

ASC Scrutiny

Subject Title: Directorate Improvement Plan Update

Presenting: Katie Watkins

Date: 12th January 2026

BACKGROUND

- CQC Assessment resulted in Middlesbrough being rated 'Requires Improvement'.
- Triggered development of formal Improvement Plan aligned to CQC themes.
- CQC Report was published Feb 2025.
- Improvement plan is monitored via the Improvement Programme Board and Scrutiny Panel
- Requirement to submit progress updates to the DHSC quarterly which have resulted in de-escalation from formal monitoring

Overview

- The plan currently consists:
 - 1 Corporate Project
 - Formally monitored via Project Management Office
 - 6 Directorate Projects
 - Monitored within the Directorate by the programme lead
 - Project plans in place with detailed plans and RAID logs
 - 34 Key Initiatives / Business-as-Usual Improvements
 - Monitored by project manager
 - Milestone monitoring

Governance

- Wrap-around governance with PMO
 - Programme Manager works closely with PMO lead to ensure the programme is aligned to corporate requirements
- Monthly reporting to Programme Board
 - Programme Board is chaired by Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration
- Risk & performance monitored via project plans
 - Risks and issues are monitored by the programme manager with the relevant project leads
- Closure reports and case studies for evidence are developed as items are complete and closed for evidence

Key Focus Areas

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) report identified critical areas that required focused improvement

These were:

- Having a **clear vision and strategy** for the Directorate
- Improving **support for unpaid carers**
- Developing a **robust workforce strategy** with a clear emphasis on **equality, diversity and inclusion**
- Tackling **digital exclusion** to ensure residents can access services effectively
- Enhancing the **promotion and visibility of services** to the community
- Embedding **co-production** so that people who use services have a genuine voice in shaping them
- Undertaking a deep dive review of the ACT model to **address homelessness and related vulnerabilities**.

These priorities formed the foundation of our improvement programme and have been translated into formal projects with clear governance and delivery plans to ensure sustainable change.

Key Focus Areas - Projects

Key Focus Area	Update
Vision and Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision & Strategy Co-Produced and progressing through sign off process Due for sign off at Executive on 21st January 2026
Unpaid Carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans are in place to improve support to unpaid carers Plans under review to ensure they fully align to the identified improvements required Lead has been absent resulting in a risk to delivery within expected timescales. Risk is being monitored and mitigated by DASS
Workforce Strategy (inclusive of Equality, Diversity and Inclusions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy in final review stages in readiness for sign off The strategy was developed with support from Partners in Care and Health An outline delivery plan has been developed with a strong focus on EDI and the requirements of the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard Working group stood up in preparation for sign off

Key Focus Areas – Projects

Key Focus Area	Update
Tackling Digital Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan in delivery with 4 Key workstreams developed (Digital Champions Programme, Volunteers Programme, Front Door and Community Hubs Digital Offer, Community Digital Support Model) • The project has seen early successes with 24/25 digital champions appointed; Drop in digital sessions established; Partnership with refurb ICT established
Promotion of Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan in delivery with an initial key focus on defining the scope for a website redesign • Working group established • Key considerations being made to approach to targeted campaigns
Co Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan in delivery with a Directorate wide co-production framework now developed • Healthwatch have been appointed as our co-production delivery partner with the lead due to be appointed mid December
Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan in delivery with lead focusing on a deep dive into the homelessness offer

Other Key Initiatives

Key Focus Area	Update
Performance Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans in place for a new and robust performance framework • Framework due to be effective reporting on Q4 2025 • The framework will support the Directorate in measuring success with both local Key Performance Indicators built in and national indicators ie ASCOF measures and the new Local Government Outcomes Framework • Quarterly reports will be shared with scrutiny
Magic Notes (transcription tool)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Magic Notes solution was piloted during August 2025 • Benefits shared with LMT in September resulting in sign off to rollout Directorate wide • Transcription has resulted in social workers having the ability to have more quality conversations with the people they are supporting and subsequently more accurate and detailed recording
Conversational Approach to Wellbeing and Care Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This change in practice and culture is being led by the principal social worker • The programme was originally supported by Partners for Change with a focus on the 3 conversation approach however is now being delivered internally • The rolling programme has seen huge successes to date

Principal Social Worker ,November 2025 Blog

Change the Conversation, Change a Life

November marked a powerful milestone for Middlesbrough Council. We successfully embedded the Conversational Approach into our West Locality team and the response was nothing short of inspiring. Staff embraced this way of working with energy and commitment, and East Locality stepped up with incredible support. I've seen firsthand the strength of collaboration—teams coming together, sharing ideas, and putting people at the heart of everything we do.

Our huddles continue to thrive, creating safe spaces for reflection and learning. These aren't just meetings; they are moments where we unite around a shared purpose helping people live better lives. And now, as we move into December, I'm thrilled that our Mental Health team will begin this approach. This is more than a change in practice; it's a change in lives. Every conversation matters. Every interaction has the power to bring hope, dignity, and choice.

The impact so far has been life-changing for so many people in our community, and I couldn't be prouder of the dedication I've witnessed. Middlesbrough Council is leading the way, and together, we are proving that when we change the conversation, we truly change lives. Let's keep pushing forward because people deserve nothing less.

Next Steps

- Continue Identifying Improvement Opportunities
 - Maintain a structured approach to gather feedback from teams, review performance data, and use benchmarking to spot gaps and areas for enhancement across Adult Social Care services.
- Establish a Transformation Working Group
 - Form a cross-functional group to explore AI and automation solutions aimed at improving capacity, reducing administrative burden, and supporting frontline staff.
- Develop a Cost Avoidance Impact Model
 - Create a framework to measure and evidence where key initiatives have delivered cost avoidance—linking these outcomes to budget requirements while demonstrating person-centred benefits.
- Strengthen Collaboration with ICT and Corporate Centre
 - Embed regular engagement sessions to align improvement and transformation initiatives with wider organisational digital strategies, ensuring scalability and sustainability.