



Falkirk Council
Children's Services

James Dornan, MSP
Convener, Education and Skills Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Date: 6 June 2017

By email to: es.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Mr. Dornan

I refer of your letter of 15 May 2017 noting the intent of the Education and Skills Committee to undertake an inquiry on school buildings across Scotland, and in response to the related questions therein, please find Falkirk Council's response below:

1. Inspection and remedial work of the current estate since January 2016

- *To what extent has the school estate been inspected;*

A range of structural inspections (visual and intrusive) were undertaken across all 9 PPP/NPDO schools within the Council's school estate in April 2016. These inspections were undertaken by independent structural engineers. The Council's remaining school estate had been subject to structural inspections in 2004, with no significant structural issues being reported at that time. Further visual inspections by a structural engineer were carried out of all 15 new school build and extension projects delivered by the Council since 2004, which are all non PPP/NPDO.

The Council's PPP/NPDO schools have a planned maintenance and lifecycle refurbishment works programme and are subject to an annual asset condition survey undertaken by a 3rd party. The Council's non PPP/NPDO schools have individual and detailed asset management plans (SAMPs), reviewed annually based on regular property inspections, which set out prioritised improvement investment in the schools over a 3-5 year period.

- *have faults been identified;*
- *has remedial work been undertaken and the impact of this?*

There were no structural faults identified that required remedial action, with minor firestopping works carried out in Falkirk's PPP schools. These were carried out as part of routine maintenance checks and inspections undertaken, with no impact on the teaching activities within the schools.

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2. Quality Assurance Practices

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

Most current capital projects on the Council's school estate are traditionally procured building contracts, where there is an in-house supervision of the construction by qualified professionals acting on behalf of the Council with appropriate authority to under the contract arrangements. The professional team is supported by an in-house team of Clerks of Works carrying out inspections on a daily basis and with appropriate authority.

The Council currently has one major capital school project being delivered in partnership with East Central HubCo under a design and build contract, however this contract has benefitted from a close working relationship between the Council's in-house professional and Clerk of Works teams, the D&B contractor, and the HubCo project management team to ensure a degree of independent inspection of the works on behalf of the Council, and an effective mechanism for issues to be reported to the contractor for appropriate action.

For the previous PPP/NPDO projects carried out some years ago, the Council ensured that in-house Clerks of Works were on site covering the 9 schools delivered through these initiatives. It was however not possible, due to the contractual arrangements for these projects, for positive intervention by the Clerk of Works directly to the contractors. Issues that were observed by the Clerks of Works were reported back to the Council's in-house professional team and then on to the main contractors. Although there was no obligation on the part of the contractors to take action the feedback given by the Clerk of Works was generally welcomed by the contractors and acted upon if deemed appropriate.

- *whether the quality assurance of school capital projects has been reassessed since 2016;*

The Council considers that, should there be projects in the future that are procured under similar contract conditions to the PPP/NPDO school projects it is vital that additional resource, with an appropriate level of authority, is an integral part of the project at the outset to ensure the level of supervision and scrutiny that is required at both design and construction stage. In relation to existing Council buildings it is proposed that surveys are undertaken throughout the school estate, as resources permit, to ensure fire stopping and protection has not been compromised and aligns with the original specification and standard of construction required. In addition the Council is in the process of looking to extend the photographic recording of major construction projects which will be indexed and catalogued to allow prompt, accurate checking of any construction element should defects or failure occur post completion.

- *whether there are, or were, particular issues depending on the funding model and the lessons to be learned?*

The Council notes that previous design and build contractual arrangements for PPP/NPDO projects had limited contractual provision to allow positive intervention by the Clerk of Works or in-house professional teams or independent advisors, and for any future such projects, would seek to ensure that such provision is an integral part of contract arrangements.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT NAYLOR
Director of Children's Services

