

Written Ministerial Statement

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Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

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Mr Poots (Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Statement to the Assembly about the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). Following my Statement on 16 October, a number of further allegations have been sent to me about potential fraud, theft or other irregularities in NIFRS, some recent and some dating back over many years. I understand that other MLAs may also have received some such allegations. Some of these have already received media coverage.

I want to assure the Assembly that where appropriate, all material allegations and any others that may come to light over the weeks and months ahead will be investigated rigorously and proportionately, to ensure that our commitment to restoring full public confidence in NIFRS is fulfilled. I am tasking the Departmental Accounting Officer with the responsibility of ensuring a satisfactory and independent investigation of the material specific allegations that have been made. I am also looking to the NIFRS leadership team of Board Chair, Interim Chief Executive and Interim CFO to ensure that proper and effective control systems are in place in relation to the basics of the management of finance, HR, procurement, stock and equipment, and that these systems are operating effectively. I want DHSSPS to continue to provide strong support for the NIFRS team in this task.

It is appropriate and important that where anyone has information about abuse of public money or the assets or equipment of NIFRS as a public body, this is brought to light so that the specific

issues can be resolved, appropriate lessons learned, and public confidence restored. Where wrongdoing has occurred it must be addressed, with a proportionate and appropriate response. I also want to emphasise that by far the majority in NIFRS continue to work faithfully and conscientiously as public servants and we should all work together to ensure that the negative factors in the culture of the organisation are dealt with fully at this time.