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SF mayor in meeting with loyalist UPRG

By Allison Morris

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A MEETING between Sinn Fein's lord mayor of Belfast and representatives of the loyalist Ulster Political Research Group took place yesterday in a bid to ease community fears following the recent violence.

Tom Hartley and fellow Sinn Fein councillor Paul Maskey met Frankie Gallagher and Billy McQuiston of the UPRG ahead of yesterday afternoon's peace rally outside City Hall.

Following the dissident republican violence that claimed the lives of two soldiers and a policeman and injured four other people including two pizza delivery men, there were fears that there could be a loyalist backlash.

Work has been going on behind the scenes to ensure there would be no violent reaction to the upsurge in dissident activity.

Following the meeting Mr Hartley said it was of crucial importance to keep lines of communication open at times of unease.

"This was the first meeting of its kind and one that was brought about by the events of the weekend," he said.

"In many ways it follows on from the decisive leadership shown in recent days by Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson.

"It was a positive meeting and one in which we were able to gauge the feeling in loyalist communities and likewise to inform them how the mood was among nationalists.

"We were in agreement that this is a time for clear heads and is important that all of us in political leadership redouble our efforts to maintain calm on our streets and see an end to these sorts of futile armed actions," he said.


Mr McQuiston said the UPRG had used the meeting to reaffirm the message that there would be no "knee-jerk" reaction from loyalists following the shootings.

"The loyalist community have welcomed the messages that have come from nationalist politicians in recent days but this was a chance to hear for ourselves what the situation was like on the ground," Mr McQuiston said.

"We were assured that these people do not represent or have the support of the nationalist/republican community.

"As a result of that we would hope those responsible will be brought to book very quickly.

"As far as loyalists are concerned we are following a path of our own choosing and we will not be changing course to further anybody else's agenda."

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