



Safeguarding Report

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

Safeguarding assessment of harm and Child Safeguarding Statement

“Under the Children First Act 2015, organisations providing a relevant service with children, such as the Church of Ireland, must display a ‘compliant’ Child Safeguarding Statement (public document) and undertake a local Assessment of Harm (private document). ... A Child Safeguarding Statement must not be published until the assessment of harm is completed.” (<https://safeguarding.ireland.anglican.org/child-safeguarding-statements/>) The *Safeguarding Trust* policy makes clear that it is the responsibility of each Bishop and Diocesan Council to ensure the above is also done for the Diocese.

This safeguarding assessment of harm is not a general health & safety risk assessment but considers the potential for “harm” (as defined by the Children First Act 2015) to children while in the parish’s care, i.e., harm on account of physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse. I met with Heather Pope, Valerie Raitt, and Lorna Sharpe in late July to complete a draft assessment of harm for the Dioceses, which has been circulated prior to this month’s Diocesan Council meetings in the hope that it will be adopted by both Councils. Once that is done, the Councils can adopt the draft Child Safeguarding Statement (also circulated), which will be signed by the Bishop and displayed on the diocesan website and at diocesan events.

Almost all the work with children and young people which takes place on a diocesan level is undertaken by the United Diocesan Youth Council. Therefore, in parallel to the above pieces of work, I have arranged a meeting with the officers of the Youth Council’s committee on 8th November, to conduct an audit and an assessment of harm specifically relating to the Youth Council’s activities in detail.

Safeguarding policies

The select vestries of the Dioceses were encouraged this year to adopt the following five sets of policies and procedures which are required by *Safeguarding Trust*: complaints and disciplinary procedures; procedures for volunteers to raise grievances; an anti-bullying policy; a communications policy; and a working in partnership with parents/guardians policy. As parishes need to adopt these, so do dioceses. These policies were also circulated prior to this month’s Council meetings so that they can be adopted by the Councils. In this way, the Councils will be modelling the governance and compliance work which we are encouraging parishes to engage in. 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.

Declarations of compliance

Every year, an annual online safeguarding return (which could be referred to as the “retrospective declaration of compliance”) must be submitted on behalf of each select vestry, reporting on the

implementation of *Safeguarding Trust* and *Adult Safeguarding* in the previous calendar year. The deadline for the submission of the online safeguarding returns (for January to December 2024) was 27th June. Submissions were made this year for 32 of the 44 select vestries in the Dioceses (72.73%).

Every year, each select vestry at its first meeting must also adopt the safeguarding declaration of compliance (which could be referred to as the “prospective declaration”), confirming that *Safeguarding Trust* and *Adult Safeguarding* are being and will be implemented by the select vestry for the year ahead. This document also lists the details of the parish panel members appointed by the select vestry. The deadline for the return of this year’s declarations of compliance was 31st May. As of 10th September, I have received declarations of compliance from 29 of the 44 select vestries in the Dioceses (65.91%). If you think your parish or parishes might be among the fifteen which have not returned a declaration of compliance to me, can you please check and ensure that this is done as soon as possible?

Adult Safeguarding

Most of the safeguarding we deal with at parish and diocesan level is related to children. This makes me so conscious that we must make every effort to remember that safeguarding of vulnerable or at-risk adults is also part of our responsibility as a Church, albeit that the legislation and policies around this are still in their relatively early stages. I had hoped to organise the delivery of *Adult Safeguarding* training for the autumn of this year, but having discussed it with Dr. Niall Moore, we have decided to wait until the spring of 2026 in the hope that there will be more clarity around the direction of travel in adult safeguarding more broadly.

Safeguarding Trust worker training and recruitment

In May, we had an attendance of 36 people at two worker training sessions (for clergy, staff, and volunteers) delivered online by Dr. Catherine Emerson and the Rev’d. Carole Reynolds. Half of these were from the Dioceses of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe, while the other half were from the Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough who we facilitated due to the lack at that time of trainers in Dublin & Glendalough. As always, our appreciation is due to Catherine and Carole, as well as those who give up their time to attend training. It is expected that further worker training will be delivered online in the next two months or so. Details of that will be circulated to clergy, Readers, and parish panels once these have been confirmed.

Related to training is the topic of recruitment in general. In mid-August, mindful that attention would soon be turning in many parishes to the beginning of new seasons of youth & children’s activities, I sent out an email to parish panel members in the Dioceses reminding them of the expectations of *Safeguarding Trust* regarding the recruitment, selection, and management of those working with children. In addition, attached were the templates of an application form and reference form referred to in the policy as well as a recruitment checklist template. I adapted the latter from a version of the template shared with me by the Dean of Tuam, to whom I am very grateful.

Diocesan Support Team

The Diocesan Support Team (DST) for child safeguarding, which is composed largely of those involved with training and auditing in the Dioceses, meets three times a year on Zoom. Two meetings (one in May and one in September) have taken place since the last meeting of the Diocesan Councils, with the next to take place in January.

Diocesan Child Safeguarding Panel

A very positive first meeting of the Diocesan Child Safeguarding Panel (DCSP) took place online in June. Members expressed the desire to meet three times a year to keep in touch and to upskill. It is hoped to meet in October, and that meeting is in the process of being scheduled.

Auditing of parishes

Since the last Diocesan Council meetings, three audit visits to parishes have taken place. Mr. Mike O'Sullivan conducted an audit visit to the Kenmare & Dromod Union; Mr. Kieran Sparling visited the Birr Group; and I made a visit to the Rathkeale & Kilnaughtin Group. I would like to record my thanks to Mike and Kieran, as well as to the incumbents/priests-in-charge (and, in the case of the Rathkeale & Kilnaughtin Group, to Mr. George McNeill) and the parishioners who facilitated and engaged with these audits. It is hoped that audit visits to the Kilcolman Union, the Clonfert Union, and the Roscrea Group will be arranged and completed in the next six months or so.

It would be wonderful to have more auditors from around the Dioceses, but I do feel we have a particular need at the moment for some female auditors and for some auditors from Tuam, Killala & Achonry. If anyone thinks they might be able and willing to consider becoming involved as an auditor (or indeed as a trainer), please let me know and we can explore together what is involved.

As this report concludes, I want to publicly acknowledge my appreciation to Heather Pope for all her work in relation to safeguarding over the years, as well as her huge support to me personally since I started in this role. I will miss working with Heather but want to take the opportunity to wish her all the best in her new role.

Damian Shorten
(Diocesan Safeguarding Compliance Officer)
Wednesday 10th September 2025