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Improbable goal is within Team Victims' grasp

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29/01/08

The cynicism surrounding the appointment of the four victims' commissioners comes as no surprise - "wait for ages and four come along at once"; "two, or even four, for the price of one" and so on.

There is no doubt that this particular post has been fraught with controversy from the start and it looks like it is going to continue in that vein for some time, as the public comes to terms with the fact that they anticipated a single appointment and instead got a team.

On balance, after having got over the initial surprise, I reckon this arrangement might just work.

considerable disquiet.

Appointing commissioners to deal with or even solve the complex problems of modern society is a measure much beloved of recent governments.

Indeed critics would suggest it is a smart way to kick difficult issues into touch and dupe the public that something is being done about the problem, when in effect what is being set up is a bureaucratic tangle of red tape that those agitating for a solution to their particular problem just tire themselves out trying to untangle.

Before looking at Team Victims' potential for real achievements, let's look at the process.

It is not rocket science to predict that the finding of a single person to be all things to all victims was going to be an almost impossible task.

If there had been any doubt, the first attempt to appoint illustrated the difficulties.

Why then at that stage did those civil servants, supposedly expert in recruitment policies and processes, not sit down and work out that what was needed was a team of commissioners and then re-advertise for just that?

Why put all those who applied, especially the second time, through the lengthy process of form-filling under what turns out to be false pretences?

Why didn't somebody work out the need for more than one person much earlier on - so that the posts could have been advertised

as such?

This experience, yet again, has not increased the public's confidence in the procedures and practices employed by the civil service when it sets out to recruit individuals or representatives for public bodies. And it is a shame that one of the first key appointments by the first and deputy first minister should be contentious.

As for the individuals themselves, they certainly illustrate a range of backgrounds and skills.

Those I know individually are well able for the challenge of defining and meeting the disparate and sometimes competing needs of victims.

Will they be able to restrain their individualism in the interests of working as and being seen to work as a coherent collaborative team?

Their collective appointment poses them with the unexpected requirement to share the responsibilities of the job with three other people, to present a united positive front, to not be seen to have specific sectoral interests

and to subjugate personal popularity and power in the interests of agreed "lines

to take".

This will be quite an undertaking for four people who, until the announcement of their joint sovereignty, were actually competing against each other for one crown.

Yet if they do take time and training to weld themselves into a cohesive team; if they also work out unambiguously what they want to achieve; if they speak as one voice, especially on sensitive and politically divisive issues; if they concentrate on developing appropriate services for the range of complex victims that Northern Ireland has produced (and don't forget the neglected needs of the victims of ordinary crime here, of racial attacks and violent and sexual offences), together they might achieve what so far has eluded all those who have been involved in victims' issues.

It is within their grasp if they manage the improbable, and get it right, to form one powerful organisation speaking with one voice that gains the confidence of people from all sides and contributes significantly and powerfully to the creation of a country which is proud of its services for victims and is more at peace with itself.