

Mental Health Commission says Thornton Hall not appropriate site for Central Mental Hospital

Review of State's forensic mental health service needs required

Tuesday 29th July: The Mental Health Commission has advised the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children that it is of the view that the proposal to relocate the Central Mental Hospital at Thornton Hall in North Dublin is not in the best interests of patients, and is not conducive to patient rehabilitation and recovery.

The Commission is the statutory body established under the Mental Health Act 2001 to promote high standards and good practices in the delivery of mental health services and to protect the interests of persons detained in approved centres. The Chairman of the Commission Dr Edmond O'Dea and the Chief Executive Ms Brid Clarke were invited to give evidence at today's meeting of the Committee.

Ms Clarke said the Commission fully supports the replacement of the current Central Mental Hospital with a purpose-designed, modern facility which promotes patient safety and dignity. However she said the Thornton Hall proposal was not suitable for a number of reasons:

- * Building it beside a new prison would promote isolation and exclusion of the population resident in this facility and increase the stigma already experienced by people with a mental illness.
- * Building a hospital with its therapeutic ethos beside a prison with a strong focus on detention and security was not appropriate.
- * Thornton Hall is not well serviced with public transport, thereby placing considerable additional burden on families to maintain contact with their relatives. This is contrary to the principle of promoting community and family contacts as outlined in the United Nations principles.
- * There would be few, if any, opportunities for local planned external activities such as work experience, which are all essential elements of a managed rehabilitation programme.
- * Building a new facility on the current site at Dundrum would eliminate all these serious barriers – there is an excellent transport system including LUAS, there is a wide range of community and social facilities and the facility is well established into the local community.

The Commission said there should be a comprehensive assessment of the State's need for forensic mental health services undertaken as a priority. "The assessment of need should include an examination of unmet need in the prison population, in generic mental health services and in the community", said Ms Clarke. "This needs assessment will help to

determine the inpatient provision required at each level of secure provision, the extent of community forensic mental health services required regionally and help to accurately identify the requirements of the prison population so that service developments are closely aligned to need.”

The Commission believes that forensic mental health services should be provided primarily on a regional basis rather than centralised in Dublin as at present. Forensic mental health services should encompass a wide range of services including high secure care, medium secure care, low secure care and community based forensic mental health teams who can provide inreach services to the local prison population and local mental health services. The Commission recommends the establishment of four regional low secure facilities (with approximately 20 beds each) in parallel with a high secure unit.

The Chairman of the Commission Dr Edmond O’Dea said that in reaching its view the Mental Health Commission was guided by its own statutory obligations but also by the United Nations Principles Regarding the Protection of People with Mental Illness and the Improvement of Mental Health Care. “In addition, the Scottish Executive and the Bamford Review in Northern Ireland, while acknowledging the need for security where necessary, have both strongly supported the provision of forensic mental health services as far as possible in the community, and in locations that maximise rehabilitation and recovery”, he said.

“This proposal would promote the isolation and exclusion of those admitted within it, and is not consistent with best practice and thinking or with the contemporary view of mental illness. While our view is that regional low security facilities should be developed in parallel with this high security facility, we would welcome a broader review and assessment of this State’s needs in this area, to ensure best planning for the future.”



For further information contact:

Murray Consultants

01 498 0300

Mark Brennock

087 2335923

Mental Health Commission

01 636 2404

Marina Duffy

Note to Editors:

The Mental Health Commission is an independent statutory body. The primary functions of the Mental Health Commission are to foster and promote high standards of care and good practice in the delivery of mental health services and to ensure that the interests of those involuntarily admitted are protected.

The Mental Health Act 2001 is the most significant legislative provision in the field of mental health for over fifty years. It significantly reforms existing legislation concerning the involuntary detention of people for psychiatric treatment. The legislation brings Irish mental health law into conformity with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.