

Dallat hits back at comments made by councillor and former UVF commander

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East Derry MLA John Dallat has accused Causeway Coast and Glens PUP councillor Russell Watton of causing great hurt and fear to many people following a recent public interview.

In the interview, which was published in the Coleraine Chronicle last week, Councillor Watton, a former member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), an illegal unionist paramilitary group which was responsible for more than 500 killings during the Troubles, said he has 'no regrets' about his past.

Mr Dallat says Councillor Watton's comments have gone 'far beyond the pale in promoting an illegal organisation which has been guilty of the most heinous crimes against humanity over many years'.

As a result of this interview, Mr Dallat has reported Councillor Watton to the Commissioner of Standards for Local Government.

In his interview, Councillor Watton, who is former member of the UDR, tells how he rose through the ranks to become the OC of the local UVF unit in Coleraine.

"I was already a trained soldier so I didn't need much training. We formed a unit. There was only four of us in Coleraine at first, but we expanded to about ten. After a while it was easy to get recruits," he told the Coleraine Chronicle.

"I was involved with bombings, for example the Salmon Leap in 1975. A bomb was set on the counter and people were given five minutes to get out. I got 20 years for that."

When asked did he regret his actions or the impact they had

Councillor Russell Watton



on victims of the UVF, Councillor Watton replied: "I do not regret being involved in the fight against Militant Irish Republicanism. We'd no great interest in them (victims). It was a cruel time and morality went out the window. And I was overcome by the need to take revenge."

Councillor Watton also claims he now works hard 'to ensure young men aren't caught up in trouble of any description, including joining paramilitary groups'.

Yet, he goes on to say that if the UVF did not exist in Coleraine 'the estates would be awash with drugs'.

Although neither endorsing nor condemning the activities of the UVF, Councillor Watton added: "I made plenty of mistakes, but I don't see my involvement with the UVF as a

mistake."

However, Mr Dallat says Councillor Watton's comments eulogize the UVF.

"I am a ratepayer and it shocks me that my money is helping to promote someone who is extolling the virtues of an illegal organisation steeped in crime and continuing to present a threat to the general public," said Mr Dallat.

"Councillor Watton has failed to uphold this important principle by refusing to state clearly and unambiguously that he is opposed to people taking justice into their own hands. He makes arguments that favour of an illegal paramilitary organisation, namely the UVF, existing in communities and delivering the work of the lawful Police Service of Northern Ireland.

"He openly and unasham-



John Dallat MLA

edly claims that he uses his influence with an illegal organisation which is linked to punishment shootings and other forms of criminality.

"Councillor Watton also declares his only regret about being involved in a terror organisation is the effect it had on his mother. He fails to show any compassion or sense of justice towards the mother of Catholic victims Brendan Doherty and his brother Chris Doherty. In his startling interview he declares he had no great interest in the victims of the UVF and has no opinion on the fact that over 100 pipe bombs were thrown at Catholic homes causing many of them to flee, creating a form of 'ethnic cleansing' which has had a permanent effect on where people can live safely in mixed communities.

"Given that the UVF still exists and exerts undue influence over communities in Coleraine this interview and the manner in which it has been given clearly indicates that Councillor Watton has shown he is ambivalent in his opinion of illegal organisations which continue to hold guns and pose a threat to many of his constituents," continued Mr Dallat.

"As a former member of the Ulster Defence Regiment and a former office bearer in the British Legion Councillor Watton's interview has undermined his position as a member of Causeway Coast and Glens Council and in particular the participation of its members in the Policing and Safety Partnership."

Mr Dallat added: "This interview shows a complete lack of leadership, a total disregard for equality for all his constituents and rather than promoting good relations, it has done serious damage. There is a complete lack of respect especially for those who suffered at the hands of the UVF and other terror groups."

During the Troubles it is believed the UVF murdered more than 500 people. In 1971, 15 people were killed in the UVF bombing of McGurk's Bar, Belfast. The group had only been formed a few months earlier. According to the book *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* by Chris Thornton Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney and David McKittrick, the UVF and an affiliate group, the Red Hand Commando, killed 547 people between 1966 and 1999.

Many were killed in high-profile attacks. By the mid-1970s a vicious UVF unit known as the Shankill Butchers was engaged in horrific sectarian killings.

In May 1974, the UVF was also suspected of planting bombs in Dublin and Monaghan which killed 33 people and in 1975 they shot dead three members of the Miami Show Band.

The County Derry Post endeavoured to get a response to Mr Dallat's comments from Councillor Watton, however at the time of going to print he had failed to respond.

NEWSBRIEFS

Desertmartin events

The following events will take place in the Parish Hall, Knocknagin Road, Desertmartin.

Tea Dance Friday 31st Music by Out Bound Express Dancing from 9-12pm.

Fundraiser: Come Dine With Us: is now re-scheduled for Sunday 22 Sept. Any Tickets that were purchased are still valid or if anyone wishes a refund contact 07887 614094.

Date for your dairy Keep Sunday 3rd November. Free for Country music Concert. Sewing class: continues Friday evenings 7-9pm spaces available Please contact 07866381473.

Crochet class: Thursday night 7-9pm with tutor Mary. 6week block cost £25.

Experienced teacher will offer Speech and Drama and communication skill 6 week block for 5/6 yrs olds cost £50 for 7yrs upwards, block will cost £60. Limited 10 Children per sessions.

Exam Qualifications if anyone interested. Please contact 07887614094.

Tuesday evenings Yoga: with Paula at 7:30pm Next block commences Tuesday 4th June. Open to ladies and gen cost £25 for 4 weeks to be paid on first class.

Advice Ni: Next clinic 14th June 1-4pm for appointment contact outreach officer 02892448738.

Sperrin Vintage Club

Sperrin Vintage are holding their annual Vintage Day on Sunday, June 2nd at An Rath Dubh from 2-6pm.

Display of vintage and classic vehicles, musical entertainment, various stalls etc. Car boot welcome.

Proceeds to charity.

Kilrea bridge results

S Fyfe & M Diamond

J & K McAllister

M & C Collier

J & B Kearney

Bridge as usual this Sunday 2nd June at 7pm in the Marian Hall.

A6 Roadworks project sees 17,000 homes and businesses lose broadband power

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Approximately 17,000 homes and businesses across the Mid-Ulster region were left without broadband on Friday.

It has been confirmed that a fibre cable had been cut mistakenly by contractors working on the A6 project.

The issue became known at lunchtime on Friday when homeowners and local businesses became affected with the loss of broadband and a slowed connection.

Banks were also affected as ATMs running on data lost connection, leaving customers not being able to withdraw money.

Local shops were also hit by the broadband glitch as transactions and card machines

would not process payments.

Some shop and business owners took to social media to warn customers that they could only accept cash payments. Locals also vented frustration as one BT customer posted on Facebook that 'this has happened more than once now'.

BT responded very quickly and broadband connection was restored to homes and businesses by 9pm on Friday evening.

Local SDLP Councillor Kerri Anne Hughes welcomed the quick response of the telecommunications provider.

"I became aware of the disruption of internet connection after numerous phone calls from local people and business owners. After speaking to BT on several occasions on Friday, I was informed about a break in

one of BT's networks due to the ongoing A6 Roadworks project. BT engineers very quickly went on site and worked on a solution, meaning that the majority of people were back to full service within a number of hours," she said.

"As a community, we rely on fast broadband for everything from emails and online shopping to card payments in stores and ATM transactions. I am pleased that BT were able to fix the break in service, so that local people and businesses were able to function as normal on Saturday. I have also been in contact with the Department of Infrastructure who are in charge of the scheme to ensure that proper care and precaution is taken by contractors to make sure that this issue does not arise again in the future."



Pupils from Termoncanice Primary School, Limavady hard at work enjoying the poetry workshop during the recent P6 Taster Day at Loreto College.

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