



Leicester
City Council
BUILDING CONTROL

Guidance Note 07



Choosing a Reputable Builder

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Choosing a builder to construct any size extension or to carry out building alterations can be a daunting task. If you employ a good reputable building contractor in terms of price, reliability and workmanship, the potential for problems will be greatly reduced.

Here are a few suggestions that may help you

Getting started

Do not employ anyone who is prepared to carry out work without planning permission and/or building regulation approval, if these are required. Check yourself first, if these approvals are required.

Where the works being considered involve electrical works or gas installations, ensure that your electrician is Part P registered with one of the competent persons scheme providers and your gas engineer is registered with the Gas Safe scheme

If possible, ask at least 3 contractors for written quotes for that work. A quote is the sum you will pay, but an estimate is just an approximate figure and you may end up paying much more;

Finding the right builder

Get recommendations. Ask relatives, friends, and neighbours if they know reliable contractors who have experience in the type of work you are wanting done. Check out any supplied written references;

Be extremely cautious about using people that you do not know, who knock on your door, leave leaflets or cold call you by telephone;

Find out if the contractor is a member of an appropriate trade association and check that they are with the association;

A list of trade associations can be found in the rear of the local Yellow Pages – not all associations are reputable. Check them out also – look for ones with strict joining criteria, codes of conduct and clear complaints procedures. Some may offer forms of contract, protection schemes and warranties;

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. Ensure you have addresses and details of the contractors if you need to contact them in writing. Remember phone numbers are easily changed leaving you with no way of contacting them;

Get a quote that includes the name & address of the owner/s of the business, a clear schedule of the work to be done, when it will begin & be finished by, the total cost of the work, and details of any stage payments to be made. Don't make assumptions;

Look at “Trust Mark” approved builders. These contractors have signed up to operate to Government endorsed standards. You can also check whether the contractor belongs to a professional trade association (although this is no guarantee that the work will be better than someone who isn't).

Check the contractors out; ask if there is a 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?

Be clear from the outset exactly what you want the contractor to do and then stick to it – changing your mind too often will probably prove expensive.

Once you agree a price and start date, **get a written contract** and make sure you understand it and agree to all of it. Seek professional advice if you are un-clear of any parts to it.

Try to get as much as possible in writing, for example:-

1. Exactly what is included in the estimate (or preferably quotation)
2. When will work start and how long will it take.
3. What payments will the contractor expect from you before the works are finished?
4. On what basis you will want to agree any increase in cost (*before* the money is spent).
5. What arrangements will the builder make for your safety and convenience as works proceed?

Agree at the beginning to withhold a final payment until you are fully satisfied the works are complete and the Local Authority Building Control Surveyor has issued the required Completion Certificate. Please note, the Completion Certificate is not a guarantee for the quality of the builder's work. **Be careful on making large upfront payments** and make sure you know what you are getting for any deposit or payment. It may be difficult to get monies back.

If things go wrong

Complain to your contractors, giving them a chance to put the matter right. If you are not satisfied, put your complaint in writing, saying what you want done and set a deadline.

Most builders are fair and will attempt to resolve any issues you may have. However, if you have a valid complaint you have a right to have the issue sorted out.

Remember, if in doubt ask. This should ensure some peace of mind and, hopefully, a good relationship with your builder.

Keep diaries recording all phone calls, conversations and events. Take photos of any work you are unhappy with recording the time and date taken.

Get advice – speak to the Citizens Advice Bureau; if the contractor is a member of a trade association, speak with them, they may offer an arbitration scheme; consult a Solicitor; engage a Chartered Building Surveyor or other suitably qualified professional person to advise and assist you.

Speak to your Building Control Surveyor; who may be able to assist on health and safety issues or failure to comply with the regulations. See contact details below.

Speak to Trading Standards; they may be able to help where you have problems with a builder that you cannot resolve yourself and may be able to advise you over contractual issues or failure of the contractor to follow sound trading practices. See contact details below.

Useful contacts

Consumer Direct offer free advice etc. Ring or visit www.Consumerdirect.gov.uk

Trading Standards You can visit to speak to one of their officers at:

The Consumer Advice Centre, Alliance House, 6 Bishop Street, Leicester, LE1 6AF.

Phone: 08454 04 05 06.

E Mail: tradingstandards@leicester.gov.uk

Visit: www.Leicester.gov.uk/tradingstandards

If you want to pass on details of illegal or unfair trade practice but wish to stay anonymous then go to **the Rip-off Tip-off** website, visit www.ripofftipoff.net

National Federation of Builders offer free advice, leaflets and builder – finding service. Ring 0870 8989 091 or visit www.builders.org.uk

The Federation of Master Builders offer free advice, leaflets and builder – finding service. Ring 020 7242 7583 or visit www.fmb.org.uk. / www.findabuilder.co.uk

National Register of Warranted Builders warranty scheme details can be found on website <http://www.masterbondwarranty.com>

Trust Mark – Consult Department for Business Innovation and Skills website www.trustmark.org.uk or phone 0845 300 8040 to find a member near you.

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buildingcontrol@leicester.gov.uk

www.leicester.gov.uk

New Walk Centre, Welford Place
Leicester LE1 6ZG

0116 252 6652

Fax 0116 254 6316

