

**FRA PROPOSAL 7 RESEARCH:** *Investigating future provision for victims of violence and those at risk/under threat of violence including victims of domestic abuse within the Northern Ireland Housing Selection Scheme*

**Response Document**

**Name of Organisation:**

Rural Residents' Forum

**Name and Job Title of Respondent:**

Aidan Campbell, Policy Officer, Rural Community Network

**Contact Details (for any follow-up):**

[aidan@ruralcommunitynetwork.org](mailto:aidan@ruralcommunitynetwork.org)

028 8676 6670

**Can we reference your organisation's name against your comments in this research study?**

**Yes/No**

**Questions**

- 1. The proposal in the Department's 2017 consultation was to remove Intimidation points from the Housing Selection Scheme (Proposal 7). What are your views on the current award of Intimidation Points in the Housing Selection Scheme?**

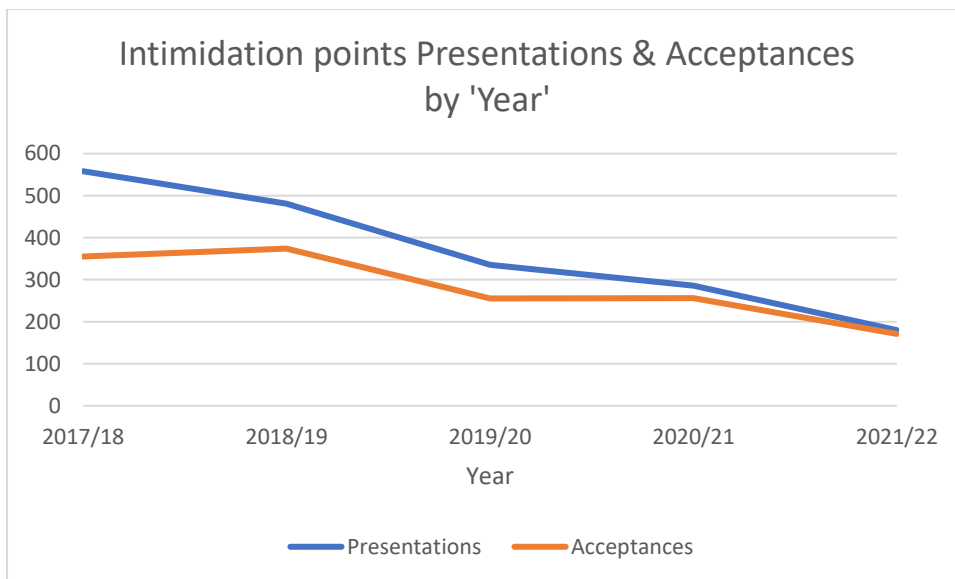
The Rural Residents Forum (RRF) accepts the fact that people are intimidated from their homes and may continue to be intimidated in future and will become homeless as a result otherwise they will remain at risk of violence and serious harm. We are also aware of allegations that some people use the current intimidation points system as a way of "gaming" the system to jump to the top of the social housing waiting list. While we accept that this may happen in some instances, we believe that it is the role of the NIHE to ensure the correct verification systems are in place to prevent it. Northern Ireland is a region emerging from conflict and the legacy of the past is still impacting on

communities. Significant efforts by government to address paramilitary activity, domestic violence, racism, homophobia, and other forms of hate crime etc. are evidence that attacks and intimidation are still common in our communities.

We believe the Housing Executive, as the agency with a statutory duty to address homelessness, must continue to take intimidation into account when making decisions on allocations.

The table and chart below outline the number of homelessness presentations and acceptances due to intimidation:

Year	Presentations	Acceptances
2017/18	558	355
2018/19	481	374
2019/20	335	255
2020/21	286	256
2021/22	180	171



Source NIHE Response to: FOI\_22-23\_203 accessed 07.02.24 <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/intimidation-points>

It is unfortunate that this data was not included in the Housing Executive briefing paper on FRA Proposal 7 but was accessed from a Housing Executive response to a Freedom of Information request. It shows a 68% decline in homelessness presentations due to intimidation from 2017/18 to 2021/22. During the same period homelessness acceptances due to intimidation declined by 52%. An analysis of this data by the Housing Executive may have added some important context to the debate on FRA Proposal 7 and RRF is unable to comment on the reasons why these declines have occurred. The same Freedom of Information request does not contain any data in

relation to homelessness presentations/acceptances due to intimidation from people in rural areas. This absence of an urban/rural breakdown of data further obscures the extent of these issues in rural communities across Northern Ireland. However, the data above shows that in recent years most applicants for intimidation points are awarded with just 5% of presentations for homelessness intimidations turned down in 2021/22. Further data on the reasons why applicants were not accepted would have been useful to inform the consultation.

RRF believes that intimidation points should be extended to victims of domestic violence, both male and female.

If the Housing Executive and the Department for Communities have concerns about the award of 200 points for homelessness due to intimidation or believe a graduated system should be developed based on the level of threat or actual level of violence or damage, then the system should be amended rather than intimidation points being withdrawn completely.

In rural communities some victims of intimidation may not be confident in approaching the Housing Executive, PSNI or other support agencies and may not know their rights, especially migrant workers and their families who do not speak English as a first language. There are additional challenges in rural communities accessing advice and support for people intimidated from their homes. Most Housing Executive offices are based in market towns and opening hours in many of these offices have been reduced in the past decade. This is a further barrier to accessing homelessness services for people in rural communities.

Access to policing in rural Northern Ireland is limited with small numbers of officers covering large geographical areas.

There remains a chronic shortage of social housing across Northern Ireland. In 2022-23 45,105 applicants were on the social housing waiting list, 32,633 of these were assessed as being in housing stress. In the same year 15,965 households presented as homeless. If the level of social housing need was addressed by the NI Executive with the level of funding required, the award of intimidation points may become less controversial.

**2. Do you think there is a need for additional priority / an award of points for those experiencing serious violence / risk to life over and above the award of statutory homelessness and Primary Social Need factors<sup>1</sup>?**

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<sup>1</sup> See information on the NIHE website on statutory homelessness and the Housing Selection Scheme – [The Housing Executive - Homelessness \(nihe.gov.uk\)](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/the-housing-executive-homelessness) – [Housing Selection Scheme Rules \(nihe.gov.uk\)](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-selection-scheme-rules)

Yes.

**3. How do you think violence should sit alongside other reasons for homelessness or reasons why people apply for social housing?**

As RRF does not deliver services directly to homeless households we are unqualified to comment on the detail of how violence should sit alongside other reasons for homelessness or reasons why people apply for social housing. As a general principle it seems fair that additional consideration in terms of points should be given to applicants who have been subjected to violence due to the additional trauma they have suffered.

**4. Do you think there should be amendments to the following and if so, what would you suggest:**

- **The treatment of all types of violence (see Appendix 1)**
- **Relative prioritisation and weighting between different types of violence**
- **Relative prioritisation and weighting in terms of different severity or persistence of violence, including actual and threat of violence, and potential level of harm**
- **Provision of evidence and robust verification systems – different levels, thresholds and suggested frameworks, inclusion of/reference to different agencies?**

**Please consider how your answers to question 4 would be framed in the Housing Selection scheme and any practical outworkings of your suggestions in terms of solutions or alternative options.**

As RRF does not deliver services directly to homeless households we are unqualified to comment on the detail of how different levels of violence, or the threat of violence are prioritised or weighted.

**Please return to:** [fboyleassociates@btinternet.com](mailto:fboyleassociates@btinternet.com)

**By:** Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024

## Appendix 1: Types of and classification of violence

- Attack related to anti-social behaviour
- Paramilitary attack
- Sectarian attack
- Racial attack – linked to a hate crime
- Attack motivated by an individual's religion
- Attack motivated by an individual's disability
- Attack motivated by an individual's sexual orientation
- Domestic abuse/domestic violence
- Attack motivated because a person has been a witness (e.g. in a criminal case)
- Attack motivated because a person has been involved in human trafficking
- Attack as a result of coercive criminality (e.g. someone has been involved in a drugs gang against their will)