COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2016 - 2019

Introduction and purpose
This strategy details how communications will support the delivery of 'shaping the future of urgent & emergency care' (EEAST strategy 2016-21). Over the last 18 months the Trust has already made good progress, but it is going to take time to sustainably transform the service.

During this transition, it is imperative that the Trust continues to rebuild its reputation and the confidence in the service. Improving patient care and performance is absolutely critical to rebuilding public confidence, but having a proactive and positive communications strategy to support the Trust and its staff is going to be equally important.

In short, good communication must be at the heart of everything the Trust does.

This strategy show how effective communications can:
- help EEAST achieve its strategic aims
- engage effectively with staff and stakeholders
- demonstrate the success of communication work
- ensure people understand what EEAST does
- help facilitate changes in behaviour and perceptions internally and externally.

This strategy, and the work that will be carried out to deliver it, will have the Trust's vision and values at the heart of it. After all, the vision and values should be at the heart of every team, member of staff and all decision making.

Therefore all communications work will be grounded against the values of care, teamwork, quality, respect and honesty.

The Trust has a well-established communications team which is responsible for a wealth of services, platforms and functions including strategic communications, internal communications, media relations, digital communications, awards and corporate identity. The team also provides support and advice to managers and their teams.

The team developed an ethos of how it works, which fits with the new Trust values. This is:

- we are proactive, accessible and helpful
- we work flexibly to help each other and support the Trust's needs
- we are professional, honest and transparent
- we find solutions to problems by being innovative and creative
- we are positive and optimistic.

The strategic principles guiding the provision of all communications and engagement for the Trust are:

- **Enhancing the reputation of the Trust**: building the reputation and positioning the Trust as an improving and transforming ambulance service
- **Managing the corporate reputation of the Trust by being proactive and responsive**: being on the front foot; getting value-added messages out regularly; and engaging with, and listening to, stakeholders
- **Cost effectiveness**: providing a high-quality service at best value for money
- **Responsive**: listening to people and their feedback and acting on it

- **Consistency**: planning of communications activity to ensure consistent messages
- **Transparency**: being open and honest in all communications
- **Inclusiveness**: accessible and inclusive communications, kept as simple as possible and avoiding jargon

Strategic aims and communication objectives
All communications activity should serve and be aligned with the Trust's strategic objectives. To develop a coherent and integrated communications strategy, a number of communications objectives have been set which map directly to the Trust's strategic objectives as set out below. This shows how communications will contribute to the overall Trust strategy.

1. Secure the sustainability of our services
   a. Establishing credible leadership
      i. **A visible and credible Board and senior leadership team**
   b. Creating sustainable infrastructure and assets
   c. Maintaining critical infrastructure and resilience capabilities
      i. **Maintain a robust communications emergency plan and out of hours support**

2. Deliver clinical excellence to patients
   a. Contributing proactively to achievement of NHS strategy for transforming healthcare
   b. Improving access and enhancing the care experience for all our patients
      i. **Empowering patients to access the right health care services for their needs**
   c. Working within strategy partnerships creating alternative models of care
      i. **Supporting the development and delivery of a new operating model**

3. Support our people
   a. Enhancing the health, safety and wellbeing of our people
      i. **Ensure staff and volunteers know about the range of support services available to them and how to access them**
   b. Continuing to strive for a positive and inclusive organisational culture
      i. **The vision and values are the fabric of the Trust, widely understood and lived and breathed every day by staff**
      ii. **An engaged and empowered workforce who feel valued**
   c. Being an employer of choice
      i. **Award winning communications team that is creative and innovative**
      ii. **Improved reputation of the trust through celebrating the work of staff and volunteers proactively**

4. Contribute to our community
   a. Contributing to the health and wellbeing of the population
      i. **Empowering patients to access the right health care services for their needs**
   b. Develop stronger engagement with our stakeholders
      i. **Support and develop stakeholder engagement**

Audiences
The following groups have been identified as stakeholders with whom the Trust needs to engage with if effective changes are to take place:

- Staff and volunteers
  Staff and volunteers deliver the Trust's services – they are the service. The organisation must communicate with, and listen to, staff and volunteers, as the better informed, engaged and motivated they are the better service they will provide to the community and be ambassadors for the Trust. The use of a two way communication approach will strengthen these relationships.

- Public and patients
  The Trust exists to serve the public and patients. The organisation must communicate and engage with the public to outline how services are being improved and to manage expectations so that the public understand the different forms of responses that the Trust might provide. This will include working with patient champions, such as Healthwatch, and the work led by the patient services team.

- Media
  Media outlets are crucial as they have the ability to portray the service negatively or positively, which directly impacts on the reputation and perception of the organisation. This includes social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs where users have the opportunity to convey their feelings and experiences about the Trust to hundreds of people.

- Commissioners and Sustainability Transformation Plan (STP) footprint areas
  Commissioners manage the NHS budget locally and therefore a good relationship is required with them. Work needs to continue to develop the Trust's relationships with clinical commissioning groups and this engagement activity is led by the executive team and local operational teams. The Trust must engage effectively with the emerging STPs to ensure the ambulance service plays a central role in the development of local health care systems and pathways.

- Partners
  The Trust needs to work with a range of partners from NHS trusts through to councils and emergency services. Engaging with these partners is increasingly important not only to maintain good relations with them but to ensure they understand how a modern ambulance service operates and to develop more collaborative working.

- MPs and councillors
  Political stakeholders represent communities and have a duty to scrutinise the work of the Trust. They are also influential commentators for the local media, and within their own personal and professional networks.

- Unions
  Unions represents a number of our staff, and can provide a helpful commentary to stakeholders as well as engaging with staff and providing staff feedback to the Trust. It is important that the Trust maintains a positive working relationship, led through the staff partnership forum and the leadership team.

- Regulators
  The Trust must work closely with its regulators – NHS Improvement, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission. Relationships need to be effective at both a regional and national level to provide assurance on how the Trust is progressing and to raise issues impacting onto the emergency service.

Messages
The Trust must regularly communicate how it is improving its services so that people are up to date with progress and informed about the directions being taken and why. To ensure consistent and clear communication for staff and stakeholders, three core messages have been developed:

- We are improving the quality of service we give to patients and are seeking to agree a remedial action plan to improve performance this year. We hope this will be supported by our Clinical Commissioning Groups and builds on the actions put in place over the past two years such as recruiting and developing staff and increasing ambulance cover.

- The Trust is proposing to change the way it operates and how it responds to patients. The aim is to treat more people in the right place, first time. This could be over the phone with a clinician or treated in the community by a paramedic or specialist paramedic.

- The Trust is working to improve staff engagement, morale, retention and welfare. The Board recognise that the Trust needs to change its culture and has launched its new vision and values, which were developed by staff and volunteers. The Trust has commissioned a Cultural Audit which will further inform this work.

These are broad messages, which will be developed as the Trust transforms. It is important that any more tailored messages on particular subjects fit into this framework.

Messages should also be targeted to appropriate audiences, depending on their needs. Where possible messaging should use interesting narrative, human interest and have arresting imagery.

Tools and methods
The Trust has a number of tools and methods of communicating its messages to, and engaging with, the public and its stakeholders. These fall into four board categories:

1. Face to face engagement
   worldwide research continues to show that the most effective form of engagement is face to face engagement. A key plank of the strategy will be to encourage and emphasise the importance of this form of engagement with staff, volunteers and stakeholders.

2. Third party channels
   Using other people's and external channels to get Trust messages across. This includes the media, other organisation's communication channels, blogs by stakeholders and so on.

3. Direct messaging
   Building audiences that follow the Trust through social media channels which allow EEAST to directly communicate and engage with them, cutting out the potential filters applied by third party channels.

4. Portals of information
   Places where people can go to get information about EEAST, its services, how it operates, vacancies and so on. These include the website and intranet.

The Trust needs to understand that each channel is unique and has a different audience. And that individuals like to be communicated and engaged with in different ways and often

not through one specific channel. The Trust should explore emerging technologies and methods of communication to ensure it maximises the effectiveness of its communications.

In addition the Trust will need to ensure the tone of its messaging directly reflects its values at all times, as EEAST drives to make this a part of the fabric of the organisation.

Work plan
The high level work plan is detailed in Appendix A. This shows the communication objectives, desired outcome and the actions to be taken as a result of these. This also shows the broad timescale of delivery.

This is a three year strategy, so each year there will be an annual communications plan which sets out in detail what will be delivered and by when. The annual plan will also capture those 'business as usual' elements that are not captured in this strategy.

Any items that require investment outside the existing communications budget will be subject to a business case which will be submitted to, and considered by, the Executive Leadership Board.

Evaluation
As part of the 2016/17 communications work plan a suite of measures will be developed. These will include metrics such as staff survey results, reviews, surveys, media monitoring and social media and digital communications measures (ie hits, likes, page views, etc).

Trust objectives	Communication objectives	Outcomes	Actions
Secure the sustainability of our services; Establishing credible leadership	**A visible and credible Board and senior leadership team**	Staff/stakeholders aware of Board and senior leadership and decisions they are taking	• Implement Board visibility programme (2016/17) • Scope out a manager briefing system (2016/17)
		Greater transparency of Board decision making and discussions	• Concentrated promotion of Board meetings and discussions (2016/17) • Develop a transparency programme (2017/18)
Secure the sustainability of our services; Maintaining critical infrastructure and resilience capabilities	**Maintain a robust communications emergency plan**	Improved preparedness	• Review and refresh communications plan and business continuity plan (2016/17; 2018/19) • Annual training and testing of plans
		Stronger relationships with partners	• Regular attendance at warning and informing meetings and exercises • Implement programme of engagement with police and fire communication colleagues (2016/17)
Deliver clinical excellence to patients; Improving access and enhancing the care experience for all our patients + Contribute to our community; Contributing to the health and wellbeing of the population	**Empowering patients to access the right health care services for their needs**	Enhancing our community presence	• Becoming an authoritative voice on healthcare matters through our external channels (2017/18) • Increasing our reach into our communities (2017/18)
		Empowering patient decision making and improving health outcomes	• Develop education campaign plan relating to ambulance matters (stroke, falls, etc) for

			children and adults (2016/17)
Deliver clinical excellence to patients; Working within strategy partnerships creating alternative models of care	**Supporting the development and delivery of a new strategy and operating model**	People understand the rational for the new strategy and model and what it will look like	• Develop internal and external communication plan for launch of new strategy (2016/17)
Support our people; Enhancing the health, safety and wellbeing of our people	**Ensure staff and volunteers know about the range of support services available to them and how to access them**	Staff know how and when to access services	• Develop internal and external anti-violence campaign (2016/17) • Implement promotion of systems and processes staff can use to report incidents, near misses and issues (2016/17) • Develop health & wellbeing communications (2016/17)
Support our people; Continuing to strive for a positive and inclusive organisational culture	**The vision and values are the fabric of the Trust, widely understood and lived and breathed every day by staff**	Greater awareness of vision and values	• Vision and values awareness campaign (2016/17) • Easy accessibility to vision and values internally and externally (2016/17)
		Vision and values lived by staff	• Development of values champions group to embed values into Trust (2017/18) • Support of cultural audit results and actions through communications (2016/2017) • Board discussions reflect values (2016/17)
Support our people; Continuing to strive for a positive and inclusive organisational culture	**An engaged and empowered workforce who feel valued**	Staff feel valued	• Review and refresh of Trust reward and recognition programme (2017/18) • Deliver reward and recognition plan (2016/17)

			• Celebrate diversity within the Trust through communications (2017/18)
		Greater staff engagement and voice	• Participate in national ambulance internal communications survey and review to further develop engagement (2017/18) • Promotion of ideas scheme through the quality improvements team (2017/18) • Staff engagement plan (2016/17)
Support or people; Being an employer of choice	**Award winning communications team that is creative and innovative**	Stakeholders recognise the value of communications, recruitment and retention of team members and developing deeper engagement with all audiences through communications innovation.	• Individual development programme (2016/17) • Team development programme (2016/17) • Development of metrics and evaluation tools (2016/17)
Support or people; Being an employer of choice	**Improved reputation of the trust through celebrating the work of staff and volunteers proactively**	Greater positive media coverage	• Carry out a media relations review (2016/17) • Proactive media plan (2016/17) • Developing relationships with journalists (2016/17)
		Increased direct engagement with the community	• Development of a digital plan and digital channels (2017/18) • Greater horizon scanning and maximising short term opportunities (2016/17) • A communication plan to support recruitment (2016/17)

			• A 'you said, we did' external campaign (2018/19)
Contribute to our community; Develop stronger engagement with our stakeholders	**Support and develop stakeholder engagement**	Wider stakeholder engagement	• Generate increased stakeholder contacts and communications (2017/18)
		Deeper stakeholder engagement	• Greater understanding of stakeholder landscape • Programme of stakeholder rideouts and EOC visits (2017/18)
		Greater volunteer engagement, recruitment and retention	• Develop volunteer engagement plan and review existing communications and support (2016/17) • Develop volunteer recruitment plan (2016/17)