



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

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

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

Date of Review Report: December 2020

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Introduction

The Diocese of Meath comprises 69 parishes grouped into 8 deaneries serving communities living in parts of counties Meath, Westmeath, Offaly, Cavan, Longford and Louth (south of the river Boyne). The diocese covers an area of 1,809 sq. miles and stretches in the west from Tupperclaire, Co Westmeath to the Co Meath towns of Drogheda Laytown-Mornington and Stamullen in the east. To the north, the diocese covers Kingscourt, Co Cavan and stretches as far as Eglishe Parish in Birr, Co Offaly to the south. The geographical spread ensures a broad variety of parish settings, with parishes ranging from small rural locations to the urban situations of the larger towns such as Mullingar, Tullamore, Navan, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne.

Meath Diocese is responsible for 118 priests at present, including 11 priests from overseas. A total of 82 priests are in active ministry, with two involved in third-level education. In eight cases, one Parish Priest has responsibility for two parishes. One priest is serving overseas in the Apostolic Nunciature in Burundi; and one priest is on sabbatical. There are 21 priests who are retired.

The Diocese of Meath is assisted by visiting priests during the summer period each year. In 2019, 16 foreign priests from the following countries assisted in the diocese: Romania (6), Nigeria (4), Liberia (2), Brazil (1) Ghana (1), Uganda (1), and Zimbabwe (1). All but two had served previously in the Diocese of Meath. The guidance document prepared by the National Board in relation to visiting clergy is followed in the recruitment and deployment process for all visiting clergy.

In 2018 the Irish Catholic Directory estimated the number of Catholics in the diocese as 270,000, unchanged since 2016. In 2014, the number was 303,000. The Diocesan Offices are based in Mullingar; and as well as servicing 69 parishes, the diocese also organises an annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

There are 196 primary schools and 10 secondary schools with direct diocesan involvement. Post primary diocesan schools are located in Mullingar, Navan, Athboy, Kells, Trim, Tullamore and Drogheda.

There is a wide range of children's and young people's activities undertaken under the auspices of the Church across the diocese. A sample of these ministries includes: Altar servers, junior and senior choirs, Junior Pastoral Parish Council (JPPC) and its younger companion group, J-Unit, Rainbows programmes, junior Pioneers and junior Legion of Mary.

There are a number of Sacramental Preparation Programmes held in a number of parishes; Pre-sacramental parish schools are held for children from non-denominational schools in the diocese.¹

Bishop Tom Deenihan was ordained Bishop of Meath on September 2nd, 2018. His predecessor Bishop Michael Smith, now retired, was ordained Auxiliary Bishop in 1984, and was Bishop of Meath for 28 years until September 2018.

A number of important changes within the Meath Diocese Child Safeguarding structure have taken place.

Following the review of safeguarding practice in 2013, a lay person was appointed as joint DLP. This arrangement remained in place until 2017, when she resigned. The priest who had been in post as DLP since 2009 continued as DLP until November 2018, when a lay person was appointed to the role.

From 2009 to 2018, a small resource team, comprised of the Safeguarding Coordinator (who also held the position of Chancellor) and Trainers, acted as the executive for the Safeguarding Committee.

On his appointment as Administrator in Mullingar parish, in 2018, the coordinator role was held for a short period by another cleric. Currently, the role is undertaken on an acting basis by a long-term member of the Safeguarding Committee; and Bishop Deenihan has decided to engage a person on a part-time basis for this role.

Members of the Safeguarding Committee serve a four-year term and may be invited by the Bishop to serve a second term. Two members of the Safeguarding Committee resigned in 2019, and three new members were appointed.

The need for good handover and induction of new personnel has been especially relevant in the Diocese of Meath as a consequence of the many safeguarding and DLP changes which had taken place.

The reviewers would like to thank Bishop Deenihan and his safeguarding team for their kind invitation to the National Board to undertake a review and for the courtesy, hospitality and cooperation shown to the reviewers.

¹ 'Pre-Sacramental Parish School' is a programme of sacramental preparation for children attending non-denominational schools, run by the parish community/ parents/volunteers, usually after school and for a set number of weeks.

Background

The previous review of Meath Diocese undertaken by the National Board was conducted in December 2013/January 2014. The Review Report was published in May 2014.

Recommendations from that review were as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Actions taken by Diocese of Meath in response to the 2014 Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The DLP role was reconfigured in September 2014 with the appointment of a lay DLP to share the role with the cleric DLP as a team. The cleric DLP retained responsibility for existing cases, while the lay DLP assumed responsibility for new cases. The lay DLP remained in role until retirement for family reasons in 2017. A new lay DLP appointment was made in November 2018 and the incumbent now has sole responsibility for the function of the role.

Recommendation 2: The DLP was so designated. The report below addresses the issues in relation to case management files.

Recommendation 3: Training did take place as recommended.

Recommendation 4: The Advisory Board has ceased. In 2018 Bishop Deenihan joined the Diocese with the National Case Management Committee (NCMC)

Recommendation 5: Reported by diocese to have been in operation during the life of the Advisory Panel. The matter of placing recordings of the Advisory Panel on the relevant case management files is discussed in the report below.

Recommendation 6: Significant child-friendly literature has been created along with a review of children's' involvement in Church related activities as part of the annual Self-Audit. A project involving children's involvement in creating and communicating the safeguarding message is currently being piloted

Recommendation 7: NBSCCCI guidance in relation to complainant support is followed. A complainant support person was appointed in 2016.

Recommendation 8: National Board safeguarding guidance in relation to role of complainant support person is adopted and incorporated in diocesan operational guidelines (2.21)

Recommendation 9: Training was provided to Advisory Panel when it was still in existence.

Process of Review

This Review does not simply assess written procedures, but it concentrates on practice through evaluating written records; interviews with Church personnel; communication with children and young people and their leaders in two Church related groups visited; discussions with external statutory authorities; and information received from a respondent and a complainant respectively. The fieldwork for the Review took place over five days, the 9th, 10th and 11th of October, 11th of December, 2019, and the 28th July 2020 at the Diocesan Offices in Mullingar, and in various locations across the diocese. The review process also involved the fieldwork team reading case management files of living and deceased priests of the diocese against whom allegations were made. The reviewers had access to all relevant safeguarding files including those related to Vetting and Training activities. The storage arrangements of all safeguarding related files were examined in the Diocesan Offices.

This report presents the assessment of the reviewers based on their three days of fieldwork in October 2019. Statements in this report about Standards being met, or not, relate to the findings in October 2019.

Two additional days were then negotiated for reviewers to spend in the diocese to assist diocesan safeguarding staff to address identified issues related to case management and the recording of case management work. The reviewers are satisfied that the diocese is now compliant with the National Standards.

Interviews were held with Bishop Tom Deenihan; the (acting) Safeguarding Coordinator; the Designated Liaison Person (DLP); members of the Safeguarding Committee; three Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs); two National Vetting Bureau Liaison Persons; and the cleric who has the role of overseeing the recruitment and induction process for visiting clergy. The reviewers met with two diocesan Trainers, and with the diocesan liaison member of An Garda Siochana. The reviewers also met with the diocesan communications team of the two clerics who look after digital and paper communication.

Telephone interviews took place with the diocesan complainant Support Person, and with the Priest Advisor, who was appointed by Bishop Deenihan in 2018. The reviewers also spoke with the member of An Garda Siochana who liaises with the diocese in relation to his supervision of one respondent priest. A senior member of staff with the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) was also consulted in relation to diocesan liaison with that agency.

The reviewers attended a meeting of the Safeguarding Committee. Two group activities involving children and young people were also attended by the reviewers. The group leaders of these activities were met with, as were two parent-supervisors and a local Safeguarding Representative located within a parish centre. A parish safeguarding office was also visited and relevant documentation located there was examined.

Written material provided to the reviewers was evaluated for relevance and accuracy, as was the child safeguarding information on the diocesan website.

The review process uses the seven Standards outlined within the NBSCCCI *Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016* as a framework for assessment.

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

The Diocese of Meath has adopted in full the Guidance of the National Board.

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

All Church personnel, and those volunteers whose work brings them into contact with children, are required by Meath Diocese to undergo a vetting process in accordance with the legislation *National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Adults) Act 2012*. Two authorised National Vetting Bureau Liaison Persons fulfil the vetting function for Church and school personnel from the Meath Diocesan Offices. They are assisted by a data-inputting clerk. Approximately 15-20% of those vetted are people engaged in Church activities, while the remainder are for diocesan school recruitment. The overall numbers of those vetted by this well run and professional office are large. The following are the numbers of Church personnel, including clergy, sacristans safeguarding representatives, choir directors, parish pre-sacramental school volunteers, Lourdes pilgrimage volunteers who have been vetted by this office:

- Jan. 2019 - November 2019 - 470 Parish safeguarding roles + 95 Lourdes Pilgrimage volunteers.
- 2018 - 541 Parish safeguarding roles + 242 Lourdes Pilgrimage volunteers;
- 2017 - 507 Parish safeguarding roles +76 Lourdes Pilgrimage volunteers.

The numbers vetted in sample parishes since the commencement of e-vetting in May 2016 is as follows: Mullingar 184; Navan 111; Tullamore 104; and Ashbourne 168.

A Review Panel was established by the Diocese following the introduction of e-vetting in May 2016 for use in the event that an applicant wishes to appeal a decision. It has not been necessary to convene this group to date.

The Diocese of Meath ensures that all priests in ministry have been Garda vetted.

The Diocese of Meath follows National Board Guidance in relation to visiting clergy/ summer supply clergy. Detailed files indicating adherence to requirements set out by the National Board were made available to the reviewers. Files included for example, letters from a priest's Ordinary addressed to Bishop Deenihan stating he is aware of the priest's request for ministry in the Diocese of Meath and his approval of such request; a Testimonial completed by a priest's Bishop; a Declaration of good standing by a priest's Bishop and the completion of Garda vetting.

The Diocese of Meath provides the visiting priest with access to the safeguarding website, which includes the Operational Guidelines, and the visiting priest meets with the Parish Safeguarding Representative in the area in which he takes on ministry if required. The Diocese keeps records of all summer supply clergy and these were examined by the reviewers.

Visiting clergy who wish to participate in ministry even for a single occasion must present a current *celebret* to the Parish Priest prior to their participation in ministry. Each sacristy in diocesan parish churches has, at the insistence of Bishop Deenihan, a copy of a notice outlining the requirement for production of the *celebret*.

The safe and secure storage of vetting files and records in relation to vetting was in evidence as was the emphasis placed by staff on the confidential nature of the work.

Code of Behaviour

Adults involved with Church-related activities agree to observe and sign the Code of Behaviour at induction. Ensuring that this is done is the responsibility of the Parish Safeguarding Representative (PSR). The PSRs who met with the reviewers outlined their understanding of this requirement.

Children and young people who are involved in Church-related activities are asked to sign a consent form whereby they agree to engage in the activity. In addition, they sign a Code of Behaviour, which sets out the expected standard of behaviour whilst being involved in the activity. Written parental consent to their involvement is also sought. This task is generally undertaken by the activity group leader at the request of the Safeguarding Representative. In both activity groups visited by the reviewers there was clear evidence that each group had purposefully participated in formulating their own rules for the behaviour of both children and adults within the group. There was an understanding of what was acceptable behaviour and what was not. Both groups of young people understood the reason behind a Code of Behaviour, and they were informed of what action to take should they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

The Safeguarding Committee of the Diocese of Meath has on a pilot basis recently begun to implement a group exercise in a number of parishes, called *Building a Safe Environment: Group Safety Checklist*, with the focus on encouraging children and young people to check how well their group respects the rights and responsibilities of everyone involved. The Safeguarding Committee hopes that the exercise will be used in a greater number of parishes, if/when the trial is deemed to be successful. The Safeguarding Committee plans to have the Checklist placed on the safeguarding website as a resource for parishes.

This new and innovative practice is commended and is considered a fitting response to Recommendation 6 of the first safeguarding review, which was *That the safeguarding committee continue to give priority to developing literature and raising awareness sessions to inform children of their right to feel and be safe and to informing and empowering them to speak with the appropriate people if they have any concerns about abuse within the Church.*

Safe Care for children

There are protocols in place, such as the prominent display of safeguarding information in churches and Church buildings associated with children's group activities. The reviewers have been assured by diocesan personnel that sign-in registers are in place in all sacristies, and at all locations where children's activities take place; and this was in evidence at both groups locations visited by the reviewers. The reviewers noted that group rules drawn up by the children themselves were displayed prominently where each activity took place; and each group was comfortable in talking about what needs to be in place for them to be safe.

The reviewers visited two group activities involving children and young people. In Mullingar Cathedral, they attended a practice session of the cathedral's young choristers group. This group activity has a leader, and two parent supervisors also attend each week and remain with the group for the duration of the activity. This group involves weekly attendance of upwards of 15 to 20 young boys whose age range from 8 to 11 years. A parent duty roster is in place, and parents communicate through a *WhatsApp* group. There is a routine followed by the parent supervisors of receiving each child into the activity and ensuring that the outside door is locked at all times. Supervisors ensure that they remain until after the last child is collected. This is a practical example of good safe caregiving for children.

In Tullamore, the reviewers attended a meeting of the Junior Parish Pastoral Council (JPPC), which was attended by 20 young people of secondary school age. This group explained that their aim is to give a voice to young people within their parish and help in the organisation of youth projects within the parish. The group is run democratically with young people nominated and elected to officer roles and is led by a trained youth leader. The group leader of this older group had full knowledge of safeguarding procedures, including recommended adult-child ratios, particularly during trips away, which for their group takes place on an annual basis when they attend a retreat centre. This group of young people were very impressive in their knowledge of self-care, care for others and the need for good child safeguarding practice generally. They had formulated their group Code of Practice which was on display in the room where their activity took place. Several young people in their late teens or early twenties, who had been participants in the group at a younger age, have remained and taken on the role of volunteers within the group. They have been Garda vetted for this role by the diocesan vetting office.

The reviewers were given written protocols put in place by the Diocese of Meath concerning Whistleblowing Procedures (Protected Disclosures) and the Complaints Process. They were informed that neither protocol has needed to be implemented to date. The parish office which was visited had a ‘complaints book’ available for use if necessary.

There is diocesan guidance in place in relation to Hazard and Risk Assessment. The 2018 Self-audits revealed that a number of parishes were unclear regarding this guidance, and as a consequence, the assessment of risk and hazards when operating children’s groups is now a featured topic on training days. This is a good example of using audit returns to influence new initiatives.

The Diocese held their annual *Safeguarding Sunday* on October 13th, 2019 and used the opportunity to highlight effective practice for the appropriate use of information technology, including social media by Church personnel and by children. Specially printed leaflets entitled *Children and digital media in our parish* were made available at Masses held on the day, and they were also available online. The information contained within the leaflet was clearly and attractively formatted and highly informative, and they were designed with both adults and young people in mind. The exercise of using *Safeguarding Sunday* to present this aspect of practice amongst Church personnel and by children represented a practical and innovative approach to safeguarding.

The Safeguarding Committee has also launched a series of new leaflets directed at children and young people involved in different activities within the Church. Information leaflets containing relevant safeguarding information including Codes of Behaviour have been produced for junior choir members and for teen choir members. A separate information leaflet is produced and distributed to altar servers.

A safeguarding leaflet titled *Learning with Jesus*, is being piloted for the Pre-sacramental parish schools’ programmes. In addition to containing Codes of Behaviour, this document also includes important safeguarding information for parents/guardians, for children, and for group leaders and volunteers, in an attractive and readable format. It is being translated into Lithuanian in recognition of the numbers from the Lithuanian community attending parish schools.

The reviewers commend the communications team for the production and distribution of well-designed high-quality age-appropriate safeguarding literature, which is targeted at specific groups of children and young people in a variety of ministries within the diocese.

The reviewers are satisfied that Standard 1 is met.

Standard 2: Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or allegations

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

The Diocese of Meath has clearly written child safeguarding procedures, as well as access to trained personnel to implement them. If suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations that meet the threshold for reporting to the statutory authorities are received, these are now reported. The diocesan and parish websites contain up to date details of the relevant persons to contact if someone has a safeguarding concern.

Safeguarding information posters are prominently displayed in Church buildings and other locations where Church related activities take place. Safeguarding information is made available on a rolling basis in different parish newsletters throughout the year. Safeguarding leaflets and information targeted at different age levels and groups involved in Church activities are produced and distributed on an ongoing basis.

In the October 2019 fieldwork stage of this review, it was noted that there was significant need for improvement in previously received record keeping case file management, which led to a degree of confusion about statistics and concern about the reliability of case files. This situation was highlighted to the bishop and safeguarding personnel who took immediate steps to improve the quality and content of case information available in case files. In this regard, files were scrutinized by safeguarding personnel and where necessary reformatted in line with National Board guidelines. Additional relevant information, such as minutes from case management advisory panel meetings has been added in some instances, together with notes from a former DLP and material sourced by the current DLP in relation to cases where queries were raised by the reviewers. The problem with case management files resulted from the role of DLP being filled by different people over a period, which interrupted continuity and consistency of approach.

At the end of National Board involvement with the Diocese of Meath, the situation regarding case file management had been fully addressed, with all relevant information centralised and formatted into restructured case files. A successful review process provides Church bodies with opportunities to learn and to improve the quality of their work.

The allegations received since the previous review are presented here.

Table 1 New allegations received since last review

Respondent type	Number	Number reported to Garda	Number reported to Tusla	Number reported to NBSCCCI
Meath Diocesan Clerics				
Living [Retired and in good standing]	1	1	1	1
Deceased (i)	6	6	5	6
Unidentified (ii)	3	3	3	3
Priests of other dioceses				
(iii)	3	3	3	3
Non-Ordained Religious				
	4	2	3	2

(i) An allegation was incorrectly attributed in the case of one deceased cleric. The allegation was subsequently withdrawn by complainant who did not name this cleric. Notification to statutory authorities had been made in the matter. It remains in this table however as it had been returned to the National Board in the pre-fieldwork questionnaire, and the case management file was put forward by the diocese to be reviewed. The diocese has re-categorised this case since the initial fieldwork; it remains in this table for statistical purpose only.

(ii) In these cases the Respondent has not been identified. In one case, the complainant is deceased and no further Garda investigation is possible. A second case has been determined as unfounded by Gardai. A third case was initially reported by another diocese, and contact information for the complainant has recently been accessed.

(iii) Two of these allegations refer to complaints reported to another diocese, as well as being reported to Meath Diocese. These allegations relate to priests from other dioceses, and these are managed by the relevant dioceses. A third allegation, which came initially to Meath, related to a respondent who was not from Meath Diocese.

Table 2 (a) – Retrospective Allegations regarding child sexual abuse by clerics notified to Diocese of Meath since December 2013

Cleric	Current status	Number of allegations	Gardaí notified	Tusla notified	NBSCCCI 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	N/A
2	Deceased	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	N/A
3	Deceased	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	No	Yes – within 2 weeks	N/A
4	Deceased	1	Yes – within 3 days	Yes – within 3 days	Yes – within 3 days	N/A
5	Deceased	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	N/A	N/A
6	Unknown as respondent unidentified	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	N/A	N/A
7	Unknown as respondent unidentified	1	Yes – within 2 weeks	Yes – within 2 weeks	No	N/A
8	Unknown*	1	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Not known*
9	Out of ministry	1	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Not known, as managed by home diocese.

**Reported by ‘home’ diocese of priest;*

Table 2 (b) – Retrospective Allegations regarding child sexual abuse by clerics notified to Diocese of Meath since December 2013, about which there is a lack of clarity regarding notifications being made in a timely manner

Cleric	Current status	Number of allegations	Gardaí notified	Tusla notified	NBSCCCI notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
10	Deceased	1				N/A
11	Unknown as respondent unidentified	1				N/A
12	Unidentified	1				N/A

The reviewers have to draw attention to the very significant confusion about when the notifications of three cases (clerics 10, 11 and 12 above) were actually made to the statutory agencies. When the reviewers examined the historic case management files produced for them in October 2019, the information contained in these either suggested that there were significant delays, or there was insufficient information available to determine whether there had been any delay. There were then further searches of file records in the Meath Diocesan Offices initiated by the direction of Bishop Deenihan, and reviewers returned twice to examine the additional information that had been located. Further clarification was provided to the National Board during the factual correction of the draft Review Report. At the end of this meticulous process, the reviewers are now advised by Meath Diocese that notifications in these cases were made by other dioceses which the relevant complainants first approached: Meath Diocese sought and received confirmation from the other Dioceses that they reported these cases to the statutory authorities. This confusion demonstrates the importance of good accurate record keeping.

[Reference was made in footnote (i) under Table 1 to a further case which was included by the diocese for the original fieldwork phase of the Review, but which was withdrawn after discussions that had taken place during the July 2020 return visit. That case does not appear in Table 2 (a) or (b)]

The reviewers have established, following very close examination of these cases, that no risk to children resulted from delayed notifications to An Garda Síochána and to Tusla. There had been a number of changes in safeguarding personnel which contributed to this unsatisfactory situation. Bishop Deenihan is aware of this historical problem, and he and his safeguarding staff are committed to ensuring that such delays in statutory notifications do not recur. Since September 2018, all complaints have been dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.

One priest in the Meath Diocese is subject to a canonical precept and a management plan is in place. The situation of this respondent became known prior to the previous review of this Diocese, and so this case pre-dates 2014.

In another case, following a review of a file by the current bishop and in line with advice of the NCMC, the diocese undertook a preliminary canonical investigation in 2019 in relation to a matter which had become known prior to the previous review.

The Diocese of Meath joined with the National Board Case Management Committee (NCMC) in 2018. Prior to this, a Diocesan Case Advisory Panel was in place. Bishop Deenihan has sought advice from the NCMC in relation to three matters since his appointment, one of which was considered not to meet the threshold of a child sex abuse allegation, and it is therefore not included in the above list.

The diocese was informed of four (4) allegations concerning Religious Orders. Notes within the case management files indicate that these matters were referred to the appropriate Religious Orders, and where relevant to the statutory authorities

The reviewers examined smaller files in relation to five safeguarding concerns - none of which involved suspicions, concerns, knowledge or allegations regarding a child's safety or welfare - which were reported by Parish Safeguarding Representatives and dealt with appropriately by safeguarding personnel, suggesting due diligence and good practice on a local level. This is commended.

Safeguarding personnel are aware of four (4) clerics from outside the diocese, now living within the diocese, who are out of ministry, subject to precepts and managed by their home diocese. There is liaison between the home dioceses and Meath Diocese in respect of these matters.

A general analysis of the case files in relation to allegations received since the last review indicated that there was room for considerable improvement in the organisation of the majority of files, such as needing a chronology and narrative, the poor quality of recording, and the absence of case summaries. The lack of narrative and contemporaneous recording left the reader unclear in some instances of what actions had been taken and what outcomes reached. On initial examination it appeared to the reviewers that some files seemed to have been left ‘open-ended’, with clear gaps in recording. This was particularly in evidence when assessing the pastoral response to and care of the complainant in several cases. In subsequent discussion with Bishop Deenihan and safeguarding staff, it became clear that much of this work did take place, but that it was not recorded on the respondents’ files at the time.

It is acknowledged that there have been a number of changes in safeguarding personnel since the 2014 Review, resulting in some lack of continuity and uniformity in the management of case files. Over the course of this review, diocesan safeguarding personnel have taken steps to address this situation in all instances and the reviewers acknowledge that significant efforts have been made to improve the case files. Reading of the case files at the close of the review fieldwork provided more clarity about and a fuller understanding of case management and practice in the Meath Diocese, but it had taken a lot of effort by all parties to reach this outcome.

This standard has not been met, as case records were not of a good enough standard at the time of the original fieldwork. This resulted in the reviewers not being able to ascertain whether cases had been appropriately managed.

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.

Bishop Smith appointed a complainant Support Person in 2016 to the Diocese of Meath to continue and complement the complainant support work previously undertaken by a Religious Sister, a trained counsellor, in role since 2009. At the request of the diocese, the complainant Support Person has attended role-specific training with the National Board; to date his services have not been requested by the diocese. The complainant Support Person confirmed to the reviewers his availability and willingness to offer complainant support, if and when requested by the diocesan safeguarding team.

It was not clear to the reviewers from their initial reading of case management files how contact was established or maintained with complainants in the past, what support had been offered by the diocese to complainants, or indeed if there had been missed opportunities in reaching out to complainants. This was primarily due to the lack of good case file record keeping. The reviewers formed the view over the course of their fieldwork visits that significant pieces of work in the area of complainant support had in fact been undertaken in the past, which were not adequately recorded on the case management file. During the review, verbal accounts were given by safeguarding personnel of conversations held with complainants and family members and of actions taken, which had not been recorded in case files.

The reviewers accept that considerable effort has been made by safeguarding personnel during the course of this review; and extensive work on all existing files has been conducted in order to ensure the keeping of accurate and contemporaneous records. Contemporaneous records relating to case management and care of the complainant in some cases were found in minutes of the then Advisory Case Management Committee; and these notes have since been correctly placed in the case management files.

As is the case for many Church bodies, the Diocese of Meath received some of its allegations through legal correspondence, in which the circumstances of complainants were not clearly or fully described; and while offers of pastoral support are always made by the diocese to complainants through their legal representatives, the take-up of this support is low.

In two matters, complainants made allegations to another diocese, which subsequently informed Meath Diocese of the allegations, as the respondent priests, both deceased, were from Meath. They were offered support and referred to *Towards Healing* by the referring diocese at the time. However, no direct contact with these complainants from Meath diocese at the time these two reports is recorded. In the case of one of these complainants contact details have recently been accessed by Meath Diocese and follow up contact and support is now planned; but this highlights a significant time lapse from when the diocese was initially informed about the allegation.

The reviewers noted that in cases, which have come to the attention of the diocese more recently, strong efforts have been made to establish complainant contact in a timely manner. Pastoral support is ongoing in at least one case. In this case, the file documents meetings and contacts between the complainant and the current Bishop, which is commended as an example of good practice in terms of outreach and support. The reviewers were made aware of other pastoral supports from other diocesan priests availed of by this complainant

In a number of cases, complainants were referred to the counselling service, *Towards Healing*. Bishop Deenihan informed the reviewers that *Towards Healing* is currently being accessed by a number of complainants; but because of the confidential nature of this service, no further details are available to him regarding the exact numbers of complainants availing of the service, or of their identities.

In order to gain the views of complainants for this Review, a questionnaire letter was sent by the diocese to three complainants inviting them to describe and/or discuss their experiences of the diocesan response, once they had made contact with it. One response was received from a complainant and a member of their family. They did not wish to engage with the reviewers; but they stated their view that they were provided with a less than satisfactory response from the diocese at the time, they made their complaint, and that they felt let down by the response, which they received at the time. They did acknowledge however that they received a written apology from the Bishop following their complaint. The reviewers understand that the complainant in this case received financial compensation.

Overall, in their review of the case management files in October 2019, focussing on response to and contact with complainants, the reviewers found little contemporaneous evidence of dates, contacts, discussions, or meetings which may have taken place between individual complainants and the DLP or Support Person; and for this reason, this standard is not met fully.

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

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

There are two respondent priests of Meath Diocese resident within the diocese.

A priest advisor was formally appointed by Bishop Deenihan in July 2019 to the first of these. This advisor will receive role-specific training and has been assigned to supporting one respondent priest. This respondent, who refused the appointment of a priest advisor in the past, is out of ministry and is subject to a *precept*, which, was put in place by Bishop Deenihan in July 2019, replacing an earlier one from May 2014 issued by Bishop Smith. Bishop Deenihan has visited this respondent priest, and the reviewers were informed that this priest has received support from fellow priests on an informal basis. Liaison with the statutory authorities who continue to be involved has taken place as part of a Management Plan. Over the course of the period covered by fieldwork visits, the recording of this file has greatly improved. This was required, as initially the case file did not contain very much detail on how the case was being managed.

It is important in terms of accountability that this file should reflect active engagement, with an agreed Management Plan for the respondent priest. At the close of this review, the reviewers had evidence that a risk assessment has been carried out and a Management Plan is in place. These are both fully documented on file. This is a case where closer formalised liaison with the statutory authorities could be of benefit in terms of ongoing risk assessment and in the sharing of relevant information.

In relation to the second respondent priest of the Meath Diocese, he is retired. There was little in the case management file to indicate how he was communicated with, cared for or managed by the diocese during the process of a canonical preliminary investigation. This matter has since been addressed, supports are, and have been in place, and a detailed outline of these supports has been added to his case file. The investigation report is fully documented on file, and no further action was recommended.

In a more recent matter, it is noted that appropriate action was taken in a timely manner in meeting with a respondent, and in directing him to relevant training and support. In this case, the file fully documents the actions taken.

Whilst it is accepted that the diocese has honoured its responsibility in supporting and managing respondent priests, all such actions have to be fully documented.

The National Board wrote to one respondent priest from Meath Diocese seeking his views on how he believed the allegation made against him was managed by the diocese, and he replied to the questionnaire. The overall tone of his reply was not positive. In response to the question asking him what his experience was of being consulted, listened to and helped to identify his pastoral needs once he was informed of the allegation made against him, his brief reply was 'Negative'. The priest acknowledged that a Priest Advisor was assigned to him for support and stated he is awaiting this support. The priest stated that he was unaware if a Management Plan was in place in his case. The reviewers are satisfied that a Management Plan is in place in this case.

The reviewers spoke with a member of An Garda Síochána who said that there is good liaison between the diocesan Safeguarding Office and An Garda Síochána; and a representative of Tusla informed the reviewers that there are no difficulties regarding that agency's dealings with the diocese in relation to safeguarding matters.

It is understood that a formal protocol was in place in the past for regular meetings to take place between DLP and the HSE, but this was discontinued due to change of safeguarding and DLP personnel. In an effort to formalise and enhance relationships with the civil authorities, plans are now in train to re-establish a tripartite group/interagency group to meet formally once or twice yearly, in which information and professional opinions can be shared between the diocesan safeguarding personnel, Tusla –which has recently appointed a social worker to deal with retrospective allegations of sexual abuse - and An Garda Síochána.

Offices for safeguarding staff within the diocesan offices in Mullingar have recently been significantly upgraded, and more space has been delegated for particular safeguarding staff.

All safeguarding files held within the diocesan offices are stored securely. Bishop Deenihan plans to further increase the safety and security of centralised file storage by locating all confidential diocesan files in an available walk-in fireproof safe room.

In the October 2019 fieldwork stage of this review, the reviewers did not find adequate evidence of a system of support or monitoring in the management of a respondent priest who remains responsibility of the diocese. In the case of a second respondent who was subject to a canonical review, there was little evidence on file in relation to how he was supported during and after this process. Whilst it is accepted by the reviewers that in both matters the above concerns have now been fully addressed by Bishop Deenihan, the standard is considered not met fully.

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

There are two National Board-accredited safeguarding training personnel working within the Diocese of Meath. Both have backgrounds in education, and both have been engaged in training in the diocese since 2016. They also act as diocesan advisors to diocesan schools within the diocese. The two Trainers are members of the Safeguarding Committee to which they are accountable. They form part of the Diocesan Resource Team along with the Safeguarding Coordinator.

The stated objective of training within the diocese is to ensure that all Church personnel receive appropriate training in child safeguarding in accordance with the National Board Training Strategy. This includes induction of all new Church personnel, and delivery of training at least every three years to those engaged in Church related activities across the diocese. A detailed list of all training events is kept. Evaluation sheets are analysed following each session, informing the content of subsequent training sessions. Attendances are recorded electronically, which assists in future scheduling of events.

The Trainers hold safeguarding information sessions in the spring and autumn, which provides each of the five Deaneries with an information night twice each year. All clergy, safeguarding personnel and safeguarding representatives are invited. These sessions are reported by the Trainers to be always well attended.

The agenda for October 2019 information sessions, which were attended by 200 approximately clergy and volunteers, was as follows:

- Safeguarding presentation
- Reformatted website
- Use of safeguarding material on parish websites
- Audit form revision including problem areas e.g. complaints procedures/whistle-blower, risk assessment
- Newsletter
- Sacristy requirements
- Safeguarding Sunday
- Addressing areas, which trouble clergy and Parish Representatives.

In 2018, in addition to the 10 annual Deanery level information sessions, 6 other information sessions were also provided for clergy, parish safeguarding representatives, Sacristans, choir members and parish volunteers. These sessions were attended by over 200 clergy and volunteers. Topics covered included:

- Completing the parish audit form
- Mandatory reporting
- GDPR
- What to do if you receive an allegation or complaint
- Safeguarding Sunday preparation

The training team also holds 2 full-day training sessions in spring and autumn for clergy, new Parish Safeguarding Representatives, foreign clergy, choir directors and members of groups such as *Children of the Eucharist*.² The agenda for the spring training day is based primarily but not exclusively on a Training Needs Analysis of the Self-audit returns.

The Trainers train adult volunteers engaged in the annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes. This group numbers approximately 150 people, and the training takes place over three evenings in three different venues. The Trainers presented to the reviewers a sample of their *PowerPoint* training specially designed for the helpers and volunteers for the pilgrimage. This was a most comprehensive and informative delivery, which addresses safeguarding issues concerning children and vulnerable adults, and is an example of excellent practice.

Young people who volunteer for the Lourdes Pilgrimage are drawn from several schools, one of which is not within the diocese. All safeguarding training for this group is undertaken by the individual schools, and the coordination of the group is facilitated by a diocesan priest.

Training requirements are communicated to the training team from individual Parish Priests; Safeguarding Representatives; group leaders; and from the Safeguarding Committee as a result of consultation and feedback meetings with a number of parishes each year.

Additional training, including role-specific training, is provided at other times to all diocesan safeguarding personnel as the need arises. Half-day training sessions have been provided for parish secretaries and lay workers within parish offices. Training of teachers and parent volunteers in parish pre-sacramental schools is provided, and this training can be provided on an individual or group basis. Training is provided at the request of individual parishes and leaders of activity groups.

² This is a volunteer lay-apostolate whose members go to the schools where children are introduced to a programme of Eucharistic Adoration in a child-friendly way

The contact details of both Trainers are widely available, and in this way, they are accessible to groups and individuals requiring training, or relevant information regarding training issues. All calls and contacts are logged and the diocesan Training Plan is adapted according to needs highlighted. This training system operates at a high level of effectiveness.

In addition to training diocesan personnel, the Trainers have provided training to other Catholic groups and lay apostolates; and to Religious identified within the diocese by Bishop Deenihan, who because of their small numbers may otherwise not have their own internal safeguarding training structure.

The Trainers keep records in hard and soft copy of safeguarding training attended and completed by diocesan personnel. The reviewers inspected the extensive training files from 2014-2019 made available to them, and noted a strong methodology employed in maintaining a large number of files. Training files are kept securely within the diocesan offices. In keeping with GDPR requirements, personnel are now invited to opt in or opt out of the retention of their personal data.

The diocesan three-year safeguarding Action Plan (2018-2021) is appended to the annual Safeguarding Report, available on the diocesan website. The Action Plan has as appendices the annual Training Plan and the annual Communication Plan. The Training Plan is informed by the analysis of the end-of-year Self-audits and of the evaluation forms completed by those who attended training.

The Trainers are confident that they have captured the training requirements of all safeguarding personnel within the diocese, and that training is up to date in all cases.

The connection between the provision of Child Safeguarding training and its practical implementation at ground level was in evidence to the reviewers during the course of fieldwork visits undertaken as part of the review process. Discussions with the different safeguarding personnel, leaders, parents and children alike revealed that the need for training is fully recognised by those involved and is viewed as important for those participating in Church related activities.

The reviewers are satisfied from the evidence they have seen that the training structure within the diocese is compliant with Standards and is appropriate to the Child Safeguarding needs of the diocese. They were impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of the two Trainers. This standard is fully met.

Standard 6: Communicating the Church’s Safeguarding Message

Church bodies appropriately communicate the Church’s child safeguarding message

The Meath Child Safeguarding Plan for the period 2018-2021 identifies two objectives in relation to communication:

1. To ensure that the Church’s safeguarding message is communicated to identified audiences; and
2. To produce and circulate printed material for specified audiences.

There is a clear Communications Policy in the diocese, which is reviewed annually by the Safeguarding Committee.

The diocesan safeguarding communications team consists of two people who are highly proficient in the use of web-based and print media, as is evident in the output of high quality communications and information sharing.

Safeguarding Sunday is held annually across the diocese, usually in October. The Safeguarding Team use the opportunity to promote the safeguarding message generally, with special emphasis each year placed on specific aspects of or new initiatives in safeguarding. In 2019, the Safeguarding Committee oversaw the production and dissemination of two safeguarding leaflets *Children and Digital media in our Parish*, and *Learning with Jesus*.

Each church and Church building where activities involving children take place has a copy of the child safeguarding policy document and the Child Safeguarding Statement displayed in prominent positions. The posters are available in Irish, English and Polish; and consideration is now being given to developing copies of safeguarding information in Portuguese and Lithuanian, reflecting the increase in populations speaking these languages in some areas.

The revised safeguarding website (www.meathsafeguarding.ie) deserves particular mention in terms of its layout, user-friendly style and easy access to information. It is regularly updated, incorporating amendments of National Board Guidance. It is an excellent example of a fully comprehensive website. It contains the Diocesan Safeguarding Statement, as well as the Policy and Standards of the National Board as implemented by the Diocese.

The diocese has developed *operational guidelines* in 4 sections on its dedicated safeguarding website:

Section 1: Creating a culture of safety (dealing with Standards 1, 5, and 6);

Section 2: Recognising, Responding and Reporting; (dealing with Standards 2, 3, and 4)

Section 3: Quality assurance; (Standard 7)

Section 4: Forms and Templates to assist Church personnel in implementing the policy and revised Standards.

The information provided is extensive but accessible, readable and easily understood. The website contains archived copies of Safeguarding Newsletters and Annual Reports, and it has access to apps for Android and Apple devices for ease of access to information and forms. There is an up-to-date list of contacts and role descriptions for the different roles within the safeguarding structure. Awareness of the website is promoted at every opportunity, and especially by Trainers and Parish Safeguarding Representatives.

Individual parish websites were examined in 2019 at Bishop Deenihan's request to ensure that all safeguarding information and contact details remain current.

The reviewers met with the diocesan communications personnel who have developed and maintain web-based information and updates, in addition to which they produce and circulate 3-4 Safeguarding Newsletters annually, once approved by the Safeguarding Committee. The newsletters are excellent productions imparting up-to-date information and news in an attractive format.

Individual parishes are encouraged by the communications team to include safeguarding information in their parish newsletters in order to keep the safeguarding topic current.

A number of safeguarding leaflets have been developed for specific audiences, such as altar servers, and junior and senior choir members. These are attractively illustrated and presented in simple child friendly language. In addition, *Learning with Jesus* has been recently produced and is an excellent 4-page leaflet prepared for use as a resource document by all who are involved in religious instruction and sacramental preparation programmes for pupils attending non-Catholic schools. It is aimed at children aged 7-9 years who are taking catechetical classes for sacramental preparations in a parish context. The purpose of the leaflet is to communicate, in child-friendly terms a simple and age-appropriate safeguarding message. The leaflet contains guidelines for 'Learning in a Safe and Happy Way' and contains a 'Code of Behaviour for Children', both written and illustrated in a child-friendly way. It is planned to reproduce the leaflet in various Eastern European languages given that a number of the parents of children attending the schools who come from Eastern Europe. The leaflet contains a list of documents/forms, which must be in place and used when necessary throughout the diocese. Additional notes are included for parents and activity leaders. This leaflet was launched on the occasion of *Safeguarding Sunday* 2019.

The reviewers commend the work of the Safeguarding Committee in creating child-friendly literature promoting the safeguarding message to different age levels and to children involved in different activities within the Church. This work directly addresses *Recommendation 6* of the 2014 Review.

The overall Communications Policy and Strategy demonstrates commitment and creativity on the part of the safeguarding personnel in promoting the safeguarding message across the diocese. The reviewers had the opportunity to witness this first hand when visiting the two different parish activities to observe if the child-safeguarding message has reached those for whom it is intended to protect, and to obtain their views. Discussions, which took place with both groups of children and young people around the need to feel safe, and around safeguarding generally, and these indicated to the reviewers that the topic of safeguarding children is increasingly becoming an accepted requirement within Church activities. The children and young people left a profound impression on the reviewers of their awareness of Child Safeguarding within their group and of what they should do in order to keep themselves and others safe. Both groups were vocal about how they formulated and kept their own group rules.

Through observation and discussion with group leaders and supervisors of both groups, it was apparent that the Child Safeguarding message is imbedded within the culture of these groups and foremost in the minds of group leaders and supervisors.

The reviewers were impressed with the level of commitment, effort and enthusiasm undertaken by the diocesan communications team in communicating the Church's child safeguarding message. This standard is fully 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

The Safeguarding Committee is charged with the overall objective of ensuring that appropriate safeguarding structures are in place. In the Diocese of Meath, the Safeguarding Committee meets 4 times per year and is chaired by Bishop Deenihan. The 11 committee members are drawn from different geographical areas and backgrounds, and it has 3 Safeguarding Representatives and 2 Trainers, the Diocesan Secretary and the DLP amongst its number. The term of office of committee members is 4 years, with a review at the autumn meeting.

The Safeguarding Committee received training from the National Board in November 2019 for the first time as a group, following the addition of new members.

In 2018, a Child Safeguarding Statement, as required by the Children First Act 2015 was prepared using National Board guidance, and this is incorporated in the Operations Guidelines on the safeguarding website (www.meathsafeguarding.ie) at S4.50. A Constitution for the committee was developed and adopted. This is available in the Operational Guidelines at S3.6. The reviewers met with the Safeguarding Committee and attended a committee meeting, which gave an insight into how this committee works and their current workload.

The committee oversees the implementation of the seven Standards in the Diocese of Meath and assesses its compliance through the annual parish Self-audit. In 2018, the rate of return of completed parish Self-audit forms reached almost 100% by December of that year. The resource team collated and analysed the returns and an independent assessor was also given the task of evaluating the responses. A report was completed by the independent assessor and is available within the comprehensive annual Safeguarding Report prepared by the Safeguarding Committee. (www.meathsafeguarding.ie)

Some general observations from the analysis of the Self-audit include:

- A high level of awareness in parish communities across the Diocese of Meath of the need for good information and preventative measures in relation to child welfare and protection to be available at parish level;
- Generally, all parishes are compliant in creating and maintaining safe environments;
- Concerted efforts were made and sustained in respect of training and information for those in parish communities.

- Some parishes indicated that training for some of their personnel was outside of the 5- year limit, and this will be addressed.
- A number of parishes specified individual training needs.

A Training Needs Analysis was undertaken informed by these returns and is addressed in Training Plan 2019.

The completion and subsequent independent analysis of the parish Self-audit forms is a very significant piece of work, and there is evidence of how information gathered from the returns has informed further safeguarding planning. The Safeguarding Committee amended the parish Self-audit form in 2019 because of user feedback, and from independent analysis of the 2018 form and that year's returned audit forms. An enhanced Self-audit form was one outcome of the external assessment of Self-audits, and it is a comprehensive and manageable version of the form designed to elicit optimum answers. It is being used for the 2019 audit. This analysis was undertaken by an assessor commissioned by the Safeguarding Committee. The new user-friendly form was launched at the information sessions in October, and hard copies given to each of more than 150 Parish Representatives as a first step towards the completion of the end-of-year Self-audit exercise. The change in the format of the Self-audit forms was innovative and proactive, allowing for easier filling in of details. It is presented in a more attractive form overall designed to encourage full completion rates in a timely way. This initiative is commended.

The end-of-year Safeguarding Report 2018 is an extremely comprehensive document, clearly detailing the areas of work undertaken.

The Safeguarding Committee produced a comprehensive three-year Child Safeguarding Action Plan for 2018-2021 in compliance with Standard 7. The plan is reviewed and updated annually, and as and when new regulatory or legislative provisions are introduced. The reviewers were impressed by the ethos of the Safeguarding Committee, which was one of continuous appraisal of how systems in place to safeguard children within the diocese could be improved and enhanced.

The reviewers consider that Standard 7 has been met.

Concluding comments

There were many examples of good practice, commitment, knowledge and enthusiasm of diocesan personnel and volunteers within the overall diocesan safeguarding structure in evidence during this Review. The National Board commends Bishop Deenihan for requesting a Review so early in his episcopate; and it is impressed by his fulsome commitment to the operation of comprehensive and effective child safeguarding in the Diocese of Meath. It is clear to the National Board that he has given priority to child safeguarding within the diocese.

The reviewers would like to acknowledge and commend the safeguarding initiatives that are evident across the diocese, which have been examined under Standards 1, 5, 6 and 7 in this review.

This review identified deficits in relation to compliance with Standards 2, 3, and 4, which have resulted in these Standards not being fully met, as assessed in October 2019. Changes in personnel in key child safeguarding positions undoubtedly contributed to these difficulties. The reviewers acknowledge that since the October 2019 fieldwork phase of this review, Bishop Deenihan and the safeguarding team have worked tirelessly to address the historical deficits in these areas. In this regard, the review has provided opportunities for learning, which have been taken. After 12-month process of engagement, the National Board can report that personnel in the Diocese of Meath under the leadership of Bishop Deenihan have brought safeguarding practice up to a satisfactory standard.