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YOUR WINDOW ON MONEY

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## Your financial wellbeing hub

The past couple of years have undoubtedly been a challenge for us all but, by pulling together, we have managed to get through an extraordinarily difficult period of time. Now, as we emerge into the post-COVID economy, we face a different set of challenges which, in their own way, appear no less daunting. One thing though does stay the same – we're still here, by your side, and determined to continue steering you safely through any financially choppy waters that lie ahead.

### Economic uncertainties

Although the economy did stage a tentative recovery last year and in the early part of 2022, it's fair to say the outlook has become increasingly challenging in recent months. Surging inflation has curtailed our spending power and, with energy bills set to rise further over the autumn and winter months, the cost-of-living squeeze looks set to continue for now. Higher-than-expected inflation has also triggered a rise in interest rates, while fallout from the war in Ukraine adds to a cocktail of economic uncertainties.



### Planning is paramount

No one is immune from these difficulties; while some will struggle more than others, we will all be impacted to some degree. In many ways, though, times like these serve to emphasise why people seek professional financial advice in the first place. Economic downturns are normal but having a sound, structured plan helps to ensure our financial goals and aspirations are not derailed when one does occur.

### Financial wellbeing

Arguably, protecting your financial wellbeing has never been so important. It's therefore essential to try to maintain any ongoing commitments such as pension contributions, protection premiums and regular savings policies if you possibly can.

### We're here to help

It's also vitally important to keep talking, so do get in touch if you need our help. We're here for both you and your family; ensuring your financial wellbeing is, and always will be, our primary concern.

## A move towards 'living legacies'

Over-55s are increasingly looking to help their families out financially while they are still alive, rather than leaving everything in the form of an inheritance. Research<sup>1</sup> has revealed a trend towards 'living legacies', due to increased life expectancy pushing up the average age at which younger generations inherit from their parents. People born in the 1980s are now predicted to receive their inheritance at age 64 on average, compared to 58 for those born in the 1960s.

Historically, the risk of running out of money during retirement has prevented many older people from offering financial support during their lifetime. This concern appears to be lessening, however, with a third of researchers' respondents saying they'd be unwilling to help a family member onto the property ladder without knowing how much they'd need in retirement – against half of respondents to the same survey in 2016.

Aviva's Matt McGill commented, "This increasing tendency towards considering helping out now rather than beneficiaries receiving an inheritance after death is perhaps a reflection of the turbulence and uncertainty that everyone has been through since we previously ran our survey in 2016, and which shows no sign of diminishing. Along with the hardship people have faced, it's also been a time of reflection for many and this could have included a resolution to live more for the moment and help family and loved ones now."

<sup>1</sup>Aviva, 2022

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## Keeping investment emotions in check

While Rudyard Kipling may not have been thinking about investments when he penned his famous poem 'If', his words will certainly resonate with investors at the moment. The current investment landscape undoubtedly presents a challenge, even for experienced investors, but those who can keep their head when all about are losing theirs definitely have the best chance of success.

### Emotional roller coaster

It can be extremely difficult for investors to keep their emotions in check when there is so much economic and geopolitical noise being reported on a daily basis. But market volatility is normal and investors who hold a well-diversified, risk-appropriate portfolio and stay focused on their long-term objectives, goals and aspirations are historically best equipped to get through such periods.



### Clear goals are essential

Setting clear goals and developing a corresponding plan to achieve them is invariably the key to investment success. Although plans may need to be adapted from time to time to take account of changes in individual circumstances or investment goals, having a well-thought-out strategy helps investors deal with unexpected events and remain calm when markets become turbulent.

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### Pausing pensions could be costly

Analysis<sup>2</sup> has revealed that reducing or stopping pension contributions, even for a relatively short period of time such as a year, can have a significant impact on your final pension pot, with savers potentially being thousands of pounds less well off in retirement. Almost all (93%) of those surveyed said they are feeling the impact of increasing costs and inflation. Whilst 77% expect to have to make cutbacks on spending or saving, an encouragingly low figure of 6% said they would reduce their pension contributions.

### The Growth Plan 2022

On 23 September, Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng outlined a series of tax cuts and measures. Key personal tax announcements included:

- A reversal of the **National Insurance** contribution rise, which came into force in April. The 1.25 percentage point increase will be reversed from 6 November. The planned Health and Social Care Levy which was due to replace the National Insurance rise as a new standalone tax from April 2023 has also been cancelled
- A reduction in **Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT)** in England and Northern Ireland, raising the residential nil-rate threshold from £125,000 to £250,000, with immediate effect, and First Time Buyers Relief from £300,000 to £425,000.
- The maximum amount that an individual can pay for a home while

remaining eligible for First Time Buyers' Relief, was increased from £500,000 to £625,000. As SDLT is devolved in Scotland and Wales, the Scottish and Welsh Governments will receive funding through an agreed fiscal framework to allocate as they see fit

- The basic rate of **Income Tax** will be cut to 19% in April 2023 – one year earlier than previously planned. At present, people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland pay 20% on annual earnings between £12,571 and £50,270, different rates apply in Scotland
- The government is reversing the 1.25 percentage point increase in **Dividend Tax** rates applying UK-wide from 6 April 2023, so the ordinary and upper rates of Dividend Tax will revert to 7.5% and 32.5% respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Standard Life, 2022

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## Pensions round-up

Recently released research<sup>3</sup> suggests UK consumers are becoming more knowledgeable about pensions and prepared to take a greater role in preparing for retirement. Other research<sup>4</sup>, however, shows significant sums are still sat in 'lost' pensions, while experts have warned about potential pension-related problems as the cost-of-living crisis bites.

### Pensions knowledge improving

A survey conducted by Link Group suggests bodies within the pensions industry have had some success in building better public knowledge of pensions and the importance of retirement planning. The research found that almost four out of five consumers 'understand' pensions, with 18 to 34 year-olds more likely to display higher levels of knowledge than consumers in other age groups. In addition, nearly six out of ten respondents said they should take more responsibility for ensuring they have a good retirement income.

### Time to trace lost pensions?

Estimates suggest there is currently over £19bn sat in lost pension pots across the UK. These are typically the result of people changing jobs and then not keeping track of contributions made with previous employers. The good news, however, is that the government runs a free pension tracing service ([www.gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details](http://www.gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details)) to help employees track down their lost pensions. So, if you've worked for a number of different employers through the years it might be worth checking to see if you can be reunited with a long-lost pension.

### Pensions warnings

Experts are warning the over-55s not to be tempted to raid their pension pots in response to the cost-of-living squeeze. There are fears that if people withdraw lump sums or start taking an income sooner than planned this will result in them having less income in the future. People are also being warned not to reduce their workplace pension contributions as a knee-jerk response to the cost-of-living crisis.

<sup>3</sup>Link Group, 2022, <sup>4</sup>ABI, 2022

*Experts are warning the over-55s not to be tempted to raid their pension pots in response to the cost-of-living squeeze*



## Looking forward to COP27

**A year after the United Nations 26th Conference of the Parties, on British shores, the upcoming COP27 climate conference is taking place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt this November.**

Key pledges made by governments last year in Glasgow included commitments to end deforestation, cut global methane emissions and to transition to zero-emission vehicles. Countries were asked to return to this year's conference with a plan to strengthen their 2030 commitments.

### "A decisive decade for climate action"

Mahmoud Mohieldin, the UN climate change high-level champion for Egypt, hopes the 2022 conference will be an important milestone in what he calls "a decisive decade for climate action." In his view, COP27 should undertake an "urgent, ambitious, impactful, and transformative agenda, guided by a holistic approach to sustainable development."

### Climate change for investors

COP27 will undoubtedly be of interest to investors engaged with climate change, with key announcements potentially impacting their portfolios. Investment decisions have a role to play, and the investment industry continues to play a pivotal role in the global climate transition. One investor initiative – The Net Zero Asset Managers Initiative – has now grown to over 270 investor signatories with over \$60trn assets under management, all committed to supporting the goal to reach net zero and investments aligned with net zero emissions.

According to the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), a United Nations-supported initiative, many are now recognising 'the enormous opportunity for economic growth and investment returns presented by the transition to net-zero emissions.' The PRI reflect a firm belief that 'the financial sector and the investment community will play a central role in the global response to climate change and supporting the transition to a net-zero economy.'

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## Retire early – repent at leisure?

It is the dream of many to retire early. Indeed, 270,000 people in their 50s and 60s left the UK workforce during the pandemic, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

### Concerns about retirement poverty

However, two thirds of people aged 50 to 70 who quit work or lost their job during the pandemic left the workforce earlier than expected<sup>5</sup>. This means that they might not have the funds they need for a longer-than-anticipated retirement, sparking concerns that they could face poverty later in life. Of particular concern is the financial impact of accessing your pension too early, with research<sup>6</sup> showing that doing so before reaching State Pension age could reduce your pot by 59% on average.

Compounding the issue is the fact that those who now want to re-enter the workforce are finding it difficult

to get rehired. According to research from the Centre for Ageing Better, unemployed over-50s are twice as likely to be out of work for 12 months or more, than their younger counterparts.

### Many factors to consider

Early retirement may be enticing, but it certainly bears thinking about. Before acting, it is always a good idea to take financial advice and think carefully about the following factors:

- Do you know how much you'll need to live comfortably in retirement?
- If so, do you have enough in your pension pot for the lifestyle you want?
- Do you have savings or any other source of income?
- Do you still have a mortgage or any other outstanding debt you are still liable for?
- Could working for just a few more years offer you valuable financial security?

Whatever your goals for retirement, we're here to help you get into the best possible financial position for later life.

<sup>5</sup>ONS, 2022, <sup>6</sup>Canada Life, 2022

## Rise in protection insurance payouts

Claims paid out under protection insurance totalled £6.8bn in 2021<sup>7</sup>, a second consecutive yearly high, with more than £18.6m paid out every day in life insurance, income protection and critical illness claims.

Last year was the third year in a row where the overall average individual payout increased, rising by 9% year-on-year to reach £14,994. For term assurance, the average claim payment was £61,944 and the average critical illness claim payment was £67,500.

### Claims do pay out

Last year, 98% of individual and group claims were paid. However, 'non-disclosure' was cited as the main reason for the 2% of rejected claims. This is when a customer fails to provide information about something that might have influenced the insurer's decision to provide cover or the price of that cover.

### Ups and downs

One noteworthy trend in 2021 was a 40% rise in claims for musculoskeletal conditions. It is suggested this could be linked to the higher number of people working from home in unsuitable conditions.

In contrast, there were 20% fewer claims relating to mental health last year, although mental health claims were still above their 2019 level.

### More than a number

Protection policies can help give you peace of mind by making sure you can meet financial commitments and knowing that your loved ones will not face hardship. Behind the headline facts are the huge number of families given support when they needed it most.

<sup>7</sup>ABI and GRiD, 2022

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*It is important to take professional advice before making any decision relating to your personal finances. Information within this newsletter is based on our current understanding of taxation and can be subject to change in future. It does not provide individual tailored investment advice and is for guidance only. Some rules may vary in different parts of the UK; please ask for details. We cannot assume legal liability for any errors or omissions it might contain. Levels and bases of, and reliefs from, taxation are those currently applying or proposed and are subject to change; their value depends on the individual circumstances of the investor.*

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*All details are correct at time of writing – September 2022.*



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