



Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

JANUARY – MARCH 2021

Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

The Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met once during the first quarter on 4 March 2021. The two-hour and forty-five minute meeting was conducted face-to-face, providing an opportunity for two new members to meet with ex-officio and other external Council members for the first time. Msgr. Ian Waters attended via Zoom, from Victoria.

There was the provision of information from the various standing committees, including; for the first time, a report from the Convenor of the *Standing Committee for the Oversight of the Office of Safeguarding*. The details of which are provided later in this quarterly report.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for Healing & Support

The Standing Committee for Healing & Support met twice during this quarter but will now meet eight times a year.

The Standing Committee continued to raise the issue of the names of priests being publicly displayed in churches and the negative impact this could have on those who have been abused by those priests. The Standing Committee has been advocating for survivors in this regard.

The Standing Committee also raised the importance of transparent communication with the Diocesan community when names of church buildings are changed or removed.

Face-to-face training recommenced at the beginning of 2021, after almost a year in hiatus due to COVID-19.

Healing & Support (Zimmerman Service) saw the commencement of a new caseworker, Deborah Diez, to replace Bernadette Parr. Deborah is a social worker with experience in sexual abuse counselling & has moved from the Coffs Harbour.

Healing & Support staff have had three training sessions with KnowMore. KnowMore is an independent legal service that was set up to assist survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

www.knowmore.org.au

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

The Standing Committee met twice during this quarter. Advice was given to the Bishop in relation to three matters.

The Diocese and claimants' solicitors convened four informal settlement conferences or mediations, using a combination of face-to-face meetings and via electronic medium.

The Diocese completed and submitted nine 'Request for Information' submissions to the National Redress Scheme related to six individual applicants.

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

On 4 March 2021 the 'Oversight Committee' as it has become known, met.

The Director of Safeguarding presented a quarterly activity report and budgetary papers which showed that the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG) was operating within budget. The Oversight Committee focused in on the timeframes in which investigations are completed.

The activities report is summarised below in the following section.

Operations of the Office of Safeguarding

The first quarter of 2021 has proven to be a period of 'rebuilding' with two new staff commencing, filling vacant positions:

- Adam Stephen joined the Prevention and Response Service (PaRS) as an Investigator on 1 February 2021 after many years in NSW Police.
- Mim Ilinkovski commenced 31 March 2021 as an Office Administrator in the Director's Office.

Whilst January was comparatively quiet, the return of schools marked a rapid acceleration in workload that has continued through to 31 March 2021. The rates of intake being received are increasing.

Implementation of the Diocese's NCSS (National Catholic Safeguarding Standards) compliance strategy continued through January in some of the parishes and recommenced in February across the schools' sector, supported and guided by OoSG staff who continued to produce additional resources and tools to support implementation.

In 4th quarter 2020, as a part of the implementation of the NCSS compliance strategy, Catholic Schools Office committed a dedicated resource to work directly with school leadership. Liz Latham, a Senior Education Officer in the CSO, is highly experienced and knowledgeable in the area of school compliance. During February and March 2021, Ms Latham worked directly with school leadership teams to achieve higher levels of compliance with the NCSS.

The Director's Office also became the primary source of advice and support for diocesan agencies in their understanding and implementation of the Unpaid Helpers Framework and Contractors (interim) Framework as well as supporting implementation of the Volunteer Induction Handbook.

ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) experienced a disrupted first quarter. Planning had been afoot to develop a collaborative, joint approach to tertiary complaints management. The proposal did not progress, however, as a consequence of the uncertainty, the newly established 'practitioner' role remained unfilled. Nevertheless, ADR continued to provide resolution services to schools and CatholicCare.

In the second week of February 2021, Healing and Support's cottage at Selma Street suffered a catastrophic IT failure, leaving no network or internet access, telephony and no front door access (because of an automated security system). Selma Street was shut down for three weeks, with Healing and Support staff required to work remotely.

From 15 March 2021, building works began on an adjoining space in 50 Crebert Street, to undertake renovations for the internal transfer of OoSG staff stationed at Mayfield. During late 2020 and early 2021 office plans were developed in consultation with OoSG staff, including the establishment of an ad-hoc 'Relocation Committee', led by the Executive Coordinator.