



Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Annual
report
1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023

Report by Lesley Hudson Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Table of Contents

Purpose of report	2
Ofsted Judgement and LADO functions	2
Background and statutory guidance informing the work of the LADO	3
LADO threshold.....	4
Recommendations from the 2021/2022 LADO annual report.	5
Referrals	8
Training.....	11
Referrals to LADO	12
Timeliness of managing allegations subject to the POT process	12
Feedback	16
The West Midlands Regional LADO Network meetings	17
Conclusions.....	17
Recommendations for 2023-2024	17

Purpose of report

To update Solihull Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) in relation to work and activity undertaken by the LADO between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

The work undertaken in respect of allegations received during this period relating to adults who work or volunteer to work with children and young people.

The data available in this report is as accurate as it can be considering some challenges and current barriers in accessing some information, regarding LADO activity on the electronic Liquid Logic system and reporting around this.

Ofsted Judgement and LADO functions

Ofsted completed an Inspection in Solihull of the Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) in November 2022. A number of areas for improvement were highlighted within the final report published in January 2023.

In addition, over this reporting period, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that Sir Alan Wood would be appointed as the Commissioner to both support the improvement work and to report to the DfE on the capacity to improve Solihull Children's Service.

On a positive note, no issues were raised of concern in respect of the LADO service observed by Ofsted, the inspectors wrote -

"The recent appointment of a dedicated designated officer to respond to allegations of abuse by professionals has strengthened the local authority's response. Arrangements to manage allegations are timely and effective. Actual and potential risks are identified well with proportionate actions taken to protect children."

The challenges for Solihull over the last 12 months have not impacted negatively on the LADO role in terms of partner confidence in the reporting of allegations to the LADO.

No new schools have opened in Solihull over this reporting period; one new early year's nursery has opened with another due to open in 2023.

Solihull currently has two private children's home in the Borough, one of these opened in the Summer of 2022. A home previously open in Solihull has closed down during this reporting period. Solihull Council plans to open three of their own children's homes during 2023/2024.

The opening of these children's homes is highly likely to generate more referrals to the LADO given known experiences elsewhere.

Background and statutory guidance informing the work of the LADO

Statutory guidance requires the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) dealing with allegations against adults that work with children to report annually about the 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 SSCP 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 role reports to the Head of Safeguards and within the staffing structure sits within the Child Protection and Reviewing Unit. The LADO largely only completes tasks related directly to the LADO role although does also support with monthly audit activity.

As of March 2022, there has been the same full time, interim LADO attached to the Child Protection and Review Unit., throughout this reporting period.

There has until recently been no permanent dedicated LADO business support as such. However, a part time, permanent LADO business support post has recently been filled and this is significant around data collection and supporting with a range of tasks associated with the wider LADO functions.

Given the confidential nature of the work, the current Business Support Lead within the service is the only business support officer that accesses the LADO files.

Solihull use the Liquid Logic computer system. The LADO files can only be accessed by a small group of workers given the confidential nature of the work.

Like all other Local Authorities across the West Midlands, Position of Trust (POT) meetings have taken place over Microsoft teams during this period. This arrangement appears to have worked well and there are no current plans to make any changes. Professionals anecdotally prefer to attend on Microsoft teams. The POT meetings consist of a small group of professionals. In addition, the adult of concern is not required to attend the meetings making it less essential for the meeting to take place face to face.

On reflection, this year has been more settled in respect of the LADO role. Having a stable LADO has provided continuity and consistency in decision making and practice that has not been evident in previous years. Anecdotally, a few head teachers in particular have reflected on being able to have a relationship with one consistent LADO as opposed to different practitioners stepping into the role.

A further benefit to having one LADO is the ability to develop a consistent threshold application of the guidance, develop an awareness of potential themes and build relationships with specific settings for example, one school in particular as well as with the Education Improvement Service.

In my view, the LADO has become a fairly consistent point of contact for professionals across Solihull. The contact telephone number is recorded on the regional online multi-agency child protection procedures as well the SSCP website.

Very occasionally, callers are not able to make their way directly through to the LADO although we are not sure why.

There remains no “gatekeeping” of the service and professionals can get straight through to the LADO ensuring it is responsive to need. The Head of Safeguards continues to cover the role when the LADO is on annual leave.

LADO threshold

The threshold for LADO cases is described in Working Together 2018 (updated 1st July 2022) and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018 (KCSiE updated in September 2022) is:

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

- behaved in a way that indicates that a person might pose a risk of harm to children.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) came into force in September 2018 and was updated in 2019 and added an additional element to the threshold; this was added to Solihull's agenda- *behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children*
- The 2022 updated KCSIE document was updated to include further guidance on how 'low level concerns' should be reported. Previously the guidance was to report to a Designated Safeguarding Lead. The update suggests that Schools may have their own system involving the Headteacher having oversight of all low-level concern referrals whilst still having the DSL as person receiving the concern (unless it is against the DSL themselves).
- Anecdotally some head teachers are reporting low level concerns to the LADO.

Recommendations from the 2021/2022 LADO annual report.

No	Action	Timescale	Update
1	<p>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</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Over the next 12 months, working with Information and Performance colleagues</p> <p>In place</p>	<p>Partially Achieved.</p> <p>Information and performance colleagues have been unable to support with the gathering of data due to having to prioritise other work. Given that only one LADO is now involved in the recording of information, it is hoped/anticipated that it is more accurate.</p>

			Achieved
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.	By September 2022	Recently Achieved A dedicated part-time LADO business support post has been filled and will be in post in forthcoming months.
3	Ongoing work to continue re - developing improved relationships and raising awareness of the LADO role with other professionals across the borough.	Ongoing	Partially achieved. A local special school where there had been a slightly higher than normal of referrals has been visited. A briefing session was provided to Solihull's Early Years Team. Managers and Designated Safeguarding Leads from Nursery settings across Solihull also attended the briefing session.
4	A feedback form to be introduced to collect information from professionals about the LADO service.	By August 2022	Achieved The feedback form was implemented in September 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	Ongoing	Partially achieved- see below

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.	September 2022	The training needs analysis did not identify specific additional training needs for education. It did identify the need for ongoing training to be available for managing allegations. This is already in place and three training sessions/briefings
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.	In place	Achieved
8	The Solihull LADO will continue to attend the regional LADO network in June, August, September, November, and December 2022.	In place	Achieved
9	A permanent LADO to be appointed to the role within 6 months, subject to the business case being approved	By December 2022	Achieved Permanent LADO due to commence in post on 15th May 2023. The post was initially recruited to in November 2022 but the successful candidate at that time subsequently withdrew.

10	To devise a leaflet for adults who are subject of position of trust processes.	By July 2022	Achieved The leaflet was put together by the Principal Officer and is now routinely sent out via the employer to all subjects of the POT process.
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Referrals

Over the 2022/2023 period, the LADO has had a total of 270 contacts with other professionals.

The term contacts apply to any contact that the LADO had regarding a person in a Position of Trust.

Many of these contacts, involved discussions about thresholds and the LADO giving advice where threshold for a POT meeting was not met.

Of the 270 contacts, 131 contacts resulted in advice being given.

The remaining 139 resulted in a referral being made to the LADO. Of this cohort, 55, moved on to an Initial Position of Trust meeting. There was one information sharing meeting also held.

Where a referral has been made, this usually results in the LADO completing more work/enquiries and awaiting feedback from other professionals before making a decision that a POT meeting is not required.

In the previous reporting year (2021/2022) overall there were 235 contacts to LADO, so this years' figures represent an increase of 35 contacts; however, whilst the number of overall contacts with the LADO has increased over the reporting period, slightly less have been subject to a Position of Trust meeting.

This is likely due to the application of the threshold being more consistent given that there is one single point of contact now. It could also be that recording information has been completed more accurately. In addition, as the relationship between the LADO and partner agencies has developed over the last 12 months, professionals feel more confident contacting LADO to seek advice or check out their decision making.

In the table below we can see the amount of initial POT meetings held over the three years has remained between approximately 50 and 60.

Table 1 - Total number of referrals converted to a POT meeting			
Year	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of allegations	49	61	55

The 55 Initial POT meetings that have taken place can be broken down into the following categories-

Category	Number of children
Physical	23
Emotional	11
Neglect	11
Sexual harm including grooming	9
Physical and emotional	1

It should be noted that due to the complex nature of specific individuals there may need to be several review POT meetings, and this is significant around LADO oversight and robust tracking in place.

The most referrals fall into the physical category which anecdotally, is in line with other LA's. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of referrals from/related to special schools, see page 11 also. Many referrals in respect of special schools relate to allegations of physical "assault". This will largely be in my view due to the fact that special schools are more likely to use "restraints" or holds as they are known; this is due to the nature of the children that they have on role and their specific behaviours.

Some of the investigations related to special schools and allegations of physical assault do not identify any deliberate intent by a staff member to harm a child. Sometimes an intervention can be viewed as an assault by a child or parent. Occasionally accidental harm can be caused to a child – for example if they need to be held (restrained) for their own safety and the safety of others and they resist the hold, an injury could occur.

Some of the referrals that fall under the category of sexual harm have included allegations of grooming. These referrals have ranged from, in my view both a perception that a staff member might be grooming a child without any proper evidence - more a low-level concern about behaviours again sometimes about perceptions – especially the perceptions of teenagers through to clear evidence of potential grooming and a staff member being dismissed.

Outcomes by definition 2020/2021		Outcomes by definition 2021/2022		Outcomes by definition 2022/2023	
Category		Category		Category	
Unsubstantiated	16	Unsubstantiated	19	Unsubstantiated	19
Substantiated	33	Substantiated	20	Substantiated	20
Malicious	2	Malicious	1	Malicious	0
False	0	False	1	False	1
Unfounded	1	Unfounded	12	Unfounded	7
		Not yet concluded	8	Partially substantiated	2
				Not yet concluded	6

Of the 6 not yet concluded, one relates to a matter that commenced in June 2022 and is the subject of an ongoing Police investigation.

The other five relate to position of trust meetings that commenced within Q4 of the 2022/2023 reporting period, so they are relatively recent pieces of work picked up by the LADO.

There are some similarities between the 2021/2022 recordings and 2022/2023- for example a very similar number of outcomes were unsubstantiated and substantiated. This evidences overall consistency hopefully with the judgements being made by professionals within the POT process.

Looking at the 2020/2021 period, there were less POT meetings but a lot more with a substantiated outcome. It is difficult to assess why this might have been the case; this reporting period was during the Covid pandemic which might have had an impact on the types of referrals and the seriousness of referrals. However, I would have potentially expected less referrals during that period due to the impact of the “lockdowns”.

Training

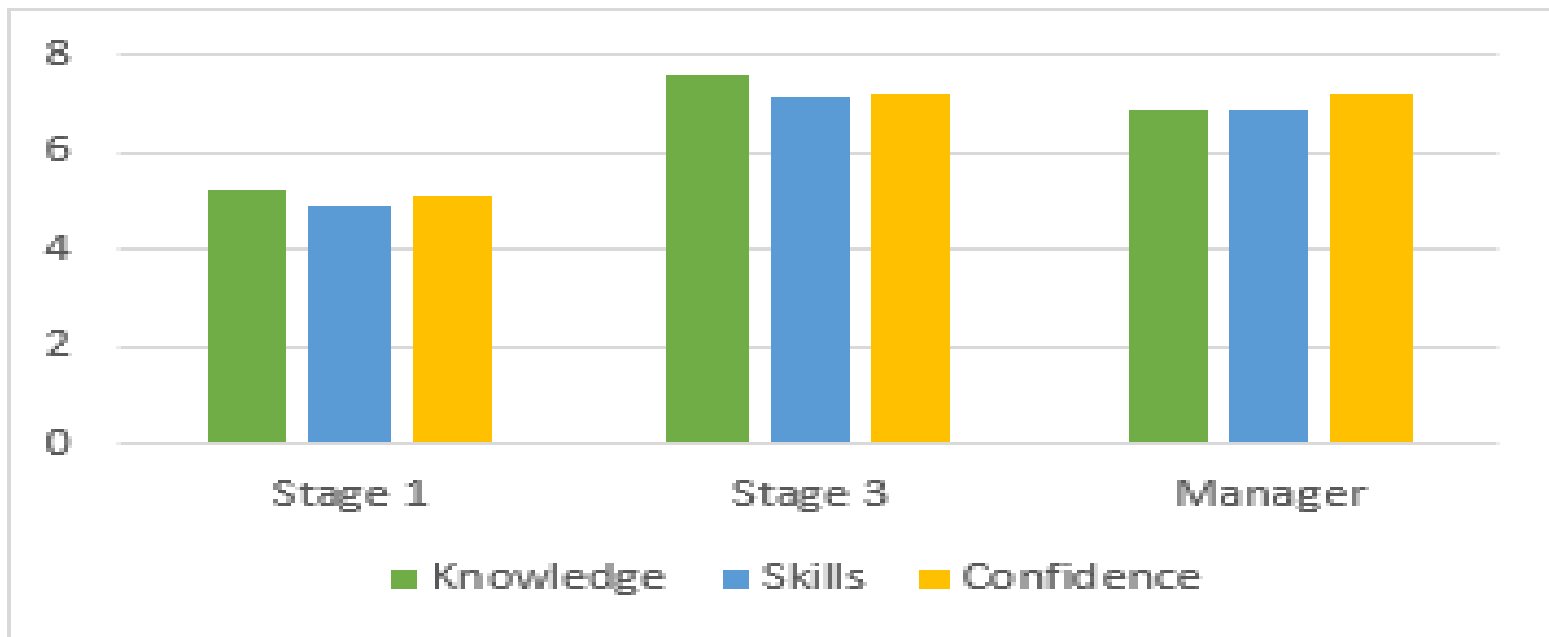
Three SSCP Managing Allegations against Staff training/briefing sessions have taken place between April 2022 and 31st March 2023 facilitated by the LADO, HR Advisor and on one occasion the SSCP Training Officer supported.

This training is aimed at staff with supervisory responsibilities for staff undertaking safeguarding work, managers, and strategic leads within multi-agency organisations.

The training provides an essential grounding for managers to enable them to manage allegations of abuse against staff.

47 pre-evaluation forms were completed, however the overall attendees was 38. This indicates that 9 places were cancelled after booking, and prior to the course running.

- Completed post-evaluation forms (delegate): **19**
- Completed post-evaluation forms (managers): **7**



The table above demonstrates the increase in knowledge, skills and confidence reported by both delegates and their managers since attending the training. The evaluations from delegates were very positive with some noting that they have gone on to update their own agencies policies to reflect what they had learnt from the training. Other delegates noted they now have a greater understanding of the role of the LADO and functions around allegations against individuals.

Referrals to LADO

Timeliness of managing allegations subject to the POT process

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	2021/2022	2022/2023
Concluded within 1 month	39	27
Concluded within 3 months	11	13
Concluded within 6 months	Not recorded	8
Concluded within 9 months	Not recorded	1
Concluded within 12 months	4	NA
Not yet concluded	7	6

In summary over this period, considering all the allegations that have been to POT meeting/s and finalised (49 which is minus the 6 matters that are ongoing) ,40 of those were concluded within 3 months which relates to nearly 90%.

The POT process can be very traumatic for staff members and concluding quickly reduces the stress and impact on an employee's emotional/mental health. As LADO I have been acutely aware of this during the last 12 months and at times have had to challenge the length of time that investigations have taken.

Where cases have taken up to nine months (and more) to conclude this has been due to one or more of the following for example – an ongoing police investigation - this is where the timescales for completion can end up being very lengthy. For example, the POT matter that took 9 months to complete was directly due to an ongoing police investigation and then awaiting a decision about charging etc.

Sometimes the employee's own child has been subject to child protection planning and the nature of the concern needs to be addressed in part through the child protection process (domestic abuse and assessing transferable risk or employment suitability).

A small proportion of POT meetings have been delayed due to school holidays and a head teacher not being available.

Sometimes more information is required about an allegation, and this has taken time to obtain. For example, drug or alcohol testing might be required. Allegations against one set of employees were delayed because they went abroad for three months and were not available to be interviewed by the police.

In summary, where there have been delays, these have largely been beyond the control of the LADO. There is one adult for example that has been open to the POT process for nearly 12 months whilst the outcome of digital forensics is awaited.

During the last 12 months, the LADO has dealt with a range of complex Position of Trust issues as well as concerns from organisations that have previously not been reported to LADO. For example, allegations against a Gymnast coach.

Contacts and referrals have been received about Community Interest Companies (CIC) and one of these led to the POT process and a number of meetings taking place. This was a complex piece of work involving a range of professionals.

CIC's are effectively unregulated companies that can be easily set up by anyone wanting to provide a service in/to the local community.

The challenge for LADO has been to maintain management oversight of the POT issues without stepping into the role of investigating the issues of concern. In North Solihull there are a number of CIC's and because of the unregulated nature of the business, this can lead to concerns about compliance for example.

Referrals have also been received about the ice hockey club in Solihull and the local ice-skating rink, local football coaches and a Bikeability instructor. In the table below they are recorded under the category of “other”. Within this category is also including four referrals via the NSPCC as well as ten initial contacts that have been received from a parent. Over the last few months, I have experienced an increase in contacts from parents – this is often where a school has dealt with an issue, but not necessarily to the satisfaction of the parent.

Total number by referral/contact “agency”	2021/2022	2022/2023
Senor school/college	38	48
Primary/infant school	41	37
Special school	8	19
Early years/nursery	20	20
Other LA	25	10
Police	12	14
Fostering agencies	7	11
Other	15	35
Ofsted	8	11
Solihull MBC	29	38
Individual	10	11
Probation	1	1
Children’s home	19	10
Health	3	5

Significantly more referrals have been received regarding special schools in the borough; this mostly relates to one particular special school. The school has some of the most challenging young people from Solihull and other LA’s. The head teacher has been receptive to a visit from me to discuss this issue. I was able to see for myself some of the complexities of teaching this particular group of children.

The rate of referrals has decreased since my visit although I am not sure why- whether this is related to greater vigilance with managing their behaviours (restraints/holds) or something else. I hope it is not due to not reporting – In my view I think parents would

raise concerns directly with the LA if they believed their child had come to harm at the school and were not dealing with it effectively (in their view).

There are also some schools that as LADO I have never had any contact with- this might be because the schools are not having allegations made against their staff, or that they are dealing with them without contacting the LADO or for another reason. It would be beneficial for the permanent LADO to make contact with these schools by way of an introduction to LADO and the allegations process.

The number of referrals relating to children's homes in Solihull has reduced. Previously, there were two private residential homes that generated a number of referrals, one closed at the start of 2022 and the other in October 2022, so this partly accounts for the reduction in the number of referrals. The two current homes are relatively new, and both have contacted me to discuss issues which is positive.

One of the children's homes chose to close down following formal LADO involvement.

There has been one referral about a police officer. There have been no referrals from faith organisations – mosques and Sikh temples for example. This is another area of work for the permanent LADO to explore in my view.

During the reporting period, there has been a number of Subject Access Requests made by employees subject to the POT process- Information Governance have supported with these requests.

There have been two complaints made about LADO during this review period- one relates to a POT meeting where a parent considered that an employee had harmed their child and wasn't happy that the employee remained at work- their complaint was partly due to them not fully understand the POT process.

The second complaint was also from a parent who considered that formal LADO involvement should have taken place when their child was injured in an Early Years setting.

Both complaints were dealt with by the head of safeguards.

There have been no formal complaints made by employees subject to the POT process. Occasionally employees have contacted the LADO directly to either express anxiety about the process and the time it is taking, to provide their own version of events reported or to seek more understanding of the process.

Feedback

The feedback form was implemented in September 2022. This feedback form is only sent out to professionals/key partners when an adult has been subject to the POT process and the process has ended. The current completion rate is somewhat low. It is not clear why- the form is not overly lengthy and is returned to business support.

Possible reasons for poor completion rate could be, lack of time/inclination or professionals feeling they have nothing specific to say.

Below is some of the feedback received in this reporting period-

- ✓ “I appreciated the support and guidance”.
- ✓ “There is a delay in the individual receiving official information/ letter which would be a concern to them. Although this has been communicated (verbally)” **
- ✓ “actions are always followed up, notes received in a timely way. Lesley is also helpful in engaging in interim communications needed between POT situations via email or phone.”
- ✓ “No delays were encountered, in fact there could have been potential delays due to changes in social services personnel however the LADO obtained written updates in the absence of SWs presence at meetings.”
- ✓ “There were some delays in relation to the letters issued and referral shared on just 1 of the POT meetings, as I understand that there was a shortage of admin support in the team”.**
- ✓ “I was kept up to date with the anticipated delays that were to be expected though communication with the LADO”
- ✓ “I would also like to say that the welfare of my employees, who have been subject to a POT has also been carefully considered and discussed by the LADO, which has been really appreciated.”
- ✓ “It was really helpful to work with the LADO. I thought the school and HR perspectives were considered and the LADO advice presented in a correct and helpful manner.”
- ✓ “Two different timings were sent out for the meeting though and I did not receive the agenda. However, I know there was an issue with my email address.”
- ✓ “I have worked with her both as HR Advisor on cases but also as the HR representative who runs the Managing Allegations training and updates the policy following annual KCSIE updates and she is knowledgeable and effective”.
- ✓ Note ** These comments relate to a period between August and November 2022 when there was a delay in the standard letter confirming the ending of the POT process, being sent out- this was due to pressures of work within business support.

The West Midlands Regional LADO Network meetings

These meetings have continued to take place every 8 weeks, they are well attended by the 13 Local Authorities in the region. The meetings remain a helpful platform for LADOs to discuss relevant issues/share good practice.

An Ofsted inspector has attended two of the meetings; in one of the meetings a discussion took place about the challenges faced by LADOs in respect of unregulated settings.

A representative from the National Football Association's safeguarding case management team has also attended one of the meetings to discuss the safeguarding structure with the Football Association.

I have benefitted from making the links with local LADO's and seeking their advice with more complex matters.

Conclusions

The 2022-2023 period has been another challenging time for Solihull MBC. The Local Authority is under pressure to improve outcomes for children, and this has been reflected in the Ofsted report and the work, on behalf of the DfE, by commissioner Sir Alan Wood.

Positively, Ofsted's view is that the LADO role is effective in managing allegations made against adults in positions of trust working with children. Positive feedback was received from Ofsted and feedback from professionals involved in the POT process has also been positive.

The recruitment of a permanent LADO means that relationship-based work with local agencies/professionals can continue and be fully embedded and that work can be completed with agencies that have had less/no contact with the LADO over the previous 12 months.

Recommendations for 2023-2024

1. With the new permanent LADO commencing in post in May 2023, that a review of the core forms that Solihull is currently using to support the LADO process takes place for example templates for the referral to LADO and POT meeting minutes.
2. That the permanent part time LADO business support role is secured in post asap offering support to the wider LADO functioning
3. Offer briefing sessions/advice to newly qualified Social Workers about the LADO role.

4. Key staff within the proposed children's homes opening in Solihull may also benefit from being part of briefing sessions (or attending SSCP training events)
5. Fully embed the use of the feedback form in line with key learning and improvement.
6. That the new LADO visits schools in the borough as well as Faith groups and any other professional group considered underrepresented in terms of referrals received.

Signed

Lesley Hudson

Interim Local Authority Designated Officer

Dated

9th May 2023