

Buying services and support

A guide for people in Leeds

**This publication was produced by
Adults and Health, Leeds City Council**

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For general information about adults and health telephone Customer Services on 0113 222 4401, textphone: 0113 222 4410, or write to:

Adults and Health
Leeds Directory Team
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Merrion House
110 Merrion Centre
Leeds
LS2 8BB

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in the booklet is correct and up-to-date at time of publication. Leeds City Council cannot take responsibility for the quality of service provided by any independent supplier.

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Introduction

Buying your own services and support brings many benefits. For example, you can shop around, mixing and matching services from the council and other suppliers to find things that meet your needs exactly.

But buying services and support is no different from buying anything else on the high street: some sellers will be more reliable than others.

This guide offers some simple advice to help you get value for money and avoid buying poor-quality products or services.



What's an independent supplier?

For the purposes of this guide, an 'independent' supplier means a person or organisation that is not part of the council.

This could be:

- an agency (e.g. for employing care workers, personal assistants, cleaners)
- a shop or private business (including websites where you can buy things or services)
- a community or voluntary organisation
- an individual (e.g. someone advertising in the paper to help with gardening or cleaning).

Tips for finding a reliable supplier

When you want to buy something, there are some steps you can take which may help you get what you want at a reasonable price ...

Step 1. Look at different options

It pays to search wisely. Don't just choose the first supplier in an alphabetical list, or one with a flashy advert. Make a note of three or more suppliers who provide the service or item you want, so you can compare their offers and pick the best.

Step 2. Contact the suppliers

Call the three suppliers you identified in step 1 and explain what you want. Take note of what they say, and how much it will cost. If you don't feel comfortable doing this, ask a relative or friend to do it on your behalf.

See the box below for some important questions to ask. Ask each supplier the same questions - that way it will be easier to compare what they offer.

Some people might try to push you into making a quick decision, but don't let them. Take your time, and don't feel bad if you need to ask for something to be explained twice. A good supplier will respect you for asking questions. If they are impatient or rude, pressure you for a decision or refuse to discuss the finer details then think twice about using them.



Questions to ask the supplier

- How much is the total amount I would have to pay? (Ask them to include up-front costs, any longer-term, add on costs and VAT if applicable).
- Can you run through with me exactly what I will get for my money?
- Do I need to sign a contract—and if so how long does it run for? Can I break it if I want to switch to a different supplier? Is there a penalty for that?
- How am I protected if you stop providing the service before the contract is up?
- What happens if the person (e.g. care worker, equipment installer—whoever will be carrying out the service) doesn't show up or shows up late?
- What happens if the equipment/ item breaks (if relevant)?
- What is your complaints (and/ or returns) procedure if I'm not happy?

Finding a reliable supplier

Buying services and support

Step 3. Get good, independent advice

Never take a seller's claims at face value. Ask your family and friends what they think. Talk to your care manager or social worker, if you have one. If there is someone who normally advises you about money, ask them. If the seller is listed in the Leeds Directory of local services at www.leedsdirectory.org do they have a good rating?

Step 4. Choose your supplier

Now that you've spoken to some different suppliers and made a note of what they said, pick the one that best meets your needs at the most reasonable price. If you're not sure, you could ask a friend or relative to help you decide.

When you're making your decision, remember that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

Once you have chosen a supplier, contact them to let them know you want to go ahead. Remind them of the price they offered you before. Remember to keep a note of their contact details, and the name of the person you would need to speak to in case of any problems.

Step 5. Keep any correspondence

Keep copies of any letters or emails you send the supplier, all contracts, receipts and other important documents they send you, and records of any payments you've made (see information to keep safe, below). An A4 binder and hole punch may be a useful investment so you can keep everything together.

See page 11 for tips on how to deal with any problems with a supplier.



Information to keep safe

- Letters or emails you send the supplier and any replies they send back
- Contracts and other important documents
- Receipts/ records of any payments you have made
- Warranties, services manuals, user guides and instructions
- Any information the supplier gave you when you first contacted them, including their complaints procedure, and information about what happens if either of you needs to end the contract early.

Using agencies

If you need one or more people to support you with personal care, cleaning, shopping or other activities, there are two ways to go. You can employ people directly, or use an agency. If you decide to employ people directly, this section won't be relevant - but you could ask your care manager for a copy of the council's book *Becoming an Employer*, a step-by-step guide to employing personal assistants. If you don't have a care manager, please contact Adults and Health on 0113 222 4401.

This section offers some tip's for finding a reliable agency ...

Step 1: Find an agency

There are several places to look for an agency:

- Care Quality Commission (CQC) - the CQC website also contains inspection reports on individual home care agencies, so you can read for yourself how they measure up. Tel 030 00 616 161, web: www.cqc.org.uk
- United Kingdom Home Care Association. Tel: 020 8661 8188 web: www.ukhca.co.uk
- Care Choices Directory. Tel: 01223 207 770, web: www.carechoices.co.uk
- Leeds Directory, Tel: 0113 3784610, web: www.leedsdirectory.org

Step 2: Make a note of what to tell the agency

There are some things the agency will need to know before they can provide someone to support you. Make a list of important information, including:

- what you will want the person to do - including regular tasks, things you might need support with every once in a while, and any regular activities you want to be accompanied to. For example, a course, a weekly lunch club, or attending your place of worship.
- any other important information. For instance, do you have children or pets in the house? Will the agency staff need to use any moving or lifting equipment? Is there any particular training or experience you would prefer someone to have?

Step 3: Speak to two or three agencies

Aim to speak to more than one agency, so you can compare deals and get the best offer. When you approach each agency:

- Explain what you need someone to do, and run through the information you prepared in step 2.
- Ask questions to make sure the agency can provide what you need—see the box below for some suggestions.
- Check if the agency is registered with the CQC, the health and social care regulator—all agencies providing personal care in England must be.
- If you visit the agency in person, or someone from the agency visits you, you could ask a friend or relative to be there to help take notes.



What to ask the agency

- What qualifications and experience do the care workers you employ have?
- What kind of training do you, as an agency, provide to your care staff? Do they all have the right moving and handling training, for example?
- What is your confidentiality policy?
- How often will someone from the agency visit to check how staff are doing?
- What happens if I'm not happy with the work of the person you provide?
- How will you arrange holiday cover for the agency worker—and how will we arrange who is being sent to replace my regular worker?
- What happens if the care worker doesn't show up, or shows up late?
- Do you employ your staff directly and pay their National Insurance and tax?
- Do you have the right insurance in place so I'm covered if your worker hurts themselves or someone else, or damages my property while working for me?
- Do you visit my home and carry out a risk assessment to make sure you've checked the workplace for your staff?
- Will you be able to give me copies of all records of hours a person works so I can be sure I only pay for the hours they have worked?
- What is the hourly rate for the kind of person I need?
- Can you put information about all fees and charges in writing for me, including any extras I need to be aware of?

See page 12 for a handy checklist of Dos and Don'ts for buying services and support!

INDEPENDENT LIVING GUIDE

Helping you live more independently in Leeds

Leeds Centre for Integrated Living is the gateway to independent living for disabled and older people in Leeds, guiding you to the support and services you can use to achieve your goals.

Would you like help:

... writing your support plan?

... identifying your personal goals?

... accessing services and support?

After you've had your self-directed assessment our independent Living Guide can help you put together your support plan, find local services and more. **Call us on 0113 231 1125** or visit our website on **www.leedscil.org.uk**.

Avoiding scams

Some suppliers are less reliable than others, so it's a good idea to be on your guard. Here are a few things to watch out for ...

- **"Cowboy" doorstep selling**

If someone comes to your door selling goods or services this can seem like a handy way to buy things - but it can also be risky. Don't be pressured into paying for anything on the spot, or signing any documents, until you have had a chance to discuss the offer with a friend, family member, your care manager (if you have one) or someone else whose advice you trust. No reputable supplier will ever try to force you into making an instant decision.

- **Phone and email scams**

You might receive phone calls or emails which claim to be from your bank, or from websites you have used to buy things in the past, asking for you to 'confirm your account information'. Don't trust anyone who phones or emails to ask for this, no matter how genuine it seems. No reputable bank or website will ever contact you to ask for your account password, PIN or login information.

- **Mail order scams**

Sometimes it's hard to judge whether offers of products and services sent through the post are genuine or not. Treat with caution any letter or flyer that claims you have 'won a prize'. Usually these are scams to get you to call an expensive telephone number to find out what you have 'won'.

Problem with a supplier

If you buy something from a supplier and the product breaks, or you're unhappy with a service, there are several steps you can take.

Step 1: Speak to the supplier

It's only fair to give the supplier a chance to put things right first. Contact them and explain the problem, and what you would like them to do. If you feel uncomfortable doing this yourself, ask a relative or someone else you trust if they can sit with you while you phone, or call on your behalf. You could also ask the supplier to let you know their formal complaints procedure.

Make a note of how the supplier says they will fix the problem, whether or not they will give you a refund, and how long this might take.

Step 2: Send a letter

Unless the complaint was minor and you feel it's now been resolved, follow it up with a signed, dated letter. Keep a copy of the letter for reference..

Step 3: Take the complaint further

If you're not satisfied with the supplier's response to your complaint, or if they are unhelpful, here is some further advice. [See the Contact page 13—16 for full contact details for all these services, and some others that may help ...](#)

- If the problem is with a council social care provider speak to Leeds Adults and Health Complaints on 0113 2224405. If you are still unhappy, contact the Local Government Ombudsman on 0300 061 0614.
- If the problem is with an NHS health provider speak to NHS Leeds Complaints on 0113 206 6261, or contact the Patient Advocacy Liaison Service (PALS) on 0800 0525 270 . If you are still unhappy, contact the Local Government Ombudsman (see above).
- Speak to your local Citizen's Advice Bureau on 0113 223 4400 . They can advise on complaints about all types of provider.

A buying checklist

Do ...

- shop around. Compare prices and offers to get what you want at a good price (but beware of anything that seems too good to be true!).
- ask friends and family members what they think.
- use regulated suppliers and members of trade associations.
- read the small print (if you have difficulty reading small print ask someone to go through it with you, or ask for a large-print version).
- complain to the supplier by phone and in writing if you're not happy.
- keep copies of correspondence, contracts, receipts, warranties, instructions and other important documents - e.g. in a folder or ring binder - and know where to find them!

But don't ...

- Deal with a supplier who tries to rush or pressure you too much.
- Pay cash in advance.
- Sign a contract you feel uncertain about, without support from friends, family, your care manager (if you have one) or someone else—like the Citizens' Advice Bureau.
- Send any original documents in the post—like proof of identity or bank statements.
- Call numbers starting with '09' as they are usually charged at a higher rate.

A guide for people in Leeds

Contacts for help and advice

Personal care and health services

If you have a care manager or Social Worker, speak to them first if you have any questions.

My Care Manager or Social Worker's contact details:

Name: Tel:

Leeds City Council Adults Social Care

Tel: 0113 22 4401 Textphone: 0113 222 4410

Complaints about council-funded social care services: 0113 222 4405

Web: www.leeds.gov.uk/residents/health-and-socialcare/adults-social-care

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

Regulates all health and adult social care services in England. Website lets you search for a home care agency in your local area and includes inspection reports so you can see how providers measure up.

Tel: 030 00 616 161

Web: www.cqc.org.uk

UK Home Care Association

The UKHCA website lets you search for a home care agency in your local area.

Tel: 020 8661 8188

Web: www.ukhca.co.uk

Care Choices

Provides a free public information service to help you find information about care options and providers. It publishes the Leeds Care Services Directory.

Tel: 01223 207 770

Web: www.carechoices.co.uk

Leeds City Council regrets that it cannot take responsibility for the quality or accuracy of advice offered by non-council organisations.

Useful contacts

Buying services and support

NHS Leeds

Tel: 0113 305 7370

Complaints about public health services: 0113 206 6267.

Web: www.leedsth.nhs.uk

Patient Advocacy Liaison Service (PALS)

Can help with complaints about a health service provider.

Tel: 0113 206 6261 Textphone: 0113 305 9495

Web: www.leeds.nhs.uk (follow link to PALS on the home page)

Disabled Living Foundation

A charity that provides impartial advice and training on daily living aids.

Tel: 0300 999 0004 Textphone: 020 7432 8009

Web: www.dlf.org.uk

Care and Repair

Home improvement agency for Leeds. Can advise on home adaptations and equipment for daily living.

Tel: 0113 240 6009

Web: www.care-repair-leeds.org.uk

DIAL

A network of local disability information services run by and for disabled people.

Web: www.dialuk.info

Leeds City Council Adults and Health

Download information from the website or speak to your care manager.

Tel: 0113 222 4401 Textphone: 0113 222 4410

Web: www.leeds.gov.uk/residents/jealth-and-social-care/help-to-live-at-home.

Consumer protection and legal advice

Citizen's Advice Bureau

Web: www.gov.uk/consumer-protection-rights

Advice Now

An independent website providing information on rights and legal issues.

Web: www.advicenow.org.uk

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Disability Law Service

National charity providing legal and consumer protection advice to disabled people.

Tel: 0207791 9800

Email: advice@dts.org.uk

Web: www.dts.org.uk

Local Government Ombudsman

Will look into complaints about services run by the local authority if you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint.

Tel: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983

Web: www.tgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint

Age UK (Formerly Age Concern and Help the Aged)

Charity working with and for older people. Provides advice and support to older people. Offers useful advice on protecting your rights when buying services.

Tel: 0113 389 3000 (Leeds) or 0800 055 6112 (free national number)

Email: contact@ageuk.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

Located across the city. They can give you free advice in person, including advice about consumer protection. For details of your nearest CAB call 020 7833 2181 or check the website . Home visits may be available for people with mobility difficulties.

Tel: 03454 040 506/ 0113 223 4400 Textphone: 0113 281 6749 (Leeds)

Web: www.leedscab.org.uk (Leeds) or www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Help with mediation and resolving disputes

ADR Now

ADRNow.org.uk provides advice to help you resolve disputes without going to court, including information about mediation and using an ombudsman.

Web: www.adrnow.org.uk

Useful contacts

Buying services and support

General information about social care

Leeds City Council Adults and Health

Speak to your care manager, or contact Adults and Health Customer Services

Tel: 0113 222 4401 Textphone: 0113 222 4410

Web: www.leeds.gov.uk/socialcare or www.leeds.gov.uk/personal_budgets

Leeds Centre for Integrated Living

Provides information and support to help disabled and older people in Leeds live more independently.

Tel: 0113 231 1125

E-mail: leedscil@leeds.gov.uk

Web: www.leedscil.org.uk

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Notes

Your notes

You could use these pages for keeping notes about suppliers or writing down questions you want to ask when you contact them...

Notes

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