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Scouting Ireland faces €8m emergency funding drive to avert collapse following abuse claims

Local scout groups to be asked to voluntarily advance up to €20,000 each to organisation's national office

Internal documents warn that the wave of legal cases taken by survivors of abuse created a serious risk for Scouting Ireland's finances.

Scouting Ireland is considering a raft of emergency measures to raise €8 million to compensate survivors of childhood sexual abuse and prevent the possible collapse of the youth organisation, confidential internal documents show.

The voluntary organisation is facing a "significant financial risk" that the cost of settling a large number of legal cases, taken by people allegedly abused as children by former scout leaders, could push Scouting Ireland into liquidation, the internal paper advised.

Documents setting out a plan to raise several million euros, seen by The Irish Times, show the organisation hopes to sell off vacant properties and secure a sizeable bank loan to help meet the growing cost of compensating past victims of sexual abuse.

Local scout groups will be asked to voluntarily advance between €10,000 and €20,000 each to the organisation's national office – an ask that volunteers said would require significant fundraising efforts by local groups to come up with the money.

The internal documents warn that the wave of legal cases taken by survivors of abuse, and the number of those civil proceedings expected to progress towards the settlement stage over the next two to three years, created a serious risk for Scouting Ireland's finances.

The organisation has spent the last number of years grappling with a historical child sex abuse scandal, which emerged following reporting by The Irish Times in 2018.

More than 350 people came forward to disclose they had been abused as children in legacy scouting associations.

The abuse took place over decades at the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland and the Scout Association of Ireland. The two predecessor bodies merged to form Scouting Ireland in 2004.

A report by child protection expert Ian Elliott concluded that predators had operated from senior positions of power in the legacy scouting associations for decades, molesting children and covering up the abuse for years.

In the wake of the scandal, more than 70 survivors took legal cases against Scouting Ireland seeking compensation.

An internal November 7th briefing warned the "timing and quantum of claims creates a significant financial risk". The organisation would need to raise €8 million to make sure it had enough resources to cover the cost of settlements.

"If Scouting Ireland cannot meet its liabilities as they fall due, then, absent a credible financial restructuring, the board's duty will be to commence a liquidation," the paper circulated to senior volunteers said.

Emergency measures, such as the sale of vacant property, were necessary, as other avenues to source funding had been “exhausted”.

The document said the Government had “firmly closed down” any suggestion the State held vicarious liability for the past abuse.

Several long-running civil cases have been settled this year, in each case as the proceedings got closer to a trial date in court. It is understood a number of other cases are at a similarly advanced stage.

The average cost of settlement in such historical abuse cases, including legal fees, can be close to €250,000.

Latest financial accounts said Scouting Ireland had enough money to operate until the end of next year, beyond which point additional funds would be needed to cover all its liabilities.

In a statement, Aidan Magner, chair of Scouting Ireland’s board, said it is “operationally solvent” and focused on expanding.

“Scouting Ireland in that context is to implement a financial resilience programme aimed at rebuilding its cash reserves, bringing certainty to the membership and, most importantly, deliver on its scouting values and our duty of care to survivors,” he said.

Scouting Ireland has 40,000 members – between juveniles and adult volunteers as leaders – across 400 local scout groups.