



2025 - 2028

NHS Ayrshire & Arran Communications and Engagement Strategy

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1. About NHS Ayrshire & Arran

NHS Ayrshire & Arran



One of 14 NHS Boards in Scotland







Three health and social care partnerships:

- East Ayrshire
- North Ayrshire
- South Ayrshire

Primary care:

- 295 GPs across 53 GP practices
- 197 dentists across 64 sites
- 2 orthodontics practices
- 97 community pharmacies
- 47 optometry high street practices



Employs 11,739 staff (10,932 whole time equivalent (WTE))

Population of Ayrshire and Arran - 368,690	
East Ayrshire - 122,020	33.1 per cent of total population
North Ayrshire - 134,220	36.4 per cent of total population
South Ayrshire - 112,450	30.5 per cent of total population



2. The Communications and Engagement & Digital Media Teams

The Communications and Engagement & Digital Media Teams work together to connect with staff and stakeholders, supporting effective communication and protecting NHS Ayrshire & Arran’s reputation. We collaborate across departments to ensure messages reach the right audiences

The Communications Team delivers a professional internal and external communications service and is the first point of contact for media enquiries, offering a 24/7 response.

The Engagement & Digital Media Team provides specialist guidance on stakeholder engagement, including gathering feedback, service change, and public involvement. We manage the public website and corporate social media to enhance communication effectiveness, accessibility, and engagement.



3. Our Communications and Engagement Strategy

Our Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out our commitment to enhance how we connect with patients, staff, local communities, and stakeholders. This strategy is designed to align with and support our corporate objectives; the Caring for Ayrshire vision; and our core values.

It encompasses a comprehensive approach to communication and engagement, integrating key activities such as internal and external communications and engagement, media relations, campaigns, digital media, and community engagement. By strategically aligning our initiatives with corporate priorities and embedding robust measurement and evaluation frameworks, this three-year strategy will empower us to deliver innovative, timely, and impactful communication and engagement.

As part of our strategic approach, we recognise that engagement and consultation are not only good practice but essential requirements, particularly when considering service changes. We are committed to working in partnership with stakeholders from the earliest possible stage to ensure their views help shape proposals before decisions are made.

Where service change is proposed, we will follow the formal consultation requirements as outlined in the Planning with People guidance. This includes setting out clear objectives, timelines, and opportunities for meaningful participation. It is the responsibility of staff involved in developing service change to ensure that appropriate engagement and consultation is carried out in line with this guidance. This will be embedded throughout the development and delivery of our communication and engagement plans.

We will review the action plan annually and share it with staff, stakeholders, and Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board to ensure transparency and sustained progress. This will clearly set out what has been achieved, why it matters, who was involved, and what impact it has had, enabling staff to understand their contribution and the value of ongoing engagement and communication efforts.



4. Our challenges

NHS Ayrshire & Arran faces significant challenges as we strive to deliver high-quality care in the context of increasing demand on our health and care services. As our population ages and more people are living with more complex needs, the demand for care grows, placing pressure on our finite resources. This is further compounded by the levels of deprivation in Ayrshire and Arran, which contribute to deep-rooted health inequalities. Additionally, all NHS Boards in Scotland are navigating an unprecedented financial challenge, with rising costs for staffing, medicines, and supplies outpacing available resources.

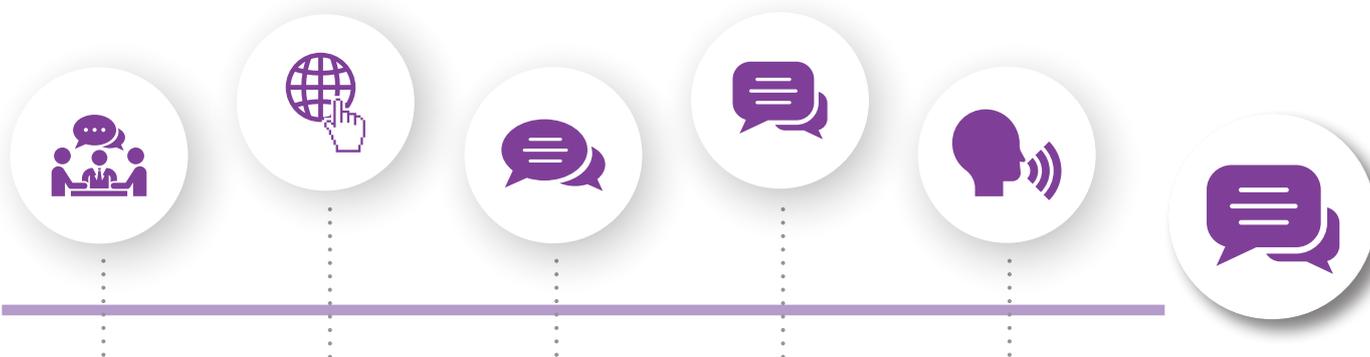
To address these challenges, we must not only deliver existing services more efficiently, but also innovate in how we provide new services, while maintaining the highest standards of care.

The communications and engagement landscape continues to transform. This strategy will meet the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities this changing landscape presents.

At the heart of this strategy is a commitment to deliver effective communications and engagement that make a genuine and measurable difference to those working in NHS Ayrshire & Arran, as well as those using our services. Our communications and engagement approach is crucial to ensuring our communities are kept informed about local health services and have the opportunity to influence and shape these.

As engagement and communication methods continue to evolve, we will actively explore and integrate new and innovative approaches to ensure our strategy remains responsive, inclusive and effective.

While the Communications and Engagement & Digital Media Teams have a key role to play in leading on and delivering this strategy, NHS Ayrshire & Arran needs the commitment and contribution of every member of staff if it is to communicate and engage effectively and deliver the aims of this strategy.



5. Caring for Ayrshire

Caring for Ayrshire represents our bold, shared ambition with East, North, and South Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) and our wider Ayrshire Community Planning Partners. Together, we are united by a common purpose, to “work together to achieve the healthiest possible life for everyone in Ayrshire and Arran”.



Our commitment is to develop a whole-system approach to health and well-being that puts people at the heart of care. Grounded in population needs, guided by evidence, and aligned with the principles of Realistic Medicine, we aim to deliver personalised, high-quality care.

Our vision for Caring for Ayrshire is to provide care as close to home as possible, supported by a strong network of community-based services. For those with more complex needs, safe and timely access to specialist care will be ensured. We’re excited to collaborate with our communities to explore innovative ways of designing and delivering health and care services that truly meet the needs of local people.

This communications and engagement strategy will play a key role in bringing the Caring for Ayrshire vision to life, helping to keep our communities informed, involved and inspired.

To learn more about our Caring for Ayrshire vision, visit www.nhs.uk/about-us/caring-for-ayrshire.

6. Legislation, standards and guidance

The delivery of this strategy will ensure we meet the key legislative requirements, standards, and guidance outlined in appendix 1.

The Communication and Engagement Strategy will be delivered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the Fairer Scotland Duty, and the Staff Governance Standards, ensuring that all engagement activities are inclusive, promote equality, address socio-economic disadvantage, and uphold the principles of dignity, fairness, and respect for staff and communities.

In 2021 the Scottish Government and COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) jointly published Planning with People, community engagement and participation guidance. In May 2024, updated Planning with People guidance was published. Our communications and engagement strategy is built on these principles, ensuring that we not only meet our legal obligations but also foster meaningful engagement, particularly around service changes, as set out in the updated guidance. By doing so, we’ll ensure that the voices of our patients, staff, and communities are at the heart of everything we do.



6.1. Our communications and engagement strategy

We will demonstrate our purpose, values and commitments by adhering to the following guiding principles:

- We are committed to building strong, meaningful relationships with our staff, patients, carers, and partners.
- Our goal is to provide clear, timely, and accessible information that is easy to find and understand.
- Listening to patient and staff experiences will be at the heart of shaping and improving local health and care services, and we will demonstrate how feedback leads to real change.
- By delivering impactful communications and engagement, we will drive forward NHS Ayrshire & Arran's strategic objectives and ensure our high standards are reflected in everything we do.
- We will enhance the reputation of NHS Ayrshire & Arran by making high-quality communications central to our work.
- We will actively promote NHS Ayrshire & Arran as a great place to work and receive care, showcasing our commitment to excellence.
- Through this strategy, we will also raise awareness of the challenges we face, encouraging a shared understanding across our communities.

For definitions of communication, engagement and consultation, see appendix 2.

The ways in which NHS Ayrshire & Arran communicates and engages is shaped by feedback from our patients, staff, citizens, and other stakeholders. We use a wide range of communication and engagement channels and methods to ensure we tailor our messages to the appropriate audience, while following accessibility guidance. We will continue to evolve and develop these channels and methods so that we can respond to new opportunities and technologies.

We communicate and engage with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders and partners on a regular basis: staff, patients and advocates, citizens, communities, partner organisations, media; and elected members.



7. Our aims

Our aims are designed to elevate how we communicate, engage, and connect across all areas of our health and care system.

- We will align our communications and engagement efforts to support and advance our key corporate priorities.
- We will ensure effective and innovative communication and engagement with our workforce that inspires, informs, involves and connects our staff.
- We will strengthen our public website as the trusted digital hub for clear, accessible information, service updates, stories, and news.
- We will enhance our social media presence across platforms to share key messages and connect with our communities.
- We will use multimedia to enhance the accessibility, engagement, and effectiveness of our communications.
- We will build and enhance NHS Ayrshire & Arran's reputation by delivering impactful media relations that highlight our successes and key messages across local, national, and digital platforms.
- We will ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to stakeholder engagement, tailored to specific needs, to ensure meaningful connections.
- We will create patient and health information that is clear, concise and meaningful to our patients, adopting a digital first approach, where appropriate.



7.1 We will align our communications and engagement efforts to support and advance our key corporate priorities.

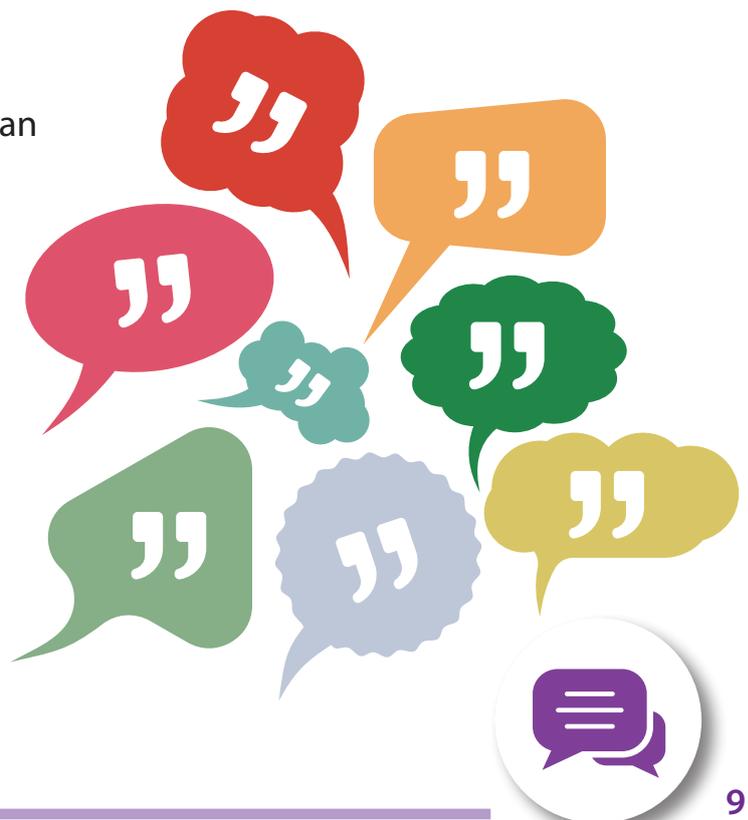
The demand for effective communications and engagement support continues to rise and further work is therefore required to establish an improved system for managing requests and priorities. This will ensure that the Communications and Engagement & Digital Media Teams' efforts can be focussed on proactive and planned activity, as well as reactive or ad-hoc requests. Improved reporting as set out in the actions below would enable the Board to strengthen the governance of engagement activity.

How we will do this:

- Produce an annual communications and engagement report for consideration by Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board.
- Review organisational communications and engagement activity - including that which the Communications and Engagement and Digital Media Teams do not lead on – and put systems in place to ensure it supports our corporate priorities and delivers best value.
- Develop guidance for the completion of the 'communication, involvement, engagement and consultation' section of the Board paper template.
- Refresh processes to improve the measurement, evaluation and reporting of organisational communications and engagement activity.
- Provide guidance and templates to support the development, engagement and implementation of NHS Ayrshire & Arran strategies.

How we will measure this:

- Annual plan reported to Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board and Corporate Management Team, which will demonstrate communication and engagement activity undertaken by teams.
- Demonstrate that processes for communication and engagement are communicated clearly with staff on a regular basis.
- Consistent approach for NHS Ayrshire & Arran strategies in terms of design, format, content and accessibility.



7.2 We will ensure effective and innovative communication and engagement with our workforce that inspires, informs, involves and connects our staff.

Clear, inclusive communication and engagement empowers staff, boosting attendance, recruitment, retention, productivity, and innovation. It is important to create opportunities for participation and feedback, especially around service change and reform. NHS Ayrshire & Arran must also engage independent contractors, volunteers, students, and trainees. We need to consider those with limited access to communication channels or engagement opportunities.

How we will do this:

- Continuously review internal communications to assess impact and improve.
- Strengthen existing channels, while managing use to prevent digital fatigue.
- Create a staff communications toolkit for consistent messaging.
- Equip leaders to engage teams through purposeful conversations.
- Embed staff involvement in planning and delivering stakeholder engagement around service change.
- Explore how we use Microsoft 365 to enhance internal communications.
- Refresh intranet content and support teams to build their own pages.
- Develop a team SharePoint site and support teams to create their own.
- Share staff stories across platforms to inspire participation.
- Create a yearly planner for Chief Executive blogs and video messages.

How we will measure this:

- Develop tools to evaluate and report on communications and engagement.
- Measure staff feedback via iMatter reports, focus groups and surveys.
- Track Viva Engage membership numbers and provide regular analytics reports.
- Monitor use of staff toolkits, through planned feedback and evaluation.
- Use Viva Engage to understand staff sentiment and content preferences.
- Assess impact of staff and organisational stories using analytics and feedback.
- Weekly walkround message; monthly blog; and quarterly video message.



7.3 We will strengthen our public website as the trusted digital hub for clear, accessible information, service updates, stories, and news.

The NHS Ayrshire & Arran public website provides a reliable and accessible platform for health information and services. We will continue to build on this foundation by enhancing content, improving user experience, and ensuring ongoing compliance with recognised digital accessibility standards. Our aim is to establish the website as the central, trusted source of information, supporting a 'digital first' approach that enables people to access care, guidance, and support easily and confidently online.

How we will do this:

- Improve website content and further develop functionality to meet user needs.
- Adopt a digital first approach to providing patient and health information, where possible, by improving access to information via the public website.
- Provide training, guidance, and support to strengthen skills in content management and maximise the impact of digital communication.
- Review and strengthen governance arrangements for the NHS Ayrshire & Arran public website and associated corporate websites.
- Ensure content is regularly reviewed and aligned with social media campaigns, creating a clear and consistent portal for digital signposting.
- Undertake user and service engagement to identify missing information, evaluate user experience and scope opportunities.
- Create a comprehensive and user-friendly portal showcasing recruitment, workforce, and career opportunities.

How we will measure this

- Monitor website engagement using Google Analytics, tracking total visits and unique users to evaluate reach.
- Assess website user feedback survey completion rates and evaluate feedback gathered.
- Regularly assess and monitor reductions in inaccessible documents.
- Reduction in content and accessibility issues identified through manual checks.
- Increased availability of patient information on the website.
- Assess provision and uptake of staff training and support.



7.4 We will enhance our social media presence across platforms to share key messages and connect with our communities.

Social media is a key channel for NHS Ayrshire & Arran to reach and engage a diverse audience. We currently use Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Strengthening how we track and analyse social media will help us identify best practices, improve performance, and evaluate impact, with a clear focus on sharing local content, video, and personal stories that resonate with our communities.

How we will do this:

- Grow our follower base by encouraging positive conversations, responding to comments, and building community through engaging messaging.
- Align positive news stories with campaigns, priorities and organisational values.
- Utilise social media effectively to drive traffic to the NHS Ayrshire & Arran website.
- Support staff managing NHS Ayrshire & Arran's associated social media accounts with clear guidelines, training, toolkit and support with brand and asset creation.
- Continue to explore emerging trends in digital communications channels.
- Manage the content schedule and annual planner, identifying news stories and campaigns and collaborating across services to create engaging digital content.
- Actively use social media to promote recruitment and careers information.

How we will measure this:

- Conduct monthly audits of corporate channels, using metrics like views, likes, shares, comments, and click-through rates to evaluate performance.
- Number of social media followers and growth rate over time.
- Conduct regular audits and evaluation of NHS Ayrshire & Arran associated social media accounts using monthly reports to measure effectiveness.
- Audit uptake and effectiveness of social media training and toolkit.
- Assess use of the corporate Canva Pro platform through user activity, content performance, and feedback.
- Evaluate the digital recruitment plan to measure effectiveness and report findings to the Workforce Planning Implementation Group.



7.5 We will use multimedia, to enhance the accessibility, engagement, and effectiveness of our communications.

Using multimedia, such as video, animation, audio, and graphics, helps engage a diverse audience, supports varied learning styles, and improves accessibility. It enhances recruitment, engagement, and learning across our workforce. It brings key messages to life and enables more accessible, creative, and compelling communication.

How we will do this:

- Collaborate with services to create and promote multimedia content across our communication channels, including social media, website and intranet.
- Strengthen support and governance for video production and YouTube use.
- Develop training and guidance for staff to help them create and use videos, animations, audio and infographics proactively.
- Actively use multimedia to support recruitment and to promote Ayrshire as an excellent place to work, train and live.
- Create a library of local multimedia assets to support communications and strengthen engagement across our channels.
- Use multimedia to support equality, diversity and inclusion, for example captions, British Sign Language (BSL), audio, and easy read formats.

How we will measure this:

- Use analytics to assess the reach, engagement, and effectiveness of multimedia content published across our digital platforms.
- Audit staff uptake of training and guidance, evaluating its effectiveness through user feedback and the quality and impact of multimedia content produced.
- Track the use of video, animation, YouTube, and other digital platforms through regular audit and review.
- Audit use of the multimedia library, including asset quality and user feedback.
- Monitor implementation and impact of inclusive multimedia formats through channel tracking and feedback from diverse audience groups.



7.6 We will build and enhance NHS Ayrshire & Arran's reputation by delivering impactful media relations that highlight our successes and key messages across local, national and digital platforms.

The way in which people access news and information is changing. NHS Ayrshire & Arran needs to react quickly and produce content that is relevant and targeted for key stakeholders. Doing so will result in improved delivery of key messages and positive coverage to enhance reputation.

How we will do this:

- Refresh and deliver media training for key spokespeople.
- Develop a media training resource for staff ahead of ad-hoc interviews or filming.
- Engage with key influencers to understand preferred content and style.
- Undertake audience insight research on accessing information.
- Review how media coverage is evaluated.
- Proactively collaborate with local media to explore opportunities.
- Source and share positive stories with local and national media to build reputation.
- Proactively promote NHS Ayrshire & Arran as an excellent place to work and receive care.
- Increase public understanding of the challenges – for example, increased demand, financial pressures and recruitment.

How we will measure this:

- Quarterly media report to the Corporate Management Team and Ayrshire and Arran Board NHS Board detailing:
 - volume of press releases and positive news stories
 - media coverage breakdown
 - number and context of media enquiries
 - deadlines met, and reasons for any delay
 - summary of media interviews and filming bids



7.7 We will ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to stakeholder engagement, tailored to specific needs, to ensure meaningful connections.

NHS Ayrshire & Arran is committed to inclusive engagement, ensuring community voices shape the services we deliver. Building on existing good practice, we will strengthen coordination and oversight to improve consistency and support shared learning. We are committed to equipping and supporting staff to lead effective stakeholder engagement that meets statutory duties and reflects best practice.

How we will do this:

- Develop a framework and supporting toolkit to support staff to effectively plan, undertake and evaluate stakeholder engagement.
- Use varied methods to involve people and make engagement more accessible.
- Complete an impact assessment before starting any service change engagement or consultation, to ensure equity, consistency, and reduce potential risks.
- Develop guidance and resources to support a consistent and effective approach to gathering feedback and lived experience through surveys.
- Proactively engage and consult with patients, service users and communities to gather feedback that drives improvements aligned with their priorities.
- Undertake and embed engagement and consultation on service proposals, in line with Planning with People guidance.
- Collaborate with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to evaluate and strengthen approaches to engagement and consultation.

How we will measure this:

- Staff use and effectiveness of the toolkit evaluated through feedback and review.
- Regular audit and evaluation of patient and public involvement approaches.
- Stakeholder engagement tracked and evaluated using a defined framework.
- Evidence of feedback being acted upon and communicated back to stakeholders.
- Equality impact assessments are audited and evaluated to ensure they are complete, evidence-based, and used to inform inclusive decision-making.
- Feedback survey tools are regularly audited for consistency, accessibility, and impact.
- Evidence of staff understanding of statutory duties and best practice.



7.8 We will create patient and health information that is clear, concise and meaningful to our patients, adopting a digital first approach, where appropriate.

Patient information is fundamental to effective, patient-centred, quality care. Information needs to be clinically accurate, up-to-date and written in a way that is easy to understand. It can provide patients with a better understanding of their condition, supporting them to manage their own condition, as well as allowing them to make informed choices and decisions regarding their treatment. We will adopt a digital first approach where possible, to improve access to information, make it easy to update where necessary, and create a more sustainable process.

How we will do this:

- Develop a robust process for the management of all patient and health information.
- Encourage staff to use reliable and evidence-based sources of patient information – for example, NHS Inform, EIDO Healthcare or Knowledge Network.
- Promote the Communications and Engagement and Digital Media Teams as the first point of contact when developing patient or health information.

How we will measure this:

- Increased use of trusted information platforms.
- More patient and health information on public website.
- Reduction in number of leaflets being created.



8. Governance

Each year, we will create an ambitious and forward-thinking communications and engagement action plan, aligned with NHS Ayrshire & Arran's planning cycle, to drive priority projects. This plan will outline key initiatives that support service changes, engagement efforts, targeted campaigns, and the delivery of our strategic communication goals. By staying adaptable and responsive to emerging needs, the plan will ensure that our communications remain impactful and relevant throughout the year.

The annual communications and engagement action plan will be submitted for approval as part of the organisation's planning cycle, ensuring alignment with our leadership at every level. The plan will be reviewed by:

- Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board
- Corporate Management Team (CMT)
- Area Partnership Forum (APF)
- Staff Governance Committee

We have engaged with key partners in the development of our strategic approach and overarching principles for this Communication and Engagement Strategy. This collaborative approach will continue to be supported by input from a network of forums across health, social care and community settings, ensuring a wide range of perspectives will inform our direction. We are committed to continuing this engagement as we move forward with the implementation of our delivery plans, maintaining open dialogue and fostering strong, inclusive partnerships throughout.

The Communications and Engagement & Digital Media teams will lead the delivery of this strategy, supported by the Chief Executive, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board, and the executive management team. Success will also depend on the active participation of individuals and teams across the organisation, ensuring our communications and engagement are truly collaborative and embedded in everything we do.



9. For more information

If you require further information, please contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Legislation, standards and guidance

- [Planning with People: community engagement and participation guidance](#)
- [Freedom of Information \(Scotland\) Act 2002](#)
- [General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
- [Patients Rights \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#)
- [NHS Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#)
- [Staff Governance Standard \(4th Edition\) \(Scottish Government, March 2012\)](#)
- [National Standards for Community Engagement \(Scottish Development Community Centre\)](#)
- [Fairer Scotland Duty 2018](#)
- [NHS Ayrshire & Arran logo and brand guidelines](#)
(document on staff intranet only)*
- [NHS Ayrshire & Arran style guide 2022](#)
(document on staff intranet only)*
- [NHS Ayrshire & Arran business use of social media policy](#)
(document on staff intranet only)*
- [NHS Ayrshire & Arran social media business user guide](#)
(document on staff intranet only)*
- [NHS Ayrshire & Arran personal use of social media policy](#)
(document on staff intranet only)*
- [NHS Ayrshire & Arran media guidance](#)
(document on staff intranet only)*

* Documents on staff intranet are only available to NHS Ayrshire & Arran staff accessing the staff network.



Appendix 2 - Definitions

Communications refers to communication activity carried out to inform stakeholders, including patients, citizens and staff. The primary objective of communications is to deliver messages that generate desired outcomes, such as understanding, awareness or a change in behaviour. The focus of communication in this context is to inform stakeholders by raising their awareness of messages that are of value to both them and the organisation.

Engagement is about building and maintaining relationships and creating a constructive dialogue with stakeholders. This dialogue should help shape and inform the organisation's thinking and decisions. Engagement covers a range of activities that encourage and enable people to be involved in decisions that affect them. Communication is a prerequisite for engagement, but it is possible to have communication without engagement.

Consultation is a more formal process with specific requirements set out within Planning with People guidance in relation to service change and major service change. Consultation forms an essential element of structured engagement and participation plans, for any change process being considered. Its remit should be finite and the scope for stakeholder input and influence should be clearly stated. Boards must be able to demonstrate they have genuinely taken account of views or suggestions made during a consultation.

