



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
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13th December 2019

Deputy Brendan Smith
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: brendan.smith@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Smith

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ 50160/19

To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the widespread concerns in relation to the proposal by an association (details supplied) to close a centre; if his attention has been further drawn to the views expressed at a recent meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health regarding the need to retain the centre in view of the important services provided to many persons with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Details supplied; Irish Wheelchair Association. Cuisle

HSE Response

The HSE funds IWA as an independent legal entity, pursuant to Section 39 of the Health Act, in order to provide a range of supports and services to people with a disability. One element of the service quantum provided by IWA includes the provision of respite holiday breaks via its commercial operation known as the Cuisle Accessible Holiday Resort, Donamon, Co. Roscommon. This commercially operated centre comprises a 34 bedroom, three story facility leased from the Divine Word Missionary Religious Order. The lease term operates up to 2026. HSE's Community Healthcare Organisations have utilised the services of Cuisle on the basis of purchasing respite breaks for people with a disability. In 2018, CHOs funded a total of 1,771 bed-nights comprising 465 adults and 14 children. In 2018 HSE Community Healthcare West provided €624,746 in funding to the IWA for the Cuisle Accessible Holiday Resort in Donamon and a further €625,631 in funding in 2019.

The HSE appreciates plans on the part of the IWA to improve standards and create choice in terms of access to 'away holiday breaks' or 'respite options' to enable people with physical disabilities to take a holiday with the specialist support of Irish Wheelchair Association's staff. There has been a shift in best practice approaches, moving away from congregated, health service settings to integrated holiday services that provide people with greater options, alongside the supports they need to maintain independence. This shift is reflected in current HSE policy under 'Time to Move on from Congregated Settings: A Strategy for Community Inclusion' and Sláintecare, and it aims to facilitate people with disabilities to live ordinary lives in ordinary places. In line with this HSE policy, the IWA has decided to transition its holiday service in the West of Ireland to provide accessible hotel holidays into the future, and to move away from its holiday facility at Cuisle in County Roscommon as part of its reform programme.

The organisation is planning to provide a wider range of choice to people with disabilities seeking to take a supported respite holiday in the West of Ireland by partnering with accessible hotels. It is planned that this new and innovative service will commence in March 2020 in conjunction with the HSE. The move to the new holiday service means that the Cuisle buildings will not open in 2020.

The IWA does not own the existing facility at Cuisle and the lease arrangement in place will expire in 2026. Additionally, it is the case that the existing Cuisle facility requires very significant capital investment in order to undertake major upgrade works. From a value for money perspective, this does not ultimately make sense given the facility is no longer fit for purpose and ultimately does not reflect the choice and preference of people with disabilities who want to have access to holiday respite via standard hotel settings with the necessary support nor does it reflect current HSE policy. Also, it should be noted that the current HSE Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 does not include the refurbishment and upgrading of the site at Cuisle.

From a HSE perspective, it is of critical importance that supports are provided to a high standard and are accessible in terms of meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

The HSE has been provided with an assurance of service continuity provided by IWA as part of its planned and funded provision.


The HSE also makes the following salient points:

1. The HSE has engaged with IWA in the context of Cuisle and the major capital works it has advised are necessary in order to render this commercially run centre safe and operable. In that context, it is critical to note that the IWA does not own the existing facility and the lease arrangement in place will expire in 2026. Additionally, it is the case that the existing Cuisle facility requires very significant new capital investment in order to undertake major upgrade works, estimated to be in the order of €1.5m and has also been advised that the costs could rise to €2m. HSE further understands that that this is a minimum estimate of costs associated with upgrades and which does not include potential for further works that may arise owing to the current building condition, including concerns regarding the presence of asbestos. A key point here remains to be important to note; that is, it is not until a procurement process has been entered into and an agreed contract for works is
 - a) in place and
 - b) is very carefully managed from a cost/ building works control perspective.
2. IWA have indicated that this level of capital funding is not available within their current resources. Equally, the HSE have confirmed to IWA that this level of capital investment is not available to HSE in the context of priorities set against our capital plan.
3. There are a number of concerns which the HSE must have regard to in relation to this commercial operation which are noted as follows in terms of considerations regarding any possible future investment;
 - a. There are alternative service options/ models from which to deliver this form of holiday respite breaks (i.e. from existing and accessible commercial hotel facilities);
 - b. There is no guarantee that IWAs, or indeed the states interest- should either party elect to invest in major upgrade works - would be protected having regard to the lease term (including the fact that the state would be investing in a facility under the private ownership arrangements of a Religious Order - i.e. the Divine Word Missionaries), and;
 - c. HSE has a Capital investment programme which is aimed at prioritising core health building projects, including disability related initiatives such as Time to Move on from Congregate Settings (i.e. a programme aimed at assisting people with disabilities moving out from congregate / institutional settings). Additionally, the actual costs associated with upgrade works associated with the facility may in fact escalate.
4. Notwithstanding that the IWA is an independent legal entity entitled to reach its own decisions, the HSE will continue to maintain its liaison with IWA Senior Management over the coming weeks and as matters progress.

The HSE confirms that the existing funding envelope aligned to the Cuisle Accessible Holiday Resort will continue to be made available in order to ensure continuance of invaluable form of respite support and for the purpose of ensuring continuity of the existing quantum of support is maintained in 2020.

Irish Wheelchair Association acknowledges the loss of employment associated with the closure of the Cuisle building. Where possible IWA will offer redeployment opportunities and are working with staff and their representatives to ensure minimum impact. IWA thanks the staff for their commitment and dedication to the Cuisle-based service and local community for their support over many years and looks forward to continuing a high quality national respite service on behalf of its members

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathal J. Morgan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**