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McCord seeks legal advice in latest row over victims group

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Rejected applicant argues that First Ministers moved the goalposts

Wednesday, January 30, 2008

By Chris Thornton

A rejected applicant for the Victims Commission job says he is consulting his solicitor over the decision to appoint four people.

Raymond McCord said First Ministers Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness " moved the goalposts" this week when they announced a four-person commission instead of a single appointment.

In particular, the collusion campaigner says Mr Paisley's remarks in the Assembly on Monday show a change in the job criteria he was rejected on.

Mr McCord was rejected for the post because he has no office management experience.

In announcing the appointments one year and two days after the job was first advertised, Dr Paisley suggested the four- person panel would be delegating less work to officials. Each member is being paid £65,000 a year.

"For example, a single commissioner would, inevitably, have had to delegate many activities, including consultation and liaison, to a secretariat," he said.

"It would also have been inevitable that many specific projects would have had to be undertaken by consultants. The four commissioners will be expected to undertake these and other important tasks themselves - although, obviously, administrative support will be provided for them."

Mr McCord, who was in the public gallery at Stormont for the First Ministers' statement, took those remarks to mean office management skills are less important now that four people are in charge instead of one.

"That's what I was turned down for, and no doubt others were as well," he said.

"Paisley's admitting things have changed.

"I'll be speaking to my solicitor. I have absolutely nothing against the four people who were appointed.

"It's not their fault, they applied like everyone else. But the nature of the process is wrong - the post was advertised for a Victims' Commissioner, not a Victims' Commission.

"They've moved the goalposts here after people applied for it, which as far as I'm concerned is totally wrong.

"People with certain points in the application process might have been looked on differently if they weren't expected to do the job themselves.

"What I believe is that Paisley and McGuinness couldn't agree the first time around and they couldn't agree the second time."

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Mr McGuinness denied that allegation during the Assembly announcement. He said he and Mr Paisley were so impressed with the range of skills on offer that they decided to appoint four candidates.

The Deputy First Minister said "without fear of contradiction, that we were never in a position of disagreement on the way forward".

"At no stage of our deliberations did we have a situation in which the First Minister proposed someone and I proposed an alternative. That never happened. Some people might greet that with incredulity, but it is a symbol of the way in which he and I proceed with business."

Mr Paisley's remarks in the Assembly also suggested that the second round of applications put in place by he and Mr McGuinness produced two candidates for the final shortlist.

He told the Assembly 38 people applied in the second round, and that he and Mr McGuinness interviewed seven people.

Those seven are believed to have included five from the original shortlist.

The job was originally advertised in January 2007 by the Direct Rule administration. Mr Paisley and Mr McGuinness were handed a shortlist of six candidates on May 8, the day they took up office.


They told the Assembly they would appoint by July, but then announced in October that they were re-advertising the post to attract more candidates. They said they would appoint by the end of December from a combined pool, including the six original shortlisted candidates but one - former Alliance deputy leader Seamus Close - publicly withdrew.


Comment, Page 33


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