



Our strategy 2019  
**Increasing social impact  
through entrepreneurship**



**Social enterprise is about running a business,  
making a profit, and using that money to  
create a positive social impact**



Firstport is Scotland's development agency for start-up social entrepreneurs and social enterprise. Since 2007, we have been helping social entrepreneurs to bring forward their ideas and make them happen.

### **Our Vision**

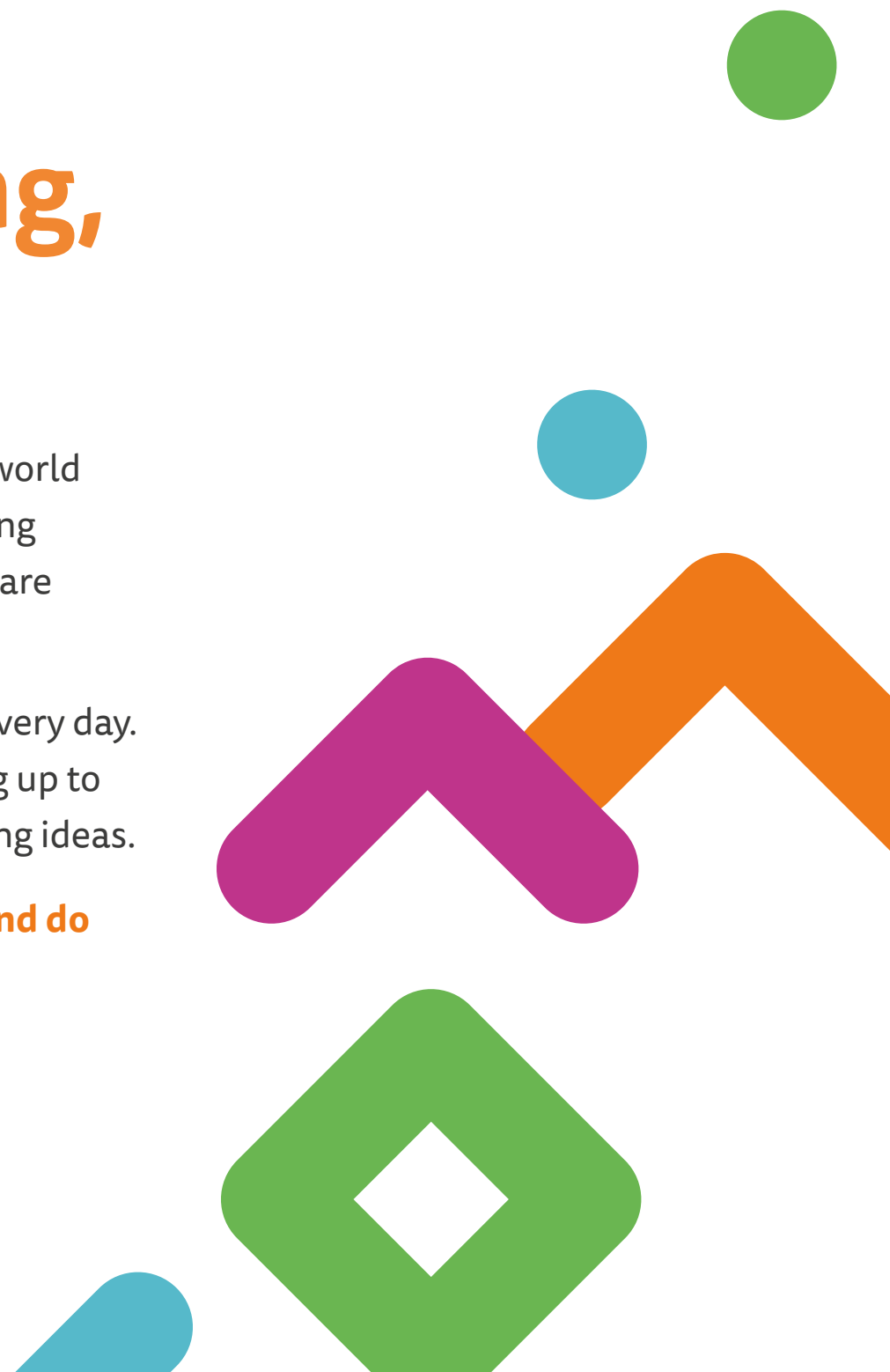
Social enterprises play a key role in society, transforming lives, communities and the economy

# Times are changing, and fast.

Uncertainty continues to be the norm. We hear about a world that is fractured, divided... you could be forgiven for feeling apprehensive about the future. But here at Firstport, we are optimistic and encouraged by the opportunities ahead.

This is because of the individuals we meet and support every day. As they have always done, social entrepreneurs are rising up to these challenges, tackling them head-on with enterprising ideas.

**Social entrepreneurs believe you can run a business and do good at the same time, and so do we.**



# Interest keeps growing.

Over the last few years, Firstport has seen an exponential increase in the demand for its services, with an average of 3-4 budding social entrepreneurs from across Scotland accessing Firstport services every day. Social enterprise is no longer confined to the periphery of the business sector or the economy, but seen as a vital partner in creating a fairer, more prosperous, and inclusive Scotland.



In 2018 alone all our main services were up from the previous year:



## Applications

to our grant funds increased by 20%



Our What if... and Localities programmes helped establish

## 29 social enterprises

that are creating change and positive impact in Girvan and Argyll & Bute



Six enterprises on

## LaunchMe Cohort 3 raised £653k

of growth investment, £280k of which came from private investors



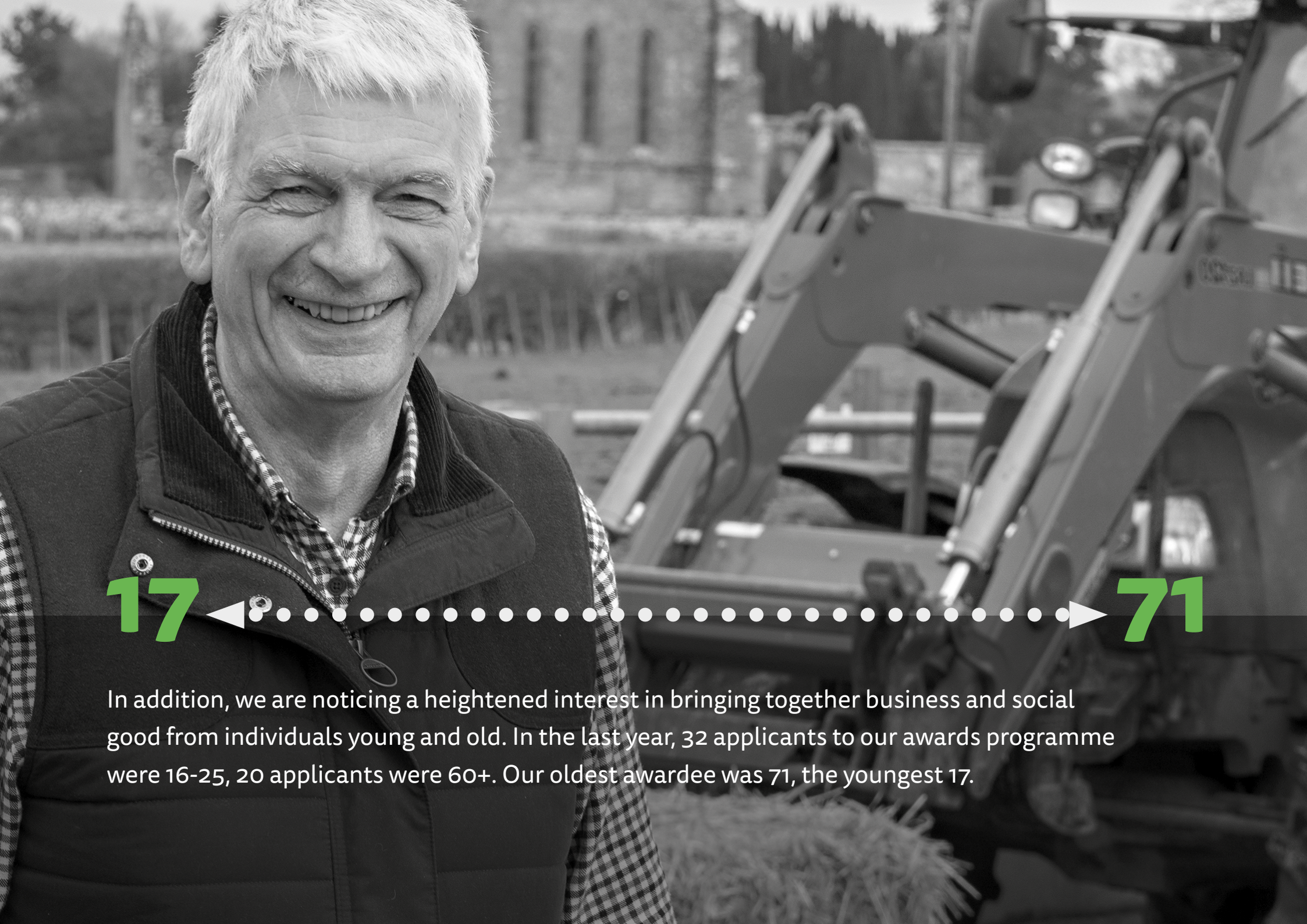
## 1135 ideas

received advice and/or support across all our programmes, with support being given in 31 council areas



## Awarded £925,700

in grant & seed funding up from £824,669



17



71

In addition, we are noticing a heightened interest in bringing together business and social good from individuals young and old. In the last year, 32 applicants to our awards programme were 16-25, 20 applicants were 60+. Our oldest awardee was 71, the youngest 17.

## Our environment

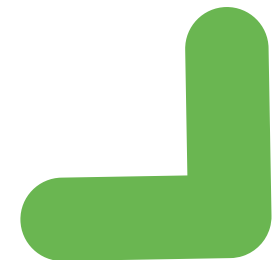
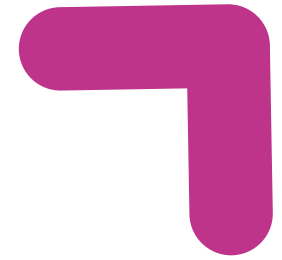
In building this new strategy, we have tried to make sense of and respond to what we see happening around us, as well as looking inwards to reflect on our growth, delivery, and impact to date.





## Some of the issues that have influenced our strategy include:

- The growing demand for work in localities, in line with Scotland's economic strategy focusing on local and community-based approaches. This is underpinned by Firstport's experience with Vital Spark and What if...
- The booming interest in values-driven business models in the private sector and entrepreneurial ecosystems, resulting in growing confusion and disagreement over what social enterprise is
- The increasing appetite for social investment and growth
- The essential role of digital and flexible technologies in every day business and life, leaving those who don't 'digitise' at a disadvantage
- The continued uncertainty in Scotland and across the UK as our departure from the European Union unfolds



**Taking into consideration all of the above,  
Firstport has set out a new strategy to help  
more people create and scale social impact  
through entrepreneurship.**

# A new approach

During the past 12 years, we have broken new ground and built a comprehensive set of services as a response to what we have seen and heard on the ground- what social entrepreneurs have told us they need.

Recognising the successes and relevance of the work we have done and the importance of maintaining those services for Scottish social entrepreneurs, we will focus our attention on increasing our capacity to support the growing interest in social entrepreneurship whilst playing a more purposeful role in shaping the inclusive economy agenda across Scotland.

In order to achieve this, we will build upon Firstport's reputation, assets, and strengths, using these five principles to underpin our future activity:



1

## Be more enterprising

Through becoming a more enterprising organisation ourselves, Firstport will apply the advice and tools we give to entrepreneurs in order to build unrestricted income and further invest in our charitable activity.



## How we'll do this:

- Create a new commercial company with the dual aims of generating unrestricted income for the charity and provide a different vehicle for supporting the c.30% of ideas that come to Firstport but are unable to use the social enterprise model due to barriers such as sector, geography, or growth aspirations. Despite not being social enterprises themselves, they are driven by their desire to create social impact. We believe they can learn and grow from the experience and knowledge of the social enterprise community while needing a different style of support.
- Invest in a new role with the remit of helping grow activity and services.

*"I wanted to run a company but keep the heart. I didn't want a company where I chased zeros in a bank account. I wanted a venture that instead used that money towards a purpose."*

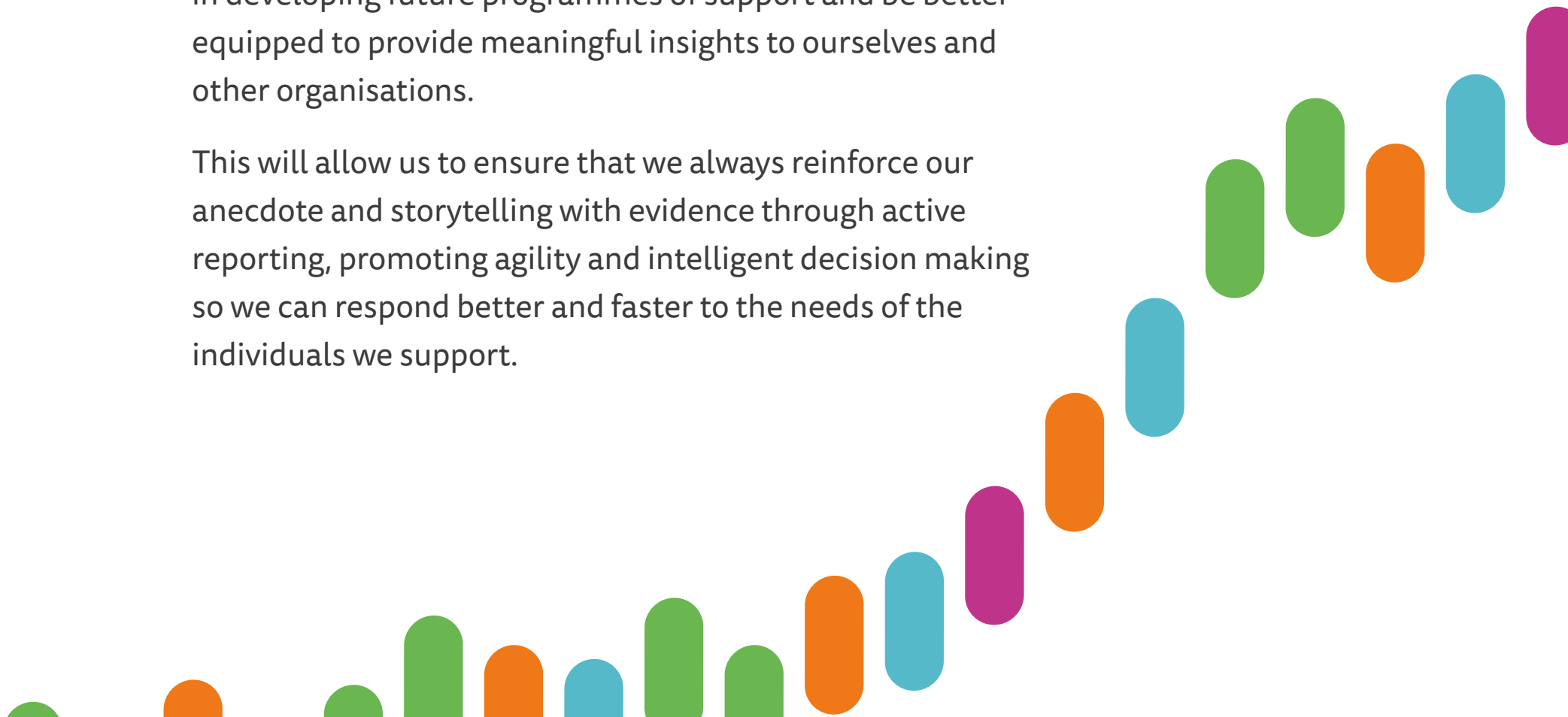


## 2

### **Make more data-driven decisions**

By using digital tools to better understand the needs of clients as well as trends within the social economy, Firstport will be able to respond quickly to change, be more strategic in developing future programmes of support and be better equipped to provide meaningful insights to ourselves and other organisations.

This will allow us to ensure that we always reinforce our anecdote and storytelling with evidence through active reporting, promoting agility and intelligent decision making so we can respond better and faster to the needs of the individuals we support.



### **How we'll do this:**

Refine operational procedures to ensure consistency across services and data collection to help us develop better business intelligence. This will include the creation of a digital tool to record and report on the information gathered, alongside an adequate level of staff training to upskill and assist them in the adoption of new technologies.

*"We believe in our capacity to generate social and environmental benefits for our community but at the same time we aim to become economically sustainable, so social enterprise is the right fit for us."*



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## Use a client-centric approach

We know there is no one-size-fits-all solution for every business and/or community and that it can take a long time for viable enterprises to form from the initial ideas stage. This is particularly true in remote localities where economic conditions are tougher, fewer resources are available and a different operating culture exists.

In implementing new and evolving programmes, Firstport will be vigilant that we do not create a bias toward organisations or communities best suited to 'winning'. We will ensure that our work is customer-led, building in active feedback mechanisms from those we support and leaving room for our programmes to be shaped around the communities in which they are delivered.

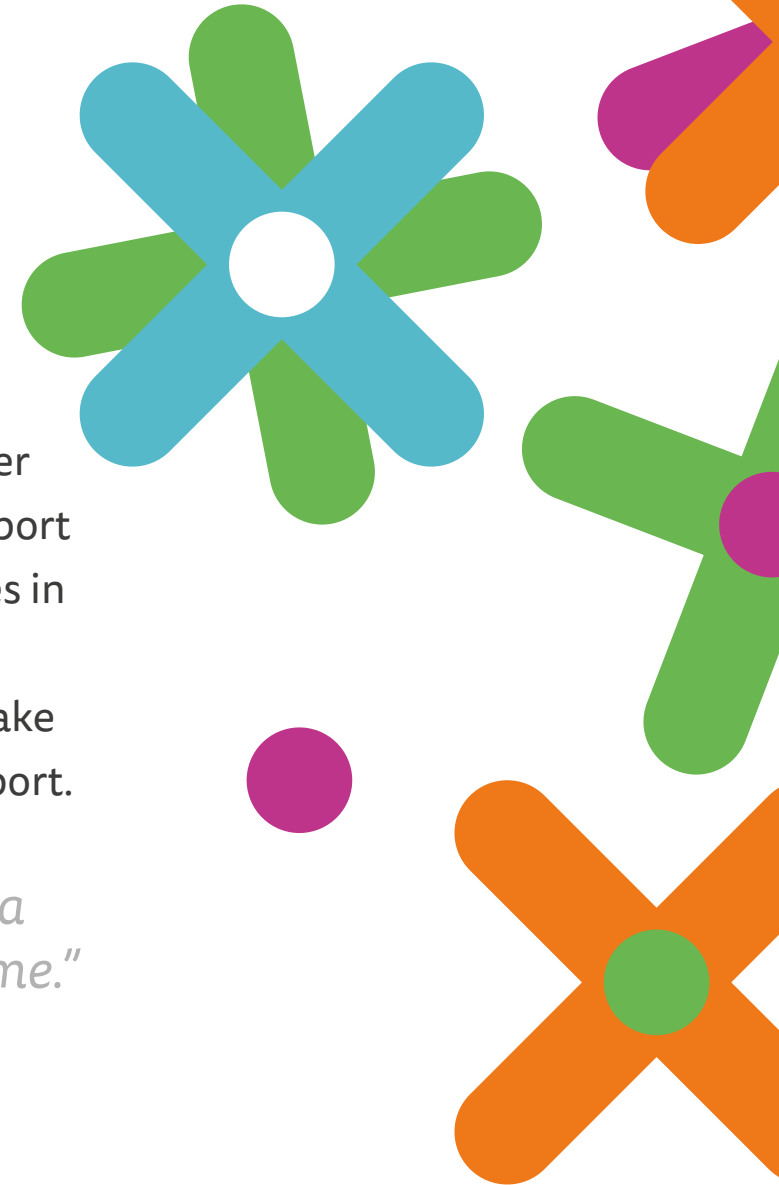




### **How we'll do this:**

- Re-structure the staff team into functional roles that work across programmes, with every client engaging with both a business advisor and a relationship manager who will stay with them across their journey with Firstport
- Engage even more entrepreneurs and social enterprises in the design and planning of new programmes
- Build additional flexibility into our programmes that take into consideration the different needs of those we support.

*"I wanted to have an enterprise that could have a social benefit and be sustainable at the same time."*



# 4

## Work more closely with others

Firstport will actively engage with wider society to better inform a more 'social' and inclusive approach to the economy, ensuring social enterprises have a role in the national economic dialogue. We will use our experience and understanding to participate freely into the national conversation and openly share our insights with others.

As a rule, we will work more closely with other organisations to co-design, co-own, and co-deliver projects across the country. We understand what we do best, so we will work with people and organisations close to the needs being faced and who have the right skill sets, even if this means showing up later in the process.



## How we'll do this:

- Start the design of any new programme by identifying key geographical or sector-specific partners
- Actively respond to and prioritise requests from other organisations to partner on initiatives with shared aims.

*"I've been thinking about my idea for several years now and a social enterprise appeared to me to be the best construct for this business. I've worked with charities and did not want to be burdened by regulation but then did not want to create a business driven by the desire for personal wealth"*



5

## Build appropriate digital tools and learning into our programmes

The pace of change is faster than ever before, and with the Scotland's Digital Economy Maturity Index 2017 showing 76% of Scottish businesses scored less than a 50 out of 100 on the scale, Firstport has a role in helping the 1100+ enterprises it supports per year to prepare for the future.



## How we'll do this:

- Design (where appropriate) and use a blend of face-to-face and digital content delivery for our business support programmes
- Work with our partners to ensure our programmes adopt a 'digital from the start' approach to ensure those we support embrace technologies that allow them to focus on their social and financial impacts efficiently and effectively.

*"Joining a movement of people wanting to make a difference in communities in Scotland felt the best way to go."*



# Full steam ahead

Over the next 18 months, we will work on implementing this evolved approach, increasing our capacity, working to expand the reach of our existing programmes and develop new, more strategic services that encourage and support individuals to bring their ideas forward.

As we look to the future and the complex changes and challenges ahead, we will work towards being well placed to respond to the growing demand for our services and to better support entrepreneurs to create and scale social impact.





**Like what you see?**

Get in touch and talk to us about your idea or how we may work together!



[www.firstport.org.uk](http://www.firstport.org.uk)

[info@firstport.org.uk](mailto:info@firstport.org.uk) • 0131 564 0331



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