

# LOOKING BEYOND THE CREDIT SCORE: HELPING MORE CUSTOMERS ACHIEVE HOMEOWNERSHIP

HELEN CAWTHRA • HEAD OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS



Economic uncertainty has reshaped today's mortgage market. In recent years, households have faced higher living costs, elevated interest rates and wider global pressures that have stretched budgets and forced many to reassess their finances. Those pressures are reflected in the data, with around four in five UK adults saying their cost of living increased compared with the previous month in April 2026<sup>1</sup>.

Although inflation and interest rates have eased from recent highs, the effects of that period can still be visible in borrowers' credit files. For some, a temporary spell of financial difficulty may have left a negative mark. For others, including people who are new to the UK, the issue may be a limited credit history rather than adverse borrowing behaviour.

For brokers, that makes it increasingly important to understand where specialist lending can open up options that might otherwise be missed. A complex credit profile does not automatically put homeownership out of reach, but it may require a different route to the right mortgage solution.



## A changing borrower landscape

Adverse credit is often associated with serious financial distress. In practice, the reality is usually more nuanced.

Unexpected life events, rising household costs, relationship breakdowns, illness or periods of reduced income can all affect someone's finances, sometimes leading to missed payments, temporary arrears or other adverse credit events. Equally, borrowers who have recently arrived in the UK may have a strong financial track record but little or no UK credit history for lenders to assess.

Just as importantly, many customers who have experienced financial difficulty may since have regained stability, with their current position looking very different from the one that led to an earlier credit issue.



## Looking beyond a credit score

One of the most persistent misconceptions is that a credit score alone decides whether someone can get a mortgage. In reality, lenders assess risk in different ways and place different levels of weight on different parts of an applicant's profile.

While some lenders rely more heavily on automated credit scoring, specialist lenders often take a broader view of an applicant's circumstances. That can be especially valuable when a credit file does not tell the full story.

Rather than focusing only on a past adverse event, specialist lenders may also consider the context: why the issue arose, when it happened, and how the customer has managed their finances since.

Technology is also playing a growing role in the application process. New tools can help lenders build a fuller picture of a borrower's financial position, while experienced underwriters provide the judgement needed to assess individual cases fairly. Together, that can support more informed decisions and help ensure borrowers are assessed on their overall financial position rather than a single data point.



### **The role of specialist lending**

As the market has evolved, so too has the range of options available to borrowers with complex credit profiles. Specialist lenders have always been known for their flexible solutions, and now that more lenders are adapting their lending criteria to allow for greater flexibility, some borrowers now have access to a wider range of options, provided they meet the relevant affordability.

For some customers, that means a previous financial setback does not automatically close the door on homeownership. For brokers, it creates an opportunity to identify solutions that may not be obvious through more traditional lending routes alone.



### **Why broker knowledge matters**

As the specialist market continues to evolve, broker education remains critical. Customers with complex financial backgrounds can be uncertain about their options. Some assume they will be rejected outright, while others may not understand why different lenders can reach different decisions on broadly similar cases.

This is where brokers can add real value. By understanding the nuances of specialist lending criteria, they can set realistic expectations, explain the options available and identify lenders whose appetite aligns more closely with a borrower's profile. Just as importantly, they can help customers understand what steps may strengthen their position before applying and build confidence throughout the process.



### **A positive outlook**

As customer profiles become more varied, lenders are developing solutions that better reflect the complexity of modern financial lives. Whether a borrower has experienced a temporary credit issue, has a limited credit history, or is still establishing themselves in the UK, the market may offer more options than many people realise.

For brokers, a deeper understanding of the specialist market is not just a way to broaden product knowledge. It is a way to widen opportunity for customers whose options may be stronger than they assume.

## **#KensingtonDifference**

 Keep up to date with our latest news and updates by following us on [LinkedIn](#)