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Cc: [Gordon, David](#)
Subject: FW: DFE News Release - STATEMENT ON ALLEGATIONS BY FORMER MINISTER
Date: 18 December 2016 19:13:20

Hi All,

Press release has issued and now that it is out through our out of hours system it will be emailed again with the documents to all the main news desks. We cannot add in links out of hours as we don't have access to the website out of hours, which is why the documents will be emailed separately to the newsdesks and if requested.

Áine

From: Executive News Service [mailto:EIS.Newsservice@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 18 December 2016 19:10
To: EIS.Newsservice@executiveoffice-ni.gsi.gov.uk
Subject: DFE News Release - STATEMENT ON ALLEGATIONS BY FORMER MINISTER

DEPARTMENT FOR THE ECONOMY

18 December 2016

Statement on allegations by former Minister

Economy Minister Simon Hamilton MLA said: "Former DETI Minister Jonathan Bell alleged in a BBC interview last week that an attempt had been made by OFMDFM officials to "cleanse" Government records in relation to First Minister Arlene Foster's involvement with RHI deliberations.

He cited a senior official from my Department, Mr Chris Stewart, as a 'whistleblower' who had alerted him to this matter.

This was a very serious allegation, and naturally received extensive media coverage. Given this level of seriousness, I requested full transparency from my Department as a matter of urgency, including the release of relevant paperwork.

I am today publishing that documentation together with a note for the record prepared by Mr Stewart with input from Departmental Permanent Secretary Andrew McCormick.

The actual facts of the matter are now in the public domain and I would urge everyone to study the material. I am satisfied that Mr Bell's account is seriously at variance from the facts.

There are many technical details here involving the machinery of Government. But I would make the following observations:

* As detailed, this documentation involves the drafting and redrafting of a DETI submission regarding RHI closure in 2016. There was no 'cleansing' of records, as both drafts are recorded and retained. Both are published today.

* The re-drafting was undertaken by Mr Bell's special adviser. It deleted a specific reference to OFMDFM being involved in discussions in early 2016 on the closure of RHI. This was not done on behalf of or to the benefit of First Minister Foster. As the documentation shows, this OFMDFM involvement helped secure the closure of RHI in February 2016 - earlier than the date originally signed off on by Minister Bell. To suggest this was a cover-up is to ignore the facts. The involvement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to bring forward RHI closure was in the public interest and the original draft made this involvement explicit.

* These deliberations and submission preparations in early 2016 were on the closure date for RHI. They were not on the separate 2015 decision regarding the introduction of RHI cost controls.

Note To Editors

The attached word document entitled 'Submission – Closure of RHI – Urgent Executive Approval' is a tracked change version and thus may not be able to be properly viewed on all devices.

The officials named in this press release and in the associated documentation are not available for comment.

All media enquiries should be directed to the Department for the Economy Press Office on 028 9052 9604. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number Personal information redacted by the RHI Inquiry and your call will be returned.

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