

Waterford journalist cleared of plot to illegally leak stories

Family speak of 'unnecessary pain, suffering and trauma'



Cleared: Waterford native Clodagh Hartley. Inset: her father John.

A Waterford born journalist was last week cleared of plotting with a UK government press officer to illegally leak stories. Clodagh Hartley (40), the former Whitehall Editor of The Sun and originally from Grantstown, was cleared at the Old Bailey of paying a press officer from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) £17,000 for tip-offs over three years which included details of Alistair Darling's 2010 budget. The mother of two, who lives in Brockley, London, had been arrested in 2012 as part of Operation Elveden investigating corrupt payments at various newspapers. Now, Ms Hartley's family are calling for the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police to launch an investigation into their own actions and have criticised Rupert Murdoch's News International. Ms Hartley, daughter of John and Kathleen, attended St Angela's Secondary School and studied Journalism at University of South Wales. "The prosecution brought by the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police (Scotland Yard) caused much unnecessary pain, suffering and trauma to Clodagh and her good husband John, his parents, and of course to Kathleen, myself and family," said Ms Hartley's father John. Speaking with The Munster Express, Mr Hartley also claimed his daughter had been made a scapegoat by News International. "I always understood that good journalistic practice was never to disclose sources. Of course Clodagh did not disclose her sources but senior personnel in Murdoch's News International freely handed over her emails, texts and other information to the police. This led to the prosecution," he said. A paper trail discovered that payments had been made to Press Officer Jonathan Hall including £750 for a story on Alistair Darling's budget. Prosecutors also said Mr Hall was paid £500 for a story about celebrities being paid to publicise a government website. Ms Hartley said the March 2010 budget leak was in the "public interest" and it was important to highlight before the government had a chance to "spin" it. Her defence team said it would be wrong to convict Ms Hartley of a plot to commit a criminal act as she was only doing her job. However, Mr Hall is due to be sentenced in February for misconduct. Ms Hartley thanked the Old Bailey jury after being cleared of conspiracy to commit misconduct in public office. The decision was widely welcomed by journalists in the UK, with many expressing unhappiness at Ms Hartley's treatment from her former employer, the Rupert Murdoch owned News International. Respected media commentator Roy Greenslade, who gave evidence in Ms Hartley's defence, said he was delighted with the verdict and described it as a "landmark decision". He insisted the leaks were the "lifeblood" of political journalism in Britain and said the cultivation of sources was a key part of the job. Ms Hartley said she had no plans to return to journalism. "Clodagh, like all our family, is a survivor and will be fine. But note what she said in court: 'I will not return to journalism'. The odd circumstances that led to her arrest, her time on police bail and the following years of stress awaiting trial have coloured

her noble decision. Who are the losers? Rupert Murdoch and his cohorts at News UK,” said Mr Hartley, who is a former Slieverue and Kilkenny hurler and former Chair of the Board of Governors at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). He added: “Clodagh is innocent and has been cleared. She did nothing wrong. Clodagh, or any of her siblings, would never do anything wrong.” Ms Hartley plans to visit Waterford this week to spend time with her family.