



# OUR APPROACH TO RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

UN GLOBAL COMPACT COMMUNICATION ON  
PROGRESS (COP) 2021



**GOWLING WLG**



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# CHIEF EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

As an international law firm operating around the world we take our responsibility to our people, our environment and our communities seriously.

Signing up to the UN Global Compact in 2020 was a natural next step to build on our many years of commitment in these areas, while recognising that there is also still much to be done. I am pleased to reaffirm our ongoing support for the ten UN Global Compact Principles, upholding human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption.

We are delighted to be publishing our first annual UN Global Compact Communication on Progress (COP), sharing some of the work that Gowling WLG (UK) LLP (the Firm) has been doing in support of the ten UN Global Compact Principles and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the period May 2020 to April 2021.

For us, responsible business is all about engaging openly with our stakeholders on how we can work together to drive positive change making connections and making a difference. Not just to benefit the not-for-profits, individuals, clients and suppliers we work with; but for the wellbeing and personal and professional development of our people and to strengthen relationships with our communities, clients and suppliers.

While the law is what we 'do', there is much more to us than that. As people, and as a firm, we believe we have a responsibility to help those around us, to make a positive difference in the local and wider community, to support our people and enable them to flourish and to minimise our environmental impact.

**“AS PEOPLE, AND AS A FIRM, WE BELIEVE WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP THOSE AROUND US, TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LOCAL AND WIDER COMMUNITY, TO SUPPORT OUR PEOPLE AND ENABLE THEM TO FLOURISH AND TO MINIMISE OUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.”**

Our work across these areas spans the whole organisation and we highlight in this report some of the key areas of focus during our 2020/21 financial year: investing in our communities, promoting the diversity, inclusion and wellbeing of our people and helping to protect the environment.

We are proud of what we have achieved over the last year in the face of the challenges presented by covid-19. Indeed, unprecedented times have re-focused all of us on what is truly important and on the part we can all play to build a better long-term future. We look forward to what we can achieve and I hope you enjoy reading the report on our progress.

**DAVID FENNELL**  
Chief Executive, Gowling WLG (UK) LLP

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# FOREWORD

COVID-19 has been a tragedy for many in the world and has shone a light on personal and business responsibility like nothing else in our lifetime.

As General Counsel my lens is ordinarily on risk, for clients, colleagues and the business more widely. The nature of the past year has now brought the global and human context ever more sharply into focus.

This report highlights where we have come from and some of the achievements made during an incredibly challenging time. The next chapter is an open book and a real opportunity to do something extraordinary.

Together with our Chief Executive and other Board-level colleagues, we are working on all elements of being a responsible business and the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) agenda.

We are fortunate in having widespread support and sponsorship for that work within our organisation, at all levels, and across our clients and suppliers. We are optimistic about how much more we can achieve in the coming years by harnessing that collective energy and commitment. Although it will be tough and perhaps daunting at times, it will be incredibly rewarding too and I cannot wait to help lead the way.

**MARY MACKINTOSH**  
General Counsel, Gowling WLG (UK) LLP

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# UN GLOBAL COMPACT PRINCIPLES

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**Principle 1:** Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

**Principle 2:** make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

## LABOUR

**Principle 3:** Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

**Principle 4:** the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;

**Principle 5:** the effective abolition of child labour; and

**Principle 6:** the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

## ENVIRONMENT

**Principle 7:** Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

**Principle 8:** undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

**Principle 9:** encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

## ANTI-CORRUPTION

**Principle 10:** Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.



# WHO WE ARE, OUR VISION AND VALUES

## INTRODUCTION

Gowling WLG is an international law firm that provides legal services to clients around the world. It comprises two entities – Gowling WLG (UK) LLP (1,341 people) and Gowling WLG (Canada) LLP (2,000 people).

This foundational COP is submitted by Gowling WLG (UK) LLP (the Firm) and focuses on its activities in the UK, which is home to the majority (95%) of its people. However many of the activities described in this COP also impact on its offices outside the UK.

Gowling WLG (Canada) LLP is a separate signatory to the UN Global Compact and is submitting its own COP.

This COP draws on a wide range of activities within the Firm that contribute to the 10 UN GC Principles. Many of these activities come under the umbrella of ESG, which is an area of particular focus for our Firm.



## A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

We are a people business and, as such, strong relationships are key - with our clients, our communities and each other.

We build strong relationships by fostering a culture that is, above all, about people and teams. We create an environment where everyone's contributions are valued and respected. We are proud to nurture and recruit ambitious people who are collaborative, open and straightforward, and actively embrace diversity and inclusion in our workplaces.

In the UK, where we have over 1300 people, we have been repeatedly recognised as a top employer and one of only two companies to be listed as a Great Place to Work® UK every year since the survey began in 2001.

## OUR VISION

A leading sector-focused international law firm.



What makes us different:

- Always striving to deliver a distinctive client experience
- Recruiting and nurturing outstanding people
- Always striving to be better and bringing innovative solutions to our clients' needs

## OUR VALUES



Our values guide everything that we do and are fundamental to our culture:

- **The power of teamwork** - We believe we can achieve much more if we work together as a team with our clients and colleagues – however talented we are as individuals. We collaborate seamlessly across services, sectors and offices – focused on the greater good for the client and our Firm.
- **Always striving to be better** - We are always striving to improve our service to clients and the way we run our own business – determined to improve in a highly competitive market.
- **We all bring something different** - We all bring different backgrounds, strengths and perspectives to the team. This diversity and openness makes us more relevant and valuable to our clients.

**1,300+ People in the UK**

**3000+ People Globally**

**21 consecutive years in the Great Places to Work best workplaces list**

# SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES

## RELATED UN GLOBAL COMPACT PRINCIPLES:

**Principle 1:** Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

**Principle 2:** make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

**Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals:**

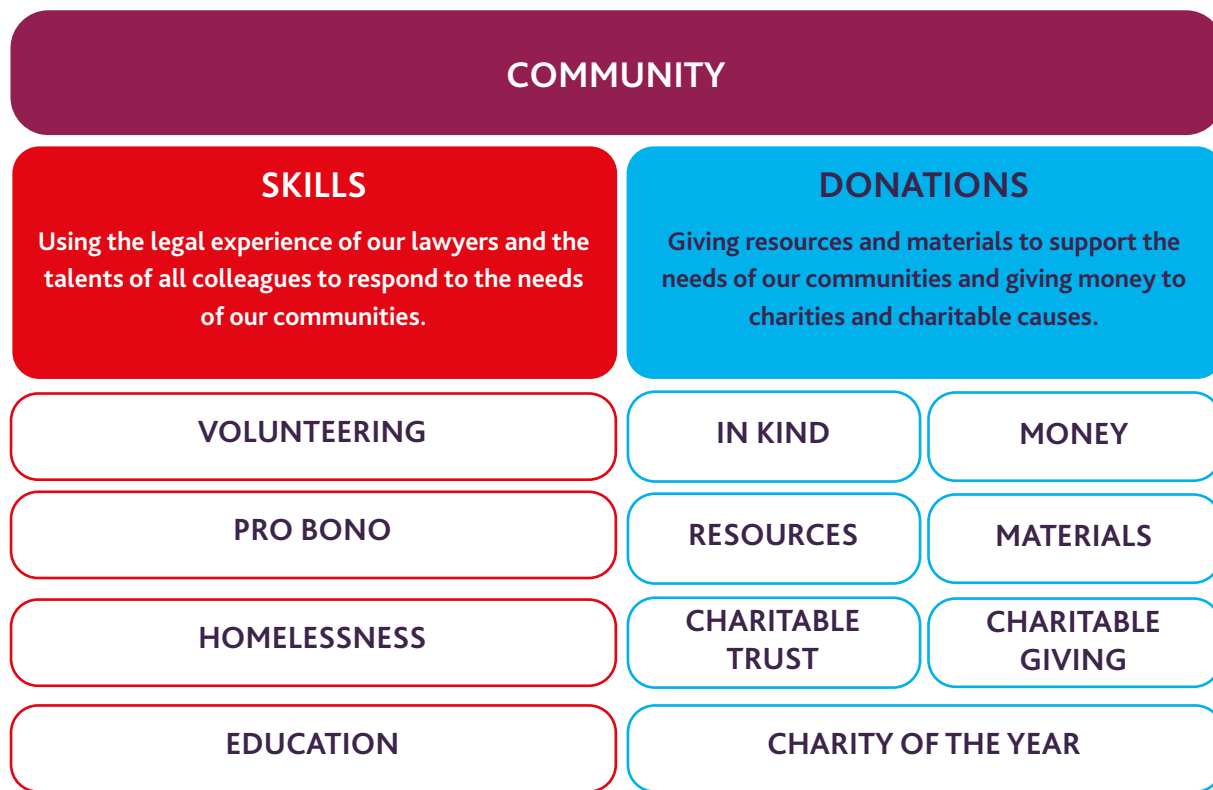


We support and invest in our communities through three priority areas: pro bono, volunteering and charitable giving. Our support for the protection of human rights and access to justice is woven through our engagement with communities on a local and international scale, through pro bono and volunteering.

## SHARING OUR SKILLS – PRO BONO

The provision of free legal advice directly to charities and community groups, as well as through legal clinics, at the heart of our community engagement, plays to our core strength. We also recognise that properly supervised pro bono work provides important development opportunities for our colleagues as they progress through their careers.

Our lawyers are given recognition for their pro bono work. The first 50 hours of time spent on pro bono matters each year contributes towards their bonus targets. They get involved with a range of pro bono initiatives; from providing tailored advice to charities and community groups directly, to helping to run the Birmingham Legal Advice Clinic once a month; to supporting the work of Kids in Need of Defense (UK) by providing pro bono support to children and their families who are entitled to apply for citizenship.



1 May 2020 – 31 April 2021:

**3,037**  
pro bono hours completed in the UK, equivalent to...

**£947,500**

Number of community organisations that have benefited: at least

**70**

Number of successful KIND citizenship applications:

**15**

...that's 15 young lives changed for the better, with the stability and freedom that comes with being granted full UK citizenship



## CASE STUDY:

PARTNER AND VOLUNTEER KIERAN LAIRD DESCRIBES HIS JOURNEY HELPING A FAMILY SECURE BRITISH CITIZENSHIP FOR THEIR SON:



“The third decision was in our favour and the Home Office confirmed that Amar is a British citizen”

“We represented Amar\* through our pro bono partnership with KIND. Amar’s mother had made a previous immigration application on behalf of herself and her other children (not Amar), part of which was based on the fact that Amar was a British citizen by birth through his father.

The application was rejected and went to the First-tier Tribunal. The Immigration Judge allowed the application overall, but found that Amar was not British by birth. That finding was wrong in law but, because the overall application was granted, the finding on Amar was not appealed.

Amar’s mother then wished to make an application some years later for confirmation of Amar’s nationality. The findings of the Immigration Judge that he was not a British citizen were obviously an obstacle to that as the Home Office could validly claim that it should follow them. We therefore had to convince the Home Office not to follow the findings of the court on the basis that they were per incuriam (wrongly decided) and that Amar’s nationality was a matter of statute law such that it didn’t matter what the judge found; he was

still a British citizen if the relevant tests were met (which the judge had found they were).

Our first application was refused. We wrote a pre-action letter threatening judicial review of that decision. The decision was withdrawn and reviewed. The second decision again refused the application. We wrote another pre-action letter. The third decision was in our favour and the Home Office confirmed that Amar is a British citizen. That confirmation will not only allow him to get a British passport and make it a lot easier for him to access services, but will also help the next round of applications for leave to remain by his mother and siblings.

It was a long slog, but a really worthwhile result in the end.”

\* The child’s real name has been changed to protect his identity.







Number of volunteering hours 2020/2021:

# 2,900



## SHARING OUR SKILLS – VOLUNTEERING



Each year our people give time to projects in our local communities in Birmingham and London – focusing on the key issues of homelessness, education and inner city needs.

Where possible we ensure our volunteering activities are skills based – deploying the wide ranging skills of lawyers and our business services teams, to maximise the impact they

can have for the benefit of others. We give our people 21 hours of paid volunteering leave each year.

Pre-pandemic, most of our volunteering programmes were in-person; all of that had to be suspended immediately in response to COVID-19. We have kept in regular touch with our community partners during the pandemic to help understand their ongoing and changing needs, and how we might best continue to support them.



## HOMELESSNESS

How can a law firm help in the battle against homelessness? By using the skills of our people to help enhance the employability skills of those who are trapped in the homeless cycle. We have worked with Business in the Community (BITC) for many years to provide workshops on drafting CVs and interview preparation, one-to-one job coaching, and work placements.

Since 2004, we have provided more than 130 work placements as part of this programme, and in some instances we have gone on to employ individuals who successfully completed their programme. Although our in-person work placements were suspended during the pandemic, we continued to work closely with BITC, with our volunteers continuing to assist at BITC's virtual job clubs in the West Midlands.

Our volunteers helped to provide employability support to local unemployed people:

- Two clients each obtained a permanent position as a result of the coaching they received.
- One client created a LinkedIn account and said how confident they felt after their coaching session.



## EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY



If we had to sum up our education programme in one word it would be "aspiration": helping underprivileged children of all ages to believe they can achieve their true potential when they leave school. The legal sector is working hard to open itself up to talent from all economic backgrounds, and we have a key role to play to address the inequalities in the sector.

We take this commitment seriously:

- We are part of the PRIME alliance of law firms determined to improve access to, and socio-economic diversity within, the legal profession, by providing a week's legal work experience to year 12 pupils from low-income backgrounds each year.
- We are also a founding member of the Social Mobility Business Partnership (SMBP), a collaboration of law firms and in-house legal departments. We lead the Birmingham SMBP cluster of employers providing quality commercial work experience to disadvantaged year 12 pupils through this Work Insight and Skills Week programme.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY: SMBP 2020

“Due to the pandemic, the 2020 Work Insight & Skills week was turned on its head for SMBP and their partners, and we had to adapt our programme to an online delivery.

More than ever, we wanted to be able to support students as we were conscious this cohort of students were already less advantaged and the impact of COVID-19 would only have an even more adverse effect on them.

SMBP was overwhelmed by the number of partners that wanted to continue to support students and help increase their employability skills and work on how they can improve resilience.

There were many lessons learned as part of the digital delivery and we overcame each challenge together by ensuring our communication lines were continually open and SMBP could offer support as and when needed.

Regardless of students not being able to visit the organisations this year, we have had very positive feedback from both partners and students and the scheme was a huge success.”

Sonia Messam, Corporate Responsibility Executive



Over the last 12 months, some of our work in this area includes:

- SMBP Week in July 2020 was hosted virtually for the first time because of the pandemic. 150 students took part in the Birmingham cluster, gaining invaluable experience from working with four different businesses, learning through interactive business games, and, on one of the days, spending the day (virtually) at WASPS Rugby Club to learn about the psychology of resilience. Once the SMBP week was completed, the students were then given access to a Group Mentoring platform, which supports them through their journey over the coming years, into their chosen career.
- Birmingham Professional Futures Skills week in November and March: six volunteers from across our business took part in career panel events for Birmingham students to find out more about working in the legal industry, and the professional services sector more generally.
- Working in partnership with Skills Builder, we have hosted two virtual sessions during the first quarter of 2021, reaching 62 students. The students presented new invention ideas that they had created, to help bring about a greener future for humanity, to volunteers from across our business. The volunteers worked with the students to develop their ideas, and provide feedback, as well as taking part in a Q&A about their jobs, careers and paths taken to get there.

“Wow! What a class of students! And what a collection of ideas! I was blown away with the thought and detail, plus the way the students conducted themselves. First class all round, and I thought they were excellent and some of those inventions!!!! I am so grateful to have had the chance to work with them today.”

Gowling WLG volunteer

“I learnt that failing doesn't always mean it's over and that you have to always try again”

Student participant

“I learnt that there are many different careers available to me in the future.”

Student participant

- We have worked closely with Compass School in Bermondsey since 2019, to provide mentoring sessions to year 10 pupils. These mentoring partnerships are designed to help the students to develop soft skills and to help them understand what it's really like in the modern workplace.
- In March 2021, volunteers from our business took part in a virtual career session during a year 10 assembly of around 80 students. The volunteers, a partner, a trainee and a legal apprentice, each gave a talk about their journey into law and the various routes that are available, so that the students could see that there is more than one way into a legal role; followed by a lively Q&A session.
- Working with Kings College London since 2017, we have hosted a number of Legal Insight Days each year for year 12 Law students from under-represented backgrounds.
- Due to the pandemic this year, we hosted a virtual event for 48 students in April, with five volunteers from our business giving their insights into what it is like to work in a law firm, and helping the students to understand that you don't have to be a lawyer to work here, with examples of some of the roles in other teams, and the routes that people have taken to get there.

All of these opportunities are designed to give the students practical insights into what opportunities there are in the working world, and to give them invaluable experiences to include on application forms and in interviews as they progress from school into further education and the world of work.

## GIVING – CHARITABLE DONATIONS AND IN KIND SUPPORT



Alongside practical help, we provide financial and in-kind support to charities in a variety of ways. The delivery of in-kind support was significantly reduced due to COVID-19; from charities and community organisations being able to use our Birmingham and London office meeting rooms for free, to clothing and toiletry donation points on every working floor, the pandemic hindered our ability to help our community partners in the way that we used to pre-COVID.

However, we have still managed to provide support in other ways and, as we head out of the pandemic and back to “in-person” working, we hope that many of our pre-pandemic support opportunities can be brought back into our programme.

Our people nominate and vote for one national charity to support each year. During 2020, that charity was Cancer Research UK. We decided to extend that partnership into 2021, given the impact that COVID-19 had had on our ability to fundraise.

### Charity of the year partnership with Cancer Research UK during 2020 and 2021:

First Virtual Carol Service  
December 2020: raised

**£1,636**

(double the amount usually raised)  
and was viewed more than

**2,100**

times (internally and externally).

Overall, our fundraising partnership  
has so far raised more than

**£80,000**

The Firm's Charitable Trust makes small grants to charities registered in England and Wales, and also provides matched funding for our people's fundraising efforts in aid of a wide variety of UK charities.

During the Charitable Trust's financial year  
(which runs 6 April – 5 April), it made



**£180,529**

in donations, benefiting

**133 charities**

## BIRMINGHAM COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2022 – OFFICIAL LEGAL ADVISERS

We are proud to be the Official Legal Advisers to and an official sponsor of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. As part of this, we have been working closely with the Birmingham 2022 Organising Committee's Engagement & Legacy Team.



We are engaging across a number of different projects, with our main focus being to deliver a programme that will leave a strong and impactful legacy to the local community. This includes partnering with the School for Social Entrepreneurs on a new mentor programme for 12 Black Owned Social Enterprises in the West Midlands; and financial and in-kind support over the next two years for five of our key community partners, including Free@Last, Saathi House and the Ladywood Community Project.

So far this year, the “Grassroots” programme has seen us make £25,000 in donations to these five community partners, which has been used by each charity in a different way: from purchasing five laptops for use by the community in the local hub, to providing much needed financial support for two women-only drop in centres.



# AN INCLUSIVE FIRM, SUPPORTING OUR PEOPLE

The diversity and inclusion (D&I) of our workplace is hugely important to WLG and is reflected in our global values.

Over many years we have invested in D&I as a central part of our vision – recognising that we are fundamentally a 'people business' and that attracting and retaining diverse talent is essential to delivering the best service to our clients and to supporting our future growth and success.

We work for sophisticated clients who themselves field diverse teams and we operate in some of the most diverse locations and communities in the UK and worldwide – and our business should reflect and harness that diversity.

We want to create an inclusive workplace where our people can be themselves, celebrating the fact that we're all individuals. We are committed to attracting and retaining talented people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

We give D&I the resource and leadership it needs to drive action.

- Andy Stylianou, our UK Chairman, is our Firm's D&I champion
- We have board sponsors for gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, parents and carers and for mental health, wellbeing and disability
- We have a dedicated D&I team led by a Head of D&I, reporting to our HR Director and Chairman
- Our latest D&I strategy, Inclusion for All, being rolled out in 2021, empowers leaders and colleagues at all levels to play an active role in making progress on D&I
- Our wider HR team plays a crucial part in delivery of inclusive practices day to day, ensuring that key processes such as recruitment, promotion and talent development are inclusive and designed to eliminate bias
- We have a consultative body called People First, which acts as an 'independent voice' in our Firm, enabling colleagues to participate in our Firm's strategy, giving feedback, challenges and ideas to our Firm

## RELATED UN GLOBAL COMPACT PRINCIPLES:

**Principle 3:** Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

**Principle 4:** the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;

**Principle 5:** the effective abolition of child labour; and

**Principle 6:** the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

**Principle 10:** Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

## Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals:



## UK DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATISTICS – 30 APRIL 2021

Gender	Legal Staff		Non-Legal Staff	% TOTAL
	Partner	Non-Partner		
Female	22.05%	65.44%	74.70%	65.39%
Male	77.95%	34.56%	25.30%	34.61%
Ethnicity	Legal Staff		Non-Legal Staff	% TOTAL
	Partner	Non-Partner		
Asian	4.72%	9.29%	11.21%	9.75%
Black	0.00%	1.08%	4.92%	2.88%
Chinese / East Asian	0.00%	0.43%	0.68%	0.51%
Mixed	0.00%	3.02%	2.89%	2.63%
White	85.83%	67.60%	60.61%	66.07%
Other	0.00%	0.43%	0.00%	0.17%
Prefer Not To Say	1.57%	1.30%	1.36%	1.36%
No Data	7.87%	16.85%	18.34%	16.62%
Sexual Orientation	Legal Staff		Non-Legal Staff	% TOTAL
	Partner	Non-Partner		
Bisexual	0.00%	0.43%	1.02%	0.68%
Gay / Lesbian	2.36%	2.16%	1.53%	1.87%
Heterosexual	84.25%	81.86%	77.25%	79.81%
Other	1.57%	0.00%	0.00%	0.17%
Prefer Not To Say	7.87%	6.91%	6.45%	6.79%
No Data	3.94%	8.64%	13.75%	10.69%
Disability	Legal Staff		Non-Legal Staff	% TOTAL
	Partner	Non-Partner		
% Employees with a disability	0.00%	4.32%	4.92%	4.16%



## ENGAGING WITH OUR PEOPLE

We have five employee networks at the Firm which all work to raise awareness and education around key issues as well as offer a safe space for our people to share any concerns and get support. They are the driving force in bringing our inclusion agenda to life.


Over the last year, key activities have included:

- Let's Talk About Race events which contributed to the development of our Black Lives Matter Action Plan
- Let's Talk About Disability events to raise awareness of visible and non-visible disabilities
- A series of events to help people balance work and home-schooling during lockdown
- Events looking at the intersectionality between race and sexual orientation

- Piloting a mentoring scheme for black students
- Raising awareness and education on the menopause

Each of our networks has detailed business plans that align to our Firm's strategy and our D&I strategy and dedicated budget for delivery.

Our networks have over 700 members from across the firm:



**Enable**  
Our disability, mental health and wellbeing network



**EmBRACE**  
Our ethnicity network



**Family matters**  
Our family and carers network



**OpenHouse**  
Our LGBT+ network



**Thrive**  
Our gender network

## INCLUSION ALLIES

In November 2020 we launched our Inclusion Allies programme which was the result of each of our networks recognising the important role allies play in making progress. Their advocacy and support helps to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace where all of our people are free to bring their authentic selves to work. Often hearing from people who don't have a vested interest in a topic can be powerful and they can use their roles in the organisation to create inclusive culture.

Our allies are asked to:

- **Challenge** – Openly challenge any behaviour or language that goes against a diverse and inclusive workplace
- **Participate** – Look for internal or external events, roundtables or feedback sessions they can participate in
- **Include** – Foster open environment by sharing their own stories of difference and asking their colleagues to do the same
- **Educate** – Understand the unique issues and challenges their colleagues face and ask questions
- **Share** – Show their colleagues that they are an inclusion ally and create a safe space where colleagues can approach them

Our allies register and share their motivation behind being an inclusion ally and are given access to resources and tools to help educate themselves on being effective.

## INCREASING REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Across the legal profession there is a visible lack of female talent at the top, and we have been focused on changing this at the Firm for a number of years. In 2016, when 18% of our partners were female, we set targets to increase representation of female partners at our Firm, with the aim to reach 25% female partners by 2021 and 30% by 2026. This is by no means our end goal, but by setting targets we focused our efforts. As of 30 April 2021, we were on course to meet our 2021 target.

Whilst we are making progress, we recognised in 2020 that progress was slow and we wanted to really understand what barriers and challenges were holding us back in seeing accelerated progress. We therefore undertook our largest research project on gender to date called Thriving in Partnership (TiP), framed around a core question: "What should / will it take to become and thrive as a female Partner in our Firm?". In effect this covered both the route to Partnership and then, once a Partner, thriving in the role.

Our research used quantitative analysis alongside qualitative interviews and roundtables with a focus on the following five areas (but inevitably covering a wider range of thoughts and observations):

- **Representation**
- **Attrition**
- **Staying and thriving**
- **Promotion**
- **External Hiring**

We have our most comprehensive data set and feedback on these issues to date. Some issues are very real; some might be perceptions that have become fact in many people's eyes. These issues and perceptions are going to take sustained effort, creativity and change to overcome.

Delivering the Thriving in Partnership recommendations has been led from the top with Executive Board oversight, support and commitment from the whole Partnership, and a robust governance model to ensure that we make tangible and sustained progress against each of the report's recommendations.



## BLACK LIVES MATTER



The deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and their consequences sparked an unprecedented global focus on the #BlackLivesMatter campaign and the experiences and social and organisational structures that have made such campaigns necessary. Sadly, these are the latest in a long chain of such events and we, along with all people around the world, need to learn and question how we as individuals and as a global business can help change the way society thinks and behaves about race.

We have over 3000 people worldwide, who all bring different perspectives and experiences to our Firm. It is important that we ensure that our people represent the communities in which we live and work and black talent is properly represented in our Firm and the legal profession as a whole.

In the UK we have focused on ethnicity inclusion for a number of years, but we know that we need to do more. In 2020 with the input of our EmbRACE employee network, our people and leadership we developed a clear action plan to help us increase the representation of ethnic minority and particularly black talent. This action plan covers

- Culture, transparency and values
- Recruitment
- Talent management
- Community outreach
- Client/market engagement

We made significant progress over the last year in delivering on this action plan and actions to date include:

- Our Inclusion Allies programme launched in November 2020.

- We launched a mentoring toolkit in October 2020 to enable people to establish and maintain effective mentoring relationships.
- We enhanced our leavers process to ensure that we ask specific questions on experiencing or witnessing racism in the Firm and act on this feedback; all black employees are offered an in-person leaver's interview.
- We continue to hold regular Let's Talk About Race sessions to keep the conversation going.
- We shared our first zero tolerance of racism statement back in July 2020 and will repeat this message annually.
- We partnered with University of Birmingham to offer the Black Talent in Law Bursary schemes which will offer black students a financial contribution to their studies, as well as a work placement and mentor at the Firm.
- We are signatories of the Race Fairness Commitment and the BITC Race at Work Charter.
- We are members of the Black Solicitors Network.
- We are signatories of The Halo Collective Hair Code.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT RACE



The Black Lives Matter movement either directly or indirectly affected our people and it highlighted to us that more needed to be done. Whilst we were already focused on race, the events of summer 2020 provided a catalyst to increase engagement and appetite across our Firm to do more.

We recognised the importance of listening to our people and understanding their views and perspectives before we rushed to implement anything. We did this by hosting a series of Let's Talk About Race webinars which offered our people an opportunity to share their thoughts, frustrations and ideas for positive change.

The first session offered an open forum for people to share their reactions to the murder of George Floyd, and the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests. This was followed by an opportunity to share any personal experiences or feedback to our Firm. This session in particular was important as it gave everyone a voice and allowed their thoughts to be heard. We have continued to run these monthly sessions covering things like a celebration of black history, something

that was important to many of our people as they didn't want people to think that being black was negative. We also discussed allyship, intersectionality between race and sexual orientation and invited a senior black lawyer from one of our clients to give her perspective.

These sessions have now become a staple in our D&I offering and we continue to bring together people from across our Firm to educate them on key issues and receive feedback.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT LGBT INCLUSION



Our LGBT+ network, OpenHouse, runs a number of events and activities aimed at supporting our LGBT+ people and allies. In February 2021, to celebrate LGBT History Month, OpenHouse ran a joint event with our ethnicity network EmbRACE to explore the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation.

External speakers Rico Johnson-Sinclair and Khakan Qureshi joined us to share their experiences and the challenges they have faced as black, South Asian and Muslim members of the LGBT+ community. Both are leaders in the Birmingham LGBT+ community and along with some of our people shared some important insights into the work that was still needed to ensure LGBT+ inclusion.

Additional activity throughout the month included sharing interesting aspects of LGBT+ history, a quiz, and links to LGBT+ books, movies, documentaries and music.

## FOCUS ON FAMILY

There has been an increased focus over the last 12 months on balancing family and work, with all of our people working from home



during the COVID-19 pandemic and in many cases balancing this with home-schooling children and not being able to rely on their normal support structures.

As a Firm we recognised this challenge and put in place a number of measures to help our people, both practically and by offering support and guidance. We updated

our family policies to enable our people to take more time off for caring responsibilities as well as enabling people to flex their working hours around childcare and home-schooling. We also piloted the introduction of emergency childcare provision.

We ran a number of sessions aimed at families over the period which covered topics such as:

- Communicating with teenagers
- Happy confident families
- How to manage with kids working from home
- Supporting children's mental health during lockdown

We also set up monthly parenting cafés as a safe space for parents to come together and share any challenges or issues they were experiencing and get advice, guidance and understanding from others. In addition to these parenting cafés, we also offer parenting coaching to anyone who is going on long term parenting leave. This consists of a pre, during and post leave session of coaching either in a group or 1-2-1 setting.



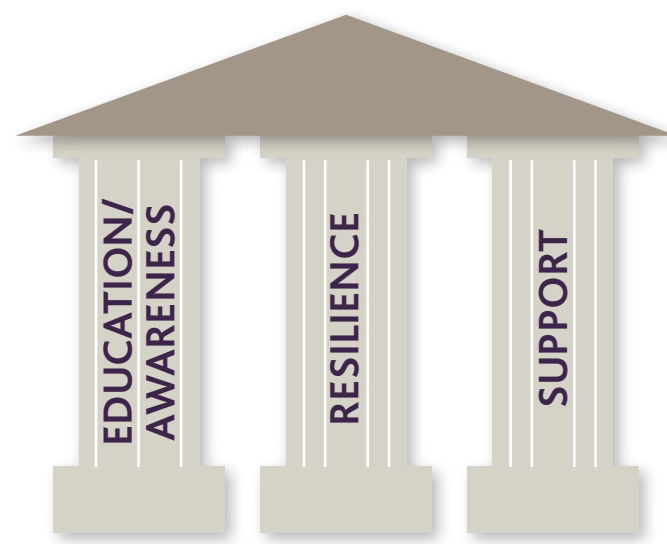


# HEALTH AND WELLBEING

People are our most important asset so it is vital our workplace is healthy, supportive and enables them to thrive.

Law firms can be stressful places to work. Fatigue (long, sedentary hours, always on technology, blurred home/work boundaries and remote working) and stress (urgent deadlines, exacting clients/co-workers/family and pressure to deliver technical excellence) can threaten our mental and physical wellbeing.

We base our current wellbeing strategy on three pillars: education/awareness, resilience and support.



## OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic changed the working lives of our people overnight as everyone immediately began working from home in March 2020. Whilst we have had a rich history of wellbeing activity at our Firm, the pandemic and the uncertainty it brought with it meant that our focus needed to shift from what we could provide in the office to what we could provide virtually and to address the new wellbeing needs our people had.

Within 48 hours of the first lockdown forcing us all to work from home, we developed and delivered our new Wellbeing Hub. This hub provides a central place for all of our wellbeing resources and encompasses:

- Mental health
- Staying connected
- Working environment
- Staying active
- Practice advice
- Fun



Each section contains links to articles and websites and is refreshed on a regular basis and also includes links to the Employee Assistance Programme, providers of all our key benefits as well as the Samaritans and key Domestic Violence support providers.

As well as the hub, we created a Wellbeing Group on Workplace where our people could stay connected, share their experiences of lockdown and ways they were coping. We also developed focused resources on things like bereavement and a wellbeing guide for employees on furlough to allow them to access the resources available. In addition, we provided monthly bitesize learning to our team leaders, sharing tools and resources to enable them to support their teams.

One of the key elements of our wellbeing approach was to ensure that our people didn't feel isolated and our culture remained intact. To enable this we developed our Lockdown Showdown competition which gave people weekly ways to connect with their teams by taking part in competitions, challenges and quizzes.

This initiative was positively received and replicated in winter 2020 with our Let's Go Together weekly wellbeing newsletter that again aimed to share resources and support, as well as ways for teams to come together.

We also adjusted our provision based on the relevant government guidelines. During the period where restrictions were being lifted we provided resources to our people and ran webinars on topics such as increased social interaction and how to cope with this change and anxiety. We continue to be flexible in the support we provide, particularly around the return to the office.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHAMPIONS



To help us support our people we have Mental Health and Domestic Violence Champions who offer a listening and signposting service for our people.

During 2020/21 our Mental Health Champions have played a critical role not only in offering support but also giving the Firm feedback on how our people are coping. They have met every two weeks for the last year and shared issues being experienced across all parts of the business. They have also played a key role in identifying any potential future issues to enable us to be proactive in providing support to our people as we look forward to a more widespread return to the office.

Our Domestic Violence Champions have also played a vital role, particularly with statistics showing that cases of domestic violence increased during the pandemic. We gave all of our champions and team leaders advice on signs to look for when connecting online that someone may be experiencing domestic abuse, struggling or vulnerable in any way.

We also signposted support from our Employee Assistance Programme for both mental health and domestic violence.



### THE ROLE OF ENABLE

Our Enable network is focused on disability, mental health and wellbeing and has played a pivotal role in supporting our people this year. They raised awareness of disability across the Firm by their Let's Talk About Disability and Let's Talk About Mental Health events, which saw people share their experiences of visible and non-visible disabilities and mental health conditions.

They are also instrumental in ensuring that consideration is given to people with disabilities when any decisions are made about working from home and returning to the office.

An area of focus that has been led by Enable over the last 12 months is the support and training we give our people in relation to the menopause. We provided training to individuals to learn more about the symptoms of the menopause, as well as training line managers on how to support women experiencing symptoms of the menopause in the workplace. In addition, a specific Menopause for Men session was held to engage with men across the Firm.

We also run monthly Menopause Cafés aimed at women currently going through the menopause or interested to learn more. These sessions are informal and allow our women to share any challenges they are experiencing and get support from others in the group. These are supported by a Menopause Workplace group, resources and information.

Training and support is only one aspect of this work; the Enable network also engages with teams across our business support functions to assist people in getting access to equipment they may need to alleviate symptoms.

**800+**  
people attended  
our Mindapples  
training to manage  
working from  
home



We are proud members  
of Purple Space and  
the Business Disability  
Network



**Access to wellbeing benefits including Employee Assistance Programme, private healthcare insurance, eye test, health screening, virtual GP, dental insurance, discounted gym membership and more**

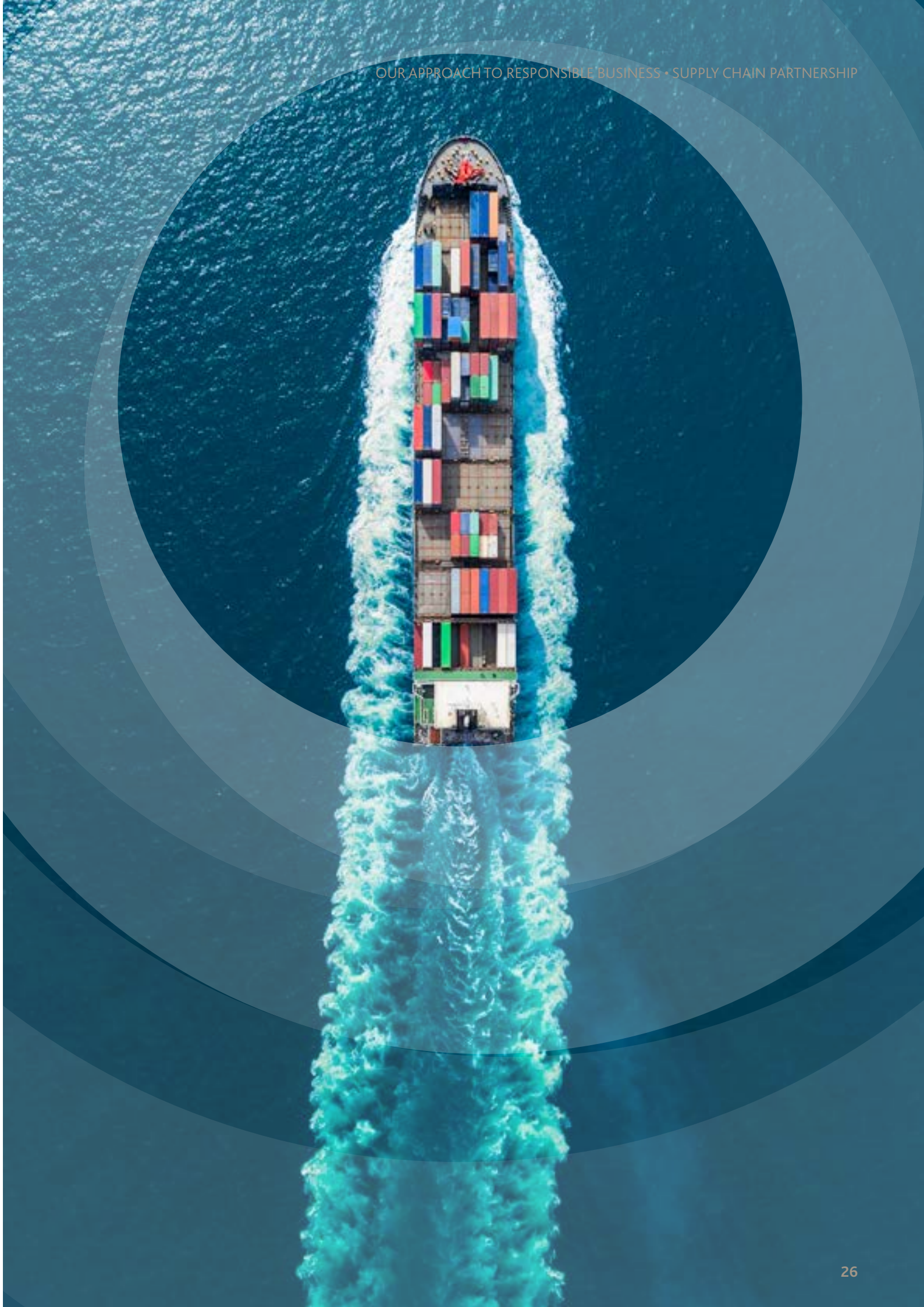
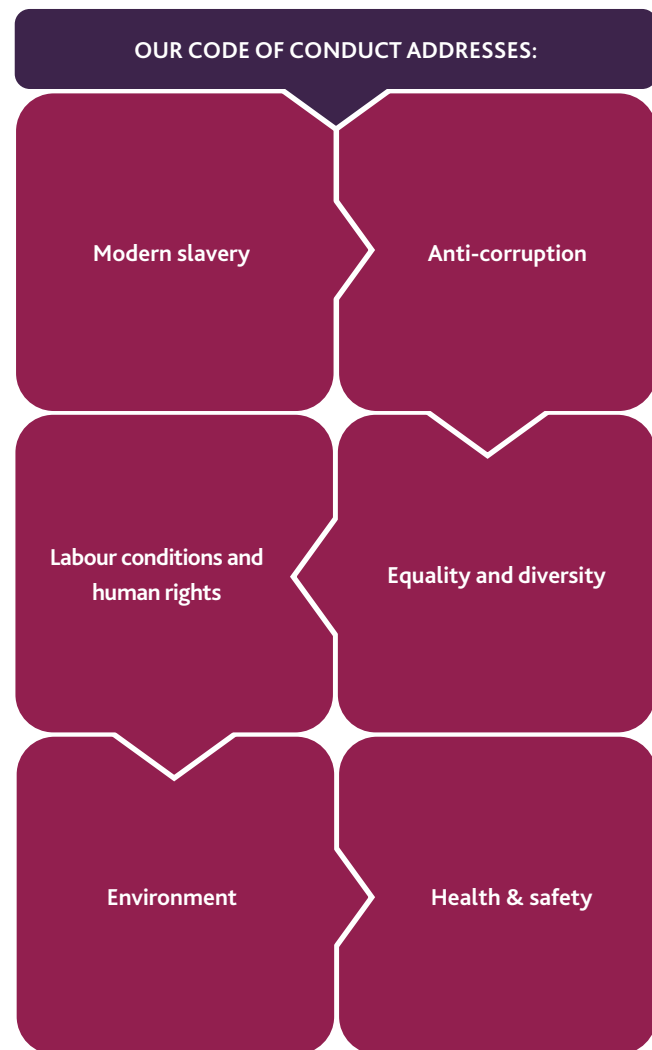




# SUPPLY CHAIN PARTNERSHIP

An important facet of conducting ourselves as a responsible business is ensuring that we and our core suppliers are sourcing products and services in a responsible manner. We have invested in a Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) database and all new suppliers are on-boarded via the SRM.

Existing suppliers are also being taken through the process over time. Part of the SRM functionality requires suppliers to agree to our supplier Code of Conduct, including standards on human rights.





# PROTECTING THE PLANET



## PLANET+

Our Firm's environmental stewardship programme, in place for several years, escalated in 2017 with the launch of our **PLANET+ policy commitment**, which includes six public goals to achieve by 2030. The policy and approach reflect the UN Global Compact Principles and draw on the SDGs as well as international standards ISO 14001 (environmental management) and ISO50001 (energy management). To date, efforts have concentrated on UK operations and going forward activity will extend to offices across the globe.

## IMPACTS

Due to the office-based nature of a law firm, environmental impacts are lower in comparison with many other businesses; however they are still significant and contribute primarily to climate change and resource depletion. Activities linked to building energy use, corporate travel, hospitality, other material purchases and waste are all part of the challenge.

There are larger, and more indirect, impacts associated with our supply chain and clients and, although we have less control over these areas, there is plenty of opportunity to influence.

## STRATEGY

The PLANET+ strategy Phase 1 (2017 - 2020) put in place a number of objectives that focussed on energy monitoring, efficiency, carbon calculation, waste management and engagement across the business.

Phase 2 (2021 - 2025) is under development and will build on successes to date, and with a greater focus on working with our clients as well as our people and suppliers.

A core element of our national and international programme going forward is the inclusion of passionate volunteer PLANET+ Ambassadors guided by the Head of Environment/Head of Assurance. Ambassadors are representatives from across the business, including two of the Firm's Partners.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Achievements to 2020 include state of the art recycling stations on all floors, removal of desk bins and waste reduction particularly in hospitality. For example, we adopted compostable plastics, removed single use/disposable items and composted food waste.

A partnership with our catering providers has led to more plant-based food choices and quicker response times to ideas. All A4/A3 copy paper used is recycled from 100% post-consumer waste and carbon emissions from corporate travel have been offset for more than ten years. Consolidation of occupied space and action to improve energy efficiency have also led to significant carbon reduction.

*"It's really refreshing to work with a firm that is willing to share its own environment / community approach and practice so openly and honestly. It can only be good for people, the planet and business generally to share knowledge and I look forward to partnering more in this way".*

Phil Warren, Head of Legal and Compliance, Cornerstone

## RELATED UN GLOBAL COMPACT PRINCIPLES:

**Principle 7:** Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

**Principle 8:** undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

**Principle 9:** encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

## Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals:



Although progress with practical on-site initiatives met with challenges linked to COVID-19, including the majority of people working from home, there have still been achievements during the time this report covers:

- Refreshed the PLANET+ policy commitment
- Shared knowledge of the Firm's environmental experience with the B2022 Organising Committee and Cornerstone
- Requested all suppliers sign up to a supplier Code of Conduct that demands that environmental, as well as other responsible practices, are adhered to
- Expanded the internal Assurance function and initiated development of plans to incorporate ESG practice into the audit programme
- Prepared a first set of objectives and targets (to be finalised during 2021)
- Continued as a member of the Legal Sustainability Alliance
- Engaged our people around World Environment Day, Earth Hour and energy achievements
- Invited a member of Team England to share thoughts about food waste

## FOCUS ON...NET ZERO CARBON



Climate change is one of the greatest issues of our times and COVID-19, along with recent weather-related disasters, has brought the topic sharply into focus for all.

There is heightened anxiety but also a counter sense that real change is in the air. Governments are getting to grips with the SDGs (SDG 13: Climate Action) and businesses, including our own, are gearing up more urgently in response. There is of course regulatory, peer and supply chain pressure but there is also a clear moral case for leading the way.





CARBON/ENERGY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020/21

26% reduction in building energy demand by April 2020 against a target of 20% (normalised for the weather on a 2015/16 baseline)

Undertook a detailed review of opportunities for further building energy reduction to enable a new plan and target to 2025

Upgraded to ISO50001: 2018, an internationally recognised and voluntary standard for energy management (first adopted in 2015)

Became a supporter with The Chancery Lane Project (TCLP), which has a vision for a world where every contract and law enables solutions to climate change

Reduced the diesel powered fleet of cars from five to one and initiated development of a new strategy for hybrid/electric options

Published energy/carbon data with financial accounts (regulatory requirement) including additional voluntary data on Scope 3 corporate travel emissions

Continued to carbon compensate with a switch to the UN Carbon Offset platform for offsetting and purchase of electricity through a renewable energy tariff

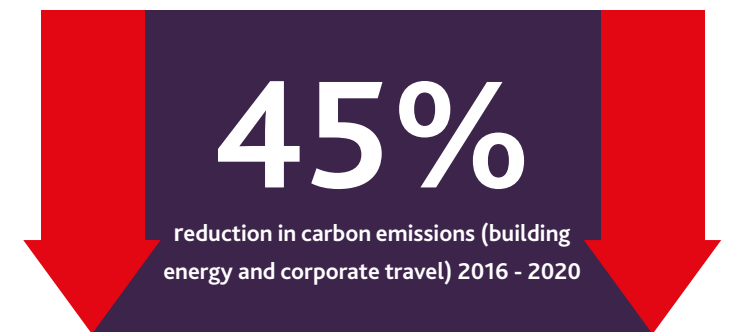
Initial exploration of climate risks and consideration of adaptation as integral to the PLANET+ strategy

Investigated the Science Based Target initiative (SBTi) and signed up to the UN's Climate Ambition Accelerator

A zero carbon goal has been in place since 2017, and PLANET+ Ambassadors and the Operations Team have been working to reduce energy demand and put in place effective management processes ever since.

The pandemic led to significant changes to operations, culminating in a marked reduction in direct energy use and corporate travel, and carbon emissions. Although a positive outcome, emissions will inevitably increase as people return to the office and corporate travel resumes. However, with use of video calling and hybrid working, it is anticipated that there will be some continued benefit.

Energy associated with working from home during the pandemic is estimated to be in the region of 3.3million kWh. There is more work to be done to explore this data and other Scope 3 emissions.



Carbon emissions arise well beyond the boundaries of the office, and in significant amounts, particularly around the supply chains and work around exploring these Scope 3 emissions will continue as part of PLANET+ Phase 2.

SUMMARY CARBON EMISSIONS FOR 2021 (PLUS OTHER YEARS FOR COMPARISON)

SOURCE	Carbon emissions (tCO <sub>2</sub> e)		
	2015/16	2019/20	2020/21
Building gas and fleet (Scope 1)	501	343	360
Building electricity (Scope 2)	2,550	1,141	692
Grey fleet, rail, flights (Scope 3)	2,346	1,434	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,397</b>	<b>2,918</b>	<b>1,093</b>

\*Calculation methodology made available by EcoAct



# GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

## RELATED UN GLOBAL COMPACT PRINCIPLES:

**Principle 10:** Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

## Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals:



We recognise the importance of robust governance and has a clear and simple governance structure.

Our main governance body is the Executive Board, which is led by our Chair and which oversees the strategic development and business activities of our Firm. It meets monthly and has representatives from all parts of the UK business (legal teams and business services) as well as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and two external Non-Executive Directors who provide independent oversight and constructive challenge. We share minutes of each monthly meeting transparently with the wider partnership and annually with our external auditors.

The powers of the Executive Board are clearly set out in a Partnership Agreement approved by the Partners – i.e. the owners of the business. The Partnership Agreement also clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the CEO, to whom powers for the day-to-day operation of our Firm are delegated. A number of key decisions are reserved for full Partner approval, including the admission of new Partners, mergers and acquisitions and property commitments. Partner meetings take place on a monthly basis, with minutes shared following each meeting.

In addition, a number of committees / groups are established – such as the Remuneration Committee, which determines Partner remuneration; the Representative Committee (RepCo), which represents the interests of Partners; the Operational Management Team (OMT), which considers operational issues; and the Risk Committee, which meets quarterly to monitor and assess internal and external risk factors.

To ensure consistency of strategy across our international platform, there is also an International Board co-chaired by the CEOs from Gowling WLG (UK) LLP and Gowling WLG (Canada) LLP together with four other International Board members – two from each of

the LLPs. The International Board oversees, and advises on, the implementation of our international strategy around the world.

## COMPLIANCE, RISK AND ASSURANCE

As a law firm we, not surprisingly, take our legal and regulatory obligations very seriously. Some of those obligations are general legal obligations; others are law firm specific and imposed by our regulator, the Solicitors Regulation Authority. We have developed comprehensive policies, processes and training to ensure compliance with these obligations with oversight from our General Counsel Team. For instance, we have:

- Various compliance policies in place including those relating to Anti-Money Laundering; Anti-Bribery and Corruption; Whistleblowing; GDPR and data protection; and Tax Evasion Facilitation Prevention. These are supported by mandatory and other annual training.
- A sophisticated central team that undertakes conflict checks and due diligence on new and existing clients, including seeking evidence and verification of identity and beneficial ownership for anti-money laundering purposes; risk assessment through adverse media scanning; and checks against government sanctions and PEP\* lists around the world.
- A specialist assurance team working in partnership with the risk and compliance functions and dedicated to delivering independent risk-focussed internal audits; having oversight of five adopted international quality standards (ISO9001, ISO14001, ISO50001, ISO22301, 27001) audited externally by BSI; reviewing and verifying data e.g. energy and carbon."

\*PEP is politically exposed person



# LOOKING FORWARD

The focus for the coming year will be on the following:

## PEOPLE:

- Maintain focus on our inclusion for all programmes
- Continue to listen, learn and implement recommendations set out in our Black Lives Matter Action Plan and related race equality initiatives
- Continue to implement recommendations from our Thriving in Partnership project with the aim of increasing representation of women in our Partnership and other senior roles at Gowling WLG
- Document a comprehensive wellbeing strategy for our people

## ENVIRONMENT:

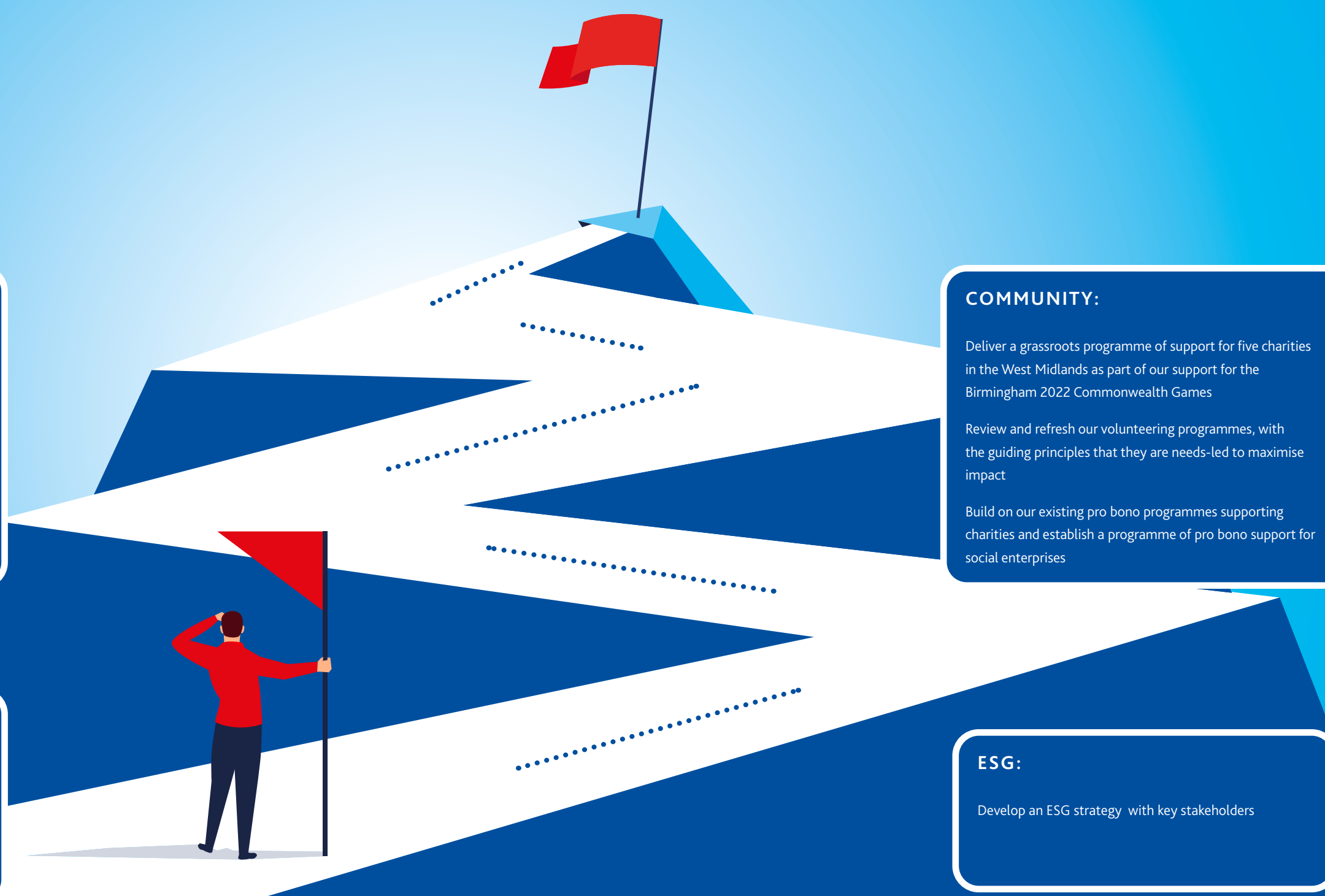
- Launch Phase 2 PLANET+ Strategy 2021-2025
- Implement the PLANET+ Engagement Programme

## COMMUNITY:

- Deliver a grassroots programme of support for five charities in the West Midlands as part of our support for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games
- Review and refresh our volunteering programmes, with the guiding principles that they are needs-led to maximise impact
- Build on our existing pro bono programmes supporting charities and establish a programme of pro bono support for social enterprises

## ESG:

- Develop an ESG strategy with key stakeholders





**Gowling WLG**, Official Legal Advisers -  
Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

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