

# Strategic Review of Child Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland

Final Report

November 2024

---

# Table of Contents

	Page Number
<b>1</b> Overview of the Report	3
<b>2</b> Background to the Review of Safeguarding in Ireland	4
<b>3</b> Legislative and Policy Context	7
<b>4</b> Review Questions	12
<b>5</b> Methodological Approach	14
<b>6</b> Findings and Recommendations	16
• Introduction	16
• Findings from the Literature	16
• Findings from Comparable Jurisdictions	17
• Findings from Consultation with External Stakeholders	18
• Findings from Consultation with Survivors	19
• Summary of Thematic Findings	22
○ Theme 1: Current and Future Safeguarding Provision	22
○ Theme 2: Governance, Management, Accountability and Communication	26
○ Theme 3: The 'One Church' Approach	30
○ Theme 4: Resources	32
○ Theme 5: Emerging Challenges	33
<b>7</b> Implementation Considerations	37
<b>8</b> The Review Team	45
<b>9</b> Acknowledgements	45
<b>10</b> Disclaimer	45

## Acronyms

ACSL	Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd
AGS	An Garda Síochána
AISGA	All-Ireland Spiritual Guide Association
AMRI	Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland
CCO	Catholic Communications Office
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFA	Child and Family Agency
CORI	Conference of Religious in Ireland
CPSL	Catholic Professional Standards Limited
CSSA	Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DLP	Designated Liaison Person
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICPO	Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas
IEC	Irish Episcopal Conference
IECE	Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants
IECI	Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants
IGIV2	In God's Image - Version 2
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
MSHR	Missionary Sisters of Holy Rosary
NBSCCCI	National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland
NCMC	National Case Management Committee
NOPS	National Office for Professional Standards
NTS	National Tribunal Service
OSA	Order of Saint Augustine
OSB	Order of Saint Benedict
PID	Project Initiation Document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RLSS	Religious Life Safeguarding Services
SBNI	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
SCSSA	Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service Agency
TOM	Target Operating Model
TOR	Terms of Reference

## 1. OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

Ensuring the implementation of appropriate child safeguarding policies, procedures and processes is the responsibility of all Church leaders nationally and locally. In November 2021 RSM Ireland were commissioned to conduct a strategic review of the extent to which the most effective and efficient structures and services are in place regarding child safeguarding across the Catholic Church's ministries and services in Ireland, North and South. Whilst the Review<sup>1</sup> was completely independent, oversight of the project was undertaken by a Project Steering Committee (PSC) consisting of clerical and lay representatives from the **Irish Episcopal Conference** (IEC) and the **Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland** (AMRI), the leadership bodies for the Catholic Church in Ireland (hereafter "the Church") across the island. The IEC, which is also sometimes referred to as the **Irish Catholic Bishops Conference**, is the assembly of the Bishops exercising together certain pastoral offices. AMRI represents and promotes active collaboration between Religious Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life and Lay Missionary Organisations in Ireland.

This Report is an overview of all the key issues relating to the Review of Safeguarding undertaken by RSM Ireland between 2021 and 2024. Our Review of Safeguarding consisted of desktop analysis of key documentary evidence, a review of the literature and comparator case studies about safeguarding in other jurisdictions. Primary data collection took the form of interviews and focus groups, as well as a public consultation with survivors asking them to share their experiences of disclosing abuse. The purpose of this Report is to synthesise all the work completed through that process, to highlight the key findings and recommendations, and to provide some indication of how these recommendations might be implemented by the Church in conjunction with relevant safeguarding agencies.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Review Team is described more fully in Section 8.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING IN IRELAND

The underlying philosophy employed for this Review was one of **Appreciative Inquiry**. Appreciative Inquiry is a strength-based approach which involves the search for the best in people and their organisations, rather than only critiquing what needs to be improved as traditional reviews may tend to do. This approach aimed at drawing out the strengths of the policies, procedures, processes and resources that the Church has put in place to date, evaluating any weaknesses and making recommendations that will allow those strengths to be built upon in the future.

Public consciousness of the problem of child abuse, and in particular child sexual abuse, has been growing in Ireland since the early 1980s<sup>2</sup>. It is generally accepted that full public awareness of the nature of child abuse in Ireland coincided with a series of high-profile cases, such as the Kilkenny Incest Investigation in 1993. However, it was not until after Fr Brendan Smyth's arrest in 1994 and the publicity which surrounded that case, that Irish society became fully exposed to the phenomenon of the abuse of children by third parties, such as priests, religious and other clergy, who were in a position of trust and authority over them. Initially, Church leaders completely failed to deal adequately with the abuse that was being disclosed. They often covered the abuse up, moving abusers to new parishes and communities, allowing them to abuse again and again. Additionally, their stance was to adopt an adversarial approach to survivors which was detrimental to any real progress being made.

In the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, it is necessary to examine the positive developments that have occurred since the early 1990s and summarise some of the progress that has been made by the Church since that time. A series of public inquiries have been undertaken. These include the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse in 2000 (***The Ryan Report***), the Inquiry into the Allegations of Clerical Sexual Abuse in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ferns in 2005 (***The Ferns Report***); the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin in 2009 (***The Murphy Report***) and the Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Diocese of Cloyne in 2010 (***The Cloyne Report***). These reports investigated allegations of clerical abuse going back to the 1960s and, importantly, examine how the Church has responded to those allegations.

The early initiatives undertaken by the Church included the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Conference of Religious of Ireland establishing an Advisory Committee in 1994 to set down guidelines for the proper handling of abuse allegations that came to the attention of Church authorities. This Committee published its report in 1996, and the guidelines are often referred to as '***The Framework Document***'.

---

<sup>2</sup>Lalor K. (1998) 'Child Sexual Abuse in Ireland: an Historical and Anthropological Note', *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*: Vol. 1, Issue 1, Article 2.

The Ferns Inquiry, in the course of its oral hearings and research, encountered a widely held view among commentators, journalists, and victims themselves, that the Catholic Church had an awareness of the problem of child sexual abuse by Priests before it entered the public domain. Since then, the Church in Ireland has continued to take several significant steps to address the safeguarding of children, the most important of which has been the establishment of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church. These actions aim to prevent abuse, to support survivors, and to implement measures for greater accountability. Some of the key developments include, *inter alia*:

- the adoption of child protection guidelines and protocols, which are mandatory for all Church personnel.
- the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training for clergy, religious, and volunteers working with children which covers recognising signs of abuse, appropriate conduct, and reporting procedures.
- cooperation with statutory authorities and mandatory reporting which means that all credible allegations of child abuse must be reported to the police and child protection agencies.<sup>3</sup>
- engagement with external organisations to enhance child protection efforts.
- increased efforts to support victims of abuse, including providing counselling services, pastoral care, and financial compensation.
- nurturing a culture of safeguarding at every level of the Church in order to promote the protection of children and the proper handling of allegations of abuse.

It is important to note that the process of addressing historical abuse and implementing effective safeguarding measures is ongoing. The Catholic Church in Ireland continues to prioritise the safety and protection of children within its institutions. However, despite the significant investment of time and funds over many years, the Church has been the subject of sustained criticism for its failure in the past to act to prevent harm to children, and accusations of past abuse continue to surface periodically. Recent developments in Ireland include the announcement in 2023 of a scoping inquiry which will examine abuse which occurred in schools run by religious congregations.

It is important to also acknowledge that the safeguarding challenge facing the Catholic Church is not unique to Ireland and was recently addressed by Pope Francis:

---

<sup>3</sup> The statutory threshold for reporting in Ireland is contained in Section 14 of the Children First Act 2015, which outlines that if a mandated person knows, believes, or has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being harmed, that must be reported. This reporting is incorporated into Standard 2 of the National Board's current policy, discussed later in this paper.

*“Even when the path forward is difficult and demanding, I urge you not to get bogged down. Keep reaching out, keep trying to instil confidence in those you meet and who share with you this common cause. Do not grow discouraged when it seems that little is changing for the better. Persevere and keep moving forwards!”*

Against that broad background, a key overall conclusion of our Review is that the measures, practices, and structures put in place by the Catholic Church in Ireland over the last 20 years have resulted in a safeguarding regime today that is stringent and rigorous when it is appropriately followed and adhered to by all relevant parties. Indeed, we encountered a general perception that the apparatus constructed around the safeguarding regime is perceived by some to now be amongst the most advanced in the Catholic Church world-wide. The findings of this Review have largely borne this out. For example, many of the external stakeholders that we consulted have not seen a case of clerical child abuse in more than a decade. All that said, our Review has established, however, that significant challenges clearly remain which will need to be addressed. In particular, the hurt experienced by survivors remains enduring and strong and our Review reveals that there is a need for a deeper acknowledgement that there are some hurts that the Church may never be able to heal. However, more than anything else, survivors want the confidence that what happened to them will not happen to others in the future. The consultation we undertook with survivors as part of the Review brought home that reality with searing clarity. For this key group of stakeholders, the overall verdict on the Church’s response to abuse remains negative. While some acknowledged that they had a positive experience, the majority view was deeply critical.

Therefore, continued vigilance and continuous improvement remain vital. It is our view that the Church itself appreciates that, and indeed this was one of the motivations behind their initiation of an independent Review of the current arrangements. This Report, in addition to detailing what has been working well, sets out recommendations for further improvements to the safeguarding regime. We deeply appreciate that the legacy of the past remains a real and living reality for many survivors, as we have just stated. That is another reason why we have approached our own work in this Review with the utmost care and dedication. Our goal has been to ensure that this Review can make a constructive contribution to the Church’s efforts to ensure that child safeguarding in the future can continue to develop and evolve, and that going forward all parts of its community will be safe places for children.

### 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

In the Republic of Ireland, the **Childcare Act, 1991** is an important piece of legislation dealing with the welfare of children and young people, providing many of the necessary legal powers to protect children who may not receive adequate care at home. It established many of the systems, services and standards that we have today which are needed to ensure children's welfare. The **Children First Act, 2015** is also important legislation dealing with the protection of children and particularly safeguarding, imposing statutory obligations regarding mandatory reporting and requiring child safeguarding statements from organisations providing relevant services. **Tusla** (the Child and Family Agency) is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children, and it has statutory responsibilities related to assessing child welfare and protection reports. The overarching policy framework also includes a 2017 document issued by what was then known as the **Department of Children and Youth Affairs**<sup>4</sup> which encompasses both legislation and non-statutory obligations surrounding child protection concerns and is entitled ***Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children***.

In Northern Ireland the **Children (Northern Ireland) Order (1995)** is the principal legislation governing the care, upbringing, and protection of children whilst the **Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) (2015)** places a requirement on individuals and organisations providing children's services to children to co-operate with each other to devise and implement cross cutting strategies. The **Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland (SBNI)** was established by the **Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011** and is a multi-agency partnership with representatives from health, social care, police, and education, and which is responsible for developing operational policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people across Northern Ireland. The overarching policy framework for safeguarding is set out in the document entitled ***Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland***.

It is clear to us from our Review, that there is a strong desire within the Catholic Church in Ireland to be an exemplar of best practice when it comes to safeguarding, using the lessons of the past to ensure that the Church is as safe a place as possible for children. Church leaders, IEC and AMRI working together, have adopted a '**One Church**' approach to safeguarding, namely that the same standards and procedures should apply to all Dioceses and Religious Congregations operating across Ireland. These are laid out in the document ***Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*** (hereafter the ***2016 Policy***). There have also been

---

<sup>4</sup> This is now the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

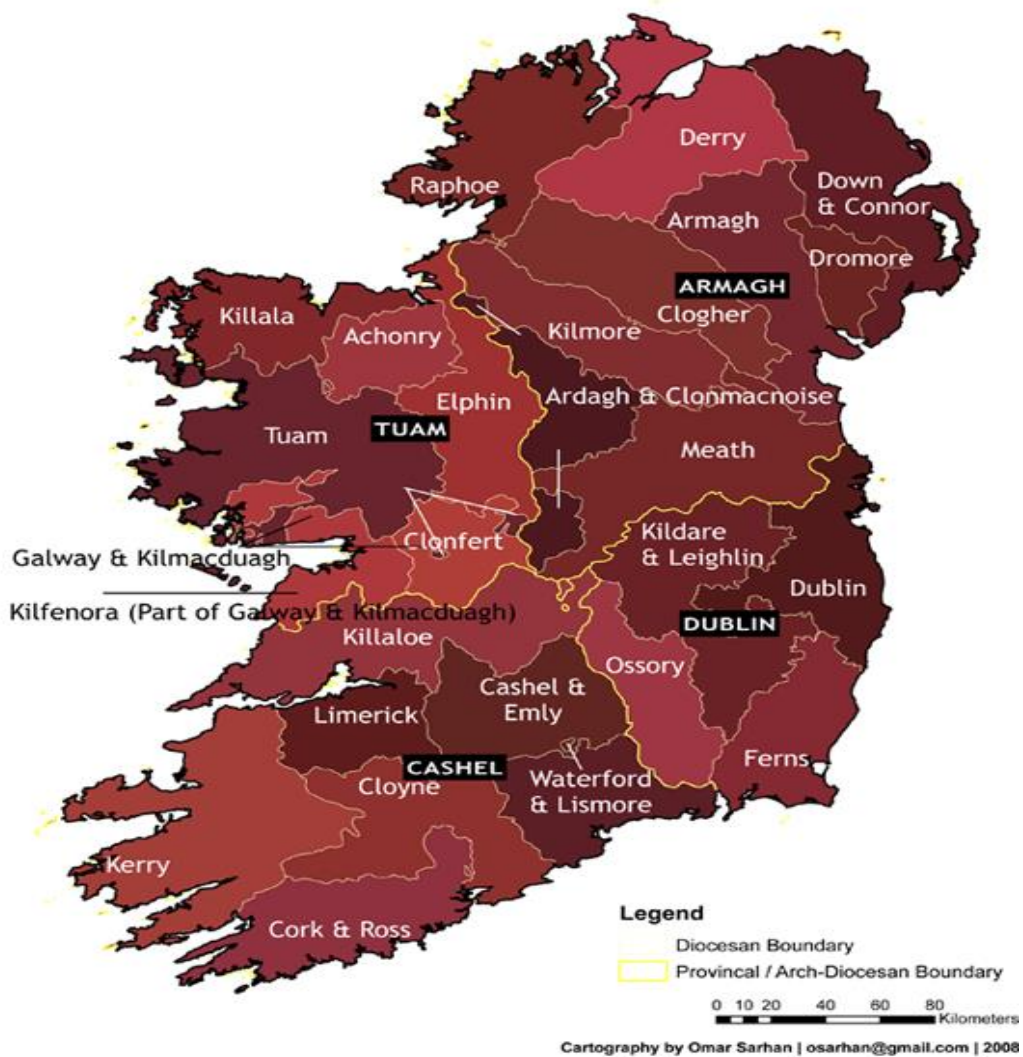


significant developments in safeguarding services at individual Diocese and Religious Congregation level in recent years.

The structure of the Catholic Church in Ireland is complex and not directly comparable or analogous to other legal entities, which arises in part due to the unique operation of the Church. The Church's internal organisation and governance is generally defined by Canon Law, which sets out the structure and jurisdiction of various Church entities, while respecting the civil law of the land. The Diocesan Church is organised into four ecclesiastical provinces: Tuam, Dublin, Cashel and Emly, and Armagh, which are led by the four archbishops and each Diocese is autonomous.

The Dioceses are illustrated in the map below. These dioceses currently contain 1,087 parishes.

**Figure 1: The Catholic Dioceses of Ireland<sup>5</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/dioceses/>

There are circa 3,000 mainstream clergy which includes Parish Priests, administrators, curates, chaplains, and professors in colleges. There are also approximately 167 Religious Orders<sup>6</sup> and the total number of other religious brothers, sisters and monks is about 4,500 according to AMRI. They are typically engaged either in teaching or in giving missions, and occasionally, charged with pastoral work in parishes. However, the majority of people in Religious Orders are now retired and have no ministry with children.

Together, the IEC and AMRI are the leadership bodies which have taken ownership of the endeavour to create a cohesive national level structure to oversee child safeguarding in the Catholic Church across the island of Ireland. It is noteworthy that the resulting national structure is non-statutory, and pursuant to Canon Law, each Bishop and Religious Superior remains ultimately accountable for their particular entity, having voluntarily signed up to comply with the structures and processes put in place. The IEC and AMRI are the funding bodies of the three national safeguarding structures set out below, each of which currently operates independently of each other.

- **The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church** (hereafter The National Board), established in 2006 ([www.safeguarding.ie](http://www.safeguarding.ie))
- **Towards Healing**, established in 2011 and the successor to Faoiseamh which was set up in 1997 ([www.towardshealing.ie](http://www.towardshealing.ie))
- **Towards Peace**, established in 2013 ([www.towardspeace.ie](http://www.towardspeace.ie)).

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland incorporating the **National Office for Safeguarding Children** (collectively the National Board) was established in 2006 to provide best practice advice and to monitor the safeguarding of children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. The National Board is the primary and central structure that coordinates safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland. The National Board is a company limited by guarantee (it is registered as Coimirce). Whilst funding derives from the IEC and AMRI, it operates independently of these bodies. It is governed by a Board of Directors, and its decisions and procedures are implemented on an ongoing basis by the National Office for Safeguarding. The National Office comprises three full time staff, and two part-time administrators. For convenience, the National Board and the National Office will be referred to collectively as the National Board throughout this report, unless the distinction is necessary<sup>7</sup>. It is important to note that the relationship between the National Board and all Dioceses and Religious Orders in Ireland is exclusively voluntary. There is no legislation providing a basis for the National Board or its functions.

---

<sup>6</sup> A complete list of organisations who are members of AMRI can be found on <https://www.amri.ie/who-we-are/our-members/>

<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that stakeholders – both in and outside the Church - use the collective phrase 'National Board' when they actually mean the National Office and its day-to-day operations, so we will attempt to clarify this wherever it is the case in the text.

The National Board was established to provide advice, services, and assistance to constituent members of the Catholic Church in furtherance of the development of the safeguarding of children on the island of Ireland. The National Board also has a role in monitoring Church bodies' compliance with civil legislation and constitutional imperatives, policy, and best practice; and it is required to report upon its activities, and the cooperation which it receives in respect of such activities. The National Board has provided an overview of the notification data about allegations of abuse in relation to members of the clergy in its Annual Reports since 2009.

Towards Healing is an organisation that provides professional support for people who have experienced institutional, clerical, or religious abuse in Ireland, primarily in the form of counselling. Like the National Board, Towards Healing is a company limited by guarantee. Although it is funded by the same Church bodies as the National Board, in relation to independence the following points are relevant. Firstly, while they receive funding from the Catholic Church, operational decisions, including the clinical model and client care, are primarily guided by an experienced team of clinicians and professionals from diverse non-religious backgrounds. Although the Board reviews and approves policies, the focus remains on delivering services based on clinical best practices and ethical standards, free from religious influence. Secondly, the Board includes members who are religious representatives, but it also comprises individuals from various professional and community backgrounds, ensuring a balanced governance structure. Importantly, Board Members, regardless of their affiliation, do not have access to client-specific information due to strict confidentiality policies. Client confidentiality is paramount, and Towards Healing upholds rigorous standards to protect the privacy of those they serve. Finally, all contracted counsellors are selected based on their professional qualifications and adherence to trauma-informed therapeutic approaches. They are not affiliated with the Catholic Church or any religious organisation, further ensuring the impartiality and professionalism of these counselling services.

The overall strategic direction of the organisation is established by the Board of Directors. Towards Healing services are managed by a team comprising of a Director of Services, a Counselling Manager, two Counselling Coordinators, and Finance and Administration Support. Its service provision team also maintains a panel of independent qualified and accredited counsellors who provide counselling services to victims of abuse, and in some cases their family members. Counsellors are professionally qualified, and work in the context of an ethical code, which guarantees the safety and privacy of every client.

Towards Peace is an unincorporated organisation designed as a service for anybody who has been abused physically, emotionally, sexually, or spiritually, in a religious/Catholic Church environment in Ireland. It assists survivors of abuse with spiritual healing, offering spiritual companions to those who wish to take up the service. Support is also available for family members of abuse survivors. Up to

twelve sessions can be made available and there is no cost to users. Since 2018, Towards Peace has been governed by an Oversight Committee comprising of seven members, which replaced the previous Board of Directors.

The daily operations of Towards Peace are managed by one lay part-time staff member. It uses an established panel of spiritual companions, comprised of lay people and religious, all with a qualification in spiritual direction. All Towards Peace spiritual companions are members of the All-Ireland Spiritual Guide Association (AISGA) and abide by the AISGA Code of Ethics. There is one in-house supervisor that spiritual companions can also access. All spiritual companions when appointed to the panel commit to ongoing supervision in relation to the Towards Peace work. They can either avail of the in-house supervisor or remain with their own supervisor with whom they would deal in the course of their own spiritual direction ministry. Like Towards Healing and the National Board, Towards Peace is financed by the IEC and AMRI but is operated as an independent referral service available to survivors of abuse who are seeking spiritual support. Towards Peace participated in the Irish Synodal Pathway by consulting with eight survivors and by reflecting on its own experience of working with survivors<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://towardspeace.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Consolidated-submission-on-behalf-of-Towards-Peace-June-22.pdf>

## 4. REVIEW QUESTIONS

There are 23 questions in total which form part of this Review of Safeguarding, and these have been divided into five themes. The questions are summarised below<sup>9</sup>:

### Current and Future Safeguarding Provision

1. What are the strengths of the current safeguarding provision and what is working well especially at local level?
2. What are the challenges and gaps in the current provision and how these might be addressed?
3. How do the National Board, Towards Healing, Towards Peace, and the Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs) and safeguarding personnel in dioceses and religious congregations collaborate to enable a more cohesive Church response to the needs of victims and survivors?
4. Is there any unnecessary duplication in provision between or within the three organisations, and with diocesan and religious congregations, child safeguarding and support personnel?
5. Are there additional, or changes to, services required to enable a more consistent approach to child safeguarding?
6. Does the National Board, work effectively to support the development of child safeguarding practice and awareness in parishes, dioceses and religious congregations?
7. How efficient and effective are the National Board's current training programmes?
8. What are the expectations, and how can they be represented, from a range of stakeholders (children, parents, clerics, religious, Church authorities, complainants and respondents) and how do they shape the direction and delivery of child safeguarding services across the Church?
9. How can robust safeguarding practices be ensured in religious congregations who are not members of AMRI?

### Governance, Management, Accountability and Communication

10. Are the governance and management structures and responsibilities of the three organisations effective and fully compliant with prevailing company law and charity regulations?
11. Are there sufficient resources (financial, personnel, premises, equipment) to deliver an effective child safeguarding service?
12. Are the current structures and lines of accountability in keeping with the requirements of an 'independent' safeguarding service?

---

<sup>9</sup> Questions adapted from the Invitation to Tender. Originally there were 20 questions, but some contained sub-questions which have been treated as distinct questions.

13. How is the independence of the existing three relevant bodies maintained including their ability to call Church leaders (sponsoring bodies) to account?
14. How do Church leaders respond to the independence of the three bodies?
15. How effectively do Church leaders, the DLPs and safeguarding personnel in Dioceses and Religious Congregations, and the National Board relate to and cooperate with civil statutory authorities and services, and do they manage their communications effectively, with clear definition of roles?
16. How are the services provided by the three bodies communicated to parishes, people who need these services, and with religious, clergy and ministers working on the ground?
17. Is the sharing of information well managed with due regard to the requirements of data protection legislation?

### **The 'One Church' Approach**

18. How effectively is the 'One Church' approach working?
19. What challenges does this strategy face and how might these be addressed?
20. Are there ways in which the 'One Church' approach can be strengthened?

### **Resources**

21. How much funding is available to the sponsoring bodies to operate the three services and is the funding efficiently deployed?
22. How is the Church response to be sustained into the future, given emerging new challenges and pressures on funding in the light of the Covid pandemic?

### **Emerging Challenges**

23. Are the current child safeguarding structures suitably responsive to address new safeguarding challenges?

## 5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The approach taken for this Review of Safeguarding involved both the analysis of secondary data and the collection and analysis of primary research. Secondary research occurred in respect of the policies, procedures, reports, and other information provided in written form by Church stakeholders. It broadly consisted of the following activities:

- a review of structures and policies in Ireland. This included an analysis of the evolution of national-level safeguarding policy, which has undergone three main iterations since the publication of ***Our Children, Our Church - Child Protection Policies and Procedures for the Catholic Church in Ireland*** in 2005.
- an analysis of information received from a sample of Dioceses and Religious Orders about their safeguarding practices in order to understand how the high-level policies are put into practice at the grass-roots level.
- a review of safeguarding activity and structures in the following jurisdictions: Australia, Canada, England and Wales, New Zealand and Scotland. These five jurisdictions were selected as they allow for a relatively straightforward comparison to Ireland, given their use of the English language and their relatively similar legal systems.
- a review of the literature around child abuse and safeguarding in the context of the Church which was deemed to be relevant to the review questions. Topics explored included, *inter alia*, the hierarchical structure of the Church, the social status of the Church in Irish society and the Christian predisposition towards forgiveness.
- a review of the general safeguarding practices of some other organisations on the island of Ireland.

A selection of Church stakeholders (n=29) was then interviewed as part of a process of Stakeholder engagement to explore more fully some of the emergent themes. This selection of stakeholders included a broad representation of those working in safeguarding within the Church, at both national and local level, and included lay people, religious and clergy. For this aspect of data collection all interviews were conducted by at least two members of the RSM Review Team, were recorded and transcribed, and were subsequently analysed independently by members of the RSM Ireland Review Team and coded for key themes.

Similarly, several focus groups with DLP participants (n=10) were held to explore the issues more fully, and a group discussion was held with members of the National Board (n=7), with the same analytical process followed. It was an iterative process as, after the first round of independent analysis, the reviewers came together to reach a consensus view about what had emerged, and to highlight areas where there were significant differences of opinion.

Following this, the Review Team engaged with selected external stakeholders (n=5), including law enforcement and statutory bodies from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, to obtain further relevant perspectives.

All these strands of data collection and analysis allowed the Review Team to put the approach taken to safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland into context, as well as allowing the Review Team to incorporate important learnings from Ireland and elsewhere as safeguarding evolves. The Review Team conducted research on the available options for the important aspect of the Review that is survivor engagement.

The Review Team engaged with survivors of abuse through a substantial online survey, which was widely publicised by RSM Ireland and through some Church communications, and which remained open for one month. Everyone who responded to this survey gave consent for their experiences to be included in this Report.

The report concludes with a comment on the Value for Money, or otherwise, represented by the current safeguarding structures given the funding allocated. This analysis is limited as we concluded early on that any amendments to the safeguarding apparatus cannot be driven by a value-for-money agenda.

The need to develop consistent standards and procedures for the protection of vulnerable adults is an emerging and urgent concern which did not fall within the scope of this Strategic Review. The views garnered from Church stakeholders, societal agencies and survivors were limited in number and cannot be said to be representative of all experiences relating to safeguarding. That being said, there was sufficient spread and consistency of response to allow us to be confident in our conclusions and recommendations.



## 6. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

In this section, findings from several distinct aspects of the Review are set out to provide a concise overview of the information gleaned from the Literature Review, the Review of Safeguarding in Comparable Jurisdictions, the Engagement with External Stakeholders, and the Survivor Consultation. Following this, the overall review findings have been grouped and set out under five themes, with the review recommendations arising from each of these themes set out immediately after the findings. The thematic findings incorporate the engagement with those charged with implementing the safeguarding policies at Diocesan and/or congregational level in the context of the totality of the evidence collected during the Review.

### Findings from the Literature

Literature relating to clerical and religious abuse of children was reviewed to explore the extent to which the Irish situation might be put into context. Regardless of the country in which abuse occurs there seems to be a relatively consistent view that identity and loyalty to the Catholic Church influence perceptions and responses to allegations, which in many cases led to a reluctance in reporting abuse and a culture of silencing victims.

The hierarchical structure of the Church was generally reported in the literature as one which enabled abuse and inhibited appropriate action. Key factors considered by the authors in the various papers studied to be of primary relevance are:

- systematic isolation of victims in physically and socially disadvantaged settings.
- the influence of Canon Law and the tensions with secular law in addressing abuse.
- competing commitments to different legitimacy groups leading to contradictory actions.
- litigation-focused responses by the Church,
- a chasm between rhetoric and action, with the Church failing to meet commitments and provide transparency.
- opaque actions taken against perpetrators, with little communication with survivors.
- reliance on the high social status of the Catholic Church in Ireland to enable abuse.
- concerns for institutional protection rather than addressing the well-being of abused individuals.

Historically these themes reflected the challenges and complexities surrounding child safeguarding in religious contexts, particularly in the Catholic Church in Ireland. They highlighted the influence of individual perspectives, institutional structures, legal frameworks, social dynamics, and the need for accountability and transparency in addressing abuse and supporting survivors. Whilst some of these issues, such as the high social status of the Catholic Church, were more prevalent in the past, the

literature still describes problems such as a lack of transparency and litigation-focussed responses which can hinder survivors' healing and justice.

### Findings from Comparable Jurisdictions

Our analysis of safeguarding activity in other countries revealed that most jurisdictions with comprehensive safeguarding regimes have converged on certain common core approaches, including the adoption of similar systems of nationally set standards, with a central national body setting policy and guidance. Notwithstanding the broad similarities, there were also several notable differences which have been considered by the Review Team in the formulation of the findings and recommendations of this Review. Some of the notable approaches at variance with that of the Catholic Church in Ireland are the following:

- in England and Wales, the Religious Life Safeguarding Service, established in February 2022, deals exclusively with Religious Orders and Congregations arising from the recognition that there are substantial differences in the needs of these organisations as distinct from the Diocesan Church.
- in England and Wales, there is a well-defined separation within the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency - the equivalent of the National Board - between the policy setting and audit function, which helps to allay any concerns about impartiality of function. It is also notable that this agency is, itself, subject to periodic external audit.
- in Scotland, the National Policy stresses the responsibility of those at the Parish level to engage with the community about safeguarding, and more onus is placed upon Parish Priests to take ownership of the issue within their communities.
- in New Zealand and Australia, there is a standalone complaints policy, which may assist in ensuring clarity around the complaints process and may be more accessible to both those making and handling complaints.
- in New Zealand, the National Office for Professional Standards - the equivalent of the National Board in Ireland - takes a more 'hands-on' approach to handling complaints by appointing an independent investigator and comes to a conclusion on the matter itself, rather than merely advising.
- in England and Wales, there is an established Survivor Reference Panel, which allows survivors to contribute to safeguarding policy in a structured manner.

Given that safeguarding in each jurisdiction studied operates in its own unique context, it is not possible to assess in any objective manner whether aspects of one system are necessarily superior to those of another. Nonetheless, the differences that were encountered provided the Review Team with considerations for potential change in making the recommendations that are set out later in this report.

## Findings from Consultation with External Stakeholders

The Review Team engaged with a small number of important external stakeholders to capture additional perspectives relevant to the Review of Safeguarding. Representatives from key agencies across both jurisdictions on the island were interviewed, providing insights into the Church's progress, current practices, and future challenges in safeguarding. This engagement aimed to ensure that the Review encompassed a comprehensive understanding of the Church's safeguarding landscape, acknowledging both advancements and areas requiring further attention.

Stakeholders generally acknowledged the Church's commitment to improving its safeguarding apparatus, noting significant strides in establishing preventative measures and evolving to a mature approach to safeguarding. Some of the organisations consulted stated they had no referrals regarding any current abuse in the Church for more than a decade. Many had excellent relationships with Church DLPs who may have been former colleagues, and the importance of the role of the DLPs undertake for the Church was often mentioned.

Despite the recognised improvements, concerns were raised about the Church's commitment to making ongoing progress, particularly regarding engagement with survivors and the potential for organisational complacency. The need for a proactive, rather than reactive, safeguarding stance was emphasised, alongside the importance of addressing cultural factors that contribute to abuse. One stakeholder raised concerns about how inclusive the Church is towards certain groups, such as young members of the LGBTQI+ community, which may impact the effectiveness of its safeguarding efforts. The engagement with a variety of stakeholders also highlighted the evolving nature of safeguarding challenges, such as the integration of international clergy, the management of lay volunteers, and the necessity of adapting to digital developments.

Particular concerns were raised about the Church's current understanding of, and engagement with young people. "*Life is online*" was a key theme for all our external stakeholders who stated that this was the reality for young people today. Therefore, the context within which the Church's safeguarding processes operate must place emphasis on this growing reality and acknowledge that this is a context that is vastly different to the one when they were setting out on this safeguarding journey more than 20 years ago.

Representatives consulted encouraged the Church to fortify its safeguarding protocols, ensuring robust governance structures that are transparent, communicative, and adaptable to the modern safeguarding context. The Church must also maintain vigilance against complacency, particularly given the decrease in reported allegations, and continue to engage in detailed audits, which should include action planning to address areas of concern, to safeguard effectively against abuse. The collective feedback underscored the imperative for the Church to evolve continuously, ensuring the

safety and well-being of all individuals under its care. The Church should also seek to be part of wider safeguarding initiatives at a national and local level, looking outwards rather than inwards.

### Findings from Consultation with Survivors

The Review Team undertook a wide-ranging engagement with survivors of clerical and religious abuse by means of a comprehensive online survey, using a platform called SenseMaker. The survey was specifically tailored for the Review, focussing in particular on survivors' perceptions of the Church's response to survivors who had reported their abuse within the past 20 years. The survey used a combination of fixed-response questions, open dialogue boxes, and visual representation answers to elicit responses. A brief overview of the survey, including some sample responses, is set out below.

The survey was widely publicised and remained live for more than one month between October and November 2023, and a total of 96 respondents completed the survey, 79% of whom were male, and 21% female. The median age of participants was 55 – 59 years, and 46% were from Dublin.

The abuse suffered by survey respondents occurred primarily over a 60-year period from the 1950s to the 2000s. The period with the highest frequency of abuse was the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, with 87% of survey respondents noting that at least some of their abuse occurred in this window. While the abuse occurred in a wide variety of settings, nearly half of the respondents to the survey reported that it occurred at school (48%). Other settings include churches, the home, at church or sporting activities, care homes, orphanages, and a university.

Survey respondents were asked about the factors that affected their decisions to come forward with the disclosures initially. The most important factor (52%) was hearing media stories of abuse. While this had an empowering effect for most, it also re-traumatised some respondents. Some reported feeling a moral duty to report the abuse to prevent a reoccurrence. 35% of survey respondents indicated that their religious beliefs and the importance of faith in their lives were factors in their disclosure. 27% of respondents to the survey stated that their family was a factor in coming forward, although this was polarising in that while some found strength in family support, others felt that they would let their families down, which made it more difficult to report the abuse experienced. Finally, 35% noted other wide-ranging factors that influenced their decision to disclose, either positively or negatively. This included anxiety and worry about loved ones, a desire for justice, frustration with the Church, solidarity with other victims, to resolve trauma, heightened awareness of statutory processes and evolving social contexts.

An important purpose of this consultation was to obtain perceptions about the Church response to disclosure<sup>10</sup>. All questions were optional; however, it is notable that the question which allowed respondents to select between various positive elements of the Church's response had the lowest response rate at 54%. In contrast, almost 90% responded to the question asking about the impact of their disclosure on themselves.

While some open text responses highlighted specific elements of the Church's response that were deemed to be positive, with people reporting that they received good and effective support, these were significantly outweighed by the volume of open text responses criticising the Church's response. Respondents were relatively equally divided between the feelings of not being listened to, that nothing was happening, and that their experiences were misrepresented. Regarding the impact on respondents of disclosing their abuse, a significant majority indicated that their disclosure had the strongest impact on their feelings, as opposed to their relationships or identity. Some respondents highlighted the doubt and denial they faced when they made their disclosures.

Survey respondents were also asked a series of questions focussing on the Church's response using a linear scale. It is clear from the responses to these questions that survivors tended to be highly critical of the Church, its processes and its priorities. 75% of respondents to the survey felt that disclosing abuse to the Church was complicated rather than straightforward, with some 45% moving the slider all the way to the end indicating 'most complicated'. Many indicated in their open text answers the legalistic nature of interactions with the Church following a disclosure of abuse.

When asked about perceptions of the Church's priorities when responding to disclosures of abuse, the vast majority of survivors (84%) felt that the Church's priority was to protect itself rather than to support victims of abuse. Some respondents shared detailed stories of a perceived degree of callousness from the Church, feeding into a wider view of misaligned priorities. Some respondents suggested that they regretted making their disclosures due to their experiences thereafter.

It is important to note that 87% of our survey respondents experienced their abuse between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s so for most disclosure occurred much later. However, 81% of survey respondents stated that the Church was 'not trustworthy' when dealing with, and responding to, their allegations of abuse. Many respondents to the survey provided free text answers to provide examples of alleged lying, cover ups, and being ignored by the Church. Other survivors stated that they were made out to be liars through that they perceived to be a closing of ranks within the Church.

---

<sup>10</sup> In all of our communications with participants it was made clear that perceptions about the response of the Church was the focus of the consultation exercise rather than the abuse itself.

The survey asked survivors to indicate what supports they accessed, and for relevant feedback. Some 40% of survey respondents had used Towards Healing, with others accessing private counselling or other well-known support agencies. When asked to assess the quality of supports offered by the Church to survivors of abuse, 73% of survey respondents indicated that they were not good enough. There were mixed views expressed in the free text answers about their experiences with Church funded counselling services. For example, some survivors described how supportive DLPs had been, and most survivors did not realise that the Church funds Towards Healing.

Survey respondents were asked about their views on Church policies moving forward. When asked to indicate their own priorities for future work in this area, survivors were generally more concerned with seeing wrongdoing appropriately punished and to stop it from happening again, than they were with reconciling or building bridges. Survey respondents were asked to indicate how favourably they view ongoing survivor engagement in two distinct ways. There was a strong desire to see survivor representation on Church Boards and Committees that relate to Child Safeguarding, with 68% in favour. A somewhat smaller majority at 60% were in favour when asked about a more general form of ongoing survivor consultation. The open text answers indicate that consultation fatigue and a feeling of scepticism surrounding consultation generally likely explains the relatively narrow majority on this broader question.

In order to capture other perspectives not directly covered by structured survey questions, survivors were invited to share their experiences in open dialogue boxes. The topics of focus, length and detail of the experiences shared varied widely. The responses pertained generally to how respondents dealt with processes, feelings, care and support, and what could have been done differently. Survey respondents provided detailed accounts of their frustrations and a myriad of other feelings. While some were positive, many more were negative. It is clear from reading these responses that many people found the process of responding to the survey itself extremely difficult:

*“At this point I would like to tell you that writing all this is very painful for me. I am only doing this to help you see how difficult it is to make these disclosures, and I hope that you will gain an insight into the lack of care I received as a Victim. Everybody, especially the Church, wants to "Move On". Just remember when someone Moves On, someone or something is Left Behind.”*

## Summary of Thematic Findings

### Theme 1: Current and Future Safeguarding Provision

It is worth noting that many of the recommendations arising from this review could relate to more than one theme. Arguably, all recommendations relate to Theme 1 about Current and Future Safeguarding Provision. For example, the issue of training forms part of the Review Questions under this theme Current and Future Safeguarding Provision, but it also relates to Theme 2 Governance, Management, Accountability and Communication, as well as Theme 4 Resources. As many of the recommendations are interdependent, it has been necessary to make a decision about the most appropriate place to include them.

As outlined in this Report, there was a general consensus during the stakeholder engagement that the Church in Ireland has travelled a considerable distance when it comes to safeguarding compared to 20 years ago. The Church's safeguarding apparatus has improved significantly since the establishment of the National Board in 2006, and many favourable views were expressed about aspects of safeguarding that are working well within the Church. There was a sense of firm ownership around the issue, much greater levels of awareness and, importantly, a substantial body of policies, procedures and processes that has been built up over time, giving legitimacy to a culture of safeguarding that is embedded deeply within the Catholic Church in Ireland today. Credit is due to everybody involved in the delivery of this progress to date. However, it is equally important to remain fully cognisant of the shortcomings in the current model which will need to be addressed to meet the needs of survivors and other stakeholders. It is notable that for many consultees there is still a lack of clarity about where ultimate accountability sits.

Key aspects of the development of safeguarding provision included the professionalisation of many safeguarding roles which has resulted in a robust safeguarding ecosystem. It is clear from the Review and from all stakeholders consulted, that the DLPs are an important lynchpin of the safeguarding apparatus of the Church. Currently they rely on high levels of peer support, with no formal mechanisms for influencing overall safeguarding policy. The DLP is a key safeguarding appointment, and they have been pivotal in driving forward many of the positive developments in safeguarding. DLPs, given their professional backgrounds, have valuable knowledge and expertise, and the implementation of any recommendations arising from this Review must remain cognisant of the vital role they play. In addition, the involvement of committed lay people as volunteers at local levels is crucial to making things work.

The majority of those consulted throughout the Review agreed that the National Board has played a crucial and valuable role in the evolution of safeguarding in Ireland. The National Board has responded effectively to the needs and requirements of the overall development of safeguarding and

has built a strong foundation for the entire ecosystem of safeguarding within the Church in Ireland. It is clear that over the years of its existence, the Board has approached its mission in a diligent and dedicated way, with a determination to ensure the highest standards of safeguarding going forward. That said, some survivors were critical of their experience with the Board. In addition, there were a small number of cautionary views shared about its optimal role in the future. It was seen as important that the National Board focuses on ensuring complacency does not seep in and that enabling continuous development and improvement are the mainstay of its functions. For example, one respondent commented that it had served its purpose at a quite different time in Irish life, when clear and centralised direction was required to get all Dioceses and Religious Orders to a sufficient baseline standard. However, there was an overwhelming consensus amongst stakeholders that safeguarding is now deeply embedded in all Church entities, both procedurally and culturally, and as such the requirements of the National Board could change, particularly as it takes on an increasing number of functions spanning from the promotion of best practice to a *de facto* regulator.

The National Board currently fulfils multiple functions in that the National Office is providing advice and guidance, organising reviews and audits compliance with policy and procedural standards, as well as developing policy. Most participants believed a single body should not carry out such competing functions and that there should be a more robust separation of duties. We also conclude that stronger governance of the National Board is required, for example a skills audit of Directors and a review of the length of time Directors have served on the Board. In relation to governance issues for the National Office, it would be beneficial to move to a fully outsourced model for undertaking independent reviews so that the National Office would have no editorial oversight or influence on the review reports. This could free up capacity to focus on other issues such as data, digitisation, or emerging challenges in safeguarding.

It is clear that some duplication does exist within the overall safeguarding system, for example, some of the DLPs who took part in our focus groups told us that they did not use the **National Case Management Committee (NCMC)**<sup>11</sup> preferring instead to seek advice from their own local advisors. When discussing duplication many of the DLPs suggested that there should be some rationalisation of people, resources, and activity on a regional basis in order to create efficiencies.

Generally, the standard of training delivered by the National Office was perceived to be very good; however, it was suggested that some consideration needs to be given to targeting safeguarding

---

<sup>11</sup> The NCMC is as an extension of the National Board in respect to its advice-giving remit. This service is available to Church bodies who have opted to become members through the signing of a data processing deed which allows the group members to access and offer advice on cases having had access to personal sensitive data relating to allegations of abuse and the management of respondents in the Church. The purpose of the NCMC is to provide high quality advice to Church authorities when they are called upon to respond to safeguarding cases. The advice focuses on the management of the investigation and assessment processes and may comment on the “fitness for ministry” of a respondent.



training more effectively in order to avoid disengagement or complacency and to ensure the Church remains a safe place in the future. Similarly, the extent of guidance material created by the National Office was considered to be voluminous and often challenging for people to engage with. Although this guidance is rationally set out on the National Board's website, almost everyone we consulted with agreed that it needs to be made easier for people to navigate.

The role that **Towards Healing** plays in meeting the needs of survivors and victims was perceived to be extremely worthwhile and something that should remain a key part of future provision. Although its operating model could be subject to a fuller analysis since Covid, along with how funds are being deployed and to whom, this should be done in a manner that is open and transparent, does not compromise data protection requirements and which ensures the privacy of service users. Initially, the Review Team held the view that Towards Healing should operate in a more cost-effective manner, perhaps by restricting the number of counselling sessions that survivors are able to access. However, the consultation with survivors altered this view and we acknowledge the importance of ongoing counselling for many survivors who are still dealing with trauma from years ago.

There was no consensus about **Towards Peace** with mixed views expressed about the value, purpose and focus of that organisation within the future structure of safeguarding in the Church. Importantly, a small number of respondents highlighted that this organisation is highly valued by some as an extremely important source of support for survivors of abuse that wish to reconnect with the Church. Irrespective of the assessment of the value of Towards Peace, there was general acknowledgement that the funds being deployed towards its operation are small in comparison to the broader expenditure on safeguarding.

Some of the people we engaged with felt that the Church was not sufficiently victim-centred, and there continues to be a view expressed from some quarters that the Church is overly concerned with its own reputation and image and that of its clergy, rather than demonstrating concern for those who have been abused. It is clear from the literature reviewed that this criticism is particularly strong in relation to the Catholic Church in Ireland. The single biggest shortcoming in terms of how the Church should ensure it is keeping people safe is the need to engage with, and consult meaningfully with, survivors and victims of abuse in an ongoing and structured way. Although there have been recent examples of survivor engagement, such as the consultation organised by Towards Peace, at the request of those involved in the Irish Synodal Pathway in 2022, there is clearly an appetite for more. However, the amount of information provided by people through the survivor consultation was enormous. We were contacted via the online survey, by telephone, by post and by email, with many people desperate to share their experiences with us. Most recently, there has been consultation with survivors as part of the National Board's revision of the Church's Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards. The new policy, ***A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and***

**Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland** (2024) has been approved by both the IEC and AMRI and came into effect on 11 June 2024. The importance of the Church continuing to engage meaningfully with survivors cannot be over-stated.

It was frequently stated by participants, particularly lay participants, in both interviews and focus groups that the views and expectations of survivors need to be better represented and included in decision-making that shapes the direction and delivery of future safeguarding provision across the Church. A good example of a victim-centred focus can be found in the Scottish Redress scheme, which among other things, included structured input from a Survivor Advisory Panel, comprised of a diverse group of survivors, to contribute directly to the scheme's framework and operation.

In summary, the impact and ongoing effect of abuse should not be regarded as a matter of historical importance but rather as a contemporary issue for survivors, so ongoing survivor consultation is essential. The existing structures are not perceived to be sufficiently victim-centred and not all relevant voices are represented equally to help the Church shape and optimise the future safeguarding environment. New approaches are required and will likely be supported by the majority of participants consulted for this Review.

## Recommendations

1. The Church develops and adopts a robust model of **ongoing consultation with survivors**, such as an annual Survivors' Forum.
2. The Church introduces a **quota of survivors** across each of its relevant boards and committees involved in directing and operating the safeguarding activities of the Church.
3. The National Board considers a fully **outsourced model to conduct all reviews** of safeguarding within Church bodies so that such reviews are visibly independent of the National Office.
4. The National Board invests in creating an **online application** to support those involved in safeguarding, with a focus on streamlining the material available and making it easier to navigate.

## Theme 2: Governance, Management, Accountability and Communication

Overall, the sense formed by the Review Team was that all three organisations perform well in terms of their statutory compliance with company law and charity regulation. However, the fact that survivors do not take part in decisions that affect them was discussed regularly by participants during the interviews and focus groups. Similarly, there were several observations made around generally improving governance and oversight more broadly and ensuring that each organisation has a robust system of risk management.

There were mixed views about the degree to which the National Board was properly independent of the Church given the funding arrangements that currently exist. We have acknowledged clearly in this Report that the Church has made enormous strides in terms of safeguarding over the last 20 years or so and has, in our view been sincere in its desire to ensure that a robust regime is in place, with the National Board playing a critical role in that regard. The question at issue here is how the governance of that regime is structured in a way that ensures overall ownership of the process by the Church, while still providing for operational autonomy by the Board in its work. Striking that balance is critical. Some stakeholders we have spoken to have raised questions about the extent to which the Board is truly independent in terms of operational autonomy. Our view is that the issue is one of perceptions about boundaries rather than independence *per se*. Ensuring continued adherence to boundaries around governance remains critically important. Some concerns were expressed about how Directors to the Board are selected, the length of time they may remain in office, and the requirement for a Board skills/experience audit to ensure all necessary skills and experience are present.

We have noted in that regard that Board members are not Members of the Company. In line with the Board's constitution, the Board nominates proposed appointees and Directors are appointed by the Members who represent the funding bodies. In our view, the creation of more detailed criteria and guidelines for the appointment of Directors, the differing skill sets they require and their length of tenure, would help to ensure the greatest possible level of transparency, even though it is recognised that adhering to such aspirations can be difficult in circumstances where the positions are voluntary.

Similarly, there was considerable debate about the extent to which there exists, or ought to exist, a fully 'independent' safeguarding service for the Catholic Church in Ireland. The majority of participants that we interviewed or who took part in focus groups felt that the relationship which the National Board, and by extension the executive National Office, has with the Church can never be completely independent, in the absolute sense of the word, given its reliance on the Church for funding. There is however a need to distinguish between strategic, financial, and operational independence. Whilst few tangible examples were given, the perception persisted, and it was

therefore necessary to take a somewhat pragmatic approach to assessing independence and any potential issues that may arise in this regard.

Across the review exercise, there were no examples reported to us of Church leaders explicitly interfering with the work of the National Board and some stakeholders expressed the view that the Church's evident understanding of the importance of having a safeguarding service that is perceived as independent, effectively acts to prevent any real interference. It was generally felt that the National Board does hold the Dioceses and Religious Congregations to account and is robust and clear in identifying practice that falls short of the expectations laid down in the principles that are now firmly established. However, the lack of independent external review aligned to the operational aspects of the National Office also contributed to concerns about independence amongst wider stakeholders. Overall, the work of National Board should be subject to a transparent process of independent oversight and should aspire to best practice in guidelines such as those established by the Charities Regulator – the ***Code of Conduct for Trustees***, as well as considering best practice for Boards as outlined in the ***Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies***.

The conclusion of the Review Team is that the independence issue is a complex one. It is the responsibility of the Catholic Church to have a fit for purpose safeguarding regime in place and it has ultimate accountability for that regime, including its funding. Taking account of all of the factors and viewpoints we have encountered, our considered assessment is that a better way to frame the issue is not to see it as being about independence per se but rather about boundaries - ensuring that full and proper boundaries exist between the various entities involved, with each discharging its defined function.

Against that backdrop, our assessment of the situation in terms of the Church's arrangements on safeguarding is that, on the whole, satisfactory boundaries pertain. In particular, we are satisfied that the National Office has operational autonomy in terms of how it undertakes its work. At the same time, as in many other aspects of this Review, we believe there is no room for complacency, and continuous work in ensuring the preservation of boundaries is needed and essential. We have accordingly included some suggested additional measures in that regard in our recommendations.

Under Theme 2 Governance, Management, Accountability and Communication the audit system was criticised in the sense that many stakeholders felt it was no longer fit-for-purpose. It was too onerous for some, while others considered it to be a 'box ticking' exercise in the absence of any system of external quality assurance. It is likely that these apparently contradictory sentiments stem from the significant differences in safeguarding activity within the entities being audited. While it is clear from our engagement that such differences are captured in the ***2016 Policy*** and are taken into consideration by the National Board, the audit system should be more specifically tailored to the

actual current activities of the auditee entity. Given the practical difficulties with the National Office conducting frequent reviews of all relevant Church entities, it appears necessary to develop a system of certification of self-audits which are undertaken by the Church entities and then subject to appropriate quality assurance procedures operated by the National Office.

Regarding the more detailed safeguarding reviews that are now occurring periodically, some respondents expressed concerns that the reviewers were not completely independent of the National Office, particularly in the early days, and that the National Office appeared to have some editorial discretion before review reports were published. There was a consensus that review activity needs to evolve and be more transparent with many stakeholders suggesting that reviews be fully outsourced to allay the concerns which exist over the difficulties caused by the National Office having the dual function of providing advice and assistance while also being responsible for the conduct of reviews. Given the small scale of the National Office and the lack of any rigid separation in functions, it is important that personal relationships are not perceived to have any bearing on review outcomes.

In terms of the management of staff and of relationships it was agreed by the majority of those consulted that human resources in the future would be adversely affected in terms of the ageing clergy and the dwindling number of Religious Orders. For those organisations which have contact with children, managing safeguarding would require employing increasing numbers of professional safeguarding staff and investing in lay volunteers to meet the safeguarding challenges of the future. Overall, there was a general consensus that safeguarding personnel working within the Church, had good relationships with civil statutory authorities, such as An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and Tusla. Many of these good relationships have developed over time, often because Church safeguarding personnel previously worked in these agencies and are able to capitalise on that knowledge and understanding. These positive perceptions of relationships were confirmed in our interviews with the relevant stakeholders.

This issue of communication was discussed by all stakeholders consulted and was the area where it was generally thought that the most improvements might be made. There were three main areas where changes were suggested. The first concerned better communication, both to stakeholders within the Church, and also wider society, about services like Towards Healing and Towards Peace which the Church makes available to survivors and victims of abuse, as well as what the Church is doing in the safeguarding space more broadly. This needs to be an ongoing activity and should be employed strategically whenever there is a programme or article published about abuse in the media. Secondly, external communication by the Church needs to be in 'one voice'. Some people expressed the view that there have been poor and diffuse responses to allegations that emerge in the media, partly due to the absence of, or the failure to use, a national Church leader on this topic, and partly it was felt, due to an understandable but over-cautious assessment of the weight to be attached to

legal considerations, given that many of the allegations in question were subject of legal proceedings. The perception amongst external stakeholders was that communication between IEC and AMRI is problematic. Finally, the issue of communication with young people was specifically addressed by one stakeholder - the Office of the Ombudsman for Children - who stated the Church had significant work to do in this regard when it comes to communicating with children and young people in their congregations, particularly those children and young people from the LGBTQI+ community.

Somewhat related to communication is the issue of sharing information. Both AMRI and the IEC comply fully with all the provisions of the GDPR. However, this is still an area that is challenging for the Church with the Dioceses and the Religious Congregations having taken different approaches to data protection. Our consultations with DLPs and other internal stakeholders revealed that this variation in approach arose due to the variations in legal advice received by the different organisations. Specifically, Religious Orders do not feel that they can share information about specific complaints and allegations with the National Board and other Church entities unless certain criteria are fulfilled. There is also the issue of the Church not having statutory powers in this regard.

It is clear that the Church leadership and the National Board have made significant efforts, both in legal and policy terms, to remove obstacles to information sharing, and to operate as best as it possibly can within the confines of the current data protection landscape. Whilst it is acknowledged that sharing information is crucial – and the failure to communicate and disclose information is something that is identified in every inquiry – the current situation is leading to concerns that the National Office does not receive all the relevant information about every allegation of abuse which would enable it to maintain an optimal level of situational awareness. This issue is evident in the somewhat variable reporting of notification data by the National Board in its annual reports. It is clear, however, that all entities are mandated to report complaints to the statutory authorities, and no concerns arose in this regard.

## Recommendations

5. The Church establishes a working group to review the **governance structure and lines of accountability for the National Board**, including the development of an open and transparent process for the recruitment and appointment of future Directors. This working group could consist of the existing PSC to provide oversight until reforms are implemented.

6. The Church commissions an **independent external review every five years** of the Church's key safeguarding entities, including the National Board, and the wider approach to safeguarding to ensure continuous improvement.

7. The Church reviews **how the data on abuse is reported** by the National Board to ensure it is timely, accurate, consistent, and comprehensive, in order that it can be kept informed about the volume and range of contemporary complaints so that it can respond in terms of resource allocation, training and guidance.

8. The National Board develops an internal **Code of Governance** in line with the standards set out in the Charities Regulator's Governance Code.

9. The Church considers creating a new **regional structure that rationalises all operational safeguarding activity and resources** across Dioceses and a corresponding structure, reflecting common services/activities, which would underpin such rationalisation across Religious Congregations.

10. **Expert legal advice** should be taken on behalf of both Dioceses and Congregations to ensure the data privacy principles for lawful processing are thoroughly considered and respected when implementing any new structures, to create a more efficient operating environment for data sharing.

11. **Towards Healing reporting** is revised to ensure greater transparency about the number of users and the nature of the services provided, without compromising the data privacy of service users.

12. The National Board moves to a model where it independently **quality assures self-audits**, conducted across Dioceses and Religious Congregations, to ensure a minimum standard is reached.

13. The National Board procures in an open tender process suitable resources capable of conducting **independent reviews of safeguarding practices**, as required.

14. The Church funds **a new communications function** within the National Board, in order for the National Board to be able to respond appropriately to all matters pertaining to safeguarding, and to promote the variety of supports available to survivors, for both internal (to wider Church stakeholders) and external public communications.

### Theme 3: The 'One Church' Approach

The task of organising and motivating the whole Church in Ireland to adopt and implement a single approach to any issue should not be underestimated. While, as outlined above, there was a broad perception that the "One Church" approach has worked well in terms of safeguarding, we also found that there was some confusion amongst the respondents we consulted about what the concept

actually refers to. Some people referred to it as meaning consistency between the Dioceses and the Religious Congregations, whilst others thought it referred to the same approach to safeguarding across the two jurisdictions. There were also some who believed the term simply related to a single policy for safeguarding.

Whilst there were many favourable views expressed about the 'One Church' approach, very few people linked the approach specifically to the safeguarding standards developed by the National Board. This difference in views and understanding could be a cause for concern. However, many people also expressed the view that the One Church approach was envied by people working in the Church in other countries with one person saying:

*"I think there are good individuals in place in terms of safeguarding. There are some really top-quality individuals involved in safeguarding .... at a national level, but also locally. I mean internationally, Ireland would be seen as a leading light in terms of the safeguarding of children now".*

However, one of the challenges of continuing to ensure the One Church strategy works, is the existence of Catholic activity outside of the scope of the IEC and AMRI. This could present a significant safeguarding risk within the broader Catholic Church in Ireland.

It is a fact that there is no one person in Ireland who holds the authority to direct all the various parts of the Church in its entirety to act in a particular way. It was suggested that there should be a single leader or champion for the One Church approach to safeguarding, whether this be the CEO of the National Board, a leader of a specific Commission on Safeguarding, or an additional appointee with appropriate authority, to coordinate all activity in a coherent manner and ensure some of the existing challenges could be addressed in a more systematic and efficient way.

## Recommendations

15. The Church **appoints a specific person as the Spokesperson for Safeguarding**, with a mandate to speak authoritatively on the issue, thereby addressing the perception that such a single voice is currently absent.

16. The Church funds a **new communications campaign** that focuses **on what the 'One Church' approach** means.



#### Theme 4: Resources

In terms of resources, concerns were expressed about the financial viability of funding the current safeguarding model into the future, given the likelihood that financial resources would diminish in direct proportion to declining Mass attendance. It was generally agreed that the Church would need to maintain the existing level of safeguarding with less available finance over the coming years which gave further support to arguments about reducing duplication and rationalising structures, notwithstanding the challenges of recognising canonical responsibilities.

Creating a tighter structure would increase both financial efficiency and the quality of work due to increased exposure to complex issues. In the same way that the Church must be mindful about the cost and effectiveness of its physical estate, which leads for example to rationalisation across parishes, similarly, the Church also must be prudent in terms of its people, both to ensure optimal value and to avoid duplication. There is a general decrease in Church human resources, but specifically many of the people involved in safeguarding since its inception will require replacement in the coming years as they step away from their current roles. Finding suitable replacements is expected to prove challenging.

There were low levels of awareness about the specifics of funding each of the organisational entities amongst those consulted as part of this Review, save for a general feeling that resources were dwindling and that some entities were duplicating activity, and by definition, may be expending limited resources poorly. It was generally felt within the focus groups that the expenditure of Towards Healing, despite its recent refocusing of its role and team, was not transparent and so issues about value for money were raised.

A small number of stakeholders questioned the rationale for the funding of Towards Peace as a standalone service, given its scale and the nature of its services, and some suggested that it could be incorporated into existing Church structures. Notwithstanding this, given Towards Peace's relatively minor draw on resources and its lean structure, it does not appear that any such restructuring would be likely to increase the efficiency of resource allocation or improve the service in any way. In addition, Towards Peace is the only support organisation with survivors on its Oversight Committee.

Overall expenditure on safeguarding will need to become more resource efficient in the future, both by ensuring there is greater control over expenditure, and by monitoring that the funds invested in those services and activities deliver the outcomes that matter most to victims and survivors. However, this does not mean that we are advocating a value-for-money agenda driving decisions. A large majority of people consulted as part of this Review expressed the belief that training about

safeguarding – when and where it was delivered, how often, by whom, and to whom – was one area which would require a complete overhaul.

One of the sentiments expressed by a significant majority of the lay people we consulted in relation to resources was their dissatisfaction at the reported vast amounts of money they believed were being spent on legal fees by the Church in respect of defending cases relating to failures in child protection, the majority of which relates to cases of abuse that happened several decades ago. More consultation specifically on this topic would be beneficial as the Church begins to move forward.

Pooling resources – for example within and between entities, agencies, or across regions, and streamlining existing activity – are potential solutions. Funding pressures and their potential impact on the sustainability of the safeguarding system were well understood by all stakeholders though there were very few specific suggestions about how the Church could alleviate such pressures into the future given newly emerging challenges. Finally, any expansion of the activities undertaken by the National Board, for example in respect of the safeguarding of vulnerable adults, would need to be resourced properly and efficiently.

## Recommendations

17. The National Board undertakes **a review of the training offered**, so that it is rationalised, and efficiencies created.

18. The Church explores a **unified and efficient approach to compensating victims**, such as a Redress Board, to reduce the legal fees incurred by all parties and to accelerate the settlement process for survivors.

19. The Church **considers how best to renew and sustain the human resources necessary to support safeguarding activity** as many involved to date cease their roles over time.

## Theme 5: Emerging Challenges

The Catholic Church does not exist in isolation from the rest of society. It is an integral part of Irish society and the attitudes and values that are to be found in society as a whole are also present within the Church. Irish society has transformed since the safeguarding structures under review were established, and social change is still occurring. There are more people living in Ireland, but born elsewhere, than ever before, and they bring with them a diversification of views, attitudes, and beliefs. Some of these people will be members of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the Catholic Church in Ireland will inevitably reflect some of that diversity.

In a similar vein, Ireland is increasingly faced with a number of social challenges. These include the impact of providing adequately in terms of services and integration for immigration, refugees, and asylum seekers, and addressing child poverty, housing problems, and homelessness. These are large issues within Irish society, and which will have implications for the role the Church plays in Irish life in the future, given its pastoral vocation.

New religious groups are emerging at grass roots level in parts of Ireland. Many of these involve children and young adults but operate completely outside formal Church structures as do some further, more established activities. Most stakeholders who shared a view believe that some form of control is now needed around any Catholic body wishing to establish a presence in Ireland, This is pertinent when we also have many Catholics arriving in Ireland from other countries who have different cultural views about what safeguarding means and how it should apply to them or to the people they interact with.

There remains a danger that the Church's Safeguarding effort is driven more by the continuing emergence of past abuse, than by current complaints and risks. Some concerns were expressed about complacency when it came to safeguarding in the future, connected to a sense that some people might believe that "*it has all been done now.*" However, there was an acknowledgement that the work of good safeguarding is never done and wherever there are people, young and old, there is going to be a need to keep them safe, and not just in the physical world but online too.

Finally, a sense emerged in the Review that conversations about safeguarding in the future need to be less siloed in terms of treating children, vulnerable adults, and others differently. All Dioceses and most Religious Congregations have in place policies, procedures, and training for the Safeguarding of Adults; however, vulnerability can be due to circumstance and can be both short and long-term. Safeguarding of vulnerable adults is currently treated differently to that of children, but stakeholders predominantly believe this should no longer be the case.

We are aware that the National Board has previously considered the issue of safeguarding vulnerable adults in detail and feels its current remit to be so significant, and its resources so limited, that it could not extend its scope at this time. We believe that in the medium term the Church should endeavour to encompass the safeguarding of all vulnerable people within its established safeguarding structures.

Safeguarding is primarily about keeping people safe, whoever they are, wherever they are from, and whatever part of the Church with which they are involved. This view about the conceptual importance of '*keeping all people safe*' was echoed by the majority of stakeholders consulted.

Much of the framework for current safeguarding in Ireland is predicated on the fact of people being in physical proximity to children. Abuse is increasingly moving online, and few models have been developed to ensure this issue is constantly and suitably monitored. This issue of *'life is online'* for young people was emphasised by every single external stakeholder consulted. There will be different challenges, equally difficult, when faced with abuse allegations that centre on an online location.

Older people are not likely to be the best source of expertise for how children and young people are living their lives online and making use of social media, and, therefore, younger people will need to be consulted and involved in developing new protocols to keep people safe in the online environment. Similarly, the Church should endeavour to develop strategic partnerships with organisations and individuals, such as the Ombudsman for Children, who are focused on the rights and welfare of children and young people in Ireland.

Encouragingly, there are champions of safeguarding at all levels of the Church who have a deep sense of purpose and commitment and who desire to see the Church as an exemplar of best practice, whatever challenges it may face. It is perhaps understandable in the historical context that the focus of the last 20 years has been about putting a comprehensive and fit for purpose safeguarding regime in place, with the emphasis on the here and now.

A major task ahead is ensuring that the Church in the future adopts a more strategic and proactive approach towards safeguarding matters, rather than responding reactively to issues as they arise. Implementing the recommendations from this Review will, we believe, make a positive contribution to that journey.

An important beginning to that journey is to consider and embrace a way of making public the results of the survivor consultation in some form. To seek to find out what survivors want implies a willingness to engage with these wants, and to do otherwise risks losing whatever small measure of good faith those who take part in such consultations might have.

If the Church genuinely wishes to demonstrate commitment to hearing, and acting upon, survivor testimony, this is an opportunity to do so and to signal a new openness and transparency in its operation of safeguarding practice.

## Recommendations

20. The Church seeks to implement a policy whereby new Catholic organisations who are commencing activity in Ireland would sign up to a **Code of Practice** committing to put safeguarding practices in place.

21. The Church develops and maintains a **register of organisations operating in Ireland** that subscribe to the safeguarding practices established by the Church. This should be easily accessible on websites so that individuals can check if an organisation is registered with the Catholic Church in Ireland.

22. The entirety of safeguarding – keeping all people, children, and vulnerable adults safe – needs to come under **one umbrella safeguarding structure** and all relevant policies, procedures, and processes should be reviewed and amended accordingly.

23. The Church keeps **online issues and risks under constant review** and includes same in every relevant Church Risk Register.

24. The Church establishes a forum to **consult with children and young people**, on a regular basis, to garner their views about safeguarding in an online environment.

25. The National Board develops **specific training focussed on online risks** including pornography, grooming, cybersecurity, and virtual reality.

26. The Church commits to a **periodic review of relevant safeguarding policies** to consider if they need adapting to **accommodate both societal change and cultural differences** for clergy and lay people coming from other countries.

Overall, this Report makes clear the view of the Review Team that the Church has a good story to tell about what it has implemented and achieved in relation to the safeguarding of children over the last 20 years. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, it is now regarded by some commentators as an exemplar in the Catholic Church globally. The recommendations we have made above, therefore, reflect that reality. At the same time, many challenges remain. The views of survivors, in particular, underline the deeply enduring reach and impact of abuse and the need to ensure that structures and responses reflect that ongoing reality.

Nonetheless, our overall conclusion is that, rather than a dramatic change in direction, what is required is a focus on continuous improvement and enhancements to address identified shortcomings or the impacts of change. In relation to any succession planning, the DLPs, given their experience and expertise, must remain pivotal in the safeguarding apparatus. In guarding against complacency and ensuring no return to the past, that focus is of itself critically important and valuable in our view. Much encouragement can be taken from what has been achieved over the last 20 years and the task now is to build on that and chart the next chapter. We hope our Review can serve as a positive contribution to that work.

## 7. IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Future discussions about how to best implement the recommendations will need to take place across and within each relevant organisation. In this section we outline a high-level roadmap for the implementation of the recommendations brought forward. We understand that some of these activities may currently be underway. It is hoped this potential roadmap will assist and inform the development of a formal plan(s) in the future. Please note all timelines referenced are from the point at which the final report is accepted by the PSC. In addition, these timelines are not intended to constrain the Church in any way but instead give some indication of the immediacy of each issue and the order of priority they should take. This report will need to be reflected upon and considered by all relevant parties and an implementation approach developed before this timeline is agreed. Developing and working to a declared timescale will be important in terms of addressing public and survivor expectations.

No.	Recommendation	Suggested Initial Activities	Lead Responsibility	Indicative Timeline
1	The Church develops and adopts a robust model of ongoing consultation with survivors.	Bring together a working group of survivors to determine how survivors would like to be consulted on an ongoing basis.	IEC/AMRI	Immediate.
2	The Church introduces a quota of survivors across each of its relevant boards and committees involved in directing and operating safeguarding activities.	This recommendation should also form part of the agenda for discussion at the initial consultation described at 1 above.	IEC/AMRI	Within 12 months.
3	The National Office considers a fully outsourced model to conduct all reviews of safeguarding.	Consideration to be given to the exact activities to be outsourced, how this model could be operationalised and its related costs.  Once the approach is approved by the Board, proceed to draft required tender documentation.	National Board	Within six months with a view to being operational within 12 months.

4	The National Board invests in creating an online application to support those involved in safeguarding.	A scoping exercise should be conducted to understand the capabilities comparable applications provide for other entities.  Once the report of the above exercise is approved by the Board, proceed to create a Statement of Requirements which the application should address. This will enable progression to procurement.	National Board	Within 12 months.
5	The Church establishes a working group to review the governance structure and lines of accountability for the National Board.	A Working Group to be established within six months which includes people with relevant governance experience and some members drawn from outside of the Church environment.  The Terms of Reference for the Review to be agreed within a further three months.	National Board	Within six months.
6	The Church commissions an independent external review of the Church's key safeguarding entities. This will occur at least every five years.	No immediate action.	IEC/AMRI	Plan for next review to commence no later than 2026.
7	The Church reviews how the data on abuse is reported by the National Board to ensure it is timely, accurate, consistent, and comprehensive.	A review of how the relevant data is captured, verified, collated, and reported should occur on an annual basis to explore potential improvements which are possible. Involving the users of such data in the review may prove valuable.	National Board	Review to occur annually commencing in 2025.
8	The National Board develops an internal Code of Governance.	The Working Group referred to at 5 above could be asked to extend its Terms of Reference to consider this requirement given the inter-relationship between the two recommendations.	National Board	The timeline of the review referred to at 5 above may need to extend to 12 months if the remit is expanded

9	The Church considers creating a new regional structure that rationalises all operational safeguarding activity and resources across Dioceses and a corresponding structure, reflecting common services/activities, which would underpin such rationalisation across Religious Congregations.	<p>A specific paper outlining the exact changes suggested should be developed expanding on the relevant content in this report and how recommendations that are going to be taken forward ought to be implemented.</p> <p>Once this proposal is agreed by the PSC of this project, the paper should be laid before respective meetings of the IEC and AMRI (or other representatives of these organisations) for their consideration.</p>	IEC/AMRI	Within 12 months.
10	Expert legal advice should be taken on behalf of both Dioceses and Congregations to ensure the data privacy principles for lawful processing are thoroughly considered and respected when implementing any new structures, to create a more efficient operating environment for data sharing.	IEC and AMRI should jointly appoint a suitable advisor to provide unified relevant data protection advice to both entities which accommodates the differences in their respective operations.	IEC/AMRI	Within 12 months.
11	Towards Healing reporting is revised to ensure greater transparency about the number of users and the nature of the services provided, without compromising the data privacy of service users.	A review of the relevant reporting and how it is presented should occur on an annual basis to explore potential improvements which are possible. Involving the users of such data in the review may prove valuable.	Towards Healing	In advance of the next annual report.
12	The National Board moves to a model where it independently quality assures self-audits, conducted across Dioceses and Religious Congregations, to ensure a minimum standard is reached.	<p>The National Board and its Executive team will wish to consider this recommendation and the nature of the assurance it could build around self-audits and how this service would be delivered.</p> <p>If a proposed model is approved by the Board, then a project plan should be developed to create the operating model across an agreed timeline.</p>	National Board	Develop outline model and wider project plan for 2025.



13	The National Board procures via an open tender process suitable resources to conduct independent reviews of safeguarding practices, as required.	Consideration to be given to the exact activities to be outsourced, how this model could be operationalised and its related costs.  Once the approach is approved by the Board, proceed to draft required tender documentation.	National Board	Within six months.
14	The Church funds a new communications function within the National Board.	Consideration to be given to the exact services that the new function would deliver, how this model could be operationalised and its related costs.  If a proposed model is approved by the funding bodies, then a project plan should be developed to create the operating model across an agreed timeline.	IEC/AMRI	Develop service catalogue and wider project plan within six months.
15	The Church appoints a specific person as the Church's Spokesperson for Safeguarding.	A specific proposal paper outlining the exact objectives, remit, responsibilities, and reporting lines associated with the proposed post should be developed expanding on the relevant content in this report.  Once this proposal is agreed by the PSC of this project, the paper should be laid before respective meetings of the IEC and AMRI (or other representatives of these organisations) for their consideration.	IEC/AMRI	Within 12 months.
16	The Church funds a new communications campaign that focuses on the 'One Church' approach.	A specific proposal paper outlining the main elements of the proposed campaign, its goals, how it would be resourced and managed, and its potential costs should be developed expanding on the relevant content in this report.  Once this proposal is agreed by the PSC of this project, the paper should be laid before	IEC/AMRI	Within 12 months.

		respective meetings of the IEC and AMRI (or other representatives of these organisations) for their consideration.		
17	The National Board undertakes a review of the training offered, so that it is rationalised, and efficiencies created.	The design and conduct of a survey of existing training users, and other stakeholders, to identify training needs and inform future provision.	National Board	Within six months.
18	The Church explores a unified and efficient approach to compensating victims, such as a Redress Board, to reduce the legal fees incurred by all parties and to accelerate the settlement process for survivors.	The funding bodies will need to consider appointing a suitable external advisor to support the creation of an options analysis considering the practical options open to the Church re compensation schemes.  Once the document is agreed by the PSC of this project, the paper should be laid before respective meetings of the IEC and AMRI (or other representatives of these organisations) for their consideration.	External Advisor working with the IEC and AMRI	By end of 2025.
19	The Church considers how to best to renew and sustain the human resources necessary to support safeguarding activity.	Each Church entity with personnel involved in safeguarding activity needs to assess its succession risk and put an appropriate plan in place to mitigate the risk.	All relevant Church entities. Communication of need for action to be managed by the National Board.	Within 12 months.
20	The Church seeks to implement a policy whereby new Catholic organisations who are commencing activity in Ireland would sign up to a Code of Practice committing to put safeguarding practices in place.	A small Working Group should be established within three months.  A Terms of Reference for its work should be agreed within a further two months. The Terms of Reference is likely to consider the potential content of a policy, how it would be made effective and how it would be communicated to relevant inbound organisations.	IEC/AMRI	Within 12 months.

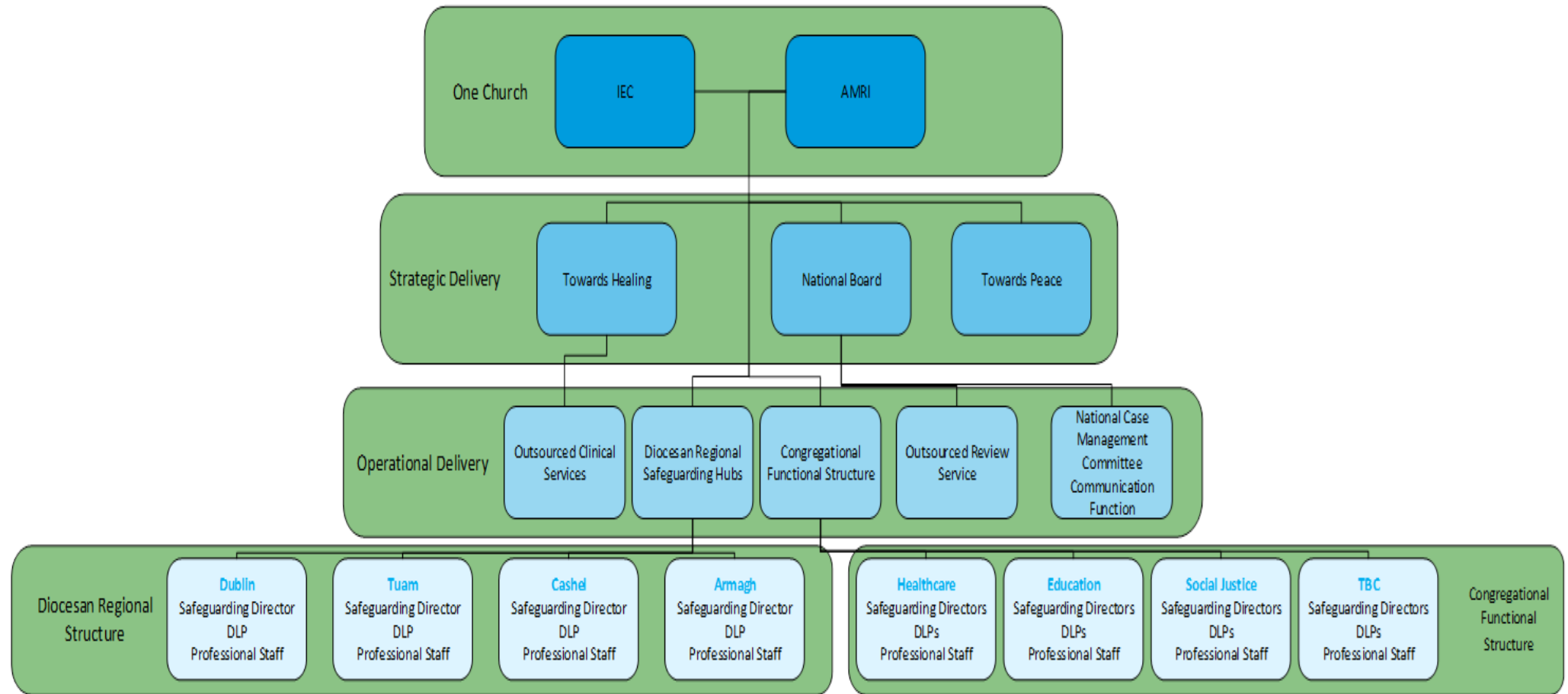
		The Working Group would be expected to report within six months thereafter.		
21	The Church develops and maintains a register of organisations operating in Ireland that subscribe to the safeguarding practices established by the Church.	The National Board would be appear best placed to create, manage, and publish this register.  If the Board is agreeable to undertake this task, then a project plan setting out the task allocation until the register goes live would require preparation.	National Board	Develop project plan within six months.
22	The entirety of safeguarding needs to come under one umbrella safeguarding structure.	The National Board believe that, given their current remit and resources, they cannot assume responsibility for the safeguarding of people beyond children. For that reason, a Working Group will need to be established to consider the strategic options as to how other vulnerable parties are safeguarded by the Church.  Such a Working Group could be established within six months and its Terms of Reference agreed within three further months.	IEC/AMRI	Working Group operational, if required, within six months.
23	The Church keeps online issues and risks under constant review and includes same in every relevant Church Risk Register.	Each Church entity should review its Risk Register periodically and when doing so the risks associated with online activity should be assessed and a treatment plan put in place to mitigate the risks, if required.	All Church entities.  The National Board may be best placed to raise awareness of the issue.	Immediately and ongoing.
24	The Church establishes a forum to consult with children and young people for their views about safeguarding in an online environment.	A Working Group to be established within three months and include stakeholders with relevant experience to guide the Church as to how such consultation with children and young people could be successfully established and sustained.	IEC/AMRI	Within twelve months.

		The Terms of Reference for the group's work to be agreed within a further three months.		
25	The National Board develops specific training focussed on relevant online risks.	It may be possible to ascertain the nature of the training required via the inclusion of relevant questions in the training survey referenced at 17 above.	National Board	Within six months.
26	The Church commits to a periodic review of relevant safeguarding policies to see if they need to be adapted to accommodate societal change and/or cultural differences.	This requirement would appear to fall within the current remit of the National Board.	National Board	Ongoing

In Figure 2 overleaf, we have set out an indicative future safeguarding structure for the consideration of readers. This structure reflects recommendation number 9 above as, for reasons of accumulating and sharing safeguarding skills and experience, it sees the advent of safeguarding hubs (virtual and perhaps physical centres where relevant activities can be concentrated) where safeguarding resources can learn from each other and have increased and continuing exposure to challenging work. These hubs are also likely to lead to greater efficiency for the Church in delivering its safeguarding obligations as safeguarding resources would be deployed to work across a specific region (in the case of the Diocesan Church), or across a cluster of congregations involved in the same functional areas, or who employ the same DLP within a set geographical area (in respect of the Religious Orders). It is our understanding that some of this operational co-operation already occurs on the ground, but it is our view that it should be formally acknowledged.

**Figure 2: Indicative Future Safeguarding Structure**

### Indicative Future Safeguarding Structure



## 8. THE REVIEW TEAM

- Terry McAdam, RSM Consulting Partner
- Tim O' Connor, RSM Specialist Advisor
- Roisin McGoldrick, Subject Matter Expert
- Ranald Mair, Subject Matter Expert
- Dr Rachel Iredale, RSM Consulting Director
- Carl Wissing, RSM Manager
- Richard O'Hagan, RSM Consultant
- Abigail Gannon, RSM Associate

The Review Team was multidisciplinary. It was comprised of acknowledged experts in child safeguarding policy and best practice, including Ranald Mair and Roisin McGoldrick, both of whom were part of the McLellan Commission looking at Safeguarding Policy and Practice for the Catholic Church in Scotland. Roisin and Ranald are both qualified Social Workers with extensive experience in relation to Child and Adult Protection.

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Review Team at RSM Ireland, along with our Subject Matter Experts, Ranald Mair and Roisin McGoldrick, would like to acknowledge the support and contribution of the IEC and AMRI, along with members of the Project Steering Committee, who provided feedback on the approach, methodology, draft materials, and early findings. Our sincerest thanks go to every person we engaged with as part of this Review of Safeguarding particularly those survivors of abuse who shared their experiences with us. Every contribution was extremely valuable.

## 10. DISCLAIMER

The matters raised in this report are only those, which came to our attention during our review and are not necessarily a complete statement of all strengths and weaknesses that exist, or all actions that might be necessary regarding the in-scope area of the Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. This report is made solely to the Project Steering Committee. We do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Project Steering Committee for the content herein.

---



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

**Terry McAdam**

**Consulting Partner**

RSM Ireland

T: +353 (0) 86 047 4002

E: [tmcadam@rsmireland.ie](mailto:tmcadam@rsmireland.ie)

### **RSM Ireland**

Trinity House,  
Charleston Rd,  
Ranelagh, Dublin  
Ireland

T +353 (0) 496 5388

[www.rsmireland.ie](http://www.rsmireland.ie)

RSM Ireland is a member of the RSM network and trades as RSM. RSM is the trading name used by the members of the RSM network. Each member of the RSM network is an independent accounting and consulting firm, which practices in its own right. The RSM network is not itself a separate legal entity in any jurisdiction. The network is administered by RSM International Limited, a company registered in England and Wales (company number 4040598) whose registered office is at 50 Cannon Street, London EC4N 6JJ. The brand and trademark RSM and other intellectual property rights used by members of the network are owned by RSM International Association, an association governed by article 60 et seq of the Civil Code of Switzerland whose seat is in Zug.