

# "How to Choose the Best Conveyancing Solicitor & Exchange Contracts Faster"

(An Essential Guide For UK Buyers & Sellers)

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## Most Conveyancers Provide a 2<sup>nd</sup> Rate Service for Premium Prices

The UK conveyancing industry is notorious for providing a slow and expensive service.

As such, finding a [conveyancing solicitor](#) that offers a reliable, efficient and personal service (all at a reasonable cost) is quite a challenge when buying or selling a property.

It's worth taking the time to choose carefully because a [good conveyancing solicitor](#) will:

**Speed up your transaction.**

**Reduce the chance of the deal falling through.**

**Make sure the process is as stress-free as possible.**

This guide contains all the information you need and will show you how to find a fast, personal service that's value for money.

## Myth - You Need a Local Conveyancing Solicitor

Traditionally, buyers and sellers automatically give their [conveyancing](#) work to their "Family" solicitor, or more commonly, a "Local" solicitor recommended by their estate agent.

Because of this, too many property movers are paying too much money for a second rate service.

First of all, if an estate agent recommends a solicitor it's probable

that the agent is making a substantial commission from the referral.

The possibility is always there for an estate agent to recommend a solicitor based on the size of their referral payment, not on the level of service of value for money that they provide.

Secondly, there are very few "value for money" [specialist conveyancing firms](#) around and the odds are not in favour of your family or high street solicitor being one of them.

Until recently, local solicitors have been able to maintain a stranglehold on the [conveyancing](#) industry purely because prospective clients are so quick to believe that local knowledge is an essential part of doing the job properly.

This is simply not true, [conveyancing](#) is mostly an administrative task and a phone, the post and a computer is all that's need.

There is no reason to ever meet with your solicitor during a typical sale or purchase. Because of this there is no need to limit yourself to your pool of local solicitors.

You're free to shop around and find a specialist that will provide you with the best service at a competitive price.

If however your transaction is not typical and involves such matters as altering existing boundaries, creating new rights of way or dividing a property, then it may be prudent to instruct a solicitor that is able to easily visit the property.

## **Where to Find the Best Conveyancing Service**

These days the Internet provides everyone with access to specialist [online conveyancing](#) firms that provide conveyancing services on a "fixed-fee" & "no-completion, no fee basis".

[Recommended "No Sale - No Fee" Conveyancing Firms!](#)

This is a massive benefit because property transactions are always unpredictable.

Only paying a solicitor if the transaction is successful will save you a substantial amount of money.

On the Internet there are many [cheap conveyancing](#) services competing for your business, some quoting fees as low as £125 (although when you look closer you're likely to find a host of hidden extras).

As you can imagine, some of the firms you'll find by searching online are excellent but many are not.

When your considering these online firms we would never recommend that you make your choice based purely on cost.

The cheapest solicitor is rarely the best.

In fact the cheapest are often the busiest and in turn the most difficult to contact, and usually the slowest.

Choosing an overworked and underpaid solicitor will not help you to secure the property you're after, within the timeframe you require.

Do not fall into the trap of saving £100 on fees only to make the process more stressful and lengthy for yourself!

Expect to pay £400 - £500 (not including disbursements etc.,) to secure the services of a top quality conveyancer.

For your interest we've written reviews of the UK's top conveyancing services.

[Read Reviews of Recommended Conveyancing](#)

[Solicitors](#)

## Why You Should Choose Your Property Solicitor Carefully

Lets look quickly at the difference between a good and bad conveyancer.

### **A Good conveyancer will:**

**Carry out the work efficiently & accurately.**

**Reduce the stress of moving by provide expert guidance & support that's in your best interests throughout the process.**

**Take a proactive (not reactive) role and push your deal through.**

**Help you to negotiate with other parties successfully.**

**Speed up the time it takes you to complete on your transaction**

**Have ample common sense and avoid being overly pedantic in an**

effort to look smart.  
Be technologically advanced enough to provide a modern conveyancing service.  
Carry professional indemnity of at least £1,000,000.  
Be on your lenders panel of approved solicitors. This will enable them to work on your mortgage without you having to pay extra.  
Be regulated and listed with one of the two professional bodies:

[The Law Society](#)

[The Council of Licensed Conveyancers](#)

### **A Poor conveyancer will:**

Put the success of your move at risk.  
Fail to read important documents carefully.  
Ignore your phone calls.  
Fail to answer your questions in plain English.  
Take longer than necessary to complete the work.  
Fail to alert you to potential problems.  
Increase your stress levels ten-fold.  
Ultimately cost you more money.

## **How to Identify a Good Conveyancer**

Here is the checklist you should judge any conveyancing solicitor against:

**1. The conveyancing firm should specialise in residential conveyancing or at least have a specialist conveyancing department.**

When choosing a conveyancing service, experience is the most important thing to look for.

Solicitors that specialise in litigation, divorce, family, employment or even commercial property law seldom provide the best residential conveyancing service.

**2. You should be told who will be handling your case. Ideally**

**you should be given their direct line.**

Some conveyancing firms operate under a "dedicated team" set-up where all admin tasks are delegated to paralegals or trainee conveyancers.

A qualified professional Solicitor or Licensed Conveyancer then checks everything.

In small - medium sized firms this tends to work well as it's an efficient working style & manageable enough to maintain a personal service.

However, in my opinion the "dedicated team" system falls apart in the large conveyancing factories.

These cut-priced legal call centres often have "team members" that are little more than glorified computer operators.

This is "conveyor-belt" conveyancing and is often slow and impersonal.

The firms' websites will swear blind that they provide the highest standards of personalised service however, experience tells me otherwise.

Conveyancing factories are fine for simple stuff like the remortgaging work lenders generate.

For anything more complicated (especially the sale or purchase of a leasehold property) you'd be wise to stay away!

**3. They are technologically advanced enough to employ - Online case tracking, e-mail & SMS update systems.**

These features separate the progressive conveyancing providers from the dinosaurs.

For example, "Online Case Tracking" is especially useful because every step of your transaction will be recorded online via a dedicated website (you're given a password & username).

It gives you the ability to check on the progress of your case at any time and know immediately if you're making progress or what the causes of any hold-ups are.

In short, firms using the latest technology will save you time, money & the stress caused by not knowing what's going on.

#### **4. Operate on a "No move, no fee" basis.**

Because 1 in 3 sales fail, choosing a conveyancing firm that operate in this way is a must.

"No move - no fee" is a slightly ambiguous term because in reality, if the solicitor has paid for any disbursements on your behalf, you will be charged for these - It is only the solicitor's basic fee that will be waived.

There are however a handful of firms that operate on an enhanced "No move- no fee" basis - they won't even charge you for disbursements.

Find out who they are by visiting:

[Recommended Conveyancing Solicitor Services](#)

#### **5. Operate on a "Fixed Fee Guarantee" basis.**

In the past Solicitors have charged for conveyancing work on an hourly basis. Not surprisingly this allows bills to escalate out of control.

A "Fixed-Fee Guarantee" lets you budget accurately. Even if you run into unexpected complications, you're protected.

With a "Fixed Fee Guarantee" firm the fee you're initially quoted will be the fee you pay.

#### **6. Are on all major lenders' "Approved" panels.**

This is important if you are buying with a mortgage because there's a certain amount of legal work that needs to be done on your lender's behalf.

If the conveyancing firm you choose is not on your lender's approved panel, your lender will instruct one that is.

This will be an extra cost you have no control over (there are no statutory set fee scales for solicitors).

Having two solicitors working on your behalf will also add to the time it takes to exchange contracts.

## **7. Operate extended opening hours.**

This is not essential but it can make your life easier if you need to act quickly on a legal issue relating to your house move outside of the 9am-5pm timeframe.

Whichever conveyancer you choose, check that someone who is familiar with your case can be contacted outside of office hours.

It is possible to find conveyancing services that keep the phones manned until 7-8pm weekday evenings and most of the weekend.

## **8. Provide you with a "Client Care Letter" upfront.**

When you've chosen a conveyancer the first thing they should send you is a "client care" letter.

The letter must contain a cost breakdown and description of the service they'll provide. If these things are not in the letter, alarm bells should ring!

Remember, you're only committed to using the conveyancing service once you return the letter signed.

## **Beware When Seeking Conveyancing Quotes**

A [conveyancing quote](#) should consist of two parts:

**The solicitor's basic fee (i.e. what they charge to do the work).**

**The disbursements (these are things a conveyancer has to pay other people for on your behalf e.g. Local Authority Searches, Stamp Duty and so on).**

The disbursements should roughly be the same from one

conveyancing quote to the next (they are fixed charges) however basic fees vary a lot.

Unfortunately you do need to be a little wary when seeking quotes.

Because conveyancing has become such a competitive business, many high profile firms employ tricks to make them look cheaper than they actually are.

A little trick some conveyancing firms like to employ is to invent disbursements.

They take tasks and charges that should be covered within the basic solicitor's fee, call them disbursements or "supplemental fees" and put a hefty price tag on them.

This does 3 things:

**It sneakily creates extra profit for the conveyancing firm.**

**It gives the impression their basic fee for doing the work is lower than it actually is (it is the trick behind some of the ultra-low conveyancing quotes you see advertised).**

**It turns what at first looks like a cheap conveyancing quote, into something far more expensive.**

To protect yourself against this:

**Be wary of any quote that does not fully itemise all the individual costs & disbursements.**

**Always scour the small print for hidden charges & supplemental fees. Add these extra costs to your quote so you can see the real cost of the solicitor's service.**

## **When to Instruct Your Conveyancing Solicitor**

The short answer is - EARLY!

If there is one thing I would like this guide to achieve is to emphasize the need to instruct your Solicitor well before acceptance of an offer.

Traditionally, buyers and sellers have tended to wait until either they have secured a buyer or found a property to buy before

instructing a Solicitor.

In the past this would have been due to the fact that they did not want to incur any costs before knowing the transaction was up and running.

With so many conveyancing firms working on a "no move, no fee" policy there's absolutely no risk in instructing early.

There is, therefore, no reason not to instruct a Solicitor as soon as you begin to think about selling or buying and there are many weeks worth of "faffing around" and paperwork to be saved by doing this.

This is especially true if you are selling a leasehold property.

Your Solicitor will have to obtain information from your Freeholder and/or Managing Agent and this can take considerable time.

If you are selling it's also a good idea to have your solicitor prepare your Home Information Pack (if you need one) before you instruct an estate agent.

Not only will a solicitor probably do a better job of this - it will also make it easier for you to negotiate down the agent's selling fees.

## **Conclusion & Summary**

In short, please bear in mind 4 key points when choosing a solicitor:

- 1. There is no reason to limit yourself to local solicitors.**
- 2. Don't base your choice purely on price. The cheap online "bucket-shop" solicitors that you'll see advertised are often overworked and can slow the progress of your move (or worse).**
- 3. Don't automatically go with the firm that your estate**

**agent recommends, especially if it's an in-house "Factory conveyancing" operation.**

I've found these tend to be staffed by teams of inexperienced "legal executives" making it a miracle to ever get hold of the same person twice.

You'll really benefit if you can find a conveyancer that provides you with the personal service and a single point of contact.

What's more, estate agents make large referral fees by recommending solicitors. It is not unusual for a whopping £200-£400 of your legal bill to go straight into their pocket.

Is the estate agent's recommendation the best for you? Or is it (more likely) the best for him?

**4. Don't even consider a solicitor that charges by the hour.**

Find someone that offers a "fixed-fee" and "no-completion, no-fee" service - this will save you a lot of money.

As mention before, we've written reviews of the UK's top conveyancing services.

[Read Reviews of Recommended Conveyancing Solicitors](#)

Wishing you complete success with your sale,

**Gavin Brazg** (Editor)  
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