

Committee of Management for the National Code of Standards for Large Student Developments.

Minutes of the Committee of Management Meeting

held at 11.00am on 25th February 2005 at the Offices of the Deputy Prime Minister, Bressendon Place, London

Present: Mr Neil Marsden (Chair and ANUK), Mr Mark Allen (UPP), Mr Martin Blakey (Unipol), Mr Andrew Cardy (UUK), Mr Bryan Carroll (ASRA), Mr John Daniels (ODPM), Mr Gavin Duncan (Opal), Ms Lindsey Fidler-Baker (NUS), Mr Ian Fletcher (ANUK), Mr Dennis Hopper (University of Leeds), Mr Paddy Jackman (CUBO), Ms Claire Powrie (AMOSSHE), Mr Jeff Preen (Liberty Living), Mr John Ripley (Victoria Hall) and Mr Simon Williams (UNITE).

In Attendance

Mr Simon Kemp (Unipol) and Mr Ian Robertson (University of Leeds)

Apologies

Mr Andrew Griffiths (CIEH) and Ms Helen Symons (NUS)

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th December 2004 were APPROVED as being a true and accurate record of that meeting.

Matters Arising

- i) The Chair asked whether progress had been made on the proposed joint ODPM/NUS housing publication. JD reported that the project was on-going
- ii) JD reported that DfES had a new contact person. He AGREED to raise with them the issue of DfES sending a representative to the CoM
- iii) SK gave a verbal report on the briefing meetings that had been taking place throughout February. These had involved RSLs, students unions and universities. Interest in joining the scheme had been expressed by a number of the RSLs and these were being followed up. Some universities had also shown interest in signing-up to the Code as a result of the briefings but were awaiting further information from UUK in respect of the proposed Code of Practice.
- iv) The briefings planned for Local Authorities had been cancelled because of lack of interest. NM AGREED to investigate how best to inform local authorities about the Code and it was further AGREED that a briefing should be prepared and circulated to the ANUK mailing list, explaining the scope and purpose of the Code, together with a cover letter from the Chair of ANUK.

Progress Report

A paper outlining progress to date with the National Code was discussed. A number of private providers and universities had already completed and returned the appropriate documentation and several others were in the process of doing so. It was likely that more than 50,000 bed spaces would be covered by the Code once these outstanding declaration forms and property schedules had been returned.

LF-B extended an invitation to the CoM to attend NUS' summer training programme for new student officers in order to run a session on the National Code. She also stated that NUS's support for the National Code had been included within the newly published education manifesto.

Matters for Discussion

Principles of Accreditation – A statement outlining the principles of accreditation in relation to the National Code was AGREED. GD stated that the main point for Opal was that the Code

provided some consistency of approach, giving both provider and consumer a framework for how to do business with one another.

Onward Development – MB introduced a paper setting out some of the ways in which the National Code would need to be seen as an ongoing development as it responded to continually changing circumstances. He specifically identified a number of areas, such as standards for internet connections, security and pastoral care, where further work should be undertaken to reflect specific standards. There was also further discussion to be held, at the next meeting, about whether the Code should have some additional standards that would result in a layering of standards along the idea of main compliance, bronze, silver and gold standard. The purpose of the Code was to raise standards and recognise best practice and this could be reflected in a more detailed system that would give the very best market advantage and recognition.

The Chair suggested that the new Health and Housing Rating System may also require alterations to the Code, especially in relation to security within developments and AGREED to prepare a short report on this for the next meeting.

LF-B suggested that any inclusion of standards relating to pastoral care would need to take into account existing policies operated by the HE institutions.

HEI Membership – In introducing the paper on this MB stated that there was a need for both the National Code, and the one which UUK are reported to be producing, to be complimentary to each other. JD believed that the UUK code would need to be based on legal requirements, so similar to that devised by RICS. It was suggested that the difference between a Code of Practice (UUK) and Code of Standards (ANUK) was that the former is based on law whilst the latter related to compliance in areas which are mainly management, services and amenity led and therefore frequently not covered by legislation.

LF-B reinforced NUS' view that the National Code should be the one that universities agree to sign-up to. It was important for the University sector to have some level of external accountability for the standards they signed up to, together with a proper complaints and tribunal system and any Code needed to address those issues. She also raised the issue that any dual Code system must take account of split responsibilities contained within student accommodation partnership agreements.

SW suggested that the decision as to which Code to sign-up to should be determined by the landlord of the development

GD felt that the existence of two codes would need to feature in any discussions between universities and private providers when partnership agreements were being discussed.

AC stated that UUK fully supported the ANUK Code but were concerned that it did not cover all properties within a university's accommodation portfolio, such as small houses, hence the need for a separate Code to cover these. UUK were willing to meet with ANUK to ensure that compatibility between any dual system was achieved.

The recommendation in the paper that UUK brief its members on the role, purpose and need for HEIs to support the National Code was AGREED.

Future SU Strategy – A paper setting out ideas for promoting the National Code to student unions was agreed. LF-B reported that work was on-going translating the Code documents into Welsh, and stated that any future publicity materials produced would also need to be bilingual.

Housing Act Approved Code of Practice Status – It was important that if an HEI agreed to join the ANUK Code that it was not necessary for them to join any other Code required by the Housing Act 2004. It was also important, for all suppliers, that the ANUK Code had the imprimatur conferred upon it of having Government approval. It was therefore AGREED that an approach was made to the Minister to confer ACOP status on the National Code. It was

further AGREED to defer this approach until a meeting had taken place with UUK about the development of their Code before proceeding with this. AC from UKK AGREED to press for the arranging of such a meeting as a matter of urgency and this sentiment was endorsed by the CoM.

It was also AGREED that some mechanism must be established between the CoM and UUK to ensure communications were improved, at both a policy and operational level, regarding the operation of any dual system of Codes.

CoM Membership of the National Code – The CoM was invited to discuss a paper which, having reminded members of their duty to publicise and promote the Code, called on all members who had not already joined up to consider doing so. It was an important part of the CoM that it consisted of members who had a stake in the Code and subscribed to its standards and this aspect of the CoM would need be strengthened in the future.

Establishment of CoM Sub Groups – A paper proposing the creation of four sub groups to represent different types of suppliers signed-up to the Code was agreed. It was also accepted that each of these be chaired by a representative from within each of those suppliers.

It was AGREED that Mr Dennis Hopper and Mr Stuart Black would Chair groups representing universities with large and small residential portfolios, respectively.

It was decided that RSLs/voluntary or not for profit sector (NFP) and the private providers be authorised to recommend someone from their own ranks to act as Chair of both of their particular sub groups.

The Tribunal – Recommendations to alter the composition of the Tribunal, in respect of increasing the number of owners represented from one to two, were AGREED.

After discussion, it was also AGREED to appoint Mr John Martin, barrister, as the Chair of the Tribunal and it was further AGREED that the two Deputy Chairs should be drawn from the other permanent members of the Tribunal, one to be decided by the Tribunal itself and one to be nominated directly by NUS.

Auditing and Compliance Checking – It was acknowledged that this was an important area that still needed further work, but in order to undertake that work, a framework needed to be agreed by the CoM on the nature of the systems to be followed. A discussion followed about the relative merits of having a peer review system as opposed to an independent audit and compliance system carried out by consultants.

Although there were some differences of opinion amongst members of the CoM, with the CUBO representative favouring peer review, it was AGREED that auditing of the Code should be undertaken independent of members as it was felt that this would give the Code considerably more credence, both from consumers and suppliers and from stakeholders who preferred external compliance. It was accepted that this system would be considerably more costly than a peer review system and the resource implications of this decision would need to be taken into account when bringing the full proposals back to the CoM.

In discussion a preference was indicated for the auditing involving members of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health or the Institute of Housing. The Chair suggested that if members of the CoM were uncomfortable about local EHO's visiting their buildings then ANUK or the CIEH could nominate officers to deal with certain regions. However, some members of the CoM felt as the standards covered by the Code went beyond merely physical ones it was AGREED to carry on this discussion once a framework for auditing had been agreed.

It was AGREED to establish a working group to be set up under Dennis Hopper to develop the audit and compliance framework and any standard documentation to be used. Members were asked to inform SK if they wished to serve on this working group. It was AGREED that Andrew Griffiths from CIEH be asked to join the group.

Staffing – A recommendation that Simon Kemp be moved for 50% of his time to become the National Code Administrator was AGREED and his staffing costs would be charged to the National Code account from 1st March 2005. until 31st October 2005 when the matter would be further reviewed.

Finances – It was AGREED that an approach be made to ODPM, DfES and UUK for some limited funding to support the development of the infrastructure and auditing mechanism of the Code. It was further AGREED that this appeal should be jointly led by Unipol and NUS on behalf of the CoM.

Any Other Business

Future agenda items – It was agreed that the National Code Administrator would send out a call for any papers and agenda items two weeks before any future meeting if the CoM and that any papers flagged would need to be received one week before the meeting. Generally, papers would be circulated a minimum of three days before the CoM meeting by E-mail.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was AGREED on Thursday 26th May 2005 in Manchester. Opal had kindly offered to host the meeting at one of its developments: The Place, Ducie St, Manchester (just next to Piccadilly train station).

The CoM THANKED the ODPM for hosting this meeting.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 1.15pm.