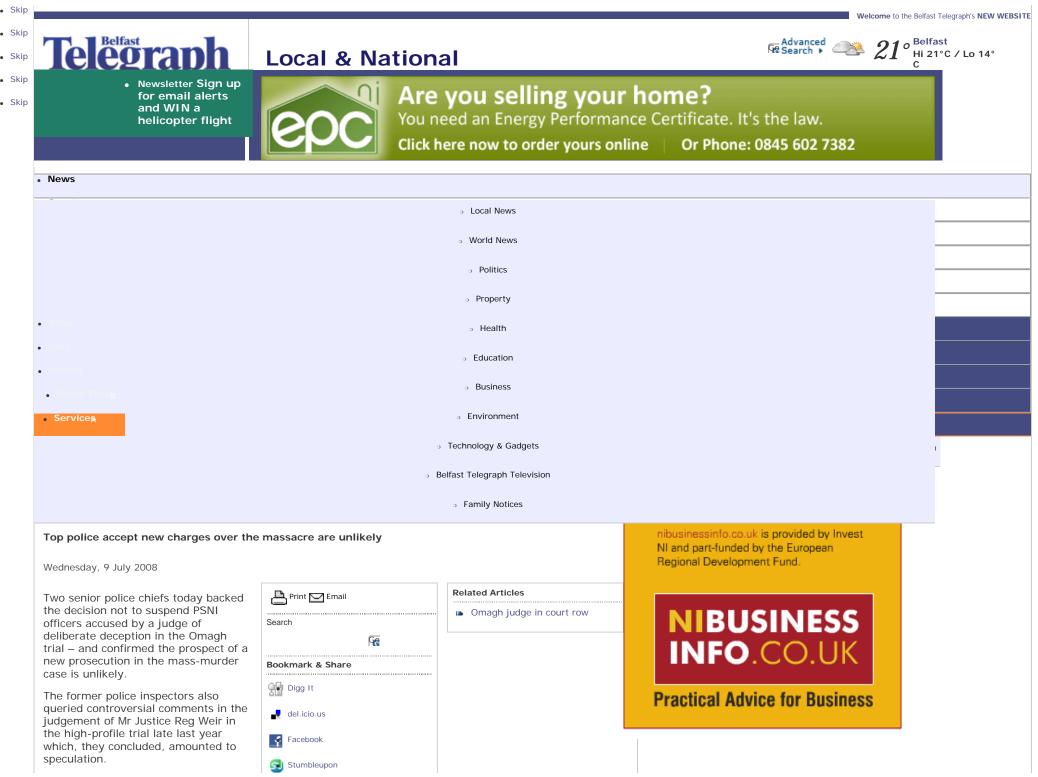
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In acquitting Co Armagh man Sean Hoey – the first person to face a murder charge in connection with the

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Real IRA blast in 1998 in which left 29 people died — the judge was severely critical of the PSNI citing highly unreliable DNA evidence, chaotic police record-keeping and allegations of had falsified evidence.

The judge accused a detective sergeant and a PSNI scenes of crimes officer of a "deliberate and calculated deception" and referred their evidence to the Police Ombudsman, whose report is still pending.

The pre-Christmas judgement described the evidence given by Detective Sergeant Fiona Cooper and Detective Sergeant Philip Marshall as "false and misleading" and "reprehensible" and they were both shifted to other positions within the PSNI.

But in the aftermath of the judgement, the Northern Ireland Policing Board instigated its own investigation headed by ex-chief constables Sir Dan Crompton and David Blakey.

Their report, accepted by a majority of Policing Bord members, today reinforced the view of PSNI chief constable Sir Hugh Orde that, in the absence of a confession or reliable witnesses, or good scientific evidence, it is unlikely a new prosecution could be launched at present.

They also noted, however, that a visit to the incident room at Omagh revealed that 70 "actions" are still not complete, some of them with the Garda for some time.

These relate to the interviewing of people who are of interest to the inquiry team or obtaining DNA samples and the inspectors said the " actions" should be pressed.

"Realistically," they said, "we accept this is a remote possibility but, perhaps, remoteness ought to be given a chance."

Commenting today, Board chairman Sir Desmond Rea said it accepted the finding of the review that there is no prospect of securing a prosecution.

The former inspectors said their provisional conclusion was that the PSNI officers criticised should have been suspended. "We have seldom seen more caustic criticism of police evidence since the officers were, in effect, branded as liars and their evidence declared totally unreliable.

"For a senior judge to 'throw out' all charges, partly on what he saw as discreditable police scientific evidence, is a matter of profound concern.

"The public have a right to expect certain standards in public life, particularly from the police, and the result of this case will have shaken public confidence."

Their more 'reflective view', however, was that not all arguments were " stacked on one side of the fence" and the Ombudsman's report, expected later this year, will take into account all the attendant circumstances surrounding the officers' evidence.

"There may or may not be criminal or disciplinary proceedings to be faced by the officers eventually, but if the latter is the end scenario, officers suspended would be recalled to duty having suffered the ignominy of suspension for months, and a possible infringement of their Human Rights.

"There may well be some issues arising from the evidence given by the two officers but it seems to us (our speculation again) that this is more likely to be of a disciplinary, or advice, nature. Our final judgement is that the arguments for the police officers not being suspended are as compelling as those 'for'. On balance, we believe the decision to re-position...was appropriate, even if the decision between the one and the other was marginal."

The former chief constables also commented: "This was a very difficult long running trial for Mr Justice Weir.

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