

**Address by Adrian Tennant, Chairperson,
Scouting Ireland Press Conference
Thursday, 14th May 2020**

Good morning everyone,

Thank you for coming to our press conference today which, due to COVID-19, we are hosting on Zoom.

My name is Adrian Tennant, Chairperson of Scouting Ireland, and I am joined by Ms Anne Griffin, CEO, Scouting Ireland and Mr Gearoid Begley, Safeguarding Manager, Scouting Ireland.

Today we are publishing the Ian Elliott Learning Review into Historical Sexual Abuse in Scouting.

I will first outline the context for Mr Elliott's report.

Anne will give an over-view of the governance structures now in place.

Gearoid will then speak to the safeguarding structures now in place in Scouting Ireland.

Then, the most important part of today, I will speak to all those who have been hurt by their involvement in Scouting in Ireland.

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The Context for Ian Elliott's Learning Review

As many of you are aware, Scouting Ireland was formed in 2004 following with the coming together of the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland and the Scout Association of Ireland.

Today we are the largest youth organisation in the country, with nearly 50,000 members, comprised of youth members, facilitated by adult volunteers, taking part in activities in virtually every town and community in Ireland.

In July of 2017, John Lawlor, the then CEO, with the support of the Board, asked Mr Elliott, Ireland's foremost safeguarding expert and a man of deep integrity, to undertake a review of safeguarding policy and procedures in Scouting Ireland. During the time Mr Elliott spent with Scouting Ireland he became aware, as only someone with vast experience in the field of Safeguarding could, of what he suspected was the under reporting or recording of sexual abuse in scouting.

It was only with this expertise and knowledge that he had, could this have been identified. As we are all only too aware, society's response to sexual and physical abuse was sorely inadequate in times past and our collective understanding of what safeguarding is, and the need to protect vulnerable children and adults, has changed utterly.

What emerged was the uncovering of shocking stories of sexual abuse in Scouting over many decades. To date 356 victims and survivors have come forward to Scouting Ireland, to the Gardai, to the PSNI and to Tusla and Gateway to share their stories. We know of 275 known or suspected perpetrators.

We now know that

- Young people in Scouting were abused, sexually and physically, and sometimes violently.
- Some alleged perpetrators were serial abusers with multiple victims.
- The alleged perpetrators were at all levels within their organisations up to the most senior levels.
- There is evidence that very senior people knew of, and protected, alleged perpetrators within these organisations. This "cronyism" led to cover-up or looking the other way.

- Abuse did happen, it was not responded to in a way that protected the young person or sought to hold the offender to account.
- Most shockingly of all, Mr Elliott states that based on emerging evidence, that senior volunteers, who were thought to be sex offenders, did share information with each other about their abuse and took steps to facilitate that abuse for each other.

What has become very clear is that scouting in its historic legacy organisations evolved into contrasting, overlapping worlds. In the main, there 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 who have had a positive experience from their scouting trail.

However, in parallel, another world existed. Sexual predators used the movement to abuse young people and destroy lives. Where cronyism is present, it permits unscrupulous behaviours to go unchecked, such as 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 were the very reason Scouting existed. These young people were failed the most.

I want to acknowledge that there were many adult volunteers in groups who did try to protect young people and brought matters to the attention of national officers but were ignored or not believed or supported. I want to recognise what they did, sometimes at a personal cost to themselves, and to apologise to them and thank them for doing what others should have done but didn't.

We are determined to learn from the mistakes of the past; to understand what has occurred so that we can do all in our power to make sure this never happens again.

To help us do that we, Scouting Ireland, commissioned Ian Elliott to undertake an independent Learning Review into Historical Sexual Abuse in Scouting.

This Learning Review has been possible because of the willingness of people who have a story to tell, to share that information.

In some cases, the individuals involved have never spoken of what happened to them to anyone else, including their close family or partners. The fact that they had the courage to come forward and share their story, is what made this review possible.

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 on this island was not always safe for our young people in the past. Today, we have put the protection of young people where it should always have been – front and centre of everything we do. We, as adult volunteers in Scouting, understand that being an adult volunteer in Scouting Ireland is a privilege, not a right.

The current Board of Scouting Ireland is in office now for twenty 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 the determination to deal fully with issues that arose from the past.

This work was started by our former board under the interim chairperson of Annette Byrne. I want to acknowledge the leadership of Annette and key individuals on that Board who stood firm, determined to do the right thing. On behalf of our organisation I want to thank her and those former Board members.

I also want to thank our former CEO, John Lawlor, who advised the Board and worked closely with Ian Elliott throughout his engagement with Scouting Ireland. These actions in facing up to the wrongs of the past have made Scouting Ireland stronger and safer for the future.

Scouting Ireland, through its own Governance Review and the Jillian Van Turnhout Review became acutely aware of the need for strong and good Governance in our organisation. Bad culture, as described in Mr Elliott's Learning Review, thrives in poor structure and poor governance. This Learning Review is correct in describing the culture that had existed in the legacy organisations as one that allowed for the spectre of cronyism to develop and where volunteers were not held accountable for their actions in the past. 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 prevailing governance structures at the time to deal with it.

Scouting is a youth movement and our young people are at the centre of everything that we do. The development of young people to be the leaders of tomorrow is what we, as adult volunteers, sign up to facilitate. As I said previously, we recognise that to be a volunteer in Scouting Ireland is a privilege, not a right. Cultural change requires we constantly re-centre ourselves on the young people we exist for.

Ian Elliott makes 12 recommendations on

- Governance,
- Safeguarding
- Disciplinary process and procedures,
- Records and documentation,
- Interagency co-operation,
- Preventing Cronyism
- And to make an institutional apology to victims and survivors of abuse in scouting

We have accepted his recommendations and are implementing them. I would now like to hand over to our CEO, Ms Anne Griffin and our Safeguarding Manager, Mr Gearoid Begley, who will outline our governance progress and our roadmap to implement the recommendations made by Ian Elliott in this Learning Review.

Remarks by Anne Griffin, CEO, Scouting Ireland

Thank you, Adrian.

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

The findings of Mr Elliott are, as Adrian said, deeply shocking and deeply distressing for everyone in Scouting, for the victims and survivors of abuse who were failed and for the parents and communities who support Scouting Ireland.

As CEO of Scouting Ireland, I want to assure all our members and the wider public that Scouting Ireland is a very different organisation today. A very significant body of work has been undertaken by the organisation over the past three years, much of which was led by our former CEO, John Lawlor.

I am determined to ensure that we continue this work so that we become an organisation that is excelling in safeguarding and governance practice. Regrettably, Mr Elliott found elements of cronyism within Scouting Ireland, but the new governance structures will, I believe, help us to stamp out any lingering elements of this damaging behaviour.

Mr Elliott makes 12 recommendations and our response is outlined in the document Scouting Ireland Response to Mr Elliott's Learning Review.

The First Recommendation is on Governance.

Our Governance journey began before the safeguarding issues came to the fore. An internal Governance Code Review was undertaken in 2014 to ensure Scouting Ireland met new legislation governing charities and voluntary organisations. This identified weaknesses in governance and the need to introduce new governance structures. Members voted for these new governance structures at an EGM in October 2018.

Minister Zappone, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs requested an independent review of our governance structures. Ms Jillian Van Turnout's Review was completed in June 2018. More recently, in April 2020 Ms Brigid McManus, former Secretary General of the Department Education and Skills conducted a review of the implementation of the recommendations of Ms Van Turnhout.

We are greatly encouraged by Ms McManus's Review which found that the recommendations of the 2018 report have been implemented satisfactorily. In benchmarking our progress to date, Ms McManus recognised 'the significant work and organisational effort by all involved in Scouting Ireland in the major changes already made'.

Our new governance structures deliver greater transparency and accountability. They include:

- The establishment of a company-only structure with a new Board of Directors
- Directors elected based on competency and skills
- Governance training for all Directors
- The appointment of external independent Directors to the Board of Scouting Ireland
- 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
- The Board prioritise safeguarding and it is a standing item at every board meeting. As CEO I report to the board monthly on safeguarding matters and our safeguarding manager attends quarterly to provide a detailed update to the Board.

As per Mr Elliott's recommendation we continue to engage with external governance experts to support us on our governance journey. We expect to be fully compliant with the CRA Charities Governance Code by Dec 2020.

Three recommendations relate to Discipline within Scouting Ireland.

As Mr Elliott has shown in his Report, discipline was lax historically and at times was difficult within Scouting in Ireland.

A lot of work has been done in this area. Our governance structures have introduced clear lines of responsibility and accountability, our processes and procedures mean people now know that they will be held to account if they do wrong.

- We developed and introduced a new disciplinary code in 2019. This is regularly reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- A Disciplinary Panel of 3 members, one of whom is external to Scouting Ireland has been appointed to hear disciplinary complaints.
- A Disciplinary Appeals Process has also been developed.

- We have also introduced a Suspension Without Prejudice policy and procedure which allows us to suspend the membership of individuals who are subject to disciplinary process and safeguarding disclosures.
- We are working on a revised Volunteer Code of Behaviour which will be completed by the end of this year.

These are big cultural changes within Scouting Ireland, but they have been welcomed by members. There can be no hiding place for bad people and no room for bad behaviour in our organisation.

We continue to review best practice by learning from other Irish organisations and international Scout Organisations.

Records

A significant problem identified by Mr Elliott was the improper keeping of safeguarding records by the legacy organisations. Often there was no records of known safeguarding complaints.

He also identified the improper holding of files relating to the legacy organisations by former national officers. These files should never have remained in the personal possession of these officers.

Mr Elliott has made two recommendations on documentation and records which we accept and have taken immediate steps to address.

Scouting Ireland is committed to ensuring that all records concerning the organisation are centrally stored, monitored and easily retrievable. In 2018 a new safeguarding recording and filing system was put in place under the guidance of Mr Elliott. All safeguarding files are the responsibility of the Safeguarding Manager.

We are digitising all paper files onto our secure electronic server.

Procedures are in place for the recording and management of all complaints to the Safeguarding Department.

We have committed to an external audit of safeguarding within scouting every two years, and an annual internal review, to ensure that we are following our procedures and to learn from best practice of other organisations.

Over the past 18 months concerted efforts have been made to ensure no records are stored outside of Scouting Ireland's Safeguarding Department. We have had files returned to us and we continue to make regular appeals to any former officials who may have files to return them to us.

Organisational Apology

A recommendation is made that Scouting Ireland issue an institutional apology to victims and survivors who were failed.

We have privately expressed our sorrow and an apology to individuals contacting Scouting Ireland directly who were failed. We have also publicly apologised at the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Children and Youth Affairs in March 2019 and December 2019, as well as in statements to our members and in media interviews.

We recognise the deep hurt caused to victims and survivors who were failed. Our repeated apologies may never be enough, but each are made sincerely on behalf of everyone in Scouting Ireland.

We also recognised the significance of an organisational apology in helping to bring about healing. Adrian Tennant will be formally making this apology in a few moments and for us, it is the most important part of today.

Concerning Interagency Co-Operation

Mr Elliott's Learning Review makes one recommendation concerning inter-agency co-operation. Since our establishment in 2004, Scouting Ireland has always disclosed to the relevant authorities any complaints that required disclosure. We have always co-operated fully with their investigations and made our files available to them. In the most recent Brigid McManus Report, Tusla made positive comments concerning the relationship between our two organisations.

Our Safeguarding Manager Gearoid Begley has been to the fore in building even closer linkages between Scouting Ireland and Tusla and An Garda Síochana and the PSNI and Gateway.

External advice and co-operation with experts in the field of safeguarding is welcomed by Scouting Ireland. Transparency in all our operations is how we restore trust and confidence in our organisation.

There are four recommendations relating to safeguarding.

This is the most important focus of our work. Safeguarding in Scouting Ireland has been completely overhauled under the guidance of Mr Elliott previously and now under our Safeguarding Manager Gearoid Begley.

In addition to monthly reporting to the Board by myself and a quarterly presentation by our Safeguarding Manager, a 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.

But, as Mr Elliott rightly states, the protection of children is not just the responsibility of the professional Safeguarding Department.

It is the responsibility of every adult in the organisation and we are engaging in a comprehensive and sustained manner with our members to ensure they understand their obligations to the health and safety of young people in Scouting.

Gearoid Begley will now outline to you the role of safeguarding in Scouting Ireland today.

Thank you

Overview of Safeguarding in Scouting Ireland
Gearoid Begley, Safeguarding Manager:

Thank you, Anne.

Good morning everyone. My name is Gearoid Begley and I was appointed Safeguarding Manager in Scouting Ireland in April 2019 following a public recruitment campaign. My comments will relate to safeguarding in Scouting Ireland since my appointment, while I cannot comment on historical issues or what occurred prior to my appointment, I can give you an overview of safeguarding in our organisation today.

Scouting Ireland is first and foremost a child and youth centred organisation. The safety of each and every child must be at the core of everything we do as an organisation.

The Safeguarding Department consists of 3 fulltime staff, and we are based in Scouting Ireland's National Office in Larch Hill. We have a secure office in Larch Hill and dealing as we do with highly sensitive information, our work is conducted on a confidential basis separate from the rest of the team.

Mr Elliott has recommended additional resources for the safeguarding department. The CEO and the Board are working to identify how best to resource the department and we are in the process of appointing an

administrator to assist with the administrative requirements of the department.

I report to the CEO and through her to the Board of Scouting Ireland. The CEO and I meet frequently, at least once a week, to discuss safeguarding. A monthly report is prepared for the Board which is presented by the CEO and I attend the Board meetings on a quarterly basis. This allows the Board of Directors to question me on the approach to safeguarding and to satisfy themselves as to the rigour with which we are protecting our members.

The term 'safeguarding' is most often thought of in the context of sexual abuse. However, safeguarding is far wider than that and involves the health and safety of children including their emotional welfare and their physical safety when engaging in scouting.

I would also echo Mr Elliott's comments that the protection of children is not just the responsibility of the professional safeguarding team. It is the responsibility of every adult in the organisation. I want to assure our parents and the wider public that this individual and collective responsibility is the foundation of all training, activities and engagements throughout our organisation.

I would also encourage parents and guardians to be active in satisfying themselves in relation to safeguarding in their child's scout group. Engage with your group leaders. Ask questions of them; ask to see their safeguarding statement and make sure you are happy with the arrangements for group events. Never Assume and Never Presume... Ask.

Safeguarding begins as soon as an adult applies to volunteer in Scouting Ireland.

- All adult volunteers must supply references that are checked by the Group Leader before being allowed to apply to become a volunteer in Scouting Ireland

- All adult Scouters must be vetted in their respective jurisdiction before engaging with youth members.
- All adult Scouters must participate in a residential training weekend, on line training, one-on-one induction with group leader and a group training workshop which involves around 24 hours of training before taking up a volunteer position.
- All adult Scouters must renew their Vetting and they must attend a Safeguarding refresher training course every 3 years.

This last point is very important. It is not enough that our volunteers undertake safeguarding training on their appointment, but they must refresh that training every 3 years. This ensures all our volunteers understand the most current and up to date standards of safeguarding.

Safeguarding is also front and centre in each of our scout groups.

- A Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) must be publicly displayed in every location as required
- Each Scout Group must complete an annual Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment
- To ensure the safeguarding of all youth members adult to youth ratios are detailed within our safeguarding policies and in our Code of Practice. They must be adhered to at all times.
- Activity consent forms are required for all activities providing adult volunteers with information to safeguard the youth members
- There are numerous policies, procedures and guidelines that provide groups with information on how to safeguard our youth members. This goes beyond sexual abuse, this extends to health and safety, physical safety, sleeping, hygiene, emotional welfare etc.
- These Child safeguarding policies and procedures have been independently reviewed by Mr Ian Elliott initially and further developed by myself and the safeguarding department in conjunction with Tusla and Gateway in NI.

When we receive a complaint – whether through our helpline or by some other means, Scouting Ireland documents the complaint.

Where a disclosure needs to be made to the appropriate agency – An Garda Síochána and Tusla in the Republic of Ireland and the PSNI and Gateway in Northern Ireland – we make those disclosures and we co-operate fully with their investigations. I am pleased to say that we have a good working relationship with all of these agencies.

If the matter requires disclosure and investigation by the State Agencies we must wait until their work is completed before starting our own process. Once the relevant authorities have completed their investigations, we then examine the complaint. The Safeguarding Department determines any actions that need to be taken from a child safeguarding perspective, such as retraining or advice. Should breaches of the organisations policies be identified the matter is referred to the organisations disciplinary process.

Mr Elliott's Learning Review found that where national officers were informed of safeguarding issues, in some cases the appropriate people were not informed, such as group leaders, thereby putting children in harm's way. This is not the case today. If an allegation of abuse is made against an adult volunteer, they are suspended without prejudice from scouting until the matter is investigated by the relevant State Agency. In addition, while our work is confidential, where there is an identified risk the relevant people are informed so as to prevent any potential harm. It is very important that we make this clear so that parents can have confidence in the steps we take to prevent harm.

Helpline:

Our helpline, which was established in November 2018, remains open Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 5.00pm.

Anyone who wishes to speak to one of our team, in confidence, may call our dedicated helpline 1800 221 199 freephone from Republic of Ireland or 00353 87 0934403 from Northern Ireland. Or they can email safeguarding@scouts.ie.

All matters will receive immediate attention and will be treated confidentially. Eliminating preventable harm to young people must be the most important objective for Scouting Ireland today. I believe that this is recognised. Since my appointment, I have had total support from the CEO and the Board and indeed from the wider membership.

Mr Elliott's Learning Review has allowed us as a department and as an organisation to learn from the mistakes of the past and to put in place the structures, processes and procedures to ensure the health and safety of our young people is to the fore of all decision making within Scouting Ireland. We know that safeguarding is a continuous and ever evolving issue. We have to continually review our processes and procedures and as our understanding and knowledge of perpetrators evolve and as new dangers emerge, we must be ready to meet them. There will never come a time when we can rest on our laurels.

That is why we have committed to an annual internal review of safeguarding in Scouting Ireland and an external audit of safeguarding every two years. We will always be vigilant and in delivering the mission of scouting, we will always have the safety of our young people to the fore.

We are committed to making Scouting Ireland as safe as it can be for our young people and to ensure there is no hiding place for those who do wrong.

Thank you.

I will now hand back to Adrian.

Adrian Tennant, Chairperson, Scouting Ireland

Thank you, Anne and Gearoid.

Anne, was appointed CEO in February this year and is continuing our work with volunteers and staff on ensuring our organisation is fit for purpose and is as safe as it can be for our young people. Anne, and her team, continue to support us, the volunteers, in our mission of providing a quality and safe Scouting programme. Teams of dedicated volunteers and staff, working together, are doing great work supporting our groups across the country as we navigate towards a brighter future.

I want to acknowledge the professionalism of our staff who worked under severe pressure during this crisis in our organisation, reaching out to those who were hurt in Scouting and implementing the biggest changes in Scouting Ireland since our establishment in 2004.

A professional safeguarding department and robust safeguarding policies and procedures are front and centre of our organisation. I also want to acknowledge the work of our safeguarding department, led by Gearoid, who demonstrate great professionalism, empathy and a deep personal commitment to the very important and sometimes difficult work they undertake on behalf of our organisation.

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I now want to turn to the most important part of today. As Chairperson of the Board of Scouting Ireland, as an adult volunteer and as a father of children involved in Scouting, I wish to make an organisational apology to the victims and survivors of historical sexual abuse in Scouting.

Organisational Apology

On behalf of Scouting Ireland, we unreservedly apologise to the victims and survivors of abuse in scouting who were failed.

We are sorry that adults in scouting harmed you.

We are sorry that you were not protected.

We are sorry that you were not listened to or were unable to tell your story at that time.

We are sorry for the hurt caused to you and the legacy of that hurt which many of you still live with today.

We know we cannot take away that hurt. But we do want you to know that you have been heard.

We want you to know that you are believed.

We want you to know that we will support you.

We are determined that there is no place in Scouting for anyone who, by design or by omission, harms a child, as you were. Cronyism, looking away and covering up are not victimless crimes. They are enabling actions.

We pledge to adopt and deliver the Learnings and Recommendations of this Report. It is a light pointing into a very dark corner but 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.

You, by your bravery in speaking out, have helped to uncover the truth. Your legacy now is to have helped to make Scouting Ireland a safer place for young people; to have reminded us of why we exist – to support and cherish our young people through their scouting experience.

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Concluding Remarks

Finally, I want to thank Mr Elliott for delivering this comprehensive Learning Review and for his work with our organisation over the past three years. Ian Elliott was critical to helping Scouting Ireland uncover these shocking and deeply distressing stories and in helping us to respond so that we could make our modern Scouting Ireland as safe a place as it possibly can be for all our members. His guidance has been instrumental to us as we transform safeguarding and governance in Scouting Ireland. Our task now is to ensure that parents and communities can continue to 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.

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.

Thank you.