

## TERMS OF BUSINESS 1 AUGUST 2024

The following terms of business apply to all engagements accepted by Blackthorns. All work is carried out under these terms except where changes are expressly agreed in writing.

### 1. APPLICABLE LAW

- 1.1. Our engagement letter, the schedules of services and our standard terms and conditions of business are governed by, and should be construed in accordance with English law. Each party agrees that the courts of England will have exclusive jurisdiction in relation to any claim, dispute or difference concerning this engagement letter and any matter arising from it on any basis. Each party irrevocably waives any right to object to any action being brought in those courts, to claim that the action has been brought in an inappropriate forum, or to claim that those courts do not have jurisdiction.
- 1.2. We will not accept responsibility if you act on advice previously given by us without first confirming with us that the advice is still valid in light of any change in the law or in your circumstances. We will accept no liability for losses arising from changes in the law, or the interpretation thereof, that occur after the date on which the advice is given.

### 2. CLIENT IDENTIFICATION

- 2.1. As with other professional services firms, we are required to identify our clients for the purposes of the UK anti-money laundering legislation. We may request from you, and retain, such information and documentation as we require for these purposes and/or make searches of appropriate databases. If we are not able to obtain satisfactory evidence of your identity, we will not be able to proceed with the engagement.

### 3. CLIENTS' MONEY

- 3.1. We may, from time to time, hold money on your behalf. The money will be held in trust in a client bank account, which is segregated from the firm's funds. The account will be operated, and all funds dealt with, in accordance with ICAEW's Clients' Money Regulations.
- 3.2. All client monies will be held in an interest-bearing account. To avoid excessive administration, interest will only be paid to you if the amount earned on the balances held on your behalf in any calendar year exceeds £25.00. If the total sum of money held on your behalf is enough to give rise to a significant amount of interest or is likely to do so, we will put the money in a designated interest-bearing client bank account and pay the interest to you. Subject to any tax legislation, interest will be paid gross.
- 3.3. We will return monies held on your behalf promptly, as soon as there is no longer any reason to retain those funds. If any funds remain in our client account that are unclaimed, and the client to which they relate has remained untraced for five years, or we as a firm cease to practise, we may pay those monies to a registered charity.

### 4. COMMISSIONS OR OTHER BENEFITS

- 4.1. We do not expect to receive commissions or other benefits for introductions to other professionals or in respect of transactions which we arrange for you.

- 4.2. However, if this happens, we will notify you in writing within 1 month of the amount and terms of payment and receipt of any such commissions or benefits. The fees you would otherwise pay will be reduced by the amount of the commissions or benefits.
- 4.3. If in the future, abnormally large commissions are received which were not envisaged when the engagement letter was signed, we will obtain specific consent to the retention of those commissions.

## **5. CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 5.1. Unless we are authorised by you to disclose information on your behalf, we confirm that if you give us confidential information we will, at all times during and after this engagement, keep it confidential, except as required by law or as provided for in regulatory, ethical or other professional pronouncements applicable to us or our engagement.
- 5.2. You agree that, if we act for other clients who are or who become your competitors, to comply with our duty of confidentiality it will be sufficient for us to take such steps as we think appropriate to preserve the confidentiality of information given to us by you, both during and after this engagement. These may include taking the same or similar steps as we take in respect of the confidentiality of our own information.
- 5.3. In addition, if we act for other clients whose interests are or may be adverse to yours, we will manage the conflict by implementing additional safeguards to preserve confidentiality. Safeguards may include measures such as separate teams, physical separation of teams, and separate arrangements for storage of, and access to, information.
- 5.4. You agree that the effective implementation of such steps or safeguards as described above will provide adequate measures to avoid any real risk of confidentiality being impaired.
- 5.5 We reserve the right, for the purpose of promotional activity, training or for other business purpose, to mention that you are a client. As stated above, we will not disclose any confidential information.
- 5.6. We may, on occasions, subcontract work on your affairs to other tax or accounting professionals. The subcontractors will be bound by our client confidentiality terms.
- 5.7. If we use external or cloud based systems, we will ensure confidentiality of your information is maintained.
- 5.8. This applies in addition to our obligations on data protection in section 7.

## **6. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

- 6.1. We will inform you if we become aware of any conflict of interest in our relationship with you or in our relationship with you and another client, unless we are unable to do so because of our confidentiality obligations. We have safeguards that can be implemented to protect the interests of different clients if a conflict arises. If conflicts are identified which cannot be managed in a way that protects your interests, we regret that we will be unable to provide further services.

- 6.2. If there is a conflict of interest that is capable of being addressed successfully by the adoption of suitable safeguards to protect your interests, we will adopt those safeguards. In resolving the conflict, we would be guided by ICAEW's Code of Ethics, which can be viewed at [icaew.com/en/membership/regulations-standards-and-guidance/ethics](http://icaew.com/en/membership/regulations-standards-and-guidance/ethics). During and after our engagement, you agree that we reserve the right to act for other clients whose interests are or may compete with or be adverse to yours, subject, of course, to our obligations of confidentiality and the safeguards set out in the paragraph on confidentiality above.

## **7. DATA PROTECTION DATA CONTROLLER**

- 7.1. In this clause 7, the following definitions shall apply:

'client personal data' means any personal data provided to us by you, or on your behalf, for the purpose of providing our services to you, pursuant to our engagement letter with you;

'data protection legislation' means all applicable privacy and data protection legislation and regulations including PECR, the GDPR and any applicable national laws, regulations and secondary legislation in the UK relating to the processing of personal data and the privacy of electronic communications, as amended, replaced or updated from time to time;

'controller', 'data subject', 'personal data', and 'process' shall have the meanings given to them in the data protection legislation;

'GDPR' means the General Data Protection Regulation ((EU) 2016/679); and

'PECR' means the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003 (SI 2426/2003).

- 7.2. We shall each be considered an independent data controller in relation to the client personal data. Each of us will comply with all requirements and obligations applicable to us under the data protection legislation in respect of the client personal data.

- 7.3. You shall only disclose client personal data to us where:

- a) you have provided the necessary information to the relevant data subjects regarding its use (and you may use or refer to our privacy notice available at [www.theblackthorns.co.uk](http://www.theblackthorns.co.uk)
- b) you have a lawful basis upon which to do so, which, in the absence of any other lawful basis, shall be with the relevant data subject's consent; and
- c) you have complied with the necessary requirements under the data protection legislation to enable you to do so.

- 7.4. Should you require any further details regarding our treatment of personal data, please contact our directors.

- 7.5. We shall only process the client personal data:

- a) in order to provide our services to you and perform any other obligations in accordance with our engagement with you;

- b) in order to comply with our legal or regulatory obligations; and
- c) where it is necessary for the purposes of our legitimate interests and those interests are not overridden by the data subjects' own privacy rights. Our privacy notice (available at [www.theblackthorns.co.uk](http://www.theblackthorns.co.uk)) contains further details as to how we may process client personal data.

7.6. For the purpose of providing our services to you, we may disclose the client personal data to our staff, members of our firm's network, our regulatory bodies or other third parties (for example, our professional advisors or service providers). The third parties to whom we disclose such personal data may be located outside of the European Economic Area (EEA). We will only disclose client personal data to a third party (including a third party outside of the EEA) provided that the transfer is undertaken in compliance with the data protection legislation.

7.7. We may disclose the client personal data to other third parties in the context of a possible sale, merger, restructuring or financing of or investment in our business. In this event we will take appropriate measures to ensure that the security of the client personal data continues to be ensured in accordance with data protection legislation. If a change happens to our business, then the new owners may use our client personal data in the same way as set out in these terms.

7.8. We shall maintain commercially reasonable and appropriate security measures, including administrative, physical and technical safeguards, to protect against unauthorised or unlawful processing of the client personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, the client personal data.

## **8. DISENGAGEMENT**

8.1. If we resign or are asked to resign, we will normally issue a disengagement letter to ensure that our respective responsibilities are clear. If we have no contact with you for a period of 1 year or more, we may issue to your last known address a disengagement letter and thereafter cease to act.

## **9. ELECTRONIC AND OTHER COMMUNICATION**

9.1. Unless you instruct us otherwise, we may, if appropriate, communicate with you and with third parties by email or other electronic means. The recipient is responsible for virus checking emails and any attachments.

9.2. With electronic communication, there is a risk of non-receipt, delayed receipt, inadvertent misdirection or interception by third parties. We use virus-scanning software to reduce the risk of viruses and similar damaging items being transmitted in emails or by electronic storage devices. Nevertheless, electronic communication is not totally secure and we cannot be held responsible for damage or loss caused by viruses or for communications which are corrupted or altered after despatch. Nor can we accept any liability for problems or accidental errors relating to this means of communication, especially in relation to commercially sensitive material. These are risks you must bear in return for greater efficiency and lower costs. If you do not wish to accept these risks, please let us know and we will communicate by paper mail, other than when electronic submission is mandatory.

9.3. Any communication by us with you sent through the postal system is deemed to arrive at your postal address two working days after the day the document was sent.

## **10. FEES AND PAYMENT TERMS**

- 10.1. Our fees may depend, not only upon the time spent on your affairs, but also on the level of skill and responsibility and the importance and value of the advice we provide, as well as the level of risk.
- 10.2. If we provide you with an estimate of our fees for any specific work, the estimate will not be contractually binding unless we explicitly state that will be the case. Otherwise, our fees will be calculated on the basis of the hours worked by each member of staff necessarily engaged on your affairs, multiplied by their charge-out rate per hour for such work, VAT being charged thereon.
- 10.3. If requested, we may indicate a fixed fee for the provision of specific services or an indicative range of fees for a particular assignment. It is not our practice to identify fixed fees for more than a year ahead as such fee quotes need to be reviewed in the light of events. If it becomes apparent to us, due to unforeseen circumstances, that a fee quote is inadequate, we reserve the right to notify you of a revised figure or range and to seek your agreement thereto.
- 10.4. In some cases, you may be entitled to assistance with your professional fees, particularly in relation to any investigation into your tax affairs by HMRC. Assistance may be provided through insurance policies you hold or via membership of a professional or trade body. Other than where such insurance was arranged through us, you will need to advise us of any such insurance cover you have. You will remain liable for our fees regardless of whether all or part are liable to be paid by your insurers.
- 10.5. We will bill monthly, or at intervals agreed with you, and our invoices will be due for payment within 30 days of issue. Our fees are exclusive of VAT which will be added where it is chargeable. Any disbursements we incur on your behalf, and expenses incurred in the course of carrying out our work for you, will be added to our invoices where appropriate.
- 10.6. Unless otherwise agreed to the contrary, our fees do not include the costs of any third party, counsel or other professional fees. If these costs are incurred to fulfil our engagement, such necessary additional charges may be payable by you.
- 10.7. We reserve the right to charge interest on late paid invoices at the rate of 8% above bank base rates under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. We also reserve the right to suspend our services or to cease to act for you, having given written notice, if payment of any fees is unduly delayed. We intend to exercise these rights only if it is fair and reasonable to do so.
- 10.8. If you do not accept that an invoiced fee is fair and reasonable, you must notify us within 21 days of receipt, failing which, you will be deemed to have accepted that payment is due.
- 10.9. If a client company, trust or other entity is unable or unwilling to settle our fees, we reserve the right to seek payment from the individual (or parent company) giving us instructions on behalf of the client, and we shall be entitled to enforce any sums due against the group company or individual nominated to act for you.

## **11. HELP US TO GIVE YOU THE BEST SERVICE**

- 11.1. We are committed to providing you with a high quality service that is both efficient and effective. If, at any point you would like to discuss with us how our service to you could be improved, or if you are dissatisfied with the service you are receiving, please let us know by contacting Karen Turner or Vicky Brassington by email at karen.turner@theblackthorns.co.uk, or vicky.brassington@theblackthorns.co.uk or by telephone on 01384 880180.
- 11.2. We will consider carefully any complaint you may make about our service as soon as we receive it and do all we can to explain the position to you. We will acknowledge your letter within five business days of its receipt and endeavour to deal with your complaint within eight weeks.
- 11.3. If we do not answer your complaint to your satisfaction, you may, of course, take up the matter with our professional body, ICAEW.
- 11.4. **For consumer agreements:** Should we be unable to resolve your complaint you may also be able to refer your complaint to an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) provider to try and reach a resolution. We will provide details of a ADR provider if we cannot resolve your complaint using our internal procedures. This is in addition to your ability to complain to ICAEW.

## **12. IMPLEMENTATION**

- 12.1 We will only assist with implementation of our advice if specifically instructed and agreed in writing.

## **13. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND USE OF OUR NAME**

- 13.1. We will retain all intellectual property rights in any document prepared by us during the course of carrying out the engagement except where the law specifically states otherwise.
- 13.2. You are not permitted to use our name in any statement or document you may issue unless our prior written consent has been obtained. The only exception to this restriction would be statements or documents that, in accordance with applicable law, are to be made public.

## **14. INTERPRETATION**

- 14.1. If any provision of our engagement letter or terms of business is held to be void, that provision will be deemed not to form part of this contract. In the event of any conflict between these terms of business and the engagement letter or appendices, the relevant provision in the engagement letter or schedules will take precedence.

## **15. INTERNAL DISPUTES WITHIN A CLIENT**

- 15.1. If we become aware of a dispute between the parties who own the business or who are in some way involved in its ownership and management, it should be noted that our client is the business and we would not provide information or services to one party without the express knowledge and permission of all parties. Unless otherwise agreed by all parties, we will continue to supply information to the normal correspondence address for the attention of the directors, partners or trustees as applicable. If conflicting advice, information or instructions are received from different directors, partners or trustees in the business, we will refer the matter back to the board of directors, or the partnership as applicable and take no further action until the board or partnership has agreed the action to be taken.

## **16. INVESTMENT ADVICE (INCLUDING INSURANCE DISTRIBUTION SERVICES)**

- 16.1. Investment business is regulated by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. If, during the provision of professional services to you, you need advice on investments including insurances, we may have to refer you to someone who is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority, as we are not. However, as we are licensed by ICAEW, we may be able to provide certain investment services that are complementary to, or arise out of, the professional services we are providing to you. Such advice may include:

- advice on investments generally, but not recommendation of a particular investment or type of investment;
- advice in connection with the disposal of an investment, other than your rights in a pension policy or scheme;
- advice and assistance in transactions concerning shares or other securities not quoted on a recognised exchange;
- assistance in making arrangements for transactions in investments in certain circumstances; and
- assistance in managing investments or acting as trustee (or donee of a power of attorney) where decisions to invest are taken on the advice of an authorised person.

We may also, on the understanding that the shares or other securities of the company are not publicly traded:

- advise the company, existing or prospective shareholders in relation to exercising rights, taking benefits or share options, valuations and methods of such valuations;
- arrange any agreements in connection with the issue, sale or transfer of the company's shares or other securities;
- arrange for the issue of new shares; and
- act as the addressee to receive confirmation of acceptance of offer documents etc.

In the unlikely event that we cannot meet our liabilities to you, you may be able to claim compensation under the Chartered Accountants' Compensation Scheme in respect of exempt regulated activities undertaken. Further information about the scheme and the circumstances in which grants may be made is available on ICAEW's website: [www.icaew.com/cacs](http://www.icaew.com/cacs)

16.2. In relation to the conduct of insurance distribution activities, we are an ancillary insurance intermediary. We are not authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority. However, we are included on the register maintained by the Financial Conduct Authority so that we can carry on insurance distribution activity, which is broadly the advising on, selling, and administration of insurance contracts. This part of our business, including arrangements for complaints or redress if something goes wrong, is regulated by ICAEW. The register can be accessed from the Financial Conduct Authority's website at [www.fca.org.uk/register](http://www.fca.org.uk/register).

## **17. LIEN**

17.1. Insofar as we are permitted to so by law or by professional guidelines, we reserve the right to exercise a lien over all funds, documents and records in our possession relating to all engagements for you until all outstanding fees and disbursements are paid in full.

## **18. LIMITATION OF THIRD PARTY RIGHTS**

18.1. The advice and information we provide to you as part of our service is for your sole use, and not for any third party to whom you may communicate it, unless we have expressly agreed in the engagement letter that a specified third party may rely on our work. We accept no responsibility to third parties, including any group company to whom the engagement letter is not addressed, for any advice, information or material produced as part of our work for you which you make available to them. A party to this agreement is the only person who has the right to enforce any of its terms, and no rights or benefits are conferred on any third party under the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999.

## **19. PERIOD OF ENGAGEMENT AND TERMINATION**

19.1. Unless otherwise agreed in our engagement letter, our work will begin when we receive implicit or explicit acceptance of that letter. Except as stated in that letter, we will not be responsible for periods before that date.

19.2. Each of us may terminate our agreement by giving not less than 21 days' notice in writing to the other party except if you fail to cooperate with us or we have reason to believe that you have provided us or HMRC with misleading information, in which case we may terminate this agreement immediately. Termination will be without prejudice to any rights that may have accrued to either of us before termination.

19.3. We reserve the right to terminate the engagement between us with immediate effect in the event of: your insolvency, bankruptcy or other arrangement being reached with creditors; an independence issue or change in the law which means we can no longer act; failure to pay our fees by the due dates; or either party being in breach of their obligations if this is not corrected within 30 days of being asked to do so.

19.4. In the event of termination of our contract, we will endeavour to agree with you the arrangements for the completion of work in progress at that time, unless we are required for legal or regulatory reasons to cease work immediately. In that event, we will not be required to carry out further work and shall not be responsible or liable for any consequences arising from termination.



## **20. PROFESSIONAL RULES AND STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS**

- 20.1. We will observe and act in accordance with the Bye-laws, regulations and Code of Ethics of ICAEW and will accept instructions to act for you on this basis. In particular you give us the authority to correct errors made by HMRC if we become aware of them. We will not be liable for any loss, damage or cost arising from our compliance with statutory or regulatory obligations. You can see copies of these requirements in our offices. The requirements are also available online at [icaew.com/en/membership/regulations-standards-and-guidance](http://icaew.com/en/membership/regulations-standards-and-guidance).
- 20.2. We confirm that we are statutory auditors eligible to conduct audits under the Companies Act 2006. When conducting audit work, we are required to comply with the Ethical and Auditing Standards issued by the FRC, which can be accessed online at [www.frc.org.uk/Our-Work/Codes-Standards/Audit-and-assurance/Standards-and-guidance/Standards-and-guidance-for-auditors.aspx](http://www.frc.org.uk/Our-Work/Codes-Standards/Audit-and-assurance/Standards-and-guidance/Standards-and-guidance-for-auditors.aspx). We are also required to comply with the Audit Regulations and Guidance which can be accessed at [icaew.com/en/technical/audit-and-assurance/working-in-the-regulated-area-of-audit](http://icaew.com/en/technical/audit-and-assurance/working-in-the-regulated-area-of-audit).

## **21. QUALITY CONTROL**

- 21.1. As part of our ongoing commitment to provide a quality service, our files are periodically reviewed by an independent regulatory or quality control body. These reviewers are highly experienced professionals and are bound by the same rules of confidentiality as our principals, directors and staff.
- 21.2. When dealing with HMRC on your behalf we are required to be honest and to take reasonable care to ensure that your returns are correct. To enable us to do this, you are required to be honest with us and to provide us with all necessary information in a timely manner. For more information about 'Your Charter' for your dealings with HMRC, visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-charter](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-charter). To the best of our abilities, we will ensure that HMRC meet their side of the Charter in their dealings with you.

## **22. RELIANCE ON ADVICE**

- 22.1. We will endeavour to record all advice on important matters in writing. Advice given orally is not intended to be relied upon unless confirmed in writing. Therefore, if we provide oral advice (for example, during the course of a meeting or a telephone conversation) and you wish to be able to rely on that advice, you must ask for the advice to be confirmed by us in writing.

## **23. RETENTION OF PAPERS**

- 23.1. You have a legal responsibility to retain documents and records relevant to your financial affairs. During the course of our work we may collect information from you and others relevant to your tax and financial affairs. We will return any original documents to you if requested. Documents and records relevant to your tax affairs are required by law to be retained as follows:

Individuals, trustees and partnerships:

- a) with trading or rental income: five years and 10 months after the end of the tax year

- b) otherwise: 22 months after the end of the tax year.

Companies, Limited Liability Partnerships, and other corporate entities:

- c) six years from the end of the accounting period.
- 23.2. Although certain documents may legally belong to you, we may destroy correspondence and other papers that we store electronically or otherwise that are more than seven years old, except documents we think may be of continuing significance. You must tell us if you wish us to keep any document for any longer period.

## **24. THE PROVISION OF SERVICES REGULATIONS 2009**

- 24.1. We are registered to carry on audit work in the UK by ICAEW. Details of our audit registration can be viewed at [www.auditregister.org.uk](http://www.auditregister.org.uk) for the UK, under reference number C003425824.
- 24.2. Our professional indemnity insurer is : HCC International Insurance Company Plc of 1 Aldgate, London EC3N 1RE, The territorial coverage is worldwide, excluding professional business carried out from an office in the United States of America or Canada, and excludes any action for a claim brought in any court in the United States or Canada.

## **25. TIMING OF OUR SERVICES**

- 25.1. If you provide us with all information and explanations on a timely basis in accordance with our requirements, we will plan to undertake the work within a reasonable period of time to meet any regulatory deadlines. However, failure to complete our services before any such regulatory deadline would not, of itself, mean that we are liable for any penalty or additional costs arising.