

SCC Corporate Property Maintenance - Schools – Update on Audit Report

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Division and Local Member: n/a

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update to the Audit Committee on the recommendations made in the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Report into Corporate Property's maintenance of the school estate with particular reference to Schools Annual Condition Surveys, issued on 30 May 2019.
- 1.2 Progress has already been made on implementing the recommendations, reflecting the urgency of the High Priority items for immediate action.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider and comment on the areas of work that are described.
- 2.2 It is recommended that this work continues, to achieve the agreed actions within the agreed timescale.

3. Background

- 3.1 An audit on Corporate Property's maintenance of the school estate had been performed in 2014-15 and partial assurance was awarded. A follow-up audit followed in 2015-16 where outstanding areas for improvement from the previous audit were identified. Due to the time elapsed and the operational changes made in the interim, the 2019/20 review was instigated
- 3.2 The objective of the Audit was to ensure that '*adequate arrangements are in place so that schools are safe and closures due to structural and maintenance issues are minimised; and to ensure the risk of reputational damage to the council is mitigated as far as possible*'. Controls within three areas of the council were looked at, namely; Corporate Property; Corporate Health and Safety; and Support Services for Education (SSE).
- 3.3 SCC is responsible for building maintenance at its maintained schools, therefore excluding Voluntary Aided and Academy Schools. The Schools responsibilities in relation to their building is set out in the Schools Financial Management Scheme. The relevant section on property maintenance is provided by the Corporate Property Team.
- 3.4 Schools have the option to purchase condition surveys from the SSE Property & Grounds team. The large majority of Schools do so and therefore most surveys

are completed by SSE surveyors. School must purchase a condition survey from another provider if they do not purchase the SSE survey.

- 3.5 Corporate Property also manage and oversee the Schools Condition Programme and ensure that all urgent priority works as identified in the School Condition surveys carried out by SSE / Private consultancy are included within the annual programme, funding permitting. Final approval of the programme is by Members.
- 3.6 The Corporate Health and Safety Unit perform School H&S audits on a three-yearly basis.
- 3.7 Schools are required to submit a number of H&S returns on an annual basis. These are checked by Corporate Health and Safety Officers and actions taken as necessary.
- 3.8 Premises Manager training for schools is provided by the Corporate H&S unit with input from Corporate Property. Training is also provided for School Governors.

4. Summary of the Audit Conclusions

- 4.1 The Audit report noted that the annual condition survey is an important control in ensuring that school buildings are safe, with most surveys performed by SSE. Weaknesses were identified in the recording of the surveys – i.e there is no permanent record of the individual surveys and they were unable to verify that they were being carried out on an annual basis.
- 4.2 Improvements were also identified in the monitoring of the condition surveys undertaken by schools.
- 4.3 A significant number of schools were found not to be making an annual return on health and safety items, despite the Corporate H&S team performing monitoring and follow up.
- 4.4 Good information is provided to schools by the Corporate H&S Unit and there is good take up of the Premises Manager training course.
- 4.5 In conclusion, the risks identified from the previous audits – *'Failures or omission of systems / controls adversely affect the health and safety of pupils, staff and the public, leading to financial loss, non-compliance with regulatory requirements, and/or reputational damage to the Council and failures in arrangements leading to closure or part closure of schools, leading to reputational damage to the Council'* were assessed as being medium or low respectively. This is in line with the initial assessment and reflects the overall risk to the Council.

5. Recommendations for Priority Actions

- 5.1 It was recommended that the guidance to Schools on the requirement to carry out an annual condition survey as stated in the Schools Financial Management Scheme (SFMS) is reviewed and updated as required, with a completion date of 31 July 2019.

New guidance in line with the recommendations made will be issued for inclusion

in the (SFMS) either before, or by that date.

- 5.2** It was recommended that the Head of Corporate Property produces a condition survey monitoring system, with monitoring on a monthly basis. The action date to be 31 May 2019.

SSE have provided the comprehensive list of schools buying (and not buying) back the annual condition survey service, with the date of when the last survey was undertaken at each School. Corporate Property have in line with the recommendation now set up a 'live' monitoring system for all schools based on this data which will track and report on each school on a monthly basis, the timeline for future surveys, thereby ensuring that any school not undergoing a survey within a 12-month period will be identified and followed up with SSE.

- 5.3** It was recommended that the Head of Corporate Property with the SSE Service Manager perform a risk assessment to determine the maximum interval between condition surveys and ensures this is complied with. The action date to be 31 July 2019.

As above, it is recommended that the date between surveys should be no more than 12 months, but this is currently being consulted upon. The RA is planned to be completed by the due date.

- 5.4** It is recommended that the Head of Corporate Property with the SSE Service Manager introduce a system to ensure that surveys are promptly recorded after being performed. The action date to be 30 June 2019

The SSE Service Manager is in the process of setting up a system to be operational before or by that date and this will also be recorded on the monitoring system now in operation (see 5.2.1)

- 5.5** It is recommended that the Head of Corporate Property ensures a risk assessment is performed on SSE condition surveys not being performed by a professionally qualified surveyor. This should include evaluating whether SSE condition surveys should be reviewed, taking into account CIPFA and ESFA guidance. The action date to be 31 August 2019.

This to be undertaken by due date.

- 5.6** It is recommended that the Head of Corporate Property, with the Service Manager for Corporate H&S evaluates the current measures in place to improve the number of annual return submissions and takes action to improve performance. The action date to be 31 October 2019.

This to be carried out before the set date and will be informed by the update to RAMIS due this September.

6. Consultations undertaken

- 6.1** Consultation with Service Managers has begun since the publication of the report at the end of May.

7. Implications

- 7.1** The report has highlighted the importance of maintaining and improving systems for the monitoring of School Building Maintenance activities, in particular the necessity for ensuring that condition surveys are carried out annually; are carried out to the required standard as set down under CIPFA and ESFA guidance; and that accurate 'live' records are maintained to record the completion of the surveys and the due date for the annual inspection by the area surveyor or private professional consultant. Specific areas for improvement of these three items was stated in the report, with one item requiring immediate address.
- 7.2** The report also noted the importance of Schools meeting their responsibilities for the Health and Safety of Pupils, Staff and Public and that improvements can be made by Corporate H&S in their monitoring actions to ensure this responsibility is being met.
- 7.3** If these areas for improvement are not addressed within the stated dates, the Council faces risks in several areas:
- Financial - Failure to maintain buildings leading to major and prohibitively high cost renovations works
 - Health & Safety – Failure to maintain safe environment for pupils and staff
Risk of building component failure
 - Reputational damage
 - Legislative – Health & Safety, employment;
 - Provision and commissioning of services by Schools

8. Background papers

- 8.1** The following papers are available on request:
- SWAP Corporate Property Maintenance – Schools 2018/19.

Note: For sight of individual background paper please contact the report authors