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*Chief constable selection procedure query.*

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By Colin O'Carroll

THE Alliance Party has criticised the Police Authority method of selecting a new chief constable as "unusual for a body of this sort" and said the authority had a big credibility problem and needed reform.

Alliance Party legal affairs spokesman Steve McBride said: "In most bodies of this sort the appointment is a matter for the full board."

Only nine members of the authority - fewer than half the total - conducted yesterday's interviews.

"For example I've been involved in the

selection of the chief executive for Belfast city council and it's the full relevant committee involved in that context, which is a very large body.

"I think that's the normal way these things are done rather than drawing a particular panel, because the Police Authority has a difficulty at the best of times in ensuring that it is representative, and if you reduce the numbers involved in the selection procedure then there clearly are potential difficulties."

Mr McBride said that a ballot of the whole authority would be a better method.

"It would seem to be reasonable in an appointment of this importance that the full body would have been involved in the selection procedure.

"Obviously nine drawn from a larger body which already has some problems satisfying people that it is a fully representative body, it seems a very odd way of going about doing it.

"I would say that the Police Authority has had a lot of criticism over the years, it's had a lot of difficulties this year - they've been in terrible difficulties.

"There must be a question mark about the future role and how best some such body can perform that role.

"It is a body which frankly at this stage probably has relatively limited public credibility.

"We have consistently said that there needs to be changes made, particularly in the direction of greater accountability."

Mr McBride said that this could then lead to greater acceptability.

"That basically has to be part of the exercise.

"The Police Authority is seen by many members of the public as being a not very effective body and there is a need for a body which provides an effective measure of public accountability for the

police and it's not clear that the Police Authority in its present constituted form is carrying out that role to the satisfaction of many members of the public.

"So there's a fair amount that has to be done there."

Tom Campbell of Families Against Intimidation and Terror, said that his organisation would try to work with whoever was selected as the new top police officer.

"I suppose the message from Fait is that we'll wait and see who the new chief constable is to be and we'll want to work with those who are committed to

upholding the law.

"It's been a concern of ours that violence and intimidation has been increasing and the authority of the police certainly had some damage caused as a result of the activities of Drumcree.

"At the end of the day there may need to be a more accountable system for governing the police.

"The Police Authority do what they can, but clearly that's the system in operation - we would have our own views on the future of policing and we are at the present time considering a paper on that."

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