



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Tom Smith,
Director of Operational Services

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Report of: *Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services*

Report to: *Strategy and Resources*

Date of Decision: *18th October 2023*

Subject: ***Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in Council buildings***

Type of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken Initial Full

Insert EIA reference number and attach EIA

Has appropriate consultation/engagement taken place? Yes No

Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-

*“The (**report/appendix**) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (**insert relevant paragraph number**) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”*

Purpose of Report:

This report outlines the Council’s approach to the assessment of its buildings for Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and the actions it will then take to mitigate those issues.

The report describes a measured and prioritised programme of work to ensure that the most ‘at risk’ properties are assessed first. The work to assess educational establishments has already begun and work on the one school identified to contain RAAC has already been completed.

Recommendations:

Strategy and Resources Policy Committee:

- 1) Notes the strategy to identify, assess and manage Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in the Council's estate;
- 2) Notes that the Council currently only has sufficient revenue funding for assessment surveys and must identify further funding for any necessary remedial work required.

Background Papers:

- "Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete: identification guidance", Department for Education, September 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-estates-guidance>
- "Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete: guidance for responsible bodies and education settings with confirmed RAAC", Department for Education, September 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-guidance-for-responsible-bodies-and-education-settings-with-confirmed-raac>.

Lead Officer to complete:-									
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1. PROPOSAL

Background

- 1.1 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is a construction material used mainly for the formation of lightweight masonry blocks and structural units such as roof planks, wall and floor units. It is typically found in buildings constructed between the 1950s and 1980s. It has recently been identified as having a useful life of around 30 years. There have been a number of incidents nationally in education settings (albeit none in Sheffield), where the failure of a RAAC panel roof construction has led to collapse with no apparent warning.
- 1.2 Following the recent decision by the Department for Education (DfE) to close over 100 schools nationally, the focus on qualified staff to inspect and identify RAAC across an estate has become a national problem and a priority. The DfE released two key guidance documents in September 2023 (see background documents), which have helped the Council to develop a methodology for identifying and dealing with RAAC across the Sheffield estate, in line with best practice in this area.
- 1.3 These guidelines issued by DfE state that buildings affected by RAAC should be isolated and kept out of bounds until approved mitigation measures can be implemented. The Council has reviewed the maintained school estate in accordance with these guidelines and is fulfilling its obligations. It is important to mention that, as of 13th September 2023, only one school in Sheffield has been identified with RAAC, and work has since taken place to resolve the identified problems.
- 1.4 It is worth noting that, whilst the focus in terms of RAAC has mainly been on educational settings, RAAC has the potential to have been used across the Council's estate. The Council's approach to identifying and dealing with RAAC therefore needs to include all Council buildings, including social housing, and not just educational settings. A summary of the number of buildings across the Council's estate is as follows:

Type	Number
Offices and Community Buildings	1,895
Educational Establishments	73
Social Housing	38,800

- 1.5 Whilst work on education establishments is progressing rapidly, evaluating the remaining properties within the Council's estate is also a high priority. Due to the estate's substantial size, the Council will need to adopt a coordinated, collaborative and prioritised approach across Council buildings. Following national guidance, the Council has therefore developed a strategy to identify, assess and manage RAAC.

The Identification, Assessment and Management of RAAC in Council Buildings

- 1.6 Given the size and diversity of the Council's estate, and the national scarcity of appropriately qualified resources, a prioritised approach to identifying, assessing and managing RAAC across all Council services has been developed. Given the clear guidance from DfE for educational settings, the Council intends to follow this same consistent guidance to support the assessment of all of the Council's estate, including schools, Council offices and depots, community and locality buildings (leased and maintained) and social housing.
- 1.7 Whilst the DfE guidance has previously outlined that RAAC is most likely to be present in buildings constructed between the 1950s and 1980s, based on additional information the Council believes that there is potential for RAAC in buildings built between 1948 and 2000. To minimise any risk the Council will therefore seek to assess any building constructed between 1948 and 2000.
- 1.8 Given the focus and heightened risks around educational settings the programme has initially focussed on the city's schools as an absolute priority. Of the 73 maintained schools in Sheffield, 35 are in scope in terms of the date they were built. To date the Council is only aware of one school with RAAC in Sheffield, which the council was already aware of before the recent DfE action. Since July, contractors have been removing and replacing RAAC at the school, Abbey Lane Primary at Woodseats. The last comprehensive schools' surveys were done in 2018. Previous surveys were asked to look at the condition of buildings and other elements including roofs, windows, and heating, but not RAAC. All of our schools will be surveyed as a priority in 2023, and RAAC assessment will be part of the Council's school survey programme in the future.
- 1.9 The programme will then move to assess other Council buildings on the basis of usage, by vulnerable adults or young people for example, and footfall, highly used city centre premises for example.
- 1.10 Whilst the Housing regulator has said that "*...based on engagement with sector advisers and stakeholders, is that RAAC is not widespread in social housing*", they have also advised that "*...it may be present in a small number of buildings dating from this period particularly in flat roof and panel structures.*" A distinct, but integrated, programme of work will take place to assess the Council's housing stock alongside the programme for other Council buildings, following the same assessment approach. Similar to the approach to schools, the assessment of RAAC will form part of the Council's ongoing condition surveys of housing properties in the future.
- 1.11 Following the prioritised approach above, every building will be assessed following a five stage process described below:

Stage 1 – Baseline information gathering

This stage will allow the Council to compile the full list of buildings which fall under its responsibility. For each building we will:

- Identify:
 - the approximate age of the building.
 - the current building use.
- Collate:
 - Architectural or technical drawings.
 - Asbestos Surveys.
 - Condition Survey information.

Stage 2 – Desktop Information Collection and survey prioritisation

- Eliminate any non-RAAC buildings based on age, construction or other information.
- Prioritise surveys of potential RAAC constructed buildings based on:
 - Age - older sites present a higher risk of RAAC being present.
 - Occupancy – type of occupation (eg infrequent to full time) and type of occupant (eg elderly, children)
 - Condition – review survey report to define condition and location of RAAC.

Stage 3 – Initial Site Assessment

For those building identified in Stage 2 above the Council will:

- Undertake an initial survey to identify accessibility issues, asbestos, or other potential hazards.
- Undertake a second survey for visual inspection and identification of RAAC by a qualified Building Surveyor.
- Based on the above refinement of risks based on the DfE criteria.
- Generation of a formal report for the building to support the decision to take no further action or to proceed to Stage 4.

Stage 4 – Detailed Assessment by a Structural Engineer

For buildings that have been identified at Stage 3 as having, or potentially having, RAAC, a detailed assessment will be carried out by an appropriately qualified structural engineer. They will:

- Validate the stage 1 and 2 information.
- Undertake a detailed site appraisal.
- Undertake intrusive investigation if they are required.
- Develop management and remediation datasets to support any mitigating actions.
- Generation of a formal report.

Stage 5 – Management and Remediation Report and Actions

Following stage 4 a report will be generated with input from a multi-disciplinary property team. This will give clarity on the ownership and responsibility of the building and the actions that need to be taken to mitigate or resolve any RAAC issues that have been identified. It will also give recommendations in terms of other similar property types, for example for Social housing archetypes if work is required. The report will also identify key stakeholders and proposals for communications to ensure any

building users are kept fully up to date with any identified issues and work that is required.

- 1.12 At each stage management information will be gathered and reported to ensure performance and progress is closely managed, and the programme of work moves forward as quickly as possible. The programme will be overseen by the Estates Management Board, chaired by the Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services.

Timescales

- 1.13 It is considered that following agreement of the strategy, completion of stages 1 to 5 could take up to 12 months. Stage 1 will be undertaken as a priority, which will then determine which buildings need to be prioritised through the following stages. The stage 1 process is expected to be completed by the end of November.

Staff Training and Communications

- 1.14 Whilst the above structured process will be undertaken it is important that services who have interactions in Council buildings are trained to understand RAAC and to be able to identify it. A number of "RAAC Champions" have been identified across the Council to support the gathering of data and ultimately the dissemination of information and training to Council staff to support this.
- 1.15 Clear communications to building users and tenants is of paramount importance. A communications plan has therefore been developed to support this and provide reassurance whilst assessment work is ongoing.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE ?

- 2.1 This work is critical for the safety and wellbeing of users and tenants of Council buildings.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 No consultation has taken place to date. As the project progresses through the assessment stages it is possible that consultation and engagement around proposals for mitigating actions at individual buildings will need to take place. This will be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

- 4.1.1 There are no currently identified equality implications of the above approach. This will be monitored in light of information gained through the work described, and the EIA will be reviewed and updated as required.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 The surveys in relation to the Educational establishments, will be funded from revenue funding identified by the Education service.
- 4.2.2 The service has a Minor Works business unit (0011518915187) that has two elements: £500k for contribution to capital schemes and £459k for Minor Works for compliance. This funding can be utilised for the RAAC work but the existing commitments will need re-prioritising and may mean some schemes being delayed until next financial year or a potential reduction in the contribution to capital schemes..
- 4.2.3 Whilst the council will seek to continue to lobby the government for additional financial support in relation to RAAC, this is by no means certain and therefore it is prudent that the council continues to identify funding within its own resources.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 The Council has a duty to protect the public from dangerous buildings or structures under the Building Act 1984.
- 4.3.2 The Council has a duty to provide a safe working environment to its employees and to persons concerned with premises to persons other than their employees under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974,
- 4.3.3 The Council has duty to repair and maintain social housing under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.
- 4.3.4 The implementation of the strategy proposed in this report shall help to ensure that the Council discharges these duties.

4.4 Climate Implications

- 4.4.1 There are no identified climate implications at this stage. Climate impacts and mitigation measures will be considered as part of stage 5 when determining remediation measures on a site-specific basis.

4.5 Other Implications

- 4.5.1 Competent and qualified resource availability is likely to be scarce given that this is a national issue affecting all public authorities. The prioritised approach to assessment and mitigation is important to ensure that the most 'at risk' buildings are therefore assessed and mitigated first.
- 4.5.2 Until building assessments are undertaken the full extent of work to assess whether RAAC is present may not be known. For example, access to properties and any restrictions to assessing buildings, such as asbestos may elongate or delay the programme due return visits, or specialist advice being required.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Given the nature of the issue, no alternative options have been considered.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Work has already begun to assess the Council's properties in line with the above strategy. Strategy and Resources Policy Committee are therefore recommended to note and comment on this report.