



INTEGRATED CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES SAFEGUARDING,  
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS &  
QUALITY ASSURANCE

# LADO ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022

**Managing Allegations Against  
Staff within the Kent Childrens  
Workforce**

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<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page No</b>
1. Introduction	2
2. Recommendations from previous reports	3
3. Activity	4
4. Data	5
5. Performance	15
6. Key Themes	17
7. Conclusions	18
8. Next Steps	18

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** This annual report for the County LADO Service (CLS) provides details of allegations and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) activity notified within Kent during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. It provides statistical data for the KSCMP and partner agencies on the number, nature, investigation processes and outcomes of allegations. It also identifies trends and issues affecting the Kent children's workforce relating to the management of such allegations as well as matters pertinent to inter-agency working arrangements.

**1.2** The CLS is underpinned by statutory guidance – Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018. This guidance sets out that Local Authorities should have a Designated Officer (LADO) to be involved in the management and oversight of allegations against staff working within the Children's Workforce.

**1.3** The definition of 'working with' children is an adult who is working or volunteering with children (anyone under the age of 18 years old) or in contact with children through work on a regular basis and would be seen as being in a position of trust over them. In addition, this would also apply to someone under eighteen in the same position e.g., a seventeen-year-old teaching a musical instrument or instructing a group.

**1.4** It is a requirement nationally for all employers within the children's workforce to have clear and robust procedures in place when responding to allegations against staff, whether they are paid or voluntary. Working Together, 2018 provided the Harm Threshold applied when an allegation is made against a member of the children's workforce, and it is believed the individual 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
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children **or**
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

**1.5** The CLS within Kent accepts referrals meeting the harm threshold and progresses these as allegations. The CLS also accepts referrals assessed to sit just outside of this threshold around quality of care, professional conduct and practice – these are recorded as consultations.

### **1.6 Overview of the County LADO Service**

**1.7** The staffing structure within the CLS at the time was 4.8 LADOs and two Contact and Referral Officers (CRO), who undertake a combined role of screening and business support, the service is overseen by the County LADO Manager. At the start of the year one full time CRO left the role in April 2021 and another recruited in June 2021.

**1.8** The CLS predominantly worked virtually through the restrictions of the pandemic. Towards the latter end of this period planned changes to recording were implemented. The changes were to streamline the service and move away from manually inputting data to recording onto the electronic recording system, Liberi. Changes were also required to bring data up to date with current terminology and practice. Statistical data remains collated manually due to Power BI and reporting abilities from electronic recording systems not being available.

**1.9** The CLS has met business needs and the high standard of work has been maintained throughout this period. The Kent Practice Framework continues to be embedded and the LADOs work evidence scoping, triangulation, and analysis. There is strong collaborative working practices, appropriate challenge, and escalation of concerns.

**1.10** All LADOs are adept at addressing any practice or lessons to be learnt and regularly feedback to stakeholders to encourage development and support for employers. Due to the impact of re-emerging from the pandemic the CLS had little opportunity to afford the wider contextual safeguarding elements of meeting with providers in person, sharing patterns and themes through training or presentations, and embedding the lead roles.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS REPORT

	RECOMMENDATIONS	PURPOSE	UPDATE	Rag
1.	<p>CLS workstream* to work towards completion and outlining improvements by July 2022.</p> <p>Reporting facilities – Power BI and Liberi</p> <p>Update of fields within electronic recording system (Liberi)</p> <p>Referral forms via Childrens Portal.</p>	<p>Bring the fields in line with Kent’s Practice framework and enable LADOs to record rationales, guidance, escalation, adjudication and learning coherently in various fields to enable reporting in the future and assist with auditing.</p>	<p>This recommendation is dependent on CYPE priorities relating to Power BI builds, it is currently in progress</p> <p>Some Liberi changes have been implemented Significant changes are awaiting completion by the Management Information Unit (MIU)</p> <p>Children’s Autonomy Portal was delayed through the pandemic. Testing is now scheduled for Autumn 2022</p>	
2.	<p>Escalation Process to embed and have a clear tracking and reporting system.</p>	<p>Evidence of LADO oversight and challenge.</p> <p>Evidence that good practice and practice needing improvement is acknowledged with stakeholders and the CLS.</p>	<p>Escalations are happening and understood by stakeholders.</p> <p>Reporting and tracking via Power Bi requires updates to Liberi, New target date is Easter 2023.</p>	
3.	<p>Improvement in attendance to the ‘KSCMP LADO need to know’ sessions from all Faith Groups.</p>	<p>CLS to continue with the promotion of the service and reaching out to Faith groups to develop robust allegation safeguarding knowledge.</p>	<p>County LADO Manager has reached out to Faith Groups but has yet to see increase in attendance on the KSCMP sessions.</p>	
4.	<p>Embed the fourth criteria of the harm threshold and provide consistency in line with national thinking.</p>	<p>CLS to continue to link in with the NLN and findings/guidance from the DFE.</p> <p>CLS to review over the next 12 months threshold linked to these criteria.</p>	<p>Clear links with national thinking and learning.</p> <p>Regular review and discussion within service around threshold. Case reviews regularly being undertaken.</p> <p>Recording processes adapted to reflect this category made towards latter half of reporting period.</p>	
5.	<p>Continue to develop and work with commissioning</p>	<p>A joined up and contextual approach to wider or cultural</p>	<p>Established meetings and ways of communicating concerns.</p>	

	about wider safeguarding concerns linked to settings.	safeguarding matters or concerns/patterns.	Process and system in place and about to be launched – Provider Hub	
6.	Improve on timescales for closures.	Closer to meeting the national timeframes.	<p>Completion timescales are no longer required from Working Together, however KCC will continue to use the KPI's to ensure that there continues to be a high level of oversight over referrals and to prevent any drift in outcomes.</p> <p>Improvements to processes around consultations will meet lower timeframes and impact of 4<sup>th</sup> harm threshold will be seen in the 3–6-month timescales.</p>	

### 3. ACTIVITY

**3.1** The LADOs continue to play a vital and expanding role in ensuring safeguarding standards across the county in several other areas of work including:

**Table 1** Areas of service delivery

OFSTED Responses	Freedom of information		Subject Access Requests	Safeguarding and Fostering checks	DBS responses	LADO Enquiries
45	3		29	598	36	646

- Developing lead roles within the CLS to build on knowledge and experience with our stakeholders.
- Regular attendance at the South East Regional LADO Meetings
- Regular attendance at the National LADO Network meetings and subgroups
- Ongoing meetings with various stakeholders
- Deliver training to partner agencies and ICS:

## 3.2

Table 2 Training Delivered

TRAINING DELIVERED TO:	DATES OF TRAINING
Early Years Safeguarding meeting (South)	15 June 2021
Early Years Safeguarding meeting (West)	16 June 2021
Early Years Safeguarding meeting (North)	22 June 2021
KSCMP LADO Need to Know	22 June 2021
Early Years Safeguarding meeting (Childminders and OOS Settings)	23 June 2021
Safer Placements Communities of Practice	16 September 2021
KSCMP LADO Need to Know	28 September 2021
Disabled Children & Young Peoples Service (East Kent)	3 March 2022
Disabled Children & Young Peoples Service (West Kent) Managers (recorded for staff)	09 March 2022
Children in Care District Meeting (South)	10 March 2022
Adolescent North/West leadership meeting	16 March 2022
Ashford CSWT Service Meeting	17 March 2022
Commissioning 22.3.22	22 March 2022
Regional Adoption Agency	24 March 2022
UASC Appledore and Millbank	25 March 2022
Child in Care Service (North)	29 March 2022
KSCMP LADO Need to Know	31 March 2022
<b>Scheduled but cancelled due to the Covid</b>	<b>Cancelled Dates</b>
Fostering Service Meeting	31 March 2022

**3.3** Feedback continues to be very positive from stakeholders but remains low having received only twenty-five forms during this period. Training sessions received 95% feedback which have all been positive. The service across the board continues to receive high scoring from stakeholders. To increase feedback an online feedback form was launched and the link shared. All types of feedback are valued and used to develop practice, inform revisions and updates to both training/presentations and processes.

**3.4** The Kent guidance has been updated to include reference to educational low-level concerns as outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). It is important to note that the National LADO Network have continued to meet with the DFE around low level concerns and the worries the network holds. This is because the inclusion initially clashed with allegation management guidance.

## 4. DATA – statistical report

**4.1** Coming through the Covid pandemic and converting to 'business as usual' demand on the service has increased as expected. The CLS recorded an increase in the volume of referrals received during this reporting period (1731). The total number of referrals progressed from 1st April 2021 - 31st March 2022 was 1248 which is an increase of 54% from the previous reporting year (808).

Twenty-eight percent (483) of referrals received were screened out as not meeting the LADO threshold. The CLS managed 712 formal allegations against the children’s workforce in Kent. This represents an increase from the previous year by 325 (83%). There were 487 consultations showing an increase of 119 (32%) and 49 ‘for information only’ cases.

**4.2** The CLS during this reporting period recorded 646 formal LADO Enquiries. Of those 85% (479) of requested referrals were received. However, there needs to be some caution around the numbers as contacts do not have identifying details of members of staff and cross referencing with referrals is not consistently accurate. It is also relevant to note that the service still only receives a negligible number of referrals from the public/parents – this year it was a total of 9 and none met the allegation Harm threshold.

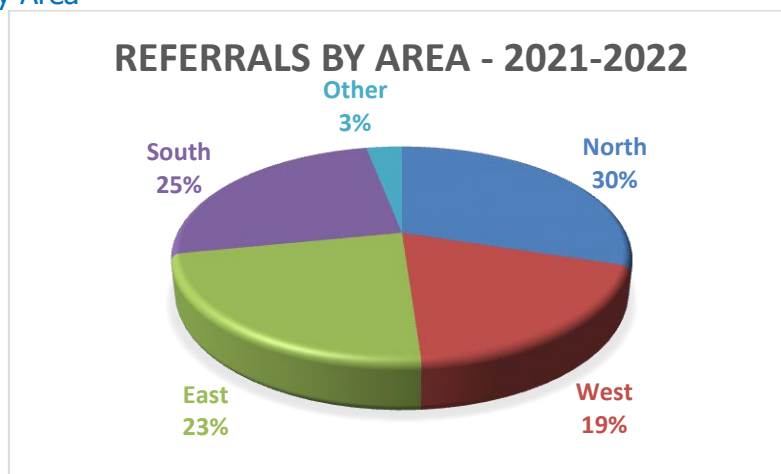
**4.3** Statistically, based on these figures, the CLS was managing an average of 23.1 new referrals per week, an increase of approximately seven, returning the average back to pre-pandemic levels. This on average breaks down to 13.6 allegations, 8.6 consultations and 0.9 for information only cases per week.

**4.4** Kent records allegations against staff who met the Harm Threshold. In addition, the CLS records consultations which mainly relate to staff conduct issues. These tend to be passed back to employers to manage as practice or competence issues. Some of these consultations will have an internal investigation or disciplinary process.

**4.5** The number of new allegations referred to the LADOs each year does not provide a full and accurate picture of LADO caseloads as there are always cases remaining open from the previous year(s) which the LADO monitors and continues to work on. This is more often due to lengthy / complex criminal investigations and waiting for court slots. A high caseload would be considered to be in excess of eighty-five, this does fluctuate but should be possible to reduce within suitable timeframes. For this reporting period the average caseload per month fluctuated between 89 and 112 demonstrating a heavy workload. It also reflected other agencies and the courts suffering with their own delays and pressures as the work increased.

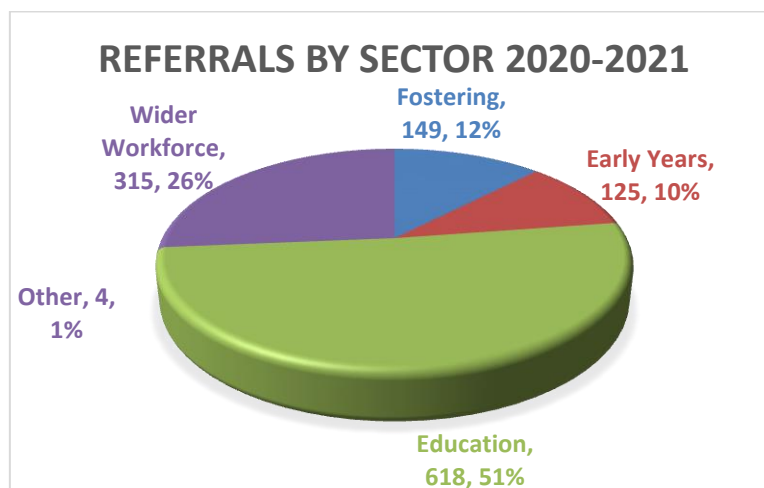
## ALLEGATIONS DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 3 Referrals by Area



**4.6** Historically, referrals received into the CLS derived mainly from the East where there is a high concentration of both residential children’s homes and independent fostering agencies (IFA’s). As with the last two years data there continues to be a shift to the North of the county (Sevenoaks, Dartford, Gravesham and Swale). A proportionate balance between the West (includes the North) (592) and the East (includes the South) (582) suggests stakeholders are continuing to apply consistent thresholds to make enquiries with the service.

Table 4 Referrals by Sector



**4.7** Recording the wider source of referrals to the CLS comes under four broad headings – Education, Early Years, Wider Workforce and Fostering. The statistical distribution of these allegations has changed this year. Education has increased to 51% an increase by 11%. This is likely to be the impact of the pandemic and changes in KCSIE and Working Together. The wider workforce has dropped by 11% which is concerning but was expected due to the reduction in contact during the restrictions around the pandemic. Please see specific agency sections for further details.

Table 5 Key Data with regards to Child and Young Person involved in the Allegation

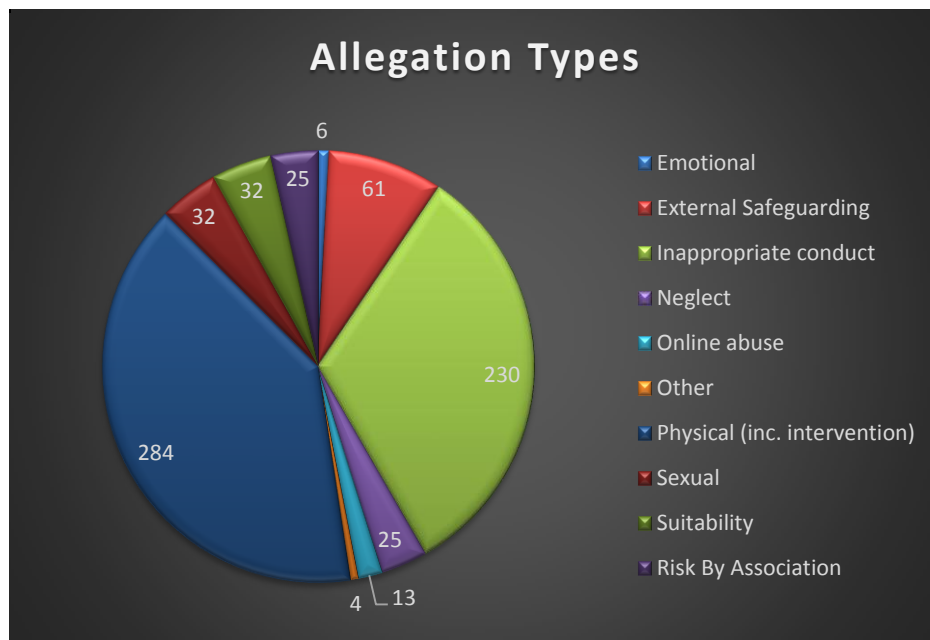
Reason	Number	Percentage
Child in Care Kent	119	18%
Child in Care OLA	173	26%
Historical/no longer CIC	20	3%
SEN/disabled children	348	52%

#### 4.8 Children and Young People

Whilst the CLS primarily records information about the member of staff it also records key data about the child and young person (if known) involved in the allegation. As seen from the figures above – which shows an increase with SEN/disabled children. This is down to the awareness raising/training within this sector. Data currently relating to CP/CIN/EH categories are not recorded consistently. The ability to report on this child level data is part of the CLS workstream.



Table 6 Allegation Type



**4.9** The data for this reporting period now includes the LADO fourth Harm threshold around suitability. For ease of reference those types that fall under this threshold are external safeguarding, suitability for role and risk by association. The highest categories have remained in line with previous reporting years around inappropriate conduct and physical abuse, which includes physical intervention. These are the highest categories across the allegations received into the CLS for all the sectors. However, in this reporting year we have seen an increase of 78% for inappropriate conduct and an increase of 105% for physical abuse. Please see the key themes section for a possible explanation.

**4.10** The CLS continues to recognise staff most likely to have allegations made against them will be those working with children directly and often for significant periods of the day. For these staff, the need to understand and work within the basic rules of professional safe working practice is crucial to protect both children and staff. Staff understanding and responses to challenges presented by children suffering trauma needs to be reinforced by positive behaviour management techniques and organisational cultures. Kent’s Practice framework supports this and is referred to regularly by the LADOs.

**OUTCOMES**

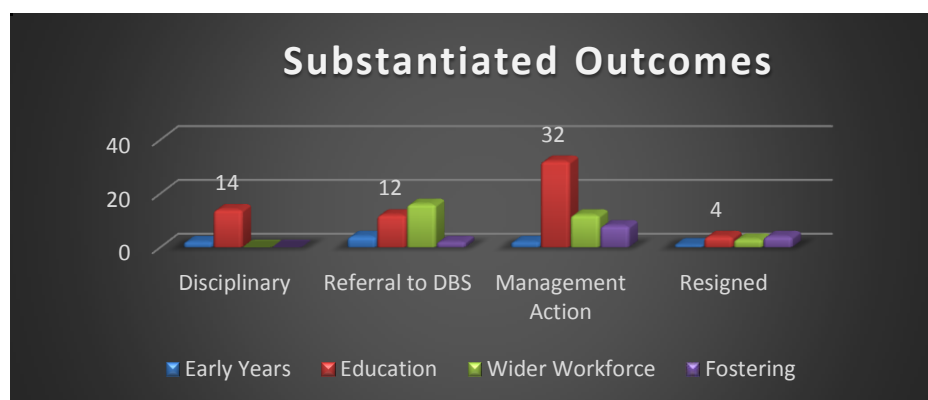
**4.11** There are a variety of routes an allegation might take after it is referred to the CLS. There may be a Section 47 enquiry if there is a risk the child involved might have suffered or be at risk of suffering serious harm, and/or police investigation if the alleged perpetrator may have committed a criminal offence, internal safeguarding investigation and/or disciplinary procedures instigated by the organisation for which the alleged perpetrator works.

**4.12** It is a requirement the LADO involved in a case is informed of the outcome of the allegation (by the police and/or employer) and an agreement reached on how this will be recorded. Final outcomes are recorded as:

- **Substantiated** – there is sufficient identifiable information to prove the allegation – this did happen. Employer to refer to DBS
- **False** – there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation
- **Malicious** – there is clear evidence to prove there was a deliberate act to deceive and the allegation was entirely false
- **Unfounded** – there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made. It might indicate the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw, alternatively, they may not have been aware of all the circumstances
- **Unsubstantiated** - An unsubstantiated allegation is not the same as a false allegation. It means there is insufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

**4.13** There were 388 allegation outcomes in this reporting period compared to the previous year of 598. It is understood that part of the reason for this is the delay in proceeding with allegation management, availability of staff and police/court delays not seen in the previous data. Out of the 288 allegations 121 were substantiated an increase of 23%. Unsubstantiated this year was the highest category which is a change from previous years when substantiated featured as the highest outcome. Unsubstantiated outcomes tend to present a dilemma for the LADO, the employer, and the member of staff, as it does not imply guilt or innocence. Unsubstantiated leaves unanswered questions and possibly an on-going level of risk to be monitored over time. The CLS worked hard with its stakeholders to address this to provide a clearer pathway, when appropriate and possible, for all.

Table 7 Substantiated Outcomes



**4.14** Education had the highest disciplinary processes and four resignations (same as the wider workforce) and the highest number of management actions following a substantiated outcome. This has almost doubled on the previous year. Management action usually entails reviewing risk assessments, monitoring and possible retraining elements or safeguarding refreshers. In this reporting year there were 34 staff referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) for consideration of on-going professional suitability, 12% (5) less than the previous year. This process is mandatory and the responsibility of the employer with a duty to refer where staff were either dismissed or resigned because of allegations which concluded risk to children. The disparity

between figures of actual referral and staff who either resigned or were dismissed is best explained by the fact some members of staff who resigned would not have been dismissed had disciplinary hearings completed. Allegations may not have been so significant as to conclude dismissal for gross misconduct, even though elements of allegations were proven.

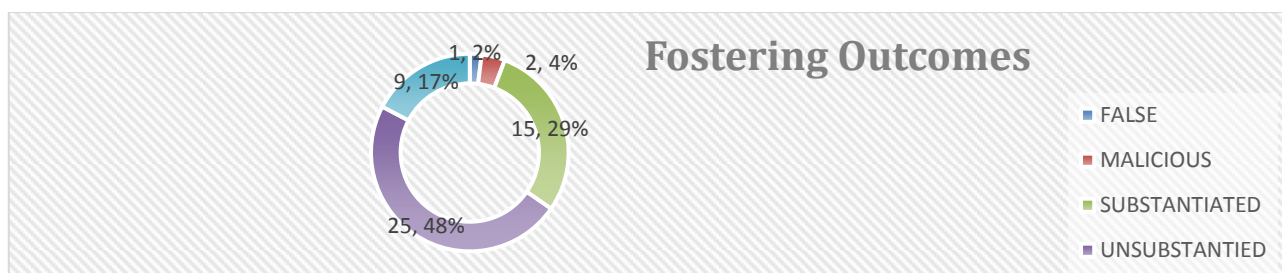
**4.15 Position of Trust (POT) Meetings** - There has been 64 POT meetings held during this reporting period, up by 36% on the previous year. POT meetings are convened when there is an allegation made against a member of staff and when a referral was directly received into the CLS or threshold for a strategy discussion with the Front Door Service was not met. The CLS has the option to hold a POT Meeting where an unsubstantiated allegation or a complex case can be further debated with a decision being reached on the balance of probability rather than beyond all reasonable doubt. These offer an additional quality assurance role offered by the CLS often highlighting lessons learnt for all involved.

## SECTORS

**4.16 Fostering** Kent continues to experience high volumes of children placed in the county from other Local Authorities. This is largely due to the high numbers of independent fostering agencies within the county. As identified in previous reports, the CLS receives referrals in this category regarding children who are vulnerable and unsettled. This increased contact with children increases the susceptibility of allegations against professionals who are there to care for them. It is also known staff experience difficulties with managing challenging behaviours with increased escalation occurring within the homes. De-escalation and positive handling of children is often identified as a skills vulnerability within the staffing group.

**4.17** The CLS received 149 referrals in this category with the Independent Fostering Agency’s (IFA) holding the biggest proportion at 69% (104) which mirrors last year’s data. Of these 63% (94) related to allegations: 30 are KCC fostering and 64 IFA. Whilst allegations relating to physical harm or intervention remain high as in previous reporting years, we have seen a consistent pattern in this reporting period compared to last year around referrals relating to inappropriate conduct 25% (38), this has broken down to 9 KCC fostering and 23 IFA, a slight increase.

Table 8 Fostering Outcomes



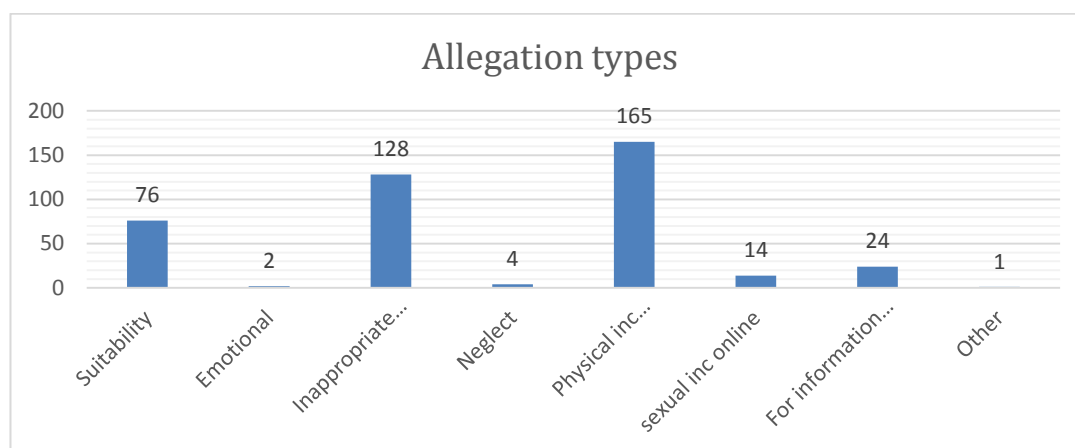
**4.18** The CLS continues to work closely with KCC Fostering and maintained joint oversight to the allegations and processes to ensure foster carers are providing consistent standards of care and work within clear safeguarding expectations. Out of the allegations made against Kent Foster Carers, seven were substantiated resulting in one resigning and three carers being

dismissed/deregistered. It is a very similar picture with the IFA data - 8 cases substantiated which resulted in three resignations. Overall, two were referred to the DBS.

**4.19 Education** - As highlighted in the above data Education have the highest referrals into the service. This has increased by 90% over the past 12 months with 40% of the education referrals falling under Primary school education. There were 618 referrals of which 52% (362) were allegations reported against education staff including staff covering transport services on behalf of the Education Department, school volunteers and site staff. It is expected that Education would provide a vast majority of the referrals into the CLS as Kent has 791 schools, of which 462 are primary, 102 secondary, 20 Free schools, 121 Special/SEN and 5 Pupil Referral Units. Of these, 273 are academies and 304 are maintained by the LA. In addition, there are 62 Independent Schools.

**4.20** Primary school referrals have been the highest in this sector for the past 3 years. Many of the referrals relate to teaching assistants and midday supervisors but we have also overseen allegations against members of Primary senior leadership teams (SLT). The CLS received approximately 173 referrals about special schools (data can be hard to determine as special schools can fall under more than one category i.e. all age, independent, primary and secondary) which is an increase of 37% and 53 referrals from independent schools which is a further increase of 58%.

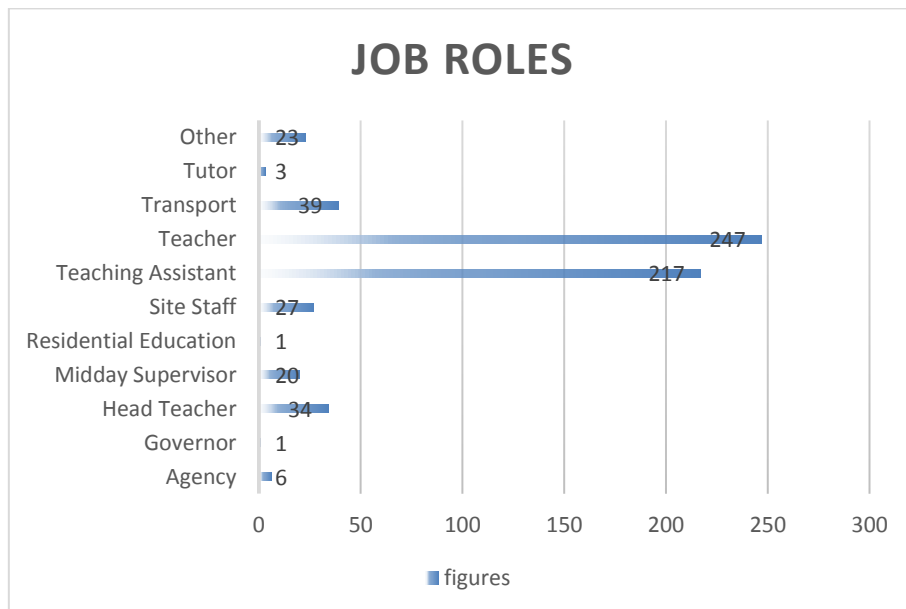
Table 9 Allegation Type



**4.21** The two highest allegation types remain consistent with previous reporting years. Amongst the allegations of physical intervention 62 were classed as unauthorised. The fourth harm threshold has seen a higher number of inappropriate conduct referrals and matters around suitability being referred across with education staff. As with previous years allegations increase towards the end of school terms and it was noted that the context around many education referrals were pressures and or stress staff felt under. In the summer we also witnessed a few referrals relating to the 'me too' movement. This was where females were empowered to come forward when uncomfortable in situations with staff members, the majority of these were misinterpretations. The CLS has seen across many education referrals the pressure and or stress staff had felt having continued to function throughout the pandemic and adapting to different teaching methods on a regular basis. KCSIE also highlighted to education the suitability criteria and this explains some of the increase in referrals around external safeguarding matters and transference of risk.

**4.22** Unsubstantiated remained the leading outcome at 24% (88) with substantiated at 17% (63). Three percent (11) were found to be False. One less staff member was referred to the DBS (12) this year, three were dismissed (14 went through disciplinary) and four resigned.

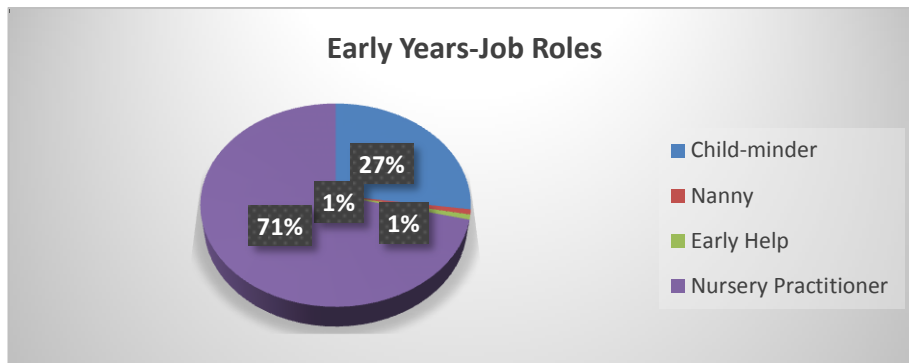
Table 10 Job Roles



**4.23** The CLS continues to manage allegations mainly against classroom/teaching staff 41% (254) and 38% (237) are linked to Teaching Assistants & Support Staff within education. These allegations also feature both Head Teachers, 5.5% (34) and school Governors – less than 1% (1) matching last year’s data. The CLS continues to work closely with our colleagues in education ensuring safer recruitment practices, role modelling and allegation management is consistently on the agenda and modelled throughout the education provisions from the top down. As seen with other roles, some of the allegations against Head Teachers have fallen under the fourth harm threshold involving external safeguarding matters and transference of risk.

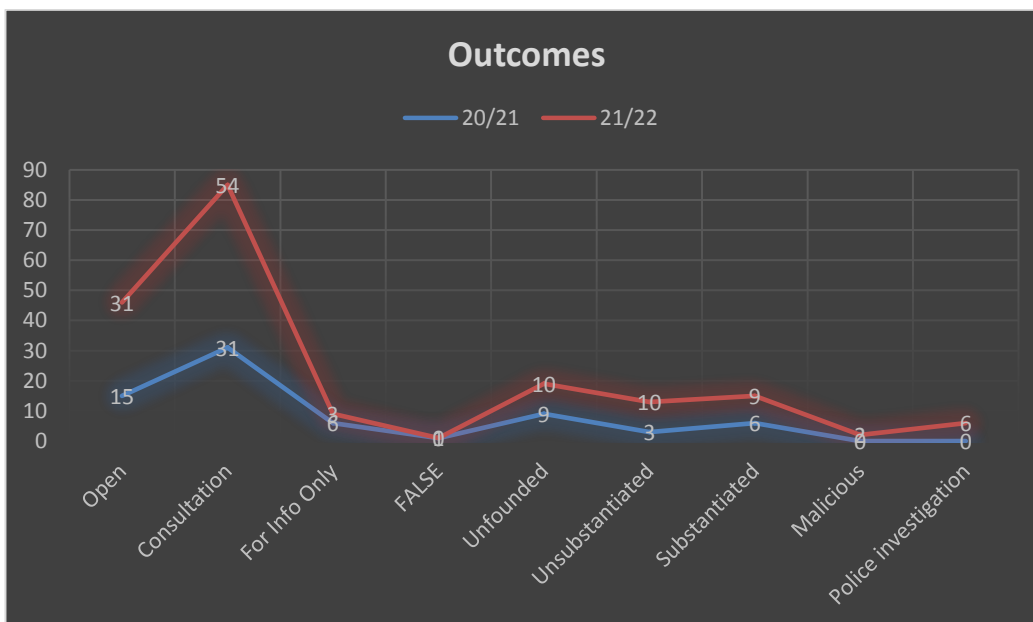
**4.24** The Early Years sector does not include those employed within schools working with reception aged children. The data represents those in pre-school employment. Across Kent there are 647 private, voluntary, and independent settings, 131 out of school settings and 95 maintained, academy, school run or colleges with a nursery. In addition, there are 827 Ofsted Registered for Early Years childminders (under 5yrs), 39 Ofsted registered for childcare childminders (5-8yrs) and 40 childminders registered with an agency. In the previous report year, we saw a 50% drop in referrals which could be explained by the impact of the pandemic. It is pleasing to report that for this reporting year referrals are up by 76% from this sector which totalled 125 referrals.

Table 11 Early Years Job Roles



**4.25** 34 (27%) of the referrals related to childminders but as seen the majority related to nursery practitioners within settings such as playgroups and nurseries. 50% (63) of the referrals were recorded as allegations with 21% (13) relating to the fourth harm threshold and 33% (21) regarding inappropriate conduct. This is a change from the previous year's data which had a larger proportion of physical abuse referrals, 38% compared to this years of 32%.

Table 12 Outcomes

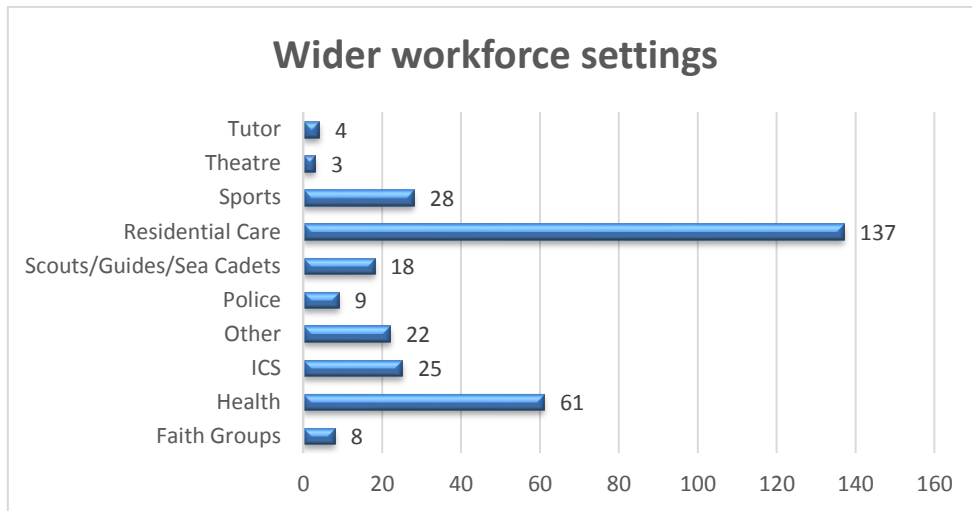


**4.26** The data shows that in total 16% (10) of members of staff resigned or were dismissed from their roles (double than the previous year) and four were referred to the DBS.

**4.27 Wider Workforce** This year there has been a slight increase in referrals for this sector from 300 to 315 of which 61% (192) were allegations reported against staff holding positions within the wider children's workforce. This is an increase of 11%. This sector ranges from grass root sports clubs through to residential/care sectors, Police, Health and ICS amongst others. The wider workforce, however, has dropped in referrals from previous years. It makes up 26% of the overall referrals into the CLS which is 11% lower than last year. It is thought that this is due to staff being impacted by the pandemic and pulled into other roles to cover through a period of crisis.

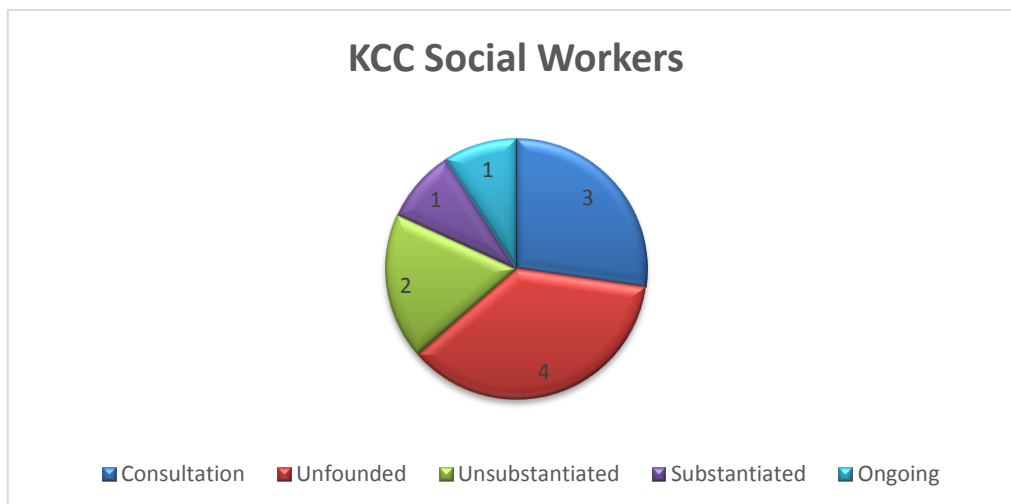
**4.28** The highest category in the wider workforce was physical abuse 32% (61) followed by inappropriate conduct 25% (49). This is the same trajectory as the last annual reporting but as mentioned at a lower level. The outcomes remained the same with Substantiated being the highest category 18% (35) and unsubstantiated 8% (15). There were 27 members of staff who resigned or were dismissed. 16 were referred to the DBS.

Table 13 Wider workforce settings



**4.29** The CLS received 61 referrals across Health which includes GPs, Hospitals and Mental Health which made up 18% (35) of the wider workforce allegations. External Safeguarding was the highest category 22% (8) and substantiated was the highest outcome. Although lower numbers this reflects last year's trajectory. Agency health workers and hospital workers were the most featured in this group 59% (36).

Table 14 KCC Social Workers



**4.30** During this reporting period the CLS received 11 referrals relating to KCC Social Workers (one agency). Five related to external safeguarding issues including risk by association, one was inappropriate conduct and the other physical abuse. The remaining three did not meet the allegation harm threshold and were recorded under consultation.

Table 15 Allegation Types from Police referrals

	External Safeguarding Issue	Suitability	Inappropriate Conduct	Online safety & abuse	Physical	Risk by Association	Sexual	Total
Police	8	6	6	9	5	5	8	15
POLIT	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
VIT	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
VISOR	1		0	0	0	3	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>

**4.31 Kent Police Force** - The CLS tracks both referrals made in relation to serving Kent police officers and those referred from Police in relation to members of staff within the children's workforce. There were nine referrals regarding serving police officers in the Kent Police Force which is an increase of three from last year. Seven are ongoing and five related to the fourth harm threshold around suitability. 98 referrals were received from Police teams across the Kent police force, an increase of 24% (79), of which 22 were progressed under allegation management (matching last year) as set out in the chart below. Partnership working with the Police Professional Standards team is still ongoing. Alongside this work is being undertaken to introduce a protocol between the CLS and Kent Police Force around allegations. This will set out expectations and timescales relating to both allegations and those relating directly to serving police officers and or personnel. It is encouraging to see that the referrals have increased.

## 5. PERFORMANCE

**5.1** The LADO's role is the management and oversight of individual allegations and concerns. Allegation management should be seen in the wider context of safer employment practices with 3 essential elements:

1. Safer recruitment and selection practices
2. Safer working practices
3. Management of allegations or concerns

**5.2** The CLS provides consistent and appropriate scrutiny across diverse workforces and voluntary bodies including affording adjudication of outcomes and escalation of practice learning – both good and requiring improvement.

**5.3** The LADOs quality assure referrals and subsequent activity in relation to the Kent Practice Framework. This is through having regard to trauma informed practice, systemic and contextual safeguarding. The lessons learnt are often regarding these approaches to ensure the wider learning around an allegation is embedded to help promote change and instil strength-based practice within the Kent children's workforce.



**5.4 Post Pandemic** – This reporting year has seen a slow return to some form of normality or as all have stated a 'new norm'. The first seven months of this reporting year was under the Governments phased exit planning. This meant that the children's workforce needed to realign themselves after Covid and consider current and future risk around work patterns. The ability to engage in face-to-face interventions, meetings and training remained compromised. Many settings had staffing issues and most were working from home or with restrictions. This resulted in not seeing other partner agencies in meetings or availability significantly reduced. Later in the year, as we saw with KCC, hybrid working arrangements were being designed and rolled out. The CLS had already adapted to changes in working arrangements when the lockdowns were implemented and were able to continue with offering a service with little change over the year. Whilst contingency planning was undertaken internally due to capacity, outwardly facing it was business as usual. The specialist and sensitive nature of the work continued to be met with consistency and where appropriate acknowledgement and flexibility around difficulties services may have been experiencing were afforded.

**5.5** The CLS had not faltered through the year and the quality of work from all parts of the service remained high. Undertaking a statutory duty and offering guidance to the Kent children's workforce was both challenging and rewarding. The CLS has been mindful that amongst the children's workforce in Kent staff both overseeing allegation referrals and subject to them may have struggled with the Covid 19 pandemic. A lot of support has been afforded to the professionals contacting the service both on emotional levels and around processes. As with last year's annual report the CLS has seen many matters relating to mental health issues, emotional wellbeing and anxiety. This resulted in a high volume of contacts that did not result in referrals into the service but did need significant resource of time.

**5.6 Benchmarking with statistical neighbours** – Members of the CLS attend the South East Regional Network Meetings and the manager attends the National LADO Network (NLN) Group to continue with ensuring Kent holds the common definition of threshold, roles and responsibilities across borders. In addition, the manager is a member of an NLN training subgroup. There continues to be frequent communication with other LADO services amongst the LADOs and this helps to understand bench marking and progression. Kent will continue to engage in these forums and adapt processes where necessary to reflect current practice and national guidance.

**5.7** To date, nationally, there is no agreed data set or categories for how to record referrals into the LADO services. This makes comparisons with other Local Authorities challenging to undertake. This remains an area the National LADO Network (NLN) revisit on a regular basis.

**5.8 Comparative data with other LAs** Hampshire reflects similar patterns to Kent and saw a significant increase in referrals of around 46%. This reporting year they record 753 allegations compared to the previous year as 517. Out of the 753 allegations 16% (122) were recorded as substantiated and 28% (212) were recorded as unsubstantiated. Like Kent, the predominant category was physical abuse/interventions.

**5.9** Surrey saw a similar trend with referrals increasing by 63% (386 to 631) during this reporting period compared to Kent's increase of 83%. Surrey also followed a similar pattern to Kent with Education being the highest referred at 36% (228) compared to Kent education referrals at 51% (618).

**5.10 Timescales** for completion of referrals is a fundamental part of the LADO role. The CLS aims to meet the original Working Together guidance around length of times cases were recommended to be open and challenge stakeholders on length of investigations. The guides are that 80% of cases should be resolved within one month, 90% within three months and all but the most exceptional cases should be completed within 12 months. It must be recognised that most LADO services do not report against these timeframes as they do not reflect current working practices.

Table 16 Key Performance indicators (KPI) for timescales

Year	1 month (80%)	3 months (90%)	12 months plus	ongoing
2020-2021	187 (31%)	104 (17%)	598	210
2021-2022	432 (35%)	712 (57%)	756	397

Table 17 KPI comparison with other LA

Hampshire	1 month (80%)	3 months (90%)	12 months plus	ongoing
2020-2021	271	81	44	55
2021-2022	366 (49%)	137 (18%)	2	161

**5.11** This is the second annual report the service has calculated and reported on the timescales. These are completed manually and this year as with 2020-2021 the data has been impacted by the pandemic and government timetable around lifting restrictions, however positively the service did close 851 cases which is an increase of 42% (253). For the closure of cases, some are delays due to two main causes. The first relates to police investigations and delays with forensics, CPS and or the courts. The second often relates to delays with regulatory bodies such as GMC, SW England, TRA or Sports governing bodies can take time for investigations to conclude. The other factor LADOs contend with around delays in progressing cases is the clash with HR processes and some employers wishing to conclude disciplinary action prior to reporting on the safeguarding risk. The latter is regularly challenged.

**5.12** However, it is suspected that the way in which the CLS records and progresses referrals will have an impact on the 1-month target of 80%. The CLS are clear not to create a record for a member of staff if they have not met LADO criteria and where triaging has managed to signpost the referrer to a more suitable pathway. These are therefore not counted in our recording, but we are aware other LADO services do record all contact with their service. If Kent CLS were to include the contacts to the LADO Enquiries the 1-month completion rate is highly likely to be significantly increased. Discussions with other LADO services highlighted again how the difference in recording and the interpretation of guidance varies immensely. The predicted increase in the 90% closed within 3 months has been evidenced through the change to recording consultations.

## 6. KEY THEMES

**6.1 Post Covid 19 Pandemic** This reporting year was partly still under the Government guidance until the summer months. There was the role out of the vaccination programme and the roadmap to removing restrictions to return the economy back to working order. As with the previous year it had in some areas impacted on availability of stakeholders and progression of work. One clear impact was the delay in court hearings. For the CLS and KCC there was the transition towards the council's hybrid working model and the importance of reintroducing connectivity with colleagues and stakeholders alike. The CLS continued to provide a service despite its ongoing challenges with ICT issues and staff changes throughout the year. Many of the stakeholders working with the

service had also adapted and become familiar with working online. It was pleasing to note towards the latter part of the year that agencies that had not been as readily available were returning to roles e.g. police and health. Due to the impact of the pandemic and return to a 'new norm' the CLS has continued to be mindful of the impact this has had on employers and staff.

**6.2 Mental health** featured in the previous annual report and is still relevant in this year's report. As mentioned above employers have needed more support as well as referrals featuring mental health. Referrals have identified staff anxiety, emotional welfare, undiagnosed conditions, and mental health as reasons for allegations. The lockdowns either exacerbated previous conditions or uncovered/led to new ones for staff. These ranged from lack of tolerance and irritations arising quickly in situations to staff members perceived to be suffering with significant mental health matters that were impacting on their ability to safeguard and undertake their roles appropriately. Education staff tend to always feature towards the end of school terms but the increase this reporting year seemed to raise the fatigue and weariness of teaching staff and a low tolerance level. This could be attributed to education continuing to provide and adapt how they delivered their services throughout the covid 19 pandemic.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

**7.1** The year was consistently busy both in enquiries and referrals, significantly under the fourth harm threshold and within education. The enquiries were high across this reporting year and reflected some of the anxiety's stakeholders held because of the impact of the pandemic. Many of the enquiries were around emotional welfare matters and LADOs providing a wider level of support around safeguarding to employers. LADOs providing a level of support not previously seen before to reassure and guide professionals both through allegation management but safer working environments altogether. This has been reflected upon nationally with LADO services who have all seen an increase in enquiries/contacts and an increase with referrals that hold a level of complexity.

**7.2** The CLS has continued to evolve and introduce new processes and systems to improve the fluidity of the work. This has involved launching a new process for the LADO Enquiries which is now recorded electronically on the Microsoft forms platform and amending or introducing different ways of electronically recording information. Inevitably this has required trial periods and adaptations with some impact on the ease around the ability to report on data but will in the long term prove to be efficient and accurate. At the start of 2022, a service evaluation was undertaken which has fed into existing workstreams and reinforced the need for areas such as electronic reporting systems and an increase in staffing capacity. Alongside this and following data from last year a relaunch of allegation management and refresher inputs were scheduled to be delivered across KCC integrated children's services.

## 8. NEXT STEPS

	RECOMMENDATIONS	PURPOSE
1.	CLS workstream to work towards completion and outlining improvements by September 2022. Reporting facilities – Power BI and Liberi Update of fields within electronic recording system (Liberi) Referral forms via Childrens Portal.	Bring the fields in line with Kent's Practice framework and enable LADOs to record rationales, guidance, escalation, adjudication and learning coherently in various fields to enable reporting in the future and assist with auditing.

2.	Escalation Process to embed and have a clear tracking and reporting system.	Evidence of LADO oversight and challenge. Evidence that good practice and practice needing improvement is acknowledged with stakeholders and the CLS.
3.	Improvement in attendance to the 'KSCMP LADO need to know' sessions from all Faith Groups.	CLS to continue with the promotion of the service and reaching out to Faith groups to develop robust allegation safeguarding knowledge.
4.	Continue to develop and work with commissioning about wider safeguarding concerns linked to settings.	A joined up and contextual approach to wider or cultural safeguarding matters or concerns/patterns.

Ali Watling (County LADO Manager)

Statistical data provided by Emma Cumberbatch & Bethany Carbin (Contact & Referral Officers)

August 2022