

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
of
Autistic Children and Carers Together
held via Zoom
on 3 March 2025, at 1pm**

Attendees: Helen Gilder (Chair), Sara Bartlett Brown, Janet Himan, Nadine Cain, Nicola Hough, Sera Cleverley, Rhiannon Hampton, Danny Antrobus (minutes)

Apologies: Margaret Kilner, Sharon Court

1. Welcome

Helen Gilder (Chair) opened the meeting by welcoming members.

Minutes from the previous AGM (30 January 2024)

The minutes were accepted unanimously as a true and accurate record.

2. Presentation of the Annual Report

ACCT's Manager, Nicola Hough, shared a presentation on ACCT's annual report for 2023-24.

Autistic Children and Carers Together provides public benefit by delivering group activity sessions which support autistic children and young people to develop confidence and emotional resilience, practice vital life skills and engage with the world, make lasting friendships, and become empowered to better understand and celebrate the role their neurodivergence plays in their identity.

We aim to support parent-carers to gain knowledge, skills and confidence around parenting autistic children, and for families to develop the emotional resilience to address internal and external challenges related to neurodiversity, such as managing stressful times of transition, or dealing with bureaucratic intransigence.

Our activities are designed to enable stronger mutually supportive peer relationships between young people, between parents and between families that can continue outside of ACCT. By supporting a growing and empowered autism community in Sheffield, we can increase autism awareness in wider society, improving outcomes by helping families identify neurodiversity and seek support at an earlier stage.

Our regular sessions during 2023-24 were:

- Activate multi-activity club for 30 children aged 5-12 on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evening Teenage Club for 30 teenagers. Sessions include games and construction, arts and crafts, a sensory room and football and outside activities. These sessions continued to be weekly and we manage session bookings carefully to ensure that all places are taken up and places are allocated fairly, with safe staff to participant ratios in place. We work with Sheffield City Council as part of the SNIPS contract framework on referrals to these groups as well as supporting a small number of self-referrals from families with young people in need who are outside the SNIPS eligibility.

- ACCT Academy football coaching for up to 24 children and young people aged 7-16 per session. These sessions, focused on fun and inclusivity, are held every Friday evening, 6-7pm at Goals Sheffield.
- Dungeons & Dragons online sessions with two per week and continued to also offer a monthly in-person session alongside Teenage Club and a monthly in-person game at Patriot Games in Sheffield city centre. Whilst most of our activities from 2023-24 continued into 2024-25, we wound down our Saturday morning online Minecraft sessions.
- ACCTing Out is our vibrant group for young autistic adults which runs fortnightly social events, supporting young adults to develop independent living skills.
- Young people attending our teenage drama sessions came up with a new name for the group this year – InterACCT. We delivered three terms of these sessions in partnership with Forced Entertainment, and saw continued strong outcomes.
- Parent-carer meetings ran every fortnight, offering a space for discussion, information sharing, advice and peer support.
- Autism-friendly family swimming sessions every two weeks at Hillsborough Leisure Centre, and regular private hire family sessions at Air Haus.
- We didn't arrange a trip to the panto in 2023 as we have done in previous years, due to a lack of funding towards the ticket costs. We are delighted that Happy Days provided a grant to enable us to offer a panto trip in December 2024.
- We supported more than 500 autistic children and young people during the year, around 300 through in-person and online sessions and 200 via participation in family activities. More than 80 parent-carers accessed Parents' Meetings and workshops. And more than 120 siblings and other family members via family activities or attending groups.

"When you're a parent of a child with disabilities, you're not just a parent, you're a parent of a child with disabilities. If this isn't you then you might not understand what I mean by that, so I'll try and explain. No matter how big or small that disability is, It means that every thought, plan, trip, activity, event that you involve your child in, you've got something else to consider, be it the travel, the environment, the access, the food, and yes these are all considerations of every parent, but like I said there's always something a bit more to think about.

As that child gets older, the considerations don't lessen, they just change. This isn't a complaint, I am blessed to have my amazing children, but what this is, is a shout out to anyone, any organisation, any education or work provider that makes those considerations a little bit easier for you and your family. That's why I'm fundraising for ACCT Sheffield". ACCT Member and Fundraiser

Without a doubt the most positive aspect of volunteering at ACCT was building some really special relationships with some ACCT young people. I think sometimes people think of volunteering as all about what you give, but in my experience of working with these young people it's really made me reflect on myself, how I see the world and interact with others and I've learned SO much about countless topics of interest! It's been a hugely valuable experience for me personally.

I also want to feed back that I think that ACCT is run brilliantly. I have done so much volunteering in my time, and I encounter a lot of volunteers/placements through my current job and what I often see is small organisations or charities being stretched and therefore not dedicating enough time and resources to their volunteers. This is a shame but also in many cases I've seen places drop the ball on really important training around safeguarding for example. My experience with ACCT has been extremely positive. I felt informed, supported and valued so I wanted to comment on how this has been far better than other experiences in terms of management (as well as the work itself) so I hope you're proud of this! - Former ACCT Volunteer

3. Presentation of the Annual Accounts

Danny Antrobus, ACCT's Fundraising and Finance Coordinator, summarised the charity's financial position and the 2023-24 annual accounts.

- At 1 April 2023, ACCT had £108,552 in the bank (what's called our total reserves), of which £15,271 were restricted (i.e. funds from a grant that can only be spent on specific things) and £93,251 unrestricted (can be spent on anything that contributes to ACCT's charitable purpose).
- During 2023-24, ACCT's total income was £211,734 and total expenditure was £200,216, a surplus of £11,518 in the year.
- At the year end (31 March 2024), our reserves were £120,040, of which £25,278 were restricted and £94,762 unrestricted.
- During 2024-25, our forecasted income and expenditure are both around £190,000, and we expect reserves to remain at a similar level.

ACCT is in a healthy financial position. Our main objectives for the coming year are:

- Renew SNIPS contract: We are currently awaiting a decision on our application to continue offering Acctivate and Teenage Club places through a Sheffield City Council SNIPS contract. This contract has been ACCT's largest single income source for many years, so it's very important to be re-contracted for the next 4-5 years.
- Grow supporter donations: To continue to develop our support from individual donors with more events like the Sheffield 10k, and reaching more potential supporters who would support ACCT via monthly or one-off donations.

4. Appointment of auditors

Danny noted that a charity of ACCT's size is required to appoint a suitably qualified person to independently examine our annual accounts.

Danny recommended to members that Terry Scully should be reappointed to independently examine ACCT's 2024-25 accounts. This was approved unanimously.

5. Election of Trustees

At each annual general meeting, any trustees co-opted onto the board during the previous year stand for election by member vote.

Sharon Court and Janet Himan were both duly elected unanimously

ACCT's constitution states that one third of existing trustees should stand down at each annual general meeting and are eligible to stand for re-election.

Nadine Cain was duly re-elected unanimously.

On behalf of members, Helen passed on our thanks to Claire Dyson for her service as an ACCT trustee for many years, and noted that Claire was still giving her time and expertise to ACCT as part of the parents' meeting team.

6. Any other business.

None

Close of AGM – 1.20pm