

# thinking ahead

One of the south west's leading firms of accountants is celebrating its centenary this year. But as **Allison Beer** explains, rather than reflecting on the past, **Bishop Fleming** is very much looking to the future

One of our key values is the relationships we have with our clients, our people and the local community



**These are exciting times for Bishop Fleming. While its 100-year milestone is a matter of tremendous pride for the firm, it's the thought of the impact it can have on businesses in the future which truly energises.**

Founded in Torbay, Bishop Fleming has since expanded to seven offices across the West Midlands and south west – Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Torquay, Worcester and, of course, Truro which has been in existence for 30 years.

Today the firm employs 350 people across the seven offices with 30 based at its expanding Truro office.

Allison Beer is corporate and business services partner at the firm's Truro office. She joined in February after a number of senior positions including a three-year spell working in the British Virgin Islands and, most recently, as a partner for Whittingham Riddell in Shrewsbury.

She now enjoys working with core clients in Cornwall; businesses of all shapes and sizes from sole-trader start-ups through to listed companies, public sector organisations, charities and schools, and covering all sectors.

One thing these different entities do have in common, however, is the close working relationship they enjoy with their business advisor.

"One of our key values is the relationships we have with our clients, our people and the local community," says Allison. "And I'm absolutely passionate about that, that's what keeps me going, building those really strong relationships and helping people for many years."

The importance the firm puts to building this kind of client service reflects how the role of an accountant has evolved over

the years. These days it extends far beyond core compliance services such as management accounts and VAT. Today a modern accountancy firm is much more about business advisory, helping you grow your business, raise additional finances, help with strategic tax planning, and eventually looking to plan for succession within

the business or a future sale or management buy-out.

"Whenever our clients have an issue, we're the first person they call," says Allison.

"And it's throughout the business lifecycle from start-up through to exit, be it through

succession or moving a business on, or if everything goes pear-shaped, we have a team to help in those situations.

"It is very reassuring for me, having relocated to Cornwall, that we can provide all of those services to our clients here. If we don't have the right person in the Truro office, I'm confident there is someone in the firm who will be able to service that client either remotely or in person."

Clients also benefit from the wide range of ancillary services Bishop Fleming offers in terms of personal wealth and personal tax and even to the point of charitable expertise if the client has charitable interests.

Prospective new client needs and expectations are all addressed from the outset at a free initial scoping meeting. Bishop Fleming takes care to find out about the business and what the challenges are and ultimately from there, see where it can assist. "Our ultimate goal is to meet that client's needs," says Allison, "so we try to find out as much as we can about them."

With the banks tightening up on things, one of the most common challenges businesses in Cornwall face, says Allison, is raising finance, be it equity or debt finance.

However, Brexit, she says, hasn't been such an issue. "It's not been mentioned that much since I've been down here to be honest.

"There is very much a 'this has been going on for a while, let's get on with things' attitude. People have been moving forward with their growth plans.

"But if there is one practical aspect of Brexit, it is the consideration those businesses have had to make around Brexit planning, importing/exporting, VAT, or movement of labour. If that's going to affect your business, we have been helping plan around that. As those businesses grow, we're well positioned because we have an international network to call upon, being a member firm of Kreston International."

**We very much have a one-firm approach. It's about putting the right people on the right job**



While Bishop Fleming has developed into one of the south west's leading and most established business advisory firms, Allison dismisses any notion that it is too big to be interested in smaller companies.

"We're here to support companies of all sizes," she says, "and we're looking to partner up with some of the local innovation initiatives to be there for these businesses as they start-up and grow. All businesses have a beginning and we want to be there for that."

"We're ambitious for our clients and ambitious for ourselves. We want to grow, but grow with them at the same time."

Another important cornerstone at the heart of Bishop Fleming's values is corporate social responsibility. It has a number of firm-wide initiatives centred around sustainability and carbon footprint, and since 2012 has been producing an annual report on progress made.

It has just launched BF Giving Back, around CSR credentials, in conjunction with Surfers Against Sewage.

"We have an ambition to become plastic free as a business," says Allison. "Everyone here is really excited about it. We piloted it at our Exeter office and the team here in Truro have taken it on board."

"It is not just paying lip service; we genuinely want to be purpose led in terms of our performance and make a difference - to get our people involved in that process and that's where this project was born."

Everyone has their own 'CSR day' which they can put to good use out in the community for a cause close to their hearts, while Bishop Fleming has a firm-wide charity it supports in Young Enterprise.

"Young Enterprise perfectly aligns with our business," says Allison. "We are the UK's leading audit firm to Academies in the education sector so education is very much an area of focus for us and aligns with helping young people move up - the start-ups of the future."

To celebrate its centenary year, the firm has set itself a target of raising £100k for charity. As part of this, each office supports a regional charity, which in Truro's case is the Cornwall Air Ambulance Trust. Bishop Fleming is looking to raise £10k for the Air Ambulance's New Heli Appeal, and as part of this is title sponsor of the 'Runway Runaround' which takes place on November 3, at Cornwall Airport Newquay.

"Earlier in the year we sponsored the Bath Half Marathon which went really well. We



thought we could do something similar in Cornwall, so we're title sponsor of the Runway Runaround. These activities help bind the firm together. We had the largest ever corporate team at the Bath Half, 120 runners from all seven offices. We would like to do the same here, bringing all offices together."

As the old cliché goes, a business is only as good as its people and Bishop Fleming focuses on continual people development and engagement across all seven offices. It has an active in-house training programme

with 60 trainees and school leavers currently coming through the programme, with many staff members having been with the firm for many years.

And the attention it pays to people engagement is evidenced by the fact that the firm has been named in the Sunday

Times Top 100 Best Companies to Work For list for four years running.

"I always wanted to be a partner with Bishop Fleming," says Allison, "and it has far exceeded my expectations."

Allison has developed a wide skill set in the accountancy world. After growing up in north Devon, she moved to Surrey to gain some audit experience and proceeded to work with several larger corporates, including as head of a client accounting division for a large law firm in the British Virgin Islands.

"I was doing accounting and corporate advisory work for clients all over the world which opened lots of doors and now have contacts all over the world," she says. "As Cornwall improves its connectivity and transport links, there is further potential for inward investment but also the opportunity to look to international markets and personally, I have experience in that area."

And it is exactly this type of wide experience which appeals to Bishop Fleming. "We want to recruit rounded business advisers and provide rewarding and challenging work for our people. It is not just about giving them great career prospects, it's about giving them good training, stimulating work and great pay and benefits. And focusing on CSR, those are aspects that a lot of people are interested in".

"It genuinely is a great place to work which is evidenced by the Sunday Times ranking.

"It's not a badge. It's genuinely surveyed, and it tells us where we are going right and wrong. You can't buy awards like that. People are proud to work at Bishop Fleming. If you look at some of the companies we rub shoulders with on that list, they're big companies. It's quite an achievement to get on the Sunday Times list once, let alone four years. And we're absolutely committed to staying in it. It helps to keep us on our toes.

"We have some of the highest calibre tax and business advisers and professionals in the region and are really confident there is someone in the firm who can help with any given scenario.

"We very much have a one-firm approach. It's about putting the right people on the right job."

Relationships are Bishop Fleming's biggest USP. Throughout your journey as a business, Bishop Fleming looks to support you every step of the way.

"The last 100 years has been forged on great relationships and we intend the same for our future. It is what sets us apart."

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