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Hugh Orde

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Orde wants names of those who refused to co-operate with Ombudsman

Northern Ireland Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde has demanded the names of every officer who allegedly refused to cooperate with Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's collusion probe, it has been revealed.

By: Press Association

Sir Hugh instructed his number two, Paul Leighton, to write to Mrs O' Loan requesting details on all retired and serving members of his force she believes resisted her appeals for assistance.

He confirmed a letter was sent as he brushed aside a staunch defence by unionist Policing Board representatives of the ex-Special Branch chiefs at the centre of the row.

He told them: "Senior officers should have turned up to speak to the Ombudsman's staff."

Mrs O' Loan's explosive dossier on how paid Ulster Volunteer Force agents behind up to 15 murders in north Belfast were protected by their Special Branch handlers included a withering assessment of the level of help given to the inquiry by some police commanders.

Three retired assistant chief constables, seven detective chief

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superintendents and two detective superintendents refused to provide assistance, the Ombudsman claimed.

But ex-ACC Chris Albiston, one of those named in Parliament as having failed to cooperate, hit back by insisting he and other retired officers had supplied written information to the investigation.

As the row reignited at a Policing Board meeting in Belfast today, Sir Hugh was asked whether any of the retired officers involved have been re-employed as civilian workers within the police service.

He told the authority: "I have requested a full list.

"I have two reports (from the Ombudsman), a public report and a private report which does contain a number of names of individuals.

"Paul (Leighton) has written to Mrs O`Loan to ask for a full list of individuals who did not co-operate with the inquiry."

But RUC supporters on the Board lined up to defend the officers at the centre of the controversy.

Arlene Foster, a Democratic Unionist member, demanded to know how ex-officers would still have had access to documents which remained with the force.

"They would have been going along on memory alone," she claimed.

"Through their solicitor they asked the Ombudsman`s Office for specific charges and what she specifically wanted to know in relation to the investigation. These specific charges or questions were not put to them.

"These people have rights too, they are entitled to due process."

Independent member Trevor Ringland, a trustee of the RUC George Cross Foundation, accused the Ombudsman of producing a subjective report which could damage confidence in her office.

And Ulster Unionist representative Danny Kennedy urged the Chief Constable to confirm all reasonable assistance was offered by the retired officers, and that any failings were not systematic.

Sir Hugh replied that former staff had stressed to him they had been in correspondence with the watchdog, and he emphasised the context in which they were operating during the early 1990s was completely different to the present.

"I don`t think that was fully explained," he said.

"I understand their concerns around how they would be treated, but quite frankly when you`re at this level of an organisation one has an obligation."

He added: "I do think the obligation on senior officers is to physically attend and have conversations with Ombudsman investigators and staff, if only to set the context."

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