

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Chief Executive, Erik Scollay
Relevant Executive Member:	Mayor, Chris Cooke
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	16 July 2025
Title:	Delivery against the Continuous Improvement Plan - Progress update
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	All
Key decision:	No
Why:	Decision does not reach the threshold to be a key decision
Subject to call in?	Yes
Why:	The report is not urgent

Proposed decision(s)
<p>That Executive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APPROVES the updated Continuous Improvement Plan • NOTES the progress made in delivering the commitments within the Continuous Improvement Plan.

Executive summary
<p>This report provides an overview of delivery against the Council's Continuous Improvement Plan which captures strategic improvement action being delivered within the organisation to ensure the Council can fully demonstrate its compliance with the principles of the Best Value Duty.</p> <p>Provision of this report forms part of the assurance framework that has been put in place to demonstrate the Council's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. It will also be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Board.</p>

The report summarises progress made since the plan was put in place in March 2025, highlighting key achievements, grouping them by Best Value theme.

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the expanded Continuous Improvement Plan for Executive consideration and set out progress made against that plan. The purpose of the plan is to ensure the Council can articulate its ongoing commitment to Continuous Improvement and capture activity that has been undertaken to deliver that commitment.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	The Continuous Improvement Plan contains commitments to work collaboratively with partners, communities and businesses to develop a vision for the town. Delivery of this will positively impact on the Council's ability to work with partners to deliver all the ambitions within the Council Plan.
A healthy Place	The Continuous Improvement Plan contains a series of actions that will impact positively on the Council's ambitions around being a healthy place. In particular it includes commitments around poverty reduction ambitions.
Safe and resilient communities	Action is planned within the Continuous Improvement Plan to strengthen the Council's approach to community engagement which will positively impact on this ambition. It sets out plans to expand community development capacity and develop the proposed Neighbourhoods Strategy with a strong focus on community engagement and co-production of solutions.
Delivering best value	Successful delivery of the Continuous Improvement Plan will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improve partnership working ▪ further enhance financial planning and management, ▪ reset the Council's approach to transformation ▪ strengthen internal audit arrangements ▪ enhance scrutiny ▪ better supporting Members.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive:

- **APPROVES** the updated Continuous Improvement Plan
- **NOTES** the progress made in delivering the commitments within the Continuous Improvement Plan.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 Having a Continuous Improvement Plan that captures all strategic Continuous Improvement activity, provides Members and Officers with a comprehensive overview of improvement activity within the organisation as part of a framework of assurance reports. Agreeing the revised content of the plan will ensure the Council is tracking this type of activity within one document. Further revisions to this live plan will be identified as necessary going forward.

4. Background and relevant information

4.1 In March 2025, Full Council considered the final reports of both the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge team and the Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board (MIIAB).

4.2 Both those reports were hugely positive, recognising the improvements the Council had made over the previous two years on its improvement journey. They also contained a series of recommendations, designed to ensure the Council maintained an outcome focussed commitment to the principles of continuous improvement journey as it transitioned from a period of intervention.

4.3 Appended to this report, is a copy of the live Continuous Improvement Plan and its status as at June 2025. Since the plan was agreed at Full Council in March 2025, it has been expanded to reflect actions arising from the External Assurance review undertaken by Grant Thornton as part of the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) application, where those actions are still relevant and in delivery. The plan also includes an action arising from the Care Quality Commission inspection of Adult Social Care services.

4.4 There are currently 47 actions within the live plan. Of those, 16 have been completed to date with the rest in progress. This is a live plan and a real commitment to continuous improvement. As such, even where actions have been completed, their impact will continue to be tracked, and further activity may be identified to ensure the actions have the required impact and / or to ensure the Council continues to proactively address the issues within the scope of the recommendations.

4.5 Key highlights, filtered by Best Value theme are set out below:



Partnerships and Community Engagement

4.6 The Council has a commitment to improving the way it works with partners with the aim of establishing a consistent, place-based approach, focussed on what Middlesbrough needs, rather than individual organisations. Since progress was last reported to Members, the Council has:

- Re-established a Town Partnership Board. This will include key public sector partners. The first meeting is due to be held in July and will focus on coproducing a shared vision for the town and ensuring this is reflected within the strategic priorities of all partners.
- Increased its engagement with the Combined Authority to identify ways in which the relationship can be reset. It has agreed a way forward on working to unlock the potential positive impacts that the Middlesbrough Development Corporation could have.
- Worked proactively with the Combined Authority to support its improvement journey as part of wider engagement to reset relationships.

Culture

4.7 One of the key documents the Council will deliver over the next three years is the People Strategy. The People Strategy sets out the steps the Council will take to ensure its staff have the skills, capabilities, behaviours and values that are needed to deliver improved outcomes for our residents and ultimately deliver the Council Plan ambitions. An annual review of the strategy was completed to ensure it continued to align with the organisation's direction of travel and reflected, where necessary, the recommendations made by the various supporting bodies that have worked with the Council on its continuous improvement journey.

4.8 The People Strategy sits alongside the Member Development Strategy which was successfully reviewed in February 2025 with input from Members to ensure the Council continues to focus on the skills and behaviours Members need to be able to deliver their roles.

Use of Resources

4.9 Ensuring resources are used effectively has been, and will continue to be, a key focus of the Council given the financially challenging environment that it continues to operate in. Over the last three months the Council has continued to build on the positive progress it achieved in relation to financial management by strengthening its quarterly financial reports to include a focus on the impact of quarterly outturns on its Medium-Term Financial planning. This will continue to be an area which it will grow and strengthen as it moves through this year's financial outturn reporting programme. This was reflected in the significantly reduced use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) that was reported to Executive in June 2025. The original submission was for £13.4m in support, following exceptional financial rigour and grip, that actual requirement was reduced to £2.443m. This is a significant achievement.

4.10 In March 2025, Audit Committee considered a report recommending that it completed review of its effectiveness against guidance published by the Chartered

Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). The Committee positively supported completion of an independent review and the Local Government Association (LGA) regional financial advisor is currently delivering this work at nil cost to the Council as part of the ongoing support offer available to all councils from the LGA. The outcome of this review will be reported to that committee in July.

- 4.11 The Council has a commitment to transformation as a method of ensuring the Council is better placed to be able to deliver its commitments within the Council Plan, on a financially sustainable footing. In April 2025, an action to reset the approach to transformation and identify additional capacity for its leadership was delivered when Executive agreed a report from the Chief Executive on the matter. Council is currently in the process of implementing that report's recommendations.
- 4.12 During the last three months the Council has also delivered commitments to secure additional capacity within key corporate teams to enable it to deliver on its commitments. Work to recruit to these posts is now in progress.

Governance

- 4.13 Regular engagement with staff and Members will continue to be undertaken on specific issues, as well as regular 'temperature checks' to identify views and assess culture. Surveys and engagement have been undertaken in relation the recent review of scrutiny, there is ongoing engagement with Members in relation to the review of the Constitution which will be considered by Council in September and a regular staff survey went live in June 2025.
- 4.14 In April 2025, a further revision was made to committee, policy and strategy templates to increase focus on delivery of the Council Plan ambitions as well as supporting ongoing compliance with good public law decision making. This report is prepared on that new format.

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

5.1 Not applicable.

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

- 6.1 The Council could choose to maintain multiple documents capturing continuous improvement activity; however this would be an inefficient approach and would reduce Members ability to see a comprehensive overview of the Council's ongoing activity in relation to continuous improvement.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	Responding to the recommendations fully that have been made by both the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team and Independent Improvement Advisory Board as well as wider strategic continuous improvement activity captured within the Plan will inevitably have financial implications for the Council.

	Financial implications in relation to individual activities will be set out as necessary and appropriate authority sought to deliver actions.
Legal	While both the LGA peer challenge process and the Independent Improvement Advisory Board are discretionary exercises, the topics covered by both support the Council's compliance with its Best Value Duty. A Continuous Improvement plan ensures there is a systematic approach to continuous improvement that will provide future assurance to all stakeholders that the Council will respond effectively to any recommendations arising from inspections, reviews and other relevant reports.
Risk	If the Council failed deliver this Continuous Improvement Plan, this could have a negative impact on potentially all of the Strategic Risk Register.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	The Continuous Improvement Plan includes actions that will impact positively on this theme, in particular there are planned actions to strengthen the Council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and community engagement.
Reducing Poverty	While not directly impacting on this theme, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge acknowledged the Council's plans which are already underway to strengthen focus on the existing commitment within the Council Plan that tackling poverty should be at the heart of everything we do.
Climate Change / Environmental	The content of this report is not directly relevant to these areas of impact, however continued implementation of improvement activity will ensure the Council is better able to deliver its Council Plan ambitions and compliance with good governance.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	
Data Protection	

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Report progress on delivery of the Continuous Improvement Plan to Overview and Scrutiny Board	Ann-Marie Johnstone, Head of Governance, Policy and Information	30 July 2025

Appendices

1	Continuous Improvement Plan – Progress as at June 2025
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Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Full Council	Local Government Association Peer Review and Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board reports and planned approach to Continuous Improvement – moving forward	26 March 2025

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