| 1 | Friday, 28 July 2023 | 1 | | MR JEREMY HUNT (sworn) |
|----|---|----|----|--|
| 2 | (2.00 pm) | 2 | | Questioned by MS RICHARDS |
| 3 | SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: Before we start can I just tell you, | 3 | MS | RICHARDS: Mr Hunt, welcome back. |
| 4 | it won't be unexpected, that the same rules, as it were, | 4 | | In terms of the roles you have held, you have been |
| 5 | apply today as they did on Wednesday, given the security | 5 | | a Member of Parliament since 2005, I understand. |
| 6 | arrangements that naturally apply to someone who | 6 | A. | Correct. |
| 7 | occupies the position of our witness. So please at any | 7 | Q. | You were Secretary of State for Health and Social Care |
| 8 | break would you remain in your seats until the | 8 | | between 2012 and 2018? |
| 9 | Chancellor has left. Thank you. | 9 | A. | Correct. |
| 10 | Chancellor, good afternoon. Let me explain the | 10 | Q. | It was in that capacity that you gave evidence or, in |
| 11 | arrangements. You probably have an idea what they are. | 11 | | that former capacity that you gave evidence to the |
| 12 | But your audience will number in four figures. Many are | 12 | | Inquiry last year? |
| 13 | here in front of you, they are participants in the | 13 | A. | Yes. |
| 14 | Inquiry. At their back there are representatives of the | 14 | Q. | You were then Foreign Secretary between July 2018 and |
| 15 | press. To your left are lawyers representing various | 15 | | July 2019? |
| 16 | different interests in the Inquiry, there is a room | 16 | A. | Yes. |
| 17 | downstairs, and otherwise people are watching by YouTube | 17 | Q. | You were not then in Government thereafter but you had |
| 18 | live stream. So that's your audience. | 18 | | been Chancellor of the Exchequer since 14 October 2022 |
| 19 | In a moment or two Mary will ask you to take the | 19 | | and it is in that capacity that you are giving evidence |
| 20 | oath again. You have been here before. One of the rare | 20 | | today. |
| 21 | witnesses to have that privilege. | 21 | A. | Yes. |
| 22 | And Ms Richards will ask you the questions, I think | 22 | Q. | I want to start by asking you some questions about the |
| 23 | as before. | 23 | | role of the Treasury and the Treasury's decision-making |
| 24 | Mary. | 24 | | processes, in general terms. |
| 25 | | 25 | | I want to start by looking at what you previously |
| | 1 | | | 2 |
| 1 | told us about that, at that stage from your perspective | 1 | | references but you told us also, by way of summary, |
| 2 | as someone who had been Secretary of State for Health. | 2 | | about the process of obtaining funding during |
| 3 | Lawrence, could we please have INQY1000235. | 3 | | Spending Reviews and the basic rule being no additional |
| 4 | This is the transcript of your evidence last summer, | 4 | | substantial amounts of funding outside of spending |
| 5 | Mr Hunt. | 5 | | reviews. But you also told us, I think, of an occasion |
| 6 | If we could go to electronic page 7 I think. | 6 | | when you were able to secure an extra £8 billion outside |
| 7 | If we pick it up towards the bottom of the page. | 7 | | of the Spending Review process. You told us also that |
| 8 | If we zoom in on the bottom half of the page, | 8 | | if the Prime Minister was behind something, it was a lot |
| 9 | please, Lawrence. | 9 | | easier to get it but that in general terms the |
| 10 | I'm going to pick it up at the bottom left-hand | 10 | | Treasury's job was to say no to lots and lots of |
| 11 | column, around line 22. You say there: | 11 | | spending requests. That was what you told us from your |
| 12 | "The way the system works in Whitehall is that any | 12 | | perspective as a spending department. |
| 13 | big spending decision requires Treasury approval, and if | 13 | | Does that remain a broadly accurate description of |
| 14 | there's a disagreement with the Treasury, you can go to | 14 | | the process now from your perspective as Chancellor? |
| 15 | the Prime Minister." | 15 | A. | I probably wouldn't use the word "the Treasury's job is |
| 16 | Then you refer, top of the next column, to the time | 16 | | to say no". The Treasury's job is to balance the |
| 17 | you were then concerned with Number 10 and Number 11 | 17 | | national accounts and make sure we can pay for the |
| 18 | singing from the same hymn sheet. | 18 | | things that we choose to pay for and that the taxes that |
| 19 | Then you talked about if you: | 19 | | we get pay for that and that the economy is as healthy |
| 20 | " needed more money than was in [the] | 20 | | as possible. But yes, it is the Treasury's job to make |
| 21 | departmental budget, then you would obviously have to go | 21 | | sure we spend money within our means. |
| 22 | to the Treasury [you] had a pretty good idea the | 22 | Q. | Just in terms of Spending Reviews, is this correct, |
| 23 | answer would be no, given the overall state of public | 23 | ~ | the 2021 Spending Review set departmental budgets up |
| 24 | finances." | 24 | | to 2024, 2025, is that correct? |
| 25 | Then I don't think we need to go to the further | 25 | A. | Correct. |
| | 2 | | | 4 |

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- 1 Q. So when is the next Spending Review?
- 2 A. It will start in April 2025.
- 3 Q. Can we take it that, in terms of the securing of funding
- for a compensation framework for those infected and affected, whatever it might ultimately look like, that
- 6 that's going to be looked at outside of the Spending
- 7 Review process?

- 8 A. I'm sorry, I'm going to have to give you an answer which
 9 I may give you more than once this afternoon, but we are
 10 genuinely in a situation where no decisions have been
 11 made about the level of compensation or how it will be
- 12 funded. We are in very active and detailed discussions
- about all of that but I can't, therefore, be drawn onwhere that funding would come from.
- 15 Q. I suppose my question more, Mr Hunt, is about timescales, because if the next Spending Review is not until as you have described it, that would postpone decision-making for a significant period of time and might not be said to be in accordance with the priority which the Prime Minister and others have told us is

attached to this issue within Government.

What can you tell us, if anything, about, then, timescales if you are not able to tell us about sources of funding?

25 A. Well, what I can tell you is that we totally understand

That's potentially a matter of concern and interest now when the Inquiry has made recommendations for compensation.

Are you able to give us, without committing to any particular decisions, an assurance that the Treasury no longer has that implacable opposition that you told us about last summer?

A. I want to be as helpful as I possibly can, but you understand -- indeed, we discussed last week -- I have to follow collective responsibility.

And it's — I think it is worth me explaining to everyone, if I may, Ms Richards, why this isn't a stalling tactic, but it — Government only works because all Government ministers stick to an agreed position for the whole Government, otherwise we just wouldn't be able to deal with having effective Government at the same time as a free and open press. So I have to speak in a way that reflects the whole Government's position.

As a former Health Secretary when I came before the Inquiry last name, I spoke very freely about the difference between my view and the Department of Health and the Treasury's view and Number 10's view, and we discussed lots of documents that showed the differences in those views.

the urgency of this situation. You know, we recognise the fact that, as I think I wrote in a letter before I was Chancellor, that one person is dying approximately every four days and that there is a need for justice to be as quick as possible for what has been a terrible scandal. So we completely understand that and -- so that is a very active consideration in all the discussions that we are having.

Q. Can I then perhaps ask you a little about, again, what
 you said last year about the stance of the Treasury.
 Now, you told us that compensation was something that
 the Treasury, at the time that you were Secretary of
 State for Health, so looking at the 2012/2018 period,
 was opposed to.

The references for that, if anyone needs it -- I'm not proposing to put it up on screen unless it would assist you, Chancellor -- but it is at pages 15 and internal page 87 of the transcript.

But you also told us that the whole question of a public inquiry was something that hadn't happened sooner precisely because the Treasury feared that it would lead to recommendations for compensation. That was your very clear understanding and clear evidence: that was a major factor as to why there hadn't been a public inquiry.

What I can say very clearly is that the Government's position, the whole Government's position, has changed, because in December we accepted the moral case for compensation. So I hope that gives comfort to people that the Government, as a whole, is not taking the stance that it took during the period that I was Health Secretary.

Q. Can I then just ask you a little about the process that the Government will be following in terms of decision-making regarding funding. Again, I'm not asking for details of meetings, I'm not asking for details of costings or of options, but just to broadly understand the process of how far along -- again, in general terms -- you are.

If we just look at WITN3499036, please, Lawrence. So this is your response to a letter from Mr Quin as part of a ministerial write-round. We looked earlier this week with Mr Quin at his letter to you; this is your letter back on 15 December with the policy clearance from the Home Affairs Committee for the acceptance of the moral case for compensation.

Can we just look to the bottom of the page, please, Lawrence. We will see the last paragraph says:

"You can proceed on the conditions that:

"a. CO [Cabinet Office] lead discussions around

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affordability and secure any associated funding with HMT "

Prime Minister.

Is it correct to understand from that that, in broad terms, the process is that a Government department, in this case the Cabinet Office, will effectively, at whatever stage is regarded as appropriate, make a case to the Treasury in relation to funding?

A. That is the way Government works in normal circumstances. So you could take any Government department, let's say the Department for Education, and the Secretary of State for Education will have a budget that's agreed at a spending round, and she will have a limit, let's say £50 million, £100 million -- these sound large sums of money but, in the context of a budget of £40-£50 billion, they are relatively small sums of money -- where she can just make a decision on her own. If it was above the departmental spending limit, she would have to refer that decision up to the Treasury and we would approve it or say we have got concerns.

So, in this situation, I think it goes without saying that the sums of money are likely to be potentially very large, so it will be a standard practice that a line like that would be put in a condition for proceeding.

decisions as turning round a supertanker, something that's quite slow.

There is a three-month gap between 22 February and 18 May. Are you confident that's consistent with the Government working at pace, which is the phrase that has been repeatedly used, but which you will appreciate many of those listening find frustratingly nebulous?

of those listening find frustratingly nebulous? A. I do appreciate that, and I do appreciate that the way Government works might seem frustratingly slow, but I am absolutely content that the Government has been acting at pace, because it isn't just me. I obviously have a very important role in this, but the structure that we have set up to address this issue is a small ministerial group across Whitehall. I asked ahead of this appearance how many meetings have happened this year, and it is about 50, and there's been a meeting at official level every week, and the small ministerial group, of which I'm not part but the Treasury is represented because the Chief Secretary of the Treasury attends, that's met four times, and the process is that, essentially, officials do a huge amount of detailed work, then there are ministerial meetings to progress the issue, and then, finally, that small ministerial group will make a recommendation to myself and to the

Q. You gave us some dates in your witness statement of dates on which you had been updated or provided with advice. Again, I stress my question is about the process; I'm not asking you to tell us what the advice was that you received.

But if we just look at your statement -- so WITN3499034, please, Lawrence -- and if we can go to paragraph 11 and 12. Thank you.

You tell us in paragraph 11 you received advice on 22 February on the fiscal implications of the policy options being considered, and you have told us that there was an emphasis from your officials on the:

"... imperative to act quickly for the benefit of the infected and affected and to respond meaningfully to the public inquiry, whilst recognising the wider economic and fiscal context."

I will come back to that last phrase later, Mr Hunt. You then refer to receiving advice on 18 May, and then having received a note on 21 June.

Now, it may be that, viewed within Government, those sound like quite speedy steps. We have heard evidence -- and I think we discussed it last year, Mr Hunt -- from a number of ministers, but Sir John Major's evidence comes to mind immediately, describing the process of Government reaching new

So, there has been a lot of work that's happened, and I think -- in my own case, I think since the Second Interim Report that the Chair produced, I think I have had ten meetings where we have discussed this issue and I have had six detailed submissions. So over a period of about three months, I think that does represent quite regular engagement.

Q. Leaving aside any question of waiting for the final report before a decision is taken, because I'm going to come onto that later, but in terms of the Treasury's own processes and Government's own processes, are you able to give any kind of sense of how far along the journey Government has reached?

Does it have now -- Mr Quin used the word "building blocks", and that was, I think, from his perspective as the Cabinet Office minister. From your perspective, has much of the underlying work been done so that what's left is now the decision-making, primarily?

A. I think there are some very big issues that are raised,
 both in Sir Robert Francis' compensation study and the
 First and Second Interim Reports, which you may want to
 talk about at some stage later, but, you know, the
 constitutional implications of on a novel arm's length
 body being set up and able to make decisions wholly
 independently of ministers and Government; the economic

implications, because the kind of sums are potentially very large; the fiscal implications, that's to say the implications for taxpayers, again the sums of money are potentially very large.

Given the scale of what we could potentially be talking about, I do think that good progress has been made. There is more work to do. But the purpose of making this progress and the purpose of having those 50 meetings and, you know, hundreds of emails flying around Whitehall is because we want to be in a position to avoid any unnecessary delay when the final recommendations in your final report, Chair, is published because we recognise the urgency.

So I think the purpose of the Government commissioning Sir Robert Francis' report and all this work now is to make — is essentially to make sure that we don't have a situation where the final report is published and then there's a further long unnecessary delay because the Government has to crunch through all these details.

But if I could perhaps give some context to the families who are listening.

One of the things you asked me about when I appeared a year ago was some of the things I had written in the book called *Zero*, and one of the things I said in that

Francis' recommendations was that we should review our approach following the publication of Sir Brian's response.

So I think having that Second Interim Report

published this April has allowed a lot more work to

happen at pace than was previously possible.

Q. In relation to those interim payments last summer, and again just talking about the timescales of decision-making rather than anything else, we know from the witness statement of Nadhim Zahawi, who was at that point the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that the Chancellor's approval was sought and given within an eight-day period in August of last year.

Now, I appreciate, of course, that the sums of money involved in relation to those interim payments, although not insignificant, are not of the same magnitude of an entire compensation framework for those infected and affected, but what part does political will play in speeding up the process? Because I don't know if you've seen, as well as Mr Zahawi's statement, Kit Malthouse's statement, but he gives some insight into having the heft of senior politicians involved, having the approval of Number 10, wanting to push something absolute quickly. How much of a difference does that make?

A. Of course it makes a big difference. I mean, you know,

book was that I thought the NHS needed a long-term workforce plan, and I was able to announce that the NHS would have a long-term workforce plan in November last year. That then was announced, finally, eight months later. There were a hundred meetings and, I think, thousands of submissions and bits of information and that was a £2.4 billion piece of work.

So it is -- I just say that not because we want any delays beyond what are strictly and absolutely necessary but it is very normal when you are talking about large sums of money for a lot of work to go into those processes.

- Q. Would it be right to understand that when you are
 talking about your perspective on the work that's being
 undertaken, you are talking about the time since you
 have been in Government?
- **A**. Yes, but I would say that I think it was -- if I look before the time I was in Government -- shortly after I had given evidence to you last year I wrote, alongside Andy Burnham and Matt Hancock, to urge the then Government to make the interim payments of £100,000, and although that finally happened when I was Chancellor, the decision to do that happened before I was Chancellor, and I think that we did need Sir Brian's Second Interim Report because I think one of Sir Robert

we're -- you know, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are very senior in the Government, and if they consider something to be a priority it happens quickly.

I think there was something else happening here as well, which is that the then Prime Minister knew that his time would be coming to an end in early September, and so that was part of the reason for me writing the letter that I wrote when I did, because I was hoping that he might think it was something that he wanted to do before he stepped down, which indeed was the case. So that may also have been a reason why it happened quickly.

13 Q. I want to turn to some newspaper articles and the14 information that's contained within them.

If we could have, please, Lawrence, RLIT0002137.
This is published in the Financial Times and it is
10 May 2023. You will see it says this in the left-hand column:

"The compensation bill for those affected by the NHS contaminated blood scandal could reach £10bn, according to officials, in a further blow to the UK's stretched public finances."

There's then reference in the next paragraph to the moral case being accepted. There is then reference to ministers "only now coming to terms with the financial

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"Government officials have told the Financial Times that the compensation scheme might cost £5bn-£10bn.

"Given the tight nature of the public finances,

officials from the Treasury and the Department of Health have been holding recent talks over how a compensation scheme would be structured. 'We are working through the options,' said one government insider.

"Another official added, 'People are very worried about the cost."

Then it is said that the Government declined to comment.

Now, do you know whether the officials who are quoted here were Treasury officials?

A. Absolutely not. I'm afraid there are leaks occasionally from Government. I've got no idea.

What I can absolutely assure you is that those leaks did not happen on the say-so of myself or anyone in my ministerial team, and we wouldn't want to do that because we are still trying to get our heads round the very complex issues involved.

Q. Can we then look at the second article, which isRILT0002136.

This is 2 July 2023, so it is just under two months later. This is -- I'm trying to remember which

are concerned, any desire to put numbers into the public domain and -- for whatever reason it might be. I think it is very unhelpful when these leaks happen and so, at a ministerial level, we are absolutely not responsible for it.

If it is not at a ministerial level, then, unless it has

Q. If it is not at a ministerial level, then, unless it has been made up by the journalists -- and we are talking here about the Financial Times and the Sunday Telegraph; it doesn't seem very likely that that would be the case -- it has to be at official level, Civil Service level. The concern that might give rise to -- going back again to your evidence last year, you told us about what you described in a memorable term as "institutional inertia", and other witnesses have told us about "groupthink" -- I think we discussed groupthink as well. Mr Hunt -- and former Secretaries of State for Health preceding you have given us similar accounts of Civil Service resistance to policies or decisions. The fact that these leaks are being made of what's said to be upper forecast and concern, they might tell us something, might they not, about the mindset of the civil servants and officials, because the purpose of the leaks would look to be a scaremongering process. There is no particular good reason why this material should be

out there in this form otherwise.

newspaper this one was -- the Sunday Telegraph.

So we can see again from the left-hand column there is a figure now which "could total more than £20 billion", so it has doubled or quadrupled, depending upon which end of the scale in the previous article you take:

"Ministers have examined financial modelling which places the upper forecast ... at the mid £20 billions.

"The figures have caused concern in Whitehall because the potential amounts involved are so large that they would affect the Government's wider fiscal plans. And ministers do not know where the money is coming from, with the compensation at present 'completely unfunded', The Telegraph has been told."

Again, are you able to say what the source of those leaks was, in terms of department? I'm not asking for individual names. Or are you able to confirm whether it was the Treasury or not?

19 A. I can absolutely confirm -- I don't know where the leaks
 20 came from. I don't -- I mean, you know, most of the
 21 time when leaks happen, they are things that ministers
 22 don't welcome. They make our life more difficult and
 23 they shouldn't happen. But what I can say is that there
 24 has been absolutely no sort of ministerial -- or
 25 certainly as far as I'm concerned or Treasury ministers

A. If I may very politely say, I think it is quite unwise to speculate on the motives of people who do leaks, because there are many different reasons why people can do it. But I would say that the overwhelming majority of civil servants want to do their very best to do what they think ministers would like them to do. They have a very strong sense of living in a democracy and doing their best for the elected politicians of the day.

So I think -- I can absolutely say, hand on heart, I have not come across any sense from the officials I've dealt with that, you know, they don't want to see this terrible scandal resolved justly. I think it is -- they are very, very difficult decisions, very complex decisions, very big decisions, and we are all looking at them from every single direction to fully understand them.

But there is absolutely no sort of Sir Humphrey-like desire to frustrate ministers or to make ministers do anything other than just fully understand the situation from every angle.

Q. There is one further newspaper article I just wanted to ask you about as well, which is RLIT0002147, please.

So this is July 16, the Sunday Times, and if we could go on, please, to page 4, Lawrence.

Yes, if we pick it up in the third paragraph:

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"Hunt [so that is a reference to you] has held several meetings in the Treasury to discuss compensation packages for the victims. This week, he and Sunak are expected to discuss options before they appear before the inquiry."

If we follow further down, please. And then this:

"The Treasury estimates total payouts from the scandal could range between £5 billion and £22 billion. The drastic variation arises because the two reports on the scandal approach compensation differently."

Now, Mr Hunt, I'm assuming you looked at the Second Interim Report of the Chair. It certainly wasn't the Inquiry's perspective that there was a radical difference between the Inquiry's recommendations and those of Sir Robert Francis -- indeed, the report says in terms something to the contrary -- and such differences as there are between the two reports, it seems difficult to see how that could make a fourfold difference in terms of magnitude.

Is this an accurate statement of the Treasury's understanding of the position, that the two reports approach compensation so markedly differently that you get those two figures?

A. Well, without sort of trespassing on the principle that
 I shouldn't be saying what our thinking is before

recognise that statement either. And that's a very good reason, by the way, why -- you know, I think when you are looking at newspaper articles that come from leaks, in my experience, quite often there is a grain of accuracy, but it is also very important to remember that the person who is responsible for the leak may not be in possession of the full facts. They might be someone who is working in one part of one department and they aren't seeing the whole picture and so sometimes they are wrong. Q. One question I have been asked by a number of Core

a decision has been made, all I can say is: I don't

Q. One question I have been asked by a number of Core Participants to ask is whether there should be an investigation into the sources of those leaks. The Prime Minister indicated he wouldn't say whether there was going to be an indication because those who were responsible would then know. But what, more generally, is the approach of Government when information like this is leaked? I appreciate there may be leaks all the time, I don't know, but this is a context in which I am sure you would agree it is incredibly important that the first people to know about what's happening are -- whether it is through Parliament, an announcement in Parliament, or directly to those infected and affected, that's the correct mechanism, not through leaks of the

media, given everything that has been suffered by people over the decades.

So what would be the approach to trying to find out

who had leaked and what their motivation was?

A. I mean, I agree with you, the right mechanism for these announcements to be made is through Parliament and directly to the families who have suffered. In my experience, I'm afraid, leak inquiries are very, very rarely successful. I don't think I can remember one where there was a successful identification of the person who was responsible, and so I'm not sure that really solves the problem. But I just would stress that, although these stories are written up in a very credible way by very credible publications, by journalists who are trying to tell people the truth, it is really important to remember that the person who is responsible for those kinds of leaks may not have been in possession of the full picture, and it is quite

important not to over-interpret as a result.

I'm just going to move on to ask you a little about the approach to the modelling that's been undertaken; not in any detailed sense, I'm not expecting you to have a grasp of how financial modelling is undertaken or to be able to explain that to us in any kind of detail, but in terms of the numbers who might claim.

You will no doubt be aware, and Mr Quin made express reference to it in his witness statement, that the Inquiry has the benefit of a report from an expert group of statisticians, which sought to identify, through statistical modelling and on the basis of the evidence available, the likely numbers of individuals who, over the decades, may have been infected with HIV or hepatitis C. And the figures are obviously large, and I know you have been provided with a summary, for the purposes of today's evidence, of what those figures were.

But, can we be assured that the Government, in looking at potential costings, is going to focus on what the likely number of claims will be, rather than the theoretical likely number of people who may have been infected over decades?

A. Well, I saw those numbers which you kindly supplied me.
 From memory, it was about 46,000 people might have been infected, of whom I think 1,300 with HIV and the rest
 HCV or most of the rest HCV. That is a much higher number than I think it is the 2,900 who are thought to have died tragically as a result of the scandal.

All I can say is that we are gathering all the evidence we can from all the sources we can. It is very helpful to have the expert independent statisticians'

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views and we are looking at those. Of course we are trying to estimate, as a result of those, what the total cost to the taxpayer would be likely to be in different scenarios. That is the reason we have to do this detailed work.

Q. If we can just look at, rather than the statistical summary but a document which I know has also been sent to you, which is INQY0000456.

So this is a note which sets out, on the basis of up-to-date information from the current four devolved schemes, it sets out first of all the numbers of registrants within the scheme. So you have at the bottom of the page, in terms of infected persons, the total figures, and then the figures in relation to bereaved partners.

So you can see there a total, Mr Hunt, of 4,519 across the entire United Kingdom of those infected and bereaved partners. Obviously it doesn't include wider relatives because they have not been included within the schemes.

But we have there a figure under three and a half thousand of living infected persons registered.

Then, if we go over the page, we have the data for the number of interim payments made. So there you will see -- and this is pursuant to last autumn's payments 25

the interim payments because we are able to do that very quickly. But I don't think I can say more because the Second Interim Report makes further suggestions as to other people who should be entitled to compensation as well

Q. Absolutely. It is really just in terms of identifying the numbers infected.

Then, you will, I'm sure, be aware from your own work as Secretary of State for Health that there has been a scheme, prior to the four devolved schemes, which happened under your watch when you were Secretary of State for Health, there were the Alliance House organisations, as they are called, which included, in relation to hepatitis C, the Skipton Fund making payments since 2004, since 2011 making payments to those who had — the estates or — those who had died prior to 2003. So there is 20 years' worth of evidence there. It is not realistic, is it, to think there are going to be thousands of people who have never made a claim previously now materialising to say that they too were infected with HIV or hepatitis C and wish to seek compensation?

A. I mean, that's the kind of thing we have to give proper
 consideration to. I don't think I can give you any
 further help on it because we haven't made any decisions

following the summer announcement and the First Interim Report.

Infected persons who received interim payments, 3,503. Bereaved partners, 900. There's an "Others" category, which is explained. So a total of 4,413.

So those figures, would you -- I'm not asking you to commit to particular figures, it is just the general approach, Mr Hunt, perhaps a good guide -- possibly the best guide but certainly a good guide -- to the number of claims that might be expected on a compensation scheme from infected people will be to look at the numbers currently registered, because all those infected have been able to register, if we leave aside the categories of hepatitis B who can't, obviously, be included within these figures, and the numbers who made applications for interim payments. It is going to be not a bad starting point, if I can put it that way, for a realistic assessment of how many of those infected might look to the compensation framework.

A. Well, I think you are suggesting that I should take note of your suggestion on this, which I absolutely do, but I would say that we, I think, used those numbers as -- those are the people that we made the interim payments to, so, you know, we recognise the importance of those groups and they are the groups that we prioritise for

about that. But certainly our starting point is the people who are on the registered schemes.

Q. The Inquiry does hold data about the numbers who made successful applications to the Skipton Fund. It is public on our website, but if there is any assistance that can be given in that respect in terms of providing that information, please do let the Inquiry know.

Can I then just turn to perhaps look at the kind of figures we are talking about, in very rough terms, and try to put them in some kind of context.

Billions sounds obviously a lot of money and a lot more money than the total of the interim payments made last summer.

A number of Core Participants in relation to this particular point have drawn to my attention a range of other spending commitments such as, I think, the 14.9 billion write-off by the Department of Health and Social Care in relation to Covid and PPE items.

But I want to perhaps give a slightly more directly relevant context in terms of clinical harm. So could we look, please, at RLIT0002162, please.

This is the annual report and accounts for 2021/2022 of NHS Resolution. Are you able to help us in understanding the role of NHS Resolution?

A. Yes, NHS Resolution is the body that essentially is

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responsible for compensating people who have been harmed by the NHS in its day-to-day functions. Somebody who has had an accident in surgery applies for compensation, NHS Resolution is the body that's responsible for that.

Q. And if we just look -- I think we only need to look at one passage for the broader points.

If we could go, please, to page 5, Lawrence. This is the Chair's welcome in the report, and if we pick it up — it is the left-hand side of the page, please, Lawrence, so if we could zoom into that left-hand side. Thank you. Then it is the right-hand column of what's on the screen, Mr Hunt. I'm going to pick it up in the third paragraph down:

"Irrespective of all the above achievements, the cost to the public purse responding to clinical negligence continued to rise over the last year with damages payments under secondary care clinical schemes increasing by 10.3% to £1.775 billion and claimant and NHS legal costs also rising ... The biggest single influence on our provision remains the long-term discount rates set by HM Treasury ... The 2021 discount rate reductions have increased the forward provision by £42.6 billion to £128.6 billion. This is an accounting provision that will further change with future rate changes."

is so high is because we don't learn enough from mistakes. I think that's one of the very important purposes of this Inquiry, to make sure that we learn for the future

I mean, if you look at, for example, maternity, we spend -- which is the bulk of -- I think it says, actually, in the next --

Q. It's about 50%.

A. It says 62% of hospital clinical claims, about 50% in total, and we spend more on maternity claims than the entire cost of every obstetrician and maternity nurse in the NHS every year. So it is an appalling waste that we do this, and we need to be much better at learning from mistakes.

But, yes, I'm afraid it is a case that -- I have to say, this is not just an NHS issue; this is the case in health care systems around the world, that they have these sums of money, which we would not have to spend if we were better at learning from mistakes and had more open and transparent systems.

Q. Just to be clear, having had the pleasure of having read
your book, Mr Hunt, for last year's evidence session,
the reason you use phrases such as "criminally
wasteful", or whatever the precise phrase was, is not
because you are saying people who were harmed didn't

Then this:

"Another important figure to focus on is the provision for CNST \ldots "

Now, as I understand it, that is clinical negligence in relation to hospital trusts, as opposed to negligence in relation to primary care:

"... for claims arising from incidents in 2021/22, which is £13.3 billion, a figure we have referred to previously as the 'annual cost of harm'. Removing the effect of the HM Treasury discount rate change translates this figure to £8.7 billion which is comparable to previous years, while remaining a very significant sum."

The purpose of referring to this, Mr Hunt, is just to get some kind of sense that when we are talking about billions of pounds in the context of a potential compensation scheme, it is right to understand, isn't it, that in terms of clinical harm through the NHS, that is measured in billions of pounds every year?

Yes. I think -- I can tell you the amount that was actually paid, from memory, was £2.7 billion or £2.8 billion last year. So there is a difference between liability and how much is actually paid, and

I think it is around £2.5 billion. Personally, I think

that is criminally high, and I think the reason why it

deserve to be compensated; it's because the whole focus
of your book was to try and stop the harm occurring in
the first place and thereby saving the cost of having to
compensate people.

A. Absolutely right, yes. No, of course, if someone has been harmed, they deserve compensation. That goes
 without saying. But they would -- by the way, their incentive, in my experience, is never about money. They want to stop these injustices happening again. What they would prefer a thousand times over is that that harm hadn't happened in the first place.

12 Q. I won't take time going into it, but your book gives
 13 other figures about NHS-related costs in terms of those
 14 who acquire hospital infections, such as MRSA, the
 15 estimate being it costs the NHS a staggering £1 billion
 16 per annum.

The purpose of flagging those figures up, Mr Hunt, is really just to say this and invite your comment on it: although the figures that have been talked about, at least in the media, are expressed in billions, in the context of the provision of compensation to people who had been harmed over decades through their NHS treatment, would you agree that it helps to perhaps put that in context when we look at the kinds of amounts we talk about each year for those harmed by the NHS?

A. Well, I do accept that, you know, we waste billions every year because of clinical harm in the NHS. It is important to say that there is a slight difference, because the argument -- I think around 10% of the costs of modern health care systems are putting right clinical mistakes. So that's a huge amount of money you could save if you didn't make those mistakes in the first place, and that certainly is billions.

A second element of this is the £2.5 billion we pay every year as compensation to right a wrong. In this case, I think it is more about the latter. It is about righting a wrong. It is about dealing with a terrible injustice that has gone on for a very long time.

If we could just go back to your witness statement WITN3499034, and back to paragraph 11.

We read out paragraph 11 previously and I said I would come back to that last phrase:

"... whilst recognising the wider economic and fiscal context."

I just want to, if I may, unpick a little with you, some considerations that might feed into that. Of course, as Chancellor, the economic and fiscal contexts no doubt lies at the heart of what you do day in day out.

I just want to explore with you questions of how 33

that fits with the decision-making, in general terms, as a matter of principle, that falls to the Government in relation to the recommendations of the Second Interim Report.

You told us last year, as we have already established, that the Government refused to hold an inquiry for years because of the fear of having to pay compensation, and you told us also it was undeniable that the Inquiry should have happened decades earlier and you talked about that being a big failing of state, a lack of openness, and other ministers have given evidence to similar effect.

Had there been an inquiry decades earlier when you suggested there should have been but for the Government's unwillingness to be landed with a bill for compensation, had successive Governments not delayed, then the question of compensation, the decision on compensation wouldn't fall to be considered at a time of financial restraint.

The proposition I want to put to you in general terms is, that's a problem of the Government's own making -- I mean by that successive Governments -- and that should not be a reason to either refuse to compensate or water down the compensation that might be payable because that would be penalising the victims for 34

the Government's own delays.

A. I think the way I would phrase it is this. The first decision you have to make is: do you believe justice should be done? In this case, do you believe that compensation should be paid?

And the Government has decided it should.

Then, if you like, the problem goes to the Chancellor -- but we haven't got to this stage yet, because the small ministerial group has not made its final recommendations and it is still going through what Sir Robert said and what the Second Interim Report said -- and then the Chancellor has to then make a judgment about what is affordable in the current context and how to do justice in the context of the economic and fiscal situation.

You are right that it might be the case that it would have been easier if -- well, it certainly would have been easier and it certainly would have been more right if this had been resolved 20 years ago, unquestionably, and it is a terrible scandal that it wasn't. But life doesn't go in straight lines and, you know, this has happened now and, you know, nor were we expecting at this time to have to fund the defence of Ukraine with, you know, £2.3 billion this year and £2.3 billion last year, but, you know, that's the timing

that was out of our hands, it was decided by Vladimir Putin. So that is what Government is. You have to make decisions that come across your desk to the best of your ability.

It is a very uncomfortable thing for me to say but I can't ignore the economic and fiscal context because, in the end, you know, the country only has the money that it has. So I can't ignore it. But I think everyone here should take some comfort from the fact that the Government has decided there is a moral case for compensation and justice should be done and that is a very big change, but we now have to work through the fact that, you are right, this is a much more challenging time to find the sorts of sums of money that this could potentially involve.

Q. Perhaps I leave it again as an invitation, Chancellor, when those decisions do fall to you, to ensure that that proposition, as a point of general principle, is part and parcel of the decision-making process.

Would it also be fair to say that had Government acted — again, I'm talking about successive Governments or Government in general rather than one Government, but had Government acted sooner it might well have cost the Government substantially less than it may do now?

25 A. Well, it wouldn't just have cost less, it would have

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- The Infected Blood Inquiry 1 been more just and it would have meant --1 2 2 Q. Of course. 3 A. -- that many hundreds if not thousands of people would 3 4 have died knowing justice had been done, even despite 4 5 the incredible agony that they and their families have 5 6 been through. So I think that goes without saying. 6 7 7 Q. You have told us, I think, or given us your reflections 8 on the pace at which the Government is currently 8 9 9 working. Can I then just ask you a couple of general 10 questions in relation to that question of impact of 10 11 delay. 11 it -- vou sav: 12 Does the Government acknowledge in its 12 13 decision-making processes that the delay in taking 13 14 a decision -- the delay in implementing any compensation 14 15 framework inevitably compounds the suffering of those 15 16 infected and affected, and thus compounds the injustice 16 17 they have already suffered? 17 18 A. This has been going on for far too long and, you know, 18 19 justice delayed is justice denied, and that's why we 19 20 have a responsibility to work as fast as we possibly can 20 21 21 to resolve this, given that people are dying every week, 22 and so we need to make this decision -- it is a very 22 23 23 challenging decision, I don't pretend otherwise, but we 24 need to resolve this as quickly as we possibly can, and 24 25 that's why Penny Mordaunt commissioned the 25 1 Dame Diana Johnson saying, "Let's not wait until the end 1 2 of the Inquiry, let's compensate now"; we have 2 3 Ms Mordaunt in 2020 saying, "Action is long overdue, 3 4 I cannot stress the urgency of action enough", which 4 5 5
 - Sir Robert Francis compensation report, so that we could start to get our heads around the potential routes as far as compensation is concerned, and not have a situation where, when the final report is published, there was then a very long period where the Government worked through different compensation options. That's why we are doing all this work contemporaneously to you finishing off your final Inquiry recommendations. Q. You say in your statement -- I don't think it is necessary to put it up on screen, but I will just read
 - "... it is imperative that the government acts quickly to give the infected and affected the certainty they need over this issue, and I am confident that the government is doing so."

You have obviously told us in your oral evidence this afternoon a little more than we knew previously in terms of the magnitude of meetings and so on.

Is there anything else you can tell those listening that supports your confidence that the Government is now, at least -- leave aside previous periods of time -acting quickly?

Because you will understand, Mr Hunt, 2017, when the decision was taken to set up a public inquiry, we had Mr Burnham calling for compensation now; 2019, we have 38

I think --

- 6 A. You had Jeremy Hunt saying it in 2022, you know, so --
- 7 Q. Yes. We will come onto that, don't worry.

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A. But I think the way I would put it, if I may, Ms Richards, is that I -- because I happen to have had a lot of experience of this issue, being the person who persuaded the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, that it was the right thing to hold this Inquiry, and having had long experience of it, and having met remarkable people like Mike Dorricott, my own constituent, who sadly passed away. So I happen to have a lot of personal interaction with people who have been affected by this scandal, and so I do understand why there is a very, very high degree of suspicion.

I was -- when I originally persuaded Theresa May that we should -- I have to say without difficulty. I think Theresa May has a very strong sense of social justice. But when I made the recommendation that we should have the Inquiry, I was Health Secretary, and I was quite surprised that the families were so adamant that the Department of Health should have absolutely

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nothing to do with the way the Inquiry was run, and that kind of showed me just how much suspicion there was of the Department which I was responsible for. So I understand there is suspicion.

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But what I would say is: if the Civil Service had been given a steer by ministers that, "We don't want to do this, we want to kick this into the long grass, we want to find a way of burying this into the far distant future", that is an awful lot of meetings to have and an awful lot of policy papers to put together. I appreciate that, from the outside, it feels like the Government is working painfully slowly, and I appreciate the moral urgency given that people are dying, but I am satisfied, as Chancellor, that the Government is working very fast to try and resolve this as quickly as

17 Q. Can I move to a related but slightly different point, 18 and pick it up with you by reference to a statement made 19 by Mr Quin in December 2022 to the House. 20

COLL0000022, please, Lawrence, and if we go to page 4, please.

Just for context, this is 15 December, and it is the date upon which Mr Quin made the statement in which he accepted or he articulated the Government's acceptance of the moral case for compensation.

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If we pick it up, it is the fifth paragraph beginning, "I cannot commit to a timetable", and then he refers to there being a complex series of steps to be taken.

Then he says this:

"But I assure hon. Members that it is my intention to update the House as we make progress. We must do so in order to ensure that those infected and affected are fully apprised of the progress we are making."

Now, you have referred to the suspicion and lack of trust, and you will appreciate, Mr Hunt, that the less people know about what's happening, the greater that suspicion and lack of trust, which in itself is damaging, given the psychological harm over decades.

Mr Quin has made further statements to the House, but they don't contain details of progress or concrete information about progress, still less anything that could amount to keeping people fully apprised.

Now, there might be two explanations for that. One is that the progress has not yet been made. The other might be that it has been made but the Government is choosing to play its cards close to its chest still.

Does the Government understand how important it is to try and give some information, when it can, to those infected and affected, such that even if there are still

Now, I think we are in that situation now, where we are going through the analysis and we are trying to understand the issues. But what I would say to people who are nervous that not enough progress has been made is that we have had an interim payment. That is a big sea change. We have had an acceptance by the Government that compensation will be paid. So that is another very big change. And we have had the Second Interim Report, and I hope we are not too far away from the final report as well.

So I think this issue is making progress towards the conclusion.

Q. When Ms Mordaunt announced the commissioning of what became the Sir Robert Francis Compensation Framework Study, what she talked about was having advice on a potential compensation framework design and solutions which can be ready to implement upon the conclusion of the Inquiry.

Now, "upon the conclusion of the Inquiry" suggests a close temporal relationship between the conclusion of the Inquiry and the implementation of the scheme, so not the Inquiry concludes and months go by. Is that still the aspiration of the Government in general terms?

Again, I'm not asking you to commit to particular dates, but that it would be upon the conclusion of the Inquiry

matters to be worked out -- the form of an arm's length
body, the need for primary legislation, whatever it
might be -- some decisions in principle could at least
potentially be communicated, even if lots of details and
matters of practice still remain to be worked out?

A. I completely accept the importance of communicating as

much as possible to families who have suffered for very many years on this. This decision is -- you know, we have had Sir Robert Francis' recommendations, we have had the Second Interim Report, we are now in a situation where we are doing the very detailed analysis of what the likely cost might be of implementing those recommendations and then understanding the constitutional, the fiscal, the economic implications of all of those. And we have this system in this country where we don't give a running description of that decision-making process because we do need to allow ministers the chance to have frank discussions in private so that -- that is actually -- it will sound to people listening like secrecy but it is important to have -- to give people the chance to say what they really believe in Government meetings without having to think: how is this going to play if it appears in a newspaper tomorrow morning? You genuinely do get better decisions that way.

as opposed to months afterwards? Not least because, as
you will appreciate given your decades of political
experience, general election potentially next year,
purdah, could lead to an extraordinary length of delay?

A. I completely understand why that's a very, very
important question for you to ask on behalf of all the

important question for you to ask on behalf of all the
families, but because we haven't made a decision on the
compensation and we are in the process of trying to
understand that and we all want to make a decision as
soon as possible, I can't give you a sense as to the
timescales.

What I can say is the fact that we commissioned -or that Penny Mordaunt commissioned Sir Robert Francis
to do his report is because we did not -- precisely
because we did not want what you fear on behalf of the
families the most, which is that there would be
unnecessary delays in a third stage. So get the
Inquiry, then, you know, a very long time before the
compensation is announced. The fact that we are doing
this work now is because we want to be in a position to
resolve this issue as soon as we possibly can upon the
conclusion of the Inquiry.

Q. Now, that leads to the next topic I wanted to explore
 with you, which is the question of waiting for the
 conclusion of the Inquiry before making a decision,

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which is what your statement tells us is the position. It is what the statements of the other ministers who have given evidence this week tells us is the position. I'm going to ask you the same question I asked other ministers this week in the hope of clarification.

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I understand you tell us, Mr Hunt, that work is still ongoing, so you can't yet announce something that you haven't decided. But the coupling of the decision-making process with the conclusion of the Inquiry, in terms of the production of the Inquiry's find report, what is it that the Government thinks it is going to learn from the final report that's so essential to its decision-making that it has to wait when it has already got Sir Robert Francis', the First and Second Interim Reports, its own work and so on, and it has already accepted the moral case for compensation?

17 **A**. Well, it was always believed that we would make this decision after the Inquiry's final recommendations were made. When I, back in 2017, argued inside Government that we should do the Inquiry, I didn't imagine any other route than we would allow the Inquiry to make its final recommendations.

> When you are deciding what to do -- this is not my money that is being given out, it is taxpayers' money, it is the money of every single person in this room and

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Q. That wasn't the approach the Government took to the 1 2 First Interim Report. We heard, obviously, from the 3 Prime Minister on Wednesday an explanation to the effect 4 that it was the practice and precedent to await the 5 final outcome of an inquiry report so its 6 recommendations could be considered in context. But the 7 Government didn't feel it necessary to do that in 8 response to the First Interim Report. And, again, a lot 9 of people struggled to understand the difference of 10 approach. Can you assist any further in relation to 11

that? 12 A. Well, I think the fact that -- I mean, I wasn't in the 13 Government at the time that that decision was made, but 14 I think the fact that the Government recognised the need 15 to make interim payments is an indication that the 16 Inquiry has had a big effect on the Government's 17 thinking. I think when the Inquiry was originally 18 commissioned I don't recall any discussion of interim 19 payments, and the fact that Government did accept the 20 recommendation to do that showed that its thinking had evolved. I think it had learnt from some of the things 22 that -- the evidence that you had heard in the Inquiry. 23 But I think it is also not just reasonable but right, 24 given the sums that are involved, which are potentially 25 very large, that we should see the full context before

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the whole country outside this room, and because the sums are potentially very large, I think it is right that the decision is made with the full context of understanding not just how much, but why these things happened, and I think that we will make a better decision as a result of that.

But what would not be acceptable would be for that moment to be another hiatus where there was another very long period of time. I think the fact that ahead of the final conclusions of the Inquiry that we paid compensation -- we paid interim compensation and we have accepted the case for compensation and we are doing the work now to understand what the final amounts should be, indicates that we want to make the process as quick as we possibly can.

But I think you will say some very important things in that Inquiry and I know that you are not going to say any more on the levels of compensation you think are necessary but I think you are going to help us to understand a lot about the context, and I do believe that it is responsible and right to the taxpayers, who are funding this, for Government ministers to see the full context of the horrific scandal that this was, before we make the final decision as to how the compensation will work.

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we make our final decision. 1

2 SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: I think, to be fair, as I understood 3 the question -- it may not have been entirely clear --4 I think counsel was asking you not so much about the 5 final compensation scheme, package, whatever it is, but 6 about further interim payments to classes of people who 7 might merit -- in my view, they do merit, but I say "might" because it is a matter for precision -- further 9 interim payments.

> So it is the parallel situation, if you like, just for different people, recognising that it may be some time before the system, whatever system is set up, provides the compensation which represents a full and fair and just settlement. That, I think, is what counsel is asking.

Am I right?

17 MS RICHARDS: In fact, I was asking the wider question which 18 Mr Hunt understood. I was going to come onto the 19 narrower question next.

20 SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: I do beg your pardon. 21 I misunderstood. But I have asked your question for 22 vou, have I?

23 MS RICHARDS: You have.

> I'm going to come back to interim payments, but before I do, the Chair has asked a question, Mr Hunt.

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A. I think the straightforward answer to that question is 1 2 that we haven't made a decision on those wider groups. 3 That is an intrinsic part of the discussions that we are 4 having in terms of the whole package, and we just need to make a lot more progress. 5

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Q. Just dealing with the general question of waiting for the final report, I have suggested to earlier witnesses this week two interpretations that could be placed upon that and invited their comment. I'm going to suggest the same to you, but a third has been flagged up to me by others, for which I'm grateful, which I'm going to explore too.

So some are concerned -- perhaps many are concerned -- that the reason you are waiting -- when I say "you", I mean the Government, obviously -- for the final report is because the Government didn't start the intensive work until really this year; it's the Government's own delay that effectively gets masked by waiting for the final report.

The other concern is that by waiting for the final report, the Inquiry, at the point it ceases its work, no longer has any powers, and the Government could ignore the Inquiry's recommendations with impunity, in terms of any powers that the Inquiry might have.

Do you have any observations on either or both of

four or five months after that, this Government accepted the moral case for compensation.

I know you will disagree with this, Sir Brian, but permit me to say it. I think the Government did take a reasonable position when it said that it wanted to know what you thought about Sir Robert's recommendations before it could progress, and so -- because if there was going to be any difference between what you said and Sir Robert said, then that would have a bearing on our decision. So I think it was necessary to have your Second Interim Report, which was extremely helpful, and then I think you see, since that moment, this really quite dramatic increase in the amount of work going on across Whitehall.

responsibility of the fact that this has taken half a century to resolve that injustice but I think these things are now moving very fast in Whitehall terms. Q. The third concern that's been expressed to me by a number of individuals, and therefore I'm articulating it to you, to invite you to comment, you may say it is

All Governments have a very big share of the

unfair and wrong, but it gives you then that opportunity to do so.

It has been suggested another reason why the Government might want to delay making a compensation 51

those matters? 1

2 A. I don't really recognise that as being fair. I will 3 say -- I need to say at the outset, you know, I don't 4 think, over the decades to date, that the people who 5 have been infected or affected have been treated fairly. 6 So this is not -- I'm not in any way trying to absolve 7 the state of its responsibility for a terrible scandal. But I think that if you look at what the Government 9 could reasonably have done in the circumstances -- and 10 I wasn't in the Government until the end of last year, 11 but Sir Robert Francis' report came in June. The 12 decision was made, I think, in August to pay --

- 13 Q. Sir Robert Francis' report was delivered to the 14 Government in the middle of March last year --
- 15 Okay, but it was --
- 16 Q. -- with a promise that the Government -- sorry, I won't 17 use the word "promise" -- with the Government saying it 18 would produce a response before he gave evidence, and 19 never has.
- 20 A. Okay. But I think about six months after that report, 21 the Government announced that they would make interim
- 22 payments.

23 Q. Yes.

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24 A. And that is a very, very big change in the posture that 25 governments over very many years have taken. And then

announcement until after the final report is that such an announcement would be designed to take the sting out of the publicity, the press reporting that might come from a highly critical final report and turn it into a good news story.

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If that were the case, I am sure you would accept it would be unacceptable to place the reputation of the Government over the needs and interests of those infected and affected. You may tell me that that is -you may be able to give an assurance that that's not the Government's thinking?

- 12 Can I just say this very plainly. There is no good news 13 story in this scandal. None whatsoever. It is a terrible, terrible scandal. So that is absolutely not 14 15 our thought.
- 16 Q. Can I then come back to the question of interim 17 payments.

As you know, the Second Interim Report has recommended interim payments for cohorts of individuals who have never previously received any compensation nor financial support from the support schemes, and in particular I have in mind, as I am sure you understand, parents whose children died and children whose parents died. You will have seen in the Second Interim Report some of the examples of the testimony of those who have

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suffered such unspeakable losses.

Can we put up on screen, and you knew I was going to ask you this, I am sure, Mr Hunt, the letter you wrote last summer when not in Government.

It is WITN3499035. This is the joint letter that you wrote with Andy Burnham and Matt Hancock.

You say this, 3 August, addressed to the Prime Minister:

"Dear Prime Minister,

"We are writing to urge you to authorise the making of interim payments to all victims and all bereaved partners of victims of the infected blood scandal with immediate effect. As recommended by the Infected Blood Inquiry Chair, Sir Brian Langstaff, on 29th July those payments should be worth at least £100,000 per award.

"As Health Secretaries with a combined period in office of 10 years we passionately believe that this is the vital next step towards justice for those who have suffered dreadfully over the decades as a result of this scandal. The victims and their families deserve nothing other than the complete and immediate acceptance of Sir Brian's recommendation. To refuse to do so would simply continue the injustice thus far handed out by the state to a group of innocent victims condemned to years of suffering and neglect.

same sense of urgency applicable to those who have

received nothing, no support even from the financial assistance schemes, why is that urgency not applicable to them and to the specific recommendation in the Second Interim Report for interim payments to be made?

A. Well, I think we do need to go as fast as we possibly can with those other groups of people. We have now got both Sir Robert's recommendation and the Second Interim Report, but I don't -- I know this will disappoint people listening, but there are some very big recommendations, not just in terms of the amount of money involved, but, for example, the idea that the amount should be decided by an independent arm's length body without any reference to ministers. We have to think through how the accountability of that would work. I'm not aware of that structure ever having happened

So the need to see justice for families who are affected, bereaved mothers and fathers and people who lost their own mother and father, is very much something that we recognise is important to do. But we have to do a lot of work to understand both the potential amounts -- it is harder to calculate the potential amounts because those people aren't part of the schemes,

before, but this is obviously taxpayer's money and these

are potentially very, very large sums of money.

"Any delay to such payments, for instance by arguing that we need to wait for the inquiry to finish, for a new Prime Minister, or for Parliament to return, will sadly almost certainly see more of the victims die before they see justice. Already more than 400 people have died since the inquiry started. With some estimating that one infected person is dying every four days waiting until even the end of the year when the inquiry hearings are concluded would mean another 40 people would die. That number would likely be above 100 if the government waits until the inquiry has reported in full. This is simply unacceptable and will cause yet more harm to a group of exceptionally vulnerable people.

"You have the opportunity to leave a lasting and positive legacy and start to put right a terrible injustice that others before you have failed to do. We urge you to grasp that opportunity before it is too late for yet more victims and their families."

I think you published that with a tweet that read:
"Contaminated blood victims need a decision from
@BorisJohnson to authorise immediate payouts.
Postponing this will see more victims die without
justice. A letter from three former Health
Secretaries."

The question therefore, Mr Hunt, is: why isn't that 54

the AHOs, in the way that the living infected and the deceased infected are. So there is complexity.

But what I would say just to sort of reassure people who are worried this is being kicked into the long grass by the Government is that this is very much part of our discussions, this is -- you made some very clear recommendations, Chair, and we are going through every single one of those recommendations, trying to understand the potential cost to the taxpayer and the best mechanism to make sure that justice is done.

Q. One practical step that I think was certainly raised in the house by Dame Diana Johnson, and I think has been raised in correspondence from campaign groups with
 Government, would be the possibility of starting a registration process for those who would fall within the recommendation 12 in the Second Interim Report.

So as to ensure expectations are not dashed it can be clear that the registration process does not mean a decision has been taken to make the payments, but it would have two potential benefits: it would give you, the Government, a clearer idea of potentially the numbers involved; and it would mean that if the Government does decide to make payments to those cohort of people, whether as an interim or final payment, they are already registered and that would minimise any

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further delay. Is that something that the Government has yet thought about and, if not, is it something that can at least be -- again, I'm certainly not asking you to commit to a policy, I understand you can't do that, but is that something that can be thought about or inquiries undertaken as to its feasibility? A. I mean, you are very elegantly trying to guide me to talk more about where our thinking is going on these. What I would say is in terms of those -- doing something like that, I mean, that would be one element of a huge number of new processes that would need to be set up, new organisations that would need to be set up, were we to implement the recommendations of the Second Interim Inquiry[sic] in full. We have to start by making the full decision as to what we are going to do, and then we start to make those processes -- set up whatever processes are set up. But I think it would be confusing to set up one process and not another when we are making good progress in trying to make a decision in its entirety, and that's our objective. Q. Mr Hunt, my final questions to you -- I'm going to ask you to look at two documents. One is an email you wrote to a constituent -- not in office, I hasten to add --and the other is a letter sent, I think, to you by waiting for a final report is not consistent with that prioritisation that comes across in your email here, but also what we have been told by other ministers this week is the Government's priority to this issue. Is there anything further you feel able to say in relation to that? A. To be honest, I don't read that email as being any different to the position that I'm saying this afternoon. I think you could read that email and fairly say that I did want the Inquiry to conclude its work and publish its recommendations, but I also want to act as quickly as possible, and I think that -- I can't see the date of that, but that email looks to me like it was sent around the same time as I wrote the letter with the other two former Health Secretaries. 16 Q. No, this is 2019. A. Oh, this is 2019? Okay. So, but -- and it is some time before, but -- but I think, you know, I would want to do something to -- well, as everyone knows, I did want interim payments to be paid as guickly as possible. But I think that is consistent with my view that I want to

Andy Burnham yesterday. I just want to put those on the screen, read them, and then ask if you have anything that you are able to say in response.

The first document, please, Lawrence, is MRIC0000001. We can see this is an email dated 18 July 2019. It is to a constituent of yours, Melanie -- and I name her with her permission, I should make that clear -- and you say this in the second main paragraph:

"If I am lucky enough to become Prime Minister [this was obviously the time of the 2019 leadership election] I will do all I can to ensure appropriate compensation and other actions to give justice to those who suffered. However I do think that we should allow the inquiry to do its work, to tell us what the next steps should be before we commit to them. One of the reasons I pushed for a full public inquiry is because it would have the power to require witnesses to give evidence, and its findings would carry huge weight. I now think we need to give Sir Brian Langstaff the freedom to do his work, and reach his conclusions."

It may be said the Inquiry has, through its Second Interim Report, told you what it thinks the next steps should be -- obviously it is a matter for Government as to whether it accepts those recommendations -- and that

It is dated yesterday's date and says this: "Dear Chancellor,

"Last August we wrote together as former Health Secretaries to the then Prime Minister calling for interim compensation payments to be quickly made to victims of the infected blood scandal. We wrote that letter along with The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP because we all appreciated that a failure to act and act quickly would continue the injustice thus far handed out by the state to this group of innocent victims.

"What you appeared on The Today Programme to discussion the letter you were clear about how important it was to resolve the question of compensation. As you said, "We should do it right away. We've waited far too long. Successive governments, which I was part of one, didn't act as quickly as they should have, and we need to recognise this as a terrible, terrible injustice'. Your words are as true today as they were last year. At least another 100 victims have sadly passed away since we wrote that letter. Like thousands of others, they decide without the closure that full compensation and justice can bring:

"You are now back in government. You have the power to right the wrongs of the past. You will give evidence again to the inquiry on tomorrow. When you last gave

hear the Inquiry make its conclusions.

Mr Burnham's letter.

HSOC0029912.

Q. The last document I'm going to put on screen is

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evidence, you talked about the shared responsibility that those of us who have served in government have in terms of how long it has taken to resolve the infected blood scandal. Your words now as Chancellor can bring either hope or despair to those whose lives have been so damaged as a result of the what we know is the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS.

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"I implore you to take this opportunity to let the infected blood community know that they still have you as an ally fighting in their corner. They need to know that you have earmarked funding for compensation. That the present financial situation, which is not their fault, will not be a barrier to them receiving what they deserve. Finally, that you will use your good offices as Chancellor to ensure that the compensation scheme will be in place for when the Inquiry issues its full report later in the year."

Now, Mr Hunt, a number of the themes which Mr Burnham there sets out I have explored with you already in your evidence and you have given your response in relation to that, but is there anything further you feel able to say, with all the constraints you have told us about in terms of collective cabinet responsibility, that would give that hope or that confidence or reassurance about this not being something 61

I do believe that the Government's view is different to the many governments that have preceded this, and I do believe that we are closer to justice. But we have to look at all these very, very difficult decisions and go through these processes, and I hope we can resolve them as quickly as possible.

MS RICHARDS: Sir, those are the questions I have for Mr Hunt. We obviously need to take a break in any event for the stenographers, but also if we can take the break now that provides Core Participants with the opportunity to suggest any further questions that they want me to consider asking Mr Hunt.

SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: Yes.

You know the process, that the Core Participants will give such questions as they have to counsel to ask you when you come back, and we have to give everyone a chance to have a break, a proper break.

So what do you think, 40 minutes?

19 MS RICHARDS: If we say 35. It is up to you, sir. It is 20 entirely up to you.

21 SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: We are arguing only about five 22 minutes, so let's say 40 minutes. If it is going to be 23 any longer you will be told, and that means we will come 24 back at 4.15 pm.

So 4.15 pm, please.

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2 utterly a priority for this Government? 3 A. Well, I believe -- you know what I believe, because 4 I gave evidence to this Inquiry a year ago, and 5 I believed then, as I believe today, that this is -- it 6 is not just a terrible injustice, but, you know, 7 politicians need more than words, they need to show with their actions that they are putting into practice what they believe, and I can understand that it is very 9 10 frustrating for people listening that I can't go into 11 details about discussions that are going on inside 12 Government. But I do believe that the actions of the 13 Government -- and I should also say that I don't know 14 what the decision is going to be because the decision

kicked into the long grass, but something that is

15 has not been made. So I have to give those provisos. 16 But I would also say that the actions of the Government

17 of which I am part to me demonstrate a seriousness of 18 intent to resolve this issue in a way that finally does 19 justice, and we are doing the work necessary to 20

understand everything that we need to understand, given 21 the potentially large sums of money involved. 22

I hope that we can avoid any unnecessary delay in resolving this, and I hope that you will see that in the actions the Government takes going forward, but I do appreciate that this is a very frustrating process. But

1 Now, remain where you are seated, as we discussed 2 earlier, and the Chancellor will leave and we will see 3 you again at 4.15.

MS RICHARDS: And the usual warnings for the witness.

5 SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: Of course.

> You are giving evidence. You may not discuss the substance of your evidence, anything you have been asked or anything you think you may yet be asked, with anyone, whoever that anyone may be.

10 (3.35 pm)

(A short break)

12 (4.15 pm)

Questions from CORE PARTICIPANTS

MS RICHARDS: Mr Hunt, just a handful of further questions. 14

However, the first matter I'm just going to raise is something I'm not going to ask you any particular questions about now but I just want to flag it up.

In the bundle of documents which the Inquiry provided to you there are two letters written by a team within HM Treasury. We will just put them very briefly on screen so that we are talking about the same thing, but I'm not going to go through them.

They are COLL0000026 and then COLL0000027, Lawrence.

24 Mr Hunt, these are not letters that were sent by 25

you, and the letters to which they respond are

(16) Pages 61 - 64

undoubtedly not letters that were ever seen by you. But just to give context, Mr and Mrs Turton, the parents of a young son who was infected with HIV and died of AIDS, and Lauren Palmer is a young woman both of whose parents were infected with HIV and died of AIDS.

Now I have been asked to ask a number of questions about the way in which these letters were written and what might be said the somewhat soulless and dispassionate tone and language used. But having discussed it further with their representatives, and indeed with your own, it seemed a more sensible way forward, rather than me ask you to analyse these now, is if a letter is sent to you via your legal representatives setting out why it was these letters were seen as so hurtful, whether that could be something that is seen directly by you and sent directly to you.

So that's the way we are going to proceed but, for the benefit of I know what may be Mr and Mrs Turton and Ms Palmer listening I wanted to make that clear.

SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: Thank you.

MS RICHARDS: If we could take those down now.

So then the next issue relates to the question
I asked you about the possibility of registering those
who are not currently registered with the schemes, and
I think as part of your answer you pointed to the
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but this is one of a number of the recommendations made in the Second Interim Report that we are still reflecting on carefully and that's why we are not in a position to make any decision or announce any decision today.

Q. I just wanted to be clear that the registration wouldn't require new schemes.

Then if we go back to the paragraph above which I referred to, you will see the recommendation is not an interim payment of £100,000 to every individual relative who falls within the category set out; it is a recommendation of a payment to recognise each death.

I think you referred in your earlier evidence to the uncertainty that there might be about the numbers who might be eligible in that regard, so I just want, if we may, please, to go to INQY0000454. This is the Inquiry's summary of the key findings of its statistical expert group.

If we could go to page 3, please, Lawrence. You will see, bottom half of the page:

"Deaths during 1970-2019 attributable to infected blood or blood products."

Then a number of general matters set out about the statistics expert group's approach.

Then this in the last paragraph:

possibility that there might need to be new organisations established, and then you referred to some of the complexities involved in relation to that.

Could we look at INQY0000453, please, Lawrence, which is the Chair's Second Interim Report, and if we go to page 61.

So this is part of what is recommendation 12, the recommendation of £100,000 interim payment, and if we pick it up in the second paragraph, it is:

"... to recognise the deaths of people to date unrecognised and thereby alleviate immediate suffering."

Then there's set out parents, children and siblings.

If we could just go to the next paragraph, you will see that the Inquiry's report said:

"These interim payments should be capable of being made through the support schemes after registration and of being achieved reasonably quickly. They can and should be achievable before the compensation scheme itself is operational."

So the Inquiry's recommendation is that in relation to these individuals, this doesn't need a new organisation, this can be done through the existing support schemes. Is that something the Government understands?

A. Yes, and I am sorry if my previous answer wasn't clear, 66

"The experts therefore conclude that around 2,900 deaths during 1970-2019 are attributable to infections from blood or blood products in the UK, although there is considerable uncertainty about this estimate."

That is the estimated figure in relation to deaths. I think you referred to it yourself in your earlier evidence.

Now, there are a number of deaths that have already been recognised by the making of an interim payment; that's the interim payments that were made to bereaved partners, around 900 or so. So that would leave, currently, around 2,000 deaths that have been unrecognised to date through the making of any kind of compensation payment.

So it may not be correct to suggest that there is no sense of how many further interim payments would fall to be made if recommendation 12 is accepted, because it is a recommendation of a payment for each thus far unrecognised death, not for each relative.

Does the Government understand that, do you think?

A. It does, but there are, as I understand it, other recommendations about affected people that we are also being asked to consider, and we want to consider all of those together.

Q. Yes, you are absolutely right there are then broader

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- recommendations in terms of the structure of a final 1 2 compensation scheme. I appreciate you have talked about 3 wanting to consider everything together. It really goes 4 back to the point I explored with you earlier, Mr Hunt, 5 about whether there are some decisions that could be 6 taken in advance of others, because, for example, 7 payment in relation to deaths as yet unrecognised would 8 not commit the Government to making payments to a wider category of relatives. That's understood, I hope, by 9 10 the Government?
- 11 A. It is understood but we do want to take all these 12 decisions together and as quickly as possible.
- 13 Q. Can I then just pick up on the question of arm's length 14 bodies. You talked about it certainly -- I'm not sure 15 whether you said it was unique or just unusual to have an arm's length body that reports directly to 16 17 Parliament?
- 18 A. Novel, I think I ...

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- 19 Q. Yes. I'm asked to point out that there are, for 20 example, two examples: the National Audit Office and the 21 Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, both of 22 which report directly to Parliament?
- 23 A. Yes, I mean, that is true but I think this would be 24 substantively different to those two bodies.
- 25 Q. Then the ALB model, I mean there are a range of
- delays and lack of information is creating an ever 1 2 greater moral duty?
- 3 A. Every day that we take longer than necessary is a day 4 too long, I absolutely accept that. The refusal to 5 accept that there was any state responsibility in this 6 and, therefore, no moral justification for compensation 7 most certainly puts salt in the wounds of people who were already having an unbelievably tough life as 8 9 a result of this scandal. I fully accept that.

So, yes, I totally agree with Sir Robert that we do have a moral duty to resolve this as quickly as we possibly can.

13 Q. The final point I'm asked to point out to ascertain that 14 it is fully understood and taken into account as part of 15 the decision-making process, particularly in terms of 16 timing, is this question of injustice continuing to be 17 compounded.

> You use a phrase in your statement "historic injustice". Others would say it is not historic, it is still a present and continuing injustice, and that there are many who, even those who received the interim payments, are still in a position of financial uncertainty, of not being able to plan, of not being able to know where they are going to be, and of course those who have received no interim payments have

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different ALBs, but Sir Robert, for example, gave 1 2 examples of the Care Quality Commission, described as 3 fiercely independent but funded by Government. So there 4 is not a single way of doing it.

- 5 A. No, but as I understand his recommendations, this was 6 a body who would decide an amount of compensation. That 7 isn't what the Care Quality Commission do. So there 8 is -- you know, without passing any judgment on the 9 recommendation, we want to give it full thought, but it 10 would be a different constitutional arrangement to one 11 that I think we have got elsewhere.
- 12 Q. The final area for questioning is this: you have said in 13 your evidence you recognise how long this community has 14 been waiting for justice, and I am reminded that the 15 fifth aspect of the moral duty discussed by Sir Robert in his report recognised the specific roller coaster of 16 17 raised and then dashed expectations with regard to 18 support and recognition of their plight. In other 19 words, part of the moral duty which, as we understand 20 it, the Government has accepted is directly tied to the 21 delays that the community has experienced over the 22 decades; in other words, the injustice upon injustice 23 heaped upon the original infections and their 24 circumstances.

Do you accept that the ongoing period of time,

a position of considerable uncertainty.

So the injustice that the harm is compounded every day it takes is something which I have been asked to convey to you and ask: is that properly understood by each and every official, each and every minister dealing with this issue?

A. Well, I believe it is understood by the ministers and officials involved that this has taken far too long to resolve. It is a terrible scandal and we have a moral 10 duty to resolve it as quickly as we possibly can, and 11 not to make the injustice worse by adding in further 12 unnecessary delays.

> It is very hard to explain to people in this context that there are still things as a Government that we have to do before we can resolve something of this magnitude. but I do believe that the necessary work is happening at the moment in order for the Government to come to a conclusion of this and, you know, that's why we are not waiting until you conclude your Inquiry before doing all this work, and as soon as you have concluded it, we will, I hope, have done enough work to be able to come to a solution and publish that solution as quickly as we possibly can.

24 MS RICHARDS: Sir, those are the questions I'm proposing to 25 ask of those put forward by Core Participants. I'm just

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| 1 | going to check Mr Skelton for Mr Hunt has no | 1 | of that death there should be interim payments. |
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| 2 | questions. | 2 | Now, I appreciate it is part of everything that you |
| 3 | Do you have any questions for the Chancellor, sir? | 3 | put together, you have explained why it is that |
| 4 | SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: No, I don't, thank you. | 4 | Government is taking its time over that. But time is |
| 5 | MS RICHARDS: Mr Hunt, is there anything you wanted to add? | 5 | corrosive, delay is corrosive, and it may be that as |
| 6 | A. I don't think so, thank you. | 6 | your discussions progress you can't say anything |
| 7 | SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: There is something I would like to | 7 | about that, I fully appreciate, but as discussions |
| 8 | add, which is to thank you. The first and perhaps the | 8 | progress you find yourself in a position to make |
| 9 | minor matter, in some respects, for which I would like | 9 | interim payments even in advance of seeing the whole |
| 10 | to thank you is for being prepared to come at relatively | 10 | scope of whatever scheme it is that you may have in mind |
| 11 | short notice on a Friday, of all days, in the afternoon, | 11 | to give fair and just compensation which people deserve. |
| 12 | of all times, to give evidence. But the major part of | 12 | So, would you consider at least doing that if the |
| 13 | is to thank you for the tone in which you have given | 13 | opportunity arises and, so far as you can, help the |
| 14 | your evidence and the way in which that may have helped | 14 | opportunity to emerge to do that? |
| 15 | to explain to those of us who have been listening, in | 15 | A. Can I say I will reflect on what you have said |
| 16 | a way that has not been clearly explained before, why | 16 | carefully, Sir Brian. |
| 17 | the commitment to compensation, what the Prime Minister | 17 | SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: Thank you very much. |
| 18 | described as one of his priorities, has not yet come to | 18 | MS RICHARDS: Sir, that concludes this witness's evidence |
| 19 | any form of tangible fruition. | 19 | and it concludes this week's hearings. |
| 20 | I would just like to add, if I may this is not | 20 | SIR BRIAN LANGSTAFF: Well, I think I said at the end of the |
| 21 | a question, it is really a request straight after the | 21 | last set of hearings that we had that we did not |
| 22 | break counsel took you to part of the interim report | 22 | anticipate having any more hearings. I didn't say |
| 23 | where I dealt with the position of people who have died, | 23 | absolutely that we wouldn't and you have seen that we |
| 24 | leaving bereaved parents or where the child has lost | 24 | have this week been exploring the nature, the adequacy |
| 25 | a parent or both parents, and suggested that in respect | 25 | and the timeliness of the Government's response. |
| 20 | 73 | 20 | 74 |
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| 1 | It remains for me to reflect on what has been said | 1 | INDEX |
| 1 2 | It remains for me to reflect on what has been said, and I have no doubt you will too, but thank you for your | 1 2 | INDEX PAGE |
| 2 | and I have no doubt you will too, but thank you for your | 2 | PAGE |
| 2 | and I have no doubt you will too, but thank you for your attendance. | 2 | PAGE MR JEREMY HUNT (sworn) |
| 2 3 4 | and I have no doubt you will too, but thank you for your attendance. Given what has been said, I shall do everything | 2 3 4 | MR JEREMY HUNT (sworn) 2 Questioned by MS RICHARDS 2 |
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