

Omagh Bombing Inquiry: Explainer document Protocol for the commemorative and personal statement hearings

June 2024

Introduction

This document has been produced to support the Omagh Bombing Inquiry Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings. More information can be read in the Protocol accompanying this document. If you have any further queries, please contact enquiries@omagh.independent-inquiry.uk.

What are commemorative hearings?

Commemorative hearings can be a key part of statutory inquiries and normally take place at the start of the inquiry process. Commemorative hearings differ for every inquiry and are very much led by submissions and the context of each inquiry. They allow the Chairman to hear directly from those most affected by the bombing, so he can understand the terrible consequences people suffered because of the bomb.

As part of the Omagh Bombing Inquiry the Chairman plans for the hearings to commemorate publicly those who were killed as a result of the bombing and to hear the impact that the Omagh Bombing had on individuals and communities. For this reason, the Inquiry is referring to its commemorative hearings as Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings.

This information is key in supporting the Chairman's approach to the later stages of the Inquiry.

What is involved in a commemorative hearing?

There are a range of ways people can contribute to the Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings depending on the preferences of those who wish to participate and how people were impacted. Contributions fall into two categories:

Pen portraits – will commemorate the individuals who were killed in the Omagh Bombing on 15th August 1998. This can take various forms from written statements, videos, audio presentations or even a photo presentation. Support is available to produce this. Details are included in the protocol document.

Personal statements – provide an opportunity for individuals who were injured or directly impacted by the bombing to publicly explain the impact that the bombing had on their lives. Personal statements will be collected in a written statement.

What type of information should I include?

The purpose of Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings is to commemorate those who were killed in the bombing and to understand the affect of the bombing on those who were injured. The Chairman cannot hear any evidence which seeks to apportion blame or discusses the preventability of the bombing during this part of the Inquiry. These issues are the focus of the evidential hearings which will occur later in the

Inquiry. The evidence should focus on the personal aspects of individuals and the impact of the bombing.

Who can take part?

Anyone who was affected by the Omagh Bombing can apply to take part in the Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings. However, the decision to participate in the Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings is the personal decision of each individual and family member on whether or how you wish to participate.

How do I provide a Pen Portrait?

If you wish to provide a Pen Portrait on behalf of a loved one who was killed as a result of the bombing in Omagh on 15th August 1998, please write to the Solicitor to the Inquiry via email (solicitors@omagh.independent-inquiry.uk) or letter (Omagh Bombing Inquiry, Colby House, Stranmillis Court, Belfast, BT9 5BF) by Monday 9th September including details of:

- The format of the pen portrait e.g. written statement, video presentation and whether any support is required to produce this.

And

- Who will be providing the statement or contributing to the audio/ video presentation.

Final versions of the pen portraits must be submitted to the Solicitor to the Inquiry by Friday 1st of November. More details are available in the Protocol for the commemorative and personal hearings.

How do I provide a personal statement?

A personal statement must be completed in a written witness statement form. A witness statement template is appended to the Commemorative Hearing Protocol. The statement should provide details about what happened to you on 15th August 1998 and what the subsequent impact has been.

Individuals wishing to submit personal statements must inform the Solicitor to the Inquiry via email (solicitors@omagh.independent-inquiry.uk) or letter (Omagh Bombing Inquiry, Colby House, Stranmillis Court, Belfast, BT9 5BF) of their wish to do so by Monday 9th September and the statement to be submitted to the inquiry by Friday 1st November.

What are the timescales?

For both the pen portraits and personal statements individuals will need to indicate to the Solicitor to the Inquiry of their wish to do so.

Closing dates for pen portrait and personal statements.

Pen portrait

Expression of interest closing date	Monday 9 th September
Submission closing date	Friday 1 st November

Personal Statement

Expression of interest closing date	Monday 9 th September
Submission closing date	Friday 1 st November

The protocol document says things like ‘witnesses’ and ‘statements’. Will I be required to give evidence to a judge? What if I don’t feel comfortable doing this?

A statutory inquiry is a legal process, and the Inquiry must follow legal protocol. This can sometimes mean that legal terms are used in documents such as witness or evidence.

The Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings are an important part of the Inquiry process and evidence collected during the Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings will inform the future direction of the Inquiry and the final report. However, it differs from later stages of the Inquiry process.

No-one will be compelled to provide evidence as part of the Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings and no-one will be cross examined or challenged during the process. There are a range of ways in which an individual can contribute to the Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearings which have been set out above.

Can evidence be grouped together?

If possible, it is recommended that contributions about individuals or impacted communities are grouped together. This could mean families or communities gathering around spokespeople or multiple people contributing to a single pen portrait or personal statement.

Further information

You can read more on the Omagh Bombing Inquiry Website on Commemorative Hearings and the wider work of the Inquiry in the [FAQ section](#).