



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Social Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into allegations, arising from a BBC NI 'Spotlight' programme aired on 3 July 2013, of impropriety or irregularity relating to NIHE-managed contracts and consideration of any resulting actions:
Briefing by the Minister for Social Development

12 December 2013

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Ms Paula Bradley
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Michael Copeland
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Fra McCann

Witnesses:

Mr McCausland Minister for Social Development

The Chairperson: The Minister is here this morning and has provided the Committee with a briefing. I invite you to speak to that briefing.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am happy to be here today and to cooperate with any aspect of the inquiry, not just in this phase, but also in the next two phases.

The Committee invited me here today to hear oral evidence in respect of strand two of the Committee's terms of reference and asked that that evidence should contain details of my knowledge of the meeting on 16 April 2012 and the drafting of the letter of 24 May 2012 to the Chairman of the Committee, which was in reply to the Chairman's letter to me dated 16 May 2012 in relation to the review of the specification for the double-glazing programme.

I will begin with the meeting on 16 April 2012. That meeting was arranged to discuss the Programme for Government target to have all Housing Executive homes double-glazed by March 2015. This was a subject close to my heart, because, within a short time of coming into office, I quickly recognised that, while the previous focus had been on the newbuild programme, it was essential that I ensured that the upkeep of existing homes and the need for Housing Executive maintenance work to continue was also a priority.

I have had many approaches, both in my constituency office and as a Minister, from tenants who believe that the provision of double glazing to their home would raise their standard of living in terms

of heating, energy efficiency and fuel poverty. I am sure that members of the Committee have had similar approaches in their constituency offices. That is why I ensured, through the commitment that the Northern Ireland Executive gave in the Programme for Government, that the thermal efficiency of all Housing Executive properties would be improved by March 2015 through the provision of double glazing.

If the meeting on 16 April 2012 had not been referred to in the 'Spotlight' programme, or this inquiry was not taking place, I admit that I would probably struggle to remember who was at the meeting, especially taking into account the number of meetings that I have as Minister. For example, I have already received over 580 invitations this year alone, and that gives some indication of the number of meetings and the scope of the work that we do. However, I have a clear recollection of what the meeting was about and the discussion at the meeting, which focused on the potential for significant savings if the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines were followed in the double-glazing programme.

The only thing that was of major significance to me at that time was what the meeting was about and not who was there. The representatives at the meeting referred on a number of occasions to their strong association with the Glass and Glazing Federation, and with all the discussion at the meeting focused on the Glass and Glazing Federation and its guidelines, I therefore believed that the representatives there were, in fact, representing the Glass and Glazing Federation and its interests. If they were not doing so, it had no bearing for me on the discussion at the meeting or the follow-up action that was taken afterwards by my officials in order to review the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines to identify significant savings.

The Committee has been provided with a copy of a note of the meeting. This was an internal note that my private secretary prepared in order to keep some degree of an internal private office record of the meeting. As is the usual process, the note was drafted and was then amended to more accurately reflect the discussion. As I, at that time, believed that the attendees were representing the Glass and Glazing Federation, the note was finalised to reflect that position.

I should say that it is only as a result of the document discovery process as part of this inquiry that I became aware, in very recent days, of this process and that there were drafts of any such meeting note.

I would advise the Committee at this stage that I did not have any previous connection with the attendees. Whilst I am aware of Turkington Holdings as a company, I have had no association with them either then or now. I have also never sought to hide or deny who was at the meeting, particularly in relation to the attendance of Jim McKeag and Ian Young of Turkington Holdings. For example, the note of the meeting at the outset states:

"Ian advised his company Turkington Holdings".

I also answered an Assembly question for written answer in September 2012, which clearly stated that the managing director and general manager of Turkington Holdings were at the meeting.

Let me be frank: there was in no way any attempt by me as Minister to mislead or to misinform in any way anyone around the fact that this meeting took place, who attended or the capacity in which they were there. I also requested that the appropriate officials attended to listen to the issues that were being raised and to ensure that proper process was followed and that actions, if any, were followed through on.

As I already said, it did not matter to me who was at the meeting or who they represented, whether it was Turkington Holdings, the Glass and Glazing Federation or, indeed, any other company. I would have held the meeting, and the follow-on actions and the outcome would have remained the same.

The role of the DSD housing official who attended was to listen to the discussion and, if necessary or relevant, to take forward any actions that I might require. As a result, the following day, he raised the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines with professional staff with the necessary technical expertise and asked them to review the guidelines.

Let me now deal with the drafting of the letter to the Chairman of the Committee, which issued on 24 May 2012. I received a letter from you, Chairman, dated 16 May 2012, which was a month after the meeting had been held. As per the usual process, my private office asked officials to consider the contents of the letter and to draft an appropriate reply to the letter for my consideration.

When the draft reply was received in my office, it was my understanding that, and I genuinely believed it at that time, while staff from Turkington Holdings Limited were at the meeting, they were not representing the interests of that firm but, rather, were representing the interests of the Glass and Glazing Federation. Therefore, it was entirely right, in my view at that time, that I sought for the reference to Turkington Holdings to be reconsidered and amended.

As is normal practice when I clear letters, I queried the reference to Turkington Holdings, suggesting that it should refer to the Glass and Glazing Federation. I also queried whether the meeting with Fusion21 should be included, as I had a recollection that, when I met them, similar matters were discussed.

In relation to the inclusion of Fusion21, it is correct to say that I did have a meeting with them and, therefore, thought perhaps that it would be appropriate to include this in the letter. Indeed, after the meeting in April with Fusion21, they again contacted my officials in early May in relation to the double-glazing programme prior to the letter to you, Chairman.

My request to have the draft letter amended was forwarded by my private office to the official who had drafted the letter to consider and amend the draft accordingly. It would be normal process within the Department for officials to consider amendments coming from the private office and, if necessary, come back via the private office with any concerns and suggestions. No concerns were raised. As a result, when I received the amended letter back from the official, I noted the amendments and signed it, and it was issued to you, Chairman, on 24 May 2012.

I am also aware that, in relation to the letter, you raised with my official at the inquiry session on 14 November the fact that in a following paragraph it states:

"As a result of this meeting".

That naturally implies that, in the preceding sentence, there was only one meeting, which included the chief executive of the Housing Executive, the Glass and Glazing Federation and Fusion21. My official advised the Committee on 14 November that he:

"should have changed the first four words of the next paragraph. I missed that."

The questioning from the Committee about that sentence implies that there was something sinister going on, or a potential cover-up. That could not be further from the truth. The truth is that it was an oversight or an inadvertent mistake — plain and simple. When the sentence was changed to include Fusion21, the following sentence should have been changed to read "these meetings" rather than "this meeting". My official did not notice that. I did not notice it either. I looked at the letter, saw that an amendment had been made and signed the letter.

I did not imagine at the time that a series of simple errors could lead us to this point. I doubt that any one of us here today could say that they have not made mistakes in letters, whether minor technical typing errors, grammatical errors or changing one part of a letter and forgetting to check whether that should be reflected elsewhere. Indeed, when I was reading these notes this morning, I noticed that I had also made a mistake overnight in amending something and correcting it inappropriately. The fact is that, in your own letter to me on 16 May there was a typing error, albeit a minor one, in the penultimate paragraph. That is just human nature; these things happen.

Mistakes are made mainly because we are very busy dealing with a number of things at any one time. My officials and I have a considerable amount of correspondence to deal with, and therefore handle many different issues in a day. In fact, my private office can receive over 130 e-mails a day. To date this year, there have been over 4,400 pieces of correspondence, including reports, briefings, letters and Assembly questions. Some of those reports and submissions can run to several hundred pages. I should, for the record, point out that, in the month of April 2012, 397 papers and pieces of correspondence crossed my desk. In May, the number was 551. I had a total of 126 meetings over those two months. Taking account of the sheer volume of correspondence etc that goes through my office, errors — even just simple typing errors — can be missed.

Let me be clear again: whoever was at the meeting on 16 April, it was immaterial to me at that time. My focus was simply on the double-glazing programme, the review of the specifications in line with the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines, and the potential for significant savings to the public purse. The issue of who was actually at the meeting was not of such great significance at that time as others seem to place on it now. However, in considering where we are now, in light of the witness evidence

given to date and the recent document discovery exercise in my Department, I realise and acknowledge that I inadvertently unintentionally misinformed the Committee in the letter. Let me assure you that that was not in any way deliberate. I realise that there has been confusion around the letter and the meetings referred to in it. However, I never sought to hide the fact that staff from Turkington's were at the meeting on 16 April. I simply believed that they were representing the interests of the Glass and Glazing Federation. I also held a meeting with Fusion21 seven days later. That is why I subsequently made my position clear on the meetings held with the Glass and Glazing Federation and Fusion21. I advised the Assembly on 8 July about that error, and I issued a revised written answer to set out clearly the position, which was that there were two separate meetings: one on 16 April 2012 and one on 23 April 2012. There are also a further two written answers that clarify the dates and context of both meetings.

I meet many companies and many individuals in relation to many issues. Part of my role as Minister is to make myself available to serve all the people of Northern Ireland. It is a key part of my role and responsibilities as Minister to discharge the duties of my office. If an individual or organisation raises an issue with me that I believe should be investigated, particularly where it relates to my duty in relation to the stewardship of public funds, I will not be deterred from doing so.

Let me also say that neither I nor my Department have any role in the tendering and letting process of any contracts. Therefore, there was nothing to be gained by anyone in relation to that meeting, other than significant savings to the public purse and less disruption to tenants when work is being carried out on their homes. My aim in relation to the double-glazing programme has always been to ensure that the Programme for Government target to double-glaze all Housing Executive homes by 2015 is met, whilst ensuring best value for money and meeting industry standards. Although much is being made now about the status of those who attended the meeting in April 2012 and the subsequent wording of the letter in May to the Chairman, that was entirely due to my genuine belief at the time that the attendees represented the Glass and Glazing Federation and to the errors in the subsequent typing of the letter in which the Committee was inadvertently misinformed about the meetings that I held in April.

This phase of the inquiry is focused on allegations that the Committee was misled over the decision to seek a review of the specification of the supply and fitting of double glazing. Let me be clear: there was no intention to mislead the Committee. In hindsight I accept that I inadvertently and unintentionally misinformed the Committee about the attendees of the meeting that was held on 16 April. At the time, the priority for me was the delivery of the Programme for Government double-glazing commitment, that was announced in November 2011, in the most economical and efficient manner possible. That was first and foremost in my mind. In a context in which the Housing Executive advised that approximately 48,000 properties required double glazing at a cost in excess of £100 million, I was made aware that using an industry standard approach could save money and cause less disruption. I am sure, therefore, that the Committee can understand why I pursued this issue with my officials and the Housing Executive rather than being concerned with who was at the meeting. Thank you, Chairman.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you, Minister. Before I bring in other members I want to make a couple of points. First, I take it from your evidence that you accept full responsibility for changing the record of the meeting from a meeting with Turkington representatives to a meeting with Glass and Glazing Federation representatives. Do you accept that?

Mr McCausland: In my introductory remarks, I stated clearly that I only became aware of the various iterations and the fact that there were iterations at all in the past few weeks and as a result of the discovery process of this inquiry. I had never seen the early iterations before and I was not aware that they even existed.

It would perhaps be helpful if I draw a distinction between meetings of a very formal nature — for example, yesterday I met with the Housing Executive about a performance review; there will be minutes of that, they are circulated to everyone, we see them, they see them, they are they are circulated and agreed and there is an agreed agenda. Those are different from more informal meetings at which an issue is discussed, because quite often I go into meetings and I do not know what the person I am meeting wants to go into detail about. I did not see the note of the *[Inaudible.]* until sometime early last year — sorry, earlier this year. It was a considerable time afterwards — maybe nine or 10 months; I am not sure exactly — but it was sometime earlier this year that I saw that for the first time. I had never seen the note of the meeting until then.

The Chairperson: You see, what goes to the heart of this — I have to say that nobody around this table is inferring anything; we are following the evidence.

Mr McCausland: Sure.

The Chairperson: The evidence that has been presented to us thus far tells us that not one single person, not one single iteration of the aide-memoire that was produced by Barbara McConaghie and not one piece of oral evidence that has been provided to the Committee has said anything other than the people who were at that meeting represented Turkington Holdings Limited. Not least, during their evidence session, the representatives of Turkington's were at pains to point out to this Committee that they made it very clear that they represented themselves and nobody else.

In your evidence, you said that you were not really all that concerned about who the attendees were at the meeting. However, I suggest that if you read the four draft versions, including the final version of the aide-memoire from Barbara McConaghie, at no time is the Glass and Glazing Federation mentioned until the final and fourth version of the draft. In her written submission, Barbara McConaghie tells us that, normally, when she does an aide-memoire, she sends it to a lead official, who, in this case, in her words, was Michael Sands. In the second iteration of that aide-memoire, we see Michael Sands's name, which had been omitted from the first as an attendee at the meeting. We have a number of tracked changes for three drafts, and then we have a final version, which completely and utterly rewrites the first aide-memoire. Barbara McConaghie, in her written advice to the Committee, said that it would not be normal for her to be requested to change an aide-memoire, and she cannot recall who advised her or requested the changes. Minister, the changes were not technical; they were not clerical or administrative errors; they are not typos. It is a complete rewrite to delete any reference to Turkington Holdings Ltd and to replace the reference of the attendees to reflect the Glass and Glazing Federation.

I also draw your attention to the e-mail correspondence between Susan McCarty in the private office and the Housing Executive in relation to their request to change their reference to who attended the meeting, from "Turkington Holdings Ltd" to the "Glass and Glazing Federation". That came from and through your office, in one instance, at least, from Susan McCarty. I suggest that, far from people not really caring or being interested or focused on who was attending, there was a very clear and concerted focus on ensuring that Turkington Holdings Ltd was deleted from the record of that meeting. I find that very hard to explain. I do not see that as a typo. I do not see it as a clerical error. I do not see it as an oversight, especially in light of the way in which the matter was dealt with. This matter was dealt with through a number of questions; it was dealt with through a television programme; it was dealt with by yourself here in the Committee meeting, after the 'Spotlight' programme, and, again, in the Chamber in the early debate. I have not had an explanation as to why you, Minister, can say to the Committee, this morning, that you had really no focus on who was attending, yet all the effort has gone into, not changing the substance of the meeting, but changing entirely the representation of the Turkington Holdings Ltd to make sure that they were deleted from any reference to attending this meeting. I have not heard any explanation from yourself, Minister, this morning, to explain how that happened.

On the one hand, you are either not that focused on who is attending the meeting, or, on the other hand, somebody was focused sufficiently to make sure, after a number of iterations of an aide-memoire and a draft letter from Michael Sands to yourself, that, at the end, the result is that we have a complete rewrite and misrepresentation of who was at that meeting. I find that hard to square in my mind. Obviously, we will reflect when we get the entirety of the evidence, but I ask you this, specifically: do you accept that you changed the reference to Turkington's to the Glass and Glazing Federation? I think that you are saying that you did.

Mr McCausland: No, I had no sight of any of those versions or iterations; I did not even know that they existed.

Mr Allister: The Chairman is asking about the letter.

Mr McCausland: Sorry, the letter.

The Chairperson: You also advised the Committee that you sought to make the changes to the draft letter.

Mr McCausland: Sorry, that is quite a long question and —

The Chairperson: It is a simple question, Minister. Just so that we are very clear on what the question is — you are accepting that you wanted to reflect the meeting to represent that the people who were attending that meeting represented the Glass and Glazing Federation. I am saying to you that not one single other person had that as their recollection. In fact, it was made very clear to you that that is not who attended the meeting, yet you insisted on changing that. I do not think that we have heard an explanation as to why that was. I will give you another opportunity to do that.

Mr McCausland: There are two separate things here. First, there is the note of the meeting and, secondly, the letter. I will take them in turn, if I may. I suppose the third element is my own recollection of that, but the two *[Inaudible.]* are the letter and the note. I will take the note first, because it is the simplest one. I did not see the note until much later. I had no input into it. I do not know anything about whatever changes were made. It was not something that I was involved in, so I cannot comment on that. When meetings take place and a note is produced internally within the private office and put on file, it is very, very rare that I would ever ask for that, comment on it or want to see it. Normally, as in this case, the official from the Department, in this case Michael Sands, would be at the meeting. That person would then take their own record of *[Inaudible.]* and the actions that were to be followed through, and they would follow through on them. So, that is left with that person, and the other is put in a drawer, and, normally, I would never see it again. So, that is why I was not aware of it until much later and then also was not aware of the iterations. I did not even know that there were such until a matter of a couple of weeks ago. So, I had no role in regard to that.

As regards the letter, my recollection when I received the draft of the letter from Michael Sands — I have stated clearly that I was wrong — was that I genuinely believed at the time that the two gentleman were representing the interests of the Glass and Glazing Federation. I acknowledge now that that was incorrect. That was my belief at the time. The letter was then amended with a note saying to change it. I had written a note saying, "Please amend that accordingly". There is also a note saying, "Fusion21?". Those two comments, including the reference to Fusion21 with a question mark, were made on the letter. It was purely, as I believed, in the interests of accuracy that the change was to be made from "Turkington's" to "Glass and Glazing Federation". The other change was a suggestion in regard to completeness, because there was a meeting with Fusion21 a week later.

The Chairperson: Members, on page 66 of your tabled pack is the first iteration of the —

Mr McCausland: To be honest, I am at a slight disadvantage because —

The Chairperson: I am going to get a copy for you now, Minister. An official will hand it to him. Thank you.

Mr McCausland: Page 66, yes.

The Chairperson: Michael Sands was very clear in his evidence that he had provided a draft to you through the private office and received back —

Mr McCausland: The draft of the —

The Chairperson: The letter.

Mr McCausland: What I have in front of me on page 66 is the note.

The Chairperson: Sorry, the aide-memoire, yes. The point that I want to make is that that aide-memoire refers to a number of people who attended that meeting.

Mr McCausland: Correct.

The Chairperson: So, what we are being told by Barbara McConaghie, for example, in her written advice to this Committee is that she is not aware and cannot recall who would have requested her to change the content in respect of Turkington Holdings from the aide-memoire. Michael Sands, in his evidence, said that, when he provided a draft letter to you, he referred specifically to Turkington's and that, through the private office back from you, he was requested to change that. He accepted that that

was an inaccuracy, but you are now saying that you were not involved in any of that middle drafting to the final letter. So, can you suggest who, among that list of attendees, could have had any authority to redraft the aide-memoire or the letter to this Committee?

Mr McCausland: The two — the note and the letter — need to be taken separately. As regards the note, I can simply reiterate the fact that I did not see the note at the time. I did not become aware of its content until sometime early this year. I only became aware of the iterations in the past number of weeks.

The Chairperson: In your estimation, who among that list of attendees could have changed that? Who would have the authority to change the content of an aide-memoire or, indeed, a letter to this Committee?

Mr McCausland: I have no dealings with and no knowledge of the internal workings of the private office as regards how a document goes through a number of iterations.

The Chairperson: OK. As I said, we will return to that, because we have specific issues around the evidence provided by Barbara McConaghie and Michael Sands. We will return to that later in the meeting.

Mr Brady: Minister, just to reiterate what the Chairman has said, everyone else who gave evidence, including Turkington's and, indeed, the Glass and Glazing Federation, stated very clearly that Turkington's was representing Turkington's and not the Glass and Glazing Federation. The Glass and Glazing Federation confirmed that it had no representatives here. Turkington's said that it was a member of, and affiliated to, the Glass and Glazing Federation but made it very clear that it was there as Turkington's.

Just a couple of questions. At a previous meeting, a member here declared an interest and said that, in the previous election, Turkington's had supplied vehicles to your party. Now, you have said that you know the company but you have no association with it, so maybe you could give clarification on that, as it might be considered the elephant on the room.

The other question is in terms of protocols for contractors, terms of contracts and incentivisation. If a contractor comes up with an idea that can save money — in this case, you are saying that something in the region of £15 million to £20 million was saved — is there some sort of bonus scheme that contractors may benefit from if it is suggested that there are methods of saving money in particular types of contracts, as apparently was the case here?

It is very clear that, from all the evidence given, Turkington's was there to represent Turkington's; it was not there to represent the Glass and Glazing Federation. The issue around Fusion21 is that it also made it very clear that it was not at the meeting. I am not sure how anybody could question whether someone was at a meeting when they were not there. I think that you said you had a meeting with Fusion21 seven days later. To be reasonably clear, because it is based in Liverpool, as far as I know, and presumably the meeting was in Liverpool —

Mr McCausland: No, the meeting was in my office.

Mr Brady: They came here. At the same time, I am sure that with most meetings you go to and meetings that most of us go to, if there are people there who you do not know, there is a round of introductions so that people are fairly clear who is represented at the meeting and what the actual names of the people are and so on. Now, in this case, you are saying that Turkington's was there to represent the Glass and Glazing Federation, but it is very clear from all the other attendees that it was not. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr McCausland: There are about four points there, and I will go through them as best I can. If I miss something out, please take me back over it. I will be happy to do that.

Mr Brady raised the issue of some sort of bonus or benefit for someone if they come up with a good idea. No, that is not the case at all. In fact, in their submission to this Committee, the representatives of Turkington's were very clear that there was no possible financial gain in the course of this. All that might happen would be that, if there were savings — and there were substantial savings that we now know to be in the region of £15.1 million — those savings are savings to the system, to the Housing

Executive and to the public purse. There is not, was not and could not have been any financial benefit for that particular company. That just clarifies that.

Mr Brady: Just on that, Minister: I was not suggesting that there was. I just wanted clarification around the incentivisation.

Mr McCausland: I appreciate that. It is an important point to clarify; I agree with that entirely.

In retrospect or in hindsight, when I look back on this, it is clear that I was wrong. I was wrong in my belief that the people there, Mr McKeag and Mr Young, were representing the Glass and Glazing Federation. Why did I come to that conclusion? That really is the heart of your question there. They stated at the meeting that they were members of the Glass and Glazing Federation. Now, my misunderstanding was in taking it that they as individuals represented the Glass and Glazing Federation by being members of it. They maybe meant simply that their company was a member of the Glass and Glazing Federation, but I misunderstood. I was wrong, and I accept and acknowledge that. I am happy to set that record straight.

In the course of the meeting, not only did they say that they were members of the Glass and Glazing Federation, but quite clearly the bulk of the discussion at the meeting was about the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines and the issue of how you install windows, in particular. That was the core element of it. I have in front of me the transcript of their presentation. In answer to one question, Mr Young said:

"We covered the glazing and the health and safety issues pretty quickly; we then talked about the second issue. He"

— that is, me —

"wrote down the figures as we went along. He totted up the value himself."

So, as they began to talk about numbers of windows and how much you would save per window, the amount of money that could be saved was beginning to rise to a very substantial figure. Mr McKeag said:

"We went over it a few times. It was such a huge sum of money that it was difficult to believe at the start. It caught his"

— that is, my —

"attention very quickly. We put the numbers to him two or three times just to make it sink in that this could be the saving."

That is the one thing that stuck out in my mind afterwards about the meeting. It was around the fact that, if you went down that particular route of the guidelines, there were very substantial savings. By way of context, I should say that — I mentioned it in passing in the introductory remarks — when I came into the Department, one of the things that were in my mind from day one, because it was important enough to be put into the Programme for Government, was the need to address single glazing in Housing Executive properties. That was because so many people were raising it as an issue again and again. Even recently, it is interesting the number of MLAs who ask questions in the Assembly, written and oral, about when the work will be done in their area or constituency.

I was also concerned about the quality of the workmanship. I was out on one occasion with one of the officials from the Department, David Malcolm, who is now in another post. We looked at windows that had been very badly fitted. On another visit to a housing estate I had seen the mess and disruption to the tenant that there was while windows were installed using the previous method. Therefore, when they started to talk about it, changing the method of installation seemed like good sense to me. When I reflected on it, I remembered that, years ago, when I had some windows fitted in my home, they were fitted in that way. It was not disruptive or damaging, and there was no need for redecoration afterwards. We were able to save £15·1 million, a substantial amount of which was through not having to pay the redecoration grants. If you can save £15·1 million, that makes good sense.

As you can see from their description of the meeting, the focus of my thinking and the thing that grasped my attention — both Mr Young and Mr McKeag make the point very clearly that I wrote it

down, did the sums on the bit of paper and went over it a few times — was the huge sum of money. As he said, it is what caught my attention very quickly. So the focus in my mind was around the Glass and Glazing Federation. I was wrong in assuming that they did represent it.

Mr Brady: Just on that point, why did you feel that it was more important that the attendees at the meeting should reflect the Glass and Glazing Federation, as opposed to Turkington's, which, to my knowledge, is quite a large, reputable company that deals with all types of work in that sector? The Glass and Glazing Federation actually stated that it has protocols through which people have to go if they want to represent it. When it was contacted initially, I think, the Glass and Glazing Federation said that it did not have any representatives here in the North. It may have had members, but it had no people who could specifically represent it or had gone through those protocols to get permission to do so.

Mr McCausland: Thank you for raising that; I had forgotten that other point. The third thing to mention regarding the meeting is that Mr Young specifically said — it was acknowledged in the meeting — that he was a former chairman in Northern Ireland of the Glass and Glazing Federation. In fact, I think he may have held other posts, not only chairman. My recollection of that is not absolutely clear, but it was definitely said that he had been chairman.

Mr Brady: He did say, I think it was in 2005 or 2006, that he had been.

Mr McCausland: In fact — I was just looking the other day — he was chairman again in 2007. I do not know over what number of years it was. All he said on the day was that he was a former chairman or the former chairman. There were a number of references throughout the meeting to membership and to the fact that Mr Young held an office in the Glass and Glazing Federation, as well as the reference to the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines as being the main content of the meeting. All that led to my wrong conclusion that they were representing it. When it came to the letter, I simply suggested the change because I believed that that was a more accurate reflection of the meeting — erroneously.

Mr Brady: The other issue was the Turkington's connection. In previous elections, that had been stated.

Mr McCausland: On the reference in the 'Spotlight' programme to the fact that Mr Turkington had signed nomination papers for a candidate, I was not aware of that. I would not have a clue about who signs nomination papers. It just shows that he was a man of good discernment in that he —

Mr Brady: I am not disputing that at all.

Mr McCausland: Well, thank you.

Mr Brady: It was not about signing papers. It was the fact that the Member had declared an interest in that vehicles were provided for the purpose of an election, which is slightly different.

Mr McCausland: Yes, indeed. Mr Allister has said that he —

Mr Brady: It is a much more active role.

Mr McCausland: Mr Allister had said that he received that support for his election campaign for the European election. That is correct. He also made another reference to another event.

My connection, and the party's connection, with — I would have no knowledge about that. Certainly, all I can say is that I have enough work to do with my Department and enough work to do with north Belfast. All I can say is that I have never had any connection with Mr Turkington and never received any support from him. To put the record straight, on reflection now, I think that I have only met Mr Turkington on two occasions. One was, and it was referred to by the representatives from his company, back in — I think that they said — 2009, when I was in DCAL. It was at a sporting event that his son had taken part in. There was a reception, and I met him there. It was the first time that I had ever met the man. After I came into the Department, there was a meeting at which there were several Ministers from different Departments. That is the only time, and nothing came of it. So, there has been really nothing in the way of contact.

The Chairperson: I will bring Jim Allister in next. On the back of your last number of comments, for the record, the Egan contract process, under the framework change protocol procedure, provides an incentivisation for companies or others that can provide a different way of doing work in that they will receive a portion of the savings. So, the question clearly was whether the company, or the company to which it subcontracted, received any benefit? In fact, you have to ask yourself this: if it saved £20-odd million, why would it not, if that is the nature of the contract?

Mr McCausland: It is interesting that, before I had the meeting, and I am not sure of the exact dates, there had already been under way over a period of time — because there is a constant review or revision of specification. There were specification revisions in — I am not sure of the exact years — 2006, 2010 and maybe again in 2011. There were three revisions of specification over a period of years. So that happened. I think that it is also on record that there had been a meeting between Turkington's and the Housing Executive prior to that. So, whatever was discussed at the meeting that I held back on 16 April would have had no benefit for them.

The Chairperson: That was the question being posed: was there any potential benefit?

I want to ask you about this last point, Minister, because you raised it again in this session. You have said that you were particularly focused on reflecting accurately the meeting. Can you show me anywhere in the aide-memoire any reference to the Glass and Glazing Federation's (GGF) specifications or, indeed, health matters? You have offered up a reason why you misunderstood Turkington's role — because the big focus was on the Glass and Glazing Federation's specifications. Can you show me anywhere that that is referred to in the aide-memoire on page 64, because I do not see it anywhere?

Mr McCausland: The only document that I saw was the letter. I did not see the aide-memoire. I have no knowledge of it or what was in it. In fact, it is interesting, because if you look at it, you see that it is clearly written by a PS who would have no specialism in those things and would not deal with them on a regular basis.

The Chairperson: With respect, if you cannot explain the change and did not see it, obviously, what you are saying is that cannot really speak to it. You cannot really offer up —

Mr McCausland: There are many things that, with hindsight, you can speculate about. I agree with that entirely.

The Chairperson: We will speak to Mrs McConaghie in further detail about that.

Mr Allister: So as we are clear, Minister: as you sit here today, are you accepting that on 16 April 2012 you did not meet the Glass and Glazing Federation?

Mr McCausland: My introductory remarks dealt with that point. I accept now, having read the submission by Mr Young and Mr McKeag — they are very clear — that, on the day, they were representing Turkington's, not the Glass and Glazing Federation. They merely said that they were members of the Glass and Glazing Federation —

Mr Allister: Do you accept —

Mr McCausland: Let me finish, please.

I said earlier that, having read the submission by Mr Young and Mr McKeag, it was very clear that I was wrong in my assumption.

Mr Allister: And you came to that realisation having read the evidence.

Mr McCausland: I accept that the two gentlemen were telling the truth when they were in front of the Committee.

Mr Allister: Hitherto, you have been very robust in claiming that the meeting on 16 April was most assuredly with the Glass and Glazing Federation. Is that fair?

Mr McCausland: That was my belief.

Mr Allister: To the very point where, for example, in a letter to the BBC on 28 June this year, you threatened legal proceedings over an allegation that you were being less than truthful about that.

Mr McCausland: I do not have a copy of that letter in front of me. All I will say is that, up until very recently, when I clearly read the submission from the two gentlemen, it was my belief that they were representing the GGF. I was wrong about that.

Mr Allister: Does it come to this, Minister, that having proclaimed most vigorously that it had always been a meeting with the GGF and having put that in several Assembly answers and having asserted that on the Floor of the House at every opportunity, you simply ran out of road on this issue once the evidence became clear? Is that right?

Mr McCausland: No. As soon as evidence is put in front of me, I read the evidence and accept the evidence. I acknowledge that my previous assumption was wrong.

Mr Allister: Are you apologising to this Committee?

Mr McCausland: I said already in my introduction that, just like anybody else, I am human and I make mistakes, and I regret that I made a mistake. I certainly —

Mr Allister: Are you apologising?

Mr McCausland: Again, Mr Chairman —

The Chairperson: OK. Fair enough. When members ask a question, let the Minister respond without any interruption, please.

Mr McCausland: Thank you, Chair. I regret very much making that mistake, and I apologise for making the mistake.

Mr Allister: Does that include apologising for changing the letter of May 2012 to the Chairman?

Mr McCausland: The letter to the Chairman is, in some ways, a mixture of two things. I would almost describe it as a botched letter; it was badly drafted. The original change that I made was to change Turkington's to Glass and Glazing Federation. I believed at that time that that part of it was correct. Following on from that, the reference to Fusion 21 with a question mark after it was misinterpreted, I think. My second mistake was to not have checked the letter thoroughly when I got it back. Ninety-nine per cent of the time when I get a letter back from officials with suggested amendments, it is totally accurate. On this occasion, it was not, and I did not pick that up. That was a mistake.

Mr Allister: Leaving aside the Fusion 21 point in the letter, the fact that you changed the letter to refer to the Glass and Glazing Federation was indicative of your own determination to maintain to the Committee and others that that was who you had met.

Mr McCausland: It was indicative of my belief at that time — I accept that it was erroneous — that I had met the Glass and Glazing Federation, and the letter was drafted accordingly.

Mr Allister: Why was that so important to you?

Mr McCausland: Because, quite clearly, I thought it was in the interests of accuracy. I was mistaken.

Mr Allister: Or was it that you had some sensitivity about putting up in lights that you had met Turkington's, a party donor, and therefore had an anxiety to divert it off to the Glass and Glazing Federation?

Mr McCausland: It is one of those issues that, when you get into the realm of party donations and people sending out begging letters, you get into territory that others may not necessarily want to

pursue. The clear point I make is what I already said. I can only repeat it, because it is the truth. I thought it was more accurate. Maybe Mr Allister thinks he can read people's minds, but I cannot and do not think that he can either.

Mr Allister: I am just asking you —

Mr McCausland: No, but you were —

Mr Allister: — whether you had a sensitivity that you were anxious to divert that meeting from being a meeting with Turkington's?

Mr McCausland: Absolutely not.

Mr Allister: You were very, very adamant, right up until this morning, that you had met the Glass and Glazing Federation. Today is the first day that you have conceded that you did not. Is that not right?

Mr McCausland: This is my opportunity to come before the Committee once the process of inquiry has started. It was at the meeting on 14 November, a few weeks ago, that Mr McKeag and Mr Young were here. Some days later, I got a copy of the transcript. I have read it, I accept it totally and this is my opportunity to say that that is indeed the case.

Mr Allister: Can I ask you about the dodgy dossier that relates to the rewriting of the minutes?

Mr McCausland: Sorry, I am not aware of something called a dodgy dossier.

Mr Allister: It is my shorthand for the fact that the minutes were rewritten three times.

Mr McCausland: I am not aware that there is a dossier.

The Chairperson: Let the member make the point and the Minister can respond. Members should be mindful of what they are saying.

Mr Allister: You accept that the minutes were rewritten three times.

Mr McCausland: In the last few weeks, the system in the private office has been searched through and these various iterations have come forward. It was the first time that I was aware of them; I had never seen any of them before that.

Mr Allister: And it accumulates to three rewrites. Is that right?

Mr McCausland: That would be correct. It was something that I have no knowledge about.

Mr Allister: Yes. And it was not until the final rewrite that, for the first time, there is any suggestion that the meeting was with the Glass and Glazing Federation. Is that right?

Mr McCausland: I do not have the —. They are probably in here somewhere. Do you know what page they are on?

The Chairperson: Page 64. These will be found between page 64 and page 69.

Mr McCausland: There is a version, an iteration, on page 64, and the second one is on page 66.

Mr Allister: I think that the final version might be on page 70. This is the final version.

Mr McCausland: What page?

Mr Allister: Page 70.

Mr McCausland: OK.

Mr Allister: I suggest to you that that is the first time — the final version — that the Glass and Glazing Federation appears. Yes. At the very heading.

Mr McCausland: That would be correct, but again, we are into difficult territory, in so far as I had never seen these until recently and, therefore, anything I would say about them would be speculative and that would be unhelpful, probably.

Mr Allister: You must have a working knowledge of your own private office. Do you?

Mr McCausland: I have very few dealings with the internal workings of the private office. Documents such as this are in the system. As I said, I attend many hundreds of meetings, whatever number per month. Look at the number of meetings. I cannot recall ever having asked for notes of meetings, to be honest. If I had, it was only once or twice, but I certainly cannot recall ever having asked for notes of meetings. From time to time, as with the meeting yesterday, I have received the formal minutes, but normally I do not see those.

Mr Allister: These are minutes. Are they not?

Mr McCausland: It is a note that was taken by the PS. A minute is generally understood to be something that has been signed up and agreed to by others. This was an individual taking a note of a meeting. It was made purely for reference purposes later on.

Mr Allister: Minister, according to you, they are minutes. On 4 July, you told this Committee:

"The minute of the meeting also records that the representatives of the Glass and Glazing Federation advised"

— such and such —

"The minute of the meeting is very clear: it is headed 'Meeting with the Glass and Glazing Federation'".

Mr McCausland: Shortly before that was the first time that I had seen the note of the meeting, the final version. I was not aware at that point of any earlier versions. I became aware of those only in the last few —.

Mr Allister: I am not dealing with the number of versions at this point; I am dealing with the fact that you described these as minutes.

Mr McCausland: Strictly speaking, that would be incorrect. Various terms have been used. Some people have used the term "aide-memoire"; some people have used the word "note"; and sometimes people have used the word "minute". I do not think that there are precise terminologies in this. It is purely a note of the meeting. The fact is that it was not circulated to all of those attending. Otherwise, as was pointed out by Mr Young or Mr McKeag, they would have picked up on the inaccuracies.

Mr Allister: There was a point when you were very anxious to call them minutes, such as 4 July and such as when you intervened in the debate on 8 July and repeatedly referred to them as the official minutes. You seem less keen to call them minutes today.

Mr McCausland: A lot of this is stuff that has really been looked into only because of the inquiry, as regards processes. I would not normally see those. You very much inherit processes from what has gone before. They probably vary from Department to Department. For example, I could not recall what the process was in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. I never had an occasion to look back at them there. Whatever term you use, whether it is aide-memoire, note or minute —

Mr Allister: Would your special adviser have any role in the revision of minutes or aide-memoires?

Mr McCausland: I have never actually had any dealing with those. I do not know who the PS spoke to or what she did when she was drafting it. She says that she cannot recall. There is no point in me speculating because —

Mr Allister: And you have not carried out any inquiries.

Mr McCausland: It would be difficult to find out from her if she cannot recall who she spoke to.

Mr Allister: Have you carried out any inquiries?

Mr McCausland: I have not carried out any inquiries.

Mr Allister: You have not asked your special adviser, for example, if he knows anything about this.

Mr McCausland: My special adviser said to me that he did not have a role in rewriting that.

Mr Allister: So, at this point, it remains a bit of a mystery.

Mr McCausland: There are some things in life that remain unknown.

Mr Allister: Would it surprise you that a minute would be rewritten three times and there would be four versions of it?

Mr McCausland: I have become aware of the existence of this and the fact that these notes may be revised only in the last few weeks. I have never had any reason to ask about them. They would not normally come to any future attention or use.

Mr Allister: The original letter asking for the meeting from Turkington's — 2 February 2012 — was cc'd to the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Had you any discussion with him or any communication with that Department about this?

Mr McCausland: No. I think that that point was dealt with by the two gentlemen, Mr Young and Mr McKeag, when they were here. I had no conversations.

Mr Allister: Just remind us when your meetings with Fusion21 were.

Mr McCausland: The meeting with Fusion21 took place a week after the meeting with the two gentlemen, Mr McKeag and Mr Young.

Mr Allister: Had you just one meeting with Fusion21?

Mr McCausland: I had one meeting with Fusion21. Now, I think that, somewhere in all of this, they have had conversations — e-mail contact and so on — with the Housing Executive and the housing section in the Department. I had only one meeting; that was all.

Mr Allister: You now accept that your meeting in April was not with the Glass and Glazing Federation. Have you ever had a meeting otherwise with the Glass and Glazing Federation?

Mr McCausland: No.

Mr Allister: You answered an Assembly question from Mr McKay on 5 December 2012.

Mr McCausland: What page is that on?

Mr Allister: I do not think that it is. It has you claiming that you had two meetings with the Glass and Glazing Federation.

Mr McCausland: I do not have the answer in front of me, therefore I could not pass any comment.

The Chairperson: That is fine.

Mr Allister: It is not your evidence that you had two meetings? In fact, it is now that you had no meetings.

Mr McCausland: At this point, I cannot recall. I will check back. I cannot recall. I need to look back at that. I do not have that with me.

The Chairperson: We can get future clarification on that.

Mr McCausland: I will be happy to respond to that when I actually see it.

Mr Allister: Thank you.

The Chairperson: Minister, before I bring Trevor in, I want to raise very important issue. It goes to you and your evidence here. You continue to say that you only recently became aware that there were a number of drafts of the aide-memoire, minutes or note — whatever. It is really the content that is important. Do you agree or can you explain why, when your Department was in discussions with the BBC in June 2013, prior to the programme, it asked specifically why the draft letter that was provided from Michael Sands, as we understand it, to you through the private office, was changed to reflect that the meeting was, in fact, with the Glass and Glazing Federation, not Turkington Holdings? You are saying that you realise that only now on reflection and having discovered that documentation. Would it not have been appropriate to have asked at that time? What I can draw from that — and I am a bit reluctant to — is that, if your Department and you were in correspondence with the BBC about the nature of that meeting and how the draft letter was changed, somebody did not say to you that it actually was Turkington's at the meeting. Did you ask? Or how was that responded to? You responded in your name to the BBC.

Mr McCausland: I responded because, at that point, I still believed that it was with the GGF.

The Chairperson: And nobody in the department, despite the fact that there were four versions of the aide-memoire and the draft letter, which Michael Sands said that he sent, clearly stating that it was, in fact, Turkington Holdings, advised you to the contrary? That is what you are saying.

Mr McCausland: No.

The Chairperson: Fair enough.

Mr Clarke: I suppose that the first thing for me, Minister — and someone maybe touched on the question earlier — is whether you had any reason to disguise the fact that it was Turkington's as opposed to the GGF? Was that of any benefit to you as an individual?

Mr McCausland: There was no benefit. There would have been no benefit to me or, indeed, to them. I have met other companies from the construction sector — people, suppliers or whatever. Over the past couple of years, I have met a number. It would not make any difference. As regards the content, as I said at the start, it would have made no difference to the outcome of it.

Mr Clarke: After that meeting and subsequently when it went to re-tender — following on from Mickey Brady's question about someone's benefiting from savings — what is your knowledge of Turkington's after it was re-tendered? Was there any benefit to them? Did they get the contract?

Mr McCausland: No, they did not.

Mr Clarke: So, in essence, what we are saying is that, for their saving Northern Ireland plc £15 million, they have lost money. Would that be fair to say?

Mr McCausland: They did not win a contract. That is true. But the good side of it all is, as you, rightly, say, that Northern Ireland plc has saved £15.1 million.

Mr Clarke: Yes, but would you accept, Minister, that there seems to be an awful focus — I have to say that there is confusion about the first letter in which Turkington's made the request. I have not got it handy at the moment. I think that, in about the third paragraph of that letter, they referred to being members of the Glass and Glazing Federation. There is a degree of confusion. Personally, I think

that we are getting bogged down in the confusion about Turkington's and the Glass and Glazing Federation. We are not focusing on the fact that, under previous Ministers, this would have been reviewed three times, as I think you have just said in an answer to another member. Do you agree that it is sad that, even with regard to other Ministers, those savings were not realised much sooner?

Mr McCausland: You are absolutely right: if potential savings had been identified some years earlier, money would have been available for other purposes and for services to tenants in the Housing Executive.

Mr Clarke: Has any quantifying answer tried to establish what we spent over the years and what we lost because of the way the contract —

The Chairperson: Sorry, Trevor, this is not about savings. We know that those are very important and the Minister himself has, rightly so, addressed that issue routinely, as has the Committee. However, this is not about savings. This is about the terms of reference of this inquiry, which is about how those meetings were represented to the Committee and publicly. So, we are not dealing with savings.

Mr Clarke: I am very clear on that, too, Chairman. I am very clear that, about 15 or 20 minutes in, the Minister acknowledged that he was confused on the GGF but we are still drilling down into that. I am trying to establish what went wrong as well. I think that you allowed a degree of latitude to other members but it is unfortunate, given that I am from the same political party, that I am not afforded the same latitude as other members.

The Chairperson: I am sorry, Trevor, but I do not accept that at all. Every member —

Mr Clarke: Well, I do. That is the point I am making.

The Chairperson: Well, that is fair enough. The Hansard report will show that, under my chairmanship of this Committee for the past two years or thereabouts, not one member of this Committee can suggest or say truthfully that I treated them any differently from any other member. Not one member.

Mr Clarke: I think that is a matter of opinion.

The Chairperson: I am giving latitude but there is no question of anybody here being treated differently here, so let us not —

Mr Clarke: I think that is a matter of opinion.

The Chairperson: Well, that is fair enough. Let us not reduce this to a squabble. These are important matters. We have terms of reference that all the members agreed. That is what we are dealing with.

Mr Clarke: I do not think that we all agreed. I think it was by majority, if I remember.

The Chairperson: It was agreed by the Committee.

Mr Clarke: Agreed by majority, that's right.

The Chairperson: That is the Committee's ruling.

Mr Clarke: Just one final question, Minister. I think that Jim referenced the biggest question in terms of something being cc'd to DFP. Given the nature of the meeting that you had with the GGF, Turkington's, the representatives, or whatever they are, and the value that was being initiated, can you see the value of that being indicated to DFP?

Mr McCausland: I can see there that it is important that DFP has an understanding of potential spend or reduction in spend because its role is to keep an oversight of the entire spread of money across Departments. It is, perhaps, important to reiterate that when this issue was first raised with the Housing Executive, I was told that there would be 48,000 properties that would require double glazing,

and that it would cost £120 million and take until 2021 to do it. So, it would take 10 years. That was why I challenged them, in the Programme for Government, that it be done by 2015.

It turned out that they did not have any proper record of how many houses were double glazed, single glazed or partially double glazed. The figures were initially an estimate of 48,000 properties. It turned out that the figure is much closer to probably around 30,000, so they were more than 50% out in that regard. The cost of £120 million seemed quite shocking at the start because I wondered how we were going to get the £120 million. I think that is why they were talking about doing it over 10 years.

It then turned out that because of the smaller numbers and because we were able to do a lot of the work in a more cost-effective way, it was possible to do it for a lot less money, and we will have the work completed as promised by March 2015.

Mr Clarke: We hear much in the media at the moment about whistle-blowers. Minister, would you accept that it is unfortunate that someone with a good reputation, such as Turkington's, albeit that they had a connection with the DUP in the past, that companies in future that may be connected to our party or another party, may be reluctant to come forward where they can save money given the quagmire that the good name of that good company has come through over the past few months?

Mr McCausland: I am sure that if one were to look at all the companies that meet Ministers in other Departments, and then started digging around, it would be interesting. The fact is, if you have a political party that is the largest in Northern Ireland, and therefore has many people who are supportive of it, undoubtedly there will be people in a range of companies that will have support for that particular party, just as there are people in other companies that would be supportive of other parties. It would be totally inappropriate and wrong for us to ignore people because of their political interest or association. It would actually be impossible to do so, because you would be guilty of political discrimination, which would breach our equality legislation in Northern Ireland. So, it is important to remember that it would be impossible for anyone to refrain from meeting people because of any political affiliation that they might have.

Mr Clarke: I accept the point that you are making, Minister. However, given the interest that the media have had in this story, has that made it difficult for other companies to come forward to show potential savings? In this case, Turkington's have not been a beneficiary and have not won a contract, but they have afforded Northern Ireland £15.2 million.

Mr McCausland: I agree entirely.

Mrs D Kelly: Has that been proven?

The Chairperson: Sorry, go ahead Minister.

Mr McCausland: I agree entirely. The current figure for savings is £15.1 million, and that is a very substantial amount of money. It would be very regrettable if people were deterred from coming forward with good ideas because they thought that they would be pilloried and hauled through the media.

Mr Clarke: Thank you, Chair. I can see why Dolores was getting excited, given that her party held the Ministry before. Thank you, Chairman, for your patience.

The Chairperson: I want to make it clear, and this is the point that you are rightly making, Trevor, that it is not an offence to donate to a political party.

Mr Clarke: That is right. Some others think that it is.

The Chairperson: It is important that there is transparency. That is another discussion, and it is not for this meeting.

Mr McCausland: It is very clear that in the final version of the note there was a reference to Turkington's. There was no attempt to hide that fact and say that the two people had parachuted in from somewhere. It was made quite clear that they were members of Turkington's staff. I have never denied that and actually provided that information in response to a written question.

Mr Copeland: It is widely accepted that the Glass and Glazing Federation, as a federation — it is a trade body — had no representatives in Northern Ireland at the time and that, when approached by the Housing Executive initially, it was unable to put forward anyone to speak about the technical specifications regarding their methods of installing windows.

I want to come at this from a slightly different angle regarding the role of your political adviser. It appears, and you may or may not have had sight of this, that the BBC wrote to your political adviser on or around 7 June 2013. In that correspondence, it raised questions about a press release that stated that a relationship was being established with Mr McCausland's adviser. Do you have any notion about the nature of that relationship? Does it cause you concern that someone so close to you politically, albeit in a departmental capacity, was highlighted as establishing a relationship with a trade body that, on the face of it, did not have any official representation in Northern Ireland apart from corporate membership?

Mr McCausland: Sorry, I missed the last part of your sentence.

Mr Copeland: That body did not have anyone in Northern Ireland that you could speak to corporately to seek the information that the Housing Executive was already seeking.

Mr McCausland: The Glass and Glazing Federation, as its representative stated at the Committee, is a trade organisation with a number of other companies.

Mr Copeland: He was there as a representative of a private company, not the Glass and Glazing Federation, apparently.

Mr McCausland: On 21 November, when Mr Giles Willson from the Glass and Glazing Federation came to the Committee, he said that the federation was a trade organisation. He said:

"In Northern Ireland we have a regional group".

That ties in with Mr Young saying that he had been chairman of the Northern Ireland branch, as we now know, for a number of years. Mr Giles Willson said that the chief executive, Nigel Rees, was unable to attend, and the question that was put to him was this:

"Who are your representatives in Northern Ireland?"

To which he replied:

"I can provide a list of all the members."

So there are clearly members in Northern Ireland; there is clearly a branch, as we term it, in Northern Ireland or a regional group, and there is clearly a chairman of that, and Mr Young held that position at a time.

I have never actually seen the press release that was supposed to have appeared at that time. Was there a date against the press release?

Mr Copeland: Not on the paper that I have.

Mr McCausland: I have a recollection of being told — presumably from the 'Spotlight' correspondence — that it was sometime around the period shortly after I came into the Department. At that point, we received a letter from the Glass and Glazing Federation UK that raised the possibility of what it described as a window scrappage scheme, which is a bit like a boiler scrappage scheme or a window replacement scheme like the boiler replacement scheme. That letter came in at that stage, and it did not really have in it anything that was particularly relevant, as we thought at that point, and they were offered then the opportunity to meet officials. So I did not meet them at that point. They met officials, and I do not think that anything in particular came of that.

This is where, when you start to look through things, you learn about other aspects of the matter. There was another meeting when somebody from the Glass and Glazing Federation was to attend — along with a number of other trade people — but did not turn up for the meeting.

Mr Copeland: Was that from the Glass and Glazing Federation UK or one of the members?

Mr McCausland: I am not clear on that. It was a Mr Ravey, whoever Mr Ravey is. He did not appear, so nothing came of that. The fact was that they had no representative in Northern Ireland. They had members, but whether a chairman in Northern Ireland has a particular role or not I do not know. Those are questions that you need to put to the Glass and Glazing Federation.

Mr Copeland: Just for clarification, when the question that you referred to was put to the representative from the Glass and Glazing Federation — "Who are your representatives in Northern Ireland" — the answer to that indicated representatives but indicated members —

Mr McCausland: Yes.

Mr Copeland: — and each of those members would represent a corporate and, for some, an independent company, but it is only when they act corporately under the auspices of the Glass and Glazing Federation —

Mr McCausland: It is, in so far as —. Mr Willson said that there are members in Northern Ireland, there are rules, there is a chairman. So, I am not quite sure. That is why I can understand it, because Mr Young said that he had been the chairman.

Mr Copeland: But, on this particular occasion, that was historical, and I accept the fact that there are —

Mr McCausland: It was. My understanding was, when they said that they were members, that they were members of some board or other.

Mr Copeland: Could you tell us again, would it be a matter of concern that the body had members in Northern Ireland but no corporate structure, that it was represented in the United Kingdom and, indeed, had people that you could actually talk to, despite the fact that when the Housing Executive contacted them it was referred to a technical helpline, which seems to be to be a fairly dodgy way or a questionable way for a Glass and Glazing Federation to respond to questions put by the biggest single purchaser of glass and glazing products in Northern Ireland, referring them to a telephone helpline? They are putting out press releases lauding or stating a relationship being established with your adviser. What would be the benefits to them of establishing a relationship with your adviser? What is the relationship between your adviser, you and the Department? Although Mr Sands's presence at some of those meetings is a matter of some conjecture, which has now been rectified, the political adviser is listed second only to you in most of the pecking order, which, I assume, is just accidental or just the way that it is done.

Mr McCausland: The role of the special adviser is set out in the document that we have all received recently. It very clearly sets out that person's remit, so I would refer you to that in relation to his particular role.

We were unaware of the press statement until it was brought up in that letter, and we had never seen it. The only record we can find is that they sent that letter in regard to a proposal for a window scrappage scheme. That was shortly after I came into the Department. I must have seen the letter and noted it, but I did not —

Mr Copeland: Would that be based on correspondence with your political adviser or with you?

Mr McCausland: That was a letter that came to me.

Mr Copeland: So how would —

Mr McCausland: I do not know —

Mr Copeland: — writing a letter to you lead them to the conclusion that they were establishing a special relationship with your adviser?

Mr McCausland: I do not know. I do not have any idea at all. That is a question that you need to put to the Glass and Glazing Federation.

Mr Copeland: Or to your adviser.

Mr McCausland: Well, he may say that, as I think he would, he knows nothing about it either.

The Chairperson: OK, well, that is for him, if he is asked, to answer.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you for coming to the meeting, Minister. In total, how many years have you served as Minister across a range of portfolios?

Mr McCausland: I was in DCAL for two years, and I have been in DSD for two and three quarter years.

Mrs D Kelly: You would be well aware, then, of the seven principles of public life, which are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Mr McCausland: It is not even a matter of being a Minister and knowing them; every Member of the Assembly would know them.

Mrs D Kelly: Yes. Surely you would be acutely aware, as a senior member of your party and as a Minister, that, in adhering to those principles, there is an additional onus, if you like, to be entirely inscrutable around these issues?

Mr McCausland: I do not think that "inscrutable" is quite the right word. I would say that there are seven standards, but infallibility is not one of them.

Mrs D Kelly: Yes, Minister, you come into the Committee and you give us an account of a flurry of meetings and a flurry of letters and correspondence to somehow suggest that you would, obviously, be unable to be on top of everything that crosses your desk. That was the principle on which you initiated your contribution to the Committee.

Mr McCausland: I think that the description or phrase that you used — "not on top of" — is not an accurate or appropriate description. You obviously have not had the experience of being a Minister, but other members of your party have. Those others, I am sure, would confirm that DSD is on a much bigger scale than DCAL was. You have responsibility for the Social Security Agency and the amount of correspondence that comes in around the workings of that, and welfare reform, and particular cases that are taken up. There is a huge amount of correspondence from the Housing Executive on individual cases and so on. You are dealing with a large amount of material, and that is why you have around you the sort of system that you have, including a private office, secretaries, diary secretaries and all the rest. The truth of the matter is that the system — that structure — is on top of things, but it is composed of fallible human beings like you and me.

Mrs D Kelly: Yes, but really, Minister, you were trying to set the context for your contribution in evidence, which was that there is a huge level of correspondence and activities in your diary.

Mr McCausland: I think that the figures confirm that.

Mrs D Kelly: I do not think that there is any denial of that. That was the context in which you began the meeting. However, Minister, today has been the first time that you have recognised the fact that the meeting was with Turkington's and not with the Glass and Glazing Federation. Given the substantial interest that there has been in questions put to you by Assembly Members, in correspondence from others and, indeed, via the BBC, why at a much earlier stage did you not think to look at your diary, where it very clearly says that the 16 April meeting was with Turkington's, and put your hands up and say that you made a mistake much earlier on in the whole inquiry or, indeed, in that correspondence? It is very clear in the diary note that the meeting was with Turkington's, so why put yourself through all this if it was so self-evident earlier on that you had obviously misunderstood who your meeting was with?

Mr McCausland: The point at which I became absolutely clear that the folk at the meeting, whilst members of staff and managers within Turkington's, were not representing also the Glass and Glazing Federation was the point at which they came to the Committee and stated that very clearly. I accept their word.

Mrs D Kelly: Why would you not have asked earlier?

Mr McCausland: No one came forward to me with any information to suggest anything to the contrary. I got that information in front of me a few days after their presentation on the fourteenth. I did not actually see the broadcast of the Committee, but once I got the Hansard report I was quite clear in my mind that, yes, I was wrong. That is why I have come this morning to acknowledge that.

Mrs D Kelly: But in the intervening period you have threatened legal action against the BBC, which I presume that you are now not taking, and you had opportunities to ask, at a much earlier stage, who the meeting was with. Plus, you heard at the outset of the inquiry Mr Allister state clearly that, when he was a member of the DUP, Turkington's were funders and provided vans to your party. In fact, is it not the case that it also funds during election time what is affectionately known in DUP circles as your battle bus? Have you asked your party executive or party leader to what extent Turkington's fund, and have funded in the past, your party?

Mr Clarke: No latitude on that?

The Chairperson: It was declared as an interest by a member previously, Trevor. It is one of the issues that has been raised on a number of occasions, and raised publicly, so, it is a matter of public concern.

Mr McCausland: I am not an officer in the party. My interests are entirely within my constituency and the remit of my Department. I have no knowledge at all with regard to the internal financial workings or arrangements of the party, because I am not an officer.

Mrs D Kelly: But have you not asked? Since this statement —

Mr McCausland: Why would I ask?

Mrs D Kelly: Why would you not? Would you not want to be clear about how perceptions can be —

The Chairperson: The answer is no.

Mrs D Kelly: Well, it was not clear whether the answer given was yes or no.

The Chairperson: I think that the answer given —

Mr McCausland: The answer was clearly no. I agree, Chairman; you are right.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, you stated in a briefing to the Committee on 4 July 2012 that:

"The important thing is that the Housing Executive itself was reviewing specifications in October 2011, long before any meeting with the Glass and Glazing Federation, which came in April 2012 — more than or around six months later. Six months prior to that, the Housing Executive itself was working on that issue. I wanted it ramped up before we even put it in as Programme for Government target. The specification was discussed with the Housing Executive in December 2011, and it was acknowledged that it needed a new specification."

Therefore, Minister, if you were aware in December 2011 that the new specification was required, why then did you delay your decision to seek a review of the Housing Executive's double-glazing programme until the start of May 2012?

Mr McCausland: The work on the review of the specification, as I have said previously, is something that happens periodically within the executive. It had already met Turkington's and, I think, may well have met others — certainly it met Turkington's with regard to the specification — about these issues. There was indeed a meeting between the Housing Executive and Turkington's prior to my meeting

with the Housing Executive and Turkington's. They met separately. I think that the issue seemed to be urgency, because, every day that was going by, more money was being spent unnecessarily on redecoration grants that might not have been required.

Mrs D Kelly: But Minister, in February 2013, regarding the Committee's concerns about changes to the double-glazing specification, you stated:

"This is an entirely operational matter for the Housing Executive and neither I nor Departmental officials have any approval role if they decide to change a specification."

Mr McCausland: The important thing for members to understand is that, at the end of the meeting on 16 April, I simply asked my official Michael Sands to ask the housing experts in the Department — the housing advisory unit — whether there was something in this that would save us money. That was followed up by him the following day. That was the end of the matter, as far as I was concerned, for some time. I am not in the business of being involved in any way in the awarding of contracts, the determination of contracts or any of that. That is a matter for the Housing Executive. I am responsible for interrogating — to use an ex-Minister's phrase — the Housing Executive to make sure that it is providing the best value for money.

Mrs D Kelly: I accept that about interrogation. Do you not consider that your letter to the chief executive of the Housing Executive, which instructs him to put on hold all further double-glazing installations until new contract provisions were put in place, actually constitutes an operational decision?

Mr McCausland: It was, in my view, not anything other than following through on the imperative to ensure value for money.

Mrs D Kelly: But would —

Mr McCausland: It is also worth noting that the contracts that had already been awarded were followed through. In the course of that year, the Housing Executive exceeded its target of, I think, about 8,600 units to be double-glazed. It actually did more in the year than the target figure. Where work was already under way, it was an opportunity for that work to continue. It continued until the point at which the new contracts came in.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you for that point, but the question was about whether you now consider that your letter to put on hold all further double-glazing installations until new contract provisions were put in place constitutes an operational decision.

Mr McCausland: No.

Mr Allister: Minister, you have told us today that you came to the point of acknowledging that you had not met the Glass and Glazing Federation because the evidence from Mr Young and Mr McKeag was very clear.

Mr McCausland: It was indeed.

Mr Allister: But you knew that from the very night that the 'Spotlight' programme went out, because it contained reference to Mr Young saying that they did not tell you that they were there on the federation's behalf, and that he did not know why Mr McCausland subsequently portrayed the discussions as a Glass and Glazing Federation meeting. From the very night of the programme, you were alert to the Turkington position. Why, then, did you cling to maintaining that for all this time before you finally faced up to it?

Mr McCausland: If, at that point, Mr Young had written to me and said that, I would have accepted that.

Mr Allister: You knew that he had said that.

Mr McCausland: Sorry, just a minute.

I have to confess that I do not necessarily believe everything I hear on 'Spotlight'. I am sure that the member does not do so, either.

Mr Allister: So, you heard but dismissed that Turkington's was questioning why you would be maintaining that you had met the Glass and Glazing —

Mr McCausland: As soon as it became clear in Hansard on record before this Committee, I accepted entirely that I was misinformed or had misunderstood the situation.

Mr Allister: I put it to you again that you ran out of road, which is the reason for your U-turn today.

Mr McCausland: The member has run out of questions and is merely reiterating what he has already said.

I take this opportunity to clarify a point that Mr Copeland raised earlier that I did not fully deal with. When the GGF in Northern Ireland's rep, Mr Willson, was here, he said:

"We have a regional secretary for Northern Ireland. The gentleman who has been looking after that is Mr Declan Moore. He has just resigned from the GGF".

There is a lack of clarity on and some confusion about the status and structure in Northern Ireland. I just put that down as a point of information.

The Chairperson: Michael, you wanted back in briefly.

Mr Copeland: Thank you for that clarification, Minister, because I am interested to know the methodology by which the GGF could put out the press release that it did in the absence of a press officer or someone similar in Northern Ireland. Further enquiries will reveal that.

Mr McCausland: I do not know.

Mr Copeland: Chairman, with your permission, I will continue. I do not intend to stray, but, if I do, I will immediately stop.

The Chairperson: I will remind you.

Mr Copeland: The Minister quite rightly emphasised the importance of saving money. I fully understand how, on the face of it, a scheme like this would be hard to turn down, if it proved to be accurate, with the vast majority of the savings, or potential savings, coming from the non-payment of redecoration grants. I understand that a number of these schemes have subsequently taken place. Although it is true that redecoration grants have not been paid, compensation has been paid to those who were deemed —

The Chairperson: Michael, I am sorry, but in deference to members who have spoken, not least Trevor, who spoke a while ago, where is this going?

Mr Copeland: I am simply asking whether, if this scheme was going to be adopted, there would be some methodology of testing. The reality of putting windows in, on a site, is difficult, and you cannot plan it on a piece of paper. If it proved to be that the savings were less than might have been expected, or that the scheme did not work according to plan — in other words, the need continued for compensation to be paid, perhaps through public liability insurance claims — would you revisit the decision or the methodology that was being approached?

The Chairperson: Michael, you have strayed.

Mr Copeland: I understand.

The Chairperson: I am not sure what your question was, and, to be truthful, I do not know whether the Minister is aware of what it was.

Mr McCausland: I am happy to speak to you in private about that.

The Chairperson: There are just a couple of points, Minister, before we conclude, as no other members have indicated that they wish to speak. I just want to be clear on this: you said in your evidence that you wanted to ensure that the aide-memoire/note/minute of the meeting of 16 April reflected that the people who were in the room from the trade side were the Glass and Glazing Federation. I make the point for the record, again, that that is notwithstanding the fact that not one other person, by written evidence, submissions or oral evidence, has said anything other than they were clear in their mind that the people were from Turkington's.

It seems that someone was at pains, through you and through Susan McCarty, if we follow the other e-mail correspondence that we received, to make sure that the final version of the official note, as it is now being described, which is the fourth iteration of that aide-memoire, plus the draft letter and the final letter to the Committee, were changed after considerable activity to make sure they were changed. I put it to you, Minister, that that goes against every other single piece of evidence that the Committee has received, not least from Turkington's. To the credit of Turkington's, they made it very, very clear that at no time did they represent themselves as anyone other than Turkington's. In fact, I think that they went further than that.

Sorry, I neglected to bring in Fra McCann. I will bring him in in a wee minute. I just wanted to make it clear that that is what we are being told this morning. Further to that, we are being told by Barbara McConaghie, you and Michael Sands that they did not see the aides-memoires. Barbara McConaghie's evidence to the Committee, so far, is that she provided an aide-memoire and does not know where the changes came from. Obviously, we will have to return to that because there is a clear void of information.

Mr McCausland: I want to correct one point. I said that I had no role in the note or the aide-memoire. I may have misheard, but, if I heard you correctly, you said that I was anxious that that be set straight. I was not anxious about the aide-memoire, because I did not even know that there was a change to it. I was anxious — not anxious — but I thought that the natural thing to do with regard to the letter was to make the change there, but I had no role in the aide-memoire.

Mr F McCann: I will be brief. Trevor raised the point that whistle-blowers in other companies might come forward. In fact, others in the industry questioned the specifications that were being put forward by Turkington's. In fact, in some evidence given to this Committee, they questioned that and said, in the longer run, that it was not cost-effective. Can you recollect who told you that the two representatives from Turkington's were representatives of the Glass and Glazing Federation?

Mr McCausland: Before the meeting took place, my special adviser had been on off on paternity leave for a number of weeks. Before he was off, he said to me that there are these Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines and that people are coming in about that. I assumed, wrongly, that they would be Glass and Glazing Federation people. The reasons why I assumed that I have set out additionally there. What was the other part of the question?

Mr F McCann: Who told you? You are saying that it was a conversation that took place between you and your special adviser.

Mr McCausland: When they came in, they did not conceal in any way, as is noted, that they were people who were employed by Turkington's. My assumption was that, when they said they were members of the Glass and Glazing Federation, they as individuals were, in some way, representing it. That was my assumption, wrongly.

Mr F McCann: Did you not think of asking them, because there is a huge difference between representing Turkington's and the Glass and Glazing Federation?

Mr McCausland: If you go back to the contribution from Mr McKeag and Mr Young when they described the meeting, you see that they said:

"It caught his attention very quickly."

As soon as I had done the calculations and worked out how many millions you were going to save, that struck me as big money. Once I realised that, that was the only thing that really mattered to me. Once I knew that Michael Sands was going off as the relevant official to look into this and get housing

advisory unit officials to look into this, it did not occur to me again because I had no further dealings with the two gentlemen. The focus was exclusively and entirely then on whether there could be a saving by changing the way in which you install windows. It is not only the question of money. I have seen windows butchered in some cases when they were being installed, and I raised the issue about the quality of workmanship. Having seen people in the middle of winter with windows being installed in a way that was more prolonged, was not as quick and which caused disruption of the plastering around the reveal, and all of that, it seemed to me that this was just good sense. Therefore, I thought that the guidelines were a good thing.

Mr F McCann: Given that Turkington's was part of the industry, would it not have been better to bring in other people who work in the industry and ask for their position? They quite clearly said that, in the longer term, the specifications that were being talked about by Turkington's were not cost-effective. You could not even get guarantees over a longer period of time, so, rather than it being cost-effective, it could end up costing more in the longer term.

Mr McCausland: I am not sure that other people have questioned this issue about the need to do replastering and the reveal on the inside or the outside. Other matters, maybe, but I cannot remember a particular challenge around that. However, we have said already that all I did was meet people and ask officials to look into it in the housing advisory unit. They produced some views on it, that was conveyed to the Housing Executive, and that was it. It was up to the Housing Executive, and it made a professional decision.

Mr F McCann: Just one more question, Chair. On 2 February 2012, you received a letter from Turkington's requesting a meeting, but, the following day, you also received a letter from Trevor Turkington, advising you of the company's collaboration with the South Ulster Housing Association on a proposal for social housing in Portadown. Is it normal to receive such frequent communication from a Housing Executive supplier?

Mr McCausland: First, I am not sure of the full details of the letter about the South Ulster Housing Association. However, the question is broadly around receiving two letters from one company. I am just trying to recall here. If you take those two letters, and, presumably, there was something around correspondence or invitation to that other meeting with the other two Ministers. In two and three quarter years, there have been no more than two or three pieces of correspondence from the company. In the space of two and three quarter years, that is not unusual. I meet a large number of companies and go out to look at their premises and see their ideas, particularly around insulation and energy efficiency, because fuel poverty is a major issue, and, if there are things that can be done, we should try to do them. So, I would have looked at examples of heating and so on from different companies, but that is just an occasional thing. There might be one or two meetings with a company.

Mr F McCann: Just reflecting on this, I remember the whole thing about Turkington's because I think that it was in collaboration with Clanmil for a development in Portadown at the time. It was hailed then as a major step forward. It was out there, and it was being talked about in those circles.

Mr McCausland: I would need to go back and look at the letter. I do not have it in front of me. Is it in the file?

Mr F McCann: What is that?

The Chairperson: What you are referring to. Is it in the tabled items file?

Mr F McCann: No, it is not.

The Chairperson: OK.

Mr McCausland: If you want me to come back on that —

Mr F McCann: Like yourself, I am trying to take it from memory.

Mr McCausland: Age affects all our memories.

Mr Clarke: I suppose it is dangerous sometimes to take things from memory.

I will just come back on something that Fra was questioning about whether the savings are being realised or not. I accept what the Minister has said about Turkington's as opposed to GGF. I know that the member has a copy of what the representatives from Turkington's said when they were here, but something that came to my attention in the notes I have takes me back to Fra's point about savings. We now accept that they were Turkington's and not GGF, and you accept that, Minister, which is clear enough for my mind. I think that it was Ian Young — I am not sure of the names. They said at the meeting, and I am sure at the Committee, that they were talking about the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines. I think that you will remember, from memory or from reading that, Minister, that the Glass and Glazing Federation is a very large trade body, and it is a recognised trade body. Would it be fair to accept that, whether they were representatives or members, the guidelines of a very large trade body would be important?

Mr McCausland: The key element in the conversation that day and in what arose from it was all around the guidelines, which were not particular to a company.

Mr Clarke: Sorry, whose guidelines?

Mr McCausland: The Glass and Glazing Federation's guidelines. They are not particular to one company; they would be applied to and obeyed by all of the companies across the United Kingdom that are members of the GGF.

Mr Clarke: You will recall from reading that, Minister, or maybe you will not — I think that Ian Young was one of them. What was the name of the other guy?

Mr McCausland: Jim McKeag.

Mr Clarke: I think that it was Jim McKeag who made the point that they were concerned about the health and safety of their workforce, given that they were expected, under the existing contract, to fit units that were coming fully glazed, and that that was one of the purposes of changing the contract.

Mr McCausland: That issue regarding the health and safety of workers was raised at the start of the meeting. They said in their evidence that they dealt with that. We covered the health and safety issue pretty quickly, and the bulk of the meeting was then spent talking about the second issue.

Mr Clarke: Which was?

Mr McCausland: That was about the Glass and Glazing Federation guidelines. Mr McKeag said that the Glass and Glazing Federation phrase came up three times during the meeting.

Mr Clarke: OK. So, your recollection is the same as theirs: that reference was made to their being the federation's guidelines?

Mr McCausland: Absolutely.

Mr F McCann: Just on the back of what Trevor said: are you saying that Turkington's was querying the health and safety record of the other companies who were putting the glazing units in?

Mr McCausland: They were not querying anybody. They were simply raising an issue about the weight of window frames when the glass has been installed and transporting them from a to b. It was purely a matter that they raised. I did not get involved in that at all. The matter was one of the two issues that would have been noted by John McPeake as chief executive of the Housing Executive, and our own housing advisory unit then presumably looked at that when it was in contact with the Housing Executive, but I have no knowledge of that.

The Chairperson: OK. We do not want to be straying into stuff that is really nothing —

Mrs D Kelly: I just want to know why, Minister, you believed that you had to write to the Housing Executive to inform them that their understanding of the meeting with Turkington's was that it was not with Turkington's but with the Glass and Glazing Federation. Why did you take that specific action?

Mr McCausland: I do not have that letter in front of me. Is it in the file?

Mrs D Kelly: Yes.

Mr Allister: Page 28.

The Chairperson: That is from Susan McCarty actually.

Mrs D Kelly: From Susan, yes. Why was it so necessary to do that?

Mr McCausland: Is it the e-mail of 1 July that you are referring to?

The Chairperson: Yes, it is in the middle of the page.

Mr McCausland: From Susan McCarty to Karen Mills. I was not aware that that had been sent, and there is no particular reason why I would be. It is not asking to do anything; it is simply advising them of a piece of information.

Mrs D Kelly: In July, though, after all the other matters had been laid before you and concerns were raised, there was still no admission of a mistake having been made, even though the diary date for 16 April clearly says Turkington's. I just find it strange.

Mr McCausland: I can honestly say to you that, as soon as the evidence was there from both gentlemen that I was wrong, I am happy to admit that. I have never been afraid to admit that I get something wrong.

Mrs D Kelly: Surely the evidence was there long before that.

Mr McCausland: The e-mail to which you refer is one piece of evidence. There is quite a bit of material floating about, some of which, in fact, has only come to light in the last few weeks.

Mrs D Kelly: But the 16 April diary date was 16 April, and it was a meeting with Turkington's.

The Chairperson: I referred to that precise e-mail contact from Susan McCarty earlier, so we will seek clarification from Ms McCarty as to why that was actually sent, because it was one of a number of e-mails that culminated in that particular message. I think it is important for the Committee to get clarification as to what that was and on whose direction Ms McCarty took that course of action.

I will just ask two brief questions. In the draft letter to you from Michael Sands — it is on page 34 — is that your own handwriting?

Mr McCausland: No, that would be the special adviser's handwriting.

The Chairperson: That is the handwriting that strikes out "Turkington Holdings Ltd" and puts on the side column "Reps of the Glass + Glazing Federation", and, below that, "Fusion 21?"

Mr McCausland: Yes.

The Chairperson: So, that is the action of the special adviser.

Mr McCausland: Yes. By way of explanation on that, I refer back to the role, remit and job description for special advisers. One of the elements there is to review correspondence and documentation. If anyone is familiar with the room that I use upstairs, they will know that there are two tables. He works at one and I work at the other, and we regularly, in the course of dealing with documentation, refer from one to the other, so I was aware that that was written on it, but it is actually his writing.

The Chairperson: In Michael Sands's evidence, he said that he sent a letter to you through your private office and received a letter back. I want to paraphrase Michael Sands: what the Minister wants, the Minister will get. Or words to that effect. The point is that we have a change to the draft letter, and Michael Sands, in his evidence, clearly acknowledged that that was an inaccuracy in the

way it was written that changed the outcome, which was sent to me on behalf of this Committee. It was an inaccuracy. You have accepted today that you made the mistake, so obviously we will reflect on that.

I have one final point. You said in your earlier evidence that you received a number of requests for meetings to discuss double-glazing contracts with companies with an interest in specifications. Did you have any meetings with any other company on that matter?

Mr McCausland: Yes, I did.

The Chairperson: Then the Committee will seek a list of that.

Mr McCausland: That is fine.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much. Minister, thank you for that this morning. We will return.

Members, we agreed that, on completion of this evidence session today, we would reflect on the evidence at the next meeting. However, as I pointed out earlier, there is clearly an issue about disclosure, which, as we all agreed in an earlier part of the meeting, is not acceptable. So, we will require Will Haire, the permanent secretary, to be here at the meeting on 9 January.

We have conflicting evidence from Barbara McConaghie and Michael Sands. I obviously have no intention of commenting on the veracity or otherwise of any of that, but what we have received is conflicting. So, I suggest that we need to hear directly from both those individuals, and that, in this context, because of the conflicting information provided, we need to ask and require people to take the oath and make a declaration as they see fit. Further to that, we need to ask Susan McCarty to clarify the terms upon which she pursued that line of action in a number of e-mails and require Stephen Brimstone to come to the Committee to give evidence as well. That will be on 9 January.

On the back of that, we will take stock. It is fair to say that we have quite a quantity of information. In ideal circumstances, certainly from my perspective in trying to make sure that we conduct the inquiry properly, I would have preferred to have all the information provided to the Committee at an early stage so that we could have perhaps had an awayday to cogitate, reflect on and examine all that. We may well do that. So, what I am suggesting is that we move forward as we agreed to the meeting on 9 January. We will advise those individuals that we now require them to present themselves to the Committee.

I just want to make it clear again for the record that this is obviously new territory for the Assembly. This is the first such inquiry that has been held. I want to make it very clear to the Department and others that when we require documentation that means that that documentation must be provided to the Committee. It is not an if or it is not a discovery exercise or a trawling exercise. It is a statutorily-based inquiry, and the Committee takes very seriously its responsibility. On that basis, we conclude this session of the inquiry.