



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Welsh Government Board meeting: Agenda item 6 paper

'Permanent Secretary's evidence to the Infected Blood Inquiry'
from the Board meeting held on 2 December 2022.

First published: 28 March 2023

Last updated: 28 March 2023

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Details

Title of paper

Permanent Secretary's evidence to the Infected Blood Inquiry

Purpose of paper

To draw the attention of the Board to some of the lessons coming out of the Inquiry and the content of the Permanent Secretary's written and oral evidence in response.

Action required by the Board

This is an opportunity for the Board to reflect on the issues covered by the Permanent Secretary in his evidence and the extent to which we are mindful of them.

Officials presenting the paper

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Paper prepared by / cleared by

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TUS engagement/viewpoint

We have not consulted TUS but we would expect them to support and endorse the issues covered.

Date submitted to Secretariat

24 November 2022

1. Background

1.1 The Infected Blood Inquiry, which is still underway, received recently what it considered to be several important pieces of evidence which were relevant to its deliberations.

1.2 The first piece of evidence was a detailed report which chronicled the impact upon victims and their families of being infected unknowingly with the HIV virus. The report highlighted what was seen as the reluctance of the NHS and government to acknowledge the mistakes that were made. The second was a report which discussed whether there was a case for extending the duty of candour which exists in the NHS to the civil service as well, and which briefed the Inquiry on the Civil Service Code and the Nolan Principles.

1.3 In taking evidence on these two reports the Inquiry also took evidence from former UK Government Ministers and others about the lessons to be learned. The points which were put to the Committee included concerns about the reluctance of governments to admit when they have made mistakes; a reluctance to offer apologies; the dangers of groupthink taking over government thinking, with insufficient challenge; and whether the Civil Service Code was

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sufficient to ensure openness and honesty, or whether there should be a statutory duty of candour placed upon the civil service as well.

1.4 In response to these concerns the Inquiry decided to put a series of specific questions to the Head of the UK Civil Service and the Permanent Secretaries of the devolved governments, and to invite them together to an oral evidence session. The written response from our Permanent Secretary to the questions posed is attached to this paper, as is the transcript of the oral evidence given (the relevant pages of the transcript are 1-118. The pages are smaller than A4 size so there is less material to cover than appears).

2. Issues for consideration

2.1 The Board might find it helpful to be reminded of how the actions of government – particularly when things go wrong – can impact upon the lives of individuals. As the Board will see, the Permanent Secretary in his written and oral evidence drew heavily upon his previous experience in the NHS about the importance of honesty and candour in dealing with citizens. The Permanent Secretary also highlighted our complaints policy and our commitment to offer an apology when we have got things wrong.

2.2 The Permanent Secretary went on to talk about the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the One Wales Public Service and how we encourage openness and dialogue outside the Welsh Government to avoid groupthink and closed minds. He talked about the importance of values and the way in which we try to embed them in the Welsh Government. And he told the Inquiry that on balance he felt that the civil service code value of openness was sufficient and that there was not a need to extend a duty of candour to the civil service.

2.3 The Permanent Secretary said in his written evidence that he would draw the attention of the lessons which the Inquiry had highlighted to the attention of his

senior staff. That commitment is being fulfilled by this paper.

2.4 The Infected Blood Inquiry is expected to publish its recommendations in late spring next year, which will no doubt cover these issues.

3. Resource implications

3.1 There are no resource or staff implications from this paper.

4. Risks

4.1 There are no risks arising from this paper though the much bigger issues arising from the recommendations of the Inquiry will need to be reflected in our risk registers in due course once the Welsh Government has decided upon its response to them.

5. Communication

5.1 There are no issues which necessitate communication.

6. General compliance issues

6.1 There are no general compliance issues.

7. Recommendation

7.1 The Board is invited to consider the issues raised by the Infected Blood Inquiry and the evidence from the Permanent Secretary and consider the extent to which these matters are embedded in the Welsh Government.

Publication

This paper (including Annexes) should be published in full as none of the exemptions in the Code of Practice on Public Access to Information apply. The written and oral evidence of the Permanent Secretary is already in the public domain.

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