

Continuous Improvement Plan

Delivery of the Council's Continuous Improvement Plan has a clear relationship with the Best Value Duty. Delivery of actions will ensure it has a robust approach across all the seven themes that comprise the Best Value Duty:



This will ensure the Council is in a stronger position to deliver the four ambitions it has set out within the 2024 – 2027 Council Plan that Middlesbrough will:

- Be a successful and ambitious town
- Be a healthy place
- Have safe and resilient communities
- Deliver Best Value.

This plan addresses both the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge team and the last report of the Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board (MIAB). Many of the recommendations are duplicated across both documents. Where this occurs, they have only been captured to avoid duplication.

Council Plan Ambition	Best Value Theme	Recommendation	Action	Owner(s)	Target date for completion
All	Partnerships and Community Engagement	<p>Develop in co-production with communities, residents, partners and businesses a long-term vision for the town that is inclusive, practical and deliverable.</p> <p>By looking outwards and harnessing untapped potential to deliver its vision, this will enable everyone to understand and contribute to delivering shared ambitions for the benefit of Middlesbrough and its communities.</p>	<p>The Council is in the process of reestablishing a town wide engagement mechanism for Partners which will be called a Towns Board and will replicate the best parts of the defunct Local Strategic Partnership arrangements to ensure there is a regular meeting of key strategic public, private and VCS partners to set the strategic direction for the town and identify and deliver system wide change to improve outcomes for our residents. Once established, the first key task will be to co-produce a vision in a process that engages local communities and residents.</p>	Chief Executive	Board to be established by June 2025 and a co-produced vision will be developed during 2025/26.
All	Partnerships and Community Engagement	<p>Redefine Middlesbrough's strategic approach to partnership working based on principles of timely and meaningful collaboration, co-design and with common purpose to inspire and build a team beyond the council that are galvanised to deliver for the town.</p> <p>This will strengthen delivery of Middlesbrough's place shaping ambitions, maximise use of collective resources, and help shift the focus from organisational recovery to delivery of improved outcomes for residents.</p>	<p>The Council is committed to working with partners more effectively to co-produce a vision for the town, alongside a strategy, underpinned by agreed principles which will govern how we will work together to deliver improved outcomes for our residents. It is planned to use the reestablished Towns Board to co-produce an agreed strategic approach to partnership working.</p>	Chief Executive	March 2026
All	Partnerships and Community Engagement	<p>Develop and seek to strengthen relationships with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and Tees Valley councils.</p> <p>This will maximise the potential for Middlesbrough and the wider Tees Valley to realise the benefits from being at the forefront of devolution and drive economic development and growth which will be critical to all the council's ambitions.</p>	<p>Officers are continuing to engage with the TVCA officers to work positively with them and there are a range of officer working groups that are well established across the Tees Valley.</p> <p>The Council will seek formal engagement with the TVCA other Local Government members of the Combined Authority to outline a proposed revised engagement approach across matters of mutual interests to enable</p>	Mayor and Chief Executive	May 2025

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			improved outcomes for residents and businesses in the Tees Valley		
All	Partnerships and Community Engagement	<p>Seek to resolve the hiatus with the Middlesbrough Mayoral Development Corporation to achieve a shared plan for the town.</p> <p>This will unlock its potential as a powerful mechanism for effectively delivering economic development and growth and integrating the resources and assets of the council and TVCA.</p>	The Council will seek formal discussions with TVCA and government on options to address the hiatus in the best interests of the residents of Middlesbrough.	Chief Executive	May 2025
All	Culture	<p>Develop and embed a comprehensive approach to strengthening equality, diversity, and inclusion, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. In organisational development, the workforce and democratic representation; b. Within strategy, policy, and service delivery; and c. Community engagement, ensuring it looks at this agenda strategically for Middlesborough as a whole, not only for the organisation and those elected or employed. <p>This will ensure EDI is at the heart of everything it does, that the council is representative of the communities it serves and delivers better decision-making by harnessing different perspectives</p>	<p>We will raise the ambitions within the People Strategy and Member Development Strategy (expanding to include promotion of councillor roles to potential future councillors) to seize the opportunities that an improved approach to community engagement will bring as our residents increase their trust in the Council.</p>	Head of HR and Head of Legal (People)	<p>People Strategy annual review (April 2025)</p> <p>Member Development Strategy annual review (February 2026)</p>
			<p>We will review the Council's report formats, policy and strategy templates to strengthen the way the Council assesses the impact of its activities on equality, diversity and inclusion.</p>	Head of Governance, Policy and Information	May 2025
			<p>Over the next 12 months the Council plans to increase community development capacity as part of the emerging Neighbourhoods Strategy which will include actions to also reset its approach to community engagement to ensure it better understands and responds to the needs of its communities as well as reestablishing a proactive approach to decision making that focusses on coproduction where possible.</p>	Director of Environment and Community Services	March 2026
Delivering Best Value	Use of Resources	Bring further rigour to financial planning and management to support savings delivery and financial resilience by:	Effects on the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) are going to be included within future quarterly budget outturn reports.	Section 151 Officer	To commence within the year-end report for 2024/25 (June 2025)

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		a. Reviewing the MTFP assumptions and updating them on a quarterly basis, with clear plans for managing demand and delivering savings reported in monthly budget reports.	The Council already has a cycle of monthly budget reporting and agreement of actions in response to issues raised by this process. These are then formally reported to Members/ appropriate member decision making and engagement is undertaken. This is included within the quarterly outturn reports		
		b. Supporting Executive Members to own and shape the financial position, within their portfolio areas and collectively, working with senior officers to challenge, monitor and hold each other to account.	Executive role - Further training will be provided to Executive Members on financial management disciplines. The Council already has in place Executive involvement in the budget clinic cycle, attending on a quarterly basis for all areas except Children's Services where they attend monthly.	Section 151 Officer	March 2026
		c. Embed understanding and ownership of the financial position with budget holders to ensure the on-going delivery of transformation, savings and efficiencies.	Regular monthly reports continue to be submitted to Leadership Team and Wider Leadership Management Team on the budget position. We have an ongoing training programme that we are committed to delivering to ensure we raise and maintain the financial skill sets of our budget holders. Additional support is targeted at new budget holders, on a risk-based approach, with the highest levels of support targeted at those managing the most volatile budgets.	Section 151 Officer	Monthly
		d. Ensuring that scrutiny and audit oversight is effective, transparent and supports understanding - beyond the council - with key partners and the public.	A proposal will be submitted to Audit Committee to recommend it completes a self-assessment against CIPFA Good Governance guidance in March. If agreed, it will be delivered during 2025/26.	Section 151 Officer	March 2025, with the review to be completed during 2025/26
		e. Reviewing pay scales to support recruitment and retention of key staff, linked to workforce and succession planning, with a focus on both bringing in external, as well as nurturing internal, talent.	Scrutiny - the Monitoring officer and S151 officer are working towards development of an integrated approach to reporting the quarterly outturn position to improve members understanding of the overall position of the Council financially and their understanding of the impact on delivery of Council plan priorities	Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer	June 2025 onwards

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			<p>The Towns Board, once reestablished, will become the vehicle through which strategic discussions with our partners are held this will include sharing information about our spending power and priorities. The Board will be established during 2025.</p>	Chief Executive	May 2025
			<p>We are securing additional capacity within the HR team to be able to look at options around the Council's recruitment and retention of key staff as well as ongoing delivery of the People Strategy to ensure our staff have the skills and capabilities to be able to meet the needs of succession planning.</p>	Head of HR	May 2025

Council Plan Ambition	Best Value Theme	Recommendation	Action	Owner(s)	Target date for completion
All	Use of Resources	<p>Reframe Middlesbrough's approach to transformation, shifting from tactical savings during a crisis, to long term financial sustainability and continuous improvement to deliver better outcomes, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undertaking a cross-council reset and relaunch of its transformation priorities, alongside the council plan and council values, underpinned by strong leadership, a robust communications and engagement plan, and organisational development strategy. b. Creating a senior transformation officer role to lead, consolidate and prioritise the current programme, identify new areas for transformation, track progress and delivery of desired outcomes, and drive the organisational change and buy-in required to deliver successful transformation. c. Reviewing capacity to deliver Middlesbrough's transformation ambitions, including within corporate services and supporting data and analysis and performance management, to ensure that all relevant services are adequately resourced to support transformation outcomes. 	<p>Following successful delivery of a programme of projects which have been primarily focussed on putting the council on a sound financial footing.</p> <p>The Council is currently pausing slightly to ensure the next phase of its approach to transformation of services, using a refined set of projects and programmes that has an increased focus on delivery of improved outcomes for our residents to support delivery of the council plan vision and underpinning ambitions, within a sustainable cost envelope.</p> <p>A report on the revised approach and the plans to put in place the capacity to deliver it successfully will be presented to Executive shortly.</p>	Chief Executive and Section 151 officer	April 2025
Delivering Best Value	Continuous Improvement	<p>Establish a locally owned assurance and improvement approach for Middlesbrough once the voluntary improvement Board steps down.</p> <p>This will help embed and sustain continuous</p>	This Continuous Improvement plan and the regular reporting of it to Executive and Scrutiny will ensure there is a locally owned assurance and improvement plan in place.	Chief Executive	July 2026 onwards

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		improvement and support, providing oversight of the golden thread between the council's vision, corporate plan, performance and delivery of outcomes. By doing so, it will provide the council, its partners, and residents with assurance that the improvement journey is continuing at pace.			
Delivering Best Value	Use of Resources	Review and strengthen Middlesbrough's internal audit arrangements and provision. This will ensure they are fit for purpose and adequately support its continuous improvement and assurance journey, with internal audit a key tool when deployed strategically in the delivery of high-quality services, transformation and financial outcomes	Commission an external review of the current arrangements for internal audit to provide assurance to the Council as to whether they remain fit for purpose or require adjustment to better support the Council's continuous improvement and assurance journey.	Section 151 Officer	Review to be commissioned by September 2025 for deliver in 2025/26.
All	Governance	<p>Review and strengthen Middlesbrough's overview & scrutiny arrangements.</p> <p>This will ensure arrangements support robust and impactful scrutiny for the future, aligned with best practice.</p>	<p>A planned review is already underway to assess the impact and effectiveness of the current arrangements following 12 months of their implementation with a view to changing if needed. Guidance from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny will be used and members will be fully engaged in the review.</p> <p>In addition, a pre-scrutiny protocol will be developed to establish a collaborative working relationship between Executive and Scrutiny Councillors to enhance decision-making in the organisation.</p>	Monitoring Officer	May 2026
All	Governance	<p>Support councillors further in their roles through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Providing the Executive with administrative support and training for their roles; b. Addressing issues with Councillor Gateway system; 	<p>We are securing additional democratic support capacity to support the Executive team administration their roles.</p> <p>We are securing additional capacity to support the quality of responses to Members and to manage feedback from Members to establish a continuous improvement approach to both the system and the outcomes members are seeking.</p>	<p>Monitoring Officer</p> <p>Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>September 2025</p> <p>September 2025</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Providing sufficient advanced notice for meetings, and at times that meet councillors' needs; and d. Promote and encourage good councillor conduct, including on digital platforms. 	<p>Ongoing discussions will continue to be held with Members to identify the issues with timings and options the Council could put in place to manage timings and support Members to attend.</p> <p>We have recently delivered further training to all Members on good conduct on social media and will regularly push out reminders on good practice on social media usage.</p>	Monitoring Officer	May 2025 committee diary setting by Council and ongoing
All	Governance	<p>Continue to improve member and officer relationships with clear understanding of the respective roles, responsibilities and promoting good behaviours.</p> <p>This will continue to strengthen Middlesbrough's governance guardrails, promote conduct in line with the Nolan Principles, and avoid the risks which in the past have arisen from Middlesbrough's Mayoral model.</p>	<p>We are committed to an ongoing cycle of training and development of both officers and Members and will regularly take the temperature of the organisation through engagement and surveys to identify where more needs to be done.</p>	Monitoring Officer	Ongoing regular surveys throughout the year
Delivering Best Value	Use of Resources, Service delivery and Continuous Improvement	<p>Develop a medium-term plan, as organisational capacity improves, to integrate finance and performance reporting within the corporate governance framework.</p>	<p>Following successful growth bids to put in place the capacity within Finance, action is being taken to secure additional capacity to reestablish a more embedded performance management process as well. Action will initially be taken to recruit additional capacity, with a view to first working together to strengthen performance management and reporting and then jointly developing an integrated approach to reporting to improve the Council's ability to demonstrate alignment of its resources with Council priorities and the relationship between resourcing and performance across its priority areas.</p>	Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer	Staff will be recruited into post by September 2025.
Delivering Best Value	Use of Resources	<p>Focus on long term financial resilience and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. tight control on 2025/26, b. develop a balanced position for the 	<p>The Council has a robust budget management approach in place which it intends to maintain in 2025/26, including ongoing budget clinics, with Member involvement within them, as well</p>	Section 151 Officer	Quarterly throughout 2025/26

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		<p>medium term,</p> <p>c. have a planned approach to growth,</p> <p>d. do not fund ongoing expenditure from one off funding pots,</p> <p>e. focus on transformational opportunities.</p>	<p>as monthly budget reporting to inform these processes.</p> <p>Regular liaison with Executive will be undertaken as part of the quarterly review of the effects of decisions and expenditure on the MTFP. This will include medium term planning for growth.</p> <p>Not funding ongoing expenditure from one off pots of funding is a principle that is already robustly applied to Council budget setting processes. For example the proposed governance of the Middlesbrough Priorities fund includes such a principle.</p>		
Delivering Best Value	Use of Resources	Be prudent with extra money: top up reserves (to a level higher than currently suggesting), invest in contingency.	<p>This is another principle within the Council's budget setting process and there are a number of contingencies built into the budget including a risk fund to manage risks around non-delivery of savings.</p> <p>The Medium-Term Financial Plan includes plans to grow the reserves prudently while balancing against the level of demand arising from being a local authority in one of the country's most deprived areas.</p>	Section 151 Officer	n/a - Ongoing over the life of the Medium Term Financial Plan
All	All	Build organisational capacity to strengthen resilience in finance, HR, OD and transformation to support delivery of your corporate plan priorities.	The Council has already taken action to identify funding for growth in these areas and it will consider whether there are any further growth needs within its reset approach to transformation which will be considered by Executive in April 2025.	Chief Executive	May 2025
All	Leadership	Continue to focus on organisational development as an important part of your continuous improvement journey, with a particular focus on team development and	Executive and Leadership team development programme has been put in place and is resuming at pace, with external support and expertise. In addition, the Council is refreshing	Monitoring Officer	Ongoing

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		embedding stable, permanent leadership arrangements.	support for its wider Managers, reestablishing a management training gateway, along with a wide range of programmes to develop skills and capacity. This is being overseen within the delivery of the People Strategy		
All	All	Complete and implement your communications strategy and use it as an effective tool to bring the council vision to life and to ensure that both the internal and external environment understands the outcomes the council is trying to achieve.	Once the Council has reset its approach to transformation, a draft Communications Strategy will be developed to ensure that there is a plan in place, owned by senior leaders, that ensures the Council is clearly communicating its vision, priorities and actions to ensure Members, Staff, the public and partners understand and engage with the outcomes the council is trying to achieve.	Chief Executive	Draft Strategy June 2025, to be reviewed on a quarterly basis by Leadership team.

To note: This is a live document and as such actions may be amended, added to or edited where it is appropriate to do. For example, there are areas within both reports where no formal recommendation has been made but there are statements that warrant further consideration, and additional actions may be added. Where there are changes, these will be documented to ensure transparency. Also initial action within this plan may lead to a need for further actions to be undertaken and these will be captured as necessary.