

**Witness Name:** Robin Swann

**Statement No.:** WITN5570030

**Exhibits:** [WITN5570031 –WITN5570034]

Dated: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **SIXTH WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ROBIN SWANN MLA**

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I, Robin Swann, in response to the Rule 9 request from Infected Blood Inquiry, dated 2 August 2022, will say as follows:

#### **Section 1: Introduction**

- 1. In both written and oral evidence to the Inquiry you stated that it was your intention to move to the same payments in Northern Ireland, as were in place in the English scheme. Please set out what, if any, steps you have taken to increase the parity of Northern Irish payments with the other devolved nations. Where steps have been taken, please describe them. If action has not yet been taken, please explain why.**

- 1.1 I refer to paragraph 3.1 - 3.12 of my first written statement (WITN5570001) and my oral evidence (INQY1000119) on why I chose to move to parity with England on payments to infected beneficiaries in Northern Ireland. When I took up post as Health Minister in January**

2020, England offered the best annual financial support for infected beneficiaries.

- 1.2 I refer to paragraphs 6.6 to 6.12 of my first written statement (**WITN5570001**) in relation to consideration I gave to the support available in the other devolved administrations. These considerations influenced my decision to introduce regular financial support for non-infected bereaved spouses and partners as described in paragraph 4.1 - 4.4 of my first written statement (**WITN5570001**).
- 1.3 On 25 March 2021 the then Paymaster General announced an agreement to bring the four UK Schemes into broader parity and I announced changes to the NI Scheme. I refer you to paragraph 6.16 in my first written statement (**WITN5570001**), paragraph 1.1 - 1.2 in my fourth written statement (**WITN5570027**) and paragraphs 2.1 to 5.4 in my fifth written statement (**WITN5570028**) in addition to my oral evidence (**INQY1000119**) for the details of this agreement and the changes I agreed to make. My fifth statement highlights that some of these changes were in line with the positions in Scotland and Wales at the time of the agreement.
- 1.4 As a result of the agreement of 25 March 2021, parity across all four nations was achieved in relation to both lump sums and annual financial support for infected beneficiaries and bereaved spouses and partners in addition to any payments payable to estates where there is no living spouse or partner.
- 1.5 I refer you to paragraphs 2.1 to 5.4 in my fifth written statement (**WITN5570028**) for the explanation as to why any lack of parity of regular financial support across the four nations from April 2017 to April 2019 was not possible under the terms of the agreement of 25 March 2021.
- 1.6 The NI Scheme will be kept under review and my officials maintain regular communication with their counterparts in the other UK nations

and any future changes made to the four Schemes will be made in consultation with the other administrations as agreed under the terms of the 'parity' agreement of 25 March 2021.

## **Section 2: Additional matters**

2. Following on from paragraph 2 in my fifth written statement (**WITN5570028**), I would like to take this opportunity to update you on the introduction of enhanced support for hepatitis C stage 1 beneficiaries of the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme (NI Scheme).
  - 2.1 A targeted consultation process took place from 6 December 2021 to 5 January 2022 to support the development of an eligibility assessment process that is fair and reasonable in the interests of achieving greater parity of financial support across the UK, whilst demonstrating proper accountability for public money. To support the consultation exercise, my officials set up a working group with membership including scheme beneficiaries, those infected and affected, clinical expertise from an independent medical advisor and representatives of the relevant haemophilia organisations (including Haemophilia NI, Haemophilia Society and Families and Friends of Haemophilia NI), as well as officials from the Business Services Organisation (BSO) and Department of Health NI (DoH NI). The report of the findings of the consultation was published on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022 (**WITN5570031**).
  - 2.2 Following completion of the consultation, my officials developed a proposal for the assessment of eligibility for the new HCV stage 1 (enhanced) support in liaison with the working group. Further engagement with clinicians on the practicalities of the eligibility assessment process was required and this caused some delay to the initial draft timetable. Following completion of this work, I approved the recommended proposal, which is a hybrid of the models in place in

England, Scotland and Wales, allowing the applicant to self-assess the impact of their condition along with a requirement for a professional medical declaration. This is to avoid any ambiguity over the distinction between stages 1 and 2. The application process is entirely paper based and there is no requirement for an in-person medical assessment. Full detail is included in the consultation response document published on 3 August 2022 (**WITN5570032**), letter of instruction to the BSO (**WITN5570033**) and application form and guidance (**WITN5570034**).

- 2.3 The agreed model is designed to place the greatest degree of control possible in the hands of the applicant, providing them with the opportunity to describe the impact on their daily life, as it is acknowledged that they are best placed to assess this themselves. The supporting medical professional declaration is intended to help so far as is possible to determine the link to HCV and / or treatment, to provide the necessary assurances in terms of responsible management of public money as well as consistency in how applications are processed. My officials have taken the necessary steps to formalise the new policy which has now been implemented by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) and became operational week commencing 8 August 2022. The BSO will continue to monitor the new support to ensure it is operating as intended in practice and will address any issues or concerns which arise.

### **Statement of Truth**

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

Signed

GRO-C

Dated: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022

## Annex A

### Table of exhibits:

Exhibit no.	Title	Date
WITN5570031	Report of the findings of the consultation	20/06/22
WITN5570032	Consultation Response document	03/08/22
WITN5570033	Letter of instruction to the BSO	06/07/22
WITN5570034	Application form and guidance	05/08/22