

# LADO Annual Report

This is the annual report of LADO activity between April 2020 until March 2021.

## Background

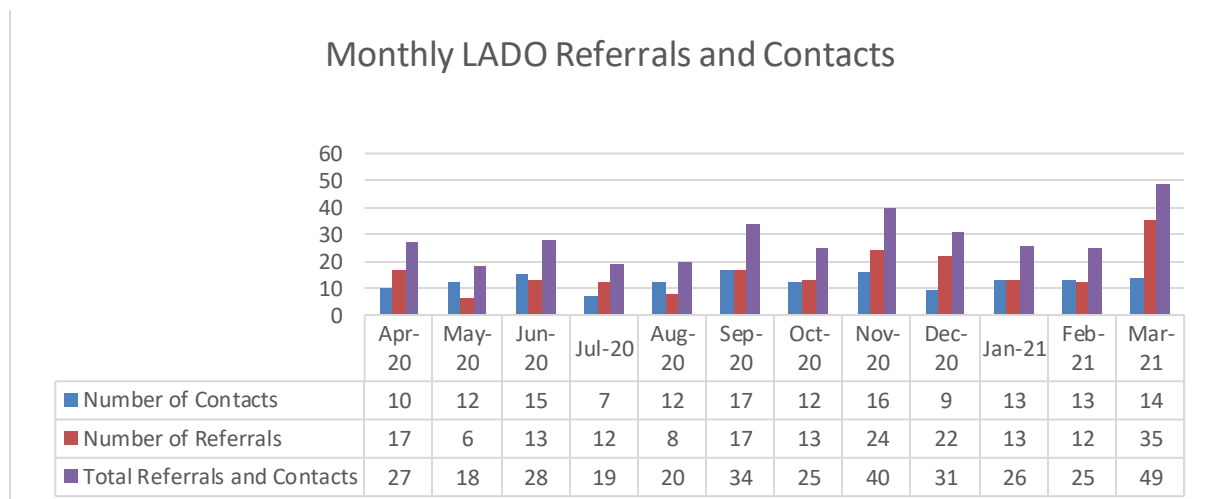
“Local authorities should put in place arrangements to provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations and agencies on how to deal with allegations against people who work with children.”

*Working Together, 2018*

## Analysis of data and outcomes

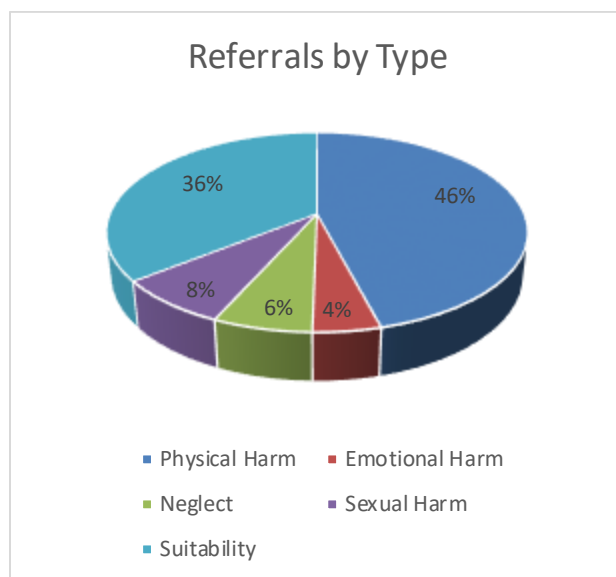
### Overall referral figures

The 2020-2021 year has been exceptional due to the Coronavirus pandemic, which has resulted in a number of prolonged lockdowns across the country and regionally, meaning that a large number of organisations weren't operational during this period. For much of the year, most schools were only open for the children of keyworkers or those with specific needs, sports organisations were not running and many voluntary organisations, such as Scouting, could not open. Given the above, it would have been expected that the number of LADO referrals received during this period would have been considerably lower, however although there were 59 less referrals that the 2019/20 year, the difference is marginal (14%) and the figures aren't that dissimilar to previous years.



The total amount of contacts during the year is 342 of which 43% did not progress beyond the initial contact stage. However the remaining 192 cases were progressed as referrals where some form of investigation was required.

### Referrals by category of abuse



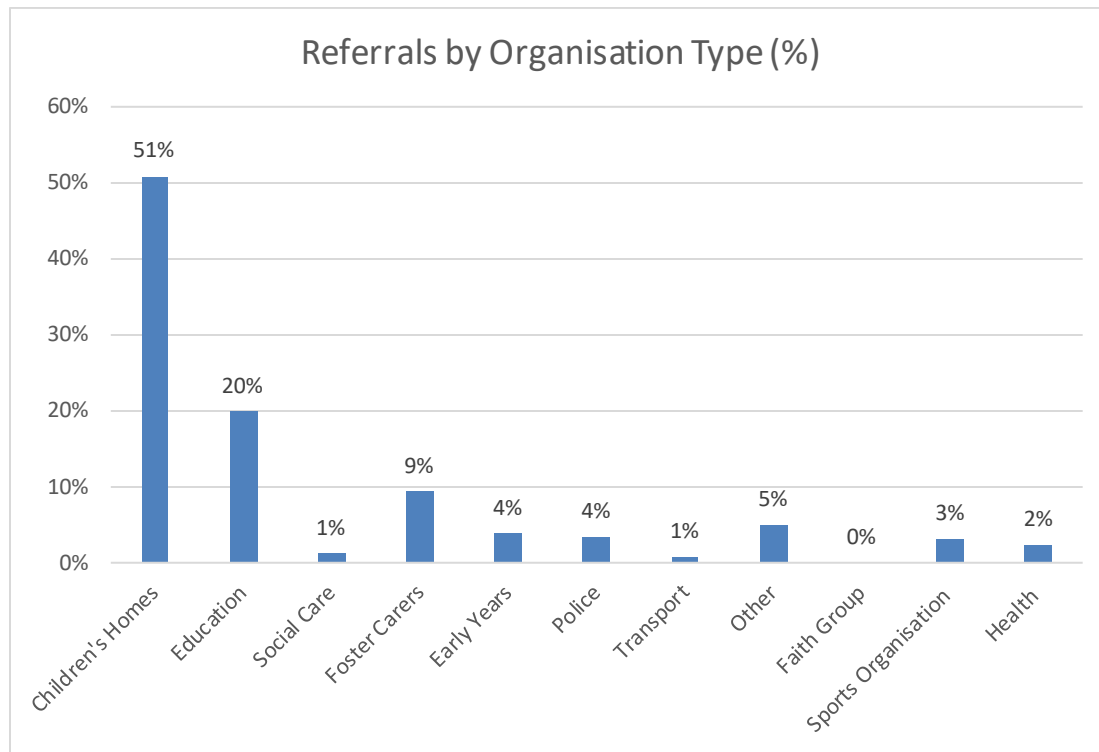
Just under 50% of all referrals related to allegations of physical abuse. This has remained consistent over recent years, and is therefore not unexpected despite the lower overall numbers of referrals. This has always been considered to be the most frequent reason for referral due to the large number of children's homes in the region, in addition to a number of specialist educational provisions where restrictive physical interventions are used. Even though many of the investigations identify no intent by the member of staff to cause harm to a child, the use of such interventions can often be misinterpreted as abusive by the children involved or lead to accidental harm being caused to children.

Suitability has also remained consistent as the second most frequent reason for referral. In December 2020 Working Together to Safeguard Children was also updated, and in relation to Positions of Trust (following an earlier update to Keeping Children Safe in Education) an additional criteria requiring a LADO referral to be made has been added:

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

This change has widened the threshold for referrals and therefore it is likely that this category will continue to increase, possibly leading to this being the most common reason for referral. However the new threshold has had limited impact on this year's figures as it only became operational at the end of the reporting period.

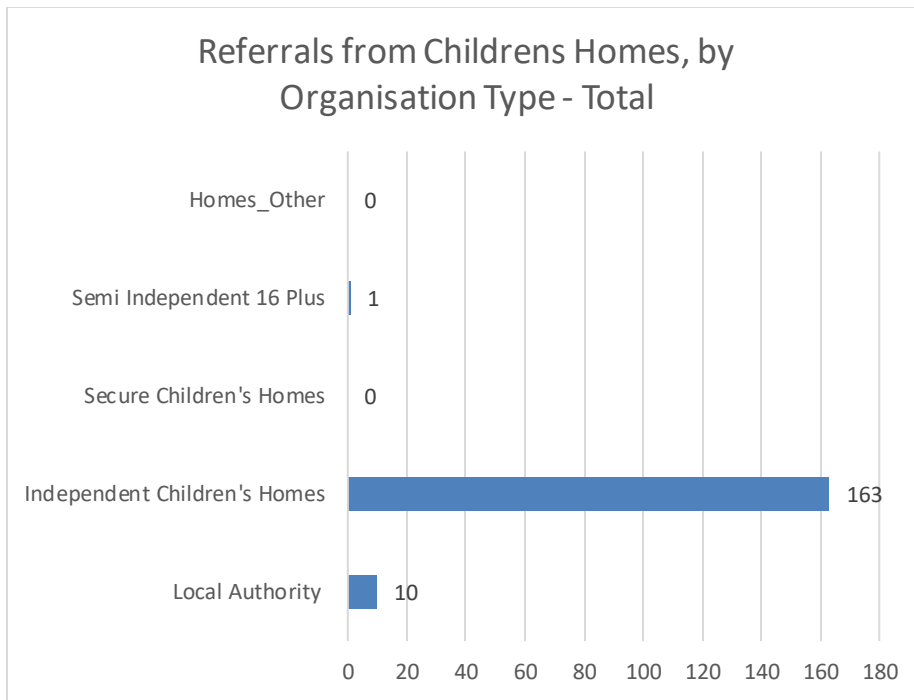
## Referral by organisation type



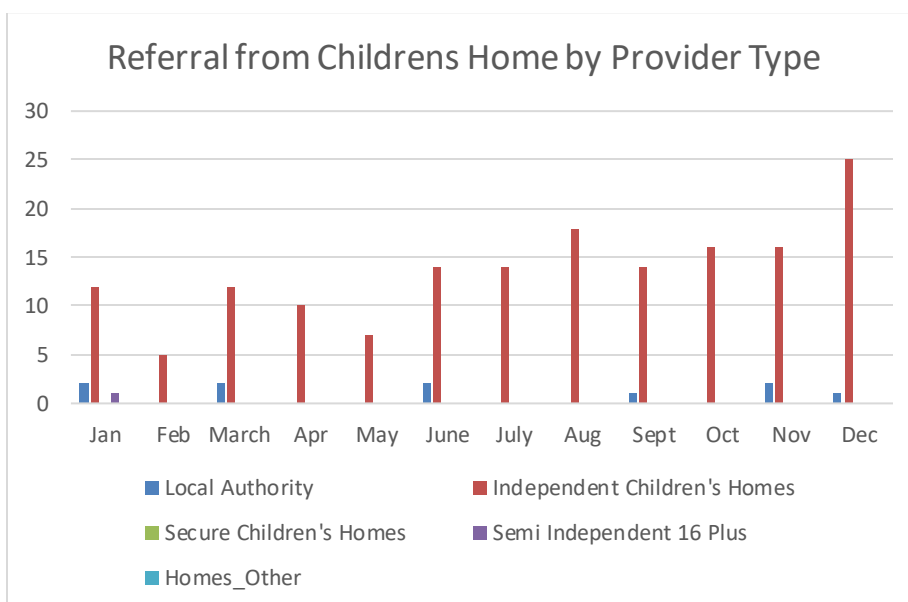
Over half of the total number of referrals related to staff that work in children's homes. This is consistent with previous years, however the number of referrals involving the education sector has reduced considerably. This is most likely to be as a direct result of the fact that for almost 2 out of the 3 school terms in this period, the large majority of pupils were being educated at home. Foster carers are the next most frequent occupation resulting in referrals being made. The most significant change in the type of organisations being referred is the much smaller than usual number of referrals regarding transport operators. Again this is likely to be due to the impact of the pandemic and fewer numbers of children being transported by bus or taxi to schools.

### Children's Homes

As previously identified, referrals involving staff from children's homes are responsible for over half of the total yearly figure for all LADO referrals.



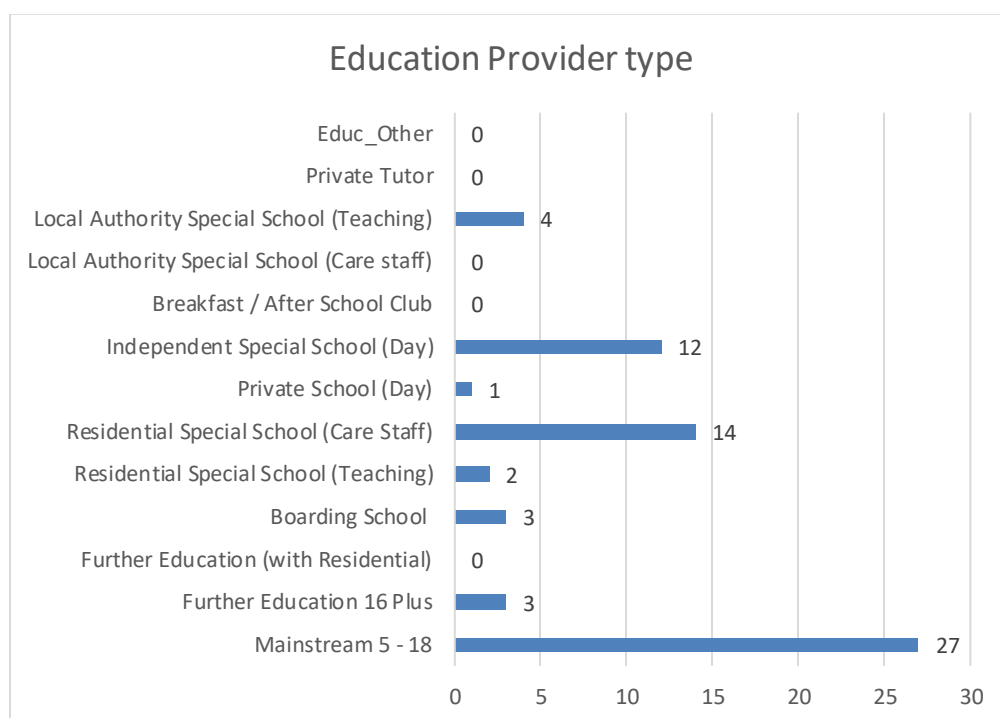
Independent Childrens home still remain the most frequent referrers perhaps due to the large number present in Shropshire, but this is also likely to be due to the cautious approach taken by these organisations in ensuring that all concerns are referred even if allegations have subsequently been retracted or there is evidence prior to referral that the allegation is unfounded.



Perhaps what is unusual about the referral patterns regarding children's homes is the apparent lack of impact of the numerous lockdowns on allegations being made. The monthly

referrals are relatively consistent throughout the year and in fact the months with the least referrals were in the months where there were limited external activities able to take place, and in fact when some homes were on complete lockdown with staff and children self isolating in the homes together. It appears therefore that for many of the children living in residential settings, the significant limits on activities that could be undertaken did not result in incidences where allegations were subsequently made.

## Education Sector



Mainstream schools are the most frequently represented in education referrals involving teaching staff (27), however if the referrals involving care staff from specialist school provisions (14) are added to the referrals regarding teaching staff from specialist provisions (18) they account for the majority of education referrals. This is likely to be due in part to the needs of the pupils being supported there, however I would also acknowledge that due to the lockdowns in place there were more specialist provisions still offering face to face educational provision than mainstream settings.

## Initial Action

As mentioned above, 150 cases referred to the LADO did not progress beyond the initial contact. The reasons for this are varied, however in the majority of cases, the LADO criteria was either not met, or following some additional basic fact finding taking place it was identified that the allegations were unfounded. It has continued to be the case that some

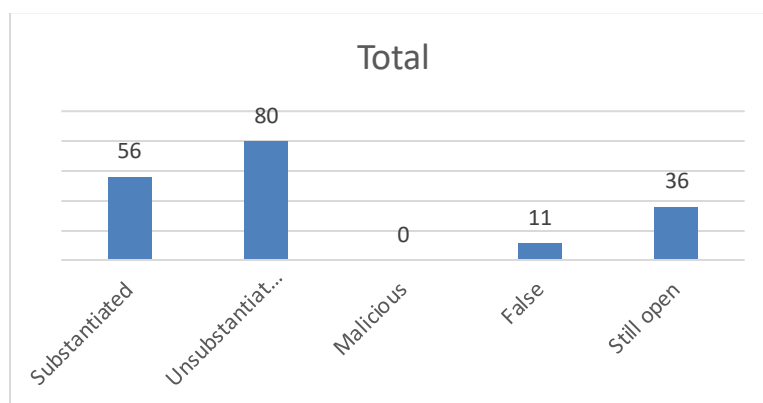
employers would prefer to make a LADO referral to ensure an independent view on a matter, even if the threshold is not met.

Of the 192 cases that progressed to an investigation, 46 cases were criminal matters investigated by the police. 145 cases resulted in investigations being undertaken by employers. In some cases employer investigations took place following the conclusion of a police investigation, where decisions could then be made on the “balance of probabilities” rather than the higher criminal threshold of “beyond reasonable doubt”.

Only 22 LADO Joint Evaluation Meetings took place during the 2020/21 year however 50 strategy meetings were held which were attended by a LADO, which then negated the need for a separate LADO meeting to take place. However many cases were not complex enough to require a JEM and agreements were reached outside of a formal meeting setting about the most appropriate type of investigation required.

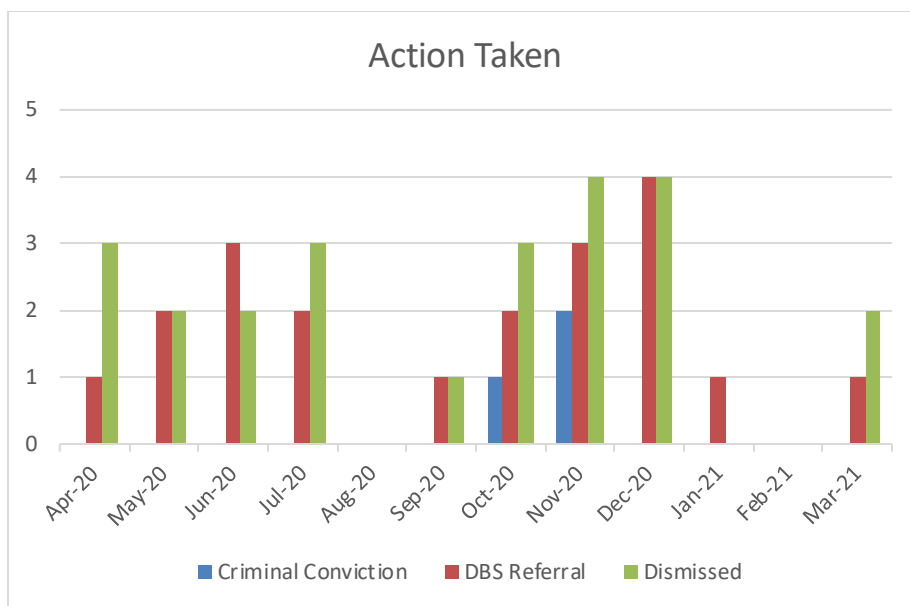
### Final outcome

The chart below identifies the final outcomes of those cases accepted as LADO referrals.



A large number of referrals concluded with the allegations being unsubstantiated (41%). Despite investigations having taken place, there was insufficient evidence to confirm whether or not an event had taken place. However in many of these cases, the case summary may provide additional information which would support if there was considered to be any concern about the actions of the professional involved. In addition, despite an allegation concluding as unsubstantiated, further action could still be taken, for example by way of additional training or supervision being provided.

56 cases (29%) concluded as being substantiated. In some cases however it was not considered that there was any evidence of intent to cause harm to a child. For example, a child may have sustained some superficial injury from a physical intervention, however the restraint was considered to be reasonable and proportionate in that situation. Some of the cases that were substantiated were considered to be so serious however that further action was taken (see below).



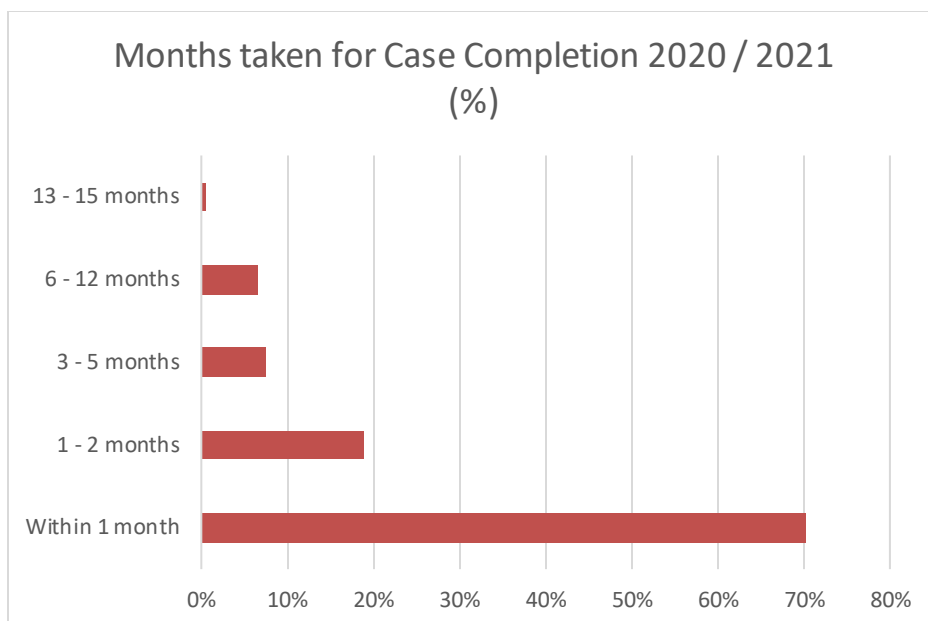
24 people in positions of trust were dismissed from their roles and 20 DBS referrals were made. 3 people received police convictions during this time.

36 cases remain open at this time. Some cases are still being investigated by the police, and in other cases, the outcome of further actions by the relevant regulatory bodies is still under consideration. Some organisations have been working with severely depleted staff over the pandemic and therefore investigation processes have been more prolonged than would be usually expected. For the cases still open, the LADOs have remained in regular contact with those agencies undertaking the investigations, to ensure that the process of investigation is as quick as possible. The impact of protracted investigations on the subject cannot be underestimated and part of the LADO role is to ensure that people who are under investigation are adequately supported. In addition, in cases where there are named children involved, appropriate support also needs to be considered for them during the investigation process.

### Timescales

There is no specific legislation that determines the timescales within which a LADO referral must reach its resolution. However previous guidance recommended that 80% of cases should be resolved within one month, 90% within 3 months and all but the most exceptional of cases should be completed within 12 months.

The chart below shows the timescales for LADO cases to be resolved in Shropshire during the 2020/21 year.



Only 70% of cases were resolved within one month, however 89% of cases were concluded within two months. Although the initial figure falls slightly short of the recommended timescales, the majority of cases are dealt with as suggested by 3 months. Most cases investigated by the police take many months, and in some cases years, to conclude. The length of time that it takes for forensic analysis of a person's electronic devices to be provided is increasing year on year, and in addition, many court cases have been adjourned due to the strain on the criminal justice system of the pandemic.

### Conclusion

Despite the unprecedented year that has been experienced internationally, the LADO picture in Shropshire has not been vastly dissimilar to recent years. There has been a small decrease in the number of referrals, however the reasons for referral, the sectors represented and the actions taken following a referral have remained fairly consistent. The ability of the LADOs to undertake direct training / awareness raising with different sectors has been limited, however good communication has remained with partner agencies.

In addition, the Shropshire LADO's have continued to be represented in the regional West Midlands LADO network, which has remained a good support network both in terms of progressing referrals, as well as sharing information where relevant to ensure appropriate safeguarding responses across different local authorities.