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McKeivitt to delay defence

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CONVICTED terror chief Michael McKeivitt is to delay his defence in the Omagh bomb civil action until an IRA informer gives evidence against him.

Lawyers for McKeivitt (58, were due to begin attempts this week to counter allegations that he was among five

men responsible for the atrocity which killed 29 people and unborn twins.

Those plans have been put on hold until after Sean O'Callaghan, a former republican jailed for two murders, testifies at the High Court trial in Belfast.

O'Callaghan is due to be called next month to try to prove a series of claims he has made against McKeivitt.

One of these involves allegations that the pair attended a meeting with other senior Provisionals in the mid-1980s to discuss buying deer-hunting rifles to kill soldiers and police officers.

O'Callaghan, a special branch agent who says he was once in charge of the IRA's southern command, is also to be questioned about his claims that he issued instructions for McKeivitt to stop taking vehicles from a Provisional IRA car pool without permission.

A further issue which lawyers for the Omagh victims families have been given permission to explore with him centres on allegations that a former IRA chief of staff told him he wanted McKeivitt voted onto the paramilitary organisation's executive.

O'Callaghan, originally from Tralee, Co Kerry, but now living in London, was sentenced to two life terms and 529 years' imprisonment for terrorist offences including the murders of a soldier and police officer. He was later released from prison under a royal prerogative.

His evidence, based on a statement submitted to the court, will result in the multi-million pound compensation case which opened in April stretching into the new year.

McKeivitt is being sued along with Liam Campbell, Seamus McKenna, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly.

All five men deny responsibility for the August 1998 Real IRA attack which resulted in the worst single massacre of the Northern Ireland conflict.

McKeivitt has been instructing his legal team from the

Republic's high-security Portlaoise Jail where he is serving a 20-year sentence for directing terrorism.

Video-link facilities have been installed in his cell to allow him to follow proceedings in Belfast.

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