



Full Council – 18 September 2023

Motion for Non-Cabinet Member debate

Provision of support to deal with cases of RAAC Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in Brent Schools

This Council notes:

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is a lightweight form of concrete pioneered in Sweden whose use swept across Europe particularly in schools, colleges, and other building construction from the 1950's until the mid-1990s. Used in flat roofing, floors, and walls it offered a cheaper alternative to standard concrete, but its short lifespan means its use in permanent buildings has caused problems. The Secretary of State for Education has clarified, out of 22,500 schools in England, 156 have been confirmed to have RAAC and 52 of these have already got mitigations in place and are dealing with repairs.

To date, it has been identified that one Brent school, an Academy that is not the responsibility of the Council, has RAAC. St. Gregory's Catholic Science College discovered it had RAAC in its Maths block in November 2022. Safety measures were introduced, and work is under way which should be completed by Monday 11th September. The Council was informed by the school's CEO/Headteacher in January 2023 of the discovery of RAAC. There is no current financial impact to the Council as the school affected is not a community school, therefore the local authority is not the responsible body.

Upon notification in January 2023, DfE have supported the school in arranging surveys and discussing the management of RAAC. Since the summer, a dedicated case officer has been assigned to the school from the DfE to manage the next steps of removing RAAC from the school with all costs to be reimbursed by the DfE.

When Brent residents apply for rear building extensions, building control officers demand high quality materials be used. If this RAAC was known to have a recommended 30-year lifespan there must be question as to why it was approved in long term school and civic developments and what reviews were put in place by Building Control to undertake regular checks on its safety?

Let's also not get carried away with the way the news of RAAC has been reported. We all remember Gordon Brown's comments about a Rochdale constituent calling her a "bigoted woman" and who later went on to deliver a personal grovelling apology. Never has it been so evident that the journalists of this country lead and dictate the

news agenda, something the Secretary of State for Education should have learnt from her predecessors.

As a result, this Council recognises:

- That successive Governments of different political persuasions since the 1980s have all colluded in neglecting capital and infrastructure investment to service insatiable public demand for increased revenue spending. People a century ago were truly building schools for the future; today's squabbles are much more about 'Patching Schools for the Present'. The uncomfortable truth is that this really, if anything, has been a pass-the-parcel problem by successive governments, putting at risk school children and staff.
- That whilst Labour may cite the Building Schools for the Future Programme, there was criticism of the scheme in a National Audit Office (NAO) report and a review of the scheme - commissioned by the government, which found the allocation of funding for school buildings had been "complex, time-consuming, expensive and opaque".
- Covid has taught us so many things and lead us to deal with issues that we thought would never be achieved. We will also deal with this.
- Whilst global events continue, there is also a need to recognise that the safety of our children comes first. The issue of RAAC has been missed by successive governments of all colours, including the coalition, for over 30 years. In 2002 the Labour government first became aware of the deterioration and risks of RAAC via a BRE (Building Research Establishment) report. In 2018 Conservative Minister Damian Hinds ordered an urgent and comprehensive review of RAAC in all schools. It is because of these inspections that we know the extent of the current risks.

This Council therefore resolves:

- To pledge to support, guide and advise Brent schools currently affected with RAAC and any schools which may become known in future.
- To recognise that school requests for planning permission and other compliance issues from the council should be dealt with expeditiously.
- To work cross party to expedite planning permissions where required for the temporary classrooms and Portacabins schools may require and should they go down this route, to house the classrooms on site or alternatively assist in finding suitable accommodation across the borough. For example, when schools ask for planning permission there should be no complacency in recognising any defects and dealing with them quickly.
- To communicate with the affected schools should they need help with contractors for remedial works.

- In the case of schools which are affected by RAAC but are not the council's responsibility, if the schools are short of funds to remedy the defects the Council to consider providing financial support recognising that the DfE has already committed to refund all costs associated with RAAC.
- To continue closely monitoring through building control functions all schools for cases of unsafe materials.

Cllr Kanta Mistry
Queensbury Ward