

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Mayor Chris Cooke

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

The details outlined in this report support delivery of the Council's strategic priorities:

- ***A successful and ambitious town*** - Driving regeneration, creating jobs and opportunities, and attracting investment
- ***A healthy place*** - Improving the environment and supporting wellbeing
- ***Safe and resilient communities*** - Tackling deprivation and building stronger neighbourhoods
- ***Delivering best value*** - Using resources effectively to deliver better outcomes for residents and make best use of our funding allocation

Update:

- Middlesbrough is entering a new chapter. For the first time in over a decade, we can propose a budget with no cuts to services and a clear focus on reinvestment.
- Enabled by a fairer funding settlement, our draft 2026/27 budget commits £6.46 million of growth to priorities that matter most: cleaner, safer neighbourhoods; youth opportunities in every ward; better play spaces and cultural events; stronger communities and support for the vulnerable; and growth and jobs in key sectors.
- This is a major milestone for Middlesbrough and reflects the hard work of this Executive and our officers to secure a sustainable financial future.
- Alongside this, we continue to deliver regeneration and opportunity, from Outwood Academy Riverside and STACK's success to expanded holiday activities and new youth provision.
- Middlesbrough is building momentum, and with this positive, forward-looking budget, we can accelerate progress towards a cleaner, safer, fairer and more ambitious town.

1. HIGHLIGHTS

Update:

1.1 Outwood Academy Riverside - Delivering for Young People and Middlehaven

- 1.1.1 Construction of Outwood Academy Riverside is now well underway, marking a major step forward for education and regeneration in Middlesbrough. Six months after work began, drone images show the outer frame of the new three-storey school nearing completion on its prominent Middlehaven site, close to Middlesbrough College and the Old Town Hall.
- 1.1.2 This project follows years of resilience from students and staff who have learned in temporary sites across Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland. Once complete, the school will provide state-of-the-art facilities for up to 1,200 pupils - a significant investment in our young people and their future.
- 1.1.3 The development is being delivered by the Department for Education and Outwood Grange Academies Trust in partnership with Middlesbrough Council, with construction led by Bowmer + Kirkland. It is on track to welcome students next calendar year.
- 1.1.4 Outwood Academy Riverside is part of a wider vision for Middlehaven. Alongside this project, work will soon start on the multi-million-pound restoration of Middlesbrough's Old Town Hall following a successful National Lottery Heritage Fund bid, and plans are progressing to deliver over 3,000 homes and new leisure and retail spaces. Together, these developments will create vibrant neighbourhoods, attract investment, and provide opportunities for families and businesses.
- 1.1.5 This milestone reflects our commitment, and that of our partners across the town, to making Middlesbrough the most creative place for young people to live, learn and realise their future, while driving regeneration that benefits the whole town.
- 1.1.6 I want to thank all those who have helped get us to this point, from the Department for Education and Outwood Grange Academies Trust to our Council officers, Deputy Mayor Philippa Storey, local councillors, Andy McDonald MP, and other partners. This has been a real team effort and a great example of partnership working to deliver for Middlesbrough.



1.2 STACK - A Year of Success in Middlesbrough

- 1.2.1 STACK has marked its first year in Middlesbrough with incredible numbers, welcoming more than 300,000 visitors since opening in Exchange Square under the A66. The venue has created over 50 jobs and become a major draw for residents and visitors from across the region, helping to revitalise an area of the town centre that was previously underused.
- 1.2.2 Beyond its economic impact, STACK has played an active role in the community - hosting sell-out family events, supporting Middlesbrough Pride, and volunteering time for local clean-up projects. The team has worked closely with neighbouring organisations including Middlesbrough College and Wander Films, and several local staff have progressed into management roles, showing the venue's commitment to career development.
- 1.2.3 STACK's success demonstrates the strong market for leisure and hospitality in Middlesbrough and the importance of creating vibrant destinations that attract people into the town. This is exactly what we set out to achieve through our regeneration plans, and it's encouraging to see businesses like STACK investing in Middlesbrough's future.
- 1.2.4 I want to thank the STACK team, our Council officers, and partners who have supported this journey. Together, we are building momentum for a thriving town centre and a successful, ambitious Middlesbrough.

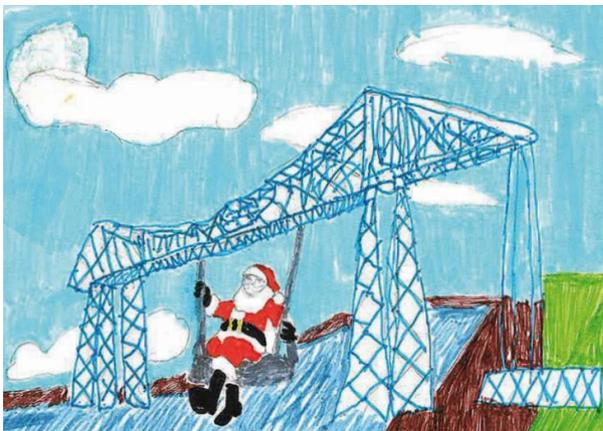


1.3 Bring It On Boro - Supporting Families Over Christmas

- 1.3.1 Our Holiday Activities and Food programme, Bring It On Boro, ran throughout the Christmas school holidays, providing thousands of Middlesbrough children with free activities, experiences and healthy meals. Young people aged five to sixteen enjoyed festive fun including panto trips, Santa's grotto visits, elf workshops, craft sessions, music performances and sports such as football, cheerleading and boxing.
- 1.3.2 Every child who attended received a nutritious meal, helping families at what can be a challenging time of year. Feedback from parents has been overwhelmingly positive, describing the programme as a "lifeline" that helps children thrive and try new experiences.
- 1.3.3 This Christmas offer built on the success of our October half-term extension, funded by a £250,000 grant from the Middlesbrough Priorities Fund. By running Bring It On Boro during every school holiday period, including Easter, summer and half terms, we are delivering on our commitment to give every child somewhere safe to go, something fun to do and a warm, healthy meal.

1.4 Christmas Card Competition - Showcasing Local Creativity

- 1.4.1 Hundreds of Middlesbrough primary school children took part in our Christmas card competition, producing fantastic designs that captured the spirit of the season and celebrated our town. Many entries featured local landmarks such as the Transporter Bridge, and even a nod to our recently departed legend Chris Rea's famous festive hit.
- 1.4.2 The winning design came from Denni, aged 11, at Whinney Banks Primary School, with runners-up Matilda from Whinney Banks, Jake from Lift North Ormesby and Karlia from Archibald Primary School. Their creativity was recognised with prizes presented by Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Education, Cllr Philippa Storey.
- 1.4.3 This competition is a great way to showcase the talent of our young people and involve schools in civic life. I want to thank all the pupils, teachers and schools who took part.



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2. THE TIME AHEAD

Update:

2.1 2026/27 Budget - Investing in Middlesbrough's Future

- 2.1.1 Our draft budget for 2026/27 marks a turning point for Middlesbrough. For the first time in over a decade, we are proposing no cuts to services. Instead, we are reinvesting £6.46 million into areas that matter most to residents, thanks to a fairer funding settlement that recognises the challenges our town faces.
- 2.1.2 This budget is built around my priorities to recover, reset and deliver. It includes:

- Cleaner, safer neighbourhoods - doubling our team of neighbourhood caretakers, reinstating park keepers, introducing a dedicated becks team, and adding extra street cleaning rounds
 - Youth opportunities in every ward - funding youth clubs or dedicated activities for young people, expanding the Holiday Activities and Food programme, and investing in the 10 x 10 initiative to give children life-changing experiences
 - Better play spaces and cultural offer - £700,000 for play park improvements alongside £500,000 for new events and museum enhancements
 - Stronger communities and support for the vulnerable - targeted investment in areas most affected by deprivation, improved housing standards, and enhanced social care services to help people live independently for longer
 - Growth and jobs - support for Middlesbrough's tech sector and a dedicated employment coordinator to connect residents with opportunities
- 2.1.3 We are also proposing a lower Council Tax increase than assumed by Government, 2% for the Adult Social Care precept, to help residents and address the injustice of the current system, while meeting statutory duties until wider reforms can be implemented.
- 2.1.4 This is a positive, forward-looking budget that reflects our ambition for Middlesbrough: cleaner streets, safer communities, better opportunities for young people and a stronger local economy. After years of being starved of resources, we can finally invest in the services and projects that will make a real difference.
- 2.1.5 It is thanks to the hard work and prudent forward planning of this Executive, and officers across the Council and particularly in our finance team, that we are in a position to deliver more for our town. Empowered by a new, fairer settlement from the Government, Middlesbrough has a bright future ahead.



2.2 Youth Infinity - Investing in Safe Spaces for Young People

- 2.2.1 Youth Infinity in Pallister Park is proving to be a lifeline for children and families, offering a safe, positive space for young people to spend time together. Launched earlier this year at the East Middlesbrough Events Centre, the club runs two weekly sessions, one for five to eight-year-olds and another for older children, and provides a wide range of activities across seven rooms, including gaming, movies, crafts, healthy eating demonstrations and a disco space.
- 2.2.2 The project has now received £6,800 from the Middlesbrough Priorities Fund, which I established to improve opportunities for children and support youth services. This funding will help Youth Infinity build on its success and continue to provide the kind of environment that keeps young people engaged, active and safe.
- 2.2.3 Improving the lives of young people is one of my top priorities, and this is exactly the type of initiative we want to see in every part of Middlesbrough. In our next budget, we'll go further by investing in youth provision across all wards, ensuring every young person has access to a club or dedicated activities.
- 2.2.4 I want to thank Lindsey Morrow, the founder of Youth Infinity, along with her volunteers, local families and our Council officers for their commitment to making this project a reality. Their work shows what can be achieved when we invest in our communities and give young people the chance they deserve.

