 2017/18, which was slightly below the 52% of allegations against school staff in 2016/17. The overall number of referrals from schools reduced from 117 in 2016/17 to 76 in 2017/18.

Referrals with regards to early years staff (predominately nurseries) continue to be the second highest category, comprising of 22% of referrals, compared to 20% in 2016/17. The overall number of allegations increased by 15 in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17.

The number of allegations against foster carers has reduced from 16 in 2016/17 to 9 in 2017/18. Of these: three were in-house carers, one was a connected persons' carer and four were IFA

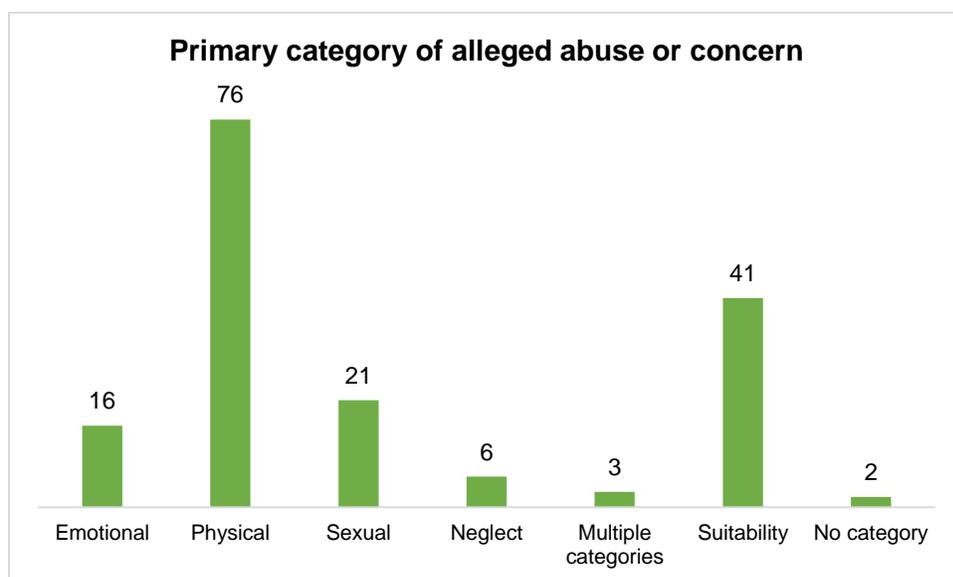
carers. One incident was a historical allegation of abuse dating back 27 years which was referred to Waltham Forest. In all cases the threshold was not met for LADO involvement.

It would be expected that school/early years' staff and foster carers are more likely to be subject to an allegation due to the nature of their work and due to these being the settings where children and young people spend the majority of their time when not in their family home.

There were 7 allegations against carers/support workers. Guidance and Advice was offered in five cases, one was a Newham case and one Allegations against Staff and Volunteers (ASV) meeting was held about a former member of Hackney staff following an allegation by a young person who has now turned 18.

There was one allegation against a volunteer and this was a crèche worker at a church.

### Nature of alleged abuse or concern



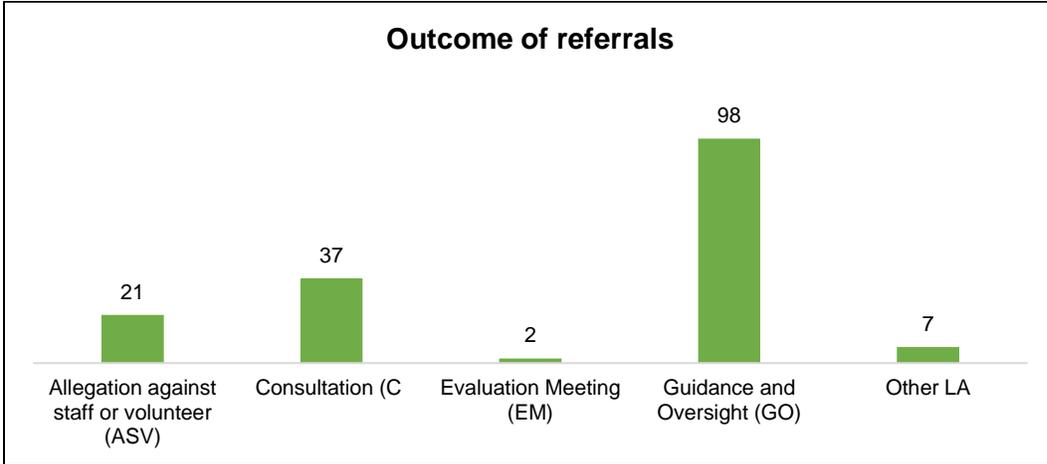
The category of physical abuse remains the largest overall (46%) which is slightly below the 48% figure for 2016/17. There was a significant increase in the category of 'suitability' (25%) compared to 2016/17 (19%). This could be attributed to a higher awareness by social workers to notify the LADO when parents on their caseloads are professionals or working with children.

The percentage of sexual abuse allegations increased again in 2017/18, accounting for 13% of primary categories in 2017/18, compared to 10% in 2016/17 and 7% in 2015/16. There has been an increase in reporting of sexual abuse allegations, partly due to a better awareness by professionals to follow up on concerns.

All sexual abuse allegations are now routinely cross-referenced with information held by the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Forum so that patterns of grooming/ abuse can be identified if present.

There were two cases recorded as 'no category'. These were more general enquiries made by nursery managers on staffing matters that warranted a recording by the LADO. Neither of these enquiries fitted any of the categories.

**Outcomes of referrals**



An Allegations against Staff and Volunteers (ASV) meeting/discussion brings together and shares information regarding the investigation of an allegation and then makes a formal decision as to the outcome category and actions needed by all agencies. Cases are managed through a discussion between the designated safeguarding lead, the police, any other relevant agency and the LADO. An ASV meeting will normally only be convened when it is highly likely that the threshold of harm/risk of harm has been met. These meetings are not used to further investigate concerns about inappropriate behaviour or conduct where there are not clear indications of harm/risk of harm to a child.

**Outcomes following an investigation:**

- **Substantiated:** there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation;
- **False:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation;
- **Malicious:** there is clear evidence to prove there has been a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation is entirely false;
- **Unfounded:** 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 of the circumstances
- **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.

Between 01 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 there were 21 cases reaching the LADO threshold for an ASV Meeting. With regards to the outcomes of those cases, 9 were substantiated, 7 were unsubstantiated, 2 had an unfounded outcome, one did not progress to an ASV meeting as a decision was made for the employer to deal with conduct issues and 2 investigations are ongoing.

All cases reaching ASV include recommendations to address agency and individual practice or performance standards as required, including those that were unsubstantiated.

An ASV meeting was held in four cases where sexual abuse was alleged. The allegation was unfounded in two of these cases. The police investigated the other two cases, with no further action taken in one case and the outcome of the police investigation is still awaited in the other case.

A significant proportion of the consultation cases resulted in extended guidance and support from the LADO and may therefore have required as much time as formally investigated LADO cases and on occasions more. Most typically these cases were with regards to allegations made against school or nursery staff, whereby the allegation was not viewed as serious enough to meet the threshold of harm for an ASV meeting and involve the police, but did however require the agency to undertake an internal investigation.

60 (53%) of 'guidance only' cases related to schools and early years settings. This has reduced from 75% in 2016/17. The LADO continues to offer advice and support to these settings in conjunction with HLT to help them deal with undertaking internal investigations. In the last academic year HLT also provided training sessions on investigating allegations for both early years and schools staff.

### **Key themes**

A key theme highlighted in referrals related to education settings was the increase in the number of children being aware of what conduct from staff is impermissible or inappropriate. A subsequent theme to this is parents' awareness, not only of the consequences staff members may face when an allegation had been made, but also seeking direct advice or making use of the LADO service as an avenue to challenge schools' outcomes.

A small number of referrals related to offences committed via social media which may become an increasing concern over time, particularly how the use of it impacts on employment.

There was an increase in managers seeking guidance on HR related matters. There were a number of allegations being made against staff members around their performance. These matters demand a high volume of professional hours and raise anxiety of both the employer and employee. The threshold for the allegations being made from a safeguarding perspective is considerably low.

There was an increase in referrals related to suitability where incidents involving safeguarding of staff members' own children raises concerns about whether or not they would pose any risk to children they work with. For the overwhelming majority, it could not be proved that what occurred in their personal lives in terms of child safeguarding suggested that they would be considered unsafe to work with children.

## **4. Training and awareness raising**

During 2017/18 fewer introduction/awareness raising events took place as head teachers and nursery managers became more familiar with the LADO.

The Safeguarding in Education Team run an extensive training programme throughout the year including Safeguarding and Child Protection training for HLT staff, Designated Safeguarding Leads for schools, Colleges and Early Years, whole School and college staff, Governors, Early Years and Childminders. All of their training covers safe practice and the procedures for dealing with allegations against adults who work with children and young people. They continue to run specific training dealing with managing allegations for managers in the early years and school sector, once an academic year for schools and twice an academic year for Early Years Managers.

From April 2017 to March 2018 they ran the following training:

- 16/05/2017 Early Years Investigating Allegations
- 21/11/2017 Early Years Investigating Allegations
- 11/01/2018 Managing Allegations for Schools

## **5. Scrutiny and report**

Quality assurance of the LADO role is provided through observations of practice and audits of LADO case files undertaken by the Service Manager, Laura Demetriades and the Practice Development Manager, Mags Wild, on a quarterly basis.

Progress against the priorities set for 2018/19 is reported to the CHSCB as part of the agreed bi-annual reporting to the Hackney CHSCB Executive.

The LADO attends the bi-monthly London LADO Network forum that considers LADO practice issues, develops guidelines and considers future developments of the LADO role and services. Hackney LADO is now part of a peer supervision arrangement with neighbouring Boroughs on a quarterly basis, to share learning and best practice.

Improved recording systems have been developed this year in line with the newly implemented GDPR. All cases where an ASV meeting is held are recorded on Mosaic. All cases which are consulted on are recorded on a spreadsheet in secure folders created in eDocs as necessary. We are looking to develop a more effective database to support in data analysis in the year ahead.

A total of twenty-three LADO audits were completed on three different themes. The themes included cases where the outcome of allegations were unsubstantiated, no further action, or substantiated. The audits considered four key areas of practice - referral information, decision-making, partnership working and outcomes. The main recommendations from the audits related to the quality of the initial referral information in supporting the LADO's investigation. Decision-making emerged as a strength with all the audits completed demonstrating evidence of proactive information gathering and timely decision making on the outcome of referrals. Partnership working also emerged as a strength with evidence of good communication and information-sharing across the professional network. In all audits the outcome of referrals were recorded and a clear rationale was provided.

The LADO is involved in responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOI) requests. Information sharing of this information has been clarified and a consistent system is in place for responding to these.

## **6. Progress against priorities for 2017/18**

The priorities for the service this year as highlighted in the end of year report for 2017/18 are outlined below:

The following priority areas have been agreed by the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service and will be reported to the CHSCB as part of the agreed bi-annual reporting to the Hackney CHSCB Executive:

**Continue to undertake themed audits within Children and Families Service**

A structured LADO audit programme was undertaken this year with different outcomes cases audited on a quarterly basis. The general outcome of these audits was good. It was identified that referral information can be weak and this led to the implementation of a new referral form to try and support referrers give the information required to make an initial decision about threshold.

### **Continue to undertake peer audit sessions with City LADO**

Due to low numbers of LADO cases within City this action was not progressed but quarterly audits of LADO cases were conducted internally

### **Focus on timely outcomes of investigations. The key outcomes of the recent audit on 'unsubstantiated' outcomes highlighted a number of areas to focus on, including:**

- Improved referral information – same point as made above
- Timeliness of concluding cases – this was generally rated highly in the audits, where there was delay this was often about waiting for the outcome of a Police investigation or schools being closed for a holiday period
- Clearer recording of significant events within the investigation on Mosaic – yes this was judged as good in audits

### **Raise awareness of their role to external organisations and offer training and advice where requested.**

The role of the LADO is covered in all Safeguarding/Child Protection training for HLT staff, Schools, Early Years and Childminders. They carry out introduction training and refresher training and advise that refresher training should be done every 2 years. They also carry out introduction and refresher training for Designated Safeguarding Leads in Schools and Early Years. As part of this training, participants are advised that they can contact the LADO for any advice and her contact details are disseminated.

The LADO has presented a session to the school Designated Safeguarding Lead Forum, which is held once a term and she has an open invite to attend future sessions.

The Childminding service is planning to invite the LADO to a Childminder Network Development Meeting this academic year to repeat the session.

### **Undertake a review of Hackney LADO guidance in accordance with the revised London Child Protection Procedures.**

This was covered as part of the rolling audit programme

### **Develop and evaluate a formal feedback process for ASV meetings to ensure that the views and experiences of other agencies are included in service development. This will be in line with the 'family feedback programme' which was re-launched in November 2017.**

Implementation of the re-designed feedback process will start from October 2018.

## **7. Strengths and areas of focus for 2017/18**

Awareness and understanding of the LADO role across multi-agency partners has remained good over the last year and agencies have taken up opportunities for consultation to enable appropriate referral-making. This has been further assisted by the continued strength in relationship between HLT and the LADO service. This is a particularly important relationship given the majority of LADO referrals are education setting based. Most notably, for the Early Years' Service, the HLT Welfare Standards Officers are particularly helpful in not only assisting in promoting the awareness of the role and encouraging the use of the service by Nursery Managers, but also in providing a service post enquiry/investigation to address all the areas of need/development identified.

The same applies to the working relationship between the LADO and HLT for registered and unregistered settings. Co-working makes for comprehensive investigations and a solid application of risk management measures, either by assessing or minimising risk. The LADO has worked extensively with the Head of Wellbeing and Education Safeguarding to address the ongoing difficulties posed by unregistered schools and the challenges around safeguarding and the apparent lack of application of procedures as set out by the London Child Protection Safeguarding Procedures.

An ongoing challenge, as identified in the report for 2016/2017, is the delay in receiving feedback from police investigations. The return of electronic devices taken by the police as part of their investigation continues to cause delays in reaching outcomes following police investigations. This is related to the forensic retrieval of information and the high volume the police service have to contend with. Although LADO procedures can, for the majority, be completed prior to achieving a police outcome, this can hamper ongoing HR procedures as they become reliant upon significant evidence such as police investigation outcomes.

There has been some variation in the timeliness of the implementation of recommendations by partner agencies. Recommendations are non-statutory and cannot be enforced by the LADO but where there are potential further safeguarding concerns these are escalated as appropriate. A number of broad themes came up regularly during the year including: the high level of anxiety and lack of knowledge for some employers around conducting internal investigations; lack of knowledge of some employers around their own HR processes; employers not wanting to think the worst of staff (empathy for staff in the situation which impacts on timely safeguarding action); anxiety around staff suspension and how this message is conveyed to wider staff group/pupils/parents without breaking confidentiality

## **8. Priorities for 2018/19**

### **Develop referral processes to LADO to ensure good quality and appropriate referrals are received**

- Monitor time spent on non LADO threshold cases and consider training needs that this may indicate
- Continue training on LADO processes and what makes a good referral

### **Develop formal feedback processes for ASV meetings to ensure that the views and experiences of other agencies are included in service development**

- Feedback for referrers to be implemented in October 2018
- Evaluate feedback received and consider service development required

### **Audit of cases to develop learning within the service and across partner agencies**

- Continue quarterly audits of LADO cases
- Share learning from these with partner agencies as appropriate
- Implement learning or training needs as identified, including what makes a good investigation

### **Increase capacity in the LADO service and consistency of cover arrangements**

- Develop shadow LADO opportunities to ensure high quality cover arrangements
- Review opportunities for administrative support for the LADO

### **Develop recording practices in line with GDPR expectations**

- Review recording practices from other LAs who are using Mosaic for recording LADO contacts
- Continue to consider impact of GDPR
- Ensure partners are aware of the need to notify employees of their information being shared through the LADO process.