



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

**Private and Confidential**

**Second Review of Safeguarding Practice**

**in the**

**Diocese of Down and Connor**

**undertaken by**

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

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

**Date of Review Report: June 2023**

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## Background

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

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

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

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

## Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the bishop ensures that a review and evaluation of the implementation of Resource 15, as outlined in the *2009 Safeguarding Children: Standards and Guidance Document for the Catholic Church in Ireland* is conducted in the Diocese of Down and Connor - **Implemented**

Recommendation 2: That the bishop initiates a process whereby the pre-2009 child safeguarding case management files that are still open are brought up to the highest possible standards of accessibility, content and functionality - **Implemented**

Recommendation 3: That the bishop should ask the Diocesan Trainers to undertake a training needs assessment of the Advisory Panel in line with their request - **Implemented**

Recommendation 4: That the bishop brings all the priest advisers together on a regular basis to receive support in their role and to develop thinking and planning for the development of this element of the diocesan safeguarding work - **Implemented**

Recommendation 5: That the bishop, with the staff of the Safeguarding Office, analyse the results of the 2009 internal diocesan review of case management files to ensure that those living priests of the diocese of Down and Connor who require to be risk assessed on the basis of child safeguarding concerns, have been so assessed and that written risk management plans have been developed and are being implemented with respect to them - **Implemented**

Recommendation 6: That the bishop requests the diocesan Safeguarding Committee to develop systems for the regular monitoring of compliance with all diocesan Child Safeguarding policy and procedures - **Implemented**

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

- Public confidence that the Church Body is safe for children;
- Affirmation to Child Safeguarding personnel that they are doing the right things well;
- Assurance to the Church Authority that the Standards are being met;
- Evidence of the governance arrangements for child safeguarding;
- Opportunities for learning and development.

## **Introduction**

Down and Connor is a diocese of the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland. It is one of eight suffragan dioceses in the ecclesiastical province of the metropolitan Archdiocese of Armagh. The position of Bishop is vacant. Bishop Donal McKeown, DD (Bishop of Derry) is currently the Apostolic Administrator, having been appointed on January 21, 2023.

The territorial remit of the diocese includes much of counties Antrim and Down, including the cities of Belfast and Lisburn, and the large towns of Antrim, Ballymena, Bangor, Carrickfergus, Downpatrick, Holywood, Larne and Newtownards and Newcastle. There are currently 86 parishes (with 146 churches) served by 85 priests in full time ministry. The diocese is the second largest on the island of Ireland in terms of population, after the Archdiocese of Dublin.

## **Diocese of Down and Connor – Incardinated clergy statistics**

There are 147 incardinated clergy in the diocese.

This number is made up of:

- 3 Bishops (1 in Brussels, 2 retired)
- 1 transitory deacon (to be ordained priest in August)
- 15 permanent deacons (all in ministry)
- 128 priests

Of the 128 (incardinated) priests:

- 31 are retired
- 6 are semi-retired / in pastoral ministry
- 2 are post graduate students
- 2 are working outside the Diocese
- 2 do not have appointments
- The remaining 85 are in full time ministry.

There are also

- 3 priests of other dioceses retired and living in the diocese.
- 6 priests on loan and in full time ministry from other dioceses.
- 1 permanent deacon from another diocese, now settled in D&C and ministering here but not yet incardinated.

In addition, there are

- 8 members of Religious congregations engaged in parochial ministry
- 1 member of a Religious congregation in Hospital Chaplaincy (BCH/MPH)

### **Process of Review**

The Review of compliance was measured against the National Board's seven standards, contained in *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, which is accessible at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/policy-guidance/policy-document>. The Review concentrated on safeguarding arrangements and practice through evaluating written records and meetings with Church personnel, parents and young people. The Review also took account of changes and developments within the diocese since the last Review in May 2013, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on parish ministry and activity. A Memorandum of Understanding and Data Processing Deed Agreement were signed prior to the Review taking place.

Bishop Noel Treanor invited the National Board to undertake this Review of practice, prior to his appointment as Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, in Brussels. The Review fieldwork was undertaken during the period of June 6 to 9, 2023. The following is a list of those with whom the reviewers met or spoke during the fieldwork of this Review:

- Most Reverend Bishop Donal McKeown DD, Apostolic Administrator
- The interim Safeguarding Director/DLP
- The Diocesan Chancellor
- The Episcopal Vicar for Safeguarding /Safeguarding Delegate
- The Diocesan Children's Safeguarding Committee Chairperson and Vice Chair
- The Northern Diocese Vetting and Barring Office Co-ordinator and vetting personnel
- The Diocesan Chief Operating Officer and Secretary to Board of Trustees
- The Diocesan Case Management Advisory Panel Chairperson
- The Training and Parish Development Officer
- The Accredited Diocesan Safeguarding Trainer/National Board Tutor/Assessor
- The Diocesan Parish Safeguarding Support Officer
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Office Administrator
- Living Church Lead/Youth Ministry
- A Priest Advisor
- Support Persons
- A complainant
- A Sacristan
- Members of the Diocesan Child Safeguarding Committee
- Parish Priests

- Altar Server Ministry Leads/parents/children
- Parish Safeguarding Committee Chairpersons/Deputies/ & members
- The leads for Children's Liturgy/Pope John Paul Award II/Folk Choir/Preparation for the Sacraments/Gift Programme/Youth Faith and Youth Pilgrimage
- St. Louis Search Youth Ministry leads and young people
- A representative of the PSNI
- A Representatives of the relevant Health and Social Care Trust

During 2020 and 2021, a range of activities involving children and young people were ceased, or were adapted to online access, to comply with government guidelines on pandemic restrictions. This involved a furlough for staff, apart from the Director of Safeguarding /Designated Liaison Person (DLP) who remained available to fulfil their role and responsibilities throughout the pandemic.

## **STANDARDS**

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

The seven Standards are:

Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments

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

Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe

Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message

Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

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

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

## **Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments**

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

The reviewers were satisfied that all relevant procedures and guidance were in place and accessible on the diocesan website at <https://downandconnorsafeguarding.com/>. From discussions with key safeguarding personnel, at diocesan and parish level, it was apparent to the reviewers that the procedures and guidelines are fully embedded in practice. The diocese has a comprehensive Parish Safeguarding Committee Handbook, and a resource pack, which contains the necessary materials for parishes to support the delivery of best safeguarding practice. It is based on the National Board Standard 1, *Creating and maintaining safe environments*. The Handbook and resource pack are easily accessible on the diocesan website and all resources can be downloaded as required. The resource pack can be amended locally, as required. Parish Safeguarding Committees (PSCs) are informed directly of any changes made to the content of the pack.

The diocese also has *The Child Safeguarding in the Diocese of Down and Connor Best Practice Guidelines*, which supports the above handbook and resources regarding the delivery of safe environments and of best safeguarding practice. The reviewers would like to highlight the following resources available on the diocesan website, which can be accessed by anyone working with children and young people across this and other dioceses:

- SBNI E-Safety Guidance for Faith Based Groups
- PSNI Sexting the Law Leaflet
- We care about you, you can get help cards for children
- GDPR – top tips for parishes
- SBNI/Early Intervention Transformation Programme Understanding ACEs and Trauma Sensitive Practice
- Top Tips for Online Ministry with Children & Young People

The reviewers commend the diocese for the resources developed during Covid-19 to enable parishes to maintain a level of ministry and activities online. Parishes prized the support provide by the safeguarding team during this difficult period.

The reviewers saw clear evidence of a diocese that provides a wide range of faith-based programmes and activities for young people that are safe, fun, engaging, adaptable, and flexible to accommodate young people with specific needs. During visits to three parishes, the reviewers had an opportunity to meet with a range of staff, clergy, volunteers, parents, children and young people involved in children's and youth ministry.

The youth ministries examined included:

- Altar Server Ministry
- Preparation for the sacraments – First Communion and Confirmation (YOUCAT)
- The Gift Programme for 11 to 16 year olds
- Youth Faith for 16/17 year Olds
- Children’s Liturgy
- Search Programme
- Pope John Paul II Award Scheme
- Folk Choir
- Pilgrimages

Information about Safeguarding was clearly displayed in buildings visited, including webcam/CCTV notices, posters for how to report a concern, the Child Safeguarding Policy Statement (with up to date DLP, statutory agency and *Towards Healing* and *Towards Peace* contact details), and *celebret* notices. In one parish visited, the membership of the Parish Safeguarding Committee was listed on a notice displayed.

During their first parish visit to a rural parish (Parish 1), the reviewer had an opportunity to meet with the Parish Manager - who is also the Chairperson of the PSC - a PSC member, three Altar Servers (6 year-olds) a parent, the sacristan, a Children’s Liturgy/Gift Programme leader, and the Pope John Paul II Award scheme leader. This parish post Covid-19 has fully established its Altar Server Ministry and Club (14 altar servers), which meets once a month. The children enthusiastically talked about being an altar server, they knew whom they could talk to if they had any worries, and they took the reviewer into the sacristy and showed him their names in the sign in/out register. The parents were aware of safeguarding arrangements for children, and said that they were happy and safe as altar servers. The sacristan was known to the children, and he is one of the adults involved in their supervision. He also advised that he was confident in asking visiting priests for their *celebret* card.

Also established in this parish was Children’s Liturgy, the Gift Programme (Growing in Faith Together – a fun faith programme for young people post primary school), and a Folk group with adults’ and (6) young peoples’ membership. The older Gift group have an opportunity to participate in a pilgrimage to Rome later in the year.

The Pope John Paul II Award scheme, which is based in the parish, has been delivered post Covid-19 by volunteer leaders, with a group of seven (7) young people. These young people are involved in readings and prayers of the faithful at Mass, every second Sunday. They also volunteer with the Gift Programme. They have an opportunity to be Eucharistic Ministers in the future. Community work involves volunteering with St Vincent de Paul, with a local hospital meet and greet service, and visiting older people in a nursing home.



During the visit to Parish 2 in Belfast, the reviewer had an opportunity to have a round table discussion with a range of personnel, including the PSC Chairperson, Parish Priest and other members (a member of this PSC was also a member of the Parish Council, where safeguarding is a standing agenda item). Others met were volunteer leaders involved in children's liturgy and in preparation for the sacraments (for children who do not attend the parish primary school), in the Gift Programme, and in the Youth Faith Group for young people over-16. This latter group provides an opportunity for young people to have a say in expressing their views on a variety of issues in relation to their faith, social awareness and their personal identities.

Post Covid-19, current activities in the parish include preparation for the sacraments, the Gift Programme and the Youth Faith group. Preparation is underway to resume Children's Liturgy and Altar Server Ministry in the autumn. Discussion with involved members of the parish included recruitment of volunteers, vetting requirements, and training provision. The need to reenergise recruitment and engagement with potential volunteers was highlighted. It was stated that the recruitment and vetting process can be off putting for volunteers, and they needed to be supported throughout the process. Parish personnel were aware that support is available from the PSC, and members of the PSC are aligned as named support persons with leaders of activities to provide advice to them regarding safeguarding arrangements.

The third parish visit was to a village parish, Parish 3, where the reviewer met with the PSC Chair (who also sits on the Pastoral Council), along with other members of the PSC, the Parish Priest, parents, two young people involved in the Gift Programme, and one altar server. Safeguarding folders were made available to the reviewer, which contained all relevant and up-to-date documentation. The two young people spoke about their involvement in the Gift Programme and of being able to talk with their peers about what was positive for them, in terms of their faith and meeting new people. The young altar server and his parent spoke about the arrangements that ensure a number of parents are always there with the altar servers before and after Mass. The young people were very clear about who they could go to if they had any concerns. Within the parish, there is a Youth Mass once a month, with the young people involved in all aspects of the liturgy. This Mass is well received, with large numbers of parishioners in attendance.

In discussions with the PSC and the parish priest, they praised the support received from the safeguarding team, in particular with regard to training. They felt listened to in relation to their training needs, and received support to take forward the ONUS Safe Place initiative – see <https://www.onustraining.co.uk/safe-places-in-northern-ireland>

As a parish, they found that the annual self-audit is much easier to complete now it was online. With regard to the Pathways to the Future, they support the 'family of parishes' approach, and they welcomed the information being shared to stimulate discussion and debate within the parishes. The parish personnel also believed that their feedback was taken on board, in that it led to changes in the approach of the diocese. This is good evidence of meaningful consultation.

The PSC welcomed the recent appointment of the Parish Safeguarding Support Officer, who has already been in contact about providing support with pastoral work and recruiting additional volunteer input.

From discussions with personnel and volunteer leaders during the three parish visits, the reviewers were impressed with their knowledge of safeguarding policy and guidance, and were provided with examples of how these had been implemented in practice, along with supporting documentation. This included, for example, parental consent forms, including medical information about children's allergies etc., and health and safety and hazard risk assessment. Codes of behaviour and conduct for both adults and children were examined, as were appropriate adult supervision ratios and leader rotas, incident and accident reports, and sign in/out forms.

Information leaflets with details about how to report a concern, with the contact details for the Diocesan DLP, the relevant statutory agencies, and Towards Healing and Towards Peace were evidenced. The reviewers also evaluated the recruitment of volunteers and police vetting, the use of technology and social media, and the use of parish premises by external organisations, with confirmation of having insurance cover and a child protection policy. The reviewers were satisfied that the needs of children with disability were provided for. Finally, they saw evidence of the safe storage of personal and confidential information.

A common theme during these parish visits was the impact of Covid-19, and the process of recruitment of volunteers to resume activities. The three parishes visited had restarted a number of the above-mentioned ministries, and were preparing to resume others in September 2023. All parish personnel are to be commended for their commitment to caring for and keeping children and young people safe.

Personnel spoken with reported that they received good support from the Diocesan Safeguarding team, and from the Northern Dioceses Vetting and Barring Service, and were confident to contact them for advice and guidance.

The evaluation of the parish self-audits has highlighted that other parishes across the diocese have yet to resume children's and young people's ministries and activities, and it is a priority of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee to support these parishes to do so. The Diocesan Parish Safeguarding Support Officer will be a critical support in this regard, as parishes begin to rebuild post Covid-19.

One of the reviewers spoke with the Parish Safeguarding Support Officer (PSSO) who has already been in contact with a number of parishes and who has developed a priority list of actions to support them following on from the self-audit findings. This includes establishing PSCs in some areas, having sacristy registers, setting up groups, and assisting in the recruitment of new volunteers.

The PSSO is very much part of the safeguarding team, and they come together every 3 to 4 weeks to review and plan future actions in terms of parish support and ensuring safe environments and practices. The PSSO also has daily contact and scheduled meetings with the DLP/Director of Safeguarding (It is primarily for this role as Director that these meetings take place)

The PSSO was previously involved in Music Ministry, and had forged relationships across the diocese. They have established new networks in their PSSO role, and they have been very visible, attending a number of Pastoral Community Support meetings (when a number of parish reps come together). They accompany the Diocesan Training and Development Officer on training sessions for PSCs; and they publicise their role in the Diocesan Newsletter. They have helped with the development of new safeguarding information leaflets in a range of languages.

Another critical area of support for parishes comes from the Living Church Youth Ministry. Ministry personnel work closely with parents and parishes in preparing young people for the sacraments. They surveyed parents and then developed a series of resources, including a My Sunday Mass Journal for the young people, as well as one for parents. That involvement enabled parents to connect and engage with their children about the Mass and the sacraments. For children with sensory/ visual needs, the Youth Ministry developed additional tailored materials to support and assist parents to engage with their children. The Youth Ministry worked with NUA Origins (see <https://nuafilmseries.org/> produced by the Scripture Union Ireland) to develop resources for Confirmation. The booklet is contemporary and visually appealing, with a clear emphasis on faith and the sacrament. Since April 2023, the Youth Ministry have had a series of one-day Confirmation retreats. In preparation for these retreats, a member of the Youth Ministry team meets the young people in school to share an information pack. This forms the basis for discussion at the retreats along with some videos, which had a very positive impact on the young people with regard their faith. The diocese hopes to have run 20 retreats by the end of June 2023.

The Living Church Youth Ministry have also been heavily involved in the Pope John Paul II Award scheme, promoting and supporting its transition to becoming more parish based, with support from the schools. Parishes have been assisted in identifying parish-based activities that meet the requirements of the Pope John Paul II Award, which at the same time makes the young people feel connected to and part of their parish.

The reviewers attended a Belfast High School to discuss the Search Youth Ministry programme, which is for young people aged 16/17 to assist their growth in faith and community. The reviewers met with two leaders, together with 14 young people (16/17 year olds) from different schools, including an integrated post-primary school.

Young people shared that participation in the programme had “changed their life”; “transformed their relationship with God”; helped them “to make better choices”; gave them the “opportunity to meet other young people from other schools; and “built their confidence”.

Leaders advised that safeguarding is part of the preparation for the weekend retreats, by ensuring all vetting, risk assessment, contract regarding behaviour, supervision ratios, and sign in/out sheets etc. are in place. The leaders shared copies of consent forms, which included a child protection-policy statement, along with a detailed activities programme. On any given retreat, there are 15 leaders to approximately 30 young people.

The young people were able discuss safeguarding arrangements, e.g. who to talk to if they had any worries. They were clear on the safe use of mobile phones, on boundaries for overnight stays, on sleeping arrangements, and on the contract for expected behaviour, and they had no issues with any of these.

What was evident during the meeting with leaders and young people was the respectful and caring relationships that exist between them.

#### Vetting

The numbers of all personnel vetted by the diocese between Jan 1, 2017 and May 31, 2023 are as followed:

- 2017: 612
- 2018: 452
- 2019: 445
- 2020: 132
- 2021: 221
- 2022: 399
- 2023: 254

**Total 2,515**

The Diocese of Down and Connor hosts the Northern Dioceses Vetting and Barring Service on behalf of the northern dioceses. All vetting documentation and personal information was securely stored in the Diocesan Safeguarding Office, which was evidenced during the reviewers visit to that office. Vetting documentation relevant to the parishes visited was also safely stored. Information is only shared on a strictly need to know basis, which ensures confidentiality. A central database is maintained by the Diocesan Office, and vetting arrangements and compliance are monitored and kept under review by the Vetting Coordinator, and by the Interim Director for Safeguarding who reports to the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee. Parish Safeguarding Committees report on vetting activity during completion of parish self-audits. Parish personnel confirmed that vetting staff are supportive and accessible to respond to any queries about the vetting process. If there are changes in parish personnel, vetting training is provided as required.

The diocese collates and maintains information regarding the status of clergy in the diocese, including their incardinated priests working, studying, or residing outside the diocese, as well as external clergy ministering in the diocese.

The diocese has specific guidance in place regarding Whistleblowing. There were no whistleblowing reports since the last Review.

One of the reviewers met with the DLP to discuss in more detail the three complaints that had been referenced in the pre-fieldwork questionnaire that had been returned to the National Board, prior to the commencement of this review. This was in line with Indicator 1.7. *The Church body has a clearly written complaints procedure regarding safeguarding concerns that are not allegations of abuse.*

All three complaints were resolved using the relevant procedures. One of these related to a Parish Safeguarding Committee; the second involved a training matter; and the third related to anonymous calls to a number of parishes and to the Safeguarding Office. This third complaint was resolved with the assistance of the PSNI.

The reviewers are satisfied that all three complaints were dealt with appropriately and that none was of a child safeguarding concern.

**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.*

Table 1 below presents the figures of reports received by Down and Connor Diocese since the last National Board Review in 2013 of alleged abuse of children by clerics.

**Table 1**

Cleric, and their current status	Number of allegations	PSNI notified	HSCT notified	National Board notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
Cleric 1 – in ministry	1	Next day	Next day	Next day	P.C.I. carried out
Cleric 2 – in ministry	1	Next day	Next day	Next day	P.C.I. carried out
Cleric 3 – in ministry	No victim identified	PSNI notified the diocese	N/A	11 days	P.C.I. carried out
Cleric 4 – in ministry	No victim identified	Discussion with PSNI - 12 days	Discussion with HSCT – 10 days HSCT notified – 35 days	37 days	CDF consulted and updated as required
Cleric 5 – out of ministry	2	1) - 15 days* 2) – 6 days	1) - 18 days* 2) - 6 days	1) – 27 days* 2) – 7 days	P.C.I. carried out P.C.I. carried out
Cleric 6 - laicised	1	2 days	2 days	10 days	Laicisation
Cleric 7 - deceased	1	21 days	N/A	21 days	N/A
Cleric 8 - deceased	1	8 days	N/A	8 days	N/A
Cleric 9 - deceased	1	Same day	N/A	7 days	N/A
Cleric 10 - deceased	1	10 days	N/A	10 days	N/A
Cleric 11 - deceased	1	10 days	N/A	10 days	N/A
Cleric 12 - deceased	1	7 days	N/A	N/A	N/A

\*Cleric 5, first allegation – delay due to complainant not being clear about the identity of the respondent – notification made to PSNI on same day respondent was identified. All decisions made were informed by risk assessment.

With regard to the notification timeframes, the original contact in the case of Cleric 4 was from a solicitor who alerted the diocese to a 'possible' allegation. However, there was no further engagement between the solicitor and his client. The diocese had made contact with the PSNI ten days after being contacted by the solicitor. It then made a formal written notification to the PSNI and the National Board, with the limited information available. During this time, the cleric was subject to a robust risk assessment and management plan, which plan remains in place.

For all the other cases reviewed, there were timely notifications to the statutory authorities and National Board, and there was a good exchange of information with the PSNI and Social Services throughout case management of respondents. The reviewers commend the DLP for the structure and layout of the case files, which were easy to navigate. Case files were well organised and up to date and contained documentation pertaining to both civil and canonical proceedings. All case files are securely stored in the diocesan safeguarding office. The case files contained clear evidence of robust case management, partnership working, and good information sharing with regard to investigations and risk management. There was appropriate use of the Diocesan Advisory Panel, the National Board, and CDF, for advice and guidance on individual cases.

During parish visits, the reviewers saw documented evidence of Child Safeguarding Procedures and Guidance, which are also accessible on the diocesan website. The diocese has also produced a leaflet about how to report a concern. During the reviewers' parish visits, everyone, including parents and young people, knew what to do and who to approach if they were concerned. In their discussions with the DLP, he was clear on his 'duty of care' and on being accessible and available to the parishes if they had any concern.

As part of the Review, one of the reviewers spoke with a PSNI and a Trust representative. Both agencies reported good open working relationships with the DLP, with information shared and updates provided in a timely, sensitive and confidential manner. Both agencies confirmed good collaboration with the diocese and the DLP with regard to risk analysis and risk management. The Trust representative also reported being kept updated by the DLP on actions taken or changes in circumstances with any cases.

**This Standard is met.**

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

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

As part of the Review, a complainant was interviewed. The individual stated that following their abuse by a priest, they had confided in another priest, but were not believed and they felt too ashamed to tell their family. They spoke of how the abuse had “consumed them”, that they felt “broken” and at times suicidal. They felt “guilty”, blaming themselves for what happened and even now still struggle with their feelings. When they did get the courage to come forward, they were put in touch with the DLP. The complainant described the DLP and their Support Person as “life savers”. Both are always there for them, they listen and believe them. The complainant has also availed of the *Towards Healing* service.

All cases reviewed included evidence that complainants were offered support from *Towards Healing*, *Towards Peace*, and a Support Person from the diocese. Complainants were kept up to date about the investigation process, including correspondence and face-to-face meetings. The DLP is proactive in reaching out to complainants to assist them, and to put support arrangements in place for them.

In addition, there was evidence on case files of the DLP and the bishop listening to and supporting, the complainant, and their family, as well.

The case files confirmed that supports had been offered in all cases, but some complainants declined a Support Person, and/or *Towards Healing* and/or *Towards Peace*. Other complainants were offered and accepted pastoral support and/or independent counselling, which was arranged by the diocese.

The reviewers also found documented proof of good communication and collaboration with other Church bodies, including Religious Orders, by the DLP to ensure that complainants received appropriate support services, irrespective of who was leading on or managing the case.

The reviewers had an opportunity to meet with two of the three diocesan Support Persons. One was from a social work background and the other was a mental health nurse. They were both formally recruited, vetted, received induction, and completed safeguarding training. They also received bespoke training for Support Persons delivered by the diocesan Registered Trainers; and both have been offered training on trauma, which they will undertake later in the year. Both Support Persons were clear on their role as advocates for complainants, and on their accountability in reporting to the DLP. They spoke of how the training has provided them with guidance for their role and for the boundaries of their remit. They receive 1:1 support from the DLP, as well as peer support.



One Support Person has a current case. She confirmed that she was briefed about the case and completed preparatory work with the DLP, before undertaking an introductory meeting with the complainant. A risk assessment was completed with the Support Person, which covered a range of issues including where to meet with and what could be shared with the complainant. There is regular discussion between the Support Person and the DLP prior to and following meetings with the complainant. She keeps a written record of completed visits, which she provides to the DLP for inserting in the case file.

Within the diocese, each Support Person is self-employed, which provides a level of independence and flexibility in that they can work across dioceses. In discussions, the Support Persons were in favour of coming together once a year across the northern dioceses for reflection and shared learning. The reviewers believe that this would merit consideration by the Diocese of Down and Connor.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee have been very proactive at both strategic and operational levels in raising awareness about the needs of victims of clerical sexual abuse. Within their Business Plan, they are committed to further developing their services to victims, as well as giving victims/survivors of abuse a voice in shaping Safeguarding within the diocese. It is also a priority of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee to raise awareness of and to promote the role of the Support Persons, as well as of *Towards Healing* and *Towards Peace* at all safeguarding training events.

Credit can be given to the Safeguarding Committee for their leadership in raising awareness about trauma-informed practice, and the impact of abuse on complainants and on their families.

**This Standard is met.**

#### **Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent**

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

Respondent priests were made aware of the National Board Review and were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire about their experiences of the care and management they received from the diocese, and/or to meet with a reviewer. No respondents met with a reviewer, but one respondent did submit a completed questionnaire. In his completed questionnaire, the respondent advised that he received limited support from the diocese. The reviewers established that a Priest Advisor had been identified for this priest, but the respondent did not feel that this was adequate support. The respondent stated that he identified his own support. It was confirmed with the respondent following completion of the investigation that he was a priest of good standing.

On the case files examined, there was good evidence of engagement with respondents and of offering them the support of a Priest Advisor. Some respondents availed of this service. In discussion with the DLP, they were clear about their responsibility and accountability when meeting with respondents. The DLP has access to the bishop and discusses cases with him. The case files also demonstrated good partnership working with the PSNI and Trusts in the monitoring, reviewing and risk management of respondents. This was confirmed in discussions with the PSNI and Trust representatives, as detailed under Standard 2. The case files also contained documentation pertaining to both civil and canonical legal processes. In cases where a criminal or civil investigation was in progress, the canonical Preliminary Inquiry (PI) would be suspended until the civil investigation was concluded. There was proof that the CDF, the National Board and the Diocesan Advisory Panel, were appropriately utilised to give advice and guidance on individual cases.

Table 1 under Standard 2 provides information on the 12 case management files examined by the reviewers. Details of the management of these cases are provided here.

Cleric 1: The allegation related to potential grooming of young people. A risk assessment was conducted, and a written precept was put in place to allow the civil investigations to take place. The diocese co-operated fully with the statutory agencies. The DLP and the bishop listened to and supported the complainant's family. An independent external review was undertaken, as recommended by Diocesan Advisory Panel. The respondent priest was offered a Priest Advisor, but he did not avail of that service. The priest returned to full ministry in good standing.

Cleric 2: The allegation related to physical abuse. There were timely notifications to and good information sharing with the statutory agencies. A specialist assessment was undertaken on the recommendation of the Diocesan Advisory Panel. A Priest Advisor was appointed to support the respondent priest. A preliminary canonical investigation was initiated as well. Following this, all restrictions on this priest's ministry were lifted. The priest is in good standing.

Cleric 3: The allegation was notified to the diocese by the PSNI. There was no identified victim in this case. Risk was appropriately managed and monitored; and there is evidence on the case management file of good collaboration with and amongst the statutory agencies. The respondent priest co-operated fully with the investigation of the allegation, and abided by all of the conditions required by the bishop's precept. He was provided with a Priest Advisor. Both the PSNI and preliminary canonical investigations concluded that there was no case to answer, and the respondent returned to full ministry in good standing.

Cleric 4: The diocese was alerted by a solicitor that a client had raised concerns in relation to this man. No allegation has been made to the diocese, and the client has not repeated these concerns. Independent reports were commissioned by the Diocesan Advisory Panel to inform the assessment and management of risk. A clear Safety Plan was put in place, which is reviewed and monitored regularly by the DLP and the Advisory Panel. The respondent has a wraparound support package.

Cleric 5: There were two allegations of sexual abuse made against this priest. A canonical precept was issued by the bishop, and a PSNI investigation was undertaken. A Priest Advisor was appointed for respondent. There is ongoing review and monitoring of this case by the DLP and the Diocesan Advisory Panel, and Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI)<sup>1</sup> arrangements are in place. Preliminary canonical investigations have been conducted in both cases, and the priest remains out of ministry with an up to date precept and management plan in place.

Cleric 6: An allegation of sexual abuse was made to the diocese, and timely notifications were made to the statutory agencies. Relevant information was shared between the diocese and these agencies. The case was appropriately managed in line with PPANI arrangements. This respondent priest is also subject to a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO). He has been laicised and subject to ongoing monitoring by the statutory authorities.

The remainder of the priests about whom allegations were made since the previous Review are deceased.

Cleric 7: This cleric was deceased at time of reporting. Details of the abuse alleged were not disclosed by complainant. Timely notification was made by the diocese to the PSNI. No investigation could be initiated due to the limited available information.

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<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.publicprotectionni.com/>

Cleric 8: This priest was already deceased when a report was made to the diocese of an allegation of sexual abuse against him. He had no connection with the diocese and his abuse occurred when he was visiting from abroad. There had been timely notifications and information sharing between the diocese and Church body to which this man belonged.

Cleric 9: This allegation of sexual abuse was made against a deceased priest. The complainant disclosed to the DLP and to the PSNI. The case management file shows evidence of good collaboration by the diocese with the PSNI investigation, and the sharing of relevant information.

Cleric 10: Allegations of physical and sexual abuse were received by the diocese related to this deceased priest. The case was discussed at the Diocesan Advisory Panel. There is record on the case management file of good partnership working with the PSNI.

Cleric 11: The allegation received about this deceased priest were of physical abuse. He was still living at the time the allegation was made. The diocese made the required notifications. A risk assessment was completed. Following the statutory investigation, the Diocesan Advisory Panel met, and it concluded that the incident reported did not meet the threshold of a child safeguarding matter. Priest was in good standing when he died, and his family are appreciative of how the diocese handled the matter.

Cleric 12: This priest had been a member of a Religious Order and was deceased at the time a report of an allegation of physical abuse against him was received by the diocese. There was good communication with the relevant Religious Order. The DLP was also in contact, and shared information with, the PSNI.

The diocese currently has five (5) Priest Advisors, and a reviewer met with one of them. This Priest Advisor had been provided with role-specific training and was very experienced. He was clear about his role being supportive of the respondent, while remaining objective, and being accountable to the DLP. He demonstrated compassion, and he showed insight about his role and about managing his own emotions when operating in it. All priest advisors have completed role specific training.

The Priest Advisor is involved in one case, which requires him to provide a written report to the DLP on a quarterly basis that helps to inform the risk management plan. The Priest Advisor gets his support and advice primarily from the DLP; but he is aware of the Pastoral Care Support Group, which has been established in the diocese by the Priest Delegate for Safeguarding.

The Priest Delegate for Safeguarding developed the panel of Priest Advisors and has yearly follow up sessions with them. He also ensures that all Priest Advisors write out to their respondents once a year, indicating that they are there to support them. This is excellent practice and is commended.

Within the diocese, the Priest Advisors meet with the Diocese Advisory Panel once a year. The northern dioceses may want to consider bringing Priest Advisors together once a year for joint training, to share learning, and to reflect on practice. The Diocesan Advisory Panel represents a breadth of professional expertise and experience, with representatives of the PSNI, the PBNI, and Children's Social Services, Psychology, along with the Episcopal Vicar for Safeguarding, the Judicial Vicar and the Chancellor of the diocese, both of whom have expertise in canon law.

There are set panel meeting dates during the year; and it has the flexibility to meet as required following receipt of reports.

There has been a change of Panel Chairperson within the last year, and the new Chairperson, an experienced lawyer, confirmed that he received an induction and a formal handover of cases from the outgoing Chairperson and the Interim Director of Safeguarding/DLP. The Chairperson highlighted the importance of training for himself and other panel members, and this is to be delivered by the National Board.

It is a priority of the Chairperson to keep under review the effectiveness of the panel, to identify areas of good practice and potential improvements, in order to enhance the management and care of respondents. He would also like to explore how dioceses could share good practice and learning with each other. He receives support from the bishop and from the Interim Director of Safeguarding.

The reviewers' examination of case management files from 2013 showed evidence of referrals, reports and presentations by the DLP to the Advisory Panel. Expert assessment was recommended by the Panel as appropriate, and this informed the management plans and the restrictions on ministry that were proportionate to risk presented by the respondent. The care of the respondent and support to their family was also considered, including the appointment of a Priest Advisor.

The Chairperson reports directly to the bishop following consideration of the cases by the panel in order to provide advice and to share with him the recommendations made at the panel meeting. All recommendations made by the panel have been accepted by the bishop and actions were taken forward by the DLP, as indicated through a close examination of the case management files.

Advisory Panel Minutes specific to each respondent priest discussed were placed on their case management file.

**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.*

Training is included in the Diocesan Safeguarding Strategic Plan, Annual Business Plan and an update report completed for each Diocesan Safeguarding Committee meeting. The reviewers were provided evidence of the aforementioned documents. The reviewers commend the inclusion of Adverse Childhood Experiences and a trauma informed approach into Safeguarding Training. Training is a standing item on the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee with the Training and Parish Development Officer providing update reports on progress against training objectives within the Annual Training Plan.

The diocese have nine accredited Trainers, which includes one clergy. One trainer is also a tutor for the National Board, and has been accredited to assess trainers in the diocese and other dioceses. There are also 12 volunteers from a range of parishes, who have been trained to deliver level one safeguarding information sessions. All trainers receive induction and group support sessions approximately three times a year, which are facilitated by the Training and Parish Development Officer. With the recent appointment of the Parish Safeguarding Support Officer, the Training and Parish Development Officer is planning to provide one to one support to each trainer.

Role specific training is provided to Priest Advisors; Support Person's as well as the Chair and Deputies of Parish Safeguarding Committees (PSCs), with excellent ongoing support by the training lead from the National Board. The Trustees of the diocese have completed safeguarding training. Within the diocese, a bespoke training programme for leaders of Pilgrimages and Retreats was piloted. This is currently being evaluated.

The reviewers saw documented evidence and received direct feedback during parish visits, of the diverse range of training provided for the diocese. The procedure for booking onto safeguarding training courses has recently been updated. Online forms have made the process much easier. The trainers provide an evaluation after each training session and a feedback questionnaire is completed by participants. The learning from these sessions combined with feedback from the Parish Audits are analysed by the Training and Development officer to identify what is working well, follow up queries/gaps and opportunities for improvement. This is also discussed at the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee to help shape and inform safeguarding training.

**Training Statistics 2017-2023**

<b>Training delivered between April 2017 and March 2018</b>	<b>Type of Training</b>	<b>Number participated</b>
	Information Session (Child Level 1)	176
	Full Day Session (Child Level 2)	146
	Parish Audit Tool	72
	PSC Training	39
	ONUS Safe Church	20
	Virtual Reality	21
	Offenders Returning to Faith	46
<b>Total Delegates Trained between April 2017 and March 2018</b>		<b>520</b>
<b>Training delivered between April 2018 and March 2019</b>	Information Session (Child Level 1)	244
	Full Day Session (Child Level 2)	186
	Safe Recruitment	24
<b>Total Delegates Trained between April 2018 and March 2019</b>		<b>454</b>
<b>Training delivered between April 2019 and March 2020</b>	Information Session (Child Level 1)	131
	Full Day Session (Child Level 2)	213
<b>Total Delegates Trained between April 2019 and March 2020</b>		<b>344</b>
<b>Training delivered between April 2020 and March 2021</b>	Information Session (Child Level 1)	20
	Best Practice in Engaging Online with Children/Young People	84
	Engaging with Children and Young People Virtually (National Board)	22
	Vademecum Training (National Board)	8
	Support Person Training (National Board)	1
	Introduction to Zoom	14

<b>Total Delegates Trained between April 2020 and March 2021</b>		<b>149</b>
<b>Training Delivered between April 2021 and March 2022</b>		
	Information Session (Child Level 1)	65
	Full Day Session (Child Level 2)	118
	Refresher (Level 2)	12
	Best Practice in Engaging Online with Children/Young People	12
	Onus - Safe Place Webinar	4
<b>Total Delegates Trained between April 2021 and March 2022</b>		<b>211</b>
<b>Training Delivered between April 2022 and March 2023</b>		
	Information Session (Child Level 1)	200
	Full Day Session (Child Level 2)	151
	Refresher (Level 2)	109
	PSC Training	16
	Priest Advisors Training (National Board)	6
	Support Person Induction Training	3
	Parish Safeguarding Support Officer Induction Training	1
	ASCERT	28
	Onus Safe Place Webinar	10
	CINI	2
	National Board Conference	6
<b>Total Delegates Trained between April 2022 and March 2023</b>		<b>532</b>

The diocese has entered into a partnership with ONUS (Domestic Abuse and Violence) to grow parishes into safe spaces for those who may be suffering domestic abuse and violence, where their story is heard and support is offered and signposted. Safe Place is a simple but effective initiative that allows the diocese to provide information and signposting to anyone affected by domestic abuse and sexual abuse. The Safe Place Zoom Webinar is a 90-minute information session that combines information on the Safe Place initiative along with Domestic Violence and Abuse awareness raising.



The aim of the session is to explain how through the Safe Place initiative, parishes can become safe places for anyone to access information on the local services available for people living with domestic abuse. Some parishes and religious organisations within the Diocese of Down and Connor recently completed the ONUS Safe Place Webinar and are in the process of registering as a Safe Place. Further Safe Place Webinars will be taking place throughout 2023.

The diocese also commissioned training from ASCERT, which has a focus on awareness raising around drug and alcohol misuse. The training looked at:

- Managing potentially difficult situations
- Substance misuse awareness
- Adverse childhood experience e-learning

In November 2022, a parent questionnaire about children's and young people's activities was issued via *Microsoft forms* and a link forwarded to participants. Responses were anonymous. Twenty-six (26) parents/guardians responded to the questionnaire. This was undertaken to obtain feedback from parents/guardians, from a sample of 10 parishes, regarding the content of child safeguarding training, and to establish if parents were aware of the child safeguarding policy, child and guardian joint consent form, and codes of behaviour. Key findings were shared with trainers and presented to the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee, and have been used to enhance training delivery.

It has been agreed to extend a similar survey approach to children and young people.

**This Standard is met**

## **Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message**

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

The diocese has a comprehensive Communication Plan and structure, as reflected in the Safeguarding Strategic Plan and Annual Business Plan, which were produced following consultation the Community and Voluntary sector. The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee are reviewing the Communication Plan, with a view to further develop online ministry and social media platforms. This will be informed by the evaluation report completed on the pilot of online ministry.

Communication is an agenda item at the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee. They are committed to develop engagement with PSCs further, and to promote understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as well as developing trauma sensitive approaches to practice. The Pathways to the Future consultation workshops, which took place across three venues in the diocese to discuss new parish structures and safeguarding practice, were also used to communicate the diocesan safeguarding message. The workshops were attended by Parish Priests, Pastoral Council and Safeguarding Committee members from 81 of the 86 parishes. There was follow up with the five (5) parishes that could not attend. The DLP is a member of the Pathways Steering Committee, thus ensuring that safeguarding is central to any future planning.

Safeguarding is a standing item on the Diocesan Trustee Board, and the DLP provides the board meetings with information and updates with regard to safeguarding in the diocese. The Chair of the Safeguarding Committee and the DLP do a joint annual presentation on safeguarding to the Trustee Board. Their most recent presentation in March 2023 covered a range of topics, including, *Safeguarding Sunday*, the three-year Strategic Plan, and the National Board Review of the diocese. During the reviewer's parish visits, they viewed the posters, leaflets and newsletters containing contact details for the DLP and the statutory agencies, that were displayed in churches and parish centres. These were in several languages, including Chinese and Malayalam. This information was also accessible on the diocesan website, along with e-resource packs, which parishes can download for display and circulation.

The reviewers also saw copies of the diocese's Spring-2023 Safeguarding E-Bulletin, which gave details on the National Board Review of Safeguarding, along with information on vetting, annual Parish Audits, Training, and the role of the Parish Safeguarding Support Officer.

One of the reviewers met with the recently appointed Parish Safeguarding Support Officer, who has already begun working through the key findings and priorities arising from the Parish Self-Audits. Through this work, they have refreshed and updated information to the PSCs in relation to safeguarding.

The Parish Safeguarding Support Officer has utilised the training for PSCs to make contact and address any issues/concerns. This will be repeated at a series of Pastoral Community Support meetings scheduled for the second half of June. The Support Officer is also working with a group of parishes to ensure all safeguarding needs are met as they begin to amalgamate as a 'family of parishes', under the Pathways to the Future Strategy.

There was strong evidence of how the diocese has forged links with local schools and sports organisations to raise awareness and share information about safeguarding within the Church. This was also apparent through the partnership working that has developed with statutory agencies, through the DLP and safeguarding team. The DLP is also a member of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) Inter Faith Group.

**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.*

The diocese has a robust safeguarding structure in place, which includes a recently appointed Parish Safeguarding Support Officer who is part of the Diocesan Safeguarding team, and whose role is to strengthen connections and support to parish safeguarding personnel. Within the structure, there are clear lines of accountability and a solid interface between the strategic and the operational elements. There is regular review of performance against outcomes and objectives of the Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2021 to 2024, and the Annual Business Plan that contains the actions required to deliver on the Strategic plan. This includes training and communicating the safeguarding message. There are six-monthly reports to the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee on progress and on any risks associated with the delivery of the plan.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee has a constitution in place, which is reviewed and updated as required. This includes its purpose, accountability arrangements, membership, meetings, and the officer posts.

An annual Safeguarding Committee Report is submitted to the Diocesan Board of Trustees. As referenced under Standard 6, the DLP provides the Board of Trustees with regular updates on safeguarding plans, objectives and practice, and with the Chair of the Safeguarding Committee, makes a joint annual presentation to the Board of Trustees, on safeguarding arrangements and activity within the diocese.

One of the reviewers met with the Diocesan Chief Operating Officer, who is also secretary to the Board of Trustees. From discussions, and from examination of the documents shared, it is evident that all members take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. The Board of Trustees must be commended for introducing a Corporate Risk Register, which includes safeguarding. This further strengthens and consolidates the governance arrangements within the diocese.

The reviewers saw clear evidence of a synergy and linkage across the key strategic documents considered. The Pathways to the Future, the Diocesan Safeguarding Strategy, and feedback to the Synod consultation, all had a number of overlapping and connected themes:-

- 1) Strengthening communication and engagement with parishes.
- 2) Addressing the decline of vocations to the priesthood, by providing supports to the current priests and further developing lay leadership and ministry.
- 3) Reviewing the current parish structures and activity with a view to planning for the development of 'families of parishes' (where a number of parishes closely collaborate).

All of this is reinforced through the key safeguarding personnel tasked with delivering against the strategies. A good example is the DLP who operationally drives forward the Diocesan Safeguarding Strategy but also contributes to and is a member of the Pathways to the Future Steering Group. Parish self-audits were completed by all parishes in the diocese and this is commended. These are essential for identifying what is working well, and the challenges/gaps established. This information enables appropriate planning for the year ahead, to support parish personnel in implementing safeguarding arrangements.

The reviewers were particularly impressed with the dedication of all volunteers to safeguard children and young people. The volunteers are supported by accessible and responsive safeguarding staff in the Diocesan Safeguarding Office and in parishes. Diocesan staff and volunteers reported to the reviewers that they were supported by clergy at the different levels in the diocesan structure.

The reviewers were provided with evidence of reports and correspondence from the Church authority to the National Board regarding the annual reports required, including the outcome of parish self-audits, training activity, and case management. The reviewers had an opportunity to meet with the Chairperson and deputy Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee, both of whom discussed the need to have a strong culture of safeguarding integrated into the life of the Church. They spoke about having a trauma-sensitive approach in all Church safeguarding activities, as well as the need to strengthen the care for those directly affected by abuse and their families, the need to connect with victims and survivors of abuse, and the need to listen to their experiences to inform the development of safeguarding practice and services. They are conscious of the need to build connections with external agencies to support victims and survivors. They highlighted the challenges to parishes of recruiting volunteers, including membership of PSCs. The reviewers attended a Diocesan Safeguarding Committee meeting during their fieldwork visit. The meeting was well attended, it had an agenda, and it was effectively chaired. Members fully participated in discussion and listened to each other. The Training Officer presented a training activity report, and the Interim Director of Safeguarding presented an update report. Time was given to discuss the annual self-audits, and the work being taken forward by the Parish Safeguarding Support Officer. The chairperson summarized discussion and confirmed actions to be progressed.

Within the overall safeguarding structure, arrangements are in place to provide ongoing support and supervision to key safeguarding staff. The DLP meets regularly with his safeguarding team, both individually and collectively. The DLP also has meetings with the Chief Operating Officer and his team. The DLP has regular access to the bishop. The diocese may want to consider putting some of the current supervision arrangements on a more formal basis.

Also as referenced under Standards 3 and 4 there is an opportunity for the diocese to explore the coming together of Support Persons and Priest Advisors across the northern dioceses, to share good practice, learn from each other, and identify areas for development and improvement, through the lens of a trauma informed approach for their respective roles.

**This Standard is met**

## Conclusion

The Diocese of Down and Connor has a strong safeguarding structure, which promotes and delivers on engagement with and support for parishes and their safeguarding personnel. None of this would be possible without the commitment and dedication the reviewers witnessed from people at all levels, to ensuring that the Church provides an inviting, safe, and happy environment for all the children, young people and parents they work with. Within the diocese, there are robust governance arrangements in place, at a strategic and operational level, that ensure safe practices. There are trained safeguarding personnel and volunteers, and wraparound supports for complainants, respondents and their families. Good case management has been established. Key objectives within the Safeguarding Strategic Plan are being delivered. All of this has been strengthened by the development of the Diocesan Corporate Risk Register, which includes safeguarding.

There was clear evidence of positive pro-active leadership in relation to safeguarding and delivering against the National Board Standards within the diocese. There is engagement with parishes, and reaching out to victims of abuse.

Finally as referenced in this report, the reviewers have been impressed by the trauma informed practice the diocese is taking to all aspects of safeguarding practice. It is key to the diocesan work with complainants, respondents and their families, and for those who work with them (information can be accessed about Trauma Informed practice – [www.safeguardingni.org/aces-and-trauma-informed-practice](http://www.safeguardingni.org/aces-and-trauma-informed-practice))