The agency bill nobody had priced

A staffing line six per cent over budget in January, nine by March, inside every tolerance anyone applies. Followed through, it is £380,400 a year and the reason one care home loses £715,000.

28.5%
of care hours through agency, against a 10% benchmark

£380k
a year above own staff rates

0.55×
rent cover, against a 1.20× covenant

What the operator saw

Ivywell Court is a 70 bed home at 71.4% occupancy. Its management accounts showed a staffing line six per cent over budget, inside the tolerance most groups apply before anyone asks a question, and it had been over for three months. Nothing in that pack said which hours, at what rate or on which shifts, because the timesheets sit with the home and the accounts sit with head office.

What was underneath it

MONTH	AGENCY SHARE OF CARE HOURS	AGAINST BENCHMARK	COST ABOVE OWN STAFF
January	9.7%	within	£10,800
February	11.6%	+1.6pp	£12,900
March	14.9%	+4.9pp	£16,600
April	18.8%	+8.8pp	£20,900
May	23.1%	+13.1pp	£25,700
June	28.5%	+18.5pp	£31,700
Six months, and the run rate	**28.5%**	**.**	**£118,600, so £380,400 a year**

Against a £179,400 monthly staffing line, January is 6% over and March is 9%. No single month asked a question, because nothing in the pack separated agency from own staff. A home carrying summer cover through June, July and August finishes above this run rate.

Where it ends

£380,400 a year does not stay a staffing problem. It comes out of EBITDARM, which is what the rent is covered from, and Ivywell Court finishes at 0.55 times cover against a covenant of 1.20: a formal breach over a number visible every month in a form nobody could read. The fix was four permanent night carers, once nights were identified as the driver.

What the platform does with it. Agency invoices are read as they arrive and set against the rostered hours for the same week. What is raised is the run rate, not the month.