Home Group Pension and Life Assurance Scheme (HGPLAS)
Annual Review 2024

1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

Defined Contribution Section

Have you changed address, or planning to do so?

Active members should update Oracle with their new address and this will automatically update their Aviva record.

Deferred members should log into their Aviva account at: **www.avivamymoney.co.uk/Login**

Alternatively, you can contact the Pensions Administrator (see useful information section on page 23).

Have your personal circumstances changed?

You may wish to send us a new beneficiary nomination form. Please see page 21.

Chair's Message

Welcome to the 2024 Annual Review!

In this newsletter, we inform you of the progress and current position of the Defined Contribution (DC) Section of the Home Group Pension and Life Assurance Scheme (the Scheme).

The 'cost of living' crisis has been grabbing the headlines for some time now, and we know that many households are tightening their belts. Some of you may have looked at how much you contribute to the Scheme as part of this. If you are considering withdrawing from the Scheme or reducing your contributions please think carefully about this as it would mean giving up valuable contributions from Home Group and your Life Assurance benefit.

You may recall extreme market volatility through 2022. This appears to have steadied, and those investment markets aimed at growth (such as company shares) have shown more consistent growth over the last year, although the performance of some types of bonds, in particular UK corporate bonds and government bonds (gilts) is still not as stable as it might be.

The Trustees have continued to monitor the range of funds and the performance of the investment managers of each of the funds which includes considering the investment returns delivered, the levels of investment risk being taken and the managers' engagement with the companies in which they invest on environmental, social and governance (ESG) matters. This has resulted in the recent changes to the Scheme's investments which we wrote to you about in October 2023, and more information is included in the investment section on page 12. The Trustees have also instructed their investment adviser to carry out a full investment strategy review in 2024.

Increase in minimum retirement age

You are currently able to access your pension from age 55. The Government has confirmed that the minimum age for drawing pension benefits, except if you are retiring due to ill-health, is to rise to 57 from 2028.

Some members of the Scheme may also qualify for a protected pension age, meaning they will still be able to retire at age 55 if they meet certain conditions.

We are reviewing the full Scheme membership and if you are affected, we will write to you separately with more information once available.

Pension scams

Unfortunately, pension scams continue to be a cause for concern and we would still caution you to be very wary. Never take advice from someone who has approached you out of the blue. To help keep yourself safe, please read the article on scams on page 17.

Administration service

The Trustees continue to monitor the administration service delivered by our DC provider, Aviva. As part of the most recently completed 'Value for Members' assessment, the Scheme's administration with Aviva was rated as 'good', in an improvement from the previous year where it was rated as 'reasonable'.

I hope you will have seen this improvement in any contact you have had with Aviva. However, if you have had any interaction with Aviva recently that you were not happy with, please share your experience by contacting the Pensions Administrator (contact details are on page 23).

Email communications

The majority of the communications that you currently get about the Scheme are sent through the post. Going forwards, the Trustees will be working with Home Group to increase the number of email addresses we hold on file. This will enable us to provide communications and updates by email in future.

Members can update their email address held with Aviva by logging onto their Myworkplace account with Aviva.

I hope that you find this newsletter useful and informative. If there is anything you would like to see more of in future Annual Reviews, please get in touch as your feedback is very valuable.

Bhavna Kumar

Align Pensions, Chair of Trustees for the HGPLAS

Terms used in this Review

Some of the words used in this Review have special meanings:

Active members: Members actively paying contributions, whether by deduction from their pay or by salary sacrifice, in order to save for a pension with the Scheme.

Deferred members: Members who no longer contribute to the Scheme but are not yet drawing a pension and have kept their pension pot in the Scheme.

Defined Contribution (DC) Section: The section of the Scheme where pensions are based on the value of your fund when you retire. This pot of money is built up by contributions paid in by you and Home Group and the investment returns (less charges) on those contributions. Before 1st January 2020, there were two DC Sections, known as the Money Purchase Section (MPS) and the Auto-Enrolment Section (AES), but these have now been combined into a single DC Section.

Equities: These are investments in company shares, either in the UK or overseas.

Bonds: These are loans typically to a company, the government or other bodies (such as the European Investment Bank). Bonds generally pay a fixed rate of interest to the investor, and at the end of their term, the investor receives the capital back. Some government bonds pay a rate of interest linked to inflation (index-linked bonds).

Statement of Investment Principles (SIP): A document setting out the Trustees' policies in relation to the investment strategy for the Scheme, and their approach to material risks.

Implementation Statement: An annual statement explaining how the Trustees have followed the policies of the SIP during the year, and providing information about how voting rights relating to the investments have been exercised by the managers.

Salary Sacrifice: An arrangement where you agree to take a lower salary in exchange for which Home Group agrees to pay your pension contributions. Members who take up Salary Sacrifice improve their take-home pay because they save national insurance contributions on the amount of their pension contributions.

Membership

The table shows a summary of the Scheme membership for the DC Section as at 31st March 2024:

	No. of members
Active members	2,886
Deferred members	5,272
Pensioners	-
Total	**8,158**

At retirement, the Scheme pays benefits, either as:

- a cash sum;
- a transfer payment;
- a pension from an insurance company written in the member's name; or
- a combination of the three.

The Scheme then ceases to be responsible for paying any further benefits. There are therefore no DC Section pensioners remaining in the DC Section of the Scheme.

The year in summary

Here is a brief overview of what has happened during the year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, and some of the key projects the Trustees have undertaken:

Trustee meetings

The Trustees met on four separate occasions over the year. There were also seven meetings of the General Purposes Committee and four meetings with Home Group.

The Trustee board

The Trustees continue to regularly invest time in training on pensions to ensure they have sufficient knowledge and experience to effectively run the Scheme.

More information about the training they have undertaken is detailed in the Chair's Statement highlights section of this review.

Service standards

The Trustees continue to monitor the service standards of the DC service provider, Aviva. Over the year, Aviva achieved around 83% of their targets for the administration of the Scheme, compared to around 87% last year. The Trustees also monitor Aviva's end-to-end times. These are the average times taken to complete each process from beginning to end, and include, for example, periods when Aviva are waiting for information from other parties. Although end-to-end times are not all within Aviva's control, they have remained relatively stable since last year.

Since 2023, Aviva also provide the Trustees with additional reporting and commentary so that the Trustees can monitor any trends or areas for concern.

Value for money

Each year, the Trustees are required by law to form a view on the extent to which the DC Section represents value for money for members. The Trustees' view on this is published in the Chair's Statement, which forms part of the annual Trustees' Report and Financial Statements.

Further information about the value for money review is provided in the 'Chair's Statement highlights' section of this review.



Fund charges

The Trustees are very aware that a portion of each member's fund is paid out each year as expenses. Part of this goes to Aviva as a platform fee. This covers Aviva's costs for administering the Scheme and for providing access to a range of investment funds. The other part is the annual management charge which is paid to the fund's investment managers.

The Trustees regularly review the charges in the DC pensions market and engage with Aviva to ensure that the DC Section remains competitive. You may remember that this produced positive benefits for members in 2022, and the Trustees will again review fees across all funds as part of the Investment Strategy Review being carried out in 2024.

Change to fund names

Over the year, some of the funds were renamed to improve efficiency of running the Scheme.

More information can be found in the investment section on page 12..

Implementation Statement

During 2023, the Trustees prepared the Scheme's third Implementation Statement, providing information about how voting rights relating to the investments have been exercised by the managers as well as how they have complied with the policies set out in the SIP.

Privacy notice

The Scheme's data privacy notice was updated in June 2023 and is available on Home Group's public website here:

https://www.homegroup.org.uk/about-us/working-with-us/careers/benefits-and-rewards/home-group-pension-and-life-assurance-scheme

Aviva webinars

As a member of the Scheme, you have access to a range of free webinars organised by Aviva. These webinars cover why saving for your future is important, how your pension works, your pension choices, how to plan for your retirement and your options if you leave the Scheme.

You can find recordings of past webinars and a link to book onto future webinars on Home Group's public website (using the link above).

Amounts from accounts

The Trustees prepare a formal report and a set of accounts to 31st March every year. A copy of the full Trustees' Report and Financial Statements to 31st March 2023 is posted on the Home Group intranet. If you would like a printed version, please contact the Pensions Administrator.

A brief summary of the transactions of the DC Section of the Scheme during the year to 31st March 2023 is set out below:

Fund value as at 31st March 2022	**£69,695,537**
PLUS increase in fund from:	
Contribution by members	£3,980,007
Contributions by the employer	£3,877,838
Transfers in	£134,904
TOTAL INCREASE IN FUND	**£7,992,749**
LESS expenditure:	
Retirement benefits – lump sums	£1,061,624
Death benefits – lump sums	£22,122
Refunds of contributions	£8,229
Transfers out	£2,973,925
Net return on investments	£5,242,119
TOTAL REDUCTION IN FUND	**£9,308,019**
Fund value as at 31st March 2023	**£68,380,267**

The expenses of running the DC Section of the Scheme, except for investment management costs and Aviva's charges, are met by Home Group Limited.

Chair's Statement highlights

Each year, the Trustees prepare a 'Chair's Statement' that describes how the Defined Contribution ("DC") Section of the Scheme has been governed.

Here are some highlights from the Chair's Statement for the year to 31st March 2023 and details of some of the work the Trustees have undertaken since.

Governance of the Scheme

The Chair's Statement focuses on the following four keys areas of DC governance:

1. Ensuring the default investment arrangement is suitable for the membership and is well governed.
2. Assessing the promptness and accuracy of the administration service.
3. Charges and costs borne by members and the Trustees' assessment of their value.
4. Trustee knowledge and understanding.

The key aim of the DC Section is to help members achieve a good outcome for life after work.

This is done by providing a well-governed pension scheme, that represents good value for members, has accurate and efficient administration, and provides appropriate investment options for members with a communication and education programme to suit their circumstances.

Top developments

Important Changes to the Investment Arrangements

The Trustees are implementing the following changes to the Scheme's investments in January 2024:

- The BlackRock Market Advantage Fund is being replaced with the Legal and General Investment Management (LGIM) Diversified Fund. This change will result in a reduction in the charges paid by members.
- Changes to the names of some of the fund options to improve efficiency of running the Scheme.

2024 DC Priorities

- Full investment strategy review covering the default and self-select options.
- Replacement of the BlackRock Market Advantage Fund with the LGIM Diversified Fund.
- Further consideration of Environmental, Social & Governance ("ESG") issues

DC Governance

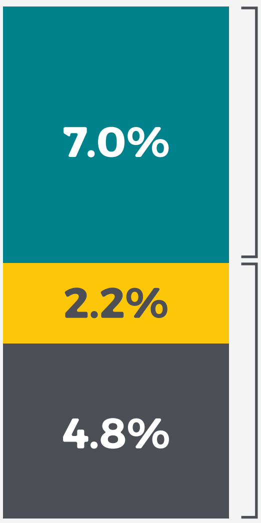
During the Scheme year, a new Member Nominated Trustee was appointed, Sarah Deans, with effect from 1 August 2022.

How you benefit from being a member of the Scheme

The Company matches employee contributions to the DC Section up to 7% and passes on the NI contributions savings gained from 'Salary Sacrifice'.

The actual cost to you, as a member of the DC Section, will normally be much less than your gross contribution, because you receive tax relief and NI contributions savings on your contributions at your highest marginal rate.

The example below shows how much could go into your pension savings if you contribute 7%.



The Company then pays 7%, **meaning you receive 14% into your pension for the cost of 4.8% from your take-home pay!**

Although your contribution is 7%, your take-home pay only reduces by 4.8%* due to tax relief and NI contribution savings.

* Assumes 20% tax rate and 12% NI contribution (for Salary Sacrifice)

Value for members

The Trustees annually assess the extent to which the DC Section provides good **value for members**. 'Value' is not just about the price of services, but also their **performance** against required standards.

Who pays?

The company pays for:

- Trustee governance
- Professional advice to the Trustee and Company, including legal, investment and audit
- Bespoke project and member engagement initiatives

You (as a member) pay for:

- Investment manager costs
- Administration and platform services supplied by Aviva

Value for members' assessment (VFM)

The Scheme's overall services were assessed in 2023 by the Trustees' advisers as providing members with '**good value**'. Fees were assessed to be providing 'good' value for the majority of funds and fund performance was generally 'good'. Scheme services around governance and administration were also assessed as providing 'good' value for members. As a result of the Trustees' engagement with Aviva following the VFM undertaken for the Scheme year to 31 March 2022, the scheme charge paid by members was **reduced by 0.06%p.a.**, therefore reducing the overall charge that members pay and improving member value.

Impact of costs and charges

The Trustees are required to show illustrations of the impact of costs and charges on a member's pension savings (full costs and charges are set out in the Chair's Statement see link below).

An example of the impact for a member invested in the default arrangement, the Home Group Drawdown Lifestyle, is shown below.

0.54%

This is an average of the total costs and charges associated with the default arrangement deducted from members' funds p.a.

Example of impact

- **Member joins Scheme at age 25**
- **Initial pot size of £0**
- **Total contributions equal £100 per month**
- **Inflation and pensionable salary growth assumed at 2.5% per year to age 65**
- **Investment return assumed to be 5.4% p.a. net of costs and charges**

Approximate fund size at age 65

c £12,000
in charges

* in today's money after the deduction of costs & charges

Trustee knowledge and understanding

The Trustees undertook training during the Scheme year in order to ensure they have knowledge of best practice in defined contribution pension schemes.

Examples of the training included:

- Webinar on Pension Dashboard.
- Update on the new extended value for members regulatory requirements.
- Update on the new regulatory requirements related to voting activity in the SIP Implementation.
- ESG Beliefs Survey undertaken by the Trustees.
- Update from the Aviva Head of Trust Operations.
- In-depth review of the BlackRock Market Advantage Fund.
- Quarterly updates from the Scheme's DC adviser covering such items as industry trends and important legislative requirements.

The full Chair's statement can be found here::

www.homegroup.org.uk/about-us/working-with-us/careers/benefits-and-rewards/home-group-pension-and-life-assurance-scheme

Investments

The Scheme offers a range of investment funds for members of the DC Section to choose from.

These are unit-linked funds, so that the value of your pension pot at any time is the number of units you hold multiplied by the unit price. All of the funds are invested by independent professional investment managers, and are made available to you through an investment and administration platform operated by Aviva.

There are three 'Lifestyle' options and a range of 'Self-select' funds for members who prefer to make their own investment decisions. The Lifestyle options invest in growth assets (such as equities) when you are younger, but automatically move your fund into lower-risk investments (such as bonds and cash) as you approach your chosen retirement age. The three Lifestyle options available - the Home Group Drawdown Lifestyle Strategy (the default investment option), the Home Group Annuity Lifestyle Strategy and the Home Group Cash Lifestyle Strategy - are designed to be appropriate depending on how you expect to take your benefits when you retire.

Changes to the investment arrangements

We wrote to you in October 2023 about some changes to the Scheme's investment arrangements, and these changes were made as planned in January 2024. These changes were:

- The replacement of the BlackRock Market Advantage Fund ("BlackRock MAF") with the Legal and General Investment Management ("LGIM") Diversified Fund.
- The creation of "white labelled" funds. These are generic names for a fund allow the Trustees to make investment changes more efficiently.
- A further minor change was to the names of the three lifestyle options, which are now known as the Home Group Drawdown Lifestyle **Strategy**, the Home Group Annuity Lifestyle **Strategy,** and the Home Group Cash Lifestyle **Strategy**.

Monitoring your investment choices

Given the flexibility in terms of when you retire and how you can take your benefits, it is especially important that you think carefully about your investment choices, and how your needs change as you progress through your career.

If you are invested in one of the three Lifestyle options, please also check that your selected investment programme retirement date is consistent with the date that you expect to retire. You can check your selected retirement date, find out details of your current investments and switch funds if you wish to by logging into your Aviva account at: **www.avivamymoney.co.uk/Login**

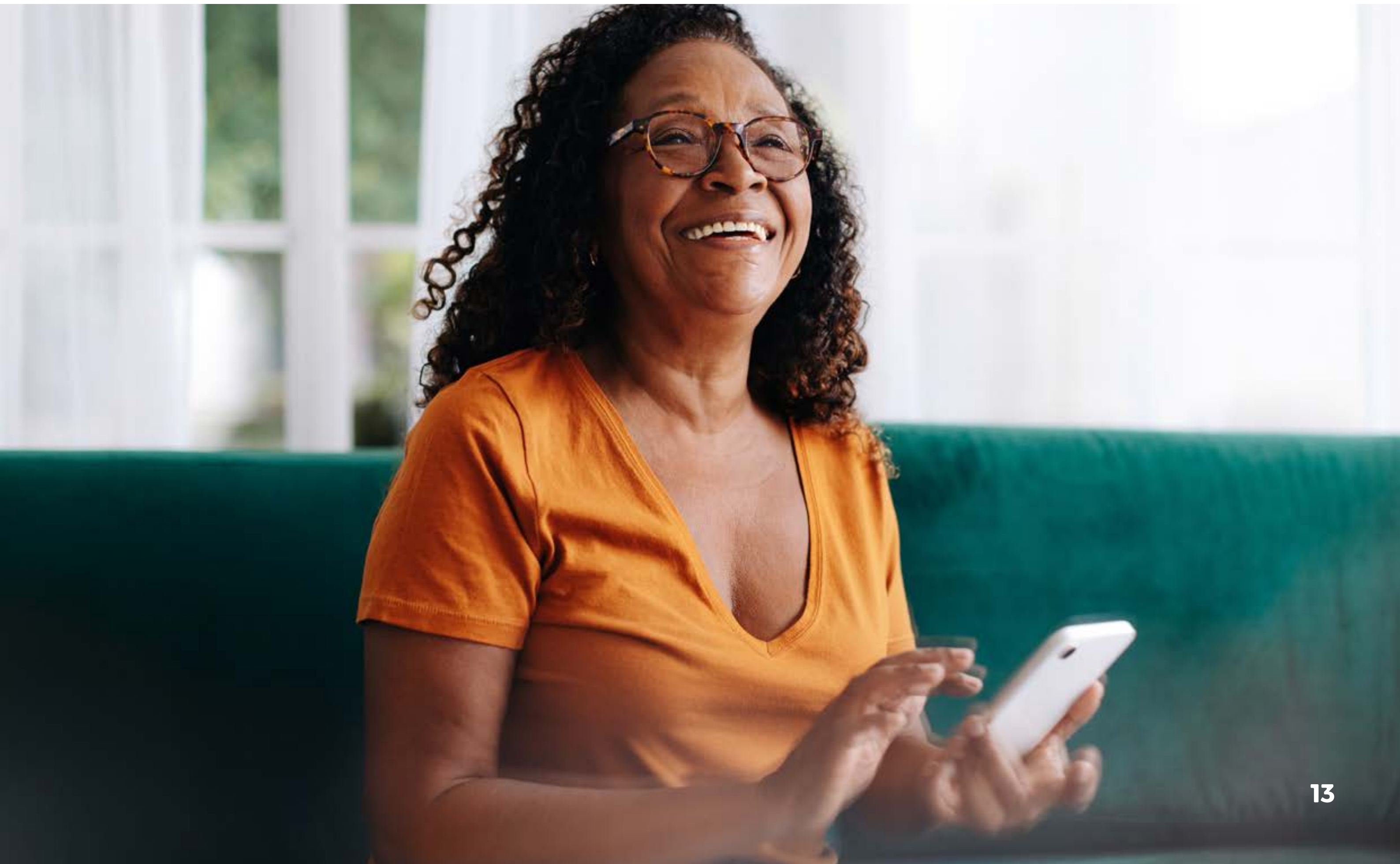
Please note that if you are intending to draw down on your fund after retirement, you cannot currently do this within the Scheme. You will therefore need to transfer your fund to another pension arrangement in order to take advantage of this option.

The Trustees encourage all DC Section members to think about their investment choices and ensure that they continue to be appropriate for their needs. This is particularly important as you approach retirement, when you should consider when and how you intend to take your benefits (i.e. cash, drawdown or annuity purchase). Details of the funds available to you are set out in the Member Guide, which is available here: https://library.aviva.com/tridion/documents/view/aengs47358a1.pdf

If you're thinking of making investment changes, you should consider seeking authorised financial advice from a regulated financial adviser. You can find one using the MoneyHelper website: https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/getting-help-and-advice/financial-advisers/choosing-a-financial-adviser

Public website - Documents

The Trustees' Statement of Investment Principles (SIP), latest Chair's Statement and latest DC Implementation Statement can be viewed on Home Group's public website: **https://www.homegroup.org.uk/about-us/working-with-us/careers/benefits-and-rewards/home-group-pension-and-life-assurance-scheme/**



Points of interest

DC Member Guide

The DC Member Guide contains lots of useful information about how the DC Section works, the contributions that go in, how they are invested and your options, as well as how and when you can take money out of your pension. You can read the new Member Guide here: **https://library.aviva.com/tridion/documents/view/aengs47358a1.pdf**

Support for you when you reach retirement – Hub Financial Solutions

As you approach retirement, you will need to decide how to take your benefits from the DC Section. The main choices available to you are:

- Take up to 25% of your fund as a tax-free cash sum and use the remainder to buy a guaranteed income for life (known as an "annuity").
- Take the whole fund as a cash sum, known as an uncrystallised funds pension lump sum (UFPLS). In this case, 25% of the fund value would be tax-free, while the remaining 75% would be subject to income tax at your marginal rate.
- Transfer all or part of your fund to another pension arrangement, from which you may be able to take your fund as a series of cash sums (known as "drawdown").

For those members who prefer to have a guaranteed income for life, the Trustees have put in place a service with Hub Financial Solutions to provide help with purchasing an annuity. Hub is a leading specialist in annuity broking, and is independent of the Scheme. The cost of the service provided by Hub is met by a commission payment from the insurer that provides your annuity, and you will not be charged a fee for using their service.

If you are planning on buying an annuity, it is very important that you shop around to find the best annuity for you at the most competitive rate. The DC section provider, Aviva, will normally give you an annuity quotation automatically as you approach retirement, but this will not necessarily be the most competitive rate for you. Hub can help you to find the best rate, and can also guide you to the most appropriate type of annuity for you.

If you are approaching retirement and have not received any information from Hub, please contact the Pensions Administrator, whose contact details are shown at the end of this Review.

Drawdown options at retirement

If you plan to take drawdown at retirement, you will need to transfer your pension pot to another pension arrangement. Aviva will offer you a drawdown arrangement that you can transfer to, but it won't necessarily be the most competitive for your needs. You should therefore consider what is available elsewhere, and you might wish to seek independent financial advice to help you do so (see page 20 for how to go about finding an adviser). Things you should consider include the range of investment options offered, the charges for each of the funds you plan to invest in and the cost of taking money out of your fund (i.e. drawing down) when you need to.

Check your State pension

From April 2016, the government introduced a new State pension, replacing the previous basic State pension and State additional pension. If you reached State pension age before April 2016, you were not affected by this change. If you reach State pension age after April 2016, then the State pension you had already earned up to that date will count towards the new State pension. You will also earn 1/35th of the additional new State pension for each further year you pay National Insurance contributions, until you have reached the full entitlement of £221.20 per week (for 2024/25).

State pension age is also set to rise, depending on your date of birth. For those born between 6th April 1960 and 5th March 1961, there will be a phased increase in State pension age to 67. State pension age will further increase to age 68 between 2044 and 2046, although the government continues to review this timetable. To find out your State pension age and to obtain an estimate of your new State pension, go to **www.gov.uk/check-state-pension**

Transfer values

A transfer value is the value of your pension pot and, once paid, no further benefits would be due to you from the Scheme. If you have not yet received any benefits from the Scheme, you have a statutory right to take a transfer value from the Scheme to another suitably approved pension arrangement, such as a personal pension policy or your current employer's pension scheme. The receiving arrangement is not obliged to accept your transfer, however, so if you are considering a transfer, you should check this with them first.

As a member of the DC Section of the Scheme, you have the option of taking the whole of your pension pot as a cash lump sum when you retire, instead of using part of it to buy an annuity. However, this might not be tax-efficient, because 75% of the lump sum would be taxed as your income in the year you receive it, which could mean that you pay higher-rate tax. Instead, you may prefer to draw down on your pension pot in stages, as you need the income. The DC Section does not offer a 'draw-down' option, so to take advantage of this, you would need to transfer your pension pot to another arrangement. By doing so, you could choose to either:

- Take a 25% tax-free lump sum, leaving the rest of your pension pot invested and drawing on it as and when required (known as 'income drawdown' or 'flexi-access drawdown'). The amounts you draw down would be taxable as your income; or
- Leave the whole of your pension pot invested, taking out cash sums as you need them. Under current rules, 25% of these cash sums, known as an uncrystallised funds pension lump sums (UFPLSs), would be tax-free and the remaining 75% would be taxed as your income.

Neither the Trustees nor Home Group are permitted to advise you in relation to a transfer of your benefits. You are strongly recommended to take independent financial advice before making any decision to transfer your benefits out of the Scheme. You should also be alert to pension scams.

Beware of pension scams!

The Trustees are keen to remind members of the dangers of pension scams, as the level of scam activity in the UK relating to pensions continues to be a cause for concern. Generally, the scams start by persuading you to transfer your fund to another pension arrangement, sometimes with the prospect that all or part of your fund can be released to you as cash. Remember that, if you are under 55, it's illegal for you to access your fund unless you are retiring due to ill-health.

Some of the tell-tale signs of pension scams are:

- An offer of a free pension review
- The promise of guaranteed returns on your investment
- Low tax/tax-free rates, including tax-free lump sums
- Exotic sounding and/or overseas investments
- Pressure to sign up quickly to avoid missing out.

The Government introduced a ban on 'cold calling' in relation to pensions. If you receive a call about pensions from someone you haven't asked to call you, and with whom you have no existing relationship, then it is likely that caller is acting illegally. You would be strongly advised to take the caller's name and then end the call immediately.

Trustees of pension schemes now have the power to prevent a pension transfer taking place if the conditions proving the legitimacy of the receiving scheme are not met, or if any of a number of 'red flags' arise in relation to the circumstances of the transfer. This means that pension scheme trustees and scheme administrators now have an even more important role to play in helping to protect members from pension scams. They will need to carry out additional checks when dealing with a pension transfer request, and if the evidence obtained is not satisfactory, they will alert the trustees who may refuse to pay the transfer.

These new protections are not a substitute for members' own responsibility to ensure they do not become the victim of a pension scam. Key to this is making sure that you have taken appropriate independent financial advice, you are familiar with the pension arrangement to which the transfer is to be made, and that you know why the transfer is being made.

The Annual Allowance

The pension savings you can make tax-free in each tax year (the year beginning 6 April) to all pension arrangements combined are limited to the Annual Allowance (AA). The Annual Allowance rose from £40,000 in 2022/23 to £60,000 in 2023/24 and is due to remain at £60,000 for 2024/25.

A reduced Annual Allowance may apply if you have taxable income above a certain threshold. Also, if you access a DC pension pot flexibly, there is a lower annual limit on the amount of contributions that you can subsequently pay with tax relief into another DC arrangement.

This lower annual limit is known as the Money Purchase Annual Allowance and is £10,000 for 2024/25.

Changes to pensions savings tax

The Lifetime Allowance (LTA), which was the maximum amount of tax-relieved pension savings an individual could build up over their lifetime, was removed on 6 April 2024. However, a new limit applies to the maximum amount most members will be able to take as a tax-free lump sum across all of their pension savings. You may wish to seek financial advice if your pension benefits are impacted by the limits above.

Pensions dashboards

Pensions dashboards will enable individuals to access their pensions information securely online. The intention is for the dashboards to provide clear and simple information about your multiple pension savings, including your State Pension. The Trustees are working with our advisers to connect to the Pensions Dashboards Programme in 2025.

Helpful websites about pensions

The following external websites provide useful information and are recognised independent sources:

MoneyHelper

MoneyHelper is part of the **Money and Pensions Service (MaPS)**, which is an arm's-length body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It joins up money and pensions guidance to make it quicker and easier to find the right help. MoneyHelper brings together the support and services of three government-backed financial guidance providers: **the Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service** and **Pensions Wise**. Visit their website for lots of information and support about your money matters.

The Money Advice Service has lots of help on its website, which covers more than just retirement planning.

Pension Wise is another free service for over 50s if you have defined contribution (DC) savings in other pension arrangements. Pension Wise provides independent guidance online, by phone and face to face. You might feel that guidance isn't enough, and you'd like to seek some independent financial advice.

www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/pensions

Age UK

www.ageuk.org.uk

There are numerous others, but you'll need to be cautious. Use online sites for background information, but you should seek independent financial advice before making key decisions about pensions, such as whether or not to transfer your pension to another arrangement.

Planning for retirement

Are you saving enough to be able to stop work one day?

That is what retirement savings are for! But understanding your pension savings can be daunting. It is never too early to start, and the sooner you begin the easier it will be. Follow these simple steps to help feel more in control about your retirement planning.

Step 1: Know what you need when you retire

It's hard to know whether you're on track if you don't know what you're aiming for. The first step is to therefore estimate the target retirement income you need. There are lots of ways to do this. Perhaps the simplest is to start with your current earnings, deduct anything you won't need when you stop work (e.g. travel costs, money for pension savings!), and add in any extras (e.g. daytime home energy costs, hobbies and leisure activities). We recommend doing this for your household for the best overall picture.

Step 2: What pensions do you have, and what are you building up?

Once you know what you're aiming for, it's time to check how your pension savings compare. You may well have pension savings in a few places, so start by tracking each of them down to find out what income and/or lump sums they may provide you with, and when.

State Pension: you build this up by paying national insurance contributions (NICs). You need at least 10 years' worth of NICs to build up any entitlement, and 35 years of paying full rate NICs to get the maximum. To obtain a forecast of your State pension and check your State pension age, go to **www.gov.uk/check-state-pension**

Workplace pensions: contact the scheme's administrator and ask them for an updated benefit statement. If you have lost track of any pension savings, use the official tracing service here: **www.gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details**

Remember to include any other non-pension savings that you've set aside for retirement too (for example cash savings, investments, ISAs). If there is a gap, think about what you can do – can you save a bit more? Can you cut down what you might need in retirement and reduce your target? Taking steps now could help to bring you back on track to reach your target.

Step 3: Know where to go for help

Make the most of free help that is available. As mentioned in the 'Helpful websites about pensions' section, **MoneyHelper** is part of the **Money and Pensions Service (MaPS)**, which is an arm's-length body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). MoneyHelper brings together the support and services of three government-backed financial guidance providers: **Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service** and **Pensions Wise**.

Make sure you find an adviser who is a qualified pension specialist. Your adviser should help you to understand your pension options and recommend the ones which are best suited to you. Assistance in finding an independent financial adviser is available here:

www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/getting-help-and-advice/financial-advisers/choosing-a-financial-adviser

Keeping in touch

Have your personal circumstances changed?

If your benefits from the Scheme have not started to be paid, the value of your fund will be payable as a lump sum if you die. The Trustees have discretion as to who should receive the lump sum, but you can nominate who you wish them to consider. If you have not already done so, we recommend that you complete a nomination form, sometimes also called an expression of wish form. Forms can be obtained from the Pensions Administrator by e-mailing **pensions@homegroup.org.uk**

Active members can update their beneficiary details using the link to the HRD Self Service Forms in Oracle self service.

If you have completed a nomination form in the past, you should review it if your personal circumstances have changed. If you are in any doubt, please complete a new form.

Please help us by ensuring your address on the Scheme's records is up to date. If your address has changed or if you need anything further, please contact the DC service provider.

Lost pensions

If you have lost track of any pension savings built up elsewhere, there is a tracing service available.

www.gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details

Queries and complaints

All queries about the Scheme, other than requests for information, should in the first instance be addressed to the Pensions Administrator, whose contact details are shown in the 'Useful information' section at the end of this Review.

If you are not satisfied with the response to your enquiry, the Scheme has an internal disputes resolution procedure (IDRP). A copy of the IDRP can be obtained from the Pensions Administrator. The IDRP explains what further steps are available to you if you are unable to resolve your complaint satisfactorily.

Useful information

Trustees

Bhavna Kumar, Align Pensions, Chair

Sarah Deans

Harry Drennan

Chris Hopkins

Rachel Lawson

Harry Lowe

You can contact the Trustees via the Pensions Administrator.

Pensions Administrator

Jackie Carnegie, Home Group Limited

Email: **pensions@homegroup.org.uk**

Telephone: **0300 304 5464**

Address: **Home Group Limited,**
One Strawberry Lane,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4BX

Scheme Secretary

Raven Cohen, First Actuarial LLP

Carolyn Stanton, First Actuarial LLP

DC pension advice

Mercer Limited

DC investment adviser

Mercer Limited

Legal advicer

Pinsent Masons LLP

DC service provider:

Aviva plc

PO Box 2282
Salisbury
SP2 2HY

Helpline: **0345 604 9915**