

# ***Safeguarding Children in the Diocese of Meath***

## ***Annual Report 2016***

### **Introduction:**

This report has been generated to comply with Standard 7 (Quality Assuring Compliance with the Standards) of the NBSCCCI document – *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards 2016*. This requires, inter alia, that the Diocese:

- Puts in place arrangements to ensure and evaluate its compliance with the safeguarding standards at local level
- Produces a report on the level of compliance established through this audit exercise
- Notifies the National Board in writing of the completion of this annual audit report.

The National Board requires that a parish safeguarding audit is carried out, returns are scrutinised by the safeguarding committee, an annual report is prepared for the Bishop – with a review of compliance and recommendations for further action and improvement - and that these are incorporated into the three-year child safeguarding plan. This process applies to Standards 1,5 and 6.

A report is also prepared for the Bishop, by the DLP, on Standards 2,3 and 4 and recommendations for action and improvements incorporated into the child safeguarding plan.

Notification that these processes have been completed will be sent to the National Board by the Bishop.

As 2016 was a year of transition from the existing Standards and style of reporting to the revised Standards and processes, this diocese retained the existing parish audit form for the 2016 report. The revised version will be used from 2017.

A new three- year plan is in development and will be informed by the outcomes of the audit process, as well as the requirements of the revised Policy and Standards. Progress towards this is reported under the report on the work of the Safeguarding Children Committee.

## **Overview of the work of the Safeguarding Committee on Standards 1, 5 and 6.**

### **Report on the audit review of safeguarding children measures in the parishes of the Diocese of Meath**

All parishes were requested by the safeguarding committee to return their completed audit forms by November 30. As is usual practice, the returned forms were scrutinised by an independent assessor who compiled the following report:

Sixty-six completed audit forms were returned out of a total of 69 by the end of January 2017.

Parishes are engaged in a number of child /youth activities namely -

Altar servers, Choir, Readers, Sacramental preparation, Feast day celebrations, Lenten, Easter and Christmas pageants and plays, Legion of Mary and Young Pioneers.

Safe recruitment and vetting procedures are in place, kept up to date and securely stored in all parishes.

Some parishes are awaiting consent forms to be returned. I have outlined these on a separate sheet.

Altar servers are given training and all children involved in parish activities receive the appropriate information leaflet. The Diocesan Safeguarding poster is prominently displayed in appropriate areas e.g. Church porch, Sacristy, Parish Centre, and on Website.

No concerns or complaints were reported to the Parish Safeguarding Representatives and as such no disciplinary procedures were invoked.

Regular contact between Priests and Safeguarding Representatives takes place; this contact varies on average from once a year to 3-4 times a year. Some meet monthly whilst others meet twice a year.

Suggestions, comments or assistance on improving safeguarding procedures or training are included on a separate sheet and will be forwarded to the Resource Team and Safeguarding Committee.

The audits demonstrate the successful implementation of the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy and procedures.

It is evident that all parishes who returned forms are aware and compliant with the Safeguarding Policy.

#### **Meetings of the Safeguarding Children Committee:**

Meetings were held in March, June and September. That planned for December was postponed since a quorum was not possible because of illness of a number of members.

The Resource Team, Fr Paul Crosbie, Ms Antoinette Shaw and Mr David Gavin, met on eight occasions.

#### **Membership:**

S Neville completed her work as Trainer with the diocese and member of the committee in Dec. 2015.

J Walshe resigned as secretary to the committee and was replaced by Fr P Crosbie. She remained as a member.

A Doran and P Clarke were appointed as new members of the committee, as were A Shaw and D Gavin who had been recruited as Trainers.

#### **Main areas of work addressed:**

##### **Revision of the Safeguarding Policy and Standards**

Aspects of the development, dissemination and implementation of the revised Policy and Standards were a major part of the work of the committee. The NBSCCCI launched the new material in June. Members of the committee attended workshops related to its development and dissemination.

Bishop Smith signed a commitment to follow the policy on behalf of the Diocese of Meath.

The SCC decided that, to the extent compatible with the revised policy and procedures, existing resource materials should continue to be used and that additional and new material contained in the NBSCCCI Guidance would be made available in a user-friendly set of operational guidelines for meeting the standards. The Policy document and the Operational Guidelines have been placed on a redesigned version of the website ([www.meathsafeguarding.ie](http://www.meathsafeguarding.ie)).

The Guidelines are organised into three sections: those related to Standards 1, 5 and 6 into a section headed “Creating a Culture of Safety”; those relating to 2, 3 and 4 into a section headed “Recognising, Responding and Reporting”; those relating to Standard 7 into a section headed “Quality Assurance”. All of the associated forms and templates are collated into Section 4.

The rationale for this approach is based primarily on ease of access for users. The first section covers mainly the areas of concern to PSR; the second to the DLP; while the third, though covering some requirements at both parish and diocesan levels, is mainly the responsibility of the SCC.

A series of four workshops was organised to inform clergy and PSR about the new requirements for compliance with the Standards. At these, copies of the ‘Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016’; a summary leaflet on the policy; and the poster for display were distributed.

The Autumn edition of the Newsletter was devoted to information on the revised Policy and Standards.

## **Garda Vetting**

The *National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012* was commenced at the end of April 2016. This legislation places mandatory requirements on the Diocese which the Diocese is making strenuous efforts to meet. The SCC decided at its meeting in June to undertake a review of Garda vetting. Every parish was asked by Bishop Smith to provide written confirmation that the following Church personnel have been vetted:

- Parish clergy, including priests who provide occasional or temporary ministry in the parish
- Parish Safeguarding Representatives
- Sacristans
- Choir directors and their assistants, where children are members of the choir.

Parishes were directed to commence the vetting process immediately in the case of any of these personnel who have not been vetted. The aim is to have all personnel vetted, in accordance with the legislation, by December 31 2017 and the diocese is on target to meet this.

The Bishop has appointed a new Liaison Person (Linda Duncan) to deal with applications from parishes. E-vetting is now in place. Priority is given to processing applications from employees and volunteers for whom vetting is mandatory.

Detailed guidance has been provided to parishes; the Summer newsletter was dedicated to explaining the requirements; and these are also contained in the Operational Guidelines.

### **Training and Support (Standard 5)**

Antoinette Shaw and David Gavin were appointed as trainers following the resignation of Sandra Neville. An induction session was provided for them by Sandra Neville. They have contacted all parishes, introduced themselves and have conducted a number of the Deanery meetings which take place in Spring and Autumn.

As no training for trainers course was available this year, a trainer from a neighbouring diocese, Sr Una Purcell of the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, facilitated a training course for PSR which the new trainers observed.

The trainers have attended briefing sessions on the revised Policy and Standards; the NBSCCCI Conference in Oct.; and contributed to the four dissemination workshops on the revised policy and procedures.

The NBSCCCI will offer a Train the Trainers Course over six days in February, March and April 2017 which AS and DG will attend.

A training plan is developed each year by the trainers and ratified by the SCC.

## **Communicating the Church`s Safeguarding Message (Standard 6)**

In line with the communications policy of the Diocese of Meath, a range of processes has been engaged in to communicate the safeguarding message. These include:

**Safeguarding website:** This has been updated to incorporate the revised Safeguarding Policy and Standards and the associated Operational Guidelines. This is the principal means for communicating information on the policy and guidelines. However, print copies of the NBSCCCI document are available and it is planned to produce a limited number of the Operational Guidelines in hard copy.

**Newsletter:** Two newsletters were produced covering information on a range of relevant topics eg Garda vetting, revised policy and procedures, training events, NBSCCCI conference. The newsletter is circulated in electronic and hard copy to clergy, PSR and safeguarding related committees.

**Printed material:** Copies of the NBSC policy document have been circulated to parishes and committee members. A new poster with the policy statement and details for reporting safeguarding concerns has been circulated.

**Consultation and feedback meetings:** Meetings, facilitated by members of the SCC, are organised with parishes with the aim of hearing the views and needs of parishioners on safeguarding issues. The facilitators report back on the outcomes to the SCC for information and, where indicated, for action. Four such meetings were held in 2016.

### **Preparation of three-year plan:**

The existing three-year plan covered the period 2013 – 2015. The SCC decided to delay development of the new plan until the new Policy and Standards were launched. This plan will cover the period 2017 – 2020; will adopt the format proposed in the NBSC Guidance; address the requirements outlined; and be informed by the outcomes of the parish audit.

Members of the SCC have reviewed the existing plan and the relevant template. Members of the Resource Team have begun preliminary work on drafting the plan and it will be considered at the rescheduled Dec. meeting (Jan. 2017).