

Scouting Ireland board member also has role with regulator inspecting youth organisation

Dual directorships of Galway barrister Lorraine Lally raise questions for Heather Humphreys

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A board member of Scouting Ireland has held on to her seat on the Charities Regulator board despite the regulator appointing statutory inspectors to investigate the affairs of the national scouting body.

The dual board directorships of Galway barrister Lorraine Lally have raised questions for outgoing Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys on her last day in the Government. A new cabinet takes office on Wednesday.

The Minister makes board appointments to the regulator and only she can remove board members. Her office acknowledged recent correspondence from the regulator on Scouting Ireland but Ms Lally remains on both boards.

“The Department can confirm that the Minister received correspondence from the chair of the Charities Regulatory Authority in relation to Scouting Ireland and related matters on 15th January 2025,” said a spokesman in reply to questions about the apparent conflict of interest.

“The issues concerned are being examined and followed up.”

The dual board positions held by Ms Lally are critical for the Charities Regulator because the authority is required under the Charities Act to be “independent in the performance of its functions”.

With more than 30,000 members and thousands of volunteers, Scouting Ireland is one of the largest youth organisations in the State. But the body has been wracked by governance and safeguarding controversies in recent years, culminating in a big historical child sexual abuse scandal.

A Scouting Ireland director since 2019, Ms Lally is the longest-serving member of its board and chairwoman of its safeguarding subcommittee. Ms Humphreys appointed her to the Charities Regulator in 2022.

Asked about the apparent conflict of interest, the regulator said it doesn't comment on engagements with individual charities or ongoing investigations.

“We are not in a position to comment on an individual board member,” the regulator said.

“However, we can confirm that the commencement of the investigation into Scouting Ireland and related matters have been brought to the attention of the Minister.”

Although The Irish Times asked the regulator whether Ms Lally herself had any comment, no comment was provided and the regulator said the questions were not put to her.

Ms Lally declined to comment when contacted directly by The Irish Times on Monday evening.

The appointment of inspectors - into Scouting Ireland, and six related charities and unincorporated organisations - comes two years into a prolonged examination into scouting “governance issues”.

“The purpose of the investigation is to establish the facts relating to the control and ownership of charitable assets. It is important to note that the opening of this investigation is not in itself a finding of any wrongdoing,” the regulator said one week ago.

Asked questions on Monday about Ms Lally, the regulator said it was committed to high standards of corporate governance and had a governance framework to set out standards of conduct.

“Adherence to the code and its principles is particularly important given the need for the organisation to embody the standards that it sets for others,” it said.

The regulator's governance document includes a conflicts of interest policy for board and committee members. The policy aims to manage any conflict of interest scenario "in such a way that the independence and integrity of the decisions of the board, its committees and staff are neither compromised nor perceived as being compromised".