Minutes of the Health Budget Oversight Meeting (HBOG)
7 May 2020
Conference Call 2:30pm

Health Service Executive:	**Stephen Mulvany, Angela Fitzgerald, Tim Cummins, Colum Maddox, Joe Sheeky, Jennifer O Callaghan, Sinead Stone, Tony Patterson, Nigel O Keefe, Alan Ryan, John Sheil, Mark O'Connor**
Department of Health:	**Paul Bolger, Gerry O'Brien, Kevin Colman, Louise Carrigan, Caoimhe Dolan, Aonraid Dunne, David Bolger, Denise McCarthy, Eoin Halpin, Evan Walker, Fiona Prendergast, Rhona Broderick, Matthew Dignam, Sharon Gilligan, Aidan Gilchrist, David Smith, Shane Corr**
D/Public Expenditure & Reform:	**Ronnie Downes (Chair), David Owens, Terry Jennings, Robert Scott, Patrick Moran, Albert Morris, Seán Prior, Cian McCarthy, Deirdre Collins, Kevin O'Farrell.**
EY:	**John Higgins, Carthach McCarthy**

1: Minutes of Meeting of 30th April

Previously submitted amendments from D/Health and a clarifying amendment from the HSE were accepted.

2: Update on HSE COVID-19 Action Plan

Logged queries – state-of-play:

It was noted that there has been an increase in number of queries in relation to specifics of the Flash Reports. Parties agreed that a separate forum to discuss these issues in greater detail would be held.

Action: D/Health to coordinate discussion between HSE, D/Health Finance Unit DPER Health Vote on Flash Report queries.

3: COVID-19 Reporting and Monitoring

Private Hospitals

There was consensus within the Group on the importance of having completed a review of the value for money of the private hospital deal in time to inform a decision to extend or terminate the agreement at the end of June. Concerns were raised of the substantial risk that the information required to conduct this review might not be available before the end-May deadline for decision-making. This includes final validated costs for the first month of the deal, adequate data on utilisation

to compare costs to clinical activity, as well as data on the forecasted demand for acute hospital care at a national level and available capacity within public hospitals over the coming months.

The Group agreed that it is of the utmost priority that the Government is fully informed at the time at which they must make the decision regarding the continuation of this agreement, rather than allow the agreement to roll forward "by default" owing to a lack of data.

It was also pointed out that the nature of the challenge facing the health system had changed and that any decision regarding the extension of the agreement would have to be considered in the context of the constrained capacity of the public system. It was also stated that NPHET may have a view on the matter. It was acknowledged that if an alternative policy rationale for the continuation of this agreement arises, which differs from the original policy imperatives which led to the agreement being put in place, then this new case must be assessed thoroughly and considered by Government.

Action: D/Health will confer about a timeline for Private Hospital review process

City West facility

There are a growing number of questions regarding the occupancy rate of City West Hotel at the time, and potential alternative uses for the facility, and it was agreed that this issue would remain under review with a view to maximising public value for money from this facility.

GP revised contract

A query arose regarding the suspension of Medical Card reviews, and the potential costs of this action. As this is a temporary measure, and there is no indication of how long it will last, there are no cost estimates currently available.

A substantial increase in the number of reimbursed non-COVID phone consultations undertaken by GPs in the week was noted.

Private Nursing Homes

Expenditure on the Private Nursing Home support scheme is coming in on profile. Questions remain regarding payments for non-NHSS patients in private nursing homes, and the Department of Health are awaiting advice from the Attorney General's office in this regard.

PPE Procurement

A sanction request is being prepared regarding increased PPE and freight costs. A spreadsheet outlining the pressures that have led to increased costs of the existing procurement deal has been shared with D/Health and DPER.

Future cost estimates are currently going through internal processes, but it is evident at this stage that significant costs will arise in this area.

Testing

The Memo for Government on testing that had been anticipated for last week was delayed, and is still being developed.

The HSE is finalising elements of testing deal, the driver of which is the decision to attain capacity for 100,000 tests per week and the need for a quick turnaround of results

It was reiterated that there is a need to consider the costs and sustainability of the model for potential large-scale testing, as this may be necessary until vaccine is available. The HSE pointed out that in a situation in which capacity has been acquired but not fully used, costs can be mitigated, but not completely.

Action: D/Health will establish a separate forum to discuss upcoming testing and procurement costs.

Updates – Workforce

Queries were raised about extent to which temporary reassignment scheme and the 'On Call for Ireland' initiative were being utilised.

The group was informed that a large majority of people who had made submissions under the "On Call for Ireland" initiative do not meet the requirements of the posts that need to be filled.

DPER Pay Side are in the process of establishing a tripartite discussion forum regarding IR and workforce issues.

Health Budget Profile and Monitoring

Non-Covid Expenditure Update

The Group was informed that the March and April Financial progress reports will be able to indicate the mitigation of costs against the gross COVID expenditure figures. However, March activity in acutes, for example, remained relatively high and therefore it may not be until April that a significant drop-off in activity will be noticeable.

4: AOB

Monthly Memo for Government: The schedule for the D/Health memos for Government on COVID Expenditure was agreed, with memos to go on the third week of each month.

HBOG Future Meetings: Thursday at 14:30 was agreed as a recurring time for HBOG meetings. They will continue to take place on a weekly basis for the time being, although it was envisaged that a move to fortnightly or monthly meetings might be appropriate over the coming weeks/months as and when the financial management aspects of the Covid-19 response have stabilised.