Health Budget Oversight Group Meeting
Draft Minutes

Thursday, 16 September 2021 – 1630-1730

Health Service Executive: TBC - Stephen Mulvany, Colum Maddox, Mark O'Donoghue, Tim Cummins, Philippa Witheroe, Brian Lee, Damien McCallion, Anne Marie Hoey, Brian Donovan, Alan Ryan

Department of Health: TBC – John O'Grady, Margaret Campbell, Daniel Curry, Claire Doyle, Pat Mullen, Emer Hanney

D/Public Expenditure and Reform: Ronnie Downes (Chair), Daniel O'Callaghan, Robert Scott, Patrick Moran, Nicola Fitzpatrick, Niamh O'Reilly, Tara Featherstone

1. Minutes of Meeting of 30 July 2021

- DPER asked attendees to provide any written comments by 20th September on draft minutes circulated in advance of the meeting.

2. Health Budget Profile and Monitoring

- DPER noted that it was important that outstanding information deficits are addressed as a matter of urgency and that a technical group may be set up to consider the issue over the medium term.

Update on Quarterly Expenditure Memorandum

- DPER enquired about the progress of the Quarterly Expenditure Memo for Government, to which DoH indicated that it would be shared shortly and finalised either on the 16th or 17th September.
- DPER stated that as much clarity as possible on the Cash vs I&E position should be provided.

Global Expenditure Profile and ELS

- DoH provided an update on the latest information related to the projected end-year position.
- DoH noted that a breakeven scenario expected in I&E terms with an underspend on non-Covid expenditure being balanced by an overspend on Covid related services.
- DPER asked for an explanation on the main deficit drivers and what budgetary management measures are in place to the end of the year. DPER noted a concern about the lack of clarity on the cash and I&E position.

Covid (incl. Flash Report progress)

- DPER raised concerns in relation to Covid-19 funding that was provided on a one off basis becoming embedded into core healthcare expenditure. The HSE shared this concern and highlighted the risk that some costs could become embedded. DPER asked for a further update on this and mitigating actions. It was stated that actions should be taken to prevent once-off expenditure from becoming embedded.

- The issue of overall expenditure related to Covid-19 was discussed.

Sláintecare/New Developments

- Draft outturn paper sent by DoH to DPER which provided some material related to the delivery of New Developments.
- DPER asked for a further update on new measures and time related savings.

3. Staffing

Pay and Numbers Strategy update

- The HSE provided an update on pay and numbers until the end of July. It was highlighted that the recruitment targets for 2021 won't be met for the year.
- Documentation on staffing to be circulated to DPER (updated Pay and Numbers Strategy) shortly.

4. COVID-19 Reporting and Monitoring

Private Hospitals

- This issue was covered in an earlier agenda item.

PPE

- DPER enquired about the actual cash spend to date on PPE, in which the HSE and DoH will follow up on to provide an exact figure and a note outlining the issue.

Mandatory Quarantine

- The HSE noted that mandatory quarantine is to be stood down in October with only 3 hotels currently being used and only one hotel set to be used in October. It was noted that some costs have been incurred to date and this may be in the range of approximately €18-20 million. DPER noted that the measure was introduced on the understanding that it would be cost-neutral to the Exchequer and DoH should provide an update on this issue and any measures taken to minimise financial risk.

Testing & Tracing

- The HSE provided an update on testing & tracing operations, highlighting that 25,000 tests a day were being carried out and that there had been an increase in demand due to the return of schools. It is noted that associated services in this area are expected to be stood down by the end of October.
- DPER enquired about the future planning related to testing & tracing operations and contracts of staff.
- It was noted that a formal request will be made for the drawdown of the contingency funding for this programme.
- DPER queried about the lab costs for testing & tracing. The HSE's understanding is that initial prices have been maintained into 2021.

Vaccinations

- The HSE gave an update on the current status of the vaccination programme, where it was noted that the current phase of the programme is due to be completed by end of September with vaccination targets set to be met.
- The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) have recommended that the vaccination booster programme is to be conducted on the immunocompromised, persons over 65 in Long Term Care Facilities and persons over 80.
- DPER noted the importance of realising any efficiencies from the administration of Covid-19 booster shots and flu shots. DPER queried whether this will be linked up into one system.

Digital Covid Certificate

- The HSE indicated that associated services in this area are expected to be stood down by the end of October and highlighted that there was a decline in the demand for the helpline services. No Digital Covid Certificate costs were available for this discussion.

5. HSE Cash v Accruals position

- DoH indicated that they had written to the HSE about the 2020 accruals and a further update will be given at the end of month. An Interim report will be published in relation to further reporting on details of creditors on an ongoing basis. DPER highlighted the importance of getting clarity on this issue which has been outstanding for some time.

6. Update on Cyber-Attack

- The HSE provided an update in relation to the Cyber-Attack in which the costs of the attack and the future needs in the ICT sector were highlighted. The HSE indicated that the vast majority of systems were back working as usual.

7. AOB

- DPER requested that they receive the updated profiles for year end to enable a better understanding of the expected outturn. DoH agreed to share this document with DPER.
- DPER sought clarification on likelihood of certain medical card expenditure arising.