

Our ref ESC/AW/VR

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Dear Mr Dornan,

## **Education and Skills Committee – Aberdeenshire Council**

Thank you for your letter of 15 May 2017 in connection with the Inquiry on School Buildings across Scotland. I am pleased that I am to participate in the Committee on 21 June 2017. In advance of that meeting I have attached details as requested with regard to Aberdeenshire Council's response to issues highlighted in the aforementioned letter.

### **1. Inspection and remedial work of the current estate since January 2016. To what extent:**

- **Has the school estate been inspected;**
- **Have the faults been identified; and**
- **Has remedial work been undertaken and the impact of this?**

Note - for ease of reference the Estate has been segmented into PFI/PPP projects; other major projects; residual estate and future survey programme.

#### **1.1 PFI/PPP Projects**

- 1.1.1 When the Edinburgh PPP schools issue arose in 2016, Aberdeenshire Council along with other public bodies across Scotland took steps to assure themselves of the structural integrity of their buildings.
- 1.1.2 A desktop assessment was carried out to identify buildings with similar forms of construction, built during the same 1990's to mid 2000's period. These initial inspections included a review of the original construction drawings and a visual inspection of the buildings to identify any signs of structural distress.

- 1.1.3 Aberdeenshire Council commissioned its framework Structural Engineers Fairhurst to undertake inspection of eleven schools, nine built under the PFI/PPP Contracts and a further two not built under PFI/PPP but of a similar age and design. The nine PFI/PPP schools being:
- i. Portlethen Academy
  - ii. Meldrum Academy
  - iii. Hill of Banchory Primary
  - iv. Kintore Primary
  - v. Longside Primary
  - vi. Banff Primary
  - vii. Oldmeldrum Primary
  - viii. Rothienorman Primary
  - ix. Rosehearty Primary
- 1.1.4 The further two schools which were designed and traditionally procured by the Council, being:
- x. Port Erroll Primary
  - xi. Strathburn Primary
- 1.1.5 The visual inspection reports identified some non-urgent issues which warranted further investigation as a matter of good maintenance practice, and Portlethen and Meldrum Academies along with Hill of Banchory, Kintore and Longside Primaries were identified for further more detailed intrusive investigations.
- 1.1.6 The Council appointed Engineers initially attempted to use scanning devices and a borescope to assess the presence and the location of wall ties and restraints, however, the results were inconclusive and this method of investigation was abandoned in favour of an opening up approach at targeted areas identified by our Engineers at each school.
- 1.1.7 The intrusive surveys identified the following:
- i. There is an absence of head restraints at inner leaf that meets the structural frame at some locations;
  - ii. The outer leaf blockwork were not tied in where it extends above the inner leaf although the detail of the roof cladding does provide restraint;
  - iii. Some localised inadequate embedment of wall ties.
- 1.1.8 It was clarified at the time whilst structural anomalies had been identified they were not as serious as those discovered in Edinburgh hence the reason there was no closure of the schools as there was no immediate risk to the building users based on the detailed structural appraisals carried out by our Structural Engineers.

- 1.1.9 The Council's Engineers along with Council Officers have thereafter engaged with the original PFI/ PPP Contractor, their original designers, and the Projectco to develop an appropriate remediation strategy.
- 1.1.10 Robertson were the delivery partner for both Aberdeenshire Council Phase 1, 2001 PFI and Phase 2, 2004 PPP schools. Under two separate contracts for each of Phase 1 and Phase 2 the Council contracted with a ProjectCo a special purpose vehicle created by Robertson through which they subcontracted construction works (Robertson Construction Company) and Facilities Management Services to (Robertson Facility Management Company (RFM)). In wake of the structural issues identified in Edinburgh the Council sought assurance from each ProjectCo and both have responded to the Council and confirmed in writing:
- i. Their acceptance of the full contractual responsibility for rectification of defects identified, and
  - ii. There is no immediate threat to the users of the PFI/PPP schools or the general public.
- 1.1.11 Each ProjectCo is also in the process of arranging reimbursement of costs incurred by the Council instructing its Structural Engineers to conduct intrusive surveys in the immediate aftermath of the issues at Edinburgh. A course of remedial works is in the process of being finalised between Council Officers, Council Structural Engineers, each Projectco and Robertson Construction Company, who will carry out the works at their cost. School specific proposals are awaited but discussions to date have indicated that the Projectco and Robertson Construction contractor will undertake a comprehensive remedial package which addresses all issues
- 1.1.12 The remediation works are expected to be carried out in the summer holiday period 2017 and a programme will be made available once the remediation strategy is finalised. Officers have sent briefing notes out to Elected Members and the affected schools on the following dates:
- 23 May 2016
  - 15 November 2016
  - February 2017
  - 21 March 2017
- 1.1.13 Within Aberdeenshire's PPP2 schools, detailed fire-stopping details, and sign off of installation, are contained within certification documentation provided at Services Commencement. Following earlier review, Aberdeenshire's 7 PPP2 schools were independently inspected by WSP UK Limited in summer 2016 which identified a number of issues. Works have been undertaken to rectify these issues with final works being completed April 2017. A programme of inspection of the PFI 1 schools is to be developed by ProjectCo.

## **1.2 Residual Estate – Major Projects**

- 1.2.1 As previously indicated at 1.1.4 two schools, namely, Port Erroll Primary and Strathburn Primary which were traditionally designed and procured were surveyed with no defects found. In addition, our most recently built campuses, namely, Alford and Ellon, were independently surveyed by the Scottish Futures Trust in collaboration with the Council with no structural issues being identified.
- 1.2.2 The Ellon project was procured through the Council's Main Contractors Framework and Alford initially designed by the Council and thereafter transferred to a design and build project undertaken by Hub North Scotland.
- 1.2.3 Aberdeenshire have procured the following new/replacement schools in a traditional manner ie separation of design team and constructor. Taking into cognisance the risks, no surveys of these facilities have been programmed (apart from Lairhillock ref \*<sub>1</sub>) but will be progressed as part of the wider survey programme for the Council estate.
- i. Newtonhill Primary (1996)
  - ii. Laurencekirk Primary (1997)
  - iii. Lairhillock Primary (2007) \*<sub>1</sub>
  - iv. Drumoak Primary (2016)
  - v. Midmill Primary (2016)
  - vi. Hillside Primary (2017)

\*<sub>1</sub> – Lairhillock design was undertaken by the PPP2 design team but delivered on a different contractual arrangement ie directly by the Council, therefore intrusive investigations are now being instructed.

- 1.2.4 Further, significant extensions have been completed to the following secondary's to meet rising rolls, with these being procured directly on a traditional manner; again these will be considered as part of the wider programme being developed;
- i. Mintlaw Academy (1997/98)
  - ii. Westhill Academy (1997/98)
  - iii. Kemnay Academy (2015)
- 1.2.5 There are three further Primary Schools underway at this juncture; they are all being traditionally designed by either the in house Council team and supplemented by external professional support, the projects being;
- i. Uryside School (completion September 2017)
  - ii. Markethill School ( completion June2017)
  - iii. Kinellar School ( completion June 2018)

### **1.3 Residual Estate - Surveys & Hard FM/Compliance**

- 1.3.1 Aberdeenshire have an inspection/reporting regime whereby Heads of Establishments and Janitors report faults/defects within facilities for investigation and/or repair with this also supported by Property Inspectors. Aberdeenshire have recently introduced a new Hard Facilities Management process which adopts an integrated approach to response, planned and lifecycle component replacement along with enhanced additional data collection and record management to inform future decisions regarding assets. Statutory compliance inspections are within the scope of the Hard FM contract i.e. boiler, legionella, electrical testing, fire alarm and the like. The Council also employ two dedicated asbestos surveyors.
- 1.3.2 In addition, a programme of chimney and roof inspections are conducted by steeplejacks. These compliance inspections are to be further enhanced with Property Inspectors and Building Surveyors within the Hard FM client team undertaking routine inspections of facilities along with planned regular meetings with Heads of Establishments.
- 1.3.3 Facilities are also inspected by Aberdeenshire's Health and Safety Unit with these inspections being either routine Fire Risk Assessment visits on either a 3 yearly (academies) or 5 yearly (primaries and special schools) cycle, or as 'reactive' visits/inspections to investigate reported items of concern.
- 1.3.4 A major refresh of condition assessments for schools estate was undertaken in 2008/09 which informed School Core fact return in April 2009 and Statutory Performance Indicator for same period. The methodology adopted is in line with current Scottish Government guidance "The Condition Core Fact" published in 2007 which assesses condition based upon the performance of elements as installed. A process for an annual update is undertaken, where projects have been completed which affect condition i.e. roofing, window replacement, rewire or wider refurbishment etc., this is captured in an annual update of information to inform both School Core Facts and Performance Indicators.

### **1.4 Aberdeenshire Council – Wider Survey Programme**

- 1.4.1 Aberdeenshire are currently developing a risk based approach to reviewing its operational estate which extends to 673 facilities in addition to key Housing facilities. This approach will assess facilities against a matrix which reviews/considers the following;
- i. Construction age
  - ii. Construction type and height
  - iii. Procurement method
  - iv. Supervision arrangements (in-house or contractor)
  - v. Asset type categorised by risk (Care and Residential Facilities, Day Centres and Education, Community Facilities, Corporate Facilities)
  - vi. Design features (large areas of masonry)
  - vii. Extensions (where above single storey)

- 1.4.2 The outcome of review will inform the survey programme. This will identify facilities to be considered for further review/site investigation with these to be undertaken in tranches by age i.e. Post 1996, Post 1980, Post 1920 and Pre 1920. Record information/past projects is collated and held centrally against assets to assist in this review.
- 1.4.3 In addition to the above, Aberdeenshire Council is involved at both Board and Project Team level with the national review of methodology adopted for undertaking condition and suitability assessments within the schools estate. The outcome of this work will further inform the survey programme.
- 1.4.4 Historically, Aberdeenshire have undertaken reviews, and act upon resulting recommendations, where wider events affect specific asset types or forms of construction, i.e. following loss of two primaries of same construction Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme (CLASP) through fire in the late 1990's, Aberdeenshire undertook review of facilities with similar construction and implemented a major programme of works to establish compartments in ceiling voids along with over-cladding external wall linings and replacing soffits and fascia's with non-combustible material.
- 1.4.5 Following the Liberton High, Edinburgh incident, the Council engaged their Consultant Engineers to survey their estate and as a result some free standing wall were removed.

## **2.1 How quality assurance is undertaken on current capital projects on the school estate;**

- 2.1.1 The Edinburgh Inquiry asks questions as to what is an acceptable level of quality for our schools and the need to ensure the safety of building users. This cuts across the briefing process, the project structure, procurement design of detail, construction process, quality assurance, handover and maintenance.
- 2.1.2 It is reassuring that from investigations of the more recently constructed schools at Ellon and Alford that no problems have been identified. However, given the significant investigation programme Aberdeenshire is undertaking it is essential that there continues to be effective programme and project management. Since 2010 the Council has implemented a Gateway Stage approach to the delivery of major projects, Furthermore, the Council have been acknowledged of exhibiting areas of good practice in the 2013 Audit Scotland report with the delivery of our investment programme. It should be stressed that given the scale of projects, there is little room for complacency and processes will continue to be refined to ensure effective design capability and capacity.

- 2.1.3 The Council has utilised different delivery models dependent on the type of construction programme. There has been an increasing reliance on the use of construction frameworks, where contractors are asked to demonstrate competency with a significant quality weighting. This assists with a greater understanding of the Council's requirements and projects are aimed to be progressed in a collaborative manner. Similarly the Council is reliant on external professional support to deliver aspects of programmes, and the consultancy framework was procured on a 100% qualitative basis with the Council setting pricing criteria.
- 2.1.4 The different models include the traditional separation of design and construct; contractor design and build and the hubco revenue financed model.
- 2.1.5 Quality assurance is taken seriously throughout the development and delivery of all project types. For larger projects the Gateway process ensures a staged approach to delivery with authorisation at each gate for scope, quality and cost. Specifically for design, the Consultant Structural Engineer has a Quality Management system ensuring a design verification process. The external Architect Consultant Architects utilise a similar approach. In house project managers have been in place since 2010 to provide an enhance co-ordinating role, producing a Project Execution Plan with roles and responsibilities matrices.
- 2.1.6 The Council has a large multi-disciplinary design team and ensure that there are regular design meetings. Building Information Modelling has been implemented and this will afford a higher level of design integration, thereby reducing construction risk. Aberdeenshire Council has always benefitted from an in-house property inspector team, which is allocated across all live construction projects. This resource is in addition to the contractor or developer supervision and management and is clearly an additional project cost, but does protect the Council's scope, quality, and deal with any perceived contractor/developer conflict of interest.
- 2.1.7 Every project has a Building Inspector, Mechanical Inspector and Electrical Inspector appointed, each with an allocated (average) weekly hours on site target that reflects the project's scale and complexity. For example for Ellon and Mearns Community Campuses, we allocated Resident Clerk of Works (Property Inspector). Even with this resource, we still encountered quality issues which had to be managed post completion. Both these projects were design and build at post construction stage and this can increase the risk of lower quality.
- 2.1.8 However, the role of Property Inspectors undoubtedly assists with Quality Control. Weekly Inspection reports are provided to the Project Manager and to the Contractor for action as required. There is not a reliance on Building Standard Officers to check either quality or construction details.
- 2.1.9 The project Architect and Engineers continue to have a role to monitor and report on all matters relating to site quality.

## **2.2 Whether the quality assurance of school capital projects has been reassessed since 2016; and**

- 2.2.1 Aberdeenshire Council has reviewed quality checking processes for the design development and technical specification stages, and continues to resource Property Inspector's time for building, mechanical and electrical site supervision. This is in addition to any contractor or contractual obligations from the developer or construction team.
- 2.2.2 The Property Service has restructured to provide a greater degree of focus to site inspection regimes for construction programmes whilst there will be an increase in the use of Independent Peer reviews. The Council will continue to promote the use of frameworks to ensure contractors deliver in a collaborative manner, with the focus on both quality and value. The use of Independent Professional Support will continue when required to supplement internal resources, this being procured on a qualitative basis and not lowest price.
- 2.2.3 The Council is currently developing a new Inverurie Community Campus with hub north Scotland. As part of the quality assurance process, a shadow design team is being procured. The scope of any shadow team provision (particularly on Design & Build projects) can be developed to include a construction phase monitoring role. The appointment of an expert shadow team will support the delivery of the above.
- 2.2.4 A review of the processes for the delivery of major projects is underway. This reflects changes as a result of the Scottish Government's Procurement Review. Revisions to date include the Commissioning and Handover Processes; Document Management; taking into consideration lessons learned; increased use of PEER Reviews, reviewing specification aligned to the use of Building Information Modelling and ensuring the Construction Requirements, clearly articulate (through performance specification) all specific requirements.
- 2.2.5 The Council continue to deliver a significant investment programme. For example at Uryside, Inverurie which is near to completion, the contractor Morrison Construction (part of the Galliford Try Group) have allocated as part of their supervisory team, an individual to check the wall ties are installed in accordance with the specification
- 2.2.6 Officers are reporting to Council in June 2017 on the Cole Inquiry providing comprehensive details in response to the individual recommendations. A Cross Service Sub Group has been managing this process.

## **2.3 Whether there are, or were, particular issues depending on the funding model and the lessons to be learned?**

- 2.3.1 Aberdeenshire Council officers concur with the findings of the Cole Enquiry that there was a rationale for utilising PFI/PPP models of financing given the funding constraints at that time to deliver major projects. Officers would contend that that traditional methods of financing and delivery provide better value for money.
- 2.3.2 Officers note that the findings of the Cole Inquiry that aspects of the PFI/ PPP model did increase the risk of poor quality design and construction (as can be evidenced by failures across Scotland).
- 2.3.3 At that juncture, there was only limited technical input by the Council with no independent verification of construction quality by Council Property Inspector.
- 2.3.4 Our findings are that with regard to the issues found at Aberdeenshire, the design of detailing was too generic and not specific enough. Good detailing assists quality control, with clear concise and adequate communication to the tradesperson on site with commensurate management and supervision by the Contractor and Inspection by the Council.
- 2.3.5 Clearly, lessons have been learned. The Council has undertaken projects in association with the Scottish Futures in recent years and these have benefitted from internal Council resources, high level professional advice, key stage reviews and rigour to cost, programme and quality standards.

I trust you find this information of assistance. I shall be able to provide further information at the Committee later this month.

Yours sincerely

**Allan Whyte**  
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