

MEETING NOTE Monday, 23 March 2020 3.30pm

INV-1449-2020 – NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme – announcement of further interim payments

Meeting with Minister Swann – by teleconference



TITLE/ORGANISATION:		DOH Health Protection Branch		
VENUE:	<input type="checkbox"/> e.g. PB	By teleconference	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:	Castle Buildings
LIST OF ATTENDEES:		Robin Swann, Health Minister <div>GRO-D</div> Co- Chair, Families and Friends <div>GRO-D</div> Co-Chair, Families and Friends <div>GRO-D</div> Chairman, Haemophilia NI <div>GRO-D</div> Haemophilia NI <div>GRO-A</div> Haemophilia Society		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minister	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spad	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PS		
OFFICIALS:	Mark Ovens, Special Adviser Kim Burns, Private Secretary Dr Carol Beattie, Senior Medical Officer, DoH Lesley Heaney, Infected Blood Team, HPB, DoH			
OTHERS:				
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED: Infected Blood Payment Scheme The Minister provided details of what he intended to announce later today. He: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• thanked all for their patience and apologised for the delay since the last meeting;• confirmed that he would make payments that would achieve 100% parity with England on infected beneficiaries payments for 2019/20;• confirmed that he was also making a one-off payment of £5,000 to all 17 non-infected widows/widowers;• referred to there being £1m in the draft budget for 2020/21;• emphasised that the £5k payments were one-off. The Minister said he had read <div>GRO-D</div> 's personal account and apologised for what he had been through.				

GRO-D thanked the Minister *"from the bottom of my heart"* for what he had done for both beneficiaries and non-infected widows and widowers.

This was echoed by **GRO-D** who thanked the Minister and said he was grateful for the NHS for providing him with his liver transplant and stated that he was self-isolating *"in respect of that"*.

GRO-D said he appreciated the positive action that had been taken but said there were other issues to be addressed and asked if parity with England would carry through until the Inquiry ends.

Minister stated that budget is for one year only and that this year and next year *"are covered"*. While he did not know what his tenure as Minister would be he hoped that any future Health Minister would *"not break the cycle"*.

The Minister said that a three-stage approach was being taken to reviewing the NI Infected Blood Payment Scheme and that there will be ongoing work on reviewing the scheme.

Minister added that there were capacity problems in the Department currently and that some staff had been re-deployed to work on COVID-19 and appealed for forbearance in the circumstances.

Mr **GRO-D** pointed out that if other nations made increases to their payments again, we would be *"back to square one"*.

Psychological support

Mr **GRO-D** asked if there would be any reform to the psychological support offered to those infected/affected by contaminated blood.

The Minister stated that issue had yet to be *"bottomed out"* and that he wasn't in a position to say anything further about psychological support at this time but that work would continue with the BHSC to see how this service might be extended.

Mr **GRO-D** stated that psychological support was currently being provided by telephone and added that he appreciated that the Minister had listened to them.

On the issue of the £5,000 one-off payments to widows/widowers, Mr **GRO-D** said while this was welcome, it is *"still a small amount of money for a person's life"*.

Minister said he had wanted to acknowledge the bereaved, from whom he had received correspondence.

GRO-A thanked the Minister and asked for clarification that the remaining £400k (approx.) from January monitoring allocation was used.

Minister confirmed that the commitment had gone further than the remaining £400k as his Department had found additional funding in order to recognise the financial plight of widows.

Mr **GRO-A** said that £5k for bereaved was “fantastic” and would provide reassurance to widows.

GRO-D thanked the Minister for taking the time and going “over and above”.

COVID-19

Mr **GRO-D** raised that fact that many of their members are susceptible to COVID-19 and asked about community testing to provide assurance and whether they might be considered for an antibodies / retrospective testing when it becomes available.

The Minister responded “we will put you in there”, adding that it was expected that letters would be sent to around 40,000 high risk individuals in NI. The Minister stressed that not all beneficiaries of the scheme would fall within the high risk category to receive the letter.

ISSUES AGREED:

- The Minister stressed the importance of social distancing and asked that all groups urge members to take responsibility in relation to social distancing.
- **GRO-D** said he would put information on the organisation’s website regarding social distancing advice.
- The Groups said they would agree a statement outlining today’s discussion to share with members.
- The Groups acknowledged the Minister’s respect of their vulnerable community at this time of health crisis.

ACTION POINTS / OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE:

- The Minister said he hoped to meet groups again in a few months’ time – LH

NOTE WRITTEN BY:

Lesley Heaney

DATE:

23 March 2020