

# POLKA

Where Theatre Begins

Appointment brief

## Chair of Board

January 2026

Reference: EBXKA



Saxton Bampfylde



# Introductory Letter

We are delighted that you are interested in joining Polka Theatre's Board of Directors as Chair. It is a fantastic time to join us, leading our skilled Board of Trustees as we head towards our 50th anniversary year in 2029.

The last 18 months has been an exceptional time for Polka. In 2024/5 over 145,000 children and adults experienced our work both at our home in Wimbledon and across the country, and we continued to significantly expand our community engagement and access work. We were named the UK's Most Welcoming Theatre, Merton's Best Business and received our first ever Olivier Award nomination. We supported artists and original theatre creation by launching innovative new programmes such as the Polka Playwriting Award and Catapult artist development scheme. Over 10,000 children saw performances for free, and hundreds more took part in workshops and in-school programmes, through our funded schemes.

Our dedicated and diverse supporters are key to ensuring that we can continue to grow our

ambitions and meet the needs of the children, families and communities we serve. As a charity, our mixed funding model – balancing Arts Council England NPO funding, earned box office income, and other wide-ranging fundraising – is vital for us to ensure our work remains accessible, affordable and ambitious.

Following our major redevelopment in 2019-21, and our recent technical refurbishment of our Y C Chan Theatre, Polka's venue is in good shape to go forward confidently and energetically into the next decade of our work. We hope you can join us!

**Helen Matravers - Artistic  
Director/Joint CEO**

&

**Lynette Shanbury - Executive  
Director/Joint CEO**



# About Polka Theatre

Polka is the home of Children's Theatre. We opened our doors in 1979, the UK's first theatre venue dedicated exclusively to children. We deliver a year-round programme of exceptional and exciting new work made by some of the UK's best theatre makers, showcasing international productions, visiting shows, and creative learning activities for 0-12-year-olds. Over 4 million people have visited Polka and experienced our work.

Polka has always led the way in inclusive practice. We were the first venue to create what are now widely known as Relaxed Performances back in 2006. Since its inception in 1994, our Curtain Up! programme has provided over 76,000 free theatre tickets to schools across 20 boroughs and is continuing to reach 9,000 children each year. Our extraordinary Freefalling programme celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2026, providing creative experiences for local children who otherwise would never get the chance to experience theatre. Innovative in-school projects like Write Here Write Now and Talking Tales use drama to bring literacy and oracy skills to life through drama.

Polka is a ground-breaking company with an international reputation, a national reach and a local heart. Producing around 9 productions each year, we are known for the high production values of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), an expansive and pioneering Creative Learning programme, and the exceptional creative environment for audiences and artists. Importantly, we also provide a London home for touring children's theatre companies from all over the UK and abroad, one of the few venues offering more than one or two day runs.

Our Early Years' work has been of particular international recognition – helping to found the international Small Size network and being part of the 17 country Mapping project through Culture Europe. Our biennial Big Dreams Early Years Festival brings the best of UK and international Early Years theatre to our Wimbledon

home, and connects artists, producers and creative practitioners for vital conversations about the artform.

In 2024/5 the venue won a host of awards, including the prestigious UK Theatre Most Welcoming Theatre Award and Merton's Best Business. We also received our very first Olivier Award nomination for The Nutcracker, a coproduction with Little Bulb Theatre, which later transferred to the West End for a Christmas run. We launched two key new programmes for artists – Catapult artist development scheme, and the Polka Playwriting Award – cementing our role supporting exceptional artists to create original new theatre for children and young people.

With two theatre spaces (the 300-seat Y C Chan Theatre and the Adventure Theatre studio), a rehearsal/community space, the Clore Learning Studio, a café and shop, indoor and outdoor play areas, and a garden, Polka is a space where children's creative confidence can flourish. Our venue is open all year round as a creative community hub in the Merton borough – a landmark venue in south west London. You don't need a ticket to enjoy our wonderful venue.

Polka is an Arts Council England NPO and a registered charity. Continuing our mixed funding model of earned income, fundraising and public funding is vital to our operational success, and the Board and Chair play an important part in this. We continually seek to maintain and grow our loyal and diverse supporters who ensure that Polka can continue to deliver its wide-ranging activities.

In 2029 Polka celebrates its 50th anniversary. We are looking ahead to how our strategy will move towards this landmark moment, honouring the past, celebrating the current and building toward an ambitious and sustainable future. We intend to both build on the core successes of the last 5 years, expanding and refining key projects, whilst exploring exciting new opportunities to push forward theatre for children.



# Our Vision and Values

Polka's mission is to 'empower children to navigate their world through inspirational theatre and creative experiences.' We are looking for people who are conscientious, proactive, and reliable, with a willingness to learn and ability to adapt to changes and share Polka's vision:

*Improving children's lives, bringing communities together, creating ground-breaking theatre.*

## Polka's values are:

### Child- centred

Children at the heart of everything we do.

### Community

Engaging diverse communities of children, families, educationalists and artists.

### Excellent

Pioneering, adventurous, offering the highest quality.

### Memorable

Creating magical, meaningful experiences.

### Inclusive

Welcoming, accessible, nurturing, supportive, representative.





# 2024/25 at a glance



**98** volunteers  
gave **4,810**  
hours

**763**  
performances of  
**30** productions

**9** touring productions  
reaching **24,000+**  
people



**37** access adapted  
performances  
reaching **3,957**  
audience members

**145,000+**  
audience members &  
workshop participants

**20,800+**  
Creative Learning  
participants joined  
**1,326** events

**184** school  
partners

**11,000+**  
people enjoyed  
our free play  
spaces

**29,548kWh**  
generated from  
our solar panels



**10,000+**  
free tickets given to  
schools &  
community groups





“Polka continues to make an **extraordinary impact**  
in the world of children's theatre and I am so  
pleased to be a Patron of such an innovative and  
dedicated organisation...and the **outstanding work**  
you do to make the arts accessible and engaging for  
young audiences”

**Sir Sadiq Khan**

Mayor of London and Polka Patron





A group of diverse school children, including boys and girls of various ethnicities, are seated in a large hall with a high ceiling and exposed wooden beams. They are all looking upwards and to the right with expressions of interest and joy. The children are wearing school uniforms, including dark blue sweaters with white collars. Some girls are wearing hijabs. The lighting is warm and comes from string lights hanging from the ceiling.

# The Chair Opportunity

The Chair's role is to lead the Board of Trustees, ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities in overseeing the development and delivery of a strategic plan and in safeguarding Polka's future. The Chair seeks to optimise the relationship between the Board of Trustees, the charity's staff and those people the charity seeks to serve – that is, children. The Chair also acts as supervisor of the Chief Executives and as an ambassador for Polka across local and national networks.

## Key Responsibilities

- To ensure that the Board of Trustees fulfils its duties and responsibilities for the proper governance of the charity.
- To ensure that the charity has a clear vision, mission and strategic direction and that the charity, the Trustees and the Chief Executives are focused on achieving these.
- To act as the charity's most senior representative and ambassador.
- To be the backstop when the unexpected happens or things go wrong.

# Key Duties and Tasks

The role of the Chair in any charity is a broad one and Polka is no exception. The description below highlights some of the key duties of the role. The term of office is three years, and tenure is usually up to six years, with an option to extend this on an annual basis for up to a further three years.

## Board

- Lead the Board in ensuring that Polka's vision and goals are achieved
- Lead the Board in meeting the aims, vision and goals of Polka, ensuring that appropriate strategies, plans, funding and governance arrangements are in place. This includes promoting and progressing Polka's environmental, social and governance activities, diversity, inclusion, equality and access.
- Ensure that the Trustees govern the charity in the long-term interests of Polka.
- Ensure the safeguarding of children and adults using Polka's facilities.
- Ensure the charity's financial dealings are systematically accounted for, audited and publicly available.
- Ensure that an environment is sustained within Polka that brings out the best from us all, and supports the charity in focusing on its objectives as a world-class children's theatre.

Ensure strong governance, for example:

- Chair meetings of the Board of Trustees and liaise with the Chairs of Board working groups
- Ensure effective communication and implementation of Board decisions.
- Take a leading role in determining the composition, structure and development of the Board, including inducting and developing Trustees with the right mix of experience and expertise.
- Engage the Board in assessing and improving its own performance.

## Executive

- Create a meaningful and productive working relationship with the Chief Executives in order to ensure a harmonious working relationship and be able to hold them to account for the delivery of Polka's strategic aims and objectives.
- Together with the Board, guide, monitor and support the Chief Executives and Senior Management Team, particularly with a view to managing the financial performance of Polka within the relevant financial constraints.
- Ensure the Chief Executives are fully equipped and supported to undertake their roles, including seeing that appropriate performance review and succession planning arrangements are in place and operated in the proper manner.
- Ensure that the management of Polka and its procedures (including audit procedures) is effective and appropriate.
- Understand the non-executive nature of the role, supporting and mentoring but not interfering with the work of the Chief Executives and Senior Management Team.

## External

- Act as principal ambassador and advocate for Polka in its search for funding within the public and private sectors.
- Build and develop relationships with Chairs and leaders of other theatres
- Develop an understanding of the publicly funded context of Polka and support constructive relationship with government via Arts Council England, and with the London Borough of Merton.







# Person Specification

## Personal qualities

The Chair should be altruistic, confident, focused, open and an active and reflective listener. They should also be organised, flexible, respectful, and empowering, as well as demonstrating:

- The highest standards of integrity and probity, both personally and in relation to Polka, ensuring that Polka aspires to the highest standards in all its dealings.
- The ability to achieve consensus through balanced discussion at Board level.
- A passion for the performing arts, community engagement and an empathy for Polka's mission.
- Strong leadership and inter-personal skills, dealing effectively with internal and external relationships.
- Clarity not just about their role, but the level and quality of their commitment to Polka; the Chair needs to be able to see the 'big picture', collaborate well, handle contentious issues and dissension positively and be assertive and constructive in clarifying any issues.

## Skills and experience

The successful candidate will ideally bring all or most of the following:

- An understanding of governance and board leadership and development, ideally gained through prior experience in a chairing or non-executive capacity whether in the commercial or charity sector
- A track record of leadership and the management skills required to support an excellent executive team
- The willingness to play a role in fundraising activities
- The willingness to be an outstanding ambassador and advocate for the Theatre and its mission and to play a role in fundraising activities
- Capacity for strategic thinking to support the ambitions and long-term development of Polka.
- A demonstrable commitment to diversity and inclusivity.





# Terms of Appointment

This is an unpaid role, though reasonable expenses may be claimed.

There are four Board meetings per year. The Chair is expected to serve on at least one committee which would involve a further 4 meetings a year. There is regular engagement with senior management. It is estimated that time commitment will be on average 1-2 days a month.

Polka Theatre are committed to creating a workforce which is representative of our society and to bringing together those with a variety of skills and experiences to help shape what we do and how we work. We are particularly keen to hear from people with ethnically diverse backgrounds and those who identify as disabled. Applicants with disabilities who opt in are guaranteed interviews where they meet the essential requirements of the role as set out in the role description.

# Equal Opportunities

Polka's commitment as an equal opportunities employer mean it is keen to encourage applications from people of colour, people across the gender spectrum and people who self-identify as disabled, who are under-represented in this sector.

Polka's newly redeveloped venue is accessible for wheelchair-users and prams/buggies; most spaces can be accessed step-free.

As a children's theatre Polka is generally open during the daytimes and weekends, rather than evenings, making it well suited to people who have families and/or other caring responsibilities.

As an important part of the local community in Wimbledon and the London borough of Merton, Polka is also well suited to people who live nearby, rather than travel into or through central London.



# How to Apply

**Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to Polka Theatre on this appointment.**

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at [www.saxbam.com/appointments](http://www.saxbam.com/appointments) using code **EBXKA**

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring\* form.

The closing date for applications is noon on **Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February**.

For an informal conversation please reach out to [ed.bampfylde@saxbam.com](mailto:ed.bampfylde@saxbam.com)

\* The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

## Process

- *First round interviews* – Thursday 5th March in person at Polka Theatre.
- *Second round interviews* – Wed 18th or Thurs 19th March in person at Polka Theatre.

## GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.







Saxton Bampfylde