

North Western Health Board

Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General for presentation to the Houses of the Oireachtas

This report has been prepared pursuant to Section 6 (4) of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993

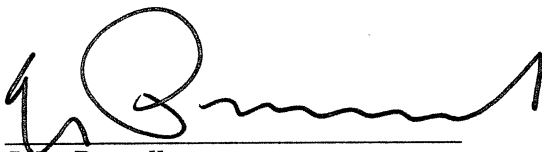
In July 2004, my Office issued a management letter to the then Chief Executive Officer of the North Western Health Board drawing attention to certain matters which had come to attention in the course of the audit of the 2002 financial statements, including the fact that the Board had not carried out a recent specific review of the security arrangements pertaining to its ICT systems. My Office recommended that the Board should carry out regular reviews of the operational controls and security of ICT systems to the appropriate recognised standards.

The Board responded in November 2004 and, on the issue of ICT security, advised my Office that, while it did not have a process to formalise the review of the ICT systems and security, it did have in place a range of measures in the area of ICT security that complied with best practice standards in this field. These included, among other measures, security controls governing authorised access to applications and systems and monitoring and auditing processes to trace systems access and activity. The Board advised also that the ICT security infrastructure was subject to ongoing review by IT professionals within the Board's Information Systems department.

In January 2005, a member of the public made contact with the Gardaí about the validity of a Health Board payment. Following receipt of the details of the payment, the HSE North West carried out a full-scale investigation which identified 41 suspicious payments to a total value of €137,563. The investigation concluded that the payments in question were facilitated by unauthorised access to and undetected activity within the North Western Health Board's financial information systems by a member of staff. The investigation showed that the breach in security occurred over a short period of time in 2004 but was due, in the main, to a failure by the Board to identify and address certain long-term shortcomings in ICT security controls.

The HSE has informed me that the matter is under criminal investigation. I have also been informed that the HSE North West has taken action to

- review and strengthen access controls and user authorisation limits and protocols on its ICT system
- develop control reporting and monthly review processes to track key user changes and activity on the system and to identify exceptions within high-risk areas
- introduce payment protocols and controls to ensure, among other things, the segregation of staff functions on the system between processing and authorising payments and to ensure the reporting and authorisation of exceptional items.



John Purcell
Comptroller and Auditor General

28 October 2005