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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 15 April 2026.

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

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Mayor C Cooke and Councillor I Blades (Executive Member for Neighbourhoods)

OFFICERS: C Benjamin, S Bonner, M Brown, E Scollay and M Walker

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Mohan and M Saunders

25/79 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting and described the fire evacuation procedure.

25/80 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

25/81 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 18 MARCH 2026**

A Member commented that minute number 25/72 (fourth paragraph) should read "Members queried if any further information was available relating to the Forward Plan item 'Update on the Neighbourhoods model'".

Notwithstanding the changes identified, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18 March 2026 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

25/82 **SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE**

The Chair of OSB invited the Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Panel to provide his update. The Board was informed that the Children's Scrutiny Panel was due to meet on Monday 20 April where it would consider its draft final report on Out of Area Specialist Provision and also receive an update on a recent Ofsted focused visit.

There were no questions from the Board.

The Chair invited the Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel to provide his update. The Board was advised the Panel had received further evidence in relation to its review into Violence Against Women and Girls, and a quarterly CQC update from the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care. The Panel had also received the annual report of the Director of Public Health and would consider the annual Quality Accounts of the South Tees Trust at its next meeting.

There were no questions from the Board.

AGREED that the information presented be noted.

25/83 **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented the Executive Forward Plan, as detailed in the report, and invited questions.

The Chief Executive drew Members' attention to the Forward Plan entry for 8 April regarding the Council's Performance Management Framework.

Members were advised that report intended to align financial and performance information, which would provide for more effective oversight of the Council's activity.

A Member requested further information relating to the Forward Plan entry, "Commercial Waste Collection and Disposal". The Member queried if the cost of contracting out such services would be less than if the Council carried out those services. It was agreed the service area would be approached for further information on this matter.

A Member queried if, in relation to the Forward Plan Entry "Cost reduction of Garden Waste", if further information could be provided regarding potential reduction in subscriptions for Green Waste.

A Member queried if any local companies were involved in the initiative relating to the Forward Plan entry "Corporate Food Poverty Policy". They also queried what the aim and reach of the policy would be.

ORDERED that:

1. Further information be sought from the relevant service area in relation to Forward Plan entry Commercial Waste Collection and Disposal, specifically around costs of the Council running the service versus the private sector.
2. Further information be sought from the relevant service area in relation to Forward Plan entry Cost reduction of Garden Waste, specifically around potential reduction in green waste subscriptions.
3. Further information be sought from the relevant service area in relation to Forward Plan entry Corporate Food Poverty Policy.

25/84

FORWARD PLAN ACTIONS PROGRESS

Members were advised an update to the query raised at the last meeting of OSB had been circulated via email and that the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, who was in attendance, would provide further detail on that subject.

AGREED that the information presented be noted.

25/85

FINAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD (SHORT REVIEW) - THE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO POVERTY

The Chair presented OSB's draft final report following its short review into the Council's approach to poverty.

The Chair outlined the report's rationale and findings and invited questions from Members.

There were no questions from Members on the report.

Members were advised that draft recommendations had been circulated before the meeting and the Chair invited comments from the Board.

The Terms of Reference were:

1. The Council develops a clearer overarching approach to addressing poverty, including consideration of how this is best defined and framed (for example 'poverty' or more broadly 'social inclusion'), and supported by a strategy or a shared corporate ambition.
2. If the Council chose the option of a mission statement, it should improve coordination and alignment across existing policies, strategies, and service areas, to develop a consistent approach to tackling poverty and its wider impacts, such as social exclusion.
3. The Council considers its performance management in regards to how it tackles poverty, including whether it needs to develop clear benchmarks to understand and demonstrate how its efforts to tackle poverty have impact.
4. As part of Recommendation 3, an annual progress report should come to OSB.

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A Member sought clarification on Terms of Reference three. It was clarified that the Council's approach to poverty should be incorporated within the Council's performance regime going forward.

The Chair stated he would like to see any work on the poverty agenda brought back to OSB on an annual basis and for poverty to become part of its annual update schedule. The Chief Executive commented there needed to be a singular use of language around this issue to prevent any confusion.

The Mayor commented that a Key Performance Indicator in future strategies would be around Household Income which was linked to the poverty agenda.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the OSB short review into the Council's approach to Poverty be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

25/86

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE - OSB SHORT REVIEW - WHAT ROLE DO FAITH AND BELIEF GROUPS PLAY IN CIVIC LIFE IN MIDDLESBROUGH

The Chair advised Members that the Board's short review into Faith and Belief in Middlesbrough's Civic Life was due to commence and that draft Terms of Reference had been circulated to Members before the meeting. The draft Terms of Reference were:

1. To understand the role and impact of faith and belief in Middlesbrough's civic life and in supporting residents.
2. To understand how faith and belief groups interact with Council services, partnerships, and community cohesion.
3. To examine how Middlesbrough Council considers religion or belief in decision-making and service delivery, including governance and engagement.
4. To identify strengths, gaps, and risks in current approaches, including issues of inclusion, fairness, safeguarding, and any barriers faced by different faith and belief communities in engaging with the Council.

The Chair commented that the review could contribute to the wider social cohesion agenda and aimed to assess how faith and belief groups could be engaged by the Council more effectively. A Member queried the nature of faith and belief groups in this context. The Chair provided a brief definition of a faith community and belief community.

There were no further questions or comments on the draft Terms of Reference.

ORDERED that the draft Terms of Reference be approved.

25/87

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Chair invited the Mayor to present the Continuous Improvement Plan update to the Board.

The Mayor stated there was a need to achieve a balance between finance and performance reporting and potential for different officer groups to provide updates to both Executive and OSB to demonstrate how the two disciplines would work together.

The Town Board, referenced in Appendix 1 of the report, would be Member led and would be the first step on a journey to close off recommendations made by the Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Board. The Chief Executive commented that during the Best Value period the Council had lost sight of what good looked like. However, there was now an opportunity to refine complex processes and demonstrate value for money. One mechanism to achieve this was to re-instate service action plans to improve monitoring across the Council. This would help show the health of the organisation more clearly and move towards integrating finance and performance reporting information.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for his update and invited questions from the Board. A Member queried if there was an update on the MDC action plan. The Mayor responded the action in question had been assigned to the Council in order to resolve the hiatus. There was a review being carried out and the Council was working with the TVCA to resolve the matter of asset return to the Council.

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The Member continued by drawing the Mayor's attention to page 81 of the report and queried how many audit days were planned for the year. It was commented a report on this matter would be submitted to Audit Committee in June.

Following a query about Independent Persons sitting on Audit Committee, it was also confirmed this issue would be addressed at the June meeting of Audit committee.

With regard to return of assets from the MDC, a Member asked if the Council had resources to develop those assets. It was confirmed the Council would likely enter into partnerships, where appropriate. It was commented it would likely be June before there was clarity on this matter.

A conversation took place regarding the effectiveness of the MDC during which it was commented there was a cautious approach to the return of assets and there was a need to get those initiatives back on track.

A question was raised regarding the Council's approach to equality and diversity. It was commented there had been investment in the Council's HR services and recognised good work had been carried out in this regard. A further question was raised about how data could be used to monitor continuous learning. It was commented the Council had worked with various partners and stakeholders to refresh the performance indicators it used to monitor the Council's effectiveness in this area. This would be demonstrated over the coming months.

A Member raised a query about the status of the Crown after having attended several Local Plan meetings. It was agreed that when further clarity was available this issue would be brought back to the Board by means of an update.

AGREED that

1. An update on the status of the Crown be brought back to OSB when further information was available.
2. The information presented be noted.

25/88

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE - THE MAYOR

The Chair invited the Mayor to deliver his update which included the following points:

- The presentation followed a similar format to the Mayor's previous update, namely "Review, Celebrate and Preview."
- Council budget highlights included youth services in every ward, the introduction of a free pest control service and doubling the team of neighbourhood caretakers.
- In terms of youth services, some funding was ending so there was a need to look at new and existing schemes. The Council was working with Middlesbrough Football Club to provide a bus to areas that did not have a hub or obvious community venue.
- Regarding pest control, a report had been submitted and approved by Executive to create a free pest control service, and it was hoped this service would begin in July. The service covered rats, mice, bed bugs and cockroaches.

Following a question, it was clarified that landlords were responsible for pest control in their properties and they would be liable for any costs. It was also clarified that while tenants could report instances of pests to the Council, landlords should have been doing this as a matter of course. It was also clarified the new service would be within the curtilage of a property, as the Council already undertook pest control for land it owned. There was a concern about how pest control applications could harm pets, but it was commented there were different methods of pest control that could be applied.

A Member suggested several options for the placement of youth services. The Mayor responded by saying it was important to understand where the service was needed in the first instance. A discussion took place regarding the lack of youth hubs in some areas of the town. Members were also advised how other schemes and mechanisms were being examined to provide services in areas where there was not an obvious hub.

A Member queried how the proposed initiative for youth services was going to work. Members heard that Middlesbrough had an array of youth activities already in place, but it was not consistent. Therefore, the initiatives aimed to bring a level of consistency.

A Member queried if the framework in place to deliver youth services could be shared with Members so they could then share that with their respective community councils. It was clarified that a full list of activities would be released through initiatives such as the 10x10 scheme. When those activities were known, and a consistent programme was in place, it would be released to all Members. It was recognised that it was often difficult to learn about different youth activities from a single source.

It was clarified that the age ranges of proposed youth activity began at eight years and lasted until teenage years. There was a need to plug gaps in youth provision, and where there was no youth activity, this would be aimed at 10-14 years.

A conversation took place regarding the types of facilities available to young people in the town and how all options were being explored. It was also commented that activities needed to be fully risk assessed, with an example of a BMX track and the potential links with off road bikes being cited as an example.

The Mayor continued with his presentation which included the following points:

- With regards to parks and open spaces, all interviews for additional staff had taken place and it was planned that a phased rollout would take place over several months.
- A full review of parks and open space was underway to ensure a complete view of required equipment was gathered.

It was agreed that the review of parks and open spaces would be shared with all Members when it was completed and that the hours covered by park rangers had not been decided. A conversation took place about security and safety in open spaces during which it was commented that increased footfall, light and clear lines of sight helped to improve safety and security. An example was provided whereby CCTV provision at Pallister Park had not been effective due to overgrown trees. It was clarified that funding bids submitted by Members would still be valid despite these initiatives. A question was raised about improvements to Spencer Beck and other similar becks. It was clarified this work would be undertaken by the new Beck's Team.

The Mayor continued with his presentation which included the following points:

- In terms of the Celebrate section of the presentation, funding had been secured for parks amounting to £270,000.
- Extra funding had also been secured for school food supply and school catering services.
- £115,000 had been secured to help implement the Renter's Right Bill. There was a need to scale up some of the work being carried out on this matter and it was hoped that more people who were renting would come forward if they needed to.
- Middlesbrough had been shortlisted as a City of Culture, which was a positive in of itself. Middlesbrough had a positive image in the arts fraternity, exemplified with Middlesbrough hosting the Arts Council. There was a need for all Members to be on board with this initiative.
- In terms of Pride of Place, the Council had secured three sets of funding. It was in the process of appointing boards to oversee the spending of £40 million of funding that was split across three wards.
- There were plans to improve the area around so-called Wilkinson Lake in centre square, install a modular village for the arrival of the Turner Prize, and improve vegetation management in the town centre. Members were advised the plans for these initiatives would be circulated to them.
- Progress against several projects were stated including the Southlands Centre, Outwood Academy, the Old Town Hall and Nunthorpe Community Centre.
- Members were advised of a timeline of events between 2026 and 2030 which included the 20th anniversary of MIMA and Middlesbrough's Bicentenary. It was confirmed there were plans in place for those events. In terms of Captain Cook celebrations, some initial approaches had been made to the Maritime Association of Australia.
- In terms of the Preview section of the update, there was a need to make Middlesbrough thrive. There was also a need to produce a single coherent message across multiple projects.

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- Several projects were presented to Members as examples of making Middlesbrough thrive which included funding for the local authority multibank which had a yearly investment of £30,000. Other projects included Auto-Enrolment in Free School Meals. Members were advised the Free School Meals initiative applied to academies and maintained schools. The cost of a school meal was confirmed as £2.40 at maintained schools.
- Following a question about what support was in place to help people accessing the Welfare Rights service, it was confirmed support would be provided on both an individual and system basis.
- A further example of initiatives to make Middlesbrough thrive was the Crisis Resilience Fund which was a new iteration of the government's Household Support Fund. The Mayor stated he would welcome scrutiny opinion on this matter.

The Mayor explained that four areas of the town had been identified as having priority to receive additional support and funding, which was detailed in the presentation. This was supported by deprivation statistics which showed those areas were among the most deprived areas in the country. An example was cited where an area between Hartford Street and Chester Street ranked 13 out of 33,755 areas for crime, meaning only 12 areas in the country ranked worse than this.

The Chair queried why Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) was used as a metric and not Free School Meals as the former focused on postcodes whereas Free School Meals focussed on the person. It was clarified the statistics shown were drawn from Local Super Output Area. It was important the Council started to work through these factors. The characteristics shown to Members were apparent in all areas of the town, including Stainton which was within the 30% worst areas for some of its outcomes. This was largely due to a lack of financial investment and Middlesbrough not being able to withstand the worst effects of austerity.

A Member queried if ward Members would be consulted on all of the issues identified in the meeting. This was confirmed and would likely be within a month of the meeting. At this stage in the meeting the Mayor took the opportunity to thank officers for their work in this regard.

A discussion took place during which Members discussed broadband provision and Health Inequalities in Middlesbrough.

A Member queried how long it would take for an area to be improved based on the statistics and initiatives described in the presentation. The Mayor clarified this would take some time, and that the initiatives designed to help those most in need would benefit all in a structured and targeted way.

The Member further queried if the youth offer was being embedded for young people with disabilities and it was confirmed that different providers were being approached to help provide this.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for his presentation and asked the Board to note the information provided.

AGREED that the information presented be noted.

25/89

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE - NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and the Head of Neighbourhoods to the meeting and invited the Executive Member to deliver his update.

The Executive Member advised the Board that a copy of his portfolio had been circulated to Members immediately before the meeting.

The Executive Member's update included the following points:

- The Executive Member had been in post since 2025 with many of the functions contained within the portfolio having had existed for some time.

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- This was a busy period for the Neighbourhoods team which had seen the recruitment of several staff following approval of the budget and work with external partners such as Belong in developing a community strategy.

At this point the Executive Member invited the Head of Communities to address Members which included the following points:

- An important part of the Communities area was work around Navigators which played an important role in signposting people to relevant services.
- A range of staff had been recruited to relevant posts.

A Member commented that the Neighbourhoods team worked well and wanted to see this continue. An explanation of the Neighbourhood Caretaker role was provided. While Area Care operatives were multidisciplinary and carried out routine maintenance, Neighbourhood Caretakers were involved, primarily, in project primarily.

A Member queried if a poster on the work of Neighbourhood Navigators had been completed. It was agreed that the Head of Neighbourhoods would follow up on this with the Member outside of the meeting. It was clarified that different areas had different neighbourhood priorities.

A discussion took place about roles in the Neighbourhood's teams and how issues were reported to them via the Councillor Gateway system. It was commented that the Neighbourhood's Model and Customer Model were closely linked, and it was important to understand how those links worked to ensure issues were not missed. The Head of Neighbourhoods commented that the current system was useful in capturing and processing information.

A Member queried the status of new community buildings. It was clarified there was to be four neighbourhood community hubs that would be open for residents, Councillors, officers and partners. The hubs would be based in the North, South, East and West of the town. Members also noted that the North hub, based in Newport, was operational. There was a programme of investing £5 million of upgrades to the hubs. The East hub was based in Norfolk Shops, South hub was based in the Viewley Centre, and the West hub was based in Grove Hill. Several important partners worked out of the hubs.

In terms of refurbishment timescales, the South hub would take 14 weeks starting in May 2026, with East starting in August 2026 and lasting 20 weeks, North starting in October 2026 lasting 26 weeks and West starting in late 2026.

A Member complimented the Neighbourhoods Team but commented that responsiveness of the Councillor Gateway system could be improved.

It was commented there was a disconnect between Members and the workings of the various Neighbourhoods Teams and requested a Member briefing explain this and the work of Neighbourhood Navigators. The Head of Neighbourhoods undertook to deliver a Member's briefing on this subject.

Following a question on the subject, it was confirmed that the Council made use of community payback.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and the Head of Neighbourhoods for their update.

AGREED that

1. The Head of Neighbourhoods deliver a Member briefing on the role of Neighbourhoods teams.
2. The information presented be noted.

25/90

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

None.

