

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

PQ08026	2006/2007
Commons Ordinary Written	

Jenny Willott (Cardiff Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Health, whether his Department has submitted evidence to the Archer Inquiry into the Safety of Blood Products; and if he will make a statement. [156814].

For Answer on:	09/10/2007
Notice Paper Date:	08/10/2007
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MP (Party):	Jennifer Willott MP (Liberal Democrat)

DRAFT REPLY TO REACH PARLIAMENTARY BRANCH BY
12:00 Wednesday 10 October 2007

PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS UNIT

FINAL MINUTE

1. Reply approved by:

Name	<i>Ailsa Wight</i>	Building	<i>Wellington House</i>
		Room	<i>524</i>
Branch	HPIH&SD-HP(ID&BP)	Ext	GRO-C
		Date	<i>10 October 2007</i>

2. Reply composed by:

Name	<i>Patrick Hennessy</i>	Ext	GRO-C
Room	<i>517</i>	Building	<i>Wellington House</i>

3. The following special points should be noted:

PQ08026 2006/2007

Written Answer

Han Ref: Vol

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Willott, Ms Jennifer (Liberal Democrat CARDIFF CENTRAL):

Jenny Willott (Cardiff Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Health, whether his Department has submitted evidence to the Archer Inquiry into the Safety of Blood Products; and if he will make a statement. [156814].

SUGGESTED REPLY

My Department is co-operating fully with the inquiry. Officials have met the inquiry team twice, on 25 April and 19 September, to hear their concerns. The evidence held by my Department is in the form of the official documents covering these issues in the years 1970-85. These documents have been prepared in line with the Freedom of Information Act and released to the inquiry team in monthly batches starting in June, and the final batch will be released this month.

Background

Lord Archer of Sandwell has set up an independent inquiry into the safety of blood and blood products (<http://www.archercbbp.com/>). The focus is on events in the 1970s and 1980s, when the majority of patients with haemophilia became infected with either hepatitis C or HIV, or both, through contaminated blood products supplied through the NHS. Jenny Willott M.P. has tabled a number of PQs that are broadly in support of the inquiry.

The evidence the Department holds is in the official documents from these years, and it has been agreed with the inquiry to release these at monthly intervals as they are prepared in line with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The inquiry now has the great majority of documents and the final batch will be released this month.

Some official documents relevant to blood safety in these years were either lost or accidentally destroyed in the 1990s following litigation on HIV, and this has been cited as a factor in holding an inquiry. However, many of these documents were recovered in 2006, and a review of documentation with supporting papers, including an audit in 2000 of the loss of documents in the 1990s, was published in May this year. The audit found that some papers from the 1990s were lost in error by being wrongly marked for destruction. However, the review concluded that the great majority of papers from 1970-85 had now been recovered. These are being issued to the inquiry.

It is not felt that there would be any benefit in officials attending to give evidence in person, as none of those currently in post has any direct knowledge of the events of more than 20 years ago with the inquiry is concerned. In addition, our legal advice is that, as this is an independent inquiry, officials or others attending to give evidence would be outside the legal requirements and safeguards of an official inquiry.