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Chairman
Committee for Social Development
Room 284
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Mr Chairman,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 3 July 2014.

The letter requests me to provide written evidence for your inquiry into allegations arising from a BBC Northern Ireland Spotlight television programme that was broadcast on 3 July 2013.

I am happy to respond to the letter and I acknowledge the Terms of Reference:

- 1. Decision making relating to the award, modification and cancellation of NIHE maintenance contracts to establish any impropriety or irregularity and, in particular, whether the actions of Minister were appropriate.*
- 2. Allegations that the Committee was misled by the Minister for Social Development over his decision to seek a review of the specification for the supply and fitting of double glazing*
- 3. The adequacy of actions proposed by the Minister, DSD and the NIHE to address previous, well documented failings in relation to procurement and contract management.*

And;

Should the Committee identify any evidence of fraud or corruption in relation to the operation of NIHE maintenance contracts and / or any actions indicating possible breaches of relevant codes of conduct, these will be reported directly to the authorities.

You have asked me to provide written evidence regarding strand (1) of the Terms of Reference and meetings held with NIHE senior management and Minister McCausland.

As a background to the first meeting on 28 April 2011, I should inform you that at this stage I had not yet been elected to the Assembly. My attendance at the meeting was a natural progression to my involvement with the Red Sky company over the years in my role as voluntary Chairman of East Belfast Partnership. During this time, a forum was established to engage private sector companies with training organisations in East Belfast. Red Sky, one of the largest employers in the area who provided jobs and apprenticeships for many of my constituents, played an important role in this forum.

With regard to the meeting of 28 April 2011, it is my understanding that matters raised during discussions were recorded by an officer of NIHE and minutes produced. These issues included: contractual difficulties between Red Sky and NIHE; the potential loss of over 400 jobs in an area

already suffering from high levels of unemployment; the loss of business to local suppliers and shops; and the anger of the Red Sky workforce who felt strongly that they were being discriminated against which had led to a number of public protests.

I attended a second meeting on 27 June 2011 at Parliament Buildings between Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland MLA and representatives of Red Sky following a request from my colleague Robin Newton MLA. At this stage, Red Sky had appointed an Administrator and senior management were anxious about the threat to the very existence of the company as a result of the decision by the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to terminate the company's five contracts. It was evident that the senior management team were determined to inform the Minister of the precarious situation facing the company and the potential loss of hundreds of local jobs. Red Sky senior management presented a very strong case that their company's operating standards were as good if not better than other contractors operating NIHE contracts.

As a newly elected representative for East Belfast, I was and still remain convinced that it was my role and duty to help and support the hundreds of workers, many of whom were my constituents.

I trust this explains my position in attending the above two meetings and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sammy Douglas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'g'.

Sammy Douglas MLA