

Council asks Holyrood for cash to fix crumbling concrete

Edinburgh City Council has called on the Scottish Government to stump up cash needed to fix crumbling school roofs, as councillors fear vital services could face cuts if funding is not provided.

The discovery of 'bubbly' concrete experts say is at risk of collapse in the city's schools, amid a UK-wide crisis, is likely to see the cost of repairs spiralling into many millions.

The council, which is already grappling with a £5.5 million education budget shortfall, said last week reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) had been found in seven schools, and since then an eighth, Lorne Primary School, has been added to the list.

And there could more could follow as building surveys continue across the capital – and the entire country – amid growing concerns for pupils' safety.

Prior to the UK Government's decision to shut more than 100 schools in England, prompting panic about the potential scale of the problem, action had already been taken in Edinburgh, where some pupils have been moved into temporary classrooms and parts of buildings deemed unsafe have been shut-off. No

schools in the city have been completely closed as of yet.

The estimated cost of remedial work to remove RAAC, a cheaper alternative to standard concrete used to construct roofs, walls and floors between the 1950s and 1990s but has a lifespan of around 30 years, and make schools safe is not yet known.

West Lothian Council has already started repairing its affected buildings, after approving to £10 million fix the 'historic construction issues' in February.

Edinburgh councillors passed an emergency motion on Tuesday to officially request funding from The Scottish Government "to be made available to carry out these urgent and necessary safety repairs".

The council leader is also to write to the UK Government to "strongly lobby for any UK spending to rectify RAAC in English schools to result in Barnett consequential to be passed to The Scottish Government".

The motion passed by the Education Committee said the crisis had resulted in "huge pressure on schools, with learners being displaced, and large parts of some schools being inaccessible for many months to come".

It added: "At present, all costs associated with RAAC are unplanned and unbudgeted, including rehousing of pupils, building works and other associated costs, which are creating additional financial pressure on the council.

"Since no additional funding has been provided by the Scottish Government yet, this may result in cuts to other vital areas of council spending to meet the pressure."

The UK Government has said it will pay for emergency work and funding and longer-term refurbishments for over 600 schools in England.

The Edinburgh sites where RAAC has been identified are: Cramond Primary School, Trinity Primary School, Lorne Primary School, Pentland Primary School, Fox Covert Primary School, St Andrews Fox Covert RC Primary School (one site but two schools), Colinton Primary School, and Currie High School.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



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