

From: Christine Palmer, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services.
Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee

Date: 16 September 2025

Subject: LADO Education Safeguarding Service (LESAS) Annual Report 2024-25

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The LESAS Annual Report for 2024-25 is attached. The report provides an account of the Council's LADO Education Safeguarding Service performance from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

Recommendation(s): Members of the CYPE Cabinet Committee are asked to note and comment on the LESAS Annual report and its findings.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This year's annual report covers the actions from 2023-24, the merger between the LADO service and the Education Safeguarding Service (ESS), Management Information, Traded activity and recommendations for the Service moving forward.

2. Body of Report

- 2.1 Please see the Table of Contents.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The report covers details of the income generated by LESAS from its Traded Activity.

4. Legal implications

- 4.1 None

5. Equalities implications

- 5.1 None

6. Other corporate implications

- 6.1 None

7. Governance

- 7.1 The main delegations will be transferred to Louise Fisher when she takes over as Assistant Director for Safeguarding Professional Standards & Quality Assurance in September 2025.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 In this transformative year, LESAS has demonstrated that it has been able to modernise and meet its statutory requirements in the context of a substantial increase in demand

9. Recommendation(s):

Members of the Cabinet Committee are asked to note and comment on the LESAS Annual Report and its findings.

10. Background Documents

- 10.1 No additional background documents.

11. Contact details

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**KENT LADO EDUCATION
SAFEGUARDING**
ADVISORY SERVICE
**KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN
THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE**

LADO Education Safeguarding Advisory Service

(LESAS)

Annual Report

2024-2025

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1. Introduction and Context

- 1.1 This is the annual report of Kent County Council's Integrated Children and Young Peoples Services "Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Education Safeguarding Advisory Service." This Service will be referred to as LESAS in the report.
- 1.2 The Kent County LADO Service merged with the Education Safeguarding Service (ESS) mid-way through the reporting period (creating LESAS) on 01.09.24 following evaluations of both the County LADO Service and ESS.
- 1.3 The identified role for LESAS is to continue and build upon the statutory LADO function for the whole of the children's workforce and support education settings (early years settings, childminders, schools, and colleges) in Kent who work with children aged 0-18 to meet their safeguarding responsibilities and respond to safeguarding concerns in line with relevant legislation, including the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004, the Education Act 2002, Working Together to Safeguard Children, Keeping Children Safe in Education, and Early Years and Foundation Stage.
- 1.4 The LESAS mission statement is provided in Appendix 1 and provides the following services:
- Undertaking the statutory LADO function for Kent Children's Workforce
 - Strategic safeguarding advice, including online safety, for education settings to support them to meet their safeguarding responsibilities via an enquiries service.
 - A timetable of core training through the academic year for Designated Safeguarding Leads and other staff in education settings which takes place either face to face or virtually (including e-learning) and as well as commissioned bespoke training.
 - Support for education settings in times of crisis and unexpected critical safeguarding incidents.
 - Targeted outreach work, including subsidised support, for education settings following critical safeguarding needs.
 - Responses to Ofsted Category 2 & 3 Safeguarding Complaints about schools and other safeguarding related Ofsted enquiries.
 - Exemplar Child Protection and Acceptable Use Policy Templates
 - A child protection newsletter for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) that is published six times a year. DSL Network meetings held three times a year in each of the four Education Areas in Kent. This is further sub divided into Primary and Secondary/Independent/Special Schools.
- 1.5 This report identifies themes from the work of LESAS and provides a medium to highlight areas of good practice and identify those areas which require continued development.
- 1.6 In summary, LESAS has demonstrated improved throughput on statutory work, lower caseloads, modernisation of the systems around budget management,

Power BI reporting and workflow Throughput. LESAS offers a comprehensive and efficient service combining statutory functions and a well-respected traded activity.

2. Recommendations from Previous Report 2023-2024

2.1 The actions referred to below are taken from last year's LADO Annual Report

2.2 *Refresh the LADO "Need to Know" programme delivered via KSCMP. Content needs to be informed via data and intelligence and regularly updated.*

2.3 A new training programme was launched in March 2025 through collaboration with KSCMP, using their platform. The updated courses were fully booked.

2.4 *Data & intelligence from the LADO Service needs to inform Safeguarding Leads training.*

2.5 Themes from practice and live cases have informed the content of training e.g. ensuring that schools are aware of how to deal with urgent safeguarding situations at the end of the school day when a parent is due to collect their child. The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training that LESAS markets is updated yearly (before the beginning of Term 1) and is based on reflective changes to legislation, guidance, and case reviews.

2.6 *Bespoke training needs to be provided to education, nurseries and residential homes, fostering & children's homes.*

2.7 LESAS offers a comprehensive suite of training to settings. Settings can contact LESAS and request bespoke training on a range of topics including safeguarding and child protection, online safety, allegations, and safeguarding reviews. See action point 6 below for the full range of services provided by LESAS.

2.8 *The LADO Service needs to develop an awareness-raising campaign for the public.*

2.9 Identifying referrals from parents has been challenging, partly because some use the professionals' form, complicating data collection and leading to underreported numbers. The LESAS offer is available on the KSCMP website and has been widely distributed to relevant organizations. Updating the Kent County Council public website is necessary to clarify referral procedures, as done on the KSCMP site. Additionally, the parental referral process will be reviewed for accessibility, potentially via a Microsoft Form, and its effect on referral rates will be monitored.

2.10 *The LADO Service needs to develop an awareness-raising campaign for all faith groups.*

2.11 One of the LADO Education Safeguarding Advisors has been appointed to be the Faith group lead. They attend the National LADO Network meeting regarding faith groups. The referral data from faith groups will be examined further in the report.

2.12 *The actions identified in the re-evaluation of the LADO Service and the Education Safeguarding Service are to be implemented.*

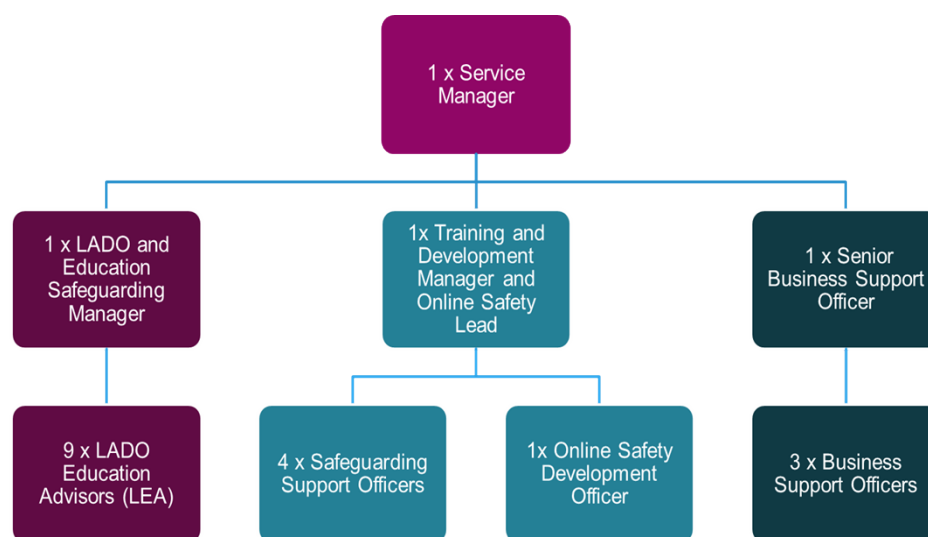
2.13 The ESS and LADO were evaluated by Leemya McKeown and Gavin Swann, using management data, organisational toolkits, and staff input. As a result, LESAS was established on 01.09.24.

2.14 *A Task and Finish group chaired by a senior leader is to be established to implement the strategic objectives of the LADO Service.*

2.15 Since September 2024, an action plan steering group and two subgroups have overseen LESAS objectives.

- LESAS Action Plan Steering Group, chaired by the Assistant Director, meets monthly to review overarching goals.
- QAF & Process Mapping Sub-group, led by the Service Manager, meets every three weeks to discuss KPIs, best practices, and workflows.
- Education Safeguarding Activity & Outreach Sub-group, also chaired by the Service Manager, meets bi-monthly to evaluate marketing strategy and statutory links via LADO and the Front Door.

2.16 *The LADO service needs to have a review of its staffing capacity to ensure it can undertake its statutory role effectively.*



2.17 Staffing capacity was reviewed as part of the LESAS merger. The team now consists of experienced social work and education professionals, supported by a business support team led by a Senior Business Support Officer (SBSO) and three Business Support Officers (all FTE).

2.17.1 A competitive process during the merger led to the creation of the LADO Education Safeguarding Advisor (LEA) role, requiring a social work qualification and five years' experience. There are 9 FTE LEAs, managed by 1 FTE LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager.

- 2.17.2 The Training and Development Manager (1 FTE) remains unchanged and oversees 4 Safeguarding Support Officers and a 0.8 FTE Online Safety Development Officer. Oversight for LESAS is provided by a Service Manager, with a new appointment made from 21.10.24.
- 2.18 *There needs to be a modernisation of the Management Information systems that the LADO Service uses.*
- 2.19 There have been significant improvements during the reporting year regarding the quality of data captured in the LADO function. The Allegations workspace part of Liberi has been improved to enable comprehensive recording of data on each individual referral. A new referral form has been developed and launched in December 2024. This has benefits from the previous form, because now all the data is captured in one place rather than having to use additional documents, tabs, and forms to record essential information such as allegation types, outcomes, and employment information. The questions within the new form are mandatory, which takes out any element of human error of the user not remembering to fill out all the sections.
- 2.19.1 The quality of data captured in the LADO function has improved significantly this year. The Allegations workspace in Liberi now allows all referral data to be recorded in one place. A new referral form, launched in December 2024, ensures all essential information is collected via mandatory questions, reducing the risk of human error. The journey of referrals can be followed, and this has contributed to better throughput as the new form is more user friendly and efficient.
- 2.19.2 The new form has also enabled reporting to Power BI to be more meaningful and accurate, and staff are now using Power BI.
- 2.19.3 A new SharePoint system was created. This enabled new ways of tracking Ofsted enquiries, child death processes, fostering checks, Freedom of Information requests and Data Subject Access Requests. In addition, trackers have been streamlined to capture data which the service requires.
- 2.19.4 It is anticipated that as these new systems and performance focus embeds, more information can be analysed and inform practice.
- 2.20 *The LADO Service needs to develop and introduce a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).*
- 2.21 Through work with partners, stakeholders and staff, the service has developed a set of KPIs. These KPI's are:
- Ofsted Category 2 & 3 complaints will be completed within 40 School days.
 - Responses to online safety and education safeguarding enquiries to be completed within five working days.
 - Responses to LADO referrals will be completed within 1 working day.
 - Responses to LADO enquiries will be completed within 2 working days.

- LADO Education Safeguarding Advisors (LEA's) oversight of Internal Investigations will be recorded by the tenth working day of the investigations being advised.
- LEAs will request an update every 90 days from the Police in respect of ongoing investigations/internal processes of staff in the children's workforce.
- The service will complete 50 Safeguarding Reviews of settings within the financial year.
- 90% of referrals accepted by the LADO as meeting the Harm Threshold will be completed within 90 days.
- All schools in Kent will be invited to DSL Network Meetings. The KPI will be 75% of schools invited will attend the Network Meetings
- At least 90% of learner evaluations for core and custom training, as well as safeguarding reviews, will be rated good (4) or excellent (5) on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent).
- LADO statutory work feedback should be rated as good or excellent: "Please rate the advice from the LADO on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent)."

2.22 *The LADO Service needs to cleanse its data quality issues so that there is confidence in the data and Power BI as its main source of Management Information*

2.23 Please refer to point 2.18 – 2.19.4

2.24 *Staff in the LADO Service need to have the right equipment and office space to be operationally efficient.*

2.25 In November 2024, LESAS audited all computers, phones, screens, projectors, and related equipment to ensure staff were properly equipped and any gaps addressed. Office work remains hybrid.

2.26 *The LADO Service needs to increase its strategy and awareness in terms of alignment with the Front Door, how it reviews its specialist roles, its analysis of training delivery and how it uses data/intelligence to target resources.*

2.27 As mentioned above in Action Points 2 and 7 there has been regular contact made with colleagues from the Front Door. LESAS is part of the operational group at the Front Door. Front Door colleagues are regular presenters at DSL network meetings to share good practice and developments.

2.27.1 As part of the Front Door operations group, LESAS has been able to receive data in a timely way, which can then inform practice and target outreach. The Front Door operations group has also presented opportunities to promote LESAS to partner agencies and make them aware of the LESAS offer and training. The operations group is also attended by visiting speakers who have also been made aware of the newsletter that goes out to school DSL's and our wider services too.

- 2.28 *The LADO Service will quality assure its work through Peer Review, Audit and Feedback.*
- 2.29 During the reporting year, the LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager developed a partnership with Lancashire County Council as they are a similar large, two-tier local authority. In May 2024 colleagues from Lancashire LADO travelled to Kent to undertake Peer auditing with Kent with a specific focus on thresholds, responses to referrals, and ensuring that work is of excellent quality and timely. A joint team meeting was also held.
- 2.29.1 The LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager has worked with MIU to produce a specific LADO audit tool on Liberi.
- 2.29.2 Feedback is received from learners of all our training courses. Course evaluations are gathered over an academic year basis to ensure training reflects the national statutory safeguarding guidance in place for education settings. Please see the traded activity section below for a detailed overview of the feedback received from the training courses facilitated by ESS/LESAS in 2024-25.

3. Management Information

LADO Activity

- 3.1 The LADO Service in Kent is underpinned by statutory guidance notably 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' 2023, specifically revised following the publication of the 'Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report' (2023) into the settings run by the Hesley Group. This updated 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. The legislative framework is also reflected in the Children Act 2004. The Kent Children's Multi Agency Partnership (KSCMP) publishes local guidance on allegations management procedures.
- 3.2 Nationally, all agencies and settings providing services for children, or employ staff or volunteers working with children, are required through Working Together (2023) to have and to implement procedures for responding to allegations against staff members and adults in positions of trust, whether paid or voluntary. 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, for example, a seventeen-year-old teaching a musical instrument or instructing a group. The LADO remit was traditionally person specific, but as the role evolved and learning taken from various reviews, it is now expected that the LADO is conscious of the wider safeguarding measures employers have in place.

- 3.3 Nationally, all agencies and organisations working with children must have procedures to respond to allegations against staff or volunteers, as required by Working Together (2023). This includes anyone in a position of trust over children under 18, whether paid or voluntary. The LADO's role, while initially person-specific, now also considers broader safeguarding measures within organisations.
- 3.4 Working Together (2023) provides 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.
 - Behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.
- 3.5 LESAS accepts referrals related to this LADO Harm threshold and progresses these as allegations. LESAS undertakes enquiries and consultations supporting employers to assess staff practice, which may sit just outside of this threshold, around areas such as quality of care, professional conduct, and practice.
- 3.6 Working Together (2023) outlines the Harm Threshold for allegations against children's workforce members, to include behaviour that harms or may harm a child, potential criminal offences, actions suggesting risk to children, or indications of unsuitability to work with children. LESAS accepts referrals meeting this threshold and supports employers with enquiries about practice concerns just outside it, such as quality of care or professional conduct.
- 3.7 In education services, the LADO Service follows Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance, updated annually, for managing allegations against staff in schools and colleges. Alongside statutory guidance, rules under the Childcare Act 2006 address situations leading to disqualification from work in domestic settings, including risk by association.
- 3.8 The KCSIE guidance outlines the requirement of a LADO to oversee an allegation management process that is effective and transparent whilst ensuring accurate records of the process are maintained. The LADO's first consideration is always to ensure children involved in an allegation are appropriately safeguarded. The LADO will also consider the safety of other children who could encounter the adult, whether that is at the setting they work in, or children in the person of concern's own family.

The Statistical Report

- 3.9 The LADO section of LESAS manages two main tasks: Enquiries and Referrals. This year, the Kent LADO Service and Education Safeguarding Service (now LESAS) processed 5,476 enquiries (excluding Ofsted cases) and 1,851 referrals.

Enquiries

- 3.10 An Enquiry is when professionals, often line managers or employers, question whether a formal referral should be made to the LADO Service. Professionals making enquiries want advice and guidance in exploring alternative options such as using the organisation's own HR processes, signposting to other services or submitting referrals to the Front Door or to the LADO Service.
- 3.11 A LEA is rostered to function as enquiries officer each day. This process enables settings to make enquiries without naming an individual and get advice on the harm threshold. The enquiries process enables agency checks to be made. Enquiries can be made about individuals by Ofsted in relation to prospective children's home managers or child minders, and by independent or in-house fostering services in relation to prospective or existing foster carers. Settings enquiries include Ofsted, or the Inspectorate for Independent Schools (ISI) inspection queries, and complaints about schools received by Ofsted or the Department for Education. 610 threshold enquiries were received by the former County LADO Service between April – August 2024. 1082 calls were received by the Advice Line run by the former ESS between April – July 2024.
- 3.12 When LESAS was formed in September 2024, the enquiries process was changed to combine strategic education safeguarding and online safety enquiries and those relating to the LADO process. A new Microsoft form was developed to accommodate these enquiries, and this was shared with settings so that they can use the form directly to contact LESAS and receive a response back via email containing our advice for their records. The new form is not used for Ofsted queries as Ofsted tend to contact the service via email. The new form took time to embed as settings got used to a new process. This may account in part for the rise in referrals in the Autumn of 2024 as settings were unsure how to use the enquiries process as an alternative. Despite this being a new process, which was not advertised in advance, 1749 enquiries were received via the new form from September 2024 to March 2025 inclusive. It is difficult for LESAS to compare this year's data with previous years as the service is no longer directly comparable. The advice and support line has closed and child specific advice which used to be available is no longer available.
- 3.13 LESAS has a commitment to sharing information about individuals and settings for the purposes of safeguarding children. LESAS has contributed to this by running checks on 363 foster carers and those applying to become foster carers. In addition to this, LESAS responded to 29 requests made by the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) about individuals. LESAS has

responded to four requests made by the ISI. These checks to enable partner organisations to make informed judgments about safeguarding especially where there are significant concerns about individuals. In 2023-24 there were 663 foster carer applications and other safeguarding checks. It is felt that the new systems in place are contributing to a more streamlined and efficient service, and processes are not being duplicated. Some agency checks are now dealt with through a new Microsoft Form which LESAS has created.

3.14 LESAS managed 36 Subject Access Requests (SAR) in this reporting last year, complying with data protection laws. Common themes include individuals referred seeking clarity on their records and incomplete communication from employers regarding LADO referrals, outcomes, and future implications. LEAs continue to encourage employers to provide feedback and later in this report, in the complaints section, this is discussed further. LESAS also processed 6 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, some partially answered or exempt. Certain queries are challenging to resolve within statutory deadlines. In 2023-24 there were only 16 FOI and SAR requests combined, the increase can be explained through more people being aware of LESAS and this will need closer monitoring due to resource and time implications.

Referrals

3.15A Referral received via the Portal (professionals must refer via the portal); although parents have the option to use a LADO referral form and send it in via email.

3.16 Referrals can be recorded as an allegation which reaches the harm threshold. If it does not reach the harm threshold, the matter can be recorded as a Consultation (not to be confused with an enquiry, which was explained earlier). This is typically advice, signposting, or a risk assessment.

3.17 As mentioned above, the LADO Service received 1851 referrals in the reporting year. This is a 21% increase from 2023-2024 where 1458 referrals were received and a 31% increase from 2022-23 when there were 1270 referrals.

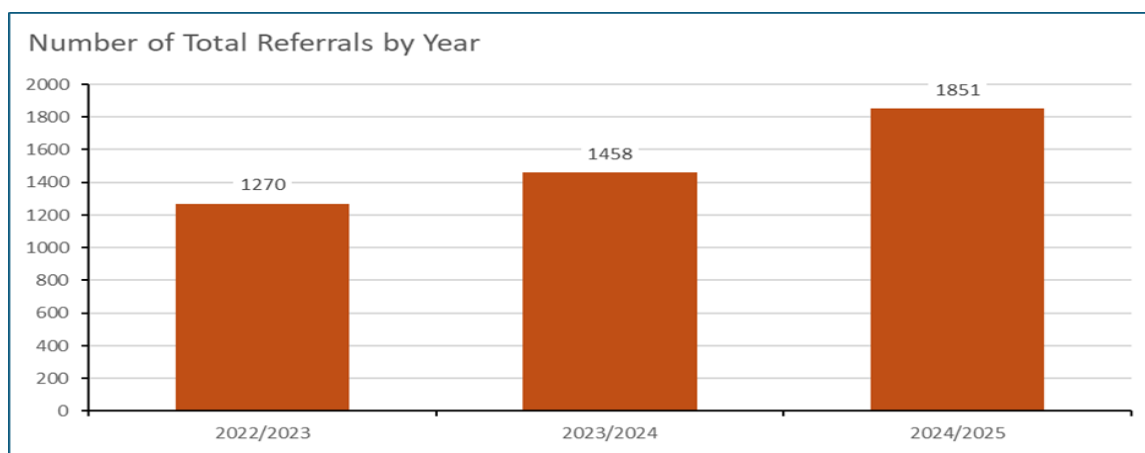
3.18 **Table 1** below helps to illustrate this increase. LADO services across England and Wales, have seen increases and it is usual for Kent and most local authorities to see increases. This year 9 local authorities have seen an increase ranging from 13% - 75%. Therefore, Kent is seeing an average increase. Increases in LADO activity has been typical in England since the Pandemic. This is partly explained by high profile national cases involving professionals causing harm to children e.g. Lucy Letby and Roksana Lecka, which have meant that the role of LADO has been highlighted to the public and awareness has been raised.

3.19 This in turn has led to increased contacts and referrals from parents and members of the public. One local authority has reported a decrease in

referrals, and this is thought to be due to a roll out of a new LADO awareness training programme. In Kent we have noticed a decrease in the ratio of Early Years referrals that lead to an allegation that meets the LADO harm threshold.

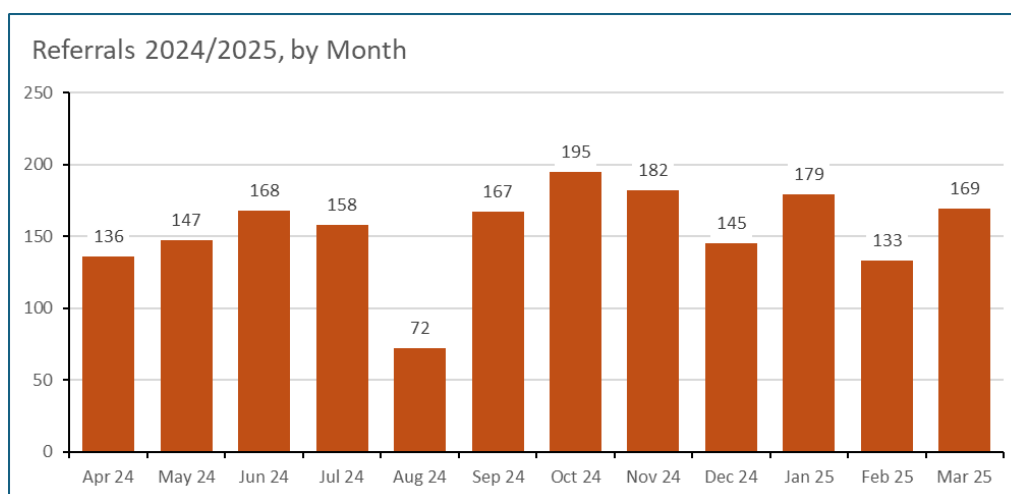
3.20 This may be explained by the number of referrals received being around staff handling and not clear allegations of harm. Kent's new "LADO need to know" programme was launched in March 2025, so the impact of this can be analysed in next year's report. It is possible that if partners could be more confident in recognising a low-level concern and not submitting an unnecessary referral that referral rates could stabilise or reduce.

Table 1



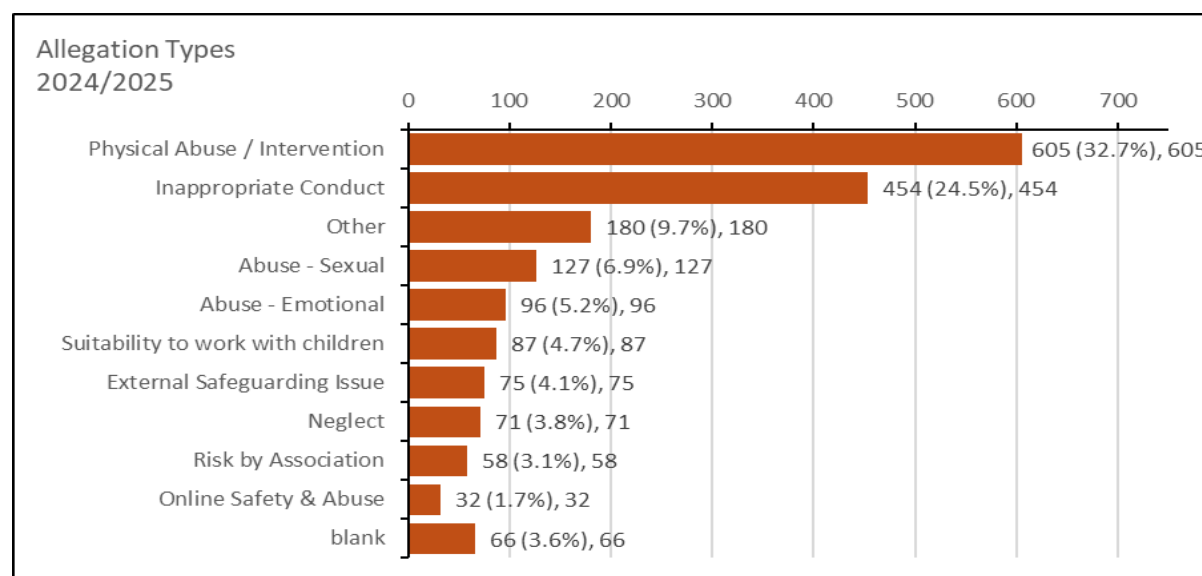
3.21 **Table 2** looks at referral numbers in each month. It is noticeable that there are less referrals when schools are on holiday in August and December. The publicity following the creation of LESAS may explain the high level of referrals in October and November 2024. During this time, the new enquiries process was still embedding, and professionals needed to use an electronic form rather than speak to an Education Safeguarding Advisor or email which was a change in practice.

Table 2



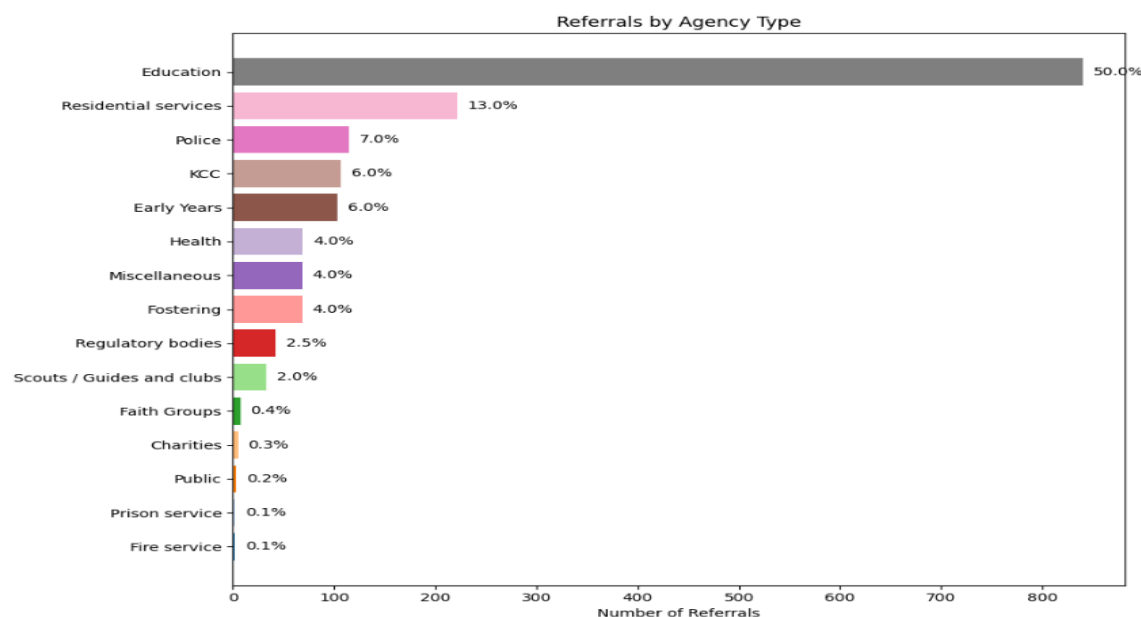
3.22 **Table 3** identifies the different allegation types referred to the LADO. Physical Abuse/Physical Intervention remains the highest allegation category. This has been the case for a number of years not just in Kent but nationally. Inappropriate conduct allegations remaining very high as they were last year. The 3.6% of referrals which show as blank in this graph, simply represent the fact that those cases were ongoing at the time the data was taken from Power BI in readiness for the preparation of this report. It is usual to have cases that continue from one financial year to the next as some investigations, especially those involving the police investigations take a long time.

Table 3



3.23 **Table 4** shows the range of agency sectors who make referrals to the LADO. Education providers make half of all referrals. This is anticipated as education is usually the highest referring agency type in Kent and nationally. There are more than 800 schools in Kent County Council's area, so this is the largest setting type. Early years settings made 6% of all referrals. This figure appears quite low given the number of setting in Kent (637 nurseries and preschools and 577 home based child care services), and LESAS are looking into engaging more with early years settings and providing them with more training and DSL Network meetings to ensure they are aware of the LESAS offer and compliant with statutory expectations. The impact of this work can be assessed in future financial years, and it is important to note that children in early year settings are often unable to verbalise allegations in contrast to older children who attend school. Looking forward LESAS will be launching an area-based outreach model which can use the intelligence from the Front Door to target resources at settings who make high levels of referrals.

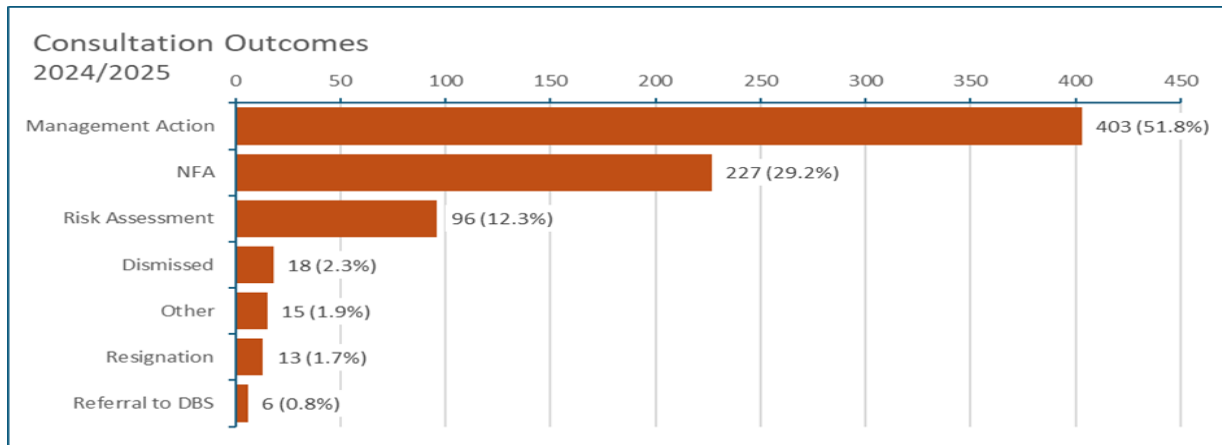
Table 4



3.24 Health referrals also appear low, and we have been in contact with colleagues in the NHS to promote our training offer to attempt to increase knowledge of the referral process. Aside from this, there are referrals from a wide range of agencies including Kent Fire and Rescue, who have not routinely made referrals previously. This followed some outreach work. Very few referrals are made by faith groups, and this is a national trend. The National LADO Network (NLN) have set up a focus group to look at how LADOs can be more accessible and known by various faith groups. LESAS are taking part in this work and a LEA has been recently selected to represent Kent County Council at this focus group.

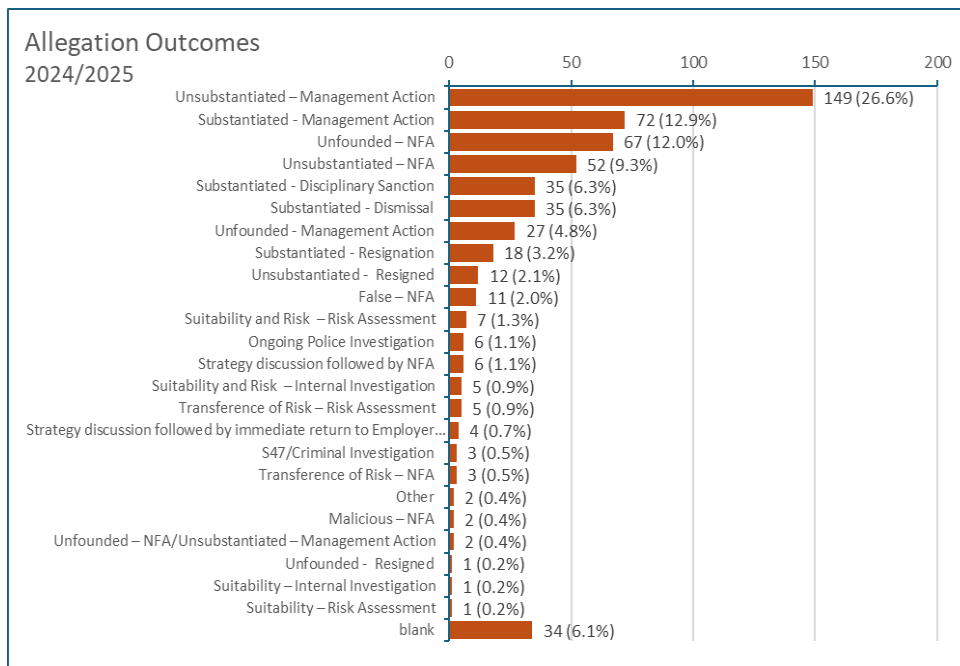
3.25 **Table 5** shows the number of referrals received that were treated as consultations, this was 768 out of 1851 (42%). Consultations are referrals that do not meet the harm threshold. These can be dealt with by recommending management actions, as opposed to further risk assessment. Management actions include undertaking reflective supervision and additional training or support for staff. This may include debriefs following physical interventions that have not reached the harm threshold, for example. This can provide learning in relation to de-escalation techniques and exploration of how things may have been managed differently. Given 42% of referrals to LESAS are treated as consultations which is higher than last years figure of 33%. This indicates that the levels of referrals meeting the harm threshold has been reduced. LESAS has introduced a new system of electronic enquiries and referrals and removed the telephone line. It is the case that some referrals should have been submitted as an enquiry as a referral was not needed.

Table 5



3.26 **Table 6** shows the allegation outcomes for this reporting year. 560 of the 1851 (30%) referrals progressed to an allegation meeting the threshold of harm. Last year's report noted that there were 391 out of 1458 (27%) so there has been a slight rise. The most common outcome has been unsubstantiated. Unsubstantiated means that it cannot prove or disprove whether something has occurred, but these matters are followed up with management actions., Substantiated concerns means that an investigation has been able to determine on the balance of probability that a concern has occurred. Just less than a third of concerns are substantiated and many of these result in management actions to improve practice, rather than dismissals, which indicates the levels of concern can be managed. In conclusion in 2023-24 9% of referrals resulted in substantiated concerns which is the same as this year's percentage. 135 from 1458 = 9% and 160 from 1851 = 9%

Table 6



LEA caseloads and breadth of work

- 3.27 There are now 7.8 Full time equivalent (FTE) LEAs sharing the LADO duty as opposed to 6 before the restructure increasing the service capacity, This has resulted in lower, safer caseloads for all and improved throughput within individual cases which in turn has reduced the level of drift. The average caseload in the former LADO service in April 2024 was 57, with caseloads of up to 84. By March 2025, the average caseload had reduced to 36, with the highest caseload being 55. This means that LEAs have time and space to fulfil the education safeguarding aspects of their roles including safeguarding reviews and training.
- 3.28 A new area-based outreach model will launch in early summer 2025 to strengthen engagement with education providers and local communities. LEAs will be assigned to county areas aligned with Assistant Directors of Education (ADEs) and Safeguarding Support Officers (SSOs), fostering stronger relationships between educational settings and LESAS personnel. This approach aims to improve outreach, increase awareness and uptake of LESAS services, and deliver targeted advice as needed. The council's area will be divided into quadrant areas to facilitate this process. Next year, LEAs will deliver the QAF for family hubs, leading interviews with district managers to ensure safeguarding arrangements are robust and recommending improvements as needed.

Ofsted/DfE Complaints against Schools and other Ofsted Enquiries

- 3.29 During 2024–25, LESAS coordinated responses to Ofsted and Department for Education (DfE) safeguarding complaints and enquiries about schools and other educational settings. Ofsted classifies complaints into three categories:
- Category 1: Handled by the Front Door Service
 - Category 2: Addressed by the LADO via LEAs
 - Category 3: Provided as information to the DCS office and addressed by LESAS or ADE School Improvement
- 3.30 Ofsted also contacts the LADO service for other matters, such as pre-inspection data for inspections, settings, and individuals.
- 3.31 The SBSO improved Ofsted-related processes by creating a new Business Support guide and clarifying category handling, which earned positive feedback from external stakeholders.
- 3.32 In September 2024, the service merged ESS and LADO systems to centralise Ofsted/DfE complaint and enquiry tracking, providing combined data for September 2024 to March 2025. **Table 7** below reflects ESS, LADO, and LESAS records for this period.

Table 7

Category/Complaint type	Number recorded
1	8
2	29
3	284
Multiple categories	40
DfE	22
Other Ofsted enquiries	46
Total	429

3.33 From April 2023 – March 2024, ESS recorded 246 category 3 complaints and 10 DfE complaints.

3.34 In comparison for April 2024 to March 2025, the services recorded 284 category 3 complaints and 22 DfE complaints; for category 3 complaints, this is an increase of 15% and for DfE complaints, an increase of 120%. These figures indicate a notable upward trend in both categories, with DfE complaints showing a particularly sharp increase. This however is likely to reflect the fact the LESAS service is now the central point for DfE complaints now the services have combined. The previous model was not effective in capturing all data.

3.35 The number of Category 3 complaints has continued to rise on an annual basis as described in **Table 8 below**; this may reflect increased awareness of the Ofsted complaints with the public, improved reporting mechanisms, or potentially growing safeguarding concerns. Whilst historical data was previously reported by academic year (making direct comparisons with the current financial year challenging), the upward trend remains evident. The year-on-year rise for 2023-2024 and 2024-25 is smaller than previous increases. This is due to the shift in reporting format from academic to financial year which may obscure seasonal peaks typically seen in school-based data. Despite this, the overall trajectory confirms a sustained increase in safeguarding-related concerns being raised and logged under Category 3.

Table 8

Total number of category 3 complaints recorded by ESS per academic year	Total
2018-19	185
2019-20	96
2020-21	100
2021-22	181
2022-23	307

Learning from Corporate Complaints

- 3.36 Eight corporate complaints have been received during the reporting period. One complaint related to the former Education Safeguarding Service and the rest relate to the LADO function. A consistent theme has been apparent in four of the complaints received that persons of concern had complaints which had arisen from them either not understanding the outcome of the referral or the consequences of what might occur arising from that. Examples, of this have included that referred persons have not understood that concerns may be passed forward to prospective employers and this has led to distress when this has happened.
- 3.37 We have taken learning from this to ensure LEAs advise employers to make those referred aware of referrals made, the outcomes of these and ensure they understand how information about them could be used in future.

4. Traded Activity

- 4.1 Since 1999, ESS has provided safeguarding training, guidance, advice and support to Kent schools and early years providers. ESS was transferred to The Education People in September 2018 until its return to KCC in April 2023, where its model of support had focused on fulfilling a core contract with Kent County Council and developing its traded services.
- 4.2 **Table 9** shows the income for the reporting year. The realigned LESAS income target for traded activity for 2024-2025 was £449.3K. The income achieved was £57.1K under target.

Table 9

2024-25 Actuals	Total
Income from Academies	£96.9K
General income Fees & charges	£158.1K
Income from KCC Schools	£137.2K
TOTAL	£392.2K

- 4.3 Significant improvements were also made to financial systems and processes. The SBSO introduced a new income tracking model, consolidating six legacy workbooks into a streamlined tool that supports forecasting and reporting. Over £28,000 in outstanding funds was recovered, and revised finance forms were developed to improve data accuracy, budget compliance, and reporting clarity. These systems had not previously been in place under the ESS structure and were developed to meet LESAS-specific needs. Purchase order coordination was also strengthened, with documentation and vendor engagement processes established to support consistency and transparency.
- 4.4 Income from traded services, particularly training, fluctuates significantly throughout the academic year. Peaks typically occur in September and during term-time, while income drops sharply during school holidays. This academic-year alignment makes financial forecasting more complex, as it does not follow the standard financial year cycle. At this stage, the impact of

the merger on meeting financial targets is yet to be released although the financial target has been reduced due to staffing realignment and recruitment which has involved appointment of a Senior Business Officer with a finance background.

Training

- 4.5 Between April 2024 and March 2025, LESAS continued to deliver a diverse and responsive training programme across Kent's education sector, supporting both statutory safeguarding responsibilities and professional development. The LESAS traded training offer comprises of a core training programme for DSLs in schools and settings, bespoke staff safeguarding training and eLearning courses for staff, to meet the education sectors diverse learning needs.
- 4.6 During this period, a total of 1,501 learners attended LESAS core training courses. Of these, 1,115 (74%) participated in school-focused courses, while 386 (26%) attended early years-focused sessions. This distribution reflects strong engagement from the school sector and highlights a continued need to address access barriers for early years settings. There is no direct comparison available from the data for 2023-24 but from September 2023 to March 2024 only 17% of core training courses were attended by EY settings.
- 4.7 In addition to core training, 76 bespoke training sessions were delivered to schools, colleges, early years settings, and KCC teams. These tailored sessions were designed to meet specific organisational needs and reinforce safeguarding practice in context.
- 4.8 LESAS also saw continued uptake of its digital offer, with 749 eLearning courses purchased during the reporting period. Of these, 478 (64%) were school-focused and 260 (35%) were early years-focused. In 23-24, ESS sold 505 eLearning courses; 314 (62%) were school-focused and 191 (38%) were early years-focused. eLearning course purchases rose by 48%, climbing from 505 in 2023-24 to 749 during the current reporting period. This significant growth underscores a rising demand for flexible and accessible training formats. It also highlights a strategic opportunity to deepen digital engagement, particularly with early years providers, where uptake, though growing, remains proportionally lower than school-focused courses.
- 4.9 The percentages of participants rating core training as good or outstanding (4 or 5 out of 5) during the reporting period are:
 - Quality of content: 98%
 - Quality of delivery: 96%
 - Achievement of learning outcomes: 98%
- 4.9.1 "I have attended the refresher course before. I found today even more informative."
- 4.9.2 "Having completed many of these, this was one of the better ones in terms of content and delivery."

- 4.9.3 “This is the best DSL Refresher I have attended. It did not spend too long going over old ground and the pace of the session was good. There were plenty of examples and discussions that were relevant to our school and its students. The topics were covered in a way to make you reflect on your practise. Definitely a worthwhile course.”
- 4.9.4 “I have been to safeguarding training a few times and I think this was the best delivery and content I’ve had. Thank you”
- 4.9.5 “Brilliant course, delivered by people who clearly knew how to engage the group, were passionate about their subject areas and were experts in their field!”
- 4.10 LESAS bespoke training received 100% good or outstanding (4 or 5 out of 5) ratings for content quality, delivery quality, and learning outcomes during the reporting period.
- 4.11 LESAS continues to provide quality safeguarding training, reviews, and consultancy in line with statutory and Kent-specific requirements. However, competition is rising as other national organisations and consultants offer cheaper, flexible services. Schools and early years settings are increasingly considering these alternatives for their cost and flexibility. To stay competitive, LESAS is investing in marketing, updating its training, and boosting outreach and visibility.

Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP)

- 4.12 During 2024-25 LESAS took the initiative in developing KCC’s response to the Department for Education (DfE) Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP). This is a revenue earner from the DfE using Kent’s position as an Outstanding local authority helping other local authorities with their improvement journey. LESAS took forward 2 projects with Brighter Futures for Children/Reading (Front Door) and the Isle of Wight (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) in 2025.
- 4.13 LESAS claimed £101,979.72 from DfE for its SLIP work in 2024-25. This income meant that LESAS overachieved its income target of £44.8K when combining SLIP income with income from training and products. Given that this is such a significant revenue stream, LESAS is keen to cultivate its work with DfE and SLIP into 2024-25. It is not possible to confirm what the DfE’s arrangements will be for SLIP in 2025-26 which is a risk given the value of this work.
- 4.14 **Table 10** shows the Safeguarding Reviews that were completed during the reporting period. LESAS conducted 32 safeguarding reviews across education settings. While this may appear modest in volume, the figure reflects a strategic focus on capacity building, particularly the upskilling of inexperienced staff in the education safeguarding function. This required

shadowing opportunities, which led to dual staffing on reviews, but all reviews requested by settings were fulfilled.

Table 10

Type of Review undertaken	Number
Early years safeguarding review	3
Online safety review	1
School safeguarding review	24
Monitoring review	4
Total	32

4.15 The reviews were well received by schools and settings, offering valuable insights into safeguarding practice. They were not only compliance checks but also aimed to assess whether children were being safeguarded in the most effective way possible. All the reviews were requested by the settings themselves.

4.16 LESAS ensures that each review is thorough, reflective, and contributes to ongoing improvement in safeguarding practice across Kent's education sector by offering setting specific recommendations. We have received some positive feedback on the reviews undertaken:

4.16.1 "Firstly, thank you for your time on Monday. We got a huge amount out of it and found it massively beneficial."

4.16.2 "In a recent conversation with (Headteacher at another school) she spoke very highly of your recent visit and the positive impact it had on their safeguarding practices. With that in mind, I was wondering if you might be available to visit my school to carry out a similar review."

5. Summary and Conclusions

5.1 In this transformative year, LESAS has demonstrated that it has been able to modernise and meet its statutory requirements in the context of a substantial increase in demand. The service reorganisation and recruitment has meant that the staff group have been able to respond to the challenging environment, and this has been aided by the refinements to management systems, and the development of Power BI performance tools. Specifically, LESAS has demonstrated operational resilience and adaptability throughout this transition, maintaining consistently high standards of safeguarding delivery. Training feedback produces consistently high satisfaction rates (98–100%) across core and bespoke training delivered through the traded arm.

5.2 The implementation of enhanced systems, particularly the redesigned Liberi referral form and Power BI dashboards, has markedly improved data integrity, throughput, and service efficiency. The establishment of defined Key Performance Indicators and strengthened quality assurance mechanisms has reinforced accountability and performance oversight.

- 5.3 Including SLIP activity, LESAS exceeded its income target by £44.8K. SLIP work enhances Kent's national reputation, supports partner authorities, contributes to national improvement initiatives, and establishes the Service as a sector-leading model.
- 5.4 This report also highlights key areas for improvement. Early Years is a particular area for further focus. Evidence from the past 3 years of LADO referrals indicates 7% of all referrals are from EY settings. However, there is a decrease in the ratio of those referrals leading to an allegation that meets the LADO harm threshold; this may be explained by the number of referrals received being around staff handling and not clear allegations of harm.
- 5.5 Another challenge identified from EY data is the lower level of Designated Safeguarding Lead training (new to role and refresher) accessed by EY settings compared to schools. Between January and April 2025, 587 learners attended DSL training facilitated by LESAS only 14% of these learners came from EY settings. Additionally, only 3 Safeguarding reviews were completed with EY settings between September 2024 and April 2025 and demand for the other traded products LESAS produce is low from EY settings. It is cited that EY settings struggle financially to afford the cost of training and the need to maintain strict child to staff ratios reduces the ability to send staff on training. LESAS operates a traded model and receives no dedicated funding. The challenge for LEAS is that although the offer is available this is not being widely taken up which in turn affects the ability to keep younger children safe in early years settings as effectively as we are with school age children. This is a concern and informs our future focus.
- 5.6 This identified underutilisation of LESAS potentially undermines the system's ability to detect harm and intervene early. Better engagement with LESAS could increase the number of safeguarding referrals, enhancing safety within provisions, and identifying where parental harm is more likely the root cause of challenges rather than SEND.
- 5.7 LESAS also recognises that the transition to the new enquiry form has led to uncertainty amongst some professionals. Complaints also reveal that some referred individuals experienced distress, and they could have been better informed of outcomes and implications of investigations. Looking forward, LESAS will be guided by a clear strategic vision, a resilient operational framework, and a resolute and fully staffed workforce committed to safeguarding children through collaborative, professional, and purposeful practice.

6. Action Plan 2025-2026

Objective	Action	Owner	Time line	Success indicator
The Service will increase the accessibility of LADO referrals for parents and the public by reviewing and streamlining the parental referral process, ensuring at least a 10% increase in parental referrals compared to 2024-25 baseline.	Evaluate, redesign, and implement a simplified parental referral process (e.g., via Microsoft Form), then monitor changes in referral rates.	LADO & Education Safeguarding Manager	Dec 2025	Parents report improved understanding and accessibility; documented increase in parental referral numbers; website content updated for clarity.
Ensure all LESAS service areas meet or exceed 80% of Key Performance Indicators by 2026, with quarterly reviews to monitor progress and address underperformance.	All parts of LESAS will collect and report KPI data, with quarterly management information reviews to identify achievements and areas for development.	LESAS Service Manager	March 2026	KPI targets achieved in all service areas; staff survey demonstrates clear role understanding; staff retention rate is maintained or improved.
Secure £127K annual income from SLIP projects with Isle of Wight and Reading Borough Council, with formal feedback evidencing improved safeguarding outcomes.	Complete all scheduled SLIP projects; collect and review external audit and inspection feedback from partner authorities.	LESAS Service Manager	May 2025	Income target achieved; partner audits/inspections confirm positive impact of collaboration.
Increase participation in EY safeguarding training by 25% (from January 2025 baseline), ensuring subsidised or free	Establish and deliver area-based network meetings thrice annually; provide guest speakers and safeguarding updates; deploy	LESAS Service Manager	March 2026	25% increase in EY training attendees; improved evaluation scores from EY settings; expanded safeguarding

training is provided to EY settings across all areas.	area-based support for local training and reviews.			reviews in EY sector.
Achieve a £50K increase in traded income, reaching at least £449.3K total income by 2026, through implementation of a targeted LESAS marketing plan and expansion of area-based outreach activities.	Develop and launch in-house purchasing on "My Ed" platform; implement outreach tracker via Microsoft List; systematically monitor and pursue engagement and sales opportunities.	Assistant Director for Safeguarding Professional Standards & Quality Assurance (SPSQA), LESAS Service Manager, Senior Business Support Office	March 2026	£449.3K income target achieved; 10% increase in new settings engaging with LESAS; marketing plan in place and evaluated for impact.
Complete quality assurance visits to 100% of Kent's Family Hub network and children's homes, using LESAS frameworks and reporting findings to the Board.	LEA cohort to schedule and conduct QA visits using bespoke tools, with results shared in quarterly Board meetings.	LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager	July 2025	All identified hubs and homes receive QA visits; Board minutes reflect learning and impact; settings report improved safeguarding awareness.
Continue shared learning partnership with Lancashire County Council, ensuring at least one peer review occurs by 2026 and findings are actioned by July 2025.	Organise and participate in peer review; address recommendations and document outcomes for service improvement.	LADO and Education Safeguarding Manager	July 2025	Peer review completed; action plan implemented; recognition from National LADO Network maintained.

7. List of Appendices

- Appendix 1 - LESAS Mission Statement
- Appendix 2 - ESS and LADO Evaluation 26.03.24 Appendix 02 - LADO Evaluation Summary.pptx
- Appendix 3 – Education Safeguarding Service and LADO Business Case ESS and LADO Evaluation Business Case - FINAL March 2024.docx
- Appendix 4 – LADO Evaluation LADO Evaluation Report 2024.docx