

Witness Name: GRO-B

Statement No.: WITN1791047

Exhibits: WITN1791048-50

Dated: February 2025

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

THIRD WRITTEN STATEMENT OF GRO-B

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 14 January 2025.

I, GRO-B will say as follows:

1. This statement is prepared on behalf of the campaign group The Forgotten Few which is a group that represents co-infected haemophiliacs whose lives have been ruined from receiving contaminated blood products. It exists to give Co Infected Haemophiliacs "who were dual infected with HIV and Hepatitis C" (and HIV infected partners) a voice. Our role is to inform our members of any government action or response to the Final Report of the Infected Blood Inquiry and the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme ("the Scheme"). Where possible, members of The Forgotten Few attend meetings with IBCA and the Government on behalf of our members.

2. Of The Forgotten Few, I would say that there are about five members who speak to government ministers. This is because some of our members are anonymous and don't want to talk to ministers and others are of a certain age where they don't want to get involved. There are others who dip in every other time, but it is generally just the five of us.

Q 1. Please describe the nature of the work which we have undertaken

3. I had a meeting with John Glen on 8 May 2024 shortly before the publication of the Inquiry Report on 20 May. During this meeting we discussed the future compensation scheme. I was allowed to take my legal representative, Dani Holliday, but she was not allowed to speak, just take a note.
4. John Glen listened to what I had to say and he was keen to stress that, for the applicant, it was all going to be very straight-forward. He said that applicants were going to receive all of the assistance they needed from case workers and that we wouldn't even have to fill in forms to apply. From what he was saying, I understood that if you were already signed up to one of the support schemes, you would automatically be accepted as being eligible, and if you were not on one of the schemes, then a panel would be set up who would assess your claim and that it would just be a matter of determining the probability that you were infected as a result of receiving contaminated blood.
5. He wouldn't, however, commit to our solicitors being involved to help design the Scheme as recommended by Sir Brian in the Second Interim Report. He did commit to there being legal support for those infected and affected after the publication of the Inquiry Report. He said that something they (the government) had been looking at was to create a plan where solicitors would be involved and then they would be reimbursed at a flat rate afterwards. I remember my initial reaction was *'that's not bad, that's kind of what we've been looking for.'*
6. I have to say that after the meeting I thought that we had turned a bit of a corner. I believed that the government finally thought that it was 'time to do right by these people' some two years after Sir Brian had made his recommendations on compensation.
7. However, things started to go wrong a day after the publication of the Inquiry Report, where the government announced details of the Scheme. I remember feeling that it was a fait accompli; the government had very obviously already put all its ducks in a line at this stage and John Glen was simply paying lip

service to the community and their representatives having any real involvement in the design of the Scheme. I realised then that he wasn't interested in receiving feedback on how a Scheme should work. The Government had already decided what they would do when they were giving the impression that we were being involved. I have since found that the Civil Service has been making all of the decisions on how the Scheme should run in the background. One thing I am sure of is that it is not (and was never going to be) an Arms Length Body ("ALB").

8. I believe that the timing of the announcement of the payment of compensation only a day after the Final Report was published was designed to take the sting out of the findings and play down the impact of the Report in the media. It distracted the general public by impressing them with the compensation figures. All of this was in addition to the fact that the government knew that it would imminently call a general election which would further bury public outrage over the findings of the Report.
9. The publication of the details of the Scheme put the members of The Forgotten Few in a state of shock. Many of our members did not know what to make of the information we were being told.
10. The election had the effect of overshadowing the damning content of the Final Report and once it had been called there was not much else that could be done as we did not know who would be elected. However, the same group of civil servants who had surrounded John Glen continued to communicate with us.

Q 2 What if any external support or assistance has been, or is, available to you?

11. The only real support we have received has been from Collins Solicitors which has been substantial and given free of charge. The campaign groups were told that the Cabinet Office would pay the legal representatives to attend the initial meetings with the IBCA in June 2024 (they were not allowed to speak) and that up to 12 hours across 4 meetings could be claimed (**WITN1791048**).

12. This has not been paid to date and no further funding has been made available from the IBCA at all for the work, support, and assistance that they continue to provide.
13. Collins' have been in regular correspondence with us all, they keep us updated and answer any questions that we have. All of this is done pro bono for any infected or affected person who contacts them and there are many.
14. I have asked that they attend more recent meetings with the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General but they have not been allowed to attend any of the meetings with the Cabinet Office civil servants or the Paymaster General. No explanation has been given as to why they are not allowed to attend and take a note (WITN1791049).
15. In most of the meetings I have attended the question of independent legal support from our existing legal representatives has been raised by various campaigners but not answered. I thought that there was an attempt to shift all the focus onto civil servant "case workers" who have yet to be appointed and do not know us individually or the trauma that our community has been through for decades.
16. Whilst no external support has been provided to us (other than Collins) the government has access to an army of lawyers and we are aware that IBCA has now entered into a £250,000 contract with a PR company with a brief that includes taking the "lead on combating negative press and media, developing defensive lines and changing the narrative to support the good and positive work" of IBCA. (WITN1791050)

Q 3. Please describe the involvement of people infected and affected in the decision-making regarding compensation

17. As I mentioned previously, I have only had one meeting with Sir Robert Francis and David Foley. This was on 17 June 2024. Nothing was discussed in much

depth and certainly nothing specific. At this point they seemed to be interested in opinions and thoughts on the Scheme. They had opinions on how things should go ahead but they said they wanted our thoughts on everything going forward. I think this was just so they could say that we had been consulted.

18. I haven't met IBCA since this time. We had been trying to arrange a face-to-face meeting with David Foley and Sir Robert late last year but there didn't seem any point as they were not going to be able to answer specific questions regarding the design of the Scheme or the next set of regulations. It was clear that they would have to ask the actual decision makers in the Cabinet Office so there didn't seem to be any point in meeting them. It just seems to be lots of nice words but with no actual point.
19. We were excluded from the initial meeting that the new Paymaster General, Nick Thomas-Symonds, had with selected campaign groups in August 2024. A small number of campaigners were invited to attend a zoom call meeting with the Paymaster General to discuss the operation of the Scheme.
20. I remember speaking with Hannah from the Cabinet Office who stressed to me that 'this is not my doing. You, along with others who haven't been selected, are being excluded from this meeting'. I told Hannah that I saw no harm in the Paymaster-General doing a zoom meeting with all of the groups. I do not know why he chose to do that.
21. In addition to this I was not told about the publication of Sir Robert's report on the recommendations and found out from a fellow campaigner. The communication from IBCA and the Cabinet Office is patchy and inconsistent.
22. More recently, we were involved in a meeting held by James Quinault and various other Cabinet officials regarding the Scheme. We felt that they were just going through the motions and agreeing with everything without properly considering the points that we were raising. They didn't really answer many of the questions put to them.

23. To be honest, it took us back to the days of the MacFarlane Trust (MFT) where they would pretend to listen in meetings and then just go out for lunch. I felt that it was an absolute joke and a complete waste of time. I and other members of The Forgotten Few have felt very frustrated and it's left me not wanting to engage. We feel as if they have led us up the garden path again.
24. The same happened last Thursday (30th January) when I, along with a number of other campaigners, had a meeting with the Paymaster General. From the Agenda provided we had understood that he would be providing an update on the second set of Regulations. In fact, he did not even mention them and it was a general chat with campaigners which largely repeated what we had gone over the previous week with James Quinault and others and did not actually take anything any further.
25. This is not meaningful engagement and we have had no influence on any of the decision making. It is just lip service and tinkering around the edges.

Q 4 Please describe the principal concerns you have in relation to the involvement of infected and affected people in the process

26. We had thought that the various campaign groups and their legal teams were going to be a part of the design of the compensation scheme itself. Stupidly, at first, I was convinced by John Glen on 8 May 2024 that there was going to be a change. I thought that, even if the conservatives lost the election, we had reached a point where, after the devastating Report, the government would have thought, 'we should take this in the right direction.' After all Diana Johnson was now a key member of the new government – I was wrong again!!
27. My confidence in the process is broken. I felt very much that we were going to be railroaded down a path that had already been chosen and we would have no influence whatsoever on the decision-making, as this is what the government had always done historically. I got the feeling from discussions

with others that it was all very 'cut and dry'; that we were being told what the government was going to do, and our 'involvement' was all just lip-service.

28. Even with our supposed "engagement", we do not know how the Scheme is currently operating. Twenty people were invited to apply for compensation; we do not know how these people were selected or how the next lot of people are going to be selected or when this is going to be. It's a lottery system at best. We believe everything has gone completely off-track. We're certain that we're only being told the stuff that the IBCA wants us to know; they're only telling us the stuff that makes them look good. It is not how it should be.
29. This can also be seen with the way the IBCA responds to questions raised in our meetings. If you have a question that you want to address to them, they will not answer unless they are told the questions well in advance and even then, they will not always answer the question you give them prior to the meeting. What's the point in pre-empting the answers to the questions? It's obvious to see they're just trying to come up with 'the line' as opposed to having an actual response.
30. At the recent meeting with Cabinet Office officials we felt that the government were being disingenuous. For example, we raised the issue of the 'gagging order' that the IBCA were trying to put on the legal teams. James Quinault said he had no idea about the gagging order until that morning and that he looked shocked despite the fact that the contract is with the Cabinet Office, and they are the decision makers. He looked a bit shocked when we brought it up but we knew that he had already had other meetings that morning with other members of other groups and we were certainly not the first people to mention it to him. So, it seemed like a put-on show. His forced reaction only creates more distrust.
31. This doesn't even touch on trying to put in the 'gagging clause' itself; in short, the only reason why you would put a gagging order on someone is because you're frightened that they are going to tell the truth and act in our best interest.

Q 5 Please describe the impact upon you and your colleagues

32. Many of our members feel very anxious and confused as we feel we're not being involved at all. I've never felt so stupid about this because I thought there was going to be a proper conclusion to the Blood Inquiry. The worst part of it was I should have known better than that. I've never been taken-in like this before. It is causing immense frustration and anxiety especially with the older co-infected community.

33. Ultimately, all the trust and confidence that the Inquiry spent the last seven years building is dropping through the floor. I told them this in the meeting; that all the bridges that have been built are being broken with the Community.

Q 6 Please describe the impact you perceive the decision-making regarding compensation is having on people infected and affected and why

34. Detrimental doesn't even scratch the surface. I've spoken with four or five of the regular people who I'm in touch with and they are all saying the same thing. They are almost in tears down the phone; you can hear the anger and despair in them. It doesn't even feel like one step forward, two steps back – it just feels like they've taken twenty steps back. Everyone feels stressed and anxious; this is why it feels as if we're back to the MacFarlane Trust days.

Q 7 Are there any particular steps or measures which you consider could be taken by Government, IBCA or both to alleviate any detrimental impact upon you, and/or the infected and affected communities?

35. I think the meetings would work better if they were being held with our lawyers assisting us. They have been by our side for the last 8 years and know all our stories and understand the legal issues. I feel that solicitors are the only real way to go forward to build confidence in the process. The short point is that we don't trust IBCA and the Cabinet Office, but we do trust our solicitors to act in our best interests.

36. I think the solicitors should be more involved in communication with IBCA on how the Scheme should operate. I understand that at the moment a number of people have been selected to bring a claim to test the process and that they speak to a case manager who has been provided with very basic information from IBSS. There may be further meetings with the case manager and then they draft a Declaration form for the person to sign and the offer of an award is based on the information in the form.
37. I am told that the IBCA case workers do not have access to any medical evidence beyond what they have received from EIBSS and they do not have access to the statements prepared for the Inquiry. When the solicitors are contacted for advice the dates have to be amended because they are wrong and the correct information with supporting medical evidence is then supplied.
38. This seems to be an unnecessarily convoluted process and surely it would be simpler to allow the solicitors to prepare the necessary documentation and submit it with the necessary evidence. It would be simpler and quicker.
39. It seems to me that they are employing case workers as a form of "empire building" in the Cabinet Office and it does not feel as though it is being done in the best interests of the infected and affected.
40. I feel the IBCA have performed very poorly so far. What makes this worse is that the Scheme is not currently dealing with anything particularly difficult yet. I can only imagine everything getting worse once the complicated aspects of the scheme are going to be discussed, such as estate claims.
41. But really, even at this stage, it's still not about the money. It's about the principle. There are many people in a very desperate state of mind because of the lack of trust and general uncertainty as to what will happen next and I really do feel for them. There are people and families who aren't as up to date, don't have access to emails etc, and even if they do they don't understand what IBCA

put in the newsletters. They are confused and anxious and they don't know what's going on.

42. I am very sceptical about the whole "engagement" process and I am concerned that other community/campaign groups don't realise what the government is doing, and it is giving the IBCA license to do what they want and all the while pretend that the voices of different campaign groups are being heard. As a result, it is creating further divisions within the community.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signature  GRO-B

Dated 21/2/25.

Table of exhibits:

Date	Notes/ Description	Exhibit number
June 2024	Email from Cabinet Office	WITN1791048
Jan 2025	Emails from Cabinet Office	WITN1791049
27/01/2025	Article by PR Week	WITN1791050