

# OFFICE FIT-OUT: *all you need to know*

FIS's newly launched guide shines a light on the whats, wheres, whys and hows of creating an office that works for everyone. **Chris Wheal** explains what it offers

**W**ith no two office fit-outs ever the same, trying to write a comprehensive guide that would be useful to every client and contractor involved in the process was a tough challenge. But it was a challenge that FIS was prepared to accept.

Its new *Client Guide: Office Fit-Out and Refurbishment* is the result. And with it, FIS has shone a spotlight on the often unseen expertise involved in office fit-out.

The guide is a thoroughly researched document covering every aspect of an office fit-out, from early thoughts on whether or not to proceed, to post-occupancy analysis. And for the first time, contributors have helped compile a detailed, step-by-step process to help clients identify what should happen to make their fit-out work.

FIS hopes members, letting agents and others in the business will promote the guide to potential clients. Those office users will, in turn, better understand the complexity of what is involved, the value of expert advice and professional services, and the importance of contractors right down the supply chain.

There are sections on client decision-making and informing staff and customers. The guide introduces possible contracting routes, from using architects or designers and a quantity surveyor and main contractor, to opting for a design and build (D&B) one-stop-shop solution.

The guide details research into staff working practices that drive the design and offer opportunities to introduce improvements, creating workspaces that increase productivity as well as reduce absenteeism and staff turnover. It explains what good design can achieve and how that happens.

With such detailed input from FIS members,



the guide takes a magnifying glass to the nitty-gritty of the construction process. It discusses specification and tendering, contracts and fees and then provides clients with a thorough understanding of the construction process.

## DOWN TO DETAIL

The detail includes the health and safety considerations of running a site, particularly an office fit-out in a building with other clients still working on alternative floors.

It explains the different sustainability standards and what they mean. Clients are advised to be clear about their aspirations as early as possible in the process, as a finalised design will allow more accurate pricing and make the fit-out affordable.

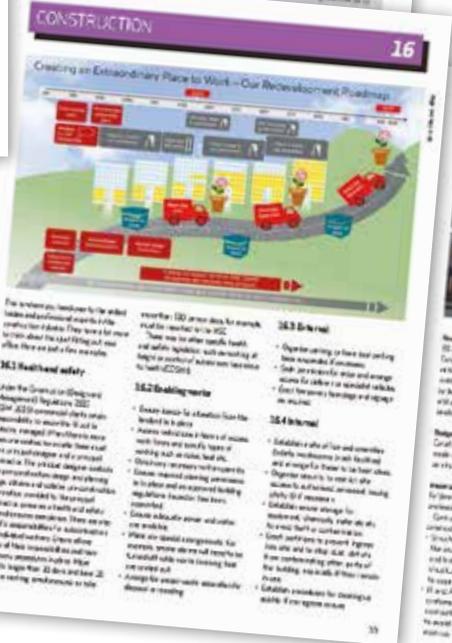
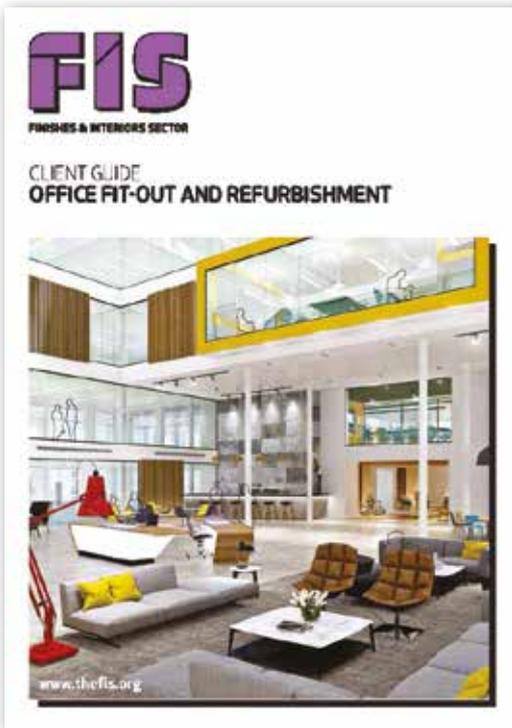
Just how much work, skill, thought and planning goes into the physical fit-out is given as much coverage as design and research. All

the different possible professionals who might become involved are listed alphabetically, from architect to workplace consultant.

All the specialist subcontractor skills of fit-out experts are also listed and the guide makes clear that their suggestions can pay dividends. The specification "needs to be flexible enough to allow expert subcontractors to suggest different ways of achieving the desired outcome and for the contractor to identify where different methods or timings can improve buildability", the guide says.

Moving staff out and in, arranging training in new equipment fitted, user manuals and other handover and occupancy issues are explained. And the concept of soft landings – where the contractor works with the client through the early period of occupancy to smooth out any issues that arise – is covered.

While the guide focuses on positives, it also warns clients against repeating the



- mistakes others have made. These include:
- Pointing to an office they like on TV or in a magazine and saying: "I want mine like that"
  - Plucking a budget figure out of thin air
  - Changing the design or specification at a late stage
  - Choosing the cheapest option without considering quality
  - Making unplanned and unannounced site visits that can halt construction and delay projects
  - Using 'snagging' to try to change the standards specified.

**CASE STUDY**

The guide includes a case study of a major fit-out carried out for the Institution of Structural Engineers.

All the key sources of information are included, such as reports from British Council for Offices (BCO), information on Building information Modelling (BIM) and details about the *Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015*. Numerous methodologies and standards are covered, including the Royal Institute of British Architects' *Plan of Work* and the British Standards Institution's *Code of Practice on Smart Working*.

The report simplifies the many competing demands of a project and sets out a straightforward and logical process map that hand-holds a client through the process.

FIS members can also use the guide to show clients that they are adhering to the highest professional standards. As the guide says at the outset: "Not everything in this guide will apply to every fit-out, but it should help you make your new office a great place to work, occupied on time, to specification and to a budget you can afford."

**Perspectives from the experts**

As part of a promotional video accompanying the launch of the guide, key figures from across the sector were asked what they saw as the most important aspect of an office fit-out.

• **Elina Grigoriou**, founder of Grigoriou Interiors, highlights the value of the design process. "It's like a tree: the taller and bigger the tree, the stronger it will be. It's the same with design: the longer the design process, the more rich it is, the better the outcome."

• **Martin Romaine**, sales director at Meronden, believes selecting the right contractor is key. "You need an efficient and intelligent contractor... small enough to care but big enough to cope."

• **Andrew Parkin**, acoustics partner at Cundall, highlights the crucial role of acoustics, particularly in open-plan offices. "The design has to work aesthetically, it has to work ergonomically... Integration between acoustics and the other factors are critical."

• **David Cant**, managing director of consultancy Veritas, focuses on health and safety. "Get that wrong and an accident could lead to an investigation, delays, prosecution, fines or even worse."

• **David Frise**, FIS chief executive, reminds readers: "The thing about doing a fit-out is: you don't always know what you don't know. If you use this fit-out guide, you'll cover all the bases."