

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL



Report of:	Chief Executive, Erik Scollay
Relevant Executive Member:	Mayor, Chris Cooke
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	11 March 2026
Title:	Continuous Improvement Plan Progress Report
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. It 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.

It focuses on progress made since Executive last considered this Plan in November 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 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 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: <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 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. In November 2025, the LGA team came back to Middlesbrough and conducted a follow up visit. A copy of their report is attached at Appendix 2. The Continuous Improvement Plan of the Council has been updated to reflect this and their findings.

4.3 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.

4.4 Appended to this report, is a copy of the Continuous Improvement Plan and its status as of January 2026. The Plan continues to evolve as actions are delivered and follow up actions are identified where necessary.

4.5 There are currently 49 actions within the plan. In November 2025 it was reported that 22 had been completed. Since that time a further eight have been completed, bringing the total number of completed action to date to 30. Two new actions have been added since the Plan was last reported. The first new action builds on the increased capacity within the neighbourhoods teams and captures plans to bring forward a Community Engagement Strategy in the summer. The second new action captures plans to conduct a further survey with Members and embed regular surveys within the Member Development Strategy.

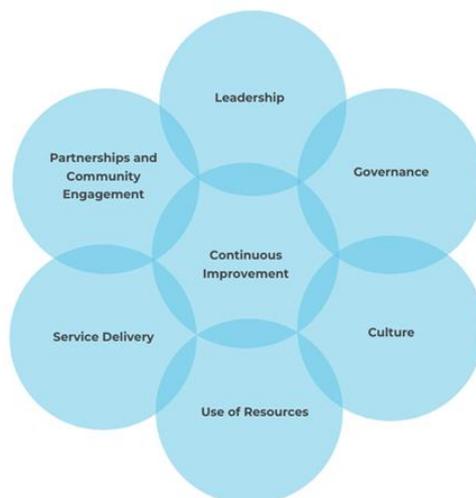
4.6 There are five actions that have been reprofiled:

- Creation of a Partnerships Strategy – reprofiled to allow the Place Leaders Partnership to emerge and develop organically, in order to ensure that all Partners who are involved are assured it is a true partnership approach. As such, while conversations are ongoing to define what partnership working should look like, this action has been reprofiled to enable the proposed document to reflect that emerging thinking

- Creation of a Continuous Improvement Team – this has been reprofiled to allow it to be implemented following agreement of the proposals within the Council Plan report being considered at this executive.
- Executive Member training on finance – the deadline has been reprofiled. Some training has been delivered but Member feedback is awaited on future training needs.
- Development of a communications strategy – this has been reprofiled to ensure there continues to be a focus on communications following the transition from Transformation to Continuous Improvement.
- Implementation of a revised approach to Performance Management – reprofiled slightly, a proposed Performance Management Policy will be brought to Executive for consideration in April 2026.

4.7 A number of actions have been closed to reflect the proposed transition from Transformation to Continuous Improvement.

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



Partnerships and Community Engagement

4.9 The Council is continuing to improve 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 Place Leaders Partnership has identified a company to undertake youth engagement as part of steps to further develop a draft vision
- Continued to work with the Tees Valley Combined Authority. The Local Government Association Peer Challenge follow up report acknowledged the progress that the Council has made to build stronger relationships and praised the action to date.

4.10 The LGA follow up report has commented on the Place Leaders approach, and went on to say that:

‘The emerging vision - centred on young people and extending into early adulthood - signals long-term aspirations for the town and provides a solid foundation for lasting change. This marks a significant shift from a period of internal focus to Middlesbrough taking an active role as the convenor of place.’

Culture

- 4.11 The latest peer challenge update stated that those the peer team spoke to found the Council to be ‘more stable, confident, and calm, reflecting a wider cultural shift’.
- 4.12 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 December 2025.
- 4.13 The People Strategy sits alongside the Member Development Strategy, which sets out how the Council will support the training and development needs of councillors. Since last reported, training continues to be delivered for Members. The Continuous Improvement Plan has been amended to include an action to embed a cycle of regular temperature check surveys within the Member Development Strategy as part of steps to increase participation. A variety of methods will be trailed in the next survey to attempt to increase participation. This will be delivered in May 2026.
- 4.14 While the peer team identified many positives, as set out in the Continuous Improvement Plan, it did also agree that while both staff and member perceptions and engagement have improved, there was room to increase the levels of engagement from both groups to ensure their views were being shared and heard. Action to address this is embedded within the ongoing Continuous Improvement Plan.

Use of Resources

- 4.15 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. The 2026/27 Budget includes provision to increase both reserves and spending on priorities, in a balanced approach that focusses on financial sustainability, following positive local government funding settlement for Middlesbrough.
- 4.16 The Council has now ensured that there is a Pay and Reward specialist in place. The review of Internal Audit arrangements is on track, and the outcome is due to be considered by Audit Committee in April 2026. Since it was last reported, actions in relation to the Treasury Management Strategy have been delivered and in addition, external training on good practice in relation to this field has been commissioned for both Executive and Audit Committee Members. The training was made available to all interested members. Actions in relation to the management of commercial property have now been completed, with new arrangements now live.

Governance

- 4.17 An action to provide a mid-year Treasury Management Strategy update to Executive in response to an Exceptional Financial Support review recommendation has now been delivered.
- 4.18 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. Since this was last reported, a session was held with the most frequent users of the system to deepen understanding of their frustrations and identify opportunities to improve their experiences. This is an area of ongoing focus for the Council in order to ensure that there is a simple, effective system to support Member needs.

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 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 Chief Executive's Department	15 April 2026

Appendices

1	Continuous Improvement Plan – Progress as at October 2025
2	Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

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

Contact: Ann-Marie Johnstone, Head of Chief Executive's Department
Email: ann-marie_johnstone@middlesbrough.gov.uk