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Friday, December 21, 2007

By Deborah McAleese

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The police officer who led the investigation into the Omagh bomb last night accepted the court's decision to acquit Sean Hoey amid chaotic scenes at the Laganside Courts complex.

Chief Inspector Norman Baxter said: "I would say that the investigation team that I have led since May 2002 reviewed the evidence as it then was and we presented the evidence to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

" It went through a preliminary inquiry where there was felt to be a prima facie case and there a due process in the court here last year and the judge retired finding there was sufficient evidence for him to consider."

However, the senior detective refused to answer questions as he was pressed for further details by journalists outside court.

Later the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland defended its decision to prosecute Sean Hoey.

A statement said: "The decision to prosecute Sean Hoey was made following a careful analysis of the available evidence.

"It was concluded that the evidence was sufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of obtaining a conviction.

"That evidence has properly been the subject of rigorous scrutiny in the course of the trial," the statement said.

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"At the close of the prosecution case, the trial judge ruled that the evidence against Sean Hoey was sufficiently strong that the tribunal of fact, properly directed upon the law, could find him guilty of the offences charged.

"Given the ruling of the trial judge, the PPS considers that the decisions which it took as to prosecution were properly taken.

"At the end of the trial, the trial judge has given detailed reasons why, in his judgment as the tribunal of fact, the case has not been proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

"The PPS will give very careful consideration to the findings and observations of the trial judge."

Stan Brown, chief executive of the Forensic Science Service Northern Ireland, added: "First and foremost we recognise the pain and suffering of the families of the 29 people who lost their lives.

"This is a detailed judgment Justice Weir has arrived at.

"As chief executive of the Forensic Science Service, it is important now to take time to consider the judgment fully.

"We will look carefully at this judgment and take whatever steps necessary.

"Where there are lessons to be learnt we will learn them and where there are improvements to be made we will make them."

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Malise Ruthven



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