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## Local & National

### Lady trimble on Victims shortlist

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#### Action demand over unfilled post

Monday, September 24, 2007

By Chris Thornton

Lady Daphne Trimble is among the candidates on the shortlist for the unfilled Victims' Commissioner post, the Belfast Telegraph has learned.

Unionist sources say Lady Trimble is in the running alongside former UTV presenter Mike Nesbitt, lecturer Marie Smyth and an unspecified number of other shortlisted candidates.

With the £65,000 a year post unfilled more than seven months after interviews were conducted, the names of applicants have started to leak out - prompting a leading Assembly member to call for action or an explanation from First Ministers Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness.

Thirteen applicants were interviewed for the high profile job in mid-February, shortly after the High Court declared that Bertha McDougall's interim appointment was an illegal political favour to the DUP.

A shortlist was handed to the First Ministers soon after they took up office in May.

In June, they told a committee at Stormont that they intended to make an appointment before the Assembly rose for the summer recess in July - but no appointment was made.

Candidates have not been contacted since the interviews.

When the matter was raised in the Assembly earlier this month, the First Ministers pleaded for patience, saying they "want to get the decision on an appointment right".

But Alliance MLA Naomi Long, deputy chair of the First Ministers' scrutiny committee, said: "People have been extremely patient.

"I do think it's time for some action. Either this process is flawed - in which case they should say so and start again - or they can't agree.

"If that's the case it doesn't bode well for any other major projects they have to decide together.

"My main concern is that things have gone on so long now that any appointee will find it difficult to establish themselves.

"Bertha McDougall suffered from this - in my opinion, she did a terrific job but the problems over the appointment process distracted from the good work that she did."

The First Ministers could scrap the process and start over, but they are legally obliged to appoint a Victims' Commissioner.

Lady Trimble, a solicitor, is the wife of former First Minister Lord Trimble. She is a member of the Equality Commission. She raised funds for victims in America with Pat Hume, former SLDP leader John Hume's wife, and sits on the board of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

She is among several prospective candidates who declined to comment on their application when contacted by the Belfast Telegraph. Mr Nesbitt is a prominent journalist who anchored UTV Live for many years and also worked for the BBC.

Dr Smyth is a lecturer in international politics at the University of Wales. She used to run the Cost of the Troubles study at the University of Ulster.

Forty-six people applied for the post after it was advertised in January. Twenty-four were men and 22

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women. There were 29 Protestant applicants, 21 Catholics and six others. Thirteen people were interviewed in mid-February.

Belfast man Raymond McCord Snr, who campaigned to expose UVF collusion linked to the murder of his son, was among those rejected.

He has questioned the grounds for his rejection.

In a written answer to MLA Sean Neeson earlier this month, the First Ministers said the appointment is "under active, detailed and careful consideration and we hope to make an early decision on this important appointment".

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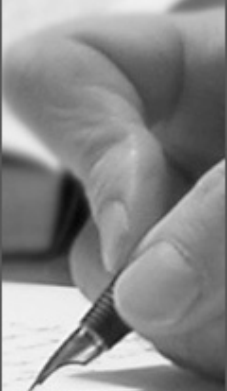
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