

PRE-SCHOOL SUB-COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 17TH MARCH 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **PRE-SCHOOL SUB-COMMITTEE**, held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **TUESDAY, 17TH MARCH 2026** at **7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillors: Martin Ashcroft, Arun M. Chandran, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Julie Gale (Pre-School Manager)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs. Vikki Anderson (Corporate Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE

No members of the public were present.

9. APPOINTMENT OF A TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN

The Town Clerk opened the meeting and as both the Chairman and Vice Chairman were not in attendance and asked the meeting to appoint a temporary chairman.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran and seconded by Ken Robson and:

RESOLVED - that Councillor Martin Ashcroft act as Chairman for the meeting.

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Tony Armstrong, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Neil Collinson, Sandra Kirby, Jackie Mcfadden Lewis and Tracey Williams.

11. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No applications for dispensations had been received.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

14. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson, and:

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Pre-School Sub-Committee, held on the 2nd July 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING CENTRE UPDATE

The Pre-School Manager submitted a report updating members on the pre-school attendance figures, staffing, special educational needs (SEN), training, health and safety, activities, events and projects.

The Pre-School Manager gave a summary of the key points from the report explaining that attendance figures at present are lower than usual, and that this could be due to the opening of a nursery in close proximity to St Oswald's and the fact that St Oswald's does not provide care to children under two years old.

Councillor Carl Robinson queried whether there is concern about the impact on future attendance numbers.

The Pre-School Manager confirmed that this is a concern highlighting that new funding came in for working families in September 2025 for children aged 9 months onwards, so quite a few families would naturally choose to place their child in a daycare facility and stay there, as the child would be settled.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked if the lack of baby room facilities was a shortfall.

The Pre-School Manager advised that the pre-school currently takes children from 2 years and at present does not have these facilities.

The Pre-School Manager advised that the newly appointed member of staff has settled in well, adding that it was nice to have a male staff member for the children.

Attention was drawn to the need to remove asbestos and replace the floor in the kitchen in the Tots in the Park building over the summer holidays. This was something that had been recommended by Environmental Health in a recent food safety inspection. The Town Clerk advised that the Works and Environment Manager would be bringing a report to the April meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee regarding this project.

Councillor Arun M Chandran asked why provision hadn't been made in the budget.

The Town Clerk explained that officers were unaware of asbestos being present until some units were removed from the kitchen and that Environmental Health had since identified it a recommendation.

Councillor Arun M Chandran questioned whether it was possible to leave the asbestos alone, as it was encapsulated.

The Town Clerk explained that full details will be within the report to Members.

The Pre-School Manager outlined some of the vast and wide range of events and visits that the children had participated in, including the July 2025 graduation ceremony for leavers and cream tea for parents, a leavers prom with a DJ and games, where all children were invited.

The Pre-school had recently received funding of £1,500 which was used to provide all families with a food hamper.

Councillor Arun M Chandran asked where the funding was received from.

The Pre-school Manager advised that the funding came from Durham County Council linked to deprivation and disadvantaged children. A similar amount was received last year.

Councillor Arun M Chandran suggested that if the funding was not guaranteed in future, the Council could look at making provision for it to continue.

The Pre-School Manager summarised the rationale for introducing a late collection fee, which had been referred to this sub-committee for consideration.

It was explained that there have been a number of parents who have been late to collect their child, and when this happens, two pre-school staff must wait back, past the end of their shift, making them late to collect their own children or for their own appointments. The introduction of £10 charge for every 15 minutes late had proven an effective deterrent and is reasonable compared to other local nurseries, some of whom charge significantly more. It is therefore recommended that the late collection fee is endorsed by the Council and permanently implemented.

Councillor Carl Robinson commented that he recalled there being a long debate in a previous meeting regarding concerns about the late charge and the reasons for it. Having heard directly from the Pre-School Manager, he understood that this fee is needed to support the pre-school staff team.

Councillor Arun M Chandran proposed to receive the report and to endorse the permanent implementation of the late collection fee and review this each year as part of the annual fees and charges review.

Councillor Ken Robson seconded this proposal and commented that attending this meeting is always a pleasure and it brings a lot of joy hearing about the activities that the pre-school staff undertake with the children, stating he was particularly impressed with the life skills they are being taught and commending the work of the team.

Councillor Arun M Chandran raised the issue of safeguarding, highlighting national cases where children had been mistreated or abused, and asked how satisfied the Pre-School Manager is that the safeguarding arrangements in place at the Pre-School are strong and effective.

The Pre-School Manager summarised the safeguarding arrangements in place advising that she is confident that the policies, procedures and controls are robust.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun M Chandran and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson, and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received;
- ii) The late collection fee of £10 be permanently implemented.

CHAIRMAN