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Ref: 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.

To whom it may concern:

Mid Ulster District Council welcomes the opportunity to provide its views and opinions in relation to the development of research examining 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.

Overall, the Council feel that the proposal to remove the intimidation points from the housing selection scheme was wrong and they should be maintained to protect those who are genuinely at risk from intimidation. The Council agree that the selection criteria should include people at risk from domestic abuse. There is a need to protect those facing serious and immediate threat to themselves and their family and there should be robust verification of intimidation points by the police to ensure they are allocated appropriately to those at genuine risk and to prevent others on the housing list (including those with homeless points) being unfairly disadvantaged.

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The Council would also have concerns regarding the way in which this research is being conducted, and the failure to publicise it widely via victims support groups etc. Furthermore, Mid Ulster District Council area is vastly rural with a lack of available social housing. As such the Council would recommend examining the contrast between urban and rural considerations when searching for housing solutions in victims of violence and those at risk/under threat of violence including victims of domestic abuse. Solutions employed in urban areas may not work in rural areas and that alternatives should be considered.

In addition, the Council believes that current levels of domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland are completely unacceptable and hopes that this research will examine the impact on victims of domestic abuse who cannot leave abusive situations because of the current flaws within the Northern Ireland Housing Selection Scheme. The Council would also encourage a significant increase in social housing. This could alleviate some of the current issues within the Northern Ireland Housing Selection Scheme and also offer victims of violence additional options and choice in relation to relocation issues. Therefore, the Council would recommend that additional consultation is carried out as a result of the findings of this research paper.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Dominic Molloy

Chairperson, Mid Ulster District Council