

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 28 January 2026.

PRESENT: Councillors L Young (Chair), J Ewan (Vice-Chair), D Branson, E Clynch, D Coupe, J Kabuye, L Lewis, T Mohan, I Morrish, J Platt, M Saunders, Z Uddin, G Wilson and J Young

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Mayor C Cooke

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: D. Hodgson (Local Democracy Reporting Service)

OFFICERS: M Adams, C Benjamin, S Bonner, S Lightwing and L Zipfell

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: None.

25/53 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

25/54 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 18 DECEMBER 2025**

It was proposed, and agreed, that the following typographical changes be made to minute number 25/51, namely:

- *“After required spending, the remaining addition funding totalled approximately £6.4 million” should read, “After required spending, the remaining additional funding totalled approximately £6.4 million.”*
- *“Overall, the Mayor stated that with increased investment and planned to spend the Council was making progress on planned outcomes” should read, “Overall, the Mayor stated that with increased investment and planned spend the Council was making progress on planned outcomes.”*

Notwithstanding the agreed changes, the minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18 December 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

25/55 **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Chair of OSB invited the Chair of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel to provide his update. The Board was advised that the Panel had last met on 26 January at which further information had been received relating to its review into Out of Area Provision. As part of this review the Panel had received information relating complex needs, both within education and children’s social care, foster carers and the workforce plan. The Panel was hoping to conclude its review into this subject at its meeting in March 2026.

The Chair of OSB invited the Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel to provide his update. The Board was advised that at the Panel’s last meeting, on 12 January, an update had been provided regarding the Adult Social Care CQC inspection. The Panel also received an overview of its next topic, Violence Against Women and Girls. Its next meeting would receive further evidence on the topic and consider the Terms of Reference for the review. The final draft of the Panel’s review into Healthy Place Making would also be presented at its next meeting.

The Chair of OSB invited the Chair of the Place Scrutiny Panel to provide his update. The Board was advised that the Panel last met on 29 January during which updates were received from the Head of Communities on topics including CHANNEL and the Community Safety Partnership. An update was also provided regarding PREVENT where the Panel discussed

the issue of radicalisation. The Panel continued to examine evidence relating to its review into Barriers to Regeneration and looked at future topics including Middlesbrough's bicentenary celebrations.

The Chair of OSB thanked the Panel Chairs for their update and asked the Board to note the information.

NOTED.

25/56 **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented the report and sought comments from the Board.

A Member requested further information be circulated to the Board in relation to the Forward Plan entry *Town Centre Future Development*.

The Chair commented there was a relatively low number of decisions on the Executive Forward Plan. He encouraged more decisions be placed on the Forward Plan going forward.

ORDERED That further information relating to the Forward Plan entry *Town Centre Future Development* be circulated to the Board.

25/57 **FORWARD PLAN ACTIONS PROGRESS**

The Democratic Services Officer advised the Board that a response to queries raised at the previous meeting of OSB had been circulated via email.

There were no questions from Members.

NOTED.

25/58 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE - PUBLIC HEALTH**

The Board noted the apologies of the Executive Member for Public Health and invited the Director of Public Health to deliver his presentation.

The presentation included the following points:

- Public Health South Tees adopted a programme approach to its work covering five programmes, four core approaches and three levels of intervention across the life course.
- The Protecting Health Programme included the successful mobilisation of the new Teesside Together sexual health service. This was a major multi-agency change programme which had been delivered on time and included four operational hubs. The protecting health programme also included the expansion of the Blood Borne Virus out-of testing at James Cook University Hospital. Local detection rates were higher than national pilots which demonstrated early identification impact. This programme also included progress in the Pegasus and Solaris exercises, Tees Valley Immunisation steering group and allergen sampling. The main challenges to this programme included lack of timely data for immunisation and screening while opportunities included the launch of the National HV action plan.
- The second programme was the Creating Environments for Healthy Food choices and Physical Activity Programme. Elements of this programme included the Tees Urban Nature Network which was a joint bid by Middlesbrough, Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland Councils and the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust to secure three years of funding to enhance partnership capacity, deepen community engagement, and build a pipeline of greenspace projects. Healthy placemaking also featured in this programme which intended health, and health inequalities, be embedded in major decisions ahead of the Local Plan's adoption. Socially inclusive football involved a partnership between Public Health South Tees, Cultural Services and Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation which delivered an innovative, socially inclusive football event. This included hosting the first-ever Northern Homeless World Cup trials which attracting 110 participants and selected two players from Middlesbrough to represent England. The Tees Valley Active Schools programme was funded through You've Got This and

engaged with 10 schools to embed physical activity throughout the school day. Opportunities within this programme included timing and interest of Health Scrutiny, as well as progressing work on advertising policy which contributed towards Healthy Weight Declaration commitments. Challenges included whole Council engagement in the Healthy Weight Declaration.

- The third programme was Ill Health Prevention which included BP Kiosks/ Community checks. Over 800 targeted Blood Pressure checks had been completed in community locations through Blood Pressure kiosks and Blood Pressure Community champions. It also included the atrial fibrillation (AF) project. This was a successful collaboration between public health, Holgate PCN and specialist cardiology during which 34 undetected AF cases were diagnosed. NHS Health Checks was a community outreach project, started through the ELM GP Federation. Substance misuse nurses had been trained to support delivery. The cervical screen pilot targeted the declining participation and inequalities in practices across South Tees. For the pilot 104 (46%) patients who had a successful telephone contact attended a screening and 7% had tested positive for HPV. Opportunities in this area included reducing Did Not Attend (DNA) in patients from lower socio-economic groups and addressing access and outcomes. Challenges included increasing the number of health checks in targeted groups and increasing referrals to support services.
- The fourth programme was Reducing Vulnerability at a Population Level. Activity in this programme included the confirmation that DATRIG had been funded for a further three years, recovery solutions had successfully completed its first CQC assessment and the South Tees individual Placement Service continued to have a very high success rate.
- The Promoting Positive Mental Health programme included the creation of the New Cruse Bereavement Pathway which was a multi-agency approach because of increased referrals for those bereaved by substance misuse related deaths. The Dementia Friendly Care Home guide had been highlighted in CQC reports as an example of best practice. Opportunities and challenges in this area included the Wellbeing Universal Pathway and Dementia Awareness Training.
- For the Best Start in Life programme the Council had procured a new 0-11 service for Middlesbrough, and a fluoride varnish programme for schools for some schools. With regards to breastfeeding, the Mamazing campaign had been delivered across the South Tees to promote breastfeeding.
- Overall challenges in Public Health included a reduction in the DATRIG element of the Public Health Grant which created uncertainty, ongoing cost of living pressures, employer and national insurance increases and the agenda for change pay awards.

The Chair thanked the Director of Public Health for his presentation and invited questions from the Board.

With regards to the Tees Urban Nature Network, and the three-year funding, a Member asked what its objective was. It was clarified this initiative aimed to look at green space in the Redcar and Stockton areas and the useability of those spaces.

It was asked, with regards to sexual health, if instances of syphilis were increasing. It was confirmed that syphilis was a significant issue across the Tees area although it was starting to decline. It was commented that future screening processes would likely be best placed in hospital emergency departments which could then lead to better treatment.

A Member queried the high levels of inpatient detox levels and if this was due to increase drug use. It was clarified this was an intensive treatment and that issues with alcohol and drug use were a long-standing issue in the area. The Member queried if the matter was an increasing problem and was stated the issue was a function of poverty. It was agreed that the Director of Public Health would provide latest data on the prevalence of drug use in the area and share it with the Board.

Clarity was sought around the issue of healthy placemaking and how this could be embedded in health and safety as well as equalities issues. It was clarified that healthy placemaking referred to addressing health inequalities rather health and safety. It was further stated that healthy place making featured in planning considerations such as the Local Plan and health impact assessments for local planning applications.

Regarding Naloxone, it was queried if the training delivered to local pubs could be part of a

wider strategic approach that also included training on defibrillators. It was agreed the Director of Public Health would make further enquiries on this matter.

A discussion took place during which it was clarified that a Substance Use nurse, based in the Public Health service had been awarded a bronze award in the British Journal of Nursing awards 2026.

A Member queried the lack of information relating to school immunisation services. It was clarified this service was commissioned at a Tees level and information was not as specific as hoped, although this was improving. It was also clarified the service was the responsibility of schools with no involvement from hospitals.

Clarification was provided about the fluoride varnish programme which, once applied to children's teeth, helped to protect them from decay especially if they had an infrequent tooth brushing routine.

A discussion took place around cervical screenings and HPV, during which it was clarified that HPV, while a sexually transmitted disease, could also be a precursor to cancer.

A Member queried what impact additional funding would have on the Headstart programme. It was clarified the programme was funded from several sources and was secure with the funding it had. Additional external funding would be required for the programme to expand.

Information relating after school physical activities was sought. It was clarified that much of this work was undertaken in partnership with Sport England and the pilot You've Got This. While there was some connection between the Public Health service, the focus tended to be on schools. The Director of Public Health agreed to provide further information on this issue.

The Chair queried immunisation rates and if there were any areas of concern. It was clarified that teenage immunisation was a big concern and that disinformation was a contributory factor. An instance of a measles outbreak in the North Ormesby Ward was discussed. It was commented that, rather than disinformation playing a significant role, there was insufficient communication leading to a lack of awareness about available support. It was also commented that Public Health Teams were promoting immunisation where they could, which included nurseries.

There were no further questions from the Board, and the Chair thanked the Director of Public Health for his presentation.

ORDERED that the Director for Public Health

1. Provide the latest data on drug prevalence to the Board.
2. Enquire about a strategic approach to the delivery of training on Naloxone and Defibrillators.
3. Provide data on what work was being undertaken regarding after school physical activities.

25/59

FINAL REPORT OF THE OSB TASK AND FINISH GROUP - COMMUNITY COHESION

A Member of the OSB Task and Finish Group, established to consider Community Cohesion, presented the group's Final Report and sought OSB's input to its recommendations.

The Member stated the intention of the group was not to review the issue of Community Cohesion through a single event understand service provision relating to Community Cohesion and if there were any gaps in that provision.

As part of its work the group compared a previous review into Community Cohesion, carried out in 2021. To understand what progress had been made, the group had spoken to relevant internal and external stakeholders as detailed in the report.

The issue of community cohesion was broad and complex, and the Task and Finish approach was carried out with a relatively narrow focus.

The group would also stress that the review may have been in response to the riots in 2024

but was still relevant.

While the group was reassured the Council's approach to Community Cohesion was more robust than in previous years, this this seemed to be in response the riots.

Using the recommendations of the 2021 report, the group was initially concerned that a Community Cohesion strategy was not in place at the time of the riots. However, it is reassured that work on developing such a strategy was now progressing well.

The group hoped that following additional funding from the Home Office in the form of the Community Recovery Fund, the Council's current approach to Community Cohesion can help prevent a repeat of the unrest experienced in 2024.

The Member stated there was no real way to predict the riots of 2024, and the Council had put more robust procedures and processes in place following them.

As part of the Board's discussion, clarification was provided around which groups had received funding from the Community Recovery Fund and how there was a need to communicate effectively to all community groups across the town.

Members also discussed the different factors that contributed to the riots in Middlesbrough in 2024 and agreed that a more strategic approach toward Community Cohesion was required.

Members asked that the relevant service area be invited to a future meeting of OSB to receive an update on work to support Community Cohesion.

Following discussion about the report OSB proposed and agreed the following recommendations:

1. To ensure Scrutiny contributes to Community Cohesion agenda: - Develop a Community Strategy as quickly as possible with quarterly progress updates brought to scrutiny.
2. A draft of the Community Strategy should be brought to Scrutiny as the earliest opportunity before it is finalised.
3. To mitigate the risk of future unrest: - An early warning system, such as a Community Cohesion dashboard, should be developed to alert the Council and relevant partners of community tensions.
4. To ensure a robust Community Cohesion offer: - that the Council embeds initiatives created because of Home Office funding as part of its business-as-usual operations. An update should be brought back to Scrutiny on this during the 2027/2028 budget setting process.
5. As part of the Council's approach to improved youth participation: - a specific plan be created that includes demonstrable, and quantifiable, actions to engage young people about the dangers of misinformation.

ORDERED

1. That the findings and recommendations of Task and Finish Group be noted and referred to the Executive.
2. That the relevant service be invited to provide an update to scrutiny on Community Cohesion work.

25/60

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - UPDATE

The Chair welcomed the Mayor and Head of ICT and Digital to the meeting and invited them to deliver their presentation.

As part of the presentation the following points were raised:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) was part of wider growth in emerging technology and there was a rapid growth in AI usage.
- The use of AI introduced new risks and responsibilities.
- AI could be leveraged to support productivity and service improvement, such as repetitive tasks and to reduce demand on some services.

- AI needed to be used transparently and with accountability.
- The Council had an AI policy in place which provided clear guidelines for AI's safe, ethical and responsible use across the Council.
- The policy also ensured the use of AI was lawful, fair and transparent which meant keeping track of how it was used.
- The need to be accountability in its use to ensure that any decisions taken were not reliant on AI. As such, there was a need to ensure the Council only used approved AI tools with all outputs reviewed by a human.
- It was important that staff used AI confidently and responsibly. Doing this would realise several benefits including adherence to Data Protection principles, improved productivity and supplier compliance.
- In terms of next steps, there would be continuous monitoring of emerging technologies and further investigations of tools on the market.
- A development of mandatory staff training was in progress and was likely to be implemented in March 2026.
- The Council would also be engaging with new and existing suppliers in the coming year.

The Chair thanked the Head of ICT and Digital for her presentation and invited question from Members.

A Member queried if there was a list of approved AI tools. It was commented that some AI tools were already within the Microsoft environment, such as CoPilot, Chat and Magic Notes. It was also stated that it was better to channel the use of AI tools so they, and the data they used, was managed appropriately and the AI policy helped to do this.

It was stated there was a lot of technology that could assist Council processes, such as in Adult Social Care. There was also a distinction to be made between AI and tools that assisted with processing.

A Member commented that, due to its potential, a specific session for Members on the use of AI would be beneficial.

A Member queried if there was a way to quantify the efficiencies AI could bring. The Mayor stated that AI was not intended to replace staff, but instead to speed up processes while maintaining human control.

A Member queried if work on AI would cover Chatbots. It was clarified that Chatbots, when used with the public facing website, would be provided with a knowledge base which would speed up response times for common enquiries. This would need to be tested before being rolled out.

A Member queried what would be required from an AI supplier. It was stated that any provider would need to work within requirements set by the Council and that the controls set by IT would have to be adhered to. It was also commented there were lots of vendors on the market. As such the Council would need to adopt a holistic, as the Council needed to develop and grow the product.

The Member further queried how Members could be involved in this process. The Mayor stated that Executive would be considering other strands of the digital strategy which tied in with the Council Plan. There was a hope that pre-decision scrutiny would be involved in this.

A conversation took place regarding the need for a joined-up approach to the Council's IT systems, with the Planning Portal and Councillor Gateway cited as examples. It was commented that the AI policy contributed to this, but further work was required regarding IT's ownership of those systems.

A Member stated that the use of AI could speed up decision making in the Council which may allow Councillors to spend more time working with members of the public.

The Chair queried how the Council was safeguarding against external vendors potentially submitting AI generated reports that may not be fit for purpose yet cost the Council money. It was stated this could be captured as part of the supply and compliance process which would

include data integrity. It was also stated that, despite emerging technologies, it was important the human involvement remained.

A conversation took place about Members use of emails on personal devices and how this worked. A Member also suggested several amendments to the AI policy which the Mayor had delegated authority to enact.

ORDERED

1. That a report be brought back to OSB within one year of the meeting to provide an update on the progress of AI's use in the Council's work.
2. That the information presented be noted.

25/61

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

None.