

## WHAT YOUR GROUP WILL NEED TO DO AND BE AWARE OF:

### Tendering for contractors

Your architect will take the lead in this process, but you will need to understand the process as you will be the group signing the contract with the builders and other contractors. To ensure you end up with the right contractor, the architect will:

- draw up the tender list carefully and only put on the list those he/she might want to work with.
- look carefully at the relevant skills on offer. It is not essential that the builder has done projects before in the church sector, and sometimes a good tender price can be achieved from a builder who has all the right skills and is eager to get into church work. What is important, however, is that the builder can demonstrate a command of the relevant issues and skills. For example, alterations to a listed church should not be entrusted to a builder who only has experience of new build, and a builder who builds the occasional house will not be right for a substantial new building.
- ask about the balance between directly employed staff ('on the books') and subcontractors. Knowing which trades a builder has in-house can be revealing – do they for example have their own plasterers, or stone masons. There is no one right answer to this; many builders produce great buildings using a lot of subcontracted labour, but that will depend on the quality of the relationships between the parties, and will have a big impact on the finished product.
- take personal recommendations and local reputations into account. The architect will want to know whether the builder has previous clients who are willing to speak honestly about their experience of working with them. In particular they will want to know how proactively any unforeseen problems were addressed and dealt with. For example, if a project gets behind programme, how good were the contractors about making up the time?
- look at their previous projects. Aside from some builders being more suited to, say, new build as against conservation work, most builders will do most of their work within a range of contract size. Below that size and they are unlikely to be as cost-effective as a smaller firm carrying less overhead; above that size and they may struggle with managing the logistics of a larger project. The architect may ask about the contract value of their three largest projects to date, and how often they do projects of this size. And besides that, one needs to look at the complexity of a project – a smaller project on a tighter site may well be more demanding than a larger project on an open site. It's a question of horses for courses.
- make sure that those who will actually be doing the work come to the interview ie: not the 'sales manager' whom you will never see again. Even if it is the same building firm that comes with positive references from another project, ask whether the same team that did that project would be involved in yours.

- run financial checks. The cost to the client of their contractor going bust during a building project can be very significant, so before appointing a contractor it is well worth running some financial checks. If the firm is a limited company, then its accounts should be available from Companies House, though this will be old information. You can also glean useful information on the directors and the company structure – for example a director with a history of starting and closing down companies may be a warning sign. It is also wise to ask for a Banker's Reference, which should show the extent of the firm's liquidity and whether they have adequate room for financial manoeuvre. Your architect will be able to advise you if a bond is necessary for the size of your contract.
- visit one of their previous projects. There is no substitute for seeing the quality of a completed project by a shortlisted builder, so you may have the opportunity to visit one or more. Even if it is the same building firm, your architect will want to ask whether the same team of people that did that project would be involved in yours. Was the project delivered to time and to budget, or if not what were the good reasons?
- find out if they are good organisers? From a client's point of view this can have a big impact on the building process. In particular, your architect will want to be able to see evidence of attention to detail, and the ability to produce an intelligent project programme (in the form of a GANTT chart, with a critical path) is an important indicator.
- agree a clear set of criteria against which they are going to select the contractor.
- ensure that key members of your Group attend the interview – you will all be working with these people.

