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To: *(by email)*
Cllr Lorna Fielker, Chair, Southampton
Health and Wellbeing Board
James House, Integrated Care Board
Chief Executive or Representative(s)
Mike Harris, Chief Executive,
Southampton City Council

18 September 2023

Dear Colleagues,

BETTER CARE FUND 2023-25

Thank you for submitting your Better Care Fund (“**BCF**”) plan for regional assurance and approval. I am pleased to let you know that following this process, your plan has been classified as ‘**approved**’. You should now proceed to finalise your section 75 agreements with a view to these being signed off by 31 October 2023.

We are grateful for your commitment to developing and producing your agreed plan and we recognise that there are many pressures on local system colleagues, despite the early publication of the planning requirements.

The BCF is the only mandatory policy to facilitate the integration of health, social care and housing funding. This is the second time that the BCF Policy Framework covers two financial years to align with NHS planning timetables and to give areas

the opportunity to plan more strategically.

BCF Conditions for financial year 2023/4

The BCF funding from NHS England for the financial year 2023/24, which includes additional discharge funding, can now be formally released subject to compliance with the following conditions (referred to as “the **BCF Conditions**”):

- The BCF funding is used in accordance with your final approved plan.
- The national conditions (“the **National Conditions**”) set out in the BCF Policy Framework for 2023-25 and further detailed in the BCF Planning Requirements for 2023-25 continue to be met.
- Satisfactory progress is made towards meeting the performance objectives specified in your BCF plan.
- Reports on your area’s progress and performance are provided to NHS England in accordance with relevant guidance and any requests made by NHS England and governmental departments. This includes quarterly reporting on the BCF overall and fortnightly reporting on use of the Additional Discharge Funding, as set out in the Planning Requirements document.

Escalation

The BCF Conditions have been imposed through NHS England’s powers under sections 223G and 223GA of the NHS Act 2006. This means that if the BCF Conditions are not complied with NHS England can, under section 223GA:

- withhold any payment, if any of the BCF Funding has not already been made available to the ICB;
- recover any of the funding (either from the current financial year or a subsequent financial year); and/or
- direct the ICB or ICBs in your Health and Wellbeing Board area as to the use of the funding.

Where an area is not compliant with one or more BCF Conditions or there is a material risk that a BCF Condition will not be met, an area may enter into escalation, as outlined in the BCF Planning Requirements 2023-25. This could lead to NHS England exercising the powers outlined above. Any intervention will be proportionate to the risk or issue identified.

Local authority funding for financial year 2023/4

Grants to local government (improved Better Care Fund, Additional Discharge Fund

and Disabled Facilities Grant) will continue to be paid to local government under s31 of the Local Government Act 2003, via the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with a condition that they are pooled into one or more pooled funds under section 75 of the NHS Act 2006 and spent in accordance with your approved BCF plan.

Reporting and compliance

Ongoing support and oversight regarding the spending of BCF funding will continue to be led by your local Better Care Manager (“**BCM**”). Following regional assurance, we are asking all BCMS to feed back to local systems where the process identified areas for improvement in plans, including where systems may benefit from conversations with other areas. Nationally, we will also be reflecting on the data and what further support we can consider in the future.

Reporting on the overall BCF programme for 2023-25 will resume in September with quarterly reporting and an end of year return. In preparation for winter and to ensure ongoing alignment with urgent and emergency care recovery plans, the Quarter 2 report will include a check that your Intermediate Care Capacity and Demand plans are still fit for purpose as we enter months where capacity is often stretched. Your refreshed Intermediate Care Capacity and Demand plan needs to be submitted by 31 October 2023. All templates and guidance will be published on the Better Care Exchange. Further information on quarterly and end of year reporting will be confirmed in due course.

You will be aware that there are additional reporting requirements for the Additional Discharge Fund. The Government maintains a strong interest in improving timely discharge of patients; details of additional reporting on this part of the fund have been published. NHS England also requires a monthly return on packages provided to date, spend to date and forecast spend data on an ICB footprint. There is a commitment to review these reporting arrangements for 2024-25.

BCF Conditions for financial year 2023/24

As explained above, the BCF Policy Framework covers the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. NHS England expects that before any BCF funding for 2024/25 is made available it will write to areas to notify them that the BCF Conditions for 2023/24 set out in this letter will also apply to 2024/25.

If your area is in breach of its BCF Conditions or there is a material risk that it will breach a BCF Condition, then further conditions may be applied to BCF funding for

2024/25.

Once again, thank you for your work and best wishes with implementation and ongoing delivery.

Yours sincerely,



Nicola Hunt

Senior Responsible Officer for the Better Care Fund
NHS England

Copy (by email) to:

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Natalie Jones, Better Care Manager, Better Care Fund Programme, NHS England