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Deputy Brian Stanley TD  
Chairperson  
Public Accounts Committee

5<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Dear Chairperson,

I write to you in relation to the information provided by me to the PAC of the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022, regarding information being provided to service users of a High Support Hostel Mental Health Service, currently located at Garnish House in Cork city and which was the subject of certain questions raised by Deputy Neasa Hourigan TD.

Deputy Hourigan's questions related to the consultation that the HSE has had with the residents of Garnish House about their ultimate placements. She wished to know if the HSE had informed residents of Garnish House of such plans, before specific details were released in a Parliamentary Question response to herself. She raised the question of residents of Owenacurra (a separate mental health acute unit in Cork) and they being told they would be going to Garnish House for the past year and a half and if the HSE informed them that they would be moved in a matter of months again. I understand that the Deputy may be of the view that the answers provided by me in respect of this matter may not be correct or fully accurate. Firstly I wish to state that the responses provided by me on these questions to the Committee, were accurate and I will set out the position in some detail for the sake of clarity below.

Up to the commencement of the Pandemic response in March 2020, the service being provided in Millfield House in Cork City was that of a high support hostel. The purpose of high support services, is to allow for the input of a multi-disciplinary consultant led team in the rehabilitation and recovery for people with mental health illness and it will normally be for a period of time until they move to an alternative location of lower support or are able to move to independent living or supported living, depending on their on-going needs. The transfer of the service from Millfield House was undertaken on the basis of a risk assessment of all mental health residential services across the wider city and county and how the HSE could mitigate in the short term, the risks to residents and service users, in light of the threat of Covid and the growing concern that it may pose a substantive risk to vulnerable groups. The accommodation at Millfield House high support hostel was such that there were high levels of multi occupancy in bedrooms in particular. The service would not have transferred out of Millfield House was it not for the pandemic, though the HSE



considered that the accommodation required some refurbishment. The opportunity provided by the alternative temporary accommodation in Garnish House (a previous Bed and Breakfast facility) reduced this risk level significantly. The initial transfer of service had to be undertaken urgently and at short notice, given the challenge of the pandemic, as it was unfolding at the time and the need to provide service continuity as much as possible in the context of a Covid environment. The service moved in full to Garnish House and some residents of other mental health facilities also moved there on a temporary basis.

The service move has always been identified as not being permanent and residents were aware of this from the outset. Furthermore the nature of high support service is not the same as continuing care, as the aim of the service user in conjunction with the clinical team, is to make plans for more independent living in the next phase of on-going recovery. Even if a service user has an extended stay in this type of service, at no stage would it be that their individual agreed plan developed in conjunction with their supporting clinical team, is to remain in the High Support service indefinitely.

In this context, there is and has been on-going discussion with residents of this high support service, to ensure that they are aware that the service would be moving at some stage, though we would not have a finalised decision on its location. This discussion would be more in the context of keeping service users aware of the temporary nature of the service location rather than in any greater detail and not to detract from their own individual plans of moving forward to a more independent living model suitable to their needs. Once we are clear on the service relocation plan, the clinical team will be engaging with each service user once again in more detail on the specifics.

The commitment is made that the service will transfer from Garnish House by the end of Q 1 2023. There will be full communication with service users around the details of the service transfer in advance. Again it is important to say this is not a continuing care resident transfer plan or a closure of a centre, but actually the relocation of a service and where the needs of the service users will be supported by the clinical team involved during the re location.

It would not be appropriate to discuss any individual residents plans who are transferring from the Owenacurra Centre, but it is important to say in general that an offer of a place in Garnish House and the services of High Support, would certainly be an appropriate offer of service potentially if a person or persons choose so and with the advice and support of the clinical team.

Again the nature and purpose of high support services would be explained to them and that it was not a continuing care facility and so the nature of the service was for a defined period and another step to a more independent life.

I hope this is of assistance to the members of the Committee by way of additional background information to that provided by me on the day.

Yours sincerely,



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Michael Fitzgerald  
Chief Officer

