



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:  
Mr Michael Sands

6 November 2014

## Committee for Social Development

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*"I said, 'Yes, fire away'. He said, 'Jenny, do you know anything about an email that was sent to the chairman of the board of the Housing Executive on the morning of the Tuesday that the Red Sky contract was terminated by the board?' I said, 'Yes, sure it was your office that sent it on behalf of Mr Brimstone'. He said, 'You know, he is going mad in the Department trying to find it'. I asked, 'Who's going mad?', and he said, 'Mr Brimstone'".*

That seems to be more than a casual conversation.

**Mr Sands:** I can assure you that all it was a casual conversation over lunch. As I said in my statement, it was Jenny who raised the issue of what had happened over the summer and her appearance, and she mentioned an email that had gone from the Department. To get clarification as to whether it was another email that I was not aware of or an email that we are aware I sent on the morning of 5 July, I simply asked her about it. She said, "It was your email". I knew then that the email that she was referring to was the one and only email and that, in fact, it was in the system, was readily available under freedom of information and that there was no need for anybody to go mad looking for it, because it was there.

**Mr F McCann:** There is a clear contradiction in the written evidence and what you are saying and what Jenny Palmer said. She said that you asked her rather than her asking you.

**Mr Sands:** Yes, I did ask her. I did not introduce the subject. She introduced the subject as we were chatting over lunch. She mentioned the email and, yes, I did ask her, for clarity, whether it was the email that I had sent or not. So, yes, I did ask her that, but I did not instigate the conversation.

**Mr F McCann:** Did you not say to her that Mr Brimstone was going mad?

**Mr Sands:** From my recollection, I did not.

**Mr F McCann:** So she is wrong in the information that she has supplied to the Committee.

**Mr Sands:** My recollection is what I have said: I did not say that he was going mad.

**Mr Allister:** I want to get the chronology of the scene. The events with the Housing Executive board occurred in July 2011. We will fast-forward through July 2013, when there was the 'Spotlight' programme, to 19 September 2013, when you were sitting beside Mrs Palmer at lunch.

**Mr Sands:** Yes, with the other councillors.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, but she was sitting next to you, and you were in conversation. In judging time as best the Committee can, that seems to have coincided with the ongoing fact-finding investigation relating to Mr Brimstone. You were aware of that fact-finding investigation?

**Mr Sands:** I was aware of it. I was not involved in it.

**Mr Allister:** How were you aware of it?

**Mr Sands:** I had heard that there was an investigation going on.

**Mr Allister:** From whom?

**Mr Sands:** I cannot remember specifically who it was.

**Mr Allister:** From Mr Brimstone?

**Mr Sands:** No, no, it was not from Mr Brimstone. It may have been discussed in the office that an investigation was ongoing.

**Mr Allister:** Given the position that you have, you have been working with Mr Brimstone very closely for a number of years and obviously have some form of relationship with him as a work colleague in that sense.

**Mr Sands:** A business relationship.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, and you know him quite well.

**Mr Sands:** I would not say that I know him quite well; I have a business relationship with him. I met him and his wife one day in House of Fraser, and that is as much as I know about his family life.

**Mr Allister:** On the subject of the email, you were at your desk at 7.30 am when the subject email was sent on 1 July 2011.

**Mr Sands:** It was 5 July.

**Mr Allister:** Sorry, 5 July 2011. Thank you. Are you normally at your desk at 7.30 am, or was that by arrangement?

**Mr Sands:** I am normally in my office every morning at 7.10 am.

**Mr Allister:** That is very commendable.

**Mr Sands:** Thank you. I was there at 7.05 am this morning.

**Mr Allister:** Mr Brimstone also appeared to be in early that morning. Is that right?

**Mr Sands:** He appeared in my room. I do not know his normal starting time because he would normally be —

**Mr Allister:** Anyhow, he came and asked you to send an email to the chairman.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** And there was some urgency about it.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** And it was an email adjusting the timings of the contract review that the Minister and Mr Brimstone were eager to get the board to agree to.

**Mr Sands:** It was an email asking if the chairman could ask the administrator if, in fact, the time of six months in the Minister's letter could be lessened to four months. It was a question asking if and whether he could. It was not telling him to do anything.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, it was a question that he put that before the board.

**Mr Sands:** No, if he could put it to BDO, the administrator.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, to the administrator to report on. That was an email amongst, I am sure, thousands of emails that you send over a year, and here we are, two years later, and that matter is being revisited. You would not remember offhand all the emails that you sent two years ago?

**Mr Sands:** No, it was only when that was shown to me and someone said, "Here is a record of it". As you rightly say, I could receive 70 or 80 emails a day.

**Mr Allister:** I am sure. Was it not the case that some issue had been raised about that email and you, knowing that Mrs Palmer was on the board and the centrality of that to the controversy that had been generated by the programme, asked her, "Do you know anything about an email to the chairman?"?

**Mr Sands:** I have already admitted that to Mr McCann. In fact, I did ask her.

**Mr Allister:** If you already knew about it, you did not need to ask that question.

**Mr Sands:** I thought that I had explained myself; I will try again. Mrs Palmer referred to an email which had been sent from the Department. I was trying to get clarity on whether it was another email or my specific email that was sent on that morning. Mrs Palmer's answer to my question was that it was my email. I knew then that it was only the one email. That is what we discussed and that which we referred to.

**Mr Allister:** Had anyone suggested that there were two emails?

**Mr Sands:** Mrs Palmer simply said that an email had been sent from the Department —

**Mr Allister:** And you knew that to be right.

**Mr Sands:** Well, I was not sure whether she was talking about another email or mine, because she did not refer to it by name.

**Mr Allister:** Was there another email?

**Mr Sands:** No, there was not. It turned out that there was not.

**Mr Allister:** So, if you knew that there was no other email, I am a bit puzzled as to why you would say or test her on whether or not you were talking about the same email.

**Mr Sands:** I now know that there was no other email. I did not know at that point in the conversation because, as I said — I repeat myself again — she had referred to an email from the Department. I was merely trying to get clarity on whether it was my email.

**Mr Allister:** So, Mrs Palmer is absolutely right when she tells us that you asked her whether she was aware of an email from the Department to the Chair.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** She is absolutely right that she sat beside you at lunch and that that is when this conversation took place.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** She is absolutely right when she asked you whether you had been in the room when the phone call had taken place.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** So, on all of those pertinent issues, Mrs Palmer is absolutely factually accurate.

**Mr Sands:** On the points that you have just raised, yes.

**Mr Allister:** Yes. And you want us to believe that she is factually inaccurate on the question of who asked about the email.

**Mr Sands:** No. Sorry, I thought that I had already said that I asked about the email. That is the third time, now, that you have said it. I asked about the email.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, but you are trying to put it in the context of your asking it after she had already asked you.

**Mr Sands:** She had raised the issue of what happened over the summer and the programme.

**Mr Allister:** She had not raised the issue of an email.

**Mr Sands:** No. She mentioned that an email had been sent from the Department.

**Mr Allister:** I want to suggest to you that you may be mistaken about that and that you raised the issue — as you admit that you did — but that you did it without Mrs Palmer's having asked you anything about an email. You asked her if she was aware of an email sent by the Department.

**Mr Sands:** My recollection is as I have set it out already, in that she raised the issue, she mentioned it, and I was trying to get clarity on which email it was.

**Mr Allister:** That is your recollection.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** So, you are relying on your recollection. You are not —

**Mr Sands:** It was a casual conversation.

**Mr Allister:** We know —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Sorry, Mr Allister. Mr Sands has answered the question.

**Mr Campbell:** About five times, Chairman.

**Mr Allister:** Well, let me put this to you, Mr Sands: the Committee knows from phase 1 of this inquiry that your recollection can be faulty. You sat where you sit today and gave us evidence that you had never seen a minute of a certain meeting until August, when it came out under freedom of information (FOI), yet the subsequent evidence was that, on four occasions, amendments to that minute had been sent to you. You had no recollection of that.

**Mr Sands:** May I explain that, Chairman?

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Of course.

**Mr Sands:** This would have been the evidence that I would have given had I not been off ill. What I would have said at that time was that the minute was sent round and, when I received it, I looked at it and, first of all, I noticed that, in fact, my name was not on the attendance list. I inserted my name. Someone must have come into my room and interrupted me. I subsequently went back to the email and reordered the middle of it to simply highlight the fact that there would be a saving of £15.1 million. I tracked those changes and sent them back to Barbara McConaghie. That is all that I did. When I answered that I had never seen the email titled "A meeting with the Glass and Glazing Federation", I had not seen that minute because the minute that I worked on had shown the meeting to be with Turkington's, so I was absolutely right.

**Mr Allister:** You are turning it on the head of that pin, are you? Four times, you told the Committee, "I did not see those minutes until August".

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Mr Allister —

**Mr Campbell:** We are going down a route again, Chairman. Obviously, you never learned the last time.

**Mr Brady:** Mr Allister, Mr Sands has answered the question. You can ask him from now till kingdom come; you will still get the same answer.

**Mr Wilson:** Chairman, I want a ruling from you. Mr Sands is here today to talk about the evidence that Mrs Palmer gave and his response to it. Phase 1 of the inquiry is over. He is not here to answer questions about phase 1 of the inquiry.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** I think, Sammy, Mr Allister initially asked Mr Sands about Jenny Palmer.

**Mr Wilson:** Yes, but he is now on to another subject.

**Mr Allister:** It is not another subject.

**Mr Wilson:** It is.

**Mr Allister:** It is the issue of what reliance this Committee should place on Mr Sands's recollection if we already have evidence of faulty recollection on phase 1. I am simply suggesting to Mr Sands that his recollection was faulty then and perhaps it is faulty now.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Again, Mr Sands has provided clarity today on whatever his recollection was. He can only answer the questions as asked.

**Mr Campbell:** Mr Sands has explained that it was not, as Mr Allister said, faulty recollection. We are in danger here of reopening old wounds.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** The point that I am trying to make, before we proceed any further, is that Mr Sands has been questioned and has given answers. That is as much as he can do in the circumstances. If people have their views on the content of those answers, that is another matter.

**Mr Wilson:** There were two occasions when the evidence that Mrs Palmer gave seemed to be in contradiction to the evidence that you have given. One was around the conversation about the emails. You have explained to us that, as far as you are concerned — we will just get this on record again — she initiated the conversation about emails —

**Mr Sands:** Over lunch, about the programme.

**Mr Wilson:** — and around the programme. Would you or Stephen Brimstone have had any reason to go mad about finding an email? What would the procedure have been had he wanted to find that email?

**Mr Sands:** He would have asked me, and I would have said that the emails that I had, and which are now freely available to the Committee, were there. We knew what they were, and they were open for anybody to see, so there was no reason why he would go mad.

**Mr Wilson:** So there is a record of all of those emails. Clearly there is, because we have been supplied with a copy of the email anyhow. So, he would have been well aware of the system and how to access it. Would he have had to go to you or could he have accessed it without going near you?

**Mr Sands:** He would not have come to me. He would have gone to, say, the director's office in the housing division, which would be the keeper of all of those things and would have ready access. As I already said, I deal with 70 or 80 emails a day. I cannot remember all the specific ones, but they could turn up on various records; they are all on the TRIM records.

**Mr Wilson:** So, indeed, if someone was very concerned about an email, rather than publicly going around being in a flap about it and drawing even more attention to their concerns, they could quite easily have gone quietly and got access to it. So it would not make sense for him to have gone mad about it, as Mrs Palmer suggested.

**Mr Sands:** Not at all.

**Mr Wilson:** In fact, if anything, it would probably have been to his detriment to have gone mad if he had been concerned about it, especially when there were other channels open to him. I am not going to ask you to speculate on Mrs Palmer's motives for presenting the information in that way. She also told us that she had a conversation with you about the phone call that Stephen Brimstone made to her. What is your recollection of that?

**Mr Sands:** She simply recounted that, in fact, the telephone call had taken place, and she asked me if I had been in the room when Stephen made the phone call. I pointed out to her that no one in the Department knew about the phone call. The first that we heard about it was when Brian Rowntree phoned Will Haire several days later and explained that that telephone call had taken place.

**Mr Wilson:** And you became aware of it after that.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Wilson:** Why did Mr Haire decide to share that? Was it shared to you in the form of a question about whether anybody had heard the phone call? What was the reason for Mr Haire raising it?

**Mr Sands:** The context would probably have been around, as you said, whether anyone else was aware of the phone call. He was not aware of it, and the senior management team was not aware of it. We were not told about it, except by Brian Rowntree after the event.

**Mr Wilson:** Mrs Palmer was quite adamant that you told her:

*"Mr Brimstone came to me personally, and he told me the very next day that he had phoned you and instructed you to go to the board to ask for an extension of the contracts and stand against the board."*

Those are the words that she has attributed to you.

**Mr Sands:** This was in the context of the actual phone call. I can only say that, in working with Mr Brimstone since May 2011, he has been in my room twice. Once was on the morning of 5 July to send that email, which you are well aware of. The second occasion was when I returned from being off ill. He called down to my room three or four days after my return as a mere courtesy to see how I was. He does not make a habit of coming down.

**Mr Wilson:** So, he is not the kind of boy who comes in and says, "Wait till I tell you what I did yesterday".

**Mr Sands:** No, absolutely not.

**Mr Wilson:** Yet, Mrs Palmer has suggested —

**Mr Sands:** I never said the words to her.

**Mr Wilson:** Here are two fairly crucial conversations that she has used as evidence that her version of events is correct, and you are saying that, on both occasions, she is lying.

**Mr Sands:** I would not accuse her of lying. I am saying that that is my recollection of that conversation. Based on the information that you have in relation to my relationship with Stephen Brimstone, it just would not have happened.

**Mr Wilson:** I think that this is important, Michael. This is not just about your recollection. This is about you saying that both of these things would be totally out of character given his relationship with you, that it is not a kind of palsy-walsy relationship where he tells you everything that he has been up to —

**Mr Sands:** Absolutely not. It is business.

**Mr Wilson:** — and, indeed, in the case of the email, that he would not have had any reason to go in a flap looking for the evidence because there was a much more surreptitious way in which he could have obtained the email if he had wished to.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** I do not think Mr Sands mentioned the word "lying", as you are saying.

**Mr Wilson:** No, he has not, but what I am saying is that —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** There is an implication there, with respect.



**Mr Wilson:** Well, it is not an implication; it is direct. One person is telling the truth, and another person is telling a lie. What I am trying to establish from Mr Sands is that, given the relationship that he had with Stephen Brimstone, it is hardly likely that he would have been coming and confiding in him about a conversation that he had with another member of the party —

**Mr Sands:** Absolutely not.

**Mr Wilson:** That was not the kind of relationship —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** I say again, with respect, that, if you consider that someone is telling a lie, that is a subjective judgement on your behalf.

**Mr Wilson:** No, I am just trying to establish that the —

**Mr Campbell:** Chairman, surely it is about an accurate recollection and an inaccurate recollection.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** You are coming in next, Gregory, so we will just let Sammy finish.

**Mr Wilson:** Leaving aside what was said in the conversation, I am just trying to establish that the kind of conversation that Mrs Palmer has suggested that Stephen Brimstone had with you is totally out of character because you are not a kind of close confidant, a buddy or somebody who frequents his company and has casual conversations with him.

**Mr Sands:** That is correct.

**Mr Wilson:** And you are saying that him visiting your office and dropping in for a chat does not happen.

**Mr Sands:** No, and it still does not happen.

**Mr Wilson:** And, as far as the email is concerned, one person claims that he was in a flap and you are saying that, if she had known the routes that were open to him, she would know that he would not have had to get into a flap because he had plenty of ways of getting this information, indeed probably without even drawing anybody's attention to the fact that he was looking for it.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Campbell:** Mr Sands, obviously the Committee is having a series of difficulties proceeding with the inquiry given the reluctance of some to appear before it, but you are here and we are glad to see you after your illness. You have alluded to the issue of the famous phone call and, after that, Mr Rowntree speaking to Will Haire, the permanent secretary. That was your knowledge then of the original phone call; is that right?

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Campbell:** What was your understanding, if you had spoken to Mr Haire, about the rationale for Brian Rowntree's phone call to Will Haire? What was your understanding of the background of that?

**Mr Sands:** Again, I am speaking on behalf of Will Haire here. Brian Rowntree's intention was simply to bring to Will Haire's attention that Jenny Palmer had received the phone call and that he had to excuse her from the meeting so that she was not involved in any vote.

**Mr Campbell:** Was it your understanding that Will Haire was just relating the factual position of the outcome of the phone call? Was that it?

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Campbell:** There was nothing else to it other than that.

**Mr Sands:** Nothing else could have been done about it because the phone call had been made. We were not involved in it, and Stephen Brimstone started to set out in his evidence at the previous meeting how he had arrived at that phone call. No official was involved in it and no official knew about it, and we did not know about it until afterwards when Brian Rowntree phoned Will.

**Mr F McCann:** I notice that, in the past, Sammy has accused members of the Committee of having a particular bias against people who have given evidence, but it is quite clear that he has a particular bias against Mrs Palmer and the evidence that she gave. I know that it was not Michael who accused her of lying, but it was Mr Wilson who accused her of lying. I cannot understand something. When Mrs Palmer gave evidence, at the start of her presentation, she would not name you as the person who she had the conversation with and, reluctantly, at the end, after being probed, said that it was you who had the conversation. What sort of relationship did you have with Mrs Palmer, if any? I know that people get on fairly friendly at Housing Council meetings and build up relationships. It is your job to do that and certainly Mrs Palmer's job to do it also. What sort of relationship did you have?

**Mr Sands:** I would not say that I had any relationship with Mrs Palmer. Again, as with my relationship with Stephen Brimstone, it is purely business. I had attended several of the housing and regeneration committee meetings. I was aware that she was on the Housing Council. I have never come into her company in any situation other than those business relationships and business meetings where we were dealing with various issues. As I said, at the meeting on 19 September when she sat beside me or I sat beside her — I cannot remember how it happened — there was a casual conversation around what had happened over the summer, and the conversation then led on to the programme.

**Mr F McCann:** Why would she say that you said those things?

**Mr Sands:** I cannot answer that, Mr McCann.

**Mr F McCann:** Councillor Palmer was unequivocal about what you told her. She said:

*"He said, 'Mr Brimstone came to me personally, and he told me the very next day that he had phoned you and instructed you to go to the board to ask for an extension of the contracts and stand against the board.' Those were Michael Sands's words to me."*

Are you saying that that did not take place?

**Mr Sands:** Absolutely not. I did not say that Stephen Brimstone came to speak to me personally. Can I just point out, Mr McCann, that, in Mrs Palmer's evidence, she said:

*"afterwards a DSD official approached me and asked me whether he could".*

She went on to say:

*"as a DSD official and had lunch with me".*

So, she said two different things.

**Mr F McCann:** We can go further on in the evidence. When she was asked again by the Chair, she identified you as the person she spoke to. She said that you had phoned her about the conversation that took place between Mr Brimstone and Mrs Palmer. It is them directly quoting that. The point that I am making is that, whilst Mr Wilson accused Mrs Palmer of telling lies, somebody is telling lies. Obviously, you are saying that it is not you.

**Mr Sands:** As you rightly said, it is a difference in a recollection of a casual conversation. I can only repeat to you what my recollection of that conversation is, and I have stated quite clearly what that is.

**Mr F McCann:** Yes, but, for her, it was much more than a recollection. She was quite clear about a conversation that took place between yourselves. Are you now saying that Mrs Palmer misled or lied to the Committee?

**Mr Sands:** I am certainly not saying that. I am saying that I can only repeat what I have said. I explained to Mr Wilson the relationship that I have with Mr Brimstone and why it would be totally out of

character for him to come and tell me anything personally. He has never done so on any issue. The only personal dealings that I have had with Mr Brimstone, as I said, was when he came to me after I came back off sick leave and asked me how I was, which was out of courtesy.

**Mr F McCann:** If you are not accusing her of lying or misleading the Committee, what are you doing? It is tantamount to telling us that she is lying.

**Mr Sands:** I am recounting my version of the events as happened in that casual conversation.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Again, I think that is all Mr Sands can do.

**Mr Allister:** I want to take you back to how you became aware of the Brimstone/Palmer phone call. Tell us how and when you became aware of that.

**Mr Sands:** Brian Rowntree phoned Will Haire after the event and told him what had happened.

**Mr Allister:** And how did you know?

**Mr Sands:** I cannot remember the exact circumstances, but Will may have told us at a particular time. I cannot honestly remember.

**Mr Allister:** I am trying to remember what they have told us. At some point, it came to your knowledge. Did that come directly from Mr Haire?

**Mr Sands:** I believe that it did, yes.

**Mr Allister:** Was that at a meeting where he sat you all down and said, "There has been this issue about a phone call from the special adviser to Councillor Palmer"? Was it at a meeting that he told you that?

**Mr Sands:** Yes, it would have been at a meeting.

**Mr Allister:** It was not an email.

**Mr Sands:** No, it was not an email. It would not be one of those things where he would specifically come and speak to me personally.

**Mr Allister:** Who else would be at that meeting?

**Mr Sands:** I honestly cannot remember.

**Mr Allister:** You cannot remember that.

**Mr Sands:** No.

**Mr Allister:** Was it just you and Mr Haire, do you think?

**Mr Sands:** I honestly cannot remember. No, I said that it would not have been a meeting simply between Will Haire and myself. It would have been a meeting of other senior officials, perhaps discussing other issues. I cannot remember.

**Mr Allister:** You remembered enough for it to register that that is how you got the information but you cannot remember where and when.

**Mr Sands:** That was helped by the evidence that Mr Haire gave to this Committee that that was how he came to hear of it.

**Mr Allister:** That is how he came to hear of it, he says.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** It is not how you came to hear of it necessarily.

**Mr Sands:** No, I have explained to you that Will told us about it then. I cannot remember —

**Mr Allister:** Are you conveying to the Committee a means by which you came into possession of that information, anxious to avoid conceding that your source was Mr Brimstone?

**Mr Sands:** Absolutely not.

**Mr Allister:** Are you trying to keep on the right side of Mr Brimstone?

**Mr Sands:** Absolutely not. I have no affinity with or loyalty to Mr Brimstone at all. He is a business colleague, and that is it.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Mr Allister, I go back to the point that I made before: Mr Sands can only answer the questions that he is asked, and I think that the last remark was speculative.

**Mr Allister:** I think that we are entitled to probe motive. Tell us this: does the special adviser personally have access to the TRIM system?

**Mr Sands:** I do not know.

**Mr Allister:** I think that we heard evidence, if I recall correctly, that a special adviser personally does not have access.

**Mr Sands:** I do not know but, again, in answering Mr Wilson's question, and as he pointed out and set out, it would not be difficult for him to come and ask somebody to get that for him.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, he would have to ask someone. If he was looking for an email —

**Mr Sands:** If he does not have access to TRIM. I do not know.

**Mr Allister:** I am relying on evidence that arose in phase 1, but I think that the evidence was that the special adviser does not have access to the TRIM system and would have to ask a third party.

**Mr Sands:** If that is what you say, yes. I honestly do not know if he has access or not.

**Mr Allister:** So, if he was looking for an email, he would have to ask someone.

**Mr Sands:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** And Mrs Palmer says that you said that he asked you.

**Mr Sands:** Sorry, run that past me again.

**Mr Allister:** Mrs Palmer says that you said that he was looking for an email and you asked her if she knew anything about it.

**Mr Sands:** As I set out in my statement to the Committee, during the casual conversation that I had with Mrs Palmer, she raised the issue and referred to a minute from the Department. I was trying to get clarity from her in relation to whether it was my minute or another minute. That was what happened. Her answer to me was, "It was your minute that was sent". So, I knew then that there was only one minute and that was what we were talking about.

**Mr Allister:** You have known Mrs Palmer in your official role for many years, is that right?

**Mr Sands:** I would not say "many": a few years.

**Mr Allister:** She told us that she has been on the board since 2007 maybe.

**Mr Sands:** Yes, but I do not attend the board. I might have known she was a member.

**Mr Allister:** How long has she been chairman of the committee that you service?

**Mr Sands:** I do not have a clue: a year or two years.

**Mr Allister:** In whatever number of years it is that you have known her, have you ever found her to be anything other than an honest person?

**Mr Sands:** Chairman, that is not a fair question for me to answer.

**Mr Campbell:** It is not the first time that has been asked either, Chairman. It was asked of another witness.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** With respect, Mr Sands is being asked to speculate on something that he may not necessarily have the answer to.

**Mr Campbell:** As Mr Brimstone was last time as well by the same member.

**Mr Allister:** I am not sure who is chairing this meeting.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** The point that I was trying to make, Mr Allister, is that Mr Sands has answered the question. You are going over old ground.

**Mr Allister:** If you please.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Are you finished?

**Mr Allister:** If you wish.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Brady):** Do any other members have questions for Mr Sands? If not, I thank you for your evidence, Mr Sands, and for attending today.