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Mr H. Downey
Democratic Services Section
Belfast City Council
Chief Executive's Department
City Hall
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27 January 2017

Dear Mr Downey,

The Secretary of State has asked me to thank you for your letters to me of 16th January highlighting two motions recently passed by Belfast City Council on the transparency of political donations and on the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme. I am happy to provide comments on his behalf.

The Secretary of State has been clear that as a devolved matter, the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme should be the subject of an independent inquiry established by Northern Ireland's devolved institutions. He has welcomed the establishment of an inquiry and believes that this is an important step towards building confidence in the ability of the institutions to deliver and help set the tone for the Assembly election.

The Secretary of State has encouraged full co-operation with the inquiry, and hopes that it is able quickly and effectively to establish the facts, and provide assurances to the public. He has also made clear that the UK Government will do everything we can to support this independent inquiry.

On the subject of the transparency of donations, the Secretary of State wrote to Northern Ireland's political parties earlier this month seeking their views on moving to full transparency and stating his clear desire to make progress on this issue. He welcomes input into this process and has noted the Council's motion in this regard.

C. Atkinson

CHRIS ATKINSON
PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND