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## Infected Blood Inquiry

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone)

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The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on the infected blood inquiry. The First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:24

I am confident that I speak for every member in this Parliament when I welcome the publication yesterday of the infected blood inquiry's final report. I offer my sincerest thanks to the inquiry's chair, Sir Brian Langstaff, and all the inquiry team for their diligence and their pursuit of truth in producing such a comprehensive final document.

Our focus should now be firmly on all those who have been infected, their families and the organisations that support them: I want to pay tribute to all of them.

Those who have been infected and those who have been impacted by the tragedy have worked tirelessly to ensure that its effects and their suffering are not ignored. It is a disgrace that those who have been affected have had to work so hard to secure the outcome that was achieved yesterday. The fact that they had to work so hard and for so long is an utter condemnation of those who have put obstacles in the way of the truth being revealed.

The report's headline findings make damning reading for Governments, the national health service and others who have been responsible for patient safety across the United Kingdom during this scandal. As Sir Brian Langstaff makes clear in the report, the situation that unfolded across the United Kingdom came about due to

"systemic, collective and individual failures"

and exposed patients to "unacceptable" risks. The failure of authorities to

"deal ethically, appropriately, and quickly ... with the infections when the risk materialised, and with the consequences for thousands of families"

is an accusation that should cause both shame and reflection. The allegations of "deception" and of "hiding the truth" are deeply alarming, as are those that describe patients being kept in the dark about their own health.

The number of people who have been impacted by those failures is truly harrowing. More than 30,000 people across the United Kingdom were infected by contaminated blood products and transfusions between 1970 and 1991, with about 3,000 of them being here in Scotland. Those are not just numbers on a page; they represent 3,000 families in Scotland who have faced decades of unnecessary heartbreak and pain—3,000 people who have had their lives, dreams, friendships, families and finances destroyed, as the report makes clear.

The report states that Governments and the health service failed people with bleeding disorders and those who were transfused. The tragic results of those failures were deaths, illness and unimaginable suffering.

The harms that have been done to those who were infected and affected were compounded by repeated failures to acknowledge that they should not have been infected and repeated failures to offer any meaningful apology and redress. Indeed, the fact that it has taken four to five decades to get to this point is a failure that the Prime Minister described yesterday as a matter of "national shame".

In March 2015, my colleague and former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, made a heartfelt apology on behalf of the Scottish Government to everyone who had been infected in, or affected as a result of, the infected NHS blood and blood products scandal in Scotland. The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, Jenni Minto, who attended the launch of the inquiry's report in London, apologised to victims yesterday.

Today, in the light of the final report from the inquiry, on behalf of the Scottish Government and as First Minister of Scotland, I apologise unreservedly to everyone who has been affected in any way by these events. To everyone who has been affected, I say that you have been failed by the organisations and processes that should have been in place to protect and support you, and I am sorry for the hurt, worry and damage that you have suffered.

I acknowledge and welcome the apology that was issued by the Prime Minister yesterday on behalf of the United Kingdom Government. It was, rightly, a fulsome apology, but it was not only that: the Prime Minister's statement also contained two solemn promises. The first was that comprehensive compensation will be paid to both the infected and the affected, and the second was that a fundamental rebalancing of the system will be required in any consideration of the report's recommendations. On the first point, the Scottish Government will work collaboratively with the United Kingdom Government to put that into effect. On the second point, the Scottish Government will take the necessary steps, within our own responsibilities, to make that happen.

When I was elected as the member of the United Kingdom Parliament for North Tayside in 1997, one of the first constituents who came to see me was Bill Wright. Bill contracted hepatitis C from contaminated blood products. He has faced, and continues to face, acute health challenges as a result of that treatment. It has had an overwhelming effect on his life and the family who love him. However, despite that intense level of suffering, Bill has, with enormous dignity, campaigned tirelessly on behalf of Haemophilia Scotland to secure justice for those who have been affected. On top of his campaigning, Bill has been a valued member of the Scottish infected blood support scheme's advisory board and has contributed his expertise and wisdom in a number of other areas to advocate for better care for patients with haemophilia and other bleeding disorders across Scotland.

Without the leadership and unrelenting work from individuals such as him, this report would not have happened, this truth would not have been exposed and this justice would never have been secured. Having walked on this journey with my constituent Bill Wright for the past 27 years, I am humbled that he is now able to hear directly from his local member of Parliament—now this country's First Minister—a direct and unreserved apology from the Government for the suffering that he has endured.

Countless others deserve recognition for their campaigning and work on the issue, including the Scottish Infected Blood Forum and many individual campaigners. To all those who have worked so hard to make this report happen, and to seek justice for those who have been impacted by this tragedy, I express my heartfelt thanks, my admiration and my appreciation for the tenacity that they have demonstrated in getting to this point.

People who were infected with HIV or hepatitis as a result of NHS treatment have endured unimaginable suffering. I know that the report will not change what has happened, nor will it bring back the loved ones who have been lost or repair the lost moments of life that could have



been. I hope, however, that it is a step forward in the journey towards a semblance of justice and that it offers a sense of peace in their lives.

The Scottish Government will carefully consider the inquiry's report in full, and all the recommendations for Scotland. In doing so, we will be able to build on the work that has already been done with victims since Scotland's earlier Penrose inquiry into infected blood. We will do so as quickly as we can, because the infected and affected communities have already waited far too long to see action.

The Scottish Government has already accepted the moral case for compensation for infected-blood victims, and we are very much committed to working with the UK Government to ensure that any compensation scheme works as well as possible for those who are infected or affected. Compensation for victims of infected blood is long overdue. For that reason it is welcome that the recent amendments to the UK Government's Victims and Prisoners Bill will ensure that people in Scotland will have access to the scheme on the same basis as those elsewhere in the UK.

Today's UK Government's announcement of further details of the compensation scheme is another step towards ensuring that those who are infected and bereaved relatives in Scotland will receive compensation as soon as possible. I welcome the Minister for the Cabinet Office's confirmation that Sir Robert Francis, who developed a proposed compensation framework for the Cabinet Office back in 2022, will act as interim chair of the new Infected Blood Compensation Authority. I am aware that the victims trust him to do right by them.

I urge the UK Government to implement the Victims and Prisoners Bill as quickly as possible, because I know how important it is that all those who are affected are able to access compensation as soon as possible.

I welcome the confirmation of further interim payments of £210,000 each to infected people and £100,000 to each of the estates of victims who have, sadly, died. The Scottish Government will work with the UK Government and the Scottish infected blood support scheme to ensure that those payments can be made as soon as possible.

The Scottish Government is now working, along with charities that represent the infected and the affected, to consider the report's recommendations for Scotland and to address its implications. We are steadfastly committed to using the inquiry's report to ensure that lessons are learned and that such a tragedy can never happen again. That is why I want to reassure all those who have been impacted, and the general public, that lessons have already been learned and that significant and widespread improvements in patient safety have been made.

The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service now has extremely high standards of blood safety. I continue to encourage anyone who can do so to give blood, because giving blood remains essential for thousands of patients. All donated blood in Scotland is now tested for a range of viruses, including hepatitis and HIV, before it is distributed to hospitals.

There is another important lesson that must be learned. It is a lesson about the culture that we must expect in our public services. That culture must be of the highest standards—a culture of openness and transparency, in which patient safety is paramount. That is the culture that I will insist upon in our public services.

Perhaps the most striking, and indeed disturbing, statement from Sir Brian about the report is this:

“This disaster was not an accident. The infections happened because those in authority—doctors, the blood services and successive governments—did not put patient safety first.”

That is something that must never, ever happen again.

It has taken more than 50 years to get to this point. I will do everything in my power to ensure that we learn the lessons from the report and from the infected blood scandal, and that we take all necessary steps so that no one else has to endure the heartbreak and the suffering that so many families have had to face.

### **The Presiding Officer**

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The First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on. It would be helpful if members who wish to put a question to the First Minister were to press their request-to-speak buttons. I call Douglas Ross.

### **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con)**

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The infected blood inquiry and the report that was published yesterday delivered complete and absolute vindication for the campaigners who have fought for truth and justice for far too long—victims of the most appalling breach of trust by individuals and organisations that should have been there to help and protect them.

Now, Sir Brian Langstaff and his inquiry team have set out in agonising, painful and disturbing detail, across 2,527 pages, the truth. Patients were lied to by doctors whom they had put their trust in to get better. In some cases, people were infected as part of research that they had no knowledge of, let alone had consented to. Just reading that aloud is still unimaginable, but it happened. Lives were ruined. Many people died, never to witness the justice and recognition that they deserved.

I was in the House of Commons yesterday as we sat in silence to hear the Prime Minister apologise on behalf of every Government since the 1970s. His remarks were echoed by every party at Westminster, and I know that we will see the same consensus here today at Holyrood. It was a devastating and appalling failure by the British state.

The actions of individuals and organisations over decades are a stain on our nation. Far too many tried to cover it up, dismiss the victims, delay justice and destroy evidence simply to protect themselves. Their disgusting betrayal of fellow citizens will never be forgotten or forgiven. Now that the inquiry has published its report, legal proceedings could be taken forward, because their behaviour was not just immoral, it was surely illegal.

Today, we have a statement about compensation. No amount of money can compensate for the impact that this disaster has had on the victims who are still alive today, the children who have grown up without a mum or dad or a parent who has grieved the loss of a child, but I ask the First Minister what support he needs from Opposition parties to ensure that the UK and Scottish Governments deliver the compensation as quickly as possible. I give a commitment on behalf of



the Scottish Conservatives that we will do everything that we can to support the Government's efforts in that area.

Finally, I pay tribute to the victims and campaigners. There are far too many to mention individually, but, quite simply, it is only because of their commitment, strength and determination that we are where we are today. The First Minister mentioned Bill Wright from Birnam. Speaking ahead of the report being published, Bill said this:

"I believe that this is not going to be a ripple for the Government, this is going to be an earthquake for the Government when this report comes out."

Bill was correct, as he has been throughout the entire time that he and many others have fought for justice for victims here in Scotland and across the whole UK. I know that the whole Parliament will wish Bill well as he awaits a liver transplant after being diagnosed with liver cancer.

Yesterday was the culmination of a decades-long fight for justice. Today is about the compensation for victims and their families, but tomorrow, and every day after that, must be about ensuring that this can never, ever happen again.

#### **The First Minister**

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I thank Mr Ross for his remarks. He is absolutely correct that yesterday represents a vindication for campaigners. Today must also be a vindication for campaigners, and tomorrow must be a vindication for campaigners. He is also absolutely right that, as we look forward, we must ensure that the processes, practices and behaviours that led to what was revealed yesterday form no part of the future delivery of our public services or the way in which we address issues of this magnitude.

Mr Ross correctly highlights the fact that trust has been eroded because of the experiences that are highlighted in the report. That trust must be rebuilt and repaired so that the public can have confidence in the delivery of services.

Mr Ross asked what support and assistance Opposition parties could give to the Government. One thing that would help would be to maintain cross-party agreement on the steps that are necessary to implement the United Kingdom Parliament's Victims and Prisoners Bill. Obviously, that might well have implications that we have to consider, and I hope that I have given sufficient reassurance to the Parliament that the Scottish Government will engage substantively with the UK Government on that question and will apply all the co-operation that is necessary.

We must ensure that the steps that we now take are taken with urgency to address the issues that are raised here, and I give that commitment on behalf of the Scottish Government.

#### **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab)**

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I begin by joining the First Minister and others in offering an apology to the victims of the scandal and their families. As a collective, we are truly sorry for the pain that people have suffered and for the failure of politicians, clinicians and the state to keep them safe over decades.

Sir Brian Langstaff's report is damning. Thousands of people have died and people continue to die as a result of the scandal. At every turn, victims and families have been stonewalled by powerful institutions and individuals who were determined to cover up the scandal, regardless of the human cost. That includes 3,000 individuals in Scotland who have been unforgivably failed again and again.

I welcome today's commitments on compensation and the First Minister's comments that the Scottish and UK Governments will work together to deliver compensation as soon as possible. The horrific reality is that the truth has only come to light because of those who relentlessly campaigned for justice. We, as a collective across the nation, owe them huge thanks.

Does the First Minister accept that too many institutions still look inward and try to protect themselves and individual reputations rather than deliver justice and support victims? If so, what steps will he take to end that culture? He will have the full and unequivocal support of the Scottish Labour Party in taking those steps.

This is a significant moment in our country's history. As I say, we thank Sir Brian Langstaff and the team of the inquiry, but the single biggest "Thank you" has to go to those who, day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, were willing to tell and retell the most horrific parts of their life to get justice and to try to ensure that it would never happen again. The victims of this scandal were failed, and we have a collective duty to make sure that it never happens again.

## **The First Minister**

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Mr Sarwar is absolutely correct that we have reached this moment because of the tenacity and determination of campaigners. He is also correct that those individuals have had to, in Mr Sarwar's words, go through the retelling of the unimaginable suffering that they have experienced month after month and year after year. The reason why I cited my personal experience of the issue is that it was literally one of the first constituency cases that came to me when I became an MP 27 years ago.

As we reflect on the 25-year anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, we should reflect collectively on the fact that, although it might have its imperfections, it created a platform, through the petitions committee process, that did not allow issues of this nature to be swept aside. It took tenacity from campaigners to continually come to press ministers to act and take matters forward, and this Government responded by establishing the Penrose inquiry, which, previously, reported on some of the issues. However, tribute must be paid to the Scottish Parliament for the way in which it has engaged substantially on the issue and helped to get us to where we are today.

Mr Sarwar asked me about the culture of organisations in which there is poor practice. I say to Mr Sarwar—and I said in my statement—that we cannot have cultures of that type in our public organisations. We have to be open about where there are failings. I give my commitment to the Parliament that I will do everything that I can to preside over an approach of that nature. Where that needs to be set out, it will be set out. I did that last week at First Minister's question time, when I made it clear that I thought that a particular example of healthcare delivery was unacceptable. That is now being addressed, and that is how the Government will proceed. In



that respect, the offer of support that Mr Sarwar has given in his statements today is welcome, and the Government will engage constructively on that basis.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)**

 **Share**

I welcome what the First Minister is describing as the Scottish Government's determination to ensure that lessons are learned from the infected blood scandal. Will the First Minister say a wee bit more about the make-up of the oversight group that the Scottish Government has established to consider the inquiry's recommendations for Scotland?

**The First Minister**

 **Share**

The approach that the Government will take will be to draw together the expertise that is required across a range of professional disciplines and backgrounds to address the detailed recommendations. However, that process will have embedded in it the contribution of representatives from Haemophilia Scotland and the Scottish Infected Blood Forum, because I want to ensure that the voices of the people who have got us to this point resonate loud and clear in the way in which we take forward our response. Therefore, we will bring together the professional disciplines that are required and, crucially, we will bring together the voices of those who have been affected, so that they can shape the response of our country to the challenges that are laid down by the report.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con)**

 **Share**

I declare an interest as a practising NHS general practitioner.

The infected blood inquiry report has laid bare the harrowing failures that led to 30,000 people's lives being devastated. I am so glad to hear the First Minister speak of culture, because there is an issue with culture at the top of NHS boards in Scotland today. One example is the bullying culture that is found at NHS Highland. We do not want to be reactive to issues—we want to be proactive. What changes will the First Minister implement to improve culture, to prevent cover-ups such as this from ever happening again?

**The First Minister**

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Part of the process that the Government will take will be to ensure that our public bodies engage in an open and transparent manner with the wider public. The scrutiny process that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care presides over in relation to the conduct and performance of health boards is a meaningful approach to scrutiny. It is about ensuring that existing practice is challenged, performance is challenged and people are held to account.

Dr Gulhane put to me concerns about bullying in NHS Highland. The Government has responded to that and has engaged substantively in that process. There has been active confronting of those questions, and so there should have been.

I give Dr Gulhane the commitment that ministers will lead the public services of Scotland on the basis that we must be open to challenge about performance to ensure that the needs of members of the public are properly and fully met as a consequence of our interventions.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)**

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I recognise how meaningful yesterday will have been for many people, because the first case that I ever dealt with in my role was also one of infected blood.

I was glad to hear the First Minister say that co-ordination between the Scottish and UK Governments is on-going to ensure that much-needed compensation can be accessed as quickly as possible by those who deserve it. Will the First Minister say more about how the UK inquiry will impact the wider support scheme in Scotland and about how we will continue providing the best support that we can?

### **The First Minister**

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The principal vehicle through which we have made that support available has been the Scottish infected blood support scheme. Although that is not a compensation scheme, it is a support scheme. There may well be some degree of interaction between the compensatory approach, as set out by the UK Government in the statement given by John Glen in the House of Commons today, and the operation of the Scottish infected blood support scheme.

We will, of course, take forward our engagement with the United Kingdom Government as part of the commitment in principle that I have given today to work collaboratively to take forward the delivery of support to individuals who have been affected.

### **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)**

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In his statement, the First Minister said that around 3,000 of those infected by contaminated blood products were living here in Scotland. The main hospital that dealt with cases of hepatitis, HIV and AIDS in this country in the 1980s, Ruchill hospital, was situated in north Glasgow. Many people died as a result of treatments, such as factor VIII, that were supposed to help them but, sadly, actually killed them in what was probably the worst scandal in the history of our national health service.

Although the UK Government is leading on compensation for victims of the infected blood scandal, the impact of that tragedy is clear in Scotland, particularly following revelations that patients were being studied rather than being fully informed about what was going on.

Will the First Minister set out what the involvement of the Scottish Government in the delivery of compensation will look like? To what extent will the compensation authority be accountable to the Scottish Parliament? What support can the Scottish Government provide for victims groups, such as the Scottish Infected Blood Forum, that are running low on funds?

### **The First Minister**

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Mr Sweeney makes a number of important points.

The compensation scheme is a UK one, so we will engage constructively to ensure that it can be accessed by people in Scotland on exactly the same basis as in the rest of the UK. The point that I made in my earlier response to Douglas Ross is that the amendments that were successfully made to the Victims and Prisoners Bill are helpful in ensuring that we can take forward our involvement in that scheme, in order to benefit individuals in Scotland.

I know from my own ministerial experience that any process that involves John Glen of the Cabinet Office will be one of good engagement. John Glen is a very good interlocutor for the

Scottish Government and is a man of great integrity and decency. I look forward to that engagement and I know that ministers will have that opportunity, because that has always been my experience of dealing with John Glen and such things count and help when it comes to intergovernmental relationships.

Lastly, I say to Mr Sweeney that we will remain open to engaging with all the support organisations in Scotland to ensure that there is appropriate assistance in place so that all the issues that need to be addressed here can be properly addressed, within the support schemes that we have available.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)**

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The First Minister referred to the Public Petitions Committee, which, in 2003, said:

“The proper way is to get a full public and independent inquiry ... We support the petition 100 per cent and will now refer it to the Health and Community Care Committee with our strongest recommendation that it support a full public inquiry.”—[Official Report, Public Petitions Committee, 18 March 2003; c 2994.]

I chaired the Health Committee in 2003. We tried to push for that but failed, and it took another 20 years, which is a disgrace.

Apologies are one thing; responsibility is another, but it is not enough. Does the First Minister agree that, where deliberate delay, obfuscation or downright cover-up is evident, prosecution should and must follow without delay, and does he agree that that would deliver even better justice for the victims and survivors?

**The First Minister**

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I am very familiar with Christine Grahame's leadership of the Health Committee in a past parliamentary session. I also note that Mr Carlaw, who is convener of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, is in his place in the chamber. I have made the point before that that channel of dialogue and access to parliamentary justice is one of the strengths of this institution and we should be immensely proud of it. I know that Christine Grahame and her colleagues did a huge amount of work on a cross-party basis to advance the arguments for a public inquiry, and we should be proud of that work.

Christine Grahame is a distinguished lawyer and she knows that I cannot determine issues in relation to criminal charges and criminal justice. Those issues are for the proper authorities to consider in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and it is important that I leave them to exercise their independent functions without further comment in that respect.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)**

 **Share**

I echo others by offering my party's condolences to those who have lost a loved one and thanking all those who have campaigned for justice.

The announcement of compensation should be welcomed. However, we should acknowledge that it cannot restore the health of those who have been infected or bring back the loved ones who have been lost. The full details of the compensation scheme have not yet been released, but will the First Minister ensure that the Scottish Government does everything that it can to



ensure that compensation is easy to access, that it does not require excessive paperwork and that members are informed about the scheme so that we can give our constituents help where they require it?

**The First Minister**

 **Share**

I welcome Gillian Mackay's remarks. I assure her that the Government will engage with members of the Scottish Parliament to ensure that they are adequately supported and briefed on all the issues that are relevant to accessing the scheme. As I indicated in my response to Mr Sweeney, I feel optimistic about the engagement route with the United Kingdom Government because it is being handled by the Cabinet Office minister John Glen. If there are issues that we need to raise, we will be able to raise them, and I am sure that they will be the subject of satisfactory engagement. I ask all members of Parliament, if issues emerge, to draw them to the attention of ministers and we will do our best to ensure that they are raised with the United Kingdom Government.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)**

 **Share**

Can the First Minister provide any update on steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support people in Scotland who received transfusions during the 1970s and 1980s, who may be concerned about exposure to infected blood? What steps have been taken to maximise access to testing across NHS Scotland?

**The First Minister**

 **Share**

In the aftermath of the Penrose inquiry, ministers put in place a number of steps to ensure that there was encouragement to individuals to come forward for testing. The offer of testing was available to people who had had blood transfusions, and a number of steps were taken through an awareness campaign involving GP practices, hospitals, dentists and libraries to encourage people to come forward for testing. A substantial number of people came forward for testing, but if people have not yet had a hepatitis C test and they think that they had a transfusion before September 1991, it is not too late for them to be tested. The risk of any blood donation being infected is still low, but individuals should speak to their GP practice about being tested if they feel that they should do so.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)**

 **Share**

I associate the Scottish Liberal Democrats with the heartfelt tributes and apologies that have been expressed by the First Minister and other colleagues to the victims of the scandal, whose lives were torn apart and, in many tragic instances, ended by infections that were contracted through treatment that was meant to save their lives. I, too, offer my thanks to Sir Brian Langstaff and his team for their painstaking work on this landmark report, which must now lead to long-overdue justice.

When does the First Minister expect payments to be made? He says that his Government will carefully consider the inquiry's recommendations for Scotland. Can he say any more at this stage about what he expects that will involve?

**The First Minister**

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On Mr McArthur's point, I am rather in the hands of the United Kingdom Government in respect of timescales for compensation payments. However, from listening to what John Glen has said today, I expect that the first payments will be made before the end of the year. I hope that that provides significant reassurance to Mr McArthur.

As I look through the recommendations from the inquiry, I see that a number of them relate to culture and practice in the health service in Scotland. I expect the Scottish NHS to consider and respond to those recommendations with care, and quickly. That is the point that I have been making about the importance of our having a culture that is open to challenge and is able to respond adequately to that.

In addition, specific points on aspects of clinical practice will perhaps require more detailed consideration. The clinicians whom we have identified to take forward that work will significantly advise the Government on that. Liam McArthur will be familiar with the approach that the Government takes, in that we rely on clinical input to make the appropriate judgments about how to handle such matters.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con)**

 **Share**

The report on the infected blood scandal has vindicated campaigners, but its findings are devastating for those who are caught up in it. The psychological impact of all that is earth shattering. Today's statement mentions that the Scottish Government is working with charities that represent the infected and affected. Will psychological support be made available in Scotland as part of the process?

**The First Minister**

 **Share**

That is an entirely reasonable point. The support that is required will vary from individual to individual as a consequence of how they have been affected. The Scottish infected blood support scheme has been designed to be that, essentially: a support scheme to make available the assistance that individuals require. That is in addition to the wider health service support that is in place.

I take Tess White's point about the importance of psychological assistance seriously and I will ensure that that is reflected in the Government's response.

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)**

 **Share**

It will be appreciated by victims that the Scottish Government accepts the very clear case for compensation for infected blood victims. The establishment of the scheme, as a priority for those who deserve redress as soon as possible as part of their meaningful apology, is crucial. Can the First Minister provide assurances that the Scottish Government will seek to engage with those who are infected and affected, and that their voices will be central to informing the next steps?

**The First Minister**

 **Share**

In response to Ruth Maguire's question, I assure Parliament of the importance of the voices of those who have been infected and affected, which are central to the Government's response on the issues. That will cover a range of points. Some of it will affect any changes to clinical approaches. It will also relate to our input on the compensation scheme and affect the issue of

culture, which has been so central to explaining why we have ended up in the situation that we have ended up in after such a long period of time. I want to make sure that we listen carefully to the voices of those who have been affected, to ensure that their concerns and their perspective are fully reflected in the Government's response.

### **The Presiding Officer**

That concludes the First Minister's statement on the infected blood inquiry. I will allow a moment or two for members on the front benches to get organised for the next item of business.

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