

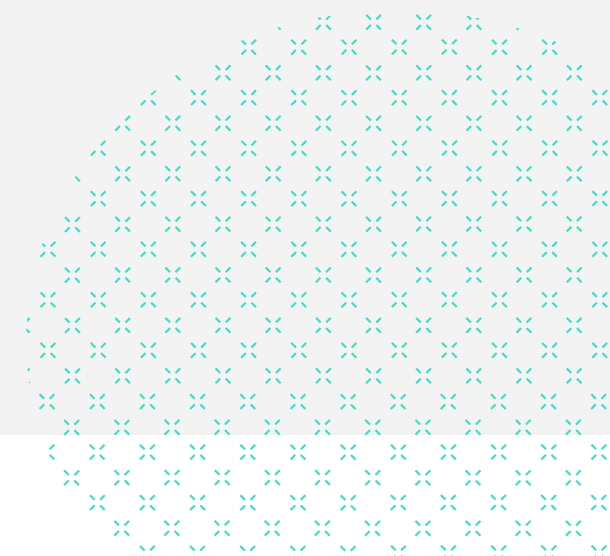
Financial Health Report 2026

A portrait of the UK's wealth and wellbeing

2026

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Research methodology

Opinium surveyed 6,000 UK adults nationwide between 17th March and 9th April 2026. Quotas and post-weighting were applied to the sample to make the dataset representative of the UK adult population.

Previous years' research was also conducted by Opinium:

- ◆ Among 6,000 UK adults in two polls between 23rd December 2024 and 17th February 2025
- ◆ Among 6,000 UK adults between 16th – 25th October 2023
- ◆ Among 4,000 UK adults between 17th – 21st October 2022
- ◆ Among 4,000 UK adults between 25th October – 2nd November 2021

Quotas and post-weighting were applied to the sample to make the dataset representative of the UK adult population.



Foreword



Mark FitzPatrick
CEO of St. James's Place

This year marks the fifth edition of our Financial Health research. Over that time, we have built a detailed picture of how people across the UK experience their financial lives – tracking not just the numbers, but the confidence, resilience and behaviours that sit behind them.

Over that period, one thing has been clear: financial health rarely moves in a straight line.

This year's findings reflect that reality. After a period where some indicators were beginning to stabilise, the nation's financial health has come under renewed pressure. Against ongoing cost pressures and global uncertainty, people are now twice as likely to say their financial situation has worsened over the past 12 months than improved, with our data pointing to a broader weakening in financial confidence. Overall, people's perceptions of their own household wealth are now at their lowest point across our five-year research period.

External indicators tell a similar story. Recent GfK research¹ shows consumer confidence has dropped to its lowest level since October 2023, while Ipsos's consumer confidence index² points to economic optimism being at record lows since measurement began in 1978.

There is no doubt that this is a challenging environment, and for many households the pressure is real and immediate. But what our research consistently shows is that, even in these conditions, the steps people take can still shape their financial outcomes. Regardless of income or age, those who engage with their finances through planning, investing and advice are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, build resilience and feel in control of their future.

Yet, despite the clear benefits, progress has stalled. Today, just 38 per cent of people have a financial plan in place – exactly the same proportion as five years ago. At a time when individuals are being asked to take greater responsibility for their financial futures, it reinforces the need for a more coordinated effort to support people in planning ahead.



Investing plays a central role in this. As the UK looks to broaden participation through the 'Invest for the Future' campaign, which we are proud to back, our findings point to the transformative effect of long-term investing. Those who invest build substantially greater wealth than those who do not, and this advantage grows over time. Those receiving ongoing advice are in the strongest position of all – underlining the value not just of starting, but of staying invested with the right support.

However, the challenge is not simply one of access. It is about narrowing the gap between intention and action. Our behavioural study, conducted with Ipsos³ earlier this year, highlights how many people are open to investing in principle but are held back by a lack of confidence, perceived risk, and a sense that investing is not for people like them.

Addressing this challenge will require a shift in how we engage people. This, coupled with efforts to improve access to guidance through the introduction of Targeted Support in April 2026, represent an important step forward.

Five years on from our first report, the conclusion is consistent. In an uncertain world, financial wellbeing is not just shaped by circumstance, but by engagement. Expanding access to support, and helping more people plan and invest, will be key in building a more financially resilient UK.

¹Gfk Consumer Confidence Index April 2026 – [Consumer confidence score down four points in April to -25](#)

²Ipsos Economic Optimism Index April 2026 – [Economic optimism falls to record low as concern over inflation rises](#)

³St. James's Place and Ipsos – [Shifting behaviours to create a new wave of investor](#)

Introduction



Alexandra Loydon
Group Advice Director

“Those with a financial plan in place are more likely to report improvements in their financial situation in the short term than those without.”

For many households, financial decision-making is often focused on the immediate – managing bills, budgeting for essentials and keeping day-to-day spending under control.

But this year’s findings show that the real difference in outcomes is often shaped by what happens beyond those everyday decisions.

Across the UK, people continue to adapt to financial pressures in practical ways, from cutting back on spending to delaying major life events or seeking additional sources of income. While these behaviours reflect resilience, they also underline the challenge of balancing short-term pressures with longer-term financial priorities.

The evidence from this year’s research, consistent across our numbers over five years, points to a clear pattern. Those with a financial plan in place are more likely to report improvements in their financial situation in the short term than those without. They are also more likely to feel confident, resilient and in control of their financial future. The strongest outcomes, however, are where planning is combined with regular investing and supported by financial advice. Together, these elements create a more structured and sustained approach to building financial wellbeing over time.

However, engagement with these behaviours is not consistent across the UK.

One of the most persistent divides is between men and women. While women are more likely to lead on everyday financial decisions such as budgeting and household

spending, they are less likely to engage with longer-term planning, investing and advice.

Addressing this imbalance will be critical to improving financial outcomes across the country more broadly.

Encouragingly, there are signs of change.

Younger generations, including younger women, are demonstrating greater engagement with how they plan their financial future. This shift matters, and initiatives from both government and industry have an important role to play in supporting this progress by widening access to investing, guidance and advice.

As this report shows, stronger financial outcomes are not driven by single decisions, but by sustained engagement over time. Making conversations around money more open and inclusive, and financial planning more relevant and accessible, is essential.

Key facts and figures

£104,329

Average UK household wealth (savings, investments and physical possessions)

14%
Hold no savings at all

38%

Of people have a financial plan in place, the same as five years ago (38%)

40%

Say their financial situation has negatively impacted their mental health

Over a third

Say their financial situation has worsened over the past year

6 in 10

Do not feel financially comfortable

7 in 10

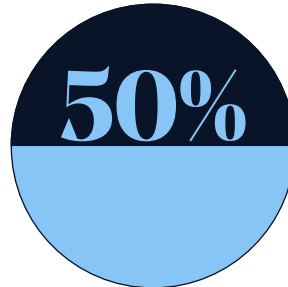
Say a financial plan makes them feel more confident in their financial position

15%
Say financial worries are affecting their sleep

£86,806

Better off, on average, with a financial plan in place compared to those without

Of those 34 and under have a financial plan in place



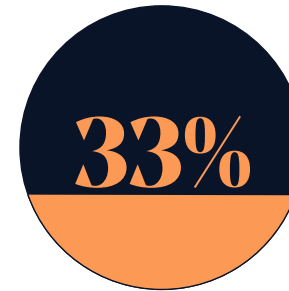
2 in 5

Have less than £10,000 in savings

£126,626

Better off, on average, with advice in the last 10 years compared to those without

Of women have a financial plan in place versus 42% of men



Advice accelerates it

£374,985 average household wealth 5+ years investing + ongoing advice

Time in the market builds wealth

£269,690 average household wealth for 5+ years investing

Those with a plan 3x more likely to say financial situation has improved in past year

31% vs 9% of those without spending in response to financial pressure

35%
Of the population invest

61%
Feel financially resilient, the same as five years ago (61%)

£49,670
The financial resilience gap

£52,973
The financial comfort gap



41%
Of those who receive ongoing financial advice say their financial situation has improved over the last year, versus 13% without

7 in 10
Have cut back or adjusted their spending in response to financial pressure

87%
Of those who have been investing for over five years feel financially resilient

21%
Struggling financially (up from 14% five years ago)

Executive summary

Across the five years we have been tracking how people across the UK are experiencing their finances, we have seen the financial health of the nation ebb and flow.

One trend, however, has remained consistent: those who engage more actively with their finances tend to achieve stronger outcomes. Whether through planning, investing or seeking advice, taking a structured, longer-term approach consistently correlates with higher levels of wealth, confidence and resilience, even as the economic backdrop shifts.

Against a backdrop of rising costs, our research highlights both challenges and opportunities for financial stability in 2025.

Our 2026 findings

This year's findings point to a more challenging financial environment. Perceptions of wealth have declined, with estimated reported average household wealth falling to £104,329, down from £126,482 in 2025. Although this reflects a period of heightened global uncertainty and market volatility, it also appears to signal a broader shift in how secure households feel about their financial position.

This weakening sense of perceived wealth is reflected more widely in both confidence and resilience. Fewer people describe themselves as financially comfortable than a year ago (37% vs 42%), and the proportion who feel financially resilient has also fallen (61% vs 65%). Satisfaction with wealth has also softened, with 49% now saying they are satisfied, down from 54% in 2025.

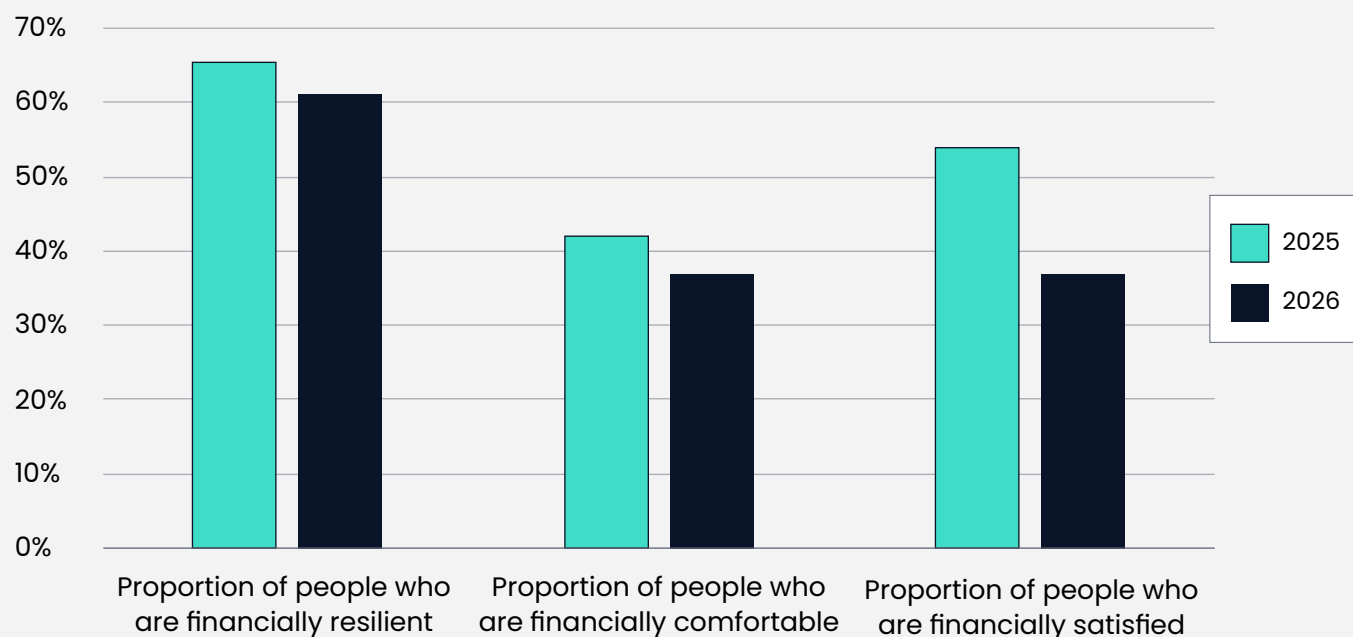
Estimated reported average household wealth has fallen to £104,329 down from £126,482 in 2025.



A worsening picture

The cost of living continues to dominate this picture. Seven in 10 (69%) cite rising costs as the main reason their financial situation has worsened, with the cost of food and essentials (57%) continuing to place strain on household budgets. As a result, financial buffers remain limited, with two fifths (38%) holding less than £10,000 in savings, investments and possessions, and 14% reporting no savings at all.

The impact extends beyond finances and through to people's wellbeing. Two in five (40%) say their financial situation has negatively affected their mental health, including 14% who say they have become anxious about going out or seeing anyone else due to worries over their finances. Meanwhile, a similar 38% report that their physical health has been impacted by their financial status in the last year, including one in seven (15%) who report losing sleep due to financial concerns, and just over a quarter (27%) who report it has had an impact on their physical appearance, for example noticing more grey hairs or wrinkles.



1 in 3

People are considering making significant lifestyle changes to deal with their financial situation.

Against this backdrop, households are adapting. Seven in 10 (70%) have made cutbacks, more than two fifths (44%) have taken steps to increase their income, and a third (32%) are making or considering more significant lifestyle changes such as changing jobs (7%) delaying retirement (6%) or renting for longer (6%). These behaviours reflect both the scale of the challenge and the need to remain flexible.

However, the picture of financial health is not uniform. A clear divide emerges between those who actively engage with their finances and those who do not.

Those with a financial plan are more than three times as likely than those without to say their financial situation has improved over the past year (31% vs 9%), while those who have received financial advice are more than twice as likely to report improvement (30% vs 13%). Investors also stand apart, with 31% reporting an improvement compared to just 10% of non-investors.

This gap is also evident across wealth, comfort and resilience. Households with a financial plan report average wealth of £157,416 compared to £70,610 among those who say they don't have a plan. Those who have received financial advice in some form over the last ten years report average wealth of £193,960, compared to £67,334 who haven't taken advice at all. Wealth rises to £298,079 among those who report receiving ongoing advice.

The impact becomes even more pronounced when investment habits are formed and supported by advice. Average household wealth rises to £269,690

for those who say they have been investing for over five years. When combined with ongoing advice, this increases to £374,985.

Among those who have been investing for more than five years, 71% say their wealth has increased over the past decade, rising to 77% among those longer-term investors who currently receive ongoing financial advice. This compares to just 25% of non-investors. Investors with over five years' experience are also significantly more likely than non-investors to feel financially comfortable (68% vs 26%) and resilient (87% vs 52%). Once again, longer-term investors who receive ongoing advice are in an even better position – 79% say they feel financially comfortable and 91% say they feel financially resilient.

Yet participation in these behaviours remains uneven. Only 38% of people have a financial plan in place, the same as five years ago, and only 35% of those surveyed say they invest in some form. Gender remains one of the clearest divides. Women are less likely than men to have a plan (33% vs 42%), invest (27% vs 43%) or receive advice (25% vs 31%), despite being highly engaged in managing day-to-day finances.

This gap continues to contribute to wealth inequality. In the context of the Great Wealth Transfer, which will see substantial wealth pass to women over the coming decades, it is a pivotal moment, and a time for change.

On a more positive note, younger generations are leading the way, with half of those aged 18–34 having

a financial plan (50%), compared with 28% of those aged over 55, and two fifths (40%) identifying as investors, suggesting a shift in behaviour.

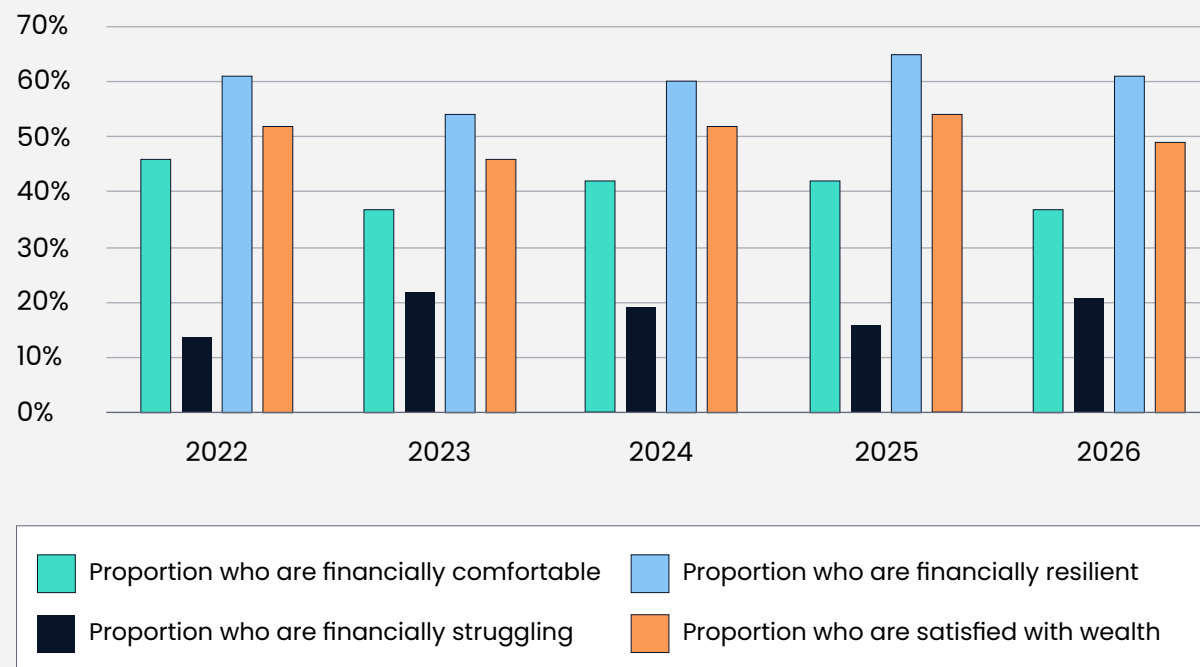
In a more uncertain environment, the importance of planning, advice and investing has only increased.



A view over five years

Looking across our five-years of data, these findings sit within a broader pattern of uneven progress. The proportion of people who feel financially comfortable has fallen from almost half (46%) at the start of our research to just over a third (37%) in 2026, while those struggling has increased from one in seven (14%) to around one in five (21%). Financial resilience has fluctuated over time, peaking at nearly two thirds (65%) in 2025 before returning to just over three in five (61%) in 2026, in line with where it stood five years ago.

Recent shifts are particularly notable. Reported household wealth has fallen sharply from £126,483 in 2025 to £104,329 in 2026, reversing gains from £113,154 in 2024. Satisfaction with overall wealth has declined from just over half (54%) in 2025 to just under half (49%) in 2026. Meanwhile, the proportion of people who say they are financially struggling has risen from around one in six (16%) in 2025 to just over one in five (21%) in 2026, again reversing improvements seen since 2024 (19%).



The proportion of people who feel financially comfortable has fallen from almost half (46%) at the start of our research to just over a third (37%) in 2026.

The world in 2026

Resilience amid a challenging backdrop

This year's report brings to life the challenging financial backdrop shaping how people across the UK are managing and feeling about their money. Over the past year, a combination of global and domestic factors, from conflict in the Middle East and wider geopolitical tensions to cost pressures at home, has created a testing environment.

For many households, this is reflected in behaviour and sentiment. More than a third (34%) say their financial situation has worsened over the past year, up from 31% in 2025, while just 17% say it has improved, down from 21%. At the same time, one in five (21%) now describe themselves as struggling financially, rising from 16% last year, and reaching the highest level since 2023 (22%). Meanwhile the proportion who feel financially comfortable has fallen to just over a third (37%), down from two fifths (42%) last year.

The underlying drivers remain consistent. Rising living costs continue to dominate, cited directly by seven in 10 (69%) as the main reason their situation has deteriorated, with increasing cost of food and essentials also scoring highly (57%). Other factors include pay not keeping pace (19%), rising rents (13%) and ill health reducing income (10%).

By contrast, those whose financial position has improved are more likely to point to a narrower set of positive drivers. Pay rises are the most frequently cited factor (30%), followed by investment performance (23%), better savings rates (21%) and work bonuses (16%). While pressures are broad-based and affecting many households, the drivers of improvement are more closely linked to either stronger earnings or more active engagement with savings and investments.

The impact beyond finances

Financial pressure is increasingly taking a toll beyond household finances. Two in five (40%) say their financial situation has had a negative impact on their mental health over the past year, with more than one in five (22%) reporting it is affecting their mood and 14% saying financial worries are making them anxious about going out and socialising. Over one in 10 have experienced stress-related conditions (13%) or depression (11%) during this period.

The impact is also being felt physically, with over a quarter (27%) saying financial pressure has affected their physical appearance. A similar proportion (16%) say they are buying or cooking less healthy food as a result and one in seven (15%) report losing sleep due to financial concerns.



How the nation is adapting

Against this backdrop, households are responding in a range of ways, from everyday adjustments to more significant, long-term financial decisions:

Cutting back

Seven in 10 (70%) have cut back or adjusted their spending, a third (34%) have chosen to shop at cheaper supermarkets, three in 10 (31%) have stopped buying non-essential items, and a fifth (20%) are reducing their holiday budget.

Managing savings

Some households are taking steps to manage their savings more actively. While it's encouraging to see that 12% are moving into higher interest rate paying accounts, the picture is less positive for a fifth (19%) who have had to resort to putting less money into savings.

Increasing income

Alongside reducing spending, many are also seeking to increase their income. Over two fifths (44%) have taken steps to increase their income, including by selling unwanted items (23%), turning a hobby into a source of income (8%), taking on additional work (8%) or doing freelance work on the side (8%).

Shifting plans

A third (33%) say they are making or considering significant lifestyle changes in response to financial pressure. A small minority (6%) say they have or are considering delaying retirement,

which is higher for those aged over 55 (8%).

A similar proportion (7%) have or are considering changing jobs, while for those aged 18-34 the figure is nearly double (15%).

These behaviours reflect both constraint and adaptability. While some households are being forced to cut back, others are engaging more actively with their finances, seeking value, managing costs and creating additional income streams.

Women more likely to take action – but often at the cost of long-term savings

Nearly three quarters of women (74%) have cut back, compared to two thirds (66%) of men:

- ◆ Four in 10 (39%) women shop at cheaper supermarkets, compared to three in 10 (28%) men
- ◆ Over a third (36%) have stopped buying non-essential items, versus a quarter (25%) of men
- ◆ However, over a fifth (22%) have reduced or stopped saving, compared to around one in seven (15%) men

**Nearly three quarters of women
74% have cut back, compared
to two thirds (66%) of men.**



Younger generations seek income boosts

Around six in 10 younger adults (61%) have taken steps to increase income, compared to around a quarter (26%) of those aged 55+.

- ◆ They are more likely to:
 - ◆ sell unwanted and second-hand items (29% of those aged 18–34 vs 16% of those aged 55+)
 - ◆ take on freelance work (14% of those aged 18–34 vs 3% of those aged 55+)
 - ◆ turn hobbies into a source of income (13% of those aged 18–34 vs 3% of those aged 55+)

Planners more proactive

- ◆ People who plan are also more likely to take targeted actions to improve their position when conditions become more difficult.
- ◆ More than half (57%) have taken steps to increase income, compared to just over a third (36%) without a plan.
- ◆ They are also more likely to take proactive steps to improve their financial position, from selling unwanted items (27% vs 21%) to taking on freelance work (12% vs 6%) or changing jobs (10% vs 3%).

Our financial buffers in 2026

This year's findings highlight an ongoing risk: many households remain exposed to financial shocks, with limited buffers or resources to offer protection against the unexpected.

Two in five people (38%) have less than £10,000 in savings, investments and physical possessions, up from 31% last year. Meanwhile, 14% now say they have no wealth at all, up from 10% in 2024. These figures point to a weakening financial safety net across the population. Even where people do not describe themselves as struggling, many appear to have only limited protection against future shocks.

The broader debt picture adds to this pressure. Half of households hold some form of unsecured

debt, such as personal loans or overdrafts, averaging £3,527. The average household with a mortgage owes £122,240. These liabilities help explain why some households feel financially stretched even when they may own assets on paper.

The financial resilience gap remains a useful way of understanding the scale of that pressure. Those who do not currently feel financially resilient say their household would need an average of £49,670 more to feel able to cope with a sudden fall in income or rise in unavoidable costs. Interestingly, this is down from £61,902 in 2025. The financial comfort gap has also narrowed, with those who do not feel financially comfortable saying they would need £52,973 more to reach that position, down from £74,382 last year.



At first glance, this reduction might look positive. But read alongside the wider deterioration in confidence and perceived wealth, it may say more about expectations shifting than about households becoming objectively stronger. In a more uncertain environment, people may simply be adjusting what they view as “comfortable” or “resilient”.

The enduring power of a plan

The benefits of financial planning are clear, but uptake remains static

The overall picture is not one of paralysis for everyone. While financial pressures are widely felt, a consistent pattern emerges across our Financial Health research: those with a financial plan in place tend to fare better and report stronger outcomes.

Those with a financial plan in place are more than three times as likely to say their financial situation has improved over the past year than those without (31% vs 9%), and significantly less likely to say it has worsened (25% vs 40%).

A similar pattern is seen for those who have received financial advice in the past ten years. They are more than twice as likely as those who have not received advice over the period to report an improvement (30% vs 13%), and less likely to say it has deteriorated (30% vs 37%). This trend is even more pronounced among those receiving ongoing advice, with 41% reporting an improvement and 22% saying their financial situation has worsened.

However, despite the clear benefits of having a financial plan, uptake has not increased over our five years of research. Fewer than four in 10 (38%) households currently have a financial plan in place, broadly unchanged from 2025 (39%) and worryingly, the same as five years ago (38%). Encouragingly the same generational shift seen last year continues to emerge. Half (50%) of those aged 18–34 now have a financial plan in place, compared to 38% of those aged 35–54, and 28% of those aged 55+, suggesting that younger households are leading the way when it comes to engaging with financial planning.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of people with a financial plan rises to almost two thirds (64%) among those who have received financial advice in the last 10 years, and to three quarters (73%) among those who currently receive ongoing financial advice.

The planning gap

Despite the clear benefits of having a financial plan in place, uptake has not changed over our five-year research period.

Fewer than four in 10 have a financial plan in place (38%), with uptake remaining unchanged over the five-year research period (38% in 2022).

A new generation of financial planners is emerging.

Half (50%) of those aged 18–34 now have a plan in place, compared to under two fifths (38%) of those aged 35–54 and fewer than three in 10 (28%) people aged 55+.

Fewer than four in 10 have a financial plan in place (38%), with uptake remaining unchanged over the five-year research period (38%) in 2022.



Stronger financial foundations

The difference in outcomes between those who do and don't have a financial plan is most clearly seen in levels of household wealth.

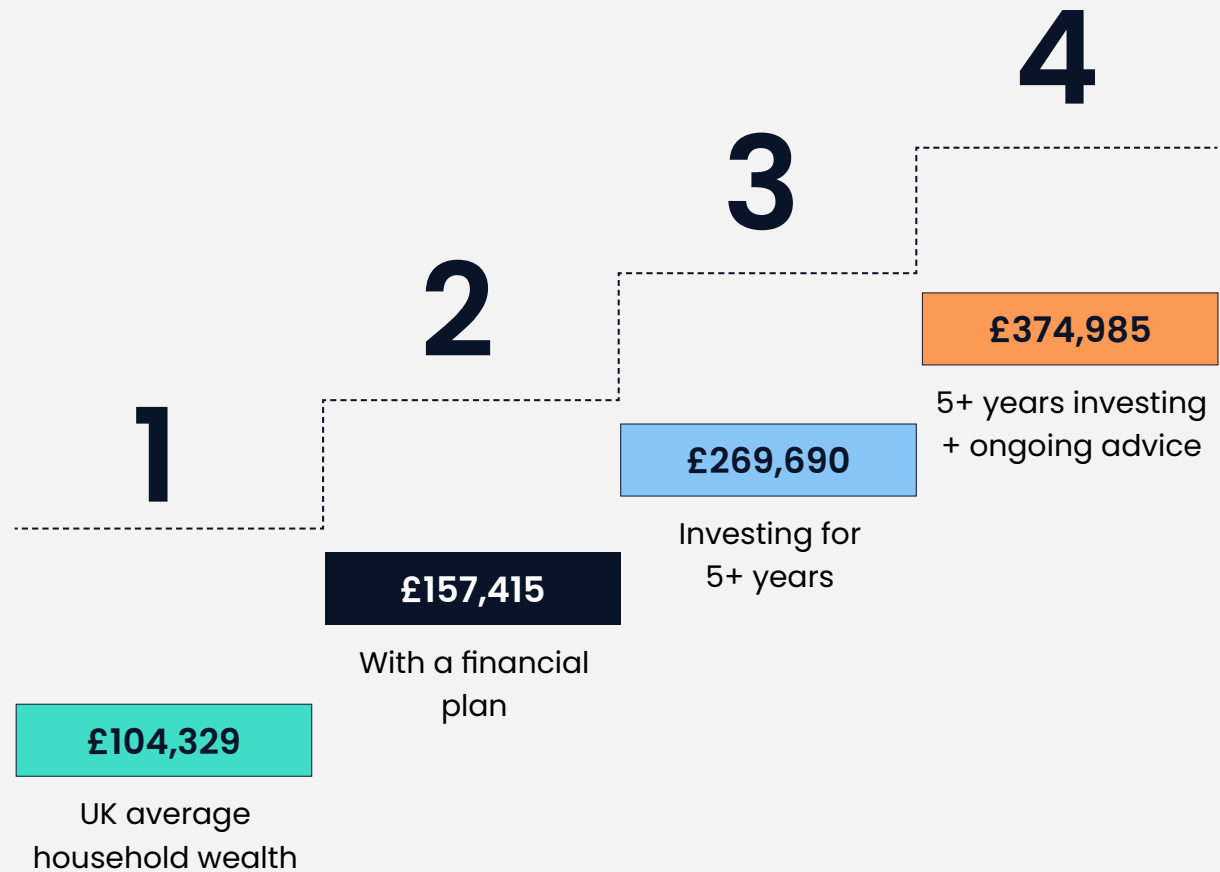
Those with a financial plan in place estimate they have, on average, £157,416 in savings, investments and physical possessions, compared with £70,610 among those without - a gap of more than £86,000. Those who have received financial advice in the last ten years report average household wealth of £193,960, around £126,000 more than those who have not taken financial advice in that period (£67,334). This increases to £298,079 among those receiving ongoing financial advice.

As we outline later, the difference becomes more pronounced when investing habits are established, with average household wealth rising to £269,690 for those who have been investing for over five years.

The strongest outcomes are seen where behaviours are combined. Among investors with over five years' experience who receive ongoing advice through a firm or individual, average household wealth rises to £374,985.

The power of planning and advice

How financial behaviours build wealth over time



Benefits across all income levels

The relationship holds across all income levels. While the gap is most pronounced among higher earners, the benefits of planning and financial advice are evident across the income spectrum, including among those with more limited resources.

Among households earning £40,000 to £60,000, those with a financial plan report they have £35,562 more in household wealth than those without. A similar pattern is seen for those who have received financial advice in the last ten years, with advised households in this income group holding £114,099 more than those who have not.

Even in the lowest income group, households earning under £20,000 with a financial plan are £24,525 better off on average, with those who have received advice in the last ten years seeing an even more significant increase, holding £39,611 more in wealth than those who have not.

This difference is still clear at the upper end of the scale. Households earning over £80,000 with a financial plan hold £194,192 more in wealth than those without, while those who have received financial advice in the last ten years report an even larger gap of £291,143.

| Income Group | Average level of overall Wealth | With a financial plan | Without a financial plan | Difference between those with/without a financial plan |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Up to 20k a year | £40,283 | £59,223 | £34,699 | £24,524 |
| £20,001 - 40k a year | £77,017 | £89,833 | £69,178 | £20,655 |
| £40,001 - 60k a year | £146,095 | £162,669 | £127,107 | £35,562 |
| £60,001 - 80k a year | £199,457 | £216,186 | £171,829 | £44,357 |
| Over £80k+ | £474,277 | £519,634 | £325,443 | £194,191 |

| Income Group | Average level of overall Wealth | With financial advice in last 10 years | Without financial advice in last 10 years | Difference between those with/without financial advice in last 10 years |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Up to 20k a year | £40,283 | £72,678 | £33,067 | £39,611 |
| £20,001 - 40k a year | £77,017 | £109,216 | £65,467 | £43,749 |
| £40,001 - 60k a year | £146,095 | £218,843 | £99,744 | £114,099 |
| £60,001 - 80k a year | £199,457 | £262,219 | £142,169 | £120,050 |
| Over £80k+ | £474,277 | £577,048 | £285,905 | £291,143 |

Wealth over the last decade

The benefits of financial planning and advice are also reflected in how households build longer-term wealth over time.

Those with a financial plan are almost twice as likely (57%) than those without (28%) to say their wealth has increased over the past decade, with a similar trend seen for those who have received advice in the last ten years (57% report an increase in wealth compared with 33% who have not taken advice).

This pattern persists across income groups, including among those earning an income of less than £20,000 a year, where those with a financial plan are twice (38%) as likely to say they've seen wealth increase over the past ten years than those who do not have a plan in place (19%). Those who have received advice report a similar trend (35% have seen an increase in wealth vs 21% of those not advised).

Boosting confidence and resilience

The benefits of planning extend beyond the purely financial.

Seven in 10 (72%) say having a plan makes them feel more confident in their financial position, while very few (6%) say it has reduced their confidence.

More than half (51%) of those with a financial plan describe themselves as financially comfortable, compared to just 29% of those without. This figure rises to 69% of those receiving ongoing financial advice. Similarly, three quarters (76%) with a plan in place say they feel financially resilient and able to cope with unexpected changes, compared to 52% of those without a plan.

Only one in 10 (11%) with a plan in place and just 7% of those taking ongoing financial advice say they are struggling, compared with over a quarter (27%) of those without a plan, and not advised (25%).

The pattern is consistent across income groups, with those who have a financial plan feeling more comfortable and more financially resilient than those who do not.

Across all measures and multiple years, the advantages of planning are consistent. While financial pressure remains a defining feature of the current environment, those with a plan are better placed to maintain progress, respond to change and navigate uncertainty with greater confidence.

| Income Group | With a financial plan - % who feel financially comfortable | Without a financial plan - % who feel financially comfortable | With a financial plan - % who feel financially resilient | Without a financial plan - % who feel financially resilient |
|----------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Up to 20k a year | 35% | 20% | 66% | 45% |
| £20,001 - 40k a year | 46% | 31% | 73% | 56% |
| £40,001 - 60k a year | 60% | 48% | 83% | 67% |
| £60,001 - 80k a year | 65% | 46% | 86% | 60% |
| Over £80k+ | 83% | 53% | 94% | 66% |

The investment advantage

For the first time in our five-years of research, we explicitly explore the role investing can play in shaping people's financial health. Average household wealth rises to £269,690 for those who have been investing regularly for more than five years.

At a time where there is emphasis on encouraging participation across the UK, our research shows only a third (35%) of the population currently invest, with 13% having invested for more than ten years and a further one in 10 (9%) for between five and ten years.

Participation varies significantly across the population. Men are far more likely to invest than women (43% vs 27%) and are almost twice as likely to have been investing for more than five years (28% vs 15%).

Encouragingly, younger generations are leading the way when it comes to investing. Two fifths (40%) of those aged 18–34 say they invest, compared to a third (35%) of those aged 35–54 and three in 10 (31%) of those aged 55+.

Men are far less likely to invest than women (43% vs 27%).

This suggests a gradual change in behaviour over time.

As with planning, advice plays an important role in driving engagement.

Those who have received financial advice in the past ten years are significantly more likely to invest (62% vs 25%) – rising to 77% of those receiving ongoing advice.

They are also more likely to invest consistently. Approaching half of those who have received financial advice in the last ten years (44%) have been investing for more than five years compared to just over one in 10 (13%) of those who have not received advice. This increases to almost two thirds (62%) of those receiving ongoing advice.

Given the importance of time in the market for long-term returns and better financial health, building these habits more widely is essential.

Two fifths (40%) of those aged 18–34 say they invest.



Investing boosts financial health all round

The relationship between investing and financial outcomes is clear. Among those who have been investing for more than five years, seven in 10 (71%) say their wealth has increased over the past decade, rising to three quarters (75%) among those who have also received professional financial advice in the last 10 years. This compares to just a quarter (25%) of non-investors.

The same pattern is seen across broader measures of financial wellbeing. Over two thirds (68%) of those who have been investing for more than five years say they feel financially comfortable, rising to 72% among those who have also received advice. This compares to only a quarter (26%) of non-investors.

Levels of satisfaction follow a similar trend – with four fifths (79%) of those who have been investing for over five years, and 84% of longer-term investors who also receive advice, saying they are financially satisfied. This compares to only four in 10 (39%) financially satisfied non-investors.

The investment advantage also extends to resilience and short-term outcomes.

Just over half (52%) of non-investors say they feel financially resilient, compared to 87% of those who have been investing for more than five years and 90% of those who combine investing with advice. Only one in 10 (10%) non-investors say their financial situation has improved over the past year, compared to a third (34%) of those who have been investing for more

than five years and two fifths (42%) of those who have invested for more than five years and receive advice.

The difference investing makes is clear. Those who engage with it, particularly over the longer term and alongside professional advice, are more likely to build wealth, feel confident in their financial position and respond more effectively to changing circumstances.

A need for industry action

At a time when the UK is focused on encouraging retail investment participation through the industry's 'Invest for the Future' campaign, the findings highlight both a clear challenge and a significant opportunity.

While the benefits of investing are well established, participation has not kept pace.

Separate behavioural research conducted by SJP in partnership with Ipsos earlier this year explores how behaviourally informed approaches could help overcome barriers to investing and encourage greater retail investment participation.

This was particularly evident among younger audiences, with over half (53%) of those aged 18–34 saying the investment information they encounter rarely feels useful to their personal situation. More than a third (34%) do not see investing as something people like them do.

The research also highlights what can shift this behaviour by testing a series of behavioural approaches. When investing is presented as

socially normal, personally relevant and connected to future goals, confidence and understanding increase significantly.

Making investing more tangible through clear, real-world examples was found to be particularly effective – reducing uncertainty and increasing willingness to invest. These effects are especially pronounced among younger audiences, where improvements in confidence and understanding are up to two to three times greater than for older generations.

The scale of the opportunity is substantial. SJP and Ipsos' modelling suggests that, if applied more widely, these approaches could help unlock up to 1.8 million new investors in the UK, equating to as much as £2.4 billion of additional investment over a one-year period.

Just over half (52%) of non-investors say they feel financially resilient, compared to 87% of those who have been investing more than five years...

¹St. James's Place and Ipsos – [Shifting behaviours to create a new wave of investor](#)

The detailed findings

A national portrait of our wealth and financial wellbeing over time, across incomes and throughout the UK

Across time – trends over the last five years

Over the last five years, this report has often shown that periods of financial recovery are followed by renewed strain. This year's findings continue that pattern. While the longer-term picture still points to growth in wealth for many households, the short-term direction of travel in 2026 is more difficult than in previous years.

Considering wealth over the last decade, two in five households (39%) say their overall wealth has increased in this period. While that remains a substantial proportion, it is lower than in recent years, down from 43% in 2025 and 49% in 2024. This suggests that the long-term accumulation of wealth has not disappeared, but it has become harder to sustain. The current environment appears to be making it more difficult for households to feel that they are moving forward financially, even where longer-term progress may still exist.

This slowing momentum is reflected more sharply in the short-term data. Estimated average household wealth, including savings, investments and physical possessions, has fallen from £126,482 in 2025 to £104,329 in 2026, a drop of 17.5%. Perceived property wealth has also declined, from £239,410 to £188,759, down 21% over the same period.

These are significant falls but should be interpreted with some caution. The research was conducted against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical tension, including conflict in the Middle East, and a period of market volatility. That context is likely to have influenced how respondents assessed the value of their assets, encouraging more conservative estimates of their wealth, especially when considering investments.

Nevertheless, the decline is meaningful. Against a backdrop of market volatility and wider economic uncertainty, perceptions of wealth and financial security appear to be under increasing pressure. Whether driven by changing asset values, broader sentiment or a combination of both, households feel less wealthy than they did a year ago. This shift matters: it is not just a reflection of current conditions, but a driver of behaviour, dampening confidence and, in many cases, reducing people's willingness to spend, save and plan for the future.

2026 vs 2025 at a glance

- ◆ Average household wealth: **£104,329**, down from **£126,482**
- ◆ Struggling financially: **21%**, up from **16%**
- ◆ Financially comfortable: **37%**, down from **42%**
- ◆ Financially resilient: **61%**, down from **65%**



This weakening in perceived wealth sits alongside a broader deterioration in financial sentiment. People are now twice as likely to say their financial situation has worsened over the past 12 months as improved, with 34% reporting deterioration compared with 17% who say it has improved. This marks a further shift from 2025, when 31% said their position had worsened and 21% said it had improved. In other words, last year's modest signs of improvement have not held.

The same pattern can be seen in how people describe their overall financial position. A fifth (21%) say they are struggling financially, the highest proportion since 2023 and a clear reversal from the 16% recorded last year. Meanwhile, the proportion describing themselves as financially comfortable has fallen to 37%, back to the level seen in 2023.

Satisfaction with wealth has also softened. Half of people (49%) say they are satisfied with their overall level of wealth, down from 54% in 2025, while 46% say they are not satisfied. This leaves only a narrow margin between those who feel positive and those who do not, reinforcing the sense that confidence has become more fragile.

Resilience has also dipped. Six in 10 (61%) say they feel financially resilient, defined as being able to cope with a sudden fall in income or unavoidable rise in expenditure. This is down from 65% in 2025. Although it remains above the 54% seen in 2023, it suggests that the gains in resilience made last year have not been fully sustained.

| Year | Average household wealth (Savings, investments, physical possessions - excluding property) | Proportion of people financially struggling | Proportion of people feeling financially resilient (Savings, investments, physical possessions - excluding property) | Proportion of people feeling financially comfortable |
|------|---|---|---|--|
| 2026 | £104,329 | 21% | 61% | 37% |
| 2025 | £126,483 | 16% | 65% | 42% |
| 2024 | £113,154 | 20% | 60% | 42% |
| 2023 | £116,305 | 22% | 54% | 37% |
| 2022 | £111,797 | 14% | 61% | 46% |



Across incomes – how financial pressure is distributed

Unsurprisingly, financial comfort continues to track income closely. Among those earning up to £20,000 a year, 32% say they are struggling financially and only 23% describe themselves as financially comfortable. That shifts steadily as earnings rise. Among those earning over £80,000, just 4% say they are struggling while 76% say they are financially comfortable.

This gradient is not new, but this year's data shows that pressure has intensified, particularly at the lower end of the income scale. The proportion of those earning up to £20,000 who say they are struggling has risen from 24% in 2025 to 32% in 2026, while the share describing themselves as financially comfortable has fallen from 31% to 23%.

A similar, though less pronounced, shift can be seen across other income groups. Among those earning £20,001 to £40,000, the proportion struggling has increased from 15% to 20%, while financial comfort has fallen from 42% to 37%. For middle-income households earning £40,001 to £60,000, the proportion struggling has edged up from 11% to 13%, while comfort has remained broadly stable at just over half (54%).

| Percentage of people financially struggling | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Year | Up to £20,000 a year | £20,001 to £40,000 a year | £40,001 to £60,000 a year | £60,001 to £80,000 a year | Over £80,000 |
| 2026 | 32% | 20% | 13% | 8% | 4% |
| 2025 | 24% | 15% | 11% | 15% | 7% |

| Percentage of people financially comfortable | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Year | Up to £20,000 a year | £20,001 to £40,000 a year | £40,001 to £60,000 a year | £60,001 to £80,000 a year | Over £80,000 |
| 2026 | 23% | 37% | 54% | 57% | 76% |
| 2025 | 31% | 42% | 53% | 59% | 81% |

Across the UK – how financial health varies by region

Financial health continues to vary significantly across the UK, with a clear divide between regions.

London remains a clear outlier, with estimated average household wealth of £171,455. This is more than double the level seen in Yorkshire and the Humber, which has the lowest reported wealth at £73,488. Other lower-wealth regions include the North West (£82,968), the South West (£86,032) and Wales (£86,847).

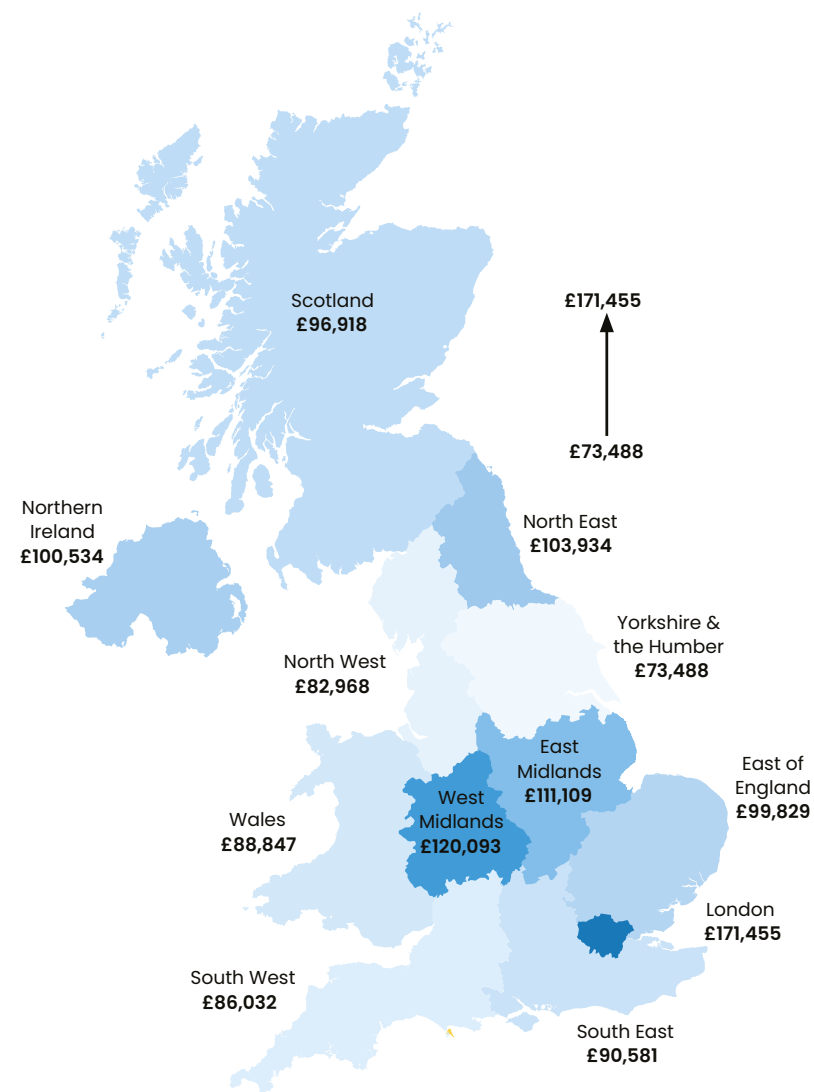
Long-term wealth growth also varies by region. In London and the North West, 42% say their wealth has increased over the past 10 years, compared with 31% in Wales. This suggests that regional disparities are not only about current wealth levels, but also about the pace at which households have been able to build wealth over time.

Regional divide

- ◆ London: **£171,455**
- ◆ Yorkshire and the Humber: **£73,487**
- ◆ Wales: **31%** say wealth has increased over 10 years
- ◆ London / North West: **42%**

| Wealth across the UK | Perceived household wealth | Proportion whose overall household wealth has increased in last 10 years |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| London | £171,455 | 42% |
| Scotland | £96,918 | 34% |
| West Midland | £120,093 | 44% |
| North East England | £103,934 | 36% |
| East of England | £99,829 | 39% |
| North West England | £82,968 | 42% |
| South East England | £90,581 | 40% |
| East Midlands | £111,109 | 42% |
| South West England | £86,032 | 39% |
| Northern Ireland | £100,534 | 34% |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | £73,488 | 41% |
| Wales | £86,847 | 31% |

Overall household wealth



A city view

This year, Reading reports the highest average household wealth at £175,261, followed by London (£171,454), Edinburgh (£137,139) and Cambridge (£136,629). These cities sit well above the national average, reflecting stronger earnings, employment opportunities and access to assets.

At the other end of the spectrum, Swansea (£28,677) and Hull (£37,378) report the lowest average household wealth, with Norwich (£44,856) and Newcastle (£60,831) also notably lower.

Long-term growth does not always align neatly with current wealth. While Reading has the highest current wealth, only 34% say their wealth has increased over the past 10 years. By contrast, Milton Keynes reports the strongest long-term growth (51%), followed by Leeds (46%), Manchester (45%) and Oxford (45%). Leicester, meanwhile, stands out for relatively weak long-term growth, with only 25% saying their wealth has increased.

This matters because it suggests that current affluence and recent momentum are not always the same thing. Some places are highly affluent but growing more slowly, while others are building wealth from a lower base.

| Wealth across the UK | Perceived household wealth | Proportion whose overall household wealth has increased in last 10 years |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Edinburgh | £137,139 | 39% |
| Reading | £175,261 | 34% |
| Liverpool | £102,142 | 37% |
| Oxford | £111,576 | 45% |
| Birmingham | £114,273 | 35% |
| Southampton | £93,367 | 42% |
| Nottingham | £111,178 | 36% |
| Bristol | £100,752 | 41% |
| Manchester | £101,397 | 45% |
| Norwich | £44,856 | 34% |
| Leeds | £107,614 | 46% |
| Cambridge | £136,629 | 42% |
| Glasgow | £77,548 | 34% |
| Belfast | £84,591 | 38% |

| Wealth across the UK | Overall household wealth | Proportion whose overall household wealth has increased in last 10 years |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Sheffield | £87,447 | 39% |
| Leicester | £73,671 | 25% |
| Maidstone | £72,550 | 40% |
| Dundee | £97,371 | 34% |
| Hull | £37,378 | 30% |
| Brighton | £67,176 | 37% |
| Plymouth | £99,993 | 41% |
| Newcastle | £60,831 | 35% |
| Milton Keynes | £101,993 | 51% |
| Cardiff | £73,666 | 32% |
| Swansea | £28,677 | 43% |

Reading

City with the highest average level of household wealth

Yorkshire & the Humber

Region with the lowest average level of household wealth

Key conclusions

Despite the clear benefits of taking an active role in managing finances, planning ahead and investing for the long term, engagement is not showing signs of an increase. Fewer than four in 10 people (38%) currently have a financial plan in place. This remains unchanged over the past five years. Meanwhile, only around a third (35%) say they invest.

This is significant, because the findings in this year's report once again demonstrate a strong correlation between financial engagement and better outcomes. Those who plan, seek advice or invest are more likely to feel financially comfortable and resilient, and more likely to report improvements in their financial position over time.

The importance of this is even greater in the context of 2026. Financial health has weakened over the past year, with confidence softening, perceived wealth declining and more people saying their situation has worsened than improved. Yet even in a more challenging environment, the report shows that the actions people take continue to shape outcomes. If more households are to build resilience and improve their long-term financial wellbeing, greater engagement with planning, advice and investing will be essential.

Improving this engagement will require continued focus on financial education and awareness, helping people feel more confident not only in managing day-to-day finances, but in making longer-term decisions. It will also require practical support. Addressing the advice gap - and expanding access to guidance through initiatives such as Targeted Support - is positive and will be key to ensuring more people can access support that is appropriate to their needs.

At the same time, there is a need to continue challenging perceptions around both investing and financial advice and planning - particularly the belief that it is 'not for people like me'. The evidence suggests otherwise: taking action early, even in small steps, can make a meaningful difference over time.

As this report shows, for many households' stronger financial outcomes are often not driven by single decisions, but by sustained engagement over time.

There is a need to continue challenging perceptions around both investing and financial advice and planning.



Some simple steps to help build a financial plan:

1 Identify your financial goals

Start by being clear about what you want your money to do for you. This could include short-term goals, such as building an emergency fund or paying for a holiday, and longer-term goals, such as buying a home or saving for retirement. Clear priorities can help shape better decisions and make planning more manageable.

2 Understand your current position

Take stock of your income, outgoings, savings, debts and assets. Understanding where your money is going can help identify areas to adjust and create opportunities to save or invest more consistently.

3 Build financial resilience

Having a financial buffer is increasingly important. Building accessible savings for the short-term, to cover unexpected costs or changes in income can provide greater confidence in uncertain times. As our research shows, investing over the long term is also key when it comes to building financial resilience. Even small, regular contributions can build up over time.

4 Think about saving and investing for the long term

Cash savings play an important role, particularly for short-term needs. But longer-term goals require a longer-term approach. Where appropriate, investing can help build wealth over time, especially when started early and maintained consistently against market shocks.

5 Review your plan regularly

Financial circumstances change. Reviewing your plan as your situation evolves can help ensure it remains aligned with your goals and priorities.

6 Consider seeking professional advice

For those who would benefit from additional support, particularly in more complex situations, professional advice can provide clarity and structure. As this report shows, those who seek advice are often better placed to navigate uncertainty and build stronger financial foundations.

The picture in 2026 is more challenging than a year ago. But the central message of this report remains consistent: while people cannot control every external pressure, they can improve how prepared they are to respond. Supporting more people to take those steps will be key to strengthening financial health in the years ahead.

The value of an investment with St. James's Place will be directly linked to the performance of the funds selected and may fall as well as rise. You may get back less than the amount invested.



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