

Minutes of the Committee of Management meeting, held at ODPM, on Thursday 16th December, 2004

Present: Martin Blakey (Unipol); Andrew Cardy (UUK); Jayne Conboye (ASRA); John Daniels (ODPM); Sally Hooker (for Ian Fletcher, ANUK); Charles Kerr (for Mark Allan, UPP); Neil Marsden (ANUK) in the Chair.

Apologies: Lindsey Fidler-Baker (NUS); Andrew Griffiths (CIEH); Paddy Jackman (CUBO); Vicky Loverseed (Unipol); Simon Williams (Unite)

In attendance: Simon Kemp (Unipol)

Minutes of the meeting held on 27/08/04 – These were agreed as a correct record

Matters arising –

- (i) The issue of DfES membership of the CoM has still not been resolved;
- (ii) At the last meeting NUS agreed to design some publicity leaflets and postcards. They were still willing to do so but just need to know what to produce;
- (iii) No other names for Tribunal Chair were submitted. MB agreed to produce draft duties of the Chair, along with terms and conditions and notes on conflicts of interest. The meeting agreed that John Martin would be the best candidate to approach for this post, after which the membership of the panel and vice Chairs need to be appointed. It was agreed that this should happen before the next CoM meeting;
- (iv) The Chair reported that the launch of the National Code had gone well, with about 85 people in attendance. A number of private providers and universities who were not able to attend had expressed interest in attending follow-up briefing events;

Main Agenda Items

4.1 Briefing Meetings – MB reported that, following the launch of the National Code, briefing meetings need to take place for 4 distinct groups: Student Unions (with the assistance of NUS); RSLs; Private providers; Universities and Colleges (with the assistance of UUK). The Chair also suggested including local authorities in that list. CK wondered if overseas investors might be added in and agreed to provide a list of possible contacts. ODPM have been approached to host the briefings for SUs (although there will need to be a second briefing for these at a venue in the North), RSLs, Private providers and Local Authorities. JD reported that they would be willing to do so, dates permitting. It was agreed that two, two hour, briefings be held at ODPM on the following dates: Friday 4th Feb, 2005 (RSL's am and Private providers pm)
Thursday 10th Feb, 2005 (SU's am and Local Authorities pm)
JD agreed to check on room availability.

This just leaves dates and venues needed for a northern NUS briefing and one for universities/colleges.

NUS has agreed to supply a spokesperson for the SU briefings. NM offered to speak at the one for local authorities and suggested Dave Princet might be prepared to assist him. MB agreed to ask David Pattey from Shaftsbury Housing to speak at the briefing for RSLs, assuming that they had signed-up to the National Code by January.

MB agreed to draft out an agenda for the briefings. JD offered to talk about the Housing Act at each briefing. NM agreed to publicise the briefing to local authorities, JD offered to check to see if the section of ODPM dealing with RSLs has a database that could be used to publicise that briefing, and NUS would be asked if their list of private providers could be used to send out info to that particular group.

4.2 Approved Code of Practice for University Halls – AC reported that a meeting had been held in Dec attended by the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE); the Conference of University Business Officers (CUBO); ASRA; UUK and the Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA). Most of these organizations supported the existence of the National Code but did not feel it was appropriate for Universities to join it, it seemed more aimed at private providers, and they therefore wanted to devise their own Code.

MB stated that the National Code had been devised in order to set some common, core, benchmark standards for those willing to join it, including universities. He claimed that a substantial number of bedspaces were now being provided on a joint basis – between a university and a private provider, and that therefore certain questions would be raised if the private provider was signed-up to the National Code but its partner university was not. He reported that some universities had enquired whether it would be possible to develop the National Code by introducing slightly higher standards – which they felt they already were able to meet.

JD reported that the ACOP for licensed HMOs will not be mandatory; merely an example of good practice that courts could use to judge what standards were reasonable. Therefore this would be true of all other ACOPs.

MB reported that something in the region of 24 universities had expressed an interest in joining the National Code, whilst the University of Leeds has already done so. He also stated that he saw no reason why the National Code could not be adapted in a way so as to allow for local condition. For example, Liverpool does not like providers charging booking fees so this could be dealt with by a codecil to the Code. Timeframes would also need to be agreed for when changes could be made to the National Code. The National Code will also have to adapt to take account of new issues within student accommodation, such as the provision of broadband.

JC reported that another reason why universities were reluctant to join the National Code was because of the fee of 35p per bedspace, as they cannot afford this. If they developed their own scheme then it is possible there would be no charge for that.

JD stated that if universities do not sign-up to an acop – especially one linked to an accreditation scheme – then the Government may decide that halls of

residence should be subject to licensing – thus they would probably have to pay an even larger fee.

MB proposed that the meeting request that ODPM accept the National Code as a recognised Approved Code of Practice.

4.3 Press and Publicity – NM asked which website – Unipol or ANUK – details of the National Code were to be posted on. MB replied that although they are currently on the Unipol one, the intention is for it to be transferred to the ANUK site, with links to the NUS and Unipol sites. However, before this can happen, some technical adjustments are required. In the medium to long-term, and depending upon take up, the National Code may need its own website.

NM proposed including on the website as much downloadable information as possible. MB replied that the National Code could already be downloaded from the site, as could information concerning complaints procedures.

NM suggested that the website could be used also for publicity materials – aimed at students especially, and which again could be downloaded. NUS has already agreed to issue postcards and these could be made available on-line. It was also suggested that some information be posted on the site about the National Code which both universities and private providers could include within prospectuses/advertising brochures.

JD reported that ODPM and NUS may be producing a joint housing publication, which ought to include something about the National Code.

MB proposed that a standard notice be produced for the foyers of the developments that were covered by the Code, and CK agreed to think about a suitable design. Thought also might be given as to whether owners/managers would require a manual explaining the requirements of the National Code.

JC agreed to produce a list of common questions that ASRA members had been asking about the National Code.

NM suggested that the CoM might wish to nominate one of its number to serve as a publicity officer.

MB raised the issue of producing merchandise to promote the National Code – such as mouse mats, key rings and stress balls – and agreed to sound out people attending the briefing sessions to discover what sort of items they think would be useful.

4.4 Schedules for New Members – SK agreed to redraft the letter aimed at informing potential new members of the Code schedules.

4.5 Auditing and Compliance Checking – MB reported that an auditing system had been drafted. It was agreed that this should be circulated to members of the CoM for comment and discussed at the next meeting. If these are agreed then it will also be necessary to discuss the costs involved and the size of audit teams. NM suggested that local authorities might wish to be involved in the auditing process, and that tenants are invited to participate via questionnaires.

4.6 Dates of Future CoM meetings – NM proposed that the CoM meet once a quarter and that for 2005 these be as follows:

End of Feb;
End of May;
Early September;
Early December.

SK agreed to circulate possible dates for these.

MB proposed that the May meeting be dedicated to a review of the content of the Code and that the one in September concentrate on the 'nuts and bolts' of its operation.

It was suggested that at least two of the meetings take place outside of London, possible venues might be Manchester, Leeds, York or Bristol.

5. AOB – (1) NM suggested that if any of the organizations comprising the CoM were organising conferences during the coming year, they might consider having a workshop session on the National Code and invite a speaker from the CoM to address it.