



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

Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice

in the Diocese of Ossory

undertaken by

The National Board for Safeguarding Children

in the Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)

Date of Review Report: June 2022

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Background

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (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;
- 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 with the 2016 Standards, the Apostolic Administrator of Ossory Diocese, Bishop Denis Nulty invited the National Board to undertake a review of child safeguarding practice in 2022. The diocese was previously reviewed in June 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 Ossory Diocese website www.ossory.ie and on the National Board's website, www.safeguarding.ie/publications

The recommendations from this first Review are available on the diocesan website at <https://ossory.ie/safeguarding-audits/>, along with statements about their implementation.

Recommendation 1:

The safeguarding committee should consider in their next revision of diocesan policy and procedures, a template which follows the seven safeguarding standards and which sets out how the diocese manages those who pose a risk to children.

Revision of the diocesan policy and procedures document is currently underway and will be ready for publication by Spring 2015.

Recommendation 2:

Bishop Freeman must ensure that old case management files are reorganised using a chronological system. The practice of using the NBSCCCI case file template should continue for all new cases.

A person has been assigned to this task and secure office space has been allocated in order to carry out reorganisation of old case management files.

Recommendation 3:

Bishop Freeman, having reviewed the case referred by the reviewers must now ensure that the recommendations of the National Case Management Reference Group (NCMRG) have been followed.

Work Completed

Recommendation 4:

Prior to issuing *celebrats* and/or letters of good standing for priests from the diocese, but not ministering in the diocese, Bishop Freeman should read all relevant records and make appropriate enquiries from the Church authority of where the priest is ministering to ensure that there are no matters of concern relating to priests of his diocese.

This recommendation has been taken and will be adhered to at all times.

Recommendation 5:

As part of restructuring of old files into chronological order, Bishop Freeman should ask his designated person to detail all information relating to named victims and ensure that all these details are passed to the civil authorities for their investigations.

This is currently a work in progress (See recommendation 2)

Recommendation 6:

Bishop Freeman should consider appointing a part time layperson to the role of designated person and case manager to ensure there is no conflict of interest and to deal with cases from start to finish.

Two new Designated Liaison persons have been recently appointed. They will receive training from the NBSCCCI early in 2015.

Recommendation 7:

The safeguarding coordinator must review all procedures within the diocese to ensure they set out how each aspect of Standard 3 is met.

Parish audits have been conducted throughout the diocese and compliance to diocesan policy and procedures has been found to be good.

A review audit will be conducted in Spring / Summer 2015.

Recommendation 8:

The safeguarding coordinator should continue to meet all safeguarding representatives and parish priests on a regular basis to provide them with a written role description for the safeguarding representative and offer support for their role as safeguarding representatives.

This is an ongoing procedure in the Diocese.

Recommendation 9:

The chair of the safeguarding committee should, alongside all committee members draft a committee constitution and annual work plan for presentation to Bishop Freeman.

A safeguarding committee constitution has been drawn up.

Recommendation 10:

The safeguarding coordinator, in consultation with Bishop Freeman and the safeguarding committee should develop a communications plan stating how safeguarding will be promoted throughout the diocese. Consideration should be given to having a safeguarding newsletter, identifying one Sunday in the year to highlight the importance of Safeguarding in the Church, and by issuing regular pastoral letters.

New safeguarding literature for children/young people, parents and the general public has been produced and was circulated to all parishes for Safeguarding Sunday, which took place on 1st Sunday in Advent, 30th November 2014.

Child friendly posters for sacristies have also been produced.

Information has been provided for inclusion in Parish Newsletters.

Recommendation 11:

Bishop Freeman in consultation with his designated persons should clarify role descriptions for those involved in the management of allegations and the subsequent safety plans.

See Diocesan Structures

Recommendation 12:

Bishop Freeman should establish a diocesan safeguarding strategic group comprising himself, his designated people, the safeguarding coordinator and others as required to develop a three year safeguarding plan and an annual review of safeguarding in the Diocese of Ossory

Bishop Freeman appointed a Director of Safeguarding as recommended by the Safeguarding Committee. The Bishop will have regular meetings with the Director who is responsible for co-ordinating all safeguarding matters in the Diocese of Ossory.

A Five Year Safeguarding Plan has been drawn up. This will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis.

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*. 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 Ossory is in the ecclesiastical province of Dublin. The diocese covers an area of approximately 935 square kilometres (361 Square Miles), comprising the county of Kilkenny, and portions of County Laois and County Offaly. The diocese has approximately 86,115 Catholic residents across 42 parishes. Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin Diocese was appointed as Apostolic Administrator in February 2021, following the elevation of his predecessor to become the Archbishop of Dublin.

A detailed history of the Diocese of Ossory can be accessed at <https://ossory.ie/history-of-the-diocese/>

The diocese has fifty-seven (57) incardinated priests, of whom thirteen (13) are retired. One (1) priest is living and working outside the diocese; and one (1) priest is out of ministry. There are eight (8) congregations of Religious Sisters based within the diocese, and five (5) male Religious Orders.

The period covered by this Review is from July 2013 to March 2022, and so it has considered all child protection cases reported to the diocese during this time-period, as well as cases reported earlier and still being managed at the time of the Review.

Child safeguarding practice is assessed against *Safeguarding Children 2016*, which is accessible at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/guidance>.

Strand 6 of the current Ossory Diocese Pastoral Plan states that one goal of the plan is

To provide support for the area of Child Safeguarding at Diocesan level by continuing to develop the area of child safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure best practice in this area.

Process of Review

The Ossory Diocese Review was commenced and undertaken during a time when some government restrictions in relation to Covid-19 continued to be in place. Nevertheless, the co-operation of all concerned ensured the reviewers obtained a comprehensive picture of safeguarding practice in the diocese. The fieldwork was conducted on March 21 and 22, 2022. The following is a list of those with whom the reviewers came into contact during the course of this Review:

- Apostolic Administrator of Diocese
- Priest Secretary to the Apostolic Administrator
- Director of Safeguarding/Designated Person
- Vetting Administrator / Trainer / former Director of Safeguarding
- Diocesan Secretary
- Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- Diocesan Youth Ministry
- Ossory Diocesan Pastoral Council Coordinator
- Safeguarding Trainers
- Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage Organisers
- A respondent priest
- Priest Advisor
- A complainant
- Complainant Support Person
- Parish Priests
- Parish Organiser of Children’s Liturgy
- Parish Safeguarding Representatives
- Altar Servers
- Youth choir members
- Sacristans
- Parish Administrator

The reviewers appreciated the warm welcome and hospitality extended to them by diocesan personnel and noted the extensive preparation and organisation undertaken in advance of this review.

STANDARDS

This section provides the findings of the Review. The template employed to present the findings are the seven standards, set down and described in the Church guidance, *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*. Ossory diocese agreed to adopt *Safeguarding Children 2016* as its child safeguarding policy through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016.

The review concentrated on safeguarding arrangements and practice through evaluating written records, meetings with Church personnel, and communication with young people, statutory agencies, a complainant and a priest advisor.

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.

The Diocese of Ossory has a Safeguarding Statement on its website at <https://ossory.ie/safeguarding-documents/> and displayed in parish churches, as required by Children First, 2015.

The Diocese has procedures in place for safe recruitment of both paid staff and volunteers. A recruitment checklist is completed for all recruitment exercises. An application process for volunteers is in place, including references and vetting, together with safeguarding training. One parish visited has developed an excellent support pack for volunteers, which included an informative Safeguarding Booklet.

Vetting is completed every three years. This information is held on a central database, updated by a diocesan vetting administrator. Vetting of all relevant personnel is up to date. The database was seen as part of the fieldwork. Parishes have up to date details of staff and volunteers, including vetting/training completed, which was evidenced during parish site visits.

Garda Vetting Statistics					
Year	Clergy	Parishes	Schools	Lourdes	Diocesan
2016-17	62	164	818	28	5
2018	5	178	470	12	6
2019	2	153	539	7	10
2020	58	79	466	-	-
2021	8	14	414	-	3
2022	1	2	110	-	-

The Diocese of Ossory has an excellent up to date Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook, which is available on the website, supplemented by hard copies in parish offices. The handbook covers the procedural and practice areas required by the National Board Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016.

Good examples of 'Codes of Behaviour & Conduct' for altar servers and choirs were shared with the reviewers. The young people themselves completed a code of behaviour for young people attending the choir.

Parishes visited had clearly displayed posters and leaflets about safeguarding at church entrances and in sacristies. These included particularly child-friendly material, which was clear and accessible. All material seen displayed up-to-date contact details of the relevant named person. Privacy and web-cam notices were displayed at church entrances.

The Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook has a Record Keeping and Safe Storage section, (1.17). All case management files are in locked storage. The vetting administrator securely stores vetting information.

There was evidence of completed registration forms for altar servers in the sacristies of the churches visited.

The reviewers had an opportunity to meet with a group of experienced Sacristans who were aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. They also understood their supervision role with children and young people, importantly including personal care arrangements.

The Sacristans reported that they worked as a team and received support in their role from the local safeguarding representative, the Parish Priests and the Director of Safeguarding. Their vetting and training was up to date, and the Sacristans understood and shared the importance of refresher training in keeping up-to-date with safeguarding requirements and practice. The Sacristans are to be commended for their support and care to children and young people. They also provided an excellent example of the Church community's embrace of a proactive and positive culture of safeguarding.

Supervision arrangements are in place for altar servers and in other youth activities, including choir and pantomime rehearsals. Adult volunteers are vetted, and they receive safeguarding training. Registration forms and incident reports are completed as required.

During the Review, reviewers met with three young people who confirmed their knowledge of safeguarding arrangements. The young people shared that they felt safe attending Church activities and they knew whom they could talk to about any safeguarding concerns, including bullying. They looked forward to the altar server role being restarted. One young person had attended the choir the previous day for the first time since the start of Covid-19 in March 2020.

During parish site visits evidence of completed hazard risk assessments, (section 1.15 Ossory Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook), and incident reports, (section 1.6), were available to the reviewers. These related to children's activities such as alter service, choir and pantomime. A Complaints Policy is in place. There were no current active complaints, (section 1.4 Ossory Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook).

There were no whistleblowing reports since the last review, (section 1.3 Ossory Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook).

The Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook includes a section (1.16) on the Use of Technology. This guidance is applied for all children's activities including use of photography, social media, mobile phones, texts and emails. This was evidenced in pre-planning preparation for trips/retreats and a parish pantomime. In addition, CCTV notices are widely displayed where this is in use.

Trips and residential retreats are pre-planned and arrangements include parental consent forms, codes of behaviour, supervision arrangements, an appropriate ratio of adults to children and young people, and emergency contacts.

Because of the ongoing pandemic and related Covid-19 issues, the annual Lourdes Diocesan Pilgrimage has not been held since 2019. A meeting with two of the pilgrimage organisers indicated that there was a high level of consciousness regarding safeguarding issues and relevant vetting procedures. Circumstances permitting, a pilgrimage may be undertaken in 2023.

Arrangements for external bodies to use Church buildings are in place. There was limited use of Church buildings in parishes during the past two years due to Covid-19, but evidence was provided of previously completed applications and requirement for insurance and safeguarding arrangements to be in place.

Children and young people with specific needs involved in trips and activities are considered on an individual basis; and obtaining parental consent and having an identified suitable adult to undertake personal care, (section 1.10 Ossory Policy Safeguarding Handbook) are both required.

The reviewers had an opportunity to meet Parish Priests and local Safeguarding Representatives from two parishes. Their knowledge of child safeguarding, their understanding of roles and responsibilities, and their commitment to care for and safeguard children were all evident in these meetings. They reported that safeguarding is a priority and a safeguarding culture is embedded in the parishes, and so is not viewed as something that has to be done. It was clear from the discussion that there is good communication and support provided to the parishes by the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee, including the Director of Safeguarding, Vetting Co-ordinator and accredited trainer. The Parish Priests and Safeguarding Representatives advised that they worked together as a team, and this was evident to the reviewers throughout.

Ten priests from outside Ossory Diocese were granted faculties to minister in the diocese between 2017 and 2021. The diocese has a strict procedure in place for processing applications from external priests for faculties. The priest seeking faculties has to apply to the Bishop of Ossory, completing a Declaration of Good Standing form.

Their Ordinary then has to supply a Confirmation of Good Standing form. The Diocesan Office retains all applications along with supportive documentation in a dedicated file. Three of the ten priests who have applied over the five years mentioned were priests returning to act as supply priests to cover summer holidays for diocesan priests. The Parish Priest requesting cover from a supply priest has to make their request to their bishop on a Request for Summer Supply in the Diocese of Ossory form.

The reviewers are satisfied that robust procedures are in place to support arrangements to safe guard children in the Diocese. All those in the Diocese who have direct contact with children have clear knowledge of their role and responsibilities to safeguard children involved in church activities.

This standard is met.

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

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

Ossory Diocese employs a Director of Safeguarding, (DLP) on a part-time basis, and there are two volunteer deputy DLPs. We note that Bishop Nulty maintains an active involvement in respect of decision-making and pastoral response to both complainants and respondents. Ossory Diocese uses the services of the National Board's Case Management Committee (NCMC) for guidance and advice.

The Director of Safeguarding, the Priest Secretary and Bishop Nulty meet regularly to discuss cases, share information and agree actions.

An inter-agency group was established in 2011, and this has met annually since then to discuss the effectiveness of case management arrangements, involving representatives from Ossory Diocese, Gardai and Tusla. The reviewers liaised directly with representatives from the Gardai and Tusla, and we received positive feedback from both agencies about working relationships with the diocese and information-sharing arrangements in place throughout the case management process.

The review of case management files evidenced notifications of complaints to statutory agencies and good communication arrangements between the DLP and statutory agencies. Risk management plans were in place and monitored by the DLP. Notifications have been made to the National Board as appropriate, and actions from reviews with the National Case Management Committee had been progressed by the DLP.

Table 1 –Allegations reported to the Diocese of Ossory since July 2013.

Cleric	Number of allegations	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	The National Board notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
1	1	Yes - Next day	Yes – next day	Yes – Next day	N/A (Left priesthood)
2	1	Yes: Within 3 weeks	Yes: Within 3 weeks	Yes: Within 3 weeks	Not possible [^]
3	1	Gardai notified diocese	Yes – within 4 days	Yes – within 4 days	Yes
4	1	Yes - Within 1 week	Yes - Within 1week	Yes - Within 1 week	Yes
	1	Yes: Same day	Yes: Same day	Yes: Same day	Yes

5	1	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	N/A
6	1	Gardai had notified Tusla	Tusla notified diocese	Same day	N/A
7	1	Yes – a year and a half	Yes – a year and a half	No	N/A
8	1	Yes – Next day	Yes – Next day	Yes – Next day	N/A
Total allegations		9			

^ Details provided below

*Dates not recorded on the case file

All notifications required of the diocese since the previous Review were made.

In two cases, there were delays in making the notifications. One priest had ministered in another diocese for a number of years, and the complainant made their complaint to that diocese, but did not provide any specific details of these allegations. The two dioceses were in communication once the complaint was made, and Ossory Diocese requested the other diocese to provide the complainant with the contact details for the Gardai and Ossory safeguarding personnel. However, the complainant has not subsequently made contact. When conducting a review of all case management files, the previous bishop decided to make notifications to the statutory agencies as he considered these should have been made when the report of allegations were received in 2017. 'He made the statutory notifications in early 2019'.

The allegation made against a second priest was of physical abuse in a school setting.

Notifications were made once the complainant was interviewed, and could provide the required information.

In a further case, the case file does not have a record of the dates on which notifications were made. 'The file does contain correspondence from the Diocesan Administrator stating that he had notified the Gardai, Tusla and the National Board, but there are no copies of written notifications on the case management file'.

The reviewers received an explanation for the delays in notifications in respect of the two cases. The diocese was without a bishop between August 2016 and January 2018. During this interregnum, there were also a number of DLPs in post for short periods. The combination of these factors led to an absence of consistency in case management. The timing of notifications has improved in recent years. In early 2021, the diocese employed a DLP and more consistency in case management has been evident following this investment of resources.

All of the allegations of abuse are retrospective. The abuses alleged were said to have occurred between 1963 and 1996.

Overall, the reviewers are satisfied that cases are now responded to and managed appropriately. There is good collaboration between diocesan safeguarding staff and statutory agencies and this was corroborated by feedback from safeguarding personnel in Tusla and the Gardai.

The period of review for Case Management Standards 2, 3 and 4 is from July 2013, and so practices over the full nine years since have to be evaluated. While these have improved and best practice is now the norm, unfortunately due to past delays in notifications and poor case management recording, this standard is not 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.

The diocese has two dedicated Support Persons, a male and a female.

The Support Person interviewed as part of the Review was clear about their role and the need for good communication with the Director of Safeguarding. The Support Person has availed of training delivered by the National Board, and their safeguarding training was up to date. Guidance and support to the Support Person is available from the Director of Safeguarding. The need for gender balance of Support Persons was highlighted to us, as was the need to explore the possibility of using Support Persons from other dioceses, especially if complainants have moved to addresses outside of the diocese.

The Support Person was aware of services available from other organisations and of the importance of a co-operative ‘working together’ approach.

Records of contact between the Support Person and the complainant she works with were up to date, as evidenced on the case management file. The complainant had agreed to be interviewed as part of the Review. Bishop Nulty had previously met with the complainant. The complainant reported that during the meeting with Bishop Nulty and the Priest Secretary, they felt heard. They were assured that action would be taken to follow up their complaint of abuse. Following that meeting the complainant said that a “weight had been lifted” from their shoulders. The complainant receives counselling support; and they are kept informed of the progress of the investigation. The complainant wanted to emphasise the importance of their voice being heard.

In the case of a priest about whom an allegation was made in a solicitor’s letter, the diocese in their solicitor’s reply offered the complainant the Towards Healing and Towards Peace services. No further contact has been made with the diocese since that letter. The complainant was contacted by an independent person who had been appointed to conduct a preliminary canonical investigation, inviting them to participate in that process, but they did not respond.

A further complainant did not maintain contact with that diocese having made their complaint. In another case, the then bishop met with the complainant. He also arranged an independent mediator to meet with the priest and the complainant. They were offered the services of Towards Healing.

In a case where the complainant stated that they did not wish to pursue the matter, once they had made their complaint, they had been offered a meeting with Ossory safeguarding personnel, as well as counselling through Towards Healing.

In another case examined, the complainant was offered the services of Towards Healing, as well as other supports.

In a further case in which there are two complainants, they each received appropriate support from the dedicated support person and received updates about the progress of the case. The bishop met with the complainants.

The evidence collected by the reviewers supports that complainants received a caring and supportive response from the Diocese and received appropriate advice and updates about the progress of the investigation from safeguarding personnel. Support services are accessible and were put in place as appropriate. This is to be commended.

Standard 3 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 is provided.

Four (4) of the eight (8) priests whose situations were described under Standard 2 above were deceased by the time the fieldwork for this Review was undertaken.

One case had been presented to the National Case Management Committee of the National Board. It was being dealt with by the statutory agencies. The priest was provided with a Priest Advisor.

In the case of a second deceased priest, the complainant was encouraged to contact Ossory Diocese, but they have not done so.

A third deceased priest had died many years before the complaint about him was made. Statutory notifications were made by Ossory Diocese.

The fourth deceased priest had been laicised, and he was no longer living in Ossory Diocese's administrative area when the complaint against him was made. The diocese, as in all of the cases reviewed, cooperated with the statutory agencies in this matter.

'One priest against whom an allegation was made is elderly and has been retired for many years. The then bishop decided as Church authority not to initiate a preliminary canonical investigation; and he has written a memorandum on the case management file explaining his decision'.

One priest moved abroad and left the priesthood. The allegation made against him related to a time before he had been ordained. The complainant did not want to pursue the matter once they had made their complaint. In the case of a third priest, the reviewers are satisfied that all civil and canonical processes were correctly followed to conclusion'.

The other living priest is in ministry. The allegation against him was made through a solicitor's letter, but the details of the complaint were not clear. A preliminary canonical investigation followed the Garda investigation, and led to a decision that there was no case to answer.

One of the reviewers met with the Priest Advisor to a respondent. He was keen to offer support to a fellow-priest. He suggested there was a need for more training for advisors, and that more liaison with colleagues in the same roles in other dioceses could be beneficial.

The reviewers are satisfied that cases are managed appropriately based on risk assessment and ongoing management and review of respondents subject to management plans.

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.

The Diocese has one accredited safeguarding Trainer, along with two who are awaiting registration following their completion of National Board training in November 2021. A Training Plan is in place for 2022/23, together with a training calendar - signed off by the Safeguarding Committee. The reviewers examined this and they consider it appropriate. It indicates that there will be a blend of in-person and Zoom facilitated training during the year for the Safeguarding Committee, clergy, parish employees (e.g. sacristans), and safeguarding volunteers.

The Safeguarding Committee and parishes value the support of training provided by the National Board. Members and Parish Safeguarding Representatives fed back to reviewers that training builds the confidence of participants and “refreshes how we see things.” Training, they said, provides an opportunity to learn, develop and improve practice, and to network with others.

Safeguarding Training 2017 - 2020							
Date	Full Day	Numbers	Information	Numbers	Refresher	Numbers	Total
13/03/17					Safeguarding Reps	7	7
13/03/17					Safeguarding Reps	5	5
10/05/17			Lourdes Group	7			7
23/09/17	New Safeguarding Reps	10					10
14/10/17	New Safeguarding Reps	5					5
16/05/18			Lourdes Group	3			3
05/06/18					Parish clergy	33	33
19/06/18					Safeguarding Reps	12	12
20/06/18					Safeguarding Reps (29) + Parish clergy (4)	33	33
21/06/18					Safeguarding Reps (15) + Parish clergy (5)	20	20
16/07/18			Medjugorje group	18	Volunteers (17) + priest (1)	18	36

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10/09/18					Safeguarding Reps	14	14
11/09/18			Parish volunteers	18	Parish volunteers (16) + priests (2)	18	36
12/09/18			Parish volunteers	79			79
17/09/18			Parish volunteers	75			75
18/09/18			Parish volunteers	65			65
19/09/18			Parish volunteers	56			56
25/09/18			Parish volunteers	71			71
26/09/18			Parish volunteers	60			60
27/09/18			Parish volunteers	82			82
02/10/18			Parish volunteers	59			59
13/05/19					Safeguarding Reps (15) + Parish clergy (6)	21	21
14/05/19					Safeguarding Reps (31) + Parish clergy (8)	39	39
20/05/19					Safeguarding Reps (15) + Parish clergy (5)	20	20
01/02/20	Safeguarding Reps	29					29
Totals		44		593		240	877

Reports on training have been submitted to the National Board. It was acknowledged that the impact of Covid-19 has affected the provision of training, but despite this, safeguarding training for mandatory reporters has been delivered via Zoom. The diocese is commended for the ongoing commitment to training in very challenging circumstances.

Members of the Safeguarding Committee and local Safeguarding Representatives advised that face-to-face training is their preference, and they described the benefits of role-play based on different safeguarding scenarios.

This standard is met.

Standard 6 - Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Church Bodies appropriately communicate the Church's child safeguarding message

The National Board's Safeguarding Review was advertised on the diocesan website and parish newsletters.

The Ossory Diocese website has a dedicated section for Safeguarding. This website is easily navigated. The safeguarding information, which includes clear guidance on how to report, is very comprehensive. Of particular assistance is the page on Safeguarding Documents at <https://ossory.ie/safeguarding-documents/>. The diocese is encouraged to keep this up to date as personnel change.

A Communication Plan is in place for 2022/23 – signed off by the Safeguarding Committee. This is a detailed and well-considered document, and it contains a review date a year out from approval. It is published on the diocesan website.

A Diocesan Safeguarding newsletter has been produced annually since 2014. The weekly parish newsletter in one of the parishes visited has a standing section on Safeguarding, including contact details for the DLP and statutory authorities, and it is available online.

A Safeguarding Sunday had been taking place each year in the parishes to promote the safeguarding message, and this continued despite the pandemic restrictions of the last two years.

Churches in Ossory Diocese have dedicated information points – directly observed during the reviewers' visits to three parishes. This information includes the diocesan Safeguarding Statement with contact details for the DLP and relevant authorities. In all sites visited, child friendly posters were on display, and leaflets were available to be taken away. Young people involved in Church activities were involved in the development of materials. Safeguarding information is available in Polish. There may well be a need for translation into another language, for example, Ukrainian, and the diocese will keep this under review.

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.

Between 2020 and 2022, ministry with children and young people has been significantly reduced due to Covid-19. Altar servers, choirs and other youth activities were suspended in parishes across the diocese, in compliance with government requirements. There are plans to re-introduce altar-servers, and the Safeguarding Committee is finalising arrangements to progress this, including developing a support pack.

The Ossory Diocese Safeguarding Committee is appropriately constituted in accordance with the National Board Safeguarding Policy and Standards, 2016. A written Constitution is in place. All members have appropriate experience, up-to-date vetting, and safeguarding training completed. There is a set schedule of meetings with agendas including parish updates, training, review of the work plan, and communications.

Minutes of meetings are completed, and these were provided to the reviewers for our information. These reflect the ongoing work to progress the actions of the three-year Children’s Safeguarding Plan. Diocese safeguarding meetings took place via Zoom during Covid-19 but have now returned to include face to face. A hybrid approach of Zoom and face-to-face meetings can be used in the future to facilitate attendance of members.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee produced an Annual Safeguarding Report for 2021, which was informed by self-audits completed by local Safeguarding Representatives and parish priests for all 42 parishes.

A three year Diocesan Safeguarding Plan (2022 to 2025) was developed based on the self-audit returns and on a training needs analysis, completed December 2021. This plan includes objectives and actions in the areas of safe recruitment, codes of behaviour and conduct, case management, communication, risk assessments of Church based activities and the safe use of Church property by external bodies. The Diocese Safeguarding Committee signed this off in February 2022, as did Bishop Nulty, the Apostolic Administrator. It will be subject to annual review by the Safeguarding Committee, and progress will be monitored by completion and analysis of annual parish self-audits. The five-pages in the plan that follow an introductory statement are set out under each of the seven standards. The template used is arranged as follows:

Standard	Specific objectives	Responsibility of	Implementation date	Review date

It provides a clear agenda for the further development of safeguarding in the diocese, and it is commended. It echoes the goal for safeguarding that is set out in the Pastoral Plan for the diocese.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council Co-ordinator was appointed in 2016; they have responsibility to co-ordinate the implementation of the Diocesan Pastoral Care Plan, and they work with the Director of Safeguarding regarding the safeguarding strand of that plan. The Director of Safeguarding attends meetings as and when required, and local Safeguarding Representatives are members of Parish Pastoral Councils. Currently, there is a review of the plan in train, and it is positive that safeguarding is a priority within this.

Annual Safeguarding and Training reports have been submitted to the National Board as required.

Members of the Diocese Safeguarding Committee shared with reviewers that there is a good connection and a good flow of information between the Safeguarding Committee and parishes. All Safeguarding Committee members reported that safeguarding is prioritised and is part of the culture across the diocese. There is a team approach to safeguarding and it is “everyone’s business” rather than being the result of a top down approach. This was evidenced to reviewers during parish visits, and in the feedback received from Parish Priests, local Safeguarding Representatives and Sacristans.

Positive feedback was received during meetings about the support received from the Director of Safeguarding and their visibility and accessibility across the parishes of the Diocese.

This standard is met.

Conclusion

The reviewers were assured regarding the Diocese of Ossory's compliance with the *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016*.

The reviewers' examination of documentation and engagement with a range of safeguarding personnel - including meeting with the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee - and meetings with local Parish Representatives evidenced clearly that there are good relationships at different levels across the Diocese, along with a commitment to listen, learn and support each other to safeguard children and young people. The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee has been in place since before the previous Review, and it has worked proactively and effectively in strengthening child safeguarding. The reviewers commend the development of a culture of child safeguarding in the diocese.

Safeguarding practices have continued to improve over the years with increasing consistency in case management. The current DLP, deputy DLPs, others who have responsibility for the delivery of safeguarding service, and the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee are all to be commended for their dedicated work in bringing about the progress detailed in this Review Report. The leadership of the previous and current Church authorities has been an important positive influence on this noted advancement.