

The London Early Years Foundation



Leyf
Nurseries

**Chair of Trustees
Candidate Information**

April 2026

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Message from our Chief Executive



Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the role of Chair of Trustees at LEYF. I am delighted that you are considering joining us at such an important point in our journey.

At LEYF, we are committed to changing the world one child at a time by delivering high quality early years education and care, particularly in communities where it is needed most. Three quarters of our nurseries are based in some of the most disadvantaged areas of London, where families face both financial hardship and a shortage of childcare places. This makes our work not only purposeful but essential.

Quality is at the heart of everything we do, and we are proud to be recognised as the largest early years social enterprise and charity in the UK. We continue to invest in our people through our pedagogy and training programmes across our nursery and central office teams, providing qualification and leadership pathways with apprenticeships and degrees to internal and external learners through the London Institute of Early Years, to build a strong pipeline of early years professionals.

Our people are the heartbeat of LEYF. Their care, creativity and commitment drives everything we achieve, reflected in high levels of engagement and pride in our social purpose. Alongside this, we have continued to grow, welcoming more children, increasing occupancy, and expanding our reach across London.

As the UK's largest childcare social enterprise, we combine commercial discipline with a clear social mission, reinvesting all surplus back into our nurseries, colleagues and communities. This balance between purpose and performance is central to who we are.

We are now seeking a Chair who can strengthen this balance. We are looking for someone pragmatic and commercially aware, who will support and challenge in equal measure, and who is comfortable navigating the nuance between charity and social enterprise. The role also requires an appreciation of the complexity and diversity of our organisation, and the credibility to represent LEYF with confidence and integrity. An understanding of the importance of partnerships and networks will be key to extending our reach and influence.

Equally important is a genuine connection to the early years sector. Our people give extraordinary energy and care, and we are looking for a Chair who understands this, brings emotional intelligence, and can engage authentically with our purpose.

LEYF is a dynamic, values led organisation with a deep commitment to social justice. As Chair, you would play a vital role in helping us grow our impact and ensure every child has the best possible start in life and that our people have the best possible environment in which they can thrive.

I very much hope you will consider joining us on the next phase of our journey.

Dr June O'Sullivan OBE
Chief Executive

About us

London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) is the UK's largest charitable childcare social enterprise with an ambition of 'changing the world, one child at a time'. We currently have 43 nurseries across 13 London boroughs.

As a social enterprise, we combine commercial discipline with a clear social mission. All surplus is reinvested into our nurseries, our people and the communities we serve. This enables us to maintain high quality, grow sustainably and reach more children who can benefit from our provision.

Our History

LEYF has been supporting children and families for over 120 years. Founded in 1903 as the City of Westminster Health Society, our original mission was to tackle high infant mortality and poor living conditions in London. Over time, our focus evolved from health and welfare services to early years education, growing from a small number of nurseries into a London wide organisation. In 2006, we began our transition to a social enterprise model, combining financial sustainability with social purpose. Today, we continue that legacy across the capital.

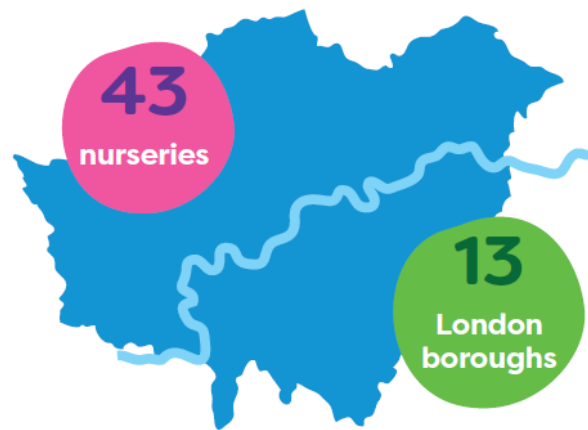
Our Purpose

Together with families and communities, we give London's children, especially those most in need, the best start in life through access to high quality, affordable early years education and care. We believe that the first five years of life are critical, shaping future health, wellbeing and life chances, and that getting this stage right can help address some of society's most complex challenges such as addiction, poor mental health and homelessness.

Our Social Impact

We focus our work where it is needed most. A significant majority of our nurseries are located in areas of disadvantage, where access to high quality childcare is often limited. By providing excellent early years education alongside wider family support, we help improve life chances for children and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.

Evidence shows that children who access quality early years provision achieve better long term outcomes. Our consistently strong Ofsted results reflect the quality of our provision, supported by our LEYF pedagogy and a commitment to continuous improvement through action research and innovation.



Community and Partnerships

Each of our nurseries is rooted in its local community, building strong relationships with families and responding to local needs. Many of our settings work with partner organisations to provide additional support, from family services to community initiatives.

[Partnerships](#) are central to our model and driving wider impact across the sector through our Institute. We collaborate with a wide range of organisations and supporters who contribute expertise and resources, helping us extend our reach and maximise our impact. We also play an active role in influencing the early years sector, campaigning for better funding, greater recognition for the workforce and improved outcomes for children.

Read our annual report

Take a look through our annual report to find out more about our impact over the past year.

[Download](#)



Our Approach to Learning

Our [pedagogy](#) is centred on learning through play, creativity and exploration, enabling children to develop confidence, curiosity and independence. We nurture each child as an individual, supporting them to learn at their own pace in safe, caring and stimulating environments.

We invest significantly in our people to maintain consistently high quality practice. Through our [Apprenticeships](#) and the [London Institute of Early Years](#) we provide industry leading learning and development opportunities, equipping our teams with the skills and knowledge to deliver excellent outcomes for all children.

Our People and Values

Our people are at the heart of LEYF. Their care, creativity and commitment underpin everything we do. Our culture is guided by four core values:

Brave
Inspiring
Nurturing
Fun

We push boundaries and advocate for children
We champion continuous learning and development
We create safe, inclusive and supportive environments
We believe in creativity, joy and learning through play

Find out about the team and trustees at LEYF and how we work together [here](#).

Championing Diversity and Inclusion

We welcome all children into our nurseries, irrespective of social background or ability, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who we know are too often turned away from other settings. We also champion diversity across our workforce, recognising the importance of representation and role models for children. Currently, 7.6% of our nursery teachers are men (compared with the national average of 3%) and 58% of our people reported their ethnicity identify as Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME). By reflecting the communities we serve, we create inclusive environments where every child and team member can thrive.

[Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement](#)



100%

Ofsted Outstanding and Good nurseries



4,191

children supported



1,198

funded-only places



140

apprentices



1000

people



64

NPS score

Strategic ambition

Our ambition is to transform early childhood by growing our impact, strengthening our model and influencing the wider system. As a social enterprise, this means combining a clear social purpose with strong commercial discipline, understanding how we earn our income and reinvest it to deliver the greatest possible impact.

How We Grow Our Impact

We think about growth in three interconnected ways:

- Scaling up** Expanding our nursery footprint to reach more children, with growth focused in areas where it will have the greatest social impact
- Scaling out** Sharing and replicating our model beyond LEYF, particularly through the London Institute of Early Years, enabling others to deliver high quality early years education
- Scaling deep** Embedding our values, pedagogy and ways of working consistently across the organisation, ensuring quality and impact as we grow



Role Description

Role title:	Chair of Trustees
Remuneration:	Voluntary
Time commitment:	There are typically 5 board meetings per year, held in-person, in London. This includes a Strategy Away Day. There will be additional time, circa 1-2 days per month for ad hoc meetings, nursery visits, events and connecting with the Chief Executive.

What's in it for you?

By joining the UK's largest childcare social enterprise as Chair of Trustees, you will have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference to the life chances of disadvantaged children across London. This role offers the chance to apply your skills and experience in a different context, using your judgement, curiosity and strategic insight to support a mission driven organisation delivering long term social change.

You will be inspired by the passionate, nurturing and committed team at LEYF, and will lead a Board of Trustees that is collaborative, professional and deeply engaged in the organisation's purpose. As Chair, you will play a key role in strengthening LEYF's social impact through strategy, supporting its continued growth and ensuring strong, effective governance as the organisation expands its reach.

It is an exciting time to join LEYF, as we move into the next phase of our development and ambition.

Responsibilities

LEYF is seeking a Chair of Trustees to lead its Board and support the organisation in achieving its charitable objectives and strategic priorities. The Chair plays a central role in ensuring strong governance, enabling LEYF to deliver high quality, cost effective services to children, families and partners, and to maximise its social impact as it grows.

Through strong leadership of the Board, the Chair will play a vital role in ensuring LEYF continues to grow its reach, strengthen its model and deliver meaningful, lasting impact for children and families.

Board Leadership and Governance

- Provide clear leadership and direction to the Board, ensuring it functions effectively as a collective decision-making body
- Set the Board agenda, priorities, annual programme of work including strategic discussion topics, and longer-term strategy, working closely with the Chief Executive to shape these
- Encourage open, inclusive and effective Board discussions, ensuring all voices are heard, whilst maintaining focus and discipline
- Ensure the Board complies with charity law, company and employment legislation, sector regulation and other relevant regulations
- Lead Board composition, induction and development of the Trustees, to ensure the right balance of skills, experience and diversity

Strategy and Performance

- Guide and support the Board in agreeing and overseeing LEYF's strategic direction, ensuring discussions are balanced, informed and timely
- Chair meetings effectively, whilst helping the Board reach consensus and ensure decisions are clearly recorded and actioned
- Support and unlock the organisational ambitions to reach more children and enable high quality education and care
- Ensure appropriate oversight of risk, financial sustainability, and organisational performance
- Leverage your business acumen, EQ, and leadership skills to add value to Board deliberations and decision making

Responsibilities continued...

Partnership with the Chief Executive

- Ensure a strong, constructive relationship is forged with the Chief Executive, acting as a sounding board and trusted advisor
- Act as a critical friend to the Chief Executive and Executive Management Team to achieve their strategic objectives, without encroaching on operational / management responsibilities
- Ensure there is clear separation between governance (which the Board is accountable for) and management of the business (which the Executive Management Team are accountable for)
- Ensure effective succession planning for the CEO, and playing a lead role in appointing and appraising the Chief Executive

Engagement and Advocacy

- Be visible and curious when visiting LEYF nurseries or attending LEYF events
- Champion the organisation's mission, values and commitment to diversity and inclusion
- Act as an ambassador for LEYF, representing the organisation with credibility and integrity
- Use networks and influence to strengthen LEYF's profile and impact across the sector

Person Specification

We are seeking an experienced, values led individual who can provide strong leadership to the Board and support LEYF in delivering its social mission at scale.

Experience and Knowledge

- Senior leadership and Board level experience, with a strong understanding of governance
- Commercial awareness and an understanding of how a social enterprise operates
- Ability to navigate the balance between social purpose and financial sustainability
- Experience of complex or growing organisations, ideally across the UK
- Understanding of, or interest in, the early years sector and wider social impact landscape
- Ability to engage effectively with stakeholders across a politically neutral environment

Skills and Capabilities

- Strategic, pragmatic and calm, with sound judgement and the ability to absorb complexity
- Strong influencing and networking skills, with the ability to build partnerships
- Confident communicator, able to represent LEYF with credibility at a senior level
- Financial awareness, with the ability to balance sustainability and risk in decision making

Leadership Style and Personal Qualities

- Values driven, with a strong commitment to LEYF's mission
- Supportive and appropriately challenging, acting as a constructive critical friend
- Agile and not risk averse, comfortable supporting innovation and growth
- Inclusive and emotionally intelligent, able to foster effective Board dynamics

Commitment

- Willingness to be visible and engaged, including attending meetings, events and visiting nurseries in London
- Ability to commit sufficient time to the role and support LEYF externally where appropriate

Diversity and Inclusion

We warmly welcome applications from individuals from all backgrounds, particularly those underrepresented at Board level. We are committed to building a Board that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve and believe this strengthens our impact.

How to Apply

If you are interested in this fantastic opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of others, please submit an application which includes the following:

- An up to date CV with details of two referees (we will not contact them without your prior permission).
- A supporting statement, which addresses your suitability against the criteria in the Person Specification, and details your motivations for applying.

All applications will be handled by our recruitment partner, Trustees Unlimited.

Please send your application to applications@trustees-unlimited.co.uk.

For an informal discussion about the role, you can contact Melissa Baxter at Trustees Unlimited on melissa.baxter@trustees-unlimited.co.uk / 07789 985 229.

Closing date for applications: Monday 1st June 2026

First stage interviews with LEYF: Monday 6th & Tuesday 7th July 2026

Second stage interview with LEYF: Before end of July 2026, dates to be confirmed.

We look forward to receiving your application.

All trustees at LEYF are required to complete their EY2 form at a full DBS check prior to appointment.

