

ANNUAL PARISH AUDIT 2025

The requirement under the Catholic Church’s safeguarding policy “A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024”, requires each Diocese to complete a yearly Audit as to how safeguarding is operating in each Parish.



On the basis of the Audit, Bishop Alan then provides assurances to the National Board with regards to Diocesan Compliance with Safeguarding Standards and Processes.

Our new Safeguarding Support Person, David Burns, has visited a lot of Parishes since his arrival. He has reviewed last years Audit and given, and received, feedback. This feedback has been incorporated in this years Audit.

The Audit was launched on **3 December 2025**.

It is expected that all returns will be received by **Friday 13 February 2026**.

This year we have scheduled two Audit Support Meetings which will provide an opportunity for Parishes to discuss any questions in relation to the Audit.

The first meeting has already taken place. The next meeting is scheduled for [Wednesday 7 January 2026 at 7pm](#).

A zoom invite will be sent out to the chairs approximately 24 hours before the meeting.

Please make the most of these meetings. They are here to help you complete the Audit in a quick and efficient manner.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY OFFICE ARRANGEMENTS

The Safeguarding & Northern Diocese Vetting Office will close on **Tues 23rd Dec 2025** and will not re-open until **Mon 5th Jan 2026**

We wish you all a very Happy & Holy Christmas



Down & Connor Safeguarding & Northern Dioceses Vetting Office

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REPORT A CONCERN

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TRAINING NEWS

581 people have attended Safeguarding training since April 2025. This figure includes Clergy, Religious and volunteers from several ministries, across the Diocese.

Why Training Matters:

Safeguarding training is essential in creating a safe, supportive and welcoming environment across all areas of ministry. Safeguarding training plays a vital role in helping us protect both children and adults safely, equipping us to recognise concerns and respond appropriately.

Safeguarding is Everyone's Responsibility: Every volunteer who undertakes safeguarding training strengthens the Diocese in respect of safeguarding.

Working Together:

When we all know and understand the safeguarding arrangements in the Diocese we help to ensure a strong culture of safety that protects all.

Thank you to all those who have engaged in Safeguarding Training!



Pictured above: Volunteers at a recent Safeguarding training event for Bereavement Ministers in St Comgall's Centre, Belfast

For information on training, including up and coming training in 2026, please go to the training section on our [WEBSITE](#)



RECENT ENGAGEMENTS

Jesus Youth

Jesus Youth is an international Catholic movement that supports young people to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. They are an Association of the Lay Faithful .

They are an external group to the Diocese and parishes and they have signed a formal agreement to minister in St Paul's Parish. The agreement covers safeguarding expectations and procedures.

We welcome them to the Diocese and wish them every success in their ministry in St Paul's.



Pictured above: David Burns (Safeguarding Office), Fr Darren Brennan (PP St Paul's Parish), Philip O'Hara (Safeguarding Office), Dellish Vamattam (DLP -Jesus Youth NI), Melbin George (Co-Ordinator -Jesus Youth NI) and Isona Joseph (Assit Co-Ordinator -Jesus Youth NI).

Permanent Diaconate Diocesan Orientation Day—20th September 2025



Fr Peter Owens, Episcopal Vicar for Safeguarding in the Diocese and Philip O'Hara, Director of Safeguarding in the Diocese, were invited to present at the Permanent Diaconate Diocesan Orientation Day in September.

During the session, (*pictured left*) Deacons and Priests completed Child Safeguarding (Refresher) Training.

National Board National Conference 3rd –5th September 2025

The conference was attended by Fr Peter Owens, Philip O'Hara, Susan Gordon and David Burns.

The theme of the conference was *"Towards a Transitional Justice Process of Engagement with Victims and Survivors of Abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland"*

Key Messages from the Conference were;

- In our Church dealings with victims and survivors, the importance of clear and accurate information in this engagement.
- The importance of a written apology.
- In the processes that a Church Body develops in engaging with victims and survivors, they may not be perfect but they need to be genuine.

There were three examples of redress schemes that were presented at the Conference :

1. Diocese of Dromore
2. The Spiritan Order
3. The Jesuits

- The theoretical basis of Restorative Practices given by the academics at the Conference.
- The endorsement by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and the Papal Nuncio.

VETTING NEWS

The Northern Dioceses Vetting Office provides a service to not only the Diocese of Down & Connor but to the other five Dioceses who have parishes in Northern Ireland.

The Office also provides vetting services to several Lay Faithful organisations. Roles in different parishes may have slightly different responsibilities but the basic principle remains the same - vetting can only be carried out by Access NI where an individual is undertaking a Regulated Activity with children or vulnerable adults.

April 2025– New Vetting Guidance

As all Safeguarding Committee Chairs will be aware, the vetting process underwent some changes in April 2025.

The changes were necessitated by new online procedures introduced by Access NI on the back of the identity verification processes carried out by Nidirect. Nidirect is the Government gateway to some services in Northern Ireland and an online Access NI application can only be made once a verified NiDirect account has been opened.

While the new processes appear to have bedded in successfully, the Vetting Office nonetheless thought that it might be helpful for both current and future Safeguarding Committee Chairs to have access to written procedures. To that end, a guidance document called ***Managing the Vetting Application process*** can now be found on the Down & Connor Safeguarding website link [VETTING TAB](#)



Safeguarding Committee Chairs—Please remind your volunteers of the following when completing an Access NI Application;

- NAMES:** Applicants must provide **all forenames and last names** that they may have ever been known by.
- ADDRESSES:** Please emphasise to your applicants that they must provide accurate information about current and past addresses (within the last 5 years).
- UPLOADING DOCUMENTS:** Applicants are required to upload 2 documents in support of their online application. These documents must correspond with the information contained within both the paper and online applications.

If documents do not correspond exactly with the application details, the online application will be returned for amendment.

If you have any queries in relation to vetting please contact the Vetting Office on :
Telephone: 028 90 492783 or Email: vetting@soddc.org

USEFUL CONTACTS

TOWARDS PEACE	00353 (1) 505 3028 00353 (0) 8677 10533	https://towardspeace.ie/
TOWARDS HEALING	NI Freephone 0800 0963315	https://towardshealing.ie/

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES GATEWAY TEAM

During normal working hours (Mon-Fri: 9.00am-5.00pm)

Belfast HSC Trust Tel: 028 9050 7000;
South Eastern HSC Trust Tel: 0300 1000 300;
Northern HSC Trust Tel: 0300 1234 333;
Southern HSC Trust Tel: 0800 7837 745
028 3756 7100

Outside normal working hours (Friday 5.00pm – Monday 9.00am, including Bank holidays):

Regional Emergency Social Work Service:

Tel: 0800 1979995
Email: resws1@belfasttrust.hscni.net

ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES GATEWAY TEAM

During normal working hours (Mon-Fri: 9.00am-5.00pm)

Belfast HSC Trust Tel: 028 9504 1744;
South Eastern HSC Trust Tel: 028 9250 1227;
Northern HSC Trust Tel: 028 9441 3659;
Southern HSC Trust Tel: 028 3756 4423.

Outside normal working hours (Friday 5.00pm – Monday 9.00am, including Bank Holidays):

Regional Emergency Social Work Service

Tel: 08001979995
Email: resws1@belfasttrust.hscni.net