

COUNCIL

A meeting of the Council was held on Wednesday 26 March 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors J Rostron, (Chair), J Ewan (Vice-Chair), J Banks, I Blades, D Branson, E Clynch, C Cooke - Elected Mayor, J Cooke, C Cooper, D Coupe, D Davison, P Gavigan, S Hill, D Jackson, J Kabuye, L Lewis, T Livingstone, L Mason, D McCabe, J McConnell, J McTigue, I Morrish, J Nicholson, M Nugent, J Platt, S Platt, A Romaine, J Ryles, M Saunders, P Storey, J Thompson, S Tranter, N Walker, G Wilson, J Young and L Young

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: M Edgell, W Sampson, Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board

OFFICERS: C Benjamin, S Bonner, M Brown, B Carr, G Field, S Lightwing, J Hedgley, T Hodgkinson, A Johnstone, A Davis, E Scollay, J Weston and K Whitmore

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of Councillors T Furness, L Henman, B Hubbard, L Hurst, N Hussain, D Jones, M McClintock, M Smiles and Z Uddin

24/109 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

24/110 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

24/111 **MINUTES - COUNCIL - 15 JANUARY, 19 FEBRUARY AND 5 MARCH 2025**

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 15 January, 19 February and 5 March 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/112 **ANNOUNCEMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS**

There were no Announcements or Communications for this meeting.

24/113 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PEER REVIEW AND MIDDLESBROUGH INDEPENDENT IMPROVEMENT ADVISORY BOARD REPORTS AND PLANNED APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT - MOVING FORWARD**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted that set out the Council's planned response to two recently issued reports from the Local Government Association and the Council's Independent Improvement Advisory Board respectively.

The purpose of the report was to ensure the Council continued to deliver continuous improvement activity that would strengthen and embed compliance with the Best Value Duty and maximise the Council's ability to deliver the 2024-2027 Council Plan.

Both reports were positive and identified the great strides the Council had made in the last eighteen months in order to be in a position where it was able to continue on its improvement journey within a Council-led business as usual approach, supported by the regular oversight and challenge mechanisms provided by scrutiny, partners, the public, internal and External Auditors.

The submitted report included a Continuous Improvement Plan, attached at Appendix 3, which set out the planned approach over the next 12 months.

The Mayor invited the Chair of the Middlesbrough Council Independent Improvement Advisory Board to present the Board's final report to Council.

The final report was intended to provide an element of reflection of progress over the past

eighteen months, but mainly focus on looking forward and the issues on which, the MIIAB felt the Council needed to concentrate most, whilst moving forward to support its continuous improvement journey.

As the Council had moved from “recovery” through to “reset” and now on to “delivery”, the MIIAB considered that there were five areas of focus:

- Culture change.
- Governance.
- Plans, priorities, and strategies.
- Financial planning and management.
- Organisational capacity.

As per the MIIAB report, an update was provided on each theme.

The Chair acknowledged that the Council had embraced the approach of the MIIAB and although some conversations had been quite difficult and challenging, the Council had entered into the relationship constructively. The Chair thanked the Chief Executive and the Leadership Team and also the former Chief Executive for their engagement and support.

Several Members asked questions in relation to Member and Officer relationships. The Chair acknowledged that whilst the Council had made good progress in relation to culture change, there was still work to do on this theme.

On a vote being taken it was **ORDERED** as follows that Council:

1. Approved the recommendations set out in the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge peer review letter and the final report of the Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board.
2. Agreed to formally thank the Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board and the support of the LGA senior regional advisor, for their support and oversight during the Council's improvement journey.
3. Agreed to formally thank the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team for giving up time in their substantive roles as leaders in other local authorities, to support the Council in its continuous improvement journey.
4. Agreed the Continuous Improvement plan.
5. Agreed the planned reporting and assurance arrangements for the Council's continuous improvement activity.
6. Noted the Council's planned approach to continuous improvement going forward and the formal closure of the Corporate Governance Improvement Plan.

24/114

SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO 4.13.2 – ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair proposed a motion without notice to change the order of business in the agenda of the meeting in accordance with the Constitution paragraph 4.30.1 (c). The motion was seconded by Councillor Blades.

On a vote being taken, the motion was declared **CARRIED**.

ORDERED that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 4.57, Council agreed to vary the order of business to deal with the items in the following order: Agenda Item 15, Agenda items 6 - 14, and Agenda Items 16 - 18.

24/115

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY).

The Chair read out Questions 2/24 and 3/24 submitted by Susan Peat and Rachel Forster, who were not in attendance.

The Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability thanked the members of the public for their questions. The Executive Member stated that due to the financial turnaround, the

Council was in a stronger position to review previous decisions. In relation to parking permits, the Council had listened to residents' concerns and the implementation of charges had been paused. A report would be submitted to Executive in the near future recommending removal of charges and looking at a fairer and more proportionate approach.

24/116 **TEES VALLEY COMBINED AUTHORITY (TVCA) UPDATE**

The Tees Valley Combined Authority Cabinet was due to meet on Friday 28 March 2025 and would be discussing the Adult Education Budget. This agenda item was currently exempt. The Mayor stated that he would like further information in relation as to who the providers were, and what the outcomes would be for the learners, before a decision was taken.

In relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Mayor commented that he was disappointed that Councils had not been better consulted on projects that could be submitted. However, the Mayor would be putting forward projects that were of great importance to the town, including the expansion of Middlesbrough College to cope with rising numbers of school leavers, and also the development of Middlehaven.

24/117 **MAYOR'S STATEMENT AND REPORT**

A new Neighbourhoods Policy and Model would be submitted to the Executive for approval at the end of April 2025. The change in approach would cement the recent development of the north, east, south and west teams and engagement approach. Additional staff would be recruited into the teams with the aim of better outcomes for residents and Councillors. Staff would also be placed into other settings including schools, hospitals and doctors' surgeries. It was important to develop better engagement with schools to support them to resolve issues raised by parents or carers and other recurring issues to ensure a quicker response.

The Middlesbrough Priorities Fund would also be discussed at the April meeting of the Executive. The Mayor invited all Councillors to bring forward suggestions for revenue projects and discuss with him what priorities the Council should be investing in. Some Ward funding would also be allocated in due course for localised projects.

In response to a request for an update on the removal of the Linthorpe Road cycle lanes, the Mayor confirmed that the work was going out to tender and it was anticipated that the tender would be awarded in approximately two months and work would commence shortly afterwards.

Members raised issues in relation to damage to pavements, grass verges and parking obstructions. The Mayor agreed that further thought needed to be given in relation to remediating damaged grass verges and whether there were better permanent solutions such as removal.

24/118 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORTS**

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Development.

Councillor Cooper agreed to email her question to the Executive Member for Development

Question in relation to the Report of the Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Education and Culture.

Councillor Morrish on VE Day 80.

The Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Education and Culture explained that previously the Civics Officer would have contacted veterans associations in advance of civic events. The Civics Officer post no longer existed and organisation of such events was now undertaken by the Events Team. Contacting veterans associations in respect of events was not a task that would be carried out by an Elected Member. The Executive Member suggested that there should be further discussion and clarification in relation to the Champion roles and expectations of Elected Members.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Children's Services.

Councillor Wilson on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

In the absence of the Executive Member, the Mayor responded stating that this process was the responsibility of the Integrated Care Board (ICB). However it was a valid point that children were having to wait a long time and often travel out of the area for their assessment. The Mayor said he would get some data on this issue. The Mayor also highlighted the the Finlay Cooper Centre who working with people to support people at both the pre and post-diagnosis stages as one of the main issues was the wait time for results. The Mayor praised the excellent work carried out by the Centre.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability.

Councillor Saunders in relation to the Transporter Bridge.

The Executive Member explained that the Transporter Bridge was one of Middlesbrough's most iconic bridges and the Council was fully committed to securing its future. Responsibility for its maintenance was shared with Stockton On Tees Borough Council. Atkins Realis had been appointed to carry out the preliminary design phase of the restoration project which would take up to 10 months to complete. The cost was just over £768,000 which would be split between Stockton and Middlesbrough Councils, funding from existing budgets, with no new requests for capital. No funding had been provided to date by the Tees Valley Combined Authority. The restoration would require a detailed design plan which would take between 8 and 10 months, followed by the tender process and construction work which would last a minimum of 3 years.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods.

Councillor Kabuye in relation to Community Newsletters.

The Executive Member agreed that the Community Newsletters, sent to residents in the East and South Neighbourhood areas had been a huge success. Work had now started on a Newsletter that would be delivered to every household in Middlesbrough. The Executive Member added her thanks to Officers involved in the newsletters production.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health.

Councillor McCabe in relation to Council priorities.

The Mayor provided an explanation that the wording in the report under the heading of Council Priorities: A Healthy Place – Helping our residents to live longer, healthier lives – was the description from the Council Plan and not part of the report.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Finance.

Councillor Livingstone in relation to Customer Strategy.

The Executive Member for Finance confirmed that the digital first approach in the Customer Strategy was not exclusive. In 2023/24 over 125,000 calls were made to the Council's Customer Centre, there were over 4,700 in-person visits and the website attracted over 2.9 million visitors. Whichever way residents needed to contact the Council would still be available. With regard to payments – this was a separate issue and cash payments would continue. The Strategy stated that Council business processes would be designed around customers and would provide consistency through the route that served the customer best. The Executive Member stated that undertaking would also be included in the Customer Charter.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health.

Councillor Saunders in relation to the inspection outcome.

The Executive Member agreed to provide further information in relation to the low scores for

assessing needs and safeguarding and the action that would be taken to address this.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods.

Councillor Morrish in relation to commemoration of three years of war in Ukraine.

The Executive Member highlighted that regular events were held to support people arriving in Middlesbrough from Ukraine and this included donating second-hand IT equipment. The Executive Member thanked the Councillor for his suggestion that vehicles that were no longer of use to the Council or untaxed vehicles that had been seized could be sent to Ukraine for charities to use. The Councillor's suggestion would be passed on to Council Officers.

Question in relation to the Report of the Executive Member for Environment and Sustainability.

Councillor Saunders in relation to the Linby and Belle Vue Footbridges.

The Executive Member was not aware of any plans to add lighting to the path leading to the footbridges and asked the Mayor to comment further. The Mayor stated that a meeting had taken place earlier in the day in relation to upcoming transport schemes. A project called Tees to the Topping had been discussed that was being led by The National Trust to connect those two areas. One of the key parts to the plan was the inclusion of the green corridor alongside Berwick Hills and Park End. The Mayor was hoping to get the green light for this scheme fairly soon. The Mayor was keen to ensure that the paths were wide enough and well lit. In respect of the repair work needed to the bridges – funding was being sought. The Mayor agreed to keep the Councillor updated on progress.

24/119 **REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board presented a report, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the current position regarding progress made by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the individual Scrutiny Panels.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and to note the report.

ORDERED that the report was noted.

24/120 **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items submitted within the specified deadlines for this meeting.

24/121 **MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME**

There were no Members' Questions submitted within the specified deadlines for this meeting.

24/122 **NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

Motion No. 173

Consideration was given to Motion No. 173 moved by Councillor Branson and seconded by Councillor L Young of which notice had been given in accordance with Council Procedure Rules No. 53-60 as follows:

Motion on the current state and future of bus services in Middlesbrough and the wider Tees Valley.

This Council notes:

- Bus deregulation in England has led to a significant reduction in bus services, with research by Friends of the Earth highlighting that bus services in England (outside of London where they have remained regulated) have reduced by 48% in urban areas and 52% rural areas

since 2008.

- The Labour government's commitment to empowering local communities to take back control of their bus services and the achievement of the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, in successfully ending the deregulation of Greater Manchester's bus network.
- Research from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) highlights that, excluding London, the region with the greatest number of residents without private motor vehicle access in England is the North East. This means it is vital for our local economy that public transport options effectively serve our communities.
- Buses account for up to 83% of all public transport journeys in the region and, excluding London, the North East has more residents without private motor vehicle access than any other region.
- In Middlesbrough, bus journeys are often excessively long, timetables are seen as unreliable, some services are infrequent, and shelters at bus stops are inadequate.
- According to a report by Transport for the North entitled Transport and Social Exclusion in the North (published in February 2024), 44% of respondents said that poor public transport was impacting on their ability to socialise and 29% reported that they were forced to spend money on a vehicle at the expense of other essentials.
- An end to deregulation of buses in the Tees Valley would empower local decision-makers accountable to local people to set routes, timetables and fares, which could help drive much-needed improvements to services in Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley as modelled in other parts of the country.

This Council resolves to:

To write to the Mayor of the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the Secretary of State for Transport calling for an end to the deregulation of buses in the Tees Valley, allowing communities to take back control of their buses.

Councillor Branson spoke in support of the motion.

Councillor L Young reserved his right to speak.

The Chair invited Members to speak to the motion.

Councillors Coupe, Livingstone, Storey, Mohan, and L Young spoke in support of the motion. Councillors Saunders, J Platt, Wilson and Morrish spoke against the motion citing the potential financial implications.

Councillor Branson reminded Members that it was important to bear in mind that the motion was in relation to franchising and not nationalising.

On a vote being taken the motion was **CARRIED**.

Motion No. 174

Consideration was given to Motion No. 174 moved by Councillor Morrish and seconded by Councillor Storey of which notice had been given in accordance with Council Procedure Rules No. 53-60 as follows:

"Middlesbrough Council resolve to establish a non politically balanced, cross party working group of five councillors. The purpose of which is to support the council's events team with civic events and when and if funding is available, to expand on the civic events calendar. The committee will receive no remuneration and will have no dedicated budgets, seeking volunteers from elected members who wish to restore civic pride."

Councillor Morrish spoke in support of the motion.

Councillor Storey spoke in support of the motion.

The Chair invited Members to speak to the motion.

The Mayor added his support to the motion.

On a vote being taken the motion was **CARRIED**.

24/123 **NOTICE OF URGENT MOTIONS (IF ANY)**

There were no Notice of Urgent Motions submitted within the specified deadlines for this meeting.

24/124 **PAY POLICY STATEMENT**

A report of the Director of Legal and Governance Services was presented in respect of the Pay Policy Statement 2025/2026.

The Pay Policy Statement set out the Council's policies on remuneration of its staff in accordance with Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011.

This included various employee policies relevant to the remuneration of Chief Officers in operation within the Council. The actual content of those policies included within the statement would continue to be determined by current mechanisms.

The Pay Policy Statement had to be approved by full Council before publication on the Council's website and before 31 March each year.

A Member suggested that Council should have the opportunity to review the Chief Officer structure. The Mayor clarified that this would be within the remit of the Chief Executive.

On a vote being taken, it was **ORDERED** that the Pay Policy Statement 2025/2026, as set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report, was approved.

24/125 **APPROVAL OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY 2025 - 2030 AND CUMULATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENT 2025 - 2028**

A report was presented to seek Council's approval of the Statement of Licensing Policy 2025 - 2030 and Cumulative Impact Assessment 2025–2028. Copies of the policies were attached as appendices to the submitted report.

Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 ("the Act") required Licensing Authorities to prepare and publish a Statement of Licensing Policy that they proposed to apply in exercising their functions under the Act. Such statements were to apply across a stated five-year period. Pursuant to the Act, the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy must be approved by Council. During each five-year period the Council had to keep its Licensing Policy under review and make such 'revisions as it considered to be appropriate'.

The Statement of Licensing Policy and Cumulative Impact Assessment had been developed in accordance with the Act. Evidence provided in the cumulative impact assessment justified the inclusion of three additional ward areas in the Off Licence Cumulative Impact Policy, which were:

Park End and Beckfield.
Brambles and Thorntree.
Berwick Hills and Pallister.

A consultation exercise had been carried out with statutory consultees and wider partners. The consultation ran for a period of 8 weeks from 1 July 2024 until 26 August 2024.

On a vote being taken it was **ORDERED** as follows that Council:

1. Approved the Statement of Licensing Policy 2025–2030
2. Approved the Cumulative Impact Assessment 2025–2028.

FLEXIBLE USE OF CAPITAL RECEIPTS STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Finance presented a report on Flexible Use of Capital Receipts (FUoCR) Strategy 2025/2026.

An error on the first page of the submitted report was highlighted. The report did not contain a key decision as stated on the first page.

Local authorities were ordinarily only able to utilise capital receipts from the sale of fixed assets for specific purposes, and this precluded the financing of revenue expenditure under s15(1) of the Local Government Act 2003 (as amended).

However, from 2016/17 statutory regulations had allowed capital receipts to be used to finance eligible revenue expenditure in specific circumstances and subject to certain conditions. This was achieved through the adoption of a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts (FUoCR) Strategy that was required to be approved by Full Council and was overseen (but not approved) by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Eligible expenditure under the regulations related to revenue expenditure which:

- was designed to generate ongoing expenditure savings, income generation, and/or more efficient delivery of services, and/or
- transformed service delivery to reduce costs/ reduce demand; and/or
- improves the quality-of-service delivery in future years.

The Council was required to deliver transformational change of its service delivery models to achieve financial sustainability over the period of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) from 2025/26 to 2028/29, and the Council's Transformation Programme was an integral part of the Council's MTFP.

The transformation expenditure could only be financed by capital receipts given the low level of revenue reserves held by the Council. The FUoCR strategy therefore provided the funding solution for the revenue costs of transformation work to be funded from capital receipts generated from the review of assets as approved by the Executive in November 2023.

The FUoCR Strategy for 2025/26 set out plans for up to £7.5m of expenditure linked to the Council's Transformation Programme to be incurred during 2025/26 to be funded by capital receipts in accordance with statutory regulations.

The Council was not permitted to apply flexible capital receipts to fund expenditure more than the sum set out in the approved FUoCR Strategy. However, the regulations enabled the revision of the FUoCR strategy during the financial year to reflect an increase in the plan if it was approved by Full Council and notified to MHCLG.

On a vote being taken it was **ORDERED** that Council approved the proposed Flexible Use of Capital Receipts (FUoCR) Strategy for 2025/26.