

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Asset Management

GOVERNMENT INQUIRY LAUNCHED INTO USE OF CRUMBLING CONCRETE IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS

1. Purpose of Report

This report recommends that the Council responds to a Government inquiry into the use of deteriorating concrete on public buildings amid concerns of potential collapses.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE that, as a result of the recent Government inquiry into deteriorating concrete in public buildings, a budget of £40,000 to fund structural surveys on various Council assets be approved. A one-off budget allocation of £40,000 in 2023/24 will be required for this purpose to be funded from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) working balances.

3. Detail

The Government has launched an inquiry into the use of deteriorating concrete in public buildings amid concerns of potential collapses. Each department within Whitehall has been instructed to assign a civil servant to identify the presence of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in the Government estate. This inquiry represents an expansion of a previous investigation that primarily focused on hospitals and schools.

Experts have already identified over 150 schools where RAAC may have been used, leading to the closure of a primary school in Southend, Essex, last week due to safety risks. The recent expansion of the inquiry was revealed in a briefing by the LGA, which highlighted that RAAC had been used not only in schools and offices but also in a wide range of buildings, including those no longer in the public sector. The LGA has briefed councils that the problem might be more serious than initially understood, and many building owners may be unaware of RAAC's presence in their properties.

It is therefore recommended that the Council investigates whether any of its assets are affected by the problems highlighted by this Government inquiry. The Capital works manager has started assessing which council houses would be affected by this issue, and will then prioritise which properties then require a structural engineer to be commissioned.

4. Financial Implications

The comments from the Head of Finance Services were as follows:

There is no currently budgetary provision in place to fund the structural surveys on the Council's housing property assets. If Members are minded to support the proposal, the one-off revenue cost of £40,000 in 2023/24 would be funded directly from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) working balances.

5. Legal Implications

The comments from the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal Services were as follows:

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. Human Resources Implications

The comments from the Human Resources Manager were as follows:

N/A

7. Union Comments

The Union comments were as follows:

N/A

8. Climate Change Implications

The comments from the Waste and Climate Change Manager were as follows:

No Comments

9. Data Protection Compliance Implications

This report does not contain any [OFFICIAL (SENSITIVE)] information and there are no Data Protection issues in relation to this report.

10. Equality Impact Assessment

N/A

11. Background Papers

Nil