

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

March 2026

Issue 121



**Naylors:
New Brand. Broader Capability.**

business | community | technology | media | built environment | education | arts | leisure | health

northern-insight.co.uk



NationalRail.com

For bookings to and from North East England and trains all over Great Britain

- Advance and walk-up (on the day) tickets
- First and standard class
- Eco friendly trains
- Groups of up to nine, and all railcards accepted
- Split ticketing to maximise your savings all over England, Scotland and Wales

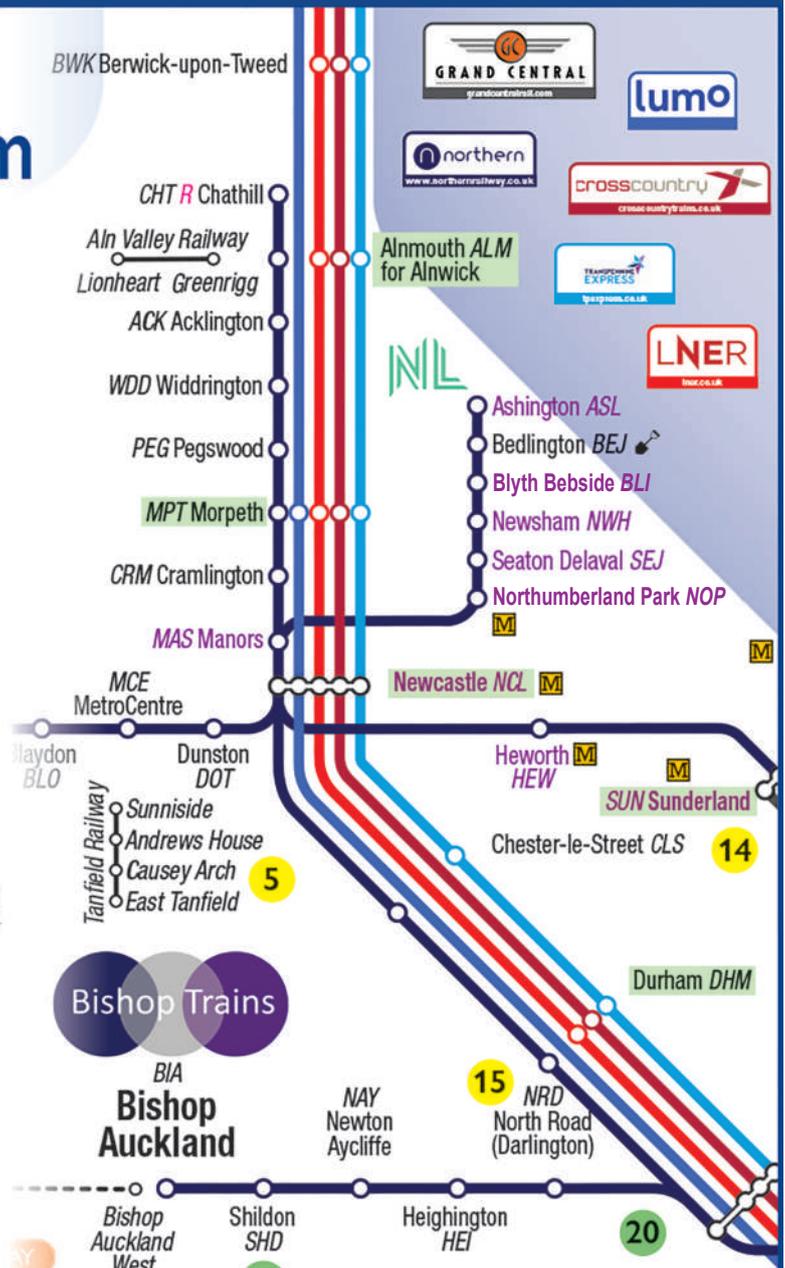


Our map is available for purchase at railmap.org.uk plus optional free pdf for personal use

Poster map for display is 63.5cm wide x 100cm deep

pdf only available for **£7.95** at railmap.org.uk

Alex Nelson (Ticket Guru)



We can advise on delay repay!



For help with bookings, email alex@nationalrail.com



NEWCASTLE
HIGH SCHOOL
FOR GIRLS

GDST
GIRLS' DAY SCHOOL TRUST

150
YEARS
OF NEXT GENERATION
TRAILBLAZERS

Girls First. Then. Now. For Good.

From the first classrooms for girls in 1876 to leading the way in girls' education today, we've been empowering the next generation for 150 years.

Whole School Open Week
Tuesday 10th – Friday 13th March

To book your visit, please register here newcastlehigh.gdst.net



we're



Yay! We've been going for six years. More to come.



Helping brands be less ordinary.



Credits

Managing Director

Michael Grahamslaw

Design

Lu O'Rourke

Accounts Manager

Lisa Grahamslaw

Front Cover

Supplied by Naylor's
Photography: Lee Dobson

Lead Photography

Crest Photography

Additional Photography

The Bigger Picture Agency

Editorial Contributors

Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw,
Graham Courtney, Alex Nelson,
David Fairlamb, Barry Speker

Social Media

Jordan Marston (JAM Marketing)

Cancellations

If an advert is cancelled by the booker within a 14 day period prior to our print deadline, the advert will be charged in full, with additional VAT.

Complaints

Any complaints regarding advertising will only be considered for up to a week after publication. No responsibility is accepted for error.

Editorial

No responsibility is accepted for drawings, photographs or literary contributions during transmission, or while in the Managing Director's or printer's hands. Editorial must be received by the 15th of the month or no responsibility is accepted for errors.

Advertisements

Although every care is taken to ensure accuracy the Publishers regret that they cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage caused by an error in the printing or damage to a loss of artwork. Complaints will only be considered for up to a week after publication. Advertising must be received by the 20th of the month. No responsibility is accepted for errors.

Advertising Charges

There is a £25 charge for every set of amendments, following the first initial set of amendments, which are free of charge, for adverts designed by Northern Insight (MJG Publishing Ltd).

Media Enquiries

Michael Grahamslaw
michael@northern-insight.co.uk

© 2026 Published by MJG Publishing Ltd
www.northern-insight.co.uk

Facebook: facebook.com/northerninsight

Twitter: @NInsightmag

Instagram: @northerninsightmagazine

LinkedIn: Northern Insight Magazine



Contents

- 8/9 Business News**
- 10/11 Cover Story**
Naylor's: New Brand. Broader Capability
- 12 Musings with Mirza**
Ammar Mirza CBE
- 16/19 Lumo**
The unseen work behind every safe journey
- 28/30 Legal and Accountancy News**
- 38/39 Marketing and Media Matters**
David Pritchard, Head of Business Development & Marketing, Sintons LLP
- 50 Straight Talk**
Barry Speker OBE
- 62 Charity & Community News**
- 64/65 Charity of the Month**
Impact Family Services
- 106 Technology News**
- 118/119 Media News**
- 142 The Built Environment News**
- 152 Education News**
- 164 Arts News**
- 168 Leisure News**
- 180/182 Health and Wellbeing News**



Foreword

Welcome to the March issue of Northern Insight

With light nights and Spring finally upon us we are proud to bring you another vibrant edition.

Our cover stars are North East Commercial Property Consultancy Naylor's Gavin Black who have unveiled a bold new chapter in their evolution.

Elsewhere we talk to David Hughes, Head of Safety, Security and Sustainability at Lumo and Hull Trains who explains what it takes to keep millions of journeys running smoothly.

On the social front look out for the Entrepreneurs Forum Founders Lunch and North Tyneside Business Forums first Breakfast Boost event of 2026.

We also go up a gear with our Health and Wellbeing section which features a plethora of sector news and new columnists.

We hope you enjoy this issue.




Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
michael@northern-insight.co.uk

Thank as you ever for your continued support. Till next month...

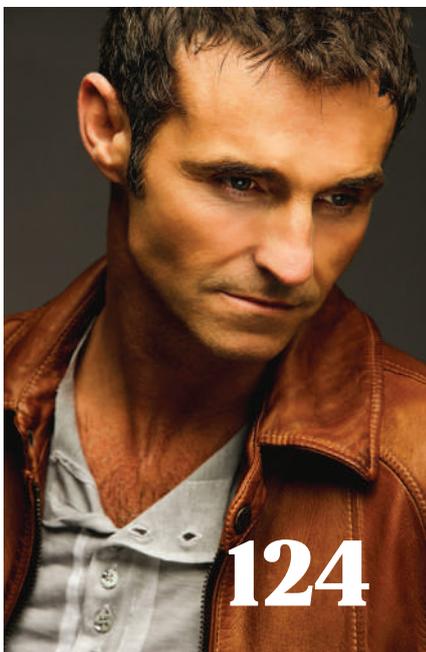
Edition Sponsors



Hargreaves Elsworth
lumo
CHERYL TANNER MENOPAUSE FITNESS COACH
L4 Financial Management
sweeney miller LAW
LUMLEY CASTLE
North Tyneside Business Forum Connecting and Supporting Businesses
WEEK 2 WEEK SERVICED APARTMENTS *Your hotel alternative*
Darlington College
swinburne maddison
PhoneticDigital
GET Brindled
SINTONS
VILLAGE HOTEL CLUB
Kinnergy
marriott communications
genee GREENING THE ECONOMY
Gillespie Recruitment Ltd
BIGGER SCENE Large format print & exhibitions
JAM MARKETING
ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM
youngsRPS CHARTERED SURVEYORS & PROPERTY CONSULTANTS



101



124





Jon's group shines a guiding light on GAP's growth

Lighthouse Business Club, founded by experienced business leader Jon Malton, has played a significant role in supporting the growth and strategic development of GAP Northeast Limited, one of the UK's leading recycling and waste electrical items companies.

Through its structured peer-to-peer advisory groups, Lighthouse Business Club has helped GAP navigate complex decisions around investment, expansion, and long-term strategy, contributing to the company's continued success and projected turnover of £30 million this year.

GAP processes thousands of fridges a day, handles millions of disposable vapes annually, and operates one of the most tightly regulated and well-invested recycling facilities in the UK.

Lighthouse Business Club is a confidential peer-to-peer advisory community for business owners, managing directors, and senior leaders of companies with a turnover of over £1 million. Members meet every six weeks to work through real business challenges, learn from world-class speakers, and draw on the collective experience of peers from non-competing industries.

Founder Jon Malton brings decades of senior-level business experience to the club. Jon built and sold his own successful milk round business before spending 25 years with family-owned firm Ringtons, working his way through the ranks to become Managing Director.

Peter Moody, Managing Director of GAP Northeast Limited, said: "Working with Jon and Lighthouse Business Club has been invaluable. The support around our expansion plans was a real turning point for the business."



Delivering long-term biodiversity net gain with farming at its core

Green Acres BNG, based in the West End of Newcastle, is led by Matt Haycock and his business partner Michael Dungait, a Northumberland farmer from Stannington. Together, they are helping developers meet the UK's new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements through a practical, land-led approach rooted in generations of farming experience.

Introduced into law in England last year, Biodiversity Net Gain requires developers to demonstrate a minimum 10% improvement in habitat value as part of new developments. This uplift must be secured and maintained for 30 years, representing a fundamental shift in how land is managed alongside construction.

"BNG isn't a tick-box exercise," explains Matt. "It's a legal, long-term commitment. Developers must prove an uplift in habitat type, not just set land aside. That takes experience, planning and proper land management."

BNG agreements require habitats to be created, monitored and maintained for three decades — something that not every provider is equipped to do.

"There will inevitably be companies that see BNG as a short-term opportunity," Matt says. "But without long-term land management experience, it's incredibly difficult to deliver what's promised."

This is where Michael Dungait's farming background plays a vital role. Based in Stannington, Michael brings deep practical knowledge of soils, livestock, arable systems and habitat management — skills that are essential when establishing and sustaining biodiversity improvements over the long term.

Samson Aviation boosts cargo services with major investment

Samson Aviation, based at Newcastle Airport, has expanded its cargo handling capabilities in response to growing air cargo demand.

The private jet facility has introduced a range of new state-of-the-art equipment, including a main deck loader, capable of handling both widebody and narrowbody passenger and cargo aircraft.

This upgrade enables the Airport to handle larger and more specialised cargo - including heavy machinery, aircraft components, and luxury vehicles - across a wider range of aircraft, supporting further growth beyond the 4,000 tonnes of cargo it currently imports and exports for the region.

Paula Ives, General Manager at Samson Aviation, said: "This investment is a major step forward, significantly enhancing our cargo handling capability and strengthening our ability to support businesses in the North East, across the UK and internationally."



"The new equipment enables us to meet growing demand, adapt to evolving customer needs and, in partnership with Newcastle Airport, deliver meaningful, long-term value to the cargo community."

Newcastle Airport serves as a key air cargo gateway for the North East supporting sectors including retail, engineering, pharmaceuticals, life sciences and energy.

Making Clients Famous.

Bradleyomahoney.co.uk



Lizzie Jowett brings high-calibre expertise to BEF

A North East business finance provider is expanding its team, scaling up the level of support it offers the local professional community.

Our region's startup entrepreneurs and SME owners can now draw on an even bigger pool of dedicated finance expertise. Business Enterprise Fund (BEF) North East welcomes Lizzie Jowett to its Sunderland-based team.

With a 13+ career that's covered Santander, Metro Bank, and directing Bradford BID, Lizzie is perfectly placed to help local businesses. She brings deep commercial expertise, infectious enthusiasm, and a particular talent for helping female-led organisations thrive.

"Joining BEF's North East office is an exciting journey for me," Lizzie comments. "This is one of the most dynamic regions in the UK to do business. People in a huge mix of sectors are being constantly inspired to do great things. It feels amazing to be the one who gets to help them along the road to success."

This new appointment brings the BEF North East team to six full-time Investment Managers. Chosen for their combination of finance savvy and rigorous local knowledge, they're trusted to find the best way forward for local entrepreneurs.



Recruitment specialists outline plans for growth after completing MBO

Two recruitment consultants have announced plans to grow their business after completing a Management Buy Out (MBO).

Heather Croft and Vanessa Slater are the new directors of KES Solutions UK. The MBO follows founder Kelly Swann's decision to pursue new opportunities and offering the opportunity to purchase the business to her two most experienced consultants.

Heather, from Peterlee, said: "When we were given the chance to buy the business from Kelly, we were both so excited, but we also knew it was going to be a big challenge for us as working for a business and running it are very different.

"However, Vanessa and I knew the business inside out and I think Kelly was happy that she was handing it over to people who cared as much about it as she had done.

"When we told our team there were tears. Everyone was so happy for us and that gave us a real confidence boost that we had done the right thing."

KES Solutions UK is a specialist provider of recruitment services to industries including automotive, manufacturing chemicals and petrochemicals, warehousing and logistics, and technical and engineering, with a turnover of £3.7m.

Dyer invests over £600,000 to expand North East operations and create skilled jobs

Dyer has announced an investment of over £600,000 in its North East operations, marking the company's largest capital spend in three years as it expands manufacturing capacity, invests in industry leading automation and grows its highly skilled workforce.

A global engineering partner to blue-chip firms, Dyer's investment includes the development of a new 8,000 sq ft facility at the company's existing Harelaw Industrial Estate site in County Durham. Designed to support fabrication and assembly work, the new space will increase capacity for project based orders, serving global customers across the oil & gas and energy sectors. The expansion complements Dyer's existing 110,000 sq ft advanced manufacturing footprint, reinforcing the company's five-decade commitment to the region.

Alongside the facility expansion, the multi award winning business has made a significant investment in automation as part of a wider programme to improve productivity and competitiveness. The business has installed a brand new, industry leading Matsuura Multi Pallet Horizontal CNC machining centre, enabling lights out machining and



significantly increasing throughput.

The new system allows up to 96 jobs to be loaded in a single setup, compared to one job per setup previously, creating substantial additional capacity while maximising cycle time and improving cost competitiveness for customers. To further strengthen capability, the business has also installed a new large capacity lathe, extending both machining capacity and the range of work it can deliver.

The investment has been matched by growth in people, with 47 people onboarded over the past 12 months, taking current headcount to over 190.

Marketing. Video. Branding. Public Relations.

Bradleyomahoney.co.uk



Cover Story...

Naylors: a new chapter in commercial property. L-R Partners at Naylors, Chris Donabie, Scott Clarke, Katy Clark, Martyn Collins, Keith Stewart

Naylors goes for growth – powered by next generation

North East commercial property consultancy Naylors Gavin Black has unveiled a bold new chapter in its evolution - announcing a complete rebrand, the launch of a new website, and exciting plans for growth.

The 40-strong firm, headquartered in Newcastle and operating nationally, will now trade simply as Naylors. The new, streamlined identity, fresh marketing collateral and state-of-the-art digital platform reflect its three-year growth strategy which will be spearheaded by its next generation of Partners.

The move positions the business for a phase of expansion and strengthens brand presence whilst building on its established reputation across the North East and UK commercial property markets.

Changes for growth

The next generation of Partners - Keith Stewart, Katy Clark, Chris Donabie, Scott Clarke and Martyn Collins – will drive forward the company's three-year growth strategy, alongside highly respected stalwarts Angus White and Fergus Laird who will remain prominent in the business.

Expansion is planned through strategic hires in key service lines, a big push on occupier services and the firm has not ruled out geographical expansion where it can benefit their clients.

To improve operations, there will be major investment in IT, client relationship management (CRM) software and property management systems to streamline processes and improve the client experience.

Strengths

Naylors, which supports clients across the UK, provides the full range of commercial real estate services.

The firm is long established in the industrial, office, retail and investment agency markets. It advises occupiers, private investors, property companies, institutions and developers.

Naylors' property & facilities management team, headed up by Partner Katy Clark, has enjoyed considerable growth over the last four years, and this continues.

Building consultancy is another expanding area of the business, with the department now consisting of five qualified surveyors and led by Partner, Scott Clarke.

In January, the business grew its valuation team with the key appointment of experienced valuer, Ben Wood, which has enabled Naylors to undertake a wide range of loan security valuations across all main property sectors, alongside its offer for private clients.

Future proofing

"This marks the start of an exciting new chapter," explains Managing Partner and industrial property lead at Naylors, Keith Stewart.

"The refreshed identity reflects our progression in recent years and better showcases our established market expertise alongside our highly-personal approach to advising clients on strategic property decisions.

"Our new strategy brings a sharper focus, continued investment across the business and a commitment to supporting clients as market conditions, occupational patterns and investment structures continue to change," said Keith.

Partner, and investment agency lead, Chris Donabie, adds: "Our new identity represents a consultancy built for what's next, meaning - forward-

looking, adaptable and focused on helping clients navigate complexity with assurance.

"While our brand has evolved, our commitment to independent advice, integrity and long-term client relationships remains unchanged."

How Naylors can help you:

Agency & Development

Find a property to buy or let, market your property to prospective occupiers or investors, or develop new commercial property.

Property & Facilities Management

Outsource management of your commercial properties and lighten your administrative load.

Occupier Services

Reduce your occupational costs and align your property with your ESG priorities, wherever you are in the UK.

Professional Services

Get expert advice on valuations, landlord & tenant matters and rating.

Investment & Asset Management

Benefit from expert purchase or disposal strategies and maximise the value of your commercial asset throughout the period of your ownership.

Building Consultancy

Talk with our surveying team for guidance on refurbishments, fit-outs, dilapidations or new-build developments.

Naylors is a member of the Commercial Property Network - a collective of privately owned commercial property firms which span the UK - giving the firm a presence in every UK region.

Find out more at www.naylors.co.uk



Naylors. Trusted. Innovative. Accountable. L-R Chris Donabie, Scott Clarke, Angus White, Keith Stewart, Martyn Collins, Katy Clark and Fergus Laird

Musings with Mirza...



Ammar Mirza CBE

Curtains closed, worlds opened

By Ammar Mirza CBE

In the West End of Newcastle, the weekend had a rhythm.

A walk to Lala's video store. Shelves lined with colour and promise. A careful choice. Then home, curtains drawn, lights dimmed, the outside world paused.

And just like that, our living room became Mumbai.

We would sit together for three or four hours immersed in Bollywood epics like Naseeb, Sholay and Disco Dancer. The music was

dramatic. The heroes fearless. The emotions unapologetic. I can still sing the lyrics today, perhaps not always in tune, but always with conviction.

What I did not fully appreciate then was that my parents were doing something quietly strategic. They were using film to anchor language. To preserve culture. To ensure that while we were Geordies through and through, we were also rooted in something deeper. Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu were not enforced. It was absorbed. Through melody. Through dialogue. Through story.

Screen became identity.

Years later, travelling through Asia, I visited a village where one television served around two hundred people. When it switched on, the entire community gathered. Children sat on the floor. Elders leaned forward. And we watched Knight Rider as if it were a shared global moment.

One screen. Hundreds of people. Collective imagination.

That image has stayed with me. Because it reminded me that television at its best is not isolating. It is unifying.

Back home, mum and I would laugh at Laurel and Hardy and marvel at the physical genius of Harold Lloyd. Saturday nights meant chuckling at Russ Abbot. It was simple entertainment, yet deeply connective. We were not just watching. We were sharing.

Professionally, the thread continued.

When I joined United Artists, the two-week induction was less about systems and more about story. We studied the founders. We reflected on the belief that film could influence society. At the centre of that legacy stood Charlie Chaplin, proving that you could challenge power, provoke thought and inspire hope without saying a word.

Content is never neutral. It shapes perception. It frames aspiration.

I later became an anchor for an in-house programme called YITV, trained by Sky to present. I learned that behind every seamless broadcast sits intention, discipline and responsibility. **The screen may look effortless, but its impact is deliberate.**

For the past decade, my collaboration with Craig Conway has centred on ensuring that our region does not simply consume stories but creates them. The Runway Rooms were born from that belief. A space where writers, actors and producers in the North East can develop their craft without leaving home. **Talent is universal. Opportunity is not. Creative infrastructure levels that field.**

Last year, when the wonderful Lisa Opie, MD BBC Studios, MD Ubisoft Reflections and Leamington and fellow visiting professor at Newcastle University, asked me to join the board of Together TV, I hesitated. Time is finite. Commitments are many. **But saying yes has been one of the most affirming decisions I have made.**

Together TV is a purpose driven broadcaster and charity that champions stories of social action, inclusion and lived experience. It represents the television sector while using screen as a catalyst for positive change. The trustees bring insight, humility and determination, united by one belief. That the right story, told well, can shift communities for the better.

Curtains may no longer close in quite the same way. But when the screen lights up, worlds still open.

And if we are wise, we will not just consume what appears on those screens. We will shape it. Support it. Invest in it. Because stories do not just reflect society. They build it.

The screen changed my life. It can change many more.

Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Executive Chair of the AmmarM Group, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors with a deep interest in Inclusion, Innovation and Internationalisation.



Places to go : Sherborne

I have a friend who lives in Sherborne, in Dorset, on the slow South Western line from London to Exeter.

Andrew works for an American firm, which means he is free in the mornings and must work afternoons and evenings to tie in with their working hours, six hours behind us. We therefore tend to have lunch in the town, sometimes in the open air on Cheap Street, before he beetles off home to work and I explore the town. Arriving in Sherborne by train in the late morning felt like stepping quietly into another era. The small station, with its understated charm, set the mood for a day shaped by history, warm stone buildings, and the gentle pace of a Dorset market town.

My first stop was Sherborne Abbey, only a short stroll from the station along streets lined with independent shops and elegant Georgian façades. The Abbey rose unexpectedly, grand yet somehow intimate, its honeycoloured Dorset hamstone glowing even under a muted sky. Inside, the fanvaulted ceiling immediately drew my eyes upward; its intricate, almost lacelike design felt both aweinspiring and calming. I wandered slowly through the space, reading fragments of its long story – from its Saxon beginnings to its transformation under Norman influence.

A gentle walk took me toward Sherborne's two castles. Sherborne Old Castle (English Heritage) appeared first, a romantic ruin set within peaceful parkland. Even from a distance, the broken towers and weathered stone hinted at centuries of conflict and change. I wandered through the grounds, imagining the medieval life that once filled the space. It was easy to linger there, but curiosity pulled me onward to Sherborne Castle – the "new" one built by Sir Walter Raleigh. The contrast was striking: where the old castle was rugged and atmospheric, the newer one stood elegant and refined, surrounded by beautifully kept gardens. I followed a path down toward the lake designed by Capability Brown, watching the reflections ripple across the water as I walked.

I spent the afternoon exploring the town's independent shops. Bookstores, antique shops, and small boutiques spilled their character onto the pavements. I browsed without any particular goal, chatting with shopkeepers who seemed genuinely pleased to share stories about their collections. Sherborne had a way of making even casual browsing feel meaningful. I also found the art gallery in the Manor House, and a small but fascinating museum, admission free.

Later in the afternoon, I visited the Almshouse of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, one of the oldest functioning almshouses in the country. Its quiet courtyard and centuriesold buildings offered a different kind of historical experience – less dramatic than the Abbey or the castles, but deeply human. Standing there, I felt the layers of history that shaped the town, each one adding its own quiet voice.

Sherborne has a famous public school, whose most famous alumnus is probably Alan Turing of artificial intelligence fame. In 1926, at the age of 13, he went to Sherborne School, where he boarded at Westcott House. The first day of term coincided with the 1926 General Strike, in Britain, but Turing was so determined to attend that he rode his bicycle unaccompanied 60 miles (97km) from Southampton to Sherborne, stopping overnight at an inn. His time at school was featured in the film "The Imitation Game".

Back at the station, waiting for my train, I realised how full the day had been without ever feeling rushed. Sherborne had revealed itself generously – rich in history, warm in character, and perfectly suited to a day's wandering. Andrew might be receiving another visit soon.

www.visitsherborne.co.uk

alex@nationalrail.com, www.nationalrail.com

NationalRail.com

For bookings to and from North East England and trains all over Great Britain

- Advance and walk-up (on the day) tickets
- First and standard class
- Eco friendly trains
- Groups of up to nine, and all railcards accepted
- Split ticketing to maximise your savings all over England, Scotland and Wales

Our map is available for purchase at railmap.org.uk plus optional free pdf for personal use

Poster map for display is 63.5cm wide x 100cm deep

We can advise on delay repay!

pdf only available for £7.95 at railmap.org.uk

Alex Nelson (Ticket Guru)

For help with bookings, email alex@nationalrail.com

Prosper provides career pathway for aspiring young professionals

Procurement and collaboration specialists Prosper has fast-tracked the careers of two of its youngest and brightest members of staff by investing in developing and enhancing their personal skills to gain promotions within the business.

The company, which specialises in creating collaborative partnerships and bespoke procurement solutions for investment works, decarbonisation and new build solutions to public sector clients across the UK, has created an environment where staff can grow, develop and progress their careers.

Heidi Molloy and Finn Johnson have been promoted into new roles and have significantly progressed their careers within the 14-strong team, headquartered at Cobalt Business Exchange on the Silverlink Business Park.

The company has adopted the same social value philosophy that it offers to clients, to develop young, talented people by creating jobs and providing structured training and development that will lead to clear career pathways.

The approach is fully supported by Prosper's Board and is a strategic commitment to create an environment to develop team members to enhance skills growth and staff retention.

We spoke to Heidi and Finn to find out about their careers and how the company has invested and developed them into their new roles.

Heidi, 20, left school at 16 and joined Prosper as an apprentice business administrator. The company supported her through her apprenticeship where she graduated with a Level 3 qualification in Business Administration. She recently secured a permanent role as a Procurement Administrator, supporting the Procurement Team and attends client and contractor meetings.

She said: "I'm very grateful to Prosper for giving me the opportunity to progress my career in a forward-thinking, dynamic company that values my contribution to the business. The company is really supportive and I have learnt a lot.

"I started fresh out of school with no experience of business or working in a busy office environment, but I wanted to demonstrate and prove to myself. The company has arranged for me to work with a business coach where I have one-to-one sessions to help me progress in my role. I feel I have matured and I see things differently, not just in the workplace but in my personal life too.

"One of the biggest things I've learnt is hard work pays off. If you are prepared to put the work in and show you are willing to learn then you'll reap the benefits. Of course, you need an employer like Prosper that is fully committed and supportive in nurturing and developing young people into new roles."

Finn, 19, joined Prosper in August 2024 as a Management Trainee after sitting his A-Levels at school. He job shadowed various roles within the business which gave him an insight into how the business operates.

Prosper has been instrumental in facilitating a number of industry-first collaborative partnerships bringing together multiple landlords and contractors and Finn was involved in some of the inception meetings.

He said, "I really enjoy meeting and engaging with people and it was interesting to learn how these projects were formed. The collaboration and partnership working was something that really attracted me and I felt this could be a career path I would like to choose."

His wish was granted after the company restructured its team, creating a Collaboration Team and Finn was appointed to the role of Collaboration Executive.

He continued: "I've learnt so much in such a short space of time. The work we do has a big impact and I feel I am making a difference. Those projects that were in their infancy, I'm now managing mobilisation and delivery meetings. I have been really impressed with Prosper's commitment to supporting landlords to improve the communities where they operate and improving people's homes and lives. It's a great feeling to believe I have played a part in that and be recognised with a promotion."

Finn is also working with Prosper's business coach and has been focussing on leadership and visualising where his career will be 5-10 years' time. He continued: "I aspire to progress to Head of Collaboration one day but I'm enjoying the learning along the way."

Rod Brasington, Chief Executive of Prosper, said: "We are fully committed to growing and nurturing our young and talented employees and giving them the pathway to progress their careers. Heidi and Finn have shown real desire and commitment to learn and grow within the business and we are fully supportive of them. We are working to develop a comprehensive People Development Strategy to support our team and help colleagues to progress their careers within Prosper."

**For more information on Prosper visit:
www.prosper.uk.com**



L-R: Heidi Malloy, Procurement Administrator and Finn Johnson, Collaboration Executive from Prosper have both been promoted within the business



“

**It's all risk
management.**

David Hughes

The unseen work behind every safe journey

Interview by Karl Holbrook

If passengers never notice safety, it usually means someone has done their job properly. David Hughes, Head of Safety, Security and Sustainability at Lumo and Hull Trains, explains what it takes to keep millions of journeys running smoothly, and why success is often invisible...

Every day, thousands of people step onto trains expecting to arrive safely, without thinking twice about it.

Making that assumption hold day after day, at speed, across the UK is David Hughes' job. And if he's done it well, you won't even notice him.

While hoards of passengers board their trains each day, coffees in hand, headphones on, eyes fixed on departure boards, Lumo and Hull Trains' newly promoted Head of Safety, Security and Sustainability, David is already several moves ahead. What happens if a protest spills onto a platform. If a fault escalates. If a decision made miles away ripples through a network at speed.

His job is to make sure none of that is felt.

"When I'm explaining it to audiences at events in the region," he says. "I tell them, 'I keep people safe. I keep people secure.'"

It's an understated line for a role that carries enormous pressure. David is responsible for keeping around 1.5 million passengers a year moving safely up and down the UK at high speed, across dozens of stations, alongside roughly 500 staff working across Lumo, Hull Trains and a new West Coast operation launching this spring. The margins for error are small. The consequences, if something slips, are not.

"If you're doing your job how you want to do it," he says, "you don't want anyone on the outside to see any of the joins."

That quiet perfectionism, the idea that success looks like nothing happening at all, shapes how David thinks, works and leads. The best day for him is the one where nobody ever knows his name.

It's a paradox that sits at the heart of modern rail safety. David operates in an environment defined by motion, speed and human unpredictability, yet his work only registers when something goes wrong. Until then, it's a constant exercise in anticipation, spotting risk early, smoothing pressure points, designing systems that hold when the things are stretched.

"It is a big responsibility," he admits. And it's an understatement.

David was promoted earlier this year after eight months in the role on an interim basis. It's a formal step up, but also recognition of how central his thinking has become as the business evolves, particularly in an open access world where pace, accountability and culture matter as much as process.

David joined Lumo in May 2023 as safety governance manager in the team he now leads. Before that he was business resilience manager at LNER. "It grew my skills quite a lot in a very short space of time," he remembers.

Even earlier, he worked in operations and control environments, alongside a long stretch in customer-facing management. It's a varied career path, which has set him up for the complexities of the current role.

For David, safety is a lot more than paperwork. It's people, behaviour, and the reality of what happens when you put hundreds of strangers into a high-hazard environment.

"It's not just about investigating when something's gone wrong," he says. "We're out there being as proactive as we can to identify risk."

In many businesses, safety, security and sustainability sit in different teams, with different reporting lines. Like much of what Lumo has pioneered, David is doing the opposite, bringing them together through what he calls "three lenses [but] one framework."

"It's all risk management," he says.

He gives a simple example. Political unrest and climate change lead to protests. Protests create security risks. Security risks become safety risks. And when safety is compromised, the knock-on effects can damage the long-term sustainability of the business through disruption, absence, financial cost and reputational impact.

"It all then rolls back," he says, "because we start having financial costs associated with dealing with all of that."

It's a worldview shaped by years of asking what could go wrong, and what needs to be done now so it doesn't.

continued...



Gosforth-based Daft As A Brush Cancer Patient Care is Lumo's official charity partner for 2026

As David puts it, he's a problem solver who likes "to get in the thick of a problem and find solutions for it... not a problem that's necessarily happened, but a problem that could."

The open access difference

There's another reason this role matters at Lumo and it goes beyond the scale of the network. It's embedded in the culture.

"One of the big things that stand out for me," David says, "is within open access, because we're very flat with our culture and our hierarchy. When we want to do something, there's nothing holding us up or getting in the way."

The non-negotiables remain non-negotiable. Risk assessments, safe methods of work and governance still matter. But the layers are reduced to what's needed to maximise outcomes and speed of delivery.

"I don't want unnecessary layers," he says. "If I need to find something out, I know I can go and talk to a frontline member of staff. We have that conversation like we're just two human beings."

Less politics. More pace. More ownership. And in a commercial open access world, there's a shared urgency underpinning it all. "We have a common goal," he says.



Sustainability people planet and profit

For David, sustainability goes far beyond running electric trains, although Lumo does operate a 100 percent electric fleet on the East Coast. His definition is broader, and more human.

“We monitor what are we consuming in our offices. What water are we using. What waste do we produce,” he says. “That’s the planet side. But then there’s the people side. Recruitment practices, apprenticeships, people development.”

There’s also the financial strand, where procurement, local supply chains and community relationships become part of sustainability too. Economic resilience matters to the places Lumo serves.

That thinking becomes more complex as Lumo expands to the West Coast, with a new operation launching this spring connecting Stirling to London via Preston.

It’s a technical challenge and a reputational one, given how strongly Lumo has built its name on the East Coast. David sees it as an opportunity to apply the same ethos of learning quickly, building strong local partnerships and pushing constant improvement.



Powered by care - driven by purpose

If David’s professional world is built around risks, frameworks and controls, the most revealing parts of his story sit outside the day job.

He’s deeply involved in the North East charity sector, including serving as a trustee for a cancer charity focused on respite support for teenagers and families. He talks about it matter-of-factly, as something that just needs doing, but it clearly shapes how he thinks about leadership.

“It’s all about improving outcomes,” he says.

That instinct feeds directly into Lumo’s community work through Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care, the Newcastle-based charity that transports cancer patients to and from chemotherapy and radiotherapy free of charge, supported by hundreds of volunteers and a fleet of ambulances.

For David, this is where Lumo’s sustainability work becomes tangible.

“[Daft as a Brush] don’t have all the skills and expertise in their organisation to work towards” sustainability reporting and emissions requirements,” he explains. “So I’m supporting them with that. Helping them develop reporting, metrics, systems and policies.”

It’s skills-based volunteering in action. He’s also helping connect the charity to more visible, everyday opportunities for passengers to support the cause, including enabling donations through Delay Repay and exploring tangible fundraising goals people can understand and get behind.

“I always use the church roof fund example,” he says, describing the classic thermometer-style fundraising tracker. “Let’s get some of that on our website. Let’s show how much has been done here.”

That desire to make impact visible, to connect systems to people, mirrors his approach to safety. It’s even captured in an internal message he’s created for Lumo’s safety culture, “safer today than yesterday,” with a strapline that sums up how he thinks.

“I thrive under pressure,” he says. “It’s fast paced and that’s what I like.”

He has two young children. He travels frequently. He volunteers. He’s involved in community roles. He still finds time for the gym, often at 4.30am.

“I’m very lucky that my kids sleep from seven at night until seven in the morning,” he laughs, as if that explains everything.

And when he does switch off, it’s rarely by slowing down. He’s a skier, and it’s fast becoming a family tradition, even for his three and four year old children who have just returned from their first ski trips.

It all fits. He’s someone who likes motion, momentum and systems that work.

Because whether he’s thinking about protests, passenger behaviour, supply chains or community partnerships, David keeps coming back to the same underlying goal. Making things better...before they break.

And if he does that well, most passengers will never know his name. Which is exactly the point.

David lives with his husband and two children near Newcastle.

lumo.co.uk



Sammy Shines Again

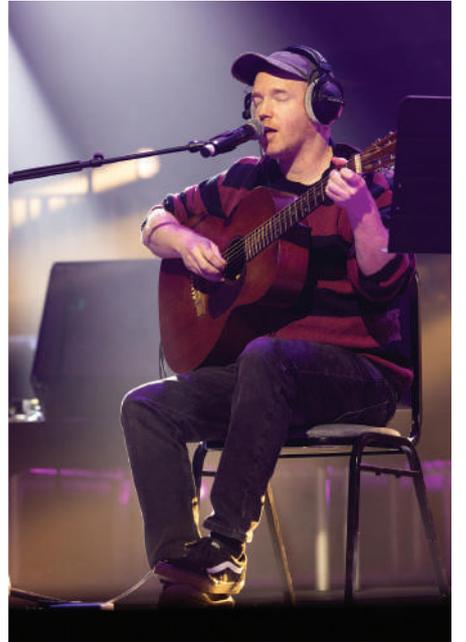
As proud supporters of the Sunday for Sammy concert 2026, Northern Insight Magazine celebrated another unforgettable night at the iconic Utilita Arena Newcastle.

Founded in memory of the much-loved actor Sammy Johnson, this extraordinary event once again unites North East talent, laughter and music in aid of emerging performers.

With heartfelt tributes, standout comedy and powerful live performances, Sunday for Sammy continues to champion regional pride while raising vital funds for the next generation of artists.



Photo Credit: John Millard Photography



GOOD COFFEE,
GOOD WINE,
GOOD TIMES.



JÓZEF'S

≡ RIVERSIDE BAR &
RESTAURANT

Whether you're in the mood for a relaxing coffee, Asian sharing plates, Afternoon Tea or something more substantial, Józef's Bar and Restaurant is a stylish, food and drink destination in the heart of Durham.

Escape the bustle of the city and take in cathedral views over a handcrafted cocktail or glass of wine on the riverside terrace. Open all day, everyday. Check our website for latest menus and live music events. We look forward to welcoming you.

Radisson **BLU**
HOTEL, DURHAM

**READER
OFFER**

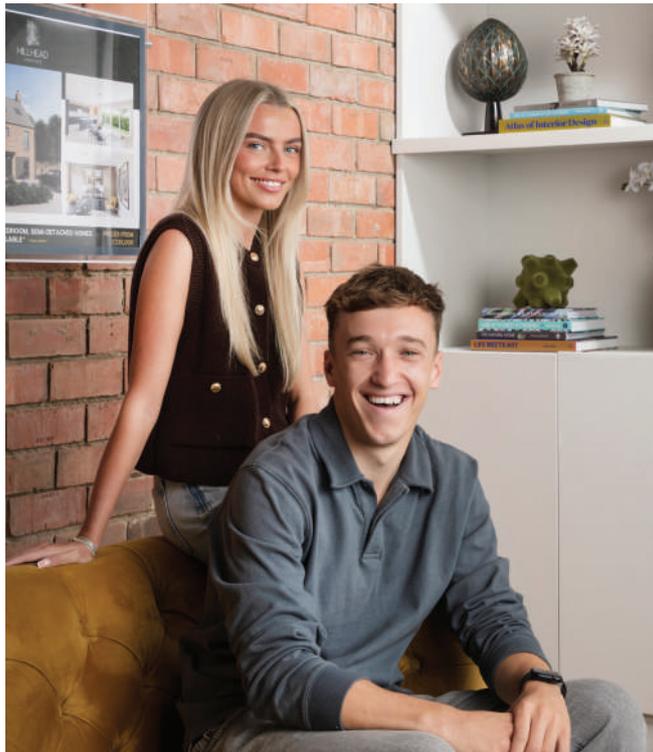
SUMMER DINING 10% off food and drinks when dining with us.
Please mention this advert on arrival.



SANDERSON
YOUNG

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS DRIVING REAL PROPERTY SALES

Rebecca Blakey - Head of Social Media



Rory Nicholson - Marketing/Social Media Consultant

The way buyers are discovering properties is changing; over the last 5 years, especially, an agent's website and Rightmove have reigned supreme as the number 1 source for buyer and vendor enquiries. However, over the last 2 years, social media has played an increasingly important role in securing deals and is now central to how we create awareness.

Looking at 2026, Sanderson Young's core social channels are forecast to generate well over 10 million views across Facebook & Instagram, and when combined with our individual agent accounts, audience reach is both substantial and highly engaged.

By investing in our media capabilities and building a strong foundation of engaged vendors and buyers, several properties teased on social media have sold directly, before ever reaching the open market. Increasingly, vendors are approaching us directly through social media, with over 10 serious enquiries in the last few months alone, highlighting just how powerful well targeted, high quality content can be when it's shown to the right audience.

Second to large visibility, calls to action serve as a pivotal statistic to ensure our audience hits the correct demographic. Property clicks have increased by around 360% year on year, driving meaningful enquiries from both buyers and prospective vendors.

While portals such as Rightmove still continue to play an important role in any sale, early visibility and momentum often lead to faster outcomes. Our social media presence is carefully designed to showcase homes in a way that builds

genuine demand ahead of a formal launch, meaning we're able to connect the right homes with the right people, quickly. This should be a major consideration for any vendor when deciding on an Agent to appoint.

Our Head of Social Media, Rebecca, said:

"This success is driven by strategy, high-quality visuals, intelligent scheduling and a cohesive brand style, which ensures each property is positioned effectively. We constantly look at new and innovative ways to advertise properties, whether that be a focus on the location, or a finer detail often overlooked when viewed online."

Individual agents are increasingly helping to expand reach and engagement. Since starting his Instagram account recently, valuer Harry has gained over 17,400 followers. His weekly content now generates 87,000 views, with more than 81% coming from non-followers. This exposure shows how property related content is connecting with new audiences beyond existing networks. With nearly 2,000 interactions in just one week and steady follower growth, this personal approach is highly effective in building awareness and early interest.

So, if you're looking for a property or an agent that has a proactive approach to multichannel marketing, get in touch with the Sanderson Young team on **0191 213 0033** or email contact@sandersonyoung.co.uk.



A Picture Perfect Start *to the year*

Shincliffe Hall *Hall Lane, Shincliffe, Durham*

Guide Price £1.95 Million
This Outstanding Country Home is Now Exchanged

Shincliffe Hall is a Grade II listed Georgian country house (1771) set within 4.5 acres of landscaped gardens and River Wear frontage near Durham Castle and Cathedral. Featuring elegant reception rooms, period details, eight bedrooms, croquet lawn, greenhouse, woodland grounds and pastoral views, it offers seclusion minutes from Durham City.



SANDERSON
YOUNG

Sanderson Young has stepped confidently into 2026, building on a dynamic start to the year that has already generated significant buyer engagement and exceptional results across the North East property market.

From the outset, activity levels have been strong, with motivated buyers competing for quality homes across a broad range of price brackets. Well-presented and accurately priced

properties are continuing to attract immediate interest, with many achieving swift sales and impressive outcomes.

To showcase this sustained momentum, Sanderson Young highlights a selection of standout properties that demonstrate both the depth of demand in the market and the decisive action being taken by buyers when the right opportunities arise.



Kenton Lane

Kenton

Offers Over £365,000

Sale Agreed Above the Asking Price | 36 Viewings | 24 Offers

Stunning extended three-bedroom semi-detached family home on Kenton Lane, offering over 1,500 sq ft of beautifully upgraded accommodation. Highlights include an impressive open-plan kitchen/diner with island and bifolds, elegant sitting room with bay window and fireplace, utility, study, garage store, off-street parking, and a superb south-facing garden.



Fletcher Crescent

Ponteland

Offers Over £595,000

Sale Agreed Above the Asking Price | 14 Viewings | 9 Offers

Immaculately presented four-bedroom detached home on the exclusive Jameson Manor Estate in Ponteland. Built by Bellway in 2021, it boasts open rear views, superb open-plan kitchen/diner with island, two reception rooms, two ensembles, upgraded bathroom, utility, garage, double driveway, and a sunny south-facing garden. Excellent location near amenities.



Audley Road

Gosforth

Offers Over £215,000

Sale Agreed Above the Asking Price | 16 Viewings | 8 Offers

Uniquely large ground floor Tyneside apartment on Audley Road, South Gosforth, offering over 900 sq ft. Features include an extra reception room, stylish kitchen/diner, utility, impressive four-piece bathroom, two double bedrooms, wrap-around front garden, and private rear courtyard overlooking Quarry Park, close to Metro stations and amenities.



SANDERSON
YOUNG



Highlaw House

Whalton, Morpeth, Northumberland

Highlaw House is a magnificent stone-built detached country residence occupying a prestigious position at the head of an exclusive five-home cul-de-sac in sought-after Whalton. Set within 5.5 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens, grazing land and equestrian facilities, it enjoys breathtaking countryside views and spectacular sunsets. Elegant reception rooms and four luxurious ensuite bedrooms create exceptional, versatile family living. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band H.



4 3 4 E

Price Guide:
£1.25 Million



Ashleigh Sundin
0191 223 3500
ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk



SANDERSON
YOUNG

The Alder

Hawthorn Paddock, Brunton Lane

This a magnificent five-bedroom detached residence set on a superb 0.3 acre plot, offering substantial, beautifully designed living space finished to an exceptional standard. Showcasing a breathtaking open-plan kitchen, cinema room, private sauna and professionally landscaped gardens with outdoor kitchen, it blends cutting-edge eco credentials with refined contemporary design. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band G

 5  3  4  C

Price Guide:

Offers Over £1.1 Million

Mary Walker

0191 223 3500

mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk



High Gardens

Front Street, Whitburn

An outstanding, architect-designed Arts & Crafts luxury residence, this exceptional Whitburn Village home occupies the largest and most prestigious plot on Front Street, extending to circa 1.25 acres. Built in 1999, it combines timeless character with superb leisure, including a stunning swimming pool wing and cinema room. Moments from the beach, it offers privacy, distinction and an exceptional standard of living. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band H

 5  4  4  D

Price Guide:

£2.25 Million

Ashleigh Sundin

0191 223 3500

ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk



Johnston Carmichael appoints audit partner to support Newcastle growth

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael has strengthened its Newcastle office with the appointment of Gemma Gibson as Audit Partner, following continued investment in the North East and the rapid growth of its Newcastle team.

Gemma joins from a Big Four firm, bringing almost 20 years' experience having progressed from graduate trainee through to Senior Audit Director. During her career, she has led audits for large, complex groups and supported the growth of medium-sized and large private businesses across a broad range of sectors.

In her new role, Gemma will take the lead on audit in Newcastle and will play a key role in new client engagement as the firm continues to expand. She brings strong cross-sector expertise in property, construction and manufacturing, as well as significant experience working with private equity-backed businesses and organisations operating in the oil and gas sector.

Gemma said: "The whole proposition for the Newcastle office really excited me, and I was genuinely inspired by the experience and enthusiasm within the team. This is an opportunity to help lead the business, and with the office continuing to thrive, the chance to be part of building something that lasts – and to leave a legacy – really resonated with me. I'm looking forward to working alongside businesses across the region, helping them to grow and succeed."

Paul Shields, Partner and Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, added: "Gemma's appointment is a significant milestone for our Newcastle office, as she brings exceptional audit experience, strong leadership credentials and a deep understanding of the regional market. As we continue to build momentum in the North East, Gemma will play a key role in strengthening our offering and supporting our clients' long-term ambitions."

Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office has seen significant growth over recent months, with the team now comprising 25 people following its office expansion.



EMG Solicitors welcomes further growth with new appointments to family law team

Award-winning law firm EMG Solicitors has strengthened its family law team with two new appointments, including one of the most experienced and respected family lawyers in the North East.

Specialist family lawyer Jenny Goldstein, formerly of Samuel Phillips Law, has joined EMG Solicitors as Consultant, Solicitor. She is accompanied by Alex Buck, also formerly of Samuel Phillips Law, who joins EMG to continue her role as Personal Assistant to Jenny.

Both Jenny and Alex are based in EMG Solicitors' Gosforth office, but work with clients across the North East, the wider UK, and internationally. The family law team at EMG has earned a fantastic reputation as one of the best specialist teams in the country thanks to its expertise across a wide range of family issues, including: divorce and finance, children custody, civil partnership dissolution, and other areas such as surrogacy, contact for grandparents, and agreements for people living together or about to get married.

Muckle supports px Group in landmark office move

Energy and industrial infrastructure business px Group is celebrating after solidifying its move into its new headquarters.

px has relocated to Boaz House, the former Barclaycard site at Teesdale Business Park, just a short distance from its original office. The move sees px take up over 30,000 sq ft of flexible office space, increasing its previous floorspace by 114%, and sign a 10-year lease.

Leading commercial law firm Muckle LLP supported px in negotiating the terms of the lease.





**JOHNSTON
CARMICHAEL**

Where sharp minds meet

We're local, we're national, and we're all connected.



INTERESTING TIMES

The Finance Newsletter You Actually Want To Read | NORTHERN INSIGHT VERSION

“Business leaders get trapped inside their own business far too often. Let’s change that.”

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



Most growing businesses hit a point where progress stalls. Turnover plateaus. The team feels stretched. And no matter how hard you push, the numbers stop moving in the right direction.

It's one of the most frustrating stages of business ownership. You've done everything right to get here, but the same approach that got you to this point won't get you to the next one.

The ceiling isn't a dead end. It's a signal that something needs to change.

1. Find out where the friction actually is

Before changing anything, identify the real problem. Is growth stalling because of capacity, pricing, the wrong clients, or a process that can't scale? Most business owners assume they need more sales when the real issue is elsewhere. Spend time in the numbers before making decisions. The answers are usually already there, they just haven't been looked at clearly enough.

2. Stop growing the wrong things

Not all turnover is good turnover. When a business plateaus, it's often because energy and resource is being spread across work that looks busy but doesn't build profit. Review your client mix, your service range, and your margins. Cutting the bottom 20% of clients or services often creates more momentum than winning three new ones.

3. Build capacity before you need it

Most businesses wait until they're overwhelmed before making changes to how they operate. By then, it costs more and takes longer. If you want to break through the ceiling, invest in systems, people, or support slightly ahead of the demand. That's what turns a plateau into a launchpad.

Hitting a ceiling isn't failure. It's the moment where deliberate businesses separate from reactive ones.

WIN

Sign up to the email version of INTERESTING TIMES at www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk and WIN copies of the books we review, and more, every single month.

INTERESTING QUOTE



You can't solve a problem with the same thinking that created it.

Albert Einstein

JUST ONE THING

“If you had to suggest **Just One Thing** to help my business financially (and my life!) – what would it be?”

Map out your time and turnover for this month. Not from memory, from the data. Most plateaus become obvious the moment you look at the numbers honestly. That's where the conversation about what to change next must start.

HAVE A READ

The Great CEO Within. Matt Mochary

A practical, no-nonsense guide to scaling a business beyond the founder stage. Mochary works directly with high-growth company leaders and this book distils what actually works when a business outgrows its original structure. Honest, direct, and full of tools you can use immediately.

£12(ish) online.



INTERESTED?

If you're interested in working with an accountant that really is interested in you, you'll be interested in Concept Accountancy. Please call 0191 603 1760 or email us at hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk.

PS.

Don't forget to sign up to the email version of INTERESTING TIMES at www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk and WIN copies of the books we review, and more, every single month.

NOT ALL GOALS ARE FINANCIAL. AND NOT ALL BALANCE IS ABOUT NUMBERS.

0191 603 1760

www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk
hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk

CONCEPT ACCOUNTANCY

ACCOUNTANCY WITH INTEREST®



Armstrong Watson launches two new services, offering enhanced support to businesses

Armstrong Watson has expanded its offering with the launch of two specialist propositions - a Financial Reporting Team and a Fractional FD/CFO Service. Together, these enhanced services provide clients with deeper technical reporting expertise and flexible, senior finance leadership.

The Financial Reporting Team, led by Anna Pickup, will help businesses faced with the growing complexities of financial reporting regulations and stringent compliance requirements. This new service formalises and extends Armstrong Watson’s financial reporting compliance offering and also offers expert advisory support in this area.

Paul Dickson, Armstrong Watson’s Chief Executive and Managing Partner said: “We are constantly looking for ways to enhance our client proposition. As financial reporting becomes more intricate, driven by evolving accounting frameworks, many businesses are struggling to keep pace. Our Financial Reporting Team supports clients with accounting for acquisitions, group reorganisations, share-based payments, complex financial instruments and where clients are transitioning between different accounting frameworks. This team will be of great value as many UK Companies are also addressing significant changes in the areas of revenue recognition and lease accounting.

“Anna has a wealth of experience working in this area and is well-placed to lead and develop our new service proposition.”



S&W corporate finance team advise on Hadrian Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Limited management buyout

The corporate finance team from the Newcastle office at S&W has provided corporate finance advice on the management buyout of Hadrian Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Limited (“Hadrian”).

The specialist air conditioning installation and maintenance business has been acquired by longstanding employees Kevin Armstrong and Mick Hurst from the current owners Alan and Libby Unsworth.

Hadrian provides a wide range of air conditioning installation and maintenance services to a range of customers primarily across the north of England.

Hadrian was originally established by Brian and Brenda Buxton in 1985 with Alan and Libby subsequently completing a management buyout from Brian and Brenda in 2008.

RG strengthens Tax service line with appointment of new Director

Ryecroft Glenton (RG), one of the North of England’s leading independent business advisory firms, has strengthened its Tax service line with the appointment of Laura Dickson as Director.

Laura joins RG with more than 20 years’ experience in private client tax. After training at PwC, where she gained Chartered Tax Adviser status, she has held senior leadership roles at regional independent firms, most recently Haines Watts (now S&W).

She specialises in private client tax planning, supporting individuals and families with managing tax obligations, succession planning and retirement planning. Her work includes Inheritance Tax reviews and collaborating closely with financial advisers to provide holistic advice aligned to wider financial goals.

Laura’s appointment further enhances RG’s advisory capability as the firm continues to invest in senior expertise to support clients navigating an increasingly complex tax landscape.





**NORTH EAST BASED...
NATIONALLY RESPECTED**

**Nationwide Process Serving
and Tracing Specialists**

www.sdlegaltd.co.uk

ARE YOU A BUSY FOOL?

It's not an insult. It's a question that most business owners will have asked themselves at least once.

You're working harder than ever. The diary is full. But at the end of the month, where has it all gone? Busy and profitable are not the same thing.

At Concept, we ask the questions that actually matter. Where is the cash going? Are you charging enough? Are you building something, or just keeping up?

The goal is a business that funds the life you actually want.

That's what Accountancy with Interest means. Let's chat.

CONCEPT ACCOUNTANCY

ACCOUNTANCY WITH INTEREST®

NOT ALL GOALS ARE FINANCIAL. AND NOT ALL BALANCE IS ABOUT NUMBERS.

0191 603 1760

www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk
hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk



Chris Moir

Taxpayer action needed on ‘cryptogains’ as HMRC targets cryptocurrency exchanges

A North East finance expert is urging people who’ve made money from cryptocurrencies to get their tax affairs in order as HMRC steps up efforts to identify undeclared ‘cryptogains’.

Chris Moir, associate director and head of personal tax at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, was speaking as HMRC begins automatically collecting information on all users of cryptocurrency exchanges, the online marketplaces that allows users to buy, sell and trade cryptocurrencies for both other digital assets and traditional currencies.

The change follows the UK’s adoption of the Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework (CARF) at the start of the year, which will lead to the automatic international exchange of data among tax authorities and which is expected to raise up to £315 million in extra tax revenue by 2030.

Research by the Financial Conduct Authority on consumer attitudes and behaviours towards crypto found that one in eight UK adults now own such assets, with the average value of their holdings being over £1,800.

HMRC has also been increasing its investigations into whether people are paying all the tax due on gains made through crypto trading in recent months, so that any potential shortfalls can be identified and pursued.

Growing numbers of HMRC ‘nudge letters’ have been sent to individuals that it believes could be under-reporting or not reporting

what they’ve earned in this way, with a view to encouraging voluntary disclosures before a formal investigation begins.

This marks a clear shift from education to enforcement, with HMRC increasingly expecting taxpayers to proactively disclose crypto-related gains.

Chris Moir says: “HMRC doesn’t consider cryptocurrency to be money or currency, but treats it as property, meaning it is subject to Capital Gains Tax and, in some cases, Income Tax and National Insurance as well.

“Disposals of crypto assets, such as selling them for cash, exchanging one for another, using them to pay for goods or services or gifting them to anyone other than a spouse or civil partner, can create a ‘taxable event’ on which tax is due.

“The unregulated nature of the crypto sector has so far often made it an attractive option for those that might not want to reveal all their assets, while any gains being made from such assets on platforms that allow people to use them anonymously have been difficult for HMRC to identify.

“With this situation changing, it’s essential that everyone understands their tax obligations

around these assets and keeps proper records of their crypto transactions, regardless of whether they’re a casual trader, a long-term investor or involved in crypto mining or staking.”

Chris Moir is now advising anyone who thinks their cryptogains will put them in the spotlight to ensure they’re declaring all their income in the appropriate way and to get qualified advice if they’re unsure where they stand.

He continues: “With assets like Bitcoin and Ethereum now increasingly part of the mainstream, HMRC is naturally keen to ensure it receives all the tax revenues it is entitled to from them.

“As with any dealings you have with HMRC, it’s essential that anyone who believes they may have declarations to make up to date information about their financial affairs to help avoid potential penalties and time-consuming investigations.

“HMRC’s Crypto Asset Disclosure Service allows individuals who have previously failed to declare gains arising from crypto transactions to report unpaid tax voluntarily.

“Coming forward in this way can reduce penalties and is likely to result in a more favourable outcome than if HMRC identifies the issue as part of a formal investigation.”

RMT provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist tax, accountancy, corporate finance, medical & healthcare and recovery & insolvency teams, and is part of the Sumer Group, the UK’s fastest-growing accountancy firm.

For further information and advice on managing tax matters around crypto assets, please contact Chris Moir at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors on 0191 256 9500 or via advice@r-m-t.co.uk

Stop Firefighting. Start Planning: Why SMEs Are Reviewing Their Finances

By Jason Smith, Financial Adviser

“As economic conditions tighten and operating costs continue to rise, businesses across the region are feeling the strain. Shifting consumer behaviour and a growing tax burden are squeezing margins at a time when many are already working to stabilise cashflow. The increase in tax rates will only add to the pressure, leaving business owners facing tougher financial decisions than ever.”

“Yet amid these challenges, experts say now is one of the most valuable moments for SMEs to step back, review their financial position and seek professional guidance. With structured planning, businesses can navigate these headwinds, improve resilience and uncover opportunities for more sustainable growth.”

The Firefighting Trap

“Many business owners spend their days firefighting – responding to immediate pressures rather than addressing underlying issues, which is understandable! When you’re managing cashflow, dealing with suppliers, keeping customers happy and trying to stay ahead of rising costs, strategic planning feels like a luxury you can’t afford.”

“But here’s the reality: businesses that don’t plan are the ones that struggle when conditions get tough.”

“The companies weathering this environment best aren’t necessarily the biggest or the best-funded, they’re the ones who’ve taken time to understand their numbers, identify vulnerabilities and build resilience into their operations.

The most successful business owners right now are asking themselves hard questions:

Where is our money actually going?

Not just the obvious costs, but the hidden ones – inefficient processes, underperforming products, resources in the wrong places.

What if revenue dropped 20% for six months?

Could the business survive? What would need to change? Having answers before you need them is the difference between adapting and panicking.

Are we structured efficiently?

From payroll to profit extraction, tax efficiency to pension contributions – small changes can create significant savings over time.

What’s our Exit Strategy?

Whether that’s five years away or twenty, business owners who plan for eventual sale or succession, protect more value than those who leave it until the last minute.

I’m increasingly working with SMEs to:

- Structure remuneration efficiently between salary, dividends and pension contributions
- Plan for tax liabilities rather than reacting to them
- Protect the business and themselves with appropriate insurance and contingency planning
- Build personal wealth outside the business so all eggs aren’t in one basket
- Prepare for exit or succession in a way that maximises value and minimises tax”

“The businesses thriving in challenging conditions aren’t lucky, they’re prepared. Preparation starts with honest assessment and expert guidance.”

“Now is the time to stop firefighting and start planning. Review your financial position. Identify vulnerabilities. Build resilience into your operations.”

The value of an investment with St. James’s Place will be directly linked to the performance of the funds you select and the value can therefore go down as well as up. You may get back less than you invested.

The levels and bases of taxation, and reliefs from taxation, can change at any time. The value of any tax relief depends on individual circumstances.

Please note that advice with regard to exit strategy planning may involve the referral to a service that is separate and distinct to those offered by St. James’s Place

For a confidential discussion about your business finances, contact Jason Smith

T : 07369 228896 / E : jason.smith@sjpp.co.uk

Sage Wealth Management Ltd is an Appointed Representative of and represents only St. James’s Place Wealth Management plc (which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority) for the purpose of advising solely on the group’s wealth management products and services, more details of which are set out on the group’s website www.sjp.co.uk/products. The ‘St. James’s Place Partnership’ and the titles ‘Partner’ and ‘Partner Practice’ are marketing terms used to describe St. James’s Place representatives.

Senior Partner Practice

St. James’s Place

SJP Approved 22/12/2025



FW Capital bolsters North East presence with strategic team expansion



Fund manager FW Capital has announced a significant expansion of its North East operations, appointing five new professionals and announcing a key promotion.

The move reinforces the firm's commitment to bridging the "funding gap" for regional SMEs and property developers through flexible financial solutions. It follows the opening of FW Capital's office in Sheffield last year where the team focus on the delivery of the South Yorkshire Debt Fund.

Strengthening the Property Division:

To drive property development and economic regeneration, FW Capital has expanded its specialist property team. Stuart Hodgson joins as Investment Executive, focusing on delivering funding to property developers through the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund. With a background in corporate banking at Santander and Lloyds, Stuart will support developers in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees.

Joining him is Adam Jones as Assistant Investment Executive. A qualified Chartered Accountant (ACCA) and Newcastle University graduate in Maths and Statistics, Adam joins FW Capital from Ernst & Young where he specialised in tax advisory accounting. Adam will work alongside the wider team to provide tailored financial structures for residential and commercial clients across Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, and County Durham using the North East Property Fund and North East Commercial Property Investment Fund.

Additionally, the firm has promoted Lesley Telford to Senior Investment Executive, strengthening leadership within the property division.

Strengthening the team focused on the North East Elevate Fund:

The expansion also supports the delivery of the £35m North East Elevate Fund. Launched last year and championed by North East Mayor Kim McGuinness, this fund provides loans and equity investments of up to £1 million to help established businesses scale. Three new recruits have joined to strengthen FW Capital's commitment to the delivery of this fund.

Matt Elliott joins the team as a Senior Investment Executive, bringing a proven track record in corporate banking starting at Barclays and most recently working at Handelsbanken. Matt is passionate about working closely with SMEs across the North East, helping them to access tailored funding solutions to facilitate growth.

Max Woodhouse joins FW Capital as Investment Executive, bringing nearly a decade of audit, accountancy and corporate finance experience. A Chartered Accountant (ACA), he has acted as a lead adviser to shareholders and management teams, helping maximise value across acquisitions, disposals, fundraising, strategic reviews, valuations and due diligence. His sector experience spans technology, leisure and hospitality, professional services, manufacturing and specialist engineering - expertise that complements the team and supports businesses in the North of England with funding for growth.

Ruby Knowles joins as Assistant Investment Executive with a solid background in accountancy and audit having graduated from the University of Hull with a First-Class Honours degree in Accountancy and Financial

Management. She is a qualified Chartered Accountant (ACA) and most recently worked at S&W Group completing their graduate scheme. Ruby will be focused on supporting businesses seeking micro-loans and was recently involved in the funding for Newcastle's Reform Studio.

Driving Regional Prosperity

These new appointments complement the existing team at FW Capital and strengthen their position as a leader in the local market, delivering much needed finance to fuel ambitions.

FW Capital manages a portfolio of funds across the North East:

North East Property Fund: Targeted at small-scale residential and non-speculative commercial developments with loans from £250,000 to £2 million across the North East Combined Authority area.

North East Commercial Property Investment Fund: Offering larger-scale loans from £1 million up to £7 million for high-quality Grade A commercial projects across the North East Combined Authority area.

Teesside Flexible Investment Fund: Providing funding for business acquisitions, property development and bond finance within the Teesside area.

The North East Elevate Fund is a £35m fund supporting businesses to scale up and innovate. It is designed to stimulate regional growth and create high-quality, sustainable jobs across the North East Combined Authority Area. The fund is backed by the North East Fund.

If you want to find out how we can support your business please email info@fwcapital.co.uk or visit our website www.fwcapital.co.uk

TRANSFORM YOUR WORKSPACE WITH universalav

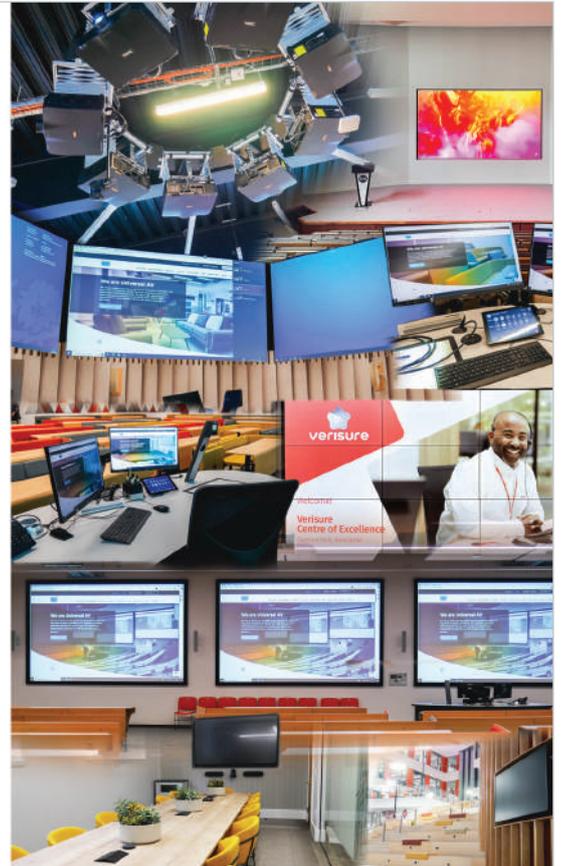
Elevate your business communication and collaboration with Universal AV Services Ltd, with over 30 years expertise in creating custom AV solutions. From state-of-the-art meeting rooms to full office management, our innovative technologies are designed to enhance productivity and efficiency across your entire workspace.

Why us?

- **Customised AV Solutions:** Tailored to fit unique workspace needs, supporting both in-office and remote collaborations.
- **Advanced Technologies:** Featuring cutting-edge spaces, digital signage, unified communications, and Microsoft Teams Rooms (MTR)
- **Expert Integration:** We handle everything from design and installation to training and aftercare, ensuring your AV Solutions are seamlessly integrated and fully optimised

Ready to Revolutionise Your Workspace? Get in touch today!

Universal AV Services Ltd: Creating environments that bring people together.



CONTACT OUR NORTH EAST TEAM ON 0191 214 0650
or email sales@uniav.com

uniav.com

JOHNSTON
CARMICHAEL



WHERE SHARP MINDS

COMPETE

The new podcast from
Johnston Carmichael

Listen here



Hosted by Paul Shields



Develop North PLC supports Newcastle United Foundation at special London fundraising event with Yolanda Brown OBE



Develop North PLC partnered with Newcastle United Foundation and Yolanda Brown OBE to support a special fundraising event in London



North East investment company, Develop North PLC has partnered with Newcastle United Foundation to support a special fundraising event for Toon fans held in London, hosted by acclaimed musician, broadcaster and philanthropist Yolanda Brown OBE DL.

The event brought together Newcastle United supporters from across the capital, including ex-pat Geordies and fans from the South who share a deep affection for the club and the city. It was held at Yolanda's London music venue and restaurant, Soul Mama, and celebrated both the unifying power of football and the vital work of Newcastle United Foundation across the North East.

Recently announced as a patron of the Foundation and awarded the Freedom of the City of Newcastle, Yolanda hosted an evening featuring a fireside conversation, fan Q&A, live music and fundraising activities including a silent auction, alongside food and drink from the Soul Mama kitchen and bar.

She was joined by Newcastle United Football Club chief executive David Hopkinson, club legend and loans manager Shola Ameobi, and Newcastle United Foundation chief executive Steve Beharall, with the audience made up of passionate Toon fans from across London and beyond.

The evening was sponsored by Develop North as part of its ongoing community support partnership with the Foundation, helping to raise awareness of the charity's work engaging and inspiring more than 70,000 people across the North East each year through education,

employability, health and community programmes.

Michelle Percy, Chief Executive Officer of Develop North PLC, said: "At Develop North, our strategy is built around investing in places, people and long-term regional growth, and that goes beyond capital alone. Supporting organisations like the Newcastle United Foundation is a natural extension of our region-focused approach, helping to champion the North East, strengthen communities and share what makes this region such a special place to live, work and invest."

"Events like this bring together people who care deeply about Newcastle, whether they live here or further afield. Many of those in the room were lifelong Toon fans, and we're proud to support work that makes a real and lasting difference across the region they care so passionately about."

Yolanda Brown is a double MOBO Award-winning artist, recognised globally for her fusion of reggae, jazz and soul. Her leadership roles include Chair of the British Phonographic Industry, organisers of the BRIT Awards, and she played a key role in bringing the prestigious Mercury Prize awards to Newcastle.

She recently joined Pete Graves, Gabby Logan OBE, Jonathan Edwards CBE and Bob Moncur

as a patron of the Newcastle United Foundation, supporting and amplifying its work across the region.

Yolanda said: "As a proud Newcastle United fan, I have seen first-hand the extraordinary reach and impact the Foundation has across the region, engaging and inspiring thousands of people each year through education, employability and community programmes.

"The football club brought so much joy last year, winning a trophy after such a long time, and it reminded us all what it feels like to believe, to keep believing and to win. I want to support the Foundation so more people can have that same chance to find belief and, eventually, win their own personal battles, using the power of football as a force for good far beyond the pitch."

Steve Beharall added: "Yolanda shares the Foundation's values as a passionate advocate for young people and positive change, and she brings a wealth of experience and influence that will help amplify our work.

"We would also like to thank Develop North for its invaluable support in helping make this event possible and for its continued commitment to the Foundation, the club and the communities we serve across the North East."

Develop North is advised by Newcastle-based fund management specialist Tier One Capital. Since its inception in 2017, the London Stock Exchange-listed company has supported 43 projects with a combined Gross Development Value (GDV) of more than £280m and helped support an estimated 12,000 jobs. To date, the company has deployed c.£90m in capital, with 16 projects in its current live portfolio.

www.developnorth.co.uk



Rethinking invoice finance

By Graeme Harrison, Director at CCBS

Many established SMEs know invoice finance — but outdated perceptions still get in the way. Here's how modern facilities remove hassle and support growth.

Most established businesses have heard of invoice finance. The resistance usually lies elsewhere: it'll be a hassle; it's only for firms in trouble; it'll spook customers; it's expensive.

These views stem from older, clunkier models and a very different banking era — but they don't reflect how modern facilities actually work. Today, invoice finance supports thousands of UK businesses, yet many owners still default to loans, overdrafts or cards simply because they feel more familiar.

The backdrop hasn't eased. Long payment terms and late invoices continue to tighten cashflow for SMEs, and government consultations on payment practices reflect the scale of the challenge. Even so, uptake of invoice finance remains lower than its practical value — driven more by perception than product.

Misconceptions — and the reality

"It's a last resort."

This stigma lingers from a time when invoice finance was often introduced too late. In today's market, thriving businesses use it proactively to smooth long terms, de-risk major contracts and create predictable working capital.

"It's high-admin and complicated."

That used to be true. Modern platforms have

transformed the experience. Onboarding is streamlined, drawdowns are simple, and reporting is automated. The right structure should feel easier than managing stretched debtor days.

"We'll lose control of customer relationships."

Confidential invoice discounting means customers don't need to know at all. Where facilities are disclosed, reputable providers act professionally, representing your brand appropriately. Communication and relationship management remain firmly in your hands.

"It's more expensive than other options."

Cost needs context. When you factor in speed, certainty, and the opportunity cost of waiting 30–90 days to be paid, invoice finance often compares favourably with overdrafts and short-term borrowing.

When a great opportunity meets cautious cashflow

We recently supported a fast-growing North East services company that had secured its biggest national contract to date. On paper, it was a turning point. In practice, their 60-day payment terms made hiring and materials tight, and the owner admitted he'd hesitated to consider invoice finance because of what he'd heard over the years.

He told us: "We'd always associated invoice finance with complexity. The reality was much more efficient than we thought and far better aligned to how we operate — it also gave us the confidence to progress the contract without stretching ourselves."

The transformation was immediate. Within a week, a flexible facility released cash as soon as invoices were raised. The team was recruited, suppliers were paid on time, delivery ran ahead of schedule — and growth followed. This is typical: many businesses already know invoice finance exists, but outdated perceptions stop them exploring it earlier.

And the truth is simple: Growth shouldn't feel like a risk. Invoice finance gives businesses the

breathing room to move with confidence.

It's not about replacing financial discipline — it's about equipping companies with working capital that matches the pace of their operations.

A pragmatic tool for ambitious teams

Invoice finance today is flexible, confidential, and designed to fit seamlessly behind the scenes. If long payment terms are making growth harder than it should be, the right facility can give you the certainty and headroom you're missing.

At CCBS, our role is to cut through the noise, match the right structure to your workflow, and keep control firmly with you. You've done the work. You've earned the revenue. Now let's make the cashflow fit the business you're building.



Graeme Harrison

Graeme Harrison is Managing Director at CCBS, helping SMEs across the UK access the right funding to support sustainable growth. He and his team bring over 50 years of combined, hands-on experience in invoice finance, making them uniquely equipped to guide businesses with clarity, confidence and real-world insight.

www.ccbso.co.uk | 0191 211 1471

Marketing and Media Matters

This month Northern Insight talks to...

David Pritchard

Head of Business Development & Marketing, Sintons LLP

Did you always envisage a career in the marketing and media industry?

Not exactly. Like many people who find their true calling, I actually fell into it by accident. My early career was more about understanding people and operations, but once I got a taste of how strategic communication could drive a business forward, I realised that marketing was where I belonged.

What has been your career path so far?

It's been an evolution. After university, I started in retail management, which was a masterclass in customer behaviour and fast-paced operations. I then moved into marketing for an estate agency, which introduced me to the professional services side of things. That eventually led me into the legal sector, where I've spent the last 25 years honing my craft in law firm marketing and business development.

What have been the biggest challenges you've faced so far?

In the legal sector, the biggest challenge has been the shift in mindset. Moving from a traditional 'technical' approach to a 'client-centric' commercial approach isn't always easy. Navigating the digital transformation of the industry—moving from print and directories to data-driven digital marketing and CRM—was also a significant, yet rewarding, hurdle.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

That's such a tough question. If I'm relating it to law I would say Jessica Pearson from *Suits*. She operates in the legal world and is the master of the 'long game'. She's disciplined, keeps her cool under pressure, and understands that while the law is technical, the business of law is about relationships and strategy. She's also her own toughest critic, which is something I definitely relate to.

Who has been your inspiration?

I tend to find inspiration in people who show resilience and adaptability. In a professional sense, I admire leaders who can balance the 'old school' values of relationship-building with the 'new school' demands of technology. I'm also inspired by anyone who maintains a high level of discipline in their personal life—it usually translates to how they lead at work.

What is your greatest strength?

I think my tenacity. I never give up. Whether it's a long-term business development strategy or a complex internal project, I see it through to the end. I believe that consistency often beats intensity.

What is your biggest weakness?

I am my own biggest critic. While it drives me to ensure that the work I produce is of the highest standard, I've had to learn to step back occasionally and acknowledge the wins rather than just looking for the next thing to improve.

What has been your proudest achievement?

I'm so fortunate to be having and have had such a great career that there are literally too many to mention. However, most recently, winning marketing team of the year at the 2025 North East Marketing Awards was a massive recognition of what we do and the impact we have.

What are your future career aspirations?

My focus is on growth—both for the business and the people within it. I want to continue evolving the business development function at Sintons, growing our market share, and mentoring the next generation of lawyers and marketing professionals so they have the tools to succeed in an increasingly competitive landscape.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

The best advice I ever received was: 'focus on the value you add, not just the tasks you complete'.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

I think we'll see a massive shift toward hyper-personalisation through AI and data. Clients won't just want a lawyer; they'll want a business partner who anticipates their needs before they even arise. The 'human element' will remain the core of legal services, but it will be heavily augmented by technology to provide a more seamless, efficient client experience.

How do you like to unwind?

I'm a big believer in the 'healthy body, healthy mind' philosophy. I love being outdoors—whether that's walking, the beach or getting some fresh air. I'm also quite active with the gym and have recently embraced the challenge of cold plunging, which is a great way to reset. When I'm not doing that, you'll find me tinkering with cars, travelling, enjoying a glass of white wine or spending time with my family.

[sintons.co.uk](https://www.sintons.co.uk)



“

I believe that consistency often beats intensity.

David Pritchard



Nigel Broadbent



Alison Leith



Wendy Beacom

A sense of community at Wynyard

Inside their Wynard offices, experts from Tilly Bailey & Irvine (“TBI”) meet with businesses from Teesside and beyond to impart their legal wisdom.

One of the North East’s oldest and largest law firms, TBI opened its Wynyard site in 2009 and has since established a strong base in the area.

“We help hundreds of businesses and individuals each year,” said Nigel Broadbent, Partner and Head of Corporate & Commercial.

“Clients utilise our expertise as they need someone they can trust to handle what are often very complex cases.”

TBI has been trusted for almost 200 years. Founded in 1842, the law firm’s reputation and consistently strong results for an impressive range of clients, has led to the firm expanding into new areas - Wynyard, Stockton, Barnard Castle, Hartlepool and Sunderland - with the latter joining TBI’s portfolio last year as TBI Scanlans, following a merger with the respected Wearside firm.

At the Wynyard office, the range of specialisms covered is extensive.

Lawyers there have in-depth experience in dealing with all manner of commercial matters for clients, including commercial dispute resolution (such as mediation, arbitration and adjudication), commercial property transactions, corporate mergers, acquisitions, disposals, finance and banking, succession planning and governance, commercial contract drafting, Employment Law (for both employers and employees), insolvency and Private Family Law.

“The teams at our Wynyard office are experienced and very capable. Some of the matters we deal with are high-value, high-stakes cases. Often, they are “mission critical” to our clients’ businesses, particularly for owner-managed businesses. We have a well-established track record of helping our clients to get the outcomes they need,” said Alison Leith, Partner and Head of Commercial Litigation.

“Some of the cases we deal with are very significant. For example, I acted for the owners of 77 new-build houses that had defective foundations in claims against the builder and NHBC.

Our clients won damages of multiple millions of pounds at first instance, and then successfully defeated an appeal to the Court of Appeal.

Heavyweight cases like that require a highly organised team effort. They provide fantastic opportunities for our younger lawyers to learn and develop their skill sets in a supportive and well-resourced environment, and that in turn helps to embed the “trusted advisor” relationships we

have with our clients. It is not an accident that many of our clients have worked with us for decades”.

It isn’t just the big money cases that TBI specialise in. Sometimes what is at stake is about more than money, as Head of Private Family Law, Wendy Beacom, can attest, having recently helped a client in successfully opposing a top-up application for child maintenance, a huge result long-term for her client.”

It isn’t just results that make what the Wynyard office does special. There is a real team ethos, and a sense of community.

TBI proudly sponsors many local events in the region, and supports local charities such as Alice House Hospice, The Teesside Charity, Butterwick Hospice, and Age UK.

And that sense of care runs right through everything the team does.

“It’s about being accessible. We sit down with our clients’ face-to face, we take the time to listen and to understand what their needs are, and we remain by their side throughout the legal process.

“What really sets us apart is how collaboratively we work. Departments don’t operate in silos – they work together, and with colleagues across our other offices, to provide an integrated full-service legal offering.”

“That joined-up approach, backed by decades of experience, means clients don’t just get a solicitor - they get a team they can trust.”

Visit www.tbilaw.co.uk/contact/Wynyard-Solicitors

SINTONS

For expert legal advice

Trust Sintons

t: 0191 226 7878 e: info@sintons.co.uk w: sintons.co.uk

Sintons LLP, The Cube, Barrack Road,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 6DB

✕ [@SintonsLaw](https://twitter.com/SintonsLaw)  [sintons-llp](https://www.linkedin.com/company/sintons-llp)

Personal & Family | Business | Healthcare

Sintons LLP is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.



Mark Brown



Carolyn Beal

Financial Governance in Law Firms: A Board and Partner- Level Priority

A joint insight from L4 Financial and
Beal Cooper Compliance

Law firms today face increasing regulatory scrutiny, rising client expectations and growing commercial pressure. In this environment, financial governance can no longer be treated as a back-office function or a compliance exercise alone. It must sit at board and partner level, informing how firms manage risk, make decisions and plan for the future.

Recent regulatory action by the Solicitors Regulation Authority highlights why this matters. High-profile fines, interventions and renewed focus on client money controls show that weaknesses in financial oversight can escalate quickly. In most cases, the underlying issue is not a lack of knowledge of the Accounts Rules, but insufficient senior ownership of how financial risk is governed across the firm.

The SRA Accounts Rules are deliberately less prescriptive than in the past. Since 2019, firms have been expected to apply judgement and operate systems and controls proportionate to their size, complexity and risk profile. This means partners and boards must understand not only what the rules require, but how effectively their firm applies them in practice and be prepared to explain the application to regulators. Compliance has become a test of governance maturity.

Accountability at senior level is explicit. Managers are jointly and severally responsible, and the COFA role is designed to provide oversight rather than firefighting. Yet in many practices, financial governance remains fragmented.

Fee earners focus on client delivery, finance teams focus on processing, and compliance becomes reactive. This can leave gaps that remain unnoticed until they are exposed through an SRA inspection or an accountant's report.

Residual client balances illustrate this clearly. The requirement to return client money promptly is well understood, but how that standard is defined and enforced varies widely between firms. Where boards and partners have not set clear expectations, balances accumulate, files remain open and risk increases. The SRA's ongoing consultation on whether more prescriptive timeframes should be introduced should be seen as a signal that this area remains under scrutiny.

The same is true for reconciliations, accountant's reports and controls around client accounts. These are often treated as operational details, yet they are powerful indicators of financial health, risk exposure and leadership oversight. Weaknesses here frequently correlate with poor cashflow visibility, unclear partner drawings policies and limited strategic insight.

Strong financial governance delivers more than regulatory

protection. Firms with disciplined financial controls and clear reporting make better commercial decisions. They manage working capital more effectively, price work with greater confidence and are better prepared for growth, investment or succession planning. Governance, when done well, becomes an enabler rather than a constraint.

This is where financial advisory and compliance support work best together. Compliance specialists ensure firms meet regulatory expectations, maintain up-to-date policies and manage risk in line with SRA standards. Board and partner-level financial advisers ensure those controls are embedded into how the business is run, linking compliance to commercial performance, cashflow and long-term strategy.

By combining robust compliance frameworks with clear financial oversight, firms can move from reactive compliance to confident, informed leadership. In an environment of increasing scrutiny and complexity, that joined-up approach is what allows practices to protect client trust while building stronger, more resilient businesses.

About the authors...

Mark Brown

*Fractional Finance Director,
L4 Financial*

Mark provides board and partner-level financial advisory support to SMEs including law firms, helping leadership teams strengthen governance, improve financial visibility and make better strategic decisions.

E: Mark@L4Financial.co.uk

T: 07960 031554

W: L4Financial.co.uk

Carolyn Beal

*Compliance Consultant,
Beal Cooper Compliance*

Beal Cooper Compliance supports law firms with SRA compliance, risk management and regulatory frameworks, helping firms meet their obligations and manage regulatory risk effectively.

E: carolyn@bealcoopercompliance.co.uk

T: 07745621718

W: bealcoopercompliance.co.uk



Financial
Management

Board-level financial leadership for growing SMEs

- Clear, independent financial input for owners and boards
- Decision-focused reporting, forecasting and cash flow
- Developing finance teams, systems and financial discipline



 07960 031554

 Mark@L4Financial.co.uk

L4Financial.co.uk



Georgia Meyer

Debunking common divorce myths

Georgia Meyer, a family solicitor at Mincoffs Solicitors, separates fact from fiction and highlights what really matters when navigating divorce.

From assumptions about court involvement, to misunderstandings about child arrangements, divorce is often surrounded by misconceptions. These myths can make an already challenging process feel even more daunting, so it is important to understand the legalities behind the process.

“I have to prove they were at fault to get a divorce.”

Since the introduction of the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020, separating couples no longer need to prove one party was at fault to obtain a divorce. Instead, they simply state that the marriage has irretrievably broken down.

This move towards no-fault divorce aims to reduce hostilities and create a more constructive path forward. Couples can even make a joint application, encouraging cooperation rather than contention.

“When we divorce, I will automatically be given 50% of the assets.”

Although equal division of matrimonial assets is generally the starting point when dividing assets, a fair financial settlement depends on a range of factors, including matrimonial and non-matrimonial assets, individual needs,

dependent children, age, and length of marriage to name just a few. In practice, courts prioritise needs above equality and each case is individually assessed. The outcome may also shift significantly depending on what the court deems appropriate for achieving a resolution that is fair.

“Mothers always get custody of the children.”

The law solely focuses on what is in the best interests of the child, meaning that care of the child is not automatically granted to one parent. Care arrangements are decided by considering each parent’s ability to meet the child’s needs, the child’s relationship with each parent and the practicalities of any proposed arrangement.

Courts favour care arrangements that allow children to have a meaningful relationship with both parents where possible. As a result, shared care arrangements, where children spend time with each parent, are becoming increasingly common.

“Pre-nups are only for the rich and famous.”

Pre-nuptial agreements are no longer solely for high-net-worth couples. Many people use them to protect everyday assets such as a house deposit contributed by one party, personal or business interests, or future inheritances.

A pre-nuptial agreement can help ring-fence certain assets, set expectations and reduce future conflict. Though not automatically binding, a properly drafted agreement, entered into freely and with proper prior disclosure, can carry significant weight with the court.

“If an asset is in my name, it’s mine in the divorce.”

Whose name an asset is held in generally matters far less than one might expect. What is crucial in divorce proceedings is whether the asset is considered matrimonial and what is needed to achieve a fair and balanced outcome. If an asset is classed as matrimonial, it may be included in the overall financial settlement (even if it is registered in only one party’s name).

“I’m going to have to go to court to get my divorce.”

A divorce does not automatically require attendance in court. In many cases, the divorce process is non-contentious and largely administrative.

Disputes are more likely to arise in relation to agreeing arrangements for finances on divorce, or arrangements for children. Even so, many issues can be resolved through solicitor correspondence or via non-court dispute resolution alternatives, without the need for a court hearing. Whilst some cases do require court involvement, it is far from the only option.

For confidential, trusted advice about divorce and separation, or any other family law matter, contact family@mincoffs.co.uk or speak to one of the team on 0191 281 6151.

www.mincoffs.co.uk

0191 232 8345 | hay-kilner.co.uk



CELEBRATING
80 YEARS

Eight decades. One trusted law firm.

For you, your family and your business.

Hay & Kilner

Here for you

CORPORATE & COMMERCIAL | EMPLOYMENT | PROPERTY | CLINICAL NEGLIGENCE | DISPUTES
WILLS, TRUSTS, ESTATES & PROBATE | CONSTRUCTION | FAMILY & DIVORCE | AGRICULTURE



Nicola Leyden and Abbey Hogg of Muckle LLP's HR team pictured with Ross Weddle, Iryna Orshak, Herman Parkhomenko and Bethan Kelly of the North East Community Forest

Muckle LLP champions sustainability through employee volunteering scheme

Muckle LLP, a leading law firm in the North East, continues to demonstrate its commitment to helping local communities through its ongoing support of a regional sustainability organisation.

Over the past year, Muckle has maintained a close partnership with The North East Community Forest (NECF), a regional organisation that works with volunteers and landowners to plant and maintain trees, hedgerows and woodlands across the region.

As part of Muckle's ongoing initiative to encourage employees to use their volunteering hours, Muckle donates £1 to NECF for every hour volunteered by its people. So far, the firm has donated £1,680 - the equivalent of planting 336 new trees.

Muckle's employees receive two days paid leave to volunteer with charities and its lawyers are also encouraged to use their legal expertise to support the community as school governors, trustees and board members of local charities. Senior partner at the firm, Hugh Welch, is a trustee at Clean Slate Solutions, whilst young solicitor

Lydia Stewart is a trustee at Choysez, a charity supporting young women. Additionally, senior associate Alison Jones is a trustee at Newcastle Theatre Royal Trust Limited, Museum of London Archaeology and the British Museum. The work carried out by NECF not only helps make the region become more resilient to climate change but also fosters a greater appreciation for trees and woodlands by engaging the people in North East England in environmental conservation.

Muckle has always been committed to its ESG work including working with SmartCarbon to accurately capture its carbon footprint, as well as delivering other environmental initiatives such as hosting its own clothes swap in aid of local charities.

As a result of this ongoing work, in 2024, Muckle became the first law firm in the North East and Cumbria to achieve B Corporation®

accreditation, building on the impact it has already achieved through its ESG initiatives.

Ross Weddle, Chair of the North East Community Forest, said: "Business supporters like Muckle LLP make a real difference to the North East Community Forest. Their contribution doesn't just plant trees—it helps us unlock matched government funding through the Trees for Climate programme, meaning every pound goes further. Support like this enables us to create greener streets, plant hedgerows, and establish new woodlands across our region. Together, we're growing a healthier, more resilient North East for generations to come.

Nicola Leyden, Director of HR at Muckle, said: "As a responsible business caring for our local communities and environment has always been at the heart of everything we do. Through our partnership with NECF, we are demonstrating our commitment to our ESG goals and showing how we can make a real difference.

"Our volunteer hours donation scheme is a natural extension of our commitment to sustainable business and community engagement. By linking our people's time to meaningful impact, we're helping grow our region's green future together."

To find out more about Muckle ESG strategies, visit: www.muckle-llp.com/about-us/environmental-social-governance

To find out more about the North East Community Forest visit: northeastcommunityforest.org.uk

Purpose-led legal experts

From pro-bono support to volunteering,
we put our people, clients
and community first

Call **0191 211 7777** to learn more

muckle-llp.com

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
We invest in people Platinum

Renters' Rights Act 2025 Update

As implementation draws closer, 2026 has brought further clarity on timing and compliance requirements, particularly around written information that must be provided to tenants from May 2026.



Charlie Lynn

Written statement of terms for tenancies

From 1 May 2026, all new periodic tenancies must be accompanied by a written statement of key terms. This can either be incorporated into the tenancy agreement itself or provided as a separate document, but it must be given to the tenant before occupation begins.

The information to be provided includes:

- the full names and contact details of the landlord and tenant(s);
- the address of the property;
- the date the tenant is entitled to occupy;
- the amount of rent, when it is payable and how it is to be paid; and
- details of any other charges or bills for which the tenant is responsible.

In addition, landlords of existing tenancies will be required to provide tenants with a government-prescribed information document summarising the key changes introduced by RRA. Where a tenancy has been agreed orally or informally, a written summary of the main terms will also be required.

Failure to comply with these documentation requirements is expected to restrict landlords' ability to rely on possession grounds and may expose them to enforcement action.

Government guidance confirms:

- tenancies that started before 1st May 2026 – you won't need to change or re-issue any existing written tenancy agreements. Instead, all you'll need to do is send your tenants a government-produced information sheet before 31st May 2026.
- tenancies that start on or after 1st May 2026 – you'll need to provide your tenants with certain information about the tenancy in writing. You could do this in a tenancy agreement.

Final reminder: section 21 notices must be served by 30 April 2026.

Section 21 "no-fault" evictions will be abolished as part of the first implementation phase. The last date on which a valid section 21 notice can be served is 30 April 2026. Any notice served after that date will be invalid. Notices served before this deadline will remain capable of being relied upon, provided all existing statutory requirements have been met.

From 1 May 2026, possession will only be

possible using the revised section 8 grounds introduced by the RRA.

Next steps

With the first implementation date now clearly in view, this is a critical period for reviewing:

- tenancy agreements and written processes; and
- possession strategies where section 21 may still be relevant.

Early planning and accurate legal guidance will be essential. Our dispute resolution team can advise on the legalities and understanding how the new possession grounds will operate in practice.

For clear, practical advice on how the RRA may affect your property interests, get in touch with Charlie Lynn, Partner and Head of Litigation at Sweeney Miller Law on 0345 900 5401, email charlie.lynn@sweeinemiller.co.uk or visit www.sweeinemiller.co.uk

Northern Soul National Reach.

Corporate and commercial
legal experts.



Give us a call on **0345 900 5401** to find out more.



www.sweeneymiller.co.uk

sweeney
miller **LAW**



Barry Speker OBE

Straight Talk

By Barry Speker OBE

Thousands gathered in Newcastle's Chinatown for this year's celebration of the Chinese New Year, 2026 being the Year of the Horse, noted for bravery, speed and resilience.

At the beginning of the Sunday event and before the precession from Grey's Monument to Stowell Street, there was a ceremony for the initiation of a new Dragon created by Edmund Ng's Choy Lee Fut Kung Fu Association. I was honoured to be asked to participate in the ceremonial 'dotting' of the dragon, which was then suitably paraded with enthusiasm by Edmund's dance troupe.

All credit to Edmund, the Northern East Chinese Association and the Confucius Institute for a wonderful event.

The constant outrage in the media, predictions of findings of unlawful activities and demands for 'Off with their heads' show no sign of dissipating following the arrest of Andrew M-W and Peter Mandelson.



There should at least be a period of restraint whilst the Police undertake their enquiries, decide if criminal charges should be brought and then respect our constitutional principle of the presumption of innocence - a principle embedded in our PM as former head of the CPS.

In the meantime the politicians will try to explain their role in the appointment of Andrew as trade envoy and Mandelson as UK Ambassador and of the statements that they were both doing a great job.

In due course and on the basis of evidence, due consideration can be given to whether the allegations go beyond personal misconduct. Were our institutions opened for facilitation of prostitution subverting our immigration controls and human trafficking protections? Were there no effective precautions regarding disclosure of private government documents to the Epstein network or to hostile states?

Plenty of grist for the Republican mill.

We may have a constitutional crisis but it is not as serious as the 1936 Abdication.

Our monarchy has served us well over the centuries and still enables us to have a cohesive democratic society. What would replace the institution if it were abolished?

The Channel 4 drama 'Dirty Business' was a masterful portrayal of a truly appalling narrative about the disgraceful pollution of our rivers and beaches. Written by Joseph Bullman, the production comprised several timelines and included contemporaneous newsreel footage.

There were shades of Mr Bates in the campaign by Ashley Smith and Peter Hammond producing the clearest evidence of widespread pollution of the River Windrush. Their approaches to the Environment Agency produced delays, denials, obfuscation and no action. Inspections were reduced and inspectors cars were taken away - to assist in achieving net zero! In the meantime the water companies were allowed to self-regulate and the Environment Agency was plied with money - to



inflate payment and bonuses to their officials and staff.

The story of the death of eight year old Heather Preen after bathing in raw sewage in the sea in Devon was heartbreaking.

Serious concerns were displayed over the irresponsible actions of the water companies, the Environment Agency's conflicts of interest, changing rules to avoid effective inspections, sewage spills and only reacting when an enquiry took place assisted by courageous whistle-blowers.

The play highlighted serious dysfunction of our privatised water system and the concerns that the damage caused to our rivers cannot be repaired.

Will the saga resemble Mr Bates and Grenfell, in facing years of delay before the many culprits are held to account?

At the Bafta Award ceremony the critics expected DiCaprio or Chalamet to pick up the Best Actor gong. Something of a surprise that the winner was Robert Aramayo for his role in 'I Swear' in which he portrays John Davidson from Galashiels who suffers from Tourette's Syndrome which produces uncontrollable ticks and uncontrollable verbal outbursts, often abusive.

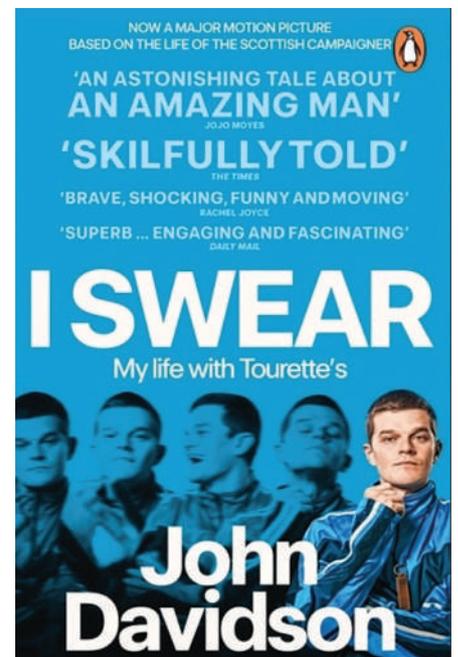
Understandably, John Davidson was present at the event to stress the need for inclusion.

However and not too surprisingly, Davidson was ticking during the ceremony and shouted the n-word as two black actors went up to present an award.

Efforts were made to be understanding of the involuntary outburst which upset attendees and was audible to viewers.

The problem persisted because the BBC failed to edit the broadcast (as they could have done) and left the unedited version streaming until the next day. Another bad tick for the BBC!

barryspeker@hotmail.com



Is your business ready for the biggest changes to Employment Law in a generation?

Charlotte McBride is a Senior Associate at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Charlotte outlines the recent and upcoming changes to employment law arising from the Employment Rights Act 2025 and their impact on businesses.

Employment Law is set to radically alter as we move through 2026 and into 2027 as a result of the Employment Rights Bill passing into law at the end 2025.

What changes are already in effect?

From 18 February 2026, the law has already changed in respect of trade union legislation, doubling the period that an industrial action ballot is effective to 12 months and reducing the notice required from a trade union to an employer in respect of industrial action from 14 days to 10 days.

What changes are on the horizon?

Looking ahead to 6 April 2026, day-one rights to parental and paternity leave are expected to come into force. In addition, we expect statutory sick pay will become payable from day-one of a period of sickness absence (dispensing with waiting days) and the lower-earnings limit will be removed. In practice this means more employees, including lower paid employees, will be entitled to some form of sick pay and from earlier on in their sickness.

For employers facing large-scale redundancies, the protective award for failing to collectively consult is also set to double from 90 days' gross pay per employee to 180 days' gross pay – a significant increase in the financial penalty businesses could face.



Charlotte McBride

What's changes can we expect in the long-term?

Some of the most significant changes are expected from October 2026, including the duty for employers to take "all reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, whether from their colleagues or third parties, a reintroduction of the concept of vicarious liability. Crucially, it is also expected that from October 2026, the time limit to bring most employment tribunal claims will rise from three months to six months from dismissal or the act complained of.

Moving into 2027, arguably the most significant change the Act makes to employment law rights will take place at the beginning of the year. From 1 January 2027, employees with 6-months service will be able to bring unfair dismissal claims against their employers, having previously required 2 years continuous employment to bring such a claim. This will increase the risks of dismissing employees, compounded by the abolition of the current compensatory cap for dismissal awards which we expect to come into force at the same time. We can also expect new protections from what

are widely considered "exploitative" fire and rehire practices to come into effect alongside the unfair dismissal changes.

Beyond the turn of the year, changes including the introduction of a collective redundancy threshold across whole organisations (whereby the obligation to collectively consult would apply) as well as the new regulation of zero hours and low hours contracts are expected. No date has been suggested yet for these changes.

What should employers be doing now?

The above changes are not exhaustive and the implementation dates are not set in stone, but clearly employers need to begin to identify which aspects of the Act will most impact their business so they can address business planning and operations to ensure everything is in order for the stepped-introduction of changes.

Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide expert legal advice and training to organisations on all areas of employment law.

www.collingwoodlegal.com
0191 282 2880



Nadine Walton

Scotland, England – and the estate that falls between them

By Nadine Walton, Brodies LLP

A personal connection, and revelation.

I live and work in the North East of England. My professional life is firmly rooted here, and I'm a proud geordie. But my family story, like that of many people in the region, doesn't stop at the border.

My great-grandfather came from Aberdeenshire, and today I regularly travel north for work, often finding myself a stone's throw from the area he once called home. I hear my maiden surname often, sounding somehow more familiar in the Scottish lilt. Like many people in Northumberland, Durham and Tyneside, Scotland isn't an abstract concept for me, it's part of a lived experience. That's also what originally attracted me to working for a law firm headquartered there.

There are so many similarities of which you become aware on heading north frequently. The nature of the people, the manner in which they greet you, and their use of familiar words that are prone to confuse southerners – to name but a few.

Before moving to Brodies in late 2022, I suppose I therefore assumed the legal differences that would have a bearing on my job as a trust and estate solicitor would be relatively inconsequential.

Not so, I found. The challenge of acting

for clients with connections to both legal jurisdictions, and analysing the interplay between them, hit me with full force. It became part of my bread and butter, and has had me hooked ever since. Below, I shed some light on the most common estate-planning related misconceptions, and frequently raised questions I hear from north-easterners connected to Scotland.

Surely where I live now is what counts?

Not always.

Where your estate is concerned, Scottish succession law may still be relevant where you have;

- a Scottish 'domicile' (that's where you 'hail from' and consider home');
- property in Scotland; or
- Scottish trust arrangements.

'Domicile' dictates the law under which the administration of your estate is governed, the entitlement to your estate, and who can administer it.

The domicile factor therefore generally has the furthest reaching consequences in cross border estate planning, even between England and Scotland. Many people find it baffling that this concept does not just translate to residence. Curiously, an individual can still be Scottish domiciled many years after relocating south, in circumstances where they are planning a move even further afield to sunnier climes, rather than a return north.

What's the biggest legal difference between English and Scottish legal rules in the area of wills and estate planning?

Scotland's "legal rights" regime.

Where an individual dies domiciled in England and Wales, their will generally does what it says, subject to potential claims for reasonable financial provision. Where an individual dies domiciled in Scotland, the law goes further. Spouses, civil partners and children have automatic rights to a share of the deceased's moveable estate, even if the will says otherwise. That can come as a shock – especially for

entrepreneurial families where a key stakeholder may have overlooked this point and their shares/partnership interest is suddenly subject to legal rights.

Do powers of attorney cross the border?

Sometimes – but not seamlessly.

English Lasting Powers of Attorney ('LPAs') and Scottish Powers of Attorney are different creatures. Problems commonly arise where a power of attorney prepared in the opposing jurisdiction is relied upon to deal with property or business interests in the other. For anyone with assets on both sides of the border, dual documentation is often the advised solution.

Are trusts any different?

Very much so. The rules around trustee powers, how they are appointed, the duration for which trusts endure, and trustee decision-making are all very different in Scottish trusts.

Particular complexities can arise where an English-law trust holds Scottish land, or vice-versa. You can therefore have a clash of the law governing the trust, and the law governing the land, which must be considered very carefully.

The North East reality

The North East has always been a dynamic region. People, industry, culture and ideas have moved across the Anglo-Scottish border in both directions. For many of us here, if we're not personally connected to Scotland through relatives, property, or work, there tends only to be 'six degrees of separation'.

For North East folk with Scottish ties, the message is simple but vital. Estate-planning advice should be taken from professionals in each jurisdiction, or from one adviser with knowledge of both regimes.

Because when it comes to your legacy, borders matter. Even when they feel canny close.

Nadine is an expert in wills and estate planning, she is based in the North East.

[brodies.com](https://www.brodies.com)

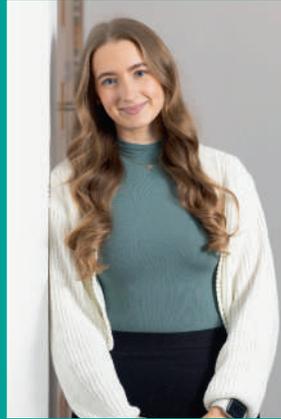
YOUR LEGAL PARTNER



David Lant



Claire Rolston



Anna Ramsden



Sara Devennie

“Exceptional - highly recommended”

- Employment law, general commercial advice and commercial disputes
- Our value-based pricing model focuses on outcomes for clients
- Clients get peace of mind working with us



CLR Law

Baltimore House, Baltic Business Quarter, Gateshead, NE8 3DF Tel: 0191 6030061 www.clrlaw.co.uk @clrlaw



RICHARD REED
SOLICITORS

Legal advice
for all aspects of
personal and
business life

GET IN TOUCH

0191 567 0465

info@richardreed.co.uk



richardreed.co.uk

Swinburne Maddison strengthens leadership and operational infrastructure with Head of Finance appointment



L-R: Jonathan Moreland, Swinburne Maddison's Managing Partner with new Head of Finance, Helen Broadhead

One of the North East's leading law firms, Swinburne Maddison, has continued its planned investment in leadership and operational infrastructure with the appointment of Helen Broadhead as Head of Finance.

Helen joins the firm as part of a wider programme of strategic growth, ensuring that Swinburne Maddison's financial governance, reporting and systems evolve in line with the firm's expanding scale and regional footprint. Her appointment reflects a deliberate focus on strengthening the business foundations that underpin long-term, sustainable growth.

A qualified management accountant and member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), Helen brings more than 20 years' finance experience,

having held senior finance roles across the North East.

Her background spans professional services, financial services, manufacturing, retail and consumer goods in roles within Zurich, Intersnack, Berghaus and Jackson Hogg Recruitment. She also has a strong track record of supporting growing businesses through periods of change and expansion.

Her appointment follows the recent release of the latest Legal 500 UK rankings, in which Swinburne Maddison reinforced its position as one of the region's most respected full-service law firms with recommendations across nine practice areas, retaining four Tier One rankings.

Jonathan Moreland, Managing Partner, said: "Helen's appointment is another important step in strengthening the firm's leadership and operational infrastructure as we continue to grow. She brings not only significant financial expertise, but also a strong understanding of the commercial realities facing businesses, having worked closely with founders, leadership teams and advisers across a wide range of sectors.

"Her experience supporting start-ups and high-

growth businesses, combined with her strong regional relationships, will be invaluable as we continue to support clients on increasingly complex commercial and corporate matters. We're delighted to welcome her to Swinburne Maddison."

Helen added: "I'm excited to be joining Swinburne Maddison at such a positive point in its journey. The firm has an excellent reputation for expertise, professionalism and client service and I'm looking forward to working closely with the leadership team to support sustainable growth and provide clear financial insight to inform future strategic direction."

Helen is known for her pro-active and hands-on leadership style, with a particular focus on creating robust financial controls, delivering timely and meaningful management information and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration within finance teams.

Helen's appointment brings the firm's headcount to 95.

www.swinburnemaddison.co.uk

Smart legal thinking for business

We're the legal team behind ambitious businesses. Our award-winning team brings sharp thinking and a practical approach. We work as part of your business, spotting opportunities, solving problems and protecting what matters.

And that's reassuring to know

swinburnemaddison.co.uk

Our Services

Solicitor of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Annaliese Barber

Director, Solicitor & Notary Public & Head of Wills, Trusts & Probate at Sunderland based Richard Reed Solicitors.

Annaliese has built a reputation not only for technical excellence in advising families on succession planning and navigating the complexities of probate, but also for recognising that behind every instruction is a story – often involving vulnerability, grief or difficult family dynamics. As conversations around capacity, long-term care planning and intergenerational wealth transfer become more sophisticated, so too must the balance between efficiency and compassion.

What inspired you to pursue a career in law, and what path did you take to become a Solicitor?

After visiting Kennedy Space Centre at 10 and standing beneath the mighty Saturn V, I was set on becoming an astronaut – until reality grounded me!

I still wanted a career that made a real difference, and law was my launchpad. My route wasn't typical: after studying at Newcastle University, I started out as a YTS Legal Secretary just to gain experience. One year turned into a journey – Paralegal, Trainee Solicitor, Solicitor, and eventually Notary Public.

What are the most common legal issues people seek advice on, and how do you help them?

People come to me for a wide range of personal legal matters, but most fall into a handful of familiar themes, making or updating a will, Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs) and probate and estate administration.

For wills, I help clients put clear, legally robust plans in place that reflect their current circumstances, family dynamics and long-term intentions. Many feel immediate relief once their affairs are properly structured.

With LPAs, I guide clients through safeguarding their future, ensuring trusted individuals can act on their behalf if capacity is lost, while protecting against undue influence and handling the registration process.

In probate and estate administration, I support families through the practical and legal responsibilities following a death, managing the process efficiently and sensitively to ease both the administrative and emotional burden.

How has the legal profession changed in recent years, and what trends do you see emerging?

AI and automation are looming on a large scale, but AI can't replace the empathy needed when dealing with someone who has just been bereaved or is vulnerable. It can't read the body

language of the person sat in front of you, technology may enhance the service – but empathy sustains it.

Covid brought significant and lasting change to the profession. Prior to 2020, hybrid or remote working was largely unheard of in most law firms; today, it is an accepted and effective part of everyday practice.

We had to adapt quickly, learning new ways of working almost overnight – from virtual client meetings to platforms such as Teams – and what initially felt unfamiliar has now become second nature. In many respects, the shift has modernised how we operate, improving flexibility without compromising service.

What advice would you give to someone facing a legal dispute for the first time?

Seek appropriate advice as soon as possible, as getting good advice from the outset can save time, money and relationships in the long run.

What are the key qualities that make a great Solicitor?

A great solicitor combines technical expertise with strong interpersonal skills. In my area of work particularly, the role is often about being a calm and steady presence during times of uncertainty or crisis.

Compassion, empathy and active listening are essential, alongside clear communication is also key, it's the balance of professionalism and humanity that truly defines a great solicitor.

What is the most rewarding part of being a Solicitor, and what keeps you motivated?

Clients often come to me carrying grief, anxiety, family tension, or uncertainty. I always take the time to listen—really listen—to what they're experiencing. Empathy is essential in private client work, and I want every person who sits across from me (or joins a call) to feel heard and safe.

Being able to assist someone when they need it most is the pivotal reward for me.

Take a deeper dive into Making Sense of Wills with Annaliese on S01 E03 of Richards Reeds Legally Sound Podcast – available across all platforms.

richardreed.co.uk

“

Being able to assist someone when they need it most is the pivotal reward for me.

Why your patent filing strategy should match your business strategy

For many businesses patent filing can follow a familiar script: an initial UK application, followed by an International application under the Patent Cooperation Treat (PCT), and later entry into Europe via a European patent application filed at the European Patent Office (EPO).

Whilst this approach offers convenience and broad coverage, it may not always be the most effective or commercially appropriate strategy.

An important alternative is direct national patent filings, which remain available as either an alternative to, or alongside regional systems such as EPO applications. National filings allow businesses to target protection precisely where commercial activity is expected. For businesses operating in only a small number of markets this can reduce costs compared with pursuing and maintaining broader regional coverage.

National patent offices may also offer faster prosecution, meaning that granted patents can be obtained more quickly. Early grant can be valuable when engaging with investors, strengthening commercial credibility.

Regional filings, such as EPO applications, undoubtedly provide an efficient route to protection across much of Europe through a single examination process. However, this efficiency can come at the cost of lengthier timelines and higher overall expense.

Concentrating filings in a single regional system can also concentrate risk. Relying solely on an EPO application means that delays, or adverse decisions affect an entire European portfolio



Dominic Elsworth

at once. By contrast, a strategy that includes national filings spreads risk across multiple offices, reducing dependence on any single authority.

It is also important to recognise that regional patent systems do not always align with political borders. National filings can sometimes cover territories that fall outside regional frameworks, a consideration that is often overlooked. A notable example is Denmark. Denmark is a full contracting state to the EPO and validating a European patent in Denmark gives protection in mainland Denmark, however it does not cover Greenland or the Faroe Islands. These territories are explicitly excluded from Denmark's EPO territorial extension. For businesses operating in Arctic technologies, such as mining, energy, or fishing this exclusion is important to consider, and national filings in Denmark may be a better route than the EPO.

For a UK business thinking about where to file patent applications the key considerations are typically: Where are the products manufactured? Where will they be sold? Where are competitors located? What is the route to market? How reliable and enforceable are the legal systems of countries being considered? For example, is the business a UK

manufacturer exporting products around the world, or is product development carried out in the UK whilst manufacturing takes place abroad through subsidiaries or licensees? These considerations will help generate a candidate list of countries where patent protection might deliver real commercial value. It is only natural for a company that has developed a new invention to want protection that is as wide as possible. However, geographically broad patent filing programmes can be very expensive. A more focused approach may provide equally effective commercial protection. Is patent protection across all EU countries necessary, or would protection Germany, France and a small number of additional countries create a sufficient barrier for a competitor to enter the market? If patent protection is obtained in China or India, how will enforcement be managed in practice?

Ultimately, effective patent strategy is an strategic business decision. Careful alignment of filing routes with commercial realities can reduce cost, avoid territorial gaps, and deliver more meaningful protection.

www.heip.co.uk



Winn Group has been offering a **market-leading** one-stop-shop for **accident management** and **legal** services for **over two decades**.

With a focus on providing the **best possible client care**, our teams work **24 hours a day, 365 days a year** because we don't believe clients should expect any less of a service if they contact us at 1am or 1pm.

WINN
SOLICITORS

WINNS
NATIONAL ACCIDENT SPECIALISTS

WINNS
WILLS



95% of our clients rate us as **Excellent** or **Great**

winngroup.co.uk





Entrepreneurs' Forum: Founders' Lunch

North East entrepreneurs gathered at The Biscuit Factory for the Entrepreneurs' Forum's Founders' Lunch, with a dynamic format designed to spark honest, peer-to-peer conversation.

Instead of listening to a keynote, guests rotated between tables hosted by nine of the region's most respected business leaders. Sharing real lessons on leadership, growth, and decision-making, the event reinforced the Forum's ethos of entrepreneurs helping entrepreneurs to build a stronger regional business community.

entrepreneursforum.net





**CARTMELL
SHEPHERD**
SOLICITORS *Always at your side*

Cartmells means business

We provide straightforward legal advice to business owners who want to move forward with confidence, whether that's growing, restructuring, protecting assets or resolving disputes.



Company & Commercial



Dispute Resolution



Commercial Property



Agri-business



Employment

01228 516666 | www.cartmells.co.uk | enquiries@cartmells.co.uk



From haggis to highland dancing- NE Youth's Burns Night Ball raises £12k

NE Youth marked Burns Night in spectacular style with its annual Burns Night Ball at The Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park, raising an impressive £12,000 to support young people across the region. Sponsored by Northern Garden Sheds, the event welcomed 300 guests for an unforgettable evening of Scottish tradition, entertainment and fundraising.

Times are difficult for charities right now- so many smaller organisations are being forced to shut down- and those still operating are being asked to do more with less, at the very moment people, especially young people, need them most!

Guests were greeted by a beautifully dressed ballroom, setting the tone for a night that blended tradition, hospitality and generosity. The evening was hosted by broadcaster Anna Foster from BBC Newcastle whose warmth and energy kept the celebrations flowing.

Of course there was a classic three-course Scottish menu including traditional haggis, neeps and tatties! The vegetarian haggis was apparently delicious too!

A charity auction featuring 15 sought-after prizes proved a major highlight of the evening, with generous donations from Ramside Estates, Nest, Royal Albert Hall and Northern Garden Sheds. Fast and furious bidding filled the room and helped raise vital funds to support NE Youth's programmes.

Guests filled the dance floor for lively ceilidh dancing led by the Robert Whitehead Band, before an upbeat performance from Storm Band brought the celebrations to a rousing finale.



New CEO Sleepout chair

An award-winning businessman, who lost one of his best friends while rough sleeping, has been appointed chairman of a leading homelessness charity.

Newcastle's Abu Ali has taken on the role at the helm of CEO Sleepout, which to date has raised over £6m to support causes across the UK helping people in poverty, or experiencing homelessness.

For Abu, the position is particularly poignant.

Having supported CEO Sleepout since the charity's inception, his involvement deepened following the devastating death in 2013 of his childhood friend Lee Haplin.

Aged just 26, Lee's body was found in a derelict building in Newcastle while he was making a documentary to raise awareness about homelessness.

Fast-forward more than a decade, and Abu is hoping to continue Lee's legacy.

"I went through school with Lee, and his death cut through our friendship group. We were young and it was the first time we'd all lost a friend," said Abu.

"It was a global story, and in Lee's memory, I wanted to raise funds in the hope we could help to finish his documentary and leave a legacy for him.

"Ultimately, that brought CEO Sleepout into my life and since then, Lee's memory has always been a big part of what's driven me to make a change through the charity."

Darlington American Football team superbowed over with equipment grant

A thriving American Football club based in Darlington is set to give more local young people the chance to try out the sport thanks to a four-figure grant from regional employer the Banks Group.

Darlington Steam runs a number of teams that play both full contact league games and five-a-side, non-contact 'flag football' matches against opponents from across the country, and is the only club of its type between Newcastle and Leeds.

To help spread the word about everything their sport offers, the club is using a £2,000 Banks Community Fund grant to bring in a range of new equipment which new players can use when they come along to a try-out session.

The grant is also funding training and development courses which will



help increase the number of qualified coaches that the club has on its books, so that it can continue to bring along both current players and new recruits.

OASIS COMMUNITY HOUSING
HOPE. NOT HOMELESSNESS.

Step up in 2026

Join one of our charity events and give hope to those who need it most



Use your camera to scan and find out more



Let's break the cycle of domestic abuse

Providing specialised professional support to children,
young people and adults experiencing domestic abuse
in a safe, friendly and nurturing environment.

Relieving families and individuals of the life-long
impacts of domestic abuse.

Delivering workplace domestic abuse training to
employers from all sectors, across the North East.



Impact
Family Services

www.impactfs.co.uk • enquiries@impactfs.co.uk • t: 07357788835



Catherine Marchant



Charity of the Month

In the latest of this popular series of features

Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Catherine Marchant

Chief Executive at Impact Family Services

Why was the charity formed?

For over 40 years, Impact Family Services has been a beacon of safety and strength for people affected by domestic abuse. While we began in Sunderland and South Tyneside supporting separated parents through conflict, our services have since grown. Today, we address the complex effects of domestic abuse on individuals and families through a comprehensive network.

Moreover, we serve as a trusted lifeline. We stand alongside survivors as they reclaim confidence, rebuild lives, and create brighter futures. Central to our journey is a firm belief: no one should live in fear. Therefore, every family deserves the chance to heal, grow, and thrive in a safe environment.

Which services do you cover?

At Impact Family Services, we are here to provide compassionate, practical support for survivors, children, and families impacted by domestic abuse. Whether you need immediate help, a safe space to heal, or guidance to rebuild your life, our tailored services are designed to meet your unique needs and empower you to take the next step.

From one-to-one support for adults and young people to specialist programmes for children, we work with every member of the family to break the cycle of abuse and create brighter, safer futures. Our team is dedicated to walking alongside you every step of the way, offering the care and expertise needed to help you move forward with confidence.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

We do an enormous variety of different things. These include regular raffles, Christmas card competitions and our annual Golf Day at South Shields Golf Club. An exciting recent project was an exhibition in the Baltic where we auctioned 15 paintings by local children. A highlight of the night was also the donation of an original rivet from the Tyne Bridge by Esh Construction.

Who are your trustees and patrons?

Our board brings a wealth of skills to the table and are as follows...

Theresa Liddle, former Managing Director at NRG, Chair

Ashleigh Wright, Managing Director at Westray Recruitment

Ruth Brown, Headteacher

Sarah McKenna, Managing Director at Sarah McKenna HR

Andy Preacher, Corporate Affairs and Communications Director, AND-E.

Michael Christiansen, Head of Audit at Lloyds, Vice Chair

Zoe Blakemore, Corporate Lawyer

Ian Farrar, Far North

Kevin Wilson, Achieve Coaching

Joan Heckels, former Nurse and Magistrate

Steven Lincoln, former Family Lawyer

David Harker, Earsdon Professional Services, Treasurer.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

There are too many to list. The fact we help people every day from age 4 to 86 is tremendously rewarding.

Our contract with South Tyneside Council came to an end in January 2024 and could have been a disaster for our charity, but by ramping up grant funding we managed to keep all of our existing staff and retain the level of support for clients, which was amazing. With our forward thinking board of trustees we are focused on consistently supporting as many people as we possibly can.

What have been your biggest challenges?

I have worked in the Charity sector for over 30 years and the environment we currently operate in is undoubtedly the toughest I've experienced. There is so much competition and getting local businesses to acknowledge and support a domestic abuse charity is difficult. To ease our reliance on grant funding, we set up our own Community Interest Company to develop our own income streams, but like all new businesses, it takes time to build the income.

What does the future hold?

Sadly the spectre of domestic abuse isn't going to go away so our services will continue to be needed. We are supporting more clients from outside of South Tyneside and that will continue. The social enterprise arm of the business is a key area of growth for us both with our expanding child contact centre and our education products. An immediate consideration for us is re-introducing a behaviour change programme for DA perpetrators.

What are you currently working on?

We recently received a three year lottery grant so have brought in a family worker who will work with the families of the children and young people we support. We are also focusing on ramping up our workplace domestic abuse training for employers across the region.

www.impactfs.co.uk





Why we all must act on rising homelessness

Homelessness is rising sharply across our region, with rough sleeping increasing by 39% between 2023 and 2024 alone.

But these figures capture only those visible on the streets. Behind the statistics are many more women and families hidden from view, sofa surfing, living in unsafe temporary accommodation, or trapped in situations where asking for help can feel impossible.

Across the North East, Changing Lives teams are responding every day. From 365 days a year outreach support for people sleeping rough to safe supported accommodation for individuals and families, our services work alongside people facing the challenges of homelessness in all its forms. That includes women escaping abuse and exploitation, people experiencing poverty, those recovering from addiction, and individuals rebuilding their lives after involvement with the criminal justice system.

At the heart of our work is a simple belief: women thrive when they are safe, heard and

supported without judgement. Every service is built around safety, dignity and the opportunity for lasting change.

Reflecting on Women's History this International Women's Day

To mark International Women's Day, Changing Lives will be joining Newcastle Cathedral for a powerful new exhibition exploring *Women Behind Bars: Life in Newcastle Prison (1828–1925)*. Held at Newcastle Cathedral, the exhibition has been developed in collaboration with Tyne Bridge Publishing and Newcastle Libraries, with archive material courtesy of North East Museums.

The exhibition tells the stories of female prisoners and offers a powerful reflection on how far we have come, and how far we still have to go. Visitors can view the 'Story Chair' which was designed with women in touch with the criminal justice system in collaboration with Changing Lives, Northumbria University and Newcastle Cathedral, supported by the North East Probation Service and The British Academy.

The Exhibition will be held at Newcastle Cathedral between the 5th March and 27th April and is free to attend with a special launch event will take place on 4 March at 6.30pm, tickets are now available via the Newcastle Cathedral website.

How you can help change lives

The demand for our services continues to grow, and we need the support of our region more than ever.

We are currently seeking partnerships with

businesses to help sustain & expand our life-changing work. Whether through Charity of the Year partnerships, staff volunteering, corporate fundraising or sponsorship, your organisation can make a meaningful local impact.

Our Senior Fundraiser, Alice Fisher, would be delighted to discuss how we can work together: alice.fisher@changing-lives.org.uk, 07548 218139.

Get involved in 2026

Fundraising plays a vital role in enabling us to continue delivering essential services. There are many inspiring ways to support Changing Lives in 2026:

- **Great North Run:** Take on the region's iconic half marathon and raise vital funds.
- **Tough Mudder:** Push yourself through mud and obstacles at events across the country.
- **The Stand Comedy Club:** Enjoy an evening of comedy while supporting women across the region (£12 per ticket).
- **Annual Golf Day, Hobson Golf Club (19 June):** Join us for a fantastic day on the course in support of Changing Lives.

To register your interest in any of the above events, contact the Fundraising Team at fundraising@changing-lives.org.uk or scan the QR code below.



Construction Recruitment Specialist

Lemon Drizzle Recruitment is a specialist construction recruitment agency based in County Durham.

Founded in 2024 by Rachel Scott, better known as 'Rachel with the lemon cakes'. She brings over 10 years of experience recruiting white-collar construction professionals across commercial, operational and technical disciplines.



Rachel Scott



Contact Rachel now on 07957 537634

rachel@lemondrizzlerecruitment.com | lemondrizzlerecruitment.com

"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day." Somerset Maugham

Breakfast served all day, every day!



Willi's Café Jesmond

23-25 Clayton Road

Jesmond Newcastle upon Tyne 0191 212 1123



ZERO WASTE, PLASTIC FREE SHOPPING WITH AN IN-HOUSE ART GALLERY

DRIED GOODS - OILS AND VINEGARS - HOUSEHOLD CLEANING - PLASTIC FREE TOILETRIES AND MUCH MORE!



No 3 | Metro Station | The Sidings | Tynemouth | North Shields | NE30 2TF | www.buy-the-kilo.com



People *Doing* Good...

Northumberland Freemasons support life-changing training for breast cancer survivors

Northumberland Freemasons have donated £1,000 to the North East Nipple Project, enabling specialist training that will further enhance support for women recovering from breast cancer surgery.

The North East Nipple Project, run by Amanda Patterson and Megan Jones, provides free areola tattooing for women who have undergone breast surgery following breast cancer. The treatment, often described as the final stage of breast reconstruction, plays a vital role in restoring confidence and helping women feel whole again. Although areola tattooing is available on the NHS, long waiting lists and limited access mean many women are unable to receive this care in a timely way.

Amanda who works from her studio in Wallsend explained: “Areola tattooing is often the last piece of the jigsaw after breast cancer treatment. Unfortunately, many women can’t afford to access it privately. We fundraise so we can step in and offer a number of these treatments free every month to those who need them most.”

Megan who has a clinic in Sherburn Hill Co Durham added: “We call areola tattooing the gift of confidence. It allows women to feel like themselves again after a long and difficult journey. It really is the final step towards emotional and physical recovery.”

The donation from Northumberland Freemasons has been used to fund advanced areola tattooing and skin camouflage training, allowing the pair to further develop their skills. This includes learning advanced techniques to better disguise scarring and work effectively across a wide range of skin types, ensuring the highest possible standard of care.



Norman West, representing Northumberland Freemasons, said: “This was a unique funding application. After everything these women have been through, we felt it was important to support a project that helps restore confidence and allows them to move forward feeling better about themselves.”



Freeman of Newcastle curries flavour with Historical Royalty

The latest person to be sworn in as Freeman of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne, is joining a civic tradition that stretches back more than 800 years, and he has Royal connections leading to two Kings.

Edward Thompson was raised on Wearside in Washington and Sunderland, Edward described the honour as a deeply personal milestone, rooted in family history and regional pride. The Freedom of the City is granted through historic guilds, and Edward was admitted through the Company of Curriers — a body historically associated with leatherworking, particularly the production of protective leather garments worn beneath metal armour. For centuries, currying was one

of the essential leather trades, involving the cleaning, stretching and finishing of tanned hides through oiling, waxing and colouring.

“Being sworn in as a Freeman is a proud moment,” Edward said. “It’s about tradition, stewardship, and following in the footsteps of previous generations.”

The Freedom of the City has long been a hereditary right, historically passed down through families. Inheritance was limited to male lineage, until 2010, when women were first granted the right to become Freeman. Edward’s mother, whose brother had previously been admitted, proudly took up that opportunity. This also gave the right for children of female Freeman to apply — a change that enabled Edward’s own admission.

Historically, Freeman were responsible for running and defending the City, including maintaining common land around the city and were entitled to graze livestock on town land. Modern Freeman still take responsibility for working for the good of the City and the Region, particularly acting as custodians of Newcastle’s green spaces and civic heritage, preserving traditions that date back centuries.

Edward’s interest in history runs deep. During the COVID period, his family researched their ancestry, uncovering links to medieval peerage lines. Through marriage connections, Edward can trace family ties back over a thousand years, including distant connections to King John and direct descent to a historic King of the Isles and the Hebrides.

The Freeman of Newcastle upon Tyne have a proud history spanning more than 800 years. Today, they combine ancient tradition with active stewardship of land, environment and community opportunity, for the benefit of the City, the Region, residents and all stakeholders.

In addition to managing significant areas of the city’s green spaces, the Freeman play a vital role in enhancing civic life through initiatives that promote biodiversity, flood alleviation and public engagement. They also provide some of the city’s most iconic event spaces, supporting major events such as The Hoppings and the Come Together music festival.

The Freeman are drawn from all walks of life and are united by a shared passion for Newcastle and the wider region.

Eothen Care Homes

Compassion, comfort and companionship



Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced residential & dementia care at our three North East care homes

Whitley Bay



Gosforth



Wallsend



Our purpose-built Whitley Bay and Gosforth homes provide our happy residents with spacious, en-suite rooms, as well as gorgeous, landscaped gardens and a range of events and activities. Our kind and caring staff are there to help residents live fuller, more rewarding lives. Both homes are close to local transport links and shops.

"We laugh together, we comfort one another. It's absolutely amazing." A Whitley Bay resident.

Our Wallsend home has been specifically designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with specially-trained staff seeing to our residents' specific needs. The home provides residents with lots of independence, features spacious grounds - including a special reminiscence area - and even has a hair salon, cafe, library and pub!

@EothenHomes

www.eothenhomes.org.uk

0191 281 9100

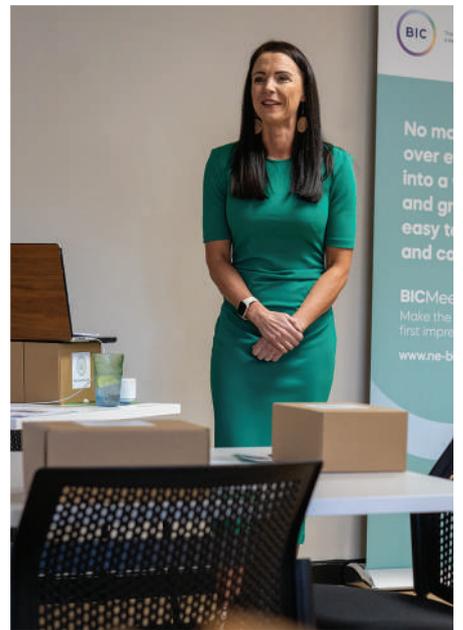


Energy, connection, and a shared commitment to healthier workplaces

Gillespie Recruitment recently hosted a vibrant networking event at NE BIC. Designed to champion workplace wellbeing, the jam-packed session brought together local businesses eager to put wellness at the heart of performance.

Guest speaker Kelly Brougham from The Wellness Collective NE and Active Families NE delivered an energising talk packed with practical insights and infectious enthusiasm. Conversations flowed, ideas sparked and new partnerships formed, proving that when businesses invest in wellbeing, everyone wins, with guests leaving inspired to think about their personal wellness!

For information on their corporate wellness packages contact kelly@activefamiliesne.co.uk





BOMBSHELL DESIGN

Creative Design and Digital Marketing

+44 (0)1642 432188 hello@bombshelldesign.co.uk
+44 (0)191 3897897 www.bombshelldesign.co.uk

- Graphic Design
- Website Design
- Social Media Marketing
- SEO



Board-level financial leadership, part time

Supporting owners and boards with confident financial decisions



07960 031554

Mark@L4Financial.co.uk

L4Financial.co.uk



Helping breast cancer survivors build confidence and self esteem

Northeastnipples@yahoo.co.uk



BIGGER SCENE
Large format print & exhibitions

Large Format Print, Signage & Exhibition Specialists

T: (0191) 236 9603 | E: mark@thebiggerscene.com | www.biggerscene.com



David Taylor

“No more square pegs in round holes”

We operate in an environment where two things have to happen...the candidate has to be right for the job and the job has to be right for the candidate!

Contact us today: info@howiewhite.co.uk

EST.  1999

Howie White

RESOURCING



The Missing Gear: Why team coaching is the secret to lasting leadership change

By Tess Peters, Founder, Accelerator Coaching

Build people-first leaders and stronger teams

Most leadership development looks great on paper. The real question is what happens on Monday morning.

I have spent years working with leaders and teams across the UK, and the pattern is consistent. Organisations invest in development, send their people on training days, and wait for transformation. Sometimes there is a buzz. A spark. People leave energised and full of good intentions. And then, slowly, the old habits creep back in.

This is not a failure of the people. It is a failure of the model.

At Accelerator Coaching, our programmes run over eight to twelve months. We do not deliver one off workshops unless there is a clear follow up plan in place, because without that, the learning simply does not stick. Our six gear approach is deliberate. You cannot jump from first to sixth and expect the engine to hold. We deliver across the UK and in person wherever possible, because meaningful human connection is not a nice to have. It is the thing that makes the difference.

What team coaching actually is

Team coaching is one of the most misunderstood tools in leadership development. It is not a team away day, a training session or mentoring where an experienced voice arrives with the answers. The International Coaching Federation defines it as partnering with a team to maximise its collective potential and shared purpose, treating the team as a

single living system rather than a collection of individuals. The focus is on the patterns and collective habits that either accelerate or quietly undermine performance.

The blended approach that actually works

Our programmes build self knowing and psychological bravery before asking leaders to change behaviour, using evidence based tools: We use a number of profiling tools including: DiSC, which illuminates communication styles and why the same message lands differently depending on who is in the room.

The Emotional Capital Report measures emotional intelligence across ten competencies. Research by Dr Martyn Newman found EQ accounts for up to 85% of the difference between average and outstanding leaders. Gallup Strengths helps individuals and teams identify where their natural energy sits and how to use it.

One to one coaching addresses personal blind spots. Team coaching is the glue that holds it all together, bringing individual insights into the real world, with real colleagues, in real time.

Where a coaching culture actually begins

Many organisations tell us they want a coaching culture. What they rarely realise is that you cannot teach your way into one. You must experience it. When leaders feel the impact of being coached, when they practise real conversations in real scenarios and learn how to coach in the moment and whilst on the



move, something shifts. The belief builds from the inside. That is where a coaching culture genuinely begins. Not in a policy or a training manual, but in the lived experience of leaders who have felt it work firsthand.

Proof that it works

Right now, we are working with a leadership cohort in Bradford and with twenty leaders at a utility firm in Sunderland. The shift in those rooms has been significant enough that the organisation has contracted an additional twelve months and is rolling the programme out to a further one hundred employees. That is not decision businesses make lightly. It is made when the return on investment and uplifted feeling is clear.

Leaders today are not short of information. They are short of integration. Team coaching bridges that gap, not by providing answers, but by creating the conditions for teams to find their own.

That is the gear most programmes never reach. Ours are built around it.

To find out more visit acceleratorcoaching.co.uk or book a free 25 minute ignition call.

Build people-first leaders and stronger teams

Teresa Peters



With our Leadership Accelerated Programmes

1:1 Executive Coaching Team Coaching



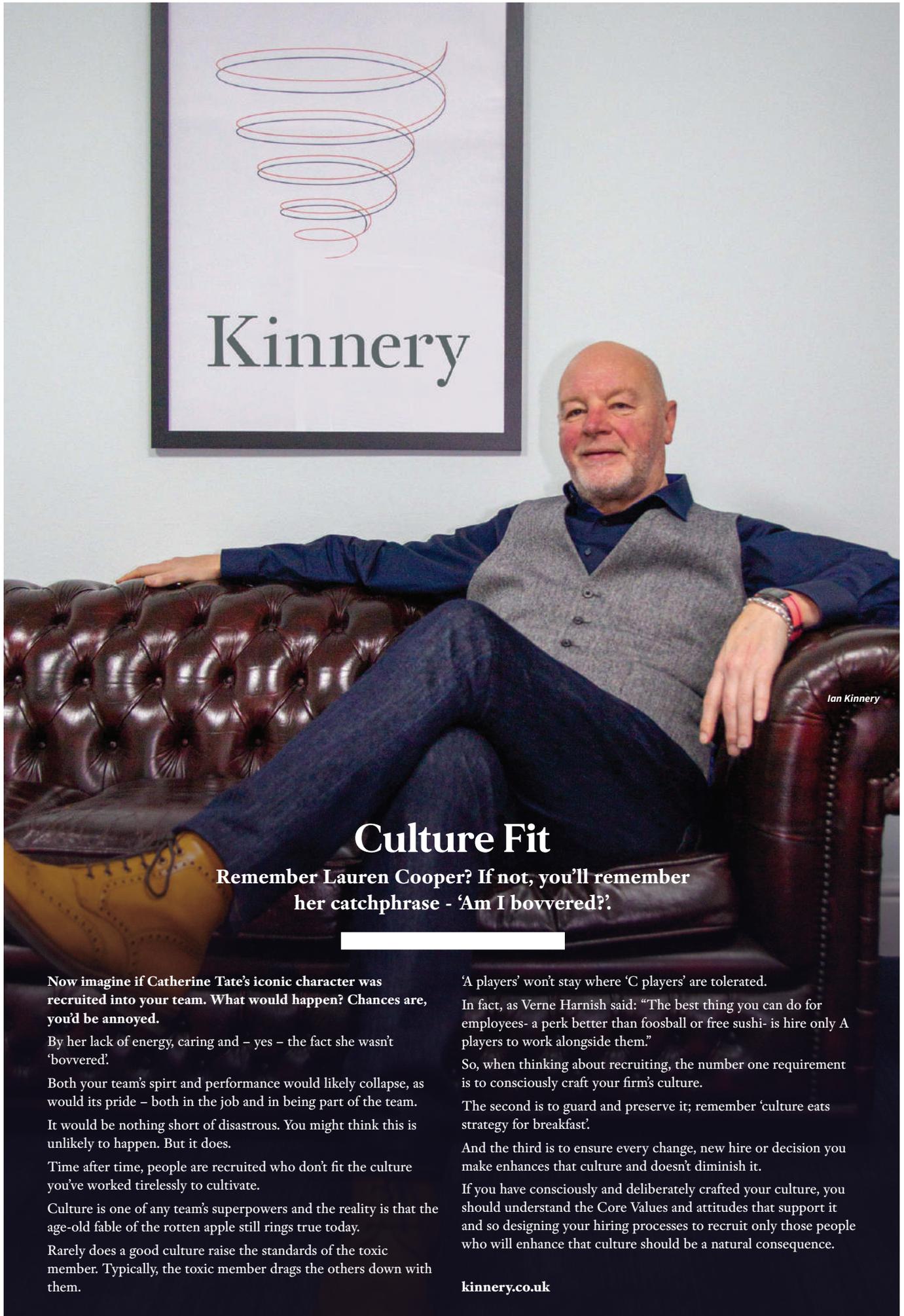
inspire . motivate . succeed

acceleratorcoaching.co.uk



EMOTIONS COACHING
PRACTITIONER





Ian Kinnery

Culture Fit

Remember Lauren Cooper? If not, you'll remember her catchphrase - 'Am I bovered?'

Now imagine if Catherine Tate's iconic character was recruited into your team. What would happen? Chances are, you'd be annoyed.

By her lack of energy, caring and – yes – the fact she wasn't 'bovered'.

Both your team's spirit and performance would likely collapse, as would its pride – both in the job and in being part of the team.

It would be nothing short of disastrous. You might think this is unlikely to happen. But it does.

Time after time, people are recruited who don't fit the culture you've worked tirelessly to cultivate.

Culture is one of any team's superpowers and the reality is that the age-old fable of the rotten apple still rings true today.

Rarely does a good culture raise the standards of the toxic member. Typically, the toxic member drags the others down with them.

'A players' won't stay where 'C players' are tolerated.

In fact, as Verne Harnish said: "The best thing you can do for employees- a perk better than foosball or free sushi- is hire only A players to work alongside them."

So, when thinking about recruiting, the number one requirement is to consciously craft your firm's culture.

The second is to guard and preserve it; remember 'culture eats strategy for breakfast'.

And the third is to ensure every change, new hire or decision you make enhances that culture and doesn't diminish it.

If you have consciously and deliberately crafted your culture, you should understand the Core Values and attitudes that support it and so designing your hiring processes to recruit only those people who will enhance that culture should be a natural consequence.

kinnery.co.uk



WEEK 2 WEEK

SERVICED APARTMENTS

Your hotel alternative



Business | Corporate | Leisure | Contractor



North East and Nationwide | Relocation | Extended Stays

Corporate Housing | Contractor Accommodation | Property Management

Experience the ultimate in home-away-from-home with Week2Week

www.week2week.co.uk

+44 (0) 191 281 3129

info@week2week.co.uk

Mistakes, judgement and the courage to learn

By Dr David Cliff, Gedanken

A classic line in many organisations runs something like this: “To err is human; to forgive is not organisational policy.” It is usually delivered with a smile, but like all good humour it contains an uncomfortable truth. In many environments, mistakes are tolerated only until they are visible.

That tension feels increasingly cultural rather than merely corporate. Nowadays we appear quicker to judge than to understand, faster to condemn than to learn. Social media has amplified immediacy. Reaction now precedes reflection. Emotional expression is rewarded; considered reasoning often arrives too late to shape the narrative.

Neuroscience reminds us that reflection, empathy and higher-order reasoning require cognitive space. They are slower processes. They do not flourish in reactive environments. Modern leaders, however, operate precisely in such environments.

The contemporary organisational landscape is saturated with information—abundant, complex, often contradictory. Leaders are expected to synthesise this rapidly and communicate clarity to their teams, shareholders and wider stakeholders. They must respond to multiple pressures, shifting markets and regulatory scrutiny, often with incomplete data and little time. It is little wonder that many astute leaders employ coaches and mentors. Structured reflection is no longer a luxury; it is a strategic necessity.

At the same time, accountability has intensified. It can even be transgenerational. Today’s leaders may find themselves apologising for historic practices embedded in cultures they did not create. Behaviours once tolerated—sometimes once celebrated—are now rightly challenged. Yet the velocity of judgement leaves little room for context, growth or repair.

We have also, it seems, diminished the notion of apprenticeship in leadership. Political and corporate tenures are shortening. It is possible to ascend rapidly on potential rather than depth of experience, only to find oneself exposed publicly when inevitable missteps occur. Recent political debate around party leadership confidence illustrates how swiftly ideological tension and public expectation collide. There is often little tolerance for orientation, calibration or gradual mastery. We expect individuals to “hit the ground running,” as though leadership were instinctive rather than developmental.

The consequence is predictable. A culture of defensive leadership emerges. When mistakes surface, the reflex becomes containment rather than curiosity. Public contrition replaces private learning. Individuals are required to “fall on their swords,” sometimes for errors that are systemic rather than singular. This may satisfy the appetite for visible accountability, but it impoverishes the organisation’s long-term intelligence and resilience.

Many organisations now speak of “no-blame” cultures. Properly understood, this is not an abdication of responsibility. It is an acknowledgment that learning requires psychological safety. Failure is undesirable, but it is also inseparable from growth and

innovation. Success, by contrast, can obscure valuable lessons beneath celebration and corporate hyperbole.

A genuinely learning-oriented organisation rests on several principles:

- 1. Psychological safety with accountability** – Individuals must be able to surface errors without fear of humiliation, while remaining responsible for addressing them.
- 2. Systemic analysis over scapegoating** – Most failures arise from interactions between processes, incentives and human judgement. Examine the system before isolating the individual.
- 3. Structured reflection** – Create formal space for review, debrief and integration of learning. Insight rarely emerges in haste.
- 4. Proportional response** – Distinguish between negligence, misjudgement and innovation risk. Not all mistakes are equal, and responses should reflect that distinction.
- 5. Developmental continuity** – Retain and support capable leaders through error when integrity remains intact. Experience, once integrated, becomes organisational capital rather than reputational debris.

This is not indulgence. It is strategic maturity. An organisation that cannot metabolise failure will eventually be paralysed by it.

The well-known biblical image of “let he who is without sin cast the first stone” captures something timeless about collective judgement. In a culture of investigations, headlines and instantaneous commentary, stones have become metaphorical missiles. Technology increases transparency, which is broadly healthy, but it also accelerates outrage. At times, one senses less a pursuit of justice than a release of collective frustration.

The question for leaders, organisations and societies is therefore profound: what kind of environment do we wish to create around human fallibility? If every error demands immediate expulsion, few will risk innovation. If every stumble is treated as existential failure, courage will recede.

Those who step forward—who accept responsibility, who make decisions under uncertainty—deserve rigorous scrutiny. But they also deserve proportion and humanity. Ethical, reflective leaders will still err. The issue is not whether mistakes occur; it is whether we convert them into wisdom or into spectacle.

In the long game of leadership, learning outperforms condemnation. The organisations and institutions that endure will not be those that never falter, but those that know how to fall, reflect and rise stronger.

www.gedanken.co.uk



“

**If every stumble
is treated as
existential
failure, courage
will recede.**

Dr David Cliff



Fashion specialist steps up growth plans with new head office

A young entrepreneur who started selling trainers from his bedroom as a teenager is stepping up his growth plans after expanding into larger premises in Sunderland.

The Sole Guy, a fashion sourcing business supplying some of the UK's most sought-after trainers to retailers, has moved into a new 472 sq ft head office and warehouse at the North East BIC following three consecutive years of strong growth.

Led by 18-year-old Elliott Usher, the company specialises in sourcing rare and in-demand footwear from global brands including Nike and Asics for British fashion

and leisure retailers. Since launching in 2023, the business has sold more than 7,000 pairs of trainers, ranging from Nike Air Jordans and P-9000s to popular Asics models such as the Gel-Kayano 14 and Gel-1130.

The move will provide additional space to support further expansion as the company looks to build on record performance and increase sales during 2026.

Elliott said the past year marked a major milestone for the business.

"Last year was our best yet, with turnover reaching a record high and a number of new retailers joining our roster," he said.

"We also made the strategic decision to focus solely on Asics and Nike rather than supplying several brands. It was a calculated risk, but one that has proven worthwhile.

"Looking ahead, our aim is to build on this momentum by onboarding more customers and expanding our product range, and this new unit will be key to achieving that."

Elliott's journey into entrepreneurship began unusually early. He first set up the business from home at just 13 years old. In 2023, he moved into his first dedicated workspace at the BIC, where the company has since grown rapidly.

After reaching capacity in his previous unit, Elliott approached the BIC team about expanding into larger premises the 14 acre site. Alongside flexible workspace, he also

received support from on-site business advisers, who signposted him to funding opportunities that helped accelerate growth.

"We were almost at capacity, so we spoke to the team about moving into a bigger space," Elliott said. "They couldn't have been more accommodating.

"As well as helping us relocate, they pointed us towards funding providers, which led to us securing a business loan. That support, combined with the new unit, will allow us to scale up operations as we continue to grow.

"It's been the perfect launchpad for the business, and I'm confident it will continue to support us as we increase our market share."

Paul McEldon OBE, chief executive of the North East BIC, said The Sole Guy's success highlights the value of providing the right environment and support for emerging businesses.

"The BIC was established to offer flexible workspace and practical support to help small businesses start and grow," he said.

"It's fantastic to see The Sole Guy continuing to expand its presence here. It demonstrates how the right backing can help entrepreneurs turn ambition into sustained success, and we look forward to supporting Elliott as the business continues to go from strength to strength."

www.ne-bic.co.uk



**From
£49
per week**

Workspace that feels more like home

Flexible workspace with free parking, a welcoming reception, café, meeting rooms and onsite nursery.

Everything your business needs, all in one place.



To arrange a viewing or find out more contact:
0191 516 6000 or info@ne-bic.co.uk

Wearfield, Enterprise Park East, Sunderland, SR5 2TA

www.ne-bic.co.uk



Why every small business owner needs the support of peers

By Andrew Marsh: Vistage Chair, Peer Group Director, NED and Small Business Owner

As a small business owner, you carry a unique blend of responsibility, from setting strategy and managing cashflow to motivating teams and navigating daily operational challenges.

The is no doubt that it can be a rewarding journey, but those of us doing it know it can also be incredibly isolating. At the top as the business owner, decisions rest squarely on your shoulders, and too often you end up making those decisions alone. Stressful!

My current portfolio has highlighted to me on a daily basis that one truth has become increasingly clear: you don't have to carry the burden and do it alone — and more importantly, you shouldn't.

Being part of a peer advisory group such as Vistage provides its members something no mentor, consultant or book ever can: insight from people who truly understand what it's like to lead a small business. Real lived in

In a Vistage peer group, you meet monthly with a small circle of non-competing CEOs and business owners who face similar strategic dilemmas, share diverse perspectives, and help each other work through issues with openness and confidentiality. This collective wisdom helps you make better decisions, avoid costly mistakes, and seize opportunities you might otherwise overlook. Indeed, one member, Laura Edgar, even claims that since joining the peer group, that she has her imposter syndrome well and truly under control!

What most of members say makes our peer groups especially powerful is the trust and accountability. In our sessions, members are encouraged to set goals and throughout the year report progress. Antonia Brindle who has been a member for over five years said: "My peers don't just listen. They challenge assumptions, offer constructive feedback and hold you to commitments you make to yourself and your business. That sense of accountability keeps you focused on what matters most and drives meaningful progress."

A peer advisory group creates a safe space where you can raise your toughest questions without fear of judgment and get real, practical insight in return. From strategic

planning to personal wellbeing, sharing experiences with peers enriches both your leadership and your life. In my groups we concentrate on personal wellbeing as well as business performance. After all, as the business owner if you don't look after yourself it can be catastrophic leaving your ship without its captain.

In my experience as a peer group chair, I see every day how this model transforms members, boosting confidence, widening perspectives and building resilience. Many think that leadership peer groups are for high flying corporates and C Suite Executives but small business leaders really commit, seeing brilliant results. Ian Brown said: "Throughout my years of membership, I have processed things I would never have spoken to other people about. I might have felt judged or like I should know the answers but at Vistage, no question is a stupid question. There is nothing but respect, camaraderie and support."

Recent statistics say that founders who invest in peer-group memberships grow two to three times faster and make more confident decisions (Enterprise Nation).

It is also widely thought that entrepreneurs thrive in the company of other entrepreneurs, sharing ideas for transformation, experiences and wider contacts.

So, if you are serious about growing your business and becoming the leader you aspire to be, the value of our Vistage supportive peer group cannot be overstated.

There are just a small number of spaces available to claim in the North East and Northumberland Small Business Peer Group which has experts from marketing, finance, business to business services, software, automotive, charity and more!

To start the process and see if you will be fit, please email Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk



“

In my groups we concentrate on personal wellbeing as well as business performance.

Andrew Marsh

With hope and a promise

Red Sky Foundation is a North East based charity dedicated to saving lives and supporting babies, children, adults, and families affected by complex heart conditions.

At its core, Red Sky Foundation was born from gratitude, hope, and a promise made by parents who experienced first-hand the life-changing work of the NHS. It's this deeply personal connection to the work of the Children's Heart Unit at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital that continues to drive the charity's mission today.

Red Sky Foundation was founded by Sergio and Emma Petrucci as a way to give back to the extraordinary team at the Freeman, a nationally recognised centre caring for young people with heart conditions from across the UK. Their journey began in 2015 when their daughter, Luna, underwent life-saving heart surgery. On the morning of her operation, Sergio looked out of the hospital window to see a sky lit red by the sunrise. Moved by the moment and the enormity of what lay ahead, he made a promise that if Luna recovered, he would do everything possible to support the hospital and its staff.

This promise led to the launch of the Red Sky Ball, initially intended as a one-off fundraising dinner to raise money for vital hospital equipment. The overwhelming support and success of this event marked the beginning of something far bigger: the creation of Red Sky Foundation. From these humble beginnings, the charity has grown into a nationally recognised organisation making a tangible difference to communities across the UK.

At the heart of Red Sky Foundation's work is prevention. Cardiovascular disease remains one of the leading causes of death in the UK, and many cardiac arrests occur without warning. The charity works tirelessly to improve survival



rates by increasing access to publicly available defibrillators in the places where people live, work, learn, and exercise. Through the One in Every Corner campaign, in partnership with Lauren's Legacy, Red Sky Foundation is funding the installation of life-saving defibrillators across football stadiums and sporting arenas nationwide. Beyond sports venues, the charity has donated defibrillators to schools, community hubs, workplaces, and every police vehicle across Northumbria Police and Durham Constabulary. Each defibrillator represents a potential life saved and a community better prepared to respond in an emergency.

Education is a cornerstone of the charity's work. Red Sky Foundation delivers CPR and defibrillator awareness training to schools, businesses, and the public, equipping people with the confidence and skills to act in a cardiac emergency. The first few minutes of a cardiac arrest can make the difference between life and death, and the charity believes this vital knowledge should be accessible to everyone.

Supporting families living with heart conditions is equally central to the charity's mission. Red Sky Foundation offers practical, emotional, and financial support to those navigating diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. From hospital journeys to life at home with a heart condition, the charity aims to reduce isolation and ensure no one faces these challenges alone.

Community fundraising and awareness campaigns drive the charity's impact. Events such as Wear Red Day, charity runs, school fundraisers, and personal challenges bring



people together to raise funds and spark conversations about heart health. Through these efforts, Red Sky Foundation continues to protect hearts, save lives, and build safer communities, one heartbeat at a time.

Today, Red Sky Foundation is actively seeking corporate partners to help expand its impact even further. Since gaining charitable status, the organisation has funded innovative and pioneering projects that are changing the way heart transplants are carried out for both adults and children. In recognition of its outstanding contribution to public health, the charity has received national recognition, and founders Sergio and Emma Petrucci were honoured with MBEs by King Charles III for their services to cardiac care and community health.

www.redskyfoundation.com



memorabilia museum

They think it's all over...

It is now...

Following the 60th Anniversary Celebration with Sir Geoff Hurst MBE in Newcastle, a limited commemorative collection is now available.



All enquiries welcome

contact : danny@memorabiliamuseum.co.uk

Sustainable supply chains: A growing priority for the North East's Public Sector

By Jo Holmes, MD, Genee

For many public sector and large organisations, the greatest contributor to their carbon footprint isn't their buildings, fleet, or energy use, it's their supply chain.

From medical equipment to outsourced services and everyday consumables, supply chains often represent the largest share of an organisation's environmental impact. Yet they are also one of the most difficult areas to monitor, measure and manage effectively.

Across the North East, public sector organisations are engaging more proactively with their suppliers to better understand and reduce the environmental impact of the goods and services they procure.

For example, organisations such as Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust are now asking suppliers to provide information on their environmental credentials and carbon impact as part of procurement processes.

Increasingly, suppliers are expected not only to deliver value for money and quality of service, but also to demonstrate how they are supporting wider environmental and social goals.

This growing emphasis on sustainable procurement is reflected in regional initiatives such as the North East Public Sector Sustainable & Social Value Supplier Event, which aims to bring together procurement leads and suppliers on the 24th March in Newcastle Civic Centre, to explore practical ways of working collaboratively towards low-carbon supply chains.

Organisations that are unable to evidence their environmental impact or demonstrate progress towards sustainability targets may find themselves at a disadvantage when bidding for public sector contracts. In some cases, this could even affect their ability to remain on key supplier frameworks, including those used by the NHS and local authorities.



Jo Holmes

However, suppliers who are able to respond positively to these evolving expectations stand to benefit from:

- Increased competitiveness in tenders
- Stronger relationships with public sector clients
- Improved resilience and operational efficiency
- Enhanced reputation with customers and investors

One of the key challenges facing procurement teams is ensuring that new sustainability requirements do not unintentionally exclude smaller organisations from tender opportunities.

SMEs make up a significant proportion of the North East's supply base, and many are at an earlier stage in their sustainability journey, without the dedicated sustainability managers and resources. Without a consistent approach to information gathering and clear guidance on expectations, there is a risk that smaller suppliers could be disproportionately affected by additional reporting requirements.

Encouragingly, public sector organisations across the region are increasingly working together to standardise their approach to collecting environmental data from suppliers. By aligning expectations and reducing duplication, they aim to create a more accessible procurement environment that enables SMEs to participate fully.

Frameworks such as Investors in the Environment (iE) are helping organisations of all sizes to gather environmental data

and measure their impact in a practical and accessible way. Through tailored support, training, and engagement, Genee works with organisations to take meaningful steps on their sustainability journey, using the iE framework as a structured guide.

This approach helps businesses define a clear environmental policy, develop practical action plans across key areas such as energy, transport, waste, and procurement, establish baselines to monitor their carbon footprint, and demonstrate their commitment through externally recognised certification.

By removing the guesswork and lowering the barriers to entry, initiatives like iE provide a practical and affordable route into environmental management, whether an organisation is just starting out or looking to build on existing progress.

As sustainability becomes increasingly embedded within procurement practices, collaboration between public sector organisations and their suppliers will be crucial. By working together to improve transparency and support organisations at every stage of the journey, the North East has an opportunity to build more resilient, low-carbon supply chains, delivering environmental benefits while continuing to support local businesses and communities.

To hear more about this, join us at the North East Public Sector Supplier Event on the 24th March. It's free to attend and you can book via www.genee.org.uk

The Capacity Illusion

By Helen Butler, Founder, Simplified Operations

When everyone is busy, but nothing feels easier.

By this point in the year, most businesses are moving at pace. Projects are live, sales are being chased, and teams are working hard. From the outside, it looks productive.

And yet this is often when I hear a familiar line from owners:

“We’re flat out, but it still feels like we’re behind.”

That’s when the questioning starts.

Are we asking too much?

Do we need more people?

Or are the team really performing as they should?

Sometimes it is a capacity issue. Sometimes performance does need addressing. But more often than not, what I find isn’t a people problem.

It’s a flow problem.

Where performance quietly slows

In growing SMEs, work rarely moves neatly from start to finish. It pauses while someone waits for approval. It sits in an inbox because the next decision isn’t clear. It moves between two roles because responsibility is shared but ownership isn’t explicit.

None of these moments feel significant on their own. But collectively, they slow the business down.

Recently, I worked with a leadership team who were questioning whether their team was underperforming. Output felt inconsistent. Deadlines were slipping. The pressure was rising.

When we traced how a typical job actually moved through the business, something else became clear. Work was regularly stalling for days waiting on decisions that only one person felt comfortable making. Meetings were updating progress rather than resolving blockers. Tasks were discussed, but no one was clearly accountable for the next step.

The team weren’t underperforming.

The structure was.



Helen Butler

Research suggests that bottlenecks and decision delays can reduce effective capacity by 20–30%, even when teams appear fully occupied. In SMEs, that lost capacity rarely shows up in a report. It shows up as frustration.

The Illusion of Underperformance

When results feel stretched, it’s natural to look at effort first. But if work is slowing because decisions sit in the wrong place, meetings don’t drive action, or ownership isn’t clear, pushing harder rarely fixes it.

I’ve seen businesses tighten performance targets, increase oversight, and introduce more tracking - when the real issue was work looping between roles without clear accountability.

From the outside, it looks like a performance issue.

From the inside, it’s often structural friction.

Busy isn’t the same as effective.

A better question for Q2

If Q1 is about setting direction, Q2 is where reality surfaces.

Before questioning capacity - or your people - ask:

Where does work regularly pause?

Who genuinely owns the next decision?

Are our meetings resolving issues, or simply discussing them?

When businesses improve flow before judging performance, pressure reduces quickly. Deadlines stabilise. Output becomes more predictable.

Not because people are working harder.

But because effort is no longer being lost in the gaps.

And when that changes, the business doesn’t just feel busy.

It starts to feel in control.

Helen Butler is the founder of Simplified Operations, supporting SMEs to strengthen structure, clarity and performance through operational leadership.

simplifiedoperations.co.uk

It Pays to Get Salary Right

Alongside the launch of their 2026 Salary Survey, Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares reflections from the North East public practice market.

Recruitment in public practice rarely moves in straight lines, and the past year has been no exception.

Right now, across the North East, I would describe the market as active but very considered. Firms need good people, often urgently, but recruitment decisions are being taken with greater care, more internal deliberation, and a sharper focus on long-term fit.

That caution is not a lack of ambition. It reflects the wider environment of economic uncertainty, changing regulations, and falling business confidence. Many firms are balancing growth plans with cost control, while also thinking carefully about succession, training investment, and how best to structure their teams for the future.

Against that backdrop, it genuinely pays to get salary positioning right.

We continue to operate in a candidate-driven market in many areas of public practice, particularly at senior, manager, and specialist levels, where supply remains tight. Advances in technology and automation are reshaping the technical base of roles, while clients increasingly expect commercial insight and advisory support. The professionals who combine strong technical ability with keen judgement, communication skills, and confidence working directly with clients are in high demand, and they know it.

However, salary conversations today are far more nuanced than they were even a few years ago.



Bryony Gibson

Money remains a central driver, particularly given ongoing cost-of-living pressures. But it is rarely the only consideration. Increasingly, candidates talk about clarity. Clarity of role, progression, workload, and leadership. They want to understand not just what they will earn, but how their career will develop, and how their working life will feel.

What also stands out is that motivations are not uniform. Different career stages and often different generations place emphasis on different aspects of the overall package. For some, accelerated progression or greater flexibility is key. For others, stability, exposure to complex work, or long-term benefits such as pension contributions carry greater weight. A single, standardised approach to remuneration no longer resonates equally across a multi-generational team.

This is where many firms face a delicate balancing act.

Pitch salaries too low and you risk losing strong candidates early in the process or valued team members who realise they are no longer competitive in the market. Pitch too high, without structure, and you create internal inconsistencies that are difficult to sustain over time.

The most effective firms treat salary benchmarking as a strategic discipline rather than a reactive adjustment. They regularly benchmark against the local market and review how their overall package compares. From hybrid working and pension contributions to bonus schemes and wellbeing support, they think carefully about how roles are evolving.

One of the consistent themes in the North East is that context matters. Roles, expectations, and reward structures can vary significantly between firms of different sizes and ownership models. Broad national averages rarely tell the full story, as a "Manager" role in one firm may look very different in another, both in scope and in reward.

Ultimately, salary is not just a number. It is a signal. It communicates how a firm values expertise, how it views progression, and how seriously it takes retention. In today's market, it pays to ensure that the signal is clear, competitive, and aligned with the reality of the role and market.

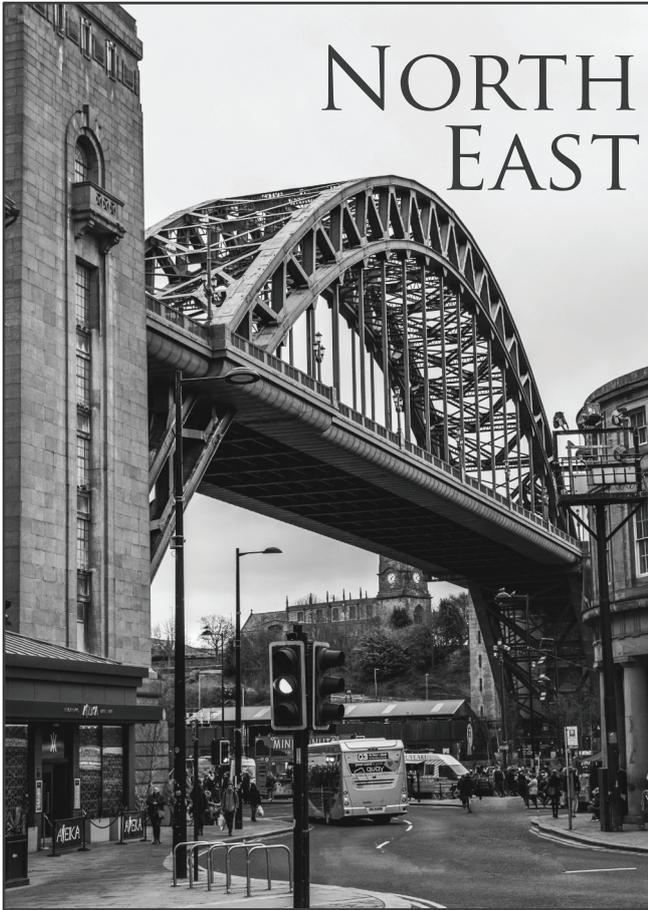
For those who find it helpful to step back and sense-check their position in the regional market, I've recently compiled an updated North East Public Practice Salary Guide for 2026. And I'm always happy to share a copy with anyone who would find it useful.

BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING

Jobs. Advice. Expertise.

With more than 40 live vacancies across the North East, whether you're hiring or hunting, head to [BRYONYGIBSON.COM](https://www.bryonygibson.com)





NORTH EAST

AVAILABLE NOW

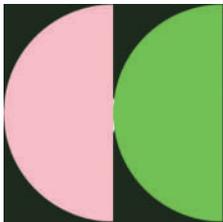
PUBLIC PRACTICE

Salary Guide | 2026

A clear, regionally relevant reference, covering audit, accountancy, and tax to corporate finance, insolvency, and outsourcing.

Request your free copy:
bryonygibson.com/contact

BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING
Jobs. Advice. Expertise.



letsrecruit

**Bet we can beat your
recruitment rate!**

Tired of empty desks & endless CVs?

Scan to get in touch with
Lets Recruit today!



How to **Stop Selling** & **Start Showing**

to **WIN** with your
Marketing in 2026

with Steven Fee

SME Business Club Networking Event

Tuesday, 24th March 2026
10am to 12pm

ISS Airview, 1 Airview Park,
Newcastle International Airport,
NE13 8BR



Scan to get your
tickets or find more
information about the
**NEW SME Business
Club Network.**



Steven, one of our trusted experts here at SME Centre of Excellence with over 20 years in **Graphic/Web Design, Digital Marketing and Videography**, reveals why traditional marketing promises no longer work in 2026's AI-saturated world. For this months event, he'll demonstrate how businesses can build instant credibility through visual proof, cut through digital & AI noise and why real visuals are important for converting more prospects into customers, because seeing truly is believing.



Business Club 
By SME Centre of Excellence

www.smecofe.com/business-club

 17 Main St, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne NE20 9NH

 hello@smecofe.com



Invest in the Future,
Become a PIE 'oneer.



Are you passionate about shaping tomorrow's workforce?

PIE (Primary Inspiration Through Enterprise) is a registered UK charity dedicated to inspiring young people with real-world enterprise and STEM experiences.

We partner with schools and businesses to deliver hands-on challenges, formal qualifications, and life-changing opportunities—helping young people build confidence, tackle social isolation, and develop the transferable skills your business needs.



Join us in building a brighter, wealthier future for all.

- Donate financially or volunteer your professional time.
- Sign up as a PIE 'oneer and gain an enterprise qualification yourself.
- Support your local school or mentor at our Airview Park Enterprise Centre.

Ready to make a difference? Register or donate today at www.pieproject.org

PIE Project Trust Limited
1 Airview Park, Newcastle
International Airport, NE13 8BR
Charity No. 1169362



Fareshare North East banks up new board

New trustees to strengthen governance and support growing demand for food redistribution across the region.

Fareshare North East has appointed seven new trustees with the support of Experience Bank Group, strengthening the charity's board at a crucial time for communities across the region.

The recruitment was delivered through Experience Bank's Peter Neal, who connects charities and social enterprises with skilled non-executive directors that bring professional expertise and lived experience to board roles.

The new trustees - Antonia Brindle, Carol Butts, Cat Duhaut, Natalie Perkins, Matthew Stephenson, Navid Moalemi and Sue Brown - bring a diverse range of skills including finance, governance, strategy, human resources, community engagement and operations.

Fareshare North East works to tackle food poverty and food waste by redistributing surplus food to charities and community groups across the North East. With demand for its services continuing to rise, the organisation identified the need to expand and strengthen its board to help guide its next phase of development.

Jane Tiplady, chair of the board at Fareshare North East, said: "Strong governance is essential to everything we do, especially as demand for our services grows. Working with Experience Bank Group helped us reach people who are not only highly skilled, but genuinely passionate about our

mission. We're delighted to welcome the new trustees who will play a key role in shaping our future."

Experience Bank Group supported Fareshare North East throughout the recruitment process, from defining trustee requirements to promoting the roles and matching candidates whose skills aligned with the charity's needs.

Peter Neal, Founder at Experience Bank, said: "Charities like Fareshare North East do vital work in their communities, and having the right trustees in place makes a real difference. It's been a pleasure to support their board recruitment and help connect them with people who want to use their experience to create social impact with a charity that has an exciting future.

"Helping charities shore up their leadership talent is what we excel in so if you have a need to expand or refresh your board or leadership team, do get in touch!"

The new trustees have now joined the board and will support Fareshare North East in delivering its mission to reduce food waste and fight hunger across the region, increasing its community presence and social impact.

theexperiencebank.co.uk



The fostering journey

By Clare Turner, a full-time foster carer for Changing Futures, who also provides short-break care

People think foster carers are one of two things. Angels or money grabbers.

Well, as someone who has fostered several children since the start of the decade, I can tell you a fact.

We are neither.

Foster parents are like the children they look after.

Unique.

There isn't one 'type' of person who fosters. Our reasons all differ.

But you don't foster because you crave love back - if so then this is not the right role.

You foster because you want to help and support a child, to help give them the good life every child deserves.

My fostering journey started in lockdown. I was a mum-of-two with a 14-year-old daughter at home.

Covid brought my long-held desire to foster to the forefront. I thought 'Why not?'

So, I contacted Changing Futures, a not-for-profit agency based in Hartlepool covering most of the North East.

The process was thorough, as it should be when young people are involved.

But you know what? We all loved it - even my daughter.

Having a stranger probe your family life may sound like a strange pleasure, but it actually brought us closer.

My daughter discovered how we were raised, sparking conversations we never thought we'd have.

It was therapeutic.

My older son had flown the nest, and we felt we had space - physically and emotionally - for more children at home.

But from my honest experience, you don't know how fostering a child will go until they arrive.

Especially when you have children already.

The guidance is to leave a few years either side of your own children and I'm unsure a very young child would have worked for us.

In our case, the first child we fostered was eight.

Like many fostered children, her picture was complex. There were difficult issues that we had to face as a family.

But it brought us closer together.

We discovered a lot about ourselves and without doubt, it was among the most rewarding things we've done.

Since then, I've fostered more children, both

long-term and short-term, as one of Changing Futures short-break carers.

It means I'm available to support other foster families by stepping in to provide short-term care to help them recharge their batteries.

A bit like how in traditional families, you may send the kids to their grandparents if you are at a wedding, or you just need sleep!

But longer-term fostering creates a stronger bond - and I won't lie, saying goodbye isn't easy.

That first goodbye is the hardest.

We still get updates and she has warm memories, but it was emotional. But remember; This isn't about you.

As a foster, yes - give them TLC and support - but the child's interests are what matter.

Your job is to be there.

To nurture and support them and provide the building blocks of a safe and warm family life so they can hopefully break the cycle and develop healthy relationships.

You must be patient and open to learning. But the rewards are priceless.

Having a grown-up turn up to their school play for the first time. Or the joy when they realise someone cares enough to throw them a birthday party.

The little things that are huge in their world. But it isn't easy. And we are not angels - or money grabbers - but I know my life is richer for fostering.

www.changingfuturesfostering.co.uk

Preparing for the first phase of the Employment Rights Act

By Michael Dobson, Director of Sapphire HR

What actions businesses must take before April.

April will mark a significant turning point for UK employers as the first confirmed phase of the Government's Employment Rights Act comes into effect.

While there has been widespread discussion about future possibilities, the immediate priority for businesses is understanding what is changing and taking practical steps now. Waiting until implementation could leave organisations exposed and underprepared.

One of the most immediate changes relates to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). The removal of traditional waiting days means employees will be eligible for SSP from the first day of sickness absence. Eligibility is also being broadened so lower-paid workers who previously fell below the earnings threshold will now qualify.

This will require payroll systems and absence management policies to be reviewed to ensure compliance and consistency. Organisations relying on informal reporting or outdated procedures will otherwise face unnecessary cost and employee relations challenges.

As an employer, before April, you should:

1. Speak with your payroll provider to confirm SSP calculations are updated and tested.
2. Review employment contracts for any 'waiting day' clauses that will no longer be lawful.
3. Update absence management policies and internal guidance documents.

Family-related leave rights are also shifting, with certain types of leave, including paternity and unpaid parental leave, becoming day-one rights. Eligible employees will be able to request these from the start of employment.

While the administrative changes are modest, consistent managerial understanding is essential to avoid grievances or inconsistent decision-making.



Before April, employers must:

1. Amend paternity, parental and shared parental leave policies to remove qualifying service periods.
2. Ensure HR handbooks and onboarding materials reflect day-one rights.
3. Provide short refresher training or guidance to line managers so leave is applied in line with the updated legal requirements.

Enforcement and accountability measures are also strengthening. Increased protective awards in collective redundancy situations raise the financial risk of failing to follow correct consultation processes.

At the same time, enhanced protections for individuals raising serious workplace concerns, including harassment, heighten the need for clear reporting channels and well-documented investigations.

Actions employers should take include:

1. Update whistleblowing policies to explicitly include sexual harassment as a qualifying disclosure.

2. Check that investigation and grievance procedures are documented and accessible.
3. Brief senior managers on the increased legal risks of retaliation or procedural shortcuts.

For employers, the priority is turning these legal changes into workable internal practice. Reviewing policies, confirming payroll capability, refreshing reporting procedures and preparing managers now will significantly reduce last-minute risk. Creating a short internal compliance checklist can help ensure nothing is missed.

April should not come as a surprise to any organisation. The timelines are clear and the actions required are largely preventative. Employers who review their processes in advance will be in a far stronger position than those who wait until the changes are already in force.

If you would like support in preparing your policies and procedures, now is the time to seek advice rather than after the legislation is in place. Please get in touch with us today. www.sapphire-hr.co.uk



QE TRAINING ACADEMY

Pursue Your Potential



Why train with us?

Learn from Experts Who Understand Your World

Accredited training from experts who understand your world. All our courses are accredited and our tutors are qualified teacher/training instructors and industry professionals with real world experience to share.

Flexible & Convenient

Study in-person, online, blended, or host us to deliver training directly at your workplace.

Impactful at Great Value

Investing in staff training enhances staff morale, loyalty, and performance, whilst reducing absenteeism and turnover. Introductory offers, group discounts, and loyalty rates, make the investment affordable without compromising quality.

Leadership Development

Unlock your leadership potential with our Institute of Leadership Approved Programmes - tailored to optimise your potential and empower you to lead.

First Aid

Gain the confidence to save lives with our Ofqual-regulated first aid at work training and paediatric first aid for those working with or caring for children.

Mental Health First Aid

With one in four people in the UK likely to experience a mental health condition, our Ofqual-regulated courses teach you to recognise, support, and signpost others to professional help.

Train to Teach

This Ofqual-regulated course is the industry minimum standard for non-teachers to be qualified to work in the further education, adult education, training and skills sector.

Health and Safety & Fire Safety

Qualsafe Health & Safety and Fire Safety training, and IOSH accredited Managing Safely course - equipping you with essential skills to prevent accidents and ensure compliance.



www.qetrainingacademy.org

Thorpe Green Lane - York - YO26 9SS

01423 333777



“

Momentum is rarely created through intensity alone.

Andrew Silver

Why good strategies can fail to make an impact

Business leaders spend a great deal of time thinking about strategy. They reflect on where the business is heading, what success looks like, and what needs to change to get there. Yet despite this effort, many well-intentioned strategies still struggle to deliver meaningful results.

In my experience, this isn't because the ideas are flawed. More often, it's because clarity never fully translates into shared direction and day-to-day decision-making.

One of the most common challenges I see is that the plan lives primarily in the mind of the business owner or leadership team. It may exist in detailed documents or presentations, but it isn't always visible or meaningful to the wider organisation. When people can't clearly see where the business is heading, or how their role contributes, alignment becomes difficult and momentum fades.

If people can't see the plan, they can't act on it

A simple visual is often far more effective than a lengthy document or complex framework. A straightforward business summary or roadmap that shows headline objectives, key priorities and ownership can start to turn strategic thinking into something practical. When people can see the plan, conversations become more relevant and decisions more consistent.

Clarity, however, isn't only about the team. Leaders also need to pay close attention to how they manage themselves and their own accountability.

As businesses grow, it's easy for everything to funnel back to the top. Decisions, problems and priorities accumulate, often leaving leaders feeling overwhelmed and stretched. Over time, this can unintentionally slow progress, as too much responsibility sits with too few people.



Reflect, learn, change

One of the most effective habits I encourage leaders to develop is regular personal reflection. Taking a short amount of time to step back and consider four areas: how they are feeling personally, how they are managing others, what they are working on themselves, and how much space they are giving to planning and thinking ahead.

This kind of reflection often reveals important insights. Leaders begin to see where their time is being lost, where they may be holding onto things that could be delegated, and where small changes could make a meaningful difference. It also prompts a powerful question: am I enabling progress, or unintentionally becoming a blocker?

Momentum is rarely created through intensity alone. Pushing harder without clarity often leads to more activity, not better outcomes. Sustainable progress comes from clear priorities, shared understanding and trust in others to lead and decide.

The leaders who navigate this well focus on creating the right conditions for progress. They communicate the plan clearly, involve their teams in it, and give themselves permission to step back and think, rather than reacting to everything at once.

When clarity is shared and leadership space is protected, strategy stops being an abstract idea and starts to show up in everyday decisions, conversations and actions. That's when momentum really builds.

The only certainty is uncertainty

What matters most is creating enough clarity for good decisions to be made — by you and by the people around you. That starts with making the plan visible, sharing the narrative clearly, and giving yourself the space to step back and think, rather than carrying everything alone.

If reading this has prompted you to pause and reflect on where clarity might be slipping in your own business, that's a useful place to be.

I spend much of my time working 'one-two-one' with business owners and leaders — listening, asking the right questions, and helping turn thinking into shared direction and practical progress. If a conversation like that would be helpful, I'm always happy to talk things through.

Get in touch at: start@360growthpartners.co.uk

www.360growthpartners.co.uk

Andrew works one-to-one with business owners and senior leaders as a trusted sounding board, helping turn thinking into shared direction and practical progress.

"I was sceptical at first, simply because it was something I hadn't done before.

But after a few sessions, the value became very clear. Andrew is genuinely independent, he doesn't take sides and he's not a 'yes man'. He gives honest, considered opinions based on what's best for the business, and that builds real trust.

Having someone external, with broad experience across different businesses and functions, gives you a safe sounding board to talk through challenges you wouldn't always discuss openly internally. The focus isn't on paperwork or frameworks, it's the conversation that adds the value.

The impact has been tangible. We're having better one-to-one conversations, people have more of a voice, and we're managing communication, visibility and succession planning far more effectively. The reality of the coaching has been better than I expected."

— Graeme Knox, Baerlocher UK



360 Growth Partners

A new era for Employment Rights: What small businesses need to know

By Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR

The Employment Rights Act 2025 has now received Royal Assent, marking one of the most significant updates to UK employment law in a generation.

While many of the changes will be phased in over the next couple of years, the direction of travel is clear: stronger protections for workers and a renewed focus on fairness, security and wellbeing at work.

For small businesses, this represents both an opportunity and a challenge. The reforms aim to modernise employment rights to reflect today's working world, but they will also require employers to review policies, processes and management capability to stay compliant.

Why this matters now

Although not all elements of the Act will take effect immediately, some key changes are expected to begin from 2026, with others following through 2027 and beyond. This gives employers a valuable window to prepare, rather than react at the last minute.

Crucially, these reforms don't replace existing rights; they build on them. The Act strengthens employee protections while encouraging better people management practices across organisations of all sizes.

Key changes coming in 2026

One of the most practical changes for employers relates to family-related leave. Paternity leave and unpaid parental leave will become day-one rights, removing the requirement for employees to complete a qualifying period of service. This means more employees will be able to take time away for family responsibilities much earlier in their employment.

Another significant change is the reduction in the qualifying period for unfair dismissal

claims. While unfair dismissal will not become a day-one right, employees will be able to bring a claim after six months' service, rather than the current two years. This will require employers to be confident that probation processes, performance management and dismissal decisions are fair, well-documented and consistently applied.

What's still to come

Beyond 2026, further reforms are planned that will reshape the employment landscape. These include:

Enhanced protections for pregnant employees and those returning from maternity leave, aimed at reducing discrimination and unfair treatment.

The introduction of a new right to statutory bereavement leave, with further details still to be confirmed.

Changes for workers on zero-hours and low-hours contracts, including the right to request a contract reflecting their regular working pattern.

New rights to reasonable notice of shifts and compensation where shifts are cancelled at short notice.

Requirements for employers to produce gender pay gap action plans and implement menopause policies, reflecting a broader focus on workplace wellbeing and inclusion.

While the detail and timing of some measures are still subject to consultation, the overall message is clear: employment practices must better reflect real working lives.

What this means for small businesses

For small businesses, these changes may feel daunting — particularly where HR support is limited. However, they also present an opportunity to strengthen people management and build more engaged, resilient teams.

To prepare, employers should start by:

Reviewing employment contracts and policies. Ensuring managers understand the changes and how they affect day-to-day decisions.

Strengthening probation, performance and absence management processes.

Communicating openly with employees about what's changing and why.

Well-prepared businesses are likely to see benefits beyond compliance, including improved trust, retention and employee engagement.

Final thoughts

The Employment Rights Act 2025 signals a clear shift towards fairer, more secure work. While the full impact will take time to unfold, businesses that prepare early — and invest in confident, capable people management — will be best placed to adapt and thrive.

If you have any questions or need support on Employment Rights Act contact Kathryn Rodgers - 07946 330025



Kathryn Rodgers

OUTDOORS: THE LEADER'S RESTORATIVE TOOL

Jane Fisher, Founder of Fresh Perspectives North East, believes effective leadership depends on restoring the cognitive capacity modern work quietly depletes.

Jane works with executive leaders under pressure, and what she's witnessing isn't a lack of capability, but cognitive fatigue.

"Today's leadership demands sustained concentration and rapid decisions," Jane explains. "But over time, this constricts thinking, narrows focus and shrinks perspective. This is attentional fatigue, caused by the relentless use of directed attention - all day, every day."

Why the outdoors restores thinking

Attention Restoration Theory (ART) explains why time outdoors helps.

"Directed attention - the effortful focus we use for analysis and decisions - fatigues when overused," Jane continues. "Natural environments engage 'soft fascination' - effortless attention that allows depleted focus to replenish, improving cognitive performance."

Simply put, stepping outside gives the brain space to reset.

"Leaders don't need more resilience. They need their attention back."

Leadership maintenance

When attention is depleted, judgement clouds and decisions are made with less depth and foresight.

"Heading outdoors isn't switching off," Jane highlights. "It's switching back on - at full throttle. Outdoors restores the cognitive capacity effective leadership requires, bringing clarity and strengthening decision-making within minutes."

"Great leadership isn't defined by pace. It's defined by clarity."

Making outdoors a habit

Restoration doesn't require retreats or countryside - simply outdoor space, even city space.

"Ten to thirty minutes outdoors is enough," Jane says. "A thinking walk. A conversation outside. A pause before a major decision."

"In fact, many of the world's most progressive businesses are already getting outdoors," she continues. "And within five to ten years, I believe forward-thinking organisations will spend at least 20 percent of their working week outdoors - habitually."

"That's why I developed The Fresh Perspective 90-Day Challenge, supporting leaders in the North East to explore, with ease, how getting outside works for them."

**Find out more about Jane's work,
Fresh Perspectives NE and the 90-Day Challenge:
07837 024 374 | hello@fpne.co.uk | www.fpne.co.uk**



North East strengthens its place in the global space race

From the launchpads of Florida's Space Coast to cutting-edge facilities across the North East of England, international collaboration is accelerating growth across the region's space sector.

A recent mission to the United States - followed by a return visit from partners in Florida - has strengthened transatlantic relationships and built momentum ahead of the North East Space Conference 2026 this June.

Earlier this year, experts, entrepreneurs, innovators and scientists representing Space North East England travelled to Orlando for Florida Commercial Space Week, flying the flag for a region whose space economy continues to expand in both capability and ambition. The delegation - including representatives from Durham, Newcastle and Northumbria universities alongside North East companies MSP and NEL Technologies - took part in a packed programme of meetings, site visits and events designed to build connections, attract investment and showcase regional strengths.

Beginning at the University of Central Florida, discussions explored collaboration across industry, academia and innovation - reflecting the partnership-driven approach that underpins the North East's growing cluster. The delegation then travelled to Florida's

Space Coast, meeting organisations including Space Florida to explore opportunities for collaboration and market development.

A tour of NASA's Kennedy Space Centre offered a powerful reminder of the scale and ambition of the global space industry, with delegates witnessing the Space Launch System rocket on the launchpad as preparations continued for the Artemis II mission - an inspiring moment that underscored the importance of international cooperation.

The final days were spent at SpaceCom 2026, where delegates pitched their products and services, connected with potential partners and reinforced the North East's reputation as a centre for innovation across satellite technologies, advanced materials, data analytics and engineering.

Building on relationships established in the United States, the North East recently welcomed colleagues from Space Florida for a return visit - further strengthening ties and exploring how collaboration can translate into tangible opportunities. Led by Space North East England and delivered by Business

Durham on behalf of regional partners, the programme showcased the breadth of the region's capabilities across research, innovation and industry.

Visits to 3S Northumbria and Northumbria University highlighted cutting-edge research and the development of the North East Space Skills and Technology Centre (NESST), while at NETPark the delegation met companies from across the cluster and heard first-hand about the technologies shaping the sector. The visit also included Durham University's Space Research Centre, the Centre for Advanced Instrumentation and Filtronic's new facility - demonstrating how advanced manufacturing and space capability are scaling in the region.

International engagement of this kind plays a vital role in building partnerships, attracting investment and positioning the North East as a globally connected space cluster. These connections will come into sharper focus at the North East Space Conference 2026, which will bring together regional, national and international delegates to explore opportunities, share insight and spark new collaborations.

Businesses, researchers, investors and organisations with an interest in the space economy are encouraged to be part of the conversation. Join Space North East England at the North East Space Conference in June. With the region's thriving space community, discover opportunities for collaboration and help shape the next chapter of the North East's space sector.

Register here to attend:
www.spacenortheastengland.com/event-details/north-east-space-conference-2026

Join the North Tyneside Business Forum – Your Free Business Support Network



Running a business can be incredibly rewarding—but it can also be challenging and, at times, isolating. That's where the North Tyneside Business Forum comes in.

Established in 2010 and led by a team of dedicated business owners, this unique community exists to connect, support, and empower local businesses across the borough. Whether you're a start-up, a growing enterprise, or an established business, we're here to help—and the best part? Membership is completely free!

Why join the North Tyneside Business Forum?

As one of the largest peer-to-peer business networks in the North East, our forum brings together a mix of local entrepreneurs, offering valuable opportunities for networking, mentorship, and collaboration. We understand that running a business can sometimes feel like a solitary journey, but at the Forum, you're never alone. Every member is welcomed with a friendly face and an open door to expert advice, business support, and community-driven initiatives.



What you'll gain as a member

- **Peer Support & Networking** – Connect with like-minded business owners who understand the challenges you face. Build relationships, exchange ideas, and forge valuable partnerships.
- **Expert Guidance & Resources** – Gain access to industry experts and local advisors who can provide tailored support to help your business thrive.
- **Events & Workshops** – Attend our free events and workshops designed to equip you with the latest insights, strategies, and skills for business success.
- **A Voice in Your Community** – Influence local business policies and be part of a network that works collaboratively with North Tyneside Council to support and promote businesses in the borough.

Keeping business local & thriving

The North Tyneside Business Forum isn't just about networking—it's about building a stronger, more resilient local economy. By joining, you're contributing to a movement that encourages businesses to support each other, share knowledge, and drive collective success.

Our events and initiatives nurture a culture of collaboration, ensuring that local businesses stay connected, stay supported, and stay local.

No cost, just opportunity

Thanks to the support of North Tyneside Council, membership in the Forum is completely free. There are no hidden costs—just genuine opportunities to grow your business and connect with a supportive community.

Join today!

If you're a business with a trading address in North Tyneside, don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity. Join the North Tyneside Business Forum today and take the next step in growing your business with the support of our community.

northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk



Scan me!





Breakfast Boost Event

North Tyneside Business Forum began 2026 with its first event of the year, Breakfast Boost: Reconnect, Reflect & Refocus, held at Red House Farm in Whitley Bay. The morning brought local businesses together to strengthen connections, share ideas and reflect on the year ahead. Guest speaker Jamilah Hassan, Founder of JH Property Connect, delivered an inspiring session on building a business that fits, supported by practical wellbeing insight from Ema Devereux of Warrior Generation Fitness. The event set a positive tone for the Forum's 2026 programme, reinforcing its commitment to supporting the North Tyneside business community.





Jamilah Hassan, Founder, JH Property Connect

Bespoke Portfolio Building across the North East

At JH Property Connect, we help investors build strong, sustainable property portfolios across the North East through tailored buy-to-let and BRRR opportunities.

Founded by Jamilah Hassan, the business is built on relationships, integrity and a deep love for the region we call home. We work closely with independent agents, motivated sellers and trusted local professionals to uncover high-quality opportunities.

Our approach is personal, data-led and grounded in local knowledge. Every deal is carefully analysed, thoroughly researched and aligned with long-term performance, not quick wins.

We prioritise Quality over quantity & Long-term relationships over one-off transactions. Whether you're looking for your first investment or growing an existing portfolio, we provide a hands-free, fully supported route to investing with confidence and would love to help.



**J H PROPERTY
CONNECT
LTD**

07432 455713 | jhpropertyconnect@gmail.com | [@jhpropertyconnect](https://www.instagram.com/jhpropertyconnect) | [○ Jamilah Hassan](https://www.linkedin.com/company/jh-property-connect)



New services and major contract wins drive growth

Rapidly expanding Greener Solutions Group, has begun 2026 with a buoyant forward order book that will see turnover increase from £3.1 million to in excess of £4 million in the current financial year.

Turnover is anticipated to hit £10 million by 2028.

Over the last 12 months, the company has devised a strategy for long-term growth with the formation of its senior team and the scaling and enhancing of its service offering.

Operating nationally, the 35-strong team has won significant contracts in the social housing sector, most recently, it was appointed by Morgan Sindall Property Services to undertake cavity wall and loft insulations across four of its UK sites, spanning approximately 130 properties.

The company also secured two lots in the North East and North West for work within retrofit assignment, design and coordination services, as part of the new four-year, £1.6bn Procure Plus framework to deliver low and zero-carbon upgrades across social housing and public buildings.

The Procure Plus framework supports the assessment, design and delivery of comprehensive retrofit measures. It encompasses low-carbon heating solutions such as air source and ground source heat pumps, electric heating systems, solar photovoltaic (PV) installations and battery storage.

Procure Plus is one of the UK's leading providers of procurement solutions for the housing, public, and community sectors.

Established in 2015, by co-founders Andrew Wilkinson and Keian Sanchez, Greener Solutions Group has evolved significantly from a surveying and compliance company in the social housing sector. It has expanded its expertise to

renewables, heating and electrical, cavity wall and loft insulation and full turnkey solutions for retrofit projects. It delivers energy efficiency at pace for the UK's retrofit sector and improves environmental credentials for clients by implementing sustainable solutions.

Andrew Wilkinson, director, Greener Solutions Group, said: "We step confidently into 2026 with a strong forward order book and a long-term strategy for growth. Our mission is to provide trusted, end-to-end support for homeowners and organisations that reduces fuel poverty and improves quality of life by making homes more energy efficient.

"Our appointment within the Procure Plus framework, is evidence that we are committed to our mission by helping to reduce the burden of heating costs and to raise the standard of living for countless families across the UK."

Director, Keian Sanchez, said: "The formation of a senior management team towards the end of 2025, all of whom were already working within the business, will strengthen us considerably. In addition, we are currently seeking to fill a number of field-based roles and are looking for talented, highly motivated individuals that will help us deliver long term growth."

greenersolutionsgroup.co.uk



SME BUSINESS INSURANCE

Helping Your SME Business Grow With Confidence

We understand that one size doesn't fit all. Our customised insurance solutions ensure that you get the cover that best suits your needs. Nothing more, nothing less.

Employers Liability | Products Liability | Public Liability | Professional Indemnity
Property & Landlord | Fleet | Taxi | Cyber | Directors & Officers | Charity
Office | Shop | Tradesman & Contractors | Construction
Tools & Equipment | Self Employed

Ready To Find Your Solution? Let's Chat.

Phone:	01913 830 401
Email:	bradley.galloway@bbrown.com
Website:	BBrown.com

[Read More](#)





Why confident leaders don't always feel confident

Sam Hook, business and confidence coach at Uniquethinking, shares her insights on leadership, doubt and what real confidence actually looks like.

From the outside, leadership often looks like certainty. People assume that those at the top of organisations wake up every day feeling sure of themselves, decisive and untroubled by doubt. The opposite is often true.

The more responsibility someone carries, the more acutely they feel the weight of getting things wrong.

Confidence, in leadership, is not the absence of doubt. It is the ability to move forward despite it.

The hidden self-doubt many leaders carry

Many senior leaders privately question whether they are good enough for the role they hold. They worry about being exposed as less capable than people believe. They replay decisions, wonder if they missed something obvious, and quietly compare themselves to others who appear more assured. This internal narrative is

rarely visible to colleagues or clients, but it is incredibly common.

The paradox is that the most conscientious, capable leaders are often the ones who feel this most strongly. They care deeply about their impact. They understand the consequences of their choices. They see the complexity of the situations they are navigating. And that awareness creates discomfort.

Those who feel no doubt aren't necessarily more confident; they are often simply less reflective.

Confidence is situational, not fixed

We tend to think of confidence as a personality trait: something you either have or you do not. In business, however, confidence is far more situational.

A highly experienced finance director may feel supremely confident in a board meeting and deeply uncertain when dealing with conflict in their team. A founder may feel bold when pitching for investment but hesitant when it comes to stepping into a more strategic leadership role.

How the pressure to 'look confident' backfires

What often undermines leaders is not doubt itself, but the belief that they should not be feeling it. When people think that confidence means never hesitating, never questioning and never feeling unsure, they interpret normal leadership discomfort as a sign of failure.

That creates a damaging cycle: the more pressure they feel to appear confident, the more they hide their uncertainty, and the more isolated they become.

Over time, that isolation erodes clarity. Leaders stop asking for input. They delay decisions because they do not want to be seen to get them wrong. They overthink rather than act.

Ironically, this is what creates the very problems they fear.

What real leadership confidence looks like

True leadership confidence looks very different. It is not bravado or loud certainty.

It is the quiet willingness to say, "I don't have all the answers yet, but I'm prepared to work them out."

It is the ability to take responsibility for decisions without needing them to be perfect. It is the resilience to recover when things do not go to plan.

This kind of confidence grows not from success, but from experience. From having made difficult calls before. From having survived mistakes. From knowing that you can adapt when circumstances change.

Why this matters more than ever

In today's business environment, where uncertainty is constant and complexity is the norm, this matters more than ever.

Leaders who expect certainty before they act will always feel stuck. Those who accept uncertainty as part of the role can keep moving.

Perhaps the most important shift, then, is not trying to feel confident all the time, but redefining what confidence really means. Not the absence of fear, but the ability to lead alongside it.

Increasing your confidence as a leader

If you'd like to build your confidence, strengthen your mindset, and grow your business with clarity, please get in touch for 1-1 coaching sessions or my 4-week Confident You programme by emailing sam@uniquethinking.co.uk

To set up a free introductory call, visit www.uniquethinking.co.uk

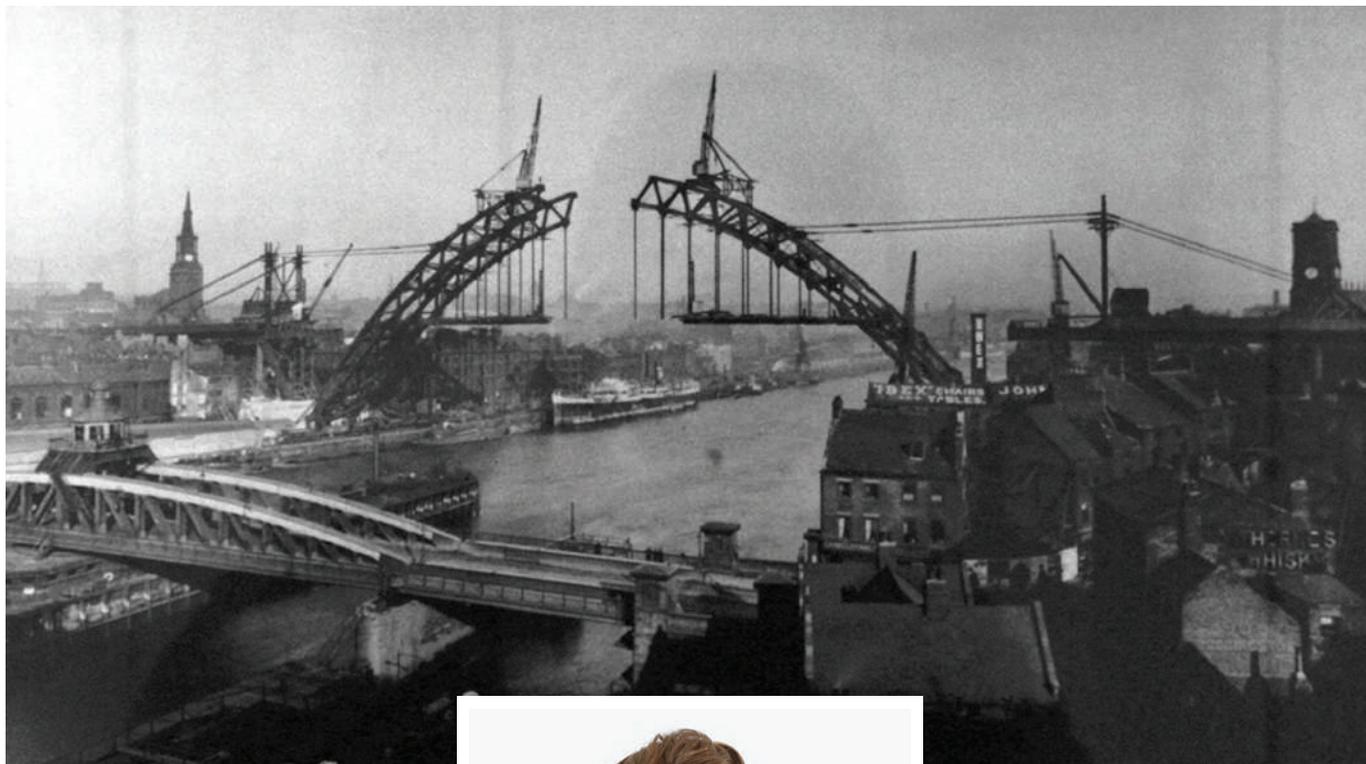


Photo credit: NorthStandard

Where yesterday meets tomorrow

By Sarah McCann, Senior Solicitor – External Affairs, NorthStandard

The North East of England has long been a cornerstone of maritime enterprise, playing a pivotal role in shaping global shipping and trade.

This rich legacy is exemplified by organisations like NorthStandard, a leading marine insurer headquartered in Newcastle, that proudly embodies the region's deep-rooted connection to its maritime heritage. Far from being confined to the past, heritage continues to serve as a living foundation for culture, purpose, and progress, guiding organisations as they navigate the complexities of the present and future.

A legacy of innovation

The maritime history of the North East is steeped in innovation and resilience. During the Industrial Revolution, the region became a powerhouse of shipbuilding, with shipyards along the Tyne and Wear producing cargo ships and warships vital to trade and defence. Its coal exports were so prolific that they inspired the enduring idiom, "bringing coals to Newcastle", highlighting the region's significance in the global supply chain.



Sarah McCann

Beyond shipbuilding, the North East fuelled Britain's industrial expansion and global influence as a centre of engineering excellence. In 1897, Newcastle-based designer Charles Parsons' Turbinia, the first steam turbine powered ship, became the world's fastest vessel, transforming ship propulsion. Soon after, the iconic Tyne-built Mauretania claimed the title of fastest transatlantic liner, holding the Blue Riband from 1907 to 1929.

The enduring importance of shipping

While the prominence of shipbuilding in the North East has diminished over the years, shipping remains central for global trade. Today, approximately 95% of goods entering the UK arrive by sea, underscoring the critical role that maritime transport plays in the economy. In addition, UK shipping contributes £16.1bn in direct GVA, supporting £46.2bn in GVA across the wider economy, and employs over 98,000 people directly, with this number swelling to over 728,000 when considering the broader economic impact.

NorthStandard stands as a testament to the enduring strength of the region's maritime

roots. Established over 165 years ago by a group of local shipowners who joined forces to share insurance risks, the company has evolved into a global leader in marine insurance, serving shipowners and charterers around the world. Its growth has been marked by strategic mergers and a steadfast commitment to exceptional service, earning a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness across the industry.

Heritage as a guiding principle

At the heart of NorthStandard's identity is its heritage, which guides all aspects of its operations, from its corporate ethos to its interactions with clients and partners. The company's deep connection to the maritime traditions of the region fosters a sense of unity, purpose, and resilience among its employees and stakeholders.

The values instilled by this heritage are evident in NorthStandard's approach to business. The company recognises that its success is built on the relationships it fosters with clients, employees, and the communities it serves, promoting a culture of collaboration and shared intent. This commitment to inclusivity enhances innovation and ensures an agile response to the evolving needs of the maritime sector.

As NorthStandard looks to the future, its heritage provides a strong foundation to embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead, leveraging its historical strengths while adapting to the changing maritime landscape.

In an era of rapid technological change and shifting global dynamics, NorthStandard continues to honour its maritime heritage while strengthening its corporate identity and supporting the economic and social well-being of the North East.

north-standard.com



RMT Technology adds eight to fast-growing expert team

The specialist technology arm of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has brought in eight new recruits as it continues to grow on the back of increasing client demand.

RMT Technology works to identify and implement security first IT solutions which meet specific business and operational needs around IT strategy, network infrastructure, information security and data management services.

Having moved into a new, purpose-built 1,800 sq ft office at RMT's Gosforth headquarters last summer, the firm committed to creating 15 new jobs over the following two years as part of its strategy for increasing its client base across the north of England.

And it is now more than halfway towards reaching that goal after bringing in a range of new technical and project management team members.

Daniel Lisle and Brad Reeves have joined the team as senior desk engineers, with Andrew McDonald and Josh McKay taking up desk engineer roles.

Caleb Errington and Megan Hindmarch have been appointed as account managers, while Ben Caygill has joined as a project engineer and Adam Grice is leading the firm's service desk.



North East businesses partner to drive digital performance

Two North East businesses have agreed a long-term partnership to drive digital performance. Leading AWS and software development specialist, Leighton will work with The eaga Trust to maintain, modernise and improve the performance of its digital estate.

Speaking on the partnership Richard Marr, CEO at the eaga Trust said: "This was a really competitive process, what impressed us most about Leighton is the wealth of AWS expertise within their business and their AWS Practice and their genuine interest in our business and what we do."

James Bunting, CEO at Leighton said: "I'm expecting this partnership to be a brilliant example of what can be achieved when two North East organisations collaborate with a shared focus on making a difference. We are looking forward to using our deep AWS expertise to help the eaga Trust run a modern, secure and cost-efficient platform that enables them to focus on the amazing work they do to support members and their families."

Sapphire expands into Newcastle with new North East office as cyber security specialist accelerates growth

Sapphire, the UK-based cyber security specialist, has opened a new office in Newcastle as part of its ongoing expansion strategy, following a period of strong growth, major contract wins and continued investment in its people and services.

The new Newcastle base, located in St James' Gate, will support Sapphire's growing national client base while enabling the business to expand its team in the North East, creating new jobs and drawing on the region's strong pipeline of digital and cyber security talent.

This new office currently supports around 20 colleagues, with plans to increase this to 25 in the coming months as the business continues to grow.

Founded in 1996, Sapphire is marking its 30th year in business and has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, rebalancing its model towards managed cyber security services, supported by specialist professional services.

The strategy has driven rapid growth, with annual recurring revenue doubling in consecutive years and the business delivering strong improvements in sales, revenue and profitability.

Sapphire now works with a broad mix of public and private sector



organisations, from SMEs to large government bodies and global enterprises, across sectors including financial services, manufacturing, gaming and insurance.

The decision to locate this office in Newcastle was driven by the city's thriving tech ecosystem, its universities, and the opportunity to retain highly skilled graduates within the region, while providing a central, well-connected base for colleagues, customers and partners.

PhoneticDigital

WEBSITES | MARKETING | TRAINING



Eclipse Wholesale introduces 8x8 Pay As You Go Service



Eclipse Wholesale, the Gateshead-based connectivity and communications wholesaler, is pleased to share the latest addition to their growing Unified Communications (UC) portfolio, 8x8 Pay As You Go.

This new service marks another milestone in Eclipse Wholesale's long-standing partnership with 8x8, a relationship that has played a key role in reinventing Eclipse Wholesale's UC offering over recent years.

8x8 recently sponsored and presented at Eclipse Wholesale's Annual Partner Event last September, where they showcased their latest innovations and demonstrated the capabilities of their platforms. Attendees gained first-hand insight into the endless opportunities that 8x8 services can bring to their businesses.

Building on this momentum, Eclipse Wholesale is excited to confirm that 8x8 Pay As You Go is now live and available to order, following 8x8's launch event in London last month, in which Eclipse were in attendance.

Unlike traditional fixed-licence UC offerings, Pay As You Go allows partners to build bespoke UC solutions. This removes the need for over-licensing or forcing customers into predefined packages. Instead, partners can tailor solutions to customer needs, easily adjust them as requirements change and pay only for what their customer actually uses.

Customers adopting the Pay As You Go model will still benefit from all of 8x8's features and capabilities. These include integrated business communications through a single app for calls, meetings, messaging and devices. One-click collaboration that enables seamless switching between voice, video and chat, while a modern digital workspace that supports productivity across multiple locations, work styles and devices.

The platform also delivers real-time visibility through actionable analytics, alongside AI-

powered collaboration tools such as automatic transcriptions, summaries and action items. Designed to scale, 8x8 Pay As You Go enables businesses to expand into customer experience (CX) solutions and APIs as they grow, all backed by industry-leading 99.999% uptime.

Eclipse Wholesale places great emphasis on the importance of UC for businesses. Not only does it provide a strong additional revenue stream for resellers with bigger margins, but it is also easy to deploy and increasingly essential as workforces continue to modernise.

In the latest episode of Eclipse Wholesale's 'Channel Corner with James Drake' series, James highlights this topic and shares his insights on why Unified Communications should be a key focus for partners.

With this latest launch, Eclipse Wholesale continues their commitment to delivering flexible, future-ready communications solutions that help partners stand out in an increasingly competitive market.

Scan below to watch their latest episode and find out more.

Watch Channel Corner with James Drake

0344 243 5555

partner@eclipsenet.co.uk

Eclipse Wholesale



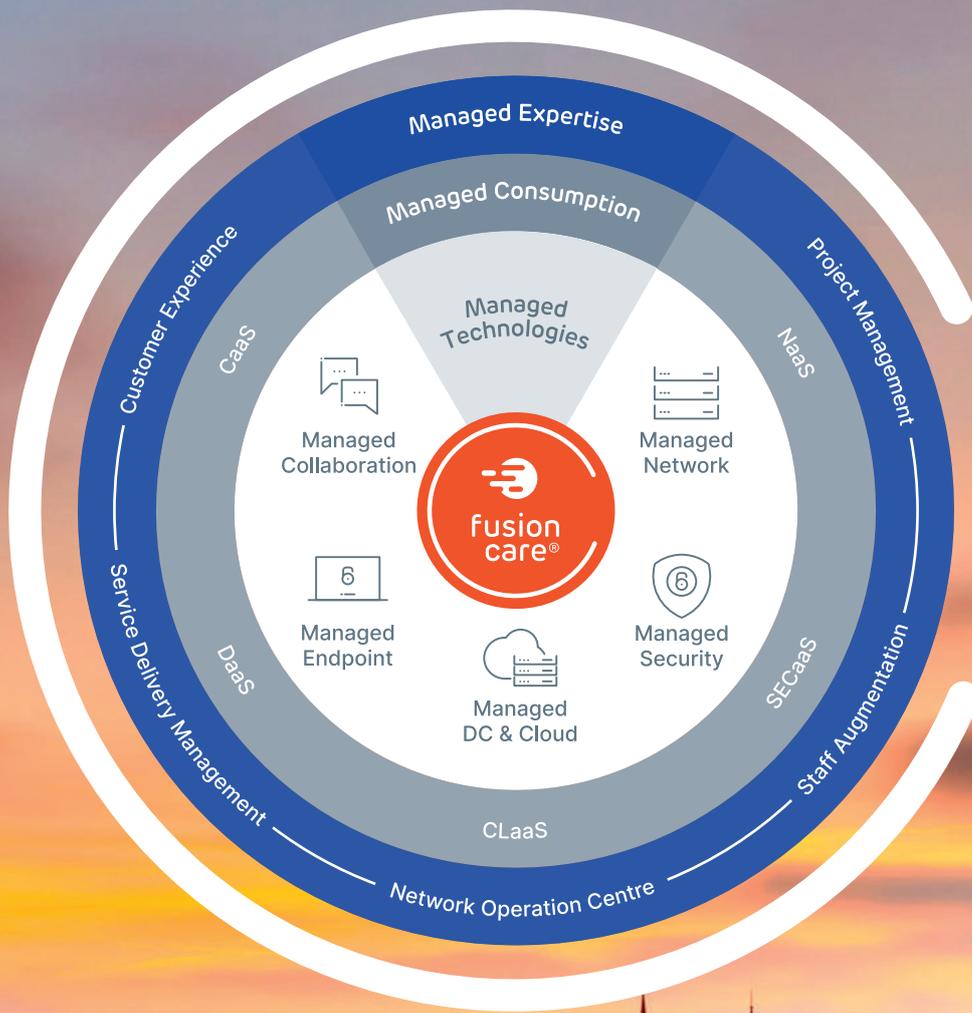
Watch here





FusionCare[®]

IT managed services exactly the way you want them



FusionCare® provides you with robust, flexible, secure and sustainable IT managed services. Developed in partnership with you and meeting your unique operational goals.

Our services can be customised and consumed according to your strategic objectives. Our comprehensive offering spans multiple integrated technology pillars and consumption-based services, leveraging our experts and serving as an extension to your team 24x7x365.

Delivering value from day one of your engagement, taking system availability, security and performance to new levels. We always balance risk and innovation to help you deliver and manage the ever-changing needs of hybrid IT.

Trusted by



Civil Service

Business Outcomes ↓



Sustainability and Responsibility



Enhanced User Experience



Optimisation and Efficiency



Security and Compliance



Return on Investment



Book a chat with our team today

0191 500 9100 hello@forfusion.com

To learn more visit

www.forfusion.com/services/fusioncare



Scan me

forfusion.com

Reshaping technology: Why organisations and engineers must adapt to AI now

By James Bunting, CEO, Leighton

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a strategic imperative for businesses and technologists alike. What once was framed as an experimental add-on is now becoming central to how organisations operate, innovate and compete.

As AI continues to gain momentum companies are being pushed to accelerate their adoption but it's essential that this is done in a measured and systematic way. The opportunity is huge – from autonomous agents that support complex workflows to increasingly accessible custom models – but to take these developments companies need to ensure they have the right foundations in place to avoid issues later down the line.

Modernisation: A turning point for AI adoption

For organisations watching from the sidelines, recent developments in AI have highlighted that the gap between legacy systems and AI-ready technology stacks is widening.

Legacy systems – monolithic, inflexible, and data-poor – are ill-suited to power AI at scale. Organisations that have invested in modern data architectures, APIs and scalable infrastructure are able to integrate AI into core processes more quickly and with fewer barriers.

This isn't just technical preparation, it's strategic positioning. These modern foundations make it feasible to integrate AI into existing workflows, scale AI functions reliably across teams and tap into advanced capabilities like real-time insights and predictive automation.

In effect, modernisation has become a prerequisite rather than a choice for organisations that are serious about leveraging AI.

Governance: Balancing speed and control

While AI can unlock remarkable capabilities, unmanaged adoption can quickly lead to chaos with uncontrolled experimentation, fragmented solutions and data governance issues spreading quickly across your organisation.

Organisations that are realising value from AI aren't just moving fast, they're moving deliberately. They build within defined guardrails, prioritise strong governance and use robust policy frameworks to retain control for example, through clear rules around data access and model usage, strong observability and monitoring practices and methods for policing compliance and ethical standards.

Innovation must be balanced with accountability. By emphasising governance early, organisations can scale AI adoption without compromising security, reliability or trust, ensuring that tools are used in ways that align with business needs.

Redefining software engineering

One of the most notable shifts driven by AI in our sector has been the way in which the discipline of software engineering is evolving. The sheer volume of tools and ultimately options being made available to work with is completely reshaping how we can approach development.

Traditionally, engineers have worked with tools that assist in incremental productivity tasks for example, code completion, debugging and testing automation however, today's AI systems are beginning to push those incremental boundaries even further. Advanced AI agents are starting to participate more meaningfully in the software development lifecycle, contributing to design, code generation, optimisation and even deployment.

Rather than simply being assistants, these AI tools will become collaborators – or team members – capable of understanding context, suggesting solutions and helping engineers navigate complex codebases.

This evolution promises major productivity gains through more informed code, faster iteration cycles, and shorter time to market. But it also raises important questions about how teams work, how skills evolve, and how organisations should structure their engineering teams in order to maximise on these opportunities.

The union of engineers and AI

There's a counterintuitive insight emerging from these opportunities and that is that greater engineering efficiency is likely to increase demand for skilled software engineers, not reduce it.

As AI tools make the process of building software faster, more predictable, and more productive, organisations will likely look to explore new products, deeper integration, richer features and expanded digital platforms. The result? The demand for engineers who understand AI-enabled workflows, can guide architectural decisions and can shape how AI is applied in complex contexts will increase.

However, this fuels a looming skills challenge. Despite rapid advances, there's a shortage of professionals with real-world experience in AI-first engineering. The pace at which the technology evolves makes it difficult for traditional educational and training systems to keep up.

Organisations that invest early in upskilling their engineers, especially by offering structured learning and hands-on experience with AI tools, will gain an advantage in capability and cultural readiness.

At Leighton we're already working with customers to integrate AI-enabled and automated solutions within digital products and cloud platforms. We help organisations to identify the right use cases, implement AI responsibly, and turn experimentation into measurable impact without unnecessary complexity.

If you'd like to hear more about the work we're doing, please get in touch: www.leighton.com



“

**Innovation must
be balanced with
accountability.**

James Bunting,

SOS Sustaining success



(L-R) Paul Edwards (Edwards Cleaning Services) and Andrew Skelton (SOS Group)

Now in their 24th year, office technology company, SOS Group, is proving every kind of sustainability is key to success for both them and their clients.

The firm specialises in providing copy, print and scan solutions and supports businesses and organisations to meet their environmental sustainability goals, increasing workplace productivity and reducing energy usage and costs along the way.

The approach has resulted in a raft of new contracts and contract renewals for the award-winning company, which is based in Gateshead.

Andrew Skelton, a Director at SOS Group, explains: “When we think about sustainability, we consider the word not only in its wider environmental and economic sense, but also in terms of our own client relationships.

“Both are vitally important to us and shape the direction our company is going in.

“That our clients renew contracts and return to us time and time again is not only testament to our overall expertise, commitment and reliability, it’s also a strong indicator that we’re helping clients fulfil all their own objectives.

“More often than not, that now includes providing practical solutions that improve efficiency and reduce energy usage and waste to help meet sustainability targets.

“Rightly, increased environmental sustainability is something every business and organisation is striving for and printing is no exception.”

Key to this sustainability success is SOS Group’s

partnership with Epson, whose heat-free inkjet printers offer significant cost-saving and environmental benefits by consuming dramatically less energy than equivalent laser printers. They also use fewer consumables, produce lower CO2 emissions and require less maintenance.

One long-standing SOS Group client who has made the move towards a more sustainable printing approach is Edwards Commercial Cleaning.

A family firm with a strong commitment to minimising environmental impact and reducing waste, the commercial cleaners have just renewed their contract with SOS Group for a third time, installing Epson devices across two locations.

Installation of the new Epson technology is one more step towards the firm’s goal of achieving Net Zero by 2030 or sooner.



Paul Edwards, Managing Director at Edwards Cleaning Services, says: "We've relied on SOS Group for years and they've given consistently excellent, supportive service."

"Recently, as part of our commitment to sustainability, we approached them about finding a more environmentally friendly printing solution. We were expertly guided to the Epson Heat-Free range, and it has been a game changer."

"Because there's no warm up time, printing begins almost instantly, even when the machine has just been switched on or is waking from sleep mode, and the benefits for our business have been immediate and significant."

"The machines maintain excellent print quality and consistent speed, even on high-volume jobs, but use significantly less energy - up to 83% less than our old laser unit - meaning lower electricity bills. Additionally, no warm up time means our team's productivity has increased."

"Overall, the reduced energy consumption and waste, combined with less maintenance required, means a smaller carbon footprint that aligns perfectly with our environmental goals."

"SOS Group has provided us with the perfect solution to meet our business and environmental needs."

Andrew Skelton adds: "Outdated office equipment consumes significantly more electricity, resulting in higher energy bills and a larger carbon footprint."

"So, making a positive environmental change can be as simple as moving away from older technology and devices that were simply not designed with modern energy efficiency standards in mind."

"Every workplace is looking closely at areas where efficiency can be improved from an environmental and cost perspective. For our clients, our role is to simplify that process and provide solutions that fulfil both objectives."

"In doing so, we're sustaining our client relationships and supporting clients to meet their own sustainability targets."

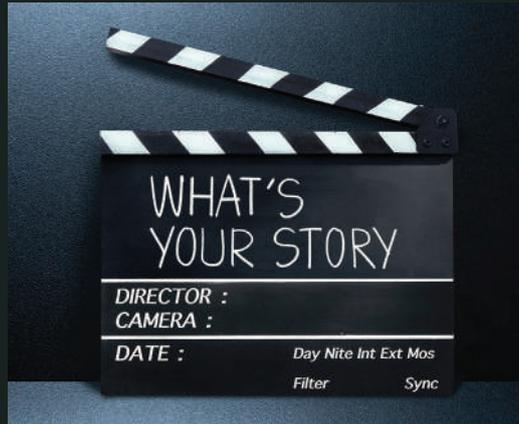
Based on the Team Valley, SOS Group has grown into an SME that counts multinationals within its established client base, and the company helps deliver internationally significant

sporting and political party events.

Its own growth was achieved by creating successful, long-term client relationships and each of the company's directors has a passion to help others do the same, working closely with small businesses and supporting start-ups as they grow.

For more information on how SOS Group can support your sustainability goals, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk





You say case study, I say case story

By Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Marketing Strategist, Film Marketing Mentor, Pascal Fintoni & Associates

How to turn your constraints into a competitive edge.

You've delivered exceptional results for your clients. You want to share those success stories. But you can't use their photos, display their logos, or in many cases even mention their names. Most marketers see this as a problem. It isn't. It's an opportunity, one that actually forces you to become a better storyteller.

Here's the counterintuitive insight: when you can use a client's logo, you're often leaning on borrowed credibility. Without that crutch, you're forced to dig deeper into the actual impact you made, explain your process in detail, and demonstrate your methodology through clear examples. That's not a weakness. That's what positions you as a trusted adviser.

From Case Study to Case Story

The shift starts with language. "Storytelling" is made up of two words, story and telling. The story is the structure: what you observed, why it happened, what was done about it. The telling is the format you choose to carry that message.

So rather than asking "how do I fill this template?", ask: what is the lesson, and what do I want people to remember? That single question transforms a dry document into something memorable. Call it a case story, not a case study, and watch how your thinking changes.

The structure that never fails

Every compelling case story needs three things: the problem your client faced, your unique solution or process, and the impact you delivered. Simple enough, but most people stop too soon at the impact stage.

Keep asking "so what?" until you reach the real transformation.

"We improved efficiency by 15%." So what? "That freed up three hours a day for the leadership team." So what? "Which allowed them to focus on growth and secure two new contracts worth £200K." Now we're talking.

The numbers, the human outcomes, the genuine before-and-after, that's where trust is built.

Solving the Visual Problem

Forget the generic stock photo of two people shaking hands in front of a suspiciously tidy desk. There are smarter options.

Data visualisation is your first port of call, before-and-after graphs, percentage improvements, visual progress indicators. These show impact without revealing anything sensitive.

Next, consider process illustrations: a visual roadmap of your decision-making, the three approaches you considered, the thinking that led to the successful outcome. Your methodology made visible.

Then there's what you might call lateral versus literal thinking. Rather than matching visuals directly to your client's world, go conceptual. A logistics client? Something resembling a Tube map conveys interconnected systems beautifully. A finance client? Grids, structure, numbers presented with precision. The image doesn't need to show their office, it needs to echo the lesson.

Professional photography platforms and AI-generated imagery offer two further routes worth exploring.

Anonymity as a Trust Signal

As for the client names you can't mention, lean into it. "Client details withheld due to commercial sensitivity" isn't an apology. It's a statement of discretion. Back it with credible detail: "an £80 million business in the manufacturing sector covering three world markets" tells your reader everything they need to know about the calibre of your work, without giving anything away.

The constraint isn't the story. The constraint is the story.

To your success!

www.pascalfintoni.com



“
Call it a case story, not a case study, and watch how your thinking changes.

Pascal Fintoni



Times are tight

In business, and at home, everyone is feeling the pinch.

As such, value for money has never been more important.

We look to make savings wherever we can, especially where quality isn't compromised.

At home, that might mean swapping Tesco for Lidl.

At work, it might mean renegotiating supplier rates, extending the life of existing systems or cutting back on non-essentials.

If there's a cheaper way to achieve the same outcome, it should be a no-brainer.

Or so you'd think.

Recently, we submitted Freedom of Information requests to public bodies across the North East.

They revealed that millions of pounds have been spent across our region by public sector on apps, websites and other digital systems.

That, in itself, isn't surprising.

A good website or app has never been more crucial, and strong, reliable systems should absolutely be a priority for every organisation.

But this spending isn't on brand-new platforms.

It's on rebuilding existing ones.

Durham Constabulary alone has spent around £2.3m in the past three years on digital rebuilds.

South Tyneside Council has spent almost £600k rebuilding apps.

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust spent just under £40k redeveloping its website and launching a charity microsite.

In the multi-billion-pound world of public sector budgets, these figures may seem like a drop in the ocean.

However, in the current climate - to paraphrase a saying from one of the supermarkets mentioned earlier - every penny really does count.

And when these costs are viewed alongside the pressures facing councils, police forces and NHS trusts, they raise some pretty uncomfortable questions.

The most important one being 'are full digital rebuilds always vital'?

In many cases, the answer is a hard no.

For years, the default response to a website or app that isn't performing as it should has been to start again from scratch.

Rebuilds are often seen as the safest, simplest option.

Oh - and pretty conveniently - they are also the most profitable approach for developers!

But as that suggests, they are rarely the most cost-effective.

There is a growing body of evidence that repairing, stabilising and improving existing systems can deliver the same results at a fraction of the cost.

Our approach is repairing systems, rather than rebuilding them, is often around 80 per cent cheaper - even when we didn't build it ourselves.

And quality is never compromised.

So, this isn't about cutting corners. It is about making smarter decisions.

In these tough times, the public sector has a duty to taxpayers to deliver value for money to the taxpayer.

Our services are stretched to breaking point.

Anybody who drives will have noticed how many potholes there are - but there would be outrage if, rather than filling it, the council just ordered a whole new road.

But that's what they are doing with digital systems.

Yet much like a pothole, repairing what's already there is quicker, safer and less disruptive.

So, the public sector needs to think repair first - and rebuild as a last resort.

Of course, there will always be cases where a rebuild is genuinely required. But the current default culture needs challenging.

If the public sector is serious about value it must re-examine how (and why) it spends such vast sums on digital redevelopment.

Crucially, it must also ensure that scarce public money is spent where it is needed most.

In the current climate, that isn't controversial.

It is just common sense.

resolvedgroup.co.uk

Digital resilience moves centre stage

“Over the past year, resilience has moved from being an IT concern to a board-level priority,” says David O’Connell, Managing Director at Advantex.

Across the North East, organisations are reassessing how prepared they truly are for disruption. It is not growth, recruitment or even energy costs dominating conversations. It is resilience.

Not in a theoretical sense, but in practical questions about what would actually happen if systems went down, data was compromised, or operations were disrupted.

What once sat within the IT department is now firmly part of leadership discussion. Managing Directors and Operations teams are asking whether their infrastructure reflects the level of risk we are now operating in.

That shift alone tells a story.

Risk Is Escalating and Evolving

The Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2025 reports that 43% of UK businesses experienced a cyber breach or attack in the past year. Medium and large organisations were even more likely to be affected.

This is not a niche problem. It is widespread.

What is changing is not just the number of incidents, but how they are carried out. Automation and generative AI are being used to make phishing and ransomware attacks faster, more convincing and more difficult to detect. These are no longer obvious attempts. They are targeted, timely and increasingly sophisticated.

A newer internal risk is also emerging. “Shadow AI” refers to employees using AI tools without formal governance. The intention is rarely harmful, but sensitive data can be shared externally before risks are understood. Many organisations are only just beginning to recognise the exposure this creates.

Cloud dependency adds another layer. As hyperscalers expand AI infrastructure at pace, complexity increases. Cloud platforms remain



David O’Connell

highly reliable, but resilience planning must now consider architecture, failover and vendor strategy, not just endpoint security.

Prevention still matters. Preparation matters just as much.

The conversations have changed

One of the clearest indicators of this shift is the type of questions we are hearing.

It is less about, “Can you fix this issue?” And more about:

- Are we resilient enough?
- How quickly would we recover from ransomware?
- Are we structured for Cyber Essentials and supply chain scrutiny?
- Does our IT strategy support where the business is heading?

For manufacturers operating around the clock, downtime has immediate financial consequences. In regulated sectors, reputational impact can be just as damaging as operational disruption. For growing SMEs, internal IT teams can quickly become stretched as systems become more complex.

Resilience has moved from being a technical concern to a commercial one.

Responding to the Shift

Across the region, demand for proactive and structured support has grown steadily. Organisations are looking for greater visibility, clearer governance and long-term planning rather than reactive fixes.

At Advantex, this has shaped how we continue to invest. Our frameworks are built around ISO 9001 and Cyber Essentials Plus, with ISO 27001

on track for completion by the end of March. That focus is not about credentials for their own sake. It is about consistency, accountability and resilience built into everyday operations. Because resilience is not just about technology. It is about structure.

Resilience as a Competitive Advantage

The North East continues to develop as a centre for advanced manufacturing, renewables and professional services. As businesses adopt AI tools and integrate smart systems, the stability beneath those systems becomes increasingly important.

Organisations that can demonstrate structured cyber maturity are better positioned to win contracts, meet procurement standards, satisfy insurers and scale confidently.

Recently, the UK Government published a comprehensive Budget Information Security Review following concerns about the handling of sensitive Budget information. It was a reminder that governance and information security now carry economic consequences at the highest levels.

The direction of travel is clear.

Digital resilience is no longer something delegated quietly to IT teams. It is a leadership responsibility that directly affects growth, competitiveness and long-term stability.

The real question is not whether resilience matters.

It is whether your organisation is prepared for what comes next.

www.advantex.uk.com



RMT Technology adds eight to fast-growing expert team

The specialist technology arm of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has brought in eight new recruits as it continues to grow on the back of increasing client demand.

RMT Technology works to identify and implement security first IT solutions which meet specific business and operational needs around IT strategy, network infrastructure, information security and data management services.

Having moved into a new, purpose-built 1,800 sq ft office at RMT's Gosforth headquarters last summer, the firm committed to creating 15 new jobs over the following two years as part of its strategy for increasing its client base across the north of England. And it is now more than halfway towards reaching that goal after bringing in a range of new technical and project management team members.

Daniel Lisle and Brad Reeves have joined the team as senior desk engineers, with Andrew McDonald and Josh McKay taking up desk engineer roles. Caleb Errington and Megan Hindmarch have been appointed as account managers, while Ben Caygill has joined as a project engineer and Adam Grice is leading the firm's service desk.



North East's first podcast-focused TV studio attracts wave of enquiries

The North East's first TV studio designed for podcasting has generated a surge of interest from businesses, universities, charities and creators within weeks of launching in Sunderland.

Howell Studios, which harnesses the same cutting-edge technology used by the BBC, Netflix and Disney to offer bespoke backdrops, opened its door to its riverside unit at the North East BIC in early 2026. And already it's fielded dozens of enquiries ranging from organisations exploring podcasting for the first time to seasoned hosts looking for customised sets, and even creators seeking a space for fitness videos, e-learning and audio books.

Co-founder Issy Howell said the volume and variety of early demand has exceeded expectations. "We launched the studio gently at the start of the year and already the interest has snowballed," she said.

"Many businesses and organisations want to add podcasting to their marketing mix but aren't sure where to begin so they're attracted by our range of support services. We've also had enquiries for all kinds of other creative uses for the space.

"Our eyes light up when people ask for off-the-wall ideas – whatever they want, we can make it happen with our green screen. Our sister company has an animator, so we can even create custom backdrops."



Marriott Communications Named in the EB100 Top 100 SME Businesses List

Marriott Communications has been named as one of the UK's top-performing small and medium-sized enterprises, securing a place in the prestigious EB100.

The EB100 recognises SMEs across the UK that demonstrate innovation, resilience, leadership and sustained commercial growth. Marriott Communications' inclusion reflects five years of strategic expansion, national impact and increasing international presence.

Founded with a focus on purpose-driven and intelligence-led communications, Marriott Communications has grown into a globally active consultancy delivering PR, public affairs and strategic advisory services across the UK, Europe and the United States. The agency successfully scaled during the COVID lockdown period, expanding its client portfolio across multiple sectors including government, third sector, legal, finance and creative industries.

In addition to its commercial performance, Marriott Communications has donated over 900 hours of pro bono support to charities across the UK, reinforcing its commitment to ethical growth and social impact.

The recognition follows a year of expansion, including the launch of the North East's first Intelligence service and the agency's announcement of future international growth plans.

Samuel Marriott-Dowding, Founder and CEO of Marriott Communications, said:

"This recognition is incredibly meaningful for us. Over the past five years, we've built the agency balancing growth with integrity and innovation with responsibility. To be recognised among the UK's 100 leading SMEs is a testament to our team, our partners and the clients who have trusted us."

SHOUT LEAD SOCIAL Your Socials Called... They Want a Spring Clean



Orange Bus founder Julian Leighton joins Different Narrative as non-exec director

Julian Leighton has joined Newcastle-based creative marketing agency Different Narrative as non-executive director.

Having co-founded the North East digital agency success story Orange Bus, Julian stepped down in 2020 after the company's acquisition by Capita. He already holds non-exec roles at Hedgehog Labs and Land Digital.

Different Narrative provides marketing, creative, film, digital, media, strategy and PR services for a growing list of regional and national clients.

Working with managing director Kieron Goldsborough and the wider senior leadership team, Julian acts a "thought partner" providing mentoring, advice and business support.

Julian said: "Different Narrative is in a really good place and Kieron and the team have dealt really well with some very challenging market conditions over recent years.

"It's exciting working with a well-run business which is on the way up. I think we're going to make a decent dent in the landscape, and I'm glad to be part of that."

In 2025, Different Narrative launched 'All in' – an industry-first offering of uncapped marketing services for one flat monthly fee. The agency's growing client list includes NewcastleGateshead Initiative, Sunderland City Council, Edwin and the NHS, with over £200,000 of new business wins in the past six weeks.

Kieron said: "Julian brings exactly the right attributes we need right now – plus he has lived experience of how to build and scale an agency. He's honest and is a great sounding board for our ideas.

"We had a phenomenal year in 2025 for client wins and we've already had an incredibly strong start to 2026. Now it's all about building on the agency's solid foundations, growing the team, getting sustained growth and proving the impact of 'All in' to continue to disrupt the market. Julian is the perfect partner to help us achieve all that."

For more visit www.differentnarrative.com



Darlington Training Company Welcomes a Trailblazer

Red Button Marketing Training based in Darlington have recruited a new member to the team as part of a government backed youth employment scheme.

The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer scheme is a new and exciting opportunity for young people who have been actively seeking work to gain a role in a company fully for 3-6 months and a minimum of 25 hours per week. It is being run through Darlington Borough Council and Stockton Borough Council.

Andrew Fitzpatrick from Darlington joined the training company at the end of January and has already made a great impact.

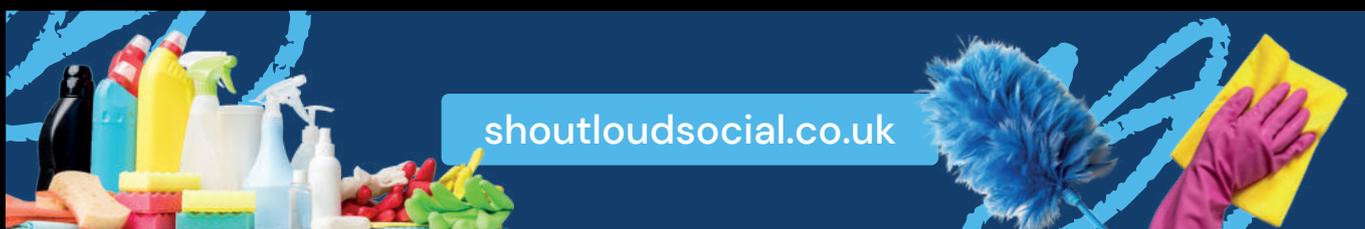
Red Button Marketing Training are a leading training company who offer marketing process education and mentoring to SMEs and their teams. They deliver programmes around The Marketing Performance Framework® - a solution that helps SMEs visualise the management process of marketing and use it to help connect other business functions such as sales, operations and business development, to motivate people and give structure to plans and activities.

Andrew attended Hummersknott School and Darlington College gaining excellent grades as well as excelling in areas such as data, IT and development.

Margaret Bradshaw, managing director of Red Button Marketing Training said: "I am thrilled that Andrew is with us and being able to offer an opportunity like this is fantastic. It can be so challenging for young people leaving school and college to find employment. This scheme is a terrific way for someone to be able to show what they can do in a company and to build their confidence in the workplace. Andrew has excellent timekeeping skills and works well in the team. With his 'can do' attitude, I am sure he will do very well in his career."

Ken Hope, Job Coach at Darlington Borough Council said: "It's fantastic to see young people like Andrew gaining meaningful opportunities through the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer scheme. At Darlington Borough Council, we're committed to helping residents develop the skills and confidence they need to build successful careers. Andrew's enthusiasm and early achievements are a great example of what this initiative is all about, and we're delighted to support him. Red Button Marketing Training provide an exceptional environment for young people to grow, offering both support and high-quality development opportunities."

Andrew added: "It is great to be working in such a nice company, and I am grateful for the opportunity. It's so good to be in work again and I'm looking forward to what the future holds."



shoutloudsocial.co.uk



Tony Hardy Founder and Managing Director at Canny Creative

North East creative agency makes strategic pivot with monster rebrand

Just months after the business celebrated its 10th anniversary, North East-based brand design and web agency, Canny Creative, has revealed a bold new brand identity and website.

The refreshed look arrives at a pivotal moment for the agency, as it makes a strategic shift towards the B2B market, specialising in digital marketing solutions for clients across the healthcare, IT and recruitment and training sectors.

“Canny has changed a lot over the last ten

years,” said Tony Hardy, Founder and Managing Director at Canny Creative.

“Our thinking has evolved, along with our client base, and our brand identity just hadn’t kept pace. We wanted something that would reflect our evolution, without losing the fun, approachable side that people know us for.

“We carried out a tonne of research and played around with lots of different concepts until we landed on something which felt authentic. It’s a bit outside of the box, but that’s exactly the point. The creative sector is saturated with agencies promising to help their clients to ‘stand out from the crowd’, but then their own visual identities don’t practice what they’re preaching. We didn’t want to do that.”

Using a pastel colour palette, hand-drawn illustrations and anchored by the strapline ‘Taming marketing monsters since 2015’, Canny’s new look comprises a refreshed logo, new website and the introduction of a new brand mascot, ‘Mark - the monster of marketing’.

The finished effect offers a playful satire of the marketing industry while doubling down on the message that Blyth-based Canny is ready for further growth.

“Introducing a big, hairy purple monster into our branding was a calculated risk,” Tony added.

“Brand mascots have been around for years, but they’re almost never used in B2B. B2B branding is traditionally very safe and accessible, but instead of seeing that as a limitation, we saw an

opportunity to create a character that didn’t just represent Canny, but represented marketing itself to help us really speak to our audience. Because the truth is, marketing today is a bit of a monster.

“We work with clients all over the world, from big multinational corporations to owner managed businesses, and the one thing that all of the marketing teams have in common is that they’re stretched too thin. Sometimes the ‘team’ is just one or two individuals, expected to manage the entire marketing function, from video production to social media, all the while keeping tabs on KPIs and ROI to justify their budget. It’s a lot, we understand that.

“Mark the monster is the embodiment of that spirit. He is a lot. He’s the unpredictable brilliance of the creative sector which, for all of its fun and playfulness, is absolutely vital to a businesses’ ongoing success.

“People will either love it or hate it, but we hope that they at least get it. It’s been a labour of love for our in-house team, and I’m really proud of how it’s turned out.”

Established in 2015, Canny Creative is a leading provider of brand design, website development and SEO services for clients spanning the B2B market, including IT and technology, recruitment and training and healthcare.

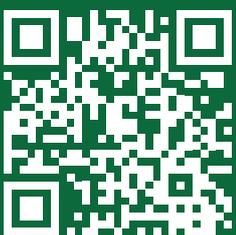
For more information, visit canny-creative.com

Making Clients Famous.

Marketing. Video.

Branding. Public Relations.

Bradleyomahoney.co.uk





The Evolution of Unique Magazines: Two years of the Mag Room

Growth has always been part of the Unique Magazines story. What began as a specialist online retailer has steadily evolved into something much bigger. From the outset, the ambition was never simply about transactions. It was about championing print.

Our founder, John Porrett, always held a clear vision to create a physical destination for independent magazines. A space where print was not just stocked on shelves, but thoughtfully curated and genuinely experienced. Somewhere considered, welcoming and purposeful.

Traditional high street locations were explored. However, high rents, rates and staffing costs would have forced compromises. The figures did not support the kind of independent, community-led retail space we wanted to build. Rather than dilute the vision, we chose to wait until the model made sense both creatively and commercially.

That moment arrived in April 2024.

We repurposed an old meeting room and tested it as a small retail concept. There was no grand launch. It was simply a considered first step. That room became the beginning of what is now our ever-evolving Mag Room.

As we approach April 2026 and the two-year milestone, it feels like the right time to reflect on how far the space has come.

The original Mag Room was simple but intentional. It showcased independent titles, carefully curated and organised into thoughtful categories. It reflected what we had long imagined. A space where independent magazines were displayed proudly and where local print lovers could browse and discover something new. We built it using the resources we already had within our Swalwell offices.

What started as one dedicated room gradually expanded. The concept flowed into our magazine lounge, then into former kitchen and office areas. Over time, the transformation reshaped the building. Our upstairs became purely workspace, while the entire ground floor evolved into

a dedicated retail and dispatch space, sending magazines to customers across the UK and beyond.

The physical space now supports and enhances our online operation, strengthening the connection between our national customer base and our local presence.

Today, the Mag Room is home to over 1,200 titles. Independent publications sit alongside mainstream favourites and carefully selected coffee table books. Niche titles share space with household names. The common thread is quality print and careful curation.

We are now recognised as more than just an online retailer. We are a national subscription partner, a collaborator with publishers and a curated physical destination for print.

Opening the Mag Room was never reactive. It was the realisation of a long-held vision, delivered at the right time and built in a way that



works for our business. We were not chasing footfall. We were building something intentional. A destination for print, created with care and grown through steady, considered hard work.

When you walk into our Mag Room, we want you to feel excited. We want you to pause. To take it all in. To feel inspired by the front-facing covers, the colour, the design and the sheer variety of print surrounding you.

That feeling is the reason we built it.

With the space as it stands today, we know we can create that experience. The scale, the curation and the care behind it now reflect the vision we had from the very beginning.

What started as one repurposed meeting room has grown into something that belongs not just to us, but to the people who use it. The students forming new ideas, the lecturers bringing in groups, the writers, photographers and designers seeking inspiration, and the local magazine lovers who return time and time again.

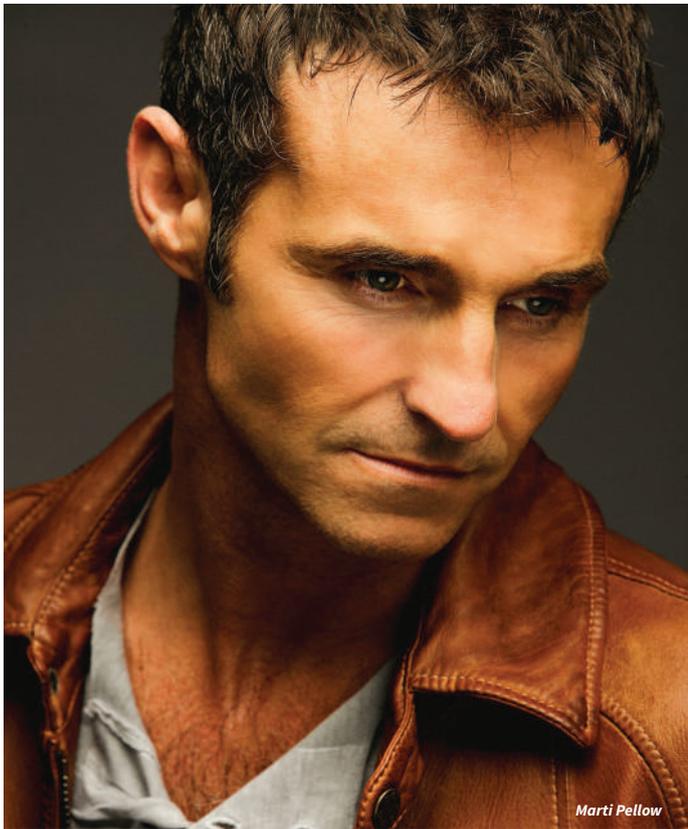
The growth of the Mag Room is not just about space. It represents a sustainable vision brought to life, and a commitment to keeping print relevant for the communities we serve.

For more information on pricing, availability and collaboration opportunities with Unique Magazines, please get in touch with Ellie Purvis at ellie.purvis@uniquemagazines.co.uk

@uniquemagazines **f Unique Magazines** **in Unique Magazines**

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk



Marti Pellow



Gabrielle

A historic North East hotel is providing the backdrop for a new musical festival

As you would expect from a building with a 600 year history, Lumley Castle has played host to its fair share of high profile guests over the decades.

Back in the 1600s, James VI is reputed to have stayed there as he travelled from Edinburgh to London to ascend to the throne and in more recent times, visiting star cricketers from both India and Australia claim they had an encounter with the hotel's ghost.

Now however Lumley Castle is set to be the backdrop for some new celebrity visitors, with the hotel hosting its first ever major music festival.

Opulence is the brainwave of experienced events organisers, ATA Events, which for the past 20 years has staged a number of music festivals across the country.

It was the company's operations manager, Daz Flatman, who wanted to replicate their successes in the North East, after moving to the region.

Lumley seemed like the perfect location – combining a unique and imposing setting with a star-studded line-up.

Daz admits that it took a lot of persuasion and a charm offensive to convince the hotel to partner with the event, but the combination of ATA's proven track record and their passion for the

project led to it being given the green light.

And so over the weekend of September 4-5 Opulence will bring a new musical experience to County Durham.

Day one – which has been named Live at Lumley Castle – will be headlined by Marti Pellow and Gabrielle, promising two powerhouse performances from these iconic stars.

The former Wet Wet Wet frontman has a string of hits to his name, along with starring in a range of musicals in both London's West End and on Broadway.

Songs like *Love Is All Around* – which was also used on the soundtrack of hit movie, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* - *Sweet Surrender* and *Wishing I was Lucky* helped make Wet Wet Wet one of the biggest bands of the 90s.

Also taking to the stage at the castle is multi award-winning British singer/songwriter Gabrielle, whose many hits include the iconic *Dreams*, *Rise* and *Out of Reach*.

The singer – who has two BRITs, an Ivor Novello awards and two MOBO awards to her name – has had every one of her albums make it

into the top 10, along with performing alongside everyone from Adele to Stormzy.

The pair will be supported at the event – on 4 September – by a range of North East-favourites including Smooth and Turrell, Soulutions and Frankie Jobling.

There'll be a sharp change in genre on day two, where big name House music legends – supported by a number of top DJs – will bring a dance vibe to the event, set across two stages.

"We are very excited about being able to bring Opulence to Lumley Castle and across the two days we've got a strong line up with something for everyone," said Daz.

"This is a rare opportunity to enjoy live music in a unique setting and we are delighted that Lumley Castle has given us the green light to deliver something truly spectacular.

Tickets for Live at Lumley Castle start from £55, with a number of special packages also available and are available to over 18s only.

VIP tickets – with prices from £85 - include access to the VIP area next to the main stage – with uninterrupted views of the stage – a dedicated premium bar, fast track entry and premium toilets.

There are also just 100 VVIP tickets available at a cost of £160 per person, which are only available on a first come, first served basis by registering on the event website.

VVIPs will have their own private tables under cover and on a raised area overlooking the stage.

The package includes waiter service, canapes and nibbles on the table, premium toilets and access to the VIP area.

To get access to all packages ahead of general ticket release, people need to register at www.opulence-events.com



marriott.
communications

Good PR tells a story
Great PR changes the ending



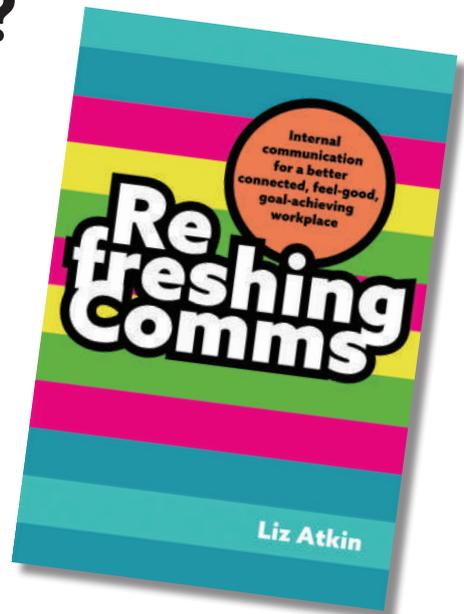
Problems in the Workplace?

If your reality is...

- Silos & disconnect between teams
- Change initiatives stalling
- Managers without people skills
- Fragmented understanding & buy-in

But you long for...

- Clearer communication
- Productive working relationships
- Confident managers who earn trust
- Teams that collaborate instead of collide

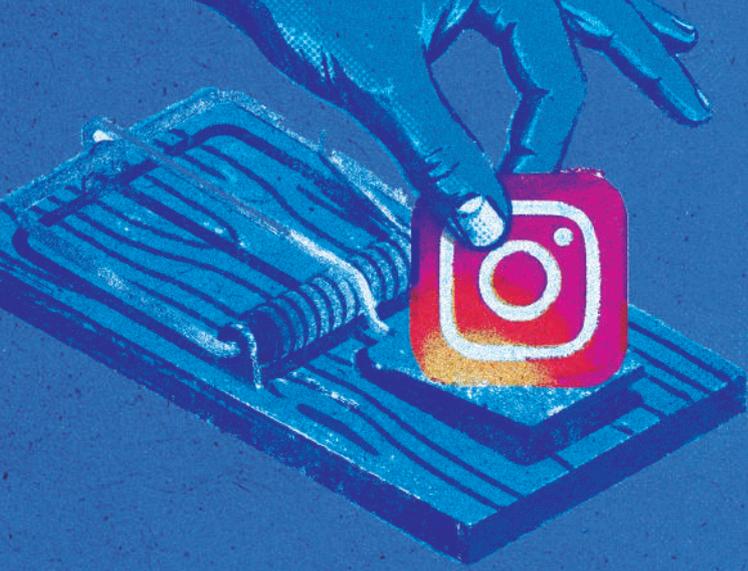


Then this is for you - explore how Refreshing Comms can help you directly

Fresh, insightful & memorable learning and support with practical application

Tailored workshops | CPD sessions | Strategic comms support | Team facilitation

Contact Liz Atkin, Refreshing Comms | liz@refreshingcomms.co.uk | www.refreshingcomms.co.uk



Escaping the *Tactics* Trap

We've seen it thousands of times, a new quarter looms and Sales are hungry for leads.

The immediate reaction in most boardrooms is a rush to *do something*. "We need a campaign," someone says. "Let's refresh the website," suggests someone else. Before you know it, LinkedIn posts are flying and the website has a new landing page.

Then, six months later, the dust settles and you realise nothing has changed.

If this sounds familiar, you aren't suffering from a lack of ambition or effort. You've simply fallen into what we call the *Tactics Trap*.

Execution often feels like progress. You can see the posts, click the links, and watch the new site go live. But execution without a plan is activity without direction. In other words, it doesn't matter how fast you can run if you're wearing a blindfold.

When we start with tactics, we run the risk of:

- Solving the wrong problems.
- Confusing the audience with inconsistent messaging.
- Showing up in the wrong places.

To escape the *Tactics Trap*, we need to look at marketing through a more disciplined lens; specifically, adding two steps before tactics that will help us focus our efforts.

Step 1: Diagnosis – *The Reality Check*

Diagnosis is often overlooked because it doesn't feel like momentum, at best it feels like treading water, and at worst can feel like a step backwards.

But skipping this stage is a gamble. Diagnosis of your brand and the market might tell you that you've got a brand awareness problem, not the lead conversion problem you initially thought. Without understanding the real challenge, you're guessing with your budget.

Step 2: Strategy – *The Power of 'No'*

This is often where businesses stumble. Strategy isn't a time-line, a list of deliverables, or a channel plan. Strategy is a set of choices, informed by your diagnosis, that tell you where you're going to plant your flag, and more importantly where you're not.

Real strategy is deciding:

- Who are we targeting and who are we not?
- When we reach those people, what specific things are we going to say to them?
- If they listen, what do we want them to do?

When we skip strategy and jump straight to tactics, messaging gets watered down, targeting is non-existent, and you quickly get lost in the noise.

Step 3: Tactics – *Execution with a Plan*

Congratulations! You've escaped the *Tactics Trap*; your solid diagnosis and strategy have created the conditions for execution to be successful. Your team is no longer guessing, your budget is more effective, and best of all you have a plan you can measure against.

Now we can:

- Choose the right channels for our target audience.
- Set pricing based on what we know people will pay.
- Make product improvements the market actually wants.
- Sell our product or service where people are buying.

So, with all the shiny tactical options available in 2026, our challenge to you is simple: resist.

Slow down, take a breath. Diagnose the real problems, set a focused strategy, and then choose the tactics that will help you deliver on that plan.

Not only will you be doing better than most other businesses, but you'll be doing better than many marketers.

YOUR 2026 STARTS WITH JAM



**Stop the Scroll. Start the Results.
You only have seconds to get attention!**

Make your brand unforgettable. jam-marketing.co.uk | info@jamprintsmarketing.co.uk

Spring is just round the corner

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR club members what they were looking forward to in their businesses this spring.



Spring is my favourite time of year, the warmer air, longer days, and the first daffodils and crocuses appearing after the dark stretch of winter always gives me a lift. The sense of things looking brighter and feeling lighter is what I aim for with my work at askmrswatson.com too. Supporting members old and new in very practical ways, with clear software how-to's and straightforward data protection support that helps them feel more confident and in control of their technology. I love Spring and I love my job, It's about making things simpler, safer, and a little easier to manage as we all move into a warmer, busier season.

Kate Watson, www.askmrswatson.com/#join

As the first signs of spring begin to brighten our days, we at Kip McGrath Gateshead East, along with our Washington and Chester le Street centres, are stepping into the season with a renewed sense of excitement, celebration, and opportunity. This year marks two remarkable milestones for us: 10 years of Kip McGrath Gateshead East supporting children and families across the community and 50 years of Kip McGrath Education worldwide, empowering young learners since 1976.

To celebrate these achievements, we opened our doors during the spring half term, for a series of special open sessions across all three centres.

Our students brought a friend for a mini taster session, and we had competitions and fun learning challenges as well as opportunities for parents to chat directly with qualified educators and ask any questions about their child's learning.

Our aim is to make learning approachable, enjoyable, and personalised—exactly what Kip McGrath has stood for over five decades.

It's a moment of gratitude, reflection, and pride—ten years of local impact made possible by an incredible community. Alongside our celebrations, we're continuing to expand the support we offer to families including Dyslexia Screening, and Functional Skills Tuition and Exam Entry. To me, Spring represents growth—and that's exactly what we're celebrating.

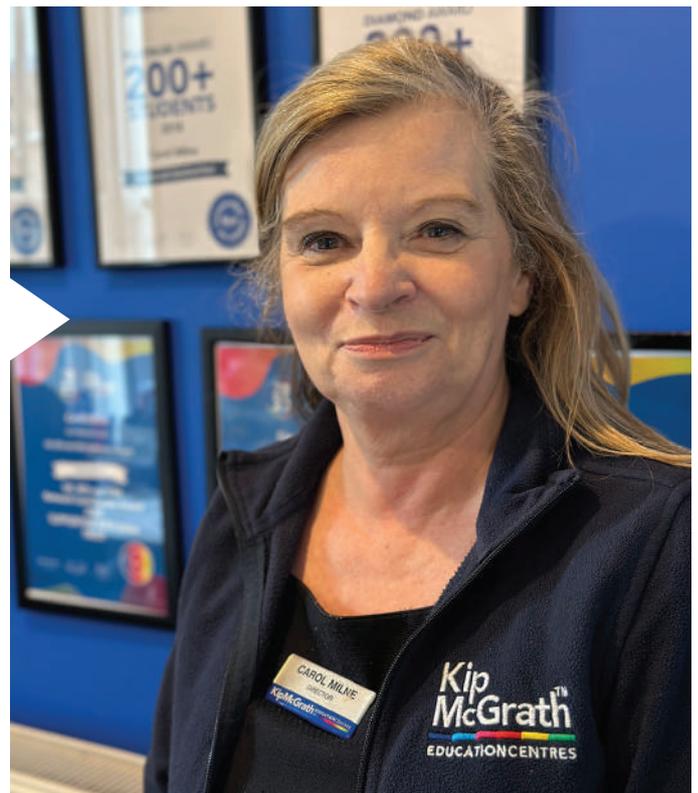
Carol Milne, www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/gateshead-east



As we look ahead to spring, one of the things we're most excited about at H Social is supporting the opening of Flow Yorkshire, a holistic treatment centre designed to calm the nervous system and strengthen the immune system. Created to support families experiencing dysregulation through autism, ADHD, mental health challenges and other pressures, the response to Flow Yorkshire's launch has been phenomenal (if a little overwhelming).

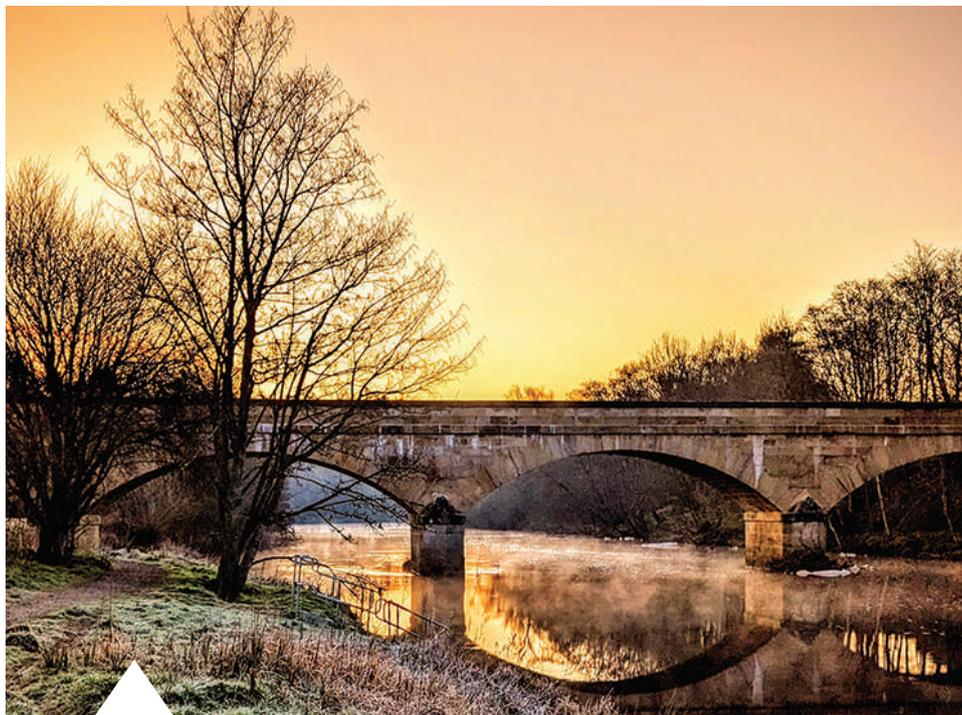
While it's deeply saddening to see just how many families are struggling, it's also incredibly hopeful. It's a powerful reminder that people are actively seeking support, and that compassionate, evidence-led solutions do exist. Being part of a project rooted in care, understanding and genuine impact feels especially meaningful as we move into a season associated with growth, renewal and fresh starts. If you'd like to find out more about Flow Yorkshire and the treatments they'll be offering when they open in Spring, head to www.flowyorkshire.com

Helen Arnold, H Social, www.hsocial.agency



I'm so looking forward to the Spring as it marks the start of the boating season and I can work more from the floating office and also take my lovely clients out on nice sunny days!

Keith Newman, www.highlightspr.co.uk



My Perspective: Capturing spring through my lens

To me, spring is a total visual rebirth. I'm always chasing those soft, pastel mornings and the way the 'golden hour' hits a fresh bloom. My highlights? Capturing the tiny details of dew-kissed petals and that fleeting, dramatic light. It's the perfect time to let the world blur and make nature truly pop. Here's a photograph I took of Bellingham Bridge in February 2025.

Michael Rickwood, www.mr-photography.co.uk



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951.

Stay ahead of the curve with **RADAR's** Media Reach



Join RADAR Today - Be Noticed Tomorrow!
Keith@highlightspr.co.uk • www.highlightspr.co.uk

Culture Club

Gareth Mitchell

Owner of Geko Landscapes

Here he tells us about his taste in music, art and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

I read a lot of business development books and am currently reading Daniel Priestleys "*Oversubscribed*". I love learning and developing so I find a glint of inspiration from everything I read and try to apply this within my business and personal life too.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Whatever - Oasis. It was the soundtrack to my teenage years and I always feel it's a powerful and personal tune whenever I've tough choices to make.

Move Your Body - Marshall Jefferson. The birth of house music to me and the build up gets me moving everytime - whether that be a kitchen disco with my daughter or when working in a clients garden - AirPods turned up loud!

Tears Dry On Their Own - Amy Winehouse. I think music is for sharing and my Daughter Poppy sings this almost constantly - we have some lovely memories of singing our hearts out on road trips and lovely holidays.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Hugh Grant always makes me chuckle and he never seems to take himself too seriously, a rule I try to live by!

What are your top three films?

Following on from Hugh Grant, *Love Actually* is our year round Christmas movie.

I really enjoy films based on real events - *1918* was particularly poignant as was *Darkest Hour*, I have a real interest in the conflicts of the past and with the current affairs, really hope we can learn from them.

And for simple escapism, something I've watched so many times would be most of the Guy Ritchie films.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

From my schooldays, I studied war poetry and Wilfred Owen with *Dulce et Decorum Est*, very much stuck with me.

My interest in past conflicts started around this time as I studied the history of World War One, and when I read this poem for the first time,



Gareth Mitchell

it really struck me about the struggle in the trenches that the soldiers endured.

What box set have you enjoyed?

I very much enjoyed the Harlem Coben sets - *Fool Me Once, Stay Close*.

I like a simple fast paced series that I can relax to with not too much thinking!

I also enjoyed "The Feud" with Jill Halfpenny - lots of local location "spots" which makes the series feel like "ours" in the North East!

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

I've been very lucky to see a lot of artists over the years and a stand out last year was Sam Fender.

What is your favourite venue ?

I love the Cluny - I last saw Spilt Milk supporting Sophie Gordon and they were both great. The gig was down in the Cluny 2, which I'd never actually been to!

Kieron Bow was a brilliant gig in the Cluny too last year, Lively and energetic!

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I'd love to have Katie Melua there, loved her story from the early 2000's and how she achieved her success.

The artist who has designed and painted some of the murals around North Shields, Prefab77 or Peter Manning - ("*Net Worth*" and "*The Siren*") could have a seat too - I enjoyed the story they told and the hunt for them around Shields too.

Jay Nottingham, an artist originally from Bedfordshire - I have some of their pieces (my favourite being "*Fairfield Horseshoe*" and "*Windermere*") and would love to hear the story behind them and find out the hidden gems of the Lake District that they must have seen in their search for the perfect picture!

Frankie Boyle can lead the dinner party and keep us all entertained with his hilarious take on life!

www.gekolandscapes.com

- Affiliate programme bloated with low-value partners?
- Voucher sites stealing last click?
- PR measured in coverage, not revenue?

**It's not you.
It's your channels.**



Better call Studio Two
Modern growth for modern brands.

If your affiliate programme feels busy but not brilliant, you're not alone.

We help brands cut out low-value partners, reclaim margin from voucher poachers, and turn PR, content and creators into measurable revenue.

No smoke. No mirrors. Just growth that shows up in the numbers.

studiotwoagency.com

**Find out
more:**



“

**We're building from
the North East, and
growing from here.**



L-R: Ellis Longhorn, Shaun Brown, Alice Eyre and Ross Longhorn

North East founders launch Studio Two to challenge outdated affiliate marketing models

A new North East agency is challenging the way ecommerce brands approach affiliate marketing. Founded in 2024 by Guide Post native Shaun Brown and Hartlepool entrepreneur Ross Longhorn, Studio Two was created to rethink a performance model the founders believe is overdue an upgrade.

While affiliate marketing has traditionally been viewed as a dependable revenue channel, Brown and Longhorn argue that many brands are overpaying for existing demand and missing the opportunity to use affiliate as a true acquisition engine.

“We’ve seen too many brands rely heavily on discount-led traffic,” says Shaun Brown. “Affiliate should be structured to drive incremental growth, protect margin and strengthen brand authority. When done properly, it becomes one of the most controllable and scalable channels in the mix.”

Brown brings years of agency-side experience across Newcastle and London, specialising in affiliate strategy and performance partnerships. Longhorn offers a complementary perspective as the owner of ecommerce brand wavecase.co.uk, where he has experienced first-hand the pressures of rising acquisition costs and the importance of sustainable profitability.

“Running an ecommerce brand changes your outlook,” says Longhorn. “Revenue alone isn’t enough, you need profitable growth. That’s the mindset we’ve built Studio Two around.”

The pair met around five years ago through industry connections in the North East. Conversations around ecommerce growth and the evolving role of digital PR gradually developed into a shared ambition: to build an agency that combines the authority-building power of digital PR with the commercial discipline of traditional affiliate marketing.

Studio Two blends strategic affiliate management with editorial-grade PR and proprietary outreach technology. Its approach combines digital PR tactics with traditional affiliate marketing tactics to build diversified, resilient partner ecosystems, reducing overreliance on voucher traffic and focusing instead on high-authority content partnerships and long-term commercial relationships.

The agency’s results are already gaining attention. Studio Two recently delivered a 71% year-on-year increase



in affiliate revenue for Hornby Hobbies, revitalising performance across Hornby, Scalextric, Airfix and Corgi. Through affiliate PR placements, partner diversification and commission restructuring, the programme became more profitable and scalable.

Proudly rooted in the North East, Studio Two represents a growing wave of regional agencies competing nationally without relocating to London.

“There’s exceptional talent here,” Brown adds. “You don’t need a London postcode to build something nationally competitive. We’re building from the North East, and growing from here.”

For more information, visit studiotwoagency.com or uk.pocher.com

“

**recommendation
and word of mouth
are the strongest
marketing tools.**

Leanne Fawcett

In conversation with...

Leanne Fawcett

MD of Peterlee-based communications consultancy, LEC

What inspired you to start this business, and what was the journey like from idea to execution?

I'd always wanted to work for myself, even going back to my days at One NorthEast when I was in my mid-twenties. But for one reason or another it was never the right time.

However, in my early 30s I found myself out of work so I decided to look at starting a business.

I thought, if I don't do it now I never will.

The other driver was seeing so many other people doing it, and honestly, a feeling that I could do it better. I would see so-called writers send out press releases that I read and thought, this is awful. So if they can do it so can I, but better.

Once I'd made the decision, I sought advice from East Durham Business Service, and they were great. They talked me through every detail, and it was a huge help as I wouldn't have known where to start otherwise.

I think from the initial conversation with my business advisor to me launching LEC, it took around two months.

And the rest is history!

What challenges did you face in the early stages, and how did you overcome them?

One of the hardest things was actually getting through the door to see potential clients. I had a clear plan that my target market was the business community in Peterlee, as that's where I'm from, so I drew up a list of companies that I wanted to get in front of.

Many of those companies knew me from my days at the Hartlepool Mail or One NorthEast, so I thought they'd be happy to meet me. But it was hard. I came to the realisation that what I needed was some content to share as me – it wasn't going to be enough to rely on anything I'd done in the past.

I decided to do some pro bono PR work for a couple of friends who were running charities which would give me media coverage to share, in turn building up my profile.

Then I got a bit of a lucky break. A business I'd approached contacted me to see if I could help them with their internal communications. I was over the moon as I knew one of the key elements of running a successful business is momentum.

What sets your business apart from competitors in your industry?

I think my all-around knowledge of business helps massively. I understand the challenges and opportunities that are shaping different industries, and that really helps me to offer the best, most tailored, solutions for my clients.

I am also very good at what I do and I make no apologies for that.

How do you define success, and how has that definition evolved over time?

There are a number of things you can look at – media coverage, the trust your clients place in you that enables you to become an extension of their team, social media engagement. But the best measures are current client retention, winning new business and recommendation – I'd argue recommendation and word of mouth are the strongest marketing tools available to any business.

What strategies have you found most effective for growing your business?

I think having the personal touch which means every client feels like they're the most important. Whatever their sector or the level of support we're providing, all LEC clients know they're being looked after.

And I suppose the other thing would be, taking the time to understand every business I work with so that I can provide a service that is right for them rather than me.

Can you share a defining moment or breakthrough that changed the course of your business?

Towards the end of 2024 I was at a real crossroads with my business. I was 12 years down the line and had lost the love a little bit. I was disillusioned and needed to take a step back.

I decided I needed to change my approach. I realised I had to be more proactive – it was no good expecting business to come to me, I had to go out there and find it. And also, do as much as possible through face-to-face engagement – in the past I was guilty of thinking, will this meeting lead to work and if I didn't think it would, I'd stick to email or Teams. Now, I give everyone my time because I've realised growth is as much about the people you know and the strength and depth of the relationships you have.

What's next for your business? Any exciting projects or future plans on the horizon?

Keeping every current client happy and of course bringing in new business.

I have set targets for myself to get LEC to where I want it to be, and key to me achieving those goals is establishing a healthy pipeline of work – consistency is essential!

www.lecc.co.uk

Vida Creative invests in team with senior promotion after a strong start to the year

Ouseburn-based brand, marketing and digital transformation agency Vida Creative is celebrating a strong start to the year with a senior promotion, notable North East project wins and the relaunch of its own website.

Working in partnership with ambitious organisations, Vida delivers strategy-led brand, website and marketing projects designed to drive measurable growth.

The agency has promoted Rachel Robson to Account Director following a standout first year with the business. Rachel joined Vida in May 2025 as Senior Account Manager and quickly became a central part of the team, leading key client relationships, shaping proposals and supporting new business activity that has helped drive growth.

Her contribution across both client delivery and commercial development has seen her step into the Account Director role, where she will continue to guide strategic partnerships and play a key part in shaping the agency's next phase of growth.

Reflecting on her promotion, Rachel said: "It's been such a rewarding first year at Vida. I've loved working closely with the team and our



Rachel Robson

clients, helping to win new projects and bring ideas to life. I'm really proud to be stepping into the Account Director role and excited to build on the momentum we've created."

Co-founder Henry Coggin added, "Rachel has made a huge impact in a short space of time. Her calm approach, commercial thinking and ability to keep projects moving have been invaluable as we've continued to grow. This promotion reflects both what she's achieved so far and the important role she'll continue to play in the future of Vida."

Alongside investing in its team, Vida has relaunched its website to better reflect its evolving offer across strategy, brand, web, marketing, product, and UX and campaign rollout. The refreshed platform showcases recent work and case studies, reinforcing the agency's focus on combining creativity with clear commercial outcomes.

The agency has also secured and delivered a number of significant North East projects across website design and brand development, including the recent completion of the new Hoult's Yard website.

The project adds to a growing portfolio of regional work and highlights Vida's continued commitment to supporting organisations looking to strengthen their positioning and digital presence.

With new client wins, a strengthened leadership team and an updated digital presence, Vida is focused on its next phase of growth, partnering with forward-thinking businesses across the North East and beyond who are ready to invest in strategy-led brand and digital transformation.

vidacreative.co.uk

~~Bullshit~~ is expensive. Luckily, we don't offer it.

Because we're the agency that spends your money on work that creates an impact. No hidden costs, no false promises, no inflated fees, and no fudged timesheets. We work with brands, companies, and organisations who really value the benefits of great design and clear communications.

It's great work for great people.

Spend less. Get more.



Kenfolk
Brand & Design Studio
-
0191 516 6082
hello@kenfolk.co.uk
-
Studio 108i, Wearfield,
Sunderland SR5 2TA
-
kenfolk.co.uk

dba Association
Member



“

**there's always
been a place
for private
healthcare.**

Consultants Choice Clinic enlists PR support as it grows

SASS media draws on experience in healthcare communications with new client.

Sarah and Sarah at Thornaby-based SASS media Ltd have revealed they are now working with Consultants Choice Clinic to promote the company's healthcare services, which bridge the gap between the NHS and private healthcare.

Sarah Walker is leading on the contract, drawing on her vast experience as a former health reporter at The Gazette on Teesside and her work in the PR department at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation trust.

The Sarahs will be supporting Stockton-based Consultants Choice through a period of growth, as demand for its services, which include dermatology, gynaecology, Arthrosamid non-surgical treatment for knee osteoarthritis and a wide range of other medical specialties, continues to grow.

Hailey Dobbs, the registered manager and managing director at Consultants Choice Clinic, set up the healthcare provider, based on Surtees Business Park, on the belief that everyone deserves timely access to trusted medical advice and treatment - and that affordability shouldn't be a barrier to excellent care.

Hailey says: "Since we started the business in 2024, it has grown from 20 consultants to at least 30 consultants - and we now have our top of the range ultrasound scanner and specialist sonographers.

"This has enabled us to offer an MSK [musculoskeletal] service, where you can be seen, scanned and receive injections for your MSK condition in one place on the same day.

"We've also started doing an outreach NHS service for Woodlands Hospital, so you can be seen here if you're choosing to be seen under the Woodlands Choose and Book system."

Hailey believes access to healthcare services like Consultants Choice are "vital" at the present time, with waiting lists for many specialist services on the NHS spiralling.

Hailey says: "There is more demand than ever, as people are aware that the NHS is struggling with long waiting times and people do want to be seen more quickly - and we offer an affordable solution.

"Where we differ from the NHS is that patients have one point of contact within one administrative team for all their healthcare needs.

"If you need to be seen at a hospital one of our consultants also works at, you can still arrange that through our team, as we look after all our consultants' lists and diaries, waiting times and billing."

These things are all key to Consultants Choice Clinic's success, as well as the fact that their healthcare services are more affordable than private hospital costs.

Hailey says: "I think there's always been a place for private healthcare as it provides people with another option if they know they can be seen more quickly than they would be waiting on the NHS.

"We offer patients a choice in the same way as the private sector within any industry.

"People are choosing private healthcare more and more because of the waiting times on the NHS and although we are not free, we provide an alternative which sits somewhere in the middle between NHS care and traditional private healthcare."

The clinic has amassed some excellent feedback from patients, who talk about the friendly staff and the fact they are treated as an individual.

Hailey is very selective of the consultants, based on their patient facing skills and ability to see the patient as an individual.

Hailey says the clinic is keen to grow to offer more services and is looking at investing in more sites, but the emphasis is on maintaining a "platinum service" for patients.

"We do want to expand, but above all else, we want to deliver a safe service, so we are taking it day by day and year by year," Hailey says.

"But in the near future, you will see more sites from Consultants Choice Clinic."



L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker, SASS media

At SASS media, health PR is just one of our specialisms!

We support businesses, public sector organisations and charities with their press and publicity needs, securing positive media coverage and supporting senior leaders with broadcast interviews in good times and bad.

We're proactive when it comes to celebrating the good, but we also make sure you are on the front foot when facing media scrutiny in adverse times, always ensuring your reputation is maintained and upheld.

At the moment, we are working behind the scenes of our own business to launch a new service for start-up businesses and a new subscription service to help get you in front of journalists.

At the same time, we are continuing to provide bespoke PR packages and strategies to directors from small sole trader businesses to those in large public sector organisations.

If you have something to celebrate in the press or you need help carefully navigating the media landscape, contact Sarah Walker, co-director of SASS on 07896 894538.



“ People won't know how important family has been to me and to ACT. Both directly and indirectly.

Each issue, founder Michael Richardson answers one of twenty questions.

Questions that explore twenty eventful years of ups, downs and more, at the Northeast of England headquartered ACT Group.

In this issue, family take centre stage.

Can you tell us something that we might not know about ACT?

I'd like to highlight my family. People might not know how important my family has been to me and to ACT – both directly and indirectly.

ACT started in 2006, and after a busy and challenging first year I desperately needed an accounts administrator. Someone to help me get to grips not just with the day-to-day of the numbers, but the high-level financial decision making that comes only from accurate financial insight. I needed help.

Dinner Table. Not Board Table.

At the beginning, there was no board room and no board table at ACT like there is today. So the dinner table had to do. One Sunday lunchtime, my dad – out of the blue – offered to retire early and move into ACT. Taking on the financial work I needed. I was pleased. But also worried. This was demanding. This was new and important. What if we didn't get along?

Twenty years later, dad still helps out in this key area. Mam joined in an administrative role for a short period too, which was amazing. But eventually, the draw of cake-making took over for mam and a new, full-time administrator was recruited.

The Creative Sister.

Claire, my sister has always been really creative and a great communicator. A strong writer too. So after a short stint in ACT's Accounts Department, Claire now heads up all of ACT's in-house marketing.

Homelife.

And behind the scenes, back at home, is Kaye. 'The Mrs'. And wow – what a woman Kaye is.

During the tough times, and there have been many, Kaye has been relentless in her support for me and the business. And even more importantly looking after the kids, our home, and me.

It's said, isn't it, that the most important decision a person makes in their life is the partner they choose, and are chosen by. I definitely picked the best partner for me. Kaye is armour.

At My Side. And On My Side.

Over the years there've been tough times, and incredible times. One thing I do know, I could never have achieved as much as I have without my family. My mam, dad, Claire, Kaye, the kids Ava and Miles – and Rubble of course (woof!)

Never miss a story. Join GROUPTHINK Newsletter at www.my-act.co.uk

ACT GROUP - THE RIGHT CUTTING TOOLS & LUBRICANTS. ON TIME. EVERY TIME.

ACTGROUP
The Right Cutting Tools & Lubricants.
On Time. Every Time.

ACTHUB
PRODUCTION IMPROVEMENT FACILITY

My Factory[®]
The Cutting Tool & Lubricant Search Engine

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

The Built Environment

construction • commercial • residential • architectural

...in association with...

Clothier
& Lacey
Co.





30 Years, 3 Generations, 1 Vision: The Contour Blinds Story

A true North East family success story, Contour Blinds and Shutters has been transforming homes and businesses across the region for three decades — powered by strong family values and a dedication to local craftsmanship.

Run by Trevor and Andrea Dingwall, alongside their daughter Zoe Brown, Contour Blinds and Shutters is based at their showroom in Whitley Bay with its factory in Benton. The business has grown steadily through word of mouth, quality products and good old-fashioned service — and now even includes a third generation of the family, as the grandchildren come in for work experience.

Originally established in 1995, Contour Blinds and Shutters is celebrating 30 years in business this year. The company’s growth and longevity are rooted in its reputation for quality, service and trust.

“All our staff are employed directly — no subcontractors,” Trevor explains. “Everyone starts by learning how to make blinds before moving on to fitting them, so they understand the full process. That’s why our customers keep coming back — we take care of people properly, and they know we’ll always be there when they need us.”



Housing development provides a ‘shot in the arm’ for local hospitality businesses

Hospitality businesses in a County Durham village are raising a glass to a major housing development that has boosted the local economy.

The arrival of new families at Homes by Carlton’s Middleton Waters development has given a welcome boost to local pubs, cafes and restaurants in the village of Middleton St George.

The picturesque County Durham village has so far welcomed over 70 new families as part of what is Homes by Carlton’s biggest development to date. And for local hospitality businesses, their arrival has already proven to be a real shot in the arm for trade.

“We are welcoming new regulars each week, and there’s a real buzz throughout the village,” said local restaurateur Leila Ghanadi.

A trained skincare specialist who worked in Harley Street, she opened the award-winning Leila’s Authentico Italiano during the covid pandemic after her adjacent salon did a roaring trade in takeaway coffee.

“During lockdown, we had clients who said they missed our coffee as much as anything, so we started selling it from the door and everything grew from there,” said Leila.

“Since Middleton Waters arrived, it has really helped business and we are now not just a cafe, but between Thursday and Saturday, we open late and have skilled chefs creating real, authentic Italian meals.

Naylor’s wins contract to transform one of Newcastle’s greatest architectural assets

Naylor’s has been appointed to play a key role in the regeneration of one of Newcastle city centre’s most iconic historic buildings, the former Lloyds Bank on Grey Street.

The owner of the Grade II listed property has instructed Naylor’s building consultancy team to provide project management and contract administration services for the refurbishment of the prominent 31,000 sq. ft. building.

Dating back to 1839, the four-storey sandstone building features a striking 91-foot frontage, an impressive double-height banking hall, mezzanine level and a full-height internal atrium. Originally occupied by Northumberland & District Bank, the building remained in continuous banking use until Lloyds vacated last year.

The redevelopment will see the basement, ground floor and mezzanine become a high-end restaurant, with the upper floors offering potential for a range of complimentary uses, which are under consideration.

The instruction was secured by Naylor’s partner Scott Clarke, who will be project lead, supported by building surveyor, Luke Overton.



J.W.Dickinson

Building Services, House Extensions, Loft Conversions, Home Refurbishments, New Home Builders. Beautiful transformations from design to build.

Book a free consultation | 07988 636 221
Mon to Fri 8am - 5pm | info@jwdickinsonltd.co.uk



JWD

jwdickinsonltd.co.uk

Walter Dix & Co

AGA and Range Cooker Specialists



Premium Perfection

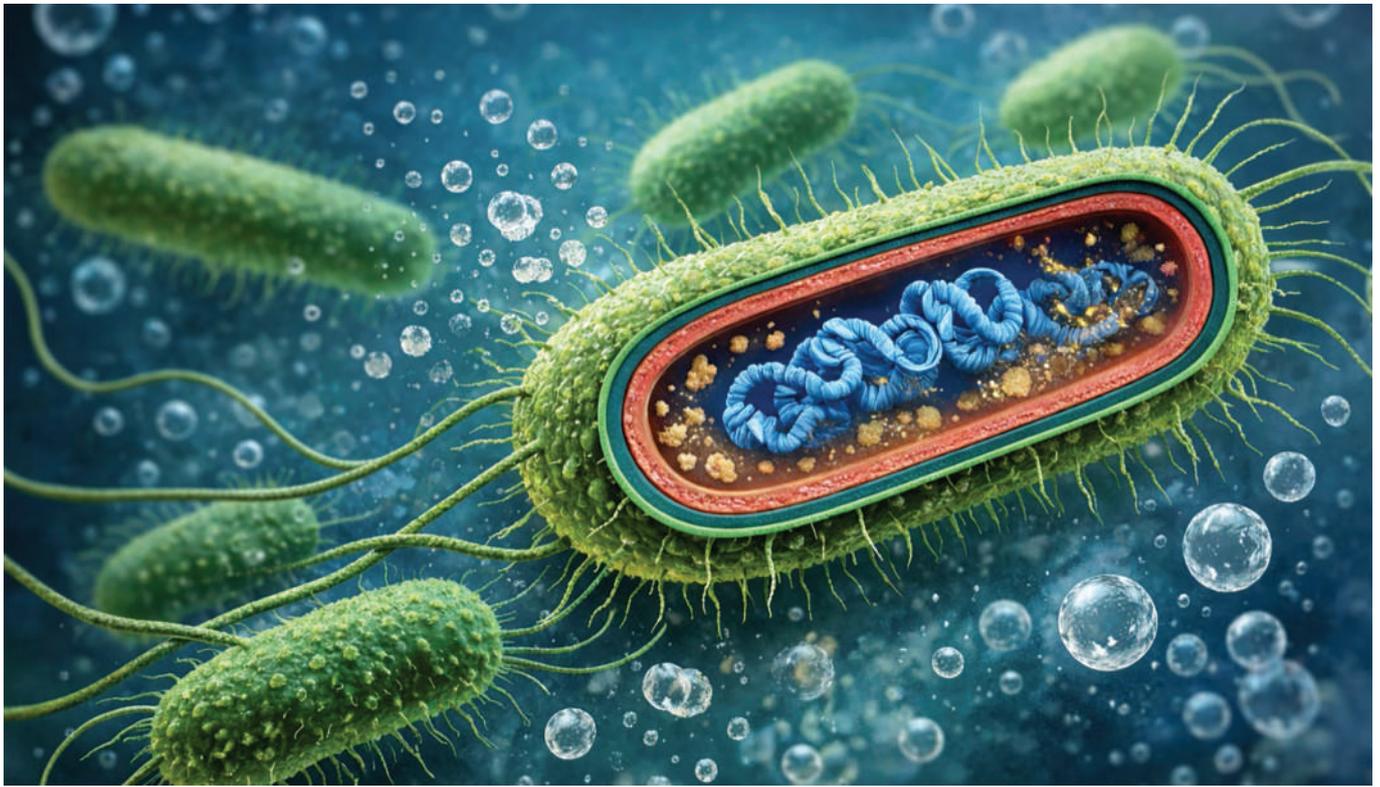
Fill your kitchen with the very best range cooker and refrigeration appliances from Walter Dix & Co.



The leading retailer of **premium kitchen** appliances in the North East of England and North Yorkshire.

Visit their large showroom or contact for more information.

1 Stirling Court, Gateshead NE11 0JF
0191 4820033 | wdix.co.uk



Legionella Compliance in high-risk environments: What nurseries, care homes and healthcare settings need to know

By *Robinson & Co Bathrooms & Heating*

Legionella compliance is a critical responsibility for organisations that care for vulnerable people, including nurseries, doctors' surgeries, care homes, schools and similar settings.

Under UK health and safety legislation, employers and landlords have a legal duty to assess, control and monitor the risks associated with Legionella bacteria in water systems. Failure to do so can have serious health implications as well as legal and financial consequences.

Legionella thrives in poorly maintained water systems, particularly where water stagnates or temperatures fall within the risk range. Environments such as care homes and nurseries are especially high priority because they involve individuals who may be more susceptible to infection. Regular risk assessments, consistent system maintenance, and accurate record keeping are therefore essential components of compliance.

At Robinson & Co Bathrooms & Heating, we work with organisations across the local area to support Legionella compliance through inspections, risk assessments and ongoing maintenance planning. A typical survey focuses on identifying potential hazards within the water system and ensuring controls are in place to reduce risk.

Key compliance considerations include maintaining safe water temperatures, typically ensuring hot water is stored above 60°C and distributed at a minimum of 50°C, while cold water remains below 20°C. Monitoring and recording these temperatures forms part of an organisation's duty to evidence compliance over time.

Routine maintenance is equally important. This includes descaling taps and thermostatic mixing valves (TMVs), inspecting and cleaning strainers and filters, and ensuring expansion vessels and hot water systems are regularly serviced. Systems must also be checked for "dead legs" – sections of pipework where water can stagnate – as well as infrequently used outlets that require flushing to prevent bacterial growth.

Infrastructure and fittings also play a role in risk management. Flexible hoses should be WRAS-approved or replaced with hard plumbing, pipework should be insulated where required, and cold-water storage tanks must be adequately maintained and protected. Visible signs of rust, sludge, scale or organic build-up should be addressed quickly, as these provide ideal

conditions for bacteria to multiply. Aerosol-producing outlets, such as showers, require particular attention and regular descaling.

Record keeping is a legal requirement for many organisations. Where five or more employees are present, written documentation of risk assessments, monitoring results and maintenance activity must typically be retained for a minimum of five years. These records demonstrate compliance and provide reassurance that appropriate controls are in place.

If a water system has been altered, expanded, or if an existing risk assessment is more than five years old, a new assessment is recommended. Robinson & Co Bathrooms & Heating offers free initial surveys to identify potential risks and provide clear recommendations, along with costed maintenance plans where required. Where systems meet compliance standards, certification can also be provided.

Beyond Legionella management, we also support organisations with boiler and heating system maintenance, including annual inspections and certification to ensure systems remain safe and efficient.

For nurseries, healthcare providers, schools and care settings, Legionella compliance is not simply a regulatory task – it is a vital part of safeguarding staff, visitors and those in care. Proactive monitoring and maintenance reduce risk, support legal compliance and provide peace of mind.

To arrange a free survey or discuss your requirements, contact Robinson & Co Bathrooms & Heating at info@robinsonbathroomsandheating.co.uk or call 07860 852264.

Returning to our roots: Why the Hoult's name matters

By Louise White, Marketing Manager, Hoult's

Rebrands often signal change. Ours signals clarity.

Over the past few years, our serviced office spaces at Hoult's Yard, Haylofts and Hypoint have operated under the HyHubs brand. It reflected a growing portfolio and an evolving business model. However, as we began work on our new website and reviewed our wider brand strategy, something became increasingly clear. Across the region, people still called us Hoult's.

That recognition mattered.

Hoult's Yard, our headquarters in Byker, is more than a business address. It is a place embedded in the North East's commercial story. Built on the former site of the Maling pottery factory, which once exported ceramics worldwide, the Yard has long been associated with industry, enterprise, and resilience. It was also home to Hoult's Removals before its sale to Pickfords in 1983.

The name carries weight. It carries trust. Most importantly, it carries history.

In a market that has seen significant change, particularly in how and where people work, we felt it was important to lean into who we are rather than move further away from it. The decision to return fully to the Hoult's brand was not nostalgic. It was strategic.

Demand for flexible, well-managed office space across Newcastle and Gateshead continues to grow. Businesses want more than square footage. They want character, service, and community. They want environments that reflect their own ambitions. That has always been central to our offer.

In 2018, we expanded our portfolio with Haylofts, a £1.5m conversion of the former Deuchar brewery stables in Newcastle city centre, alongside Hypoint on Saltmeadows



Louise White

Road in Gateshead. Each location has its own identity, yet all share the same ethos: property with personality.

That phrase is not marketing shorthand. It underpins how we approach development, management, and customer experience. Our Front of House teams are visible, proactive, and supportive. We invest consistently in upgrades and refurbishment. We focus on creating spaces that feel inspiring rather than corporate by default.

The rebrand gave us the opportunity to refine how we present ourselves externally while reaffirming our internal values. Working with Newcastle-based agency Vida Creative, we developed a visual identity that acknowledges our heritage while positioning us confidently for the future. The result feels authentic and assured.

"Returning to the Hoult's name was not about looking backwards. It was about owning the reputation, heritage and community we have built across the North East."

Returning to one clear, recognised brand also strengthens our message. In property, clarity matters. Tenants, partners, and stakeholders value consistency. They want to know who they are working with and what they can expect. Aligning everything under the Hoult's name provides that confidence.

As we look ahead, our ambition remains focused on thoughtful growth across the North East. The region continues to demonstrate resilience and entrepreneurial energy, and we are proud to provide the environments that support that momentum.

If your business is reviewing its workspace, planning its next phase of growth, or simply seeking an office environment with character and community at its core, we would welcome the opportunity to start that conversation.

We are Hoult's, and we are building on strong foundations.

houltস্যard.co.uk

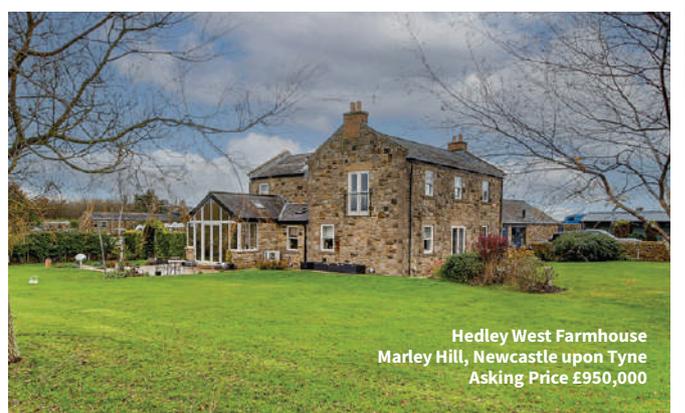
HOULT'S
Feel-Home
MORE THAN An Office
FIND YOUR SPACE. GET IN TOUCH. FIND YOUR SPACE. GET IN TOUCH. FIND YOUR SPACE. GET IN TOUCH.
QR CODE



Exceptional Homes

Across the North of England

from youngsRPS



Hedley West Farmhouse
 Marley Hill, Newcastle upon Tyne
 Asking Price £950,000

From striking contemporary residences to beautifully appointed country homes, our Hexham office presents an exceptional collection of luxury properties, each offering distinctive design, impressive surroundings and the very best of Northumberland and Cumbria living.

The upper end of the regional market continues to demonstrate steady confidence. Buyers are increasingly seeking space, privacy and quality, often favouring generous plots and versatile interiors over town centre convenience. It is a shift shaped as much by lifestyle priorities as by location alone.

Across the Tyne Valley, rural Northumberland and into Cumbria, demand remains strong for substantial homes that combine practicality with presence. Well proportioned reception rooms, contemporary kitchen and family spaces, and thoughtfully arranged bedroom accommodation are central to modern expectations.

Gardens and grounds that offer privacy, outlook and flexibility remain equally important.

Accessibility underpins the area's continued appeal. Strong schooling, thriving market towns and established rural communities sit alongside excellent road and rail links to Newcastle and beyond. This balance between connectivity and open countryside is one of the region's defining strengths.

The properties featured here illustrate just a small selection of the scale and quality currently available through our Hexham office.. With extensive local knowledge and experience across the north of England, our team offers clear, considered advice tailored to individual requirements. Whether you are seeking your next home or contemplating a move, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss your plans and guide you through the process with confidence and discretion.

The Old Corn Mill

Brampton, Cumbria

Nestled in the tranquil hamlet of Denton Mill, The Old Corn Mill is a truly exceptional Grade II listed period conversion. With its idyllic surroundings, mature gardens, and a wealth of original features, this stunning four-bedroom residence offers an enchanting blend of historic charm and contemporary luxury.

Offers in Excess of £750,000



Apperley Bank House

Stocksfield, Northumberland

Set within peaceful woodland on Lead Road, Stocksfield, this impressive four-bedroom detached home blends character with contemporary family living. A private driveway and generous landscaped gardens frame light-filled interiors, welcoming reception rooms and stylish finishes, all within easy reach of village amenities and excellent transport links.

Offers in Excess of £720,000



Westmorland House

Wark, Northumberland

Westmorland House beautifully retains most of its original character, showcasing a range of charming period features, including elegant fireplaces, original doors, detailed cornicing, and classic sash windows. These traditional elements are complemented by subtle modern updates.

Offers in Excess of £850,000



Hedley West Farmhouse

Marley Hill, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Hedley West Farmhouse is an exquisitely extended and modernised four-bedroom family home, ideal for equestrian buyers, with a 40x30m all-weather arena, four-bay stables, tack room and store, set within 5.2 acres of gardens and well-managed paddocks nearby for lifestyle appeal and privacy year-round enjoyment.

Offers in Excess of £950,000



True North Construction names Maggie's Newcastle as 2026 charity partner



True North Construction charity golf day for Maggie's Newcastle

True North Construction has announced Maggie's Newcastle, a charity providing free practical, emotional and social support to people living with cancer, as its charity of the year for 2026.

The partnership builds on a successful relationship established in 2025 and reflects the company's commitment to supporting people affected by cancer and the vital services the charity provides in the North East.

Founded in 2019, True North Construction has earned a strong reputation for delivering bespoke residential builds, high-end refurbishments and certified Passivhaus homes.

Its focus on quality, sustainability and attention to detail has helped the company expand into new commercial sectors, including hospitality, healthcare, education and workplace fit-outs. Partnering with Maggie's reinforces the company's dedication to making a positive impact in the wider community alongside its professional achievements.

David Roberts, managing director, True North Construction, said: "We are proud to continue our partnership with Maggie's in 2026. Last

year, our team was inspired by the incredible work the charity does to support people living with cancer. This year, we are building on that commitment through volunteering, fundraising and supporting community projects. Supporting Maggie's isn't just about giving back—it's about helping people find connection, calm and reassurance during some of the most challenging moments of their lives."

Karen Verrill, centre head, Maggie's Newcastle, said: "Cancer affects so many people across our region, and we're delighted with the continued support from True North Construction. We couldn't provide the emotional, practical and psychological support to people living with cancer and those that love them, without the generosity of individuals and businesses like True North Construction.

The funds and awareness raised throughout the year will make a real difference to our centre and those that need us. We're very grateful

for the company's ongoing commitment and partnership."

In 2025, True North Construction colleagues actively supported Maggie's through volunteering and fundraising initiatives. In September, team members volunteered at Maggie's Centre at the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, assisting with the installation of Corten steel planters in the centre's tranquil garden.

Designed to offer calm and reflective spaces, the garden features carefully arranged seating, forming small alcoves for peaceful contemplation. Open to both centre users and the public, it provides a quiet retreat from the surrounding hospital environment.

Fundraising also formed a key part of the partnership. Maggie's benefited from True North Construction's annual charity golf day, which brought together construction companies from across the region and raised £3,500 to help sustain the charity's ongoing work.

The funds were used to support Maggie's Newcastle centre and essential services, enabling more people affected by cancer to access the help they need.

truenorthconstruction.co.uk
maggies.org

Banks Group welcomes latest graduate training programme intake as predecessors start permanent roles



The new recruits to the Banks Group's graduate training programme (from left) Shabbir Boksh, Matthew Newton, Jaja Inskeep, Macauley Duke, Liam Young and Muhammed Kasuji

The latest intake onto North East property, housebuilding and mining firm the Banks Group's graduate training programme have taken up their new roles.

Six new recruits have embarked on a comprehensive two-year programme with the Durham-headquartered business which offers them support in building the key vocational, technical and professional skills needed for their respective roles, as well as opportunities to gain hands-on experience on live projects and evolving plans.

And as the new graduate trainees are starting their new roles, their immediate predecessors on Banks' graduate training programme, Matt Bishop, Ollie Pocock and Matthew Noble, have all been awarded permanent jobs with the family-owned firm after successfully completing their training.

Five of the six new graduate trainees are working within Banks' property development and housebuilding divisions, Banks Property and Banks Homes, while the sixth is working on site with Banks Mining.

Graduate development surveyor Jaja Inskeep and graduate project manager Muhammed

Kasuji both studied at Leeds Beckett University, taking degrees in Real Estate & Property Management and Building Surveying respectively.

Matthew Newton holds a Civil Engineering degree from Teesside University and is now working as a graduate development engineer, while Shabbir Boksh has joined Banks as a graduate development engineer (housebuilding) after completing a master's degree in Civil & Structural Engineering at Newcastle University.

Liam Young is now working as a graduate development planner after completing a master's in City Planning at the University of Glasgow, with Macauley Duke, who is working towards a Real Estate Management degree from The University of the Built Environment, joining Banks Mining as a graduate site engineer.

The Banks Group's graduate training programme gives recruits the chance to take on real workplace responsibilities with the support of an experienced team around them and to learn, develop and deliver across a range of disciplines that support the company's planned and operational projects.

It's the fourth cohort of graduate trainees that Banks has welcomed since launching the initiative in 2021, with the scheme being enhanced this year to provide focused training and coaching around 'soft skills' such as effective communication, teamworking and personal resilience which complement their business activities.

The graduates will also embark on a rotation programme, allowing them to spend time in each of the departments to build comprehensive knowledge of the full development cycle. The enhancements that have been implemented were identified through learning needs analysis and feedback from previous years.

Russ Hall, managing director at Banks Property and Banks Homes, says: "Finding, training and bringing through skilled young people is crucial to the long-term, sustainable success of any business, and our graduate scheme has proven to be an extremely effective way of doing so.

"It gives ambitious young people the chance to get real responsibility at an early stage in their careers, and to learn, develop and deliver across a range of projects, disciplines and locations, and we see the benefits of their input to our work on a daily basis.

"Enhancing the programme to include the softer skills that complement their professional learning will add an extra dimension to what our new recruits get out of their training and will equip them with knowledge that will be useful right through their careers.

"The dedication, skills and levels of achievement shown by our preceding group of graduate trainees means they all thoroughly deserve the permanent roles that they've earned with us and we hope our latest intake will be inspired to follow their example."

www.bankshomes.co.uk



Neil Turner

One hundred wet days in January!

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

Well, that's a slight exaggeration, but it certainly felt like it.

Some places in the UK have not seen any sunlight throughout January and each day has been wet receiving 150% of the long-term average rainfall (according to the Environment Agency).

In Wales, Rhondda Cyon Council, is set to buy and demolish 16 terraced houses due to severe reoccurring flood risk. You must really feel for the poor people and the stress that this causes them.

I am certainly looking forward to some brighter weather, but what impact does increasingly wet weather have on our approach to design and construction?

When we design a building and submit a planning application, the issue of flood plains and drainage strategies are now, more than ever, key elements of the planning process to demonstrate that your design, flood risk mitigation and water storage strategies can cope with the elements.

With the pressure to build on more land, particularly grey and brown field sites - (land that has previously had development) - then investigations have to make sure that the site on which you plan to build can be effectively drained and will not push water onto adjoining land.

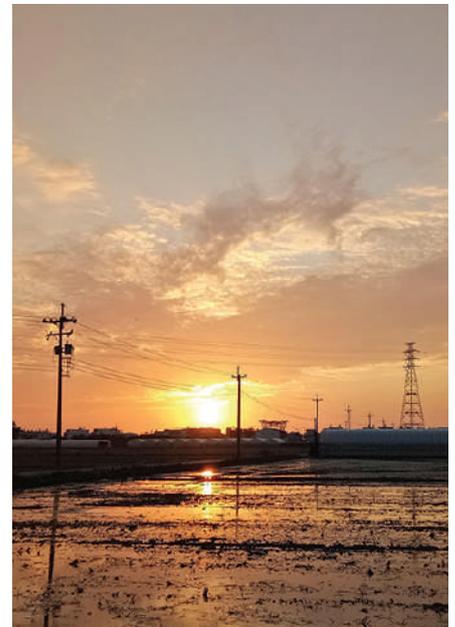
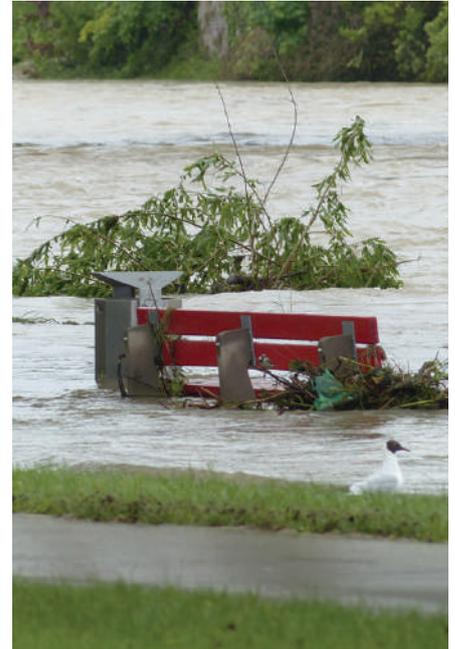
So how do we, as architects, design in drainage? It's no longer the sole occupation of the civil engineer, although clearly their expertise is vital. The issue of water and its storage has to be considered early in the design solutions for buildings. We cannot simply assume that the water will drain into the main water systems or water courses.

One solution is to store water on site, in storage or on the roof and then reuse it in gardens, for flushing toilets and for washing machines, potentially reducing mains water consumption by up to 40%. The options can range from a very simple water butt to complex underground water tanks with pumps and filtration.

I am involved in a project in an urban area, and we are using green and blue roof systems. There are different green roofs (intensive and extensive) but in essence a green roof is a living roof, while a blue roof provides an ability to store water on the roof.

This has to be carefully designed as nobody wants a leak inside the building. It certainly adds complexity and weight to the building as the frame has to account for the extra weight. But it prevents excess water going into the system and builds a living green roof in an urban area.

More common is the use of underground



systems that store and slowly release the water to avoid flooding the mains. They also provide a large reservoir that can be used when a lack of water causes issues for gardens in the summer. So, they offer a balancing ability.

As demand increases for development, the pressure to build in known flood plains occurs, so designers have to be more innovative with how to overcome these challenges. Old buildings in known flood zones have to consider the impact for the fabric of the building and the potential safe escape of users in the building.

As we slowly move out of winter, with lighter nights, it's worth considering maintenance. With all the water I would suggest you look at downpipes, gutters, drains and gulleys to make sure they are not blocked with debris and leaves. So much damage is done by lack of regular and simple maintenance.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com

Wright Residential continues to support landlords and tenants after office fire

Wright Residential is currently operating from a temporary office following a devastating fire that spread from a neighbouring property into our Chillingham Road premises – an event that has deeply affected our team, our workspace, and the community we serve. While the damage to our office has been significant, our commitment to our landlords, tenants, and partners remains unchanged.

Like many local businesses, our office is more than just a workplace – it is a hub for conversations, problem-solving, and the relationships we have built with clients over time. Seeing it affected in this way has been incredibly difficult for everyone involved.

However, in true Wright Residential fashion, the focus quickly shifted from what had been lost to what comes next. Our priority has always been the people who rely on us – the tenants who need support, the landlords who trust us to manage their properties, and the wider network that depends on our service and responsiveness. With this in mind, we moved swiftly to ensure continuity and stability.

We are now operating from a temporary office at: Suite 11, Space Group, Spaceworks, Benton Park Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE7 7LX

From this location, we are continuing to deliver a full service and remain fully operational. It is very much business as usual.

Every enquiry is still being handled. Every property is still being managed. Every tenant and landlord continues to receive the same level of attention, professionalism, and care that defines Wright Residential. Whether it is day-to-day lettings, property management, maintenance coordination, or urgent issues, our team is here and ready to respond.

Emergencies remain a top priority, and our systems and processes are in place to ensure swift action when needed. Tenants can continue to report issues and receive support, and landlords can rely on us to protect their properties and investments without interruption. The change in location has not changed our standards – if anything, it has strengthened our resolve to deliver even more.

We are incredibly grateful for the support we have received since the incident. Messages from landlords, tenants, contractors, and members of the local community have meant a great deal to our team. That encouragement has reinforced just how important strong relationships are, and how valued Wright Residential is within the areas we serve.

Refurbishment works are now being planned for our Chillingham Road office, and we are committed to restoring it as soon as possible. The goal is not simply to return, but to come back stronger – with a refreshed space that reflects the professionalism, warmth, and reliability our clients expect from us.

Until that time, our temporary office will remain fully active and accessible. Clients can contact us as they always have, and visits can be arranged where needed. The name, the people, and the service remain exactly the same – only the location has changed.

We are here for any tenant needs, any landlord requirements, any emergencies – anything you need. And we will continue to be, every step of the way, until our doors reopen on Chillingham Road and beyond.

www.wrightresidential.co.uk | 0191 240 1818
catherine@wrightresidential.co.uk

WE ARE
OPEN
 AS USUAL

We are operating business as usual from a temporary office at Suite 11, Space Group, Spaceworks, Benton Park Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE7 7LX while refurbishment works take place following the recent fire. All services remain fully operational.

Thank you for your continued support.

wright residential

www.wrightresidential.co.uk | 0191 240 1818

Education trust working hard to support children’s wellbeing all year round

From those very first days at nursery to leaving college as young adults, supporting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing “needs to be integrated into education’s daily and weekly routines”.

This year’s theme for Children’s Mental Health Week (9-15 February) was ‘This is my place’.

Place2Be, which introduced Children’s Mental Health Week in 2015, believes that “when we feel that we belong, it empowers us to contribute to the world and make a real difference” and has “long-lasting impacts on lots of areas of our lives, including our physical and mental health, education, employment and relationships”.

Ensuring every pupil of the 31 schools across South Tyneside, Sunderland and East Durham in Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust has access to mental health and wellbeing support is part of the ethos of the Trust.

At St Oswald’s Catholic Primary School in South Shields, assistant headteacher, SENDCo and senior mental health lead Tom Smith is committed to implementing a holistic approach to children’s mental health.

“We recognise the need for mental health support to be integrated into our daily and weekly routines, not just one week a year,” he says.

“By teaching children how to understand their feelings from Nursery, all the way to Year 6, we are able to develop more emotionally literate and resilient children, who are able to engage with challenges positively, recognising their own value and articulate their feelings more fluently.”

The school, whose most recent Ofsted report noted that the pupils are “proud and happy members of the school community”, is working with Pets as Therapy to introduce one-to-one sessions to provide emotional support to children in school.



“A school dog improves self-esteem and lifts mood,” he adds.

Supporting the older members of the Trust community is equally important and St Joseph’s Catholic Academy in Hebburn employs a school counsellor.

Beverley Foden says: “It feels so important to me to have a role like mine so that someone is there for the students on a therapeutic level.

They know that they are well supported and I can offer them dedicated time and a safe space for one-to-one sessions. I can’t emphasise enough how important it is for them to have that safe space accompanied by person centred core conditions.”

The secondary school and sixth form takes a “proactive approach” using early identification and assessing individual needs. The school’s tiered approach ensures everyone plays a part, from tutors to the pastoral team to teaching staff to support staff. They also work with community mental health teams at Healthy Minds, Lifecycle, CYPS and CAMHS.

Stephanie Arthur has worked at St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School in Jarrow for 18 years and retrained to become the school’s child wellbeing lead. Her role includes developing a whole-school approach to wellbeing, providing support and guidance to staff and pupils, and promoting a positive school environment, where students can thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

“At St Joseph’s we are passionate about promoting and supporting pupils’ mental health and wellbeing,” she says.

“We know how vital it is in identifying,



Bev Foden

supporting and signposting children to getting the help and support they need. While rates of mental ill health do increase as children get older, early intervention is key to giving young people the best start in life, teaching them the skills they need to recognise and deal with their emotions, and helping those with difficulties get the support they need.”

www.bccet.org.uk





MOWDEN HALL SCHOOL
AGES 2-13

FROM MORPETH TO MOWDEN

AN AWARD-WINNING PREP SCHOOL
IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Book your personal tour today and discover the
#MagicofMowden for yourself:

✉ admissions@mowdenhall.org.uk

☎ 01661 842147



RADLEY
SCHOOLS GROUP



Mowden welcomes World Cup England Rugby star

Mowden Hall School played host to an inspiring assembly featuring England and Saracens Women's rugby star May Campbell, who visited to promote girls' rugby and share her journey in the sport with pupils.

Campbell, who currently plays as a hooker for Saracens Women and represents the England women's national rugby team, spoke passionately about her love for rugby and the values that have shaped her career including resilience, teamwork, and enjoyment of the game.

She told the pupils: "I started playing when I was seven years old at Stirling County up in Scotland where I grew up. My parents thought it would be a good idea to let me try rugby as my father played during Prep School too. And I loved it."

May also opened up about the challenges she has faced, including a significant leg injury and the long road back to playing at her best. She emphasised the importance of resilience, which is one of Mowden Hall's six Character Values and the focus on this half term.

She encouraged pupils to focus on enjoyment and teamwork as essential parts of sport, while also sharing her ambitions to play in another World Cup, in three year's time in Australia.

www.mowdenhall.org.uk



Mowden families celebrate Number Day

Mowden Hall School embraced the joy of numbers last month as pupils, parents, and staff came together for Number Day, a special event dedicated to exploring Maths in engaging and creative ways.

The day was not only about fostering a love for Mathematics but also raising funds and awareness for the NSPCC.

The morning saw children from Nursery to Year 4 welcoming their parents and families into their classrooms to take part in a range of exciting activities, including Maths scavenger hunts, homemade board games, and other number-related challenges. The interactive sessions provided a wonderful opportunity for families to experience the joy of learning Maths together. Meanwhile, Prep School pupils showcased their creativity by designing and



decorating their own Maths-themed pencil cases, on either their current mathematical topic or for Year 8, a topic they need to revise based on their latest test results.

The school community successfully raised over £500 for the NSPCC for the second year in a row, a charity which supports children by providing counselling, advocacy and protection services to prevent abuse and promote their well-being.

Abigail Henry, Head of Maths at Mowden Hall School, said "We are delighted with how many

parents and grandparents were able to attend and how engaged the pupils were in the various activities."

"It was wonderful to see their enthusiasm for problem-solving, logic, and numbers, all while supporting the important work of the NSPCC. A huge thank you to everyone who attended and donated, and to all the staff who helped to make the morning possible."

www.mowdenhall.org.uk

A night to remember: Awards celebrate region's young champions

The third NE Community Champion Awards 2025, sponsored by Northern Leaders Trust (NLT) and Association of Education Advisers (AoEA), were a resounding success, celebrating some outstanding young people from the region.



The awards ceremony, held on Thursday, 12 February at Vertu Arena, home of the Newcastle Eagles basketball team saw over 200 guests including nominees, their families, friends, carers, teachers and special invitees, celebrate some exceptional contributions to the community.

The event was formally launched by The Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Cllr Henry Gallagher who was accompanied by the Lady Mayoress.

He said: "It is really important that we celebrate these children. They are a great example to other children – and to adults, of course – of what we should be doing in our communities."

The event was generously supported by some of the region's foremost companies including BAM Construction, AtkinsRealis, Brims Construction, Develop North PLC, Hart Family Accountancy, Muckle LLP, Ryder Architecture and The Education Network, who each sponsored an award category.

Reflecting on the event's success, CEO of Northern Leaders Trust, Lee Kirtley, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the nominees and attendees, stating, "This event is a testament to the incredible contributions of our young people. Their dedication and hard work are an inspiration to us all and we are proud to celebrate their achievements.

"I would like to extend my thanks to our fantastic sponsors of the evening, without whom tonight would not have been possible."

Commenting on their sponsorship of the awards programme, Michelle Percy, CEO of Develop North, said: "Events like this really help to shine a light on the very best of the North East community spirit and youth development and typify everything that is truly great about this wonderful region, its history and its roots. As a North East-based business we are honoured to present this year's Special Recognition award."

Dr Thérèse Quincey, member and chair of Northern Leaders Trust board of trustees closed the evening with a special tribute to Ian Kershaw, NLT's former CEO, who died recently after a short illness. She added: "Sometimes in life, you meet someone who makes a huge impact and leaves a lasting impression. For me, this was Ian Kershaw, a great educationist who loved children and sadly died a few months ago. So, it gives me great pleasure to announce that he will not be forgotten because next year, there will be a new award – the Ian Kershaw award for a young person that is making a big impact."

Joint sponsor, Les Walton CBE, founder and chair of AoEA, said: "It's exciting to see the success of these awards for a third year and we already look forward to next year. "Young people are capable of great things and it is wonderful to have an event like this where their contributions are recognised. We hope that awareness and nominations will continue to grow. We want this event to keep getting bigger and better."





The award celebrated achievements across eight categories:

- Community Hero Award** – sponsored by The Education Network
- Young Volunteer of the Year Award** – sponsored by Muckle-LLP
- Young Fundraiser of the Year Award** – sponsored by Hart Family Accountancy Ltd
- Eco Ambassador Award** – sponsored by BAM Construction North
- Act of Kindness Award** – sponsored by AtkinsRealis
- Young Carer Award** – sponsored by Brims Construction
- The Courage Award** – sponsored by Ryder
- Special Recognition Award** – sponsored by Develop North PLC

Each winner received a £200 high-street retail voucher, a £50 book token, an engraved trophy and a certificate.



Building resilience to help every child thrive

By James Miller, Head of RGS Junior School

Helping the RGS Junior School students understand their emotions is not an add-on - it is at the heart of how we help them grow.

Every day, we equip our pupils with the tools to recognise how they feel, validate those emotions, and reflect on what support they might need, both in and beyond the classroom.

True learning in the classroom can at times feel uncomfortable as we stretch and challenge our students within a nurturing environment to unlock their full potential.

I have seen firsthand the impact of empowering pupils to identify and regulate their emotions through the RGS Junior School's Zones of Regulation - a research-based approach that strengthens pupils' emotional understanding and self-awareness.

This Spring Term, alongside our established Zones of Regulation programme, I am excited to introduce A Can of Toughen Up (TU) to the RGS Junior School. This new 'product' is designed to help pupils recognise and reflect on the support they need when facing challenges, empowering them to approach obstacles with confidence and resilience. TU builds naturally on the strong foundations laid through our Zones of Regulation work.

While we are committed to supporting students throughout their RGS journey, we also recognise the importance of helping them build resilience and determination - not doubt or dependency. In practice, TU acts as a simple metaphor children can relate to - an imaginative way to pause, reframe a situation, and draw on their inner resilience.

For example, a child might identify that they are in the Blue Zone (Sad) due to dropping one mark in a spelling test, and we want them to consider TU as part of the solution. By being offered a can, the adult is essentially saying, "Let



Mr Miller, Head of RGS Junior School and Mysha I (Year 3)

us put this into perspective together. Scoring 9/10 is something to feel proud of, so let us celebrate what went well!"

Having a can of TU can also be useful in preparation for when students face something fun but challenging, for example, before their first House Cross Country event, our Year 3 pupils enjoyed a shared moment of 'drinking' TU. Doing it together had a wonderfully unifying effect, encouraging them to support one another and approach the challenge with confidence.

Our RGS Junior School students have been central to the creation of A Can of Toughen Up (TU). After sharing and discussing the concept with them during assembly, they came forward with a wealth of exciting designs for our TU cans. Four of our Year 6 pupils - Chrissy, Hetty, Lucy and Ava - created the winning design. They said: "It was really cool to have our design selected, as we love the idea of Toughen Up and how it can help us be resilient!"

While this is a positive new tool students can add to their emotional toolkit, it is also important for us to remind them how to look after their overall well-being. I think for anyone to be resilient, they need to eat a balanced diet, stay hydrated and sleep well. These are key ingredients of TU. An additional and very important ingredient is gratitude. On a daily basis, we encourage students to practice gratitude to help with perspective and to aid them in navigating tricky situations.

I would like to thank our amazing RGS families



for supporting the campaign so far. It has been a highlight of my day when I watch children handing each other a can of TU unprompted by their families and teachers, often asking what flavour they would prefer!

To discover more about life at RGS Junior School, join us for our Virtual Information Evening on Thursday 11 June 2026, which will include insights into our Senior School and RGS Sixth Form.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



RGS
NEWCASTLE

FROM
MOMENTS
TO SHARE

TO
TEACHERS
WHO CARE



THERE'S MORE
TO LIFE AT RGS

JOIN US FOR AN
ONLINE INTRODUCTION

THURSDAY 11TH JUNE 5PM

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

Royal Grammar School Newcastle
Next to Jesmond Metro Station
500 years of shaping futures
Fully funded places available



SCAN TO
REGISTER





NPS Anniversary Dinner

The Anniversary Dinner at Wood Hall was a wonderful way to mark 140 years of Newcastle Preparatory School. Staff, parents, governors and former pupils came together to celebrate in a setting that couldn't have been more beautiful. Having arrived dressed to the nines, the evening began with a drinks reception accompanied by the Arco String Quartet, which set a relaxed and elegant atmosphere from the start. A three-course dinner followed in the historic hall, whose impressive surroundings added something really special to the occasion. The evening was filled with warmth, shared memories and a real sense of pride in the NPS community. It was an event which will be looked back on with the same genuine fondness as those who know the school share.





The Case for Humanity in the Age of AI

Pupils at Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) stepped boldly into discussions about the future recently at the NHSG Future First Conference, which explored the theme: **Championing the Case for Humanity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.**

Now in its second year, the annual conference brings together pupils in Years 10 and 12, alongside parents, to consider what the world of work might look like for the next generation – and how they can shape it.

Throughout the day, pupils, alumnae, and staff examined why human intelligence, creativity, and judgement remain essential in a world increasingly defined by rapid technological advancement.

Assistant Head and conference organiser David Hyde presented the event theme with his address *“AI and 2026 – Two Competing Visions of Our Futures,”* urging attendees to reflect on the opportunities, risks, and ethical questions surrounding artificial intelligence – including the possibility that human-designed systems could one day surpass human capability.

The programme also featured talks from three high-achieving NHSG alumnae, each offering a frontline perspective on how AI is reshaping their industries:

“Being a Newly Qualified Solicitor in the Age of AI”

- Lucy Baxter, Commercial Solicitor at Ward Hadaway

“Healthcare Must Remain Human in the Age of AI”

- Jennifer Vineberg, Practice Educator Radiographer, NHS

“The Importance of Human Intelligence in Journalism”

- Emilia Hardie, Associate Producer at CNBC International

While each speaker highlighted the efficiencies and innovations AI brings to their workplace, all three concluded that qualities such as accuracy, empathy, communication, and relationship-building – hallmarks of human intelligence – remain irreplaceable.

Complementing the alumnae contributions, pupils from Years 10–12 delivered a series of compelling talks on the human achievements that inspire them. Their presentations ranged from the invention of the telegraph to the role of imagination and play in early childhood, providing powerful arguments for the importance of human creativity, ingenuity, and communication across the generations.

Later in the Conference, pupils took part in series of seminars exploring the broader debate around AI and human values covering the future of knowledge, language learning, politics, and digital ethics.

Talking about the impact of the Future First Conference, David Hyde, Assistant Head and

Conference Organiser, said: “The pace of technological change – especially in AI – is challenging every generation in both exciting and unsettling ways. AI is here to stay, but it is the choices we make, and particularly the choices this next generation will make, that will determine how AI develops and what role it plays in shaping our shared future. In my view, humanity must remain at the centre of that conversation.”

Amanda Hardie, Head of Newcastle High School for Girls, added: “As a forward-thinking school, it is vital that we help our pupils understand not only the world they live in today, but the world they will shape tomorrow. The Future First Conference gives our pupils the chance to engage with some of the most important questions of our time and to hear first-hand from young alumnae who are navigating these challenges in their early careers. Their talks reinforced the importance of a values-led, human-centred approach to work and to life. Their insight was compelling and I was incredibly proud to see how the firm foundations they established in school have propelled them to enjoy incredible success in their careers to date.”

newcastlehigh.gdst.net



David Hyde



Jennifer Vineberg



Emilia Hardie



Sit Your Exams at Darlington College

Darlington College test centre is
now accepting external students
for the following exam boards:



For more information email:
exams@darlington.ac.uk

www.darlington.ac.uk



10th Anniversary Tour

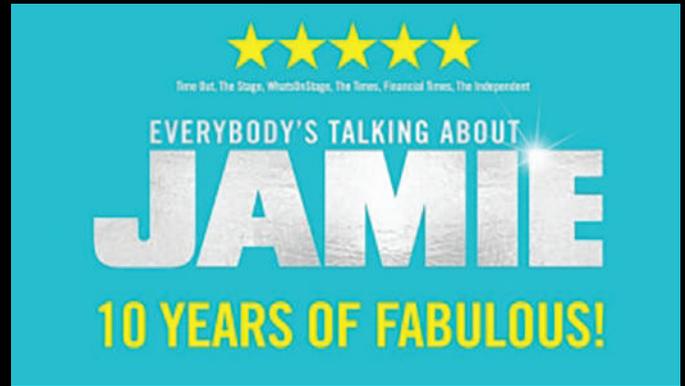
Following a record-breaking three-year West End residency, two sold-out UK & Ireland Tours and Amazon Studios award-winning film, the smash-hit and critically acclaimed musical *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* returns for the 10th Anniversary Tour featuring a brand new song from Dan Gillespie Sells and Tom MacRae.

It will open in Leeds 10 years after the original opening at the Sheffield Crucible prior to the West End, national tours and playing across the world including USA, Korea, Japan and Italy. *Jamie* is coming home to the UK again for possibly the last time.

The tour will visit Sunderland Empire from Tuesday 9 – Saturday 13 February 2027. Casting to be announced.

Jamie New is sixteen and lives on a council estate in Sheffield. *Jamie* doesn't quite fit in. *Jamie* is terrified about the future. *Jamie* is going to be a sensation.

Supported by his brilliant loving mum and surrounded by his friends, *Jamie* overcomes prejudice, beats the bullies and steps out of the darkness, into the spotlight.



This 'Funny, outrageous, touching' (Daily Telegraph), musical sensation is to be experienced by all the family and not to be missed! With an original score of catchy pop tunes that will 'blow the roof off the Theatre' (Mail on Sunday) by lead singer-songwriter of The Feeling, Dan Gillespie Sells and writer Tom MacRae (Doctor Who), this 'Sparkling coming-of-age musical' (The Times) will have everybody talking about *Jamie* for years to come.



“Things Are Getting Better” at Blyth Live 26

Blyth Live Music Festival is delighted to announce iconic 90's pop and dance group D:Ream as the headline act for Blyth Live 2026, taking place on Saturday 20th June.

D:Ream rose to prominence in the 1990s and achieved a UK No.1 hit with the anthemic “Things Can Only Get Better” in 1994. The band went on to enjoy eight further UK Top 40 hits, including “U R the Best Thing”, “Take Me Away” and “Shoot Me with Your Love”. Their two studio albums released during the decade both reached the UK Top Five, cementing their place as one of the era's most recognisable acts.

Alongside an exciting live music programme, Blyth Live Festival will once again offer a full day of family-friendly entertainment. Families can enjoy community and craft stalls showcasing local talent and creativity, a wide variety of food concessions, vibrant street theatre performances, and a fun fair.

Mayor of Blyth Town Council, David Swinhoe, said:

“We're thrilled to welcome this iconic band from the 90's to Blyth Live 2026. Their music has truly stood the test of time, and we know their performance will get everyone dancing. This free festival is a fantastic way to bring our community together and celebrate everything that makes Blyth special. Things are already getting better with this announcement,” he said.

More acts will be announced soon.

Anyone interested in sponsoring or being part of Blyth Live 2026 is encouraged to get in touch via events@blythtowncouncil.org.uk.

New twist to a beloved classic

A Sunderland community theatre is once again putting local people centre stage with its latest project that gives a Wearside twist to the beloved classic *The Wind in the Willows*.

Set along the banks of the River Wear, the ambitious project by Atlas Theatre Company CIC celebrates local stories, landscapes, and the power of community connection through theatre experience that everyone can get involved with.

Willows on the Wear will feature script contributions from local people and performances by Sunderland primary schools, giving dozens of young people hands-on experience in theatre, alongside a large-scale community company production. It is supported by The Barbour Foundation, Hays Travel Foundation, Chloe & Liam Together Forever Trust and The June Rose Project.

The production and two primary school adaptations will be hosted this June and July by Monkwearmouth Academy in its new theatre space.



Gosforth Civic Theatre

Not your average meeting room.



Mary Ann Rogers

An artists life

By Mary Ann Rogers

The beginning of the year is never a great time for painting the landscape up here in the Rede valley. The cold temperatures and endless rain have created a tapestry of dull, soaked hills and fields, and up until the time I write, the light simply hasn't brought everything to life, apart from brief spells which occasionally occur at each end of the day.

Winter wildlife has been much more exciting. Our daily walks along the riverbank have paid off, with regular sightings of kingfishers, herons, migratory geese, ducks and egrets which we have only begun seeing in recent years. The highlight though, has been the return of otters, after two years of not seeing them. Not just once, but about four times we have come across them feeding, splashing, swimming and playing in the river.

I was alerted to the most recent (and best!) sighting by some ripples at my side of the river, then as I crept closer, I saw a dark form on the bank, and another one swimming close by. Dorothy, our miniature dachshund mercifully kept quiet, allowing me to spend about ten minutes quietly watching these two otters as they dived under the water, then resurfaced, crunching what I suspect were crayfish. They worked their way closer and closer, until one of them saw me. This sparked curiosity, and they swam back and forth, looking at me, and one of them even came out onto the riverbank very close to me, and as Dorothy is smaller than an otter, and they can be quite ferocious, I hoped she was out of sight!

After many years of inadequate amounts of snow, finally, the Scottish ski areas are running again with fantastic snow. We learned to ski at Glenshee in the 90's, frequently encountering ptarmigan, mountain hare, thousands of red deer along with ice, heather, mud and rocks, which made skiing in the Alps like a walk in the park in comparison. I couldn't miss the chance to go back and ski there again recently and was not disappointed. The snow was great, the staff and café as warm and friendly as ever, and it was one of those occasions when returning to recapture old memories did not disappoint. As I'd hoped, ptarmigan were spotted flying around the ski slopes. They are part of the grouse family and change the colour of their feathers to white in the winter as camouflage, similar to the mountain hare, who are also white in the winter. Sadly we didn't see any hares this time. On the drive up and down the mountain, there were huge numbers of red deer grazing just below the snow line. Wonderful to see, but causing immense problems for owners of Scottish estates trying to bring back the Caledonian forests as they graze on tree seedlings, and their numbers far exceed a sustainable population.



I have never spent enough time close enough to red deer to be able to paint them, but gained access to the introduced (and controlled) reindeer herd over near Aviemore and painted them, with their splayed hooves for walking on snow, and curious clicking tendons which allow them to hear each other even when the blowing snow creates blinding conditions.

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery,
West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE
Open Tues, Thurs, Fri 10-4 • Sundays 2-5
07967 550772 • www.marogers.com**

In business you build key relationships, partnerships, and attract ambassadors who carry your thinking into rooms you may never enter.

Brinkburn could not exist without them.

But relationships like that don't begin with strategy. They begin with how you turn up.

How you meet the world, and what you assume about the people in it.

I grew up believing you don't talk to strangers.

Not because they were dangerous, but because they were strange. Unknown. Outside the circle.

It was protective. Manageable.

Then I was asked, "If you don't talk to strangers, how will you ever meet someone you might actually like?"

Every partner we value began as someone we didn't know. A walk. A coffee. A conversation that didn't need to happen - but did.

That's where the old phrase becomes practical: Don't judge a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes.

Judgement is distance disguised as certainty.

From far away, it's easy to believe we understand someone - to reduce them to a headline, a first impression, a single interaction.

It feels efficient. It feels decisive. But often it's simply interpretation without proximity.

Closeness disrupts that. When you step beside someone, listen longer, stay curious, the neat categories soften - and the person becomes human again.

Unforgettable.

Recently, someone who coaches leaders on communication told me he asks clients to imagine what would happen if they were truly unforgettable.

After visiting Brinkburn he said, "I found 'unforgettable' everywhere - from the welcome, to the buildings, to walking along the riverside."

That walk was muddy and playful. We followed the bends of the Coquet. I shared stories of childhood games, the character of the trees, the history of the Priory watching over the river. It was grey and drizzly, but he barely noticed.

Later he said, "I keep thinking about how unforgettable every part of Brinkburn feels."

That's the point. Ambassadors aren't persuaded.

They're immersed. At Brinkburn, closeness happens walking in the woods, sitting by the fire, sharing a wild swim. It doesn't always take years.

Sometimes it takes an afternoon. Because intimacy isn't about duration. It's about presence - and walking far enough together that judgement loosens and something real begins.

Sustainable growth isn't built on transactions.

It's built on strangers who walked a little way together - and decided to keep going.

One Walk: Nut Wood.

Nut Wood at Brinkburn is a slender, secretive ribbon of trees, stitched through with a small stream that slips quietly down to meet the River Coquet. We have laid simple bridges across its restless crossings.

After rain, the water gives up fragments of Victorian crockery, the banks once a refuse pit, now an accidental archive. Majestic beech and oak guard the entrance, before hazel - once coppiced for charcoal and craft - gathers thickly around you, left untended since the war. Wild garlic, bluebells and dog mercury soften the floor. At the river's edge, a fallen oak grows skyward still, faithful to the light.

“

Sustainable growth isn't built on transactions. It's built on strangers who walked a little way together - and decided to keep going.

One Walk. One Thought.

Each issue, Brinkburn Co-Founder Mark Fenwick introduces us to One Walk around the 52-acre Brinkburn Estate in Northumberland. Alongside, because the greatest outdoor spaces cultivate the greatest thinking – there's a focus on One Thought, too.

One Thought: “Until You’ve Walked a Mile..”

Simon Williams



Eagles celebrate six-year Maldron stay

Newcastle Eagles and Maldron Hotel Newcastle are celebrating a major milestone in their long-standing partnership as they mark six years of working together, including four consecutive seasons with the hotel proudly positioned on the back of the Eagles men’s team’s kit.

The popular city-centre hotel has become a key pillar of the Eagles’ operations over the years, providing a home-from-home for visiting teams from across Super League Basketball (SLB), as well as opposition clubs and officials during the Eagles’ three-season campaign in the European North Basketball League (ENBL).

“We are delighted to once again be supporting the Newcastle Eagles this season. This partnership is one that we treasure deeply, and the Eagles are very much part of our family now,” said Anna Wadcock, General Manager of Maldron Hotel Newcastle.

“It’s been amazing to see the club going from strength to strength over the last few seasons, and there have been so many positive benefits to this partnership. We’ve had brilliant brand exposure and some amazing business opportunities.

“Our team’s well-being is a huge part of our culture here at the Maldron, and being able to send them and their families to cheer on the team and experience the amazing atmosphere at a game is just wonderful.”

Colmans fish & chips marks centenary by confirming its future at Fenwick

Two of the North East’s most famous family businesses are making their partnership permanent following a successful first 12 months.

As it celebrates its centenary year, South Shields’ legendary Colmans Fish & Chips has confirmed it will remain a permanent fixture inside Newcastle’s Fenwick department store, becoming an official concession from February 28.

The multi award-winning fish and chip shop opened its first restaurant outside South Tyneside in March 2025 with a bold extension into the prestigious city centre store, following a six-figure investment.

Serving up a fresh take on the nation’s favourite dish, it quickly proved to be a firm favourite with diners keen to taste Colmans’ acclaimed tried and tested menu - and as a result, Richard Colman, Director at Colman’s Fish & Chips has confirmed the brand is there to stay.

“Opening our first branch outside of South Tyneside was a huge step for us and we knew it could only be done if we found the perfect partnership, one that aligned with our own values” he said.



Headlam Hall Head Chef cooks up career move

It’s all change at the top for County Durham hotel Headlam Hall, as former head chef Austen Shaw steps up to the role of General Manager - replacing David Jackson who made exactly the same move almost 30-years ago.

Mr Shaw has taken over as GM after two stints as head chef at the 17th Century hotel near Darlington. And his promotion echoes that of his predecessor, who made the same progression back in the 1990s.

Joining the family-run hotel in 1999 as a teenager in the role of chef de partie, Austen worked his way up under David’s guidance and was promoted to head chef in 2003. Keen to explore new opportunities, he left in 2009 to launch his own business and also spent a few years working at a leading Darlington patisserie Robineau, where he honed his pastry skills.

In 2018, he returned to Headlam Hall as joint head chef before taking up the role full time and last summer, was offered the opportunity to become GM when David announced his retirement.

He has worked closely with David and business coach Teresa Peters over the last few months to prepare for the switch and officially began his new role earlier this year.



“Not only is Fenwick the most famous department store in the region, it’s a family business like ourselves so it was the perfect fit.

“We were always confident this partnership would be successful but it’s exceeded all expectations. We’ve welcomed thousands of visitors, we’ve created dozens of jobs and we’ve quickly established ourselves as an integral part of the Fenwick family and the Newcastle dining scene.

“I am delighted that Colmans Fish & Chips is now a permanent part of the Fenwick experience and it comes at a very important time for us, as we celebrate our centenary year.”

Epicurus Catering & Fells’ Kitchen Adventures Ltd.

Event Catering | Cater Hire | Staff Hire | Catered Outdoor Adventures

17 Mandale Business Park, Wallsend Rd, North Shields, NE29 7FN

Tel: 0191 2708540 • M: 07976 374629 • www.epicurus.co.uk • www.fellskitchen.co.uk



epicurus



fratelli

RISTORANTE • BAR • TERRACE

Sunday Lunch

**EVERY SUNDAY
FROM 12PM**

Magic or Face Painting every week!

BOOK ONLINE

www.fratelliponteland.co.uk



A rail launch like no other...

Together in electric dreams

By Michael Grahamslaw

There's something rather special about travelling between Christmas and New Year - that gentle lull where the world slows down just enough to savour it.

On 30 December, Lisa and I swapped the post-festive haze for something far more energising: a first experience aboard Lumo's new all-electric service from Newcastle to Glasgow.

The route has been talked about with no shortage of enthusiasm, and rightly so. In just



TikTok stars Just The Brave were part of the launch at a reception at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

two hours and 20 minutes, with only four brief stops - Morpeth, Edinburgh Waverley, Edinburgh Haymarket and Falkirk - we were carried smoothly from the North East to the heart of this Caledonian cultural powerhouse. It's fast, it's efficient and, crucially, it drops you right into Glasgow Queen Street, where the city's main attractions are practically on your doorstep.

From the moment we boarded, the atmosphere felt different to the usual long-distance rail experience. Lumo's interiors are bright and modern, the staff upbeat, and the quiet hum of the all-electric train lends a calmness that's rare during the festive rush.

With fares starting from an impressive £10.90 between Newcastle and Glasgow, it's also one of the most accessible ways to travel between the two cities - a point not lost on the many families, couples and solo adventurers sharing our carriage.

The company's recent launch celebrations have only added to the sense of momentum. The inaugural service departed Glasgow Queen Street to great fanfare, complete with performances from Storm Electric Strings, a comedy set by rising talent Connor Burns and a



A seamless celebration for the launch of the new Glasgow service in December 2025

special appearance from Scottish boyband Just The Brave.

In a nod to Scottish heritage, Lumo even unveiled its own official tartan, created with Houston Kiltmakers, with guests receiving limited edition scarves.

Our own journey north was smooth and scenic, the winter light casting a soft glow over the coastline before giving way to the dramatic approach into Edinburgh and the rolling central belt beyond. Before we knew it, we were stepping out into a lively, festive Glasgow - the perfect base for a pre New Year escape.

Fast forward to 2 January, and the return leg was every bit as seamless. While many were still easing themselves into the new year, we boarded the southbound service and settled into that same relaxed rhythm. The train pulled away from Queen Street with the city still carrying the last traces of Hogmanay reverie, and by early afternoon we were back in Newcastle, refreshed and ready for 2026.

Lumo's Managing Director, Stuart Jones, described the new service as "a landmark moment" for connectivity between Scotland and England - and it's hard to disagree. With two northbound services each weekday, one southbound, and a Stirling-London Euston route launching in May 2026, the company is clearly on an upward trajectory.

For Lisa and me, this new Newcastle-Glasgow link felt like a genuine gamechanger: fast, affordable, sustainable and surprisingly serene.

A smart choice for anyone looking to travel between two great cities with ease - and a what a way to get the new year off to a flier!

For more information, visit www.lumo.co.uk



ELLINGHAM HALL

PROUDLY OURS, EXCLUSIVELY YOURS

HOME OF THE TWO NIGHT WEDDING

Set in 8-acres of beautiful Northumberland Countryside, Ellingham Hall is a charming estate with an abundance of indoor and outdoor ceremony spaces, enchanting bedrooms and exquisite grounds.



YOUR TWO NIGHT WEDDING EXPERIENCE INCLUDES

- Exclusive Use of Hall & Grounds
- Picturesque Countryside Estate
- 5 Unique Ceremony Spaces
- 2 Luxurious Wedding Suites
- Boutique Guest Rooms (Sleeps 40 Guests)
- 19th Century Chapel
- Underground Party Vault
- Dog Friendly Venue
- Award Winning Team
- Max 140 Day & 180 Evening Guests

Follow us @ellinghamhall



www.ellingham-hall.co.uk





The Hadrian Hotel team

Hadrian's Hotel – at the heart of Wall

There's a fresh chapter beginning at Hadrian's Hotel in Wall, Northumberland. The much-loved venue is set to reopen with a bold new vision – transforming into a vibrant pub, dining destination and hotel.

Leading the exciting relaunch are dynamic hospitality duo Jack Brown and Alice Lawson, who are bringing fresh energy, big ideas, and a passion for great food.

What inspired you to take over Hadrian's Hotel in Wall – was there a defining moment?

We had been thinking about doing a venture for ourselves for a while and we decided to take the leap of faith after talking to a bit of a legend of the industry who gave us some brilliant advice to move forward. We viewed another property which fell through but the agent knew the landlord of Hadrian's and thought we'd be a good match, and he was right!

The building is exactly what we wanted for the next stage in our development. The perfect size with multiple revenue streams.

What is the vision for Hadrian's?

Our focus initially will be to reinstate the venue to the local community by bringing back the local pub and building relationships.

Having two different food offerings will be big for us. A good choice for locals and visitors, with the aim of being a destination for fine dining and great pub food too.

The venue will be an extension of the team's personality and passion for the industry. Delivering quality service, food & drinks.

How have you connected with the local community- how important is it to engage them?

I have joined community groups and we openly invited everyone in before and during the build process to begin opening some open dialogue and a rapport between the team and the village.

What kind of atmosphere did you want to create?

A buzz. Sounds too simple, but to create a consistent buzz within the venue is difficult.

From the moment we open the doors, we'd like to think we'll be welcoming a variety of customers. One of the biggest appeals of the venue was its location.

We hope to be welcoming walkers, cyclists, locals & customers visiting Northumberland. And of course, those coming direct to us,

who will then discover what we have on our doorstep!

How did you shape the menu or drink offerings to reflect your vision?

Willow's offer will be 8 courses of seasonal ingredients, heavily influenced by the best British produce we can buy. Accompanied by wonderful wines from around the world and cocktails which have been crafted with the same ethos of quality and deliciousness!

In the pub, we will be serving traditional gastro pub food. The opening menu will be a mainly classic dishes and we will be using the specials board to add a little diversity & more choice but also to get a feel for what is popular.

If guests leave remembering just one thing, what do you hope it is?

The personal touch. Everyone is different and enjoys something different.

That's the beauty of having the option in the hotel. Whether it's a local farmer who wants a pint of John Smiths and a steak pie or a tourist seeking fine dining with a wine pairing, we can fulfil both needs and make each person feel as welcome as the next.

What's next for you both?

There may be another venue on the way...but shhh, it's still a secret!

hadrianshotel.com





Hadrian's Hotel

Where history meets
home comfort and heritage
meets hearty dishes.

Now open

Escape to the heart of the Northumberland countryside at Hadrian's Hotel, a charming country pub hotel where comfort meets rustic elegance. Unwind in beautifully appointed rooms that blend modern convenience with timeless character, then settle into our cosy pub interiors for hearty seasonal dishes and perfectly poured drinks by the fire.

Whether you're exploring rolling hills, historic landmarks, or simply seeking a peaceful retreat, Hadrian's Hotel offers warm hospitality and an unforgettable countryside stay.

Book online at www.hadrianshotel.com



Hospitality is a results-driven industry

We measure occupancy, average rate, covers, spend per head, guest satisfaction scores, payroll percentages and profit margins. From the outside, leadership in hotels can look like a numbers game – strategy meetings, performance reviews and constant target setting.

Early in my career, I believed that was what leadership meant. Deliver the numbers. Control the detail. Drive performance.

Experience has taught me something different.

In hospitality, leadership is not defined by how you perform when the hotel is full, the reviews are glowing and the sun is shining over a wedding on the terrace. Leadership is revealed when something goes wrong – and something always does.

A guest complaint escalates.

A function doesn't run as planned.

A team member makes a costly mistake.

Pressure comes from ownership or head office. Those are the moments that define culture.

The true test of a General Manager is not how they celebrate success, but how they behave when the pressure is on. Do they protect their team – or do they protect themselves?

I have come to believe that leadership in hospitality is less about control and more about responsibility. Responsibility to create an environment where people can perform with confidence, not fear.

Our industry is built on people. The guest experience lives and dies through frontline teams – receptionists, chefs, housekeepers, servers, events coordinators. If those individuals are operating in an atmosphere of anxiety, where blame travels faster than praise, standards will eventually slip. Not because people don't care, but because fear restricts performance.

Defending your team does not mean lowering standards or avoiding accountability. Quite the opposite. It means taking ownership as a leader when things go wrong. It means addressing issues constructively and privately. It means standing up for your people when they are not in the room.

And it means giving credit loudly and publicly when they succeed.

In my role at Lumley Castle, I regularly ask myself three questions:

Do my team feel safe speaking honestly?

Do they trust that I will listen before I judge?

Do they know I will stand up for them under pressure?

If the answer to those questions is uncertain, then the culture needs work.

Hospitality is a high-pressure environment.

We operate long hours, emotional moments and significant financial expectations. Mistakes are inevitable. What cannot be inevitable is a culture where people feel exposed.

When team members know their General Manager will support them – while still holding them accountable – something powerful happens. Confidence grows. Initiative increases. Pride deepens. Standards rise naturally because people want to protect the reputation of a business that protects them.

The strongest hotels I have worked in are not driven purely by systems or SOP manuals. They are driven by trust.

A leader who only appears when the hotel hits budget is not leading. A leader who disappears during guest complaints is not leading. Leadership is presence – especially in uncomfortable conversations.

High-performing hospitality businesses are built on loyalty – not just from guests, but from teams. Retention improves. Engagement strengthens. Service becomes more authentic. And in a sector where recruitment remains one of our greatest challenges, culture has become a competitive advantage.

Authority might secure compliance.

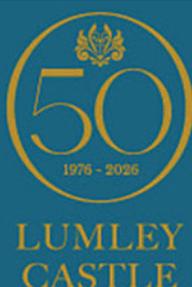
Protection secures commitment.

As General Managers, we carry the responsibility of shaping environments where people can grow, make mistakes safely, learn quickly and deliver exceptional service with confidence.

Because at its heart, hospitality is about care.

And leadership should be no different.

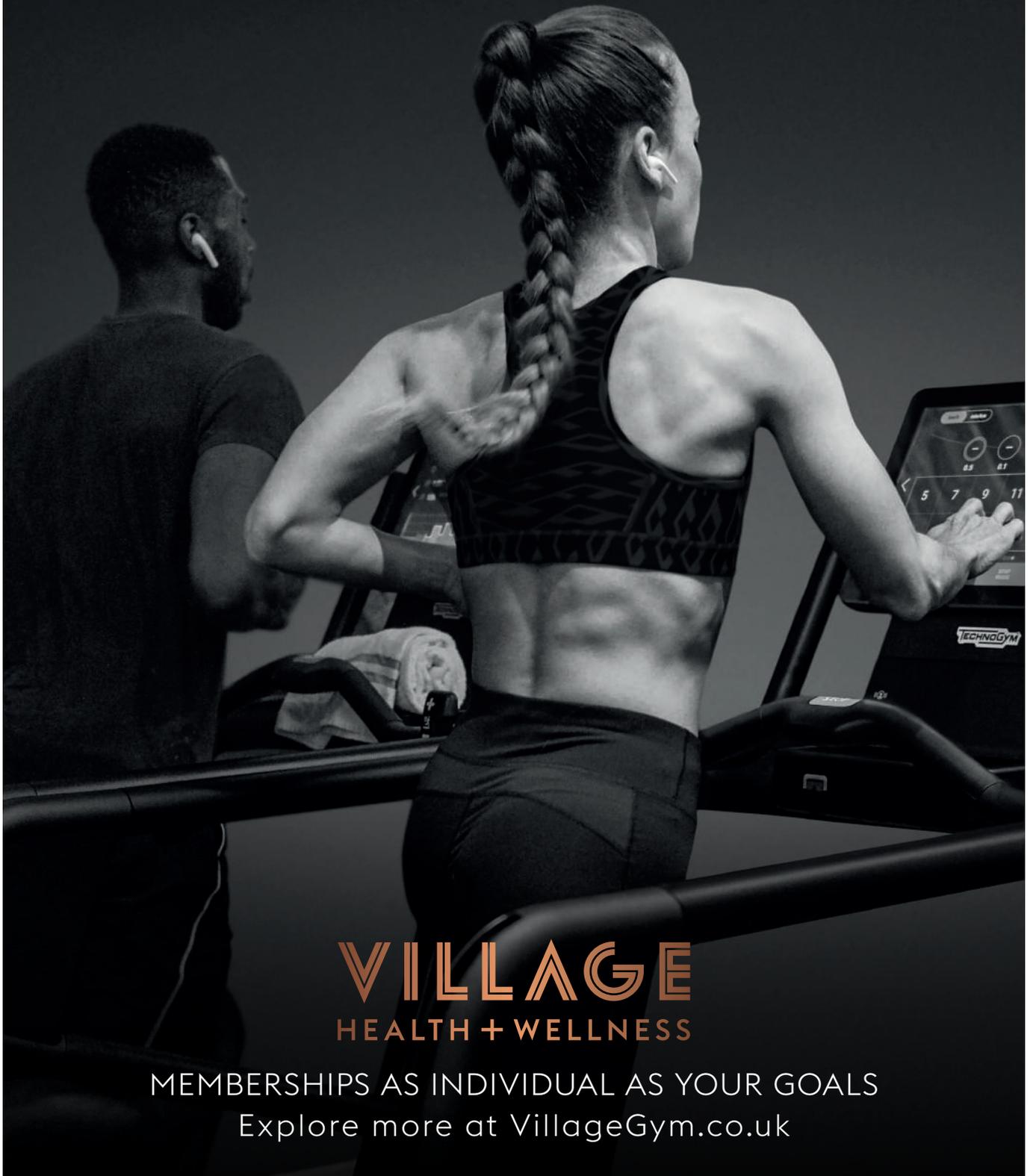
www.lumleycastle.com



CELEBRATING
50 YEARS OF
LUMLEY CASTLE HOTEL

COLD OUTSIDE. FIRE INSIDE.

TIME TO LEVEL UP



VILLAGE
HEALTH + WELLNESS

MEMBERSHIPS AS INDIVIDUAL AS YOUR GOALS
Explore more at VillageGym.co.uk



Tantara: The new bistro bringing a taste of Bengal to Jesmond

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Every year, new openings reshape the city's culinary identity, introducing fresh perspectives and new cultural influences. Tantara, the new Bengali bistro preparing to open this Spring in Jesmond, is poised to be exactly that.

Situated on Osborne Road, Tantara is bringing something not yet seen in the region: a dining experience inspired by the cabin cafés of Calcutta. These cafés have long been cultural institutions across Bengal - intimate, vibrant spaces where conversation, creativity and comfort food exist side by side. Tantara is taking that heritage and reimagining it through a modern bistro lens, creating a concept that feels both rooted in tradition and forward-thinking in execution.

For many diners in the North East, Bengali cuisine remains relatively undiscovered territory. While British curry culture has largely been shaped by North Indian and Punjabi influences, Bengali cooking tells a very different story. It is known for its elegant use of spices,

its celebration of seafood and fresh produce, and its ability to balance richness with delicacy. The result is an experience built around depth of flavour and careful craftsmanship rather than overwhelming heat.

What stands out to me about the concept is its confidence. This is not a restaurant attempting to simplify Bengali cuisine for mainstream appeal, but instead, it feels like an invitation for diners and the curious to step into something new. The menu is expected to showcase traditional influences while presenting them in a format that feels accessible, to even the most cautious diner - a balance that many successful modern restaurants are striving to achieve.

Jesmond provides a fitting backdrop for this

ambition. Tantara follows other operators understanding the distinct social energy Jesmond has - Branches, Chakh Dhoom, Dabbawal, and Florence to name a few, have in recent years made this suburban gem their home. Tantara adds another dimension to this landscape, offering something culturally distinctive, yet creatively fitting.

More broadly, openings like this reflect the growing maturity of the North East's restaurant scene. The region is increasingly becoming a destination where chefs and operators feel confident introducing niche cuisines and specialist dining experiences.

Tantara arrives at a time when Newcastle is continuing to redefine itself as a cultural and culinary destination. New venues are no longer competing for footfall; they are contributing to a larger narrative about identity, diversity and creativity across the region.

Ultimately, restaurants like Tantara do more than offer new menus. They expand the conversation around food, culture and community. As the North East continues to build its reputation as one of the UK's most exciting dining regions, Tantara feels ready to play an important role in shaping what comes next.

www.tantaradining.com



THE ORIGINAL & THE BEST!

Our Beach Bootcamp workouts are for all!

Each session consists of aerobic and bodyweight exercises designed to suit every fitness level, therefore allowing individuals to work at their own pace.

There is no competition in anything we do.

Training on the stunning Tynemouth Longsands beach in a group is fun, different and leaves you with that wonderful feel good factor at the end of the session.

**£5 PER SESSION : 45 MINUTES
LOCATION : TYNEMOUTH BEACH**

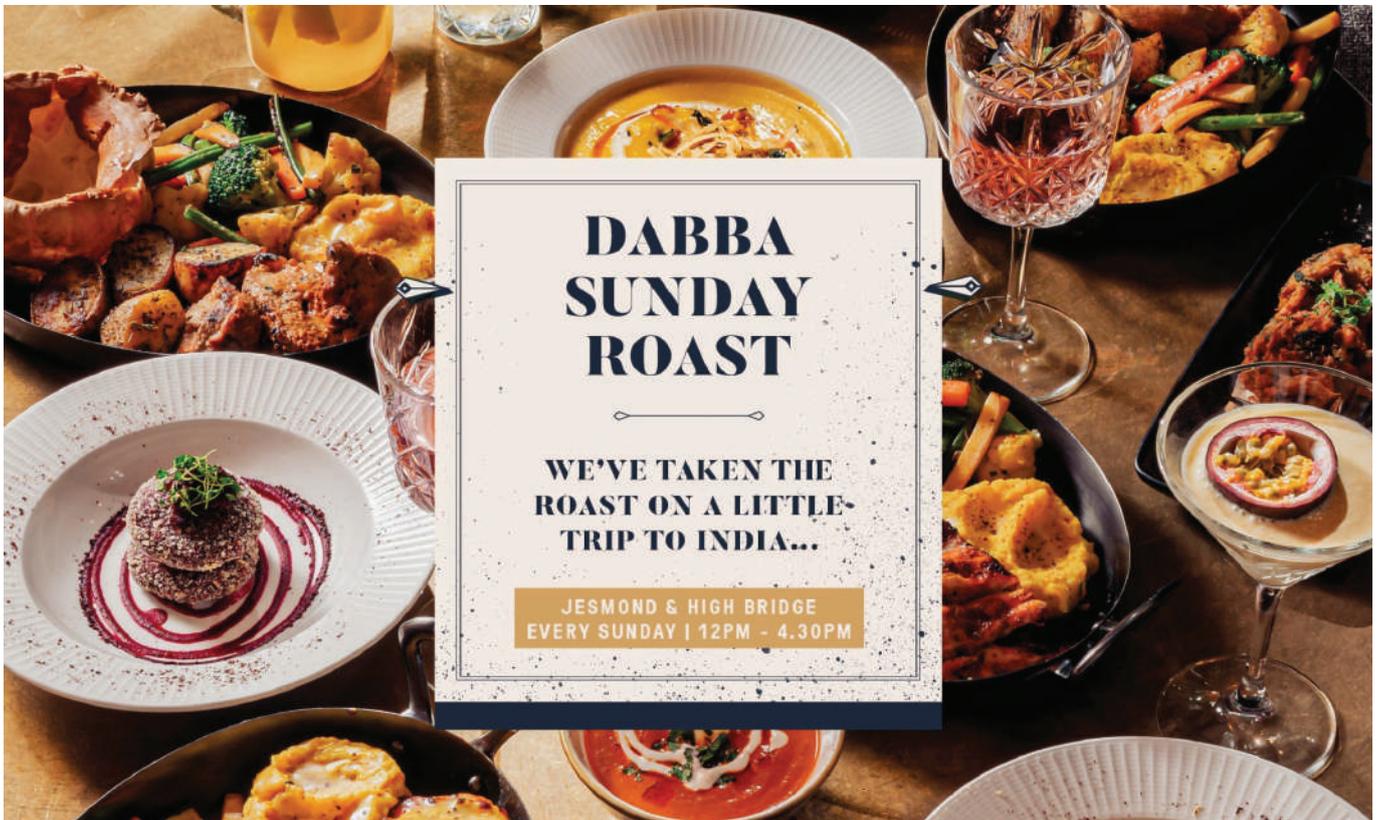
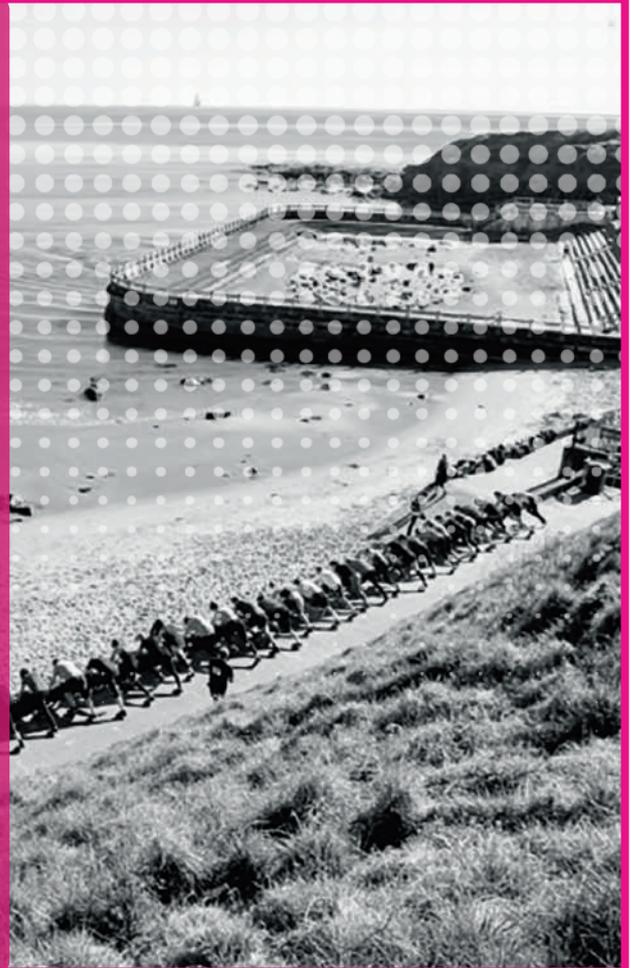
TUESDAYS 6.45-7.30am | SATURDAYS 9.00-9.45am | SUNDAYS 9.15-10.00am

df

David Fairlamb Fitness

3 Saturn Court Orion Business Park
Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate NE29 7BY. Tel: 07713 640 899

Email us, info.dffitness@gmail.com or
visit www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk



DABBA SUNDAY ROAST

WE'VE TAKEN THE
ROAST ON A LITTLE-
TRIP TO INDIA...

JESMOND & HIGH BRIDGE
EVERY SUNDAY | 12PM - 4.30PM

DABBAWAL
STREET FOOD KITCHEN

   @dabbawal dabbawal.com

Scan to make
a booking
at Dabbawal



Scan for the
Dabba Sunday
Roast Menu



Crisis facing Newcastle's hospitality sector

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd, the Business Improvement District company for Newcastle city centre.

Newcastle is internationally renowned for its nightlife and hospitality scene. Mention Newcastle to a group of non-Geordies and hear them rave about the amazing time they had when they visited, a sentiment echoed by the people who live, work and study here.

Newcastle captures people's hearts and a large part of this is because of the fun they have in the city's vibrant hospitality venues. From Michelin-starred restaurants to award-winning pubs and clubs, the city relies on this sector as much for its identity as its economic survival.

Sadly, the industry is on the brink and facing its worst crisis in living memory. If we don't support these businesses now, we can't feign surprise when they collapse.

The hospitality sector has been hit disproportionately hard by a relentless onslaught of tax rises and economic challenges. If Covid didn't devastate the sector, rising fuel costs, the cost-of-living crisis, National Insurance hikes for employers and minimum wage increases have all dealt serious blows. For many, the abolition of business rates relief in last November's budget was the final straw.

Hospitality makes up 31% of city centre businesses, yet was responsible for 51% of business rates rises, placing a disproportionate burden on these businesses and highlighting how inequitable the system has become.

Thankfully, hospitality owners are a resilient bunch. Perhaps that's why successive governments have treated the sector as a cash cow. It remains one of the most highly regulated parts of the economy.

In response to pressure from NE1 and industry bodies, the Government rather belatedly accepted that business rates changes would cause harm and went back to its calculations to develop a support package.

The Government acted with a 15% reduction and a three-year price freeze, which is welcome, but is a sticking plaster for a gaping wound.

Make no mistake, this will result in business closures and job losses. We have already started to see the impact. There were sixteen closures last year and the usually buoyant openings have slowed to a trickle. This year, The Mushroom, Point Blank, and SIX at Baltic have all closed and it's only March!

Pubs and independent music venues were singled out for what little relief was offered, but there was no lifeline for restaurants, cafes, hotels and other venues.

How do you decide which industry is worth saving? Clearly, the Great British pub was deemed worthy but one area of hospitality that has been largely ignored is hotels. They are large employers with high staffing costs, large buildings, soaring energy bills and increased competition, and face stratospheric rates rises with no relief.

You can't keep hitting businesses with additional regulation and taxes and expect 'business as usual'. Many profitable businesses would still be open had the Government acted differently and we now have a whole industry in peril.

In light of this crisis, we are renewing our calls for the Government to reduce VAT to 13% for the hospitality sector, bringing the UK into line with the rest of Europe, where rates are closer to 10%.

We are also working with licensees and the council to see what can be done at a local level. We have helped set up a Licensees Forum to improve dialogue between the sector and the council. We have three key goals: a vision that guides policy and supports the sector, repeal of the Late-Night Levy, and a review of the city's pavement café policy.

None of these alone will save the sector, but together they will make a difference and mark the beginning of a more progressive approach that values its social and economic contribution to the city.

We welcome and support the formal consultation on repealing the Late-Night Levy. Introduced in 2013, it imposes an additional tax on businesses serving alcohol after midnight. With average profit on a pint only 12p after costs and taxes, landlords need to sell nearly 37,000 pints a year just to pay the levy - it's easy to see why it is so unpopular.

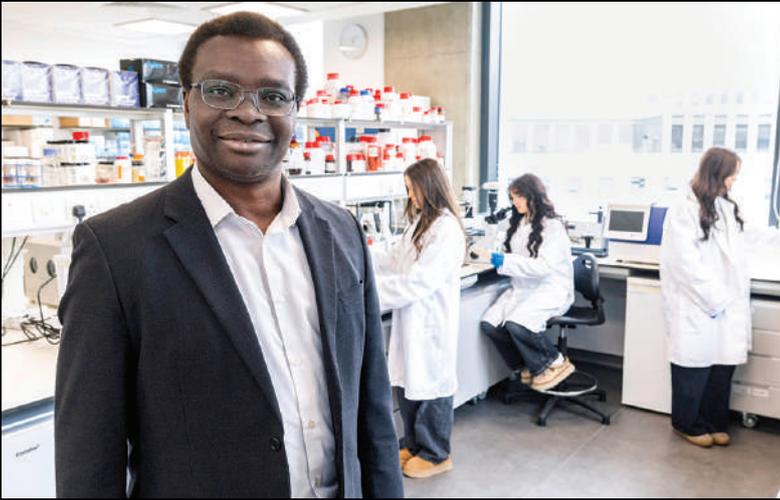
The Newcastle of today is vastly different from 2013, when the levy was introduced. Then, the city had a reputation as the UK 'party capital', with 'vertical drinking', treble measures at extremely low prices, and 13 nightclubs, now we have only four. Newcastle is now known for traditional pubs, quality service, and food, and for being one of only four core cities with Michelin-starred restaurants. Credit goes to our local licensees who have invested to make this a reality. They deserve recognition and support.

Encouraging conversations about repealing the levy have been held with the Police and city council but more work is needed. Our hospitality scene is worth fighting for, and with collective effort we can create the best possible environment for the sector, and the city, to thrive.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Stephen Patterson



Northumberland scientist puts newcastle at the forefront of AI-led beauty research

Dr Olusola Idowu is positioning Newcastle at the forefront of safe, science-led innovation in beauty and healthcare through the responsible use of artificial intelligence and advanced ingredient research.

Based at the Biosphere in Helix Newcastle, Dr Idowu is the founder of HexisLab, a boutique research and development consultancy that has been supporting global brands for more than 14 years to create high-performance, safe, and effective skincare and haircare products that meet international standards.

HexisLab specialises in ingredient analysis, formulation, testing, and validation for products applied to the skin and hair. The company places strong emphasis on safety, regulatory compliance, and efficacy, ensuring products do exactly what they claim to do.

At the core of HexisLab's work is a proprietary AI-driven research platform developed by Dr Idowu long before artificial intelligence became a mainstream buzzword. The platform allows researchers to predict how ingredients and formulations behave within biological systems before they reach laboratory testing.

"AI is a predictive tool for us," explains Dr Idowu. "It helps us reduce guesswork, cut development time, and minimise waste. We simulate outcomes digitally, shortlist the most promising formulations, and only then move into laboratory validation. When results differ from our predictions, we refine the model — that's how science progresses."

New Business Manager role at Tell Us North CIC

Tell Us North CIC has appointed Avish Johnson as its new Business Manager, strengthening the leadership team of the Newcastle-based community interest company.

Operating across the North East, Tell Us North CIC works with local people and with voluntary, community and public sector organisations to help shape and enhance health, wellbeing and social care services. Its work includes community engagement, research, evaluation, training and information services, as well as supporting collaboration between organisations.

Avish takes on the Business Manager role following a successful six-year career with EY (Ernst & Young), where he specialised in Australian taxation.

In his new position, Avish will lead on finance and business operations, helping to drive forward the organisation's continued growth and long-term sustainability. Tell Us North CIC is recognised for delivering the Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead services, ensuring that local people's experiences and views influence the development of health and care services.

For Avish, the most rewarding part of stepping into this new role is the opportunity to contribute directly to community impact.



Core Studio Launches in Benton

A new era of integrated rehabilitation and performance care has come to the North East as Amy Sykes opens Core Studio in Benton.

Amy is a fully qualified Physiotherapist and Sports Massage Therapist with a clear mission: helping the people of the North East move better, feel stronger and stay injury-free.

After years of seeing patients frustrated by short-term, "quick-fix" treatments that failed to address the root cause of pain and injury, Amy created Core Studio to offer something different — a truly integrated approach. By combining expert physiotherapy diagnosis with powerful sports massage recovery and preventative Clinical Pilates, Core Studio delivers long-term results rather than temporary relief.

"I founded Core Studio because people deserve more than a quick fix," says Amy. "Whether you're recovering from an injury, training for a sporting event, or simply dealing with the aches and stiffness that come from desk life, my goal is to help you move with confidence and strength for the long term."



Burnout costs UK businesses £28 billion a year.

What is it costing yours?

One app. Six pillars of wellbeing.

AI personalised support for everyone.

www.optimewellbeing.com

Scan QR code to start your FREE trial



When women thrive, we all gain

(International Women's Day Special Edition)

By *Bethany Ainsley*,
Founder of *Nuvo Wellbeing and OptiMe*.

International Women's Day is a powerful reminder of how far we've come, and how far we still have to go.

But real progress is not built on awareness alone. It is built on decisions, the everyday strategic choices organisations make about how women's health is protected, how ambition is enabled, and how wellbeing is embedded into culture.

When women are supported in their health, ambition and wellbeing, the impact extends far beyond the individual. Teams strengthen, cultures evolve and performance becomes sustainable.

This is not symbolic. It is strategic.

Globally, the economic case is clear. UN Women reports that closing gender gaps in employment and leadership could add trillions to the global economy. But beyond macroeconomic impact, there is a direct organisational truth; when women are supported to perform at their best, businesses perform better. Yet many workplaces still operate within systems that were not designed with women's lived realities in mind.

Health and Wellbeing is a Business Issue

UK data shows women consistently report higher levels of anxiety and common mental health disorders, while also navigating complex life stages, from fertility and pregnancy to menopause and caregiving. Yet many of these experiences remain invisible at work. Support is inconsistent, conversations are uncomfortable, and the pressure to perform does not ease.

The issue is not capability, but capacity. Talented women scale back, pause progression or leave altogether. Supporting women's health and wellbeing is not preferential treatment, it is

the removal of unnecessary barriers.

Practical steps organisations can take include:

- Introduce clear menopause and reproductive health policies.
- Equip line managers to handle health conversations confidently.
- Normalise flexible working without career penalty.
- Provide accessible counselling and wellbeing support.

Ambition without Penalty

Ambition in women is still interpreted differently in many workplaces. Assertiveness can be misread as aggression, and confidence misinterpreted as difficult. Career breaks, whether for maternity leave, caring responsibilities or health can quietly slow progression in ways that are rarely acknowledged. Visibility can also come at a cost. Women who want to progress can feel pressure to be constantly available, consistently exceeding expectations in order to be seen as leadership material.

For female entrepreneurs, the pressure can look different but feel just as intense. Women who build businesses often carry financial risk, caregiving responsibility and leadership accountability simultaneously. In the UK,

female-founded businesses still receive a disproportionately small share of venture funding. The expectation to continually prove credibility can be constant. High-performing women, whether in the workplace or running their own ventures, do not lack drive or capability. What they can lack, are fair systems that enable sustainable success.

A practical starting point is this: make progression criteria explicit and assess performance against impact. Review promotion outcomes following maternity leave or career breaks to ensure progression has not quietly stalled. In entrepreneurial settings, widen access to funding networks and actively invest in female founders with clear, transparent decision-making.

International Women's Day should not simply be a moment of recognition. It should be a catalyst for better decisions. Decisions that protect health and wellbeing rather than test its limits. Decisions that enable ambition without relying on overextension or risking burnout. When organisations design systems where women can thrive without compromise, they strengthen leadership, retain talent and future-proof performance. When women thrive, we all gain.

bethanyainsley.com



Bethany Ainsley



Cheryl Tanner launches North Tyneside's first dedicated menopause strength studio

Menopause specialist and strength coach Cheryl Tanner has relocated her business to new premises at Linskill, North Shields, creating a dedicated studio focused on supporting women through midlife and menopause.

After working with women who felt overlooked or unsupported during this stage of life, Cheryl recognised the need for a space combining evidence-based strength training, education, and community. The new Menopause Strength Studio delivers small-group resistance training, posture and core development, and lifestyle guidance tailored to the physiological changes of perimenopause and menopause.

Her approach focuses on helping women build muscle, protect bone density, improve metabolic health, and regain confidence. "Too often women are told to slow down during menopause," Cheryl says. "In reality, this is the time to get stronger. Strength training is one of the most powerful tools we have to future-proof women's health."

The move marks an exciting new chapter for the business, which continues to expand its workshops, corporate wellbeing sessions, and online programmes across the North East.

The studio launches on International Women's Day with a free community event celebrating women's strength and raising awareness of midlife wellbeing.



Climb on board at ClimbAhub

ClimbAhub is proud to be the UK's only standalone Versaclimber studio, delivering a truly one-of-a-kind fitness experience in Jesmond.

If you're short on time but serious about results, ClimbAhub is built for you. Their unique 30-minute sessions deliver a low-impact, full-body workout that's efficient, effective, and designed to maximise every minute. Perfect for busy professionals, parents, students, and anyone who wants results without spending hours in the gym.

Each 30-minute session is fully immersive. With energising music and trainer-led coaching delivered directly through their silent headphone technology, you're locked into your workout from start to finish. No distractions. No outside noise. Just you, the climb, and expert instruction pushing you to perform at your best.

Every session seamlessly combines cardio and strength in one fantastic workout. You'll burn fat, build lean muscle, increase endurance and boost your overall fitness, all in just half an hour. Whether you're new to fitness or already training hard, the Versaclimber adapts to your level and challenges you every time.

And they've removed the barriers that hold most people back. No joining fees. No contracts. No memberships. Just simple, flexible training that works around your life. Book and pay as you go through the ClimbAhub app, you decide when you train and how often.

ClimbAhub isn't just another workout. It's a high-energy, unique session built around community, convenience, and designed to suit every level.

Jesmond now has access to cutting-edge training that's simple, flexible, and delivers.

Book your climb, and experience the difference!

Download the app from their website, www.Climbahub.co.uk

WARRIOR GENERATION FITNESS

**LOW-IMPACT EXERCISE CLASSES IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY & WORKPLACE
EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES AND LOCAL RESIDENTS TO STAY ACTIVE,
BUILD STRENGTH, AND ENHANCE WELLBEING**

INFO@WARRIORGENERATION.CO.UK | WWW.WARRIORGENERATION.CO.UK | 07745 553574



Taking care of your inner self

The Holistic Self Care Kit Company expands collection with Anxiety Jewellery, Crystal Cage Necklaces and Holistic Key Rings.

The Holistic Self Care Kit Company, a brand dedicated to nurturing mind, body, and spirit through thoughtfully curated self-care kits, blends and crystals, is delighted to announce the addition of a new solution to stress and anxiety to its growing collection.

Designed to combine intention, style, and everyday practicality, the new crystal accessories allow customers to carry their chosen crystals with them wherever they go.

Each crystal cage necklace is crafted to hold interchangeable stones, empowering wearers to align their energy with their personal intentions, whether for grounding, protection, calm, or clarity. Each Trilogy Elements Crystal Necklace Set comes with three crystals, in small, medium or large to perfect a look with every outfit and mood. The crystal key rings, which are also perfect as handbag décor, offer the same mindful connection in a functional, on-the-go form, perfect for daily use and to have close for personal rituals.

“Our community has been asking for more ways to integrate crystal energy into everyday life,” said Allison Rose-Mannall, Founder of The Holistic Self Care Kit Company. “These crystal cage necklaces and key rings are a natural extension of our mission to make holistic self-care accessible, intentional, and beautifully simple. Our anxiety relief necklace is not only ideal for controlling breathing but also looks stunning!”

The new additions complement the company’s existing range of holistic self-care kits and wellness tools, reinforcing its commitment to mindful living and personal empowerment.



Each piece is designed to be both meaningful and versatile, suitable for gifting or personal use and can be ordered with or without a blend, carefully curated to help with different intentions and energies.

The crystal cage necklaces, anxiety necklaces and key rings are now available to purchase via www.theholisticselfcarekitcompany.com, with a variety of crystals offered to suit different intentions and energies. The handmade self-care kits offer support for stress relief, restful sleep, emotional balance, and everyday wellbeing all in one mindful box or mini bag. Each kit and piece of jewellery is lovingly assembled by hand and designed to be tools for building sustainable self-care habits. Popular offerings include:

- **Roller blends** such as “Overworked, Underslept, & Out of Fcks™”, created to soothe the nervous system and support sleep.
- **Children’s kits**, like the “Calm Bubble Kit”, made to help kids discover calming rituals of their own.

- **Targeted blends** such as “Ouch! The Blend” (Pain without Pills relief), designed for natural pain relief; and “Winter Mood Magic” – an uplifting blend for SAD and Winter Blues.

Allison’s latest release is an innovative solution for women experiencing menopause – Hormones and Hellfire including a cooling calm roller blend and Hot Mess Rescue Kit is designed to settle hormonal chaos. And the seasonal Bloom in Your Own Time kit, design to help users move through into the lighter months seamlessly is bound to be popular too. Beyond their function, the products carry Allison’s values: they’re vegan, cruelty-free, eco-conscious, and handmade with intention. Blending holistic practices with modern living, the brand encourages individuals to slow down, reconnect, and prioritise self-care as an essential part of everyday life.

Purchase on Etsy, Amazon, or on www.theholisticselfcarekitcompany.com

A new chapter of growth: The story behind SELF and our vision for 2026

By Hannah Dodds, Founder of Self Medical Aesthetics

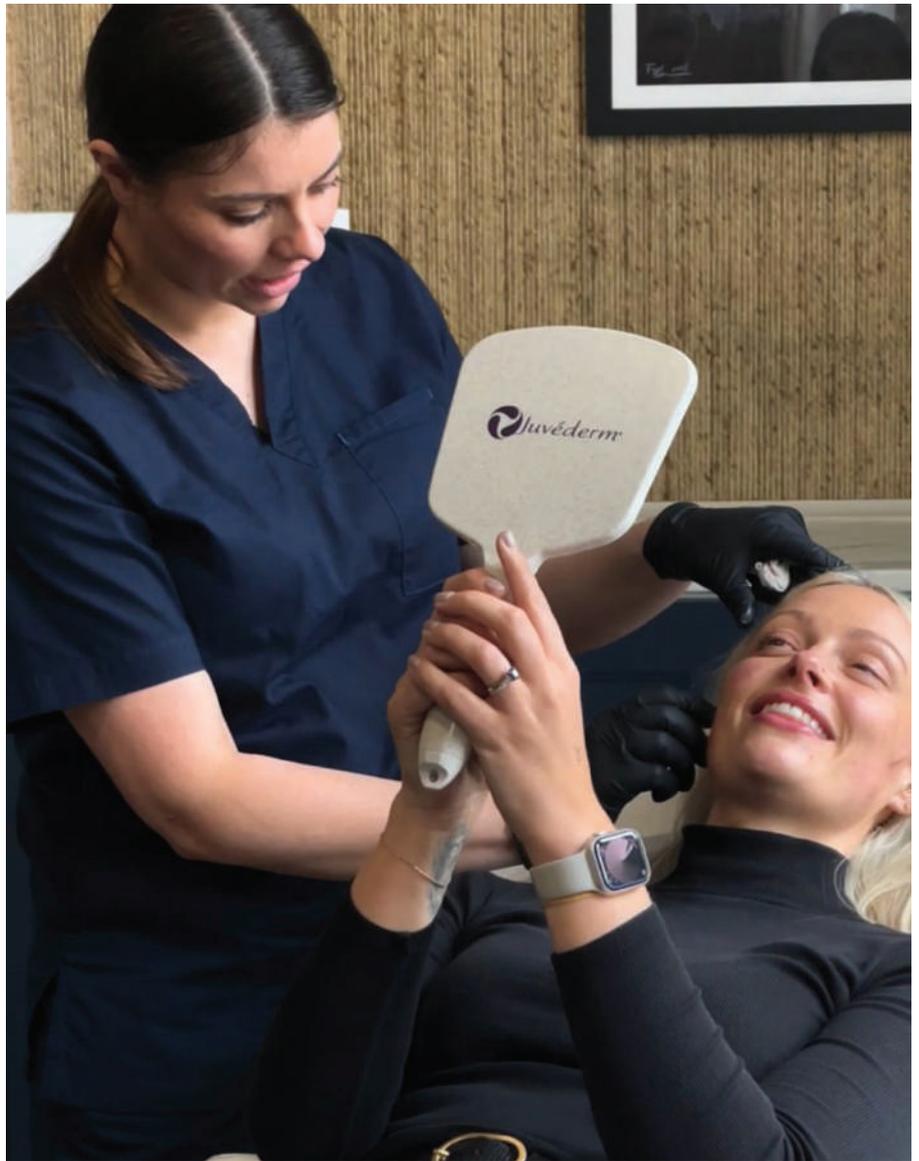
New beginnings rarely arrive quietly. More often, they emerge through uncertainty, challenge, and unexpected change.

As we step into 2026, I've been reflecting on the journey that shaped Self Medical Aesthetics and the new chapter unfolding as our clinic expands.

Building a clinic while raising two young boys, Ed (3) and James (1), has been one of the greatest challenges of my life. Their early months were marked by hospital admissions no parent ever feels prepared for. Balancing their needs with growing a business often felt overwhelming. Appointments were rescheduled, plans reshuffled, and there were moments when everything felt uncertain. I worried about letting people down, both at home and at work. Looking back, I'm not entirely sure how we navigated those years, but they taught me resilience, compassion, and perspective in ways nothing else could.

The foundations of SELF were laid even earlier. In 2020, after my dad passed away, I flew home from Australia where we had been preparing to immigrate. Overnight, our plans changed. With our savings gone and no clear direction, my partner and I moved into my sister's back bedroom to rebuild from scratch.

It was during that time I chose to step into aesthetics. My dad had encouraged it for years, but it was also a practical decision, a way to create stability and build a future for our family. My ex-partner launched his own business at the same time, often working long rotations away. It was a demanding and lonely season, but it shaped the values I would later pour into SELF: ambition grounded in integrity, courage in uncertainty, and an unwavering work ethic.



While working in my NHS role and studying late into the night, a clear vision began to form. I didn't want to create a clinic that simply delivered treatments. I wanted to build a space rooted in medical integrity, emotional intelligence, and the belief that confidence grows from thoughtful care, not quick correction. I wanted patients to feel seen as whole people: their skin, their wellbeing, their stories.

That vision became SELF; a clinic grounded in Medical-Led Confidence, honesty, and family values. From the beginning, we have challenged the transactional model that can dominate aesthetic medicine. We prioritise education, evidence-based decisions, and patient safety over trends. Patients deserve more than a treatment; they deserve a long-term plan, a partnership, and reassurance that their wellbeing comes first.

Now entering our third year, SELF is moving into a purposeful phase of growth. We are expanding our space, welcoming new team members, and strengthening our commitment to raising standards within the industry. This growth is intentional. It allows us to deepen our focus on regenerative medicine, medical-led skincare, and treatments that support the whole person, not just a single concern.

Expanding SELF also means expanding our mission. It means continuing to challenge the 'quick fix' culture and advocating for safer, more thoughtful pathways in aesthetic care. It means prioritising proper screening, honest conversations, and treatment plans that respect the complexity of skin, ageing, and emotion. It means building a clinic culture that understands real life, messy, busy, and beautiful, and supports patients through every season of it.

The challenges of our early years shaped my leadership more than any qualification ever could.

They taught me to lead with empathy, uphold high standards, and build a business that honours both patient and practitioner.

As we step into 2026, I feel deeply grateful, for the patients who trusted us from the beginning, for the mentors and colleagues who guided us, and for the opportunity to grow a clinic with purpose at its core.

SELF may have begun in uncertainty, but it has grown into something steady, intentional, and full of heart. This next chapter is only just beginning.

www.selfmedicaesthetics.com



Craig Robinson

As spring returns, so can your clarity

By Craig Robinson, Meditation Teacher (DipBSOM), Clear Mind Meditation

As we move towards spring, there's a familiar shift happening around us. The mornings brighten, the air softens, and there can be a quiet sense that life is beginning to open again. The weather has an affect on our mood, our thoughts. As we shift from the darkness and almost constant rainy days of Jan and Feb, let's feel into the freshness of spring, with a clearer mind.

This month, I want to explore our relationship with thoughts, because for most of us, it's the thoughts, not the circumstances, that create the tension we feel day to day. The mind is constantly producing commentary: planning, worrying, replaying, imagining. But here's the part we often forget: Underneath all of that mental activity, there is a natural stillness. A clarity that's always there. A place of peace. "Home".

We don't lose it. It just gets covered over by noise.

Most people assume their thoughts are telling the truth. That every thought needs attention, or action, or a reaction. But thoughts are simply movements of the mind, temporary, shifting, often inaccurate. They're not instructions. They're not warnings. They're not who we are.

The real issue isn't the thinking itself. It's that we rarely give ourselves the space to notice that we're thinking.

This is where meditation becomes genuinely transformative. When you sit quietly, even for a few minutes, and allow your attention to rest on the breath, something subtle but powerful happens: you begin to see the gap between you and your thoughts. You notice the stories without being pulled into them. You feel the body settle. You reconnect with the stillness that was there all along.

It's a bit like spring. The clarity isn't created, it's revealed. The light was always coming back; we just had to wait for it.

A simple practice you can try this month is to sit for a few minutes each morning and watch the breath. When a thought appears... and it will... just acknowledge it and let it pass, the same way you'd watch a cloud drift across a brightening sky. No judgement. No pressure. Just noticing.

If you want something a little more tangible, try this: Take a slow breath in and imagine drawing in clear, bright spring light. Hold it gently. Then as you exhale, imagine releasing the heaviness of the day before it even begins. Let the body soften. Let the mind unclench. With a bit of space, a bit of patience, and the natural lift that spring brings, you might find that clarity isn't something you have to work for. It's something you return to — something that's been waiting underneath your thoughts the whole time.

Enjoy.

www.clearmindmeditation.co.uk

Spring into strength

Why March is the perfect time to reset your energy.

By Cheryl Tanner, Cheryl Tanner fitness



March brings lighter mornings and a natural sense of renewal. Many of us feel the pull to reset our health. But for women navigating perimenopause or menopause, energy and motivation don't always return just because the season changes.

If you're feeling unusually tired, stiff, or frustrated that your old routines no longer work, it isn't a lack of willpower. It's biology.

During menopause, declining oestrogen affects how your body uses energy, maintains muscle and recovers from stress. It plays a key role in muscle strength, bone density and metabolic health. As levels shift, women often notice reduced energy, joint aches, increased body fat and a dip in confidence, especially if they're relying on the same exercise habits they used in their 30s.

This is where strength training becomes powerful. Building muscle isn't about punishing workouts. It's about supporting hormone health, improving insulin sensitivity, protecting bones and creating steadier energy. Just two to three well-structured sessions per week can improve posture, reduce aches, lift mood and help you feel capable in your body again.

March is the ideal time to begin, not with extremes, but with consistency. Good technique, progressive loading and proper recovery matter more than intensity. Pair this with balanced nutrition and adequate protein, and your body has what it needs to adapt rather than feel depleted.

Spring isn't about doing more. It's about doing what works now.

Consistency over perfection. Strength over burnout. Progress over pressure.

I'm officially opening a specialist strength studio for women navigating menopause at Linskill, North Shields.

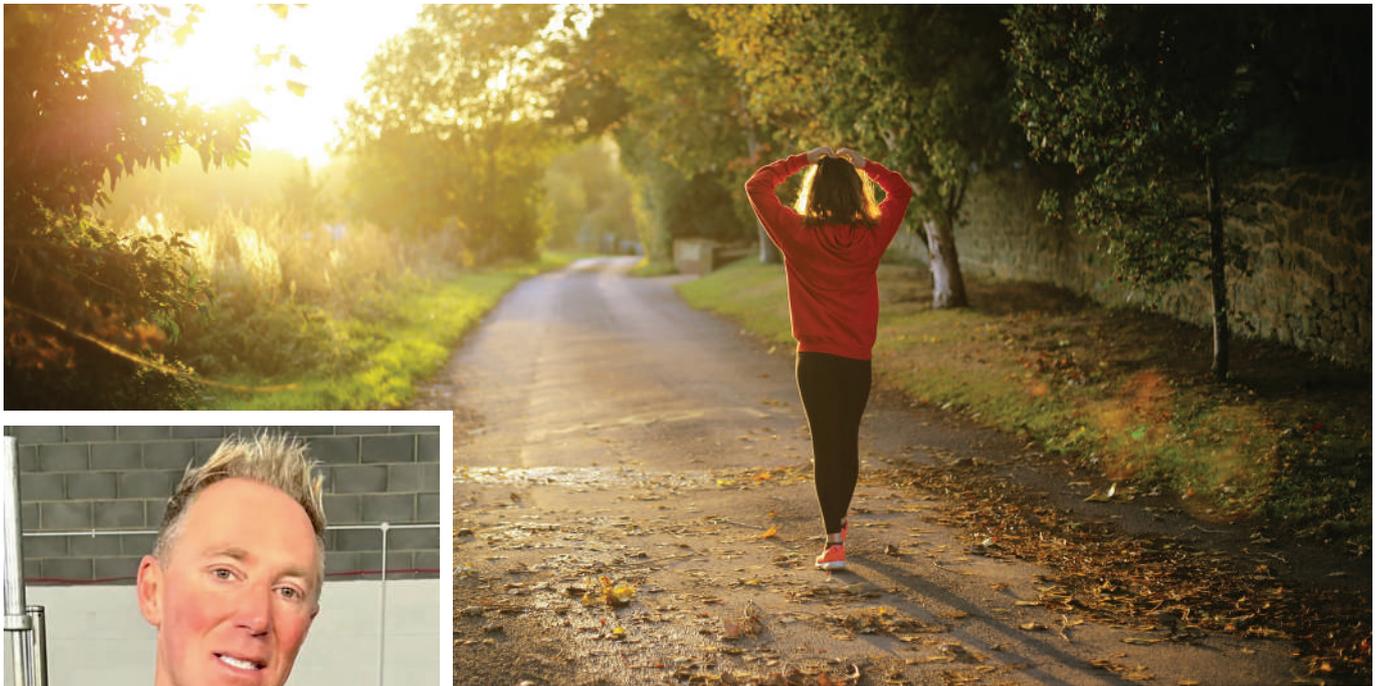
Scan the QR code to find out more and take the first step towards feeling strong, energised and confident again.



Scan me!



Cheryl Tanner, Menopause Fitness & Wellness Coach
cheryltannerpt.co.uk



David Fairlamb

Variety is the spice of life!

Sticking to just one type of exercise may not be the most effective way to stay healthy in the long term.

Research shows that including a variety of physical activities each week can improve overall health and may even help people live longer. Rather than repeating the same workout, mixing different types of exercise appears to offer extra benefits for both the body and the mind.

A large study followed more than 100,000 adults in the United States over a 30-year period to examine how exercise habits affected health. The researchers found that people who took part in the widest range of physical activities were around 19% less likely to die during the study than those who focused on just one type of exercise. This benefit was greater than the benefit linked to individual activities such as walking, jogging, or racket sports alone.

The total amount of exercise a person does is still very important. Regular physical activity helps protect against many health problems, including heart disease, lung conditions, and some cancers. However, this research suggests that combining different types of movement can provide even more protection.

One reason may be that different exercises support the body in different ways:

Aerobic activities improve heart and lung health, such as:

- Brisk walking
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Dancing

Vigorous activities raise fitness levels more quickly, including:

- Running
- Football or hockey
- Fast swimming
- Climbing stairs

Strength-building exercises help maintain muscle and bone strength, such as:

- Weight training
- Yoga or Pilates
- Bodyweight exercises
- Carrying heavy shopping

By combining these, people can develop fitness, strength, flexibility, and balance all at the same time.

Variety can also make exercise easier to stick to. Repeating the same routine every week can become boring or tiring, while having different options allows people to choose activities that suit their mood or energy levels. On days when intense exercise feels too demanding, gentler movement can still be beneficial.

A mixed routine can also support mental wellbeing. Some activities help reduce stress and promote relaxation, while others boost energy or provide a sense of achievement.

Social activities, such as team sports or group classes, can also help people stay motivated and connected.

If you're not sure where to start, here at DF Fitness we offer a wide range of sessions that allow clients to mix their training and cover all areas, including:

Daily Strength Classes

VersaClimber 30-minute classes suitable for all levels

Small Group 6-week Body Transformation programmes

- Personal Training
- Outdoor Strength Classes
- Over-60s Classes

Beach Bootcamps at Tynemouth Longsands

2-week Body Boost Course

Health guidelines recommend that adults aim for:

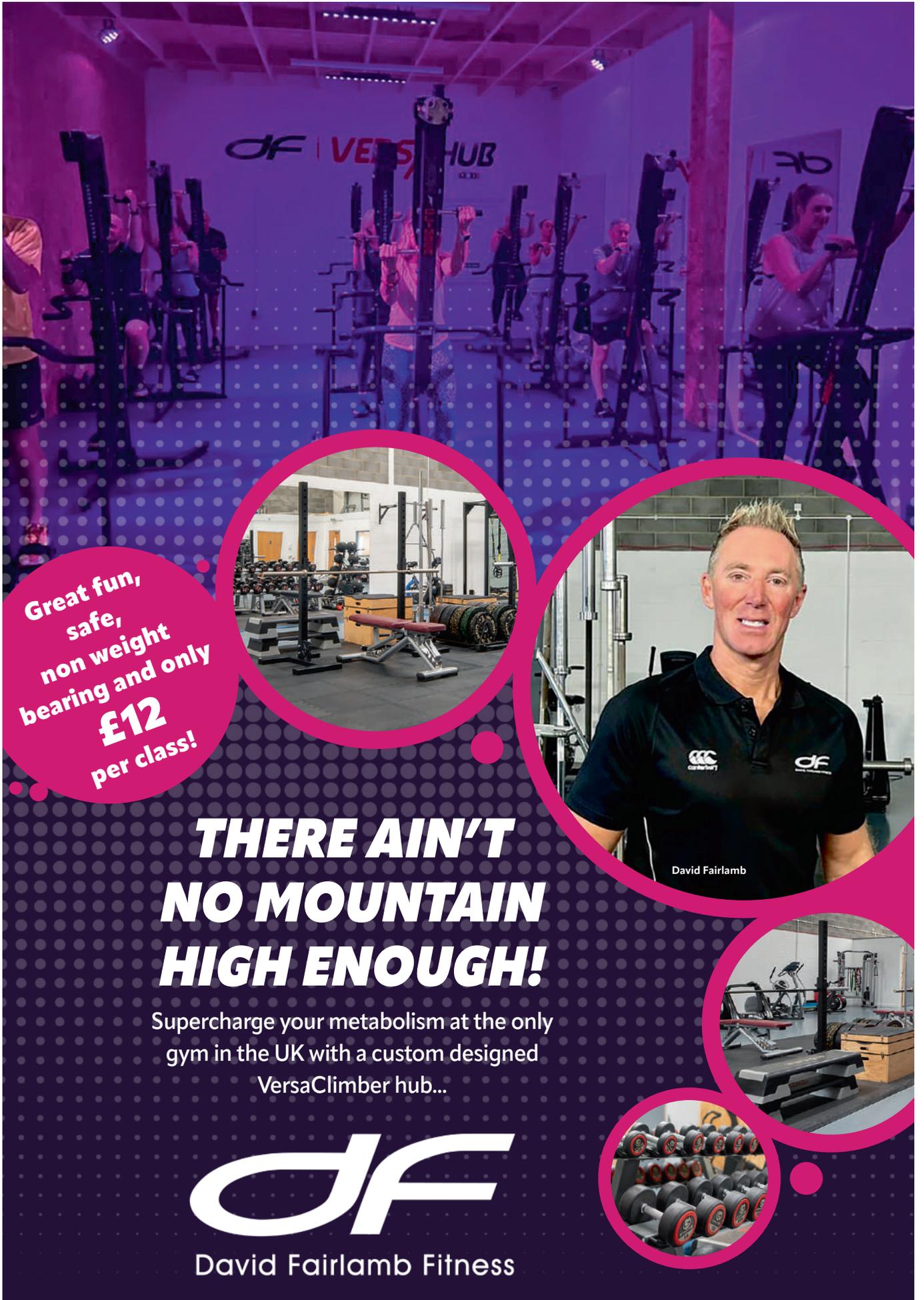
- At least 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week
- Muscle-strengthening exercises on at least two days per week
- Activity spread across several days
- Less time spent sitting or being inactive

The study found that around six hours of moderate activity or three hours of vigorous activity per week provided the greatest health benefits, with little additional gain beyond that level.

davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up

While the research cannot prove that exercise variety directly causes a longer life, the results strongly suggest that staying active in different ways is linked to better health. The overall message is to move regularly, mix your activities, and choose exercises you enjoy to support your long-term physical and mental wellbeing.



Great fun,
safe,
non weight
bearing and only
£12
per class!



David Fairlamb

THERE AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH!

Supercharge your metabolism at the only
gym in the UK with a custom designed
VersaClimber hub...



df

David Fairlamb Fitness



Imagine if distinction was matched with success

For over 10 years we've continued to build a passionate team that work tirelessly to help protect, serve and support our clients each and everyday. We see nothing but potential in our people, our community and you.

Imagine, together what we could do.

emgsolicitors

#ImagineALawFirm

