

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Mayor Chris Cooke

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

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 service cuts and a strong focus on reinvestment.

- Several long-standing projects have been delivered, including the £1.9m renovation of Central Library and the reopening of Levick Court Respite Service with modern, purpose-built facilities designed with NHS and council partners.
- The Young Inspectors programme continues to shape HAF provision, leading to improvements such as mandatory Physical Activity training and ensuring youth voice is central to service design.
- The 2026/27 parks investment programme is progressing well, with major upgrades at Colmore Play Area including new equipment, safety features and a community-designed mural.
- Middlesbrough has been longlisted for UK City of Culture 2029, receiving £60,000 to develop a full bid, building on bicentenary planning, the Turner Prize hosting and major cultural investment.
- Budget implementation is underway, supported by a detailed action plan across all service areas.

1. HIGHLIGHTS

Update:

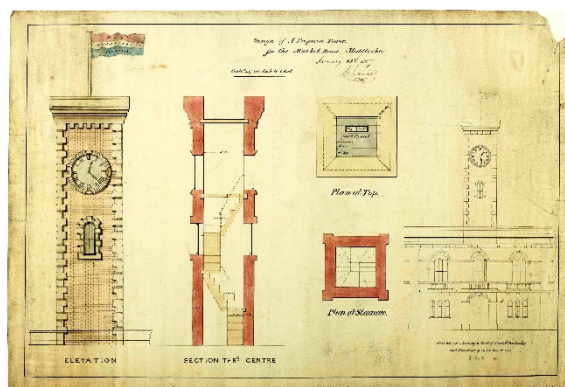
1.1 *Central Library - A Revitalised Cultural Hub for Middlesbrough*

- 1.1.1 We recently celebrated the formal re-opening of Middlesbrough's historic Central Library following one of the most significant refurbishments in its 114-year history. It was a pleasure to welcome Luke Burton, Libraries Director at Arts Council England, to mark the completion of this £1.9 million transformation.
- 1.1.2 The Grade II-listed Central Library has undergone a major 20-month refurbishment funded by Arts Council England, the Future High Streets Fund and Middlesbrough Council, following a successful Cultural Development Fund bid.
- 1.1.3 Improvements include a redesigned ground floor with a new children's library, a modern ICT suite and flexible event spaces, upgraded accessibility features, new public computers, and sensitive restoration of the reference library's historic flooring and furniture. The project delivers a fully modernised, community-focused space while preserving key heritage features.
- 1.1.4 Since reopening, the feedback from residents has been overwhelmingly positive. The Central Library has been a cornerstone of our town centre for more than a century and continues to be a place where people of all ages come to read, learn, create and connect. This investment ensures it will remain one of Middlesbrough's most treasured cultural assets for generations to come.
- 1.1.5 I want to thank our partners at Arts Council England, the Future High Streets Fund, Council officers, Aptus, and everyone who played a role in delivering this outstanding project. Their hard work has restored one of Middlesbrough's jewels and created a welcoming, modern space that will enrich lives for many years ahead.



1.2 Old Town Hall - Remarkable Discovery as Restoration Begins

- 1.2.1 Work to restore Middlesbrough's iconic Old Town Hall has already revealed extraordinary insights into the town's earliest days. Just days into the £6.3 million project, a Victorian time capsule was uncovered beneath the clock tower, which was immortalised by LS Lowry and central to Middlesbrough's early identity.
- 1.2.2 The capsule, sealed within the foundation stone laid in 1858 by the then Mayor Henry Thompson, contained a handwritten parchment signed by Middlesbrough's founding figures, including Henry Bolckow, John Vaughan and Isaac Wilson. The document describes a town transformed in just three decades from "one solitary house" to a thriving industrial centre and even notes that the clock tower's bell was cast from the same model as the bell at Balmoral Castle. Alongside the inscription was a pristine 1858 edition of the Darlington & Stockton Times and an 1857 silver threepence, all in remarkably good condition thanks to careful Victorian craftsmanship.
- 1.2.3 This discovery adds new depth to our understanding of the building's history, confirming that although the main Old Town Hall opened in 1846, the clock tower was constructed more than a decade later. Teesside Archives are now preserving these historic finds for future generations.
- 1.2.4 The restoration, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and led by contractor Walter Thompson, will stabilise and restore the Grade II-listed structure, remove a 1970s extension, and create new business space as part of the growing Boho Zone. A modern marketplace extension will blend heritage and innovation, and will form a centrepiece of our bicentenary celebrations in 2028.
- 1.2.5 The Old Town Hall is one of the most powerful symbols of Middlesbrough's origins and ambition. This project is already uncovering forgotten stories from our town's infancy, and as work continues, I am sure more revelations will follow. It is a privilege to see this landmark being given the new lease of life it richly deserves as we look ahead to celebrating 200 years of Middlesbrough.



1.3 Levick Court - Securing the Future of a Vital Respite Service

- 1.3.1 I'm delighted to report that Middlesbrough's learning disability respite service has secured its long-term future with a move to modern, high-quality premises at Levick Court. This is a hugely important milestone for around 70 families and carers who rely on the service for essential support.
- 1.3.2 For years, the service was delivered across two ageing NHS buildings at Aysgarth in Stockton and Bankfields in Middlesbrough. Those facilities had become increasingly unsafe, expensive to maintain and unable to meet modern Care Quality Commission (CQC) requirements. Continuing care in those buildings simply wasn't sustainable.
- 1.3.3 Thanks to a strong partnership between NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) and Middlesbrough Council, families, carers and professionals have co-designed a new model of support and secured a permanent home for the service at Levick Court.
- 1.3.4 Levick Court was built in 2012 as a 16-bed adult respite unit with additional supported living apartments, and provides a safe, modern and purpose-built environment. The building includes individual bedrooms, multiple sitting rooms, a well-equipped games room, and a state-of-the-art sensory room. Families have already described the move as "the best news we've had in eight years".
- 1.3.5 This new partnership model places clinical expertise with the NHS, alongside dedicated social care support from the Council, ensuring the service meets complex needs while helping people maintain independence and family relationships.
- 1.3.6 I want to pay tribute to the families and carers who have fought for this service, and to our partners across the NHS and Middlesbrough Council who made this possible. I also take personal pride in seeing Levick Court reopen, after taking difficult but necessary decisions to protect its future at a time when the Council's finances were under immense pressure.
- 1.3.7 Levick Court now provides a stable, high-quality home for respite care, giving families the reassurance and support they deserve for many years to come.



1.4 Young Inspectors – Strengthening Youth Voice in the HAF Programme

- 1.4.1 As part of our commitment to giving young people a real say in the services that support them, the Young Inspectors programme has become an increasingly important part of how we shape and improve the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) offer across Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland.
- 1.4.2 The Young Inspectors are a diverse group of young people from different backgrounds and abilities who assess local services and ensure young voices are heard where it matters. Their role is clear: to highlight what works well, what doesn't, and what needs to change. They produce formal reports with recommendations, giving providers direct insight into the experience of the children and young people they serve.
- 1.4.3 For the HAF programme, Young Inspectors:
- Visit a range of HAF providers and carry out structured inspections
 - Follow guidelines set by the HAF team to assess quality, safety and inclusivity
 - Produce reports highlighting strengths, areas for improvement and practical recommendations
 - Promote the voices and interests of young people across the North East
 - Challenge providers to reflect on their delivery and make meaningful improvements
- 1.4.4 Their impact over the past year has been significant. Based on their findings, the HAF team introduced mandatory Physical Activity training for all organisations delivering HAF sessions. This has helped upskill staff, improve programme quality and ensure children benefit from a wider range of engaging, active opportunities during the school holidays.
- 1.4.5 The Young Inspectors have become a vital part of how we deliver HAF, ensuring young people are at the heart of decision-making. Their insight has strengthened the programme, improved standards and ensured that the voices of those who use the service most are shaping its future.
- 1.4.6 I want to thank every young person involved, along with the HAF team and our partners, for their dedication and leadership. We will continue to work closely with the Young Inspectors as we expand and improve HAF provision across Middlesbrough.

2. THE TIME AHEAD

Update:

2.1 Investing in Middlesbrough's Future Investing in Our Parks - Progress on Play Area Improvements

- 2.1.1 Following the agreement of our 2026/27 budget, which includes significant new investment in parks and play spaces across Middlesbrough, work is now progressing at pace to deliver improvements for children and families in every part of the town.

- 2.1.2 At Colmore Play Area, the main equipment has now been installed along with new fencing, lighting and CCTV. We are currently awaiting delivery of the Teqball table and goalposts, both of which will add to the range of activities available on site.
- 2.1.3 Further enhancements are underway. The MUGA will be painted once a specialist contractor has been procured, as the height of the work means it cannot be completed in-house for health and safety reasons. In addition, a construction supplier is scheduled to repair and render the boundary wall as soon as the weather allows. Once that is complete, a community mural will be created with the support of a professional artist.
- 2.1.4 The mural project is an important part of our approach of giving children and young people ownership of their local spaces and celebrating community pride. The programme includes:
- Day 1: Creative workshops at Thorntree Academy
 - Day 2: Consultation and design session at Thorntree Youth Centre
 - Days 3-5: Mural creation on site during the Easter holidays, with young people directly involved in painting
- 2.1.5 Additional dates include sessions at Caldicotes and Thorntree Academy on 24 March, Youth Focus North East's session at Thorntree Hub on 31 March, and on-site mural creation scheduled for 13-14 April.
- 2.1.6 These improvements at Colmore are just the start. The budget we passed invests heavily in play parks right across Middlesbrough: repairing equipment, upgrading facilities and creating safer, more inviting spaces for families. This is a key part of our commitment to give every child in Middlesbrough access to high-quality places to play, learn and grow.
- 2.1.7 I want to thank our officers, contractors, schools and youth partners for their work so far. As more projects move from planning into delivery, residents will start to see real, tangible improvements in their local parks over the months ahead.



2.2 UK City of Culture 2029 - Middlesbrough Longlisted

- 2.2.1 Middlesbrough has taken a major step forward in showcasing its creativity and ambition after being longlisted for UK City of Culture 2029. This is a hugely significant moment for our town and reflects years of work to strengthen and grow our cultural sector.
- 2.2.2 Being longlisted means Middlesbrough will now receive £60,000 from the Government to develop a full bid, competing alongside eight other places from across the UK. Winning the title would be transformational, as previous hosts have attracted millions of pounds of investment, created new jobs and welcomed thousands of visitors.
- 2.2.3 Middlesbrough's City of Culture bid builds on preparations for the town's 200th anniversary in 2030–31, its upcoming hosting of the Turner Prize, and the success of the 10-year Creative Vision launched in 2023. It is strengthened by £4.25m of Cultural Development Fund investment that has supported key cultural institutions, including Central Library, Mima and The Auxiliary.
- 2.2.4 The City of Culture programme would be delivered with Teesside University and the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership, involving over 30 local arts, heritage and creative organisations. The programme would span the whole Tees Valley, reflecting the region's shared cultural identity.
- 2.2.5 This is an opportunity rooted in who we are. Middlesbrough has always been a town that builds things, from iron and steel to art, ideas and digital innovation. Our bid brings our motto Erimus or 'We Shall Be' to life, combining the story of our industrial beginnings with a bold vision for the future.
- 2.2.6 If successful, the winning place will receive £10 million to deliver a show-stopping year of cultural activity. Even those shortlisted but not selected will receive £125,000 to take forward elements of their plans.
- 2.2.7 I'm delighted that we have been longlisted for this once-in-a-generation opportunity to celebrate the creativity of our residents, artists and businesses and to change how people see Middlesbrough. We'll share more about our full bid as it develops, but for now, this recognition is a testament to the ambition, talent and resilience of our cultural sector.

2.3 Budget Implementation Programme

- 2.3.1 Following the passing of the budget at the 18th of February Council meeting, good progress is being made towards its implementation.
- 2.3.2 A full implementation plan has been created and approved by the councils Policy development Group, which all council service areas are now working towards.
- 2.3.3 62 new jobs have been advertised to date, with all of them now closed and going towards the interview process.
- 2.3.4 On the 5th of March, a jobs fair took place at the town hall, in which members of the public we're invited to attend and speak with council staff to talk through the jobs available, help with applications and answer any questions.

