

Communications Strategy 2024-2026



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Overview and impact
3. Context and policy landscape
4. How well are we doing?
5. What do we want to achieve by 2026?
6. Audience and message
7. Approach
8. Timeline
9. Resources
10. Governance and reporting
11. Evaluation and measuring impact

1. Introduction

Our strategy will build on the growing awareness and knowledge of the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), maximising awareness of our roles beyond regulation and expanding the impact of our full range of services and products. Making sure that our audiences know about our services and products will allow us to support the social work, social care and children and young people workforce now and for the future.

The strategy is based on evidence through stakeholder research, analysis and behavioural insights from our campaigns as well as our policy and environmental context.

This strategy is the framework for all communication, marketing and engagement activity for the SSSC and can be adapted to use across all projects, making sure that our activity meets the outcomes and activities outlined in the Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

We will review the strategy in line with the development of the next strategic plan.



2. Overview and impact

In the last three years, we focused our external communication and engagement activities on a range of activities and campaigns. Our particular focus has been the Future Proofing Programme, our major service reform and redesign programme that began in December 2021 and launched with a series of improvements on 3 June 2024.

The programme streamlines our processes both within the SSSC and for our stakeholders, as well as bringing increased flexibility for people to work across a range of social service careers. The outcome will, overall, make being registered simple and easy to understand.

Our communications and engagement over the last three years have:

- increased engagement and involvement of our stakeholders and customers in our work, giving people more opportunities to get to know us and influence our work and for us to get to know them better
- delivered effective communications campaigns, sharing personal stories from our registrants of their careers, championing and promoting the value of the workforce
- made sure that employers and people on our Register have the information they need to make the most of their registration and our products and services
- involved working closely with our partners including Scottish Government to support and develop the workforce.

A few of the highlights

- Contributing to and influencing national policy development is essential in our role and we responded to 64 consultations across a range of topics including the Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny and Regulation and the National Care Service.
- Involving people, listening to them and acting on their feedback is central to the way we work. We launched the Future Proofing Programme, our major service reform and redesign programme, with 6,533 people responding to the first consultation, the highest consultation response we have ever had. We asked people to give their views on the changes we wanted to make. Alongside the consultation, we ran 13 online events. Their involvement and feedback led to changes in the final proposals that were better informed because of it.
- Engagement in the programme continued throughout, leading to sell out workshops ahead of the changes coming in on 3 June 2024 and over 700 people joining online to meet our staff, find out more and ask questions.
- 208 people and 12 stakeholder groups were directly involved in redesigning the SSSC Codes of Practice along with views and feedback from members of the public which resulted in changes to the language we use, as well as a review of the Codes themselves. Their views on the ways we can develop and promote the Codes will inform future activity.
- We issued 56 news releases and features across national and specialist trade press and published 195 articles and features on our website.
- We email SSSC News to over 182k people each month with news and information for their registration, news about regulation and about their learning and development. SSSC News is a trusted source of information for the sector. We consistently engaged over 56% of registrants and employers in the content including essential information that resulted in 7 in 10 people surveyed telling us that they were aware of and regularly using our email newsletter.
- Our focus on sharing real life stories and experiences in our social media campaigns to promote modern apprenticeships and careers in care with school leavers resulted in our highest engagement across all the platforms we use.

3. Context and policy landscape

This strategy takes account of the considerable change taking place within the cultural and policy landscape for the social work, social care and children and young people workforce, as well as for the SSSC.

The evolution of the sector means there are several developments underway that relate to our work. This includes the journey towards a National Care Service and how this provides us with an opportunity to improve our reach into those policy areas that bring social care and health together. And we are working with Scottish Government on the development of the new National Social Work Agency which will bring increasing opportunities for social work in the wider context of health and social care.

→ Demonstrating our value and how we are contributing to public sector reform is critical and we are confident that our ongoing focus on improvement demonstrates our commitment. Our Future Proofing Programme has modernised and streamlined our registration processes, taking account of changes in the sector and the way people work. We will continue to monitor, evaluate and share the impact and benefits of the changes we have made and work with our sector to continue this journey.

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‘We are committed to keeping The Promise and the Plan 2024-30 is at the heart of what we do, reflecting our part in improving opportunities for care experienced children and young people.’

- In 2023 the Independent Review of Inspection, Scrutiny and Regulation published its findings and one of the key areas for the SSSC is increasing the involvement of people with experience of care services in our work, making sure that we are more visible and learning more from our sector. We are launching a new payment procedure to support more people with experience of care to get involved in our work.
- Another key development is expanding the Register to include more groups of people working in this sector. While many will be aware of the SSSC and registration, they won't have had direct experience of us, so we will design an engagement plan to make sure that the people who may need to register with us and their employers have the information they need when they need it.
- We are committed to keeping The Promise and the Plan 2024-30 is at the heart of what we do, reflecting our part in improving opportunities for care experienced children and young people. This includes work to develop resources to support them to understand and use the SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and their Employers.
- As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes an even greater part of our lives, it will have an impact on the way we communicate and engage with our customers and stakeholders. Exploring and adapting to emerging technologies is essential if we are to provide innovative and effective services. We will make sure that we are open and transparent about how we use AI in our products and services.
- As an official statistics provider we publish reports each year on the workforce and other key data. In 2023 we brought out two new reports – data snapshots of both our registration and fitness to practise data. These reports aim to give a more detailed look at the workforce and provide insights that can influence and drive change in this sector. The reports were well received and we aim to publish these each year along with more of the unique data we hold.

- Working with our key partners, including Scottish Government, local authorities, COSLA, SOLACE, the private and voluntary care sectors, education, the health sector and others, we will build on the increasing public awareness of the value of the social service workforce, how this connects with health and wellbeing more generally and a wider understanding of their essential role in our communities.
- With the increased awareness of our role, a flexible approach and our work with key partners, we have an increasing demand for our skills and the learning and workforce development resources we provide, which gives us opportunities to reach more people.
- The pace of change in our communities and for the workforce we register continues to require a robust, flexible approach which needs strategic and proactive communication and engagement with our key stakeholders and audiences, so they are involved, informed, consulted, engaged, supported and receiving the information they need from us in a timely manner and accessible formats.
- Now more than ever, effective and integrated communication and engagement, championed by all our staff, is central to achieving our objectives and securing the trust and buy in of our audiences and key stakeholders.

‘we have an increasing demand for our skills and the learning and workforce development resources we provide, which gives us opportunities to reach more people.’



4. How well are we doing?

We carry out regular surveys with our registrants and stakeholders which provide valuable insights into how people view and feel about the SSSC and how well they recognise us and what we do.

What the research tells us.

- Our key audiences know who we are with our brand recognition and our visual identity well recognised.
- Most registrants and employers continue to have positive perceptions of the role of the SSSC with 71.7% believing that our work helps to improve their practice, an increase of 6.8% on the previous year. And 75.6% think that registration with the SSSC is beneficial, an increase of 6.8%.
- Our sector is diverse, covering people working in different kinds of services and at all levels so their communication and engagement needs are wide and varied. 75.4% of people told us that our work promotes equality, diversity and inclusion, an increase of 4.6%.
- Most people we engage with see us as professional, approachable, trustworthy, authoritative and helpful and view our staff very positively.



5. What do we want to achieve by 2026?

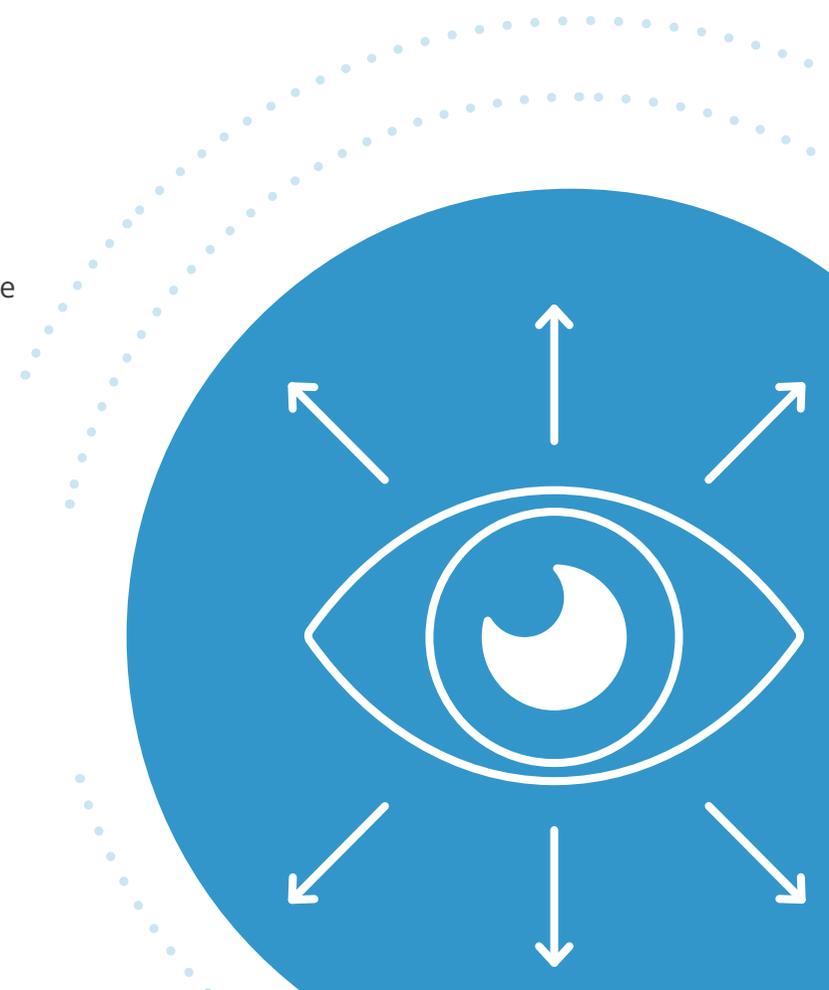
Vision

To increase awareness of our unique role as an effective regulator and go to organisation for workforce development, workforce planning, intelligence and best practice for the social work, social care and children and young people workforce, strengthening our influence in the future direction of this sector in Scotland.

Aims

We have five communication and engagement aims. Our activity must fulfil one or more of these aims so that it fits with the strategic plan and is both relevant and necessary.

1. To increase brand awareness among our key audience groups through planned and coordinated initiatives so more of our key stakeholders know who we are and what we do and tell us they value our role.
2. To reach the right audiences with accessible information, services and products they need for their registration, their learning and development and for workforce planning.
3. To demonstrate the value of the SSSC with key stakeholders through planned and coordinated communication and engagement activity.
4. To promote the role and value of the social work, social care and children and young people workforce with key audiences.
5. To involve, codesign and collaborate with colleagues on the development of our services and products and promote their benefits so that more people are aware of, accessing and using our resources.



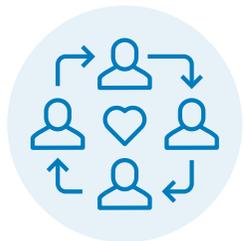
Our themes and delivery 2024-2026



1. Influence

What this means?

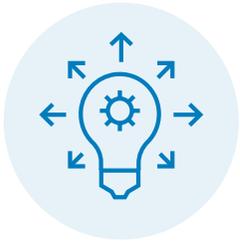
- Demonstrate the work we are doing to develop and support the social work, social care and children and young people workforce.
- Demonstrate, promote and share the impact and benefit of our services and resources for registrants, social service providers, our partners and policy makers.
- Publish and share the intelligence, evidence and data we gather through our unique role in ways that are accessible and usable and that will drive and influence change and improvement. This includes new snapshot data reports looking at key areas of our work.
- Raise our profile with key audiences and increase our reach into relevant sectors including health.
- Craft effective position statements and consultation responses and demonstrate the way we are influencing national policy development.
- Effective and positive media relationships and management.



2. Involvement

What this means?

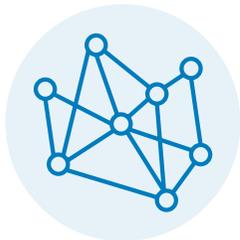
- Involve relevant stakeholders in our work and involve the SSSC in key national and strategic initiatives.
- Establish an SSSC National Stakeholder Advisory Forum to bring their voice into our work and business development.
- Introduce a payment procedure to support more people, particularly those with experience of care, to get involved in our work.
- Using the Scottish Approach to Service Design, we will codesign more of our services and products with people who use them and for whom they may have an impact.



3. Value

What this means?

- Promote the value and benefits of being registered with the SSSC and of our services (such as the new continuous professional learning website), shaping a positive attitude to our role including regulation, learning and development, workforce planning and intelligence to our audiences.
- Demonstrate how we contribute to the wider value view of the sector.
- Identify opportunities to promote the value, both social and economic, of this workforce, the standards they work to, their skills, wellbeing and the positive impact on our communities.
- Promote careers in social work, social care and children and young people services and contribute to the national drive to improve perceptions of careers in care.
- Develop innovative and effective resources to promote the SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and their Employers and the impact and benefits they have for this sector.



4. Connection

What this means?

- Build on the current understanding of our role to connect to our wider roles and responsibilities.
- Provide the right information in the right way through designing and providing accessible products and campaigns.
- Continue our outreach programme with our Convener and Council Members and our staff visits to services across Scotland to meet our registrants and their employers and the individuals using their services.
- Connect with more of our registrants and employers through our annual online engagement events programme along with our speaking engagements and pop ups at stakeholder events and conferences.
- Design a new, accessible website that will be simple to use and provide trusted, reliable information and services.
- Design a compelling narrative about the role of regulation and workforce development that people can easily understand.
- Work closely with all SSSC departments to make sure we have planned and carefully coordinated communication and engagement for all key workstreams in the operational plan to deliver maximum impact.

Our communication and engagement principles



Clear

What this means?

- Our audiences will understand how they should use and act on the information we provide.
- Our tone is clear, professional and concise across all of communication and engagement activity.
- We are honest and open in our communication with our stakeholders.



Innovative

What this means?

- We identify and keep up to date with changing and emerging social and communication trends, adapting and responding to reach our audiences quickly and effectively.
- We are flexible in our campaign planning and development so we can respond and adapt to changing priorities.



Consistent

What this means?

- We continue to coordinate activity with partners to ensure a joined-up approach and consistent messaging.
- People recognise and value our services and products through our clear, consistent brand.



Audience focused

What this means?

- We use accessible, effective communication channels and methods to meet the needs of our different internal SSSC and external stakeholder and customer groups, that are appropriate for their role, skills and experience.
- We provide real time, up to date and reliable sources of essential information.



Digital First

What this means?

- We make it easy to access information through our digital channels.



Evidence and insight based

What this means?

- Our activity is based on sound evidence and audience insight.
- We make sure there is two-way communication, providing our audiences with opportunities to provide feedback that influences our work.



Tested and evaluated

What this means?

- We evaluate our activity throughout, to test impact, adapt and adjust and continue to improve.
- We measure the impact of our communication and engagement activity and build on results.



Values based

What this means?

- Our communication and engagement activity always demonstrates our values.

6. Audience and message

Audience

We will define our main audiences and use this to describe the audiences and messages for each workstream in the annual operational plan as required.

Identifying and prioritising audiences makes sure our activities deliver the right message and information in the right way and at the right time and makes the most of our resources.

Our stakeholders include key policy makers/influencers at UK and national level, strategic partnerships with organisations, people who use social services, the local and national media, social work, social care and children and young people employers, the wider public and a workforce of over 200,000 people working in different services across the public, voluntary and private sectors, most of whom are on our Register.

This is underpinned by our Involving People Framework which will be reviewed in line with the next strategic plan review.



Main messages

These are the key messages which underpin our corporate communications. Each main workstream in the annual operational plan must reflect these messages and include specific messages for its purpose and audiences.

The SSSC and our role

- We protect the public by supporting the social work, social care and children and young people workforce to deliver high quality services and we do this by registering this workforce, setting the standards they must meet and maintain for their practice, conduct, training and education and by supporting their professional development.
- We are unique because we both regulate and develop the workforce to be the best it can be, making life better for people using social services in Scotland.
- We are connected to around 206,000 people in this workforce plus their employers, training providers, representative bodies and other partners across social work, social care and children and young people services and reach over 182,000 people each month via SSSC News. And we also reach those social care staff who are not required to register with us through our workforce development and planning role.
- We can and do take action where a registrant's practice falls below the standards set out in the SSSC Code of Practice which is improving the quality of the workforce and safeguarding people who use social services.
- We lead on increasing workforce capacity in the sector, regulating education and learning and designing resources to enhance and develop core skills in the workforce.
- Our unique role provides essential information and data on the social work, social care and children and young people workforce which informs national and local workforce planning.
- We work with our partners to strengthen the professionalism and skill of the workforce.

The SSSC and the social work, social care and children and young people workforce

- We are here for you throughout your career in social work, social care and children and young people services.
- Getting registered is just the start – we will continue to support you not only by setting standards for practice and training but also through developing qualifications, practice guidance and free, easy to use learning and practice support resources.
- Working in partnership we are committed to improving fair work practices for people working in social work, social care and children and young people settings and we are working with stakeholders to embed fair work principles and achieve better terms and conditions for you.

7. Approach

Successful communication and engagement will require a mix of channels and content depending on the audiences we want to reach, their needs, influences and interests. Here are some examples.



Expert opinion

We will identify opportunities for the SSSC to lead conversations on the role of the social service workforce and the value of the workforce and the role of the SSSC. This can include briefings, traditional or social media, speaking opportunities, professional groups, statements and digital engagement.



Providing trusted information

In a time when multiple channels are available for people to find information, we will provide trusted, real time, accessible and reliable sources of essential information for service providers and registrants including our reports, publications and products, our website and social media channels, direct email news and our customer contact centre.





Media - mainstream and digital

We will continue to build positive momentum that is shifting the perception of the social work, social care and children and young people workforce.

This will include access to SSSC experts, case studies, key data and information for local and national media, key policy makers and influencers to use to illustrate the role and impact of this workforce.



Storytelling

Sharing and promoting stories from people working in social work, social care and children and young people services and stories from people using these services to demonstrate the value of the workforce and raise understanding of what they do and the impact it has. We will work with our Workforce, Education and Standards and Regulation colleagues as well as existing and new networks to draw on their experiences.

These case studies and stories will be used in different ways:

- campaign content for social media
- for our Workforce, Education and Standards colleagues to develop video and other resources
- to provide traditional local, national or broadcast media access to positive stories
- to promote a network of spokespeople who work in the sector and are prepared to talk about their work.



Social media campaigns for example, careers in care and #SSSCregistered

This will include refreshing the successful 'I'm registered' social media campaign and building on our effective campaign designed to encourage people of all ages to find out more about a career or modern apprenticeship in this sector.



Direct mail

Reaching our key stakeholders and customers via our direct email marketing and effective email newsletter so they are aware of our resources and national initiatives with partners and have the information they need at the right time and in the right way.



8. Timeline

This strategy will be in place until 31 March 2026 and will remain flexible so we can respond to rapidly changing circumstances during this time. Each main workstream will reflect one or more of the five aims and four themes.

9. Resources

This strategy applies across all business areas.

Corporate communications costs are contained within the existing Communications and Policy Department's annual budget and are based on the annual operational plan.

Each directorate is responsible for the communication and engagement budgets for their activities in the annual operational plan where required.

Effective communication and engagement are a priority for the SSSC. We carry out our activities through collaboration and the commitment of all staff and provide a range of corporate tools to support staff in planning and delivering their communications and engagement.



10. Governance and reporting

The Communications Team is a strategic corporate function that delivers integrated communications, marketing, multimedia design and digital engagement.

The team sits within the Communications and Policy Department within the Strategy and Performance Directorate which has lead responsibility for coordinating the delivery of the strategy and for overseeing communication with the public and key stakeholders.

The strategy is sponsored by the Director of Strategy and Performance.

The Head of Strategic Communications and Policy is responsible for designing and implementing the strategy and managing associated risks.

The lead officers for each strategic outcome in the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 will report on their engagement and communication activities in their assurance reports.



11. Evaluation and measuring impact

We will report progress through the assurance report on the measures in the Strategic Plan and annual operational plans. Each workstream communication plan must include measures to demonstrate the return on investment and assess progress using a combination of:

- evaluation and analysis of engagement activity and analytics
- regular analysis of stakeholder perception insights and behavioural analytics that tell us if what we are doing is reaching our audience
- feedback, case studies and survey results
- review of the overall operational plan to make sure we are on target and within budget where there are defined costs for activities.





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We promote equality by removing unlawful and unfair treatment on the
grounds of any protected characteristic wherever possible.

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