



Executive Member

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Philippa Storey - Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Education and Culture

DATE OF MEETING: 14 January 2026

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members on areas of activity within my portfolio including performance against strategic priorities.

COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES

- *Successful & Ambitious Town*
- *A Healthy Place*

Update:

- Education Alliance Board
- Suspension and Exclusions
- Grants for Schools
- Town Hall
- Theatre
- Performing Arts Grants for schools
- Events

1. HIGHLIGHTS

Update:

Education and Partnerships

1.1 Special Free School

1.1.1 The DfE announced 11th December that it will be investing at least £3bn in high needs capital funding over the next four years. This investment is expected to create at least 50,000 high needs places in mainstream schools across England, as well as special school places where they are needed, ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can learn, achieve and thrive closer to home. The LA will be notified of our 2026-27 allocation in spring, in line with usual high needs capital allocation cycles.

1.1.2 The DfE also announced they are offering Middlesbrough Council the choice of continuing with the planned special free school or opting for a funding settlement on top of our high needs capital allocation to deliver the same number of places in a different way, instead of a new school. We will be investigating this proposal and consider which is the best option for the children and young people of Middlesbrough. The DfE are asking for a final decision no later than 27th February 2026.

1.2 Virtual School

1.2.1 Attendance remains a key priority across Middlesbrough for all children. While overall attendance for statutory school-age children looked after stands at 86.5%, more than 100 children have achieved 95% or better attendance since September, which is a fantastic achievement for this cohort. However, attendance at Key Stage 4 remains low and the Virtual School will be working with the Attendance Team in the new year to offer enhanced support.

1.2.2 Engagement from social care has been strong, with over 90% of social workers attending scheduled Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, ensuring co-ordinated planning and joint support.

1.2.3 The Virtual School are seeing encouraging signs in educational outcomes. These improvements highlight the positive impact of stability and sustained support.

1.2.4 This term has seen significant progress across the PROCLAIM and Pre-PROCLAIM workstreams. Two foundation training programmes for schools have been implemented to support those schools that were not yet ready to join PROCLAIM. Through this work the Virtual School are ensuring these schools have the essential groundwork in trauma-informed and relational practice. Alongside this, the Virtual School continue to collaborate with the Rees Centre at Oxford University, working with four other Virtual Schools to deepen research into attachment and trauma and how this learning can be applied in a school setting to best support our children.

1.3 Exclusion and Suspension Rates

1.3.1 Exclusion and suspensions remain a key priority for the local area with officers and schools working together to drive down exclusions and further develop inclusion across all settings to ensure children and young people receive the support that they need.

1.3.2 Improvements in the tracking of data regarding suspensions is now possible. This agreement to share this data was made earlier this academic year. This offers real time tracking for suspensions data which avoid lags in reporting.

1.3.3 Using this data we can see that for the Autumn Term (Sept to Dec) that the position with suspensions remains broadly comparable to the previous academic year:

- 2100 suspensions in total, compared to 2082 in the Autumn Term 24-25
- 3910 days lost to suspension compared to 3944 days in the Autumn Term 24-25

1.3.4 With regard to permanent exclusions, there have been 33 since the start of the 2025-26 academic year in September. This is again broadly comparable to levels in the previous year where there had been 33 permanent exclusions during the same period. There remain high numbers of children in alternative provision as a result of permanent exclusions which continues to present a demand pressure in terms of placement availability.

1.4 Middlesbrough Family Hubs: Expansion, Ambition and Expectations

1.4.1 Middlesbrough's commitment to giving every child the best start in life is being strengthened through the expansion of the Best Start Family Hub model, aligned with the Education Alliance Board (EAB) and School Readiness Strategy. Together, these reforms represent a step change in how the town supports children and families from pregnancy

through the school entry (0-25 for those you people with SEND) with a clear focus on reducing inequality, improving outcomes and closing the school readiness gap.

1.4.2 Middlesbrough's expanded Family Hub network, guided by the Education Alliance Board, represents a collective commitment to children and families. By aligning our strategic vision, delivery and accountability, the town is building a system that supports families earlier, intervenes more effectively and ensues every child arrives at school ready to thrive.

1.4.3 While school readiness starts from birth, the 3-4 age phase is a critical focus of the expansion and Government expectations. Key priorities for Middlesbrough are:

- Empowering parents to be advocates for themselves
- Accelerating communication, language and literacy with a strong focus on vocabulary, listening, attention and early narrative skills
- Supporting emotional regulation and social skills, including turn-taking, resilience and managing transitions
- Developing independence, particularly self-care skills such as toileting, dressing and feeding
- Strengthening early literacy and numeracy foundations, through play based learning and adult interaction
- Ensuring smooth and supported transitions between early years settings into primary school

1.4.4 The expansion of the Family Hub strengthens Middlesbrough's early intervention infrastructure, providing a single trusted access point where families can receive joined-up support. Partnership working is key to success bringing together health visiting, early years education, SEND, Stronger Families services, public health and the voluntary sector.

1.4.5 Under the expanded model, the hubs will:

- Act as the primary delivery platform for school readiness
- Provide universal access alongside targeted outreach to families facing the greatest disadvantage
- Enable earlier identification of need and quicker access to support
- Build services driven by local communities, strengthening Parent Champion roles
- Build parental confidence to support learning at home
- Support for parents to understand child development and respond positively to behaviour - parents are the child's first educator

1.5 Community Learning

1.5.1 The completion of the new employment and skills hub is on schedule and work is due to be complete at the beginning of March 2026. There will be a planned move with minimal disruption to classes and courses around the end of March time. Learning for Inclusion – over 200 learners have been supported since September and now have a full staff team in place to continue delivery.

1.5.2 Trailblazer – has now commenced with approximately 36 young people now in paid placements or work trials, funding has been extended until 2027 and we are looking at a delivery model within communities to target the NEETS group.

1.5.3 Outreach events – Community Learning attended Tees skills careers fair in December and also the family hub event at North Ormesby community hub on 9th December, with further attendance at more outreach events in the future.

1.5.4 Work well - a new employment focussed contract to support people with a fit note (in last 6 months) to help them access support to help them return to the workplace or to help them to look for alternative employment - this is a one year funded project and funding agreements have been received and delivery to commence in January 2026.

1.5.5 Alternative Provision – We are now delivering AP at Martonside and currently have 26 places with plans and agreement from MBC to extend this offer to 32 in the coming months, there are also discussions about growing the service and looking at Whinney Banks as another area of delivery. There is currently a piece of work taking place to look at the current structure and changing that to manage the current growth and the potential of another service – this is still ongoing.

1.5.6 Employment and Skills - We have two new members of staff who have been delivering services from the hubs and offering employment support to individuals. Working in the communities and being accessible in communities, instead of expecting communities to travel into the town centre.

1.5.7 Employment Hub Coordinator – Has now been appointed, Vikki Brumwell has over 15 years experience of leading on employability programmes and has managed the IPS contract in Middlesbrough for the last 2 years, Vikki is joining us in January 2026 and I look forward to welcoming her to the team.

1.5.8 Apprenticeship Programmes – Management L3 and L5 is doing well with a new intake of 16 learners, we are currently reviewing the delivery models and offer and also looking at a strategy for the apprenticeship levy across all service delivery.

1.5.9 Partnership Working – Community learning is now part of the Tees Valley Housing Partnership workstream for employability group and will be working together to provide collaborative support for residents of Middlesbrough. Working closely with Middlesbrough College to establish a partnership that collaborates on our delivery and working together in the future.

Culture

1.6 Musinc

- Careers Panel (Secondary Schools) – 50 young people from 3 local schools attended to learn more about careers in the music industry
- Schools Big Gig: Rockin' Christmas – 700 young people from 11 schools and home ed families
- Family Big Gig: Rockin' Christmas – 88 attendees – increased from last year.
- Amplify – 40 performers and 104 audience members across the Juniors (8 to 11) and Seniors (12 to 18) Amplify events. This is a unique opportunity for young people to be part of a performing band.
- MTH Community Choir & NEO Winter Concert – 120 performers and 162 audience
- 6 young people performed at Musinc's Buskers Stage at the Christmas Lights Switch On (inside MTH)
- All engagement groups continue to run weekly, most are at full capacity.

1.6.1 Musinc were successful in the Better Use Spaces Grant Funding and secured a £99,547 Grant for a new professional recording studio for new and emerging musicians and for regular youth music groups such as Bandjam Juniors and Seniors.

1.7 Town Hall

1.7.1 Programming & Event Highlights from September to December

- Dance – Anthony Lo Giudice, Southpaw rehearsals, Tees Dance, Evening of Burlesque, Stagestruck Holiday Workshops
- Theatre - Fenwick Christmas Window Rehearsals, Theatre Go-Round Sherlock Holmes, Simon Yates, Pirates of Buccaneer Bay, Sh*t Faced Shakespeare, Brett Tippie, Middlesbrough Theatre Pantomime Rehearsals, Amanda Owen Yorkshire Shepherdess,
- Comedy – Jimmy Carr – 2 x sell out shows, Gary Meikle, Georgie Carroll, Daniel O'Reilly, Iain Stirling, Jimeoin, Urzila Carlson, Jason Manford, Henning Wehn, Christmas Comedy Clubs
- Music – Jodie Nicholson, Twisterella, The Lightning Seeds, Skindred, The Young'uns Big Boro Bash, Fatboy Slim, Fisherman Friends, Musinc Rockin' Christmas, Christmas By Candlelight,
- Classical Music - Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Classical Café, Royal Northern Sinfonia
- Events – Middlesbrough Art Week Launch, Middlesbrough Pride, annual Older Peoples Day, School & College Tours, Twisterella Unconference, Taste of Africa Showcase, Bernie Slaven Anniversary Celebration, Musinc Careers Panel, Middlesbrough College Graduations, Fatboy Slim Book Signing, Middlesbrough Christmas Light Switch On, Christmas Toy Shop with The Junction
- Exhibitions – Tomorrow Street exhibition with Stellar Creates, Shine On Boro with Stellar Creates

1.7.2 We were very proud to partner with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor & The Junction Multibank to bring the 'Christmas Toy Shop' event to life. This special event was designed to ensure that every local child and young person can look forward to Christmas and enjoy festive experiences, regardless of their circumstances.

1.7.3 Held in the Courtroom, the event supported 150 local school children, including Junction service users from Young Carers and Family Focus.

1.7.4 The Town Hall has successfully applied to be part of TVCA's Unlocking Access programme which is designed to support cultural and leisure venues boost their visitor numbers, audiences, and income by making them more welcoming and accessible to all visitors. The programme includes accessibility training and scoping visits/audits, plus the Town Hall has been awarded £10,000 for a range of accessibility improvements.

1.8 Middlesbrough Theatre

1.8.1 Pantomime sales have improved since we opened and the show is being well-received. With a running time of 1 ¾ hours, it is ideally suited to small people and we have introduced a Babes-in-Arms ticket which is attracting a good response.

1.8.2 The Spring season is selling strongly, with three of the five shows in January already exceeding target and the others on track to do the same.

16-Jan ELO AGAIN
23-Jan THE DOLLY SHOW
24-Jan BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY
30-Jan CELEBRATING CELINE
31-Jan JUST MY IMAGINATION(TEMPTATIONS)

1.9 Events

- Beginning of November the team delivered their first Civic events series, including Laying of the First Poppy, welcoming over 300 school children to lay wooden crosses, Remembrance Sunday, attracting in excess of 2000 people and Armistice Day.
- End of November saw the Middlesbrough Christmas Parade and Light Switch On. Overall the event was successful and attracted a peak attendance of 8000 people. However we will no longer use live reindeer in the Christmas parade.
- Working with ICT and the Web team to create outdoor events web pages on the council website, and an online form for external event organisers.
- The events team have been using December to debrief and plan ready for the 2026 events calendar.