



Effective communication ensures high customer satisfaction despite Covid challenges

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic meant adjustments to the programme of work were required on this project, along with the introduction of additional protocols and increased communication between the site team and residents to ensure everyone was kept safe and satisfied.



Overview

Name: Neckinger Estate

Client: London Borough of Southwark

Type: Refurbishment

Duration: 13 months

Value: £2.1m



Scope

- Provision of MEWP access equipment
- Front entrance door repairs
- Window repair/replacement works
- Electrical works
- Walkway repairs
- FRA works
- LD2 smoke/fire alarm system where required
- Kitchen and bathroom/WC replacement
- Internal works to be completed in 2022



Benefits

- ✓ Residents fully engaged
- ✓ Effective COVID safety measures implemented quickly
- ✓ Delays minimised
- ✓ No extra cost to client because of COVID-related issues
- ✓ Improved living conditions for residents
- ✓ A trainee RLO employed from estate

Work programme and delivery

This was a challenging project due to disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which began just one month before work was scheduled to finish. Subsequent lockdowns meant the programme had to be adjusted to suit the requirements of residents and the client. Elkins' on-site delivery team worked alongside the contract, commercial and procurement teams to agree a revised programme with the client, which they successfully delivered in keeping with the revised time frame and budget.

Elkins proactively managed the programme of works by looking ahead, planning all resources and deliverables. By doing this rather than reacting to slippage, the team were in a better position to anticipate and resolve any unexpected issues. A small initial float was included within the original programme for dealing with these.

Effective Covid-19 protocols were established and revised working practices were put in place, ensuring the team had the tools to react and mitigate contract slippage. Critical tasks and responsibilities were identified and prioritised. The Project Risk Register was effective in helping the team manage the project, by prioritising any risks faced and allowing for expedient mitigation measures to be put in place.

Some of the internal works in the original scope – including the kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, glass replacement and the installation of LD2 systems – had to be put on hold as the team were unable to gain access to resident's homes due to Covid safety precautions. The team subsequently returned to the site in July 2022 to resume these works.

Resident engagement

The works were managed to ensure detailed, honest, and transparent communications with residents and other stakeholders. Elkins' site team consulted with residents and incorporated their feedback to enable the work to take place in the least disruptive and most efficient manner. In addition to regular meetings, communication (where Covid protocols allowed) included:

- Asking residents their preferred method of communication.
- Invitations to meetings – hand delivered, emailed, by phone, face-to-face etc.
- Working in partnership with existing residents' groups and associations.
- Coffee mornings – inviting residents to come and chat on a more informal basis with refreshments provided.
- Surgeries – open at set times of the day and week where residents could come, without an appointment, and talk to site delivery team members.
- Newsletters with all relevant information, including input from residents.
- Website updates with all relevant information.
- Competitions and quizzes with prizes, such as food hampers, vouchers, etc. to encourage residents into the office.
- Community initiatives, including fun days and school safety talks regarding living around building works and sites.
- Encouraging/assisting residents to set up residents' groups where they did not exist already.
- Holding meetings at various times of the day to suit residents' needs.
- Regularly walking the site to meet residents informally and get to know the area.
- Liaising with caretakers and street wardens.
- Providing a user-friendly, welcoming environment for residents to feel safe communicating with Elkins' site delivery teams.
- Acting as advocates for vulnerable tenants through Elkins' contacts at London Borough of Southwark (social services, O. Ts etc.) when necessary and appropriate, i.e. if there are no current carers or representatives to make decisions.
- Tenant liaison plans for individual tenants, where they were deemed sensitive or vulnerable.
- Additional measures for sensitive cases, where additional time, care, out of hours working, changes to appointments or reassurance was required.

The site manager visited each property daily to monitor progress of works and ensure quality of workmanship. A check was carried out at the end of each working day to ensure the property was clean and secure.

Once the work was complete, the site manager and/or foreman conducted a snagging visit, which gave the resident an opportunity to raise any issues and ensure they were satisfied.

Diversity

Elkins' policy for hiring bilingual or diverse employees who not only speak some other language but also have unique insights into different cultures and beliefs, helps to create an improved customer experience and welcoming environment.

Value for money

Despite required adjustments to the programme, the client was not charged for any additional prelims or extensions of time caused by Covid.

KPIs and performance

KPIs improved on the project due to more frequent communication with residents on the estate, particularly when Covid hit and additional protocols were required. Residents were extremely pleased with the additional safety measures and contact arrangements that were put in place during this period.

Social value

During the course of the project, Elkins employed a trainee Resident Liaison Officer from the estate, who has since gone on to become a full-time employee.

