



Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

January-March 2023

Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During the first quarter of 2023, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met on the 28th of March. The meeting was attended by our newly installed Bishop, Bishop Michael Kennedy. During this meeting, the Bishop was granted an introduction to the Council, its Standing Committees and its members. The meeting lasted two hours and was conducted face to face, with all members in attendance.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for the Support and Guidance of Healing and Support Issues

Bishops Healing Fund:

We continue to receive new applications for the Bishops Healing Fund. Equine Therapy continues to be greatly appreciated by many survivors and new individuals and groups are commencing as well as others continuing to utilise this service. Some are returning as volunteers to the farm. The Fund has provided the finance for the commissioning of a piece of music for the Perpetual Day of Remembrance. This is on track to be completed in coming months.

Zimmerman Service-Healing & Support Caseload Information:

The following provides a concise snapshot of ZSH&S open and active clients, current total client numbers total 43 people.

- 72% of clients are primary (survivors)
- 28% are secondary (relatives)
- 61% are in counselling
- Average age of primary: male 57 years old; female, 59 years old
- Average age of secondary: male 69 years old; female 66 years old
- Age range of primary male: 40-76 years old; female 26-81 years old
- Age range of secondary male: 55-82, female 48-80 years old
- 26% participated in Royal Commission
- 26% on Disability Support

Community Memorial for Victims and Survivors of Institutionalised Child Sexual Abuse in the Hunter Valley:

Progress continues to be made. There will be a significant period of community consultation this year. This is being led by the Newcastle City Council. The Diocese continues to support this important initiative.

Loud Sky Installation & Exhibition, 31 March 2023:

Justice Peter McClennan (Royal Commission) officially opened the Exhibition and spoke about the significance of Newcastle and the Hunter in the Royal Commission's work. Magda Mycak (Manager of Zimmerman Services) and other members of Zimmerman Services were available as professional support persons for survivors on the night. Bishop Michael Kennedy and a large number of the Committee attended. It was a powerful exhibition, and we encourage people to see it.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims

During the first quarter the Standing Committee met once, on 15 February 2023 when the Manager Redress, Compliance and Administration (Manager RCA) presented a claim from which the Director of Safeguarding had recused himself. The claim related to sexual abuse by deceased priest Vincent Ryan, to which he had confessed as part of his guilty plea in 1997. Manager RCA obtained instructions to settle the claim.

There were no mediations or ISC (informal settlement conferences) held during the first quarter. It is not unusual that the first quarter of the year is relatively quiet as many law firms scale back their work during January. The first quarter was in stark contrast to the seven mediations or ISCs that were held in the previous quarter.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for the Oversight of the Office of Safeguarding

There can be no more important issue in the investigation of complaints than that of ensuring

there are investigators of proven capacity and, as important, that there are adequate numbers to address complaint issues when and as they arise. This observation is pertinent to the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG) both in terms of ensuring that the complement of staff is maintained and that their training and development is appropriate to their tasks.

It is in the very nature of the investigative personnel who have been recruited to the OoSG within the Diocese that many have been subsequently recruited to other agencies to undertake the critical role of investigators. This has been no more so than instances where experienced staff have been recruited to the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian. We regard this fact as an acknowledgement of the ability of investigative staff who have diligently served the Diocese over recent years. That said, we have been fortunate to recruit a number of new investigative staff in recent weeks and who are drawn from a wide range of disciplines. We are now back to a full complement of personnel and we are certain that the new staff will build on the foundations established by others.

In this quarter we welcomed three new members to the Committee. The Diocesan Protection and Safety Council have approved the appointments of Fr Peter Street, Parish Priest of Forster, Ms Patricia Hales, Principal of St Joseph's College, Lochinvar, and Mr Simon Walsh, CEO, Allambi Care, Charlestown to the Oversight Committee. They have attended an Induction Day on the role and responsibilities of the Standing Committee for the Oversight OoSG and doubtless they will make an important contribution to the Committee's work.

These appointments complement the recent appointment of Ms Julianna Demetrious LLB as Deputy Chair of the Oversight Committee. Ms Demetrious was the former Assistant Ombudsman (NSW) and has extensive and credible history in the field of child protection and related matters. The Committee expressed their appreciation to Fr Gregory Barker who, until recently, was the Diocesan Administrator. We have benefited from Fr Barker's advice and counsel since the death of the late Bishop William Wright, and he has provided strong impetus for enhanced safeguarding standards.

As noted previously, the committee endorsed the Diocesan submission on the Statutory Review of the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*. This Review is being undertaken by Mr Mark Tedeschi KC and we await his final report.

The OoSG Strategic Plan is current, and the Operational Plan 2023/2024 is to be submitted to the Oversight Committee in August 2023 for adoption.

From a policy perspective, the Committee noted the completion of the Diocesan Safeguarding Framework Policy (Version 2), the conduct of the Responsible Persons Governance (Training) Day in January 2023, and the introduction of *mnLearn* a new learning management system which provides for the delivery of safeguarding training across the whole of the Diocese. Throughout 2023, additional training will be provided on 'safeguarding for employees in child-related work'. In addition, training will also be provided on 'safeguarding in parishes'. Attendances at the training sessions are well supported.

An important aspect of training was recognised by the collaboration between the OoSG and the eSafety Commissioner on embedding online training modules into *mnLearn*. An evaluation of this online medium will be made at the proper time to gauge its effectiveness as a learning tool.

At a Parish level the OoSG continues its work to ensure compliance with safeguarding standards. To this end, the OoSG remains committed to the finalisation of parish Safeguarding Implementation Plans and their evaluation.

For the period ended 31 December 2022, the Committee noted that five investigations remained outstanding in excess of 90 days. Each of these matters commenced in 2022 and their current status is due to the ongoing nature of the allegations, the finalisation of judicial proceedings, outstanding aspects of the investigation to be completed, or staffing issues within the OoSG.

The Committee received a report from Damian Wicks, Chief Information Officer for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, regarding an apparent data breach. He provided an extensive report regarding an incident in May 2022 of the data breach and importantly, the actions taken to reduce the likelihood of a similar occurrence. From a proactive perspective, Mr Wicks indicated that security and email hardening has taken place to reduce the ability of hackers from accessing data.

An independent security audit of the Diocese's I.T. processes has been completed and that independent report has been favourable. A follow-up independent audit has also proved satisfactory.



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A number of web monitoring tools have been purchased as part of the ongoing security management arrangements for Diocesan I.T. records.

From a financial perspective, the OoSG continues to meet its obligations consistent with budgetary and fiscal responsibilities.

On 28 March 2023, the Committee Chair met with the newly appointed Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle, the Most Reverend Bishop Michael Kennedy and, along with Chairs of other Committees, familiarised the Bishop with the role, function and responsibilities of the Committee for the Oversight of the Office of Safeguarding.

