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**Buckinghamshire County Council  
Children's Services**

**Local Authority Designated Officer  
Annual Report**

**April 2017 – March 2018**

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## **Executive Summary**

The aim of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is to provide an efficient and child focused service when managing and overseeing allegations against people that work (in a voluntary or paid capacity) with children and who are therefore in a position of trust.

Buckinghamshire County Council's re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers (published on 29 January 2018) found that overall progress in improving services for children in the County since 2014 has been inconsistent and too slow. The inspectors consequently judged the local authority to be inadequate overall.

Positively, however, the Ofsted report noted that:

*'The designated officer provides a timely and effective response to concerns about adults who work with children. Work to raise awareness of the designated officer role to ensure a full understanding of professionals' responsibilities has taken place with a wide range of professionals. Close working arrangements are evident in the majority of cases sampled'*

Below is a summary of the actions completed against each of the key objectives that were agreed for the LADO in 2017-18:

**Raising awareness and understanding:** Support and workshops were provided specifically targeted at Early Years settings, which received positive feedback. In addition, LADO briefings were offered to multi-agency partners throughout the year via the Local Safeguarding Children Board training programme. A total of 421 referrals were received in 2017/18, of which on average across the year 62% met the threshold for LADO oversight.

**Compliance with new data protection regulations:** A privacy impact assessment was produced in preparation for the changes introduced to the data protection legislation through the General Data Protection Regulations, on 1 May 2018. All files, historic paper records and electronic, are appropriately stored in line with the new regulations.

**Recruiting permanent staff:** Two permanent staff started in post in August 2017. This assisted in maintaining the timeliness of completing cases with 70% concluding in less than one month.

**Improving recording systems:** Group abuse allegations management system has been introduced, and a record retention period agreed that complies with the corporate policy. Improvements were also introduced to the way 'transfer of risk' allegations are recorded so they can be readily identified and therefore reported. Physical abuse remains the most prominent type of allegation made against people in a position of trust (36%). Education continues to be the highest referrer to the LADO, which is reflective of the significant size of this workforce across the County.

## **Introduction**

All agencies that provide services for children, or 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 and volunteers. This procedure needs to be consistent with statutory guidance published by HM Government (*Working Together to Safeguard Children*). This guidance outlines the requirement of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to oversee the effectiveness, transparency and record retention of the process not only in terms of protecting children but also ensuring that those who are the subject of an allegation are treated fairly and that the response and subsequent action is consistent, reasonable and proportionate.

The definition of what constitutes an allegation is defined in *Working Together* as when it is alleged that a person who works or volunteers with children 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 towards a child or children in a way that indicates they might pose a risk to children

In Buckinghamshire, all agencies are expected to follow the procedures in the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board “Managing allegations against staff and volunteers working with children”, which was updated in July 2017.

In 2015<sup>1</sup>, *Working Together* was changed to remove reference to Local Authority Designated Officer and replaced this with the broader term “designated officers”. Similar to other Local Authorities, Buckinghamshire continues to use the title of Local Authority Designated Officer. *Working Together 2015* also allowed Local Authorities scope to change the arrangements for the referral of cases to the LADO, in line with local arrangements. During 2017/18 referrals continued to come directly to the LADO through their dedicated secure email and telephone number.

This annual report provides information on the number, nature and outcomes of allegations made against staff within the children’s workforce in Buckinghamshire between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. The report also provides an analysis of issues and trends that are considered to be relevant regarding inter-agency working together arrangements that is aiming to improve outcomes for children and families.

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<sup>1</sup> *Working Together 2015* was the current version of the statutory guidance during the period that this annual report covers

## Staffing and resources

### Local Authority Designated Officers

During the period between April 2017 and March 2018 the Local Authority maintained the full time establishment of 1.6 Local Authority Designated Officers (covered by two members of staff). These two individuals are managed and supervised by a full time manager (Conferencing Service Manager) who reports to the Head of Quality, Standards and Performance.

The Local Authority Designated Officers are qualified social workers, with many years post qualifying children's social work and management experience. The two individuals in post were recruited to the permanent positions in August 2017. As both were new to the role, an experienced interim LADO provided initial advice, guidance and support along with the Conferencing Service Manager, to ensure best practice was being followed.

### Business support staff

The Local Authority Designated Officers are supported in their work by a full time permanent Business Support Specialist. The Business Support Specialist provides an initial point of contact, helps in keeping the electronic records up to date, and takes notes at Joint Evaluation Meetings. A permanent Business Support Coordinator provides direct line management to the Business Support Specialist and arranges cover during periods of annual leave.

### Local Authority Designated Officer caseloads

The number of active cases within the LADO Service fluctuated between 80-95 staff and volunteers over 2017/18. This resulted in an average of up to 50 cases per 1.0 FTE officer. Where active cases are linked to specialist provisions or group allegations, these are managed as one case.

### Staff training

With such a specialist role, it is important for the LADO to be able to access national training and events. The LADO attends the quarterly South East Regional meetings to hear about and share good practice. The LADO also attends the Annual National LADO Conference which is held in March each year. In addition to this, resources are made available in the annual budget to enable the LADO to attend up to two external courses over the year. Peer development sessions are scheduled across the year with the manager to provide opportunities for reflective discussion as a means to continue to improve the service.

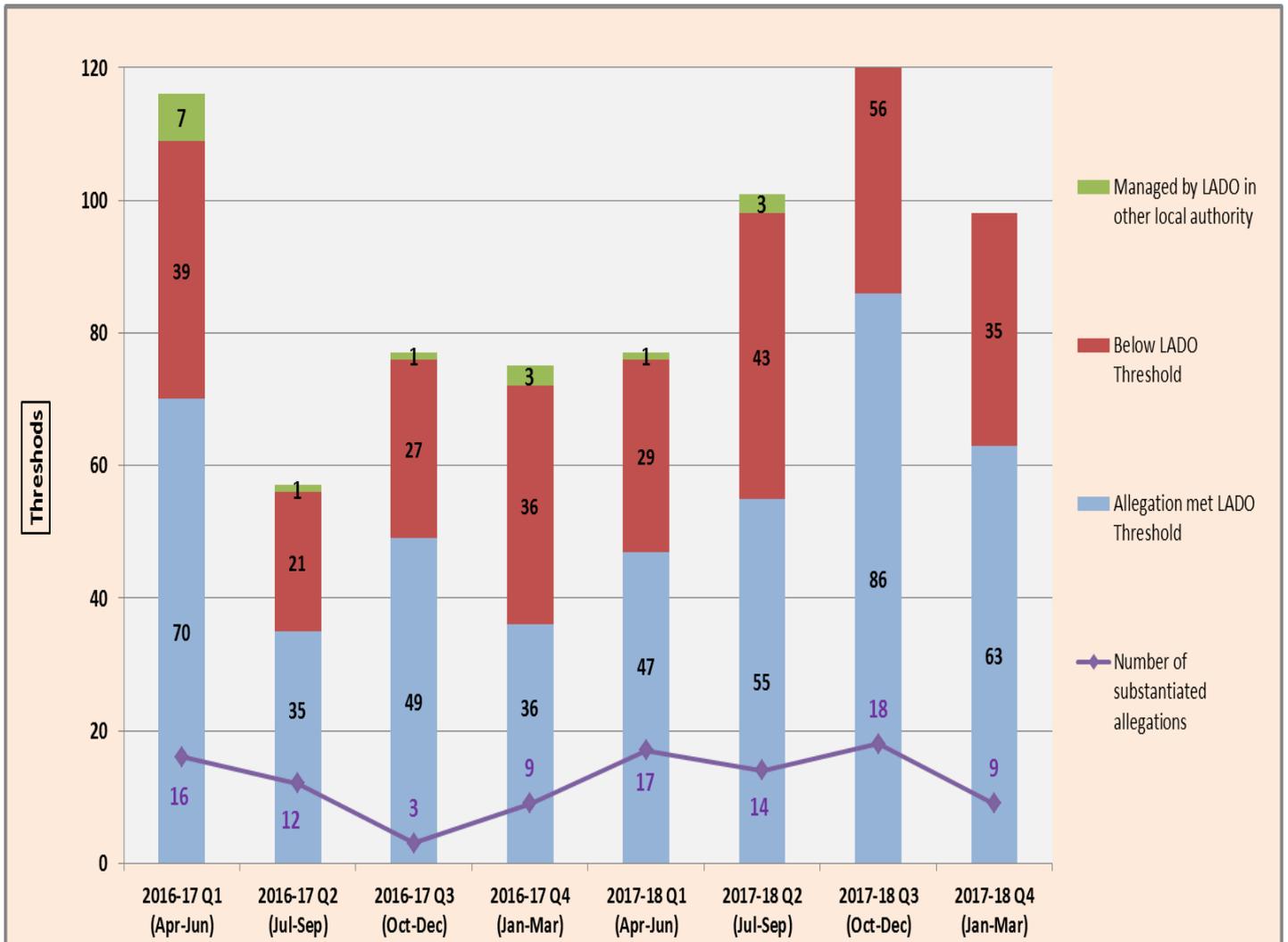
### Budget

The LADO spend in 2017/18 remained in line with its forecast budget.

## Activity

Changes were introduced in 2016/17 to how the Local Authority Designated Officer collects data. This has improved the ability to track performance activity. Further changes were introduced in 2017/18 to improve data collection, and provide more detail on the source of referrals received. There is currently no comparator data with other Local Authorities available against which to benchmark Buckinghamshire data.

### Number of allegations referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer



There were 421 allegations made against people in a position of trust in 2017/18 compared to 325 allegations made in 2016/17. This represents a 29% increase from the previous year and remains well below the 543 allegations made in 2015/16. There will always be some fluctuation due to the scale of the workforce in scope and the on-going turnover that occurs, particularly in the volunteer workforce.

There were a comparatively higher number of allegations received in quarter 3 compared to the same period last year. This period saw an almost doubling in the numbers of referrals made to the LADO and a proportionately higher number of substantiated allegations (6% in 2016/17 compared to 25% in 2017/18).

	2016/17				2017/18			
	Q1 (Apr- Jun)	Q2 (Jul- Sep)	Q3 (Oct- Dec)	Q4 (Jan- Mar)	Q1 (Apr- Jun)	Q2 (Jul- Sep)	Q3 (Oct- Dec)	Q4 (Jan- Mar)
Allegation met LADO Threshold	70	35	49	36	47	55	86	63
Below LADO Threshold	39	21	27	36	29	43	56	35
% below LADO Threshold	34%	37%	35%	48%	38%	43%	39%	35%
Managed by LADO in other local authority	7	1	1	3	1	3	2	1
<b>Total Allegations</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>99</b>
Number of substantiated allegations	16	12	3	9	17	14	18	9

This could in part be indicative of people's response to the re-inspection of Children's Social Care, which took place in November 2017, and also to the improved understanding and awareness of the LADO following the multi-agency workshops delivered through the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

With regards to the proportionally higher number of substantiated allegations, this may be due to the recruitment of new permanent staff and the oversight provided by the experienced interim LADO who drew on their knowledge from working in good Local Authorities. However, the average percentage of allegations received that were below the LADO threshold remains broadly the same in 2017/18 (38.75%) as in 2016/17 (38.5%).

The peaks and troughs of allegations received and those meeting threshold is different across 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. The highest quarter for total allegations was July to September in 2017/18 whereas the highest quarter in the previous year was April to June.

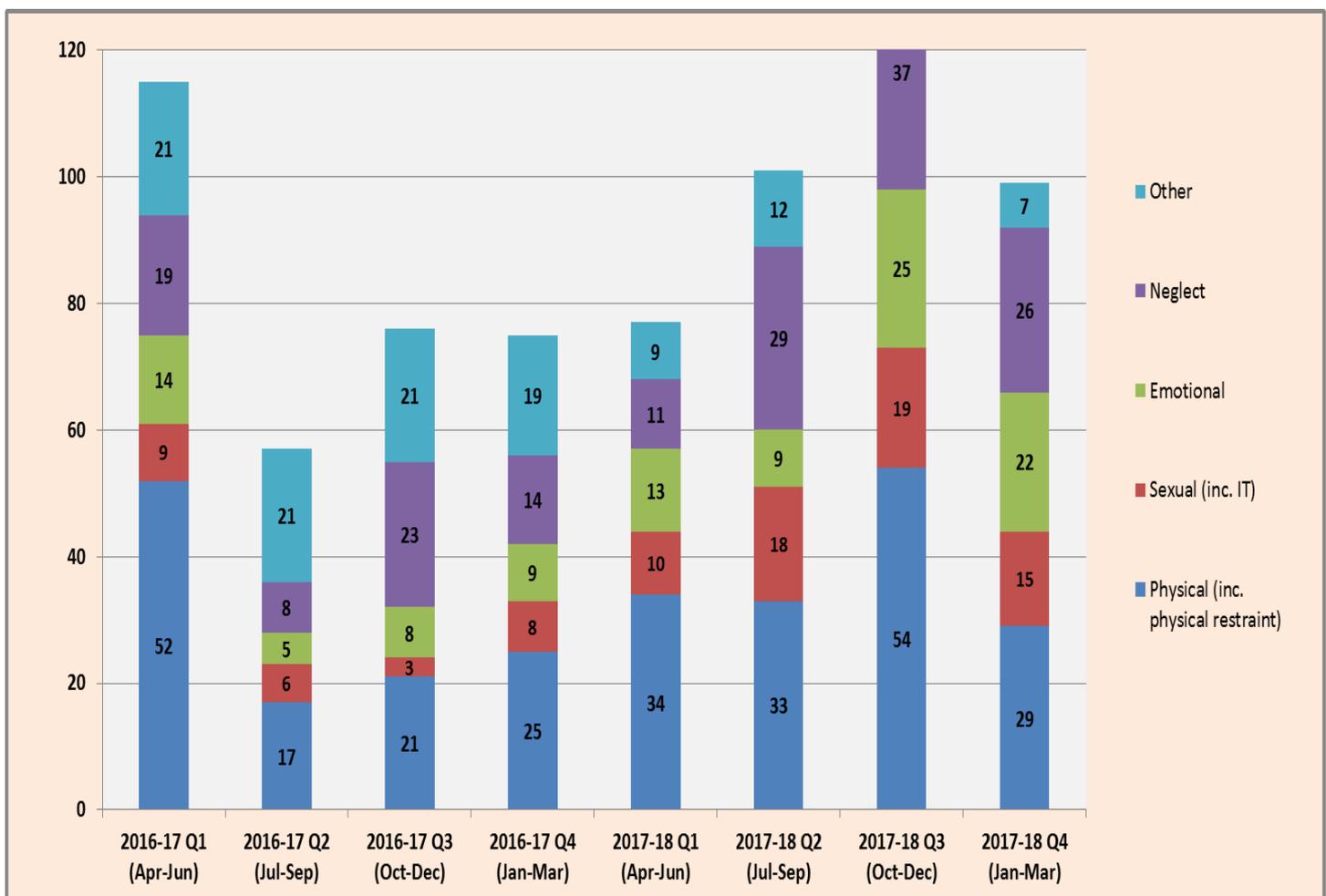
Although LADO provides support and guidance, it is important that the majority of LADO time is focused on threshold cases. The Education Safeguarding Advisory Service has continued to provide advice and guidance to primary, secondary and special schools which assists in maintaining this focus.

### **Type of allegations**

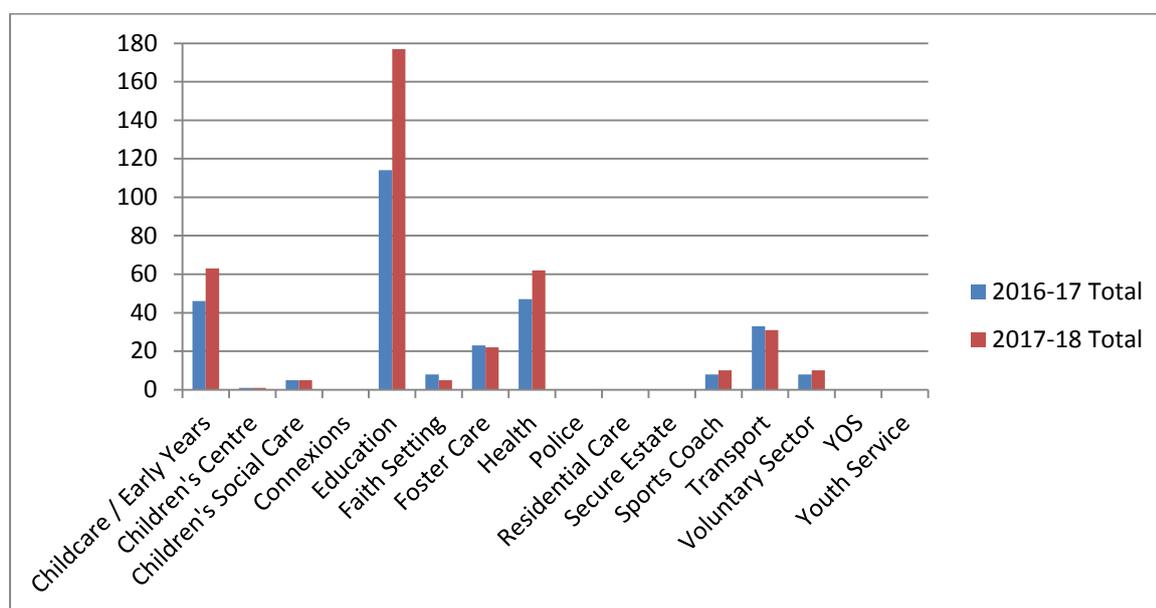
Physical abuse remains the most prominent type of allegation made against people in a position of trust (36% in 2016/17 and 2017/18). Neglect continues to be the second highest category (24%) and the most significant increase in category has been sexual (which includes IT related allegations). This rose from 8% in 2016/17 to 15% in 2017/18 and could be attributed to the increased awareness in and reporting by schools.

In 2017/18 the number of allegations against the physical category (which includes physical restraint) was much higher in quarter 3 (October to December) than at any other times in the year. This could be linked to the beginning of the new academic year following the start of the new school year in September.

The use of the category 'other' (historically used to capture 'transfer of risk' cases) has continued to decrease this year. Transfer of risk refers to concerns about the care someone affords their own children when they are in a position of trust through their employment or as a volunteer. For example their own children are the subject of a Child Protection Plan. On-going analysis of these cases has led to the LADO capturing these allegations within the existing categories, as reflected in the data where only 9% of allegations have been categorised as 'other' in 2017/18, compared to 25% in 2016/17.



## Allegations by sector



Education continues to be the highest referrer to the LADO which is likely to be due to the sheer number of employees and volunteers they have that are in a position of trust with children. Health is the second highest referrer which can be seen as evidence that the actions taken to address the historic concerns that health providers were not always referring relevant cases are becoming embedded. The roles included in 'other' are agency workers, ancillary workers, and adopters, with the numbers and percentages slightly decreasing as improved categorisation and recording has been introduced over 2017/18

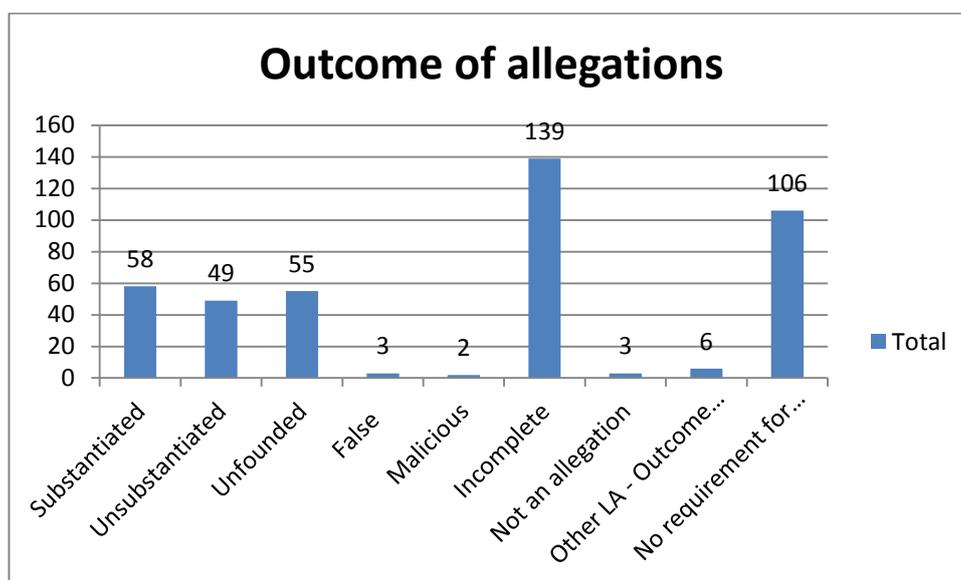
## Outcomes of allegations

When allegations are referred to the LADO, most should meet threshold. Of those that do meet threshold a Joint Evaluation Meeting (previously known as a LADO Strategy Meeting) is held where concerns are significant. This meeting is chaired by the LADO with representatives from the employer, Police and Children's Social Care invited to attend. Below is a summary of the percentage of allegations by quarter that were below the threshold for a Joint Evaluation Meeting to be convened.

Allegation met LADO Threshold	47	55	86	63
Below LADO Threshold	29	43	56	35
% below LADO Threshold	38%	43%	39%	35%
Managed by LADO in other local authority	1	3	2	1
<b>Total Allegations</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>99</b>

The average percentage of allegations below the LADO threshold remained at just over 38% across 2017/18 (38.75%, when compared to 2016/17 when it was 38.5%). This is a significant proportion of time that the LADO is spending on providing advice

and guidance to safeguarding leads in organisations where threshold has not been met, with a higher number of occurrences in quarter 3 of the year (September to December). Given the highest number of referrals are from education establishments, a correlation could be drawn with the start of the new academic year in September and the higher number of referrals received where there was no requirement for the LADO to be involved.

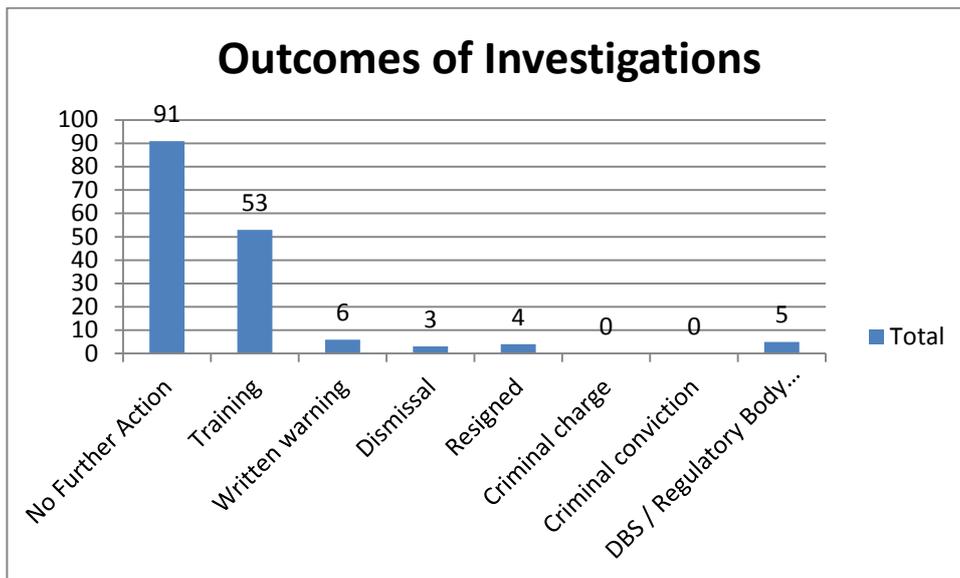


Outcomes of allegations:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
Substantiated	17	14	18	9	58
Unsubstantiated	10	12	17	10	49
Unfounded	8	7	17	23	55
False	0	0	0	3	3
Malicious	0	1	1	0	2
Incomplete	31	34	45	29	139
Not an allegation	1	1	1	0	3
Other LA - Outcome Unknown	2	4	0	0	6
No requirement for LADO oversight; advice given and agreed	8	28	45	25	106

The 'incomplete category' accounts for those cases that are still active at the end of that particular reporting quarter. At year end the number of incomplete allegations was 29. The main reasons for recording as incomplete, is where the organisation has not reported back to the LADO. A reduction in incomplete outcomes is very positive. The LADO continues to remind agencies about the importance of ensuring timely feedback is provided on outcomes.

There were 58 substantiated allegations of the 421 total allegations received. This represents 14% of the total compared to 12% in 2016/17 (40 out of the 325 allegations).

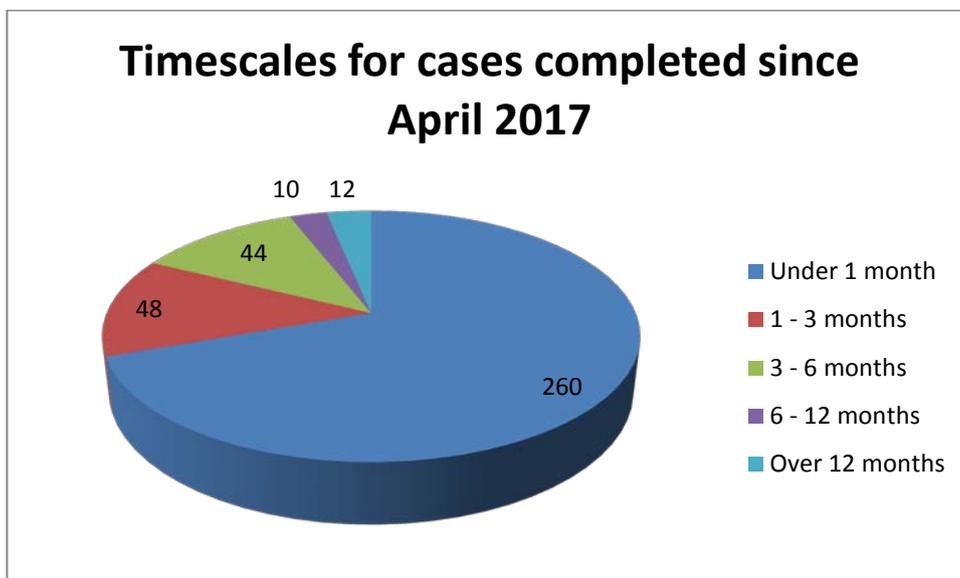
## Outcomes of investigations



Of the total number of investigations completed in 2017/18, 56% resulted in no further action (compared to 60% in 2016/17) and 33% resulted in training requirements for the staff (compared to 24% in 2016/17). Three members of staff were dismissed in 2017/18 (with no staff dismissed in 2016/17).

## Performance

### Timescales for the completion of cases



70% of cases in 2017/18 were completed in less than one month, compared to 74% of the cases that were completed in 2016-17. This could be seen as a positive indicator, as it can show that agencies are concluding their investigations in a timely manner. However, a note of caution would be that the quality of the investigations

and subsequent outcomes should be routinely and regularly checked to confirm that they comply with the expected practice standards.

### **Allegation management system**

All concerns referred to the LADO continue to be recorded on LCS (Allegation Management System). An internal audit is scheduled to take place in 2018/19 to test the robustness of governance processes and procedures and the consistency in the application of agreed systems by the LADO and their business support.

### **Management oversight**

Weekly data reports are used by the Conference Service Manager to track the caseloads of the individual LADOs, the source and type of allegations and timeliness in achieving an outcome. This regular monitoring of activity plus discussions in monthly supervision means that the LADO is able to take an active role in driving improvements in safeguarding children across the multi-agency workforce.

**Key actions for 2017-2018**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Achieved by who</b>	<b>Achieved by when</b>
Implement actions arising from internal audit action plan	Conferencing Service Manager	December 2018
Undertake regular audits to check the quality and standard of completed investigations and the agreed LADO outcome	Conferencing Service Manager	Monthly from October 2018
To ensure that allegations about people who work with children and young people in positions of trust, including those who are paid, unpaid, volunteers, casual, agency or anyone self-employed, are dealt with promptly and robustly	To review Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) practice in line with procedures and ensure that outcome decisions reflect the available evidence in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Child protection enquiries</li> <li>○ Criminal investigations and prosecutions</li> <li>○ Employer actions (e.g. disciplinary or fitness to practice matters)</li> </ul>	December 2018