

Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer

The Official Journal of Leeds Law Society

 **Leeds**
Law Society

July 2025
Issue 195

The business of law

Innovation, growth & leadership

Leeds JLD

Ellie Whitehead on how junior lawyers can utilise AI

People Moves

Law firm Gordons expands private client team

Regulatory

Compli's Andrea Cohen gives an update on regulatory matters and compliance

Business Development

Milestone year sees Blacks Solicitors reach new heights

Last word

We catch up with Jo Chan Shaw following her latest job role





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President's column



Luke Corcoran is a Senior Lawyer at Government Legal Department and current President of Leeds Law Society

Welcome to the 195th edition of the Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer, official journal of Leeds Law Society. This is my first opportunity to write to you in the president's column, after my recent election at the Society's AGM on 13th May 2025.

I am Leeds born and bred and save for three years over the wrong side of the Pennines in to study a Philosophy and Politics degree at the University of Manchester, I have lived here all of my life. After Manchester, I completed the law conversion at Leeds Metropolitan University and the LPC at BPP. I am happily married to my amazingly supportive wife Amy, and I am a dad to incredible six-year-old son.

I began my legal career at Simpson Millar, working my way through the ranks, starting as a legal cashier, then paralegal, trainee and newly qualified solicitor. A few months after qualification I joined the Government Legal Department in 2017. I joined as the Government Legal Department (GLD) began its drive to recruit outside of London and arrived in the department as one of around 25 lawyers based in Leeds at that time. In the years since our numbers have grown to over 200, a recognition of the quality of lawyers based in and around Leeds and the contribution to the Government's work that has been done from Leeds in that time.

I became a director of Leeds Law Society in 2018, keen to be a voice for public sector and in house lawyers. As someone from a

non-traditional legal background, I also wanted to play my part in welcoming those from outside the norm find their way into our brilliant profession, regardless of their background or personal characteristics.

At Leeds Law Society our objective is to "represent, support and help solicitors in Leeds".

That takes many forms. From being part of Leeds Pride on 20th July to supporting the annual Leeds LegalTech conference, Leeds Law Society carries out this objective in a wide variety of ways. As President I want to continue this valuable work as well as ensure that Leeds remains well represented amongst the Joint V, the five largest law societies in England outside London, and with the Law Society of England and Wales - who have already hosted their first in house event in Leeds in five years as part of my Presidential term.

With over 800 walkers, last month saw the largest Leeds legal walk ever, in fact the biggest the legal walk ever outside of London. This demonstrates both the scale of the legal profession in Leeds but also how keen our legal community is to come together and support a good cause. In that vein, I am very pleased to have been able to choose Martin House Children's Hospice as my charity for the year. I will be announcing various ways in which the legal community in our region can support this incredible charity in their valuable work in the near future.

This issue of the Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer is focused on innovation, growth and leadership. As GLD's first ever innovation lead this is an issue that is close to my heart.

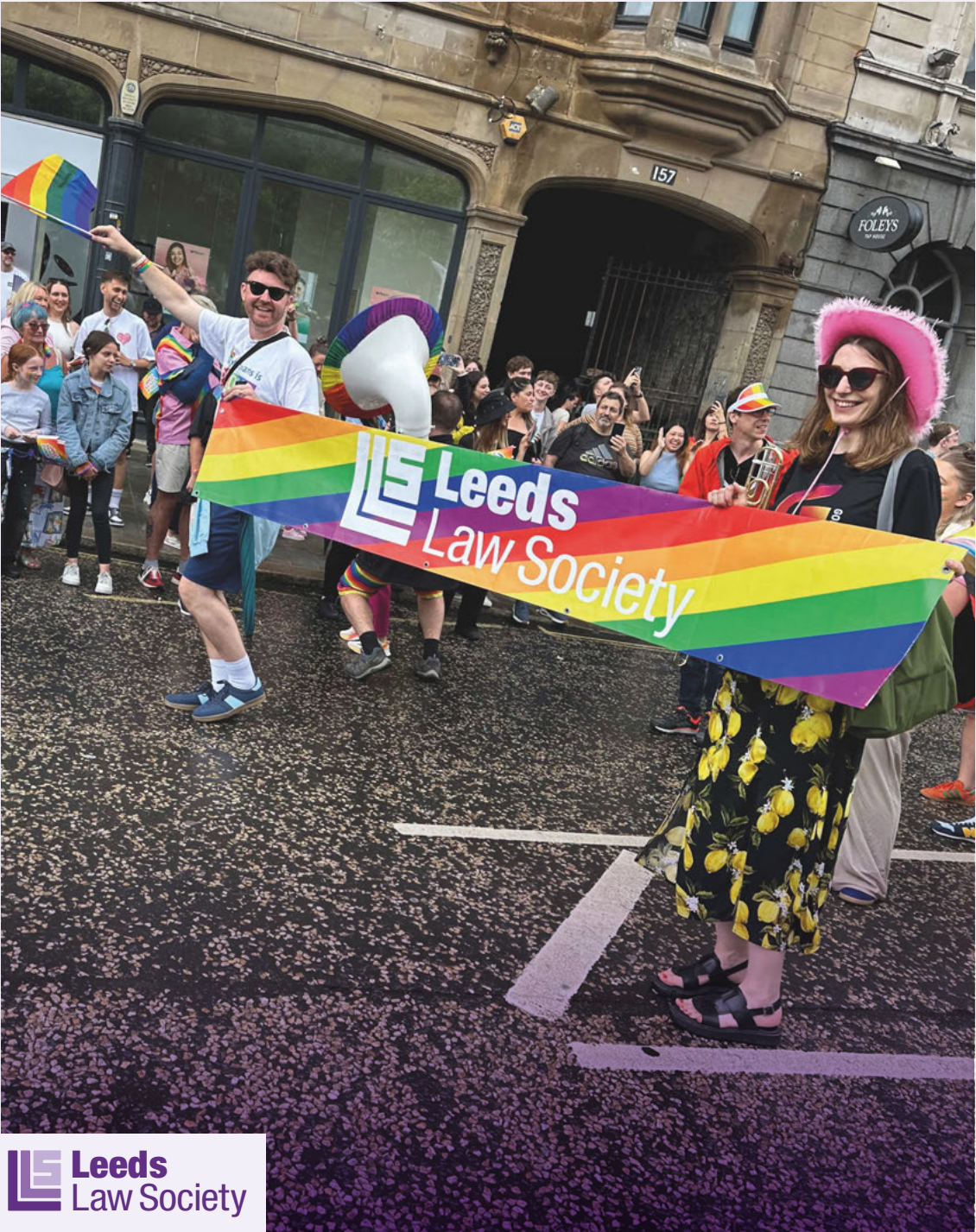
We are a historic profession and one that can be sceptical of change. But in a rapidly changing world it is imperative on all of us to understand those changes and embrace them, for the benefit of both ourselves and our clients. There is sometimes a misunderstanding that innovation automatically equates to technology. While technology undoubtedly has its place, sometimes challenging the "way things have always been done", can unlock new and better ways of working. It can feel like the world whizzes by at a relentless pace, perhaps now is a good time to reflect on how we can all adapt, change and innovate the ways we work and the way we lead.

If you are interested in getting involved – with a practice-area committee or otherwise – please do get in contact with us; we would be delighted to hear from you. In the spirit of innovation, growth and leadership, we are always open to new ideas and new people who are keen to be involved. Contact in the first instance should be to our head of operations, Rachel Windle, on rachel.windle@leedslawsociety.org.uk or by calling our office on 0113 245 4997



Leeds Law Society at Leeds Pride 2025

Leeds Law Society at Leeds Pride 2025





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Milestone year sees Blacks Solicitors reach new heights



Blacks Solicitors has announced a record-breaking financial year, surpassing £20 million in turnover for the first time in its history. The Leeds-based firm reported a 2024/25 turnover of £21.65 million—up

from £12.6 million in 2021/22—reflecting rapid and sustained growth since its move to City Point on King Street in 2017. During this period, the firm's headcount also grew by nearly a third, reaching 236 employees.

Over the past year, Blacks supported more than 8,000 clients nationwide, including major names like Harmony Energy, the Rugby Football League, and Harrogate Spring Water. Alongside strong commercial performance, the firm expanded its legal services, adding expertise in regulatory, music, and

construction law. It also introduced in-house training programs on Equality, Diversity, and Sexual Harassment, reinforcing its commitment to professional development and workplace culture.

Blacks has embraced innovation with AI-powered data management tools, enhancing operational efficiency and client service. Its dedication to excellence has earned national recognition, including Lexcel accreditation and awards such as "Legal Employer of the Year 2025" at the Yorkshire Business Hero Awards, and a spot on the UK's Best Companies to Work For list.

Reflecting on the milestone year, Managing Partner Chris Allen said: "Almost doubling our turnover is a clear indicator of progress, but what's most exciting is the foundation we've built for the future. We're focused on building not just the leading independent law firm in Yorkshire, but the best place to work in the profession, where expertise and collaboration thrive. There's a great deal more to come and we're ready and raring to go."

One of Sheffield's largest law firms to move into Heart of the City

Sheffield City Council's Heart of the City regeneration scheme has gained further momentum with the announcement that leading regional law firm Taylor Emmet will relocate to the iconic Isaacs Building. The firm, one of the fastest growing in the region, has signed a deal to occupy two floors of the redeveloped building, highlighting the continued appeal of the city centre transformation project.

Cllr Ben Miskell, chair of the Transport, Regeneration and Climate Policy Committee, welcomed the move, noting Taylor Emmet's 150-year history of supporting local people and businesses. He described the relocation as "yet another example" of how the Heart of the City project is attracting prominent companies and generating renewed interest in the city centre.

Originally constructed between 1904 and 1905, the Isaacs Building has been transformed to offer over 39,000 sq ft of premium office space and more than 8,000 sq ft of retail and leisure space. It joins a growing list of successful developments in the scheme, including Elshaw House and Leah's Yard.

Steve Hinshelwood, CEO of Taylor Emmet, described the relocation as a strategic move that reflects the firm's growth and ambitions: "This move reflects our continued growth and our commitment to providing a modern, collaborative environment for both our clients and colleagues."

Andrew Davison, Project Director at Queensberry, echoed the sentiment, noting the development's appeal to established local businesses. As Cllr Miskell concluded, "We're not finished with the project yet and will be making further announcements of exciting businesses coming to Sheffield in the coming weeks and months."



Secerna LLP Celebrates Fifth Consecutive Year of Recognition in Prestigious IAM Patent 1000 Directory



Secerna LLP, a York-based intellectual property firm, has once again been recognised in the IAM Patent 1000 directory for the fifth consecutive year, affirming its leading role in patent prosecution. This sustained

recognition underscores the firm's dedication to excellence and the deep technical and strategic expertise of its team.

The IAM Patent 1000 is a globally respected guide that identifies top patent professionals and firms through extensive research and feedback from nearly 6,000 clients worldwide, including major players like Microsoft, Google, and Novo Nordisk. Secerna earned a "Bronze" ranking in the Firms: prosecution category, praised for its rapid but strategic growth

and a uniquely personal, high-quality service approach.

Co-founders Charlotte Watkins and Jason Boakes were awarded "Silver" in the Individuals: prosecution category. Watkins was celebrated for her unmatched management of large patent portfolios and strategic insight at both UKIPO and EPO levels. Boakes was commended for his client-first mindset, thoroughness, and value-driven approach, especially in understanding client needs and delivering cost-effective solutions.

The report applauds top-ranked firms for combining operational excellence, collaboration, and international capability—qualities Secerna consistently demonstrates. It also highlights the importance of practical advice and strong communication, both of which Boakes and Watkins exemplify.

Secerna expressed deep gratitude to IAM's researchers, clients, and peers for their continued support, reinforcing the firm's position as a key player in the intellectual property arena.

As Jason Boakes put it, "We are proud of this recognition, which reflects not only our technical expertise but also our unwavering commitment to our clients' success."

From Paper Trails to Digital Trials: Innovation in the Business of Law

Denney Lau, former President of the Sheffield & District Law Society and Barrister at Bank House Chambers, discusses how recent changes are shaping the future of law.

The English and Welsh legal system is generally regarded as one of the best systems in the world, it has evolved over more than 1000 years and is still changing to meet the needs of modern society, but how so?

There is no doubt that this is due to innovation, growth and leadership.

When I first started as a defence solicitor, all files were paper based. On a typical day at court, I would carry with me a number of paper files to the Magistrates' Court, the file would include handwritten police station interview notes and a cassette tape from the police interview.

I would then collect the IDPC from the prosecutor, a bundle of paper usually about 40 pages (albeit not usual for 20 of those pages to be the client's previous convictions!), if it was to be a not guilty plea, then I would collect a pre-trial form from the court clerk and complete it by hand then hand it over to the prosecutor to complete. With regards to Legal Aid applications, I used to have to complete it by hand, then go and see the designated legal aid officer at court to be approved. The whole system was cumbersome and unnecessarily time consuming.

Fast forward 20 years, everything is online; days before the hearing, you can now obtain the IDPC on line via common platform, you can submit legal aid online so you know your fate before going to court, trial forms completed on common platform, interview recordings on egress and alike. All these are not gimmicks, they have genuinely improved our efficiency so we can cope with the increasing pressure placed on our justice system.

Innovation also creates business opportunities; as a barrister, the introduction of Cloud Virtual Platform (CVP) has been invaluable, gone are the days of trying to rush from one court house to another.

You could simply dial in at the appropriate time to another court house (with the judge's leave of course) for a hearing of 30 minutes then carry on with other in person hearings, in addition to being able to conduct conferences over video links instead of travelling to a far away prison. These facilities have now become an integral part of a busy practice.

Innovation also creates business opportunities for law firms, the online case management system we have now are incredible.

The ability to conduct conflict checks instantly even when you are at a police station out of hours ultimately saves time and also enables us to comply with our core duty to act in the client's best interest. In addition to the fact that we can obtain clients' instructions without being geographically restricted has expanded the reach of our business no end.

Who are driving these changes you might wonder?

Is it the government or the private sector or IT companies leading the change? It is my opinion that we are all leaders in this field, every time we embrace the use of new technology, we are pioneering and refining the ever-growing system, so don't be afraid and in fact embrace the change!



Walker Foster announces launch of WF Trust Corporation Limited



Walker Foster, a well-established Yorkshire law firm, has launched a new trust corporation, WF Trust Corporation Limited, to enhance its private client services and ensure long-term continuity in trust and estate management.

Officially rolled out on 27th May, the corporation enables the firm to act as a trustee, executor, or attorney with the stability and reliability of a corporate entity—avoiding common issues linked to appointing individual professionals, such as death, incapacity, or retirement.

The formation of WF Trust Corporation Limited allows Walker Foster to streamline appointments as executors, trustees, attorneys, and deputies, offering a seamless experience for clients across matters involving property and financial affairs.

Unlike individuals who may be unavailable or reluctant due to liability concerns, the corporate trustee ensures consistent accessibility, high levels of professional oversight, and enduring accountability.

Maxine Heppenstall, Managing Director at Walker Foster, highlighted the practical and strategic benefits: “Operating through an enduring corporate trustee removes the need for replacement appointments and offers the continuity our clients can rely on.” She added that clients would benefit from direct access to experienced directors, including solicitors with in-depth knowledge of trust law, tax planning, and estate administration.

The new structure also introduces the advantage of collective responsibility and evolving governance, ensuring sustained diligence and fresh perspectives.

“We believe this structure gives our clients greater confidence in the long-term stewardship of their trust arrangements,” said Heppenstall. “It’s about peace of mind—for today and the future.”

York-based solicitors announce transition to an Employee Ownership Trust

Guest Walker, a York-based law firm with a legacy dating back to 1981, has transitioned to an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT) in a significant move to secure its long-term independence and preserve its values-driven culture. Founded by John Guest and later joined by John Walker in 1984, the firm has grown into a 31-strong team based in the heart of York.

The transition to 100% employee ownership reflects Guest Walker’s commitment to its people and long-standing clients. While directors John Walker, Sean Gallagher, and Louise Elliott remain in leadership, a newly formed EOT board—comprising employee representatives and independent governance—will oversee the firm’s continued growth.

Director Sean Gallagher emphasised the importance of the move: “We are proud to announce that Guest Walker is now 100% employee owned. This reflects our ethos and values, which have been built very much around our employees, ensuring long-term security for the firm.”

The new structure gives all employees a financial stake in the business, with the goal of boosting motivation, recognising contribution, and fostering a deeper sense of shared purpose. The EOT model also reassures clients of the firm’s continuity, consistent leadership, and commitment to service excellence.

Emma Hartley, a long-serving legal executive and now employee representative on the EOT board, said, “This allows our ethos, values, and the family feel that we are so proud of, to be secure for the future. I am delighted to be part of this exciting milestone in Guest Walker’s journey.”



The Garfitt Law Partnership Merges With Harrowells Solicitors



David Garfitt and Sally Robinson, co-founders of specialist firm The Garfitt Law Partnership, have officially joined Harrowells as consultant solicitors following a strategic merger.

This move allows

them to continue serving their Yorkshire-based clients while gaining access to Harrowells’ wider network and broader range of advisory services.

Both David and Sally bring deep technical expertise in their respective fields—Private Client and Property Law—and are recognised for their exceptional client service. Their integration into Harrowells aligns with the firm’s ongoing expansion, which has included a series of senior-level lateral hires over the

past year.

David Garfitt joins Harrowells’ Private Client Department—now one of the largest in the North and East Yorkshire region—with 17 specialist advisers, five of whom hold the prestigious STEP (Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners) qualification. Sally Robinson joins the Agricultural Property Department, a growing team that continues to win work beyond Yorkshire under the leadership of Katie Daniel.

Ed Ryder, Head of Private Client at Harrowells, commented, “David and Sally are well known for their formidable technical expertise and very high standards of client service in their respective fields. Their approach is very much at one with ours and we look forward to welcoming them and their clients into the wider practice.”

With over 120 staff across seven regional offices, Harrowells delivers legal services in areas including Private Client, Agriculture and Estates, and Commercial Property—each recognised by Legal 500 for excellence. As Sally Robinson noted, “Joining Harrowells gives us the scale, support and reach to deliver even more for our clients.”

Facing the Future: How Law Firms Must Lead on Risk, AI and Compliance

Andrea Cohen, legal director in the Compli team at Weightmans, is back with our regular update on regulatory matters, risk and compliance, and added pressures on solicitors.

As lawyers, we are constantly juggling between client requirements, keeping up to date with changes in the law in whichever area we practice, ever increasing regulatory obligations etc. while running and growing a business, developing ourselves and our teams (at whatever level of our career we may be), and keeping an eye on what is on the horizon so that we don't get left behind by our competitors. In the world of risk and compliance, matters are constantly changing and new and pressing issues arising.

Since our last update, we have seen increasing challenges with AI, cybersecurity, the effects of 'poor' leadership etc. In the space available, we can't cover them all, but some examples include:

- With the expansion of AI into all areas, lawyers cannot become complacent and rely on AI to produce advice, precedent documents, case citations etc without taking responsibility for accuracy. Only recently the courts issued a warning about misusing AI, with the president of the King's Bench Division saying, 'practical and effective measures must now be taken by those within the legal profession with individual leadership responsibilities and by those with the responsibility for regulating the provision of legal services...' to ensure 'every individual ... understands and complies with their professional and ethical obligations'.

As we noted in a previous article, firms should be putting policies in place, if they have not already done so, and citations and advice should be checked by reference to sources. We anticipate there will be more lawyers referred to their regulators over the reliance on inaccurate AI generated matters, and some may even find themselves facing contempt proceedings. Suggestions from some solicitors of getting indemnities from Counsel in respect of advice and submissions may not be a sufficient defence before the court or SDT.

- We have seen several household names affected both financially and reputationally by cyber breaches, data breaches etc. While there are no fail-safe measures that can protect firms, processes can be put in place to reduce risks, including information security training, password protection, multi-factor authentication, test emails being sent to new clients/contacts, limitations on providing client account details, internal review processes, tests of cybersecurity processes etc.
- In its recent financial statement, the SRA revealed that in the year to end October 2024 it issued 173 fines totalling £1.3m, an increase from 73 fines totalling £400,000. Since then, fines have increased considerably, particularly in relation to breaches of AML, and also a record fine of £4m to a non-lawyer owner of an ABS, so next year's report will far exceed the 2024 figure, and the following year will see the effects of the SRA's unlimited fining powers in cases of economic crime.

The report also noted that the number of AML inspections and reviews doubled to 545. Fewer cases were heard by the SDT and this is likely to continue with more firms 'accepting' fines, rather than incurring additional (and usually irrecoverable) costs of defending allegations before the SDT with the risk of a costs order for all or part of the SRA's costs. The collapse of Axiom Ince may result in payouts of £41m from the SRA Compensation Fund, for which contributions tripled for the current financial year for solicitors (£30 to £90), and more than tripled for firms (£660 to £2220).

Present proposals are to reduce contributions for 25/26, but not to the extent they were increased last year (down to £70 and £1950 respectively). While many of these issues are outside the control of individual firms and their leadership teams, reviews should be taken of supervision processes, particularly with hybrid working; training, both frequency and quality, and professional ethics, particularly in light of the recent LSB concerns and draft policy statement on professional ethics, and, where found lacking, steps should be put in place.

Reminder

The SRA's annual AML and sanctions data collection exercise opened on 7 July with data to be submitted by 15 August 2025, and information must be provided by all regulated firms, not just those within scope of the AML regulations. The link will be sent to Compliance officers, so make sure someone with a mySRA account and a current relevant post and role recorded in mySRA has access if the COLP/COFA are out of the office, or knows to access the link on the SRA website, as it is a regulatory requirement to complete the form. The SRA have helpfully provided a specimen questionnaire, and firms may want to start collating the information before the exercise goes live.

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 complil@weightmans.com



Taylor Emmet announces firm's charities of the year



Taylor Emmet, one of the region's leading law firms, has announced its chosen charities for the 2025/26 financial year, with the Alzheimer's Society joining its panel of supported causes. The selection was made through an internal staff vote, highlighting the firm's culture of inclusivity and

shared commitment to impactful charitable work. The Alzheimer's Society now joins Support Dogs, The Children's Hospital, and Weston Park Cancer Charity as the firm's key charity partners.

Over the years, Taylor Emmet has maintained a strong tradition of fundraising and community engagement. Staff have taken part in a wide range of events

including charity skydives, sponsored walks, themed workplace activities like "Dog and Doughnut Days," and family fun days. These efforts are further supported by the firm's 'Volunteer Day' programme, which grants each employee a paid day off annually to volunteer with a charity of their choice.

The Alzheimer's Society expressed their appreciation for the partnership. Emily Johnson said, "Support like this is vital in helping us provide essential services and fund research for the 900,000 people in the UK living with dementia. We look forward to working closely with the Taylor Emmet team."

Mike Robinson, Senior Web Developer at Taylor Emmet, echoed this enthusiasm:

"Their work in supporting people affected by dementia is personally meaningful to many of our people. We hope to make a significant contribution to their cause while continuing our strong relationships with Support Dogs, The Children's Hospital, and Weston Park Cancer Charity."

Wake Smith Solicitors beat £6k target for Sheffield charity

Wake Smith Solicitors has raised an impressive £6,243 for Cavendish Cancer Care as part of its annual fundraising campaign, honouring the memory of Kelly Pashley-Handford, the firm's former HR Director who passed away in 2023 following a cancer diagnosis. The Sheffield-based firm selected Cavendish as its 2024–25 charity partner, supporting the local cancer support organisation through a series of creative and engaging initiatives.

The fundraising efforts included a variety of staff-led events such as beauty product evenings, tuck shops, bake sales, sweepstakes, wreath-making, and seasonal competitions. The most successful events were the annual Christmas lunch, Sheffield Half Marathon, a popular staff quiz, and a wine tasting evening hosted with local wine experts, Starmore Boss.

As part of its extended commitment, Wake Smith also provided discounted Will-writing services for Cavendish's clients, staff, and supporters, delivered through its Wills, Trusts and Probate team.

Kate Lax, director and charitable board member at Wake Smith, praised the

team's dedication:

"The charitable efforts of our staff and clients to impact positively on our community through Cavendish Cancer Care has been really inspiring."

Kirsty White, Head of Fundraising at Cavendish, expressed gratitude for the firm's contributions:

"Support like this is absolutely vital. These funds will go a long way in helping us continue to be there for anyone affected by cancer in our community."

Wake Smith's continued commitment to local causes follows last year's success, when over £5,200 was raised for PACES, a charity supporting individuals with Cerebral Palsy.

"We all know this money will make a huge difference to many who need help."



Taylor Emmet to be headline sponsor for Sheffield RUFC Summer Ball with rugby legend Kevin Sinfield



Leading law firm Taylor Emmet proudly served as the headline sponsor for the 2025 Sheffield RUFC Summer Ball, held on Friday, 6th June, at Abbeydale Sports Club. The prestigious event welcomed around 500 guests and featured a special appearance by Kevin Sinfield, England Rugby's defence coach and a celebrated rugby league legend. Sinfield, known for his

extraordinary sporting career and close friendship with Rob Burrow, has raised millions for Motor Neurone Disease (MND) research through a series of high-profile sporting challenges.

The Summer Ball marked a significant partnership between Sheffield RUFC and key local businesses, with Taylor Emmet strengthening its ties to the club

after becoming the shirt sponsor for the 2024/25 season. This collaboration highlights the firm's ongoing dedication to supporting both sport and community initiatives across South Yorkshire.

Steve Hinchelwood, CEO of Taylor Emmet, expressed pride in the firm's involvement:

"As a firm deeply rooted in the Sheffield community, we're honoured to be the headline sponsor of this event. The presence of Kevin Sinfield, whose dedication to raising awareness and funds for MND research is inspiring, makes this partnership even more meaningful. Through this partnership, we're excited to support both Sheffield's sporting community and important causes that make a real difference in our wider local community."

Taylor Emmet's commitment to community engagement and charitable support continues to shine through events like the Sheffield RUFC Summer Ball, creating lasting positive impact locally.

Levi Solicitors Partner Walks 121 Miles from Newcastle to Leeds to raise money for ANDYSMANCLUB

Navjit Singh Degun, property partner at Leeds-based Levi Solicitors, completed a challenging 121-mile charity walk from Newcastle to Leeds to raise awareness and funds for ANDYSMANCLUB, a mental health charity focused on preventing male suicide. Navjit was one of 75 walkers who undertook the demanding five-day trek, which concluded at Elland Road. The event honoured the memory of Gary Speed and aimed to encourage open conversations about men's mental health, offering free support services across the UK.

Navjit's motivation for participating was deeply personal—his younger brother tragically died by suicide in 2021 after battling depression. "It was one of the toughest things I've ever done, both physically and mentally," he reflected. The 121-mile journey tested participants' endurance, but the camaraderie and shared purpose helped them persevere. Navjit highlighted the emotional significance of finishing the walk and reuniting with his family, reinforcing the importance of the cause.

Despite the physical challenges, Navjit praised the supportive community of walkers and staff, describing them as "one big family" who motivated each other throughout. The event ended with a warm reception at Elland Road, including food and drinks provided by Leeds United, further lifting spirits.

Levi Solicitors, celebrating 90 years, proudly backs Navjit's efforts and promotes mental health awareness within the firm and beyond. The walkers have raised nearly £60,000 so far, with donations still open.

Navjit said, "Seeing my family again reminded me exactly why this matters."





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Humanising the Law: Innovation, Ownership and the Future of Legal Practice

Daniel Allison, Trainee Solicitor at Ison Harrison Solicitors, reflects on how the legal sector is being reshaped by innovation, employee ownership, and the evolving role of leadership.

In an era where the legal profession is being reshaped by technology, shifting client expectations, and evolving workplace cultures, leadership in law firms must adapt. Fading are the more traditional hierarchical partnership models to be replaced by new alternative business structures and models.

Some law firms have embraced technology, becoming disruptors in the legal industry (ie Radar and more recently Garfield.Law Ltd – the law firm providing legal services through artificial intelligence (AI)), been transformed by private equity and capital markets investments (Knights, DWF and Gateley to name a few) whereas other firms have instead adopted an employee focused approach, choosing to become 100% employee owned.

Innovation – The dangers of technology Innovation in law is often synonymous with technology with significant emphasis on technological advancement and the adoption of AI in the legal sector, however innovation is also occurring in many other areas across the profession. Different routes into law are being identified with the development of apprenticeship routes and the old, supposedly archaic LPC has been replaced by the newer SQE exam. That said, perhaps the most transformative innovation is the shift by law firms towards employee ownership.

As technology and AI disrupts the status quo and firms are looking for ways to increase efficiency, potentially to the detriment of those that practice the law, employee-owned business models emphasise the human side of law by placing the employees at the heart of the business.

The legal profession is underpinned by the service that is provided to clients and the relationships built over time, and there is a real possibility that innovation through technology may move so far away from the core principles of the legal profession, removing the human element of law entirely.

Growth – Values driven business Adopting an employee-owned business model centred around its employees creates a ‘values-driven’ approach to business, attracting clients who share a similar ethos and culture. This alignment strengthens the bond between the law firm and its clients, shifting the relationship from being purely transactional to one rooted in shared principles and mutual respect.

Technology may be able to provide services faster but at what cost to the service provided to the client? As a service-based profession, the legal sector thrives on meaningful client relationships. Employee-owned firms are therefore uniquely positioned to connect with clients on a deeper level, enabling them to better understand individual needs and provide a higher standard, more tailored and bespoke service.

Leadership through ownership Focusing on employee-owned businesses and placing the employees at the centre of the business means that decisions are made for the best of all employees. Leadership is displayed through ownership and key decisions no longer rest in the hands of a select few individuals, resulting in a far more agile management team. Law firms can flex and adjust to external challenges affecting the legal industry.

Further, every employee has a stake in the firm’s success due to the structure of employee ownership – as any profits are distributed between all employees equally via a tax-free bonus (up to £3,600 subject to qualifying distribution criteria), fostering a culture of accountability, innovation, and mutual respect. This mindset fosters a culture where everyone feels empowered to act in the best interest of the team or organization.

Final Thoughts In short, the legal profession is undergoing a profound transformation—driven not only by technological innovation but also by a renewed focus on people and purpose. While AI and automation offer efficiency, it is the shift toward employee ownership that redefines leadership, culture, and client service. Employee ownership not only preserves the essential humanity of legal practice but also strengthens client relationships and empowers every individual to lead through ownership—ensuring the profession evolves with integrity and impact.



Alex Walsh joins Prosperity Law as Partner in Real Estate



Prosperity Law has expanded its Real Estate team with the appointment of experienced Partner Alex Walsh, just over a year after the team was first established under Karen Piontek's leadership. This move comes in response to increasing client demand and reflects the firm's broader growth strategy. Alex, who joins from roles in major regional and international firms, specialises in Commercial Property and brings extensive experience advising banks, pension funds, and individual investors. His client-focused approach and collaborative ethos

align with Prosperity's values.

Karen expressed enthusiasm for Alex's arrival, highlighting the value he brings to their growing team. Alex, based in Manchester, echoed her sentiments, noting the shared commitment to practical, team-driven legal support. His appointment complements recent internal milestones, including Jennifer Shaw's qualification as a Solicitor and Bethany Coward starting her training contract—underscoring Prosperity's dedication to nurturing legal talent.

Andrew Farrell, Managing Partner in Manchester, welcomed Alex as a reflection of the firm's ability to attract top-tier talent. With offices across major UK cities, Prosperity Law continues to build on its reputation for high-quality service and trusted client relationships.

"It was clear we shared the same ethos in terms of delivering for clients and working collectively as a team to achieve results." – Alex Walsh

Law firm Gordons expands private client team

Law firm Gordons has further strengthened its private client practice with the appointment of specialist lawyer Victoria Jones, who joins from Ridley & Hall Solicitors. Victoria brings extensive experience in wills, trusts, lasting powers of attorney, and estate administration. At Gordons, she is advising long-established private clients while also building new relationships, contributing to the firm's commitment to a personal, relationship-led approach.

Victoria expressed enthusiasm about her new role, praising the strength and reputation of Gordons' private client team. She joins a growing practice that recently welcomed chartered tax advisor Isca Watson, an expert in inheritance tax, capital gains tax, and income tax. Together, their expertise broadens the firm's ability to provide comprehensive and tailored support to trustees, personal representatives, and individuals.

Greg Dixon, Partner and Head of Private Client at Gordons, praised Victoria's combination of technical skill and approachability. He noted that

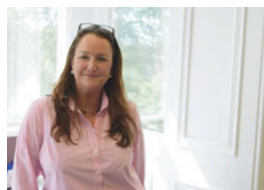
her contributions have already made a positive impact and that the team's expansion with both Victoria and Isca enhances the depth and quality of advice available to clients.

With 170 staff and a head office in Leeds, Gordons serves major clients such as AO, Iceland Foods, Morrisons, Ocado Retail, Wren Kitchens, Molson Coors, and Evri. The firm continues to focus on delivering high-quality, personalised legal support.

"I have joined a highly capable team with a deep and diverse range of clients, and one which has the desire to attract more individuals who want to benefit from the firm's distinct relationship-led approach." – Victoria Jones



Jones Myers appoints financial disputes specialist as new partner



Jones Myers has appointed experienced family lawyer Sarah Barr-Young to lead its Financial Remedies Department in Harrogate. Known for her skill in high net worth and complex financial disputes—including those involving business assets and pensions—Sarah brings extensive legal expertise and a strong track record in out-of-court

resolutions. Recognised by Legal 500 as a 'Key Lawyer' and by Chambers UK as a 'Notable Practitioner', she is praised for her strategic, empathetic approach and clear, pragmatic advice.

Returning to her Harrogate roots, Sarah expressed pride in joining a firm she has long admired, stating, "I regard this opportunity as a real honour."

She also paid tribute to her late colleague Neil Dring, whom she described as a dedicated and compassionate professional.

Managing Partner Richard Peaker welcomed Sarah, noting her outstanding reputation in financial remedy law and her value to the firm's award-winning team. Her appointment coincides with a significant growth phase for Jones Myers, which has recently expanded its York office.

The firm, headquartered in Leeds, continues to maintain top-tier rankings in Legal 500 and Chambers UK for over 30 years. It also ranks in the top five per cent of UK family law firms on Review Solicitors, with clients consistently rating its service as 'Excellent'.

Reflecting on her return and new role, Sarah summed up her commitment:

"It is a privilege to support clients through some of the most difficult times in their lives with clarity, empathy, and strength."

Walton & Co welcomes experienced planning lawyer to fuel growth

Walton & Co has welcomed seasoned planning lawyer Katy McPhie to its growing team, marking a key step in the firm's strategic expansion. Katy brings 14 years of specialist experience in planning and highways law, having worked at top firms including Blacks Solicitors and Womble Bond Dickinson, as well as within local government at Sheffield City Council. At Walton & Co, she will focus on advising clients on a wide range of complex planning issues, including judicial review, development in the Green Belt, biodiversity net gain, and intricate Section 106 and highways agreements.

Katy's expertise spans major sectors such as residential development, energy, logistics, healthcare, and mixed-use schemes. Her arrival comes at a time of sustained growth for the firm, following a leadership restructure that brought Alec Cropper and James Cook on board as equity partners alongside founder David Walton.

Reflecting on her appointment, Katy said she was drawn to the firm's national reach and exclusive focus on planning and highways law. "It is great to be reunited with James Cook and to contribute meaningfully to the firm's

exciting future," she added.

Equity Partner James Cook praised Katy's depth of experience and her reputation for trusted, pragmatic advice. Her background in local government will be especially valuable as the firm continues guiding clients through increasingly complex planning landscapes.

With notable recent work including major development schemes across Leeds, South Yorkshire, and the Midlands, Walton & Co continues to cement its place among the UK's top planning law specialists.

"I'm really looking forward to working with the team here," said Katy.



Wrigleys Solicitors announces five promotions across key practice areas



Wrigleys Solicitors, a Yorkshire-based legal specialist, has announced five internal promotions, underscoring its dedication to nurturing in-house talent and delivering expert legal services

across its core sectors.

Leading the promotions is Hywel Jenkins, elevated to partner in the firm's health and care team. With a background in public sector law, Hywel brings deep expertise in mental health, childcare, and adult social care. Since joining Wrigleys, he has become integral to the firm's Court of Protection and health and social care practice, navigating the complexities of this sensitive legal field.

Four colleagues have also been promoted to managing associate:

- Thomas Mundy in the Court of Protection team, known for his collaborative style and technical insight, particularly in his work representing Wrigleys Trustees Limited in contested proceedings.

- Kelly Edmundson, who joined the firm in 2015, specialises in probate, estate planning, wills, and powers of attorney, blending technical knowledge with a personal, client-focused approach.

- Robert Sowerby, a 2014 qualifier, brings expertise in charity, ecclesiastical, and educational property law, with clients including dioceses, academy trusts, and charities. He's also recognised for his skills in land registration and Stamp Duty Land Tax.

- Hayley Marsden, trained and qualified at Wrigleys, advises not-for-profit organisations on governance and regulatory compliance and plays a leading role in the firm's Annual Charity Governance Seminar.

Managing partner Marie-Louise Hamilton said, "Their progression reflects the firm's continued investment in developing talent from within."

Seven promotions announced at Gateley

Professional services group Gateley has announced seven promotions in its Leeds office, including the appointment of real estate lawyer Miranda Stirling as a partner within Gateley Legal.

Stirling specialises in asset management work and has considerable experience in handling landlord and tenant matters for large clients and complex portfolios.

In addition, construction lawyer Gemma Bowkett is promoted to legal director alongside three promotions within the residential development team where Sarah Burgman and Helen Gregory are made senior associate with Rachel Wilkins promoted to associate. Commercial dispute resolution lawyer Sophie Clague is also promoted to associate.

At Gateley Smithers Purslow, the multi-disciplinary surveying, engineering and architecture consultancy arm of Gateley, Geri Turner has been promoted to regional manager.

Roger McCourt, partner and head of Gateley's Leeds office, said, "I'm delighted that we've been able to start our new financial year with these announcements. All of the

promotions are well deserved and a reflection of the highest regard in which each of these individuals are held at Gateley."

These promotions are part of 73 announced by Gateley nationwide this year, with nine made up to partner in total.

Gateley is a professional services group. They have provided commercial legal services to individuals and businesses over the last 200 years with 28 offices in 26 locations, including Belfast, Birmingham, Chester, Exeter, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, and even have presence in Dubai.



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Yorkshire Law Firm expands Child Law team



specialism recognised by leading legal directories such as The Legal 500.

Since qualifying as a solicitor in 2021, Oliver has focused on representing vulnerable individuals—including parents, grandparents, and extended family members—in public law proceedings involving concerns raised by local authorities. His experience and commitment to client care align well with Ramsdens' values of handling sensitive cases

Ramsdens Solicitors has welcomed Oliver Swales to its Child Law team in York, marking another step in the firm's strategic expansion across North Yorkshire. Oliver's appointment enhances Ramsdens' growing reputation in child law, care proceedings, and complex family cases—a

with diligence and empathy.

Expressing his enthusiasm, Oliver said, "I have admired the firm's work for some time, for the expertise and care that goes into their cases. Ramsdens is always striving to achieve the best outcome while managing every case with care and respect." He added that joining the Legal 500-recognised team—many of whom he knew through previous cases—felt like a natural and positive move.

Joanne Coen, head of the Child Law team, praised Oliver's compassionate and professional approach, adding confidence that he will deliver excellent advice and strong court representation.

This appointment follows the firm's move to new offices at Monks Cross last year and reflects Ramsdens' continued focus on enhancing its legal services in the region. With a strong presence in York and a growing team, Ramsdens remains committed to providing expert support in even the most challenging child law matters.

Disruptive Law Firm ALT Legal Expands its Team

ALT Legal, a modern, client-focused law firm known for disrupting the traditional legal model, has strengthened its team with two key hires: Lisa Hyndman and Caroline Broad. The firm, based in Wetherby, has gained a reputation for shaking off the legal sector's stuffy image by offering subscription-based legal services tailored to SMEs and high-growth businesses.

Lisa Hyndman, who spent 20 years at Eversheds, joins as Head of Commercial Property. Her deep experience in property transactions enhances ALT Legal's ability to support clients with sales, acquisitions, and leasing. Meanwhile, Caroline Broad brings her expertise in governance, compliance, and ESG to a new role as Operations and Business Development Manager. She will lead on systems and technology integration and help expand the firm's reach in high-growth sectors such as tech, healthcare, and manufacturing.

Since its launch in 2021, ALT Legal has grown to a 15-lawyer team, serving over 500 clients. The firm has seen a 75% increase in subscription growth in Q1 of 2025, with a 130% annual rise projected. Co-founders Richard Turner and Rob Ashall, along with Head of Operations Anna Ashford, have built the firm on a "no drama, no egos" ethos, offering fixed-fee, plain-English legal advice.

As Caroline put it, "We can work deeply on client work, not just on legal aspects, but helping with succession planning and really getting immersed into a client's world."



Bhayani Law expands with appointment of Alexandra Hurwood as Head of Employment Law



Bhayani Law, a leading specialist in employment law and HR services, has appointed Alexandra Hurwood as its new Head of Employment Law, further reinforcing its commitment to delivering expert and people-focused legal support.

With over a decade of experience spanning both private practice and in-house roles, Alexandra

brings deep knowledge across a range of employment law areas. She is recognised for her pragmatic, solution-driven approach and particular expertise in complex employee relations, restructures, discrimination claims, and tribunal advocacy.

In her new role, Alexandra will lead Bhayani Law's employment law team of five, playing a central role in guiding clients through a broad

spectrum of legal challenges. She will also contribute to the firm's innovative Watertight HR service, which supports organisations in maintaining compliant and effective workplace practices.

Jay Bhayani, Managing Director of Bhayani Law, praised Alexandra's arrival, stating her leadership and approachable style align perfectly with the firm's culture and client values. "Her deep expertise and approachable style make her a perfect fit," he said, highlighting Alexandra's role in supporting the firm's continued growth and evolution.

Alexandra's appointment reflects Bhayani Law's strategic focus on strengthening its national reputation and expanding its client services. The firm continues to support both employers and employees throughout the full lifecycle of workplace relationships.

Alexandra said, "The firm's blend of legal excellence and human-centred support is truly unique, and I'm looking forward to working with a brilliant team to continue delivering the very best outcomes for our clients."

Hawkswell Kilvington announces Senior Partner

Hawkswell Kilvington, a boutique firm of construction and engineering lawyers, has announced the promotion of Matthew Leonard to Partner.

Daniel Silberstein, Managing Partner at Hawkswell Kilvington, said, "I'd like to congratulate Matthew on his promotion. It is a significant career milestone and is thoroughly deserved. He is an exceptionally talented lawyer, embodies our collaborative culture and forward-thinking approach, and we are confident that he will play a key role in the firm's continued growth and success."

The promotion follows another year of significant investment and growth for Hawkswell Kilvington, including the opening of a new London office in March 2025.

Matthew Leonard said, "I am delighted to have been promoted to Partner which is both a proud milestone and exciting opportunity. In the 8 years I have been at Hawkswell Kilvington, I have worked alongside an outstanding and dedicated team, and have seen how

our client-focused, commercial approach, and specialist expertise have contributed to the significant growth and development of the firm. We have a top tier construction and engineering offering, and I look forward to playing a role in shaping and making a significant contribution to the firm's continued success."

Hawkswell Kilvington is a boutique and award-winning firm of specialist construction and engineering lawyers, providing legal solutions and advice in areas ranging from contract procurement and negotiation through to dispute resolution, all with a straightforward, no-nonsense commercial approach.



Walker Morris strengthens Board with new appointment



Walker Morris has announced the election of Construction & Engineering Partner Jules Harbage to its Board, marking a significant leadership milestone for the

firm. He joins re-elected Board members Richard Naish and George Bacon, who will serve alongside Chair John Hamer, Managing Partner Jeanette Burgess, General Counsel Simon Clark, and CFO Amy Lewis.

Jules has been with Walker Morris since 2002 and became a Partner in 2013. Over two decades, he has been instrumental in the growth of the firm's Construction & Engineering practice, earning a strong reputation for strategic thinking and a client-focused approach. His appointment to the

Board coincides with a pivotal phase in the firm's Ambition 27 Strategy, which focuses on innovation, collaboration, and sustainable growth.

Managing Partner Jeanette Burgess welcomed Jules' appointment, emphasising his practical expertise and long-standing contribution to the firm's success. She also highlighted the strength of the returning Board members, underlining the value of a stable and experienced leadership team.

Jules' elevation reflects Walker Morris's commitment to recognising internal talent and aligning leadership with its forward-looking strategy. His insights into construction and infrastructure law, combined with a deep understanding of the firm's values and culture, position him to play a key role in driving strategic objectives forward.

Jules commented, "Having been part of the firm for over two decades, I've seen firsthand the strength of our people, our culture, and our values. I look forward to contributing to the continued success of the firm and supporting the delivery of our Ambition 27 Strategy."

National law firm Clarion has announced the promotions of two new Partners

Clarion has announced 11 promotions across its Leeds-based office, highlighting its commitment to developing home-grown talent and strengthening leadership across key legal teams. Notably, Joanna Dodd and Deborah Warren have been promoted to Partner in the Employment team. Both joined Clarion as trainees and have since become instrumental in shaping the team's strategy, leading client relationships, and delivering high-level legal services. Their elevation reflects their strong reputations as leading employment law specialists in the region.

In the Property Litigation team, Kate Joss has been promoted to Legal Director. Known for handling complex, high-value disputes and leading sizeable teams, Kate's promotion recognises her significant contribution to the firm's litigation practice.

Clarion has also named eight new Senior Associates across various departments: Georgia Samardija (Private Wealth), David Spence (Business Restructuring and Insolvency), Hannah Bywater and Anna-Elise Harvey (Employment), Paige Duller (Property Litigation), Avril Higginbottom (Banking), Lucy Alderson (Regulatory), and Harry Hobson (Commercial

Dispute Resolution). These promotions underscore the firm's depth of expertise and commitment to nurturing legal talent across disciplines.



Roger Hutton, Joint Managing Partner, praised the newly promoted lawyers for their excellence and dedication: "Each of these lawyers has demonstrated outstanding expertise and commitment to excellence, and their contributions have significantly enhanced our client service, firm culture and growth. These promotions are testament to that and I'm looking forward to seeing them continue to thrive at Clarion and develop in their new roles."

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Ward Hadaway promotes seven in Leeds office as firm continues to expand



Ward Hadaway has announced seven promotions within its Leeds office as part of a broader firmwide progression round involving 22 promotions, including two new partners. These developments align with the firm's strategic national growth agenda, which

includes the opening of a Birmingham office and a planned merger with Teesside-based The Endeavour Partnership.

In Leeds, six lawyers have advanced to associate level, while one has been promoted to managing associate. Katrina returns to the firm with a variety of departments including Corporate Finance, Commercial Litigation, Employment, Housing, Social Housing, Private Client, and Children Law,

reflecting the breadth of talent and expertise across the office.

Emma Digby, Executive Partner of the Leeds office, praised the team's commitment and alignment to the firm's values: "Through hard work, dedication and demonstrating true alignment to our firm values, all seven promoted team members have earned the trust of colleagues and clients alike, and it's great to see that recognised."

These promotions come amid a significant expansion phase for the firm, positioning Ward Hadaway to enhance its national presence and service offering. The recent growth initiatives are designed to open up new opportunities for both clients and staff across its offices.

Elish Porter, who has been promoted to Managing Associate in the Children team, reflected on the firm's supportive culture: "Ward Hadaway has always supported me to grow, both professionally and personally. I've been given real responsibility and the chance to work with great people from the start. I'm proud to take this next step and excited for what lies ahead."

Experienced Residential Property lawyer Katrina Allen joins Knights in Leeds

Knights has reinforced its Residential Property team in Leeds with the appointment of Katrina Allen as Partner. A seasoned property law expert with over 20 years' experience, Katrina returns to the firm with a strong track record for delivering commercially focused, pragmatic legal advice across a wide range of residential matters.

Her expertise spans freehold and leasehold transactions, new builds, unregistered titles, equity release, title reconstitution, and transfers of part or equity. Her clients include first-time buyers, high-net-worth individuals, investors, and corporate entities, making her a valuable asset to Knights' diverse client base.

Katrina's return marks another step in Knights' expansion in Leeds and across the UK, as the firm continues to grow its nationwide footprint. With 28 offices, Knights is ranked among the top 50 UK law firms by revenue and provides comprehensive legal services to both businesses and private clients.

Commenting on her return, Katrina said: "I'm thrilled to be joining

Knights at such an exciting stage of growth. The firm's national reach, combined with its strong local presence in Leeds, provides a brilliant platform to provide excellent service for clients. Knights has a market-leading reputation for delivering premium legal advice and I'm excited to see what we can achieve as one team in this highly collaborative and supportive working environment."

Lisa Shacklock, Group Client Services Director at Knights, welcomed Katrina back, noting her deep expertise and immediate impact on the Residential Property team, saying: "Katrina has really hit the ground running and we're excited to be welcoming yet more top professionals to our teams across the country."



Law firm Gordons retains trainee solicitors



All trainee solicitors qualifying in September this year at Gordons have accepted offers to continue their careers with the firm. Each trainee will have spent at least two years training across various practice areas, gaining valuable experience before specialising in their chosen fields.

Starting in September, the new solicitors will join dedicated teams and continue to receive professional and personal mentorship from senior colleagues. Abbie Little will join the employment team, while Daniel Callaghan moves into corporate practice. Jonathan Wu and Tosif Bashir will join the commercial property and commercial contracts teams, respectively. Notably, Jonathan and Tosif began their journey at Gordons as paralegals before starting their

training contracts in 2023.

Amy Pierechod, Gordons' training principal and corporate partner, highlighted the significance of the trainees' commitment: "The market for attracting and retaining legal talent is a highly competitive one. Having all of our trainees commit their immediate future to Gordons speaks volumes about their belief in our distinct culture and the opportunities we can offer them. Abbie, Daniel, Jonathan and Tosif have already proven themselves to have the engaging natures and legal capabilities required to make them highly valued by clients and colleagues alike. From September, we will see them begin their careers as newly qualified solicitors which is something both they and the firm will be very proud of."

Gordons, headquartered in Leeds with 170 employees, serves major clients including AO, Iceland Foods, Morrisons, Ocado Retail, Wren Kitchens, Molson Coors, and Evri.

Harrowells Expands Private Client Team in Response to Growing Demand for Estate Tax Planning

Harrowells Solicitors has significantly expanded its Private Client department in response to rising demand for estate and inheritance tax planning. This surge is driven by legislative changes, frozen tax allowances, and increasing asset values. With property, investments, and business assets climbing in value, many more individuals and families now find themselves liable for inheritance tax, as the nil-rate band remains frozen at £325,000. Additionally, upcoming changes to how pensions are treated for inheritance purposes are encouraging clients to take a proactive approach to estate management.

Ed Ryder, Head of the Private Client department, notes, "Where inheritance tax was once something that primarily affected the very wealthy, it's now an issue that more and more ordinary families are facing." He highlights the growing interest in strategies such as lifetime gifting and the use of trusts to protect assets for future generations.

Over the past year, Harrowells has bolstered its team with five key appointments: Partners Amaya Huntly and Ed Taylor; Associate Solicitor

Beth Credgington; and Senior Solicitors Danielle Bebbington and Fiona Fawcett. The team also gained specialist expertise through the recent merger with Garfitt Law Partnership, welcoming David Garfitt.

These strategic hires underscore Harrowells' dedication to offering expert, forward-thinking advice amid the complexities of estate planning. Ryder adds, "With these additions, we've significantly strengthened our capacity to support clients at every stage of planning for the future. Our goal is to ensure families can pass on their wealth as intended — without an unnecessary tax burden."



Leading Family Law Solicitors Austin Kemp Appoints New Partner



Austin Kemp Solicitors, a Legal 500 Leading Firm, has promoted Jennifer Hollyer to salaried partner, increasing the firm's total partners to seven by the end of 2025. This promotion marks a significant step in Austin Kemp's ongoing strategy to develop a best-in-class family law practice rooted in

internal progression and deep sector expertise.

Jennifer joined the firm in 2020 and has quickly advanced due to her consistent high performance, legal expertise, and leadership skills. With over a decade of experience in private family law, she is particularly skilled

in high-net-worth divorce and financial remedy cases, private law children matters, jurisdictional disputes, post-foreign divorce financial claims, and enforcement proceedings. Her talent for simplifying complex legal issues has made her a trusted advisor to clients and a key figure within the firm.

Amandeep Kooner, Managing Director at Austin Kemp Solicitors, praised Jennifer's promotion, stating, "Jennifer's promotion is richly deserved and reflects the incredible value she brings to our clients and team. Her commitment to excellence, skill in handling high-value complex family matters, and mentoring younger lawyers all demonstrate the kind of leadership we are proud to foster at Austin Kemp."

He added, "This promotion is also a powerful signal of our firm's commitment to investing in and promoting from within. At a time when family law is becoming ever more complex, Jennifer exemplifies the high standards, client care, and specialist expertise that Austin Kemp is known for."

Decade brings two new equity partners for Sheffield law firm

Sheffield-based MD Law has marked its 10th anniversary with the promotion of two solicitors, James Burdekin and Kelly Wharin, to equity partners. This milestone reflects the firm's significant growth and expanding influence across South Yorkshire, Yorkshire, and the national legal market.

James, a corporate partner who joined MD Law in 2021, leads a successful team handling corporate mergers and acquisitions, completing 45 transactions valued at £80 million in the last financial year. His work includes management buyouts, employee ownership trusts, trade sales, acquisitions, and share buybacks. Kelly, a litigation specialist with over a decade of experience, became a partner in 2021 after joining the firm in 2018. She has built a strong reputation for managing high-value disputes and litigation for both companies and individuals.

Founder Matthew Dixon highlighted the firm's evolution from a niche insolvency and dispute resolution practice to a broader firm offering expertise in company law, commercial property, and employment, all while maintaining high specialisation. The firm now employs 20 staff,

including 18 fee earners, with insolvency work accounting for over half of its income.

With the new equity partners joining the leadership team, MD Law aims to continue shaping its culture, workflows, and strategy to stay agile in a changing legal landscape. The firm celebrated its decade of success with an event attended by more than 150 employees, clients, and contacts.

Matthew Dixon said, "We welcome James and Kelly as equity partners and look forward to seeing how they help shape the firm's future, ensuring we continue to adapt and excel in the UK legal market."



£9million turnover push sees Holden Smith appoints Head of Litigation



Holden Smith, a law firm based in Yorkshire and Manchester, has appointed Paul Phillips as Head of Litigation as part of its ambitious growth plans to reach a £9 million turnover by October. Phillips brings extensive experience from his previous roles as litigation manager at both national and international firms. He will be based at Holden

Smith's Horsforth office, covering civil litigation cases across Yorkshire and the North West. His expertise includes contract disputes, financial claims, personal injury, and criminal injury cases for both individuals and

businesses.

Founded in 2019 by David Bancroft and James Smith, Holden Smith has rapidly expanded to over 90 employees with offices in Huddersfield, Leeds, Horsforth, Elland, Queensbury, and Manchester. The firm recorded a turnover of £8.6 million in its last financial year and is pushing forward with ambitious expansion plans.

David Bancroft, director at Holden Smith, welcomed Paul's appointment as a crucial step in expanding the firm's litigation team and client base. He highlighted Paul's strong background in dispute resolution as a perfect fit to support the firm's continued growth.

Paul Phillips expressed enthusiasm about joining an ambitious and fast-growing firm. He said, "Holden Smith is clearly an ambitious firm that is going places, and as soon as I spoke with David about the role, I knew it was where I wanted to be. I'm delighted to be joining as Head of Litigation at an exciting time with further growth on the horizon."

Taylor Emmet appoints new Senior Business Development Manager to drive firm's strategic growth

Taylor Emmet, a leading law firm with over 150 years of heritage, has appointed Jo Chan Shaw as Senior Business Development Manager, a newly created role supporting the firm's five-year growth strategy. This appointment aims to raise Taylor Emmet's profile regionally while enhancing its strategic planning capabilities.

Jo brings significant expertise in relationship building and sector development, particularly within the sports and media industries. Her experience includes managing partnerships with major national governing bodies such as England Rugby, British Rowing, and UK Athletics. Her appointment aligns with the firm's ambition to strengthen its presence locally in Sheffield while expanding its reach nationally.

Jo expressed enthusiasm about joining Taylor Emmet, citing the firm's excellent reputation and growth plans as key factors in her decision. She highlighted the firm's strong Sheffield roots and forward-thinking approach as exciting elements for the future, emphasising her goal to contribute meaningfully to the firm's development and broaden its

visibility.

Steve Hinshelwood, CEO of Taylor Emmet, welcomed Jo's appointment as a significant step in the firm's strategic expansion. He praised her extensive experience and innovative ideas for promoting the firm's full-service capabilities, expressing confidence in her ability to drive Taylor Emmet's growth regionally and nationally.

Jo concluded, "I was drawn to Taylor Emmet because I saw an opportunity to make a significant impact within a firm that has an excellent reputation and ambitious growth plans."



Medical Solicitors Promotes Miriam Bi to Director



Yorkshire-based Medical Solicitors has promoted medical negligence solicitor Miriam Bi to its board of directors, recognising her significant contributions since joining the firm in 2016. Starting as a litigation assistant in the Sheffield office, Miriam qualified as a Chartered Legal Executive

in 2018 and shortly after as a solicitor. Over nine years, she has gained a strong reputation for her dedication to clients affected by medical errors, handling complex, high-value claims involving surgical mistakes, misdiagnoses, delayed treatment, and systemic healthcare failings.

Miriam has developed particular expertise in cases related to negligent delays in prostate cancer diagnosis, spinal injuries, and fatal errors. She

has also represented numerous clients at inquests, reflecting her deep understanding of the sensitive nature of clinical negligence work. Her appointment to the board on May 1, 2025, coincided with her acceptance onto AvMA's specialist clinical negligence panel, highlighting her professional standing.

As a director, Miriam will take on greater strategic responsibilities, including mentoring junior solicitors, while continuing her work on high-profile cases. She expressed pride in joining the leadership team, emphasising the importance of supporting clients through challenging experiences.

Medical Solicitors' managing director Caroline Moore praised Miriam's legal expertise, leadership, and confidence, calling her appointment a key step in the firm's growth.

Miriam reflected, "Working in clinical negligence is about more than legal outcomes; it's about helping people rebuild their lives after devastating events. I'm proud to be part of a team that truly puts clients first."

Mason Thomas Law expands team with appointment of Residential Conveyancer Mollie Lancaster

Sheffield-based Mason Thomas Law, a specialist property law firm, has welcomed Mollie Lancaster as a full-time Residential Conveyancer, marking another milestone in the firm's ongoing growth. Mollie brings over 15 years of experience in property law, having started her career as an apprentice after gaining early work experience at a local solicitor's office. Most recently, she worked at PM Property Lawyers, where she earned her Level 4 CLC qualification and gained strong expertise in residential property transactions, particularly freehold purchases.

At Mason Thomas Law, Mollie will now pursue her Level 6 CLC qualification, the final step required to become a fully licensed conveyancer regulated by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers. Her appointment reunites her with Cathy Thomas, the firm's solicitor and director, who played a significant role in Mollie's early career. Mollie expressed enthusiasm about joining the experienced, all-female team, describing it as a rare and inspiring environment.

Cathy Thomas praised Mollie's practical experience, commitment, and eagerness to learn, highlighting the appointment as a key development in the firm's mission to expand its client-focused property law services. Mason Thomas Law remains the only firm in South Yorkshire dedicated solely to property law

and is recognised nationally for its niche expertise in secured lending. Reflecting on the move, Mollie said, "I'm passionate about property law. Joining Mason Thomas Law gives me the opportunity to broaden my property knowledge and qualifications, especially in leaseholds, new-builds, and more complex transactions."



Simpson Millar appoints Esther Ralston as Head of Business Development



Simpson Millar, a leading national consumer law firm, has appointed Esther Ralston as its new Head of Business Development to support its growth strategy and national expansion. With over 15 years of experience in senior business development and marketing roles within professional services, Esther brings a strong track record of

fostering trusted relationships, driving commercial growth, and enhancing team collaboration.

Based in Leeds but working nationally, Esther will focus on developing new commercial opportunities and forming long-term partnerships with external organisations, including charities, hospitals, and key introducers. Her expertise spans client engagement, marketing strategy, team development, and leading business change in fast-paced environments.

Simpson Millar is known for delivering straightforward and accessible legal advice to individuals and families across England and Wales, covering areas such as personal injury, clinical negligence, education law, Court of Protection matters, and public law. The firm aims to simplify legal services and make them more inclusive, especially for those facing life-changing events.

Esther expressed enthusiasm about joining Simpson Millar at a pivotal time, saying, "In a sector that has evolved significantly in recent years, the firm has set out a clear vision for the future and a strong sense of purpose which really align with my own values. I'm excited to help build new partnerships and support our teams in reaching more people who need expert legal advice."

Dane Stanley, Director of Marketing, added, "Esther's experience and strategic mindset make her a fantastic addition to the team. She has a proven ability to build relationships, inspire people, and find new ways to grow — all of which will be key to delivering on our ambitions."

Wake Smith boosts residential conveyancing operations

Sheffield-based Wake Smith Solicitors has strengthened its residential conveyancing team with the appointment of fee earner Alexander Harrison and paralegals Nicole Reid and Ailish Woodhead. Together, they bring nearly 20 years of combined experience to the growing department, which has seen a significant increase in instructions over the past year.

Nicole Reid, who began her career as a paralegal in 2017 and qualified as a conveyancing legal executive in 2023, was drawn to Wake Smith for its forward-thinking approach and strong people-focused culture. Alexander Harrison has seven years of conveyancing experience, progressing from office junior to paralegal at local firms. Ailish Woodhead, with a background in conveyancing and private client work, holds an LLB Law degree and LPC and brings valuable expertise in new build conveyancing.

The team will support clients throughout the home buying and selling process, under the leadership of Director and Head of Residential Conveyancing Operations Bonita Wolfenden, alongside directors Amanda Cowley and Lisa Molinari.

Bonita highlighted the firm's focus on quality and speed, which has helped build its reputation and foster relationships with estate agents and referrers in a competitive market. She said, "We're thrilled to welcome Alexander, Nicole and Ailish to Wake Smith. Their combined local expertise and commitment to exceptional client care will ensure we continue to meet the needs of both clients and local property professionals effectively."

Wake Smith's conveyancing department is accredited to the Law Society's Conveyancing Quality Scheme, offering services from home purchases to wills and lasting powers of attorney.



Last Word

Jo Chan Shaw, Senior Business Development Manager at Taylor Emmet, shares career highlights and insights for success:

Congratulations on your new role. What attracted you to Taylor Emmet and this opportunity in particular?

Thank you so much! What attracted me to Taylor Emmet was the ambitious growth plans. This role was newly created as part of the firmwide strategy to accelerate growth, so it's really exciting that I can shape the role and put my own "stamp" on it.

What are your key priorities as Senior Business Development Manager in the first 12 months?

The firm undertook a seismic rebrand in 2022 which has had an impact on brand awareness. The next 12 months will see me raising the profile of Taylor Emmet primarily in the Sheffield and Peak District areas. I am building relationships internally so I can support the teams across the business to drive revenue through our existing, growth and target client base.

In your view, what does 'innovation' look like in the legal sector today — and where is it most needed?

There is no doubt that AI is having an impact in the sector. For us it is about adopting the right digital platforms that are suited for the business needs to streamline processes, driving costs down for the client without impacting on the service delivery. AI will hopefully drive firms to be more innovative as it will free up time, making legal services more accessible, affordable and personal to small businesses and individuals.

How do you think law firms can strike the right balance between growth and client service?

At Taylor Emmet our support teams play a crucial role when it comes to service. Both in the face-to-face role but in their ability to assist the legal teams where required. As part of my role, I am bringing together the support teams with the marketing and business development. If everyone is aware of what the other needs, then we can make sure that they can do their job to the highest standard, delivering an expert experience to the client every time. It also allows the legal teams to focus on technical delivery and driving more work to the firm, with the client's best interest at the heart of it all.

What role does business development play in shaping a modern law firm's leadership approach?

The business development role is a busy and diverse one, that's for sure. Having a business development team that has the freedom to be able to be out building relationships and networking sends a really strong leadership message to the team as a whole. It allows the whole team to know that they matter, and they are part of the growth. Business development isn't just there to bring in new business, it should help identify potential challenges and make the right introductions to the right networks. It's important to be on people's radar when they might need your services and be their trusted advisor and business development makes sure that all the touch points are being covered to ensure that happens.

What trends or shifts in client expectations are you currently seeing — and how are you responding to them?

Clients are increasingly looking for longer term, strategic relationships. Working in business development, we need to remain proactive, regularly engaging and understand our clients' objectives so we can build trust and on-going relationships.

How do you plan to foster internal collaboration across departments to drive firmwide growth?

I am working with all the teams and getting to know them at the moment. I know that the biggest way we can ensure growth is by understanding what other teams do by knowledge sharing and internal networking. We have two office relocations in the up-coming months and the offices are open plan, so there will be lots of opportunities to internally collaborate on projects. Making use of our intranet for key information and events is another area I have been working on. Having a structured plan

to encourage client sharing within teams and build a programme around key clients, targets and referrers will contribute to driving growth across the teams.

What have been the biggest changes in legal marketing and BD during your career so far?

The biggest change for me has been the transition from being a generalist to becoming a specialist in a particular area. The ability to adapt to change quickly and being able to switch from sector to practice group expertise. The role of BD's and the expectation is constantly evolving, which makes it such an exciting role.

Who or what inspires your approach to leadership and business development?

Sport! It really does bring everyone together. Whether it's grassroots level or elite level. I love watching and playing sports. There are many qualities that can translate into my approach to leadership and business development, which may not be obvious. The resilience, commitment, teamwork, training, and ability to bring people on that journey with you. It's a marathon, not a sprint, you must think about the longer-term gain and be patient whilst you're building the foundations.

Finally, what advice would you give to other professionals looking to step into strategic leadership roles within law firms?

Trust your instincts and your gut! If you're ready for the challenge, then you're ready and go for it. At a recent networking event, the CEO of a professional sports team said; "Don't be afraid to change direction, follow your passion". It's really resonated with me and will do for many, so embrace the challenge with a positive attitude, you're part way there!





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