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CHOOSING A REPUTABLE CONTRACTOR

When choosing a building contractor you should consider your choice very carefully and you are advised to check them out before employing them.

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 after.
- 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.

- Look for the 'Trust Mark' – the Government is introducing this scheme to cover all building trades, this means the traders have passed the checks needed for membership.

Consult Department of Trade and Industry web site www.trustmark.org.uk or phone 0870 163 7373 to find a member near you.

- Tameside MBC Buy With Confidence – Approved Trader Scheme.
<http://www.tameside.gov.uk/tradingstandards/buywithconfidence>
- 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.
- Check the contractors out; 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 it was your contractor who actually undertook the work. ***A contractor with a reputation to preserve is more likely to be around if you have problems later.***

- Always obtain **at least three** quotations for the works and ensure these are in writing with a break down of works to be undertaken.

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- Don't make assumptions about quality of fixtures and fixings to be supplied i.e. kitchens, bath suites, doors and windows, electrical provisions etc. If you have specific requirements ensure the quotation includes reference to them, 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 on upfront payments** – ensure 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 – this gives you extra protection if the work is not satisfactory, because you may be able to claim for compensation from the card company.
- 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 of 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.

If your contractor won't supply a contract – consider drawing up one yourself.

Consider suitable forms of standard contract – examples of which can be found at Contractpack on www.contractpack.org.uk or ring 0845 665 1012.or ring 0121 722 8200 or FMB plain English contract www.findabuilder.co.uk or JCT (Joins Contracts Tribunal) Building Contract for home owner/ occupier, which can be obtained from Construction Industry Publications Ltd, 60 Coventry Road Sheldon Birmingham B26 3AY Tel: 0121 722 8200 Fax: 0121 722 8201

- 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.
- Ask about insurance – make sure your builder has up to date public liability insurance.
- Never let your contractor start works without checking with the Local Authority Planning & Building Control that all necessary approvals have been obtained. ***Also ensure that all conditions imposed on the Planning and Building Regulation approvals are addressed before work commences and on the works completion you obtain the Local Authority Completion Certificate, which will be required for any future house sale.***

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Useful Contacts:

Office of Fair Trading

15-25 Bream's Buildings
London
EC4A 1PR

phone 0345 22 44 99 (general number)
0870 60 60 321 (publication orders)
fax 440 171 211 8800

e mail enquiries@oft.gov.uk

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

Trust Mark - Consult Department of Trade and Industry web site www.trustmark.org.uk or phone 0845 300 8040 to find a member near you.

- Tameside MBC Buy With Confidence – Approved Trader Scheme.
<http://www.tameside.gov.uk/tradingstandards/buywithconfidence>

What do I do if things go wrong

- Complain: give your contractor chance to put things right. If you are still unhappy, put it in writing with a resolution deadline.
- Consider withholding payments – but check the contract you have with the contractor.
- Keep a diary 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 Trading Standards Department, Citizens Advice Bureau, consult a solicitor, 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.
- Speak to you Building Control Surveyor, who may be able to assist on health and safety issues.