

Publication: Sunday World NI Edition

Date: Sunday, January 29, 2017

Page: 48

Extract: 1 of 2

Circulation: 49359

Author: STEPHEN LOONEY

Headline: BRIMSTONE HAD LINKS TO FUNDING



BRIMSTONE HAD LINKS TO FUNDING

By STEPHEN LOONEY

THE MAN at the heart of the current RHI scandal and the Red Sky controversy in 2013 was also behind the allocation of £36m of public funding for football stadia, the Sunday World can reveal.

Stephen Brimstone was former Sports Minister Nelson McCausland's Special Adviser (SPAD), back in 2011 when the department was in negotiations with the Irish FA.

IFA Chief Executive Patrick Nelson was asked by DCAL officials what projects might benefit from £36m of public funding to develop safe stadia, called the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.

Nelson was given 48 hours to come up with a document outlining projects that might be worthy of public funding, and the two clubs he said would merit funding were Glentoran and Crusaders.

The Stormont Assembly seized on his suggestions and used them as a framework to endorse the £36m of public funding at Executive level.

The IFA subsequently produced a revised document a year later, called the IFA Facilities Strategy (August 2012), and asked the Assembly to use this document instead of Nelson's hastily prepared 2011 document.

Ignored

However, the Assembly has rigidly stuck to the March 2011 suggestions and also ignored a consultation document on stadia funding drawn up by the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) in 2015.

The matter has been dragged out over the

last six years and an announcement was due from Department of Communities Minister Paul Givan in November of last year.

However, fears that the proposals were not robust enough and could be challenged in court led to the matter being passed to Attorney General John Larkin QC for guidance and advice.

The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scandal that broke late last year prompted the collapse of the Assembly, leaving football clubs in limbo.

The Sunday World contacted Mr Nelson on two occasions to discuss the thorny matter but received no reply.

Today, we reveal

that the man who was accused of being 'deliberately evasive' by a Stormont Committee looking into the Red Sky affair was heavily involved in the production of the 2011 funding suggestions.

"Stephen Brimstone was certainly involved in it," said a source with intimate knowledge of the matter. "It was Brimstone who came to the IFA.

"He was the messenger, Nelson was asked could he put something together very quickly, and he worked very closely with the DUP at the time.

"Nelson McCausland was the DUP Sports Minister at the time and Brimstone accompanied him to a few Northern Ireland matches at Windsor Park.

"There was a lot of sympathy for Nelson at the time because he was desperate for funding in football here and was put under a lot of pressure.

"The feeling at the time was that officials from the Minister's department pulled him onto a punch, Nelson knew he had been caught and tried to rectify things with the 2012 document, but by then it was too late."

Mr Brimstone quit his £92,000 post as Special Adviser to First Minister Arlene Foster in November of last year to work in the private sector.

The Fermanagh native this week refused to comment on allegations made under parliamentary privilege that he was using a non-domestic RHI boiler to heat his own home in County Antrim.

In the 2011 document drawn up by Nelson, Glentoran were earmarked to receive at least £10m of funding while rival clubs were limited to a maximum of £3m.

Publication: Sunday World NI Edition

Date: Sunday, January 29, 2017

Page: 48

Extract: 2 of 2

Circulation: 49359

Author: STEPHEN LOONEY

Headline: BRIMSTONE HAD LINKS TO FUNDING



QUESTIONS: IFA chief executive Patrick Nelson