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INSIGHT

Choosing Between Two FM Job Offers



Introduction

Two offers on the table is a good problem, and it is still a problem. Both employers have said yes. Both want an answer. Both will tell you their role is the better one, and neither is an impartial adviser. The decision is yours, and it will shape your next two to five years.

Most FM and estates professionals default to the bigger number. That is understandable and often wrong. Salary is the easiest thing to compare, so it takes up far more of the conversation than it deserves. The things that make a role good or bad, such as the authority you really hold, the person you report to, the condition of the buildings and the stability of the contract, are harder to compare and far more likely to decide whether you are still happy in eighteen months.

This guide gives you a method. You will price both packages on the same basis, test what each job really is as opposed to what the advert says, look at the leadership and the estate behind it, and think about what each role does for your next move. You will also get a simple scoring approach, a way to run a regret test, and some guidance on how to handle both employers while you decide.

It is written for FM, estates and workplace professionals at any level, from site-based managers to heads of function. The aim is not to tell you which job to take. It is to make sure that whichever you choose, you chose it on evidence rather than on whoever rang you last.

Decide what you are choosing between

Before you compare anything, write down what you want from the next move. Not what the job descriptions say, what you want. A step up in responsibility? A better work-life balance? A route to director? A sector change? A shorter commute? Money to clear a mortgage? These are different goals, and the right offer depends on which one is the real driver.

Most people discover they have two or three priorities and then pretend to have ten. Force the issue. Rank your top three in order. If you cannot say which matters more, scope or salary, you are not ready to choose, and no spreadsheet will fix that.

Then be honest about your position. If you are comfortable where you are and could happily stay, you can afford to be demanding. If you are under pressure to leave, because of a restructure, a difficult boss or a contract ending, you will weigh certainty more heavily, and that is perfectly legitimate. Just name it so it does not quietly make the decision for you.

- Write your top three priorities before you read either offer again.
- Note which one you would sacrifice if you had to, because that shows what you really value.
- Decide the minimum you will accept on each, such as a floor on base pay or a ceiling on travel.
- Say out loud what you want your CV to show in three years.

The test: if both roles disappeared tomorrow and a third appeared with the same pay as your current job, what would it need to have for you to say yes? That answer is your real brief.

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Price both packages like for like

A headline salary is not a package. Compare base pay, bonus, pension, car or car allowance, healthcare, life cover, holiday, and any on-call or standby payments on the same page, in the same format. Then ask what is contractual and what is discretionary. A bonus that is described as up to a figure is not the same as a bonus that has been paid in full for three years running. Ask how it was paid last year and what drove it.

Pension matters more than people allow. Two employers can offer the same base pay with very different employer contributions, and the gap compounds over time. Ask for the employer contribution in plain terms, whether it is matched, and whether there is a waiting period.

Then cost the job itself. Commuting, parking, uniforms, tools, professional subscriptions and unpaid out-of-hours time all have a price, even if nobody puts it on the offer letter. A role that pays a little more but needs an extra hour a day on the road is not clearly the better deal.

Get both offers in writing, with the job title, reporting line, notice period, probation length and any restrictive covenants. Do not compare a written offer with a verbal one.

- Build one simple table with the same rows for both offers.
- Separate guaranteed income from conditional income.
- Ask about review dates and how pay progression really works.
- Check holiday, sick pay and notice terms, not just the money.
- Take professional advice on tax or contract questions where you are unsure.

Test the scope: what will you actually own?

Job titles in FM are famously loose. A Head of Facilities in one organisation runs a team of fifty with a seven figure budget. In another, the same title means managing a handful of contractors with no say over spend. Do not compare titles. Compare authority.

Ask each employer the same questions. What budget will I own, and what can I approve without sign off? How many direct reports will I have, and how many indirect? How many sites, how many square metres, how many contracts? Who decides on capital spend? Can I hire and remove contractors? What is the first thing the business expects me to fix?

Pay attention to how specific the answers are. Employers who know what the role is can answer these without hesitating. Vague answers often mean the role has not been properly defined, or that the authority sits with someone else and you will be accountable without control.

That last point is the one to fear. Accountability without authority is the classic FM trap. If compliance, safety or service failures will land on you but the budget decisions sit elsewhere, you need to know before you sign.

- Ask for the organisation chart, or ask who the role's peers are.
- Find out who held the job before and why they left.
- Clarify decision rights on budget, hiring and contractor choice.
- Ask what has been promised to you that is not yet in writing.

A smaller role with real authority often does more for your career than a bigger title without it.

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Test the boss and the leadership above them

People do not leave organisations, the saying goes, they leave managers. In FM it is often truer than usual, because the manager decides whether you are supported or exposed when something goes wrong at three in the morning.

You have probably met your future boss twice, in formal interviews where both sides were on best behaviour. That is not enough. Ask for another conversation, informal if possible, and use it to learn how they actually lead. How do they handle a failure? How do they feel about being challenged? What do they expect when an incident happens out of hours? Who do they credit when things go well?

Then look upward. Who does your boss report to, and how secure is their position? A great boss with a weak mandate can be gone within a year. Ask how FM is viewed by the board or senior team. Is it a cost to be squeezed or a function that is consulted on decisions? You will feel the answer in your budget within months.

If you can, speak to people who work or have worked there. Ask the employer for a conversation with a future peer or a direct report, and notice whether they agree. An employer who is relaxed about you talking to the team usually has nothing to hide.

- Ask each boss how they would describe their management style, then check it with someone else.
- Ask how often one to ones happen and what they cover.
- Find out how many people have held your role in recent years.
- Notice how each side treated you during the process, because it previews the relationship.

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Test the building and the estate

You are not just joining an employer. You are inheriting a set of assets, and their condition will shape your working life more than most people expect. A well maintained, well documented estate is a very different job from one carrying years of deferred maintenance and a thin compliance record.

Ask to see the property. Walk the plant rooms if you can. Look at the state of the risers, the condition of the roofs, the tidiness of the records. Ask about the last statutory inspections, the status of any outstanding actions, and the planned preventative maintenance programme. Ask what the capital plan looks like and whether it is funded.

A good employer will welcome these questions, because they show you take the job seriously. A defensive answer tells you something too. Neither is automatically a reason to walk away, since a messy estate with a supportive budget can be a brilliant opportunity. A messy estate with no budget and a sceptical board is a very different proposition.

Ask also about live issues: open health and safety actions, recent incidents, tenant or occupier complaints, and any enforcement correspondence. You are entitled to understand what you are inheriting before you accept accountability for it. Check the current legal position with your advisers if anything looks serious.

- Ask for the compliance register or a summary of its status.
- Find out the age and condition of key plant and the building fabric.
- Ask what was spent on planned and reactive work last year, and whether that was enough.
- Ask what the biggest risk in the estate is, and see how openly they answer.

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Test the contract, the client and the stability

Stability looks different depending on where you sit. In-house roles depend on the health and priorities of the organisation. Roles with a service provider depend on contract wins, renewals and the relationship with the client. A role tied to a single contract can disappear the day that contract is retendered.

If either offer is on the supplier side, ask about the contract. How long is the term, when is the break or renewal, and how is the account performing? What is the client's view of the service? Is there a transfer of staff involved, and what does it mean for you? Take advice on any employment transfer question rather than relying on a verbal assurance.

If either offer is in-house, ask about the organisation's direction. Is there a restructure, a merger, a sale, a relocation or a big change to the property portfolio on the horizon? Is the role replacing someone or newly created, and who sponsored it? A newly created role with an enthusiastic sponsor can be a great opportunity. One with no clear owner can quickly become a target.

None of this means you should avoid risk. Some of the best career moves involve uncertainty. The question is whether the risk is one you understand and are being paid, or rewarded in experience, to take.

- Ask how long the current leadership team has been in place.
- Ask when the last significant restructure happened and what changed.
- Find out whether the budget for your area is approved or still to be agreed.
- Ask what happens to the role if the portfolio shrinks.

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Count the hours, the travel and the on-call reality

Working patterns are where good offers quietly go wrong. A salary can look generous until you realise it assumes being reachable at all hours, attending every out-of-hours incident and covering a rota that never quite fills.

Ask exactly how on-call works. Is it a formal rota, how many people share it, and how often will you be on it? Is it paid, and is time off in lieu given after a night call out? How many call outs were there in the last quarter? What is the escalation route so you are not the first call for everything? The answers tell you how much of your life the employer is buying.

Look at the location properly. Drive the commute at the time you would actually do it, not on a quiet Sunday. If the role involves multiple sites, ask how travel time is treated and whether the vehicle arrangement covers it. If hybrid working is mentioned, ask what it means in practice for an operational role, because the honest answer is often that it applies to the office part of the job only.

Consider also the shape of the working week. Early starts, late finishes, weekend events, shutdowns and project peaks all vary by employer and sector. Neither pattern is wrong, but you should choose one knowingly.

- Ask for a typical week, then ask for the worst week from the last year.
- Find out how holiday cover works during shutdowns and peaks.
- Test the commute at rush hour before you decide.
- Ask what time away from work after an incident looks like in practice.

Score them, then run the regret test

Once you have the facts, put them into a simple weighted scorecard. List six to eight factors that matter to you, such as package, scope, boss, estate condition, stability, hours and location, and progression. Give each a weight reflecting your priorities from the first step, then score each offer out of five. Multiply, add up, and look at the result.

The numbers are not the decision. They are a conversation with yourself. If the scorecard puts one offer clearly ahead, ask whether that matches your gut. If it does not, one of your weights is probably wrong, or there is a factor you have not written down. That is useful to know.

Then run the regret test. Imagine you have accepted offer A. In a year, it has gone badly. What is the most likely reason? Now imagine the same for offer B. Compare the two failure stories. Often one is a risk you could manage, such as a difficult first six months, and the other is structural, such as a boss you doubt or a budget you cannot control. Pick the one whose failure you could live with.

Finally, tell someone you trust both options and watch how they react. You will often learn which one you were leaning towards by which one you start defending.

- Weight your factors before scoring, not after.
- Treat any score you cannot justify with evidence as a question to go and answer.
- Ask which offer you would take if the pay were identical.
- Check the choice against your top three priorities from the start.

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Handle both employers well while you decide

Be honest and courteous with both. Tell each employer you have another offer, because it is true and it is professional. You do not need to name the other organisation or the figures. Ask politely for a short extension if you need more information, and give a specific date you will respond by.

Be careful about using one offer as leverage over the other. A fair question, such as whether there is any flexibility on the package, is fine. Playing the two off against each other in rounds of escalating demands tends to damage trust with the employer you may end up joining. If you would not take the role at the figure you are asking for, do not ask for it.

Decide what you would need to change to make your preferred offer a clear yes, and ask for that once, clearly. It might be a review date written into the contract, a change to the start date, a clearer reporting line or a defined budget. Get any agreement confirmed in the contract rather than in a conversation.

When you decide, tell the other employer promptly and graciously. FM is a smaller world than it looks. The person you decline today may be a client, a colleague or a hiring manager in five years. Thank them, be clear, and keep the door open. Then resign from your current role properly, and be prepared for a counter-offer by deciding in advance what would change your mind, if anything.

- Ask for any extension early and give a date.
- Do not accept a role you intend to leave, or accept verbally and keep shopping.
- Put agreed changes in writing before you resign.
- Decline the other offer by phone first, then follow up in writing.

Offer comparison checklist

- [ ] Write your top three priorities for this move before reading either offer again.
- [ ] Get both offers in writing and compare them in one table.
- [ ] Separate guaranteed pay from discretionary bonus and benefits.
- [ ] Ask each employer the same questions about budget, headcount and decision rights.
- [ ] Meet each future boss informally and speak to a peer or direct report.
- [ ] See the property and ask about compliance status, deferred maintenance and live issues.
- [ ] Ask about on-call arrangements, typical weeks and the worst week of the last year.
- [ ] Test the commute at the real time of day.
- [ ] Complete a weighted scorecard and then run the regret test on both roles.
- [ ] Ask once for any change you need, get it in writing, and decline the other offer promptly and politely.

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Next steps

A good decision between two offers rests on evidence you gathered, not pressure you absorbed. Give yourself a deadline, do the digging, and accept that no choice will be risk free. The aim is to choose with your eyes open.

If you want a sounding board on a live decision, Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management recruitment consultancy. Whatever you choose, start by writing down your three priorities tonight, then build the comparison table tomorrow.

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Maxwell Stephens Recruitment is registered in England and Wales No. 02660883

CONTACT
t: 0207 118 4848

w: www.maxwellstephens.com
e: info@maxwellstephens.com

LONDON
Golden Cross House
8 Duncannon Street
Strand
London
WC2N 4JF