


STARK WARNING FROM ST JOHN OF GOD

Mary of Angels may be sold off



St Mary of the Angels, Beaufort

■ Huge €32.5m debt facing operators

■ Families of residents oppose the sale

THE ORGANISATION operating St Mary of the Angels residential centre have told Health Minister Stephen Donnelly that it will be forced to sell the Beaufort facility unless the State sorts out its €32.5m debt.

BY CHIEF REPORTER
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St John of God Community Services run St Mary of the Angels which is home to 64 adults with physical and intellectual disabilities.

But the service, funded

by the HSE, has racked up accumulated deficits of €32.5m because of 'repeated failure to provide annual funding to meet service requirements'.

Last September, St John of God issued 12 months' notice to terminate the servic-

es arrangement at Beaufort and transfer the operation of its services to the HSE by October.

St John of God Services is currently in discussions with the HSE about the hand-over of services at St Mary of the Angels.

Kerry's Eye can now reveal that St John of God has written to Minister Donnelly and told him that if the €32.5m deficit is not sorted out by the State, then the assets in Beaufort will be sold.

St Mary of the Angels comprises several buildings with state-of-the-art facilities and sits on 30 acres of landscaped gardens. Huge fundraising efforts by families have helped upgrade

the facilities there.

In a statement issued to *Kerry's Eye* on Wednesday, St John of God Community Services said: "In the absence of addressing this deficit, the company will be insolvent and this could trigger an automatic sale of assets in order to settle the liabilities.

"A transition process is currently in train between HSE and St John of God which may ultimately see all existing services coming under the direct responsibility of the HSE. A wide range of matters including the utilisation of the existing asset base are a matter of ongoing discussion."

The service said that it remains committed to 'an

orderly transition over this period with minimal disruption caused to those using our services, their families and our staff'.

But residents, their families and staff fear the worst and want a clear commitment that the assets at Beaufort will not be sold, potentially leaving over 60 residents homeless.

A parents and relatives group from St Mary of the Angels met with Minister Norma Foley and Disability Minister Anne Rabbitte last week to voice their concerns.

After the meeting, Minister Foley said: "There is no question but that the facility, the land around it, is strictly entrusted for the

benefit of current residents and residents of the future. Minister Rabbitte and her officials understood that very clearly."

The parents and relatives group now want a clear and public assurance from St John of God Services that it will not sell any of the St Mary of the Angels assets.

Jack Fitzpatrick, whose son Bernard is a resident at St Mary of the Angels, said families do not want the assets sold to deal with any deficit and want families to be involved in decision-making. They also want the facilities in Beaufort - like the hydrotherapy pool - to be opened up to wider use.