

**CatholicCare, Diocese of Wollongong**  
**Notes for Royal Commission**  
**Panel 8.2 Catholic Church community and social services**

**1. How is your agency structured and governed as an entity of the Catholic Church that provides community or social services?**

- The legal entity 'Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Wollongong' is incorporated under the Roman Catholic Church Property Act 1936. It is known as the 'Catholic Diocese of Wollongong'.
- Catholic Social Welfare Services (known as CatholicCare since 2009) is a division of the Diocese, operating under a 'Mandate' and Constitution approved by the Bishop.
- CatholicCare (Wollongong) is the trading name and has its own Australian Business Number and is registered as a Charitable Institution and as a Public Benevolent Institution
- Responsibility for the governance of CatholicCare resides with the Bishop, the Director of CatholicCare and the CatholicCare Advisory Council. Council members are appointed by the Bishop to advise him and the Director in relation to strategic direction, service development and financial and risk management.
- The Constitution delegates responsibility for the management and operations of CatholicCare to the Director.
- The Bishop is the Head of Agency under the Ombudsman Act 1974. The Director is a Sector Head to whom the Bishop delegates authority to direct operations in relation to child protection in CatholicCare.
- The Advisory Council and its standing committee on Finance, Risk & Audit both meet at least 7 times per year. The Bishop attends the Advisory Council meetings at which the Director provides an agency report. The Director also meets separately with the Bishop each month.
- The Executive Leadership Team supports the Director in fulfilling his above responsibilities. Each of the 5 Executive Managers is responsible for a particular service area - Children & Youth, Family, Aged & Disability, Business Support and Quality & Human Resources.

**2. What services does your agency operate or provide to children?**

- **Children & Youth Services**
  - Out of Home Care - (Foster Care)
  - Children's Contact Service
  - Out of School Hours Care
- **Family Services**
  - School Student & Family Program - school counselling in Catholic schools
  - Families and Communities Program - including counselling for children
  - School Chaplaincy Program
  - Chaplaincy in Juvenile Justice
- **Aged & Disability Services**
  - Your Direction - in home support for adults & children with disabilities
  - Family & Sibling Support Program - for siblings of children with disabilities
  - Respite Services - for children with disabilities
  - Disability Advocacy

3. How does your agency meet the elements of a child safe institution, including:  
 a. How does your agency address any risks of abuse of children associated with the services you offer?

- **Public Commitment to the Safety of Children** - included in all recruitment material and on CatholicCare's website.
- **Pre-engagement screening** - for all personnel (see Section 3.b)
- **Comprehensive Policies & Procedures** - includes Code of Ethics & Conduct, Child Protection Head of Agency Charter, Child Protection Policy, Social Networking Policy and guidelines 'Professional Conduct & Child Protection - Responding to allegations involving people working for CatholicCare', CatholicCare Practice Framework, and Code of Conduct for Authorised Foster, Relative and Kinship Carers.

The Child Protection Policy requires all staff, volunteers & foster carers to report children at risk of significant harm. This is in addition to those who are mandatory reporters under the Children & Young Persons (Care & Protection) Act.

- **Audits & Reviews** - are conducted by external auditors (e.g. Children's Guardian OOH Accreditation), Diocesan auditor and internally.
- **Child Protection Module in Orientation Day** - introduction to Child Protection included in Orientation Days held at least quarterly and attended by all new employees.
- **Compulsory Training** - a module on Cultural Awareness is attended by all new staff and a full day workshop on Child Protection attended by all new staff who work with children. Foster carers complete a compulsory child protection training module every 2 years and includes "e-safety". "Child to Child Abuse" module for foster carers to develop knowledge and minimise risk.
- **On-going Child Protection Training** - provided regularly eg 'Child Safe Organisations (Office of the Children's Guardian)
- **Professional Guidance ('Supervision')** – provided regularly for all staff. Clinical Supervision for clinical staff and regular Reflective Practice sessions for OOH Caseworkers.
- **Child Protection Committee** - promotes a 'whole of agency' approach to child safety and monitors Risk of Significant Harm reports to identify trends, cumulative risk, specialist training required and other relevant areas for improvement. Includes representation from the Office of the Bishop's, Professional Standards and Child Protection Officer.
- **Client Feedback System** - CatholicCare encourages clients, including children, and their families to lodge compliments, suggestions and complaints that are used to improve systems
- **Provision of Programs for Children Focused on Safety** - the School Student and Family Program and Foster Care Caseworkers and Psychologist use a range of resources and strategies (e.g. Braveheart's DVD/Workbooks; play therapy; Bear Cards) to support the development of protective behaviours by children, particularly those assessed as vulnerable.
- **Chapter 16A - Exchange of Information** - utilized by the agency to provide and receive information between prescribed bodies to promote the safety, welfare or wellbeing of children or young persons.

**b. What background checks, including criminal record checks or working with children checks are required prior to staff or volunteers undertaking any role in your agency? Do these checks apply to any catholic priests or religious undertaking any role in your agency? Provide details if so, including if that is required by an external regulation or agency policy**

**b.i) Background Checks** - are conducted immediately prior to employment/ engagement as follows:

- **National Police History Check** - for all employees, volunteers, foster carers, members of foster care households over the age of 16 yrs, Advisory Council members and Bishop. This also includes an Identity Check.
- **Verification of Working with Children Check** - for applicants for any child-related work as defined in the Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (including volunteers and members of foster care households over the age of 18 yrs), Executive Leadership Team members, Advisory Council members and Bishop).
- **Community Services Check** - This is completed for any person applying to become a foster carer to seek information on ROSH reports, and/or allegations of abuse if previously a FaCS carer.
- **Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) Check and Australian Charities and Not for Profits (ACNC) Declaration** - for Advisory Council members, Bishop, Executive Leadership Team members and applicants for positions deemed to be 'key personnel' under the Aged Care Act 1997
- **Health Check** - for situations where the recruitment process gives rise to concerns that the health of a preferred applicant may limit their ability to carry out the required duties
- **Referee Checks** - two referee checks are conducted for all personnel (as for National Police History Check)

**b.ii) Catholic priests and religious** - are checked in exactly the same manner as anyone else i.e. checks are conducted in accordance with the position to which they are about to be appointed.

Currently there is one religious working with the agency undertaking a direct service role and one priest who is a member of the Advisory Council.

**b.iii) External Regulation and Agency Policy** - most of the checks are required by external regulation. However CatholicCare policy extends a National Police History Check to everyone about to be engaged at CatholicCare in any role (see above). All foster carers and household members over the age of 15 years complete National Police History Check every three years. Referee checks are required for some personnel under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 but for the vast majority this is a policy requirement. Health checking, where relevant, is also a policy requirement

**c. What external child protection and safety regulations apply to your agency? For example, the 'reportable conduct scheme' of the Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)?**

- Children & Young Persons (Care & Protection) Act 1998
- Children & Young Persons (Care & Protection) Regulation 2012
- Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012
- Child Protection (Working with Children) Regulation 2013
- NSW Ombudsman Act 1974 (including "Class or Kind Agreement")

- Disability Inclusion Act 2014
- Office of the Children's Guardian - NSW Child Safe Standards for Permanent Care
- Dept of Social Services - Families & Communities Program Approval Requirements
- National Disability Standards
- National School Chaplaincy Program - NSW Arrangements for 2016-18

**d. How does your agency respond to any complaints of child sexual abuse?**

The following response is based on the assumption that the complaints are about CatholicCare personnel (including authorized carers and their adult household members) & the children concerned are known to CatholicCare. The response is outlined in the document 'Professional Conduct & Child Protection - Responding to allegations involving people working for CatholicCare'. (In other situations some of the following steps would not/could not occur.)

- CatholicCare's first step is to ensure the safety of the children concerned. A risk assessment is conducted immediately. Depending on the outcome the following may occur while the matter is investigated:
  - CatholicCare personnel are removed from contact with children
  - Children in Out of Home are placed with another carer
- On-going care and support for the children are provided by CatholicCare or other external service where appropriate e.g. specialist sexual assault counselling.
- A Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) Report is made to the Community Services Helpline. This would initiate police involvement via the Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) which includes an arm of the NSW Police.
- The Director is advised and appoints an investigation team.
- The relevant Executive Manager ensures support is available for the person about whom the complaint is made.
- If the allegation is against a foster carer or a member of a foster care household it is flagged on the NSW Carers Register in line with the guidelines of the NSW Carers Register and NSW Ombudsman.
- If the children involved are in Out of Home Care, CatholicCare notifies the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian in writing.
- CatholicCare notifies the Ombudsman's Office of the allegations in the designated timeframe and conducts an investigation as required under the NSW Ombudsman Act. The timing of this investigation may depend on the finalization of investigations being conducted by police and/or Dept. of Family and Community Services (FaCS). The completed investigation file is provided to the Ombudsman for review.
- Appropriate action and follow-up is taken depending on the outcome of the police, FaCS and CatholicCare investigations. This may include dismissal (for employees and volunteers) and de-authorisation (for a foster carer).
- Feedback regarding progress, findings and subsequent action in relation to CatholicCare's investigation is given to the child, parents and carers.

2 February 2017