



Chief Operating Officer / Deputy CEO Candidate Recruitment Pack

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1. Welcome Letter

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the role of COO / Deputy CEO at MRCT. We are a growing, ambitious organisation delivering six impactful projects with a team of 21 passionate staff. With an annual turnover of just over £1 million, we are entering an important phase of strengthening our operational foundations in order to sustainably expand our reach and impact.

The organisation has designated the COO role as one of two in the workforce that has a genuine occupational requirement to be occupied by a practicing Christian. This emanates from the founding principles of the charity which have shaped the direction, motivation and application of Christian discipleship and values with in our everyday work. Our work is widely supported by Churches and other faith communities in the town; is recognised to have integrity with mainstream Christian beliefs, and knowingly strives to put these into practice without barriers to those who don't share our beliefs but value its expression. Your faithfulness will play a central role in shaping our future. You will support the CEO in turning strategy into operational reality, ensuring our systems, people, and projects work effectively, compliantly, and sustainably. This is an influential hands-on leadership role with the opportunity to make a meaningful difference to those who have known disadvantage and exclusion.

I warmly invite you to read more about us on www.mrct.org.uk and look forward to receiving your application.

Warm regards,

Andy Thornton
Chief Executive Officer



2. About Us

Legal Status

The Michael Roberts Charitable Trust (MRCT) is a registered charitable company.

- **Charity Number:** 1065006
- **Company Number:** 3439299
- Incorporated: 25 September 1997 (amended 28 February 2012; further amendment registered 5 March 2012)
- Registered as a charity: 23 October 1997

Charitable Objects

Our registered purpose is:

“To promote social inclusion for the public benefit by preventing people from becoming socially excluded, relieving the needs of those who are socially excluded, and assisting them to integrate into society.”

For these purposes, *social exclusion* refers to being excluded from society, or parts of society, due to one or more of the following: unemployment; financial hardship; age; ill health (physical or mental); substance dependency; poor educational attainment; learning or physical disabilities; family breakdown; or poor housing conditions.

Background and History

MRCT originated from a church-based community of 46 members, the Harlow Causeway Group that formed in 1991. Our founders Gary and Teresa Knott followed their God given vision to start a charity based on activities focused on inclusion through drama and social programmes involving people with and without disabilities. They developed an international ministry in Poland with able bodied and Learning Disabled from 1999 to 2009 and then decided to focus totally on our local community needs.



Michael Roberts, an inspirational man with Down's Syndrome, played a central role in these early activities. In his honour the charity was named the Michael Roberts Charitable Trust when formally established in 1997.

In 1998, the Maybury Centre in Harlow opened two days per week and continues to operate today. Over time, MRCT has expanded its focus to support people facing financial crisis and long-term poverty. Our current work is delivered through six major programmes and collaborative partnerships with local agencies.

While MRCT has the capacity to work nationally, our primary focus remains Harlow and the surrounding area, ensuring that our efforts remain locally targeted and community-driven.

3. Our Current Focus

Our Goal

We aim to ensure that people in Harlow and the surrounding areas who are in crisis, overlooked, isolated, or living in long-term hardship gain increased confidence, resilience, and hope. Our support helps people maintain dignity and be valued as full members of the community.

Our Aims

1. Support people in crisis to regain stability.
2. Provide initiatives that help vulnerable people avoid future crises.
3. Mitigate the impact of poverty on households in need.
4. Offer friendship, purpose, and community to those who are socially isolated.

How We Achieve This

- **Redistribution:** Supplying food and children's items from local businesses and residents to those in need.
- **Community Spaces:** Hosting drop-in centres for friendship, social support, and belonging.
- **Partnerships:** Working alongside local voluntary and statutory bodies to address poverty and isolation.
- **Volunteer Mobilisation:** Engaging people across Harlow in meaningful community service.
- **Advocacy:** Representing the voices of those affected by hardship and empowering them to advocate for themselves.

The Results of Our Work

1. Immediate food support for anyone in need.
2. Faster recovery from crises, leading to greater resilience.
3. Stronger and more stable low-income households.
4. More secure early years for children in families experiencing hardship.
5. Greater belonging, confidence, and hope among vulnerable groups.
6. Increased empathy and solidarity within the wider community.
7. Public intolerance of crisis-inducing disadvantage.
8. Inspiration for further community action and innovation.

Our Approach

Although MRCT has grown significantly, we remain a locally rooted charity. We continue to focus on **practical, grassroots solutions** to local problems, delivered in partnership with the people we serve. This community-led approach ensures that our programmes remain relevant, adaptive, and impactful.

Our Motivation

Our work is rooted in Christian principles. We are committed to alleviating suffering and fostering community harmony, guided by the belief that no one is excluded, unwanted, or overlooked by God, whose love is revealed in the life of Jesus.

4. Our Current Projects

Since 2017, MRCT has expanded and refined its work to respond to the town's most pressing needs, particularly financial crisis and social isolation. Today, our programmes fall broadly into three areas: **relief from financial crisis, support for inclusion, and community empowerment.**

Relief from Financial Crisis

- **Harlow Foodbank** – Founded in 2019, a Trussell affiliated Foodbank, provides emergency food packages to individuals and families in crisis. In 2024/25, we supported 9,375 people (including 3,552 children) through 4,204 packages. Our Financial Caseworker also secured £124,000 in unclaimed benefits for clients and supported over £511,000 in debt management, including £48,200 of debt write-offs.
- **The Bounty Club Social Supermarket** – A surplus food redistribution project, expanded in 2024 into a town-centre social supermarket. It now has 3,400 members and serves 600 visitors weekly, offering essential items at around 60% of retail cost and saving households an average of £67 per month. The project is supported by 60 volunteers, many of whom are former beneficiaries.



- **Essex Affordable Food Hub** – Started in 2025 - Supplies low-cost food to partner charities across Essex and is an integral part of Essex County Council’s public health funded initiative The Essex Community Food Network.



- **Bump to Five** – Provides essentials for families with children under five. In 2025, over 1,000 tailored support parcels were distributed to 449 families, benefitting around 700 children.
- **School Uniform Shop** – Relieves financial pressure on families with school-age children (5–16) by providing affordable uniform items, which redistributed nearly 6,000 uniform items last year



- **Advice, Information & Guidance** – Daily staffed with partner organisations and local advisory charities to help families manage hardship and navigate services.

Support for Inclusion

- **Maybury Open Door** – Our town-centre drop-in for adults of all backgrounds and abilities. Operating three days per week, it supports around 170 attendees weekly. Activities include craft sessions, exercise, and group outings. Many trips are now organised by participants themselves, fostering independence and confidence. In addition to regular drop-in services, the centre also hosts coaching, mental health support, and community action projects.



- **The Bounty Active Centre** – Just launching: a member-led venue that promotes health, wellbeing, and social connection through shared skills, hobbies, and mutual support.

Community Empowerment

- **The Harlow Hive** – A platform enabling people with lived experience of poverty to share insights, organise projects, and influence change. The projects also works with groups in crisis such as local residents threatened with eviction.



5. Strategic Priorities 2025–2028

Over the next three years, MRCT will strengthen and expand its work by focusing on four strategic priorities. These will maximise the impact of our current projects, ensure long-term sustainability, and deepen our engagement with those we serve.

1. Securing our Permanent Town Centre Location

In October 2024, we were granted a three-year lease for the former Wilko store, also in the Harvey Centre. This large, central location allows us to:

- Offer services in one easily accessible hub.
- Provide holistic, wrap-around support to individuals and families.
- Create a welcoming social space for community connection.
- Share premises with other support services for efficient referrals.
- Achieve operational economies of scale.

Guiding Principles:

- Support will be unconditional at first contact, fostering trust and readiness for change.
- Visitors will receive holistic help, addressing both causes and effects of poverty.
- We will collaborate with other agencies, offering our expertise while respecting theirs.
- Partnerships will include voluntary, statutory, commercial, and educational bodies.

- Our work will remain rooted in Harlow, with strong local community involvement.
 - We will advocate for beneficiaries, amplifying their voices with dignity and respect.
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2. Influencing Through Strategic Alliances and User Voice

Our charitable objects commit us to addressing the root causes of exclusion, including unemployment, ill health, financial hardship, and poor housing. While our programmes provide direct relief, long-term change requires systemic influence.

We will therefore strengthen alliances with organisations tackling related issues, sharing insights from our work and the lived experience of our beneficiaries.

Guiding Principles:

- Remain focused on Harlow while working in partnership with others.
 - Protect the privacy and dignity of all service users.
 - Share case studies and insights responsibly, ensuring compliance with data protection.
 - Empower beneficiaries to self-advocate, rather than using them as organisational spokespeople.
 - Remain non-partisan, but highlight the real-world impact of policy decisions.
 - Ensure all public statements are evidence-based, well-researched, and open to scrutiny.
 - MRCT representatives will speak from our organisational knowledge and values, not personal opinion.
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3. Reaching New Audiences

Our core mission remains focused on relieving poverty and isolation. Currently, our services primarily reach adults aged 25–55. We see opportunities to extend our impact to other groups, including:

- **Early years children and parents** – through expanded parenting education within *Bump to Five*.
- **Teenagers and school children** – through engagement in food support initiatives and youth-led advocacy via *Harlow Hive*.
- **Older adults** – by creating opportunities for them to share time and skills (e.g., intergenerational “make and mend” activities).

Guiding Principles:

- New work must have clear, achievable objectives aligned with MRCT's mission.
 - Initiatives should be co-produced with beneficiaries to ensure relevance.
 - Expansion must be well-researched and not compromise existing projects.
 - We will avoid duplicating or competing with the work of other agencies.
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4. Communicating Our Christian Identity

MRCT is rooted in Christian principles, which inspire our commitment to dignity, equity, and compassion for all. While our services are open to people of all faiths and none, our faith remains central to our motivation and vision.

Guiding Principles:

- Our historic Christian inspiration continues to drive outreach, innovation, and openness.
- Faith motivates us to develop new solutions to social need, not to impose belief.
- We celebrate life with gratitude, sharing blessings without judgement or explicit proselytism.
- We acknowledge our fallibility, always pointing to the source of our inspiration rather than elevating our own example.

Financial Plan

MRCT's financial strategy is designed to sustain and expand our services in response to rising local need. We operate with a diverse funding mix, balancing charitable donations, trading income, and partnership contributions to maintain stability.

Funding Mix

Our income is currently derived from the following sources:

1. **Regular monthly donors** from Harlow and surrounding areas.
2. **One-off donations** from the public, local organisations, corporates, and trusts.
3. **Recurrent commitments** from larger charitable trusts.
4. **Charitable income** from partner agencies and use of our facilities.
5. **Trading income** from low-cost food redistribution and sales.
6. **In-kind support** from partner organisations.
7. **Corporate sponsorships.**

This blend enables both project-specific funding and support for core costs. For example, Big Lottery Fund underwrites staff salaries, while Foodbank donors and trading surpluses from the Bounty Club sustain project-level delivery.

We typically achieve a modest annual surplus, which strengthens reserves and supports organisational growth.

6. Recognised Areas of Vulnerability

Despite current stability, several factors require close monitoring:

1. Bounty Club Turnover

- The Bounty Club social supermarket is projected to reach an annual turnover of £400,000, representing nearly half of MRCT's total income.
- With net profits of around £140,000, the model remains sustainable while keeping food prices low for households in hardship.
- However, losses in this project would directly impact unrestricted funds and reserves. Its size makes careful oversight essential to ensure it does not become "too big to fail."

2. Time-Limited Charitable Income

- Significant contributions currently come from time-limited partnerships, particularly with the Trussell Trust, which are due to expire within two years.
- These partnerships have been vital in strengthening the Foodbank and contribute towards core costs. We must continue to demonstrate impact to attract replacement partnerships.

3. Regular Donor Base

- Our existing base is loyal but has not grown in four years. Meanwhile, operating costs and demand have risen sharply.
 - Increased visibility in Harlow presents opportunities for growth, but also reputational risk if public confidence were undermined.
 - We must actively protect our reputation, cultivate new supporters, and engage newcomers to the town with a compelling case for giving.
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Income Generation Priorities (2025–2028)

- **Growing our Supporter Base:** Implement the “Supporter Journey” model (see Appendix 2) to deepen engagement and increase regular giving.
 - **Expanding Partnerships:** Seek sustainable collaborations that align with our mission, particularly around food security and poverty reduction.
 - **Trading Growth:** Ensure that trading activities remain financially viable while meeting social objectives.
 - **Corporate Engagement:** Build structured opportunities for local and regional businesses to support MRCT’s work.
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Internal Development

To deliver this plan effectively, MRCT will strengthen internal capacity in the following areas:

1. **People** – Targeted recruitment of staff, trustees, and volunteers from diverse backgrounds, reflecting the community we serve.
 2. **Communications** – Improve visibility and reach. Currently, communications are shared across senior staff and project leads; we will develop a more coordinated communications strategy, with priority on donor engagement.
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7. The COO / Deputy CEO Role - Overview

- **Job Title:** Chief Operating Officer / Deputy CEO
- **Reports to:** Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- **Direct Reports:** Operations Manager, Finance Officer and 3 Project Leads
- **Location:** Harlow – CM17 0PB
- **Salary:** £41,000 – 46,000 depending on experience
- **Hours:** Full-time
- **Pension:** Employer contribution
- **Annual Leave:** 28 days including public holidays plus discretionary leave between Christmas to New Year closure
- **Hybrid Working:** not normal in the organisation
- **Other Benefits:**

- Relocation support
- Professional development budget
- Employee wellbeing support
- Flexible working options

The COO will lead the day-to-day operations of the charity, improve systems, support people management, oversee finance and compliance, and ensure our projects are delivered efficiently and effectively.

8. Job Description Summary (See Appendix for full version)

Strategic Leadership

- Work with the CEO and Leadership Team to deliver organisational strategy
- Convert strategic goals into operational plans
- Drive organisational improvement and innovation
- Deputise for the CEO when required

Operational Management

- Oversee operations across six projects
- Strengthen systems across finance, HR, IT, governance
- Ensure compliance with charity law, GDPR, safeguarding
- Lead continuous improvement initiatives

Finance & Resources

- Co-develop and manage the annual £1m budget
- Lead financial processes and reporting
- Monitor financial performance and risk
- Support fundraising applications with operational insight

People & Culture

- Oversee HR, recruitment, and staff development
- Foster a positive, inclusive organisational culture
- Support line managers and team leads

Governance & Risk

- Provide accurate reporting to the Board
- Maintain risk registers and compliance frameworks
- Lead safeguarding and data protection processes

Systems & Infrastructure

- Maintain IT, CRM, data, and digital systems
 - Improve monitoring and evaluation practices
 - Manage suppliers and external partners
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7. Person Specification

Essential

- Senior leadership experience in the charity sector
- Strong operational management background
- Excellent financial literacy and budget oversight
- Experience managing multiple projects/services
- Understanding of charity HR, governance and compliance
- Effective communicator and relationship-builder
- Ability to lead change and improve systems
- Highly organised, proactive, and solution-focused
- Practicing Christian familiar with local church life and faith in action

Desirable

- Experience in charities of comparable size
- Familiarity with fundraising and income generation
- HR or project management qualifications
- Experience working closely with Boards
- Experience leading digital transformation

9. How to Apply

MRCT is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion across our projects and encourages anyone to apply based on the criteria in the post. To download application form:

<https://mrct.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/MRCT-Application-Form-COO-CEO-Deputy-2026.docx>

Please contact Alison Keir or Andy Thornotn on 01279 724515 if you have other questions or wish to visit the charity.

10. Recruitment Timeline

- **Applications Open:** 6th Jan 2026
- **Application Deadline:** 22nd Jan 2026
- **Shortlisting:** 26th Jan 2026
- **First Interviews:** week commencing 2nd Feb 2026
- **Start Date:** Negotiable



Job Description: Chief Operating Officer / Deputy CEO

Organisation: The Michael Roberts Charitable Trust (MRCT)

Location: Harlow, Essex

Contract: Full-time

Salary: £41 – 46,000

Reports to: Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Direct Reports: Project Managers / Operations Manager / Finance Officer (PT)

About the Organisation

MRCT is a UK-registered Christian charity delivering six key projects that support People experiencing exclusion through learning difficulties, physical disabilities, poverty and other crises. With a dedicated team of around 20 staff and an annual turnover of approximately £1 million, we are entering an exciting period of consolidation and growth. We are now seeking an experienced Chief Operating Officer to strengthen our operational foundations and help drive the organisation's strategic ambitions.

In recent years MRCT has developed innovative ways of addressing these through projects involving purchasing and selling food and other household items at low profit to alleviate the household budgets. Our audience is those in the town Benefits and longer term low incomes which is approximately 10% of the population. Of the 6,000 in that category, we help around 4,000 a year.

As well as generating this income, we are part of developmental plans for Harlow Council and Essex County Council. We place great importance on working in partnerships with other bodies in the town, helping to bring the needs of our beneficiaries to their attention and to work for systemic progress in addressing poverty and isolation. We have secured long term income from the Community Fund (Big Lottery) and Postcode Lottery as well as significant trust and foundation support. Alongside that we have regular income from households, businesses and corporates in the area.

These partnerships are, to us, part of our Christian commission to be salt and light to our neighbours in the town. The post has a genuine occupational requirement to share and live-out the Christian faith that motivates and directs the charity's work.

Role Purpose

The Chief Operating Officer / Deputy CEO will play a pivotal role in ensuring the effective, efficient, and compliant operation of the charity. As a key member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the COO will oversee operational delivery, internal systems, financial stewardship, risk management, volunteer management, and will line initially manage project managers across three of the more established existing projects. The postholder will work closely with the CEO and Board of Trustees to shape and execute strategic priorities, ensuring the charity remains sustainable, resilient, and impactful.

Key Responsibilities

1. Strategic Leadership

- Act as a core member of the Senior Leadership Team, contributing to organisational strategy, planning, and decision-making.
- Translate strategic objectives into operational plans and measurable outcomes.
- Lead cross-organisational initiatives that improve efficiency and long-term sustainability.
- Deputise for the CEO when required.

2. Operational Management

- Oversee day-to-day operations across all six projects, ensuring high-quality, consistent delivery, line managing three of the more established projects.
- Working with the Operations Manager to maintain robust operational systems, policies, and procedures across finance, HR, IT, safeguarding, project management and volunteer oversight.
- Ensuring compliance with charity law, data protection (GDPR), health & safety, safeguarding, and funder requirements.
- Leading continuous improvement initiatives to enhance productivity and organisational clarity.

3. Finance & Resource Management

- Work with the Finance Manager and CEO to develop and manage the annual £1m budget.

- Working with the Operations Manager to oversee financial processes, reporting, and controls to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Monitor organisational performance, cashflow, and resource allocation.
- Support income generation by providing operational insight for fundraising bids and grant applications.

4. People & Culture

- Working with the Operations Manager to oversee HR functions including recruitment, performance management, wellbeing, and staff development.
- Working with the Operations Manager and team leads to oversee and monitor our volunteer recruitment, training and retention.
- Build a positive, inclusive, and empowering organisational culture aligned with charity values.
- Ensure staff and volunteer policies are up-to-date and embedded in practice.
- Support managers to lead effective, motivated, and high-performing teams.

5. Governance & Risk

- Support the Board of Trustees by providing accurate, timely operational and financial reports.
- Working with the Operations Manager to lead organisational risk management, maintaining risk registers and implementing mitigation strategies.
- Ensure the organisation meets all statutory, regulatory, and contractual obligations.
- Oversee safeguarding systems and compliance.

6. Systems, Data & Infrastructure

- Improve and maintain internal IT, CRM, monitoring & evaluation systems, and digital processes.
- Ensure data-driven decision-making and high-quality reporting to funders and regulators.
- Manage relationships with external suppliers, contractors, and professional services.

Person Specification

Essential

- Senior leadership experience within the charity or non-profit sector.
- Demonstrable experience managing operations, people, and organisational systems.
- Strong financial literacy, including budgeting, reporting, and risk management.
- Experience overseeing multiple projects or services simultaneously.
- Excellent understanding of charity governance, compliance, and safeguarding requirements.
- Strong communication, negotiation, and relationship-building skills.
- Ability to lead change, improve systems, and embed a culture of accountability and learning.
- Solutions-focused, resilient, and able to manage competing priorities.

Desirable

- Experience in a charity with turnover between £500k–£2m.
- Experience supporting fundraising and income generation activity.
- Knowledge of digital transformation or service innovation.
- HR or Project management qualifications (CIPD, PRINCE2, etc.).
- Experience working with Boards or Trustees.

How to Apply

The application can be found at <https://mrct.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/MRCT-Application-Form-COO-CEO-Deputy-2026.docx>