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

Health Service Executive:	Stephen Mulvany, Tim Cummins, Colum Maddox, Nigel O'Keefe, Damien McCallion, Mark O'Connor, Helen Byrne.
Department of Health:	Paul Bolger, Fiona Prendergast, Gerry O'Brien, Kevin Colman, Caoimhe Dolan, Aonraid Dunne, David Bolger, Denise McCarthy, Eoin Halpin, Evan Walker, Rhona Broderick, Matthew Dignam, Sharon Gilligan, Aidan Gilchrist, Shane Corr, Louise Carrigan, Donn Maguire, Susan Kehoe, Megan Coll.
D/Public Expenditure & Reform:	Ronnie Downes (Chair), David Owens, Terry Jennings, Patrick Moran, Deirdre Collins, Robert Scott, Cian McCarthy, Albert Morris, Kevin O'Farrell.

1. Minutes of previous meeting

Previously submitted amendments from D/Health for the Minutes of the meeting held on May 7th were accepted.

2. Update on HSE COVID-19 Action Plan

Logged queries – state-of-play:
Parties discussed the Flash Report at a separate forum earlier in the week in detail. There remain some outstanding issues but all concur that this is a useful meeting and that answers to queries are being assessed and reverted quickly.

Action: Meetings to continue offline to allow in-depth discussions on the Action Plan to take place.

3. COVID-19 Reporting and Monitoring

Emergency GP COVID-19 Fee Structure
The group noted the significant cost and value for money considerations of the temporary emergency GP fee structure which is due to expire following the initial 13 week period. It was also noted that the scheme in terms of costs was operating as envisaged when sanction for it was provided. It was agreed that this issue would merit further assessment, particularly in the context of the €210m contract agreed in 2019.

Action: D/Health will update DPER in advance of expiration.

Temporary Assistance Payment Scheme (Nursing Homes)
A pre-HBOG meeting took place between D/PER and D/Health to discuss the temporary assistance payment to nursing homes. There was general consensus that these meetings are fruitful and will continue.

It was outlined that, following consideration of AG advice, the Scheme would likely be expanded to include non-NHSS clients in private nursing homes. This could require an additional sanction request.

It will be a further month before actual data is available for analysis. This will be kept under review and the HBOG updated as appropriate.

Citywest Facility

A conference call took place on Wednesday, 13 May between PER, HSE Estates and D/Health to discuss the occupancy rate of Citywest. A pathway to the alternative utilisation of the facility was outlined, while retaining capability to respond to potential adverse COVID-19 scenarios. All are aware that a review of the value for money of the Citywest agreement needs to be completed and agreed upon by end June and this matter will remain on the HBOG agenda in the meantime.

Private Hospitals

There had been significant engagement between EY, the HSE, D/Health and D/PER over a number of meetings since the last HBOG. The HSE outlined the five headings to which they will have regard in reviewing the agreement. This means it would be the last week of the month before a Memo can be brought to Government.

PER noted that the five headings corresponded broadly with the factors they regarded as relevant to such a review. It was noted that the financial implications for the health system from a two month extension of this agreement would be significant, although other factors mentioned also needed to be given due weight. PER requested information on the distributional effects on patients and highlighted that the lease arrangement is time limited to the emergency situation the nation is currently facing.

Action: HSE and D/PER to share their respective documents outlining factors to be considered in reviewing the agreement.

Testing

An update was provided in relation to discussions with contractors including terms and conditions/ costs.

There is a view that testing may be increased as social distancing measures are relaxed. NPHET are advising increasing testing to 100,000 tests a week until year-end. The HSE has calculated costings of 50,000, 75,000 and 100,000 tests a week for comparison purposes.

There was agreement that the scale of expenditure involved would require a Government Decision with a Memo for Government on testing possibly being brought to Government by next week.

Action: D/Health will establish a separate forum to discuss testing, with specific questions on testing strategy and on information being supplied to those being tested, prior to next week's HBOG meeting.

Procurement

The demand and supply side pressures that have led to increased costs of PPE were outlined and discussed. It is projected that there will be further significant costs in this area. It was agreed that supply stimulation would be appropriate for discussion at the Senior Officials Group (SOG) and/or its relevant sub-group.

There were no updates available on queries in relation to procurement of ventilators and masks in terms of timelines or value.

Ventilators – *HSE to clarify additional questions in terms of note provided on ventilator procurement to date.*

It was agreed that data in regard to modelling and forecasting would be shared in an Excel format going forward to facilitate robust analysis in a timely manner.

Action: HSE and D/Health officials to meet offline and discuss the sharing of modelling data.

4. Workforce planning

The IR Tripartite meeting will take place tomorrow, which will deal with IR and workforce issues. It was noted that while the official Census figures are not yet available, the majority of those hired to date are part-time staff on three month contracts.

5. Health Budget Profile and Monitoring

To enable robust analysis and decision making, the latest available data will need to be available in a timely manner going forward. To date, available data up to March does not highlight any profiling issues.

6. AOB

Funding
The preparations underway to apply for available EU funding in relation to COVID were noted and welcomed by the Group.

Winter flu vaccination
It was noted that in principle procurement of the vaccine would, in principle, come within the scope of the existing delegated sanction relating to the COVID-19 Health Action Plan.
Action: Letter to be sent by D/Health to D/PER outlining the underlying assumptions and health policy being addressed with this proposal.

State Claims Agency
An invitation will be extended to a representative from the SCA to attend a future HBOG meeting to provide an overview of the State claims financial risk at mid-year. This had initially been agreed as part of the regular work of HBOG prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Non-COVID expenditure
It was agreed that a non-COVID health expenditure HBOG may be of benefit to assess other health care expenditure at the mid-year point.

Action: PER to revert to D/Health in regard to COVID related absenteeism pay for non-public services.

Next meeting: Thursday 21st May, 2:30pm.