

Council plans to buy homes and flats to tackle RAAC issues

Edinburgh Council is planning to buy 17 homes and flats in the capital in order to tackle issues with a dangerous type of concrete in ceiling panels.

Officers have confirmed that in five buildings where the council owns homes, RAAC roof panels were used, which risk collapsing in on the structures they are a part of.

RAAC, or reinforced autoclaved air-entrained concrete, was a building material often used in the construction of publicly-owned buildings in the UK up to the 1990s.

It was popular for its low cost, low weight and fire resistance, but it can fail if it comes into contact with water for extended periods of time.

Several council primary and secondary schools are affected by RAAC, as well as the Blackhall Library, which closed temporarily until fixes could be implemented last year.

After conducting a survey, council officers found that 72 current and former council flats in the city used a certain type of RAAC roof panels, with the council still owning 44.

Private tenants at the affected properties will now be offered the option of being bought out by the council at market rate and becoming tenants, which a report by officers said would

offer good value for money due to the impact the RAAC would have on their home values.

Green councillor Ben Parker asked council officer Jackie Timmons: "An obvious one, really, or a common sense question. From a safety point of view, how likely are we to see any risk come through before repairs are completed on these buildings?"

Timmons replied: "All the surveys that have been done now, there's no critical risks. There's been no propping, no evacuation of any residents.

"There's high risks on some panels, and the structural engineer is quite comfortable that the work is done as soon as possible.

"We can see the panels, it's not like they're hidden – we can see any changes and things. The work will start quite quickly, hoping by the end of summer we're on site."

She also said that there would need to be some further surveys into RAAC in the affected buildings, including in common areas.

The five affected buildings include three terraced rows of six houses, and two low-rise apartment blocks.

During the works, both council and private residents of the buildings will need to be temporarily moved out.

If the council is unable to buy out the private owners in the buildings, or reach an agreement with them on works, it could use emergency powers to force them out and remediate the RAAC in their homes.

Councillors at the city's Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee agreed unanimously to authorise the purchase offers.

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter