



HomeOwners Alliance

# Working with your estate agent

Essential guide



HomeOwners  
Alliance

On your side since 2012

Our [estateagent4me](#) tool helps you find local agents and rank them according to how likely they are to sell your home, the speed at which they are likely to sell it, how often they achieve asking price and how much they charge.

Remember your estate agent and you want the same things: a quick sale at the best price. This guide will help you get the best out of your estate agent and help you avoid unexpected costs and common pitfalls at every step of the home selling process.

## Before you Instruct an Agent

1. [Meeting with prospective estate agents](#)
2. [Setting asking price](#)
3. [Marketing](#)
4. [Contract terms](#)
5. [Tie in period](#)
6. [Fees](#)
7. [Ombudsman schemes](#)

## Working with an Agent

1. [Getting your house on the market](#)
2. [Viewings](#)
3. [Accepting an offer](#)
4. [Sales progression](#)



# Before you instruct an agent

## 1. Meeting prospective estate agents

- We recommend you select the top three agents and get in touch to see what services they provide. A home visit will help them understand your property. You may also want to include an online or hybrid estate agent in your shortlist.
- Arrange their visits so they don't coincide so you have time to understand what each agent will do for you and establish a good rapport. Ask whether the person you are dealing with is the person who will be working with you on your sale.

**Top Tip:** You've [checked how the agent performs](#) in terms of how quickly they sell, how often they achieve asking price and more. Meeting them is an opportunity for you to get a feel for whether you can work together

## 2. Setting asking price

- To get a rough idea of what your property is worth ahead of any estate agent valuations, our [free instant online valuation tool](#) can give you a sense of the minimum and maximum range to expect for your property based on local data and Land Registry sold data in your postcode.
- Using their up-to-date local market knowledge and local house price data, the estate agent will be able to give you a recommended asking price at which to market the property. They should present you with details of what similar houses in your local area have sold for and the price of current local houses for sale to help you set a price.
- Getting three agents to give a valuation should give you a better indication of the right price to pitch at, as some agents are prone to over-valuing to get your business (only to lower the price once you are signed up and there has been little interest) while others might not meet your expectations on price. You can check their track-record on valuations with the % achieving asking price on [estateagent4me](#).
- Do not reveal how much you want for your home or what other agents have quoted until the estate agent in front of you has completed their appraisal and given you a valuation.
- The final decision about the price at which to market your home is entirely up to you – the agent will abide by your wishes.

**Top Tip:** An agent should be able to support the proposed asking price for your property using details of similar properties sold at that price.

## Before you instruct an agent - cont'

### 3. Marketing

- You'll want to hear from the agent's experience which marketing channels will work best for your home and whether they have any particular ideas for drumming up interest, including their advertising approach or, when restrictions allow, hosting an open house.
- If you are speaking to online or hybrid estate agents, ask them how long they will market your home for and what is included in the fixed fee, especially if you are paying upfront.
- You will of course also expect them to confirm on which property portals they advertise: Rightmove, Zoopla, Prime Location and OnTheMarket.
- Most agents will provide professional photography, sales particulars including floor plans and, some may have enhanced options including virtual tours. It is a good idea to check what is standard or extra.

### 4. Contract terms

By law, the agent must give you written details of their terms of business, including fees and charges, before you are committed.

There are different types of contract, so make sure you know what they are and choose carefully. The estate agent should explain these to you, but in short the main terms are:

- **Sole agency** - This is the most common form of contract. They are the only agent with the right to sell your home during the term of the contract but if you find a buyer yourself, you don't have to pay the estate agent fees.
- **Sole selling rights** - This is the same as sole agency but it also gives the agent the right to claim commission if you find your own purchaser. Ideally you would resist this and go for a sole agency contract instead.
- **Ready, willing and able purchaser** - Do not accept this. It means you have to pay the agent for finding a buyer, even if you decide not to sell.

Any contract signed away from the estate agent offices should entitle the seller to a 14 day cooling off period during which they can terminate the contract. Be aware that you may still have to pay for some marketing costs.

**Top Tip:** Don't sign on the day – lingering liabilities and £££ are at stake. Take the contract away and read the terms and conditions closely. Our biggest number of complaints come from home sellers who didn't realise



# Before you instruct an agent - cont'

## 5. Tie-in periods and on-going liabilities

- If you end up not getting on with your agent or become unhappy with their service you may want to terminate the contract.
- Lots of estate agents include a tie in period. But make sure your contract gives you flexibility to terminate without incurring a penalty ("no withdrawal fee"). We believe you should not be locked in for more than 12 weeks (including your notice period).
- If you terminate the contract, make sure you receive written confirmation of the date you have terminated and a list of people the estate agent considers they have introduced to the property. If you go to sell to one of these people in the future, you may be liable to your original agent for commission.

## 6. Fees

- From using our [estateagent4me](#) you should have an indication of how much each estate agent charges. Fees vary from 0.75% to 3% depending on the type of contract. The average sole agency fee including VAT is approximately 1.5%. We recommend negotiating on whatever percentage the agent puts forward.
- [Online estate agents](#) generally charge fixed fees so tend to be lower than local agents who charge commission fees. While they offer different packages, it is usually cheapest to pay upfront.
- In their contract, agents should express their fee as an actual amount, based on the asking price. Note the actual commission you pay will be calculated on the agreed selling price which may be slightly higher or lower than this. Most high street agents operate on a no sale no fee basis, meaning you only pay their commission if they sell your home.
- Be clear upfront what is included in the fee – does it include advertising costs of professional photography, floor plans, marketing on property portals, and a "For Sale" board?
- You are legally obliged to have an Energy Performance Certificate in place before you sell your property. You may already have a valid EPC if you purchased the house in the last 10 years. Alternatively, most agents can arrange one on your behalf, and this should be your **only** up-front cost. [There are other ways to get your EPC.](#)
- Be aware that you are under no obligation to use any in-house estate agent services (such as mortgages or conveyancing). By all means get a quote, but shop around to ensure it's the best price and gives you the service you're looking for.

## Before you instruct an agent - cont'

### 7. Member of an ombudsman scheme

- Check your agent is a member of one of the grievance bodies who can pursue your claims should things go really wrong.
- All agents must be a member of either the Property Ombudsman or the Property Redress Scheme. However, their powers are limited so don't make the mistake of taking it as a stamp of approval.





# Working with your agent

## 1. Getting on the market

- Once you have appointed an estate agent they will produce property details for you to approve. It's important that you go through the details and check they don't just put your home in the best light but are also correct and not misleading in any way.

**Top Tips:** Check out our guide on how to [make your house more valuable and sell faster](#)

## 2. Viewings

- As a result of lockdown, virtual viewings are becoming more popular, so this may be a marketing feature you discuss with your estate agent.
- It is up to you whether you would prefer the estate agent to carry out viewings or if you would like to conduct these yourself.
- If you're serious about selling your house, it is best to be as flexible as possible in accommodating viewings. Say yes whenever you can.
- If your schedule makes it difficult for you to show your property, give your estate agent a set of keys to show it when you're not around but ask that the agent notifies you of viewings ahead of visiting the property so they won't turn up with prospective buyers unexpected.
- You should arrange at the outset a schedule for feedback on viewings.
- Some estate agents have online systems to arrange viewings and to provide feedback on viewings.

**Top tip:** check out what buyers will be looking for when they view your property with our [guide](#)



## Working with your agent - cont'

### 3. Accepting an offer

- Your estate agent is legally obliged to pass on all offers made on your property as soon as possible.
- In receiving an offer, an agent should find out from the buyer how they intend to fund the purchase. Do they need to sell a property, get a mortgage or claim to be a cash buyer?
- If the buyer is in a chain, your estate agent should check details of that chain prior to notifying you of the offer.
- Once you have accepted an offer, and the buyer has booked a survey and has a conveyancing solicitor in place, it is usual practise that the property should be withdrawn from the market. The expense of a survey demonstrates the buyer's commitment to proceed with the purchase.
- You'll want to start house hunting if you haven't already done so!

### 4. Sales progression

- Much of what happens during the conveyancing stage of a property sale is beyond the remit of estate agents. Nevertheless a good agent will progress the sale, making regular contact with you and the buyer, the solicitors and other agents in the chain.
- The critical parts of the process are the buyer completing their survey, getting a mortgage offer confirmed and exchanging contracts. Tell your agent you would like them to keep on top of these areas in particular and chase for regular progress checks.
- If the process is dragging on and you suspect your buyer is delaying or not going as quickly as you need, re-assess the situation with your estate agent. You may decide to cut your losses and put your home back on the market.

**Top tip:** read our [step by step guide to selling a home](#), including when to pay the estate agent

**Good luck!**

For more advice on selling your home, [see our I am selling advice guides](#).