

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL



Report of: Director of Environment, Community and Culture

Submitted to: Audit Committee

Date: 16 April 2026

Title: Management of Strategic Risk 15: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience

Report for: Information

Status: Public

Council Plan priority: Safe and resilient communities

Proposed decision(s)

The report is provided for information purposes.

It is requested that the Audit Committee:

- **Notes:** the work undertaken regarding the management of Strategic Risk 15: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience, and
- **Considers:** whether they have received sufficient information to be assured that there are appropriate arrangements in place to manage the risk.

Executive summary

This report is for information only. It requests the Audit Committee to note the work undertaken to manage Strategic Risk 15: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience, and to confirm whether they are assured that appropriate arrangements are in place to manage this risk.

The report provides an overview of the civil unrest that led to the risk being introduced in September 2024 and it also sets out what is being done in relation to the internal control measures.

1. Purpose

1.1 The report is provided for information purposes, and it requests that the Audit Committee notes the work undertaken regarding the management of Strategic Risk 15: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience. The report is also seeking the views of Audit Committee at whether or not they are assured that appropriate arrangements are in place to manage the risk.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Audit Committee

- **Notes:** the work undertaken regarding the management of Strategic Risk 15: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience, and
- **Considers:** whether they have received sufficient information to be assured that there are appropriate arrangements in place to manage the risk.

3. Background and relevant information

3.1 Strategic Risk 15: *Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience* was added to the Council's Strategic Risk Register following the civil unrest that occurred in Middlesbrough on 4 August 2024. The disorder, involving around 400 people and linked to misinformation circulating online, resulted in significant damage to property, including more than £300,000 of damage to Teesside University buildings and caused considerable anxiety among residents. Although no further incidents occurred, the spread of misinformation subsequently led to town-wide disruption and precautionary closures.

The risk is currently assessed as:

Impact: 5 – Major

Likelihood: 3 – Possible (21%–50%)

Overall Score: 15

Date Assessed: 4 March 2026

3.2 This represents a high but manageable exposure. While internal controls are strong and embedded, external drivers including national political volatility, misinformation, online extremism, and local social tensions mean the likelihood cannot yet be reduced further. Nevertheless, the risk has stabilised since late 2024 due to strengthened governance, improved early-warning systems, and enhanced partnership arrangements.

3.3 **Community tension monitoring undertaken.** Community tension monitoring is well established and has been enhanced through monthly multi-agency meetings involving the Council, Fire Service, and Police. Data from a wide range of sources is consolidated into a dedicated Council dashboard to identify trends and emerging issues. This approach is supported by daily Cleveland Police led briefings and strengthened hate-crime monitoring, including both monthly and quarterly partnership meetings. The monitoring framework is being expanded to schools, internal staff, and primary settings to strengthen early detection of tension indicators.

3.4 **Community engagement undertaken.** The Council have implemented a new Neighbourhood Model, and this has provided an additional mechanism for regular

engagement with Elected Members who are the conduit to the communities of Middlesbrough. Community engagement takes place via Neighbourhood Action Partnership Newsletters on several issues relating specifically to each of the 4 neighbourhoods (North, East, South and West). These newsletters are provided in a range of formats, including electronic which are e-mailed to those who have signed up to receive updates on what is happening in their area (the number of people signed up in each area are: South - 10,380, East - 8,463, West - 12,572, North - 12,396). It is also available on the Council's website and promoted on social media. Hard copies have also been posted through the door of households in each neighbourhood using grant funding to keep people up to date, remind people how to report issues and keep people engaged in the work that is taking place in their area.

Work has also been taking place via the Community Recovery Fund provided through MHCLG following the riots. This will be detailed in the spend breakdown at 3.18 later in the report. However, it includes youth outreach, community conversations, it supported the development of a Community Forum where voluntary and community sector groups came together to share good practice and concerns that they took forward to statutory organisations to develop actions/responses that were need. It also made use of a '*We Are Middlesbrough*' media and publicity campaign involving a videography of community activities and events, support for community groups that developed media skills, digital tool kit for all. It included a community radio podcast showcasing positive activities, community newsletters, and culminated in a showcase event on 4th Aug 2025 where all the community groups involved in the recovery process attended to share the work they had been doing, this included a number of schools from right across Middlesbrough.

3.5 Neighbourhood safety liaison in place. Neighbourhood Safety Officers participate in daily operational briefings and lead monthly multi-agency Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour meetings, which include Police, Fire, Registered Social Landlords, Youth Services and others. A clear escalation pathway is in place through:

- Neighbourhood briefings and strategic groups
- Strategic Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Meetings
- Community Safety Partnership (CSP)
- Recruited into essential posts, Community Development Officers,

Neighbourhood Link Workers and Neighbourhood Navigators.

The CSP has been reconstituted to provide stronger strategic leadership, with executive-level representation from all key partners.

3.6 Prevent operational group risk plans in place. The Prevent Operational Group remains a core control mechanism. The 2024–25 Home Office Prevent Benchmarking Assessment rated Middlesbrough as "Exceeded" in all areas. This assurance framework is now part of routine oversight, with Prevent officers maintaining ongoing scrutiny of extremist risks, disinformation, and harmful narratives.

3.7 Liaison with policing partners to verify validity of possible demonstrations.

Early liaison takes place as soon as notification is received of any demonstration and multi-agency meetings are set up at the earliest opportunity to start the response planning and engagement work. Communication is a key part of this process, and plans are put in place to ensure that key people are kept updated throughout and that relevant officers are involved as and when needed.

- 3.8 Initial credibility verification through visual audits using CCTV operations and open sources.** Community Safety and Neighbourhood staff and CCTV operatives from the Council and (where appropriate) police will verify any threatening or offensive material to ensure credibility. This will be shared with police using agreed information sharing protocols and appropriate action taken. This is then stored and recorded for monitoring and action.
- 3.9 Gatekeeping protocols with marketing and communications for potentially controversial communications.** The Home Office have provided Councils with a form to share any emerging threats relating to mis/dis or mal information. In order to make sure that we are being consistent in our approach, all of our returns will go through our Comms Team via the Head of Communications, and this will be discussed with the Head of Neighbourhoods if there is any uncertainty so that we can cross check to see if anything is already recorded on our systems.
- 3.10 Ongoing promotion of education around disinformation and building of media literacy by partners within the local authority and via social media.** The Community Safety team and the neighbourhood teams share information relating to disinformation. This is shared with schools, partner organisations, local businesses, as well as internally with council staff on the staff portal and on the staff newsletter.
- 3.11 Monthly meetings held with senior leadership.** Middlesbrough Council Chief Executive meets Monthly with the Policing District Commander and the Head of Neighbourhoods.
- 3.12 Gold and Silver recovery group meetings with senior leadership teams across the organisation and partners.** Following the riots, a Gold recovery group was established consisting of executive level officers. A term of reference was established and this group provided direction to the Silver Recovery group. Both groups had representation from multiple partners, and they were well attended. Gold group is no longer active as it is not needed, and the Silver Recovery group fulfilled its purpose as a recovery group however they still meet as the group have evolved into a productive team for doing great things together in order to improve cohesion and resilience in Middlesbrough.
- 3.13 Action plan developed by silver group to be reported to gold with escalations.** Silver group developed an action plan that was then turned into the delivery plan for the spending of the £600k grant that will be explained in more detail at point 3.18 below.
- 3.14 Community safety partnership reconstituted to provide greater strategic oversight.** The Community Safety Partnership constitution was revised and membership changed. Executive level management now attend, and decisions can now be made with discussions taking on a different strategic frame. The escalation process from Multi-Agency Neighbourhood Strategic Group, and Neighbourhood Action Partnership groups, to Active Intelligence Mapping Group, then to Community Safety Partnership Group allows a clear route for issues to be accelerated if they can't be resolved by single agency or by the efforts of others at earlier stages in the process meaning they need a more strategic approach across broader partners.

A community tension reporting process is now in place for secondary schools. The same process will be available for internal Middlesbrough Council staff, and primary schools in May 2026. Concerns are recorded and fed into the community tension monitoring process

3.15 The Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) allocated £600,000 to Middlesbrough Council via the Community Recovery Fund (CRF) which is aimed at supporting those communities impacted by the public disorder that took place between July and August 2024. MHCLG then provided £55,000 Community Capacity and Resilience Programme funding bringing the total grant received to £655,000.

The funding was spent as agreed by Executive at the meeting on 8th January 2025

<p>Develop a Community Forum bringing together all community representatives in Middlesbrough – self-sustaining Community Action Group - The group consists of key community representatives. Allocated to Council Community Development Officers and managed via Council budget: all spent by 31st March 2025</p> <p>Clear guidelines on what it could be allocated to i.e. room hire, food, tea, coffee, coms etc. Launch event. Funding to be directed under the direction of the engagement and participation group.</p>	<p>10,000</p>
<p>Voluntary and community sector opportunity to map existing assets - Establish current community offer throughout Middlesbrough, identify unmet needs and gaps in delivery. Working with the Neighbourhood Team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be some mapping of what is already being done by partners. • Community Asset Mapping (LA GIS) • Participation/engagement • Person to map out. <p>Allocated via grants and spend by 31st March 2025. Delivery between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant</p>	<p>30,000</p>
<p>Deliver joint engagement activities and events throughout Middlesbrough via the Neighbourhood model – Voluntary and community sector to be involved in delivering activities in the community.</p> <p>This was allocated via grants and committed by 31st March 2025. Delivery will be between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant</p>	<p>75,000</p>
<p>Communications – Develop a process for statutory services to use 'trusted voices' within the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) community to deliver regular clear joint messages to the wider community, promoting cohesion and working together narratives.</p> <p>Allocated to Head of Coms and spent by 31st March 2025</p> <p>Clear guidelines on what it was allocated for i.e. promotion, publicity, feedback, engagement.</p>	<p>20,000</p>

Funding was directed under the direction of the communications group.	
Youth related assertive outreach and centre-based activities throughout Middlesbrough. Identify key areas of concern, and individuals, engage young people in the community, develop relationships and signpost young people to existing and new youth related activities. Work 121 with those most disengaged young people and existing initiatives to maximise resources. The £205,000 was split £48,750 to each of existing providers. (3 via extension to existing contracts and one by exemption) £10,000 for small grants (all will be spent by 31 st March 2025). £55,000 Community Cohesion and Resilience Programme Grant partially funded this initiative. In line with the grant conditions, this resource was fully spent by 31 March 2025, whilst the Community Recovery Fund has been carried over.	CRF 150,000 CCRP 55,000
Council has employed Community Development focussed posts to work across all services and projects supporting LA/Police/VCS services ensuring a fully joined up approach is embedded and identify and develop sustainability community opportunities. 2 x Community Development Officers to work across the town linking in with the subgroups. Officers also to spend some time with MVDA. This funding will be committed by 31 st March 2025, and the post will be on a fixed term contract for 12 months. Delivery will be between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant	80,000
Support for grassroots community groups, identify informal groups provide support and resources to develop, advertise and become constituted. Develop Social Action projects - Fund for community members to develop projects to solve problems and improve their local community. This has been allocated via the small grants process and committed by 31 st March 2025. Delivery will be between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant	30,000
Fund experienced specialist facilitators in Hate rhetoric to develop and deliver Community Conversations throughout Middlesbrough, linked to riots and Community Cohesion Contract – in line with the council's procurement arrangements Delivery will be February 2025 – March 2025.	20,000
Building resilience in vulnerable communities and members to develop confidence and improve engagement in wider community activities. This has been allocated via grants to be committed by 31 st March 2025. Delivery will be between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant	50,000
Educational resources Contract – in line with the council's procurement arrangements. #wearemiddlesbrough	45,000
TOTAL REVENUE GRANT	565,000

Invest in environmental equipment to improve aesthetics, related to broken window theory. This will be linked to the levelling up capital funding to maximise impact and contracts will be aligned where appropriate via the council's procurement arrangements. Delivery will be between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant.	40,000
Target Hardening reconnaissance and works to the physical environment, design out crime, increase lighting, open up areas. This will be linked to the levelling up capital funding to maximise impact and contracts will be aligned where appropriate via the council's procurement arrangements. Delivery will be between February 2025 and March 2026 in line with conditions of the grant.	50,000
TOTAL CAPITAL GRANT	90,000
TOTAL REVENUE & CAPITAL GRANT	655,000

3.16 To manage the risk, a series of actions were identified and implemented to deliver the golden thread of community engagement. Supporting evidence has been provided by the Head of Neighbourhoods to demonstrate that these actions have been monitored, delivered, and embedded. The actions below show clear progression from one-off corrective measures to established internal control mechanisms, forming part of routine governance, partnership engagement, and operational assurance activity.

- SR-15a Promote social cohesion through dedicated local government effort, reinforcing democratic freedoms and supporting evidence-based local cohesion initiatives.

Implementation:

- Neighbourhood Teams are fully operational across all four localities.
- Four locality hubs are now established and actively used.
- Strong partner engagement evidenced through consistent attendance at both strategic and operational meetings in each locality.
- Neighbourhood Plans are developed with elected members and residents balanced between consistent borough-wide themes and tailored local needs.
- Plans include preventive approaches for community cohesion issues and resilience-building in identified areas of risk.

Internal control transition:

Neighbourhood planning and multi-agency locality governance now operate as embedded mechanisms for monitoring and responding to cohesion-related risks.

- SR-15b Build resilience in local communities against extremist ideologies and narratives, including conspiracy theories and disinformation (PREVENT).

Implementation:

- The PREVENT Benchmarking Assurance Outcome for 2025–26 was positive across all areas.
- PREVENT officers achieved an “Exceeded” rating across all aspects of the framework, evidencing strong operational management and delivery.

Internal control transition:

Benchmarking outcomes and ongoing PREVENT officer oversight now form part of a routine assurance cycle, providing structured scrutiny and ongoing compliance with national standards.

- SR-15c Engage people utilising the neighbourhood model, tying in with partnership organisations, VCS, local community groups and elected members. We will work to find solutions with communities and not to them.

Implementation:

- Neighbourhood Teams and locality hubs are fully in place.
- Partner engagement remains strong, evidenced by attendance at strategic and operational neighbourhood meetings.
- Co-produced neighbourhood plans with members and residents reflect both shared and locality-specific priorities.
- Bi-monthly Neighbourhood Action Partnership (NAP) meetings and newsletters are consistently delivered and positively received by elected members and partners.

Internal control transition:

Regular cycles of NAP communications and meetings now act as established governance mechanisms for neighbourhood engagement and issue escalation.

- SR-15d Develop an early tension warning system that monitors and alerts the local authority and other key local partners about growing tensions.

Implementation:

- Monthly tension-monitoring meetings take place with Police, Fire Brigade and Neighbourhood Teams.
- The system has expanded to include schools, improving early identification and management of school-based tensions.
- Work is complete on hate crime eLearning package for Middlesbrough Council Staff.
- Work is ongoing to deliver the community tension eLearning package to further strengthen staff capability in reporting and escalation.
- Further development is required to enhance data extraction and reporting functionality.

Internal control transition:

The regular multi-agency monitoring process now operates as an established early-warning mechanism, with the future eLearning module expected to enhance organisation-wide reporting controls.

- SR-15e Marginalise and isolate extremist and other malign actors to prevent the mainstreaming of extremist ideologies and dangerous conspiracy theories which are causing severe harm and disruption in local areas (PREVENT).

Implementation:

- The PREVENT Benchmarking Assurance Outcome for 2025–26 confirmed strong performance against all areas, with “Exceeded” ratings across the board.

Internal control transition:

PREVENT oversight and assurance reporting now function as embedded controls, ensuring risks linked to extremist narratives are continually monitored.

- SR-15f Respond quickly and effectively to flashpoint incidents and triggers
Implementation:
 - The local authority operates a (Bronze Command Officer (BCO) system, providing rapid incident response through Local Resilience Forum (LRF) structures and internal Emergency Management Response Team (EMRT) processes.
 - The neighbourhood model adds operational resilience; for example, during recent Hemlington underground electrical fire, the team opened a community facility out of hours on two occasions with support from ward members.
 - Coordination between Neighbourhood Teams, Police, Fire Brigade and relevant partners enables effective, on-the-ground responses to community-level incidents, including out-of-hours situations.

Internal control transition:

The BCO/EMRT structures and neighbourhood-based operational response capability now operate as embedded emergency response controls.

3.17 **To seek continuous improvement, the Council has also employed BELONG to support delivery of the community cohesion strategy.**

BELONG has completed its initial scoping to support a gap analysis of required work. Early activity is already underway to address cohesion, governance, and community engagement issues. This includes:

- Focus groups and meetings with council officers, elected members, partners, and a broad range of voluntary and community sector organisations (including faith groups).
- Initial review of local strategies, reports, and data.

Alongside institutional engagement, BELONG will conduct direct engagement with residents and service users particularly young people who are often under-represented. This will test assumptions, highlight blind spots, and identify informal dynamics and trust gaps not visible through official channels. Their independent role supports open, objective insight-gathering and ensures the scoping reflects lived experience.

BELONG's work will involve several visits to Middlesbrough and will result in a short scoping report outlining detailed recommendations and next steps. This will form the basis for agreeing the next phase of work, parts of which have already begun.

Project Stages:

1. Inception & Assessment: Review of local/national data and context.
2. Engagement & Analysis: Structured engagement with residents and agencies.
3. Strategy Development & Launch: Co-producing a strategy, delivery framework, and commissioning community-focused cohesion projects.
4. Implementation & Evaluation: Ongoing support, organisational development, and impact measurement.

4. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

- 4.1 The paper is for information only, and a decision is not being sought on the topic at this time.

5. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	Grant funding received from MHCLG (para 3.18) and Home Office funding for the BELONG programme (para 3.19) supports the delivery of the activities outlined within this report. All remaining associated costs are contained within existing allocations in the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and therefore no additional financial pressure is anticipated.
Legal	There are no direct legal implications arising from the management of Strategic Risk 15 to date. The actions taken fall within the Council's existing statutory powers and responsibilities, and no additional legal duties or liabilities have been created as a result of the work undertaken.
Risk	This report directly relates to the oversight and continued management of Strategic Risk 15: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience and sets out the actions and controls in place to mitigate this risk effectively.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	The content of this report is directly relevant to community cohesion and the Council's duty to foster good relations between communities. The activities described contribute toward meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty by supporting inclusive engagement and strengthening the resilience of communities across the borough.
Reducing poverty	Poverty is recognised as a key factor influencing community resilience. Lower levels of financial stability can reduce a community's capacity to respond to or recover from shocks and stressors. The work described in this report supports wider efforts to strengthen community resilience in areas where poverty may exacerbate vulnerability.
Climate Change / Environmental	There are no climate-related or environmental implications arising from the proposals within this report.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	Strong community cohesion contributes to the safety, wellbeing and opportunities available to children and young people, including those in the Council's care. Engagement activities delivered through BELONG will involve young people directly alongside wider community involvement.
Data Protection	There are no new data protection implications arising from this report. Existing information-handling arrangements and protocols remain adequate for the activities described.

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Community Recovery Fund.pdf	Community Recovery Fund	08/01/2025

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