

## **MINUTES** **MEETING OF REGIONAL HEALTH FORUM SOUTH**

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 2pm**  
**Webex Meeting**

### **Present:**

Clr Pat Barden  
Clr Declan Burgess  
Clr Peter Cleere  
Clr Danny Collins  
Clr John Coonan  
Clr Pat Dunphy  
Clr Michael Gleeson  
Clr Pat Hayes  
Clr Mike Kennelly

Clr Donal Kenny  
Clr Garry Laffan  
Clr Michael McCarthy  
Clr Susan McCarthy  
Clr Arthur McDonald  
Clr John McDonald  
Clr Norma Moriarty  
Clr John Sheehan  
Clr Mikey Sheehy

### **Apologies:**

Clr Davy Daniels  
Clr Mark Fitzgerald  
Clr Pat Fitzgerald  
Clr Mary Linehan Foley  
Clr Conor McGuinness  
Clr Jody Power  
Clr James Tobin

### **In Attendance:**

Mr Gerry O'Dwyer, Chief Executive Officer, South/South West Hospitals Group  
Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Chief Officer, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare  
Ms Kate Killeen White, Chief Officer, South East Community Health Organisation  
Dr Anne Sheehan, Director of Public Health, HSE South West  
Dr Carmel Mullaney, Director of Public Health, HSE South East  
Ms Bridie O'Sullivan, Chief Director of Nursing and Midwifery, South/South West Hospitals Group  
Ms Priscilla Lynch, Head of Service, Health & Wellbeing, Cork-Kerry Community Healthcare  
Ms Derval Howley, Head of Service, Health & Wellbeing, South East Community Healthcare  
Members of the HSE South Forum Office staff

Cllr Burgess Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

At the outset the Chairperson proposed a vote of sympathy to Regional Health Forum Member Councillor James Tobin on his recent bereavements; his wife Anne who sadly passed away on the 21<sup>st</sup> December and his sister Nora Ahearn.

A vote of sympathy was also proposed for Cllr. Sean O'Donovan on the loss of his Father.

Members also passed a vote of sympathy to the Dr. Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer and his children and family following the sad loss of his wife Dr. Emer Feely. Members acknowledged the significant contribution Dr Feely (RIP) had made to Public Health in Ireland. Members also paid tribute to Dr Tony Holohan for his ongoing work throughout the pandemic at such a difficult time.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

Cllr. Burgess Chairperson welcomed Cllr Garry Laffan as a new member to the Regional Health Forum. Cllr Laffan is replacing Cllr Willie Kavanagh (Wexford) who has stood down from the Forum. The Chairperson acknowledged Cllr Kavanagh's inputs to both the RHF South and South East Committee and wished him well.

### **1. Adoption of the Minutes of the previous Meeting held on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

On the proposal of Cllr Mike Kennelly, seconded by Cllr Pat Barden, the Minutes of the Forum meeting held on Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 were approved and adopted by the members.

Directors of Public Health updates

### **2. The next Committee meetings will be held on:**

- (a)** South East Committee Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021
- (b)** South West Committee Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021

### **3. Director of Public Health Updates**

In the South East, cases have reduced from up to 5,000 per week in early January to 377 over the last 7 days (to 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021) which is broken down as follows: Carlow 43, Kilkenny 45, South Tipperary 90, Waterford 139, Wexford 60. The situation as it currently presents is on a par with figures from October 2020.

Sadly, the Department of Public Health South East has been notified of 362 Covid related deaths across the South East from the beginning of the pandemic to the present time. Of these deaths 130 were linked to residential care facilities and all nursing homes. Dr. Mullaney outlined to members that half of these deaths took place during the first 6 weeks of 2021 thus highlighting the severity of this 'third wave'.

There are still outbreaks being reported in both public and private residential care facilities although thankfully not to the same extent and the benefits of the vaccination programme for residents and staff is apparent.

Outbreaks have occurred in all settings ranging from acute hospitals, nursing homes, meat plants, schools, workplaces of all kinds - public sector, private sector. Common factors associated with workplace outbreaks are lack of compliance with basic measures such as social distancing and wearing of face-coverings and people coming to work with symptoms of Covid.

Dr. Mullaney updated Members on the Covid mutations and that are now of concern including variants originally identified in Brazil and South Africa. To date no Variant of Concern (VOC) cases have been notified in the South East.

Dr. Anne Sheahan provided an update to Members on Cork and Kerry. The first case of Covid-19 was notified to the Department of Public Health on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 with a total of 25,268 cases notified between then and 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021. Since the onset of the pandemic there have been three distinct waves (April/October/December-January). As with the South East, there has been a substantial drop in the number of Covid-19 cases notified from 6,849 on week beginning 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 to 223 on week ending 20<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

There has been a significant reduction in the 14-day incidence rate across all age-groups in Kerry which is the lowest rate in the country and Cork the second lowest.

Community transmission accounts for a significant number of Covid-19 cases. It is critical to get the rate of community transmission down as this is a key to reducing overall numbers. One area of concern with high incidence rates is in the 19 -24 year old age group who are socialising and it is anticipated that there may be further cases as schools and colleges open up.

Questions and Answers:

Following their presentations, the Members asked a number of questions which were responded to by Directors of Public Health.

- Impact of Covid on Health Services
- Data availability for Members
- Procurement of Vaccination Centres
- Capacity of Public Health in terms of resources and future proofing for a potential 4<sup>th</sup> wave/future pandemics.

#### **4. Covid Vaccination Leads Updates**

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines is underway and the HSE is offering the vaccine in accordance with the allocation strategy and provisional prioritisation list set out by the government (this is subject to revision). The first groups to be offered the vaccine are the groups most at risk of COVID-19 i.e. people aged 65 years and older who live in long-term care facilities, frontline healthcare workers.

Dr. Derval Howley Head of Health & Wellbeing/Covid Lead South East Community Healthcare provided an update on the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme in long term Residential Care Facilities (including Nursing Homes, Community Hospitals, over 65 years in mental health and disability facilities, social inclusion settings and congregated settings) across the South West and South East. To date a total of 41, 486 vaccinations have been administered in 283 facilities comprising 16,131 residents and 25,355 staff.

Dr. Howley acknowledged the support provided by Acute Hospitals with the vaccination roll-out in nursing homes. In some instances there were significant Covid-19 outbreaks within the long term care facilities so it was not possible to adhere to all of the initially

scheduled dates for Dose 1. Where residents and/or staff were unable to receive their first or second dose due to their COVID19 status, additional arrangements were put in place to rearrange first and second doses to these individuals.

As with all aspects of the vaccination programme, progress must be considered in line with the arrival of vaccine stocks into the country.

Ms Bridie O'Sullivan Chief Director of Nursing and Midwifery for the South/South West Hospitals Group (S/SWHG) / Covid-19 Lead provided an update in relation to the vaccination of healthcare workers. Cork University Hospital was initially selected as the first of 4 Hospitals in S/SWHG to roll-out this workstream to healthcare workers. To date 14 sites have been stood as part of this process with a total of 71, 404 vaccinations administered (i.e. Dose 1 plus Dose 2). The vaccination of staff will be in accordance with the specific national guidance issued in relation to the sequencing of vaccinations of frontline healthcare workers. Ms O'Sullivan advised Members that with regard to this particular work stream, 5 sites will remain active and for S/SWHG including South Infirmary (central hub), Mallow HC, Tralee Institute Technology, South Tipperary General Hospital and University Hospital Waterford and Ireland East Hospital Group, Wexford General Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny. This has been a very successful programme and the response from staff has been tremendous. We are only hindered by the amount of vaccine supplies available which is a national and international issue. Waterford.

Ms Priscilla Lynch, Head of Health & Wellbeing Services Covid-19 Lead Cork Kerry Healthcare provided an update on the GP Vaccination Rollout and also the roll-out of public vaccination centres.

Ms Lynch also advised Members of the ongoing work with General Practitioners and their Teams to deliver Covid-19 vaccines to those patients aged over 70 years. The core principle of this programme is to ensure that the oldest and most vulnerable are vaccinated first in line with the age cohorts as set out by NIAC (on a sequential basis commencing with the over 85 years cohort) in line with available vaccine.

While vaccines are now being administered in healthcare settings by GPs and Practice Nurses, it is expected that members of the public will be also be offered vaccinations in the new public vaccination centres. This work stream is a joint venture between acute hospital and community services. The centres vary in size and operating hours and were selected based on population density, ease of access, transport, and parking availability. It is planned that there will be 7 vaccination centres in the South West and 5 in the South East. Unfortunately at this time it is not possible to operate vaccination centres in every town. It is intended that each centre will offer a number of booths whereby individuals with appointments only can be vaccinated at the same time. There are ongoing final preparations in terms of staffing and equipping these locations. When these centres are operational, it is anticipated that people should be able to electronically book their appointment. The IT system will be critical for this. It is envisaged that there will be community supports for people who may not have access to IT or indeed be able to use IT. There are no definite service commencement dates as yet - this is very much dependent on vaccine supplies. It is also critical that in addition to the vaccination programme that people also adhere to public health guidance. The HSE is engaging with community partners in relation to arrangements for transport for those with mobility problems.

The HSE is also currently working on plans for the vaccination of bedbound elderly people at home - this will involve close working with GPs and Public Health Nursing in order to identify this cohort.

It is intended that these vaccination work streams will run concurrently subject to vaccine supply. It should be highlighted that this is the first time in our history that a national vaccination programme has been stood up for the country - it is acknowledged that there will be learnings which we will apply as we progress with the vaccination roll-out.

#### Questions and Answers:

Following their presentations, the Members asked a number of questions which were responded to by the Covid Leads and HSE Management.

- Acknowledgement of work to date on staff vaccination programme in UHK
- Queries re Public Vaccinations Centres
  - Locations of Vaccination Centres and requests for additional locations
  - Hours of Operation of vaccination centres
  - Numbers of Booths and operational throughput.
  - Supports to people who may not be familiar with booking their appointments online.
  - Staffing of Vaccination Centres - retired nurses and registration fees
- Vaccines for Other Healthcare Workers e.g. Physiotherapists, Pharmacists
- Vaccination for those living in Direct Provision accommodation
- Queries re GP Vaccination Programme
  - Process and arrangements for Vaccine Supplies/Delivery to GPs for those aged over 70 years cohort commencing with 85 years plus cohort.
  - Concerns regarding variances in deliveries throughout the Region.
- Arrangements for vaccination of elderly bedbound cohort at home.
- Arrangements for vaccination of those who work closely with children with special needs who have been significantly negatively impacted by the pandemic. These key workers include Bus Drivers, Special Needs Assistants and also close family members living with children with special needs. It was agreed that the RHF would written to the Minister for Health on this issue.
- Arrangements for vaccination of those living with Chronic Conditions
- Will there be a choice of vaccine offered?
- Arrangements for Older People scheduled for vaccination by their GP but who have been admitted to hospital in the meantime.
- Arrangements for vaccination of people transferring from acute hospitals to nursing homes.

7. Date and Time of next meeting - 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021, at 2pm.