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How to sell...

A guide for people looking to sell a home in England and Wales

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This information is frequently updated. Search on GOV.UK for **How to Sell** to ensure you have the latest version.

The online version contains links you can click on to get more information.

If you do not have internet access, ask your local library to help.

September 2019

How to Sell

Introduction

Selling a home can be a big undertaking, and the process is often unfamiliar as, on average, we only move every 15 – 20 years. It is really important you are able to get advice from the right people at the right time.

You can avoid stress and speed up the process by understanding what questions to ask, what your rights are, and what responsibilities you have as a home seller. You will find a glossary at the end of this guide for many of the technical terms it uses, including those highlighted in **bold.**

Who is this guide for?

- This guide is for people who are thinking of selling a home.
  First-time sellers may find it particularly useful, but even more experienced sellers need to know what processes or requirements have changed since their last sale.
- It is focused on **freehold** properties.
  - It includes a short overview of how to sell a leasehold property – more detailed information is available in Government's How to Lease guide.
- It is intended for people purchasing a home in England or Wales. More information on buying property in Scotland or Northern Ireland is available through the links.
- It is intended as a helpful overview of the process; it is not a definitive statement of the law and not all of the steps are mandatory for all cases. If you are thinking of buying a property, you should seek independent financial and legal advice.

How to use this guide

- This guide is best viewed online as it contains hyperlinks.
- If you are reading this on a computer or tablet, you can click on the links to go to other websites which provide more detailed information.
- Hyperlinks are coloured and underlined like this.
- On Android and Windows devices, links work better if you download Acrobat Reader.

Understand your finances

When you sell your home, you will need enough money to pay off the **remainder of your mortgage,** if you have one. You should speak with your lender or broker to find out how much you owe, including any possible penalties for early repayment.

In addition, when selling, you may also need to pay:

- any other outstanding debts secured against the property
- estate agent fees
- **Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)** fees (unless the property is exempt or a valid certificate already exists)
- legal fees
- land registry fees
- removal costs
- capital gains tax if the property is not your primary home or includes a lot of land
- for essential home repairs or improvements

It is therefore very important you know how much your property is likely to be worth so you can compare it to the outstanding balance on your mortgage and the other costs of moving. When you know how much money you are likely to release from selling your property, you can budget for your next move. It is important to do this early on so that the final **exchange** of contracts is not delayed. A helpful checklist of costs to think about is available from the Money Advice Service.

While it is currently a rare problem, you may find that you are in **negative equity.** This means your home is worth less than the amount you owe your mortgage provider, and so you may not want to sell your home as you will still be liable for the outstanding balance. If you still want to move, lenders may consider allowing you to transfer the debt to a new property, but you must speak to them as soon as possible and tell your legal representative what has been agreed. More advice on negative equity can be found from the Money Advice Service.

Before you market your home - getting 'sale ready'

Before you begin to think about putting your property on the market, you should spend some time getting your paperwork together and making your home 'sale ready'.

Paperwork

Your estate agent and legal representative will ask for various pieces of information throughout the selling process. You are likely to have received some of it when you purchased your property. If you gather together the relevant documents at this stage, you can avoid future delays and provide your estate agent with key information to share with prospective buyers from the outset.

If you bought your home recently it will have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) which you might be able to reuse as they are valid for 10 years (provided you have not done anything to affect the rating – if you have, you will need a new EPC). You can look up your property's latest EPC through the online EPC register. If your property does not have an up-to-date EPC, in most cases you will need to commission one; however if your home is listed or in a conservation area you may not need an EPC. More information about EPCs, including how to find an accredited assessor, can be found on the Government's website.

Other paperwork you may already have includes:

- HM Land Registry title documents
- gas checks completed by a Gas Safe registered engineer (or Corgi-registered engineer prior to 2009)
- electrical checks – an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) or a NAPIT or NICEIC certificate/report from a registered electrical competent person
- FENSA or CERTAS certificates for windows
- planning permission for any major work carried out
- building regulation completion certificates and builder's guarantee certificates for alterations or additions
- subsidence guarantees/warranties
- damp guarantees/warranties
- party wall agreements (if relevant)
- if a listed building, listed building consent for interior and exterior works
- if your home is in a conservation area, conservation area consent for works
- Japanese knotweed management plans (if relevant)
- specialist asbestos surveys (if relevant)
- any title insurance policies you may have taken out to solve title defects

When you come to sell, your legal representative will ask you to complete a Property Information Form, also known as a TA6 form, and a TA7 form if you are selling a leasehold property. Take a look at a draft version on the Law Society's website and start to gather any information you have access to now. You can instruct a legal representative to check your property **title** and information as soon as you decide to sell. It can save a lot of time as they can resolve any issues before you even find a buyer. Whilst it is possible to do some of this work yourself, you need to be fully aware that any mistakes you make could be very costly and you could find yourself sued by a buyer if the information is inaccurate.

In most cases, when you bought your first home you will have had a cash **deposit,** but if you are selling and buying at the same time you may not have the entire deposit to hand. You will be able to transfer the equity from your current property to the next. If your new home is going to be more expensive, you must always check with the seller that they are happy to accept a reduced deposit.

ID checks

Estate agents, legal representatives and mortgage lenders are required by law to check your identity in order to protect against money laundering. You will need to provide them with proof of identity (including photographic ID) and proof of address.

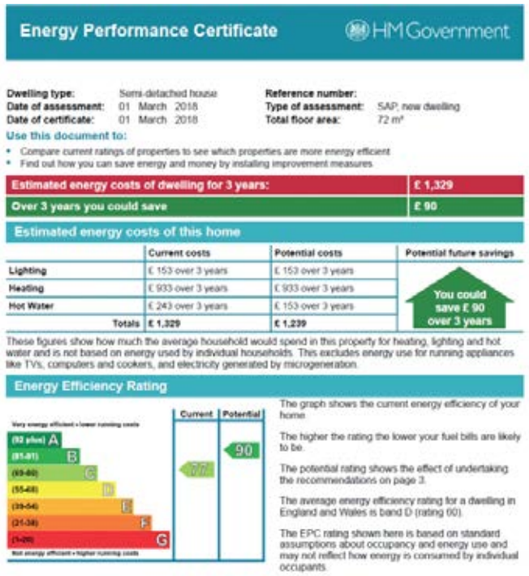
Get the documentation that you will need together now to speed up your purchase:

- proof of identity document – e.g. passport or driving licence. A full list of official identification documents is available on the Government's website.
- proof of address – e.g. driving licence, bank statement, or utility bill (not more than 3 months old). A full list of proof of address documents is available on the Government's website.

Making your home 'sale ready'

Before you instruct an estate agent and begin viewings, make sure your home is looking its best. Investing a little time and money now could improve your chances of selling at a better price. Consider the following:

- **kerb appeal** – when potential buyers arrive at your property, what will they think? Does the property need a lick of paint, or the front garden need tidying up?
- **snags** – you might not notice an unfinished DIY project, but it might put off a potential buyer. Try to fix any snags.
- **tidy, de-clutter and clean** – you should aim to make your home look inviting.
- **review your Energy Performance Certificate** – particularly if the EPC was done some time ago, consider whether it reflects your property now. For example, have you had a new boiler or insulation fitted since the certificate was awarded? Also consider whether there are any recommendations you could implement to improve the energy efficiency of your property.



Energy Performance Certificate — HM Government

Dwelling type: Semi-detached house
Date of assessment: 01 March 2018
Date of certificate: 01 March 2018
Reference number:
Type of assessment: SAP, new dwelling
Total floor area: 72 m²

Use this document to:

- Compare current ratings of properties to see which properties are more energy efficient
- Find out how you can save energy and money by installing improvement measures

Estimated energy costs of dwelling for 3 years:	£ 1,329
Over 3 years you could save	£ 90

Estimated energy costs of this home

	Current costs	Potential costs	Potential future savings
Lighting	£ 153 over 3 years	£ 153 over 3 years	You could save £ 90 over 3 years
Heating	£ 933 over 3 years	£ 933 over 3 years	
Hot Water	£ 243 over 3 years	£ 153 over 3 years	
Totals	£ 1,329	£ 1,239	

These figures show how much the average household would spend in this property for heating, lighting and hot water and is not based on energy used by individual households. This excludes energy use for running appliances like TVs, computers and cookers, and electricity generated by microgeneration.

Energy Efficiency Rating

Current 67 | Potential 90

The graph shows the current energy efficiency of your home.

The higher the rating the lower your fuel bills are likely to be.

The potential rating shows the effect of undertaking the recommendations on page 3.

The average energy efficiency rating for a dwelling in England and Wales is band D (rating 60).

The EPC rating shown here is based on standard assumptions about occupancy and energy use and may not reflect how energy is consumed by individual occupants.

- You might also consider having the **boiler serviced** and an **electrical installation condition report** carried out.

You should be prepared to tell your estate agent all the relevant material facts about your property. Your estate agent will provide more guidance, but broadly material facts are things which may have a major impact on whether a buyer decides to purchase your home; for example if it regularly floods. Estate agents are legally required to share this information with potential buyers.

While you want to present your home in the best possible light, you should not mislead potential buyers by covering up any defects; for example by painting over damp patches. Any problems are likely to come up in the buyer's survey, which could then lead to avoidable price negotiations. If you are particularly concerned about an aspect of your property, you may wish to have the problem assessed by a suitable professional in order to determine the likely cost of remedial works, which you can then present to potential buyers before an offer is made.

If you know there is a significant issue with your that can be addressed with appropriate work, such as damp, it may be worth having the work done to rectify it in advance of putting your home on the market. If you decide against remedial works you should factor that into the price of the property, and let your estate agent know you have already accounted for the existing issue. This means potential buyers will have better information up-front and will be less likely to ask for a price reduction at a later date.

You should also consider whether there are any fixtures or fittings, or even pieces of furniture, that you do not want to take with you to your next home and which you will include in the sale or offer to the buyer for a fee.

Leasehold

If your property is **leasehold,** there are a number of key pieces of information your buyer will need to understand and your agent will have to provide. These might include:

- the **remaining time on the lease.** If the lease has less than 80 years to run, you may need to extend the lease before selling. Some lenders are reluctant to lend on leasehold properties with less than 80 years remaining. More information is available from the Leasehold Advisory Service.
- **a copy of the lease/a leasehold information pack,** which will include how long the lease has left to run (your legal representative can normally obtain this for you).
- the key **terms of the lease,** including service charges, ground rent and event fees
- **all documents you have relating to service charges** including a copy of accounts, share certificate, memorandum and articles, buildings insurance, and recent correspondence from the freeholder or managing agent. These should be sent to your legal representative. If you do not have them, your legal representative will obtain copies from the freeholder or managing agent.
- whether there are **any major works planned** at the property, for example replacing the roof.
- **fire risk** and other assessments (e.g. asbestos).

You should discuss with your legal representative when and how to gather this information, as your freeholder or managing agent are likely to charge you for providing it. You should contact the freeholder as early as possible to obtain information for the leasehold information pack to avoid delaying the transaction process.

More information on leasehold properties can be found in the Government's How to Lease guide and from the Leasehold Advisory Service.

Valuations and price

When it comes to putting your property on the market, the price at which you list it should be informed by your own research and the opinion of local estate agents, but remember that the final decision is yours. A property's valuation is not necessarily the same as the price it will eventually sell for – this will ultimately be decided by how much your buyer is willing to pay. This can be either more or less than the initial valuation and will be influenced by market conditions.

Your first step is to do some research on property websites and/or by looking in estate agent windows to give you a feel for the asking and sold prices for similar properties in the area. You can also find the agreed purchase price for properties from HM Land Registry, all of which can be helpful when deciding your property's value.

You should ask 3 different estate agents to value your property. This is not a formal valuation – a qualified valuer or **surveyor** will charge you for this service – but it will give you a better idea of what your property is worth. Ask the estate agent for evidence to support their valuation; for example, similar properties they have recently sold. A high valuation does not necessarily mean you will secure this price. If you decide to put your property on the market for a price which is much higher than the estate agent's valuation it may take a long time to sell or you may not get any offers at all.

Selling a rented property

Selling a property you currently let to tenants is complex and beyond the scope of this guide. You should consider seeking expert advice, as there are a number of factors to consider including tax (more information available from the Government's website.

Selling your rented property to a buyer who intends to live in it themselves involves many of the same steps as selling a home you live in yourself. You must ensure you are mindful of your tenant's rights and consider the timing of the property sale to coincide with the appropriate point in the tenancy agreement. More information on ending tenancy agreements is available in the How to Let guide. You will also need to consider the tax implications of selling a property that is not your primary residence.

Selling in special circumstances

Probate

Probate is the process through which someone is given permission to deal with the estate (belongings and debts) of someone who has died. This can include selling a home. There are some things to bear in mind during this process:

- an application for probate can take a number of weeks or months depending on the complexity of the estate, but you can market the property while you wait for probate to be granted
- you will need to organise a number of separate valuations in order for inheritance tax to be calculated
- you should consider how you will keep the property safe while it is uninhabited; for example putting the heating on during the winter to prevent damp and paying for home insurance
- check the property is insured if empty as many policies won't cover you if the property is empty for more than 30 or 60 days
- sign up for the HM Land Registry Property Alert service to monitor the property against risk of fraud

More advice on selling a property through probate can be found through the Gazette website (the official public record).

Specialist Retirement Properties

When selling a specialist retirement property, there are some things to consider:

- sometimes charges are accrued and only paid upon the death of the owner
- there may be restricted sales clauses, e.g. the property can only be sold to another older person
- you may have to pay an exit fee to the landlord or management company when you sell the property

Make sure you and your legal advisor check the small print carefully. Advice about leasehold retirement properties is available from the Leasehold Advisory Service.

Selling under Power of Attorney

A power of attorney gives an individual the power to make or help make decisions about someone else's property, including selling their home. Lasting powers of attorney can be used before and after the donor loses capacity; according to their wishes.

Selling property under power of attorney is complex and will depend upon what type of power of attorney is in place; whether it is a lasting power of attorney or an enduring power of attorney. You should consult a legal adviser if you are considering selling a property on behalf of someone else in this way.

How to choose an estate agent

An estate agent acts on your behalf to negotiate the sale of the property between you and the buyer, and is able to list your property on property portal websites. You may be tempted to select the agent who valued your property the highest but you should remember that a valuation is not a guarantee of sale price; they may advise that you drop the price at a later date. There are a range of factors you should consider when choosing an estate agent:

- **online or high street estate agent** – both have their pros and cons. You might want to have an estate agent that you can meet face-to-face, or it might be more important that you benefit from the cheaper costs of an online agency
- **fee transparency** – some agents charge a percentage of the sale price while others charge a fixed fee. Make sure you know what you are paying for – will you be charged if your home doesn't sell? Will you pay extra for post-sales progression? Are there any penalties? Don't be afraid to try and negotiate on the fee
- do you want to do your **own viewings?** – some estate agents offer a cheaper package if you are able to conduct your own viewings
- do they have a **dedicated sales progressor/ team?** – they will help and advise you between offer and completion
- **online reviews** – are other customers pleased with the service received?
- **sole selling rights** – if your contract gives the agent sole selling rights then you will pay the estate agent even if you find your own buyer during the period agreed. Make sure you know what happens after 3 or 6 months – can you engage another estate agent without any penalties? Do you have to give notice to your first estate agent? If you change agents, will you end up paying fees to both when you find a buyer?
- **membership of a representative body** – membership requires estate agents to sign up to a code of practice or membership rules. Example bodies include the National Association of Estate Agents (NAEA) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

You can also use online comparison tools to search for and compare estate agents. More advice on how to choose an estate agent can be found on the Which? website.

It is also possible to sell your home without employing an estate agent, such as through an auction or private sale.

Referrals

The estate agent can be a useful source of recommendations for a legal representative, mortgage broker, energy assessor or surveyor. They may refer you to a company because they recommend the service, and may also receive a payment (known as a **referral fee**) from the business they have referred you to. This is an established way of working, but both the estate agent and the business they refer you to should give you clear, up-front information on any referral fees, including how much they amount to, allowing you to make an informed decision about which business to select.

You should not feel obliged to take up any referral the estate agent makes – it is entirely your choice. Shop around for the best deals for you; although be aware that if you are looking for a mortgage for another home, in some cases multiple lender inquiries may have an impact on your credit score. If you're in doubt, ask your mortgage provider for more detail about how they carry out credit checks.

Instruct a conveyancer or other legal representative

A conveyancer is a legal professional whose role is to do the legal work of transferring the ownership of the home from you to the buyer. You should choose your legal representative shortly before you put your home on the market or as soon as possible once your property is up for sale, as it will reduce delays.

There are various legal professionals who are qualified to carry out conveyancing work: solicitors, licensed conveyancers, and chartered legal executives and CILEx practitioners. These are all qualified and regulated professionals, who can undertake this work for you. The Legal Choices webpages for each conveyancing professional (linked above) contain information on how to check that your legal professional is regulated by the appropriate body.

You should get quotes from more than one legal representative before you choose which one to use. When choosing, you should consider:

- ☐ the **price** – are there any hidden extras, and will they be paid a referral fee for your custom? Do they have a no-move, no-fee service?
- ☐ the **quality** – do they have online reviews? If your property is more complex than normal (leasehold, listed-building etc.) do they have the specialist skills needed?
- ☐ the **service** – will you have a named contact? How will they communicate with you (phone, email etc.) and how often? Do their opening hours suit you? Do they have experience conveyancing properties in your local area?

If you have taken out a Green Deal loan on your property which you have yet to repay, you must inform your legal representative. This is because the obligation to repay the loan remains with the property, so the new owner will have to continue to repay the investment. It is likely that they will want you to pay it off prior to the sale.

Fraud

Selling a home involves the transfer of large sums of money and can attract the attention of criminals. Though the risk of fraud is low, you should be vigilant about common scams.

Misdirection fraud is when you receive an email or phone-call which seems to come from your legal representatives informing you of a change to their bank account details.

It is extremely rare for legal representative to change their bank account. If you are in any doubt, do not transfer any money.

Call your legal representative on a known number (i.e. not the number listed on the potentially fraudulent email) to check.

Sometimes fraudsters try to **transfer the property into their own name,** often using false documents, allowing them to take out a mortgage against it. This is most likely to happen to homes which do not already have a mortgage taken out against them. You can sign up for HM Land Registry's free Property Alert Service to be notified of any searches or changes to the title of your property; so if anything unexpected happens you can take action.

Think carefully about how you use social media – it is not uncommon for criminals to find the information they need to commit fraud from your social media profile. For example:

- If there are open groups on a social media platform such as Facebook containing you and the other people in your property transaction chain. This can also obstruct your legal professional in their work.
- If there are any types of open discussions with others involved in the process on an open online forum.

Showing your property

Regardless of whether you or your agent is showing your property, it is important that it looks and smells clean, tidy and welcoming. Make sure you tidy away any clutter and clean up before any viewings. It can be helpful to have a bed in the smallest bedroom in order to reassure viewers that a bed will fit.

Bear in mind that potential buyers may also wish to see the garden or inside the loft or garage, so make sure your agent has access to these spaces.

You should also ask your estate agent to collect feedback from viewings – this way you can rectify problems or adjust the asking price accordingly.

Open house viewings can be an alternative to the traditional model of separate viewings over the course of a few weeks.

Choosing a buyer

Estate agents are legally required to inform you of all offers made, regardless of whether they are below the asking price or if you have already accepted another offer. Don't feel rushed into accepting an offer. You should take some time to consider the following:

- the **amount of the offer** –would you be happy to accept? Do similar homes in the area seem to be selling for a similar amount?
- if the offer is made by a **cash or mortgage** buyer – securing a mortgage can take more time; have they already got a **decision in principle** from a lender so they know they can get the required loan?
- if the buyer is **part of a chain or not** – a chain is a number of linked property transactions, where a seller of one property is a buyer of another. A chain starts with a buyer who isn't a seller (for example a first time buyer) and ends with a seller who isn't a buyer (for example where a property is sold because the owner has died). If one transaction becomes delayed or fails it can have a knock-on effect on the other transactions in the chain. First time buyers or people living in rented accommodation don't have a chain, which means there are fewer opportunities for delays
- if in a chain, **the chain length,** which means the number of buyers and sellers involved in the chain. The longer the chain the more potential for delays
- if in a chain, whether the **chain is open or closed.** A chain is closed when each buyer has also found a purchaser for their home. On the other hand, an open chain happens when one or more buyers haven't been able to sell their homes, and can add significant delays to the process
- whether the buyer is willing to enter into a **reservation agreement** to show they are committed to buying your property and prepared to pay you compensation if they pull out of the deal

If you bought your home using the support of a Help to Buy: Equity Loan, then there will be additional requirements when you sell your home. More information can be found on the Help to Buy website.You should also contact the mortgage administrator early to ensure the selling process runs smoothly. More information on this is available on the My First Home website.

One option to sell your home may be to consider a company offering an instant cash purchase, but make sure you understand the trade-off involved; these firms may offer a quick sale, but they may pay well below the market price for your home. You should use a firm that is a member of the National Association of Property Buyers (NAPB), as they are signed up to The Property Ombudsman's Code of Practice.

Negotiating

At this stage, while you and the buyer have agreed to a sale, the specifics of the agreement have yet to be decided. Remember that at this point, neither party is under any legal obligation to the sale. Only when you exchange the signed contracts with your buyer is it legally binding.

Some things which might come up during negotiations:

- **completion date** – this is the date by which you must have vacated the property. This may be dictated by when your buyer must move out of their current home. Timings can vary but must be agreed by all parties in a chain. You may wish to consider letting people know in advance of any holidays you have booked.
- **fixtures and fittings** – consider which things you definitely do and do not want to take with you to your new home, and on which things you can be more flexible. Make sure it is clear in the contract (often part of a TA10 fittings and content form) what you intend to leave behind either for free or at extra cost, as this must be agreed with the buyer. More information is available on the RICS website.
- **survey** – if the buyer's survey has uncovered significant issues they might ask you to pay to have them fixed; renegotiate their offer to take into account the cost of the work; or even withdraw their offer altogether.

Enquiries

During the process the buyer's legal representative will raise enquiries. These are questions about the information which they have asked for or received e.g. the title, searches, the mortgage offer or general questions about the property or transaction. Enquiries are therefore raised at different points through the process, sometimes at the very last minute, and will normally be answered by your legal representative but may need your input. These questions are important as the buyer's legal representative has to satisfy the lender's requirements. You are not required to answer questions on condition; questions which are outside your knowledge; or questions which the buyer can find out the answers to themselves. Your legal representative will advise you on answering these enquiries.

Accepting an offer

Once you have accepted an offer, the buyer will instruct their legal representative to commission searches and review the title of the property. They may also get in touch to ask questions about your home, or ask for a mortgage valuer, surveyor or builder to have access to carry out property assessments. These are all good signs that they are committed to purchasing the property.

Remember that your property is not legally sold until you have exchanged written contracts with the buyer. If you have accepted an offer but not yet exchanged contracts, your property is said to be 'sold subject to contract', which means that the paperwork has not been finalised. Although neither you nor the buyer is legally committed to the sale at this stage, you should bear in mind that pulling out after you have accepted an offer is likely to increase delays, costs and frustration for both yourself and the potential buyer, and may jeopardise any property purchase you intend to make.

A few days after you have accepted the offer, check with your legal representative to make sure the buyer has appointed their own legal representative. If the buyer does not seem to be making any preparations for purchase, ask your estate agent and legal representative to check what is causing the delay. Your estate agent may charge more for sales progression if it is not part of the service you commissioned at the start. In order to signal your commitment to the sale, you should remove the property from the market once the offer has been accepted.

What if you get no offers?

It can be disheartening when you are struggling to get viewings, or when the viewings are not generating offers. You should speak to your estate agent and discuss the feedback they have collected from previous viewings. Ask a friend to do a mock viewing and be honest about the areas for improvement.

Get advice from your agent on the following:

- **price –** the asking price should be similar to comparable properties in the same area. What you paid for it originally and how much money you want to make are not relevant to the value of the property now. Remember that a property is only worth what people are willing to pay for it. You may need to consider lowering the asking price.
- **condition –** are there any problems with the property? You might find that investing now to fix issues such as damp problems or unfinished DIY projects will result in more and higher offers from buyers.
- **marketing –** do your photographs do the property justice? They should make the property look as bright, spacious and welcoming as possible. Buyers can find it hard to visualise the potential in empty rooms, so consider putting a single bed in the second bedroom or a table in the dining room.

You may also want to reconsider your estate agent – could a different agent offer a better marketing package? Has a different agent sold a lot of properties similar to yours in your area recently? If you are thinking of changing estate agents, make sure you understand the terms of your contract with your existing agent as you may end up paying fees to two separate agents when you sell.

What to do if there are problems in your chain

A property chain contains multiple people buying and selling homes at the same time. Chains can be tricky because if one transaction is delayed or fails the whole chain can be affected.

However it is important not to panic. Try to find out more details about your buyer – are they in a chain? If so, how long is it? Does everyone have a buyer, or are some people still waiting to sell their home? If they offer sales progression services, your estate agent and legal representative should help you answer these questions, and liaise with the other estate agents and legal representatives in the chain on your behalf to keep everyone updated on progress.

You should also make sure you don't become the 'weak link' in the chain. Have your documents in order, sign and return paperwork promptly, and respond to queries from your estate agent or legal representative in a timely manner.

Exchange

Exchange is when you and the buyer exchange signed contracts and are legally bound to the sale. Neither party can withdraw from this legal commitment without consequences. If the buyer withdraws from the agreement after exchange they may lose their deposit. If you withdraw you may be liable for breach of contract, the buyer's costs and even compensation.

Now that you have legally committed to the sale the buyer may wish to visit the property again in order to measure rooms for furniture, curtains etc, and it is helpful if you can agree for them to do so.

Choosing a removal company

You need to consider how you are going to move your belongings out of your home. You may be able to move yourself, or you might consider using a professional removals company. You can opt to pack yourself or have the removal firm do it for you. This service will cost extra, but can remove stress from the moving process. While being part of a chain may limit your ability to choose your own moving day, you may get better rates and availability if you try to avoid busy times such as Fridays and the first and last days of the month.

When selecting a removals firm you should consider price, quality of service and availability. They will be responsible for all of your possessions, so choose them carefully.

You should get more than one quote before selecting your removals firm. Check:

- ☐ are they a member of a trade association such as the British Association of Removers?
- ☐ do they have insurance in place and are your belongings covered throughout the move?
- ☐ how are their online reviews? If there are issues, how are they resolved?
- ☐ check the small print for additional charges – a professional company will explain them to you

If your property is difficult to access or you have unusual items to move, ensure the removal company visit before giving you a quote.

Preparations for moving

Between exchange and completion you should:

- ☐ inform your removal company of your move date
- ☐ arrange buildings insurance for your new property. This is usually a requirement to obtain a mortgage and needs to be in place to exchange. You should also consider taking out contents insurance to cover your belongings.
- ☐ contact your utilities, water and broadband providers to close or move your old accounts
- ☐ organise for your post to be forwarded to help protect you against identity fraud – the Royal Mail offers a post-forwarding service
- ☐ keep paying your mortgage right up until completion
- ☐ start clearing out unwanted objects – don't forget about the attic or garden shed
- ☐ You are likely to have to move out of the property by lunchtime, so you should aim to be packed and ready to move the day before. The morning of moving day is rarely enough time to pack and clean a whole home, and this often causes delays for the rest of the chain.

If you have a mortgage or loans secured against the property, your legal representative will request your redemption figure. A **redemption figure** is the amount it will cost to pay back your mortgage early, which consists of the remaining unpaid mortgage, any early payback charges and a certain amount of interest. Your legal representative will pay off this sum upon completion, and you should be aware it may be slightly different to the initial redemption figure due to mortgage interest.

Completion and moving

Completion is when your legal representative receives the remaining funds from the buyer's legal representative, and you hand over ownership of the property.

Before you leave you should ensure you have taken all of your belongings and any rubbish, and left behind anything that was agreed in the Property Fixtures and Fittings form. You should leave your property in the condition you would wish to find your next home. Make a record of the meter readings and call your energy providers to close your account. Completion often happens and the keys are handed over to the buyer at lunchtime, so you need to have moved out by this point. However, you should be aware that delays can happen due to many people in the chain completing on the same day.

Complex money transfers take place on completion day, and you should be aware that there may be delays. The purchase money will be transferred from the buyer (or their mortgage provider) to their legal representative, who will pass it on to your legal

representative. Your legal representative will pay off the mortgage and any secured debts (if you have them), stamp duty (if you are buying another property), outstanding estate agent fees, service charges (if relevant), settle their own fees and send the balance due to you to your account. You should regularly check in with your legal representative on the day for progress updates and to tackle any issues which may emerge.

Post-move

Once you have moved out of your home, you should update the following with your new address:

- The local authorities of both your new home and your previous one to get your Council Tax liability transferred to your new property and to ensure you don't keep paying tax on your old one. Similarly you should move your electoral roll registration over to the local authority in your new area.
- utilities and water
- GP and other medical providers e.g. dentist
- insurance company (for both buildings and contents insurance)
- DVLA (if applicable)
- any financial products you have (e.g. bank or building society accounts; pension schemes)
- mobile phone, TV and internet packages
- vet, especially to change your pet's micro-chip details (if applicable)

You should also cancel the property insurance you have for your previous property if you have not yet done so.

Making a complaint

The first step with any complaint is to raise it via that company's complaints procedure.

If you are not happy with the final response from the company, you may be able to escalate the complaint to an **ombudsman.** Ombudsmen provide a free and independent advice service for consumers who want to complain about a company. Once the ombudsman has received your complaint, they will investigate the claim on your behalf.

- All **estate agents** must be signed up to a redress scheme – The Property Ombudsman or The Property Redress Scheme. Ask the estate agent or check online to see which scheme they belong to, and then follow the complaints procedure on the website.
- If you have an unresolved complaint against your **legal representative,** you should contact The Legal Ombudsman.
- if you wish to escalate a complaint about a **lender,** you should contact the Financial Services Ombudsman.

Other professionals may be members of trade associations who can investigate complaints. You can also pursue complaints in court.

Buying and selling at the same time

If you are buying as well as selling a property, check our guide on How to Buy.

Other organisations who can help

Citizen's Advice – free, independent, confidential and impartial advice on a wide range of areas including housing and consumer issues

Money Advice Service – free and impartial money advice, including on mortgages

Which? – free and impartial consumer advice

Home Owners Alliance – provides free expert advice and services for homeowners and aspiring homeowners.

Age UK – free advice on retirement properties

PropertyChecklists.co.uk – free checklists on all aspects of buying and selling

Money Saving Expert – free advice on mortgages and homes

Historic England – free advice on the implications of living in a listed building or conservation area, and how to look after a listed home

Leasehold Advisory Service – free information and advice about residential leasehold and park homes law

Move IQ – tips for buying, renting, selling and moving home

Conveyancing Association – more information on the legal aspects of the home buying and selling process

HM Land Registry – searchable property information (e.g. flood risk) and advice for joint property owners and for boundary questions

Glossary

- **completion** – when your legal representative transfers the remaining funds to the seller's legal representative, and you take ownership of the property
- **conveyancer** – legal executive, licensed conveyancer or conveyancing solicitor who does the legal work to do with transferring the ownership of land or buildings from one person to another. They will generally owe a duty to their client to take reasonable care when carrying out that legal work.
- **decision in principle** – a written statement from a lender to say that 'in principle' they would lend a certain amount to a particular prospective borrower.
- **deposit** – a payment passed on to your legal representative upon exchange of contracts, which represents a percentage of the purchase price.
- **Energy Performance Certificate** – an Energy Label with a ranking between A and G that also indicates running costs and suggests suitable improvements which can be made to a property to make it more energy efficient. An EPC must be provided to any potential buyer unless the property is exempt from EPC requirements.
- **estate agent** – a person/business who markets and negotiates on the sale of property; facilitating the introduction of buyers and sellers. Estate agents must make reasonable enquiries about a property and disclose any important information they become aware of to potential buyers.
- **exchange of contracts** – when contracts are exchanged between buyers and sellers. Legally binding and commits the parties to the property sale/purchase.
- **equity** – the difference between the property's value and the outstanding debts you owe on it.
- **event fee** – a fee payable under a term of, or relating to, a residential lease of a retirement property on certain events such as resale and sub-letting. An event fee is sometimes referred to as an exit or transfer fee.
- **FENSA** – a certification scheme for replacement window installers. FENSA members are certified as competent persons and can self-certify that replacement windows comply with building regulations, meaning you don't need a separate assessment from a local authority building control inspector.
- **fittings** – items in your property that are not fixed down e.g. carpets, curtain rails, free-standing ovens, fridges, freezers and washing machines.
- **fixtures** – items in your property that are fixed to the floor or wall, e.g. light fittings, built-in wardrobes, boiler, radiators, plug sockets.
- **freehold** –where you own the land and the buildings on it outright.
- **ground rent** – A payment generally made annually by the leaseholder to the freeholder under the terms of a lease. Historically many ground rents are set at a minimal 'peppercorn' rate; but it is also common for the lease to provide that the ground rent increases at intervals. For example, initial ground rent of £100 per annum going up after 33 years to £150 p.a. and after 66 years increasing finally to £200 p.a. However, there can be substantially higher increases and more regular changes, so the amount and any consequential changes should be understood at an early stage.
- **HM Land Registry** – the organisation which registers the ownership of land and property in England and Wales.
- **indemnity insurance** – insurance that can be used during conveyancing transactions to cover a legal defect with the property that can't be quickly resolved, or at all.
- **lease** – a document which sets out the rights and duties of landlord, leaseholder and any other party, such as a management company, who has rights and obligations in the lease.
- **leasehold** – where you own the right to occupy a property for a fixed number of years, typically 99 years or more.
- **listed status** – listing marks a building's special architectural and historic interest, and brings it under the protection of the planning system. Depending on the category of listed building and the scope of alterations a householder may wish to make, listed building consent will need to be secured to make any changes that might affect the building's special interest. More details are available on Historic England's website.
- **local authority searches** – a set of information about a property and/or land and the local area provided by the relevant authority.

- **mortgage valuation** – an assessment made by your mortgage provider as to whether they are willing to lend you money against a property. This is not the same thing as a survey.
- **negative equity** – when your home is worth less than the amount you owe a financial provider or other organisation for your mortgage.
- **ombudsman** – an official organisation appointed to investigate individuals' complaints against a company or organisation.
- **probate** – the process through which someone is given permission to deal with the estate (belongings and debts) of someone who has died.
- **property chain** – linked property transactions, where a seller of one property is a buyer of another.
- **property searches** – a legal professional will conduct legal searches when you are buying a property to ensure there are no other factors you should be aware of. Some searches will be recommended by your legal representative for all purchases and others will be required by the mortgage lender to protect them from any liabilities that the property may have.
- **redemption figure** - the amount it will cost to pay back your mortgage early, which consists of the remaining unpaid mortgage, any early payback charges and a certain amount of interest.
- **redress scheme** – all estate agents are legally required to be members of a redress scheme. Schemes may be able to resolve disputes between estate agents and consumers once internal complaint processes have been exhausted. More information is available on on the Government's website.
- **referral fee** – a payment made from one business to another in exchange for referring customers to them.
- **reservation agreement** – an agreement between the buyer and seller where each commits to a property transaction. May include a financial penalty for pulling out of the agreement to cover costs incurred by the other party during the transaction process.
- **reservation fee** – a payment made to a developer to secure a property.
- **service charge** – A contribution payable by a leaseholder typically to a freeholder or managing agent, for a share of the cost of insuring, maintaining, repairing, and cleaning the building.
- **snagging** – defects or unfinished pieces of work in a new build home.
- **sold subject to contract (SSTC)** – an offer has been made on the property and the seller has accepted it, but they have yet to exchange contracts, so it is not legally binding.
- **sole selling rights** – this type of contract means that the estate agent is the only one able to sell a house during the period set out in the agreement. This means that even if you find a buyer yourself, you will still have to pay commission fees to the estate agent. If you engage another estate agent during the period stipulated and find a buyer through them, you may find you are liable for dual fees where both agents require payment.
- **stamp duty/Land Transaction Tax** – a tax paid upon purchase of any homes costing more than £125,000 in England (or £180,000 in Wales), unless you are a first time buyer.
- **(home) survey** – an agreed level of service to advise clients on the condition and matters relating to a property. The homebuyer's survey should not be confused with a mortgage valuation.
- **(home) surveyor** – it is advisable to employ the services of a qualified surveyor to conduct a homebuyer's survey before purchasing a property.
- **TA6 form (or TA7 form for leasehold properties)** – Property Information Form which sets out information relating to a property for sale; e.g boundaries and disputes
- **TA10 form** – known as the Fittings and Content Form or the Fixtures and Fitting Form. Sets out what fixtures and fittings are included in the sale of the property and which are excluded.
- **title –** legal ownership of a property.
- **under offer –** the same as 'sold subject to contract' - an offer has been made on the property and the seller has accepted it, but they have yet to exchange contracts, so it is not legally binding.

Annex: Key milestones

Length varies - if there is little interest in your property, ask your estate agent what you can do

Marketing to selling subject to contract

Get your home sale ready

- Check finances
- Undertake repairs/ home improvements
- Gather paperwork
- Research estate agents

Get your property on the market

- Research local house prices
- Get 3 valuations
- Choose estate agent
- Estate agent collects material facts relating to your home to inform potential buyers

Property goes on sale

- Potential buyers view property
- Research and choose a legal representative to handle the legal side of sale

Offer(s) received

- Negotiate with potential buyer(s)
- Consider carefully which offer to accept

Property sold subject to contract

Sold subject to contract to moving in

Arrange mortgage

- Buyer arranges mortgage
- Arrange to pay off your existing mortgage
- Arrange a new mortgage if purchasing another home

c. 18-40 days

Property searches & survey

- Buyer's legal representative arranges property searches
- Buyer arranges survey of your property
- Additional enquiries
- Research & choose a removal company

c. 28 - 45 days

Exchange contracts

- Agree moving date

Plan to move

Completion and moving in

- Payments transferred legal representatives
- Deliver house keys to estate agent or directly to buyer
- Post-move - notify local authority, utilities providers & other relevant organisations of your address change

Approx. 12 weeks (although precise timing varies)

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