

The Infected Blood Public Inquiry NEWSLETTER



THE
HAEMOPHILIA
SOCIETY

A summary of remote inquiry hearings

This was the third week of investigations into grants and trusts. Four former Trust trustees—Russell Mishcon, Kate Rendle, Alasdair Murray and Sue Phipps—gave evidence as well as two staff members—Susan Daniels, Jude Cohen and benefits adviser Neil Bateman.

Ms Daniels, an independent financial adviser who worked with the MFT, Caxton Foundation and Eileen Trust from 1991-2017, highlighted the problems of getting a mortgage for haemophiliacs infected with HIV and the “impossibility” of life insurance. This also applied to anyone with hepatitis C showing liver

damage. She believed that the government should have underwritten an insurance policy to support the infected community.

She stressed the importance of her home visits where she built up a personal relationship with registrants. Ms Daniels was critical of some MFT trustees, many of whom were middle aged, well-off men with no understanding, she felt, of what it was like to be “ill and poor”.

Ms Daniels described visiting a MFT recipient in 2005 who was so worried about her visit he was visibly shaking. She said she was saddened that the trust was seen as a

source of stress, not support.

She left the MFT in 2006 after being “bullied” by chief executive Martin Harvey, but later was employed as a case worker for the ET.

Neil Bateman acted as a benefits adviser to the MFT, Caxton Foundation and, latterly, the Infected Blood Support Schemes.

He said since 2011 he’s advised 945 people from the contaminated blood community and helped them claim £3m in benefits.

Mr Bateman said preparing for the inquiry had been “very difficult emotionally”. He announced he will retire this year.

Inquiry news in focus: Jude Cohen

Jude Cohen was Head of Support Services at the Macfarlane Trust (MFT) from 2004-5. In her evidence to the inquiry this week, she said she found its grant-giving system “ad hoc” and “inconsistent” and tried, without success, to get the MFT’s National Support Services Committee to publish its guidelines. The NSSC was so “adamant” that this would not happen, that in March 2005 it issued a document which read: “As far as registrants are concerned there are no longer any office guidelines.” Asked if this meant she was expected to lie if a registrant was to ask, Ms Cohen said: “Yes, totally.” She said the MFT had a “schizophrenic” approach to widows and dependants with some getting support and others who did not. She described an “undercurrent” of distrust and her feeling that some registrants were “favoured” and their applications “nodded through”, while others had their claims rejected. Ms Cohen said some trustees liked the “power” of deciding who was “deserving” of an MFT grant. Ms Cohen was shocked when, in August 2005, she was dismissed out of the blue by chief executive Martin Harvey. Weeks earlier she had raised concerns about her workload.

Quotes of the week

“Roger Evans had his own agenda, he did not like anyone disagreeing with him.” Russell Mishcon on the former MFT chair

“The DWP is a very difficult organisation to work with and lobby. It's very introspective and arrogant sometimes. It's very difficult to influence them.” Neil Bateman

“I often tried to soften the refusal rather than just saying they don't think you deserve it ..I didn't want the registrant to feel that they weren't trusted, even though the reality was I knew that some of the committee didn't trust some. It seemed unnecessarily cruel to actually spell it out.” Jude Cohen

“It became much harder for the registrants to get grants. I think they were making ill people go through hoops ... for a simple grant.. I think there was [a] total lack of compassion.” Susan Daniels on MFT in around 2005

“Make it so that they had enough money to live decent lives, not just get by on a week-by-week basis.” Eileen Trust trustee Sue Phipps on what extra DoH money would have been used for.