



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice**

**in the**

**Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois**

**undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the**

**Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)**

**Date of Review Report: October 2022**

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## Background

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church Ireland (National Board) was established in 2006 to provide advice, services and assistance in the ongoing development of safeguarding children within the Roman Catholic Church on the island of Ireland; to monitor compliance with legislation, policy and best practice; and to report on these activities. This is comprehensively set out in the Memorandum of Association of the Company.

Church authorities who have entered into an agreement with the National Board through signing a Memorandum of Understanding have committed to following *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*.

In order to assess compliance, the Diocesan Administrator of Ardagh and Clonmacnois invited the National Board to undertake a review of practice in his diocese, which took place in September 2022. A Memorandum of Understanding and Data Processing Deed Agreement were signed prior to the Review taking place.

The Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois was previously reviewed in April 2011 under the *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2008*. The report of the first Review and the Diocese's response to the recommendations and planned actions/progress (to the National Board, November 2011) can be found on the National Board's website [www.safeguarding.ie/publications](http://www.safeguarding.ie/publications). This current Review is an opportunity for the National Board to confirm that recommendations from the previous Review (2011) were implemented.

The recommendations from the previous Review (2011) are set out below, along with the status of implementation:

1. The Safeguarding Committee should assess the information received from the parish audit, feed this into the annual Diocesan self-audit, and assess if current policies, procedures and practice are in line with the expected standards set out in Safeguarding Children:  
**Implemented**
2. Consideration should be given to adopting the case file template proposed by the National Board:  
**Implemented - use of National Board templates, including notifications to civil authorities/National Board**  
**Not fully implemented - The case file structure/index.**
3. Attempts should be made to identify and recruit a suitable lay person who could be trained to take over the role of designated person at some agreed point in the future:  
**Implemented**

4. The authorised signatory and chair of the safeguarding committee to consider attending National Office training on vetting in May 2011:

**Implemented**

5. The Safeguarding trainers should arrange an annual meeting with safeguarding representatives and parish priests to: clarify role; raise awareness of the Standards and Guidance; and to offer support:

**Implemented**

6. The existing trainers should engage with the National Office around registration and delivery of NBSCCC training materials:

**Implemented**

7. Bishop O'Reilly should make a formal approach to the HSE and a representative from An Garda Síochána to hold bi-annual meetings to develop relationships and share practice relating to safeguarding:

**Implemented**

8. Bishop O'Reilly should consider appointing a second designated person and to consider the appointment of a female lay person to this role:

**Implemented**

9. The Safeguarding Committee and the Diocesan Trainers should consider running an annual awareness training event to update all personnel on developments in relation to safeguarding:

**Implemented**

10. Bishop O'Reilly and his safeguarding team should develop a plan (with timescales) in consultation with the National Office to implement and report on the recommendations of this audit:

**Implemented**

The purpose of this second round of Reviews is to assess child-safeguarding practice against the Catholic Church in Ireland's current standards as detailed in *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016* and make statements based on evidence, which provide:

- Public confidence that the Church Body is safe for children;
- Affirmation to Child Safeguarding personnel that they are doing the right things well;
- Confirmation to the Church Authority that what they want to be done is in fact being done;
- Independent verification of Self-Audit – or correction and/or improvement of Self-Audit;
- Opportunities for learning

## Introduction

The Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois is spread over parts of seven counties in the centre of Ireland. It includes almost all of Longford, half of Leitrim and parts of Westmeath, Offaly, Cavan, Roscommon and Sligo. It covers an area of 2,437 sq. km. At the end of 2020, the population was 87,500, of which 75,000 were Catholic.

The diocese is part of the Ecclesiastical Province of Armagh / Metropolitan Area of the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Following his resignation in July 2013, Bishop Colm O'Reilly was succeeded by Fr. Francis Duffy as Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois. In November 2021, Bishop Duffy was announced as Archbishop elect of the Archdiocese of Tuam and subsequently installed on 9 January 2022. Fr. Tom Healy was appointed to the role of Diocesan Administrator of Ardagh and Clonmacnois in January 2022.

The diocese has forty-one (41) parishes and sixty-five (65) clergy – forty-five (45) of whom are in active ministry, twelve (12) are retired, four (4) are on loan to other Church bodies, and four (4) are resident in Ireland outside of the diocese. There are seven (7) Religious Orders and Congregations located in the diocese, which include the Franciscans; Sisters of Mercy; La Sainte Union; Marist Sisters; Our Lady of the Missions; Poor Clare and St. Joseph of Cluny with a combined membership of five (5) religious priests, one (1) male religious, and ninety-three (93) female religious.

The reviewers, on behalf of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the National Board), would like to thank the Very Reverend Tom Healy, Diocesan Administrator, for his invitation to undertake a Review of child safeguarding arrangements and practice in the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois. We appreciated everyone's willingness to engage openly with us during our visits to the Diocesan Office, and to parishes in Athlone and Killashee. We would also like to acknowledge the support we received from the Diocesan Office secretary during our visit to the diocese.

The Review of compliance was measured against the National Board's seven Standards, contained in *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*, which can be accessed at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/guidance>. The Review concentrated on safeguarding arrangements and practice through evaluating written records, meetings with Church personnel including the former Safeguarding Co-ordinator, and discussion with a group of young people.

The diocese's ministry with children and young people included altar server ministry, youth choirs, sacramental preparation programmes, youth pilgrimages, and the Pope John Paul II Award Programme.

During 2020 and 2021, activities involving children and young people were ceased, to comply with government guidelines on pandemic restrictions. The reviewers took account of this during the completion of this Review.

### **Process of Review**

The Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois Review fieldwork was undertaken on September 11 and 12, 2022. The following is a list of those with whom the reviewers met or spoke during the fieldwork for this Review:

- Diocesan Administrator (currently providing administration in the absence of an appointed bishop to the diocese)
- DLP
- Safeguarding Coordinator (who also undertakes Garda vetting and Safeguarding training)
- Parish Priest Vetting Liaison Person
- Former Safeguarding Co-ordinator (up to 2019)
- Chairperson and members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- Parish Priests / Local Safeguarding Representatives
- Priest Advisor
- Sacristans
- Pope John Paul II Award Programme Co-ordinators
- Leaders and young people from a school based *Alpha* group
- Lourdes Pilgrimage Lead
- Taizé Pilgrimage Leads
- Tusla
- An Garda Síochána

The reviewers would like to acknowledge everyone's willingness to participate, and openly discuss their experience of safeguarding practice in the diocese.

## STANDARDS

The Standards are a level of practice required to ensure good child safeguarding arrangements. Each standard is self-contained and supported by indicators to evidence if safeguarding arrangements and practice meet the required standard. The National Board has produced detailed Guidance, which is accessible on its website (<https://www.safeguarding.ie/guidance>).

The seven Standards are:

Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

Standard 2: Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations

Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

This Review concentrates on practice through evaluating written records, interviews with Church personnel and young people; information from complainants and respondents.

An assessment of practice under each Standard is set out below:

## **Standard 1 - Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments**

*Church bodies provide an environment for children that is welcoming, nurturing and safe. They provide access to good role models whom children can trust, who respect, protect and enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.*

The diocese has fully adopted the Church's *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards 2016* (and has summarised this into an information leaflet), together with guidance and supporting documentation, which are accessible on the diocesan website at <https://ardaghdiocese.org/safeguarding/#1542572319183-718b3839-ca2f>.

Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs) have been provided with written information about their role, as part of their induction. They advised that the Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator was accessible, supportive, and has provided them with good advice. LSRs talked about their skills and experience, and of how they supported each other, and how their Parish Priest supported them.

Everyone met during parish visits had a clear understanding of their safeguarding role and responsibilities, and reported that they worked together as a team.

The diocese has a useful Parish Checklist for LSRs to reference. The Safeguarding Co-ordinator has agreed to add the safe use of information technology to the checklist.

Sacristans spoke confidently about safeguarding arrangements in place for altar servers, including safe use of mobile phones. LSRs and Sacristans hold an information night for parents when training new altar servers, and provide assistance to complete consent forms, and issue leaflets on safeguarding to parents and children. Sacristy sign-in and sign-out registers are completed, and registers from 2016 to the present were shown to the reviewers.

Although there were no current external organisations using parish buildings post Covid-19, Parish Priests and LSRs were clear about the requirement to seek written confirmation from an external agency that they had insurance and a safeguarding policy in place. Evidence of an external organisations signed confirmation (pre Covid-19) was seen by reviewers.

Those involved in leading and organising activities with children and young people were aware of the need to complete a hazard / risk assessment, in compliance with the Tusla's required Safeguarding Statement. Reviewers were provided evidence of completed hazard / risk assessments.

A form for Clerics/Religious who have Ministry with Children in an External Organisation/Church Body is in place and accessible in the Safeguarding section of the diocesan website. Guidance for storage and retention to comply with GDPR is in place.

In 2021, all safeguarding forms were updated to comply with GDPR and were issued to LSRs.

Signage for CCTV and Webcams were displayed in the entrances to churches, which were seen during parish visits.



All Church personnel are required to sign an agreement form regarding data protection, and evidence of completed forms were seen during parish visits.

The diocese has clear procedures / guidance and robust arrangements in place to ensure personnel who have contact with children are Garda vetted. This information is recorded on a database and monitored by the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and LSRs. All documentation is held securely, including archived records. The vetting database and documentation were seen by the reviewers as part of the Review.

LSRs advised that they consult with the Safeguarding Co-ordinator about any queries about the vetting process. The Safeguarding Co-ordinator will identify any potential gaps in vetting as part of the parish self- audit (2022), which will be issued to LSRs in October 2022.

Vetting figures 2016 to 2022:

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Clergy</b>	18	8	46	22	2	24	38
<b>Volunteers</b>	115	172	141	123	49	41	117

Recruitment and selection of volunteers meets the required standard, and documentation was viewed during a parish visit to corroborate this.

The recruitment for the Safeguarding Co-ordinator post in 2019 included a job description, up take of references, Garda vetting, and a contract. The diocese has agreed that recruitment of future paid posts will also include an advertisement and selection interview with a properly convened panel.

Two leaders of the Taizé pilgrimage group met with reviewers about safeguarding arrangements for trips, which took place pre Covid-19. The Diocesan Safeguarding Co-ordinator was involved in planning/preparation; and volunteers were Garda vetted and received training. Information for parents and the participating young people was provided, including completion of parental consent forms. The leaders advised that the safeguarding arrangements made them feel safe when working with young people. Safe care arrangements included supervision ratios and sleeping arrangements. Codes of behaviour were in place for young people and adults.

Reviewers met with a leader of the Lourdes Pilgrimage to discuss safeguarding arrangements in place for young people (16/17 years) from local secondary schools who volunteer to help others during the Pilgrimage. Garda vetting and training is provided, and codes of behaviour for adults and children are discussed as part of the pre-planning process. An information night for parents takes place, and consent forms are completed. Young people do not undertake any aspect of intimate care of someone they are assisting. Any intimate care required is provided by a suitably trained adult volunteer. A social media policy is in place. Young people have an identified leader to whom they can report any concerns, and from whom they can receive support. The leader advised that they take the Diocesan Children’s Safeguarding Statement poster with them on the Pilgrimage.

A group of young people from a local secondary school discussed with reviewers their experience of participating in the Alpha programme where young people can engage in conversations about faith. They all advised that they were happy to attend the programme and were aware of who they could talk to about any concern they had about themselves or others. They confirmed that they felt they would be listened to and supported. The young people had a clear understanding of child protection/safeguarding.

The Parish Priests and LSRs were clear about how to report a concern and advised that the Designated Liaison Person is accessible, supportive and responds to concerns reported.

There were no complaints outside of notifications of child abuse since the last Review. There were no whistleblowing notifications since the last Review. Guidance was in place for both.

Post Covid-19, the Safeguarding Co-ordinator together with the Safeguarding Committee are considering how best to reach out to parishes to hear about what is working well, areas where support is required, and suggestions for improvement to maintain a safe environment for children and young people. The completed parish self-audits and the analysis of these provide a good basis for ongoing planning and the prioritisation of actions within the Child Safeguarding Plan.

Meetings with the Safeguarding Committee, Safeguarding Co-ordinators (past and present), leaders for Lourdes and Taizé Pilgrimages, Parish Priests, LSRs, sacristans and young people involved in a school-based Alpha programme together with supporting documentation provided evidence of compliance with this standard.

**This standard is met.**

## Standard 2 - Procedures for responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations

*Church bodies have clear procedures and guidance on what to do when suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations arise regarding a child's safety or welfare that will ensure there is a prompt response. They also enable the Church to meet all national and international legal and practice requirements and guidance.*

Reports of abuse received since the previous review in 2011 up to September 2022 are outlined below:

**Table 1- Allegations reported to the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois since 2011**

Current Status	Number of Complainants	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	National Board Notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
<b>Living clerics</b>					
1.	1	Yes - within 13 days	Yes - within 13 days	Yes - within 13 days	N/A
2.	1	Yes – within 34 days	Yes – within 34 days	Yes – within 23 days	Yes - completed NFA
3.	2	Yes complaints notified within 1 day	Yes complaints notified within 1 day	Yes complaints notified within 1 day	N/A N/A
4. Cleric not identified	1	Yes - notified within 2 days	Yes - notified within 2 days	Yes - notified within 1 day	N/A
<b>Deceased clerics</b>					
5. Deceased	2	Yes - 1 <sup>st</sup> complaint - notified 1 month, 17 days Yes - 2 <sup>nd</sup> complaint notified within 3 days	Yes - 1 <sup>st</sup> complaint notified 1 month, 17 days Yes - 2 <sup>nd</sup> complaint notified within 3 days	Yes - 1 <sup>st</sup> complaint notified 1 month, 12 days Yes - 2 <sup>nd</sup> complaint notified within 3 days	N/A
6. Deceased	2	Yes - 1 <sup>st</sup> complaint notified within 1 day	Yes - 1 <sup>st</sup> complaint notified within 1 day Yes -2nd complaint within 6 days	Yes - 1 <sup>st</sup> complaint notified within 1 day	N/A

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		Yes - 2 <sup>nd</sup> complaint - within 6 days		Yes - 2 <sup>nd</sup> complaint - within 6 days	
7. Deceased	1	Yes - within one day	Yes - within one day	Yes - within one day	Yes - Preliminary investigation
<b>Other Church bodies</b>					
8. Cleric not identified	1	Yes – notified within 1 day	Yes – notified within 1 day	Yes – notified within 1 day	N/A
9. Cleric not identified	1	Yes – notified within 6 days	Yes - notified within 1 day	Yes – for advice only 3 months after notification	N/A
10. Deceased prior to report	1	Yes - notified within 1 day	Yes - notified within 1 day	Yes - notified within 1 day	N/A

All reports received were retrospective complaints of abuse.

In all of the cases reviewed, notifications were made within timescale to the Gardaí, Tusla and the National Board, based on the information available at the time of report.

None of the three unnamed respondent priests could be identified, despite the efforts of the DLP. In these three cases, complainants who could be contacted were offered support. Notifications to the civil authorities and to the National Board were completed as required.

There were three (3) respondent priests reported to the diocese who were the responsibility of other Church bodies. One (1) of these was regarding a deceased priest, and it related to a civil legal action. The information received by the diocese was forwarded to the relevant Church authority to provide a response. Notifications were made by the Diocesan DLP to the civil authorities and National Board as required.

One (1) respondent priest, whose case was considered in the previous Review, remains out of ministry and is subject to a management plan (refer to section 4).

The canon law process was appropriately initiated in two (2) cases that met the criteria.

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy DLP (both laypersons – male and female) are widely identified and well known, so that everyone is aware of who to go to if they have a safeguarding concern. Their identity is made public through display of their contact details on the diocesan website, diocesan newsletters, parish bulletins and display of posters in Church premises.

Following the resignation of the Deputy DLP in April 2022, the diocese has appointed a new Deputy DLP who has been Garda vetted and has completed their training. Both the DLP and Deputy DLP are members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee. The DLP will provide support to the Deputy, and keep their training and support needs under review.

A Parish Priest provides guidance and support to the Diocesan Administrator and the DLP regarding case management. This Parish Priest was clear that he does not make decisions about cases. He explained that others seek guidance from him, given his knowledge and experience, including in canon law. The reviewers advised that guidance provided by this Parish Priest should be recorded and placed in the relevant case management file by the DLP/Deputy.

It was suggested by the reviewers that as this priest has access to case management information, their role and responsibilities should be agreed and formalised in writing, shared with relevant safeguarding personnel and included in the safeguarding structure. It should be explicit in the safeguarding structure that the DLP has lead responsibility for all aspects of the case management process. The Diocesan Administrator agreed to progress this with the relevant personnel.

The DLP reported that he met with the Diocesan Administrator to review case management progress and to discuss actions required by the diocese, as and when required. These discussions also included an exchange of information about support to complainants and respondents. This was evidenced in the case files reviewed, and it has been the practice with the previous bishops since the last Review in 2011. The reviewers suggested that it would be helpful for dates in advance to be arranged for supervision with the DLP. One of these meetings each year should include discussion with the DLP about their training needs and role development. The Diocesan Administrator agreed to progress this with the DLP.

The reviewers suggested that the DLP, Deputy DLP and diocesan Parish Priest who provides case management support (to Diocesan Administrator and DLP) should meet with the Diocesan Administrator every 6 months to provide an update on overall case management arrangements, share good practice, and identify areas for improvement. The Diocesan Administrator agreed to take this forward with the aforementioned personnel.

The DLP advised that there could be delays in information sharing from the civil authorities, and that this information when shared is limited in respect of an ongoing investigation and its outcome, because of Data Protection requirements.

Tusla and the An Garda Síochána both provided positive feedback about the Diocese reporting complaints of abuse against clergy, sharing information and fully co-operating with civil investigations. Both agencies acknowledged the constraints of information sharing due to data protection requirements.

The Diocesan Administrator demonstrated oversight of current cases.

The reviewers made suggestions for improvement in the following areas which the Diocesan Administrator agreed to progress with the relevant personnel:

- To facilitate easy access to information in the case file, a file index should be used for each file.
- It may be helpful to understand the narrative of a case to have a record of the sequence of decision making completed and placed in the case management file.

The reviewers are satisfied that the diocese has procedures and arrangements in place for responding to child protection suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations. The above are suggested areas of improvement to strengthen existing good practice.

**This Standard is met.**

### **Standard 3 - Care and Support for the Complainant**

*Complainants who have suffered abuse as children receive a compassionate response when they disclose their abuse. They, and their families, are offered appropriate support, advice and pastoral care.*

Evidence of how complainants were responded to was gleaned from the eleven (11) case files reviewed (including the case currently being managed from the previous review), and from meetings with the Diocesan Administrator, a parish priest support person, and the Designated Liaison Person. Complainants were listened to and treated with respect; they were offered a meeting with the bishop, a named support person from the diocese, and support from Towards Healing and Towards Peace services. Advice was also given about how to access legal support.

There has been ongoing involvement with thirteen (13) complainants where the relevant respondent priests were deceased at the time of report to the diocese. The response of the diocese to four (4) of these complainants (Table 1, Standard 2) were considered as part of the Review. The findings are incorporated into the evidence of care and support to complainants below.

There was evidence in all (11) case files examined by the reviewers of the complainant being kept up to date about the progress of their case, and of minutes of meetings, which involved the complainant being shared with them.

Six (6) complainants declined diocesan support, but they were provided with written information about the Towards Healing and Towards Peace services.

Two (2) complaints had been made by a third party, but when one of these was contacted, they did not want support from the diocese. The other complainant informed the diocese that they were already in receipt of counselling.

Three (3) dedicated Support Persons had been recruited and trained by the diocese to undertake this role. However, due to there not having been any uptake of their support, these dedicated roles have ceased. The DLP advised that if a Support Person were required in the future, a suitable person from within the diocese would be identified.

The reviewers made suggestions for improvement in the following areas, which the Diocesan Administrator agreed to progress with the relevant personnel:

- The DLP should follow up with complainants who initially decline support, to make a further offer of support within a defined period, as appropriate.
- Explore with neighbouring dioceses about establishing a pool of Support Persons – male and female. This will develop the expertise of Support Persons; facilitate suitable matching of a Support Person with a complainant; and facilitate role-specific training and group mentoring/support.

The reviewers are satisfied that complainants received a caring and supportive response from the diocese. The above are suggested areas of improvement to strengthen existing good practice.

**This standard is met.**

#### **Standard 4 - Care and Management of the Respondent**

*The Church authority has in place a fair process for investigating and managing child safeguarding concerns. When the threshold for reporting has been reached, a system of support and monitoring for respondents (cleric or religious) is provided.*

Respondents were given an opportunity to complete a questionnaire about their experience of the care and management they received from the diocese, and to meet with reviewers during their visit to the diocese. No completed questionnaires or requests from respondents to meet with the reviewers were received.

At the time of this Review, one respondent priest was subject to a management plan. The DLP and Diocesan Administrator had full knowledge of this case; sought guidance from the National Board; made referrals to the National Case Management Committee; and followed up on agreed actions. The management plan was monitored, reviewed and kept up to date, based on current circumstances. A Priest Advisor was appointed, and he was clear about his role and responsibilities and with the plan in place. Appropriate canonical action had been taken based on up to date information. The complainants had been offered support, but this was declined.

Cleric one (1) was not involved in ministry (and had no appointments with the diocese) before the diocese received a complaint from a third party. Notifications were completed appropriately to the civil authorities and National Board. The priest denied the allegations and the complainant did not make a formal complaint to the Gardai. The priest was kept up to date and offered support from the DLP and bishop.

Cleric two (2) continued in ministry without restrictions. The required process of completion of civil investigations, the canonical process and assessment was followed. These processes concluded with no action required. During the investigation and assessment process, the priest availed of support, including from a Priest Advisor. The priest is in good standing.

Cleric three (3) continued in ministry without restrictions following completion of a criminal investigation, an assessment of risk together with consultation with civil authorities and the National Board / National Case Management Committee. The required process for investigation and review was completed. The priest was provided with support and kept up to date about the investigation. The priest is in good standing.

One report was received from another Church body regarding a complaint made by a third party who did not provide the name/details of the complainant and respondent. The DLP followed up with the DLP from the other Church body but no further action could be taken as the identity of the complainant and respondent remained unknown.

The review of case files evidenced that respondents have been offered support from a Priest Advisor, and their welfare is considered as part of case management. Each respondent who required a management plan had one in place, and these were kept under review by the DLP.

The reviewers had an opportunity to meet with a Priest Advisor who was currently involved with a respondent priest. He was clear about his role and responsibilities and relevant information was made available to him about the respondent. The priest advisor kept the Diocesan Administrator up to date about his contact with the respondent. He reported that support and guidance was



readily available when required. He kept records of visits, and provided these to the Diocesan Administrator. The Priest Advisor was open to avail of up to date training and support.

Respondents were offered to seek legal advice from both civil and canon law legal representatives as appropriate.

There was evidence in case files of respondents being kept up to date about the progress of their case, and minutes of meetings that involved respondents were shared with them.

Complaints were referred to the National Case Management Committee when appropriate, and recommendations were followed through as required. Management plans were kept under review, and amendments made to reflect any change in the respondent's circumstances. The Delegated Liaison Person was involved in all cases, and monitored respondents as per their management plan.

The reviewers made suggestions for improvement in the following areas, which the Diocesan Administrator agreed to progress with the relevant personnel:

- For support and guidance DLP's and priest advisors could consult to exchange information in advance of meetings with the respondent.
- Although priest advisor records are completed, for ease of access these should be placed in the case management file.
- The Diocesan Administrator and DLP will explore with neighbouring dioceses about establishing a pool of Priest Advisors. This will allow for the development of experience and expertise; shared role-specific training; group mentoring/support; and a choice of advisor who is not involved in the management of the case to be matched with the respondent.

The reviewers are satisfied that the diocese has a fair process in place for investigating and managing child safeguarding concerns, together with arrangements for support and monitoring of respondents. The above are suggested areas of improvement to strengthen existing good practice.

**This standard is met.**

## Standard 5 - Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

*Church personnel are trained and supported in all aspects of safeguarding relevant to their role, in order to develop and maintain the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to safeguard and protect children.*

A Training Plan is in place for 2022. The plan includes information sessions; awareness raising; mandatory training; role-specific training; a Diocesan Annual Conference; and National Board training. A diocesan training programme is scheduled a year ahead and is kept under review by the Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Safeguarding Committee on an ongoing basis. The reviewers were provided copies of the plan and programme, and they are satisfied that these are up to standard.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator maintains a centralised training record of clergy, co-workers and laity who have completed one-day safeguarding training and refresher training. The Safeguarding Committee receive updates from the Safeguarding Co-ordinator regarding mandatory safeguarding training, and an annual training return is submitted to the National Board, including evaluation and feedback. Training needs, including for bespoke roles at parish level, are identified during analysis of self-audits completed by LSRs. This information informs the Training Plan for the following year.

Two experienced accredited trainers retired from post in 2021 and replacements have not been recruited, despite all efforts made by the Safeguarding Committee. The Safeguarding Co-ordinator is awaiting accreditation as a Trainer from the National Board. The Safeguarding Committee reported to reviewers that it is a priority to identify trainers, and at their last meeting in September 2022, they agreed actions to deliver mandatory training, which included seeking support from a neighbouring diocese.

Safeguarding Training Records 2016 - 2021				
Date	Venue	Number Attended	Type	Totals
<b>2016</b>				
16 April	Athlone	6	Full	<b>266</b> in total attended training in 2016.  Of these 99 were Clergy
23 April	St Mel's Longford	17	Full Training	
27 April	St Mel's Longford	62 (34 Clergy )	Info	
5 May	Drumshanbo	11 (1 Clergy)	Info	
20 May	Longford	11 (1 Clergy)	All Polish Community	
16 June	Longford	52 (All Clergy)	Full Training	
23 June	Moate	23	Info Session	
6 Oct	Longford	11	LS REPS	
10 Oct	Granard	7	LS REPS	
12 Oct	Drumshanbo	7	LS REPS	
13 Oct	Athlone	13 (9 Clergy)	Vulnerable Adults Training	
17 Oct	Ballymahon	3	LS REPS	
20 Oct	Ferbnane	9 (2 Clergy)	LS REPS	
25 Oct	Longford	9	Full New LS REPS	

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12 Nov	Longford	16	Full Training LS REPS	
19 Nov	Athlone	9	Full Training LS REPS	
<b>2017</b>				
17 Feb	Drumshanbo	5	Poor Clare Sisters	<b>145</b> in total attended training in 2017.  Of these 18 were Clergy
4 April	Longford	58 ( 25 LS REPS)	Safeguarding Meeting	
13 May	Longford	16	Full Training	
8 June	Ferbane	5	Sisters of St Joseph	
17 Oct	Granard	19 (5 Clergy)	Info	
7 Nov	Athlone	10 ( 3 Clergy)	Info	
14 Nov	Longford	32 (10 Clergy)	Info	
<b>2018</b>				
9 Feb	Drumshanbo	6	Poor Clare Sisters	<b>316</b> in total attended training in 2018.  Of these 55 were Clergy/Religious
14 March	Longford	60 (19 Clergy)	Diocesan Conference and Training	
11 May	Longford	32	Lourdes Pilgrimage	
12 May	Longford	11	Full Day Training	
16 May	Longford	29	Lourdes Youth	
4 July	Dublin Airport	6 (1 Clergy)	Info Session AC Youth	
15 Sept	Athlone	34 (4 religious)	Full Day Training	
22 Sept	Athlone	13 (4 Clergy)	Full Day Training	
27 Sept	Granard	18 (9 Clergy)	Annual Update	
3 Oct	Athlone	9 ( 1 Clergy)	Annual Update	
9 Oct	Drumshanbo	11 (2 Clergy)	Annual Update	
15 Oct	Longford	32 (12 Clergy)	Annual Update	
25 Oct	Longford	20 (3 Clergy)	Annual Update	
8 Nov	Longford	12	Legion of Mary	
1 Dec	Athlone	13	Legion of Mary	
<b>2019</b>				
2 April	Longford	78 (27 religious)	Diocesan Conference and Training	<b>247</b> in total attended training in 2019.  Of these 84 were Clergy/Religious
7 May	Longford	28 ( 3 Adults)	Lourdes Youth Volunteer	
10 May	Longford	33 (3 Religious)	Info Session	
6 June	Longford	13 (9 Clergy)	Full Day Training	
8 June	Athlone	6 (2 Clergy)	Full Day Training	
24 June	Ballymahon	7 (1 Clergy)	AC Youth	
12 Sept	Granard	19 (6 Clergy)	Info Session	
18 Sept	Athlone	5 (2 Clergy)	Info Session	
7 Oct	Longford	41 (11 Clergy)	Info Session	
15 Oct	Drumshanbo	29 (7 Clergy)	Info Session	
7 Dec	Longford	15 (13 Clergy)	Info Session	

No further face-to-face Training took place during 2020, or 2021, due to Covid-19.

Online Training for new Local Safeguarding Reps: September 2020 - 5 attended online training; September 2021 - 2 attended online training.

The Safeguarding Committee has organised a Diocesan Safeguarding Conference to take place in October 2022, with the theme - *Kingdom Values: Placing Children at the Centre*. These annual conferences have taken place since 2014, which is commended.

Positive feedback was received from safeguarding personnel about support provided by the National Board's Director of Training and Support.

The diocese would welcome ongoing training opportunities for DLP's/Deputies and Priest Advisors.

The reviewers are satisfied that training is a priority for the diocese and requirements for mandatory training have been met in previous years. Actions are currently in place to address gaps in mandatory training, and the Training Plan for 2022 remains under constant review of the Safeguarding Committee.

**This standard is met**

## Standard 6 - Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

*Church bodies appropriately communicate the Church's child safeguarding message.*

The Children's Safeguarding Co-ordinator promoted the National Board Review for Safeguarding Children in the diocese by issuing correspondence about it to Parish Priests and LSRs. Information was also included in parish bulletins. Evidence of these communications were provided to the reviewers.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator has agreed to update the Diocesan Child Safeguarding Statement immediately, in line with the new National Board's agreed template. This will contain the signature of the Diocesan Administrator, (who would be signing in lieu of a bishop) who is the Provider of the Relevant Service under the Children First Act. This is to be displayed alongside the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy Statement in all churches.

A Communication Plan is in place for 2022. The plan includes the

- Circulation and display of safeguarding posters and leaflets, with up to date contact details of safeguarding personnel;
- Circulation of a children's safeguarding poster designed for children with special needs;
- Safeguarding information sessions with Pastoral Care Councils;
- Circulation of the Diocese Safeguarding Newsletter and Easter Safeguarding Message;
- Circulation of the National Board Newsletter;
- Translation and display of safeguarding posters for Polish and Brazilian families; and
- Review and update of safeguarding section of Diocesan website.

The reviewers were provided a copy of the Plan, and they judged it to meet the standard required.

Children's safeguarding posters (with up to date contact details of the Designated Liaison Person and civil authorities), leaflets, children's/adults codes of behaviour, Towards Healing and Towards Peace information were on display in church buildings, e.g. entrances and sacristies. A child-friendly safeguarding poster for children with special needs was also on display at a child's eye level in the sacristy.

Safeguarding information was translated and displayed for Polish and Brazilian families.

Notices stating the requirement for priests to produce current *celebrets* were clearly displayed in sacristies, and completed documentation was provided to reviewers to evidence that requirements were met for visiting priests to the diocese. Sacristans reported that they felt confident to ask visiting priests to show their *celebret* card to them.

Information about safeguarding responsibilities and arrangements has been provided to safeguarding representatives for use at Parish Pastoral Councils.

Diocesan Children's Safeguarding Newsletters have been published annually, and these included a safeguarding message from the bishop. Copies of these - from 2015 to 2019 - were provided to the reviewers. Due to Covid-19, newsletters have not been published for two years prior to the Review, but it is planned to issue one within the next year. Child Safeguarding messages were published in parish newsletters during Advent 2021, and Easter 2022; and were placed on the diocesan website as well.

Names and contact details of Local Safeguarding Representatives are published in parish bulletins. Safeguarding children information leaflets for parents are available, together with a young people's version. These leaflets include a code of behaviour for children and adults. The Safeguarding Committee is considering different ways of sharing these with parents and young people, for example by attaching to parish bulletins. This is a way of emphasising to families that safeguarding remains a priority with the recommencement of children's activities post Covid-19.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator and the Safeguarding Committee are committed to update the Safeguarding section of the diocesan website, to include timely up loading of information, for example safeguarding plans, reports and resources, with clear links between the *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards, 2016* and localised procedures/guidance and resources.

The reviewers are satisfied that the diocese is appropriately communicating the Church's safeguarding message.

**This standard is met**

## **Standard 7 - Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards**

*The Church body develops a plan of action to quality assure compliance with the safeguarding standards. This action plan is reviewed annually. The Church body only has responsibility to monitor, evaluate and report on compliance with the indicators under each standard that apply to it, depending on its ministry.*

The Diocesan Children's Safeguarding Committee has a constitution in place, including its terms of reference. The membership of the Committee meets the requirements of the constitution. The reviewers had access to these documents.

A mandated person's list is in place, and this was provided to the reviewers. This list includes sixty-five (65) clergy and two (2) pastoral care staff

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator and the Committee are to be commended for having in place an up-to-date Three-Year Children's Safeguarding Strategic Plan, 2022 to 2024 (based on the seven Standards), together with Training and Communication Plans for 2022. These were based on one hundred per cent returns from parish self-audits in 2021. The reviewers had access to these documents.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator provided a summary report on parish self-audits conducted in 2021, together with a Children's Safeguarding Annual Report, 2021. Evidence was also provided of these having been completed in preceding years, from 2016. (The Safeguarding Committee completed an Annual Self Audit for 2020, even though this was not required by the National Board, making allowances for the impact of Covid-19).

The Diocesan Administrator and Safeguarding Committee have responsibility for the implementation of the three-year Strategic Plan, with support from the Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Designated Liaison Person/Deputy Designated Liaison Person, LSRs and safeguarding Trainers.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator has been in post since 2019, and confirmed receipt of a handover and induction from the previous Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator reported that she received regular support from the Diocesan Administrator and the Safeguarding Committee.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator is to be commended for her work and for the progress made with the three-year Children's Safeguarding Plan since coming into post, despite the challenges presented by Covid-19 and lockdown.

Parish personnel spoken with reported good communication and support from the diocesan safeguarding leads.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Safeguarding Committee are committed to maintain connections with parishes, which will utilise a hybrid approach of face-to-face contact and Zoom meetings.

The reviewers observed a supportive environment in the Diocesan Safeguarding Office, as well as positive working relationships between Safeguarding Committee members at their September 2022 meeting. The Chairperson of the Committee had a set agenda, reviewed matters arising and

actions from the previous meeting. The Safeguarding Coordinator was given time to present their report and to discuss challenges, including the delivery of mandatory training. All committee members participated in discussion and listened to each other's views. The Chairperson was able to summarise discussion and agree actions on priorities, to be reviewed at the next meeting.

The reviewers made suggestions for improvement in the following areas which the Diocesan Administrator agreed to progress with the relevant personnel:

- The Safeguarding Co-ordinator to liaise with other Co-ordinators in neighbouring dioceses to establish a Co-ordinator support network.
- It would be helpful for the DLP on an annual basis to complete a review on active cases to include new concerns/complaints; liaison between the complainant and their support person; liaison between the priest advisor and respondent; a legal update; and updating the risk management plan as appropriate. The record of the outcome of this review to be placed at the beginning of the current case file.

The reviewers are satisfied that the diocese has an up to date Children's Safeguarding Three Year Strategic Plan, with agreed actions, monitoring and review arrangements in place, to enable quality assurance of compliance with the safeguarding standards. The above are suggested areas of improvement to strengthen current good practice.

**This Standard is met.**



## Conclusion

The reviewers are satisfied that there is full compliance by the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois with the seven Standards of the Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016.

The reviewers are confident that their input during the fieldwork has resulted in learning to strengthen current good practice outlined under Standards two (2), three (3), four (4) and seven (7), and that full implementation of learning will be prioritised by the Diocesan Administrator, together with relevant diocesan personnel.

Procedures/guidance and safeguarding arrangements are in place to promote the safety of children in the diocese. This assessment is based on evidence from documentation examined, engagement and feedback from the Diocesan Administrator; Safeguarding Co-ordinator; former Safeguarding Co-ordinator (up to 2019); DLP; Parish Priests; a priest advisor; Local Safeguarding Representatives; sacristans; Pope John Paul II Award Programme Co-ordinators; Lourdes/Taizé leads; young people from an *Alpha* group; the Safeguarding Committee; and representatives from Tusla and the An Garda Síochána.

Personnel we met with during our visit had a clear understanding about their safeguarding role and responsibilities, and were committed to work together to safeguard children. There was an openness and willingness to learn and improve services to safeguard children in the Diocese.

The Diocesan Administrator, together with his safeguarding team and the Safeguarding Committee, confirmed that all suggested areas of improvement would be actioned.

Everyone is to be commended for their caring and collaborative approach, under the leadership of the Diocesan Administrator, to keep children safe.