



CHILDREN

LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT

April 2024 to March 2025

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the work of the Local Authority Designated Officer for the period 1st April 2024-31st March 2025. It details data in relation to allegations referred to the LADO service regarding people in a position of trust working or volunteering with children in the Bristol area, as well as lower-level concerns or “consultations”. The other work of the LADO service is also reported on as well as future areas for development.

National Policy/Framework

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 requires Local Authorities to have a Designated Officer to be involved in the management and oversight of allegations against people who work or volunteer with children and sets out their responsibilities.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (WTTSC) also places a responsibility on organisations to have safeguarding policies for managing and reporting allegations regarding people who work with children.

Education settings are required to follow the legal duties set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE, DfE 2024) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It includes detailed guidance on managing allegations regarding people in a position of trust.

Under WTTSC and KCSIE organisations have a duty to report to the LADO within one working day where it is alleged that an individual working or volunteering with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed a child; or
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against, or related to a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that they may pose a risk of harm to children; or
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates that they may not be suitable to work with children.

These concerns may relate to a person's work/volunteering or to their behaviour outside of the work setting, in their personal life.

In all cases that meet the threshold, the LADO considers the following:

- Issues of child protection
- Possible criminal investigation that may need to take place.
- Internal disciplinary processes by the employer

The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (KBSP) has adopted the South West Child Protection Procedures online resource which requires all agencies to comply with the LADO service when managing allegations against people who work or volunteer with children.

The LADO is responsible for:

- Providing advice, information and guidance to employers, and voluntary organisations and agencies in relation to allegations and concerns regarding paid and unpaid individuals who work with children.
- Managing and overseeing individual cases from all partner agencies.
- Ensuring the child's voice is heard, that they are safeguarded, and their welfare prioritised.
- Ensuring there is a consistent, fair, and thorough process for all adults working or volunteering with children and young people against whom an allegation is made.

- Liaising effectively with the police and other organisations and agencies to monitor the progress of cases and ensuring that they are dealt with as quickly as possible, consistent with a thorough and fair process.
- Providing oversight of the investigative process through to its conclusion.
- Chairing LADO Allegation Management Meetings in complex/high risk cases or where the allegation requires investigation by police and/or social care.
- Collecting strategic data and maintaining a confidential database in relation to allegations.
- Providing training, leaflets, and information to the wider workforce to support the confidence of agencies in reporting allegations and managing the immediate concern to ensure the safety of children, as well as considering their duty of care to their employee.

The LADO service sits within the Strategic Safeguarding Service of Bristol City Council children's services. The LADO role is undertaken by one full time and one part time LADO, with a cover LADO offering support to cover annual leave, all of whom are qualified social workers. These arrangements ensure consistency and timeliness of the service. The LADOs manage three Child Protection & LADO Coordinators who assist in their role, in addition to being responsible for undertaking child protection checks in relation to probation and fostering processes, amongst others.

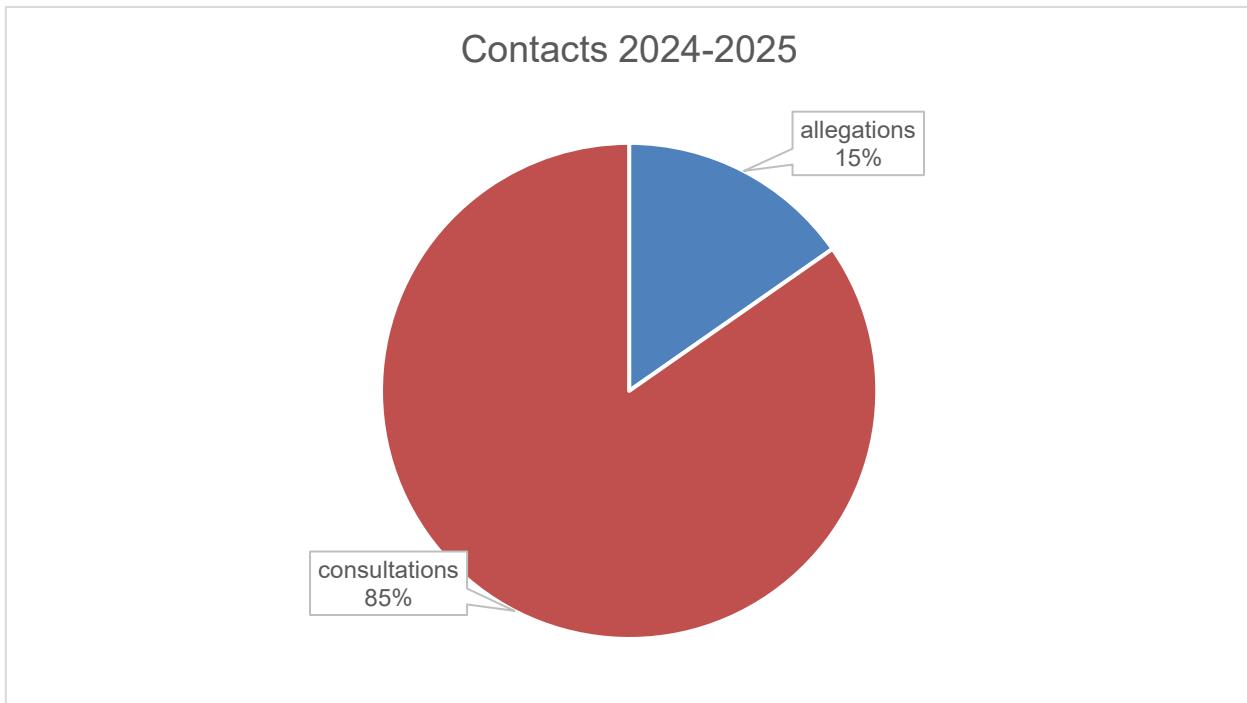
Progress of LADO team priorities 2023-2024

Objective/service priority	By whom?	Timescale	Update
Creation and implementation of an online LADO referral form	BCC IT Service	By March 2025	This remains an action for the coming year.
Training to be provided targeted at sports and faith organisations and CICs to improve knowledge and understanding of allegations management process and how staff can protect themselves from allegations being made.	Nicola Laird	Across 2024- 2025	Initial research and network building underway but not completed due to lack of existing sports networks in the city. There is a faith network but currently the format does not work for training delivery for our team. Further work will be undertaken to achieve this objective in the coming year.
Training to be provided to post 16 supported accommodation providers to improve knowledge and understanding of allegations management process and how staff can protect themselves from allegations being made.	Alice Bennett	Across 2024-2025	Completed and ongoing offer for providers in place.
Refresher training to be provided across various BCC children's social care teams, to support professionals to identify when concerns about professionals meet LADO threshold and to ensure correct LADO referral processes are followed.	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett	Across 2024-2025	Training sessions undertaken with some teams but changes across services. The LADO team had an ambitious plan for training delivery in 2024-2025 and focused on delivery of Low-Level Concern training across various sectors. This significant roll-out impacted on our capacity to deliver training to BCC social care teams.

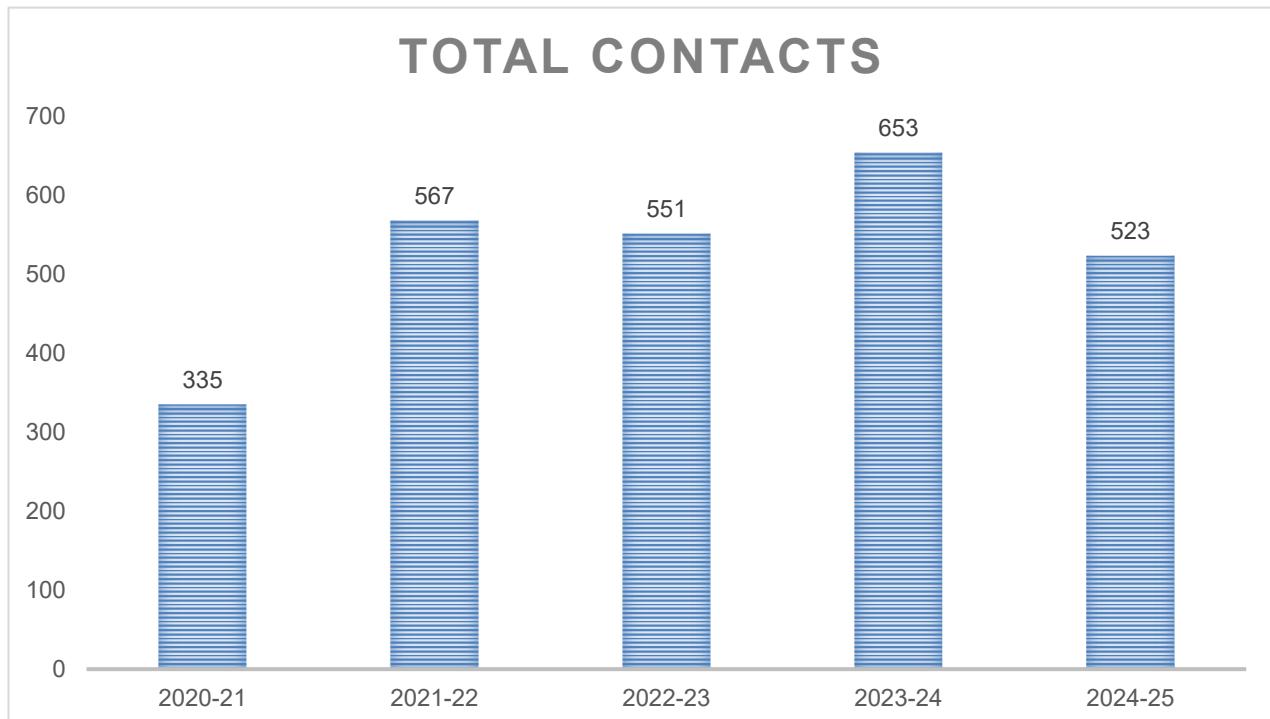
			However, the increase in referrals from these teams in 2024-2025 indicates that their understanding of referral criteria is generally good. Further work will be undertaken to achieve this objective in the coming year.
Expansion of Low-Level Concerns training offer across non-education settings.	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett	Across 2024-2025	Expanded to early years, children's homes, and home to school travel, to continue during 2025-2026.
To continue to monitor safeguarding and allegations management processes within local health Partnerships and escalate any concerns accordingly within KBSP and externally to the ICB.	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett	Across 2024-2025	Extensive work undertaken with Partnership that gave most cause for concern, and improvement in practice observed.
LADO page on KBSP website to be reviewed and resources to be refreshed	LADO team	By March 2025	Refreshed in August 2025. To remain as an annual action.

The Work of the LADO

Number of contacts



Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 there were 523 contacts to the LADO. This figure comprises of 80 concerns that meet the LADO threshold as defined in WTTSC and 443 lower-level concerns or consultations. This is a 20% reduction overall compared to the previous year when there were 653 contacts. In comparing this and the previous year there was a 53% reduction in referrals that met the LADO threshold. This is discussed in more detail later in this report.

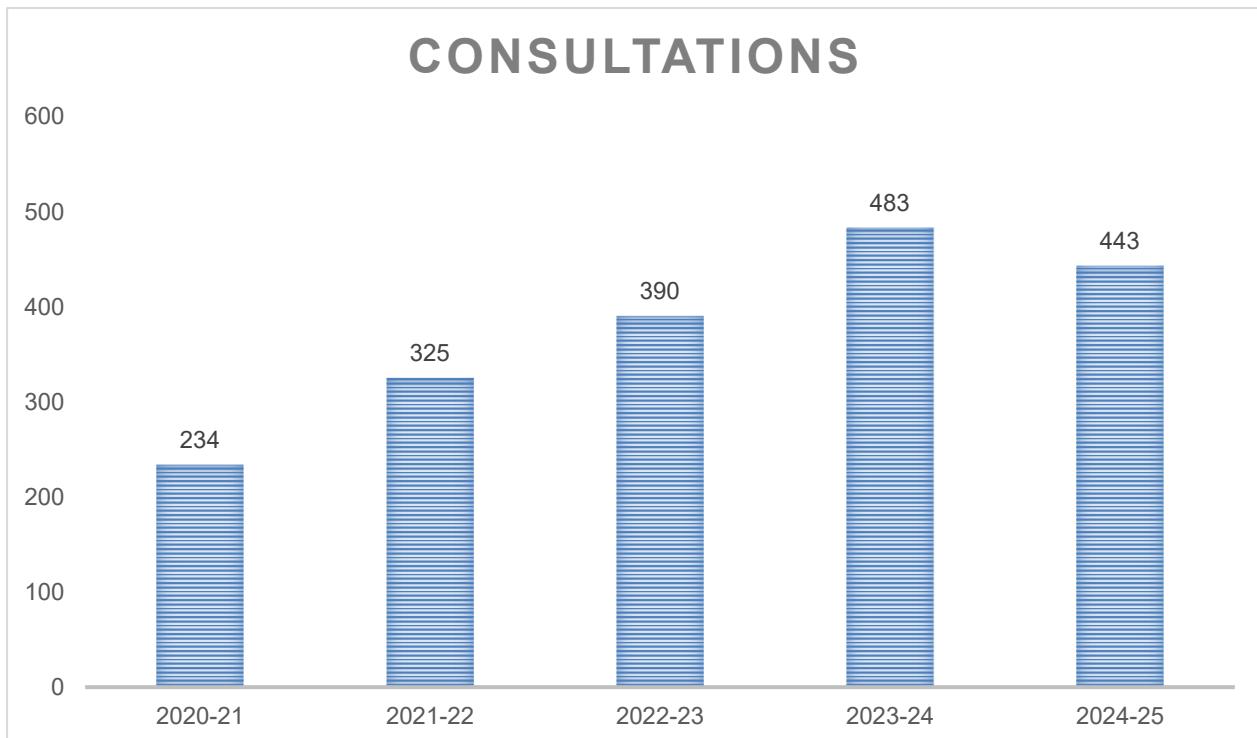


In this reporting period, LADO team has continued to provide a consistent and reliable service. Following a period of monitoring demand within the service, a second LADO working 18.5 hours

per week on a permanent basis has been appointed and the LADO role has been fully occupied since June 2024. An additional part time, permanent LADO and Child Protection Co-ordinator has been in post since January 2025. The increased capacity across the service has enabled us to respond in a timelier manner to referrers and also afforded us more opportunity to work reflectively and consider service development.

As well as managing allegations that meet the threshold the LADO team provides a consultation service to employers, professionals and members of the public who have a concern regarding someone working or volunteering with children. Managing consultations is a significant part of the LADO role and is very time consuming. The team also deal with a significant volume of enquiries that do not fall into the category of a LADO consultation or referral. In previous reporting periods we have not provided data on these, but due to increasing demand on the service, we have begun tracking these in order to provide comparable data in coming years – see [Enquiries](#).

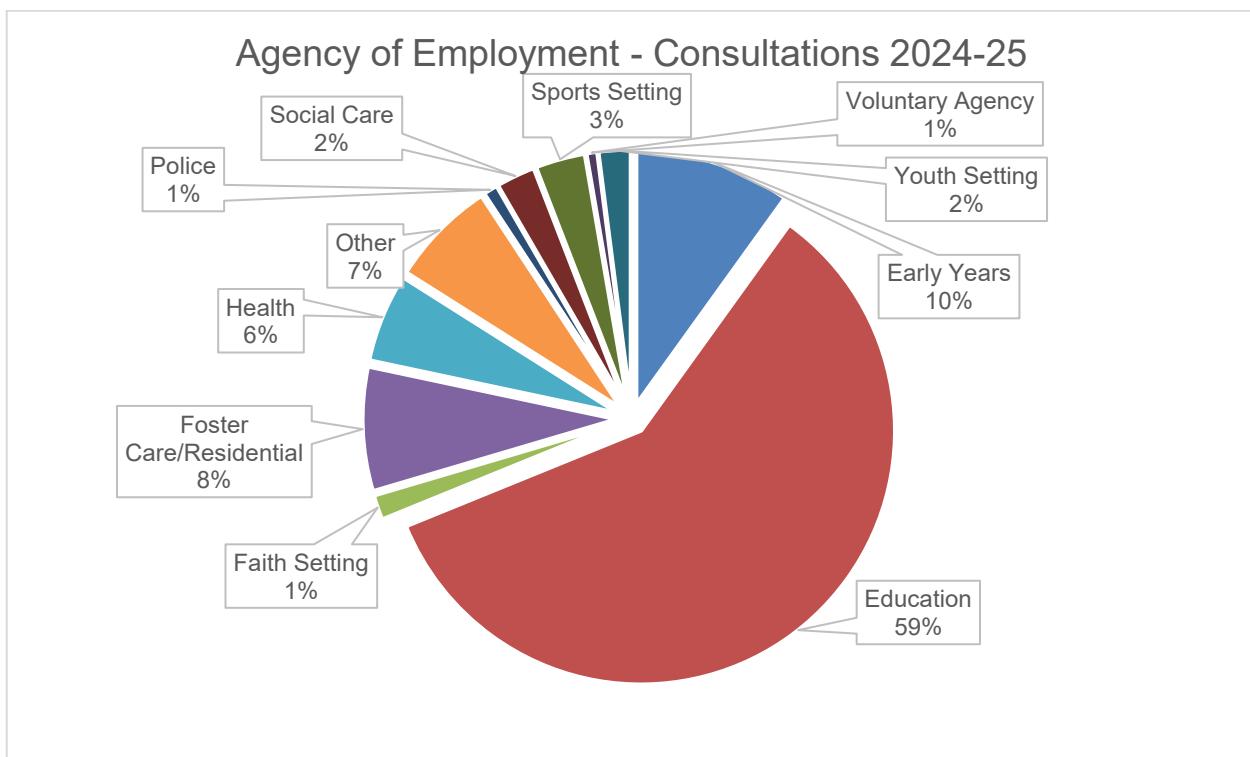
Consultations



Concerns that don't meet the LADO threshold as defined in WTTSC are recorded as consultations by the Bristol LADO team.

In the majority of cases consultations are handed back to the manager to address as a conduct or practice issue, with advice and guidance given about how to action this or progress an investigation. Consultations can take a considerable amount of time for the LADOs to deal with and are therefore recorded for accountability and statistical purposes.

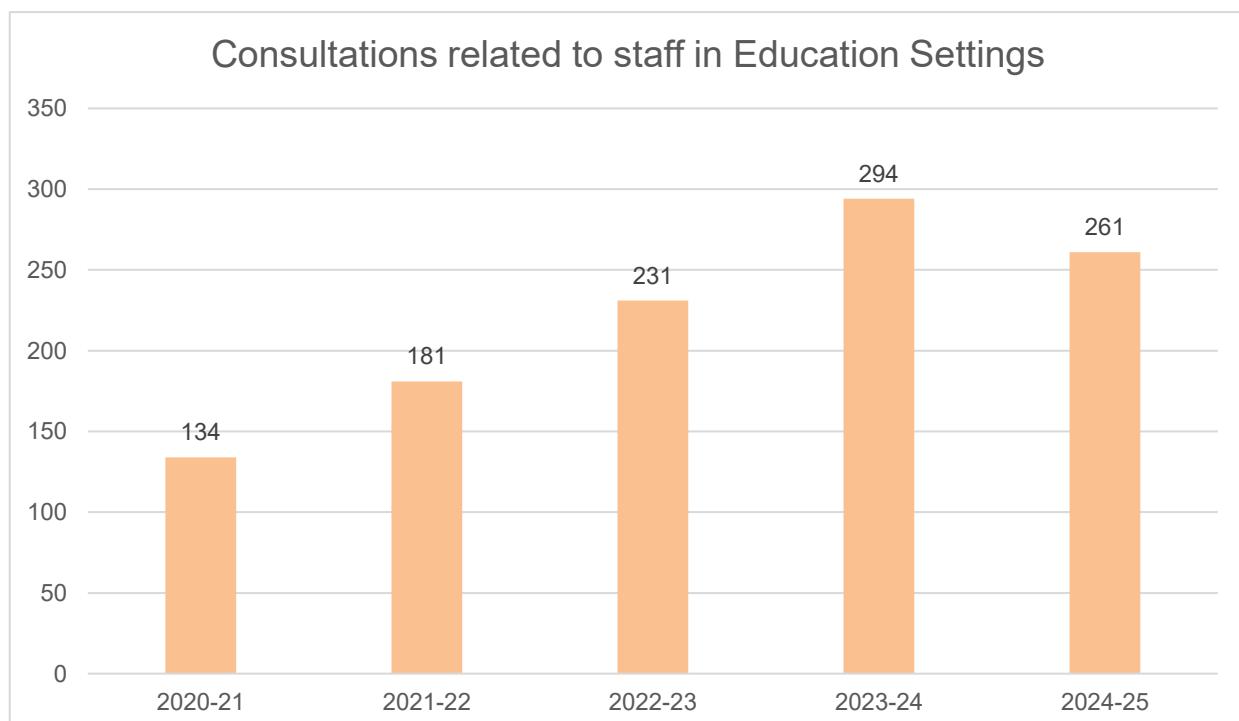
In the reporting period there was an overall decrease in consultations of 8%, 443 compared to 483 in the previous year.



Most consultations are regarding education staff which is to be expected given the size of the workforce, 261 (59%) compared to 294 (61%) the previous year. This is a reduction of 33 consultations, which is likely explainable by the increased delivery and uptake of Low-Level Concerns training for education settings, discussed in more detail below.

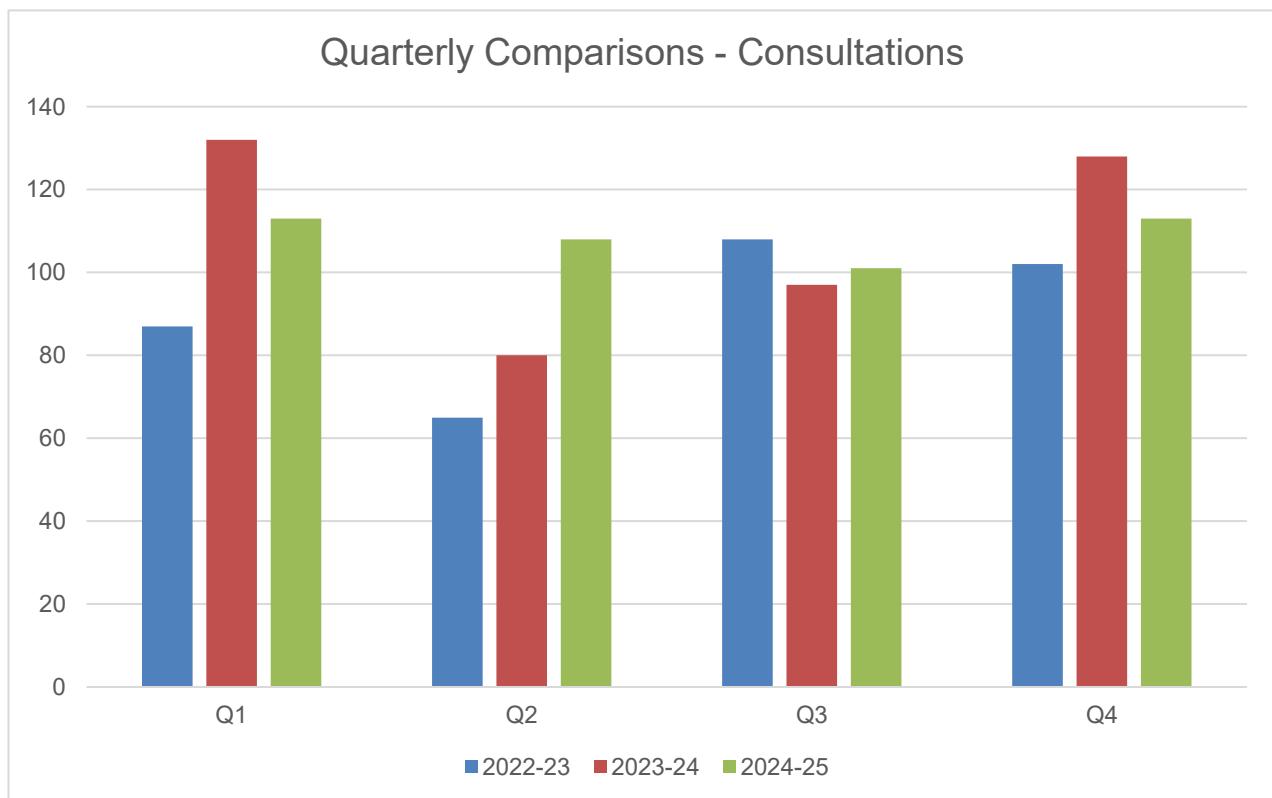
The second highest category was regarding early years settings with 44 (10%), followed by foster carers and residential care workers with 35 (8%).

There was a noticeable increase in consultations regarding children's social care staff in this reporting period; 11 (2%) in the reporting period compared to 5 (1%) the previous year. This could be explained by an increased awareness of the LADO role and responsibilities in relation to transferable risk within the Bristol City Council workforce, and in partner agencies, as a result of training delivered by the team.

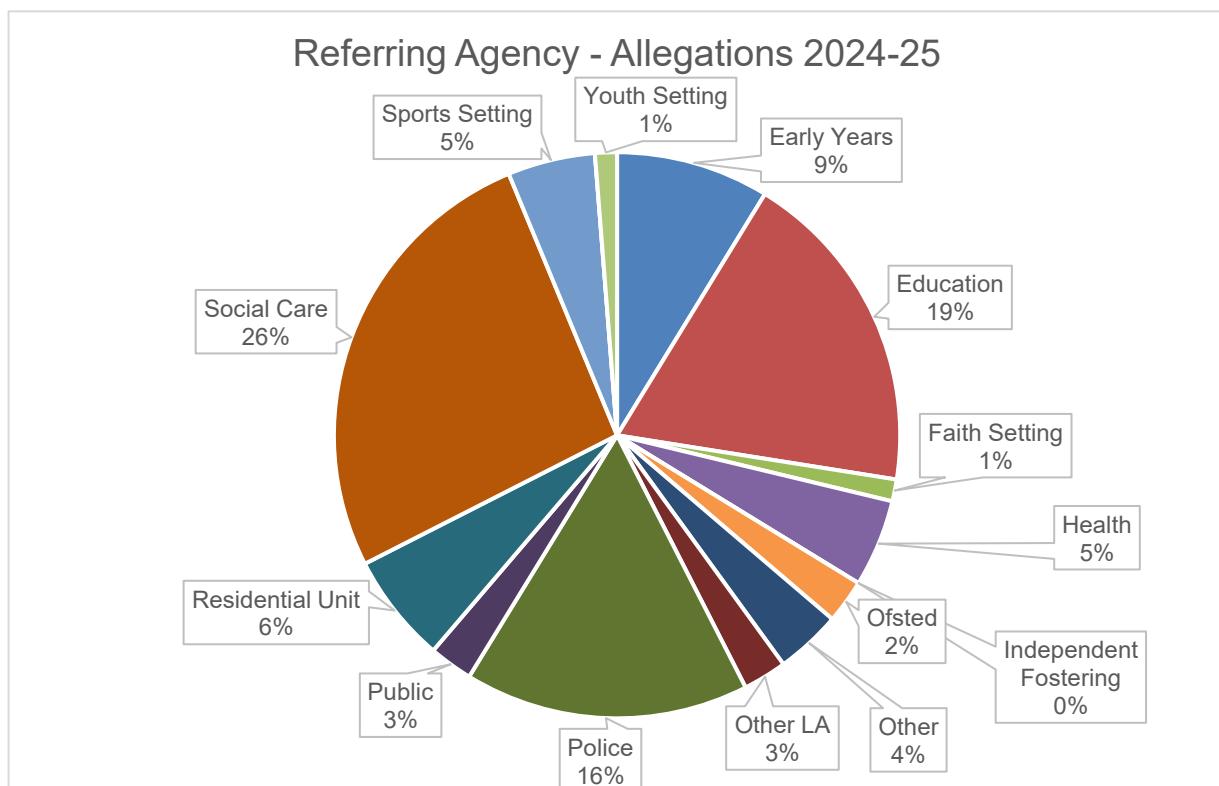
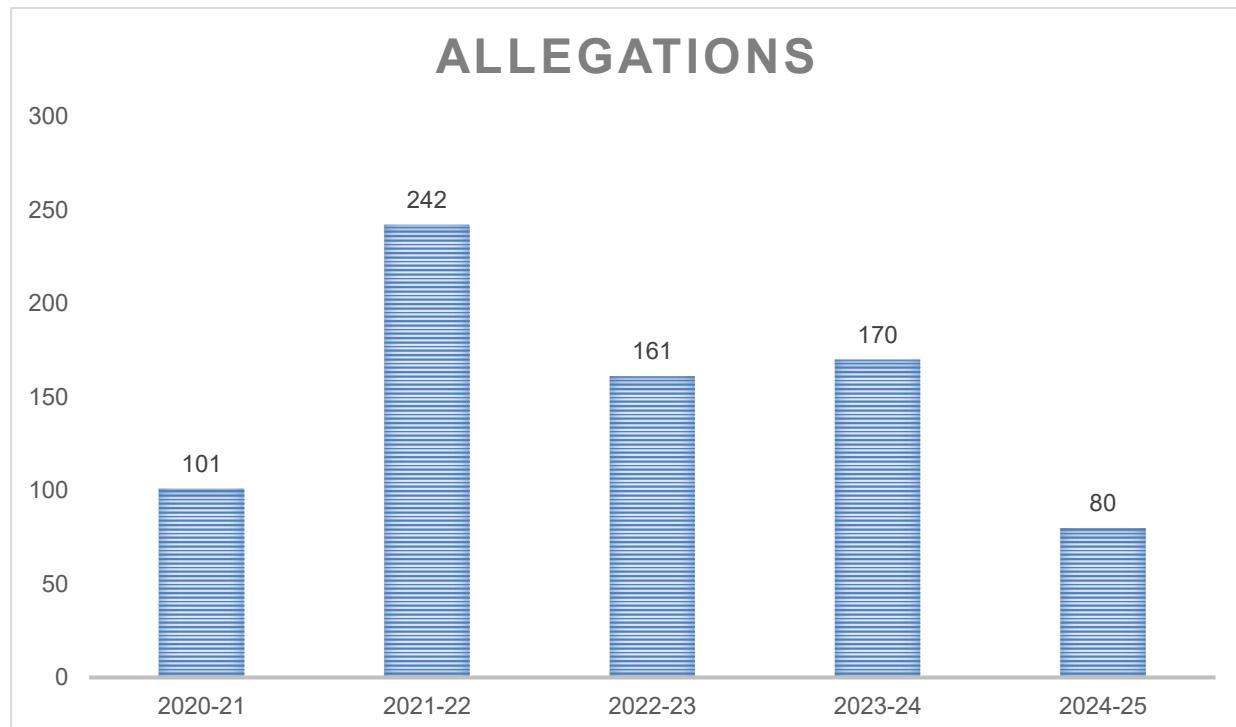


In response to the increase in education consultations in the period 2022-2023, a training session “How to Deal with Low Level Concerns” was developed by the LADO team and co-delivered with the Safeguarding in Education Team. The session has continued to be delivered during subsequent reporting periods and is now embedded as part of our training offer. KCSIE places a responsibility on schools to have appropriate processes in place to identify and address LLC, and managing this high level of consultations has a significant impact on capacity in the LADO team, therefore implementing this training has been a focus of the team in this reporting year. We have observed a reduction in consultations with education settings this year, and conversations with settings regarding consultations we have provided advice and guidance on indicate that LLC policies are beginning to be implemented in many schools across the city.

The LADO team has identified that other areas of the Partnership are also seeking consultation on issues which should be managed as LLC. We have implemented a significant training offer for early years in the 2024-2025 reporting period, and also delivered LLC training to children’s residential services, and home to school travel services. We request that the partners across all areas of the children’s workforce do more to support with the development of LLC policies and the implementation of these in their services and areas. This was identified in the previous two annual reports as an action for the Partnership.



Allegations

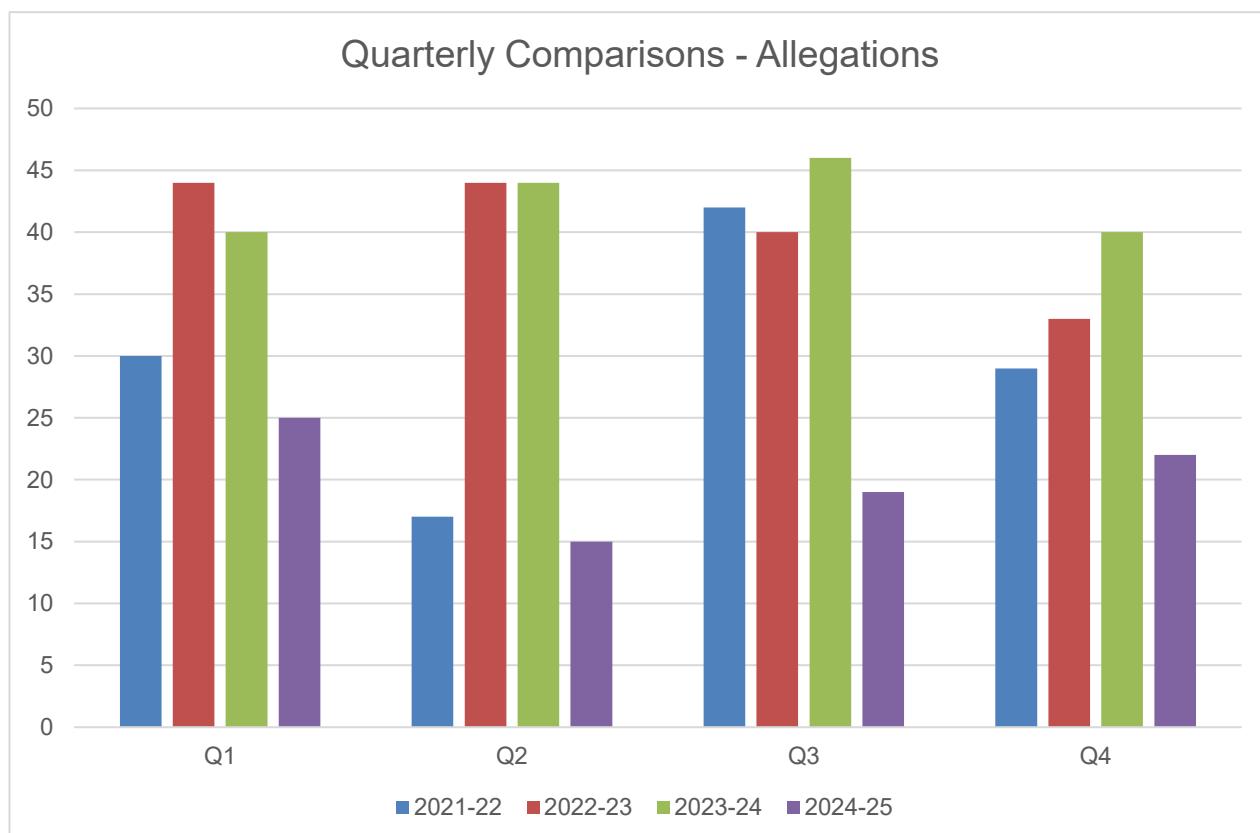


The majority of referrals in this reporting period were made by social care, followed by education and police. This is different to last year, when the majority of referrals were made by education, followed by social care, with police being the third highest referring agency.

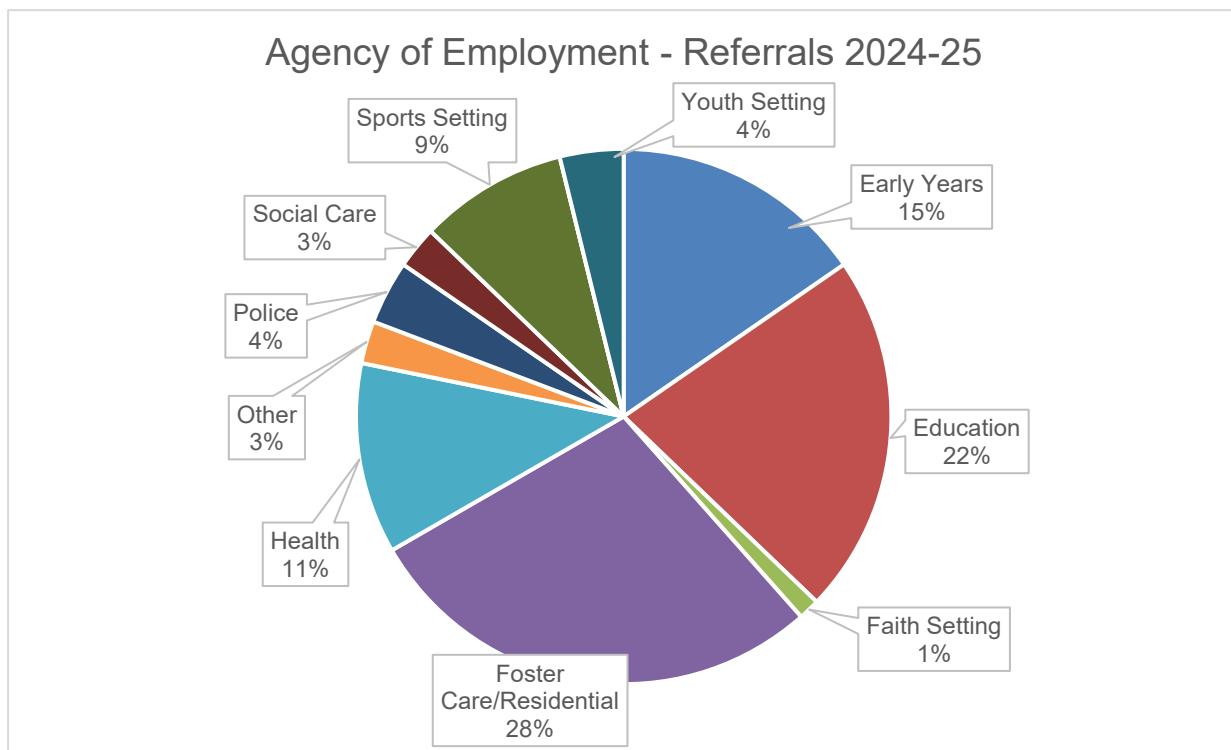
Given the size of the faith, voluntary and sports sectors in Bristol, rates of referral from these agencies remains low. However, this year we did receive one referral from a faith setting, compared to none in the previous reporting period, and a slight increase in referrals from sports settings, four compared to one in the previous reporting period. There were no referrals from

voluntary sector agencies in either reporting period. The LADO team continue to work on network building within the faith, voluntary and sports sectors in the city, our engagement with these groups has been a challenge as there are limited existing networks in the city for us to work alongside.

Last year we suggested that the KBSP may want to consider how to better engage these sectors in safeguarding given that there is no specific targeted offer from the Partnership to these groups. The LADO team are not aware of any changes to this situation having occurred in this reporting period and therefore our ask remains the same – we are unable to progress our work without support from the Partnership in this area. Given we are aware of low numbers of referrals from these sectors, and a very diverse group of organisations working in the city, this is an action that we feel requires attention.

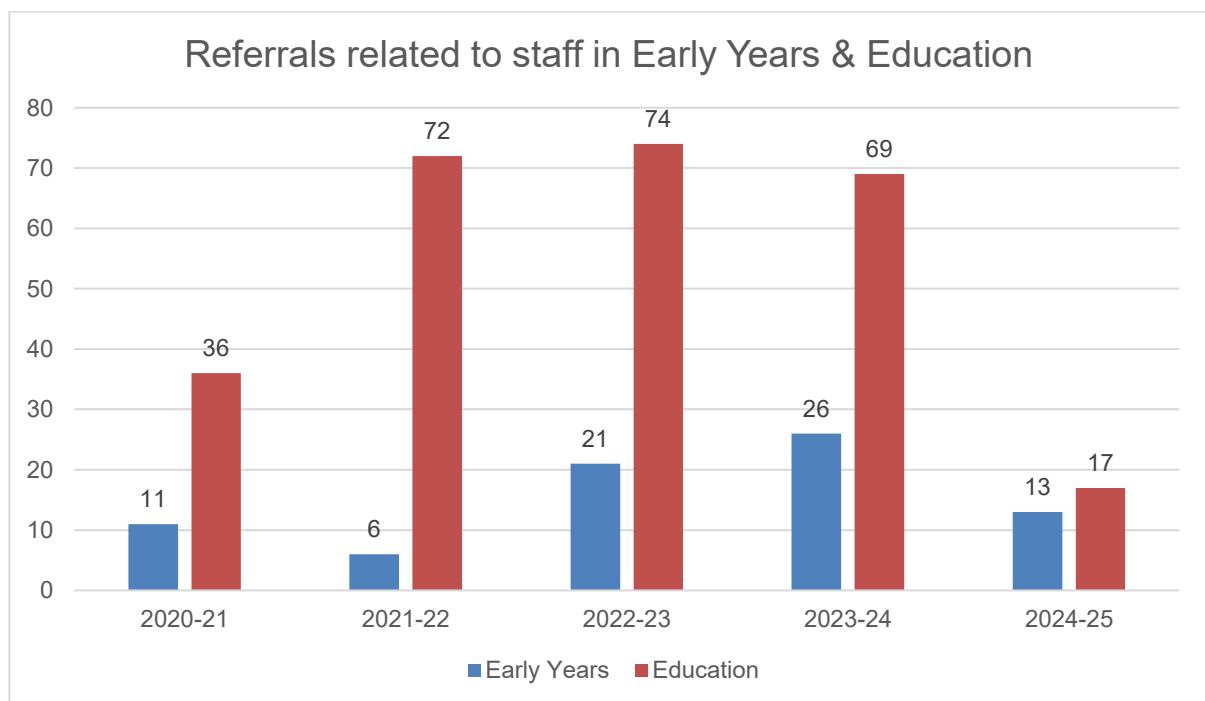


Agency in which staff are employed



In the 2024-25 reporting period, the highest number of referrals meeting threshold related to foster carers and residential child care workers, 22 (28%), whilst referrals relating to professionals in the education sector were 17 (22%).

In all previous reporting periods the highest number of referrals to the LADO team were regarding education staff. In the 2023-2024 period there were 69, accounting for 41% of referrals, meaning that this year's number represents a 75% reduction in referrals. Referrals relating to education staff come from schools, ALPs and via education employment agencies. There has also been a notable reduction in referrals regarding early years staff in this reporting period, 12 compared to 26 in 2023-2024, which is a 53% reduction.



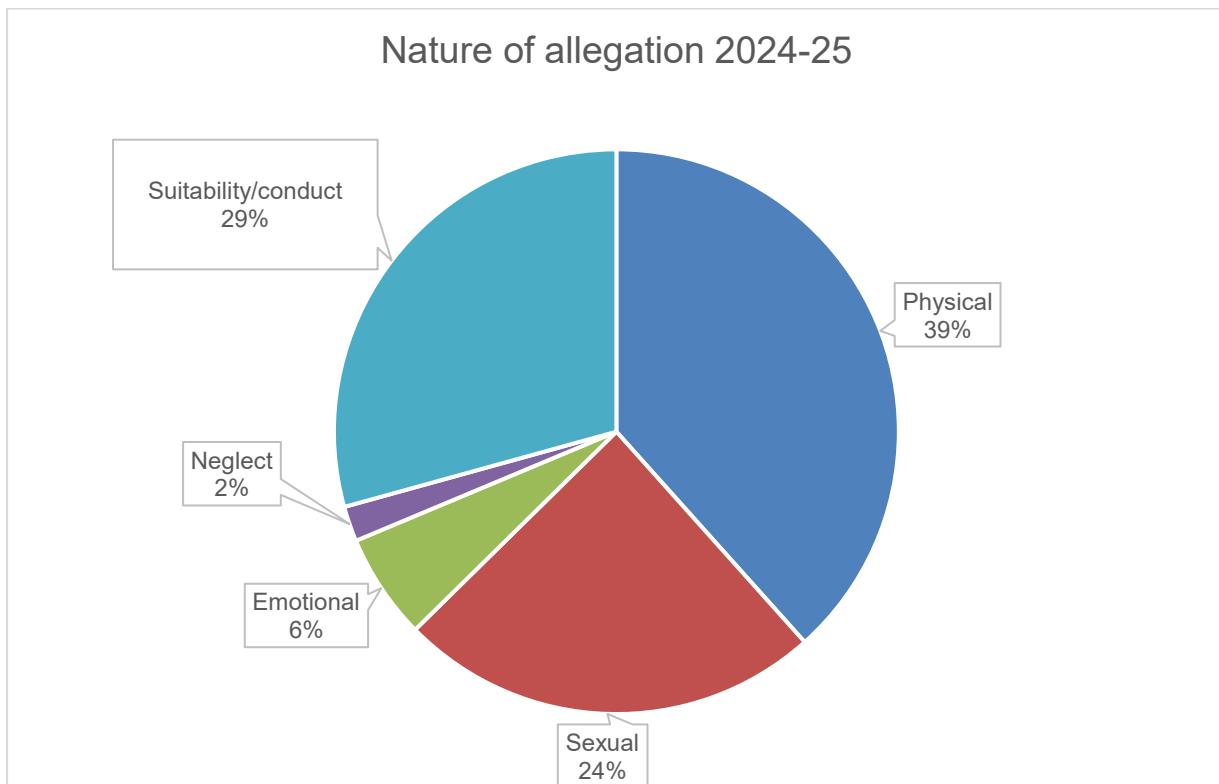
This significant decrease in referrals regarding education and early years professionals is an anomaly compared to previous years and does not follow the usual pattern of referrals. As the above chart demonstrates, the number of referrals relating to education and early years staff has remained consistent since normal service resumed following COVID19 lockdowns. The LADO team question whether incidents of harm have truly diminished to this extent or whether under-reporting is occurring from education and early years. It is important to note that both of these sectors fall under Keeping Children Safe in Education, which is typically reviewed and updated each academic year. The LADO team has reflected on whether there is an internal or external explanation for these anomalies, and as part of this we have undertaken extensive internal auditing activity and been audited by external colleagues. The outcome of this auditing is that our threshold is consistent, both internally between LADOs and externally with our South West colleagues. Ongoing reflective case discussions around threshold and practice issues allows greater robustness and consistency in the service.

In relation to external factors which may account for the anomaly in referral rates, the LADO team have noticed an increase in agencies, particularly education and early years, seeking advice from their HR providers prior to making a referral to the LADO team. We have observed that HR teams very often lack understanding of safeguarding and prioritise employment matters in these situations when safeguarding issues should take precedence. We have also noticed the impact of large Multi Academy Trusts managing a significant proportion of schools in the city, where there are centralised Safeguarding and HR departments advising multiple settings, directing actions which do not consistently align with KCSIE's guidance around safeguarding practice. There have been examples of good practice, but there have been noticeable repeated instances where particular Trusts are managing allegations which may meet threshold, internally, rather than seeking LADO advice and guidance. We have observed similar patterns in some of the larger early years companies which have taken over multiple settings in the city. We suggest this as a possible explanation for the reduction in referrals in the reporting period. To address this issue, the LADO team intend to put together an offer of safeguarding investigation training for HR providers in these agencies, in Partnership with Bristol City Council's HR team. We also ask education and early years representatives in the Partnership to carry out their own enquiries into current practice in their organisations.

There has been a reduction in referrals regarding health staff compared to the previous reporting period, from 19 to 9. This rate is more in line with previous reporting periods, and there is no consistent referral pattern from health across years. This reduction supports the hypothesis we held in 2023-2024, when the increase was attributed to serious concerns about the safeguarding practice within a local health Partnership primarily providing mental health care. Many of these referrals related to practice in a residential mental health unit which subsequently closed, hence the return to lower reporting rates.

During 2024-2025 there were only 3 referrals regarding police staff, the same number as in the previous reporting period. Since LADO reporting has begun there has been a low number of referrals in relation to police staff. This reflects the pattern both locally and nationally. Given the size of the police workforce in the city, this of concern. The likely reason for this is that concerns are dealt with via the Police Professional Standards Department and not being referred to the LADO as is required. In early 2023 there was guidance issued by the College of Policing to forces nationally about expectations for following LADO processes. There is ongoing work locally to reinforce these expectations and requirements, and the LADO team have delivered targeted training to the Police Professional Standards Department and Counter Corruption Unit in the 2024-2025 reporting period and continue to build on local relationships with the PSD and CCU.

Nature of the allegations



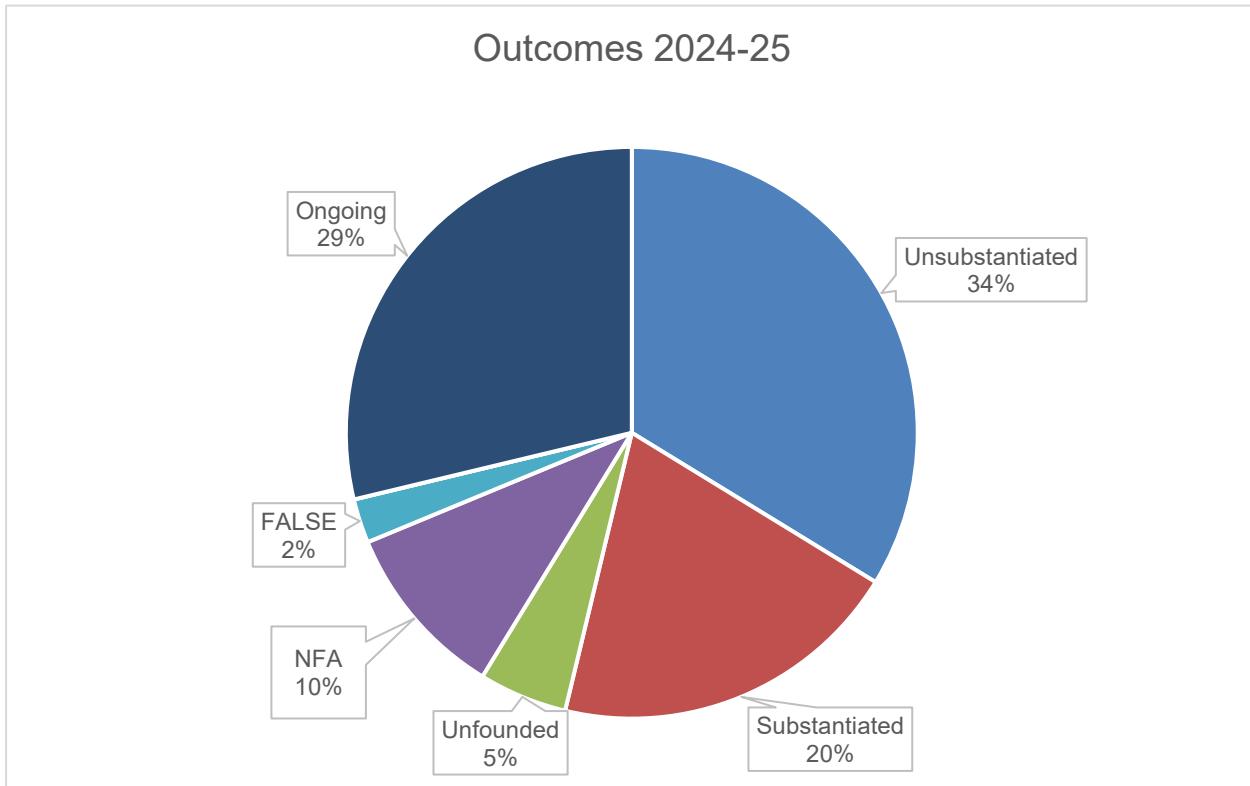
Since LADO reporting began, physical abuse has remained the highest reported category of harm. In the reporting period there were 38 referrals (39 %) regarding allegations of a physical nature. This compares to 45% of referrals in the previous reporting period.

The second highest category was in relation to issues of suitability or transferable risk – 29 (29%). These relate to issues within the professional's personal life for example safeguarding concerns regarding their own children, perpetrating physical or sexual violence, and issues of substance misuse. After a noticeable increase in the last 3 years regarding issues of suitability and conduct, referrals this year have reduced slightly, from 37% to 29%. The increases in previous years were likely explained by WTTSC and KCSIE including the fourth threshold category - "suitability to work with children", and inclusion of this category within training delivered by the LADO team. We attribute the 2024-2025 reduction to more consistent and proportionate decision making around progressing suitability cases when they relate to social care involvement and reach the child protection threshold and maintaining these at contact stage when they are at voluntary social care involvement level.

There has been an increase in allegations that relate to sexual abuse from the previous reporting year – 24% of referrals, compared to 19% last year. We will be interested to see whether this pattern continues in coming years. This may be attributable to high profile national cases of historical sexual abuse being reported on in the media, thus increasing awareness generally around the prevalence of sexual harm. Overall the LADO team has noticed an increase in referrals regarding non-recent sexual abuse, which indicates an increase in the public's confidence that non-recent cases of sexual abuse will be taken seriously. An alternative hypothesis is that the LADO team may not be consistently categorising types of abuse, which may be skewing the statistics. For example, cases of sexual abuse of an adult in an individual's personal life should be categorised as "suitability", however if these are mis-categorised as "sexual abuse" then this may account for this increase in "sexual abuse" and reduction in "suitability". The LADO team intend to review how we categorise suitability cases in the coming year.

The lowest number of referrals was in a relation to emotional harm, of which there were 6 (6 %). This is consistent with the previous year and is likely to be as this form of harm is harder to identify or detect and typically requires employers to refer in when a pattern of concerns is observed or incidents and therefore concerns accumulate meaning threshold is met.

Outcomes



All allegations that meet the LADO threshold require an investigation either criminal or, in the majority of cases, by the employer under the organisation's disciplinary procedures. The LADO team keeps a case open until the conclusion of the investigation and expects to be notified of the outcome. Where the investigation was completed by the employer the LADO team will be provided with the investigation report which they review from a safeguarding and quality assurance perspective.

All reports are expected to include at least one of the five outcomes as detailed in the South West Child Protections Procedures and KCSIE.

- Substantiated
- Malicious
- False
- Unsubstantiated
- Unfounded

On reviewing the investigation report the LADO team will only close the case when they are satisfied with the quality, outcome, and recommendations. Where the safeguarding concern has been substantiated and the subject dismissed, the LADO team will ensure that referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service and appropriate regulatory body (where relevant) have been made and subsequently share information with these bodies as requested.

In the reporting period the highest proportion of investigations concluded that the allegation was unsubstantiated 27 (34%).

The second highest proportion of investigations concluded that the allegation was substantiated – 16 cases (20%).

As with the four previous years there were a low number of investigations that concluded that allegation was false (2), and none that concluded the allegation was malicious.

At the time of reporting a significant number of cases were ongoing – 23 (29%), a decrease from 41% on the previous year. Of the ongoing cases, 15 (65%) are subject to criminal investigations

The LADO service has previously escalated concerns about police investigation timeliness to the KBSP. Police investigations can take a considerable amount of time to conclude, particularly those regarding downloading or possession of indecent images of children, which is due to the analysis of electronic devices being a lengthy process in this force area and nationally. Police investigations into non recent offences can also take a significant amount of time to progress due to it being difficult to locate witnesses and records, however these challenges are no different to the previous reporting year.

It is concerning that national pressures in the criminal justice system, relating to recruitment, resourcing and funding, continue to impact the timeliness of investigations related to safeguarding children, and that year on year, from a LADO perspective, there are no discernible improvements to this issue. These delays are also likely to have a significant impact on the subjects of investigations.

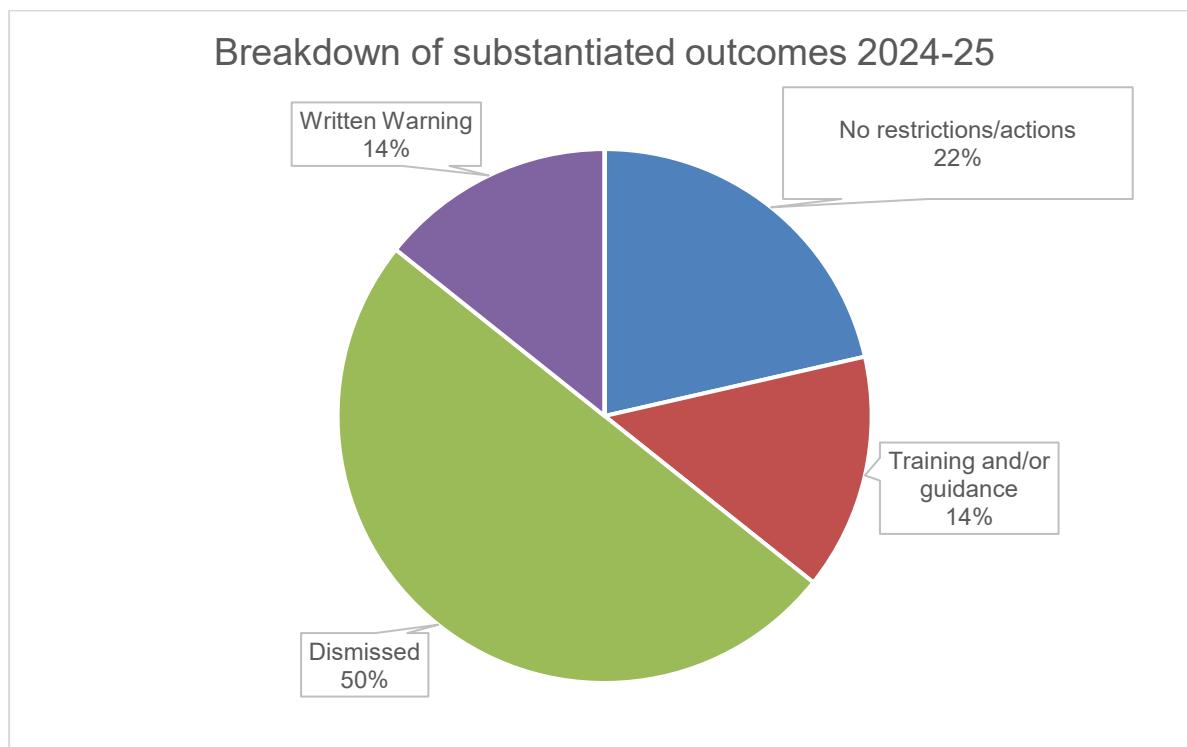
Over the past two years, there has been a consistent recommendation for KBSP to request and review performance data relating to the timeliness of investigations into online child abuse, benchmarked by force area. This would support a deeper understanding of any local challenges and help identify opportunities for improvement.

Given that the same challenges persist, we have escalated our concerns through the Executive Director for Children and Education and would welcome KBSP's consideration of this request as part of its 2025/26 priorities. Revisiting this recommendation offers a valuable opportunity to strengthen scrutiny, enhance transparency, and ensure that responses to online child abuse are as timely and effective as possible across Bristol.

During the 2024–2025 reporting period, the LADO team has played a vital role in maintaining high standards of safeguarding practice by providing detailed feedback and support on investigation reports across all sectors. This proactive approach has ensured that reports meet the minimum standards outlined in statutory guidance, helping to uphold the integrity and effectiveness of safeguarding processes.

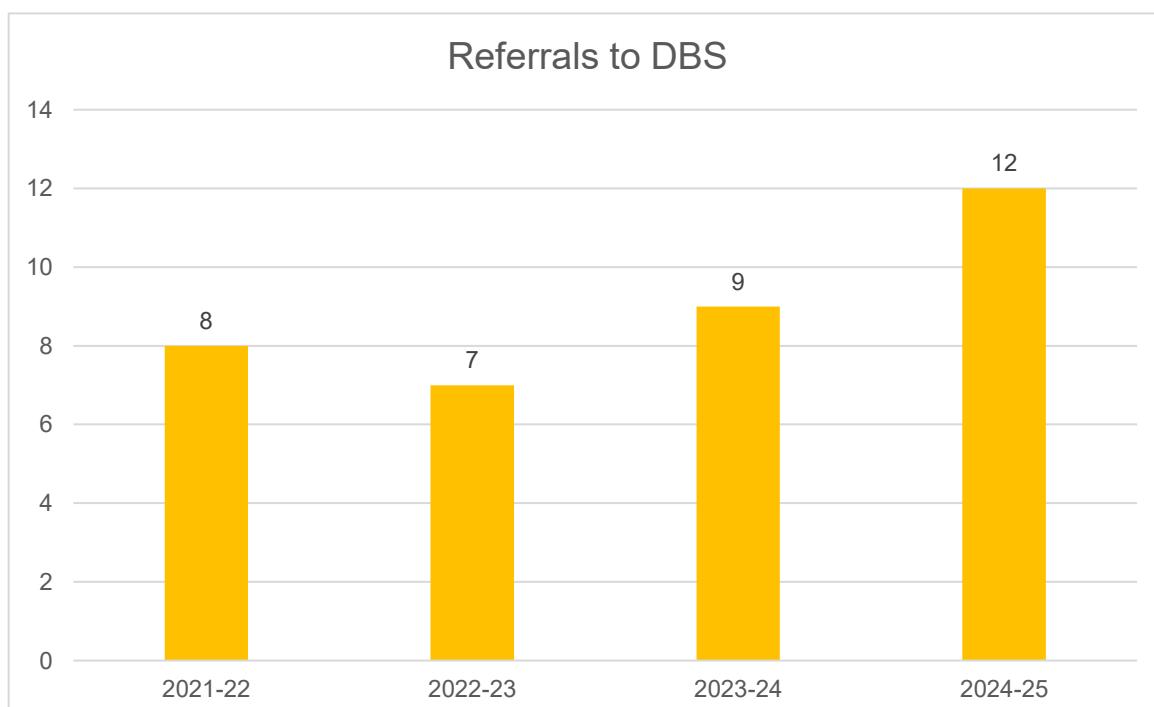
While this has placed additional demands on the team's capacity, it has also highlighted an opportunity for wider system learning. The variation in report quality appears to stem from gaps in investigative skills and knowledge, as well as inconsistent support and oversight from HR teams. Moving forward, there is a valuable opportunity to strengthen multi-agency understanding of safeguarding investigations through targeted training, clearer guidance, and enhanced collaboration between operational teams and HR colleagues. This will help build confidence and consistency across the system, ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people.

Breakdown of substantiated outcomes



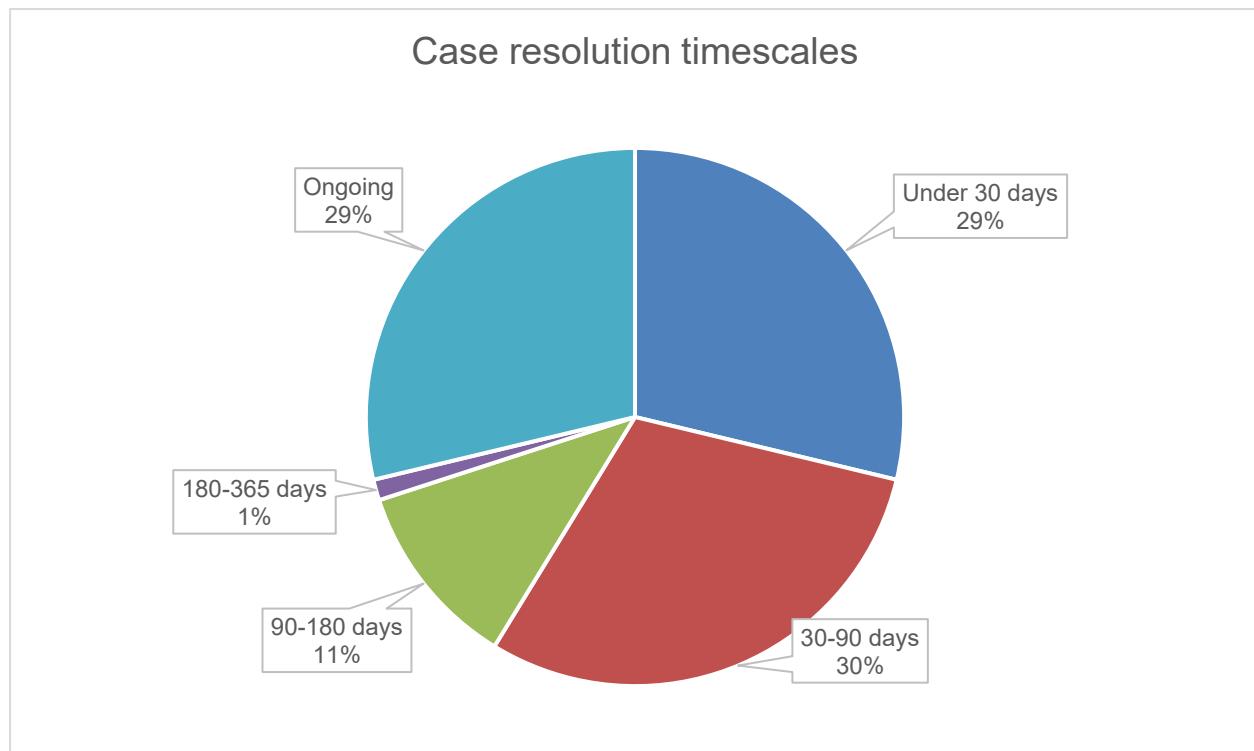
Of the substantiated allegations, in the majority of cases the subject was dismissed (50% compared to 34% in the previous period). This may indicate that the allegations reaching safeguarding investigation in organisations are more serious or concerning. There have been far fewer written warnings or training outcomes in this reporting period, and fewer resignations. When an individual resigns where they would have been dismissed, the LADO team ensure that employers continue to progress the disciplinary process to conclusion, as per direction within KCSIE.

Our data is correct that there have been no convictions for cases referred to the LADO within this reporting period. However there have been convictions in older cases owing to the amount of time it takes for these cases to move progress through the various stages of the criminal justice system.



There have been 12 cases in this reporting period where referrals have been made to the DBS for a barring decision, one to Nursing and Midwifery Council, two to Social Work England, and two to the Teaching Regulation Agency.

Case resolution timescales



It is a responsibility of the LADO, as detailed in the Southwest Child Protection Procedures, to monitor and record the progress of each case, either fortnightly or monthly depending on the complexity of the case, either from the police or the employer, dependent on the nature of the investigation.

The timeliness measures set out for the LADO detailed in Keeping Children Safe in Education are:

- 80% of cases resolved within one month.
- 90% of cases are resolved in three months.
- All but the most exceptional cases within 12 months.

In the reporting period 23 (29%) cases were concluded within one month. This is significantly below the expected timescales.

59% of cases were concluded within 90 days.

At the time of reporting 23 (29%) of the cases were recorded as having an ongoing investigation, 15 of these (65%) are subject to criminal investigation.

The significant decrease in ongoing investigations is likely in part attributable to a more robust system of tracking case progress which we have implemented this year, and clearer expectations around monthly chasing of ongoing cases by the team. The team also have more capacity to undertake these tasks due to increased staffing levels.

The overall figures regarding timescales of investigation are considerably outside the expectations in KCSIE. The reasons for delays can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly the timescales outlined in disciplinary procedure making it difficult to conclude a case in one month, particularly

where employees are awaiting union representative availability to convene disciplinary meetings and panels, or where an employee lodges a counter-grievance. Secondly, the length of time it takes for a case to progress through the criminal justice process and employers awaiting the outcome of criminal investigation before formally investigating the concerns under their disciplinary procedures.

Enquiries

The LADO team began monitoring and reporting on “enquiries” received from September 2024 onwards. To provide an overview of this work, in the period 1st September 2024 to 31st March 2025, we received 166 enquiries. These enquiries included consultations and referrals that fell out of area, consultations and referrals regarding individuals only working with adults, Subject Access and Freedom of Information requests, and information requests from DBS and other LADO teams. Some of these referrals we would previously have logged and counted in our statistics, therefore this change in practice likely accounts for some of the reduction in referrals in this reporting period.

Other activities

Strategic Links with Other Services

In 2024-25 the LADO continued to provide briefings on request to the Bristol City Council Risk Assurance Meeting, in relation to high profile or high-risk cases that the LADO is managing to enable them to have oversight of these.

In previous reporting periods, the LADO has attended termly Schools Causing Concerns meetings alongside the Manager of the Safeguarding in Education Team and the Manager of Bristol City Council Early Years' Service. These meetings have enabled information to be shared regarding high risk, high profile and complex cases in schools and early years settings as well as supporting emerging themes and trends to be identified. Due to changes in leadership these meetings were paused in the 2022-2023 reporting period, however there are plans in place for them to recommence in the 2025-2026 reporting. The LADO team have fed back extensively on the format of these that we feel would be most productive and have also made senior leaders aware that the contribution our team can make would be limited if attendance is too wide, due to the highly confidential nature of our work. We are hopeful that these meetings will resume in the coming months as they enable a coordinated and robust response by the Local Authority to safeguarding concerns in education settings.

Quality Assurance

The LADOs are typically provided with monthly supervision by their manager who also undertakes six monthly audits of their work. The LADOs receive monthly supervision from their manager, which supports reflective practice and oversight. The team also benefits from periodic audits of their work, typically undertaken every six months. As the senior leadership team transitions, we anticipate the resumption of a consistent audit cycle once a permanent Head of Service is in place.

In this reporting period, peer-to-peer auditing has been undertaken between Bristol and other member authorities of the South West LADO group, using the South West LADO quality assurance tool. It had been proposed by the group that peer to peer audit will take place on a six-monthly basis to ensure the rigour of the quality assurance process. Although capacity across the region has prevented this from happening regularly in the 2024-2025 period, we anticipate six monthly auditing will take place as planned in the next reporting period.

With increased LADO capacity within our own service we have undertaken a number of internal peer audits during the reporting period. As a response to the reduced number of referrals from education and early years, we also carried out a targeted review of around forty consultations from these agencies.

Training

The delivery of training is a significant activity of the LADO team and integral in promoting the LADO role and allegations management process, to support partner agencies in developing their confidence in delivering their safeguarding responsibilities. The training delivered is regularly adapted to service needs and updated to reflect national changes as well as address local trends and feedback from stakeholders.

In March 2020 as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic all training provided by the LADO team was adapted to take place online and at present, we deliver training both online and face to face depending on the needs of the receiving agency. This model of delivery is effective in enabling greater accessibility and attendance and ensuring consistency in the delivery of the LADO service.

Training has been provided across a wide variety of agencies and sectors, and the LADO team also regularly delivers training to BCC teams to improve their understanding of the role and responsibilities of the LADO. In the reporting period training was provided to 16 plus

accommodation providers, school governors across the city, new recruits to the police Lighthouse Safeguarding Unit, and social workers now employed by BCC who trained overseas. The LADO team continues to deliver input to the multiagency KBSP Safeguarding for Managers Training course, which takes place regularly throughout the year.

We also expanded our Low-Level Concerns training offer in this reporting period, formulating a rolling schedule of three sessions each for education and early years across the academic year, delivered in Partnership with our SET and early years colleagues. We also delivered Low Level Concerns training to BCC children's home managers and the Home to School travel team, which was targeted training due to an increase in consultations from these services.

We will continue to deliver Low Level concerns to education and early years as described above in the upcoming year and will also extend this offer to other agencies as and when trends indicate a need.

South West Regional LADO group and National LADO Network

The Bristol LADO team is a member of the South West Regional LADO group which is comprised of representatives from the 15 Local Authorities across the South West. Local Authorities in the region take turns to chair, and Bristol LADO team's co-ordinators provide minute taking support. Since March 2020 the group has met online. This has enabled more frequent meetings and improved attendance.

A peer-to-peer quality assurance framework was developed and implemented by the SW group. This involves the pairing up of LADOs from different authorities on a six-monthly basis to undertake a peer audit of a number of cases that meet threshold as well as lower-level concerns or consultations. The framework has enabled LADOs in the South West to develop and improve their processes and gain greater clarity regarding threshold and consistency of practice across the region.

At a national level, the National LADO Network (NLN) continues to be chaired by the Croydon LADO and comprises of a representative of each regional LADO group. The NLN has created a website in order to raise their profile, that of the regional groups, in addition to the role of the LADO. It contains guidance documents created by the Network including the threshold document and a set of principles and minimum standards. The aim of these documents is to develop consistency of practice across the country.

The national review of Safeguarding Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Needs in Residential Settings by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, October 2022, made a number of recommendations for LADO services. One being the creation of a LADO handbook which is currently being drafted by the DfE in consultation with the NLN. The purpose of the handbook is to provide clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of the LADO and the allegations management process with the aim of creating consistency of practice nationally. The Bristol LADO team has contributed to the development of the handbook however progress in implementing this nationally has stalled, and the handbook is sitting with DfE awaiting review. While progress on national implementation has temporarily stalled, the team has taken proactive steps by seeking support from the Executive Director for Children and Education to advocate for its expedited sign-off. Although internal changes have delayed this strategic action locally, the team remains focused on supporting national consistency and is well-positioned to contribute further once the handbook is approved.

The NLN annual conference took place online on 7th October 2024, and the Bristol LADO team were represented at this. The conference was well attended and consisted of speakers and group discussions which provided an opportunity to link up with LADO colleagues to consider current themes and issues.

LADO Resources

The LADO team continue to maintain a dedicated page on the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership website which includes an annually referral form and guidance, leaflets for parents, employers, and employees and an information document for employers regarding undertaking safeguarding investigations, as well as links to relevant resources.

An ongoing action from the previous two annual report is the development and implementation of an online LADO referral form to enable greater efficiency and timeliness in processing and progressing LADO referrals. It was hoped this would have been completed within this reporting period but we anticipate that it will be actioned in the coming year led by our permanent Head of Service.

LADO Feedback

The LADO team seeks feedback on the service provided via an anonymised online form. This takes place each quarter on cases that were closed to the LADO in that period. This is to enable the continued development and improvement of the service to ensure that it meets the needs of agencies across the city.

At the time of reporting 45 responses had been received in the previous 12 months. 98% advised that they had received a response in a timely manner. 96% found LADO response to be very helpful, and 2% somewhat helpful.

The following are quotes from feedback received:

- Clear and strong answer immediately to our concern. I felt that I was well listened to and then given clear advice.
- I have found both Nicola and Alice to be very supportive and helpful. They are knowledgeable and help you reflect on actions and support decision making.
- Clear advice. Quick response time. Sensitivity in terms of staff member's and student's needs.
- The advice and guidance is always well managed and considerate and Alice and Nicola have always been willing to discuss and explain their decision making so it informs DSL practice.
- Good understanding of the nature of the issue and the context (initial teacher education); constructive guidance; clear and timely follow up.
- The communications were clear, responsive, and calm, which is just what you need when dealing with an upsetting, worrying situation.
- They were very clear and kindly explained their role etc. to me, and we were able to have a frank conversation to enable better safeguarding.
- Always responsive and help with the process of not only acting on the concern but providing appropriate support for the staff member affected.

The only negative feedback we received was from someone requesting advice without completing a referral form. The requirement for a form to be completed is practice we adhere to, to ensure a consistent and informed service.

Looking Forward - Key objectives and service priorities 2025-2026

Objective/service priority	By whom?	Timescale
Creation and implementation of an online LADO referral form	BCC IT Service and Head of Service	By March 2026
Training to be provided targeted at sports and faith organisations and CICs to improve knowledge and understanding of allegations management process and how staff can protect themselves from allegations being made, with support from the Partnership.	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett, KBSP	Across 2025-2026
Investigation training in Partnership with BCC HR	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett, HR Business Partner	Across 2025-2026
Refresher training to be provided across various BCC children's social care teams, to support professionals to identify when concerns about professionals meet LADO threshold and to ensure correct LADO referral processes are followed.	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett	Across 2025-2026
Continued and increased expansion of Low-Level Concerns training offer across non-education settings.	Nicola Laird and Alice Bennett	Across 2025-2026
Internal auditing by LADO team manager	Head of Service	By March 2026
Ability to obtain data directly from LCS for various reporting processes i.e. Risk Assurance, Annual Report, Ofsted.	ICT and Head of Service	By March 2026

Recommendations for the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership

- To review their oversight and engagement with sports settings and faith settings, and support the rejuvenation of the multi-faith network.
- To promote all organisations in the city working with children and young people to implement low level concerns policies, with a focus on voluntary and sports organisations.
- Support with the re-implementation of the school causing concern meeting.
- Education and Early Years partners to explore the reduction in referrals to the LADO team from these sectors.