



April 2026

Lifetime ISA Update: *What It Means For First-Time Buyers*

The Spring Statement: Meaning For Homeowners

A look at how the Spring Statement could shape mortgage pricing and household finances in 2026.

Freedom To Buy: The Permanent 95% Mortgage

How the government's permanent guarantee is helping to keep 95% mortgages available for buyers with smaller deposits.

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Featured **This Month**

As the market starts to steady, April is a good time to check in on what's changing.

This month we cover the 95% mortgage guarantee, whether spring is still the right time to sell, the latest on Lifetime ISAs, the Spring Statement, and how top-slicing can support some landlords.

Working **With Us**

Welcome to our monthly newsletter! With over 30 years' experience in mortgages and protection, we offer whole-of-market guidance to help you make confident financial decisions. Our personalised advice and ongoing support are here to ease your stress and keep you informed as your needs evolve.

If you have any queries, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Is Spring Still The Sweet Spot For Selling Your Home?

Spring has long had a good reputation in the housing market. Gardens start to look better, homes feel lighter, and **buyers often seem ready to get moving** after the stop-start feel of winter.

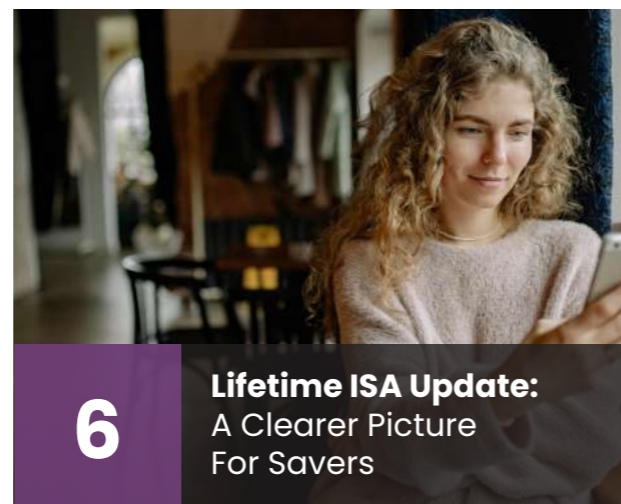


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Freedom To Buy:
The Permanent 95% Mortgage Guarantee

The Spring Statement: What It Means For Homeowners

The Spring Statement: What It Means For Homeowners

There was no big housing giveaway in this year's Spring Statement. No fresh Help to Buy-style scheme, no new stamp duty shake-up, and no dramatic policy move aimed directly at people buying, remortgaging or moving home.

In that sense, the message was fairly simple: this was more about keeping the wider economy steady than unveiling headline-grabbing property measures.

A Quiet Statement Can Still Matter

When governments avoid sudden tax or spending surprises, markets usually prefer it. Mortgage pricing does not move because of one speech alone, but lenders do pay close attention to the bigger picture around inflation, government borrowing and where interest rates may go next.

The Office for Budget Responsibility now expects UK economic growth to come in at 1.1% in 2026, while CPI inflation is forecast to fall to 2.3% this year before returning to the Bank of England's 2% target from 2027 onwards [1]. On paper, that is reasonably supportive for borrowers. Lower inflation tends to reduce pressure for higher interest rates, and slower, steadier growth can help create a calmer backdrop for mortgage pricing.

That does not mean rates will suddenly tumble. But it does help explain why the mortgage market had started 2026 in better shape than many people expected.

What It Could Mean For Mortgage Rates

As of early March, the Bank of England's Bank Rate remains at 3.75%. The Bank has said inflation is likely to fall back to target later this spring and that, if the economy evolves as expected, there should be scope for some

further cuts this year^[2].

For homeowners, that is the part worth watching.

Bank Rate does not dictate every fixed mortgage deal, but it heavily influences the direction of travel. If rate expectations keep easing, lenders can often price more competitively. Earlier this year, some of the cheapest fixed deals on the open market had already fallen to 3.5% for homebuyers and 3.61% for remortgage customers, with more than 7,000 mortgage deals available overall. Brokers described the lowest fixes as being as cheap as they had been since 2022^[3].

So the basic story coming out of the Spring Statement was quite encouraging: no major shock, inflation expected to ease, and a mortgage market that had become more competitive.

Why The Picture Is Not Completely Straightforward

There is a catch - since the Statement, financial markets have become more nervous again because of rising energy prices and wider global uncertainty. That matters because lenders also price fixed-rate mortgages using swap rates, and those can move quickly even when Bank Rate stays the same.

Recent market reporting has already shown some lenders

becoming more cautious, with a few fixed rates edging back up after swap rates rose. Moneyfacts data also showed average mortgage rates had improved over the year, but warned that wider uncertainty was starting to affect pricing again^[4].

A quieter Spring Statement helps avoid adding fresh volatility, but it cannot shield borrowers from everything happening in the wider world. If oil and gas prices stay elevated for longer, that could feed into household bills and inflation, which in turn could make the Bank of England more careful about cutting rates.

What About Monthly Bills And Household Finances?

For many households, the challenge is not just the mortgage payment itself. It is everything around it: energy, food, council tax, fuel, insurance and day-to-day living costs. A more stable inflation outlook is good news in theory, but households will judge that against what they actually feel in their bank account each month.

The Spring Statement did not offer a major direct reset for homeowners. Instead, it pointed to a slower improvement: inflation easing, borrowing conditions gradually becoming less harsh, and living standards hopefully becoming a little less stretched over time.

What To Do Now

If your fixed rate is ending this year, this is probably not the moment to sit back and hope for a dramatic last-minute drop. Rates have improved from the highs, and competition is better, but recent market moves are a reminder that pricing can change quickly.

A few sensible steps can help:

- Review your mortgage well before your deal ends, ideally a few months out.
- Look at the total cost of a new deal, not just the headline rate.
- Check whether staying with your current lender is competitive against switching.
- Think about payment stability as well as chasing the absolute lowest rate.
- Keep some breathing room in your budget in case bills stay higher for longer.

A member of our team can assist you with reviewing your mortgage!

For movers, the same principle applies. This market is more settled than it was, but affordability still matters. A deal that looks manageable today should still feel comfortable if household costs stay sticky for a while. If you want to discuss your options, get in touch.

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

Source Data

[1] Office for Budget Responsibility / GOV.UK - Economic and Fiscal Outlook – March 2026

[2] Bank of England - Interest Rates and Bank Rate: Our Latest Decision

[3] MoneySavingExpert - Cheapest Mortgage Fixes Drop To 3.5% – Brokers Answer

[4] Financial Reporter - Path Of Mortgage Rates Uncertain As Swap Rates Rise: Moneyfacts



Lifetime ISA Update:

A Clearer Picture For Savers

The government has now offered savers more clarity on the future of Lifetime ISAs. They are not being scrapped immediately. Eligible savers can still open a Lifetime ISA under the current rules, and existing account holders can continue paying into theirs while the government works on a simpler savings scheme for first-time buyers.

That is a meaningful update, because for many people a LISA is not just a policy idea in the background. It is the account they have been feeding month by month while trying to build a deposit around rent, bills, travel, food costs and everything else that tends to get in the way of saving for a home.

Why This Matters To Savers

The appeal of a Lifetime ISA has always been easy to understand. It gives first-time buyers a way to make their savings work harder. The promise of a government bonus has made it one of the few products that feels directly tied to the reality of trying to pull together a deposit.

That is also why the recent uncertainty mattered. When the government signalled last year that it wanted to replace the product, plenty of savers were left wondering whether they had missed the boat, whether it was still worth opening one, or whether they should hold off and wait for something new.

The latest update settles that part, at least for now. There is no sudden closure, no immediate switch-off, and no sign that existing savers will be forced out before the replacement is ready.

What Is Changing

The long-term plan is still to replace the Lifetime ISA with a new first-time buyer-only product. The government says this future product is intended to work differently in two important ways.

First, the bonus would be paid when the saver actually uses the money to buy a home, rather than being added into the account as they save. Second, the replacement is intended to remove the withdrawal charge, giving people more flexibility if life does not go exactly to plan.

That second point is a big part of why the change has been welcomed.

Where The Current LISA Has Fallen Short

In theory, the Lifetime ISA has always sounded straightforward: save for your first home and get a government bonus along the way. In practice, it has been less tidy than that.

The difficulty is that the product works best when someone follows the intended route all the way through. But real life is rarely that neat. People delay buying, move area, split up, change jobs, need cash for something unexpected, or simply realise their original timeline was too optimistic. Under the current setup, that can become expensive. The withdrawal charge has long been one of the main sticking points, because it makes the account feel helpful while everything is on track, but restrictive when circumstances change. That is one reason the government now seems to be steering towards a simpler product with a clearer purpose.

What Savers Should Take From It

For now, the practical message is fairly straightforward. If you already have a Lifetime ISA, you can continue saving into it under the existing rules. If you are eligible and were thinking of opening one, you still can.

The bigger unknown is what the replacement will look like in full. A first-time buyer-only product with no withdrawal charge could solve one of the LISA's biggest weaknesses. It may also be easier for savers to understand, because it would do one job rather than trying to double up

as both a homebuying product and a later-life savings vehicle. But there are still gaps. The final design, timing and detail are yet to come. So while the latest announcement brings more certainty than before, it is not the finished picture.

For Now, The Door Is Still Open

That is probably the most useful takeaway for aspiring buyers. If saving for a first home is already part of your plan, the Lifetime ISA still has a place in it for now. The government has made clear that the product remains open while the replacement is developed,

which at least gives savers a firmer footing than they had a few months ago.

For people trying to piece together a deposit one step at a time, that clarity matters. If you want to discuss your options, get in touch.

Source Data

[1] **Tembo Money** – Government issues major update on Lifetime ISAs –

Top-Slicing For Buy-To-Let: When Personal Income Helps Bridge The Gap

For most buy-to-let mortgages, the starting point is not your salary. It is the rent. Lenders usually want the expected rental income to cover the mortgage by a set margin.

In simple terms, they want to see that the property more than pays for itself on paper, rather than only just scraping by. That works well enough in many parts of the country. But in more expensive areas, especially where property prices are high and rental yields are tighter, the sums do not always work as neatly.

That is where top-slicing comes in.

What Top-Slicing Actually Means

Top-slicing is when a lender looks at a landlord's personal income alongside the rental income from the property, using that earned income to help make up a shortfall in the usual buy-to-let affordability calculation.

It is not the standard approach across the market, and it is not

available from every lender. But for the right borrower, it can open up options that might otherwise fall short on rental affordability alone.

This tends to come up most often in higher-value, lower-yield areas. A property may still be attractive as a long-term investment, but the rent might not be strong enough on paper to satisfy a lender's normal rental cover rules. Rather than declining the case outright, some lenders are prepared to take the landlord's wider income into account.

Why It Matters In Practice

The reason top-slicing gets attention is that buy-to-let affordability can be quite mechanical. Residential lenders usually take a broad view of income and outgoings. Buy-to-let lenders, by contrast, often focus heavily on whether the

rent meets a required coverage level based on the mortgage payment and a stress rate. If the rent falls short, top-slicing can sometimes help bridge the gap.

That can be particularly relevant in parts of London and the South East, where property prices are high relative to rent. In those markets, a borrower may have a strong income and be financially comfortable, but still find that the rental figures alone do not quite fit a lender's usual formula. Available From Certain Lenders This is the key point: top-slicing exists, but it is not a feature of the whole market.

Only certain lenders offer it, and where they do, the criteria can be quite specific. Some lenders also expect borrowers to have a relatively strong income profile before they will consider this route. For example, Accord later

widened its criteria to include first-time landlords, but only where there was a minimum household income of £75,000 excluding rental income^[1].

That tells you two things. First, lenders that offer top-slicing still want a strong overall financial picture. Second, the criteria are not standardised. One lender's version of top-slicing may look quite different from another's.

What About First-Time Buyers?

Top-slicing is often more relevant to existing homeowners, experienced landlords or higher-income borrowers. Some lenders have historically excluded first-time landlords from this kind of underwriting, while others have become more flexible over time. That means newer landlords should not assume it will automatically be available to them just because they have a good salary.

Even where a lender does allow first-time landlords, buy-to-let is still a specialist area. A lender may take a cautious view if the applicant has limited property experience or if the rental figures are especially tight.

Worth Knowing If The Numbers Are Close

Top-slicing will not be right for every landlord, and it is not something you can assume will be available everywhere. But where a case is strong overall and the rental figures are only just missing the mark, it can sometimes make the difference between a deal working and not working at all.

For landlords buying in high-price, lower-yield locations, it is one of those features that can be genuinely useful to know about. If you want to discuss your options, get in touch.

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

Source Data

[1] **Financial Reporter** - Accord Makes Top Slicing Available To First-Time Landlords



Is Spring Still The Sweet Spot For Selling Your Home?

Spring has long had a good reputation in the housing market. Gardens start to look better, homes feel lighter, and buyers often seem more ready to get moving after the stop-start feel of winter.

While spring is still an important selling season, it is not a magic shortcut to a quick sale or a top price.

Spring can be a strong time to sell, but only if the property is well presented, realistically priced and launched into the right local market.

Why Spring Gets So Much Attention

There is good reason why spring gets talked about so often. Rightmove's latest analysis says February has the highest proportion of homes going on to find a buyer, with 68.9% of homes listed in that month going on to secure one. March and January followed closely behind, while March recorded the highest amount of home-moving activity overall^[1]. In other words, spring is busy for a reason. More buyers are looking, and that usually means more viewings, more comparisons and a better chance of finding the right match.

Zoopla's February 2026 house price index points in a similar direction. It said February was on track to record the highest monthly number of new listings in a decade, with sales activity healthy even though house price growth remains subdued^[2]. That is an important detail for sellers. A lively market does not necessarily mean you can name your price. It means there are more active buyers around, but also more competing listings.

The Practical Upside Of Selling In Spring

That is where spring's practical advantages come in. Homes often photograph better at this time of year. Natural light is kinder, gardens are starting to wake up, and even smaller outdoor spaces can look more inviting than they do in January drizzle. Buyers also tend to find it easier to picture themselves moving when the days are longer and the school summer term is still ahead. For family buyers especially, a spring sale can line up neatly with a summer move.

Even so, sellers should be realistic about timescales. Rightmove says the average time a property spends on the market is around 76 days^[1]. That is just the marketing stage, not the full journey to completion. Once a buyer is found, there is still conveyancing, mortgage processing, surveys and the usual chain-related delays to get through. So a home listed in March may not complete until early summer, and sometimes later. Spring can help generate momentum, but it does not remove the admin.

When Spring Is Not Necessarily Best

It is also worth remembering that this year's market is not short of stock. Rightmove says the number of homes for sale is at an 11-year high for this time of year^[3]. Zoopla also reports that there

are already more homes for sale than a year ago, giving buyers more choice and keeping price growth in check. That makes pricing especially important. In a crowded spring market, the homes that attract early interest are usually the ones that feel fresh, well judged and sensibly priced from day one.

And this is where spring is not always the best option.

If you are in an area where supply is high and buyers are cautious, joining the spring rush can simply mean facing more competition. Zoopla's postcode analysis shows some higher-value areas are seeing slower sales and are more exposed to overpricing. Realistic pricing matters if sellers want to generate early interest and avoid losing momentum^[4].

There are also situations where another season may suit the property better. A cosy cottage may shine in autumn. A city flat aimed at first-time buyers may perform well whenever mortgage affordability improves. Some sellers also benefit from listing slightly earlier, before the full spring wave arrives, when serious buyers are active but rival stock is lighter.

The Bottom Line

So, is spring still the sweet spot for selling your home? Often, yes – but not automatically! Spring gives sellers a useful tailwind: more buyer activity, better presentation opportunities and a natural point in the year when many people are ready to make decisions. But it is not the season alone that sells a home.

The real difference usually comes down to preparation, pricing and understanding your local market.

Source Data

[1] Rightmove – February Is The Best Time To Sell A House – 6 Expert Tips To Get Started

[2] Zoopla, House Price Index: February 2026

[3] Rightmove – House Price Index

[4] Zoopla – 2026 House Price Growth: How Does Your Postcode Stack Up?



Freedom To Buy:

How The Permanent 95% Mortgage Guarantee Works

For buyers with a small deposit, the biggest hurdle is often not monthly affordability but getting through the front door in the first place. Saving 10% or 15% can take years, especially while rents and living costs are still high. That is why 95% mortgages matter: they allow buyers to purchase with a 5% deposit, provided they meet the lender's affordability checks and product criteria.

The government's permanent mortgage guarantee is designed to help keep those deals available, even when lender appetite becomes more cautious.

You will still hear the scheme referred to as Freedom To Buy, because that was the name attached to Labour's original proposal. In practice, the official scheme is the 2025 Mortgage Guarantee Scheme, which became permanently available from July 2025 after the previous temporary Mortgage Guarantee Scheme closed to new accounts on 30 June 2025^[1].

What The Scheme Actually Does

The scheme supports the availability of mortgages at 91% to 95% loan-to-value, which means deposits as low as 5%. It does this by giving participating lenders a government-backed guarantee against a portion of their potential losses on those mortgages. That backing is there for the lender, not the borrower. In other words, the government is not topping up your deposit

or guaranteeing that you will be accepted. Buyers still need to pass the usual affordability and credit checks.

That distinction matters, because this is not a subsidy in the way some older homebuying schemes were. It is really a market-support measure. The idea is that if lenders feel more confident offering higher loan-to-value loans, buyers with smaller deposits are less likely to see those products disappear whenever market conditions become unsettled.

Who It Is Meant To Help

The scheme is aimed at first-time buyers and home movers buying a property to live in. It is not intended for buy-to-let, second homes, or more specialist arrangements such as interest-only, guarantor or shared ownership mortgages under the scheme rules described by MoneyHelper^[2].

That means it has a wider reach than some buyers assume: it is not just for people purchasing

their first home. Someone moving house may also benefit.

How It Compares With The Outgoing Scheme

In many ways, the permanent version works much like the previous scheme. The old Mortgage Guarantee Scheme, launched in 2021, also aimed to encourage lenders to offer 95% mortgages by reducing some of the risk involved. The key difference now is permanence. Instead of setting a deadline and then leaving the market to wonder whether support will be extended, the government has put the guarantee onto an ongoing footing.

The intention is to end the stop-start nature of support for low-deposit lending and give lenders more confidence throughout the cycle. That should help make 95% mortgage availability feel less temporary and less dependent on short-term political decisions.

What It Does Not Solve

This does not suddenly make buying easy for everyone. A 5% deposit mortgage can help buyers get moving sooner, but borrowing at a higher loan-to-value often means a higher rate than someone with a larger deposit might pay. And while the scheme may support access, it does not change the basic affordability maths. Buyers still

need enough income, a sensible budget and a mortgage that feels manageable not just now, but when the fixed deal ends.

The right mortgage will depend on affordability, product choice and whether buying now fits your wider finances. If you want to discuss your options, get in touch.

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

Source Data

[1] GOV.UK - 2025 Mortgage Guarantee Scheme

[2] MoneyHelper - Government Schemes For First-Time Home Buyers And Existing Homeowners

[3] GOV.UK - The Mortgage Guarantee Scheme

[4] HomeOwners Alliance - Freedom To Buy Mortgage Scheme 2026



Need a Hand with Your Mortgage Plans?

Whether you're thinking about remortgaging, moving home, or just want to explore your options, we're only a call or email away.

Happy with our service?

The best compliment you can give is a recommendation. If you have friends, family or colleagues who could use expert mortgage advice, we'd love to help them too.

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