

Workshop 1A

Managing risk in a high rise building – Case Study: Grange House, Bexley

Speaker: Trevor Graham, Interim CPO - Orbit

Chaired by: Neil Watts

Room: Blenheim



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Grange House



- 11 storey tower block (including ground floor) comprising 68 flats of which 6 are leaseholder properties.
- Primarily EPC C.
- High Risk Building under Building Safety Act.
- Constructed in 1960's.
- Post war no fines construction - beyond its designed life.
- Historical issues with leaks from roof and rainwater systems.
- Property 'tired' and in need of investment.

The fire!

- Fire broke out on Saturday 16th March at around 9.20am. Fire services were called and the fire was dealt with by 11.30am.
- The fire related to a third floor flat with smoke damage to adjacent flats.
- There were no fatalities, two residents were hospitalised (but no serious injuries) and a further three were treated for smoke inhalation.
- First Orbit person on site arrived at 9.30am because they had seen the fire whilst driving!



Immediate response

- London Fire Service evacuated the block.
- Orbit's Major Incident Response process kicked in – 36 Orbit colleagues were mobilized.
- Orbit provided immediate respite at a local independent living scheme.
- Orbit's Communications Team created a 'Grange House Residents' web page providing constant updates to customers. This was particularly helpful for customers who had dispersed until they could return home
- At 2.30pm the Metropolitan Police declared the block a crime scene and all access for customers was prohibited (this was rescinded the following day).
- At 3.00pm it was discovered that the Mains electrical supply to the block had been damaged by water and had to be isolated.
- All 200+ customers had to be decanted, along with their pets.
- By 1.00am on Sunday 17th March all customers who needed alternative accommodation had been found somewhere to stay

Fire performance



Immediate aftermath

- Whilst the building performed as designed and the fire was contained within the flat there had been smoke damage as a result of tackling the fire.
- 17 flat front doors were damaged by the London Fire Brigade in the process of the evacuation. These had to be secured and subsequently replaced.
- Once the Mains had dried power was restored.
- The main water tank on the roof had drained. Once refilling commenced it was found to be leaking badly.
- The tank was unrepairable and no suitable alternatives were found to be available.
- An alternative solution involving 4 smaller tanks was arrived at as a short term fix until a permanent solution could be installed.
- Regrettably, customers remained decanted until early June when a phased reoccupation commenced.

Dealing with the water supply

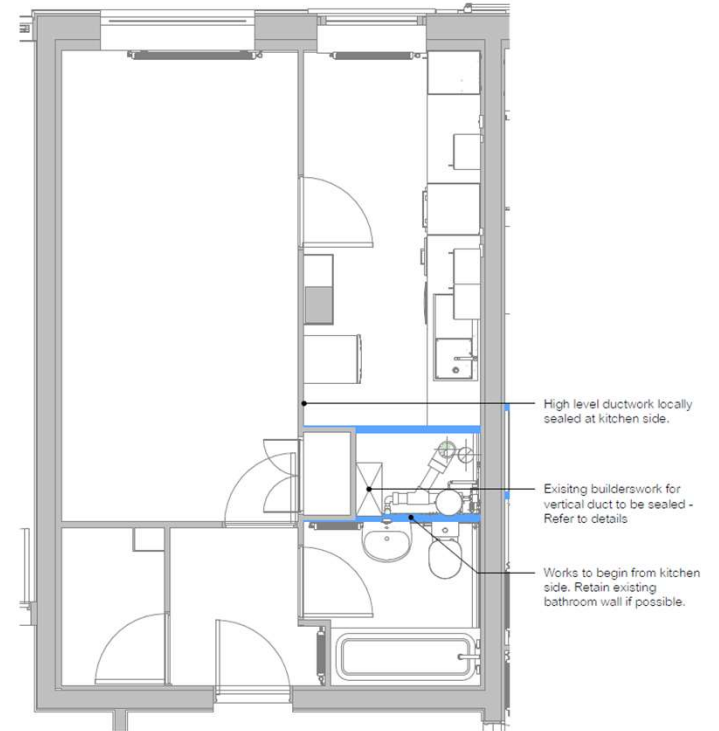
Phase 1 Reoccupation (May-Jun) 2024

- Risk of non-compliance under CDM 2015 – F10, welfare, insurance, health and safety and competency.
- Wates appointed as Principal Contractor in May.
- New temporary water tanks and distribution pipework throughout – pumps, leaks and water pressure.
- Gas testing – meters without credit.
- Electrical testing – meters without credit.
- Asbestos testing and removal.
- Cleaning, decoration and water damage.
- Fire doors.
- Security and Customer access – empty properties.
- Insurance and Loss Adjuster negotiations/approvals.



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Reinstatement works - challenges



Reinstatement works – permanent solution

Phase 2 Permanent Reinstatement Works (Oct-Apr)

- New Building Safety Act and Building Safety Regulator ambiguity – limited to work falling within the definition of ‘emergency’.
- Wates managing the design with Hunters appointed as Lead Designer and Principal Designer for both CDM and Building Regulations.
- Loss Adjuster involvement.
- Permanent pressurised water supply reinstatement. Demolition of pram stores on the ground floor to create space for a new tank room.
- Installation of ventilation and fire dampers.
- Existing building features – water cylinder cupboards, boiler location.
- Window replacement, concrete repairs, and full reinstatement works in Flat 17.
- Flooring and decoration where damaged.
- Asbestos testing and removal (some licensed).



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Customer engagement – communication methods

Face to face

Telephone

SMS

Webpage and
FAQs

IVR

Posters

In-person meeting
and information
pack

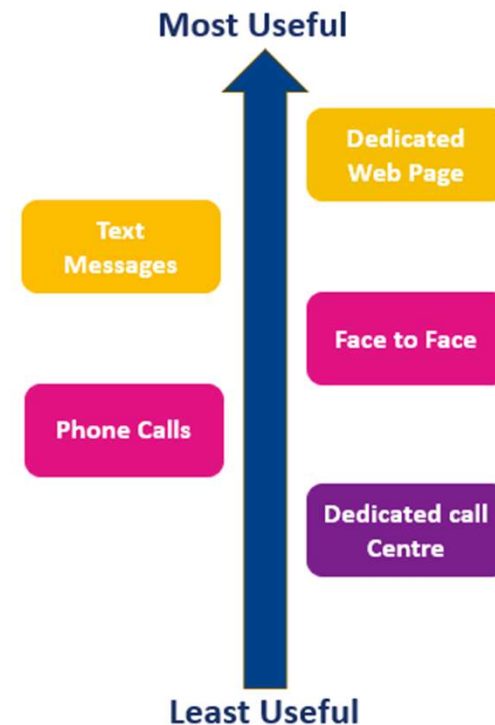
Letters

Resident Liaison
Officer

- Decant information
- Marler house
- Building access
- Help and support
- Programme of works
- Returning to Grange House

Overall satisfaction with communication

- There was an almost equal split between customers who thought Orbit was updating customers enough and customers who thought Orbit was not updating enough.
- Customers found dedicated web pages and text messages to be the most useful.
- The dedicated call centre scored the lowest when comparing all forms of communication.



Lessons learned - customers

- ✓ Prioritising the human touch.
- ✓ Showing compassion and empathy.
- ✓ Collecting up-to-date customer contact data.
- ✓ Providing a single source of the truth / combatting misinformation.
- ✓ Reducing customer effort in accessing information.
- ✓ Not assume customers know about fire safety or have any understanding of why things are happening
- ✓ Utilising a mix of channels.
- ✓ Being prepared and equipped for incoming enquiries.
- ✓ Proving clear communication around temporary accommodation bookings and logistics.
- ✓ Forming a working group with clear communication and defined roles and responsibilities.

Lessons learned - buildings

- ✓ Maintain the 'Golden Thread' and ensure you know your buildings – BIM modelling of Grange House proved invaluable in moving to the design stage for reinstatement.
- ✓ Understand how the building is expected to perform in the event of a fire and ensure everything has been done to achieve this.
- ✓ Assume nothing and make no customer promises until all services have been recommissioned and checked.
- ✓ Consider 'What if' scenarios for complex buildings and endeavour to model your response as you might with a broader spanning business continuity or disaster recovery approach.
- ✓ Review supply chain – is it adequate to address emergencies such as this?

Finally – the financial legacy of the fire!



Thank you.

See you at the
next conference!



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