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Local & National

Pledge to publish 'cover-up' report

Attorney General examining documents on claims over appointment

Friday, July 20, 2007

By Chris Thornton

The new Attorney General has pledged to publish the report on allegations of an NIO cover up in the first Victims Commissioner's appointment.

The report by Peter Scott QC was completed last month after a seven month review that was prompted by a high profile court case.

Mr Scott looked at Lord Justice Girvan's questions about the NIO's conduct during the legal action - including criticism directed at former Secretary of State Peter Hain and his two most senior civil servants.

Baroness Scotland - appointed Attorney General last month when Gordon Brown became Prime Minister - has indicated that she will release the report.

"The report is under consideration by the Attorney General," a spokesman for her office said. "It will be published as soon as possible."

Mr Scott's review began after the judge raised concerns about the NIO's conduct directly with the then Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith.

Lord Justice Girvan said he was concerned that the NIO could have tried to pervert the course of justice by covering up Mr Hain's reasons for giving the Victims Commissioner's job to DUP choice Bertha McDougall.

He said the NIO had relied on "obviously misleading" information to defend the appointment, adding that "for some reason it was decided within Government that incorrect and misleading information would be supplied" to the court.

Mr Hain welcomed the review, insisting that there was "no question" of an attempt to deliberately mislead the court.

Mrs McDougall's appointment as Interim Victims Commissioner was declared illegal by the High Court last year, but she was allowed to publish her final report in her own name.

The NIO is currently appealing the court ruling.






The appointment of her permanent successor was handed over to the devolved administration, but appears to have stalled in the First Ministers' Office. Interviews were conducted four months ago, but no candidate has been agreed by Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness.

Mr Scott sent questionnaires to 17 potential witnesses and ended up interviewing eight of them in Belfast and London.

He also reviewed documents from the case that filled dozens of lever arch files.

Concerns about publication of the report had been raised at Westminster. Lord Goldsmith, had said it was his "intention" to publish the report at the time he appointed Mr Scott.

But he also indicated that "issues may arise that might limit or delay that. "For example, if for any reason it were to lead to disciplinary or other proceedings following from it."

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