

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 19th January 2023



Building Safety: RAAC Strategy Update

Purpose of report

For decision

Summary

This report updates members on the LGA's awareness-raising work regarding the dangers of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and requires agreement of members to pursue an updated strategy as set out in paragraph 15.

Is this report confidential? No

Recommendation

That members agree that the LGA should pursue an updated strategy of awareness-raising and collaboration with the Department for Education.

Contact details

Contact officer: Charles Loft

Position: Senior Advisor

Phone no: 020 7665 3874

Email: Charles.Loft@local.gov.uk

Building Safety: RAAC Strategy Update



Background

1. Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is a lightweight form of concrete, used in roof, floor, cladding and wall construction in the UK, from the 1950s to the 1990s.
2. RAAC is of particular concern because it is 'life expired' and can collapse without warning. It can be (and has been) found in all types of public buildings, including schools, and has already resulted in the collapse of two school roofs. It has been used in housing, but we are not aware of any current issues in the housing stock.

Raising Awareness

3. Since the collapse of a school roof in 2018, the LGA and the Department for Education (DfE) have been raising awareness about the dangers of RAAC. Our [web page on RAAC](#) first appeared in 2019 and has been updated on several occasions.
4. In 2021 the Department for Education designed a survey for local councils to complete intended both to raise awareness of the issue and to measure awareness and activity.. The LGA encouraged member councils to complete this [survey](#). Councils must first [create an account](#) to complete the survey.
5. In 2022 The Office for Government Property wrote [a letter](#) to Government departments about RAAC and the LGA replicated the letter on its website and drew it to councils' attention.
6. The LGA has been raising awareness of the DfE's RAAC Survey since Spring 2022. Initially, we conducted a communications campaign by sending informative emails to councils, encouraging them to complete the survey. Follow-up communications were sent both directly from our building safety team and through our regional teams. In recent months, RAAC has featured in our Chairman's and Chief Executive's bulletins. As a result, all English councils with responsibility for school buildings should be aware of the issue.
7. In October 2022, DfE officials informed us that RAAC awareness was a priority and asked that our communications campaign should focus on councils with the lowest submission rates (0-20%). With data from the department, the LGA sent follow up emails to all low-responding councils by the end of December 2022.
8. In December 2022, DfE published [updated guidance](#) on the identification and management of RAAC in educational buildings (but useful to any building owner).
9. Some funding to remediate school buildings with RAAC may be provided through the [School Rebuilding Programme](#) (SRP). Although the programme is not specifically for remediation of school buildings with RAAC, they do prioritise buildings with "risks that have the potential to cause significant harm to pupils and/or staff that meant they were a high priority for replacement".

10. £1.8 billion has been allocated in financial year 2022-23, to maintain and improve school facilities across England. Find more information [here](#).

Press Coverage

11. RAAC has been gaining traction in the press with recent articles being written about its dangers, particularly in schools.

11.1. The Guardian recently published an article in [December 2022](#) about [the DfE Consolidated Annual Report 2022](#) declaring the likelihood of school buildings collapsing as 'critical – very likely'.

11.2. The Guardian also published articles about RAAC in hospitals during [August 2022](#) and [September 2022](#).

11.3. The LGA was also approached for comment by Schools Week, which published an article on 9th January 2023 entitled '[Councils dawdle on surveying collapse risk building material](#)'.

RAAC: Updated Strategy

12. It is now four years since DfE and LGA began raising awareness in the education sector and we still have schools that are yet to check their roofs. Over 150 schools have been identified as potentially having RAAC, but it is difficult to say what this represents as a proportion of the total.

13. Our awareness-raising work has nearly reached its initial goal of ensuring that the relevant people in every council are aware of the need to identify and manage RAAC and are responding to the DfE survey, although we have further work to follow up with a small number of authorities.

14. However, responding to the survey does not necessarily mean that a council is identifying and managing all its RAAC. Given the length of time since this issue first appeared (over four years), there is a reputational risk for those councils that have not yet checked all their schools.

15. Officers propose that we update our strategy as follows:

15.1. Continue to contact councils that have not responded to the DfE survey.

15.2. Continue to raise awareness of the danger that RAAC could be present (including in non-school buildings) both within the sector and more widely and consider the role of councils in encouraging other duty holders to identify RAAC.

15.3. Work with DfE to establish the progress councils (and other providers) are making in identifying and remediating RAAC in schools and cooperatively devise a strategy for promoting action on dealing with RAAC in schools, now that there is near universal awareness of the issue.

15.4. The LGA Building Safety Team will be looking to identify common barriers to dealing with RAAC and communicating with DfE so these issues can be resolved. On the behalf of member councils, we will be asking DfE for advice and resource to aid councils in dealing with RAAC.

15.5. Within this updated strategy, we would look to government to provide any additional funding required to complete the remedial work needed to replace RAAC in school buildings. This approach could be extended to other types of public building.

Implications for Wales

16. Education has been devolved to the Welsh Assembly.

Financial Implications

17. The team's work on RAAC will be covered by existing policy and improvement grant budgets. Proposed work will consider any need for additional funding to councils.

Equalities implications

18. None.

Next steps

19. Officers to proceed as directed by members.