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Paisley and McGuinness must stop delaying and heed advice on Victims' Commissioners

9.25.00am BST (GMT +0100) Thu 17th Apr 2008

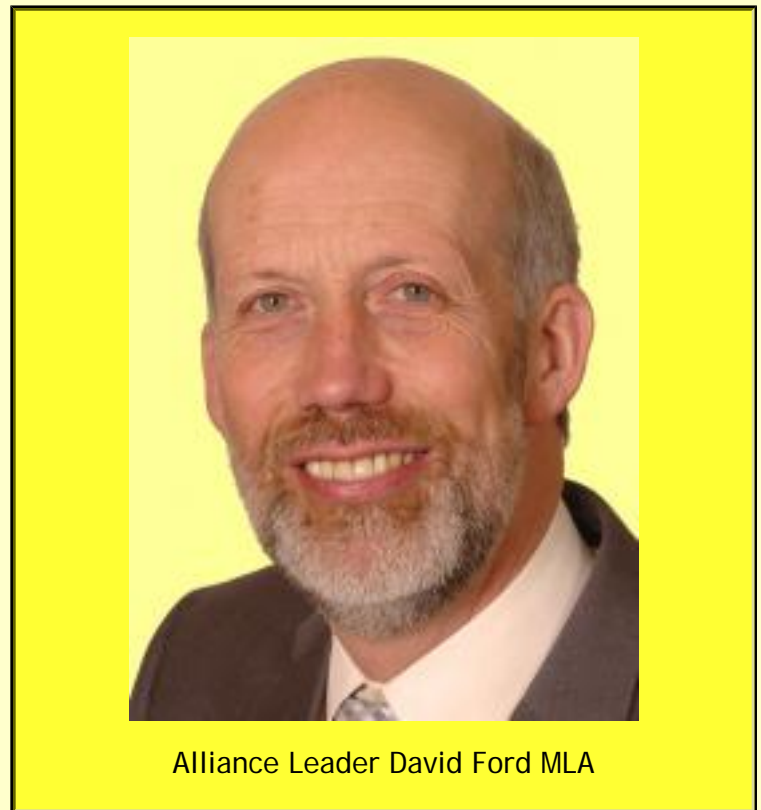
Alliance Leader David Ford has accused Paisley and McGuinness of making a mess of helping victims by delaying progress on the issue in the Assembly. He also outlined the constructive suggestions that Alliance provided in their amendments on the Victims' Commissioner legislation. He said that it shows what mess OFMDFM is in, when it goes into meltdown over helpful suggestions to solve a crisis it created.

David Ford said: "The First and Deputy First Ministers keep making a mess of helping victims and survivors. First, they want

to get legislation through the Assembly urgently, and then last Tuesday they walked away from the issue. They have since created a two week delay, as they are not going to address the matter again until next Tuesday.

"The First and Deputy First Minister have already delayed appointing a Commissioner for almost a year. When will they ever get their act together?

"They created a mess by appointing four Commissioners instead of one, as the



Alliance Leader David Ford MLA

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current law requires, without any thought as to how that would work in practice. Alliance is trying to clear up their mess with constructive suggestions to improve the system.

"Paisley and McGuinness talk about putting victims first, but actions speak louder than words. All that victims have had from them so far are delays, confusion and bickering over back-room deals. The First and Deputy First Ministers are creating a legal timebomb and will not heed anyone else's advice.

"Alliance was prepared to debate our amendments last Tuesday, until the Assembly was suspended because OFMDFM couldn't even agree to allow the discussion. Our changes would limit the maximum number of Commissioners to four, and ensure that money is spent directly on victims and not an ever-expanding Commission. We also want to make sure that all Commission staff work for the central organisation, to ensure a united approach.

"Alliance wants one of the Victims' Commissioners to act as Chief Commissioner, to lead their work and ensure that there is a single, strong and coherent voice to deliver for victims. We also think that, whilst consensus should be aimed for, where it can't be achieved decisions could be taken on a two thirds majority basis. This means that the support of three out of four Commissioners would be needed to make a decision. It is unrealistic to expect unanimity on everything and we can't have a Commission deadlocked and unable to deliver.

"It says a lot about the leadership in OFMDFM that it goes into meltdown when it receives constructive solutions on a crisis that it created. Had there been proper consultation, many of these issues could have been sorted out without a crisis.

"Whatever stitch up the DUP and Sinn Fein may have cobbled together on this issue at Christmas is clearly coming apart at the seams. Alliance is not interested in that and neither are victims. We are focussed on sorting out the problems which clearly exist, so that victims and survivors get the strong voice they deserve.

"The DUP and Sinn Fein are now too busy sham-fighting over our suggestions to think about how their behaviour looks to victims and survivors. Alliance will continue to keep the pressure on Paisley and McGuinness to get back to work on this vitally important issue."

ENDS

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