



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Minutes of Special Meeting of the HSE Board Meeting

Ref: COVID-19

A meeting of the Board of the Health Service Executive was held on Monday 16 March 2020 at 6:00pm. The meeting was held via telecon.

Present: Ciarán Devane (Chairperson), Deirdre Madden (Deputy Chairperson), Aogan Ó Fearghaíl, Brendan Lenihan, Fergus Finlay, Fergus O' Kelly, Fiona Ross, Tim Hynes, Sarah McLoughlin.

Apologies: Yvonne Traynor.

In Attendance:

Paul Reid (CEO), Colm Henry (CCO) Anne Marie Hoey (ND HR), Geraldine Smith (ND Internal Audit), Sean Bresnan (ND Procurement) Dara Purcell (Secretary), John Kelly (Corporate Affairs).

Chair welcomed members to meeting which was called to review response to COVID-19. The meeting commenced with the CEO briefing the Board on the planned measures for the next immediate phase of scaling up of the HSE, Government and all other stakeholders' response to COVID-19 during the "Delay" phase, noting that the objective of this phase is to slow down the transmission of the virus while protecting vulnerable populations through preventative measures and clinical management options and attempting to reduce the burden on the health system.

The CEO confirmed that despite best efforts to reduce levels of transmission, figures will continue to rise and the public's participation in mitigating the spread of the virus by adhering to public health advice is and will remain critical at this time. It was emphasised that the HSE will be continuing to focus on containment while in delay phase and that COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge to the health system and to society in general. The Board discussed with the CEO the enormous strain on the existing healthcare system and the CEO provided an update with regards to government response which is being co-ordinated at Departmental and Cabinet level to support the health services in protecting citizens.

With regards to funding the CEO confirmed that €435m previously approved by Cabinet for the HSE to implement this initial response, which is in addition to the previously approved €21m that was focused on ICU / Acute capacity, is currently being implemented. Written sanction for the amount of €456m will be provided by the Department of Health and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform at the earliest opportunity albeit actions are proceeding.

The Board discussed in depth with the CEO and the EMT proposals with regards to delaying the transmission in the community and flattening the curve including investment in all available capacity in both acute and community settings so that the model of care for patients can focus on community provision to the greatest extent possible. It was agreed that this presents the greatest opportunity to scale up the response within the available timeframes.

The CEO confirmed that the high-level Government Action Plan has been developed which includes the health services submission for the Delay phase and the Board were provided with a summary of the funding required by the HSE which would be in addition to the already approved funding. It was acknowledged that this additional funding would be required to scale up and enhance the contract tracing teams for the delay phase and to expand both the acute/critical care and community care capacity to facilitate the discharge of patients to appropriate facilities or home with homecare support.

Funding is envisaged for the opening of additional step-down care beds to allow for flow of patients through the acute system, and to continue to utilise public sector broadcasting and buy media to develop a suite of content suitable for various audiences and people with different needs. The Board discussed and highlighted that the focus of communications must be on making sure everyone knows that www.hse.ie contains all relevant, up to date information, support, help and that it should also include information for GPs and enable systems for phone triage, telemedicine and reducing unnecessary healthcare visits.

An update was given with regards to the HSELive call centres which have been handling exponentially increasing levels of phone calls from the public. This medium is being used to triage and direct patients in co-ordination with Public Health. It was welcomed that capacity is being added through the redeployment of existing HSE Staff from other departments, staff from Local Government and outsource provision to support this.

As the scale, speed and severity of the COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in rapid consumption of available stocks and supplies of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), the CEO reported to the Board on HSE efforts to secure significant additional supplies of essential PPE. Two briefing papers were circulated at the start of the meeting setting out the circumstances to this issue. It was noted that this was an emergency measure which developed rapidly over the weekend as traditional supply routes were non-existent and traditional sourcing mechanisms did not meet existing demand. Discussions had been ongoing over the weekend resulting in a conference call at 06:00 on 14 March 2020 between the HSE and China Resources Pharmaceuticals. This call was facilitated by IDA and the HSE proposed a total order to the value of €208m and this was agreed with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER).

In line with the mandate provided by the Board to the CEO at the special Board meeting on 9 March 2020, an amendment to the CEO delegated functions by the Board was approved to allow this order to be placed. The amendment provided the CEO with authority for the duration of the emergency situation to approve any expenditure associated with COVID-19 pandemic once approved by DPER and DOH. It was deemed prudent to also include in the amended delegation the ability for the CEO to accept any offers (which may be termed as gifts) from the private sector that may assist in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CEO amended delegation

Recognising the unique and rapidly changing environment pertaining, and to ensure the effective operation of the multi-agency approach, the Board provided an amended delegation to the CEO to make the necessary decisions as required within the All-of-Government approach and multi-agency approach. This amendment provided the CEO with authority to approve any expenditure associated with COVID-19 pandemic once approved by DPER and DOH. (The CEO normal approval limit is to execute contracts up to the value of €10m, or in the case of transactions concerning land or property, up to a value of €2m. Formal Board approval is normally required beyond this threshold). It was deemed prudent to also include in the amended delegation the ability for the CEO to accept any offers (which may be termed as gifts) from the private sector that may assist in the management of this pandemic. ***(Decision No. 160320/16)***

Following the briefing from the CEO and EMT the Board held a member only meeting to consider and review the overall governance arrangements in place for the management of COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting concluded at 20.15pm

Signed: 
Ciarán Devane
Chairperson

Date: 27/03/2020