



O'Loan played a historic role

(Editorial, [Irish News](#))

The seven years Nuala O'Loan spent as police ombudsman have undoubtedly taken their toll, but she can be satisfied that she has played a key role during an important period in our history.

In recent days she has given an insight into the fierce pressure she came under on a number of occasions and her experience will leave her successor in no doubt about the challenge he faces.

As a former oversight commissioner, Al Hutchinson will have a strong understanding of the policing structures in place in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement.

He will also know that the role of the Police Ombudsman was a major pillar of that agreement and the importance of the job has not diminished in the ensuing years.

Demonstrating that the police is held to account by an impartial, rigorous and independent complaints system has been a major factor in building and maintaining public confidence.

Mrs O'Loan has undoubtedly shown herself to have the toughness and independence necessary to discharge this vital role, although it is regrettable, if unsurprising, that her critics have sounded a sour note on her departure.

It is notable that victims who turned to her for assistance and information offered a very different assessment.

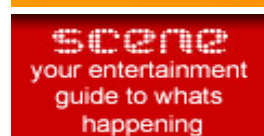
Those who felt she was not impartial need to look at the range of her output, which often supported the actions of officers, backed the use of baton rounds and, at times, found no evidence of collusion despite strongly held suspicions.

However, the failure of former officers to cooperate with her office, as well as the routine destruction of intelligence papers, was a significant impediment at times.

It is both disturbing and inexcusable that she came under intense pressure while attempting to carry out a legitimate investigation into collusion between the police and UVF in north Belfast.

Hopefully, Mr Hutchinson will be allowed to get on with the

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vital job of ensuring that police maintain the highest standards without the type of intolerable attention experienced by his predecessor.

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