wealth management

financial

Newsletter

Edition 43 – 2023

KEY FACTS & FIGURES – The UK Economy

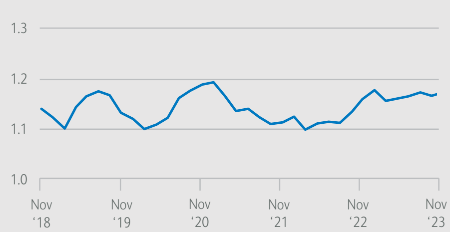
BoE Base Rate – 5.25% *October 2023*

Unemployment – 4.3% *May – July 2023*

Inflation (CPI) – 4.6% *October 2023*

FTSE 100 Chart

What is the British Pound worth vs. Euro?



What is the British Pound worth vs. Dollar?

In this Issue

Bank of England Base Rate

- The current base rate is 5.25%.
- The Bank of England base rate is the base rate of interest. It's a mechanism to allow the Bank of England to manage the economy and control inflation.
- Also known as Bank Rate, it influences the rates of interest banks charge to people when they borrow money. It also impacts rates on savings accounts.
- The base rate is set by the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)
- On 3 August the Bank of England raised it by 0.25 percentage points to bring it to its highest point since 2008.
- Since December 2021, the Bank of England has raised the base rate 14 times in a row in order to address rising inflation.

Inflation

- The UK's annual inflation rate fell sharply to 4.6% in October on the back of cheaper gas and electricity, its lowest level for two years.

  This means Rishi Sunak has achieved his target [set in January] of halving inflation by the end of the year from the 10.7% average in the last quarter of 2022.

Cost of Living – Overview

- The cost of living has been rising in recent months in the UK and across the world.
- Food and energy prices have been rising markedly over the past year, particularly gas prices, partly in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Global recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is putting further pressure on prices.
- Around two-thirds (67%) of adults in Great Britain are spending less on non-essentials because of the rising cost of living.

Cost of Living Insights – Food

- Despite easing inflation, more than 4 in 10 (43%) adults across Great Britain say they have spent more than usual to get what they normally buy when food shopping within the past two weeks.
- Rising food costs was the most commonly reported reason among the 49% of adults who said their cost of living had risen compared with a month ago.
- Prices in restaurants and cafes rose by 9.1% in the year to September 2023, up from 8.8% in June.
- In its Households below average income (HBAI) statistics, it reported that 3% of all individuals in the UK used a food bank in the financial year ending 2022. This is expected to be higher at the end of the current financial year.

Cost of Living Insights – Energy

- Gas and electricity prices rose at 1.7% and 6.7%, respectively, in the year to September 2023. These were both unchanged from August.
- Between June and July 2023, gas prices fell at record rates of 25.2%. This was largely because of the lowering of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) price cap in that month.
- This was the largest monthly fall in gas prices since at least 1988, when data were first collected. In the same period, electricity prices fell by 8.6%.
- The survey also revealed that 47% of adults in Great Britain are using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their homes because of the rising cost of living.
- Around 4 in 10 adults (39%) who pay energy bills said it was very or somewhat difficult to afford them.
- Around a third of adults in Great Britain have not heard of important government schemes that could help with their energy bills this winter.
- This is according to those asked between 18 and 29 October 2023 as part of our latest Public opinions and social trends bulletin.
- Of those surveyed, 36% had not heard of any of the government schemes they were asked about, such as the Energy Price Guarantee or the Warm Home Discount.
- The price of motor fuels fell by 9.7% in the year to September 2023, compared with a fall of 16.4% in the year to August.
- The smaller fall in fuel prices in the year to August is because of recent rises in the price of petrol and diesel.
- Diesel prices rose by 6.3 pence per litre this year to stand at 157.4 pence per litre. Last year, they fell by 5 pence per litre to stand at 181.6 pence per litre in September 2022.

Cost of Living Insights – Housing

- Across the UK, house prices increased 0.2% in the year to August 2023 (provisional estimate). This was down from the revised estimate of 0.7% in July 2023.
- The average UK house price was £291,000 in August 2023 (provisional). This is little changed from the same month a year ago, but £9,000 above the recent low point in March 2023.
- Private rental prices continued to grow at record high rates in all UK countries in the year to September 2023.
- Around a third (35%) of adults in Great Britain paying rent or a mortgage said they were finding the payments very or somewhat difficult to afford.
- Among rent and mortgage payers, 40% said their payments had increased in the last six months. That was compared with 32% a year ago (12 to 23 October 2022)
- According to data from Pay.UK and Vocalink, average monthly mortgage payments made by Direct Debit have been rising steadily, from £718 in December 2021 to £880 in September 2023.
- The proportion of mortgage payments made by Direct Debit which failed because of insufficient funds last month was the highest since May 2023.

The Duty covers four main areas and to put this into plain English;

1. Products & Services

"Does exactly what it says on the tin". For products and services to meet the needs of a clearly defined market i.e. the right products for the right clients, at the right time; whatever your needs are.

2. Price & Value

Value is more than just price. The aim is to remove products from the market that are of poor value. For those products offered there is a reasonable relationship between the price paid and the overall benefit you receive from that product or service.

3. Customer Understanding

This is a key FCA focus that you can make informed decisions and choose products and services that best meet your needs.

4. Customer Support

For you to receive support that meets your needs throughout the life of the product or service whilst you are a client.

Consumer Duty

2023 saw the implementation of the Consumer Duty to the Financial Services. The Duty sets higher and clearer standards of consumer protection across financial services and requires adviser firms to put their customers' needs first.

Of course, this has always been our aim and as we state within our Personal Client Agreement;

We act solely on behalf of our clients and have their best interests at heart at all times. We make a commitment to our clients that the "client experience" is paramount and pride ourselves in building lasting, professional client relationships.

This is by far a one off project. This is a far reaching, fundamental change to enhance the financial services industry. It's aim is to build trust so clients are confident that you will be treated fairly and purchase products that suit your needs. It also covers the fact that if you want to cancel a product, that you must be able to do so easily with no obstacles or barriers put in your way from any provider we deal with. Furthermore, the Duty aims to ensure vulnerable customers are recognised early in the advice process to take their needs and requirements into consideration.

Rooted in our culture of client service, we want to enhance the way we receive feedback from you. We are exploring different ways we conduct client surveys including contacting you directly to ascertain the experience you had in dealing with your adviser and your understanding of the products and services you have bought. You will hear more about this as we move into 2024.

2plan wealth management has grown to be one of the largest financial advice firms in the UK. We have seen many more adviser firms seek to move their businesses to 2plan so they can receive superior services to help them grow their own businesses in a safe environment and provide enhanced services to their clients.

Our technology provides huge benefits to these firms and that of their clients in the way we all work together. Our technology is the underlying engine that provides the platform for our administration, regu-lation and back office services to operate effectively.

The size and scale of our business enables us to work with product providers to reduce the costs and charges of products and passing these savings on to you, so you benefit financially. Our growth also means we can invest in our technology systems and processes with the aim to continually improve the client experience when you are dealing with adviser firms within 2plan.

As we embed all these changes and services across 2plan and the adviser firms, we look forward to working ever more closely with you in 2024, providing an environment which demystifies the world of financial services, meeting your financial needs and objectives and continuing to build trust in our dealings with you.

Author: Chris Smallwood, 2plan

Exploring financial planning...

...and how to get more from this valuable process

Long-term financial planning is not taught in schools yet throughout their lifetimes, most people will need financial advice, and you can get more from this service by understanding the process. So, I'd like to cover some of the main areas to consider when you design or review your financial life plan with your adviser. In outline, the process is simple, but it's important to take time to explore what you really want for your financial future.

Before I consider the different steps involved in putting a plan together, it's worth remembering that your adviser doesn't develop a plan for you – they work with you to tailor a plan to meet your needs and future hopes. By engaging in the development of your plan and with better understanding, there's more likelihood you'll do what you need to make your plan successful and meet your financial goals.

Step 1: Start with the essentials

When planning the holiday of a lifetime, we will all list the 'must-see' places for the trip. Likewise, when planning your finances, there are particular 'must-sort' money challenges. To help with this, I've listed below some of the big money questions you may face during your lifetime (your 2plan adviser will be able to discuss these challenges with you) and identify solutions to meet your needs.

1. Will you provide enough money for any financial dependents in the event of your death?
2. Will you and your loved ones have enough money if you cannot work due to an accident or illness?
3. Do you have enough accessible savings to cover short-term emergencies?
4. Are you optimising your State Pension and other benefit entitlements?
5. Are you on track to repay your mortgage before you retire and any other large debts you may have?
6. Do you have (or on track to build) a big enough pot of money to stop or slow down from work in the future?
7. Are you saving enough for any other life goals?
8. Are you making sensible use of investments to offset the long-term risks from inflation?
9. Are you using all your tax-free allowances?
10. If you're at or in retirement, do you have a robust plan to deliver a sustainable income from your savings?

Step 2: Define your goals

Once you and your adviser have discussed your financial priorities, you'll need to estimate how much money you'd like to provide for each of your priority goals. Once you've done that, decide on the timeframes for these goals.

Step 3: Explore ways to get your plans on track

Next, you and your adviser will check what, if anything, you need to change to put your plan on track. Your adviser will need details of your financial situation, including your income, spending, mortgage and other loans, any regular savings, and the current value of your assets.

Armed with this information, your adviser can undertake the necessary analysis and planning to get (or keep) your financial goals on track.

Step 4: Adjust your goals – if you need to

From the previous steps, you may discover you can afford to fund all of your goals or achieve a big goal earlier than you thought.

Or, you may find you can't afford to achieve all of your goals in the timeframes you've set. In this case, you and your adviser can discuss some of the alternatives such as saving more towards the goals that matter to you or possibly delaying one or more of your goals.

It's not always easy making these choices, but by engaging in the planning process you can ensure you're in control of your financial future.

Step 5: Stress test your plan

It's important to ensure your plan won't break if unexpected events occur, so in addition to having enough life and health insurance in place, you'll want to check how your finances would be affected by a significant stock market fall, for example, or a steep rise in interest rates. Again, your adviser can help you consider these scenarios.

Step 6: Put your plan into action

The final step is to act on whatever recommendations your adviser makes within your unique plan.

Broadly speaking, financial planning is about designing a plan for tomorrow, so you can focus on what matters today. With the help of your 2plan adviser, these six steps will help you create a robust financial plan to achieve your goals. And the same steps can also be followed to review your progress yearly or when significant life events occur.

Author: Fidelity Adviser Solutions

Inflation explained

why is it so high and how could it affect you?

With inflation still high and energy prices skyrocketing, the cost of living crisis has dominated headlines since inflation began to creep up from historic lows in mid-2021. Following such an extended period of price rises, you may be concerned about your household finances and long-term plans.

"A small level of inflation each year is good for the economy."

What is inflation?

Inflation measures how the average price of goods and services changes annually, and is the main driver of the cost of living crisis.

Each month, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) monitors the price of 700 goods and services to determine how much an average household's shopping basket changed in the preceding 12 months. This provides the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), which is one of the key ways we measure inflation.

The Bank of England (BoE) is tasked by the government to keep inflation to 2%. A small level of inflation each year is good for the economy. However, when inflation rises above the 2% target, it can put more pressure on consumer finances and lead to problems in the economy.

A combination of world events raised inflation

Several events in recent years have led to the sharp rise in inflation.

The Covid pandemic
During Covid lockdowns many workplaces closed, so normal manufacturing stopped temporarily. This led to a shortage of products. So, when the lockdowns ended, and we resumed our day-to-day lives, demand outstripped supply and prices rose.

The war in Ukraine
Food prices – specifically animal feed, fertiliser and vegetable oil – have risen directly because of the war, which had a knock-on effect on the price of everyday products such as sugar. Energy prices have also soared to the highest level in 10 years as many European countries rely on Russia for imported natural gas.

Inflation could soon start to fall

In response to rising inflation, the BoE has raised the base interest rate several times throughout 2023 and currently sits at 5.25%. This is expected to encourage more people to save, reducing demand for goods and services, so slowing the pace of price increases.

However, experts predict that inflation will remain high for some time, not returning to the 2% target until late 2024. Therefore interest rates are expected to continue to rise through 2023, which could lead to higher mortgage rates and monthly repayments for borrowers.

Your experience of inflation may be different

The ONS makes certain assumptions when calculating UK inflation, such as that the average household allocates 9.8% of their monthly budget to personal travel costs like owning a car. If you do not own a car, your personal inflation rate might be lower than average.

Author: 2plan

Get in touch

If you're worried about the rising cost of living and would like to discuss ways to protect your finances from the effects of inflation, we're here to help. Please get in touch with your Financial Advisor to arrange a time to chat.

Reaching retirement is like reaching a summit and decumulation can present dangers. After saving for years, planning before you spend your wealth is crucial.

Making your retirement savings last a lifetime

To help ensure a sustainable income, you first need to understand how much you'll need to live on.

On the go

During the early stages of retirement, there's a strong likelihood that you'll spend more on travel, hobbies, or home improvements

Slowing down

While you may be slightly less active, you're still busy with hobbies, but you may be less inclined to long-haul travel

Coming to a stop

In later life, your mobility may be more limited, which risks increasing costs due to needing care

Structuring a sustainable income

The most efficient retirement income strategy should be planned well in advance and ensure that:

- Allowances and exemptions are used to their full capacity
- Married couples plan together so income and assets are allocated effectively of Cost Living "You first need to understand how much you'll need to live on.

"You first need to understand how much you'll need to live on."

When it comes to withdrawing funds, you may want to consider using cash first, followed by taxable investments, ISAs, and finally pensions.

Tax efficiency is key

While tax-efficient savings helps enhance your wealth for retiring in style, tax-efficient withdrawals helps preserve your capital and increases the chance of having money to leave to your loved ones.

So, maximise all your tax allowances including:

- Income Tax allowances
- The Dividend allowance
- 5% return of capital allowance from investment bonds
- Personal savings allowance
- ISA allowance
- Capital Gains Tax allowance

By planning together, couples can use these allowances to maximise the amount of tax-free income available.

Consider spending excess cash first

Ideally, you should hold an emergency fund to cover around six months of regular expenditure. If you have more cash available, consider using this before withdrawing from pensions. Using excess cash allows you to leave funds invested, which may provide enough time for funds to recover any lost value.

Think twice before drawing on your pension

While you may consider your pension as the foundation of your retirement plan, if you have other income that uses your tax allowances, it may be prudent to defer drawing on your pension. Since pension funds benefit from tax free growth, interest, and dividends, leaving your pension invested is especially useful for maintaining capital value. Plus, pension funds are usually not subject to IHT.

Leaving your pension fund intact while drawing on other investments may help to reduce your IHT liability.

Enjoy flexibility from ISA savings

ISAs are considerably more flexible than pensions. Growth, interest, and dividends are all free of tax and you can withdraw money tax-free without restriction. As for IHT, ISAs can be passed between spouses on death, which preserves the tax-efficient treatment.

Useful in reducing tax in retirement, you can use your ISA to:

- Fund large, one-off purchases
- Top up your income – especially useful if your pension exceeds your tax-free allowance
- Make your portfolio more efficient over time, by gradually moving taxable funds across

Take a savvy approach to investment accounts

A basic and flexible wrapper, investment accounts can hold funds, shares and investment trusts. Interest and dividends are taxable at your marginal rate and selling assets can incur Capital Gains Tax (CGT) if your profit exceeds your annual exemption (£6,000 for 2023/2024 or, for a couple, £12,000).

The following strategies can help reduce tax:

- Move your taxable investment accounts into ISAs
- Use your annual CGT exemption to avoid large gains rolling up
- Structure your investments depending on the type of income they generate

Author: 2plan

Get in touch

If you'd like help to create a financial plan to structure a tax-efficient income in retirement, we can help. Please get in touch to arrange a time to chat.

The value of investments and any income from them can fall as well as rise and you may not get back the original amount invested.

Past performance is not a guide to future performance and should not be relied upon.

An ISA is a medium to long-term investment, which aims to increase the value of the money you invest for growth or income or both.

HM Revenue and Customs practice and the law relating to taxation are complex and subject to individual circumstances and changes which cannot be foreseen. Tax concessions are not guaranteed and may change in the future. Tax free means the investor pays no tax.

4 practical steps you could take if you're struggling to pay your mortgage

To tackle persistent inflation, the Bank of England (BoE) has increased the base interest rate 14 times since December 2021. As of September 2023, it stands at 5.25% – the highest seen in 15 years. As a result, millions of homeowners are struggling to afford their mortgage repayments.

If you have a fixed-rate deal that's coming to an end, you could face going from paying interest rates of less than 2% to having to find the means to pay more than double what you've been used to.

While the rate you could secure will depend on your own particular circumstances, the current best-available rates are around 5%.

Fortunately, the government has stepped in to offer support to UK mortgage holders. In June 2023, a new Mortgage Charter was introduced.

Key measures of the Mortgage Charter

- Concerned customers can call their lender for support – vitally, these interactions will not affect your credit score.
- You can secure a new fixed-rate deal up to six months before your existing agreement ends – plus you are free to pursue new agreements right up until your remortgage date.
- Some customers can switch to an interest-only mortgage or extend their mortgage term – each option can be taken without a new affordability check, and neither will affect your credit score.
- Some mortgage holders may be able to remortgage without an affordability check – this could help ensure that you're able to get the mortgage that's right for you when your term ends, without worrying that your finances won't measure up on paper. It may also mean that you needn't worry about how your decisions now could influence your future borrowing options.
- Customers won't be forced to have their homes repossessed 12 months after their first missed payment – this could provide immense peace of mind if you're finding it hard to keep up with repayments in the short term.

If you're among the many struggling to meet higher mortgage repayments, here are a few practical suggestions that may help reduce the stress.

1 Scrutinise your household budget

Going through your monthly expenses with a fine-tooth comb may reveal possible savings, allowing you to divert extra cash towards your mortgage. With a clear idea of where you may be able to make savings, you could find meeting increased mortgage repayments a little easier.

2 Claim any protection insurance you have

If you're struggling to cover your household costs due to injury or sickness, you may have insurance that could bolster your monthly income.

Mortgage payment protection is by no means obligatory, but if you do have it, the insurance should pay out if you're unable to work due to an accident, illness, or redundancy.

Alternatively, you may have other insurance that could pay out in the event that you're unable to work. Income protection insurance, for example, pays out a set amount of income in the event of accident or sickness until you're strong enough to return to work or reach retirement.

Author: 2plan

3 Take advantage of the Mortgage Charter and switch to interest-only payments for six months

Most people have a repayment mortgage, where each month you pay off some of the capital and the interest charged.

The Mortgage Charter allows you to switch to an interest-only mortgage for up to six months. This could help to make the costs more manageable for a period, granting you time to figure out your finances. Following the six-month respite period, your usual schedule of repayments covering both capital and interest will restart.

4 Extend your mortgage term

Stretching your mortgage term to spread the cost of repayments – by adding five years to the term, for example – can help reduce the amount of capital you'll be repaying every month.

You're free to choose how long you'd like to extend your term, as long as it is within the lender's maximum allowed mortgage term and doesn't go beyond your expected retirement age.

Beware though, while extending your mortgage over a longer term may help you benefit from a lower monthly payment, over the long term, you'll end up paying more interest to the lender.

To put this in perspective, assuming a 5% interest rate, although extending a typical £200,000 mortgage from 25 to 30 years could save you £95.54 on your monthly repayments, the relatively small saving now could cost you more than £35,500 in interest over the long term.

Think carefully before securing other debts against your home. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

Get in touch

If you're struggling to meet your monthly mortgage payments, you should talk to us sooner rather than later. We're here to help and can explain your options and give you the expert advice you need.

Why we all need to get 'comfortable' with Capital Gains Tax

In the 2021/22 tax year 394,000 taxpayers paid Capital Gains Tax (CGT)[1]. If you consider that, in the same year, there were 33.3m taxpayers who paid Income Tax[2] you would be forgiven for thinking that CGT is something you'll never need to think about. This could however, be somewhat naive in the fiscal world we find ourselves.

Allowances are dwindling

Over the last 10 years you would need gains in excess of £10,000 (£10,900 in 2013/14, peaking at £12,300 in 2020/21), before CGT would 'bite'. Even with this fairly generous annual allowance, recent trends in rising capital prices, has resulted in record amounts of CGT (£16.7 billion) being recorded in 2021/22, a 15% increase on the preceding year.

This trend will only continue. Following the November 2022 Autumn Statement things have started to change and not for the better. In the current tax year, gains (profit above the price paid) above £6,000 will get you a tax bill, this will be just £3,000 from 6th April 2024. CGT will no longer be such a minority tax. It is all but guaranteed that we will see records set in this space in the years to come. The treasury has predicted that by 2024/25 the number of taxpayers will rise by 45%[3]! Even average returns will lead to people like you paying CGT for the first time.

1 - gov.uk/government/statistics/capital-gains-tax-statistics

2 - gov.uk/government/statistics/income-tax-liabilities-statistics-tax-year-2020-to-2021-to-tax-year-2023-to-2024

3 - Reducing the annual exempt amount for CGT – policy paper

4 - Halifax House Price Index – September 2023

5 - Median Collective Investment Account holding on the Quilter Investment Platform 6 November 2023

6 - Using IA Mixed 40-85% Shares as a benchmark 2018/19 – 2022/23

Professional advice is crucial, there are strategies to help reduce your tax bill

If you have accrued wealth, perhaps in second properties or savings, it is now the time to sit down with your 2plan adviser to discuss the impact these changes will have on you. There are simple strategies that can help, including how assets are owned, useful for married couples or civil partners, and reducing the rate of tax you pay.

CGT is payable at two main rates 10% and 20%. Unfortunately, property attracts a surcharge of an additional 8% resulting in 18% or 28% respectively. With the help of your 2plan adviser you can maximise the use of allowances and pay the lowest possible effective rate to help improve your net returns.

No tax is 'comfortable' but being well informed and having a sound financial plan will help to feel in control of your finances and make sure you can benefit from your hard-earned wealth.

Author: Quilter

What does average look like?

Two common asset classes which attract CGT are property (other than your main residence) and investments (stocks & shares / collectives). If we consider what average looks like it is easy to see the impact of the reducing allowance will have on all of us.

Average house price[4]	£278,601
Average investment portfolio[5]	£134,600

Using the 2024/25 allowance of £3,000, very modest returns on these averages will result in gains in excess of the allowance, and if sold a CGT bill. 1.08% of the average house in a single year exceeds this whereas 2.23% return is required on the average investment to exceed.

Except for 2023, every year in the last 10 would see you achieve this kind of growth on property[4]. Similarly, even in the particularly volatile years we have experienced, 3 out of the last 5[6] will have seen you top the 2.23% return quoted above in investments.

Again, it is all but guaranteed that average returns will create CGT bills for many of us when assets are sold.

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If you would like to discuss any of these topics in more detail, please feel free to contact me to make an appointment. If you have friends, family members or colleagues who you think would be interested in these topics, please pass this newsletter to them.

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The information contained in this newsletter is based on 2plan wealth management Ltd's current understanding of tax laws as at December 2023. These laws are subject to change at any time and 2plan wealth management Ltd cannot be held responsible for any decisions made as a result of this newsletter. Tax advice is not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

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