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16th July 2020

Merthyr Planning

Dear Caroline Pulley

Re Planning Application Number P/20/0102.

In respect of the above application which relates to a children's care home, I report as follows:-

South Wales Police will always support the need for safe, secure and well managed care provision and would wish to work with the authority and care home providers to achieve this outcome.

It is a fact that children and young people in care are some of the most vulnerable in our communities. Many will be in need of support, some will be subject to child protection orders and all will have care or risk management plans.

Such care homes, as proposed in the above application, have often resulted in huge demands being placed on the police and partner organisations. One of the biggest demands is down to the fact that children often go missing from these establishments. South Wales Police Missing/CSE Safeguarding Team have highlighted growing concerns in particular the numbers of children who are reported missing from care homes and the risks and dangers they face.

The reasons why children run away from care are varied, but often they run away from a problem, such as abuse, conflict or neglect, or to somewhere they want to be. Some may have been coerced run away. Whatever the reason, children and young people that go missing may be at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation such as violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug

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and alcohol misuse.

Every missing episode carries with it the potential for a child to come to serious harm. Some children will only experience a single episode of going missing, other children repeatedly go missing. Children, who are looked after, are three times more likely to go missing than their peers are.

It is therefore, absolutely necessary to ensure that all children's care homes provide safe, secure, supportive and well managed accommodation.

Both the Police and local authority social services have limited resources to deal with what is seen to be an increasing problem.

In Northern BCU there are already 33 children's care homes/supported living placements which provide in excess of 130 bed placements. A review of occurrences (1/1/20 – 31/3/20) linked to residents of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registered care homes within Northern BCU indicated that they were responsible for 17% of all missing person occurrences during that time. 97% of those calls related to a resident in a children's care home.

In the last year (1/7/19 – 30/6/20), South Wales Police Northern BCU, received 1699 missing person calls. Merthyr borough reported 389 (23%) of those calls received with 238 out of those calls (61%) being missing person reports received pertaining to young persons under the age of 18.

South Wales Police are disappointed that the developer in the above application, has made no contact with South Wales Police to discuss our concerns.

In view of this, the fact that there is already a care home in the street where this new home is proposed, and the demands such establishments place on South Wales Police and our partner agencies, as outlined above, I would object to this planning application.

If the authority do allow this application, then South Wales Police would ask for a detailed management plan to be included as a condition. The plan should provide details of staffing levels, the number of staff to child ratios at all times, what qualifications staff have to work with the children, criminal records checks (vetting) and processes regarding safeguarding issues. It should also include an agreement to work to any agreed protocols or memorandum of understandings with the police, regarding missing children.

There should be an appropriate fire safety/evacuation plan in place and a consultation meeting should take place with the local Policing Inspector prior to opening. This would be key in ensuring the home and the Police have a good working relationship.

Reason safeguarding of children and reducing the numbers of children who go missing.

In respect of the physical security of the home, all external doors and vulnerable windows installed should meet the standard PAS 24 2016 and be third party certificated. Upstairs windows should have restrictors fitted and the rear garden should be protected by security lighting and also by a wall or fencing at least 1.8 metres high that is difficult to climb.

Reason safeguarding of children and reducing the numbers of children who go missing.

South Wales Police are keen to work in partnership with the local authority and care home providers to ensure that care homes in the Merthyr area are safe, secure and well managed, with safeguarding being at the centre of partnership working.

To this aim South Wales Police are happy to provide support and further detailed evidence should this be required at any stage of the planning process.

If you require discussing any issues raised as a result of this report please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Mike Harvey

Designing out Crime Officer

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