

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland](#),
HC 24

Wednesday 1 February 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 February 2023.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Simon Hoare (Chair); Sir Robert Buckland; Stephen Farry; Mary Kelly Foy; Sir Robert Goodwill; Claire Hanna; Carla Lockhart; Jim Shannon; Mr Robin Walker.

Questions 355 - 379

Witnesses

[II](#): Ian Jeffers, Commissioner, Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland; Sandra Peake, Chief Executive Officer, WAVE Trauma Centre; Peter Murtagh, Advocacy Support Manager, South East Fermanagh Foundation.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland](#)
- [South East Fermanagh Foundation](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ian Jeffers, Sandra Peake and Peter Murtagh.

Q355 **Chair:** Can I thank the three of you for joining us this morning? In order to expedite proceedings, you heard my opening question—and if you have listened to our other sessions, you will have heard my opening question in all of those—which is about the terminology. I am not going to reiterate the question because you have heard it. If you agree with where we as the Committee have been trying to move the debate to in terms of terms, tell us, and then we can move on to somebody else's question. If you do not, tell us. If you think we have missed something, also tell us that.

Peter Murtagh: We are looking at a perception of victims and survivors of the Troubles, and some of those we support would look at it slightly differently. All these paramilitary groupings originated as terrorist organisations and were regarded as such, whether it be to defend the union, searching for a united Ireland, or so-called protection of civil rights. The using of the term “paramilitary” has perhaps now taken over from them being regarded as terrorist organisations. In that, we feel that it has brought about an acceptance of their existence.

Q356 **Chair:** Would you like to see them proscribed?

Peter Murtagh: They are proscribed.

Q357 **Chair:** But they are proscribed in what seems to be a sort of tick-box exercise and nothing really seems to happen. That is the flavour or the assessment that we are getting from people. Is that something you share?

Peter Murtagh: They still fall within the Terrorism Act with all their actions. What you then get on to is the threat to national security and therefore how they are investigated, what the response is and what resources are put into them. They terrorise their communities. If that is not a threat to national security, then what is?

Chair: That is a powerful point.

Ian Jeffers: The reality here is that we have not dealt with the past. While we are celebrating 25 years this year, we still have that vacuum that paramilitaries have filled. PSNI data says that 32% of organised crime groups operate with direct links to paramilitaries. We have to have the debate. How do we encourage those paramilitaries to come to the table and ultimately get them off the scene? Then you deal with the criminality, without a doubt.

There is that grey area at the minute. There is this supposed credibility that the paramilitaries carry, and that is a throwover to the Troubles, without a doubt. We need to look at what the road map is for reconciliation. Then you can start to address that as part of this.

Peter Murtagh: To the people we represent, the terms “paramilitary”



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and “terrorist groups” are one and the same, and are regarded as that. As Ian says, it is because we have not dealt with the past.

Sandra Peake: One of the central difficulties is that, regardless of what you call them, they are what they are and they persecute their community. By claiming paramilitarism, they are hanging on to the historic significance, and that is giving them credibility. That is what they want. But the community sees criminality. That is what they are faced with. They see that issues are not addressed.

Also, if you get on the wrong side of them, it follows you because of where social housing is positioned. If you leave your community because something has happened, often it follows you into the next community you go into because they label, demonise and stigmatise you. In doing that, they immediately identify you when you go into another community.

I could not agree more with Paul. Describing “punishment attacks” is a way of validating and endorsing because they brutalise and they leave people with very severe injuries. I nursed in the Royal Victoria Hospital, which was the leading accident and emergency hospital in Northern Ireland, and one of the vascular surgeons was very clear that they could give you a grading of the type of shooting, whether it was soft tissue or whether they will remove your leg and you end up with an amputation. That is horrific when you think of that.

What we are seeing today is the long-term consequences of that. We see it in relation to the people who are presenting, and who have had years of living with that legacy. It is very wrong, and it is wrong that we are still allowing that to happen today.

Q358 **Chair:** Ian, you spoke about the Good Friday agreement and the processes that flow from it. Do you think there has been enough rigour in terms of the use of public money going to community leaders and community builders, etc., who sometimes are very far from being that or who use it as a flag of convenience?

Ian Jeffers: There is a broader question there. Money has flowed around communities, without a doubt. Has some of it been wrongly spent? Quite possibly, but it would be wrong to say that is a reason to stop.

Chair: I did not say that. I asked whether you thought the audit trail was robust enough.

Ian Jeffers: The audit trail in any public money is robust. I speak from previous experience working with the youth sector. Take the European social fund money; you have to justify where and how it is spent, to the last penny. From that point of view, have we looked at projects that are maybe inappropriate and so forth? Quite possibly. But to go to something that Paul said, this is about joined-up funding. It is not about a little bit of money to one particular project. This is about looking at the community as a whole, and how that sits with policing and with youth work on the ground. Throwing a few quid at one particular group will not solve the problem.



Sandra Peake: The fundamental difficulty is when the community sees that and it does not actually filter down in relation to the wider community. If people are seen to have resources and to have means because they are linked to a group, it is very hard for the young people not to see that and actually aspire to be that when maybe the education system has not offered them something or where we have let them down right across our various statutory agencies. There are fundamental problems for how that filters within the community and the actual benefit for the community.

Q359 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** In the first session, Paul said that these sorts of attacks do not just brutalise the victims; they brutalise all of us. Many of the people we are talking about are younger people who are being coerced into various activities and being subjected to punishment beating. Many of the victims of the Troubles will now be middle-aged or old people. How do these continuing attacks and this continuing activity affect the mental wellbeing of that generation?

Sandra Peake: It maintains fear—that is basically it—because people are still exerting that control within communities. One thing—I raised this before at Committee—is that the intimacy of the violence in Northern Ireland is not understood. People are often living in very close proximity to those who have affected them. They continue to exert power and control. They wink at them, they sneer at them and they jeer at them. They leave them with the very clear message that “we are still here”. It makes it very difficult, if you are affected at the hands of your own community, to come out of that and speak about that. People are very concerned about that.

While those groups had a focus of external violence through the Troubles, in latter years they have brought the violence internally and it has been internalised within their own communities, which leaves victims and survivors all the more frightened. You can see it in relation to how people are treated and what is happening. That is a very big fear and reality for people coming out of this legacy legislation—what that may mean to them. Those people are still active within their community, are still there, are still seen and are still exerting that control.

Q360 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** How does that control manifest itself? I am guessing these older people are not running drugs or being forced to do these sorts of errands. Is it just a sort of prevailing atmosphere or is it actually affecting them?

Ian Jeffers: You have to reflect that the communities who were most impacted by the Troubles are where the majority of this activity is continuing to go on. We all, as a community, signed up to a reform of policing. For a large majority that has made good progress, but there are communities where it has not, and that is where the paramilitaries and the organised crime groups are stepping in to fill the void.

The 50-year-old or 60-year-old who potentially experienced the worst of the Troubles also, unfortunately, keeps their head down and keeps out of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

it. They are not wanting to get drawn into it because they potentially do not have the community policing around them that they can trust.

Sir Robert Goodwill: If there was something that concerned them, they would not ring the police. They would not see them as the first port of call if there was antisocial behaviour.

Ian Jeffers: Or the police do not have the visibility. It is to a point that Paul made: if you have officers dedicated to a community, building relationships in the long term, what is the long term? Are we equipping the PSNI to provide those long-term relationships or is it, "I'm here for a year or six months and then I'm off again"? You get to know who is who in the community and, all of a sudden, "I'm off to another district".

Q361 **Sir Robert Goodwill:** Given that, in some cases, these paramilitary groups are in effect policing those communities, would people from an older generation let it be known that they are getting hassled and they are getting grief so that they could sort it out for them? Does that sort of thing happen or, as a victim, would they not see that as something that they would want to initiate?

Ian Jeffers: I wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable saying so-and-so would do such-and-such an activity. But the paramilitary are controlling communities. They are sowing that seed of fear. You may want to tell the police and you may quietly work out how to tell the police but, for many, they would rather keep quiet. We have to look at how we engage communities in this dialogue. We have to have that community dialogue, and that brings up the reconciliation side. It is about community dialogue and creating a safe space to do it.

Sir Robert Goodwill: It is depressing, 25 years after signing the agreement.

Peter Murtagh: Yes. To be honest, a good number of our members, people we support, voted for the Good Friday/Belfast agreement but now they see that nothing has been delivered in relation to dealing with the past and also dealing with paramilitary terrorist groupings. Therefore, they have said that, if they were given the option now, they would not vote for the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, which is worrying.

Q362 **Chair:** It is the wrong landing spot, isn't it? Because a process has not done everything, it does not mean that you should abandon the process; it means that you should actually redouble your efforts. Turning back the clock is not going to make any progress. It is just turning back the clock.

Peter Murtagh: Yes, but the most important thing is that it has not done anything for the most important thing to them and how they were greatly affected during the Troubles.

Q363 **Chair:** We are all conscious there are pockets of communities across Northern Ireland who, rather like that scene in *Life of Brian*, say, "What has the Good Friday agreement ever done for us?" That is the failure of the process, which can be addressed. But tearing it up and going, "Let's go back to bombs, bullets and blood on the streets," is not something



that anybody would advocate for or is advocating for.

Sandra Peake: I just finished a study last year looking at the disappeared people whose loved ones were murdered, abducted and secretly buried, and that work reflected that there were three categories in relation to how the paramilitaries worked. They worked as they pretended to be the protectors of the community through the Troubles, they were the enforcers of the community when something happened, but they were also the perpetrator of the community. Obviously, they fell in relation to the fact that violence was perpetrated against them.

The difficulty in relation to that sort of perpetration has continued, because who do you go to? One of the speakers referred to the difficulties of police coming to your door. Families have been told, "Police should not be brought into the area. Do not bring them into this area." They have been warned to be quiet. You asked how it manifests itself: "Keep your mouth shut or else."

Even in relation to the next generation, if you have children, there is the fear that something will happen to them, and that subtlety around, "Oh, you've boys." That has also silenced many victims and survivors, particularly around intra-community violence. They feel that they cannot speak out because they have other children in the house and something may well happen to them.

The messages that people get are quite subtle. People say, "Why don't you report it to the police?" Well how do you report a wink or a smile, using your name, to the police? The reality is that that will not hold but you know those messages are there and they are very real.

Q364 **Sir Robert Buckland:** Can I turn to the legacy and reconciliation Bill that is currently going through Parliament? I am very grateful for the evidence you have given and the concerns that we know you are expressing about aspects of that Bill. It is a very vexed history. We all remember on-the-runs and the letters. The question of immunity is such a difficult and sensitive one, bearing in mind the nature of the communities in Northern Ireland. This, of course, is a conditional immunity with a basis of co-operation with a new commission. Given your concerns about the Bill, what needs to be done by way of potential amendment to make it better? Or does there need to be a fundamentally different approach here?

Ian Jeffers: You know I would throw the Bill out tomorrow. I think it is the wrong approach, because it has not involved the communities. We have not had that collective discussion and debate about it, whether that is in communities or local political parties or so forth. We now have the two traditional communities saying that they do not want the Bill but they are united around very different things: one around the state cover-up and one around terrorists getting away with murder, quite literally.

Claire Hanna: Many of us are opposed to both.

Ian Jeffers: Yes. From that perspective, the Bill is another dividing factor in all this huge debate that we have. Yes, as a commission, we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have tabled amendments to make a bad Bill better, but we are not—we are tinkering. My real worry is that we continue to tinker. We saw it last night: more tinkering and tinkering. It is not going to lead to a Bill that honestly works. We have to get back, honestly, to the point of how we really encourage reconciliation in Northern Ireland. How do we start to move towards environments where we are educating our young people together, where we are having community dialogue and where we can address the issue that we are talking about here today as a community and give that confidence to communities? I fear that the Bill is just another roadblock that we have to get over to work out how we work our way around this.

Q365 Sir Robert Buckland: Just putting the case for the Bill, there is a real and genuine concern about how due process, which is really important not just in terms of prosecution but in terms of inquests, which is a big part of this, has, in effect, dominated the debate to the detriment of allowing communities and families to, in some way, move on and get—I hate the word “closure” but you know what I mean—some measure of justice from what has been a deeply traumatic and terrible period in the history of that part of the island of Ireland. Therefore, if not this, do you think there should be no legislative mechanism at the moment and we should just carry on with inquests until the crack of doom?

Ian Jeffers: I would be the first to acknowledge that inquests are not perfect, but they have provided answers for families and provided that opportunity that did not exist before, as have other mechanisms and so forth. Will the new commission provide that? Victims and families definitely want knowledge and information but many want justice as well, however small that opportunity is, and the Bill denies them that opportunity.

Peter Murtagh: But inquests only provide any sort of investigative process and any closure for a very small number of families. The majority of innocent victims had a tokenistic half a day if they were lucky. They had no legal representative or anything. There was no proper inquest as you would have now in finding out and establishing the facts. The majority of them were open-ended verdicts as well.

Sandra Peake: To concentrate on inquests alone is wrong. They have provided answers. We saw that very clearly. It needed an inquest to stand for Ballymurphy families, because otherwise that would have gone with them to the grave. How wrong would that have been? There are very clear issues in terms of the benefit of inquests.

There are a number of things. One is that the Bill puts the perpetrator in charge. It is a perpetrator-friendly Bill, and that is what the Government are pushing through. That is of deep concern. It is of deep concern to the Good Friday agreement in terms of undermining the devolution of policing and justice; the police service will be told what cases they can and cannot investigate, the judiciary will be told what cases they can and cannot look at, and the Public Prosecution Service will be told what cases they can and cannot look at. If you are a family in Northern Ireland and your loved



HOUSE OF COMMONS

one was murdered in a sectarian murder, what is the difference between that and a murder in your constituency? Why are we treating murders differently?

In relation to your paramilitary point, the message to paramilitaries from legacy is, "Wait long enough and you will get away with it because no one will hold you to account." That is very damaging for us for the future, for our children, for our grandchildren, and in terms of how we can operate.

I have been around WAVE a long time. I have been there since the mid-'90s. The best piece of work I have seen on legacy is Operation Kenova. Operation Kenova has put those families at the centre. Operation Kenova has provided those families with information. There are 30-odd files within our Public Prosecution Service, which is starved of resources, and that, sadly, has meant that there has been a delay on those files. That is the best example that I have seen. We work with around 30 families who are in Operation Kenova and that is the best example. Had they trust and confidence in the process when it started? No, because they thought it was an English police officer investigating their own. They found that that is not correct.

We would urge an Operation Kenova model to be available for those who want it. There will be families who will want it and families who will not. The cases that are most detrimentally impacted are cases from when the Historical Enquiries Team ended in the mid-'80s to the Good Friday agreement that have never been looked at, bar the initial investigation by the police at the time. In some cases, there are huge evidential opportunities.

We would urge the Government: "We have one more throw of the dice around legacy. This is not it." If it is enforced and pushed through, I think it will be extremely damaging and we will see the long-term consequences of it for the future.

Ian Jeffers: In relation to today's conversation, it is really important that the Bill will remove, potentially, the opportunity to use interlocutors to discuss and extract information from paramilitary organisations, because it talks about individuals coming forward to the ICIR. There were some well-researched articles in the *Belfast Telegraph* that talked about the impracticalities and the fact that very few, if any, paramilitaries will engage as individuals. But there is opportunity to engage with groups that have that corporate knowledge, if you like, and the Bill removes that.

It is painful to say it, but part of the process about addressing this criminality is to get the paramilitaries around the table to work out how to remove them from the equation and leave the stage. To do that, all of a sudden you are now talking to individuals, not groups, as a result of the Bill. It is something to consider as it goes through.

Peter Murtagh: Some of the people we support just said they would not deal with the new process—they would not engage with it—and therefore an investigation would not be initiated. By them initiating an



investigation, they are possibly facilitating immunity for someone who murdered their loved one and therefore they will never be delivered justice.

- Q366 **Claire Hanna:** What impact do memorials, commemorative artefacts and flags have on communities that paramilitary groups are attempting to control? What effect does all that, I suppose, branding have on the wellbeing of victims and survivors?

Sandra Peake: It demarks areas. You can see very clearly—it is a visual reminder to the community—“This is who’s in charge. This is who will come if you’re stepping out of line.” Every morning I pass the mural in north Belfast, “Prepared for peace, ready for war,” with two paramilitary-clad men, put on the edge of a wall. It is part of the strategy to maintain control. It is part of a very clear strategy to let communities know that they are there and that they are very much in power. There is no doubt that there is very little thought given to the traumatic impact for victims and survivors of those memorialisations.

There is also loss of control for families; names have been put up on memorials with absolutely no consultation. It is not just that you see a name on something and you think, “Obviously that family wanted that.” They have no power and control to stop that. That is very traumatic to a family, whenever their loved one’s name and identity is used and they have no power and control to stop that.

When you see something and you see the various trappings around it, you cannot assume that families are in agreement with that. Often they are not, but the dead have no rights and therefore their name can be used. I have seen that in a number of examples, even when families requested that their loved ones’ names were not included or put on anything. They have no power over that.

Peter Murtagh: Overall, the people we support see it as part of the glorification of violence and terrorists, and therefore it retraumatises them. It is a form of romanticising what happened during the Troubles and the actions of paramilitary terrorist groupings. It is also part of the rewriting of histories. To be honest, it is a bit worrying that it can be the first and only impression of people visiting Northern Ireland. That is what they get, and there is no narrative or explanation around that. It is a very one-dimensional impression that they are getting in relation to the Troubles.

- Q367 **Claire Hanna:** You rightly said earlier, Sandra, that it is about the future and how we possibly reconcile and have a real shared future when narratives about the past are so coloured and, in so many cases, so partial. I always think of the academic Duncan Morrow who said we are each obsessed by what them’uns did to us’uns, and nobody is thinking so much about vice versa. There is some good voluntary and community-based truth and reconciliation platform type projects that try to bring this to a younger generation, but what can we do in the curriculum to try to reduce the sanitisation and romanticisation of the past for current and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

future generations?

Sandra Peake: If you look at the school curriculum, the GCSE curriculum, for instance, does have the Troubles on it. You look at the major political context but not the human context. My own kid studied it. I could see the major events and the ramifications but not the human consequence. That human consequence has to be included when you look at how detrimental that has been.

We have a really innovative team of victims and survivors, both bereaved and injured by the Troubles, who go in to educate our future social workers, nurses, doctors, police and counsellors. They are really the gamut, and they are sharing their experience of why we must have sensitive and respectful practice. You sometimes get a bit of a kickback, with some of the students saying, "That's not our legacy. That's in the past. That's gone." By week 2, they realise why they have to look at it. The fabric within many families has been to keep a lid on it, to keep it silent and not to talk about it. The other reality is that they are seeing it when they think back to practice in relation to the people who presented to them.

It is about education in a number of ways, whether it is in the adult sphere through our whole gamut of health and social care, or from an early stage. The difficulty is that we need to hear those stories, we need to honour those stories, and they need to be used in the most appropriate way. Those educators will say that using something that was so destructive for positive ends is very therapeutic in itself, because we are informing the future generation of what they need to look at, and why so much of what has happened in the Troubles is hidden and why it needs to be brought out into the open and shaped. That is really important.

Ian Jeffers: Just prior to Christmas, the commission took a virtual reality project called "The House" around schools, with 500 young people taking part. This is based on two houses, one in Andersonstown and one in Tullycarnet, so two from the traditional communities, if you like. But the story was identical in each house, with the suffering and the coping mechanisms that the families were going through, and the challenging conversations about whether the young person should leave Northern Ireland to teach somewhere else because they did not want to teach in Northern Ireland, and all of that.

It was fascinating to talk to the young people at the end of that process. Many said that they did not realise that was what their parents were coping with. Many said, "I understand now why my mum doesn't open up about certain things." Others showed blissful ignorance in a nice way: "Oh, they're some of the things that happened."

A couple of weeks ago, we published a policy to stimulate this debate, building for a better future by learning the past. There is no doubt that, in our education system, we need to enable children and young people to understand the legacy of the past and then contribute to building a



shared future.

It has to be a mutual understanding. It cannot be a one-sided view. Unfortunately, the curriculum at the minute allows people to pick and choose, and it can be very, "I don't necessarily want to teach that today because I know that I'm teaching wee Johnny, and if I tell wee Johnny certain things about that particular thing, the likelihood is his father will be protesting out the gates." We see it in the papers this week. We have a school in County Down where they say, "No Irish". How do we allow that in this society?

Chair: Yes, I saw that.

Ian Jeffers: That is why we have to get to that conversation. I totally believe that our education system has a huge role to play in this, as well as our children and young people.

Claire Hanna: You are absolutely right. Peter, do you want to add anything?

Peter Murtagh: I agree with everything that has been said. It must be objective and factual. Diversity in relation to sectarianism should be very much part of it, and everyone should be looking at it from their own perspective. For too long we have let our young people just look at it through narrow channels where they do not see the broader picture and the impact that it had on other people, put themselves in that position and understand and know why they did what they did. That would bring about a greater understanding, with the ultimate aim that we prevent the cycle of violence happening again, which history has proved too often.

Q368 **Chair:** Some peace walls have been taken down and the sky has not fallen in. Is it not now time to remove these territorial markers between some of these gangs, groups and organised criminals?

Sandra Peake: This week there was a BBC article on two women from either side of the peace walls and the work they were doing together. They talked about how important it was and that they would love to see those peace walls down, but they also knew that, at times of difficulty, they were a protection as well. There are key challenges. You can see, in terms of communities working together, how beneficial and fruitful that is and, as Ian said, the commonality of experience.

Q369 **Chair:** Do they provide protection or are they just something there to protect—i.e. to protect the installation?

Sandra Peake: I think when you have lived under constant threat your whole life, when you don't know what is going to come through the back of your house, when you don't know if your kids are safe when they go out and play—when you live with that for so long, it is very difficult to remove those structures.

Q370 **Chair:** As I say, some have been removed and the world has not come to an end, has it?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sandra Peake: No, but I think that is part of a process. It is part of a process of dialogue and engagement, and that work is ongoing. When you talk about protections, I think of a lady whose father was killed in bed. Her mother put an ornate metal gate on the stairs and she locked the kids upstairs at night. This lady today locks her children upstairs at night because her fear is somebody coming in. Of course the kids are reacting to that and struggling. That was because that was her protective mechanism. It is really about how you work with that and support her. Can we bring change that is to the overall benefit of the family?

I know how that may seem when you compare it to peace walls, but the difficulty for people living with those walls is the unpredictability of violence when you live on high alert for so long. People are living in that state of heightened tension and watchfulness.

Q371 **Carla Lockhart:** I want to touch on something you said, Peter, about glorification. The Committee will be sick of me chomping on about this, but what we have in our society in Northern Ireland is the continual glorification of terrorism by those in high office. In recent days, we have had the Sinn Féin leader talk about there being no alternative to what the IRA did and the many innocent victims that it created. I want you to be really truthful with this Committee about how that retraumatises victims, and how that impacts young people in our society and legitimises the likes of these artefacts—the hate expressions that we see.

Peter Murtagh: It is the continual justification by these paramilitary terrorist groupings of the actions they took in the past. There is no acknowledgement of wrongs. There is no showing of any remorse. To be honest, that is one thing that is completely missing from any legacy proposals, especially this new legacy Bill. How can you engage someone who has carried out a brutal murder and can show absolutely no remorse and continues to justify what they did?

Certain leading politicians have spoken about their actions during the Troubles and it has almost been commended and respected, especially on social media. Their actions resulted in the death of an innocent person who was going about his duty, yet, again, it is a form of glorification.

Q372 **Carla Lockhart:** In this very House, we have a Member who has an office named after terrorists. In my mind, this continual glorification has to stop, and the only way that I see that stopping is legislation. Do you think legislation would help?

Peter Murtagh: You have to accept that it is difficult to deal with it under the Criminal Justice Act. More recently, we have had the almost systemic—and it has originated from young people—glorification and singing songs in relation to paramilitary actions that resulted in death, and it has received widespread media attention. A lot, again, goes back to education. To deal with that under the criminal justice system is no doubt difficult, but the legislation has to be written in the correct guise and it has to be at the correct level. A lot of these are probably on the lower scale of the criminal justice system, and therefore the evidence



required and the criminal process should reflect that. They need to be tailored specifically to cater for those offences, rather than reliant on the likes of hate crime, where the bar is set quite high in relation to securing a conviction.

Ian Jeffers: This is about fostering mutual respect and understanding. I feel that young people, in a number of cases, are manipulated and they are saying things without understanding any consequences of them. That glorification does lead victims and survivors to be retraumatised by it. How on earth can they sing that particular song or do that at a bonfire and so forth without knowing the full hurt that they have caused? Our young people are pawns in it just as the paramilitaries are using young people as pawns in their game here now.

We need to start on the education side, to build that mutual respect and understanding of where we have all come from and the hurt we have caused each other as communities within society and to work out how we move forward. We should not be glorifying any of it.

Carla Lockhart: Therein lies the problem.

Peter Murtagh: If you are dealing with it in the criminal justice system, it has to be tangible and enforceable.

Q373 **Carla Lockhart:** The Committee is keen to understand your thoughts around expression of hate in the public space and what more could be done to deal with that. Again, does that glorification impact that where it nearly makes it okay?

Ian Jeffers: We cannot tolerate it. The police, particularly, are in a no-win situation here where we have seen public displays of hate. Anywhere else in the UK they would be straight in. If it is a banner that says something wrong, if it is an effigy on a bonfire or whatever, they would be in and it would be removed. We have to have sub-committees, debates and consultations and so forth. We saw that with the bonfire in Larne. The council are now in a no-win situation over, effectively, health and safety, where an individual unfortunately died as a result of falling from a massive bonfire. We would have reacted in a different way—"Get that guy down; that's not safe"—from a pure health and safety point of view.

We have to have those conversations: "We allow people to respect what they want to do, but think of your neighbours—think of the hurt that that could be causing people." The police and, indeed, communities have to have that engagement. It comes down a lot to community policing, but together with that mutual understanding.

Q374 **Carla Lockhart:** Significant strides have been made. I can think of numerous cases in my constituency where it really has been tremendous to see the transition away from it. Would more support be helpful? I am thinking about murals and things like that, or actually transitioning to a mural that is not offensive. I know the Housing Executive does some work around it. Is that something that you think would be—



Ian Jeffers: Without a doubt. You are quite right to give credit; there has been massive work over the years, and communities as a whole in many areas have moved forward. We also see some communities that are held back, and a lot of that is because of paramilitary coercion and control. There are still areas to be addressed.

Where we have memorials and murals that in some ways romanticise and glamorise the past, we have to have that debate about how you remove them, or how you remember the past and tell our history of the past without effectively retraumatising victims and survivors. Certainly, in the whole terror tourism side of things, we have to create ethical frameworks in which we are not spreading the mystery of the Troubles and the romance of the Troubles. There are some very good examples—there are people doing walking tours of Belfast or other parts of the Province that tell a history from all sides—but there are also some shocking examples.

Carla Lockhart: There are some very poor examples, some of which have statutory bodies involved.

Sandra Peake: There are a number of things for me. One is that the stories from the Troubles and the testimonies from those who have been directly affected need to be heard, and they need to be heard with respect. That needs to be heard at the widest level. I suppose that is my concern about the legacy Bill, because the legacy Bill is about closing that down. It is about not allowing that information to come out. I have worked with quite a number of the families for Operation Kenova. What happened there needs to be told, because of the impact on their loved ones. It is so important.

We need to hear all the stories. One side that is not brought out is the fact that the paramilitaries also destroyed their own families. While you want to glorify paramilitaries and say, “Look at these guys”, the reality—the underbelly—is that you see families that are totally wrecked and children who have been left to live with a legacy, through no fault of their own but through their parents’ fault, with really quite detrimental consequences right across the community. You cannot just look at one side and one section. We need to look at the whole picture.

We also need political leadership in relation to what the politicians do, because there are subtexts and sub-messages that victims and survivors take from that on all sides and all sections. That is really important too.

We would want to see a process where we remember the past with dignity, where people are given dignity and are being heard, and where what happened to them is fully acknowledged.

Carla Lockhart: The voice of victims is so important, and it is so important in this place here. I want to commend you guys for bringing some victims over—and that means right across. I was speaking to someone yesterday who was in Germany. That is really important.

Q375 **Mr Walker:** I am very struck by some of the things that you have mentioned, particularly in terms of the memorialisation of people without



HOUSE OF COMMONS

their family's consent and that kind of thing. It is grim, frankly, and needs to be looked at. Peter, I remember, from when I met with SEFF and other organisations as a Minister, the deep level of concern there was about cross-border issues and the north-south dimension of this in terms of the concerns of victims that things that crossed borders were unable to be investigated and pursued, which also perhaps touches on the memorialisation issues. Is there anything that is being done differently in the Republic on this front that we could learn from, or is this an issue that is not being addressed there either?

Peter Murtagh: I am not aware of the legislation down south. Obviously, it is not as great an issue but there are good examples of memorialisation and glorification south of the border in the different sorts of events that they have. Obviously, with the majority of victims living north of the border, there is less impact, less exposure and less traumatising, but if it does receive media attention, obviously it is impacting on them.

Ian Jeffers: You open up the debate again on the legacy Bill. If we end up with a legacy Bill in the UK—

Q376 **Mr Walker:** I accept some of the challenges on that front, but the flip side of that is that, whenever I went to the Republic or engaged with Sinn Féin members on BIPA as a Minister, we were always challenged with, "We've done the legislation. Why haven't you done yours?" I always thought that was—

Ian Jeffers: We don't need to go there, but Jon Boutcher is the guy to talk to about the painstaking work he has done to build relationships with An Garda Síochána to extract information, and it is down to relationships being built as opposed to legislation.

Peter Murtagh: The problem with it is that it is down to relationships. There is not a bespoke process that we can go to. There was no commitment under the Stormont House agreement with the proposals that they were going to replicate an investigative unit set up within their jurisdiction. That continues to be a problem.

Ian Jeffers: Looking at the positive side of things, the late Queen was able to visit a garden of remembrance in Dublin and show respect. If we could reciprocate that and think of the learnings we could get from that, you can see the opportunity.

Q377 **Stephen Farry:** Good morning. How can the Regional Trauma Network develop standards and frameworks to recognise the ongoing influence on victims and survivors of the paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, particularly regarding the locations where they might access services or the history connected with certain service providers?

Ian Jeffers: When we made the submission to the Committee—before my appointment, I should say—I think the thought was that the Regional Trauma Network would be much more established. The Regional Trauma Network, which is a fantastic initiative that should give access for victims and survivors from the Troubles to receive specialist care, is in its



infancy. To date, there have been eight referrals into it, so it is too early to say.

What we have to challenge ourselves going forward is whether victims and survivors are able to access it and whether there are constraints that would potentially restrict that. It is too early to fully answer the question.

Sandra Peake: I think it will offer very much a statutory response, and what we want is access to psychiatry and psychology services for those who require that higher level of care in terms of mental health services. That would be really useful.

However, the other limitation—if you want to call it a limitation—is that people’s needs as victims and survivors are very diverse. While that is one aspect, there are so many other aspects that need to be provided. It is very much a joined-up approach between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector, where we are all—whether it is SEFF or us—working together as part of a Regional Trauma Network. We will be pushing to see that there is a firm statutory response.

Q378 **Chair:** You have all intimated, as did the first panel, political leadership. We are alert to the problems of funding programmes and delivering initiatives that the absence of Stormont demonstrates, but the key word is “leadership”, isn’t it? Do you share a concern that I have, going back to the eradication of paramilitaries and challenging their existence, that the echo chambers of social media do not allow for strong political leadership for fear of just getting submerged in a reservoir of bile, hate and anger, and therefore political leadership is not as strong as it needs to be to play its part in defeating this pernicious problem?

Ian Jeffers: We need strong political leadership—of that there is no doubt—and strong political leadership is demonstrated by an effective Stormont. There is no question about that. In the absence of that, there is a vacuum that is filled, and there are people willing to step into that vacuum. It is important that we understand that, if political leadership is not able, for whatever reason, to take its seat in Stormont, it can still be exhibited, but it needs to work harder, because many communities then do not trust it: “You’re not working—therefore.” There is a really strong argument in there but we cannot ignore the fact that, regardless of the noise of social media, political leadership needs to win over that.

Q379 **Carla Lockhart:** Obviously, there was a lot of ethnic cleansing in certain areas. I am keen to understand whether any organisation has done any work around trying to bring people back to those areas. In the likes of, say, Fermanagh or Armagh, you have a lot of derelict farm houses and vacant properties.

Peter Murtagh: I am aware of a couple of isolated cases where people had been intimidated out of their homes but now feel safe enough to return and have dwelled in relative comfort without being intimidated.

Carla Lockhart: I think there is something in that.

Chair: Yes, exactly. There should be no barriers, as it were. On behalf of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the Committee, can I thank the three of you very much indeed for your patience in what has been an elongated session due to a later than envisaged start? Once again, my apologies to all of our witnesses. I thank my colleagues for taking part this morning. Thank you for your evidence and insight, all of which, as always, has been enormously helpful and useful to us. We are grateful.