

This is a letter for the attention of the counsellors due to be present at Tuesday's planning committee meeting dated [REDACTED] 2021. My name is Patrick Meehan and I am the co-director of Coastal Key Housing. I am writing on behalf of our other director [REDACTED] and our General Manager [REDACTED].

Coastal Key Housing has been operating its Outstanding semi-independent provision since July 2018. We provide support and accommodation that equips our young people with the skills required to live independently when they leave us at 18. All of our young people are 'care leavers' and are from Blackpool or Lancashire. We hope this letter finds you well as we feel it contains key information that will help you better understand who we are, the service we provide and the dilemma we are faced with.

In 2013, I was employed by Blackpool Borough Council as a Primary School Teacher and worked at several Blackpool schools over the course of five years. I was rated as an Outstanding teacher and thoroughly enjoyed educating and being a positive role model for the young children of Blackpool. My partner [REDACTED] worked at Claremont Primary School for over 10 years, working as a Teaching Assistant and in Family Liaison for families with higher levels of need within this deprived area of Blackpool. After careful consideration and extensive research, I chose to leave my teaching career to pursue a career in supporting and caring for vulnerable local teenagers as I felt that this to be my vocation.

I initially endeavoured to open a residential children's home however believed my skillset would be better suited to semi-independent accommodation for care leavers. For two years, I worked as a Support Officer at the YMCA in Fleetwood, during which time I gained experience in this field. My vision was coming closer to reality as we identified the building in 2016 and purchased it soon after, using the building as a family home while we brought the infrastructure up-to standard for its desired purpose. We invested heavily in decoration, amenities and equipment to ensure it was suited for a high-quality leaving care provision.

All of my life savings as well as additional borrowing was dedicated to the formation of Coastal Key Housing. During the development phase, we went to great lengths to contact all relevant applicable governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to ensure we were compliant with all policies and regulations. We applied to the Placements Northwest Leaving Care framework tender and were accepted in June 2018. Alongside regulatory compliance, this two-year process allowed us to fully develop our ethos and ensure we were fully prepared for safely and appropriately housing young people. The safety, well-being and progression of our residents and staff is at the heart of that ethos. We have developed a close and professional working relationship with Blackpool Borough Council, including the Placements Team and Social Services within BBC since opening in 2018. We have since developed a great working relationship with Blackpool Council and their Placements team. They visited our home and were impressed with what we had created and were happy to place young people with us. They commented that we have something unique with an approachable and influential attitude to the young people who we support, and they recognised how hard we have worked on our property to give that homely feel and our dedication to improving the lives of local young people.

Being born and raised in Layton myself, I was lucky to have a privileged upbringing and would thrive from giving something back to our community. I feel I do this well and this is reflected in the nature of Coastal Key Housing. Both my partner Ruth and our manager Jordan, along with the rest of our dedicated staff team are fellow Sandgrown'uns and understand the challenges care leavers face in Blackpool.

We are driven by achieving positive outcomes for our young people who reside with us. Since opening in 2018 we have supported 15 care leavers onto independence. All of our young people have come from different walks of life, ranging from extreme poverty, families with a history of substance misuse and unaccompanied asylum seekers. We celebrate and promote diversity.

Each story is different; however, each outcome has been positive. We have consistently provided stability, structure and security to enable them to their potential. This is not easy to achieve but we work tirelessly to ensure our residents are safe and happy. Unlike others in Blackpool, we are not a big company with a large turnover of staff, who are motivated by expending their business. We are a small family-run business with one home.

We believe a smaller staff team with familiar faces is our greatest resource. Without our staff team, our vision could not work. Every member of our team has vast experience in working with underprivileged local young people and are driven by improving outcomes and creating a homely environment for our residents. Our staff team have a vast range of skills and external interests that helps to motivate our young people to strive for a bright future. We include our residents in our own lives outside of work such as sporting and music events. One resident in particular relished the opportunity to watch his first ever game of football at Blackpool Football Club. Another accompanied myself when my band performed at Layton Institute. I am currently teaching two of our young people how to play guitar, and they are really enjoying the opportunity to learn a new hobby and channel their creativity. I am a hands-on director who is involved daily on our rota; I know and love my business to its highest extent.

We have recently invested over £10,000 by improving our communal areas for our residents. They have had input in this process and we are in the final stages of completion. It looks fantastic and we hope to invite you to visit our beautiful home when it is safe to do so. Each room is decorated and furnished to the highest of standards. I do not believe in doing things on the cheap as some other provisions seem to do. Our young people respect what they have and view this as their home — it's not just a placement to them. It saddens me to highlight however some providers in our area do not do this. They simply see our line as work as a 'get rich quick' scheme and place vulnerable young people into makeshift accommodation with poor levels of support and lack of supervision.

When first setting up our home in 2016, we enquired with Blackpool Borough Council on the need for planning permission or HMO approval for a semi-independent provision, and neither was required at this time. However, following consultation with Susan Parker (Head of Planning) in June 2020, we instructed to apply for a change of use to C2 status, allowing us to operate with Children's Home status despite the fact we are not a Children's Home under the attached OFSTED guidance. We hope this will ensure that no other provider can be within close proximity to us (400 meters). We believe that additional facilities within a close proximity will have serious negative implications for our residents.

In February last year, [REDACTED] purchased the vacant building next door to our own to set up the exact same provision as ours, however they did this without consulting the council, placements team or the local community. We feared that this would have an adverse effect on the day-to-day running of our own provision as we felt that there was a likelihood their issues would become an issue on our own doorstep. It has been a living nightmare at times and it has deeply affected our home and, most importantly, our residents. I have raised these issues with the council and placements team, and I have attached my log of concerns to highlight how bad things have been since they opened in September 2020. As a result of multiple serious safeguarding concerns the placements team have intervened and something is finally being done. [REDACTED]

██████ (Director of █████) claimed he was professionally embarrassed about the concerns raised yet the problems still persist.

As a result of █████ setting up next door I had to protect my business, my staff and our young people. I sought advice from the placements team and █████ about what we could do to prevent this from happening. I was told planning had to be reactive to such issues and that I would need to apply for planning permission (C2 status) to ensure █████ would cease to operate next door and relocate. I was led to believe that with this support and advice the issue would be resolved as we were the first semi-independent provision in our area. However, I am now to understand that our application is recommended for refusal because we are within 400m of another children's home with C2 planning.

Despite being within 400m of an operating children's care home with C2 status (██████ on █████ Avenue), this a completely different service to what we provide. We have spoken with the owners (Sandcastle Care) and they have agreed that we provide a distinctly different service, i.e. our residents' needs are completely different to theirs – █████ provides care and accommodation for up to seven children or young people (aged 4+) who require care and have a range of learning, emotional and physical needs. Their residents require round the clock supervision. On the other end of the residential childcare spectrum, we provide accommodation and leaving care support for low-risk 16- & 17-year-olds as they prepare to live independently. We pose no difficulties for each other and the services we provide are very different. This is something that is supported by Blackpool Children's Social Care. With our services being very different, I disagree with the statement in section 13.2 of the Planning Committee Agenda of there being a high concentration of specialist services in our area. I ask you to consider whether the 400m rule is appropriate for two services that contrast so drastically and hope this recommendation can be overturned.

During our application process, we have sought advice and spoken to all relevant people making them aware of our concerns about next door and the situation we find ourselves in. I have reached out to Paul Maynard several times as his letter of objection contained inaccurate information and labelled us to be like other children's homes. Unfortunately, I have had no correspondence back from Paul despite reaching out several times, although I appreciate he is extremely busy due to the ongoing pandemic. In contrast, Councillor █████ has been very understanding and has considered our concerns. Although her comments were opposing our application in respect of the hoteliers in the area, we invited her to our home so she could see our service for herself and hear our response to the concerns that have been raised. We feel this was a successful visit and gave someone of her authority and status a better understanding as to who we are and what we do. Resulting from this, I have now established a network with █████ who is the spokesperson for hoteliers in our area. I speak monthly with Rebecca and we discuss any concerns. It has been nice to extend our arms to the wider community a few streets up from our home and we intend to keep a positive relationship with each other.

In summer 2020 there were number of local issues that involved teenagers in the area, two of whom were from out of the local area and placed in █████ (another home). For several months, different anti-social behaviours were happening and the youths were drawn to the abandoned hotels on King Edward Avenue. These hotels were closely monitored by nearby hotel owners. However, the actual owners did nothing to make these properties secure and with teenagers being teenagers – they became a beacon to explore. Our residents were not involved apart from one isolated incident which led to the police stepping in after a bus stop was destroyed. This resident was swiftly moved from our provision; he was gone within ten hours of the incident. My point is that we were proactive in the situation — we did not sit back and do nothing. We then provided a

community watch for the residents and hoteliers to appease their concerns and ensure our residents were not involved with any other crime. We did not have to do this however we wanted to respect the concerns of our community. This area was once my home community. I take extreme pride in my community and will do anything I can to prevent it from being ruined by the disrespect of others.

We are everchanging to suit our young people's needs. This is reflected through their own voices and their social workers' feedback. I have collated several feedback responses from different but relevant people.

I have to make you aware of our latest inspection. We have received an outstanding report from our quality assurance officer [REDACTED]. As a council, you have a duty of care to keep our children safe. You are our residents' corporate parent, and you have a responsibility to ensure our children are safeguarded and placed in high-quality accommodation. Therefore, if you have placed a child with us, we also take on that role. It is clearly evident we do this well and it is confirmed that the council want to continue to work with us. Below is their statement and I have also attached the full report.

"Coastal Key are one of our best providers - they received their quality assurance visit the week before Christmas and were outstanding. There are currently 3 looked after children in their care from Blackpool. We do have a need for this accommodation and always strive to place in good quality provision so would like to continue to work with the company. The location was acceptable until [REDACTED] set up their provision next door without any consultation with the local authority. This has now resulted in a difficult situation: we do have quality concerns regarding [REDACTED] [REDACTED] however they haven't applied for planning permission and as such are not under the same scrutiny. Coastal Key are the only semi-independent provider to have applied for planning permission and the reason for that is that planning recommended it as a course of action when [REDACTED] set up next door to them. I am concerned that this situation will end badly for them because they followed our advice to apply for the permission. None of the semi-independent providers have planning permission currently. The identity of the operator is irrelevant in the context of planning permission. The Council's planning enforcement team are investigating [REDACTED] and any other SISL's that come to our attention".

It deeply upsets me to think that we may have to close. We have worked tirelessly to get to where we need to be. This is not an easy job and presents many challenges that we manage extremely well on a daily basis. Since [REDACTED] have opened next door we are constantly faced with extra stresses and unnecessary issues that are affecting my business, my health and personal well-being. There is an unnecessary constant feeling of stress and the council have sympathised with my dilemma. I have not been able to focus my full attention on my business because I am constantly having to deal with next door or a planning related issue. On top of that there is also the worry that my staff might lose their jobs and we will not be able to continue our outstanding work.

We have been faced with a pandemic. As key workers, we have to ensure our young people are safe whilst not losing focus on their mental and emotional well-being. This has not been easy with four teenagers however our residents feel happy and content. Unlike others across the country who have been able to enjoy time at home with their families and loved ones, we worked long shifts throughout and continued to prioritise our young people. We are proud to be key workers.

Outside of work, we endeavour to act as positive role models and try to include our residents within certain aspects of this. As a musician, I share my love of music and live events with our residents and I enjoy taking them to these events. We also have three members of our staff team who play in a local amateur football team, one of whom used to play for Blackpool FC. Our residents regularly go

along to games to support the team and have even become involved in volunteering for the team to help with the running on a match day. This allows our young people to be introduced to new experiences and have a feeling of inclusion. We support local charities, encouraging our residents in volunteering for litter picking, dog walking and donating to the local food bank. We sponsor local rugby clubs, football clubs and boxing clubs. We would like the opportunity to continue this charitable work. This all contributes to enhancing opportunities for our young people and allows us to show them that we live in a town that we can be proud of. Our extensive links to work experience opportunities give residents the opportunity to succeed in life, something that they may not have previously had access to.

I appreciate that this is a lot of information to digest, however I hope this highlights our dedication to supporting the young people of Blackpool and our business. If you would like to discuss anything further, please don't hesitate to call me ([REDACTED] Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I look forward to meeting you virtually on Tuesday evening.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Meehan
Director
Coastal Key Housing