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Local & National

'New laws needed to aid victims' commissioners'

Monday, January 28, 2008

By Noel McAdam

New legislation will be required to underpin Northern Ireland's four new Victims' Commissioners, the Assembly was told today.

First Minister Ian Paisley said it was hoped the legislation will be brought forward as soon as possible, but the quartet of commissioners are for now appointed as "designates".

Mr Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness also defended their decision to appoint four commissioners rather than one — due to a "significant backlog of urgent work".

MLAs, angry that the appointments were leaked before today's official statement, also heard that the decision to re-advertise the then single position had resulted in 38 new applicants.

But it is understood that at least one of those appointed, former UTV Live anchorman Mike Nesbitt, was on the shortlist from the original pool of applicants.

Mr Paisley also argued a single commissioner would "inevitably" have been forced to delegate many activities, including consultation and liaison, to a secretariat and many specific projects would have had to be undertaken by consultants.

"Obviously" though, Mr Paisley added, administrative support will still be provided to the four commissioners.

"It is our intention to make formal appointments in due course, but we must first introduce the necessary legislation to create the Victims' Commission," the DUP leader said.

Before Mr McGuinness was due to take questions from Assembly members, Mr Paisley set out that the initial tasks for the commissioners would include a review of support services and the setting up of a Victims and Survivors' Forum.

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