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Policing Board seeks clarification of 'deceit'

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

The Policing Board is to write to the Lord Chief Justice over claims that senior police officers may have been involved in falsifying evidence given during the Omagh bombing trial.

On Thursday the board announced plans to conduct an independent review of the investigation following trial judge Mr Justice Weir's stinging criticism of the PSNI.

In a damning verdict the judge identified Chief Inspector Philip Marshall and Constable Fiona Cooper as being guilty of "deliberate and calculated deception" to the court when they were found to have falsified witness statements.

In what he described as a "most disturbing situation", Mr Justice Weir said: "The explanation as to how their untruths came to be told and the deliberate attempts, as I am satisfied they were, to conceal what the defence not unfairly characterised as the 'beefing up' of the initial statement of Ms Cooper are deeply disquieting."

Under cross-examination during the trial Mr Marshall claimed that he had been ordered by senior officers in the Omagh Bombing investigation to "beef up" witness statements.

That admission was highlighted by Mr Justice Weir in his verdict when he questioned whether "others concerned in the investigation and preparation of this case for trial beyond these two witnesses may also have played a part" in falsifying statements.

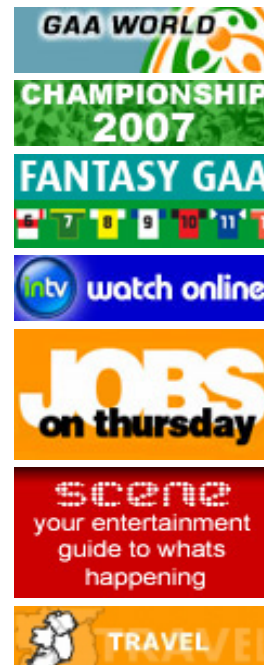
In what is being seen as a highly unusual decision the Policing Board has indicated it will now write to the Lord Chief Justice to ask for clarification over the admission that other police officers may have been involved in the deceit.

Sinn Féin's Alex Maskey said it was important that the Policing Board exposed the full extent of police corruption.

"We are writing to the Lord Chief Justice to ask him to explain his comments that other police officers may have been involved," he said.

"We will wait on his response before deciding what further

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action, if any, should then be taken.

"The public have to have confidence that the Policing Board will not accept any wrongdoing within the PSNI.

"It is the duty of the Policing Board and the chief constable to root out any officer involved in attempting to pervert the course of justice.

"There should be no place for such people within the PSNI.

"This issue goes right to the heart of the need for public confidence within the PSNI."

In a potential rift between the PSNI and Sinn Féin, Mr Maskey described the chief constable's briefing to the Policing Board on Thursday as "deeply unsatisfactory."

"He gave us a staunch defence of their (the police's) inquiries thus far and in my opinion that was an attempt to defend the indefensible," he said.

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