

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

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

DATE OF MEETING: 15 July 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:

- *City of Culture Bid*
- Events & Creative Programme
- Middlesbrough Town Hall
- Middlesbrough Theatre
- Middlesbrough Museums
- Outwood Riverside
- Family Hubs
- New SEND Free School
- Complaints
- Small School Grants
- National Literacy Trust Partnership Update
- Poetry Slam

1. HIGHLIGHTS

Update:

UK City of Culture Bid 2029

- 1.1** Following Middlesbrough's longlisting for the UK City of Culture 2029, we have been busy developing our full bid in advance of the deadline set by DCMS of 10 August. UK City of Culture is a UK-wide programme for cities and large towns and has become a model for cultural place-making. The programme celebrates and supports communities to use culture as a catalyst for transforming places and creating richer lives with choices and opportunities for all, where communities feel proud of their place and empowered to change it.
- 1.2** The development of Middlesbrough's bid is being overseen by a Steering Board, chaired by the Councils CEO Erik Scollay, with representatives from the Executive and other lead partners: Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership; Teesside University; and

Tees Valley Combined Authority. The Board also includes wider representatives of our community, young people and the creative sector.

- 1.3** The Board have agreed the central vision and core narratives for our City of Culture programme and are overseeing a number of work streams, who are collectively bringing together the detail required for the bid. This includes:
- Artistic Programme
 - Community Voice
 - Youth Voice
 - Sector Development & Capital
 - Fundraising Plan
 - Business Engagement
- 1.4** We've been listening to the voices from our communities and young people to inform the programme. This includes engagement with 1,300+ young people, families and carers on a new Place Strategy for Middlesbrough. These conversations have been fed into the artistic programme team to help shape the ideas coming forward. Members of the Cultural Partnership are supporting the development of the programme ideas, alongside freelance creative producers Katy Fuller and Stella Hall.
- 1.5** DCMS (Department Culture, Media and Sport) will announce the four short-listed places in mid-October, which will be followed by visits to those places from the UK City of Culture panel members, with the winner being announced in January 2027. Being named UK City of Culture is a unique opportunity to put culture and creativity at the heart of our plans for transformation and aspirations for the future.

Events & Creative Programme

- 1.6** The latest edition to our cultural calendar, Middlesbrough Storytelling Festival kicked off on Wednesday 24 June with the NLT Middlesbrough school Poetry Slam and had a packed programme of free and low-cost activities running through a week and ending with the NLT Middlesbrough Book Boro Bash. I'd like to thank Ellen Howarth and Allison Potter MBE for their huge amount of work in creating this during the National Year of Reading.
- 1.7** The week-long, family-friendly festival, in conjunction with the National Literacy Trust, features, everything from immersive storytelling and author sessions to acoustic and poetry nights. The main festival day coincides with Orange Pip Market and created an unmissable experience in Middlesbrough Town Centre. Among the highlights from festival day were The Happy Space, a colourful inflatable storytelling dome created by Stellar Creates, performances led by young creatives from Musinc, and illustrator-led drawing workshops.
- 1.8** Orange Pip went off with a bang on 30th May for its 10-year anniversary special. Thousands came down to enjoy the sunshine, free family activities, an array of traders and dancing in the streets, with lots of positive coverage on social media. Thank you Lisa Templeman for all the work you have put in.



Middlesbrough Town Hall

1.9 We have hosted a diverse programme of events and activities at Middlesbrough Town Hall over the last few months, welcoming a wide range of audiences and partners. Highlights have included Middlesbrough Football Club's 10-year promotion celebration, Musinc Gig School and Stagecraft Performing Arts programmes, supported through HAF, charity fundraising events & conferences, and the final performances of the 2025/26 Classical Season, with the next season set to begin in September.

1.10 Audience numbers for our Classical Café events continue to grow steadily, supporting plans to expand the programme through a Classical Café on Tour initiative in 2027. Alongside this, the venue has hosted a successful programme of commercial tribute shows, comedy performances and live music events.

1.11 Additional activity has included supporting the National Literacy Trust's Storytelling Festival and piloting technician development workshops in partnership with the National Theatre, helping to provide new skills development opportunities for local theatre professionals.

1.12 In May - Silent Disco, Damian Hall, Housemasters, Wedding Fayre, Jamie Hutchinson (2 sell out nights), Too Much Too Young (sell out), Clinton Baptiste.

1.13 June - Adriana Brownlee plus a large host of community events.

1.14 July - Outdoor Theatre, Jimmy Nail, BBC Proms. Then we're into Happy Rooms till end of August!

Middlesbrough Theatre

1.15 Throughout June & July, we are delivering a programme of Council-funded school performances, providing children and young people with valuable opportunities to access live theatre and develop their own performance skills. This forms part of the 10 x 10 strategy, which enables the participants to experience theatre and perform in front of a live audience on a commercial theatre stage, helping to build confidence, creativity, and engagement with the arts.

1.16 Alongside our funded programme, we have continued to support a busy schedule of community hire performances and commercial shows. Recent highlights have included productions from Middlesbrough Scouts, Teesside Musical Theatre

Company, a new writing evening delivered in partnership with Hooley Theatre, an audience with Steve Cradock, and a range of popular musical tribute shows that have attracted strong audiences.

1.17In July, alongside our funded school performances, we are pleased to welcome back a number of returning performing arts groups, including Middlesbrough Youth Theatre, Spotlight Performing Arts, Muir School of Irish Dancing, Terpsichore Arts, RLD Dance and Fusion Dance.

1.18Finally, after an incredible 27 years, Theatre General Manager David Lindsey officially took his last curtain call in April after a career in theatre spanning 6 decades. On his final day in charge David reflected on his time in Middlesbrough adding “I’m leaving the Theatre in a strong position and with exciting plans in the pipeline, so the future really does look bright.” Kesia Bruce, as Strategic Venues Manager, now leads the management of both the Town Hall and Theatre.

1.19We will be naming the main auditorium after David Lindsey and I would like to thank Councillor Stephen Hill for his support in this.

Middlesbrough Museums

1.20In June we saw the completion of Middlesbrough Museums in Your Classroom in partnership with Beech Grove Primary School. The purpose of the project is to improve literacy, engagement, and confidence by bringing authentic artefacts and creative expertise directly into classrooms. The confidence in which the children spoke about and presented the exhibition was outstanding. The school and children are an absolute credit to Middlesbrough. We are looking to expand the capacity of the Museum team so this can be gently rolled out to other schools.

1.21Middlesbrough continues to face significant literacy challenges, with a notable proportion of pupils not meeting expected standards at Key Stage 2. This programme provides a targeted, inclusive intervention, particularly benefiting pupils less engaged by traditional approaches.

1.22This was the second year of the project, which took the following shape:

- **Cohort:** Year 6 pupils, Beech Grove Primary School
- **Theme:** World War II (curriculum-aligned)
- **Core resources:** Field telephone & propaganda posters
- **Approach:** Object-based learning + creative, multimodal activity

Extended Offer:

- Author-led storytelling workshops
- Stop-frame animation production
- Poster design and visual communication
- Local archive research (Teesside Archives)
- Pupil-created newspaper (*TS4 Times*)

1.23Independent evaluation by Teesside University showed the project to be an effective artefact-based, experiential literacy model. It significantly improves engagement,

confidence, and the application of literacy skills particularly for pupils most in need while offering a practical model for scaling cultural learning across the borough.

1.24A more in-depth description of the outcomes is described below.

1.25 Engagement as the Primary Driver

- Pupils significantly more engaged through hands-on, creative learning
- Engagement extended to critical thinking and interpretation, not just participation
- Particularly effective for pupils who struggle with traditional literacy methods

1.26 Increased Confidence (Especially Speaking & Listening)

- Strongest gains in **communication and presentation skills**
- Pupils more confident sharing ideas and speaking to peers and visitors
- Evidenced progression among previously less confident learners

1.27 Applied Literacy Skills

- Literacy demonstrated across:
 - Writing (scripts, stories, journalism)
 - Speaking & listening (collaboration, presentation)
 - Reading (growing interest beyond classroom)

1.28 Creativity, Motivation & Collaboration

- High levels of creative output and originality
- Evidence of intrinsic motivation (independent research, reading)
- Strong collaborative learning, supported by facilitation

1.29 Strategic Value

- Demonstrates a scalable, partnership-led model for cultural education
- Supports inclusive teaching practice and alternative literacy pathways
- Aligns with priorities on raising attainment, cultural access, and wellbeing
- Positions museums as active education partners, not just destinations

1.30 Key Learning

Literacy development is driven not only by skills, but by engagement, context, and meaningful experience.



Education

1.31 Progress continues to be made constructing the new Outwood Riverside school and at this stage we still expect completion and handover to be achieved by February half term 2027.

1.32 As part of the development of the local area reform plan, there were several engagement sessions to allow partners and parents and carers to inform the development of the local area plan which the Middlesbrough SEND Parent Carer Forum were represented at. Alongside this, there were 4 dedicated family activity sessions running in family hubs, an evening information session, 2 engagement sessions for children and young people and a workshop session for families facilitated by the National Development Team for Inclusion. These sessions have all contributed to the development of the local area plan, and a video has been produced outlining the approach and the importance of this work.

1.33 Further information has been provided to the DfE to support the development of the new school, specifically around the proposed changes to the age range for the school and the supporting data and rationale for this locally. We await further feedback from the DfE ahead of next steps.

Family hubs

1.34 The Best Start in Life Family Hubs and Local Area Reform plan are fully integrated focussing on a community-based delivery giving more opportunities for support from expert specialists for children with SEND via their local family hub. The grant allocation for the Experts at Hand model is due to arrive into the LA in June, and as a result we are currently in the early stage of plan delivery which is focussed on setting up an initial pilot experts at model in a family hub in one area of the town and will recruit additional staff to deliver in the new model.

1.35 The model is being designed to:

- Strengthen inclusion and early intervention
- Improve support for children with emerging SEND needs
- Reduce barriers to accessing specialist advice
- Support practitioners through consultation and coaching
- Improve transitions into education and between key phases
- Contribute directly to improved school readiness outcomes

1.36 I have received a lot of queries from parents and carers about schools not meeting their child's need. There is a clear process in place to support parents and carers who have concerns regarding a school not meeting the needs of their child.

1.37 If a parent or carer has concerns regarding the school not meeting the needs of their child then they should:

- Contact the school to discuss the problem first - some problems can be solved this way
- Make an informal complaint. The school will tell them when they respond. After they review the complaint, they will be told the outcome
- If the problem is not resolved, follow the school's complaints procedure to make a formal complaint

- Every school in England must have one. It's usually available on the school's website or from the school office and should tell you the kind of complaints the school deals with

Complaints to DfE

1.38 The parent or carers will need to complete the school's complaints procedure before complaining to DfE, unless one of the following applies:

- A child is not getting an education
- A child has been exposed to harm
- The school is stopping you from following its complaints procedure

1.39 DfE will consider the complaint. They may use the information provided to recommend improvements to school policies.

1.40 DfE cannot deal with complaints about:

- Fines for taking holidays in term time (sometimes known as a 'fixed penalty notice')
- Lack of compensation or apologies from the school
- The behaviour of school staff

1.41 If all the steps have been followed in the school's complaints procedure and believe the complaint was not dealt with correctly, parents can [complain to DfE](#).

Complaints to Ofsted

1.42 If parents have complained to the school and the problem has not been resolved, they can complain to Ofsted. This does not mean that Ofsted will then inspect the school.

1.43 They will record the complaint and may use the information provided to help them decide what areas to focus their next inspection on.

1.44 Ofsted considers complaints about things that affect the whole school rather than individuals.

Further information can be found [Complain about a school: State schools - GOV.UK](#)

1.45 If a parent contacts the LA about their concerns parents will be sign posted to the school's complaints procedure.

Small Schools Grants

1.46 The small schools grant funding for 25/26 attracted 48 schools who applied for the funding to fund a range of equipment. This included sports equipment, art equipment, sensory resources etc. Schools have shared that this funding has been beneficial to supporting children and young people.

National Literacy Trust Partnership Update

1.47 Middlesbrough continues to benefit from a strong partnership with the National Literacy Trust, which remains a key contributor to the borough's literacy and school readiness ambitions. As testament to all the fantastic work, Allison Potter has been

awarded an MBE. Her work is amazing and all of this runs alongside the statutory elements such as moderation and SATs monitoring which have both taken place in the last month.

1.48The annual Poetry Slam has once again demonstrated the creativity, confidence, and talent of Middlesbrough's young people. 700 pupils have taken part in workshops learning how to perform to audiences, improve oracy skills and have fun with words.

1.49Schools from across the borough participate in a programme of literacy-focused activities culminating in a celebratory performance event. The initiative supports:

- Speaking and listening skills
- Vocabulary development
- Confidence and self-expression
- Oracy and communication
- Engagement with reading and writing

1.50Feedback from schools has been extremely positive, with pupils demonstrating high levels of enthusiasm and participation.

1.51Over 900 primary school children took part in the Big Boro Book Bash this year, which included interactive work shops with Lisette Auton, Gary Northfield and Robin Stevens, along with poet, musician and song writer Sara Dennis. Each child took home a Pheonix comic and book, as well as a doodle pad.