

South Tyneside Partnership

Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: 28 May 2026

Better Care Fund – End of Year Report 2025-2026

Report of: Vicki Pattinson, Director of Adult Social Services and Commissioning, South Tyneside Council and Lynn Wilson, Director of Commissioning, Neighbourhood Central Team, NHS NENC ICB.

Why Has this Report Come to the Health and Wellbeing Board?

1. To provide an update of the submitted 'Better Care Fund (BCF) End of Year Report 2025/26' on behalf of South Tyneside
2. To provide an update from NHS England on the Better Care Fund 2025-26 submission which was approved with one local condition.
3. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to acknowledge the progress made and the challenges identified.

Which Outcome is this Linked to Within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and How?

4. The Better Care Fund supports delivery of multiple outcomes within the South Tyneside Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, particularly through its focus on prevention, independence and integrated working.
5. In practical terms, the 2025-2026 BCF End of Year (EOY) plan contributed to the following priority outcomes:
 - **Safe and Healthy Places to Live** – through neighbourhood-based MDTs, Home First pathways and the use of DFG to support people to return home safely and remain independent.
 - **Good Mental Wellbeing and Social Connectivity** – by enabling early intervention, community-based support and stronger links with voluntary and community sector partners as part of neighbourhood delivery.
 - **Fair Delivery of Services** – through consistent neighbourhood models, clearer pathways and reduced variation in access to reablement, discharge support and community services.
 - **Public Involvement** – through feedback from people using reablement and intermediate care services, which informs continuous service improvement.
6. Overall, the BCF plan supports the Strategy's ambition to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and deliver more responsive, community-based care.

How Does This Report Contribute to the Cross Cutting Theme(s)?

7. The plan strengthens prevention, integrated working, population insight, productivity and effectiveness of services, equality of access and transparency through joint governance and pooled budget arrangements.

Purpose of the Report

8. This report provides the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) with an end of year update on delivery of the Better Care Fund (BCF) for 2025–26. It reflects on performance across the year, highlights key achievements and challenges, and summarises how learning from 2025–26 is shaping delivery going into 2026–27. The report is based on the submitted BCF End of Year return and aligned with national reporting requirements.

Context and Background

9. Under national Better Care Fund requirements, local authorities and Integrated Care Boards are required to submit an annual End of Year Report, signed off by the Health and Wellbeing Board. In South Tyneside, the BCF continues to be a core mechanism for supporting integrated working between health, social care and the voluntary sector, with a strong focus on prevention, Home First and neighbourhood-based models of care.
10. Throughout 2025–26, BCF delivery has operated alongside wider system transformation, including the development of neighbourhood multidisciplinary teams, implementation of the Guiding You Home programme and continued delivery of Care Closer to Home principles. Governance and oversight have been provided through the BCF Working Group, with reporting through Alliance and HWBB structures.

Summary of End of Year Performance

11. The 2025–26 End of Year return provides a mixed but realistic picture of system performance.

Key themes from the year include:

- Continued progress in embedding Home First and reducing reliance on long-term residential placements.
- Improvement in discharge practice following changes to ward-based discharge arrangements.
- Ongoing system pressure impacting emergency admissions, discharge flow and reablement throughput.
- Financial pressures linked to Community Equipment Services and domiciliary care, reflecting increased acuity and Care Closer to Home delivery.

Key Achievements in 2025–26

- **Home First and Discharge Improvements:**
A significant improvement during 2025–26 was the move to ward-based Hospital Discharge Teams. This strengthened joint decision-making, improved relationships between health and social care staff and supported more appropriate discharge outcomes. Pathway 3 discharges into long-term care reduced, reinforcing Home First as the default approach.
- **Reduction in Permanent Admissions to Residential Care**
Data for 2025–26 indicates that permanent admissions to residential and nursing care for people aged 65+ remained below expectations. This reflects the positive impact of reablement, intermediate care and community-based support, demonstrating progress in supporting people to remain independent for longer.
- **Intermediate Care and Reablement**
Borrowdale and Haven Court continued to play a critical role in supporting recovery and return to independence. These services have shown the benefits of coordinated assessment, goal-focused rehabilitation and joint working across teams.
- **Strengthened System Learning**
Learning from the Strategic BCF Review and the South Tyneside & Sunderland system diagnostic informed in-year improvements and laid the foundation for stronger governance, clearer pathways and a more consistent operational model going forward.

Key Challenges and Areas for Improvement

12. Despite progress, several challenges persisted during 2025–26:

- **Emergency admissions for people aged 65+** remained above locally agreed trajectories, reflecting wider system pressures and data quality limitations.
- **Discharge delays**, particularly the gap between discharge-ready date and actual discharge, continued to fluctuate due to patient acuity, housing issues, and workforce capacity.
- **Reablement effectiveness** varied, with throughput and conversion to long-term care higher than desired in some pathways.
- **Financial pressures**, particularly within Community Equipment Services and domiciliary care, highlighted the need for tighter alignment between operational demand and budget planning.
- **Data quality and sharing issues**, particularly across acute and community services, limited the ability to fully understand and respond to variation.

13. These challenges are recognised within the End of Year return and have directly informed planning priorities for 2026–27.

Governance and Assurance

14. Throughout 2025–26, the four national Better Care Fund conditions continued to be met:

- Plans were jointly agreed.
- BCF objectives continued to be implemented.
- Grant and funding conditions, including the NHS minimum contribution and Section 75 arrangements, were upheld.
- Oversight and assurance processes remained in place.

15. The Health and Wellbeing Board gives delegated authority for the approval of the Better Care Fund Plan and associated submissions to the Director of Adult Social Care and the ICB Place Director, in line with locally agreed governance arrangements.

16. The BCF Working Group is reviewing its terms of reference and membership to ensure governance remains fit for purpose in light of health reforms and the emerging neighbourhood health model.

Transition into 2026–27

17. Learning from 2025–26 is central to the 2026–27 BCF plan. The End of Year position reinforces the importance of:

- Strengthening neighbourhood MDT working.
- Embedding Guiding You Home across discharge and recovery pathways.
- Improving data quality, shared documentation and analytics.
- Continuing a strong focus on prevention, reablement and early intervention.

18. The BCF remains a key enabler rather than a standalone programme, supporting delivery of priorities already agreed through the South Tyneside Health and Care Partnership.

Recommendation to the Health and Wellbeing Board

19. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

- a) Note the content of the Better Care Fund End of Year Report 2025–26.
- b) Acknowledge the progress made and the challenges identified.
- c) Support continued oversight of improvement actions through 2026–27 via the BCF governance arrangements.