



HSE Communications and Public Affairs Strategy

2026



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1. Introduction

The Communications and Public Affairs function supports the health service in a complex, high profile and constantly changing environment. Our work is key to how the health service is understood by the public, patients, staff, the political system and wider stakeholders.

The work of Communications and Public Affairs can be understood through **two core elements**, which together reflect the full breadth of the function:

Telling the story of the health service — explaining, adding context, and responding to issues affecting the health service through media, public affairs, internal communications and stakeholder engagement. This work often takes place in fast moving, high profile and complex environments.

It includes supporting the organisation through periods of scrutiny, reform and challenge, and ensuring accurate, timely and credible information is available to decision makers, staff and the public.

Enabling service delivery for patients and service users — through communications, digital services and engagement that help people understand the health service, access care, trust the information they receive, and feel supported in managing their health and wellbeing over time. This includes prevention, early intervention and informed self-care where appropriate.

Together, these two elements describe the purpose of Communications and Public Affairs, and reflect the full breadth, scale and importance of the function within the HSE.



Our Aim

Our aim is to support trust and confidence in the health service by providing clear, reliable and effective communications and digital services for the public, patients, staff and stakeholders.

Our Goals for 2026

To fulfil this aim, our work in 2026 will focus on the following broad goals. These goals describe the outcomes we want to achieve across both public facing communications and service-enabling activity.

1. Improve public understanding of the health service

Ensure the public, patients, staff and stakeholders have access to clear, timely and accurate information about how the health service operates, how decisions are made, and how issues affecting the service are being addressed.

2. Build and sustain trust and confidence

Strengthen trust and confidence in the health service through credible, consistent and transparent communications, particularly during periods of pressure, reform or heightened public scrutiny.

3. Enable access to care and information

Help patients and service users to access the right information and services, at the right time and in the right place, through effective communications and digital services.

4. Promote health and wellbeing

Enable people to manage, protect and improve their health and wellbeing through clear public health communications, campaigns and information services.

5. Support effective communication across the health service

Ensure leadership, staff and teams communicate clearly and consistently with each other and with external audiences, particularly in complex or rapidly evolving situations.

6. Enhance transparency, accountability and engagement

Improve how the HSE communicates with elected representatives, media, stakeholders and the public, ensuring openness, responsiveness and trust.

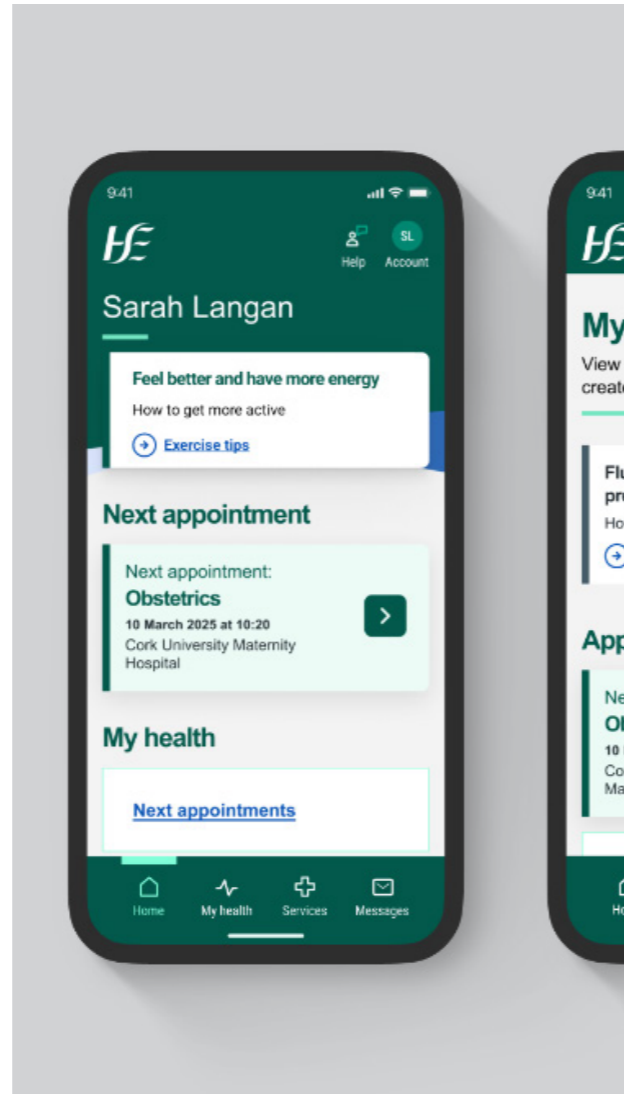


How We Deliver These Goals

We deliver these goals through an integrated approach to communications. Our work spans campaigns, media and issues management, public affairs, digital platforms, direct patient communications, internal communications, public engagement and feedback systems.

This includes the development and continuous improvement of digital platforms, systems and communications infrastructure that enable safe, reliable and accessible information and services.

We do this in partnership with services, staff and, where appropriate, patients and the public, co-designing communications and digital services informed by insight and evidence. This includes close collaboration with communications teams across the six Health Regions to ensure alignment between national priorities and regional service delivery.



Supporting Patients and Service Users

Supporting patients and service users is a central part of this strategy. Our communications and digital services are designed to:

- help people understand what services are available
- support informed decision-making
- reduce confusion and anxiety
- provide opportunities for feedback and learning

Through services such as the HSE website, the HSE Health App, HSE Live, campaigns, direct patient communications and complaints and feedback systems, we support people throughout their interactions with the health service. This includes supporting people through operational digital tools used in everyday care.

We continuously review feedback, performance data and user insight to improve how we communicate and deliver digital services. This work complements our wider role in supporting public understanding of the health service and responding to issues affecting the organisation.

Our Teams and Functions

Our national Communications and Public Affairs teams work closely with regional communications teams and communications professionals across the health service.

Together, we deliver communications and digital services across:

- Campaigns
- Press and Media
- Strategic Communications and Delivery
- Public Affairs
- Internal Communications
- Digital
- Design

- HSE Live
- Complaints Governance and Learning
- Freedom of Information
- Irish Language
- Business Support Team
- Visual Identity and Branding

Together, these teams enable the health service to communicate effectively, consistently and credibly with patients, the public, staff, media, elected representatives and stakeholders.

While this is a National Communications and Public Affairs Strategy, it operates within a system that includes six Health Regions. National and regional communications teams work in alignment, sharing common principles and standards while responding to regional service priorities.





2. Communications Projects

In this section, we set out the communications projects for 2026, including projects aligned to the National Service Plan, alongside internal projects to strengthen how we work and support effective delivery.

Priority projects for 2026 – the major communications initiatives that will support key objectives of the HSE, as outlined in the National Service Plan 2026 and the Corporate Plan and drive the strategic priorities for HSE Communications.

Projects to develop our own services and teams – internal transformation projects to enhance our ways of working,

promote greater collaboration and information sharing. They will help to deliver on our priority projects and other key communications deliverables.

Each of our operational teams works to a detailed operational plan aligned to and supporting delivery of the projects outlined above, providing clear visibility of delivery, ownership and impact.

Priority Projects

Our priority projects for 2026 have been selected through a review of the National Service Plan and Corporate Plan, together with engagement with senior leadership.

They reflect areas where strong communications can:

- Improve understanding
- Support access to care
- Strengthen trust and confidence in the health service
- Improve patient and service user experience

Each priority project follows a common, structured approach:

- **Insight and analysis** to understand public and service need, information gaps and barriers
- **Engagement with services** to confirm findings and align with operational realities
- **Proactive communications planning** to identify how communications can best support patients and services
- **Horizon scanning** to anticipate policy, system or external factors that may affect delivery
- **A concise communications plan** setting out objectives and how progress will be assessed

Progress on priority projects will be reviewed periodically to ensure alignment with evolving service priorities and organisational capacity.

Delivery of priority projects will involve working in partnership with services and, where appropriate, communications teams across the six Health Regions, recognising that services are delivered locally and communications must reflect regional service realities.

Priority Projects for 2026

Enhancing Trust and Confidence in Maternity Services

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives under the National Women and Infants Health Programme, including the delivery of timely, safe, local and high-quality maternity and gynaecology services, reduction of delays, and improvement of outcomes for women and infants.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Enhance and sustain trust and confidence in maternity and gynaecology services
- Provide clear, compassionate and accessible information for expectant parents and families
- Support understanding of care pathways, service changes and reform activity
- Ensure digital and direct patient communications are clearly associated with trusted HSE services and supports



Improving Understanding and Access to Mental Health Services

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives relating to mental health reform, with a particular focus on prevention, early intervention, access to care and improved outcomes for children, young people and adults.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Support clear, compassionate and consistent communication about mental health services and supports
- Improve understanding of access routes, pathways and eligibility, particularly for children and young people and their families
- Clearly and compassionately explain pressures affecting access to services and what the HSE is doing to improve service provision
- Strengthen reform messaging and reduce confusion or misinformation
- Signpost effectively to trusted supports across the system, including where services are delivered by partners

Supporting Integrated Care and Community-Based Services

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives to deliver integrated, regional and community-based models of care, improve patient flow and provide care closer to home.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Help our patients and service users to understand integrated and community-based care and how services connect
- Enhance confidence in accessing care outside acute hospital settings
- Improve understanding of local and regional service structures
- Support positive engagement with new and evolving service improvements



Digital for Care – Building Trust and Understanding in Digital Health Services

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives relating to digital transformation, improved access to services and modernisation of health service delivery.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Build trust and confidence in digital health services and tools
- Support awareness, understanding and appropriate use of digital services
- Clearly explain benefits, limitations and privacy protections
- Ensure digital communications are accessible and inclusive



Vaccination Programmes – Maintaining Confidence and Uptake

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives to protect population health through high vaccination uptake and effective immunisation programmes.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Maintain public confidence in vaccination programmes
- Provide clear and timely information on eligibility and access
- Support rapid communications response for seasonal, emerging or priority vaccination needs
- Address misinformation through trusted, evidence-based messaging

Improving Transparency and Understanding of Health Service Data

This priority supports National Service Plan commitments to transparency, performance reporting and evidence-based decision-making.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Improve access and availability of health service data to the public and stakeholders
- Provide context to support informed interpretation
- Support services in communicating performance and capacity information
- Reduce misinterpretation and reactive clarification activity



Improving Navigation and Confidence in Urgent and Emergency Care

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives to improve patient flow, reduce pressure on emergency departments and ensure people access the right care at the right time.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Provide 'right place, right care' information to the public and service users
- Improve understanding of urgent and emergency care options
- Support public confidence during periods of high demand or system pressure
- Provide consistent, timely information across channels

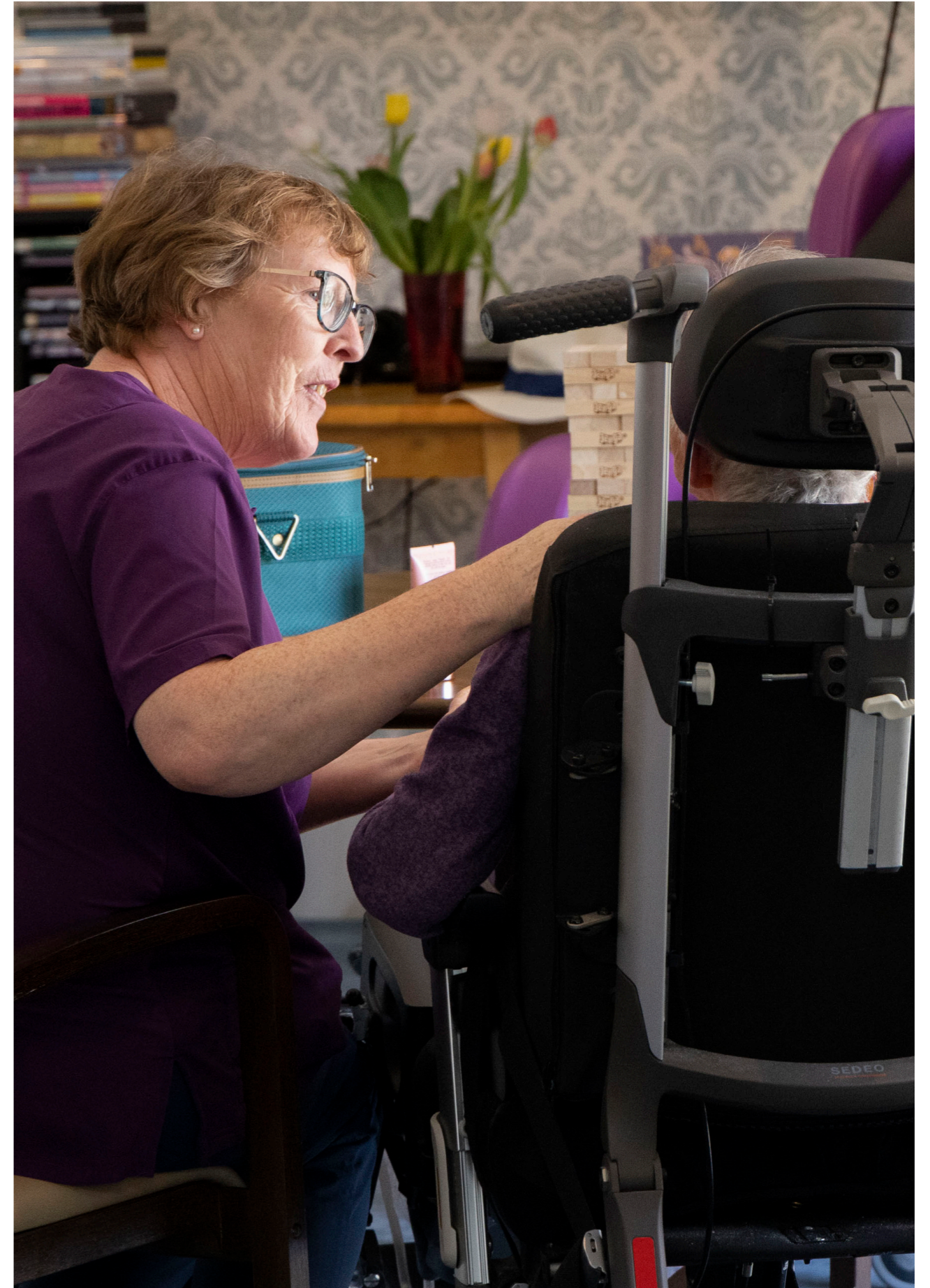


Improving Clarity and Accessibility of Disability Services Information

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives to improve access, equity and quality of disability services and supports.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Improve clarity and accessibility of information for service users and families
- Strengthen understanding of pathways, supports and entitlements
- Ensure communications are inclusive and respectful
- Support services in explaining issues around access to services and what the HSE is doing to make key programme improvements



Improving Understanding of Waiting Times and Confidence in Scheduled Care

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives relating to improved access to scheduled and elective care, transparency around waiting times, and the delivery of reform programmes aimed at reducing delays and improving patient flow.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Help public and patients understanding of how waiting lists and scheduled care pathways operate
- Provide clear, consistent and trusted information about what people can expect while waiting for care
- Build confidence in reform and improvement programmes focused on scheduled care
- Reduce confusion by ensuring information is aligned across national, regional and service-level communications
- Assist services by helping patients navigate available information and supports while awaiting treatment

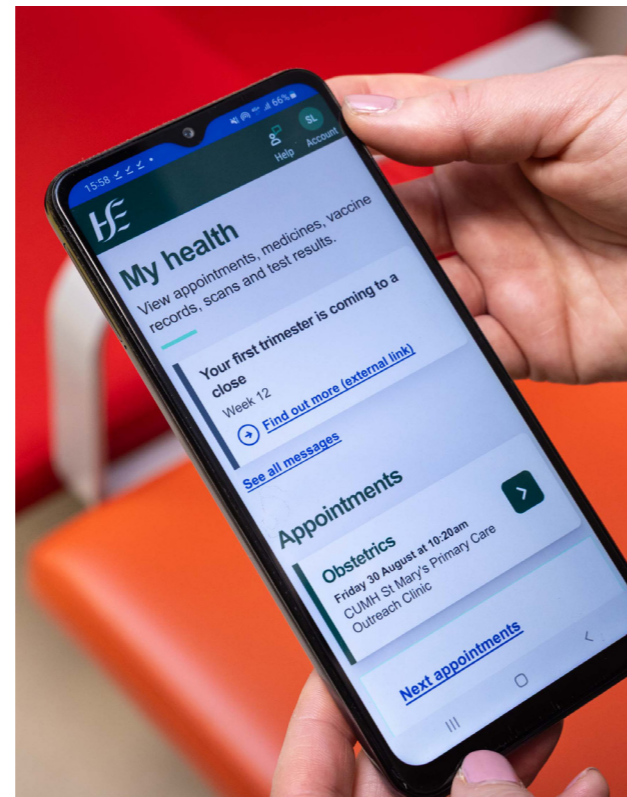
HSE Notify – Strengthening Digital Patient Communications

This priority supports the continued development of HSE Notify as a key channel for direct patient communication, enabling a shift from paper-based to digital

communications and supporting improved access, service efficiency and patient experience.

What communications is trying to achieve:

- Enable the transition from paper-based to digital patient communications, using the HSE Health App, SMS and email
- Improve the timeliness, clarity and reliability of patient communications
- Enhance patient experience through clear, consistent and accessible messaging
- Support services to use Notify effectively as part of care pathways and service delivery
- Contribute to quality improvement through more efficient and responsive communication with patients




**Your Service
Your Say**

Strengthening Quality, Compliance and Learning in Your Service Your Say

This priority supports National Service Plan objectives relating to good governance, risk management and service improvement. It also supports the commitment to ensure that patient and service user experience informs the design and delivery of care.

What communications is trying to achieve:

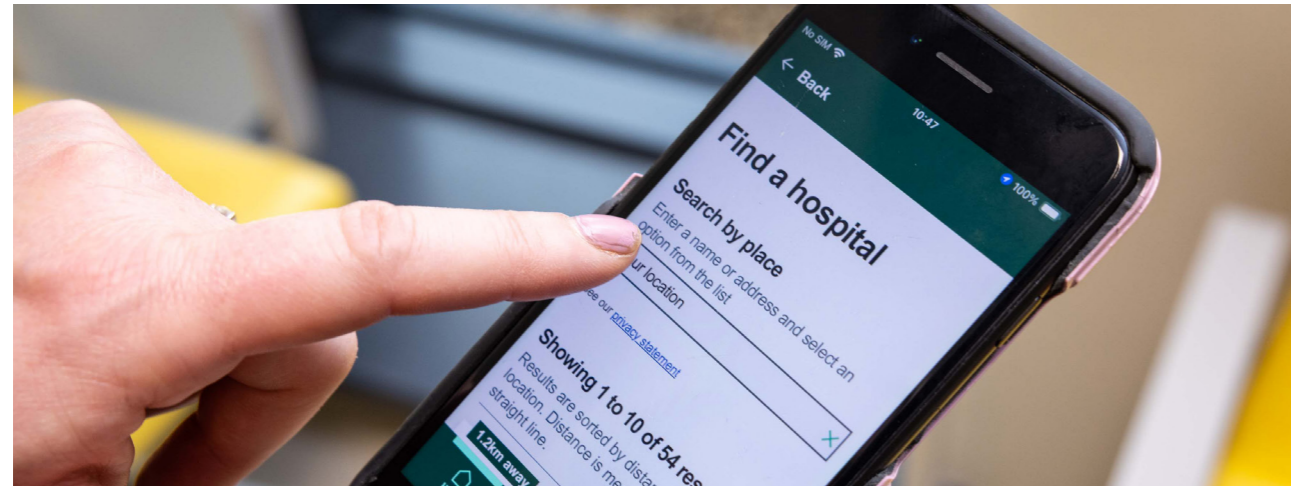
- Support clear understanding of the statutory and policy framework underpinning the Your Service Your Say complaints process

- Strengthen awareness of quality standards, risk management and compliance requirements across services
- Provide clear and accessible communication of audit findings and recommendations to support learning and improvement
- Enable the appropriate use and dissemination of anonymised audit data for organisational learning
- Maintain and strengthen public trust and confidence in the Your Service Your Say process as a way to listen, respond and improve

Projects to Develop Our Services and Teams

Our people and teams are our greatest asset and we will continue to build on the quality and delivery of communications and digital services through our internal transformation projects.

They are designed to strengthen Communications and Public Affairs and are integral to support effective delivery of our priority projects and other key communications deliverables in 2026.



Improving Communications and Access to Information

This theme covers projects that strengthen what we deliver externally through communications and digital services. Our focus is to ensure that information is clear, trusted, accessible and easy to navigate for patients, service users, staff and the public.

These projects support improved access to information, modernisation of platforms and channels, and more evidence-based communications.

The work is grouped under three sub-headings:

- **Platforms, Systems and Digital Delivery**
Development and improvement of digital platforms, systems and tools that support access to information

and services, including websites, apps and integrated systems. This includes integration with operational systems and the development of communications infrastructure that supports safe, reliable service delivery.

- **Content, Quality and Inclusive Access**
Improving the clarity, consistency and accessibility of communications across all channels, ensuring content is inclusive, user-centred and aligned with agreed standards.
- **Insight, Innovation and Improvement**
Strengthening the use of data, insight and innovation to inform planning, improve effectiveness and support continuous improvement in communications delivery.

Enabling Our Teams to Deliver

This theme focuses on how we work together, ensuring our teams are supported and equipped to deliver high-quality communications aligned to HSE priorities.

These projects aim to improve consistency, collaboration and sustainability across the Communications and Public Affairs Division.

The work is grouped under two sub-headings:

- **Project Management**
Strengthening project management approaches, including clearer planning, governance, roles and responsibilities, and improved visibility of progress and performance across projects.
- **Ways of Working and Cross-Team Collaboration**
Enhancing collaboration across teams and regions, improving how work is coordinated, shared and aligned to support delivery of strategic priorities. This includes ongoing work to strengthen crisis communications approaches.
- **Workforce Capability, Learning & Development and Our Culture**
Building skills, capability and leadership across the division, while supporting a positive culture. Exploring the use of AI and emerging technologies to support workforce capability, learning and development, and improve how we deliver communications and digital services.



Together, these internal projects provide the foundation that enables delivery of the priority projects for 2026. They are progressed through team plans and existing governance arrangements.

They will be kept under review to ensure they remain aligned with organisational priorities and capacity, and may be adapted as organisational priorities, system pressures or capacity change during 2026.

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