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23rd March 2022

Mr. Paul Kehoe TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 13171/22
To ask the Minister for Health his plans to clear the waiting list for access to speech and language and occupational therapy for children in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 13161/22
To ask the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists that are currently actively working in County Wexford providing services to children; his plans to increase this number; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 13163/22
To ask the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists that are currently actively working in County Wexford providing services to children; his plans to increase this number; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Kehoe,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which were submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

I have reviewed the matter and the following composite reply outlines the current position.

We are assuming that the Deputy is referring to speech and language and occupational therapy for children within the remit of Disability Services.

There are 4 Children's Disability Network Teams established (since 27th September 2021) across County Wexford currently. In total 8 WTE Occupational Therapy posts have been allocated to the CDNTs of which 3 WTE Occupational Therapists are in post. A recruitment campaign for South East Community Healthcare (CHO 5) is due to be advertised on the HSE website imminently with a closing date by the end of March 2022.

There are 12.78 WTE Speech and Language Therapist posts allocated to the Children's Disability Network Teams across Co. Wexford. There are 9.88 WTEs currently employed. Recruitment is currently ongoing to fill the vacant posts.

As with other areas all services within CHO South East Community Healthcare (SECH) are experiencing significant recruitment challenges due to shortages of Health & Social Care Professionals (including Speech & Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists) across the country. The HSE/SECH are reviewing all options to address the current vacancies as quickly as possible. Vacant posts have been advertised and in some cases re-advertised unsuccessfully. In addition the HSE continues to express posts out to the national panels.

There are a number of children who were on the Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) and Occupational Therapy (OT) waiting lists prior to service reconfiguration (Progressing Disability Services) but will now transfer to the Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) waiting lists. The transfer of these lists is currently ongoing and therefore it is not possible to confirm waiting list numbers at this time.

The current focus of the CDNT is establishing the new model of service delivery based on Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP), this is alongside meeting high priority urgent needs of children. Each child and families goals are identified at the IFSP which may indicate a need for a specific intervention from OT or SLT. It should be noted that there are a number of vacant posts across the CDNTs, which is impacting on the activity.

The HSE regrets the difficulties in accessing services and is seeking to reduce the waiting times and address issues arising for all children and their families through a number of measures including:
- The HSE continues to fill approved posts in line with the HSE Recruitment and National Pay Bill Management Framework
- Waiting list validation is in operation with a particular focus on those who are waiting longest.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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Anne Ennis
Head of Service
South East Community Healthcare