Health Budget Oversight Group Minutes

10th September 2020. 2:30pm

Health Service Executive:	Anne Marie Hoey, Colum Maddox, Damien McCallion, Mark O'Donoghue, Seán Bresnan, Stephen Mulvany, Tim Cummins.
Department of Health:	Aidan Gilchrist, Claire Doyle, Denise McCarthy, Emer Hanney, Evan Walker, Fiona Prendergast, Kevin Colman, Linda Learmouth, Louise Carrigan, Mairead Keating, Mark Hennessy, Matthew Dignam, Paul Bolger, Rhona Broderick, Shane Corr.
D/Public Expenditure & Reform:	Ronnie Downes (Chair), , David Owens, Terry Jennings, Patrick Moran, Robert Scott, Deirdre Collins, Seán Prior, Cian McCarthy, Kevin O'Farrell.

1. Minutes of Meeting of 27 August 2020

Minutes from the previous HBOG meeting, with amendments from 27th August 2020, were agreed.

2. Profiles 2020 – Covid-19 Winter Plan Adjustments

Expected costs of Winter Plan for 2020 were outlined. Work is currently being undertaken with regard to winter planning for 2021; high-level cost estimates were outlined.

3. Reporting and Monitoring

- A discussion took place in relation to PPE expenditure tracking and reporting. HSE/DoH agree that work to profile PPE expenditure to year end will begin shortly. DPER query PPE market developments and how this will likely affect future expenditure in this area – HSE outlined recent improvements in market conditions, and further note long-term plans for development of significant indigenous PPE production capacity.
- Citywest hotel agreement was discussed. HSE are in talks with the hotel providers on the possibility of an extension under different terms of the current arrangement, which is due to expire in October. It was noted that the original agreement was terminated on the basis of low occupancy, and that any future agreement must be subject to a rigorous Value for Money assessment.
- Expected costs of the Private Hospital Agreement were discussed, and technical questions on whether these estimates included bridging costs and other aspects were raised. It was noted that future costs will be in part determined by disease trajectory in the community and the success of suppression measures.
- DPER note that all expenditure recorded in the Action Plan may be designated COVID-19 related however this does not necessarily imply an additional resource requirement given below profile budget lines in other areas.

4. **Pay/Numbers**

- Changes in Health workforce headcounts were outlined by HSE – increases throughout 2020 to date.
- With regard to an end of year profile/estimate of headcount the HSE noted that exact numbers would be dependent on the parameters stipulated within the Winter Plan. Recruitment drives for essential staff such as COVID19 Swabbers and Contact Tracers are ongoing.
- DPER query the rate of absenteeism among Heath Care Workers in recent months and the degree attributable to COVID19. The HSE note around an additional 0.9% absentee rate is attributable to COVID as of end-June, and that this has increased in recent weeks.
- HSE note that a high-level labour market analysis exercise is to be undertaken in the context of additional recruitment.

5. **Testing/Tracing Policy/Strategy – re-opening economy**

- DPER query the basis recent media reports that HSE was forced to prioritise testing for the community despite available testing capacity of 100k tests per week
- Testing settings were outlined by the HSE - rough proportions provided. Background information on the decision to prioritise symptomatic community testing over asymptomatic testing of meat processing plants was set out.
- DPER also query results of updated costing exercise amid recent increases in testing numbers.

6. **2021 Estimates (Bid update)**

- DPER note that two Memorandums for Government are being developed which will outline parameters for estimates discussions and expectations with regard to fiscal capacity in 2021. These will be shared with colleagues when finalised.
- Discussion regarding the classification of COVID related expenditure; some areas clear cut whereas others more complicated to assess.

Next meeting is scheduled for 1 October 2020 at 2:30p.m.