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Opening Statement of Ms. Aisling Kelly, Chairperson, Scouting Ireland
at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs.

21st November 2018

Mr Chairman

Thank you and thanks to the Committee for inviting Scouting Ireland to appear before you again. My name is Aisling Kelly, I have been an adult Scout volunteer for 23 years, previously I was a youth member of Girl Guiding from the age of 9. I am accompanied by Mr. Adrian Tennant, Director of Scouting Ireland, Miss Lisa Barnes, Director of Scouting Ireland, and who resides in Northern Ireland, Dr. John Lawlor, CEO of Scouting Ireland and Mr. Ian Elliott, an independent Safeguarding Consultant, who has been working with us as the interim Safeguarding Manager.

I want to tell you about the progress which Scouting Ireland has made since the last time the organisation appeared before you on 9th May 2018. I want to outline too, the challenges we face.

When we last appeared before this Committee, an apology was offered for the hurt that has been caused as a result of poor practice on the part of those involved in Scouting. Some of this occurred many years ago but the effects are still causing distress today. I want to reiterate that apology and add to it our sincere regret for what has happened, and our absolute determination to learn from those mistakes and make Scouting Ireland today as safe an environment as we can create for all of our members. To that end, we have made many positive changes in our structure and our approach to Governance.

Reg. No. 397094
Charity No. CHY3507

PATRON Michael D. Higgins PRESIDENT OF IRELAND



Member of World Organisation of the Scout Movement

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Governance

You will recall that previously Mr Martin Burbridge was present in his capacity as the head of the Governance Review Group, which was the group responsible for designing and recommending governance changes within Scouting Ireland. At that time, the Company; Scouting Ireland Services CLG and the unincorporated Association; Scouting Ireland, were run as one entity. The Company's Board and the Associations' Management Committee were populated by the same people. There was no non-executive Board which one would expect to find in a Company of this size. The executive and non-executive were enmeshed.

I am very happy to report to you that this is no longer the case. The Company and the Association on the 6th October 2018 voted overwhelmingly, nearly 99%, in favour of radical governance change. This was a monumental decision for the organisation, heavily debated and examined by the membership in minute detail. Our youth members were instrumental on that day and I'm delighted to say to say that it reflects how informed our organisation is by our youth led ethos. This decision was taken against the backdrop of the highly sensitive Safeguarding investigation, being carried out by independent barrister Ms Lorna Lynch. However, despite requiring the high threshold of a 75% majority, the membership at the EGM of the 6th October 2018 showed great determination in voting for a new future for Scouting Ireland. It will be a new era of openness, integrity, transparency and, most importantly, accountability.

The unincorporated Association is being wound down and we have instructed Solicitors in this regard. The assets and liabilities of that entity will be transferred to the Company. Residual accounts which are held there will also be transferred to the Company. There will be no renewal

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of membership in that Association as of the next membership renewal in January 2019. The membership of Scouting Ireland now resides in the Company in the form of the individual Scout Groups. The governance documents which reflect the relationship between the Scout Groups and the Company are clear in what each entity expects of each other.

Since the 6th October 2018 the new Board has been extremely busy. It took office earlier than originally envisaged under the Governance Review Group proposals but has hit the ground running. It has met 15 times in 7 weeks, averaging two meetings a week; one by teleconference and one face to face.

The ten members of this Board, three of whom are present today, are dedicated and committed to steering the Company into an era of transparency and one where safeguarding of children and adults is our number one priority. Scouting Ireland commits to making the organisation a safe environment for all of our members.

Safeguarding

As recommended in the Jillian van Turnhout report, Safeguarding is now a standing item on our Agenda. The Board has had the benefit of two detailed briefings from Ian Elliott in relation to the current and historic situations which we now face into.

It is apparent from the ongoing review of past practice, being carried out by Mr Elliott at the behest of the Board, that there is evidence of past abuse emerging from the former organisations that merged to form Scouting Ireland some sixteen years ago. Unfortunately, this is so as with so many other organisations in this country's history. Scouting Ireland is working

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hard to establish the full extent of the knowledge that exists in relation to that abuse; a process that deserves time and space in order to gather an accurate picture. No adult volunteer wants to hear that of their organisation which forms more than a hobby for them, but rather a way of life. Personally, as a mother of two very young children, this fills me with deep sadness. I want to say categorically that Scouting Ireland is committed to providing support and help to all victims of past abuse within Scouting and is looking to include this in our policy framework. The Committee should be assured that this new Board of oversight will meet this situation with integrity, compassion and dedication.

It has been highlighted by Ian Elliott that Scouting Ireland is under resourced with regard to Safeguarding. The Board has some work to do on scoping out what these new resources will look like, how key people will be needed with new skills. This work is not just critically important, it is highly specialist and expert.

I would ask all members of this Committee to have regard for what Scouting Ireland is trying to achieve in ensuring a comprehensive and compassionate response to those that were so badly wronged in the past. We look forward to a discussion in the future about how these resources can be sustainably funded.

As an indicator of how much of a priority this is for the new Board, I can inform the Committee that just this week we have advertised for a Safeguarding Manager in the national and international press. The recruitment of an experienced and independently minded individual is a key priority for the new Board. Indeed, when we last appeared before this Committee we reported that we were in the process of implementing the recommendations of Mr. Ian Elliott in

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ensuring that the Safeguarding team is made up of professional members of staff. I am happy to report that we are working hard to achieve this.

Disciplinary policies

In addition to ensuring that Safeguarding is resourced and supported within the organisation, the new Board has made another priority in the enactment of new policies relating to dispute resolution and disciplinary procedures. These policies have been externally reviewed by a specialist employment lawyer and we are happy to report that the Board was in a position to ratify and adopt them at our meeting on Sunday 18th November 2018. The roll out of these policies will ensure that Scouting Ireland develops a culture of consequence. The position of the adult volunteer must always be that he or she serves as a volunteer for the furtherance of the development of young people. Positions of responsibility over young people, and fellow adults, are a privilege, not a right. We after all, are adults who agree *“by thought, word and deed to be a positive influence to young people.”*

Accountability

Scouting Ireland welcomes the ongoing discussions with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. As the Committee is aware we met with the Secretary General and members of his staff on 24th October 2018. We had a detailed and constructive meeting, where I and Dr. Lawlor and two others briefed the Secretary General as to the governance changes within the organisation. The officials in DCYA with whom we have been working are supportive and encouraging and we greatly appreciate the Department ‘walking the walk’ with us this past year. Scouting Ireland very much welcomes the restoration of funding from the Minister as announced on 30th October 2018 and sincerely thanks the Minister in that regard.

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We are an organisation which welcomes oversight. There has been concrete progress on implementing the recommendations of Jillian van Turnhout and I am glad to be able to report that substantial progress has been made on these recommendations and reported to DCYA to their satisfaction.

We are also in the process of ongoing engagement with the Charities Regulatory Authority and our next meeting is on the 10th December 2018. We welcome the publication of the new Governance Code for Charities which was published on 7th November 2018 and are committed to full compliance with this Code.

Lastly, we value your interest and oversight as the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas. We hope that some of our younger members watching this on TV look at each of you as role models and understand the important responsibility you have in being prepared to hold organisations and individuals to high standards. It is a significant role which allows us the opportunity for self-examination and reflection. We welcome all support and constructive feedback. The new Board genuinely thanks you in this regard.

Aisling Kelly

Chairperson, Scouting Ireland

November 2018

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