

Health & Wellbeing Board

17 June 2026

Better Care Fund in Dorset: End of Year 2025/26 Template & 2026/27 Plans For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care & Health

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

S Crowe - Executive Director, Housing, Prevention and Communities

Report author and job title: Sarah Sewell, Head of Service for Commissioning for Older People and Home First

Email: sarah.sewell@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 Dorset's Better Care Fund continues to support strong system performance, particularly in reducing emergency admissions and strengthening discharge pathways through improved partnership working. However, increasing demand, acuity and complexity are placing sustained pressure on community capacity, residential care pathways and workforce availability.
- 1.2 The 2026/27 plan builds on existing progress with a strengthened focus on community-based provision, prevention and integrated neighbourhood working. It also reflects the need for continued transformation to ensure the system remains sustainable, improves flow, and enables more people to live independently at home.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval from the Health and Wellbeing Board for endorsement of Better Care Fund Reporting Templates and Plans.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To endorse the Better Care Fund (BCF) End of Year Reporting Template for 2025/26, and the Narrative Plan and Reporting Template for 2026/27; approved under delegated authority.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 NHS England (NHSE) require the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) to approve all BCF plans, this is one of the national conditions within the Policy Framework. This includes planning documents at the beginning of a funding period, and template returns reporting progress against the plans mid-year, and at the end of the year.
- 3.2 There is typically a short timeframe between NHS England (NHSE) publishing BCF reporting templates and the required submission deadline. NHSE permits local areas to submit plans under delegated authority, pending subsequent approval by the HWB. At its meeting on 12 January 2022, the HWB agreed that, where it is not possible to convene a meeting within the NHSE sign-off period, delegated authority to approve BCF plans would be granted following consultation with the HWB Chair. This responsibility now sits with the Executive Director of Housing, Communities and Prevention, reflecting the current leadership and governance arrangements.
- 3.3 The 2025/26 End of Year template submitted for endorsement today was shared with HWB Members by email on 1st June 2026. The 2026/27 Narrative Plan and Numerical Template were shared on 14th May 2026. This was in advance of submission to NHSE to provide advance oversight and offer opportunity to comment; no comments or amendments were returned for either submissions.
- 3.4 Submission of the templates were made to NHSE as follows on behalf of Dorset Council and Dorset NHS in line with delegated approvals; 26/27 Plans on 19th May 2026 and 25/26 End of Year template on 5th June. Retrospective endorsement is now sought from the Board at its meeting on 17 June 2026.

4. The Report

2025/26 End of Year Template

- 4.1 The template is at Appendix A and reports performance against the original plan submitted for 2025-26. The template format is in line with previous formats.
- 4.2 During 25/26 Dorset's Better Care Fund was invested as planned, and there were no change in planned expenditure. The schemes have delivered a strong overall performance, with emergency admissions not meeting target, but with discharge targets achieved, reflecting our focus of effort on improving partnership working and more joined up system coordination embedded via the Future Care transformation programme.
- 4.3 Increased demand, acuity and complexity of need has created pressures, particularly in residential care admissions and some discharge pathways,

these continue to be actively addressed through targeted actions and forward planning.

2026/27 Narrative & Numerical Plan

- 4.4 The 2026/27 Narrative plan is at Appendix B, and the 2026/27 Numerical template at Appendix C. Again, the format of the documents is in line with previous years.
- 4.5 BCF objectives for 26/27 continue to focus on strengthening integrated working between system partners and enhancing preventative care, particularly for people with complex needs. A key objective is to enable more people to live independently at home by expanding community and intermediate care services, improving discharge pathways and reducing avoidable admissions.
- 4.6 Local systems are expected to begin aligning BCF plans and investment with the development of integrated neighbourhood health services, including multidisciplinary teams and place-based care.
- 4.7 Key performance metrics continue that focus on reducing non-elective admissions and delayed discharges, improving reablement outcomes, and reducing long-term residential care admissions.
- 4.8 The framework reinforces the importance of sustained investment in adult social care, carers, housing adaptations and prevention to support independence and system resilience.
- 4.9 In Dorset, we continue to demonstrate a strong and balanced financial plan, consistent with previous years, with a clear narrative outlining how current schemes align to strategic objectives and identifying areas for further development. The BCF contains c£160m reflecting significant and ongoing joint investment from both the Council and NHS Dorset into initiatives that support BCF policy objectives.
- 4.10 Our plans evidence our focus on prevention initiatives and regaining / maintaining independence and improving the move from hospital back into the community. We are investing mainly in community-based resources, such as intermediate care, prevention and reablement focussed, including long term care packages and placements. Support for carers remains as an important feature of BCF investment.
- 4.11 The plan outlines the current work within the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT) programme, and our intention to consider how we improve joint

commissioning of proactive and preventative care that meets a wide range of common objectives for INTs and BCF, as the initiatives become more aligned in the coming years.

- 4.12 Our plans explain ongoing challenges such as delays in discharge, growing demand and acuity but mitigations to address these through targeted actions are included.
- 4.13 Renewal of the Section 75 Agreement remains a key priority. Council commissioners have proposed a template that aligns well to the standard reporting requirements from NHSE, and that is easily adaptable in coming years if BCF schemes investments change.
- 4.14 Dorset is currently undertaking a system-wide audit of the Better Care Fund, with active engagement and support from system partners across health and social care. The purpose of the audit is to provide assurance that BCF funding is being utilised in line with agreed plans and national guidance, and to assess the extent to which investment is delivering the intended outcomes aligned to both national BCF objectives and Dorset ICS priorities. The findings will inform future planning, strengthening oversight, value for money and alignment of resources to system goals.

5. Future Development of the BCF

- 5.1 During 2026/27, we intend, via the Health & Wellbeing Board, and linked development sessions, to explore options to better align the BCF with other initiatives and programmes where there are common goals and outcomes. For example place-based approaches to community prevention and neighbourhood health, improving alignment of integrated working approaches between health, social care and community partners and / or differing commissioning models that could better enable joint working. As this work develops, and priority areas identified, along with timescales, further updates will be shared.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Council and Dorset NHS are required to work within the financial envelope and to Plan, hence continuous monitoring is required. Joint commissioning activity and close working with System partners, including Acute Trusts, allow these funds to be invested to support collective priorities for Dorset.

7. Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Implications.

- 7.1 All partner agencies are mindful in their strategic and operational planning of the commitments, which they have taken on to address the impact of climate change.

8. Well-being and Health Implications

- 8.1 Allocation of the BCF supports individuals with health and social care needs, as well as enabling preventative measures and promoting independence.
- 8.2 Dorset, like many other areas across the South West and nationally, is continuing to experience many challenges in providing and supporting the delivery of health and social care. For Dorset, the highest risks continue to be the increasing acuity of health, care and support needs of those being supported both in the community and in hospital. In addition the lack of therapy led care and support to promote the regaining and maintaining of longer-term independence continues to challenge us.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1 Dorset Council and Dorset NHS officers will continue to work closely with Dorset System Partners to plan measures to protect local NHS services, particularly around admission avoidance and hospital discharge to ensure flow is maintained to support and respond to additional demand.

10. Risk Assessment

- 10.1 Dorset Council and Dorset NHS officers are confident the report appendices provide appropriate assurance and confirms spending is compliant with conditions.
- 10.2 The funds provide mitigation of risks by securing continuation of essential service provision and provides preventative measures to reduce, delay and avoid demand.
- 10.3 Dorset is actively working to alter approaches that enable enhancement of provision to mitigate risks, and promote recovery, regaining and maintaining of independence.

11. Impact Assessment

- 11.1 It is important that all partners ensure that the individual needs and rights of every person accessing health and social care services are respected, including people with protected characteristics so the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010 are met by all partners.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix A: Dorset's Better Care Fund 2025-2026 End of Year Template

Appendix B: Dorset's Better Care Fund 2026-2027 Narrative Plan

Appendix C: Dorset's Better Care Fund 2026-2027 Numerical Template

13. 13. Background Papers

- [Better Care Fund framework 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)
- Health & Wellbeing Board, 19th November 2025 - [Committee Report template](#)
- Health & Wellbeing Board, 18th March 2026 - [Committee Report template](#)

14. Report sign-off

- 14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Assurance & Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)