

Mortgage & Protection news

The newsletter from An Independent Mortgage Solution Ltd



In the current marketplace it makes sense to take stock.

loans as a share of family incomes or the value of the home'. At the same event, the governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, said that a Bank Rate rise 'could happen sooner than markets currently expect'. Although he added that any increase 'will be gradual and limited' and that the financial markets expect it 'to rise to only 2.25% over the next three years'.

(Source: Mansion House speeches, June 2014)

Any future increase may have an effect on mortgage rates. In fact, interest rates on some mortgage deals are already creeping upwards.

Aiming to please

As we set out on page 2, stricter borrowing rules have already recently been introduced and that's why it makes sense to take advice. Like other professionals, we are required to attain qualifications and meet certain industry standards, which enables us to:

- Assess your needs and identify the more appropriate deals, with the additional benefit that we'd endeavour to avoid multiple applications (as this may have an adverse affect on your credit rating).

- Save time and effort on your part, by liaising with lenders and other key parties to help keep the whole process moving along.

Some of the topics you may need to consider are covered in this issue.

You may have to pay an early repayment charge to your existing lender if you remortgage.

The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate most Buy-to-Let mortgages.

TARGETING your needs

» With an improving economy, house price growth and decent loans on offer, many will feel that this is the time to take stock of what they'd like to achieve now and over the next few years. Here are a few areas that could be on that checklist:

- Moving to a more suitable home.
- Finally undertaking the much-needed renovations to the existing one.
- Purchasing a first home.
- Expanding an existing property portfolio to add a holiday home.
- Increasing activity within the buy-to-let sector, or deciding to move into it.
- Or it might just simply be a question of making the money work harder by seeking out a better loan than the one currently in place.

Consider the existing climate

After the fall in house prices following the 'credit crunch' back in 2007, we are now seeing sizeable annual growth in the average UK house price - up 11.8% in the year to June 2014. It's currently standing at almost £189,000 (surpassing the 2007 peak), although there continues to be wide price variations across the country.

(Source: Nationwide House Prices, June 2014)

This growth has meant that the Bank of England is constantly monitoring house price movements and already has various options at its disposal to help deliver a degree of control. Added to this is the announcement in June by the chancellor, George Osborne, that he intends to hand the Bank extra powers 'over the size of mortgage

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Welcome.... to this newsletter, which covers what we believe are some of the key issues of the moment that affect mortgage, protection and insurance products - and sets out how we **may help you.**

- An Independent Mortgage Solution Ltd is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

■ Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.



Living the LIFE?

Do you serve steak at dinner parties? And how much do you spend on grooming?

» These are an example of anecdotal questions that may have cropped up in some lenders' affordability checks, as a consequence of the new borrowing rules brought in by the recent 'Mortgage Market Review' (MMR).

Even though the lending criteria has been tightened up over recent years, the 'evidencing of income' and new 'affordability' rules as part of MMR take this further, as borrowers would need to be stress-tested to see if they can also meet payments should the interest rate rise. This is all part of ensuring there is a sensible lending policy to help avoid past problems.

The variables

The borrowers themselves would be one aspect. As will the lenders - who may apply different interpretations to the new rulings. **That's why it makes sense to talk to us,** as we will have a better understanding of 'who wants what' and 'how that may impact upon you'.

It's also quite likely that the vast majority of sales will now require advice. And why wouldn't you take advice for what might be the largest financial deal you undertake?

What it all means

In short, more information may be required to secure a mortgage offer, and it could take more time in terms of both the interview and how quickly it all goes through.

However, as every borrower will be pretty much in the same boat, if you are forearmed you may be able to work the process to your advantage.

Details on income and expenditure

One of the cornerstones of the new rules is that there must be a careful and detailed assessment to the affordability of the mortgage for you - and not just now, but into the future too. Hence the need to stress-test against possible interest rate

rises. Again, different lenders may apply varying interest rate criteria.

So it will make sense to have to hand supportive documentation that may be applicable such as: payslips, bank statements, evidence of any overtime or bonus payments, investment income, business accounts and tax returns.

Should you expect the mortgage term to run into your retirement years, you might also need documentation such as a pension statement and projections.

Talk to us to establish what's specifically required for your needs.

Impact on what you can borrow

You should also bear in mind that the detailed expenditure and income analysis required may lower the amount of money you can borrow - so do consider how this could affect the property buying process or the size of the renovation budget required for your existing home.

Over time we expect the new rules to get bedded in and a clearer picture will emerge that's still focused on sensible lending practices - without being overly concerned with knowing if steak is on the menu, and if you pamper yourself!

Get in touch to find out more.

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Help for existing SVR borrowers...

Back in December 2012, HSBC estimated that there were 4.4m mortgage borrowers who were sitting on their respective lenders' Standard Variable Rate (SVR), equating to 39% of the total market.

The improving economy and raft of decent deals over the last couple of years may have lowered that figure, but it's still likely to stand at a substantial amount. In fact, some of those still sitting on their SVR could be classed as 'mortgage prisoners'; feeling unable to remortgage to a better deal because of the tighter borrowing rules, or perhaps due to changed financial circumstances from when they first took out the mortgage.

However, there may be good news, as 'transitional arrangements' under the Financial Conduct Authority's MMR proposals exist. This can apply if the borrower does not increase the mortgage amount (unless it's for essential repairs) and has a good payment history. In which case, the affordability assessment may not be required and the borrower may be able to move to a better deal.

In fact, once we establish the borrower's current situation there may be further flexibility on what can be delivered; as decisions could be influenced by the value of the property and/or any improvement in the borrower's own personal circumstances.

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Could you manage?



Would you (or your family) cope financially if faced with an untimely death, serious health issues, or other seismic shocks to the existing lifestyle?

» Many of us may feel 'it'll never happen to us', or that 'the state, (or employer) will step in', but the latter options may offer limited support, and often for a short period. As for the former - the protection industry is not short of sobering research on the numbers that have faced serious illness, job loss, or an early death.

Of course, you could dip into your savings. Although this may be a worrying issue for many families, as 40% have less than £2,000 put away. (Source: Aviva Family Finances Report, Dec 2013)

That's why protecting you (and your family) should be an integral part of your financial planning, enabling you to then concentrate on building for your future, without being constantly distracted by the fear of the unknown.

Start somewhere

At the simplest level it should deliver life cover protection to help pay off the mortgage (yet plenty don't even have this), and whilst you don't want to be over-insured, there are a number of health and life stage issues you really should consider (see right, for example).

Of course, you could opt to do your initial analysis online, but you may soon find that decisions need to be made with regard to judging the varying policies on offer, and the subsections within this, such as is it to be 'single or joint cover', 'inflation linked', and so on? That's why ultimately it makes sense to take advice.

What you may also find once we start assessing your needs is the premium could possibly be lower than you anticipated. Either way, a small degree of additional budgeting at your end - such as cutting out the odd take-away,

high street coffee, cab journey, trip to the cinema, etc - could put you well on the way to finding the premium required, without too much financial pain.

You'll also be pleased to hear that the policies tend to pay out too. Latest findings show that for life, critical (serious) illness and income protection, almost 99,000 claims (averaging out at

270 families per day) were paid out last year, which equates to 97% of all claims submitted.

(Source: Association of British Insurers, 2013 figures, released May 2014)

As it can be a complex area, it's essential that you do take advice.

As with all insurance policies, terms, conditions and exclusions will apply.

Protecting the Children



If you think having protection in place is something you could do without, then consider this. The cost of raising a child to the age of 21 sits at over £227,000 - equating to more than £200 per week! (Source: LV=, Cost of a Child report, January 2014)

That fact alone should help focus thoughts on how to meet this expense should an income stream dry up, quite apart from considering the normal living and accommodation costs.

As part of this process, perhaps either the protection of a lump-sum life cover policy should be considered, or products that are designed for families with children, which can payout over a specific timeframe following the death of the insured.

Of course, the possibility of one (or both) parents dying is unlikely, but it could happen. And according to the Childhood Bereavement Network

around 1 in 29 children and young people of school age have experienced the death of a parent, brother or sister.

Consideration 1 - If both parents died and there was no Will or Guardianship arrangement in place to set out future care for the child/children, it's quite possible that they may go into care whilst decisions are being made. This process could take a number of weeks, at an awful time for both the children, and other family members.

Consideration 2 - Not only make sure that there's a suitable life policy in place. But also, in most cases, put it in trust as it may assist any tax planning requirements, along with ensuring a speedy release of funds to the trustees.

Not all protection policies should be written into trust, so do take advice. The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate Taxation, Trust advice or Will writing.

Time for Home Improvements



With a degree of confidence returning to the economy you may feel more inclined to undertake renovations to your home.

» Creating more living space or improving what you have, not only makes your home more pleasant to live in, but could also increase its value for when you do choose to move.

Alternatively, you may decide to avoid the building disruption and expense, and merely secure planning permission ahead of putting the property on the market - as that may add value and could make your home a more attractive prospect for potential purchasers.

So what is one of the most beneficial changes you can make to a property?

Add living space!

You could increase the living space in your property by building into the loft, creating an extension, adding a conservatory or converting the garage.

According to a recent report by Nationwide, adding a bedroom and a bathroom through an extension or loft conversion may increase a property's value by over 20%.

A second bathroom also remains a favourite and the same research shows that creating an additional bathroom could add 5% to the value of an average house.

In general, finding space to add an extra bedroom to increase a 2-bed home into a 3-bed one adds about 10-12%, on average. Whilst turning a 3-bed into a 4-bed home adds around 9% to the value. (Source: Nationwide, April 2014)

Do your homework

In some cases, planning permission has been relaxed so it makes sense to talk to the local planning authority, an architect or builder to see what can and can't be done. And if you live in a listed building or a conservation area, then do establish your parameters in this respect too.

Possibly don't do this

A swimming pool, or hot tub may be what you're after, but in most cases it's unlikely to add value, and may even reduce both the appeal and value of the property.

Compare prices

With the proliferation of websites to tell you what's for sale; what they've sold for; or what might be achieved if it went on the market, will mean you can make a rough comparison within the local area and gauge if the extra bedroom, etc, really does add value.

How we can help

Once you've worked out your sums, we can identify suitable routes to help fund it, should you need to borrow money.

Remortgaging is one option if it's beneficial to change your existing deal, and that you're likely to meet the borrowing criteria.

Alternatively, if you do not require a level of funding that would make remortgaging a worthwhile option, or would not want to jeopardise your existing arrangements a **Secured Loan** may be a solution for you. This is designed for homeowners who can use part of the equity in their property to obtain a loan that would sit as a second charge on top of their mortgage, which may be with a different lender.

Like a mortgage, the repayments are over an agreed timeframe. Of course, you need to consider that the interest rate on a secured loan tends to be higher than an average mortgage one.

If this is of interest, why not get in touch and let us see if we can identify a suitable solution for you.

You may have to pay an early repayment charge to your existing lender if you remortgage.

THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE SECURING OTHER DEBTS AGAINST YOUR HOME. YOUR HOME MAY BE REPOSSESSED IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP REPAYMENTS ON A MORTGAGE OR ANY OTHER DEBT SECURED ON IT.

■ Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

There may be a fee for arranging a mortgage and the precise amount will depend on your circumstances. This will typically be £495. A discount may be given should you take up and keep other products from which we receive commission.

■ The contents of this newsletter are believed to be correct at the date of publication (June 2014).

■ Every care is taken that the information in *The Mortgage & Protection News* publication is accurate at the time of going to press. However, all information and figures are subject to change and you should always make enquiries and check details and, where necessary, seek legal advice before entering into any transaction.

■ The information in this newsletter is of a general nature. You should seek professional advice tailored to your needs and circumstances before making any decisions.

■ We cover mortgages, insurance and protection products along with a number of other financial areas, so do contact us if you'd like to discuss your financial needs: Tel: 028 9028 8585 Email: enquiries@aims-ni.co.uk Web: www.aims-ni.co.uk