



News from Louis Letourneau.

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[Louis Letourneau](#) looks at the complicated issue of retiring.

As the nation celebrates the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, chances are that thousands of gay men are reaching retirement at the same time.

Of course, there are many who have already retired, but most would have lived partly in a sheltered gay, but mostly straight-acting, environment. After all, gay sex was only decriminalised in 1967 and anyone born after the end of the war could have lived most of their adult life openly gay, without the risk of imprisonment - although discrimination has almost totally disappeared in only the last few years. What's significant about this is that these men (and women) are part of the first generation of openly-gay people to retire. This raises a number of issues.

Anyone, gay or straight, reaching retirement age (currently 65 for men but still 60 for women), is entitled to a [pension](#) from the State. We all know that this isn't sufficient to keep a 'girl' going, but the difference with straight people, and younger gay men who will retire much later, is that the gay people retiring today won't be able to transfer their benefits to a partner - as the new law on [Civil Partnership](#) currently stands.

However, most gay men of that generation expected that this was going to be the case, and I find that most of them have made provision for it - which is good news - either through company pensions, personal pensions or, like so many gay men do, in residential property. I don't know if this was the influence of their parents or the Thatcher years, but I also find that at least some of them have diversified their portfolios a little.

However, a large number of them have relied on the appreciation of the property market and are now sitting on a significant asset in their home. The problem now is that they can't get an income from it because they need to live somewhere, and they are likely to live for many more years. So what are they going to do? The clever (or lucky) ones have bought more than one property and can live on rental income if they find good tenants. Typically, I meet many gay men, with or without partners, who rely almost totally on some limited cash savings and the income from a number of properties that are difficult to shift as they grow older. I say to them that perhaps this is now the time to let go a bit. You've enjoyed the property boom of the last century; this is unlikely to continue at this pace, and the market can even collapse - the first signs are starting to emerge, with property prices starting to fall in many parts of the UK. Furthermore, most of these gay men have got no family *per se* to pass these properties to after their own partners have gone.

This advice also applies to those in their early 50s. So what should they do? If you're approaching these challenging years, there are a few financial issues that you should start to take seriously. Firstly, if you live with your partner, make sure that the ownership of

your house is dealt with according to your personal circumstances, your needs and your wishes (for example, have you considered joint ownership? This will be easy to transfer under the new Civil Partnership Act). Secondly, if your income isn't adequate for your needs over the next 20-30 years, perhaps you should consider selling some properties and moving into much safer investments such as fixed interest, cash or even into commercial, rather than residential, property.

If your home is the largest part of your assets, perhaps you should look into some kind of equity release or even some home reversion plans (but only if you're in your 70s). These plans, at last, will soon be covered under the [Financial Services Authority](#), following an announcement in the Queen's Speech in May 2005. But also, if you're in your 60s, you should consider looking at [Long Term Care](#) policies to cover the cost of care when you need it.

As usual, financial planning is not all straight forward, and everyone is different, but a good [financial health check](#) as you get closer to retirement, can be the best move you'll ever make.

Louis Letourneau, MA is an experienced independent financial adviser (IFA), specialist in financial planning and wealth management. He founded Rainbow Finance in 1995 and has consistently challenged financial companies and Government on their attitudes to gays, lesbians and same sex couples and was instrumental in the Inland Revenue to changing its guidance notes to recognise unmarried couples in pension benefits. His work has also resulted in life insurance companies starting to relax the discriminatory underwriting criteria toward gay men and people living with HIV. He was a founder of the Rainbow Research Project which surveys and educates private pension schemes in how they recognise unmarried couples on death benefits. He was also a founder member of the Stonewall Immigration Group (which campaigned for Immigration rights for same-sex couples, achieving a significant victory in April 1997) and helped set up the gaypartners.org initiative with gay.com in early 2001, campaigning for same-sex partnership rights. He speaks regularly on national and local radio.

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