

National RAAC campaigners call on West Lothian Council to back their petition

National RAAC campaigners have called on West Lothian Council to back their petition to the Scottish Government.

A meeting of the full council voted in favour of a plea by Wilson Chowdhry the leader of the campaign group to be heard at this month's meeting.

Mr Chowdhry last week presented a petition to MSPs at Holyrood on behalf of RAAC homeowners from across Scotland.

However, a local campaigner criticised the response the council had given to Mr Chowdhry after he appeared via a video link from his home on Tuesday.

Three councillors Sally Pattle, Craig Meek and Andrew McGuire voted against hearing the deputation. A fourth, Danny Logue, abstained.

Ghost estate campaigner Kerry Macintosh said "Shame on those councillors who voted against hearing the deputation. Sally Pattle has homeowners and tenants who have RAAC in their homes. These people need help."

She added: "The council should be supporting the national campaign to raise funds for homeowners."

Mr Chowdhry told councillors he was disappointed at the council's stance not to offer financial help to tenants facing

RAAC problems. He reiterated that he believed that the council could use existing legislation to tackle RAAC.

He told the meeting: "RAAC is not a routine housing repair issue—it is a public safety crisis. We are talking about structural instability that threatens the habitability of homes and the safety of residents. By treating this under the same approach as general home repairs, the council is failing to recognize the scale and urgency of the problem."

He called on the council to work with the Scottish Government to secure funding and also for greater clarity on the actual numbers of homes, private and tenanted, who may be affected by RAAC.

He said: "As elected members, you have the unique ability to act without the constraints of political neutrality. Your endorsement could play a crucial role in advancing the aims of both this council and the UK RAAC Campaign Group, ensuring a fair deal for the homeowners affected by this crisis."

Councillor Andrew McGuire asked Mr Chowdhry whether he was a resident or council taxpayer in the county, and exchanges became testy, with Mr Chowdhry asserting that he had contacted all MSPs seeking support for the petition.

The only public support given by MSPs so far has been from Conservatives from the Highlands and North-East, and from Lothians' Miles Briggs.

Councillor Pattle, who had questioned whether the deputation should be heard without relevant papers coming before the council, asked Mr Chowdhry if he would recognise the work that the council had done in trying to tackle the RAAC crisis.

Local campaigner Kerry Macintosh said she was "appalled" at the way Mr Chowdhry had "been rushed" through his presentation.

“I was not happy about the way the whole thing was conducted. Wilson was rudely interrupted not once but quite a few times.”

Referring to councillor Pattle’s question she said: “The council has not sorted RAAC out, they’ve done nothing since 1990.”

Kerry added: “West Lothian needs to step up. They need to support homeowners, and they need to support the petition. We’re fighting for funds for the council.”

A spokesperson for the council told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “We note the discussion at council and presentation from Mr Chowdhry. A response will be provided to him in the near future.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter