



Ison Harrison

The Yorkshire Law Firm

An Employee Owned Business

5 Year Business Plan

2023 – 2028



Employee Owned
The Yorkshire Law Firm



ison harrison
solicitors

5 Year Vision Statement

Over the next 5 years we intend to consolidate our position as The Yorkshire Law Firm, by:

1. Increasing turnover, both through organic growth and acquisition to circa £28m;
2. Maintaining our current levels of profitability;
3. Continuing to invest for the long term sustainability of the firm for the benefit of all;
4. Being agile and innovative in the services we offer and how we provide these to our clients;
5. By building on our EOB identity and culture; and
6. Providing a place of work which attracts, retains and develops our people, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

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A short history of the firm

We all have a story of where we have come from, who we are and what makes us tick. Over the past 45 years Ison Harrison has grown from a one-man band operating out of a small office in Leeds to what is now a large regional law firm employing over 240 staff across 17 offices throughout Yorkshire.

When embarking on our 5 year business plan we felt it important to reflect on our story to ensure that we don't lose sight of where we have come from and the lessons that we have learnt on the way. What follows is our story. What happened, how and why?

Small beginnings

1978-2000 : S.C. Harrison & Ison Harrison

Stephen Harrison founded S.C.Harrison & Co in 1978. His idea was to operate as a small independent law firm advising businesses and private individuals alike. The firm remained a small practice until 10 years later in 1988 when Stephen acquired another small but much older and established law firm based in Garforth, called Ison Driver and Furniss.

The new firm, Ison Harrison, operated out of 2 offices, one in Leeds and the other in Garforth at the same premises where we continue to trade today.

In 1993, Ruth Bunday & Co, a legal aid practice joined the fold and later in 1996 Philips Gillis in Crossgates resulting in 4 offices offering a range of legal services.

During the 1990's the practice pursued a business model of developing bulk conveyancing and personal injury departments by securing new clients through paid referrals from a small number of work providers. Whilst the increase in work improved the firm's turnover, it had little impact upon the profitability of the business nor its long-term viability. The firm's strength was not to be found in the clients that it had paid for, but in those who were attracted as a result of its local and accessible profile.

Local people became increasingly familiar with the extent of services the firm offered and competitors started to see the firm develop a business model for continued growth. The subsequent 20 years may have seen the culture and performance of the firm change almost beyond recognition, the essence of the firm's purpose and commitment to meet the needs of local people and businesses has not.

A strategy for survival

2010-2018 : The Leeds Law Firm

By the turn of the millennium there were a number of threats to the legal market, not least the removing of barriers to entry for new entrants into the market. Reforms were introduced to allow non-qualified individuals and businesses to own and run law firms, and there was much speculation about which particular entities would take the lawyers on, in the brave new world. 'Tesco-law' became a bi-word for what were to be our new challengers. Deep-pocketed consolidators with excellent IT and existing databases of clients apparently threatening to take our clients through greater efficiencies, more consistent service delivery and lower prices.

It was in response to this threat that we invited everyone at the firm to get involved in a consultation on how we might best deal with the challenges. The result was to be referred to as 'The Leeds Law Firm' strategy. It seemed the one thing that, despite our disparate areas of work, we all had in common was Leeds. Whether we were involved in criminal work, drafting a will, completing a commercial property transaction or advising on a family dispute, we were all acting for people from in or around Leeds. Tesco's could be many things, but could never develop a truly local identity.

In 2010 the strategy of 'The Leeds Law Firm' was launched. At the time the firm had 4 offices, acted for around 5000 new clients a year (most but not all local) and had a turnover of around £5m. The strategy recognised that to survive we needed to grow in size, breadth and profile whilst taking advantage of being local and accessible.

To be The Leeds Law Firm we recognised that...

- Size mattered – we needed to be large enough to carry the mantle of being 'The Leeds Law Firm'.
- Breadth mattered – we needed to offer a broad range of services to meet the needs of those living and working in Leeds.
- Location mattered - we needed to be accessible, visible and rooted in the local communities in and around Leeds.

As a firm we became focussed on identifying potential areas in and around Leeds within which we might open a new office and attract new clients. We looked out for new areas of law to advise upon so that we could broaden our offering. Each time we grew a little we looked for ways in which we could take advantage of increased economies of scale to further improve efficiencies, competitiveness, and profitability.

Funding growth through cashflow whilst paying down the firm's indebtedness to banks and lenders was never going to be easy and that may explain why so few firms across the country adopted a similar strategy. However, such an approach exemplifies good business practice, and it didn't take long before we discovered that the strategy was not only a good one for growth but was also good for cashflow.

This is what we discovered each time we opened a new office:

- Each new office was able to perform well enough to cover the costs of the initial outlay and running costs by the end of year 1 and moved into profitability by year 2.
- Each new office created a sense of excitement and confidence for those working at the firm, and positive publicity to those who might have been attracted to apply for a role with us. Retention and recruitment of staff both became easier. Opening offices was positive news.
- Each new office provided an opportunity for someone within the firm to be promoted to Branch Manager. Career progression became easier to achieve.
- We not only became better at identifying opportunities, but also became more efficient at the logistics of fitting out and opening a new office.
- A number of smaller firms approached us to enquire about the possibility of being acquired and we were able to agree terms with several.
- Each office attracted new clients with each shop sign acting as an interactive billboard for potential clients to enquire whether we could help them.
- As the firm's profile and visibility increased in and around Leeds so did its online profile. Trading as 'The Leeds Law Firm' gave us an online credibility which was supported by our offline activity in opening branches where people searching for us tended to live or relate to. Potential clients saw how large we were, how accessible we were and what a broad offering of services we provided.

Regional Growth

2018-2023 : The Yorkshire Law Firm

After 8 years of running The Leeds Law Firm strategy the firm had increased the number of offices in the region from 4 to 12, doubling turnover in the process to £10m. We now acted for over 15,000 clients a year.

The focus, energy, simplicity and discipline of the strategy had served the firm well but was starting to show limitations. Some of the newer offices (Huddersfield, Castleford and Pontefract) didn't benefit from the association with Leeds and it was becoming increasingly apparent that we may have outgrown the strategy.

After much consultation we elected to take on the challenge of becoming 'The Yorkshire Law Firm'. Being 'The Leeds Law Firm' had clearly been a good move for us and there were obvious risks in moving away from something that had been successful. However, given its limitations we felt that the risks were outweighed by the advantages. Something had to change if we were to continue to grow.

- As a brand 'Yorkshire' is a very strong one and we intended to benefit from it. Yorkshire people are often seen as 'straight forward', 'no nonsense', 'honest', 'grounded' and 'careful with their money'. These are our values and it made sense to wear the Yorkshire badge with pride.
- Yorkshire is a very big County with a large population. There are more people in Yorkshire than in Scotland and the County won more medals at the 2012 Olympics than Australia or Canada! There would be plenty more clients for us to act for. The move could encourage significant growth.
- The Yorkshire Law Firm would be more attractive to clients living outside the county than The Leeds Law Firm would. Again, size mattered.

Marketing campaigns helped raise the firm's new profile, new offices became easier to open and establish and we enjoyed greater economies of scale each time one opened. Internal systems became more sophisticated, and it became easier to recruit and retain staff through an increase in energy and optimism around the firm.

By the end of 2022 the firm's turnover hit £20m generated by 240 members of staff working across 17 offices. The strategy had been a success.

In October 2022 the firm was awarded Law Firm of the Year (medium size) at the 2022 Yorkshire Legal Awards.

An Employee Owned Business

2022 : Conversion to an EOT

On 1 January 2022 we became the 10th law firm in the Country to become an Employee Owned Business and one of only three to be 100% employee owned.

The firm is now owned by a Trust which requires the business to be run ethically, for the benefit of all employees and in a way that delivers a breadth and level of service that is second to none.

As one of the first 100% Employee-Owned Law firms in the Country we have a genuine point of difference in a competitive market and we intend to maximise the advantages that being employee owned brings. As an Employee Owned Business we have found that we have already benefitted from greater innovation, improved performance, together with greater employee engagement, loyalty and commitment. Converting to an Employee Owned Business has been a great move for everyone at the firm.



The Ison Harrison Way

Our Mantra

ALWAYS CHANGING, ALWAYS IMPROVING

Continued success and growth will not just be achieved through honest endeavour, strong management, strategic planning or a commitment to client care. The firm must continue to take pride in its ability to adapt, change and innovate. Changes should be clear but flexible and always embraced with speed, positivity and enthusiasm.

Our Purpose

WHATEVER YOU NEED, WHENEVER AND WHEREVER YOU NEED IT

Ison Harrison is a 100% employee-owned law firm putting our people and clients at the heart of what we do.

We always provide a professional, expert service with a friendly approach that you can trust.

We offer the widest range of legal services delivered via our growing network of branch offices to both individuals and businesses from Yorkshire and beyond.

Our Mission

We are committed to creating a large, accessible, energetic and successful law firm that puts our people and our clients at the heart of everything we do.

As a law firm we aim to offer the widest range of legal services across the greatest number of locations across Yorkshire at a fair price. Our diverse range of services means that we are always there for clients at key points in their lives, helping them move home, overcoming family problems, resolving disputes, attending court, bringing a claim, preparing for old age or dealing with losing a loved one.

We are local, friendly, affordable, consistent and supportive. We pride ourselves on taking the time to listen and understand what matters most to people, so that we can provide straightforward, and practical advice to help them achieve the right result, whatever their circumstances.

We are a 100% employee-owned business. Everyone at the firm is recognised for the contribution they make to the firm's success, and as stakeholders in the firm are directly invested in its success and future.

Our Ison-8 Values

Hover over each value for further information.



A Leading Regional Law Firm

Our 5 Year Plan 2023 – 2028



Our Position of Advantage

We start the next 5 years in a better financial, cultural and strategic position than the firm has ever been in. However, in order to take advantage of our relative strengths and weaknesses we need to understand them and put them in the context of an ever-changing legal market.

Understanding our position of advantage

Cultural

We have strong, clear and universally accepted values. The values that have developed over the course of the past 20 years are now so engrained within those who work at the firm that recruitment, retention, supervision and accountability are one of the firm's key strengths.

Regional dominance

We have a strong, clear and well-respected profile across Yorkshire and beyond. With a turnover of £20m and headcount of 250 across 17 offices we are one of the pre-eminent general practice law firms in the County. This level of regional dominance brings with it a level of credibility that attracts new clients and colleagues new alike.

Economies of scale

We have become a large high street law firm with multiple branch offices dotted around Yorkshire. Compared to the vast majority of our competitors we are now able to leverage economies of scale in a way that is unattainable to them. All of our HR, accounts, IT, regulatory, marketing and business support functions are carried out centrally and as a result we have seen that we can service more clients and deliver a higher level of fee-income and profit than our competitors. Economies of scale is a huge advantage.

Breadth of service

We continue to be the broadest offering of legal services in the County. Whether it be publicly funded criminal or care work, privately funded family or conveyancing work, conditional fee funded personal injury work or company funded commercial work we offer more services than any other firm in the County. This strength in breadth is a huge advantage for the firm's profile and cashflow.

Financial position

We are in an enviable financial position which means that we are able to invest for further growth through cash reserves. We have a track record of success and growth which lends a credibility to attracting new clients and colleagues. We do not rely upon any bank funding, overdrafts, loans or other credit arrangements.

EOB structure

As a 100% Employee Owned Business ,we are rare and therefore have a very clear and defined point of difference. Clients and colleagues are attracted to the fact that we are an EOB, and it has proved to be a real strength of the firm.

Maximising our position of advantage

Keeping the momentum going – the Yorkshire Law Firm business model.

We have a business model that works, which demonstrates ambition and growth and is understood and accepted by all within the firm. Further growth through developing the firm's brilliant branch network further is integral to maintaining momentum.

New geographical markets

Yorkshire is very large with over 5 million residents and we have yet to establish ourselves in many of the major towns and cities in the County. As The Yorkshire Law Firm we should use our position of advantage to grow into those areas where we don't have a presence (Sheffield, South Yorkshire, Bradford, North Yorkshire etc) and secure access to a whole new market of potential clients and colleagues.

New legal services

Whilst we offer the broadest range of services in the County our familiarity with legal aid, conditional fee work, privately paying work and commercial work puts us in a position of advantage in terms of bolting on new departments offering new areas of law.

Acquisition of other practices

The firm is in a strong position to be able to acquire smaller practices so as to increase short term turnover and long-term security and profitability to the benefit of both parties. Many at the firm now have experience in helping to acquire and integrate smaller practices into the firm and as such opportunities to grow through acquisition should always be considered.

Financial performance

If successful in maximising our position of advantage we shall increase our turnover further, leverage economies of scale and deliver an even better financial performance for all eligible employees in the firm.



Our Ambitions

The target in the firm's last 5 year business plan was to try and achieve an increase in turnover from £12m in 2018 to £15m by 2022.

In the event 2022 was to be the firm's first year trading as an E.O.B. and proved to be a very strong one in terms of financial performance with turnover hitting 20m.

No reference was made to profitability in the last 5 year Business Plan but as an EOB it is important that we all know what our financial ambitions are and so profitability will be addressed in this plan.

We obviously want to continue to grow in size and breadth but what will further growth actually look like? What are our ambitions?

1. To become the largest multi-site high street firm in Yorkshire

Biggest is not always best, but growing a large regional business through cashflow has already delivered great benefits and The Yorkshire Law Firm model has plenty of further growth in it yet.

Further growth over the period of this 5-year business plan will look like:

- Largest by turnover : **£28 million by 2028**
- Largest by number of branches : **25 by 2028**
- Largest number of new clients : **28,000 per year by 2028**
- Largest by profitability : **maintain a minimum profit margin of 25%**
- Largest by accreditations : highest number of Law Society accreditations of any firm in Yorkshire – **15 by 2028**
- Largest by offering : Broadest offering of legal services

2. To be best law firm to work for in Yorkshire

We are already a super firm to work for but how do we continue to change and improve as employers?

- To encourage and allow Trustees to drive the HR agenda
- To feature in 'The Times Best Places to Work' in the next 5 years
- To feature as a winner of an E.O.A. award
- Improve recruitment and retention of staff
- Improve staff engagement
- Improve encouragement and supervision from managers aligned with transparent career pathways for all
- Maintain high levels of individual profit share (2022 was so good that all eligible employees received a tax free profit distribution share of £3,600 before the year concluded.)

3. To deliver the best quality of advice and service in Yorkshire

Over the past 15 years we have successfully managed to compete with our competitors through culture, breadth of service, a good business model, re-investment of retained profits and economies of scale. Whilst we deliver a very good and consistent service we have never competed in terms of service delivery whether it be quality, service or price and with the emergence of remote legal services, AI etc. this is likely the next battleground for law firms to compete in. A focus for the next 5 years will be to deliver the best quality of advice and service of any legal services provider in Yorkshire.

- New enquires must be dealt with immediately, politely and efficiently
- We must give equal weight to providing the best quality of advice as well as the best quality of service
- Triaging of enquiries must be fast and effective
- Cross referrals must be fast and effective
- A brilliant branch network needs to deliver a service that is:
 - Local
 - Accessible
 - Consistent
 - Broad - full range of services
 - Friendly
 - Value for money
 - Efficient
- **Clients want to be understood.**
We aim to ensure that we know our clients. We need to understand their circumstances, understand what their concerns are, and understand what they want to achieve.

- **Clients want an element of certainty.**
We cannot deliver certainty of outcome or timing etc. We can however ensure that we explain and stick to timetables and case plans, agree fixed fees and costs estimates.
- **Clients expect accessibility.**
We aim to be accessible for clients communicating with them face to face, by telephone, letter, e-mail, portal, or however else they wish. We shall use accessible language.
- **Clients expect great communication.**
We want to be known as the firm that always returns client's calls and e-mails, great at managing a client's expectations, and always keeping their clients up to date.
- **Clients expect knowledge and experience.**
The firm is committed to be market leaders as far as the quality of advice and service that it provides to clients.
- **Clients expect a quick service.**
Speed of response matters. We shall promptly return calls and reply to correspondence.
- **Clients expect a value for money service.**
Our charges shall be fair, transparent and competitive.
- **Clients expect courtesy and respect.**
Everyone does.
- **Clients expect a consistency.**
Reputations are built on consistency. The firm is committed to consistency in the quality of advice and service that it provides to clients irrespective of whom they deal with or which department or office is involved.

4. To have outstanding IT, data management and support

“It’s the data stupid!”

Legal service businesses deal in the handling of people, knowledge, money and data and the interaction between all four elements. The way in which we handle our clients’ data and operate our IT systems is both the greatest challenge as well as the greatest opportunity that the firm faces.

Challenges

- **Cyber threats**
 - Impact upon the ability for one or more people to be able to continue to work
 - Impact upon service delivery and performance
 - Impact upon financial performance
 - Impact upon access to client and office funds
 - Data protection breaches
 - Damage to the firm’s brand and reputation
- **Negligent / poorly supervised work**
 - Impact upon claim payments
 - Impact upon future insurance premiums
 - Impact upon reputation
 - Impact upon attracting further clients and referrals
 - Impact upon recruitment and retention
 - Impact upon regulatory breaches
- **AI**
 - Impact upon demand for and financial viability of continuing to undertake work of a particular kind
 - Impact upon necessary skill sets within the firm
 - Impact upon recruitment and retention

Opportunities

All the opportunities that arise for the firm with regards to IT and data management relate to the relative size and economies of scale that can be leveraged as compared to many of our competitors.

- **Case management system**
Install and develop a better case management system than our competitors.
- **Supervision**
Ensure sophisticated supervision and authorisation levels across the firm assisted by IT.
- **Cyber threat**
Ensure that cyber risks are minimised through strong security software, strong data management policies, adequate resources and cloud based storage etc.
- **IT performance**
Ensure downtime is minimised through adequate hardware, software, procedures and resources.
- **Ongoing data management**
Maximise opportunities to keep in contact with our clients and ensure the efficient storage and subsequent destruction of their data.
- **AI**
Ensure that our systems are 'AI' ready.
- **Confidence**
Embrace the concept of 'we don't know what we don't know' and be constantly looking for ways to improve our offering and service to clients.

Conclusions

We used to be focused on Leeds, now our focus is Yorkshire. We want to be best of breed; the biggest multi-site law firm in the County offering the broadest offering, a better service than anyone else and of course be the best law firm to work for.

There will be three key aspects that are likely to determine how successful we are in achieving our ambitions and in each case, we need to do so, better than our competitors. Our focus must be on....

- The quality of service that we deliver
- The way in which we engage and treat our colleagues
- The way that we manage and handle client data

How will we quantify success?

We want to achieve increases in branches, turnover and profitability. We want to deliver strong and consistent profit distributions and we want to win awards, but never in a way that compromises our values.

Greater levels of employee engagement can help drive an improved client experience and inevitably result in increased level of profit to the firm.

Our next chapter will involve a collective drive to improve our levels of customer service that we deliver, staff engagement and data management. We shall not only look to increase the depth and breadth of the firm through the opening of new offices in the region, but with the assistance of IT, we will also strive to deliver higher and higher levels of service in each of those areas where we specialise. Our commitment and enthusiasm to look for ways to improve upon the services that we offer will ensure that the firm is well placed to meet the opportunities and challenges facing the legal services sector in the years ahead.

As always, we will need to continue to live by our mantra which has served us so well ...**Always Changing – Always Improving.**

Appendix 1:

Our Operating Structure

Ison Harrison Employee Ownership Trust

100% of the shares in Ison Harrison Limited are owned by Ison Harrison Employee Ownership Trust which owns the shares for the benefit of all eligible employees.

Trustees

The stewardship of the Employee ownership Trust comes under a Board of Trustees, currently:

Jonathan Wearing : Founding Director and Managing Director
Dominic Mackenzie : Founding Director
Sarah Laughey : Director
Robert Camp : Independent Trustee
Rebecca Austin : Employee Representative Trustee
David Lynas : Employee Representative Trustee

The names of the Trustees are reviewed annually.

Ison Harrison Limited

The firm is run by a Board of Directors appointed by the Trustees, currently:

Jonathan Wearing (Managing Director)
Dominic Mackenzie
Richard Coulthard
Sarah Laughey
Jenny Bland
Gareth Naylor
James Thompson

The Yorkshire Law Firm is a trading name of Ison Harrison Limited.




Senior Management Team, Department Heads and Branch Managers

There are over 30 individuals in the firm who are either Department Heads or Branch Managers and together they sit on the firm's Senior Management Team.


Partners and Associates

The Board of Directors recognises and promotes key individuals to Partner or Associate status by reference to criteria which is reviewed and published annually on the firm's intranet.



Branch Network

The firm operates a hub and spokes model for its 17 offices. Duke House in Leeds is the hub where all central service functions are delivered (accounts, IT, HT, marketing, business support etc) and each of the branch offices delivers legal services, currently including residential conveyancing, family law and wills and probate services. All other work is directed towards the relevant departments based in Leeds.



Regulatory information

The firm, all Trustees and Directors are approved and authorised by the SRA. Jonathan Wearing is both the firm's Compliance Officer for Legal Practice as well as Compliance Officer for Financial Administration.

The firm is regulated by the SRA (SRA ID 484936), is Lexcel accredited and has 11 Law Society accreditations.

Appendix 2: Growth Timeline

1978 – 2023

