

CONDITION SURVEYS FOR SCHOOLS

Guidance on 2010/2011 Surveys



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

Introduction

This document:

- Sets out information on condition surveys for schools in Plymouth
- Considers the affordability of backlog maintenance
- Describes arrangements for training on the use of condition surveys
- Sets out how the Council is to gain better understanding of schools condition issues through condition bids

Condition Surveys

Many schools have already received copies of their condition survey carried out last year. Now we are pleased to formally issue the survey which sets out the condition of your school buildings for 2010/11. These surveys have been carried out by a single surveying company over a short period of time and offer us a direct comparable basis. In order for you to see how your survey compares to the overall results, all the condition surveys have been posted on the Plymouth city council website: www.plymouth.gov.uk/capitalplanning.

In issuing these condition surveys we are anxious that you and your governors and trustees or directors are fully aware of what these surveys tell us, and more importantly what they don't tell us. We would ask you to read carefully the instructions and guidance in the front of the survey; this will tell you in detail what you should expect from the survey. There will be many school staff and governors that do not agree with the assessments and/or do not agree with the costs that the survey contain. However, many fruitless telephone calls and site visits could be avoided if the judgment criteria are fully understood. Experience has taught us that nearly all disagreements with the surveyors' judgements arise from a misunderstanding of the criteria of these judgments. Please be aware that the criterion used is a national methodology based on the Department for Education (DfE) guidance: 0-097/2000. This methodology has been in existence for over 10 years and has been applied consistently in Plymouth since its introduction.

There will be occasions where issues that are of the highest priority to you will not be commented upon in the survey, or they may be of a lower priority than other things. There will also be times when you will have quotes for repairs that come to much more than are shown in the survey. These factors do not mean the survey is wrong or not useful. They are a snapshot of a moment in time. They have been described as an MOT advisory note rather than a quotation for work. The condition survey is a valuable tool in the management of your building, whether you see it as a means of assisting with your own assessments or as a challenge, you will see the importance placed by professional surveyors on matters you might not have seen as so important.

The survey, provided to you electronically, has two components. A PDF document, which contains the narrative and summaries, is useful for briefing governors or trustees. There is also an Excel file that contains all the judgments. This file is most useful to a caretaker or business manager; the judgments can be sorted by block, by component, or by priority; allowing detailed analysis of the data.

Condition surveys are important data and the information can be used in many ways. Firstly, there is an element of the algorithm used in calculating your revenue budget that uses this data, so that schools with greater backlog maintenance liability receive higher maintenance budgets. In addition, the condition data is used in many instances in prioritising schools for capital funding. This data used to be given to the DfE and was used nationally in discussions with the Treasury over comprehensive spending reviews. This stopped in 2005; however, Sebastian James' Review of Education Capital criticises the Government for not retaining this data and is recommending a new national data collection of condition liability.

We hope you can see that the information in these surveys should not be overlooked, it is important that you take the time to consider these reports and make sure that you understand what they are saying.

Training

In order to help you understand and use the surveys, we are arranging two informal training sessions at Windsor House on Thursday 19 May 2011. The first session will be 2.00-4.00pm in Corporate Room C and is aimed at headteachers or business managers. The second session 6.00-8.00pm in Corporate Room A is for governors or directors to see how condition surveys should be used in the day to day planning of building environments. Places at these sessions will be booked on a first come first served basis, by emailing: strategyforchange@plymouth.gov.uk or contacting Debbie Storey (Strategy for Change Project Officer) on 01752 307420.

Affordability

A key question to ask will be how we can afford the work that has been identified in Priority 1 and then how do we plan to afford the work identified as Priority 2-4. In the past this would have been largely the responsibility of the schools using devolved revenue and capital funding. Projects that were beyond the scope of this funding, when the maximum rolling up of devolved capital was considered, were eligible to funding that the Council made available through condition, security or access funding bids. In this way schools had the ability to plan and prioritise work. Under the new arrangements of devolved capital funding it will not be possible for schools to manage the backlog maintenance liability in the same way.

The publication of the Review of Education Capital reveals the national thinking and explains the reasons for reducing devolved capital in the way the Government has. In the Review it suggests that schools are not best placed to manage backlog maintenance as the reduction of procurement gains means that the cost of this maintenance is much more than it needs to be. The recommendations are that a responsible authority (local authority, diocese or academy trust etc.) manage programmes of maintenance across schools in their estate, and it may be that in the future this is how Plymouth City Council will need to respond to this national means of allocating funding in 2012/13 onwards.

Regardless of how future funding may be allocated or controlled the question still remains, that the liability is here today and that between the Council and schools we need to manage these issues.

Many of the initial PI items are below the £3000 de-minimus, these items will be revenue funding and not something that the Council can consider under its capital programme. These items should still be managed at school level, although it is recognised that where schools have a series of these matters the collective issue can cause a pressure on the revenue budget. In these cases the Council's finance team will be supporting the schools directly.

Where PI items are listed above £3000, these will need to be addressed from capital funding. Where a school has devolved capital funding that is sufficient to deal with PI items it should consider carefully the need and if the judgments are in-line with your own priorities, then you should go ahead and have the work carried out from your own capital resources, even if this means diverting funds from other work you had planned.

There will be many situations where the available resources are insufficient to have the work done and there will also be situations where work not prioritised in these surveys needs to be completed but is outside the affordability envelope of devolved capital funding. In these cases we are arranging a condition bidding round, which offers schools the opportunity to set out their highest building condition worries.

Very tight central government capital settlements mean that the level of allocation for the Council's condition funding for 2011/12 is set at the very low level of £200k. This will, subject to the confirmation of central government allocations for 2012/13, be raised to £1.2m in the following year. It has been concluded that to make the most of this funding it is best to make both years' funding available in one bidding round.

Condition Bids

Schools will be familiar with submitting condition bids as the Council has used this method of allocating funding for nearly 10 years. A bidding process is not perfect; it can be time consuming for schools and frustrating when bids do not result in funding. It is also frustrating for the Council, as in many cases funding allocated is not spent on the issue or in some cases not spent at all. However, as schools retain the responsibility for buildings there needs to be a mechanism for the Council to coordinate what schools believe are their priorities and get further detail of the issues in the condition surveys. Therefore, despite the difficulties with the system we have concluded that while schools retain the responsibility, we need to continue with a bidding round for 2011-13.

However, this year the issues are somewhat different. The scale of the capital funding available is smaller and the Council needs to gather information on where schools are not able to afford to rectify the condition of their school buildings. As a consequence we are looking for two sorts of return. Therefore, Part 1 is a call for evidence, which is a simple notification of the most urgent condition priorities with your estimate of the likely cost of dealing with this. If you agree with your condition survey you need do nothing as we will take a non-response as your agreement that these are the highest priorities for your school. If you feel that the survey doesn't reflect your needs, it is important that you at least give us some basic information, which should not take you too much time or research. In addition to this, Part 2 what you might understand as traditional bids. Here we are asking for a reasonable amount of information that is sufficient for the Council to assess need and to be sure that allocating a degree of funding will meet this need.

Bids are now invited from schools to put forward proposals for consideration for funding that would assist in addressing P1 or high P2/3 condition issues in school buildings where the schools devolved funding is unable to meet the liability. Bids are requested via completion of a downloadable form that is available on the Plymouth City Council website: www.plymouth.gov.uk/capitalplanning. Please refer to the guidance available on this webpage for further information with regards to eligibility criteria. Forms returned on line or via hard copy will be accepted.

Further Assistance

Should you require any further information on you condition survey or require any assistance with your bid please contact Michelle Endacott on 01752 307426 in the first instance.

You may also want to speak to the surveyor who did your condition survey. The company that undertook the surveys has made allowance for reasonable questions by schools. However, the company may charge for more detailed or invasive inspections that might be necessary for you to submit a detailed bid. It may be worth discussing this with us before going ahead.