



Falls Strategy

2023–2026


Sunderland
City Council

Foreword from the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Director of Adult Care

As people grow older, there is a greater likelihood that they will experience a fall, especially if they are already managing a long-term condition or illness, however the collective ambition in Sunderland is to achieve a culture in which falls are not inevitable and all of our services are working together to actively prevent the incidence of falls. This strategy for 2023–2026 sets out how we will work together to achieve this.

A fall can have devastating consequences ranging from physical injury and broken bones to a reduction in confidence. Whatever the outcome for the person's health, the impact on their wellbeing can be life changing and cause people to live their lives differently and with less independence.

The evidence shows that the incidence of falls is a significant problem in Sunderland. There are a number of reasons for this and it is vital that we use the intelligence we have to help us tackle this situation.

It is essential that our services provide as much opportunity to prevent a fall as they do to respond to a fall. There are multiple opportunities for health and social care teams to identify Sunderland residents who present with the risk factors associated with a potential fall, and the strategy seeks to ensure we have embraced the principles of making every contact count in our collective management of falls.

A commitment to creating safe home environments is a key foundation of the strategy and the promotion of services developed specifically for this purpose is vital, particularly at a time when residents are experiencing the current impact of the cost of living.

Raising awareness and educating our whole community in respect of falls and how to prevent them is a vital component of the strategy, building on the excellent work already delivered through Sunderland's Strength and Balance training programme that provides opportunities for our residents to engage in activities that will naturally reduce their potential to fall.

Working in partnership with the health and social care teams that contribute to the management of falls in Sunderland, we have developed eight core principles that will underpin the activity of our Multi-Agency Falls Group.

We recognise the importance of this work in the context of the size of the problem in our city and we are committed to supporting and building upon the partnership working already started so that through this strategy we will reduce the incidence of falls in our city and promote the safety and independence of our residents.



Graham King
Director of Adult Social Care



Cllr Kelly Chequer
Chair of Health and Wellbeing Board
and Portfolio Holder for Healthy City



Introduction

In its guidance refreshed in February 2023, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities states;

- “A fall is defined as an event which causes a person to, unintentionally, rest on the ground or lower level, and is not a result of a major intrinsic event (such as a stroke) or overwhelming hazard.”

This definition is supported by the NICE Quality Standard 86, 2015, which states

- “A fall is defined as an unintentional loss of balance resulting in coming to rest on the floor, the ground, or an object below knee level. A fall is distinguished from a collapse that occurs as a result of an acute medical problem such as acute arrhythmia, a Transient Ischaemic Attack or Vertigo.”

Falls and fall-related injuries are a common and serious problem for older people, particularly those who have underlying conditions.

People aged 65 years and older have the highest risk of falling, with around 30% of adults over the age of 65 who are living at home, experiencing at least one fall a year. By the age of 80 years, this statistic rises to 50%.

With approximately one in twenty older people living in the community who experience a hip fracture requiring hospital admission and around 20% of people who experience a hip fracture entering a permanent care placement within a year of sustaining the injury, the potential impact on independence resulting from a fall is evident.

Falls are not inevitable as we age, and many falls and fractures can be prevented, particularly if a system wide approach to identification, prevention and management of falls is in place.

There are multiple reasons for a fall and the cause is often as a result of the interplay between the following factors

- Muscle weakness
- Poor balance
- Visual impairment
- Certain kinds of medication
- Hazards in the environment
- Certain medical conditions

The importance of falls prevention has been recognised by health and social care partners in Sunderland, who have collaborated to develop eight key principles upon which this strategy for achieving better outcomes for Sunderland residents is founded.

The strategy takes into consideration national guidance and best practise and will provide a framework that underpins the work of our Multi-Agency Falls Group for the coming years, preparing the group for the refreshed National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance in respect of falls that is expected to be published in 2024. Integrated working across health and social care teams is vital to the success of the strategy and this has been recognised through the inclusion of the monitoring of admissions to hospital resulting from a fall through the city's Better Care Fund programme.



The local picture

Data shows that in 2020–21, Sunderland had the second highest falls related emergency admission rate in England, and at that time the number of falls related admissions were rising year on year as can be seen in the Figure 1, below.

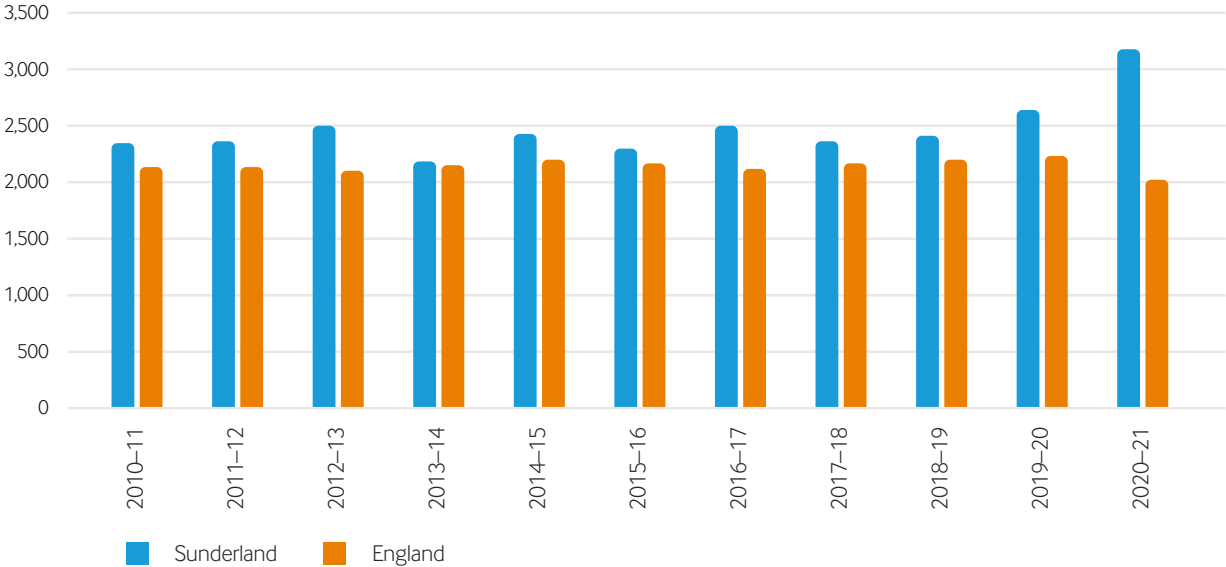


Figure 1: Rate of emergency admission rate as a result of a fall in Sunderland and England

Emergency admissions due to falls reduced slightly to 2,710 per 100,000 amongst the over 65s during 2021–22. Whilst this is positive, it is still higher than the average North East figure (2,531) and significantly higher than the England figure at 2,100.



Predictions for Sunderland

As per the recent 2021 census, Sunderland’s total population is 274,200. Of this approximately 20.5% of the population is aged 65 years and above. This equates to 56,200 people.

From known statistics approximately 30% of the population aged 65 years and above will have one fall a year. Based on this, we can anticipate there will be 17,000 people who fall a year in our city and at least 50% of those people will have more than one fall a year.

Figure 2 sets out the predicted rate of falls, with an astonishing figure of approximately 30,000 to 35,000 falls per year in Sunderland.

30% of the population aged 65 years and above will have one fall a year	17,000
50% of the fallers will have more than one falls a year	8,500
50% of the fallers will have more than two falls a year	4,250
50% of the fallers will have more than three falls a year	2,125
50% of the fallers will have more than four falls a year	1,060
50% of the fallers will have more than five falls a year	530
50% of the fallers will have more than six falls a year	250
Estimated falls per year	33,865

Figure 2: Predicted rate of Falls for Sunderland

Overall, the data shows that a significant number of people who fall, will fall repeatedly and generate an overwhelming number of incidences of a fall. This presents an opportunity for services to intervene and prevent further falls from occurring. Figure 3 sets out the correlation between people and the incidence of falls.

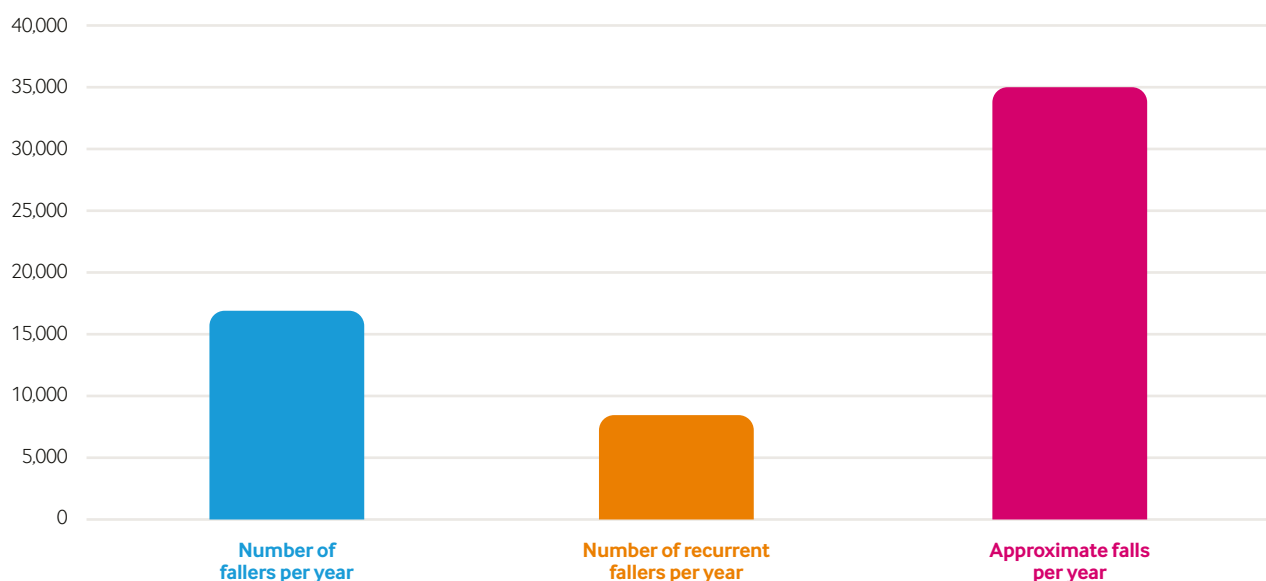


Figure 3: Predicted approximate number of fallers and falls per year in Sunderland

Sunderland is dealing with a complex set of factors that contribute to its significant incidence of falls and the challenges for service providers are set out in the image below in Figure 4.

Falls in Sunderland



56,200

residents are aged
65+ (20.5%)



33,000+

falls per year in population
aged over 65+



2,710

2,100 Nationally

Emergency admissions related
to falls in people aged 65+
(per 100k population)

Figure 4: Falls in Sunderland visual representation

The average emergency admission rate for the North East is 2,531 admissions per year, which makes Sunderland 7% higher than the regional average rate

Contributing factors

There are multiple contributing factors for the high falls rate in Sunderland including:

- Low healthy life expectancy - Sunderland has one of the lowest healthy life expectancy rates in England at 56.9 years for women (England average 63.9 years) and 56.1 years for men (England average 63.1 years). This means that people in Sunderland may be becoming frailer at young age compared to national average
- Social Deprivation - 21.7% or 14,833 older people older were living in poverty during 2019. This is significantly higher than the England average of 14.2%. Overall, Sunderland is ranked 4th highest in the North East for older people living in poverty
- High levels of alcohol consumption and smoking - in 2021, Sunderland had the highest rate of alcohol related mortality in the North East and 15.2% of adults in the city described themselves as smokers

The impact of Covid-19

The impact of Covid-19 on older people has been extensive. It became apparent as the pandemic spread that older people were at greater risk of long term damage to their health as a result of contracting the virus, but there have been further more wide ranging implications of the pandemic for our older people.

In June 2020, NHS Sunderland CCG published its report, Covid-19 - and the Impacts on Local Health and Well-being, which found that between the COVID-19 outbreak and June 2020 there had been a 40% reduction in Emergency Department attendance and a 50% reduction in Urgent Treatment Centre attendance. This led to a concern that the onset of ill-health was remaining undiagnosed, which in turn gave rise to the potential for people in Sunderland to find themselves experiencing a health-related crisis.

In its 2021 publication, Wider Impacts of COVID-19 on Physical Activity, Deconditioning and Falls in Older Adults, Public Health England predicted that the rate of falls in older people would significantly increase as a result of their experience of the wider impacts of the pandemic by this group. These wider impacts included mental health, access to services, employment, and changes in behaviours including smoking, diet, alcohol consumption, and physical activity.

The study undertaken in support of the publication identified that 32% of older people were inactive (did either no activity or less than 30 minutes of moderate activity per week) between March to May 2020, which was a 5% increase from the corresponding period in 2019.

Deconditioning is the term used to describe the loss of physical, psychological, and functional capacity due to inactivity. It can occur rapidly in older adults and there is a clear correlation between deconditioning and the likelihood of falling.

Of equal significance was the potential impact of the restrictions that were necessary to manage the spread of the infection on mental health. As people withdrew from their usual social contact, they began to experience loneliness, isolation, anxiety and low mood, all of which made it more difficult for people to be sufficiently motivated to re-initiate social contact and physical activity once restrictions began to be lifted.



Vision and principles

Our vision is simply that we will make the prevention of falls everybody's business, achieving a culture in which falls are not inevitable and all of our services are working together to actively prevent the incidence of falls.

We will achieve this vision through the delivery of eight principles.

1. We will strive to achieve excellence in our partnership working in the management of falls

With sponsorship from our Ageing Well Board, Sunderland City Council employed a Falls Coordinator in 2022, whose role is to promote partnership working and best practise in the management of falls and in early 2023 the city's, Multi-Agency Falls Group was established. The group brings together representatives from health, the council, social care agencies, public health, care home providers, housing providers and our voluntary sector.

The purpose of the group is to oversee the delivery of this strategy, through their leadership, sharing of knowledge and best practise and ability to inspire change. In coming together, the group have given a commitment to achieving our vision.

In preparation for the implementation of revised NICE guidance due for release in 2024, we will promote the work of the group with people over 50 years of age. This move to focussing on prevention at an earlier age resonates in Sunderland in the context of our understanding of local healthy life expectancy.

2. We will continually raise awareness in respect of falls prevention and falls management, making falls everyone's business

The national annual Falls Awareness Week provides a real opportunity to promote the importance of preventing and managing falls and in Falls Awareness Week 2022, we delivered a range of activities including a programme of mobility equipment checks in our care homes, training and awareness raising across health and social care teams and an event to promote the concept of multi-agency working that was publicised through our social media.

The Multi-Agency Falls Group will continue to deliver high impact awareness raising activities as a partnership in Falls Awareness Week and all year round.

In addition, we will review the information available in respect of our services and ensure it is accurate and accessible.

3. We will promote and actively contribute to the development of the preventative offer in respect of falls in the city and we will create connections between preventative and clinical services

The management of hazards in the home environment is a high priority for the city and in 2021–22 Community Equipment Services provided 38,692 individual items of equipment to Sunderland residents to promote independence and contribute to the prevention of falls.

Through the collaboration between the Home Improvement Agency and the city's health and social care teams, in 2021–22, 706 Sunderland residents were provided with major adaptations to their homes including stairlifts, ramps and showering facilities and 2,551 minor alterations including handrails and banister rails. In addition, with support from the Ageing Well Board, the city's Handy Person's Service provided support to 192 residents.

The city has developed a vibrant Strength and Balance programme and following a successful 6-month pilot, a full city programme will be launched in March 2023, with opportunities for residents to engage in each area of the city.

The Multi-Agency Falls Group will continue to promote opportunities for preventative work in the city but will also seek to raise awareness of both the preventative and clinical offer, ensuring that residents and patients are supported to access the right service, at the right time and thereby maximising the opportunity for the right kind of early intervention.

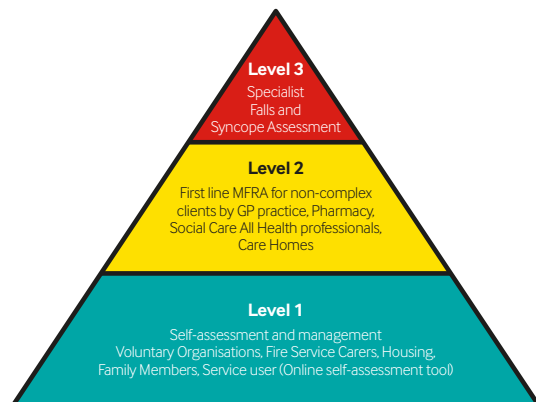
4. We will develop a directory of services that contribute to the management of falls in the city and we will develop a set of model customer journeys that will ensure we make the best use of the resources available to us

Sunderland has a rich and varied range of services that support people who fall or are likely to fall, some of which focus on the management of falls as their core business and some of which contribute to the identification of falls as a risk factor.

It is essential that we make best use of these resources by developing a set of customer journeys that demonstrate how we preserve specialist services for those people who need specialist interventions and deliver responsive services when people are in crisis, all of which should be without duplication.

This aspiration is in keeping with the requirements for community-based falls response services set out by NHS England in its 2022 winter plans, 'Going Further for Winter: Community Based Falls Response'.

5. We will work with a set of consistent falls assessment tools that promote a set of shared principles



Services contributing to the falls pathways in the city are using a range of assessment tools, and there is a shared commitment to using multifactorial assessments that seek to identify the person's individual risk factors in falling, which in turn enables referral of the person for the most effective interventions targeted at their specific needs.

The Multi-Agency Falls Group will seek to promote three levels of assessment through the assessment tools it endorses:

Level 1: Self-assessment

Level 2: Assessment from a recognised health or social care professional

Level 3: Assessment from a specialist in falls

6. We will develop a matrix that sets out the falls training that is available in the city and ensure that all training promotes a set of shared principles

There is a range of training in respect of falls available for employees across the agencies that make up the Falls Multi-Agency Group partnership. This principle will ensure that training is accessible, up to date and in keeping with the framework for assessment.

7. We will promote the use of innovative technology in the management of falls

Technology enabled care presents a real opportunity for the smart management of falls through the implementation of digital solutions that have the capability to predict, prevent and respond to a fall.

We are already reviewing the opportunities for digital development of our Telecare Service, providing family monitored assistive technologies and delivering projects in digital home monitoring.

The development of the Virtual Ward in Sunderland presents further opportunities for integration of systems and devices that will facilitate proactive, intelligence based falls management.

8. We will make evidence based decisions in respect of the management of falls and we will develop a data set that will inform the work of the Multi-Agency Falls Group

We recognise the value of data both in the development of care plans for individuals and in the development of our services.

The Multi-Agency Falls Group is committed to developing a dashboard of key metrics that will act as a barometer in respect of our collective performance in the management of falls.

In addition, there is an aspiration to develop a digital means of delivering the self-assessment element of the assessment framework, which will provide a vital intelligence in respect of our resident's experience of falls as well as providing immediate advice in respect of how best to meet their individual needs.

Outcomes - how we will measure our success

The Multi-Agency Falls Group will monitor progress in respect of meeting the principle of the strategy and report its progress to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Ageing Well Board.

In its current guidance, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommends nine standards of acute and community care for people who fall or are at risk of falling. This strategy takes into consideration the six standards that relate to the community.

- Statement 1: Older people are asked about falls when they have routine assessments and reviews with health and social care practitioners, and if they present at hospital
- Statement 2: Older people at risk of falling are offered a multifactorial falls risk assessment
- Statement 3: Older people assessed as being at increased risk of falling have an individualised multifactorial intervention
- Statement 7: Older people who present for medical attention because of a fall have a multifactorial falls risk assessment
- Statement 8: Older people living in the community who have a known history of recurrent falls are referred for strength and balance training
- Statement 9: Older people who are admitted to hospital after having a fall are offered a home hazard assessment and safety interventions

The implementation of the strategy will give assurance that these six standards are met.

The group will also monitor the following key performance indicators

- Number of Strength and Balance exercise classes offered and the associated number of participants
- Number of people trained in Falls Awareness by the Falls Coordinator
- Reduction in the number of people over 65 years of age admitted to hospital as a result of a fall
- Reduction in the number of calls to the Telecare Service relating to a fall

As the dashboard described in Principle 8 is developed, further indicators may be added to this initial dataset.

Conclusion

Sunderland has a significant problem in respect of the incidence and management of falls.

Falls and fractures in those aged 65 years and above account for over 4 million hospital bed days per year in England. The implementation of this strategy will reduce the number of hospital bed days in Sunderland arising from a fall and promote the early supported discharge of those patients who are identified as being at risk of a fall during an admission.

Key to the success of this strategy is the partnership approach being delivered through the Multi-Agency Falls Group and the commitment of partners to its eight guiding principle.

As the strategy is implemented, the group will actively seek out opportunities to consult with people who fall or are at risk of falling to ensure their voice influences the development of future services and ways of working.

Prior to implementation, the strategy will be approved by Sunderland's Ageing Well and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

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