

Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health, Friday 29 January 2021

Opening Statement

Professor Brian MacCraith, Chair, High Level Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccination

The High-Level Task Force (HLTF) was established by Government on 10 November 2020 to act as a forum for coordination, and oversight, of the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Ireland.

The overall objective of the HLTF is:

'To support the Department of Health and HSE in developing a strategy and implementation plan, and to monitor the roll-out of, and provide strategic inputs to, an efficient and agile national COVID-19 immunisation programme that plays a central role in Ireland's exit from the pandemic.'

The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Strategy and Implementation Plan were launched and published on 15 December 2020.

The programme has now moved into a live HSE operation with the commencement of roll-out.

The ongoing role of the HLTF is to support the HSE/DOH in planning amid uncertainty, and in developing and testing scenarios that enable the vaccination programme to be adapted to a very fluid external environment (e.g. vaccine supply).

The HLTF has no executive authority or responsibility for the roll out. The Minister and Department of Health is responsible for policy matters. The operational delivery of the programme is the responsibility of the HSE, under its Chief Clinical Officer, Dr Colm Henry. The HLTF facilitates coordination of the work of important national bodies, as well as the addition of specialist input, and currently meets weekly.

The weekly HLTF meetings (which draw together expertise and inputs from DOH, HSE, DOT, CMO, NIAC, HPRA, ICGP, and others) create a valuable forum for addressing all elements of the programme and ensuring full awareness of key risks and issues which can then be addressed by the appropriate department or agency.

The HLTF is supported by a programme management office (PMO) led by a programme director, Mr Derek Tierney. A key piece of work developed through the PMO is the Programme Planning Roadmap (PPR), an integrated design tool which supports adaptive planning of the programme (e.g. planning for scenarios such as for reductions in early deliveries of AstraZeneca vaccines).

Since the commencement of the vaccination programme, significant progress has been made. Up to Wednesday 27 January, the HSE has administered a total of 161,500 Covid-19 vaccines. This represents 71,600 in long-term care facilities (LTCFs) and 89,900 front-line health care workers. This also means that approximately 3% of our population has received

a first vaccination. Last week, the HSE started administering the recommended second dose vaccinations to those whom we vaccinated from 29 December onwards.

A key operating principle of the programme is that the administration of vaccines will be limited only by supply, and you will be aware that there have been some challenges in this regard. Supply uncertainty is one of the biggest challenges to the programme. However, supplies continue to arrive, and we anticipate continuing to scale up the vaccination programme over the coming weeks and months.

The programme is now firmly in operational mode, and a number of the programme's workstream leads are represented here today. The HLTF continues to meet on a weekly basis in its role as support to the DOH and the HSE, to monitor the progress of the programme and to ensure a coordinated response to any issues that arise.

I will hand you over now to my colleagues to discuss the details of the programme.