

Milton Keynes Community Foundation

Strategic Plan Review: 2023 - 2026



Funding Fairness

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Our Vision:

A thriving Milton Keynes where everyone is contributing to their community.

Our Strategic Goal over the next three years is to build a thriving, philanthropic, creative, equitable and FAIR community.

Our Mission:

We're sending funding where it's needed most in Milton Keynes. By guiding businesses, philanthropists and charities to the right giving and grants, we're on a mission for a fairer community.

Creative Expression:

Funding Fairness

(Purpose) (Passion)

"We are funding fairness."

Values:

FAIR values become our organisational signature, underpinned by truths which we act on. It is a simple philosophy to power our proposition and rally behind. It matters to us as a team and to the communities who we serve.

These are the characteristics we want to be known for:

Fairness: Seek detailed understanding to make the right decisions.

Assistance: Share our expertise and referrals for those who need advice.

Inspiration: Communicate our unique proposition passionately and with hope.

Reliability: Deliver what we say, when we say.

Our Outcomes

1. A sustainable, resilient, confident, and creative VCCS
2. An actively philanthropic Milton Keynes community
3. An effective and appropriately resourced VCCS and MK Community Foundation

Introduction

Milton Keynes Community Foundation has been working in the city since 1986 supporting and growing the Voluntary, Community and Cultural Sector (VCCS). Our Strategic Goal is to build a thriving, philanthropic, creative, equitable and **FAIR** community.

This strategy has ambitious goals and sets out a comprehensive range of activities which we plan to deliver for the sector over the next three years. Throughout we will work closely to support and partner organisations to underpin all that we do. MK Community Foundation is primarily a grant-giving philanthropy¹ charity. However, we also manage a wide range of community facilities and buildings and, working with and through partner VCCS organisations, we are developing new facilities on numerous community land sites across the city of Milton Keynes.

Serving our community

MK Community Foundation exists to promote charitable purposes for the benefit of the community, individuals, and groups in the city of Milton Keynes. We are governed by a Board of Trustees who are elected by our members. We seek to encourage citizens from all our communities to join us as members to create a real sense of ownership.

Over the next three years we will deliver a step change in the resilience of our sector by supporting our VCCS and inspiring individuals and companies to embrace and engage in philanthropic giving.

During this time, we will seek to establish new funds in response to community needs and priorities identified through our annual Vital Signs and other research. In this way we seek to enhance and deepen our role as philanthropy advisors so that the investment from donors delivers significant **positive community impact**.

Foundation Priorities

Since 2013, we have published our annual Vital Signs Report. Every third year the report looks across all 12 Vital Sign areas of: Stronger Communities; Work; Economy; Education; Diversity; Disadvantage & Poverty; Housing; Crime & Safety; Health & Wellbeing; Transport; The Local Environment and Arts & Heritage.



Throughout this reporting period the consistent priority themes highlighted have related to Poverty and Inclusion with Environment emerging as an urgent priority. It is clear therefore that to achieve our mission of a fairer community across Milton Keynes we will need to focus and prioritise how we work as an organisation and support and fund partner organisations and projects that address these three priorities:

¹ **Philanthropy:** 1. The love of humanity 2. The desire to promote the welfare of others, expressed especially by the donation of money to worthy causes.

Priority One

Disadvantage and Poverty

This includes championing the real Living Wage across our own employees, through our grants programme and with our suppliers. To support the local community, we use local suppliers where possible, working with organisations who are training apprentices and actively developing social mobility projects. As well as developing partnerships that focus on these issues, providing funding support through our grant and subsidised rent offer. Finally, we will seek to ensure our investment strategy actively works to alleviate disadvantage and poverty.



Priority Two

Environmental Sustainability

As an organisation we have adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals focus on issues that are reflected in our Vital Signs themes. As an organisation we need to specifically focus on our environmental impact including the stewardship of our buildings, land, and wider estate. Minimising our impact through consumption of energy alongside encouraging the organisations we fund to seek to minimise their environmental impact and ensure our investments are actively supporting the protection of the environment. In our effort to deliver environmental sustainability we seek to go beyond minimising impact to seeking to enhance the local environment and to invest our time and resources in organisations and project that champion delivering carbon positive outcomes.



Priority Three

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Key to delivering on our Mission for a Fairer Milton Keynes is ensuring all our communities can benefit from our support and funding. We will champion and partner with organisations that seek out and engage with our diverse communities across the city. We will require organisations we work with and support to have a proactive engagement and inclusion policy in place. We will seek out seldom engaged and seldom asked communities and work continuously to ensure the Foundation is maintaining and extending our connections across the diverse communities of Milton Keynes. Championing Equity will be a key feature of our decision making. This will see us supporting communities that are disadvantaged or who have been treated unfairly.



Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Milton Keynes is fortunate to be a community with a rich, vibrant, and diverse demographic, both in the rural and new city areas. Our rich cultural heritage is continuously being created from a culmination of cultures and traditions from across the world, brought to Milton Keynes through differing circumstances. This makes Milton Keynes a wonderfully vibrant and unique place to live, work and engage in recreation.

In the 2021 census, 34% of the people living in Milton Keynes said they were from an Ethnically Diverse background in comparison with 13.2% in 2005. This is a very significant increase and one of the city's strengths. In 2021, 52% of the students enrolled in the city's mainstream school population were from an Ethnically Diverse families compared with 20.7% in 2005. We seek through this plan to activate a "step- change" in our engagement with Ethnically Diverse groups and projects to reflect the changing diversity of our community.

We have a commitment to the other protected characteristics such as gender, age, and people with disabilities to ensure the organisations we support and work with are inclusive and accessible. The city was created with a [commitment to inclusive growth](#)² and MK Community Foundation strongly supports this objective.

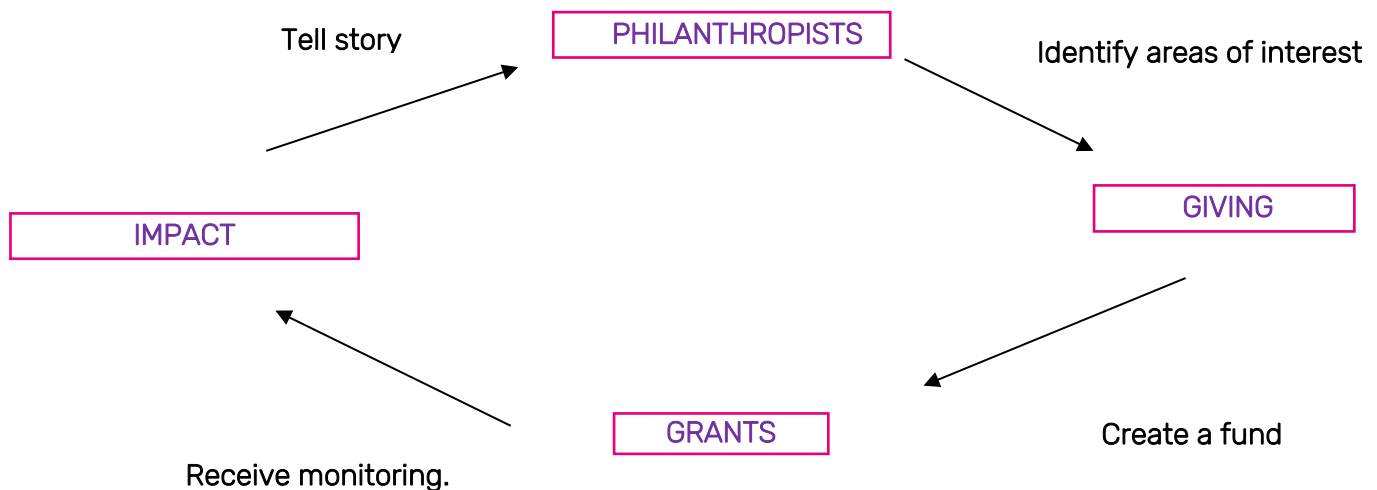
² **commitment to inclusive growth** - According to the OECD, "Inclusive Growth is growth that creates opportunity for all segments of the population and the dividends of increased prosperity, both in monetary and non-monetary terms, fairly across society."

Strategic Goals

Goal 1:

Promote philanthropy as a way of life across all our communities:

- We will provide a range of ways for the people to give to the Foundation to inspire community philanthropy.
- We will provide alternative opportunities to donate for those with cultural or religious requirements to secure new donors from our diverse community.
- We will grow the number of philanthropist who are giving to the Foundation.
- We will provide an excellent donor experience to our existing donors to grow income.
- We will share the impact stories from our beneficiaries to demonstrate the effectiveness of giving through MKCF



Place based philanthropy is an important part of society, it is the understanding of local community need and connecting donors to the causes they care about most as well as the knowledge Community Foundations can provide about need. Philanthropy should be made accessible to people from all walks of life and from all economic backgrounds. We want to encourage philanthropy across the whole of our city.

Working with philanthropists who reflect the growing diversity of Milton Keynes communities, also

enables a truly diversified support for those communities who are rarely heard or supported. Only when we have a diverse donor base can we be a grant funder who truly reflects the communities we represent. Guided by our Vital Signs research and donor choices will also help us understand and prioritise the needs of the causes our donors care about most. Encouraging the next generation of philanthropists will help our communities to remain supported and relevant into the future.

Businesses play a vital role in our society; they employ local people who care about their community and want to work for employers who are also invested in making the city a better place to live and work. Businesses can play their part by providing philanthropic support including time, expertise, and money. We will aim to work closer and in partnership with corporate supporters in line with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) priorities and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Excellent donor experience and stewardship is key to keep this audience engaged, informed, and inspired to support their local communities. We will connect our donors with the causes they care about most and keep them informed of the impact of their giving, inspiring the Foundation giving circle.

Our grant funding programmes are a vital source of income for local community groups to deliver essential projects in our city. It is important to provide information on timescales for distribution of grant funding and manage grantee expectations, providing clear communication when a timescale might not be met. We will offer a range of programmes throughout the year ensuring projects are delivered when and where they are required.

Ensuring the support and impact of the Foundation's work is known across our city is important so that community groups are aware of the support that is available, what the priorities of the city are and how philanthropist can support this work.

What does philanthropy mean to us?

There are many definitions of philanthropy, but MK Community Foundation defines it as connecting those that wish to support the community with those that need it with time, money and expertise.

We will know we are successful when.....

1. We have used our database to gather data on the demographic breakdown of our existing donor base to provide a benchmark for growth and change. (2023 - 24)
2. We have developed a donor product that offers an alternative to our existing funding and membership model to grow our giving from a new community. (2024 - 26)
3. We have increased the number of businesses that support the Foundation through our Corporate Membership scheme by 10% each year and secure one Corporate Fund each year. (2023 - 26)
4. Reporting to existing donors on both the social and financial impact of their giving to increase donations into existing funds by 10% (2024 - 26)
5. We increase members of our Friends of MKCF programme to achieve increased engagement 50% year on year. (2023-26)

Goal 2:

Ensure all our dealings with VCCS stakeholders are consistent, fair, equitable and inclusive.

- We will ensure that our grant programmes are targeted to areas in most need as defined by Vital Signs.
- We will ensure that our grant applications are accessible to all members of the community who qualify for support.
- We will develop a range of programmes that anticipate the needs of our growing community.
- We will align our Rent subsidy policy with Grant making policy, focusing on impact and support to organisations that respond to Vital Sign priorities.
- We will promote the community benefit provided by our property portfolio and ensure communications are in line with our mission and brand value.



Supporting the community through our grant giving and rent subsidies is the main purpose of the Foundation and as such we have a responsibility to the community to ensure that this funding is distributed fairly and to where it is most impactful. The Foundation already uses Vital Signs research to identify the key issues within our community, we will also research the demographic breakdown of our existing grant giving to identify any gaps and ensure that funding is being distributed fairly.

As a Foundation we are aware that there are communities in our city who do not engage with our funding programmes but provide vital support to their neighbourhoods. It is important that we actively identify and engage with these communities through a wider more inclusive networks, making use of the existing relationships we have with organisations such as Q:alliance, CIL, The MK Intercultural Forum and MK Ethnic Business Community.

The Foundation will continue to reach out to support groups who need funding, through meetings, workshops, and reviews. Our communications need to be accessible, use plain English, able to accommodate varying cultural expectations and people with differing abilities to ensure we are resourcing groups who tackle the issues raised by Vital Signs. The introduction of a new salesforce system will enable us to review our current processes to develop new ways of recording and gathering data, to include our support through rent subsidies and grant giving.

The Foundation has committed to undertake extensive research to identify the changing needs of the community and incorporate this into our long-term strategic planning. This project will start early 2023 with the report expected later that year.

Rent subsidy applications policy and process has brought this financial support in line with the existing criteria for grants applications, with assessment being presented and decided by an independent panel. This will have an impact on the current tenants as we transition to the new process. VCCS tenants will be contacted every year to review their subsidy so that when a lease is reviewed there will be no issues that have not already been discussed. We will work with organisations to help them plan effectively for any changes in rental payments. Rent subsidies add significant value to groups and it's important that we are transparent and clear in our communications, and tenants understand the reasons for changes in policy and how this can support them to work more effectively.

Communications with VCCS stakeholders is important; all supporters, tenants, and community groups, receive a monthly newsletter, which will outline new information on policy changes, details of support available through our capacity building programme and grant giving programmes.

We will know we are successful when.....

1. Our grant distribution aligns to the needs of our community identified by Vital Signs, feedback surveys and data from Salesforce in line with the VCCS research report. (2023 - 24)
2. Through end of grant feedback from community groups, we have positive rating in 75% of responses and develop an active learning plan for all replies. (2024 - 26)
3. Every VCCS tenant has been through the new rent subsidy policy and is receiving the correct and fair subsidy based on an assessment of their benefit to the community by the independent Subsidy Panel. (2023 - 26)
4. When our grant success rate is consistently over 80% at our independent Grant Panel and our giving to the VCCS is increased in line with the expectations/needs as identified in our VCCS research paper (2023 - 24)
5. Case studies in our marketing and communications around our impact are equally balanced between rent subsidies, land projects, grant programmes, bursaries and partnership funding. (2023 - 26)

Goal 3:

Develop our role as an enabler of a thriving VCCS by building capacity.

- We will support groups to become more environmentally sustainable, in line with our commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- We will build partnerships with the corporate sector that support a thriving and financially sustainable VCCS .
- We will encourage volunteers from our diverse communities to become involved in Voluntary sector leadership roles, through our Trustee engagement programme.
- We will build the capacity of the VCCS by signposting to existing support and by identifying gaps to existing services and build a programme that grows the sector.
- We will encourage collaboration and sharing of resources to support the VCCS utilising both our financial and property portfolio resources.



For the voluntary sector to thrive there needs to be strong infrastructure support, enabling them to deliver their services effectively both now and in the future. The Foundations Capacity Building programme provides infrastructure support to the sector beyond the grant giving and rent subsidies and encourages the sharing of best practice.

What do we mean by Capacity Building?

Capacity building enables voluntary sector organisations to develop competencies and skills that enables them to become more effective in the delivery of their programmes and more environmentally and financially sustainable.

The Foundation has committed to supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which show how local actions contribute to global change. The SDGs provide a blueprint and focus for all organisations to help implement place-based solutions to the global issues, with the aim to create a more sustainable world by 2030. Our commitment to the goals means we will review our working practices across in our own organisation and property portfolio to implement change where possible, demonstrating the benefit of operating to improve the environment and opportunities for all.



The Foundation has the connections to build a bridge between the Corporate and Voluntary sectors by facilitating effective volunteering. By matching offers of pro bono sharing of expertise to the need for support from the VCCS the Foundation is providing a valuable way for businesses to meet their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) targets while give targeted support to the VCCS and helping to build long term relationships.

Evidence shows that voluntary organisations with boards that reflect the demographic of their beneficiaries and have a mixture of people with different skills and lived experience, in terms of age, gender, ability and ethnicity produce more robust and creative strategic thinking.

Having the right people in the right roles creates a stronger and more sustainable foundation so that voluntary organisations can be agile and innovative. We will work with boards to help them build a more engaging trustee recruitment process which attracts diverse candidates. We will also work with volunteers on the roles and responsibilities of trusteeship to encourage a wide-ranging pipeline of potential candidates.

Our mission to support a thriving voluntary sector is essential to Milton Keynes and it's growing communities. How groups are set up and how they operate is crucial to their success. The Capacity Building Programme will build a calendar of activities based on the gaps identified through our due diligence checks and the feedback from the sector, ensuring that the support on offer is accessible and adds value to the local community.

There are many community and voluntary organisations in Milton Keynes, many offering complimentary or overlapping services. As part of our offer to support the sector, we will encourage collaboration and the creation of strategic partnerships enabling organisations to use their resources more effectively and scale up their services. Using our sector wide knowledge, we will work with organisations to maximise the opportunities for sharing resources, particularly through our property strategy to build community hubs, this will be increasingly important as costs soar and demands on voluntary services are set to increase.



We will know we are successful when.....

1. Partnership and collaborative working between VCCS organisations produce grant applications showing that collaborations increase year on year for our grants over £10,000. (2023 - 26)
2. Our grants policy and application workshops are developed to include scoring for environmental sustainability and impact with a route to achieving zero carbon targets. (2023 - 24)
3. Our Key Performance indicator shows the number of grants rejected pre-panel reduces from 36% to 20% over the next 3 years because of the work done to improve governance and training. (2023 - 26)
4. We have a pipeline of volunteers interested in becoming Trustees that cover the 9 protected characteristics and have placed 5 each year onto existing boards. (2024- 26)
5. The Corporate skills volunteering provides an 25% increase on the number of hours donated year on year. (2024-25)

Goal 4:

Align our property activities with our philanthropic objectives.

- We will maximize long-term rental income from our existing portfolio to support additional grant funding and rent subsidies.
- We will release capital that can be invested into existing portfolio and ensure that our current units for both commercial and voluntary sector tenants remain fit for purpose.
- We will secure new community land sites in expansion areas to provide new initiatives such as community hubs which drive change, support collaboration and provide sustainability.
- We will implement the Social Enterprise business plan to provide a return on investment and additional funding to support our charitable activities.
- We will develop an effective investment strategy to support the maintenance and improvement of the portfolio.



The Foundation was endowed a portfolio of buildings currently rented to a mix of commercial and voluntary sector tenants, the vision was to provide the Foundation with income to operate its core mission and provide low-cost premises for the VCCS. The Foundation was also endowed development land and the promise of additional land in the new city areas to enable the Foundation to support the VCCS with access to space to develop new community buildings to meet the growing needs of the city. Intrinsic to this endowment was the management of the portfolio to provide income for the Foundation so that the running cost could be covered and that surpluses generated could be re-invested.

The Foundation's Property and Estate portfolio is managed as part of its wider philanthropic endeavour. The Foundation aims to be generating circa £4m of surplus each year which would be used to fund the running cost of the Foundation; establish an investment fund to purchase additional buildings or land; cover the increasing cost associated to an aging building stock and to double the contribution back to the VCCS (£2M) through subsidised rents and/or increased grant making.

To achieve these ambitions, we will seek to release some of the undeveloped land from our portfolio, which has not attracted any community development applications. This will create a capital funding pot to support the building of new community hubs for the sector. These hubs will be offered with subsidised rent aligned to the community benefit delivered and the needs of our community (as highlighted in our Vital signs research). This will enable us to work with sector partners to create appropriate bespoke buildings that encourage partnership and sharing of support services, providing the right building type for the right use. We will seek to develop "fine buildings" that are adaptable, have negligible or zero environmental impact and that will support, encourage, and enable sustainable delivery of community services and programmes.



Aligned to the Community buildings focus we will ensure the commercial tenanted spaces are also developed and grown to provide an income that matches the needs for support and funds the Foundations work with the VCCS as it grows. Our commercial tenants provide long-term sustainable income which will ensure we can continue to provide subsidised space for the VCCS, generate surpluses which can fund our ongoing investments and as the portfolio grows, provide additional grant funding year on year.

The management of our Estate and Property Social enterprise demonstrates our Corporate Philanthropy request to other MK companies. Surplus generated through our Estate and Property activities will be used to establish an Endowment Fund providing feedback for our tenants on their contribution to the VCCS.

We continue to bring forward community developments through our Community Hubs programme, working with the VCCS to support them to develop and renew their accommodation to meet future needs. We focus continuously on how we improve our own Estate and building management so that the Foundation can build its relationships with tenants, support partnership working and ensure efficient use of space and deliver credible positive climate outcomes.

As Milton Keynes continues to grow, we continue to engage in policy making and place making activities that support the VCCS to enable development of communities and align to our FAIR values.

Finally, our Conferencing and Small Business units Social Enterprise which provide outstanding venues, great spaces for commercial and VCCS customers, will generate surplus that is invested in our philanthropic activities. We will also enhance the opportunities through the Conferencing and Small business Unit Social Enterprise to create new relationships with businesses and business owners, directors and people working in the commercial sector so that they too may be encouraged to engage in philanthropy in the city.

We will know we are successful when.....

1. We have carried out accommodation research to identify the needs of VCCS and have a delivery plan to provide or move organisations to the most appropriate premises. (2024 - 25)
2. We have completed a base-line environmental audit of our estate and buildings and have developed an annual action / mitigation plan to ensure our portfolio remains fit for purpose. (2023 - 24)
3. We are working to achieve our longer-term Property/Estate surplus target to deliver £2m annually for our rent subsidy and grants programmes (2025-26)
4. We will have completed tranche 1&2 land sales to deliver a capital investment fund (2023 - 24 & 2024 - 25)
5. New community land sites (or equivalent) are included in MK Planning policy documents and the Foundation is party to discussions about the wider development of MK. (2024-25)

Goal 5:

Raise the profile of the Community Foundation and the VCCS sector as a voice to influence change, locally, regionally, and nationally.

- We will inspire third party ambassadors, working with local, regional and national champions to promote the work of the Community Foundation.
- We will act as brand champions, ensuring Funding Fairness is represented and empowered both visually and model best practice.
- We will provide marketing and communication assets to support the development of the Fairspace brand and its unique selling point.
- We will provide timely information to communities' and groups impacted by our property strategy.
- We will communicate and engage regularly using a variety of methods, with VCCS stakeholders.



The Foundation is a vital part of the infrastructure of the city, as such it is important we are represented at decision making meetings with MK City Council and SEMLEP. The Foundation can support policy development and increase the influence of both the Foundation and the VCCS in ensuring and enhancing Milton Keynes as a thriving community where philanthropic values of fairness are integral. Information gathered at the meetings will be fed back to inform our future plans and try to avoid duplication.

As the city develops and grows the Foundation's engagement with local and regional bodies will be all about creating a vibrant VCCS where communities thrive and where no community is left out. The VCCS is a vital part of the MK economy and therefore needs to be actively supported and the Foundation can act as an advocate on behalf of the sector, working with MK City Council to build space to support the growing Voluntary sector needs.

MK Community Foundation is reliant on ambassadors to spread the word of our work throughout the city. A focus on both recruiting and nurturing ambassadors, through our Friends of MKCF programme, is therefore a key aim of the marketing strategy for 2023/24. The campaign should build on initial efforts to launch the programme; creating a growing community of ambassadors who are able to talk confidently to their peers about the work of MK Community Foundation, as well as increasing monthly donations to the Foundation. Work should also continue to both engage and motivate the Honorary Structure, Corporate members, Fundholders and other stakeholders to fully utilise their skills and networks.



To raise the profile of the Community Foundation amongst ambassadors and Honorary Structure, there should also be a clear marketing strategy across the Foundation's digital platforms, including website optimisation and social media pages. A clear content strategy, that promotes the work of the Foundation, and relevant campaigns will be written and executed throughout 2023/24 to provide a baseline for continued growth. This includes the introduction of tracking links, to ensure we can measure return on investment through Marketing's digital activities.

Having built on MKCF's branding over the last two years, a focus in 2023/4 is for marketing to act as brand champions across the organisation. Ensuring that MK Community Foundation's tagline of 'Funding Fairness' is not only represented in branding but understood by its audience is a key priority. All staff should be aware of the tone of voice for the organisation provided by the 'Sage persona' – the Foundation using its expertise to give its expertise and advice, supporting and helping others to understand and be able to access better resources. An understanding of branding should also extend internally, with regular brand and tone of voice workshops, to ensure staff, trustees and ambassadors are able to clearly articulate the work of the Foundation and its key objectives as set out in this plan.

As a relatively new brand, more work needs to be done around the marketing and communications of Fairspace. While work has already begun on this, with the launch of Fairspace's standalone Twitter and LinkedIn pages, a marketing aim in 2023/4 should be to grow these platforms to expand Fairspace's audience and increase co-working and conference bookings in line with the Social Enterprise business plan.

Work will continue in branding/rebranding the MK Community Foundations estate, creating a clearly branded portfolio across the city that effectively educates and informs the community about the Foundation's work. In terms of marketing and communications surrounding our property portfolio, a clear PR plan will be created to allow the Foundation to swiftly react to the sale of sites of land; positively educating audiences about our community hubs.

More work will be done around a PR strategy for the rent subsidy review, to bring the process in line with our grant giving making the rent offering fairer.

Promoting our charitable aims, Mission, and values, telling our story is essential to grow support for growing philanthropy across Milton Keynes. Our campaign and support materials used to tell this story will continue to be exceptional. Our commitment to telling the stories of the groups we support, and the impact philanthropy makes will be key in delivering this strategy.

We will know we are successful when....

1. Our engagement with our Honorary Structure through our communication channels, equates to an increase in leads to the Philanthropy Team 1 lead per year per member. [\(2023 – 26\)](#)
2. We have increased the number of bookings of the available Fairspace co-working and conference rooms to new audiences in line with the Social Enterprise business plan. [\(2023 – 26\)](#)
3. We establish a robust PR plan for property and estates that educates key audiences around the Foundation's property strategy. [\(2023 – 24\)](#)
4. We have promoted the work of the Foundation at regional level through the development of relationships with at least one significant media outlet i.e., BBC, ITV radio or television. [\(2023 – 26\)](#)
5. We have a strategic marketing plan, with a campaign strategy based on data that supports the development of our Philanthropic aims across all aspects of the Foundations work.





MK Community
Foundation

Funding Fairness