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Deputy Séan Crowe,
Cathaoirleach,
Joint Committee on Health,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

Re: Ref (JCH-i-925)

Dear Deputy Crowe,

I refer to your recent correspondence to Mr. Paul Reid, Chief Executive Officer, Health Service Executive, regarding the Owenacurra Centre, Cork.

Please find below for the attention of the Joint Committee on Health members a briefing note on the matter as requested.

If any further information is required, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Mitchell
Assistant National Director
Parliamentary Affairs Division

Briefing Note for Joint Committee on Health

1. Building standards and comparisons with other facilities (per Item 1 in your letter).

The initial plan for the Owenacurra Centre was to refurbish the building in order to bring it to a compliance level that allows for the provision of care and recovery in an appropriate modern environment. It is important to reiterate that within Owenacurra Centre, one of the primary reasons originally for commissioning works was in response to a need to separate Day Services from Residential Services in the centre. While this was the initial driver for commissioning works, it was also clear that residents should have access to a much higher standard of accommodation. Given the restricted nature of the premises and the site, clients accessing day services had to travel to/from the Day Unit via residents' living accommodation, which is an unsatisfactory arrangement. One of the deficits raised by the Mental Health Commission in their reports on the centre was that *"The layout of the approved centre was not conducive to resident privacy and dignity due to the fact that both a day centre, which was open to the public and health and social care offices were situated on the same corridor as resident bedrooms. This meant that members of the public and health professionals had access to the residents' sleeping area during the day."*

Works in the Owenacurra Centre were tendered in 2020 in the main to address this issue. These works were suspended in March 2020 given the outbreak of Covid-19 in Ireland. Once service planning and delivery started to recommence the works required in Owenacurra were revisited and were reviewed in the context of other concerns evident in the centre. These included:

- Fire risk assessment report survey findings detailing works required to address these deficiencies, which were significantly more than "repair" works.
- Asbestos survey detailing findings of a decorative coating throughout the ceilings in the centre that contains chrysotile asbestos which would need to be removed when completing necessary fire risk works to a significant number of ceilings within the building. The presence of Asbestos was also noted in the flooring.
- Mechanical and Electrical infrastructural deficiencies with mechanical plant and electrical wiring at the end of its useful life.
- Continuance of HSE clients living in 7.5m² bedrooms with no ensuite when the current standard is 22m² (including an ensuite) and the regulatory challenge that this would present.
- Lack of social spaces, therapeutic spaces and essential staff support accommodation.
- It should also be noted that the sub structure of the building has a raft foundation, which in turn supports steel framing, block work & stud walling with a precast concrete panel external leaf and pitched roof. The general condition of the building fabric is poor, taking account that it is a Rohcon part pre-fabricated building developed in the 1970's, with an expectancy of circa 40 years useful lifespan and now approximately 50 years in operation. The structure makes use of some of the walling and most of the steel framing to provide both vertical and horizontal load carrying structure. The said structural elements are supported from the raft (i.e. foundation and sub floor) which also supports a 50 mm non-structural screed.

In order to meet the Governments energy targets for public buildings by the 2030 deadline, the foundation and sub floor would need to be removed and a new foundation and insulated floor be constructed. However, as noted previously the foundation and sub floor carries all the loads from the super structure. Therefore, to replace the foundation and sub floor structure while attempting to support the super structure would require a very complex and extremely costly Engineering solution. One option would be to review the floor level to see if it could be raised. However, there is an existing floor to ceiling ht. of 2.4m., and to reduce same would not comply with current building standards.

- In addition, it would be totally impractical and inappropriate to undertake works of such significance with residents in place, due to issues including Health & Safety, the overall welfare of residents and staff, Fire Control, Asbestos and Aspergillosis risks due to the nature of the works involved.

The Mental Health Commission (MHC) in their inspections have noted *“The approved centre facilities did not adequately support resident independence and comfort”*. Other findings included in the MHC reports found *“Residents single bedrooms were too small with very limited personal space”* and *“Single bedrooms were too small without adequate furniture to meet residents’ needs, and there was no assisted toilet in the approved centre”*. Most recently, the focused inspection in 2021 found that the non-compliance with the regulation on premises was judged to be a critical risk.

As has been outlined previously, the Owenacurra Centre is currently c.1,050m². Based on existing standards of accommodation for the client profile in the Centre, a new facility with the same number of bedrooms would need to be approximately twice the size of the current Centre in the order of c.1,800m² – c.2,000m² would be required. This does not include other essential requirements necessary on-site such as secure, external recreational and therapeutic spaces, 20 – 25 parking spaces (as well as disabled parking spaces, EV parking spaces, bike parking and set down spaces) as well as creating an independent day unit.

The reports referred to and shared with the Committee were undertaken to identify existing risks and identify potential solutions. There are significant deficiencies in the accommodation, as outlined. Given these deficiencies the age and type of construction of the building, the material alteration required to meet modern residential needs, it became clear that to achieve an appropriate standard of quality environment a significant capital envelope of funding would be required.

Assigning an independent assessor to the Owenacurra Centre in Midleton is not merited given the compelling evidence as outlined above and given that no information or detail has been put forward of credible and sustainable options that would suggest that investment in the current centre and maintenance as an approved centre would be achievable in a cost effective manner.

Reference to Saol Nua in your letter, which is a community residence in Skibbereen, is not comparable to the Owenacurra Approved Centre, which delivers a higher acuity service requiring a higher level of care to residents.

As outlined to the Committee on the 21st September the HSE will continue to develop plans for accommodation and the modernisation of our Mental Health residential service settings to ensure we provide the appropriate service to meet the evolving needs of Mental Health service users in line with Government policy as outlined in a “Sharing the Vision”.

2. Will and Preference & Family Consultation (per items 3 and 4 in your letter).

The assessed needs and will and preference of residents has always been to the fore in the context of their relocation to other appropriate settings. The HSE is very conscious of the need for engagement with residents during this difficult period and has extended the closure period of the centre while these requirements of individuals are being identified and sourced.

This assessment consists of individual care plans, multi-disciplinary reviews with the residents, Consultant Psychiatric review, formal family meetings and informal family contacts. At all times residents have been given the option to approach named members of staff to provide supports and information relating to their assessed needs and will and preference. There is an on-going advocacy service available and in place to discuss and support residents’ concerns.

3. Planning for Future Services in East Cork/Midleton

As outlined by Mr. Michael Fitzgerald Chief Officer in his opening statement to the Committee on the 14th December, 2021, “it is important to state the emphasis is on supporting people with mental health needs to remain independently living, where possible, in their own homes and communities.”

The HSE Corporate Plan defines specific actions that will be taken to build primary and community services to help care for people at home, especially older people and people with chronic conditions. It also supports the provision of integrated care at a local level where possible, including the expansion of community diagnostics. The plan aims to progress the implementation of the new mental health policy ‘Sharing the Vision’ by reducing the numbers in institutional type settings and providing more appropriate community-based accommodation.

As outlined in A Vision for Change Section 8.5 - Recovery and Rehabilitation mental health services for severe and enduring mental illness:

Individuals with severe and enduring mental illness are recognised as an especially vulnerable group of adults, in need of intensive treatment and care in order for the individual to regain their selfhood and their place in society. Mental health services for this group should be provided by multidisciplinary CMHTs, with one team per 100,000 population. These teams should provide intensive treatment and rehabilitation, and should have a number of members delivering assertive outreach care. In-patient beds and other parts of mental health services in the catchment area should be accessed during acute episodes if required

Also as referenced by Dr Sinead O'Brien in her evidence to the Oireachtas Committee from Section 12.10 in Vision for Change – Accommodation needs of people with severe mental health illness:

The need for 24-hour-staffed residences will decrease once the cohort of former long stay hospital service users has been catered for. In the long term, there will a requirement of approximately 30 places in large urban areas, with fewer required in areas with low deprivation levels. Some may be designated to provide social respite care.

Furthermore, the Model of Care for People with Severe and Enduring Mental Illness and Complex Needs was launched by the HSE in September 2019. It outlines a care pathway designed to meet the needs of people with severe and enduring mental illness and complex needs. It describes a rehabilitation care pathway that helps individuals who have had prolonged episodes of severe and enduring mental illness to experience recovery and regain the skills and confidence required to live an independent life. Specifically the Model of Care outlines the following:

In many mental health services, community residences are organised around a 'High Support Hostel' model of care. Potentially, these residences can become mini-institutions. To prevent this, services will develop alternative Community Rehabilitation Residences which, although continuing to provide intensive MDT support, are primarily geared towards active rehabilitation and recovery.

In line with this policy, it is the intention of the HSE to implement, as part of the overall Model of Care in Midleton, the development of community accommodation supporting 10 residents. This will be done following an options appraisal of the Owenacurra site and any other appropriate sites in the vicinity, e.g Midleton Community Hospital complex, for the purpose of developing this new accommodation. This facility would be supported by a Rehabilitation team currently being established in Mental Health Services, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare with a focus on assisting those with Mental Health needs including those with enduring Mental illness to achieve their full potential.

In addition, a commitment to source a community house in Midleton town was made to facilitate any current resident of Owenacurra that may be suitable for this facility or any service user in East Cork. The model for this service would be rehabilitation focussed also, with healthcare professional staff supporting the residents. The HSE does not accept that this initiative would be a misdirection of public money as it is in accordance with public policy. This commitment is progressing and with ongoing sourcing of appropriate available accommodation.

In addition to the above, we had provided assurances that we will explore options to relocate and reinstate the day service in the town as soon as possible. An interim arrangement has been in situ with My Place in Midleton and is being utilised at present. A community space owned by Respond Housing Association was identified to lease. This property has been clinically reviewed and it was agreed that this community space was suitable for a temporary Day Service and can confirm that Day Centre operations have commenced. The longer term plan is to re-provide this service at the redeveloped Midleton Community Hospital site.

4. Other Mental Health Services Supports in East Cork (per item 2 in your letter).

With regards to Midleton/Youghal and Cobh/Glenville sectors, the HSE wishes to update the Committee on the MHS services available in these catchment areas as previously set out by the Executive Clinical Director to include the establishment of the Rehabilitation team as outlined in the engagement with the Oireachtas Committee on the 14th December 2021

Cobh/Glenville Sector

- East Cork Home Based Treatment Team which covers both Cobh/Glenville and Midleton/Youghal sectors which offers a prompt multidisciplinary and assessment and intervention service in the community for individuals presenting in crisis.
- Sli Nua Day resource consisting of 1 CNM2 and 2 staff nurses. They provide support and facilitate various therapeutic groups on a one to one basis and on a group basis also (recommencing 22/10/2021 in keeping with Covid-19 guidelines)
- Community Mental Health Team consisting of Consultant Psychiatrist, NCHD, Psychology, Social Work, Occupational Therapy and two Community Mental Health Nurses
- OPD clinic on Tuesday's and Thursday's
- Sessional input from Clinical Nurse Specialists in Psychotherapy and Weight management
- Rapid access clinic weekly which provides a rapid community review for individuals who have presented in crisis in the previous week and who may have presented to the Emergency Department.
- Weekend Nursing Service to allow follow up for individuals on a 7 day basis (including bank holidays)
- Early Intervention in Psychosis Service.
- Psychiatry of Later Life Service.
- Flexible Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) provides assertive outreach to individuals from all Cork.

Midleton/Youghal Sector:

- East Cork Home Based Treatment Team which covers both Cobh/Glenville and Midleton/Youghal sectors which offers a prompt multidisciplinary and assessment and intervention service in the community for individuals presenting in crisis.
- Community Mental Health Team consisting of Consultant Psychiatrist, NCHD, Psychology, Social Work, Occupational Therapy and two Community Mental Health Nurses
- New patient OPD clinic on alternative Tuesdays with full day clinic every Thursday.
- OPD clinic in Youghal every 2nd Tuesday
- Sessional input from Clinical Nurse Specialists in Psychotherapy and Weight management and CNS Family Therapy.
- Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse (SCAN)
- Access to space in Cuman na Daoine in Youghal to facilitate one to one work
- Psychiatry of Later Life Service.
- Flexible Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) provides assertive outreach to individuals from all Cork.
- Access to space in Cuman na Daoine in Youghal to facilitate one to one work

5. Glenwood House (per item 2 in your letter).

The HSE has long identified the need for significant replacement and upgrade of its Mental Health accommodation across Cork. Auctioneers have been requested, working on our behalf, to bring to our attention any multi-bed properties (i.e. large houses, guest houses, hotels, etc.) in both the Cork City and county regions for review for potential health uses. Following an advert in the Irish Examiner being brought to the attention of HSE, the property known as Glenwood House, Carrigaline (which was a 14 bed Guest House) was purchased by the HSE in the context of Covid-19 as well as the significant shortcomings in the stock of residential services in Cork city and county.

The purchase formed part of the Emergency Planning to provide additional space for HSE residents with single ensuite rooms and a high standard of social space. The premises is well located in a community residential setting and, given its access to services, transport etc., was considered as a replacement for mental health residential type accommodation initially. The property was purchased in 2021 during Covid with the aim to provide accommodation for Mental Health residents under the planning derogation that was in force at the time for HSE under the Covid emergency regulations for the provision of emergency facilities. Given the proposed long-term use of the property, and in order to regularise the proposed use following the lapse of the planning derogation available to HSE under Covid emergency regulations, the HSE applied for Planning Permission in relation to the premises on the basis of our overall objective to be a compliant organisation with other public services and also with due regard to any concerns that either planners or other members of the public may have about this property.

At a combined cost of €1.25m for the purchase and renovation of the property as a 10 bed residential facility, with appropriate social space for residents, the cost expended represents significant value for money when compared to the cost of providing similar HSE residential accommodation compliant with regulation.

While the rationale for the purchase of Glenwood House was initially taken as an emergency replacement property for Millfield House high support unit (a residential centre located in Cork city and which, pre Covid featured significant levels of multi occupancy), all other arrangements made during the pandemic to mitigate against the spread of Covid in residential settings are currently being reviewed in the context of Infection Prevention Control measures, suitability of environment etc. The HSE wishes to move to a place where Mental Health residents are provided with appropriate, single room ensuite accommodation, thereby replacing accommodation with multi-beds and shared toileting facilities and also addressing social distancing and Covid 19 concerns. The purchase of the Glenwood house property represents a first step opportunity to address such significant shortcomings in the stock of Mental Health residential services in Cork in general.

As planning for the service to be established in Glenwood has proceeded, the service can confirm that the residence will be supported by a new rehabilitation consultant and MDT being appointed to services in Cork. The intention is that once planning permission for use of the accommodation is granted and taking account of any planning requirements, the service will proceed with the identification of the particular service users who may take up residence in the unit, based on consultation with them and their assessed needs. Service users will be included in planning the final refurbishment \ redecoration of the unit. The Service will also resume its engagement with the local Residents Association in the Glenwood area in relation to the introduction of the service to the community.

It is regrettable that this positive development has been portrayed in a negative way recently as it will provide a very welcome opportunity for service users to enjoy a very appropriate community based setting in the future.

Finally, I would hope that this further detailed account of the rationale for the closure of Owenacurra Centre, its future transition into a rehabilitation centre and community residence service for Midleton and its environs, will see the further transition of service to a community based recovery approach, which will serve the future needs of the area in line with government policy. The supports being provided to current residents as they move through what is a difficult process for them will continue, as will the engagement with themselves and their families.

The recent restoration of day services is also a key component of the transition. CHO Cork Kerry Community Healthcare acknowledges the challenge it faces to implement the transition and the fact that many of its centres in Cork, in particular, require replacement or refurbishment. The Mental Health Management team of the CHO are committed to work through these issues to ensure a modern and proactive service is achieved to meet the needs of the community.

Health Service Executive
May 2022