

# Could this be the year you get one of these?

Give yourself the best chance of getting on the property ladder with these insider tips

## Get voting

"Even with the government's Help to Buy schemes, many people earning a good salary could be refused a mortgage if they're not on the electoral register," says Anne Ashworth, property editor for *The Times*. "People who've moved back home with their parents to save up often forget to do this and get

stung." It's crucial that the address you give your mortgage broker is exactly the same as the one on the register. Make sure you're covered at Gov.uk/electoral-register.

## Get the credit for direct debits

Having direct debits for household bills such as council tax, gas and electricity in your name will boost your credit rating. "Also, *any* unpaid bills are bad for your credit rating, so if you dispute a bill it might be better to pay it and apply for a refund than leave it unpaid," says Anne.

## What's Help to Buy all about?

The government's two Help to Buy schemes give opportunities to people who can afford a mortgage but don't have the usual 20% deposit (both schemes only require that you have a 5% deposit).

**HELP TO BUY 1** The government will give you a five-year interest-free loan for 20% of a new-build property. After that there's a fee of 1.75% of the loan value, then a small increase every year. "This is great for low-income earners. The loan bumps your deposit up to 25%, which means you'll get better interest rates on your mortgage," says Georgina Partridge of Plutus Wealth Management.

**HELP TO BUY 2** NatWest, RBS, Bank of Scotland and Halifax have signed up to this. The government will guarantee these banks 15% of the value of your home should it ever be repossessed. "Unlike Help to Buy 1 it's not only on new builds, but the interest rate on your mortgage will be higher," says Georgina.

## Prepare to be interrogated

"Many people are surprised to be asked intrusive questions by lenders – for example, what they spend on socialising or beauty," says Anne. "Be prepared for anything and get your budget straight months in advance." Try keeping track of your expenditure on a spreadsheet.

## Credit contradiction?

While unpaid debts can stop you from getting a decent mortgage, it's actually good to have a credit card that you make regular payments on. "Not having one makes it hard for lenders to see if you'd manage a mortgage responsibly," says Anne. "Budget to make certain purchases on it but make sure you can pay them off each month."

## THE GREAT CHRISTMAS-MOVIE GENERATOR

Want to make a smash-hit Christmas movie? Pick one element from each column and you're good to go!

### Your lead character is:

- ★ A lonely single woman (seen, at some point, struggling to carry a Christmas tree).
- ★ A child whose faith in Santa is at risk.
- ★ An elf/Santa/reindeer trapped in New York.
- ★ A career-hungry Christmas scrooge.
- ★ A bratty child at home alone.

### The main setting is:

- ★ A huge, festively decorated department store with lax security.
- ★ A cosy family home with kooky relatives.
- ★ The North Pole.
- ★ A huge, posh house with the biggest Xmas tree you've ever seen.
- ★ A small apartment with a turkey dinner for one in the fridge.

### Someone will say:

- ★ "You believe in Santa Claus, right Dad?"
- ★ "All I need for Christmas is my family."
- ★ "The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear."
- ★ "All I want for Christmas... is you."
- ★ "God bless us, everyone!"

### At the end, the main characters will:

- ★ Look in awe as Santa takes off in his sleigh. He *does* exist!
- ★ Sing a festive tune as the snow starts falling.
- ★ Exchange quirky gifts in front of a blazing fire.
- ★ Snog someone under the mistletoe.
- ★ Tuck into a turkey at a lavishly decorated table.

