

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

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

DATE OF MEETING: 09 September 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:

1. HIGHLIGHTS

Update:

- Middlesbrough Mela
- Archives
- BBC Proms
- NPO Programme
- Venues Equipment Programme
- City of Culture Bid
- Community Learning
- Best Start Family Hubs
- SEND
- Access to Education

Culture

1.1 Middlesbrough Mela

1.1.1 Middlesbrough Mela returned to Albert Park on Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 August. The event brought communities together to celebrate and promote the diverse cultures within the region by playing host to a high-quality programme of world class music covering a rich mix of hip hop, Bhangra and traditional Asian sounds, Market Bazaar, street theatre, family fun zone and fun fair. Across the weekend, it is estimated more than 50,000 visitors came through the park. The programme featured a headline Michael Jackson tribute act on the Saturday and Miss Pooja headlined on Sunday.

1.1.2 I'd like to thank the Mela Committee and especially Kash and John for the work they put in to make this event so successful.

1.2 Archives

- 1.2.1** After a long slog, the born Digital Preservation programme was agreed with the other Local Authorities in Teesside. The team are now populating the system and developing policies in order to manage the material that we retain. Work is going well, but it will be a little while before we can make it accessible to the public.

1.3 BBC Proms

- 1.3.1** Middlesbrough Town Hall successfully hosted the BBC Proms for the first time in July 2026, marking a significant milestone for the Venue and Middlesbrough's cultural programme. Delivered in partnership with BBC & The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, the event welcome a sell out audience and brought one of the UK's most prestigious music festivals to the town. The Town Hall team did an outstanding job on the evening and its run up. Thank you to everyone on the team.

1.4 NPO Programme

- 1.4.1** Musinc have continued delivery of weekly music engagement sessions, providing accessible opportunities for young people and communities across Middlesbrough. Through the Holiday Activity Funding Musinc & MTH hosted Gig School, Industry and Stagecraft Performing Arts activity, giving young people practical experience of music, performance and the wider creative industries. As well as their fun days, reading to the beat and classic programming.
- 1.4.2** Musinc's young people have also played an active role in the wider cultural activity across Middlesbrough, including Orange Pip Market, Middlesbrough Mela and Middlesbrough Storytelling festival, where young producers helped lead stage activity alongside young performers.

1.5 Update on Venues Equipment Programme

- 1.5.1** Procurement is ongoing for upgrades to Middlesbrough Town Hall & Middlesbrough Theatre's capital works and equipment upgrades. The upgrades include updating the Theatre rigging system, purchase of a new PA for MTH Main Hall, upgrades to lighting across both Venues spaces and air conditioning for Middlesbrough Theatre.

1.6 UK City of Culture 2029 Bid

- 1.6.1** Middlesbrough's bid for UK City of Culture 2029 was submitted to DCMS on 10 August. The bid, led by Middlesbrough Council, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Teesside University and Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership, will now be reviewed by the UK City of Culture Expert Advisory Panel, who will shortlist four cities from the long list of nine. The shortlisted cities are expected to be announced towards the end of October.
- 1.6.2** If Middlesbrough makes the shortlist, the judging panel will visit in person during November/December, before the winning city is announced in January 2027. Between the submission and the shortlist announcement, the bid partners will continue work across several areas including delivery of a communications programme to build momentum, plus developing our proposed governance and

delivery structures, which would need to be in place for January if we were to be successful.

1.6.3 A full briefing for elected members is being planned for Tuesday 22 September.

Community Learning

1.7 Employment and Skills Hub

1.7.1 The employment and Skills Hub has opened to the public on the 1st August 2026 as a soft launch, there will be an official open day on the 3rd September where the hub will be opened by the Mayor and myself, as Deputy Mayor. Classes recommence 8th September 2026.

1.8 NEETS (Not in Education Employment or Training)

- 1.8.1** MCL (Middlesbrough Community Learning) is working closely with the MBC NEET team on the delivery of the trailblazer project, we have 39 funded placements for 5 months for young people 18-24 and funding to provide training and resources to help them secure employment. Delivery commences next week.
- 1.8.2** We are also working with Middlesbrough college to pilot a foundation apprenticeship alongside South Tees in health and social care and are aiming to recruit some young people from the NEET group to offer these opportunities too.
- 1.8.3** We also have a contract with the DWP and have worked with 205 young people since April 2026 to provide information advice and guidance and support with job search alongside the DWP advisers who are based in our employment and skills hub each day.
- 1.8.4** We are also working with our AP (alternative provision) to develop a pathway for AP leavers to access employment support from the employment and skills hub.

Education

1.9 Best Start Family Hubs – Progress

- 1.9.1** Middlesbrough has continued to transform its Family Hub model, with a stronger emphasis on education, school readiness, parenting, inclusion, and early intervention.
- 1.9.2** The developing model brings together education, health, early help, SEND and family support and is increasingly focused on creating a coherent pathway from pregnancy through to starting school.
- 1.9.3** Key developments include the Middlesbrough Commitment, borough-wide Reception Transition Protocol, Launchpad for Literacy, WellComm, the Literacy Pathway, Parent Champions, Experts at Hand and an integrated School Readiness Framework.
- 1.9.4** There has also been significant success in increasing access to early education. Middlesbrough achieved 106% take-up of the Department for

Education's extended childcare expansion, demonstrating the effectiveness of partnership working between providers, Family Hubs, Schools, and Council services.

- 1.9.5** The next phase is to strengthen the connection between Family Hub reach, participation, and educational outcomes, enabling us to understand how many families access services and the impact that engagement makes to children's development and readiness for school.

1.10 School Readiness Workstream

- 1.10.1** The Education Alliance Board School Readiness Workstream continues to provide the strategic framework for bringing schools, PVI providers, childminders, Family Hubs, health, and wider partners together around a common ambition for children from birth to five.

- 1.10.2** The workstream has deliberately moved school readiness away from being viewed solely as an early years or reception issue. It is now a shared system responsibility, with a stronger focus on communication and language, early literacy, parenting and the home learning environment, SEND and inclusion, attendance at early education and effective transition.

- 1.10.3** The Middlesbrough Commitment and Reception Transition Protocol are creating greater consistency between providers, while WellComm, Launchpad for Literacy and the Literacy Pathway are strengthening the focus on communication, language, and early literacy. The evidence available indicates improved collaboration between schools, PVI providers and health professionals and stronger arrangements for early identification and intervention.

1.11 Phonics

- 1.11.1** The Family Hub and School Readiness programme is increasingly supporting this ambition before children reach statutory phonics assessment. Launchpad for Literacy, the Literacy Pathway, National Literacy Trust activity, book gifting and workforce development are intended to strengthen the foundations of communication, language, and early reading.

- 1.11.2** The next stage will be to use the final 2026 Phonics data alongside GLD outcomes to identify the relationship between children's performance at the end of Reception and their subsequent success in Phonics, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and children with SEND.

1.12 Provisional 2026 Outcomes

- 1.12.1** The provisional 2026 Key Stage 2 outcomes are particularly encouraging and demonstrate improvement in several important measures.

- 1.12.2** The combined Reading, Writing and Mathematics measure has increased from 61.9% in 2025 to 63.2% in 2026, a 1.3 percentage-point improvement. This moves Middlesbrough from 0.1 percentage points below national in 2025 to 0.2 percentage points above national in 2026.

1.12.3 Writing remains a particular strength at 73.8%, compared with the national figure of 73%, placing Middlesbrough 0.8 percentage points above national.

1.12.4 Maths has improved from 73.4% to 74.4%, reducing the distance from the national position to just 0.6 percentage points.

1.12.5 Reading remains an area requiring further attention. Middlesbrough stands at 73.2% compared with 75% nationally, leaving a 1.8 percentage-point gap.

1.12.6 This provides a clear priority for 2026/27 and reinforces the importance of the borough's work on literacy beginning in the earliest years.

1.12.7 This is important because it moves the Council away from viewing individual programmes or attainment measures in isolation. Instead, it provides the basis for understanding how investment and intervention during the earliest years can contribute to a holistically improved educational outcomes over time.

1.13 *Priorities for 2026/27*

1.13.1 The next phase will focus on accelerating improvement while reducing inequalities. Priorities will include increasing GLD and narrowing gaps between groups; strengthening communication, language and early literacy; improving Year 1 Phonics towards the 90% ambition; maintaining the improvement in KS2 combined outcomes; addressing the remaining reading gap; embedding the Middlesbrough Commitment and Reception Transition Protocol; and using Family Hub, education and community intelligence more systematically to target support.

1.14 *Executive Member Summary*

1.14.1 There is a positive and increasingly measurable direction of travel:

- Middlesbrough has secured more than £1.3 million to transform its Family Hub offer, achieved 106% take-up of the expanded childcare entitlement
- Increased GLD (Good Level of Development) to 66.2%
- Phonics increased to 77.1%
- Provisional 2026 KS2 results show 63.2% achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined – 0.2 percentage points above the national figure

1.14.2 The challenge now is to accelerate improvement and ensure that progress is experienced equally by children across Middlesbrough.

1.14.3 The strategic approach for 2026/27 will therefore be to strengthen the line of sight from Best Start → School Readiness → GLD → Phonics → KS2, using data and intelligence to identify where intervention has the greatest impact and ensuring that resources are targeted towards children, families and communities where inequalities remain.

1.14.4 This supports the Council's ambition to give every child the best start in life while demonstrating that early investment, strong partnership working and a

relentless focus on educational outcomes are beginning to translate into measurable improvement.

1.15 Local Area SEND Reform Plan

- 1.15.1** On 23 February 2026, the Government published it's Schools White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' and its proposals regarding the SEND Reforms in a detailed consultation 'Putting Children and Young People First'.
- 1.15.2** In response to this, the Local Authority submitted a detailed Local Area Reform Plan to the DfE in June outlining the local area partnership delivery plan for Middlesbrough.
- 1.15.3** If successfully approved by the DfE, the Local Area Reform Plan could unlock a stability grant to the value of up to 90% of historical cumulative DSG (Dedicated School Grant) deficit. The Local Authority will be notified of the outcome of this by the DfE in September 2026.
- 1.15.4** To enable the shift in practice and capacity required to deliver the reforms, Middlesbrough Council was awarded a £1.48m Experts at Hand Grant Allocation from the DfE in June. As a result, work towards the operationalisation of the Local Area Reform Plan has now begun.

1.16 SEND Free School

- 1.16.1** Work continues with the Department for Education regarding the new 100 place secondary age free school for neurodiversity and communication needs. The school offers significant opportunity for additional capacity within the system locally and the plans for development of the new school will be fully integrated into the Local Area SEND Reform Plan to ensure as many children as possible benefit from the new provision.

1.17 Exclusions

- 1.17.1** Academic Year 2025-26 has seen a reduction in the number of permanent exclusions issued by Middlesbrough Schools. This is the fourth consecutive year that there has been a reduction and there is evidence of the rate plateauing and beginning to reduce.
- 1.17.2** The most frequent reason for exclusion continues to be persistent disruptive behaviour. This is in line with previous years where this reason was the most commonly recorded and is in line with both regional and national data.

Academic Year	Total Number of Permanent Exclusions
2023-24	111
2024-25	106
2025-26	99

1.18 Access to Education

- 1.18.1** Construction of the new school at Middlehaven is on track and is scheduled to open early 2027. The contractor expects to reach practical completion and hand the building over to OGAT in January 2027. The academy is planning to “move in” during February half term. Fantastic views of the Transporter Bridge from the 2nd and 3rd floor classrooms are sure to give the students a real sense of belonging.
- 1.18.2** Overall school attendance improved slightly over the last year, and primary school attendance is now at the national average, which is a real cause for celebration. The LA is reviewing the structure of the attendance support team, with the aim of strengthening it over the next year to provide all schools, and particularly those experiencing attendance difficulties to be able to access bespoke expert support when they need it.
- 1.18.3** The Virtual School has supported looked after children attending school in Middlesbrough and further afield. The Virtual School is planning a celebration of progress and achievement for looked after children in the autumn term.