Communication Strategy



2024 - 2027

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context

The Communication Strategy 2024 – 2027 is part of a set of documents which support the delivery of the Partnership’s [2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan, Creating a Healthier Falkirk](https://falkirkhscp.org/publications/#strategic-plan). The Communication Strategy has been developed alongside the Participation and Engagement Strategy and shares a joint action plan outlining its delivery.

The strategy supports the implementation of national guidance and legislation covering inclusive communication standards for public sector bodies, and anticipates the introduction of a new Public Sector Equality Duty on inclusive communication from April 2025. A summary of relevant legislation is provided within the appendix.

# Purpose

This strategy outlines the Partnership’s approach to using communication to support the implementation of its Strategic Plan 2023-2026, and the routine operation of Falkirk’s Integration Joint Board. This strategy and its principles apply to all Partnership staff and their communication activity.

### our PROGRESS

The Partnership’s first Communication Strategy, published in 2021, recognised communication as a priority area for development – setting out to co-ordinate activity, strengthen messaging, and increase understanding and awareness of local services.

The Strategy included 31 actions which have helped establish new practices, standards, and resources across the Partnership’s communication activities. Throughout the three-year period, these actions have delivered:

* The launch of a ‘colleague hub’ webpage providing quick access to communication resources, training, and guides for all staff.
* A new Brand Guide, accompanied by templates.
* Regular reporting and monitoring opportunities, with a new quarterly Communications Report presented to each meeting of the Integration Joint Board.
* Frequent media coverage in target publications – promoting a range of services including residential care, home care, alcohol and drug support, adult support and protection, and our funded projects delivered by third sector partners.
* Aligning Partnership communication with national campaigns, such as Power of Attorney Day; the Scottish Government's Adult Social Care Recruitment Campaign; and Adult Support and Protection Day.
* The development of 'A Career that Cares’, our ongoing recruitment campaign which launched with a 6-month paid marketing push. This achieved 941,000 impressions; a 70% increase in applicants; and a forecast reduction in staff turnover.

methodology

The Partnership adopts the [OASIS framework](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-oasis/), a widely recognised planning tool for communication strategies, developed by the UK Government’s Communication Service.

The model has successfully been used by the Partnership to produce communication plans covering workforce recruitment, the Alcohol and Drug Partnership, and service redesign projects.

Bringing clarity to campaign and communications activity, the framework establishes five elements of planning and measurement:

1. Objectives: What do we want to achieve?
2. Audience: Who do we want to communicate with?
3. Strategy: What is the messaging?
4. Implementation: How do we take messages to target audiences?
5. Scoring: Evaluating and reviewing communications activity

### Strategy development

This strategy has been updated using feedback gathered during the development of the Partnership’s 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, which identified communication as a key workstream which will help deliver the strategic priorities.

Between 2022-2023, the Partnership undertook a major engagement programme which included consultations, surveys, and face-to-face engagement sessions with community groups, third sector organisations, and partners.

The Partnership will always seek to reduce ‘consultation fatigue’ on our audiences and partners, so has implemented the knowledge and insight gained from this process within this updated strategy.

In addition, early drafts and proposed actions from this Communications Strategy were presented to the council-wide Community Empowerment and Action Team (CEAT) networking group; the Partnership’s Policy, Planning, and Performance team; service managers; and the Senior Leadership Team for feedback.

This strategy also seeks to align itself with other strategic programmes – including the Partnership’s Integrated Workforce Plan and the new Equalities and Human Rights workplan.

objectives

The Partnership’s strategic vision is to enable people in Falkirk to live full and positive lives within supportive and inclusive communities.

The previous communications strategy set out three communication priorities, which have been updated and amended for 2024 – 2027 as:

* **Be a champion for Falkirk’s local services and workforce.**

Adding clearer recognition of workforce, this updated objective sets out how we will continue to protect and enhance the reputation of the health and social care sector, the Partnership, and its partner organisations. We will celebrate achievements and service development, supporting where possible to submit nominations to top target awards.

* **Build understanding of local services and how to access them, promoting prevention and early support where possible.**

A core component of all communication is to improve people’s access to services and support. We will continue to build understanding of the Partnership’s services delivered by our partner organisations to both internal and external audiences. Staff and partners working across our services should be able to navigate and link together services’ support, with confidence that people using the service will have their needs met. People who use our services should have a clear understanding of accessing services before they need them. Preventative and early intervention support options should be promoted as much as possible. 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.**

Since the last strategy, the Partnership has bolstered its visual identify, materials and channels of communication – fostering a shared culture across sometimes disparate teams and organisations. A continued, flexible, approach must remain to support internal stakeholders across NHS Forth Valley, Falkirk Council, our commissioned providers, community organisations and carers to feel part of the Partnership.

* **Celebrate the diversity of our local communities and workforce.**

This new objective aims to raise awareness and understanding of the various barriers and needs which can affect people’s interaction with services. The Partnership should celebrate diversity and inclusion within Falkirk to demonstrate the tailored health and social care support that is available and required. By promoting inclusion, the Partnership will help foster a culture which promotes relationships and good understanding between diverse groups.

audiences

Understanding the diversity of our audiences, and their needs, is key to tailoring our communication messages and channels. While audience profiles should be reviewed ahead of delivering distinct communication activities, the Partnership has conducted stakeholder mapping exercises outlining the following core audience groups:

**Constituent Partners**

* Falkirk Council (incl. IJB members)
* NHS Forth Valley (incl. board members)
* Commissioned Providers of our services and support options.
* People who work and volunteer in our services, including carers.

**Third, community, and voluntary sector**

* Falkirk area community councils
* Falkirk community planning partners
* Advocacy and support groups, including The Carers Centre and Self-Directed Support Forth Valley
* Community and volunteer groups

**Government and local authority**

* Local Councillors elected to Falkirk Council
* Local constituency and regional members of Scottish Parliament
* COSLA
* Other Health and Social Care Partnerships

**Professional & Registration bodies**

* Royal Colleges and professional organisations
* Scottish Association of Social Workers
* Scottish Social Services Council
* Health and Care Professions Council
* Care Inspectorate
* Trade unions

**Local connections**

* People who access our services; who may access services in future; or the families, carers, and advocates of people who access services
* Local businesses and media

### Insight

The Partnership will use a range of resources already available which provide insight into the communication needs of our audiences, including from:

* 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)

strategy

This section outlines key messages which relate to each of the afore-stated communications objectives.

### key messages

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Objective** | **Key messages** |
| Be a champion for Falkirk’s local services and workforce. | * Social care is a rewarding, flexible, career option. * Staff manage complex tasks, requiring skills and experience. * Health and care services are well-managed and innovative, designed in collaboration with the people who access support. * The Partnership provides quality, personalised care and support. * The Partnership manages an annual budget of over £255m, our workforce spans local authority, NHS, commissioned and third sector organisations. * We serve the local population of around 160,000 across our rural and urban communities. * Services follow good practice in their design and planning. |
| Build understanding of local services and how to access them, promoting prevention and early support where possible. | * We understand local needs and can connect NHS, Council, and the Third Sector together. * The Partnership brings together a range of services and support options. * We want more people to be familiar with the Partnership visual identity, as we know people who access our services may not be aware they are managed by the Partnership. * The Partnership is best placed to inform and manage local improvements to local care and services. * There are a range of services and support options which can help everyone prevent or delay a need for future care. |
| Ensure effective communication across the integrated workforce. | * We are all part of the same team, working together to deliver services. No matter if you are employed by the council, NHS, or the third sector. * We are reducing information overload and communication breakdown by providing clearer internal channels. |
| Celebrate the diversity of our local communities and workforce. | * The Partnership values and supports staff, and people who access our services, to feel a sense of belonging. * The Partnership brings together colleagues from a range of backgrounds, but we are all part of one team. * People may have different experiences accessing services, due to their background, culture, or needs. * People may have differing needs, due to their ability, knowledge, health condition, or culture. * Recognising diversity will help our staff and services understand needs, and how their support can be tailored to meet those needs. |

# 

# implementation

We will achieve our communication objectives by setting and adhering to our communication standards; improving accessibility; championing inclusivity; and using a range of methods and channels.

### 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. A range of accessible formats will be provided as default for publications and communications which help people access services.
* **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. While efficient, this ethos also promotes consistency in wording and shared understanding.
* **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.

### DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, BELONGING

There are several pieces of legislation which help public bodies protect people’s rights while developing and delivering services. These include the Equality Act (which introduced both the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Fairer Scotland Duty) and the Human Rights Act 1998.

In addition, the Scottish Government intends to introduce a new Scottish Specific Public Sector Equality Duty from April 2025 on Inclusive Communication.

Together, these regulations will help ensure we consider the needs of everyone who accesses local services through Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership by addressing the challenges or barriers they may face.

We know that people can experience barriers to accessing services because of their background or demographics – such as race, age, sexual orientation, or disability. These factors are called ‘Protected Characteristics’ and have been identified in law to help public bodies plan services which address discrimination and inequality.

Inclusive communication recognises these barriers, raises awareness, and helps people access services by signposting to extra support or offering information in a more suitable way.

The Partnership’s communication will also proactively celebrate Falkirk’s diverse population and health and social care workforce. By doing so, we will help foster a culture of understanding – sharing experiences and perspectives. This will ultimately help services to recognise barriers and offer support in a flexible and inclusive way, leading to more equitable services.

We recognise the principle of inclusion and equitable services must be embedded throughout all our work. This is referred to as ‘mainstreaming’, which is measured through our Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report, published every two years.

The Partnership’s Communications Officer will work closely with the Equality and Human Rights Officer to support associated workplans and promote inclusive communication across a range of work.

### ACCESSIBILITY

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

To ensure our written and online materials meet accessibility requirements for public sector websites, the Partnership follows accessibility guidelines and policies provided by Falkirk Council.

The Partnership will tailor its communication to meet the needs of audiences, which may involve offering materials in a range of formats, including:

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| --- | --- |
| **Format** | **Definition** |
| **Summary** | A stand-alone document which provides the main points but not the in-depth details. Useful for providing large documents in a way that is quickly understood and accessible. |
| **Easy Read** | Text and image-based format primarily aimed at people with learning disabilities. Easy read documents use simple language and short sentences. Images should represent each sentence or idea. Text should use a plain font in a minimum 14 point size. To keep easy read materials short and digestible, it is beneficial to shorten information into an executive summary – keeping just the elements people need to know. |
| **British Sign Language (BSL)** | British Sign Language uses hand gestures, facial expression, and body language. BSL is a recognised language and is used by people who are Deaf or have hearing impairments. |
| **Video** | We will use short visual summaries for key Partnership communication pieces. Where video is used, we will also include subtitles. The Partnership will host all video files on its [YouTube channel.](https://www.youtube.com/@FalkirkHSCP) |
| **Audio MP3** | Material that is read out loud and recorded for playback. Text-to-speech (TTS) may also be used, where audio material is provided using software to convert written material. |
| **Clear / large print** | Documents provided in at least 18-point font size. |
| **Language translation** | Text translated into a language other than English. The Partnership will use local demographic data to establish a list of the most used languages in the local population. |
| **Braille** | A tactile writing system used by some visually impaired people. |

When producing alternative accessible format materials, the Partnership will utilise latest guidance from the UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF), available at [ukaaf.org](https://www.ukaaf.org/).

**Accessible Formats**

Action #34 of the joint Communication, Participation, and Engagement Action Plan proposes the development of Accessible Communication Standards and Guidance, applicable to key materials which communicate how people can access a service, and the range of support offered by a service. This will ensure key materials which act as a ‘front door’ to a service or support option are immediately accessible to as many people as possible.

Services should consider where it is applicable and proportionate to apply these standards, meeting the needs of people who use their support and services. The advance and prevalent use of technology, such as e-readers and online translation by a service’s audience may reduce the need for the production of alternative formats as default.

The accessible formats covered include a summary for documents longer than two pages of A4; Easy Read; and Audio versions. These formats will be defined in detail, including guidance resources, within documents produced as part of the delivery of Action #34. The formats should be applied proportionately to key materials identified by service demand.

The summary, easy read, and audio formats have been identified as formats which can be produced using efficient and proportional resources. While we anticipate these formats will ensure the Partnership meets the requirements of the upcoming Inclusive Communication Public Sector Equality Duty from its inception, further amendments to our Primary Formats criteria will be made as national guidance is produced and finalised by the Scottish Government.

As already in practice, alternative formats (i.e. language translations) can be produced upon request by anyone, at any time, and are produced where we identify an audience need when planning engagement activity.

The Partnership’s [2023 -2026 Strategic Plan](https://falkirkhscp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2023/04/Falkirk-HSCP-Strategic-Plan.pdf) provides an example of producing material in a range of accessible formats. In addition to the full strategy, [a summary document](https://falkirkhscp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2023/04/Falkirk-HSCP-Strategic-Plan-Summary-on-a-page.pdf), [easy read version](https://falkirkhscp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2023/04/Falkirk-HSCP-Strategic-Plan-Easy-Read.pdf), and [audio described video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7NcX7iBtoE&ab_channel=FalkirkHealthandSocialCarePartnership) are available.

**Training**

The Partnership will offer communication training and resources to staff, with the following areas identified as useful focus areas:

* Plain English
* Communication Access UK accreditation

The principles of Plain English should be used within all Partnership communication. The Partnership will utilise free guides and resources from the Plain English Campaign to continually promote best practice. The use of jargon, technical wording, or acronyms is common within the health and social care sector. These phrases and acronyms may be widely understood by staff but are not as commonly understood by public audiences. The principles of plain English will ensure everyone understands information the first time they read or hear it.

Communication Access UK is an initiative led by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, developed with charities and other organisations which share a vision to improve the lives of people with communication difficulties. The free Communication Access accreditation training implements the TALK prompt/standards, which ensure people are given the opportunity to communicate their needs and wants when interacting with services:

* **Time**: Give people time to communicate
* **Ask**: Ask what you can do to help, and check if they understand.
* **Listen**: Pay attention, don’t interrupt or multi-task. Show that you understand and care.
* **Keep trying**: Allow time for misunderstanding or accessibility needs. Don’t rush people into a decision or end the conversation.

### methods and channels

The Partnership will continue to use a range of methods to reach audiences. This includes:

* **Media relations**

We will proactively manage the Partnership’s reputation and increase awareness of its services through media relations – including press releases, media comments, opinion pieces, photocalls, and interviews. A joint media and communications protocol is in place between Falkirk Council, NHS Forth Valley, and the Partnership, providing a framework for responding to media enquires.

* **Digital**

Our online presence offers information in easily accessible formats. Using the Partnership website, social media channels, and newsletters to engage and communicate with audiences. The Partnership has its [own social media guidelines](https://falkirkhscp.org/social-media-guidelines/) and moderation principles which sit alongside the approved communications protocol.

* **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.

* **Internal engagement**

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 sets out good practice and engagement principles to support this.

### Brand identity

The Partnership’s brand guide, [Communicating for Falkirk](https://falkirkhscp.org/colleague-hub/#brand), sets out further standards and best practice for our communication. It is designed to equip everyone with the guidance, tools, and templates needed to communicate with a consistent and accessible voice and identity.

It is important that identity and brand guidelines are consistently applied to present a professional, reputable, and trusted voice.

Scoring & evaluation

The Partnership monitors the implementation of its Communication Strategy and activity through a quarterly update report, presented to the Integration Joint Board at each meeting.

This Board update includes a summary of:

* Media – quantity of media mentions, and estimated audience reach.
* Website activity – quantity of visits, most visited pages, social media referrals.
* Social media presence – number of followers, total reach and engagements (likes/shares/comments).
* Comments and feedback received via Care Opinion.

In addition, campaign activities will set tailored measurement metrics such as: number of service referrals; reduced complaints; or increases in job applications.

The quarterly Board update monitors the implementation the Communication Strategy, Participation and Engagement Strategy, and the joint action plan.

### action plan

A [joint action plan](https://falkirkhscp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2024/07/Comms-and-Engagement-Action-Plan.docx) which supports the implementation of the Partnership’s Communication Strategy and the Participation and Engagement Strategy has been produced.

The action plan contains 21 actions supporting Communication and 17 actions supporting Participation and Engagement.

# Appendix 1 – summary of relevant legislation

Inclusive information and communication is promoted through various pieces of legislation and policy, as follows:

### The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act makes it unlawful for public authorities and others to discriminate against, harass or victimise employees and people who use services. It requires public authorities and others to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to avoid disadvantage and is clear that reasonable adjustment can include provision of information in an accessible format.

### The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) – Scottish Specific Duties Regulations

In March 2021, the Scottish Government published a report which identified issues and areas for improvement for the existing Scottish Specific Equality Duties. This made a commitment to embed inclusive communication as a new duty, expected to be introduced from April 2025.

### The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018

The 2018 Act contains an example of a specific duty being placed on a public authority regarding inclusive communication. Section 4 of the 2018 Act states that the Scottish Ministers must have regard to the importance of communicating in an inclusive way as part of their duty to keep under consideration what steps they could take to ensure that individuals are given what they are eligible to be given through the Scottish social security system. The 2018 Act explains that 'communicating in an inclusive way' means communicating in a way that ensures individuals who have difficulty communicating (in relation to speech, language or otherwise) can receive information and express themselves in ways that best meet each individual's needs.

### The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations

In general, these place a duty on public sector bodies, including the Scottish Government, to make sure that their website or mobile applications are accessible. This means making them perceivable, operable, understandable and robust to an internationally recognised accessibility standard.

### The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act

The health care principles as set out in the 2011 Act include reference to accessible information. Under section 5 of the 2011 Act, NHS bodies must, in performing their health service functions, uphold the health care principles in so far as they are relevant to the function being performed.

### 

### getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)

GIRFEC is the national approach to promoting, supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing of all children and young people, providing a consistent framework and shared language which puts their rights and wellbeing at the heart of the services that provide support to them and their families.

The GIRFEC National Practice Model seeks to help practitioners consider ways to help improve wellbeing for a child or young person. Children, young people and families should be supported to fully participate in discussions as the assessment of need is made and be at the heart of any planning, including receiving accessible information on the decisions reached and why.

### National Trauma Training Programme

In 2016 NHS Education for Scotland was asked by the Scottish Government to develop a set of resources to promote and implement trauma informed practice within Scotland. This was due to the growing recognition of the impact of traumatic experiences on people. Trauma informed practice, including within communication, recognises when someone may be affected by trauma, collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account and responding in a way that supports recovery, does no harm, and recognises and supports people's resilience.

### BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force in October 2015. It promotes the use of BSL in Scotland, primarily by requiring local authorities, and other public bodies, to develop BSL plans that outline how they will promote and raise awareness of the language. Falkirk Council’s British Sign Language policy sets out how the national BSL plan will be implemented in the local area.