

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Chief Executive - Erik Scollay
Relevant Executive Member:	Mayor - Chris Cooke
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	12 November 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:	Non-Urgent Report

Proposed decision(s)
That Executive: • APPROVES the updated Continuous Improvement Plan • NOTES the progress made in delivering the commitments within the Continuous Improvement Plan.

Executive summary
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 Middlesbrough Council can fully demonstrate its compliance with the principles of the Best Value Duty. 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.

The report summarises progress made since the Plan was put in place in March 2025, focussing in particular on progress made since Executive last considered this Plan in July 2025. The report highlights key achievements, grouping them by Best Value theme and includes a key to indicate the source of recommendations.

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 progress in delivering the Continuous Improvement Plan for Executive consideration. 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 delivery 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 Middlesbrough 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 progress made 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: ▪ improve partnership working ▪ further enhance financial planning and management ▪ reset the Council's approach to transformation ▪ strengthen internal audit arrangements ▪ enhance scrutiny ▪ better support 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. The plan ensures the Council is tracking this type of activity within one document. Successful delivery of continual improvement activity will improve the Council's ability to deliver against its Council Plan ambitions.

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 of 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 its continuous improvement journey as it transitioned from a period of intervention. The plan also continues to track delivery of actions arising from the External Assurance review undertaken by Grant Thornton as part of the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) application. It also includes an action arising from the Care Quality Commission inspection of Adult Social Care services.

4.3 Appended to this report, is a copy of the Continuous Improvement Plan and its status as of October 2025. The Plan continues to evolve as actions are delivered and follow up actions are identified where necessary.

4.4 There are currently 49 actions within the plan. In June 2025 it was reported that 16 had been completed. Since that time a further six have been completed, bringing the total number of completed action to date to 22. Two new follow up actions have been added since the Plan was last reported. The first new action will track the launch of arrangements to bring in external expertise to manage the Council's commercial property portfolio, following completion of market testing. The second new action builds on completion of recruitment of additional capacity to support Members submitting Councillor Gateway inquiries. It will track delivery of an improvement plan to strengthen the system and respond to feedback from Councillors who are using it.

4.5 There are six actions that are currently overdue:

- Completion of recruitment was necessary to complete three actions. Despite proactive marketing of these two posts, the recruitment campaigns were unsuccessful. This resulted in the target dates for having people in post being missed. The Council is reviewing options to ensure it is able to populate the posts. Another post was successfully recruited to, however the appointed candidate withdrew as this report was being prepared. Options to address this are currently being considered.
- Two actions are paused in order to allow them to be shaped by the incoming Strategic Lead for Transformation once they are appointed. They relate to the

recruitment of a Continuous Improvement Team and the completion of a Communications Strategy for the Transformation Programme.

- There has been a slight delay in relation to shaping the full content of a training programme for Executive Members, although training on some topics has commenced. During this quarter training will be delivered that focusses on the role of the Executive Member in the budget setting process. It will be jointly delivered by the Mayor and Section 151 officer.

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



Partnerships and Community Engagement

4.7 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:

- Held a number of meetings with the re-established Town Partnership Board, which is now known as the Place Leaders Partnership. The Partnership has agreed a work programme of thematic topics to explore with the agreed outcome being the creation of a strategic, long-term plan for the Town that can be delivered by partners across the Town.
- Continued to engage with the Tees Valley Combined Authority on key issues and is focussed on supporting it with its improvement journey.

Culture

4.8 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. Since this was last reported, the Council continues to deliver actions within the strategy and regularly report progress and impact. Leadership Management Team considered a progress report in August 2025.

4.9 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. As part of delivery of the Member Development Strategy, there is ongoing engagement, delivered through the Members Communications Working Group. Following a meeting of the Members and Officers Communication Working Group in September 2025, the Council will be establishing regular quarterly training sessions to drive a regular cycle of training opportunities as part of the suite of actions being delivered by the Member Development Strategy.

Use of Resources

- 4.10 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. That being said, financial pressures have been a significant issue in 2025/6. The Section 151 Officer continues to consider all measures that could be taken should the budget position not improve. During Quarter One, all directorates with predicted overspends have developed recovery plan options to address overspends.
- 4.11 In March 2025, Audit Committee considered a report recommending that it completed a 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 with the Local Government Association (LGA) regional financial advisor and accepted all of their recommendations at its meeting in September 2025. The Committee has also delivered its first annual report to Full Council. This was considered by Full Council in October 2025 and set out the work of the Committee and its plans to further strengthen its arrangements.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 Progress is being made in relation to the review of the Council's internal audit arrangements. The review is on track to be completed and reported to Audit Committee in April 2026. It is good practice to change the lead auditor periodically. The current lead auditor will be changed by the end of 2025.

Governance

- 4.14 An action to provide a mid-year Treasury Management Strategy update to Executive in response to an Exceptional Financial Support review recommendation was reprofiled from October to December 2025 to align with good practice that the mid-year review should follow the mid-year budget outturn position being reported to Members.

- 4.15 In July 2025, Executive were advised that regular engagement with Members and Officers will continue to be undertaken on specific issues, as well as regular 'temperature checks' to identify views and assess culture. Results from the regular staff survey undertaken in June 2025 are now available. There was a significant increase in the number of employees that responded to the survey this year. In 2024 21% of the workforce responded. This rose to 37% in 2025, with 1153 people taking the time to feedback to the organisation. 74% of staff said they were proud to work for Middlesbrough Council (up from 49% in 2024).
- 4.16 Additional capacity is now in place to support the Councillor Gateway system. The Officer started in the post in September 2025. The aim of the post is to improve the user experience Members have with the system. The Council has also reestablished the project group that implemented the system to review whether further improvements can be made.

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 Middlesbrough Independent Improvement Advisory Board (MIIAB) 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 work of MIIAB 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 to deliver this Continuous Improvement Plan, this could have a negative impact on potentially all Strategic Risk Register risks. Successful delivery will impact positively on the risk of a failure in corporate governance.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty	The Continuous Improvement Plan includes actions that will impact positively on this theme, in particular there are planned

and Community Cohesion	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	19 November 2025

Appendices

1	Continuous Improvement Plan – Progress as at October 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
Executive	Delivery against the Continuous Improvement Plan - Progress update	16 July 2025
Overview and Scrutiny Board	Delivery against the Continuous Improvement Plan - Progress update	30 July 2025

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