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Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) ANNUAL REPORT

1st April 2021

to

31st March 2022

Report by Lesley Hudson and Anthony McGregor Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

**Purpose of report**

To update the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) in relation to work undertaken by the LADO between April 2021 and March 2022.

This work being in respect of allegations received during the period about adults who work or volunteer to work with children.

This reporting year, the report has been produced by the newly appointed interim LADO and interim Head of Safeguards.

Information has also been sourced by business support colleagues.

The data is as accurate as it can be considering challenges and current barriers in accessing information re- LADO activity on the electronic system.

**Current situation in Solihull**

In February 2022, the DfE issued an Improvement Notice to Solihull MBC. The Improvement Notice requires Solihull MBC to make steps to improve its social care functions and delivery to children and families. The notice followed a Joint Targeted Area Inspection in January 2022

In terms of the LADO role, there is no direct reference to the LADO activity, but the Notice may have had an impact since January 2022- in terms of the reputation of Solihull’s Children’s Social Care and perceptions/concerns about how risks and thresholds are managed.

As a result of the Improvement Notice and JTAI inspection, partner agencies have also developed their own individual Improvement Plans. In addition, the LSCP will have a responsibility to co-ordinate the required improvements across the partnership.

Children’s Services has already established a multi-agency Improvement Board. The Improvement Board is responsible for overseeing its Improvement Plan and for driving through the necessary changes across all organisations. All professionals across the wider partnership will have a part to play in the Improvement Plan.

**Background**

Statutory guidance requires the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) dealing with allegations against adults that work with children to report annually about work undertaken. This report will provide an overview of the work undertaken with reference to relevant available data in relation to managing allegations against adults who work with children in paid and unpaid roles. The report will also inform the LSCP of the wider activity undertaken within the role.

The statutory guidance requires Local Authorities to have a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to be involved in the management and oversight of individual cases. The LADO should provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations, liaising with the police and other agencies and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible, consistent with a thorough and fair process.

In Solihull the LADO sits within the Child Protection and Reviewing Unit and will usually be managed by the Principal Officer.

The arrangements for the LADO role have until March 2022 been the same as during the April 2020- March 2021 period- much of the LADO role has been completed by the Principal Officer with support from child protection conference chairs and IRO’s. The conference chairs have offered advice and support on a daily, duty basis and chaired some of the Position of Trust meetings.

As of March 2022, there has been a full time, interim LADO attached to the Child Protection and Reviewing Unit. A business case has been submitted and accepted for a permanent full time LADO. This represents good progress as within the West Midlands LADO network of thirteen LA’s, Solihull had been the only LA without a dedicated LADO.

Depending on capacity, when the role is filled permanently the LADO may also take on other roles such as auditing activity. The plan is for the LADO to undertake more training especially with schools around safer recruitment practices.

The introduction of a permanent LADO will provide consistency within the role that has not been in place previously. It will also enable the LADO role to be further developed.

When the LADO is on annual leave, the role will only be covered by either the Head of Safeguards or the Principal Officer; this should minimise concerns about application of thresholds.

There is currently no dedicated LADO business support as such. The LADO books Position of Trust (POT) meetings into their calendar, produces the written record of the meeting and often distributes the written record. The business support lead at the CPRU is currently responsible for creating files, uploading minutes onto the electronic system and supporting with other administrative aspects of the LADO role depending on the competing demands placed upon them.

There is a review of business support at the CPRU taking place imminently which will determine whether additional business support is to be offered/is required in respect of the LADO functioning.

Solihull use the LCS computer system. The LADO file can only be accessed by a small group of workers. More work needs to be completed over the next six months to ensure that all the information is up to date, accessible to those who need it and to enable accurate data to be taken from LCS as and when required- quarterly and at the end of each reporting year for example.

Like many other local authorities Position of Trust meetings have taken place over Microsoft teams during this period. Anecdotally, this arrangement appears to have worked well and there are no current plans to make any changes. The feedback is that it has facilitated attendance rather than acted as a barrier. POT meetings tend not to be attended by large groups of professionals and therefore managing them effectively online hasn’t been an issue.

**System for dealing with notifications.**

Solihull has a LADO inbox into which any referrals, queries etc can be sent. In line with confidentiality there is limited access to this inbox. This together with the LADO mobile phone number is essentially the single point of access to the LADO. Previously the business support lead within the CPRU was also a point of access but this is no longer the case.

**LADO threshold**

The threshold for LADO cases is described in Working Together 2018 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018 updated 2019 and 1 2021 (KCSiE) as:

An allegation may relate to a person who works with children who 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
* Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) came into force in September 2018 and was updated in 2019 and an additional element to the threshold in 9 as below and this has been added to Solihull’s agenda-

*behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.*

**Referrals**

Over the 2021/2022 period, the LADO has had a total of 235 *contacts* with other professionals. The term contact in this context means any contact that the LADO has had regarding a person in a position of trust. Many of this cohort were discussions about thresholds and the LADO giving advice where threshold for a Position of Trust (POT) meeting wasn’t met.

Anecdotally, in my opinion, many of the contacts are in respect of the referrer seeking re-assurance that they were dealing with a matter appropriately and also to ensure that they effectively had evidence that they had discussed their concern/issue with the LADO.

Almost a quarter (61) of the 235 progressed to a POT meeting as seen in the table below; 174 did not. All the contacts are recorded on the LADO tracker regardless of whether they progress to a POT meeting. This enables cross reference, for themes across organisations for example. Many of the employees were subject to more than one meeting- this is often due to professionals needing to gather more information for the purposes of assessing risk. Very few allegations will be resolved in the initial POT meeting and often require follow up meeting/s to reach a conclusion and outcome.

The number of POT meetings held during this period is higher than the previous two periods although not significantly so.

This could be due to the application of thresholds (linked to the fact that the LADO role has been completed by a combination of the Principal Officer and conference chairs and IRO’s). It could also be due to an ongoing increased awareness of the LADO role and more concerns being reported. It might be due to the residual impact of the covid pandemic and the DfE’s recent involvement with the LA.

It could be a combination of all these factors. If this report was also considering the 2018/2019 reporting period, the number of referrals that progressed to a Position of Trust meeting was 79 in this reporting period which is higher than the two subsequent reporting periods.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1 - Total number of initial POT meetings held during 2021/22** | | | |
| **Year** | **2019/20** | **2020/21** | **2021/2022** |
| **Number of initial POT meetings held not including review meetings** | 47 | 49 | 61 |

* The 61 initial POT meetings that have taken place can be broken down into the following categories of harm –

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** |  |
| Physical | 27 |
| Emotional | 16 |
| Neglect | 8 |
| Sexual harm | 11 |
| Other | 1 |

Two of the allegations were recorded under two categories –

* sexual and physical harm and
* emotional and physical harm.

The 1 “other” relates to a breach of covid 19 rules (taxi driver).

In the previous two reporting periods the breakdown was as follows

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **2019/2020** | **2020/2021** |
| Physical | 23 | 15 |
| Emotional | 3 | 8 |
| Neglect | 8 | 14 |
| Sexual harm | 13 | 12 |
| Total | **47** | **49** |

Concerns about physical harm have remained the most significant over the last three years. Unlike in previous years, the next most significant category of concern is emotional harm and then sexual harm. It is unclear why this is the case although it is interesting that allegations of physical harm remained high even during the previous reporting period when the pandemic would have meant far fewer children physically went to school (considering that education made the highest number of referrals, and many relate to issues of potential physical harm).

Outcomes by definition- 2021/2022

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** |  |
| Unsubstantiated | 21 |
| Substantiated | 20 |
| Malicious | 1 |
| False | 1 |
| Unfounded | 12 |
| Not yet concluded | 7 |
| “No abuse to investigate” | 1 |

Of the 7 not yet concluded, one relates to a matter commenced in September 2021. There was an ongoing Police investigation and now a trial.

The other six relate to POT meetings that commenced in February and March 2022. They are either awaiting the outcome of Police investigations or other enquires.

* For two of the allegations the outcomes were recorded as unsubstantiated and unfounded.

Outcomes compared to the two previous reporting periods:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **2019/2020** | **2020/2021** | **2021/2022** |
| Substantiated | 19 | 33 | 20 |
| Malicious | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| False | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Unfounded | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| Unsubstantiated | 20 | 16` | 21 |
| Not yet concluded |  |  | 7 |
| No abuse to investigate |  |  | 1 |

There are some similarities between some categories over a three-year period.

Noticeably there have been less substantiated over the last 12 months and more recorded as unfounded compared to the 2020/2021 period. This could be due to the interpretation of the definition or more investigations involving the Police. We need to carefully consider and monitor the number of outcomes that result in a substantiated allegation over forthcoming months.

**Timeliness** **of dealing with referrals**

There is no specific legislation that states how long it should take for referrals to be dealt with however Keeping Children Safe in Schools guidance recommends the following –

* 80% of cases are resolved within 1 month
* 90%of cases are resolved within three months- All but the most exceptional cases are resolved within 12 months.

Timeliness of concluding investigations from receiving the initial referral to the final POT meeting where a conclusion is reached is as follows-

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Timescale** |  |
| Concluded within 1 month | 39 |
| Concluded within 3 months | 11 |
| Concluded within 12 months | 4  due to ongoing Police investigations |
| Not yet concluded | 7 |

Of the seven not concluded, one relates to a matter commenced in September 2021.

There has been an ongoing Police investigation and now the adult awaits trial. One relates to a matter commenced in February 2022 and will likely be concluded by mid May 2022. The other 5 relates to referrals received in March 2022. One of these is subject to an ongoing police investigation and the others are subject to other enquires.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Total number by referral agency** | **2021/2022** |
| Senor school/college | 38 |
| Primary/infant school | 41 |
| Special school | 8 |
| Early years/nursery | 20 |
| Other LA | 25 |
| Police | 12 |
| Fostering agencies | 7 |
| Other | 15 |
| Ofsted | 8 |
| Solihull MBC | 29 |
| Individual | 10 |
| Probation | 1 |
| Children’s home | 19 |
| Health | 3 |

The above represents the total number of contacts with the LADO by agency.

* The figures in respect of allegations from school/colleges this reporting period are unsurprising in my view. When speaking with LADO colleagues locally and further afield anecdotally, the highest proportion of referrals other LA’s receive are from schools and residential homes.
* Unlike many other local authorities, Solihull doesn’t have any of their own children’s homes currently. There were until recently three private residential homes. One home in the area has been the subject of a number of referrals and some converted into POT meetings. This home has experienced a number of issues with staffing- historical staffing issues and getting appropriate senior staff members and has recently decided to close for the time being. Another home has very recently opened and has not been the subject of any referrals or POT meetings.
* I had hoped to gain some information from SMBC’s statistical neighbours to make comparisons between us as a LA and others. Unfortunately, at the time of concluding this report, feedback has been extremely limited. Most LA’s haven’t yet gathered their information for the 2021/2022 reporting period. I think for next year’s report, gaining this feedback will be very useful in terms of benchmarking our performance as a LA.
* **Training**

The Managing Allegations Against Staff (MAAS) training has been run on three occasions over the 2021/2022 period. The course is for managers and strategic leads across the multi-agency organisations. It has been attended by a total of 29 staff members and the feedback evidences an increased awareness and confidence in managing allegations. Two sessions took place via the equivalent of Microsoft teams and one face to face.

The attendance by staff on the training breaks down as follows-

5 Early Years representatives

3 Fostering / Childrens home providers

19 schools/ college representatives

1 Children’s Services representative

1 Voluntary sector representative

A training needs analysis has been sent out to all agencies to inform what training is to be offered during 2022/2023. There will be at least 3 MAAS sessions during the next period, the first planned for June 2022 and any other training that comes out of the training needs analysis will be considered/planned for.

**Complaints**

I am not aware of any complaints having been made over the last 12 months. There can however be issues raised from adults who are alleged to have behaved in a way that might have harmed a child in respect of the amount of time investigations can take as well as queries about why they are not allowed into meetings or to see a copy of the written record from a meeting.

Recent discussions have taken place about devising a leaflet that answers questions raised by the adult in the Position of Trust about the process.

**Regional LADO activity**

Solihull LADO is part of the West Midlands regional LADO network alongside 13 other regional LA’s. Up until recently the group has been chaired by one of the LADO’s in Staffordshire- as he is moving on it has been agreed that the chair will rotate between each LA over the next 12 months. The group is useful; it provides a platform for sharing best practice and talking through problems. In addition, guest speakers have attended the meetings- in February 2022 social care compliance inspectors from Ofsted took part in the regional group.

**Conclusion**

Despite the challenges of the last 12 months- the residual impact of the pandemic, the LADO role being undertaken by the Principal Officer as well as other IRO’s, the scrutiny and challenge from the DfE since December 2021, at the end of this year there are a number of positives. A full-time interim LADO is now in place, business support for the LADO is being considered as part of the wider longer-term plans.

Referrals have been broadly in line with previous years.

Training has been undertaken, there are plans in place for a permanent standalone LADO to be appointed.

Having once key person undertake the role is allowing for consistency in practice and decision making and for developing relationships with key stakeholders

**Recommendations/actions for next 12 months**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Action** | **Who** | **Timescale** |
| 1, The quality and accuracy of data gathered through the allegations process to continue to be improved upon. In particular, the recording, gathering, and interpreting of statistical information on LCS needs to be better  Ensure that the LADO tracker is used consistently and records accurately the nature of referrals. The current tracker is to be improved to make it easier to record and analyse information. The tracker has been updated for the next 12 months to include the collection of data re- ethnicity, sex/gender, and the category of abuse in respect of referrals/advice given. | Over the next 12 months, working with Information data over the next 8 weeks  LADO | LADO, information data  Ongoing |
| 2, The review of business support at the CPRU to consider the specific needs of the LADO and consider the benefits of identifying specific business support for LADO activity. | Head of Service and Business support colleagues | By September 2022 |
| 3, Ongoing work to continue re - developing improved relationships and raising awareness of the LADO role with other professionals across the borough | LADO | Ongoing |
| 4, A feedback form to be introduced to collect information from professionals about the service. | LADO | By August 2022 |
| 5, The performance of managing 80% of allegations within 1 month and 90 % within three months as set out in KCSIE to be improved over the next 12 months | LADO | Ongoing |
| 6, The focus on providing more training to partner agencies across Solihull to continue- the outcome of the training needs analysis will inform this process. Given the level of contact from education, specific training for education settings might be beneficial. | LSCP | September 2022 |
| 7, Develop an approach where the Voice of the child is more routinely recorded, where appropriate in LADO minutes. Timescales to be included in any actions agreed, within the minutes. | LADO | Ongoing |
| 8, The Solihull LADO will continue to attend the regional LADO network in June, August, September, November, and December 2022. | LADO | Every 8 weeks |
| 9, A permanent LADO to be appointed to the role within 6 months, subject to the business case being approved | Head of Safeguarding | By December 2022 |
| 10, To devise a leaflet for adults who are subject of position of trust processes. | LADO, IRO Principal Officer | By July 2022 |

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Date of report 31-05-2022 refreshed 15-06-2022