

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

Minutes of Committee of Management Meeting

held on Friday 8th December, 2006, at The University of Greenwich, Maritime Campus, London

Present: Mr Neil Marsden (ANUK and Chair), Mr Mark Allen (UPP), Mr Stuart Black (London Metropolitan University), Mr Martin Blakey (Unipol), Mr Jonathan Chandler (University of Greenwich), Mr Bob Crompton (Victoria Hall), Mr Graham Donaldson, (Mainstay Group), Ms Agnes Gautier (NUS), Mr Allan Hilton (Cass & Claredale), Mr Paddy Jackman (UUK), Ms Jacqueline Mc Nee (Unipol); Mr Jeff Preen (Liberty Living), Mr Nick Stanton (UNITE), Mr Terence Treadwell (ASRA) and Mr Keith White (CRM)

In Attendance: Mr Simon Kemp (National Code Administrator)

Apologies: Mr Jason Bains (Derwent Living), Mr Andrew Cardy (UUL), Mr Jeff Childs (Welsh Assembly), Mr Tim Cobbett (UUK), Mr John Daniels (DCLG), Mr Ian Fletcher (ANUK), Mr Andrew Griffiths (CIEH), Mr Dennis Hopper (University of Leeds), Ms Veronica King (NUS), Ms Claire Powrie (AMOSSHE), Mr Paul Rowlinson (Shaftesbury Student Housing), Mr Robert Russell (AoC) and Ms Geraldine Ward (University of Hertfordshire)

The meeting began at 11.10am. The Chair thanked The University of Greenwich for hosting the meeting 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

Energy Charging and Sustainability - The Chair suggested that members of the CoM should continue to feedback to the National Code Administrator information about energy charging and sustainability issues.

HMO Licensing - It was agreed that the NCA would report back to the next CoM on progress made by the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme to develop an honorary membership scheme for members of the National Codes with developments in London.

Welsh Assembly - It was reported that work was still on-going to arrange for some briefings on the implications of the Housing Act for student accommodation providers in Wales. As the intention is for the Assembly to host these, the dates will be determined by availability of rooms in the Assembly Building.

Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme Briefings - The National Code Administrator reported that two joint Unipol/DCLG briefing events are to be held in January, at DCLG's Eland House in London. Ian Fletcher has been in contact with one of the organisations that will be operating one of the insurance-based schemes, who are willing to speak at a future CoM meeting.

ANUK Guidance on HMO Licensing for Larger Developments – The Chair reported that he had met with LACORS to discuss ANUK's view on how blocks of self-contained flats should be treated for licensing purposes. He had re-iterated the advice issued on the ANUK website that only flats that were on three storeys and with five tenants should be licensed and not all buildings that were three or more storeys high. However, LACORS appear to take the view that this is for each local authority to decide upon and only the courts could determine which interpretation was correct. The Chair proposed that the CoM take legal advice in this and offered to draft a brief.

Allan Hilton expressed some concerns about the costs of the fees that were being charged by local authorities for the costs of the license. This view was supported by other providers who wondered whether costs would rise to similar levels as charged in Scotland.

The Chair proposed that the National Code Administrator invite all Code members to report back on how their developments are being treated by different local authorities in terms of licensing, including the costs charged. This can then be fed back to DCLG via the annual report that is to be submitted to them by April 2007.

National Code Logo – The National Code Administrator reported that a high definition version of the logo has been provided by NUS. It was agreed that each existing member be emailed a copy. It was also agreed that it should not be posted on the National Code section of the ANUK website until a members-only section can be created.

Correspondence with Educational Establishments – A revised version of a letter aimed at promoting the ANUK/Unipol Code for non-educational establishments to universities (previously circulated) was agreed. The National Code Administrator informed the meeting that these would be sent out before the CoM next meets.

Staff Training on the National Code – The National Code Administrator reported that a significant number of members had responded positively to the proposal that Unipol organise some training sessions on the National Code, aimed at staff managing developments covered by the ANUK/Unipol Codes. The first of these is likely to take place on Feb 1st, in Leeds. However, as some of the respondents had expressed a preference for a London-based venue, other dates will need to be agreed and venues procured. Jonathan Chandler offered the University of Greenwich as one potential venue.

Universities UK Code and its Governance – The Chair invited Paddy Jackman to report on the latest progress being made with agreeing governance arrangements for the UUK Code. He informed the meeting that the first meeting of the Code's management committee is due to take place in February 2007 and that it will discuss governance matters. However, they have yet to appoint an independent Chair and would welcome any suggestions. He also announced that a decision had been taken not to make a charge for membership of this Code.

Agnes Gautier enquired as to why NUS had not been informed about the meeting to be held in February. Paddy Jackman agreed to raise this with UUK.

Update on Code Membership

The National Code Administrator introduced a paper setting out the latest details of how many bed spaces were covered by the ANUK/Unipol Codes and which suppliers had recently joined. It was reported that a total of 84,462 bed spaces are signed-up to both Codes, an increase of 6.5% since the last meeting of the CoM. In terms of the Codes separately, 65,886 are in developments not managed and controlled by educational establishments and 18,765 are in accommodation managed and controlled by them.

Four new suppliers had joined since the last meeting of the CoM, one of which (University of Greenwich) has been co-opted onto the CoM as a result of the number of bed spaces that it manages. The Committee WELCOMED Mr Jonathan Chandler from the University of Greenwich who was attending the meeting.

Assessment and Verification Methodology

The National Code Administrator introduced a paper detailing latest developments with the self-assessment and verification procedures.

It was reported that all but one of the members signed-up to the Codes as of October had returned their completed self-assessment questionnaires. Those new members who have joined subsequently have been given until the end of December 2006 to do so.

Following a meeting of the Audit Panel on November 9th, the National Code Administrator had agreed to review all of the returned questionnaires and, where necessary, request additional information from providers. This was because it had become clear from the initial analysis of the returns that some providers had scored zero for certain questions and that this was either because they had misunderstood what was being asked OR the question itself was misleading. The Audit Panel requested that once all the forms had been re-scored then they be provided with final versions of the reports, along with information about any action plans adopted by members. This would then be used to inform the content of the verification visits.

The National Code Administrator announced that the content of the self-assessment questionnaire would be revised before it is re-issued to existing members again. Members were invited to assist with this process by feeding back any concerns about the content of the questionnaire based on their own experiences of completing it.

Proposed Alterations to the Codes

The CoM was invited to consider, and approve as necessary, a number of amendments (that would apply to both ANUK/Unipol Codes) that would come into effect from January 2008.

Clause 2.07 – Following agreement at the previous CoM, the National Code Administrator invited members prior to the meeting to comment on a proposed alteration to this clause. After discussion it was agreed that the existing wording to this clause was more effective than the amendment, although it was in need of some revision so that it takes into account the customers' wishes. No changes would therefore be made to clause 2.07.

Clauses 3.15 -3.18 – A proposal to replace the existing clauses relating to kitchen provisions with one provision reading "Shared kitchens are designed and installed having regard to safety and are of such layout and size and equipped with such facilities so as to adequately enable the storage, preparation and cooking of food and comply with any standards required by the local authority for this type of development" was agreed.

Clause 3.19 – It was proposed that the existing clause be replaced with the following wording: "Adequate WC, wash basin, and bath and/or shower facilities are provided, and in compliance with any standards laid down by the local authority for this type of development". This was agreed.

Clause 4.09 – A proposal to alter this clause was not accepted. It was agreed that the original was more effective than the amendment.

Clause 4.10 – An amendment to remove the words "on request" from the existing clause was agreed.

Clause 4.19 – An amendment to add the words "where installed" to the existing clause was agreed.

Clause 4.20 – A proposal to replace the section of the existing clause which reads "a lockable system capable of being opened" with a "secure latch that can be opened" was deferred. It was agreed to invite the Home Office to a future meeting of the CoM to talk about security standards in buildings of this type and, from that, revise the security section of the codes.

A draft pro-forma for use when proposing future amendments to the Codes was agreed. This will be posted onto the relevant section of the ANUK Code as a PDF.

Briefing on the NUS/Unipol Accommodation Survey

The Chair invited Agnes Gautier to make a presentation on the findings from the most recent edition of the NUS Accommodation Costs Survey, which for the first time had been jointly produced with Unipol.

Agnes reported that, amongst other things, the findings revealed that:

- Rents charged by private halls in London were 27% higher than those charged for accommodation provided by universities in London;
- Average deposits charged by private sector landlords are £180, but that providers of private halls on average were charging £280;
- There has been a big increase in the number of providers charging a booking fee, although it's not always clear what these are being charged for.

The Chair proposed that the National Code Administrator circulates copies of the executive summary of the report to members of the CoM.

Martin Blakey highlighted a number of possible policy implications that arise from the findings.

Booking fees appear to be coming more common but there is a big variation in the reasons providers give for charging them. They mainly appear to be cancellation fees; however, as some providers are charging more than £300 these may appear to be more of an income stream. The Office of Fair Trading believes a fee of £25 would cover the administrative costs associated with cancelling, they also take the view that there needs to be more transparency over what the booking fee is covering.

Another outcome from the report is that rent structures are becoming more complicated and there appears to have been a narrowing in the range of rents that providers are charging, which may make accommodation less affordable for certain groups of students.

Nick Stanton commented that UNITE's research does not support the findings that more students are living at home. They have found that a lot of their tenants actually have parental homes in the same city as the development in which they are living. Stuart Black felt the issue was more complex, and that issues of ethnicity ought to be factored into the analysis. Paddy Jackman congratulated NUS and Unipol on the report and asked for more in-depth analysis on certain areas of the report.

Martin Blakey thanked Agnes for her hard work in compiling the report.

2007 Outline Budget

The Committee of Management were asked to ratify the budget for 2007 and which was discussed at the last meeting.

Code Publicity and Awareness

The National Code Administrator introduced a paper, discussion of which was held-over from the last meeting. The CoM was asked to provide feedback on what, if any, additional publicity materials members might require and in what format. It was agreed that the National Code Administrator would send an email to all of the members asking whether they required additional copies of the A5 publicity leaflet.

The CoM was asked to endorse a proposal to buy in some support from a PR agency in 2007 in order to promote the National Codes to both students and their parents as effectively as possible. This was agreed.

Martin Blakey proposed that some consideration should also be given to publicising which private providers had not joined the appropriate Code. This should highlight the positive aspects of membership of the Code as well as the negative implications for providers of not having joined.

Dates and Venues for meetings in 2007

The National Code Administrator introduced a paper proposing reducing the number of CoM meetings from four a year to three a year. This was agreed. It was suggested that an annual

mini conference could be organised, to which all Code members should be invited and this was supported.

The paper highlighted problems in securing venues for CoM meetings given the current size of the CoM (30). The CoM endorsed the custom and practice of members and supporters of the Code hosting meetings and it was agreed that the National Code Administrator survey all members to discover which would be able to host possible future meetings.

The meeting closed at 1.25pm