

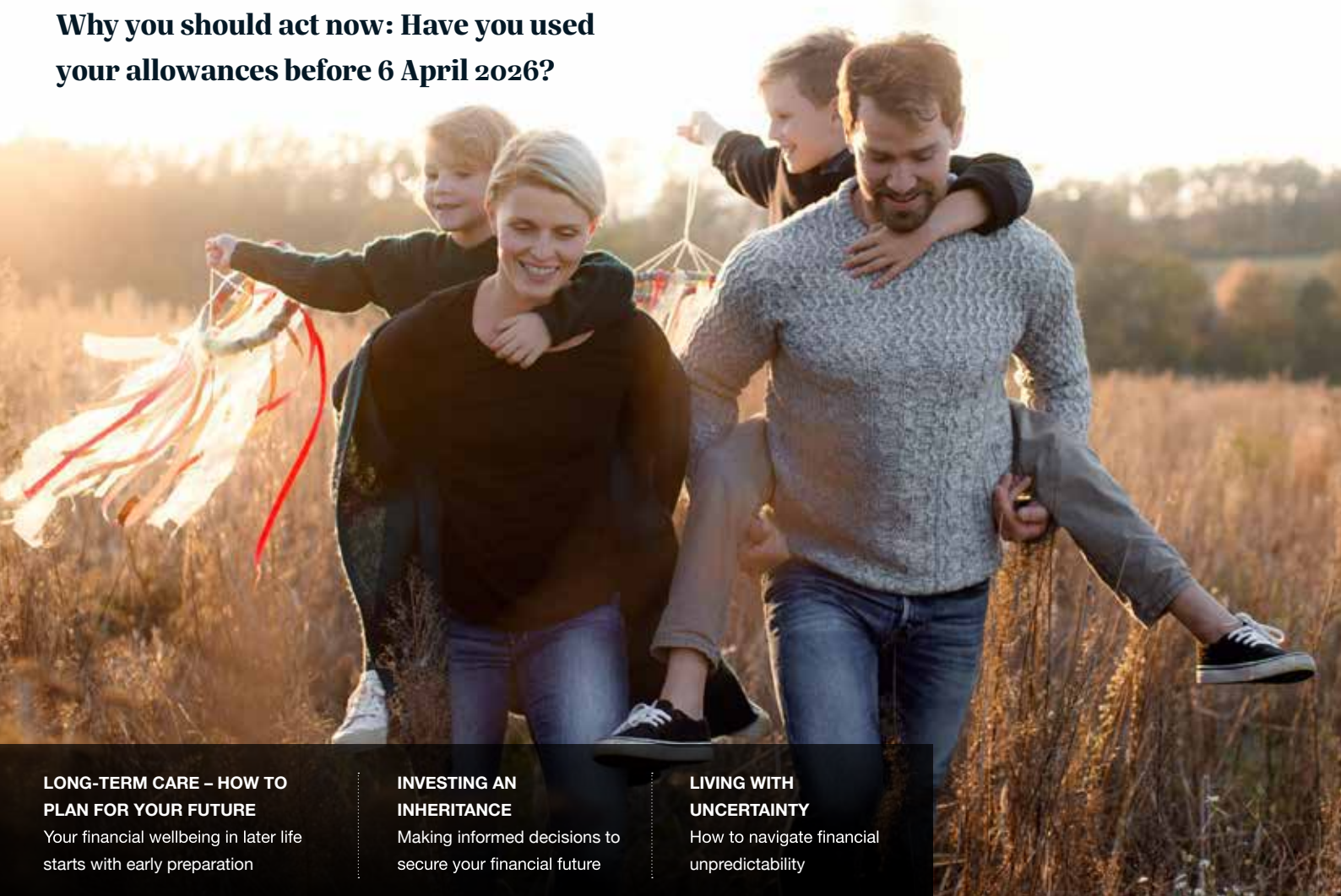
STERLING & LAW

INDEPENDENT WEALTH MANAGEMENT

MARCH / APRIL 2026

Key steps to take before the tax year ends

Why you should act now: Have you used your allowances before 6 April 2026?



LONG-TERM CARE – HOW TO PLAN FOR YOUR FUTURE

Your financial wellbeing in later life starts with early preparation

INVESTING AN INHERITANCE

Making informed decisions to secure your financial future

LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY

How to navigate financial unpredictability

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Inside this issue

With the 2025/26 tax year-end approaching, now is the time to act to maximise your financial opportunities. Key priorities include using your £20,000 ISA allowance for tax-efficient growth and contributing up to £60,000 (or more if carry forward is available and relevant earnings are sufficient) to your pension to take advantage of tax relief and long-term benefits. Other allowances, such as Capital Gains Tax, Dividend Allowance and Junior ISAs, are ‘use it or lose it’ opportunities. On page 06, we explain why early action avoids last-minute stress, secures tax savings and ensures financial growth.

With rising life expectancy, more of us will need long-term care, making early financial planning essential. Fees have surged, and regional cost disparities add to the challenge. Funding options include annuities, insurance, investments and equity release. On page 10, we consider how professional advice is crucial for navigating tax implications and securing a sustainable plan for future care needs.

Inheriting wealth can be life-changing but comes with challenges. On page 12, we explain why holding excessive cash may not be the best choice as inflation erodes its value. Instead, consider diversified investments to foster growth. Align your strategies with your goals, whether it’s retirement or supporting your family, and seek professional advice to maximise tax benefits and avoid pitfalls.

Financial uncertainty is growing, with many feeling life is unpredictable. Rising inflation, energy costs and tax increases fuel concerns, prompting shifts like increased cash savings and delayed retirements. While saving is important, balancing short-term needs with long-term investments is key. Reviewing pensions and seeking advice builds resilience and confidence. Turn to page 04.

A complete list of the articles featured in this issue is on the right. ◀

Wealth planning for your future

We create personalised strategies to ensure every aspect of your wealth aligns with your life goals, family priorities and aspirations for future generations. Ready to take the next step? Contact us today to learn more or arrange a meeting.

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Information is based on our current understanding of taxation legislation and regulations. Any levels and bases of, and reliefs from, taxation are subject to change.

The value of investments may go down as well as up, and you may get back less than you invested.

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Smart gifting

Tax-free ways to support your children and grandchildren



Passing wealth to the next generation is a primary concern for many families, yet the complexities of Inheritance Tax (IHT) often cause unnecessary anxiety. With the headline rate of IHT set at 40%, careful planning is essential to ensure your children benefit as much as possible from your estate. Fortunately, there are several tax-efficient strategies available that, when used properly, can help you make significant lifetime gifts completely free of tax.

Using allowances and exemptions wisely is one of the easiest ways to give to children or grandchildren. The annual exemption lets you gift up to £3,000 each tax year without incurring IHT. If you haven't used the previous year's allowance, you can carry it forward, potentially doubling the amount to £6,000, or even £12,000 for couples. These sums can add up to a substantial nest egg for children over the years.

MAKE THE MOST OF REGULAR GIFTING

Another valuable, though often overlooked, option is to make regular gifts from surplus income. This route is ideal for people who have a consistent annual surplus after covering normal living expenses. There is no upper limit to this exemption, provided you can show that the gifts come from income, not capital, and that your standard of living isn't affected. Clear documentation is key to satisfying HMRC's requirements if HMRC queries it in the future.

Additionally, you can give small gifts of up to £250 per person per tax year, provided the recipient has not already benefited from your main £3,000 allowance. These small amounts are perfect for birthday or Christmas presents and help use up your gifting allowances without incurring any additional tax.

WEDDING GIFTS AND THE SEVEN-YEAR RULE

Special occasions offer more opportunities for tax-free gifting. For weddings, you can gift your child up to £5,000 tax-free, or £2,500 if you are a grandparent. The exemption applies per parent, so a couple could give their child £10,000 towards their big day without incurring IHT.

For those wishing to make larger lump-sum gifts, understanding the 'seven-year rule' is essential. Any sum given outright will fall outside your estate for IHT purposes after seven years. If you pass away within this period, a sliding scale of 'taper relief' may reduce the tax due on gifts over £325,000.

PLANNING AHEAD FOR PEACE OF MIND

Sound estate planning often involves a combination of these exemptions and careful record-keeping. The right mix depends on your individual financial situation and your goals for your children's future. Seeking advice early can make a significant difference to the amount your loved ones will ultimately receive. ◀

Looking for a tax-efficient strategy for passing on your wealth?

Don't let Inheritance Tax complexities overshadow your legacy. With careful planning and the right strategies, you can maximise the benefits for your loved ones while minimising tax liabilities. Contact us today to discuss your estate planning needs and ensure your family's financial future is protected.

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Living with uncertainty

How to navigate financial unpredictability

The world feels more uncertain than ever, with 85% of UK adults agreeing that life has become less predictable, according to research^[1].

This growing unease is reshaping how people view their finances, with six in ten (59%) feeling less confident about their financial future because of recent changes in the UK.

From inflation to energy costs, financial pressures are mounting. Nearly all UK adults (94%) are concerned about rising prices, while 91% worry about energy bills. Tax increases and interest rate hikes are also weighing heavily on people's minds.

FINANCIAL DECISIONS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

This uncertainty is prompting many to rethink their financial strategies. Almost a quarter (23%) are opting for cash savings rather than investments, while one in five (19%) are considering delaying retirement. Among those aged 55 to 65, 11% are even withdrawing money from their pensions earlier than planned.

However, it's not all doom and gloom. Encouragingly, 48% of people are building up additional savings, and 18% are seeking financial advice to navigate these turbulent times. These proactive steps can help individuals regain control of their financial future.

BALANCING SHORT-TERM NEEDS WITH LONG-TERM GOALS

While saving more is a positive trend, holding too much in cash can erode its value over time due to inflation. A balanced approach, combining cash savings for short-term needs with investments for

long-term growth, can provide both security and the potential for financial wellbeing.

Periods of uncertainty underscore the importance of understanding your options. Small actions, such as reviewing your pension or seeking professional financial advice, can make a meaningful difference over the long term.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BUILD CONFIDENCE

Review your pension: Check your savings, update your retirement age and ensure your details are up to date.

Think long-term: Avoid making hasty decisions; gradual adjustments often yield better results.

Understand your options: Explore different ways to draw income from your pension.

Balance savings and investments: Diversify to meet short-term and long-term needs.

Seek advice: Professional guidance can help you make informed decisions tailored to your circumstances.

Taking proactive steps now can not only help you weather the current uncertainty but also lay a strong foundation for the future. By staying informed, reassessing your financial goals and seeking advice, you can build resilience and confidence in your financial journey. Remember, even small, consistent actions today can yield

significant benefits over time, ensuring you're better prepared for whatever lies ahead. ◀

Need more guidance?

Feeling uncertain about your financial future? Take the first step today, contact us. We're here to listen, address your concerns and guide you through your options with professional advice tailored to your needs.

Source data:

[1] Research conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Standard Life in June 2025. In total, 6,000 participants took part in the online survey. Participants were aged 18-80 and included working, unemployed, and retired people. Quotas and weights were used to ensure respondents were representative of the UK general population by age, gender and region.

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Is your income protected?



Half of UK workers see income protection as vital, yet only 27% have it

Recent research reveals a striking insight. 50% of the UK's working population believes they would feel more financially resilient with income protection insurance^[1]. This type of cover is specifically designed to provide financial support if you're unable to work due to illness or injury. Yet despite the peace of mind it offers, only 27% of UK workers currently hold an income protection policy.

This gap between awareness and action is concerning. With the average worker supporting three dependents and many households relying on dual incomes to meet monthly expenses, the loss of a salary could lead to immediate financial strain. The findings highlight a growing financial vulnerability across the country.

REALITY OF HOUSEHOLD RELIANCE

The research also highlights the precarious financial situation many households face. Household debt has risen by an average of £1,734 over the past year, reaching £20,640. Meanwhile, a third of UK workers have less than £5,000 in savings, and nearly a quarter have under £1,000. For these individuals, an unexpected period off work could be financially devastating.

Income protection can be a vital safety net in such situations. It provides a regular, tax-free monthly income during periods of illness or injury, helping you cover essential costs such as your mortgage or rent, utility bills and daily living expenses. This allows you to focus on your recovery without the added stress of financial worries.

BRIDGING THE PROTECTION GAP

The findings also highlight a significant protection gap among renters, women and single parents, groups that are often more vulnerable to financial shocks. As living costs continue to rise, a robust financial plan has never been more critical.

An income protection policy offers more than financial security; it provides confidence and peace of mind when you need it most. It's designed to help you build both emotional and financial resilience, enabling you to face life's challenges with greater stability. ◀

Is it time to take control of your financial future?

Don't wait for the unexpected to happen. Protect your income and safeguard your family's financial wellbeing today. Speak to us to explore how income protection can work for you. Together, we'll create a plan that ensures you're prepared for whatever life throws your way.

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Source data:

[1] Research from the LV= Reaching Resilience report – data from a survey of 2,720 nationally representative UK workers conducted for LV= by Opinionium between 15 and 25 October 2024.

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Key steps to take before the tax year ends

Why you should act now: Have you used your allowances before 6 April 2026?

With the 2025/26 tax year-end fast approaching, now is the time to act. Waiting until the last minute could mean missing out on valuable allowances that can boost your finances and save you money.

We've all been there, scrambling to meet a deadline, whether it's for work, a holiday booking or filing paperwork. But when it comes to your finances, that last-minute rush can be costly. By planning, you'll not only avoid unnecessary stress but also set yourself up for a stronger financial future.

Everything you do now could secure tax savings before it's too late. Leaving action down to the wire often leads to missed opportunities for your money to grow tax-free and prompts rushed, potentially poor decisions. By making the most of every available allowance now, you lock in more financial value for the year ahead.

MAXIMISE YOUR ISA ALLOWANCE BEFORE IT EXPIRES

A key priority this year is making the most of your Individual Savings Account (ISA) allowance. For the 2025/26 tax year, you can put up to £20,000 into ISAs across Cash, Stocks and Shares, Innovative Finance and LISAs.

The real power of an ISA lies in its tax efficiency. All gains, interest and dividends within your ISA are tax-efficient. However, this benefit isn't retroactive; it applies only if you act before the 6 April 2026 deadline.

WHY EARLY ACTION MATTERS

The sooner you invest in your ISA, the longer you benefit from tax-efficient compounding.

What is tax-efficient compounding? Simply put, it means your investments grow faster because you aren't paying tax on the gains, and those gains then generate their own earnings.

If you don't use your allowance before the deadline, it's lost for good. You cannot carry it over to the next year, so don't miss out on this valuable opportunity.

BOOST YOUR PENSION POT

The annual pension allowance for this tax year remains at £60,000 or 100% of your earnings, whichever is lower. Tax relief is applied based on your relevant earnings; if you have no or low earnings, you can still contribute up to £3,600 gross. Maximising your contributions before the tax year ends gives your retirement pot another full year to grow and benefit from generous tax relief.

This is especially crucial if you are:

- Nearing retirement and want to maximise your final pot size.
- Planning a substantial pension top-up.
- Looking to reduce your taxable income for the current year.



Leaving it too late could mean missing this year's allowance entirely and falling behind on your long-term retirement goals.

USE OTHER ALLOWANCES OR RISK LOSING THEM

ISAs and pensions aren't the only tools you should consider. There are several 'use it or lose it' allowances that reset on 6 April. If you haven't utilised them by the deadline, they vanish.

Key allowances to review include:

Capital Gains Tax (CGT) Allowance: This has been reduced to £3,000 for individuals (£1,500 for most trusts). If you are sitting on investment profits outside of an ISA or pension, utilising this allowance can save you a significant tax bill.

Dividend Allowance: This has been cut to just £500. Ensure your investments are structured to mitigate the impact of this lower threshold.

Junior ISAs: Don't forget the younger members of the family. Funding Junior ISAs is a great way to pass on wealth tax-efficiently.

Gifting: Making gifts now can help reduce the value of your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes.

Spousal Transfers: If appropriate, splitting allowances with a spouse or registered civil partner

can double your household's tax efficiency.

Every action you take contributes to your family's overall financial wellbeing.

GET PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT TO MEET THE DEADLINE

Tax rules are constantly changing, and navigating the right steps to take on your own can be daunting. Seeking professional advice now ensures you make the most of what's on offer and have a clear plan in place well ahead of the deadline.

Adapt your financial strategy sooner, rather than later. You'll make informed decisions, avoid the 11th-hour panic and feel confident that you've used every allowance to its full potential. ◀

Are you ready to use your tax allowances?

If you want to secure your finances and make the most of this tax year's opportunities, contact us today. We are ready to help you navigate your options and ensure your financial plans stay on track.

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The self-employed pension gap

Are you sleepwalking into a crisis?

Some freelancers are neglecting their financial future, according to new research: nearly two-thirds of self-employed and freelancers are failing to save enough for retirement^[1]. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of this workforce are not prioritising their financial future, leaving them vulnerable in later life.



While the freedom of being your own boss is attractive, it often comes at the cost of the safety net provided by traditional employment.

Without a workplace pension scheme to automatically enrol in, many independent workers push retirement planning to the bottom of their to-do list. The immediate pressures of cash flow, tax returns and finding the next client often take precedence over retirement, which feels decades away.

A GROWING DISCONNECT BETWEEN INTENTION AND ACTION

The data paints a worrying picture for this part of the UK's economy. Nearly 60% of self-employed individuals are not saving for their later years, instead relying on the State Pension or hoping their business will be sold to fund their retirement. More than 45% report having no private pension savings. Only about 17% of self-employed people currently contribute to a private pension.

Additionally, the research found that almost 49% of self-employed people do not know how much they need to save for later life, and almost 30% plan to rely solely on the State Pension. Worryingly, 38% feel anxious or concerned about their financial future once they stop working.

A CHALLENGE OF CONFIDENCE AND CLARITY

The reality is that relying solely on the State Pension is unlikely to provide a comfortable lifestyle. As the cost of living rises, the gap between what the state provides and what

is needed for a basic standard of living is widening, making personal provision essential.

The findings also highlight confidence issues: 27% of freelancers say they do not know how to set up a pension, and more than a quarter are unsure where to seek professional advice. These barriers can cause hesitation and mean many miss out on the benefits of regular, long-term saving.

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED NOW

One of the biggest barriers cited is the lack of consistent income, which makes committing to regular monthly contributions feel daunting. However, modern pension providers are increasingly flexible, allowing ad hoc contributions that suit the feast-and-famine nature of freelance work.

Compound interest means that even small, irregular amounts saved early can grow significantly over time. Ignoring the issue does not make it go away; it simply compounds the problem, requiring much larger contributions later in life to achieve the same outcome. ◀

Unsure where to start with your pension?

If you are self-employed and unsure where to start with your pension, it is never too late to take control. Professional financial advice can help you structure a plan that fits your unique income patterns. Contact us today to discuss your retirement options and secure your future.

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Source data:

[1] Censuswide conducted the research for Aviva among a sample of 500 freelancers and self-employed individuals aged 16+ in the UK between 24 and 29 October 2025. The sample includes 64 digital nomads.

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Long-term care – how to plan for your future

Your financial wellbeing in later life starts with early preparation

Thinking about care in your later years may seem premature, especially if you are currently fit and healthy. However, with average life expectancy in the UK continuing to rise, the likelihood of needing some form of care support increases significantly. It is estimated that one in four of us will need long-term care at some point, making early financial planning not just sensible but essential.

Some people may assume the state will automatically cover these costs. While local authorities provide support, it is strictly means-tested. If your assets, including your property, exceed the £23,250 threshold in England, you will likely have to fund your own care.

GROWING FINANCIAL BURDEN

Care home fees have spiralled over the past two years for people needing a bed in a residential or nursing home. Some individuals paid up to 20% more in 2023/24 than in 2021/22, according to a report^[1]. This sharp increase highlights the growing financial burden on those funding their own later-life care.

The average weekly fee for a residential care home has now reached £949, a 19% increase since 2021/22. For those requiring nursing care, the average weekly cost is £1,267, marking an 18% rise over the same period. These significant increases are largely driven by wider inflationary pressures, including surging energy prices and successive increases in the National Living Wage, which heavily affect provider operating costs.

A TALE OF TWO PRICES

A significant disparity exists between what local authorities pay for care and the fees charged to private individuals. This gap suggests that

self-funded residents are subsidising the cost of care for those funded by the state. Councils, with their substantial bargaining power, can negotiate lower rates. For nursing care, private-pay clients are charged an average of £1,409 per week, £263 more than local authorities pay.

This financial imbalance is even more pronounced in residential care, where the difference is £308 per week. This two-tier system adds to concerns that individuals and their families are bearing the brunt of a strained social care system. As political parties appear hesitant to tackle social care reform, it seems likely that self-funders will continue to face rising costs.

POSTCODE LOTTERY OF COSTS

Care home fees also vary significantly across the country. Residents in the North and the Midlands generally pay substantially less than those in the South. For example, the North East has the lowest average weekly nursing care fee at £1,073, while the South East is the most expensive region, with average nursing care fees of £1,457 per week.

This regional variation is not just due to property prices and pay rates. Analysis shows that costs across the board, including food and staffing levels, are higher in more affluent areas. Providers in these regions appear to flex their costs upwards to meet the expectations of a

client base dominated by private payers, while those in less affluent areas must keep costs down to remain viable.

EXPLORING FUNDING SOLUTIONS

Fortunately, there are several ways to prepare. Immediate needs annuities are a popular choice for those already receiving care, providing a guaranteed income for life in exchange for a lump sum. For those planning ahead, specific insurance policies or dedicated investment strategies can build a fund earmarked for future health needs.

Equity release is another option some homeowners consider, unlocking the value tied up in their property to pay for domiciliary care while staying at home. Each option carries specific tax implications and risks, so professional advice is crucial to ensure you choose the option that best suits your family's circumstances. ◀

Need more information on planning for care costs?

If you are unsure about how to fund potential care costs or want to protect your estate for future generations, we are here to help. Contact us today to arrange a comprehensive review of your long-term care plans.

Source data:

[1] LaingBuisson's Care Homes for Older People UK Market Report (The thirty-fifth edition), published: 27 February 2025.

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Securing your family's financial future

Start the conversation: Why financial planning with older relatives matters

Discussing finances with older relatives can feel daunting, yet it's a vital conversation for everyone involved. Many families avoid these talks out of discomfort, yet addressing financial matters early can prevent misunderstandings and reduce future stress. Understanding their financial situation and identifying potential gaps build a foundation of transparency and trust.

From managing daily expenses to planning for long-term care, open conversations are essential. They offer an opportunity to address concerns, explore options such as income protection and make informed decisions together. Tackling these topics proactively helps families prepare for the future, safeguard their financial wellbeing and build intergenerational security.

WHY THESE CONVERSATIONS MATTER

Some families avoid financial discussions, often assuming there's no need. However, avoiding these conversations can lead to confusion and missed opportunities for effective planning. Early discussions enable families to work together, ensuring that care plans, estate distribution and financial wellbeing are managed smoothly.

Discussing finances also helps identify potential challenges before they arise. Whether it's unexpected care costs, managing an inheritance or simply ensuring day-to-day expenses are covered, these conversations can provide clarity and peace of mind for everyone involved.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

Start by asking your relatives whether they've reviewed their living costs recently. Creating a budget that covers essentials, savings and one-off expenses can help manage day-to-day finances. Younger family members can help find online deals or ensure tax allowances, such as the Marriage Allowance, are claimed.

Another critical question is whether they've considered the impact of Inheritance Tax (IHT) on their estate. Rising house prices and frozen tax thresholds mean more families face higher IHT bills. Strategies such as gifting assets or setting up trusts can help reduce liabilities, and a financial adviser can guide you through the best options.

PLANNING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

It's also worth discussing whether your relatives have an up-to-date Will and whether they've considered setting up a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA). An LPA allows a trusted person to make decisions on their behalf if they're unable to do so, providing peace of mind for the whole family.

Long-term care costs are another important topic. These can significantly erode wealth, but

options such as immediate needs annuities can help. Keeping all important documents organised and accessible is also essential to avoid confusion during critical times.

Early financial planning benefits everyone, reducing stress and ensuring your family's future is secure. By working together, families can make informed decisions and focus on enjoying their time together. ◀

Ready to secure your family's financial future?

Don't wait until it's too late. Start the conversation today. Whether it's planning for care costs, managing inheritance or simply organising important documents, taking action now can make all the difference. For professional guidance tailored to your family's needs, please get in touch with us. Together, we can help you create a plan that provides peace of mind for generations.

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Investing an inheritance

Making informed decisions to secure your financial future

Receiving an inheritance can be a life-changing moment, often accompanied by a mix of emotions. While it may provide financial security or the means to realise long-held dreams, it can also bring uncertainty about how best to manage this newfound wealth. For many, the responsibility of making the right decisions can feel overwhelming, especially when faced with a range of options and potential pitfalls.

This is why taking a thoughtful, informed approach is so important. Whether you're looking to pay off debts, invest for the future or support your family, understanding your financial priorities and seeking professional advice can help you make the most of your inheritance. Here's what you need to consider to navigate this process with confidence.

START WITH A FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Before making any decisions, it's essential to assess your full financial position. Consulting with us will help you understand your current situation and identify priorities, such as paying off debts, funding major life goals or building long-term savings.

We'll also guide you on how to use tax-efficient options such as ISAs and pensions, ensuring your inheritance works harder for you. This initial step is crucial to avoid common pitfalls and to create a clear plan tailored to your needs.

WHY INVESTING BEATS SAVING

While leaving your inheritance in cash may feel safe, inflation can erode its value over time. By contrast, investing offers the potential for long-term growth and protection against inflation, but the returns are not guaranteed.

For those considering property, it's worth noting that while it can generate rental income, it's an illiquid asset. Diversified investment portfolios, however, offer flexibility, access to global markets and the potential for risk-adjusted returns.

TAILORING YOUR INVESTMENT STRATEGY

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to investing an inheritance. Your strategy should reflect your goals, timeframe and risk tolerance. For example, you might allocate funds to tax-efficient wrappers, such as ISAs or pensions, or split your inheritance across different goals, such as retirement and education.

A diversified portfolio combining equities, bonds and other assets can help balance risk and return. Professional advice ensures your investments align with your financial objectives and adapt to changing circumstances.

BUILDING A LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Some people use their inheritance to support children or grandchildren. Options include setting up Junior ISAs, funding education and contributing to family trusts. With the right structure, your inheritance can benefit your family for years to come.

AVOIDING COMMON MISTAKES

It's easy to fall into traps such as holding too much cash, focusing on a single asset class or trying to time the market. Professional guidance can help you avoid these pitfalls, maximise tax benefits and create a sustainable investment plan. ◀

Need help with your inheritance?

For advice tailored to your unique situation on how to manage and invest your inheritance, contact us today. We'll help you make informed decisions and secure your financial future.

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