

Communications Strategy

2021 - 2024

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# Introduction and purpose

## Purpose

This communications strategy outlines the Partnership’s approach to how effective communication can support Falkirk’s Integrated Joint Board to achieve the vision outlined in its Strategic Plan. This strategy and its principles apply to all Partnership staff and their communication activity.

## Foreword

The process of transformation is a familiar one to anyone working in Scotland’s health and social care environment, especially since the introduction of integration bodies six years ago. The complex process can be a daunting endeavour, but we know it can help reap significant rewards.

We also all know that the key to successful change is to bring everyone along with us, and only an open and communicative culture can achieve this. It is with this in mind, that we have set out our communication priorities in this strategy.

We want the Partnership to be a champion for Falkirk’s health and social care sector, shouting about its successes and encouraging innovation and fresh thinking every step of the way.

We want the Partnership and its services to be accessible and open. Everyone in Falkirk should understand what support is available to them and where, when, and how to access it.

And last but not least, we want the Partnership to be a great place to work, no matter what part of it you belong to or who you are employed by.

We have certainly made significant progress against our strategic vision since the beginning of integration and our establishment in 2011, but how do we ensure continued progress towards our goals?

This is the role of good, inclusive communication. Accessibility must be at the heart of everything we do, to ensure as many people as possible are able to hear our message and ensure as many people receive the support they need.

As our first communication strategy, we hope you find this document ambitious yet achievable. We have sought to be clear about the challenges which face us and to establish a new framework which enhances our communication. Ultimately, we hope it supports the planning and successful delivery of our services.

I look forward to working with everyone in the Partnership to implement this strategy, which will help us progress towards and our vision for health and social care in Falkirk.

Patricia Cassidy

Chief Officer

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# Methodology

Communications has been identified as a priority area for development within the Partnership’s overall strategic plan, with actions set out to develop a communications strategy, coordinate activity, and strengthen messaging to support better understanding and awareness of services. In addition, an efficient communications function is viewed as a key part of the Partnership’s Remobilisation and Delivery Plan following the coronavirus pandemic.

To take forward improvement within priority areas, the Partnership has invested in additional support roles to strengthen its communications, policy, research, and project management functions. This dedicated resource will help the Partnership improve its communications and engagement with all stakeholders, enhancing the quality of decisions, resulting in services which are better tailored to the needs of the community.

Significant work has already been taken forward by the Partnership’s first participation and engagement strategy, published in 2016. Alongside a review of this existing strategy, the Partnership welcomes the opportunity to develop and implement a stand-alone communications strategy to complement its engagement activity.

The Partnership’s policy and communication team began work to refresh its strategic documents through a survey of internal and external stakeholders, gathering feedback on existing activity.

Themes identified from this survey were expanded upon during a workshop session with a new communications and engagement working group. This included representation from:

* Community Planning
* Home First
* Housing
* Locality Managers
* Partnership Funding
* Patient Engagement (NHS)
* AHP Coordinator
* CVS Falkirk (Third Sector)
* CSREC
* HSCP Leadership
* HSCP Communications
* HSCP Policy and Research

Issues identified and discussed through the survey and workshop session form the basis of this communications strategy.

The Partnership’s communication and policy team intends to run similar workshop sessions with other stakeholders in the future to help steer and inform the implementation of this strategy.

## Strategic context

The Communication Strategy 2021 – 2024 is part of a set of strategic documents that support the implementation of the Partnership’s overall Strategic Plan. It should be reviewed in tandem with the accompanying Participation and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024. Our communication and engagement activities are intertwined, with stakeholder engagement and participation featuring as a key outcome throughout our communication methods.

# Where we are now

Since the formal establishment of Falkirk’s Integration Joint Board (IJB) in 2015, the Partnership’s communication has been supported by the NHS Forth Valley and Falkirk Council communication teams.

As set out by the IJB strategic plan, communication has been identified as a priority area for improvement. Efficient communication is key to supporting the delivery of the Partnership’s strategic vision, and to the successful remobilisation of services following the coronavirus pandemic.

With the publication of this new three-year strategy, the Partnership has the opportunity to expand its communication function, proactively sharing the progress and success of health and social care integration and informing public audiences of the important role of the Partnership and its services.

The Partnership’s diverse workforce includes staff employed by Falkirk Council, NHS Forth Valley, unpaid carers, volunteers, and its partners in the third & independent sectors. The Partnership will benefit from its own clear channels of communication for efficient dissemination of information between these sections of its workforce. This will help foster a cross-workforce identity, helping everyone in Falkirk’s health and social care sector feel part of the Partnership.

There is a significant piece of work required to review, update, and link the Partnership’s communication materials together to communicate more efficiently to multiple audiences. This is especially true of the Partnership’s online communication, as material relating to its services is currently hosted across NHS, and partnership web pages.

# Where we want to be

The Partnership’s strategic vision is to enable people in Falkirk to live full and positive lives within supportive and inclusive communities. To support this, our communication and engagement working group has identified the following communication priorities:

### Be a champion for Falkirk’s health and social care sector.

Protect and enhance the reputation of the health and social care sector, the Partnership and its partner organisations. Messages in this priority area are vital to support staff morale and to bolster workforce recruitment campaigns.

### Build understanding of the Partnership’s services and how to access them.

Both internal and external audiences will benefit from improved understanding of the Partnership’s services. Staff and partners working across our services should be able to navigate and link together services’ support, with confidence that the person using the service will have their needs met. People who use our services should have a clear means of accessing services when they need them. External partners should feel part of a network of services and have connections across the Partnership’s workforce.

### Ensure effective communications across the integrated workforce.

Clear and integrated communication channels are required to reach all internal stakeholders across NHS Forth Valley, Falkirk Council, our commissioned providers, community organisations and carers. This includes the fostering of a Partnership identity which everyone across Falkirk’s health and social care can feel part of. Our communications approach will be flexible, keeping up-to-date with new ways channels and continually improving our communications.

# How we will get there

## Communication standards

At the foundation of the Partnership’s communication activity will be the following standards:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Clear | Our communication is jargon-free, in Plain English and tailored to the needs of the targeted audience. |
| Concise | We provide relevant and easy to understand content. |
| Accessible | We tailor our style, format, and material to the needs of the targeted audience. |
| Evidence-based | We utilise research, statistics, and real-life case study examples to tell the story of how the Partnership’s services make a difference. |
| Endorsed | Credible and trustworthy third-party endorsements should illustrate the benefits of health and social care integration. |
| Efficient | We adopt a ‘write once, use often’ ethos. Material is filed for re-use across a range of platforms including social media, blogs, opinion pieces, presentations, briefings. |
| Timely | We are responsive, transparent, accountable, and fair. |
| Conversational | People can actively contribute at all levels across the organisation. We engage audiences, we don’t broadcast to them. |
| Consistent | We maintain a visual identity, look, and feel which supports engagement with external and internal audiences. |

## Inclusivity and accessibility

Inclusive communication is good for everyone. By making everything easy to access and simple to understand, our message will go further.

The Partnership will always aim to support as many people as possible in the local population to take part in communication with its services. We will achieve this by enabling individuals to use whatever ways of understanding and expressing themselves that they find easiest.

Our approach to accessible and inclusive communications is set within the wider context of equalities and human rights as set out by the Equality Act 2010. Our accompanying Participation and Engagement Strategy (2021-24) also sets out how National Standards for Community Engagement inform our inclusive engagement activity.

Both our partner organisations (Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley) have policies and guidelines on accessible communications which should be adhered to. The UK government has also published accessibility guidelines and regulations for public sector websites and applications which the Partnership will implement.

A list of resources to support and inform our inclusive, accessible communication is provided in the appendix of this document.

## Our key messages

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Communications Objective** | **Key message** | **Tactics / channels** |
| Perceptions of health and social care |  |  |
| Recognition of the scale and importance of social care | Manages annual £235m budget, workforce includes X people, and services a local population of 160,000. | * Media * Stakeholder communication * Briefings * Social media |
| Reputation for quality and value | HSCP provides quality, personalised care & support  Services are well-managed & innovative | * Media with case studies * Use of third-party advocates * Briefings * Social media |
| Respect for the expertise of workforce | Staff manage complex tasks requiring skills and experience  Social care is a rewarding career option | * Use of individual profiles / case studies in media and briefings * Wider co-ordinated campaign with partners * Social media |
| Understanding the role of the Partnership and its services |  |  |
| Increase awareness and understanding of the Partnership among potential users and care providers. | Most people have used our services but may not know it is managed by the Partnership. | * Media * Briefings * Stakeholder comms * Internal partner comms |
| Our role in improving how care and support is provided is recognised | The HSCP is best placed to inform and manage improvements to local care and services. We understand local needs and connect NHS, Council, and the Third Sector together. | * Evidence contribution to improvement through briefings, media etc. * Use examples of integration to show wider economic and social benefits. * Social media |
| Seen as an innovator and source of fresh thinking | Services follow good practice in their design and planning | * Showcase examples of innovative practice in communication / media etc. |
| Operational issues and internal comms |  |  |
| Outline clear communication networks for the  dissemination of advice | We are reducing information overload and communication breakdown by providing clear internal channels. | * Easy to understand summaries / visuals * New internal channels (such as a newsletter) |
| Improve integration of communication  across NHS, HSCP, Falkirk Council, commissioned providers, ScotGov | We are all part of the same team, working together to deliver services. No matter if you are employed by council, NHS or the third sector. | * Joint media campaigns * Shared social media resources * Improved signposting and internal understanding of services. |
| Identity – cultural  Staff alignment with either council or NHS | The Partnership brings together colleagues from a range of backgrounds, but we are all part of it. | * Brand guidelines * Internal comms * Training and resources |

## Our audiences

Understanding the diversity of our audiences is key to tailoring our communication messages and channels. Good use should be made of the many resources available which provide insight into the communication needs of our audiences. These resources include:

* The Partnership’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Locality Profiles
* Office for National Statistics Census Data
* [Government Communication Service Behaviour and Change Guide](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/the-principles-of-behaviour-change-communications/)
* [News media association](http://www.newsmediauk.org)
* [Ofcom](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/home) (the communications regulator)
* Professional bodies
* Minority and advocacy groups
* Scottish Government research (such as the Scottish Household Survey)

Our audiences, which have been mapped out in a separate stakeholder mapping exercise, include:

## Methods of communication

### Media relations

There is a need to proactively manage the Partnership’s reputation and increase awareness of its services through media relations. A joint media and communications protocol is in place, developed between Falkirk Council, NHS Forth Valley and the Partnership. It covers guidelines on proactive communications, media enquiries process, and key corporate communication channels. To complement this, and set an operational framework for the Partnership, an additional communications protocol has been drafted in collaboration with partners and approved by the Senior Leadership Team. Any engagement with the media must adhere to these protocols. A copy of the Partnership’s communication protocol is provided in the appendix of this strategy.

This activity could include any of the following:

* Press releases.
* Media comment and response to media enquiries.
* Opinion pieces.
* Broadcast interviews.
* Photocalls and site visits.
* Integrated campaigns (earned, placed, and paid content across media and digital channels).

### Digital

An online presence supports the provision of information in an easily accessible format. The Partnership will use its website and social media channels to share information and engage with stakeholders and public audiences. In tandem, consideration will be taken as to how those who are digitally excluded can access this same information, either through supported access or alternative channels.

The key element of effective digital communication is timely, relevant content. While these channels provide further opportunities to communicate and engage, it also presents some risk. To address this, Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley have policies on the acceptable use of social media in a professional capacity. In addition, the Partnership has established its [own social media guidelines](https://falkirkhscp.org/social-media-guidelines/) and moderation principles which sit alongside the approved communications protocol.

To provide a single location for efficient signposting, information relating to the Partnership’s services, which has historically sat across NHS, Council and Partnership websites, should be combined on to the Partnership’s pages.

### Branding

A defined brand identity is important to support a shared culture within the Partnership. This will foster an understanding of our vision for health and social care in Falkirk. A brand identity toolkit and internal communications plan will be developed to implement this.

It is important to note the diversity of the Partnership’s workforce, coming from a range of backgrounds in Falkirk Council, the NHS, third sector, and those providing support as unpaid carers and volunteering. The Partnership’s branding identity and related communications will complement existing organisational cultures, not seek to replace. Everyone working in Falkirk’s health and social care services should feel ‘part of’ this shared identity, regardless of who employs them.

### Stakeholder engagement

In addition to the public involvement, participation and engagement activity as set out in the Partnership’s Participation and Engagement Strategy, stakeholder engagement can be utilised as a useful communications tool. The dissemination of information through stakeholders can help the Partnership’s communication audiences beyond its immediate reach. Toolkit resources and briefings will be provided as appropriate to stakeholders such as:

* Elected council members
* Local members of Scottish Parliament
* Falkirk’s minority and advocacy organisations, such as the Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC)

### Joint campaigning

The Partnership has a key role in championing prevention and supporting people to make choices that reduce their longer term need for health and social care services. This can include a range of topics covering public protection, self-directed support, smoking cessation, breast feeding or dementia awareness. A wide range of campaign materials will be required alongside a mix of credible voices and organisations.

The Partnership will explore opportunities to develop joint campaigns with its community partners, NHS Forth Valley, Falkirk Council, and other local businesses and organisations. The creation of shared resources will be at the centre of any joint campaign, which also highlights the potential for the Partnership’s webpages to facilitate efficient communication.

### Internal and staff engagement

As identified previously, there is an immediate need for a single channel of internal communication which reaches as many internal audiences as possible. In addition, the Partnership’s communication function would benefit from an understanding of how to effectively reach individual staff groups. Staff engagement and communication is critical to achieving the Partnership’s strategic plan, as they are ultimately the link between people who use our services and the Partnership as an organisation.

Successful and positive staff engagement will help create and sustain a whole-partnership, cross workforce inclusive identity. The Partnership’s Participation and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 sets out good practice and engagement principles to support this.

# Measurement and evaluation

The Partnership’s communication campaigns will use the [OASIS model](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-oasis/) as a basis for planning, measurement and evaluation. The model is the preferred campaign framework of the Government Communication Service. It includes the following criteria for rigorous and systematic campaign development:

1. Objectives
2. Audience/Insight
3. Strategy/Ideas
4. Implementation
5. Scoring/Evaluation

Additional evaluation sources and monitoring may take the form of:

* Monthly metric snapshots including media coverage; website visits; social media activity; service user engagement and complaints.
* Accessibility reviews – self-assessment tools; public service improvement framework reviews; and Equality Impact Assessments.
* Regular and frequent reporting to the Partnership’s senior leadership team, integration joint board and or its committees.

Any improvements identified will be incorporated into subsequent versions of both this Strategy and related action plans.

# Advice and guidance

Support, advice, and guidance on the full range of internal and external communications across the Partnership is available through our communications office within the Planning, Policy, and Performance team. We also have links with both our partner organisations’ corporate communications teams to ensure co-ordinated and consistent communications (Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley). This includes not only issuing communications, but also relevant policies and guidelines.

Advice and guidance can be provided in the following areas:

* the application of communications standards, brand identity, accessible communications, working with the media, and the acceptable staff use of social media.
* the development of communications plans, associated material, and activity.
* reporting of newsworthy items across our channels and those of our partner organisations.
* web and social media content and management.

# Action plan and recommendations

The following recommendations and actions support the implementation of the Partnership’s three communication priorities:

* Be a champion for Falkirk’s health and social care sector.
* Build understanding of the Partnership’s services and how to access them.
* Ensure effective communications across the integrated workforce.

Many of these actions will require repeated focus throughout the 3-year span of this strategy. Actions relating to measurement and evaluation (28-31) will inform the continual roll out and implementation of other actions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No. | Action | Timescale |
|  | Internal communications development |  |
| 1 | Produce a communications cascade map detailing how each staff ‘pocket’ will be reached. This will help establish a process for communicating messages to staff. An immediate focus should be on reaching non office-based staff. | 2021 |
| 2 | Equip and enable line managers to cascade information to their teams: embed a cascade system for line managers to brief staff at team meetings | 2021 |
| 3 | Introduce one cornerstone communication mechanism for use across all internal Partnership audiences. (e.g newsletter) | 2021 |
| 4 | In addition to ad-hoc briefings from the Chief Officer and senior leadership on transformation programme updates, equip line managers to explain how the message relates to their team. | 2022 |
| 5 | Co-ordinate team and staff award nominations for internal and external awards programmes. | 2023 |
|  | Brand, identity, and culture |  |
| 6 | Develop a Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership brand toolkit and communications plan. This should encourage everyone working in Falkirk’s health and social care sector to feel ‘part of it’ regardless of what service they provide or who they are employed by.  *While the publication of a brand toolkit is an immediate priority, the cultivation of a shared cross-workforce partnership culture is a long-term goal and continual process.* | Autumn 2021 |
| 7 | Create a service map to improve internal understanding of provision. | Autumn 2021 |
| 8 | Encourage staff engagement with online channels through signposting and training. | Ongoing |
|  | Media relations |  |
| 9 | Build internal understanding of the Partnership’s new communications protocol. | Spring 2021 onwards |
| 10 | Operate a rolling planner of potential Partnership communications activity and active work. | Active |
| 11 | Selective engagement with traditional media and social media - blogs, opinion pieces and occasional news releases. | Ongoing |
| 12 | Use third-party commentators and influencers (stakeholders) to campaign on issues. This could include third-party endorsement within our media content. | Ongoing |
| 13 | Raise understanding of newsworthiness among staff and the process for accessing communications support. Create a communications checklist and consider training needs for staff, senior staff and board. | Winter 2021 |
|  | Stakeholder engagement |  |
| 14 | Undertake stakeholder mapping to produce a stakeholder list for communications, participation, and engagement. | Complete / ongoing |
| 15 | Produce a one-page briefing note on the Partnership for use with elected members and other external stakeholders. | Immediate |
| 16 | Provide briefings and resources to elected members to update their constituents on service changes and news through their own social channels. | Ongoing |
|  | Joint working with partners and commissioned providers |  |
| 17 | Consider potential for joint campaigns with the Partnership acting as a lead and providing a shared resource hub, for example surrounding:   * Winter pressures * Local social care recruitment * New service provision, e.g. Near Me implementation   An agreement with community partners, organisations in the private and independent sectors, and unions with campaigning capabilities will increase the understanding of the scale and role of services. | 2024 |
| 18 | Extend Partnership messaging – provide resources (tweets, links, quotes) for use by partners when carrying out their own communications. Utilise new shared brand identity. | Ongoing |
|  | Accessibility |  |
| 19 | Work towards achieving [Communication Access UK accreditation](https://communication-access.co.uk/about/). The Communication Access Symbol and accreditation scheme is a free training initiative led by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and developed in partnership by charities and organisations that share a vision to improve the lives of people with communication difficulties.  The accreditation programme aims to train staff in basic inclusive communication good practice. This training should be delivered in tandem with support from Falkirk’s sensory services team and other resources. The communication officer should be the key contact for this accreditation. | 2022 |
| 20 | Where appropriate, develop informational videos for use on the Partnership’s webpages and social media channels to explain the range of services and how to access them. | 2023 |
| 21 | Update the Partnership’s website to include clear signposting to inclusive ways of contacting services. This includes face to face; phone; text messaging; contactSCOTLAND-BSL; Relay UK; SMS; video; online; post. | 2022 |
| 22 | Produce a guidance note with communication hints and tips for Partnership staff to improve the accessibility of communications. | 2021 |
| 23 | In conjunction with the wider review of online materials and channels, review needs for digital excluded individuals – such as print format leaflets, newsletters or briefings, and face-to-face communication methods. | 2023 |
|  | Online content – website and social media |  |
| 24 | Review and redevelop Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership’s main website, alongside Partnership pages hosted on Falkirk Council, NHS Forth Valley, Living Well Falkirk, and the Alcohol and Drug Partnership websites. | Summer 2021 onwards |
| 25 | Develop a ‘for professionals’ page on the Partnership’s website for easily accessible guidance, briefings and signposting information. | Summer 2021 onwards |
| 26 | Develop and improve service information on the Partnership website. Potential for individual pages covering mental health, sensory, etc. Consideration should also be made to how additional services be integrated to the website should further delegation occur. | Summer 2021 onwards |
| 27 | Grow / develop the Partnership’s new social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) | Spring 2021 onwards |
|  | Measurement and evaluation |  |
| 28 | Rerun or adapt communications, participation, and engagement workshop sessions with wider stakeholders to steer and inform implementation of this strategy and its recommendations. | Ongoing |
| 29 | Establish a point of review of this communications strategy – such as an annual or bi-annual communications survey. | 2022 |
| 30 | Implement monthly snapshot monitoring of all communications activity for the Partnership’s senior leadership team | Active |
| 31 | Produce an annual performance report on communications activity for the Partnership and Integration Joint Board. | June 2022/23/24 |

# Appendices

## Appendix I: Resources for inclusive and accessible communication

* [Communication Access UK](https://communication-access.co.uk/)
* [Inclusive Communication](https://inclusivecommunication.scot/)
* [Communication Alliance guide to becoming an inclusive communication nation](https://inclusivecommunication.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Becoming-an-Inclusive-Communication-Nation-to-Recover-Rebuild-and-Renew-PDF.pdf)
* [Healthcare Improvement Scotland Participation Toolkit](https://www.hisengage.scot/equipping-professionals/participation-toolkit/#.VzRla9IrKUk)
* [Scottish Government Principles of Inclusive Communication](https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2011/09/principles-inclusive-communication-information-self-assessment-tool-public-authorities/documents/0120931-pdf/0120931-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0120931.pdf)
* [Equality and Human Rights Commission, Statutory Code of Practice for Services, public functions, and associations](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/servicescode_0.pdf)
* [Communication Forum Scotland Talk for Scotland toolkit](http://communicationforumscotland.org.uk/2010/TK_BSL.html)

## Appendix II: Legislative context

### BSL (Scotland) Act 2015

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 promotes the use of BSL in Scotland, primarily by requiring certain authorities to develop BSL plans that outline how they will promote and raise awareness of the language. As appropriate, the Partnership will support the implementation of [Falkirk Council’s BSL Action Plan 2018-2024](https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/council-democracy/policies-strategies/bsl.aspx#:~:text=The%20BSL%20plan%20for%20will,for%20Falkirk%20will%20focus%20on%3A&text=Enabling%20BSL%2FBSL%20tactile%20users,the%20lives%20of%20their%20children).

### Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018

These accessibility regulations require public sector bodies to ensure their websites or mobile apps are accessible by making them ‘perceivable, operable, understandable and robust’. These regulations build on existing obligations to people who have a disability under the Equality Act.

### Equality Act 2010

This Act aims to prevent discrimination of nine ‘protected characteristics’. These are: age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, and religion or belief.

### Human Rights Act 1998

This Act gives people rights: to life, liberty and security, to a fair trial, to marry and start a family, to education, and to participation in free elections. It also gives people freedoms: from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, slavery and forced labour, of thought, belief and religion, or assembly and association. Public authorities must comply with the European Convention on Human Rights.

### NHS Reform (Scotland) Act 2004

This Act places duties of public involvement and equal opportunities on NHS Health Boards. This led to the establishment of the Scottish Health Council (SHS) in 2005 to ensure that the NHS allows patients to participate as fully as possible.

### Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011

The Act sets out health care principles and a Charter of Patients’ Rights. This includes allowing patients to participate as fully as possible in decisions relating to their health and wellbeing and have full access to the necessary information to do so. The Act provides a right to give feedback (both positive and negative), leave comments, or raise concerns or complaints about the health care they have received. The Act requires that Health Boards encourage, monitor and learn from the feedback and comments they receive.

## 

## Appendix III: Falkirk HSCP Communications Protocol

**BACKGROUND**

The protocol set outs how Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership will manage its relationships with the media and update its online communication channels. Members of the Partnership’s Integrated Joint Board (IJB) should also follow this protocol when communicating on behalf of the Partnership.

The Partnership is committed to developing and maintaining positive and productive working relationships with the media at both a local and national level. The Partnership will achieve this through its own proactive and reactive media content, in addition to input into Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley communications activity.

**PRINCIPLES**

The following principles apply to all engagement between the Partnership and the media:

* The Partnership will be open and honest in all communications with the media, taking account of legal, privacy or commercial considerations. The Partnership will follow the [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-authority-publicity-code-of-practice/).
* The Partnership will never say “no comment”. While there may be times when information cannot be released because of legal, privacy or commercial considerations, we will always explain this and provide a general comment on our policies/procedures. “Off the record” briefings should always be avoided.
* Partnership communication should always maintain political neutrality. Media enquiries that are deemed to be political will be referred to the Leader of the Council or relevant Portfolio Holder. Members of the IJB who hold a dual mandate (such as Chair of the Board and Council Portfolio Holder) should ensure any political communication is not attributed to the Board or Partnership.
* It is a shared responsibility to identify media opportunities. Any employee can be approached by media for comment, enquiries should be immediately directed to the HSCP Communications Officer. The Partnership’s Communications Officer should attend relevant meetings, such as IJB pre-agenda, to discuss items which are potentially newsworthy.

**MEDIA – APPROVAL PROCESS**

Following the identification of a media enquiry or newsworthy story:

1. The HSCP Communications Officer will draft content (such as a release or statement) based on information provided and made available by the related service, this draft will include proposed circulation and timing of release.
2. This will include a draft quote from the relevant senior officer within the service area, who will review for approval in the first instance and make any required factual adjustments. As appropriate, quotes may be attributed to the Chief Officer, a Head of Service, or a Locality / Service Manager.
3. The HSCP Communications Officer will refer any media enquiries out of scope or service area of the HSCP to the relevant partner organisation. Similarly, Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley’s Communications Teams will forward any media enquiries they receive to the HSCP Communications Officer, where appropriate.
4. To streamline the approval process and reduce workload of the senior management team, Communications should advise on the required sign-off level. Heads of Service can sign off on operational comment (positive and factual content), while the Chief Officer must review content which contains reputational risk (sensitive issues, crisis management). The Chief Officer, IJB Chair or Vice Chair should be the key contact for communicating activity relating to Board decisions.
5. The content of any proposed media statement or media release will be shared with Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley’s communications teams to provide prior notice of its release.
6. The release or statement will be issued to media and, if appropriate, posted on the Partnership’s social media channels and/or website. It will be circulated to the IJB Chair and Vice Chair, Senior Management Team, and at the same time as issued to the press.

**Quote attribution**

* In general, comments relating to the plans, policies and performance of the HSCP will be attributed to a spokesperson for the Partnership. This will normally be the Chief Officer, Chair or relevant Head of Service. All quotes will be cleared by the named individual to whom the quote is attributed.

**Integration Joint Board decisions**

* Statements related to newsworthy Board decisions will be drafted in advance of the meeting based on the details in the relevant papers. These drafts will then be amended to take account of the decisions made at the IJB and issued as soon as possible after the meeting.

**Joint communications**

* The HSCP may take the lead in co-ordinating media and PR activity. Communications teams in both Falkirk Council and NHS Forth Valley should be informed of any planned communications activity at an early stage for information or input.

**DIGITAL CONTENT**

Easily accessible content can be a lifeline for people seeking to keep up to date with what services, care and support is available to them. Online content, including website news and social media posts, is often published at a much higher frequency than Partnership media releases. As such, it is beneficial to have a streamlined sign off process. Key to keeping up with the pace of the online environment is the principle that:

* Content (media releases and comment) which has received sign-off for use at another stage may be replicated on the Partnerships social media channels and website as deemed appropriate by communications without further approval.
* The Partnership’s communications officer leads on social media content, following the Council’s adopted Social Media Policy for Employees and NHS Forth Valley’s Social Media guidance

**Social media content**

* A rolling social media content calendar is curated by the Partnership’s communications officer. As required, content should be fact checked by an officer within the relevant service area.
* Content which includes subjective material (such as humour) or content on sensitive subject matters (such as mental health) should be jointly reviewed for appropriateness and accuracy. The Partnership’s communication officer should sense-check such material with communications colleagues in either Falkirk Council or NHS Forth Valley as needed.
* Toolkit content provided by the Scottish Government and other local authority partners does not require further approval before use on Partnership channels.
* The Partnership’s social channels share news from across all services. As such, all Partnership staff are encouraged to feed into social media content. To share news items on social media, staff can send brief details to the Partnership’s communication officer, who will draft and schedule content as appropriate.

