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fair, and many will say that Butler had his chance to be leader in 2019, 2021 and 2024 but didn't take it. Jon Burrows has every right as a UUP representative to put his hat into the ring for the leadership.

The fundamental problems that have besieged UUP leaders throughout the years remain – the party's poor leadership structures, the party's poor election machine and the party's general inability to define what it stands for. The solution to each of those requires fundamental changes to the UUP's constitution.

The lesson of Doug Beattie's resignation in 2024 was clear: a UUP leader will only succeed in shaping the party's narrative if they challenge their internal critics head on.

The new UUP leader has 12 months to make a dire election campaign into a valiant effort from their party. That includes reducing the number of UUP candidates to the bare minimum in each constituency to end the mad idea that the UUP can compete with their rivals for two or three seats in one area.

Simple changes in election tactics like this could make a bad election result into a huge moral boost for a flailing party.

Whoever succeeds at becoming the next UUP leader, their job will not be easy.

Edward Ferrin, Belfast BT14

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Austen Morgan



Boutcher should be sacked over his handling of Kenova

If Jon Boutcher, the chief constable of the PSNI, had behaved in England, Scotland or Wales, as he has done in Northern Ireland since 2016, he would have been sacked – aka permitted to resign.

Consider the indictment. First, in operation Kenova, he took over nine years and £50 million, to investigate only a selection of Troubles deaths that has perpetuated the imbalance on legacy – an imbalance that works against police officers.

He submitted dozens of files to prosecutors. How many prosecutions did he get? One: of Martin McCauley for the killing of three RUC officers in Lurgan in 1982.

McCauley, if he attends court, and is tried and convicted, will be looking at a maximum sentence of two years: there is a high probability he has a comfort letter, considering the numbers of them (given to at least 187 of 228 supporters of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness who applied to the Northern Ireland Office. I wrote a book about that secret scheme of Tony Blair's to appease the IRA.

Second, by addressing the problem of legacy through a sentimental focus on a random group of victims, selected by the courts, Boutcher trifled with the feelings of some 3,750 families, who suffered bereavements during the Troubles, the great majority of whom are not getting such an extensive probe.

Every time a case from the past is discussed on broadcasts or social media, thousands of viewers think about their personal circumstances...sometimes none too compassionately towards those grieving relatives whom Boutcher helped to get special focus, with their team of publicly funded legacy practitioners. The BBC has facilitated this by doing nothing to aid the understanding of legacy but instead adopting a news value of victimhood, especially if the UK state is being blamed.

Third, in a recent case before the Supreme Court, the UK's highest court, called Thompson, Boutcher lost out to Hilary Benn, over who – the chief constable or the secretary



Jon Boutcher, with Sir Iain Livingstone (left), needs to be grilled by MPs on Kenova's cost

of state – was ultimately responsible for national security.

Boutcher had wanted to do away with 'neither confirm nor deny' (NCND) in his bailiwick, the policy in which the state will never confirm that someone was or was not an informer. This is a key part of the social contract between the state and agents who work for it, and is crucial in defeating terrorism. The handling of agents is now under legislation (which was not the position in the Troubles).

To be fair to Boutcher, he did not choose this random selection of killings to investigate. The PSNI, struggling with legacy, and with no leadership from any government before 2020, put together a portfolio of cases under pressure from the courts.

First, there was Freddie Scappaticci, whom Boutcher is moving mountains to identify as 'Stakeknife'. Scappaticci lived under the protection of the army after 2003, and died in Surrey – under the name Frank Cowley – in 2023. The IRA never tracked him down to get their revenge. And Boutcher also failed, even over a prosecution in London for animal pornography, when Scappaticci was alive.

Second, there was Jean Smyth-Campbell, killed in west Belfast in 1972. In 2021, in a Supreme Court case called McQuillan, the justices ruled that there was no human right to an effective investigation

He campaigned on naming informers, a political question which isn't the remit of a police officer, and lost totally in UK's top court

for her relatives. The legal reason was a domestic line of legacy legal cases about state killings, called McKerr, trumping a Strasbourg line, which focussed on the Human Rights Act 1998 not entering into force until October 2000.

Third, the 1982 killing of three police officers, which led to Martin McCauley being extradited unusually by Dublin in January 2025, only to be given bail by a NI court.

And fourth, the so-called Glenanne gang and its purported 127 victims. OM December 2025, Hilary Benn used the term 'Ulster Volunteer Force Glenanne gang' in the House of Commons. But Boutcher, in the final report, had revealed that there was no gang: '[The involvement in sectarian attacks by] members of the security forces was shocking, but we did not see any evidence that it [was] strategic'.

Boutcher's interim report of October 2023 (just before he was made

chief constable) and the final report of December 2025, signed off by Sir Iain Livingstone, is doused embarrassingly in Boutcher self-regard: 'Kenova has from the outset put the interests of victims and families at the heart of its approach. We learned that an outcome through the criminal justice process may in fact not always be achievable ... Kenova detectives prioritised listening and being responsive to questions unanswered for decades.'

All through the report, Boutcher in effect says 'what a good boy am I'.

He has campaigned on NCND, a highly political question which is not the remit of a senior police officer. It is one thing for the identity of an informer to become widely known, perhaps because they admit it. It is quite another for the state to confirm their identity because that makes informers who never want to be identified, not even after death, less likely to come forward. Republicans, including dissidents, want to shatter that system.

The UK's highest court understood this. Given that Jon Boutcher has declined so far to resign following the his devastating loss in the Supreme Court, in which the judges were unanimous (the devastating nature of that loss was certainly not reflected in BBC reports), what could he do by way of expiation? He could seek to learn about the corrupted criminal justice system, by hosting seminars for his senior officers on how legacy might be more effectively tackled in ways that do not unfairly target them. That would involve a plurality of voices, and dumping reliance on the radical, anti security force activists with whom he appears to be besotted. Tomorrow MPs will question Jon Boutcher and Sir Ian Livingstone on their Kenova report. I trust that they will grill them on the huge cost of it, and how it has worsened the legacy imbalance against state forces.

• Dr Austen Morgan, a barrister, is author of Tony Blair and the IRA: The 'On The Run' Scandal. He is part of the Malone House Group, which challenges the unfair way legacy is examined