

# Scouting Ireland Response to Mr. Ian Elliott's '*Historical Sexual Abuse in Scouting: A Learning Review*'

Scouting Ireland Board of Directors

May 2020

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# INTRODUCTION

Scouting Ireland commissioned Mr Ian Elliott to undertake an independent Learning Review to help us learn from the mistakes of the past so that we can ensure modern Scouting never fails our young people, our volunteers, and our employees again.

Mr Elliott's Report 'Historical Sexual Abuse in Scouting: A Learning Review' is important:

- For the courageous survivors of sexual abuse in Scouting, many of whom have come to us to tell their stories
- For the volunteers who are committed to Scouting and who support Scouting for the benefit of our young people
- For the parents who trust us to safeguard their children
- For the young people in Scouting – the only reason we exist
- For other youth organisations who can learn from its findings

This Learning Review is a milestone in Scouting Ireland's determination to search for the truth. It exposes past failings, particularly in our legacy organisations. It enables us to learn from an appalling backdrop of abuse which was ignored and unfortunately, in some cases, actively covered up.

As Scouts, we will not hide from our responsibility, to tell the truth. By looking 'beneath the stone' and searching 'the darker corners of the organisation' we have faced up to the fact that Scouting was not as safe as it should have been for our young people.

Today, we have put the protection of young people where it should always have been – front and center of everything we do.

Scouting Ireland unreservedly accepts the findings of this Learning Review in their entirety. It is an appalling vision of abuse, of cronyism and a catastrophic failure over decades of the governance required to deal with it. Mr Elliot describes cronyism as a negative culture focused on self-interest.

Scouting in its historic legacy organisations evolved into contrasting, overlapping worlds. One was Scouting at its best. It was supported by the genuine commitment of thousands of volunteers. They worked for the benefit of tens of thousands of young people. In parallel, another world existed. Sexual predators used the movement to abuse young people and destroy lives. Where cronyism is present it permits unscrupulous behaviors to go unchecked such as child sexual abuse. Habits developed of turning a blind eye. Organisational reputation and what passed for personal respectability was put before the welfare of young people. These young people are the very reason Scouting exists. These young people were failed the most.

The current Board of Scouting Ireland is in office now for eighteen months. We are not simply a new Board, we are driving forward a completely new approach to good governance and accountability. What motivates us is determination to deal fully with issues that arose from the past.

The decision of the previous Board in calling on Mr Elliott, initially to undertake a safeguarding review of the policies and procedures in place in July 2017, was part of that. It rapidly became clear that a much larger legacy issue existed. The job of facing up to that legacy was severely hampered by inadequate governance structures. Bad culture thrives in poor structure and governance.

This Report is correct in describing that the culture that had existed in the legacy organisations was one that allowed for cronyism to develop and where volunteers were not held accountable for their actions.

The backdrop to this Report includes:

- New governance structures that are in place in Scouting Ireland
- The findings of Ms Jillian van Turnhout's report 'Review of Scouting Ireland' completed for Minister Zappone in June 2018.
- The appointment in March 2020 of Ms Brigid McManus to carry out an assessment of governance and safeguarding in Scouting Ireland as a follow-up to the earlier work of Ms van Turnhout.
- Child safeguarding policies and procedures have been independently reviewed by Mr Elliott and further developed by our Safeguarding Department in conjunction with Tusla.
- Scouting Ireland has completed the agreed Scouting Ireland Tusla Action Plan and developed new procedures for the assessment and handling of child protection disclosures.

Good policy, transparent structures and effective enforcement are required for real change. Historically discipline in Scouting was at best a reluctant response within a peer group. It was ineffective. This Report details the shocking consequences of that failure. The lack of consequences fostered bad culture, in the context of poor governance:

- Scouting Ireland has developed a new disciplinary code, which is regularly reviewed, and appointed a Disciplinary Panel of 3 members one of whom is external to Scouting Ireland.
- Scouting Ireland continues to liaise with all relevant authorities including Túsla, Gateway, An Garda Síochána, PSNI, Charities Regulatory Authority and the Charities Commission of Northern Ireland.
- Delivering on this is an enhanced safeguarding department including the new post of Safeguarding Manager.
- Our new CEO Ms Anne Griffin is leading the professional team forward in a completely different governance structure.
- All positions at a national level, from Project Teams through to Directors, are advertised, interviewed for and filled with persons holding the skills and experience to meet the term-bound role.

**Scouting is a youth movement, not a hobby for adults. To be a volunteer in Scouting Ireland is a privilege not a right.**

Cultural change requires we re-centre ourselves on the young people we exist for. To our survivors of abuse in Scouting, we want you to know that you have been heard. You are believed. We are determined that there is no place in Scouting for anyone who by design or by omission harms a child. Cronyism, looking away and covering up are not victimless crimes. They are enabling actions.

Scouting Ireland unreservedly apologises to those who placed their trust in Scouting here in Ireland and those Scouting has failed. We pledge to adopt and deliver on the Learnings and Recommendations of this Report. It is a light pointing into a very dark corner. It is also a beacon for the standards, culture, and structures we must have, and which must be resourced to ensure that Scouting is a safe place for young people.

Our task now is to ensure that parents and communities can have full confidence in modern Scouting and in the huge efforts and positivity that our Volunteers bring to their communities across the whole island of Ireland.

For those of us committed to Scouting, that commitment is to lead every change required. Our thanks are due to Mr Elliott for such a comprehensive report.

Our deepest respect is due to the victims and survivors. We will not forget that in the bravery and honesty of their personal accounts, they, more than any others, have demonstrated the character which Scouting Ireland needs to continually strive to meet.

Mr Elliott's Report is for them, it is their story.



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**Adrian Tennant**  
**Chairperson**  
**Gasóga na hÉireann/Scouting Ireland**

**7<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

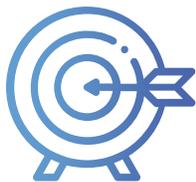
## RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Ian Elliott makes 12 recommendations in his report *'Historical Sexual Abuse in Scouting: A Learning Review'*.

Scouting Ireland is committed to meeting each of these recommendations. We are determined to learn from past mistakes, and we have already taken action on all of them.

This response from the Board of Directors of Scouting Ireland sets out the changes introduced in our organisation that address these recommendations. It also sets out further changes Scouting Ireland will implement to ensure all recommendations are not just met but are exceeded.

## RECOMMENDATION 1



**The governance structure of Scouting Ireland should ensure that small, undemocratic cliques of members, do not exert undue influence on the decision making of the organisation. This has happened and was accepted practice until very recently. It should continue to make use of experienced governance experts to advise it on how it develops its structure.**

### 1.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to ensuring good governance through the continuation of our structural reform, which has been ongoing over the past 18 months. To reflect the diversity of our organisation we ensure inclusion and transparency in our decision making. We are commitment to external governance review to allow reflection and continual improvement.**

### 1.2 Actions Taken



- New Board structure (including external directors) with a full new Board of Directors in place since October 2018.
- Directors elected by the members with, a competency selection process for internal directors and a competency interview for external directors.
- External individuals now sit on the Board of Directors and on Sub-Committees to ensure an external perspective
- All directors have appropriate skills and experience
- Term limits in place across the Board, sub-committees and teams
- Engaged governance experts to guide us on this governance journey
- Scheduled continual review process: Triennial review of Governance (2021) and Biannual Audit of Safeguarding (2020) by external experts
- Structural reform ensuring a clear separation of oversight, at Board of Directors' level, and operations, delivered by the CEO through the departments of the organisation.

- Safeguarding Department is run by professionals. All guidance, management and reporting of cases is by professionals.
- Annual Director's Skill Assessment, self and peer, was carried out with the support of an external professional was conducted in November 2019
- Diversity and Inclusion Policy in place since 2016, revised 2018

### 1.3 Actions to Take



- Continue our Good Governance journey
- Continue to drive cultural change
- Fully compliant with CRA Charities Governance Code by Dec 2020
- Promotion of Diversity & Inclusion Policy and develop a practice framework
- Increase youth inclusion in decision making process

## RECOMMENDATION 2



**A robust disciplinary process should be adopted that will hold volunteers accountable where it has been found that their behaviour is unacceptable or contravenes the expectations that are held of how an adult volunteer should behave. It is important that this process should be capable of delivering discipline quickly to avoid situations occurring which drag on for months or even years.**

### 2.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is fully committed to holding volunteers to account. Volunteering in scouting is a privilege, not a right, which may be removed when it is deemed necessary. Scouting Ireland is committed to making this process as swift as possible.**

### 2.2 Actions Taken



- Disciplinary procedures overhauled to ensure responsibility and accountability within Scouting Ireland
- Introduced a new Disciplinary Code, which is regularly reviewed
- Established Disputes, Resolutions and Appeals Panel (DRAP)
- Appointed a Disciplinary Panel of 3 members one of whom is external to Scouting Ireland within the DRAP structure
- Established a Suspension Without Prejudice policy and procedure
- All disputes and discipline policies and procedures are under continual review

### 2.3 Actions to Take



- Continue to review best practice by learning from other Irish organisations and international Scout Organisations
- Development of a re-admittance policy by end of 2020
- Development of new volunteer Code of Behaviour by end of 2020
- Simplified diagram / flowchart of Disciplinary Process to increase understanding by end of 2020
- Communicate continually the privilege of volunteering with young people

## RECOMMENDATION 3



**Records should be created that reflect the safeguarding practice of the organisation fairly and comprehensively. They should be centrally stored, regularly monitored, and capable of being retrieved easily. The practice of holding documentation or electronic information outside of the approved central database, should be ended immediately.**

### 3.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to ensuring that all records concerning the organisation are centrally stored, monitored and easily retrievable. All efforts have been made to ensure no records are stored outside of Scouting Ireland's Safeguarding Department.**

### 3.2 Actions Taken



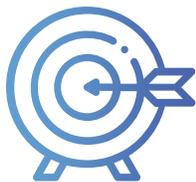
- Over the past 18 months Scouting Ireland have made concerted efforts to retrieve any documentation held by members. All ex-National officers were requested to review and return any Scouting Ireland documentation held by them to Scouting Ireland and a national request to all members for any supporting documentation was issued in January 2019 with a continual request on our website for six months
- All safeguarding records in the organisation's possession are held centrally
- An electronic database is in use by Safeguarding Department
- The Safeguarding Manager is responsible for all Safeguarding Reports. A new recording and filing system have been put in place under the guidance of Ian Elliott from 2018.
- Improved documentation management at Board, Sub-Committee and Teams level – removing the risk of documentation being held off site

### 3.3 Actions to Take



- Archival Project – All paper files within the Safeguarding Department are to be scanned and indexed for easy retrieval and safer storage
- Develop a new flexible database for data and case management
- Continuous reminders to all Group Leaders to ensure all safeguarding concerns are recorded and documented by Scouting Ireland's Safeguarding Team

## RECOMMENDATION 4



The Board should be regularly updated on the overall safeguarding workload that exists, at any time, in Scouting Ireland. This information, when presented by the safeguarding manager, should be interrogated by the directors to satisfy themselves that appropriate responses were made to all the safeguarding concerns that emerged.

### 4.1 Commitment



It is the responsibility of each Board member of Scouting Ireland to understand their obligations, to ensure that they are satisfied that the safeguarding policies and procedures are appropriate, and that all safeguarding concerns are handled appropriately. Further, the Board commits to ensuring adequate resources are in place to safeguard youth members. The safety of all members is of paramount importance.

### 4.2 Actions Taken

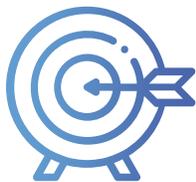


- Safeguarding Manager meets weekly with CEO
- Safeguarding is a standing item on the Board of Directors agenda
- Safeguarding Manager prepares monthly report for CEO to present to the Board
- Safeguarding Manager attends Board meeting in person every quarter
- Safeguarding sub-committee of the Board is in place with the skills and knowledge required to advise the Board of Directors. The Safeguarding sub-committee has three external members, one of which is the chair of the committee

### 4.3 Actions to Take



- Biennial External Audit of Safeguarding in Scouting Ireland by end of 2020
- Internal annual review of Safeguarding



## RECOMMENDATION 5

**A diligent attempt should be made to establish what documentation exists outside of the official records system, currently. Home visits should be made to make it as easy as possible for anyone to return documentation for archiving in Larch Hill.**



### 5.1 Commitment

**Scouting Ireland is committed to ensuring all documentation is held within the organisation. It is steadfast in its commitment to ensure ease of collection and will facilitate this.**



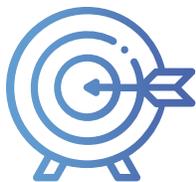
### 5.2 Actions Taken

- All ex-National officers were requested to review any records they may have and submit documentation to SI in December 2018. A national request to all members for any supporting documentation was issued in January 2019 and a continual request on our website for six months



### 5.2 Actions to Take

- A renewed call for documentation to ex-National Officers



## RECOMMENDATION 6

**Scouting Ireland should make an institutional apology to all those that have been harmed through their contact with scouting in previous years.**



### 6.1 Commitment

Scouting Ireland apologises to all the who have been failed by scouting, those who have been subject to child sexual abuse, victims and survivors, to their parents who trusted us with their children, to the adults who tried to protect them and were ignored, to the youth members at the time whose development was not the focus, to our communities who supported us, to the funders who supported us and to our members today.



### 6.2 Actions Taken

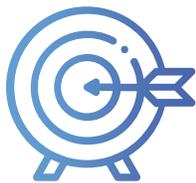
- Victims and survivors contacting Scouting Ireland directly have been issued with a personal apology
- A public apology was made at the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Children and Youth Affairs in March 2019
- An apology was again issued at the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Children and Youth Affairs in December 2019



### 6.3 Actions to Take

- An organisational apology will be offered in May 2020
- This organisational apology will be publicised in a press statement issued to national media and published on the Scouting Ireland website and in a video published on Scouting Ireland social channels
- Scouting Ireland will continue to apologise to all who have been failed through scouting

## RECOMMENDATION 7



**Effective safeguarding must be adequately resourced and prioritised in Scouting Ireland today and going forward. Eliminating preventable harm to young people must be the most important objective before Scouting Ireland today. There is evidence that this aim was ignored in previous years, as can be seen by any review of the documentation detailing the discussions that led to the creation of Scouting Ireland. Protecting young people from abuse was never mentioned.**

### 7.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to supporting the development of our youth members. Scouting is a youth movement, and we are committed to the cultural change which focuses our organisation on the young people we exist for and prioritise their safeguarding.**

### 7.2 Actions Taken

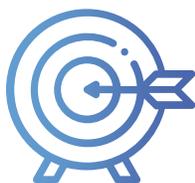


- Changes made not just structural but culturally, across the whole organisation with accountability and a refocus on the delivery of positive scouting to youth members
- All decisions and strategy are taken with the youth member at their centre
- New Safeguarding Manager and two full time case officers in place
- Developed new procedures for the assessment and handling of child protection disclosures
- Child safeguarding policies and procedures have been independently reviewed by Mr Ian Elliott and further developed by our Safeguarding Manager and Team in conjunction with Tusla
- Safeguarding including the resources of the Safeguarding Department is a standing item on the Board of Directors agenda
- Scouting Ireland Tusla Action Plan completed



### 7.3 Actions to Take

- Employ an administrator to join the Safeguarding Team
- Continue to drive the cultural change across the whole organisation where youth members are the focus of all that we do



## RECOMMENDATION 8

**Where it has been shown that an individual, regardless of their position, has placed a young person at risk through their actions, or brought dishonour to the scouting movement by their behaviour, they should be expelled directly.**

### 8.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to providing the safest environment for young people. Scouting Ireland will not tolerate any individual who places young people at risk, nor will it allow those who have behaved inappropriately to continue in Scouting.**

### 8.2 Actions Taken



- Overhaul of approach to discipline within Scouting Ireland
- A new Disciplinary Code developed
- Established Disputes, Resolutions and Appeals Panel
- Appointed a Disciplinary Panel of three members one of whom is external to Scouting Ireland
- Established a Suspension Without Prejudice Policy and procedure
- All disputes and discipline policies and procedures are under continual review
- All reportable concerns are reported immediately to the appropriate authority – the Garda / Tusla in the Republic of Ireland and the PSNI / Gateway in Northern Ireland
- Scouting Ireland acts on their advice and co-operates fully with their investigations

### 8.3 Actions to Take



- Continue to review best practice by learning from other Irish organisations and international Scout Organisations
- Development of new Volunteer Standards
- Communicate continually the privilege of volunteering with young people



## RECOMMENDATION 9

**Where risk has been identified as existing, this information should be shared with all those people that need to be informed.**

### 9.1 Commitment



**The young person is at the centre of all that Scouting Ireland does. It is a youth centered organisation, existing only for the positive development of young people. Our safeguarding policies and procedures state that where a risk is identified, all persons who need to be informed to ensure the prevention of harm to young people, must be informed.**

### 9.2 Actions Taken



- Safeguarding Department have improved standard reporting process and procedures, which have been independently reviewed
- All concerns are reported immediately to the appropriate authority
- The Suspension without Prejudice Policy, which sets out who is informed is practiced

### 9.3 Actions to Take



- Continual communication regarding Safeguarding Policy and procedures to all members
- Continual review of legislation and best practice to ensure up-to-date policies and procedures
- Annual Safeguarding review includes the examination of the practice of the policy and procedure for notifying all those who need to be informed

## RECOMMENDATION 10



**Scouting Ireland should set up an independent audit process that monitors the quality of its safeguarding practice. An audit report should be presented to the Board, detailing the findings. The regularity of the audit process should be undertaken annually or no less frequently than every two years. The findings of the audit should be made available to all the key stakeholders, as well as the Board.**

### 10.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to the highest possible standard of safeguarding for our young people. To ensure this is the case Scouting Ireland will engage an independent audit process that monitors the quality of its safeguarding practice.**

### 10.2 Actions Taken



- Scouting Ireland will be engaging an independent consultant to conduct this audit by the end of 2020. The Audit Report and any findings arising will be considered by the Board. The Audit Report will be made available to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

### 10.3 Actions to Take



- Conduct the internal annual review of Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- Appoint external consultant to conduct independent Audit of Safeguarding
- Implement findings and recommendations of both



## RECOMMENDATION 11

**Scouting Ireland should continue to maintain and nurture a close working relationship with the key safeguarding statutory agencies in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. This relationship should also be included in the independent audit process previously recommended.**

### 11.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to the highest level of Safeguarding of our young people. Scouting Ireland is committed to working closely with the agencies that safeguard our young people and will ensure a professional and positive working relationship is maintained and nurtured.**

### 11.2 Actions Taken

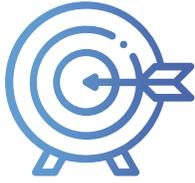


- Strong working relationship with Tusla and Gateway
- Strong working relationship with An Garda Síochána and the PSNI
- Commitment to conduct biennial Audit of Safeguarding including our relationship with key safeguarding agencies

### 11.3 Actions to Take



- Conduct the internal annual review of Safeguarding Policy and Procedures implementation
- Conduct the Biennial External Audit of Safeguarding
- Implement findings and recommendations of both reviews



## RECOMMENDATION 12

**Scouting Ireland should deter an improper use of social media to distribute unsubstantiated allegations and to encourage the spread of cronyism. Any breach of this should be subject to the disciplinary processes in Scouting Ireland.**

### 12.1 Commitment



**Scouting Ireland is committed to accountability, transparency and behaving with integrity. It will not tolerate any behaviour that encourages the spread of cronyism or the spread unsubstantiated allegations whether this be via social media or any other forum.**



### 12.2 Actions Taken

- The new Disciplinary Code has been used to deal with situation as set out above



### 12.3 Actions to Take

- Continue to update Social Media Policy to reflect the ever-evolving use of technology



## CONCLUSION

The Board of Scouting Ireland wishes to thank Mr Ian Elliott for his comprehensive Learning Review into historical sexual abuse in Scouting.

He has been unreservedly committed to unlocking the truth of a shameful past. More importantly, he has been determined to help Scouting learn from that past and become as safe an environment as it possibly can be for both our youth members and adult volunteers.

We are committed to implementing in full the recommendations from Mr. Elliott's Learning Review and to sharing our experiences with other national and international youth organisations.

We sincerely hope that those who were hurt by scouting in the past, and all victims and survivors of sexual abuse in scouting, accept our organisational apology and take comfort from knowing that by speaking out they have ensured that scouting in Ireland is safer than it ever has been for members.

Scouting Ireland has been on a very significant journey of governance and cultural change. We are now a very different organisation from the one which started this journey three years ago.

The new governance and organisational structures introduced with the support of our members herald a new era for Scouting in Ireland. We have renewed our commitment to the young people we serve; to providing them with a positive experience of Scouting in a safe environment where there are clear lines of responsibility and people who do wrong are held to account. Safeguarding is at the core of everything we do.

The Board is committed to an organisation that is accountable, professional, proactive, inclusive, transparent, competent and behaves with integrity to deliver scouting to all youth members.

There is no place in our organisation for cronyism. There is no place in our organisation for those who seek to harm children. There will be no hiding places for those who do wrong.