

London Borough of Islington

Note for Audit Committee – Update on RAAC

20 November 2023

Introduction

1. The safety of everyone using our buildings is of utmost importance – from pupils and staff in the school buildings we own, to residents in our social housing stock, to the employees and visitors using our public buildings.
2. We have taken a proactive approach to ensure safety across our estate, reviewing all the information we hold on our buildings, and updating processes and training, as required.

Schools' Estate

3. The issues with RAAC in buildings have been known about for some time and we had already been supporting and working closely with all schools and nursery schools in the borough to identify whether RAAC may be present in any of their buildings. All schools in the borough opened as planned at the start of term.
4. The DfE raised the level of alert for RAAC late Summer 2023 requiring any areas within schools with confirmed RAAC to be closed down until remediation works to remove or manage the situation were completed. LBI at this point were nearing the end of a rolling programme of RAAC surveys. An external surveyor had been commissioned to carry out visual inspections at maintained primary, special and alternative provision schools considered at risk and our secondary school FM Contractor carried out the inspections at the maintained secondary schools at risk. Schools at risk were those constructed either prior to or during the RAAC construction timescale 1950s to 1990s.
5. LBI worked to expedite the completion of the survey programme during early September as there were some schools where survey reports were awaited or surveys still to be completed.
6. All the surveys have now been completed with no RAAC suspected or found except at one of our secondary schools, St Aloysius College. Three floors of the four-storey block with RAAC have been closed down. There has been no disruption to teaching and learning as classes have been moved to other locations around the school. The school, LBI and the BSF team are now working with the DfE to agree and progress the programme of works to remove the RAAC at the school.
7. The DfE requested that further intrusive investigations be carried out at another secondary, Highbury Fields School. These inspections are in progress with no RAAC found in areas reinspected to date with two test locations outstanding and scheduled for reinspection.
8. More recently the DfE RAAC Investigation team confirmed that their construction professionals are reviewing all Responsible Body RAAC survey reports and triaging them for additional verification inspections they would like undertaken. They initially requested verification at 12 LBI schools but on further review of the LBI survey reports they have concluded that the presence of any RAAC related construction in those school buildings and

an additional 5 schools is unlikely and they will not now require further verification testing. We are ready to support the DfE should any specific further investigations should this be requested in the future.

9. The DfE will liaise with other responsible bodies in the borough such as the Diocese and Academy Trust in relation to any further investigations required at those sites. Initial reports received indicate no RAAC at any of these schools.
10. The DfE have indicated that they will fund remediation works required to remove or manage RAAC identified at any school. They have more recently indicated that they will fund up to £4,000 towards the cost of RAAC building surveys commissioned by responsible bodies between 30 August 2023 and 1 November 2023.

Housing Estate

11. As per the last update, housing colleagues have a high degree of confidence that there is no known RAAC in our estate. This is based on structural surveys of our highest risk buildings, desktop reviews of medium risk stock, as well as detailed knowledge of officers and long-standing relationships with structural specialists who have carried out surveys of our blocks. It should be noted that RAAC was not specifically included for structural surveys but that these did seek to identify defective structural issues which would have inevitably identified the presence of RAAC.
12. Housing Repairs is delivering a programme of RAAC recognition training, through toolbox talks, for in-house operatives who are out and about on our estates. If they identify any concerns these will be raised with our surveyors so that they can review any suspected RAAC and refer any confirmed concerns for testing. To date, this has not resulted in any confirmed reports from our operatives or surveyors.
13. Colleagues continue to engage in social housing sector networks to ensure that the council's practice is in line with best practice elsewhere on RAAC. However, the prevailing view in the sector remains that this was not a material widely used in the construction of residential properties.

Corporate Estate (non-educational/non-residential)

14. The council has been undertaking a rolling programme of stock condition surveys of all LBI owned properties over the last 2 years. The expert surveyors appointed have been given further instructions to specifically inspect for the presence of RAAC in all the remaining outstanding buildings that are being surveyed in the coming months.
15. For those where condition surveys have already been completed without an RAAC survey, the Property Information Services are banding these according to age and review where it may be advisable to seek a follow-up survey. However, it should be noted that we maintain our buildings to a high standard and the deterioration of any RAAC identified is usually revealed by other structural problems, such as water ingress.
16. In surveys to be undertaken for other properties, priority is being given to those buildings such as community centres within the impacted period where there are vulnerable user groups e.g. adult day care; nurseries. This is a rolling programme. We continue to develop a list of those buildings for which a survey has already been completed and which we believe

would be prudent to re-inspect, again using the priority criteria of building age and vulnerable clients groups.

17. We are also writing to leaseholders within our commercial portfolio to advise them either: of our forthcoming actions; or, whether they should be taking action – depending on the terms of their lease. To date, we have had no correspondence from commercial tenants seeking advice on the presence of RAAC.
18. We are also advising council commissioners that they should be seeking assurance from building owners where we deliver/oversee services in 3rd party buildings e.g. nursery day care.

General

19. Housing, Property services and education officers have met to share practice across the organisation. We have agreed that there is no need for a standing group but will continue to share any developments/contacts across services via email.
20. The council has published a frequently asked questions page about RAAC to provide answers to some of the more common questions, at islington.gov.uk/RAAC and will continue to update this as new information emerges.
21. As a precaution, we have sent details of our RAAC schools (and any others we may identify) to London Fire Brigade and they will add 'flags' for operational responses.

Conclusion

22. This remains an evolving situation; we stay vigilant to changes in government advice and are working closely with all our partners across the borough to protect the safety of our residents and staff.

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