



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

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice  
in the**

**Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin**

**undertaken by**

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

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

**Date of Review: December 2022**

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## Background

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

In order to assess its compliance with these safeguarding standards, the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin invited the National Board to undertake a review of its child safeguarding practice, which took place in December 2022.

The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin was previously reviewed in May 2012, under the *Safeguarding Children Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2008*. The recommendations from the 2012 Review, which are listed below were progressed by the diocese, and the reviewer has seen proof during the current Review fieldwork that all have been implemented. Monsignor Byrne was the Diocesan Apostolic Administrator at the time of the first Review.

Recommendation 1: That when the Kildare and Leighlin Diocesan Child Protection Committee's current review of the Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedure is completed, Monsignor Byrne will ensure that they are consistent with Children First, 2011, and with the HSE guidance document, Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook, 2011 – **Implemented.**

Recommendation 2: That Monsignor Byrne appoint a lay Deputy Designated Person to act as an understudy to the current Designated Person for a period of six months and who he would thereafter appoint as Designated Person- **Implemented.**

Recommendation 3: That Monsignor Byrne appoint a suitably qualified person to coordinate all child-safeguarding activities in the Kildare and Leighlin Diocese – **Implemented.**

Recommendation 4: That in the context of the publication of the revised edition of the Diocesan Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures, Monsignor Byrne should convene a Kildare and Leighlin Diocese Child Safeguarding Workshop to be attended by all personnel involved in diocesan child safeguarding activities at which a five-year diocesan Child Safeguarding Plan would be drawn up. This plan should include the formal appointment of people to key roles with clear remits and systems of accountability - **Implemented.**

Recommendation 5: That Monsignor Byrne initiates an audit of all diocesan files in all locations to ensure that the central filing system in the Diocesan Offices contains every document that refers in any way to a child safeguarding concern about a priest – **Implemented**.

Recommendation 6: That Monsignor Byrne directs the Diocesan Advisory Panel to ensure that all comments/recommendations of the July 2006 file review report are identified, reviewed and acted upon as a matter of urgency - **Implemented**.

Recommendation 7: That Monsignor Byrne arrange annual meetings between An Garda Síochána, the HSE, the Diocesan Designated Person, the Diocesan Chancellor, and himself, at which all child safeguarding file material in the possession of the diocese would be shared with the two statutory agencies, and at which an interagency approach to information-sharing and case management would be agreed – **Implemented**.

Recommendation 8: That Monsignor Byrne supports and assists the Advisory Panel to develop clear Terms of Reference, a clear methodology for its work, and a 12-month plan for its activities, to include joint training and development activities for its membership. This panel should meet regularly to build up its identity and sense of cohesion as well as its expertise. The Advisory Panel should methodically and comprehensively review the management of all cases of clerical child sexual abuse that have been handled by the diocese with a view to addressing all outstanding case management issues - **Implemented**.

Recommendation 9: That Monsignor Byrne ensures that the Designated Person is responsible for the presentation of cases to the panel and that he becomes an integral part of the panel to enable fuller assessment and management of risk as required of the Advisory Panel – **Implemented**.

Recommendation 10: That Monsignor Byrne appoint two Support Persons for victims of clerical sexual abuse, one female and one male, and arrange appropriate training for them – **Implemented**.

Recommendation 11: That the Safeguarding Committee keeps Garda Vetting in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese under ongoing review to ensure that a robust system is in place to administer this important child safeguarding process – **Implemented**.

Recommendation 12: That Monsignor Byrne develops a comprehensive Child Safeguarding Communications Plan including the use of all appropriate print and electronic media, which will ensure that regular clear and accurate child safeguarding information is made available to children, young people and adults across the diocese – **Implemented**.

This current Review is to assess child-safeguarding practice in the diocese against the current *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, and to gather evidence which:

- (a) Provides assurance to the Church Authority that the standards are being met.
- (b) Demonstrates good child safeguarding practices.
- (c) Enhances public confidence in child safeguarding within the diocese.
- (d) Looks at the governance arrangements for child safeguarding.
- (e) Provides opportunities for learning and development.

## **Introduction**

The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin is in the Archdiocese of Dublin Metropolitan area. The diocese has fifty-six (56) parishes, which straddle seven (7) counties, namely Carlow, Kildare, Offaly, Laois, Kilkenny, Wicklow, and Wexford. The total population for the area (as at 2019) was 286,360 of which the Catholic population for the diocese was 262,250 or 91.6%.

Within the diocese, there are one hundred and sixteen (116) clergy, including seven (7) from Religious Orders. The Religious Orders are St. Patricks Society for the Foreign Missions (Kiltegnans), the Society of Divine Word (SVD) and the Society of African Missions (SMA). The overall number includes forty (40) Parish Priests, two (2) of whom are members of the Kiltegan Order. There are also twenty (20) retired priests, and eleven (11) Permanent Deacons.

Bishop Denis Nulty was appointed on May 7, 2013. The diocesan parishes, which were originally organised into three (3) Deaneries, were reconfigured in 2022 to seven (7) Pastoral Areas. These are Kildare, Portarlinton, Naas, Portlaoise, Tullow, Borris and Carlow.

In his Autumn 2022 Pastoral letter, Bishop Nulty stated that *“Greater co-operation and sharing among parishes and co-responsibility between clergy and the lay faithful is essential before the majority of our priests retire or are no longer with us. Now is our opportunity, clergy and people together, to act concretely for the immediate future of our parish faith communities”*.

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the National Board) would like to thank Bishop Nulty for his invitation to undertake this Review; and to express gratitude to him, the Safeguarding staff, the personnel in the parishes visited, as well as the Youth Ministry, parents and young people who were met, for their hospitality, warmth and generosity of spirit, and for creating an environment of openness and learning.

Special thanks is due to the Director of Safeguarding (who is also the DLP and Safeguarding Co-ordinator) who gave so generously of her time, effort and commitment to facilitate this Review.

The National Board acknowledges the impact of Covid-19 on parish activity, and commends the diocese, under Bishop Nulty’s leadership, for how they adapted and developed, to stay connected with and provide online support to the parishes, families and young people.

## Process of Review

The Review of compliance was measured against the National Board's seven standards, as set out in *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*. The Review examined developments since the previous Review in 2012, the overall child safeguarding and governance arrangements of the diocese, and best practice, and identified some areas for further improvement. This entailed evaluating strategic and operational activities, reviewing written records and meeting with a range of Church personnel, parents and young people.

Prior to the Review commencing, a Memorandum of Understanding and Data Processing Deed Agreement were signed by Bishop Nulty and by the National Board's CEO. The fieldwork took place on December 12, 13 and 14, 2022.

The people who were spoken to or contacted during and after the Review were:

- Bishop Denis Nulty
- The Director of Safeguarding / Child Safeguarding Co-ordinator / DLP
- Accredited Trainers
- The Authorised Liaison Person for parish Garda vetting in the diocese
- A Priest Advisor
- A Complainant
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs)
- Children and young people
- Parents
- Parish Priests
- Curates
- Sacristans
- Volunteers
- The Chair of the Diocesan Pastoral Council
- A Deacon
- The Meitheal Co-ordinator
- The former Co-ordinator of the Pope John Paul II Awards Scheme
- The Youth Ministry Lead and their team
- A senior representative of An Gardai Siochana
- A senior representative of TUSLA
- A support person
- The chancellor and assistant chancellor

## **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 at <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 young people; 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.*

From discussions, visits and observations at diocesan and parish level, creating a safe environment for children is paramount for everyone and is embedded in practice at all levels. To create and sustain safe environments needs strong clear and decisive leadership, which Bishop Nulty provides. He is visible, accessible, and engages widely with his parishes and local communities.

The diocesan website contains up to date safeguarding policies and procedures based on the Church's *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards 2016*, along with relevant guidance, information and advice. It is commendable that on the website under Safeguarding, the first item is "Support for Survivors".

The website contains a wide range of materials, including:

- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Diocesan Safeguarding Statement
- How to report a concern
- Counselling
- Contact details for key Safeguarding Personnel
- Codes of Behaviour
- Risk Hazard Assessments
- Recruitment and Vetting Forms/Information
- A Complaints Leaflet and complaint forms

The diocese has a Complaints Policy. This would need to be updated and placed on the website. Since the last Review in 2012, there have been three complaints not relating to allegations of a child safeguarding nature.

Three complaints were dealt with under the complaints process. Between the DLP and the bishop, all matters were followed up and both made written records of all of their interventions with the parties involved.

The reviewer discussed these matters with the DLP, and from the information shared - in addition to what is recorded on file - he is satisfied that these complaints were appropriately dealt with under the diocesan Complaints Policy. They were matters relating to child safeguarding and were categorised as 'boundary violations' (such as inappropriate language used by an adult to a child). None of them met the threshold for notification to the statutory authorities.



There is also a Whistleblowing Policy, which has been in place since 2013. Each parish received a paper copy of this policy. On the diocesan website under the policies section, there is a link to the National Guidance on whistleblowing. Ireland's Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022 came into force on January 1, 2023; and under the Act, the definition of 'worker' has now been extended to include volunteers. This change is significant in relation to parish activities. Therefore, through the Safeguarding Committee, the 2013 Policy is currently being reviewed and updated to incorporate the changes. This issue was discussed in some detail at the Safeguarding Committee meeting attended by the reviewer in December.

The diocese uses the National Vetting Bureau online Vetting Facility for vetting personnel, including visiting priests and keep parish vetting records on the central diocesan computer system. The Vetting Coordinator is the diocesan Authorised Liaison Person for linking with the Gardai. As coordinator, they are responsible for processing applications, and providing and seeking clarification around vetting. Most of their work involves supporting the recruitment activities of parishes in relation to volunteer safeguarding personnel. Completed 'disclosure' forms are returned to the relevant Parish Priest for his attention. All parishes are 'affiliates' on the system.

Copies of all relevant documents are kept on the central computer system. The centralised record system complies with GDPR requirements. In addition, for priests, paper copies of 'disclosure' forms are kept centrally and securely locked.

The vetting Co-ordinator works closely with the bishop and DLP to ensure all up to date information about vetting is accessible and is on the website. The weekly diocesan email system is used periodically to remind parishes of when Garda vetting is due. It is clear that ultimate responsibility for renewal of any vetting lies with the local parish.

Where there are delays in applications being returned, the Coordinator links in with the DLP. The following could be considered to help strengthen the governance around delayed / outstanding vetting returns: That at parish level, someone would take lead responsibility to quality assure vetting application forms before they are returned to the Coordinator. In addition, bi-monthly information could be provided to the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee on any delayed or outstanding vetting returns, for it to monitor and review.

The vetting figures for the diocese from 2016 to 2022 are in the table below

<b>Year</b>	<b>Completed Vetting Applications</b>
2016	197
2017	282
2018	298
2019	465
2020	149
2021	63
2022	332

The rise in figures for 2019 is because all priests were vetted that year, creating a consistent review timeline. This also occurred in 2022, which accounts for the rise in that year as well. In addition, the 2019 figures were affected by vetting a group for a summer camp, plus a parish group that formed a committee to host a Syrian refugee gathering. The diocese has in place guidance for Clerics/Religious who have Ministry with children in an external organisation or Church body, and documentation related to this is accessible on the diocesan website. The DLP was very clear that any priests working outside the diocese must adhere to the diocesan - safeguarding training and vetting requirements.

The parishes visited during the Review were a mix of urban and rural. From talking with Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs) it was apparent that they work as a cohesive unit, with everyone clear about their respective roles and responsibilities in providing a safe environment for children.

During Covid-19, no external organisations had used the parish buildings in the parishes. However, everyone was clear that any external organisation wishing to use parish property in the future would need to confirm in writing that it had a safeguarding policy and adequate insurance in place.

The parish safeguarding personnel met spoke positively of the DLP/Safeguarding Co-ordinator, who they described as being supportive, accessible and responsive to any issues or concerns they had. The DLP/Safeguarding Co-ordinator kept the parishes apprised of any national or diocesan changes or developments.

Safeguarding material was prominently on display in the parishes visited. Parish newsletters contained the names of LSRs, the Diocesan lead for Safeguarding, TUSLA and the Gardai. The parish newsletters had a Child Safeguarding section, and referred to this Review. It was impressive to note the extent to which safeguarding personnel in parishes were connecting with and reaching out to their communities. An example of this was the holding of a Christmas Nativity event for children and their parents from the local non-denominational Educate Together Primary School, which the reviewer attended during an evening visit to a parish church.

From observations and discussions with the Youth Ministry Leaders and a Youth Pastoral worker, it was evident that the children and young people in the urban parishes visited are provided with a diverse and creative range of activities. These included:

- Local Parish Youth Groups (one is for Polish children)
- Sunday Schools
- Altar Servers
- Parish Children and Youth Choirs
- The Meitheal Programme<sup>1</sup>
- The Pope John Paul II Award scheme

The Reviewer spoke with LSRs and youth leaders in relation to running their Sunday schools. They outlined the range of activities provided and were clear on the staffing ratios needed to ensure they delivered a safe programme. In response to a query about how they would accommodate a child with special needs, which they have had to do on a number of occasions, they advised that they work very closely with the parents and bring in additional staff/ volunteers to assist.

One of the LSRs was in a 'supportive/overview' role in relation to the Sunday school staff. As well as being an extra pair of hands, they ensured that all requirements were in place to ensure a safe environment for everyone.

The challenge is greater for the smaller and more rural parishes that usually have fewer resources and personnel to call on. The diocese is looking at creating parish clusters, through which resources and efforts can be pooled, and this may be the catalyst for developing ministries with and activities for children and young people across the diocese.

Consideration might be given to the diocese engaging in strategic discussions with a number of influential community based groups in its area, with a view to piloting one or two 'floating' community support posts to assist the development of the parish clusters and to strengthen their wider community links.

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<sup>1</sup> A school based peer ministry programme

There was clear evidence of diocesan Youth Ministry adapting to working online with young people, during Covid-19. They received specific training from the National Board for their youth leaders to use the Zoom platform safely for meetings with young people.

The youth leaders ensured a safe online environment for young people and their parents. All interactions were password protected. Codes of conduct were developed, along with online consent forms for parents and young people. One of the Youth Ministry teams uses an online attendance platform called *Notion*. This is a very secure system.

Guidance was in place for Zoom video meetings, in relation to where they took place (e.g. not in the young person's bedroom, but somewhere neutral), how young people logged on/off safely, and giving access to parents, which gave them reassurance.

During pandemic restrictions, practical activities for the Pope John Paul II Award were difficult to arrange, and the focus of online discussions was more on faith. In March 2022, Newbridge and Naas Parishes ran an online initiative called 'Exploring Faith'. This was provided in collaboration with the Pope John Paul II Award scheme leaders, and it ran for six weeks. A number of guest speakers talked about their own faith, and about what meaning it had for them.

As restrictions have eased, the young people now get involved in liturgy groups, announce notices during Mass, or act as Ministers of the Word or Eucharistic Ministers.

It is apparent from the visits and the discussions during the fieldwork that the Youth Ministry outreach is held in high regard within the diocese. They presented as forward thinking, enthusiastic and imaginative. They keep thinking of new ways to reach out to young people and to keep them connected to their faith, their parishes and their communities. Examples of this included:

- The Romanian shoebox appeal, which has been running for 4 years. Young people bring in food items and together pack them for distribution.
- The participants in the Pope John Paul II Award scheme gave their help and support to their local Rotary Club Christmas appeal.
- The young people make St. Brigid's Day crosses for distribution.
- The Parish Youth Group is extending the upper age limit to 21+. and the focus will be on exploring their personal faith. It will also allow the older members to mentor and work with the younger children.
- The Youth Ministry leaders are currently carrying out a number of Confirmation Retreats by going out to the smaller parish centres to engage with parents and young people.
- The Parish Youth Group had a 'Stay Awake' fundraiser for the Red Cross Ukraine Appeal.

For the range of activities, all appropriate documentation and governance arrangements were in place to ensure safe care; this included consent forms, completed hazard risk assessments, codes of conduct (including those developed by the young people), along with recruitment and vetting forms, which were stored in secure cabinets.

During the parish visits, a number of hazard risk assessments relating to a range of activities provided by youth ministry leaders were examined. They were on a standard template, which clearly highlighted the specific risk, how to manage that risk, and who was responsible. They covered activities related to altar servers, children's choir, Sunday school, youth outings among others. These were all detailed, with recurring themes around:

- Appropriate staff ratios
- Ensuring everyone is appropriately vetted.
- Ensuring everyone has had appropriate safeguarding training.
- That relevant supervision is in place.

Information about and forms for conducting a hazard / risk assessment were also available on the diocesan website. The DLP is available to give advice and support. Everyone spoken to with regard to youth activities was very clear on the importance of the risk assessments to help them to provide a safe environment for all children and parents, staff and volunteers.

A deacon, who is a member of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and works alongside priests and lay ministers participated in the Review. Refresher safeguarding training is provided to deacons, given their role in sacramental preparation programmes, such as *You Shall Be My Witness*. The deacon has a support role and link to the Pope John Paul II Award scheme and with altar servers, and he works with parents, young people, the schools and Youth Ministry.

The Coordinator for the *Meitheal* Programme in the diocese also engaged in the Review. The programme focuses on personal, interpersonal and spiritual development. It helps bring ministry out to the schools. Currently 26 schools are involved. Residential training for leaders takes place during Easter and Summer school breaks, with over 200 attending. All leaders are Garda vetted, references are taken up, and consent forms completed. In addition, leaders are provided with training on safeguarding, on identifying risk factors, and on how to respond to disclosures.

Because of Covid-19, a lot of the work with schools was done online, which adversely affected the numbers taking part in the *Meitheal* Programme. However, greater parish involvement with young people could enhance and enrich the programme within the diocese, to complement the involvement of schools.

In relation to the Pope John Paul II Awards, the previous co-ordinator who is still active as an LSR in a parish, engaged in the Review. Due to pandemic restrictions, a lot of the Award programme had to be provided online, which was a challenge to deliver the programme, especially for smaller parishes.

Where the young people were helping with community events, as part of their Pope John Paul II Award, a *Heja* app system was used. This system allowed parents to receive a message from the youth leader at the same time as the young person. This reassured parents and enabled them to know where their child would be, and what they would be doing.

In one of the parishes visited, the youth leaders meet with the participants on the Pope John Paul II Award scheme every two weeks to have ‘faith discussions’ blended with ice breakers, some fun activities, and relationship building. The focus is on creating a safe environment where the young people feel comfortable. It also helps to create other opportunities for young people to be involved in other faith events, such as the Lourdes Pilgrimage, to become Eucharistic Ministers, or Ministers of the Word at Mass.

It was very evident from discussions and from the documentation that the youth ministry leaders have put a lot of effort into making things safer for young people in this blended environment of face-to-face and online.

The reviewer had the opportunity to meet with parents and young people who attend a Youth Group in one of the parishes and/or are involved in Pope John Paul II Award scheme. The young people talked about feeling safe, being listened to and valued. They saw themselves as “part of a community”. They spoke openly, stating that if they had a worry or concern there were identified people they could go to for support and help.

The reviewer was also struck by how the leaders and the young people gave so freely of their time to help others in the community who were less fortunate, for example by:

- Making Christmas cards for Religious sisters
- Preparing food hampers for vulnerable families
- Visiting local nursing homes to sing carols

Parents spoke of how their child /children had blossomed and grown through their involvement in Youth Ministry, and how the youth leaders had supported their child /children through some difficult personal challenges and were always there for them.

**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.*

Reports of abuse since the previous Review in 2012 up to December 2022 are outlined in the table below:

Cleric’s Current Status	Number of Complainants	Gardai Notified	Tusla Notified	National Board Notified	Appropriate and timely canonical action taken
Cleric 1	1	Yes - 11 days	Yes - 11 days	Yes - 11 days	CDF Report Submitted
Cleric 2	1	Yes - 39 days	Yes - 39 days	Yes - 39 days	N/A
Cleric 3	1 1	Yes - 45 days	Yes - 45 days	Yes - 45 days	N/A
Cleric 4	1	Yes – 5 days once threshold for reporting was reached.	Yes – 5 days once threshold for reporting was reached.	Yes – 5 days once threshold for reporting was reached.	Report submitted to CDF
Cleric 5	1 1	Yes - 8 days	Yes - 8 days	Yes - 8 days	Report submitted to CDF. Canonical process concluded.
Cleric 6	1	Information came from the Gardai	Yes – same day	Yes - next day	Report submitted to CDF and canonical process completed.
Cleric 7	1	Yes - next day	Yes - next day	Yes - 2 days	Report submitted to CDF

All of the above allegations relate to sexual abuse, and related emotional abuse

Three (3) of the seven (7) priests whose situations were described in the table above were deceased by the time the fieldwork for this Review was undertaken.

It can be seen in the table that there are variances in the timescales for notifications to the relevant authorities. Below are details of factors that influenced specific case timelines.

Cleric 1: Slight delay in making the notifications was due to the DLP trying to arrange to meet with the complainant to gather the full information for reporting. No risk was identified at the time, as the priest was deceased.

Cleric 2: The initial report was received in an anonymous email. There followed emails and a phone call to the DLP, who then tried to arrange to meet the complainant, which contributed to the delay in notification. After this meeting, notifications were sent promptly. No risk was identified at the time, as the priest was deceased.

Cleric 3: From reviewing the case management file, the delay in making notifications was due to attempts to set up a meeting with the complainant. The initial report was received in a phone call, and the DLP then tried to arrange to meet the complainant. Dates were set, but these needed to be rearranged to accommodate the complainant. No risk was identified at the time, as the priest was deceased.

Allegations against clerics 4, 5, 6 and 7 were all promptly reported by the diocese. In one case, the information was reported to the diocese by An Garda Síochána.

Two cases involving living priests of the diocese are being managed.

The DLPs /Safeguarding Co-ordinators (current and former) have undertaken extensive work to ensure that Case Management files are well structured and easy to navigate. The file sections include notifications, supports to complainants, risk assessments, communications on legal matters, management plans for respondents, and monitoring.

Senior managers in Tusla and Gardai gave the reviewer positive feedback about the DLP for her commitment to partnership working and to fostering good relations. Both agencies expressed their satisfaction with the information sharing and the safeguarding arrangements within the diocese.

Formal meetings between the diocese, Tusla and the Gardai took place up to 2018. With the introduction of GDPR, the frequency and focus of these meetings changed. Matters were then compounded by Covid-19. The most recent meeting between all three parties took place in December 2022. The reviewer suggests that the diocese try to reinstate formal interagency meetings, to strengthen further the collaborative approach to child safeguarding.



During parish visits, it was apparent that LSRs, lay people and volunteers understood the role and function of the DLP, and knew they could contact her if they had any concerns of a safeguarding nature. The DLP's details were clearly displayed on notice boards, in the parish newsletters and on the diocesan website.

The reviewer is satisfied that since the last Review, all new allegations were dealt with in accordance with current guidance and procedures. The diocese complied with all canon and civil law requirements.

However, whilst there are plausible and reasonable explanations for the delays in notifications, there were significant delays relating to reporting allegations against deceased clerics. It is imperative that in future, all notifications are made in a timely manner. Even where the full information is not available, the notification should be made, and supplementary information provided as it becomes available. These delays cannot be overlooked.

**This standard is met in relation to notification of allegations against living clerics; but it is not met in relation to notifications related to deceased clerics.**

### **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.*

Complainants who are currently involved with the diocese were made aware of the National Board Safeguarding Review. They were given the choice to either meet with a reviewer or submit a written response. No written responses were received, but one complainant did meet with the reviewer, and they are to be commended for their courage in telling their story.

They were clear that the support they received from their Parish Priest, their Support Person and the bishop was invaluable in helping them to come to terms with their abuse, to rebuild their life, and to try to move forward. In discussions, the complainant stated how they felt “listened to, believed and treated with dignity and respect”. There are still challenges for the individual for whom ongoing support is crucial for their emotional health and well-being.

Case files showed complainants being offered the services of a Support Person, as well as contact and advice from the DLP. There was clear documented evidence of the diocese reaching out and offering support to complainants directly, or via any third party acting on behalf of the complainant. There was also evidence of complainants being informed of and directed towards counselling services, including Towards Healing, and where appropriate, Towards Peace. Not all complainants availed of these services. From the files reviewed and from discussions with Bishop Nulty, the DLP, and the Support Person, it was clear that complainants were treated sensitively, listened to and offered a range of support services.

The diocesan website Safeguarding section has information on support for survivors, with contact details for the HSE National Counselling Service, as well as of Connect, the HSE out-of-hours counselling support helpline.

File records examined contained examples of Bishop Nulty writing to complainants offering support, consolation, and an apology on behalf of the Church. Minutes of meetings where the bishop and DLP had met with complainants were reviewed.

There were entries in the files demonstrating how the DLP had:

- Kept complainants up to date with developments in their case
- Given advice and support to complainants around accessing legal services and counselling.
- Collaborated with statutory agencies to ensure that complainants were offered, and received the necessary support or counselling they needed.

Where the identity of the respondent priest was unknown, support was still offered to the complainant. Where the respondent priest was deceased prior to the notification being made, files showed that the DLP had contacted the complainant to offer support and/or counselling.

For the majority of cases reviewed there was good evidence of ongoing support, advice and feedback to complainants.

However, where a complainant may have initially declined support, or where there had been no contact for some time, the diocese might consider making a renewed offer of support.

The roles of the DLP and Support Person are critical in providing support to individual complainants who still struggle to come to terms with the abuse they suffered as they try to rebuild their lives.

The diocese is to be commended, as it now has three Support Persons available. The Support Persons provide updates on cases to the DLP, which the DLP then puts on the main case file. The Support Persons also receive relevant training, along with personal support from the DLP. The diocese also has three deputy DLPs, both male and female. This offers greater flexibility and choice for complainants.

For the majority of cases reviewed there was good evidence of ongoing support, advice and feedback to complainants. In a few files where the complainant may have initially declined support, or where there had been no contact for quite some time, follow-up to offer further support could be considered.

**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 (cleric or religious) is provided.*

Respondents were made aware of the Review and were given the opportunity to meet with the reviewer or to complete a questionnaire about their experiences of the care and management they received from the diocese. No respondents requested to meet with the reviewer; however, two respondents did submit completed questionnaires.

The first respondent reported a positive experience, in terms of being consulted, listened to and supported. He was made aware of his right to access civil and canon law legal representation. He also confirmed that a management plan was in place.

The second respondent stated that he had been treated well by the diocese, and that he was well supported by Bishop Nulty, his Priest Advisor and other colleagues. He confirmed that a management plan was in place. This respondent also referred to the fact that being involved in a protracted and lengthy investigation had taken a toll on his emotional health and wellbeing. Three of the priests whose details are presented in Table 1, under Standard 2 above, are deceased, Clerics 1, 2 and 3.

The cases of clerics 4, 5 and 6 have been active in the reporting period covered by this Review.

Cleric 1 was deceased for a long number of years when a complaint about him was received by the diocese, relating to an allegation about events in the 1980s. Statutory notifications were made by the diocese, and the bishop reported the matter to the CDF as well. The diocese provided support to the complainant and referred them to Towards Healing for ongoing counselling. The complainant initiated a civil case, which had not concluded at the time of the Review.

Cleric 2 was deceased for a number of years before the complaint about him was received by the diocese. The allegation made related to events in the 1980s. The bishop and the DLP met with the complainant and provided them with support. They referred them to Towards Healing for ongoing counselling. The statutory authorities were notified.

Cleric 3 was deceased for a long number of years before a complaint about him was made to the diocese. The DLP followed up appropriately with the complainant and a sibling of the complainant.

Clerics 4, 5, 6 have been managed by the diocese. All allegations relate to times prior to the 1990s. The CDF was informed of all allegations and in all cases, the civil and canonical processes have concluded. One priest was able to continue his ministry in a restricted capacity during the Garda and preliminary canonical investigation. Two priests remain out of ministry having no public ministry and one priest is in full ministry and considered a priest in good standing. Files show that the necessary management plans including risk management were put in place and for the priests who are out of ministry these are reviewed regularly. All clerics were offered the support of a Priest Advisor.

In the case of Cleric 7, an allegation of abuse was received via a third party. The DLP offered to meet with the complainant, via the third party, but the complainant did not avail of this offer. Bishop Nulty moved quickly to get canonical advice. All notifications were made to the Gardai, Tusla and CDF. The matter did not proceed to prosecution in civil or canon law and the priest remains a priest in good standing.

There was another case relating to a layman, which falls outside the remit of the National Board. At the request of Bishop Nulty, the file was reviewed. It was evident that risk was assessed and appropriate action taken by the diocese. The diocese responded to the complainant appropriately and with understanding.

The diocese has a number of Priest Advisors who are available to support respondents. The evidence on the case management files shows that some respondents did not avail of this service, preferring to find their support through family, friends or other priest colleagues.

During the Review, a Priest Advisor who had supported a respondent during the investigation of his case was interviewed. The Priest Advisor impressed as a person who demonstrated sensitivity, care and responsiveness in dealing with a very difficult challenging and stressful case. The Priest Advisor created a safe environment for the respondent, while at all times he remained diligent and clear about his own role and responsibilities.

The DLP had ongoing contact with the Priest Advisor during the investigation to provide him with advice and support. Records of the Priest Advisor's work were provided to the DLP and placed in the relevant case file.

The DLP has overall case management responsibility for respondents, and she reports directly to Bishop Nulty. The DLP undertakes this responsible role in a caring and professional manner. The DLP informed the reviewer that she has frequent and regular contact with Bishop Nulty to discuss and review cases. From review of the case files and discussions with the DLP, the reviewer is satisfied that all procedures were clearly understood and adhered to.

There was evidence of case management plans on file, which were regularly reviewed and dates set for future reviews. In addition to the formal review of safety plans, there was documented evidence of ongoing discussions between, and monitoring by Bishop Nulty and the DLP.

Risk assessments were conducted, safety plans monitored and reviewed. The records demonstrate that when any changes in the circumstances of a respondent or new information became known, risk assessments were updated in a timely manner.

There was evidence of cases being appropriately referred to the National Case Management Committee for advice and guidance. Any recommendations from the National Case Management Committee were actioned, recorded on file, and the National Board advised.

In case files where the threshold was met, canon law processes were clearly followed. There was documentation on file pertaining to notifications, evidence of initiating preliminary canonical investigations, and of reports to the CDF from the bishop.

These cases can be very complex and drawn out. From the case files reviewed, Bishop Nulty and the DLP are to be commended for their efforts to prevent undue delay in progressing cases for the benefit of both the complainant and the respondent. There was evidence of:

- Bishop Nulty's swift follow up communications with relevant authorities and with the Vatican
- Bishop Nulty seeking legal advice and guidance in a timely manner.
- The DLP's prompt and continuous engagement with a wide range of statutory agencies to enable cases to be progressed.
- The DLP's due diligence and professional approach in their dealings with Solicitors and any other third party involved in a case.

**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.*

From discussions at diocesan and local parish level, it is apparent that training is valued and welcomed by both Church personnel and volunteers, and is considered crucial in ensuring a safe environment for children and young people and for those who work with them.

There are several direct references to training contained in the Safeguarding Committee’s Constitution. Training is discussed, monitored and reviewed at Safeguarding Committee meetings. I attended the Safeguarding Committee Meeting on the 13/12/2022, and an end of year training update was presented and considered. There was also discussion about planning future training arising from the Parish Audit Report.

A review of the Safeguarding Committees three year Safeguarding Plan 2022-2025 provided further evidence of the Committee’s responsibility and commitment, along with the Director of Safeguarding and the trainers, in the planning and delivery of training and support to local parishes.

The table below shows the type of training provided to clergy/religious and lay people from 2017

Year	Full Day - Lay	Refresher - Lay	Information - Lay	Full Day - Clergy / Religious	Refresher - Clergy / Religious	Information - Clergy / Religious	Total
2017	12	0	118	0	0	0	130
2018	30	63	9	8	14	0	124
2019	48	0	54	22	0	8	132
2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2021	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
2022	62	92	24	11	22	1	212

**Footnote:** The lack of training during 2020 and 2021 was due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19.

For 2017, the training was provided to both lay personnel and clergy.

Information in the Parish Self Audits is used to identify general and role specific training required in the parishes. The impact of Covid-19 on training was clearly reflected in the Parish Self-Audit returns of December 2020-November 2021. The Self-Audit Report, compiled by the Director of Safeguarding, is presented to the Safeguarding Committee. This helps to inform the Training Plan for the following year.

All 56 parishes (57 for the purposes of safeguarding auditing) submitted their completed audit forms. The returns showed that in a number of parishes, activity and training was seriously curtailed during this period. For example, very few of the parishes were able to host any safeguarding awareness initiatives with children and young people, or with their parents/guardians.

To its credit, the diocese was able to adapt and continued to provide some level of online training during the pandemic. For example, in 2020 youth leaders from parishes with active youth groups, along with a trainer, attended training provided by the NBSCCCI for those ministering with children online.

Training has been an important part of ‘rebuilding’ following the pandemic. I reviewed copies of the training schedules for 2022, which included safeguarding information sessions, refresher training and safeguarding risk assessment training. For some specific safeguarding roles, training was provided by the National Board. The majority of the sessions were provided via Zoom, with some taking place face-to-face in some of the larger parish centres. In total, 212 were trained, which included LSRs, priests, Sacristans, deacons and volunteers.

The reviewer read in detail the Training Plan for 2022-2023. It covers the twelve-month period from September to September, and it was signed off by the Safeguarding Committee on the September 5, 2022. The Plan outlined the various target groups for training, namely parish volunteers, Safeguarding Committee members, clergy, mandated persons and parish staff (e.g. sacristans). It contained details of the type of training required, who would deliver it, when, and how. There is a centralised computer record system for training in the Diocesan Office. Updated reports are provided to the Safeguarding Committee to allow it to review and monitor training activity.

Below are the training figures for mandated persons in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese from 2016-2022.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Participants</b>
2016	24	2020	5
2017	113	2021	0
2018	137	2022	56
2019	87	<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>TOTAL = 422</b>	

The numbers trained through 2020-2021 is directly linked to the impact of Covid-19. The higher numbers in 2017 and 2018 were in response to the *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards* update in 2016.



There are four registered Trainers available to the diocese. Two of these need to update their own training. All of those spoken to at parish level recognised the importance of ongoing training to keep their knowledge and skills up to date and to remain apprised of changes and developments at national and diocesan level.

**This standard is met.**

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

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

A Communication Plan for 2022-23 was agreed by the Safeguarding Committee on the September 5, 2022. The plan is accessible on the diocesan website. The plan details the range of platforms that will be utilised to ensure maximum dissemination of relevant safeguarding information, guidance, policies and procedures.

The plan stresses the importance of ensuring leaflets and publications are available in churches, with signposts to the website, and that parish newsletters contain the contact details for key safeguarding personnel, including the DLP, LSRs, Tusla and the Gardai.

The diocesan website Safeguarding section is reviewed and monitored regularly. Safeguarding updates are shared with the Chair of the Pastoral Council. The Council plays an important role in providing support and advice to Bishop Nulty. This forum presents ideas and options to Bishop Nulty for future developments within the diocese.

One of the work streams within the Pastoral Council is 'reaching out'. In compiling the Diocese's Synod Report, members of this sub-group met with local parish groups to collate their experiences as members of the Church. It was promoted through weekly newsletters and social media. Information and feedback was also gathered through a series of 'Listening Sessions'.

They reached out to a diverse range of people, including Travellers, and Polish and African communities. Over 3,000 individuals engaged in the process, with 37% of online responders aged between 18 and 29 years.

The Synod Report for Kildare and Leighlin was published in May 2022. It is a very frank, open and honest report outlining the challenges for the Church and the diocese into the future. This report provides a basis for continuing the conversation and engagement with young people, parishes, and with the wider community reflecting a more diverse population.

During parish visits, information on view in churches and parish halls included children's safeguarding posters, adult and children's codes of behaviour leaflets, Towards Healing leaflets, and the National Board's Standards leaflet and poster.

The Child Safeguarding statement is also available in Polish and in Irish. In discussions at the Safeguarding Committee meeting in December, it was agreed to produce the materials in additional languages to reflect the needs of the changing population.

In discussion with several Sacristans, they were clear about their responsibility to ensure all displayed safeguarding material was up to date. In fact, the diocese's Child Safeguarding Statement, which had been updated in October 2022, was prominently displayed in the parishes visited as part of this Review.

Notices for visiting priests were also on display in the sacristies, and the Sacristans provided details of completed documentation. The Reviewer was shown where altar servers prepared for Mass, as well as the register for them to sign in. Codes of conduct were on display in this area.

In 2021, the Safeguarding Committee produced a video on Safeguarding in the diocese. This was made available on the diocesan website, and on social media platforms, such as *YouTube*.

Safeguarding Sunday was held on October 9, 2022 and the annual Safeguarding Sunday newsletter was used to drive home the importance of young people's participation for the continuity of parish life, and of giving young people the opportunities to grow in a safe environment and to stay connected to their faith and their community. Safeguarding Sunday is also a way to reaffirm the safeguarding work in the diocese, which in turn can enhance public confidence in the work of the Church. It can act as a catalyst for people to come forward and volunteer to help their parish.

The diocesan Facebook page allows young people to share their experiences of involvement in Youth Ministry and the Pope John Paul II Award scheme. A video was carried on Facebook in preparation for Confirmation 2023 as an exercise in the Church reaching out to get young people's views by asking them for 'one word' to describe their Church of the future and to display it in the form of a poster.

From all evidence reviewed, it is clear that child safeguarding is a priority for the diocese. From parish visits, attendance at the Safeguarding Committee, and discussions with safeguarding personnel, the reviewer is satisfied that the diocese has developed a range of mechanisms to ensure that it communicates widely and effectively the Church's child safeguarding message.

**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.*

In reviewing the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee Action Plans from 2012, there is clear evidence of a mature committee that over the years has adapted and developed their practices, services and governance arrangements to ensure a healthy compliance with the Church's Safeguarding Children standards.

All of the recommendations and actions from the previous Review in 2012 were progressed, and the National Board formally confirmed their satisfaction that all 12 recommendations had been implemented.

From a governance perspective, the Safeguarding Committee had in place an Annual Training and Communication Plan to run from September 2022 to September 2023. There is also a 3-year Safeguarding Plan (2022-2025) which was agreed by the Safeguarding Committee on September 5, 2022. This sets out specific objectives against each of the seven safeguarding standards, with associated actions, allocation of responsibility, and implementation dates. All of these plans are accessible on the diocesan website.

The current Safeguarding Committee has a good blend of experience and skills, with a healthy geographical representation, given the size of the diocese. They have a constitution in place outlining their purpose, membership and frequency of meetings.

The Reviewer attended the Safeguarding Committee meeting on the December 13, 2022. The meeting was well chaired and had a clear agenda, which was worked through in an effective and efficient manner. Updates were provided on actions from the previous meeting.

During the meeting, there was wide-ranging discussion on a number of issues including:

- Safeguarding Sunday update
- Future training needs on the back of the Parish Audit returns
- Plans for translation of safeguarding materials in to Ukrainian and Portuguese
- A debate on the current draft Whistleblowing Policy and the need for further advice in terms of application and implementation.

An updated Safeguarding Statement was approved by the Safeguarding Committee, and this is now on the diocesan website. The changes reflect the removal of the reference to the seal of confession from the body of the statement and its inclusion as a risk.

The reviewer was also provided with a copy of the DLP's Annual Report.

Parish Self-Audits for 2020/21 were returned by all 56 parishes (57 for the purposes of Safeguarding auditing). The Safeguarding Coordinator collates and analyses the information before presenting a composite report to the Safeguarding Committee. One of the questions that parishes were asked was how the Safeguarding Director or Safeguarding Committee can support them in their safeguarding work. Responses to this will be taken forward by the Safeguarding Director.

The Self-Audit Report reviews compliance with the seven safeguarding children standards, highlighting areas of good practice, as well as where there are gaps, and offers proposals for improvement. This is then discussed and approved at the Safeguarding Committee. A formal written response goes out to each Parish Priest, with proposed actions and advice to help improve their safeguarding practice and/or governance arrangements.

The Self-Audit Report reflects a Safeguarding Committee that is open and transparent, and that wants to learn. One of the questions that parishes were asked was how the Safeguarding Director or Safeguarding Committee can support them in their safeguarding work.

In addition, Safeguarding Audits were carried out in March 2020 for the *Meitheal* and the Pope John Paul II programmes. They looked at the programme documentation, along with recruitment and vetting, and the appropriate obtaining of consent. Proposals were made to both programmes, and the audit reports were presented to the Safeguarding Committee for ratification. This is commended, as it keeps practice and governance arrangements under review, and gives assurance to the Safeguarding Committee and to the bishop.

The reviewer met with the previous Safeguarding Co-ordinator, and it was apparent from that discussion that a lot of work had taken place previously to develop a clear job description and work plan for this post. There is now a contract with defined roles and responsibilities.

There are three deputy DLP's in place. The Deputy DLP role would benefit from further internal discussion and clarification about how they can best support the DLP, particularly with regard to service development and good governance.

As previously stated, the DLP has frequent and regular contact with Bishop Nulty, who is very accessible and supportive. In addition, peer support for the DLP is provided through quarterly meetings with the safeguarding teams in Dublin Archdiocese and Ferns Diocese. When required, the DLP will consult with her counterparts in other dioceses for advice and support.

The DLP had a good working knowledge of all case files and has done a lot to strengthen the governance arrangements around file structure, content and accessibility.

A lot of credit must go to the DLP and the Safeguarding Committee for overseeing and driving forward good governance arrangements, to support safe practice and adherence to policy, procedures and guidance.

In the parishes visited, there was good communication and collaboration between the DLP and the parish LSRs. Those met were clear about the role of the DLP, and they valued her support and advice. Appropriate checks and balances were in place to ensure everyone was aware of their own role and responsibility in providing a safe, caring and welcoming environment for all the children and young people.

**This standard is met.**

## Conclusion

From meetings and discussions with Bishop Nulty, his safeguarding team and the Local Safeguarding Representatives in the parishes, the Reviewer is satisfied with the safeguarding arrangements in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese, and with its levels of compliance with the National Board safeguarding children standards.

There is evidence of a strong commitment and dedication by everyone to creating and sustaining a safe environment for all those involved in Church ministry. This is a diocese that strives to reach out to and engage with its parishioners and local communities.

The Reviewer has tried to reflect this reaching out and engagement in this report. Its inclusiveness was also evident in other ways, for example with:

- Asylum Seekers - parishes are working in collaboration with local Direct Provision Centres. Coffee mornings have been set up in parish centres. Parish volunteers have helped to establish a walking group; and asylum seekers are invited to diocesan events as members of their local parish;
- In one parish visited, there was an initiative to reach out, to assist and support Ukrainians. A drop-in centre was opened, and Church volunteers got other organisations on board to help with health and education issues. Retired teachers in the parish were helped to set up and run English classes, which are now attended by a diverse range of nationalities.
- Establishing a 'Share Food' programme to support the poor in the locality. People brought food to their local churches and volunteers were recruited to support food distribution. The programme brought the big supermarkets on board and linked in with local charities.

The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin is in a good place to take these developments forward. Under Bishop Nulty's leadership, and with the support of those around him, an open culture has been fostered that is focused on learning and improvement, so that everyone in the diocese can feel safe, valued and cared for.