



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

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice
in the Diocese of Ferns
undertaken by**

**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the
Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)**

Date of Review Report: January 2020

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Background

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

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

In order to assess compliance, the Bishop of Ferns invited the National Board to undertake a review of practice in 2019. The Diocese was previously reviewed in 2012 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 Ferns Diocese website www.ferns.ie and on the National Board website www.safeguarding.ie/publications

The purpose of this second round of reviews is to assess the 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*. The Review seeks a level and quality of evidence to 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 Ferns is in the Archdiocese of Dublin Metropolitan area. The diocese covers an area of 1,158 square miles, comprising County Wexford and parts of counties Wicklow and Carlow. The diocese has approximately 130,000 Catholic residents across 49 parishes. Bishop Denis Brennan, the current bishop, was installed as Bishop of Ferns on March 1st, 2006. Prior to his installation Bishop Brennan was the child protection delegate for the diocese.

The diocese has 107 priests; this includes one former bishop now retired, and the current bishop. One priest is retired with pastoral appointments; 28 priests are retired without pastoral appointments, with 27 of this number available for supply, and one residing in a nursing home. Three priests are living outside the diocese; two are Army Chaplains; and one lives in the USA. Two priests are out of ministry. A priest from a Religious Order ministers in the diocese as the chaplain to the Polish community.

The Diocese of Ferns has 16 congregations of Religious Sisters based within the diocese, with a total of 139 members, including 3 sisters who are hermits. There are 3 male Religious Orders, with a total of 13 members. Of the male Religious, 7 are non-ordained, and 6 are ordained priests.

The period covered by this review is from June 2012 to July 2019. This review therefore has considered all cases reported to the diocese during this time-period, as well as cases still being managed at the time of this review. Practice related to all the Standards is assessed from the date of the introduction of the revised National Standards in 2016.

The Diocese of Ferns was the subject of an Inquiry initiated in March 2002; and the Ferns Report was published in October 2005.

Process of Review

Event	Status
Letter of invitation from Bishop Denis Brennan	✓
MOU and Data Processing Deed signed by Bishop Brennan	✓
Preliminary meeting about proposed Review	✓
Confirmation that recommendations of previous review have been implemented	✓
Submission of preliminary data to the National Board	✓
Access to safeguarding personnel and other stakeholders arranged by Bishop Brennan	✓
Fieldwork visit to Diocese of Ferns	✓
Confirmation that reviewers have had access to all case material	✓
Letter of Initial Feedback to Bishop Brennan	✓
Completion of first draft Review Report	✓
Review Report sent to Diocese of Ferns for factual checking	✓
Review Report sent to the National Board solicitor for legal checking	✓
Review Report sent to Reference Group for methodology checking	✓
Final Review Report sent to Bishop Denis Brennan	✓

The diocese placed a notice in all Parish Newsletters and on their website informing people of the forthcoming review, while also inviting anyone with views on safeguarding practice that they wished to share to come forward.

The on-site fieldwork was carried out on 22.7.19 and 23.7.19 and the following were either met or spoken to by telephone during this time or in the following days by the reviewers:

- The Church authority, Bishop Denis Brennan
- The internal safeguarding team
- The Designated Liaison Person (DLP)
- Representatives of the Safeguarding Committee, including the Chair
- Representatives of the Advisory Panel, including the Chair
- A pastoral support priest.
- A priest advisor
- Statutory representatives on the Inter Agency Panel
- The Safeguarding Coordinator and the administrative support person for Garda vetting
- Members of the Lourdes Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage Group, including the Chair
- A complainant and partner
- The Director of Religious Education who is also the Diocesan Adviser for Post Primary Schools
- Local Parish Safeguarding Representatives
- Diocesan Trainers
- A Transition Year Coordinator at a second level school re *Spirit*¹ youth programme
- The parent of a former Spirit member who had made a complaint

¹ *Spirit* is a faith-based personal development youth programme

- Youth members of *Spirit* and a junior *Spirit* leader
- Parents of *Spirit* members
- *Spirit* leaders
- The bishop, DLP and Safeguarding Coordinator for initial verbal feedback

As part of this process case management records were examined and any clarifications required were provided by the DLP. In addition, all relevant Safeguarding Children material was reviewed in either soft or hard copy.

There was also contact with the DLP and the Safeguarding Coordinator after the fieldwork phase of the review.

The reviewers would like to express their sincere thanks to Bishop Brennan, his safeguarding staff and volunteers and the priests and lay faithful of the Ferns Diocese for the welcome, hospitality and assistance provided during the fieldwork.

Standards and Indicators

Each standard contains a list of indicators, by compliance with which the standard is met.

Standard 1: <i>Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments</i>	
1.1	The Church body follows effective practice guidelines and legislative requirements in the recruitment of all Church personnel and in assessing their suitability to work with children.
1.2	The Church body implements effective practice on the expected standards of adults' behaviour towards children.
1.3	The Church body implements effective practice in encouraging children's positive behaviour.
1.4	The Church body implements effective practice in safe care for all children, including those with specific needs.
1.5	The Church body ensures that the safe use of Church property by external groups complies with effective child safeguarding practice.
1.6	The Church body has in place clearly written whistle-blowing procedures to support and assist Church personnel to raise concerns about possible dangerous or unethical conduct by others towards children involved in Church activities.
1.7	The Church body has a clearly written complaints procedure regarding safeguarding concerns that are not allegations of abuse.
1.8	The Church body implements effective practice for Church personnel on assessment of hazards when working with children
1.9	The Church body implements effective practice for the appropriate use of information technology, including social media by Church personnel and by children.
1.10	The Church authority has responsibility for ensuring that all clerics/religious, who are members of the Church body and are ministering with children in an external organisation/Church body agree to follow effective safeguarding practice.
Standard 2: <i>Procedures for responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations</i>	
2.1	<p>The Church body has clearly written child safeguarding procedures and access to the personnel to implement them if suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations are received about the abuse of a child. These procedures specify that all suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations that meet the threshold for reporting to the statutory authorities (apart from those received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation) will be reported. In addition to reporting to the statutory authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if the allegation relates to a Church authority, the National Board must also be informed; • if the allegation relates to a cleric or religious, the National Board and the Church authority must also be informed; • if the allegation relates to a lay member of Church personnel, the Church authority must be informed.
2.2	The Church body records all suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations and action taken which complies with relevant data protection legislation, statutory guidance on confidentiality and storage of information.
2.3	The Church authority shares information about child protection suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations with those who need to know, in order to keep children safe.
Standard 3: <i>Care and Support for the Complainant</i>	
3.1	The Church authority offers appropriate pastoral care and support to the complainant, which recognises their unique needs.
3.2	The Church authority has access to appropriately trained personnel – lay, religious or clergy – whose clearly defined roles are to listen to and represent the pastoral needs of the complainant.
3.3	The Church body works in cooperation with relevant organisations and seeks specialist advice from the statutory child protection services when necessary.
Standard 4: <i>Care and Management of the Respondent</i>	
4.1	The Church authority has access to appropriately trained personnel – lay, religious or clergy – whose clearly defined roles are to listen to and represent the pastoral needs of the respondent. This is done in consultation with the respondent.

4.2	The Church authority has arrangements in place to inform the respondent that an allegation has been received about them, and has a procedure for deciding whether an interim management plan needs to be put in place for the respondent.
4.3	When statutory authority investigations and assessments have been completed, the Church authority resumes the preliminary investigation/collecting the proofs as provided for in Canon 1717 (1)-(3) (cleric) and Canon 695 (non-ordained religious).
4.4	The Church authority has in place suitable arrangements for the monitoring of a respondent, where there is a case to answer, until (and if) the Church authority no longer has responsibility for monitoring the respondent.
Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe	
5.1	The Church authority takes responsibility to ensure that the induction of all personnel – lay, religious or clergy – includes training in the Church’s child safeguarding policy and procedures.
5.2	The Church body conducts an annual training-needs analysis that identifies all Church personnel who require training and develops a training plan based on this.
5.3	The Church body ensures delivery at a local level of basic training programmes that are identified and approved by the National Board, as outlined in the National Board’s Training Strategy, where this has been identified as necessary through the annual training-needs analysis.
5.4	The Church body ensures that Church personnel who have specific child safeguarding responsibilities have appropriate, role-specific training that is identified and approved by the National Board, as outlined in the National Board Training Strategy.
5.5	The Church body provides children who access Church-related activities and their parents/guardians with information, advice and support on keeping children safe, and involves them in Church child safeguarding training initiatives wherever possible and appropriate.
5.6	The Church body facilitates the provision of an appropriate level of support to all involved with the Church in relation to their responsibilities to safeguard children.
Standard 6: Communicating the Church’s Safeguarding Message	
6.1	The Church body has a written plan, which details how the Church’s child safeguarding message will be communicated.
6.2	The Church body makes information regarding how to safeguard children available to all.
6.3	The Church body ensures that it communicates the Church’s child safeguarding message to people whose first language is not English, as well as to people who have specific needs.
6.4	The Church body establishes links with other local organisations in order to promote a safe and caring community for children and to share best child safeguarding practice.
Standard 7: Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards	
7.1	<p>The Church authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • puts in place arrangements to ensure and evaluate its compliance with the safeguarding standards at a local level; • produces a report on the level of compliance established through this audit exercise; • notifies the National Board in writing of the completion of this annual audit report.
7.2	<p>The Church body produces a three-year child safeguarding plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outlines the actions that will be taken to keep children safe; • identifies who is responsible for implementing these actions; • specifies the time frame within which actions are completed; • identifies the resources to ensure that the plan’s objectives are realised.
7.3	The Church authority invites the National Board to carry out an independent review of its safeguarding practice in relation to the applicable indicators of the seven safeguarding standards, in accordance with standard terms of reference at a frequency agreed with the National Board.

To support implementation of the Standards, the National Board has produced detailed Guidance which is accessible on its website (<https://www.safeguarding.ie/guidance>). Ferns Diocese has adopted in full the Guidance of the National Board.

This review concentrates on practice through evaluating written records, interviews with Church personnel, communication with young people; information from complainants; information from respondents; and discussions with external statutory personnel.

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 are welcoming, nurturing and safe. They provide access to good role models whom the children can trust, who respect, protect and enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

Safe recruitment

Evidence of good practice included examining the diocesan safe recruitment guidance contained in the *Safeguarding Handbook - Diocese of Ferns 2018* and on the diocesan website; reviewing the Garda vetting procedures, spending time inspecting the set up in the vetting office; and interviewing the two vetting officers recognised by An Garda Síochána.

In the first full year of the revised system of Garda vetting, 2017, the Diocesan vetting office processed 350 applications - 278 volunteers and 72 clergy. In 2018 a total of 623 were processed, 597 volunteers (which included the review of all local Parish Safeguarding Representatives) and 26 clergy; and in 2019, up to the end of July, 231 applications were processed- 230 volunteers and 1 member of the clergy.

The groups that are covered by this safe recruitment process include all priests; staff; volunteers; diocesan school staff not registered with the Teaching Council; Special Needs Assistants; caretakers; and sports coaches.

Garda vetting for all diocesan-linked organisations, such as *Spirit* and the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage is processed through the Diocesan Office and records securely retained in that location. We were assured that confidential records related to parish volunteers are safely kept within the parishes.

The Safeguarding Coordinator discovered that clients of the Probation Service whose sentences for criminal behaviour involved Community Service, and who were placed on work schemes that could potentially result in contact with children had not been Garda vetted. She brought this to the attention of the National Board and the Probation Service, as this practice had national implications.

Code of Conduct

This code was developed by the Safeguarding Committee for clergy, staff and volunteers working with children and young people. It has been made available in a number of locations – the diocesan website, church porches and halls, and in the *Safeguarding Handbook - Diocese of Ferns 2018*.

There are a number of ways in which the safeguarding personnel of the diocese continue to highlight the Code of Conduct. They have adopted what they call a ‘practical training’ approach, so that any time a training event is held in the diocese, for whatever group, this is also used to communicate reminders about key issues, including the Code of Conduct. When the document requires a reprint due to demand, it is updated and its colour is changed to signal that it is a new version and needs to be studied, and that the previous one is superseded. It is the first item in the *Safeguarding Handbook*; and it is reproduced as part of the *Parish Youth Activities - Safeguarding Procedures Information for Parents* leaflet.

Information about it is sought in the annual Parish Self Audit exercise, and because of the manner in which all audit returns are interrogated, its accessibility and availability is monitored.

Engagement of Young People

It is significant in particular that the engagement of young people through programmes such as *Spirit*, the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage and the John Paul II Awards is now reaching a level where there are more young people coming forward than can be accommodated in some of the programmes. This is a live example of the active engagement of young people and their carers/parents with the diocese.

Evidence was also seen that the above youth groups and the sacramental groups, plus altar servers, have a strong commitment to safeguarding children, both in how they plan their activities and in how they ensure that adults involved do not pose a risk to children.

The parents involved in the youth programmes who were met spoke of feeling confident that their children were in a safe environment, and they said that they were fully aware of the positive impact of these programmes on their children. The young people who had been involved in *Spirit* told the reviewers of being engaged from the start of the programme in drafting the code of behaviour that would be a critical part of creating a safe environment for them. The Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage leaders have a planning process in place for each group of young volunteers that has their safety as a priority, and there is a built-in review after every pilgrimage to identify the effectiveness of that plan.

The diocese engages with the parents of children who attend diocesan activities to ensure they are aware of the existence of this code and its part keeping their children safe. This was evidenced within the *Spirit* personal development youth programme preparation for an overnight away from home, when parents were asked to attend with their daughter / son to observe their formal admission into the activity. The *Spirit* information leaflet for parents includes the Code of Conduct for *Spirit* leaders; and another parent's leaflet, *Safeguarding procedures for Parish Youth Activities* also includes a Code of Conduct for adults.

The reviewers spoke with *Spirit* members and a *Spirit* junior leader who informed them that the application form for joining the *Spirit* programme is signed jointly by the young person and their parent/guardian; and that at the start of every new group the young people agree the code of behaviour for that group. The young people believe that this gave them a responsibility to manage their own and others' behaviour within the group.

The voluntary *Spirit* programme is available to adolescents who are in their Transition Year at school. They attend one evening a week and also commit to being involved in work group activities at the weekend. The members spoken with were very positive about their participation aiding self-development, particularly in generating positive mental wellbeing and in building resilience for the challenges ahead. The young people said that they felt both physically and emotionally safe within the environment of the *Spirit* programme. They, and some of their parents who the reviewers met, believe that this programme should be extended beyond the Transition Year timeframe.

Safe care practices

The *Safeguarding Children Policy Statement* and the *Safeguarding Children Information for Young People* are available across the diocese in hard copy posters and in soft copy on the diocesan website. In discussions with *Spirit* leaders and with the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage leaders it was evident that these groups ensure that safe care for all children they are engaged with is a priority. All volunteers are regularly vetted and trained. This priority was exemplified in the document entitled *Youth leader Duties and Responsibilities April 2018, Lourdes Pilgrimage* which sets out quite clearly that

...it is of benefit to everyone in Lourdes but especially the youth helpers that we adhere to and observe the duties and responsibilities as laid down above and that we adopt and observe the code of conduct and best practice as laid down by the Diocese of Ferns and the Child Safeguarding Committee.

Speaking with other personnel involved in providing services to children, the reviewers noted that parents are engaged and given information about safeguarding, for example when their daughter / son is becoming an altar server; or is being prepared for Confirmation; or taking part in the John Paul II Award programme.

There was a team approach exemplified by the Parish Representatives working with their local clergy to ensure a safe environment was maintained for children participating in parish activities.

Regarding children with specific needs, the Ferns Diocesan website contains the National Board's Guidance for specific roles (available at <https://ferns.ie/guidance-by-role/> 1.4F). In addition, this list is referred to within the Safeguarding Handbook for Ferns (2018) - in the final section - which has been sent out to parishes. Attention to these procedures is referred to within all training and information days.

Use of Church property

Four of the Local Parish Safeguarding Representatives confirmed that the requirements around any external body renting Church property are in place; these include having a child safeguarding policy and adequate insurance in place.

The guidance in the Diocesan Handbook and on the diocesan website notes that when a school is using Church property for sacramental celebrations, the school and parish priest must agree in advance who is responsible for safeguarding (and if necessary, whose procedures will be followed) in each circumstance.

Whistleblowing

The appropriate procedure is in place but has not needed to be used to date.

Complaints procedure

The Complaints Procedure has been used on one occasion; and the reviewers spoke with the parent who made the complaint. The complainant's daughter had a concern about a work placement she was attending as part of the *Spirit* programme. The parent told of how respectfully the matter was handled and resolved by the adult *Spirit* leader. The parent wanted to take the opportunity of this meeting to speak very highly of the *Spirit* programme, and of the personal and reflective skills young people learn through their involvement in it.

Hazard assessment

An example of implementing the Ferns Diocese guidance on hazard assessment was provided by the adult members of the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage who met the reviewers. As part of the preparation for the pilgrimage they complete a comprehensive Youth Information Form for each youth helper, which ensures that basic health information is readily available on any helper who might need medical treatment while abroad to facilitate a speedy diagnosis and treatment.

The adult to young person supervision ratio of 1:10 implemented for the pilgrimage is an important means of reducing potential hazards during the trip. A review following each pilgrimage helps to identify hazards that had been encountered.

Controls applied within the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage planning process include:

- Safe recruitment, selection and training of volunteer youth leaders;
- Two preparation meetings for youth helpers prior to the pilgrimage, the first one also attended by their parents/carers;
- Codes of behaviour for adult leaders and youth helpers
- A gender balance of youth leaders, with suitable gender specific accommodation arranged in Lourdes; and
- Each youth helper has a designated youth leader on the pilgrimage

Use of social media by Church personnel

It was confirmed to the reviewers that direct contact by Church personnel with young people using by text or email only occurs when parental consent is in place. The example seen by the reviewers relates to the Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage preparation where the parent/guardian can sign a specific consent within the Youth Information Form.

Ferns clergy ministering elsewhere

Ferns Diocese requires all of its priests who minister outside the diocese to sign a form that commits them to agree to follow the safeguarding policy and procedures of the Church body or organisation to which they have been deployed, including chaplaincies in hospitals and with the Defence Forces. A list of clergy ministering outside the diocese is kept centrally within the Diocesan Office and maintaining this is a function of the Diocesan Curia.

Clergy from elsewhere coming into the Diocese of Ferns

The Diocesan Secretary has confirmed in writing the detailed procedures that are followed in relation to priests who come into Ferns Diocese from elsewhere, whether they wish to minister or not. This includes priests who are on holiday; priests who may want to officiate at a wedding; and priests who are

retiring to the Ferns Diocese. If they wish to minister as a priest, the Ferns Diocese has to receive a letter from the relevant Church authority indicating that the priest is in good standing. All priests visiting are met by diocesan safeguarding personnel, where required or where appropriate; and depending on the length of their proposed stay and their wish to be granted faculties by the bishop to minister while there, Garda vetting is required, and refresher Child Safeguarding training may also be arranged.

The figures for the period July 2017 to July 2019 are:

1. Eight priests who habitually minister in Ferns or who have retired to the diocese – (4 habitual, 4 in domicile retired); these men very occasionally cover for diocesan priests who are unavailable.
2. Ordained Religious – faculties are extended by the bishop based on a testimonial letter from their superior and Garda vetting received.
3. Fixed term supply – One priest has been appointed for three years, the diocese having received a testimonial letter and Garda vetting.
4. Wedding Solemnisers – In the period covered, nine priests from abroad have been given permission to officiate at weddings in the Ferns Diocese. Testimonial letters confirming that they were all in good standing were received and validated. This faculty is only extended for the wedding itself
5. No priest from outside the Diocese of Ferns was incardinated into the diocese during this two-year period.

The Safeguarding Children Plan for the diocese sets out the objectives and actions required to ensure safe environments be maintained. Examples of these objectives are:

- The Parish Annual Audit continues to be updated to ensure compliance with all indicators

A sub-group of the Committee analyses the annual audit returns and go through them with a fine comb. Their findings are brought back to the Committee for information and action. The Committee provides a full report back to the bishop. The Handbook is updated each year based on findings from the Parish Audits.

The reviewers noted the following issues from the 2018 Parish Audits:

- All parish audits had been returned every year since the implementation of these audits. However it was noted that a number of parishes were consistently late with their returns.
- There was also an issue in respect of the non-distribution of Safeguarding Information for Parents, with a number of parishes providing a negative response to this question.
- Another issue noted was the non-usage of the attendance record for large groups. All parishes were using the official Sacristy attendance records for Altar Servers, but they did not seem to be using attendance records for choirs or liturgy programmes.
- A number of parishes answered “not applicable” in relation to maintaining supervision ratios.
- Finally, a number of parishes answered “not applicable” for recruitment and selection requirements.

In response to the above concerns, the Safeguarding Committee has produced a set of actions with a view to resolving them. For example, with regard to the non-distribution of Safeguarding Information for Parents the actions recommended were to draw deliberate attention to this leaflet and to its benefits via letter, newsletter, email etc., and to incorporate the form into future training programme and highlight it. The Audit Report also noted the anchor documents to support the audit process, which are the 3-year Safeguarding Children Plan, the Training Plan, the Communications Plan and the Safeguarding Handbook 2020.

- Visiting clergy seeking to minister in the Catholic Church follow all relevant procedures – (see description above of how this is managed)

The Safeguarding Committee is one of the driving forces within the diocese in ensuring that safeguarding children is the main priority in any diocesan activity that may impact on children. Along with the key safeguarding personnel in the diocese, they have integrated the National Board Guidance into Ferns Diocese, and have ensured that information leaflets are available in hard copy and soft copy, for access by all.

In 2019 this committee produced a Constitution which included sections on: A Safeguarding Children Policy Statement; The Purpose of the Committee; The Membership of the Committee; Training Requirements for Committee Members; and guidance on Record Keeping and Administration of the Meetings of the Committee.

Some of the priests interviewed had led various groups, of which they were now members, and in some cases, they had encouraged lay persons to step into these leadership roles, e.g. the current chair of the Safeguarding Committee is a lay volunteer who replaced the priest member who had been the previous chair. Among the priests who the reviewers met were a Priest trainer; the Coordinator of the Lourdes Pilgrimage; a Priest Advisor; the Deputy DLP; and a Pastoral Support priest. These priests were all clear on and comfortable about their safeguarding responsibilities.

Bishop Brennan has shown a strong commitment to creating and maintaining safe environments for children and young people involved with the Diocese of Ferns. This was evidenced in his discussions with the reviewers, and by the safeguarding structure and personnel with which he directly engages. He also attends key operational safeguarding meetings that are held within the diocese - the internal weekly safeguarding meeting, the Inter Agency Panel and the Advisory Panel.

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.

The Ferns diocesan website home page has a clear Safeguarding link which goes on to list or gives links to all the relevant documents, procedures and guidance. The diocese follows the guidance of the National Board in implementing the policy and procedures for child protection. These are evidenced on this website; and it was noted that the diocese has also developed a *Safeguarding Handbook* for Ferns (2018) which is a quick reference guidebook containing frequently asked questions and answers, and it is available in hard and soft copy in all diocesan locations and at all training events. This excellent guidebook could be further enhanced in its next version by the inclusion of contact information for Tusla and An Garda Síochána.

The reviewers noted that all forms, leaflets and posters in use by the diocese are also available in soft copy on the website and referenced in the Handbook.

Standard 2 places a strong emphasis on reporting, notification and information-sharing.

Since the last the National Board review in 2012, Ferns Diocese has received no reports of incidents of abuse alleged to have taken place in the period 2012 to the present.

During this period the Ferns Diocese has received **16** retrospective allegations (about events alleged to have happened prior to 2012) against **12** clerics who were incardinated in the diocese at the time when the abuse allegedly occurred, including one who was unidentified.

Table 1 – Retrospective Allegations regarding child sexual abuse by clerics notified to Ferns Diocese since 2012

Cleric	Current status	Number of allegations	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	The National Board notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
1	Retired, in good standing	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes
2	Dismissed from the clerical state in 2005*	1	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	Yes*
*These actions were taken by the priest's 'home' diocese, to which he had been seconded from Ferns in the 1980s						
3	Dismissed from the clerical state prior to 2012	1	Yes – within 24 hours	Yes – within 24 hours	Yes – within 24 hours	Yes
4	In ministry – wrongly identified	1	Yes – within 10 days	Yes – within 10 days	Yes – within 10 days	N/A
5	Out of ministry - in prison	1	Yes – within 4 days	Yes – within 4 days	Yes – within 4 days	Yes
6	Deceased	4	Yes – first one within 5	Yes – first one within 5	Yes – first one within 6	Yes (prior to 2012)

			weeks Yes – second one within 9 days Yes – third one within 9 days Yes – fourth one within 5 days	weeks Yes – second one within 9 days Yes – third one within 9 days	weeks Yes – second one within 9 days Yes – third one within 9 days	
7	Deceased	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	N/A
8	Deceased	1	Yes – within 6 days	Yes – within 6 days	Yes – within 6 days	N/A
9	Dismissed from the clerical state prior to 2012	1	Yes – on same day	Yes – on same day	Yes – on same day	N/A
10	Unidentified	1	Yes – within 7 days	Yes – within 7 days	Yes – within 7 days	Not possible
11	Suspended by his home diocese+	1	Yes – on same day	Yes – on same day	Yes – on same day	Responsibility of other diocese
+While the initial report came to the Ferns Diocese, this priest had and has no association with the diocese						
12	Retired within his religious order	2	Yes – first one within 2 months Yes – exact date not recorded	Yes – first one within 2 months Yes – exact date not recorded	Yes – first one within 2 month Yes – exact date not recorded	Yes

Two Ferns priests currently have management plans in place, based on the conditions set out in their initial canonical precepts. One is in prison and the other is still involved in civil proceedings; the second priest's situation came to light prior to the previous Review.

One former priest still has contact from the diocese and has a management plan in place. This person was dealt with within the Ferns Inquiry report and so did not feature in the previous Review Report.

In the same period 2012 to 2019, the diocese also received reports of allegations of child sexual abuse in respect of two priests, one from outside the jurisdiction, and the other an unidentified missionary priest. These were both notified to the appropriate statutory and Church authorities.

Religious Orders

In addition to allegations against ordained priests, the Diocese of Ferns received five allegations against five different religious Brothers in the period November 2012 to July 2019; and appropriate notifications were made in all cases. These are detailed as follows:

1. Tusla informed the diocese of an allegation against a former religious Brother, and this was forwarded within 2 weeks to the relevant congregation's DLP. While this man resided in the diocese at the time of the report, the alleged incident occurred in a school in another part of Ireland in the period 1968-70.
2. Tusla informed the diocese of an allegation against a religious Brother, and this was forwarded within 10 days to the relevant congregation's DLP. There was no information suggesting any possible activity by the identified Brother within the diocese.

3. A child abuse allegation was received by the diocese in relation to a former religious Brother, and this was reported by the diocese on the following day to Tusla, An Garda Síochána and the National Board.
4. Tusla informed the diocese of an allegation against an unidentified religious Brother. Following initial enquiries taking 8 days, this report was referred by the diocese back to Tusla; and it was also forwarded within 4 weeks to the relevant congregation's DLP. There was no apparent link with any possible activity within the diocese.
5. Tusla informed the diocese of an allegation against a religious Brother. This was forwarded within 9 days by the diocese to the relevant congregation's DLP as there was no apparent link with any possible activity by the identified Brother in the Diocese.

Committees

Ferns Diocese has a sophisticated child safeguarding architecture, with two case management committees established in the early 2000's, influenced by the Ferns Inquiry and the concern to have more effective systems in place. These are the Interagency Panel and the Diocesan Advisory Panel. In addition, the key safeguarding personnel in the diocese comprise an internal safeguarding team of the bishop, the Diocesan Secretary, the DLP, the Assistant DLP and the Safeguarding Coordinator. This grouping was first convened in 2003.

The Interagency Panel is composed of a Tusla Principal Social Worker, a Chief Superintendent of An Garda Síochána and the Bishop of Ferns. The other internal safeguarding team members also attend this meeting. Cases are discussed, and information is shared to help shape views on safeguarding children from both civil and criminal perspectives.

The Diocesan Advisory Panel meets in the afternoon of the day that the Inter-agency Panel meets; cases are presented in an anonymous format, but with the benefit of the views of the Inter-agency meeting held that morning being available to participants. The membership of the Diocesan Advisory Panel includes a religious Sister with significant safeguarding experience as chair; two Tusla Social Work Team Leaders; a civil lawyer; a canon lawyer; and a community representative with a counselling and HR background. The internal safeguarding team also attend this meeting. Cases are presented by the DLP; and the primary role of the Committee is to make recommendations to the bishop on actions, if any, that should be taken in managing a concern.

In relation to how the Diocese of Ferns is implementing Standard 2, the reviewers established that:

- The case management files reviewed were comprehensive, structured and transparent.
- All allegations were reported to the appropriate statutory bodies, and the majority of these were notified in a timely fashion.
- In one case a record made in 2004 was not correctly filed until 2014, due to an oversight. Thereafter, the follow up actions were carried out in an efficient and professional manner. A preliminary investigation was also completed by the Gardai, who subsequently closed the case.

At the weekly meeting of the internal safeguarding team, a check is made to establish that all cases have been appropriately reported. While it happens as a matter of course, it is suggested that this becomes a standing agenda item and should also be recorded in the minutes of these meetings to capture the weekly practice.

- Restricting a priest's ministry and/or reminding respondent priests of their restrictions was acted upon by either the bishop or one of the internal case management team. At the time of this Review, Bishop Brennan has restricted the ministry of 2 diocesan priests due to child safeguarding concerns.
- The bishop, the internal safeguarding team and the committees have as their primary goal safeguarding the children who have contact with the diocese both in their words and in their actions. This was evidenced in meeting records and on case files.

The records of any meeting related to a respondent priest are copied to the relevant case file and are colour-coded for easier identification. The weekly internal safeguarding meeting, as well as referencing case management issues, also notes any broader safeguarding issues that arise and which the Coordinator may need to take to the Safeguarding Committee.

- The foundations for inter-agency cooperation within Ferns Diocese are now long established and are built upon a trust between the statutory agencies and the diocese that they share a joint goal in safeguarding children. They meet as and when needed, and discuss anonymised concerns about which they give general advice to the bishop.
- The Advisory Panel has been in place since 2003 and has the former Safeguarding Coordinator as its chair. As stated earlier they act in an advisory capacity to the bishop in terms of the management of cases.

The Advisory Panel and the Inter Agency Panel have discussed a total of 9 out of the 16 allegations referenced in Table 1 since the last review. In all cases their advice was followed.

- There was also evidence on the case management files of the Diocese taking the opportunity of seeking the advice of the National Board's Case Management Committee (NCCMC).

Direct advice was sought from the NCCMC in respect of 4 out of the 16 allegations; (the National Board was notified formally in respect of all the allegations). The advice given was closely considered by the Diocese on all occasions. On one occasion the bishop asked the Diocesan Advisory Panel to consider the advice he had received from the NCCMC, before proceeding.

Overall, the reviewers are satisfied that Ferns Diocese meets Standard 2, to the extent that no recommendations are required. They consider the potential risk to children, they notify statutory authorities promptly, and they place restrictions on respondent clerics appropriately. The approach taken is collaborative and no one person acts on their own in attempting to manage cases.

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.

The three sources of information about how complainants were engaged with were (i) discussions with the bishop, the DLP and the Safeguarding Coordinator; (ii) telephone interviews with a complainant and his partner; and (iii) reading the case management file records.

Of note during this review has been the leadership displayed by Bishop Brennan in responding to complainants. If complainants or their families came forward and wished to meet him, the bishop made sure that he was available to meet them. This was evidenced on two specific files, including that of the complainant and his partner interviewed by the reviewers. In both cases where the bishop met family members he offered counselling services. The complainant who came forward to be interviewed by the reviewers felt that following his meeting with the bishop, the Church had taken ownership of his concerns. He was already receiving counselling at the time he met the bishop.

In all diocesan case management files reviewed, the DLP, the Assistant DLP, and on occasion the Diocesan Secretary also offered to meet with the complainants. They offered pastoral support from themselves and counselling supports from agencies, or from individual counsellors nominated by the complainants. The current Safeguarding Coordinator has, as one of her responsibilities, the support of complainants. She will be leaving directly after the completion of the review fieldwork, but she is to be replaced quickly.

The bishop and key safeguarding personnel in the internal safeguarding team clearly invest significantly in ensuring that the response to complainants is consistent, appropriate and compassionate. This was reflected in the case files reviewed, as well as from the complainant and partner who spoke to the reviewers.

The reviewers have suggested in their feedback to the bishop that complainants would be offered support from either a female or a male support person. Complainants who came through their solicitor were also offered pastoral support as a standard response from the diocese. If a complainant did not wish to give their name, every effort was still made by the diocese to offer them support, on occasions through a third party, and to keep them informed of the progress of the case.

A number of complainants did not wish to engage directly with the diocese.

Interview with a complainant; and interview with their partner

As mentioned, the reviewers had the opportunity to talk to one complainant, and separately to their partner. The complainant had made an allegation of abuse during the period covered by this review. He had come forward prior to 2012 with this allegation, but it was withdrawn. He had been and was still receiving support from Towards Healing. Both he and his partner emphasised that the long-term impact of the abuse could not be over-estimated; and they stated that some complainants may need long-term support. They were both appreciative of the diocesan response to their coming forward a second time, from the bishop and the DLP, and from the Safeguarding Coordinator who provided support to them both. The reviewers became very aware from their interviews how the family in this case had been impacted by the abuse, and that the Ferns Diocese response was caring, supportive and compassionate. The complainant was appreciative of the work of the investigating Gardai as well, as he felt that they had also believed him.

Cooperation with other agencies

This was evidenced in relation to complainants being offered a range of service options through the diocesan support person, for example, Towards Healing, Towards Peace, or support from a private counsellor. Cooperation with Tusla and the An Garda Síochána has been described in some detail in the previous section.

Overall, the diocesan response to complainants reflects a respect for the people coming forward and recognition that they have individual needs requiring a range of responses. In accessing a variety of service responses, the diocese has evidenced engagement with external voluntary and statutory bodies.

In most of the 16 concerns referenced in Table 1 the complainants were offered initial pastoral support from the DLP or the Safeguarding Coordinator. After this initial offer of support at least 5 of the complainants did not pursue any support from or through the diocese. The complainant in the Cleric 1 case had their counselling initially funded by the diocese. At least 3 of the complainants received supportive counselling from Towards Healing. In view of the confidential nature of counselling it is very difficult to give an absolute figure for those who actually received counselling.

The reviewers commend the good example given by Bishop Brennan to all in the diocese in how he responds in a caring and compassionate way to complainants.

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 is provided.

Priests receiving care and support under a management plan

There are two priests in the diocese who require care and management, and another former priest who is still receiving pastoral support from the diocese. The two respondents with a Care and Management Plan were sent a questionnaire with a cover letter prior to the fieldwork visit, and only one of these, Cleric 5 replied and he had no complaints about how the bishop had dealt with the allegations, including how he had been advised of the allegation, or the level of support he has subsequently received from fellow priests and family.

Cleric 5 (previously referenced under Standard 2) has had a priest advisor in place since he stepped aside from ministry before 2012; and he has been the subject of a canonical precept² since that time. In addition, he has had the assistance of the pastoral support priest for at least the last seven years. The priest advisor and pastoral support priest have kept regular, often weekly contact with him. Since this respondent's recent prison sentence, the contact has primarily been from the pastoral support priest. This pastoral support priest attended the criminal court hearings and has continued his contact with the priest in prison. Prior to the prison sentence, the priest advisor would have attended most of the quarterly meetings held by the DLP with the respondent.

Both these priests, involved in supportive roles to a respondent have attended general safeguarding training provided by the diocesan trainers, and role specific training from the National Board. The second of the priests under a Care and Management regime has been in this situation since before 2012, but he is not included in the discussion under Standard 2, as the allegation against him was received prior to 2012. The case management file notes that in 2014, a support priest was appointed to him, and that a canonical precept remained in place.

The third case reviewed under Standard 4 is that of a former priest who was dismissed in 2005. The person receives regular pastoral support visits from another diocesan priest. He also receives visits from the DLP and from Bishop Brennan. All of these contacts are recorded on the case management file.

Priest advisers

In the above three cases, a priest advisor was appointed to the respondent by the diocese. The reviewers spoke to one priest advisor who presented as caring, while also clearly understanding the impact of child abuse on the lives of complainants. This person has been an advisor to the same priest for at least the last seven years, first supporting his fellow priest through the criminal process and now within a prison setting.

The reviewers also spoke to a pastoral support priest to the same man. Similar to the priest advisor, he was chosen by the respondent to take on this role. This priest had clearly committed to offering support as long as it was needed and as frequently as practicable.

It was not fully clear to the reviewers what the role distinction is between a priest adviser and a pastoral support priest; the priest adviser however is formally appointed, while the priest providing pastoral support tends to be a priest friend of the respondent priest.

The reviewers have raised with the bishop that the way in which pastoral support and priest advisers are appointed could be more structured, and a more formal system of support could be put in place for pastoral support and adviser priests themselves.

² Under Canon 49 (*Praeceptum singular*) of the Code of Canon Law: "A singular precept is a decree by which an obligation is directly and lawfully imposed on a specific person or persons to do or omit something, especially in order to urge the observance of a law".

Procedures

The case management files provide evidence that the respondents were notified following consultation with the relevant statutory authorities (where and when appropriate) of allegations made against them.

In respect of the two respondent priests referenced in this section, penal canonical processes have not been initiated, as in one case, civil actions are on-going; and in the other, criminal proceedings have only recently been completed. Both men however have been subject to canonical precepts; and both of them have been the subject of correspondence between the bishop and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF – the Vatican congregation which deals with disciplinary matters relating to child abuse) in Rome.

The DLP offers quarterly meetings with clerics out of ministry as part of the follow up to a precept being in place; however, a respondent may not always cooperate by making himself available for these meetings.

The Bishop of Ferns and the key diocesan safeguarding personnel provide a clear and consistent system of caring and managing respondents. A strong emphasis remains on safeguarding children; and the firm but caring management of the respondents reflects this emphasis.

A good level of consultation with other agencies and relevant advisory panels, including the National Board's case management committee was also evidenced.

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.

At the time of the review the Diocese of Ferns has four National Board accredited trainers who form the diocesan training team. This team reports to the Safeguarding Committee. This committee also has responsibility for developing a three-year Safeguarding Plan, which includes a training plan and a communication plan.

The last available full set of Training records for the diocese covers the period June 1st, 2017 to December 1st, 2018. In this period, 470 people were trained through the delivery of 8 Information Sessions and 3 Full-day Training Sessions.

At the time of this review the following personnel in child safeguarding roles have received or will receive role specific training by 2020:

- The Bishop
- DLP/Assistant DLP
- Diocesan trainers
- Priest advisors
- Pastoral support priests
- All clergy in ministry
- All parish secretaries
- Local parish safeguarding representatives
- Safeguarding Committee members
- Choir leaders
- Youth leaders
- Spirit/Youth leadership course attenders
- Lourdes pilgrimage leaders

Training Plan

The current Training Plan runs from 2018 to 2020. It sets out targets for delivery of training, either by the training team or the National Board accredited trainers. The plan also sets out timing, location and costs associated with the training. The Training Plan sets out the programme for the delivery of local safeguarding awareness sessions by the accredited diocesan trainers. If external training is required based on information from the training needs analysis, this is sourced by the diocese.

When the reviewers met with three of the trainers it was clear that they all remain committed to continuing in this work.

In 2018, the following groups received training from this team or from the National Board:

- Local safeguarding representatives, clergy and secretaries.
- Lourdes Pilgrimage volunteers
- All Church volunteers across the four Deaneries of the diocese
- Safeguarding Committee members (from the National Board)
- Diocesan Religious Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre for John of God Sisters and staff
- Diocesan Religious Adoration Sisters

The diocesan Training Programme provides for a mix of generic and role-specific Child Safeguarding training.

The generic Safeguarding Children training is for a full day, with the DLP attending part of this session. The training day covers the seven Standards in the morning, while a discussion of case scenarios takes

place in the afternoon. It is mandatory for diocesan clergy in ministry to attend this full day of training. To date, training of the clergy has taken place in 2013 and 2016, with the next round due in 2020.

When the reviewers met with Parish Safeguarding Representatives, they gave very positive feedback on the delivery of Safeguarding Children training to all Church volunteers in 2018, which feedback the reviewers shared with the trainers in turn. At this time over 400 Church volunteers attended this training, delivered on a Deanery basis.

Safeguarding personnel with specific roles such as DLP, assistant DLP and Safeguarding Coordinator, access their role-specific training from the National Board. The reviewers inspected the training files to establish that all safeguarding personnel receive updated general training, irrespective of role; and this was clarified in meetings with all individuals and groups during the fieldwork. This well organised commitment to training is commended.

The Safeguarding Committee has the task of ensuring that all new Church personnel are made aware of the Standards, as well as their own safeguarding role. The diocese is developing a Volunteer Induction Pack in conjunction with the Safeguarding Committee and the incoming Safeguarding Coordinator.

Training Needs Analysis

The annual training needs analysis is another key function of the Safeguarding Committee, and this is administered by the Safeguarding Coordinator.

The Safeguarding Coordinator also administers the annual Safeguarding Audit of the parishes in the diocese. This audit gathers and collates the records of various training-related activities. The collated information informs the training needs analysis which is then signed off by the Safeguarding Committee and integrated into the Diocesan Training Plan for Safeguarding Children. The Safeguarding Committee also ensures that training needs assessments are completed across the various child safeguarding roles in the diocese.

Since 2018, the Safeguarding Coordinator has conducted visits to the parishes to discuss their completed audit reports, and has been meeting with priests, local parish safeguarding representatives and parish secretaries; and these visits provide another method of gathering information for the training needs analysis.

Supports to Children and Young People

Ferns Diocese utilises posters and leaflets for safeguarding guidance for young people and their parents, which include the following:

- Policy Statements Safeguarding Children poster
- Ferns Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes Safeguarding Procedures
- Spirit Safeguarding Procedures: Information for Parents
- Code of Conduct for Clergy, Staff and Volunteers working with children and young people
- Safeguarding Children, Information for Young People poster
- Sacristy and Altar Servers information
- Parish Youth Activities, Safeguarding Procedures, Information for Parents
- Workshop on creating a code of behaviour for children
- Code of Behaviour for Children and Young People
- A notice for visiting clergy to present their *celebrats* when ministering within the Diocese.

All are available in both hard and soft copy - <https://ferns.ie/safeguardingforms>

In their discussions with young people and their parents, the reviewers were informed that they were briefed about safeguarding issues prior to engagement by the young person in any Church related activity.

The bishop, the internal safeguarding team, the Advisory Panel and the Safeguarding Committee provide an internal framework of support for safeguarding children activity within the diocese. This is an integrated support structure which reaches out to all in the diocese, and promotes the message that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. This structure is enhanced by the Director of Religious Education who is also the Diocesan Adviser for Post Primary Schools. This person is a

member of the Diocesan Confirmation Team and has strong links with the John Paul II awards scheme. The safeguarding structures within the parishes are also supported in particular by the Safeguarding Coordinator and the Diocesan Training Team.

Evidence was provided through documentation and interviews to establish that all six indicators for Standard 5 are met in full by the Diocese of Ferns. The experience and commitment of the diocesan trainers was evident, as was the support and drive for relevant safeguarding training that comes from the Safeguarding Committee and the bishop.

Standard 6

Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Church Bodies appropriately communicate the Church's child safeguarding message

Planning

Ferns Diocese has a Safeguarding Plan for the period 2018 to 2020. The diocese also has a linked Communication Plan and Training Plan for the same period. These plans have been developed by the Safeguarding Committee of Ferns Diocese.

Means of Communication

The comprehensive Ferns Diocese website has a dedicated Safeguarding section at <https://ferns.ie>. The Diocese has also developed a 22-page Safeguarding Handbook, and this is available in both hard and soft copy.

As noted previously in this report the diocese uses posters and leaflets, both in hard and soft copy, ensuring that the safeguarding message is accessible to all. These are all accessible at <https://ferns.ie/safeguardingforms>, as is the Safeguarding Handbook. In addition, the parish newsletters are used as a means of communicating this message, particularly by the local safeguarding representatives.

A Safeguarding Newsletter for Ferns was produced in early 2019. This was informative and updated the diocese on safeguarding developments. The goal of the diocese is to issue one of these annually; and the previous Newsletters are archived on the diocesan website at <https://ferns.ie/safeguarding-newsletter/>

The safeguarding message is also communicated directly to priests at their Conferences, which take place three times a year. These Conferences are attended by the Safeguarding Coordinator; and by DLP, if required.

To date, the Diocese of Ferns has produced safeguarding information in English, Irish and Polish, which is to be commended. There is a question in the annual Parish Self-audit about the existence of significant non-national communities, so that the diocese can establish whether a need for further translations into other languages is indicated.

Interagency Communication

The Diocese of Ferns has a long established Inter Agency Panel involving Tusla and An Garda Síochána. This link has been enhanced further with two Tusla managers now sitting on the Diocesan Advisory Panel.

The diocese also maintains significant links with the school system through, in particular:

- The Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage
- The *You Shall be my Witness* a parent led Confirmation preparation programme
- The John Paul II awards
- The *Spirit* youth development programme

Communication is a two-way process. The reviewers were encouraged to see feedback from parishes to the diocesan centre and an openness to receive this. One example noted was that a number of parishes gave feedback to the Safeguarding Committee about the structure and content of the annual Parish Audit, which feedback was taken into account in making amendments to the audit instrument.

Based on the evidence reviewed, including fieldwork and documentation examined, the reviewers are satisfied that the Diocese of Ferns meets all the requirements of Standard 6. A system is in place which encourages communication throughout the Diocese, supported by the framework of the Communication Plan.

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.

Bishop Brennan has notified the National Board of the completion of the parish self-audit exercise and of the DLP audit exercise each year. This process has been enhanced in recent years by a parish-visiting programme undertaken by the Safeguarding Coordinator with the relevant priest/s and parish volunteers. This has ensured that the importance of the audit process has been further reinforced at parish level. All parishes have completed and submitted their self-audit reports in 2018, which is an excellent achievement and evidence of a commitment to quality assurance that is commended. This area of practice has been described above under Standard 2.

The Diocese of Ferns has a detailed three-year Safeguarding Children Plan in place for 2018-2020, which has been described in detail previously. The parish audit returns are closely scrutinised by a small sub-group of the Safeguarding Committee, which includes the Safeguarding Coordinator, and this group feeds their analysis back into the Safeguarding Committee to be utilised for planning purposes. This allows the parishes to see a direct link between the information that they feed in to the Diocesan Office and the outcome in the form of a relevant Diocesan Safeguarding Plan. The information, comments and questions fed back through the parish audits are also used to continually update the Ferns Diocese Safeguarding Handbook.

Safeguarding Children activities and initiatives are sufficiently funded within the Diocese of Ferns, and lack of adequate funding has never been a reason for something being left undone or a requirement not being met.

This review was conducted at the invitation of Bishop Brennan, which is evidence that indicator 7.3 is fully met.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the reviewers are of the view that there is significant evidence across all seven Standards that the Diocese of Ferns has put into practice systems and procedures to promote the safety of children and young people. The personnel and volunteers involved with safeguarding children are committed to this task and show a team approach at all levels within the diocese.

This commitment to safeguarding children is supported by strong leadership, again from all levels within the diocese. Leadership in this area was evidenced consistently from the bishop and the diocesan priests. It was also evidenced by all individuals, including young people and parents, who spoke with and engaged with the reviewers.