

FORSTERS

CSR at Forsters

2020 / 21
HIGHLIGHTS

2021 / 22
PREVIEW

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“At Forsters we have always believed in supporting and promoting the things that matter. Within our firm community we know that an inclusive and supportive culture, which values the development, wellbeing and happiness of all our people, is critical to our ability to provide the right service to our clients and critical to our continued success. We positively enjoy engaging and forming partnerships with people and organisations in our local community and beyond, sharing the enthusiasm and skills we have to contribute to wider society. We also recognise that we are part of a global community and that, as a successful business, we have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to be a positive influence by taking action to support equality and environmental sustainability. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity has long been part of life at Forsters and, as I see it, our continued commitment to CSR is completely consistent with our values and sense of who we want to be as a business.”

Emily Exton, Managing Partner

As we transition from lockdown to a gradual return to office life, it's impressive and inspiring to look back over the 2020/21 year from a Corporate Social Responsibility perspective and see how well we did over what was a difficult year in so many ways. I'd like to say thank you and well done to everyone involved in CSR.

In 2020/21, we recorded 1700 hours of CSR and pro bono work. We responded to the pandemic immediately, signing up to the Covid-19 Business Pledge, and we kept up momentum through volunteering, supporting the Trussell Trust and other emergency funding appeals, and being mindful of the mental health and wellbeing of those in the firm. In spite of the pandemic, we continued to undertake work with our charity partner, St Andrew's Club, we introduced CSR Days, we contributed pro bono legal expertise, and we made some fantastic progress on our EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) and sustainability work.

January 2021 saw the appointment of Lizzie Heighway, our dedicated CSR Executive, who has brought enthusiasm, expertise and drive to the CSR work we do and is making a significant difference to the plans we have for the years ahead. In 2021/22, we look forward to returning to face to face activity again, including restarting our refugee lunch club and school reading scheme. We are preparing to make further public commitments relating to our sustainability, EDI and pro bono work, and more information will follow about these over the course of the year.

We have also recently integrated CSR into the annual review process, to embed CSR into our work processes and to encourage everyone to share what they have been doing on the CSR front.

Many thanks again to everyone who contributed to CSR activity during the 2020-2021 year and to those who continue to do so.

Kelly Noel-Smith



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CSR at Forsters is broadly broken down into the following categories:



Charity and community initiatives

We have a charity partnership with St Andrew's Club, refugee lunch club and primary school reading scheme, CSR Days and a firm charitable trust.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Including an active EDI committee and sub-groups, use of the Rare Contextual Recruitment Tool and work with Bright Network to widen access to the firm.



Sustainability

We have been a carbon neutral firm since 2007 and were shortlisted for a LexisNexis Award for Sustainability in 2020. We have an active committee (Green Impact Group) and Sustainability Board, which guide sustainability work in the firm.



Pro bono work

Work includes supporting The Chancery Lane project and Solace Women's Aid. We recorded 1700 hours of CSR and pro bono work during the 2020-2021 year.



Wellbeing

We were shortlisted for a LexisNexis Award for Wellbeing in 2020 and have achieved a Silver award in the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index for the last four years.

The following pages contain highlights from the 2020 – 2021 year and what is planned for the coming year.





St Andrew's Club partnership

St Andrew's Club has been the firm's charity partner for the last two years. The Club does fantastic work supporting young people in Westminster.

Our partnership looked a little different during 2020-2021 as we were not able to visit. However we have still been able to support the Club and it has been amazing to see how they have adapted their support for the young people they work with.

Our activity during 2020 – 2021 included:

- Joining their virtual 10k walk in September and joining their virtual quiz in November
- Providing activities for the young people
- Supporting their operations – thank you to Andrew Neave, Joe Beeston and Nicole Borg, who have provided legal and learning and development support to the Club.

Our fundraising:

Over the 2020-2021 year we raised just over £15,000 for the Club. This included:

- A 12 Days of Christmas raffle and Christmas jumper day
- Staff donating their Christmas vouchers (this also raised £2,900 for Solace Women's Aid)
- Donating money from filming held in our offices
- Donating money from a cancelled event
- An Easter raffle
- Donations from the Forsters Charitable Trust.

To find out more about the great work the Club does, see [here](#).



Baking competition at St Andrew's Club - pre-pandemic (Left).

Forsters Charitable Trust

The Forsters Charitable Trust is a grant-making charity set up in 1998. The partners make annual contributions to the charity, which enable it to respond to appeals from clients and members of staff and support many charitable causes each year.

During 2020-2021 the Trust helped to alleviate financial distress arising from the pandemic and ran a Christmas appeal, in which staff were invited to nominate charities needing support.

The organisations which received contributions from the Trust during the year included:

St Andrew's Club; Little Village; Ronald McDonald House Charities; Enfield Carers; Crisis; Tantum Trust; Salvation Army; Sikh Welfare and Awareness Team; Dons Local Action Group (Wimbledon); Bold Vision (Lewisham); Digging Deep for Myanmar; The Daryl Jelinek Memorial Scholarship and other pandemic emergency appeals.

Other staff fundraising

Teams or individuals in the firm regularly undertake sporting and other challenges in support of charitable causes. This year many of those activities have been postponed, however members of the firm did take part in the annual London Legal Walk, raising money for legal aid organisations, and more recently members of staff have taken part in a London 2 Brighton Challenge raising money for London Air Ambulance, and Fiera Real Estate's Covid-19 Fundraiser, raising money for Duty to Care, which provides wellbeing/mental health support for healthcare professionals affected by the pandemic.

Karen Hepworth gardening with Bankside Open Spaces Trust (Left).

CSR Days

The firm introduced a CSR Day policy during 2020, which allows every member of staff to volunteer during working hours on one full day or two half days each calendar year.

Staff can choose the charitable organisation they'd like to support, and the Forsters Charitable Trust will often contribute to that organisation.

Despite being in lockdown for much of the year, several members of the firm have been able to use their CSR Day, including a day of gardening work with Bankside Open Spaces Trust, a day of packing Christmas hampers for elderly residents with a local housing association, a day donating marketing skills to launch an auction sale for a social enterprise, time spent collecting food for a local foodbank and volunteering at a local vaccination centre.



Supporting communities during the pandemic

At the start of the first lockdown, the firm signed the Covid-19 Business Pledge, launched by former cabinet minister Justine Greening to encourage businesses to commit to doing what they can to support staff, clients and the wider community during the pandemic.

We've made our C-19 Business Pledge



Our support included:

- Contributing to the Trussel Trust, which runs food banks across the UK, and to emergency funds set up by charities such as the Care Workers' Charity, East End Community Foundation, Dare to Care, and Computers for Kids in South East London.
- Supporting St Martin's Trust by donating food parcels on Saturdays, in place of our usual Thursday Lunch Club – a particular mention goes to Horace Gooden, Laura Hattrell and Jack Beeston – and fundraising to support Lunch Club guests who couldn't be accommodated through the local authority pandemic provision.
- Taking on additional pro bono legal work to support victims of domestic abuse who were in lockdown in unsafe situations.

Members of the firm also volunteered to support their local communities, including:

Nichola Padget – volunteering with Waste Not Want Not Battersea, an organisation donating daily food parcels to the local community using unsold produce from Covent Garden market.

Zahava Lever – volunteering with Dare to Care, which delivered essentials to isolated and shielding individuals across London and PPE to the NHS.

Kelly Noel-Smith – adapting her volunteer counselling work with Cruse Bereavement to provide support online and over the telephone.

Melody Green – sewing laundry bags for NHS staff to take home their clothes to wash in, to prevent the spread of the virus within their homes.

Karen Hepworth – using her gardening skills and training to run a weekly socially distanced gardening group in the community garden close to her flat.

We know that many members of the firm are still doing a lot to volunteer their time and support vulnerable neighbours and family members, and we are proud of everyone's efforts.

The events of 2020 put the work of the EDI Committee into sharp focus, and the committee has considerably grown in the last year. We now have infrastructure established to raise awareness and understanding through celebrating key EDI events, and in 2020-2021 this has included:

- **Pride**

In 2020 we celebrated Pride through circulating resources, sharing messages and articles about what Pride means to members of the firm, and holding a virtual Pride bake off. In 2021 we celebrated Pride month with a discussion with barrister and social commentator Mohsin Zaidi, and by launching our LGBTQ+ Support Network.

- **Black History Month 2020**

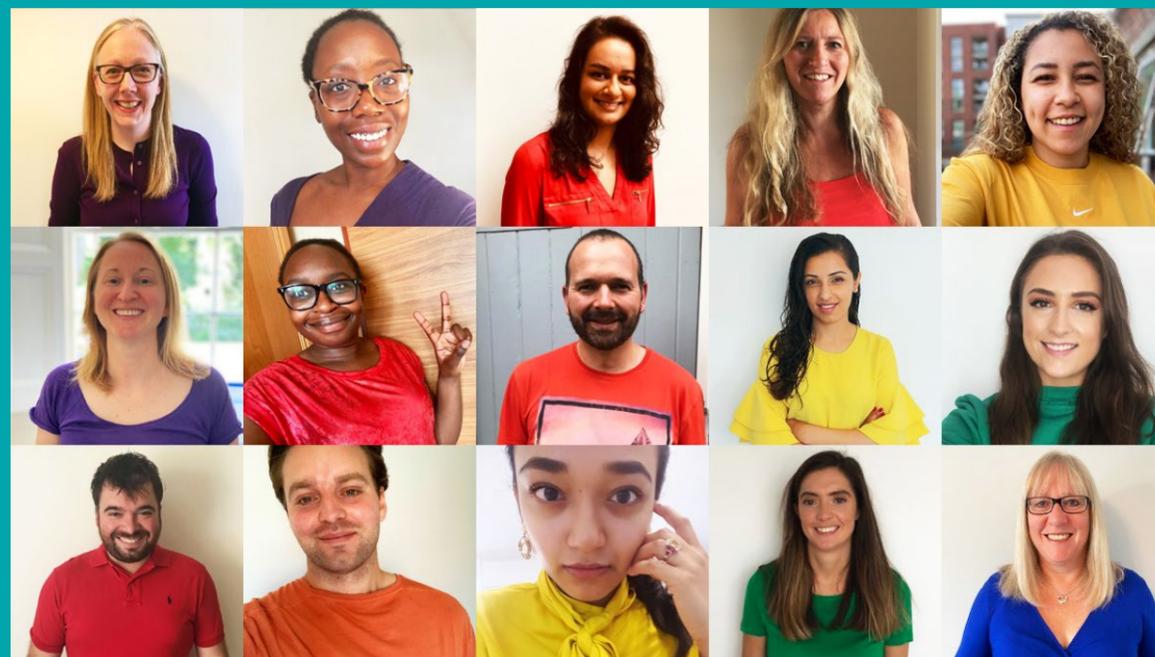
Celebrated through weekly newsletters with resources and personal stories, and a speaker event with Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu.



- **International Women's Day**

In 2020 we celebrated International Women's Day with a fantastic talk from Martine Wright, 7/7 survivor and paralympian. This year we held a panel event, with female leaders from the firm sharing their experiences and how we can encourage gender equality.

We have also circulated information and resources around other notable dates, including Race Equality Week and LGBTQ+ History Month, and we look forward to face to face events happening again in the next year.



EDI Committee 2020 Pride photo

EDI support networks

In 2021 we also started launching our support networks, with partner sponsors and committee members taking a lead in organising these groups. Our Race Support Network and Working Parents and Carers groups have launched and already had several productive and informative conversations. We launched our LGBTQ+ network during Pride month in June, and we look forward to launching Disability, Faith, Gender and Social Mobility networks over the rest of the year.

Looking ahead

We have substantial plans to build on our diversity and inclusion work over the next year, including undertaking a firmwide EDI survey, making further external EDI commitments, and beginning implementation of a firmwide strategy that will enable us to build on our strong history of gender diversity and increase diversity in other areas.

You can see more about our EDI work and commitments [here](#).

2020-2021 SUSTAINABILITY HIGHLIGHTS

LexisNexis

Legal Awards 2020

We were pleased to be shortlisted for a LexisNexis Sustainability Award at the start of 2020.

LSA
Legal Sustainability Alliance



We joined the Legal Sustainability Alliance and the Sustainable Recruitment Alliance.



We launched a Sustainability Board, comprising senior leaders in the firm, which is responsible for ensuring sustainability is at the heart of the firm's decision-making.



We renewed our carbon neutral status (covering 2019-2020 emissions). We are in the process of calculating our 2020-2021 emissions, which we will offset.

FORSTERS
#FORSUSTAINABILITY

We launched our #FORSustainability hub, an online resource that brings together our legal insights on environmental and sustainability matters that affect our clients' business and personal affairs.

Emissions across our operations

We switched to renewable electricity sources across all four of our offices.

Looking ahead

As we move back to work from our offices, we look forward to building on some of the sustainable practices we've been able to develop in lockdown. This includes:

- **Printing:** in 2020-2021 our printing levels dropped by around two thirds compared with 2019-2020, as people were mainly working from home and printing less. We will be working to keep this number down, and in 2021-2022 we will be launching a printing taskforce to support this.
- **Travel:** the reduction in travel during 2020-2021 has also been significant – we took far fewer flights compared with the previous year. Whilst acknowledging that a good proportion of our business depends on the ability to travel, we are actively looking to set an ambitious target for reducing our carbon emissions through flights and other travel.
- **Emission reduction target:** during the coming year we will be setting a target for reducing our carbon emissions.

There is more information on our current sustainability practices [here](#).

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Pro bono

Over the last year many of our lawyers have been involved in pro bono work and lawyers at all levels of the firm are encouraged to be involved.

The firm has recently become a signatory to the Joint Pro Bono Protocol for Legal Work and established a pro bono committee (led by Counsel Neasa Coen and Joe Beeston). During 2021-2022, the committee will be looking at ways to structure the firm's pro bono work and identify initiatives to support.

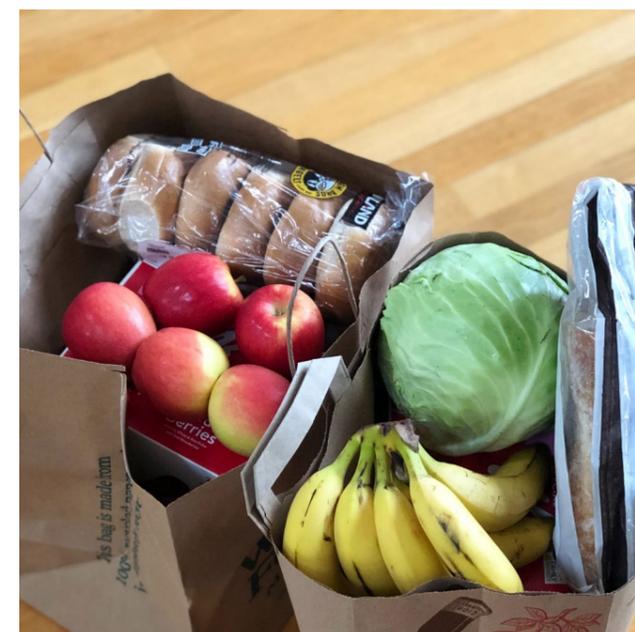
Some examples of the work members of the firm have been involved in recently are below:

The Chancery Lane Project

Several lawyers in the firm are involved with the work of The Chancery Lane Project, a collaborative legal effort that is tackling climate change through drafting and publishing legal precedents that support environmental sustainability.

Miri Strickland, Knowledge Development Lawyer, has recently been drafting model clauses that encourage the inclusion of sustainable and circular economy principles in lease obligations relating to repair and alterations, to ensure landlords and tenants maximise the use of reclaimed, recycled and recyclable products.

Holly Badi, Associate, has been drafting a model green service charge clause called "Hannah's Clause", which will be published online in due course.



Bromley Borough Foodbank

Ben Brayford, Partner, and **Doneen Ennis**, Paralegal, have been acting for Bromley Borough Foodbank in relation to the new ten-year lease they are taking of replacement warehouse facilities. Ben and Doneen have been advising the foodbank throughout the letting process – providing advice at the initial heads of terms stage as well as negotiating the lease and ancillary letting documentation.

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Green Impact Group



Green Impact Group River Lea cleanup

The firm's Green Impact Group (GIG) has had to adapt its approach this year, and we were sad to miss events like our annual River Lea clean-up, Walk to Work Day barbecue and others.

GIG organised a webinar in September 2020 so staff could vote on carbon offsetting project options. Throughout the year GIG has been providing tips on how we can live more sustainably, especially at home, including wildlife and garden projects, sustainable gift and wrapping ideas at Christmas time, sustainable food ideas, and recycling tips on Global

Recycling Day. We have also started a GIG Book Club, looking at sustainability-related books.

Over the next year, GIG hopes to get back to face to face events and awareness sessions, and also encourage longer term change based on some of the environmentally sustainable working practices we've been able to adopt for the last year.

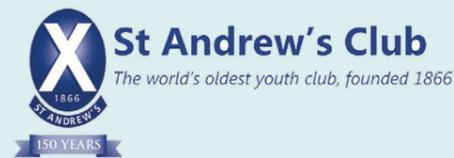


Walk to work BBQ



St Andrew's Club

Joe Beeston, Counsel, has recently worked with the firm's partner charity, St Andrew's Club, assisting them to update their staff documentation, including preparing an up-to-date staff handbook (which includes all the mandatory policies and procedures) and preparing template employment contracts for future hires. **Andrew Neave**, Legal Assistant, has also recently assisted the Club with a special resolution to update its articles of association.

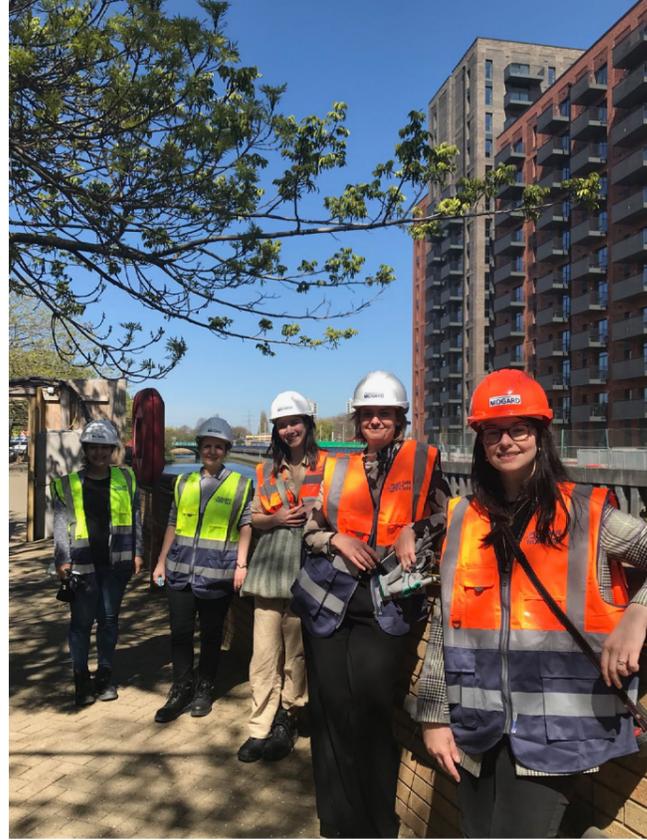


Supporting Legal Aid Centres

A number of our Associates have been volunteering with legal advice centres, in Westminster and Waterloo, including supporting virtual clinics during lockdowns.

Jack Beeston, Associate, has been volunteering at the South Westminster Legal Advice Centre for two years. Based in Victoria, the Centre provides walk-in legal advice in a range of areas, from housing and property Law to family and immigration. Jack's volunteering there focuses on providing initial pro bono property law advice. Since the start of the pandemic, the Centre has focussed on the provision of remote advice.

Tom Mawson, Associate, has also been volunteering at the South Westminster Legal Advice Centre for two years and has given initial advice on a wide range of issues, from difficulties with landlords, to unpaid invoices, to someone concerned that her mother had been unlawfully cremated.



East End Women's Museum

Sarupe Uppal, Associate, is working with The East End Women's Museum (EEWM) on a pro bono basis as they secure their permanent home in Barking to be opened in mid 2022. Sarupe is providing EEWM with real estate advice on this exciting project alongside consultant, **Sarah Pass**. Construction Partner **Emily Holdstock** and Paralegal **Hannah Punshon** are providing construction advice on the fit-out of the Museum. Once the Museum opens, it will be the only dedicated women's museum in England. EEWM seeks to record, research, share and celebrate the stories of East London women past and present – see more about their work [here](#).

Stonewall

This year **Jonathan Lyness**, Associate in the Family team, and **Joe Beeston**, Counsel in the Employment team, have been supporting Stonewall on their upcoming guide to family formation and co-parenting, providing a legal perspective on Parental Responsibility, legal parenthood, surrogacy and fertility for the LGBTQ+ community.

CABI

CAB International (CABI) is an inter-governmental, not-for-profit organisation that provides information and applies scientific expertise worldwide to solve problems in agriculture and the environment. It operates under a United Nations registered international treaty with 50 member countries.

Anne O'Neill, Joanna Brown and Laura Haworth have worked with them for nearly 10 years in a complex and long running transaction to enable them to develop a new UK headquarters building which reflects their global environmental credentials without using their members funds! The work involved many different property elements including managing occupational tenancies, planning and development sale with complex co-operation provisions to allow for a joint development of interlinked sites.

The new building builds on CABI's commitment towards a sustainable world - the innovative design leaves less of a carbon footprint, with solar energy, natural ventilation and lighting systems which reduce demand for electric lighting.



Family team

The Family team at Forsters has a long history of undertaking pro bono work.

In the last year they have increased their pro bono work to support victims of domestic abuse, in response to the sad rise in cases due to the pandemic. They have provided pro bono assistance through assisting vulnerable people or through various charities. Specifically, the Family team regularly volunteer and help domestic abuse survivors by supporting the work of Solace Women's Aid, RISE and Citizens Advice.

The Family team's work has included:

- Preparing proforma statements, applications and draft orders for those in need.
- Making urgent applications for court orders and putting survivors of domestic abuse in touch with local support services.
- Connecting with respected barristers to advocate for survivors at hearings.
- Advising on cases, including to obtain a non-molestation order at the Central Family Court, and work with a victim of domestic abuse to achieve a financial outcome that enabled them to move into new accommodation with their child.
- Supporting Citizens Advice by establishing the Honorary Legal Advisors platform to answer family law enquiries received in London, which will operate a virtual clinic once per month.
- Participating in Cambridge University Law Society's domestic abuse panel to help raise awareness about the issues that survivors face and encourage students to volunteer.

The Family team has also acted pro bono in notable cases involving complex financial and children issues, such as the respondent for the reported case of *Goyal v Goyal* [2017] EWFC 1 at the Court of Appeal. The Family team has worked hard to provide pro bono support to vulnerable people experiencing relationship issues.

The team's work was published in [The Law Society Gazette](#).



Looking ahead

There is still more we can be doing to support the wellbeing of our people.

As well as continuing our ongoing education, support and awareness raising programmes, this year we will also be focusing on our lived experience of our day to day roles as providers of legal or business support services. This will involve hosting live wellbeing panel sessions with members of the firm and we will also be working with each team to develop a Wellbeing Charter or action plan.

Our regular wellbeing programme includes:

- A wellbeing communication and events programme, including:
 - A bi-monthly newsletter containing tips, information and stories of staff lived experiences
 - Wellbeing walks and coffee mornings
 - Monthly wellbeing events to encourage staff to focus on their own health and wellbeing, e.g. webinars and information sessions on topics like nutrition, resilience and specific health conditions
- Wellbeing training for all staff and specialist training for line managers to support mental health issues
- Firmwide activity groups (e.g. a Running Club, Book Club, Choir and yoga sessions)
- Private health insurance and other benefits that support health and wellbeing
- Access to mental health support, including mental health first aider support, 1:1 counselling sessions, and an employee assistance programme.

MIND wellbeing index

We were really pleased to retain our Silver Award status in the Annual Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index in 2020 and 2021.

Our Managing Partner, Emily Exton, was also shortlisted for a Mind Senior Leader employee recognition award in 2021.

Some of the findings from the survey are below.

The feedback we receive in the survey informs our approach to wellbeing, and you can see on the right what we will be doing this year.



As well as playing our part in making a positive contribution to wider society, we also recognise the importance of supporting those in the firm.

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of everyone at Forsters is central to our ethos, and in this particularly challenging year we have needed to adapt our regular wellbeing programme, and also do more, to ensure people have had the flexibility and support they needed.

We were really pleased to be shortlisted in the Wellbeing category at the LexisNexis Legal Awards in 2020, and also be shortlisted in the Best Law Firm for Work Life Balance category in the 2021 Legal Cheek awards, as ranked by trainees and junior lawyers.

During the pandemic we:

- Rolled out firmwide wellbeing training for all staff
- Hosted webinars on topics such as 'Dealing with grief' and 'Navigating the new normal'
- Continued to share information, resources and personal stories
- Hosted regular wellbeing coffee mornings on Zoom
- Moved our existing wellbeing provision online, including yoga classes and one to one counselling sessions
- Posted wellbeing-related gifts to staff
- Launched e-cards, to celebrate success and thank colleagues.

We are grateful to everyone who has stepped up to lead discussions, support colleagues or share their stories over the year.



