

Witness Name: ROGER EVANS

Statement No: WITN3859003

Exhibits: None

Dated: 15 February 2021

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **THIRD WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ROGER EVANS IN RESPONSE TO CRITICISM BY W4474**

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I, ROGER EVANS, will say as follows: -

I provide this statement in response to the Inquiry's letter dated 4 February 2021 notifying me of criticism made against me by W4474 in his statement to the Inquiry dated 22 January 2021.

#### **Response to paragraph 20 of W4474's statement**

1. W4474 was one of the eight MFT board members for the first two years of my Chairmanship, from 2012 to 2014. When his period of office expired in February 2014, he was not reappointed. All board members were of equal status, including W4474. Therefore, in drafting his letter (WITN4474004), which I discuss below, he had no mandate to do so. Neither I, nor the Board had requested it. Most, but not all, of my fellow board members showed good judgement, were focused and demonstrated a commitment to the beneficiary community in its entirety.
2. W4474 took it upon himself to draft the letter at WITN4474004, to the Minister of Health, without my, the CEO's, nor most of the board members' knowledge. As I have stated in my second statement dated 4 February 2021, the first, and only, time I saw the letter was when he thrust it in front of me during a board meeting, challenging me to sign it immediately. Importantly, the letter which he has attached to his Statement is similar, but not the same, as the version he produced at the meeting. The version of

the letter attached to his statement has omitted an important paragraph which I felt gave an aggressive tone to the letter. The version of the letter attached to his statement appears anodyne, whereas the one produced at the board meeting was confrontational towards the Minister, with a threat and ultimatum that I, and others, would resign if the MFT's financial allocation was reduced. I have already referred to this in paragraph 147 of my Statement of 4 February 2021. For reasons I explain below, there was no possibility any Minister would succumb to such a threat. Contrary to W4474's Statement, of the nine board members, six of us refused to sign the letter, and rejected it out of hand. I am fairly sure, but not certain, that the remaining two had assisted W4474 in drafting the letter.

3. Procedurally, he had not followed the Standing Orders, the custom and practice of which were well known by all board members. This was giving advance notice to the CEO, requesting an item to be included on the board agenda, and providing any supporting documents. I believe the motive in not complying with Standing Orders was a deliberate tactic to pressurise me into signing at the meeting.
4. Furthermore, it would have been good practice, and courteous, if he had contacted me in advance, shown me the letter, sought my agreement to table it, enabling us to discuss the contents. This did not happen, I suspect, as he was aware that I would not agree to support it. W4474 was in frequent contact with me, for example by email. At paragraph 131 of my Statement of 4 February 2021 I referred to two trustee board members contacting me on my personal email account. W4474 was one of the two (the other W1122 who was party to the letter). Neither were hesitant about emailing me when they so wished. I felt that W4474 has made a conscious decision to keep me in the dark.
5. At the end of paragraph 20 of his Statement, W4474 refers to my style as one of "appeasement" with the Department of Health ('DH'). I think the insinuation is that I should have been more combative or robust in my dealings with DH. I have already explained in some detail in my Statement of 4 February 2021 (including paragraphs 145/6) the working relationship with DH and Ministers. As I have explained previously, while those two particular trustees mentioned above wanted us to take a combative or campaigning approach with DH, my view, and I believe the view shared by other trustees, was that that would have been the wrong approach.

6. It was a time of reductions in public spending (austerity) and MFT held reserves of £3.245 M (See Annual Report 2013/14). The board members who were party to drafting the letter were well aware of this. Furthermore, there were two other reasons why the contents of the letter were in my view inappropriate (and were regarded as inappropriate by the other trustees who also declined to sign it).
7. Firstly, the letter makes an inappropriate comparison between MFT's primary beneficiaries, who suffer from haemophilia, and HIV with the Caxton Foundation's beneficiaries with Hepatitis C, asserting that the financial and medical needs of MFT primary beneficiaries are greater than half of the Caxton Foundation beneficiaries who do not suffer from haemophilia. The MFT board had never sought to compare the needs. To do so would have been explosive and inevitably upsetting to many people, some of whom would have been very angry. In any event, such a comparison was I thought the wrong approach, for something going out from the MFT. This would have stimulated considerable emotion and anger amongst Caxton Foundation beneficiaries, as well as tensions between the two boards. Most probably it would have to be retracted and an apology issued publicly. Personally, I regard any attempt to compare the needs of two groups of people, both of whom have been inflicted with terrible conditions, and both suffered real injustices, to be unnecessary, offensive to many people, and distasteful. It would not have been the right approach.
8. Secondly, the draft letter challenged the basis of a Government decision to allocate considerable finances to people who suffered from the thalidomide scandal. Questioning their need for the funding would in my view have been offensive to the community of people who suffered as a result of that scandal. MFT had no knowledge of the rationale for the Government's financial allocation. The MFT board did not have an opinion on this very separate, and also extremely sensitive, matter of Government funding. The draft letter contained a view which was not that of the board, but a personal one expressed by W4474 and W1122. The great majority of trustees did not regard it as appropriate to sign the letter.
9. In summary, the MFT was in a difficult and sensitive position when negotiating its financial allocation with DH that year. The economy was in recession, and we were at that time holding considerable reserves. Threatening the Minister and DHSC with resignation, backed up by questioning a Government decision to allocate funds to other charities, would not have been a good tactic to deploy. I think we would have been regarded by DH as having very poor judgement. Doing something which may

well have resulted in DH losing all confidence in the professionalism of MFT, would not have been the more likely starting point for seeking to convince the DH to allocate more funds to us.

10. Incidentally, in the following March, the DH agreed an allocation for the following year which was, in real terms, the same and not reduced. It was as good an outcome as we could have expected. It justified the approach of negotiating with the DH and Ministers. As anticipated, the DH introduced a caveat, expecting MFT to reduce its reserves by £1M during 2014/15, transferring the funds to revenue spending. This we did, which was appreciated by beneficiaries

### **Response to paragraph 21 of W4474's statement**

11. I have explained, in paragraph 61 of my Statement of 4 February 2021, the process leading to my being appointed as Chairman of MFT. It followed a nationwide recruitment process, conducted by external consultants, and an interview and selection process with W4474 participating in interviewing candidates. I did not apply. The interview panel recommended to the board that, in their opinion, no suitable applicants were interviewed. Subsequently, the full board then invited me to apply, and a panel, chaired by a User Trustee, formally interviewed me. The full board members unanimously invited me to be Chairman, on condition that I stood down from my Caxton Foundation trusteeship, to avoid any potential conflict of interest. I readily agreed to do this. I do not recall any conversation about my taking on the position on an interim basis. In any event W4474's information is second hand and hearsay.
12. As for the statement that W4474 would not expect me to respect other people's views, or that I was not respectful towards him or others who disagreed with me, I disagree with this. I do not believe most other MFT board members, nor any staff, would recognize W4474's description of my leadership style.

### **STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true based on my recollections and the documents provided to me by the Inquiry.

Signed: GRO-C

Dated 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021