

HOMELESSNESS

The policy context

Statutory homelessness is defined in the Housing Order (NI) 1988. This legislation outlines the criteria under which the Northern Ireland Housing Executive determines levels of homelessness and applicants' eligibility for assistance. It is also recognised that many people who do not meet the legislative criteria may yet be homeless, for example if they are not considered to be in priority need according to the legislation. Such people are not eligible for Housing Executive assistance, but it is in accordance with the Housing Executive's policy aim to prevent homelessness that consideration is given to how the needs of these people can be met, and how their risk of social exclusion may be minimised.

There are three categories to consider when undertaking integrated appraisal. People may fall into more than one of these categories at any one time:

- **People who are of no fixed address** may include: people who stay with friends and relatives, moving frequently from one house to another; people who sleep rough; or who use direct access hostels. By reason of their transient lifestyle such people may be difficult to contact.
- **People who are homeless** includes people who meet the statutory definition of homeless as defined in the Housing Order (NI) 1988. Some of this group (those who are assessed as being in priority need, and unintentionally homeless as defined by the legislation) may receive Housing Executive assistance and be placed in temporary accommodation, but many will not, and therefore rely on voluntary sector provision, or sharing with friends and relatives.
- **People who are residing in temporary accommodation** includes those in Housing Executive or voluntary sector accommodation. This group may move frequently between different types of temporary accommodation, and these moves may mean transfers between different areas of service provision, for example, Health and Social Services Trust areas. They may also face stigma when accessing services due to having an address that is known to be temporary accommodation.

Matters to consider in completing the Integrated Impact Assessment

The guidance above gives an indication of the range of circumstances that affect people who are homeless. Policy makers should consider, where a policy offers programmes or services that are ostensibly available to all, whether it will be more difficult for people in the above circumstances to access these. For example, without a permanent address it may be more difficult to obtain a bank account, or receive information by post; and depending on the reason for homelessness, it may be difficult for people to readily provide identification. If the assessment suggests that programmes or services may be less easily available to people who are homeless, the development of special initiatives may be required to ensure that this group has the same level of access as other sections of the population. Care should also be taken to identify whether a policy might contribute to homelessness, and how this impact may be mitigated.