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Daily

Cost of Saville spirals to £174m

By Mark Hookham

Thursday, February 22, 2007

The spiralling cost of the Bloody Sunday inquiry has been branded a "national scandal" after figures revealed it topped £174m.

Legal fees alone have cost more than £92m during the inquiry, which is yet to publish its report.

The total cost appears to have grown by £2m in two months alone - even though the investigation ended in 2004.

NIO figures revealed to MPs show the bill for the inquiry includes £15m on accommodation and £41m on salaries for inquiry staff, expenses for witnesses and security. Another £7.7m was spent on hiring venues and £4m on transport.

The latest figures date to October 2006, so the final amount could be even higher than the £174.36m quoted.

A statement given to the Belfast Telegraph by the NIO in August stated that the cost "to date" stood at £172m - which appears to suggest costs were increasing at a rate of £1m a month last year.

Tory defence spokesman Gerald Howarth said: "This is a national scandal. It has just kept the sore open and has lined the pockets of lawyers to no purpose whatsoever."

The inquiry, chaired by Lord Saville, was set up by Tony Blair in 1998 and took six years, racking up 432 days of oral testimony from more than 900 witnesses.

The 42-day-long opening speech by Christopher Clarke, QC, counsel to the inquiry, was at the time the longest in English legal history.

Today's figures state that £13m was spent on IT equipment.

But a separate written answer from the NIO in the summer stated that £34m had been spent on computers and IT systems - £8m more than the total cost of the UK's second most expensive inquiry - the BSE inquiry, which cost £26m.

Criminal Justice minister David Hanson today declined to state when he expects the inquiry to finally announce its findings.

He said: "The independent Bloody Sunday inquiry has informed me that it is now engaged in compiling its final report. Due to the vast amount of evidence that must be considered this is a very time consuming process."

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