

Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG) on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse

Terms of Reference

Updated June 2024

1. Background to the IDWG

In October 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed that a single interdepartmental working group (IDWG), with an independent chair, should be set up to review the evidence relating to historical abuse of:

- a) residents in Mother and Baby Homes / Magdalene Laundries and
- b) clerical child abuse in the north of Ireland.

The review related only to residents in Mother and Baby Homes / Magdalene Laundries who are outside the terms of reference of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry and children who were victims of historical clerical child abuse.

c. Since then, work related to historical Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries operation (which was outside the terms of reference of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry) led to an independent investigation, and subsequent set up of an Independent Truth Recovery Design Panel in April 2023. This work continues separately.

2. Role of the IDWG

The IDWG will:

Under the direction of an independent chair, guide and oversee the next strand of work which is as follows:

a) Work relating to historical clerical child abuse (which was also outside the terms of reference of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry).

b) Within this strand of work, develop an evidence base for the purpose of providing advice to Executive Ministers on a way forward. This will involve:

- commissioning research;
- engaging with victims and survivors' groups and those who advocate on their behalf, with the continuation of a reference group. Where possible building membership of this reference group to facilitate engagement.
- monitoring and considering developments relating to each strand of work taking place in other jurisdictions;

c) Report progress to Executive Ministers and Assembly Committees at appropriate junctures;

d) Aim to develop and present recommendations on a way forward for Executive approval on Historical Clerical Child Abuse by April 2025

e) Following completion of the current work, it would be a matter for Ministers to decide if there would be a future role for the IDWG, or if the group would be formally closed

3. Guiding Principles

In undertaking its work, the IDWG will:

- a) Work at pace and seek as far as possible to eliminate further unnecessary delay;
- b) Seek appropriate resourcing of IDWG work, including work commissioned by or undertaken on behalf of the IDWG;
- c) Communicate with all stakeholders regularly, and as openly and transparently as relevant legislation permits;
- d) Capture the lessons learnt from the work of the IDWG as early as possible and seek to apply those lessons where it is considered they will enhance current safeguarding arrangements for children and vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland;
- e) Maintain and enhance the confidence of all stakeholders, in particular victim/survivor groups.

4. Membership of the IDWG

Membership will include:

An Independent Chair;

A Representative from Departmental Solicitor's Office;

Representatives from:

- The Executive Office;
- Department of Health;
- Department of Justice;
- Department of Education;
- Department for the Economy;
- Department for Communities.

Any other representatives agreed by the IDWG during the course of its work.

5. Frequency of Meetings

The IDWG will determine the frequency of its meetings with a view to ensuring that the timescales set out are met. A calendar for 2024 has been set out.