

**MINUTES
MEETING OF REGIONAL HEALTH FORUM SOUTH**

**Thursday 18th November 2021 at 2pm
Webex Meeting**

Present:

Cllr Ann Marie Ahern
Cllr Audrey Buckley
Cllr Declan Burgess
Cllr John Coonan
Cllr Davy Daniels
Cllr Pat Dunphy
Cllr Pat Fitzgerald
Cllr Pat Hayes
Cllr Joe Kavanagh
Cllr Niall Kelleher
Cllr Garry Laffan
Cllr Mary Linehan Foley
Cllr Eileen Lynch

Cllr Michael McCarthy
Cllr Susan McCarthy
Cllr Arthur McDonald
Cllr John McDonald
Cllr Conor McGuinness
Cllr Norma Moriarty
Cllr John O'Donoghue
Cllr Ken O'Flynn
Cllr Jody Power
Cllr John Sheehan
Cllr Mikey Sheehy
Cllr James Tobin

Apologies:

Cllr Danny Collins
Cllr Mark Fitzgerald
Cllr Sean O'Donovan
Cllr Jody Power
Cllr Ted Tynan

In Attendance:

Ms Tess O'Donovan, Chief Operations Officer, South/South West Hospitals Group
Mr Ken Fitzgibbon, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Ireland East Hospital Group
Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare
Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Healthcare
Members of the HSE South Forum Office staff

Cllr Declan Burgess, Chairman welcomed members to the meeting. He reminded them to keep efficacy in the meeting and remain muted during the meeting unless speaking. Before the meeting began he thanked all the HSE Management for being here today, he also thanked them for agreeing to hold an additional meeting to be held on the 2nd of December 2021 in place of missed meetings during 2021 due to Covid Surges and the Cyber attack on the HSE.

1. Adoption of the Minutes of the previous Meeting held on Thursday 16th of September 2021

On the proposal of Cllr Pat Hayes seconded by Cllr Ken O'Flynn, the minutes of the Forum meeting held on Thursday, 16th of September 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. Notices of Motion

(a) 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 causality survivability and the expected operational infrastructure of a Level 4 Regional medical facility."

This motion was deferred to the December meeting on the request of Cllr Power.

(b) Cllr Susan McCarthy, Cllr Mary Lenihan Foley and Cllr Ann Marie Ahern moved the following Motion, standing in their names:

"We, as elected representatives of the East Cork Municipal District, request the HSE to directly assess the potential impact of the proposed closure of the Owenacurra Centre, Midleton on residents and families, and the broader cohort of service-users with similar needs in the region, examining, in particular:

How do each of these potential alternative long-stay / respite placements in Cork compare to the Owenacurra Centre in respect of the following:

- i) proximity to an urban centre and connectivity to an urban centre by footpath
- ii) availability of public transport - frequency of buses/trains
- iii) staff to client ratio
- iv) single-room occupancy vs shared-room accommodation (please specify numbers of residents per room for each possible alternative placement)
- v) proximity to Midleton for family contact and reconnection with friends and community activities
- vi) regulated / not regulated by the Mental Health Commission
- vii) most recent Mental Health Commission compliance ratings

vii) most recent rating on Regulation 22 (Premises) of the Mental Health Commission inspection report

viii) Room dimensions and how they compare with existing accommodation

What service plan is in place for people more generally under the care of the Midleton/Youghal and Cobh/Glenville Adult Mental Health Teams with severe and enduring mental illness who require long-stay or respite placement into the future in the event that the Owenacurra Centre is closed permanently? How does this service-plan match requirements by the HSE's policy on the community-based rehabilitation of this client group (the *Sharing the Vision* document, for example) and the Mental Health Commission's guidance on the rehabilitation and care of this client group."

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

Cllr Susan McCarthy felt that the response did not adequately address the queries raised. She expressed her disappointment at the lack of information being provided on the plans being put in place for long term care residents of the centre and on the plans for the replacement of the day centre. Cllr McCarthy raised concerns about the suggestion that some residents may be moved to Cork city or North Cork. She also questioned whether the HSE will be able to source suitable accommodation in the community at a time when there is a shortage of housing in the region. Cllr McCarthy stated that any solution put in place by the HSE needs to be in the best interests of the residents and would need to be sustainable. She acknowledged that Owenacurra Centre has been deemed to be not fit for purpose but she emphasised the need that the East Cork area does not lose access to the services which it provides, in particular the 21 residential beds.

Cllr Ann Marie Ahern supported Cllr. McCarthy's comments and she welcomed the invitation to a briefing session on the future of the centre which the East Cork councillors have received. Cllr Ahern said she is hopeful that the current discussions will lead to a positive outcome for the service users and their families.

Cllr Mary Lenihan Foley joined her fellow Cllrs in expressing support for the role which the Owenacurra Centre has played at the heart of Midleton town for over 35 years saying it has integrated extremely well into the local community and allowed service users to stay close to their home communities whilst still providing them with the care and support they require. Cllr Linehan Foley referenced the wonderful job which the HSE did on the decongregation of St Raphael's Centre in Youghal. She said that significant funding was put in place for that project to ensure that appropriate accommodation was secured for the residents and she hoped that similar resources will be secured for Owenacurra.

Mr Michael Fitzgerald acknowledged the concerns expressed by the members. He stated the facilities in Owenacurra are no longer fit for purpose, are not compliant with Mental Health Commission regulations. It had originally been the HSE's intention to refurbish the centre but both internal and external professional opinion concluded that the facilities could not be brought up to the required standard even with substantial investment. The HSE is very cognisant of the fact that the centre is home to many people and the location of the residential unit and day centre at the heart of the town has been an important factor in the integration on the service into the local community. Mr. Fitzgerald confirmed that it is the HSE's intention to retain the site and to develop health services on the site. That may include a number of smaller residential houses which would allow residents to live in a supported environment within the community. The emphasis on service delivery must continue to move towards providing care and treatment and support to people in the community in their own homes where possible. Mr. Fitzgerald said that there is a Home Based Treatment Team and Community Mental Health Teams in place in East Cork to support this model of care and the HSE is always looking to further develop and enhance these services and seek resources to develop them.

Mr. Fitzgerald concluded by saying that the HSE is conscious of the fact that a number of other residential units within mental health services in Cork are also not fit for purpose and said that local management are working on a strategic plan to develop proposals for redevelopment in line with government policy.

Cllrs McCarthy, Ahern and Lenihan Foley thanked Mr. Fitzgerald for his response.

Cllr Burgess said he would move on with the Agenda after wishing the councillors well in their upcoming briefing on the matter.

(c) Cllr Pat Dunphy moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

“What are the steps to be taken, the maximum amount of hours given and also the timeframe involved for a person to receive Home Care Hours or Extra Home Care Hours, especially when their condition worsens. If a patient is being released from hospital how does one get the Extra Home Care Hours in order for them to live at home. I am aware that this is Government Policy as well as HSE Policy and which the public prefer also. It seems as if there is a delay in granting Extra Home Care Hours or New Home Care Hours. Most feel this should be in place as the person is being released from Hospital. Can you let us know why this is not the case currently.”

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

Cllr Dunphy asked about the timeframe around providing home support hours for those who wish to remain in their own home, some very elderly with no family. He said he knew of quiet a lot of people approved which is good but they have not received it to date. He would like if the HSE could speed up the process.

Ms Kate Killeen White spoke to the importance of Home Support and stated that the HSE are constantly looking to recruit Home Support Workers to all their care groups in the South East. The pool of Home Support Workers available to work has however reduced and all attempts are being made to recruit into the sector. She explained that SECH had carried out three separate recruitment drives in the 2021. Kate Killeen White reiterated that the main risk presenting is not approval of the hours but the availability of home support staff. Ms Killeen White stated that SECH were constantly recruiting, constantly reviewing the service, constantly prioritising those with greatest need to receive hours required. Ms Killeen White advised that SECH know that people wish to stay at home and are doing their very best to deliver the service to all of those in need of it but it remains a significant risk and waitlists are growing.

Cllr Dunphy thanked Ms Killeen White for her update and asked that the timeframes of the more recent recruitment campaign be provided at the next Forum Meeting.

Cllr Coonan supported Cllr Dunphy in his motion and offered his support to Ms Kate Killeen White as a county councillor. Cllr Burgess, Chairperson, agreed with this and offered support to SECH in terms of supporting communication of any information to constituents if this would assist the service. Ms. Kate Killeen White thanked the forum for their ongoing support and dedication.

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

“That a mental health nurse to co-ordinate wellness and wellbeing activities in South West Kerry on a par with the excellent work being facilitated through the provision of such a position in West Cork be provided.”

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

Cllr Moriarty thanked Mr Fitzgerald for his positive response. She stated that there are a lot of good things happening in the area and a pool of people willing to help. What is needed now is someone to co-ordinate these efforts and resources. Mr. Fitzgerald agreed to forward the name and contact details of the Mental Health Engagement Lead for the region to Cllr. Moriarty.

(e) Cllr Mike Kennelly moved the following Motion, standing in his name:

“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?”

Cllr Mike Kennelly

This motion was deferred to the December meeting on the request of Cllr Kennelly.

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

“That the South/South West Hospital Group offers supports to elderly patients by the implementation of specific protocols to allow advocates of patients to be present or specifically communicated with at critical and decision making stages of care.”

A written response from Ms Tess O’Donovan, Chief Officer, South/South West Hospitals Group was circulated to members and noted. Cllr Sheehy said he appreciated the response and understands that we are in the middle of a pandemic and care and access to care is difficult and that restrictions are in place in acute settings. He thought it was an important issue to raise especially when vulnerable patients get access to services that sometimes through no fault of the carers or staff, ~~that~~ there is a breakdown in communications with patients.

Ms Tess O’Donovan stated that the points that Cllr Sheehy raised are very important as they form part of how to support people through all stages of their hospital experience. Hospitals work closely with patients and their families, however, Covid-19 has made this very challenging in terms of access to hospitals for families of patients and S/SWHG are very aware of this challenge. A compassionate approach is used as much as possible and noted that the psychological support that a patient receives from family is very important to recovery and the needs of the patient are always kept to the forefront of decision making. Ms O’Donovan advised members that a Patient Advocacy Liaison Service (PALS) is being piloted in the Group and this service will be implemented in Tipperary University Hospital and Cork University Hospital initially to support the work currently being carried out in these hospitals and increase patient advocacy on the ground. S/SWHG welcomes various groups such as SAGE that engage on behalf of the patients. Ms O’Donovan reassured members that patient advocacy is a top priority for the Group especially with the surges of Covid-19 in the community which is putting more pressure on our health system. Ms O’Donovan advised that S/SWHG will work to ensure that patient supports to include family access to patients where appropriate are maximised.

Mr Michael Fitzgerald agreed with Ms O’Donovan’s points and also added that forthcoming legislation on Assisted Decision Making will require the HSE to review its processes

thoroughly. Service users and their families need to be at the centre of the decision making process and their rights and wishes are paramount.

Ms Killeen White agreed with Mr Fitzgerald's points around the Assisted Decision Making Act. She said it is a very important piece of legislation and will further underpin the requirement of all to look at the will and the preference of the individual. This may require a cultural shift in order to put the individual's preference first and their capacity to make these decisions at the centre of all we do. As Ms O'Donovan mentioned Ms Killeen White very much welcomed Advocacy Groups and their engagement across all of the care groups including SAGE so that people have the support they require to make decisions.

Cllr Sheehy asked which hospitals were being piloted with the patient Advocacy Liaison Service. Ms O'Donovan explained that two hospitals were being piloted currently Tipperary University Hospital and Cork University Hospital. Two hospitals with very different requirements which should lead to an outcome where all requirements would be covered in the pilot.

6. Questions

(a) 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."

This motion was deferred to the December meeting on the request of Cllr Power.

(b) Cllr. Declan Burgess put forward the following question:

"With HIQA's condition to have the new residential development for long stay residents at Saint Patricks Hospital, Cashel, operational by the end of 2021 not going to materialize despite all the promises. With the facility at Our Lady's Hospital Complex only licensed by HIQA for three years, could I have a detailed account of what, if anything, is planned for the long term care of senior residents in Cashel."

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

Cllr Burgesses reminded members that he has raised St Patrick's Hospital, Cashel numerous times in his term on the Regional Health Forum. St Patricks provides excellent care in Cashel and is a wonderful model and he asked to thank both the staff and management who run it for this excellent service. The long waited Capital Building development is very much on his agenda, the communities agenda and the staff's agenda. He appreciated the comprehensive response from Ms Killeen White. He stated that it is still on the Capital plan and is happy it remains on the Capital plan going forward and hopefully we will see progress in the new year. He requested to kept up to date with any progress going forward. It is of great importance to the community.

Ms Killeen White stated that is remains on the Capital Plan with all plans being reviewed continually with all of the changing regulations and guidelines. She said she would keep Cllr Burgess updated of progress on the project.

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

“Can we please be provided with a specific report on the provision of South Doc services in the West Iveragh area (Kells to Castlecove) and details on what arrangements are and will be in place for that service. e.g Numbers of locum doctors, durations of time they have committed to and any ongoing recruitment being carried out and issues that are hindering same?”

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

Cllr Moriarty welcomed the arrangements which have been put in place and she urged the HSE to continue to do all it can to ensure there is adequate locum support in place for the already overburdened GPs. Cllr Moriarty highlighted the need for future planning to protect our GP services.

Mr. Micheal Fitzgerald stated that the HSE is keen to work with GPs and with SouthDoc to secure the long term future of GPs services in Cork and Kerry. He stated that the age profile of GPs is increasing and the demographics of the population they serve are also changing rapidly. There is a growing concern around the sustainability of GP services in some rural areas. Mr. Fitzgerald pointed out that it is in everyone’s interest that we maintain and develop our GP in hours and out of hours services. GP practices need to be a viable business if we are to continue to attract new GPs. We also need to consider new models of service delivery and look at the skill mix within GP practices and if other professionals can contribute more on a safe and sustainable basis to meet the needs of the public. He stated that the HSE will continue to try and ensure that we put sufficient support and services in place to support GPs and consider all options that work to suit the community.

(d) Cllr Niall Kelleher put forward the following question:

“What is the update position on the development on all primary care centres in Kerry?”

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

Cllr Niall Kelleher welcomed the progression of the Primary Care Centres in Castleisland and Caherciveen. He asked for further clarity on the proposed centre for Killarney stating the response provided was somewhat at odds with a recent statement issued by Kerry County Council on the status of the project. Cllr Kelleher also asked further detail on the status of discussions on the Rathmore centre. He stated that the building currently in use in Rathmore is in very poor condition.

Mr. Fitzgerald stated the development of a Primary Care Centre in Killarney has been a priority for the HSE for some time but that a number of previous proposed developments failed to come to fruition. He added the HSE also has a number of other critical accommodation requirements in the Killarney area. Mr. Fitzgerald agreed to revert to the Kerry members of the Forum with an update on the status of the proposed development under discussion with Kerry County Council, and also with an update on the current status of the ongoing discussions around the Rathmore development.

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

“What is the current staffing shortfall in the following areas at UHK presently; i) Nursing ii) Administration; iii) Consultants; iii) Laboratory staff?”

A written response from Tess O'Donovan, Chief Officer, South/South West Hospitals Group was circulated to members and noted.

Cllr Mikey Sheehy thanked Ms O'Donovan for her response. Cllr Sheehy said that the recruitment of staff and staff retention was a very relevant topic at the moment. He understood it was an incredibly difficult environment to be recruiting staff through a Pandemic. He had an additional query on the number of nurses in the response and if the figure included a number of newly recruited nurses discussed at the South West Committee Meeting in October or are the new recruited nurses going to fill the vacancies that are there?

Ms O'Donovan explained to members that the difficulties being experienced in UHK with regard to recruitment has been highly publicised and she acknowledged that it is a cause of worry among people of Kerry. Ms O'Donovan explained that recruitment drives have been very positive in terms of the current Nursing deficit. Today's figures showed a 16 WTE deficit in nursing staff and noted that in addition to vacancies, staff can also be on sick leave, isolating due to Covid-19, maternity leave, etc. It was noted that this figure is a significant improvement on two months ago. This is as a result of the Nurse graduate programme, overseas recruitment and the on-going recruitment process in UHK. Ms O'Donovan emphasised that recruitment needs to be on-going to keep up Nursing staffing levels.

With regard to Administration staff, Ms O'Donovan outlined '33' clerical administrative staff posts were currently being processed. These clerical administration positions would provide support for clinics and consultants and is very welcome progress and will make a huge difference to a very difficult work load that staff are facing at UHK. Ms O'Donovan highlighted to Members the increase in Consultant posts at UHK and noted that there are 8 locum posts at the moment, noting that the recruitment of Consultants is a slower process and is managed nationally. UHK are in a queue similar to all hospitals with locums filling in posts during that process. With regard to Medical Laboratory Scientists, UHK have a deficit of '7' WTEs but flagged that there are particular difficulties in recruiting Medical Laboratory Scientists nationwide. UHK do use Medical Laboratory Aids when difficulties arise in getting Med Lab Scientists. Ms O'Donovan committed to continue to update councillors on recruitment at UHK on a regular basis.

Cllr Sheehy had one other follow on question from reading the response which he said made much more promising reading than recent reports in the media. He asked about Med Lab Scientists enquiring if the main reason behind this nationwide difficulty to recruit to these posts is as a result of large pharmaceutical companies hiring the available staff.

Ms O'Donovan explained that when you look at the numbers graduating this could be the case. Ms. O'Donovan updated that when Med Lab Scientists are doing their graduate programme, the graduates are on placement in hospitals which can then possibly allow the hospitals to have the first choice while working within the consolidated salary scale. Lab Aids allow the Laboratories run while filling these posts.

(f) Cllr Eileen Lynch put forward the following Question:

"Can the HSE advise as to when there will be a full return of adult disability day services in Cork County and advise as to how many adult disability centres in Cork County have resumed their services to full pre Covid levels."

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

Cllr Lynch stated that she felt the response received was not satisfactory. She said that full services had not resumed and far too many service users were being left without any service. Cllr. Lynch also pointed to a lack of communication from service providers with families and said that too often it appeared to be the case that it was those who shouted loudest received a service rather than those most in need.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked that Cllr Lynch revert to him with details of any service user or group which was having an issue with a service provider and he would arrange for the matter to be followed up with that provider. He stated that Covid is still having an effect on service delivery and both the HSE and service providers have an obligation to ensure that services can be provided in a safe manner. Mr. Fitzgerald said that recruitment and staffing difficulties are also impacting upon service delivery and these difficulties are being encountered by both the HSE and service providers.

Cllr Declan Burgess thanked all members and HSE Management for their attendance at the meeting and reminded them that Covid 19 and Vaccines Roll out would be on the Agenda for the upcoming December Regional Health Forum Members.

Cllr Coonan expressed his appreciation to all those involved in the HSE during the Covid Pandemic and welcomed the discussion Covid 19. He had concerns over the adherence to the basic guidelines of hand sanitizing and mask wearing in recent weeks and was trying to send this message of going back to basics and following these guidelines to the public.

Mr Michael Fitzgerald welcomed Cllr Coonan's support and that of all the Councillors. He stated that as public representatives they are in the best position to provide information to people on the ground. The vaccination campaign is ongoing and the administration of the booster vaccine has commenced. Mr Fitzgerald asked that the members would continue to encourage the public to get vaccinated, particularly those who have not been vaccinated to date. Public Health have indicated that the current Covid trajectory will impact on the workload of the Community and Acute Hospital services and he stressed the importance of protecting our ICU beds. Mr. Fitzgerald stated that Community and Acute Hospital services are working very hard together to get through this latest phase of the pandemic and will do all they can to support and protect the public and our staff. He reminded the members that the normal pressures of the Winter season will also need to be dealt with by our services. He concluded by saying that the coming weeks are of great importance and he asked for the members assistance in urging people to continue to adhere to public health guidelines, to wash their hands, wear their masks and maintain social distancing.

Ms Tess O'Donovan agreed with Mr Fitzgerald's words and also thanked Cllr Coonan for raising the topic. Ms. O'Donovan explained that the difference in this wave of Covid to other waves was that services stopped during earlier waves and advised that the HSE cannot do this again noting the current issues with waiting lists. Ms O' Donovan advised that before this latest wave of Covid-19, additional work had begun to reduce waiting lists. Ms O'Donovan also noted that HSE staff are tired and continue to be asked to work very hard. Vaccine boosters are being rolled out to HSE staff in both the Hospitals and the Community and all efforts are being made to expedite the booster vaccine rollout to staff and the population within the specified age brackets. The major challenge is the Winter season ahead which will bring with it the usual respiratory issues, limited bed capacity issues and concern over waiting lists along with a peak in this Covid wave.

Ms Kate Killeen White echoed Mr Fitzgerald and Ms O'Donovan and thanked Cllr Coonan saying that the basics around Covid had not changed during the entire pandemic, hand washing, keeping your distance, mask wearing and reducing contacts are the main measures that will break the chains of transmission. The growing outbreaks within different areas that the HSE have to deal with is really significant and challenging together with the numbers of staff on sick leave or just being tired nearly exhausted. She said that

the staff are so resilient and are aware that we are in the throes of another peak, there is huge personal responsibility on every member of the public to try and stem this surge. Ms Killeen White also said for councillors and the public to urge those unvaccinated for whatever reason to come forward now and get vaccinated. It's never too late.

Cllr Arthur McDonald raised the issue the question with regard to Antigen Testing and people who have been moving freely after a positive result on these tests. He asked what can be done to ensure that these people self-isolate. Cllr McDonald was advised that positive encouragement to the public to follow the guidelines would be advised and It then becomes a matter of personal responsibility if people chose to take or ignore this advice. Public Health will be able to advise further on this at the meeting to take place on 2nd of December 2021.

7. Date and Time of next meeting – 2nd of December 2021 at 2pm.