

Middlesbrough First Trustees Annual Report

Period April 2024 – March 2025

Charity Name : Middlesbrough First

Registered Charity number : 1108140

Address : Breckon Hill Community Centre, Breckon Hill Rd., Middlesbrough TS4 2DR

Names of Trustees : Julie McGee	Chair
Mike English	Secretary
Steve Hepples	Treasurer
Julie Wilson	
Margaret Walters	
Claire Higgins	
Angela Johnson	

Structure governance and management

Constitution adopted : 18/01/2005

Trustee Selection method: Trustees are appointed or reappointed annually at the Annual General Meeting

Additional information

The charity seeks to involve its members in its decision making and activities are co-produced where possible.

A range of policies are in place including Safeguarding Adults Policy.

All trustees give their time voluntarily.

Objects of the Charity : To promote the relief of people with learning difficulties and their carers by the provision of an advocacy service, advice, support, information and other charitable services, to enable them to make independent decisions and therefore improve their conditions of life.

Summary of the main activities undertaken for the public benefit in relation to these objects: Members of Middlesbrough First meet as a group on a monthly basis. The meetings include a range of instructional activities which encourage personal development and confidence building to ensure that members are better able to self advocate. There has been an emphasis of health and fitness and there has been close working partnerships with colleagues from health services.

Summary of main activities of the charity during the year

Partnerships and reputation

We were pleased to be invited to take part in Teesside Mind's fundraising and networking event at Middlesbrough Sports Village. This was a great opportunity right to meet with partner agencies and explore ways of working collaboratively. Some of our group members were proud to represent Middlesbrough First and speak to a range of interested parties from school children to the elderly. We came away with a refreshed list of contacts with aligned values, and our group members benefitted from an improved understanding of the venue's health and wellness offer, plus some interesting resources from Safer Communities, who subsequently visited our Brothers and Sisters group to provide an adapted presentation on Staying Safe. The event also generated new referrals to our service.

Intergenerational workstream

This season also saw the first of our Intergenerational projects, delivering a series of art-based sessions facilitated by members of Middlesbrough First alongside Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland (TM&C). Our members were supported to plan and deliver classes based around their own particular talents to a group of thirteen children attending Discovery Special Academy – Middlesbrough's newest special school for children with severe learning and physical disabilities and neurodivergence. They named the project 'Autumn Changes', to reflect the theme of this pilot and the transformations they sought to bring about. Our members gave careful consideration to the needs of their learners, with particular focus on safe use of materials; quiet spaces and mindful activities for children with challenging behaviours and ensuring that each child has an opportunity to contribute and be celebrated for their efforts. We were very moved to witness the level of care our members had for every child and were deeply impressed by their confidence in leading sessions to such a diverse group in a formal educational setting.

Our meetings outside of the setting caused individual group members to reflect on their own childhood experiences of special education and the positive changes which have occurred over the generations. It was an empowering opportunity for our members to take the position of role models to the children in providing an understanding of their potential as future adults living with learning disabilities and their value to the wider community. As professionals, we could find no existing precedent or guidance for intergenerational practice with both children and adults with learning disabilities, and we feel therefore quite confident in claiming this as true innovation. The success of the project meant we were invited by the Academy Trust's leadership to provide further similar intervention.

Recruitment and resources

The receipt of funds from the lottery allowed us to grow the team (from one part time staff member) to include a part time Wellbeing Coordinator who commenced in post on November 16th 2023, shadowing the Brothers & Sisters group they would go on to take responsibility for running. Shortlisting and interviewing were done by three Trustees including one of our Lived Experience Trustees who selected a person they felt would best work with our members.

In February 2024, we recruited through the standard processes to the post of Service Manager. The contract will last until November 2026. We were also able to offer a long-time volunteer who is an IT graduate with autism some work 7 hours per week providing support with IT and admin to staff and Trustees. This staff member has previously struggled despite his expertise, to secure paid employment due to his difficulties in navigating formal interviews and office work settings/conventional working hours. We have found that by gaining an understanding of the needs of some individuals with autism in the context of work, this staff member has been an asset to us in setting up Middlesbrough First with our own domain; individual email accounts for staff and trustees, a website, social media and the production of promotional materials for all of our projects and events. The Buckland Review of Autism Employment published February 2024 has been a useful piece of DWP guidance for the service manager.

In November 2024, our Wellbeing Coordinator resigned due to relocation to Wales and the post was recruited to again through the correct processes.

Active citizenship

Middlesbrough First members undertook training by The National Literacy Trust and gained their status as certified Literacy Champions – the first group of people living with learning disabilities to achieve this. The inclusion of adults living with learning disabilities in public activities such as distributing reading material and supporting our town's children's literacy is important to us as an organisation as it allows people living with LD to be rightfully recognised as valued, skilled individuals who contribute to the wider community.

Enjoyment of books is something that we have developed under the theme of wellbeing. This provides a route to include our members who cannot read independently but who enjoy the pleasure of good story telling.

Development/training

New Safeguarding Adults training was undertaken by staff and Trustees, provided by Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA).

MVDA in partnership with Middlesbrough First developed and delivered a specifically adapted version of this training for our Brothers and Sisters group. The group each now have gained their certificate in Understanding Safeguarding.

Consultation and Intelligence Gathering

We have hosted HealthWatch South Tees, who were commissioned to provide the local health authority with a consultation on housing and planning for more independent living. This is part of a wider piece of work addressing the issue of an aging population of parents in Middlesbrough some of whom support and cohabit with their adult children living with learning disabilities. Our group provided useful insights into how they would like transitions to be managed and what sort of adaptations and features they would like to see when the time comes for them to live without parental support.

Middlesbrough First also invited Cleveland Police to collect the group's contributions for their most recent public consultation on Crime and Public Safety. This provides public services with a wider perspective on citizen's experiences within the community, and allows people living with learning disabilities to both contribute and hopefully benefit from better intelligence sharing.

The organisation was also approached by Middlesbrough Job Centre as DWP seek to increase their awareness of services available to claimants with learning difficulties and potential agencies who can support volunteering and otherwise increase employability prospects.

Advocacy and Self Advocacy

This aspect alongside our enrichment opportunities is the mainstay of Middlesbrough First. This year, providing individual advocacy and support has been principally focussed on supporting service users to navigate a range of complex health issues, appointments and treatment which continue to be impacted by the delays created by the COVID pandemic. Talking to similar agencies it remains clear that 'COVID recovery' is still a pressing, current issue faced by people with learning disabilities whose health anxiety was heightened during this period when people became disconnected from the routines and social interactions which helped maintain their sense of wellbeing.

Regular meetings and special events

Our monthly 'Brothers and Sisters' meetings always include guest speakers as part of a full day of activity, discussion, physical movement and peer support. Embedded within the first six months of this year, a visit from the learning disability nurses from Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys who have presented on a targeted health topic at each session, to include The Annual Health Check, Weight Management/Better Eating; separate gender-specific breast/testicular screening talks; Infection Prevention and Control; Sun Safety and Falls Prevention.

Feedback to inform future planning is collected at every meeting. This year we have a protected slot at each meeting to enable a group member to present their own particular interest or passion. It has been a pleasure to support members to put together engaging presentations on a range of topics including a showcase of medals; a first-person account on Managing Type 1 Diabetes; and a talk on someone's travels with their carer.

Financial Review

Brief statement on the charity's policy on reserves :

Details of any funds materially in deficit: Not applicable

Further financial review details (optional) :

The Charity's main source of funds is the National Lottery. This funding has been used to employ staff to deliver on the objectives of the Lottery grant through an agreed programme.

Future plans

Short term/operational – The group have been planning and preparing future monthly meetings

The group is also looking forward to welcoming guests from Middlesbrough Environment City who will provide sessions on Healthy Cooking to us, using air fryers and slow cookers. We have also discussed plans to invite musicians to future group meetings as members have identified the positive impact of music on their mood and sense of participation with others.

Longer term/strategic – We want to continue with the development of our health and wellbeing work to further explore and challenge Health Inequalities for adults living with Learning Disabilities as part of NHS England CORE 20+5 agenda. Middlesbrough First is now part of South Tees Wellbeing Network and are recognised as key partners in the town's Health Champions Network. We look forward to additional opportunities these memberships may present to further enhance our offer.

We will also be developing our Intergenerational Work with children and older adults.

Declaration

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature : J.McGee

Full Name : Julie McGee

Position : Chair

Date : 22nd December 2025

Middlesbrough First

In accordance with your instructions, we have compiled these unaudited accounts from the accounting records and information and explanations supplied to us for the period ended 31/3/2025

Sabre Accountants FFA Ltd
1 Kings Road
North Ormesby
Middlesbrough
TS3 6NG

Mohammed Shabir FFA
Institute of Financial Accountants

9th December 2025

**Middlesbrough First
Charity Accounts
Profit & Loss Account Year Ending 31st March 2025**

	£	£
Turnover		
Grants		45,746.50
Other		<u>179.00</u>
		45,925.50
Expenses		
Salaries	38,981.59	
Pension	763.29	
Travel Expenses	1,106.02	
Rent	0.00	
Telephone	0.00	
Bank Charges	87.40	
Software	369.60	
Acc & Payroll Ser	736.80	
Insurance	525.45	
Training/DBS	0.00	
Events	324.00	
Equipment	14.98	
Council	250.00	
Lottery Fees	8,865.44	
Total Expenses	52,024.57	52,024.57
Net Income		<u><u>-6,099.07</u></u>

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Signature : J.McGee

Full Name : Julie McGee

Position : Chair

Date : 22nd December 2025
