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## Collusion inquiries have cost £29 million

(Bimpe Fatogun, [Irish News](#))

Almost £30 million has already been spent on three independent inquiries into collusion-linked murders despite no evidence yet being heard.

The inquiries into the murders of Rosemary Nelson, Billy Wright and Robert Hamill have reached a combined cost of more than £29 million before their full hearings have even started.

The inquiries were announced by the then secretary of state, Paul Murphy, following the damning findings of the independent report by retired Canadian judge Peter Cory.

However, they have been delayed following wranglings over their respective remits and administrative matters leading costs to escalate.

They have accrued an extra £10 million in the last three months alone.

The latest figures obtained by *The Irish News* come amid attempts by the British Treasury to cap costs of the inquiries.

Maximum hourly rates for lawyers have been capped at £200 for leading counsel, £100 for junior counsel and £150 for solicitors.

The maximum number of hours to be charged by each member of any of the legal teams is set at 40 hours per week.

The full inquiry into the racist murder of London teenager Stephen Lawrence cost a comparatively paltry £4.2 million.

That figure has been exceeded in 'salary-related costs' for the Rosemary Nelson Inquiry alone.

These, which include professional fees, stand at £5,339,670.

Other costs now total almost £9 million, taking the overall cost to £14,082,198.

In the Billy Wright Inquiry, salary-related costs stand at more

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than £3 million, with the total already £5,492,517.

The Robert Hamill Inquiry's salary-related costs so far are £3,386,966 and its other costs more than £6 million giving a total of £9,633,825.

*The Irish News* revealed in October the shock resignation of this inquiry's lead solicitor.

Patricia Fitzmaurice left the post just six months into the job and was still not replaced months later.

It was just one of a series of controversies to dog the proceedings.

Mr Hamill, a 25-year-old Cath-olic, died in hospital after being attacked by a loyalist mob in Portadown, Co Armagh in 1997.

LVF leader Billy Wright (37) was shot dead by three INLA prisoners in the Maze on December 27 1997.

Solicitor Rosemary Nelson died after loyalists planted a booby-trap bomb underneath her car outside her Lurgan home in March 1999.

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