

National Code of Standards for Large Student Developments
Minutes of the Committee of Management (CoM) Meeting
Held on Friday 23rd October 2009 at Liberty Park, Bedford

Present: Mr John Daniels (Chair); Mr Mark Allen (UPP); Mr Michael Ball (ASRA); Mr Martin Blakey (Unipol Student Homes); Mr Bob Crompton (Victoria Hall); Mr Gavin Duncan (Opal); Mr Ian Fletcher (ANUK); Ms Hannah Greenslade (Unipol Student Homes); Mr Paddy Jackman (CUBO); Mr Ian Robertson (University of Leeds); Mr Paul Rowlinson (Sanctuary Management Services); Mr Alan Russell (Unite); Mr Brian Welsh (Liberty Living); Mr Keith White (CRM); Mr Ben Whittaker (NUS)

In Attendance: Mrs Sharon Cross (Mainstay, for Ms Kerry Mattock); Mr Simon Kemp (National Code Administrator); Mr John Rayner (IQ, for Jane Crouch)

Apologies: Mr David Arblaster (AMoSSHE); Mr Jason Baines (Derwent Living); Mr Jonathan Chandler (University of Greenwich); Mrs Ruth Hammond Laing (LACoRS); Mr Robert Russell (AoC); Mrs Yvonne Jones (Carlton North Wales); Ms Geraldine Ward (University of Hertfordshire); Ms Sarah Wayman (NUS)

The Chair opened the meeting at 11.05am. He thanked Liberty Living for agreeing to host the event, and for providing a buffet lunch. He invited members present to introduce themselves.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on June 25th 2009 were approved

Matters Arising

Review of the Code for Non Educational Establishments

The National Code Administrator (NCA) reported that additional members of the review group – set up to review this Code – had been recruited, but that some of the other places remained to be filled. Michael Ball agreed to represent ASRA on the group and it was reported that NUS wished to hold some focus groups with students, once a first draft of the Code had been written, in order to gauge student opinion. The National Code Administrator was instructed to fill the other available slots in time for a first meeting in mid December.

Marketing and Publicity

The two versions of the revised National Code logo were circulated and members of the CoM were invited to make a choice between them. Following a vote, the ‘Thumbs Up’ version was chosen as the new logo.

The NCA distributed some draft text for revised versions of the poster intended for use by members of the Code in developments to promote their membership to tenants. In addition, text for some publicity postcards was also circulated for discussion. Members of the CoM felt that postcards would not be helpful as they might get confused with other publicity materials that circulate. The meeting felt it would be better if more web-based materials were developed so that members could make use of it in a way that best suited them. It was also agreed that such materials should be

targeted at different audiences, and CUBO re-iterated their willingness to promote the ANUK/Unipol Code to tenants covered by their Code.

Some members commented on the growing use of Facebook to promote organisations and it was agreed that a Facebook page be set up for the National Code. It was also agreed that the National Code website should be re-modelled – and to add something to it on social networking. It was also proposed that an approach should be made to UCAS to see if they could assist with the promotion of the ANUK/Unipol Codes.

Impact Reports

The CoM was invited to discuss a proposal for the production of impact reports which were aimed at raising the overall awareness of the Codes. It was proposed that these would consist of:

- a brief summary of each provider and the accommodation they manage (to be written by the NCA but approved by the provider);
- a statement from the provider outlining their main Code achievement of 2009 – or something new they had put in place;
- photographs of some developments.

The proposal was agreed and the NCA was instructed to compile the material before Christmas, with the aim of circulating the finished product to members early in 2010.

LACoRS Guidance

Although LACoRS were unable to attend this meeting, they notified the NCA that the guidance document on the three ‘Approved’ National Codes – aimed at Local Authorities – would be available to download from their website at the beginning of December 2009.

Rugg Review

Martin Blakey (Unipol) reported that the general consensus was that this review was effectively in “the long grass”, it was also reported that Simon Llewellyn had left private sector housing for another part of CLG. Ian Fletcher informed the meeting that the task groups, set up to look at possible ways of implementing ideas in the review, had failed to agree on most issues – other than the licensing of letting agents.

Martin also mentioned that it was possible the Government would approve a change to the Use Class Orders, which could have implications for any planning applications for new large developments.

Code Membership and Membership of the CoM

The NCA informed the meeting that the number of bed spaces covered by both the Codes had increased by 2.9% since the last meeting, to 131,367. In addition, the number of providers signed up to the two Codes had increased by a third since the start of 2009. It was agreed that in future the report on membership numbers would include graphs showing how membership levels have changed over time.

It was reported that applications to join the ANUK/Unipol Code had been received from most of the Cambridge University colleges, who had previously been members of the UUK Code. The NCA informed the meeting that before the applications could

be accepted it had been agreed that a member of the Codes verification team undertake an inspection of five sample colleges, to assess the extent to which they complied with the Code – especially in respect of health and safety. The CoM was informed that the inspections were scheduled to take place on the 28th October 2009.

Paddy Jackman (CUBO) reported that UUK was not keen to see movement between the Codes and expressed some disappointment that no contact had been made with UUK at the time the colleges first began applying for ANUK/Unipol Code membership. In response, Martin Blakey informed the meeting that CLG had been acting as an intermediary in the discussions so it was assumed they had liaised with UUK about this. It was agreed that should any similar applications be received in future, direct contact would be made with UUK and that UUK be invited to comment on the overall application being made by the Cambridge Colleges.

The meeting was invited to confirm the appointment of three new members of the CoM – David Arblaster (AMoSSHE); Hannah Greenslade (Unipol) and Ian Robertson (University of Leeds), and these appointments were agreed. The Chair proposed a vote of thanks to Dennis Hopper (University of Leeds) for his assistance with the development of the Codes.

The NCA reported that Robert Russell (Association of Colleges) had requested to withdraw from membership of the CoM and to nominate somebody from a member college to take his place. This was agreed.

Assessment and Verification

Details of the planned autumn 2009 verification visits were circulated to the CoM for information.

The NCA reported that one member of the Code for educational establishments had failed to respond to a request for a timetable detailing how they intend to address a number of action points identified during their verification visit, which took place in November 2008. Despite a number of attempts throughout 2009 to get the information, no response was received until shortly before this meeting.

The CoM felt that the matter should be referred to the Audit Panel for final determination, but recommended that a re-visit take place to the provider as soon as possible to check that the action points had all been addressed.

2010 Fee Levels and Budget

A paper setting out the proposed fee levels for 2010 was presented, along with a budget setting out projected income and expenditure for 2010.

The paper proposed:

- increasing the minimum fee for membership from £450 (inc VAT) to £550 (inc VAT);
- holding the per bed space fee for existing members at 0.79p (excluding VAT);

- retaining a lower per bed space fee (excluding VAT) for members of the educational establishment Code who opt to use the peer to peer system of verification;
- increasing the per bed space fee for new members from 0.90p to 0.95p (excluding VAT).

These proposals were agreed.

Martin Blakey reported that of the £35,000 set aside in the 2010 budget for consultancy and verification, most would be spent on verification.

Student Loan Company and Rent Collection

The CoM expressed its thanks to David Arblaster for contributing the paper for this item. Ben Whittaker (NUS) endorsed the estimated scales of the problems as outlined in David's paper, and noted that they were especially problematic for non-means tested students – many of whom are likely to have to wait until January 2010 before they receive their loans. NUS are therefore predicting that the problems will have an impact on rent cycles for the rest of the year. It was also reported that the SLC had lost some students passports and other paperwork.

A number of the providers present reported that they were experiencing problems collecting rent from tenants as a result of these problems and that they are having to check weekly with the tenants to find out whether they know when their loans will be arriving.

NUS offered to help solve issues providers were experiencing and to provide regular up-dates, via the NCA, on what was happening with the SLC.

Letting Conditions and Outcomes 2009

Martin Blakey gave a short presentation on issues relating to lettings for 2009 and 2010, which included the following points:

- student numbers increased in 2008/09 by 10.4%
- applications for 2009/10 increased by 8.8%
- the Government announced in July an additional 10,000 places would be available for universities, but many have ignored this limit and it's estimated that there will be 35,000 more students in the system
- UCAS report student numbers from Singapore are up by 22.4%, whilst those for Pakistan are down by 21.8%
- the plan to build 20 new universities has been put on hold
- there have been accommodation shortages in some places, but there are surpluses elsewhere

Members of the CoM were invited to share their experiences of how lettings went over the summer.

NUS/Unipol Accommodation Costs Survey

NUS apologised for the fact that no preliminary data was yet available from the survey, but expressed the hope that some would be ready in early November. It was reported that 76 educational establishments and 35 private providers had responded to the survey. NUS and Unipol expressed their thanks to all who had participated and or helped to circulate the survey, especially AMOSHEE, ASRA, CUBO, Liberty Living, Unite and UUK.

The survey will be launched in January and details will be circulated to members of the CoM as soon as possible.

National Code Conference 2009

The NCA informed the CoM about the conference and invited members to book their places on-line using the Unipol website.

Proposed Alterations to the Code for Non Educational Establishments

A paper proposing changes to the section of this Code relating to deposits was introduced for discussion. It proposed replacing the existing three clauses 5.00 to 5.02 with three new ones. The CoM agreed the proposals without comment.

CoM Membership:Co-Option Policy

Following on from a discussion at the last CoM concerning future co-options to the CoM, a paper setting out a policy for dealing with such issues was presented for discussion. The paper set out the main objectives for co-option, the number of places available on the CoM for o-optees and eligibility for membership. The CoM approved the policy as outlined in the paper.

Any Other Business

Office for National Statistics – The NCA informed the meeting of a request from the OfNS for a copy of the database detailing the names and addresses of all developments covered by the ANUK/Unipol Codes, along with the contact details for the people who manage them. One member asked whether it would be a breach of the Data Protection Act to do so, but it was not felt to be so. The request was therefore agreed.

NUS “Reducing Crime Where Students Live” Conference – The NCA announced that NUS were holding a one-day event on this topic in London on Friday 6th November, which was free of charge. Any members of the CoM who wished to attend were advised to email the organiser, Mark McCormack, in advance.

NUS Voter Registration Campaign – Ben Whittaker asked whether providers present automatically register their tenants with the relevant local authority to vote; most did not do so. He informed the meeting that NUS would be running a campaign to encourage students to register and hoped that private providers would assist them

get the message over to their tenants. It was agreed that information on the campaign would be circulated to providers via the NCA.

Dates and Venues for Future Meetings

The NCA reported that Unite had offered to host the next meeting of the CoM, scheduled for Friday 19th February, at one of their venues in London. Details will be circulated as soon as possible nearer the time.

A proposal to move forward the date for the June meeting of the CoM from Thursday 24th to Friday 18th was agreed. A venue (to be outside of London) still needs to be found.

The meeting closed at 1.10pm.