

## **Resident engagement**

### **Why effective communication is so important during a construction project.**

Managing projects and working on site where residents or businesses remain in occupation can often be fraught with difficulty. Complaints from irritated residents, complaining about the dust and noise being created by your building works are an inevitable part of any construction work, particularly during these times of unprecedented uncertainty and anxiety. Often these will be escalated and passed around until eventually several different people in various departments could be dealing with what should have been a simple issue.

By their nature, construction projects have an enormous number of moving parts including dozens of people. Noise, dirt, vibration, scaffolding, dust, trespassing, increased traffic congestion and lack of access undoubtedly lead to inconvenience, frustration and sometimes anger. All-too-often, these difficulties arise when residents, block managers and neighbours don't know what's going on or how long the work is going to last, they snowball from a simple lack of communication.

### **A new age of considerate construction.**

The importance of communication in construction cannot be overstated. Getting the local community 'on-side' is a must. As a contractor, it's important that you engage local residents and businesses well before a hi-vis jacket appears and maintain regular and effective communication while the building works continue. That means preparing, implementing and monitoring any block refurbishment scheme and ensuring that it is completed within an appropriate period of time. It also means keeping any disruption to a reasonable minimum.

Active engagement is proven to reduce the number of complaints, creating goodwill within the local community and building positive relationships with political stakeholders in the boroughs or regions where you are working. It also enables the contractor to deal with any issues before they progress to a formal complaint and escalate to the attention of decision-makers and stakeholders that are important to your business. With careful, proactive attention to detail, many problems can be anticipated early and mitigated.

### **Managing fears and expectation through regular, open communications.**

While most contractors are making efforts towards social responsibility and have a policy of some sort which explains how they're environmentally responsible and socially aware, not many consider it to be something which could make their job easier and boost their reputation. As one of London's most experienced building contractors, the A.S. Ramsay Group often works in live environments and on sites in busy locations. Over the past four years, the company has developed a system which takes a proactive approach towards resident engagement.

"Our construction management plan engages directly with those who are going to be affected by the works, introducing the team, explaining any access requirements and management, and offering guidance on potential security issues", says company Director, Jamie Godman. "Before the work begins, we send out a letter to local residents, neighbours and businesses to explain the nature of the building works and provide them with a timetable of what works will be happening and when. Where possible, we try to give them at least seven days' notice of any likely noisy or disturbing activities."

#### **Communicating with local businesses to avoid unnecessary disruption.**

However efficient a plan is, during its lifecycle, a construction project will inevitably face delays and disruption, so it's vital to maintain regularly contact and open a channel of two-way communication. As well as communicating to residents, it's essential that you provide a way for them to make their concerns known. It's a relationship built on trust. For a disgruntled resident, there's nothing worse than a hi-vis, hard-hat clad man looking blankly at them and shrugging in response to their questions.

"We see it as a vital part of our work to continue to update them throughout the process. We keep residents, neighbours and local businesses up-to-date with a monthly newsletter. We tell them at what stage the works are, what will be happening during the following month, explain what impact the work might have and what steps we'll be taking to minimise it. Additionally, to manage expectation and minimise any frustration, every fortnight, the company's Quality Assurance Manager visits the site and compiles a report which provides property managers and freeholders with the latest information including the progress that has been made and the work that is planned over the following two weeks."

“Once work has started, we also place boards around the site which display a named person at the company and their dedicated contact details, should any residents, neighbours or local businesses have any questions or concerns. Opening channels of communication with residents in such a transparent way has actually benefitted the company. With such regular reporting, we’re not only aware of what element might be frustrating residents, we can also measure and monitor our activities and make informed decisions about the project while work is in progress. To support our efforts and ensure that we continue to improve our service, we also integrate an Excellent Delivery model in each of our plans. This includes project updates, a Quality Assurance report, a Site Manager report and a Health and Safety report.”