

Finding a reliable contractor

This leaflet gives guidance and advice
on finding a reliable contractor.



Carrying out building work can be disruptive, stressful, expensive and inconvenient. To minimise the impact of any building work it is important you take time to make sure you choose the right contractor.

If you employ a good, reputable building contractor in terms of price, reliability and workmanship, the potential for problems will be greatly reduced.

How do I do that?

- Get recommendations. Ask friends, family, neighbours and relevant trade associations if they know of reliable contractors who have experience in the type of work you are looking for.
- Never employ someone who calls at your home uninvited without getting a second opinion and an alternative quote.
- Choose established contractors with premises you can visit and ask how long they have been in business. If things go wrong you should then be able to contact them. Make sure you have addresses and details of the contractors.
- Ask if there is similar completed work that they have carried out that you can view. Make sure you speak to the previous customers for their comments. Were they happy with the work? Was it started and completed on time? Was the final bill in line with the estimate?
- Check out any supplied written references and make sure it was your contractor who actually did the work. A contractor with a reputation to preserve is more likely to be around if you have problems later.
- Always get at least two quotations for the works and make sure these are in writing with a break down of works to be undertaken.
- Don't make assumptions about quality of fixtures and fixings to be supplied. If you have specific requirements, make sure the quotation includes reference to them as this also helps in obtaining comparable quotations.
- Check the quotations carefully, compare like for like and examine what the contractor is providing for in the price. Don't always assume that the cheapest is the best. Good contractors who refuse to cut corners will seldom be able to compete on price with those that do.
- Agree payment terms before the work commences. Be careful with upfront payments. Make sure you know what you are getting for any upfront payment. It may be difficult to get monies

back. Contractors offering cash / vat free deals are not easily tracked down if things go wrong.

- Consider paying, where possible, by credit card as this gives you extra protection if the work is not satisfactory because you may be able to claim for compensation from the card company. There may be a cost for this.
- Be clear from the outset exactly what you want the contractor to do and then stick to it. Changing your mind too often may prove expensive.

How do I get quotations?

Once you have decided which contractors you will use for a quote, contact them and arrange for them to come and see you.

No matter how big or small the job is, always:

- Make sure you have a full description of the works that you want carried out.
- Get at least two written quotations for the work.
- Remember a quotation is a fixed price while an estimate is a calculation of how much the work is likely to cost.
- Check to see if your estimate/ quotation includes VAT.
- Enquire about what guarantees they can offer.
- Ask the contractor how long the work will take and when they can carry out the works. If possible, get this in writing.
- Some contractors give you a period of time to accept the quotation at the given price. Check any delays mean you are not charged more money.



Should I get references?

Yes. A good contractor will be able to provide references of previous work which they have carried out. You shouldn't be afraid to contact referees and, if they live nearby, you can ask to see the work carried out.

Ask the referee how easy the contractor was to deal with. Did they complete work on time? Was the final bill similar to quotation? How tidy were they?

Is the contractor a member of a trade association?

Find out if the contractor is a member of an appropriate trade association. Not all associations are reputable. If you find out that a contractor is making false claims regarding membership of trade bodies or qualifications which they don't have, report them to Aberdeenshire Council Trading Standards (contact details at the end of this leaflet).

Do I make an agreement with the contractor?

Yes, make sure to get as much detail as possible in writing, for example:

- Exactly what is included in the quotation.
- When work will start and how long it will take.
- What payments the contractor will expect from you before the works are finished.
- Who pays for power, portable toilets etc.
- What arrangements the contractor will make for safety and convenience as works proceed.
- What areas of my house I will need to clear before work starts.

Also

- Take photos or notes of the condition of fixtures and fittings before work starts.
- Do not agree to or sign anything until you are happy with the terms of the contract.
- If you don't understand anything on the quote, check with the contractor.

If your contractor won't supply a contract, consider drawing up one yourself. Contact National Trading Standards on **0345 608 9515** for more information or contact Aberdeenshire Council Trading Standards.

Make that all paperwork is in order and permission has been granted

Never let your contractor start works without checking with the Local Authority Planning Department or Building Standards that all necessary approvals have been obtained. Also make sure that all conditions imposed by Planning and Building Regulations are addressed before work starts and on the works completion you obtain the Local Authority Completion Certificate, which will be needed for any future house sale.

It is the homeowner's responsibility to make sure these types of permissions are in place, not the contractor.

Ask for a method statement

This can be very useful on large jobs as it gives the builder an opportunity to explain how the work will be carried out and how they will deal with health and safety issues.

Does the contractor need public liability insurance?

Yes. Make sure your contractor has up to date public liability insurance. Their insurance should not only cover for accidental damage to your property but neighbouring properties too.



What do I do if things go wrong?

- Complain. Give your contractor the chance to put things right. If you are still unhappy, put it in writing to them with a resolution deadline.
- Keep a diary recording all phone calls, conversations and events. Take photos of any work you are unhappy and record the time and date it was taken.
- Get advice. Speak to Trading Standards, Citizens Advice Bureau, consult a solicitor or engage a Chartered Building Surveyor or other suitably qualified professional person.
- If the contractor is a member of a trade association, speak to them. They may offer an arbitration scheme.
- Contact the health and safety executive who may be able to assist on health and safety issues.

www.hse.gov.uk

What guarantees can I get?

Ask about the availability of insurance backed guarantees. These can be a good idea particularly if the contractor stops trading.

Make sure your guarantee is in writing. Never accept any verbal guarantees.

When will I make a final payment?

Agree at the beginning to withhold full payment until you are satisfied the works are completed to an acceptable standard as discussed/estimated and the Local Authority Building Standards Surveyor has issued the required Completion Certificate if required.

What are my rights?

You have basic rights under the law and can expect the work to be:

- Carried out with reasonable care and skill.
- Finished within a reasonable time (unless a specific timescale has been agreed).
- Provided at a reasonable cost although you should try to agree a fixed price in advance.

You have these rights even if nothing is written down but a written agreement or contract will help things run smoother.

Useful contacts

For help finding a builder and checking membership or for help resolving an issue with a builder, contact the Federation of Master Builders (FMB) on **0330 333 7777**, email reception@fmb.org.uk or access www.fmb.org.uk

To find a decorator, check membership or resolve issues with a decorator contact Scottish Decorators' Federation (SDF) call **01786 448838**, email info@scottishdecorators.co.uk or access www.scottishdecorators.co.uk

You can find useful information and approved contractors contact SNIPEF (Scottish & Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation) on **0131 556 0600**, email info@snipef.org or access www.snipef.org

Scotland's electrical trade association (SELECT) is the trade association for the electrical contracting industry in Scotland. To find a SELECT contractor call **0131 445 5577**, email admin@select.org.uk or access www.select.org.uk

For help and advice on consumer issues contact Citizens Advice consumer helpline on **03454 040506** or access www.citizensadvice.org.uk

For consumer advice and assistance contact Aberdeenshire Council Trading Standards on **01467 537222** (Inverurie), **01346 587007** (Fraserburgh), email trading_standards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or access www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/business/trading-standards

