

**Buckinghamshire County Council
Children's Services**

**Local Authority Designated Officer
Annual Report**

**The management of allegations and concerns regarding adults who work
with, care for or volunteer with children.**

2018-19

Introduction

All agencies that provide services for children, or provide staff or volunteers to work with or care for children, are required to have a procedure in place for managing and reporting allegations against staff and volunteers. This procedure needs to be consistent with statutory guidance published by HM Government (*Working Together to Safeguard Children*). This guidance outlines the requirement of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to oversee the effectiveness, transparency and record retention of the process not only in terms of protecting children but also ensuring that those who are the subject of an allegation are treated fairly and that the response and subsequent action is consistent, reasonable and proportionate.

The definition of what constitutes an allegation is defined in *Working Together* as when it is alleged that a person who works or volunteers 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 might pose a risk to children

In Buckinghamshire, all agencies are expected to follow the procedures in the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board “Managing allegations against staff and volunteers working with children”, which was updated in September 2018.

In 2015¹, *Working Together* was changed to remove reference to Local Authority Designated Officer and replaced this with the broader term “designated officers”. Similar to other Local Authorities, Buckinghamshire continues to use the title of Local Authority Designated Officer. *Working Together* 2015 also allowed Local Authorities scope to change the arrangements for the referral of cases to the LADO, in line with local arrangements. During 2018/19 referrals continued to come directly to the LADO through their dedicated secure email and telephone number.

This annual report provides information on the number, nature and outcomes of allegations made against staff within the children’s workforce in Buckinghamshire between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019. The report also provides an analysis of issues and trends that are considered to be relevant regarding inter-agency working together arrangements that is aiming to improve outcomes for children and families.

¹ Working Together 2015 was the current version of the statutory guidance during the period that this annual report covers

Allegations Management

The management of allegations should be seen in the wider context of safer employment practices, which has three essential elements:

- Safer recruitment & selection practices
- Safer working practices
- Management of allegations or concerns

Although this report primarily focuses on the third element, the three elements are interlinked with the work undertaken by the LADO in respect of safer recruitment, employment and guidance to support safer working practices across the children's workforce and within the private and voluntary sector.

The Buckinghamshire LADO Service aims to provide consistent and appropriate scrutiny across diverse workforces and voluntary bodies, contribute to a greater level of safeguarding to children, facilitate a proportionate response to staff, enable appropriate referrals being made, and to build a safer workforce by vetting individuals who are likely to present a risk.

Buckinghamshire County Council's re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers (published on 29 January 2018) found that overall progress in improving services for children in the County since 2014 has been inconsistent and too slow. The inspectors consequently judged the local authority to be inadequate overall.

However, the Ofsted report noted that:

'The designated officer provides a timely and effective response to concerns about adults who work with children. Work to raise awareness of the designated officer role to ensure a full understanding of professionals' responsibilities has taken place with a wide range of professionals. Close working arrangements are evident in the majority of cases sampled'

Below is a summary of the actions completed against each of the key objectives that were agreed for the LADO in 2017-18:

Action	Achieved by who	Achieved by when
Implement actions arising from internal audit action plan	Service Manager	This was completed and reported to senior management in December 2018.
Undertake regular audits to check the quality and standard of completed investigations and the agreed LADO outcome	Service Manager	The new service manager has closely worked with the 2 LADOs to review outcomes of cases since being in post monthly from October 2018, and facilitated an independent review of a

Action	Achieved by who	Achieved by when
		random sample of cases in March 2019.
To ensure that allegations about people who work with children and young people in positions of trust, including those who are paid, unpaid, volunteers, casual, agency or anyone self-employed, are dealt with promptly and robustly	To review Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) practice in line with procedures and ensure that outcome decisions reflect the available evidence in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Child protection enquiries ○ Criminal investigations and prosecutions ○ Employer actions (e.g. disciplinary or fitness to practice matters) 	A preliminary review was undertaken in December 2018 and subsequently with an independent consultant in March 2019.

In summary, the outcomes and impact from the completed actions are:

- Digitalising all paper records.
- Ensure that LSCB guidance is up to date and reflective of current procedures and regional agreements
- Implementation of management oversight on every case that is closed to the LADO service.
- Review of the LADO procedures and forms to reflect changes and learning and share with key agencies such as MASH and CYP First response.
- Holding child Protection (Section 47) enquiries outside of LADO position of trust meetings so that the child's view is obtained for every case considered within the service, whether that be a criminal investigation, employer investigation or a transference of risk.
- Ensuring that every LADO case that meets threshold clearly stipulates a summary of the case with the employer's outcome, overall outcome from the LADO and the learning / next steps that will implemented including notifications to regulatory bodies.

Staffing and resources

Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO)

The staffing establishment for the LADO service continued to remain the same during the period between April 2018 and March 2019 at 1.6 Local Authority Designated Officers (covered by two members of staff). These two individuals were managed and supervised by a full time manager, who also manages the conferencing service and reports to the Head of Quality, Standards and Performance.

The Local Authority Designated Officers are qualified social workers, with many years post qualifying children's social work and management experience. The two individuals in post were recruited to the permanent positions in August 2017. As they were both new to LADO work, they were mentored by an experienced LADO for a period of time. The management support they received from the conferencing manager prior to September 2018 was minimal and the systems in place did not provide the level of support they required to manage the volume of work coming through.

As a result during the course of 2018, staffing became an issue with sickness and periods of absence. This included the manager of the service. Between the months of June 2018 and March 2019, the service did not have a full time permanent LADO. Subsequent to the start of the new manager in post in September 2018, child protection advisors (CPAs) with LADO experience supported the service, in order to ensure that there was sufficient coverage to meet the demand. Due to the persistent sickness and the inability to recruit suitable staff, the manager has continued to facilitate the service with the support of the Child Protection Advisors and with high level of management oversight and support. At the end of March 2019, the LADO service had one consistent staff member and different agency staff providing cover.

Safeguarding Officers within the LADO Service

In November 2018, the LADO and Education Safeguarding Advisory services were reviewed and it was decided that the two social work posts (full time equivalent of 1.6 posts) which were supporting the Education Safeguarding Advisory Service should be located within the LADO service. This enabled a more comprehensive LADO service to provide support, consultation and advice alongside training and the management of allegations. As a result of this review and change, 1.6 full time equivalent social work posts were created within the LADO service and named as Safeguarding Officers, the part time role being a senior to oversee the work of the second full time post. At the end of 31st March 2019, both these posts were recruited and had just begun working with the LADO service.

Business support staff

The Local Authority Designated Officer service is supported by a full time permanent Business Support Specialist. The Business Support Specialist provides an initial point of contact, helps in keeping the electronic records up to date, and takes notes at Joint Evaluation Meetings. The digitalising of paper files has required the support of an additional Business Support Administrator who provides part time support of 20

hours per week. As the volume of work within the LADO service has increased, this additional post supports the overall work of the team.

A permanent Business Support Coordinator provides direct line management to the Business Support Specialist and arranges cover during periods of annual leave.

Local Authority Designated Officer caseloads

The number of active cases within the LADO Service rose to 279 at the end of 31st March 2019. This resulted in an average of up to 140 cases per 1.0 FTE officer. This is a decrease from last year by nearly 50%. Where active cases are linked to specialist provisions or group allegations, these are managed as one case. During the period of 2018/19, there were 2 large health employers which had several allegations and this was shared by the 2 LADOs, in the team at the time.

Staff training

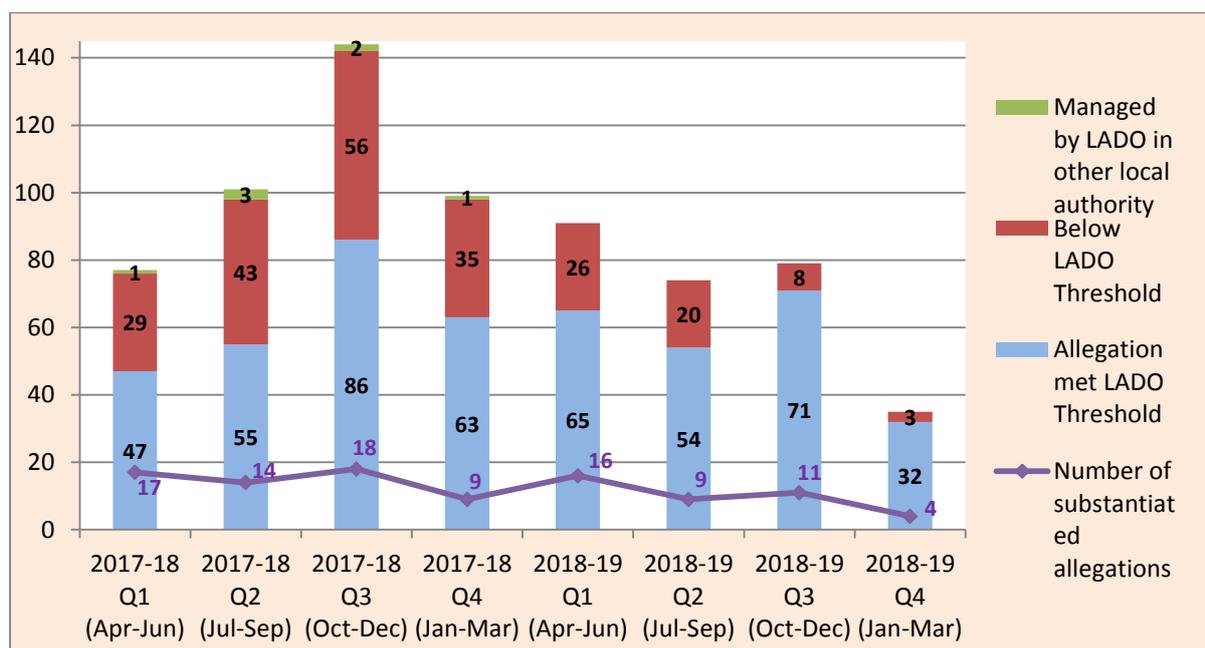
With such a specialist role, it is important for the LADO to be able to access national training and events. During 2018-19 due to the issues of staffing and increased volume in activity, the LADOs have not been able to routinely and consistently attend the quarterly South East Regional meetings to hear about and share good practice. However, they have been in liaison with LADOs in the local region and attended Ofsted learning events during this time. The challenges within the service in 2018/19 have meant that the LADOs have not had the benefit of being able to access any additional training to further their development. As such resources made available in the annual budget for the LADO to attend up to two external courses over the year were not utilised.

One of the key changes to the service since the new manager has been in post is to facilitate regular team meetings and peer development sessions which were scheduled across the year to provide opportunities for reflective discussion as a means to continue to improve the service. This has become a vital part of the team's routine and now includes the safeguarding officers and the business support staff.

Budget

The LADO spend in 2018/19 remained in line with its forecast budget.

Overall Activity



The total number of allegations made against people in a position of trust decreased by 13% during 2018-19, compared to 2017/18 (251 in 2017/18 compared to 222 in 2018/19).

	2017-18				2018/19			
	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	Q4 (Jan-Mar)	Q1 (Apr-Jun)	Q2 (Jul-Sep)	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	Q4 (Jan-Mar)
Allegation met LADO Threshold	47	55	86	63	65	54	71	32
Below LADO Threshold	29	43	56	35	26	20	8	3
% below LADO Threshold	38%	43%	39%	35%	29%	27%	10%	9%
Managed by LADO in other local authority	1	3	2	1				
Total Allegations	77	101	144	99	91	74	79	35
Number of substantiated allegations	17	14	18	9	16	9	11	4

Commentary:

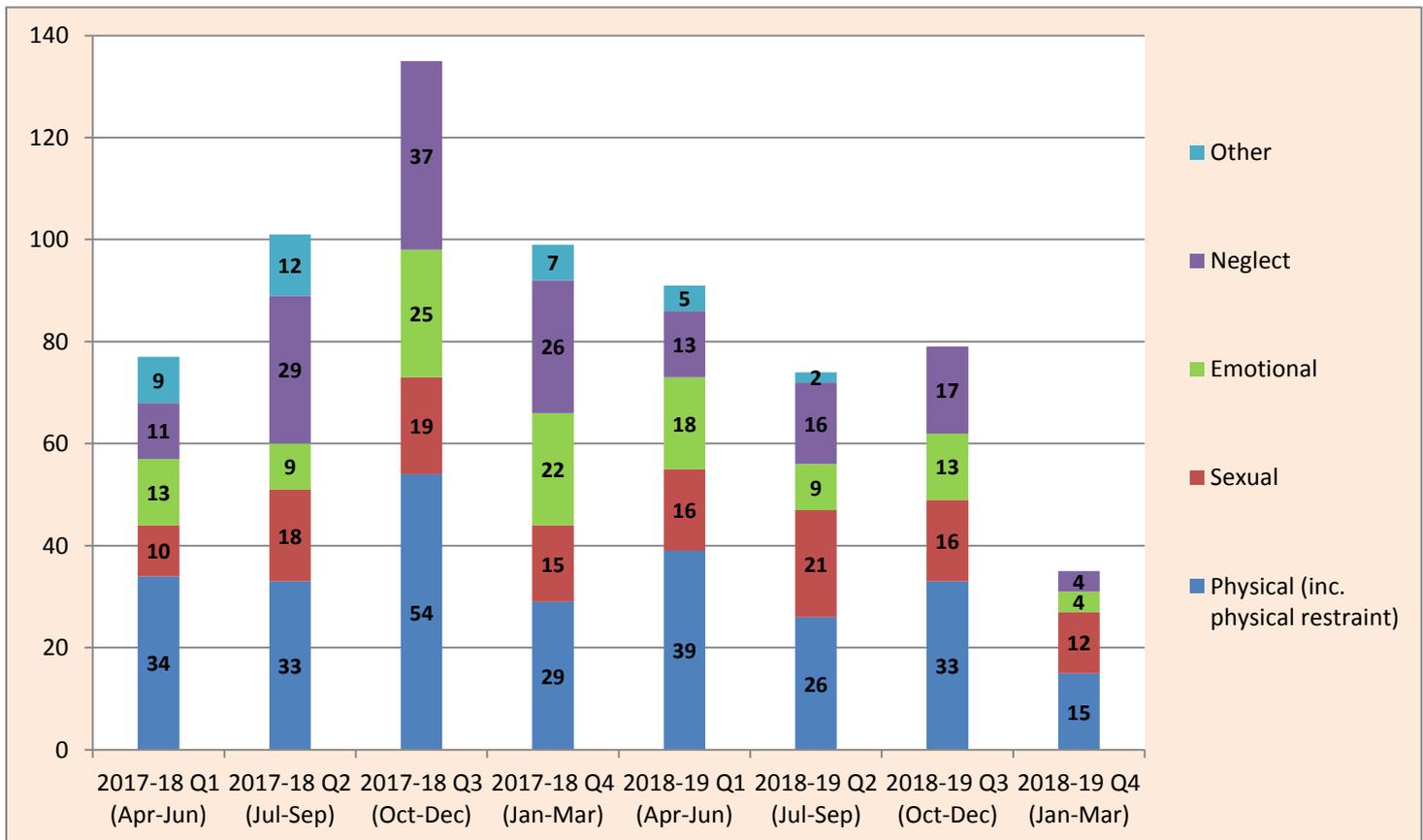
When allegations are referred to the LADO, most should meet threshold. Of those that do meet threshold a Position of Trust Meeting (previously known as a Joint Evaluation Meeting) is held where concerns are significant. That is, the nature of the allegation suggests significant harm and or a crime to a child and has complex elements to the allegation. At times, this may mean, multiple children and or multiple adults involved. This meeting is chaired by the LADO with representatives from the employer, Police and Children's Social Care invited to attend. Above is a summary of the percentage of allegations by quarter that were below the threshold for a Position of Trust Meeting to be convened.

There were 279 allegation made in 2018-19 compared to 421 in the previous year - a 34% decrease. The number of allegations slowly decreased throughout the year starting at 99 in Q1 with only 35 allegations made in Q4. This is in part due to the consistency of the LADOs in post, time lapse between the previous inspection and levels of anxiety / thresholds being considered appropriately and tighter management oversight.

The LADO service continues to spend a significant proportion of their time with advice and consultations to safeguarding leads in organisations where threshold has not been met, with a higher number of occurrences in quarter 1 of the year (April to June). This could be partly attributed to the post Ofsted inspection period and the LADO service was fully staffed with the ability to consistently record the activity being undertaken.

It should be noted that auditing and quality assurance activity shows that the recording of consultations and advice activity overall was not consistent and accurate prior to the period of June and September 2018 due to sickness within the team and the lack of consistent management oversight. As such, the number of consultations recorded on the system in quarters 2, 3, and 4 may not be a true reflection of activity at the time.

Type of allegations

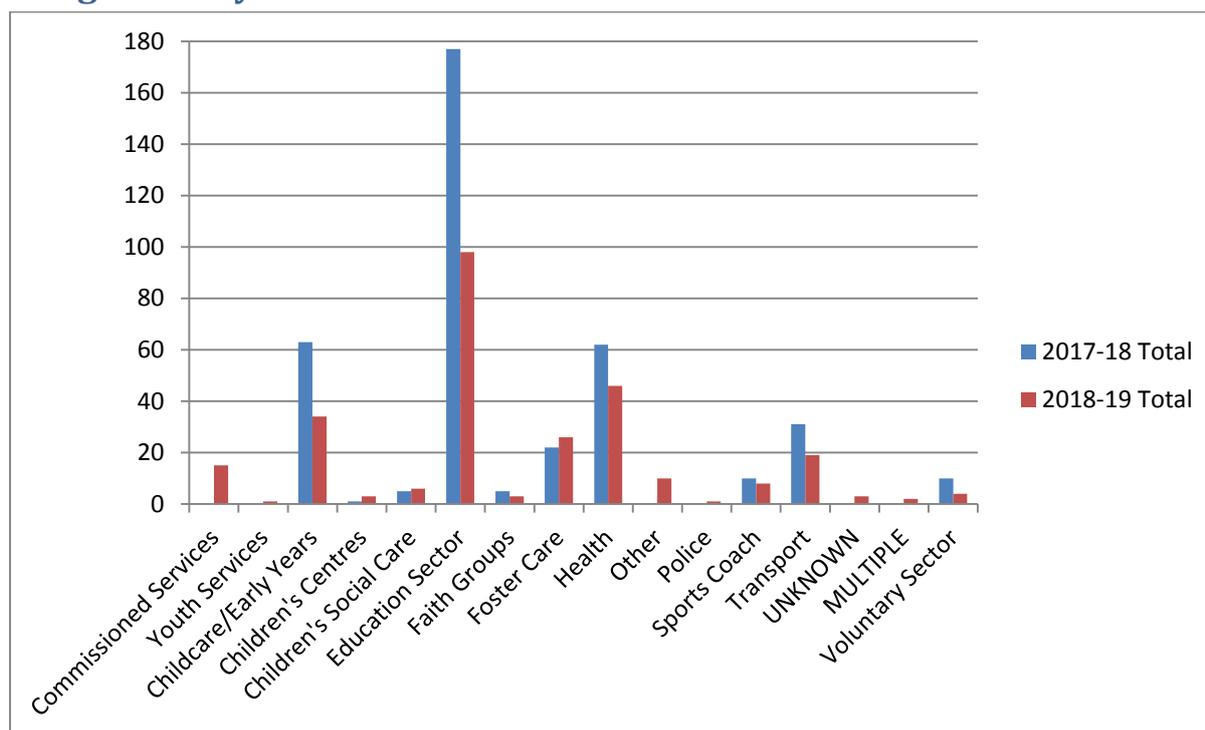


Commentary:

Physical abuse remained the most prevalent allegation type at 41% of total allegations in 2018-19. This is a continuing trend from 2017-18. The second most common allegation type is allegations of sexual abuse (23% of the total in 2018-19) with Q2 2018-19 showing particularly high numbers compared to other quarters (up to 21). This is a change from last year where neglect was the second highest category. In 2018-19 this only accounted for 18% of all allegations raised.

Use of 'other' as an allegation type has continued to decrease in 2018-19 with no allegations recorded under this category in Q3 and Q4.

Allegations by sector



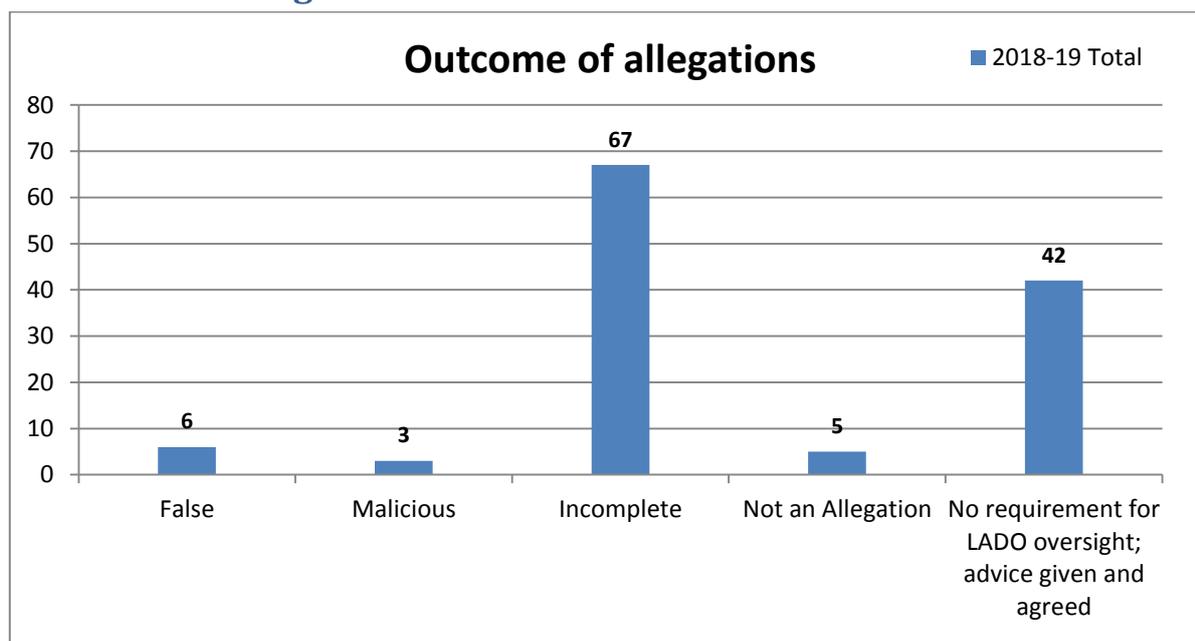
Commentary:

Education continued to be the highest referring sector in 2018-19 (35% of all referrals)

There was an increase in the number of referrals from Health which became the second largest referring sector in 2018-19 alongside childcare / early years. In 2017-18 the second highest referring sector was childcare/early years. This rise is largely attributed to one residential health facility which had a spate of referrals between December 2018 and February 2019. The nature of concerns with this provider was such that alongside managing the allegations about staff, the LADO service was involved in significant partnership work with the relevant health regulatory bodies and local authorities who had children placed in the facility to ensure appropriate safeguarding measures were in place for children accessing this service.

There was also an increase in referrals coming from foster carers, from 22 in 2017-18 to 26 in 2018-19. There were a number of referrals from commissioned service and other sectors, neither of which made referrals during the previous year.

Outcomes of allegations

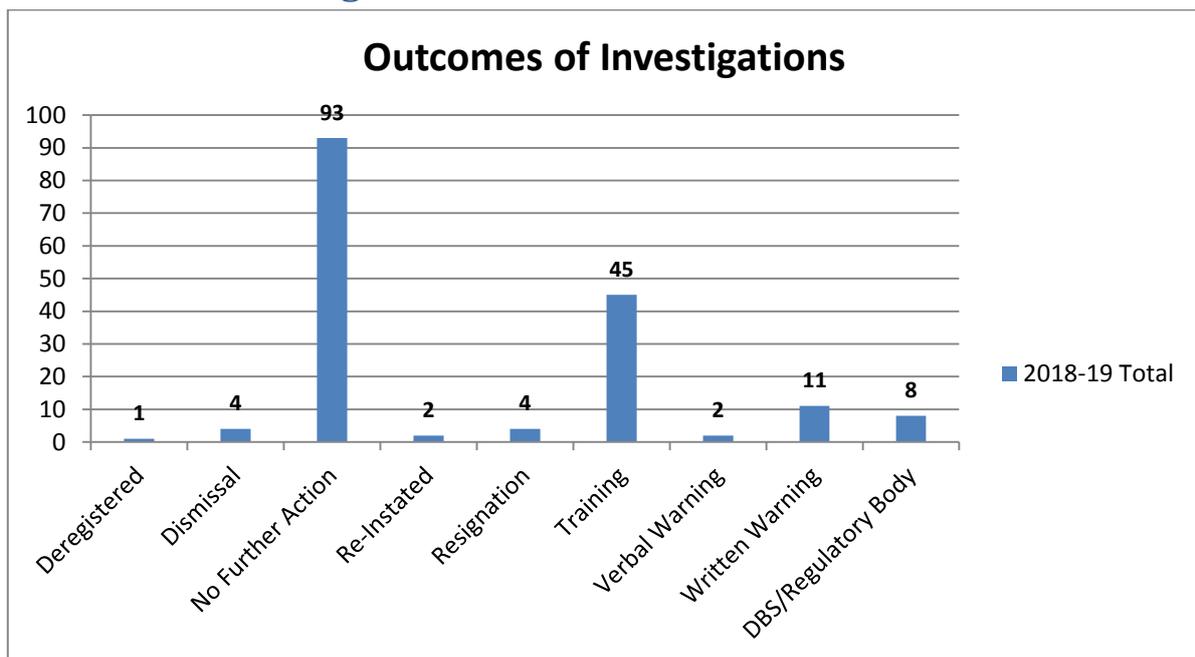


Outcome of Allegation	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	2018-19 Total
Substantiated	16	9	11	4	40
Unsubstantiated	17	14	20	8	59
Unfounded	20	15	17	5	57
False	1	1	0	4	6
Malicious	1	2	0	0	3
Incomplete	10	19	24	14	67
Not an Allegation	2	2	1	0	5
No requirement for LADO oversight; advice given and agreed	24	12	6	0	42

Commentary:

During the year there were a total of 40 substantiated allegations, which accounts for 14% of the total. This is the same % as 2017-18, showing that the % of substantiated claims has remained consistent. At year end 14 cases were still open to the LADO team. This is a decrease from the end of last year where the total was 29. The 'incomplete category' accounts for those cases that are still active at the end of that particular reporting quarter. Though this number has decreased the main reasons for recording as incomplete, is where the organisation has not reported back to the LADO. A reduction in incomplete outcomes is very positive. The LADO continues to remind agencies about the importance of ensuring timely feedback is provided on outcomes.

Outcomes of investigations

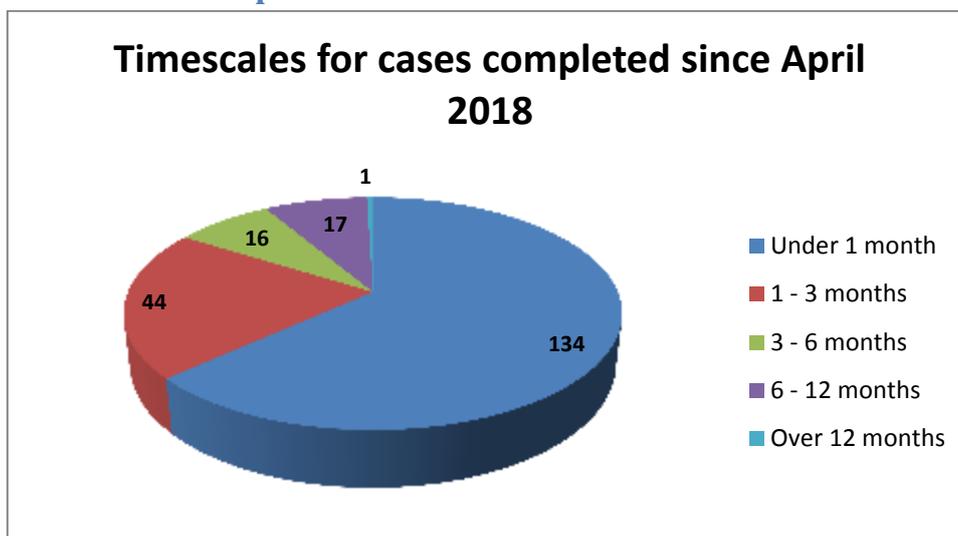


Commentary:

Overall, of the total investigations completed during 2018-29, 93 resulted in no further action, which amounts to 55%. This is a slight decrease compared to last year where 56% resulted in no further action. The percentage of cases resulting in training requirements for staff was 26 (45 in number). The number of staff dismissed increased slightly during 2018-19 with a total of 4, compared to 3 in the previous year.

Performance

Timescales for the completion of cases



Commentary:

In 2018-19, 63% of cases were completed in less than 1 month. This is a decrease compared to last year where 70% of cases were completed in less than 1 month. This is in part due to staffing challenges which include sickness and staff recruitment and turnover.

There has been a decrease in the number of cases taken over 1 year to be completed, with only 1 case in 2018-19.

Allegation management system

All concerns referred to the LADO continue to be recorded on LCS (Allegation Management System). An internal audit was undertaken in 2018/19 to test the robustness of governance processes and procedures and the consistency in the application of agreed systems by the LADO and their business support. The outcomes of this audit were considered and implemented shortly after the arrival of the new manager in September 2018. The recommendations required the LADO service to routinely advise employers of the overall outcome of the allegation, ensure that cases were completed and closed within a week of the employer notifying the LADO of their outcome and up to date procedures in place for managing allegations which is reflected on the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Childrens Board's website.

Management oversight

Weekly data reports are used by the LADO Manager to track the caseloads of the individual LADOs, the source and type of allegations and timeliness in achieving an outcome. This regular monitoring of activity plus discussions in monthly supervision means that the LADO is able to take an active role in driving improvements in safeguarding children across the multi-agency workforce.

Management oversight of cases has further improved in 2018-19 with the LADOs now advising the manager of their outcome for each case, which is jointly considered and approved prior to case closure. This is an area for further improvement in 2019/20.

Areas for Development and Improvement: 2019/20

- To facilitate greater understanding about safer recruitment & selection processes; safer working practices and the management of allegations or concerns to be undertaken by the LADO Service before the end of March 2020.
- To develop greater links with faith settings across the county, to be undertaken by the LADO Service over the coming 6 months.
- To be more visible within the county through training, development and information sessions with the major referring sources into the LADO service, this will be undertaken by the LADO Service commencing in January 2020.
- To develop newsletters linked to Schools Bulletins to be undertaken in partnership with the Education Safeguarding Advisory Service starting from January 2020.
- To update the Privacy Impact Statement and publish this on the safeguarding partnership (BCSP) website alongside the updated material about the Management of Allegations procedures, which will be completed in partnership with the BSCP by March 2020.
- To improve the recording of cases which do not meet the threshold for LADO oversight, to be undertaken by the Safeguarding Officers by March 2020.
- To improve the consistency of management oversight on all cases considered within the LADO service, to be consistently applied by the Manager of the LADO Service by March 2020.
- To facilitate a feedback system about the LADO service to appreciate partner agency views about the service and areas for improvements, to be initiated by March 2020 by the LADO Service.
- Records of LADO strategy meetings reflect how the integrity of the investigation will be maintained and the decision making of what information to share with whom and when, implemented from December 2019.