



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

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice**

**in the**

**Diocese of Elphin**

**undertaken by**

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

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

**Date of Review Report: March 2023**

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## Background

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

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

The Diocese of Elphin was previously reviewed in February 2013 under the *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2008*. The report of the first Review can be found on the National Board's website [www.safeguarding.ie/publications](http://www.safeguarding.ie/publications). This current Review is an opportunity for the National Board to confirm that recommendations from the previous Review (2013) were implemented.

The response to the recommendations from the previous Review (February 2013) are set out below, along with the status of implementation:

Recommendation	Status of implementation
1. That the bishop should ensure that guidance on how individuals that pose a risk to children are managed will be expanded and inserted in the dioceses safeguarding policies.	Fully implemented
2. That the bishop should ask the Safeguarding Committee to produce a specific protocol, which sets down the expectation of the diocese concerning the standing of any religious priest engaged in ministry within the diocese.	Fully implemented
3. That the bishop should ensure that he makes full use of the formal safeguarding structure that he has developed within the diocese, when deciding what actions to take in the management of cases.	Fully implemented
4. That the bishop should ask that an induction programme should be prepared, which will seek to provide a new bishop with an understanding of what safeguarding activities take place in his Diocese.	Fully implemented
5. That the bishop should consider joining the NCMRG as an additional support in the event of being faced with a case management situation that he finds very difficult or demanding.	Fully implemented
6. That the bishop should ask the Safeguarding Committee to establish means by which parents and children can encourage and facilitate feedback to them on the safeguarding activities that take place in the Diocese.	Fully implemented

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

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

## Introduction

The Diocese of Elphin is in the western part of Ireland. It is in the Metropolitan Area of Tuam. The current bishop, Most Reverend Kevin Doran, was consecrated in July 2014.

The diocese covers parts of the counties of Roscommon, Sligo, Galway, and Westmeath. The major towns are Athlone, Boyle, Castlerea, Roscommon and Sligo.

There are currently thirty-seven (37) parishes in the diocese, which are divided into six (6) administrative deaneries, based in the towns of Sligo, Boyle, Strokestown, Castlerea, Roscommon and part of Athlone, west of the river Shannon.

There are currently thirty-eight (38) incardinated diocesan priests ministering to a Roman Catholic population 82,320.

In addition, there are twenty (20) clerics ministering in the diocese who have come from outside of Ireland. This number includes two priests who are completing further studies and who have part time ministry.

There are also a further twelve (12) priests in ministry from Irish based religious orders.

There are six (6) retired diocesan priests living within the diocese, of whom four (4) are fully retired with no ministry, and two (2) are still involved in an occasional supply role.

There are two (2) clerics who are restricted and without ministry, of whom one was incardinated into the diocese, and the other belongs to another diocese.

Two (2) diocesan priests are in ministry outside the diocese.

Two (2) priests have left the diocese for reasons that are not connected to child protection concerns.

There are ten (10) deacons in ministry in the diocese, of whom seven (7) are permanent deacons, and three (3) are transitional deacons. A further permanent diocesan deacon is in ministry in another Irish diocese.

There are seven (7) female Religious Orders based in the Diocese of Elphin, which are located in fifteen (15) separate community houses or convents, and which have a combined membership of 127 Sisters.

There are two male Religious Orders in the diocese's administrative area, which are located in two community houses, and which together have eleven (11) members.

### **Process of Review**

The Review measured compliance against the National Board's seven standards, contained in *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, which is accessible at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/policy-guidance/policy-document>. The Review concentrated on safeguarding arrangements and practice through evaluating written records and meetings with Church personnel.

A Memorandum of Understanding and Data Processing Deed Agreement were signed prior to the Review taking place.

Bishop Kevin Doran invited the National Board to undertake the Review, and the fieldwork was conducted on March 13 and 14, 2023.

The following is a list of those with whom the reviewers met or spoke with during the fieldwork of this Review:

- Bishop Kevin Doran
- The Director of Safeguarding /DLP / Diocesan Trainer
- The Deputy DLP/ Diocesan trainer
- Western Province Vetting Office personnel
- Accredited Safeguarding Trainers
- The Director of Pastoral and Faith Development
- The Diocesan Secretary – Youth Ministry/Communications
- A Synodal Pathway Team Member
- A Priest Advisor
- A Support Person
- A Respondent
- Sacristans
- Catechists of the Good Shepherd Leaders/children/parents

- Lourdes Pilgrimage: Director/Administrator/ Safeguarding Officer/parent/ and young person
- Members of the Diocesan Child Safeguarding Executive Committee
- Parish Priests
- A Parish Catechist Leader
- Altar Service Ministry Leaders/parents/children
- Local Safeguarding Representatives
- Tusla

During 2020 and 2021, a range of activities involving children and young people were paused to comply with government guidelines on Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. However, gradual steps are being taken by parishes to encourage the resumption of activity with children and young people.

## **STANDARDS**

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

The seven Standards are:

Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

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

Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

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

An assessment of practice under each standard is set out below.

## Standard 1 - Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

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

The Parish Safeguarding Children Handbook, 2017 developed jointly and issued by the six dioceses of the Western Province, is comprehensive and reflects the requirements of the *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*. The Handbook can be accessed in the safeguarding section of the diocesan website. This handbook is currently being reviewed by the Western Province, but this process may not be completed until the amended National Guidance is produced.

In compliance with the Children First Act 2015, the diocese updated its Child Safeguarding Statement in October 2022. A version of this document was evidenced on the diocesan website. As per the Children First Act, the reviewers were also provided with a numerical list of the mandated persons within the diocese.

Guidance on Whistleblowing is included in the Parish Safeguarding Children Handbook; there were no whistleblowing reports since the last National Board Review in 2013.

A Complaints Procedure for Safeguarding Concerns that are not Allegations of Abuse is included in the Parish Safeguarding Children Handbook; the Bishop confirmed that there were no complaints reported since the last National Board Review in 2013.

Guidance on codes of behaviour for adults and children, as well as for safe care for children were also evidenced in the Parish Handbook.

Direction on the use of social media is provided by National Board guidance, as well as the guidance contained within the Parish Handbook. The guidance in the Parish Handbook covers the issues of consent, the use of the Internet, texting and emailing, photography, CCTV and the use of webcams.

Guidance is in place for clerics/religious who have ministry with children in an external organisation/Church Body. This information is collated and held securely by the Bishop. The reviewers were shown where this information was held securely. There are currently two (2) diocesan priests in ministry outside the diocese.

Vetting of all personnel across the diocese is up to date. The Director of Safeguarding has a master record, seen by the reviewers, of vetted personnel with date completed. Records are stored securely in compliance with GDPR. Vetting of all relevant persons is updated every 3 years as required.

The Garda vetting figures of completed applications are as follows:

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023, to date
89	204	289	373	114	104	290	61

## **Youth Ministry**

Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Elphin is referred to as 'Elphin Youth and Young Adult Ministry' (EYYAM) as a way of distinguishing activities in which minors might be involved from those in which young people over eighteen might be involved. One of the challenges of youth and young adult ministry in Elphin is the rural nature of the diocese, and the distances that have to be travelled, considering the fact that young people depend on adults to bring them. Another challenge is the fact that so many young adults work or study in urban centres and only return to their rural homes for the weekend. This area of ministry was coordinated by a deacon until their move to another area of ministry at the end of 2022. The diocese is in a consultation process with parents, young adults and older young people to establish what might be a helpful approach to youth and young-adult ministry.

The following are examples of diocesan engagement with Youth.

**The Lenten Youth Ambassador initiative** provides an opportunity for a Transition Year/ Fifth Year Student who is willing, between mid-January and late-March to come along to a school-day event, meet young people from other schools and parishes, adult parish volunteers, and Trócaire personnel, and spend the day learning about Global Justice and the work of Trócaire.

Young people with appropriate support from a teacher / chaplain (in terms of school initiatives) and /or a pre-identified adult parish volunteer (parish initiatives), can choose to highlight Trócaire's Lenten Campaign in their school and /or parish.

All adult parish volunteers are Garda vetted and complete safeguarding training. Consent forms are completed. During induction days, both adults and young people sign in and out. There are appropriate adult to young people supervision ratios. A hazard risk assessment is completed, and a Code of Behaviour is in place. At the completion of the initiative, all documentation is sent to the diocesan archive for secure storage. The Director provided evidence of all of the relevant completed documentation to the reviewer. The reviewers were satisfied that safeguarding arrangements are considered as part of the preparation stage, and are in place for the duration of the Lenten campaign.

This is an excellent initiative, which enables young people to be involved in youth ministry and to build their self-confidence.

**The Pope John Paul II Award** programme is coordinated with a designated teacher in each of the secondary schools. The aim of the programme is to encourage and facilitate participation of young people (typically 15-18 years of age) in parish activities. Somewhere in excess of two hundred young people participate each year, assisting in a sacristy, serving Mass, reading at Mass, serving as Ministers of the Eucharist, in choirs, or in other pastoral activities, such as visiting the elderly in care homes. Parental consent forms are signed and kept on file, together with contact details of parents. The award programme concludes with a presentation of awards to which parents are invited.

**Youth Alpha.** The Alpha programme is an interactive programme of faith exploration. A youth version of the programme has been developed and has been facilitated by the EYYAM in a number of schools in the diocese.

**Fifth Year Retreat Day.** Each year in March, the Diocese organises a full-day gathering at Knock Shrine for students in 5<sup>th</sup> year at secondary level. The elements of the day are some music, an inspirational guest speaker, and interactive workshops. While this is a diocesan project, it operates on the basis that young people travel as students of their school and with their own teachers, who are present throughout. The safeguarding protocols followed are those of the school.

**Youth and Young Adult Mass.** In October 2022, as a way of re-grouping with young people after Covid-19, young people from around the diocese were invited to come to a vigil Mass in Roscommon Town, where the music was provided by a local youth choir. Refreshments (tea / coffee and finger food) were provided afterwards for parents and young people at a neighbouring hotel. Numbers attending were small, but young people who did come were positive about the outcome, and the diocese is committed to organise the youth and young adult Mass on an annual basis.

**Lourdes Pilgrimage.** Young people of 17 years and older can participate as volunteers, with the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes. This is a well-organised and well-supervised project, in which young people have the opportunity to meet with and serve the assisted pilgrims. The bishop participates in the training gathering in advance of the pilgrimage, and he meets with the young people for a social gathering and time of prayer some weeks after return.

The reviewers met with a young adult and their parent. The young person shared that they enjoyed the experience (the opportunity to meet and socialise with other young people and support to those who needed assistance) and was clear about safeguarding arrangements – who to talk to about any concerns – leaders had young people designated to them. The parent confirmed the completion of registration information including medical information/parent contact details; completion of signed consent form; code of conduct for young people; attendance at induction and orientation meetings; ID badges; uniform; accommodation arrangements; role of young people during the trip; supervision arrangements; each day of the pilgrimage was timetabled.

The reviewers also met with the Lourdes Pilgrimage Director, Administrator and Safeguarding Officer. Following discussion with the pilgrimage leads, it was very clear that safeguarding young people is a priority, and it is an integral part of planning, preparation and conduct of the trip, and is followed by an evaluation process. The learning from each pilgrimage is taken forward to the preparation and planning in the following year. There is consultation with the Director of Safeguarding. The knowledge and experience of the Safeguarding Officer is fully utilised. Meeting with the young person and parent, and reading feedback from other young people and parents, highlighted that the pilgrimage appears to be an enriching and safe faith experience for everyone involved. The procedures and guidance for safeguarding specific to the Lourdes Pilgrimage take full account of the Western Province Parish Safeguarding Children Handbook, 2017. For example, all volunteer leaders are vetted/have completed safeguarding training;

consent forms are completed; the completed risk assessments are exemplary; there are appropriate supervision ratios; check in and check out arrangements are in place during the pilgrimage; there are uniforms to identify leaders and young people. All pilgrimage documentation is securely stored in the diocesan archive following the completion of each trip.

The pilgrimage leaders are to be commended for the comprehensive planning and preparation that is completed to ensure that everyone involved has a positive and safe experience.

**Synodal Consultation.** EYYAM provided young people with the opportunity to participate in an anonymised online consultation about their experience of Church, using Survey Monkey. This elicited over three hundred responses from minors of school-going age, and about seventy from young adults between 18 and 30.

**Covid-19 online ministry.** During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, when it was not possible to have in-person activities, EYYAM made available online a collection of materials aimed at supporting young people and young adults in nourishing their faith.

### **Parish visits**

The reviewers visited three parishes where children's ministry had recommenced post the pandemic lockdowns. The reviewers noted in particular the commitment of all the adults they met to the importance of their children being back in the Church, as well as the importance they placed on it being a safe environment.

In Parish 1, the reviewers met with Catechesis of the Good Shepherd leaders/ parents, and observed the children's group. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a Christian catechesis program for children aged 3-12 years, which enables them to form and experience an authentic relationship with God. The Catechesis is rooted in Scripture and the Liturgy of the Church, and is inspired by Maria Montessori's principles of education. Each child's unique spiritual needs and abilities are respected and nurtured.

The voluntary leaders who were met were vetted and trained, and they were clear about the required safeguarding arrangements. Completed consent forms, hazard risk assessment, and the children's attendance register were evidenced. The leaders confirmed that support is available from the Director of Safeguarding. The Safeguarding Agreement for Children was clearly displayed within the room used by the group and within the body of the church.

The leaders confirmed that relevant information (consent forms/registers) is sent to the diocesan archive for secure storage at the end of each term.

Parents spoken with were happy for their children to attend the group, and were confident that the children are safe and happy in the group. Children are handed over and collected by their parents from the room the group uses within the church.

Parent's feedback about the group included:

"Nurturing and caring"

"Opportunity to learn scripture"

"Children discover faith in the community"

"Children receive a warm welcome, are secure and safe"

"The group provides a calm, quiet space which enables independent prayer"

During the visit, the reviewers observed that the children were happy, relaxed and fully engaged in their activity.

The parish visited also has an external organisation drama group that uses their church hall. The organisation has confirmed proof of insurance and child safeguarding policy.

The reviewers also had an opportunity to visit the Cathedral in the diocese. Webcam and safeguarding information was displayed in entrances, and the sacristy including the *celebret* notice. The reviewers had access to completed altar server registers, and all documentation was securely stored.

In Parish 2, the reviewers met with altar server ministry leads, altar servers, a sacristan, the Parish Priest, parents, Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs), and a catechist.

During this visit, the reviewers evidenced that safeguarding information was clearly displayed. The reviewers were shown where confidential documentation was securely stored.

Everyone was clear about their own roles and responsibilities, and about the process to follow when reporting a concern. They reported that the Safeguarding Director was accessible and their support was valued. They spoke positively about the training they had received; and training and Garda vetting were up to date. Personnel worked as a team and provided support to each other. Children's leaders reported that the LSR was accessible and supportive. The parish has 18 new altar servers divided into 4 groups. Children identified to the reviewers to whom they could talk if they were worried or concerned about anything, including a leader, a teacher, or parents. The children enjoyed being an altar server - it was something to do, and they felt part of the Mass, up at the altar to help the priest. They said that they were able to move around rather than having to stay in their seat.

Parents and child sign a joint consent form. Each parent and child receive a copy of the information leaflet for parents and children involved in youth activities. An adult is always present with the altar servers. An altar server sign in/out register is completed. A poster was on display as a reminder to sign the register. The sacristan advised that she is confident to ask a visiting priest for his *celebret* card. At the end of each year, registers are sent to the diocesan archive.

The Director of Safeguarding has an up to date master list of all LSRs in the diocese with a record of dates that vetting and training was completed.

LSRs are nominated for the role, and they serve a 3-year term. They can be re-nominated to continue in the role.

In Parish 3, the reviewers met the Parish Priest and a deacon, 3 LSRs (one from each church in the parish), parents, and approximately 10 altar servers. One parent praised how the priest had come into the school and spoke to the children about serving again and had provided written information for the children and parents. Consents have been completed and signed for the 20 altar servers who came back last year. The altar servers have brought some of their families back to church, as the parents must be present in church when their children serve mass. Most of the altar servers had served prior to the pandemic.

The children when asked confirmed that they knew who to talk to if they had a concern, and that they were clearly happy to be back serving. The parents present confirmed that they recognised the importance of safeguarding in allowing their children to be involved as servers. All relevant adults present had been Garda vetted and had received training from the Director of Safeguarding.

In the sacristy, the reviewers saw the current signing in register, the separate robing area for servers, and the *celebret* notice. There were safeguarding notices throughout the church and in the sacristy.

The reviewers also met a group of Parish Safeguarding Representatives from across the Deaneries who were very clear on their role within their parishes in keeping children safe. Their commitment to ensuring that children involved in parish activities are safe and happy was evident. All were experienced in the role and had received the appropriate training. They advised that they have a clear role in assisting the Parish Priest to complete the annual parish self-audit, and in linking with the Director of Safeguarding when she completes her parish support visits as a follow up to the return of the completed audit form. It was evident that these representatives place significant trust in the support they receive from the Director of Safeguarding.

As discussed with the bishop and the safeguarding committee, the Diocese consider appointing some Local Safeguarding Representatives as members of the Safeguarding Committee. This would provide a direct connection from key safeguarding people in the parishes to this key committee. In summary, the reviewers evidenced that all relevant policies and procedures are being implemented to ensure, as far as practicable, the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children and young people. On that basis, it is our opinion that **Standard 1 is met.**

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

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

Six (6) reports of new allegations were received by the diocese since the previous Review. Three (3) reports related to allegations against priests of the diocese, and three (3) other reports received were in respect of members of Religious Orders who had ministered in the diocese or worked in the diocese's administrative area.

Of the reports received by the diocese since the first Review, allegations were made in respect of two (2) deceased clerics, three (3) living clerics, and one (1) living non-ordained Religious.

All of these cases will be dealt with in more detail in the later section on Standard 4.

Table 1 records the diocesan responses to and notifications of new cases received since the last Review.

**Table 1. Child Safeguarding concerns relating to priests and religious received by Diocese of Elphin since 2013 Review**

Status	Number of allegations	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	National Board notified	Appropriate timely canonical action taken
<b>Diocesan</b>					
Cleric 1 Living	(1)*	Threshold for reporting to Gardai not reached.	Within three days	Within four days	N/A*
Cleric 2 Deceased	(1) (3)	Next day Within one week	Next day Within one week	Next day Within one week	Restrictions put in place to allow investigations in second case
Cleric 3 Deceased	(1)	Within one week	Within one week	Within one week	CDF notified

Religious					
Cleric 4 Living	(1)	Notified by his Religious Order	Notified by his Religious Order	Notified by his Religious Order	N/A
Cleric 5 Living	(1) (1)	Notified by his Religious Order	Notified by his Religious Order	Notified by his Religious Order	Preliminary canonical investigation conducted by his Religious Order.
Case 6 Deceased	(1)  (1)	Within 10 days  Within 3 weeks	Within 10 days  Within 3 weeks	Not notified  Not notified	Religious Brother in a school

\*Physical abuse alleged

In the three cases where the diocese was responsible for notifications, these were made speedily. The following text provides an account of the sequence of events in each of the case files where new allegations were made since the first Review.

Cleric 1. An allegation of physical abuse was made against this diocesan priest. The diocese consulted the National Board, which advised that Tusla should be notified by the diocese, and this was done within three days of the initial report being received. A third party made the complaint without knowledge of the alleged victim. Tusla found that there was insufficient evidence to proceed, and closed the case. The threshold for notifying the Gardai was not reached. This priest remains in ministry and in good standing.

Cleric 2. The first allegation of sexual abuse was made when this diocesan priest was alive (he is now deceased). Notifications were made to the statutory authorities and to the National Board within one day. This allegation was subject to a Garda investigation and a Tusla assessment. The complainant however would not engage with the civil authorities. The civil authorities decided that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation.

The second allegation in respect of this priest was also of sexual abuse, and he was alive when this allegation was received by the diocese through Towards Healing, from which agency three siblings were receiving counselling. Notifications were completed to Tusla, An Garda Síochána and the National Board within three days. No complaints were made to the diocese or to An Garda Síochána by the alleged victims. They decided not to meet with Tusla. The civil authorities deemed there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the allegations.

At the time of his death, this cleric was a priest in good standing.

Cleric 3. This diocesan priest was deceased when an allegation of sexual abuse was received by the bishop from a legal representative of a complainant. Notifications to Tusla, An Garda Síochána and the National Board were completed within a week. The bishop notified the CDF of the allegation.

In relation to Cleric 4, who is not incardinated into the Diocese of Elphin, but is a member of a Religious Order ministering in the diocese, the allegation was received through another Church body outside Ireland, which had been contacted by a relative of an alleged victim of sexual abuse by this priest. The bishop quickly wrote to the identified third party offering to meet with her, but received no response. The external Church body did not notify the Irish statutory authorities, and the diocesan DLP passed the information to the relevant Religious Order for it to make the statutory notifications.

Cleric 5. This cleric is a Religious Order priest who now resides outside of the diocese. Two separate allegations of sexual abuse were made against this priest. The Provincial from the relevant order notified the bishop on both occasions, as the priest had a work placement within the diocesan area. All notifications were completed by the DLP of the relevant order, which was confirmed by the diocese.

Case 6. This deceased man was a Religious Brother, and therefore not a cleric. There are two specific allegations of sexual abuse in which this man was named:

1. A third party made a report directly to the bishop, which the bishop notified to Tusla and An Garda Síochána, as a mandated person, within 10 days. The Diocesan DLP also notified the DLP of the relevant Religious Order of the allegation.
2. A legal advisor wrote to the bishop with details of alleged sexual abuse by this Brother. The diocesan DLP notified An Garda Síochána and Tusla within 3 weeks. This allegation is quite recent, and the case remains open.

As part of the review of this standard, the reviewers spoke to two Tusla managers who have knowledge of communicating with the diocese in respect of child protection and safeguarding issues. Both representatives reported that timely notifications were made by the DLP to Tusla.

They confirmed that there was full co-operation with requests for information from the diocese to enable completion of assessments/investigations. They advised that open and transparent relationships had been established, based on confidence and trust in diocesan personnel.

The bi-annual inter-agency meetings had been stood down in May 2022 due to service demands and Tusla capacity issues. These had been valued by staff from both the diocese and Tusla. These meetings had formal agendas, and the reviewers examined the written minutes file. Tusla has made it clear that due to resource issues, they will not be able to reinstate these meetings.

The Tusla staff confirmed that they remain available for consultation with the DLP in relation to notifications. A similar arrangement is in place with An Garda Siochana. As the Diocese notifies An Garda Siochana centrally (Dublin) of concerns, the reviewers were not in a position to consult with local Garda management.

In summary, the reviewers are confident about the overall diocesan approach to the management of allegations, which is applied in a consistent manner at all levels of the diocesan safeguarding structure.

The reviewers are satisfied that **this standard is met.**

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

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

Before this review commenced, Bishop Doran placed a notice on the Diocese of Elphin website to inform people of the forthcoming Review. This notice, evidenced by the reviewers, invited anyone to come forward to the diocese or to the reviewers if they wished to express any opinions relating to child safeguarding practice in the diocese, or if they wished to report a concern. Contact details were also given for Tusla and An Garda Siochana.

There were no contacts made in response to this notice.

Guidance on the care of complainants is detailed on the National Board's website at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%203.pdf>, which is cross-referenced within the Parish Handbook.

As noted in Standard 2, six case management files were reviewed related to allegations received since the 2013 Review. The following detail relates to the diocese's involvement with complainants in these cases:

Cleric 1. This was a third-party referral made without the knowledge of the alleged victim. The DLP met the third party reporter, and information about Towards Healing was provided by the diocese to them, to pass on to the complainant. The complainant however made no contact with the diocese.

Cleric 2. The first allegation in respect of this priest was a third-party report by a relative of an alleged victim. Pastoral support was offered through this relative to the alleged victim, but this was never taken up. Through the same channel, the alleged victim was also advised to make a report to the statutory authorities, but they did not do so.

The second third-party allegation made against this priest was reported to the diocese by Towards Healing in respect of three siblings. The alleged victims refused to meet Tusla for assessment. No formal complaints were made to the Gardai or to the diocese by the complainants. Pastoral support was offered to them by the diocese, through Towards Healing. Following investigation, the civil authorities concluded that there was no evidence to substantiate the allegations of the complainants.

Cleric 3. The complainant in this case was met by the DLP after the diocese had received a solicitor's letter alleging abuse by Cleric 3. Subsequently, a mediated meeting took place led by an independent mediator. This meeting was attended by the bishop and the complainant, and the respective lawyers. The outcome of this meeting was that the diocese agreed to meet the complainant's legal costs, without any admission of responsibility. The complainant subsequently withdrew their civil action.

Cleric 4. This was another third-party notification to the diocese, on this occasion via a Church organisation outside the diocese. A relative of an alleged victim had written to the Church organisation alleging abuse by Cleric 4. The bishop offered to meet the third party, but he received no reply to his offer. Subsequently, the Diocesan DLP notified the cleric's Religious Order and advised of the allegation and of the external Church organisation's involvement. It is not known by the diocese if the complainant was aware of the initial approach to the external Church organisation.

Cleric 5. This case was processed by Cleric 5's Religious Order. The diocese had no contact with the complainant.

Case 6. The first allegation received by the diocese in respect of this deceased Religious Brother was a third-party referral made by a relative to the diocese. Bishop Doran offered through the third party to meet the complainant, but his offer was not taken up.

The second allegation against this man was reported via a solicitor's letter, and as it is a relatively recent case, there has been no direct contact with the complainant by the diocese at the time of the Review fieldwork.

The reviewers note that in all the relevant cases, where possible the diocese has reached out to engage with and offer pastoral support to the identified complainants. This has been led and encouraged by Bishop Doran.

During the fieldwork for this Review, the reviewers met the Diocesan Support Person who confirmed that he had been Garda vetted and had completed role-specific training with the National Board, and that he had received a handover from the previous Support Person. The Support Person was clear about his role and responsibilities, although to date, his services have not been utilised. He is confident that if /when a case is allocated to them, he will receive suitable support from the Director of Safeguarding.

The reviewers noted that there is an annual diocesan Mass for the Day of Prayer for Survivors and Victims of Abuse, when the candle of atonement is lit.

The diocese confirmed that they had no current or ongoing contact with any complainants, and therefore, the reviewers were unable to interview a complainant as part of the assessment of this standard. However, through examining the case files and their meetings with key safeguarding personnel, they established that there was a caring pastoral response to complainants from the diocese, influenced by Bishop Doran. The reviewers evidenced this in the case management files and in the openness expressed by all the relevant Church personnel in offering to meet with complainants and to resource the necessary system responses to them.

**The standard is met.**

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

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

Eight (8) case files were reviewed under this standard – four (4) relating to diocesan priests, two (2) to priests belonging to Religious Orders, one (1) in respect of a Religious Brother, and one (1) relating to a priest from a diocese outside the jurisdiction.

Three of the priests had been referenced in the 2013 Review, Clerics 4, 7 and 8.

The following details the response by the diocese in terms of the care and management of the respondents identified in this Review:

Cleric 1. The file evidences that the bishop informed the respondent of the physical abuse allegation against him. In due course, the bishop advised the priest that Tusla had closed the case, as there was insufficient information to proceed with an assessment of risk. This priest was not asked by the bishop to stand aside from ministry at any stage, as the report received was third party and was based on hearsay.

Cleric 2 was the subject of two (2) separate allegations of sexual abuse. On investigation, no evidence to substantiate either allegation was adduced. In respect of the second allegation, the priest stood aside from ministry while investigations were underway. When the civil investigations had been completed, the diocese referred this case to the NCMC. The advice of the NCMC was that there was no case to answer and as a result, the Bishop could restore the priest to ministry in good standing, which was done.

Cleric 3. This cleric was deceased when the diocese received the abuse allegation about him.

Cleric 4. This priest is a member of a Religious Order. At the time the allegation against him was received, he was serving a prison sentence. All responsibility for this respondent lie with his Religious Order. The case management file was examined as part of this Review, as the allegation was received since the previous Review, and had come to the diocese first.

Cleric 5. This priest is a member of a Religious Order, which has processed all elements of his case, including providing support to him. The cleric was stood down by his Order while investigations were being conducted. The bishop was subsequently advised by the Provincial of the relevant Order that no evidence had been established that would stop Cleric 6 from returning to ministry. Before the resumption of ministry, the diocese had to renew the priest's Garda vetting, so his return to ministry was delayed until the vetting was completed.

Case 6. This Religious Brother was deceased when the diocese received the first abuse allegations about him. He had been a teacher in a school within the diocese's administrative area. The statutory notifications were made by the bishop as a mandated person.

Cleric 7. This diocesan priest has been out of ministry since the late 1990's due to sexual abuse concerns. The case file showed a record of monitoring contacts by the diocese from 2014 to 2023. There is a current management plan in place, which means this priest is formally monitored by the Deputy DLP. The bishop has issued a canonical precept in terms of no contact with children or vulnerable adults unsupervised. The DDF are aware of this case.

The respondent engaged with the reviewers as part of this review. He confirmed that he has been subject to a management plan since prior to the first Review. He was initially informed about the allegations made against him by the then bishop. He was clear about the requirements of the management plan (signed safeguarding agreement) and confirmed monitoring visits by the deputy DLP took place.

He is satisfied with support he receives currently, and he knows that he can contact the bishop directly about support if required.

Cleric 8. This priest was out of ministry prior to the first Review. He is a priest incardinated into a diocese outside the jurisdiction. His home diocese requested that Elphin Diocese would formally monitor the priest on their behalf. A safeguarding agreement and formal monitoring arrangement was initiated, and he is now monitored by the Diocesan Deputy DLP, with face-to-face visits every four months. This respondent has never exercised or sought to exercise public ministry in the diocese. There is clear evidence on file of communications between the Bishop and the DLP, and the respondent. Actions are agreed and confirmed in writing with the respondent.

As part of the assessment of this standard, the reviewers also met a Priest Advisor. He had been Garda vetted and had completed role-specific training. He was clear about his defined role and responsibilities for the support and care of a respondent priest. The Priest Advisor had not been utilised in the role however, as respondents by choice had sought support from other trusted clergy, or from family or friends. The Priest Advisor has experience in providing care and therapeutic support to others outside of Church personnel, and he remains available if required to take on this particular safeguarding role.

In summary, the reviewers note that Bishop Doran and the two DLPs had significant detailed knowledge of all cases. The files were well structured, and information was accessible. There was a case summary at the front of the file for each case. Records were detailed and up to date. There was evidence of interagency cooperation and communication with other Church bodies both within the case files and in the records of meetings. The NCMC and the National Office were also approached for advice when deemed necessary. Where canonical action was being considered, this was evidenced in the case files.

The diocese has a case management meeting after each Child Safeguarding Committee. This meeting is attended by Bishop Doran, the Chancellor and the two DLPs. The reviewers would suggest that the record of all discussions at this meeting specific to a respondent is placed in their case management file.

From the files reviewed and their meetings with key safeguarding personnel, and with one respondent, the reviewers are satisfied that clergy about who safeguarding concerns have arisen receive a considered and fair response from the diocese, and that suitable and effective arrangements are in place to manage, monitor and support them.

**This standard is met.**

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

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

As part of the assessment of the diocesan compliance with this standard, the reviewers met the two accredited Trainers. Both are members of the Safeguarding Committee and undertake the DLP role as well. One Trainer is also the diocesan Director of Safeguarding.

The current Three-Year Child Safeguarding Strategy was examined, and this includes training as a strategic objective. An annual training action plan is agreed, monitored and reviewed by the Safeguarding Committee. The reviewers were provided with copies of the three-year plans that have been implemented from 2017 to 2023.

Training priorities are set as part of the annual training needs analysis, which is in turn informed by the annual parish self-audits, as well as by the follow up parish support visits completed by the Director of Safeguarding.

Ad-hoc requests from parishes for safeguarding training are also facilitated.

**The training figures for 2017 to 2023 are set out below.**

Year	Priests/religious/deacons	Volunteers	Total
2017-2018	65	298	363
2018-2019	83	440	523
2019-2020	43	133	176
2020-2022	9	0	9
2022-2023	53	248	299

The above table clearly shows the impact of the pandemic restrictions on safeguarding training within the diocese. The last full year of training was 2018 to 2019, and in that year, the Trainers were involved in:

- Six sessions of parish training
- Two training sessions with volunteers
- Four sessions of induction training
- Two training sessions for external groups
- Two sessions of in-service training

The Director of Safeguarding keeps an up to date record of clergy and volunteers, including LSRs, who have completed safeguarding training, including refresher sessions, and this record was seen by the reviewers.

The Trainers deliver two in-service safeguarding training sessions in November each year, which are attended by LSRs and Parish Priests from across the parishes. The session includes updates about safeguarding arrangements, discussion about completion of self-audits, sharing new publications related to safeguarding, Garda vetting requirements, and facilitating completion of vetting documentation. These sessions can also be provided at the request of a Parish Priest or LSRs, to be attended by, Children's Leaders, sacristans, parents, and LSRs.

The reviewers also evidenced that the induction programme for new priests /overseas priests /deacons includes a safeguarding session. Safeguarding training for Lourdes Pilgrimage youth section volunteers is also completed.

The Trainers also provide training for Divine Word Missionaries who are located within the diocese.

Diocesan personnel attend role-specific training delivered by the National Board. Training returns and evaluation summaries have been completed and submitted to the National Board, and copies of these returns were evidenced by the reviewers.

The reviewers received significant positive feedback during parish visits about the benefits and quality of training content and delivery. The people spoken with had missed the opportunity of attending training during the pandemic lockdown.

Safeguarding training in 2022-2023 is up to date, and this is commended.

From the reviewers' interviews with Bishop Doran, with key safeguarding personnel and volunteers, it was evident that the bishop is committed to resourcing diocesan safeguarding children training. The provision of training to all key safeguarding personnel was referenced, and evidence of the commitment of the diocese to future training opportunities was established.

**This standard is met.**

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

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

As evidence of the Elphin Diocese communicating the Church's safeguarding message, the reviewers noted that this National Board Review was publicised on the diocesan website and on the diocesan Facebook page, as well as in the bishop's Spring Safeguarding Newsletter and parish bulletins.

An annual Communication Action Plan is in place based on the objectives of the Child Safeguarding Three-Year Strategy. These plans are reviewed on an annual basis by the Safeguarding Committee, and actions are informed by analysis of completed parish self-audits and through feedback during parish support visits completed by the Director of Safeguarding. Plans from 2017 to date were made available to the reviewers to examine, and these were of the required standard.

Webcam notices, *celebret* notices and the Diocesan Policy Statement required under the Children First Act were evidenced in the reviewers' visits to parish churches and to parish offices and rooms. Posters containing the Safeguarding Agreement for Children were also evidenced within these locations. Leaflets were also available for children and parents, providing safeguarding guidance. During the parish visits, the children showed the reviewers that they knew the location of the safeguarding material, and they were able to advise the reviewers how they would keep themselves safe if they felt at risk.

Due to the changing population demographic, the safeguarding information for children, young people and parents is now available in English, Irish, Polish, Portuguese and Ukrainian.

An annual Safeguarding Newsletter is issued, and this was evidenced by the reviewers. This is accessible on the Elphin Diocese website's Safeguarding section. The reviewers met with the Bishop's Secretary, one of whose functions is the management of the Diocesan website.

Safeguarding information is included in parish bulletins, including the DLP and statutory agency contact details.

As part of their communication role, the Director of Safeguarding shares safeguarding information at Deanery meetings twice a year.

Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs) promote safeguarding at parish Pastoral Council meetings where safeguarding is becoming a standard agenda item. They ensure that safeguarding information is easily accessible on the diocesan website. This website is maintained and kept up to date by the Bishop's secretary and the Director of Pastoral and Faith Development. The Diocesan Secretary also uploads information on the diocesan Facebook and Twitter accounts. These platforms can be used to share safeguarding information and promote safeguarding events e.g. the Mass for the Day of Prayer for victims and survivors of abuse, and the Youth Ambassadors Lenten event.

The reviewers are satisfied that **this standard is met.**

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

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

In line with the statutory requirements of the Children First Act, 2015 Elphin Diocese has a Child Safeguarding Statement (updated in October 2022), which is displayed on the diocesan website and in all Church premises.

As per the requirements of section 2 of the Act, the diocese keep a list of Mandated Persons, of which there are eighty-seven (87) in the diocese. Eighty-four (84) of this total are priests and deacons.

As a key element of quality assurance activity, the Director of Safeguarding completes parish support visits following the completion of the parish self-audits each year. Twenty-five (25) support visits have been completed since October 2022, and the remaining visits will conclude in June 2023. These visits are completed on a rolling basis every year. They have a set agenda that includes self-audits, youth ministry, local planning, vetting, training, hazard risk assessments, and actions. A written record of the visit is formally signed off by the Director of Safeguarding, the relevant Parish Priest and Local Safeguarding Representative.

Evidence of all the elements of this process from 2017 to date were provided to the reviewers, including the Parish Safeguarding Review reports. The last of these review reports was completed for 2022 and was read by the reviewers. Each of these reports showed a clear analysis of any issues raised across the diocese, along with recommendations and actions for the coming year. The 2022 report included a plan for the return of children to Church involvement, mainly as altar servers. At the end of 2022, twenty-nine (29) churches had altar servers back again, compared to virtually none in 2021. It is worth noting - for comparison - that in 2017,

- seventy-nine churches (79) had altar servers, and only nine (9) did not;
- thirty-five (35) churches had either a mixed age group or children's choir;
- four (4) churches had a children's prayer group;
- four (4) had Children's Liturgy of the Word groups; and
- nine (9) parishes had Church-related youth activities, such as the Pope John Paul II awards scheme.

It will take time and commitment to build up such involvement of children and young people again, but a good start has been made.

As part of the Review fieldwork, the reviewers also met with the Child Safeguarding Committee, chaired by the Director of Safeguarding. The Committee has a constitution, which was last reviewed on in March 2020. The constitution was examined by the reviewers, and provided evidence that the Child Safeguarding Committee is appropriately constituted. It sets a schedule of meetings for the year ahead and its activities, which indicates an organised approach to its work. Bishop Doran, the Chancellor and the two DLPs are members of this committee. The current committee has been in place since 2017. Members are all Garda vetted, and they have completed safeguarding training. Membership is for a 3-year term, after which individuals can step out, or can be reappointed.

The Committee discussed the potential of appointing two LSRs to Committee, one urban and one rural, and are considering inviting a new member who currently works in Tusla. These new members would not be representing their parish or agency, but would bring their knowledge, skills and expertise to the table.

The activity of the Committee continued during Covid-19, and this is commended; and self-audits and reporting activity was not stood down during that time.

The members of the Safeguarding Committee said that they value the support of the Safeguarding Director /DLP, and indicated that she has established good working relationships with LSRs and other parish personnel; and LSRs and parish personnel confirmed this during the reviewers' parish visits.

Committee members were clear about the purpose and function of the Committee and about their role and responsibilities, primarily to provide good governance as required by the seven Standards.

Members reported that safeguarding is embedded into day-to-day activities and practice. This had been evident when the Synodal discussions took place in the diocese, where safeguarding had not been raised as one of the primary issues. It was the view of the coordinator that this was because the messaging in terms of the importance of safeguarding children was now part of how the diocese approaches caring for children and keeping them safe.

Members shared that they could have open and frank discussion, and everyone was facilitated to participate. They highlighted the need to do everything exceptionally well. It was evident to the reviewers that the committee have relevant experience and skills to progress Committee aims and objectives. There is a team approach, where members take collective responsibility to completes tasks and support each other.

The reviewers were provided with and they examined the following documentation:

- Three-year Strategic Plans and annual action plans for Training and Communication, 2017 to 2023. These plans reflect the requirements of the seven Standards, and they are informed by the parish self-audits and the support visits to parishes. There was clear evidence in these plans of the objectives set, actions required, persons responsible, timescale and review. These plans are monitored at the Safeguarding Committee meetings and are reviewed annually.
- Reports of Parish Self-Audits – 2017-2022 – returns have been completed for 2022. There was clear evidence from discussion with committee members, and from examining reports, agendas, minutes provided to reviewers that actions required from self-audits are actioned and inform review of plans. Progress with actions are monitored by the committee throughout the year.
- DLP reports to the Bishop, 2017 to 2022 – these were a concise summary of a review of all cases, including notifications and all case management activity, including contact with complainants.

Bishop Doran, the DLPs and the Chancellor have scheduled time to meet (Case Management Personnel Meeting) following each Safeguarding Committee meeting to discuss cases, when required. The bishop and DLPs confirmed that they regularly discuss cases outside of this meeting. The DLPs confirmed that the bishop is accessible and supportive. The bishop and DLPs highlighted that they worked well together as a team, and this was evident to the reviewers. The bishop and DLPs utilise the resource of the NCMC as appropriate, and progress the actions agreed there.

The reviewers suggested to the bishop that he should meet once a year with the Director of Safeguarding/DLP to discuss their professional development and training needs. The DLP should also meet once a year with the Deputy DLP to discuss professional development and training needs.

The final element in quality assurance in respect of safeguarding children in the Diocese of Elphin is the completion of this Review and the diocesan response to it.

**This standard is met.**

## **Conclusion**

The reviewers were assured regarding compliance with the Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016 following completion of the fieldwork visit to the diocese.

Policy, procedures and guidance, together with safeguarding arrangements are in place for children and young people in the diocese. This is based on evidence from documentation examined, and from feedback from clergy, staff, volunteers, parents, and children/ young people. All Church safeguarding personnel had been Garda vetted and had been trained appropriately; and they demonstrated a clear understanding of their safeguarding roles and responsibilities. There is a team ethos where everyone has a working together approach, and are open to learning to improve existing good safeguarding practice.

Bishop Doran is a caring, supportive leader with a 'hands on' approach to safeguarding children and young people. He is fully supported by the diocesan and parish structures; and dedicated safeguarding personnel, leaders, and volunteers, who through discussion with the reviewers demonstrated their care and commitment to ensure children and young people involved in Church activities are happy and safe.