

Newsletter



Annual Safeguarding Children Report for the Diocese of Meath

31 January 2018

Introduction

This report has been prepared to outline the efforts of the Diocese of Meath during 2017 to comply with the seven standards for safeguarding children identified by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI).

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

The Diocese of Meath is required to put in place arrangements to ensure and evaluate its compliance with these seven safeguarding standards at local level and to notify the NBSCCCI in writing of the completion of this annual report.

The parish safeguarding audit returns have been scrutinised by the Safeguarding Children Committee and recommendations for further action and improvements are incorporated in a report for Bishop Smith. This process applies to Standards 1, 5, and 6. A report is also prepared for the Bishop by the Designated Liaison Persons (DLP) on Standards 2, 3, and 4. Recommendations for action and improvements identified by the DLP will be incorporated into the Safeguarding Plan 2017-2020. It has been decided to include reports on the work of the Advisory Case Management Committee (ACMC) and of the Safeguarding Children Committee (SCC) in this annual report.

Section 1

Report of the Safeguarding Children Committee on Standards 1, 5 and 6

The Safeguarding Children Committee has overall responsibility for the implementation of Standards 1, 5 and 6 and aspects of Standard 7. In relation to Standard 1 in particular, this is delegated, in the main, to the diocesan safeguarding trainers and parish safeguarding representatives (PSR) and is reported on through the annual parish self-audit. The returns from the parishes have been scrutinised and a report has been prepared by an independent assessor.

Independent Assessor's Report on Parish Audits

My interim report identified a number of issues arising from the introduction of a new reporting template for the 2017 process, based on reviewing 53 completed forms at the time. I understand that contact was made with a number of these parishes by the Safeguarding Resource Team in order to clarify certain aspect of the completion of the forms, in particular where questions were left unanswered or it appeared that those completing the forms had been unclear as to the requirements.

I have now fully re-evaluated those 53 forms, along with a further 12 submitted for review, leading to a full review by me now of 65 forms. This represents a very high level of compliance with the policy of requiring parishes to complete self-audits on an annual basis.

It is evident that there is a high level of awareness in parish communities across the Diocese of Meath of the requirements for high levels of information, and preventative and assurance measures in relation to child welfare and protection.

Concerted efforts have been made, and sustained, in respect of training and information for those in parish communities working directly with children, both on a professional and volunteer basis. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of those volunteers who make themselves available for the very necessary training, as well as undertaking their core roles. The Resource Team have clearly been active in addressing any training needs arising and it is recommended that they follow up with any parishes where individual needs have been identified through the completion of the self-audit process, both in terms of information, training and continuing to provide a valuable resource to parishes in meeting their obligations.

As a general observation it is evident that the understanding among parishes of the requirements for robust child welfare and protection safeguards extends beyond simply adherence to the stated obligations, and encompasses a deeper understanding and congruence with the various indicators of good practice as set out in Standards 1, 5 and 6 of the revised national policy and standards.

For the 2018 audit, it is recommended that the Resource Team continue to work with parishes in respect of their understanding of the requirements of the reporting template on a case by case basis based on this year's experience, so that the parishes can complete these with assurance and confidence. This can be supported by means of continuing to provide generic information and guidance on the process through, for example, helpful Frequently Asked Questions. The issues raised in my interim report may be helpful to the Resource Team in this context, for example where the questions posed in the audit are open to misinterpretation.

In conclusion, it is quite apparent from my evaluation of the 2017 audit that consistent and focused attention to child welfare and protection has been taken as a matter of policy by the Diocese and implemented as a matter of practice at parish level. This is evidenced in particular by the commitment to training over many years now which demonstrates that the Diocese of Meath, at individual parish level, has been embedding this key message in its work through all of its agents who work with children.

Report on the work of the Safeguarding Children Committee and Safeguarding Trainers

Meetings of the Committee were held on 31 January, 20 April, 5 September and 28 November 2017. The Resource Team met at least monthly throughout the course of the year.

The members of the Committee are Bishop Michael Smith (Chair); Fr Paul Crosbie (Secretary); Ms Nuala McLoughlin (DLP); Mr David Gavin (Trainer); Ms Antoinette Shaw (Trainer); Ms Pauline Clarke; Mr Alan Doran; Ms Joan Walshe; Ms Marie Willoughby.

Main areas of work addressed by the Committee and Trainers

Standard 1: Creating and maintaining safe environments

The Diocese of Meath provides an environment for children that is welcoming, nurturing and safe. We provide access to good role models whom children can trust, who respect, protect and enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

The Committee continued work on monitoring and ensuring that the new vetting procedures were adhered to. In that regard, the Committee heard from the Authorised Signatory Liaison Person. Over 4,000 vetting disclosures were returned to applicants since e-vetting commenced in July 2016.

There was a steady increase in the number of requests by external groups to access parish properties for child related activities including summer clubs and pre-school care. The Bishop briefed the Committee on efforts by the College of Consultors to develop a standardised legal agreement with external agents using Church property including schools.

Standard 5: Training and support for keeping children safe

The Diocese of Meath ensures that Church personnel are trained and supported in all areas of safeguarding relevant to their role, to develop and maintain the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to safeguarding and protect children.

The annual training needs analysis identified all Church personnel who required training and the trainers developed a training plan based on this assessment.

The induction of Church personnel during 2017 included training in the Church's child safeguarding policy and procedures. All parish clergy and parish safeguarding representatives were invited to the annual deanery information sessions.

Over 200 parish clergy and volunteers attended these sessions where they learned about compliance on the seven safeguarding standards. Copies of *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland*, a summary leaflet and posters for display were distributed. Leaflets were also available in both Irish and Polish. We encouraged participants to display these leaflets and to ensure that they are readily available in our parish churches.

The topics covered by the training included:

- **Completing the new parish audit form**
- **Garda Vetting for volunteers**
- **Role of the Designated Liaison Person**
- **What to do if you receive an allegation or complaint?**
- **Preparing for Safeguarding Awareness Day.**

In addition, specific information sessions were facilitated by the trainers in Tullamore (10 May), Ashbourne (7 October), Mullingar (11 October) and Delvin (27 November). Clergy, parish representatives, sacristans, choir members and parish volunteers were invited to attend these information sessions.

The Diocese is committed to ensuring delivery at local level of basic training programmes that are identified and approved by the NBSCCCI, as outlined in the National Board's Training Strategy. As a result, the trainers delivered two full-day training sessions to local clergy, new parish representatives, foreign clergy, choir directors and "Children of the Eucharist" leaders in Navan (29 April) and Trim (28 October). These training days fulfilled the trainers' annual registration conditions.

Church personnel who have specific child safeguarding responsibilities had appropriate, role-specific training that is identified and approved by the NBSCCCI, as outlined in the National Board's Training Strategy. The following training was undertaken:

- **"Training for Trainers" (25 February, 26 February, 11 March, 12 March and 1 April) attended by David Gavin and Antoinette Shaw**
- **Role specific training for Support People (8 February) attended by Richard Lowry**
- **Vetting Legislation Briefing with Gardaí (13 September) attended by Linda Duncan and Irene Connaughton**
- **Self-Audit Training for Safeguarding Committees and Church Authorities (11 October) attended by Joan Walshe**
- **Risk Management and Creating Management Plans (8 November) attended by Nuala McLoughlin.**

Children who access Church-related activities and their parents/guardians are provided with information, advice and support on keeping children safe, and they are involved in child-safeguarding training initiatives wherever possible and appropriate.

Parents attended "Consultation and Feedback" sessions, which gave them the opportunity to be informed on child safeguarding initiatives in the Diocese. The Committee members hosted these sessions in a number of parishes including Castlepollard, Clonmellon, Ballymore, Drumraney, Carnaross, Castletown-Kilpatrick, Kilbeg and Nobber. On each occasion, child friendly leaflets, outlining safety procedures for altar servers and choir members, were distributed to parents and all volunteers working with children in parish settings. The Committee thanks the Parish Priests for their hospitality on these occasions.

The Diocese is required to facilitate the provision of an appropriate level of support to all involved in parish activities in relation to their responsibilities to safeguard children. Towards this end, the trainers are always available to respond to emails and phone calls. All clergy and parish safeguarding representatives have access to the personal mobile numbers of the trainers. The trainers received and logged all phone calls received during 2017 and promptly responded to queries and concerns. Minutes of the monthly meetings of Resource Team are kept and stored in a safe environment in the Diocesan Office. In addition, the trainers are constantly updating the data base of email addresses so as to facilitate ready contact with clergy and parish safeguarding representatives.

Standard 6: Communicating the safeguarding message

The Diocese has a written communications plan that details how the Church's child safeguarding message will be communicated. This was updated in 2017, incorporated in the three-year safeguarding plan (2017-2020) and reviewed as provided for in the plan.

The Diocese makes information regarding how to safeguard children available to a range of audiences including parishioners; children and their parents involved in Church activities; Church personnel; statutory agencies. It does this through disseminating child-friendly information leaflets, information leaflets for adults, posters with the safeguarding policy statement and contact details for DLP and Tusla in Church buildings. The website www.meathsafeguarding.ie has details of the safeguarding policy and procedures.

Three newsletters were circulated across the Diocese to inform parishioners on matters including training dates, updates on Garda vetting and the three-year safeguarding plan. Other items included information on the parish self-audit, evidence of good practice in parishes and preparations for Safeguarding Awareness Day. The aforementioned "Consultation and Feedback" sessions have been valuable from a communications perspective.

Posters in Irish and Polish were printed to communicate the Church's child safeguarding message to people whose first language is not English. There are two Gaeltacht areas in the Diocese and a substantial Polish community. The need for material in other languages and means of communication with people who have specific needs is kept under review.

Links are fostered with various local organisations in order to promote a safe and caring community for children and to share best child safeguarding practice.

Representative members of the Committee met with Charney Weitzman (Children First Information Officer with Tusla) in May as part of the ongoing liaison with the statutory agency. Agenda items included the Garda vetting process, use of parish property by child-care groups, caring for vulnerable adults and updating details for Tusla personnel on Church posters.

Standard 7: Quality Assurance

The Committee agreed its annual report. An independent assessment of parish self-audits was completed (see above). The findings were positive.

The Committee developed a three-year safeguarding plan which included an outline of resources required for implementing the plan.

A report was provided for Bishop Smith by the DLP on Standards 2, 3 and 4 and recommendations for action and improvements were incorporated into the child safeguarding plan.

Section 2

Report of the Advisory Case Management Committee on Standards 2, 3 and 4

The Advisory Case Management Committee (ACMC) is appointed by Bishop Smith to work on his behalf to advise on all aspects of case management, including reporting and pastoral care. This Committee works to ensure an effective response is made to complaints and the appropriate pastoral care is put in place.

The members of this Committee include Fr John Byrne (Chair), Marie Gibney (Secretary), Sr Rose King, Barry Lysaght, Martin Marshall and Fr Paul Crosbie. The Bishop and Designated Liaison Persons (Nuala McLoughlin and Fr Sean Henry) give a briefing at each meeting.

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

The ACMC received detailed briefings from the Designated Liaison Persons, Ms Nuala McLoughlin and Fr Sean Henry, with Bishop Smith in attendance. Given the sensitive nature of this information, and in compliance with guidance from the NBSCCCI, this material is published only in the DLP's report to the Bishop.

Standard 3: Care and Support of the Complainant

A new Support Person, Mr. Richard Lowry, has been appointed to continue the excellent work undertaken by Sr Rose King. Mr Lowry is an accredited psychotherapist with the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and has worked for the past ten years in this sector, dividing his time between private practice and working with students in post-primary education. He has also worked with Bethany Support Group, training parishioners for ministry to the bereaved.

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

As part of the up-skilling of the Committee, Fr. Fintan Gavin, Vice-Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Dublin, gave a presentation on the role of canon law in initiating the preliminary investigation.

Section 3

Report of the Safeguarding Children Committee on Quality Assurance in accordance with Standard 7

Quality assurance procedures are a systematic method of assessing the extent to which the seven child safeguarding standards are implemented at all levels within the Diocese of Meath. This is an important method of ensuring that a process of continuous improvement takes place, and of demonstrating accountability and transparency.

In relation to Standard 7, the Safeguarding Children Committee is responsible for:

- **Producing and reviewing the three-year child safeguarding plan of how to implement and maintain standards 1, 5 and 6 across the Diocese**
- **Liaising with the parish safeguarding representatives to ensure the compilation of a parish safeguarding audit**
- **Identifying areas where guidance and support on policy or practice is needed**
- **Ensuring that an annual safeguarding report on Standards 1, 5 and 6 is made to Bishop Smith**
- **Ensuring that records in relation to safeguarding matters are produced and stored securely.**

As indicated above, the DLP is responsible for producing a report to Bishop Smith on Standards 2, 3 and 4.

A three-year child safeguarding plan for the period 2017-20 was produced and adopted by the Safeguarding Children Committee at the April meeting, implemented and reviewed at the specified intervals. The plan included the training plan and the communications plan for 2017.

The annual parish safeguarding audit has been completed, the returns collated, and a report produced by an independent assessor. This assessment recommended that the Resource Team continue to work with parishes in respect of their understanding of the requirements of the reporting template on a case by case basis. It recommended that guidance to parishes could be provided in the form of “Frequently Asked Questions”, particularly where the questions posed in the audit are open to misinterpretation.

The training plan for 2018 is included as Appendix 1 of this report.

No areas for guidance and support on policy and practice were identified in the report of the ACMC. However, a number of new developments consequent on legislation and new guidance from the NBSCCCI have implications for the Committee and will be incorporated in the training plan.

Appendix 1

Training Plan for 2018

This training plan is prepared by David Gavin and Antoinette Shaw. It outlines the work to be undertaken in 2018 to ensure compliance with the seven safeguarding standards.

Standard 1 *Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments*

Guidance will be provided by the trainers at the annual deanery-level training sessions to clergy and parish safeguarding representatives on the following procedures, detailed in the Operational Guidelines:

- **Application form**
- **Declaration form**
- **Interviews and References**
- **Adults involved in Church related activities agree to observe and sign the COB at induction**

- **Parents and children sign consent form which includes code of behaviour.**
- **Anti-bullying policy agreed between leaders and children**
- **Advised supervision ratios**
- **Dealing with accidents/incidents**
- **Risk assessment of activities**
- **One to one contacts with children**
- **Participation of children with specific needs**
- **Procedures for visiting clergy**
- **Use of ICT**
- **External groups using Church property.**

Training will be provided to diocesan personnel who conduct Garda vetting for parishes and schools. Guidance will also be made available in advance of the annual Safeguarding Awareness Day.

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

Training will be provided at the annual deanery-level meetings on all matters pertaining to this Standard, including the following:

- **definitions of abuse**
- **referral procedures operating in the Diocese of Meath**
- **requirements of the new General Data Protection Regulation**
- **complaints procedure**
- **disciplinary process**
- **protected disclosure procedure.**

NBSCCCI training for the Designated Liaison Persons, Advisory Case Management Committee and Support Person will be made available.

Training needs will be assessed as required arising from the Designated Liaison Persons' meetings with the statutory authorities.

Standard 3 *Care and Support for the Complainant*

New guidance from the NBSCCCI will be added to the Operational Guidelines and brought to the attention of all relevant personnel.

Training needs analysis will be carried out on the basis of regular contact with the Support Person.

When necessary, specialist advice is sought from NBSCCCI and statutory agencies.

Standard 4 *Care and Management of the Respondent*

Training will be provided as required by the Advisor.

The guidance from the canonical expert on conducting a preliminary investigation following conclusion of any statutory investigation will be reviewed.

Training needs identified by the Designated Liaison Persons and Advisory Case Management Committee will be provided. Specialist advice will also be sought from NBSCCCI and statutory agencies.

Standard 5 *Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe*

This training plan will be reviewed by the Safeguarding Children Committee on the basis of ongoing training needs analysis.

Training sessions will be evaluated by the Resource Team.

Professional supervision will be made available to diocesan safeguarding personnel.

Standard 6 *Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message*

The communications policy will be reviewed annually.

The revised safeguarding website will regularly updated (www.meathsafeguarding.ie) and new information communicated directly to all clergy and parish safeguarding representatives by email.

Copies of the policy statement will be displayed in churches and buildings where child-related activities take place.

Three safeguarding newsletters will be produced and circulated widely.

Children who act as altar servers or are involved in choirs will be provided with the information leaflets.

Posters in Irish and in Polish have been produced; research will be carried out on whether we need posters/information in other languages.

The annual meeting with Tusla Information Persons will take place.

Contact will be established with local Social Workers and Garda Siochana.

Consultation and Feedback Sessions will take place in accordance with the three year safeguarding plan 2017-2020.

Standard 7 *Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards*

The independent review of parish safeguarding audits will be examined by the trainers and training needs will be assessed accordingly.

Clergy and parish safeguarding representatives will be assisted in completing the safeguarding audit at the end of the year.

As indicated above, training provided by the NBSCCCI will be made available to the following: Safeguarding Children Committee, Advisory Case Management Committee, Designated Liaison Persons, Safeguarding Trainers, Support Person, Advisor, Disciplinary Panel, Garda Vetting Persons and all relevant personnel.

Date for the diary

David Gavin and Antoinette Shaw will run the following training sessions in the coming weeks:

- **an information session for volunteers (sacristans, choir directors, liturgy coordinators, parents etc) in Kingscourt on Wednesday 28 February at 7.30pm for parishes in that area**
- **a training day for new parish safeguarding representatives and other Church personnel in the Trim Castle Hotel on Saturday 24 March. A booking form is available on request. Please email us: info@meathsafeguarding.ie.**

Towards Peace

Towards Peace is a service offering spiritual support to people who have experienced abuse, be it physical, emotional, sexual and/or spiritual abuse, which was perpetrated by Church personnel. The vision of Towards Peace is to provide a safe supportive space for people and their families, whose spiritual life has been damaged by abuse. Through spiritual accompaniment with a trained spiritual director, Towards Peace endeavours to accompany people as they seek their own experience of spiritual peace one step at a time. The service is free of charge. For further information, please contact the Towards Peace office at 01 5053028 or towardspeace@iecon.ie.

Contact details for Diocesan Trainers

David Gavin (087 679 3523)

Antoinette Shaw (086 848 4518)

Contact details for Designated Liaison Persons

Fr Seán Henry (046 943 1251)

Ms Nuala McLoughlin (044 934 8841)

