



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

**Second Review of Child Safeguarding Practice**  
  
**in the**  
  
**Diocese of Achonry**  
  
**undertaken by**  
  
**The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the**  
  
**Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board)**

**Date of Review Report: 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 compliance, the Diocese of Achonry invited the National Board to undertake a review of practice, which took place in November 2022.

## Introduction

The Diocese of Achonry was previously reviewed in August 2013 under the 2008 standards, *Safeguarding Children - Standards and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2008*. The purpose of this second round of Reviews is to assess practice against the current standards, *Safeguarding Children - Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, and to make statements based on evidence, which provide:

- Public confidence that the Church body is safe for children
- Confirmation 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 happening
- Independent verification of Parish Self-Audit and subsequent analysis
- Opportunities for learning.

The terms of reference for this Review in terms of Case Management cover the period from the date of the last review in August 2013 to November 2022 inclusive; while Child Safeguarding practice is assessed from the date of the introduction of the 2016 standards in January 2017, through to November 2022.

The Review was carried out with due regard to compliance with *Children First*, on the basis that the Diocese of Achonry is deemed to be a relevant body under the Children First Act 2015.

### **The Diocese of Achonry**

The Diocese of Achonry covers a geographical area of approximately 560 square miles (1500 km sq.), and it consists of 23 parishes spanning the counties of Mayo (11 parishes) and Sligo (11 parishes), with one (1) parish in Roscommon. There are about 40,000 Catholics resident in the diocese, served by **36** priests. The diocese is mostly made up of rural townlands and villages, with a small number of medium sized towns (Tubbercurry, Ballaghaderreen, Charlestown, Foxford, Kiltimagh, Collooney, and Swinford).

The Diocese is in the ecclesiastical province of Tuam.

At the time of the 2013 review, Bishop Brendan Kelly was the Bishop of Achonry.

From February 2018 to August 2020, Fr Dermot Meehan was the Diocesan Administrator.

From August 2020 to the present, Bishop Paul Dempsey has been the Bishop of Achonry.

As referenced above, the Diocese of Achonry has 36 priests (including the bishop) covering 23 parishes, with 47 churches. Of these priests, twenty-four (24) are active in parish or diocesan ministry (23 in parish, 1 in Pastoral Leadership); three (3) are working in education (2 in schools and 1 in St Patrick's Seminary, Maynooth); and eight (8) are retired. The diocese also has two (2) deacons.

Five other clergy are associated in various ways with the Diocese:

- One retired cleric lives outside the jurisdiction, but he retains an address within the diocese, and he provides cover when he returns;
- Two priests from the Holy Cross Order ministers at the Father Peyton Centre;
- One retired priest from another Irish Diocese lives within the diocesan area;
- One priest from outside the jurisdiction officiated at a wedding, but he then remained in the area for some weeks. His Garda vetting is for 3 years
- One retired priest from outside the jurisdiction lives within the diocese and ministers at Knock Shrine.

### **Religious**

The diocese has one male order involved in delivering family ministry, namely the Congregation of the Holy Cross, based at the Fr. Peyton Memorial Centre at Attymass, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

Other congregations located within the diocese are:

- The Sisters of Mercy
- The Marist Sisters
- The Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition

The **Recommendations** from the last NBSCCCI review in 2013 (in accordance with the 2008 Standards) are set out below and include an update of actions taken by the Diocese of Achonry. Individual names have been removed from this update apart from the Church Authority.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Implementation status</b>
<p><u>Recommendation 1</u></p> <p>The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee should review Criterion 1.6, with a view to inserting a clear statement about the role of the Church authority and of the Designated Person in managing priests and other diocesan personnel in respect of whom allegations have been made, but where the civil processes have been discontinued and/or completed.</p>	<p>The Achonry Diocesan Safeguarding Policy was launched in 2012, reviewed, and updated following the 2013 Review.</p> <p>The diocese adopted and now uses only the Policy and Standards of the National Board, which are summarised in the Western Province Parish Handbook; and it has linked the diocesan website to the National Board website.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 2</u></p> <p>While Bishop Kelly has no authority over other bishops, the reviewers recommend that he should contact the bishops of the two retired priests, advising that they put precepts in place, to include no public ministry, no unsupervised contact with children, and not wearing priest's clothing. And ask them to forward a copy of the precepts to the priests, and to Bishop Kelly for his records.</p>	<p>Bishop Brendan Kelly wrote to the two relevant external bishops requesting confirmation that they had issued precepts for their respective priests. The bishop of one external diocese did respond without undue delay to Bishop Kelly in 2014, and confirmed that a precept was in place regarding his priest. This retired cleric never ministered in Achonry diocese, and he died in 2021. Precepts were put in place for the one priest now deceased.</p> <p>In the case of the second priest who does not exercise a public ministry. Both the previous bishop and the current bishop have written to his home diocese. The home diocese has clarified that they have management responsibility and oversight of this priest.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 3</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Committee should consider Criterion 2.5 further and include a child/young person centred complaints policy in its next review of the policy and procedures.</p>	<p>See current child friendly brochure; and page 47 of the Western Province Parish Handbook.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 4</u></p> <p>That the Bishop of Achonry arranges for the careful inventory and transfer of all vetting files and other records from parishes to a secure location in the diocesan offices.</p>	<p>The former policy required keeping copies of parish vetting disclosures in the Diocesan Office. The current practice requires keeping copies of all safeguarding forms (SG01, SG04), confidentiality forms, consent forms and Garda Vetting disclosures for parish staff and volunteers securely filed in the parish.</p> <p>The Director of Safeguarding sends the Checklist for Parishes regularly to remind Parish Priests and Reps of best practice.</p>

<p><u>Recommendation 5</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Committee should review Standard 3, Criterion 3.6 in order to strengthen the mandate for ‘whistleblowing’.</p>	<p>The diocese adopted and now uses only the Policy and Standards of the National Board, which are summarised in the Western Province Parish Handbook; and it has linked the diocesan website to the National Board website.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 6</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Committee should review Standard 3 Criterion 3.8 in order to strengthen the anti-discriminatory message.</p>	<p>The diocese adopted and now uses only the Policy and Standards of the National Board, which are summarised in the Western Province Parish Handbook; and it has linked the diocesan website to the National Board website.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 7</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Committee should review Standard 3, Criterion 3.10, with the trainers, in order to give more direction on risk assessment for overnight trips.</p>	<p>The diocese adopted and now uses only the Policy and Standards of the National Board, which are summarised in the Western Province Parish Handbook; and it has linked the diocesan website to the National Board website.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 8</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Committee needs to ensure that a formal training needs analysis is carried out as the basis for the design, implementation and review of an annual training plan for the diocese.</p>	<p>See Diocesan Safeguarding Children Training Plan</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 9</u></p> <p>Bishop Kelly, in conjunction with the Safeguarding Committee and the other key members of the safeguarding structure, need to review diocesan training capacity, in order to ensure that the resources are in place to achieve full compliance with Standard 4.</p>	<p>This has taken time to deal with - there was a shortage of trainers in the diocese then, but four trainers are now in place.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 10</u></p> <p>The Bishop and the Safeguarding Committee should agree and implement a regular formal report from the committee to the bishop addressing the state of safeguarding in the diocese.</p>	<p>Annual Reports are submitted to the Bishop as required</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 11</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Committee should, with the support of trainers consider ways of directly involving children and young people in articulating and communicating their right to be safe.</p>	<p>Training is provided for relevant parties and material is updated in line with National Board Policies.</p> <p>See Diocesan Safeguarding Children Training Plan</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 12</u></p> <p>The Bishop, in consultation with the Safeguarding Committee, needs to develop a formal safeguarding communications policy for the diocese based on the principle of transparency and openness, knitting together all of the elements of the safeguarding structure, developing communication initiatives for</p>	<p>See Diocesan Safeguarding Children Communications Plan</p> <p>See Bishop Paul Dempsey’s Pastoral Letter for Safeguarding Sunday on 7 November 2021.</p>

children and young people and providing for management of the media as required.	
<p><u>Recommendation 13</u></p> <p>Bishop Kelly, the Victim Support Person and the Safeguarding Committee need to develop and implement a diocesan strategy for reaching out and supporting victims of clerical abuse.</p>	<p>At the time of the Audit, there was a dedicated Victim Support Person. With regard to strategy, as stated previously, the Diocese adopted and now uses only the Policy and Standards of the National Board, in this case Standard 3.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 14</u></p> <p>Bishop Kelly and the Safeguarding Committee need to address Criterion 7.1 by developing and implementing a three-year strategic safeguarding plan for the diocese.</p>	<p>See current three-year Strategic Plan</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 15</u></p> <p>Bishop Kelly and the Safeguarding Committee need to design and develop a child/young person friendly process for ascertaining their views on safeguarding (to be taken forward with Recommendations 3 and 12).</p>	<p><u>Recommendation 15 – Current Status</u></p> <p>Training of Safeguarding Representatives and other personnel is ongoing and managed by the Director of Safeguarding.</p> <p>There are a number of child friendly leaflets provided and, again, policy is that of the National Board.</p> <p>The 2022 Parish Audit will now contain a question on the feedback from children to the parish priests and representatives.</p>

The diocese has implemented all of the above recommendations since the 2013 Review.

## Process of Review

The review process involved two reviewers spending two days on site completing fieldwork. Prior to and during that time, the reviewers interviewed safeguarding personnel, volunteers, parents, clergy and young people. All meetings were face-to-face, apart from an online meeting with the Safeguarding Committee, and a telephone call to the Western Province Vetting Office.

During the fieldwork phase, we read relevant case files and completed an analysis of compliance with Standard 2, 3 and 4.

Visits were made to three parish churches where children, parents, volunteers and clergy were met. Safeguarding policies and procedures and their implementation by the diocese were assessed during these visits.

The reviewers provided initial verbal feedback to the Bishop of Achonry, and later sent him a written summary of their findings.

This report has been quality assured by the National Board and checked for factual accuracy by the Bishop of Achonry, prior to signing off on this final version.

The reviewers met and spoke with:

- Bishop Paul Dempsey, as the Church authority
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- The previous and current Chairs of the Safeguarding Committee
- The Diocesan Secretary, who is also the Diocesan Chancellor and a Parish Priest. He also has responsibility for the diocesan website
- The Diocesan Administrator who was in post from February 2018 to August 2020.
- The Director of Safeguarding, who is also an accredited trainer with NBSCCCI
- The two current DLP's and the former DLP.
- A call was made to the Vetting Office of the Western Province in Galway city.
- The diocesan Support Person who is also a member of the Safeguarding Committee
- A Priest Advisor
- Across the 3 parish churches visited, the reviewers met two Parish Priests, a Sacristan, two parish Local Safeguarding Representatives (LSRs), and the leader of a Folk Choir
- In these parish locations, the reviewers also met with children and young people, some of whom were altar servers, and others, members of a Folk Choir. In all locations where the reviewers met children, their parents were also present

## **STANDARDS**

This section provides the findings of the Review. The template employed to present the findings are the seven standards, set down and described in the Church guidance, Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2016. The Diocese of Achonry agreed to adopt Safeguarding Children 2016 as its child safeguarding policy through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016.

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; 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.*

Information was reviewed from the diocesan website, parish websites and in hard copy. Further evidence was gathered on site visits and in discussions with a range of individuals, including young people and their parents.

It was noted that a significant document is the Safeguarding Children Parish Handbook, used across the Western Province, and that this is being reviewed. This document was published in 2017, prior to the last iteration of Children First in 2018.

The diocese adheres to National Board Guidance, with the Parish Handbook providing additional supporting information to parishes.

In compliance with the Children First Act 2015, the diocese updated its Child Safeguarding Statement in October 2022. A version of this document was evidenced on the diocesan website. An example of the diocese's thoroughness in safeguarding children is in its application of Garda vetting, which we were able to evidence during the parish visits, and in the Diocesan Office where the vetting records are stored and overseen by the Director of Safeguarding.

The Parish Priests securely hold copies of all safeguarding forms, consent forms and Garda vetting disclosures for all relevant parish staff and volunteers in the relevant parish office. The parishes retain the originals of the applications, while copies are securely retained in the Diocesan Safeguarding Office, and evidence of both filing systems was seen by the reviewers.

In relation to clergy, they are reviewed every 3 years, and the tracking of this process by the Director of Safeguarding was evidenced.

Any priests intending to come to the area and minister for a period go through a comprehensive system of checks before the bishop gives them permission to minister. An example seen by the reviewers involved an application from outside the jurisdiction, which required:

- Garda vetting;
- Completion of identity validation documents; and
- A letter of good standing from a previous Church authority

A register of external priests seeking permission to minister is held in the Diocesan Office. The Diocesan Chancellor has responsibility for the registration of temporary marriage solemnisers and the associated marriage paperwork.

Our online meeting with the Western Province Vetting Office confirmed the view that Garda vetting is safely processed in the Diocese of Achonry. Vetting of all relevant persons is updated on a three-year cycle.

The numbers for vetting applications of volunteers submitted by the Diocese of Achonry are as follows:

Year	Number
2017	70
2018	32
2019	73
2020	21
2021	97
2022	92

The reviewers evidenced the application of Codes of Behaviour during our parish visits. In one church Sacristy, the code of behaviour for altar servers was displayed and was signed by all servers and by the Parish Priest.

On these parish visits, we also evidenced the use of the sacristy and general registers, issued in January 2022. Evidence was seen of *celebrats* of visiting priests being checked, and of signing in by altar servers.

Evidence was also seen of appropriate adult-to-child ratios (2 adults to 7 young people) in the Folk Choir we met. This choir has two (2) adult leaders, both Garda vetted. Practice for the folk group takes place in an upstairs meeting room in the parochial house on Thursdays, and they are normally let in to the house by the priest or in his absence, the sacristan. There are always two folk group leaders present, as their rule is that if one of them is unable to attend, there is no practice or performance. There are fourteen (14) young people in the group; however, there are never more than seven (7) or eight (8) attending at any one time. During the practice / performance, the two leaders are always present and either the priest or sacristan can be called upon if needed. One of the group has turned 18, and she is being vetted.

Guidance on codes of behaviour for adults and children as well as for safe care for children were evidenced in the Parish Handbook.

In terms of third party use of Church property, the reviewers examined the required paperwork held by a Parish Priest for one organisation already using Church property, as well as the plans in place for another organisation requesting future use. The procedures for such use are also set out in the Parish Handbook.

The reviewers also saw evidence of a comprehensive safeguarding children hazards assessment completed by one of the parishes we visited, and were satisfied with its thoroughness. The reviewers noted also that the Director of Safeguarding, the DLP and the Deputy DLP had all attended National Board training in Localised Risk Assessment in September 2022.

As an example of the level of commitment to safeguarding children at parish level, the summary of the reviewers' visit to the diocesan Cathedral is as follows:

The reviewers met with the Parish Priest, one of the Sacristans who is also a Local Safeguarding Representative (LSR), parents and their children who were altar-servers. The Folk Choir and its group leaders were also met separately.

There were approximately 10 altar servers in the age range 8 to 13 years, and their parents present. There are 39 altar servers altogether in the parish. Safeguarding Children posters were observed in Church entrance, and child-friendly Safeguarding versions were at children's eye level for ease of reading. Safeguarding leaflets for adults were available from an information table inside the entrance.

Children were asked what the safeguarding posters and leaflets in the church were about. They outlined that the posters were about them feeling safe. They were asked to whom they would talk if they did not feel safe or were worried about anything. They said they would talk to parents, teachers or their choir leaders.

Parents outlined that they were happy that their children were back altar serving, and they felt that all necessary safeguarding arrangements were in place. They outlined that they had had signed consent forms and had received a parents' leaflet about safeguarding. The children had received a Code of Behaviour for themselves, and the parents were aware that there was Code of Behaviour for adults who were in contact with their children during parish activities.

The Local Safeguarding Representative had only taken up this role in the last few months, having attended general safeguarding training. The LSR meets regularly with the Parish Priest and has helped him with paperwork for altar servers, i.e. consent forms and leaflet distribution to parents. There was an induction for the altar servers, which parents also attended.

There are two Sacristans for the church. One (female) is responsible for assisting children to robe for Mass. She signs them in; and she oversees the sign in register for visiting priests as well.

In the sacristy, we observed:

- the sign in register
- the children's Code of Behaviour (The Parish Priest had explained the Code of Behaviour to the children and they had written their names on the poster)
- the *Celebret* notice
- the children's safeguarding posters
- the general safeguarding posters

In our meeting with the Parish Priest and the Director of Safeguarding about parish safeguarding administration, we saw comprehensive safeguarding documentation. The parish has four churches, all of which are covered by the PP.

In relation to this parish visit, the reviewers had sight of:

- Parish audits forms from 2021
- Altar servers' consent forms
- Vetting documentation for volunteers
- Folk Choir consent forms and vetting forms
- External organizations agreement forms
- Complaints form (template)
- Data protection consent forms
- Risk assessment appropriately tailored to specific local risks.

Reviewers were shown a locked room and secured filing cabinets where all safeguarding documentation is kept. The Parish Handbook lists the specific documentation that must be stored in this secure environment, examples of which are listed above.

The PP discussed the setting up of a cross-agency youth committee to address the needs of young people in the parish. The reviewers noted that the PP displayed a child-centered approach to the issues discussed. The PP believes that the bishop is very supportive of youth activities.

The last Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage was held in 2015, and it is proposed to reestablish it.

The feedback from the members of the youth choir indicated how much the young people get from participating. They build friendships and enjoy creating music together. One member spoke of how little there was to do in the town, particularly if you did not like sport and liked music. They perform at Saturday evening Masses. One leader had been part of the youth choir for 30 years and the other, currently teaching, had been involved since being a teenager.

Members were clear about who they should go to if they had concerns or worries. Members said they felt safe in the group. Safeguarding posters were evident in the rehearsal room. All documentation relating to the youth choir was evident (as above) in parish files, i.e. vetting, consent forms etc.

The reviewers recognised that the renewal of any children's ministry within the diocese post pandemic has been problematic. However, the diocese already has 10 parishes, including the one detailed above that have re-engaged in ministry with children and young people. The children and young people who were met across the three parishes visited, expressed that they felt safe in the ministry in which they were involved, and they appeared happy to be attending activities within the Church again. The Director of Safeguarding has resumed parish visits this year and has prioritised supportive visits to these parishes first. To date she has visited nine (9) out of the ten (10) parishes in 2022.

As noted above, ministry with children by the diocese is mainly focussed on altar servers and choir or folk group members. The diocese has no current direct involvement in the Pope John Paul II Award programme, and the last Lourdes Pilgrimage was in 2015.

Family and Children's Ministry outside of the parish structure has been provided since 2014 at the Father Peyton Memorial Centre. As noted earlier, this centre is the responsibility of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, and they provide day retreats for schools and for confirmation classes, for example. The groups attend the centre accompanied by their teachers and each event is the subject of an agreement between the centre and the relevant school. The reviewers established that the clerics involved attend diocesan safeguarding training and that are Garda vetted. There is a person nominated from Achonry Diocese on the Management Board of the centre. The centre's website can be accessed at <https://fatherpeytoncentre.ie/>.

The Parish Handbook contains clear guidance regarding the processing of complaints and the procedures for whistleblowing. Neither has been activated since the first Review.

There are three diocesan priests working outside of the diocesan parish structures. The reviewers were advised that these clerics have been made aware of the requirement to comply with the safeguarding procedures where they are employed externally, primarily in education.

Key members of the diocesan safeguarding team were interviewed during the fieldwork. It is recognised that while this is a relatively new team, the reviewers found its members to be very committed. The various members are:

- Director of Safeguarding - appointed September 2020
- Acting Director of Safeguarding - appointed February 2021
- DLP and Deputy DLP - appointed April 2021
- Diocesan Support Person for Complainants - appointed June 2021
- Diocesan Priest Advisor - appointed June 2021

The Western Province also has a Data Protection Officer who was appointed in January 2021, but the reviewers did not interview him.

The use of social media is guided by the National Board guidance as well as the guidance contained within the Parish Handbook. The guidance in the Parish Handbook covers the issues of consent, the use of the Internet, texting and emailing, photography, CCTV and the use of webcams.

The reviewers noted in particular the establishment of regular internal safeguarding meetings in 2021 to support and assist the Safeguarding Committee in pursuing and maintaining the safeguarding of children agenda within the diocese, and the reviewers had access to the records of these meetings.

As discussed with the bishop and his safeguarding team, they could consider appointing some LSRs as members of the Safeguarding Committee in order to give this key group of volunteers a voice at diocesan level and to enhance the Committee's connection with parishes.

The reviewers evidenced that all relevant policies and procedures are being implemented to ensure, as far as practicable, the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children and young people. On that basis, **Standard 1 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.*

Five (5) new notifications by the Diocese of Achonry were received since the date of the last Review; and three (3) other files read by reviewers related to cases active since before that Review in 2013; and they are discussed in Standard 4 below.

Three (3) allegations of a sexual abuse nature, related to priests who were deceased at the time they were reported to the diocese. Two (2) other allegations reported since 2013, the date of the last Review, related to physical abuse.

Table 1 records the reports of new allegations or concerns about sexual abuse received by the diocese since the last Review.

**Table 1. Child Safeguarding concerns of a sexual abuse nature relating to diocesan clergy received by Diocese of Achonry since 2013 Review**

Status	Number of allegations	Gardai notified	Tusla notified	National Board notified	Appropriate timely canonical action taken
Cleric 1 – deceased –	1	Yes - 6 months after the identity of the priest became known.	Yes – 9 years later**	Yes – 6 months after the identity of the priest became known	N/A*
Cleric 2 – deceased	1	Yes – 7 years later	Yes – 7 years later**	Yes – 7 years later	N/A*
Cleric 3 – deceased	1	Yes – 9 months later	Yes – 10 days later by Religious Order **	Yes – Verbally on the day. Six days later in writing.	N/A*

\*Canonical action was not possible as the cleric was deceased

\*\*There was no requirement at the time to report cases against deceased clerics to HSE/Tusla at the time of receipt

There were delays in notifications being made by the diocese to the statutory authorities in all three cases where there were allegations of sexual abuse.

In addition to the three cases above, there were two notifications in relation to physical abuse. In both cases, there were significant delays in reporting – in one case, which was reported to the Diocese by Tusla, it was 11 months before the Diocese informed An Garda Síochána and the National Board. In the second case, the allegation has not been reported to either statutory body and was reported to the National Board during this Review. Physical abuse does not constitute a delict (crime) in canon law, and so no canonical process can be initiated.

Based on the information in the case management files, the following observations provided by the reviewers provide an account of the sequence of events.

**Cleric 1:** This priest was a member of a religious order who, although ministering as a curate in an Achonry parish, was not incardinated into the diocese. The mother of the complainant told a priest of the diocese in 1995 about the alleged abuse of her child, but she did not name the respondent at that time. It was three years later in 1998 that the then bishop, Bishop Thomas Flynn (who retired in November 2007), met with the complainant. Afterwards, he received a letter from the complainant about their unhappiness with how they had been received by him in their recent meeting. The bishop wrote back immediately, apologising to the complainant and offering them counselling. There is no evidence that the complainant identified the priest involved, as Bishop Flynn has not recorded the name of the accused priest.

This is where matters lay, until 2013, when the identity of the respondent was made known to the diocese by the complainant's mother as Cleric 1, who had died in 1996. The then bishop, Bishop Kelly, while undertaking a visit to this family in December 2013, was informed by the mother of the complainant that Cleric 1 had sexually abused her child in the 1980s. This was the first time that the identity of the respondent was recorded by the diocese. It was, however, another six (6) months later before the Bishop Kelly raised the matter with the Provincial of Cleric 2's religious order, and notified the Gardaí and the National Board of the allegation. Eight (8) years later, a notification of retrospective abuse was made by the diocese to Tusla. That agency responded that it would not do anything, as the named priest was long deceased.

At the complainant's request, they were not named in either notification to the statutory agencies. Offers of support to the complainant and their family were not taken up by them.

**Cleric 2:** Statutory notifications in the case of Cleric 2 were made almost seven (7) years after the case was first reported to the diocese in 2015. The respondent priest was long deceased by this time.



**Cleric 3:** In the case of Cleric 3, the alleged abuse occurred in a convent within the diocese, where the priest said Mass. The report was made to the relevant female Religious Order through the complainant's solicitor, and it related to events that are alleged to have happened in the 1980s. By the time the report was made known to the diocese, the named priest was dead for over 20 years. Two years after the report was received, the newly appointed DLPs of the diocese requested verification, in writing, from the Religious Order that they had notified the Gardaí and Tusla of what was being alleged. The Religious Order confirmed that it had notified Tusla, but they did not confirm whether they had notified An Garda Síochana or not.

The diocesan DLP then notified the Gardaí, three years after the initial notification to the diocese. At the time of the initial report, the diocesan DLP did not notify An Garda Síochana, but they did notify the National Board, who advised that a report to An Garda Síochana was required.

Two meetings of diocesan safeguarding personnel with representatives of Tusla took place during the years of the pandemic. Such liaison meetings are no longer undertaken by Tusla, but the diocese can informally consult with the Tusla duty social work service to seek advice about of a concern they have received. No formal meetings with An Garda Síochana have taken place in recent years; but as with Tusla, individual case consultations can occur.

The reviewers are satisfied that good informal relationships exist between safeguarding personnel of the diocese and representatives of the Gardaí and of Tusla. They appreciate the challenges faced by the diocese in establishing tri-partite relationships with the statutory authorities, as it covers three (3) Tusla areas and three (3) Garda Divisional areas.

In summary, the reviewers have concerns regarding delays in notifications being made to An Garda Síochana in all cases. Whilst there was no obligation to report allegations against deceased clerics to Tusla, evidence would also suggest there were delays in reporting living cases to them. There were also significant delays in reporting allegations to the National Board in 3 cases.

**This standard is not met.**

#### **Recommendation 1**

While Bishop Dempsey cannot be held accountable for the omissions of the past he must ensure going forward that all allegations suspicions and concerns notified to Achonry Diocese are reported to the statutory authorities, without delay, using a standardised reporting format.

### **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.*

Prior to this Review, Bishop Dempsey placed a notice on the Diocese of Achonry website to inform people of the forthcoming Review. This notice, evidenced by the reviewers, invited anyone to come forward to the diocese or to the reviewers if they wished to express any opinions relating to child safeguarding practice in the diocese, or if they wished to report a concern. Contact details were also given for Tusla and An Garda Síochána.

There were no contacts made in response to this notice.

Guidance on the care of complainants is detailed on the National Board's website at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Standards/Standard%203.pdf>, which is cross-referenced within the Parish Handbook.

Seven case management files were reviewed, three of the cases involved direct pastoral contact with complainants, either face-to-face with, or in written format by the Church authority. Some of the notifications were reported through solicitors, where there was no direct contact with the complainant.

- In relation to two allegations of physical abuse the allegations were made through the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB), and there was no direct contact with the complainants.
- In another case, during a home visit the then bishop was informed of abuse allegations against a deceased cleric that a parent had made on behalf of their adult child in the late 90's to the bishop at the time. The parent was critical of the then Bishop (Bishop Flynn) and his inaction. When Bishop Kelly met the parent, the child, by now an adult, was already receiving counselling. Further support was offered by Bishop Kelly, but this was not taken up by the complainant. The complainant requested however that they would not be named in any notifications to the statutory authorities.
- In a third case, which related to an allegation against a deceased respondent Bishop Kelly met the complainant. The complainant in this case was already receiving counselling in the jurisdiction they lived in. When they were in Ireland in the summer of 2015, they telephoned Bishop Kelly, to inform him of alleged sexual abuse by the priest who had died a number of years previously. The case management file records that the bishop met the complainant on the same day as the phone call, and made a written record of the details of the allegation. The complainant's counsellor had encouraged them to make a report to Achonry Diocese.

- In one other case, the diocese was notified of abuse allegations through contact from an external agency. The diocese offered support to the complainants through their solicitor, which included the option of meeting the bishop or the DLP. The complainant did not seek a subsequent meeting with the bishop or the DLP. The diocesan solicitor wrote to the complainant's solicitor with the name and contact details of the DLP, advised of the availability of Towards Healing to the complainant, and stated that the diocese had made notifications to the two statutory agencies.
- In relation to the other two clerics, neither was incardinated into Achonry Diocese or ministered there, and while both lived in the diocesan administrative area, they were from other Church bodies in other jurisdictions. The responsibility of Achonry Diocese did not include complainant support in either case.

The reviewers noted that a lay female Support Person was appointed by the diocese in June 2021. This person has attended the safeguarding training provided by the Director of Safeguarding. To date, she has not been able to avail of role-specific training from the National Board, primarily due to the pandemic. She confirmed when interviewed that there have been no new referrals requiring their input since their appointment.

The Support Person was of the view that having a mentor from other dioceses in the Western Province would be very helpful, and she will pursue this with the Director of Safeguarding. She understands her role to be victim led and as empowering complainants to tell their story. The Support Person appreciates that the role may be challenging, but she believes that her previous experience in restorative justice and in working for Tusla will assist in hearing and supporting victims. She is confident in being supported in her role by the Director of Safeguarding and by the bishop. The Support Person is a member of the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee and therefore possesses a working knowledge of the safeguarding structures and supports available to complainants.

The diocese had no ongoing contact with any complainants; therefore, we were unable to interview a complainant as part of the assessment of this standard. However, through review of the case files and meetings with key safeguarding personnel, we established that there was under the tenure of Bishop Kelly and now under Bishop Dempsey a compassionate pastoral response to complainants from the diocese. This was evidenced on file and expressed in person by the willingness of all the relevant Church authorities both to meet with complainants and to resource the necessary system response.

**The 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.*

Seven (7) case files were reviewed under this standard – four (4) relating to diocesan priests, one (1) to a priest belonging to a Religious Order, and two (2) relating to priests from other Church bodies. In addition, in one further case, addressed by the Reviewers during the last Review in 2013, action undertaken by Bishop Kelly since then had been written up.

Matters relating to two priests from outside the diocese, and outside the jurisdiction were commented on in the National Board report of 2013 and required follow-up action by Achonry. The case records demonstrate that in 2014, Bishop Brendan Kelly wrote to the two relevant external bishops requesting confirmation that they had issued precepts for their respective priests. The bishop of one external diocese did respond without undue delay to Bishop Kelly in 2014, and confirmed that a precept was in place regarding his priest. This retired cleric never ministered in Achonry diocese, and he died in 2021. In this case, the two Church authorities maintained a correspondence about the retired priest between 2014 and 2021 concerning the monitoring of the safeguarding arrangements.

In the case of the second priest, still living, Bishop Dempsey wrote again in 2022 and requested confirmation of what action had been taken. He received clarification from the priest's home diocese that they have management responsibility and oversight of this priest. Bishop Dempsey has reported the existence of this priest in the diocese to Tusla and An Garda Síochana in all three areas of the diocese, so that, in consultation with the statutory authorities, all risk to children can be assessed and managed appropriately. The National Board has clarified that the Diocese of Achonry has no jurisdiction in this case.

Cleric 1 was not incardinated into the diocese and so remained the responsibility of the Provincial of the religious order of which he was a member. He had ministered in Achonry Diocese as a parish curate for seven years.

Clerics 2 and 3, had both been incardinated into the Diocese of Achonry, but were deceased at the time the allegation was made.

In respect of two priests against whom there were allegations of physical abuse, reference has already been made to the delays in notifications to the statutory authorities. In one case, the diocese sought advice from the National Case Management Committee, which provided safeguarding advice pending the outcome of any inquiries. The advice was followed in line with risk assessment procedures. There was no possibility of canonical action, as physical abuse does not constitute a crime in canon law. In the second case, Bishop Kelly met the priest and put the allegation of physical abuse to him. He denied it, and there was no further action.

A final case related to a priest, accused of physical abuse prior to the last review in 2013, and was shared with the National Board following the fieldwork for this Review. The Diocese reported on action taken immediately after the last Review in 2013. Bishop Kelly acted upon the advice of the National Board, and he liaised with Tusla, which agency determined there was no risk to children and no further action was required.

The diocese appointed a Diocesan Priest Advisor in June 2021. To date, this person has received the basic child safeguarding training provided to diocesan clergy, but he has not yet been provided with role-specific training, which is dependent on the National Board's training calendar. The Priest Advisor understands his role as being a support to the respondent, keeping them up to date with any processes ongoing, and to be aware of any needs they might have in relation to their wellbeing. The Priest Advisor comes from a counselling background, so believes this would help him in this role. He outlined that the role would be challenging, but he believes that he would be able to manage this.

The reviewers had no direct contact with respondents, nor did we receive any completed questionnaires from any respondents.

Communication between the former bishop/administrator and the former DLP was however not consistently recorded in all files. It is now established practice in the diocese that all information concerning abuse allegations coming to the notice of a bishop will be channelled through the DLP to the statutory authorities without delay.

Since 2020, a case-management review process has been established by the diocese and this is seen as a positive move in quality assurance, and in ensuring that critical actions have been taken. Records of these meetings were seen by the reviewers.

Going forward, further improvement in compliance with this standard would be achieved by ensuring that all contact between diocesan safeguarding personnel, including the bishop, and living respondents is recorded.

The National Board is aware that the Diocese of Achonry has a new safeguarding team and system already in place.

The case files were readable and fronted by a case summary. Some files lacked documentation it would be expected that they would contain.

Standard 4 relates to progressing an investigation under canon law and managing risk relating to abuse of a sexual nature. The cases cited above relate to physical abuse, which is not a crime under canon law, and no canonical action could have been taken.

The reviewers therefore conclude that the structures and processes are in place to manage and oversee cases of a sexual abuse nature in Achonry Diocese, and have determined that **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.*

Safeguarding Children Training comes within the terms of reference of the Safeguarding Committee, which has produced a three-year Training Plan, 2021 to 2024, examined by the reviewers. This comprehensive and detailed plan sets targets for the delivery of safeguarding training, the training to be delivered to each target group, and the frequency of delivery. Along with its own two accredited trainers, the diocese can call on the services of trainers from other western dioceses. Of note in this plan is the provision of a full day of safeguarding training to Lay Apostolates, including the Legion of Mary and the Couples for Christ.

The format for the plan is reproduced here, with just one target group reproduced as an example.

Target group	Training required	Delivery by Western Province Trainer (Yes/No)	Delivery by National Board (Yes/No)	When	Location	Notes
Volunteers	Full Day Training	Yes		June 2022 October 2022	Throughout the Diocese	Completed for 2022

Training is planned for the following personnel over the three years of the plan: The bishop, diocesan priests, Local Safeguarding Representatives, DLPs, the Director of Safeguarding, volunteers, Lourdes Pilgrimage organisers, groups working with children at parish or diocesan level, the Safeguarding Children Committee, the Support Person, the Priest Advisor, Trainers and Lay Apostolates.

The annual training needs analysis was conducted as part of the 2021 Parish Self-audits, the report of which the reviewers examined.

The reviewers also met with one of the two accredited National Board diocesan trainers, the Director of Safeguarding. Three other accredited trainers from the Western Province can be called on to assist if required, which provides significant capacity to deliver training across the diocese, now that in-person training has recommenced.

The Director of Safeguarding also carries out supportive visits to parishes. In 2022, the visits have prioritised visits to parishes where children's ministry has restarted.

Parish based face-to-face safeguarding children training recommenced in June 2022, following the lifting of pandemic restrictions. Prior to this, the last full training year had been 2019. The Director of Safeguarding keeps records of attendance at training events, including evaluations from attendees, and these were examined by the reviewers.

In the year April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018, for example, there were four training sessions held in the diocese. The *Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards 2016* was new at this time and its requirements were the focus of training for three of the four sessions. The fourth session was on the Parish Audit exercise and the introduction of E-vetting. One hundred individuals attended across the four sessions, including 38 priests and religious.

The secure database managed by the Director of Safeguarding tracks the status of Garda vetting, as well as training records of individuals from the following groups:

- Clergy
- Local Safeguarding Representatives in parishes
- Sacristans
- Volunteers involved with groups such as choirs
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- The diocesan Lourdes Committee

To date in 2022 the following training has been delivered:

- Local Safeguarding Representative Training delivered to 30 clerics and 36 representatives jointly
- Child Safeguarding training delivered to 26 priests and 154 volunteers.

This training includes retired priests, deacons and those clerics ministering outside of the diocesan parish structure. The content of the training programmes was made available in hard copy to the reviewers by the Director of Safeguarding.

During the parish visits, the reviewers met with Local Safeguarding Representatives who spoke positively about the safeguarding training that they had received.

Bishop Dempsey attended National Board training as a new Church authority.

The recently appointed Designated Liaison persons have also attended:

- Online training from the National Board in respect of their role
- In-person training from the National Board in respect of Localised Risk Assessment and Local Audit training.
- In-person training from the National Board in respect of recording



Both DLPs were due to attend in-person National Board training in December 2022 for their specific safeguarding role, but this was cancelled and confirmation of a new date is awaited. The Support Person for complainants and the Priest Advisor are also waiting to attend role specific training when it is next offered by the National Board.

From the reviewers' interviews with Bishop Dempsey and with key safeguarding personnel, it was evident that the bishop is committed to resourcing diocesan safeguarding children training. The provision of training to all key safeguarding personnel is commended.

**This standard is met.**

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

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

The reviewers read and discussed the three-year Communication Plan for the Diocese of Achonry, Material on the diocesan website, leaflets and posters seen during our parish visits, the 2021 Safeguarding Newsletter, and the Parish Handbook are further evidence of how the diocese is addressing Standard 6.

Correspondence generated by Bishop Dempsey concerning Safeguarding Sunday 2021 was also examined. We are aware that the next Safeguarding Sunday has been moved back to early next year, to allow feedback to be given on this review across the Diocese.

The implementation of the Communication Plan and the Training Plan are critical in ensuring that the diocese remains informed of the challenges of keeping children safe. Both documents provide timeframes for delivery, and monitoring implementation is part of the governance responsibilities of the Safeguarding Committee.

The Communication Plan outlines in detail the target groups, such as outreach and support groups, and priests. For each group it is clarified what the specific objective is and how this will be met. In meeting an objective, the plan sets out which named individual or group retains responsibility for ensuring the objective is met. The plan also outlines the timeframe for delivery of objectives, and arrangements for review by the Safeguarding Committee.

The nine-page Communications Plan is excellent, and it could be shared as an exemplar for other Church bodies to consult. The reviewers believe that the implementation of this plan will provide consistent and effective communication of the Safeguarding Children messages across the Diocese.

Safeguarding children information is available on the diocesan website at <https://achonrydiocese.org/safeguardingwelcome/> and in every Church location that the reviewers visited. What was of note was the level of understanding of the young people of the messages contained within this documentation, and it was evident that the child-friendly posters have been read and understood by the children the reviewers met.

The Safeguarding Committee is in the process of redrafting the parish audit form, which will include a section on seeking children's views about safeguarding.

As noted previously, the Director of Safeguarding has completed a number of parish visits in 2022 to parishes with ministry with children. They have also developed a safeguarding checklist, which has been sent regularly to all parishes to remind priests and LSRs of best practice in safeguarding children.

The reviewers have obtained sufficient evidence to state that **this standard is met.**

## **Standard 7 - Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards**

*The Church body develops a plan of action to quality assure compliance with the safeguarding standards. This action plan is reviewed annually. The Church body only has responsibility to monitor, evaluate and report on compliance with the indicators under each standard that apply to it, depending on its ministry.*

The Diocese of Achonry is implementing its three-year Strategic Safeguarding Children Plan, 2021 to 2024, which plan was signed off by the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee. Sub-sections of this plan have already been referenced in respect of Training and Communication. This 14-page Strategic Plan sets out specific objectives and the actions required to achieve compliance with each of the seven Standards.

The diocese has also put in place a framework of meetings to improve safeguarding governance alongside the Safeguarding Committee. This enhanced safeguarding meetings structure, initiated in 2020 is commended. Monthly safeguarding meetings involve the bishop and the Director of Safeguarding. Records of these meetings were evidenced by the reviewers.

The renewed Safeguarding Committee maintains governance responsibility in monitoring safeguarding activity. It has a multi-professional membership, all of who bring significant experience to their role in the diocese.

A case management meeting has also been established, which has added a dimension to tracking the diocesan responses to open cases.

The current Chair is committed to building up good relationships with the parishes and sees this as an important function of the committee. The Chair was also of the opinion that sharing of information and peer exchange between LSRs and Parish Secretaries, Sacristans and volunteers could provide great opportunities for learning, and this development could use the Deanery structure as a framework.

Some of the challenges outlined in these interviews were ensuring that annual audits are tightened up and that the learning from the audits is applied. The Director of Safeguarding is supported by the Committee with the analysis of the audit information, and with how this informs strategies. The Chair believes that a further challenge is to support diocesan priests to reestablish the involvement of children and young people in parish activities, post pandemic.

The annual parish audit process assists in monitoring implementation, and it identifies any gaps or areas for improvement. The reviewers sat in on a discussion at the Safeguarding Committee when they were reviewing the content of the 2022 audit form, particularly with regard to gathering the views of children. In our discussions with the current and previous chair of the Safeguarding Committee, they placed great importance on ensuring the audit took place and that the information secured would be used to strengthen safeguarding practice where applicable, as in the example above. It was evident to the reviewers that the safeguarding personnel and the Safeguarding Committee see this annual audit process as a key activity in ensuring safeguarding is maintained as an important element across all parishes in the Diocese. Commitment to this annual audit was clear at all levels from the bishop through to safeguarding representatives in the parishes.

The annual reports to Bishop Dempsey from the DLP and the Director of Safeguarding were also examined. The quality and detail of these is excellent. These are clearly key forms of communication, which then inform the relevant groups within the diocese. Written records of the review of these reports were confirmed in the minutes of the Safeguarding Committee and the diocesan case management meetings.

The diocese may wish to consider an enhancement to the audit form of adding a question to be completed by parish priests, which will identify any clerics or religious living in the parishes who are not incardinated into the Diocese of Achonry.

It was noted by the reviewers that the 2021 Parish Audit had a 100 % return rate, which assisted the diocese in securing an accurate picture of the status in respect of safeguarding children in parishes. The reviewers accessed copies of these parish returns held by the Director of Safeguarding.

A further support to this audit process has been the reintroduction in 2022 of parish visits by the Director of Safeguarding, and the parish contact file for 2022 held by the Director of Safeguarding contains written records of these visits. These were inspected by the reviewers.

The final element in Quality Assurance, to date, in respect of safeguarding children is the completion of this Review, and the diocesan response to it.

**This standard is met.**

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the reviewers consider that under the leadership of Bishop Paul Dempsey and supported by the safeguarding personnel and structures, the Diocese of Achonry has evidenced a strong commitment to safeguarding children in recent years. A new Director of Safeguarding has been employed by the Diocese since September 2020, and a new Safeguarding Office has been established, both of which constitute significant evidence of commitment to Safeguarding by Bishop Dempsey.

However, prior to 2020 it is noted that in the past there have been examples of practice in responding to abuse allegations that give cause for concern. This is with particular regard to the internal notification of a report within the diocese to the appropriate post holders at that time, and to delays in notifying the relevant authorities. On that basis, a recommendation has been made in respect of Standard 2, which when implemented, should improve compliance in respect of this standard.

The reviewers noted the expressed willingness to learn and to improve practice, evidenced by the engagement that they had with the safeguarding personnel of the diocese throughout this review process.