



**CSCCP**

CROYDON SAFEGUARDING  
CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

**Annual Report  
of  
The local Authority  
designated Officer  
(LADO)  
2020 - 21**

**Steve Hall  
LADO**

# Executive summary

## What have we done?

Throughout the pandemic the LADO service has continued to provide support to children's organisations with the management of allegations and complaints. Whilst the activities of many groups such as schools, youth services and clubs etc. have been significantly curtailed during the periods of lockdown, many services such as fostering, early years settings and residential provision have continued to offer services. Indeed the challenges on these and other services as a result of Covid 19 has been significant

As a result the number of consultations to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Service has seen a reduction of some 25% on 2019/20 figures. However, given the level of disruption services have experienced this is understandable and may well reflect closures and reduced services rather than a reduction in concerns.

Over previous years the level of consultations being considered referrals and therefore reaching the LADO threshold for intervention has been around 20-25%. In the last 12 months this has increased to 40%. This may indicate that during the pandemic, organisations have been more sparing with their use of the LADO consultations and reserved their contact for significant concerns.

There has been an improvement in the timeliness of investigations overseen by the LADO and in 2020/21 97% of investigations were completed within 6 months and 98% within one year. (2018/19 87% and 97% respectively)

In addition to handling and managing allegations, the LADO service provides awareness training to schools, nurseries, fostering agencies, and residential homes within the Borough and also provides regular briefing and training sessions to a variety of safeguarding forums across the children's workforce. These sessions are popular and well received. Indeed in total, the LADO service has provided over 100 hours training during the period of this report.

In addition the Croydon LADO service is now well established at local, regional and national levels and is involved in developments of policy and procedure at all levels of strategic thinking.

## How well was it done?

The LADO Service was inspected during the Ofsted inspection of children's services in February 2020 and was described positively. Ofsted reflected that improvements had been made to tracking systems and complimented the service on its ability to spot and address patterns of concerns and behaviours. Indeed verbal feedback from the inspector indicates that the Croydon LADO service was seen as an exemplar.

Feedback from organisations seeking support from the LADO is positive and these organisations continue to seek LADO advice and support. In addition, the LADO service in Croydon is well respected within the "LADO community" and is consulted regarding thresholds and interventions by colleagues and partner agencies at a regional and national level.

## What difference has been made?

The LADO process continues to ensure that allegations against those who work or volunteer with children are not seen in isolation and that the welfare of children is prioritised and that organisations and employers are supported in investigating and managing the outcomes of such concerns. This ensures that services for children within the Borough are provided in a safer manner and supports

support and training or the exclusion of those who pose a risk to children or should not be working in the sector.

Indeed as a result of allegations overseen by the Croydon LADO service, 4 individuals have been referred to the Disqualification and Barring Service, 3 individuals to professional regulatory bodies and 11 members of staff from a variety of agencies were dismissed following disciplinary processes. In addition a number of those working with children have received additional support and training to continue to work in a challenging sector of care.

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the management of allegations made against the children's workforce and how the role of the LADO in Croydon supports the management and investigation of such allegations and complaints. The report covers the work of the LADO over the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and sets out the role, function of the LADO as well as an analysis of the work completed.

All agencies that provide services for children, 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, which is consistent with statutory guidance published by HM Government guidance in Working Together.<sup>1</sup>

This guidance outlines the requirement for the LADO to be contacted and to oversee the effectiveness, transparency and record retention of the process, not only in terms of protecting children, but also ensuring that staff who are the subject of an allegation are treated fairly and that the response and subsequent action is consistent, reasonable and proportionate.

Keeping Children Safe in Education updated in September 2020<sup>2</sup>, sets out the legal duties educational establishments must follow to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It includes guidance around the management of allegations against the children's workforce.

The detail of the procedure followed by Croydon's LADO to manage allegations against people who work with children is contained within the Pan London Child Protection Procedures.<sup>3</sup> Following an update of the procedures, proposed by the London Regional LADO Group, the role of the LADO was expanded to address wider concerns relating to staff and these are addressed in this report.

## **2. The role of the LADO**

The LADO's key role is to provide advice and guidance to employers or voluntary organisations when there has been an allegation against a member of staff or volunteer. The LADO will liaise with the police and other agencies, including Ofsted and professional bodies and monitor the progress of referrals to ensure that they are dealt with consistently, fairly and in a timely manner. The LADO ensures organisations operate a thorough and fair process of investigating allegations. The LADO will provide oversight of the investigative process through to its conclusion.

The LADO service will also chair, where appropriate allegations against staff and volunteer (ASV) meetings and establish an agreed format to an investigation, whilst facilitating the resolution of any inter-agency issues. The LADO will also provide liaison with other local authority LADOs where there are cross-boundary issues. The service collects strategic data and maintains a confidential database in relation to allegations.

The LADO Service disseminates learning from LADO enquiries throughout the children's workforce and wider groups, including safeguarding forums across the Borough. The LADO will also attend children's social care and police strategy meetings held under child protection procedures where there are concerns regarding the children of those working within the children's workforce.

---

<sup>1</sup> Working Together to Safeguard Children, revised 2020

<sup>2</sup> Keeping Children Safe in Education, (KCSIE) Revised Sept 2020

<sup>3</sup> London Child protection procedures

Statutory guidance requires that the LADO is involved where it is suspected that a member of staff has

- behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that they may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the latter criteria is supported by the London Child Protection procedures, amended in 2018 following proposals submitted by the London Regional LADO group, also requires that the LADO considers concerns where the allegations or concerns arise in people working with children's private life. Allegations can also relate to the partner of the person who works with children, whose response or attitude suggest that their ability to fulfil their role might be compromised or where the behaviour raises concerns as to their suitability to work with children.

### **3. Staffing, including administrative support**

The LADO service, consists of a Senior LADO and LADO, both full time officers who are based within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service within Children's Social Care. Unlike some Local Authorities, but in keeping with Working Together, both LADOs are qualified social workers.

This increase in resources, over the last three years was seen positively by Ofsted as a commitment to safeguarding during their inspection of Children's Services.

### **4. Overview of the service function and key areas of work**

#### **i. Allegations**

Where allegations or concerns are expressed regarding the conduct or behaviour of an adult working with children are raised, the LADO provides immediate triaging and assessing within 24 hours, with the employer in order to evaluate the seriousness of the concerns. Where concerns do not meet the threshold for LADO oversight, the service will offer guidance and support for next steps action by the organisation. In some circumstances, concerns do not meet the harm threshold as above, but do indicate a level of care or professional conduct which falls far below that which is expected, the LADO will oversee the investigation of the allegations.

Where the threshold for LADO oversight is met, the LADO will evaluate next steps, including the involvement of the police, the most appropriate level of investigation including the involvement of police and Children's Social Care. Where cases are complex, or involve a number of agencies, a formal evaluation meeting is held to evaluate the concerns and to plan the interventions. In all cases where an investigation is initiated, a final evaluation meeting is convened to agree a multi-agency outcome.

In recent years there has been an increase in the numbers of investigations overseen by the LADO where a "single agency" investigation is initiated by the employer and police are not involved. This has been partly due to the repositioning of the LADO role from merely dealing with matters of harm, to those of standards of care and transferable risk, but also as a result of an ongoing positive working relationship between the police CAIT Teams and the LADO service where police are reassured that action will be taken in respect of such concerns.

---

<sup>4</sup> Updated and included in Working together Jan 2021 and in KCSIE Sept 2020

In 2020 and 2021 respectively, the “fourth criteria” was added to the LADO threshold by KCSIE and “Working Together” and this reflects how guidance has evolved and responded to this preventative agenda, in that this allows for wider consideration of behaviour which raises wider concerns regarding adults working with children where a direct impact upon a child of the behaviour is identified.

## **ii. Oversight of historical allegations**

Following the establishment of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) nationally, there has been a steady rise in the number of historical disclosures leading to police investigations of historic sexual abuse. In such allegations, the LADO service provides support to the police and liaison with providers and links with other LADOs.

Whilst the level of these disclosures peaked in 2018, such allegations can involve a number of victims, a variety of organisations and cross local authority boundaries. These investigations can be complex and slow to progress and the LADO service has developed knowledge of historical records, historical organisations and wider intelligence relating to settings.

## **iii. Information**

Over the last three years, the LADO service has improved the retention and storage of historical allegations and concerns. This has been reinforced by the Independent Investigation into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) requiring that all Local Authorities retain all records held regarding historical abuse. As a result, and with the support of the additional administrative support, the service has progressed in indexing a considerable amount of historical referrals to the LADO and to begin the process of digitalising these records.

This has led to the LADO being able to more easily identify the details concerning historical concerns regarding individuals and organisations and the service has been able to assist police in investigations into historical abuse as well as supporting current investigations with a historical context. As a result, patterns of behaviour have been identified which have aided prosecution.

In order to better oversee referrals and consultations within the service, a case tracker has been evolved to manage and oversee investigations managed by the LADO. This allows immediate access to the progress of current cases and supports the role of the LADO in ensuring the timely completion of investigations. The data extracted from this tracker is considerable and enables patterns of individual behaviour to be identified as well as repeat concerns and hotspots in organisations, indeed the tracker was complimented upon by Ofsted and has been copied by other local authorities.

It has long been an objective of the LADO Service to develop an appropriate recording system for allegations within the Children’s Recording System (CRS) which could be cross referenced with children’s records and offer children’s social care awareness of LADO involvement. Recently resource has been made available to develop this and initial testing has been completed. It is expected that the system will be operational by December 2021.

## **iv. Safer recruitment issues**

The LADO Service provides advice and support to organisations, and in particular schools, working with children in relation to safe recruitment practices. This includes discussions around references, and advice on issues where recruits may have positive DBS checks. This has complimented HR guidance and advice and provided a safeguarding context to recruiting staff.

## **v. Training and briefing sessions**

The LADO has taken responsibility for providing briefings to schools, governors and other settings, including the early-years teams, in regards to these regulations. These have included topics such as the role of the LADO, managing allegations, safer cultures within organisations, safer recruitment and wider safeguarding issue. Indeed, the service has provided over 100 hours of training and workshops within Croydon over the last 12 months.

This has been provided at local organisation level as well as borough wide e.g. individual schools, as well as wider existing safeguarding forums and targeted groups such as Newly Qualified Teachers, newly appointed head teachers, residential homes staff, Primary School head teachers, schools designated safeguarding leads, Early Years managers, child minders, GPs, fostering agencies, and foster carers.

Although many of these have been virtual the feedback has been positive from attendees. Indeed, training in relation to Early Years understanding of conducting employee investigations received 75% excellent and 25% good or very good feedback.

## **vi. Feedback on the Service**

Feedback to the service by individual employers, managers and organisations is consistently positive and the service provided is regularly reported as helpful, reassuring and supportive. Indeed designated managers, and in particular head teachers have reflected that the LADO service provides an opportunity to evaluate their concerns and to consider how best to address poor behaviour, concerns and organisation difficulties within their establishments. Below are some examples of positive feedback;

*“Thank you very much, this is exceptionally helpful.”* Deputy Head Secondary School

*“As ever, THANK YOU! Ps You’re not allowed to retire before me”*. DS CAIT Referral Desk

*“Thank you. You have put the allegation in perspective”* SW Manager LAC Service

*“Many thanks for your very detailed response below, and I completely agree with your thoughts and rationale. I have to say this is one of the most thorough responses I ever had from a LADO which for us is really helpful.”*

*The Scouts Association*

In February 2020 Ofsted reported of the Croydon LADO Service:

*“The management of allegations against adults working with children has improved. Formal tracking systems are now in place. Responses are timely, and strategy meetings are held when needed and are well recorded. Links are made with any other known information, and themes are quickly identified.”<sup>5</sup>*

In addition, during verbal feedback from inspectors, the LADO service was advised that it was on the verge of being an “exemplar” for other LADO services.

## **5. External Contacts**

As well as providing a service to organisations working with children within the Borough, the LADO service has also played a part in the Management of Allegations at Regional and National levels.

---

<sup>5</sup> London Borough of Croydon: Inspection of children’s Services. Feb 2020

Over the last 18 months there have been a number of developments on the regional and national levels in relation to allegations management. These have included:-

- Broadcast of the documentary Athlete A
- Publication of the Sheldon report into abuse in Football.
- Launch of “Everyone’s Invited” website addressing rape culture in schools

#### **i. London LADO Group**

The Croydon Senior LADO is one of three coordinators of the regional London LADO group which meets on a two monthly basis. The group has been used to support the ongoing management of allegations procedures in the London Child protection Procedures and has met with partner agencies in developing good working relationships and address operational challenges and differences. Meetings have been held with regional groups including

- Met Police CAIT services
- Met Police Professional Standards Agency
- Disqualification and Barring Service
- Football Association and numerous and other sports governing bodies
- British Gymnastic Association
- The Football Association
- Scouting and Guiding Associations

#### **ii. National LADO Group**

At national level, the National LADO Network (NLN), continues to be chaired by the Croydon LADO, and meets quarterly. The NLN has forged links with the Department of Education in relation to keeping Children Safe in Education, Working Together, and with particular teams addressing out of school provision, and radicalisation.

As at Regional Level, links have been forged with key partners including the Charities Commission, Sporting Governing Bodies, faith safeguarding organisations, Teaching Standards agency and many more.

In May 2019. The NLN held its fifth and, as a result of the pandemic, the last National LADO conference hosted by the London region and held at the Guildhall. Many local authorities, including Croydon sponsored the event, organised by a small group of LADOs including those from Achieving for Children and Croydon. The event received positive feedback.

In addition, NLN, led by Croydon, has established a website in order to share resources and raise the profile of the regional and National groups and their work. The website was created and is currently managed by the Croydon LADO Service.

#### **iii. Working with Other LADOs**

Croydon has a well-established LADO service with a stable staffing position. As a result, newly appointed LADOs within the South London area have used the Croydon LADO Service to support their induction, development, and integration. As a result, the LADO service has provided peer audits for neighbouring local authorities and their views on specific cases are often sought by LADOs from other authorities. In addition, the business support element of the Croydon LADO service has also provided support to other local authorities.



## 6. LADO case activity and analysis

### i. Consultations

It has been a challenging year for organisations working with children with Covid 19 having a significant impact upon the level of services which have been delivered. This has of course had a knock on effect on the level of contacts to the LADO service. Indeed the closure of schools in particular has reduced contacts with the LADO. However, whilst consultations to the LADO over the last 12 months have fallen by some 25% in comparison with 2019/20, this would not appear proportionate to the level of closures and suggests that LADO consultations remain at a significant level. It should of course be recognised that despite the various lockdowns, schools continued to remain open to vulnerable children and young people. Fig 1 demonstrates the level of consultations over the last 8 years.

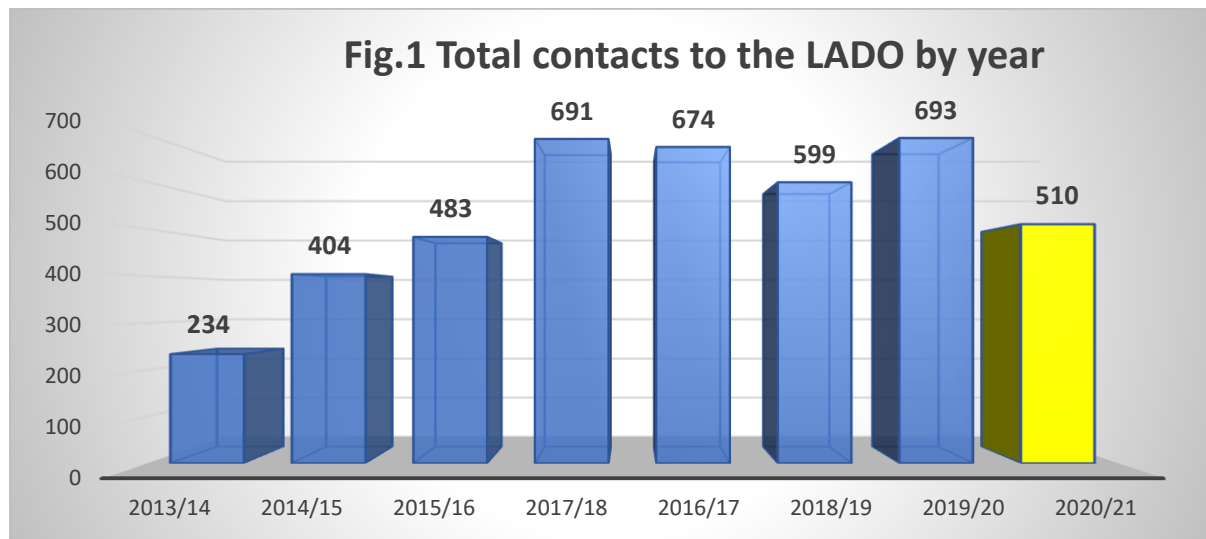
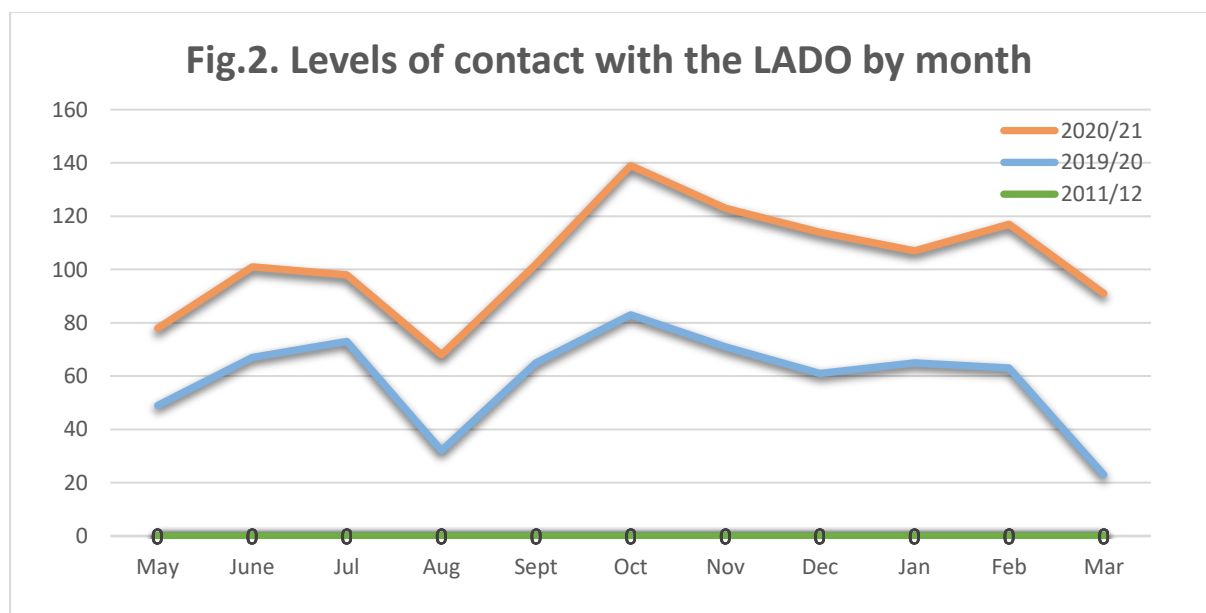


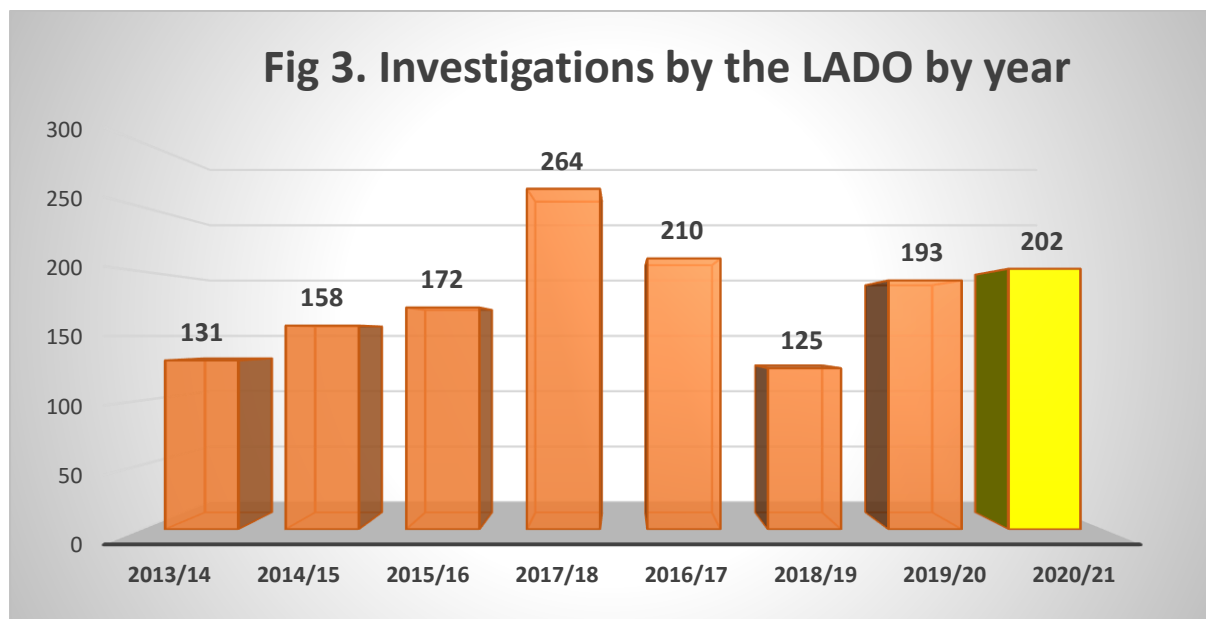
Fig. 2. Illustrates when consultations were received and that despite the pandemic, previous patterns of contact have been maintained with peak contacts in October and February and a dip during August when schools particularly would be closed and professional interventions are reduced during the holiday period.



The numbers of consultations demonstrates the level of advice and guidance the LADO services provides to organisations providing services to children and young people and these include safer recruitment advice, support in managing staff conduct and behaviour where it might lead to safeguarding issues. This level of preventative work is valued and well received by partners, particularly schools and early years settings.

## ii. Referrals

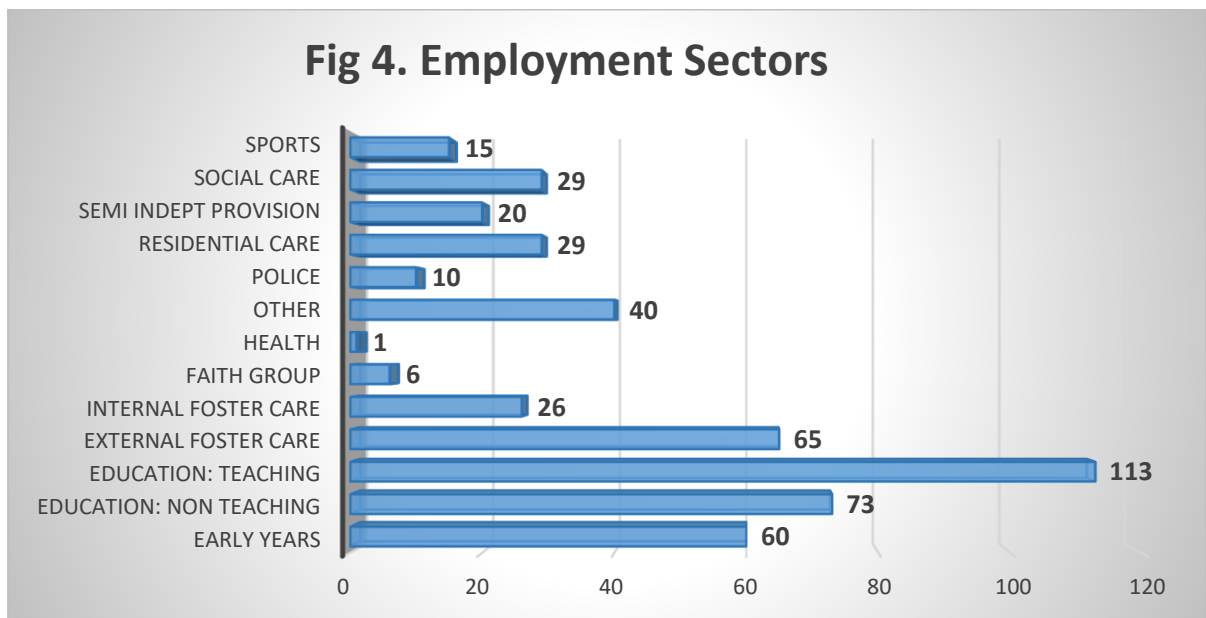
Of those consultations which meet the threshold for LADO intervention, Fig 3 shows the levels of such work over previous years. It is of note that whilst the numbers of consultations dropped by some 20%, the numbers of those which let to referrals to the LADO remains comparable with previous years. This illustrates that the proportion of consultations leading to referrals in 2020/21 was 1 to 2.5 as opposed to previous years of 1 to 3.5 on average.



This reduction in the level of consultations against referrals suggests that the guidance and advice offered may be landing and increasing local understanding and confidence in managing low level concerns without the need to refer to the LADO.

## iii. Sources of Referrals

**Fig 4. Employment Sectors**



The employment sectors where concerns are identified are shown in Figure 4 and these reflect previous years in that education and early years are significant sources of referrals to the LADO. Moreover, given these two sectors maintained the highest level of services during the pandemic, it is of little surprise that their proportion of referrals has risen correspondingly from 39% to 48%.

In addition, there has been an increase in referrals regarding police officers and these have centred primarily concerning behaviour in officers private lives. The LADO service has liaised with local officers regarding appropriate risk assessments and where appropriate, directly with the Met's Professional Standards Agency. Referrals regarding health professionals has traditionally been low and this has been explored in previous years. Given the pressures placed on health sector over the last 18 months this is perhaps unsurprising. However, initial reviews of referrals in 2021/2 suggests this deficit is correcting itself.

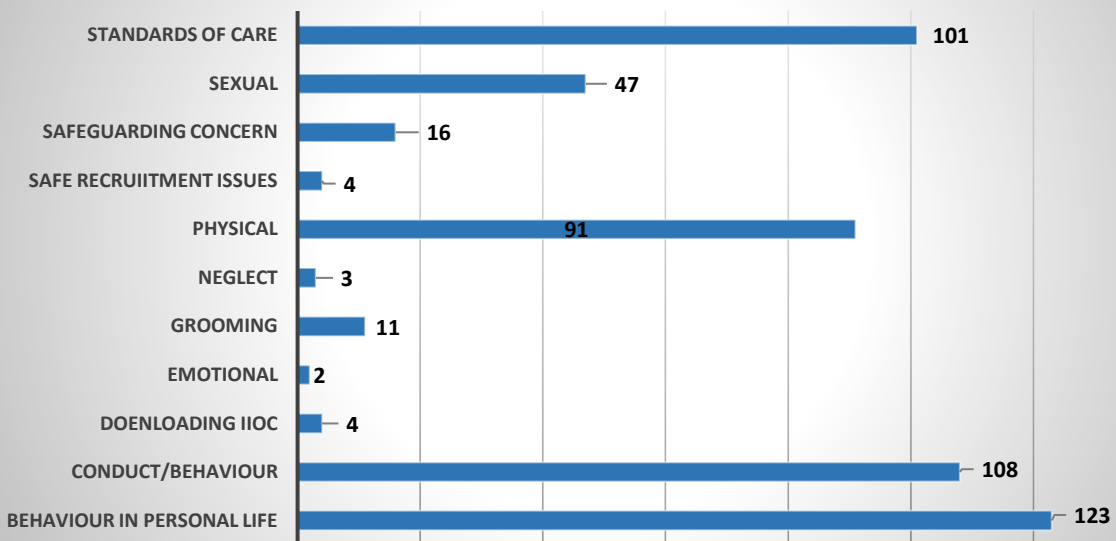
Concerns regarding foster carers continues to be a significant source of referrals. Indeed, where children and young people have been locked down at home with their carers, there have been a number of referrals which would appear to have developed from these stresses.

**iv. Reasons for Consultations**

In terms of the nature of concerns raised in consultations, a significant proportion of these are now categorised as relating to the conduct or behaviour of adults working with children. Following the inclusion within the London child protection procedures, Working Together and Keeping Children Safe in Education, of behaviour in private life and how this might result in a transferable risk continues to be a significant part of the work of the LADO Service. In such circumstances the LADO assists the employer in completing a risk assessment of the potential transferable risk that the underlying behaviour might pose to the work environment of children involved.

The graph below (Fig 5) illustrates the types of concerns in 2020/21.

**Fig 5. Reasons for referrals**

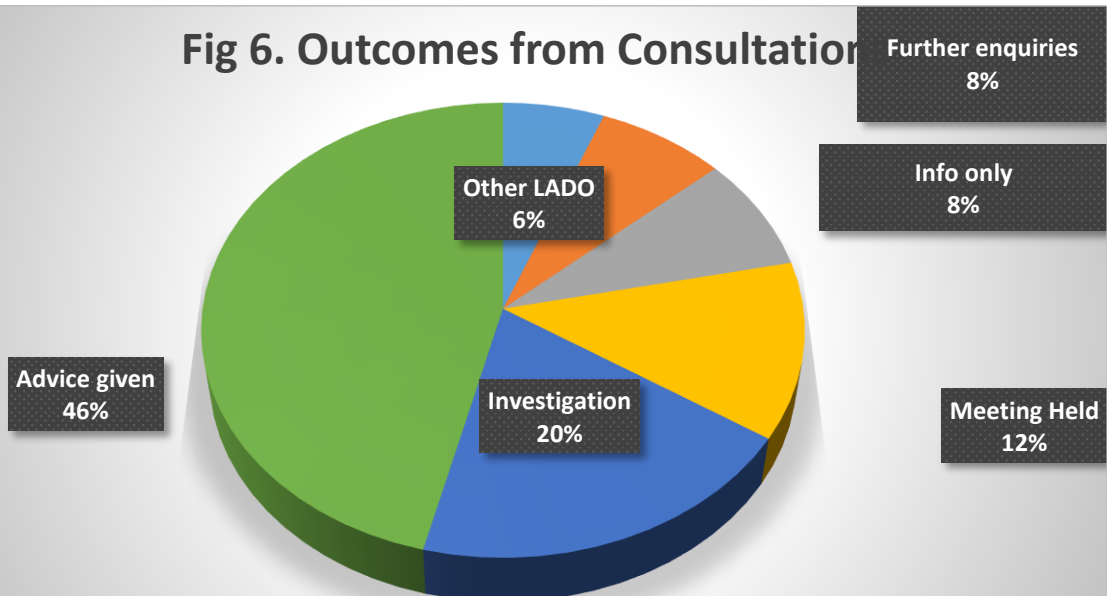


**v. Outcomes from Consultations**

The bulk of contacts with the LADO service are dealt with and resolved without the need for formal LADO intervention. These are often contacts where staff conduct or behaviour is of concern or where a complaint has been received relating to safeguarding concerns. Many can be resolved quickly with advice/guidance or referrals to Human Resources. As the London Child Protection Procedures point out

*“Whether an incident constitutes an allegation and hence needs to be dealt with through these procedures, may need to be discussed by the LADO and the employer’s safeguarding lead. If it falls short of this threshold there may still be a role for the LADO to provide advice and support to the employer. Where the matter constitutes a conduct or performance issue, the employer should follow the appropriate disciplinary procedures and let the LADO know of the outcome.”*

**Fig 6. Outcomes from Consultation**



The graph above illustrates that a significant level of consultations, some 46% can be dealt with quickly with guidance and advice. Moreover in keeping with a developing trend over the last two years, there is an increase in allegations which lead to investigations by the employer and therefore do not require a formal meeting following the referral.

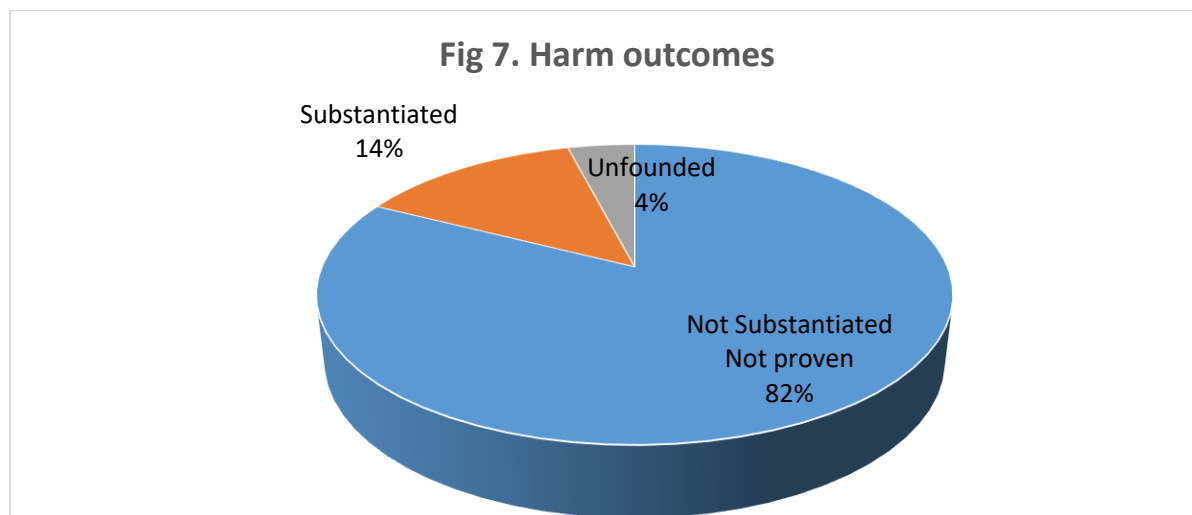
However, where evaluation meetings have been held, as a means to evaluate information or to directly plan interventions, these have been wholly held virtually using MS Teams. This has led to timely and speedier meetings, and has significantly improved attendance, particularly by the police who have found the greater flexibility helpful.

#### vi. Investigations

Whilst it is no longer an indicator required to be reported on by the Department of Education, where an investigation is initiated, investigations can be stressful for all concerned and clearly the quicker they can be concluded appropriately, the better. Where allegations are investigated by employers oversight by the LADO can ensure that the matter is concluded in a timely manner. As a result, 67% of allegations are completed within a month and 88% within 3 months. However, there remain some cases where investigations take longer and these are as a result of police investigations where the “beyond reasonable doubt” threshold requires lengthier processes. However, performance in this area continues to improve

#### vii. Outcomes of Investigations

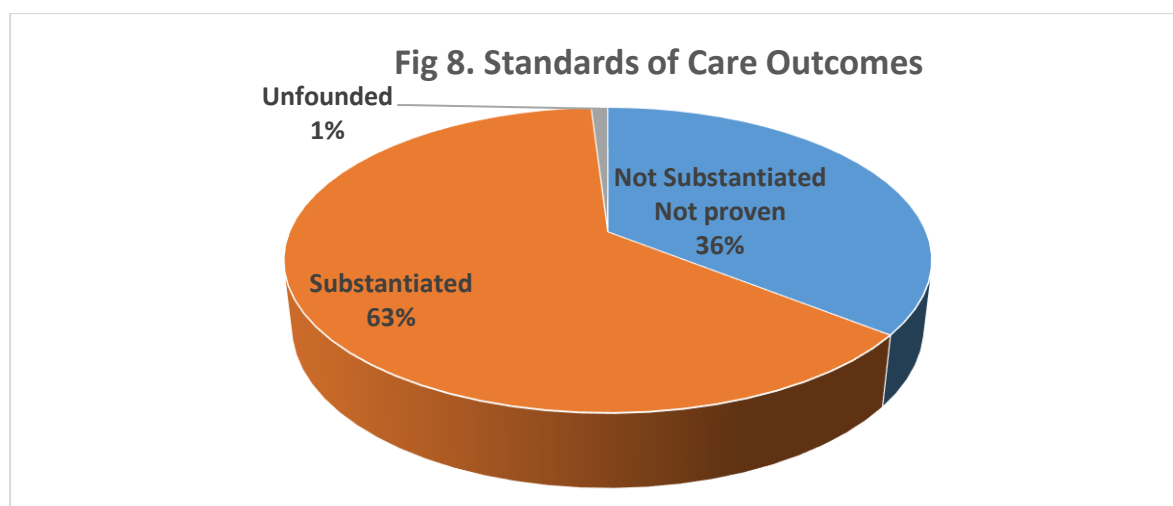
Outcomes are defined against two thresholds, where harm or the risk of harm has been caused, and where the standard of care fell below that which could be reasonably expected. In cases where the harm threshold is met, criminal prosecutions are normally considered and referrals to DBS and professional regulatory bodies take place. Over the last twelve months 14% of cases which met the harm threshold were substantiated.



As a result, of the 10 cases substantiated, 7 were referred to the Disqualification and Barring service for consideration, 8 had their employment terminated and three were the subject of criminal prosecution.

Of those meeting the standards of care threshold, where concerns were substantiated, a third of substantiated concerns came from the fostering sector and a similar number from the educational field. Thus 66% of cases came from these sectors. As a result of these outcomes, some 20 cases have been referred back to fostering panels, where 5 have been deregistered and 3 resigned.

In other sectors disciplinary action was taken against individuals and a significant number received additional training/mentoring.



### **7. Forward Planning.**

The last 18 months have proven a challenge to all services working with children and the LADO Service has been no exception. The service has continued to maintain its profile within the children's workforce but over the next few months as organisations return to the "new normal" the service will need to ensure it remains responsive to organisations. For this reason there will need to be a period of getting things back to normal and a time of consolidation. The service has already begun increased awareness raising within the children's community within Croydon with training sessions and workshops planned. In addition, all social work teams will be visited in the next three months to increase social work awareness of the role of the LADO.

Moreover, the increased use of virtual communications such as Zoom and MS Teams has created more flexibility and inclusivity in the way in which LADO meetings are held and the benefits are evident. As a result, as we return to the office, a "mixed economy" of virtual and face to face meetings will develop and provide increased efficiency in convening meetings.

With the development of a dedicated pathway within the children's recording system, the LADO service will have a more integrated recording system and this will result in improved management information as well as improved transparency within the wider system.

### **8. Conclusion.**

The LADO service continues to be a well-established service overseeing the management of allegations against adults who work with children. The service received positive feedback from Ofsted and service users, and is respected within the LADO community.

The information above indicates that despite the pandemic, the service has maintained a presence within Croydon and has continued to manage and oversee allegations against adults who work with children and therefore supporting standards in the provision of services to children and young people

**Steve Hall**  
**Service Manager**  
**LADO**

**Jane Parr**  
**LADO**