Fixing the broken chain

September 2025

Santander

Foreword

Homeownership is part and parcel of the British psych, yet for many, getting onto and progressing up the property ladder has proved far from smooth sailing. The housing market is volatile and this has been particularly evident in recent years, whether due to the fallout from the global financial crisis, the impact of Covid-19, or the market reaction to the 2022 Mini Budget. But in stark contrast to the dynamism and fluidity of the market, the underlying process of buying and selling a home has stayed frozen in time. Without significant attention, the outdated system risks weakening the health of the wider economy and undermining the confidence of the UK economy.

Established in its current form over a century ago, the framework brought about through the Law of Property Act of 1925 pre-dates the World Wide Web, let alone the advent of the smart phone and the digital explosion that came with it. Put simply, someone buying their first home today will experience a process that's almost identical to that experienced by their grandparents' generation.

The Labour Government recognised the desire for change, and, in early 2025, announced plans to modernise the homebuying process in a bid to tackle common challenges and delays that are not only frustrating for industry players and consumers, but also have an enormous economic impact. Importantly, the critical need for digitalisation and data sharing across the sector was highlighted as key to making the homebuying process fit for the 21st century, but the scale of the challenge is largely underappreciated.

The research we conducted, in partnership with WPI Economics and JL Partners, confirms just how big this issue has become and just how ingrained the problems in the market are. Our conservative calculation shows that £1.5bn a year is lost in the economy and by consumers from failed property transactions – alarmingly, this is more than any previous estimates suggested. Even where a chain does complete, the process is often marred by delays and complications resulting in an acutely stressful and off-putting experience for consumers. An experience that some choose to never repeat again - which in turn locks thousands of properties out of the market.

We have the opportunity to transform home buying and selling in the UK for generations to come, creating a market that sets a global standard while delivering lasting value to both the economy and consumers. Now is the moment to seize it.

David Morris

**Head of Homes,
Santander UK**

Executive Summary

Economic cost of failure

- Failed transactions are widespread. Economic analysis shows 530,000 transactions fail each year.
- One in four (23%) adults have tried to buy a property, only for that process to fall through.
- These failed residential property transactions alone lead to £1.5 billion of losses to the economy and consumers in England and Wales.
- But the impact is not just limited to failed transactions. Home buying and selling is being deferred or deterred, causing housing misallocation and additional impacts on the economy.
- 28% of consumers are less likely to move again following their previous property market experience – a figure that rises with age. Conversely a more streamlined process would make 88% of people who recently moved more likely to move again in the future.

Consumer impact

- The complexity, length and stress of the process is having a profound impact on consumers.
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of homebuyers said that the complexity of the process made them consider giving up on buying a home all together.
- The process takes far longer than consumers expect, with only 9% expecting it to take longer than six months; in reality, nearly double the number of buyers (17%) found their process took longer than six months.
- While 46% of homebuyers were frequently 'excited' or 'hopeful' in the process, this was outweighed by the 54% who were consistently stressed during the process.
- Failed transactions take an even greater toll, with 57% reporting increased anxiety, 49% reporting impacts on sleep, and 26% reporting a strain on personal relationships.
- On a personal financial level, the average direct cost to a consumer of a failed transaction is £1,240.

The way ahead: 7 policies to fix this

01 Expedite digitisation across all stakeholders

02 Implement better up-front information disclosure from all parties

03 Create a government-owned, centralised system on which all information on all residential properties in the UK is stored

04 Improve data sharing through the Smart Data Working Group

05 Incentivise the use of AI

06 Disincentivise gazumping and gazundering

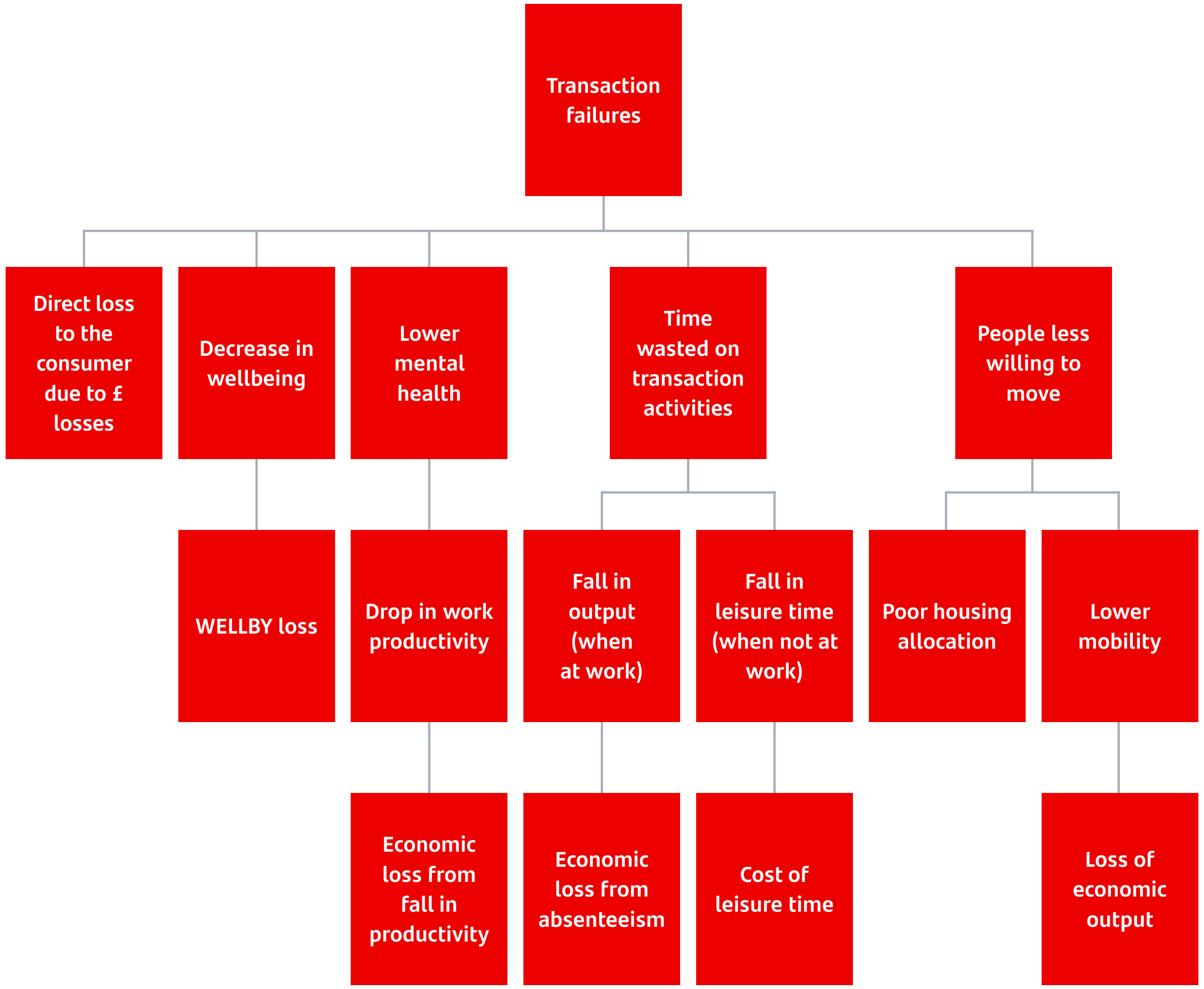
07 Take a long-term approach to support market activity

Methodology

Santander commissioned WPI Economics and JL Partners to undertake economic analysis and survey consumers (including homeowners) respectively.

WPI Economics' analysis and estimations of the costs of failed housing transactions is underpinned by a hypothesised Theory of Change (ToC). This ToC shows the channels through which WPI Economics expect failed housing transactions to lead to a cost (direct consumer costs, wellbeing costs, work output costs, leisure time costs, and costs associated with poor allocation of housing).

This is set out in the diagram below:



J.L. Partners conducted an online survey of 2,363 respondents, with an oversample of those who had experienced failed property transactions. Fieldwork was conducted between July 2 and July 8 2025, with quotas and weighting to ensure that the results were nationally representative. The margin of error is 2%.

The need for reform

The UK home buying process is outdated, inefficient, and a barrier to Labour's commitment to resolving the housing crisis. Characterised by lengthy delays, high costs, and a high risk of transaction failure, the way residential property is transacted in this country exacerbates housing market inefficiencies, discourages mobility, and undermines affordability.

As such, a bold approach to modernising the home buying process must sit alongside policy focused on addressing supply and affordability if the Government is to deliver real change in the housing market.

Marginal gains in the housing market

The residential property market has seen some green shoots of recovery of late, fuelled by a slight increase in stock, an improvement in lending policies and steadily reducing interest rates, but structural inefficiencies and affordability challenges persist, holding back more radical progress.

The latest ONS data points to steady improvement in transactions – the market is stabilising following volatility around April's Stamp Duty deadline. June saw an estimated 13% more transactions than in May, although this represented a marginal annual improvement of just 1%. Mortgage lending approvals have been steadily climbing, as the Bank of England cuts the Base Rate, increasing buyer confidence and supporting market activity.

But these changes represent minimal gains when put into broader context. 2024 saw an estimated 970,000 housing transactions in England and Wales. While this is an 8.1% increase on 2023, that total was still lower than pre-Covid levels (down 6.6% on 2019).

On a macro-level, new housing supply lags behind Government ambitions. High house price-to-earnings ratios and rising rents hold back homeownership, with the average first time buyer age rising to 34 in 2023-4, two years older than the average age in 2019-2020.

Tackling a hidden aspect of the housing crisis

Labour's 2024 manifesto recognised several of these issues, declaring a crisis in the UK housing market. Solving this won't be simple. Problems of supply, affordability and process are deep-seated.

Since coming to power, the Government has prioritised supply, with a focus on its headline commitment to facilitate the building of 1.5m homes. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has begun to tackle the biggest barrier to this target, through a radical approach to planning reform. The Government has also targeted funding and attention to unlock stalled development sites and support SME builders. Labour has, in addition, looked at the demand side, focusing on affordability barriers, through provisions for increasing social housing, but also a permanent Mortgage Guarantee Scheme for first-time buyers.

There have also been important regulatory changes to support growth. In March 2025, Santander was the first major lender to reduce residential affordability rates in response to FCA guidance to lenders allowing more flexibility with the stress testing rules. In July, we welcomed the PRA's updated guidance allowing lenders to increase their share of high LTI loans provided the overall flow across the industry remains within 15% of new mortgage lending per year, which enables us to lend to 5,000 more first time buyers and unlocks up to 24% more in available borrowing.

With less political fanfare, but no less importance, Ministers have recognised the need to reform the practicalities of the home buying process too. In February 2025, Housing and Planning Minister, Matthew Pennycook announced plans for modernisation, focusing on digitalisation, increasing data sharing and digital ID. At the time he argued that:

"Under a fully digitalised home buying and selling process, the information key parties need – from mortgage companies to surveyors – will be within reach immediately, with the necessary identity checks carried out once. Clear information early on will mean there are no surprises late on in the transaction which might cause it to fall through, so instead the transaction is completed smoothly without unnecessary time, energy or money spent."

Modernisation would directly support the housing agenda by increasing market efficiency, supply and therefore improving affordability. Streamlined processes can reduce transaction times, enabling faster turnover of properties and freeing up housing stock. Lowering transaction costs and risks makes homeownership more accessible, particularly for first-time buyers. Tackling process issues will support wider objectives to support economic growth, with a more efficient housing market encouraging labour mobility, boosting regional economic development and productivity.

The home buying process: a century of complexity

As it stands, though, the UK home buying process, particularly in England and Wales, relies on antiquated systems and practices that create inefficiencies and inequities, and this is exacerbating the wider housing crisis.

The way we buy and sell residential property in England and Wales is based on practices established more than a century ago, formalised in its current structure through the Law of Property Act of 1925. This legislation established the framework for conveyancing, including the use of deeds, contracts of sale, and the registration of land titles, which still underpins the process today.

While elements like local authority searches and mortgage agreements have evolved later, particularly with the growth of the mortgage market post-World War II, the core process for offer, acceptance, exchange of contracts, and completion, has remained largely unchanged since 1925.

One hundred years on, the UK home buying process is unsurprisingly in need of a refresh. The process is too complicated, too slow, too paper-based, too costly and too often contributes to the fact that one in three property transactions fall through. The Government estimates the cost of this is around £400 million a year, although as this report shows, this figure underestimates the scale of cost to consumers, and the broader economic impact.

Despite clear government interest, there is still a significant underappreciation of the scale of this issue, and the socio-economic impact of a stressful and complex process, and critically, the impact on consumer outcomes.

Chapter 2

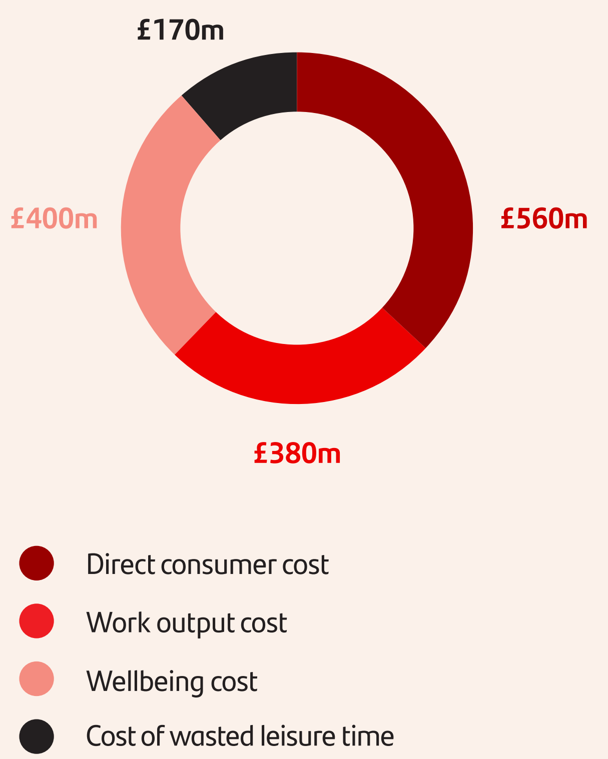
The cost of failure: The £1.5bn annual cost of the broken system

WPI Economics' research has calculated that around 530,000 transactions fail each year in England and Wales. Meanwhile, a JL Partners survey of over 2,300 consumers to support WPI Economics' analysis shows that some 23% of all UK adults had tried at some point to buy a house or flat, only for that process to fall through.

The economic cost of this is huge. WPI's analysis identifies £1.5bn of yearly losses associated with failed property transactions – let alone the additional economic cost of delays, uncertainty and a poor customer experience.

In its analysis, WPI Economics covers direct consumer costs, work output cost, wellbeing cost, and cost of wasted leisure time:

Annual cost of failed housing transations



Direct costs to consumers

The economic analysis reveals that **around £560 million each year is wasted on failed transactions in England and Wales through direct costs to the consumer.** Outlays typically include mortgage fees and solicitors' fees – which, for consumers, cannot be recouped. This is 40% higher than the £400 million estimate used by the Government as recently as February 2025, showing the problem is even larger than expected[1].

WPI's calculation is based on the average inflation-adjusted cost reported by those who experience a recent transaction failure – with approximately 85% of people who experienced a transaction reporting some sort of financial loss.

The average cost to consumers is £1,240 per failed transaction – while one in five people with a recent experience of a failed purchase reported losses in excess of £2,000.

Economic costs

The economic costs of failed housing transactions are much broader, with the broken property transaction process ultimately damaging UK productivity.

A conservative calculation of the broader, additional cost of failed transactions alone is £950 million a year. This is comprised of three components – work output costs, wellbeing costs and leisure costs.

While not all failures are preventable, it is critical to improve the process and make it more efficient to reduce the economic cost and productivity losses, while reducing the overall impact on consumers.

[1] Growth boost to support more first time buyers (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2025)

Work output costs

Total costs to the economy of failed transactions from lost work output amount to £380 million a year.

Firstly, there is a cost of lost output caused by working-age buyers missing work to complete purchase-related activities during failed transactions, amounting to £270 million annually, given the average Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked:

43% of recent buyers report wasting time on a transaction failure

A typical buyer who reported wasting time estimated they spent 100 hours engaging in activities related to a failed transaction

The majority (nearly 60%) of those activities were taken during regular work hours – time that could have otherwise been spent being economically productive

Secondly, there is a cost of lost work output by these buyers due to stress and mental health issues caused by failed transactions, totalling £110 million annually.

For instance, 52% of recent buyers reported negative mental health impacts as a result of a housing transaction failure, with issues including anxiety and insomnia. For one in three people, these negative feelings were reported to lead to a fall in workplace productivity – with over 90,000 individuals affected each year.

Wellbeing costs

More broadly there is an effect on the wellbeing of many who experience failed transactions, which carries an economic impact. This can be quantified through the WELLBY (Well-being adjusted life-year) methodology.

WELLBY methodology

WELLBY is a calculation used to understand monetary value of improvements, or declines, in life satisfaction. It is, for instance, used by HMRC in its financial modelling.

Life satisfaction is typically calculated in surveys, such as that undertaken by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) by asking respondents questions such as 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?'. Respondents provide an answer on a 1-10 scale.

To calculate WELLBY, statisticians convert this score to a new scale, with each point on the new scale equating to financial figure representing economic output. It assumed that the more satisfied people are with their lives, the more economically productive they are (if of working age).

In calculating the figure, WPI Economics has taken the difference between a buyer or seller's average reported wellbeing currently, and during the experience of a transaction failure and multiplied it by an inflation adjusted WELLBY value. Conservatively, it is assumed that the reduction in wellbeing is only experienced during a portion of the total duration of a failed transaction. In total, the financial value of this loss in wellbeing is estimated to be £400 million a year.

Experience of a failed housing transaction was associated with a fall in wellbeing by 0.5 on a 1-6 scale. Whenever converted to the 0-10 wellbeing scale, the value of a one-year long point drop is approximately £16,600. However, given transactions do not take a whole year, the experience of transaction failure is associated with an average wellbeing loss equivalent to £750 in value.

Cost of wasted leisure time

Finally, time wasted on purchase-related activities also happens during leisure time (58%), or eats into this time by forcing consumers involved in a property purchase to work late or take paid time off. The financial value of this to the economy is £170 million annually.

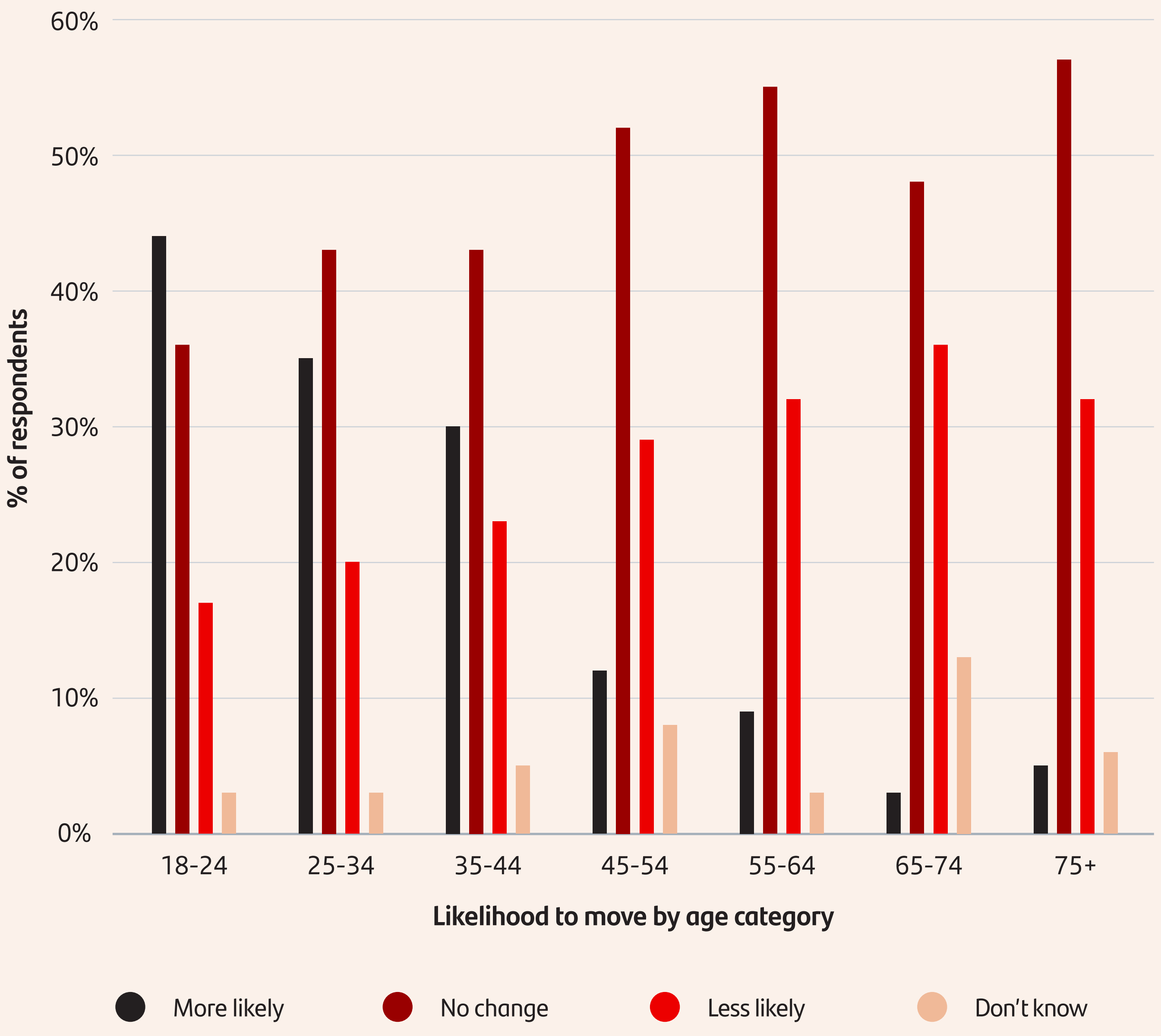
To break down the total, on average, time spent doing admin work versus engaging in other activities costs approximately £10 per hour. The average person who reported wasting time on purchase related activities spends around 70 hours of their leisure time on those activities.

Housing misallocation

Beyond failed transactions and the very real costs associated with them, difficult processes act as barriers to families moving homes. This causes housing misallocation and reduces the liquidity of the property market. This in turn causes socio-economic damage, exacerbating affordability issues even further.

Strikingly, just 17% of consumers are more likely to move again following their experience of the property market. By contrast, 28% are less likely to move – a figure that increases with age.

Likelihood to move by age following a previous experience of the transaction process



Looking at it another way, a more streamlined process would make 88% of people who recently purchased a home more likely to move again, and 41% much more likely to do so. This figure jumps to 47% for people who have experience of a failed transaction. If we are looking to stimulate greater liquidity in the housing market, a stressful and laborious process is a critical disincentive.

There is also a clear indication that this also reduces homeowners' appetite to downsize, with older generations less likely to move following their property market experiences. More than a third (36%) of 65–74-year-olds said they are unlikely to move following a prior experience of the property market. Conversely, four in ten 65–74-year-olds (40%) would be more likely to move in the future if the process was streamlined.

A reduced likelihood of downsizing has knock-on impacts across the housing market, including reducing the supply of properties available to families looking to grow. There are also repercussions in terms of planning implications for Government. For instance, while New Towns may prove an attractive option for first-time buyers, with older generations less willing to move, it will be more difficult to build demographically diverse communities.

WPI Economics' analysis of wider academic research demonstrates that housing misallocation has a clear and consistent negative impact on jobs and productivity. Economists from the University of Glasgow have argued that "by reducing the size of the labour pool for businesses, as well as restricting workers' access to high-productivity jobs and activities in city centres, poor matching of housing opportunities... in big cities weakens agglomeration effects and productivity"[2].

Within the UK, household misallocation also plays a much broader role in capital misallocation, due to the unusual amount of household wealth tied up in housing stock relative to international comparators. Barriers to household transactions therefore are also substantial barriers to the movement of capital and investment, and thus economic growth in the UK, as argued by Michael Tory of Turning the Page[3].

It is clear then, that reform and innovation in the housing market will drive significant socio-economic benefits beyond those associated with failed transactions. The size of the prize is substantial.

[2] How does the housing market affect UK productivity? (Economics Observatory, 2023)
[3] Capital misallocation is a root cause problem for the UK economy (Turning the Page, 2025)

Chapter 3

The consumer impact of complexity

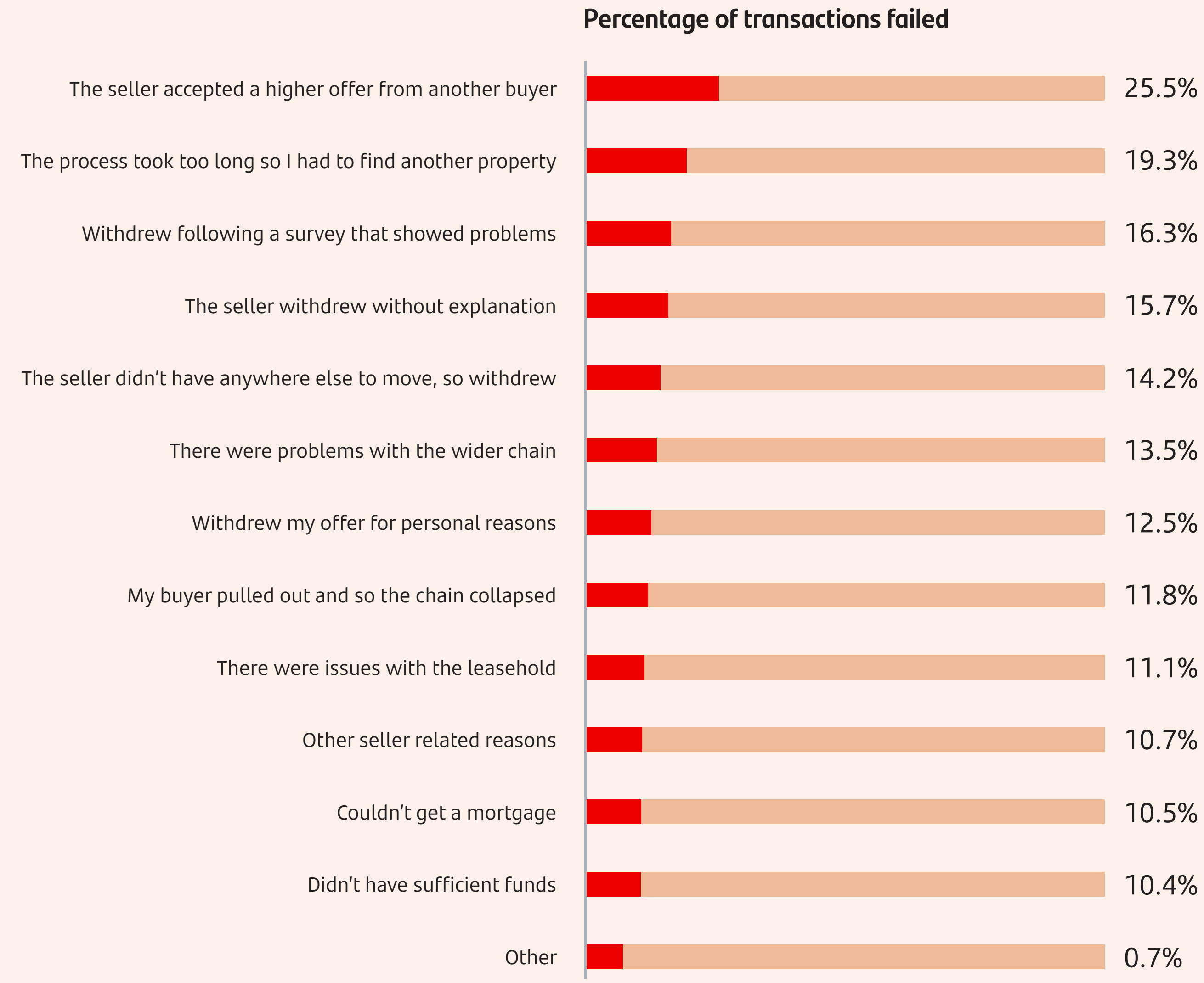
As the previous chapter demonstrates, home buying is notoriously stressful, and takes an emotional toll on those involved in the process as a result of the time that must be invested – often without success.

In fact, 23% of adults in England and Wales have experienced a property transaction falling through at some point. This means almost one in four people have undertaken a process that saw them invest time, money and emotional energy, only to not reach the end result.

Worryingly, this is more prevalent among younger generations: 36% for 25–34-year-olds and 27% for 35–44-year-olds. This means it is more likely that those with dependents in their households have been disproportionately affected, such as young families. London also appears as a hotspot for failure, with 29% experiencing fall-throughs.

The reasons behind a transaction failing are many and varied:

Reason why recent property transactions failed



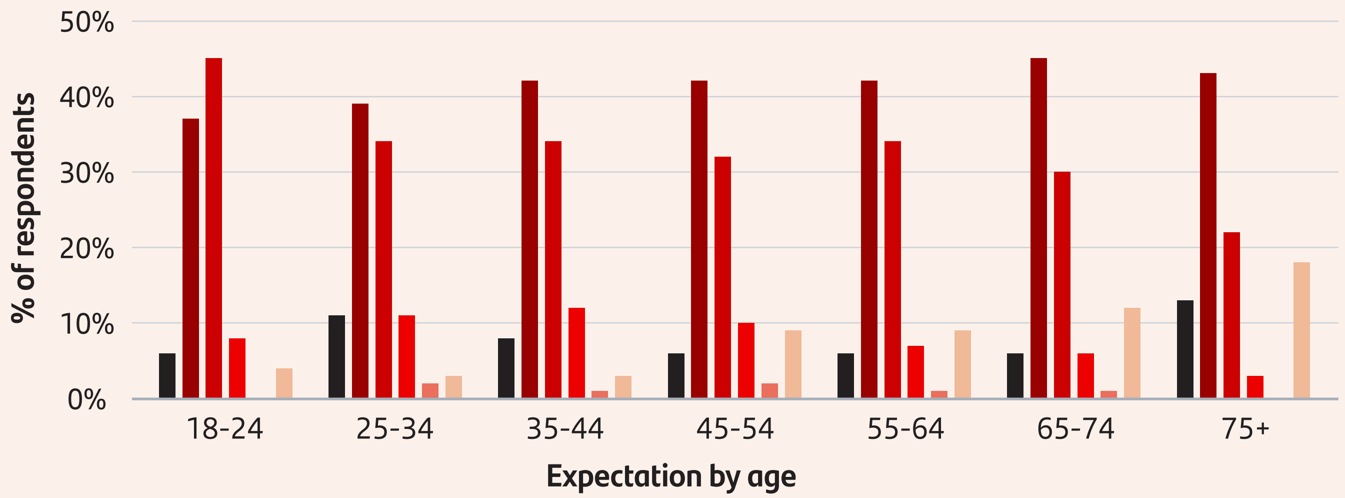
Time kills deals as reality bites

The second most frequently cited factor in a transaction failing was the time taken - far longer than buyers expected. 50% of respondents expected their purchase process to take under three months, but only 41% reported that it did. Only 9% thought it would take more than six months, whereas in practice 17% found that they were in the process for over six months.

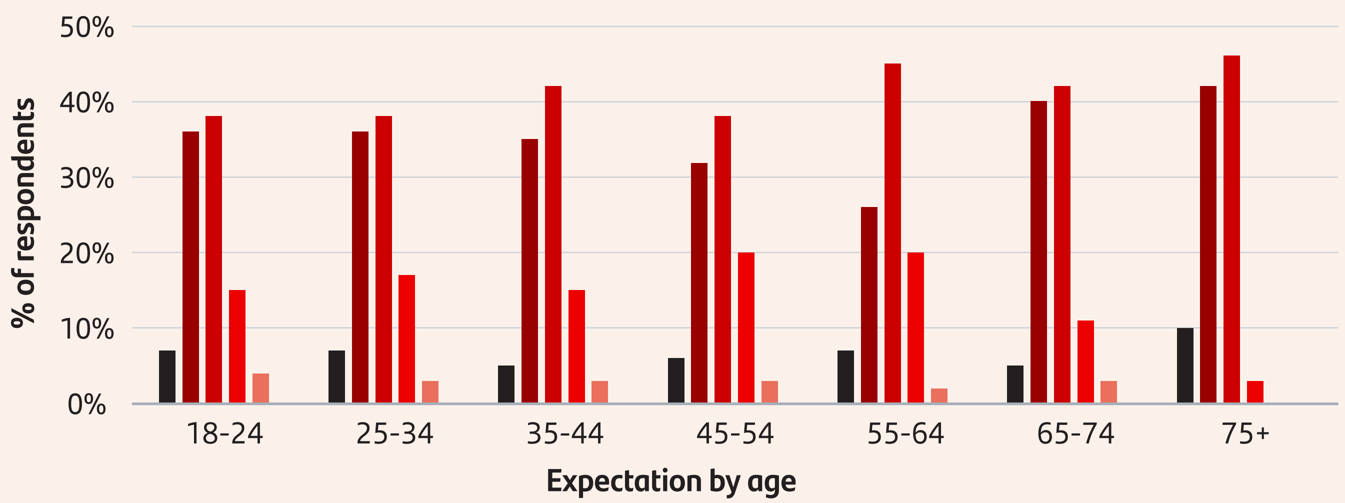
Excitement gives way to stress

But the system isn't just inefficient, it's disheartening and is driving disillusionment. 35% of respondents reported that the home buying process was worse than they expected. Nearly a quarter (24%) of homebuyers said that the complexity of the process made them consider giving up on buying a home all together, or at least delaying it. Londoners, facing steeper competition, are among the most disillusioned with 31% considering giving up, while young families and first-time buyers now have the lowest expectations; 50% of 25–34-year-olds now expect to complete in less than three months, compared to 56% of 75-year-olds and older.

Expected time between offer and completion



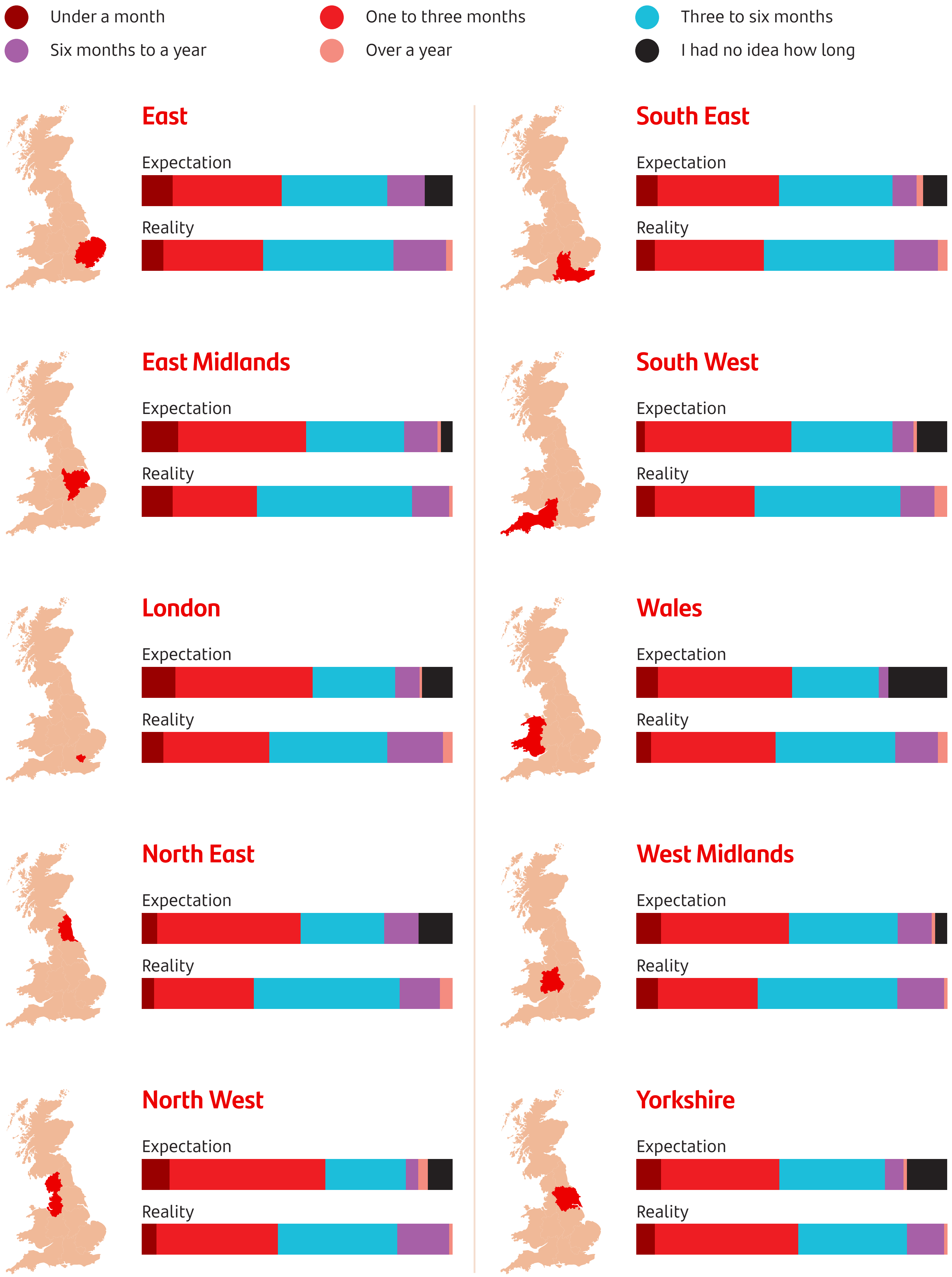
Actual time between offer and completion



Key reflects both graphs above

- Under a month
- One to three months
- Three to six months
- Six months to a year
- Over a year
- I had no idea how long

Expectation vs reality - time expected against actual time to transact per region



For many, buying a home will represent years of saving and the realisation of a long-term life goal. However, under half of homebuyers (46%) regularly felt positive feelings like excitement and hope in relation to the process. In stark contrast, a majority (54%) reported frequent or constant stress, with 17% feeling stressed all the time. 44% were frequently frustrated and 29% felt powerless.

Importantly, these negative emotions do not appear to stem from a difficulty understanding the process. England and Wales benefits from a well-established intermediary market, which many buyer and sellers seek out for financial advice and support. This could be why only 22% report feeling regularly confused during the process, suggesting consumers' complaints lie with the system's design and process, not with their knowledge of it.

The emotional toll of a failed process

Few life events come with so much investment and so little security. And so the emotional toll of a failed transaction is not just anecdotal, it's measurable, and it's serious. Of those who experienced a purchase or sale fall through:

- **64% said their stress levels were higher than normal**
- **57% reported increased anxiety**
- **49% suffered from sleep disruption**
- **26% experienced strain in their personal relationships**
- **42% reported a drop in energy and wellbeing**
- **33% said their work performance deteriorated**

If reform focuses only on speed or cost, it will miss the wider human impact. We need a system designed not only to process transactions but to support people through one of life's biggest milestones. Until then, we risk accepting emotional cost as a routine part of home buying and that should never be the accepted standard.

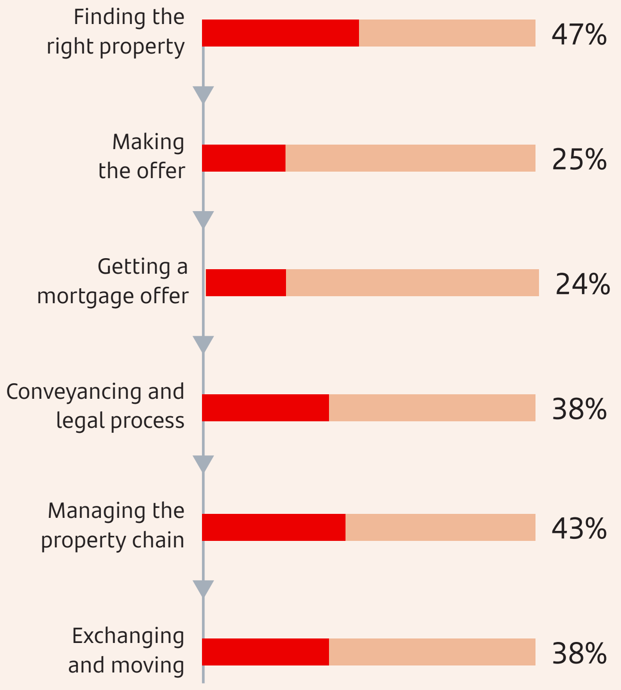
Chapter 4

The issues with the system

Certain elements are disproportionately slow or stressful, and our research points to difficulties emerging further into the process, once the initial hurdle of finding the right home has been cleared. Looking at failed transactions specifically, the further into the process, the more likely it is to happen. For 17% of those who experienced a failure, it occurred in the first month. From three months onwards this figure increases to 43%.

Looking more broadly at all transactions, nearly half (47%) of buyers found that one of the most difficult parts of the purchase process was finding a property in the first place. These troubles acknowledged, our research reveals buyers generally found the front end of the journey easier. For example, buyers reported making an offer as being easy – 46% agreed with this, as opposed to just a quarter (25%) saying it was hard. For the latter group, it was difficult because they were uncertain about how much to offer (39%), were worried about overpaying (37%) and that they lacked confidence in the process (34%), indicating the value in consumer education around the offer process.

Percentage of respondents who found each stage of the process hard

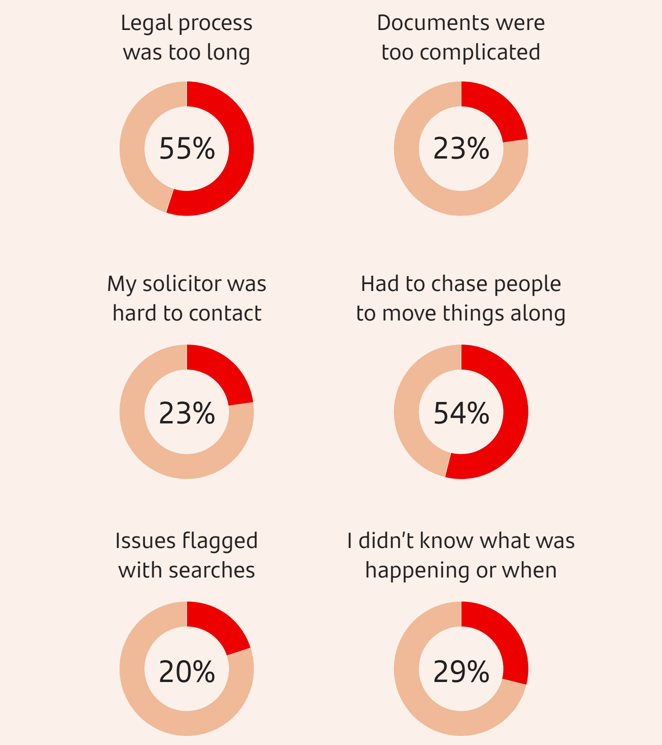


The next step, getting a mortgage offer, was also easy for two fifths (41%) of respondents, serving as a true testament to the vital role of mortgage brokers and the valuable work they do in delivering the right products at the right rates to their customers. Less than a quarter (24%) found it hard to secure the right deal, but those that did said it was because they struggled to find a good deal in the current climate (39%), the paperwork was too complicated (38%) or that that the process took too long (49%).

This latter point is a telling one. The length of time taken for transactions to move along the journey forms the basis of the struggles at the back end, and as we have established it is a critical reason in transactions failing.

Specifically, 38% found the legal and conveyancing process difficult. And over half of those who did (55%) said the process was too long, and nearly the same number (54%) said they had to keep chasing people in order to move things along.

Element of the legal process that was hard



This perhaps reflects the pressure on the system as it currently operates, with stakeholders from conveyancers to surveyors already operating at maximum capacity, which has been exacerbated by a reduction in the number of conveyancers and firms. In fact, there has been a 15% fall in the number of conveyancers in England and Wales between September 2021 and January 2025 according to the Law Society[4].

Even at the end of the process, when you might expect the stress to ease and the excitement of a new home to kick in, people still found it really difficult: 38% of respondents said that exchanging and moving was hard.

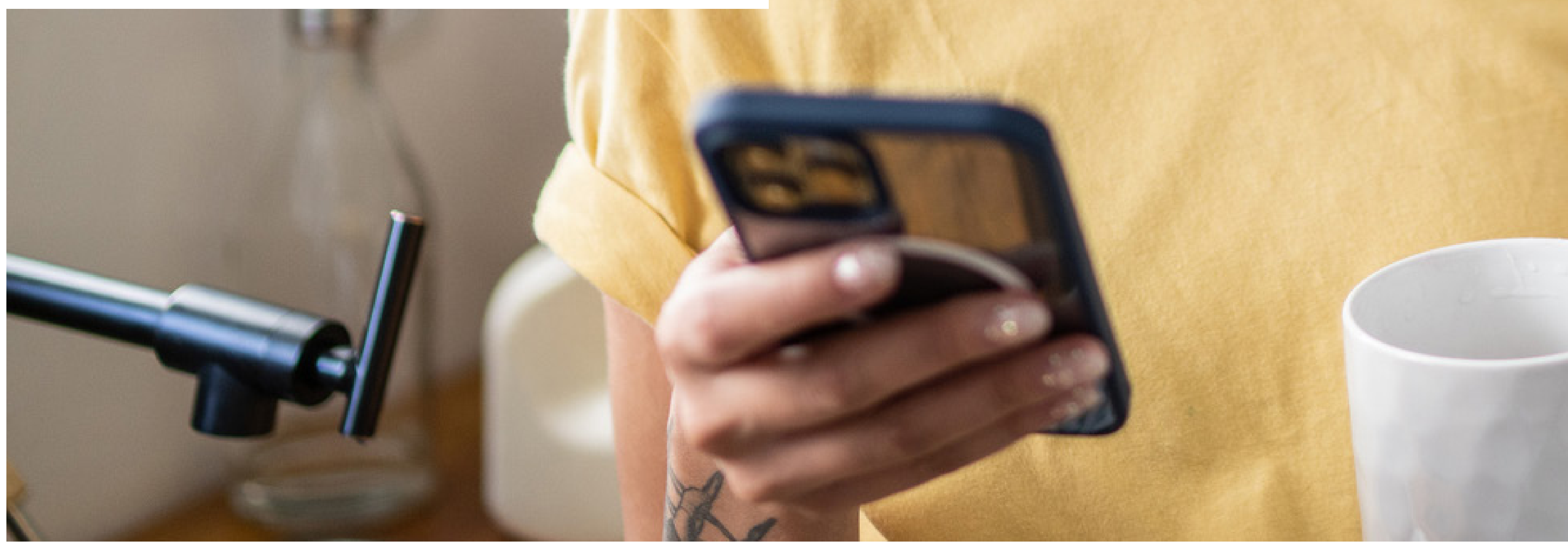
And throughout, the quality of communication between all parties was highlighted with 28% saying it proved difficult.

We must do more to address these issues.

For most people, buying a house is their biggest financial commitment. The process as it stands simply does not reflect that. In an era that is marked by digitisation and ease for so many areas of day-to-day life, the property market sticks out like a sore thumb. It is not good enough that almost double the amount of people found managing the property chain difficult versus those who found it easy (43% vs 25% respectively).

Our research thus far has highlighted that a lot of the stress, whether that is the emotional turmoil or the practicalities for all parties involved, would be solved if only we fixed the transaction process. It is too cumbersome as it stands, and while there is no silver bullet, speeding things along and driving efficiency would go a long way when it comes to getting the housing market moving more rapidly, without significant Government outlay.

To do so, we need to two things: to learn from other nations who do this well, and a far more digitally connected process, paving the way for faster and simpler transactions.



[4] https://www.irnlegalreports.com/store/UK-Residential-Conveyancing-Market-Report-2023-p512316204

Chapter 5

The path forwards

All of this paints a picture of a housing market with a hidden crisis, dragging on our economy.

There has been progress to expedite the conveyancing process through digitisation. For instance, there are plans to continue digitising HM Land Registry and its data as well as for it to start accepting qualified electronic signatures on documents – removing the need to either scan a signed document to send on or hand-deliver, and the need for third party witnesses. But this has not been implemented across industry yet.

And digitisation has proven successful earlier in the process. For instance, in the last 12 months, Santander saw around four in ten (41%) of direct mortgage applications submitted via a Smartphone.

However, there is a lot more to be done. The current process, rather than being linear, "is more like a plate of spaghetti" said Leyre De Alvaro Garcia, Global Head of Retail and Commercial Products at Santander. The UK is not alone in this. What can we learn from other nations that have streamlined the process, digitised or introduced innovative legislation? And with so many parties involved in the process, collaboration is critical. What does the industry see as the key steps forwards?

Country comparisons

1. Digital innovation

When it comes to digital-first property transactions, the UK lags significantly behind Estonia and Australia. With a blockchain backed land registry with e-notary capability that allows transactions to be completed remotely within days and with full legal validity, Estonia's level of digital integration is unmatched in Europe. It is the result of widespread use of electronic government services – 99% of all services are conducted digitally, including property transactions and most transactions take one to two months, with some being as quick as three days.

In Australia, in a legal system that is very similar to England and Wales, the conveyancing process is also entirely digital, reducing rekeying and discrepancies, and improving communication. With widespread use of the digital platform PEXA, all data is uploaded once to the platform and able to be shared with each stakeholder via API to increase security and transparency. Through its own payment rail, it enables the almost simultaneous settlement of funds with lodgement of title, with this process in itself only taking 2-3 hours, much faster than in the UK. This prevents fraud, drives efficiency and removes the uncertainty for both the buyer and the lender near the end of the process.

2. Buyer and seller information and protection

At the same time, at the front end of the process in Australia, offers are often legally binding as contracts are signed very shortly after the seller has accepted, giving additional security and protection from gazumping. Scotland, Spain and the United States also provide some form of certainty.

In the Scottish system, offers are legally binding. This is made possible by enhanced disclosure up front, removing the risk of gazumping altogether.

Through an Arras Contract, buyers and sellers in Spain enter a formal agreement to go through with the sale. If the buyer drops out after 90-100 days, they lose the right to the house and the deposit. Similarly, if the seller backs out, they are liable to pay the buyer double the monies committed. The same process can be seen in Italy through the Compromesso.

The United States operates on somewhat of a compromise. After an offer is accepted on a house, a Sale and Purchase agreement is signed, including a list of contingencies that allow withdrawal without a financial penalty for both sides if they are not met. This includes actions like getting finances in order and getting surveys completed. Once this period is cleared, the contract becomes fully binding.

The view from industry

John Baguley, Principal, Mortgage Policy at UK Finance, highlighted the twin issues of poor upfront information, and a lack of digitisation:

"The current homebuying process can be long, complex, and challenging, with many points of failure which lead to aborted transactions. The cost, time, and effort of all involved is significant.

"Lots of key data about individual properties exists but little of it is joined up and even less is digitised. This means the average consumer can be making a decision to buy the home of their dreams, based on half the picture.

"The current home buying and selling process is loaded towards obtaining crucial property information once the decision to buy has been taken, and an offer accepted. The buyer may not have made an offer had all the relevant information been available at the start of the homebuying journey.

"We welcome proposals to digitise, simplify and speed-up the homebuying process. Lenders have invested heavily in systems to improve the speed of making a mortgage offer, often to just a few hours. The blockers emerge beyond this point, so moving to a situation where information sharing happens at the start of the journey is welcomed. Similarly, bringing data together in a digital format, using consistent language will mean the market can operate with less friction, leading to greater certainty for all involved. Key changes like these will mean purchasers can be more confident in making the decision to buy, based on all the key facts available."

Maria Harris, Chair of the Open Property Data Association, agreed:

"Owning a home is more than a quintessential characteristic of UK culture, it's one of the cornerstones of our physical, emotional and financial wellbeing. A thriving and well-functioning housing market plays an essential role in the nation's health, growth, and financial stability, as well as giving us more control over the quality of our life choices.

"For too long the focus has been on the challenges of housing supply and the headlines generated from fluctuating house prices and temporary stimulus schemes. The complexities of the property market and the impact on consumers extend well beyond these issues with investment in our property market infrastructure lagging significantly behind other jurisdictions.

"In today's smartphone enabled and digital world, the current homebuying experience seems archaic. Our forms and paper-based processes are outdated and no longer fit for purpose. And no-one feels the impacts more than the customer. There are few, if any, service or retail industries where this level of demand failure and poor achievement of expectations would be tolerated.

"It's time for a radical rethink. Transformation and modernisation of the homebuying process is no longer just desirable, it's fundamental to deliver the industrial strategy and smart data economy which underpin the government's growth agenda."

Charlotte Neal MRICS, Director of Surveying Practice at RICS added:

"Better quality and more comprehensive, upfront information are crucial to a smooth home buying and selling process. RICS advocates consistent comprehensive upfront information at the point of listing, which should reduce fall through by helping buyers to make more informed decisions at the beginning and throughout the process. Improved consumer education supported by industry will help the public understand key topics, such as leasehold versus freehold, new builds versus heritage properties, and the different types of surveys recommended for these properties.

"RICS sits alongside key industry partners on MHCLG's Digital Property Information Steering Group where it calls for greater digitisation within the industry. Increased digitisation would streamline transactions, reduce duplication, and enhance accuracy. Furthermore, increasing regulation around estate agents will improve outcomes for consumers and enhance buyer confidence.

"Industry and government hold a good understanding of what needs to be done – we simply must make sure that we bring these crucial reforms over the line in good time, and RICS is playing a significant part in this work."

Kate Davies, Executive Director of the Intermediary Mortgage Lenders Association said:

"From a lender's perspective, the most frustrating element of today's homebuying process is that so many failures occur after applicants have already been fully assessed and approved for their mortgage.

"We see cases where buyers are perfectly creditworthy, the funding is in place, but the transaction collapses because of avoidable problems further down the chain. That is wasted time, money and emotional energy for consumers, and wasted resource for lenders and brokers.

"The mortgage sector has invested heavily in streamlining systems and using technology to give customers quicker, clearer decisions, but unless the rest of the process catches up, we are running ever faster simply to stand still.

"What we need now is for government and industry to work together on a joined-up system that puts data and certainty at the start of the journey. Only then will consumers truly feel the benefit of the efficiency gains that lenders and intermediaries have worked so hard to deliver."

It seems, as an industry, we are all in agreement that we need change, we need it as soon as possible, and we need at least some of it to come from the top down. Government policy and regulatory change will be necessary to make the long-lasting adjustments the UK desperately needs.

Political asks

01 **Expedite digitisation across all stakeholders**
Incentivise and encourage all parties involved in the process to use a digital platform that can connect with other platforms seamlessly to reduce the amount of time taken with administrative tasks and ensure all data is available to those who need access to it throughout the journey, increasing transparency and reducing the risk of human error.

02 **Implement the collation of better up-front information disclosure from all parties**
Improve the level and reliability of data through sellers disclosing all information about the property at the outset of any transaction, giving prospective buyers greater confidence in the property and the sales process, and reduce unnecessary fall throughs.

03 **Create a government owned, centralised property data system**
Having all of the information in one place at the start of any transaction to drive efficiency, save time and manual effort of sourcing legal documents regarding the property. Reduce duplication of effort and data sourcing for information that already exists from previous sales.

04 **Improve data sharing through a Smart Data Working Group**
Support the sharing of data between parties openly along with the application of adequate data use regulation to reassure consumers. Introducing a system of standardised open data sharing would facilitate a much smoother, efficient process, enabling faster communication between parties. This must be supported by digital ID verification.

05 **Incentivise the use of AI**
Increasing the use of AI within the transaction process would create a more seamless journey for all. Automating administration tasks removes the burden from conveyancers and lenders, freeing up time to spend on the elements of transactions that require their expertise and provide the most value of customers. It will also reduce manual errors from rekeying of data.

06 **Disincentivise gazumping and gazundering**
There are legitimate reasons for buyers or sellers pulling out of transactions. They should not be penalised. However, this must be balanced against the impact of uncertainty, gazumping and gazundering to property chains. Introducing disincentives and greater legal certainty against the latter would reduce failures and increase confidence.

07 **Take a long-term approach to support market activity**
Government policies have historically focused on helping improve short term affordability or raise revenue, such as Stamp Duty holidays. These measures fuel increasing house prices – something that we saw as house prices rose during Covid. Building more housing stock is the only long-term solution that does not inflate house prices for the next generation. It will make moving up and down the ladder much more feasible, supported by a slicker transaction process.

It is clear that better data, and better digitisation are key to unlocking a safer, faster and more enjoyable experience for both consumers, and the industry. In so doing, we can stem the flow of £1.5bn in consumer and economic costs each year. But digitisation must be universal.

We must facilitate a system whereby each and every stage of the journey is using technology to drive efficiency, and that this is interconnected. A uniform approach across industry is required if we are going to fix the broken chain.