

Special Advocate for Survivors Advisory Council

Meeting Note

Meeting 1, Pillar 4 – People who were born or who spent time in Mother and Baby or County Home Institutions and related Institutions, or who experienced forced family separation through other settings

4 March 2026

Agenda item: Introductions

- Special Advocate and pillar members in attendance introduced and shared some background about themselves information and further information about why they applied to the Advisory Council as well as 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: Identity and Impact

- Members highlighted a lack of understanding at government level of the paths walked by survivors and affected persons.
- The need for connection and community was emphasised
- The importance of having a voice, and of being a voice for those who are no longer alive, was strongly underscored.
- Members reflected on the lifelong impact of secrecy and shame, including the suppression of identity.
- The intergenerational nature of harm was noted, with impacts extending to children and families.
- Survivors are often exhausted by the cumulative burden of processes, delays and repeated engagement with the system.

Issue 2: DNA and Tracing

- DNA was described as instrumental in establishing truth, particularly where official records are inaccurate, incomplete or falsified.
- Unlike institutional records, DNA was highlighted as a source that cannot be altered.

Discussion focused on whether DNA testing should be provided as a dedicated, supported resource for survivors.

Members noted the importance of appropriate assistance, including:

- Clear pathways for accessing DNA testing.
- Designated agencies or trained personnel to support survivors before and after receiving results.



Issue 2: Education and Public Understanding

- Members highlighted a significant lack of public understanding about institutionalisation and what occurred.
- It was noted the importance of not ensuring that this history is not erased.
- The need to embed Ireland's institutional history within the education curriculum was strongly emphasised.
- Encouraging developments were acknowledged, including the inclusion of *Small Things Like These* in the Leaving Certificate curriculum, while noting that more remains to be done.

Issue 3: Records and Information

- Members highlighted poor experiences, inconsistency and lack of transparency in engagement with State bodies regarding records.
- Records are often heavily redacted, limiting survivors' ability to understand their own histories.
- Concerns were raised that some records were altered at source and therefore may not represent honest or complete accounts.
- The need for records to reflect the full network of trafficking, including links to the United States, was emphasised.
- A significant proportion of records remain in religious or private ownership, limiting access.
- Serious concerns were raised regarding missing or inadequate records relating to vaccine trials and milk trials carried out on children in institutions.
- The absence of consent and transparency in these practices.

Issue 4: Redress

- Members highlighted the urgent need to address the exclusion of approximately 180 individuals from redress schemes.
- The urgent need to include all ineligible institutions such as Temple Hill.



- A current legal challenge in respect of ineligible institutions was noted.
- Members stressed that redress is not solely about financial compensation.

There is a need for clearer public education about redress, including its links to:

- Records and information
- Acknowledgement
- Identity and truth

It was noted that meaningful redress is difficult where the truth remains unknown or inaccessible.

- The Special Advocate expressed concerns about the low uptake of the current Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme.
- Members emphasised that shame and secrecy remain significant barriers, and that these factors likely deter far more eligible applicants than is currently recognised.

Issue 5: Health and Housing

- Recognition was sought of the long-term health and housing impacts arising from institutionalisation.

Issue 6: Burials and Memorialisation

- Strong concern and disbelief were expressed regarding potential planning developments at the Bessborough site.
- Members highlighted the need for greater education of politicians and decision-makers on burial sites, memorialisation, and the sensitivities involved.

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



Page 5 of 6

Council pillar members across the year as part of her ongoing advocacy work, and other projects, events and initiatives.

- 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 agenda items 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 person 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.

Agenda Item: Next Steps

Follow ups

Action	Responsible	Status
Send on additional information to pillar • Article in relation to the challenge in court at the moment against excluded institutions. 2021. • Taoiseach apology as well as the recent Industrial school apology. • BITA review. People affected by legislation.	Special Advocate office	Completed

• DNA policy when it's received. • Special Advocate office mailing list. • Special Advocate Office public statement on dignified burial and memorialisation • Special Advocate Office public statement around concerns at the poor uptake of the Mother and Baby Institutions payment scheme.		
Special Advocate to contact Department of Children, Disability and Equality in relation to updated re. policy and procedures for Tusla and Adoption Authority Ireland around DNA and Tracing.	Special Advocate	Ongoing

