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Local & National

Stormont u-turn as victims post advertised once again

Monday, October 08, 2007

By Chris Thornton

The final stage of the process will involve a presentation to Dr Paisley and myself personally by all candidates deemed appointable before a final decision is made

Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness performed a U-turn on the Victims Commissioner post today and announced a new hunt for applicants.

They said the £65,000-a-year post, which has been on hold for the past five months, will be re-advertised.

They made the announcement 11 days after their office said there was "no intention" of re-advertising. At that stage, a Belfast Telegraph report that the competition would be re-run was denied.

In a joint statement, the two Ministers said they had been sitting on the appointment since May because they had "taken time to consider the best way forward", adding: "That is just as it should be."

They denied disagreeing about the appointment.

Mr Paisley said he and Mr McGuinness felt that they could widen the pool of candidates by re-advertising, but claimed people on the current shortlist remain appointable. They were handed that shortlist soon after taking up office on May 8.

The two ministers previously told the Assembly that they intended to appoint from that shortlist in July.

They now say they will have an appointment made before the end of the year.

The two ministers would not answer questions about the five month delay or why they previously thought they could appoint an applicant in July.

Not did they explain why they may eventually appoint shortlisted applicants who are not appointable now.

They also added a new hurdle for candidates: a presentation to the First Ministers will be "an essential new element of the appointment process".

Mr McGuinness said those on the current shortlist "would be asked to allow their names to remain in contention for the post but they would not have to reapply or be re-interviewed, and would be considered along with any further applicants who are deemed appointable".

The Deputy First Minister said: "The final stage of the process will involve a presentation to Dr Paisley and myself personally by all candidates deemed appointable before a final decision is made."

He said the Commissioner for Public Appointments is "content" with the new approach.

An Executive spokesman denied the decision was a U-turn.

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He said the new process had not been under "active consideration" 11 days ago, when the First Ministers' Office said there was "no intention" of re-advertising.

Senior sources had told the Belfast Telegraph in late September that the post would be re-advertised, but OFMDFM denied any decision had been taken.

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