

## 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

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Tel: 028 9037 8617

Email: [DataProtectionOfficer@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DataProtectionOfficer@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk)

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### **Northern Ireland Information Commissioner's Office**

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Website: [www.ico.org.uk/](http://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.....*(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]
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**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? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

Women's Aid warmly welcomes the introduction of Domestic Homicide Reviews in Northern Ireland, and the opportunity to comment on the proposals on behalf of our 9 local Women's Aid groups. We would like to take this opportunity to commend the Department of Justice for its diligent work to ensure that the DHR process in Northern Ireland is workable, useful and victim-centred. Overall, we are of the view that the proposals laid out in the consultation document are very positive. We have a number of recommendations for how DHRs could operate in Northern Ireland, to avoid the pitfalls experienced in other regimes. These recommendations are drawn from our own expertise, and from the expertise of colleagues and contacts who have been involved in DHRs in England and Wales, either as Chairs, Panel members or quality assurance assessors. We have outlined these recommendations within our responses to the consultation questions below, and where appropriate we have alluded to specific recommendations which have come from those involved in other DHR processes.

Regarding the purpose of DHRs:

- We by and large agree with the purpose of DHRs as outlined in this section.
- We would suggest that purpose (vi) to “prevent domestic violence and homicides and improve service responses for all domestic violence and abuse victims...” is the overarching purpose of the DHR process. Therefore we would lead with this point and have all other bullet points regarding the purpose of DHRs falling under that.
- We agree that the aim of DHRs should be to learn lessons and change policy in line with those lessons learned. It is essential that the process is based on the principle of openness and candid disclosure, and that agencies feel comfortable in discussing shortcomings and failures without fear of censure. It is only by nurturing this culture that DHRs will wield the most benefit.
- We agree that the review process should ensure that organisations identify when

and how action will be taken (5.5). We would like more concrete detail on how that will take place, and how the implementation of recommendations will be enforced. In our view, if successive Domestic Homicide Reviews are making the same recommendations time and again, year after year, the process will have failed.

- While we appreciate that DHRs are not about how a victim died, we would stress that the victim's journey and story are an important part of the process and will help the review team to better understand what led to the death and how it could have been prevented. It is vital for the victim's voice to be central to the process – while the ultimate aim is about preventing future deaths and learning lessons, this cannot be effectively done without recognising the humanity of victims and viewing agency conduct and policies through their eyes.
- We urge that the spirit of DHRs should be underpinned by professional curiosity, a desire to seek truth, openness to change, and a commitment to banish defensiveness from the process. To establish an accurate narrative, this means taking evidence from a wide range of sources, including agencies, support organisations, and friends and family. Statutory records alone will not provide a full picture, and will steer any review through the eyes of those agencies instead of through the eyes of the victim. This should be avoided at all costs.
- We would suggest the language around identifying good practice could be tempered slightly. Our concern is that excessive focus on good practice might pressure agencies into listing all their standard practice in order to have submitted something to this portion of the review, which would ultimately be unhelpful and result in lengthy reports and evidence submissions. Good practice should not be confused with standard practice – there is no need for agencies to list things that equate to them doing their job correctly. Good practice would be examples of innovation, where an agency has implemented something that goes above and beyond standard practice which has yielded results. This should be made clear to those participating in DHRs, and it should be expected that in most cases there is not much good practice, ie practice that goes above and beyond standard practice, to be identified. It may be useful to include a definition of what good practice is, and clarify that not everyone will have examples to give and that this is OK.
- We recommend the addition of “enabling families to get answers to their questions” as a purpose of DHRs under the bullet points at page 8.
- Finally, it is crucial that the DHR process does not become a mere ‘tick box exercise’, only looking at whether agencies followed their policies. It should genuinely engage with the question of what might have made a difference in the responses of agencies, or the way their services are accessed if the victim/perpetrator/ their children did not have any contact with services.

## Question 2:

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

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We welcome the intention that it would only be in exceptional circumstances where a review would not be commissioned. Truly 'one-off' instances of violence with no abuse context are quite rare. Even if there had been no contact with services, it is possible that there was abuse in the relationship. In those cases, there would be much learning to gain from examining how the abuse never reached any agencies or organisations, and what can be done better to disrupt abuse at the earliest possible stage.
- We acknowledge that it may be correct for a review to be conducted through a different process, depending on the details of the case. We would highlight that domestic abuse is often the precipitating factor in cases where mental health and other issues are present, and that it is important to recognise this by using the DHR process where appropriate.
- We welcome that victims between the ages of 16-18 will be included in the DHR process.
- Regarding suicide, Women's Aid understands the reasoning of the Department not to include suicide in the initial roll-out of the DHR process. Having spoken with contacts who have been involved in DHR processes in England, we acknowledge that suicides can be particularly difficult to successfully review in the DHR process. This is in part due to the likelihood that a perpetrator will most likely be alive, and won't have been charged or incarcerated in connection with the suicide as no crime may have been committed (particularly in the absence of a coercive control law here). We appreciate that in order to make the process fit to tackle the complexities of domestic abuse-related suicides, it may be prudent to test the process first on the 5-7 annual domestic homicides and allow the process to bed in first.
- However we strongly recommend that once this has been done, domestic violence-related suicides should be brought within the remit of DHRs. Women's Aid's work with the Attorney General, John Larkin QC, has revealed that the issue of suicide as a result of domestic abuse is severely under-recognised within existing review processes. The current mechanism whereby the Attorney General can direct the

coroner to investigate a death and its causal link to abuse is an imperfect mechanism which requires a great deal of proactive work on the part of families, support services and the Attorney himself, and it may be extremely valuable for the DHR process to fill that gap given that it comes with a wraparound process and pathways tailored to cases where a death has resulted from domestic violence.

- To circumvent potential difficulties of examining death by suicide within the DHR process, it may be useful to conduct a fact-finding exercise similar to what the Department has carried out with DHRs, by speaking to those who have experience of DHRs and suicides and gathering learning and good practice to ensure their success in Northern Ireland.
- We recommend that cases of familicide, or ‘family wipeout’ (whereby a family member murders his family then dies by suicide) are treated with particular sensitivity, and avoid the pitfall of treating the perpetrator of such atrocities as an equal victim. In such cases, DHR reports could become instrumental tools in debunking common myths around familicide, particularly those myths that present the perpetrator as a ‘good family man’ or ‘pillar of the community’ and look for as-yet undiagnosed mental health issues to explain away the perpetrator’s actions without acknowledging the killings were a predictable result of escalating coercive control and abuse. Given that such reviews would be dealing with both domestic homicide and suicide, it may be helpful to develop specific guidance for Chairs and Panels on this issue.

### **Question 3:**

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

If yes, please provide comments below.

- Women’s Aid welcomes this list of what might be typically contained within Terms of Reference. We have a number of additional recommendations.
- Every TOR should be underpinned by principles by which the Chair and Panel will abide, such as to conduct themselves with honesty, transparency, humility and a desire to learn lessons. A key principle would also be keeping the humanity of the victim at the centre of the review.

- TORs should also be underpinned by a commitment to victim-centred focus, whereby the victim and their story is not lost in examination of policies and practices. The human stories behind the practices can often reveal learning and better understanding of what did or didn't happen to keep a victim safe, and this should not be lost from the DHR process.
- Terms of reference should be written in plain English, as they will be sent to families, and it would be jarring and inconsiderate if families weren't able to understand the TOR because they were written in unnecessarily technical language.
- It may be useful to separate TORs into two separate aspects: general terms of the review, and lines of inquiry. General terms would most likely include anticipated length of review, what media strategy the panel plans to employ etc. Standard lines of inquiry would presumably include what questions are the DHR trying to answer, were professional standards met, was risk assessed accurately, were staff in contact with victim trained appropriately.
- We fully support adding additional terms in cases where equality and diversity considerations come into play. Where there are unique aspects of the case, additional lines of inquiry should be added. For example, if the victim was a foreign national, it would be prudent to examine whether the policies and procedures in place would have informed and assured the victim that there was support out there for her/him, and that service pathways were fit for purpose in overcoming any additional barriers that those victims faced.

#### 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?**

YES

If yes, please provide comments below.

- **the knowledge and skills of the chair**

Having consulted widely with colleagues engaged in DHR processes elsewhere, it is clear that the role of the Chair is absolutely pivotal to the success or otherwise of the DHR. While we are broadly supportive of the criteria outlined, we believe that these could be strengthened. A starting point would be the more robust criteria for Chairs outlined in the Home Office Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews, December 2016 – paras 36 – 39. We would make the following further recommendations:

- The Chair should be a recognised expert in the field of domestic violence, and have a proven in-depth understanding of all aspects of domestic violence including coercive control and the gendered nature of domestic violence and abuse.
- The Chair should have experience in managing large, complex processes like DHRs and should have a proven track record in managing relationships with multiple agencies and groups. It is key that the Chair has sufficient experience managing and engaging with statutory agencies, and that they are not easily harried or pressured, regardless of an agency representative's seniority. The Chair will also have to put strategies in place to encourage buy-in from all participants, so experience of this would be useful. Ideally, it may be helpful if the first tranche of Chairs in the Northern Irish process have some experience of some aspects of other DHR processes elsewhere.
- The Chair should ideally be able to provide both an academic helicopter view of abuse and a practical, front-line understanding of how victims interact with agencies in practice.

- We believe that it is not just 'ideal' for the Chair to be independent, but fundamental. The Chair should not only be independent, but should be seen to be independent. We recommend that a Chair should make a declaration of independence at the beginning of every DHR report they author, which also states the case of exactly *why* they are independent. Further guidance may be necessary to clarify what constitutes independence for the purposes of the DHR process. It may also be useful for the Department to consider what independence means in a Northern Irish context, and whether recruitment of Chairs should take into account the legacy of the Troubles, potential sensitivities of families from different communities, and whether the appointment of a Chair with perceived political views or background might negatively affect buy-in to the process from families.
- It is essential that the Chair fully embraces the function of communicating with families of the victim, and appreciates the compassion and sensitivity required in carrying out this role. From our research and conversations with those involved in DHRs in GB, inadequate communication and engagement with families tends to be the most-criticised aspect of DHR processes. To this end, we suggest that guidance on the multiple roles and jobs of the Chair could be developed to ensure that this vital role of family liaison is not forgotten or inadequately executed.
- We strongly recommend that one criterion for hiring a Chair is that they have experience and skill in engaging with perpetrators and family members that may have been groomed by a perpetrator. It may be helpful in certain DHRs to engage with perpetrators and their families. In those cases it will be essential that the Chair can extract pertinent information without being manipulated by a perpetrator, or misinterpreting information that has come from someone whose views have been coloured because they have been groomed by the perpetrator.
- Another key attribute of a Chair is the ability to write to families of victims. Writing such letters is a real skill, as they must be a careful balance of information in plain English, explanation of the DHR process, and compassion and commitment to work with families.
  - **the recruitment and contingency for the role of chair?**
- Given the potentially onerous nature of Chairing, we recommend a pool of at least 2, but ideally 3 or 4, Chairs who would Chair DHRs on a rotational basis. This would ensure that no one person is overburdened by working on too many DHRs at a time, and provides a ready-made support group for Chairs

encountering any challenges in the course of their work. Experience from elsewhere has shown that when a Chair is inundated with competing requirements, the first aspect of the work to be cut back on is communication with families. Indeed this is one of the most common criticisms of other DHR processes. It is vital that the Northern Irish DHR process comes up with a solution to prevent this from happening, as families of the dead are living victims and must be treated with compassion and care.

- A rotational basis for Chairs would also be valuable as certain parts of the DHR process are more time-consuming than others. Ideally, one would want to avoid a scenario in which the same Chair has to take on several DHRs in close succession, because the workload would be untenable at specific stages of the process.
- Having discussed this role with contacts who have taken on the role of DHR Chair in other jurisdictions, it is clear that this role could not be adequately fulfilled by someone who is already in full-time work and plans to keep on that job throughout their tenure as Chair. It is also evident that the DHR process is an emotionally draining one. Therefore we recommend that any given Chair does not conduct more than 4 DHRs per year.

### **Question 5:**

#### **Do you have any comments to make about DHR panel membership? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We welcome the proposal for the community and voluntary sector to be part of the core panel membership. We recommend that every DHR panel should contain at least one expert on domestic violence with practical front-line experience. In the Northern Irish context, this would be a member from Women's Aid or the Men's Advisory Project as appropriate. The role of expert domestic violence organisations provides a challenge role to statutory agencies, which is invaluable in a DHR process and should be embraced by the Department to ensure the efficacy of the DHR process in Northern Ireland.
- Other relevant voluntary sector organisations, such as those working in the areas of substance misuse support, mental health, BME support, should be invited if the perpetrator or victim's background suggests that these agencies may have relevant knowledge or challenge function to contribute.
- Given the fluid nature of employment in today's workplace, it may be prudent to limit Panel membership to a shorter period of time, given staff turnover and changes at organisations and agencies. A period of 2 years may be more practical, though the optimum time would need to be formulated on the basis of how long a DHR process might take once suspensions are factored in.
- We support the proposal to have deputy or alternate panel members nominated for each organisation. It might also be worthwhile considering a staggered change of panel membership, with one half of the panel being replaced in one year, and the other half being replaced in the next. This would ensure that at any given time there are experienced panel members who can pass on that expertise and capacity build new members.
- Panel members should be of sufficient seniority to be able to make decisions without having to delay or defer to a superior.

**Question 6:**

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

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We agree that anyone who falls into one of the protected characteristics under equality legislation should have that characteristic taken into consideration during the course of the DHR. When taking equality into consideration, the Chair and Panel should examine not only any barriers posed by agencies policies and procedures, but also how someone's characteristic or status might have impacted on how either the perpetrator or victim acted in the lead-up to the homicide.
- From our interviews with people who have been involved in DHR processes elsewhere, we have identified a trend whereby gender is not specifically taken into account when a woman is killed. This may be because women are the majority of victims in domestic homicides and are therefore regarded as the 'norm'. However, women are disproportionately victims of domestic homicides BECAUSE they are women, and this fact is inextricably linked with gender inequality. Therefore we urge that the gendered nature of the killing of women is not overlooked in equality and diversity considerations in DHRs.
- We also recommend that in cases where victims are foreign nationals or not from 'indigenous' communities, their cultural context should also be examined. For instance, if the victim was a BME woman whose country of origin or community had different cultural norms around domestic violence, this might be useful information in unpicking whether the victim believed she was a victim of abuse, or felt that the abuse merited reporting to police or a support service. Such considerations would aid in the Panel's understanding of the victim's motivation for actions taken or not taken, and provide an insight into how policies and procedures need to be changed to intervene earlier in such cases.
- We are aware that organisations supporting rural and BME people are extremely stretched following cuts to funding and staffing. It would be useful to consult with organisations like Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and BME women's network and NICRE to ascertain the best means of ensuring diversity on the panel and adequate representation of those issues when and where relevant. While the organisations themselves may not

have the capacity to sit on a panel, they will certainly have important views as to how the voices of rural and BME women can be heard more effectively.

### Question 7:

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

If yes, please provide comments below.

- The input of families is vital to establishing a clear picture of the life of the victim and the circumstances leading to their death. We believe that a full, holistic picture should be gathered. It is not enough just to question statutory agencies that were in contact with the victim, as this would provide an incomplete picture of the circumstances leading to the victim's death.
- When consulting with people who have Chaired or sat on DHR panels elsewhere, several contacts stated that family involvement was "of greatest importance" to the DHR process. One colleague told us:

*"I learned so much about the victim and often the perpetrator from talking to friends and family, and the reviews were much more difficult and less thorough when they were not involved."*

- Women's Aid is of the view that the consultation document is currently too cautious about managing family expectations, and not strong enough on the value of DHRs to families, or the value of involving families in DHRs. Families can often unlock key insights that put the actions of agencies, and the victim's reactions, in context.
- Women's Aid recommends that family involvement is reflected more strongly in the Northern Irish DHR process, and that a partnership approach is taken by Chairs and Panels. By building a partnership with families, and recognising both their special status as living victims and their value as holders of key information about the victim, a Chair and Panel are more likely to get useful and valuable information from them. This will ultimately result in a better DHR process with fuller, more accurate findings and recommendations.

- In statutory guidance in GB, families are entitled to attend a meeting of the panel, and can request to get sight of IMRs even though they are confidential – it is the role of the Chair to make a decision on this. This may be a useful addition to the Northern Irish DHR process.
- We recommend that families should be informed right from the beginning that a DHR will be taking place, and kept informed through every step of the process. At the outset, families should be given an outline of what the process will entail in plain English, and be invited to participate in whatever way they feel comfortable. This could be correspondence via email, phone calls, house visits from the Chair, meetings in a neutral venue, and possibly the chance to attend a panel meeting.
- Families should also be asked if there is anyone else who would be useful to talk to. For example, a victim may not have confided in her mother about problems in her relationship but may have been more candid with her best friend, a work colleague, or a professional such as a hairdresser.
- We also recommend that families and friends of the victim should be offered independent support to enable them to engage with the process.
- As with the whole of the DHR process, the Chair and Panel’s interaction with families should be sensitive to the possibility that a family member may have been groomed by the perpetrator.
- It can be useful to involve children and young people in the DHR process, particularly if they have witnessed abuse or the death of their parent. Interacting with children and young people during the information gathering process naturally requires a special skillset and sensitivity. For this reason it would be preferable if the Chair has experience in this regard. It is also understandable that guardians of the child will be keen to safeguard them from further harm and trauma, and therefore may be inclined to block the child’s involvement in any DHR process. This highlights the need to get the process right when interacting with children and young people, ensuring that their wellbeing and best interests are always at the heart of the process, and looking in detail at creating guidance and training for Chairs in how to appropriately liaise with families and children.

### Question 8:

#### **Do you have anything to say about the involvement of other individuals in the process? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We acknowledge that involving perpetrators can be useful to the DHR process, particularly if they are brought in later in the process. Contacts we spoke to who had experience of seeking information from perpetrators found that they were most valuable when they had been in prison for at least 6 months to a year after sentencing, as they were more likely to have undergone a period of reflection themselves and be more willing to provide missing information. The most useful information in this regard may be about what actions might have made a difference and prevented the homicide.
- As stated earlier, any involvement with a perpetrator would need to be conducted by a Chair and Panel who are skilled and understand the capacity of perpetrators for manipulation.
- Contacting the family of perpetrators can also be useful if they have witnessed things that are pertinent to the review or had involvement with the victim. Again, knowledge and understanding of grooming and the potential for a perpetrator's family to have been complicit in abuse is vital when undertaking interviews or information gathering of this kind.
- We would urge extreme caution and sensitivity when involving perpetrator and/or their family in a DHR. Victims' families may feel angry that perpetrators and their families are being permitted input into the review. This again highlights why a good rapport with families from the outset is key – it will allow the Chair to explain the reason why they are involved, the value of seeking information to ensure and reassure the families that the Chair and Panel understand the manipulative nature of abusers and that they must be engaged with caution.
- Having consulted with several seasoned DHR Chairs, Panel members and QA panel members in England, it is clear that there is value in canvassing a number of individuals who were close to the victim. Friends, colleagues and other close acquaintances may hold information and insight that family members do not have. This can often be the case when domestic abuse is

involved, as some victims may have been isolated from their family or may have been loath to disclose what was happening in their relationship out of shame or fear.

- Most colleagues we questioned agreed that it wouldn't usually be necessary to question more than 5 or 6 other individuals connected to the victim in the course of a single DHR, in addition to family and perpetrator/family.

### **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? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We welcome the potential for a 2-stage process. One flaw of other DHR processes is that they can often take years to even begin due to waiting for other processes such as court cases to end. The approach proposed by DOJ here is pragmatic and will allow for some recommendations to be taken forward immediately while allowing for a fuller examination of lessons learned at a later stage.
- We would caveat that by saying that it may not always be possible to get early learning or initial findings without going through the whole process, and that a DHR process is not a failure if it isn't possible to adhere to the 2-stage process.

### 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? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- From our conversations with colleagues who have been involved in DHRs England and Wales, it is clear that IMRs are a valuable mechanism for collecting information and nurturing buy-in among agencies. They are a useful basis for the overview report, and allow the process to circumvent many data protection issues by having the information come directly from agencies. We welcome the proposal to make them more dynamic, but we would be of the view that any changes to the IMR process should not stifle information sharing or buy-in.
- One extremely useful suggestion from a contact working on DHRs in England was for the Chair and panel to gather together all IMRs, and collate the information on the office wall chronologically. This would allow the Chair and Panel to view the multiple interventions through the eyes of the victim's experience, and shed light on why the victim acted the way they did or why the interventions weren't successful.
- It was also suggested that putting a photo of the victim on the wall was useful as it reminded the Chair and Panel that they were ultimately reviewing the death of a person, not just looking at policy and procedure. This keeps the process grounded and victim-centred.
- Whether or not the Department opts for a traditional IMR process, or an amended more dynamic version, it is vital to keep the core purpose unchanged. This is to ensure that agencies don't just document what happened but also WHY. It is the WHY that is central to DHRs, and gathering this information will enable the Chair and Panel to better examine what policies and procedures are working, which are missing, and which need to change.
- Another suggestion is to use people's names in the review process and

report. This serves a dual purpose: keeping the humanity of victims front and centre, and avoiding errors in reporting. One colleague who worked as a Chair in DHRs in England noted a case in which police supplied an IMR stating that “Mrs A assaulted Mr A”. Feeling that this did not fit with the other facts of the case, the Chair went back to police to question this report. In fact, it had been Mr A who assaulted Mrs A, but the use of very similar pseudonyms had resulted in a mix-up.

- One newer approach that is being considered in some DHR processes in England is to have a meeting with support workers from the various agencies who directly supported the victim, as well as those who were in other forms of direct contact like GPs and solicitors. This would be valuable for effective information gathering, as long as meetings imbued the spirit of the DHRs and were focused on learning lessons, keeping the review victim-centred, and steering firmly away from blaming individuals for action or inaction.
- Based on our interviews with contacts who have been involved in DHR processes, we believe it should generally be possible to conclude a review within nine months, not including times when the review had to be suspended.

#### **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? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We agree that reports should be to the point and focus on lessons to be learned. An overly long report filled with unnecessary detail will be a less effective tool for learning.
- We would urge the Department to reconsider a slightly different reporting model, to enable all potential audiences to be catered for. Based on our research and conversations with those familiar with DHRs, we would recommend that a full report is written in the manner stated. Following on from this, we recommend that a shorter Executive Summary is produced, and a Key Learning document of at most 1-2 pages to be disseminated among

frontline staff of all relevant agencies. This will assist with the change process by cascading learning down through organisations.

- We would also be supportive of learning events being run to enable those on the ground to learn how the recommendations will affect their work.
- We would caution against the process viewing the publication of the report as the 'last stage' of the DHR process. Monitoring of the implementation of recommendations, ensuring recommendations are followed up, are essential.
- Guidance and training would be very helpful for authors of report, as would providing a template report for authors to follow. This would effectively guide authors in producing the kind of report that the Department desires.

#### **Question 12:**

#### **Do you have any comment on the potential outcome of the reviews through the development of reports? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We fully support the proposal to ensure that the outcomes of reports should focus on "tangible results".
- We have some concerns about the enforceability of recommendations. As we have already stated above, if the same recommendations continue to be made year after year, it will be evident that the DHR process has not been effective or successful in creating meaningful change. While we appreciate that concrete enforcement measures like monetary fines would necessitate new legislation, and we are not in favour of holding up the introduction of DHRs until legislation could be passed, we nonetheless think it would be worth further investigation into alternative enforcement models used in different jurisdictions.
- We would also raise the issue of who owns the report. Given the need for independence of the Chair and author, and protection from undue influence of agencies who may wish recommendations to be tempered for their own benefit, we would suggest that the author of the report is the owner, and while

he or she can take on advice and guidance from agencies either directly or adjacently affected by the recommendations, they should not have the power to censor those recommendations.

**Question 13:**

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

If yes, please provide comments below.

- We agree that a quality assurance function is vital to the DHR process. To ensure that this function can run smoothly, we recommend that SOF membership shouldn't be too unwieldy as this would hamper the QA and oversight function.
- The role of the SOF should include receiving updates on the progress of DHRs and the implementation of recommendations.
- We would like to see more detail about how the SOF would be able to compel compliance with recommendations.
- We would recommend that the SOF's follow up function to review how findings of reviews are being implemented should be written into the process in detail.

**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? - YES**

If yes, please provide comments below.

- Naming of Women’s Aid and Men’s Advisory Project as standing members of the SOF, as the lead domestic violence organisations in Northern Ireland.

**Question 15:**

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

If yes, please provide comments below.

- Given that women comprise the majority of victims of domestic violence, high risk cases, and domestic homicides, this proposal has the potential to better safeguard the human rights of women liberty, to live free from torture and inhuman degrading treatment, and to fulfil their rights to private and family life.

**Question 16:**

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

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.

- We reiterate our recommendation that the process should have more emphasis on the voice of the victim.
- We would also recommend that the process should be reviewed to ensure that it is capable of creating meaningful change for victims that don’t follow traditional patterns – for example victims who have not needed contact with the Housing Executive or gone to police, who may have been well-off enough or had wealthy enough support networks with space in their homes not to require refuge space, who may have had no contact with any service other than their GP, or who may have had complicating factors in their case such as an ‘honour’-based element to the domestic

violence suffered. It is important to examine policies, procedures and services to ensure that they are fit for purpose for these victims as well as those who fit traditional patterns of support seeking.

- Regarding children and young people, even if children and young people were very young when their parent was killed, it would be good practice for a complete and unredacted copy of the DHR report to be attached to their social care file. This will enable them to have access to the full information surrounding their parent's death when they are older and have questions about what happened.
- We recommend that further consideration is given to the question of anonymity. While it most likely wouldn't be possible to ensure anonymity for victims in such a small province, it would be useful to consider offering anonymity to witnesses and participants to get buy-in. For example, a Chair or Panel may wish to speak with a former partner of the killer to get insight into their patterns and MO. However, a former partner may be reluctant to disclose any information or take part in a review unless they can do so anonymously. They may feel guilt if they didn't report their abuser to police, and may be at risk of public reprisal for 'causing' the death by not reporting their own abuse to police.
- We recommend the establishment of pathways for change in each agency named in a given DHR. This could possibly include naming a specific person responsible for overseeing changes based on recommendations in each agency. This should be someone with seniority and in appropriate role to take this forward. It may also be valuable to include a requirement for agencies to report back to SOF within a year on the progress of implementing recommendations.