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Probe of informer's 'shielding' considered

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

Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan was last night considering an investigation into allegations that a UDA killer implicated in more than 20 murders was protected by Special Branch because he was an informer.

Yesterday (Friday) *The Irish News* [revealed](#) that a number of south Belfast families whose loved ones had been murdered by the UDA in the 1990s were to ask Mrs O'Loan to investigate the activities of self-confessed Special Branch informer Stephen 'Inch' McFerran.

In February the 39-year-old was sentenced to five years' imprisonment after pleading guilty to the manslaughter of fellow UDA man Roy Green in January 2003.

It was revealed during McFerran's trial that he had been a Special Branch informer.

However, what did not emerge at the trial was that McFerran had previously been implicated in a series of UDA killings in south Belfast including the murder of five men at Sean Graham's bookmakers in February 1992.

The families of three UDA murder victims Teresa Clinton, Peter Magee and John O'Hara want Mrs O'Loan to investigate allegations that McFerran was protected.

Last night a spokesman for Mrs O'Loan confirmed that she was considering an investigation into what he described as "very serious allegations".

South Belfast MP Alasdair McDonnell said the allegation that McFerran had been involved in multiple murders while working as a Special Branch agent took the "sorry saga of collusion to new depths".

"The massacre at the bookmaker's is etched in all our memories forever and now we learn that this man was involved in more than 20 murders over a 13-year period," he said.

"It is clearly a case where the police ombudsman should investigate the role of Special Branch and particularly the

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question of whether they did anything to inhibit and prevent his arrest and prosecution.

"The bottom line is that we need to know whether they could have prevented any of these murders.

"The full truth must come out for the sake of all his victims and ultimately for all our sakes."

Sinn Féin assembly member Alex Maskey said McFerran's role must be fully investigated.

"The UDA in south Belfast in the late 1980s and early 1990s were responsible for scores of murders," he said.

"For many years 'Inch' McFerran has been named as a leading suspect in many of these.

"It has been widely believed for many years before the recent revelations in court that McFerran was a highly placed Special Branch agent."

Mr Maskey said Mrs O'Loan must investigate claims that the fingerprints of at least one Special Branch officer had been found on guns used in UDA members.

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