

East Lothian's largest legal firm launches family law division

New Legal Director to head up unparalleled team

A solicitors and estate agency firm has launched the biggest family law division in its region with four new additions to its team.

Garden Stirling Burnet has set up a family law division with a combined 70 years of legal experience which will cater for the whole of East Lothian, as well as Edinburgh and the Borders.

Fronting the team with 18 years of experience is Legal Director, Claire Christie. The Musselburgh local is accredited by the Law Society of Scotland as a specialist in family law and has exclusively practiced in the field since 2006.

Claire started her career in 2005 as a Trainee Solicitor at Turcan Connell. Adept in financial provisions and child law, Claire regularly appears in Sheriff Court acting on financial and child matters including residence and contact disputes.

Claire has been praised by senior counsel as being one of the best family lawyers of her generation, the Legal 500 2021 edition recognised her as a 'practitioner of note' and she is also trained in collaborative law.

Previously at SK0 Solicitors, Claire is well-respected in her field, and will form part of the senior management team at Garden Stirling Burnet.

Joining Claire in a consultancy role is Kathryn Wilson.

Formerly of Melrose and Porteous Solicitors in Eyemouth and Duns in the Borders, she has 35 years of legal experience – including 25 years as a partner – with a particular strength in court-related matters.

Fellow consultant Angela Craig, who used to head the family team at Garden Stirling Burnet, and Family Law Paralegal, Amanda Richardson – who has 20 years of experience running high value matrimonial cases – have also joined the team.

Legal Director Claire is relishing the opportunity to give back to her home region of East Lothian and is ‘keen to get started’.

She said: “We wanted to take an institution which has a long-standing reputation within the local community and add the highest quality family law advice to its repertoire.

“To have the opportunity to build something up from scratch is wonderful. I did a similar thing at a large Glasgow practice when it wanted to open a family law branch in Edinburgh; so, to have an opportunity like that again on a larger scale is really exciting.

“I’m an East Lothian resident myself so I understand how important it is to build relationships with the local community and I hope the experience our team will bring to the region will provide a positive outcome for all those seeking legal advice in family law.”

Garden Stirling Burnet’s family law team will provide extensive experience in Pre-Nuptial, Post-Nuptial, Pre-Cohabitation and Separation Agreements.

Claire hopes the team can bring innovation and collaboration to the sector by cooperating with other law firms in the region to provide the best possible service for clients through the collaborative law process.

She said: "Ultimately, we want to provide quality, value for money family law advice for the people of East Lothian and the surrounding regions. It is important that our clients leave us feeling they had a positive experience at what is often a very difficult time in their lives.

"We see great opportunities in redefining the family law process through a collaborative approach with other firms within the region. This will provide a more forward-thinking and less adversarial method of dispute resolution for clients. We hope other solicitors in East Lothian will also be interested in developing this family-focused alternative process for the public.

"Garden Stirling Burnet had a strong family law presence, and so we want to establish the firm's reputation as the pinnacle for family law within East Lothian and beyond."

Managing Partner of Garden Stirling Burnet, Tony O'Malley, said: "We've long considered family law a real growth opportunity in East Lothian and are excited to have recruited Claire to lead the team as Legal Director.

"She has a fantastic reputation and has all the legal, management and marketing skills required to grow the department, not just in our core area of East Lothian, but beyond. She will also be a valuable member of the new senior management team.

"Kathryn brings many years of family law experience, but also of running her own law practice. Her experience and enthusiasm will be a benefit to Claire and the wider business. We are extremely fortunate to have been able to recruit such high calibre lawyers and look forward to working with them."

The new law division comes after the acquisition of Garden Stirling Burnet by the modern law practice, Friends Legal, in September last year.

The takeover created a business with more than £7m-a-year turnover and 60 staff in six offices across Scotland, giving Glasgow-headquartered Friends Legal a significant platform to create one of the biggest specialist private client firms in Scotland.

Garden Stirling Burnet has since enjoyed rapid investment into the 22-strong team across its four offices in Dunbar, Haddington, North Berwick and Tranent, and has ambitions to double the headcount and turnover of the firm within the next three years.

The company has also embarked on a significant rebrand which will see it develop its marketing output.

While Garden Stirling and Burnet is best known for its estate agency, executry and conveyancing work; a priority will be to unlock the potential of its whole private client team including its letting business.