



2.1G GUIDANCE ON ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE DIOCESAN PANEL (OR EQUIVALENT) ON CHILD SAFEGUARDING SUSPICIONS, CONCERNS, KNOWLEDGE OR ALLEGATIONS AGAINST CHURCH PERSONNEL WHILE STATUTORY AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATION IS ONGOING

If a suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation is received relating to church personnel the reporting process outlined in **Guidance 2.1A** is followed. The next steps outlined below should only be taken in consultation with the statutory authorities, and on advice from the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team.

The first priority is to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. The Diocesan Safeguarding Panel should as a matter of urgency take any necessary protective measures. As far as possible these measures should be agreed in advance with the statutory authorities. Any measures should be proportionate to the level of risk and should not unreasonably penalise the member of church personnel, financially or otherwise, unless necessary to protect children. Where protective measures may adversely impact the member of church personnel, it is important that early consideration be given to the case. It is very important that any protective measures taken are intended to be precautionary and not disciplinary. The protective measures are an interim measure pending the statutory authorities' consideration of the matter.

Any action taken should be guided by agreed procedures, and any applicable employment contract or volunteer arrangement and the rules of natural justice. It is not possible in these guidelines to deal with every scenario as conditions vary greatly between members of church personnel as can the terms. Legal advice should be sought by the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel as quickly as possible to ensure that applicable employment law procedures and natural justice principles are correctly followed. Insurers should be advised of any issue of alleged abuse by church personnel.

Once the statutory authorities agree that the Church can inform the respondent, members of the Diocesan Safeguarding Panel or agreed personnel should arrange to meet the respondent.

In arranging this meeting:

- The Bishop or person delegated by the Bishop should inform the person who will be attending the meeting;
- The respondent should be offered the support of an Advisor and the guidance on the role (**Guidance 2.3A**) outlined to them; this support should include pastoral care and support to the family of the respondent if they wish;
- The respondent should be informed that they can be accompanied by another person at this meeting for their own support.



At the meeting:

- The respondent must be informed of their rights to civil legal advice.
- The respondent must immediately be advised that they may admit, deny or decide not to respond at this stage.
- The respondent needs to be given enough detail about the suspicion, concern or allegation and about the person making it, in order to be able to offer a response, if they choose to do so. This should be agreed in advance with the statutory authorities. However, if a written statement has been given by the complainant, this cannot be given to the respondent, but a summary of its content can be shared if agreed with the statutory authorities.
- If a complainant does not wish to be identified, then their information cannot be shared with the respondent. The complainant should be made aware that they may be identifiable by the circumstances of the complaint.
- Protective measures will be agreed, in conjunction with statutory authorities as relevant, and implemented. The record should outline any planned risk mitigations and note if these mitigations impact on the respondent's exercise of ministry.

After the meeting:

- A dated, written record of the meeting is forwarded to the respondent for signing.
- The record should detail what they have been informed of, and their response (if any).
- The respondent is given written information about the next steps of the process, so that they are clear about the process that will be followed.

If the statutory authorities proceed with an investigation, the Church of Ireland will pause its own internal review, pending the outcome of the investigation. When the statutory authorities have concluded its investigation, the Church of Ireland will recommence an internal review and agree any further action required (**Guidance 2.4A**).