

Government publishes the Recommendations from the First Report of the Collaborative Forum for Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and Related Institutions.

16 April 2019

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What has the Minister published today?

The Minister has published the recommendations from the First Report of the Collaborative Forum for Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and Related Institutions.

In its report the Forum identifies priority issues for former residents and makes recommendations in the areas of health and well-being supports, identity and language, and memorialisation.

2. Why is the full report not being published?

The Report deals with matters that are currently before the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters. Legal advice received indicates the report should not be published ahead of the Commission's report.

The Forum has substantially delivered on its initial Charter and mandate. The Charter charges the Forum not to pre-empt the findings of the Commission. Due diligence and a right of reply is also required ahead of publication of any report.

The Minister will revisit the publication of the report, subject to seeking further legal advice, once the Commission has delivered its final report in February 2020.

It should be understood that the Forum, and any measures developed in this context, are separate to the work of the independent Commission. The Commission has been provided with a copy of the full report.

3. What did Government decide?

Publication does not imply that the Government endorses all of the Forum's recommendations. Detailed analysis of the recommendations is to be completed within two

months. It will involve assessing the practicability of the recommendations and an assessment of the policy, resource and legislative implications for Departments. This process will be coordinated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs but individual Departments retain responsibility for policy and services issues within their respective remits. The scope of the recommendations is wide, so a whole of Government approach is required to progress this assessment.

4. Following the publication of the recommendations, what happens next?

The Minister has been taking steps to advance consideration of the report's detailed recommendations with other relevant Departments and agencies.

The Minister has committed to furthering those that do come under her areas of responsibility. She has also secured the Government's agreement that all relevant Departments will examine the recommendations relevant to their area, and revert within two months. The Minister has acknowledged there are significant legislative, policy and resource implications associated with implementation of recommendations for relevant Government Departments.

5. How will the Forum input into the implementation of the recommendations?

There is a wealth of experience and willingness to engage amongst the Forum members. They have signalled their desire to assist in the implementation of the recommendations. The Minister has met with the Forum members and outlined some of the areas where she will seek their assistance.

One of the major issues for implementing the recommendations is the limitations in the available data regarding the specific numbers, circumstances and needs of former residents that the recommendations would apply to. The Forum members have indicated they will provide assistance in this regard where they can.

The Minister has also outlined some of the measures which the Department of Children will be developing further. The Minister has asked Forum to be involved in these processes also.

6. What recommendations are progressing now?

Government approved an initial response to a number of the recommendations contained in the report as follows:

Package of health and well-being supports:

The Minister for Health will establish a focused working group to develop proposals for a package of health and well-being supports, including access to appropriate health and social care measures. The working group will report back to Government by September, in order to be in time for decisions on Budget 2020.

Amendments to the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 which address some of the concerns expressed by the Forum in relation to the current proposals.

The Minister has secured Government approval to amend provisions of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill to take account of concerns raised by the Forum. The Minister hopes to progress the Bill in the Oireachtas in the coming weeks.

- ***Commissioning of Research into use of language and terminology.***

The Minister will commission research into the use of terminology and language as recommended by the Forum. The process will be led by Irish Research Council. An advisory group to the research project will include members of the Forum.

- ***Funding for a series of memorialisation measures (including local projects) to honour and remember the mothers and children who resided in relevant institutions.***

The Minister endorses this recommendation. The Minister will develop a series of measures including the establishment of a scheme to fund permanent memorials in the locality of mother and baby institutions, provision of financial support to survivor-led groups for annual commemoration events, and a working group to develop a national memorial that commemorates, respects and honours mothers and children held in these Institutions.

A living memorial in digital, audio or visual presentation of information and individual narratives, will be developed to serve to support the historic preservation of this long episode in our country's history.

The Department will develop the programme criteria. Forum members to be consulted and will input into the process.

- ***Funding of research proposals to cross-reference public records maintained by the General Register Office with records originating from the former institutions,***

The Fifth Interim Report from the Commission, which the Minister has brought to Government today, will assist in advancing some of the recommendations around memorialisation.

7. What are the plans for the Forum into the future?

The Forum itself has called for a revisiting of its mandate and membership. The Minister believes it is timely to reflect upon the process to date, the effectiveness of the mandate provided in the Charter and the capacity of the current Forum.

The Minister intends to conduct an evaluation of the Collaborative Forum process to date to refine and enhance continued engagement with former residents of the institutions involved. The Minister has assured members of the Collaborative Forum of her continued commitment to this process.

A key challenge is to broaden participation, awareness and visibility of this work. The Chair of the Forum has confirmed his plans to step down upon the completion of this first phase of the process. The Minister is considering the approach to identify and appoint a suitable replacement. The experience thus far has demonstrated the critical importance of having an independent Chair with the competence, credibility and capacity to support the process sensitively and effectively.

The process will involve the membership of the Forum

8. Will the Fifth Interim Report on Burials from the Commission assist with the recommendations of the Forum?

The Fifth Interim Report, which the Minister has also brought to Government today, will assist in advancing some of the recommendations around memorialisation.

The Minister will publish this report shortly.

Given the evidential value of the full report from the Forum, the Minister will share the report with the Commission of Investigation.