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## Blocked emergency exit among shortcomings found

**Jess Casey**

Safeguarding concerns and a blocked fire evacuation route were among shortcomings found at disability centres inspected by the health and safety watchdog.

The Health and Safety Inspection Authority (Hiqa) published 31 inspection reports yesterday, looking at designated centres across the country for people with disabilities.

Of the centres inspected, the watchdog found a good level of compliance with the regulations and standards in 16 of the centres visited. However, non-compliance was identified at almost half of the inspected centres, including two RehabCare centres.

Hiqa received a number of notifications from one of the centres, based in Listowel, for male residents over the age of 18 prior to its inspection.

"Such notifications involved verbal altercations between residents, items being thrown, and some residents being moved from one area of the designated centre to another for their safety amongst others," said Hiqa. "It had also been noted in some notifications that some residents were asking other residents to go away or to be left alone."

In some notifications, it was clear that some residents were particularly upset by such interactions, Hiqa's report notes. While limitations due to the pandemic were acknowledged, it was also noted that a recent compatibility assessment had raised concerns around whether this designated centre was appropriate to meet all residents' needs.

"As such, while the provider did monitor the service provided to the residents and there were positive aspects of this service, the admissions practices and the findings of this inspection in key

regulations raised concerns around how the overall management systems operated to ensure that the centre was safe and appropriate to residents' needs," Hiqa said.

The report also notes that a behavioural therapist began visiting the site weekly. Staffing has also been increased and that one resident who was deemed better suited to live alone in a non-shared space is being supported to do so.

A spokeswoman for RehabCare said a compatibility issue has arisen, which it has been working to resolve with the HSE.

"In RehabCare, we aspire to always meet the needs and wishes of our residents and we have comprehensive controls and measures in place to ensure that each individual receives the highest possible quality of care and support," she said.

Non-compliances were also found at four centres run by Stewarts Care, three St John of God Community Services centres, and at a centre run by St Joseph's Foundation.

Inspectors also found non-compliance in five St Michael's House centres, all of which are based in Dublin. At one of the centres in Dublin 9, the Hiqa inspector observed an emergency evacuation route was blocked, and an exit gate was locked. One break key glass unit at an exit was broken and a key was not in place.

The centre immediately cleared the evacuation route and unlocked both exit gates, the report notes. The break glass was also repaired shortly afterwards. A spokeswoman for St Michael's said it has taken the findings of HIQA seriously.

"The non-compliances noted in the report have been actioned to ensure that the service provided is safe, appropriate to residents' needs, consistent and effectively monitored."



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