



Opening Statement by Mr Michael Scanlan, Secretary General of the Department of Health at the meeting of the Dáil Committee of Public Accounts on 15 December 2011

Chapter 37 of the Comptroller's 2009 Annual Report dealt with the SKILL Programme.

At meetings of the Committee of the 30th Dáil on 7 October and 16 December 2010, Mr Magee and I briefed the Committee, based on the information available to us at that time, on various aspects of this Programme.

In February this year, a value for money review of the SKILL Programme, which was undertaken for the HSE by Ernst & Young, was finalised.

In March, SIPTU published a report of its inquiry into the establishment and operation of the SIPTU National Health and Local Authority Levy Fund bank account.

The final report of the Committee of the 30th Dáil, published in July, dealt with the SKILL Programme and the Health Service National Partnership Forum. I understand that, in accordance with normal practice, the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform will issue a response to the recommendations in that report.

As requested, the Department and the HSE have recently furnished this Committee with a joint analysis of the various issues involved. This joint report covers the background to, and our involvement in, the funding of the SKILL and Partnership Programmes, the question of foreign travel by our respective officials, the Ernst & Young value for money report and the SIPTU report.

Drawing on information from various sources including the HSE internal audits on SKILL and Partnership, data available in the Department of Health, records available from the Office for Health Management and the SIPTU report, we have tried to determine, as conclusively as possible, what public monies were paid into the SIPTU National Health and Local Authority Levy Fund bank account.

Chapter 41 of the Comptroller's 2010 Annual Report deals with partnership arrangements in the health service.

Partnership was Government policy and the national agreements on social partnership referred to in the chapter applied across the public service, with appropriate partnership structures and funding being put in place in the different parts of the public service.

As the Comptroller's report indicates, partnership was seen as an enabler of change and modernisation through the development of a shared vision for the service by management and staff.

The Health Services National Partnership Forum (HSNPF) was established as a joint management/trade union consultative group for workplace partnership in the health

service. The Forum was established in 1999 on foot of the provisions of Partnership 2000, the national agreement on social partnership in place at the time.

I understand that the Forum typically supported 500-600 local partnership projects a year, which involved management and unions, staff and service users across the health services.

The Forum and its facilitators were instrumental in developing the health sector's Action Plan for People Management (APPM). The 2001 Health Strategy had contained an explicit commitment to produce this plan, which when completed identified key areas to be addressed, including effective people management, improving the quality of working life, developing and implementing best practice employment policies, investing in training and education, and further developing the partnership approach.

I note the Comptroller's conclusions and recommendations about the manner in which certain APPM funding was paid by the Forum into the SIPTU National Health and Local Authority Levy Fund bank account.

The Department was represented on the APPM National Implementation Monitoring Committee when the first application for funding was approved in 2004. It ceased to be represented on the committee when the HSE was established in 2005. The Department continued to be represented on National Partnership Forum after the establishment of the HSE but its representatives were not aware of the change in procedures referred to by the Comptroller in his report.

Thank you for your attention and I will do my best to answer any of the Committee's questions.