

Student letting agent suspended by Unipol Code Tribunal

Megaclose, a large student landlord have been suspended from the official student housing accreditation scheme for Nottingham - the Unipol Code. Megaclose, who mainly provide accommodation for Nottingham Trent University students, were suspended from the scheme by a Tribunal on the 2nd March 2016 due to non-compliance with the standards required in the Unipol Code.

The Code is operated by the housing charity, Unipol and forms part of the Nottingham Standard, an accreditation mark unique to Nottingham and supported by Nottingham City Council that guarantees a minimum standard for privately rented accommodation across the city. The Unipol Code is a scheme whereby student landlords and agents can distinguish themselves as responsible landlords by signing up to an agreed set of standards relating to physical and management aspects of student letting, with the aim of improving the standards. More than 380 landlords and agents are currently members and both Universities advise their students to prioritise accredited landlords when looking for accommodation in the private sector.

At the Tribunal, it was noted that Megaclose had signed a declaration confirming that their accommodation complied with standards set out in the Unipol Code. However, after Unipol carried out verification inspections of their portfolio, it was observed that none of the selected properties met the standards, mainly in regard to health and safety elements of the Code and particularly fire safety. This included not having suitable escape routes and missing elements of smoke detection equipment. Unipol contacted Megaclose on numerous occasions after the inspections for confirmation that they would carry out the required works, but no response was received until over six months later when Megaclose stated that they were too busy to deal with the required works. The Tribunal considered that non-compliance with health and safety elements of the Code was a serious matter and that the landlord's behaviour was not in line with that expected in the Code. The Tribunal also noted that as a large landlord who had been given over six months to respond to the inspection reports, the excuse of being too busy was not acceptable.

Commenting on the decision, Councillor Nicola Heaton, City Council Portfolio Holder for Community Services, said: "Students, and everyone else in the city, have a right to expect a decent standard of rental accommodation. We're committed to taking action against landlords who fail in their

responsibilities to tenants so welcome the move made by Unipol in relation to this particular company." Whilst Tim Woodman-Clarke, Head of Accommodation Services at Nottingham Trent University said "We are most disappointed to learn that Megaclose will no longer be working with Unipol on the accreditation of its properties. Nottingham Trent University have a clear policy that we will only recommend accredited suppliers of accommodation to our students and therefore we will be unable to recommend that our students access student accommodation through Megaclose." Although Megaclose have been suspended from the Unipol Code, they also have several large developments for students which are accredited under a different Code - ANUK - and this accreditation remains in place.

Unipol Student Homes is a national not for profit organisation, and as well as accreditation also provides student with the most extensive listing of private sector student accommodation in the city and offers training and exclusive market information to landlords and agents. Over the last letting year the Unipol Nottingham website has listed more than 6,000 private sector bed spaces in Nottingham.

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