

Witness Name: William Wright

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INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

EXHIBIT WITN2287078

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S4F-02697)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: Under the First Minister's Government's centralisation of the police, Fife's control room closed last week. Calls are now handled at Bilston Glen, but there are problems. Earlier this month, more than 1,000 calls were dropped in just one day and non-emergency calls took 40 minutes to get an answer. I have now been told that a dozen of the hugely pressurised staff there have been off sick and that it can take 58 minutes for a call to be answered. Did the First Minister know that that was happening?

The First Minister: The changeover period has been extended, but I undertake to discuss the particular issues and concerns that Willie Rennie raises with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Police Scotland. People have a right to get a high-quality service from the police and where, for any reason, it falls short we will ensure that action is taken to rectify that.

On the more general issue, I know that there is an in-principle disagreement between my Government and Willie Rennie over whether amalgamating Scotland's eight police forces was the right or wrong thing to do. We did it and we did it for the right reasons. We wanted less resource to be taken up by chief constables and all of the things that go with that rank and for the resource to be invested instead in the front line. That is one of the reasons why we are maintaining 1,000 extra cops on Scotland's streets, helping to keep crime low.

Willie Rennie: The closure of the Dumfries control room last year was described as "shambolic". The Stirling control room was closed but, only weeks later, had to reopen in an emergency. The closures in Aberdeen and Inverness are still to come. I am alarmed that the First Minister seems to be unaware of the problems because, earlier this month, there was almost a critical incident because staffing levels were so low. Will she call a halt today to further closures while she gets a grip at Bilston Glen?

The First Minister: I have already said that the issues that Willie Rennie raises deserve to be treated seriously—I do not deny that for a second—and I will discuss them directly with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Police Scotland. As I said, the changeover period is being extended.

The police carry out user satisfaction surveys to ensure that, where there are failings in the service that they provide to people, they can act on them. Public satisfaction with our police remains very high, but it is essential that we work with our police and support them to provide the level of service that the public throughout Scotland have a right to expect. I, as First Minister, and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will do everything that we can to support Police Scotland in doing that.

Penrose Inquiry

4. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the final report of the Penrose inquiry. (S4F-02695)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As First Minister of Scotland, and on behalf of the Government of Scotland and the national health service, I take the opportunity to say a sincere and heartfelt sorry to everyone who has had to deal with the devastating impact of infected NHS blood and blood products.

I cannot begin to understand the difficulties and many hardships that individuals and their families have had to contend with. It is important that we apologise to them openly and without reservation and I do so on behalf of the Government of Scotland and the NHS.

I established the Penrose inquiry because I felt that it was vital that we understand the series of events that led to such a devastating impact on so many people. Now, as First Minister, I am determined that we do everything possible to give all of those who are affected the support that they deserve.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport will make a full statement this afternoon setting out the Government's response to the inquiry's findings. I am sure that I speak for everyone in the chamber and throughout Scotland when I say that we must do everything in our power to ensure that such terrible events never ever happen again.

Richard Lyle: I note that, as she said, the First Minister was responsible for commissioning the inquiry as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. As she will be aware, some of those who are impacted by the report have called it a whitewash. What steps will the Government take to support those families and ensure time for a debate in the chamber to discuss those views and the inquiry in general?

The First Minister: I can obviously understand the feelings, frustration and, even, disappointment of all of those who are affected by the dreadful events. However, I was struck particularly by comments that Bill Wright of Haemophilia Scotland

made yesterday. I thought that he was correct in his assessment that, despite his disappointment,

"there is a narrative setting out the case that cannot be avoided by the government and its moral responsibility."

On behalf of the Scottish Government, I certainly accept that responsibility.

I make it very clear that we regard the publication of the report as the start of a process of further engagement with those who are affected rather than an end to the investigations into the tragic events. Taking account of the wider findings of the report, and in consultation with patients and families, we will act to implement the report's recommendation and take forward the review of financial support as a matter of urgency. We recognise that direct payments are only part of the support package for those affected. Therefore, we will also implement pilots on increased psychological and social work support with a view to putting in place a national service, and we will provide further funding to Haemophilia Scotland and the Scottish Infected Blood Forum, which provide a valuable peer support, mentoring and advice function.

In opposition, I campaigned for justice for all those affected by infected blood and infected blood products. As Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, I set up the Penrose inquiry. Now that I am First Minister, I am absolutely determined that we do everything that we can to deliver justice and support to those who have suffered so much.

Zero-hours Contracts

5. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to end the use of zero-hours contracts. (S4F-02698)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We condemn totally the inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts. Unfair work practices such as that are unacceptable. They undermine our ambitions to grow our economy and to tackle inequalities in our society.

The Scottish Government and its agencies aim to set an example by not directly employing anyone on a zero-hours contract. Although the issue is reserved to Westminster, we will use all the levers at our disposal to tackle any abuse. Through public contracts Scotland guidelines and our programme for government commitments to establish a fair work convention and introduce a Scottish business pledge, we are looking to encourage all employers across Scotland to adopt fair working practices.

Neil Findlay: More than 100,000 Scots are trapped on zero-hours contracts. They are used in our national health service and our universities

and by councils and companies that are engaged on public sector contracts across Scotland. Those are all areas that are under the Scottish Government's control or in which it has significant influence. If that influence was used properly, it could change people's working lives for the better.

The First Minister can take her responsibilities seriously and act on zero-hours contracts here, or she can shrug her shoulders and blame someone else—anyone else. Which is it to be?

The First Minister: I do not think that I was blaming anyone else in anything that I said in my opening answer. I made the factual point that these matters are reserved to Westminster. I also made it absolutely clear that we would use all the levers under our control to tackle this practice.

As First Minister, such is the importance that I attach to ensuring that people in work have fair employment conditions—that includes the payment of the living wage and not having the inappropriate or abusive use of zero-hours contracts—I appointed a cabinet secretary to be in charge of fair work.

We will continue to make all the efforts that we can to crack down on the inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts. Instead of trying to divide ourselves on this issue, on which I think we substantially agree, perhaps Labour and the Scottish National Party should join forces, back the efforts that this Government is making and call on the present UK Government and whatever one is elected at the election to take even tougher action at Westminster level.

"Constitutional implications of the Government's draft Scotland clauses"

6. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee's report, "Constitutional implications of the Government's draft Scotland clauses". (S4F-02707)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government welcomes some of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee's conclusions, especially the conclusion on the need for amendments to strengthen the clause concerning the Sewel convention. It is notable that the United Kingdom Parliament committee concludes that some of the draft clauses

"address matters of very significant constitutional importance in a less than satisfactory manner."

I have previously set out this Government's concern over other clauses, in particular the veto in the clauses that relate to removing the bedroom tax or changing welfare. I very much hope that the