

Subject: Re: FW: Oxgangs PS - response to your query S168

From: Crerar Christie <crerarchristie@gmail.com>

Date: 08/06/2016 19:04

To: Gavin Corbett <Gavin.Corbett@edinburgh.gov.uk>

CC: Andy Gray <Andy.Gray@edinburgh.gov.uk>, Patrick Brown <Patrick.Brown@edinburgh.gov.uk>, Alistair Gaw <Alistair.Gaw@edinburgh.gov.uk>, Jason Rust <Jason.Rust@edinburgh.gov.uk>, Elaine Aitken <elaine.aitken@edinburgh.gov.uk>, Liz Walshe <Liz.Walshe@oxgangs.edin.sch.uk>

Gavin,

Thank you very much for passing this on to me, and apologies for taking a bit of time before getting back to you.

The following comments pertain to item 2 of the inspection intent.

I'm afraid Will Rudd Davidson's (WRD) answer does not satisfactorily explain the rationale for initially opening the building to children and staff three working days after the initial collapse. It explains that the children were sent back into a school that had experienced a catastrophic structural failure on the basis of a visual inspection, and suggests that this was a proportionate response. However, this remains the most fundamental and common question that our parents ask, and the reply struggles to bridge - what most parents perceive to be - a lapse in common sense let alone in Engineering judgement.

In terms of the engineering judgement, the letter states that "...the failure of the wall was considered to be a local event at a more exposed gable wall." and that "A visual inspection of the school revealed no further visible defects and given that the internal leaf remained in situ, and that there was no other damage, there was no reason to recommend further detailed surveys (apart from the gable)."

You don't have to be an engineer to realise that the first thing you have to do is find out why the failure occurred, and that the second thing you have to do is ensure, objectively, that it presents no further danger. A visual inspection would be a wholly inappropriate means of establishing the safety of the rest of the building against similar failures - I'm thinking particularly of the blank gable wall adjacent to the bike sheds. A visual inspection would not provide any objective evidence as to the safety of the building. Why? Again, there had demonstrably been a catastrophic structural failure of a veneer wall, likely under design conditions, and likely related to a build problem affecting the tie-to-veneer wall connections. This type of (brittle) failure would have been instantaneous - there would have been very little superficial evidence to conclude beforehand that such a failure would or would not occur again under the actions of a subsequent storm within the season.

I have to lapse into the realms of Engineering judgement to substantiate this opinion - apologies.

I had a quick look at the collapsed gable end the day it happened and noted, that:

1. There was probably a sufficient number of ties, judging by the spacing, though the veneer

brickwork appeared otherwise unsupported over its vertical extent (my guess is that the design assumes lateral stability would be provided by the ties)

2. The ties were visible within the exposed blockwork and appeared to be largely undeformed (suggesting that the wall had, for the most part, been pulled-off instantaneously due to tie-bond failure rather than progressively collapsing)
3. There was no rotation of the infill blockwork wall where the veneer brickwork had detached (indicating both that the structural integrity of the building had not been compromised, and, that the attachment of the veneer brickwork was in question)
4. There was little sign of cracking either across the bricks or the bedding layers around the rest of the building, beyond the extent of the damaged wall (suggesting no consequent failure modes had been initiated)

Also, I have to assume that the building was operating within the bounds of its design parameters - I assume a review of the building design has been carried out: nowhere have I heard that the design was at fault. The windspeeds were high: I haven't been able to ascertain what they actually were from local weather stations, though they were definitely below 70 mph (the lowest recorded gust speed in the top ten gust speeds recorded for Gertrude around Scotland), and certainly below those that had been experienced during the storm of 2012, which the building had successfully endured. There was minor structural damage across the city, but no other permanent building had experienced such a catastrophic failure during the storm.

At the very least, I think a properly proportionate initial assessment would have inspected all walls, especially similarly large blank walls, for depth of tie embedment, and ensured that the mortar strength was adequate. Given the evidence provided by the all too evident collapsed wall, and the risk similar failures would pose to human life - particularly children - I think a visual assessment was wholly insufficient to conclude that the school could be safely operated. Subsequent investigations ultimately confirmed that there were further safety concerns.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but, as events transpired, it strikes me that had a more robust initial investigation been carried out, parents' fears would have been allayed and it would have been possible for the Council to formulate a more robust contingency plan going forward, rather than the debacle of subsequently opening and closing (at the last minute) the school with each subsequent set of reports.

I would hope that this issue is picked up at the Inquiry - we got away with it (in terms of fatalities) - but it would be dangerously delusional to conclude that this was a safe precedent to set as a consequence.

With best wishes,

Crerar

On 24/05/2016 13:21, Gavin Corbett wrote:

Crerar

See below and attached

Gavin

Gavin Corbett
Green Councillor for Fountainbridge - Craiglockhart
Spokesperson on Economy and Finance and member of Education, Children and Families Committee
0131 529 3174
07718 666480
Twitter @gavincorbett

Surgery arrangements: contact me and I will arrange to meet at a time and place that suits you.

Constituents who contact me by email may be added to a list to receive an e-newsletter every couple of months or so about my council work in the area. If you prefer not to receive this update either follow the instructions at the foot of the e-newsletter to unsubscribe or let me know directly.



From: Michaela Lyons **On Behalf Of** Alistair Gaw
Sent: 23 May 2016 14:28
To: Gavin Corbett
Subject: Oxfangs PS - response to your query S168

Dear Gavin

Thank you for your email and I regret the delay in responding. With regard to your additional queries:

1. Crerar's question on why a full structural survey was not done after the first wall collapse in January.

Please see the attached letter in response to your query.

2. Why is there not more obvious sign of repair work going on at the school (I have had the same complaint put to me again this morning). Is ESP actually geared up and capable of delivering to the extent and urgency needed?

The school opens tomorrow.

3. How can the council ensure that secondary costs like the After School Club (£10k); school fair (£5k); breakfast club and active schools are met by ESP – assuming that there are other such costs in all schools.

It is unfortunate that these unprecedented circumstances have temporarily impacted on these activities. The Council apologises for this. At present the Council is unable to consider covering any additional costs as it is having to react to circumstances beyond its control by putting in place temporary measures for those children who require to be relocated as a result of their school being temporarily closed.

Best wishes

Alistair

Alistair Gaw | Acting Executive Director of Communities and Families | The City of Edinburgh Council | Waverley Court, Business Centre 2.6 | 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh, EH8 8BG | Tel 0131 469 3322 | alistair.gaw@edinburgh.gov.uk | www.edinburgh.gov.uk

From: Gavin Corbett
Sent: 27 April 2016 12:31
To: Andy Gray; Alistair Gaw; Patrick Brown
Subject: Oxfangs PS

Alistair / Andy / Patrick

Thanks for attending and answering questions at the special meeting of Oxfangs PC last night. The parents I spoke to afterwards – while still vexed by not knowing when the school can re-open – seemed appreciative of the extra information they had gained and welcomed your open-ness.

There was obviously a lot of territory covered which I won't even try to capture – however, there were some key questions or observations worth follow up (and I recognise that some of these are for ESP).

1. Crerar's question on why a full structural survey was not done after the first wall collapse in January.
2. Why is there not more obvious sign of repair work going on at the school (I have had the same complaint put to me again this morning). Is ESP actually geared up and capable of delivering to the extent and urgency needed?
3. How can the council ensure that secondary costs like the After School Club (£10k); school fair (£5k); breakfast club and active schools are met by ESP – assuming that there are other such costs in all schools.

Obviously the key next step for parents is the submission of the full survey: with a clear indication of work still to do, timescale and projected re-occupation date.

Many thanks

Gavin

Gavin Corbett
Green Councillor for Fountainbridge - Craiglockhart
Spokesperson on Economy and Finance and member of Education, Children and Families Committee
0131 529 3174
07718 666480
Twitter @gavincorbett

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