Health Budget Oversight Group

Minutes of Meeting

Thursday, 31 March 2022 – 1200-1300

Health Service Executive: TBC - Stephen Mulvany, Anne Marie Hoey, Brian Lee, Triona Graham, Dorothea Dolan, Tim Cummins, Brian Donovan, Martin Quinlivan, Phillipa Withero, Chloe Caffrey, Damien McCallion, Alan Ryan, Sonya Cotter, Martin Quinlivan, John Swords.

Department of Health: TBC – Louise McGirr, John O'Grady, Margaret Campbell, Daniel Curry, Claire Doyle, Pat Mullen, Michael O'Leary, Fiona Prendergast, Eleanor Horan, Colin Layde, Alan Hughes.

D/Public Expenditure and Reform: John Kinnane (Chair), Jim Deane, Daniel O'Callaghan, Terry Jennings, Robert Scott, Patrick Moran, Nicola Fitzpatrick, Niamh O'Reilly, Noel Howard, Tara Featherstone.

1. Minutes of Meeting of 3 March 2022

- Draft minutes were circulated in advance of this meeting with the HSE noting amendments to be made, which they will circulate to DPER.
- The letter sent from DoH to HSE on 4 March is to be appended to the minutes of 3 March meeting.

2. Monthly Reporting Schedule

- DPER noted the importance of the implementation of reporting schedule and the adherence to the proposed timeline.
- DPER raised the importance of DoH providing their views or assessments of the information received from the HSE when sending it on to DPER in advance of HBOG to enable discussions.
- DoH and HSE are committed to adhering to firm timelines.

3. Health Budget Profile and Monitoring

<u>End-2021 Position</u>

- DPER asked for an update on the closing of the HSE Financial Statements.
- The HSE provided an update that the process will be complete by the middle of May.
- DPER highlighted that there appeared to be significant profiling changes in the updated version of the December FPR compared to the original FPR. DPER noted that changes at the end of the year impact monitoring during the year.
- The HSE noted that the movements were once off to balance up the overall position and to not leave areas with big deficits.
- DoH indicated that they are engaging with the HSE on the 2022 profile.

2022 Expenditure

- PER noted that as per the year-to-date current Issues (including March), health spending is €30m or 0.6% behind profile; but actual expenditure is €597m or 13.7% higher than in 2021.
- HSE said a further explanation of the cash position to end March would be provided and would deal further with the year on year variance.
- DoH highlighted that they are looking at ways to further explain cash and I&E and their respective relationships, and note that they will work with the HSE on providing I&E profiles.

4. New Developments Update (Budget 2021 and 2022)

Staffing/Recruitment

- DPER noted that recruitment to the end of February was 1,164 and queried the HSE/DoH on where they think the recruitment figure will land between the 5,500 – 10,189 range. DPER asked for more detail on the potential financial savings if the higher end of the growth target isn't met.
- DPER further queried on when they could expect to receive the Pay and Numbers Strategy (PNS) for 2022 given Q1 had just passed.
- DoH indicated that they will review the PNS once they receive it next week and will engage with DPER.
- The HSE noted that it is too early to predict where the final recruitment figure will land as some categories are ahead of target with others behind target.

Beds

- DPER noted that different bed numbers were being provided in different reports and highlighted the need for consistency going forward. DPER asked for an update on the Bed Census and for a timeline for when this information would be available. It was also emphasised that clarity is needed on the net additions compared to the before the pandemic given the scale of resources provided.
- The HSE provided an update on the Bed Census, indicating that 44/49 sites were complete and the remaining were delayed due to Covid but they will be completed in the next two weeks.

5. Covid-19 Expenditure 2022

Overview

- DPER queried the status of Covid Flash Reporting for 2022 as the FPRs have limited detail in relation to Covid expenditure. The importance of maintaining appropriate reporting and the need for DoH and the HSE to provide clarity on this promptly was emphasised.
- DoH agree that more work needs to be done to in relation to a Covid expenditure plan.
- The HSE advised that the provision of Flash Reports will start again next week.

PPE

- DPER raised queries and concerns about the estimates provided by the HSE in relation to PPE, requesting that DoH IGEES apply the previously used model to determine likely PPE requirements for the remainder of the year
- DoH noted that there has been contact with their IGEES unit to see if they can provide assistance with their model to give a view on PPE estimates.

Testing & Trace and Vaccinations

- DPER queried the high PCR weekly testing numbers of 80,000+ given the change in public health advices for many of those under 55.
- The HSE indicated that there had been a surge in testing numbers of 100,000 a week but noted a decrease in the last few days. It is expected that this decreasing trend will continue into the next few weeks. The majority of individuals getting tested are young healthcare workers, vulnerable or immunocompromised. Individuals living in the same household as these categories are also eligible for a PCR test.
- The HSE explained how the referral system operates, made up of GP referral and self-referral. The HSE website advises whether an individual is eligible for a PCR test or an Antigen test but certain individuals under 55 have been able to access a PCR test.
- DPER queried about the medium term plan for Test & Trace and Vaccination with the HSE replying that they hope to scale back testing to GPs, move from large testing centres to smaller locations whilst still being prepared for a winter surge. Work is ongoing on planning and related costings.
- It was noted that there is still a State commitment through the EU Agreements in relation to vaccines.

6. AOB

- An update on the upcoming Transfer of Functions on 1st May 2022 was given with DoH and DCEDIY colleagues to brief the HSE.
- Progress is being made on the Memorandum of Understanding and Operational Agreements with a view of being completed before Easter. A Memorandum for Government will follow suit.