Item No. 6

SUNDERLAND HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD **3 July 2025**

BETTER CARE FUND 2025/2026 SUBMISSION AND 2024/2025 END OF YEAR REPORT

Report of the Director of the South Tyneside & Sunderland Local Delivery Team, North East and North Cumbria (NENC), Integrated Care Board (ICB)

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To provide Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) members with assurance that:

- The 2025/2026 Better Care Fund (BCF) plan has been submitted in-line with national conditions and local need.
- The 2024/2025 BCF "End of Year Report" has been submitted in-line with national requirements.

2.0 Background

2.1 The BCF is a national integration transformation programme that aims to support improved transformation of local health and care provision through better integration of NHS and Local Authority-funded health and care services.

2.2 The BCF is supported by a policy and planning framework, that sets out national expectations for Integrated Care Board and Local Authorities, to guide the annual BCF planning process and to ensure minimum levels of investment are protected within local planning arrangements. The HWB has a statutory role in assuring these plans and subsequent reporting arrangements.

2.3 In September 2023, the Sunderland Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), formally delegated the sign-off of Sunderland's BCF quarterly monitoring and end of year reports to the Place Committee and Partnership Board in-common. The reports are used regionally and nationally to:

- Assess performance against BCF metrics, based on locally agreed target trajectories, and seek assurance on any variations from target.
- Assess expected and actual capacity and demand for hospital discharge and community pathways.
- Assess financial outturn and identify areas of under/over-spend.
- Assess key strengths and challenges within the 2024/25 reporting period, with specific reference to the enablers articulated within the Social Care Institute for Excellence's (SCIE), 'Logic model for integrated care'

3.0 Sunderland Better Care Fund 2025/2026 Submission

3.1 Sunderland's Better Care Fund (BCF) for 2025-26 is a joint plan developed by Sunderland City Council and the North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB), overseen by the Sunderland Health & Wellbeing Board. The vision for the 2025/26 BCF plan, mirrors ambitions set out in Sunderland's Healthy City Plan (HCP) for "*everyone in Sunderland to lead healthy, happy lives, with no one left behind*".

3.2 The BCF serves as a key vehicle for integrating health and social care commissioning to achieve two main BCF policy objectives:

- supporting the shift from sickness to prevention and,
- helping people to live independently and move from hospital to home.

3.3 For 2025-26, Sunderland has undertaken a strategic "refresh" and "restructure" of its BCF schemes, aligning them with the national Neighbourhood health guidelines 2025/26. The plan is now organised into three "super" schemes that reflect national neighbourhood health aims:

- **Scheme 1:** NHS and Social Care working together to prevent people spending unnecessary time in hospital or care homes.
- **Scheme 2:** Strengthening Primary and Community based care to enable more people to be supported closer to home or work.
- **Scheme 3:** Connecting people accessing health and care to wider public services and third sector support.

3.4 Key priorities for 2025-26 include:

- Implementing significant transformation programmes, including a System Diagnostic programme with Newton Europe and a Care Closer to Home programme.
- Adopting a "*home first*" approach, supported by a review of Community Equipment Services (CES) and transformation work aimed at enhancing urgent and emergency care flow.
- Conducting a dedicated review of BCF expenditure distribution in Summer 2025 to account for inflation and finalised NHS budgets.
- Improving data sharing, quality, and understanding through a 12-month roadmap of activities.
- Reprofiling BCF schemes to align to neighbourhood level delivery in order to provide a robust commissioning and financial framework that incentivises provided-led collaboration through pooled budgeting and shared accountability. Schemes will centre on the three aims of neighbourhood delivery, with senior sponsorship from Graham King (Director for Adult Services) who will head up Scheme 1: "NHS and social care working together to prevent people spending unnecessary time in hospital or care homes"; Scott Watson (NENC ICB Delivery Director for South Tyneside and Sunderland) who will head-up Scheme 2: "Strengthening Primary and community-based care to enable more people to access care closer to home or work"; and Gerry Taylor (Executive Director of Public Health and Wellbeing) who will head-up Scheme 3:

"Connecting people to accessing health and care to wider public services and third sector support, including social care, public health and other local government services".

Financial Summary

3.5 The total BCF budget for Sunderland for 2025-26 is £62,660,490. The funding is composed of the following sources:

- NHS Minimum Contribution: £34,531,086
- Local Authority Better Care Grant: £23,049,520
- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG): £5,032,092
- Additional LA Contribution: £47,792

3.6 The plan confirms that the planned spend from the NHS minimum contribution on Adult Social Care services is £12,144,580, which exceeds the minimum required spend of £10,384,145. An additional voluntary contribution of £47,792 from the local authority has been included for "Nap Pad," provisions which aims to ensure that homeless individuals continue to benefit from home-first improvements to discharge pathways.

3.7 Key areas of expenditure include:

- Domiciliary Care Packages: £12,796,007
- Housing Adaptations (DFG): £4,509,210
- Residential/Nursing Care Placements: £4,115,760
- NHS Funding for Domiciliary Care Packages: £4,115,760

Summary of Key Metrics

3.8 The plan sets goals for three national metrics, using a consistent ICB-wide approach.

1) *Emergency admissions to hospital for people aged 65+ per 100,000 population*
    - **Rationale:** The goal is based on historical performance, uplifted for average non-elective growth, and adjusted for forecasted reductions from Urgent Community Response (UCR) and Virtual Wards. The average rate for April-November 2025 is forecast to be slightly higher than the previous year.
    - **Target:** The plan sets monthly targets, starting at a rate of 1917.89 in April 2025 and rising to 2310.87 in January 2026.

2) *Average length of discharge delay for all acute adult patients*
    - **Rationale:** The goal is based on an expected 7.8% increase in overall hospital spells, with a planned 8.5% uplift in the number of patients discharged on their discharge ready date, which equates to a 0.5% improvement. A 3% reduction in delays for those not discharged on time is also forecast, linked to planned programmes of work.

- **Target:** The monthly planned average delay ranges from 0.648 days in December 2025 to 1.082 days in November 2025.

3) *Long-term admissions to residential and nursing care homes for people aged 65+ per 100,000 population*
    - **Rationale:** The target is based on findings from the system diagnostic of in- and out-of-hospital patient flow which indicated that 9% of people on hospital discharge pathway P3, and 5% of those stepping up from the community, could have achieved a different, non-residential outcome.
    - **Target:** The plan aims for a cumulative rate of 877.07 per 100,000 over the year, a reduction from the 2024-25 estimated rate of 964.10. The planned number of admissions is 514 for 2025-26, down from an estimated 565 in the previous year.

3.9 The full, detailed 2025/2026 submission has been embedded within Appendix A for reference.

4.0 Sunderland Better Care Fund End of Year Report 2024/2025

Financial Summary

4.1 The 2024/2025 BCF fund remained balanced at year-end, with both income and expenditure matching the planned total, as set out below:

- Total planned BCF pooled fund: £50,281,000
- Total actual income: £50,281,000
- Total actual expenditure: £50,281,000

4.2 The 2024/2025 income streams can be broken down as below:

- NENC ICB (NHS Minimum Contribution): £28,883,000
- iBCF (Improved Better Care Fund/LA): £17,398,000
- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG): £4,000,000

4.3 2024/25 expenditure was allocated across various schemes aimed at integrating health and social care services. Key areas of spend can be broken down into the following categories:

Redefined Scheme Category	**Expenditure**	**%**
01. Admission Avoidance	£909,254	2%
02. Bed-based Intermediate Care	£4,765,566	8%
03. Carer & Advocacy Support	£1,373,000	2%
04. Community Equipment, Wheelchairs and Tech Enabled Care	£7,855,421	13%
05. Discharge Support	£2,109,219	3%
06. Domiciliary Care	£7,947,862	13%

07. Home-based Intermediate Care	£11,208,706	18%
08. Housing Adaptations and Handyperson Services	£4,511,579	7%
09. Infrastructural Support	£711,759	1%
10. Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism	£6,978,201	11%
11. Residential Placements	£3,284,859	5%
12. Broader Community-based Support	£10,304,649	17%
TOTAL BCF:	**£61,960,075**	**100%**

Table 1: BCF 2024/2025 Expenditure Breakdown

Key Areas for Improvement

4.4 Key areas for improvement identified within the report are outlined below:

- Avoidable admissions rates for over-65s.
- Rate of discharge to usual place of residence
- Rate of permanent admissions to residential care for over-65s.
- Managing spend in relation to Community Equipment Services (CES).

4.5 The report identifies key action taken to address off-target metrics for both avoidable admissions and permanent admissions to residential care. These actions build-on:

  - The findings and recommendations of the 2023/2024 system diagnostic.
  - Work-to-date in relation to Care Closer to Home (e.g., virtual ward roll-out, care coordination hub development, proactive care in communities).
  - The system improvement programme with South Tyneside (i.e., improvements in discharge and intermediate care provisions).

4.6 In relation to CES spend, a CES review is currently awaiting CES Board approval and is scheduled for discussion at the Health and Care Alliance (HCA) in June. The review will support action to address CES spend in the 2025/2026 Better Care Fund (BCF). The BCF Implementation and Monitoring Group will keep committee informed of any BCF implications via routine BCF reporting into Place Committee arrangements.

4.7 The report also notes challenges regarding data quality and access, and joint commissioning arrangements, particularly in light of ongoing health reforms and respective Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Local Authority (LA) efficiency programmes. The remit of the BCF Implementation and Monitoring Group is being updated to address these challenges, and a system-wide efficiency approach (agreed at the Place Committee in May 2025), will help manage ongoing challenges related to potential BCF funding gaps and/or changes.

Highlighted Successes

4.8.1 The report highlights successes of the 2024/2025 BCF in achieving target trajectories for falls admissions among those aged over-65, with specific reference to the impact of the falls strategy on system-wide action to prevent falls, including improved data sharing, the ongoing investment in strength and balance programmes, and the implementation of the online falls assessment process. In addition, the report notes the buoyancy of the Home Care market in promoting improved discharge pathways, including timeliness of discharge and improved access to discharge to assess. The report also notes the increased flexibility and resource optimisation within reablement provision.

4.8.2 The report additionally acknowledges the findings and recommendations of the Strategic BCF Review and anticipates its positive impact on the leadership and governance of the 2025/26 BCF and beyond.

Impact Summary

4.9 The Better Care Fund has been instrumental in fostering a collaborative approach between the Sunderland City Council and the NHS, leading to more integrated and person-centred services. Key achievements and impacts highlighted in the report include:

- **Successful integration:** The BCF continues to support a joint commissioning agenda, strengthening the integration of health and social care. This has enabled the development of a 'one team' approach across services including Recovery at Home and Community Integrated Teams.
- **Improved community support:** Investments have enhanced community-based services, helping to manage demand for more acute care settings. The reduction in permanent admissions to residential and nursing care is a key success, indicating that more people are being supported to live independently in their own homes for longer.
- **Focus on prevention and early intervention:** Schemes funded through the BCF have a strong focus on preventing needs from escalating. This includes investment in reablement services, assistive technology, and support for carers, all of which contribute to better outcomes and reduced pressure on statutory services.

4.10 A full, detailed copy of the Sunderland End of Year BCF Report 2024/2025 has been included in Appendix B.

5.0 Contribution to delivering the Healthy City Plan

5.1 The BCF continues to support the delivery of the HCP with a specific focus on leveraging the value and opportunity of integrated commissioning in the promotion of effective delivery of health and care-related priorities, including addressing health care inequalities and promoting improved integration of services to support preventative and proactive person-centred care.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

a. Agree the 2025/2026 BCF planning approach, including reprofiling local BCF schemes and leadership arrangements in-line with neighbourhood health guidelines (see section 3.4)
b. Agree the narrative and conclusions of the BCF 2024/2025 End of Year Report, as assured by the Sunderland Place Committee.