

First-Time Buyer's Guide (England and Wales): Step-by- Step from Start to Keys in Hand



Buying your first home is exciting—but it can also feel a bit overwhelming. Here's a simple guide to help you through each stage of the journey, from getting your documents in order, to moving in and managing your bills. As always, I'm here to guide you every step of the way

Step 1: Get Your Documents Ready

Before we can explore your mortgage options, I will need a few key documents. These help me understand your income, outgoings, and credit status:

- ID – Passport or driving licence
- Proof of address – Recent utility bill or bank statement (within 3 months)
- Income – Last 3 months' payslips (or 2 years' tax returns if self-employed)
- Bank statements – Last 3 months showing your income and spending
- Credit commitments – Details of loans, credit cards, car finance etc.
- Proof of deposit – Bank savings or gifted deposit letter (if applicable)

Step 2: Speak to a Mortgage Advisor (That's Me!)

Once you've got your documents and a rough idea of what you're looking for, we'll have a relaxed chat about:

- Your situation (income, job, credit, savings)
- How much you can borrow
- What your monthly payments might look like
- Deposit requirements
- Current mortgage deals (fixed, tracker, etc.)

There's no pressure—we go at your pace.

Step 3: Get a Mortgage Agreement in Principle/Decision in Principle (AIP/DIP)

This is a “mini approval” from a lender based on basic checks. It helps you:

- Show estate agents you're serious
- Know your borrowing limit
- Avoid wasting time on homes outside your budget

An AIP/DIP is usually valid for 30–90 days and doesn't commit you to anything. As your mortgage advisor, I apply for and acquire an AIP/DIP on your behalf, so that's less work and less stress for you. I will need all the documents listed from Step 1 to ensure I am entering accurate information for your AIP/DIP.

An AIP/DIP is not a guarantee of a mortgage and a full mortgage offer would still be subject to an application, documentation submission, and full underwriting by the lender.

Step 4: Start House Hunting

You don't need to wait until everything is perfect to look around—it's good to get a feel for what's out there! But do keep in mind:

- Location & budget – Look at areas you can afford based on your likely borrowing power.
- Speak to estate agents – Let them know you're a first-time buyer; they'll appreciate that.
- Viewing tips – Don't be afraid to ask questions or take notes.

!!! BE CAREFUL !!!

Most estate agents follow the Estate Agents Code of Practice and the Mortgage Market Code of Conduct, which state that buyers must not be pressured into using any specific mortgage broker or solicitor.

However, some estate agents—particularly when dealing with first-time buyers—are implying that you must use their in-house mortgage adviser or their chosen firm of solicitors to view a property or accept an offer. This is not true and is both misleading and inappropriate.

Please be assured that you are under no obligation to use the estate agent's broker or conveyancer. If you are ever told otherwise, you can confidently respond by saying that you already have a mortgage adviser acting for you and that you are aware of the Code of Practice rules estate agents must follow.

If you feel uncomfortable at any point or face undue pressure from an estate agent, please let me know—I will be more than happy to contact them directly on your behalf.

You have every right to work with professionals you trust and I am here to support you throughout the entire process.

Step 5: The Mortgage Application Process

Once you've found a property and had an offer accepted, we'll move forward with your full mortgage application. At this stage, I will also need:

- The property details and estate agent contact.
- Your solicitor's information - I can also recommend solicitors and provide comparison quotes if needed.

Here's what happens next:

1. Full application submitted.
2. Lender checks your documents.
3. Physical valuation booked or auto-valuation completed (the lender values the property to ensure it's worth what you're paying).
4. Underwriting – The lender assesses your loan request and reviews all documents and details specific to your situation. They may request additional documents or information at this time.
5. Mortgage offer issued – Once approved, your offer is sent to you and your solicitor.

I will keep you updated throughout this process, so you're never left wondering what's going on.

Step 6: Solicitor's Enquiries and Searches

- Your solicitor/conveyancer completes property title and land searches and submits enquiries to the seller's solicitors.
- Enquiries are a combination of standard checks and any additional questions about the property you would like explored.
- **This is the part of the house buying process that can take the longest amount of time.** It's important to have a quality solicitor who will be proactive with your case and keep you updated.

Step 7: Exchange and Completion

- Once all the enquiries and searches are completed to your satisfaction, your solicitor should work with you and the seller's solicitor to arrange an exchange date. This is when you sign and exchange contracts to buy the property and pay the deposit.
- Once you have exchanged contracts both parties are now bound to the arrangement. Before this point either party can withdraw with no penalty other than costs already incurred!
- You will also want to ensure you have buildings insurance and mortgage protection in place, effective at the date of exchange. I can help advise on options for both items if you wish. This protects your financial commitments if anything should happen to you or the property before the completion date.
- After exchanging contracts, the next goal is to arrange a completion date. This is the date that the lender pays your solicitor the mortgage loan, your solicitor pays the seller's solicitor the purchase amount and you get the keys to your new property!
- The completion date that is agreed can be affected by a number of factors such as the logistics of both parties moving house, or if you are in a property chain.

Step 8: What to Expect When You Move In

Once you've got the keys (yay!), you'll be responsible for:

- Mortgage payments – Paid monthly to your lender (we'll go through how much and when).
- Council Tax – Paid to your local council.
- Utilities – Gas, electricity, and water bills
- Broadband & TV licence
- Buildings insurance – Should be arranged at exchange and this is often a requirement of the mortgage.
- Contents insurance – Optional but wise to have.

Extra Info! – Additional Costs Involved in the House Buying Process

There are other associated fees in the house buying process that you will need to keep in mind. Solicitor's fees will definitely come into play. The other fees will be variable according to the mortgage product and lender that you apply to. Make sure that you have considered your ability to pay these additional fees as part of the house buying process.

These are:

- Solicitor/Conveyancer fees: £1,000 - £2,500. The solicitors conduct all the searches, handle title deeds and transfer all monies (deposit/final loan) between the lender and seller's solicitor.
- Valuation fee: £0 - £500. This is the cost to a lender to assess the value of the property you want to buy to ensure it is sufficient financial security for the loan.
- Product fee: £0 - £2,000. This is an admin charge from the lender for providing your mortgage product. Product fees can usually be added to the total loan but then you pay interest on it.
- Property Survey: £500 - £1,500. This is the survey of the property that you want done on your behalf to make sure there aren't any structural or building defects. There are 3 different levels of survey depending on the depth of investigation you require. Here is a link to a [consumer guide](#) from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors with more information on the types of surveys.
- Mortgage Advisor Fee: £0 - £1,000 depending on the advisor and product requirements of the client. This is the advisor fee for searching and recommending products for you, making an application, and liaising to successful offer and completion.
- Stamp Duty/Land Transaction Tax: The tax paid to the government for buying a property. In Wales, this is called Land Transaction Tax. The cost depends on the price of the property and whether you are a first time buyer or if you already own additional properties. Your solicitor will formally confirm what your Stamp Duty obligation is. If you have a complex situation, you may need to get qualified stamp duty tax advice to confirm your obligations.

A general guide and a simple calculator on Stamp Duty and Land Transaction Tax are available [here](#). That website is slightly more comprehensible than the government website on [Stamp Duty!](#) The government website for Land Transaction Tax is available [here](#).

Ongoing Support

Even after you receive your mortgage offer, I will still keep an eye on your lender's rates before you complete and update you if I think there is a better rate available for you. In some cases, it could be beneficial to apply for a lower rate, but I will always go through the benefits and risks with you.

After you've completed and moved in, I'm still here to help. I'll check in before your initial mortgage deal ends to review your options and make sure you stay on the best rate.



Contact information


Need help or have questions?

[Make an appointment](#) for a full discussion, or Whatsapp or [email me](#) for quick queries. No question is too small, and there's no such thing as a silly one—I'm here to make this easy for you. Welcome to the property journey!

Best wishes,

Jamie Horsley

Mortgage and Protection Advisor
OSL Financial Services

 **Mobile:** 07467 576419

 **Email:** jamie@osl-fs.co.uk

 **Website:** [Jamie Horsley - OSL Financial Services](#)

 **Facebook:** [Jamie Horsley | Business Facebook](#)

 **Linktree:** [Jamie Horsley - Linktree](#)

OSL REGISTERED OFFICE ADDRESS

11 Dinthill
Telford
Shropshire
TF3 2DT