

## EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

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

**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

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

#### Update:

- Special Free School
- SEND Reforms
- City of Culture
- Captain Cook Birthplace Museum
- Events Programme
- Musinc

## 1. HIGHLIGHTS

#### Update:

### *Education and Partnerships*

#### *1.1 Special Free School*

I'm pleased to confirm that the DfE have informed us that they have approved our request to go ahead with the Special Free School as a secondary school instead of primary.

#### *1.2 SEND Reforms*

**1.2.1** On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2026, the Government published the long awaited School's White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'; alongside a consultation on SEND Reform – Putting Children and Young People First. Both documents propose significant changes to the current system with an ambitious vision for a reformed SEND system which will be enshrined in new legislation by 2029-30.

**1.2.2** To summarise the key areas that are included in the SEND Reform consultation:

- Inclusion by design: focussing on making mainstream schools more inclusive, requiring them to provide high quality adaptive support without the need for formal statutory processes

- The introduction of new local Experts at Hands services to improve the availability of support for children from specialist practitioners across education and health services
- Introduction of individual support plans [ISPs]: A new duty for all education providers across the 0-25 age range to create and maintain a digital ISP for children with SEND
- Introduction of specialist provision packages for children with the most complex needs, for whom EHCPs will be retained
- The introduction of new national inclusion standards, with an expectation on every school to publish an inclusion strategy
- A focus on workforce development to train staff and improve adaptive teaching approaches
- Tiered approach to support: a new system for categorising children based on the level of support they required to meet their individual needs. These include universal, targeted, targeted plus and specialist.
- Investment to create inclusion bases to provide flexible spaces for targeted support and regulation in mainstream schools
- A focus on best start in life for children in early years via the Best Start Family Hub model
- Capping independent school fees

**1.2.3** Alongside the above, there has also been an announcement of additional funding for each local authority area to address historic deficits and provide investment for the changes required to meet the new expectations. This includes:

- A grant for 90% of the historic high needs deficit in each local authority
- Transformation funding
- Funding to support the development of Experts at Hand services
- Early Years investment
- Capital Investment
- Best Start Family Hubs

**1.2.4** In response to the announcements, each local authority has been requested to produce a local area reform plan to be submitted to the Department for Education by June 2026. The plan will set out how the local area will deliver on the improvement actions and the strengthening of the local system in response to the reforms. There is an expectation that each local area reform plan will be coproduced across all local area stakeholders including children, young people and their families alongside education, health and care services. The approval of this plan is essential to receive the 90% grant payment towards the historic high needs deficit.

**1.2.5** At present, there is extensive planning, development and engagement activity underway to prepare the local area reform. The LA has also benefitted from a small pot of funding through the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance to support these activities, which are being planned and coordinated in partnership with Middlesbrough SEND Parent Carer Forum and other stakeholders from across the local area Strategic SEND & Inclusion Partnership.

**1.2.6** A full briefing on the SEND reforms is being offered to all councillors.

## **Culture**

### **1.3 City of Culture**

- 1.3.1** As announced publicly on 18 March, Middlesbrough has been longlisted with 8 other places for UK City of Culture 2029. This prestigious award brings with a prize for the winner of £10M from DCMS and the opportunity to leverage further investment.
- 1.3.2** Middlesbrough's expression of interest spoke of the history of the town as an industrial powerhouse and place of making and innovation. It identified a unique opportunity through City of Culture to reclaim our ambitious and confident identity through embedding creativity across all our communities and promoting pride in where we live.
- 1.3.3** We are now invited to make a full bid and have been awarded £60,000 from DCMS to support its development. Our bid will build on preparations to celebrate the town's 200th birthday in 2030-31 as Middlesbrough gets ready to host the Turner Prize later this year.
- 1.3.4** To clarify any misunderstanding – the City of Culture was open to City's and Large Towns.

## ***1.4 Captain Cook Birthplace Museum***

### **1.4.1 Captain Cook Birthplace Museum**

Thanks to funding from the Arts Council's Museums Renewal Fund, the Museums Team have been able to undertake a series of enhancements at the Captain Cook Museum to improve the overall visitor experience. This includes:

#### **1.4.2 The Australian Gallery**

What was previously the 'Walkabout Gallery' behind the learning space and off the main visitor route has been reimaged and relocated within the main museum galleries so that all visitors can now enjoy this unique collection.

#### **1.4.3 Self-Led Play Space**

A newly developed area for our younger explorers.

#### **1.4.4 New Interactives**

Featuring a bespoke sailing game developed in partnership with Teesside University.

#### **1.4.5 Site Upgrades**

New donation points, refreshed signage, and updated promotional materials. A special preview for partners and stakeholders will take place on Monday 30 March, 10:30am – 1:00pm

## ***Events***

### ***1.5 Events Programme***

We are developing our Cultural Events Programme in partnership with our Neighbourhoods Team to enable more creative engagement in local communities. We're

taking a multi-layered approach including setting up a small grants fund to help communities to deliver their own events and providing supporting resources and training. We'll work closely with community hubs to expand on their offer including family fun days. As a third strand, we'll co-produce creative programmes with communities in priority areas, bringing together residents and artists so that creative programmes can be delivered with communities rather than for them. This may include a 'Give it a Go' programme where opportunities such as touring theatre can be brought to community spaces.

### **1.6 Musinc**

Held a very successful opening of the new recording studio with all brand new instruments and deck with money from the Youth Better Spaces fund. Amplify continues to grow, with Musinc with Amplify having an article in NEVolume. Shine Festival was exceptional, with choirs from schools across Middlesbrough and singing groups from across the North East.