



Rt Hon. Nick Thomas-Symonds MP
His Majesty's Paymaster General
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Dear Sir Brian,

Thank you for your letters of 13 November and 9 December regarding the concerns that have been raised with you about compensation for victims of Infected Blood.

Since the Government was elected in July, the Prime Minister and I have always been determined to deliver justice for the victims of the Infected Blood Scandal. This Government is committed to ensuring that victims receive the compensation they are due, and as swiftly as possible.

At the Autumn Statement we set £11.8 billion aside to fund full compensation for people infected and affected. Earlier in December the Infected Blood Compensation Authority (IBCA) made the first full compensation payments, which is a significant milestone in delivering the compensation to all victims. In my Oral Statement to the House of Commons on 2 September 2024, I outlined that the Government expected that final compensation payments would begin by the end of the year. I am pleased that this has been achieved and I am grateful to the work of IBCA, its interim Chair and Chief Executive and all those working to deliver long overdue compensation. This is only the start. I have outlined to IBCA that I expect the numbers able to apply for compensation to increase throughout the early part of 2025.

I understand that every day for victims having to wait for compensation is a day too many and that is why in July, when appointed to this role, I made sure that the first set

of regulations were in law by the statutory deadline of 23 August 2024, as set by the Victims and Prisoners Act. I also made a statement to the House of Commons on 26 July to set out that intent. I was conscious that as a new Government we needed to ensure no further delays to compensation and I am glad that we hit that deadline.

In those early weeks, I also received Sir Robert Francis' KC report into recommendations to the Government on the proposals for the compensation scheme. My predecessor in this role asked Sir Robert to conduct a series of consultations with the community on the Scheme before the regulations were, and are, laid. Sir Robert released his report to the community on 14 August and the Government responded to his recommendations on 16 August. The Government accepted 69 of the points he raised; and for the five it did not, provided a clear explanation as to why.

On 16 August, I also published the reports of the Expert Group, Chaired by Professor Sir Jonathan Montgomery, underpinning the detailed design of the scheme and the tariff framework.

Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Government is aiming for the second set of regulations to be in place by 31 March 2025. This will establish the scheme for affected people and to provide a route for cases which fall outside the framework set by the 'core' scheme.

We have also now made interim payments of over £1 billion to living infected victims and bereaved partners, administered via the Infected Blood Support Schemes. In the specific case for the interim payments to the estates of those who have died, the first 130 claims were paid in December, totalling £13 million. When I became aware of issues for those applying with Chains of Representations, my officials worked as quickly as possible with the infected blood community and representatives of the probate services to ensure people are able to access money to which they are entitled. I am glad that this issue has now been resolved, and I have asked my officials to ensure that the process of receiving interim payments is as easy as possible to navigate. I hope and expect that those eligible are able to access interim payments as soon as possible.

More broadly than compensation, on 17 December, I published an update on the Government's response to the Infected Blood Inquiry, following the general debate on

the Inquiry's recommendations that I led on 19 November. The Government has accepted all of the Inquiry's recommendations either in full, or in principle. Where recommendations have been accepted in principle, further work needs to be done on the deliverability and the long-term cost of the recommendations. This is work I am absolutely committed to progressing, in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. It is critical that the UK Government and the Devolved Governments work together to deliver real and lasting change as a result of your Inquiry and I hope this report reassures you that we have absolute determination to do so. We will provide a further update on the Government's response in May next year, as you recommended.

You have raised the importance of engaging with the community as we finalise the terms of this part of the scheme, and the Government is doing so.

We are consulting the community now on how best to recognise the unethical research in the scheme. Meanwhile, I have personally met community groups in August and December to hear their wider representations on the scheme, and I am committed to continuing to engage with the community. My officials are regularly responding to correspondence and enquiries from both the infected and affected. This is separate from and in addition to the ongoing consultation and engagement with claimants by the Infected Blood Compensation Authority on the implementation of the scheme.

Cabinet Office officials are also planning a series of engagements with key community representatives in the new year to listen to views and update on progress, for example on delivering interim payments for estates.

I have already made one important change in response to representations from the community: that adult siblings should qualify as affected people for compensation in their own right, rather than just those under 18 as Sir Robert Francis recommended in his original compensation study.

Your letter to me of 13 November clarified that it was not your intention to exclude adult siblings from compensation, and we have reflected this in the terms of the scheme. I announced to Parliament on 17 December that all siblings of infected people will be eligible for compensation as long as they lived with the infected person for two years

when they were under 18, or would have done were it not for the impact of the infection. All siblings will receive an Injury Impact Award, the amount of which will be in line with the severity of their infected sibling's infection. Siblings who lived with an infected person whilst they were under the age of 18 and for at least two years *after* the infection date (or would have expected to were it not for the impact of the infection) will receive a higher Social Impact Award (£12,000) in recognition of the impact the infection will have had on their childhood. All other siblings, including adult siblings, will receive an £8,000 social impact award. This mirrors the Award for parents where onset of a child's infection began after age 18; and children where onset of a parent's infection began after the child turned 18.

The scheme has to balance the need to recognise the special circumstances of each case, as far as it can, with the need for a process that is as swift and straightforward as possible for claimants as a whole. Such a balance can only be achieved by taking a broad approach to many issues.

I agree with your advice about engagement and transparency. That is why I am committed to regularly updating Members of Parliament on the Government's progress. In addition to my oral statements on 26 July and 2 September and my written statement of 17 December, I have updated the House at the SI debate on 23 October, the general debate on 19 November and at Cabinet Office Oral Questions on 25 July, 24 October and 5 December.

However, I would like to emphasise the practical independence of the Infected Blood Compensation Authority. I want to be clear with you as the Inquiry Chair and with the community that the Infected Blood Compensation Authority is operationally independent.

The Chair of the Authority wrote to you on 10 December to set out the position, and to explain what the Authority is doing to earn the trust of the community in its work, and to ensure that it puts the community's concerns at the centre of how it is designing its service. His letter speaks for itself. While the terms of the scheme are set in regulations, it is staff working for IBCA under the oversight of its Board who are designing its operations, and, now, making decisions on claims.

No measures can ever make up for the losses and hardships that victims of this scandal have suffered, but my priority, and the priority of the Government as a whole, is ensuring that victims now get the compensation they deserve, and with the minimum of delay. I hope you are reassured that we are in the process of doing so.

I will continue to engage with you to ensure you are aware of the steps the Government is taking on these important issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Thomas-Symonds', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**RT HON NICK THOMAS-SYMONDS MP
MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE
HIS MAJESTY'S PAYMASTER GENERAL**