

How Philip Bowden's Hire Fits into Proskauer's London Strategy

By Kasvi Sehgal
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While it is hardly unusual for large U.S.-led law firms to hire well known partners in London, Proskauer Rose's hire of A&O Shearman's private capital co-head Philip Bowden and leveraged finance partner Megan Lawrence earlier this month stood out as a statement of intent.

Bowden is no minnow. Up until earlier this year he was viewed as the likely candidate to lead one of the largest firms in the world. He failed to win that election but he and his new colleagues now talk of a different battle they are seeking to win: the fight for market share in the private capital deal market.

The arrival of the A&O Shearman duo comes soon after the U.K. office hired capital markets partner Jake Keaveny and leveraged finance partner Warren Newton from U.S. rival outfit Cahill Gordon & Reindel.

Bowden sat down with Law.com International along with Steven Davis, who co-leads the firm's London office and global private equity offering and New York-based Justin Breen, who co-heads its global finance practice to talk about the shifting market and Proskauer's strategy to "win" it.

A Full-Service Private Capital Shop

London lawyers have previously shared how clients are increasingly seek out a "full-service, one stop shop that is equally strong across all teams". Proskauer says it is planning to do that for its private capital suite.



Courtesy Photos

From left: Steven Davis, Justin Breen and Philip Bowden, Proskauer Rose

Davis shared that though the firm has focused on private capital and asset managers across alternative asset class over the last decade, it is now "seeking to grow scale and depth in the key practices those institutions use in the financial markets". This, he said, ranges from fund formation to the deployment of private capital in debt and equity markets.

"We've tried to identify the opportunity to really solve the leveraged finance market from A to Z, where we can offer our clients real top of the market expertise, irrespective of whether it's a syndicated bank bond deal, a direct deal or a first lien-second lien deal where maybe the role is bifurcated", Breen added.

Bowden further highlighted that the sponsor community is recognising that "private credit is now a very key part of the landscape financing". Indeed,

the market is expected to grow to \$2.3 trillion by 2027, up from just \$500 million in 2015.

He said that sponsors “were very encouraging for Megan and I to consider moving to a platform which is strong in this area because they thought a number of their other service providers on the lender-side came more from a bank bond background”.

More Hires On The Horizon

The firm has “immediate” plans to hire further, both at a partner and associate level. This follows in the footsteps of the other top players in this market building their teams, especially amidst the growing prominence of private credit as its own practice area.

In addition to its latest hires in this space, Proskauer also bolstered its private funds offering in Europe in February, with the addition of Sidley Austin’s co-head of investment funds, James Oussedik, in London.

Speaking about growing the team now that his move is complete, Bowden shared: “It’s sort of a leaky market so people were talking about my move well before it was official. But the nice thing about that is that a number of market participants reached out to me and initiated conversations because they wanted to understand what the vision and opportunity was”.

“A number of people find it quite exciting, so there are conversations that we’ve been having with people who have expressed an interest in learning more about what we’re doing and potentially joining”, he added.

Davis also noted that Proskauer operates on a traditional three associates to one partner ratio and plans to build its private capital teams accordingly.

“There’s always one or two people at other firms who have a relationship with a particular sponsor. I think a number of those individuals are beginning to worry

whether they’ll be able to keep their clients when they go to the next fundraise, since you see much stronger, deeper benches in other firms. And I think we’ll see a number of these people look to join larger platforms or seek assurances from the management of those firms”, he said.

“We need to grow because without it we’re in danger of losing our market share.”

Competing With The Others

“All of our competitors are really ramping up on the private credit front. We welcome it. We think the market can bear it and we know what our stature in that market is,” Breen said.

He stated that between its U.S. and U.K. offerings, the firm is primarily contending with Milbank, Latham & Watkins, Davis Polk & Wardwell and Paul Hastings in this space.

Bowden also added that his “old shop will continue to be credible competition”.

Proskauer has a sizeable presence in London, with 42 partners, according to its website, but does not feature on Law.com International’s ranking of the largest 30 firms operating in the U.K. by revenue. The office is Proskauer’s second largest by head count and brought in \$127.6 million in revenue in 2023, down 3.5% from 2022.

Proskauer’s U.K. team is planning to do both London-originated and satellite U.S. mandates over the course of the year, with Bowden hoping to have done a “full range of mid-cap and large-cap bank, bond and private credit deals” by Christmas.

He said his “relationships with sponsors and their advisors in London” on top of Proskauer’s “deep bench of private credit clients in the U.S.” places them well to pick up cross border opportunities.

He added: “ We’re impatient to get started.”