Health Budget Oversight Group Minutes

18th February 2021 14:30

Health Service Executive: Stephen Mulvany, Colum Maddox, Mark O'Donoghue, Tim Cummins, Philippa Witheroe, Edna Hoare, Niamh O' Beirne, Brian Lee, John Swords, Margaret Tobin, Martin Quinlivan

Department of Health: Claire Doyle, John O'Grady, Denise McCarthy, Kevin Colman, Louise Carrigan, Paul Bolger, Shane Corr, Margaret Campbell, Daniel Curry, Michael O'Leary, Keith Blythe

D/Public Expenditure and Reform: Ronnie Downes (Chair), David Owens, Patrick Moran, Robert Scott, Deirdre Collins, Seán Prior, Helen Murphy

- **Minutes of meeting of 21 January 2021**

Amendments to the minutes by both the HSE and DoH were agreed and accepted.

- **Update on HSE COVID-19 Action Plan – Finance, including**
  - **GP Fees**

It was noted that the current arrangements for GP fees are due to expire at end-March and that a review of same is forthcoming. The factors that will need to be considered as part of that review were briefly discussed.

  - **Vaccination Costs**

It was agreed that a separate technical meeting would take place between DoH and DPER to discuss the forthcoming memo to Government on the vaccination strategy, specifically to discuss the costing element. DoH set out that the funding of the vaccination programme also needs to be clarified and there is likely to be a separate process around that element.

- **COVID-19 Reporting and Monitoring**
  - **Private Hospitals – review process**

DPER outlined a newly developed framework for monitoring the Private Hospitals agreement. It was agreed that a meeting between DPER and HSE would be useful to determine whether the information requested to allow the framework to operate can be provided.

  - **Procurements (PPE and Consultancies)**

It was acknowledged that there is correspondence in train between DPER and DoH in relation to PPE procurement. There are currently two PPE models in use, one by the HSE and one by DoH, developed by the IGEES unit. It was suggested that the aim should be to move to one model over time.

On consultancies, DPER raised the issue of consultancies with a cost of over €100k, which require sanction from DPER. DoH noted that there were no sanction requests of this nature required or outstanding at this time.

- **Testing/Tracing**

DPER raised queries about the testing and tracing strategy in light of the progress of the vaccination programme. HSE advised that cumulative average each week is key indicator of cost. While this was high in the early part of the year it is now falling. On staffing of the testing and tracing programme it was indicated that it is not intended to carry out any further recruitment other than managing attrition.

- **Other (Including Mandatory Quarantine)**

It is anticipated that in the main those in mandatory hotel quarantine will be expected to pay for their own accommodation, though there may be an element of state funding for those who cannot pay and for a possible retention fee. DPER highlighted that the principle of paying for own accommodation should be included in any legislation or regulations.

- **Update – Workforce**
  - **Vaccinations recruitment**

DPER expressed the view that the pay scale for vaccinators requires sanction and queried whether there is scope to utilise some of the 16,000 staff sanctioned for 2021 to deliver the vaccination programme before returning to the positions originally recruited for.

Both HSE and DoH indicated that the 2,500 staff required for the vaccination programme are intended to be additional to the sanctioned 16,000 and that it was their view that additional sanction is not required for vaccination staff.

HSE advised that the approach to recruiting for the vaccination programme has been designed specifically to avoid targeting the same people being targeted by the core recruitment plan. DoH has received the workforce plan for the vaccination programme and will be seeking further clarification from the HSE.

- **Staffing Plans – process generally including community**

The potential impact of restrictions and other issues on recruitment as set out in the PNS was discussed. DoH stated that while there may be issues associated with restrictions the PNS is around broader objectives and the intention is to implement the full service plan.

- **Health Budget Profile and Monitoring**
  - **Non-Covid Expenditure Update**

An update was requested on the 2021 expenditure profiles. DoH stated that these are being finalised with HSE. It was also noted that financial planning work across the system has been impacted by other considerations such as vaccination planning.

- **NSP – PNS – Update/timetable**

DPER requested an update on the PNS. DoH advised that they have received the PNS from the HSE. An initial review has been carried out and DoH will seek further clarification from the HSE in the coming days.

- **AOB**

There was a discussion of the timelines for sharing relevant documents. It was agreed that DoH would draw up a schedule for the sharing of documents in advance of meetings, and for issuing quarterly reports.