

Developer picks up awards despite building 728 defective council homes

Edinburgh residents have been left “appalled” after a developer for the same group responsible for over 700 “negligently built” council homes found to have mould and fire safety issues was given a ‘Housebuilder of the Year’ award

Robertson Homes was named the best housebuilder in Scotland for the second year in a row at the Scottish Home Awards in June.

While Robertson Homes was not directly involved in the construction of the Edinburgh homes, it is part of the Robertson Group, whose social housing arm Robertson Partnership Homes was the contractor for the city developments that have been found to be riddled with serious defects.

And as well as Robertson Homes picking up the Housebuilder of the Year Prize, several of the defective constructions Robertson Partnership Homes oversaw won ‘considerate constructors’ awards for ‘the environment, safety, and our workforce’.

This included blocks at Calder Gardens, West Pilton Grove and one of the worst-affected sites, Parkgrove Terrace, where residents have been waiting three years major repairs to the

roof.

Extensive repairs have been required to hundreds of flats Robertson Partnership Homes was contracted to build for Edinburgh City Council over the last eight years, forcing some to temporarily move out of their homes.

One tenant still waiting on roof repairs to stop water leaking into her home said it was "appalling" the award had been accepted and called for it to be handed back.

Overall 728 properties in the north and west of the city delivered by Robertson Partnership Homes were discovered with defects long after occupants moved in.

Issues across the 12 affected sites varied but generally related to leaking roofs, walls and ceilings missing sealant which slows the spread of fires, and lack of proper ventilation in homes which, accompanied by the water ingress, can cause mould to form.

Black specks in tap water, sewage leaking into bathrooms, faulty electrics, and randomly-sounding fire alarms were among other issues uncovered.

Following reports of water leaking into flats at four newly-built developments, intrusive building surveys found design and construction faults with some of the roofs that would "require major repair work," a memo to councillors from officials said.

The full scale of the failures became apparent to the council and Robertson Partnership Homes around a year ago following further investigations. However, details of the scandal were only made public last month after further enquiries by the Local Democracy Reporting Service, following a brief discussion about the issues lasting only a few minutes a recent housing committee.

Tenants told the LDRS it was clear the flats had been “negligently built,” and accused the council and its contractor of “compromising our safety” by “cutting corners,” while calling for answers over how so many were signed off despite containing serious defects.

Reacting to news of the awards, top floor Parkgrove resident Lorna, whose flat continues to be plagued by damp and mould, said: “That’s absolutely shocking, it’s appalling.”

She said the awards should be handed back, adding: “They’re playing games with people’s lives. The dampness isn’t doing my chest any good.

“I want a report done to say these houses are safe, I’ve still not got that report.”

Council officers previously promised repairs to the roof would begin by the end of September, however Lorna said scaffolding was yet to appear.

A spokesperson for Robertson Partnership Homes, said: “Working with our customer City of Edinburgh Council, some defects were identified across developments within the Edinburgh Living and Council portfolio.

“As a responsible contractor, we are working closely with the Council and its tenants to carry out repairs.”

The council’s housing convener, Councillor Jane Meagher, said: “Ensuring the quality and safety of our tenants’ homes will always be our top priority, so I was disappointed to hear about these issues, particularly in new buildings.

“I fully appreciate the concerns of our tenants and am sorry for the impact that this has had on them. The builders, Roberson Group, are making good progress on carrying out the repairs and other improvements, which will all be independently inspected once complete.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter