



**Private and Confidential**

**Review of Safeguarding Practice**

**in the Diocese of Meath**

**undertaken by**

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

**Catholic Church (NBSCCCI)**

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Bishop Michael Smith**

**Date: December 2013**

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## **Background**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) was asked by the Sponsoring Bodies, namely the Episcopal Conference, the Conference of Religious of Ireland and the Irish Missionary Union, to undertake a comprehensive review of safeguarding practice within and across all the Church authorities on the island of Ireland. The purpose of the review is to confirm that current safeguarding practice complies with the standards set down within the guidance issued by the Sponsoring Bodies in February 2009, *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* and whether all known allegations and concerns had been appropriately dealt with. To achieve this task, safeguarding practice in each Church authority is to be reviewed through an examination of case records and through interviews with key personnel involved both within and external to a diocese or other authority.

This report contains the findings of the *Review of Safeguarding Practice in the Diocese of Meath* undertaken by the NBSCCCI in line with the request made to it by the Sponsoring Bodies. It is based upon the case material made available to us by the bishop, along with interviews with selected key personnel who contribute to safeguarding within the diocese. The NBSCCCI believes that all relevant documentation for these cases was passed to the reviewers, and the bishop has confirmed this.

The findings of the review have been shared with a reference group before being submitted to Bishop Smith, along with any recommendations arising from the findings.

## **Introduction**

At the request of Bishop Michael Smith the NBSCCCI engaged in a process of reviewing child safeguarding policy and practice within the Diocese of Meath. The review took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2013, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2014. During the course of the fieldwork case files were examined and interviews were conducted with key personnel in the diocesan safeguarding structure. In addition the reviewers consulted with external safeguarding agencies. The fieldwork was further supplemented by a review of all written policies, procedures, guidance documents and general diocesan safeguarding files. The diocese was also the subject of a HSE audit published in 2012 and this document is referred to when relevant.

The review team would like to take the opportunity to thank Bishop Michael Smith, the diocesan secretary who also acts as safeguarding coordinator, secretary of safeguarding committee, designated persons, trainer and all whom the reviewers met who hold safeguarding roles for their commitment and openness and contribution to the review process.

## **Diocese of Meath**

The Diocese of Meath comprises 69 parishes grouped into 8 deaneries serving communities living in parts of counties Meath, Westmeath Offaly Cavan, Longford and Louth (south of the river Boyne) The diocese covers an area of 1,809 sq. miles and stretches in the west from Tupperclaire Co Westmeath to the Co Meath towns of Drogheda Laytown-Mornington and Stamullen in the East. To the North the diocese covers Kingscourt Co Cavan and stretches as far as Eglisk Parish Birr Co.Offaly to the South. The geographical spread ensures a broad variety of parish settings with parishes ranging from small rural settings to urban settings of the larger towns such as Mullingar, Tullamore, Navan, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne. There are in total 102 priests in active ministry and 24 are retired in the diocese. There are 123 religious priests very few of whom minister in the diocese. There are 9 men studying for the priesthood for the diocese. Bishop Michael Smith was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Meath in 1984. He was appointed coadjutor Bishop in 1989 and succeeded as Bishop in 1990. His association with the diocese goes back further than that having previously served as diocesan secretary and secretary to the Conference of Bishops. The population of the diocese is 303,000 of which 265,000 are Catholic. Bishop Smith commented that he has seen the current population of Catholics in his area more than double in his time.

The diocesan office is based in Mullingar and as well as servicing 69 parishes the diocese also organises an annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes. There are 196 primary schools and 10 secondary schools with direct diocesan involvement. Post primary diocesan schools are located in Mullingar, Navan, Athboy, Kells, Trim Tullamore and Drogheda. A number of priests were educated at St. Finians School Mullingar and later in St. Patrick's College,

Navan. The current president of St Finian's College is the only priest currently working in education in schools at present.

The diocese has international links with countries such as Columbia, Thailand, Burma, Haiti, Ghana, Nigeria, Romania and Zambia. Clergy from these countries, usually undertaking postgraduate studies in Rome and elsewhere in Europe, serve some parishes over the summer months. Presently there are three priests from Nigeria, one from Ghana and another from India serving in ongoing pastoral ministry in the diocese, while some of them are also pursuing post graduate studies in Ireland.

The review process involved the fieldwork team reading all case management files of living priests within the diocese against whom allegations were made. A sample number of case management files of deceased priests against whom allegations were made were also examined.

In addition interviews were held with Bishop Michael Smith, the safeguarding co coordinator, the designated liaison person (DLP) and recently appointed deputy designated person, three members of the safeguarding committee, three members of the advisory case management committee, four parish safeguarding representatives, the person responsible for training, and vetting and the victim support person.

The review also assessed the diocesan document, *Safeguarding Children - Child Protection Policy and Procedures for the Diocese of Meath*, and other documents relating to diocesan safeguarding activities. All other written material provided to the reviewers was evaluated for relevance and accuracy as was the child safeguarding information on the diocesan website. The review process uses the seven standards outlined within the NBSCCCI *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* as an assessment framework.

The purpose of this review is set out within the Terms of Reference that are appended to this report. It seeks to examine how case management practice conforms to expected standards in the Church, both at the time an allegation was received and currently. Just as importantly, the review evaluates the efforts that have been made to create safe environments for children to ensure their current and future safety. To achieve these two objectives, the review process uses the seven standards outlined within *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*, the 2009 document as an assessment framework.

The review was initiated through the signing of a data protection deed, allowing full access by review fieldwork staff from to all case management and diocesan records. This access does not constitute disclosure as the reviewers through the deed were deemed to be nominated data processors of the material for Bishop Smith.

The stated purpose of the review is to confirm that current safeguarding practice complies with the guidance document *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*. The report below discusses the findings of the

fieldworkers under each of the seven standards. Conclusions are drawn regarding both the effectiveness of diocesan policies and practices in preventing abuse and the ability of the relevant personnel within the diocese to assess and manage risk to children. Recommendations for improvements are made where considered appropriate.

## **STANDARDS**

This section provides the findings of the review. The template employed to present the findings are the seven standards, set down and described in the Church's *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*. This guidance was launched in February 2009 and was endorsed and adopted by all the Church authorities that minister on the island of Ireland, including the Diocese of Meath. The seven standards are:

**Standard 1** A written policy on keeping children safe

**Standard 2** Procedures – how to respond to allegations and suspicions in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

**Standard 3** Preventing harm to children:

- recruitment and vetting
- running safe activities for children
- codes of behaviour

**Standard 4** Training and education

**Standard 5** Communicating the Church's safeguarding message:

- to children
- to parents and adults
- to other organisations

**Standard 6** Access to advice and support

**Standard 7** Implementing and monitoring the Standards

Each standard contains a list of criteria, which are indicators that help decide whether this Standard has been met. The criteria give details of the steps that a Church organisation, diocese or religious order, - needs to take to meet the standard and ways of providing evidence that the standard has been met.

**Standard 1**

**A written policy on keeping children safe**

*Each child should be cherished and affirmed as a gift from God with an inherent right to dignity of life and bodily integrity, which shall be respected, nurtured and protected by all.*

Compliance with Standard 1 is only fully achieved when a diocese meets the requirements of all nine criteria against which the standard is measured.

**Criteria**

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
1.1	The Church organisation has a child protection policy that is written in a clear and easily understandable way.	Met fully
1.2	The policy is approved and signed by the relevant leadership body of the Church organisation (e.g. the Bishop of the diocese or provincial of a religious congregation).	Met fully
1.3	The policy states that all Church personnel are required to comply with it.	Met fully
1.4	The policy is reviewed at regular intervals no more than three years apart and is adapted whenever there are significant changes in the organisation or legislation.	Met fully
1.5	The policy addresses child protection in the different aspects of Church work e.g. within a church building, community work, pilgrimages, trips and holidays.	Met fully
1.6	The policy states how those individuals who pose a risk to children are managed.	Met fully
1.7	The policy clearly describes the Church's understanding and definitions of abuse.	Met fully
1.8	The policy states that all current child protection concerns must be fully reported to the civil authorities without delay.	Met fully
1.9	The policy should be created at diocese or congregational level. If a separate policy document at parish or other level is necessary this should be consistent with the diocesan or congregational policy and approved by the relevant diocesan or congregational authority before distribution.	Met fully

The safeguarding children policy and procedures document for the Diocese of Meath, *Safeguarding Children - Child Protection Policy and Procedures for the Diocese of Meath*, was first published in March 2010. In accordance with guidance from the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI)

which requires the regular review of policies and procedures Bishop Smith requested that a review take place in 2012. A comprehensive and intense period of review was undertaken by the diocese safeguarding committee and the current *Safeguarding Children - Child Protection Policy and Procedures for the Diocese of Meath* was published towards the end of 2012.

In reviewing their existing document the safeguarding committee sought to incorporate the following into their revised policy and procedures:

- New documentation / guidance issued by the NBSCCCI since 2010
- Revised Children First Guidance (2011)
- Relevant existing and pending legislation
- The experience of implementing the policy over the previous two years
- Feedback from the HSE Audit 2012

The methodology employed in the policy and procedure document review process involved interrogation of the policy documents current at the time in order to revise, make additions or other amendments as deemed appropriate. The safeguarding committee also devised an online consultation questionnaire inviting parishioners and clergy to make submissions. A consultation and feedback process took place also in two sample parishes and the outcomes informed the review process. As a result of this process, the updated policies and procedures is a comprehensive, readable and usable document presented in both a handbook ring binder format and an electronic format with associated resources material inserted for ease of consultation.

The policy is approved and signed off by Bishop Smith and states that all Church personnel are required to comply with it. The policy as already stated has been subject to review in 2012 and Bishop Smith has indicated his commitment that a further review will take place in 2015.

The policy addresses child protection in the different aspects of the Church's activities. The annual diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes is referenced in detail in this context. In 2013 a revision of the Lourdes child protection policy and procedures in line with the diocesan safeguarding children policy was carried out. The reviewed document also includes a new section on child protection guidance during trips away.

There are clear descriptions of the Church's understanding and definitions of abuse.

In their audit of 2012, the HSE recommended that the diocese *clarify the time scales and circumstances for reporting of allegations and concerns to the civil authorities*. The diocese states clearly in their document that the responsibility lies with the designated liaison person (DLP) to *promptly* refer child protection concerns to the HSE. The guidance in relation to the circumstances for reporting is taken from Appendix 8 of the national *Children First* guidelines.

The HSE audit also recommended that the diocese develop an approach to the management of individuals (Church personnel) who pose risk to children. The diocese now incorporates the guidance from the NBSCCCI in this respect, which is contained in Resource M (1) of the diocesan policy document.

The reviewers consider that all criteria under Standard 1 have been fully met.

## Standard 2

### Management of allegations

*Children have a right to be listened to and heard: Church organisations must respond effectively and ensure any allegations and suspicions of abuse are reported both within the Church and to civil authorities.*

Compliance with Standard 2 is only fully achieved when a diocese meets the requirements of all seven criteria against which the standard is measured.

### Criteria

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
2.1	There are clear child protection procedures in all Church organisations that provide step-by-step guidance on what action to take if there are allegations or suspicions of abuse of a child (historic or current).	Met fully
2.2	The child protection procedures are consistent with legislation on child welfare civil guidance for child protection and written in a clear, easily understandable way.	Met fully
2.3	There is a designated officer or officer(s) with a clearly defined role and responsibilities for safeguarding children at diocesan or congregational level.	Met fully
2.4	There is a process for recording incidents, allegations and suspicions and referrals. These will be stored securely, so that confidential information is protected and complies with relevant legislation.	Met partially
2.5	There is a process for dealing with complaints made by adults and children about unacceptable behaviour towards children, with clear timescales for resolving the complaint.	Met fully
2.6	There is guidance on confidentiality and information-sharing which makes clear that the protection of the child is the most important consideration. The Seal of Confession is absolute.	Met fully
2.7	The procedures include contact details for local child protection services e.g. (Republic of Ireland) the local Health Service Executive and An Garda Síochána; (Northern Ireland) the local health and social services trust and the PSNI.	Met fully

**Table 1**

**Incidence of Safeguarding allegations received within Diocese of Meath from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1975 up to the time of the Review.**

1	Number of priests incardinated into the Meath Diocese against whom allegations have been made since the 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1975 up to the date of the Review	<b>11</b>
2	Total number of allegations received by the diocese since 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1975	<b>23*</b>
3	Number of allegations reported to An Garda Síochána involving priests of the diocese since 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1975 – this figure includes some allegations that were notified by the Gardai to the diocese	<b>7</b>
4	Number of allegations reported to the HSE (or the health boards which preceded the setting up of the HSE) involving priests of the diocese since 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1975: This figure includes some allegations that were notified by the health services to the diocese	<b>7</b>
5	Number of priests (still members of the diocese) against whom an allegation was made and who were living at the date of the Review	<b>4</b>
6	Number of priests against whom an allegation was made and who are deceased	<b>7</b>
7	Number of priests against whom an allegation has been made and who are in ministry.	<b>2</b>
8	Number of priests against whom an allegation was made and who are “Out of Ministry”, but are still members of the diocese.	<b>1</b>
9	Number of priests against whom an allegation was made and who are retired.	<b>1</b>
10	Number of priests against whom an allegations was made and who have left the diocese/priesthood	<b>0</b>
11	Number of priests of the diocese who have been convicted of having committed an offence or offences against a child or young person since the 1 <sup>st</sup> January 1975	<b>1</b>

**Footnote:** The term allegation in this table includes complaints and expressions of concern

*\* Of these 23 allegations only 7 were received in the first instance by the diocese and subsequently referred to the civil authorities. The number 23 refers to the total allegations made known to the diocese.*

The above table indicates that since January 1975, a total of 23 allegations have been made against eleven priests in the diocese. There are four priests living against whom allegations have been made and seven priests who are deceased. In the cases of the deceased priests only one allegation was made known to the diocese while the priest was still alive. The most recent allegation was made to the diocese in January 2012 and related to a priest who was deceased some years earlier The HSE were informed and the matter was investigated by An Garda Síochána and resulted in no further action. In that

case the designated person had contact with the complainant. In the majority of cases involving deceased priests, the allegations relate to the 1940s 1950s and 1960s. In order to differentiate between the four living priests in the discussion below, they will each be identified by a distinct capital letter.

Of the living priests Fr. A was convicted in 2012 of child sexual abuse against a total of 10 children in the 1960s and 1970s. The allegations, which were admitted, related to abuse of boys in a number of different settings. Fr. A was sentenced to two years imprisonment and is due for release in spring 2014. Concerns in relation to Fr. A were first made known to Bishop Smith in 1999 by a bishop in another diocese, as some of the allegations related to a period when the priest was on loan to that diocese. Bishop Smith immediately removed this priest from ministry and arranged that he reside in a monastery.

In 2006, Fr. A took a High Court Judicial Review of his case which resulted in criminal charges relating to his alleged abuse in the other diocese being dismissed. He remained out of ministry but eventually left the monastery and went to live in a house in a rural location which had been left to him by a deceased relative.

In 2008 a fresh Garda investigation commenced arising out of new allegations dating back to the 1970s which involved a substantial number of complainants. Whilst the Garda investigation was on-going, the Diocese of Meath was not informed of the details of the allegations and the complainants were not identified. This was a source of frustration for the bishop and the designated person. They had to rely on the media or on the respondent priest to inform them of developments in the case. This, they believe undermined their ability to seek to engage in a timely manner with the complainants.

The Garda investigation resulted in the conviction of Fr. A. Both Bishop Smith and the designated person spoke of the difficulty they had in engaging with this priest as he was highly resistant to support or contact with the diocesan authorities and the assessment of on-going risk was therefore thwarted from their perspective. Bishop Smith reflected that when Fr. A was convicted, he (the bishop) felt obligated to go to the parish where most of the victims came from to express his personal sadness and to apologise at Mass that weekend.

In the cases involving the three other living priests, each involved a single complainant. The allegations related to periods in 1974, 1990 and 2004 respectively. Garda investigations were conducted in all three, none of which led to a prosecution. In the case of Fr. B, a file was sent to the DPP and returned with no prosecution recommended. In the two other cases the HSE conducted investigations, which in the case of Fr. C led to a finding of 'inconclusive' and in the case of Fr. D to the conclusion of 'allegation unfounded'.

One of the four living priests is retired and out of ministry and the other two priests against whom allegations were found to be unsubstantiated are in active ministry. The reviewers are satisfied that the status of both priests in full ministry is an appropriate one

taking into account all information available to Bishop Smith following investigation of the allegations by the civil authorities.

In the case of Fr 'C' a verbal allegation was made by a complainant who declined to make a formal complaint or written statement to An Garda Siochana. The HSE investigated the matter and the diocese was informed that there was no evidence to substantiate the allegation and the investigation was found to be inconclusive. The reviewers noted that consultation took place with the HSE and An Garda Siochana. There is evidence on the file that the DLP endeavoured to contact the complainant. The file also indicated a good level of co-operation between the diocese, Fr.'C' and the civil authorities.

The case of Fr.'D' suggests good inter agency communication. The file showed evidence that the bishop took immediate action to consider the risks involved in the case. An investigation by the HSE took place, An Garda Siochana also carried out an investigation. The complaint was withdrawn by the complainant.

The reviewers examined the files of the four priests still living, as well as of those of three deceased priests. The following issues or themes emerged as a result of the examination of these files:

- Generally the files examined did not show evidence of actions relating to safety or risk assessment undertaken in relation to priests who are subject of allegations. As an example, in the case of Fr. A the priest was promptly removed from active ministry by Bishop Smith and has never returned to ministry. He was placed in a monastery where he remained for four years whilst investigations were on-going, but had subsequently lived alone in a rural area. The file did not show evidence of a risk management or safety plan in relation to this priest until the months prior to his conviction in 2012. The diocese did seek advice from the NBSCCCI in this case as to how to proceed. The reviewers noted that some months were allowed go by before evidence of implementing that advice was recorded on file, for example, the issuing of a written precept.
- Except in the case of Fr. A, the files do not show details of Church canonical actions taken following the conclusion of the investigations by the civil authorities.
- Not all victim outreach and support given to victims and complainants was documented in the files. In fact very little narrative alluded to the contacts made and interaction with a significant number of complainants on the parts of the bishop, designated liaison person (DLP) and support person. The bishop held the view that his contacts with many complainants were of a pastoral nature and he therefore believed that they did not need to be recorded. In two particular cases he explained that the complainants would only come forward if the meetings went unrecorded. From their discussions with Bishop Smith, the DLP and support person and from documentation they examined, the reviewers have concluded that

- a great deal of effort has in fact been made by the diocese to respond in a compassionate, pastoral and supportive way to complainants. It is recommended however that for the sake of thoroughness all contact with complainants and actions taken to support them must be noted and recorded in the case management files. By not recording all actions that take place the diocese is not doing justice to the positive work its staff has actually carried out.
- No evidence was seen of the formal appointment of a priest advisor for priests against whom allegations were made. In the case of Fr. A, he refused a support person but the DLP eventually fell into this role by virtue of the fact that Fr. A knew him and accepted him. However, having someone occupy these two potentially conflicting roles is not recommended.
  - There is evidence that the relationship between the diocese and the civil authorities has improved in recent years, with information being exchanged in particular between the HSE and the diocese. A protocol has been developed between the diocese and the HSE to formally meet twice yearly to exchange information and discuss and review safeguarding issues. At any other time the understanding exists that the door is open for informal discussions between the HSE and the diocesan DLP.
  - In the majority of the files examined, the HSE and An Garda Síochána were appropriately notified of a child sexual abuse allegation. Written notifications of allegations were not always made by the diocese on the recommended forms. In one case, that of Fr. A, a significant delay of 18 months before the diocese formally notified the HSE of the allegations was noted. The reviewers accept that the diocese did seek to ensure that the priest who received the initial complaint did refer the matter to the authorities without delay. The diocese sought to further satisfy itself that the HSE was aware of the allegation through informal contact with the HSE but *formal written* notification was not in evidence on file until the above mentioned period of time.
  - The reviewers were made aware that the cases of the four living priests have been discussed at the diocesan Advisory Case Management Committee. It is important that these discussions and decisions reached at this committee are formally recorded in the relevant case management file.

The diocesan safeguarding policy document follows the guidance on recording and data protection issued by the NBSCCCI. Confidential files and records are protected and stored securely and are only accessed by Bishop Smith and the DLP.

The diocese maintains separate files in relation to legal matters between the diocese and complainants / victims. Having examined these legal files, the reviewers are of the

opinion that they should be integrated with the case management files to which they are related.

The diocesan policy document outlines very clearly and in some detail a step by step guidance on what action to be taken if allegations or suspicions of abuse arise. The child protection procedures described are consistent with current legislation on child welfare and with civil guidance on child protection and are written in a clear easily understandable way as required in Criterion 2.2. A flow chart that describes clearly the steps in the diocesan child protection reporting process is set out in that section of the policy headed *Responding to concerns*.

A new designated liaison person (DLP) has been in post since spring 2009. The previous incumbent of this post had fulfilled this role since the implementation of the framework document and had been the DLP who dealt with complaints prior to 2009. More recently a new deputy designated liaison person (D/DLP) has been appointed by the bishop. The role and responsibilities of the DLP are clearly defined in the policy document and are consistent with the guidance of the NSBCCCI in this respect. The current DLP is a parish priest in a medium sized town. The D/DLP is a lay person who has been highly involved in the development of the child protection policy, training, administration in the diocese. The bishop has given an indication that he will in the near future make the DLP role one for a lay person to occupy. This thinking is in line with NSBCCCI thinking on this matter and it is suggested that the bishop makes this change as soon as is practicable.

### **Recommendation 1**

#### **That Bishop Smith considers assigning the DLP role to a lay person.**

Resource H of the diocesan policy document entitled *Disciplinary and grievance procedures* offers clear guidance for all church personnel in dealing with complaints made by adults and children about unacceptable behaviour towards children. Resource H states:

- *The code of behaviour, which reflects a child-centred ethos, will be issued to, and signed by, all Church personnel to indicate their acceptance of its provisions.*
- *Cases of minor misconduct or unsatisfactory performance are usually best dealt with informally. Sometimes additional training and advice is what is needed. Where an informal approach is not working, then the formal process may be invoked.*

The formal process involves the filling in of a complaints form and the matter is then brought before a disciplinary committee drawn from a diocesan disciplinary panel for resolution.

The disciplinary and grievance procedures as outlined in the diocesan safeguarding policy document outline a systematic process to be taken by the diocese when a

complaint is made in relation to church personnel working with children and clear timescales for dealing with the matter are outlined within the procedure.

The HSE Audit 2012 recommended that the diocese would revise its policy document to more fully address the issue of confidentiality. The reviewers can confirm that the policy document now includes the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2011) guidelines on confidentiality and it therefore leaves no ambiguity in this area.

In line with Criterion 2.7 of the 2009 NBSCCCI's *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland*, contact details for local child protection services and An Garda Siochana are provided in the diocesan policies and procedures document.

The reviewers consider that the Diocese of Meath has met all but one criterion in relation to Standard 2.

In their feedback to Bishop Smith on December 11<sup>th</sup> last, the reviewers expressed their concerns regarding the case management files and pointed out the need for improvements in how these files are structured and organised and in the level of detail contained. The advice provided was immediately acted on and the case management files went through a process of reorganisation over the period between that fieldwork visit and the later one on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 and this is commended.

However, some case management file details are still lacking. For instance, records of the support person's work and reports from the advisory committee meetings on cases discussed are two examples. To improve the quality of the files in general all files and documents relating to a case should be included in the case file.

Criterion 2.4 is deemed fully met in relation to the safe-keeping of the records in a secure and confidential environment.

## **Recommendation 2**

**That the DLP, as case manager, must ensure that each case management file should contain records of all work done in relation to the case, including the work done by the victim support person and details of the discussion of the case at the Advisory Case Management Committee. To facilitate this development, the DLP should be designated the case files manager.**

## **Personnel**

Resource Team: Under the leadership of Bishop Smith the diocese has the benefit of a strong, dynamic and progressive safeguarding team. The safeguarding structure that has developed has a relatively flat management profile, with the Safeguarding Resource Team at the centre, supported by the bishop. The resource team is comprised of the safeguarding coordinator, who is also the chancellor of the diocese and secretary to the bishop, the person responsible for training and Garda vetting and the advisor for policy development, who is also the D/DLP. The Safeguarding Resource Team acts as the executive group that carries out the tasks identified and prioritised by the Safeguarding Committee. The resource team in turn can bring matters to that committee for discussion and decision. The resource team impressed as a dynamic, enthusiastic and hardworking unit.

Safeguarding Committee: The Safeguarding Committee has six members, one of these members, who now acts as the committee's secretary, came on board in 2009. She is the key advisor for the development of policy and procedures and was the key person in the revising and redrafting of the diocesan policy and procedures document that was launched in 2012. She also is involved in training. She is a volunteer staff member but appears to contribute hugely in terms of time and expertise.

The Safeguarding Committee is chaired by Bishop Smith and to date has been meeting 2-3 times per year. The aim is for it to have four meetings per year from 2014 onwards. The term of office for committee members is four years, but a retiring member can serve a second term if requested to. The committee members met spoke about a current project to develop a clear practice guideline on the use of CCTV and webcams in churches which capture images of children. They suggested that the NBSCCCI would convene small working groups, as it had done in relation to training, to deal with issues that all dioceses and parishes face.

Both the resource team and the safeguarding committee are aware of the need to continually update their own procedures to take account of national developments.

A number of key staff have more than one separate but related safeguarding role. As already mentioned, the safeguarding coordinator is also the diocesan chancellor, the bishop's secretary and a canon lawyer and he is a member of the Resource Team, the Safeguarding Committee and the Advisory Case Management Committee. These memberships allow him to have a wide overview of child safeguarding activity in the diocese. The reviewers had the opportunity to meet with the three key personnel, the Safeguarding Resource Team members - plus members of the Safeguarding Committee, the Advisory Case Management Committee and Parish Safeguarding Representatives. They were impressed with the motivation, enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism of the members of the different groups with whom they came into contact during the course of this review. The reviewers were left in no doubt that the diocese is committed to the provision of the highest standards and practice of safeguarding children.

Advisory Case Management Committee: This committee was formed in 2009, the members having been invited to take part by Bishop Smith and it has met on five occasions, essentially once per year since then. There are six members of this committee, including the bishop's secretary who acts as secretary and take minutes of the meetings. All of the lay members of the committee were appointed because of their relevant professional expertise. They include the fields of law, counselling (two members) and education. The reviewers met with three members together to get a sense of how the committee functions (in fact the reviewers met all members of this committee in the course of the review, but only three of them together to discuss the work of the committee). Meetings are convened by Bishop Smith, and the members are given the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting at the start of each meeting. The names of priests against whom an allegation or concern has been raised are not disclosed, with priests referred to by a letter. The committee members are only aware of the identity of the priest who received a conviction. The bishop and DLP attend each meeting to brief members.

In relation to their specific role as members of the advisory panel a number of points arose as follows:

- Members generally were unclear of the terms of reference of the panel.
- Members did not receive specific training for their role as committee members and they were not informed in time about training provided last year by the NBSCCCI.
- Members were of the opinion that once yearly meetings were too infrequent to allow the group members to gel and to form a group identity and sense of shared purpose.
- Members believe they are an underused resource.
- Members believe that meetings should be convened at key times, such as when there is a change in the status of a case or when a fresh concern emerges. As a consequence they felt their role was at times 'retrospective', in that as a committee they were 'rubber stamping' decisions already made by the bishop, by virtue of the fact that the committee did not convene in a pertinent and timely way.
- Members believed that they could be more objective in case management discussions if the bishop and DLP were not in attendance for that part of the meeting and they voiced the view that decisions arrived at following full discussion could be given to the bishop in a written format.

Bishop Smith's interest and involvement in safeguarding matters within the diocese is acknowledged, however, the reviewers are of the opinion that his not attending the case management discussion may allow for greater freedom and objectivity amongst panel members in their discussions. Communications between the committee and the bishop could be formalised, by the bishop receiving minutes of the discussions and the recommendations made by the committee following each meeting. The bishop's secretary who attends the advisory committee should do so in his capacity as canon lawyer and another member should undertake the secretarial work of the group.

The reviewers are of the opinion that the advisory committee is a valuable resource to the diocese in the management of cases, but that they are underused and under resourced and so have not achieved their full potential. A training needs assessment of the advisory committee members should be undertaken. The terms of reference for the panel should be established. At the time of writing the reviewers understand from the safeguarding coordinator that this process is in planning. It would be more advantageous if the committee was convened at appropriate and specific times when their expertise could be called upon, for instance in advance of the release of Fr. A from prison in spring 2014.

Because the advisory case management committee is currently convened on a once yearly basis and in light of the fact that most of the committee members have little or no contact with the wider diocesan safeguarding team, these members find themselves to be in an isolated position. This could be counteracted if the bishop were to consider joining the Meath Diocese Advisory Case Management Committee with an advisory panel from an adjoining diocese. Bringing the committee members together with people involved in other parts of the diocesan safeguarding effort would also help mitigate any sense of detachment. The way the committee operates at present does not allow the members to deal with a sufficient workload to keep their skills honed. If he cannot generate sufficient work for the committee, Bishop Smith could consider winding it down and joining the Meath Diocese to the National Case Management Reference Group (NCMRG).

### **Recommendation 3**

**That the Bishop should ask the diocesan trainer to undertake training needs assessment of the Advisory Panel in line with their request.**

### **Recommendation 4**

**That Bishop Smith gives consideration to joining the national NCMRG, if there is insufficient work for Meath Diocesan Advisory Panel.**

Notes of case discussions at Advisory Case Management Committee meetings should be inserted in the relevant case management file. The reviewers noted that there was a brief reference in the case file of Fr. A that the case had been discussed at the advisory committee, but no further details regarding the discussion or decisions made were noted on file. In the case of Fr. D there is reference to a request by the DLP to the HSE social worker for further information 'necessary for our Case Management Committee', but there is no evidence on file to indicate that this discussion ever took place. There is a brief one line reference in the case file of Fr. C. that the case was discussed by the advisory committee, but there is no detail recorded.

The need to have a written risk assessment and the development of a safety plan in each case is considered by the reviewers as an important part of case management. In addition the safety plan should be reviewed at regular intervals.

**Recommendation 5**

**That the DLP ensures that case management discussions and decisions of the Advisory Case Management Committee including safety plan reviews be clearly documented and recorded in the relevant case management files.**

**Victim Support Person:**

The victim support person appointed by the bishop is a religious sister with many years' experience in counselling and pastoral care and who has been in post since the late 1990's. She is also a member of the diocesan Advisory Case Management Committee. Although on sabbatical at the time of the review, she made herself available to meet with the reviewers and they would like to acknowledge her willingness and interest in doing this.

The reviewers had not been aware from examining the case management files of her many contacts and work with a number of complainants as this work had not been documented. This appears to relate to the rather informal and unstructured approach the diocese had previously taken in relation to record keeping rather than any lapse on the part of the support person. Indeed she had kept case notes in her own filing system, but these details were not apparent to the reviewers from the documented files which were made available to the reviewers.

In discussion with the support person it became evident to the reviewers that her work in a number of cases was pivotal to assisting the process of healing for the complainant. Not only were people counselled in the first instance and referred on to specialist counselling in some cases, but the support person facilitated a number of meetings between Bishop Smith and the complainants. This in itself proved hugely beneficial for the people involved. In one case the complainant chose not to initiate legal proceedings but wished instead to meet with his abuser and seek an apology. The support person facilitated this meeting which concluded to the satisfaction of the complainant.

The support person spoke of the lack of clarity and structure of her role as support person. The support person's role is outlined in the policy document. However the reviewer's consider that further elaboration and training may be required to further enhance the structure of the role.

### Standard 3

#### Preventing Harm to Children

*This standard requires that all procedures and practices relating to creating a safe environment for children be in place and effectively implemented. These include having safe recruitment and vetting practices in place, having clear codes of behaviour for adults who work with children and by operating safe activities for children.*

Compliance with Standard 3 is only fully achieved when a diocese meets the requirements of all twelve criteria against which the standard is measured. These criteria are grouped into three areas, safe recruitment and vetting, codes of behaviour and operating safe activities for children.

#### Criteria – safe recruitment and vetting

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
3.1	There are policies and procedures for recruiting Church personnel and assessing their suitability to work with children.	Met fully
3.2	The safe recruitment and vetting policy is in line with best practice guidance.	Met fully
3.3	All those who have the opportunity for regular contact with children, or who are in positions of trust, complete a form declaring any previous court convictions and undergo other checks as required by legislation and guidance and this information is then properly assessed and recorded.	Met fully

#### Criteria – Codes of behaviour

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
3.4	The Church organisation provides guidance on appropriate/ expected standards of behaviour of, adults towards children.	Met fully
3.5	There is guidance on expected and acceptable behaviour of children towards other children (anti-bullying policy).	Met fully
3.6	There are clear ways in which Church personnel can raise allegations and suspicions about unacceptable behaviour towards children by other Church personnel or volunteers ('whistle-blowing'), confidentially if necessary.	Met fully

<b>3.7</b>	There are processes for dealing with children’s unacceptable behaviour that do not involve physical punishment or any other form of degrading or humiliating treatment.	Met fully
<b>3.8</b>	Guidance to staff and children makes it clear that discriminatory behaviour or language in relation to any of the following is not acceptable: race, culture, age, gender, disability, religion, sexuality or political views.	Met fully
<b>3.9</b>	Policies include guidelines on the personal/ intimate care of children with disabilities, including appropriate and inappropriate touch.	Met fully

**Criteria – Operating safe activities for children**

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
<b>3.10</b>	There is guidance on assessing all possible risks when working with children – especially in activities that involve time spent away from home.	Met fully
<b>3.11</b>	When operating projects/ activities children are adequately supervised and protected at all times.	Met fully
<b>3.12</b>	Guidelines exist for appropriate use of information technology (such as mobile phones, email, digital cameras, websites, the Internet) to make sure that children are not put in danger and exposed to abuse and exploitation.	Met fully

In section 1.5 of the Meath Diocese *Safeguarding Children - Child Protection Policy and Procedures 2012* document in relation to recruitment and supporting employees and volunteers it states: ‘Safe practice starts with safe recruitment procedures’. The policy goes on to describe in detail the process of recruiting and selecting Church personnel. There are a number of supporting resources including for example, copies of volunteer application forms, volunteer reference forms, declaration forms, and forms used in the completion of the Garda vetting process. These are all available on the diocesan website. The reviewers are satisfied that the diocese has in place a safe recruitment system for its volunteers to work in Church activities with children and young people.

A member of the diocesan safeguarding team is registered as the Authorised Signatory for the vetting of Church personnel for the diocese, following attendance at training with the Garda Central Vetting Unit in 2009. As part of the Diocese of Meath’s commitment to best practice in its recruitment process, specific guidelines were put in place which requires the vetting of personnel commissioned in the Diocese of Meath for pastoral outreach at parish or diocesan level, e.g. school catechists, youth ministry, parish pastoral coordinators, prospective candidates for admission to seminary formation and diocesan

Lourdes pilgrimage assistants. All other volunteers are required to complete the recruitment process including signing a Declaration Form and the Code of Behaviour.

In 2012 the NBSCCCI published two documents: *Guidance on Vetting* and *Vetting Appeals Panel*. The Meath Diocese adopted these guidelines for implementing the Garda Vetting Policy. Since 2009 a systematic process of vetting has been undertaken in the diocese and in 2013 alone, 156 personnel were vetted including priests. In total, 622 Church personnel have been vetted to date. All vetting records are securely kept at the diocesan office.

In 2013 the diocese set in motion a Process Review Panel to examine appeals arising out of the vetting process.

The reviewers are satisfied that Meath Diocese has adopted a diligent and proactive approach in its recruitment and vetting procedures that is in line with best practice.

Criteria 3.4 to 3.9 under this standard are considered by the reviewers to be fully met. The codes of behaviour that are presented in the Diocese of Meath policy document are comprehensive. In their revised 2012 document the diocese has included an anti-bullying policy as well as an equality statement. These were areas which the HSE audit found were lacking in the policy document at the time of that review. The diocese has also added guidance on including disabled children in Church activities and the specific care issues that may arise in that situation.

The diocesan policy also includes detailed guidelines in relation to disciplinary and grievance procedures. Disciplinary situations include misconduct and /or poor performance. Grievances are concerns, problems or complaints that Church personnel raise. The resource material also includes a complaints form. Prior to the HSE audit the diocese had in place a disciplinary process. The HSE recommended in its audit report that a whistle blowing process be developed. This process was subsequently adopted and incorporated into the diocesan safeguarding policy

In relation to visiting priests, Meath Diocese has the policy of requesting a celebret and/letter of recommendation from the priest's bishop or superior. The diocese has most recently brought in an additional requirement which takes the form of an '*Interim*' *Testimonial Letter*, which is a detailed document to be completed by the visiting priest's bishop or provincial and which must be passed by the diocesan Safeguarding Committee prior to the priest engaging in parish work. The Action Plan 2012-2015 indicates that, when developed, the national guidance on visiting clergy will be adopted.

The policy contains detailed guidance on the assessment of all possible risks when working with children and includes guidance on risk management for activities undertaken away from home. There is very clear guidance on supervision and on adult to children supervisory ratios that meet Criterion 3.11. There is detailed guidance on the use of images of children involved in Church related activities as there is on the appropriate use of information technology. The reviewers were most impressed by the excellent

safeguarding work undertaken by the diocesan safeguarding personnel and the diocese must be commended for the responsible approach adopted in relation to child safeguarding. The reviewers are satisfied that all criteria in relation to Standard 3 are fully met.

## Standard 4

### Training and Education

All Church personnel should be offered training in child protection to maintain high standards and good practice.

#### Criteria

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
4.1	All Church personnel who work with children are inducted into the Church's policy and procedures on child protection when they begin working within Church organisations.	Met fully
4.2	Identified Church personnel are provided with appropriate training for keeping children safe with regular opportunities to update their skills and knowledge.	Met fully
4.3	Training is provided to those with additional responsibilities such as recruiting and selecting staff, dealing with complaints, disciplinary processes, managing risk, acting as designated person.	Met partially
4.4	Training programmes are approved by National Board for Safeguarding Children and updated in line with current legislation, guidance and best practice.	Met fully

The Diocese of Meath has demonstrated its commitment to creating a culture of awareness of safeguarding issues through the training it provides to its Church personnel. In 2006 Bishop Smith invited two HSE Children First Information and Advice Officers to deliver the *Keeping Safe* programme within the diocese. That programme was delivered on a rolling basis throughout the diocese until 2012 when the diocese adopted the new training programme, *Training and Support Materials for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church*, devised by the NBSCCCI. The diocese's current training coordinator became an accredited trainer in this new programme. All new parish safeguarding representatives are required to undergo this training.

The diocesan policy states that all clergy, parish safeguarding representatives and Church personnel who have attended the previous *Keeping Safe* training will be offered regular opportunities to update their skills and knowledge through periodic safeguarding training.

The diocesan policy states that all church personnel are required to comply with the policy and procedures document. The reviewers are aware that all personnel are required to sign up to the code of behaviour for Church personnel document in order to ensure compliance. In a similar vein all Church personnel who have undergone safeguarding

training are required to sign their compliance to the policy, procedures and practices set out in the diocesan policy in order to ensure that all responsibilities are taken seriously by all concerned.

In the course of this review the National Board for Safeguarding Children in Ireland (NBSCCCI) became aware of a situation which suggested that a priest of the diocese did not act in a prompt fashion to information which was conveyed to him which at the time reflected a potential child at risk situation. It later transpired that the information related to a situation involving adults. The point raised for the NBSCCCI was the fact that specific safeguarding guidelines which are in place for all church personnel in the Meath Diocese were not followed in this instance. The matter was brought to the attention of the safeguarding coordinator by the NBSCCCI and the situation was dealt with in a prompt, systematic and responsible way, and training for the priest has been pursued by the diocese.

All members of the Safeguarding Committee are required to attend safeguarding children training also. The Resource Team have to date overseen the safeguarding training of 1,984 Church personnel in the diocese and this is commended.

For a number of years the diocese has included a specific training on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults to youth and staff travelling on the diocesan Lourdes pilgrimage.

The diocese has two trainers, both of whom have other key safeguarding roles. None the less they have succeeded in providing a range of training programmes to a substantial number of Church personnel over the last five years. Their enthusiasm, energy and commitment are commended. In this respect, Criteria 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4 of this standard are considered fully met.

The reviewers are aware that training has been provided to those with additional responsibilities such as for example an information session held with the incoming Disciplinary and Appeals panel (2013), training in safe recruitment and vetting (2011); Keeping Safe Disability Awareness (2011), Training in Recording, Storage of Data and Data Protection (2010), and training for Support Persons (2010). However, it was noted that training with a particular emphasis on the areas of assessing and managing risk in relation to priests against whom complaints have been made needs to be accessed for the Designated Liaison Person, this was something which the person in that role had requested. The training needs of the advisory committee have already been discussed under recommendation 7 in Standard 2 above. Criterion 4.3 is therefore considered to be only partially met.

It is noted that the Training Plan in the diocesan *Safeguarding Children Child Protection Policy and Procedures for the Diocese of Meath* document lists as priority 3, *Target: Particular skills training will be offered to personnel with additional responsibilities*. The reviewers are aware that the safeguarding coordinator has requested assistance from the NBSCCCI in the provision of targeted training.

## Standard 5

### Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

*This standard requires that the Church's safeguarding policies and procedures be successfully communicated to Church personnel and parishioners (including children). This can be achieved through the prominent display of the Church policy, making children aware of their right to speak out and knowing who to speak to, having the Designated Person's contact details clearly visible, ensuring Church personnel have access to contact details for child protection services, having good working relationships with statutory child protection agencies and developing a communication plan which reflects the Church's commitment to transparency.*

#### Criteria

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
5.1	The child protection policy is openly displayed and available to everyone.	Met fully
5.2	Children are made aware of their right to be safe from abuse and who to speak to if they have concerns.	Met partially
5.3	Everyone in Church organisations knows who the designated person is and how to contact them.	Met fully
5.4	Church personnel are provided with contact details of local child protection services, such as Health and Social Care Trusts / Health Service Executive, PSNI, An Garda Síochána, telephone helplines and the designated person.	Met fully
5.5	Church organisations establish links with statutory child protection agencies to develop good working relationships in order to keep children safe.	Met fully
5.6	Church organisations at diocesan and religious order level have an established communications policy which reflects a commitment to transparency and openness.	Met fully

The diocese has 248 parish safeguarding representatives. There is a policy of having no less than two representatives for every parish and several parishes have three or more representatives. These people give voluntarily of their time and have all undergone safeguarding training. The reviewers met four safeguarding representatives drawn from various parishes/deaneries across the diocese. All spoke enthusiastically and with clarity about what they understood their role entailed. They are familiar with their parish activities and are available to Church personnel and parishioners with regard to child

welfare issues related to Church run activities. They have responsibility to ensure that the safeguarding poster is in place in each church and ensure that parish activities are run in a manner which ensures the safety and wellbeing of children involved, whether they are in children's choirs, attending children's liturgies or act as altar servers. They have to ensure that the safeguarding procedures are in place for groups wishing to use parish centres or halls for activities with children. They ensure that safeguarding information regarding the diocesan safeguarding policy and procedures is disseminated throughout the parish and that the policies and procedures are fully implemented. They ensure that safeguarding information is regularly included in the parish newsletters. The reviewers were impressed with the commitment, energy and awareness of their role which the parish safeguarding representatives (PSRs) demonstrated.

In communicating the safeguarding role and message the PSRs in the Diocese of Meath participated in 'Safeguarding Awareness Day' in October 2013 when they gave a short presentation at Masses in the diocese about safeguarding activities in the parishes. This was the first time this initiative took place and the feedback was positive. In November each year, PSRs are responsible for undertaking the parish self-audits and for reporting back to the diocesan office through their parish priests. This audit is assessed each year by an independent auditor and the information generated is contained in the *Diocesan Annual Safeguarding Report*. These annual reports are available on the diocesan *Safeguarding Children* website and are an invaluable and transparent form of communication.

The PSRs who we met spoke very positively of the support and training they receive from the diocesan office, in particular from the resource person / trainer who keeps in very regular contact with them. They believe that this contact helps them to feel more confident in their role. Between them, the diocesan secretary / safeguarding coordinator and training resource person endeavour to visit most parishes at least once yearly, primarily to offer support and to hear feedback from clergy and parishioners.. This is commendable.

Whilst the PSRs have good contact with each other at deanery level, where they are brought together twice yearly for training purposes, the reviewers consider that a Diocesan Forum of all PSRs could have a unifying and enhancing effect, where the hard work of the PSRs could be recognised and celebrated.

The reviewers agree that Criteria 5.1, 5.3 and 5.4 are fully met. In relation to Criterion 5.2, the reviewers would like to see more structured involvement of children in the creation of communication materials. The active involvement of children in helping in the development of the safeguarding message for themselves would itself have an overall positive safeguarding effect. The Resource Team members have indicated that they are aware that more needs to be done to improve the dissemination of the safeguarding message in a child-friendly way to all children involved in all Church activities. In recent months a child specific leaflet has been produced for altar servers and this is commended. The Safeguarding Children Committee has already nominated two children's choirs for consultation on preparing the next child- friendly Newsletter. For Meath Diocese to fully

meet the requirements of Criterion 5.2, more needs to be done to communicate the safeguarding message in an accessible and easily understood way to every child involved in every Church related activity. Criterion 5.2 is deemed at this point to be partially met.

**Recommendation 6**

**That the Safeguarding Children Committee continues to give priority to developing literature and raising awareness sessions to inform children of their right to feel and to be safe, and to informing and empowering them to speak with the appropriate people if they have any concern about abuse within the Church.**

The reviewers have spoken by telephone to a senior HSE representative and are satisfied that good working relationships exist between the HSE and the diocese. Both agencies have come together on a more frequent basis in recent years in order to share information regarding safeguarding matters. They have agreed to meet formally twice yearly and to review all safeguarding concerns together. The HSE representative believes that communication has improved particularly since the current DLP took up post in spring 2009 and commented on the professional approach adopted by this person.

The reviewers met with a representative of An Garda Síochána who echoed the comments made by the HSE. It was felt that the joint *Keeping Safe* training that the diocese previously undertook with the HSE and which was also attended by members of An Garda Síochána, helped to improve communication between the diocese and t An Garda Síochána. Criterion 5.5 is fully met.

The diocesan policy document contains a very detailed Communications Policy. The safeguarding coordinator looks after communications for the diocese. The Meath Diocese website home page has a link to a dedicated Meath *Safeguarding Children* website. This site contained a notification that the NBSCCI Review was to take place and extended an invitation to any victim of abuse who had not come forward before now to do so. The *Safeguarding Children* website is impressive in its content and transparency. The diocesan safeguarding policy document is available on the website. The Resource Team also encourages the PSRs to use the parish newsletters to regularly convey the safeguarding message. On the basis of its impressive communication policy and dissemination of safeguarding message, the diocese fully meets Criterion 5.6

## Standard 6

### Access to Advice and Support

*Those who have suffered child abuse should receive a compassionate and just response and should be offered appropriate pastoral care to rebuild their lives.*

*Those who have harmed others should be helped to face up to the reality of abuse, as well as being assisted in healing.*

### Criteria

Number	Criterion	Met fully or Met partially or Not met
6.1	Church personnel with special responsibilities for keeping children safe have access to specialist advice, support and information on child protection.	Met fully
6.2	Contacts are established at a national and/ or local level with the relevant child protection/ welfare agencies and helplines that can provide information, support and assistance to children and Church personnel.	Met fully
6.3	There is guidance on how to respond to and support a child who is suspected to have been abused whether that abuse is by someone within the Church or in the community, including family members or peers.	Met fully
6.4	Information is provided to those who have experienced abuse on how to seek support.	Met partially
6.5	Appropriate support is provided to those who have perpetrated abuse to help them to face up to the reality of abuse as well as to promote healing in a manner which does not compromise children's safety.	Met partially

Good working relationships have been established between the diocese and the HSE and An Garda Siochana. The designated liaison person has stated that he could contact the HSE at any time to seek advice or guidance in relation to child safety and welfare concerns. The diocese's Resource Team has consulted with the NBSCCCI to seek guidance and clarity on issues. Criteria 6.1 and 6.2 are therefore judged to be fully met. In relation to Criterion 6.3, there is excellent guidance in the diocesan policy on how to respond to and support a child who is suspected to have been abused and therefore this criterion is fully met also.

As discussed earlier the diocese has in the last number of years appointed a victim support person who has brought enthusiasm and compassion to her role. She and the

DLP both informed the reviewers that always recommend the *Towards Healing* Counselling service (previously *Faoiseamh*) to victims.

The diocese has had difficulty in the past in making contact with victims, particularly the large number of victims in the Fr. A case, as these people chose to make contact with the civil authorities in the first instance. They were not identified to the DLP until the matter came before the courts, so an immediate response from the diocese was not possible in most cases. The reviewers saw evidence on file of letters which the diocese sent to the victims through An Garda Siochana in that case.

In general however, the case management files reviewed did not show evidence of a clear strategy about contact with and support to victims. The reviewers were assured by the bishop and the DLP that contact was made with victims and supports offered to them once their names became available and the reviewers understand that a number of victims did make contact in recent months. All victim outreach should be clearly documented, and because it is not, Criterion 6.4 is deemed to be partially met.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**That the diocesan safeguarding committee seek guidance from the NBSCCCI in developing terms of reference and an enhanced job description for the Victim Support Person in order to more fully structure that role.**

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That Bishop Smith ensures that the role and services of the Victim Support Person should be promoted within the diocese and a more developed protocol for victim support services should be included in the diocesan safeguarding children policy when next revised.**

Bishop Smith appoints a Priest Advisor on a case by case basis. The role of advisor is clearly outlined in the diocesan *Safeguarding Children* policy as follows:

*The advisor should offer support including advice on finding alternative accommodation, accessing counselling, if required and responding to the pastoral needs of the respondent's family.*

The reviewers realise that there can be difficulties when a priest against whom an allegation of abuse is made refuses to accept this help, such as in the case of Fr A. In that case the diocese referred the priest for risk assessment and to counselling. The case management file does not indicate however what on-going risk management measures if any, were implemented by the diocese in this case from 1999 when the allegations first came to light until the months prior to conviction in 2012. A precept was put in place prohibiting the priest from any priestly function with restrictions on movement, the wearing of clerical dress and contact with young people. There is little or no evidence on the file to indicate how these restrictions were managed or monitored over what was a lengthy period of time. The reviewers were informed that this priest declined intervention

from the diocese until relatively late into the civil investigations when he agreed to accept visits from a fellow priest who acted in a support capacity .

The area of risk management is one in which the diocese has sought guidance from the NBSCCCI and it is addressed in their safeguarding children policy document. The management of ongoing risk is a real concern which was articulated by diocesan safeguarding personnel on more than one occasion during the review fieldwork visits, which suggests to the reviewers that this is an area in which further development and training is required in Meath Diocese. The diocesan safeguarding children policy and procedures document contains in section 2.5 *Managing persons who pose a risk to children*, the statement that:

*“the diocese is committed to accessing high quality assessment and management advice to assist it in developing a risk management plan.....The Advisory panel, NBSCCCI and HSE will provide advice on this”.*

While the statutory authorities have specific responsibilities for investigation and assessment and the provision of effective interventions, the Church authority has its own clear obligations, which include the assessment and management of risks in relation to priests about whom child safeguarding concerns exist. These matters require ongoing consideration by Bishop Smith and his safeguarding personnel. The reviewers are of the view that Criterion 6.5 is partially met.

**Recommendation 9**

**That Bishop Smith arranges for appropriate training for the Advisory Case Management Committee access on-going risk assessment and risk management**

**Standard 7**  
**Implementing and Monitoring Standards**

*Standard 7 outlines the need to develop a plan of action, which monitors the effectiveness of the steps being taken to keep children safe. This is achieved through making a written plan, having the human and financial resources available, monitoring compliance and ensuring all allegations and suspicions are recorded and stored securely.*

**Criteria**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Met fully or Met partially or Not met</b>
7.1	There is a written plan showing what steps will be taken to keep children safe, who is responsible for implementing these measures and when these will be completed.	Fully met
7.2	The human or financial resources necessary for implementing the plan are made available.	Fully met
7.3	Arrangements are in place to monitor compliance with child protection policies and procedures.	Fully met
7.4	Processes are in place to ask parishioners (children and parents/ carers) about their views on policies and practices for keeping children safe.	Fully met
7.5	All incidents, allegations/ suspicions of abuse are recorded and stored securely.	Fully met

The reviewers consider that safeguarding children in the Diocese of Meath is a responsibility taken with the utmost seriousness by diocesan personnel under the leadership and direction of Bishop Smith. The safeguarding team have collectively impressed as a dynamic, hardworking and highly informed group. Together they have brought their expertise to bear in developing a comprehensive safeguarding policy and implementation strategy. It is clear from all sources of information reviewed that there is great enthusiasm and determination in the diocese to oversee the best possible practice.

The Meath Diocese invests on an on-going basis in its *Diocesan Training Plan* which is informed by assessment of needs. The speed and flexibility in doing so was clearly demonstrated by the safeguarding coordinator who immediately acted on advice given on December 11<sup>th</sup> in relation to specific training areas that were deemed by the reviewers as needing attention. The *Diocesan Training Plan* was reviewed and amended before the reviewers' return on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 to include training in the areas recommended.

There is a detailed *Meath Diocese Child Safeguarding Action Plan and Implementation Strategy for 2013 to 2015* submitted by their Safeguarding Children Committee to the NBSCCCI, including the identification of resources available for executing it.

The annual parish and diocesan audits along with the input of the PSRs and the Resource Team ensure close monitoring of and compliance with child protection policies and procedures in the diocese. The reviewers noted that not all (some 3-4 parishes) parish audits had been returned to the diocesan office by the parishes by mid-January when they should have been received by December for the purposes of compiling the annual diocesan audit and report. This could reflect that not all personnel are taking their responsibilities seriously. The reviewers were informed by the diocese that where there are significant delays in parishes returning their audits action is taken to follow up initially by the trainer and resource team and if necessary by invoking the non-compliance procedure adopted by the Safeguarding Children Committee.

The diocese is well advanced in its parish consultations and feedback sessions, originally started as a pilot project in 2012 and it has planned five of these sessions to happen in the first two months of 2014. The reviewers have recommended that consultation with children and young people be built into these parish visits.

It is accepted that all child safeguarding incidents allegations or suspicions are properly recorded and securely stored and therefore Criterion 7.5 is met fully.

The quality of file records has been commented on earlier, and Meath Diocese has undertaken to address shortcomings in this regard.

All other criterion under his standard are fully met.

It is evident that Bishop Smith has shown commitment to and leadership in the development of very good standards in the child safeguarding policies, procedures and practices of the Diocese of Meath. The dynamism, commitment and expertise demonstrated by all whom the reviewers came into contact with are highly commended.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** That Bishop Smith considers assigning the DLP role to a lay person.

**Recommendation 2:** That the DLP, as case manager, must ensure that each case management file should contain records of all work done in relation to the case, including the work done by the victim support person and details of the discussion of the case at the Advisory Case Management Committee. To facilitate this development, the DLP should be designated the case files manager.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Bishop should ask the diocesan trainer to undertake training needs assessment of the Advisory Panel in line with their request.

**Recommendation 4:** That Bishop Smith gives consideration to joining the national NCMRG, if there is insufficient work for Meath Diocesan Advisory Panel.

**Recommendation 5:** That the DLP ensures that case management discussions and decisions of the Advisory Case Management Committee including safety plan reviews be clearly documented and recorded in the relevant case management files.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Safeguarding Children Committee continues to give priority to developing literature and raising awareness sessions to inform children of their right to feel and to be safe, and to informing and empowering them to speak with the appropriate people if they have any concern about abuse within the Church.

**Recommendation 7:** That the diocesan safeguarding committee seek guidance from the NBSCCCI in developing terms of reference and an enhanced job description for the Victim Support Person in order to more fully structure that role.

**Recommendation 8:** That Bishop Smith ensures that the role and services of the Victim Support Person should be promoted within the diocese and a more developed protocol for victim support services should be included in the diocesan safeguarding children policy when next revised.

**Recommendation 9:** That Bishop Smith arranges for appropriate training for the Advisory Case Management Committee access on-going risk assessment and risk management.

**Review of Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland**

**Terms of Reference (which should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Notes)**

1. To ascertain the full extent of all complaints or allegations, knowledge, suspicions or concerns of child sexual abuse, made to the Church Authority (Diocese/religious congregation/missionary society) by individuals or by the Civil Authorities in the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 1975 up to the date of the review, against Catholic clergy and/or religious still living and who are ministering/or who once ministered under the aegis of the Church Authority, and examine/review and report on the nature of the response on the part of the Church Authority.
2. If deemed relevant, select a random sample of complaints or allegations, knowledge, suspicions or concerns of child sexual abuse, made to the Church Authority by individuals or by the Civil Authorities in the period 1st January 1975 to the date of the review, against Catholic clergy and/or religious now deceased and who ministered under the aegis of the Church Authority.
3. Examine/review and report on the nature of the response on the part of the Church Authority.
4. To ascertain all of the cases during the relevant period in which the Church Authority
  - knew of child sexual abuse involving Catholic clergy and/or religious still living and including those clergy and/or religious visiting, studying and/or retired;
  - had strong and clear suspicion of child sexual abuse; or
  - had reasonable concern;
  - and examine/review and report on the nature of the response on the part of the Church Authority.

As well as examine

- Communication by the Church Authority with the Civil Authorities;
- Current risks and their management.

5. To consider and report on the implementation of the 7 Safeguarding Standards set out in *Safeguarding Children* (2009), including the following:
  - a) A review of the current child safeguarding policies and guidance materials in use by the Church Authority and an evaluation of their application;
  - b) How the Church Authority creates and maintains safe environments.
  - c) How victims are responded to by the Church Authority
  - d) What training is taking place within the Church Authority
  - e) How advice and support is accessed by the Church Authority in relation to victim support and assessment and management of accused respondents.
  - f) What systems are in place for monitoring practice and reporting back to the Church Authority.

## **Accompanying Notes**

### **Note 1: Definition of Child Sexual Abuse:**

The definition of child sexual abuse is in accordance with the definition adopted by the Ferns Report (and the Commission of Investigation Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin). The following is the relevant extract from the Ferns Report:

“While definitions of child sexual abuse vary according to context, probably the most useful definition and broadest for the purposes of this Report was that which was adopted by the Law Reform Commission in 1990<sup>1</sup> and later developed in Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health and Children, 1999) which state that “child sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or that of others”. Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child;
- intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
- masturbation in the presence of the child or the involvement of the child in an act of masturbation;
- sexual intercourse with the child whether oral, vaginal or anal;
- sexual exploitation of a child which includes inciting, encouraging, propositioning, requiring or permitting a child to solicit for, or to engage in prostitution or other sexual acts. Sexual exploitation also occurs when a child is involved in exhibition, modelling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act, including its recording (on film, video tape, or other media) or the manipulation for those purposes of the image by computer or other means. It may also include showing sexually explicit material to children which is often a feature of the ‘grooming’ process by perpetrators of abuse.”

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<sup>1</sup> This definition was originally proposed by the Western Australia Task Force on Child Sexual Abuse, 1987 and is adopted by the Law Reform Commission (1990) *Report on Child Sexual Abuse*, p. 8.

**Note 2: Definition of Allegation:**

The term allegation is defined as an accusation or complaint where there are reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, or is being sexually abused, or is at risk of sexual abuse, including retrospective disclosure by adults. It includes allegations that did not necessarily result in a criminal or canonical investigation, or a civil action, and allegations that are unsubstantiated but which are plausible. (NB: Erroneous information does not necessarily make an allegation implausible, for example, a priest arrived in a parish in the Diocese a year after the alleged abuse, but other information supplied appears credible and the alleged victim may have mistaken the date).

**Note 3: False Allegations:**

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland wishes to examine any cases of false allegation so as to review the management of the complaint by the Diocese/religious congregation/missionary society.

**Note 4: Random sample:**

The random sample (if applicable) must be taken from complaints or allegations, knowledge, suspicions or concerns of child sexual abuse made against all deceased Catholic clergy/religious covering the entire of the relevant period being 1<sup>st</sup> January 1975 to the date of the Review.

**Note 5: Civil Authorities:**

Civil Authorities are defined in the Republic of Ireland as the Health Service Executive and An Garda Síochána and in Northern Ireland as the Health and Social Care Trust and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.