

Housing Minister meets West Lothian Council on RAAC in homes

Scottish Housing minister Paul McLennan met West Lothian Council this week to discuss the problems of crumbling concrete found in council and private homes.

The meeting followed a motion put forward by the council's Conservative group leader which was backed by the ruling Labour group calling for more practical help for homeowners facing big bills following the discovery of RAAC in council homes.

But while the Scottish Government promised to work with insurance companies and housing surveyors, there was little solid financial reassurance to help homeowners.

Tory group leader Damian Doran-Timson urged the minister to meet homeowners to hear their stories.

Council leader Labour's Lawrence Fitzpatrick described the initial talks as "constructive".

Hundreds of former council and housing association homes in the county have been sold in the last 40 years. Many who thought they were investing in their future now find themselves in a financial minefield.

Earlier this year the council identified tenanted homes in Bathgate, Broxburn, Linlithgow and Craigshill, Livingston.

Work is expected to start in August on a £4 million refurbishment programme of council homes discovered to have crumbling concrete roof panels in West Lothian.

The programme will focus on 69 individual properties and 15 blocks of flats. The work will take almost two years.

An estimated 150 private homeowners face having to pay for structural surveys and potentially remedial work on their former council homes. Many have found that their buildings insurance does not cover costs and homes they bought as an investment cannot now be sold.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service has highlighted growing protests in communities where the RAAC homes are concentrated as local residents have banded together to campaign for help.

Councillor Doran-Timson told the LDRS: "With Paul McLennan, SNP Minister for Housing meeting with West Lothian Council and the Labour administration I am hoping that something will be done at last for the homeowners with RAAC in West Lothian.

"It is simply unacceptable for the homeowners to be ignored and not supported during this incredibly stressful time. As well as offering support for surveys I also want the Minister to meet with the homeowners in Craigshill and hear what they are going through firsthand."

Councillor Fitzpatrick struck a more optimistic note.

He said: "Our meeting with the Minister for Housing to discuss RAAC was constructive and senior housing officers set out the concerns that local homeowners have raised with the council, particularly around a way forward and support available from the Scottish Government."

"This is not an issue that is affecting only homeowners in West Lothian. People across the country are affected by this issue and it's important that the Scottish Government takes

that point forward, especially in terms of support that they and professional bodies can provide homeowners in Scotland.”

“Council officers will be engaging with Scottish Government officials over the summer holiday period and an update will be reported to the Council Executive.”

A spokesperson for the Minister told the LDRS: “We recognise that this will be a worrying time for those who have concerns about RAAC in their homes.

Ministers have held constructive discussions with West Lothian Council and will continue to work together to support the affected households, recognising the importance of homeowners having access to the appropriate advice, guidance and information on RAAC.

“We are working with the Institution of Structural Engineers, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Association of British Insurers and UK Finance through the Cross Sector Working Group so that homeowners are supported appropriately.

“Where homeowners are notified that their home may contain RAAC, we expect their local authority to provide advice on the next steps they can take.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter