Esmée Fairbairn FOUNDATION

Pre-application Q&A

3 June 2026, 2.00pm to 3.15pm

Panel

- Genevieve Ford-Saville, Funding Manager – A Fairer Future
- Rosa Sulley, Funding Manager Lead – Creative, Confident Communities
- Jenny Dadd, Funding Manager Lead – Our Natural World
- Luna Dizon, Communications Manager (Q&A support)

Welcome and plan for the session

- Quick introduction to Esmée
- What we don't fund and what we look for
- How we make decisions
- Application process
- Q&A
- Further information and resources

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About Esmée

We aim to improve our natural world, secure a fairer future and strengthen the bonds in communities in the UK.

We want to play an active role ourselves, using our **range of tools** to effect change.

As well as **grants**, we also make **social investments**, **convene** and **broker alliances**, **commission research**, and use our **influence** to achieve our goals.

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A bit about social investment

What is it?

- Repayable finance e.g. loan, equity, community shares, bond
- Organisations often use it to increase their sustainability and impact – e.g. purchasing an asset, developing a product, expanding their team or growing revenue
- Good Finance offers tools and resources to help you understand whether it's right for you

What we offer

- We invest in organisations, funds and projects creating impact towards our funding priorities. Financial returns from our investments are recycled into new investments.
- We work with applicants to find the type and terms of investment that will best help them to achieve their mission
- Learn more and how to apply

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Grants – in numbers

£50m yearly grant budget

200 main grants awarded a year (roughly) across **13** funding priorities

44 Esmée staff including **19** in our grant funding team

67% grants awarded in 2025 for core or unrestricted costs

3 to 5 years term for the majority of grants (we have no minimum/maximum)

£204,363 / £195,000 average / median grant amount in 2025

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What we don't fund

These types of organisations:

- Organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100,000 (see our FAQs on how we assess turnover).
- Organisations that aren't constituted. Note that if your organisation is not a registered charity, we will assess governance and the risk of disproportionate 'personal benefit' (see our FAQs on kinds of organisations we support).

These types of costs:

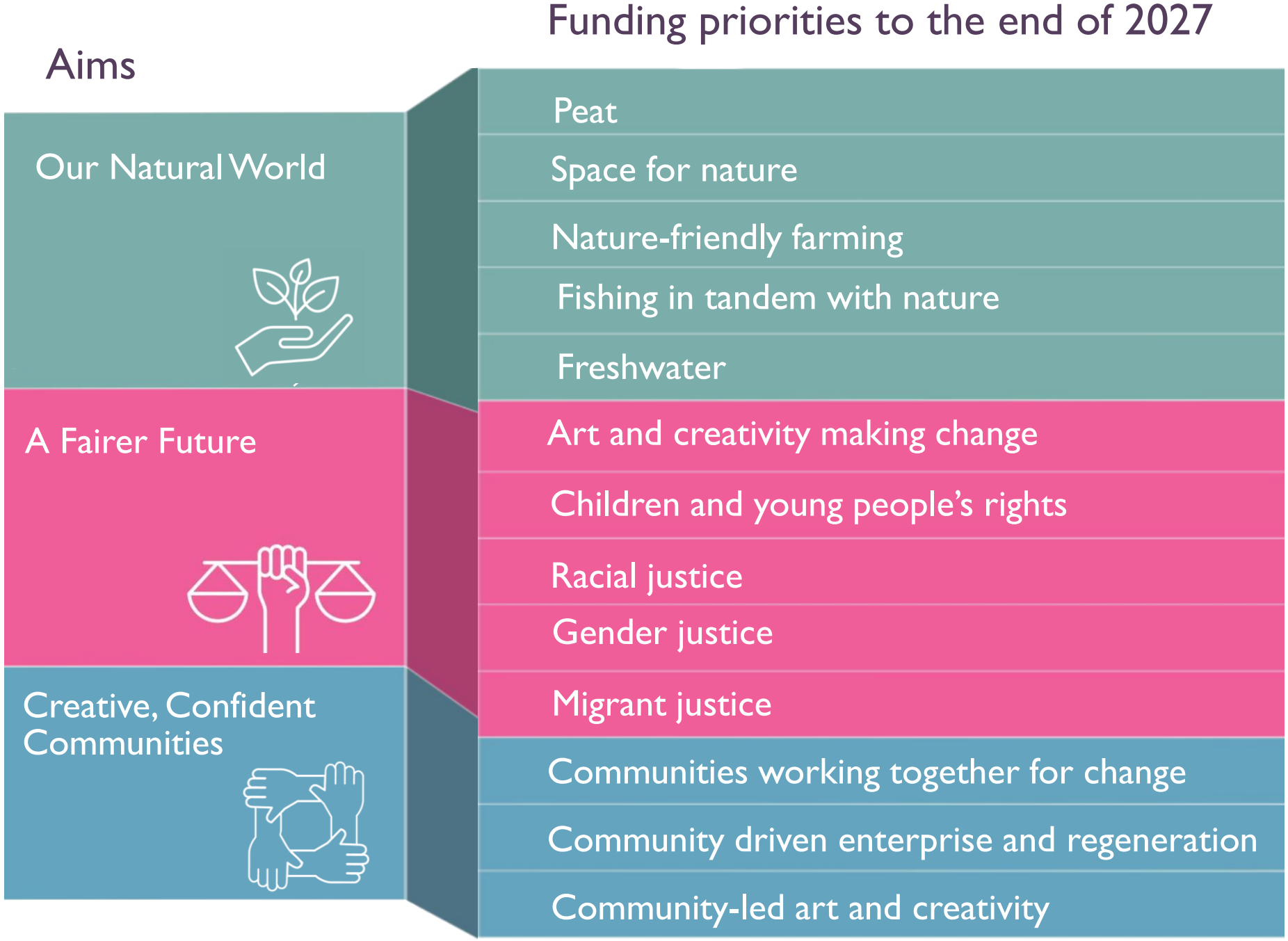
- Capital costs including building work, renovations, and equipment (the exclusion applies to grants only, we may make social investments for these).
- Grants for less than £30,000.
- Grants to individuals.

These types of work:

- Work that is not legally charitable – defined as work that falls within one of 13 descriptions of charitable purposes.
- Work that does not have a direct benefit in the UK.
- Academic research – unless it can demonstrate real potential for practical outcomes.
- Healthcare with a clinical basis, including medical research, hospices, counselling and therapy, arts therapy, education about and treatment for drug and alcohol misuse.
- Independent education – work that takes place or is delivered by fee-paying schools.
- Work that is primarily the responsibility of statutory authorities.
- The advancement of religion.

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Strategic framework



Community-led art and creativity



We have three long-term outcomes in this priority:

1. Local people and local artists lead creative and cultural activity in their communities.
2. A collaborative approach to creativity and culture enables people to work together to strengthen their community.
3. Local and regional cultural strategies are shaped by citizens and impact wider decision making and agendas for change.

We will consider proposals that include activity in schools *only* where this approach is part of a wider engagement plan (e.g. a programme with multiple routes for community co-creation, one of which takes place in schools). We would *not* support work that is only taking place in schools or work that is part of the curriculum.

Please note: all applications in this priority will need to contribute to *both* the first *and* second long-term outcomes. If your work is a good fit to the third long-term outcome, your application will need to contribute to *all three* long-term outcomes.

Museum collections funding: we also partner with Museums Association to deliver the Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund, which has a different application process and is managed by the Museums Association.

Explore recent grants in Community-led art and creativity.

1. Local people and local artists lead creative and cultural activity in their communities.

We want to support work that:

- Demonstrates the impact of community-led creativity and culture making change in neighbourhoods.
- Is representative of the diversity of the communities in the local area.
- Is managed using co-leadership models between local people and organisations.

Example priority in Creative, Confident Communities

The long-term outcomes we're focusing our support on. In applications, we'll consider how the work could contribute to these.

Additional guidance for the *first* long-term outcome. See our website for the full guidance and case studies

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What we look for

- **A strong fit for our strategy:** contributes towards the long-term outcomes in our strategy.
- **Ambitious and/or doing something new to create systemic change**, with a solid understanding of the context and plans for a lasting impact.
- **Wider influence or spread:** going beyond service delivery to influence policy, practice, attitudes, and behaviour; and/or has the potential to be scaled up, replicated or scope to spread.
- **Centres lived experience, justice, and equity:** driven and shaped by those with lived experience of the issues or is community-led, and centres equity and justice in how they work.
- **A collaborative approach:** has a good understanding of their role and has good connections to their communities, relevant networks and grassroots groups.
- **Governance and leadership:** the organisation is governed accountably and well; and has the relevant skills and experience.

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How we make decisions

To help us make a decision about what applications to take forward, we look at a range of factors based on:

- **How strong a fit the work is to our strategy**
- **How well-placed the organisation is to do the work**

Throughout the assessment process, we take into account other work we're funding and our own plans so we can consider potential opportunities. This helps us make a judgement about what's the most effective use of our resources.

Learn more about how we make decisions.

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

To help us make progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, we gather DEI data from all applicants:

- **Expression of Interest:** applicants complete a DEI monitoring form about their organisation – using the DEI data standard.
- **Assessment call:** we ask applicants to tell us about their approach to DEI within their organisation and through their work.

How we use the information:

- Helps us understand who our funding is reaching as well as identify and address structural inequity in our funding.
- Part of our assessment of applications.
- We're interested in how people and communities most impacted by the issues shape the work.

Learn more about how we use your information

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Watch a short video on how to apply



If you can't see the video, you can watch the video on YouTube.

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Behind the scenes



Expressions of Interest (EOI) reviewed

EOIs are reviewed against our criteria and the outcomes we're working to in our strategy.

We get many more requests than we can fund so the EOI is intended to be quick – to avoid people investing more time applying if it is unlikely we will fund the work.

Learn more about each stage of the application process



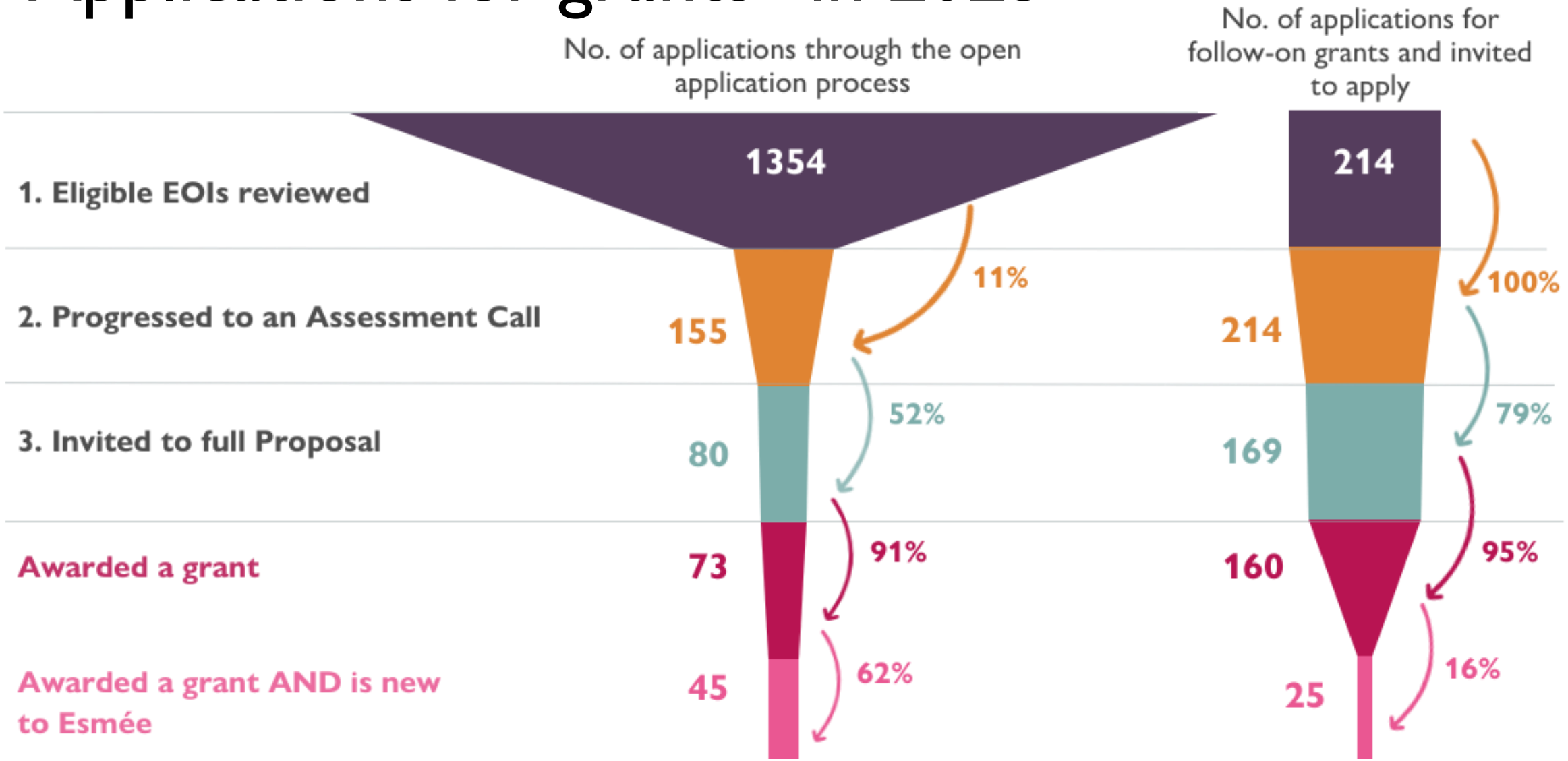
Applications considered at staff meetings

We invite applications we progress further for an **Assessment Call** to learn more.

These applications are considered at regular staff meetings. The team consider potential opportunities in line with our strategy and other work we fund, and whether to progress the application to full **Proposal**. This is based on what we believe is the most effective use of our resources.

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Applications for grants* in 2025



* Excludes applications to our infrastructure support programme, which is invite-only

How do you get on our radar?

We're being more proactive

- Attending sector and community events.
- Research into our areas of work: reports as well as what's in the news and social media.
- Recommendations from partners.

We're staying open

- The EOI stage is for you to tell us that you're interested in our funding and support.
- If we don't think your work is a strong fit for our strategy, we can let you know sooner and save you time working on a full application.

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Support applying and further information

Our guidance has more detail about the types of work we're looking to support under each aim:

- Creative, Confident Communities
- A Fairer Future
- Our Natural World

Accessibility-related support

Download the full guidance and a sample application form

Grant funding overview broken down by funding priority. We also share stories of work we've funded on our website under the relevant funding priority.

Our online FAQs

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Other useful resources



Information on other funding sources including a comprehensive guide to fundraising for small organisations and links to funding directories. It includes a link to GrantNav, a tool to search grants from over 300 funders including Esmée – see tips for using GrantNav



Useful sector resources on a range of topics including fundraising, legal, campaigning, digital and safeguarding.

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For more information:
www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

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Find us on social media