

A local guide to undertaking Domestic Homicide Reviews in Hertfordshire

1. Introduction

This document is intended to be used as a guide to Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Chairs, Local Authority Chief Executives and Independent Panel Chairs/Overview Report Writers, outlining the agreed Hertfordshire Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process and their responsibilities in the undertaking a DHR.

The process agreed in Hertfordshire is a county-wide framework that reflects the national [Home Office Statutory Guidance for conducting DHRs](#) (updated 2016). It also incorporates changes in guidance and good practice, as summarised by leading DHR advocacy charity and Home Office expert advisors [here](#)

A DHR must be held to ensure that the life of the victim is illuminated. This should include their journey, friends and family, professionals and services, with the fundamental basis of raising the victim status, providing a voice for family and friends to understand fully the history of their loved one(s), and to explore and learn how to bring about change, without blame. Without strict boundaries, a DHR should embrace a culture of professional curiosity and ensure the review explores all necessary areas, in order that it identifies and understands the trail and pattern of life and events that led to the incident.

The Home Office National Statutory Guidance states that the circumstances in which to consider holding a DHR are:

The death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by –

- a) person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship,*
- b) a member of the same household¹ as himself,*

held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death.

Or:

Where a victim took their own life (suicide) and the circumstances give rise to concern, for example it emerges that there was coercive controlling behaviour in the relationship.

The Home Office have developed a range of accompanying [training](#) tools, including an online package for all those taking part in the DHR process and DHR Panel (module 1).

All Independent DHR Panel Chairs must also complete the online DHR Panel Chairs training (module 2) to understand their responsibilities before undertaking the role by meeting the basic [DHR Panel Chair Skills and Expertise](#) criteria.

¹ As set out by the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and determined by the courts

2. Process Overview

See also the *DHR Guidance Overview* and [DHR Process Overview Flow Chart](#)

A) Key points for CSP and DHR Panel Chairs

- The National Statutory Guidance states the responsibility for decision to conduct a DHR sits with the CSP where the victim was last or most frequently resident.
- Core agencies set out in statute (section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004) who have duty to establish, or to participate in, a DHR across England and Wales are:
 - Chief officers of police for police areas;
 - Local authorities;
 - NHS Commissioning Board (NHS England);
 - Clinical Commissioning Groups;
 - Providers of probation services;
 - Local Health Boards established under [section 11 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006];
 - NHS trusts established under [section 25 of the National Health Service Act 2006 or section 18 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006];
 - Other agencies may have a key role in the review process but are not named in legislation, these include; housing associations and social landlords, charity and voluntary sector, HM prison service, HM Courts and Tribunals Service, General Practitioners (GPs), dentists and teachers
- The Strategic Partnership's Team for Domestic Abuse (located within Hertfordshire County Council's Adult Care Services Department) are responsible for the management of the local DHR process on behalf of the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership and its associated DHR Sub Group. The Strategic Partnership's Team, via the Partnership's Manager and Business Support Officer, will provide on-going advice to CSP and DHR Chairs throughout the DHR process.
- All on-going associated administration and business support for a DHR is to be provided to the DHR Panel Chair by the Strategic Partnership's Team (Business Support Officer).
- All communication and notifications between the Home Office, local Safeguarding Boards and Coroner's Office will be managed by the Strategic Partnership's Team (Partnership's Manager).
- Any costs associated with the commissioning of a DHR Panel Chair and (where not the same person) an Overview Report Writer, will be met by the budget provided by the Office of the Police and Crime Commission (OPCC).
- It is the expectation set out in the Statutory Guidance that a DHR – and overview report – will be completed within **six months** from the date of decision to proceed, unless otherwise agreed between the DHR Panel and CSP. Any delay should be reported to the Home Office.
- All information shared during the review must be regarded as 'official' until an agreed date for publication. Prior to this, information should be made available only to participating professionals and their line managers who have a pre-declared interest in the review.
- Any Individual Management Review (IMR) author should not have been directly involved with the victim, the perpetrator or either of their families and should not have been the immediate line manager of any staff involved in the case. All IMRs must be fully quality assured, endorsed and signed off by an appropriate representative from the senior or executive management team within the agency to which the report refers; and it remains the DHR Panel Chairs responsibility to be satisfied this is so.
- When appointing a communications (media) and family liaison lead, it is best practice for the DHR Panel Chair to be that lead and proceed in consultation with wider DHR Panel members, specialist advocacy and police officers involved in any criminal proceedings.

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- The DHR Panel should make every attempt to engage with wider specialist and voluntary organisations that will (whether involved directly or not) bring added value and expertise to the process. All dialogue and outcomes should be recorded within the Overview Report. This is paramount in cases involving forms of and issues associated with 'Honour' based abuse.
- The DHR Panel should give due consideration as to the invitation for any participating family members to formally attend and meet the DHR Panel, along with on-going contact and contribution. Family members should be provided opportunity to input into and agree the DHR Scope and Terms of Reference and given suitable time to consider any draft Overview Report (e.g. good practice advises no less than 3weeks).
- Consideration of any face to face meetings with family and wider networks to be considered along with any support required for any party, such as advocates, health or social care professionals, police officers or other agency/persons with experience of the issues relating to any specific circumstance of the case and/or bereavement.
- The DHR Panel should also give due consideration to any children affected and how they can be supported to engage e.g. through specialist organisations such as Winston's Wish. This is paramount in cases involving forms of and issues associated with 'Honour' based abuse.
- The DHR Panel should seek to maintain its sense of humility by having a photo of the victim present at each meeting and where appropriate and agreeable with family this should be included within the Final Overview Report.
- Any subsequent debriefing opportunities for panel members and subsequent staff involved in the DHR (e.g. via the IMR process) to be considered by the CSP Chair from both a welfare point of view and to understand any learning from the DHR.
- The CSP Chair will seek assurance from all agencies that their action plans have been completed – or provide assurance that they are in progress.
- The CSP Chair is then responsible for updating the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board on a quarterly basis on the progress of their action plans (via the DHR Sub Group). These will be presented to the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board by the DHR Sub Group Chair as part of their quarterly Sub Group report and supported by the DHR Tracker produced and updated by the Strategic Partnership's Team (Partnership's Manager; Domestic Abuse).
- Any reasonable delays in progress against an action plan, or apparent non-compliance by any agency in providing assurances to the CSP Chair, must be highlighted to the DHR Sub-Group for escalation purposes.

B) The Overview Report

The [Overview Report](#) will bring together full and detailed consideration and scrutiny of all related information and reports provided to the DHR Panel, and drawing upon this, provides final conclusions and recommendations (local agency/partnership and regional/national). The report will:

- Be of high quality and fairly, accurately and openly represent the information provided by contributing agencies and individuals, stating facts as they have been found, showing humility and without blame or assumption.
- Be presented using the agreed report template and be quality assured and agreed by the DHR Panel and then the DHR Sub Group before formal presentation to the CSP and subsequent

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submission the Home Office QA Panel. The DHR Panel Chair holds the responsibility for the scheduling and presenting the Overview Report to the DHR Sub Group and CSP whilst the Strategic Partnership's Team (Partnership's Manager) is responsible for submission to the Home Office for Quality Assurance.

- Be shared and fully considered by any participating family, friend or wider networks.
- Be suitably anonymised and / or redacted under the guidance and direction of the DHR Panel, ready for publication.
- Stated clearly, any agency disputes in the findings, and any resolution or agreements in respect of any such dispute.
- Include an [Executive Summary](#), clear [SMART Recommendations and an agreed Action Plan](#).
- Be owned by and published via a suitable platform, as agreed by the CSP (e.g. CSP website/page).
- Be the responsibility, with on-going oversight provided by the DHR Sub Group, of the CSP to conclude SMART Targets and relating actions identified in the action plan. Any action identified within the action plan is to be the responsibility of those suitably accountable for managing outcomes, actions and improvements across practice and systems within their agency.
- Inform any subsequent learning event as determined by the CSP Chair and DHR Panel Chair.
- State where the DHR Panel agrees if there is evidence to conclude that the homicide could have been prevented.

C) Establishing a DHR and a Review Panel, Scope and Terms of Reference

*To be completed within **28 calendar days** of a case coming to the attention of the CSP; outlined as follows:*

1. Notification² sent to relevant CSP Chair, Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (HDAPB) Chair, and substantive DHR Panel Members (DHR Sub Group Chair, DCI - Safeguarding Command, and the Partnership's Manager; Domestic Abuse) of incident via the [Home Office \(HO\) DHR Notification Form](#) (Part 1).
2. CSP chair and substantive DHR Panel Members establish whether the circumstances appear to meet the requirements of a DHR. Complete DHR Notification Form (part 2).
3. The Strategic Partnership's Team liaise with the CSP Chair and all core agencies (DHR Sub Group Members) to confirm details and circulate invitation for the convening of the [Preliminary DHR Meeting](#)/discussion to be held in order to analyse agency contact and make formal decision to proceed (or not). DHR Notification Form (Part 2).
4. Where decision to proceed is agreed, The Strategic Partnership's Team liaise with the CSP Chair and all DHR Substantive Panel Members (including the proposed DHR Panel Chair / Overview Report Writer when known) to agree a date for the [Initial DHR Panel Meeting](#).
5. The Strategic Partnership's Team formally identify and contact CEOs/nominated DHR Leads within all agencies identified, inviting them to the meeting and requesting identification of relevant and qualified [panel members](#), along with the immediate securing of all files and other information, and a full chronology of all contact in relation to the victim, perpetrator and

² The guidance states that any agency can, and should, notify the CSP Chair of an incident they believe should be considered for a DHR although it is accepted that this is likely to be via Police in the majority of cases.

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children/family, with [chronology guidance](#) and [templates](#). This should be held before the end of the 28 days.

6. In conjunction with the substantive DHR Panel Members, the CSP Chair initiates process to appoint the Independent DHR Panel Chair and Overview Report Writer (if different) using the locally agreed process, endorsed pool of candidates and accompanying CVs.
 - All CSP Chairs must be assured that any DHR Panel Chair is suitably independent from any statutory CSP agency or organisation. Any potential DHR Panel Chair who may have been affiliated to an agency operating within the CSP area, must have been disassociated with any such agency for a minimum of 2yrs before the date of the homicide.
 - All CSP Chairs are to formally commission a DHR Panel Chair and/or Overview Report Writer using the DA Partnership agreed process [ST/DH – to draft Templates].
7. CSP Chair in conjunction with the DHR Panel Chair and Overview Report Writer draft letter of introduction and invitation to consent to engage advocacy for family and friends.
8. Partnership's Manager notifies Home Office of decision via submission of the completed DHR Notification Form (parts 1 and 2).
9. Partnership's Manager completes and submits the [Coroner's](#) and local [Safeguarding Boards Notification Forms](#) (for inquest and possible parallel review process considerations).
10. Formal notification of agency DHR Panel Member representatives and all chronology returns submitted to the Strategic Partnership's Team.
11. Initial DHR Panel meeting convened and attended by CSP Chair in conjunction with Independent DHR Panel Chair, Overview Report Writer and DHR Sub-Group and/or the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) and identified agency Panel Members.
 - Agree appointment of Panel Chair and Overview Report Writer
 - [Confidentiality Agreement](#) signed.
 - Consider all chronology responses and information submitted
 - Consider any additional information and agencies required, and timescales
 - Agree Panel Membership
 - Agree Scope and Terms of Reference for the Panel including full consideration of the [Safeguarding Adult and Serious Case Review Referral Process](#).
 - Agree communications (media) and liaison with family/friends, colleagues/employers and perpetrator; consideration given to disclosure and any criminal proceedings and impact. *Any exceptional circumstances (e.g. HBA cases) for not engaging with family and wider networks to be considered.*
 - Agree IMR requirements and timescales
12. Formal [letter](#) to agreed family and friend contacts – including information about advocacy support ([Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse - AAFDA](#)) – drafted and circulated by DHR Panel Chair and Overview Report Writer (under guidance from the Family Liaison Officer in the case)

D) Continuing and concluding a DHR; months 2 - 6

13. The Strategic Partnership's Team on behalf of the DHR Panel Chair send [formal requests](#) to all agencies confirming request and timescales for [IMR submissions](#); and any other required information as necessary and determined by the DHR Panel as the review continues.
14. The DHR Panel Chair and Overview Report writer, supported by the Strategic Partnership's Team, convene an IMR authors briefing session to set the context and expectations of content in line with the agreed Terms or Reference.

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- 15.** The DHR Panel should meet no less than a further two times in order to review progress, consider IMRs and draft Overview Report(s). These Panel Meetings will be the responsibility of the DHR Panel Chair, managed and supported by the Strategic Partnership's Team.
- 16.** The Strategic Partnership's Team on behalf of the DHR Panel continue to manage all inward and outward communications, requests and follow up for further information, chronologies and IMRs.
- 17.** Arrangements and considerations for the continued engagement and contribution of family, friends and wider networks remain open and on-going.
- 18.** The DHR Panel Chair – or CSP Chair upon Report completion - provides [quarterly updates](#) to the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (via the DHR Sub Group) including any delays to the review and escalation of any identified concerns. These are to be submitted to the Strategic Partnership's Team (Business Support Officer).
- 19.** The DHR Panel Chair is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the final Overview Report is of good quality and that this, along with an accompanying Executive Summary and Action Plan, take full account of the circumstances and facts pertaining to the case and is well written in tone and context, suitably anonymised, and SMART in its target setting.
- 20.** The Strategic Partnership's Team (Partnership's Manager) will submit final and agreed Overview Report to the Home Office. Should the Home Office refer the Overview Report back with queries or concerns, the DHR Panel Chair and Overview Report Writer will be required to review the report and agree actions with the CSP and the substantive DHR Panel Members. This may require the re-convening of the full DHR Panel to consider a formal response.
- 21.** Overview Report – anonymised, and redacted where necessary, is published by the CSP upon quality assurance outcomes from the Home Office Panel.