

Special Advocate for Survivors Advisory Council

Meeting Note - Meeting 1, Pillar 3

Mothers who spent time in Mother and Baby or County Home Institutions, or who experienced forced family separations through other settings

5 March 2026

Agenda item: Introductions

- Special Advocate and pillar members in attendance introduced themselves, shared some background information and further detail about why they applied to the Advisory Council and what they hope to achieve as part of the Advisory Council work this year, through these meetings.

Agenda item: Overview of the work of the Special Advocate Office, the Advisory Council and Pillar Structure

- Special Advocate provided pillar members with an overview of the work of the office since the establishment of the role in March 2024, and further details around the key issues shared with her by Survivors, particularly around records, redress, memorialisation and dignified burial, and the need for ongoing health and housing supports.
- Since her appointment in March 2024, she and the team have engaged with over 1800 Survivors and Affected Persons, living in Ireland and overseas. Her remit covers people who spent time in Mother and Baby institutions, County homes, Magdelene Laundries, Industrial School and Reformatory institutions, people affected by illegal birth registration, people who were boarded out and Survivors living both in Ireland and overseas.

Agenda item: Discussion on the purpose of the Advisory Council and opportunities for engagement with the pillar members for 2026

- The Advisory Council supporting the work of the Special Advocate consists of 7 distinct pillars, covering a range of different experiences of institutional abuse and forced family separation.
- 38 people have been appointed to the Advisory Council, living in Ireland and overseas.
- The Advisory Council members have been appointed for a year.



Agenda item: Key themes and possible areas of focus for the pillar in 2026

The following includes a summary of the key issues discussed at the meeting:

Issue 1: Records

- Pillar members highlighted a wide range of issues relating to access to personal records, including incorrect information received under records, people being stripped of their names on records, mistakes and deliberately falsified records, no records available for periods of time spent in certain institutions, and redactions, as well as the false attribution of infants to women who gave birth in an institution.
- Significant administrative burden is placed on Survivor/Affected Person in seeking their information – it is critical that there is a central repository for all records which can be applied to directly by Survivors, a one-stop shop, instead of multiple application pathways.
- Years of searching, and feeling stonewalled by State and various bodies in their search for records and information was shared – including accounts of feeling in limbo, many Survivors who still have no records or trusted information to base on except accounts from other people. This is unfair and discriminatory.
- The need for Survivors to have the ability to submit personal statements to ‘correct’ the official record and set out the truth, was also noted as a key concern and priority.
- Lack of clarity on which Commission of Investigation records are sealed for 30 years, and who can access what types of records raised as an issue. Special Advocate will follow up on this.
- The significant challenges in communicating with religious and private organisations, and accessing records when these are held by private or religious bodies was particularly emphasised. These records must be handed over in full to the State. The Special Advocate referenced the Preservation Act passed in October 2024, which makes it illegal to destroy or move outside the State, these records and that religious orders must provide a full inventory to the National Archives. This is an important first step, but which needs to be built on.
- Medical records, and information about vaccine trials and baby formula trials also highlighted as areas that need attention.
- Discussion also followed on the importance of educating Irish society and future generations about the experiences in mother and baby institutions (and other sites of institutional abuse and forced family separation), and ensuring

access to general records about how these institutions operated for research and education purposes.

Issue 2: Redress

- The many unjust exclusions embedded in the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme were discussed, including the 180-day rule for children born in the institutions, and the ongoing exclusion of many institutions such as Temple Hill.
- Pillar members also raised the work payment for mothers not being included for all mother and baby institutions as part of the redress scheme – a situation which has caused further hurt, upset and division for Survivors. Many of the pillar numbers outlined the extensive physical work they were obliged to undertake, while pregnant and after giving birth, in the institutions with many sharing that food, time with their baby, or the opportunity to feed their baby was withheld until this work was completed. It was noted that everyone's time in institutions was individual, and different and some women did not have the same forced work requirements.
- The recent legal challenges to the Redress Scheme were noted.
- Ongoing issues with the medical card provided as part of the redress package was also highlighted, and the entitlements included as part of this above a regular medical card (not means-tested, no expiry date, no prescription charges).
- The Special Advocate noted the upcoming Operational Review of the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, and the survey currently under development which she would welcome the Advisory Council member's input as part of this.

Issue 3: Justice and Truth Telling

- Pillar members shared strong feelings about the Commission of Investigation report, and the narratives – *"the Commission rewrote our history"*
- The handling of the Commission of Investigation evidence-gathering and report process, the mistakes and narrative included in the report, and the cruel and poor treatment of the testimonies and evidence provided by Survivors to the Commission were discussed. The Special Advocate agreed to share the report produced by Catriona Crowe in response to the Commission of Investigation report.



- This is a matter that continues to cause immense hurt to Survivors who took part in the process.

Issue 4: Representation / Different experiences of Mothers

- During the meeting, it was highlighted that mothers in institutions had differing experiences and it is important that these are reflected in the public discourse, especially ones that are less known and understood. It is important to challenge any ongoing stereotypes and myths being perpetuated about who the women and girls who were in these institutions, were and are today.
- In particular, the continuation of forced family separation practices in these mother and baby institutions and the experiences of younger mothers into the 80s and 90s was highlighted.
- In addition, it was flagged that mothers who spent time in mother and baby institutions, operated by a minority religion (for example Protestant and Presbyterian-run institutions) may sometimes feel less represented in terms of their experiences being reflected and public attention.
- The cross-border trafficking of children across the border of Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was also highlighted as an area requiring further State attention.

Issue 5: Tracing and DNA

- Pillar briefly discussed the Contact Preference Register and how this works. The Special Advocate noted the review of the Birth Information and Tracing Act which is currently underway and that she would welcome the pillar's input into this process, when it is open for submissions.
- Members advised that they would welcome statistics / breakdown of how many people (including how many mothers) have engaged with the contact preference register. The Special Advocate advised she will follow up on this.

Issue 6: Dignified Burial and Memorialisation (Local, National and Overseas)

- The pillar discussed the thousands of infants, children and adults who died in the institutions across Ireland, including many as a direct result of the inadequate conditions at the institutions.
- There is an urgent need to identify, protect and mark sites of burial across all of these institutional sites. The ongoing situation and lack of burial records needs attention.



- While the National Centre in Dublin is welcome, there were some concerns expressed about an overly Dublin-centric approach to memorialisation.
- There was agreement across the pillar that it is vital that there is local memorialisation at sites, as well as across the 4 provinces of Ireland, so that people don't need to travel to learn about this, or to see their experiences reflected. Exhibitions need to be able to move around the country to tell this important story. It was noted that the Oak consultation report included recommendations in relation to a garden of remembrance which had support from participants.
- In relation to the National Centre, it is critical that prioritisation for the social housing on this campus should be for eligible Survivors of institutional abuse. The Special Advocate noted that she has repeatedly raised this during meetings of the NCRR Steering Group, and with Dublin City Council directly.

Issue 7: Language and Terminology, and Communications by Government and State Bodies

- Pillar members discussed the use of language, and their feelings regarding terms such as 'mother', 'birth mother', 'first mother', as well as 'homes' rather than 'institutions'.
- The use of terminology by State bodies working with Survivors can be very hurtful, and this is something that these organisations and their staff should be sensitive to. It is important that they reflect back preferred language when they are engaging with individuals.
- The University of Galway's report on Language and Terminology undertaken with Survivors was mentioned as an important piece of research work on this topic, and this will be re-circulated to the pillar.

Issue 8: Inclusion of Institutional Abuse and Forced Family Separation on School Curricula

- It is important that the next generation, and Irish people, are taught about the history of the institutions and hear the stories about those who experienced institutional abuse and forced family separation. This history needs to be included as part of school curricula.

Agenda Item: Discussion about future meetings and sharing information

Advisory Council Engagement throughout 2026

- Special Advocate advised that it is her hope that the Advisory Council will be involved with, input into and support the work of the office, throughout the year. While there are 3 meetings which pillar members will be invited to attend



throughout the year, (2 pillar meetings and one full Advisory Council meeting) the Special Advocate envisions that members will engage with Advisory Council pillar members across the year as part of her ongoing advocacy work, and other projects, events and initiatives.

- There will be a range of other ongoing work that would be greatly enhanced by the contribution, voice and lived experience of Pillar members. Participation and feedback into external projects will of be voluntary for all members.
- The Special Advocate office noted that the team are happy to provide and information/ documents in whichever format is most useful for members, please just let the team know.

Meeting 2 in Summer 2026

- Special Advocate office will be in touch with pillar members regarding the scheduling of the next meeting, and to ask what agenda items pillar members would like to add for discussion.

Full Advisory Council Meeting 3 in Winter 2026

- Special Advocate provided some further information about plans for the plenary meeting of the Advisory Council at the end of the year, where it is envisioned that members from all 7 Advisory Council pillars would be invited to come together in Dublin for a full meeting.
- Ideas, thoughts and suggestions about what items and issues pillar members may want to include on the agenda for this meeting, as well as possible external attendees to invite to speak to issues, would be very welcome in coming weeks and months.

A note on privacy and representation concerns

- The Special Advocate advised that Advisory Council members represent themselves and their own experiences, insights and views on the Advisory Council.
- Notes of meetings will be a high-level summary of points of discussion and matters for follow up. Any member's personal information will not be included, and specific points will not be attributed to any single member.
- Copies of the note will be shared with pillar attendees for review and sign-off, and will be published on the Special Advocate website, for transparency and to provide an overview of the range of issues being raised across the Advisory Council pillar.



- Decisions on the naming of pillar members (for example as included by way of thanks in any published outputs, can be agreed in advance)

Agenda Item: Next Steps

- Special Advocate office will be in touch to share a note of this meeting, any follow up actions, and with more information about the date and details for next meeting and in person meeting.
- Share information about DCDE Consultation with Advisory Council members

Meeting Follow ups

Action	Responsible	Status
Confirmation of details for next meetings of pillar	Special Advocate office	
Send on additional information to pillar, • Catriona Crowe Analysis of the Commission of Inquiry • Language and Terminology report • Oak Report	Special Advocate office	
Send on update on upcoming consultation reviews • Update on Birth Information and Tracing review • Update on Mother and Baby Institution Payment Scheme operational review	Special Advocate office	
Special Advocate to follow up on • Update on Commission of Investigation records, which records are sealed, and what information can be accessed. • Contact Preference Register statistic breakdown	Special Advocate	In Progress