



The Law Society
of Northern Ireland

Sustainability Strategy

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Foreword

As Chair of the Climate Justice Group, I am delighted to introduce the Law Society of Northern Ireland's first ever Sustainability Strategy.

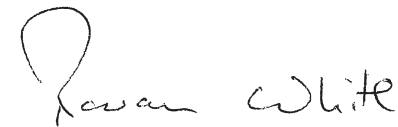
Colleagues will be aware that the Society established a Climate Justice Group in early 2022 to take pro-active steps to address climate change issues affecting the solicitor profession in Northern Ireland, and to promote and enhance the role of solicitors in tackling climate change.

Since its establishment, I am pleased to say the Group has undertaken a range of important initiatives. We published a Climate Change Resolution in October 2022, with two key strands – the first focuses on the Society's commitments in relation to climate change, and the second encourages solicitors to make changes and act in a climate conscious manner.

To build on and deliver the commitments contained within the Resolution, the Group engaged the expertise of KPMG's ESG team to develop a Sustainability Strategy. The Strategy is set out in this document and is intended to be a roadmap towards a more sustainable future. It outlines how the Society aims to take steps to reduce its environmental impact and how it endeavours to support members in doing the same. I would like to express my gratitude to KPMG's team, members of the Group and Society staff who provided invaluable help in shaping the Strategy.

I recognise that we are all busy professionals, with growing pressures, and that climate change issues may not be top of your priority list. This is why the Strategy is designed in a practical way so that it is relevant and accessible to all, whether you are a sole practitioner, in-house solicitor, corporate lawyer, or anyone in-between.

As we embark on this journey towards sustainability, I would urge colleagues to review the Strategy and get involved in the Society's efforts so that it becomes more than just words on a page and is implemented into achieving real and meaningful change. While the path ahead will be a challenging one, we can make a difference together, one sustainable step at a time.



Rowan White
Chair of the Climate Justice Group

Introduction

Global greenhouse gas emissions, which are responsible for rising temperatures globally, increased by 43% from 1990 to 2015.¹ Governments and organisations have been developing legislation and policy reforms over the years to help ensure that sustainability is at the forefront of operations.



Legislative background:

The United Kingdom (UK) Government passed its Climate Change Act in 2008, with the goal now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 100% of 1990 levels by 2050.

In 2016, the UK and Irish Governments ratified the Paris Agreement, which sets the target of holding the increase of global warming below 2°C.

The Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act in 2022. It sets the goal of reducing emissions by 100% by 2050 but does not require a level of methane emissions reduction of more than 46% by 2050. The Act also establishes an independent Climate Commissioner for NI, the Just Transition Commission, and the Just Transition Fund for Agriculture, and commits Government Departments to set sectoral plans on how to reduce emissions.

Climate change and the solicitor profession:

Climate change is likely to be relevant to almost all solicitors in different ways. Some solicitors will have a personal interest in climate change issues and may feel driven to make changes to reduce their business' environmental footprint. Some will see climate and environmental legal issues as an exciting professional opportunity. Others may simply decide that they don't see this as an important issue in their professional lives.

With laws and regulations now enacted across the world, solicitors will have a growing role to play in navigating these evolving frameworks in their own right and for their clients. The area of climate change also cuts across many aspects of a solicitor's role, including upholding the Rule of Law and enabling Access to Justice. Solicitors are often at the forefront of positive social change and there is an opportunity to shape and influence policy and legislative developments on climate related matters.

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-global-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

Moreover, there are important business and economic factors for solicitors to consider. Businesses across Northern Ireland have already begun taking steps to commit to reducing emissions across their operations, and this includes ensuring that those they do business with also have sustainable operations, which will have a direct impact on solicitors. Furthermore, as climate change leads to more frequent and severe weather events, this poses risks to businesses, so it is important for mitigations to be put in place to deal with these impacts to maintain services and protect their business continuity.

The Law Society of Northern Ireland has an important leadership role on these issues, in terms of helping the solicitor profession prepare for and adapt to the risks and opportunities that climate change brings and also to represent the profession's interests with external stakeholders. It is essential for the legal profession to understand the challenges ahead, to be prepared to grasp the opportunities and to be ready to support clients, businesses, and wider society in tackling the climate change crisis.

The Strategy:

The overarching purpose of the Sustainability Strategy is to set out a roadmap towards developing sustainability both within the Society itself and across its membership.

The Strategy identifies actions that the Society will take to directly reduce its environmental impact. In leading by example, the Society will share its learnings in the hope to inspire and support our members to take action towards a sustainable future. The Society hopes to begin delivering positive change through a series of short-, medium- and long-term goals.

The Strategy has been developed with expert input from within and outside of the solicitor profession and has been informed by a benchmarking exercise with other Law Societies on these islands and further afield. There was recognition of the ranging needs of businesses from sole practitioners, rural practices, larger firms, and those across different sectors. The aim, therefore, was to ensure initiatives will be accessible and applicable to all firms, regardless of their size and resources.

The Strategy itself consists of 24 actions across the 4 major themes.



Sustainable Workplace



Stakeholder Engagement



Training and Development



Climate Justice

Further details on what each of these themes involve are set out in the remainder of this document.



Sustainable Workplace

In line with enacting positive change, the Society is committed to taking action to create a sustainable workplace at Law Society House through a series of initiatives targeted at its operations. It hopes to then use this learning and experience to support members to take action to work more sustainably and embed changes within their own practices.

• SHORT TERM GOALS

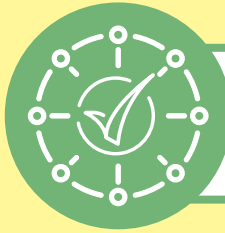
- Communicate sustainability initiatives to employees
- Explore additional sustainable workplace initiatives

• MEDIUM-TERM GOALS

- Reduce energy demand across Law Society operations
- Develop a carbon management plan to manage, monitor, and disclose Law Society's Scope 1, 2, and 3 carbon emissions
- Develop waste management plan to enable measurement, reporting, and reduction of waste across the Law Society's operations
- Raise awareness on alternative pension scheme investments, promoting and supporting the sustainability agenda
- Review PII providers' ESG credentials at time of renewal
- Reflecting on Law Society initiatives, encourage members to take actions appropriate to their businesses

• LONG-TERM GOALS

- Work towards implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) for UK reporting requirements
- Define and report progress against time-bound science-based GHG emissions targets that are in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement
- Develop a climate risk assessment and management strategy



Stakeholder Engagement

As the voice of the solicitor profession in Northern Ireland, the Society will develop links and work pro-actively with key stakeholders to promote members' interests on climate related issues. The following goals will help strengthen continuous and structured communication and collaboration with stakeholders on sustainability matters.

- **SHORT TERM GOALS**
- Establish a structured approach to stakeholder engagement on sustainability-related activities within the Law Society
- Communicate Law Society climate ambition and role

- **MEDIUM-TERM GOALS**
- Develop and publish guidance with practical advice on how member firms can action their own sustainability agendas, including case study example of a member firm successfully embedding sustainability into its operations and activities
- Identify and disclose material issues impacting stakeholders



Training and Development

As the Professional Body responsible for the training and ongoing professional development of solicitors in Northern Ireland, we hope to equip our members and teams with the skills, knowledge, and tools they need to drive the climate agenda and tackle issues in their work and everyday activities.

- **MEDIUM-TERM GOALS**

- Develop, deliver, track, and report internal sustainability training on Law Society initiatives to ensure a base level of knowledge across the Society
- Work with educational institutions to explore the possibility of expanding law degree modules to include (additional) sustainability/climate-related modules/electives

- **LONG-TERM GOALS**

- Develop and deliver external educational trainings outlining the role of a solicitor in the climate change agenda



Climate Justice

We are seeking to empower our members to deal with and promote climate justice matters. The Society regularly plays a role in influencing policy and legislative reform to best reflect the interests of members and the wider public, and by engaging in the same with climate change, the Society hopes to play its part in the development and shaping of policies and other related initiatives.

• SHORT-TERM GOALS

- Actively engage in relevant climate-related policy reform in the jurisdiction of NI, contributing to external meetings and consultation
- Ensure knowledge is shared with members on any legislative changes relating to sustainability/ climate change

• MEDIUM-TERM GOALS

- Provide guidance to members on the consideration of the climate crisis within their legal practices, whilst upholding professional duties and justice
- Actively encourage solicitors, law firms and organisations in NI to take a holistic and proactive approach to mitigating the climate crisis and promoting climate change adaptation
- Ensure up-to-date information is available to members on compliance requirements relating to climate change and wider sustainability

• LONG-TERM GOALS

- Develop sustainable professional pathways, including through appropriate guidance, for members to support and enable their clients to meet the challenges of climate change adaptation - in both law and practice - as and when they arise

Reporting

The Society is committed to the principles of transparency and accountability.

As outlined in the previous section, the actions in this Strategy will be commenced on a short-, medium-, and long-term basis. Short-term goals will be commenced within 6 months, medium-term goals will be commenced between 6-18 months, and long-term goals will be commenced 18+ months from the publication of this Strategy.

The Climate Justice Group will oversee the implementation of the Strategy and progress will be reviewed regularly. Regular updates will be provided internally to the Society's Future of the Profession Committee and Council.

Reports on the progress of delivering on the actions will be communicated regularly to members and stakeholders through the Society's usual communication platforms to ensure accountability and transparency.

The Strategy will remain under review and will be developed or adapted as and when needed.



Conclusion

The Law Society of Northern Ireland would like to thank KPMG and the members of the Climate Justice Group for their expertise, insight, and assistance in developing this Strategy.

Working sustainably is an essential element of mitigating and addressing climate change and every individual and organisation can play a positive role. By creating a sustainable workplace, engaging with stakeholders, delivering training and development, and promoting climate justice, meeting climate justice targets is achievable. It is hoped through taking these steps, there will be benefits for staff, members, clients, businesses and the wider public.

The solicitor profession will undoubtedly have a growing role in climate justice in the coming years with litigation and business opportunities increasing. The Society hopes that through this strategy it can continue to offer guidance and support to members in their endeavours.



THE LAW SOCIETY
OF NORTHERN IRELAND



100
YEARS

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