

16th April, 2021

Mr. Sean Fleming T.D.,
Minister of State,
Dept of Finance,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re: Parliamentary Question - 16675/21

To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE will bring in staff on a contract basis with regard to the major issue in relation to the lack of a speech and language therapist in the midland region especially to assist children who need this facility in view of the fact that due to operational reasons the HSE cannot provide this facility through its own staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Minister Fleming,

Thank you for your query. The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you recently submitted. In preparing this response your representation has been discussed with the relevant Managers. I have examined the matter and outline the position as follows.

Speech and Language Therapists were one of the professions re-deployed to assist with the HSE'S response to the pandemic. In late 2020 Speech and Language Therapists returned to their core duties.

During 2020 there was limited speech and language therapy available. High priority cases e.g. palliative cases, people with cancer were seen where possible. In addition children who had commenced speech and language therapy were prioritized for intervention. These children had been on waiting lists during 2019 and due to the length of time on waiting list had been offered intervention.

Currently Speech and Language Therapists in the Midlands are offering telehealth sessions via video and telephone. There are also face to face appointments where telehealth isn't appropriate, however these are limited due to level 5 restrictions.

The Speech and Language Therapy Department in Laois/Offaly are addressing the back log of children waiting for assessment. This will start in April 2021 with children waiting from December 2019 -> June 2020 who are school going being contacted. This will be extended to pre-school children during the summer months.

The Speech and Language Therapy Department in Longford/Westmeath are addressing the waiting list backlog accrued during the disruption of services as part of the recovery plan. Open cases have been prioritised to date with long waiters offered telehealth consultation and advice in the interim. Capacity within clinics and level 5 restrictions continue to be a challenge in providing face to face assessment.

I trust the above is in order but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Des O'Flynn', written in a cursive style.

Des O'Flynn
Chief Officer
Midlands Louth Meath Community Health Organisation