

## **Alliance Party of Northern Ireland**

### **Response to the Department of Justice Consultation on Domestic Homicide Reviews**

**September 2018**

For further info, please contact:

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#### **Response**

The Alliance Party welcomes the introduction of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) as an important step in understanding and tackling domestic violence.

As a political party, we consider ourselves to be an interested stakeholder in relation to this issue and believe that whilst our elected representatives have extensive experience in assisting vulnerable constituents, it is most appropriate for us to make some general comments on DHRs, rather than to address each question in turn.

1. We believe that the primary purpose of DHRs is to “prevent domestic violence and homicides and improve service responses for all domestic violence and abuse victims” but that an additional purpose regarding disclosure and truth would be welcome.
2. Whilst we very much hope that a desire to seek truth, an openness to change and a willingness to learn will all be part of the DHR process, this will require both the use of a wide range of information sources as well as a lack of defensiveness on the part of the agencies involved in a case. Consideration should, therefore, be given to a duty of candour on statutory agencies.
3. Victims and their families should be at the centre of the DHR process. Families should be kept informed from the commencement of a DHR and invited to participate in the process in whatever way they and the Panel feel appropriate.
4. We welcome the inclusion of victims aged 16-18 within the scope of DHRs but believe there may be a gap in the review of suicides related to domestic violence.
5. We believe further guidance may be required for extremely sensitive and complex cases involving domestic homicide and death by suicide (of the perpetrator). Best practice from other jurisdictions which have already dealt with such cases through DHRs should be used.
6. Central to any Terms of Reference should be the humanity and dignity of the victim(s).
7. The Chair should be an expert in the field of domestic violence and should state their independence at the commencement of each DHR.
8. Careful attention should be given to equality and diversity issues. This may include consideration of a protected characteristic during the DHR process, but also how this may have impacted the victim’s interaction with agencies and other parties. Where the victim is a foreign national, it is also vital to consider the cultural context of domestic violence as part of the review, taking expert evidence on this where necessary.