Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Slough Health & Wellbeing Board
Date:	[Date of Committee meeting]
Subject:	Better Care Fund programme 2025/6 and planning 2026/27
Lead Officers:	David Coleman-Groom (Slough Borough Council) and Martha Earley (NHS Frimley ICB)
Contact Officer:	Mike Wooldridge, BCF & Transformation Lead, Frimley ICB
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	N/A

1. Summary, Recommendations

To inform the Health and Wellbeing Board of the national guidance for the Better Care Fund (BCF) for 2026–27 and outline the implications for local planning, governance and performance monitoring.

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

1. Note the national Better Care Fund framework for 2026–27
2. Note the increased emphasis on integration, prevention and outcomes
3. Note the requirement for the Board to agree local goals and plans
4. Note the requirements to develop the local Better Care Fund plan for 2026–27 and refreshed Section 75 agreement
5. Receive further reports as the local plan is developed

Please indicate which priority in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Slough Wellbeing Strategy 2020 – 2025, your report links to:

Priority 1 – Starting Well	Priority 2 - Integration	Priority 3 – Strong, Health and Attractive Neighbourhoods	Priority 4 – Workplace Health
	✓		

1.1 Consideration:

☐ Information ✓
☐ Discussion
☐ Decision
☐ Endorsement

Recommendations:

The Health & Wellbeing Board is recommended to note the contents of the report and the priority areas identified for the Better Care Fund investment in 2026/27.

Reason:

Health and Wellbeing Boards hold the statutory oversight and decision-making for the BCF in each local authority area. Local joint partnerships are established to oversee the operational decision-making and make recommendations to the Health and Wellbeing Board. For Slough this is through the local Health and Social Care Partnership and the Better Care Fund Delivery Group.

The 2026/27 BCF framework introduces early but significant steps in a wider reform programme. It strengthens expectations for integrated delivery, emphasises neighbourhood health and devolved responsibilities, and moves toward a more consistent national approach. HWBs will play a critical role in ensuring local plans, governance, and delivery models reflect this shift and support deeper integration across health and social care.

2. Report

2.1 Introduction

The Slough Better Care Fund programme is developed, agreed and managed between Slough Borough Council and the Frimley Integrated Care Board. Working together with local stakeholders and delivery partners it aims to improve, both directly and indirectly, the health and wellbeing outcomes for the people of Slough.

A BCF Plan is produced each year in accordance with the national policy framework to demonstrate that it meets the criteria and conditions that apply to the BCF and is subject to a national assurance process. New guidance on the BCF planning framework was published on 17th February (Better Care Fund framework 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK) outlining the requirement for ICBs and Local Authorities to submit returns and plans by the **19th May 2026**.

The Better Care Fund directly supports the ambitions of Slough's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Corporate Plan 2023-27 strategic priority for 'A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives' particularly in the investment towards addressing health inequalities but also in respect of 'maximising independence, confidence and capacity for self-management ... to enable people to live the life they want, stay independent at home for longer and reduce the need for emergency and statutory services' (page 14).

2.2 Background

The Government has published the Better Care Fund (BCF) framework for 2026–27, setting out the planning requirements for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), local authorities, and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The 2026–27 framework represents the first phase of wider reform of the Better Care Fund, aligned to the Government's 10-Year Health Plan and the development of neighbourhood health services, with increased emphasis on:

- Integration of health and social care
- Prevention and independence
- Community-based care
- Reducing hospital demand
- Improving discharge and recovery outcomes

The 2026/27 BCF framework marks the first phase of a national reform programme, designed to create a more consistent and effective approach to integrated care. It builds on the 2025/26 focus on prevention and independence but introduces stronger expectations for neighbourhood-level delivery, devolved responsibilities, and more prescriptive national direction.

Health and Wellbeing Boards continue to have a statutory role in agreeing BCF plans and overseeing delivery.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Purpose of the BCF

The Better Care Fund is intended to support local systems to deliver:

- Integrated health and social care services
- Improved outcomes for people with complex needs
- Reduced avoidable hospital admissions
- Timely discharge from hospital
- Greater independence for older people and adults with care needs

Priority areas include:

- Intermediate care
- Reablement
- Hospital discharge
- Prevention of long-term residential care
- Support for unpaid carers
- Community-based services
- Home adaptations through the Disabled Facilities Grant

3.2 National Policy Direction

The 2026–27 framework requires local areas to align BCF plans with the development of neighbourhood health services, which aim to:

- Deliver more care in community settings
- Improve integration across organisations
- Focus on prevention and early intervention
- Support people with frailty and complex needs
- Reduce reliance on hospital care

Local plans must demonstrate how BCF funding contributes to these objectives while maintaining delivery of existing services.

3.3 Role of the Health and Wellbeing Board

The Health and Wellbeing Board must:

- Agree the Better Care Fund plan
- Agree local performance goals
- Ensure alignment with local strategies
- Monitor delivery and outcomes
- Provide system oversight

The Board is expected to ensure that:

- Plans support integration
- Funding represents value for money
- Outcomes improve for local residents
- Partners work collaboratively

3.4 Financial Framework 2026–27

Slough BCF funding for 2026–27 is £20.2m, comprising:

NHS minimum contribution	£13.839m
Local Authority Better Care Grant	£4.9m
Disabled Facilities Grant	£1.466m

Key requirements:

- NHS minimum contribution to adult social care must increase by 4.4%
- Funding must be pooled under Section 75 arrangements
- Plans must demonstrate value for money
- Local areas may pool additional funding voluntarily

Local plans must show how funding supports strategic priorities and delivers improved outcomes.

3.5 Required Local Priorities

BCF plans must support:

Intermediate care	• Step-up / step-down care • Rehabilitation and reablement • Increased home-based support
Hospital discharge	• Reduce delays • Improve system flow • Avoid readmissions
Prevention and independence	• Disabled Facilities Grant • Community support • Carer support • Voluntary sector involvement

Integrated neighbourhood working	• Multidisciplinary teams • Community-based care • Support for frailty and complex needs

3.6 Required Local Performance Goals

Local areas must agree goals with the Health and Wellbeing Board for:

- Reduction in non-elective hospital admissions (age 65+)
- Reduction in delayed discharges
- Improvement in reablement outcomes

Local areas are also expected to monitor:

- Long-term care home admissions
- Independence after discharge
- Use of intermediate care

Performance will be monitored nationally through BCF metrics.

3.7 Assurance and Governance Requirements

BCF plans must be submitted by **19 May 2026**.

The assurance return must include:

- Spending plan
- Local goals
- Governance arrangements
- Value for money statement
- Confirmation of pooled funding
- Alignment with neighbourhood health plans

Plans must be approved by:

- NHS England
- Regional BCF leads
- Government departments

Health and Wellbeing Boards are expected to provide ongoing oversight of delivery. They must also ensure BCF plans reflect the new reform direction, particularly neighbourhood health and devolved responsibilities.

3.8 Implications for Slough

Implications for Slough

For Slough, the 2026–27 framework means using the BCF as a financial bridge to enable:

- NHS 10-year plan (community, digital, prevention). - the latter being clearer about our Prevention offer and looking for synergy between different investment
- Neighbourhood Wellbeing & Health Plans (population health and inequalities) - target BCF-funded VCSE and community schemes at neighbourhoods with greatest inequalities
- ASC Vision and Three-Tier Model (prevention, independence, targeted support).

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

- Growth in the ASC minimum provides a degree of stability for BCF-funded ASC services - use ASC uplift and LA BC to protect core ASC/discharge capacity.
- Ability to maintain key discharge, intermediate care and prevention schemes within the pooled fund
- Chance to align BCF investments more explicitly with emerging neighbourhood models and local wellbeing/health plans.

Challenges

- Discharge and intermediate care funding uplift (2.1%) is below cost inflation
- The local authority portion of the Better Care Fund Geant remains flat, i.e. the same as the allocation in 25/26 in a context where inflationary pressures and demand for adult social care continue to rise.

4 Equality implications

The Better Care Fund supports the reduction of health inequalities through its focus on prevention, integrated working and the development of neighbourhood health services.

By promoting earlier intervention, more coordinated care, and support to remain independent at home, the Better Care Fund helps reduce avoidable hospital admissions and improve health outcomes by targeting resources towards populations experiencing the greatest health inequalities.

5 Financial implications

The financial framework for 2026/27 is outlined in 3.4

6 Background Papers

Better Care Fund Planning Framework 2026/27