

Councils must learn lessons about keeping public buildings safe

All councils must learn lessons to maintain the safety of public buildings following Edinburgh school wall collapse

In a report out today, the Accounts Commission has pointed out that there are important lessons for all councils following the collapse of a wall at Oxbgangs Primary School in 2016.

They say that were serious faults in procurement, design and construction which also then led to the large scale closure of other schools in Edinburgh.



Oxbgangs PS was one of the 17 schools in Edinburgh affected by building design flaws which led to their closure.

Faults like those identified in the construction of Oxbgangs Primary School were also found in other City of Edinburgh Council buildings, including libraries, community centres and care homes.

The Commission's report follows its consideration of the circumstances surrounding the wall collapse at Oxbgangs Primary School in south Edinburgh in January 2016. The report emphasises the importance of all councils undertaking regular, comprehensive structural risk assessments and inspections on public buildings to ensure the safety of service users.

Where a council employs a company to provide construction services, the Commission says it's vital that it puts in place appropriate checks and controls.

The Accounts Commission recognises the substantial amount of learning already taken forward as a result of this case, but says it is vital that all councils have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the control and assurance of the construction of public buildings.

Graham Sharp, Chair, Accounts Commission said: "The City of Edinburgh Council responded quickly and comprehensively to the wall collapse at Oxbgangs Primary School. However, all councils in Scotland must ensure public buildings in their care are regularly checked and appropriately maintained.

"While reduced resources mean councils must make difficult decisions about service provision, they should have an appropriate level of expertise to deliver and safely maintain buildings. People must have confidence in the safety and integrity of public buildings."

Edinburgh West MP Christine Jardine commented on the report by. She says this highlights failures by The City of Edinburgh Council to ensure that proper building and safety standards were followed.



The publication also challenged Local Authorities on the lack of adequate resourcing of departments that are essential to public safety, and to ensuring that contracts are properly carried out.

Ms Jardine said: "When it comes to the safety of our children, it is the council's duty to ensure that all buildings meet the highest standards.

"I find it absolutely scandalous that, according to this report, proper checks were not made that the building work was up to standard and properly maintained.

"Its simply not good enough, and if departments are under-resourced that has to be addressed."

"The Scottish Government must also accept that its stranglehold on local authority funding has not helped, and rather than pass the buck to councils or Westminster take responsibility for improving council funding."

The City of Edinburgh Council commissioned an independent inquiry into the PPP1 schools in the city which reported in

2017. The inquiry under Professor John Cole CBE found that the reason for the wall collapsing was bad workmanship and lack of independent scrutiny of work being carried out.