

REGIONAL HEALTH FORUM - DUBLIN NORTH EAST

FÓRAM RÉIGIÚNACH SLÁINTE - BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH AGUS AN TÓIRTHUAISCEART

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2019 AT 2:00PM

IN THE BOARDROOM, HSE, BECTIVE STREET, KELLS

**Members Present**

Cllr. Tom Behan	Cllr. Séamus Coyle	Cllr. Kieran Dennison
Cllr. Aiden Fitzpatrick	Cllr. Michelle Hall	Cllr. Adrian Henchy
Cllr. Craig Lovett	Cllr. Brigid Manton	Cllr. David Maxwell
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr. Darren O'Rourke	Cllr. John Sheridan
Cllr. Trevor Smith	Cllr. Niamh Souhan	Cllr. Emer Tóibín
Cllr. Gillian Toole		

**Apologies**

Cllr. Daryl Barron	Cllr. Christy Burke	Cllr. Mary Callaghan
Cllr. Sean Kelly	Cllr. Colm O'Rourke	Cllr. Patricia Roe
Cllr. Aoibhinn Tormey		

**Not in Attendance**

Cllr. Declan Flanagan	Cllr. Deirdre Heney	Cllr. Mary McCamley
Cllr. Séamas McGrattan	Cllr. Eoghan O'Brien	Cllr. Tomás Sharkey

**Officials Present**

Ms. Rosaleen Harlin, Lead Manager, Regional Health Office – Dublin North East  
Mr. Shaun Flanagan, Assistant National Director, PCRS  
Ms. Kate Halliwell, Head of Operations, Medical Card Unit, PCRS  
Mr. Des O'Flynn, Head of Primary Care, CHO DNCC  
Mr. Jude O'Neill, Head of Social Care, CHO Midlands Louth Meath  
Mr. Cathal Hand, Network Manager, Monaghan Primary Care Services  
Mr. Joe Ruane, Head of Primary Care, Midlands Louth Meath CHO  
Mr. Brian O'Connell, Estates Manager - Swords  
Ms. Lorraine Timmons, Regional Health Office – HSE DNE

Cllr. Adrian Henchy welcomed all members and HSE staff to the meeting.

**1. Adoption of minutes of meeting held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019.**

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2019 were adopted by the Forum on the proposal of Cllr. David Maxwell and seconded by Cllr. Giliian Toole.

Cllr. Toole requested further information in relation to a response on the issue of a Grant for Assessment of Need and also on the plans for an Infant Mental Health Strategy.

Management advised that a response had issued to members advising them that there was no grant available for Assessment of Need and that they would seek further information on the Infant Mental Health Strategy for members.

**2. Health Service Executive Updates**

Ms. Rosaleen Harlin, Lead Manager, Regional Health Office, gave a report to the meeting which dealt with the following:-

- HSE launches HPV vaccination programme for all first year secondary school students.
- World Hepatitis Day 2019.
- National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) Annual Report 2018.
- Launch of the 2018 Annual Report of the Confidential Recipient.
- Spotlight on improving medical care for people who are overweight.
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Awareness Day.
- HSE issues drug harm-reduction information for attendees at music festivals.
- HSE at the 2019 Ploughing Championships.
- International Overdose Awareness Day 2019.

Cllr. David Maxwell raised his concerns regarding the conflicting messages on drug harm reduction and the perceived impression of perhaps condoning the use of drugs.

Cllr. Darren O'Rourke commented on the very useful information provided to the public by the HSE and Department of Health at their stands at the recent Ploughing Championships, particularly in relation to the topic of sepsis.

Cllr. O'Rourke also raised his concerns in relation to unsolicited Health Screening invitations received by the general public through the post or through mail drops. He worried that people who may receive them might think that they are obliged to attend these health screenings. He also spoke about the validity of the results given through these appointments and the lack of regulation around these types of companies.

Cllr. John Sheridan welcomed the news regarding the HPV Vaccine and stated that this should be promoted more in relation to boys receiving the vaccine.

Cllr. Gilian Toole requested further information regarding the HSE's attendance at Festivals and Events. She expressed her views regarding the benefits of health promotion information being available at these sites.

A request was also made by members for the HSE Updates to be circulated in advance of future meetings.

Management advised that they would seek further information in relation to the issues raised and they would revert to members.

The report was noted by the Forum.

- 3. Presentation on Primary Care Reimbursement/National Medical Card Unit**  
Mr. Shaun Flanagan, Assistant National Director, Primary Care Scheme and Eligibility and Ms. Kate Haliwell, Head of Operations National Medical Card Unit gave a presentation to members on Primary Care Reimbursement/National Medical Care Unit (copy appended to the official minute).

A discussion took place where members raised the following issues:-

- Do Cancer patients automatically get a medical card? The feedback from constituents is that they are having a lot of trouble accessing same. Also, what is the position in relation to terminally ill patients receiving a medical card?
- Can the HSE medical card be extended to under 18's in relation to mental health issues?
- Do you need to register an appeal letter?
- Can you make an appeal online in regards to financial hardship?
- How many applications are received online in comparison to those received in paper format?
- What is the position with regards to a situation where a parent who has a medical card but has to apply separately for their children? The nature of the process can put people off applying when it is quite drawn out. It can discourage people from applying or from appealing.
- What is the reason for the significant reimbursement costs to pharmacists?
- Members commented that some of the issues relating to Pharmacy costs were due to the change in primary care and the accessibility to GP services, particularly out of hours services and the need for emergency supply in medicines.
- What is the rationale for the assessment on net versus gross income basis?
- What is the difference in benefits between the Medical Card and the GP Visit Card?
- What is the position regarding medical cards for children with a confirmed diagnosis of autism or a disability?
- Who is eligible to make an emergency medical card application?
- Who monitors when someone is no longer eligible for their medical card?
- When a person is initially refused a medical card, when can they reapply?
- Members commented on the benefit of this very informative presentation.

Mr. Flanagan, Ms. Haliwell and senior management responded to the questions and comments from the members as follows:-

- Every effort is made to be sensitive in relation to applications from persons with Cancer or a terminal illness. The statutory basis for Medical Cards is a means tested system. However the PCRS does seek to apply the maximum level of discretion legally possible and PCRS has Medical Officers who provide clinical insight into the discretionary processes.
- The 2014 Keane Report on Medical Card Eligibility flagged the challenges of providing medical card eligibility on the basis of individual conditions. Since 2014 PCRS has introduced enhancements and improvements in its ability to capture individual applicant's medical costs and to ensure those costs are considered and used in the medical card process.
- The issue of considering whether to extend medical cards to different age cohorts is an issue of policy. PCRS is required to make decisions on eligibility in line with statutory criteria.
- The National Appeals Office is based in Ballyshannon. The appeals system is a manual process and during this process the Medical Officer may pick up something that the initial administrative process has not. There is no specific requirement to register your appeals application.
- The majority of applications are made up of manual applications and 35% are made online. There is progress being made in the area of online applications and PCRS has a quality assurance system which identifies continuous improvements to be made to the online system. It is hoped to have a 50-50 split next year. The feedback from the public is that the online satisfaction rate was better. As many people as possible are encouraged to create an account online.
- Young adults between the ages of 16 - 25 years old are required to be financially assessed.
- In response to a specific query, Mr Flanagan noted that he considered that Pharmacists provide a valuable community service.
- In relation to costs, the average ingredient cost per item reimbursed under the GMS currently sits at approximately €10 which is similar to the average ingredient cost from 1999. There is also a dispensing fee paid. The amount of the dispensing fees are set by Statutory Instrument. No mark-up is paid on dispensed items.
- In relation to applications for those over 70, it is at the discretion of the applicant whether they want to apply under the standard application or the over 70s application which will differentiate between the criteria of net income and gross income in assessing financial means.
- The key difference in terms of the services funded through PCRS between medical cards and GP visit cards is the pharmacy costs benefit i.e. a medical card covers medicines costs.
- PCRS endeavours to try and stretch discretion as far as it can to assist as many people as it can.
- There is a process in place for an emergency medical card for six months. Such applications are generally made by a social worker in hospital or by another healthcare professional on behalf of the person.
- All applications can be made on a person's behalf by their spouse, legal carer or authorised person provided that there is proper paperwork in place to cover off GDPR regulations.

- Medical cards are generally issued for a 3 year period. There is a process in place where medical cards are reviewed on an ongoing basis. PCRS does have links to the Revenue and Social Welfare Departments. There can be targeted reviews of medical card holders to determine their current eligibility status.
- A person can reapply immediately for a medical card if their circumstances have changed.
- Members were advised of an email address and a direct contact line for Regional Health Forum members to contact PCRS: [regionalhealthforum.pcrs@hse.ie](mailto:regionalhealthforum.pcrs@hse.ie) and Tel: 1890 252 929.

#### 4. Motions

That the HSE will ring-fence at least €1.2m for the provision of respite facilities for young adults with intellectual and sensory disabilities (age over 18 years). This should be sought from the Minister for Health and Junior Minister for Health with responsibility for Disabilities, as a top-up payment before the end of October 2019, if funding no longer available from 2019 allocation.

Cllr. Gillian Toole

Cllr. Toole raised her Motion which was seconded by Cllr. Emer Tóibín. She stated that similar motions/questions have been submitted over recent years to the Forum, in particular in relation to the Special Hands Support Group for families. This Group has met on several occasions with the Minister for Disabilities.

Cllr. Toole spoke in relation to four houses that could be utilised for respite services but only one was suitable. Funding was received by CHO DNCC and a location was selected within the County of Meath but this was allocated for CHO DNCC residents only. While this is a welcome development, it does not resolve the Meath issue and the resounding need for respite in the area. Respite is of utmost importance to services users to enable them to socialise with their peers and also a source of rest for their families.

Cllr. Toole stated that in 2017 there was an issue in relation to the amount of funding which was applied for in CHO8. The overall disabilities budget was subsequently increased at the end of 2018. Why does this year's funding not include respite for CHO8 and why is additional funding not being made available for respite services?

Mr. Jude O'Neill, Head of Social Care, CHO Midlands Louth Meath responded to Cllr. Toole's Motion and advised members present that the HSE has always engaged to develop respite services. The HSE had been fortunate in previous years in relation to funding.

- €2m nationally had been allocated for non-residential funding.
- €8m nationally had been allocated for residential respite.
- €1.2m had been allocated for respite services in Balbriggan. Service users with complex issues from Louth/Meath were able to access this service also.
- €200k had been allocated for a home share model.

The 2019 Budget did not provide any additional funding for residential respite services so it was not possible to purchase any of the aforementioned sites. There is a six bed residential unit in Athboy but this is a private enterprise which has developed independent of the HSE.

Unfortunately, at this time of year there is no additional funding available. The HSE has repeated its request through the estimates process for an increase in funding next year.

Cllr. Toole commented on the possibility of another location where funding would only need to be found for some renovations rather than a new purchase and expressed her frustration with the overall situation. She stated that she is very aware of demands for all services but was trying to assist families and service users where she could. Cllr. Toole asked when funding was ring-fenced in this area.

Mr. O'Neill advised that they had a responsibility to deliver on all services. The services available in Balbriggan have been a success, however, the proposed houses referred to needed both capital and revenue. In relation to the issue of funding, it was advised that this should be ring-fenced from the start to enable the development of the dedicated services.

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To ask the HSE if the boundary between HSE lands and the residential area of Seaview Park / Tower View Heights, Portrane could perhaps be created as a legal right of way through negotiation and agreement with Fingal County Council. This boundary has, for a significant period of time, been used as a pedestrian gateway between Tower View Heights and Seaview Park, and also as a gateway from both of these estates up to St. Ita's Hospital Campus. To ask the HSE to enter into discussions with local political representatives and Fingal County Council on the above.

Cllr. Adrian Henchy

Cllr. Henchy spoke in relation to his Motion, advising members that the local residents in this area have been trying to get this matter resolved for some time. He stated that St. Ita's has provided community facilities for the community of Portrane for a very long time.

In recent years the Campus has been brought back to life and services have been put in. Residents have had access to other areas but this is changing. There have been issues with anti-social behaviour and illegal dumping but the sports services are still being used.

Fingal County Council has no issue in talking with the HSE to resolve the overall issue, so that residents can continue to enjoy the area.

Mr. Brian O'Connell, Estates Manager – Swords advised members present that this area has been under ongoing review for some time. There were major issues with illegal dumping and the use of scramblers. There have been two

robberies also of lead from a roof and numerous instances of anti-social behaviour, which the security on site have been dealing with.

The St. Ita's site is a designated centre of care and the HSE's main responsibility is to the residents on site. 60 of our most vulnerable clients are located in this particular area. There is pedestrian access through the campus for the public. The area in question is very underdeveloped land and is not suitable to make a walk way through. There are no plans at present to extend the connection of the site to the two estates. The lane to rear of Tower View is not within the ownership of the HSE. The issue will continue to remain under review.

Cllr. Henchy appreciated the feedback on the situation but commented that the residents had been walking this area every day all their lives and it has a very strong connection to the area of Portrane.

## **5. Questions**

The responses to the Questions were noted.

## **6. Chairperson's Correspondence**

Cllr. Adrian Henchy, Chairperson advised members that Ms. Roslaeen Harlin, Lead Manager, Regional Health Office, would be leaving the HSE on secondment to the Department of Health to work with Sláintecare.

Members expressed their gratitude to Ms. Harlin for her invaluable services to the Forum over the years and wished her well in the future.

## **7. Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Regional Health Forum - Dublin North East will be a Committee meeting and it will take place on Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 at 11:00am and the next Forum meeting will take place on Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 at 2:00pm.

**Signed:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Chairperson**