



Department  
of Health

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From the Lord O'Shaughnessy  
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*Dear Diana,*

Thank you for your letter of 13 February to Jeremy Hunt raising concerns about the upcoming reforms of the payment support schemes for those affected by HIV and/or hepatitis C through NHS-supplied blood. Thank you also for welcoming me to my role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health. I apologise for the delay in responding.

You raise specific concerns about the implementation of the new payment support scheme for those infected with HIV and hepatitis C through NHS-supplied blood products and you are seeking assurances in your letter about when this will be. My response to your letter appears to have been superseded with our telephone conversation on Monday 6 March informing you of the consultation "*Infected Blood: Consultation on Special category Mechanism and financial and other support in England*".

In our telephone conversation I updated you on the elements of this consultation and announced that the NHS Business Services Authority will be the new scheme administrator from later this year.

We had intended to procure the new scheme administrator through open competition, however we heard clearly beneficiaries' and Parliamentarians' feedback regarding the plans to procure for a new scheme administrator and the concerns about private companies being eligible to bid under procurement rules.

As a result and having considered this very carefully, I decided to appoint the NHS Business Services Authority as the new single scheme administrator. This will happen later in 2017. Until then, annual and discretionary payments and services will continue to be made by the current schemes to ensure a smooth transition to the new scheme administrator with minimum impact on the important financial and non-financial ex gratia services infected blood beneficiaries will receive this parliament.

The intention is for a transition period between closing down the existing schemes and delivering the new scheme.

We will ensure processes are put in place to ensure that individuals currently registered with one of the existing companies or charities are transferred to the reformed scheme with minimal involvement from the individuals and no adverse impact on the support they receive. All changes will be clearly communicated to all existing beneficiaries in advance of any change.

Your letter raises concerns about the £10,000 lump sum payment to bereaved spouses and partners of primary beneficiaries. I do not agree that the criteria for awarding this payment to those affected are flawed. We appreciate that individuals' circumstances differ and may not be straightforward. We have received requests for clarity or approval where the applicant's situation falls short of the criteria set out in the given policy. All such requests have, so far, resulted in approval. However, you will appreciate that a policy has to be in place for the use of this public money, and as such a rigorous review and verification process of the evidence must also be in place.

In terms of when these payments to the bereaved are to be made, the schemes have confirmed they remain on track to make all approved payments by 31 March 2017.

We also heard clearly through the consultation that many people rely on the support provided through the discretionary schemes. As such, the consultation announced on 6 March includes views on elements of discretionary support that meets the needs of those affected and takes their circumstances into account – something we heard very clearly in last year's consultation.

We will continue to fund the three discretionary payment support schemes beyond 1 April 2017 and until the NHS-BSA is in full operation. However, we are not yet able to confirm at this stage what the discretionary funding amount will be during 2017. I am committed to ensuring however, that scheme reform does not affect current and new support being given to beneficiaries and that discretionary funding will continue.

Finally, you seek assurances that nobody must be worse off as a result of these reforms and I am aware you also raised this during Business Questions on 9 March. I would like to reassure you that we do not anticipate that there will be any reduction in current spending as a result of the consultation proposals and no-one who currently receives an annual payment will be worse off than they are now.

You also referred to a proposed meeting with the all-party parliamentary group. As I said during our telephone conversation on Monday 6 March, I would be very happy to attend a meeting of all-party parliamentary group to discuss these proposals with you and to listen to any further concerns you may have.



## Department of Health

I hope this reply is helpful.

I am copying this letter to the Leader of the House and will place a copy of this letter in the House of Commons Library.

**JAMES O'SHAUGHNESSY**