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Bloody Sunday probe's latest bill: £33m for IT

Wednesday, 11 February 2009

Taxpayers have forked out £33m to cover the IT costs of the Bloody Sunday Saville Inquiry.

The huge sum accounts for almost one fifth of the current bill for the 11-year-long investigation, which now stands at £184.9m — and the shock figure comes on the back of records released last week showing lawyers have earned a total of £98m so far.

Leading politicians last night called for the inquiry to be brought to a "swift conclusion" and branded the set-up a shambles.

Owen Paterson, Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, said: "Within days of seeing the astonishing sums individual lawyers have made from the Saville Inquiry, we now learn of further huge payments of taxpayers' money to IT contractors.

"No evidence has been taken since 2005 and at a time of recession such sums can not be justified; this inquiry must be brought to a swift conclusion."

Last week the Belfast Telegraph revealed how the two most senior lawyers earned almost £9m between them since the inquiry, set up in 1998 to investigate Bloody Sunday under then Prime Minister Tony Blair.

More than 70 solicitors and barristers are on the payroll and the legal fees will account for more than half of the final bill, now estimated to be around £190m.

In a written parliamentary answer Northern Minister Paul Goggins revealed six firms, Bull Information Systems, International Computers, Capital Computers, Diagonal Solutions, Deloitte and Fujitsu, were all involved in providing IT systems and support to the inquiry.

Ulster Unionist Lord Laird said the revelations about how the money has been spent on the inquiry, the most expensive in UK history, was particularly difficult to justify during the current economic climate.

He added: "It would be cheaper to run this thing on the moon.

"It is the height of nonsense. Lawyers and IT firms are the ones who are benefiting. The whole thing is a shambles."

Jenny Willott, Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, who requested the information, said: "This is a staggering sum of money for the inquiry to spend on IT.

"When it comes to IT projects, this Labour Government has an abysmal record of bringing forward over-ambitious and ill-thought-through projects that end up hugely delayed and massively over budget. The inquiry IT system seems to be a classic example.

"With so much money going on IT and legal costs, the public has a right to expect something back from the inquiry. But there still seems to be no end in sight."

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It is an absolute disgrace this enquiry can drag on and on for years and cost so much to the tax payers. and what will the outcome be? Inconclusive. It looks like one big pocket lining exercise, but hey, if I was a lawyer I would do the same. The politicians need to sort this shambles out. The money could be spent on any number of things that would help the communities all over Northern Ireland

Posted by Phil | 11.02.09, 08:50 GMT

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