

Your home help guide



Being able to maintain a comfortable and clean home environment plays an important part in staying independent and healthy as we get older.

Finding a trustworthy cleaner or domestic help service can be difficult – whilst we can't recommend or endorse any company or individual, we've put together some suggestions to help you understand what type of help you need and the options available so you can make an informed choice.

This guide covers the following areas:

- Options for getting domestic help at home
- Things to consider and questions to ask when choosing domestic help
- Details of larger cleaning agencies (for information purposes only)

Options for getting domestic help at home

Local authority and statutory assistance

If someone can no longer manage domestic tasks, such as cleaning, shopping, preparing meals due to their health they could be eligible for other help:

- Care needs assessment - a free assessment from their local authority adult social care team. This is an assessment of a person's 'eligible needs' and can help because it provides a report of what the needs are and how these could be met, which can be a good basis for arranging care and support. The assessment should include, amongst other things, consideration of 'maintaining a habitable home environment'. This can provide up to £1000 of free aids and equipment to help people manage around the home more easily, regardless of finances. The local authority may be able to contribute towards care package fees and larger adaptations, depending on the outcome of a separate financial assessment.
- Attendance Allowance - a disability benefit from the government to help with the extra costs of having a long-term health condition or disability. It is not means-tested and could be put towards paying for domestic help or other support.

For more information see Age UK's information guide 'IG23: Getting help at home' www.ageuk.org.uk/publications or contact us.

Employing an individual privately

Rates vary but are usually charged per hour for a private carer or personal assistant – expect to pay from £15ph. You should think carefully before employing someone privately and you should always obtain several genuine references. You may also need to take advice about liability insurance and your responsibilities as an employer.

Southampton SPECTRUM Centre for Independent Living (<https://spectrumcil.co.uk/services/direct-payments-personal-budgets-support/parecruitment/> Tel: 023 8033 0982) can provide further information on responsibilities of becoming an employer and offers support to recruit personal assistants.

Using a private agency

Agencies generally charge an hourly fee plus extra for travel, so it is advisable to contact a few to compare costs and services –expect to pay up to £45ph for specialist services. They may also be able to help with things like meal preparation and laundry. The agency is the employer of the carer and should handle wages, taxes and insurance.

Some agencies use contract workers, who are slightly different to employees and may not have the same type of supervision or training and you may not have the same cleaner each time.

Using a reputable agency can provide some protection that comes with choosing a larger business - for example, if the work is not as expected or a cleaner cannot attend, it is likely the agency will want to resolve this and have the capacity to do so.

Many care agencies also provide domestic help as part of their support. The Care Quality Commission (www.cqc.org.uk / 03000 616161 / enquiries@cqc.org.uk) is the regulator of care agencies and has a comprehensive database of providers and produces reports on their quality standards.

Family and friends

Family and friends can be reliable sources of word-of-mouth recommendations so why not check if your local friends or neighbours have someone they would recommend or have had a good experience with?

We can find it difficult to accept support from friends and family but if they offer to help around the house, try to remember that they wouldn't offer if they didn't want to help.

Using a community or charity service

Domestic help is not usually covered by volunteer organisations, however some run Home from Hospital services which provide short-term help with domestic tasks as part of a package of support following hospital discharge.

A Home from Hospital service is usually arranged through the Discharge Team before you are discharged from hospital. These services may be provided by staff or volunteers, but the service is usually free to users.

Things to consider when choosing a cleaner

There are plenty of reasons to hire a cleaner to help look after your home:

- My family life or caring responsibilities make it hard to find time
- I have a larger home that requires more cleaning
- I've lost confidence with cleaning
- My home has messier inhabitants – pets, children (and adults!)
- I can't clean as often or thoroughly as you'd like due to physical or mental health difficulties
- I would like a deep clean
- I just don't like cleaning!

If you wish to use a cleaner or other domestic help service you should ensure they are fully qualified, insured and registered with an appropriate organisation (see 'Useful Organisations' below) and you are happy with the proposed prices and work. These are some key areas and questions to consider:

Type of service

A cleaner's role is to maintain the cleanliness and neatness of your home so it is safe and comfortable – this might be through regular cleaning sessions of your whole home, specific cleaning of a room(s) or a specialist one-off clean.

A cleaner will often complete the following:

- Cleaning kitchens thoroughly, including wiping down countertops, sinks, drawers fronts, cupboards fronts, the outside of appliances, light switch covers, cleaning table.
- Cleaning and sanitising bathroom/cloakroom thoroughly including toilets, bathtubs, sinks, showers plus the stainless steel, chrome, brass fixtures and drains.
- Sweeping, hoovering and mopping floors
- Dusting doors, picture frames, light fixtures, windowsills, skirting boards, furniture tops and cupboards.

Other areas that might be covered depending on the service:

- Making beds, changing bed sheets and folding laundry
- Emptying and cleaning out bins
- Moving heavy furniture and cleaning behind
- Wiping down and cleaning expensive appliances
- Specific stain removal

- Reaching high cobwebs, ceilings and tall furniture to dust
- Steam-cleaning carpets and furniture
- Cleaning interior or exterior walls
- Scrubbing / washing windows and windowsills.
- Cleaning the inside of kitchen cupboards and appliances like ovens, fridges and microwaves
- Picking up and tidying items around the house e.g. organising tabletops, handling jewellery or medication. (We suggest putting personal belongings and medication away whilst your cleaner visits.)
- Deep cleaning e.g. end of tenancy cleaning, post-renovation cleaning
- Other domestic tasks like washing up, ironing, laundry

Questions to ask

- What cleaning services do you offer? Do you clean similar houses to mine?
- Does the company take requests for a set list of tasks depending on what I need/would like or will I receive the same fixed service each visit?
- How long will the cleaning take? Ask the cleaner to complete a walkthrough with you at your home so that they can give a more accurate quote, before you agree to their service.
- Is it a company with a consistent roster of employees, an agency with contract workers that may change more frequently, or just one person?
- Do I ring and book a visit each time or can I arrange a regular visit? How flexible can this arrangement be? What days can you work?
- What happens if I need to cancel the service unexpectedly? What happens if I'd like to cancel the service altogether?
- Does the cleaner bring their own cleaning supplies and equipment or do I have to supply my own? What cleaning supplies do you prefer to use?
- Do you use eco-friendly products and methods (if this is important to you)? You may want to ask about specific cleaning products due to allergies or if you have children or pets at home.
- If they'll be using your supplies, how will they leave them? E.g. leave cleaning cloths in the sink?



Finding someone you can trust

It is important to find someone that you can trust. You want to be confident that they will report back honestly on any issues or damage and it is particularly important if they will be in your home when you are not there.

You could start by asking friends, neighbours and family who they use – word-of-mouth referrals give you an insight into the service beyond what is stated on their flyer or website. Most cleaners are trustworthy, but this is sadly not always the case. It is important to research the company and ask questions beforehand.

Questions to ask

- Can you provide references for your work? A reputable company should have references available for recent similar work they have done. Contact the people to verify they are genuine.
- Are there online reviews? If a company has many bad reviews you may want to avoid it! If a company has 100% good reviews this could also be suspicious - not all online reviews may be genuine.
- How do you interview and background check staff? If there are vulnerable adults or children in your house, consider asking if the cleaner has a DBS check, so you know appropriate background checks have been completed
- What boundaries and expectations do you have?
- Do you work individually or in pairs?
- How would/ could the company cover the costs of any damage done to my home, any theft, or if an injury or accident occurs on my property? Ask to see a copy of insurance documents. Check if they have Public Liability Insurance and Employer's Liability Insurance and that this will cover your neighbour's property as well as your own, where appropriate.
- How will the cleaner gain access to my home? E.g. a keysafe or will you always be present

- Are there any tasks the cleaner won't undertake? For instance, it is usual to have a policy where they cannot climb ladders.
- Check that you have adequate contact details for the company including an address and a landline phone number.

Getting a good service

When employing a new cleaner, it's natural to feel a small amount of worry - how do you know their standards and methods will meet your requirements? It can help to be clear about the jobs that need doing, maintain regular friendly communication and mention any concerns straight away.

Questions to ask

- How long have you been in business for?
- Will you do a trial period/session? This means you can try them out as a one-off before you commit to a more frequent arrangement.
- Do you have any specialist / professional equipment?
- How would you deal with a cleaning-related emergency, such as a coffee spill, potential dangerous cleaning product or a water leak? You want to be reassured that they know how to use cleaning products safely
- Will it be the same cleaners visiting each time? Most companies will try to send the same cleaners, but there may be occasions when it's not possible. It can be reassuring to understand their process for arranging an alternative cleaner if someone is sick or on holiday.
- Ensure you have a contract– without one if something goes wrong, your legal position won't be strong. Contracts do not need to be long but should detail the work to be completed for the price agreed.
- Do you wear shoe covers or take your shoes off?
- What training have you completed?
- Do you have any accreditations, or affiliations with professional organisations or trade associations? Some trade associations operate codes of practice that offer extra protection to consumers and/or offer help to resolve disputes. Contact the trade association to see what they offer and to check that the trader is a member. You could look on TrustMark or Buy With Confidence schemes or a relevant trade association to find details of traders (see 'Useful Organisations' below)
- What arrangements are in place to deal with concerns if things go wrong?



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How much will it cost?

The cost of hiring domestic help varies depending on many different factors. Before agreeing to a service, ask the cleaner to complete a walkthrough with you at home so they can give a more accurate quote. Remember, they want to see your home in its 'usual' condition (not after you have just cleaned it!).

Think about the main chores that are important to you - if you can't afford to have your house fully cleaned each week focus on one or two jobs you find most difficult, like cleaning the bathroom or changing bed sheets.

Some factors that impact price:

- Time spent - the more rooms or areas to be cleaned the longer the job will take
- Type of cleaning – deep-cleaning jobs are more detailed and time consuming than 1 or 2 rooms.
- Frequency of visits - less regular /ad-hoc visits are usually more expensive as there is more cleaning to do and it doesn't offer reliable work for the cleaner
- Current condition – if your home is in good condition, it should take less time to thoroughly clean
- Difficult, hazardous or dangerous jobs – unusual stains, human waste or dangerous items require specialist supplies and skills.
- Pets or children – different types of dirt, fur and stains may need more attention to clean
- Type of worker - it is generally more affordable to hire an independent worker compared to an agency

Questions to ask

- How much will it cost? Check if this includes travel mileage, VAT, hourly charge. Check that the quote includes an inclusive price and details all work that you have requested
- Are there extra charges for certain services? Do you charge more for evenings or weekends?
- Can I have a written quote? We suggest you obtain at least 3 written quotes before having work carried out, to compare prices. Some companies may charge for a quote – check this first...
- Check whether you are given a quote or an estimate. A quote is a fixed price for the job and should not change, whereas an estimate can vary by a reasonable amount.
- How do you charge - by the hour or a flat rate per job? If you pay a cleaner per hour, they shouldn't leave your property earlier than the agreed time
- How would/ could the company cover the costs of any damage done to my home, any theft, or if an injury or accident occurs on my property? Ask to see a copy of insurance documents. Check if they have Public Liability Insurance and Employer's Liability Insurance and that this will

cover your neighbour's property as well as your own, where appropriate.

- How do you take payment? Pay by credit card where possible, as you may get extra protection. Otherwise, try to pay by cheque or card rather than cash. Never agree to go with a cleaner to a bank or building society in order to withdraw money.
- Avoid deposits or up-front payments - you should always aim to keep back at least some money until the work is complete.
- What is your cancellation policy? It is not unusual for cleaners to charge a cancellation fee since it can be difficult to reschedule at the last minute.
- Check that you are happy with the standard of the work before paying the bill. If you are not, seek advice from the Citizens Advice consumer helpline (see 'Useful Organisations' below).

Local companies offering cleaning and domestic help

DISCLAIMER: Please note that this guide is for information purposes only and Age UK Southampton do not recommend or endorse any company or organisation listed. You should make enquiries with the company to discuss your requirements. Any lists are not exhaustive.

Company and contact details	Area covered	Date checked
Communicare Charity or visit Good Neighbours Network Shopping, Befriending, out & about, transport, DIY & Gardening 02382 500050 07827 925 327 info@goodneighbours.org.uk	SO14 – SO19	June 2024
Amberley Care Ltd – www.amberleycare.co.uk Email: katie@amberleycare.co.uk 01489 788160	Covers Southampton - Hedge End / Eastleigh / West End areas	June 2024
Bluebird Care – Southampton – www.bluebirdcare.co.uk/southampton Email: southampton@bluebirdcare.co.uk 023 8001 8221	All of Southampton	June 2024
Home Instead Senior Care – Southampton – www.homeinstead.co.uk/southampton Email: southampton@homeinstead.co.uk 01489 345879	Southampton area	June 2024

SCA Care Southampton – www.sciagroup.co.uk Email: hello@sciagroup.co.uk 023 8036 6663	Southampton area	June 2024
Good Life Sorted – hello@goodlifesorted.com 0808 164 8338 Kerry-Jayne Wilson	Currently operating across Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Essex, Devon and Suffolk, and expanding rapidly.	June 2024
Heart 2 Heart Homecare – hello@hearttohearhomecare.co.uk 02380 984976 Harriet Parkin	Centre of Southampton	June 2024
Local care agencies may also offer domestic help The Care Quality Commission has a database of registered care agencies and also provides written reports on their quality and standards: https://www.cqc.org.uk/ . Or, Connect Hampshire care services directory lists home care providers (pgs 21-27): www.carechoices.co.uk/publication/connect-to-support-hampshire-care-guide/		

We try to update this information throughout the year, however if any of our information appears out of date then please let us know and we will update it. Telephone: 023 8036 8636 Email: info@ageuksouthampton.org.uk

Useful organisations

Trading Standards ‘Buy with Confidence’ traders’ scheme
www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk

Trustmark government-endorsed traders' scheme
www.trustmark.org.uk

Citizens Advice Consumer helpline

Tel: 0808 223 1133.

If you have concerns about a trader or a contract you have made with one they offer free advice. They can also pass complaints and feedback to your

local council's Trading Standards department. You can also search 'trader' on www.citizensadvice.org.uk for information on resolving problems.

British Institute of Cleaning Science

www.bics.org.uk

Tel: 01604 678710

Accreditation for cleaning services.

Age UK Southampton

www.ageuk.org.uk/southampton/our-services/

Tel: 023 8036 8636

Whilst we are unable to recommend specific traders or companies, we have gathered together information about the trades, services and organisations we get asked about most often - to help you make informed decisions.

Checktrade Guide to hiring a cleaner:

www.checktrade.com/blog/hiring-guides/house-cleaner

Southampton Council Adult Social Care team:

www.southampton.gov.uk/adult-social-care/

Tel: 023 8083 3003