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11/09/2023

Ms. Caoímhe O'Rourke
Clerk to the Committee
Joint Committee on Social Protection,
Community and Rural Development and the Islands
Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Dublin 2
D02 XR20

Re: All-Ireland Islands HSE Primary Healthcare Programme

Dear Ms. O'Rourke

I refer to your recent correspondence from the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands members requesting a briefing note on the All-Ireland Islands HSE Primary Healthcare Programme in particular, the impacts of the volunteer programmes on the West Cork Islands (mainly Sherkin) and any new initiatives of the programme.

Please find below for the attention of the members a briefing note on the matter as requested.

If any further information is required, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ray Mitchell".

Ray Mitchell
Assistant National Director
Parliamentary Affairs Division

Briefing Note for the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands

The Island Services Primary Care Review (2017), was commissioned by the Primary Care Division of the HSE with a view to developing a sustainable, cost effective, quality and fair primary care service that meets the everyday needs of the Irish Island populations.

An interdepartmental steering group was convened which included representation from the HSE, Department of Health, Comhdháil Oileán na hÉireann, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, health care professionals living on the islands and other key personnel.

The vision for the Islands is to build an efficient and sustainable, high quality and fair primary care service that facilitates collaboration between the island populations, healthcare professionals, the primary care teams and the secondary care teams (developed pre the Community Healthcare Network being established).

Within this review, there are 16 main work streams/themes with an average of 8 sub objectives in each work stream/theme. At a national level, there is a National Islands Services Forum, with a Community Health Organisation Island Service Project Board and a Lead Island Services Project. There is a lead Project Manager overall.

In West Cork, the HSE convened the CHO 4 project forum in September 2021, known as the West Cork Islands Health Forum (WCIHF). The forum established its terms of reference and the HSE has worked with the island representatives and islanders on what were the top priorities out of the 16 work streams/themes for the West Cork Islands. From this, it was established which work streams/themes and objectives had a national focus and what work streams/themes required focus on a local level. For example, under workforce planning, Nursing requires focus on a national level.

West Cork Islands Health Forum are also part of the Islands Digital Health subgroup at a national level and participated in a review of IT equipment required for health workers working on the islands.

WCIHF agreed to concentrate on the following six work streams:

1. **Workforce Planning** - Nursing: supporting current Island nursing levels and supporting the Director of Public Health Nursing at national level.
2. **Community Resilience** - supporting and developing the community first responder training and the emergency management training. A sub group was established to support this inclusive of Community Work, National Ambulance Service, Coast Guard, RNLI, CHO 4 Emergency management, and Island Representation.
3. **HSE property evaluation** - CHO 4 has a health centre on Cape Clear and rents a health centre on Bere Island. The HSE has access to a health room on Sherkin and Whiddy Islands.

4. **Digital Health and E-Health** – a new sub group has been convened to develop a plan and recommendations during 2024, this is also linked in at a national level.
5. **Health and Wellbeing** supports to the Islands.
6. **Mental Health** – continue to support Safe Talk and Assist programmes.

In addition, as configuration within the health service had changed since 2017, the HSE has worked with the Island communities and presented information on the Community Healthcare Networks and Enhanced Community Care. The Islands are part of Community Network 10 (West Cork) and the manager of the Network 10 is part of the forum.

Summary of Work to Date

- **Islands project group established including:** Community Healthcare Network, Public Health Nursing, Chronic Disease Management, Community Work, Health and Wellbeing, National Ambulance Service, Island Representation and Project Management support (plus sub working groups).
- **Nursing:** Electrocardiogram (ECG) on islands for public health nurses. Mobile phones have been ordered for better connectivity and a review of the nursing job description is underway, as part of the national workforce planning. **Below is a summary of nursing services provided to the Islands in Cork:**

<u>Island</u>	<u>Public Health Nursing</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Additional Information</u>
Bere	Monday-Friday (resident)	216	
Cape Clear	24/7 (resident)	124	New Syrian family since June 2023 – 4 people
Sherkin	Mainland and visits once a month	114	New Ukraine arrivals since August 2022- 98 new people
Whiddy	Mainland	20	
Heir	Mainland	29	
Long	Mainland	10	
Dursey	Mainland	3	

- **GP access:** Approx. 25% of Island population across the islands are GMS patients. 6 GPs, across 3 practices in Skibbereen and Castletownbere, provide the GMS services. There is a separate national group looking at GP access across all the Islands.
- **Community Resilience:** 10 volunteers across the Islands are trained as Emergency First Responders.

- Defibrillators (AEDS) have been provided for all the respective Islands and training has been supported by Cork Kerry Community Healthcare and the National Ambulance Service.
- An Emergency Guide has been provided for all the Islands.
- **Emergency Care:** demonstration on emergency scenarios on Islands has been provided – supported by Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, National Ambulance Service, Coast Guard, RNLI, Fire Service, Gardaí, and local community on Islands
- A planning emergency evacuations audit and policy update will be undertaken in Quarter 4 2023.
- **E- Health/Digital Health:** island connectivity and available IT equipment is being reviewed by HSE ICT personnel with plans to enhance further in Quarter 4 2023 based on the review outcome.
- As part of this review a visit was arrange to Clare Island, Co. Mayo, to learn from the Home Health Project there which manages digital health/e – health.
- **Community Healthcare Network:** The Community Healthcare Network Manager participates on the Island Project Group.
- **Mental Health:** Safetalk and Assist training has been provided to Islanders.
- **Estates:** An assessment of HSE property with Cork Kerry Community Healthcare Estates has been undertaken to ensure that they are fit to deliver the desired level of service to the population.
- **Community Work:** Section 39 funding support has been made available to Sherkin Island, Cape Clear and Bere Island has been provided with financial support for community development and Older Person supports and Meals on Wheels.
- **Sherkin Island:** Support for health in-reach to the Ukraine community living on Sherkin has been made available, including Public Health Nursing services. Access to GP services on the mainland has been provided as well as community development support locally. Sherkin Island Development supported intercultural events between the Active Retirement Group and the Ukraine community (intergenerational and cultural).
- Supporting Health and Wellbeing Programmes on the Islands via online services for the autumn/winter 2023.
- Online annual update and progress report to all the Islands is accessible to all islanders, with opportunity for discussion and consultation.
- **Health Programmes:** 8 Islands participated in the Health and Well-Being & the Sailing into Wellness Programmes in summer 2023
- Bere Island has been supported for its Slí na Sláinte and Park Run initiatives.
- The Active Retirement Groups on Sherkin and Bere Island have both been supported through Community Work.
- Linkages have been made with HSE colleagues in Community Health Organisations 1 and 2 who also support and provide services to island communities .

Next Steps

The HSE will:

- Continue to meet as a forum, both remotely and on the Islands.
- Support and work on the emergency evacuation exercise.
- Continue to link in at national level with the Project Management Lead and with CHO 1 and CHO 2.
- Support the national sub groups on nursing and digital health/e –health.
- Explore local options on digital health/e- health and develop a working plan on same.
- Continue to support options for the islanders to access health and wellbeing courses.
- Continue to review and evaluate the West Cork Island Health Forum.
- Take into account the recently published *Our Living Islands Action Plan 2023-2026* which is part of the whole of government policy on the Islands.
- Host our annual islanders update (November 2023 – online).
- Review the workstreams/themes and agree our next set of actions at local level for 2024.
- Continue to seek funding to support recommendations outlined in the 2017 report and to develop a Community HealthWorker post for the Islands.

**Health Service Executive
September 2023**