

Mortgage & Protection news

From Watts Mortgage & Wealth Management Ltd

Watts Mortgage & Wealth Management retain coveted industry accolade...

» The winners of the **2020 Investment Life & Pensions Moneyfacts Awards**

were announced in September in an exciting online virtual event.

With the calibre of finalists being extremely high this year, **Watts Mortgage & Wealth Management** were honoured to have been awarded '**Protection Adviser of the Year**' for the second consecutive year.

Building on the protection side of our business

Commenting on the win, Andrew Watts, Managing Director of Watts Mortgage & Wealth Management said: "We are delighted to have retained this coveted accolade. While our sector has seen a significant number of challenges over the last 12 months, we have continued to build on the protection side of our business – raising awareness of sensitive insurance products, providing excellent customer services, training our employees and all the while, having fun.

This award is testament to the **amazing team we have here at Watts** and for their hard work, tenacity and dedication to providing excellent customer service, appropriate protection insurance and financial peace of mind."



■ l-r: Barry Jones, Kate Johnson & Andrew Watts

Desire to offer the very best client experience

Richard Eagling, Editor of Investment Life & Pensions Moneyfacts, added: "A combination of its expertise in the protection sector and a true desire to offer the very best client experience enabled Watts Mortgage & Wealth Management to take the accolade of Protection Adviser of the Year for the second year running at the 2020 Investment Life & Pensions Moneyfacts Awards.

The firm demonstrated a strong ethos of educating and informing clients to ensure that they have a robust protection plan in place. The judges were also impressed with the firm's commitment towards professionalism and raising standards, not least its "**Watts Academy**" designed to support and develop the skillset of its staff.

Praise was also reserved for the way in which Watts is committed to ensuring **its advisers have an in-depth medical knowledge** and understanding of the many conditions that could impact its clients as well as a wide understanding of medical underwriting at all major insurers.

Watts also excelled in its ability to deliver a robust, highly-detailed process for writing protection, with a **client-centric approach throughout**.

It's extremely high persistency rate and excellent client testimonials demonstrated that it has built up a loyal client base, with a culture of delivering quality service permeating the whole company."

Why not get in touch to see how we could help you.

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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**.

■ **Watts Mortgage & Wealth Management Ltd is directly authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.**

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

Lots to Consider



Continued financial support into 2021 announced for Employees, Self-Employed and Businesses.
(Source: Chancellor's statements, 24 September & 9 October 2020)

With varying levels of restriction in place across the UK, the Chancellor's announcement for further financial support should help mitigate concerns across the wider economy - including your own borrowing needs.

» That said, you may also feel confused about identifying the best way forward on the mortgage (and protection) front. With our extensive knowledge of this marketplace, this is where we can help.

You may also have concerns, for example, if you've been **furloughed**, are a **first-time buyer**, are **self-employed**, or have taken a **mortgage payment holiday**. Whilst we can't resolve every issue, we're fairly adept at finding solutions.

Although, even in our shoes, it can be hard to keep up. With lenders withdrawing from certain markets, then returning; products that were available at 8am, then unavailable at 8.15am; and so on.

Housing mini-boom

On the upside, the Chancellor recognised early on that the property sector can be the perfect engine to help the economy to recover.

It's partly for this reason that the **Stamp Duty reduction** was introduced (see box item), which could deliver a **saving of up**

to £15,000 until 1 April 2021, when the previous rates will be reapplied.

If you then add the pent-up demand from the initial lockdown period, along with a reassessment by many on how they want to live their lives, it helps to create a buoyant property marketplace.

Figures from Rightmove endorse this. It estimates that there are nearly 40% more sales currently going through the buying and selling process compared to the same time last year.

More recently, Nationwide's house price figures set out a 5% UK-wide annual growth for September, equating to the highest annual increase since September 2016.

(Sources: Rightmove, 21 September 2020; Nationwide, 30 September 2020 release)

What does it mean for you?

The positive developments above need to be balanced by what may be ahead. We can't lose sight that we're in a recession, and there will be further job losses. Plus, as the

STAMP DUTY

Applicable to a residential property purchase in England and Northern Ireland.

Up to £500,000	0%
The next £425,000 (the portion from £500,001 to £925,000)	5%
The next £575,000 (the portion from £925,001 to £1.5m)	10%
The remaining amount (the portion above £1.5m)	12%

■ This is applicable on purchases up to 31 March 2021, and thereafter it reverts to the rates in place prior to 8 July 2020.

■ Add a 3% surcharge to the above for those buying an 'additional' property.

(Source: GOV.UK, 8 July 2020)

HM Revenue & Customs practice and the law relating to taxation are complex and subject to individual circumstances and changes which cannot be foreseen.

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Lots to Consider (contd)

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mortgage payment holiday initiative comes to an end, this too may bring problems. These events are likely to have an impact on the property marketplace. Also, no-one quite knows how COVID-19 will play out.

However, it's not as if the government and lenders aren't aware of the issues and both are keen to deliver support.

With regard to what's on offer from lenders, there are still some **excellent mortgage deals** out there. The lower the percentage of loan that you need, the greater the likelihood that there will be a wider range of products on offer, a decent rate and the possibility of being accepted for a loan.

BUT - rates are starting to creep up.*

AND - the strict rules applicable to

'evidencing of income' and 'affordability' still apply across the board.

(Source: *Moneyfacts, 19 October 2020 release)

Other positive initiatives

In addition to the colossal amount of money that the government has pumped in to help us through this crisis, there are additional initiatives that would also be of interest to existing and potential homeowners.

The government intends to **make the planning process easier** for those that might want to add, for example, additional space above their current home, subject to neighbour consultation. Additionally, it wants to deliver greater freedom to adapt

the use of vacant buildings and land in town centres to create new residential properties.

The smaller renovation projects may be easily covered from existing savings, or even money saved from not going on an overseas holiday! For the bigger projects, then talk to us about a mortgage or remortgage to help raise the funds needed.

Finally, from the end of September, you can apply for government vouchers under the **Green Homes Grant**. Against certain criteria, this will provide £2 for every £1 homeowners and landlords spend to make their homes more energy efficient, up to £5,000 per household. Or, in the case of those on the lowest incomes - up to £10,000. It's applicable in England - but similar schemes may exist elsewhere in the UK.

Do get in touch to see how we can help. You may have to pay an early repayment charge to your existing lender if you remortgage.

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UPDATE... Furloughed Workers

■ In total, around 9.6m jobs were furloughed. By September, this number had reduced to around 4m.

(Sources: GOV.UK, August 2020, Office for National Statistics, September 2020)

■ **A NEW Job Support scheme** will launch in November and will run until April (the current Job Retention scheme ends 31 October). The 'OPEN' element of the scheme is designed to protect jobs in businesses that can operate safely, but are facing lower demand due to COVID-19.

- It will only be open to employees who can work at least 20% of their normal hours.

This will be paid for by their employer.

- The Government will then pay 61.67% of hours not worked up to a cap of £1,541.75 per month, with the employer contributing 5% of non-worked hours up to a cap of £125 per month. These caps are based on a monthly reference salary of £3,125.

This will ensure employees earn a

minimum of at least 73% of their normal wages, where their usual wages do not exceed the reference salary.

- Firms will not be allowed to make staff redundant while they are on the scheme.

- Businesses will be eligible even if they've not previously used the furlough scheme.

■ This new scheme will sit alongside the previously announced **Job Retention Bonus**, that's designed to help ensure as many furloughed workers as possible return to (and remain in) the workplace.

This scheme will provide a one-off bonus of £1,000 for the business, applicable to each furloughed employee (who's paid over £520/month), who is still employed as of 31 January 2021.

■ Grants of up to £2,100 a month will also be made available to businesses that may be adversely impacted by the restrictions in high-alert level areas, and if relevant, back-dated to when the restrictions began.

Businesses required to close

■ In October the Chancellor also announced that there will be a 'CLOSED' element of the Job Support Scheme to protect jobs and support businesses required to close their doors as a result of coronavirus restrictions.

- The Government will support eligible businesses (and employees) by paying two-thirds of each employees' salary, up to a maximum of £2,100 a month.

- Plus, cash grants for businesses required to close in local lockdowns will be increased to up to £3,000 per month.

Current Mortgage Issues

■ For those who are on furlough (or have placed staff on furlough), different lenders have set different criteria with regard to assessing income and affordability.

In short, it's best to take advice.



Screen Time!

We can provide advice on both your **mortgage** and **insurance** requirements in a way that best meets your needs - by phone, email, videoconferencing or possibly a socially-distanced meeting.

» One key piece of advice - unless there are mitigating circumstances - is not to sit on your lender's Standard Variable Rate (SVR) once you come to the end of your deal period. As the chart below shows, you'll be paying almost twice as much in interest!

Average Fixed Rates vs. Standard Variable Rate (SVR)

	19 October 2020
2-year fixed rate	2.42%
5-year fixed rate	2.67%
SVR	4.44%

(Source: Moneyfacts, 19 October 2020)

Naturally, there are fees to pay with a new deal, so you need to do the maths. Our discussions would also cover issues such as the merits of a fixed vs. tracker mortgage, and the length of the mortgage deal, such as the 2 or 5-year plans above.

The process

Of course, you can undertake this yourself. However, you don't want to make too many unnecessary applications, which may have a negative impact on your credit rating.

That's why it makes sense to ask us to assess the wider marketplace in light of

what we've established with regard to your financial position and particular needs.

Also, we'd endeavour to help reduce the hassle of filling out forms. Plus hold your hand throughout the process, and liaise with the various parties along the way.

So, irrespective of whether you're new to property buying, or an old hand, we have experience of dealing with all types of clients, enabling us to work towards identifying a suitable product for you.

What if life goes wrong?

The current challenging times may well have focused your thoughts on having some **protection insurance** in place.

This could be **life cover** to deliver a lump sum to your family, if the insured person dies. Or insuring yourself against suffering a **critical illness**, or being **off work long-term** due to illness or injury.

Already have cover in place?

Even here it's worth having a conversation (if it's not a policy that we've recently set up), as there's been so much innovation over the last few years. With many policies

now fully recognising mental health issues, plus lots of value-added benefits, such as medical advice and fitness support.

Also, as a consequence of the current crisis, you may even be thinking about saving money and cancelling a policy. This could then prove to be more expensive, with more caveats, and an age weighting, should you return to start a new one with the same insurer. The insurers are mindful of this and some will allow you to stop paying premiums for an agreed period, with certain rules.

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

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UPDATE... Mortgage Payment Holidays

- Around 2.5m mortgage customers (including buy-to-let borrowers) have taken a mortgage payment holiday. This scheme ends on 31 October 2020.
- Although it shouldn't affect your credit rating, lenders may ask if you participated and might factor that into future loan applications.

THE FUTURE

- Over 70% of participants have returned to making full mortgage payments, but the Financial Conduct Authority recognises that some may need further help and asked lenders to deliver structured payment plans. On-going support may include:
 - Extending the length of the mortgage term.
 - Temporary change to an 'interest-only' mortgage.
 - Deferring payment of the interest or the sums due.
 - Capitalising the interest accrued, such as adding the interest owed to the balance of the loan.
- This support, though, will come at a price, including being flagged on your credit file.

(Source: UK Finance, August & October 2020)

A record **98.3%** of all **PROTECTION CLAIMS** are met

- equating to a sizeable **£15.8m a day** in payouts, and how that plays out for the key sectors are as follows:

LIFE COVER

- 99.6% of all Life claims
- Average payout of: £77,535 (term) £3,465 (whole of life)

CRITICAL ILLNESS

- 91.6% of all Critical Illness claims
- Average payout of £67,573

INCOME PROTECTION

- 87.2% of all Income Protection claims
- Average payout of £17,729

(Source: Association of British Insurers, 2019 data, May 2020 release)



LANDLORDS have proved to be a fairly resilient group, and may have built up a greater resolve than most to face the current recession.

» As it stands, in this strange property market, the average monthly rental income across the UK is still holding up at £987, up 2.1% year on year. In fact, 10 of the 12 regions all showed an increase, with the exception of Northern Ireland and Greater London - albeit the average rental value for the latter was £1,646 - 100% higher than the figure for the rest of the UK (£828).

(Source: HomeLet Rental Index, September 2020)

Financial stability of tenants

The main concern for landlords into the near future will be hoping those rental payments continue to come through, as there's the likelihood that some tenants will fall on hard times as the furlough scheme comes to an end, raising the possibility of void periods.

However, it's not just a case of 'sit and wait', as there are a number of initiatives landlords could undertake to help recession-proof their business.

Time to remortgage?

Buy-to-Let **mortgage rates remain low** although - as with the residential sector - rates are starting to creep up. So, if you haven't already assessed what's on offer, perhaps it's time to take stock. Dependent on the deal you're on, there may be savings to be made.

(Source: Moneyfacts, 19 October 2020)

Alternatively, you may want to consider pooling together your properties into one mortgage, but do be aware there are benefits and disadvantages of this course of action. The same can be said about considering a **Limited Company** structure to help mitigate the tax changes. As well as talking to your accountant about these issues, do get in touch with us, as we can look at your particular situation and help identify what may work best for you.

Make new investments, and/or restructure

Landlords will also benefit from the short-term reduction in **Stamp Duty** fees. As was the case previously, the 3% surcharge still needs to be added, but the current charges could deliver a substantial saving on a property purchase ahead of 1 April 2021.

With regard to purchasing additional properties, the normal disciplines apply, such as:

- don't buy a property that you'd like to live in yourself. You need to **love the deal, not the property.**

- research the area and **understand market conditions.**

- decide on the **type of renter you want.** Properties that can be let, for example, to **multiple tenants**, such as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) could help to spread the risk of any rental voids, as you'll receive an income from various people.

- shying away from **student rents**, in the current climate, and possibly being drawn to a slightly different form of renting - **holiday lets.** The rise of the 'staycation' will increase the demand for this type of property. But again, talk to us, as this is a different form of borrowing compared to the normal buy-to-let loan process.

There is no guarantee that it will be possible to arrange continuous letting of the property, nor that the rental income will be sufficient to meet the costs of the mortgage.

The value of your Buy-to-Let property and income from it can go down as well as up. You may also require advice on the legal and tax issues.

The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate legal and taxation advice, and most Buy-to-Let mortgages.

HM Revenue & Customs practice and the law relating to taxation are complex and subject to individual circumstances and changes which cannot be foreseen.

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■ The contents of this newsletter are believed to be correct at the date of publication (October 2020).

■ 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 do hope that the newsletter is of interest to you, however, please inform us if you no longer wish to receive it.**