

# Statement to Joint Committee From Scouting Ireland

## Introduction

Scouting Ireland wishes to thank the Joint Committee for their interest and concern regarding the current difficulties that we are experiencing. It was always the intention and stated commitment of our organisation to come before the Committee. As you are aware, our preference was to do so on the completion of investigator's report. We meet you today to address your concerns as openly as possible given the constraints placed upon us by the current investigation.

Unfortunately, due to a long-standing leave commitment, our interim chair, Ms. Annette Byrne is abroad and unavailable today but we are confident that our team has sufficient knowledge and expertise to provide you with the necessary information.

## Engagement with the Minister

As you know, we met with Minister Zappone and her officials on April 19th and we had a lengthy, constructive and detailed discussion covering all the areas of concern and we have since provided further information in relation to cases of particular concern that were raised by third parties with the Minister. We continue to engage regularly with the Department on these matters. We are pleased that the Minister has advised the Dáil, that in the light of our conversation that she believes Scouting Ireland to be honest and that our ambition and intention is to make necessary reforms. You will also know that the Minister has appointed former Senator, Jillian Van Turnhout to provide her with a view on Scouting Ireland's governance. Scouting Ireland welcomes this appointment and looks forward to working with Ms. Van Turnhout to provide the necessary reassurance to the Minister concerning the adequacy of the governance of our organisation and the project that is in train to radically improve our governance structures.

## Finance

The withholding of funds has had an immediate and serious impact on the finances of Scouting Ireland. Our government grant under the Youth Service Grant Scheme represents approximately one-third of our funding and primarily goes to fund our National Office and professional staff salaries.

The financial situation is now grave with a requirement to place staff on protective notice in June. Our reserves are limited and the stop on funding also has significant indirect effects. We are already experiencing a loss of key staff related to the uncertainty of their position. Our Board has taken steps to change our reserves policy, to restrict spending and husband our resources to maintain operations for as long as possible. We have already experienced a negative reaction from our creditors and suppliers. This is affecting day-to-day operations and worryingly our ability to put in place the necessary arrangements and facilities for our planned Jamboree for 3,000 young people in July and also the planned recruitment of additional professional safeguarding staff. Establishing a pathway to the restoration of our funding is a vital requirement for us.

## Governance

Scouting Ireland was established in 2003. It was established as an unincorporated entity (Association) and later (2007) a Company was established, Scouting Ireland Services CLG (Company limited by guarantee). The management and oversight of these two entities are enmeshed in a single Board called the National Management Committee comprised of elected volunteers. Currently the volunteer National Management Committee exercises executive control in Scouting Ireland and directs the Chief Executive Officer.

A governance reform project now in its 4th year is working to change this structure to provide for a separation of the oversight and executive functions and to establish clear lines of accountability and responsibility. This project has now been accelerated to reach conclusion in October 2018 and will facilitate full compliance with the Code of Governance for the Community and Voluntary Sector.

### **Ian Elliott**

In July 2017 Scouting Ireland, on its own initiative, commissioned Mr. Ian Elliott, an internationally respected expert in safeguarding, to review the policies, procedures and practice in safeguarding to ensure that Scouting Ireland was conforming with best practice and was compliant with Children First Children First Act 2015 ahead of its implementation in 2018. Mr. Elliott was also asked, by the Chief Executive Officer, to conduct a critical case review into a specific case. Mr. Elliott produced an interim report in October 2017. This was presented to the Board of Scouting Ireland and his recommendations were accepted in full. These included stepping down the Child Protection Management Team, a standing committee of the Board and transferring responsibility for Safeguarding to the Chief Executive Officer. It was also resolved to have Mr. Elliott provide professional supervision of case management in safeguarding until new structures and additional professional staff could be put in place. That position continues to-date. Mr. Elliott completed his second report in November 2017 and appended the requested Critical Case Review. This was presented to the Board of Scouting Ireland in January 2018. The Critical Case Review was updated in February 2018.

### **Current Investigation**

The Board resolved on foot of the Critical Case Review to commission an independent investigation as to whether named individuals acted appropriately in relation to a complaint and further resolved that the NMC/Board will consider disciplinary actions based on the findings of that investigation. Four senior volunteers who are directors of Scouting Ireland are the respondents in the investigation. A barrister has been engaged to carry out this investigation and it is anticipated it will conclude by the end of this month (May 2018). This investigation is independent and at arm's length from Scouting Ireland. The report will be provided to our Board for their consideration and action as appropriate. We are concerned that this investigation should not be compromised by any external commentary or interference and we will avoid any comment on it while it proceeds.

### **Safeguarding structures**

The legacy safeguarding structure that was stood down in October 2017 on the recommendation of Ian Elliott relied on a Board subcommittee called the Child Protection Management Team with a volunteer chair and membership made up of senior volunteers with the Child Protection Officer and Chief Executive Officer attending. Mr. Elliott identified serious weakness in this structure and particularly pointed to the vulnerability of volunteers to be lobbied in cases. Mr. Elliott has proposed a new structure with an entirely professional management and expert oversight. This will include a Safe Guarding Coordinator, In-house Case Officers, External Sessional Case Officers engaged on a case basis with a regional spread of expertise made available and overarching professional expert oversight.

### **Staff Resources**

Scouting Ireland has 34 full-time staff supporting and serving 13,000 adult volunteers who in turn provide Scouting's programme to 40,000 young people in over 500 communities across the island. Our staff to volunteer ratio is by far the leanest in the sector and our recently prepared HR strategy has identified a gap of 10 full-time equivalent staff to meet our current

requirements and this is before the requirement to recruit additional safeguarding staff. Currently, Scouting Ireland does not have the financial resources to close this human resource gap.

### **Historic Files**

Scouting Ireland received historic case files covering safeguarding and child protection cases reaching back to the 1950's. These pre-2003 files were passed on to Scouting Ireland from the two old Scouting organisations after they resolved to form Scouting Ireland in 2003. These files are securely stored by Scouting Ireland and are made available to statutory agencies as required. Access to them has been provided on occasion, to assist investigations by An Garda Síochána and Túsla. They have provided an important source of information in those enquiries. In 2012, Scouting Ireland conducted a review of these files with the specific objective of determining if any person removed from the old organisations for child protection reasons had gained access to Scouting Ireland. We encountered one such case which was immediately dealt with by removing this person from the organisation. No further such instances were uncovered in the review.

As part of meeting the recommendations set out by Mr. Elliott's Report, a further in-depth assessment of these files is planned and will be made under the supervision of Mr. Elliott. Since 2012 Scouting Ireland has carefully maintained safeguarding and child protection files and we have worked to improve their quality, guided by the report and oversight provided by Mr. Elliott.