

**MINUTES  
MEETING OF REGIONAL HEALTH FORUM SOUTH**

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 2pm  
Webex Meeting**

**Present:**

Cllr Audrey Buckley  
Cllr Declan Burgess  
Cllr Danny Collins  
Cllr Pat Dunphy  
Cllr Pat Fitzgerald  
Cllr Pat Hayes  
Cllr Niall Kelleher  
Cllr Garry Laffan  
Cllr Mary Linehan Foley  
Cllr Eileen Lynch  
Cllr Arthur McDonald

Cllr John McDonald  
Cllr Conor McGuinness  
Cllr Norma Moriarty  
Cllr John O'Donoghue  
Cllr Sean O'Donovan  
Cllr Jody Power  
Cllr John Sheehan  
Cllr Mikey Sheehy  
Cllr Frank Staples  
Cllr James Tobin

**Apologies:**

Cllr John Coonan

**In Attendance:**

Mr Gerry O'Dwyer, Chief Executive Officer, South/South West Hospitals Group  
Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare  
Ms Catherine Neary, Head of Human Resources, South East Community Healthcare  
Members of the HSE South Forum Office staff

## **1. Adoption of the Minutes of the previous Meeting held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2021**

On the proposal of Cllr Mikey Sheehy seconded by Cllr Pat Dunphy, the minutes of the Forum meeting held on Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 were approved and adopted by the members.

Cllr John Donoghue was welcomed to the Regional Health Forum as a new member following the recent retirement of Cllr Michael Gleeson. Both HSE Management and Forum Members expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to Cllr Gleeson for his significant contribution to the Forum.

## **2. Chairperson's Correspondence**

## **3. Committees**

The next Committee meetings will be held on:

- (a) South East Committee Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2021
- (b) South West Committee Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2021

## **4. Notices of Motion**

(a) Cllr Mary Linehan Foley moved the following Motion, standing in her name:

"Please provide an update on Primary Care Unit for Youghal area, how far along are we on this?"

A written response from Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Foley thanked HSE Management and welcomed this overall positive reply. She requested that she be kept updated in progress over the upcoming months. Mr Michael Fitzgerald agreed that they would provide updates and also indicated that as with many other projects progress had slowed down due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

(b) Cllr Arthur McDonald moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

"Why have people in Carlow to endure long delays to access the ambulances? The system has been changed and this current system is not working. Can we revert to a better system where such long delays are not occurring?"

A written response from Mr Nicky Glynn, Chief Ambulance Officer, National Ambulance Service was circulated to members and noted. Cllr McDonald advised that as far as he is aware there are 3 ambulances in the Ambulance Station at St Dymphna's Hospital Carlow at any one time and yet it takes hours for patients in Carlow to get an ambulance. Cllr McDonald stated that Carlow as a central county should have a service. Mr. Nicky Glynn responded stating that he had raised this issue with the Ambulance Service nationally. It is acknowledged that there is a difficulty with the central location in Carlow. There are service enhancements but these are being drawn into other areas which are not historically part of the catchment area. It has been agreed at national level to update the spatial review which was completed in 2015 - this will include a review of activity levels. Mr Glynn advised that there are ongoing discussions with national ambulance centre in relation to deployment of available resources and it is acknowledged that there needs to be additional resources on the ground and to bring them into the Carlow area. Mr Glynn continued

stating that there is a separate process underway with a number of staff across the South East and South West in relation to long response to ambulance calls. Mr. Glynn advised Members that he would come back and provide verbal and written updates to them.

(c) Cllr John Sheehan moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

“That the HSE, recognising the challenge of recruitment General Practitioners, especially in Rural Areas would engage with the various stakeholders (GMS, HSE, Irish Medical Organisation etc.) to ensure that there are a variety of flexible solutions to meet local needs such as salary GPs , and other supports.”

A written response from Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare and Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Sheehan thanked HSE Managers for their reply. He stated that this question was more directed nationally and particularly at the present as he felt the GP Contract is ‘a one-size fits all’ which can be problematic. Initiatives such as GP Practices linking with larger practices and GP mentoring early on in careers are positive developments. Mr Michael Fitzgerald agreed that this issue in relation to GP vacancies is a very pertinent point and that there are ongoing challenges in recruitment and vulnerabilities with certain types of practices. It is very much a changing world for GPs which has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The HSE is working hard to try and attract new GP recruits. This is a national issue and the public should be aware of the challenges. Michael Fitzgerald agreed to raise this matter at a national level with Mr. Pat Healy, National Director, Community Strategy and Planning. Ms Catherine Neary concurred with Mr Fitzgerald advising that that are difficulties filling GP posts in some locations and we need to consider how best this is managed into the future. In the South East there are three GP Panels ongoing at present.

Cllr. Moriarty supported the Motion, stating that in South West Kerry this will be an issue. Communities and GPs themselves are open to innovative solutions. Cllr Mikey Sheehy asked about contact between the HSE and Department of Justice particularly in relation to South African working visa for prospective GP recruits. Mr Fitzgerald advised Cllr Sheehy that he could not respond on the specifics of this matter at this time but would endeavour to follow up as appropriate.

(d) Cllr Norma Moriarty moved the following Motion, standing in her name:

“That we ensure a full examination of Ambulance Provision in the region as we are experiencing far too many delays, and inter county call outs which are exacerbated by log jams in hospital admissions. Dynamic Deployment as an approach it seems, is better suited to some geographical areas than others and if it is to be pursued, then more bases may very well be required to allow for sufficient coverage.”

A written response from Mr Nicky Glynn, Chief Ambulance Officer, National Ambulance Service was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Moriarty outlined her concerns in relation to Ambulance Service located in the Kenmare Iveragh area and the issue of staff burnout. For a significant proportion of time there are no ambulances available in the area - they are elsewhere on calls. This is further compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic where some GPs may not be seeing patients with a resulting impact on the ambulance service and overall waiting times in hospitals for patients awaiting admission. Cllr Moriarty stated that the lack of ambulance call triaging often results in an ambulance being used as a taxi. There is also a fear of litigation in relation to the ambulance service and emergency 999 calls. Cllr Moriarty stated that while she acknowledges the written reply but it is critical that we find solutions. Mr. Nicky Glynn responded stating that he fully recognises matters that staff are raising about services. He also advised that Ambulance staff feel that a

number of the calls they go to are unnecessary and there is a high level of concerns in relation to these particular calls. Issues in relation to the ambulance services are always emotive and the overall dynamic situation over the last 18 months with the Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the service and frontline staff. This evolving situation is ongoing and the aim to return to normal whilst desirable is not necessarily achievable given the huge unknowns with Covid-19 and variants. Mr Glynn advised members of paramedic and intermediate care and also regarding the ambulance helicopter which is used for the most urgent cases. The National Ambulance Control Centre in Dublin is looking at different models of working in response to calls. For instance, in Cork/Kerry area, as part of a pilot project, a Doctor and Paramedic would go out in a car to triage a call prior to any transfer into hospital.

Mr Glynn also outlined that the Ambulance Service was examining the spatial strategy across the South West and the South East with the aim of developing responses to problems arising. It is not simply a matter of providing additional resources only without looking at how best to address issues. Mr Glynn advised of an initiative which is being tested at present whereby Doctors are present in the Control Centre and available to triage calls received. This is proving useful in terms of unnecessary hospital admissions.

Mr Glynn also explained to Members that at times when someone calls 999, the Ambulance Service needs to prioritise removing the patient from the environment they are in as opposed to an Emergency Admission to hospital. Cllr Moriarty asked whether for example an inebriated patient could be transferred by car as opposed to ambulance vehicle – Mr Glynn replied that cars by their nature are single person and that in such instances ambulance vehicles may be preferable given need to have multiple staff on board.

Cllr Mikey Sheehy thanked Mr Glynn and noted that it was a very different environment for ambulance staff and that he would have concerns for their welfare and well-being. Mr Glynn concluded advising Members that he would come back before the Regional Health Forum to provide an update on initiatives as required.

(e) Cllr Jody Power moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

“That SSWHG update and make operational forthwith the Helicopter Landing Pad at UHW in the interest of acute casualty 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.

As requested by Cllr Power, this Motion was deferred to the November meeting.

(f) Cllr Eileen Lynch moved the following Motion, standing in her name:

“That the HSE would provide an update on the ongoing refurbishment and extension works to Macroom Hospital, to include any information regarding when the works will be completed.”

A written response from Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Lynch thanked HSE Management for their reply which is welcome. She asked for confirmation of a contractor and for an estimated completion timeframe and also on the impact on current services. Mr Michael Fitzgerald advised that he would arrange to revert to Cllr Lynch in relation to the contractor. Mr Fitzgerald agreed that this was positive news. It is planned that the extension would be built first and then to undertake the refurbishment of existing setting

so it may feel like a phased development but in reality it is not. There is a resulting impact on the overall bed stock by approximately 20 beds whilst development works are ongoing and to ensure compliance with infection control and safety requirements. Once the works are completed it is planned that the overall bed stock will increase.

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

“That this forum and the SSWHG supports fully vaccinated partners of pregnant women by re introducing visiting rights to pre COVID19 pandemic access for the birth of their child, pre labour scans, consultations and post labour partner support.”

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 thanked HSE Management for the written reply. Whilst he fully acknowledged the need to proceed with caution, he indicated that the HSE must consider the needs of pregnant women and their partners in relation to attendance at scans, during birth and post-natal appointments. It is a stressful time for women concerned and the support from partners is critical. Mr Gerry O’Dwyer acknowledged the concerns raised by Cllr Sheehy.

Mr O’Dwyer highlighted to Members that since the commencement of the Covid-19 pandemic, maternity services have been committed to ensuring that the impact of Covid-19 on services and the pregnancy experience for every mother and their partner is kept to a minimum. He explained that the HSE prioritises the health and safety of its service users and its staff. Managing the risk of infection has to take account of the fact that many maternity hospitals work within sites with infrastructural challenges. Taking these challenges into account it was necessary for the HSE to develop guidance on visiting in maternity hospitals that seeks to balance the competing requirements for partners to be present to support women but also giving priority to the safety, welfare and privacy of all women and infants that use the service, in a sympathetic way and its staff.

Mr O’Dwyer advised Members that it is necessary to remain vigilant to the ongoing challenges presenting with Covid-19. There are currently 66 persons with Covid-19 in hospitals across the South/South West Hospital Group and a number of these patients are in ICU. Whilst guidance may be reviewed we need to continue to prioritise the safety of all women and infants that use maternity services and our staff.

## **6. Questions**

(a) Cllr. John Sheehan put forward the following question:

“To ask the HSE what are the total number of Hospital Consultants positions in Cork University Hospital and what number and percentage are either not currently filled or filled by locum Consultants.”

A written response from Dr Gerard O’Callaghan, Chief Executive Officer, Cork University Hospital was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Sheehan thanked HSE Management for the written reply and welcomed the positive developments and new Consultant posts coming on-stream in the Hospital Group whilst noting that there are a number of upcoming retirements.

Mr Gerry O’Dwyer outlined that with Covid-19 acute hospital services and indeed the entire healthcare system are in a different arena – there is ongoing reform of services to try and prevent (where clinically indicated) admissions to acute hospitals and to provide services closer to home. The core objective is to shift the emphasis of providing care from the acute hospitals to the community. For instance as part of the Integrated Care Programme for

Chronic Disease, the focus is on supporting people living with chronic diseases including respiratory, cardiovascular and diabetes. Many Consultant posts will be split between acute hospital and community services provision. The Integrated Programme for Older People on the development of an end to end pathway to support older people many with multiple co-morbidities and frailty.

(b) Cllr. Norma Moriarty put forward the following question:

"Is there a clear schedule for the re-opening of Day Care centres available and or steps or milestones that need to be met to allow for same?"

A written response from Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare and Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Moriarty thanked HSE Management for the reply and outlined that her query was specifically relating to Cahirciveen Day Hospital/Day Care Centre and an actual re-opening date. Mr Fitzgerald stated that whilst he does not currently have specific re-opening dates for all centres, work is ongoing for the safe phased reopening of day centres for older people in communities across the Cork Kerry Healthcare area. He accepted that there was a need and demand for the re-opening of day centres particularly given the impact of Covid-19 on many older people over the last 18 months. The HSE is working through a process to support Day Care Centres to resume services which include risk assessments in relation to environment and staffing, infection control measures and adaptation works.

Ms Catherine Neary advised Members that similar work had taken place across the South East to support the safe re-opening of Day Centres for Older People and she thanked the staff involvement for their ongoing dedication and commitment for this.

(c) Cllr. Jody Power put forward the following question:

"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 Grace Rothwell, General Manager, University Hospital Waterford was circulated to members and noted.

As requested by Cllr Power, this Motion was deferred to the November meeting.

(d) Cllr Eileen Lynch put forward the following question:

"That the HSE would provide an update on the ongoing refurbishment and extension work to Millstreet Community Hospital, to include information regarding when the works will be completed."

A written response from Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Lynch thanked HSE Management for their reply and asked for confirmation in relation to the handover of the completed work, whether this would be a phased development and the impact on current services. In response Mr Fitzgerald advised that there would be phased opening – this is a live service and we are currently down a number of beds at this time. Bed numbers had previously been reduced as part of a compliance issue with independent regulatory body HIQA. With the phased opening, it is planned to move

residents to the new area when complete and work will then commence on the refurbishment of the older section. This will be a complex process and will require careful planning and organisation to ensure the safe transfer of residents.

(e) Cllr Mikey Sheehy put forward the following Question:

“When will the vacant diabetic podiatrist postilion be filled at UHK and will the hospital commit to filling the post to the same professional standard as the recently retired podiatrist.”

A written response from Mr Fearghal Grimes, General Manger, University Hospital Kerry was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Mikey Sheehy thanked Mr Grimes for his written reply. Cllr Sheehy outlined his concerns for the Diabetic Service. Mr Gerry O’Dwyer assured Cllr Sheehy that he would keep him updated on developments.

7. Date and Time of next meeting - 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

Forum Members also agreed for an additional RHF South Meeting to be scheduled in December 2021.