Health Budget Oversight Group Minutes

23rd July 2020. 2:30pm

Health Service Executive:	Stephen Mulvany, Colum Maddox, Paddy Walsh.
Department of Health:	Paul Bolger, Fiona Prendergast, Kevin Colman, Caoimhe Dolan, Eoin Halpin, Matthew Dignam, Aidan Gilchrist, Mark Hennessy, Shane Corr, Sharon Gilligan, Louise Carrigan, Aonraid Dunne, Megan Coll, Rhona Broderick
D/Public Expenditure & Reform:	Ronnie Downes (Chair), David Owens, Terry Jennings, Patrick Moran, Cian McCarthy , Kevin O'Farrell

1. Minutes & Agenda

Minutes from the previous HBOG meeting of 9 July 2020, with amendments from Department of Health, were accepted.

2. Health Service Pay and Numbers

The Department of Health and HSE updated the group on the year-to-date positions regarding the pay bill and staff numbers in the HSE.

As of the end of June, there had been a WTE increase of 4,535 since the beginning of 2020. A significant proportion of the increase is attributable to temporary recruitment related to the COVID-19 Action Plan, such as the Student Nurse cohort employed as Health Care Assistants, the additional Medical Interns, and the return of retirees to the workforce. Work is ongoing to identify how much of the additional recruitment is of permanent staff, and to assess whether the additional staff would be allowable under the Pay and Numbers Strategy.

The Group was informed that the Pay Budget was broadly on profile year to date. However, many of the staff who had been redeployed from other areas of the public service to the HSE will be returning to the original posts, and hence further recruitment may be required to continue COVID-19 services, such as contact tracing. The Group accepted this point, while acknowledging that any hiring of permanent staff must be controlled and closely monitored.

3. COVID-19 Reporting and Monitoring

Private Hospital Agreement

A cost-to-date estimate for the Private Hospital Agreement was shared with the Group in advance of the meeting. It was requested that the breakdown of utilisation, including transfer of public care to the private hospitals, be shared with the Group when possible.

Personal Protective Equipment

A Memo for Government regarding sanction for additional expenditure on PPE is currently with the Government Secretariat.

A discussion took place regarding the expenditure on the procurement of "other equipment" within the HSE Flash Reports. It was outlined that this equipment had been procured centrally as part of the COVID Action Plan response and the HSE will work to identify specific Action Plan items towards

which the cost of this procurement can be attributed. It was emphasised that Action Plan items and spends must be tracked and monitored in line with the sanction.

Testing and Tracing Strategy

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform requested sight of the NPHET-approved Testing and Tracing Strategy, which is currently being applied and which forms the basis for major expenditures in this area, pending the finalisation of a fully developed strategy expected for end-August. The Department of Health informed the Group that NPHET were in general reluctant to disseminate internal papers on a wider basis, but understood DPER's position and would pursue the matter.

4. AOB

- Legislation is going through the Dáil today (23 July) regarding the extension of medical card thresholds and eligibility for GP services for under 8s. The Department of Health are not aware of any other potential forthcoming legislation with expenditure implications.
- Work is underway to estimate an end-year position on Health expenditure for 2020.
- The Group will begin preliminary discussions on the potential 'baseline' expenditure requirements for 2021 at next week's meeting. The Chair requested that the Department of Health and HSE submit a document in advance which outlines the main issues for discussion.

Next meeting is scheduled for 30th July 2020, 1:30pm.