

KIRKLEES HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD
MEETING DATE: Thursday 26th March 2026
TITLE OF PAPER: Delivering integrated Neighbourhood Health through the Better Care Fund
<p>1. Purpose of paper</p> <p>To update the Health and Wellbeing Board on the national requirements for the Better Care Fund (BCF) for 2026/27, set out how BCF planning in Kirklees is supporting the delivery of integrated neighbourhood health, provide an overview of the planning work currently underway, and to seek the Board's approval to delegate authority to enable timely submission of the BCF documentation.</p>
<p>2. Background</p> <p>The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a national policy framework and pooled budget arrangement that supports closer integration between health, social care and housing. It brings together NHS and local authority funding to enable joint planning, commissioning and delivery of services that help people to stay well, safe and independent at home for longer, and to ensure they receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.</p> <p>In Kirklees, the BCF has been a long standing mechanism for integrated working and is embedded within the partnership's wider approach to system wide planning and delivery. The Fund supports delivery of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Kirklees Health and Care Plan, with a particular focus on the Connected Care and Support priority and the Ageing Well programme.</p> <p>The BCF is an accounting and governance mechanism that aligns existing NHS and Council resources to support shared outcomes. In Kirklees, this includes funding for core adult social care services, intermediate care and reablement, support for unpaid carers, assistive technology and community equipment, housing adaptations through the Disabled Facilities Grant, and services that support hospital discharge and admission avoidance.</p> <p>The Kirklees BCF has evolved over successive planning periods, building on strong partnership working across the NHS, the Council, providers, the voluntary and community sector, housing and other partners. The approach has consistently prioritised prevention, early intervention and personalised, asset based models of care. In recent years, this has included a growing emphasis on home first approaches, integrated intermediate care, proactive support for people living with frailty, and strengthening community based alternatives to hospital and residential care.</p> <p>As national policy continues to place increased emphasis on neighbourhood based models of care, the Better Care Fund remains a critical enabler for delivering integrated neighbourhood health services in Kirklees. It provides both the financial framework and the governance arrangements needed to align health and social care services around local populations, priority cohorts and shared outcomes.</p>

3. Planning Requirements (2026/27)

For 2026/27, the Better Care Fund planning requirements place a strong emphasis on supporting the delivery of Neighbourhood Health and integrated, place-based models of care.

Key requirements are:

- A Narrative Plan is required, setting out:
 - The local approach to delivering the BCF national objectives
 - How health and social care partners will work jointly
 - Governance and accountability arrangements
 - Alignment with Neighbourhood Health Plans and wider place-based strategies
- A Numerical Template detailing:
 - Performance ambitions against national BCF metrics (below)
 - Key expenditure categories
 - Funding and pooled budget arrangements
- National BCF Metrics for 2026/27:
 - Mandated metrics:
 - Non-elective hospital admissions for people aged 65 and over
 - Average length of discharge delay for all acute adult patients
 - Encouraged metrics:
 - Long-term admissions to residential and nursing care for people aged 65 and over
 - Proportion of people aged 65+ discharged with reablement who remain at home 12 weeks post-discharge (new metric highlighted)

Better Care Fund 2026/27 – Submission Timelines

- **24 February 2026** – Publication of BCF planning requirements, guidance and release of draft templates
- **17 April 2026** – Submission of draft headline plans for feedback (optional)
- **19 May 2026** – Final submission of Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) plans
- **30 September 2026** – Section 75 agreements to be in place across HWB areas

It is to align with these submission timelines the delegation within the recommendations of this paper is being requested.

4. Planning Process for the Better Care Fund 2026/27

Planning for the Better Care Fund (BCF) 2026/27 has been undertaken through a joint, place-based approach, reflecting the increasing alignment between the BCF and the development of Neighbourhood Health in Kirklees. The process has been designed to ensure continued delivery of critical integrated services while responding to new national expectations and preparing for further reform from 2027/28.

A joint Better Care Fund Working Group is in place, with representation from Kirklees Council and the Kirklees Integrated Care Board. This group provides operational oversight of the

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planning process and has been responsible for coordinating activity across partners, ensuring compliance with national requirements and maintaining alignment with wider system priorities.

The planning process has focused on four key areas:

- **Alignment with Neighbourhood Health**

BCF planning for 2026/27 is being developed alongside the emerging Neighbourhood Health Plan, recognising 2026/27 as a transition year. This has involved reviewing existing BCF-funded activity to ensure schemes support neighbourhood-based models of care, particularly for priority cohorts such as people living with frailty and those approaching the end of life.

- **Review of existing expenditure and schemes**

A detailed review of current BCF expenditure has been completed to understand how existing resources contribute to the BCF objectives and national metrics. Schemes have been assessed for their continued relevance, value for money and contribution to integrated working, with a focus on sustaining core services that support independence, hospital discharge and admission avoidance.

- **Development of performance ambitions**

Draft trajectories are being developed for the national BCF metrics required for 2026/27. The approach supports a shift towards improved reablement outcomes, reduced reliance on long-term residential care and improved system flow.

- **Narrative development and governance**

A narrative plan is being prepared to set out the local approach to delivering the BCF objectives, joint working arrangements and governance. This narrative is being explicitly linked to the Neighbourhood Health agenda to ensure coherence across place-based plans.

Throughout the planning process, partners have worked collaboratively to balance national requirements with local priorities, taking a pragmatic approach to integration during this transition year. Final plans will be reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board once planning work is complete.

5. Financial Implications

Financial implications for the Better Care Fund (BCF) in 2026/27 is still in progress and remains at the planning stage. Initial work has focused on understanding the baseline position from 2025/26, existing commitments and how current resources may be aligned to support national requirements and the emerging Neighbourhood Health agenda.

At this stage, the draft position indicates that BCF funding will continue to support core integrated services, including adult social care, intermediate care and reablement, home-first discharge services, support for unpaid carers, assistive technology and preventative community-based provision. The emphasis remains on maintaining services and aligning spend to support neighbourhood-based models of care.

Further work is required to:

- Confirm final funding assumptions and minimum NHS contributions
- Review and agree the treatment of cost and demand pressures
- Finalise schemes under consideration for inclusion or realignment

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- Complete assurance and governance processes ahead of submission

Final financial implications will be reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board once planning work is complete and national and local assumptions are confirmed.

6. Sign off

Michelle Cross - Executive Director for Adults and Health - Kirklees Council – 13/3/2026



Vicky Dutchburn - Interim Accountable Officer - Kirklees Integrated Care Board – 16/03/2026



7. Next Steps

- Finalise the BCF 2026/27 narrative plan and numerical template.
- Use delegated authority, if approved, to submit the BCF return to NHS England within required timescales.
- Progress Section 75 agreements development work.
- Provide full details of the submission to the Health and Wellbeing Board once complete.

8. Recommendations

That the Kirklees Health and Wellbeing Board:

1. Note the progress being made in the development of Neighbourhood Health in Kirklees and the alignment with Better Care Fund planning for 2026/27.
2. Receive a full update on the submission at a meeting in late summer or autumn 2026.
3. Delegate authority to Vicky Dutchburn, Interim Accountable Officer for the Kirklees Integrated Care Board, and Cath Simms, Service Director, Adults and Social Care Operations at Kirklees Council, in consultation with the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, to complete and submit the Better Care Fund 2026/27 narrative plan and numerical template to NHS England on behalf of the Kirklees Health and Wellbeing Board, ensuring submission within required national timescales.

8. Contact Officer

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