

Domestic Homicide Reviews – Consultation

RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION

The Department of Justice (DOJ), is seeking your views on a proposed model for the introduction of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) in Northern Ireland, which will seek opportunities for learning from cases of homicide resulting from domestic abuse or violence.

Please use this questionnaire to tell us your views on the proposed model.

Please send your response, **no later than 5pm on Friday 28 September 2018**, to:

Department of Justice
Community Safety Division
Room A4.03
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SG

Tel: 028 9052 3772

E-mail: DOJCommunity.SafetyUnitProjMailbox@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk

Confidentiality and Access to Information Legislation

The Department intends to publish responses to the consultation and a summary response report on our website. Any contact details or information that will identify a respondent as a private individual will be removed prior to publication. All information will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your information will not be shared outside of the Department.

What rights do you have?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being processed, and access to your personal data;
- You are entitled to have personal data rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete;
- You have a right to have personal data erased and to prevent processing, in specific circumstances ;
- You have the right to 'block' or suppress processing of personal data, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to data portability, in specific circumstances;
- You have the right to object to the processing, in specific circumstances;
- You have rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling.

Respondents should also be aware that the Department's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) may require that any responses not subject to specific exemptions under the Act be communicated to third parties on request.

If you have any concerns about how your personal data has been handled please contact the **Departmental Data Protection Officer**:

Tel: 028 9037 8617

Email: DataProtectionOfficer@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

Northern Ireland Information Commissioner's Office

3rd Floor

14 Cromac Place

Belfast

BT7 2JB

Tel: 028 9027 8757 or 0303 123 1114

Email: ni@ico.org.uk

Website: www.ico.org.uk/

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and providing input to this consultation.

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU

Consultee Details

Question (a):

I am responding as... *(Please tick one option only)*

A member of the Public

On behalf of an organisation

Other: Independent Social Worker *(Please specify)*

Question (b):

In some cases, the DOJ might need to contact respondents to seek further clarification on their response or to send out a summary of responses to the consultation.

Please tick the below consent box if you are willing to provide the DOJ with contact details for these purposes:

All information will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Name:	[redacted - personal information]
Job Title: <i>(if applicable)</i>	Independent Social Worker
Organisation: <i>(if applicable)</i>	N/A
Address:	[redacted - personal information]
City/Town:	[redacted - personal information]
Postcode:	[redacted - personal information]
Email Address:	[redacted - personal information]

This consultation seeks views on a proposed model for the introduction of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) in Northern Ireland, which will seek opportunities for learning from cases of homicide resulting from domestic abuse or violence.

Question 1:

Do you have any comments to make about the purpose of a Domestic Homicide Review?

If yes, please provide comments below.

As an Independent Social Work Practitioner delivering services in relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence I am fully supportive of the purpose of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) as set out in the departments document and welcome the opportunity to engage in the consultation process. It is important to acknowledge the significant progress and commitment made by the Community Safety Division within the Department of Justice in relation to tackling Domestic Violence within Northern Ireland.

The focus of the DHR process is to enable the examination and dissemination of learning and regional practice development. DHR's have now been in place in England, Wales and Scotland for a number of years and have proven a vital opportunity for agencies to develop learning, improve interagency working, processes and systems in which to identify and monitor potential risk. The families and friends of victims have an opportunity to share the impact of their loss and develop an understanding of the agencies roles and to have their voice heard.

The introduction of DHR's also provides agencies with direction in relation to the development and implementation of service provision. The aims outlined in the consultation document to gather information in relation to safe and positive practice and to identify areas to improve opportunities for victims to seek support will provide opportunities to prevent further harm.

DHR's provide an opportunity in which agencies can examine practice in a manner in which they are able to be open without attributing or creating a culture of blame. This in turn has proven to be successful in understanding contributing factors as well as providing opportunities to improve services from a multi-agency perspective. The document clearly outlines the aim of the DHR.

Question 2:

Do you have anything to say about when a DHR will or will not be commissioned?

If yes, please provide comments below.

It is acknowledged that in practice the majority of the referrals to DHR will be made by the Police Service for Northern Ireland. However, it would be important to provide opportunities for all relevant agencies, professional bodies and interested parties to have an opportunity to request consideration for a DHR.

It would be crucial for example for family members to have an opportunity to request reviews and for the criteria to be considered. If the criteria are not met this would still provide families with information and support.

It is recognised that there may be alternative processes and reviews ongoing and accept the importance of not duplicating and as such am supportive of the DHR process ensuring guidance is developed in relation to the management of such cases.

In relation to paragraph 6.7 where the document outlines *potential instances whereby there may be not be scope for seeking post learning outlined for example as a one-off incident., no history of domestic abuse and no contact with services.*

It is crucial to consider the nature and contact to domestic abuse and violence. Research and practice learning have identified that particularly when a homicide has taking place it is extremely unlikely that there has not been significant previous abuse. As such the learning from cases where there has been no contact with services would be imperative in understanding obstacles or barriers to support.

Cases where the victims have not had contact with agencies would not be an indicator that that all agencies and support service could not learn lessons. This in turn highlights the important that the panel considering the threshold have expertise within the area of domestic abuse and violence.

Question 3:

Do you have anything to say about what may ‘typically’ be outlined within the terms of reference?

If yes, please provide comments below.

It is assumed that the terminology within this section of the document will be amended following agreement and approval and as such the word *typical* will be removed giving the potential impact the wording could have on the victim’s family and friends.

I would agree with the suggested terms of reference with consideration giving to the following:

- It would be relevant to consider gathering information to ascertain the networks connected with the victim and perpetrator including family, friends, community and employment connections. This will provide the SOF with more detailed guidance on section 6.12 point two “*how best relevant information can be obtained*” and would provide clarity on who to involve in the review.
- It is welcomed that a timeline for the review be devised which is important for all involved. However, the development of the timeline should consider and be dependent on establishing the individuals involved, their personal circumstances and ability to contribute to the review. For example, it would be vital to include family members however the timing of the review would potentially impact on their emotional ability to engage. It is therefore important to consider a timeline that provides opportunities for families to begin to address grief, process and perhaps seek emotional support. The DHR process could also consider providing this support in partnership with relevant services such as family advocates.
- It is welcomed that the chair would devise the terms of reference and this would be approved by the SOF. The chair will have significant experience in working with perpetrators, victims and families and as such will be able to provide appropriate TOR. However, the approval of the SOF provides an oversight mechanism which is also welcomed.

Question 4:

Do you have anything to say about:

- **the knowledge and skills of the chair**
- **the recruitment and contingency for the role of chair?**

If yes, please provide comments below.

It is important to ensure that the Chair is experienced within the field of domestic and sexual violence and has an in-depth understanding of the varying agencies roles and responsibilities. It is also crucial that the Chair is independent as this enables objectivity and provides public confidence and reassurance to family members.

I would be supportive of the proposal of a range of Chairs being appointed as per paragraph 6.18. This will provide continuity and enable the appointed chairs to develop expertise and to share practice in undertaking reviews as well as a clinical support mechanism.

In terms of considering the knowledge and skills required to undertake the role the chair would have to display:

- Objectivity.
- In-depth understanding of Domestic and Sexual Violence.
- Has an ability to provide concise and accessible reports.
- Has the ability to engage all involved in DHR in particular family and friends.
- Has developed experience working with perpetrators, victims and proxy victims.
- Understands the roles and responsibilities of all Statutory and Voluntary agencies.
- Has a clear understanding of the legal framework within Northern Ireland.

Question 5:

Do you have any comments to make about DHR panel membership?

If yes, please provide comments below.

I would be supportive of the development of an oversight panel and the proposals in relation to membership. However, given the nature of the reviews it is important that the panel members whilst representing the statutory agencies also ensure the representatives have the expertise in relation to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence as well as an in-depth understanding of the network of services within Northern Ireland.

Given the number of agencies involved with perpetrators and victims throughout Northern Ireland it is essential that members and organisations from the voluntary and community sector are involved given their expertise and independence. Consideration should also be given to the SOF including membership from the SVDV partnerships.

Question 6:

Do you have any comments to make about the consideration of equality and diversity issues by the Panel?

If yes, please provide comments below.

It is welcomed that specific consideration has been applied in relation to equality and diversity issues. This is particular important given the nature and purpose of the review. However, giving that domestic and sexual violence impacts on all genders it would be suggested that the terminology be gender neutral.

It is positive that reference is made to *“Gender identity, ethnicity, disability, etc. that may require special consideration or if an outside expert will be needed to assist in understanding these crucial aspects of the case”*. In a recent study undertaken with individuals within the LGBTQ community 52% of respondents disclosed that they had experienced some form of abusive behaviour from a partner or ex-partner.

It is therefore welcomed that the document considers the specific impact issues for victims and families from the LGBTQ community and is suggesting in those circumstances support, guidance and expertise can be sought from relevant professions.

Question 7:

Do you have anything to say about family involvement in the process?

If yes, please provide comments below.

It is crucial not only to involve friends and family but to also identify the individuals who require to receive regular updates and liaison. In many cases where the victims have not sought service provision they will have disclosed abuse to family members and friends as such their input into the reviews are essential.

I am fully supportive of the proposal to include family and friends within the review process and the recognition that family, friends and community members contribute not only to the review findings but to creating safer communities for victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Consideration may also be appropriate in relation to the inclusion where age appropriate and dependant of the emotional health of children in the process given they may have witnessed significant events within their family home.

Research would indicate that family and friends can also make an empirical contribution to the review. Information from these sources can rebalance information for example received by perpetrators and provide an accurate narrative which provides learning from an objective history.

Suggestions in involving family members include:

- Providing independent support through the process
- Ensure families are involved in the development of the DHR from the initial stage and ensure they have a clear understanding of the terms of reference and feel able to suggest additions
- Ensure the family feel their contribution is valued and are treated with sensitivity and respect
- Invite the family to attend and share their experience with the panel members
- Maintain contact throughout and after the review

Question 8:

Do you have anything to say about the involvement of other individuals in the process?

If yes, please provide comments below.

The proposal to include friends and colleagues within the review process is welcomed. This is important given this provides an opportunity in which to gather information that agency may not hold. Friends may also at times hold more information than family members who the victim may have wanted to protect for a number of reasons or in circumstances where there is no contact with family members.

This is particularly relevant in relation to employers given the introduction of Domestic Abuse Workplace Policies in many organisations and businesses. This information is stored and may provide vital information in relation to risks impacting on victims and how employers can manage this safely.

The inclusion of individuals within the review process should be considered by the DHR panel and chair.

Question 9:

Do you have any comments about the two key elements of the DHR process:

- (i) initial findings, learning and identification of actions needed; and**
- (ii) identification of key findings, learning, actions and longer- term change**

to improve service and the response in future cases of domestic violence and abuse?

If yes, please provide comments below.

The key purpose outlined behind the DHR is to ascertain learning it is therefore vital that the review finding be disseminated as soon as is assessed as appropriate. Considering the advice and guidance in relation to criminal proceeding it is welcomed that the document considers agencies being provided with key learning points and more importantly the key action steps in which to implemented immediately giving the focus is community safety.

This not only impacts on agencies practice systems and procedures but can also influence service provision and additional services being considered for introduction within Northern Ireland. This provides information both locally and nationally and influences early intervention.

Question 10:

Do you have any comment on the approach proposed regarding gathering information, or any suggestions as to how best this could be undertaken?

If yes, please provide comments below.

It is welcomed the document suggestion of gathering information in a more dynamic manner and in particular the clarity that the information will be used to inform future practice.

It is also welcomed that the document provides clarity that they DHR will also seek to ascertain conditions in which practice can be influenced negatively. This is particularly important as it focuses on the conditions as opposed to individuals which will ensure there are limited obstacles in agencies engaging within the DHR process.

It would also be welcomed that the information gathering takes on many forms to ensure full cooperation and opportunities to engage. This could include:

- Face to face interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Email contact
- Written Statements
- Questionnaires
- Via relevant professionals or support persons (particularly when including children)

Question 11:

Do you have any comment on the suggested approach around publication of the DHR report and do you have any views on the frequency of report publication?

If yes, please provide comments below.

I would agree with the proposal to publish a more concise report and a yearly thematic report provided. Given the geographical nature of Northern Ireland this would have to consider the confidentiality of the victims and family. This outlines the importance of the report being developed in a sensitive manner and ensure that agencies staff members cannot be identified, and the focus is on what the multi-agencies can learn and develop.

Reports need to consider the impact on family and friends and agencies and as such ensure positive practice is highlighted. It would also be welcomed to have the inclusion of changes in practice where able to evidence for example if agencies received action steps prior to the conclusion and publication of the review and can evidence positive changes.

Question 12:

Do you have any comment on the potential outcome of the reviews through the development of reports?

If yes, please provide comments below.

I would support the proposals outlined in relation to the development of reports. Particularly a mechanism for ensuring any recommendations made by the DHR are being progressed. During this process it would also be important to capture and consider the views of staff delivering the recommendation as well as the strategic perspective.

Given the role and insight the chair in relation to the specific cases consideration could be given to the role they could play in ensuring the oversight alongside the SOF in relation to action steps and the dissemination of learning.

Question 13:

Do you have any comment on the role and scope of the Senior Oversight Forum?

If yes, please provide comments below.

I would be supportive of the proposals outlined in the document. However, I would suggest the following be considered:

- Further information and discussion in relation to the membership of the SOF which should include representation of all SVDV partnerships as a regional group.
- Assurance of the independent nature of the SOF, this is particularly important giving the SOF suggested role in endorsing the final DHR report.
- Consideration of independence when considering implementation of review recommendations

Question 14:

Do you have any comment on the organisations that would make up the Senior Oversight Forum, particularly the additional bodies that could be considered, or others that should be considered?

If yes, please provide comments below.

I would agree with the proposals with the addition of Independent members, members from research and education and health practitioners.

Question 15:

Do you have any comment on the potential implications the proposed model may have on equality or human rights?

If yes, please provide comments below.

There not appear to be any specific implications in relation to human rights. Assuming the DHR process adheres to human rights legislation throughout and after the DHR review.

Question 16:

Do you have any further comment to make about the proposed model?

It would be helpful if you reference which part of the document you are commenting on. If you refer to any other documents, please provide the title, author and if possible approximate date of publication or alternatively a hyperlink if it can be accessed online.

As mentioned it is extremely important to introduce DHR within Northern Ireland in keeping with practice throughout the UK. The purpose of the reviews is to ensure practice development which is underpinned by public safety.

The inclusion of family and friends is extremely important as is the independence nature of the chair. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation document.

