

CHAIR INFORMATION PACK



Sydenham Garden
A growing community



Role Headlines

Who We Are and What We Do

At Sydenham Garden, we use nature, creativity and community to support people living with mental ill health and dementia to grow and thrive. Through gardening, creative activities, cooking and therapeutic programmes, we provide a welcoming environment where people can build confidence, improve wellbeing and develop meaningful social connections.

What The Role Involves

As Chair, you will inspire and support a highly engaged Board, providing strategic leadership, strong governance and constructive challenge while working in close partnership with the Co-Directors to shape the charity's future. As an ambassador for Sydenham Garden, you will champion our mission, build relationships with funders and partners, and help ensure more people can benefit from our unique approach to improving wellbeing.

What We Are Looking For

We're looking for a collaborative and values-driven leader who is passionate about our mission and can provide strategic leadership, sound judgement and strong governance to help Sydenham Garden thrive. Previous Chair experience isn't essential—we welcome applicants with leadership, governance or people management experience who can build positive relationships, support and challenge the executive team, and champion our work within the community. We are committed to building a diverse and inclusive Board that reflects the communities we serve and warmly encourage applications from people of all backgrounds, providing reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process.

How To Apply

To apply, please submit your CV along with a supporting statement of no more than 500 words to: trusteeworks@reachskills.org.uk by 5pm, Friday the 11th of September 2026.

WELCOME.

Thank you for your interest in joining Sydenham Garden as Chair.

This is an exciting time to join our organisation as we continue to embed our Strategic Plan to:

- develop Sydenham Garden's services to reach a larger cohort of co-workers (the people accessing our services).
- continuously improve the effectiveness and impact of Sydenham Garden's activities.
- solidify and diversify Sydenham Garden's funding sources.
- increase Sydenham Garden's diversity at all levels.



Alongside delivering our current strategy, the charity is embarking on an exciting new phase of development. A governance review is now underway, providing an opportunity to strengthen and evolve our governance arrangements. We are also beginning work on our next three-year strategy, which will launch next April. This work will take place over the coming months and the incoming Chair will play an important role in shaping both the future governance of the organisation and its strategic direction.

As Chair, you will be responsible for leading the Board in delivering against our strategy and business objectives, ensuring effective governance and supporting the two Co-Directors and senior leadership team as a trusted critical friend. You will work closely with fellow trustees to provide strategic leadership while fostering an inclusive and collaborative Board culture where governance responsibilities are shared and the diverse skills and experience of trustees are fully utilised.

You will join a Board where your contribution will be valued. We provide a comprehensive induction, opportunities to visit our projects and meet our co-workers (the name we give to our primary beneficiaries), and the chance to help shape our governance review and next three-year strategy from the outset.

The Board enjoys a close working relationship with the staff team, and we believe serving as Chair of Sydenham Garden is both a rewarding and enjoyable opportunity to make a lasting difference.

You can read our full 2024-2027 Strategic Plan [here](#)



WHAT WE DO.

Sydenham Garden is a unique wellbeing centre utilising its gardens, nature reserve and activity rooms to help people in their recovery from mental and physical ill-health in Lewisham.

We do this through providing co-workers (the people accessing our services) an opportunity to take part in one of our five main projects, along with many supplementary activities and clubs.

Four of these projects are focused on Adult Mental Health and include gardening, art & craft, cooking and opportunities to achieve recognised qualifications

The fifth project is focused on Dementia and includes all the same elements but underpins them with Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST).

We promote inclusion and reduce prejudice by bringing together co-workers with different degrees of mental and physical ill health, volunteers and members of the local community to work together.

Sydenham Garden enables people to improve their quality of life, social interaction and physical and mental health in a supportive community environment.



Find out more about the work we do [on our website](#) and in our latest [Annual Impact Report](#).

CHARITABLE STATUS & FINANCES.

We have been a Charity since 2004, and we are registered with the Charity Commission (Charity No: 1108100).

In our last published financial year (2024-25) our total income for the year was £659,441 (compared to £429,703 in 2023-2024), and total expenditure was £529,584 (compared to £445,788 in 2023-2024). We intend to continue efforts to diversify our income base.

Our sources of income to date have been grant and trust funding, individual donations, community fundraising, as well as trading income from rental and corporate hire as well as our Flower farm. Our current list of grant funders includes City Bridge, Mercers' Company, Lloyds Bank Foundation, National Lottery as well as commissioning funding from South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Foundation Trust and Lewisham Council.



Our 2024-25 Financial Statements can be viewed [here](#).

Chair Role Description

About The Position

Above all, the Chair understands and champions the ethos and values of Sydenham Garden. The recovery journey of the people we support, whom we call co-workers, is at the heart of everything we do, and the Chair is a visible ambassador for that vision, both within the Board and externally.

The Chair leads an effective Board, ensuring it provides strategic direction, accountability and inclusive decision-making, with meetings that are well prepared, well managed and productive. Working closely with the Vice-Chairs, Committee Chairs and Co-Directors, the Chair fosters strong relationships across the organisation, provides support and constructive challenge to the leadership team, and represents Sydenham Garden with funders, partners and the wider community.

Governance And The Board

Sydenham Garden's Board is made up of 11 Trustees, including Vice Chairs, a Company Secretary and a Treasurer. We are proud of our positive, supportive and collaborative Board culture. Our Trustees describe it as kind, open and transparent, with a strong focus on community and improving the wellbeing of our beneficiaries. As our new Chair, you will be working alongside a dedicated group of Trustees who bring a wide range of skills, experience and enthusiasm.

The gardens are central to Sydenham Garden's identity, providing spaces for sanctuary, therapy, healing and community connection. We are looking for a Chair who shares these values and can lead with empathy, collaboration and good judgement, creating an environment where every Trustee feels heard and able to contribute.

We are proud of our highly engaged Board, whose members bring a wide range of skills, experience and enthusiasm. Alongside the full Board, Trustees contribute through three standing committees – Finance & Governance, People & Services, and Fundraising – as well as lead roles for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and Safeguarding. These roles and committees provide valuable oversight, scrutiny and insight across the charity's work, helping to strengthen governance and decision-making.

As Chair, you will work closely with the Vice Chairs, Committee Chairs and Trustee leads to ensure the Board remains effective and focused on delivering the charity's strategic priorities. While it is not essential for our new Chair to sit on committee meetings, you will take an active interest in their work and participate if/where appropriate.

Trustees are appointed for a term of three years but are eligible for re-appointment for a further two terms (maximum of 9 years in total).

Key Responsibilities

This is the detail behind the role above; what the Chair actually does, month to month.

Ensuring The Board Of Trustees And Its Supporting Group's Function Properly

- Plan and run Board and other meetings in line with the governing document, in consultation with the Co-Directors.
- Ensure matters are dealt with in an orderly and efficient manner.
- Bring impartiality and objectivity to meetings and decision-making.
- Facilitate change and address conflict within the Board where it arises.
- Review governance performance and the Board's skills on an ongoing basis.
- Plan for the recruitment and renewal of the Board.
- Ensure full compliance with charity law and regulation.

Ensuring The Organisation Is Managed Effectively

- Liaise regularly with the Co-Directors to keep an overview of the organisation's affairs, through regular in person meetings.
- Co-ordinate the Board so that responsibilities for particular areas (e.g. personnel, financial control) are properly covered and specialist expertise is brought in where needed.
- Ensure safeguarding is fully implemented across the organisation.
- Work with the Co-Directors to facilitate change and address conflict within the organisation

Supporting And Supervising Staff

- Line manage the Co-Directors.
- Sit on appointment panels and final appeal grievance panels, as appropriate

Representing The Organisation

- Communicate the vision and purpose of Sydenham Garden clearly and consistently.
- Advocate for and represent, Sydenham Garden at external meetings and events.
- Help raise the profile of the charity in ways that support fundraising and achieve its objectives.
- Stay alert to sector issues and developments that might affect Sydenham Garden, and act on them.



We recommend applicants visit **NVCO's Code of Good Governance**, which provides a good overview of general Trustee responsibilities.

You can read more about our current Trustee Board **here**.

YOUR TIME COMMITMENT.

We estimate this role requires around two days per month, although this should be seen as a guide rather than a fixed requirement. We recognise that flexibility is important, particularly for those balancing the role with full-time employment.

Alongside general Board business, the Chair will typically:

- Attend five hybrid Board meetings each year, held in the evenings and lasting around two hours, with time to read Board papers in advance.
- Attend one annual in-person Board away day.
- Meet regularly with the Co-Directors to provide support, guidance and constructive challenge. Meetings currently are held monthly (there is flexibility here and these could be moved to an every six to eight weeks model), alongside regular contact by phone or email as needed. Initial meetings will usually be held in person to help build relationships and gain a deeper understanding of the organisation.
- Support governance work between Board meetings, including occasional advice and support to staff where appropriate.
- Represent Sydenham Garden within the local community, supporting fundraising, stakeholder relationships and key events, including attendance at our three annual community fairs, where Trustee visibility is highly valued.

The time commitment may increase occasionally around Board meetings, budget setting, safeguarding matters or other significant organisational issues.

Our meetings are a mix of online and in person and our venues are fully accessible.

Specific adjustments can also be made for a Chair's individual needs.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR.

We're not looking for a perfect match on paper – we're looking for someone who cares about our mission and can bring good judgement, kindness and steady leadership to the Board. **Previous experience as a Chair is not essential, and we don't want it to be a barrier to a strong candidate coming forward.** More important is that you share our values, understand the importance of good governance and are committed to helping Sydenham Garden thrive.

The following will matter for this role:

- A genuine understanding of, and enthusiasm for, the mission and values of Sydenham Garden.
- Kindness, empathy and generosity of spirit, with the ability to build positive relationships across the Board, staff team, volunteers, funders and the wider community.
- Strong leadership, communication and interpersonal skills, together with impartiality, fairness and the ability to maintain confidentiality.
- An understanding of the role of the Board and the importance of effective governance, with the ability to provide strategic leadership while offering support and constructive challenge as a critical friend.
- Experience of organisational leadership, governance or people management. This could have been gained through chairing an organisation, serving as a school Governor or Trustee, holding a senior leadership or Chief Executive role within the charity sector, or through another position demonstrating strong governance capability.
- An understanding of, or connection with, the London Borough of Lewisham. Sydenham Garden's work is rooted in responding to local needs and supporting the wellbeing of our community, and as such an understanding of the local area, the communities we serve and the wider health and wellbeing landscape would be advantageous.
- An understanding of the challenges facing charities, including funding, commissioning and the wider operating environment. Knowledge of the mental health sector or local government would be welcome but is not essential.
- The ability to ensure decisions are made, followed through and focused on the long-term direction of the charity, while leaving day-to-day operational management to the executive team.

OUR COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING SOCIAL INEQUALITY.

At Sydenham Garden we value diversity and believe that a diverse mix of voices will help Sydenham Garden achieve its best work.

We expect our Board to directly tackle social injustices and to reflect the communities in which we live and work and are committed to taking action to address this.

At Sydenham Garden, we are committed to building a diverse, inclusive and welcoming Board that reflects the communities we serve. We particularly welcome applications from people with lived experience of mental health challenges, disabled people, people with physical or mental health conditions, LGBTQ+ people, and people from Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic groups, as we know that diverse perspectives strengthen our Board and our decision-making.

We recognise that inequality and discrimination can have a significant impact on people's lives, wellbeing and access to opportunities. As a mental health and wellbeing charity, we are committed to ensuring that equity, diversity and inclusion are embedded in everything we do – from the support we provide to our co-workers to the way we work together as an organisation.

We want everyone involved with Sydenham Garden to feel respected, valued and able to contribute fully. We are committed to continually learning, improving and fostering a culture that is kind, inclusive and supportive.

We are also committed to making reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process. If there is anything we can do to support your application or participation, please let us know.

Sydenham Garden is committed to dismantling barriers for people facing exclusion from Chair opportunities.

If you would like to discuss this in relation to either your participation in the recruitment process or in the role of Chair, please contact us directly.

OUR COMMITMENT TO BEST PRACTICE.

Lewisham Safer Recruitment

Sydenham Garden is committed the safeguarding of all children, young people and adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Sydenham Garden follows Lewisham Safeguarding Board Safer Recruitment practices to best protect the people we work with. All Trustees are subject to regulatory checks including a basic DBS check.

The role of Chair is voluntary, but all reasonable expenses will be paid to attend Chair commitments.



HOW TO APPLY

The TrusteeWorks team at Reach Volunteering are supporting Sydenham Garden with the recruitment of its new Chair.

To apply, please submit your CV along with a supporting statement of no more than 500 words explaining why you are interested in becoming Chair of Sydenham Garden and the skills, experience and qualities you would bring to the role. Your CV should outline your key achievements in previous and current roles, including any voluntary experience, and include contact details for two referees, including your most recent employer.

We value authentic personal statements that reflect your own voice and experience. You are welcome to use AI tools for proof-reading, grammar checks or word count assistance, but please do not use generative AI to draft or substantially rewrite your supporting statement.

Enquiries and requests for an informal conversation before applying should be submitted via TrusteeWorks in the first instance. This may be particularly helpful if this would be your first Chair or Trustee role.

Please send enquiries and applications to: [**trusteeworks@reachskills.org.uk**](mailto:trusteeworks@reachskills.org.uk)

Deadline for applications: Friday the 11th of
September 2026 by 5pm.

