

Committee of Management for the National Codes of Standards for Large Student Developments

Minutes of Committee of Management Meeting

held on Thursday 7th June, 2007, at the University of Leeds

Present: Mr Neil Marsden (ANUK and Chair), Mr Jason Bains (Derwent Living), Mr Martin Blakey (Unipol), Mr Gavin Duncan (Opal), Mr Ian Fletcher (ANUK), Ms Ruth Hammond-Laing (LACORS), Mr Allan Hilton (Cass & Claredale), Mr Dennis Hopper (University of Leeds), Ms Veronica King (NUS), Mr Charles Marshall (Liberty Living), Ms Jacqueline McNee (Unipol), Ms Helen Mc Neely (AMOSSHE), Ms Valerie Nicholls (ASRA), Mr John Ripley (Victoria Hall, for Bob Crompton); Mr Paul Rowlinson (Shaftesbury), Mr Alan Russell (UNITE), Mr Nick Stanton (Mainstay), Ms Sarah Wayman (NUS) and Mr Keith White (CRM)

In Attendance: Maggie Davidson (Buildings Research Establishment); Mr Simon Kemp (National Code Administrator),

Apologies: Mr Mark Allen (UPP), Mr Stuart Black (London Metropolitan University), Mr Andrew Cardy (UUK), Mr Jeff Childs (Welsh Assembly Government), Mr Andrew Griffiths (CIEH), Mr Paddy Jackman (UUK), Ms Geraldine Ward (University of Hertfordshire)

The meeting began at 11.35am. The Chair thanked the University of Leeds for arranging the venue and the lunch and then asked members to introduce themselves.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

These were **APPROVED** as being a true and accurate record of that meeting.

Matters Arising

Training – The National Code Administrator reported that two training events on the National Codes had already taken place, one for staff of Victoria Hall and one general session, and that several more will be taking place throughout June and July. John Ripley (Victoria Hall) informed the meeting that VH staff had found the training to be worthwhile.

Publicity & Awareness – The National Code Administrator announced that additional copies of the A5 size publicity leaflets for both codes have been printed and invited members to contact him if they wanted any more copies.

Photocopies of a full page advert for the national codes, which appeared in the April edition of *The National Student*, were circulated. The CoM was asked to consider a proposal that three further adverts be placed in three consecutive issues of *TNS*, the design and content of which would be circulated to members of the CoM before publication. Veronica King (NUS) welcomed the proposal and also suggested that NUS could distribute a syndicated article on the national codes for use in student union papers. Alan Hilton (Cass and Claredale), although supporting the proposal, felt that a developed marketing strategy should be produced. It was agreed to bring a draft strategy to the next CoM. Martin Blakey reported that although some contacts had been made with certain national newspapers, more work was required to get interest from these in publishing an article on the codes.

ANUK Website Page Impressions – The National Code Administrator tabled some information concerning the amount of use being made of the National Code sections on the ANUK website. On the basis of page impressions, four out of the top five most visited pages on the ANUK site in 2006 related to the National Codes, the most popular of which was the list of developments covered by the Codes.

It was agreed that the National Code Administrator would circulate, via email, details of the page impressions for 2007 and also indicate comparisons between the figures for 2006 and 2007.

Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes – The Chair invited members present to comment on which of the TDP schemes they had or were considering signing-up to and to raise any problems or concerns that they might have with these schemes.

Charles Marshall (Liberty Living) reported that they had signed-up to the insurance scheme operated by The Disputes Service, at a cost of around £16,000. They were concerned about the speed with which the system had been introduced and the fact that, as a result of this, a number of problems with the system still had to be ironed out. They were also concerned about the cap which the scheme imposed on the number of disputes that they are permitted to have brought against them, as this can be difficult to predict from year to year.

John Ripley (Victoria Hall) announced that although they wanted to join one of the schemes, because the organisation is registered off shore, they are not permitted to do so. This is despite the fact that their operations are purely UK-based.

Other members of the CoM were concerned that none of the schemes had so far seemed able to develop effective technology to process the amount of data required. This therefore meant something of a 'paper war' for providers of high density student accommodation.

Martin Blakey (Unipol) wondered whether there was a role for the CoM in influencing how the schemes were being operated. He felt that it would be possible to design a bespoke scheme that would be simpler, provide standard documentation and software, and could charge a more competitive price.

It was agreed that the National Code Administrator should contact the CEO of The Disputes Service and arrange a meeting to discuss this idea further. Once a date had been agreed, the NCA will notify members of the CoM and invite expressions of interest to attend the meeting.

Update on Code Membership

The National Code Administrator reported that the total number of bed spaces covered by the ANUK/Unipol Codes, as of May 31st 2007, was 98,474. This was an increase of 16.6% on the figures last reported to the CoM in December 2006. The increase was partially due to membership applications from 6 new providers as well as existing providers increasing the size of their portfolios.

Nick Stanton (Mainstay) asked for clarification on the process for accepting new members and the NCA agreed to re-circulate the flow diagram which describes the existing procedure. Allan Hilton (Cass and Claredale) asked if any questions were raised about the legal entity of the organisations that were applying to join and expressed an opinion that only the companies managing the developments ought to be listed as members and not the asset companies. Charles Marshall (Liberty Living) wondered whether now was the time to begin to consider ways of tightening-up on the procedures for joining the Codes, especially now that a distinct 'brand' had been created. It was agreed that the NCA should ask for comments from members of the CoM on the existing membership procedures and use these as the basis for a discussion on changes to it at the next meeting of the CoM.

The NCA informed the meeting that a number of members of the CoM had – by virtue of not attending the last three meetings – been deemed to have resigned their membership. These included two of the three reps from UUK and it was agreed that the NCA should contact their Chief Executive to request replacements. In addition to those deemed resigned due to a lack of attendance, several others had resigned as a result of either changing jobs, retirement or not being re-nominated by the organisations they represent. All of these will be replaced.

Two members of the Codes with more than 2000 bed spaces not currently represented on the CoM have been contacted and offered the opportunity to take up an automatic place, but neither Servite or Operon have yet responded to this invitation.

Assessment and Verification Procedures

The National Code Administrator reported that most of the membership had returned a self-assessment questionnaire, the only outstanding ones related to new members who joined in April/May and therefore had until the end of June to do so.

The Chair informed the meeting that he, along with Mr Philip Moxon from the Audit Panel, had been involved in the undertaking the series of verification visits which the CoM had agreed should take place at the last meeting. He announced that between May 9th and May 25th inspections had taken place at 24 developments belonging to 14 different members, with two further inspections visits needing to be re-arranged due to the provider not being able to be present on the date originally agreed for the visit to take place.

The Chair thanked those members present who had been subject to a visit for their help and support during the inspection process. He stated that the main purpose of the inspections had been to verify the accuracy of each of the provider's self assessment questionnaires and that, in order to do so, the verifiers had asked managers to supply set documentation, explain how they manage on a day-to-day basis, provide tenants comments and permit them access to the complex, including rooms.

The Full reports from each of the visits will be sent to the providers at the start of July and they will be permitted 30 days to respond to any issues raised. The Audit Panel will then meet in August to receive the final reports (including any amendments resulting from the consultation with providers) and to make any recommendations arising from the inspections. These may include agreeing the time gaps between how often members should be asked to complete the self-assessment questionnaire and members receive a verification visit, reviewing the process to take account of the fact that the self-assessment questionnaire is usually completed centrally whilst the verification visits focus on particular sites, how to compare old and new buildings when undertaking the verification visits, and the best ways of sharing good practice following on from the visits – especially when providers might wish to retain some market advantage from certain procedures. Gavin Duncan (Opal) suggested that a members' mail-base be created that could be used to share best practice.

The Audit Panel will also be asked to agree upon a timetable and location for the next round of verification visits. A full report will be made at the next meeting of the CoM.

Responses to Suggested New Security Standards

Martin Blakey (Unipol) reported that a meeting had been arranged between the Home Office and NUS to discuss whether there is any interest in the development of some nationally recognised security standards for student accommodation. It was agreed that the Home Office be invited to attend the next CoM to explore these matters further.

The National Code Administrator thanked members of the CoM who had responded to the request for feedback on a series of suggested alterations and additions to the National Codes in respect of security issues. There was general consensus that the proposal to restrict the placing of desks next to windows was not practical and the CoM therefore agreed not to discuss the suggestion further. It was agreed that the other proposals required further thought and should be the subject of a more detailed discussion at the next meeting of the CoM.

Building Research Establishment – Review of HMO Licensing

Maggie Davidson from the BRE gave a presentation on the findings of phase one of their review into HMO licensing – copies of which it was agreed should be emailed to members of the CoM. Maggie informed the meeting that the report was to be published shortly and that phase two of the project was likely to begin after that. Maggie reported that one of the aims of phase two was to get feedback from providers of high density student accommodation and invited members of the CoM to contact her with their experiences of licensing.

The Chair reported that LACORS had expressed the view that when Local Authorities decide on whether a development consisting of self-contained flats should be licensable or not, they should ask themselves whether the flats themselves have three storeys and five tenants and not take into account the size and occupancy levels of the whole building. However, he noted that such a position could only finally be established via the courts and that, as a result, Local Authorities were still free to determine policy on this matter for themselves.

The Chair asked Ruth Hammond-Laing(LACORS) for permission to circulate their advice on this matter to members of the National Codes. She agreed to inform the NCA whether or not this was possible.

Annual Report to CLG

The final version of the report – previously circulated by email – was tabled and comments invited. It was noted that Communities and Local Government has acknowledged receipt of the report and that it was the only Annual Report they had received in respect of the Approved Codes of Practice.

Links with UUK

Martin Blakey (Unipol) introduced a paper noting that links between ANUK/Unipol and UUK continue to be problematic and highlighting the fact that UUK are in breach of the protocol that was agreed in 2006. It was stated that these on-going problems could give the whole process of accrediting large student developments a bad name.

The meeting agreed the following proposals:

- That Martin Blakey meet with the Chief Executive of UUK to discuss matters further;
- That the position requiring reciprocal representation on both governance committees be affirmed;
- That once minutes of the only meeting of the UUK governance board to have taken place so far have been produced, then ANUK/Unipol will confirm who their 3 reps to the UUK body are

Veronica King (NUS) expressed their on-going frustrations about the lack of clear governance structures in respect of the UUK Code and reported that they had met with Government ministers to make them aware of this.

It was suggested that some universities were also becoming frustrated with the lack of progress by UUK and that ANUK/Unipol could offer some general training events on the Code – aimed specifically at HEIs – as a way of increasing awareness of their importance.

AOB

Code of Standards Complaint (Chair's Adjudication) – The National Code Administrator reported that the Chair of the Tribunal Panel had adjudicated on the first formal complaint brought under the National Code that had escalated beyond the level of the National Code Administrator himself. The Tribunal Panel was scheduled to meet following the CoM meeting in order to receive the adjudication and decide on what action, if any, to take as a result of it.

Smoking Ban – Following various requests from members for guidance on implications of the actual and proposed smoking bans, the National Code Administrator circulated a copy of Unipol's draft smokefree policy. Allan Hilton (Cass and Claredale) proposed that a future meeting of the CoM discuss a proposed ban on smoking in all large developments.

On-line Application Systems and Implications for the Codes – Jason Bains (Derwent Living) asked whether an amendment was needed to the Codes to take into consideration the fact that many members now require tenants to sign-up on line, so no copies of the tenancy agreement are actually provided before they sign-up – as currently required by the Codes.

It was agreed to amend the Codes and bring revised wording to the next CoM for approval.

Veronica King – Following her two years as NUS Vice President (Welfare), Veronica will leave her post at the end of June. The Chair asked the CoM to formally express its thanks to Veronica for her efforts in helping develop the Codes and her overall support for the process.

Dates and Venues of Next Meetings

The National Code Administrator proposed that the next CoM be held on Friday 7th September, in London. Some members of the CoM felt that early September was a busy time and that it would be better to wait until late September or early October. The NCA agreed to email members of the CoM asking for alternative dates.

It was further proposed that in place of the usual December CoM meeting, that a National Codes conference be held to which all members of the Codes would be invited to send representatives. The event could begin with a key note speaker and then be followed by workshops on topics deemed to be of relevance to the National Codes. Due to the shortage of time it was agreed that the NCA should email members to get an impression of how many people would be interested in such an event.

The meeting closed at 2.00pm