Communication and Engagement Report

Reporting Period: 1 August 2026 to 31 October 2026

Introduction

The Communication and Engagement function continues to support Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership through public engagement, stakeholder communications, internal communications, public information activity, media management and support for strategic service development.

The service continues to operate across both NHS Dumfries and Galloway and Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership, reflecting the integrated nature of health and social care delivery within the region and supporting a coordinated approach to communication and engagement activity.

Established governance arrangements remained in place throughout the reporting period. The Consultation and Engagement Working Group continued to meet monthly, bringing together representatives from across health and social care services to share intelligence, coordinate engagement activity, identify emerging priorities and support a consistent approach to participation and involvement. The working group continues to provide an important assurance mechanism, helping ensure engagement activity is proportionate, coordinated and aligned with organisational priorities.

The Participation and Engagement Network (PEN) has continued to provide an effective forum for promoting opportunities for engagement.

Alongside these arrangements, the new Participation and Engagement Strategy has been agreed. This provides a structure for developing engagement practices aligned to Planning with People principles and supporting the Partnership's commitment to meaningful involvement of communities, patients, service users, staff and stakeholders in decisions affecting local services.

The reporting period has been characterised by a significant programme of engagement relating to relocation of GP services in Stranraer, extensive stakeholder communications activity, substantial public health communications campaigns, increasing emphasis on prevention and wellbeing, and ongoing work to improve understanding of wider health and social care system pressures.

Participation and Engagement Activity

Relocation of GP Services to the Galloway Community Hospital Campus

The most significant programme of engagement activity undertaken during the reporting period related to proposals to relocate GP services currently provided from Waverley Medical Centre to the Galloway Community Hospital campus.

The now adopted proposal represented an important development for primary care services within Wigtownshire, and it was recognised from the outset that any future decision should be informed by the experiences, priorities and views of those most directly affected. A substantial programme of communication and engagement activity was therefore undertaken involving patients, service users, staff, stakeholders and members of the wider community.

A broad range of engagement approaches were used. These included online and paper-based surveys, engagement with staff teams, communications with affected service users, proactive media activity and opportunities for community members to provide feedback. Considerable effort was made to ensure opportunities for participation were available through a variety of channels and accessible to a wide range of people, including at the existing on-site points of service delivery.

The response to the exercise was particularly positive. Almost 600 responses were received overall, including more than 400 public responses and 69 staff responses. This represents one of the most significant levels of engagement achieved during the reporting period and provided a substantial evidence base for decision-making.

Thematic analysis identified a number of consistent themes. Parking provision featured prominently within both public and staff responses, alongside issues including accessibility, transport, privacy, accommodation arrangements and practical considerations associated with service delivery across the wider campus. Respondents also emphasised the importance of maintaining high-quality access to services while minimising disruption during any future transition.

Alongside concerns and challenges, many respondents also recognised potential benefits associated with co-locating services on a single NHS campus. These included opportunities to improve service integration, strengthen links between services, secure a more sustainable long-term base for primary care services and make more effective use of NHS-owned facilities.

Following completion of the engagement programme, communications activity focused on publication of findings, explanation of the thematic analysis, communication of the decision to proceed with relocation planning and ongoing engagement regarding future implementation. Particular effort was made to demonstrate how issues raised by respondents had been considered and how engagement had informed subsequent planning activity.

This programme provides a strong example of meaningful engagement informing service planning and helping shape future service delivery arrangements. It also demonstrates the value of creating opportunities for patients, communities and staff to influence decisions which affect local services.

Community-Based Health and Care Engagement

The Partnership continued to support a range of opportunities for engagement with communities throughout Dumfries and Galloway.

Engagement events organised by Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway brought together residents, community groups, service providers, health and social care representatives, voluntary organisations and wider stakeholders to explore issues affecting local communities and discuss future priorities.

The events provided opportunities to discuss access to services, and future opportunities for partnership working. They also helped strengthen relationships between statutory services and community organisations while providing valuable insight into local concerns, experiences and priorities.

Sustainability, Climate and Future Priorities

Engagement activity has also supported wider sustainability objectives.

This has included work associated with Greening the Estate initiatives and wider Climate Emergency and Sustainability Programme priorities. Activity has sought to improve awareness of sustainability objectives, encourage staff and stakeholder participation and support wider organisational commitments relating to environmental sustainability.

The reporting period also included initial discussion regarding the future communications and engagement implications of the Good Food Nation agenda. While no formal engagement programme has yet commenced, consideration has been given to how stakeholders and communities may be involved as local work develops.

Preparatory work has also commenced in relation to anticipated future engagement requirements associated with Sub-National Planning arrangements, NHS Scotland reform and simplification activity and wider sustainable service planning discussions. While these programmes remain at an early stage, it is recognised that robust communication and engagement arrangements will be essential as proposals develop.

Communications Activity

Stakeholder Communications and Briefings

Stakeholder communications remained one of the most significant areas of activity during the reporting period.

A programme of briefings, updates and supporting communications was provided for Integration Joint Board members, NHS Board members, local elected members, senior NHS managers, senior Council managers and

partner organisations. The purpose of this work was not simply to provide information, but to support understanding of complex issues affecting services and facilitate informed discussion and decision-making.

A substantial amount of communications activity related to care home services and care home improvement work. Communications support included preparation of briefing materials, updates for elected members and stakeholder groups, responses to enquiries and support for senior leaders engaging with partners and communities.

Given the sensitivity of some of these issues and the understandable interest generated, considerable effort was directed towards ensuring communications were accurate and timely.

Stakeholder communications also supported understanding of delayed discharge performance, operational pressures, service sustainability issues, service changes, transformation activity and wider health and social care challenges. Throughout the period the objective remained to improve understanding and maintain confidence that activity was being undertaken to respond to the issues identified.

Managers' briefings following NHS Board meetings have continued throughout the reporting period and remain an important mechanism for supporting communication between leadership teams and staff. The briefings help ensure consistency of messaging while creating opportunities for discussion and feedback at a local level.

Internal Communications

Internal communications activity continued through a range of established channels including the Partneship-wide newsletter OnTheGround, all-user emails, the weekly NHS Staff News, management cascades and targeted communications to specific staff groups.

A broad range of issues were communicated during the reporting period, including vaccination programmes, service developments, operational pressures, workforce matters, sustainability activity, transformation work and organisational priorities.

Particular attention was given to helping staff understand the increasingly challenging environment within which services are operating.

Communications sought to provide context relating to financial recovery activity, service sustainability discussions, workforce pressures, delayed discharge, social care capacity and emerging work associated with transformation and reform.

A deliberate effort has been made to ensure staff communications move beyond simply reporting decisions and instead help explain the context and challenges informing those decisions. This reflects recognition that informed and engaged staff are better able to contribute to organisational development and communicate confidently with patients, service users and communities.

The reporting period also included communications supporting celebration of achievements across services, including staff awards and nominations, sharing examples of innovation and partnership working and highlighting initiatives supporting improved outcomes for people across Dumfries and Galloway.

Public Health Campaigns and Prevention

Public health communications represented one of the largest programmes of communications activity delivered during the reporting period.

The 2026/27 seasonal vaccination programme required a substantial communications effort aimed at supporting uptake of both flu and COVID-19 vaccination amongst eligible members of the public and health and social care staff.

A multi-channel approach was adopted. Activity included targeted communications to local stakeholders, media releases, digital communications, photography, social media content, locally-produced video content and targeted Facebook advertising.

These approaches were designed to maximise reach and ensure campaign messaging could reach different audiences through appropriate channels.

Facebook advertising focused on specific geographic areas hosting drop-in flu and vaccination clinics provided by the Scottish Ambulance Service proved particularly successful, with dozens of people attending. This is in contrast to the low-uptake seen when these days have not been promoted for paid-for advertising, which comes at a modest cost.

Communications activity encouraged uptake of vaccination, promoted awareness of eligibility criteria and provided information regarding appointment arrangements. Messaging also sought to reinforce understanding of the contribution vaccination makes towards protecting vulnerable individuals and supporting resilience across health and social care services during winter.

The campaign also reflected the increasing importance of digital communication and audience targeting.

Communications activity also supported national screening programmes and wider public health priorities.

A particularly successful example involved promotion of Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) screening through a locally-produced video featuring a Dumfries man discussing his personal experience of screening and highlighting the benefits of early detection. Use of this local experience helped create a more relatable campaign and demonstrated the value of applying local communications approaches to national public health programmes.

Taken together, vaccination and screening communications represented a significant contribution toward prevention, early intervention and population health improvement.

Prevention, Wellbeing and Community Partnerships

Communications support was also provided for a range of activities aimed at promoting prevention, supporting independence and encouraging healthier lifestyles.

This included promotion of the Active Lives Pathway, which received national recognition through presentation at the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy Annual Conference. The initiative highlights effective

partnership working between health services, local government and third-sector organisations and demonstrates the value of preventative approaches which support people beyond formal healthcare interventions.

Communications activity helped promote awareness of the programme while also showcasing positive examples of partnership working and innovation taking place locally.

The reporting period also included communications support for wider wellbeing initiatives, healthy lifestyle activity and programmes focused on improving long-term health outcomes. While often less visible than large public campaigns, these programmes remain an important part of wider efforts to improve population health and reduce future demand on services.

Service Access and Service Improvement Communications

A substantial amount of communications activity related to service developments and service improvement initiatives.

Communications support was provided for primary care developments, service sustainability projects and initiatives designed to improve access to care. Activity focused on ensuring communities remained informed regarding developments affecting local services and helping explain the reasons underlying service changes and investment decisions.

One particularly positive development during the reporting period involved communications promoting the creation of more than 6000 additional NHS dental registration opportunities within Dumfries.

Publicity activity helped maximise awareness of this opportunity and provided a tangible example of work being undertaken to improve access to NHS dental services.

Communications support also extended across a range of other service developments and initiatives aimed at strengthening capacity, improving access and supporting long-term sustainability.

Partnership Communications and Visibility

The reporting period saw continuing work to strengthen visibility and understanding of Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership.

Historically, many communications relating to health and social care services have naturally been viewed through either an NHS or local authority lens. Work undertaken during this reporting period sought to improve awareness of the specific role played by the Partnership in planning, commissioning and delivering integrated services.

This included increased use of Partnership branding, development of Partnership-specific communication channels and introduction of the dedicated **news@dghscp.co.uk** email address for media and public communications activity.

Effort was also directed towards improving understanding of Partnership structures and governance arrangements through greater use of supporting visual materials and explanatory content.

The objective has not simply been to create a stronger visual identity but to help communities and stakeholders better understand how health and social care services are planned and delivered through partnership arrangements. Early indications suggest this work has contributed to increased visibility of the Partnership within media coverage and stakeholder communications.

Communicating System Pressures and Integrated Care

One of the most significant communications themes during the reporting period has been supporting understanding of the interconnected nature of health and social care services.

Increasingly, communications activity has sought to move beyond explanation of individual service pressures and instead improve understanding of how different parts of the system influence each other.

A particular focus has been placed on communicating the relationship between social care capacity, funded care provision, delayed discharge, patient flow, hospital occupancy and wider operational performance.

Communications activity has sought to explain that pressures experienced within acute hospital services are frequently connected to wider challenges affecting community health and social care provision.

This approach has informed media engagement, stakeholder communications and public information activity throughout the reporting period.

Supporting understanding of these relationships has become increasingly important as public and political attention on health and social care performance continues to grow. Helping communities and stakeholders understand why pressures arise and how different elements of the system interact is essential to maintaining informed public discussion and confidence.

Communications activity has therefore increasingly focused on explaining whole-system challenges and reinforcing the need for coordinated responses involving health services, social care services, local government and wider partners.

Strategic Communications and Future Planning

The reporting period also saw continued development of communications arrangements supporting future strategic priorities.

Initial work was undertaken to develop a communications and engagement framework supporting the emerging Transformation Programme and its nine workstreams. Informed by financial recovery planning and wider sustainability considerations, this work seeks to ensure that communication and engagement are embedded within programme development and implementation.

Activity in this area remains at an early stage and will continue to evolve as programme arrangements develop.

Communications activity also increasingly reflected wider NHS Scotland reform discussions, simplification initiatives and emerging Sub-National Planning arrangements. Work has focused on helping staff, stakeholders and communities understand how local developments relate to national

policy agendas, regional planning arrangements and wider sustainability considerations.

It is anticipated that communications and engagement activity associated with these programmes will continue to increase over future reporting periods.

Conclusion

Communication and engagement activity during the reporting period has continued to support the Partnership's objectives through meaningful engagement, stakeholder communication, public information, public health campaigns, service improvement communications and strategic communications activity.

The quarter has been characterised by a particularly significant programme of engagement relating to relocation of GP services to the Galloway Community Hospital campus, extensive stakeholder briefing activity, substantial public health communications campaigns, continued work to strengthen Partnership visibility and increasing emphasis on explaining the interconnected nature of health and social care services.

The period has also seen continuing communications support for care home improvement activity, public health and prevention programmes, service developments and future strategic planning work.

Taken together, this activity provides assurance that communication and engagement continues to make an important contribution to informed decision-making, meaningful participation, effective partnership working and improved understanding of health and social care services across Dumfries and Galloway.