



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London  
Diocese of Chelmsford

## **CHELMSFORD DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **Why a specification be needed?**

#### **Policy**

The DAC often suggests that a specification for work should be sought from an experienced architect or surveyor, or some specialist consultant. The DAC is concerned that PCCs should not spend more than is absolutely necessary and that the work proposed will be for the long-term benefit of the church building as a whole. Good stewardship of hard-earned resources and of the buildings entrusted to our care is the key.

The following notes are intended to address frequently asked questions. It is hoped that they go some way to explaining why the Committee considers that obtaining a specification and involving a professional in the project should ensure that the PCC gets the best possible value for the money it has to pay out.

#### **The work is mentioned in the Quinquennial Inspection Report: why can't we get a contractor to quote on the basis of that?**

- The Quinquennial Inspection Report (QIR) is a snapshot of a particular situation on a particular day. Further investigation at a subsequent time, when the PCC is actually ready to do the work, may reveal that more or less needs to be done.
- The QIR is not intended to be a specification and this is usually made clear by the architect or surveyor. What s/he sees on an overall inspection of the church may not be the full and detailed analysis of the problem which needs to be addressed, only an overview.
- The QIR is intended to help PCCs plan maintenance work not to explain it in detail.

#### **We have obtained quotes from contractors; why aren't they enough?**

- Different contractors will interpret the work outlined in the QIR in different ways. Even if the PCC gets more than one quote it is quite likely that the work each firm proposes is different. The PCC has no way of knowing which contractor's response is the one that will best address the problems. The cheapest quote might not be the best value – especially if half way through the job the PCC is informed that twice as much work is involved as has been budgeted for. Equally, the most expensive quote might not be the best – the contractor may be planning to do more work than is really necessary and most PCCs do not have the expertise to be able to assess this.
- Contractors, even well respected ones, may lack the specialist knowledge required for work on sensitive church buildings. They may not be fully informed on recent research into methods and materials. They may not even be aware of developments relating to basic materials such as mortar, lead and glass.
- Contractors' reputations often rest with particular employees. A firm can be of first class quality for many years but a change of personnel can result in a dip in performance. The PCC may not be able to check out whether the particular person who did a good job ten years ago is still employed. This can make a crucial difference to the quality of workmanship.

#### **What is the point of getting a specification and bringing an architect/surveyor into the project?**

- The specification gives a clear and detailed statement of the work that is necessary, the methods and materials to be used and exact instructions about the standard of workmanship that is expected. It also explains the legal framework for the job and outlines the PCC's statutory responsibilities in terms of Health & Safety, Archaeological implications and contract issues. This means that the PCC and contractors tendering for the work know exactly what is to be done and what their responsibilities are. It acts as a benchmark.
- The specification can be sent out to tender to contractors known to be doing quality work at the present time. They then put in costings on the basis of a given job and their quotes can be directly compared. The PCC knows that the least and most expensive are both going to do exactly the same amount of work and are clear about the standards expected.
- The involvement of the architect/surveyor means that the PCC has a professional on board who can inspect the work in progress and ensure that it is done properly. If there are difficulties about inexplicable delays, the skills being used or the care being taken s/he can act on behalf of the PCC to get things put right.
- Should the PCC have received grant aid from English Heritage in the past, or for the current project, the architect/surveyor will be able to negotiate with the EH Buildings Inspector to ensure that EH is happy with the project. Even if no funding is involved EH may still have to be consulted and the architect/surveyor can deal with this process, modifying the specification as necessary and ensuring that the PCC and EH come to a reasonable accommodation.
- If anything goes wrong, the architect/surveyor has professional insurance against which the PCC can claim. S/he is responsible for ensuring that the contract is honoured and the PCC fully satisfied that what it believed it was commissioning has in fact been done to the expected standard. Obviously, the DAC hopes that nothing does go wrong but occasionally there are major problems and the PCC needs to be aware of the legal and insurance framework from the outset.

### **But the contractor and architect/surveyor have spoken; isn't that good enough?**

This depends on the amount of work, the sensitivity of the fabric concerned and the architect's or surveyor's willingness to be involved in an informal way. If it all works out well then it may not matter that the only consultation was a chat on the 'phone. On the other hand, if it goes wrong or the PCC finds that the costings escalate wildly during the job, the PCC will have no come-back on the architect/surveyor.

### **Summary**

The DAC knows that PCCs struggle to raise funds for necessary work and are therefore reluctant to commit money for professional fees. However, experience has shown that, in the long run, engaging an architect/surveyor and getting a specification may well save money and represent best value stewardship.

***With grateful thanks to Peterborough Diocese***