

STANDARD 2

PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO CHILD PROTECTION SUSPICIONS, CONCERNS, KNOWLEDGE OR ALLEGATIONS GUIDANCE FOR INDICATOR 2.2

2.2A Guidance on Regular Liaison with Statutory Authorities

Best practice in safeguarding children requires a multiagency approach that allows for exchange of information proportionate to the risk, and in line with relevant legislation. The statutory authorities are Tusla and An Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland, and the PSNI and the HSCT in Northern Ireland.

Case discussions

1. On an individual case-by-case basis, the Church authority must liaise with the statutory authority agencies to notify them of allegations, and to consider with them the appropriate actions to take in terms of notifying the respondent and of managing risk. **No action by the Church authority should be taken that may interfere with any criminal or statutory inquiries being conducted by state agencies.**
2. Notification of an allegation must be made in writing using the child protection referral form (Guidance 2.1A Template 1). All fields should be completed, and if the information is not known this should be stated.
3. A copy of this form must be forwarded to the statutory authority agencies and to the NBSCCCI, and a copy retained on the case file.
4. Any contacts and/or meetings with statutory authority agencies should be recorded in writing and a copy kept securely in the respondent case file.
5. Prior to informing the respondent that an allegation has been made, there should be a discussion with the relevant police force (An Garda Síochána/PSNI), whose view on informing the respondent should be sought. The purpose is to ensure that the Church authority is not prejudicing any criminal investigation (see Guidance 4.2A).
6. Prior to proceeding with the preliminary investigation in the case of clergy, or gathering the proofs in the case of a religious, written confirmation should be received from the statutory authority agencies, stating that their investigations have concluded.
(For clergy see Guidance 4.3A; for non-ordained religious see Guidance 4.3D.)

General meetings

It is acknowledged that the interagency review committees envisaged in the report of the Ferns Inquiry³ cannot be instituted in the Republic of Ireland due to legal difficulties.⁴

However, at least on an annual basis, the Church authority, the relevant police force (An Garda Síochána/PSNI) and Tusla/HSCT should liaise to discuss general matters relating to safeguarding children.

³ Ferns Report, 2005, p. 265.

⁴ Oireachtas debate, Tuesday, 22 November 2011, <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2011112200405?opendocument>.

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The rationale behind such meetings is explained in *Children First*⁵ in the Republic of Ireland, and in *Co-operating to Safeguard Children*⁶ in Northern Ireland, where the benefits of interagency cooperation and exchange of information in relation to child protection and welfare are explained and encouraged, and in which joint working is considered to extend across the planning, management, provision and delivery of child safeguarding services.

These general meetings should include:

- an update by the Church authority on all allegations notified during the previous year;
- sharing information on the management of respondents;
- strengthening the working relationships between the three organisations.

The meetings should be recorded and the minutes circulated to all participating agencies. Any reference to individual cases should be anonymised or recorded separately and retained on the case management record (Guidance 2.2B).

Contact information

Contact details for the relevant social work office, central Gardaí office/relevant PSNI contact and the DLP should be displayed in areas where there is public ministry. This information sets out how to raise a concern about a child or make an allegation of child abuse. A summary of these contacts is contained in Appendix D.

⁵ *Children First* 2011, Section 3.2 and 4.3.

⁶ *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 20016, Section 8.0*