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Scouting Ireland directors warn over infighting

Organisation's child protection standards in "jeopardy", two board members claim

Scouting body rejects allegations over child safeguarding issue and finances

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Two members of Scouting Ireland's board have claimed the integrity of child protection standards in the youth organisation is in "jeopardy" due to in-fighting among directors.

They allege they raised concerns that a report about the "handling of a paedophile" had not been appropriately investigated by the organisation.

The directors, Donnachadha Reynolds and Jacques Kinane, claim the board of Scouting Ireland was beset by "terrible in-fighting" over the past 18 months. A document written by the pair states "the integrity of safeguarding and decisions reached in our organisation is now in jeopardy".

The document dated November 7th last, seen by The Irish Times, reveals a rift within the board of the organisation, which in recent years has weathered a major historical child sex abuse scandal and a previous boardroom fallout.

The two board members also said they had raised concerns about the organisation's finances due to fears the large number of legal cases taken by abuse survivors could lead to a possible "wipeout". Mr Reynolds and Mr Kinane, who joined the voluntary board in September 2022, claimed colleagues had been "limiting" information provided to a group of three directors.

Scouting Ireland said the claims made in the document were "without merit" and seemed "designed to undermine the progressive work" of the organisation and damage its reputation.

In a statement, the organisation said child protection was a "priority" for its board. It rejected "in the strongest possible terms" the claim that a safeguarding issue had not been appropriately investigated, saying the allegation was "without foundation".

Scouting Ireland added that its finances were "healthy" and its accounts included a "contingency" to cover the cost of legal cases taken by abuse survivors.

Briefing document

The two board members prepared the briefing document for Sinn Féin, but it was later shared with the Department of Children, Scouting Ireland's main public funder.

The briefing stated that Mr Reynolds was suspended as a board member and volunteer following a clash with Joe Marken, Scouting Ireland's interim chief executive, during a board meeting last June.

The document was sent to the entire board on November 19th, at which point Mr Marken shared it with department officials, internal emails show.

Mr Marken told the department one of the authors was suspended from the board. While the other was asked to leave a recent meeting "for a breach of the board's code of conduct".

A Scouting Ireland spokeswoman said it did not comment on disciplinary matters "in order to ensure due and fair process".

A department spokesman said officials were "reviewing" the allegations made by the two directors and had met Mr Reynolds and Mr Kinane last month.

Mr Reynolds said he could not comment on their claims or his suspension, while Mr Kinane did not respond to requests for comment.

Scouting Ireland receives €1.3 million a year from the department. The funding was suspended in 2018 following controversy over the flawed handling of a serious sexual assault allegation concerning two adult volunteers. It was restored after its entire board was replaced as part of a governance overhaul.