

THE REGULATION AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AUTHORITY (RQIA)

NOTICE OF DECISION

Name of Registered Establishment: River House (RQIA ID: 020131)	Name of Registered Person: Amore (Watton) Limited Responsible Individual: Sarah Perez
Address of Registered Establishment: River House, 114 Milltown Road, Belfast, BT8 7XP	
Issue Date: 28 March 2025	NOD Ref: NOD000128
<p>The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority gives notice of a decision to impose a condition in relation to the registration of River House as follows:</p> <p><i>No resident is to be admitted who requires greater than a two to one staff to resident ratio.</i></p> <p><i>Following admission, should any resident require staffing above this ratio, at any time, an application to vary registration must be submitted to and approved by RQIA.</i></p> <p><i>The ratio of staff to resident must not exceed three to one.</i></p> <p>This is in relation to the following Regulations:</p> <p>Statement of purpose</p> <p>3.—(1) <i>The registered person shall compile in relation to the residential care home a written statement which shall consist of –</i></p> <p><i>(a) a statement of the aims and objectives of the home;</i></p> <p><i>(b) a statement as to the facilities and services which are to be provided by the registered person for residents; and</i></p> <p><i>(c) a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 1.</i></p> <p><i>(3) Nothing in regulation 18(1) or 27(1) shall require or authorise the registered person to contravene, or not to comply with –</i></p> <p><i>(a) any other provision of these Regulations; or</i></p> <p><i>(b) the conditions for the time being in force in relation to the registration of the registered person under Part III of the Order.</i></p> <p>Fitness of premises</p> <p>27.—(1) <i>Subject to regulation 3(3), the registered person shall not use premises for the purposes of a residential care home unless the premises are suitable for the purpose of achieving the aims and objectives set out in the statement of purpose.</i></p> <p><i>(2) The registered person shall, having regard to the number and needs of the residents, ensure that –</i></p>	

(a) the physical design and layout of the premises to be used as the home meets the needs of the residents;

The reasons for serving this Notice of Decision are:

RQIA are concerned about the inability of River House to effectively meet its aims and objectives as set out in the Statement of Purpose (SOP). This particularly relates to the challenges in effectively supporting residents requiring a high staff to resident ratio, largely due to the limitations presented by the physical layout of the premises. For the purposes of this notice, RQIA are defining a high staff to resident ratio as greater than a two to one staff to resident ratio; and no greater than a three to one staff to resident ratio.

In 2022, in response to a high number of concerns and adult safeguarding (ASG) referrals, RQIA carried out a review and shared the summary recommendations with the Provider and with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT). At that time, we reviewed the premises and determined that, whilst they met The Residential Care Homes Minimum Standards for premises (updated Dec 2022), account had not been taken of the complexity of residents and the number of staff required to care for them, resulting in areas of the home becoming congested. In addition, the dining room is, in effect, a multi-purpose room and link area from one part of the home to another. It is not conducive to a calm dining experience, particularly when accounting for the number of staff required to care for residents.

In comparison to other residential care homes in the Care Home group, River House does not offer the same availability or range of communal and quiet spaces for residents.

The BHSCT commissioned a review of River House in April 2024 and shared the report with RQIA. The report commented that the premises were not purpose built and the layout was challenging, particularly when trying to meet the needs of an identified resident with a particularly high staff to resident ratio.

RQIA are aware that notice of termination of contract was issued by the home to a number of residents within the preceding 18 months, all of whom required a high staff to resident ratio. RQIA believe this may be a further indication of the challenges of supporting residents requiring high staff to resident ratios within River House.

Multiple concerns have been raised by relatives with RQIA, BHSCT and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET), over the preceding four years and particularly in this past year. In 2024 there were a high number of ASG referrals made of which 72% related to residents on a high staff to resident ratio. This included a recent safeguarding investigation where undoubtedly, the limitations posed by the premises were a contributory factor. In responding to the level of concern raised, RQIA has dedicated a significant and disproportionate regulatory effort to this Residential Care Home in comparison to similar residential care homes.

A review of River House enforcement history demonstrates ongoing concerns in relation to the environmental constraints and the maintenance of safe staffing levels since

August 2020. At a Serious Concerns meeting in August 2020 the impact of the environmental constraints were discussed. It was agreed by all attendees that the home had departed from their original SOP and was now providing care to residents with very complex needs. At that time there was only one resident requiring a high staff to resident ratio. Despite assurances from management at this time that they would be mindful of their ability to provide care to residents with such needs, given the limitations of the premises, a number of residents went on to require a high staff to resident ratio.

A Failure to Comply notice was issued to River House in October 2020 relating to staffing issues including dependency on agency staff and maintaining the required staffing levels. Compliance was later achieved. In March 2024, a meeting was held with the intention of issuing two Failure to Comply notices, one in relation to staffing levels. The notice was not issued on that occasion with the assurances provided. Concerns continued to be raised intermittently regarding the maintenance of planned staffing levels underlining the challenges in maintaining such high staffing levels.

An intention to issue a Notice of Proposal meeting was held on 9 January 2025, following which an opportunity was given for the Provider to review their SOP in light of the concerns raised by RQIA and to apply their learning from recent experiences of caring for those requiring a high staff to resident ratio. A revised SOP was submitted to RQIA on 21 January 2025 and again on 24 January 2025 for review.

The intention meeting was reconvened with the Provider on 7 February 2025 during which it was shared that the assurances given during the meeting of 9 January 2025 and the revised SOP were inadequate to satisfy RQIA that similar circumstances would not occur in future.

RQIA are aware of the systemic challenges within the Health and Social Care sector of the availability of appropriate and sustainable accommodation for people with a learning disability. Should residents require to be reaccommodated, the capacity of the Trusts to facilitate this in a timely manner is limited. As a result, residents could be potentially maintained in an inappropriate placement for protracted periods of time. RQIA are keen to support the sustainability of such placements by taking measures to prevent any avoidable breakdown in prospective residents' placements with the resultant negative impact on residents and their families. RQIA therefore seek to impose a condition on the registration to regulate the staff to resident ratios. The home must be able to achieve its aims and objectives within its Statement of Purpose (SOP) and within the limitations imposed by the home's environment going forward.

Under Article 22 of the 2003 Order the Registered Person/Applicant may, within 28 days of the service of this notice, make an appeal to the Care Tribunal concerning any matter which that person wishes to dispute.

<p>Signed.....</p>	<p><i>Elaine Connolly</i></p> <p>pp on behalf of the Chief Executive</p>
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This notice is served under Article 20 of The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

It should be noted that failure to comply with some regulations is considered to be an offence and RQIA has the power under regulations to prosecute for specified offences.