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WELCOME

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Autumn / Winter edition of The Cotswold Estate Manager, written exclusively for House Managers, Estate Managers & Private PAs overseeing the recruitment and management of household staff for the most distinguished homes and estates in our region.

As we approach the festive season and look ahead to 2026, the demands on private households continue to evolve.

The Cotswold Estate Manager's role remains as challenging as ever. Recruiting and retaining the very best private staff, navigating rising salary expectations, and staying ahead of the legislative changes affecting the sector, staying informed is key.

In this issue, we share insights drawn from our work with estates across the Cotswolds, offering practical guidance on:

- Preparing households for the festive season with chefs, butlers, and event staff.
- The true cost of on a PAYE vs. self-employed basis.
- Current salary expectations for housekeepers, and what level of service you should expect at each level of experience.
- The influx of high-profile residents to the Cotswolds and what it means for standards, and for Private Household professionals.
- Best practice in arranging short-term cover for maternity, sickness, or when Principals are in residence.
- Upcoming legislative changes that affect Private Households, such as proposed changes to how NDAs are used and when they are no longer enforcable.

Our aim, as always, is to provide clear, practical advice that helps you anticipate challenges, manage teams effectively, and maintain the highest standards within your household or estate.

We hope you find this edition both informative and useful as you plan ahead for the year to come.

Jodie



Jodie Hannah - Founder of The Burford Recruitment Company & Cotswold Private Staff


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NOW IS THE TIME TO PREPARE PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS FOR CHRISTMAS

A Very Cotswold Christmas: How Private Households Can Host the Perfect Festive Season

The Christmas season in the Cotswolds is unlike any other. For Principals, it's the time of year when family and friends gather, traditions are honoured, and homes come alive with the warmth of hospitality. For House Managers, however, it can be one of the most demanding periods of the calendar. A season that requires meticulous planning, flexibility, and often the ability to scale staffing arrangements rapidly.

In recent years, the expectations placed upon private households during the festive season have risen. Guests anticipate exceptional food, seamless service, and an atmosphere that reflects both the grandeur and intimacy of the setting. This article explores the key considerations for House Managers preparing estates for Christmas, with a particular focus on temporary support staff such as chefs, butlers, and event hosts.

The Cotswold Christmas: Why Planning Matters

The Cotswolds is a magnet for seasonal entertaining. Principals often choose to spend extended periods at their country residences during December and January, hosting everything from intimate family dinners to large-scale parties. For House Managers, the challenge lies in delivering exceptional experiences while maintaining discretion and smooth operations.

Staffing is central to this success. Permanent teams may be stretched, particularly if holidays or sickness coincide with festive demands. Additional support, carefully selected and integrated ensures service standards remain uncompromised.

The Role of the Private Chef

At the heart of any Christmas gathering is the food. Yet few occasions place such high demands on culinary preparation. Multiple meals, diverse dietary requirements, and the expectation of creativity alongside tradition make Christmas catering uniquely challenging.

Private chefs accustomed to working in prestigious households typically charge £350–£450 per day (More on bank holidays and other special days.)



For that investment, House Managers can expect more than just cooking:

- Menu planning and consultation tailored to family traditions and guest preferences.
- Sourcing of ingredients, often from trusted suppliers or local producers.
- Dietary management, including vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, or allergen-sensitive dishes.
- Coordination with service staff to ensure timing and presentation are impeccable.
- Post-event clear down, leaving kitchens immaculate.

The presence of a professional chef frees Principals to enjoy their gatherings without stress, while giving House Managers confidence that culinary expectations will be exceeded.

Butlers and Event Hosts

Food is only one part of the equation. Service makes the experience memorable. This is where butlers and event hosts come into their own.

Their responsibilities may include:

- Welcoming and ushering guests.
- Managing cloakrooms and seating.
- Coordinating timings with the kitchen.
- Keeping drinks refreshed and plates cleared.
- Overseeing the smooth flow of formal or semi-formal service.

The hallmark of a professional butler or host is discretion. Guests may barely notice their presence, and that is the point. They allow Principals to engage fully with family and friends, confident that every practical detail is being managed.

Tailoring Support to Household Needs

Not every household requires the same level of seasonal support. Some Principals may want a private chef only for Christmas Day itself, while others will schedule a series of events across December and New Year requiring a team of staff.

Factors to consider include:

- Number of guests expected.
- Formality of events (casual family lunches vs black-tie dinners).
- Existing household staff capacity.
- Preferences of the Principal regarding style, cuisine, or traditions.

The most effective House Managers anticipate these needs early. Securing trusted professionals in advance avoids last-minute compromises and ensures the right cultural fit for the household.

Integration and Discretion

One of the greatest challenges of bringing in temporary staff is ensuring seamless integration into established household teams.

House Managers must be prepared to:

- Provide clear briefings on household preferences, schedules, and protocols.
- Oversee introductions to permanent staff, setting expectations of teamwork.
- Monitor service delivery discreetly to ensure consistency with the Principal's standards.

Discretion is paramount. Professionals with prior experience in prestigious households understand the importance of confidentiality, something House Managers should always verify through references and prior placements.

Seasonal Pitfalls to Avoid

Even experienced House Managers can encounter challenges during the festive period. Common pitfalls include:

- Underestimating demand: last-minute requests from Principals for additional events can overwhelm staff capacity.
- Neglecting logistics: from parking arrangements for guests to delivery slots for food suppliers, details matter.
- Over-reliance on permanent staff: without relief, fatigue can lead to errors at the very moment when standards must be highest.

"For House Managers, success depends on foresight, planning, and the ability to draw on a network of trusted professionals"

Looking Ahead: Trends in Festive Household Staffing

Several trends are shaping how households approach Christmas in the Cotswolds:

1. Longer stays in residence: Principals are spending more time in their country homes, requiring extended support.
2. Hybrid entertaining: combining formal dinners with relaxed, family-friendly gatherings.
3. Focus on wellbeing: requests for chefs to incorporate healthier menus alongside traditional indulgence.
4. Sustainability: increased interest in locally sourced ingredients and environmentally conscious entertaining.

House Managers who anticipate these trends are best positioned to deliver value to Principals.

Final Thoughts

Christmas is both the highlight and the pressure point of the household calendar. For House Managers, success depends on foresight, planning, and the ability to draw on a network of trusted professionals.

With skilled chefs, butlers, and hosts in place, households can achieve the rarest of combinations: celebrations that are both polished and joyful.

While the details may vary from estate to estate, one truth remains constant: when House Managers plan early, select carefully, and integrate seamlessly, Christmas in the Cotswolds becomes everything Principals hope it to be — effortless, elegant, and unforgettable.



Maxine Gallagher - Senior Private Household Consultant

PAYE OR SELF-EMPLOYED - WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO PAY

For Principals and House Managers in the Cotswolds, two roles sit at the very heart of daily estate operations: the housekeeper and the gardener. A skilled housekeeper ensures the home runs with polish and precision, while an experienced gardener maintains the landscapes that make the region so admired.

When considering how to staff these roles, one of the most important questions is whether to employ directly through PAYE (Pay As You Earn) or to engage staff on a self-employed basis.

At first glance, the answer may appear straightforward: PAYE is traditional, while self-employment offers flexibility. Yet in practice, the decision has significant financial, legal, and operational implications.

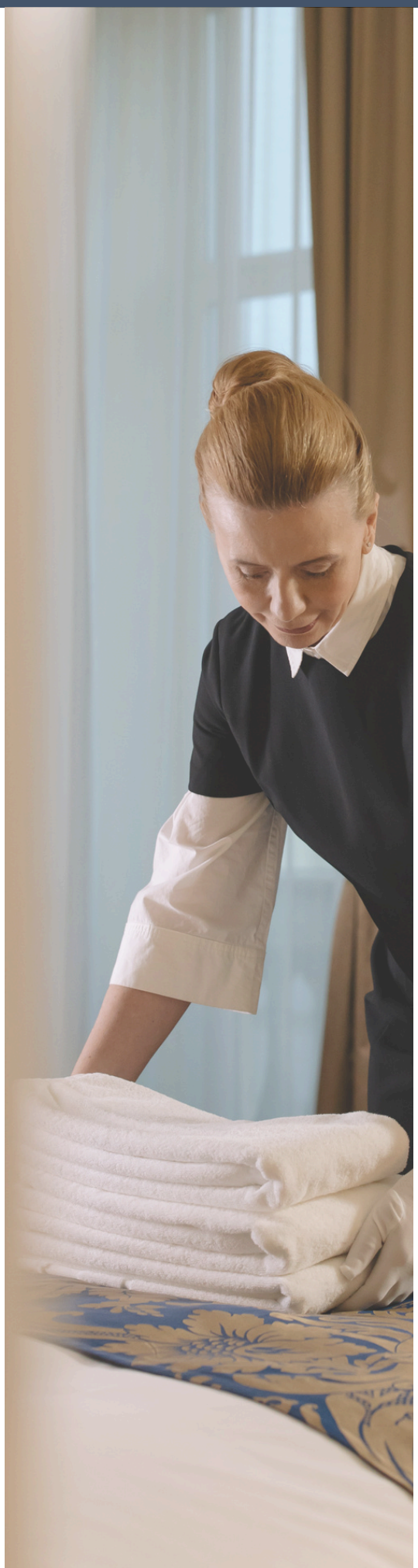
This article provides a detailed overview of the true costs and practical differences, with worked examples for both housekeepers and gardeners, so Principals and House Managers can make informed choices.

PAYE vs. Self-Employed: The Essentials

Under PAYE, the household employs the worker directly. The employer deducts tax and National Insurance (NI) on behalf of the employee, pays employer's NI, and contributes to a pension scheme. The worker is entitled to statutory benefits such as paid holiday and sick pay.

By contrast, a self-employed worker invoices for their services and is responsible for their own tax, NI, pensions, and insurances. They do not receive statutory holiday pay or sick pay from the household, and the Principal avoids the administrative burden of payroll.

On paper, PAYE may look more expensive because of employer contributions, while self-employed workers usually quote a higher hourly rate to account for the benefits they must provide for themselves.



The Housekeeper Example

Let's begin with the housekeeper, one of the most integral members of any household team.

PAYE Arrangement

Imagine a household employs a housekeeper for 15 hours per week at £25 per hour (PAYE).

- Gross weekly pay: £375
- Holiday entitlement: 28 days pro rata (worth roughly 12% of annual pay).
- Employer pension contribution: minimum 3% of qualifying earnings.
- Employer's National Insurance: 13.8% above the threshold.

When these factors are accounted for, the true cost to the household rises to nearer £420–£440 per week, depending on pension arrangements and whether any additional benefits (such as uniforms or training) are provided.

Self-Employed Equivalent

For the housekeeper, being self-employed means covering:

- Holiday pay (12–15% of gross).
- Pension contributions (8% if matching typical PAYE employee + employer).
- Income tax and NI.
- Insurance (public liability is often expected in domestic work).

To achieve the same take-home as a £25/hour PAYE employee, a self-employed housekeeper would typically need to charge £33–£35 per hour.

This differential reflects the cost of replicating the PAYE package independently.

The Gardener Example

Gardens in the Cotswolds require year-round attention, and skilled gardeners are in high demand. Unlike housekeepers, gardening rates are often quoted hourly rather than salaried.

PAYE Arrangement

A gardener employed directly might receive £18–£20 per hour PAYE. Let's assume 20 hours per week at £20/hour:

- Gross weekly pay: £400
- Holiday entitlement: worth around £45 per week when averaged.
- Employer pension contribution: £10–£15 per week.
- Employer's NI: £20–£25 per week above threshold.

This takes the true cost for the household to approximately £450–£470 per week.

Self-Employed Equivalent

A self-employed gardener at first glance appears more expensive, with rates between £24–£26 per hour. But this accounts for:

- Unpaid holiday (worth 12–15%).
- Pension contributions (if they wish to save at the same rate as PAYE).
- Insurance (gardeners usually require liability cover).
- Tools, equipment, and transport (often provided by themselves rather than the household).

The higher rate ensures that, in practice, they are financially no better off than a PAYE colleague — it simply redistributes who carries the cost.

Beyond the Numbers: Practical Considerations

While the financial calculations are important, there are additional factors Principals and House Managers should weigh carefully.

1. Flexibility

- Self-employed staff often work with multiple clients and may offer more flexible arrangements (a few hours per week, seasonal projects).
- PAYE employees may offer more stability and availability but require a consistent schedule and contractual obligations.

2. Integration

- Housekeepers employed under PAYE often integrate more fully into household culture and routines.
- Self-employed staff may feel more like external contractors, though many are adept at adapting to different homes.

3. Continuity and Loyalty

- PAYE staff tend to demonstrate longer-term loyalty, particularly if they feel valued and secure.
- Self-employed workers may prioritise higher-paying clients or vary their availability.

4. Compliance and Risk

HMRC takes a close interest in employment status. If someone is treated like an employee — regular hours, under direction, working only for one client — but paid as self-employed, the household could face penalties. House Managers must ensure that the arrangement reflects reality.

The Current Market Context

Demand for domestic staff in the Cotswolds is strong, and competition for skilled individuals is high. Salaries and rates have risen, not only because of cost-of-living pressures but also due to the scarcity of candidates with true private household experience.

It is worth noting that many of the most experienced candidates prefer the stability of PAYE, particularly at higher levels of responsibility.
Strategic Advice for House Managers
When considering whether to employ directly or engage on a self-employed basis, House Managers should:

1. Analyse workload carefully: is the role ongoing and integral, or occasional and seasonal?
2. Calculate the true costs: don't be misled by hourly rates alone. Factor in pensions, holidays, insurance, and NI.
3. Consider long-term stability: will the Principal want continuity and loyalty, or is flexibility more valuable?
4. Ensure compliance: avoid "disguised employment" that could expose the household to HMRC challenges.
5. Communicate expectations: clear job descriptions and agreements prevent misunderstandings.

Final Thoughts

The decision between PAYE and self-employed arrangements for housekeepers and gardeners is not simply about money. It is about aligning the structure of employment with the needs of the household.

- For ongoing, integral roles, PAYE provides stability, loyalty, and integration, albeit at the cost of greater employer responsibility.

- For flexible, seasonal, or part-time arrangements, self-employed staff may offer the right balance, provided the terms are genuinely reflective of contractor status.

In either case, House Managers who understand the full financial and practical picture are best placed to deliver value to their Principals and to build teams that maintain the highest standards in the Cotswolds.



Chris Hannah - Managing Director at The Burford Recruitment Company & Cotswold Private Staff


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SEAMLESS SUPPORT:
SHORT-TERM COVER FOR COTSWOLD ESTATES



Life in a private household or estate rarely follows a predictable pattern. Principals may arrive at short notice, valued members of staff may be away on holiday or maternity leave, or unexpected illness can leave gaps in service at the most inconvenient times. For households that demand continuity, discretion, and the highest standards, securing experienced cover staff quickly is essential.

At The Burford Recruitment Company, we specialise in providing short-term household cover to ensure estates and private residences continue to run smoothly whatever the circumstances.

When Principals are in Residence

Many estates operate with a "low-key" team when principals are away, only to scale up dramatically the moment they return. Whether for a weekend stay, a family celebration, or an extended summer visit, additional support may be required across housekeeping, service, gardening, or front-of-house roles. Our temporary staff are accustomed to stepping seamlessly into prestigious households, delivering service that matches the standards principals expect without disruption.

Holiday, Maternity and Sickness Cover
Even the most dedicated team members need time away, and sudden absences can place strain on small household teams. By arranging temporary cover, households can ensure there is no dip in standards while allowing permanent staff to rest and recover. From providing a trusted housekeeper during maternity leave to assigning a butler for a fortnight while the family's right-hand man is on holiday, we make sure the household continues to run effortlessly.

Experienced, Vetted and Trusted

Every member of our temporary staff pool is:

- DBS checked for safeguarding and security.
- Fully referenced, with a proven track record of excellence.
- Experienced in prestigious households across the Cotswolds and beyond.
- Skilled in adapting quickly, maintaining discretion, and working as part of an established team.

This means principals and managers alike can have confidence that even temporary cover will meet the highest standards of professionalism.

"Unexpected absences never need to disrupt the smooth running of your home or estate."

Flexible Engagement Options

We understand that no two households are the same. That's why we offer a range of engagement options — from weekly timesheets for ad hoc support, to fixed-term contracts for longer placements, or the introduction of self-employed contractors for maximum flexibility. Whatever the structure, we adapt to suit the household's needs.

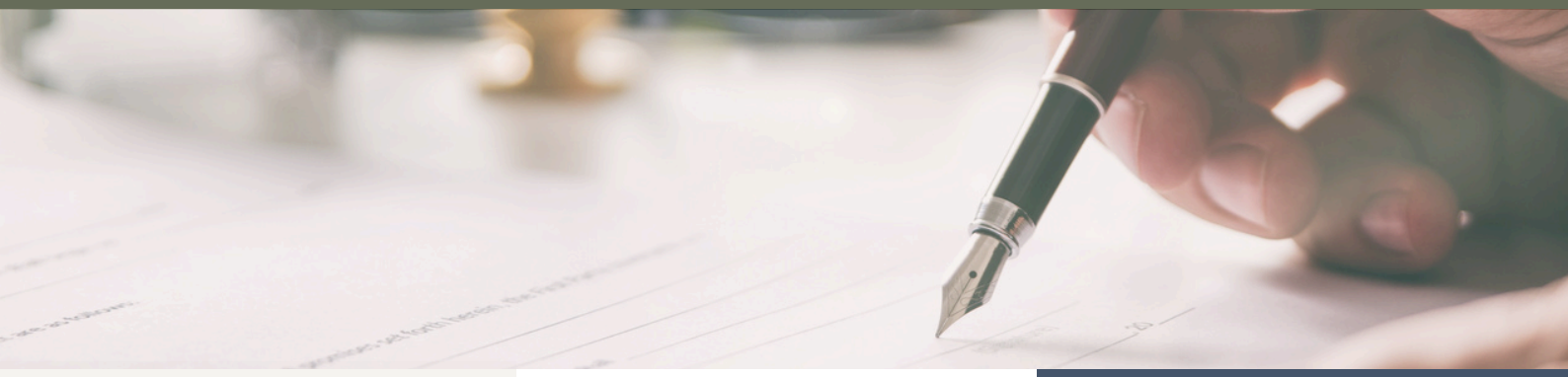
For House Managers, this flexibility is particularly valuable. If principals are in residence for a fixed time frame, they may also choose to offer retention bonuses to incentivise staff to commit to the full duration of the assignment agreed at the outset. This ensures continuity, avoids last-minute gaps, and gives principals peace of mind that their household will remain fully supported throughout their stay.

Why Choose The Burford Recruitment Company?

Our reputation has been built on trust, discretion, and a deep understanding of the private household sector. By providing short-term cover with staff who are as polished and reliable as permanent team members, we allow households to focus on what matters most, whether that's family time, entertaining, or simply enjoying the beauty of the Cotswolds.

With our support, unexpected absences never need to disrupt the smooth running of your home or estate.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



The Employment Rights Bill: What's Coming & What It Could Mean

The Government's Employment Rights Bill (sometimes referred to as the Workers' Rights Bill) is one of the most significant overhauls of UK employment law in decades. While several provisions remain subject to consultation or secondary legislation, many are expected to take effect between late 2025 and 2027.
Here are some of the most important proposals and how they could affect estate households:

1. Day-One Unfair Dismissal Protection

Under the draft bill, employees could gain protection from unfair dismissal from their first day of employment meaning the current two-year qualifying period would be removed. However, a new statutory probationary period (potentially up to 9 months) is expected, during which a lighter dismissal regime may apply. For House Managers, this means your probation procedures, performance reviews, and documentation will need to be very clear and robust.

2. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Reforms

From April 2026, the waiting period for SSP is likely to be removed, and the lower earnings threshold may be eliminated. That is, eligible employees may be able to claim SSP from day one of absence.

Households will need to budget accordingly and update policies for short-term illness.

3. Parental and Leave Rights from Day One

Parental leave and paternity leave may become rights from day one of employment, rather than existing qualifying periods.

That raises the importance of leave planning and ensuring staff records and claims are handled correctly.

4. Ban on Exploitative Zero-Hours Contracts / Guaranteed Hours

The draft law is set to restrict the use of zero-hours contracts. Employers may be required to offer guaranteed hours to workers who have followed regular patterns of shifts. This could affect how you engage ad hoc or flexible staff.

5. "Fire and Rehire" & Dismissal Safeguards

The bill is expected to make dismissal and re-engagement on less favourable terms (i.e. "fire and rehire") more likely to be treated as automatically unfair in many cases. If you ever restructure roles or change terms, careful legal advice will be essential.

6. Strengthened Protections for Industrial Action & Trade Union Activity

Changes are also proposed around industrial action, union recognition, and protections for employees participating in strikes or collective bargaining.

Practical Steps for House Managers & Principals

- Review and update contracts and handbooks now
- Ensure probationary clauses, dismissal procedures, SSP policies, and leave provisions are up to date and clearly documented.
- Plan your staffing models
- If you rely on zero-hours, agency, or flexible staff, consider how offering guaranteed hours or shifting to part-time/PAYE might impact operations.
- Budget for higher costs
- With expanded sick pay and protections, your staffing costs — both direct and indirect — may rise.
- Train managers in compliant practice
- Good documentation, fair procedures, and clear performance management will become even more important.
- Stay informed as law progresses
- Many of the provisions await secondary legislation and consultations — keeping pace with updates will help you adapt before deadlines.

The coming changes are likely to affect employer responsibilities and staff protections across all sectors, including domestic and private households. while the law has not yet changed in full, proactive preparation will ensure that your household remains compliant, stable, and able to attract and retain the best talent under evolving standards.

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To be put in touch with HR specialists with experience of Human Resourses Management in Private Households contact chris@burfordrecruitment.co.uk

NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS (NDA) WHAT'S CHANGING?

One particularly important amendment to the Employment Rights Bill could significantly curtail the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in circumstances involving harassment, discrimination or abuse in the workplace.

While NDAs have long been used in many sectors to protect confidentiality, the proposed changes make clear that they should not serve as tools to silence staff who wish to speak out about wrongdoing.

In private households, where discretion and privacy are central, it is especially important for House Managers and Principals to understand how the law is shifting, and how to ensure policies remain fair, defensible, and legally compliant.

What's Changing: The Proposed Amendment

The amendment introduces a new clause that would render void any provision in a contract or settlement agreement that attempts to stop a worker from making a "relevant disclosure" of harassment, discrimination, or abuse, or from sharing how the employer responded to such allegations.

The change applies to workers broadly (not just employees), and would also cover witnesses to misconduct.

However, NDAs may still remain valid in other contexts provided they don't attempt to gag employees on harassment or discrimination.

Some provisions may be excluded under "excepted agreements" (yet to be fully defined) if they meet particular conditions set by future regulation.

Why This Matters in Private Households

Households often rely on NDAs or confidentiality clauses when resolving internal staff matters or disputes discreetly. But the proposed changes make clear that protecting privacy is legitimate, silencing staff complaints is not.

In practical terms:

- Settlement agreements involving harassment or abuse cannot legitimately prevent a worker from speaking out about those very allegations.
- Contractual clauses inserted to restrict discussion of misconduct may be deemed void.
- Witnesses will be empowered to share their perspective without fear of breaching a non-disclosure clause.
- It is essential, therefore, that House Managers review existing confidentiality clauses and settlement templates, ensuring they don't overreach into prohibited territory.

Balancing Privacy and Accountability

The goal is not to eliminate confidentiality entirely. Principals and households will still have legitimate reasons to protect estate security, family privacy, or sensitive operational details. NDAs used appropriately, for example, to safeguard sensitive financial, design, or security information—should remain valid so long as they don't stifle disclosure about harassment or discrimination.

That said, the new regime emphasises transparency, fairness, and accountability. Households must avoid adopting overly broad "gag clauses" that could be struck down, or worse, exposed to reputational risks if they are viewed as attempts to silence genuine complaints.

Key Steps for House Managers & Principals

- Audit existing agreements
- Review employment contracts, staff handbooks, and settlement templates to identify any clauses that purport to silence workers regarding harassment or discrimination.
- Adapt settlement practices
- In future, avoid insisting on confidentiality provisions that prevent staff from speaking out about abuse, even if such clauses were previously accepted.
- Train leadership and staff
- Ensure that line managers and senior staff understand the difference between protecting privacy and unlawfully gagging staff. Cultivate a workplace culture where complaints are handled transparently and safely.
- Seek legal clarity

As the Bill progresses, watch for definitions of "excepted agreements" and additional guidance on permissible confidentiality provisions. Legal advice will help ensure your documents and practices comply.

"It is essential, that House Managers review existing confidentiality clauses and settlement templates, ensuring they don't overreach into prohibited territory."

The proposed reforms to NDAs reflect a broader shift in employment law philosophy: dignity, justice, and transparency should not be trumped by overbearing confidentiality. In the unique environment of private households, where trust and discretion are foundational, House Managers and Principals must act now to ensure their practices align with evolving standards. When confidentiality supports privacy, not silencing it benefits everyone.

THE COTSWOLDS AS A VIP DESTINATION: HOW IT IS IMPROVING THE PROSPECTS FOR PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD PROFESSIONALS

The Cotswolds has long been cherished for its rolling hills, picturesque villages, and an air of unspoiled English countryside. Over recent years, though, the region has quietly become something of a magnet for VIPs and A-listers, particularly from the United States. With them has come a surge in demand for highly professional private household staff. For candidates seeking a serious career in domestic service, the timing could not be better.

From Hollywood to Honey-Stone

High-profile relocations, and visitors include the American Vice President - JD Vance, and celebrities Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi, who's time in the Cotswolds has been widely covered in the media, and has futher established the area as a new enclave for the rich and famous seeking privacy, prestige, and rustic charm.

They join established residents from the world of film, sport, music, and poilitics.

And the rumour mill keeps turning....

Locals in Burford have whispered that the music industry's biggest power couple are considering a move to the region after being spotted in the local town. At the same time, it's been reported that a number of film stars are also exploring property options in the Cotswolds, after recently filming close to the area.

Whether fact or gossip, the effect is the same: the Cotswolds is firmly on the radar for the global elite.

Why the Upswing in Private Household Demand Matters

Expectations for privacy, professionalism, and service are extremely high, with new arrivals expecting a "hotel-plus" standard. For local households, this raises the benchmark. In demend skill sets, discreet service, and attention to detail become more desirable, not just for UHNW clients but for all high-end households in the area.

As more homes in the Cotswolds adopt this elevated standard, the market for domestic professionals is realigning, with more opportunities for experienced Butlers, Housekeepers and Estate Managers, as well as opportunities for hospitality Steward/Stewardess staff looking to enter the private household industry.

From Houseman to Estate Manager / Chief of Staff: A Real Career Path

One of the most exciting aspects of this evolution is the clear career pathway that now exists for ambitious candidates. Here's a typical trajectory:

Houseman / Junior Domestic Assistant

This is where many begin: assisting with general maintenance, housekeeping support, guest services, errands, and helping across multiple domains. At this stage, the emphasis is on reliability, willingness to learn, and mastering the foundational tasks of a private estate.



Housekeeper / Butler / Valet / Specialty Role

After time and proven performance, a houseman might specialise, becoming a full Housekeeper, Butler, or Valet. At this level, discretion, refined skills, and sometimes formal training in hospitality or silver service become essential.

Deputy or Assistant Manager / Head of Department

Once a staff member has demonstrated competence across multiple roles and shown leadership potential, they may be promoted to head of a department, overseeing junior staff (including recruitment and training), managing budgets, or coordinating household schedules.

Estate Manager / House Manager

Depending on the size of the estate, or if there is more than one property, at the top is the role of Chief of Staff, Estate Manager or House Manager, overseeing all aspects of property operations, staff, renovations, guest hosting, and security.

They will liaise with principals, provide reports, make strategic decisions, and ensure everything meets the highest standards. In internationally mobile households, they will often coordinate with global teams, organising travel, and complex logistics.

The prestige, autonomy, and salary potential grow with each step. In the Cotswolds luxury domestic market, an estate manager supporting an ultra-high-net-worth principal with great references can command a premium.

Why the Cotswolds Now Offers Unique Opportunities

- Dense Luxury Market in One Place: With VIPs and ultra-high-net-worth families clustering in the Cotswolds, opportunities are concentrated locally.
- Cross-Household Experience: Households often entertain at scale, exposing staff to high-level event hosting and coordination.
- Global Standards, Local Roots: Candidates can develop world-class skills without leaving the region.
- Career Mobility: Movement between estates offers natural progression from junior to senior roles.
- Training & Mentorship Potential: Agencies and principals are increasingly investing in staff development.

How The Burford Recruitment Company Supports This Growth

At The Burford Recruitment Company, we see this shift firsthand. We are not just placing staff.

We are actively helping candidates map career trajectories. Whether someone is joining as a houseman or looking to transition into a management role, we provide guidance on training, benchmarks, and progressive placements.

We also advise new arrivals on how to attract, nurture and retain talent. After all, continuity and loyalty are just as important as polish in ensuring a household runs smoothly.

Conclusion

The Cotswolds is no longer just a picture-postcard countryside retreat. The area's reputation as the English Riviera, or the UK Hamptons only grows stronger.

For domestic staff, this trend translates into unprecedented career opportunities. A houseman starting out today could, with the right training and ambition, progress to estate manager in just a few years. And for those who want to build a career in the Cotswolds, the message is clear: the future of private households has never looked brighter.





Jodie Hannah - Founder of The Burford Recruitment Company & Cotswold Private Staff

THE RISING VALUE OF HOUSEKEEPERS IN THE COTSWOLDS

The Rising Value of Housekeepers in the Cotswolds

The Cotswolds has long been known for its honey-stone manor houses, immaculate gardens, and elegant country living. Behind the beauty of these homes, however, lies a team of dedicated professionals who ensure they run smoothly – and at the heart of that team is often the housekeeper.

In recent years, salaries for housekeepers have risen significantly, reflecting both increased demand and the growing recognition of the skills required to manage a private household to a high standard. For families and estates seeking to hire, understanding what you can expect at different salary levels is essential.

Why Salaries Are Rising

A perfect storm of factors has driven this upward shift. The demand for experienced private staff has increased as more families relocate to the countryside, often bringing metropolitan expectations of service with them.

At the same time, the pool of housekeepers with true private household experience is limited. Luxury hospitality professionals moving into private households have also pushed standards higher, particularly for roles requiring discretion, organisational ability, and experience with fine furnishings, antiques, and wardrobes. As a result, salaries have adjusted to reflect the skill, reliability, and expertise needed to excel.

So, what should you expect to pay today for a housekeeper in the Cotswolds – and what do you get at each level?

Entry-Level Housekeepers (£35,000–£38,000)

For households willing to consider candidates with less direct private household experience, there are still opportunities to hire housekeepers at the £35,000–£38,000 mark.

These individuals may have backgrounds in luxury hospitality, such as boutique hotels, private members clubs or high-end holiday cottage rentals, and will bring strong cleaning standards, team work and a service mindset.

However, they may require additional training to adapt to the unique expectations of a private household, such as caring for delicate antiques, handling designer wardrobes, or providing discreet family support.

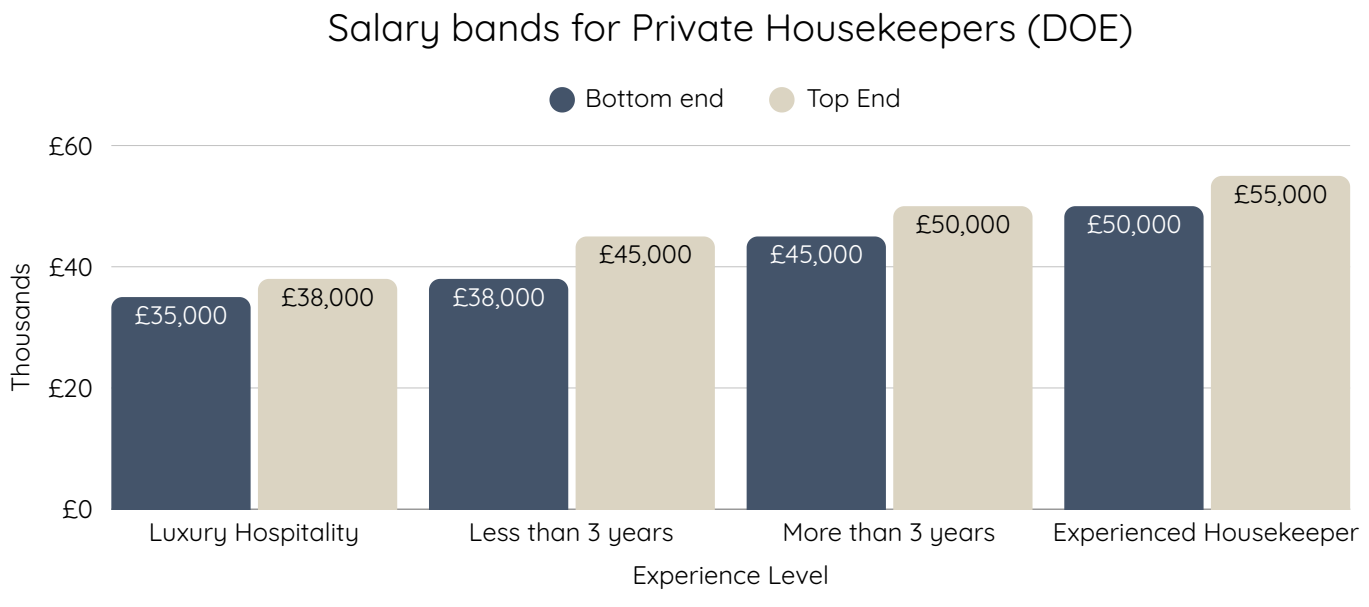
What to expect at this level:

- Solid cleaning and housekeeping skills, often honed in hospitality.
- A “can-do” attitude and willingness to learn household-specific standards.
- Limited experience in areas like wardrobe management, silver polishing, or fine laundry.
- Good fit for smaller households or families open to providing guidance and training.

Experienced Private Household Housekeepers (£38,000–£45,000)

To secure a housekeeper with proven private household or luxury yacht experience, the salary expectation is now firmly in the £38,000–£45,000 range.

These professionals understand the rhythm of private family life and have experience working in discreet, trusted roles. They will often be confident in managing cleaning schedules, overseeing laundry and wardrobe care, liaising with tradespeople, and ensuring the household runs to a polished standard without direction.



What to expect at this level:

- Strong background in private households, often with multiple years' experience.
- High standards in cleaning, presentation, and organisational ability.
- Knowledge of caring for fine furniture, artwork, and valuable fabrics.
- Discretion, reliability, and the ability to work independently.
- Good communication skills for liaising with principals and other staff.

This is the level at which many Cotswold households are now competing, and the salaries reflect both demand and the rarity of skilled, experienced candidates.

Senior Housekeepers (£45,000–£55,000)

At the top end of the housekeeper spectrum are those who not only excel in their role but also bring an additional layer of professionalism and polish. The very best housekeepers are now commanding salaries of £45,000–£55,000, particularly when working in larger estates or more formal households.

These individuals combine deep technical knowledge with the ability to anticipate needs, manage household budgets, and oversee junior staff or contractors. They are the right hand of the principal when it comes to household operations.

What to expect at this level:

- A fully autonomous professional who requires little or no supervision.
- Expertise in wardrobe management, including care for luxury fabrics and couture pieces.
- Experience hosting and supporting events, liaising seamlessly with chefs, butlers, and external suppliers.
- Often formally trained in household management or high-end hospitality.
- Exceptional discretion and loyalty.

Households hiring at this level are not just employing a housekeeper; they are gaining a trusted partner in managing their home.

"While less experienced housekeepers can be a cost-effective choice for smaller homes, those seeking true private household expertise should be prepared to invest at the higher levels"

Head Housekeepers (£55,000+)

For large estates, a Head Housekeeper is often required to oversee a team. Salaries here are typically in the £55,000+ range, reflecting both leadership responsibilities and the depth of knowledge required.

A Head Housekeeper doesn't just work within the household; they set the tone for the entire domestic team. They are responsible for recruitment, training, scheduling, and ensuring every member of staff meets the principal's standards.

What to expect at this level:

- Proven leadership and management skills, often with a background in running sizeable teams.
- Oversight of rotas, training, and recruitment.
- Responsibility for household budgets, purchasing, and stock control.
- Ability to coordinate seamlessly with estate managers, chefs, and butlers.
- Experience managing multiple properties or a very large primary residence.

Choosing the Right Level

The salary you should expect to pay depends on your household's size, formality, and expectations. While less experienced housekeepers can be a cost-effective choice for smaller homes, those seeking true private household expertise should be prepared to invest at the higher levels.

Ultimately, the rise in salaries reflects the value of having a professional who not only maintains your home to the highest standard but does so with discretion, loyalty, and skill.

How The Burford Recruitment Company Can Help

At The Burford Recruitment Company, we specialise in helping Cotswold households navigate this evolving market. From sourcing entry-level housekeepers with hospitality experience to placing Head Housekeepers in large estates, we provide tailored advice to ensure you secure the right fit for your home – and understand the salary expectations at each level.

With competition for talent increasing, our expertise ensures you attract and retain the best candidates for your household.



Amelia Marsh - Senior Private Household Specialist at The Burford Recruitment Company

LIVE-IN STAFF
ACCOMMODATION OFFSETS AND OVERTIME RULES

For many Cotswold estates and private households, live-in staff are indispensable. Gardeners, housekeepers, chauffeurs and couples who reside on-site provide continuity, flexibility and peace of mind. But these arrangements can create legal pitfalls — particularly around working hours, pay and accommodation.

A common misconception is that because live-in employees receive free housing, employers can expect additional hours without extra pay. In fact, UK minimum wage rules still apply, and the value of accommodation can only be counted to a limited degree. Failing to observe this can leave even well-intentioned households in breach of the law.

Here's what you need to know to stay compliant — and how to structure contracts to keep things clear and fair for both sides.

Understanding the Accommodation Offset

The accommodation offset is a statutory figure set by the Government to account for the value of housing provided as part of employment. From 1 April 2025, that figure is £10.66 per day (or £74.62 per week).

- If you provide accommodation free of charge, you may add up to that amount to the employee's pay for the purposes of checking National Minimum or Living Wage (NMW) compliance.
- If you charge rent, you may deduct up to that amount. Any deduction above £74.62 per week must be treated as reducing the employee's pay when assessing NMW.

The Legal Test

All employees — including live-in staff — must receive at least the National Minimum or Living Wage for every hour worked, averaged across the pay reference period (usually a week or month).

From April 2025, the National Living Wage for age 21+ will be £12.21 per hour.

To remain compliant, the calculation is straightforward:

Total pay (plus accommodation offset, if applicable) ÷ Total hours worked ≥ £12.21

If additional hours are worked without pay, that hourly average can quickly fall below the legal threshold.

Example: Live-in Gardener on £28,000 per Year

Imagine a live-in gardener employed on a salary of £28,000, contracted for a 40-hour week, with free accommodation on the estate.

Step 1: Work out the base rate

£28,000 ÷ 52 weeks = £538.46 per week

£538.46 ÷ 40 hours = £13.46/hour

This comfortably exceeds the £12.21 minimum.

Step 2: Include the accommodation offset

Because accommodation is free, the employer can add £74.62 for NMW calculations:

- £538.46 + £74.62 = £613.08 (counted pay)
- £613.08 ÷ 40 = £15.33/hour — well within compliance.

Step 3: Now add extra unpaid hours

- If the gardener regularly works an extra 10 hours a week without additional pay (50 hours total
- £538.46 ÷ 50 = £10.77/hour — below the minimum wage.
- Even after adding the £74.62 offset, £613.08 ÷ 50 = £12.26/hour — barely compliant.
- Any additional unpaid hours would push pay below the legal minimum, exposing the household to enforcement action.

Why the Risk Matters

HMRC has the power to investigate NMW breaches, including in private households. Where underpayment is found, employers can be ordered to:

- Repay staff the difference going back up to six years.
- Pay penalties of up to 200% of the arrears (capped at £20,000 per worker).
- Be publicly named for non-compliance.

These penalties are the same for households as for any business employer. Even an innocent oversight, such as failing to record hours properly, can result in costly correction and reputational damage.

Best Practice for House and Estate Managers

1. Be Clear in Contracts

A well-drafted employment contract is your best defence. It should state:

- Core working hours (for example, 40 per week).
- Normal working pattern (days and times).
- Expectations for additional hours, including how and when they will be paid or compensated.
- Whether overtime is included in the salary up to a certain limit, or whether it triggers extra payment or time off in lieu (TOIL).

Avoid vague language such as "reasonable additional hours as required." This phrase is too open-ended and, if those hours are frequent, may not stand up in a wage audit.

2. Set a Clear Overtime Threshold

Specify the point at which overtime becomes payable. For example: "The employee's salary covers up to 40 hours per week. Hours worked beyond this will be paid at £X per hour or compensated with equivalent time off in lieu, to be taken within one month."

This makes expectations transparent and ensures both sides can plan accordingly.

3. Keep Accurate Records

Some household environments may be informal by nature, but you should still maintain timesheets or digital logs of hours worked. This protects both employer and employee by providing a clear record if questions arise.

4. Use the Accommodation Offset Correctly

If you provide free accommodation, note the offset each pay period in your payroll record.

If you charge rent, ensure any deduction beyond £74.62/week is excluded from NMW calculations.

5. Review Pay Annually

With National Living Wage rates increasing almost every April, review salaries each year to ensure you remain compliant. What was comfortably above minimum one year can slip below the threshold the next.

6. Avoid "Built-in Overtime" Without Clarity

Some households offer a single annual salary with the understanding that staff will "work as needed." This can work where hours fluctuate modestly, but it is essential to monitor average weekly hours. If overtime becomes regular, it should either be paid or the contract revised to reflect a higher base salary.

7. Communicate and Manage Expectations

Discuss overtime openly with staff, especially in busy seasons (for example, leading up to events, shoots, or holidays). Transparency helps maintain trust and morale while ensuring no one feels exploited.

Why Clarity Benefits Everyone

Clear contracts and well-defined overtime terms protect both parties:

For the household, it ensures legal compliance and avoids costly disputes.

For the employee, it provides reassurance that their time and effort are fairly recognised.

Good documentation also helps to demonstrate professionalism. Increasingly, high-end households are run to the same standards as small businesses — and clear HR practices are now expected.

A Simple Rule of Thumb

If you're unsure whether an arrangement is lawful, apply this quick test:

Take the total weekly pay (including accommodation offset if free housing is provided) and divide by the total hours worked.

If the figure is below £12.21 (from April 2025), the arrangement breaches minimum wage law.

Final Thoughts

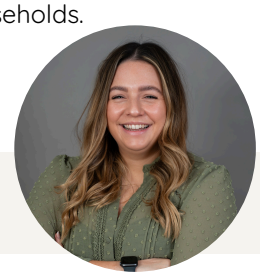
Live-in arrangements are invaluable for maintaining continuity, security, and service quality on estates. But they also carry legal complexity. The accommodation offset is a small allowance — not a loophole. The safest approach is to:

Be explicit in contracts about working hours and overtime.

Monitor total hours regularly to ensure effective pay stays above the minimum.

Pay fairly for additional work or provide agreed time off in lieu.

Clarity, documentation, and regular review not only prevent problems with HMRC — they also foster the trust and professionalism that define the very best private households.



Louisa Ryan - Horticulture & Estate Management Specialist at The Burford Recruitment Company

THE HIRING MANAGER TOOLKIT



At The Burford Recruitment Company, we strive to offer comprehensive support and guidance. We have therefore compiled a hiring manager toolkit, developed for you by our team of seasoned Private Household recruitment specialists.

The pursuit of finding the ideal candidate to fit into your team and the Principal's household requires a methodical approach. It's not just about filling a position; it's about finding the right person who will contribute to your team's success, and align with the household's culture and values. To help you achieve this, our toolkit offers an array of resources that will support you at every step of the way.

Tailored to Your Needs

Discover a wealth of resources including articles, best practices, and template documents that will help you to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of talent acquisition.



Our Hiring Manager Toolkit encompasses a wide range of free resources and tools, including:

- **Document Templates:**

Craft compelling job descriptions and offer letters that attract top-tier talent by using our professionally designed templates.

- **Salary Benchmarking Data:**

Make informed salary offers by accessing up-to-date salary benchmarking data for different roles and regions.

- **Candidate Assessment Tools:**

To streamline your evaluation process and assess candidates' skills, qualifications, and cultural fit.

Visit Toolkit



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Household Management

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Private Personal Assistants
Chiefs of Staff

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Butlers
Housekeepers / Head Housekeepers
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Domestic Couples

Grounds & Maintenance

Gardeners / Head Gardeners
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★★★★★

"Wonderful service, very efficient and pleasant to work with. Maxine is extremely personable and professional. I would definitely use Burford Recruitment Company again and highly recommended them to other job seekers."

Live-in Housekeeper

★★★★★

"My experience with The Burford Recruitment Company has from start to finish been fantastic. Louisa has been very professional and helpful every step of the way. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend."

Sole Gardener

★★★★★

"A positive experience throughout. Jodie was very accommodating with her time, which was very much appreciated. No question was too big or too small, everything answered within a short timeframe."

Close Protecxtion Specialist

★★★★★

"I've had the pleasure of working with Jodie on many assignments and I can honestly say if you require the personal touch and someone who is invested in every role, Burford is the company to use. Professional, seamless agency with amazing knowledge."

Private Chef

★★★★★

"Fantastic service from start to finish from Amelia and the team. Great communication and I was kept well informed every step of the way. Highly recommended."

Estate Gardener

★★★★★

"I would highly recommend The Burford Recruitment Company - This is the best experience I've had so far in applying for a job. Maxine helped along every step of the way in getting my dream job. She was absolutely amazing. The company goes above and beyond to help you. Truly 5 star"

Under Gardener

The Burford Recruitment Company are proud to hold the Trust Index Top Rated Service Certificate, which independently verifies the authenticity of our reviews and recognises the high standard of service we consistently deliver. To review all of our 5-Star reviews visit https://www.burfordrecruitment.co.uk/our-testimonials/

★★★★★

“Absolutely amazing service! Jodie has been super helpful and really lovely to communicate with. Her response timings have been effortlessly quick. With so many thanks as I have now landed the perfect role for me. Thanks so much!”

Private PA

★★★★★

“The team at Burford Recruitment were brilliant, a pleasure to work with and Jodie was always keeping me up to date , helping with my CV and making sure everything was the best it could be . I would definitely recommend using them as they were the friendliest and most professional agency I've ever used.”

Butler / Houseman

★★★★★

“Fabulous staff, very professional and friendly.
Nothing was too much trouble and they stayed in touch throughout the whole process of recruitment. I would highly recommend Burford Recruitment. Thank you so much for making the whole process easy and securing me with my perfect role.”

Head Housekeeper

★★★★★

“I’ve had the pleasure of working with Jodie on many assignments and I can honestly say if you require the personal touch and someone who is invested in every role, Burford is the company to use. Professional, seamless agency with amazing knowledge.”

Private Chef

★★★★★

“Jodie recently helped recruit me for a new position in the Cotswolds. She was friendly and helpfull at all stages from initial interview through to my stating date. It felt like Jodie was working hard to find the right person to fit the role and that it was also well suited to my skillset and circumstances. Thank you Jodie and team.”

Residential Security Team Leader

★★★★★

“Such a brilliant recruitment company from the point of view of a jobseeker. Louisa was the most pro-active recruiter I’ve worked with and very easy to communicate with. From my experience Burford Recruitment always seem to know the places they are recruiting for very well and have been much easier to work with than some of the larger recruitment companies.”

Head Gardener

In the private household sector, trust, discretion, and attention to detail are essential. These reviews show that our approach, shaped by our core values – **Confidentiality & Discretion, Commitment to Excellence, Professional Integrity, and Community** – is valued by the people we work with.









Contact us for specialist support with your recruitment needs:

The Burford Recruitment Company
Phoenix House
Tannery Yard
Witney Street
Burford
OX18 4DQ

info@burfordrecruitment.co.uk

01993 225055

www.burfordrecruitment.co.uk
www.cotswoldprivatestaff.com