



Oifig an Príomhoifigeach
Eagraíocht Cúram Sláinte Pobail Lár Tire,
An Lú, An Mhí

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte,
Oifig Cheantair, Bóthar Ardáin,
An Tulach Mhór, Co. Uíbh Fhailí.

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28th June 2022

Ms Neasa Hourigan T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

RE: Parliamentary Question - 33788/22

Dear Deputy Hourigan

I wish to respond to your request for information regarding the proposed option of relocating the high support residence “Erkina House”, Rathdowney to “Silver Lodge”, Tullamore. This proposal is one option that will be discussed with residents and their families along with local political representatives.

Background and changes in service expectations

The Housing Agency and the HSE have drawn together best practice in home design for people living with enduring and life altering mental health conditions into design guidelines to help facilitate independent living, *Design for Mental Health Housing Design Guidelines: to promote independent living and mental health recovery (HSE, 2017)*. As in the case of a person with a physical disability, and indeed for everybody in society, a well organised, needs-driven, tailored environment can make it easier for people diagnosed with mental health conditions to carry out daily living tasks, reduce environmental stressors and promote independence and quality of life.

The long term strategic aim for the service is to provide a consistent quality approach across all community residences, whilst responding to the care needs of service users as supported by national policy, *Vision for Change, The MHC Quality Framework* and *Sharing the Vision*. To realise this aim a funding application and business case was submitted prior to Covid -19 under capital spending to build a new 10 bed community residence in Portlaoise.

Erkina House

Erkina House is considered unsuitable in contemporary mental health service provision.

Prior to Covid -19 residents lived in shared dormitory style bedrooms. In 2020, the bed capacity in Erkina House, went from 17 to 11 residents (which increased to 12 residents in 2021). Emergency measures were put in place to ensure that there was only bed per room. All bedrooms except one in Erkina are located upstairs and shower and toilet facilities are shared and would be considered less than adequate. There is an industrial style kitchen which renders it out of bounds for residents to access.

Erkina is located in the village of Rathdowney and has limited access to community services and public transport. It is widely accepted that the number and quality of amenities can have a positive impact on individual recovery.

Silver Lodge

In June 2020 the HSE on behalf of Laois/Offaly Mental Health Service purchased a modern building in Tullamore town called Silver Lodge. The purchase of this building is one part of Laois/Offaly mental



health service development and reform plan to modernise residential services aligned with *Vision for Change 2006*.

The long term plan for Silver Lodge is to function as a high support 24 hour nurse supervised community residence. This will provide suitable modern accommodation for intensive Rehabilitation and Recovery services within Laois Offaly Mental Health services. At present, due to service needs associated with the urgent refurbishment of the Maryborough Psychiatry of Later Life Approved Centre, Silver Lodge has facilitated temporary accommodation for this service. The projected completion date for Maryborough refurbishment is imminent. This in turn will render Silver Lodge available for occupancy.

Consultation and Planning stage

The Laois/Offaly Rehab and Recovery Consultant Psychiatrist and Rehab and Recovery Assistant Director of Nursing have discussed the needs of our service users and the available accommodation with the Executive Clinical Director and Area Director of Nursing and the outcome was a proposal that Silver Lodge could be suitable for use as a staffed community residence to re-provide for the service currently delivered in Erkina House, Rathdowney.

Over the coming months a number of consultative approaches were in preparedness for the transfer of services, however these are now on hold until a full option appraisal is completed.

Option Appraisal:

An independent professional company with extensive experience working with charities in the area of community development and who has also done extensive work with TUSLA and the HSE will be conducting this option appraisal. The company is a charity, deriving all their funding from contract work with the state and charity sectors. All the personnel involved have Masters Degrees in business, sociology, social care and associated fields, as well as experience in establishing and managing innovative programmes and services.

The Terms of Reference for the company to deliver on are as follows:

- Develop clear pathways for housing of existing residents of Erkina house
- Explore primarily from the perspective of residents the most favourable options and how practically any change could best meet their needs
- To engage with wider stakeholders to record their perspectives
- To work with local decision makers to develop recommendations that aim to support client goals and needs

This company will hold focus groups with all key stakeholders and will meet with all of the residents individually. It is expected that recommendations will be made by the end of the year.

In addition to the above, I am liaising with Estates to establish the cost of a potential refurbishment of Erkina House should a decision be made following the options appraisal that residents' needs can be met in the current location.



Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Des O'Flynn', written in a cursive style.

Des O'Flynn
Chief Officer
Midlands Louth Meath Community Health Organisation