

Blackhall Library to remain closed – for now

An Edinburgh library is to remain closed for the foreseeable future after it was discovered the ‘entire roof’ contains potentially dangerous crumbling concrete.

It comes as the council says inspections to determine which of its buildings contain Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) are “substantially complete”.

The bubbly, lightweight material linked to cases of suddenly-collapsing roofs has been discovered in 12 operational properties owned by the authority including eight schools, none of which have had to completely close as a result.

The council is bracing for a huge bill to carry out all the necessary remedial works, with an update on the total costs expected early next year.

At Blackhall Library, one of the worst affected sites, surveys found that the “entire roof area” has RAAC, an update to councillors said.

“More detailed analysis is ongoing due to significant ceiling coverings and equipment that needs to be removed. The library will remain closed meantime,” officials said in a report to the Finance and Resources Committee which meets on Tuesday.

They said: “The inspection of the council’s operational estate, for the identification of RAAC, is substantially complete.

“There are few areas, in a limited number of buildings that require specialist equipment and/or additional works to expose the structural elements and these are being worked through incrementally to finalise the inspections.”

Meanwhile partial roof replacements are required at Trinity and Cramond primary schools, where some pupils have been moved into temporary classroom units erected in the playground.

Also called siporex, the low-cost building material was widely used to construct roofs, walls and floors between the 1950s and 1990s. But with a lifespan of around 30 years, there are now major concerns over the safety of buildings up and down the country, which promoted an eleventh-hour decision by the UK Government to shut over 100 schools in England just before the new term began in September.

A motion passed by councillors in September noted all costs associated with RAAC were “unplanned and unbudgeted”.

They warned as no additional funding has been announced by the Scottish Government the crisis “may result in cuts to other vital areas of council spending”.

A separate report to this week’s committee said: “The extent of the capital expenditure requirement remains to be established and this will be subject to a separate report in the next cycle.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

