



19 April 2020

Our Ref: PR/JK/AM
CEO Ref: 0170

Mr Jim Breslin
Secretary General
Department of Health
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BY EMAIL: secgen@health.gov.ie

Dear Jim,

Following our phone discussions on the evening of Friday, 17th April, I wanted to set out my concerns in relation to the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) directions from the above date as they relate to the HSE and the communications of same.

I am accustomed at this stage to receiving regular correspondence from NPHET through the Chairperson, Dr Tony Holohan. Generally speaking, I have a good sense of the general direction of travel in advance of formally receiving the NPHET actions which are then progressed and monitored closely through the HSE's National Crisis Management Team (NCMT) which I chair.

Regrettably, I was taken very much by surprise by Dr Holohan's letter of 17 April 2020 (received at 20:50) and also by the NPHET press conference which preceded the letter arriving. The directions as set out in the above letter and press conference are at odds with the process that we have been jointly engaged in at both the Government Cabinet Committee and in subsequent meetings with Secretary General Fraser. They are also at odds with the process in place with the HSE Board.

At the Cabinet Committee on Tuesday 14th April, I presented a paper which set out the current capacity with regard to testing and tracing. Following this, a meeting was called by Secretary General Fraser for the afternoon of Friday 17th April, at which Dr Holohan and both you and I attended. An action from this meeting was that "Department of Health to confirm position re (i) testing and contact tracing capacity and (ii) health service capacity on Friday 24th April". There was no mention at this meeting of the directions that were to issue from the NPHET that evening.

A Cabinet Committee meeting is also scheduled for Monday 20th April at which we are to provide a further update on testing and tracing capacity. Separate to this, and at the request of Dr Holohan, we had committed to developing a paper for consideration and approval at the NPHET meeting on the 21st April 2020. That in itself is no small undertaking, and we have been working intensively to ensure that the Department receives a response that is both thorough and capable of rapid implementation. I had updated the Chairman and the Board of the HSE in this regard on Wednesday 15th April and I am to present on the same topic to the HSE Board on Friday 24th April.

Given that all of this was agreed, I am extremely disappointed that these understandings appear not to have been respected. I'm at a loss as to why this direction from the NPHE'T to the HSE was given and publicly communicated without completing the jointly agreed processes and without regard to appropriate governance. The directions set out effectively attempted to commit the HSE to an intensity of implementation which bears absolutely no resemblance to that which we previously discussed and has taken no account of what can be achieved by when.

Separately, I set out in the attached note some more detail concerning the challenges that we have been working through and continue to face in relation to further increasing capacity on testing and tracing.

All in all, I think this points to the need for far greater cooperation and collaboration on decisions from the NPHE'T in order to work to the best of our collective abilities to protect the health of the population, our staff and especially those who are most vulnerable.

My Chair, Ciarán Devane will separately be writing to the Minister to express his and the Board's disquiet and to request changes to the nature of the relationship between the NPHE'T and its stakeholders, including the HSE.

I would like to discuss the matters raised in this letter as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Reid
Chief Executive Officer