FF&E procurement routes *compared*

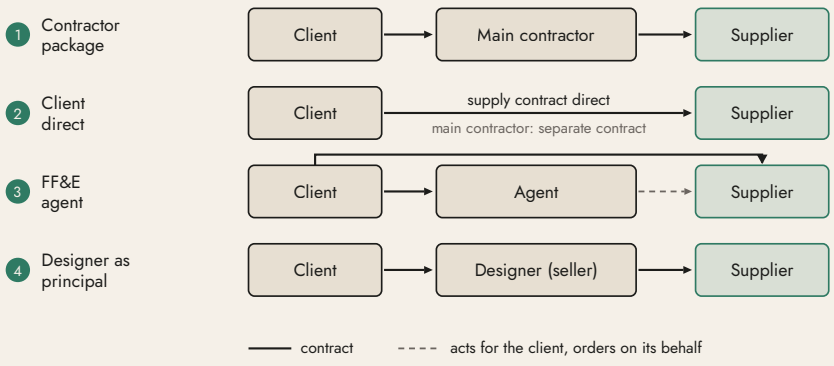
Four routes compared: who holds the contract, who carries the risk, what the client sees.

Compliance guidance. Summarises BIID (15 December 2020), Designing Buildings and the RIBA Plan of Work 2020 Overview, read on 5 November 2026. The documents on your project decide who holds which contract. This is guidance, not legal advice: take legal advice before choosing a route or signing an appointment.

AT A GLANCE

Route	Supply contract held by	Who coordinates delivery and installation	Warranty and defects chain	What the client sees of the price	Often used when
1 Contractor package	The main contractor; the supplier is its subcontractor	The main contractor, within the building programme	Normally via the main contractor: confirm to whom, and how long	The contractor's price; the supplier's price is shown only if the contract says so	The client wants the contractor to coordinate FF&E with construction
2 Client-direct	The client, with each supplier	The client or its representative; installation integrated with the building contract	Each supplier to the client, item by item	Each supplier's own price	The client has its own purchasing, or keeps specialist items outside the building contract
3 FF&E agent	The client; the agent acts on its behalf	The agent: programme, sourcing, orders, installation oversight	Supplier to the client; BIID says designers are unlikely to give guarantees	Supplier prices; the agent's fee, commissions and discounts disclosed	A specialist, or the designer as agent, is asked to run the buying
4 Designer as principal	The designer, who sells to the client and buys from the supplier	The designer, as seller	The designer, as seller, is liable to the client (BIID)	The designer's price; BIID advises transparency	The designer sells some or all FF&E, or a turnkey package

Typical patterns only: the contract documents decide. No route is shown as cheaper or dearer, because that depends on the project and on what each price includes. Tax treatment is not covered.



Contract lines in four FF&E procurement routes, schematic. The pattern is the usual one: each project's documents decide. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

QUESTIONS TO SETTLE BEFORE YOU CHOOSE

- Which items are inside the building contract, and who coordinates the interface?
- Who gives each warranty, to whom, and for how long?
- Which pieces are long-lead, and who releases production?

SPECIFICATION WORDING

PROCUREMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT

FF&E for [project] is procured by the [contractor package / client-direct / FF&E agent / designer-as-principal] route. The supply contract for [package] is held by [party]. [Party] coordinates delivery, installation and the interface with the building contract. The FF&E schedule [ref, revision] states, for every item, the contract it sits in. Warranties: [party] to [party] for [period], listed in the O&M manual.

CONTRACTOR PACKAGE ROUTE

The Contractor's FF&E package comprises the items in schedule [ref]. The Contractor is to obtain [the Employer's / the design team's] approval of shop drawings and samples before ordering, coordinate delivery with the building programme, and provide [warranties, test and fire certificates, O&M information]. The price is [a separate itemised section / a lump sum].

CLIENT-DIRECT ROUTE

Items [refs] are supplied under separate contracts between the Employer and [supplier(s)], outside the building contract. The Contractor is to provide [power, blocking, fixings, access, storage] at [locations] by [date] and to receive and protect deliveries where instructed. Interface duties are listed in [ref].

AGENT OR PRINCIPAL APPOINTMENT

[Party] acts as [the client's agent / principal] for [package], as stated in the appointment dated [date]. As agent it places orders on the client's behalf, issues [monthly] statements of orders and payments, and discloses any commission, discount or rebate. As principal it sells the items on the terms in [ref]. [Legal advice taken: yes / no.]

TERMS USED

FF&E procurement agent

A firm appointed to buy, track, receive and sometimes install FF&E on a client's behalf, often for hotels. It is different from the designer who specifies the items, although some designers act as agent or principal.

Warranty

A promise written into a contract that something is as stated, so that if it is not the other party can claim compensation. A collateral warranty extends such a promise to a party outside the main contract.

Guarantee

A written commitment to put something right if it fails within a stated period, enforceable only if it is in writing. A consumer guarantee should be clear and cannot take away statutory rights.

Principal (in FF&E procurement)

A party that sells FF&E to the client itself, buying from suppliers and taking responsibility for supply. Not the same as the CDM 'principal designer', which is a health and safety role.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- BIID: Professional Practice Series: FF&E (15 December 2020): agent and principal, disclosure, warranties (read 5 Nov 2026).
- Designing Buildings: Furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E): separate procurement (edited 30 June 2022).
- Designing Buildings: Procurement route: main contract routes (edited 14 Aug 2026).
- RIBA Plan of Work 2020 Overview: items outside the building contract (PDF pages 63 and 122).

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/ffe-procurement-routes-compared. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.