

# LEGAL SECTOR ALLIANCE DISCUSSION PAPER

## REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Prepared by

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Having taken steps to measure its collective carbon footprint, the next stage for the Legal Sector Alliance to consider is how we reduce that footprint and our overall environmental impact. This paper focuses on looking at the big picture – how can we as a profession change the way that we do business to reduce our environmental impact? However, a number of the ideas can be taken up by individual firms as well as collectively.
- 1.2. This paper does not focus on quick wins – these have already been collated and are available on [www.legalsectoralliance.com/getinvolved/quickwins](http://www.legalsectoralliance.com/getinvolved/quickwins). The key challenge is to move beyond these to devise a broader and well thought out strategy of which the quick wins form just a part, so that firms are discouraged from thinking that adoption of quick wins is all that is required.
- 1.3. The following ideas are aimed at the profession as a whole in terms of how it conducts its business, and if implemented will assist in producing a marked reduction in the sector's existing carbon footprint. A number of ideas are designed to support smaller firms in reducing their footprint through collaboration and collective bargaining. An emphasis upon the concept of sustainability in business should be stressed and the language of sustainability adopted as centrally as the carbon footprint.
- 1.4. The ideas are concentrated on the three main areas where the legal sector's effect on the environment is arguably the greatest - energy usage in buildings, business travel and paper/resource usage. This is deliberately wider in scope than the initial footprint scoping agreed by the LSA.
- 1.5. Reference is also made to the opportunities for embedding environmental good practice down the supply chain, which is something to be covered in more depth in the next Taskforce meeting.
- 1.6. A key way of reducing impact requires the engagement of employees. Therefore, we have included some thoughts around employee engagement, but this will be developed more comprehensively during the group discussions that follow.
- 1.7. At the end of the paper there are some questions. It would be helpful if you could come to the meeting prepared to share your thoughts on those questions.

### 2. Reducing environmental impact across the legal sector

#### 2.1. Energy use

- 2.1.1. Support might be sought from say the Law Society to implement a scheme of bulk purchasing across the profession for green energy and energy efficient products and services. This may be particularly attractive to smaller and

medium-sized law firms. A similar proposal is made below in relation to the purchase of recycled paper stock.

- 2.1.2. The LSA on behalf of the profession might lobby/influence commercial landlords, especially institutional investors, from a PR and CSR perspective to explore the greater use of green energy sources and encourage energy efficiency measures in common areas. This might be by the promotion of “green leases”, requiring tenants (inter alia) to devise, implement and monitor sustainability plans for their building.
- 2.1.3. As tenants themselves, firms might get together with co-tenants in their building and jointly develop energy efficiency plans as well as encourage landlords to adopt a “green” approach as described above..
- 2.1.4. The voluntary disclosure of energy efficiency of buildings and energy usage might help drive supply chain pressures for commercial landlords/financial institutions to build and convert office developments with a view to maximum energy efficiency.
- 2.1.5. Law firms may be able to work with and/or influence energy suppliers and providers of energy services. Are there any joint initiatives where the LSA or member firms could work with such companies on a cooperative basis? Can the LSA or member firms exert any influence on such companies which are clients?

## **2.2. Business travel**

- 2.2.1. Firms should be encouraged to analyse their operations and seek to reduce business travel wherever possible. This might be done by addressing particular stakeholders in turn. For example:
  - the bar - a joint protocol could be established to encourage video conferencing in place of face-to-face conferences with counsel
  - other professions - a similar approach might be taken with other professionals such as accountants, surveyors etc
  - clients - many clients are already alive to green issues and may be sympathetic to moves to reduce meetings, especially where they can be persuaded that meetings at their behest will contribute to their own carbon footprint. There may be an opportunity for the profession as a whole to encourage the larger plcs to begin including their lawyer’s business travel in their own footprints for their own reporting purposes.
- 2.2.2. Reduction in business travel is of course dependent to a very large degree on increased use of video conferencing/webcam/internet meetings, There may be a role here for the LSA in highlighting the technology options - including for example Skype and the free/cheap methods of online communication, as well as the state-of-the-art equipment and facilities - and providing firms (especially the small firms) with tools/guides for installation and use.
- 2.2.3. The profession as a whole could seek technological improvement. To support this, local law societies or barrister’s chambers could be encouraged to provide video conferencing facilities for the smaller high street firms.

- 2.2.4. A factor that may influence indirect impact of travel would be to encourage home-working by staff.
- 2.2.5. Greater use of on-line legal training would reduce travel for attending CPD courses in London and regional centres.
- 2.2.6. Firms should be encouraged to monitor business travel closely. The most “sustainable” form of travel should be encouraged whilst balancing job requirements. Firms should be provided with support and guidance to enable the adoption of centralised systems of travel recording to enable accurate monitoring of the impact of business travel on the firm’s carbon footprint.
- 2.2.7. Air travel is recognised as the biggest and most insoluble problem by environmental organisations, given that there is currently no technology alternative to carbon fuels for air transport. Because of the relative high environmental impact caused by air travel compared with most other aspects of a law firm’s business, and the predicted growth in air travel, there is a distinct danger that lack of progress in this area will completely overshadow progress made in other areas.
- 2.2.8. Moreover, for smaller firms to be persuaded to engage in the work of the LSA, some demonstrably effective measures to reduce air travel will need to be shown by those firms who have frequent flyers, so that those smaller firms do not feel that the relatively modest tangible benefits which they might achieve will be eclipsed. Realistically, firms cannot of course eliminate air travel altogether, but they should try and encourage staff to consider alternatives, especially for domestic flights. One measure would be for the LSA to adopt the ideas for example of pledging to reduce flights (see [www.lowflyzone.org](http://www.lowflyzone.org) for ideas). Introducing pledges to reduce flights (and indeed other practices) is relatively easy to do and concentrates only on positives in terms of reductions of harmful behaviour.
- 2.2.9. Law firms should be encouraged to draft and adopt, in consultation with staff, a voluntary “Green Travel Plan” (borrowed from the planning system) that includes business travel and employee travel patterns. By way of example, a number of Government departments have their own internal “green travel plans”.
- 2.2.10. Each plan could seek to encourage responsible and sustainable patterns of travel, reductions in business travel and alternative mechanisms to cater for client needs. The plan could also encourage staff to reduce the need for travel by car and to swap to public transport. There could also be a financial incentive allied to this by providing staff with interest-free yearly public transport travel schemes. The travel plan could also encourage certain forms of home working and car sharing schemes with employees. Firms could also provide specific facilities for cyclists including cycle racks, changing room and shower facilities, etc.
- 2.2.11. Specific staff incentives could be built into the plan to encourage a more environmentally responsible travel pattern. This could include financial rewards and bonuses together with extra time off.
- 2.2.12. As part of any “Green Travel Plan” a firm may seek to adopt optional targets in terms of reducing its direct and indirect carbon impacts.

### **2.3. Paper/resource usage**

- 2.3.1. The reduction in consumption of paper is an important step towards sustainability, and the profession as a whole should continue to drive/promote innovation and encourage a paperless office. Greater use of electronic files is an obvious measure, but the profession might also consider whether there are any legal implications for the storage of electronic files and the need for a paper file to be held for limitation purposes.
- 2.3.2. Allied to this would be encouragement to reduce the need for printing and the use of double sided printing and smaller fonts, included in the quick wins.
- 2.3.3. Firms could influence a reduction in their indirect use of paper by encouraging service providers to the sector (eg course providers) to minimise junk mail.
- 2.3.4. Greater use of recycled paper should be encouraged. Support could be sought from the Law Society to implement a scheme of bulk purchasing across the profession for recycled paper stocks. This may be particularly attractive to smaller and medium-sized law firms.

## **2.4. Embedding good practice**

- 2.4.1 Whilst we have focused thus far on strategies for reducing impact, it is important to consider the issue of how to embed the concept of sustainability into good business practice. We recognise that this will be covered more comprehensively in future meetings, but here are some initial thoughts.
- 2.4.2 Ideas for future discussion include devising “approved product/supplier” lists, possibly using the LSA website, and thinking more carefully (ie in sustainability context) about firms’ marketing and hospitality activities. .

## **3. Strategies for Employee Engagement**

- 3.1. Firms should have a specific environmental policy in place which deals with the firms approach to its carbon footprint and its efforts to act in an environmentally responsible manner in terms of its business operations. Staff should be encouraged to “buy into” the environmental policy by helping to shape and develop it in the first place. There is an increased sense of public responsibility and a perception that everyone should be doing their “bit” to reduce carbon footprint and hence slow down climate change. There may well be a “feel good factor” in terms of staff appreciation of working for a firm that acts in an environmentally responsible manner.
- 3.2. It is important that senior executives/partners understand and buy into the policies and are educated about them to the extent that they take the policies on board and lead by example. The policies need to be real and lead to permanent cultural change within an organisation rather than adopted for presentational reasons. Senior staff who ‘talk the talk’ on these matters will be found out (and the policies undermined) if they don’t also ‘walk the walk’.
- 3.3. Prospective new employees/graduates may determine and identify firms of choice that they apply to based on a firm’s green credentials. Therefore the legal market place may indirectly drive this approach.
- 3.4. Firms should carry out a consultation exercise with staff, seeking and encouraging input into the process. This can be done in ways to maximise employee engagement. Suggestions include that firms set up initial meetings seeking volunteers for an environmental taskforce, to stimulate ideas and implement them. A

green office board or newsletter, suggestion box, intranet discussion forum etc could all be implemented. An empowered culture should be developed where employees routinely come up with ideas that are then implemented (requiring top level support) Firms should be transparent in terms of the exercise and seek to act on the representations received.

- 3.5. Indeed the representations and ideas stimulated should be monitored and publicised. The likelihood is that initial ideas will be of the quick win variety but this does not make them less valid. For example, firms could set themselves measurable targets of how much paper is saved, how many ink cartridges recycled etc.
- 3.6. A firm should encourage employees to buy into the firm's travel scheme and the more specific policies which may be set out in a firm's Green Travel Plan. Firms should also consider writing into all job descriptions the need to behave sustainably and with regard to carbon footprint, and to specifically reward those who hit carbon footprint/sustainability targets as well as billable hours targets.
- 3.7. To encourage staff involvement a firm should consider appointing a specific team made up of partners, other legal staff and administrative personnel with a view to encouraging input into the firm's overall environmental policy. As part of this process employees could be specifically rewarded for what are seen to be contributing actions taken to reduce the firm's carbon footprint and their own individual contribution
- 3.8. In the above ways, firms could strive to develop a culture of good sustainability practice where employees routinely come up with ideas to improve performance and it becomes a natural part of the firms operations.

#### **4. How to take forward**

It is suggested that, following discussion at the meeting, Taskforce members come to some degree of consensus over, say, 5 key actions/measures which are considered to be:

- achievable,
- capable of making a significant, and measurable, impact, and
- of relevance to the sector as a whole.

For each measure, next steps will ideally be identified, and where appropriate a measurement tool specified to enable the level of impact to be assessed.

#### **Questions**

1. Are we looking at the right areas for collective action as a sector?
2. How will we know that we have reduced our collective impact – are there collective indicators we need to put in place now?
3. Do we need to set a collective target in any area, as well as encouraging the use of voluntary pledges
4. Can we develop measures that contribute to sustainability ie. to indicate improvement, not just collect data?

5. What output/guidance do we want to produce as a result of these discussions?