

MINUTES **MEETING OF REGIONAL HEALTH FORUM SOUTH**

Thursday 2nd December 2021 at 2pm
Webex Meeting

Present:

Cllr Ann Marie Ahern
Cllr Audrey Buckley
Cllr Declan Burgess
Cllr Peter Cleere
Cllr Danny Collins
Cllr John Coonan
Cllr Pat Dunphy
Cllr Damien Geoghegan
Cllr Joe Kavanagh
Cllr Niall Kelleher
Cllr Roger Kennedy
Cllr Mike Kennelly

Cllr Donal Kenny
Cllr Garry Laffan
Cllr Eileen Lynch
Cllr Michael McCarthy
Cllr Susan McCarthy
Cllr Arthur McDonald
Cllr John McDonald
Cllr Norma Moriarty
Cllr John O'Donoghue
Cllr Jody Power
Cllr John Sheehan
Cllr Mikey Sheehy

Apologies:

Cllr Pat Fitzgerald
Cllr Conor McGuinness
Cllr Frank Staples

In Attendance:

Ms Tess O'Donovan, Chief Operations Officer, South/South West Hospitals Group
Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare
Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare
Dr Carmel Mullaney, Director of Public Health, HSE South East
Ms Bridie O'Sullivan, Direct of Nursing, South/South West Hospital Group
Ms Gabriele O'Keefe, Head of Health and Wellbeing, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare
Dr Derval Howley, Head of Health and Wellbeing, South East Community Healthcare
Mr Nicky Glynn, Ambulance Officer, National Ambulance Service
Members of the HSE South Forum Office staff

1. Adoption of the Minutes of the previous Meeting held on Thursday 18th of November 2021

On the proposal of Cllr Roger Kennedy seconded by Cllr Mikey Sheehy, the minutes of the Forum meeting held on Thursday, 18th of November 2021 were approved and adopted by the members.

2. Chairperson's Correspondence

3. Committees

The next Committee meetings will be held on:

- (a)** South East Committee Meeting held on 7th of December 2021
- (b)** South West Committee Meeting held on 9th of December 2021

4. Covid Update and Vaccine update

An integrated update was shared by Public Health, Community Services and Acute Services with RHF Members providing information on Covid and Vaccination across the South East and South West.

Dr Carmel Mullaney, Director of Public Health South East provided an update on Covid across the South East firstly in relation to the increasing numbers of covid positive cases over recent weeks. There were 12,500 cases notified across the South East which is equal to if not above the positive cases last January 2021. Dr Mullaney outlined to Members that there is a serious fourth wave ongoing and at this time we are continuing to monitor how / if these positive cases translate into hospital cases and deaths.

Dr Mullaney cautioned Members advising that current data presented was subject to correction and validation. She advised Members trends show increased numbers in younger children cohort i.e. aged 5-12 years. These rates dropped off for teenagers and those in the early 20s given the high rates of vaccination achieved in these cohorts. The high rate of vaccinated adults in conjunction with the ongoing vaccine booster campaign for the older age group is proving successful.

Dr Mullaney highlighted the high rate of transmission in the community and there are a number of outbreaks Nursing Homes and Long Term Residential Care facilities. It is positive to note that the outcomes are not as severe compared to previously.

Mr Michael Fitzgerald Chief Officer Cork Kerry Healthcare gave apologies from Dr Anne Sheehan, A/Director of Public Health in the South West. He advised that trends in the South West mirror the South East with approximately 600/650 cases notified daily across Cork and Kerry. Mr Fitzgerald advised of outbreaks in nursing homes and other long term residential facilities noting that there seems to be a lesser impact on residents as a result of vaccination.

Ms Bridie O'Sullivan Chief Director of Nursing and Midwifery for the South/South West Hospitals Group (SSWHG) provided an update on vaccination across the South West and highlighted the ongoing collaborative work with colleagues in community services. There are 5 vaccination centres under the integrated governance of the Hospital Group and community i.e. Tralee, City Hall Cork, Bantry, WIT Waterford and Clonmel. Pop up vaccination centres have opened as required managing surges in demand. There are a number of concurrent vaccination work streams in operation ranging from booster campaign for healthcare workers and those aged 60-69 years, additional doses for the

immunocompromised, the continued provision of primary vaccinations i.e. Dose 1 and Dose2, outreach vaccination to residential centres and housebound and pop-up clinics. The HSE is currently planning the booster roll-out to those aged over 50 years and those identified as high risk to commence in the second week of December. Two vaccines are currently being offered i.e. Pfizer and Moderna. With regard to vaccination and younger children (5 - 12 years) it is anticipated that there will be guidance from NIAC regarding this cohort in the coming weeks.

Ms Gabrielle O’Keeffe Head of Health Wellbeing & Strategy, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare provided an update to Members on Covid testing in the South West area. There are currently 4 testing sites in operation, 3 of which are permanent. Ms O’Keeffe advised Members of the extremely high level of demand for testing.

Dr Derval Howley provided Members with an update from the South East and advised of the various testing work streams in operation including the resumption of serial testing in long term residential care facilities over a 4 week period. As with the South West demand for testing is high and over 72,000 tests were completed in November – a significant increase compared to previously. Derval Howley acknowledged the significant supports provided by the National Ambulance Service, Defence Forces and the Civil Defence. Given the surge in demand, testing centres are operating on a 7 day basis. A pop up testing Centre was established in Carlow Youth Service in response to demand.

Appointment slots are also being held for General Practitioners and Public Health. With regard to vaccination, Dr Howley highlighted the high levels of vaccination uptake in the South East across all the vaccine programme work streams as referenced earlier. It was very welcome to note the decrease in notified cases amongst the older cohort who had received their booster dose. Dr Howley advised that the HSE/South East Community Healthcare are continuing to work in partnership with local authorities and An Garda Síochána as part of the Emergency Management structures and this continues to be critical for the overall response and public health messaging.

Ms Kate Killeen White Chief Officer South East Community Healthcare highlighted to Members the exceptional demands on health services and particularly with the current surge which is seeing significant surges in testing along with the delivery of the vaccination programme and regular health service provision. Ms Killeen White thanked staff and partners across the system for their extraordinary efforts during challenging times. She acknowledged Dr Mullaney and Public Health staff and the National Ambulance Service, Defence Forces and other key stakeholders. Ms Killeen White thanked RHF Members for their continued support and reiterated the key public health messages of mask wearing, hand sanitising and social distancing.

Questions

Councillors thanked HSE Management for their informative update and there following a question and answer session:

- Interval between positive Covid test and booster appointment
- Surge and HSE Surge capacity query
- Process to cancel a booster appointment received by text for an individual who already has received their booster.
- Pop Up Testing Centres in Kerry
- Testing turnaround times
- Antigen Testing - use of antigen tests and availability
- Death Certificates and Covid
- Booster Work streams - clarification on process required
- Booster Vaccine for travel purposes
- Numbers Vaccinated and Unvaccinated in Intensive Care Units
- Thanks to health staff for their immense efforts to keep the population safe.

5. Notices of Motion

(a) Cllr Mike Kennelly moved the following Motion, standing in his name (Deferred from November Regional Health Forum Meeting):

“Based on the number of recent complaints received through Councillors, TDs and social media it’s obvious that the current Ambulance Service in Kerry is totally inadequate. What immediate measures can be implemented to improve the current service?”

A written response from Mr Nicky Glynn, Operations Officer Chief Officer, National Ambulance Service was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Kennelly broadly welcomed this written reply - nonetheless he remained very concerned about the adequacy of ambulance service provision in Kerry. Cllr Kennelly cited increased waiting times for ambulance services in the county and the low level of ambulance vehicles which under the current system could be called as far away as Limerick. The old system worked better. Cllr Kennelly also stated that the increased waiting times cannot be solely as a result of Covid. Whilst he welcomed the additional ambulance officer in Kerry, Cllr Kennelly more needed to be done in order to provide adequate service. Cllr Norma Moriarty supported this Motion. Mr Nicky Glynn National Ambulance Service acknowledged that is very unfortunate that people have to wait for emergency ambulances - neither increased service demands nor Covid can be used to justify waits. Mr Glynn advised that the NAS are actively trying to effectively manage the service in the area and whilst accepting that Dynamic Deployment model has deficits it should not be cast aside. Since 2013 the deployment of all ambulances has been from NEOC Control Centre Dublin and this can bring challenges as highlighted by Councillors. The Ambulance Capacity Review should examine this issue and highlight where best to put available resources. It may also be worthwhile to consider other patient transfer services across the area. The additional Ambulance Officer for Kerry Cork and the South East with good local managers on the ground should ensure better local service accountability. Mr Glynn outlined to Members that there are complexities in the management of ambulance services.

Mr Glynn also spoke to Members on the Pathfinder Project which will be operated from NEOC Dublin with a cohort of doctors triaging calls. In some instances what may be initially assumed as an emergency call may not be the case. Mr Glynn offered to provide a project updates to Members at a future Forum meeting. Cllr Kennelly welcomed the Pathfinder initiative and asked when the outcome of the ongoing Capacity Review will be available. Mr Glynn responded advising that the Review Company should be in place in January and their role will be to review all technical information available in NEOC. It is positive that there is a single quantifiable data source to provide information on the service demands.

(b) Cllr Danny Collins moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

“As there are only 4 ambulances in West Cork most of which are not even in the West Cork vicinity a lot of the time, does the HSE have any plans on providing better ambulance service with extra paramedics to the area? If not so I am calling on the HSE to provide extra ambulances and paramedics to the area.”

A written response from Mr Nicky Glynn, Operations Officer Chief Officer, National Ambulance Service was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Collins thanked Mr Glynn for his reply and noted that his Motion was very similar in nature to Cllr Kennelly’s one. Cllr Collins outlined his concerns in relation to ambulance provision in the West Cork area and provided a number of examples in relation to individuals and incidents where ambulances were not available. Cllr Collins felt that under

the old system there was always a good chance of having an ambulance in the area. Whilst Cllr Collins welcomed the Capacity Review, he requested that they pay attention to services on the ground. Mr Glynn in response advised Cllr Collins that if there are individuals with concerns / negative experiences about the ambulance service they should submit formally through the complaints Your Service Your Say feedback process. Mr Glynn stated that he fully accepted staff concerns and confirmed that there is an internal staffing review ongoing in NEOC.

In conclusion Mr Glynn advised Members that across the South East and South West the ambulance service expect to close out 80,000 emergency calls this year covering over 8 million kilometres.

(c) Cllr Declan Burgess moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

"Can management please advise if there is any plans to improve the derelict appearance of the former gate lodge at Our Lady's Hospital Complex in Cashel? It's a protected structure in the heart of a heritage town and it needs some attention".

A written response from Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Burgess thanked Ms Killeen White for the written reply. He highlighted that the Gate Lodge was a protected structure in the heart of the heritage town of Cashel. Its shabby appearance is currently not in keeping with the efforts to maintain the town. Ms Killeen White in response confirmed that the Gate Lodge is not suitable for clinical services. Nonetheless HSE/SECH would take as an action to progress work on the Gate Lodge appearance.

(d) Cllr John O'Donoghue moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

"As considerable confusion exists in the minds of the public, in relation to the entitlement or otherwise of Medical Centres to charge the over 70's for blood tests, that clarity be provided would be provided in relation to this?"

A written response from Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare and Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr O'Donoghue thanked Management for this response. He outlined that this is an issue of concern for patients. In response Mr Fitzgerald stated that the HSE is aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances. This is an ongoing matter of concern and needs resolution. Mr Fitzgerald advised if a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should contact their HSE Local Community Services/Primary Care Unit and apply for a refund.

(e) Cllr Mikey Sheehy moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

"That this forum invites Minister Stephen Donnelly to visit University Hospital Kerry as a matter of urgency."

A discussion was held in the Chambers.

(f) Cllr Jody Power moved the following Motion, standing in his name (Deferred from November Regional Health Forum Meeting):

“That SSWHG update and make operational forthwith the Helicopter Landing Pad at UHW in the interest of acute causality survivability and the expected operational infrastructure of a Level 4 Regional medical facility.”

A written response from Ms Tess O’Donovan, Interim Chief Operations Officer, South/South West Hospital Group was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Power thanked Management for their written reply and outlined that the Coastguard based at Waterford Airport requires the landing pad to be upgraded and as part of the Capital Projects agenda. Ms O’Donovan responded advising that the Hospital is working closely with HSE Estates Colleagues to progress this matter, noting that there are aviation authority requirements to enable a larger helipad on site.

6. Questions

(a) Cllr. Mikey Sheehy put forward the following question:

“What is the average length of time that it takes this South/South West Hospital Group to employ a staff member from when the vacancy arises to the post being filled?”

A written response from Ms Tess O’Donovan, Interim Chief Operations Officer, South/South West Hospital Group was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Sheehy acknowledged the response, however he outlined his concerns in relation the the length of time taken to fill vacant posts. Cllr Sheehy asked whether there is any regular review in relation to staff recruitment.

Ms O’Donovan responded stating that work is on-going across the Hospital Group to expedite recruitment. Ms. O’Donovan acknowledged that Consultant recruitment can be slow in some circumstances, however, this is due to the demand outweighing the supply and a similar trend can be seen both nationally and internationally. Once approval to recruit is complete the HSE then proceeds to fill the posts. There can also at times be delays with candidates submitting paperwork and also with garda vetting checks.

Cllr Sheehy questioned delays in the recruitment process itself. Ms O’Donovan advised that Consultant posts require approval nationally by the Consultant Applications Advisory Committee (CAAC) who meet on a monthly basis. Once a permanent post is approved and whilst recruitment efforts are ongoing, it is possible to employ a Locum Consultant in the interim. Work is on-going to progress recruitment processes and to improve employee retention.

(b) Cllr. Eileen Lynch put forward the following question:

“Can the HSE advise of the estimated time frame for when the new outpatient ophthalmology services for the South/South West area currently being developed in Ballincollig, County Cork will be fully operational.”

A written response from Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Lynch thanked Mr Fitzgerald for his reply and had further queries in relation to the building tender process and whether the service will be integrated between hospital and community. Mr Fitzgerald responded

advising that the ophthalmology service will be provided in line with national report for eye care. It will be have joint governance arrangements across hospital and community.

(c) Cllr. Roger Kennedy put forward the following question:

"Can we have an update on the use of the "new Merck treatment " for Covid-19 in any of the Hospitals in this region or any other trials in relation to treatment of Covid-19 ongoing at present."

A written response from Dr Anne Sheehan, Director of Public Health, HSE South, was circulated to members and noted.

(d) Cllr Jody Power put forward the following question (Deferred from November Regional Health Forum Meeting):

"Acknowledging the demand for 24/7 Cardiac Care in the South East region, with a hinterland population of over 500,000, what initiatives are currently in train to realise this critical medical infrastructure."

A written response from Ms Tess O'Donovan, Interim Chief Operations Officer, South/South West Hospital Group was circulated to members and noted. Ms O'Donovan provided an update advising that the construction work on the 2nd Cat Lab is expected to be handed over in June 2022 and, following the equipping and commissioning phase, is expected to be operational in Q3 2022.

7. Date and Time of next meeting - 24th February 2022 at 2pm.