



## **APPOINTING A CONTRACTOR OR AGENT**

Before you start looking for a contractor or agent take a look at the following tips and advice which may help you to avoid some common problems.

### **Getting started**

- Friends and family may be able to recommend trades people that they have used.
- Consider using a contractor from the Council's online Directory where possible.
- Ask contractors to provide details of previous clients who can be contacted for a reference. Give them a call to see if they were happy with the workmanship they received, and ask about tidiness and reliability.
- Avoid door step sellers. If you are concerned about a trader cold calling at your door, then contact the Citizens' Advice Consumer Helpline on 03454 04 05 06.
- You can search online for reviews and some contractors may use social media eg Facebook/Twitter, where you can also obtain comments and information about their work.
- Try to use a builder from a recognised trade association. The National Home Improvement Council has a list of member organisations on their website. [www.nhic.org.uk](http://www.nhic.org.uk)
- Gloucestershire Trading Standards also supports "Buy with Confidence", which is an approved trader scheme. [www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk](http://www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk)
- Gas engineers must be registered with gas safe. You can check online whether a contractor is registered at [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)
- Electrical contractors should be registered with a national competent person scheme. You can check if your electrician is registered at: [www.electricalcompetentperson.co.uk](http://www.electricalcompetentperson.co.uk)
- Builders registered with any competent builders approved scheme can be checked at [www.competentperson.co.uk](http://www.competentperson.co.uk)
- For grant/loan works any Agent appointed should be given a copy of the Council's Protocol for Agents, available on the Council website. Your agent will need to agree to comply with the Protocol. [www.Stroud.Gov.UK/dfg](http://www.Stroud.Gov.UK/dfg).

### **Before you appoint a Contractor or Agent**

- Always check the Contractor or Agent's name and address. You can use online directories or visit Companies House online if they are a limited company.
- Visit their website.
- Ask your Contractor / Agent to give you a fixed quote for the job, rather than an estimate which can be subject to change.
- Check the price by getting at least 3 quotes and make sure all quote for the same amount of work.
- Be wary of any very low quotes and ask the contractor to check that everything has been included.
- Once you have selected a Contractor/Agent, make sure you have a clear agreement on the scope of work to be done, how much it will cost and when it will start. It's best to have this in writing to avoid any confusion.
- Always check if VAT is included or not as this will add 20% to the total cost. The contractor must be VAT registered to charge VAT and their VAT number should appear on your quote.
- Ask your contractor if works are guaranteed or not, and if the guarantee is insurance backed in case the company stops trading.



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- Check with your Contractor whether the company has public liability insurance cover. They may also hold additional insurance to protect your home from damages. Ask to see a copy of the insurances they hold.
- If you are doing work funded by a grant or loan from the Council then make sure your contractor is aware that the grant process must be followed or payment can be delayed or withheld.

### **Starting the works**

- Generally you should not be required to pay money up front or give an advanced deposit for works. For larger projects however it may be a requirement of the contract which you should read carefully. Discuss any queries with your contractor and agent before you sign it.
- If you can not avoid a deposit then pay as little as possible and by credit card if you can, which gives added protection if over £100 in value.
- Don't pay for materials up front before your contractor starts, unless they can be delivered direct to your property. Then only pay on receipt of goods and always retain the delivery invoice and receipt.
- If your work is being funded by a disabled facilities grant, loan or other council funding then your contractor must not start work or receive any payment from you until the funding is approved.
- Staged payment can be agreed for larger jobs. If you are applying for a Council grant or loan, interim payments will need to be agreed with the grant officer first.
- Always insist on a receipt for any money paid during or at the end of the job.
- If there are any additional works once the contractor is on site ask for a fixed price before any further work is carried out. If works are funded with a council grant then the grant officer will also need to be informed before any additional work can be included.

### **Building Regulations, Planning and Agents**

- If you are unsure whether or not the work requires planning consent or building regulation approval then speak to your local council. A pre-application meeting with the planning officer can be arranged, usually subject to a fee. Guidance can also be found on the national planning portal website [www.planningportal.co.uk](http://www.planningportal.co.uk)
- Planning applications usually take at least 8 weeks to process.
- Some projects may require architectural plans to be drawn up before your contractor can give an accurate quote.
- If you need to hire an architect check that he/she appears on the register of architects. [www.architects-register.org.uk](http://www.architects-register.org.uk)
- Check with your Agents when they will be available to start work.

### **Dealing with disputes**

- Unfortunately whatever precautions are taken sometimes problems still occur. Always try to resolve a dispute amicably if possible. Put your complaint in writing to the builder and keep a copy of it. If you are unable to resolve the disagreement, you can get further information and advice on what to do next from Gloucestershire Trading Standards website. [www.glos.tradingstandards.gov.uk/Consumer](http://www.glos.tradingstandards.gov.uk/Consumer)