

Consultation response submitted by

Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI)

DECEMBER 2022

Proposed Closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital

ARC NI is a representative organisation supporting 49 cross-sector learning disability providers. ARC NI welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Do you agree with the proposed closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital?

ARC NI strongly agrees that Muckamore Abbey Hospital should close but would go further to reiterate our disgust that this has not been completed as a commitment in policy stated this over a quarter of a century ago.

The consequence of the failure to complete resettlement on human beings, such as people with a learning disability and their family members has been catastrophic, and for many, the legacy of this damage continues to traumatise.

This consultation document is unclear as to whether the proposal is to fully cease any operations occurring at Muckamore Abbey Hospital and hence the site is fully closed, or whether operations may be re-purposed back to an Assessment and Treatment facility.

ARC NI would strongly advocate the full and final closure of the site due to the trauma associated with the operating history of Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

The need however, for assessment and treatment interventions of people at different points in their lives is not going to change. It is acknowledged that the inadequate infrastructure based in the community contributes to hospital admissions. The consultation makes no reference to how this challenge will be addressed, including within current financial constraints and insufficient workforce pipeline. The former Health & Social Care Board, now Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) chaired a regional discussion on community based assessment and treatment. ARC NI was a participant. A draft pathway was developed but has not been shared within the learning disability community.

ARC NI would strongly advocate the need for transparently communicating the regional pathway for community based assessment and treatment.

ARC NI believes that no one should call a hospital their home. The evidence is all too clear that this institutionalisation of so many human beings over the years, and still to this day, is fundamentally wrong. However, a further consequence of this institutionalisation is the unfortunate position that for some individuals who continue to live at Muckamore Abbey Hospital, they do view it as their home.

Any renewed policy commitment to complete resettlement, must have at its heart, a firm value base which places the person with a learning disability and their family at

the centre of all communications and conversations to plan all action relating to resettlement.

Any transition for a human being requires care, attention and very robust partnership working with transparent communication. As stated within a 2022 report named “Independent Review of the Learning Disability Resettlement Programme In Northern Ireland”¹, “There was a lack of consistency in the documentation used to support care planning for transition from hospital to community, and nor was there an agreed regional pathway for resettlement, which should map out roles and responsibilities within the process. Families and providers both commented that they felt only involved in a limited way in developing assessments and care plans”.

ARC NI welcomes the proposal for regional documentation consistently used to assess care and support needs. This should explore all areas of a person’s life, hence support needs are different to care needs. People with a learning disability are experts and their voice should be heard.

ARC NI strongly advocates the right of an individual to choose what care and support looks like as part of their resettlement planning/journey.

The Terms of Reference for the Oversight Board state as part of it’s purpose the following:

- Identify, resolve and/or escalate issues of concern in the resettlement process.
- Identify and escalate any issues relating to the management of risk or governance.
- Ensure that resettlement is expedited and the resettlement programme is brought to a successful conclusion for individuals and their families.

Due to a history of poor leadership and lacking scrutiny within the HSC resettlement programme, we would question the independence of the Oversight Board. We fear that in response to growing pressures to get resettlement done, that attitudes and behaviours will dehumanise the process required by the people who have a right to choose a new home in the community that meets their care and support needs.

ARC NI would strongly advocate that the balance of human rights, upholding choice and control, is firmly at the heart of all conversations had by the Oversight Board.

ARC NI previously supported a patient representative who was part of a wider Telling It Like It Is (TILII) Patient Council at Muckamore Abbey Hospital, participating in a regional meeting with statutory colleagues discussing resettlement plans. This stopped with no explanation. TILII members challenged this twice with the then Health and Social Care Board but received inadequate explanation for their

¹ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-ind-review-ld-resttlement-july-2022.PDF>

exclusion. TILII have since written to the Chair of the Oversight Board to propose their re-instated inclusion.

ARC NI would also strongly advocate the need for independent scrutiny through a patient advocate, representing their wider peers, on the Oversight Board.

Do you agree that the proposed closure of Muckamore Abbey Hospital is consistent with the overall policy aim of improving services for people with a learning disability in NI?

As stated before, ARC NI believes that no one should call a hospital their home we remain committed to the vision of Equal Lives (2005) as the current policy framework for people with a learning disability.

An objective as stated in Equal Lives (2005), was to ensure that all men and women with a learning disability have their home, in the community, the choice of whom they live with and that, where they live with their family, their carers receive the support they need. This recognised the range of living options required by people at different stages of their lives, from living independently on our own, to co-sharing in a small dwelling, to requiring nursing support in response to our changing health requirements.

Currently today there are 606 people supported in learning disability nursing homes and 546 people supported in residential care. 1,334 people with a learning disability are in Supported Living. Supported living offers the individual a secured tenancy, which ensures rights as a tenant under the relevant housing legislation and the individual is eligible to apply for personal benefits. This independence can result in more disposable income which can support greater financial choice. The reform of Adult Social Care placed great emphasis on the need to expand this type of support for any adult.

Whilst there is no regionally agreed population figures for the learning disability community, it is clear that from the numbers of people listed above, the majority of people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland currently live at home with family.

Equal Lives went on to make the correlation with the human rights of a person with a learning disability to demand diverse living options and the need to adequately plan the supply of options across Northern Ireland. It rightly outlined the joint responsibility on the Department for Communities with the Department of Health to fulfil this. Supporting People is the policy and funding framework for housing support services, which many providers avail of to enable Supported Living for people with a learning disability. This funding envelope has been baselined since 2008. Furthermore in the recent Supporting People consultation, the learning disability community read the strategic priority as on homelessness.

We are aware of the Department of Health's intentions to progress the development of a modern framework for learning disability services and supports, including the integration of other key frameworks such as the Children with Disabilities framework. We welcome this as in previous consultation, the learning disability community confirmed that a transformational cradle to grave model is urgently required.

Furthermore the policy context for a person with a learning disability spans multiple Department responsibilities and policy areas, including inclusion, employment, education etc. However in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive and hence a committed Programme for Government, we are unclear how the cross-departmental collaboration will succeed.

Within previous Programme for Government consultation responses, **ARC NI has advocated the need for pooled budgets for areas of joint responsibility. We continue to hold this view.**

Do you have any further comments?

None