

Safeguarding Strategy

2024-2026

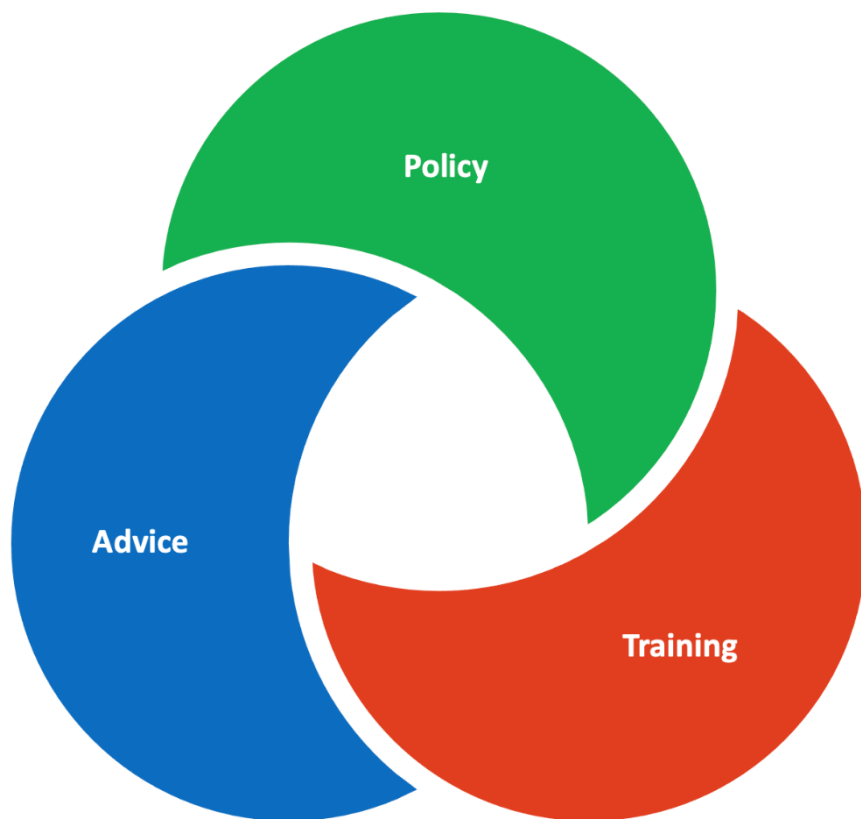


Background and Function

The Church of Ireland Safeguarding Board (“the Board”) exists to develop and approve safeguarding policy, to monitor implementation and to report to Standing Committee and the Representative Body as appropriate. All policies produced follow Irish and UK law as appropriate and are informed by best practice.

The Board is committed to learning from experience. By a process of continuous improvement, it monitors and challenges the effectiveness of The Church of Ireland’s safeguarding policies and processes. The Board submits an annual report for inclusion in the Church of Ireland General Synod Book of Reports.

The Safeguarding Office works to the Board and fulfils its objectives by developing policy, providing training for implementation, and offering advice to support best practice. Policy, training, and advice exist in a cycle, in that through training and advice common trends and themes begin to emerge which in turn require the development of policy leading to further training and advice as demonstrated in the diagram below.

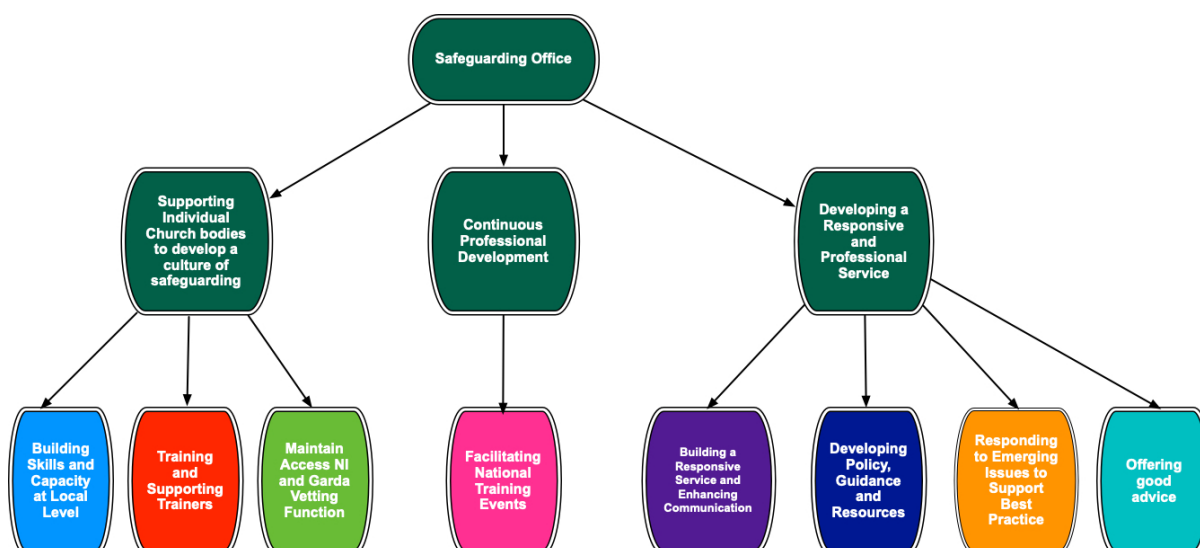


This cycle of continual development to support implementation and best practice is the basis upon which this strategy is written and is reflected in the objectives set out below.

Objectives

To support the development of good safeguarding practice, the Safeguarding Office will support individual Church bodies to develop a culture of safeguarding, support in the process of continuous professional development and develop a responsive service. These aims have been broken into a number of objectives grouped under the following headings:

- A. Building Competence and Skills at Local Level.
- B. Maintaining Access NI and Garda Vetting Function.
- C. Training and Supporting Trainers.
- D. Facilitating National Training Events.
- E. Building a Responsive Service and Enhancing Communication.
- F. Developing Policy, Guidance and Resources.
- G. Responding to Emerging Issues to Support Best Practice.
- H. Offering Good Advice.



Foundations

In order to fulfil the objectives above a number of foundations need to be in place to provide the necessary structure and resources to achieve the objectives. These include:

- Updated child safeguarding policy- a revised child safeguarding policy is at present still in draft form. The policy needs to be in place to fulfil the objectives above.
- Updated adult policy- the adult policy needs to be reviewed in line with changing legislation in Ireland and national policy in both jurisdictions.
- Resources- the updated policy includes several new roles in the safeguarding structure. These roles need to be filled and resourced to fully realise the safeguarding policy.
- Review of safeguarding governance- a proposal is in place to review the current structure of safeguarding for the Church of Ireland. It is important that the relevant recommendations within this review are implemented to support the work of this strategy. This is likely to happen concurrently with this Strategy.

Building Skills and Competence at Local Level

One of the main aims of the Safeguarding Office is to **empower** local Church personnel to implement the child safeguarding policy and adult safeguarding policy. To assist with this, local training will be provided to Church personnel at a time and date that suits them and can be tailored to the individual needs of each diocese.

These training programmes will be adapted to suit the needs of each diocese and can be focused on any aspect of child or adult safeguarding. The diversity of ministry within the Church means that **training must be adapted and tailored to particular circumstances**; it is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Officers to recognise this diversity through assessing need, developing and delivering specific training to reflect need. In delivering training this way the unique needs of each diocese can be explored with local Church personnel to skill them to meet local demands in relation to safeguarding practice.

What We Will Do:

In the next three years we will:

- Deliver at least 3 specific training events annually in total as requested by dioceses.
- Develop and deliver an induction programme on the new safeguarding policy.

Training and Supporting Trainers

A key aspect of ensuring the creation and maintenance of safe environments for children, adults and those that work with them, is to deliver the message of safeguarding and the structures within the Church in an appropriate way, to relevant Church personnel across Ireland.

The existing training programme will be adapted in 2024 to reflect a revised policy for safeguarding children, which is currently under development. In designing the new programme, a **working group of trainers** will be established so that their local knowledge and skills will be employed to assist in tailoring this important awareness programme to the needs of those who support child safeguarding within parishes. The new programme will be expanded to include not only basic awareness courses, but also programmes on key issues relevant to parishes and dioceses including risk assessment for groups involving children, panel training and mandated persons.

The current programme only includes child safeguarding, and a **new programme will be created to raise awareness of safeguarding for adults**.

A new **system of assessing existing and new trainers** will be developed to ensure that trainers continually update their skills and abilities to deliver the important message of safeguarding within parishes.

Consideration will be given to the place of **e-learning** in relation to the training provided by trainers.

What We Will Do:

In the next three years we will:

- Revise the current training manual in line with the new policy including specific workshops on relevant skills required to support parishes and dioceses in the work of safeguarding.
- Benchmark and develop an assessment process for currently registered trainers.
- Develop specific guidance regarding which roles need which levels of training.
- Evaluate opportunities to potentially integrate eLearning into a hybrid delivery model for training.
- Develop a Train the Trainers structure for adult safeguarding

Maintaining AccessNI and Garda Vetting Function

A key part of the work of the Safeguarding Office is providing Garda vetting/AccessNI checks for parishes, dioceses and those we have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with. This function will continue to be a part of the service offered by the Safeguarding Office. In the period covered by this strategy we will commit to evaluating the effectiveness of the service by those who have an SLA with us and following this **evaluation** making any changes we can to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

What We Will Do:

In the next three years we will:

- Continue to provide Garda Vetting/AccessNI vetting for parishes, dioceses and those we have a Service Level Agreement with.
- Provide stats and figures to evaluate the performance of the vetting function and make changes were necessary.
- Provide training as required to ensure clear processes for vetting in parishes, dioceses and for those we have an SLA with.
- Create and implement a new application pack for Access NI.
- Develop and agree a national vetting matrix in ROI.

Facilitating National Training Events

Organising training at a **national level** (either online or in person) offers opportunities for skills development and exchange of ideas and practice among specific disciplines within the Church. We envisage that National training events will not just assist embedding good practice but will also assist in increasing knowledge.

The Safeguarding Office will develop a **benchmarking exercise** based on assessed need drawn from parish returns and queries directly to the Safeguarding Office.

As part of the development and implementation of the new safeguarding policy there will be specific roles for those who carry out the responsibilities of Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs), Support Persons who will work with victims/survivors and Advisors who will work with those who have been accused of wrongdoing. National training for these roles will need to be considered as part of the benchmarking exercise.

What We Will Do:

In the next three years we will:

- Deliver a benchmarking exercise to understand the specific national training requirements.
- Develop and deliver training for those carrying out the functions of DLPs.
- Develop and deliver training for Support People and Advisors.

Building a Responsive Service and Enhancing Communication

A part of the work of the safeguarding office is to be an accessible resource for Church personnel. We do this through developing policy, offering advice and developing training.

To enhance this work and the synergy between policy, advice and training a **new database system** will be developed to manage the contact information of Church safeguarding personnel and track attendance at training and provide live feedback on trends from advice to aid the development of policy and training to improve practice.

Alongside this work consideration will be given to reaching out to target audiences to establish how we can best **communicate** with them. This may include children, victims and survivors or those who have been accused. Following this piece of work the existing website will be evaluated and updated to ensure it is user friendly and accessible.

Consider the development of a **newsletter** will would be produced twice annually and evaluated by recipients to assess its effectiveness and usefulness for Church personnel.

What We Will Do:

In the next three years we will:

- Develop an integrated database system to manage contacts, enhance communication and track and monitor trends in advice to assist in developing greater consistency of advice.
- Continue to evaluate and update the website to make it user friendly and accessible and add additional functionality to the website to enable training sessions to be booked on the Safeguarding website.
- Develop and deliver a newsletter (initially twice annually) to update Church personnel on the work of safeguarding.
- Consider reaching out to target audiences to find out how we can communicate and engage with them.

Developing Policy, Guidance and Resources

Following extensive consultation, the current Child Safeguarding Policy has been updated and will be implemented in 2024. Whilst the policy contains all information relevant to child safeguarding at present, it is an area which is continually developing. Using a new electronic database system to **monitor trends** in advice, the office will continue to **develop support material** on the implementation of the revised safeguarding policy when required and ensure this guidance is accessible to all personnel who wish to use it. In developing this material the Safeguarding Office will **engage with a range of relevant stakeholders** which may include insurers, legal advisers, Church personnel, children and their parents/ guardians, victims and survivors and those that have been accused.

Consideration will also be given to producing resources relevant for specific roles, to make the policy **easier to navigate and to understand**.

What We Will Do:

In the next three years we will:

- Continue to develop resources to support the implementation of the child safeguarding and adult policies.

Responding to Emerging Issues to Support Best Practice

The Safeguarding Office responds to requests from the Safeguarding Board relating to new and emerging areas of safeguarding.

The office stands ready to respond to further requests for support as required. To do this the office will aim to ensure that it is **informed by research and evidence** which will be used to assist the Church in improving practice.

The office will update relevant safeguarding personnel on developments in best practice through:

- Networking and taking part in relevant interagency initiatives.
- Developing briefing papers on topics relevant to the work of safeguarding children and adults.
- Facilitating meetings with church personal to support best practice.

What We Will Do:

- Participate and report back on appropriate network and support groups to develop best practice.
- Develop briefing papers as necessary so safeguarding practice is informed by developments nationally and internationally.
- Facilitate Diocesan Support Team meetings two times a year to ensure that each diocese feels connected and able to contribute to the work of the Safeguarding Office.

Offering Good Advice

A core function of the safeguarding office is to offer advice on aspects of child and adult safeguarding within the remit of the Office.

At present alongside advice, the Safeguarding Officers are involved in case management of allegations. It is envisaged that as the new child safeguarding policy is implemented and roles are in place, more of the case management can be done at a diocesan level and the Safeguarding Office will continue to offer advice.

To **increase the case management skills** of local diocesan personnel a Case Management Committee will be established and resourced by the Safeguarding Office, to offer advice on complex cases where a multi disciplinary perspective may be necessary.

Work will continue within the Safeguarding Office, RCB, the Safeguarding Board and the dioceses to establish **governance, data sharing, reporting structures and case management protocols for the Church of Ireland**. This will be part of and in tandem with the proposed review of the current safeguarding structure.

What We Will Do:

- **Establish a Case Management Committee and facilitate meetings as needed by diocesan personnel.**
- **Continue to offer advice on all aspects of child and adult safeguarding within the remit of the Safeguarding Office.**
- **Utilise the new integrated database to assist with recording and monitoring trends in casework and advice to inform best practice.**