



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.

Office of the Chief Officer
Community Health Organisation
Midlands Louth Meath

HSE,
Area Office, Arden Road,
Tullamore, Co Offaly

www.hse.ie
[@hselive](https://twitter.com/hselive)
[@MLMCommHealth](https://twitter.com/MLMCommHealth)

t 057 9359787
e CHO8@hse.ie

25th January, 2023

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

Re: Parliamentary Question – 1148/23 - Erkina House, Rathdowney, Co. Laois

Dear Deputy Hourigan

The Health Service Executive has been requested to respond in the context of your recent correspondence, regarding Erkina House, Co. Laois.

- (1) If the HSE plans to use the location as a Community MH residence into the future and
- (3) the extent of engagement with residents and their families regarding future plans.

I wish to advise you that any plan to close Erkina House has been put on hold pending the completion of an options appraisal exercise that is being concluded by 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. 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. This company has held focus groups with all key stakeholders and has met with all of the residents individually. It is expected that recommendations be made in the coming weeks.

- (2) If so, the number of service users placed there.

There are currently 9 residents living in Erkina House, Co. Laois. All residents of Laois/Offaly Rehab & Recovery Mental Health service are under the care of a consultant led Multidisciplinary Team (MDT), which includes representation from medical, nursing,



occupational therapy and social work professionals. The MDT works collaboratively in a person centred way with each resident, in undertaking a biopsychosocial assessment of their needs to inform the development of a person centred recovery focused individual care plan (ICP). Family/chosen advocates are involved in this process, with the consent of the resident, which is clearly documented in each ICP. A person's ICP is regularly reviewed jointly by the MDT and the resident in line with agreed review dates. Family/chosen advocates may attend ICP review meetings with the consent of the resident. In every case all ICPs are reviewed at least 6 monthly.

As with all 24 hour supervised community mental health residences there is flow through the service, which is in response to the biopsychosocial needs of each individual. This is outlined in national mental health policy, *Sharing the Vision*¹ (2020 p54): *'community rehabilitation residences depend on a multi-disciplinary team to support and enable the person concerned to move towards independent community living accommodation'*.

Examples of resident flow in practice are: In supporting the person's recovery journey they may be transferred to a lower support community residence, whilst others may be discharged to independent living.

If through ongoing MDT assessment there is evidence that the resident's physical needs have outweighed their mental health needs, leading in some cases to an increased risk of further physical deterioration, MDT support is offered collaboratively with the resident and their family/chosen advocate in choosing long-term care options. This may include transfer to a community nursing unit or nursing home.

In all aforementioned examples, the resident remains under the care of the community mental health service with mental health and recovery needs met on a case by case individual basis using an assertive outreach approach as part of their ICP.

¹ Department of Health, (2020) *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.



CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Background Information

1991: The former Midland Health Board acquired Rathdowney Convent now known as 'Erkina House' as part of its plans to provide a comprehensive community based mental health services for the Laois/ Offaly Catchment Area.

1996: The mental health service in Erkina House opened in September as a high support community residence. All of the new residents were former in-patients of St Fintan's Hospital, Portlaoise and this move supported the standards of de-congregation at that time. The new residents in 1996 had a previous duration of stay in St Fintan's Hospital of between 6 months to 43 years.

2011: The HSE published a strategy document on accommodation for people with disabilities titled: Time to Move on from Congregated Settings². This report recommended that home sharing arrangements should be confined to no more than four residents in total and that those sharing accommodation have, as far as possible, chosen to live with the other three people. Whilst this document was proposed for disability services it had significant relevance for mental health service planning.

2015 -2017: The Housing Agency and the HSE developed best practice in home design for people living with enduring and life altering mental health conditions³. These design guidelines help facilitate independent living. 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.

In 2015 Laois/ Offaly Mental Health Services submitted a business case for the replacement of Erkina House citing the evidence based standards of practice care in A Vision for Change (2006)⁴ which it was thought could not be met in this location. All bedrooms except one in

² HSE (2011) Time to Move on from Congregated Settings. *A Strategy for Community Inclusion*. Dublin, Ireland

³ HSE & Housing Agency (2016) Design for Mental Health Housing. *Housing Design Guidelines to Promote Independent Living and Mental Health Recovery*. Dublin, Ireland

⁴ HSE, Dept of Health (2006), A Vision for Change: *Report of the Expert Groups on Mental Health*. Dublin: Government of Ireland



Erkina House are small and located upstairs and the shared shower and toilet facilities are considered less than adequate. This application was supported by the then General Manager of mental health services who wrote a letter of support to the AND of national estates. This was in the context of the forthcoming Mental Health Commission Inspections of 24 hour supervised residences, the position paper published by Mental Health Reform⁵ and the HSE (2012) guidance paper on Addressing the Needs of People using the Mental Health Services⁶.

2018: The Mental Health Commission (MHC) inspected all 24 hr supervised residences and published a report on their findings⁷. They stated that: *“many of the residences inspected were too big, in poor condition and institutional”*. The MHC also reported that the residences were failing to provide opportunities for the optimal recovery and rehabilitation of their resident population, as outlined for them in A Vision for Change (2006).

The MHC recommended that recovery⁸ in the context of housing, reflects the belief that it is possible for all residents to achieve control over their lives, to recover their self-esteem, and move towards building a life where they experience a sense of belonging and participation.

2019: The MHC published its Inspection Report on Erkina House and 7 areas for improvement were noted of which 3 related to the premises. The MHC recommended that all residents should have access to single rooms; all residents should have access to kitchen facilities to develop independent living skills and new floor coverings to be installed.

2020: Due to the COVID19 pandemic the bed capacity in Erkina House, went from a capacity of seventeen to eleven residents. In 2020, Sharing the Vision, the updated mental health policy was published.⁹ This policy document recommended that: ‘A joint protocol agreed by the DoH and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) in consultation with key stakeholders is required to assist people living in HSE mental health service congregated settings to move to mainstream community-based living’ (DOH., 2020 pg 67).

⁵ Mental Health Reform (2016) *Forgotten and Abandoned by a Modern Mental Health Service*. Briefing Paper on 24 hr staffed, community residences for people with severe mental health difficulties.

⁶ HSE (2012) *Addressing the Needs of People using the Mental Health Services – a Guidance Paper*. Dublin, Ireland

⁷ Mental Health Commission (2018) *2018 Inspection of 24-hour Supervised Residences for People with Mental Illness*. Dublin, Ireland.

⁸ HSE (2018) *A National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health. A National Framework for Mental Health Service Providers to Support the Delivery of a Quality, Person- Centred Service*. Dublin: HSE

⁹ Department of Health, (2020) *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.



Sharing the Vision (2020; 68) also recommends that residents are supported to secure meaningful employment which: *'fosters hope, participation and a sense of a better and brighter future. In addition, employment can reduce and/or stabilise symptoms, increase self-worth and provide greater disposable income'*. As Erkina House is located in a rural area it has limited access to community services and public transport, when it is widely accepted that the number and quality of amenities can have a positive impact on individual recovery.

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's development and reform plan to modernise residential services aligned with Vision for Change (2006). This complements the 2015/2016 capital funding submission to build a replacement 10 bed community residence in Portlaoise. The MLM CHO mental health service aims to provide a consistent quality approach across all community residences, whilst responding to the care needs of residents as supported by national policy.

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. However, due to the urgent requirement to refurbish the Maryborough Psychiatry of Later Life Approved Centre, Silver Lodge facilitated temporary accommodation for this service. The projected completion date for Maryborough refurbishment is Q4 2022. This in turn will render Silver Lodge available for occupancy. The transfer of services from Erkina House or other mental health 24 hr supported residences to Silver Lodge became a viable option for planning. The relocation of one of Laois/Offaly's 24 hr supported residences to Silver Lodge will greatly improve the care environment for residents and staff alike.

2022: In March 2022 members of the Laois/ Offaly Catchment Management Team met with the Consultant led Rehab and Recovery team to discuss community residential planning, demand, bed capacity and standards of infrastructure. The service proposed that Erkina House had the highest infrastructural and environmental challenges and it was clinically supported that it be prioritised for transfer to Silver Lodge ahead of other residences. The planning for



the viability of this proposal was recommended. A number of consultative approaches were in preparedness for the potential transfer of services, Eg:

- *The residents will be kept fully informed on the potential transfer to Tullamore and they will have opportunity to visit Silver Lodge and their views will be considered.*
- *The Consultant Psychiatrist for the residents will have regard for the clinical needs of residents and their transfer to Silver Lodge in Tullamore.*
- *The multi-disciplinary Rehabilitation team will also engage, with residents' consent, with relatives of the residents to discuss the transfer.*
- *Informal discussion had begun with staff representatives.*

All of the above was placed on hold as in early April 2022 there was a report on social media that Erkina House was closing and that residents would be moving to Tullamore. This raised significant local concern voiced by local TDs and subsequently the Midlands Regional Health Forum.

The Acting Chief Officer, Head of Service Mental Health, Area Director of Nursing and ADON Rehab & Recovery Team met with local TDs in April and expressed regret at the lack of engagement with them on this matter and agreed to place the decision making with regard to the future of Erkina House on hold pending the outcome of an independent options appraisal.

As previously referred, in June, MLM CHO, commissioned an independent professional organisation to conduct an options appraisal on Erkina House which will include a consideration for refurbishment. This organisation's work is well underway and the report is due for completion in the coming weeks.

The independent organisation conducting the options appraisal, inclusive of stakeholder consultation, is near to completion. They have received an independent architect's report on the building that was conducted in line with the HSE & Housing Agency (2016) Design for Mental Health Housing (Housing Design Guidelines to Promote Independent Living and Mental Health Recovery).



I trust the above is in order but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries in this regard.

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