

School RAAC repairs hit by setback after contractor goes under

Work to remove dangerous crumbling concrete from school roofs in Edinburgh has been hit by a setback after the council's contractor went into administration.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was found in eight of the city's schools following investigations, costing the authority up to £50m in repairs.

Used up to the 1980s, the cheap, bubbly material has a lifespan of around 30 years and is now liable to suddenly collapsing. Concerns over the risk to pupils sparked the closure or part closure of hundreds of schools across the UK last year as emergency remedial works were commissioned.

Hadden Construction, which was carrying out RAAC removal projects at four Edinburgh schools, announced last week it had gone into administration, resulting in 66 job losses.

It means works have now been put on hold at Trinity, Cramond, Pentland and Colinton primary schools.

Council bosses said they have "bolstered resources" to ensure delays are kept to a minimum.

Crawford McGhie, the council's head of strategic asset planning, said at Trinity and Cramond repairs were "nearing completion" and officials were working with the main sub-

contractor “to see if we can take on the responsibility for those works”.

However rectifications at Colinton Primary and Pentland are yet to begin and a retendering process to find a new contractor could delay works being progressed by two to three months, officials said.

Initial mitigation measures at Colinton Primary were “minimal and implemented quickly” with no impact on school operations, with the roof replacement costing around £2m. At Pentland Primary, the presence of RAAC has rendered its kitchen and part of a corridor not capable of being used safely, however additional classroom space has been available and school meals have been delivered.

Mr McGhie said: “At Trinity which is the one nearest completion there are ongoing surveys to look at the detail of the work that’s actually been completed and whether that aligns with the contractor that’s gone into administration, what they were claiming had been done.

“We’ll look to get an indication of the programme to completion . . . the classrooms there were due to be handed over already so we’re at least looking at a delay until the end of October.”

“For the other two, Pentland and Colinton, the works hadn’t really been started so the likelihood is that they will be retendered.

“I would imagine two to three months for a re-tendering process would be the delay at least in those circumstances. That’s a rough guess at the moment.”

Peter Watton, head of property and facilities management, added: “Whilst we can’t give anything definitive I’d like to give committee the assurance that we’re giving it the utmost priority in terms of finding a solution.

“Unfortunately these circumstances, whilst they are not new, they do create a problem and we have to address that as soon as we can in order to get the buildings finished.

“We’ve bolstered resources in that area to make sure we keep delays to a minimum and do it as quickly as possible.”

Meanwhile councillors have agreed to set up a temporary library facility in a modular building outside Davidson’s Mains Primary School while Blackhall Library remains closed following the discovery of RAAC.

A report said options include replacing all the library’s RAAC, or knocking it down and building a new one on the same site or on the Davidson’s Mains Primary School site.

“Because there is the opportunity for the replacement library to be in a different location, it is proposed that detailed community engagement to discuss and consider these options is progressed over the next six months.” the report said.

“The best value option is for the facility to be purchased rather than rented. This option allows the most flexibility in terms of the time taken to deliver the permanent solution as the one-off cost is known compared to rental fees which increase the longer it takes to deliver the permanent replacement library.

“The cost of the temporary facility will be in the region of £1m and can be funded from the RAAC capital budget allocated in the 2024 budget setting process.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter