

Cautionary Note No 12: Designing to the client's budget

A disciplinary hearing on 3 November 2020, related to an architect who had received written confirmation from clients as to their budget for their new build home. An initial round of design and indicative costing produced a design that was above the clients' budget. The architect then provided further designs for the project following receipt of the client's confirmed budget, and a quantity surveyor was engaged. The quantity surveyor's preliminary estimates for the revised design was significantly higher than the client's budget. The architect continued with a competitive tendering process for the project, on the assumption the clients had raised their budget to the amount in the quantity surveyors preliminary estimate. The assumption was incorrect, the clients had not increased their budget, the competitive tenders came in above their budget and the project was never completed.

The clients paid significant professional fees for something they could not afford to build. This was a clear lack of professional care and diligence on the part of the architect. The architect admitted to the charge, thereby reducing the timeframe and the costs of the hearing. The Board decided to make penalty orders against the architect, including censure.

The Board was informed, during the hearing, that the architect's practice had introduced new project protocols around obtaining extra written client consent regarding the budget at each key stage in a project, requiring clients to instruct a quantity surveyor for all residential projects, and explaining options to clients where costings differ from their budget.

This case is a reminder to architects that they have a duty to communicate effectively with their clients, including on matters such as project costs and estimates and that any assumptions should be clarified.



Gina Jones
Chair
8 December 2020