

Alleged criminal tarred and feathered in vigilante attack

Thair Shaikh

An alleged drug dealer was tarred and feathered while tied to a lamppost by two hooded men in a paramilitary-style vigilante attack in Belfast.

The assault, reminiscent of IRA-style retribution in the 1970s, took place in a loyalist stronghold in the south of the city and was blamed by locals on a lack of police action against the victim, said to be a local man in his 30s.

Bystanders on the Taughmonagh estate on Sunday evening captured the incident on mobile phone cameras and a series of pictures showed a man pouring tar on

to the victim. Another man is then seen emptying bags of white feathers on the man's head as women and children looked on. A placard is then hung around his neck with the words "I'm a drug dealing scum bag".

The Ulster Defence Association, which has a strong presence on the estate and has been issued with an ultimatum from the Stormont government to abandon violence and give up its guns, denied any involvement in the incident.

Frankie Gallagher of the Ulster Political Research Group, which represents the political wing of the group, said: "The UDA told the local community to go to the police about this.

"The community responded in the way it did because it had no confidence in the police." Police were given information but failed to intervene, he said.

Alban Maginness, a nationalist SDLP Assembly member, said the organisation was to blame. "It is clear that it was an element of the UDA which was responsible for this. These things are not done spontaneously by the community. It would seem to be a very provocative act," he said.

However, Mr Gallagher insisted the attack should have no bearing on the government ultimatum. Margaret Ritchie, the social development minister in Northern Ireland, has given the UDA a 60-day deadline to deliver otherwise a £1.2m



The alleged drug dealer after the attack

conflict-transformation grant earmarked for loyalist areas will be withheld. "This type of behaviour has no place in a civilised society," she said.

A police spokesman said that when police arrived at the scene the victim had left and no one had come forward.

"There was no place in civilised society for people taking the law into their own hands resulting in such a brutal and barbaric attack," he said. "We have been working closely with local community groups to try and address these issues and find solutions. If people have concerns and grievances about what is happening in their local community they should bring that evidence to the police."