



Northumberland

County Council

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Date: 10 August 2023

Better Care Fund Plan 2023-2025

Report of Councillor Wendy Pattison, Adult Wellbeing

Executive Director: Neil Bradley – Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing

Purpose of report

To request the Board formally to sign off the Northumberland Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan 2023-25, and to make proposals about the sign-off process for future BCF plans.

Recommendations

The Board is recommended:

- 1. To sign off the BCF Plan annexed to this report as Annex A (narrative plan) and Annex B (spreadsheet plan)**
- 2. To delegate to the Council's statutory Director of Adult Social Services (currently the Executive Director for Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing) the authority to sign off any future BCF planning submissions, if the nationally-set timetable makes it impracticable for the Board to do so before the submission date, provided that a draft of the submission has been circulated to all Board members for comment, and no issues have been raised which require fuller discussion at a Board meeting before sign-off.**

Link to Corporate Plan

The BCF supports the Tackling Inequalities objective in the Corporate Plan 2023-2026 of all adults living well, regardless of age, background, illness or disability.

Key issues

- 1. The Better Care Fund is a funding mechanism introduced from 2015/16, whose original objective was to require local authorities and NHS bodies in each area to develop joint plans for a substantial element of their funding to support an integrated approach to services at the interface between the community and acute hospitals. Initially its**

intended objective was to reduce growth in emergency admissions; over time the main focus has shifted to reducing delayed discharges from hospital.

2. Over time, a number of further elements of funding have been added to the sums originally required to be covered by BCF plans. Over the years the Fund has supported some new initiatives in Northumberland, but most of the available funding is committed to maintain existing core community health and social care services.
3. The main new funding element this year is a specific Discharge Funding grant, consisting of an NHS element and a local authority element. Schemes planned to be funded from the NHS element include additional intermediate care capacity during the winter and additional funding for NEAS. The local authority element will be used flexibly to support costs associated with hospital discharge, and to fund the costs of a block contract for specialist care home support for older people whose dementia is causing them to behave in ways which mainstream care homes for older people find difficult to accommodate because of risks to the person themselves, other residents or staff. Older people in this category are among the hardest to find suitable accommodation for after acute hospital treatment.

Better Care Fund Plan 2023-2025

BACKGROUND

1. Background

- 1.1 For a number of years, local authorities and local NHS commissioners have received details of the conditions they are required to meet in their plan for the use of the Better Care Fund after the beginning of the financial year to which the plan relates, and have received confirmation of approval of this plan some months later. Plans for 2023/24 were only formally approved in January this year, and additional BCF funding to support discharges from hospital was confirmed in mid-November 2022 with a separate plan required by mid-December.
- 1.2 In practice, since the funding supports core community health and social care services, both the local NHS and the Council have largely continued with previous patterns of expenditure in each year, without waiting for formal approval of the BCF plan.
- 1.3 Planning requirements for the current financial year were published considerably earlier than in recent years, though still slightly after the start of the financial year, on 4 April 2023. However we did not until 19 May receive details of the reporting which is required about the use of the main new element of the grant – funding specifically for support to enable early discharges from hospital. It was therefore not possible to present a draft BCF plan to the 8 June meeting of the Board before the submission date of 28 June, so an oral report was provided to the Board on what were expected to be the main points of the plan, and a draft report was circulated to all Board members for comment before the submission date.
- 1.4 All comments received from Board members were supportive, with a few detailed comments about specific presentational points which have been reflected in the final submitted versions accompanying this report.
- 1.5 After submitting the plan on 28 June, we received some comments from the regional panel established by NHS England to assure the plans. These requested further detail on some points. The attached version includes this further detail, which does not change the substance of the plan or the planned allocation of expenditure. NHS England expect to issue letters confirming approval of plans by 8 September.
- 1.6 The submitted plans are in principle two-year plans, though some of the financial allocations to local areas are said to be provisional, so the expenditure plans for the second year are at this stage only indicative. Planning guidance also states that the Department of Health and Social Care may revise the conditions attached to the Discharge Fund for 2023/24 after analysing information about the use of discharge funding allocated in 2022/23. It is not clear what (if any) further planning documents may be required during the two-year period.

2. The process for Board sign-off

- 2.1 Planning guidance for the BCF requires that plans are signed off by or on behalf of the Health and Wellbeing Board. However in practice timetabling issues have generally meant that it has not been practicable to present a near final version of the BCF plan to the Board for sign off – and NHS England's BCF planning template reflects this by asking whether the Plan has been signed off yet at the date of submission, and requiring confirmation that it has received Board sign-off afterwards if not. Slightly different approaches have in practice been adopted in different years, depending in part on whether there are any substantially new elements in the Plan. In some years plans have been signed off by the Chair of the Board or by the responsible Executive Director; in other years a Board meeting has been asked to sign them off.
- 2.2 The second recommendation in this report is intended to formalise the position and ensure that the Board has adequate oversight of our joint plans.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy	The plan support the council's long-standing policy of aiming to ensure that people do not have to stay in hospital when they no longer need to be there because no suitable community support is available for them.
Finance and value for money	BCF income and expenditure formed part of the Council's budget adopted in February.
Legal	There is a formal partnership agreement between the Council and the ICB under Section 75 of the NHS Act 2006 covering the joint arrangements for the use of BCF funding, which will be updated as necessary.
Procurement	Most Council expenditure on commissioned services included in the BCF plan will be within the terms of existing contracts. Any commissioned services outside those terms will be procured in line with the Council's usual processes.
Human Resources	No direct implications have been identified.
Property	No implications.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Equality issues will be considered as part of individual assessments when arranging care and support services.

Risk Assessment	No risks specifically linked to the use of BCF funding have been identified.
Crime & Disorder	No implications have been identified.
Customer Considerations	Services funded through the BCF provide vital support for ill and disabled people.
Carbon reduction	No direct implications have been identified.
Health and wellbeing	Services funded through the BCF support ill and disabled people to live well.
Wards	All

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background documents for this report within the meaning of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report.

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Stephen Gerrard
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Executive Director	Neil Bradley
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Wendy Pattison

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