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## KELLY WELCOMES VICTIMS STRATEGY

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SDLP Victims Spokesperson Dolores Kelly MLA welcomed publication of the outline £36 million victims strategy by the Office of the First Ministers (OFMDFM), but noted that there are many issues still to be addressed.

She said: “The outline is broadly in line with the draft strategy disclosed to the Assembly OFMDFM Committee in early July, but unfortunately it does not really address many of the concerns raised by the Committee and by victims and victim groups.

“We are now to have three bodies – a Victims’ Forum, a Victims’ Service and a Victims’ Commission which has grown from one commissioner to four. Many victims feel this is all very top-heavy with no clear division of labour between the bodies, so there is a danger of duplication and available resources being consumed by bureaucracy. It is particularly worrying that the commissioners who have been appointed were not consulted about the Victims’ Service.

“Also, we don’t know how the Victims’ Service will work, whether it will incorporate existing work done by bodies such as the Trauma Advisory Panel, the Memorial Fund and the Community Relations Council, or whether the whole thing will be contracted out somewhere.

“That said, I am glad to see some progress being made, especially given the poor delivery record of OFMDFM in so many important areas such as a shared future. I hope they will now finish the job and provide victims with the necessary level of detail to have faith in all these institutions. OFMDFM also needs to place these measures for victims firmly in the context of the whole task of dealing with the past, including the Eames/Bradley process. Sinn Féin is taking a hands-off approach to the process just because the Provisional IRA won’t meet Eames/Bradley, but this must not prevent OFMDFM from linking their work on behalf of victims firmly to the process.”

ENDS

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