

Annual Scrutiny Report 2025/26

Democratic Services


Middlesbrough
moving forward

May 2026

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD



Welcome to our Annual Report, which details the work undertaken and the progress and achievements made by Middlesbrough Council's Scrutiny function in the previous Municipal year (which runs between May and April). This report encompasses scrutiny activity between May 2025 and April 2026.

These are incredibly challenging times for local government, and despite Middlesbrough receiving a more favourable financial settlement for 2026/2027, the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) recognise the financial context in which decisions around service delivery and spending plans have been made. Scrutiny plays an important role in assisting to ensure that such decisions are both effective and robust and will continue to do so.

The period between May 2025 and April 2026, saw scrutiny continuing to embed changes to scrutiny panel structures which provide resilience in how scrutiny is supported. Scrutiny moved from two Panels in 2024/2025 (People and Place) to three Panels (Place, Adult Social Care and Health and Children's) in 2025/2026. Despite these changes Scrutiny Members continued their work of scrutinising the work and performance of the Council, local health providers and other external agencies and organisations with great dedication and enthusiasm.

It has been both a busy and challenging period for members including the Council emerging from a Best Value Notice, Corporate Peer Challenge as well as Care Quality Commission and Ofsted inspections in Adults and Children's services respectively. It was against this backdrop that Scrutiny members undertook a range of topics utilising a range of tools and helped to develop the Council's first pre-decision protocol which has placed emphasis on adding value at the earliest possible stage. All members have been actively involved in the Scrutiny journey to achieve a variety of positive outcomes, which are set out in this report.

I would like to thank all Members, both scrutiny and Executive, for their involvement and contribution to the work carried out, as well as those external to the Council who afforded the time to attend meetings and provide evidence. I would also like to thank officers for their continued efforts in supporting the Scrutiny process for the good of both the Council and the Borough. I particularly would like to thank the Democratic Services team for the work they do to ensure that Scrutiny is effective, and members and Chairs are fully supported.

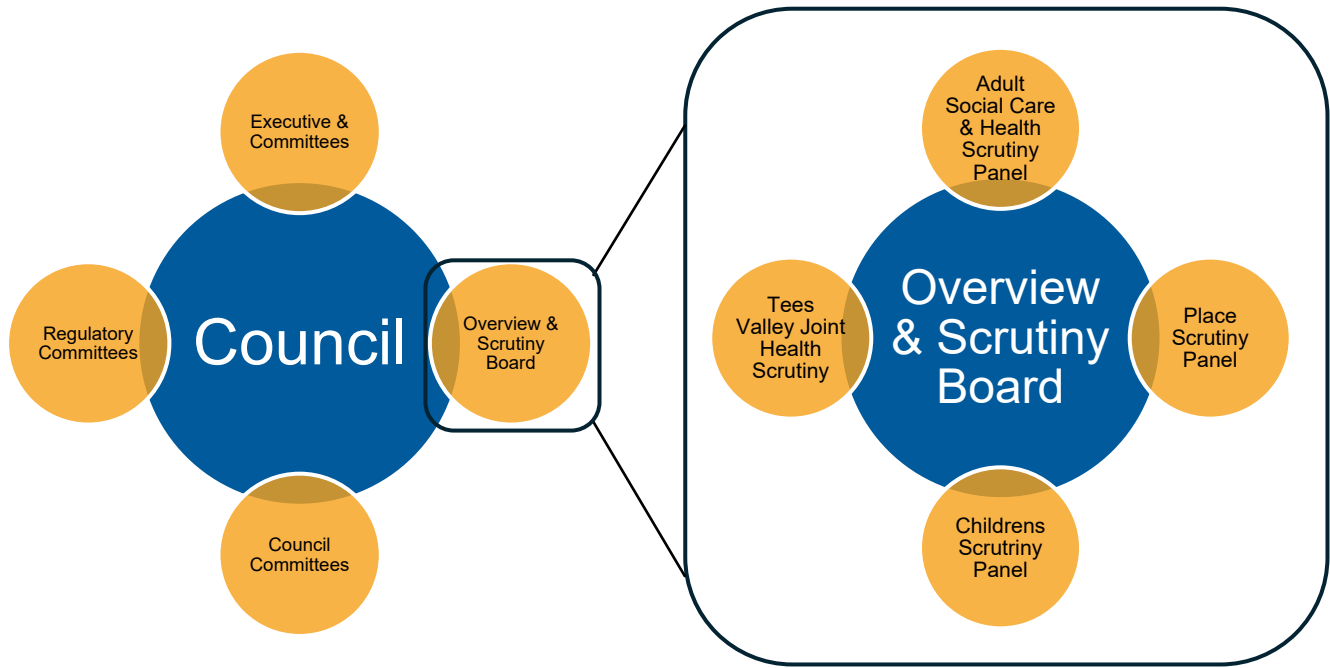
A programme of work for the Municipal year 2026/27 will be created and agreed by OSB, which I am sure will result in the same dedication and commitment to scrutinising the work of the Council and external partners over the year ahead.

I hope you find the report interesting.

SIGNATURE

Councillor Lewis Young
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COUNCIL AND SCRUTINY



The Council is responsible for setting the Budget and Policy Framework.

The Executive, comprising of the Mayor and eight Executive Members, is responsible for the management of the Council’s services within the framework set by the Council. Each Executive Member has responsibility for a particular area of the Council’s services and policies.

The responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny function are to ensure that the Council’s services are delivered effectively and efficiently, to monitor the Council’s performance and to develop new policies.

The Scrutiny Panels are, therefore, comprised of non-Executive members.

MEETINGS AND REVIEWS

OSB, and each Scrutiny Panel, met monthly during 2025/2026. All of which were open for the public to attend and observe.

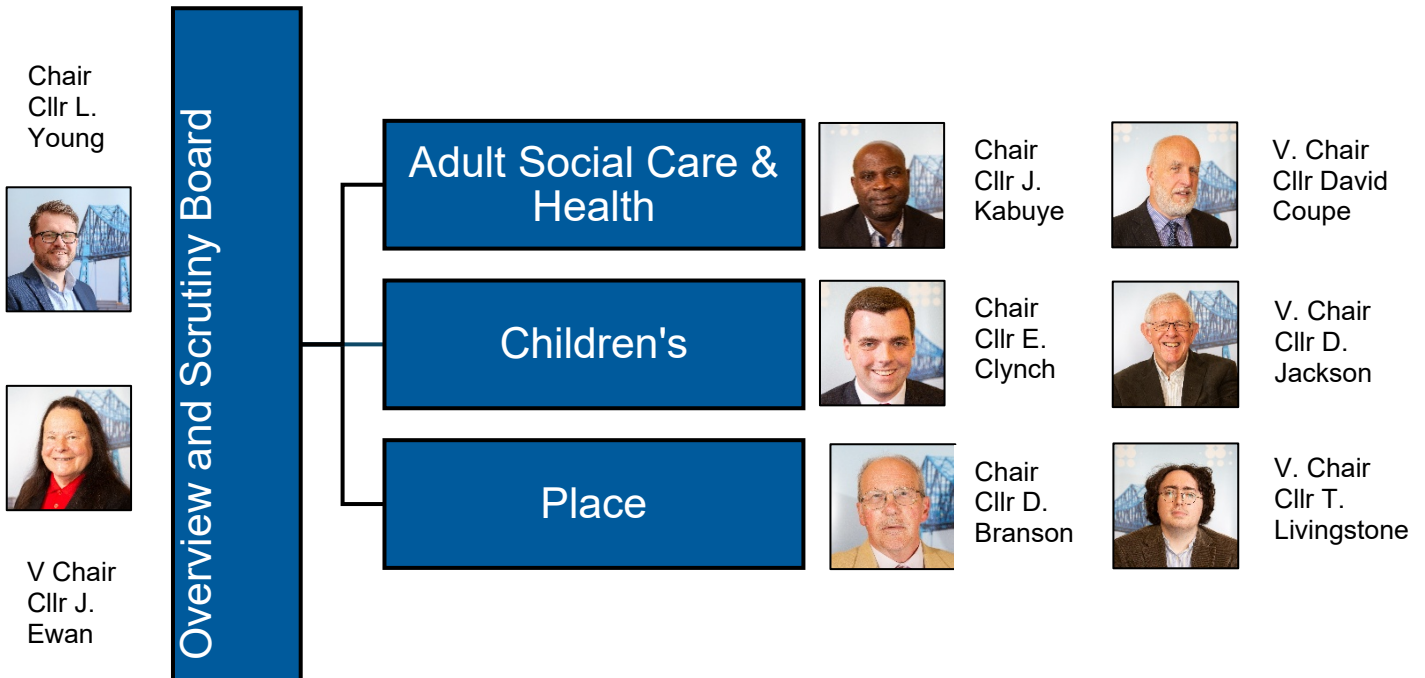


In addition to those public meetings, briefing meetings were undertaken with Chairs on a regular basis, together with informal work.

In total, five scrutiny reviews were concluded during 2025/26, generating 36 recommendations to the Executive. Two additional reviews were initiated during the year and are scheduled for completion in 2026/27, while one further review is in the drafting stage and is anticipated to be submitted in early 2026/27

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN MIDDLESBROUGH

In 2025/2026 OSB, with the support of three Scrutiny Panels carried out Middlesbrough's Scrutiny programme. Further information about Middlesbrough's Scrutiny Panels can be found on the Council's website: [Scrutiny | Middlesbrough Council](#)



DEVELOPING SCRUTINY

Scrutiny continued to develop during 2025/2026, with Members and officers undertaking several initiatives which, in addition to the work of the OSB and the work programmes of individual panels, helped to drive the scrutiny function in Middlesbrough. The following are examples of those initiatives:



- ✓ The development of the Council's first pre-decision protocol, which establishes the principles of early scrutiny intervention in decision making. The protocol is the first stage in a wider programme of work that will provide the tools and mechanisms elected members need to scrutinise decisions before they are made.
- ✓ The creation of scrutiny's first Task and Finish protocol which equips Members with the tools they need to undertake short, focused scrutiny work that complements an existing panel review.

The OSB, and its panels have a role in holding the Executive to account. This involves inviting individual portfolio holders, including the Mayor, to attend the OSB to provide an update on their respective portfolios. It is both an opportunity for the Mayor and Executive to set out their aspirations for the coming year and look back on recent successes and challenges, and for scrutiny members to identify or highlight any issues of concern or difficulty, and question what actions were planned to address them. This approach promotes cross-functional working and supports transparency, and is being expanded to individual scrutiny panels, whereby relevant

Executive Members will have a standing invitation to scrutiny panels carrying out reviews associated with their portfolios.

Scrutiny's role in the Policy Framework continues to be fully embedded within the scrutiny process in the form of reviewing the Council's major plans and strategies, as contained within the Constitution's Policy Framework.

The scrutiny function continues to play its part in joint health scrutiny arrangements with neighbouring authorities. The municipal year 2026/2027 will see Middlesbrough take its turn as the lead Authority for the Tees Valley Joint Scrutiny Committee during which the NHS will be carrying out a consultation on the merger of Tees Hospital Trusts. Middlesbrough will also hold the Chair of the Regional Scrutiny Officers group.

SCRUTINY SURVEY – FEEDBACK

A survey was issued to all members of Scrutiny Panels seeking their views on the effectiveness of scrutiny. The survey received 6 responses from 22 members, representing a response rate of 27%. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) rated scrutiny as “fairly effective”. A strong majority (83%) felt “very clear” about the respective roles of members, officers and Democratic Services in scrutiny.



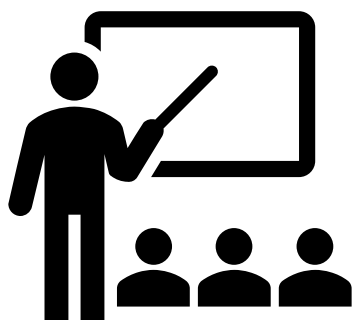
Half of respondents had taken part in training, independent research, or scrutiny-related briefings. However, 50% reported no involvement in scrutiny outside formal meetings, indicating potential scope to widen informal or developmental engagement.

Most members (83%) stated that scrutiny outcomes are only “sometimes” clear. This feedback highlights the importance of ensuring scrutiny recommendations and their outcomes remain visible to Members, and work is ongoing to strengthen processes that improve oversight and transparency in how recommendations are progressed.

Final comments were generally positive, with several Members expressing satisfaction with current arrangements and recognition of officer effort.

SUPPORTING SCRUTINY

Scrutiny Members have been supported in developing their scrutiny roles through training and development opportunities. Throughout 2025/2026 scrutiny Members have had the opportunity to attend several sessions including:



7 and 8 July 2025 - Scrutiny Workshop during which topics including meeting etiquette, Task and Finish Group guidance and Work Planning were covered.

Chairs and Vice Chair Training (delivered by the Association of Democratic Services Officers).

9 December – Pre-Decision Scrutiny Conversation which included a session on horizon scanning and topics for potential future inclusion into Scrutiny's work programme.

Scrutiny Panels are supported by relevant Democratic Services Officers. Their role is to provide Members with any research and administrative support where appropriate which can include

securing relevant witnesses to participate in the scrutiny process and to liaise with relevant service areas or key partners to ensure the scrutiny process is as robust as possible.

To ensure that the recommendations arising from scrutiny reviews are successfully implemented, the team are integrating a reporting mechanism into all scrutiny reviews. This mechanism will require updates on all recommendations to be provided to the relevant scrutiny panel within a specified timeframe. Doing so will provide scrutiny Members with the sufficient oversight to ensure agreed recommendations are implemented.

ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC



As well as being a key stakeholder during the annual work programme consultation exercises, there are several ways the public can input to the Council's overview and scrutiny process. These include suggesting topics for review, participating in meetings, contributing to surveys, and as experts and witnesses.

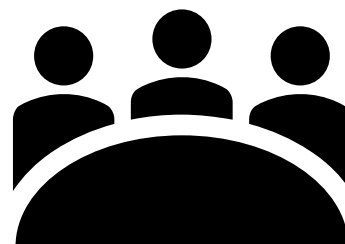
Aside from taking evidence from officers of the Council and other professionals in their field the scrutiny panels are always very interested to hear the views of the local community on matters being considered whenever it is available

To assist them in making informed decisions about policies and recommendations, Scrutiny members may find it helpful to meet with members of the public who are directly involved in the areas that are being scrutinised.

THE WORK OF THE PANELS

Scrutiny Panels aim to undertake reviews in a realistic and achievable programme and, where possible, build in capacity to consider any emerging issues.

The Scrutiny Work Programme is developed at the beginning of the Municipal Year (May/June) through a process involving consultation with both internal and external stakeholders. A call for scrutiny topics is undertaken via the Council's social media platforms, intranet bulletins and direct emails. Internal stakeholders include Scrutiny Panels, elected Members and service areas while external stakeholders include strategic partners and the public. The process also involves studying the key Council documents such as the Council Plan and its corresponding Work Plans, the Executive Forward Work Programme. Consideration of national research, Government legislation and regulations etc. is also considered.



HOW REVIEWS WERE UNDERTAKEN

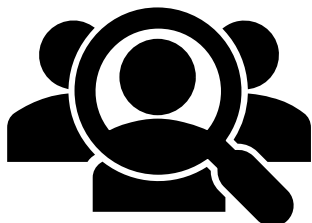
It is recognised that Scrutiny reviews need to be undertaken using a variety of methods to achieve the best results.

Instead of conducting all scrutiny business in committee environments, relying on traditional methods of receiving information, Scrutiny Members increasingly utilised tools such as Task and Finish Groups. These methods empower and enable Members to gain first-hand information from officers and organisations in their own environment.

This next section provides an outline of the reviews that have been undertaken, some of the consultation that has taken place and the positive results that have arisen. It is not the intention to recreate the Panels' final reports within this annual report. Should you wish to read one of the final reports, they are available on the Council's website (www.middlesbrough.gov.uk), or directly from the Democratic Services team.

SCRUTINY ACTIVITY (COMPLETED OR STARTED IN 2025/26)

Overview and Scrutiny Board



Reviews

- ✓ Community Cohesion (Task and Finish Group)
- ✓ Council Approach to poverty (Short Review)
- ✓ Faith and Belief in Civic Life (Short Review)

Updates

- ✓ Executive Member Updates
- ✓ Continuous Improvement Progress
- ✓ Budget and Performance Outturns
- ✓ Budget Consultation

Reviews

- ✓ Healthy Placemaking with a Focus on Childhood Obesity
- ✓ Violence Against Women and Girls

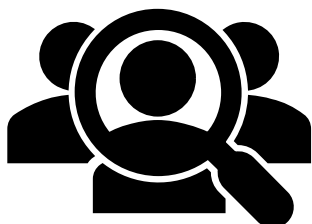
Updates

- ✓ Adult Social Care CQC Improvement Plan
- ✓ Health Determinants Research Collaboration
- ✓ Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) Annual Report
- ✓ Director of Public Health Annual Report

Adult Social Care & Health



Children's



Review

- ✓ Out of Area Specialist Provision

Updates

- ✓ South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report
- ✓ OFSTED focussed visit to the Front Door of Children's Services (December 2025).
- ✓ Corporate Director's Updates (on matters pertinent to the Panel).

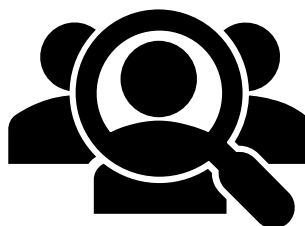
Reviews

- ✓ Barriers to Regeneration
- ✓ Middlesbrough's Bicentenary
- ✓ Council's Role in Housing

Updates

- ✓ RIPA
- ✓ PREVENT & CHANNEL
- ✓ Flood Risk Management
- ✓ Community Safety Partnership

Place



SELECT REVIEW SUMMARY

Below is a selection of reviews carried out by scrutiny in Middlesbrough this year. The reports for those reviews are available on Modern.Gov or by contacting the relevant Democratic Services Officer.

Overview and Scrutiny Board



Chair
Cllr L.
Young



V Chair
Cllr J.
Ewan

The Council's Approach to Poverty

Why?

OSB were keen to understand what, if any, policies were in place to support the Council's approach to poverty in Middlesbrough. Specifically, Members wanted to understand if the Council needed to adopt a specific poverty strategy or if it needed to embed poverty as part of its business-as-usual approach.

How?

OSB received evidence from the Chief Executive and Officers from Public Health and Resident and Business Support Services. The Board found the Council did not have a specific poverty strategy and that its approach to poverty had been contained within a business-as-usual approach via the Council's Plan thematic pillars. The Board also found the Council Plan was being refreshed which would see the Council's performance regime enhanced to allow a more joined up approach giving Council services the ability to contribute to, and report against, the poverty agenda.

What?

Members felt a dedicated poverty strategy was not necessary when existing and planned approaches were taken into consideration. The Board was satisfied that work to refresh to the Council Plan, and its associated performance frameworks, provided a more consistent approach to addressing poverty than had previously been possible. OSB were keen to ensure scrutiny had continued oversight of this issue and as such agreed to embed updates on how the Council was addressing poverty within its annual update schedule going forward.

Adult Social Care & Health



Chair
Cllr J.
Kabuye



V. Chair
Cllr David
Coupe

Healthy Placemaking with a Focus on Childhood Obesity

Why?

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel recognised that childhood obesity is a significant and long-standing challenge in Middlesbrough and a key driver of health inequalities. As such, it was keen to understand how this issue could be challenged within the context of Healthy Placemaking,

How?

The Panel considered evidence from a wide range of sources, including Public Health, Planning, Transport and Infrastructure. Members examined national and local policy frameworks, current programmes and initiatives, and detailed data on childhood obesity prevalence and its wider determinants. The review explored how the physical environment, local policy and service delivery combine to influence everyday opportunities for children and families to live healthier lives.

What?

The Panel acknowledged there were no quick wins in addressing childhood obesity. However, Members agreed that sustained, coordinated action focused on place, prevention and partnership was essential to creating the conditions for long-term improvement.

The Panel recommended a series of actions aimed at strengthening healthy placemaking and embedding health considerations across Council policies and decision-making. The Panel's recommendations contributed to ongoing work aimed to reduce childhood obesity. After identifying required improvements to the leadership of the Council's Healthy Weight Declaration, the Panel asked Leadership Management Team to provide active oversight of the declaration.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) – How to Tackle It

Why?

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel selected Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) as a review topic in recognition of its significant and complex impact both nationally and locally. Evidence presented to the Panel highlighted that VAWG represents a substantial proportion of recorded crime noting that Middlesbrough is a statistical outlier in this area, with high rates of domestic abuse and VAWG-related offences. The review also reflected the importance of early intervention, education and prevention, particularly in addressing attitudes and behaviours among young people.

How?

The Panel gathered evidence through a series of meetings with key Council officers and partners including representatives from Adult Social Care, Children's Services and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This included consideration of data, strategic priorities and services. The Panel also explored national policy context, including the Government's VAWG strategy and examined the role of education, early help and partnership working in preventing harm and supporting cultural change.

What?

The review provided the Panel with a clearer understanding of the scale and nature of VAWG locally, alongside the importance of prevention, promoting healthy relationships and challenging harmful behaviours.

The Panel identified the challenges associated with a devolved education system, where responsibility for curriculum delivery sits largely with individual schools, which can limit oversight and consistency across the area. This reinforced the importance of strong partnership working and a clear strategic role for the local authority in supporting prevention activity.

The review also led to tangible progress, with the Panel playing an integral role in initiating work towards White Ribbon accreditation. This work is now underway, with a view to strengthening the Council's commitment to tackling VAWG, promoting cultural change and embedding positive behaviours across the organisation and wider community.

Children's



Chair
Cllr E.
Clynch



V. Chair
Cllr D.
Jackson

Out of Area Specialist Provision:

Why?

The Children's Scrutiny Panel was keen to understand why the Council uses out of area provision, both in a SEND education and complex needs social care context, and to examine whether reliance on out of area provision can be reduced.

How?

The Panel examined a variety of evidence including why out of area provision and placements are necessary; what the Council's statutory duties are; understanding the needs of children and young people who may require out of area provision; where provision gaps exist; the importance of workforce training and development.

What?

The Panel acknowledged that use of out of area placements will never be completely eradicated, however, it found evidence of a strong approach to workforce development particularly within the SEND and Inclusion Service which includes a comprehensive training offer across education, health and care services, together with multi-agency training opportunities, and the implementation of a local area graduated response model. This approach has contributed to positive outcomes including a reduction in demand for specialist out of area provision through earlier intervention and strengthened inclusive practice.

The Panel also found that Children's social care teams demonstrate collaborative approaches to the commissioning and management of external and out of area placements for children with complex needs. The Panel identified several areas of best practice, including data analysis to project future demand, in order to build on internal provision as far as possible, based on need. The Panel also recognised the benefits of progressing the Regional Care Collaborative model which focuses on regional collaboration to manage regional sufficiency.

Place



Chair
Cllr D.
Branson



V. Chair
Cllr T.
Livingstone

Barriers to Regeneration

Why?

The Place Scrutiny Panel was conscious that economic growth and vitality were largely dependent on successful regeneration projects. Such projects both attracted inward investment and provided a sense of pride and stability for those living, working and visiting the town. The Panel were aware that regeneration projects could be hindered and was keen to understand what barriers existed to carrying out regeneration work and how best to overcome them.

How?

The Panel considered evidence from multiple sources, including the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Housing and officers from Neighbourhoods, Growth, Public Protection and Culture as well as external partners including Locus and Senior regeneration officers from Stockton Council. Members examined the most prevalent barriers to regeneration in the town and identified good practice from other local authorities in relation to attracting businesses to the area. The perception of anti-social behaviour was identified as a key issue and the review investigated what measures were in place to make people feel safer in Middlesbrough town centre and neighbourhoods and sought to gain an understanding of current legislation available to local authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour.

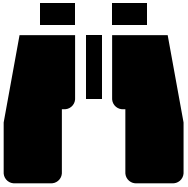
What?

Effective regeneration is in providing economic growth and vitality but also fostering a sense of pride of place in Middlesbrough. The Panel was aware the Council had been reviewing its retail/non-retail use of space as part of its regeneration projects. In view of changing retail behaviours, the Panel recommended an improved mix of uses be considered for future regeneration projects, especially those within the town centre. To achieve this the Panel also emphasised the need to focus on diversification, partnership working and improved perceptions of Middlesbrough.

The Council's Role in Housing and Middlesbrough's Bicentenary

The Panel commenced two further reviews, with overview evidence provided at meetings on "The Council's Role in Housing" and "Middlesbrough's Bicentenary". Further evidence will be provided on these subject areas during the 2026/27 municipal year.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2026/2027



During February and May each year the Council seeks suggestions for scrutiny topics from all internal and external stakeholders. The table below shows scrutiny topic suggestions that will be considered by the scrutiny function.

Overview &
Scrutiny Board



Adult Social
Care and
Health



Children's



Place





KEY CONTACTS

Email Demservices_inbox@middlesbrough.gov.uk



Charlotte Benjamin
Monitoring Officer



Ann-Marie Wilson
Statutory Scrutiny Officer

