



Busy Times Ahead For Top Belfast Law Firm

It was recently announced that John McKee & Son joins three other Belfast-based law firms, and two with offices both north and south, on the NAMA legal panel.

Over recent years, the banking team has been busy on restructuring and recovery work on behalf of the local banks, with Avril McCammon and her team looking at a wide range of lending security issues on behalf of financial institutions.

"We've also been active when it comes to working with administrators, the appointment of fixed charge receivers and possession proceedings," says Avril, "as well as follow-on work arising from those areas."

Avril was one of only two lawyers ranked this year in Chambers and Partners in Band 1 for Banking.

The other partners at the 17 lawyer firm at John McKee & Son all have their areas of speciality. Chris Ross concentrates on commercial dispute resolution; Gerard Small on commercial property and private client; Julie Huddleston on corporate work; Andrea McCann on employment law and Leonard Edgar on high value personal injury claims.

The firm has evolved over more recent years and has adopted a new focus. "Insolvency used to be a big focus for us," says Avril, "But, in more recent years, we've moved towards banking, finance and the wider corporate arena. We're in the business of identifying and applying solutions for our clients, whether they are banks or companies."

But the firm's range of client work goes a lot wider than that. Leonard Edgar is one of the most respected names around when it comes to defendant insurance litigation. In particular, he specialises in what are termed larger 'catastrophic' claims arising from road and workplace accidents.

"A lot of people out there are trying to avoid court and court costs, as much as possible, and that has been our focus as solicitors for a while," he says. "Open discussion leading to early resolution of disputes is the way forward."

Commercial litigation, the domain of Chris Ross, is a wide-ranging area which includes the likes of construction disputes, professional negligence and contractual disputes.

Once again, there is a strong trend amongst clients to try to avoid court cases unless absolutely necessary.

"There is no doubt that mediation is rapidly gaining ground as an effective means of resolving disputes without the time and expense of going before the courts," says Chris. "We're only too happy to facilitate mediation when appropriate."

Gerard Small, private client partner, manages the debt recovery team on behalf of local and UK financial institutions. Debt recovery is a busy area at the moment, given the climate and this work has become extremely collections-focused in recent years. "The bottom line for clients here is early cost-effective net recovery", says Gerard.

The firm has invested in Microsoft Office

and SharePoint 2010 technology to gain competitive advantage. "Much of our project and recovery work comes from competitive tendering, so being able to demonstrate efficiency is a vital tool in our armoury as we seek to win new business," explains Chris. "We are delighted to have been recently approved by Microsoft as one of the few SMEs in Northern Ireland to be allowed access to Microsoft's latest innovation in Cloud Computing called Office 365."

By moving to the Cloud, the firm will no longer need the same number of servers. This will not only lead to an immediate capital saving but will also lead to significant savings in on-going power consumption, maintenance and disaster recovery costs. In the unfortunate event that a business interruption does occur, then the business has the capability to get its ICT systems back up and running again almost immediately, simply by accessing the firm's network from any regular internet connection as its systems "reside securely" in the Cloud.

