

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

Minutes of Committee of Management Meeting

held at 11.00am on 24th February 2006 at ODPM, Eland House, London

Present: Mr Neil Marsden (ANUK and Chair), Mr Stuart Black (London Metropolitan University), Mr Martin Blakey (Unipol), Ms Leanne Creighton (Unipol), Mr John Daniels (ODPM), Mr Gavin Duncan (Opal), Mr Ian Fletcher (ANUK), Mr Andrew Griffiths (CIEH), Mr Stefan Hartman (Derwent Living), Mr Dennis Hopper (University of Leeds), Mr Paddy Jackman (UUK), Mr Jeff Preen (Liberty Living), Ms Claire Powrie (AMOSSHE), Mr Robert Russell (Association of Colleges), Mr Paul Rowlinson (Shaftesbury Student Housing), Mr Nick Stanton (UNITE), Mr Terence Treadwell (ASRA), Mr Keith White (CRM)

In Attendance: Mr Jonathan Chandler (University of Greenwich), Mr Colin Chapman (Bentley Jennison Consulting), Mr Simon Kemp (National Code Administrator), Mr John Martin (Chair of the Tribunal Panel)

Apologies: Mr Andrew Cardy (UUK), Mr Jeff Childs (Welsh Assembly), Mr Tim Cobbett (UUK), Ms Agnes Gautier (NUS), Ms Veronica King (NUS), Mr John Ripley (Victoria Hall)

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2005 were **APPROVED** as being a true and accurate record of that meeting.

Matters Arising

Chair of the Tribunal Panel

The Chair welcomed Mr John Martin, recently appointed Chair of the Complaints Tribunal, to the meeting. He thanked him for agreeing to take on the role and invited Mr Martin to address the CoM.

Membership Certificates

The National Code Administrator circulated design ideas for membership certificates and asked the CoM for its endorsement. The CoM **APPROVED** the design, subject to the inclusion of an expiry date of January 31st. It was also **AGREED** that the design be reviewed before 2007 certificates are issued.

Housing Act Briefing for HEIs

Following the agreement at the previous meeting that a briefing on the Housing Act be organised specifically with higher education institutions in mind, it was reported that it had not proved possible to find a venue for a date in February. John Daniels agreed to look into the possibility of a venue at ODPM for April 28th.

Committee of Management Membership Update

The National Code Administrator reported that the following people have been nominated to join the CoM:

Mr Robert Russell – Association of Colleges;
Mr Terence Treadwell – ASRA;
Mr Jeff Childs – Welsh Assembly

In addition to these, two of the most recent providers to join the National Codes have more than 2000 bed spaces – the University of Hertfordshire and Moorfield Domain, which gives them the right of automatic membership of the CoM. The University of Hertfordshire have nominated Ms Geraldine Ward as their representative, whilst a reply is still awaited from Moorfield Domain.

Martin Blakey reported that the Welsh Assembly is considering approving the National Codes and has requested copies in Welsh. NUS have previously agreed to ensure that a Welsh

translation is produced and they have been asked to provide such a version to Jeff Childs as soon as possible.

It was **PROPOSED** that some contact be made with the Scottish Assembly to ascertain whether they might also be interested in approving the Codes.

Publicity and Awareness

John Daniels reported that ODPM have included into the HMO Licensing orders details about the National Codes and are encouraging Local Authorities to treat suppliers who are signed-up to the non educational establishment Code in a favourable way if they have accommodation that is licensable. It was noted that a small number of the providers present operated such accommodation.

It was also reported that both of the ANUK/Unipol Codes now include in the declaration form for 2006 a requirement on members to promote the Code to their tenants. It was **AGREED** that some thought be given at a future CoM meeting to what additional publicity might need to be produced.

ODPM Approved Status

The CoM was invited to discuss a paper reporting on developments in respect of the granting of 'approved status' of the Codes by ODPM. The paper highlighted a number of issues which had recently been resolved between ODPM/ANUK/Unipol/NUS and UUK, particularly with regard to the applicability of the Codes to smaller properties. It had been agreed that if these were managed and controlled by educational establishments then they could join, but not if they were leased from a private landlord and classified as head leased. This is to be reviewed after one year. It was also reported that UUK had decided that Further Education Colleges are not able to join the UUK/SCOP Code.

Martin Blakey stated that following some communications with Tim Cobbett, the 50p per bed space charge for membership of the UUK/SCOP Code that was cited in the paper has not yet been agreed. It is more likely to be between 30p-60p.

Robert Russell informed the CoM that the Association of Colleges were unhappy that Further Education Colleges did not have a choice of which Code they could apply to join. He also expressed a concern that the ANUK/Unipol Code does not make any reference to FE Colleges. Martin Blakey explained that the reason why FE Colleges cannot join the UUK/SCOP Code was due to the fact that UUK have insisted on using the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to oversee their complaints procedure, and FE students fall outside of their remit. He **AGREED** that the AOC should be invited to comment on the ANUK/Unipol Code and to submit any alterations that they felt were required.

John Daniels reported that the ANUK/Unipol Codes had been approved by the Minister on February 20th. The Statutory Instruments relating to the Codes are currently being drawn-up, which may mean that a few minor alterations will be required - such as schedules of members. He thanked ANUK/Unipol and the CoM for the work that had gone into developing the Codes. He **AGREED** to look into whether or not ODPM's logo could be included on future Code publicity.

Martin Blakey **PROPOSED** that the pictures on the front cover of the two Codes ought to reflect the developments belonging to members other than Unipol – as is the case currently. It was **AGREED** that members email any photographs they felt were relevant to the National Code Administrator. The covers of the Codes will be reviewed at a later date.

ANUK/Unipol UUK/SCOP Protocol

A revised version of the Protocol agreement was circulated and comments invited. It was suggested that the second sentence of 2a be revised to read "Further educational establishments are obliged to join the ANUK/Unipol Code", and that 22 be revised to read "UUK, AOC and ANUK/Unipol will undertake joint training initiatives in respect of all three codes".

Subject to these alterations the Protocol was agreed.

Update on Code Membership

The National Code Administrator introduced a paper setting out latest details of how many bed spaces were covered by the ANUK/Unipol Codes, which suppliers had recently joined and latest initiatives to increase membership.

It was reported that a total of 71,409 bed spaces were signed-up to both Codes. Eight new suppliers had joined since the last meeting of the CoM, half of which were educational establishments. The only significant suppliers who are not currently signed-up are Downing Developments and Sanctuary Housing Association.

Letters have been sent to university Vice Chancellors and heads of accommodation services asking for contact details of any local non educational establishment providers who have not yet joined the ANUK/Unipol Code, and the responses are being followed-up. Some interest has also been received from some Scottish Universities in joining the educational establishment Code and it was **AGREED** that a report back on this be given at the next meeting of the CoM.

Assessment and Verification Methodology

Mr Colin Chapman of Bentley-Jennison reported back to the CoM on the outcomes of the verification visits which had been made to the three pilot sites. As this work was only commissioned in the middle of January 2006, Mr Chapman had not been able to fully complete his analysis of the findings; however, he felt that the visits had raised some issues which will have a bearing on the eventual assessment and verification framework.

The second stage of the piloting process entailed visits being made to the organisations that completed the self assessment questionnaire in order to verify the findings of the self-assessment. The original questionnaires were reviewed and checklists prepared to help focus the visits. The central activities of each of the organisations (i.e. marketing, allocations, student contracts, inductions, complaints) were reviewed. At least one site belonging to each organisation was visited and a review was made of the provision of facilities, operational records (i.e. gas safety certification, PAT testing, fire alarm testing, and maintenance requests), risk assessments, security provision, grounds maintenance. The outcomes were discussed with each organisation and specific recommendations for action were provided.

The visits revealed that the organisations' self assessments had been broadly accurate. They all had a comprehensive tenant handbook and induction process, methods for recording maintenance requirements and completion of work, systems to record and resolve complaints, disaster recovery plans in respect of major incidents, manage the service in a professional manner and provide staff training. Those taking part were extremely positive and professional and appeared committed to providing an excellent service to their tenants, they were also keen to learn from feedback and improve their performance.

The main points of discussion arising from the verification visits were as follows:

- Is it necessary to visit more than one development belonging to a member in order to get a proper sample?
- Should organisations be informed in advance of what records/documentation is required as part of the verification visit? – this would avoid problems if such records were held centrally or not on the site being visited
- Is there any additional information that organisations can supply which would provide an indication of performance? i.e. tenant surveys, percentage of returning students, levels of complaints and average time of resolution, action plan in respect of improving on the results of the self assessment
- The timing of the self assessment and verification process needs to be agreed, as do the costs and amount of time for the verification visits. Some thought also needs to be given to how the processes are recorded.

Mr Chapman proposed that the next steps should involve the issuing of the updated self assessment questionnaire to all members signed-up for 2006 (to include basic performance indicators such as those indicated in the third bullet point above); a request for members to submit an improvement plan against the Code; planning verification visits.

Representatives of the three organisations who took part in the pilot process were invited to comment on their experience of it. They reported that it had been non-threatening and had identified some weaknesses and issues that they had not been previously aware of.

The COM thanked Mr Chapman for his report. Due to the lack of time available, it was **AGREED** that discussions about the number of developments to be included in verification visits and whether or not reports from other independent auditors could be incorporated into the process should be included in a paper that will be emailed to all members of the COM in advance of the next meeting.

Further Educational Establishments and Other Regulators

The COM was asked to note this paper, which clarified the legal position of student accommodation housing student under the age of 18. Because this accommodation would fall under the auspices of the national care standards regulations, ODPM have advised that it would not be regarded as Homes for the purpose of part 2 of the Housing Act.

Energy Charging and Future Codes

Martin Blakey introduced a paper proposing that future editions of the Codes incorporate a range of sustainability issues and that some consideration is given to the introduction of energy charging. The CoM was invited to discuss the ideas contained in the paper as well as any other themes they might care to introduce.

The CoM was generally in support of the principle of incorporating sustainability issues into the Codes. It was **AGREED** that members would give some consideration as to how best to do so and ideas should be emailed to the National Code Administrator.

Although members were sympathetic to the stated intentions behind the idea of energy charging, concerns were raised about the practicalities involved. It was **PROPOSED** that some further research might be conducted into the idea, highlighting all the pros and cons.

Finance Update

A revised budget, adjusted to indicate probable fee income and costs of consultancy, was presented for approval. Subject to amending the maximum fee level from £15,000 to £12,500 – as had been agreed at the CoM held on December 9th, the budget was agreed.

Any Other Business

Tribunal Panel Membership

Mr Gavin Duncan volunteered to fill the vacant owners' place on the complaints Tribunal Panel. This was **AGREED**.

Date of Next Meeting

A number of problems have arisen with the date that was previously agreed for the next meeting. Members of the CoM were offered the choice of keeping it on May 25th and moving the venue from Leicester to York, or finding another date and venue. The consensus was in favour of the latter. It was **AGREED** that the next CoM take place on Thursday 1st June. Liberty Living have kindly agreed to host it at their London office.

Vote of Thanks

Martin Blakey proposed a vote of thanks to Verity Coyle, former Vice President (Welfare) at NUS, for her help in devising the National Codes. He also, on behalf of the CoM, thanked John Daniels for his assistance in the on-going development of the Codes.

The meeting closed at 1.30pm