

# Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer

The Official Journal of Leeds Law Society

**Leeds**  
Law Society

December 2024

Issue 191

## Closing arguments

Reflecting on the year, and preparing  
for the next

### Society

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### News

Legal Studio acquires GC Business Lawyers

### Comment

Ashton Legal's Natalie Cosgrove on the importance of reflection

### Yorkshire Legal Awards

Meet the 2024 winners

### Last Word

Yorkshire Lawyer of the Year, James Love





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## President's column

**Nigel Brook** is legal director of Tyr and current president of Leeds Law Society.

Dear Sirs,

This formal salutation has been a mainstay of legal correspondence for an age.

Dictionary definitions suggest 'sir' is a 'formal and polite way of speaking to a man'. I recall first encountering the phrase as a trainee solicitor. It was very much part of the correct way to go about drafting correspondence. It still appears frequently in the work undertaken by law firms, not only when we are writing to corporate entities, but perhaps more importantly, when we are writing to one another. It is a default, something which we unconsciously adopt without really considering why.

Yet today, if you are reading this (or if you are in receipt of inter partes correspondence generally) the odds are that you are not a man. SRA diversity data from 2023 reflects that of all lawyers working in law firms, the proportion of women had risen to 53%.

Arguably the salutation – apparently harking back to a time when it was safe to assume that those operating law firms (and other organisations) were men – is now extremely anachronistic. It is more than 100 years since December 1922, when Carrie Morrison became the first woman solicitor admitted to the roll.

At some point in the last few years (this column excluded) I started to ditch using 'Dear Sirs' in correspondence and encouraged colleagues to take the same approach.

It came to my attention again this month when Ellie Rees, co-founder of estate agency, Brickworks, spoke to BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, alongside Susie Dent (lexicographer and etymologist of Countdown fame). Ellie is on a campaign to eradicate 'Dear Sirs' from legal correspondence. In wondering whether this matters, Ellie during her interview recounts discussing the issue with her daughter, asking "Why does this matter to you?", and her response; "Just sounds like all the men are in charge, Mum."

A lot of the work that we undertake as solicitors is serious in nature. For significant parts of our work, formality will remain appropriate. I suspect that part of the inertia in shifting from 'Dear Sirs' is that it is easy to lend things a sense of formality by acting consistently with what has been done historically. These two concepts can become unnecessarily entwined.

Because of its inaccuracy, and its anti-inclusivity, I would encourage anyone reading this to give serious thought to consigning 'Dear Sirs' to history. Such a change is not going to remedy broader issues which can cause disadvantage to women in various areas of their lives. It will not plug the pay gap between men and women. It will not address women's under-representation in senior positions across a range of sectors.

It is a small change, but it can at least reflect the right intention.

What though, to replace it with?

There are a wealth of options, some better than others; 'Dear all', 'Dear colleagues', 'To whom it may concern' can all work. However, to me, the neatest option when writing to another firm of solicitors is simply 'Dear [Law Firm]'.

Best wishes  
Yours faithfully



**Nigel Brook**  
President, Leeds Law Society

**Leeds  
Law Society**

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LEGAL DINNER**

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**Bring colleagues, clients and friends to join us at Leeds Law Society's flagship black-tie event, hosted by the president of Leeds Law Society, Nigel Brook.**

This will be a spectacular evening with speeches from highly acclaimed guests and fun light entertainment.

A welcome drink will be served on arrival followed by a scrumptious 3 course meal. Each table will be provided with a 1/2 bottle of wine (non-alcoholic options available) per person.

Book before the 31 January 2025 and receive a 10% discount on the standard prices below:

If you require a table of more than 10 or have a question about the event, please e-mail: [events@leedslawsociety.org.uk](mailto:events@leedslawsociety.org.uk)

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## Children's Heart Surgery Fund: Christmas Wishes 2024

Leeds Law Society's Charity of the Year has launched its 'Christmas Wishes' appeal, aiming to raise £12,000 to support the Leeds Congenital Heart Unit (LCHU) and CHSF into next year. Each 'wish' highlights vital services - so, join in the song (to the tune of 'The 12 Days of Christmas') and dig deep!

"On the first day of Christmas, our Unit is in need, can you help with our Christmas appeal?"

On the second day of Christmas, our patients really need: INR machines

On the third day of Christmas, our families really need: patient accommodation

On the fourth day of Christmas, our adults really need: KardiasMobiles

On the fifth day of Christmas, CHSF needs: your donations!

On the sixth day of Christmas, our teens really need: a youth support worker

On the seventh day of Christmas, our nurses really need: life-saving training

On the eighth day of Christmas, our patients really need: Katie Bears and medals

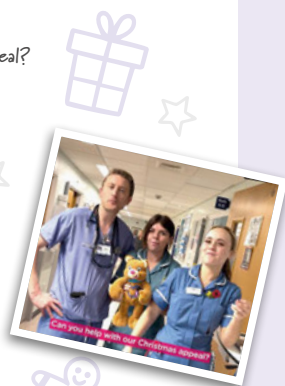
On the ninth day of Christmas, our ward really needs: our famous fishtank

On the tenth day of Christmas, our region really needs: local specialist nurses

On the eleventh day of Christmas, our families really need: our support workers

On the last day of Christmas, it's all because of you."

Support their goals at [justgiving.com/campaign/chsf-christmas-wishes-2024](https://justgiving.com/campaign/chsf-christmas-wishes-2024)



## Truth Legal walks 21 miles in support of road safety charity Brake

Staff of Truth Legal have completed a 21-mile charity walk from Whitby to Scarborough to raise funds for Brake, the road safety charity.

The firm, with offices in Leeds, Harrogate, and Hull, offers its clients personal injury, clinical negligence, immigration, family law, and employment law advice.

The Truth Legal personal injury team took on the challenge on 20 September, walking along the scenic Cleveland Way and surpassing their fundraising target by raising over £1,500 – £500 more than their initial goal.

The funds will support Brake's efforts to raise awareness of road safety, prevent road traffic accidents (RTAs), and provide crucial support to those affected by such incidents. The charity

is known for offering both practical and emotional help to victims and their families, a cause close to the hearts of the Truth Legal team.

Catherine Reynolds, head of personal injury at Truth Legal, said, "We are thrilled to support Brake in a mission that directly benefits people bereaved and serious injured in road traffic accidents. We are fully aware how supportive Brake is to those clients in their time of need offering vital practical and emotional help.

"Our firm is deeply committed to making a positive impact in the community, and this initiative reflects our dedication to promoting safe road practices and the well-being of individuals who have experienced an accident."

## Paul Verrico completes cancer research fundraising challenge

Yorkshire lawyer Paul Verrico has completed a 10-marathon fundraising challenge to support cancer research at the University of Sheffield.

Over 10 months, across three continents and 10 countries, Paul ran 265.4 miles, raising £69,501 - surpassing his £52,000 target. A senior partner at Eversheds Sutherland and solo parent, Paul honoured his late wife, Anna, who passed away in 2013 from an aggressive form of breast cancer, by founding charity Team Verrico. Since its inception, the charity has raised over £1.3m to assist families affected by cancer, fund second opinions, provide counselling, and support research.

The marathons included Chicago, Zurich, and Hong Kong, among others, with family and friends, including his children Alessandro and Lucia, joining in Riga. Paul's commitment stems

from his experience of losing Anna to a rare, aggressive subtype of triple-negative breast cancer.

Funds will support a Sheffield University study investigating a biomarker to predict relapse risks in triple-negative breast cancer patients post-chemotherapy. Professor Lewis, leading the research, states: "If validated, this biomarker will help oncologists identify patients needing closer monitoring."

Reflecting on his journey, Paul said: "The marathon challenge was tough, but not as tough as chemotherapy.

"We will allocate the remainder of funds raised to our counselling provision, specifically to help children who have lost a parent to the disease and require immediate support. Thank you again, Love and Light"

## Leeds barristers raise £55,000 for children's cancer research charity



Exchange Chambers, a barristers' chambers based in Leeds, has raised an impressive £54,786 for the children's cancer research charity, Friends of Rosie.

The presentation of the cheque was the grand finale of two years of fundraising efforts by members and staff of Exchange

Chambers.

The funds raised will enable Friends of Rosie to fund a second year of specialised research into Proton Beam Therapy, a promising treatment for sarcomas in children.

Friends of Rosie, a volunteer-led charity, was established to support pioneering research into children's cancer. Since its founding in 1991 following the death of five-year-old Rosie Larkin, the charity has raised £2.75 million and funded 28 research projects tackling a range of childhood cancers, including neuroblastoma, leukaemia, osteosarcoma, and brain tumours.

Exchange Chambers CEO Jonathan I'Anson said, "I would like everyone at Exchange for making this partnership such a huge success. It has been a real team effort."

"The support we have received from Exchange Chambers over the last two years has been phenomenal," commented Felicity Goodey, chair of trustees at Friends of Rosie. "The difference it makes to children with cancer is huge."

# COURT ENFORCEMENT SERVICES●

## Court Enforcement Services achieves outstanding client satisfaction in recent survey

**Court Enforcement Services is proud to announce the success of our recent client satisfaction survey, which highlights the dedication and professionalism of our team. In a year marked by continued success, the survey results are a testament to our commitment to providing an ethical, efficient, and client-focused approach to high court enforcement.**

Since the end of the pandemic, we have successfully collected over £105 million, a milestone that reflects our operational efficiency and expertise in managing. Having ethically enforced over 100,000 writs of control, we are committed to upholding the highest standards of service and practice within the enforcement industry.

### **The results of our client satisfaction survey reflect this commitment:**

- 100% of clients agreed that Court Enforcement Services is an approachable, client-focused, and professional high court enforcement partner. This recognition underscores the close relationships we build with our clients, ensuring their needs are met through personalised support and clear communication.
- Over 95% of clients agreed that we achieve writs in a quick and timely manner, reinforcing our ability to deliver results swiftly without compromising on the quality or care of our services.
- 100% of clients reported that their client account manager is attentive and knowledgeable, a key factor in the trust our clients place in us. Our account managers are equipped to handle diverse and often complex situations, providing clients with expert advice and continuous support throughout the enforcement process.

- Over 96.5% of clients agreed that we report adequately and promptly on their instructions. This reflects our strong focus on transparency and ensuring clients are kept informed at every stage of the enforcement process, fostering trust and collaboration.

These survey results reinforce the values that have made us a leader in high court enforcement—efficiency, ethical practice, and a deep commitment to our clients' success. We are extremely proud of our team's hard work, dedication, and the trust that our clients have placed in us over the years.

As part of our continued commitment to the legal sector, we are delighted to be sponsoring the Litigation Team of the Year at the upcoming Yorkshire Legal Awards. This prestigious event brings together some of the most influential figures in the legal community, and we look forward to celebrating the achievements of the sector and continuing to strengthen our partnerships.

Court Enforcement Services remains committed to excellence, ensuring that we not only meet but exceed our clients' expectations in the future. We are grateful for the confidence placed in us and are eager to continue delivering outstanding results for our client base in Yorkshire and beyond.

**For further information, please contact:**  
**[BD@courtenforcementservices.co.uk](mailto:BD@courtenforcementservices.co.uk)**

# Reflection: finding the wins in law and life

**Natalie Cosgrove** is a partner in the medical negligence team at Ashtons Legal.

I have long endorsed reflection. I have lost count of the many hearings I've left thinking of arguments I should have made; questions I should have asked; things I should have done differently. (Of course, usually, when I revisit the transcript, I realise that what I did was quite good. Not that I would publicly admit that!)

Reflection isn't always about finding your flaws so you can self-flagellate. Cursing yourself for not doing or being better, thinking you are rubbish, and questioning your career choices is not constructive. In fact, it is downright toxic. That's why it's ironic that January often finds us regretting our Christmas indulgence and vowing to deprive ourselves in the name of restoring health or a "fresh start." While that is worthy and commendable, I've always admired cultures that wait until spring to reset. Let us hibernate in winter!

Reflection, when done properly, isn't about self-denial or overcorrecting; it's about recognising balance. Proper contemplative practice not only makes us better lawyers but can make us more positive, even in times of adversity. If you spend your life frustrated about the things on your to-do list that you didn't manage, you will lose sight of what you achieved.

Contemplative practice acknowledges successes and failures as equals - one cannot happen without the other. It doesn't have to be a total failure, just room for improvement. It doesn't have to be a win, just something you did well. When the pendulum swings so far one way or the other, the joy of the in-between vanishes. Instead, work can often be spent waiting for the highs, with the lows making us very low indeed.



We rarely acknowledge how low that can be. While we can all laugh at the memes, there's an underlying truth: law isn't all bad, but it's not all good either. When the work environment becomes toxic, it's important to shift your perspective. Things go wrong in every aspect of life, but what defines us is how we respond, learn, and come back stronger.

Some days it is all about the small wins, and they often do add up. Take a moment to think back over your last week and reflect on five good things that happened in work, and personally. The first thing you will think is: I can't think of that many. So go smaller: Did you go for a walk? Do a piece of work you have been putting off? Pick up some life admin? Cook a lovely warm meal? Manage a proper breakfast? Meet a friend? Share a lovely conversation with a colleague? Declutter your inbox or update your to-do list? Did you have an early night? Did you wake up feeling refreshed? Did you make the perfect brew?

The point is, reflection doesn't have to be daunting. In the competitive world of law, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking only big wins count. That's not true. The everyday moments of "just doing the law" are worth recognising too.

As you end your 2024, of course reflect, but perhaps as we step into 2025, engage in reflective, contemplative practice. Whether it is a little good or a little bad, it matters. You matter. Life becomes far more rewarding when you find joy in the spaces between the pendulum swings.

## Switalskis relocates Leeds office to West Village innovation cluster



Switalskis has relocated its legal teams from St James House to the West Village development on Wellington Street.

After 15 years in its former location, the firm's new 3,326 sq ft office means that its Leeds-based employees are now all in one location.

Julie Guest, head of people, commented, "The Leeds office is the first step in a wider review of all our locations. The feedback has been hugely positive so far, which we're delighted with."

## Steven Newdall reveals new boutique law firm

Former managing partner of Levis Solicitors, Steven Newdall, has launched a new boutique law firm.

The new venture, Thomas Harvey Solicitors, will focus on personal and commercial dispute resolution, providing tailored legal services to individuals and businesses across a range of areas.

Newdall, with over 30 years of legal experience, is well-regarded for his expertise in handling complex professional

negligence claims, property litigation, and partnership disputes.

The new firm aims to provide a personalised service which breaks away from the traditional '9 to 5' model by offering flexible options.

Newdall said, "After 33 years at Levi Solicitors, I'm thrilled to embark on this new journey and look forward to offering a fresh approach."

## Levi Solicitors secures new premises licence for Blayds Bar in challenging 'Red Zone'

Levi Solicitors successfully represented Blayds Bar, a longstanding LGBTQ+ venue in Leeds, in securing a new premises licence. The decision came despite the bar's location in the city's Cumulative Impact 'Red Zone', where new licences are typically denied to prevent adverse effects on public safety and order.

Blayds Bar, a key part of Leeds' LGBTQ+ nightlife for over 18 years, needed a new licence after administrative changes

following the death of the owner's husband. Without it, the bar faced closure.

Ed Smith, partner at Levi Solicitors, represented the bar at the hearing, backed by community support including a 3,000-signature petition. The council granted the licence.

Ed commented, "I'm proud to have been involved with the project and look forward to seeing Blayds go from strength to strength."

## Legal Studio acquires GC Business Lawyers

Legal Studio has marked its 10th anniversary with the acquisition of GC Business Lawyers.

The acquisition brings senior solicitor Gary Caplan to the team, complementing the recent appointments of Richard Dean and Clare Young as directors. Richard, formerly with Ramsdens Solicitors, brings expertise in mergers, acquisitions, and private equity. Clare specialises in wills, trusts, probate,

and inheritance tax planning.

Founded in 2014 by Matt Dowell, Leeds-based Legal Studio has grown to 34 consultant solicitors.

Ian McCann, CEO of Legal Studio, said: "We're excited for the future as we continue our growth while staying true to our founding principles."

## Gordons reports 14% net profit growth for 2023-2024

Leeds-based law firm Gordons LLP has reported a 14% increase in net profit, reaching £12.1 million for the year ending 31 March 2024. This growth comes alongside a 6% rise in annual revenue to £22.3 million.

The firm's strong performance has enabled a profit-sharing scheme, with all 170 staff across offices in Leeds and Bradford receiving a bonus equal to 5% of their annual salary.

The firm's corporate and commercial department saw a standout 20% increase in revenue, while its employment practice grew by 14%.

Managing partner, Victoria Davey, commented, "These

results demonstrate the effectiveness of our distinct ability to think and act entrepreneurially on behalf of our clients. This approach sets Gordons apart."



## JWP Solicitors unveil new Bradford office



JWP Solicitors has announced the opening of their newest high-street office on Grattan Road, Bradford. This will be the

firm's seventh office in West Yorkshire.

The firm will offer in-person and remote consultations from their new office and maintain their 24-hour emergency contact services for urgent cases. Directors Lois Monks and Damien Dobson will lead the new office.

Damien, who joined the firm in 2014 and became a director in 2021, brings extensive expertise in child care, adult care, and mental health law. Lois, who began her journey at JWP as a trainee in 2012 and rose to director status in 2021, has significant experience in public law proceedings.

Lois said, "This latest site opening demonstrates our continued commitment to the West Yorkshire region, and we look forward to becoming a part of the local community."

---

## Winston Solicitors expands with new hires and takeover

Leeds-based Winston Solicitors has announced the acquisition of WildWood Legal, a small specialist personal injury (PI) firm previously based in Harrogate, and welcomed new hires as a result.

Hannah Craven, formerly of Silk Family Law, joins the family law team as an associate solicitor.

The PI department has also grown following the acquisition:

Rogan Ashton joins as a senior personal injury solicitor and head of department alongside Stephen Hattersley, who will work as a PI consultant.

Jonathan Winston, managing partner of Winston Solicitors, said, "I am delighted to welcome Hannah, Rogan and Stephen to our team."

---

## Schofield Sweeney celebrates 100% retention for 'Class of 2024'

Schofield Sweeney has announced that its 2024 cohort of trainees and apprentices have successfully completed their training, with all choosing to stay at the firm.

Each of the newly qualified solicitors has completed their training in key areas of law. Liam Murphy has qualified as

a solicitor within the corporate team; Caprice Coulson has qualified into the commercial team; Waqar Munir has joined the private wealth team; Rosie Bamforth has qualified into the real estate team; and Kieran Berry has joined the private wealth and succession team.

---

## Switalskis launches specialist inheritance disputes service



Switalskis has introduced a dedicated inheritance disputes service. The move responds to an uptick in inheritance disputes across

Yorkshire, driven by factors like complex family dynamics and financial pressures.

Switalskis has appointed Sandra Kowalska, an experienced inheritance disputes solicitor, to lead the new service. Sandra, who will be based in the firm's Doncaster office, began her career in 2018 and has recently completed the Association of Contentious Trust and Probate Specialists (ACTAPS) course.

She said, "Developing this team at Switalskis allows us to fill an important gap and make a meaningful impact in Yorkshire's legal market."

---

## Blacks Solicitors unveils new trademark protection service

Leeds-based Blacks Solicitors has announced the launch of a new trademark protection service, offering businesses proactive monitoring for similar or identical trademark registrations.

"Protecting your brand is key in today's marketplace, and it's not enough to rely on the IPO (Intellectual Property Office) to flag potential issues," said Pete Konieczko-Hansom, the firm's legal director and head of commercial law. "We've developed

this service to allow our clients to focus on business growth, confident that their brands are being properly safeguarded."

Blacks Solicitors' IP team includes seasoned experts with over four decades of experience in the field, including Konieczko-Hansom, senior associate Yat Wong, and solicitors Beth Brindley and Daisy Jackman.

# Looking for Moore

**Fiona Moore of Moore Family Law in Skipton ponders the difficulty in recruiting experienced family law solicitors outside cities in the Yorkshire region.**

*Founded by Fiona Moore in 2013, Moore Family Law has been busy helping Dales families to traverse the difficult terrain of separation and divorce for more than a decade. Highly regarded in the busy market town on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales, the practice values its reputation for providing an efficient and reassuring service for clients who are at their most vulnerable. Yet growing the team has been a perennial challenge over the years.*

## **Fiona explains:**

It seems to be a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy that lawyers train and cut their teeth in the cities, falling into work at large corporate firms without exploring options further afield.

The reality is that working for smaller firms in towns fed by rural areas actually delivers a far better quality of life. As part of a team dedicated to a particular legal sector, it's possible to automatically be a big fish in a small pond, with a much more rewarding and pivotal role in a practice.

Family law is a specialist area of the legal profession requiring a particular blend of empathy paired with professional qualifications. In our case, there is also a difference in the client base due to our location, which is predominantly a blend of farming community, professional services and tourism employees. Our clients live in a beautiful location with generations of families living locally, contrasting with city environments which tend to have a much more transient population.

As a result, we work with many families who genuinely want to resolve matters rather than seeing it as commercially transactional and automatically adversarial situation. They are often going through considerable emotional trauma and it's our job to present them with options and prepare a path for them to make a transition.

It means the work is hugely varied and rewarding, taking in all aspects of family law; finances, children, divorce, separation, pre-nups, post-nups and even grandparents rights. We conduct all the necessary legal steps to disentangling a relationship: divorce and all its ramifications, handling the fair distribution of assets and pensions to ensure short and long term financial stability.



Most importantly we work to minimise the impact of separation on children. Their welfare is paramount and we assist with issues ranging from living and visiting arrangements through to financial maintenance for their upbringing.

Skipton is fast becoming unusual in that it retains its own magistrates' court, where many have closed. The distances required to travel to another court saved Skipton from closure when local MP Julian Smith highlighted that travelling from Bentham to Harrogate or Bradford court appointments was not actually viable in time on public transport. Skipton Court's reprieve represents a huge benefit to solicitors working here in the town and our clients.

Another string to our bow is that we are the only legal practice in the Dales area to offer a mediation service. As an accredited mediator I receive mediation referrals from other professionals as well as direct from new clients. Couples looking for this service are invited to attend joint meetings which are not counselling or marriage guidance, simply impartial help to find workable compromise and solutions objectively without emotional heat or bias. We cannot go on to represent someone if I have acted as their mediator.

Due to a member of our team retiring, we're looking to bring another qualified family lawyer on board at Moore Family Law to join us in our fulfilling and sensitive work. Applicants with all levels of post-qualification experience are welcome for full time roles as we offer a rewarding and nurturing environment for those at the start of their career and a relaxed, friendly team of colleagues for more senior solicitors.

Commuting to – or from – the bright lights is easy as Skipton has a direct line into Leeds taking only 45 minutes. Currently our paralegal, who came from London, commutes daily from Leeds and loves the scenic run as a relaxing chance to ease in and out of the working day.

We offer our clients meetings in person and on online platforms such as Zoom and Teams. The role is office based in a lovely C19th century building on Rectory Lane in the centre of Skipton. It's an attractive and busy market town with plenty to offer as a gateway to the Dales and a springboard for enjoying Wharfedale, which has graced our TV scenes lately as the home of All Creatures Great & Small.



**MOORE FAMILY LAW**

[www.moorefamilylaw.co.uk](http://www.moorefamilylaw.co.uk)

28 Rectory Lane, Skipton, BD23 1ER



# YORKSHIRE LEGAL AWARDS 2024



**As another year comes to a close, it's natural to reflect on the achievements of the year we're leaving behind.**

The 25th annual Yorkshire Legal Awards took place on 12 October 2024 in partnership with headline sponsors LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions. The glittering ceremony, hosted by "Judge" Rob Rinder and for the very first time taking place at the FirstDirect Arena, Leeds, celebrated and honoured the region's outstanding law firms, in-house teams, and individual practitioners.

# CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS:

**Commercial Property**  
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Winner: DAC Beachcroft

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Winner: Switalskis

**Debt Recovery**  
Sponsored by High Court  
Enforcement Group  
Winner: BW Legal

**Employment Law**  
Sponsored by SOS Legal  
Winner: Frederick Solicitors

**Family Law**  
Sponsored by Spire Barristers  
Winner: Stewarts

**Intellectual Property**  
Winner: Mills & Reeve

**Litigation and Dispute  
Resolution**  
Sponsored by Court  
Enforcement Services  
Winner: Switalskis' abuse team

**Personal Injury and Clinical  
Negligence**  
Sponsored by Scala  
Winner: Ison Harrison Solicitors

**Private Client**  
Sponsored by Perfect Portal  
Winner: Clarion

**Regulatory & Compliance**  
Sponsored by Park Square  
Barristers  
Winner: Weightmans

**Residential Property**  
Sponsored by InfoTrack  
Winner: Ison Harrison Solicitors

**Best ESG Campaign**  
Sponsored by Devonshires  
Winner: Eversheds Sutherland

**Chambers of the Year**  
Sponsored by Leigh Day  
Winner: Spire Barristers

**In-House Team of the Year**  
Sponsored by BW Legal  
Winner: WM Morrisons  
Supermarkets Ltd

**Law Firm of the Year: Small**  
Sponsored by St Philips  
Chambers  
Winner: Howard & Byrne  
Solicitors

**Law Firm of the Year: Medium**  
Sponsored by PracticeEvolve  
Winner: Devonshires

**Law Firm of the Year: Large**  
Sponsored by LexisNexis  
Enterprise Solutions  
Winner: Mills & Reeve

**Niche Law Firm of the Year**  
Sponsored by Miller Insurance  
Winner: Torque Law

**Lawtech Initiative of the Year**  
Sponsored by PEXA UK  
Winner: Walker Morris

**In-House Lawyer of the Year**  
Winner: David Lukic from  
Government Legal Department

**Managing Partner of the Year**  
Sponsored by Review Solicitors  
Winner: Jodie Hill from Thrive  
Law

**Partner of the Year**  
Sponsored by SearchFlow  
Winner: Leo Jones-Rowe from  
Schofield Sweeney

**Rising Star of the Year**  
Sponsored by RG Law  
Winner: Sofia Wyzkiewicz  
from DLA Piper UK LLP

**Trainee Solicitor of the Year**  
Sponsored by Tremark  
Winner: Maryam Razzaq from  
Fraser Masood Solicitors

**Yorkshire Lawyer of the Year**  
Sponsored by Groundsure  
Winner: James Love from  
Womble Bond Dickinson

# A year with Leeds JLD



**Danielle Hutchison** is the chair of Leeds Junior Lawyers Division for 2024 and a family solicitor at Brabners in their Leeds office.

December marks the end of my four-year Leeds JLD journey, and what a great four years it has been! I am pleased to have the opportunity to reflect on my time on the committee, my personal highlights and all the opportunities being involved with Leeds JLD has brought me.



The standout event for me this year has to be our annual winter ball which we hosted at

Aspire in November. We brought 250 junior legal professionals together for welcome drinks, a three-course meal and of course, an afterparty on Greek Street. We had so much great feedback afterwards and it was great to know that all the effort was well worth it. Some other favourite events this year have been our comedy evening at Hifi Club, the Leeds Pride parade and afterparty event with Leeds Law Society, and our wellbeing evening with spa treatments hosted at our Brabners Leeds office. I am very proud of the range of events we have hosted this year and hope that we achieved our goal of there being something for everyone.

I also had the pleasure of judging and attending the Yorkshire Legal Awards this year. It was great to be reminded of the first-class legal sector we have in Leeds, even though that made judging the awards so very difficult! The event was a huge success, and all attendees were so supportive of the winners.

One of my favourite things about the junior legal community in Leeds is their commitment to charitable giving. For 2024, our charity of the year has been Candlelighters, a wonderful charity who work with young cancer patients and their families. I am delighted to announce that we have raised £4,798.94 this year which will help to fund crucial front-line support for families at Leeds Children's Hospital. Leeds JLD are passionate about supporting local charities, and we wouldn't be able to do so without the generosity of our members and the local legal community for their kind donations, for which we are extremely grateful.

*"I am delighted to announce that we have raised £4,798.94 this year."*



A huge thank you also to the amazing JLD committee for 2024. I think the level of commitment and dedication

of our committee often goes unnoticed, so I just want to say a big thank you for everyone's hard work and making this our biggest year yet. I urge everyone to consider applying for a role on the committee, I am certainly so glad I did many years ago!

The past year as chair has been unforgettable and I can't thank our members enough for their support. Our annual ball tickets sold out in 8 minutes, which sums up the level of excitement and engagement we've had from members, sponsors, and the Leeds legal community this year. The success is directly linked to the engagement of our JLD members, so I really am thankful to you all!

I am very much looking forwards to the Christmas break, but excited to come back to the brilliant team at Brabners in January feeling refreshed and ready for another year. My time as JLD chair may have come to an end, but my love for networking events certainly hasn't, so I hope to see as many of you as possible throughout 2025 and beyond!





## Client & transaction onboarding - preventing issues before they happen

Dr Michael Mosley's approach of tackling 'just one thing' to live a healthier life proved a huge hit. Adopting the same approach to improving the 'health' of your practice can pay similar dividends. Our 'just one thing' to radically improve your chances of a claims-free life is a robust client and transaction onboarding process as this provides the foundation on which the rest of your matter-management is based.

### STEP 1: EVALUATE & RECORD YOUR RISK APPETITE

Unless one person is the gatekeeper for all matters taken on in your firm, it's worth having a formal risk appetite framework.

We recommend creating a record of:

- **GREEN** – the ideal work types you want to take on;
- **AMBER** – work which you may take on but requires senior sign-off and careful allocation;
- **RED** – work types you will not take on.

This should align with the skillsets and experience of your fee-earners, and those capable of supervising them.

Your broker should be able to support by providing an insurer-view of risk by work type.

### STEP 2: INTEGRATE YOUR RISK APPETITE INTO YOUR RISK ASSESSMENTS

Risk assessments go far beyond anti-money-laundering (AML) checks. From a claims perspective, AML is only one part of the equation.

Your risk assessment process should be a practical application of your risk appetite framework. If, for example, you have decided not to touch property purchases with Building Safety Act issues, your risk assessment should include relevant questions on that point. Don't forget to provide guidance on how to answer those questions meaningfully.

### STEP 3: CONSIDER CLIENT & MATTER RISKS SEPARATELY – ALBEIT NOT IN ISOLATION

While your risk assessment can take several forms, it should always include an assessment of client risk, as well as an evaluation of matter-specific risks. Do not assume that an existing client does not need to be risk assessed; circumstances change, as do the nature of the instructions. A sophisticated fraudster will use a straightforward instruction to 'get in the door' before trying to commit the fraud. Client risk factors to consider (alongside your usual AML checks) include:

- Does the age and profile of the apparent client 'fit' with the transaction?
- Does the client face a language barrier? Are they 'vulnerable' in any way?
- How experienced and 'savvy' do they appear to be?
- Are they financially constrained? Is there a risk that they may not be able/willing to pay all your fee?

- Are they clear about what they want you to do and the rationale behind their instructions?
- Are you taking instructions through a third party?
- Are there indications that they could be a difficult client?

#### Matter risk factors might include:

- Impending time-limits or unrealistic deadlines.
- Estimated 'worst-case scenario' claims cost (so you can assess the suitability of your PII arrangements).
- Unusual or potentially complex matters.
- You may want to include matter-area specific risk criteria for different types of work or departments. Miller can assist with this.

### STEP 4: HARNESS THE OUTPUTS FROM YOUR RISK ASSESSMENT

Your risk assessment needs to be an integral part of the wider matter management process. The output from your risk assessment should help you ascertain which fee earners are suitable to undertake the work. It should also trigger enhanced review processes where appropriate – not only at the matter acceptance stage, but also for second-pair-of-eyes evaluations at critical junctures for high value and other high risk matters. Make sure you keep a central record of high-risk matters. This enables targeted supervision and, importantly, you can evidence this to insurers.

Taken together, the above measures should help ensure that you are only taking on work that you have the expertise and capacity to manage, and that higher risk matters are getting the oversight required to minimise the risks of errors and omissions.

**For more information contact**  
[marianne.mcwilliams@miller-insurance.com](mailto:marianne.mcwilliams@miller-insurance.com).

*Calum MacLean is a solicitor who has specialised in risk and compliance management for the legal profession since 2008. He worked as a Risk Manager for a major insurer before joining Miller in 2024.*

# Supporting legal professionals on Yorkshire's east coast

**Laura Thorne**, president of Scarborough Law Society, is an agricultural and commercial property solicitor at Pinkney Grunwells in Scarborough.

Scarborough Law Society proudly represents and promotes the interests of solicitors in and around the picturesque North Yorkshire coastal town of Scarborough. With a growing membership of over 40 solicitors and trainee solicitors, we are a vibrant hub for the local legal community. While most of our members are based at Scarborough firms, others hail from neighbouring towns across North and East Yorkshire. Our 15-strong Committee works to uphold the Society's mission and organise its activities.

## A calendar full of activity

We meet four times a year, including our Annual General Meeting, to discuss pressing legal matters, share updates, and plan events. These meetings are open not only to members but also to guests, such as representatives from other regional law societies.

Throughout the year, the Committee organises two key social events. In spring or summer, members and fellow legal professionals come together for a lively social activity—think bowling followed by dinner. November brings our Member's Dinner, a more formal affair where invited guests join members to celebrate another year of legal excellence.



One of our most beloved traditions is the annual Quiz Night each October, raising funds for a local charity. This general knowledge

showdown attracts teams from solicitor firms, accountants, estate agents, local businesses, and the charity itself. With prizes like a trophy and chocolates for the winners—and wooden spoons for the last-placed team—the evening is filled with good-natured competition and laughter. Generous raffle donations from local businesses add to the excitement, and this year's event raised an impressive £1,000. As the highlight of our calendar, we're already planning to make the 2025 Quiz Night our biggest and best yet, with the goal of welcoming even more participants and raising even more for charity.

## Inspiring the next generation

Our commitment extends beyond our members. Each year, the Scarborough Law Society's president and vice president or secretary attend the sixth form college in Scarborough to present an award to an outstanding second-year student nominated by their law tutor. This accolade, which includes a certificate and cash prize, recognises their hard work and hopefully gives them a confidence boost as they look towards

their future. Prior to presenting the award, we talk to a class of law students: recalling our days at university studying law, discussing what law is like in practice, and having an engaging Q&A session with the students.

Scarborough Law Society attends various careers fairs throughout the year to promote the study and practice of law to the younger generation.

## Representing Scarborough on the regional and national stage

We are honoured to represent our Society on larger stages as well. Each year, either the president, vice president or a past president of Scarborough Law Society will attend the North Eastern Circuit Annual Legal Service and partake in the procession before the service.

The Committee also circulates literature received from courts and other local, regional, and national law societies to members to ensure they are kept up to date with any changes that affect their working lives.

## Looking ahead

As the bicentenary of the Law Society approaches, Scarborough Law Society is eager to play its part in the celebrations. We look forward to commemorating this historic milestone alongside our peers and continuing our work to support and connect the local legal community.



## Prosperity Law welcomes new partner and head of employment



Prosperity Law has appointed Rebecca Townsend as partner and head of employment law in Leeds.

Townsend joins from her own firm which she founded in 2008. Her expertise spans

complex cases for private businesses and public bodies, including the Police Federation of England and Wales. She has also lectured at Leeds Trinity University College.

Rebecca said, "I am very much looking forward to supporting Prosperity's roster of clients, but also working with the wider team to become the best legal partner for individuals and businesses of all sizes."

## Switalskis grows commercial property team

Switalskis has appointed solicitors Amber Gray and George Mallinson to its expanding commercial property team.

Amber, based in the Knaresborough office, brings four years of paralegal experience and recently qualified as a solicitor in February 2024.

George has over four years of experience in commercial property law, handling acquisitions, dispositions, and leases. He will split his time between Switalskis' Bradford and Leeds offices.

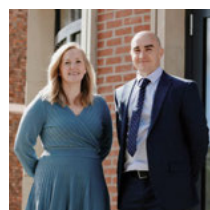
Switalskis, recently recognised as a "Firm to Watch" in the

Legal 500 guide, is noted for its work with high-profile clients including Lidl and Nandos.

Claire Murphy, head of commercial property at Switalskis, says: "We're delighted to welcome Amber and George to our growing team. We look forward to seeing how their fresh perspectives and skills will enhance our client services."



## Secerna LLP expands chemistry and pharmaceutical team



York-based intellectual property firm Secerna LLP has strengthened its chemistry and pharmaceutical team with the addition of Melvyn Ansell, a seasoned UK and European patent attorney.

Melvyn, who holds a PhD and master's degree in chemistry, brings

extensive experience in IP. He is also qualified to represent clients before the Unified Patent Court.

"We are thrilled to welcome Melvyn to our team," said Charlotte Watkins, partner at Secerna LLP, "His experience and knowledge will be a significant asset to our chemistry & pharmaceutical practice."

"I am delighted to have joined the Secerna LLP team," said Melvyn.

## Senior appointment joins Hudgells Solicitors serious injury team

Hudgell Solicitors has expanded its serious injury team with the appointment of Mark Ellis, who joins from Minster Law.

Mark Ellis, who has been practising since 2002, brings a wealth of experience in managing high-value catastrophic injury cases.

Ellis's decision to join Hudgell Solicitors was influenced by the firm's shift to employee ownership in December last year. Its employee-owned model means that staff collectively hold a majority stake in the business, giving them a voice in

strategic decision-making.

Founded in 1997, Hudgell Solicitors is a specialist litigation practice with offices in Hull, Manchester, and London. It is best known for supporting the victims of the Post Office Horizon scandal and of the 2017 Manchester Arena Attack.

Rachel Di Clemente, chief executive, said, "We are getting a highly talented solicitor who makes client care, and getting the very best results for those clients, his number one priority."

## Gaimster to lead new MD Law employment law division

Sheffield-based MD Law has launched an employment law division, led by solicitor Lindsey Gaimster.

The expansion builds on MD Law's services in corporate law, business recovery, insolvency, litigation, and commercial property.

Gaimster, who has over a decade of experience in senior roles, said, "I have worked with the MD Law team for a number of years, and what attracted me to join them was not only do they have great clients and a great ethos, but how they work aligned with my values.

"I look forward to helping grow the team and bring this new discipline to the practice."

Founded nine years ago by Matthew Dixon, MD Law now has a team of 20 professionals serving clients throughout south Yorkshire. Dixon said, "Lindsey's skills in providing easy to understand advice, no matter how complex the situation, and her down to earth and friendly approach, will mean our clients' cases will be dealt with both professionally and efficiently."

## Holden Smith announces RYANNE SMITH as director of residential property

Holden Smith, the Yorkshire based law firm, has announced the promotion of RYANNE SMITH to director of residential property. In her new role, RYANNE will oversee the firm's team of 75 conveyancing staff and will split her time across the company's five offices in Denby Dale, Elland, Leeds Crossgates, Horsforth, and Queensbury.

David Bancroft, co-founder and director at Holden Smith, said, "We are delighted to announce RYANNE as our director of residential property.

"Under her guidance, we're looking to grow our residential conveyancing team further as we head into our sixth year in business."

## MILLS & REEVE appoints partner to lead Leeds team



MILLS & REEVE has expanded its Leeds office with the appointment of Nick Bell as partner to lead its new banking and finance team.

Nick, with over 20 years of experience, joins from Squire Patton Boggs, where he was a partner in the financial services group. He previously led the transaction

management team at National Westminster Bank.

Recognised as a Leading Partner in Legal 500 and one of Yorkshire's Top 10 Powerhouse Banking & Finance Lawyers in 2023, Nick has a proven track record of building successful teams.

Nick commented, "I'm looking forward to helping the firm grow and build its banking and finance practice in Leeds, across the North, and nationally."

## WILKIN CHAPMAN welcomes six newly qualified solicitors across Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire

Wilkin Chapman has announced the qualification of six new solicitors following the completion of their training contracts.

Caitlin Bellamy, Rebecca Jex, Reece Townsend, Jacob Houlty, Harry Fox, and Sophie Emms are joining the firm's Grimsby, Lincoln, Beverley, and Louth offices, adding expertise in family law, personal injury, dispute resolution, and insolvency.

Lisa Boileau, partner and head of Wilkin Chapman's private client division, said, "We're thrilled to welcome our newest solicitors. The future is very exciting for them and for us."



## Wake Smith strengthens corporate team with senior appointment



Wake Smith Solicitors has appointed Tom Goff as head of corporate, strengthening its corporate and commercial team.

Sheffield-born Tom is a specialist in corporate M&A and venture capital. He joins from a successful London career

at international law firms and as a senior investment manager at the British Business Bank, focusing on high-tech aerospace and defence investments.

"I am incredibly proud of the spirit and commitment the people of my hometown are known for," said Tom, who has degrees in artificial intelligence and law. "I am delighted to join the [Wake Smith] team and thrilled at the opportunity," he continued.

## Lupton Fawcett picks heads of commercial property and employment teams

Lupton Fawcett, with offices in Leeds, Sheffield, and York, has promoted Julian Rowden to head of commercial property and Angela Gorton to head of employment.

Julian, who joined the firm in 2013, brings over 30 years of experience, specialising in commercial and agricultural property transactions.

Angela, a partner for 15 years with 25 years of employment law experience, advises clients in sectors such as

housebuilding, education, and manufacturing.

Lupton Fawcett's managing partner, James Richardson, said: "I'm delighted to congratulate Julian and Angela on their new leadership roles."



## New leadership for award-winning Raworths trusts, wills and estates team

Harrogate-based firm Raworths has appointed Alison Walker and Sam Jenner as joint heads of its 23-member trusts, wills, and estates team.

The leadership transition will allow Rachel Tunnicliffe, who has led the team for the past decade, to focus on her roles as senior partner at Raworths and head of private client services.

Rachel will continue to work with her long-standing clients.

Alison specialises in wills, trusts, succession planning, and tax advice for business owners. Sam brings expertise in estate administration, family investment companies, and tax issues.

Alison said, "I'd like to thank Raworths for this opportunity. Rachel has been an inspirational leader over the last ten years."

# Regulatory update

**Andrea Cohen**, legal director at Weightmans, gives her regular update.

As the first snow of winter hits the UK, panic sets in, trains stop running, roads close. Meanwhile, in the compliance world, things are running at a pace, hopes of a wind-down to Christmas are fading, and the Compli team is back with our monthly round-up.

## LSB independent review on SRA

The LSB released the report on the SRA Axiom Ince debacle and will be initiating enforcement action against the SRA. Important to note are the ramifications of the recommendations, including firms not having long periods between SRA visits, with an inspection regime based on risk profile, changes in approved role holders, type of work, recent mergers/acquisitions etc. Are you comfortable your firm would stand up to scrutiny if the SRA contacted you?

## Economic crime – AML, sanctions, fraud

In the same week as the Axiom Ince report, the SRA published two reports, its AML Annual Report and AML Training - Thematic Review, including a training checklist. The Annual Report confirmed that proactive supervision - which includes inspections and desk-based reviews - has doubled, with only 22% of firms being fully compliant. Enforcement has increased by almost 50%, with over £1 million in AML breach-related fines imposed by the SRA and SDT. In addition, 343 firms had their sanctions controls assessed with 55 sanctions inspections. This year, the SRA plans to expand proactive supervision, including a rolling programme to check independent AML audits.

Separately, the LSB has launched a consultation on proposed draft guidance regarding how legal regulators can fight economic crime, further to the new regulatory objective of 'promoting the prevention and detection of economic crime' in the Legal Services Act 2007, added by the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 (ECCTA). This may lead to a further increase in SRA inspections, investigations and enforcement. The consultation runs until 7 February 2025. Watch this space!

If you need assistance with any areas, including an independent AML audit, please get in touch.

## Data breaches and cyber attacks

Cyber-attacks against law firms increased dramatically in the 12 months to August 2024 and the SRA AML annual report recognised this an emerging risk. Firms should review cyber security to prevent successful attacks and put themselves in the best position possible to respond effectively and minimise any damage. We work with our CyXcel team to provide an integrated and holistic approach to cyber resilience, with experts from cybersecurity, legal, technical and regulatory fields.

## SRA consultation on client money

The SRA is consulting on proposals which could see major changes, including reducing client money held by solicitors, appropriate controls, and how the Compensation Fund is funded. The consultation ends 21 February 2025.

## ECCTA 2024

Guidance on the new corporate criminal offence of failure to prevent fraud has been published. Organisations within scope will have until 1 September 2025 to develop and implement these measures. Failure to do so could lead to investigation, prosecution and fines.

## Disciplinary and regulatory decisions

### Fines for AML breaches

A raft of firms have been fined a total of £57,000 for AML breaches, including not having FWRAs or client and matter risk assessments, lack of appropriate source of funds checks, ongoing monitoring, with fines ranging from £2,300 to £18,000.

A firm was fined £12,000 because it could not locate previous versions of its FWRA and PCPs although it produced fully compliant documents at an inspection in September 2023.

### Managing partner suspended for instructing solicitor to lie

A managing partner who instructed a newly admitted solicitor to send a misleading email to a client was found to have acted dishonestly, but only suspended for 9 months, the SDT taking into account exceptional circumstances, his remorse, and that he was issued practising certificates free from conditions up to the hearing.

## How Compli can help...

The Compli Solicitor Regulatory and Professional Discipline Team can provide expertise and advice on risk and compliance, AML, disciplinary assistance etc. If we can help in any way, please get in touch at [compl@weightmans.com](mailto:compl@weightmans.com)



## Legal talent recognised at Yorkshire awards night

The Yorkshire Legal Awards 2024 took place at the Leeds First Direct Arena, marking its 25th anniversary. Lawyers, firms, and teams from across the region gathered for a special evening, hosted by TV star Rob Rinder.

The awards honoured winners in various categories, with many categories sponsored by industry leaders.

"The 25th Yorkshire Legal Awards was a truly special evening, celebrating the incredible talent and dedication within our legal community," commented Harry Thomas, account manager for Yorkshire Legal and part of the team behind the awards. "This milestone event at the Leeds First Direct Arena allows us to honour those who have made outstanding contributions to the profession. We look forward to continuing this tradition of excellence for many more years to come."

Marketing manager of headline sponsor LexisNexis

Enterprise Solutions, Elizabeth Wing-To, said:

"We can't believe it has been a week since we had the honour of being headline sponsor of the Yorkshire Legal Awards! The opportunity to speak to some great legal minds and share the room with truly impressive firms, professionals, and colleagues from our Yorkshire region was certainly an opportunity not to be missed. In its 25th year, the event has gone from strength to strength, and as product director, Nigel Williams declared on the night, here at LexisNexis Enterprise Solutions we are excited to share our knowledge, solutions and enthusiasm to help mobilise your legal tech, leverage your data and improve efficiencies and profitability.

"Find out how we can help you today at [www.lexisnexis-es.co.uk](http://www.lexisnexis-es.co.uk)."

See all the winners on pages 12 and 13 of this edition of Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer.

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## Yorkshire lawyers chosen for new Access to Justice scheme

A new Access to Justice scheme, aimed at improving legal support for disabled people, has been launched in collaboration between Disability Rights UK and Yorkshire-based law firm, Inspire Legal Group.

The scheme will tackle ongoing discrimination faced by the UK's disabled population, offering pro bono legal advice and representation on disability discrimination issues.

With around 16.1 million people in the UK living with a disability, many still experience barriers when accessing legal advice. The new service aims to help disabled individuals understand their rights and take action against discrimination.

The scheme will initially be available across North East and North West England, East of England, and the Midlands. It provides support on disability discrimination cases, particularly relating to consumer issues, and is accessible to

law firms, advice centres, charities, and the general public. London-based Cloisters Chambers is also lending its expertise to the initiative.

Kamran Mallick, CEO of Disability Rights UK, commented, "Access to justice is essential in combating the daily discrimination faced by disabled people. Thanks to the support of the Access to Justice Foundation, Inspire Legal, and Cloisters Chambers, we are ready to challenge discrimination head-on and ensure that it does not become normalised."

The scheme is funded for two years by the Access to Justice Foundation. Those interested in accessing the service should contact Disability Rights UK via email at [enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org) or by phone at 0203 687 0785.

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## Levi Solicitors celebrates 90 years with community, cake, and coffee

Leeds-based law firm Levi Solicitors marked its 90th anniversary this October, celebrating with a charity coffee morning and cake sale at its north Leeds office.

The event, which raised funds for local charity St Gemma's Hospice, welcomed clients, local businesses, and residents to enjoy treats prepared by the firm's practice manager and resident baker, Janet.

The anniversary event is part of a year-long celebration during which Levi Solicitors has committed to supporting St Gemma's Hospice, Homeless Street Angels, and the Yorkshire Children's Charity. Fundraising activities have included everything from cake sales and football tournaments to a team walk of 90 miles in September.

Founded in 1934 by Jack Levi, Leeds-based Levi Solicitors has grown into a top-ranked Leeds firm. With a long-standing team, including senior partner Ian Land who joined in 1987,



Levi Solicitors takes pride in its strong retention rates, with nearly 40% of its solicitors having trained in-house.

Land said, "When you think about it, our journey has been quite remarkable, considering the last 90 years of recessions, a world war, and the pandemic. Our commitment to our team's development, happiness, and innovation makes Levi Solicitors an exceptional legal partner."

## Jones Myers partner celebrates three decades in family law



Nicki Mitchell, a partner at specialist family law firm Jones Myers, is celebrating a remarkable thirty-year career in family law.

Known for her expertise in managing the financial

complexities of divorce and separation, Mitchell has built a reputation for handling complex cases involving family businesses, multiple properties, and pension arrangements.

Mitchell became York's first collaborative family lawyer in 2006. Her career at Jones Myers saw her lead the firm's expansion into York in 2019. Just three years later, the York team relocated to larger premises at Bootham Row to

accommodate further growth.

Mitchell's accomplishments have earned her recognition in the latest Legal 500 2025 guide, which endorses her as a Recommended UK Lawyer with "a strong niche family law presence in York" and a reputation for offering "specialist and tailored family law services." She also retains her position in the Family and Matrimonial category of Chambers 2025.

Reflecting on her career, Mitchell said, "My passion for, and commitment to, family law and seeking the best solutions for our clients is as strong now as when I started out thirty years ago. It has been tremendous to witness formative changes including no-fault divorce and the increase in options such as mediation and collaboration which avoid lengthy and expensive court litigation and put children's best interests first."

Jones Myers managing partner Richard Peaker praised Mitchell's dedication and influence. He commented, "We congratulate Nicki on her significant milestone and her exceptional track record. Nicki's commitment and extensive expertise is instrumental to our standing in York and we wish her continued success."

## Pepperells Solicitors signs armed forces covenant, supporting military communities

In the wake of Armistice Day, Pepperells Solicitors signed the Armed Forces Covenant, a government-backed promise to treat current and former military members, along with their families, fairly and with respect.

The firm's commitment recognises the valuable role of the Armed Forces and the sacrifices they make.

The Covenant is based on two main principles: ensuring Armed Forces members and their families are not disadvantaged in accessing services and giving special consideration to those who have made significant sacrifices, such as the injured and bereaved.

Pepperells has pledged to:

- Support the hiring of veterans, reservists, and military spouses, appreciating the unique skills they bring.
- Ensure Armed Forces community members have fair access to the firm's services.
- Create a supportive environment for military community members, including offering flexibility to reservists for training and deployment.

Vicky Kulleseid, chief operating officer of Pepperells Solicitors, said, "As a firm we recognise and respect the unique role that the Armed Forces play in protecting everyone who makes the UK their home.

"It's right therefore that, in return, we commit to supporting those who do so much and risk so much, and their immediate families. We intend to go above and beyond the requirements of the Covenant by actively recruiting service

people. We recognise the diverse skills and perspectives they can bring to our workforce, and I believe that the discipline, resilience, and leadership qualities found in servicemen and women can prove invaluable to any organisation."

Pepperells' armed forces champion, Nigel Manuel, who served 23 years in the army, added, "Having served for 23 years in the army, I have real life experience of the challenges faced by serving service people and also individuals transitioning from military to civilian life, as well as the needs of veterans within the community. I'm proud to be part of a business that acknowledges these challenges and takes active steps to support this community."

Pepperells also plans to join events and initiatives that support veterans and their families, aiming to make a real difference for military communities in the regions it serves.



# Last Word

**James Love** is a partner at Womble Bond Dickinson and winner of Yorkshire Lawyer of the Year at the Yorkshire Legal Awards 2024.

***Congratulations on being named Yorkshire Lawyer of the Year! What does it mean to you?***

I was somewhat in awe of the other candidates and felt privileged to be nominated. I'm pleased to see that the judges value contributions to society alongside legal achievements, which is important in any career. Since winning, I have been amazed how many friends outside the legal field have noticed.

***The judges highlighted your journey from city firms to establishing your own practice in Yorkshire. What inspired you to take that path, and what challenges did you face along the way?***

I was very settled in my first job in London, where I trained, and loved the work. However, the "call" of the North was always there. In the 1990s, moving north wasn't as common as earlier in the decade, but we embraced the change despite challenges like negative equity on our London flat. It was a decision I've never regretted.

***You've advised on matters like 'cybersquatting' and IT issues. How do you stay updated with the fast-paced changes in technology that impact IP law?***

Your question assumes I do manage to stay updated with fast-paced technology! I am not sure whether some of the younger members of my team would agree.

An interest in science and progress helps. As an IP lawyer, you are regularly in contact with clients who have developed cutting-edge inventions. Also, the technology itself, such as generative AI, helps keep me up to date.

***You've handled cases that reached the Supreme Court. What are the rewards and challenges of handling high-level litigation?***

The heat gets slowly notched up as you progress through the Court of Appeal and then onto, as it was previously, the House of Lords. Not only has the rank of the judges increased, but there are more of them to spot deficiencies and level criticism. Fortunately, I have escaped any wrath, although I have certainly felt the pressure.

On the other hand, perhaps counter-intuitively, the legal arguments can become simpler and more focused on appeal, having been so well rehearsed in the lower courts.

***You've advised major clients like TomTom, Tetra Pak, and Rightmove Group. Which cases stand out to you as particularly impactful?***

There can be prestige in acting for these major clients, although my favourite cases are defending the rights of smaller organisations. In the 1990s, I defended start-ups against industry giants - one involving police car lightbars and another on safety signs. Winning these cases saved the businesses and their employees' futures, which was deeply satisfying.

***The judging panel also praised your voluntary work. How has this shaped you?***

A hugely rewarding period early in my career was as chairman of the board of Hackney City Farm. I found that role through a scheme pairing lawyers with charities. The scheme's founder had been told by his law firm employer that if he had time to do charity work, he clearly wasn't putting all of his effort into the firm. So, he left and set up the scheme!

I'm pleased that times have changed. For example, my whole team is spending an afternoon next week decorating a children's hospital ward on behalf of the Children's Heart Surgery Fund.

I'm also currently an Ambassador for Henshaws, a hugely inspirational specialist college in Harrogate with a community facility in Knaresborough, helping those with special needs achieve their full potential. This is particularly important to me, as I have a 25-year-old non-verbal autistic son who has learning difficulties.

***Your science degree from Cambridge must provide a strong foundation for your work in IP law. How does your scientific background inform your approach to cases, especially in technical areas like patents?***

I graduated in the late 1980s, a time when the general economy was booming, but jobs in science were relatively scarce and low-paid, and morale was low. I was directed to a specialist IP law firm looking for scientists. I went for some work experience, was offered a job, and my career path instantly changed.

My science degree helps me grasp technical concepts without a dictionary, but it's not essential for IP law. Some of the best patent litigators I have come across do not have science degrees. Much more important is an openness to learn and to understand.

***You've been part of several committees, including the Law Society Intellectual Property Law Committee. What role do such committees play in shaping the law?***

Committees are invaluable for ensuring practitioners' perspectives inform law reform. I've contributed to changes like the Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Act 2017, which protects legal advisors from personal liability. I'd encourage any lawyer with an interest in policy to get involved.

***Establishing your own boutique IP practice was a bold move. What were the key lessons you learned?***

Maybe if I had known what I learnt from the experience, right at the start, I may not have had the courage to set up from scratch. I still remember vividly the feeling I had when walking into my office on the first day. I had been on an extended period of gardening leave, and so had no immediate workload. My room had an empty filing cabinet, a desk with a PC (with an empty inbox) and a telephone. It was a daunting sink-or-swim moment.

I think the strongest lesson I learnt was not to dwell on times of sparse workload. Instead, focus on continuing to work hard on all avenues of the business, and trust in the fact that this hard work will pay off ... eventually!

***Looking back on your career, what are you most proud of? And what would you like to accomplish next?***

In terms of cases, I am still thrilled to have recently obtained a record IP damages court award for a local Yorkshire manufacturing company competing against a huge US conglomerate.

Looking ahead, I would be keen to export more legal services to China, a market I was active in before Covid.

Winning Yorkshire Lawyer of the Year is a career highlight, but being named a Local Hero for Charity Fundraising in a ceremony organised by YourHarrogate radio, largely for tandem rides with my son, is even more special.



# Leigh Day's Sarah Moore fighting the good fight in Yorkshire and beyond

**Sarah Moore**, partner at Leigh Day, has built a career tackling pressing public health and environmental issues. From representing clients against global corporations to investigating environmental injustices closer to home, her work reflects a deep commitment to justice and accountability.

With a reputation for taking on complex, high-stakes cases, Leeds-based Sarah is a leading advocate for communities and individuals seeking redress.

## **Challenging AstraZeneca: Seeking fairness for vaccine damage**

Sarah is representing individuals in claims against AstraZeneca for alleged vaccine injuries. Seven of Leigh Day's clients based in Yorkshire, highlighting the urgent need for reforms in the UK's Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (VDPS).

A BBC documentary, 'Covid Vaccine: Fighting for a Payout,' featured Sarah criticising the scheme as offering "too little, too late, to too few people."

## **Advocating for women with breast implant-associated lymphoma**

Sarah leads claims for women diagnosed with Breast Implant-Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (BIA-ALCL), a rare but devastating cancer allegedly linked to breast implants produced by Allergan Limited.

The individual claims are at different stages, with one claim settled for a Sheffield resident. However, more broadly, the claims constitute a critical stand for women's health and corporate responsibility, exposing the potential risks posed by medical devices and the necessity for transparency in their marketing and regulation.

"Women constitute the biggest market target market for 'Big Pharma' budgets," said Sarah. "People place an enormous amount of trust in medical devices and pharmaceutical products [so] it's essential to challenge the systems and practices that fail to prioritise patient safety."

## **Fighting PFAS pollution in Yorkshire: A legal first**

Closer to home, Sarah is pioneering what could become the first PFAS-related legal claim in the UK. Known as 'forever chemicals,' PFAS are linked to significant health risks and environmental degradation. The town of Bentham in Yorkshire, identified as one of the UK's most PFAS-polluted areas, stands at the centre of this groundbreaking investigation. Sarah's involvement highlights her



commitment to environmental justice and her willingness to tackle issues of national importance starting at the local level.

Sarah said: "Northern communities like Bentham deserve action and accountability, not just acknowledgment of the problem. This fight is about protecting our health, our environment, and future generations."

## **Holding water companies to account: Protecting Yorkshire's rivers**

Yorkshire's rivers, from the Calder to the Wharfe, are vital to the county's natural beauty and community well-being, yet they face ongoing threats from pollution. With alarming reports of sewage spills by Yorkshire Water, Sarah and her team are investigating potential group actions against water companies for their alleged role in degrading river ecosystems. Highlighting issues such as foul odours, illnesses, and the decline of aquatic life, Sarah aims to hold polluters accountable and restore Yorkshire's waterways for future generations.

### **Sarah said:**

"Justice should be accessible to everyone, regardless of the scale of the harm they've suffered or the power of those responsible."

"At Leigh Day, we believe the law should be a tool to protect the vulnerable, challenge injustice, and hold those in positions of power accountable. Over the years, I've seen firsthand the devastating impact that corporate negligence, environmental harm, and systemic failures can have."

"Whether helping a family with medical product issues, a community facing polluted waterways, or individuals harmed by inadequate policies, my goal is to ensure they feel heard and represented. It's a privilege to stand with people in their fight for accountability."

**leighday.co.uk**



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