

PARISH SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE HANDBOOK



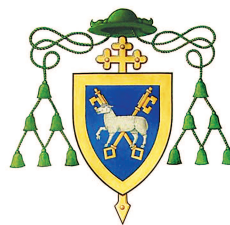
**Safeguarding
Office**

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR



Foreword

Parish Safeguarding Committees (PSCs) have been a long-standing cornerstone of the safeguarding arrangements within the diocese of Down and Connor. Their existence and work deserve our gratitude and they justify a certain pride in their voluntary service to the good and welfare of all. These Parish Safeguarding Committees have been staffed by an army of committed lay volunteers from various professions and walks of life. Over many years they have willingly and selflessly given of their time and skills to assist the diocese and its parishes on their safeguarding journey. For their dedication and service together with the parishioners, parents and families of our parishes I am most grateful.



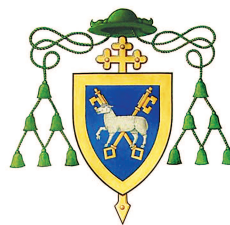
This parish-based model of practice has been adopted by the Catholic Church throughout Ireland. The model is designed to help provide safe environments for all children/young people and adults who take part in parish activities. I have no doubt that the care and safety of children/young people and adults is greatly enhanced because of these arrangements, which have been put in place with determination and following extensive training.

Safeguarding is however an ever-changing landscape particularly with the growth of the online and virtual world. Vigilance on the part of all, to ensure the safety of children/young people and adults, cannot be taken for granted. For vigilance to flourish a culture of awareness and an ongoing commitment to fostering safeguarding measures must be promoted.

Over the years many positive steps have been taken to develop and enhance our safeguarding practice as we move forward. While we embrace the lessons from research, reflect on our own experiences in dealing with child abuse and abuse of adults, we must also recognise that safeguarding children/young people and adults is a shared responsibility. Partnership and co-operation are key. Thus, partnership arrangements between statutory, voluntary, faith agencies and colleagues are a pre-condition for effective safeguarding.

For all of us, clergy, laity, statutory authorities and society at large, working together is the only way in which we can truly challenge and reduce the risk of abuse which children/young people and adults may experience and thus promote their safety and well-being. Each and every one of us has an important part to play in fostering the well-being and welfare of children/young people and adults within our parish communities.

The development of this Handbook is a response to the comments and requests made by PSC Chairs and Parish Priests during the pre-COVID-19 pandemic visits to PSC's by diocesan Safeguarding staff.



I recommend this new Handbook to our Parish Safeguarding Committees. It outlines their key roles and responsibilities and enables compliance with the Standards and Guidance (2016) of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

It is our aim and our desire that all children/young people and adults within the diocese of Down and Connor experience positive and safe environments within their Parishes and Pastoral Communities.

As this Handbook is made available to the Chairpersons and members of our Parish Safeguarding Committees – and indeed to a wider public – I wish to renew my personal gratitude to all who serve this local Church and society with their skill, voluntary dedication and commitment to the work and culture of safeguarding.

Bishop of Down and Connor

Introduction

This handbook is intended to help the Parish Safeguarding Committee (PSC) understand the vital role it plays in creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all children/young people and adults who avail of services and activities offered by the Parish or by external groups using parish facilities.

Whilst this 'go to' handbook is designed to offer, at a glance, practical advice for PSCs, let us not forget that the PSC's primary role is to promote a culture of safeguarding into the life of the Parish where safeguarding children/young people and adults are at the heart of all that is done in the Parish, thereby creating a Parish Safeguarding community. The PSC does not have any role in investigating concerns of a safeguarding nature. This role belongs to the Diocesan Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Any matters of a safeguarding nature should be passed on to the DLP.

This handbook should be read along with the Parish Resource Pack, which contains further detailed advice, guidance, and resources to supplement the handbook. The Resource Pack can be accessed at

<http://www.downandconnorsafeguarding.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NEWLY-REVISED-PARISH-RESOURCE-PACK-DEC19.pdf>

Appointment of the Parish Safeguarding Committee (PSC)

The members of a PSC are usually drawn from within the Parish and are nominated and appointed by the Parish Priest (PP) (or delegate) who may have consulted with the Parish Pastoral Council.

PSC members may be drawn from a variety of backgrounds and skill sets but consideration should be given to those individuals who:

- Have a genuine interest in promoting the welfare of children/young people and adults deemed to be at risk of harm
- Have relevant experience which may be, but not necessarily, from one of the following backgrounds – Education, Corporate Governance, Personnel, Youth Service, Social Work, Legal Profession, Pastoral Ministry, Health (Nurse, Doctor, Health Care Professional, Psychologist or GP)

- Are available to:
 - Attend at least 3-4 PSC meetings per year
 - Be active members of the committee by undertaking allocated tasks to support the functioning of the committee (please see heading below entitled “Role & Function of a PSC”) and
 - Are willing to act as team members who respect the values and opinions of others as well as demonstrating an understanding of the importance of confidentiality and showing a commitment to working alongside others to get things done.

Membership of a PSC

- There should be a minimum of 5 people per committee. Some committees that choose to cluster with neighbouring parishes, may have more members
- Ideally each PSC member should serve a minimum three-year term, which can be extended to two further three-year terms
- The committee once appointed should nominate a Chair, ensuring as stated above each PSC member is allocated a role to undertake
- The PP should be a member of the committee but not allocated the post of Chair. Whilst the PP is exempt from having to undertake a functioning role, his attendance is vital to the effectiveness of the committee.

The Function of a PSC

The PSC has several functions, but these can be divided into two broad areas:

1. Raising awareness about safeguarding in the Parish; and
2. Putting in place best safeguarding arrangements within the Parish.

Key Roles of the PSC

The PSC is required to:

1. Be aware of all parish activities (including the activities of external groups using parish premises) which need to comply with Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
2. Raise awareness of what safeguarding involves at parish level
3. Offer information and advice on safe practice to individuals, volunteers and group leaders involved with children/young people and adults in the Parish
4. Make sure church activities are provided in a way that children/young people and adults are looked after safely and protected from abuse
5. Publicise contact details of the relevant statutory and Diocesan safeguarding personnel widely
6. Ensure that the Parish complies with legislation regarding the processing of safeguarding information (Record retention and disposal).

Outlined below are some practical suggestions as to how a PSC can achieve best safeguarding arrangements within the Parish.

1. Being aware of all parish activities (including the activities of external groups using parish premises) which need to comply with Safeguarding Policy and Procedures will involve:

- Undertaking a 'scoping exercise' of all activities offered by the Parish and by external groups to both children/young people and adults
- Keeping and maintaining a register/database of these activities. This should be an annual exercise undertaken by the PSC. A suggestion would be to allocate this task to one or two PSC members. The message is clear: 'Know what is happening in your Parish'

- Checking that all external groups using parish premises complete the external licence form in relation to safeguarding. Once completed, this should be returned to either the hall committee or the parish secretary. Any problems arising should be discussed with the PSC Chair
- Making sure that all those involved in an activity have gone through the appropriate process relating to volunteers (see section below on Parish personnel/volunteers). There should be no one else involved in any activity such as those 'who offer to help out'.

REMEMBER: There should be no activities taking place within the Parish involving children/young people and adults that the PSC is not aware of. PSCs should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Do we have an up to date register of all activities involving children/young people and adults... with the names and contact details of the group leaders?
2. Are all volunteers appropriately trained for their role?
3. Are volunteers appropriately vetted for the role? All group leaders **MUST** be trained in Level 2 Child Safeguarding training before they undertake leading an activity
4. Are leaders and volunteers aware what needs to be in place when hosting an activity (e.g. consent forms, attendance register, accidents/incidents process/forms, codes of behaviour, adequate supervision ratios, completion of a risk assessment)?
5. Have parents/guardians and children/young people been made aware of and received a copy of the Complaints Procedure, the relevant Code of Behaviour for children/young people and adults, and the procedure for reporting safeguarding concerns?

2. Raising awareness of what safeguarding involves at Parish level will include:

- Disseminating and raising awareness of both Child and Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedures within the Parish by:
 - Issuing the safeguarding policies and whistleblowing policy to new volunteers

- Displaying the Diocesan safeguarding posters about keeping children/young people and adults safe from harm
- Communicating the safeguarding message regularly in the parish bulletin, newsletter, and parish websites
- Designating a Safeguarding Sunday to communicate/raise awareness of what the PSC does and to keep safeguarding on everyone's agenda
- Sharing with group leaders the necessity to have in place:
 - Age appropriate codes of behaviour
 - Completed Risk Assessments and Health and Safety checks
 - Agreed volunteer ratios during activities
 - Agreement from group leaders to attend Level 2 Child Safeguarding training
 - Vetting for group leaders and volunteers working in a regulated active with children/young people and adults
- Linking in regularly with other parish-based groups such as the Parish Pastoral Council to support and maintain a parish safeguarding perspective and share the work of the PSC
- Reporting to the Diocesan Designated Liaison Person any safeguarding concerns that arise regarding children/young people and adults at risk.

3. Offering information and advice on safe practice to individuals, volunteers and group leaders involved with children/young people and adults in the Parish includes:

- The PSC being confident that individuals, groups, and leaders know how PSC members can be contacted for help, support and development of parish activities for children/young people and adults

- The Chair of a PSC should allocate a member of the committee to be the link person for group leaders within their Parish for checking each group's compliance with safe practice, for example:
 - Identifying those who require to be vetted (please see Appendix on vetting and recruitment of volunteers)
 - Identifying those volunteers who require training (Level 1 training is for all volunteers working in the Parish; Level 2 is currently available to Clergy, group leaders and deputies)
 - The PSC must hold a register of all volunteers in the Parish who have received training and alert the Diocesan Safeguarding Office regarding those who require to be trained
 - Linking in with larger groups in the Parish such as the GAA and Youth Centres and sharing ideas around best safeguarding practice.

REMEMBER: The Diocese will allocate a Safeguarding Support Officer (SSO) to each Parish. The SSO is available to offer practical advice and guidance and will meet with PSC Chairs in each pastoral community 2/3 times annually.

4. Making sure church activities are provided in a way that children/young people and adults are looked after safely and protected from abuse

Below is a suggested list for PSC to check if in place:

- Regular liaison with the leaders (e.g. children's liturgy, choir leader, spread organiser, youth club leader) of the activity
- Required levels of supervision and ratios are being met
- Adequate records are maintained (please refer to the Diocesan Safeguarding Data Protection/Privacy Guidelines¹, the Diocesan Privacy Policy² and the Record Retention Guide)

¹ <http://www.downandconnorsafeguarding.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Privacy-Notice-May-2018.pdf>

² <http://www.downandconnorsafeguarding.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Safeguarding-Office-Privacy-Notice.pdf>

- Safe recruitment and vetting of volunteers involved in parish activities. No one should undertake a regulated activity without first being vetted. The audit of parish activities completed by the PSC annually will help identify those volunteers requiring to be vetted and trained
- Making sure that all those involved in an activity have gone through the appropriate process relating to volunteers (see section below on Parish personnel/volunteers). There should be no one else involved in any activity such as those ‘who offer to help out’
- Risk Assessments and Health and Safety checks are carried out by those organising the activity.

REMEMBER: A member of the PSC should make themselves known to group leaders in the Parish and have a ‘conversation’ about best safeguarding practice and what must be in place.

5. Publicising contact details of the relevant statutory and Diocesan safeguarding personnel widely. This information should be available on:

- a. Church notice boards
- b. Parish newsletter
- c. Parish website/social media sites

6. Ensuring that the Parish complies with legislation regarding the processing of information

The PSC has an important role to play in collecting, managing, and storing safeguarding information, which is collected as part of its parish role in line with the NBSCCCI standards and guidance document 2016³. The PSC must also comply with Data Protection legislation and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Below are some key points to consider.

³ <https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Safeguarding%20Children%20Policy.pdf>

It is expected that safeguarding information held by the Parish is:

- for a specific, explicit, and legitimate purpose
- held safely and securely
- adequate, relevant, and necessary
- accurate and kept up to date
- only stored for as long as is necessary.

This can be achieved by the PSC:

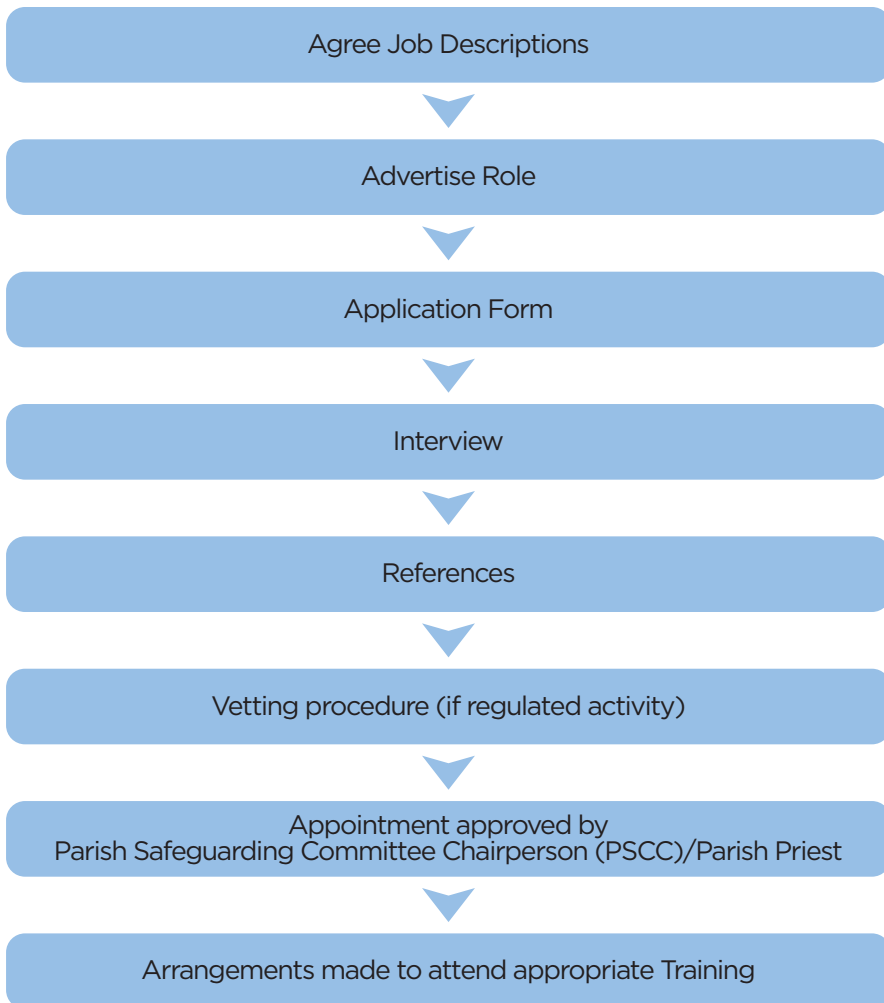
- Appointing one or two PSC members to specifically undertake the role of managing and processing safeguarding information held by the Parish
- Keeping a register/database of safeguarding information held by the Parish
- Updating the register/database as and when necessary
- Reviewing the register/database on an annual basis
- Disposing of records in line with the Records Retention Guide.

Parish Personnel/Volunteers – Recruiting and Vetting

The PSC has a pivotal role in ensuring that statutory guidance is followed, and best practice encouraged, in relation to recruiting volunteers and vetting individuals who carry out a regulated activity as part of their role in the Parish.

The Parish Resource Pack provides a detailed step-by-step guide for recruiting and vetting individuals for parish roles. Additional information is outlined in the Appendix.

Below is a summary, step-by-step best practice guide when considering recruiting volunteers to a parish role:-



Summary of Key Messages



Ensure you establish a PSC with at least 4/5 committed members appropriately recruited. Allocate each member a role on the committee to help it function smoothly and effectively.



Remember the two key functions of all PSCs:

- 1: Raise awareness about safeguarding in your parish community..... Let the Parish know who you are and what you do. Link in with other groups such as your Pastoral Council, hall committees and those engaging with children/young people and adults in your Parish.
- 2: Put in place the best possible safeguarding arrangements.....
It is your role to help create and maintain a safe environment for children/young people and adults in need of safeguarding within your Parish..... be creative as to how you might achieve this. Connect with neighbouring PSCs and share best practice.



Be aware of all the activities taking place in your Parish or using your parish facilities..... Start by doing a 'scoping' exercise annually. Ideally you should undertake this activity in September when parish groups are restarting post summer.
Keep a register and bring this regularly to committee meetings for updating.



It is your role to identify.....

Who needs to be trained?

Who needs to be vetted?

Unclear!..... check with the staff at the Safeguarding Office.



Allocated to every PSC is a Safeguarding Support Officer (SSO).

Working alongside the Safeguarding Office the SSO is there to offer advice and guidance to PSCs on all safeguarding matters.

Find out who your SSO is by contacting the Safeguarding Office.



A comprehensive list of practical tasks that a PSC should work towards having in place for the Parish can be found in:

Standard 1 of the National Board's Standards and Guidance Document (2016)

click here to access

<https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Safeguarding%20Children%20Policy.pdf>

APPENDIX

VETTING

Anyone undertaking a paid or voluntary role in a regulated activity, working with children/young people and/or adults, requires by law to be vetted. It is the responsibility of the PSC to co-ordinate who requires to be vetted and to ensure the individual does not undertake their volunteering duties until they are vetted. The vetting process involves a criminal records check, which will show if the individual has any criminal convictions. A person who does have a criminal conviction will not necessarily be barred from working in a church setting. Only convictions that are relevant will be taken into consideration.

Information on vetting and vetting forms are available online at <https://downandconnorsafeguarding.com/vetting-forms/>

Telephone: 028 **9049 2783**

Email: **vetting@soddc.org**

A PSC Chairperson or delegate can arrange for vetting training. This is organised through direct contact with the Vetting Office.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Category One: Individuals working with Children/Young People in a non-leadership role

- Complete an application form
- Undergo the vetting process
- Have a meeting/interview

Once recruited Individuals are:

- Given a copy of the Diocesan Safeguarding Induction leaflet
- Given access to the Diocesan's Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in respect of both children/young people and adults

- Given time to read the documents and revert to the PSC or PP with any questions or queries they may have
- Provided with a Parish Volunteer Agreement form
- Volunteers are required to sign a declaration at the bottom of the form that they have read and understood the documents and agree to abide by their contents
- Complete a probationary period
- Volunteers are required to undertake Level 1 Child Safeguarding Training Information Session are also expected to attend training every three-years and complete a probationary period
- Undertake Adult Safeguarding Training
- The details of the individual are entered into the Parish database.

Category Two: Individuals working with Children/Young People in a leadership/deputy leadership role

- Complete an application form
- Undergo the vetting process
- Have a meeting/interview

Once recruited Individuals are:

- Given a copy of the Diocesan Safeguarding Induction leaflet
- Given access to the Diocesan's Safeguarding Policies and Procedures in respect of both children/young people and adults
- Given time to read the documents and revert to the PSC or PP with any questions or queries they may have
- Provided with a Parish Volunteer Agreement form. Volunteers are asked to sign the declaration at the bottom of the form that they have read and understood the documents and agree to abide by their contents

- Volunteers are expected to attend Child Safeguarding Level 2 (Mandatory) Training every three years and complete a probationary period
- Attend Adult Safeguarding Training
- Complete a probationary period
- The details of the individual are entered into the Parish database.

Category Three: Individuals who are working with Adults

- Complete an application form
- Have a meeting/interview
- Undergo the vetting process only if undertaking regulated activity

Once Recruited Individuals are:

- Given a copy of the Diocesan Safeguarding Induction leaflet
- Given access to the Diocesan's Adult Safeguarding Policy and the Child Safeguarding Policy
- Given time to read the documents and revert to the PSC or PP with any questions or queries they may have
- Provided with a Parish Volunteer Agreement form. Volunteers are asked to sign a declaration at the bottom of the form that they have read and understood the documents and agree to abide by their contents
- Volunteers are expected to attend Adult Safeguarding Training and complete a probationary period
- Attend Level 1 Child Safeguarding Training
- Complete a probationary period
- The details of the individual are entered into Parish database.

Safeguarding is
everyone's shared
responsibility.

Safeguarding Office

tel: **028 9049 2798**

email: **office@soddc.org**

web: **www.downandconnorsafeguarding.com**

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