



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Head of Service - Older People
South East Community Healthcare
Lacken, Dublin Road
Kilkenny
R95NV08

8th February 2021

Ms. Róisín Shorthall T.D.
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 4015/21

To ask the Minister for Health the steps that were taken to engage with local community groups in the decision to close St. Brigid's District Hospital, Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary; the reason for the decision taken; the use to which the hospital will now be put; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Shorthall,

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

I have reviewed that matter and the following composite response is the position:

St Brigid's Hospital is a short stay unit with 16 beds including 3 palliative, 2 respite and 11 convalescent beds. The HSE operated activity at the hospital and the design and layout of the hospital is largely reflective of a small hospital from the time period that it was built (1837). The older and main part of the hospital is comprised of three floors, with resident bedrooms on the ground and first floor.

As part of the South East response to the Covid-19 public health emergency, St. Brigid's was designated as a Covid-19 step down facility to support flow from the acute hospitals in the region. As the demand for Covid-19 step down beds was not required to the level as predicted during the initial Covid-19 pandemic, South East Community Healthcare (SECH) utilised the staffing resource from St. Brigid's to meet demands in community healthcare services. South East Community Healthcare appreciates the commitment of the excellent team of staff associated with St. Brigid's in taking up redeployment in Covid-19 related roles in community healthcare services.

As health services resume, prevailing public health guidance and social distancing requirements are having an impact on the manner in which we are delivering services, particularly in both short stay and residential services. There is an absolute requirement to ensure that strict infection, prevention and control measures are implemented across services and that services are delivered in appropriate physical environments that enable adequate isolation and social distancing measures at all times. As part of planning for services resumption, there was a need to assess all services and the physical environments that those services operate in, to determine what actions required, if any, to enable the safe resumption of services, in line with guidance.

Now more than ever, in this emerging Covid environment, we are required to implement and support infection, prevention and control measures in order to manage this highly infectious disease and maintain our services as safe places.

Substantial refurbishment is required in order to resume short stay services at St. Brigid's Hospital in line with safer, better, healthcare and infection, prevention and control standards. Unfortunately, the current premises are not conducive to support the level of refurbishment and adaptations required to resume short stay inpatient services at St. Brigid's Hospital.

It is important to note that people in the Carrick-on-Suir area who require convalescent, respite and/or palliative care services are being supported in alternative settings in the South Tipperary area including HSE St Theresa's Hospital Clogheen and HSE Cluain Arann in Tipperary town.

The HSE/SECH wrote to the Chairperson South Tipperary Hospice on 9th December 2020 to advise of these service changes. Following this there were meetings held on 14th and 24th December 2020 between HSE/SECH with South Tipperary Hospice in relation to issues raised. In terms of future developments, it is planned to develop a 50-bed replacement build of St Anthony's Unit in Clonmel with building expected to be completed in 2023. SECH are currently engaged in discussions with the South Tipperary Hospice Home Care Team relevant to incorporating the provision of palliative care beds into these future development plans. In the interim, it has been agreed in conjunction with South Tipperary Hospice that SECH will provide 2 additional palliative care beds in the existing St. Anthony's Unit in Clonmel. In addition, in conjunction with the Home Care Team, SECH will if required provide palliative care beds in private nursing homes in the Carrick on Suir area. This provision of palliative care beds in private nursing homes in the area will be offered to families, on a case by case base, where the particular family circumstances require such a response. It should also be noted that for a number of individuals and their families, the preference is to remain in their own home for the duration of their palliative care, and the HSE will continue to provide home based supports as appropriate. This is particularly relevant at this time with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In a Covid-19 environment, the HSE is striving to provide safe services to protect patients, services users and our staff delivering care.

From a staffing perspective, it is important to note that SECH is in the process of engagement with the St. Brigid's staff members with a view to ensuring that they are supported and accommodated during this time. SECH have met both collectively and individually with these staff and their Unions and discussions are ongoing. These are being held virtually at this time due to the current Level 5 restrictions. In addition I can confirm that the HSE/SECH is in regular communication with the Unions involved.

The HSE/SECH also engaged with Tipperary Oireachtas members with a written briefing and meetings (held virtually) in December 2020. In addition the HSE continues respond to individuals / groups who have been campaigning in respect of St. Brigid's.

It is the preference of SECH to maintain and preserve the community ethos at the existing St. Brigid's site along with maintaining the premises and for this reason; SECH intends to reconfigure St. Brigid's into a Community Health Centre with a focus on the creation of a central hub for diabetes management in the community. SECH welcomes this investment and the opportunity to develop specialist teams to meet the needs of the local community including older people and those living with chronic conditions in the South Tipperary area.

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

Yours sincerely,



Ms. Barbara Murphy
Head of Service for Older People
South East Community Healthcare