

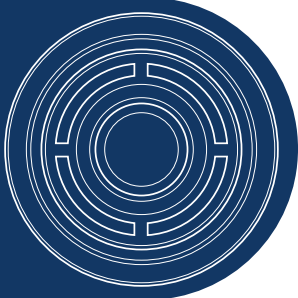


BASE 2: WORKING TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS UNDER THREAT

AN INSPECTION OF THE ROLE OF
BASE 2 IN THREAT VERIFICATION

March 2020





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VERIFICATION

Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under Section 49(2) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (as amended by paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 13 to The Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010) by the Department of Justice.

March 2020





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List of abbreviations

CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
CRJI	Community Restorative Justice Ireland
DfC	Department for Communities
DoJ	Department of Justice
NIA	Northern Ireland Alternatives
NIACRO	Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
PfG	Programme for Government
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
STEM	Supporting Tenancies for Ethnic Minorities



Chief Inspector's Foreword

Services and processes designed and implemented 30 years ago to protect life and keep people safe are still much needed today.

Base 2 has saved lives and works in our communities to effectively validate threats from paramilitary groups to individuals and families living in public housing and helps them to relocate and resettle. The small number of dedicated staff have the trust and confidence of statutory providers.

In a normalised society we shouldn't need Base 2 but the reality is we do.

This review concluded that overall the Base 2 project was working soundly, processes were operating with integrity and clear human welfare outcomes had been delivered. It makes a strategic recommendation that the Department of Justice integrates the Base 2 process with the Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime. Inclusion within the proposed centre of excellence for restorative justice should ensure Base 2 continues to effectively contribute to our journey towards normalisation.

Dr Stephen Dolan conducted this inspection and I am grateful to all those who contributed to this review.

Jacqui Durkin
**Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland**

March 2020

**Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland**
a better justice system for all





Executive Summary

Origins of Base 2

The Base 2 project was established in 1990 with the support of several statutory bodies and had a role in supporting people under threat prior to its formal funding relationship with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) which began in 2003-04; Base 2 receives £95,000 annually. The Base 2 project has been managed by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) - a large voluntary sector body - since its inception.

The initial 200 or so referrals per year to Base 2 now numbers just under 1,300 annually¹. Base 2 engages with 60 community based sources to verify threats, to mediate with individuals and groups and to signpost individuals to other statutory and voluntary support services.

The Base 2 Role in Verification

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) examined the processes and governance of the Base 2 project through: observations of the process in practice; reviews of case files; interviews with a wide range of stakeholders; and analysis of the available statistics. Taking into account the checks arising from the application process, information sharing arrangements with the NIHE, the triangulating of evidence from

over 60 community based contacts, the input of restorative justice agencies, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the extensive experience of the Base 2 interviewers,² a large scale or systematic misuse of the system was unlikely.

However, there were localised areas of concern with public perception being that the award of intimidation points³ meant threats could be misused to achieve higher priorities on the NIHE/Housing Associations' housing lists and that a local waiting list with a high level of applicants with intimidation points could negatively impact on other applicants in housing need. Local political representatives also expressed concerns about problem applicants being exported from one area to another and a potential conflict of interest due to the community contacts providing verification possibly being associated with the source of the threat. Compounding this was difficulty in providing triangulated evidence to verify threats emanating from dissident republican groups.

With these localised areas of concern noted, Inspectors formed the view that allegations of widespread abuse of the scheme or that Base 2 acted without integrity or to the benefit of particular individuals or groups were unfounded.

1 Referrals to Base 2, NIACRO Annual Report 2018-19 available at www.niacro.co.uk/publications

2 The Senior Practitioner has conducted 18,000 interviews.

3 Where an individual is assessed to be under threat the NIHE may award intimidation points which gives that individual a higher priority on the NIHE/Housing Associations' housing lists.

The overall working of the project was deemed to be sound and a widespread or systematic abuse of the public housing system remains unlikely.

Verification of threats and Intimidation Points

When an individual presents as homeless to the NIHE due to a threat or intimidation, the NIHE will request the PSNI to verify the threat⁴ and in a number of cases, the NIHE will also make a referral to Base 2. The NIHE will review this information and all relevant information to decide whether the individual's circumstances meet the criteria under the rules of the statutory Housing Selection Scheme for an award of intimidation points.⁵ In 2017-18, 558 individuals presented to the NIHE citing intimidation as the reason for their being rendered homeless. Of these 355 (64%) were accepted (figures provided by the NIHE). A review of the Waiting List in May 2018 identified that there were roughly 250 individuals with intimidation points on the Waiting List of around 40,000 at that time; less than 1%.

Looking forward

Some of the issues identified in this report extend beyond the role of Base 2. There are a range of social issues of which paramilitary coercion is but one. There is a need for a more strategic approach through the Executive Action Plan to *Tackle Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime* (the Action Plan) dealing with coercive control within communities. Base 2 should be included within Action Plan activities and its reporting could form part of the progress.

Over the last six years anti-social behaviour, drugs issues and community disputes have formed the majority of referrals to Base 2. This indicates that a restorative justice approach may be viable and supports the intention to create a centre of excellence for restorative justice. The report makes one strategic recommendation in this regard.

Most significantly, potential changes to social housing allocations and the current Housing Selection Scheme is part of a fundamental review by the Department for Communities (DfC) with a proposal to remove intimidation points from the Scheme.⁶

4 Some individuals present themselves to Base 2 in the first instance. Base 2 staff will always direct them to report to the NIHE.
5 The Housing Executive is required to provide an Allocations Scheme under Article 22 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.
6 Further information on the Department's review of the Housing Selection Scheme is available at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/communities/AW-041017%200641%20Housing%20Consultation%20Review%20of%20Social%20Housing%20Allocation.pdf>



Recommendations


Strategic recommendation

1 Within six months of the publication of this report, in accordance with the objectives agreed in the Executive Action Plan on *Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime*, the Department of Justice (DoJ) should bring forward options to create a centre of excellence for restorative justice and Base 2 should be affiliated to this centre (*Paragraph 2.7*).

Operational Recommendation

1 Following confirmation of information sharing arrangements, the annual/bi annual meetings of the Tackling Paramilitarism Team with Base 2, the PSNI and the NIHE should take place, with the Base 2 annual report as an agenda item to provide additional input to gauging Action Plan progress (*Paragraph 4.7*).

Areas for Improvement are highlighted in bold text throughout the report.



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Block 1, Knockview Buildings
Belfast BT4 3SJ
www.cjini.org

