

AWARD CATEGORIES & CRITERIA

SLS LEGAL AWARDS

SHOWCASING SURREY'S LEGAL TALENT



FIRM AWARDS

Law Firm of the Year (16+ Fee Earners)

Judges will be looking for a firm that has demonstrated outstanding performance and leadership over the past 12 months.

Entries should highlight:

- Strong reputation and professional profile within the legal sector and wider community.
- Evidence of strong performance and progress over the past 12 months, which may include growth, strategic initiatives or other measurable achievements.
- Excellence in client service, supported by testimonials, feedback or measurable outcomes.
- Effective leadership and management, demonstrating how the firm supports and motivates its people to achieve excellent results.
- Commitment to a positive and inclusive workplace culture, including staff development, wellbeing, training and engagement.
- Innovation and forward thinking, including the use of technology or new approaches to delivering legal services.
- Positive contribution to the profession or wider community, including CSR or pro bono initiatives.

Firms should demonstrate a clear vision for their business and tangible achievements over the past year. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, accreditations, awards or performance results.

Law Firm of the Year (Up to 15 Fee Earners)

This award recognises an outstanding smaller practice that has demonstrated excellence, strong client relationships and a clear vision for its future.

Judges will consider:

- Reputation and impact within the local legal market or community.
- Exceptional client care, including evidence of strong relationships and client feedback.
- Strong leadership and direction within a smaller firm environment.
- Commitment to creating a positive and inclusive working culture, including staff development and wellbeing.
- Innovation, adaptability or entrepreneurial approaches to developing and growing the practice.
- Contribution to the local community or legal profession.
- Evidence of progress or success over the past 12 months, which may include growth, new services or other achievements.

Entries should demonstrate how the firm has developed, evolved or achieved notable success during the past year. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, accreditations, awards or examples of results achieved.

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Client Experience Award

This award recognises firms that place clients at the heart of everything they do, delivering outstanding service and creating positive, memorable client experiences.

Judges will be looking for clear evidence of a strong client-focused approach. Entries may highlight:

- A client-centred approach, demonstrating how services are tailored to meet individual client needs.
- Excellent communication and transparency, including clear advice, accessible information and transparent fee structures.
- Accessibility and responsiveness, ensuring clients can easily engage with the firm and receive timely support.
- Innovative approaches to client service, including the use of technology, new processes or creative initiatives that enhance the client experience.
- Use of client feedback to drive improvement, including reviews, testimonials or satisfaction data.
- Strong client relationships, demonstrated through repeat work, referrals or long-term client partnerships.

Entries should demonstrate how the firm has delivered an outstanding client experience over the past 12 months. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, client feedback, reviews or examples of initiatives introduced.

Community Impact Award

NEW CATEGORY FOR 2026

This award recognises a firm or individual within the legal profession who has made a meaningful and positive contribution to the local community or the wider legal profession. Nominations may be submitted for either a law firm, legal organisation, or an individual working within the legal sector.

Judges will be looking for a genuine commitment to social responsibility and initiatives that make a difference beyond core legal work. Entries may highlight:

- Community engagement initiatives, such as partnerships with local charities, schools or community organisations.
- Pro bono legal work or initiatives supporting access to justice.
- Volunteering, fundraising or charitable activities.
- Mentoring or outreach initiatives supporting education or the legal profession.
- Long-term commitment to a particular cause or community project.
- Evidence of positive impact, including testimonials, outcomes or measurable results.

Entries should demonstrate how the nominee's activities have made a tangible difference over the past 12 months. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, case studies, fundraising outcomes or examples of community partnerships.

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Employer of the Year

This award recognises a firm that has created an outstanding workplace culture and demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting, developing and engaging its people.

Judges will consider evidence of a positive and supportive working environment. Entries may highlight:

- A positive and inclusive workplace culture, where staff feel valued and supported.
- Strong leadership, fostering trust, collaboration and engagement across the organisation.
- Commitment to staff development, including training, mentoring or career progression opportunities.
- Initiatives that support staff wellbeing, including policies, programmes or benefits that promote a healthy work-life balance.
- Recognition and reward, celebrating staff achievements and contributions.
- Evidence of strong employee engagement, such as retention, feedback or testimonials from staff.

Entries should demonstrate how the firm has created an environment where people thrive and are motivated to perform at their best. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, staff feedback, engagement initiatives or examples of measurable impact.

TEAM AWARDS

Family Law Team of the Year

This award recognises an outstanding family law team that has demonstrated excellence in legal practice and client service over the past 12 months.

Judges will be looking for teams that deliver high-quality legal services while supporting clients through complex and often sensitive matters. Entries may highlight:

- Excellence in family law practice, including the quality of legal advice and outcomes achieved for clients.
- Exceptional client care, particularly in supporting clients through complex or emotionally challenging situations.
- Strong teamwork and collaboration within the team and across the wider firm.
- Effective collaboration with other professionals or organisations where appropriate to support the best outcomes for clients.
- Innovation or best practice in family law, including new approaches, processes or initiatives that improve client service.
- Notable achievements during the past 12 months, such as significant matters handled, team developments or other successes.

Entries should demonstrate how the team has worked together to deliver excellent outcomes for clients and contribute positively to the practice of family law. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of work undertaken, or other relevant achievements.

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Private Client Team of the Year

This award recognises an outstanding private client team that has demonstrated excellence in legal practice and client service over the past 12 months.

Judges will be looking for teams that deliver high-quality advice while supporting clients through complex personal and financial matters. Entries may highlight:

- Excellence in private client practice, including the quality of legal advice and outcomes achieved for clients.
- Exceptional client care, particularly in building trusted long-term relationships with individuals and families.
- Strong teamwork and collaboration within the team and across the wider firm.
- Effective collaboration with other professionals or organisations where appropriate to support the best outcomes for clients.
- Innovation or best practice in private client work, including new approaches, processes or initiatives that enhance client service.
- Notable achievements during the past 12 months, such as complex matters handled, team developments or other successes.

Entries should demonstrate how the team has worked together to deliver excellent outcomes for clients and contribute positively to private client practice. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of work undertaken, or other relevant achievements.

Property Law Team of the Year

This award recognises an outstanding property law team that has demonstrated excellence in legal practice and client service over the past 12 months. Entries are welcome from teams practising in residential or commercial property, including specialists in conveyancing, landlord and tenant matters and other property-related work.

Judges will be looking for teams that deliver high-quality legal services while effectively managing complex transactions and providing excellent support to clients. Entries may highlight:

- Excellence in property law practice, including the quality of legal advice and outcomes achieved for clients.
- Exceptional client care, particularly in managing transactions efficiently and keeping clients informed throughout the process.
- Strong teamwork and collaboration within the property team and across the wider firm.
- Effective collaboration with other professionals or organisations, where appropriate, to support the best outcomes for clients.
- Innovation or best practice in property law, including new approaches, processes or technology that enhance service delivery.
- Notable achievements during the past 12 months, such as significant transactions, team developments or other successes.

Entries should demonstrate how the team has worked together to deliver excellent outcomes for clients and contribute positively to the practice of property law. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of work undertaken or other relevant achievements.

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Legal Team of the Year

NEW CATEGORY FOR 2026

This award recognises an outstanding legal team that has demonstrated excellence in its area of practice over the past 12 months. This category is open to legal teams working in practice areas not otherwise recognised within the awards, such as litigation, corporate or commercial law, employment, regulatory or other specialist fields. Judges will be looking for teams that deliver high-quality legal services, work collaboratively and achieve excellent outcomes for their clients. Entries may highlight:

- Excellence in legal practice, including the quality of advice and outcomes achieved for clients.
- Exceptional client service, supported by testimonials or evidence of strong client relationships.
- Strong teamwork and collaboration within the team and across the wider firm.
- Effective collaboration with other professionals or organisations, where appropriate, to support the best outcomes for clients.
- Innovation or best practice, including new approaches, processes or initiatives that enhance legal service delivery.
- Notable achievements during the past 12 months, such as significant matters handled, team developments or other successes.

Entries should demonstrate how the team has worked together to deliver excellent outcomes for clients and contribute positively to their area of legal practice. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of work undertaken or other relevant achievements.

INDIVIDUAL & PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Innovation in Legal Services Award

NEW CATEGORY FOR 2026

This award recognises a firm, team or individual that has introduced an innovative initiative which has significantly improved the delivery of legal services. Innovation may relate to the use of technology, new ways of working, service delivery improvements or creative approaches to solving challenges within the legal profession. Innovations may be developed internally or in collaboration with external partners or suppliers. Judges will be looking for initiatives that demonstrate originality, impact and measurable benefits for clients, colleagues or the wider profession. Entries may highlight:

- Innovative ideas or initiatives that improve the delivery of legal services.
- Use of technology or new processes to enhance efficiency, accessibility or client experience.
- Creative solutions to challenges within legal practice or firm management.
- Collaboration with colleagues or external partners, where relevant, to develop or deliver the innovation.
- Measurable impact, such as improved client service, efficiency, accessibility or business performance.
- Evidence of success, including outcomes, adoption within the firm or wider sector.

Entries should demonstrate how the initiative has made a meaningful difference to legal practice or client service over the past 12 months. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, case studies, examples of the initiative in practice or measurable outcomes.

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Lifetime Achievement Award

The Lifetime Achievement Award recognises an individual who has made an outstanding and lasting contribution to the legal profession in Surrey over the course of their career. This prestigious honour celebrates individuals whose dedication, professionalism and leadership have had a significant and enduring impact on their firm, colleagues, clients or the wider legal community.

The award may recognise lawyers or other professionals who have played a pivotal role in supporting and strengthening the legal profession throughout their career. Judges will consider nominees who demonstrate:

- A distinguished career marked by long-standing commitment to the legal profession.
- Significant contribution to the reputation and development of the profession in Surrey.
- Respect and recognition from colleagues, peers and the wider legal community.
- Leadership, mentorship or influence, helping to support and develop others within the profession.
- Commitment to professional values, including integrity, professionalism and dedication to clients or colleagues.
- A lasting legacy, demonstrated through their impact on their firm, the profession or the community.

This award recognises individuals whose careers have left a meaningful and enduring mark on the legal profession. Nominations may include testimonials or reflections from colleagues that illustrate the nominee's contribution and influence over the course of their career.

Outstanding Surrey Lawyer of the Year

This award recognises an exceptional lawyer who has demonstrated outstanding professional achievement and made a significant contribution to their firm, clients or the wider legal community in Surrey over the past 12 months.

The award is open to lawyers at any stage of their career, and the judges will be looking for individuals whose work, professionalism and commitment to excellence distinguish them within the Surrey legal community. Entries may highlight:

- Outstanding legal expertise, demonstrated through the quality and impact of work delivered for clients.
- Exceptional client service, including evidence of strong relationships, trust and positive outcomes.
- Significant professional achievements during the past 12 months, such as notable matters handled, cases won or projects delivered.
- Leadership, initiative or influence, whether through leading teams, mentoring colleagues or contributing to the development of others.
- Contribution to the wider profession or community, including pro bono work, professional involvement or community initiatives.
- Commitment to professional excellence, including integrity, judgement and dedication to the highest standards of legal practice.

Entries should demonstrate how the nominee has distinguished themselves through the quality of their work, their impact on others and their contribution to the profession. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of work undertaken or other relevant achievements.

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Professional Support & Practice Management Award

NEW CATEGORY FOR 2026

This award recognises the vital contribution made by professional support and practice management professionals to the success of their firm and the delivery of high-quality legal services. Nominations are welcome for individuals, teams or functions working in areas such as practice management, operations, compliance, finance, HR, marketing, IT, or other professional support roles within a law firm.

Judges will be looking for nominees who demonstrate excellence in supporting the effective management and operation of their organisation. Entries may highlight:

- Excellence in professional support or practice management, including the effective running of key functions within the firm.
- Positive impact on the firm's performance, culture or client service.
- Innovation or improvements to systems, processes or ways of working.
- Strong collaboration with colleagues across the firm, supporting lawyers and other teams to achieve excellent results.
- Leadership, initiative or problem-solving, helping the firm adapt to challenges or opportunities.
- Notable achievements during the past 12 months, such as projects delivered, systems implemented or operational improvements.

Entries should demonstrate how the nominee has made a meaningful contribution to the success and effectiveness of their organisation. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of initiatives introduced, or measurable outcomes.

Rising Star Award

Eligibility

For the purposes of this award, a Rising Star is defined as an individual in the early stages of their legal career, such as a trainee solicitor, solicitor apprentice, paralegal or qualified lawyer with up to five years' post-qualification experience.

This award recognises an exceptional early-career lawyer who has demonstrated outstanding potential and made a significant contribution to their firm, clients or the wider legal community. The Rising Star Award celebrates individuals who are already making a strong impact in their professional role and showing the qualities that mark them as future leaders of the profession.

Judges will be looking for individuals who demonstrate initiative, talent and a commitment to excellence in legal practice. Entries may highlight:

- Outstanding legal work, demonstrating strong technical ability and a commitment to delivering excellent outcomes for clients.
- Exceptional client service, including evidence of building strong client relationships and trust.
- Initiative and innovation, such as introducing new ideas, efficiencies or approaches that improve legal services.
- Leadership potential, including taking responsibility on matters, mentoring others or contributing to team success.
- Contribution to the wider profession or community, including pro bono work, volunteering or involvement in professional initiatives.
- Commitment to professional development, demonstrating ambition, learning and growth in their career.

Entries should demonstrate how the nominee has gone beyond expectations and shown the qualities of a future leader within the legal profession. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of work undertaken or other relevant achievements.

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Strategic Leadership Award

NEW CATEGORY FOR 2026

This award recognises an individual who has demonstrated outstanding leadership in guiding the strategy, growth or transformation of a legal practice. The award is open to senior leaders within law firms, including managing partners, senior partners, CEOs, COOs or other professionals responsible for the strategic direction and success of their organisation.

Judges will be looking for individuals who have played a pivotal role in shaping their firm's performance, culture or long-term vision. Entries may highlight:

- Strategic leadership, including the development and successful implementation of the firm's vision or business strategy.
- Positive impact on firm performance, such as growth, transformation, new services or improved operational effectiveness.
- Leadership of people and culture, fostering an environment where colleagues can develop and perform at their best.
- Innovation or forward thinking, including introducing new approaches, technology or service models.
- Contribution to the wider profession or community, including leadership beyond their own firm.
- Demonstrable achievements over the past 12 months, showing how their leadership has driven meaningful progress.

Entries should demonstrate how the nominee's leadership has had a significant and measurable impact on their organisation and the wider legal community. Supporting evidence may include testimonials, examples of initiatives led, or measurable business outcomes.

Deadline for Nominations

Friday 1 May 2026

Eligibility

Nominees must be members of Surrey Law Society or work for a firm that is a member of Surrey Law Society at the time of nomination

How to Nominate?

- 1) Select the category or categories you wish to enter
- 2) Download the relevant nomination form(s) from the Surrey Law Society website
- 3) Complete the nomination form and submit it, together with any supporting documentation, to:

helen.opie@surreylawsociety.org.uk

Multiple nominations are welcomed from individuals, firms and teams where appropriate