



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

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice  
in the Archdiocese of Tuam  
undertaken by**

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

**Date of Review Report: November 2021**

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## Background

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the National Board) was established in 2006 to provide advice, services and assistance in furtherance of the development of the safeguarding of children within the Roman Catholic Church on the island of Ireland; and to monitor compliance with legislation, policy and best practice and to report on these activities as 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 *Safeguarding Children – Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*.

In order to assess compliance, Archbishop Michael Neary of the Archdiocese of Tuam invited the National Board to undertake a Review of practice in 2021. The Archdiocese was previously reviewed in June 2011 under the *Safeguarding Children – Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2008*. The report of the first Review can be found on the National Board's website <http://www.safeguarding.ie/publications>

The purpose of this second round of Reviews is to assess the 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;
- Confirmation to the Church authority that what they want to be done is in fact being done;
- Independent verification of Self-Audit – or correction and/or improvement of Self-Audit;
- Opportunities for learning.

## Introduction

In the Archdiocese of Tuam there are 56 parishes with 144,000 Catholic residents. The geographical area of the Archdiocese stretches across three counties, Galway (27 parishes), Mayo (27 parishes) and Roscommon (2 parishes). There are 4 parishes in the Gaeltacht and a further 4 with Gaeltacht areas located within the parish. Three of the parishes are island parishes. There are a total of 131 churches within the Archdiocese. Knock Shrine is located in Co. Mayo, and in 2021 it was designated the status of International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine by Pope Francis.

There are fifty-two (52) diocesan priests with appointments, including five (5) priests past the age of retirement (75 years); twenty-nine (29) fully retired priests; and ten (10) priests incardinated in dioceses elsewhere, but in ministry in the Archdiocese of Tuam. Five (5) priests are out of ministry.

Fourteen (14) religious congregations, with one hundred and eighty-nine (189) members between them, are located within the Archdiocese.

There are sixty (60) Parish Safeguarding Representatives in the Archdiocese of Tuam. According to parish self-audits, a total of 3,059 children were involved in Church activities in 2018; and in 2019, this number rose to 4,237 children. The three most popular activities/youth ministries in 2019 were: Altar servers, involving 1,757; Children's Choirs with 738; and John Paul 11 Awards being undertaken by 492.

Archbishop Neary served as Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Tuam from September 1992 – March 1995. On 5 March 1995 he was installed as Archbishop of Tuam.

## **Process of Review**

This Review was undertaken at a time when the country was in a state of extended lockdown due to Covid-19; and the consequent imposition of restrictions meant that on-site visits could not take place. The National Board in conjunction with Archbishop Neary and his safeguarding staff agreed to conduct the Review in two stages. In Stage 1, the reviewers assessed compliance with Child Safeguarding practice and structures against Standards 1, 5, 6 and 7. All interviews in this stage were conducted online using the Zoom platform, and took place over 4 days during the period from 21 April 2021 to 29 April 2021. All data protection legislation was complied with by the Archdiocese as data controller, and by the National Board as data processor, in conducting meetings and interviews by this method.

In advance of Stage 1, safeguarding personnel provided the reviewers with relevant documentation in soft copy relating to safeguarding structures and practice in the Archdiocese.

Stage 2 of the review process took place when ease of lockdown measures allowed the reviewers to be on site and examine all case file material held in the safeguarding office. This stage allowed for some interviews to be held in person and others online.

The following were met with online in Stage 1:

- Archbishop Michael Neary
- The Diocesan Secretary
- The Director of Safeguarding, who also acts as Trainer and Trainer-Coordinator.
- The Tuam Archdiocese Safeguarding Committee
- Six Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs)
- A Parish Pastoral Coordinator
- Three Trainers (one of whom is also the Director of Safeguarding, and one of whom is the Director of Youth Ministry)
- The Director of Youth Ministry
- Two Administration Staff of the Western Province Vetting Office
- Knock Shrine Safeguarding Committee Members
- The Data Protection Officer
- Young people attending the *Nua* online Ministry programme along with five of their leaders and the programme Coordinator.

The reviewers wish to thank the Diocesan Secretary and the Director of Safeguarding for the smooth facilitation of the online process which allowed for the completion of this stage of the Review.

Stage 2 of the review process took place in the period on 14 – 23 July 2021

Case management files and other related material were assessed on site on July 14 2021

Interviews were held with the following personnel in person: The Archbishop; Designated Liaison Persons; and the Child Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

Interviews were held with the following personnel via Zoom: Three Complainant Support Persons; Two Priest Advisors; the Archbishop; and four members of the Case Management Advisory Committee.

Further contact took place with the Director of Safeguarding after the interview/fieldwork of Stage 1 of the Review.

The reviewers would like to express their sincere thanks to Archbishop Neary, his safeguarding staff and volunteers, and the priests of Tuam Archdiocese for the invitation to conduct a Review and for their co-operation during this process.

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

The Archdiocese of Tuam has adopted in full the Guidance of the National Board.

This Review does not assess written procedures, but instead concentrates on practice through a review of written records, interviews with Church personnel, and communication with young people.

The reviewers did not have contact directly with complainants or respondents for the purposes of gauging the archdiocesan response to them. No parties responded to a notice placed on the Archdiocese of Tuam website in advance of this Review calling for those with feedback on safeguarding to come forward to the National Board.

The most recent complainant contact which the safeguarding team had taken place over five years ago, and therefore it was not considered appropriate to re-engage with the complainant at this point in time to avoid causing them any distress.

In a different case, the respondent who remains subject to ongoing involvement with outside agencies was not contacted.

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

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

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

Safe Recruitment

The Archdiocese of Tuam requires that all Church personnel and volunteers whose work brings them into contact with children must undergo a safe recruitment process. Practice guidelines for safe recruitment for all Church-related activities in Tuam Archdiocese are detailed in the *Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook* and in soft copy on the separate archdiocesan and Knock Shrine Websites. Garda vetting is central to the recruitment process and is in accordance with the legislation *National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Adults) Act 2012*. All vetting applications for the archdiocese are processed through the Western Province Vetting Office which looks after the vetting requirements of the six dioceses which form the Western Province. Roles are categorised for vetting purposes; and the numbers supplied by the Western Vetting Office Galway of those vetted for roles within parishes, including Knock Shrine, and for non-teaching staff in schools in the Tuam Archdiocese are as follows:

Year	Parishes	Schools
2016	205	449
2017	827	723
2018	1,504	864
2019	755	988
2020	303	434

Diocesan safeguarding staff stated that the introduction of e-vetting in 2016 has positively transformed the vetting process and allows for a fast and efficient service. Databases containing vetting information are maintained by both the Western Province Vetting Office and also by the diocesan curia. A vetting database has been established in Knock Shrine since 2019 and is retained there within the parish office. All priests ministering in the archdiocese are Garda vetted and are issued with a *celebret* which allows them to minister away from their home parish/diocese. Visiting clergy are required to present their *celebret* if they wish to minister within the archdiocese. Re-vetting takes place at three yearly intervals, with the next date for large-scale re-vetting in Tuam Archdiocese being in late 2021/2022.

In 2020 the Safeguarding Office in Tuam Archdiocese established a Vetting Appeals Committee to make a determination in the event that an applicant may wish to appeal a vetting decision. This committee has not been called upon to date to hear an appeal.

A comprehensive *Recruitment and Selection Checklist* designed to be used in the recruitment process is available in the *Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook* and on the website of the Archdiocese of Tuam. The handbook is an excellent resource that has been developed as a coordinated initiative of the Western dioceses that make up the Tuam Metropolitan Area; it was closely examined by the reviewers who established that it is of a standard that is consistent with the requirements of the National Board and its contents are compliant with the Church's safeguarding children standards and policy of 2016.

#### Visiting Clergy seeking to Minister in the Archdiocese of Tuam

Tuam Archdiocese follows guidance for visiting clergy, visiting persons in any form of consecrated life, and for lay ecclesial Ministers seeking to minister in the diocese. Reviewers were informed that National Board Guidance ref: *1.1F Overview of Documentation Required for Visiting Clergy, Visiting Persons in Any Form of Consecrated Life, or Lay Ecclesial Ministers Seeking to Minister in the Catholic Church in Ireland* is implemented in practice across the archdiocese and in Knock Shrine, which sees a steady number of priests seeking to minister on short and longer term visits.

The protocol distinguishes those visiting priests who wish to minister on a *once-off cover* basis, and who stay 1-3 days, from those engaging in two or more liturgies, i.e. *short-term cover*, who stay more than 1-3 days, including regular and repeated events.

Procedures for visiting priests ensure that all visiting priests to the archdiocese must register with the Diocesan Secretary, or with the Parish Priest in Knock, if ministering at the Shrine. A central filing system in relation to visiting priests is retained in the Diocesan Office.

The same criteria are in use at Knock Shrine where the protocol for visiting priests is followed. The application process which is in place for priests who wish to minister at Knock Shrine for longer periods - for example, for the summer months - was explained to the reviewers. Applications are dealt with according to procedures outlined in the above National Board Guidance. The reviewers were informed that all successful applicants who come to minister at Knock Shrine for an extended period of time are personally met with by the Parish Priest on their arrival. All vetting requests related to Knock Shrine are processed by the Western Province Vetting Office.

The reviewers were informed by safeguarding personnel that in their experience vetting requirements are understood by clergy and Church personnel, including visiting clergy, and that no issues have arisen in relation to non-compliance.

#### Safe Care Practices, including Codes of Conduct

All Church personnel, including adult volunteers, must sign a Safeguarding Agreement form which ensures they have been inducted in the Church's child safeguarding policy, and that they abide by its requirement stipulating expected behaviour of adults towards children. Adult volunteers whose work involves contact with children are required to sign a Declaration Form stating that there is no reason why they would be considered unsuitable to work with children or young people.

Discussions between reviewers and safeguarding personnel - including Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs) ascertained that there is full awareness at parish level that proper procedure is followed in the recruitment process. It was stated to reviewers that parents and children have 'an expectation of safeguarding' procedure, where safeguarding forms - including consent forms – and codes of behaviour for parents and children are necessary. Church personnel, including volunteers, fully accept that vetting and training protocols are required to be followed in order to ensure that children are kept safe.

Safe practice procedures, including, for example, sacristy sign-in registers, leaders' diaries, *celebret* requirements and the display of safeguarding posters are now routine practice throughout the archdiocese. While the safeguarding policy and information posters are displayed in all relevant Church buildings, the reviewers learned that the display of more *child-friendly* versions of these posters will be addressed by the Safeguarding Committee. Following discussions with reviewers, archdiocesan Youth Ministry Office personnel, along with safeguarding personnel expressed a keenness to explore and put into practice suggestions how best to do this. In this respect, there is a willingness to engage with young people in the development of child-friendly safeguarding information.

Several examples of good practice in safe care for children and young people were discussed with the group of Parish Safeguarding Representatives (PSRs). In one parish, for example, in advance of the commencement of the annual John Paul II Awards, a meeting of all those involved in the awards - parents, teachers, agencies/organisation, and young people - takes place in order to give information to everyone, and to set out the requirements and expectations of the behaviour of adults and young people, and the rules, and guidelines around their participation in the awards. This is also good practice in communicating the safeguarding message.

The reviewers were informed of examples of excellent practice in the safe introduction and involvement of children with specific needs in parish ministries. In one parish discussed with reviewers, children with special needs are involved in a number of children's programmes, including as altar servers where children with specific needs are integrated carefully and gradually under the guidance of the pastoral worker. In another parish, the reviewers were informed of a long standing practice of including children and adults with specific needs, in Church liturgies. Many of the adults now attending once attended as children.

### Nua Programme

Stage One of this Review took place during a lockdown period where no actual Ministry with Children was permitted to take place. The consequence of this was that the reviewers could not visit in person a Church activity with children in order to hear their views about safeguarding or about what behaviour was expected of participants in their group. However, the reviewers had the opportunity, to attend by Zoom a meeting of *Nua*, a programme in Youth Ministry which took place online during the Covid-19 restrictions. The 8-week programme, coordinated by the Director of Youth Ministry introduces young people to Christian topics of the day through short video clips followed by discussion in small groups facilitated by youth leaders.



The reviewers joined the group of 22 participants and their six leaders on the second-last night in the 8-week series. The reviewers were informed that full attendance of the 22 participants aged 16-17 years had taken place over the course of the previous 7-weeks. Participants and their parents granted consent for the reviewers to engage with the young people on the night. The event was conducted through Zoom and the reviewers were informed that all online ministry protocol and procedures were in place and conformed to Tuam Archdiocese *Guidance for Online Ministry with Children* document, itself based on National Board guidance, and in compliance with data protection legislation. The Director of Youth Ministry previously attended National Board training in *Online Ministry with Children*.

Prior to the commencement of the programme, the participants and their parents were requested to complete an application and consent form; and the reviewers saw these digital forms, which they assess to be compliant with National Board requirements. In addition, there was separate communication between the Coordinator and parents to ensure that parents were fully informed of and understood their child's participation in the programme.

A facility was put in place for parent and participant feedback and evaluation. During the online programme, the Director of Youth Ministry maintained oversight of leaders and young people in the small group discussions in 'breakout rooms'. One leader had the responsibility of IT Coordinator, ensuring effective running of the online session.

Prior to engaging with the young people on the night, the leaders confirmed to the reviewers that they were aware of National Board safeguarding guidance in relation to online ministry. All leaders confirmed that they have received child safeguarding training and have been Garda vetted for the role of youth leader. Adult-child ratios were in compliance with guidance.

The reviewer's engagement with the young people was time-limited and took place with the group as a whole.

The following reflects the key points which arose from the discussion with the young people:

- Participants understood what 'safeguarding' means and what it means to feel safe and be safe. Their comments - 'to keep safe', 'no bullying', 'no leaving people out', 'being comfortable in the group'.
- Participants confirmed that they jointly developed a Code of Behaviour on their first session. This included items such as 'respect', 'listening to each other', 'what everyone has to say is important', 'no bullying';
- Participants confirmed that they knew they could get help and support if they felt unsafe or upset or uncomfortable about anything happening in the group. Participants confirmed they could approach - 'the leaders' and/or 'their parents'.
- They were aware they would be invited by the leaders to give feedback on their experience of the programme when it ends.
- All participants agreed that they were enjoying the *Nua* programme.

Arising from their discussion with the young people, the reviewers established that good safeguarding practice was in evidence. A code of behaviour had been created by the group of young people at the commencement of the programme, the rationale and context of which they understood and agreed. The young people were confident and fully apprised of safeguarding measures in place, including the protocol around the online aspect of the group forum. The young people indicated that participation in the online programme was a positive experience for them.

The reviewers wish to thank the Director of Youth Ministry, the leaders and the young people for facilitating their engagement with the group on the night in question. The organisation, innovation and commitment of the leadership group was highly apparent, and the obvious success is reflected in the 100% full attendance up to and including week 7. The reviewers were reassured in their discussion with the young people that information and support in relation to keeping safe while engaged in the activity was made available and openly discussed with them by the group leaders, both prior to and intermittently during the weekly sessions. The reviewers concluded that there was excellent practice in safe care for young people in this programme.

The leadership and sense of responsibility shown by the youth leaders in this online Youth Ministry deserves mention and is reflective of good practice.

#### John Paul II Awards

This is a popular programme coordinated by the Youth Ministry Team across the archdiocese. In 2019, over 400 young people participated in the awards; and in 2020-2021 approximately 140 young people participated, the drop in number being attributed to Covid-19 restrictions. The process of engagement and participation of the young people, and of agencies/ministries with whom they are placed as volunteers, was explained in detail by the Director of Youth Ministry who oversees the programme in the archdiocese. All Safeguarding protocols are seen to be complied with in respect of this programme, including the provision of training for all participants in the programme content and ethos. In relation to safeguarding there is an emphasis on anti-bullying and young people are made aware of who to go to if there is a safeguarding concern. Young people are supervised at all times and carry out their volunteer work in groups of two or more.

#### Knock Shrine – Support Services for Children and Young People

Discussions with the Knock Youth Minister and with the Director of Counselling both based at Knock Shrine, informed the reviewers of good professional safeguarding practice in their respective areas of work and engagement with children and young people.

There are two full-time staff involved in Youth Ministry at Knock Shrine. Youth Ministries take place primarily in the Youth Centre and the Children's Hub located in the grounds of the Shrine.

The following is an overview of Youth Ministries which are undertaken at Knock annually:

- September – May: School Retreats (1-day retreats usually, 2-days on occasion). Four to five retreats are run weekly during this period. Once a booking is made by the school, a letter containing details of all safeguarding and other requirements including parental consent, are sent to the school. Schools are responsible for providing supervision adult to children ratios, and teachers are required to remain on the premises at all times. On occasions, retreats involve overnight stays, when up to 20 young people can be accommodated at the Youth Hostel based in Knock. Teachers have sole responsibility for supervision during the overnight stay, and again permission forms from parents are required,
- July – August: Children’s Hub and Summer Camps - The Children’s Hub involves structured 40-minute sessions focussing on stories based on the Gospel of the day. Parents sign their children in for a session and pick-up time is specified. The consent form includes agreement to the code of behaviour, and parent’s contact details. This form is consistent with the one provided by the National Board in its guidance on Standard 1. Parents are required to stay on the grounds of the Shrine for the duration of the session.

Summer camps are accessed primarily by local primary school children. Parental consent forms are required, with details of the child and contact details of the parent, as well as contact details of two other people who will be collecting the child if a parent is not available to do so. Past experience has shown that this is a necessary safeguarding requirement when a parent is not available.

- Annual Family Day (which takes place during the annual Knock Novena). Activities are family based, and the children are the responsibility of their parents at all times. Young Volunteers at Knock (VAKs) are primarily the leaders of the family activities for that day.

The Youth Ministry runs the above-mentioned Volunteers at Knock Shrine (VAKS) Programme (for 16-18 year-olds). In this programme, young people apply to become a volunteer. Parents are required to sign a permission form, and the young person must sign a code of behaviour. The young people are vetted in accordance with National Vetting Bureau guidelines processed through the Western Province Vetting Office, and they undergo a structured training programme, which includes, amongst other topics, child safeguarding, and correct and safe communication with pilgrims. VAKS are supervised by Youth Ministry staff.

An Adolescent Counselling Service for 12-18 year olds forms part of a much wider Counselling Service provided at Knock Shrine, and is overseen by the Director of Counselling. Parental consent is required prior to a counsellor engaging with a young person; the counselling work is needs-based and is undertaken in conjunction with parents. The adolescent counselling service is part-funded by Tusla under an annual service agreement.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a key Ministry which involves adults as well as children visiting Knock Shrine. On average 40,000 - 50,000 confessions are heard at Knock each year in the Confessional Chapel, the provision of which involves a number of resident chaplains and visiting priests, as well as stewards and volunteers. Safeguarding procedures such as vetting requirements are outlined above; safeguarding training is provided, and a Safeguarding Agreement must be signed (see Standard 5).

#### Use of Church property

There is appropriate guidance in place in relation to the use of Church property by external groups, or when hired for private functions. One essential requirement is that the external group must have a child safeguarding policy in place. This must be indicated in a form (*SG-07 Parish Handbook*) and filed at parish level. The analysis of Parish Audit returns of 2018 indicated that this form was not in place in a number of parishes. Consequently, this matter was addressed by the Safeguarding Committee, and this situation was rectified, which was reflected in the 2019 returns.

#### Whistle-blowing / Complaints

Policy and procedures to be followed by a whistle-blower or by a complainant are in place within the Archdiocese; but neither the whistleblowing nor the complaints procedures have been invoked to date.

The reviewers ascertained from their contact with parish personnel that they have sufficient familiarity with the guidance to be followed if a complaint or a matter of concern is brought to them.

#### Hazard Assessment

All parish group activities involving children are required to have a hazard assessment drawn up. The practice of assessing hazards at parish level was covered in discussion with the PSRs and the Parish Pastoral Coordinator. Examples of situations identified as hazardous by PSRs, and the practical steps taken to prevent a reoccurrence, were outlined. The discussion informed the reviewers that hazard identification and assessment of risk at parish level where children's ministry takes place is prominent in PSR practice on the ground.

A Safeguarding Hazard Assessment has been undertaken in Knock Shrine and an extensive document outlining risks, consequences, controls needed and responsibility is in place. This document was examined by the reviewers and is a comprehensive document.

#### Use of digital media by Church personnel

The website of the Archdiocese contains the National Board's *GAP Paper 1 Child Safeguarding and Digital Media 2018* which informs good child safeguarding practice in the Catholic Church in Ireland in the area of digital media. The Archdiocese also follows National Board guidance on the use of technology including email, texting, photography, CCTV and web broadcasting. This guidance is available in soft copy on the website, as well as in hard copy in the *Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook*, (pages 25-30), which provides very clear guidance in an easily readable format, and which is available in every parish.

GDPR compliance has been overseen by the Data Protection Officer on behalf of the Archdiocese. The National Board has developed guidance in relation to *Online Ministry with Children* which includes guidelines for safe use of Zoom in Youth Ministry. Tuam Youth Ministry has accessed training in this area. The evidence of guidelines being followed in relation to digital technology was provided by the leadership of the *Nua* programme and by the young people themselves.

There are two Safeguarding Committees in place within Tuam Archdiocese, which provide advice on the implementation of safeguarding policy practice and procedures practice.

- The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee is comprised of 11 committee members, who between them have many years of experience in safeguarding within Tuam Archdiocese. Many of the committee members hold leadership roles within the archdiocese such as training, Youth Ministry, pastoral work, and as members of the Archdiocesan Case Management Committee.
- The Knock Shrine Safeguarding Committee was formed (2017/2018) to advise and implement child safeguarding policy for Knock Parish and Shrine. This development took place with the assistance and guidance of the diocesan committee, when it became clear that the scale and popularity of Knock Shrine was such that a dedicated committee was required. Members of this committee represent management and heads of departments representing key areas of ministry within the Shrine. A Safeguarding Officer has been recently appointed. This role will have overall responsibility for and oversight of the Knock Shrine safeguarding policy, and for the coordination of practice.

There is good linkage between the two committees, with some safeguarding personnel sitting on both. Youth Ministry is well represented at committee level in both cases, and the reviewers were impressed with how the voices and needs of young people are brought to the committee tables through this representation. Youth Ministry representatives view their role as advocates for young people at Safeguarding Committee level. In the reviewers' opinion their presence and participation in the Safeguarding Committee gives recognition to the importance of the role of Youth Ministry across the Archdiocese of Tuam. In their discussions with reviewers, safeguarding personnel placed much emphasis on the child-centred focus of their work. Strong representation of Youth Ministry at committee level ensures that this focus can be kept centre stage, while at the same time it allows for clear communication and implementation of safeguarding information and practice in projects overseen by Youth Ministry. An example of this relates to the adaption by the archdiocese of National Board Guidance in relation to *Conducting Online Ministry with Children*. Training in this was accessed by Youth Ministry personnel and by members of the Safeguarding Committee, and a programme was implemented in keeping with guidance.

Minutes of meetings held by both committees were made available to the reviewers.

The appointment of the incoming Safeguarding Officer at Knock Shrine, who has a background in disability services management, is an important development for the overall coordination, management and implementation of safeguarding practice across all departments of this large organisation. The Parish Priest, management and committee members of Knock Shrine spoke of their commitment to child safeguarding (and also of their responsibility for implementing best practice in the area of vulnerable adults which is an aligned priority). There is a consciousness at management and committee level that, as this unique National and International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine continues to grow in popularity in the years ahead, every effort is being made at organisational level to facilitate this growth, while at the same time taking into account the need for good safeguarding practice.

A three-year Safeguarding Plan developed by Knock Shrine Safeguarding Committee is in place. This plan, updated in March 2021 outlines comprehensively, under each standard, what action needs to take place, by whom and by when. The document also indicates timelines for frequency of review of each action.

#### Ministry in external agencies

It was confirmed to reviewers that archdiocesan priests (currently one) who minister in external agencies must sign up to the safeguarding policy of that agency. Documentation to this effect is retained at the Archdiocesan Office.

The requirements of this standard are met.

## **Standard 2: Procedures for responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or allegations**

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

The last Review of the Archdiocese of Tuam took place in June 2011. In the intervening period, the archdiocese has received four allegations of child abuse. Three allegations have been received concerning three deceased priests of the archdiocese in this period

There is one active case – not against a priest - which continues to be the focus of investigation by statutory authorities. The case file indicates that all notifications were made to the relevant agencies immediately upon receipt of the allegation; and the respondent was removed immediately from all Church ministry. The respondent was offered pastoral support; and there is evidence on file that the archbishop was open and clear in his verbal and written contacts with the respondent following the emergence of the allegations of abuse. Safeguarding policies and procedures were outlined, and legal and canonical advice was recommended to the respondent, while their support needs were highlighted. There is also evidence on file that the archbishop has continued to keep in contact with the respondent, primarily by telephone, in the intervening period; and there is a record on file of the Diocesan Secretary /DLP having also met with the respondent. The advice of the National Board in the management of this case has been sought and provided on two occasions. The case has been the subject of reviews twice a year by the archdiocesan Case Management Advisory Committee.

The archdiocese was informed of the allegation in 2017. The file indicates that at that time, the archbishop was requested by An Garda Síochána to refrain from making contact with the complainant, as the Garda investigation was at an early stage. In 2018, Archbishop Neary requested an update from An Garda Síochána on the progress of the case, and he was informed that the investigation was still ongoing. The archdiocese was again requested to refrain from making contact with the complainant. There are regular file notes on the progress of statutory inquiries based on information given to the archbishop by the respondent.

The complainant has not brought the allegation to the archdiocese. To date, the archdiocese has held back from making contact with the complainant; the archbishop would like to offer them support. The reviewers were informed by the archbishop that in order to comply with the request of the statutory authorities to refrain from complainant contact until the final outcome of the investigation, a less than satisfactory situation exists, where the archdiocese has been unable to fulfil its responsibility to offer support to this complainant in a timely manner. The reviewers are satisfied from their discussions with the archbishop that he is committed to offering supports to the complainant, once the statutory agencies have completed their respective roles in the matter.

It is important that the archdiocese is allowed to discharge its own responsibilities in this case and that a preliminary canonical investigation is initiated. This would require that the archbishop now formally requests the approval of the Gardaí to do so. Natural justice for the respondent is being denied by such a lengthy delay in the investigation process.

The reviewers note that the case file contains contemporaneous records and is stored confidentially, as are all case management files. The details of cases are set out under Standard 4 below.

In relation to the three deceased priests of the archdiocese, the first, Fr. A had died in the 1980s. The allegation concerning him was received by the National Board in 2021 from a person living abroad. This related to alleged physical beatings in a school environment in the 1960s. The National Board notified the archdiocese. The matter was referred by the archdiocese to the Gardaí within three days. As there was no risk to children, Tusla was not notified. The DLP has written twice to the complainant offering support and providing them him with contact details for the Gardaí.

Fr. B had also died in the 1980s. The allegation pertaining to him was received in 2020 from a person who said that he had sexually abused them in the 1950s. The complainant had first approached a priest of their own parish who immediately made appropriate referrals to Towards Healing as well as to another, local support service. This priest referred into the DLP. The DLP in turn made a notification to the Gardaí within four working days, and to the National Board within eight working days.

Fr. C had died in the 1960s. The allegation in relation to him was received by the archdiocese in 2019. The Gardaí had been notified by the complainant, and as the respondent was deceased, no notification to the HSE was required.

As well as examining the case management files, the reviewers also read the minutes of the Case Management Committee of the archdiocese, and this is reported on under Standard 4 below.

The requirements of this standard are 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.*

In advance of this Review, the Archdiocese of Tuam placed a notice on its website requesting anyone wishing to offer feedback on Safeguarding within the Tuam Archdiocese to contact the National Board directly. At the time of writing, this invitation had not resulted in any response from complainants or others; and so evidence of care and support offered to complainants is based on file content and through dialogue with both DLPs and Archbishop Neary.

As discussed earlier, complainant contact in respect of the current allegation has not been possible to date for reasons outside the control of the archdiocese.

However, the reviewers were made aware of a complainant who made contact with the archdiocese in the period since the last Review. Her complaint, and the case of the priest (cleric 5 below, now deceased) had been examined in the National Board Review of June 2011, at which time the complainant had not come forward to the archdiocese. The following assessment is based solely on what the reviewers read on case management files.

The reviewers saw evidence from Cleric 5's file of commendable engagement with this person once they made contact with the archdiocese. This included organising transport and accommodation for the complainant and their support person to allow them meet with Church personnel. They were communicated with in a sensitive and compassionate manner as evidenced in letters on file. Appropriate supports, including financial, were provided, and the complainant remained in contact with the archdiocese for a period of time.

The reviewers noted supportive complainant contact in another case which had been examined in the previous Review. This complainant had continued their engagement with the archdiocese over a number of years, was advised of supports available to them, availed of counselling and received a financial settlement.

Three people, two women and one man, were appointed to the role of Complainant Support Person within the archdiocese in 2020. All three were interviewed for the purpose of this Review and present as compassionate, insightful people with the skills necessary to provide support to a complainant if the need arises. All three were trained specifically for their role within safeguarding; and although none to date has been requested to support a complainant, the reviewers are impressed with their confidence that they can fulfil the duties of the role with care and compassion.

A review of the case file in relation to the one allegation of abuse that has arisen in the period since the last National Board Review in 2011 shows evidence of correspondence between the archdiocese and the statutory authorities in relation to the ongoing status of the case. This shows a willingness to engage with statutory authorities in the absence of established formal links.

Archbishop Neary advised that in the past the archdiocese had developed strong links with the relevant statutory agencies when numbers of allegations of abuse in the archdiocese were high, and when as a consequence, interagency meetings were necessary. He viewed this interaction as essential to his understanding and management of allegations. In recent years, as the number of allegations has declined, so too has the frequency of formal engagement with the statutory bodies in the form of interagency meetings. The reviewers are of the opinion that the archbishop should discuss with relevant personnel in An Garda Síochána and in Tusla the benefits of having a continuous dialogue, facilitated through annual meetings, which could ensure that relationships are kept current and maintain the focus on good safeguarding practice, as well as on the management of allegations.

In the opinion of the reviewers, based on the evidence examined, the archdiocese has responded in a compassionate and respectful manner to complainants, and therefore 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.*

Archbishop Neary and his safeguarding team brought to the attention of the reviewers five (5) cases which relate to allegations made against respondent priests prior to the 2011 National Board Review, and all of which were examined in that Review.

Four (4) of the cases relate to living priests from the archdiocese, all retired and none in ministry; and one (1) is deceased. The case files contain contemporaneous notes outlining the continued involvement of the archdiocese in the management of the respondent priests, including contacts with respondents, and complainants where appropriate. The reviewers were informed that each of these cases is subject to twice yearly review by the archdiocese Case Management Advisory Committee, and file notes indicate this. The reviewers were informed that minutes of the Case Management Advisory Committee are kept in a central file. However, following discussion with reviewers, the archdiocese will change this practice and will place minutes of case discussion and outcome in each respondent case file, to allow for a comprehensive overview of each case.

The following is an update on the situation pertaining to the four living priests about whom there have been child safeguarding concerns.

Cleric 1 is retired from ministry under strict conditions, which are outlined in the case file. He was formally advised regarding the withdrawal of all faculties by the archbishop when the allegation became known. This matter was outlined in the 2011 National Board Review and safeguarding procedures were followed in the management of the allegation, with timely reports to Tusla, An Garda Síochána and the National Board, and Archbishop Neary initiated the appropriate canonical process; evidence of correspondence between the archbishop and Rome is contained in the file. Garda investigations did not lead to a criminal trial. The file indicates that both the complainant and the accused priest were responded to and managed in accordance with National Board safeguarding standards, at the time of the allegation and in subsequent years. The archdiocese engaged in a supportive way with the complainant and a settlement was made.

The respondent remained out of ministry until his subsequent retirement and is still under a strict behavioural contract. There is evidence on file of two occasions where the conditions of this contract were not adequately adhered to by the respondent and which were addressed by the archbishop. There is evidence of ongoing contact between the archbishop and the respondent. The file did not contain a formal assessment of ongoing risk. This is a matter that needs to be covered in a comprehensive handover from the archbishop to his successor, so that a review of potential risk from this respondent can be conducted.

In the case of Cleric 2, he has not been given faculties by the archbishop for the last 24 years, and he is now formally retired. The file indicates that the respondent is unwilling to submit to any form of supervision by the archdiocese and has renounced his entitlement to financial and other supports from the archdiocese. Correspondence to him from the archbishop is not responded to or acknowledged. Archbishop Neary acknowledged to the reviewers his sense of responsibility in this matter; and they in turn advised him to refer his concerns to the National Board's National Case Management Committee for advice and guidance in relation to the future case management, including risk assessment.

Clerics 3 and 4 are both elderly and live in care environments due to infirmity. Neither man has been in any form of ministry for over 20 years. The archbishop and the Diocesan Secretary are fully acquainted with their circumstances and are in contact with each man on a regular basis. Both are financially supported by the archdiocese. The archbishop informed the reviewers that neither man is considered a risk. Both cases are reviewed on a twice annual basis by the archdiocesan Case Management Committee.

The matter concerning Cleric 5 (deceased) is discussed below, as it outlines how a complainant was supported by the archdiocese after contacting it for the first time many years after their case had been dealt with by the statutory authorities.

There are two ordained priests appointed to the role of priest support/advisor within the archdiocese, and both men were interviewed for the purposes of this Review. They were appointed to the role approximately eight years ago, and neither has been formally called upon to support a respondent in that time. They spoke with compassion and understanding of the requirements and importance of the role. Both received safeguarding training in the past and acknowledged that refresher role-specific training would be beneficial in keeping their knowledge current. The reviewers are assured of the existence of a solid respondent support system in place by the availability and interest of both men.

From an examination of case files, the reviewers are aware that in two cases, a priest support/advisor was made available in the past to two priests who are still alive, but their circumstances are now such that this service is no longer needed.

The archbishop, and his Diocesan Secretary in his role of DLP, have undertaken regular visits to respondents as outlined in the above cases. Following discussion, and as evidenced in the case files, the archbishop and his safeguarding team acknowledge that there is a responsibility on the part of the Tuam Archdiocese to support, monitor and manage men against whom allegations have been made. The reviewers acknowledge that this has not always been an easy task, and note in the file of one man that the archbishop actively challenged his breach of adherence to the conditions of his retirement.

Archbishop Neary appointed a Case Management Advisory Committee in 1996 in order to help guide and advise him on a number of difficult and challenging child abuse cases which came to prominence within the archdiocese at the time he became installed as Archbishop of Tuam in 1995. He spoke of his sense of shock and lack of preparedness for dealing with a large number of cases at that time, and described the independent professional advice and expertise of the Case Management Advisory Committee as one of the most important child safeguarding support systems available to him, then and since. The membership of this committee has remained stable over the years, and numbers eleven (11) personnel drawn from across a wide range of professional and personal life backgrounds. Most importantly, according to the archbishop, it is parents who have reinforced for him the reality of child protection, of what it is to have a child and the need to protect that child above all else.

The Case Management Advisory Committee continues to function, and it meets twice yearly when all live cases/concerns are discussed and advice given. All committee members have received training from the National Board for their role. The reviewers met with four members of archdiocesan safeguarding personnel who also serve on this on this committee to discuss its work, and examined minutes of its meetings.

Archbishop Neary confirmed that all cases which have arisen during his time as archbishop have been presented to the committee for advice/guidance. Cases are anonymised when presented to the committee, and while the archbishop does not participate in case discussion, he does share all knowledge he has of cases with the committee. The management of risk and child safeguarding are prominent themes in all case discussions. He is informed at the end of each meeting what decision/action is being advised; and he stated that in all cases he has followed the advice given. This is apparent for example in the case file of a cleric who transgressed conditions of his retirement and who was challenged by the archbishop in this regard, on foot of advice and guidance from the archdiocesan Case Management Advisory Committee.

The reviewers examined the Minutes file of the Case Management Advisory Committee to establish that all relevant cases had been appropriately responded to. In relation to cases of priests of the Tuam Archdiocese, it was clear that the reviewers had been provided with all of the case management files that they needed to see. It was of interest to note that other appropriate matters were also discussed at this forum.

Two matters were deliberated on by the archdiocesan Case Management Advisory Committee and involved more work by the archbishop and his archdiocesan safeguarding personnel. Both of these were situations that involved members of two different Religious Orders, where the reports came initially to the archdiocese, one in 2012 and the second in 2013. In both cases, the statutory authorities were informed quickly, and Archbishop Neary made the appropriate contact with the relevant Religious leaders to formally refer the matters to them for follow-up. Both Religious leaders accepted responsibility to do so.

Two other matters could not be progressed. In the first case, in 2016, there was an anonymous report of a concern about a priest of the archdiocese, which was appropriately notified to the statutory authorities. The priest, who was named, cooperated fully, but the complaint when investigated was found to have no basis in fact, and the anonymous reporter could not be identified by the Gardaí.

The second was a third-party report in 2019 in relation to a priest of another diocese, where a relative of the person alleged to have been abused made the report, but where the person themselves did not want to report it. The Gardaí who were notified could not commence an investigation as they had no complainant. The relevant diocese was notified by the archdiocese.

The archdiocese has joined the National Case Management Committee (NCMC) of the National Board. Case files show that contact has been made with the National Board by the archbishop directly and advice sought on a number of occasions.

Members of the Advisory Committee praised the leadership provided by the archbishop in relation to safeguarding work since his appointment in 1995. They outlined their belief that the safeguarding systems and procedures currently in place are sufficiently robust to withstand any changes that may occur following the archbishop's pending retirement. He has a depth and breadth of knowledge and commitment in relation to safeguarding matters in the archdiocese, and his sense of duty, responsibility and leadership were in evidence throughout the work of this Review.

The archbishop confirmed that he has considered the issue of succession planning and the possible implications for both the Advisory Committee and case management following his retirement. He plans to meet with his successor to brief him in full in advance of his departure. He is also open to attending an Advisory Group meeting with his successor to clarify its role, responsibilities and function.

Aligned with a strong emphasis on child safeguarding in the archdiocese, there is evidence of responsibility for the care of management of respondents. This standard is therefore 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.*

### Trainers

There are three National Board registered trainers who provide training in Tuam Archdiocese. All three trainers are members of the Safeguarding Committee, and between them have extensive knowledge and experience in the area of training. The archdiocesan Director of Safeguarding assumed the role of archdiocesan Safeguarding Training Coordinator in 2019; she acknowledged the high level of training undertaken by her predecessor in Tuam Archdiocese.

### Training Plan

The Safeguarding Committee has produced a **Three Year Training Plan - Archdiocese of Tuam 2020-2023** (reviewed in February 2021). This is a comprehensive plan which is incorporated within the overall Archdiocesan Safeguarding Plan, and it is available on the archdiocesan website [www.tuamArchdiocese.org](http://www.tuamArchdiocese.org).

Training requirements and planning are primarily based on the analysis of the annual parish audits and identified in the annual report, based on the audit outcome. Additional training events are provided outside of the plan according to specific need and requirements as they arise. For example, Archbishop Neary requested safeguarding training for a group of priests who arrived in the archdiocese and who were not part of the Safeguarding Plan. Several religious orders in the archdiocese requested archdiocesan training for their members and associated staff, such as gardeners and café staff where members of the public visit their campus. Training provided in Tuam Archdiocese is National Board approved.

Types of training as outlined in the Training Plan are as follows:

- Full Day Training for priests and for all who work directly with children;
- Full Day Training for all Parish Safeguarding Representatives;
- Refresher Training (3 hours) for those who have had Full Training within the last 3 years;
- Refresher Training for priests every year at deanery meetings;
- Information Sessions at deanery level;
- Information Sessions for Cairde Mhuire, Stewards and VAKs in Knock;
- Refresher Sessions for Trainers and Church authority with National Board as required;
- Training for Support Persons, Safeguarding Committees (Tuam and Knock) and Case Management Committee by National Board;
- Any other training needs that may arise.

### Supports to Parishes

The provision of safeguarding training within the Archdiocese of Tuam is a significantly large undertaking. The spread and diversity of parishes, including island communities, along with the requirements of providing safeguarding training for the large number of personnel associated with Knock Shrine ensure that trainers are kept busy.

The archdiocesan training team maintains a training database outlining training events, dates and attendances and follows a three-year cycle. Separately, the management team at Knock Shrine maintains a database outlining similar information with specific reference to Knock Shrine personnel.

The reviewers examined documentation and training reports for the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 which detail training events - with dates, attendance numbers and attendee category, i.e. cleric, religious, lay person, volunteer, young volunteer, etc. Documentation provided indicates that training has taken place at regular intervals and at locations covering a wide geographical area across the archdiocese. From March 2020 some training events took place online, while other events were indefinitely postponed because of Covid-19.

2018 was an exceptional year for Tuam Archdiocese, culminating with the visit of Pope Francis to Knock Shrine as part of the World Meeting of Families celebrations. In that year, 26 training events coordinated by the training team took place across the archdiocese, 11 of which took place at Knock. Twelve of these events were Full Training events, and 14 were Information Sessions. An analysis of the data indicated that 67 priests received full safeguarding training, while another eight priests attended information sessions. 159 lay personnel attended full training sessions while 539 attended information sessions. The more numerically prominent of groups of those attending information sessions at Knock included 98 young volunteers (VAKs), 277 *Cairde Mhuire* volunteers, and 28 stewards and prayer guides.

In 2019, training records indicate that 10 training events were undertaken in Tuam Archdiocese, six of which were held at Knock. Seven training events were Full Training sessions, which were attended by 115 lay people, five Religious Sisters, and four priests. The remaining three safeguarding Information Sessions provided in 2019 were attended by 26 lay people, three priests, and one Religious Sister. Attendees are requested to fill in evaluation forms following participation in training events; and the Safeguarding Committee indicated to reviewers that feedback from attendees was positive.

Training records indicate that role-specific training is included in the overall Training Plan and has been provided.

Training has been provided in the Irish language at the request of Gaeltacht areas.

The value of engagement in training was apparent to reviewers following their discussion with the PSRs who spoke highly of the relevance of their training, and of the support and accessibility of the training team. It had made their roles manageable and their engagement and communication with parents, parish personnel and children /young people relevant. Different initiatives which take place at local level promoting safeguarding awareness, information and support as part of routine induction were highlighted to reviewers. For example, in one parish parents are invited to meet with the Pastoral Coordinator in advance of children engaging in the children's activity where they are encouraged to ask questions and discuss any issue or concern they may have. This Pastoral Coordinator spoke of the importance of "openness and transparency with parents from the outset."



Training has a significant importance for those involved in island parish life as isolation can sometimes be a factor. Travelling to a training event can at times be challenging because of difficult weather or sea conditions. The reviewers were informed of a peer mentoring arrangement between two PSRs, facilitated by the Safeguarding Coordinator as a means of providing additional support in this instance. This initiative, an example of good practice provided a response to a particular situation.

The reviewers were reassured in their discussion with the young people engaged in the online programme *Nua* that information and support in relation to keeping safe while engaged in the activity was made available and openly discussed with them by the group leaders prior to and intermittently during the weekly sessions.

#### Supports to Parishes – Knock Shrine

Knock Shrine welcomes visitors from Ireland and further afield. In addition to pastoral and community services the Shrine is host to forty-seven pilgrimages annually, which take place from April to October. The annual footfall averages one million visitors. Between 2020 - March 2021, despite Covid-19 restrictions footfall to the Shrine reached 400,000 plus. The grounds of the Shrine cover an area of 100 acres where the Basilica, three chapels, a counselling centre, a rest and day care centre, along with a hotel, a retreat house, a café, a museum and a medical centre are located.

In addition to the six resident chaplains, there are a number of visiting chaplains who, for example, may come for the summer months. Reviewers were informed that visiting chaplains and visiting priests - those who remain for more than two liturgies - will receive safeguarding training; visiting priests who come for a shorter period, i.e. to carry out a specific ministry, must produce a *celebret* and be recorded in the Church register. The reviewers were informed that in any event, all visiting clerics are met with by the Shrine Rector who provides them with a handout containing basic safeguarding procedures and contact details for the DLPs, Tusla and the Gardaí.

Knock Shrine has undergone a period of significant development organisationally since 2018, with permanent staff of 92 working across 22 departments.

In addition to a number of permanent staff who hold roles which bring them into contact with children and young people, there are several large groups that are engaged in seasonal work or volunteer work which, while it may not involve them working with children directly, because of the public nature of their activities, it may bring them into some contact with children.

There are three main groups of volunteers whose roles are considered critical to the smooth running of the organisation of the Shrine. These are:

- *Cairde Mhuire*, of whom there are approximately **400** adult members on file in the Shrine administration. These volunteers commit to helping out at the Shrine on one weekend per month and come from all over the country. On Sundays there are generally **20** *Cairde Mhuire* adult volunteers helping out at the Shrine.

- In addition to this group, there is a group of approximately **70** adult parish and community volunteers who come mainly from Knock and surrounding parishes. Both groups of adult volunteers are managed and coordinated by a staff member of the Shrine.
- There are approximately ninety-eight (**98**) young Volunteers at Knock Shrine (VAKS) who come from various parishes within the Tuam Archdiocese. This group of young people is incorporated within the Youth Ministry programme of the Shrine and is led and coordinated by the Youth Minister based at Knock Shrine.

Training and re-training or refresher training is operated on a three-year cycle. This suggests that there is now a requirement to retrain Church personnel, especially at Knock Shrine where the majority of personnel received training in 2018. Reviewers have been assured by Trainers and by the Knock Safeguarding Committee that this is a priority. Training personnel aim to keep attendances at training events, such as information sessions, to a more manageable number than was often the case in the past.

The Shrine is due to reopen in May 2021 due to Government relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions. Given the size of the organisation, the diversity of locations and activities and the volume of visitors, including families with children to the Shrine, the reviewers consider that careful attention should be given to achieving optimum levels of safeguarding training. This may require implementing ‘a belt and braces’ approach beyond the level that is required simply for compliance with Church guidance.

The requirements of this standard are met.

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

*Church Bodies appropriately communicate the Church’s child safeguarding message.*

The Communications Policy of Tuam Archdiocese outlines the commitment of the archdiocese to communicate *effectively its child safeguarding policies, procedures and practices. Policies and procedures are only effective if everyone, including children, understands their purpose and knows how to use them. Church Personnel, and all who work with children in church settings, must be appropriately trained in best safeguarding practices. They must be able to listen effectively to children, their parents/guardians and the lay faithful and must communicate the Church’s safeguarding message to them.*

### Communications Plan

Incorporated into the three-year Safeguarding Plan, the Communications Plan sets out the range of methods put in place to communicate how it creates a safe environment for children, and for those who work with them in a Church context. The Communications Policy and Plan are both displayed in the safeguarding section of the archdiocesan website [www.tuamarchdiocese.org](http://www.tuamarchdiocese.org).

The Child Safeguarding Statement and its related risk assessment required under the Children First Act 2015 are easily accessible in the safeguarding section of the website. An Irish language version of the Safeguarding Statement is also available; and all relevant safeguarding forms are also available in the Irish language.

Information regarding this National Board Review was displayed on the website, with the invitation extended to all who may wish to offer feedback to the National Board on safeguarding in the Archdiocese of Tuam.

Knock Shrine Safeguarding Committee has developed a Safeguarding Plan which also incorporates an annual Communications Plan, which is in line with the archdiocesan communications strategy.

The two-page Communications Plan of the archdiocese outlines in table form the methods it employs to communicate the safeguarding message - by whom; the timeframe; when to review etc.

Key mechanisms to communicate the safeguarding message are as follows –

### Websites

The safeguarding section of the archdiocesan website was upgraded in the last eighteen months and provides all safeguarding information in an easily accessible and transparent format within its ‘drop down’ boxes. It includes all guidance and forms, which are regularly updated as new guidance becomes available.

The separate website of Knock Shrine <http://www.knockshrine.ie> contains the Child Safeguarding Statement of Knock Shrine, and also comprehensive safeguarding information and guidance. There are links to the Tuam Archdiocese website.

Tuam Youth Ministry within the Archdiocese also hosts a website - [dyctuam.ie](http://dyctuam.ie) - incorporating a safeguarding section with all relevant safeguarding information and forms, including application forms/ consent forms for the various ministries and activities it engages in with young people.

All three websites prominently display safeguarding information with links to archdiocesan resources and guidance, in an easily accessible way. In the reviewer's opinion each website successfully communicates the safeguarding message.

#### Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook

The Archdiocese of Tuam, in conjunction with the five other dioceses in the Western Province produced a Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook in 2017. This is designed to facilitate the implementation of best practice in safeguarding children in all parishes within the six dioceses of the Western Province. It contains safeguarding information and the most pertinent guidance including the most commonly used forms used at parish level by Church personnel. The handbook is designed to be used in conjunction with the archdiocesan website, where wider guidance can be found and where updates on new guidance are regularly posted. The Parish Safeguarding Representatives who engaged with the reviewers described the Parish Handbook as really useful, and it is considered an essential guide for their role in the parish. The Communications Plan stated that this must be made available in every parish.

The *Safeguarding Policy* is displayed in every church building; and at the time of the Review new notices containing updated contact details reflecting changes in DLP were about to be put in place. A separate version orientated towards children and displayed where children can access it is being considered by the Safeguarding Committee.

Knock Shrine has a total of 21 notices displaying the *Safeguarding Policy* in prominent locations around the campus.

Safeguarding information and forms have been translated into Irish and are used in several Gaeltacht areas. Safeguarding personnel have examined the requirement to display information in languages other than English and Irish, and following contact with the Polish community, the largest migrant group in the archdiocese, concluded that translation into that language was not necessary, reflecting the level of integration of that community into parish life. The Safeguarding Committee advised of an openness to translation of safeguarding information into other languages should the need arise and continues to monitor this situation.

Examples were given of translators having been made available for specific family sacramental occasions in the past when there were difficulties in language identified, but this is seen as a rare event in recent years.

The Safeguarding Committee has actively encouraged PSRs to be members of their Parish Pastoral Councils where these are in place. This is seen as an effective way of informing the PPC of ongoing safeguarding issues, initiatives and information within the parish; and most PSRs are reported by safeguarding personnel to be members of their PPC. Where they are not, they are encouraged to meet with the PPC at least twice yearly in order to communicate safeguarding information.

Priests and PSRs are also encouraged to provide regular safeguarding information in their Parish Newsletters in order to create and promote safeguarding awareness in their parish. This may require greater promotion as this was not immediately apparent following a random sampling of parish newsletters by reviewers.

#### Safeguarding Sunday

*Safeguarding Sunday* is a relatively new initiative which commenced in Tuam Archdiocese in 2018. It takes place on the first Sunday of June and is designed to allow for greater emphasis on safeguarding awareness at parish Masses during that weekend. Printed brochures with safeguarding information are available for the weekend of *Safeguarding Sunday*. This was a low key event in 2020 because of the pandemic, and the Safeguarding Committee intend to promote this event into the future. The production of a dedicated Safeguarding Newsletter, which is in the planning stages at the time of this Review, will be of great assistance in helping make this an annual event.

#### New Dawn Magazine

*New Dawn* Magazine is a publication of the archdiocese, and it is published three times yearly and is available to all. The reviewers were informed that each issue carries safeguarding information in order to promote safeguarding awareness across the archdiocese.

It has been the practice over the last number of years to have two Transition Year students join the editorial board of the magazine. Members of the Safeguarding Committee who are also associated with the editorship of the magazine regard the inclusion of the young people as exciting and invigorating, and at the same incorporating time the voice of young people into the production of the magazine.

When visiting parishes, Archbishop Neary thanks each Parish Safeguarding Representative by name for their safeguarding work in the parish. He does this to show not only his sincere appreciation for their work, but also as another opportunity to promote safeguarding awareness amongst the congregation.

Since taking up post in 2019, the Safeguarding Coordinator has met with all clergy in their deanery meetings and has presented them with information regarding local and national safeguarding initiatives and developments. The affirmation of clergy for their work in safeguarding within their parishes is underlined at these meetings.

The Safeguarding Coordinator, and one other member of the committee who is also a Trainer, formally meet with their counterparts from the other five dioceses that make up the Western Province once every two months to keep abreast of current safeguarding information and practice.

The reviewers were informed by the archbishop that regular interaction with the statutory agencies took place over previous years as a direct consequence of case referral and case management. This formal contact has lessened in recent years as case numbers declined and the requirement to meet became less important. At the time of writing no formal arrangements are in place for this contact to resume; but there is a willingness on the part of archdiocesan safeguarding personnel to pursue a similar arrangement of formalising contact with statutory agencies.

The reviewers discussed with the Safeguarding Committee that sharing a platform on safeguarding practice and learning with stakeholders in the wider community would bring benefits, not only to safeguarding learning within Tuam Archdiocese, but also to other stakeholders who can hear of good safeguarding practice already taking place within the archdiocese. This can take place through participation in youth conferences, safeguarding conferences for example.

The requirements of this standard are met.

## **Standard 7: Quality Assurance**

*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.*

### Annual Parish Audit

The archdiocesan Safeguarding Committee organises and oversees the completion of the annual parish self-audits which take place in December/January each year. The self-audit form was adapted for use in Tuam Archdiocese and is an easily manageable 5-page document.

No audit took place in 2020 because of Covid-19 restrictions, with the agreement of the National Board.

The reviewers examined the analysis of audit returns for the years 2018 and 2019, as well as the reports based on the analysis for each year which were presented to the archbishop. In both years nearly 100% parish completion was achieved. Parishes which had late or no returns (4 in 2018 and 3 in 2019) had genuine reasons for non-compliance, due to absence or sickness.

The reports on the analysis of audits are prepared in a comprehensive and transparent way. Issues which required clarification following the 2018 self-audit were addressed, and this was evident when the reviewers compared the reports for both years. Some areas which required attention according to the 2018 audit included: Use of safeguarding form for external organisations using Church property; Codes of behaviour not in use in some parishes; and some children and parents unaware of who to go to with a concern.

The value of the safeguarding parish self-audit as a planning tool was emphasised to reviewers on numerous occasions by safeguarding personnel at all levels. The diocesan Safeguarding Plan 2020 - 2023 is evidently informed by the outcome of the analysis of the parish self-audits.

The practice of parish visitation by the Director of Safeguarding commenced in 2019, with assistance from members of the Safeguarding Committee; this is a means to support parish personnel and to assist, if necessary, in implementing child safeguarding policy and procedures. These parish visits will continue when Covid-19 restrictions allow.

All requirements under this standard are met.

## **Conclusion**

Stage 1 of this Review was undertaken when Government restrictions curtailed on site visitation and in person meeting with stakeholders. Stage 2 was completed in July 2021 when the easing of Covid 19 restrictions allowed for site visitation affording the opportunity for case file analysis, examination of requested data not easily accessible previously and interaction with key safeguarding personnel both in person and virtually.

The sense of strong leadership, enthusiasm and willingness to learn were discerned from the reviewers' engagement with Church safeguarding personnel.

The strong desire to guard against complacency in the area of safeguarding and the need for succession planning were recurrent themes in discussion with Church safeguarding personnel throughout the review process. In the reviewer's opinion both of these issues are being actively addressed and note in this regard the collaborative teamwork approach adopted by the Safeguarding Committee

The reviewers conclude that there is evidence of a robust safeguarding structure and practice in place under the active and compassionate the leadership of Archbishop Neary. All seven standards comprising both parts of the review have been deemed to be met