

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Nicky Walker - Executive Member for Finance

DATE OF MEETING: 01 April 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

Delivering Best Value

1. HIGHLIGHTS

Update:

Ward Priorities Fund (Revenue) Update

1.1 The Priorities Fund was introduced in 2025/26 and allocated at a rate of £5,000 per ward councillor for projects within their wards. Ward councillors were invited to submit proposed initiatives.

1.2 To date officers have approved 41 schemes from 19 wards, totalling £180,000 (potential for allocation to rise when some final pricing has been provided)

1.3 Some of the work undertaken includes:

- New Seating
- Planter installation/repair
- Bollards
- CCTV
- Community Skips
- Literacy event
- Bins
- Christmas Lights
- Chicanes
- Signage
- Artwork
- Salt/Grit Bins
- Speed awareness signs
- VCS projects
- Kick barriers
- Hanging Baskets
- Planting/Flowers

- Road Safety cut outs/equipment
- Fencing
- YP Outreach
- Play Park equipment and upgrades
- Christmas Events

1.4 I would like to thank the officers concerned for all their hard work on this and also the councillors who have submitted schemes to make a difference in their wards, some of which are some quite innovative ideas.

1.5 I am pleased to say that the scheme will continue next year.

Members Small Scheme (Capital)

1.6 A total of 10 schemes were submitted by councillors with a total funding requested from the Members Small Scheme (Capital) of £143,59 with match funding of £80,000. The officer recommendations will be considered by the Executive Subcommittee for Property, for which a date is to be arranged. Again, I would like to thank the officers concerned for their hard work on this.

Budget timetable

1.7 Consultation and engagement over the recently approved budget for 2026/27 included:

- Briefings for all Elected Members
- Elected Members were provided with details of the budget consultation to enable them to share with residents in their ward
- Consultation on the budget with the Financial Resilience Working Group (FRWG) comprising cross party member representation with 5 meetings being held on 13 October 2025, 27 October 2025, 20 November 2025, 22 December 2025 and 14 January 2026. Unfortunately, these were not always well attended
- Consultation with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB), and attendance of the Mayor and Executive Member for Finance at Overview and Scrutiny Board on 18 December 2025

1.8 I have recently been in discussions with officers regarding starting these processes with members earlier for the next budget for 2027/28. My intention is that scene setting and early consultation with members should commence in June/July before the summer holidays. If any members have any suggestions around this, please let me know.

3rd Quarter Budget Outturn

1.9 Following the Quarter Three Budget Clinics, I presented a report to Executive on 04 February 2026 which was also considered by OSB.

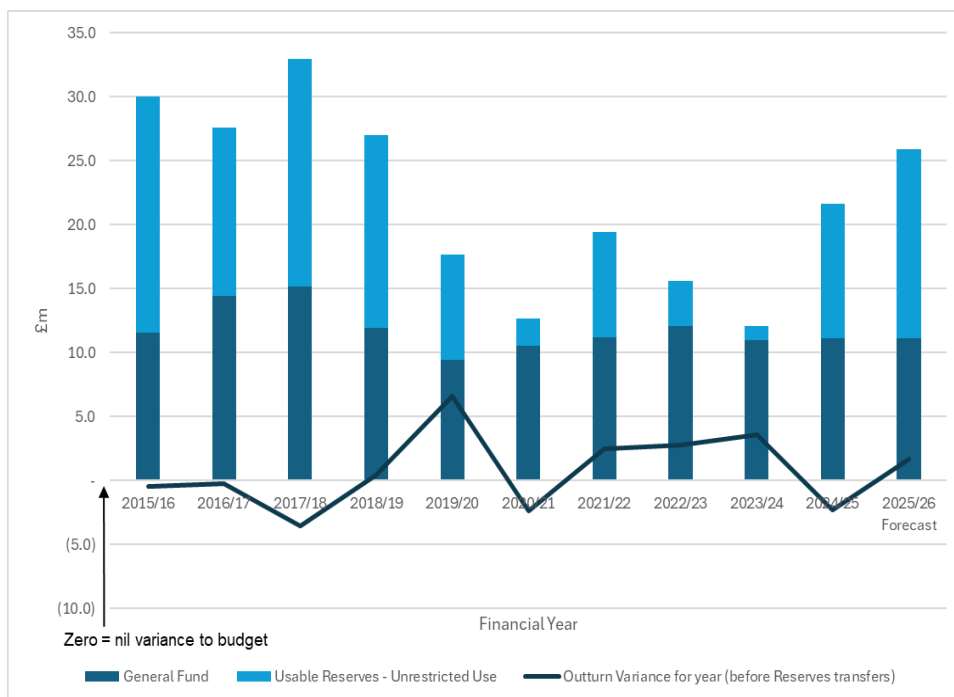
1.10 The forecast position at Quarter Three if no further action is successfully taken is an overspend of £1.675m (1.1%) at year end after the proposed use of central contingences and other budgets.

1.11 This represents slightly improved overall position compared to Quarter Two, when the forecast year-end budget pressure was estimated at £1.804m after the proposed use of contingencies and from the Quarter 1 position of £10.677m. This reflects the impact of actions already implemented and ongoing work to reduce financial pressures across Directorates.

1.12 In common with other councils, the largest area of overspend is still Children’s Services with forecast pressures of £.8.247m , an increase of £237k since Quarter Two.

1.13 The quarterly budget monitoring and reporting has served to identify areas for additional funding in the recently approved budget for 2026/27. This covers a number of existing continuing and emerging service demand and inflation pressures. Also identified were a number of budgets that required re-basing due to other reasons such as re-evaluating achievable income levels against current budgets and changes to services required due to legislative changes. A more comprehensive list was included in the budget report. This does help address many of the areas of overspend and so it is reasonable to expect service areas to manage better within their budgets next year. However, these will be constantly monitored and challenged through the budget monitoring process and updated in future revisions of the MTFP where appropriate.

1.14 As I mentioned in earlier reports, in relation to reserves, it is worthy of note that this year an additional £6m was built into the budget to go into reserves, in line with the policy to continue to rebuild our reserves from their former critically low level. Therefore, even if the overspend of £1.675m remained at year-end, the reserves would still be substantially higher at year-end than they were at the start of the financial year. This is illustrated by the graph below which shows the unrestricted reserves balances from closing balance 2015/16 through to year-end forecast closing balance 2025/26 and reported outturn variance per year, with the Q3 position assumed.



1.15 Further to the amendment agreed at the budget meeting of 18 February regarding quarterly reports to full council, these will be introduced in relation to future reports.

1.16 From Monday 16 March, residents can drop into the below Community Hubs for help or advice from the council's Welfare Support Officers, bringing advice back out into the community.

1.17 There's a range of support available including:

- Financial assistance - such as Crisis Awards and support with housing payments
- Support to purchase essential household items including white goods and furniture

1.18 Help and advice with:

- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction
- General Council Tax enquiries
- Free school meals support
- Welfare benefit checks and referrals to a Welfare Rights Officer

1.19 Officers will be constantly reviewing the hubs that they are working at, monitoring the outcomes and will assess if there is a need to expand the service or change locations as part of the review. Locations were selected according to:


- Take up for council tax reduction
- Amount of take up in the unclaimed benefit campaign (high demand areas)
- Levels of deprivation
- Geographical reach

1.20 The team will be at the below hubs each week: (Locations have been identified by officers according to need drawn from our data but will be reviewed)

- North Ormesby Community Hub – Monday, 9am – 12pm and 1pm – 4.30pm
- Grove Hill Community Hub – Tuesday, 9am – 12pm and 1pm – 4.30pm
- Hemlington Community Hub – Thursday, 9.30am – 12pm and 1pm – 4.30pm
- Easterside Community Hub – Friday, 9am – 12pm and 1pm – 4.30pm

1.21 No appointment needed, everyone is welcome to drop in.

1.22 For those unable to make the sessions, there is support available on our website 
<https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/>

1.23 Welfare Rights Officers are available by appointment at some hubs, to assist with claiming welfare benefits, further details can be found here 
<https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/.../help-with-your-money/>

1.24 Community Benefits Advice is already offered by Middlesbrough CAB at several locations in Middlesbrough and from their base at 9 Linthorpe Road.

1.25 Further detail can be found at www.mcab.org.uk/getting-advice