

Background to our decision not to renew the license of Willowbrook Nursery

- The license to Willowbrook, agreed in 2020, expired in July 2023. Willowbrook was given notice by previous Trustees in March 2023. In June 2023, incoming Trustees (see below) offered Willowbrook a new license at a commercial rent, reflecting an unprecedented and massive rent increase being imposed by Welwyn Hatfield Council for the lease of the building. This commercial rent was unacceptable to Willowbrook, and Willowbrook's counter-offer would have made the Centre financially unviable. The Trustees therefore confirmed to Willowbrook in June 2023 that the license would not be renewed. However, Willowbrook had meanwhile not informed parents that the nursery was under notice at the end of its license and had instead made commitments into the Autumn term, beyond the license expiry.
- A license for one further term, to 22 December 2023, at the fee offered by Willowbrook, was granted by the Trustees on the explicit condition that this license would not be renegotiated or renewed, and was being granted for one term only in order to give parents and staff time to make new arrangements.
- However, Willowbrook management again withheld this information from parents. Instead, with their "non-negotiably non-renewable" license expiring on December 22, they invoiced current families for the New Year and offered places to new families. The Trustees became aware of this, by chance, shortly before Christmas, by which time they had already made plans for renovations required under their own lease to commence at the end of Willowbrook's license.
- At a meeting a week before the end of term, Willowbrook for the first time requested an extension of their license, pressing this on grounds that local families to whom they had promised places would otherwise be critically disadvantaged. The Trustees made explicit at the meeting that were not willing to do further business with Willowbrook on this basis. However, recognising the gravity of the crisis that Willowbrook had caused, they started after the meeting to look for ways of mitigating it.
- Even at this stage, and without any further license having been granted, offered or promised, it appears that Willowbrook management continued to circulate misleading information to parents, incorrectly indicating that they had secured assurances from Trustees that the nursery could continue as usual after Christmas.

The Trustees have now granted this brief final non-renewable license purely with a view to mitigating the situation which Willowbrook has caused local families. Anyone wishing to see a copy of the current, final, non-renewable license, may contact the Trustees as below.

[continued below]

Moving on

The Trustees much regret the situation that has arisen and the distress that has been caused to local families over this Christmas and New Year period. We recognise that there has been pre-school provision at the Centre for many years and that Willowbrook Nursery provided a high standard of care for its children, which will be sadly missed in the local community.

We are currently renovating the Centre and exploring ways for it to accommodate a wide range of activities of benefit to all age-groups within the local community, in line with its charitable obligations. We hope that at some point this will again include activities for pre-school children.

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North Mymms Youth and Community Centre

Registered Charity 275285