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## Local & National

### Independent overview of Omagh case ordered by Police Board

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Friday, January 04, 2008

By David Young and Chris Thornton

A team of independent experts is to be appointed to re-examine evidence from the Omagh bombing in an attempt to bring those responsible to justice, it emerged last night.

The Policing Board has decided to set up an independent external overview of past investigations into the 1998 atrocity, in which 29 people died.

The move comes as it was revealed that two police officers accused of misleading the court during the trial of Sean Hoey, who was last month acquitted of the bombing, could now face criminal charges themselves.

The Police Ombudsman's Office has confirmed it has passed files on the two scene-of-crime officers to the Public Prosecution Service.

Policing Board member Jeffrey Donaldson said the independent overview would look afresh at the Omagh case.

"The objective is to re-focus on the evidence and bring the focus back again on the need to secure a prosecution."

Earlier, Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde defended his force against the case's fallout, but warned more officers could be referred to the Ombudsman for allegedly 'cooking' evidence.

The PSNI chief said he has asked the judiciary for more detail about the trial judge's suggestion that a wider group of officers could have been involved in the "deliberate and calculated deception" exposed by the case.

He said the two officers currently under investigation for lying during the trial remain at work in uniform because: "I have nothing to act on."

The Chief Constable and other senior PSNI officers had a "robust and challenging meeting" with the Policing Board yesterday afternoon over the findings of the case.

After yesterday's meeting, Sir Hugh said he has asked the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Brian Kerr, for "urgent clarification" about those references to other officers.

"Are the judge's comments something I take seriously? Of course I do," said Sir Hugh.

"That's why it was referred immediately to the Police Ombudsman. It's also why I've actually written the day after the judgment to the Lord Chief Justice, asking for urgent clarification of the points made by Justice Weir in relation to other officers.

"Because I don't understand that bit and I need that clarification. If I need to, I will, of course, refer that to the Police Ombudsman."

The Chief Constable tried to distance the two officers from the Omagh investigation, but defended the decision to keep them in uniform while the Ombudsman investigates them.

"Take a step back and wait and see what the Ombudsman says," he said.

"I have never failed to accept one recommendation from the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland and I don't intend to start now. I will act on whatever the Ombudsman says.

"But I do think those officers actually have the right of a fair hearing, too.

"If the Police Ombudsman had said to me, 'We want these officers suspended', I would have acted on that

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advice. It is their investigation.

"They have not made that recommendation, therefore I have nothing to act on."

Sir Hugh did not accept any dent to his own credibility as a result.

"I'm quite happy for the public to judge me on how I deliver policing," he said. "People will judge us on how we deliver current policing. Currently confidence in policing is high. Do I think it will take a knock? It's possible. Let's wait and see."

He said if there is a public inquiry into Omagh, the PSNI will "do our very best to fully support" it.

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