



Fleetbank House
1st Floor, 2-6 Salisbury Square
London
EC4Y 8AE

Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP
Paymaster General
70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS

1 June 2020

Dear Minister,

Infected Blood Inquiry

Thank you for reaffirming the Government's commitment to the Inquiry, when you wrote to confirm your appointment as Minister responsible for the Infected Blood Inquiry. I welcome the fact that the Inquiry is both a priority for the Government and for you personally.

This is important because when setting up the Inquiry your predecessor assured me and Parliament that the Cabinet Office would provide all the resources and support that the Inquiry needs to meet the demanding timescales that are essential in order to meet the expectations of people who have already waited so long for answers.

At the start of the lockdown I told participants in the Inquiry that my team and I would continue to work full tilt on our investigation, and on preparation for future hearings. We are doing so. We have been able to maintain our rate of progress and, as I said at the start of the Inquiry, care taken over this stage of the process will help to ensure the Inquiry concludes as early as is consistent with proper thoroughness.

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I am glad also to hear your commitment to act on issues of pressing concern to participants in the Inquiry. The Government accepted the terms of reference for the Inquiry nearly two years ago now. They drew attention to access to (and variations in) financial support. I reiterated concerns about these issues after the Preliminary Hearings, along with those about access to psychological support. I did so because it seemed right that the Government, together with the devolved administrations in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast, should have an early opportunity to address them.

Since then, there have been some developments: increased financial support for people infected and affected - but not for bereaved partners – in England, one-off payments in Northern Ireland, and some dedicated psychological support in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Though I understand that these have been welcomed as interim measures pending any recommendation I may make in the Inquiry Report, I am aware that there is still concern for many participants.

It remains the case that the majority of people infected and affected do not have access to dedicated psychological support despite having had to struggle with the corrosive effects of infection, the debilitating side-effects of treatment (often with the destructive uncertainties of knowing that whether that treatment would succeed was speculative), and the brutal manifestations of stigma. All of this on top of losses of career, social and educational opportunity, and finance: and in many cases, also bereavement. The evidence given to me not just from people infected and affected but also from the Inquiry's panels of leading psychosocial, HIV and hepatitis experts is that dedicated psychological support is long overdue.

It remains the case that bereaved partners in Scotland have secure financial provision but elsewhere in the UK they do not. It remains the case that people in Wales and Northern Ireland receive lower levels of financial support. It remains the case that many of those who have suffered the grinding hardship that came with infection are haunted by worries that they will leave impoverished those who have already sacrificed much of their own lives and dreams by standing by and caring for them.

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I share the admiration and gratitude to all the people infected and affected which you expressed in your final paragraph. It will be plain from what I have said already that I, too, found their testimonies moving, powerful and important. It is not easy to expose intimate details of one's life to public gaze. I have asked them to take all the risks of doing so, in the interests of the Inquiry. You will understand then why it is that I feel a particular sense of responsibility for ensuring that the support is there for them, on a professional and long term basis, not only to assist in dealing with the problems of the past but with the added pressures that participating in the Inquiry will have brought to bear on them. I hope that with ministerial colleagues in the four nations you are able to cut through whatever problems have prevented greater progress to date.

I welcome your interest in attending the Inquiry when we next hear evidence. We intend to resume hearings in autumn. In the meantime, my team and I will continue to advance the investigation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian J Langstaff". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.

Sir Brian Langstaff
Chair, Infected Blood Inquiry

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