

# WESTERN CARE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 15<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2021



## *Briefing Note*

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The 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of Western Care Association was held on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2021 at the Western Care offices at John Moore Road, Castlebar. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this meeting was held virtually by video conferencing facilities, with the Chairperson, CEO and Recording Secretary being the only people present. This is the second year that the AGM has been held virtually.

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING BUSINESS**

The business of the AGM was carried out as follows:

1. **Minutes and Matters Arising:** The minutes of the 2020 AGM were approved and signed off on.
2. **Presentation of Audited Accounts for year ending 31/12/2020:** Ms Úna Owens, Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented the Audited Accounts. Copies of the Audited Accounts were circulated to Members in advance of the meeting.
3. **Reappointment of Auditors:** Mazars were re-appointed as Auditors.
4. **Consideration of the adoption of the Constitution and associated special resolution:** The Constitution was reviewed by the Governance and Compliance Sub-Committee of the Board of Directors during the year and changes were approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021. The revised Constitution was circulated to members in advance of this meeting. The revised Constitution and associated Special Resolution were approved at the AGM.
5. **Re-election of directors**  
The Following Directors were put forward for re-election:
  - Mr Paddy Geraghty (6 years completed)
  - Ms Marie Munnelly (6 years completed)
  - Mr Michael Leyden (3 years completed)
6. **New Directors for election**  
The election of Mr Hugh Farrell and Mr Alan McCarron as directors was ratified at the meeting.
7. **Notification of incoming Board of Directors:**  
The Chairperson listed the members of the incoming Board: Frances Burke (Chairperson), Michael Prendergast (Vice-Chairperson), Michael Leyden (Company Secretary), Paddy Geraghty, Kieran McGloin, Marie Munnelly, Iarla Duffy, Marilyn McNicholas, Angela Campbell, Alan McCarron, Hugh Farrell.

### **THE CHAIRPERSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS ADDRESSED THE MEETING:**

#### **CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS – Ms Frances Burke**

Ms Burke thanked the Management Team for their leadership in managing and continuing services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, while keeping service users, families and staff safe. She noted that the rollout of the vaccination programme during 2021 is a cause for optimism. The organization will continue to follow guidance from the HSE on the resumption of services, but above all, the priority remains that everyone stays safe.

She extended her condolences to those who, sadly, were bereaved during the year.

She noted the challenges the Progressing Disability Services rollout is having for both staff and families.

She thanked the Board of Directors, for their commitment, diligence and support. Meetings continue to be held virtually, which has been challenging but everyone has embraced the change and adapted to it. It is hoped that face to face or blended meetings can recommence in the near future.

She noted the volume of work that had been progressed by the Board of Directors during the year. For example, Sub Committees were reviewed and reconfigured, and a considerable amount of work was

completed in the area of Governance, particularly in the review of the Constitution and the development of a Governance Framework.

She thanked Board members who had retired during 2020 and 2021: Helen McHugh; Ann Loftus; Denise Swanick and Ed Rose and welcomed new Board members Angela Campbell, Alan McCarron and Hugh Farrell.

She extended her thanks to the HSE, our main funders, noting that fundraising income had been impacted significantly by COVID-19 restrictions.

She thanked the staff for their resilience and flexibility, with many having to work in different locations to meet the needs of those they support.

Ms Burke concluded by noting that Western Care, like many other service providers, has changed considerably in recent years. The traditional Branch structure is no longer functioning well and is no longer a way to communicate with families. She promised the older generation of families that they had not been forgotten and that the Board of Directors is considering meaningful ways to engage with them.

### **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER ADDRESS – Ms Tia Crowley**

Ms Crowley reflected on 2021 as being another challenging year for everyone. She noted that, for service users and their families, as well as encountering many challenges as they navigate their way through service deficits and a lack of planning for future needs, they have now also faced the added challenge of COVID-19 and all it entails.

In terms of service delivery, the last year challenged the organisation as we endeavoured to keep everyone safe while navigating a mountain of guidance, recommendations and legislation. Service delivery was curtailed as a result of COVID-19 restrictions in many areas, in particular day services, transport and some community support services. She said that we will continue to advocate for change both locally and nationally.

The normal discussion around service direction, budgets and service development was eclipsed for another year with COVID-19 planning, infection control measures and staffing issues. Many of the essential supports Western Care delivers to families were curtailed by COVID-19 restrictions.

Ms Crowley noted that families are in crises and while this is acknowledged by the HSE, sufficient funding is not being made available on a long term basis to meet demand for services.

In April the Board of Directors wrote to local TDs outlining the grave concerns they had for disability services. Following on from this the Chairperson and CEO had individual meetings with Alan Dillon, T.D. and Dara Callery T.D.. As a result of this, they also got the opportunity to meet with Anne Rabbitte Minister of State at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth at the Department of Health. Subsequently, Minister Rabbitte visited services in Ballina which was welcomed.

Ms Crowley paid tribute to all Western Care staff, who are working tirelessly for the benefit of those we support. Staff recruitment and retention is a challenge currently in the sector and is going to require significant focus in the coming year to develop strategies both nationally and locally to address this.

The Government published the Disability Capacity Review document this year and it estimates that the annual extra cost of addressing both demographic change and unmet need would range from an extra €320m a year by 2032 under the minimum scenario outlined, and an extra €550m a year under the pre-recession scenario, at current unit costs. While these headline figures appear high, Ms Crowley noted that it is her belief that these figures are vastly understated based on the level of need that has been identified in Mayo alone. It is also worrying that while a significant level of need has been identified there is no concrete plan in place to address it.

Ms Crowley thanked the Board of Directors for their support and encouragement throughout these challenging times. This is a very diligent and pro-active Board of Directors, who are dedicated to furthering the aims of Western Care while ensuring the organisation is effectively governed. Later this year we will embark on the formation of a new strategy for the organisation.

She welcomed the new members: Hugh Farrell and Alan McCarron and thanked outgoing Directors Ed Rose, who retired from the board this year after serving nine years, Denise Swanick and Ann Loftus who also resigned this year.

She thanked Mr Chris Pratt who resigned from the Quality, Safety and Risk sub-committee this year after many years of dedicated service.

She thanked Frances Burke, Chairperson of the Board of Directors for her support. She also thanked Mr Michael Prendergast the Vice Chair for his support and encouragement.

She thanked the Executive Management team, who work tirelessly on behalf of the organisation.

She thanked the HSE for funding Western Care and the local HSE team who actively support Western Care and fight to secure funding.

She thanked those we support and their families. She noted that as we strive to do more for families, we are more and more curtailed by funding deficits, increased regulation, staffing issues and Government policy.

Ms Crowley outlined her continued concern concerned that Government policy and regulation is removing autonomy from organisations like Western Care. The Slainte Care policy is designed to bring services closer to the person, however, she is concerned that poor implementation of this policy and increased bureaucracy could actually move services further from those most in need.

Ms Crowley concluded by saying that there is a cause for hope. The vaccination programme has been successful in ensuring that the vast majority of Western Care staff and Service Users are vaccinated. We opened the newly renovated Hillcrest Apartments at Highland Lodge during the year and the children's respite service in Ballina re-commenced respite provision in May. We are also progressing with plans to renovate The Vocational Training Centre in Castlebar.

She shared a quote about resilience that captures the spirit in Western Care throughout the last year.

“The oak fought the wind and was broken, the willow bent when it must and survived”

Western Care Association may have to bend when it must but it will endure.

#### **DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS ADDRESS – Ms Clare O’Dowd**

Ms O’Dowd reflected on the year in which even though we continued to experience the impact of COVID-19, the focus has moved from crisis response to the recovery phase of the pandemic.

She noted that the constant throughout the last 18 months has been the incredible dedication and determination demonstrated by those we support, their families and the staff who continue to strive in delivering person centred, progressive, and innovative services with unmeasurable dedication and commitment.

Ms O’Dowd outlined the challenges being faced by the organisation:

- We continue to witness significant demand for services such as residential, respite, day, home share, therapies and community supports.
- The challenge to recruit and retain staff against the back drop of slow progress on restoring pay rates to 2008 levels and achieving pay parity with the HSE and similar organisations remains. Negotiations are on-going in this regard.

- July 2021 saw the publication of the Disability Capacity Review Report to 2032. An action plan is in development mapping out details on how to make progress up to 2025 with a focus on children's services, intensive supports for young people with disabilities, personal assistance, home support, respite and more supported housing in the community.
- We will continue to advocate to our funder and any other avenue for future proof funding opportunities to secure and maintain service development that is person centred, quality driven, safe and effective, with a strong sector and community presence.
- We are preparing for increased compliance in terms of a new national Adult Safeguarding Policy, Assisted Decision Making and HIQA's consultation on the standards for home support services, which will continue to challenge us in terms of resources and often in the expectation to comply within existing resources.

Ms O'Dowd also outlined the many achievements / developments during the year:

- Hillcrest Apartments at Highland Lodge was refurbished into three separate apartments that are now home to three individuals. This new model of service is specifically designed to offer quality accommodation and support to people who chose not to live in a group setting or in standalone residential settings.
- Bridge is an initiative offering day support to young people who are seeking an alternative type of service in the Ballina area. The name reflects the idea of crossing a bridge, reflecting the progression from leaving school and moving into adulthood.
- Western Care was represented at the international Short Break Conference and following an intensive recruitment process, we are delighted to offer additional new home share opportunities. We have accepted an invitation to appear on RTE's Nationwide and eagerly await this opportunity later in the year to promote our homesharing service.
- Our children's respite services in Ballina reopened during the summer, which was enormously well received by the children, their families and staff.
- Ms O'Dowd reflected on the significant change ahead for children, families and our staff with the rollout of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People 0-18" (PDS) model. The aim of the national PDS programme is to provide an equal and consistent way to provide services for children with disabilities. In PDS, the ambition is that access to services will be based on a child's needs rather than on their diagnosis. As part of this model services and staff currently working in children's services in Western Care will transition to HSE led disability network teams. On completion of this transition, some children may have their needs supported by their local Primary Care services, while others will be supported by a Children's Disability Network Team. The implementation of this programme will result in Western Care ceasing to be the provider of children's services into the future other than respite, home share and community supports and the transfer of 43 experienced and valued members of staff who will be joining the three network teams.
- The Rights Review Committee welcomed Aine Flynn, Director of the Decision Support Services remotely to discuss the guiding principles of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and the key reform it will bring, including the establishment of the Decision Support Services

Ms O'Dowd said that the vision for the organisation will be to continue in our commitment to promote and protect people's rights, wills and preference and continue to develop and maintain and deliver a range of diverse person/child led services in line with identified need in the ever evolving landscape of health and social care practice.

We will revisit and prioritise vision for 2021 / 2022 that was halted by the need to prioritise everyone's safety, to ensure Western Care delivers on our strategic objectives.

Ms O'Dowd thanked the Executive and Senior Management Teams and members of the Board of Directors for their dedication, support and leadership.

She thanked the staff of Western Care for their unwavering commitment unselfishly demonstrated time and time again and especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She thanked the local HSE Team, the Public Health Team for their support and guidance and the numerous community partners, volunteers and the people of Co. Mayo for their continued support to Western Care.

She thanked the service users and families as they weathered the storm with us.

She quoted the words of Martin Luther King,:

“Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope”

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