



Safeguarding Report

Diocesan Councils of Tuam and Limerick & Killaloe (February 2025)

Adoption of policies

It's getting to that time of year when parishes will have their Easter general vestry meetings and select vestries will be newly-formed. It has become clear to me that many – but not all – parishes have not adopted/re-adopted the safeguarding-specific policies required by the *Safeguarding Trust* and *Adult Safeguarding* policies. These are the:

1. complaints and disciplinary policies;
2. procedures for volunteers to raise grievances;
3. anti-bullying policy;
4. communications policy;
5. and working in partnership with parents/guardians policy.

Going forward, the diocesan secretaries and I will be encouraging newly-formed select vestries to annually adopt these policies. Templates and guidance to make this as simple as possible will be sent out in due course. As is so often the case, policies such as those listed above might seem unnecessary; however, putting them in place is a proactive step to help prevent issues arising, and, if issues arise, ensures that the way to respond to them is clearer. In addition, the systematic adoption of these policies across the whole Dioceses is a clear statement of our commitment to a culture of safeguarding in our parishes.

Annual online safeguarding returns

The link for parishes to submit their online safeguarding return for the calendar year 2024 is open and has been circulated. **All parishes must complete this by Friday 27th June 2025: a separate return must be completed for each select vestry in a group of parishes**, even if there is a shared parish panel. The return could be completed by the incumbent/priest-in-charge, the secretary of the select vestry, or a member of the parish panel. Where possible, the select vestry should have the opportunity to discuss the return before it is submitted. At the very least, the submitted return ought to be discussed at a select vestry meeting so that the members know what has been submitted on the vestry's behalf.

Parish panel training

Dr. Niall Moore (the Church of Ireland's Safeguarding Officer for the Republic of Ireland) has kindly agreed to deliver training for parish panel members in our Dioceses **online (via Zoom) from 7 pm to 10 pm on Wednesday 9th April 2025**, primarily for those who didn't attend one of the five in-person sessions held in the Dioceses in September and October 2024. Panel members must complete this training at the earliest opportunity after appointment, and then every three years. As panel training is delivered by the Safeguarding Officers based in the RCB, I cannot say when panel training will again be delivered online, and in-person training will most likely not be offered in the Dioceses again until at least 2027. To have an idea of the numbers planning to attend this session, I would appreciate it if attendees

could register directly with me, or if the incumbent/priest-in-charge could let me know how many panel members plan to attend from their parish(es), **by 11 pm on Sunday 6th April.**

Diocesan Support Team (DST)

Thank you to the Diocesan Councils for approving the membership of the Diocesan Support Team (DST) in December. I was greatly encouraged by the first of the DST's meetings, which took place online on Wednesday 15th January. I am very appreciative of the collaboration offered by the DST and think that it will be a great resource to parishes and the Dioceses as a whole in fulfilling our safeguarding responsibilities. The plan is that the DST will meet three times in each year, with the next to take place in May or June.

Parish panel survey

I recently conducted a short survey of parish panel members to give them the opportunity to give feedback on their experience in the role. I then shared the anonymised responses with the Diocesan Support Team. The feedback is helpful context for the DST as it supports and encourages parishes, and their panel members, in their compliance with *Safeguarding Trust*. Here are some statistics regarding those who completed the survey:

- There were 56 responses, which is 54% of the 103 panel members surveyed.
- 10 of the 56 responses were from incumbents/priests-in-charge who are members of parish panels, which is 48% of the 21 incumbents/priests-in-charge on panels.
- 46 of the responses were from other panel members (almost all of whom are laypeople), which is 56% of the 82 panel members (other than incumbents/priests-in-charge) surveyed.

[The five charts in the appendix below visually depict the answers to the multiple-choice questions.]

Auditing of parishes

At the time of writing, audit visits are currently scheduled to take place in:

- the Aghaval Group of Parishes;
- Straid Parish, Foxford;
- the Killala Group of Parishes;
- the Tuam & Omey Group of Parishes;
- Galway Parish;
- Kilcummin Parish, Oughterard;

with audits of several parishes in Limerick & Killaloe on the agenda to be completed over the coming months. In January, I visited Rathbarron, Co. Sligo, to audit the Achonry and Skreen Groups of Parishes, and the reports and action plans from those audits will be finalised and sent to the relevant parish panels in due course.

Diocesan Child Safeguarding Panel

Work is continuing behind-the-scenes on the formation of a re-constituted Diocesan Child Safeguarding Panel to deal not just with U.D.Y.C., but with a broader remit for responding to child safeguarding at a diocesan level across the bishopric. Unfortunately, I am not in the position to propose the membership at these meetings of the Diocesan Councils in February (as had been hoped); I feel it is best not to rush this so that we can have the most effective panel in place, well-balanced in terms of geography, gender, and experience. Two people (one member of the clergy and one layperson, both from Limerick & Killaloe) have confirmed their willingness to become members of this panel, so all that remains is to recruit one more member, ideally a layperson from Tuam, Killala & Achonry.

Safeguarding Newsletter

The Church of Ireland's Safeguarding Office is going to be producing a twice-yearly newsletter to keep readers updated on various matters. The first issue of this was sent out in December and can be found [at this link](#) or by going to the "Publications" section of the Church of Ireland's safeguarding website. Details of how to subscribe to this newsletter can be found in the first issue, and I would encourage Diocesan Council members to consider doing so.

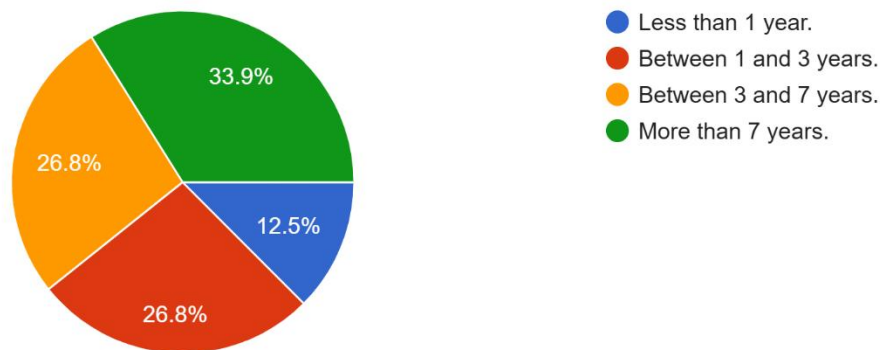
As always, if you have any queries, please feel free to get in touch with me either by email to safeguarding@tlk.ie or on 087 2274663. If I cannot answer the phone when you call, please leave a voicemail (with your name and number) or text/WhatsApp me and I will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you for your encouragement and support to me in this role.

Damian Shorten
(Diocesan Safeguarding Compliance Officer)
Tuesday 25th February 2025

Appendix

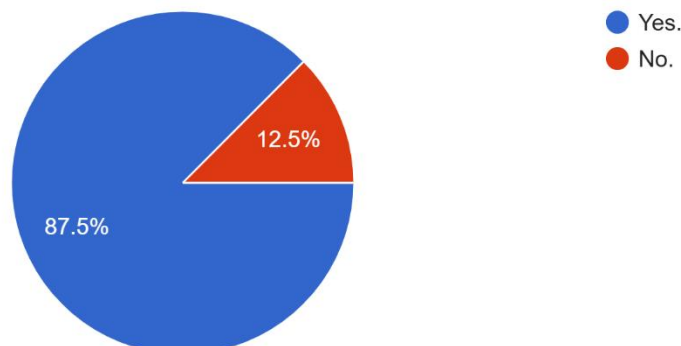
2. How long (approximately) have you been a member of your parish panel?

56 responses



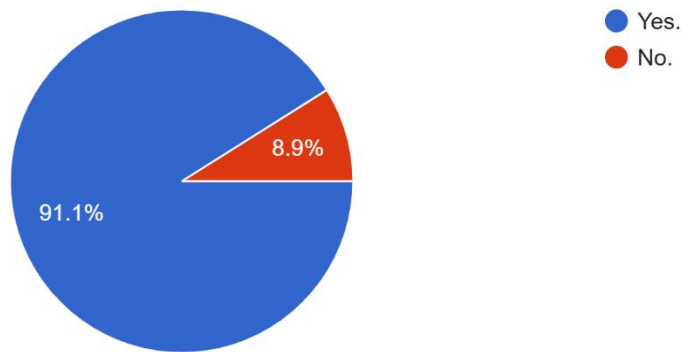
3 (a). Do you feel confident in your role as a parish panel member?

56 responses



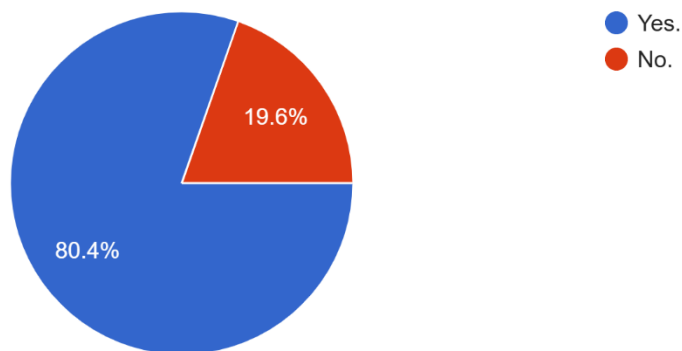
4 (a). Do you feel supported in your role as a parish panel member?

56 responses



5 (a). In your parish/group of parishes, do you think people are generally aware that you are a parish panel member?

56 responses



8 (a). Which of these statements best summarises how you feel about your responsibility and workload as a parish panel member?

56 responses

