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DURKAN - TIME TO GET ON WITH THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS

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SDLP Leader and Foyle MP Mark Durkan has said the announcement that there are to be four new victims commissioners has come as a surprise and could pose potential difficulties.

However, Mr Durkan said criticism of the appointment process should not overshadow the important issue of addressing the rights and needs of victims.

He said: “I find the potential appointment of four new victims commissioners very surprising.

“Originally only one post was advertised and the previous failure to make an appointment of any kind was based on the premise there would only be one job.

“In addition, any public utterance from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister was only in relation to a single appointment.

“However, the fact we have now ended up with more victims commissioners than was originally anticipated means we have to make the most of what we have got.

“We need to move on for the sake of the victims.

“To date there has been too much of delay and too much suspicion and dispute surrounding their appointment.

“However, there is still the possibility of all sorts of difficulties arising and a number of questions remain unanswered.

“Anyone looking this will wonder how it will work.

“Will these commissioners have different remits and specialisms?

“Will they be operating on different issues and will they have different victim constituencies?

“There may also be further problems regarding their engagement with public bodies.

“We want the victims’ commissioners not only to engage with victims but advocate their behalf.

“They must also challenge public bodies on their dealings and in some cases lack of consideration for victims.

“It looks like it will be a challenge for them to speak with strength and coherence.

“However, we cannot allow our concern and criticism of the manner of these appointments devalue the importance on the issue of dealing with victims.

“We cannot allow ourselves to fall into the trap of asking silly questions of the office of OFMDFM and the new victims commissioners.

“Instead we need to be asking the questions the victims need answering and challenging the public bodies who are not responding to the needs and rights of the victims.

“Now is the time to make the most of it and get on with the serious business of dealing with the interests of the victims.

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