

Guidance for Buying the Services of a Care Agency

The Direct Payment and Employment Support Service are unable to recommend individual care agencies to people wishing to employ care services that help them live independently at home. However, we can assist people to make choices by giving some guidance around questions that it may be worthwhile asking potential care agencies. This guidance, in the form of a checklist, is a list of things you may wish to discuss with a care agency when considering who to employ to deliver services such as personal or domestic care. This is not an exhaustive list and of course you may want to discuss things that are not included here.

Checklist

Agency/Provider Name:		
Question		My notes about agency / provider
1.	<p>Is the agency registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC)? All care agencies in England are regulated and inspected regularly by the CQC. This guarantees certain minimum standards of service.</p>	
2.	<p>Does the agency have a current contract with Oxfordshire County Council? If they do, they will have satisfied a number of checks and will also be monitored by the Council.</p>	
3.	<p>Have the agency carried out an Enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check on people they employ? CRB checks are a way in which employers can identify people who may be unsuitable for working with vulnerable adults (such as those receiving help in their home).</p>	
4.	<p>Do you have appropriate insurance in place (Public Liability)? It is essential that the agency has proper insurance so that you and their employees are covered.</p>	
5.	<p>Are the carers employed directly by the agency, or, are you introducing a self-employed carer? It is important to establish if your carer is employed directly by the agency or not. There may be other things you need to consider if the carer is self-</p>	

	employed and the agency are just introducing them to you; for example you may be responsible for their Tax and National Insurance.	
6.	<p>What training is provided for the agency employees?</p> <p>This can tell you how an agency makes sure their employees are aware of certain health and safety issues around personal care, manual handling or food preparation, etc.</p>	
7.	<p>What specialist training has been completed?</p> <p>It is useful to explore carer's training if you have needs that may require a higher level of training (e.g. someone suffering from dementia or needing two people to assist them).</p>	
8.	<p>What hours of support can they provide?</p> <p>Does this match with your requirements?</p>	
9.	<p>What happens at Christmas and on Bank Holidays?</p> <p>You will want to make sure you will receive services during public holiday periods.</p>	
10.	<p>What happens if the carer is sick?</p> <p>You will want to know what happens to you if the carer is ill and unable to work.</p>	
11.	<p>What happens if I have an emergency situation?</p> <p>You will want to know what to do if you have an emergency and need additional help.</p>	
12.	<p>How many carers will I have coming to my home?</p> <p>Are you comfortable with the number of carers who may visit your home – you may prefer to have a known group of four people for example, who visit you.</p>	

13.	<p>What choices do you offer around gender, age and ethnicity of carer, etc?</p> <p>You may have clear preferences around who carries out your personal care and should explore the choices available to you so that you are happy services are appropriate to your age, social and cultural norms, etc.</p>	
14.	<p>How long have the carers who will be providing my services been working with the agency?</p> <p>You may want to know how well known the carer is to the agency.</p>	
15.	<p>What will be the cost of the services I need?</p> <p>You want to be clear about how much you will be charged by the agency. Including bank holidays and mileage cost.</p>	
16.	<p>If you charge mileage, is that from your office or the carer's home?</p> <p>You want to be clear if you will have to pay additional charges for the carers travel.</p>	
17.	<p>How will you charge me?</p> <p>You need to know how the agency will deal with the charges – they may accept a cheque but it is more likely you will receive an invoice or have to pay by direct debit. You also want to know if the charges will be monthly or weekly.</p>	
18.	<p>Can you provide me with a copy of your complaints procedure?</p> <p>You do need to know what to do if you are not happy about any aspect of the care the agency is providing.</p>	
19.	<p>How much notice is needed for services to end?</p> <p>This can be relevant to client and provider.</p>	

You may find it helpful to jot down anything else you want to ask the care agency in the boxes below:

	Question	My notes