

Handsworth Pre-school Committee Meeting Minutes – 6 February 2024

1. **Present:** Johnnie Padilla (Chair), Louise Paul, Ruth Mattison, Lauren Mankelow, Hannah, Lykke Hansen, Lee McNulty, Siobhan Knifton, Alex Fletcher
2. **Apologies:** No apologies noted.
3. **Minutes of the last Committee Meeting:** Agreed.
4. **Matters arising (from previous Committee Meeting):** Spring/Summer Fete date to be discussed under item 8.
5. **Chair's report:** Johnnie noted there have been challenges around recruitment and thanked Louise who has been instrumentally involved whilst a new Pre-School Manager is recruited.
Gemma Ransome (interim joint deputy lead) had announced she would be leaving with her last day on 8 February. Johnnie held an exit interview with Gemma earlier in the day and noted that exit interviews would be standard practice and offered going forward. Gemma was a key player and would be very much missed and the committee wished her all the best for the future.
Trustees have a meeting planned for 27 February to discuss business operations. Alex Fletcher was welcomed and thanked for taking on the secretary role.
6. **Pre-school Manager's report:** See attached document.
Following the report, it was queried whether anyone would be taking over Gemma's role. Louise confirmed that the position was being advertised and meanwhile, Aysha would be stepping up to the role until July.
7. **Business Manager's report:** See attached document.
Following the report, Johnnie noted the increased rate per child by £0.18 and £0.10. Ruth explained it was comparable to previous years but this year the pre-school would benefit. There were various factors involved in the funding formula including the age of the child and if they reside in one of the deprivation areas in the borough which would increase the pre-school's hourly rate. Although 2-year-olds and those paying fees would be more lucrative, the pre-school offer as many places as possible to people in the community, with older children being contacted first.
There were 47 children on the waiting list, however, worth noting that some families add their name to more than one waiting list, so until they had been contacted it was unconfirmed if they would all want the place when offered.
Although there is not a legal capacity for the maximum number of children the preschool could provide childcare for, it is guided by staff ratios (with a smaller ratio for 2-year-olds compared to 3- and 4-year-olds). The pre-school usually aims for 30 children with a maximum of 32, although are currently at 28 children due to staff challenges. In a year with more consistent staffing, the number of children could increase to 30 in the autumn term, and increase again to 32 in the summer term (when there are more older children in the setting and adjusted ratios).
8. **Items for discussion/proposals:**
Summer Fete: It was agreed to hold the fete on Saturday 18th May from 11am-2pm, depending on availability of the church halls.
Last year's fete, held late June, clashed with other local events and was lost amongst the school fetes, whereas the 2022 fete had been held in May.
Ruth would approach the church and request the Cowling Hall and the hall next to the kitchen from 10am-3pm (to include preparation and clear up time) for Saturday 18th May, and confirm back to the committee.

9. Any questions: N/A.

10. Date and Time agreed for the next meeting: Tuesday 7 May 2024, 8.30pm via Zoom.

11. Johnnie thanked everyone for attending the meeting and to Louise and Ruth for their contributions.

Pre-School Manager's Report

The Pre-School re-opened in September with a new staff team and new operating hours. All of the children settled in well. In a move away from a more rigid curriculum and planning approach the staff introduced an in the moment planning approach. This involves allowing the children to take the lead and following their interests, this has included doing a variety of fun activities including welly painting, taking photos, making bird feeders. This is all documented within floor books which will be available for you to see when visiting the setting.

The extended hours have seen a good uptake and has worked well so far. There is perhaps room for discussion around increasing hours further.

In November we were visited by a teaching advisor from Waltham Forest who commented that the children were all involved and happy within the setting, as well as leaving us with some useful information and ideas for the future. This was in preparation for our Ofsted inspection which could happen at any time.

We have held a successful stay and play for new parents, which enabled them to have an informal chat with their Child's Keyworker. We trialled this as an alternative to the more formal parent consultations which used to happen twice a year. The staff team found this to be a successful and useful event and an improvement on what we had offered before. This also prevented the need to close the setting for two days to enable the Parent Consultations to take place. It also reduced pressure on staff who did not need to produce reports for all of the children at once. We will be holding a similar event for parents of Children who are now in their second year with us on Thursday 8th February. Over the festive period we held a successful concert and lunch party which was enjoyed by all, and the Pre-School children made us all so proud with some amazing singing. Having lunch altogether was a joy and hopefully helped promote the lunch club to Parents/Children who might be thinking of extending hours.

We have worked hard to strengthen our relationship with the Church, enabling better and more prompt communication between the church staff and ourselves ensuring that maintenance matters are dealt with promptly. We have also been lucky that Cherie the Church Vicar has volunteered to come in and lead a (non-religious) singing session with the children every Friday morning. This has proved a welcome addition, and the children greatly enjoy and value the session.

Staffing issues consider to be a huge issue and concern for the Pre-School. The search for a new Pre-school manager has been unsuccessful as of yet, placing additional stress and burden onto existing staff. Finding reliable staff has proved difficult and unfortunately due to staff sickness and unavailability the Pre-School had to close for the day on Monday 18th December. The Pre-School has been using agency staff which obviously comes at an additional cost. The staffing situation has also reduced the chance for much CPD throughout the team which is concerning. Sadly, Gemma will be leaving the staff team on Friday 9th February to take a position closer to home. Her loss as a consistent and valued team member will be felt across the whole of Pre-school and it is a great shame that she is leaving us.

Business Manager's Report

Setting numbers:

The setting is currently full, there are fourteen funded 3- and 4-year-olds, eight funded 2-year-old and six fee paying child on our register.

We have six families who are entitled to the 30 hours and staying all the 23 hours provided.

Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE):

The Early Years Team within the Local Authority (LA) had set up a Task and Finish Group (T&FG) which are tasked to look at the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for the financial year 2024/2025.

I acted as one of the representatives for the Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) Sector on the T&FG. I attended three meetings between November 2023 and January 2024.

The recommendations from the group have now gone to Schools Forum for approval.

The T&FG are hoping that the schools Forum will approve an increase of 10p per hour from £8.26 to £8.36 for funded two-year-olds on benefits and £7.86 for working families, and an increase of 18p from £5.39 to £5.57 for funded 3- and 4-year-olds from April 2024.

Pupil Premium

We currently have two child who are eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium.

National Minimum Wage

From 1st April 2024 the National Minimum Wage will increase by £1.02 per hour from £10.42 per hour to £11.44 per hour. This is an increase of 10% and will have a significant impact on the settings finances.

Waiting list numbers:

There are currently 47 children on the waiting list.