

Stephen Brown (Chief Officer)

Orkney Health and Social Care Partnership

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Agenda Item: 8

Performance and Audit Committee

Date of Meeting: 25 September 2024.

Subject: Internal Audit – Internal Communications.

1. Purpose

1.1. To present the Internal Communication Audit Report for members' scrutiny.

2. Recommendations

The Performance and Audit Committee is invited to scrutinise:

2.1. The findings contained in the internal audit report, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, reviewing the procedures and controls around internal communications and engagement for the Integration Joint Board, in order to obtain assurance that action has been taken or agreed where necessary.

3. Background

3.1. The Orkney Integration Joint Board (IJB) was established in 2016 under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014, which aimed to enhance the coordination and integration of health and social care services in order to improve outcomes for patients, service users, carers and their families.

3.2. Communicating well is an essential skill for all individuals and at an organisational level. Organisational communications which are well managed ensure that the right people receive the right information at the right time. This includes communications internally to employees and externally to a range of stakeholders.

3.3. The objective of this audit was to review the processes and procedures around communication planning, execution and monitoring of internal communications only.

3.3.1. For the purpose of this review, internal communications include to the partner bodies of the IJB, Orkney Islands Council and NHS Orkney.

4. Audit Findings

4.1. The audit provides assurance over the procedures and controls relating to internal communications.

4.2. The internal audit report, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, includes seven improvement actions. Three are assessed as grade 3 (Amber) and four as grade 2 (Yellow). These have been itemised for the IJB to consider alongside NHS Orkney and/or Orkney Islands Council.

5. Contribution to quality

Please indicate which of the Orkney Community Plan 2023 to 2030 values are supported in this report adding Yes or No to the relevant area(s):

Resilience: To support and promote our strong communities.	No.
Enterprise: To tackle crosscutting issues such as digital connectivity, transport, housing and fuel poverty.	No.
Equality: To encourage services to provide equal opportunities for everyone.	No.
Fairness: To make sure socio-economic and social factors are balanced.	No.
Innovation: To overcome issues more effectively through partnership working.	No.
Leadership: To involve partners such as community councils, community groups, voluntary groups and individuals in the process.	No.
Sustainability: To make sure economic and environmental factors are balanced.	No.

6. Resource and financial implications

6.1. There are no resource of financial implications associated directly with this report.

7. Risk and equality implications

7.1. This audit contributed to assurance around the adequacy and operation of mitigating controls associated with NHS Orkney and Orkney Islands Council's internal communications risks.

8. Direction required

Please indicate if this report requires a direction to be passed to:

NHS Orkney.	No.
Orkney Islands Council.	No.

9. Escalation required

Please indicate if this report requires escalated to:

NHS Orkney.	Yes.
Orkney Islands Council.	Yes.

10. Authors and contact information

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10.2. Rachel King (Audit Manger), Azets. Email: rachel.king2@azets.co.uk.

11. Supporting documents

11.1. Appendix 1: Internal Audit – Internal Communications.

Orkney IJB

Internal Audit Report 2023/24

IJB – Internal Communications

June 2024



Orkney IJB

Internal Audit Report 2023/24

IJB – Internal Communications

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Audit Sponsor	Key Contacts	Audit team
<i>Stephen Brown, Chief Officer IJB</i>	<i>Kirsty Groundwater, Communications Team Leader, Orkney Islands Council</i> <i>Shona Lawrence, External Communications Officer, NHS Orkney</i> <i>Emma Laughton, Internal Communications Officer, NHS Orkney</i>	<i>David Eardley, Partner</i> <i>Rachel King, Audit Manager</i> <i>Salman Akram, Internal Auditor</i>

Executive Summary

Conclusion

Orkney IJB relies on robust processes within Orkney Islands Council (OIC) and NHS Orkney to ensure staff are communicated with in a timely and appropriate manner.

We reviewed the IJB strategy for communications and found that this was up to date and included sufficient detail on internal communications from a strategic perspective. However, the related arrangements in place within both Orkney Islands Council and NHS Orkney need further work.

Orkney Islands Council lacks a complete and up to date strategy, with policies and procedures to be developed thereafter to support the implementation of the strategy.

NHS Orkney has a strategy for communications, supported by policies, procedures and frameworks for a range of communications. However, these documents require review following some changes to the process in practice.

Both the Council and NHS board require a more formal approach to the seeking, collation and analysis of feedback to support staff engagement.

We have identified a total of seven improvement actions (as itemised for the IJB to consider alongside the Council and/or NHS board), and more detail on these can be found in the management action plan within this report.

Background and scope

Communicating well is an essential skill for all individuals and at an organisational level. Organisational communications which are well managed ensure that the right people receive the right information at the right time. This includes communications internally to employees and externally to a range of stakeholders.

Internal communications can include the following:

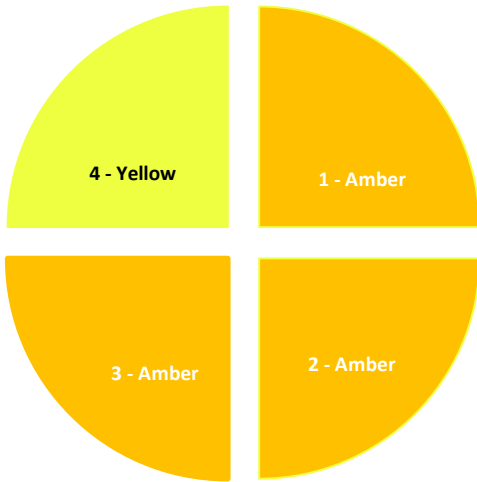
- Formal communications;
- Informal communications;
- Feedback channels;
- Crisis communications; and
- Training and development.

Orkney IJB requires a clear communications strategy which provides direction to communications both internally and externally. This should be supported by a range of guidance documents and templates which are readily available to staff and to help ensure control and consistency.

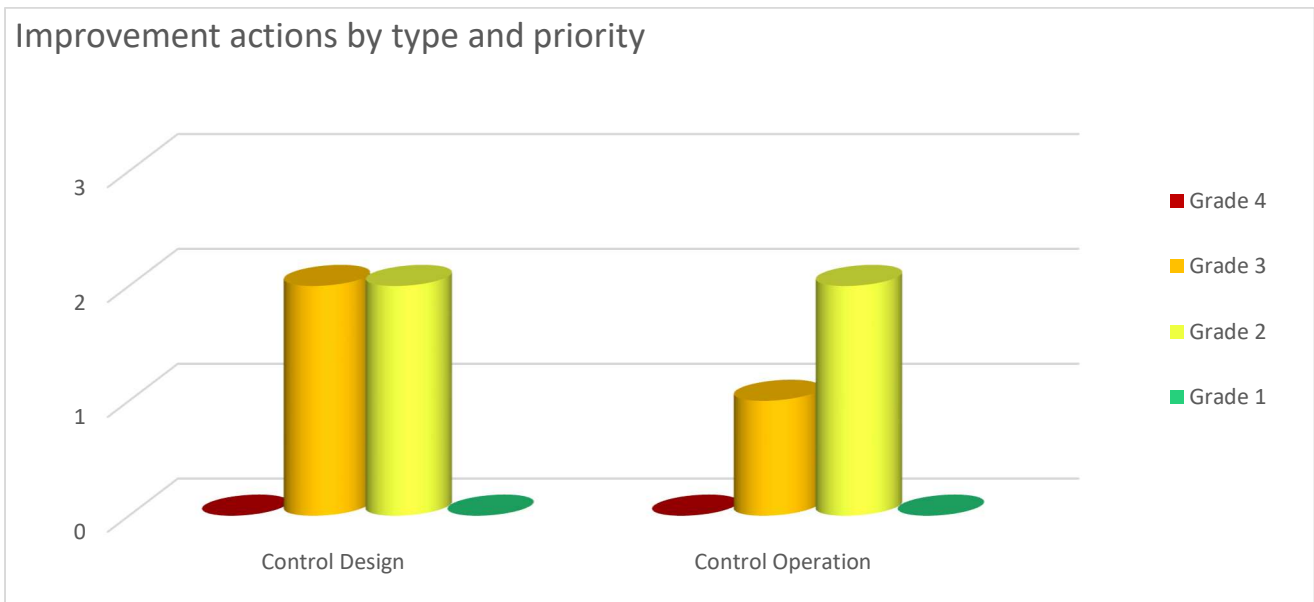
In accordance with the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan, we performed a review of internal communications. This review covered communication planning, execution and monitoring of internal communications only. (For the purpose of this review, internal communications include to the partner bodies of the IJB, Orkney Islands Council (OIC) and NHS Orkney (NHS O). A separate review of external communications will be completed to complement this work).

Control assessment

- 1. There is a communications strategy which includes reference to internal communications and how these will support the overall strategy of the IJB
- 2. There are supporting guidance documents and templates available to staff, these are used for all internal communications to ensure consistency, these include a range of mechanisms for communication and when these should be used
- 3. Internal communications are reviewed and approved before issued by an applicable individual/forum in accordance to the content and sensitivity of the communication
- 4. There is a clear governance structure and monitoring arrangements for internal communications including collection of feedback and escalation routes



Improvement actions by type and priority



Seven improvement actions have been identified from this review, three of which relate to compliance with existing procedures and four to the design of controls themselves. This number is partly arrived at by splitting out some issues as they pertain to the IJB and/or the Council/NHS Board, for ease of response and action. See Appendix A for definitions of colour coding.

Key findings

Good practice

We noted the following good practice:

- The Integration Joint Board (IJB) Strategic Plan outlines its strategic priorities with a strong emphasis on listening to and engaging with communities.
- In line with its strategic objectives, the IJB has developed a Communication and Engagement Strategy for the period 2023-25. This strategy was approved by the Head of Strategic Planning & Performance on 19 April 2023, and it delineates key principles governing communication and engagement practices. (Notably for this audit, it includes a dedicated section on Staff Engagement and Communication, highlighting the importance of internal communication within the organisation).
- NHS O and OIC follow independent protocols and communicate with each other on IJB matters to help ensure internal communications are accurate and timely.

Areas for improvement

We have identified a number of areas for improvement which, if addressed, would strengthen Orkney IJB's control framework. These include:

- Orkney Island Council should review and update the communications and engagement strategy to bring this up to date. This should include ensuring it supports the IJB communications strategy already in place.
- Orkney Islands Council should develop a suite of supporting documents for the internal communications process which help the achievement of IJB communications objectives.
- Orkney Islands Council and the health board should ensure the approval process for internal communication is executed and that these approvals are documented.
- Orkney Island Council and NHS Orkney should enhance feedback mechanisms, to inform continuous improvement.

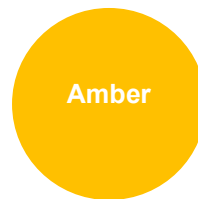
These and other matters are further discussed in the Management Action Plan below.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all staff consulted during this review for their assistance and co-operation.

Management Action Plan

Control Objective 1: There is a communications strategy which includes reference to internal communications and how these will support the overall strategy of the IJB



1.1 OIC - Communications strategy

As IJB communications are managed by the Communication Teams within NHS Orkney and Orkney Islands Council, we obtained the respective communications strategies.

We observed that the Communication and Engagement Strategy for Orkney Island Council (OIC) is significantly out of date; it was due for review in 2020, but this did not take place. Management have since confirmed that the OIC Communications and Engagement Strategy is being presented to the Council's Resources Committee in November 2024.

Risk

Communication and Engagement may be impaired, leading to poor communications delivery which fail to meet stakeholder and employee needs.

Recommendation

OIC should review/update the Communications and Engagement Strategy. This strategy should include appropriate reference to the IJB communications strategy and how it will support IJB internal communications.

Management Action

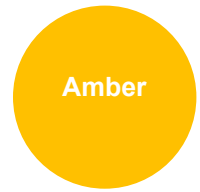
Grade 3
(Design)

A 2024 – 2029 Communications and Engagement Strategy will be coming to elected members at the Policy and Resources Committee on 26 November 2024 and will include appropriate reference to the IJB and their communications strategy.

Action owner: Kirsty Groundwater, OIC Communications Team Leader

Due date: 31 December 2024

Control Objective 2: There are supporting guidance documents and templates available to staff, these are used for all internal communications to ensure consistency, these include a range of mechanisms for communication and when these should be used.



2.1 OIC - Supporting documents

To support the implementation of any strategy, there should be a suite of documentation. For communications this could include:



OIC does not have such formal supporting documentation.

Risk

Communications may not be executed comprehensively and consistently, damaging staff engagement/morale and impairing achievement of objectives.

Recommendation

Following action of the Communications Strategy (per MAP1.1), documentation to support communications strategy should be considered.

Management Action

Grade 3
(Design)

Internal communications forms part of the Communications and Engagement Strategy coming to Policy and Resources on 26 November 2024 and will include reference to the potential future development of protocols and templates with those protocols and templates to be developed in the first half of 2025.

Action owner: Kirsty Groundwater, OIC Communications Team Leader

Due date: 31 March 2025

2.2 NHS Orkney – Review of internal communication documents

NHS Orkney has a Communications Framework, Communications Policy, Internal Communications Protocols and related templates in place. These provide guidance and support to staff on internal communications.

Whilst “in date” at the time of our testing, we noted that two changes to process in practice have not been reflected in the documentation. (In relation to (i) the weekly bulletin replacing the monthly newsletter, and (ii) the approval process for the bulletin).

Risk

Actual processes are not reflective of current, approved practices.

Recommendation

All internal communications documentation should be reviewed/updated to reflect of current practices, with staff notified accordingly.

Management Action

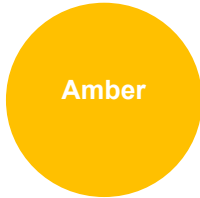
Grade 2
(Design)

All Internal communications protocols have been updated.

Action owner: NHS Orkney, Communications Team

Due date: Complete

Control Objective 3: Internal communications are reviewed and approved before issued by an applicable individual/forum in accordance to the content and sensitivity of the communication



3.1 OIC – Approval process

Segregation of duties helps ensure all information being shared with staff is accurate, appropriate and sensitive to the expectations of the operating environment.

There is no documented review and approval process for the weekly staff newsletter. We obtained email evidence of the draft newsletters being shared between communications team members, however this does not demonstrate approval of the newsletters and content explicitly. We recognise that the content of these newsletters is made up of press releases which have been approved with additional wrap around text.

We acknowledge that a new strategy and supporting documentation are being developed and as part of this process the methods for review and approval of the staff newsletters will be revised and process documented.

Risk

Communications with staff may be inaccurate and/or inappropriate, leading to confusion, misunderstanding, and potential misinterpretation of information among staff members. This has related staffing, culture and reputation implications.

Recommendation

In line with MAP 2.1, the process for approval of all communications should be documented, including internal communications to staff. This should outline all communication types, the frequency of the communication, and the individual/group responsible for review and approval. Evidence of this process should be stored to ensure a clear trail of approval can be traced for every communication.

Management Action

Grade 3
(Operation)

Internal communications forms part of the Communications and Engagement Strategy coming to Policy and Resources on 26 November 2024 and will include reference to the potential future development of documented approval processes with those documented approval processes to be developed in the first half of 2025.

Action owner: Kirsty Groundwater, OIC Communications Team Leader

Due date: 31 March 2025

3.2 NHS Orkney - Approval process

NHS Orkney has a process in place for the review and approval of internal communications (although it is not documented within the communications policy). In practice, the communications team prepares the internal communication which is then reviewed by the CEO and approval confirmed via email.

We selected a sample of seven weekly bulletins from different months to ensure that weekly communications had been approved by the CEO before issuing to staff. However, we were only able to obtain this evidence for six of the seven weeks selected. One of the seven which we did obtain was not easily retrieved and was provided after the fieldwork was complete.

Risk

Communications with staff may be inaccurate and/or inappropriate, leading to confusion, misunderstanding, and potential misinterpretation of information among staff members. This has related staffing, culture and reputation implications.

Recommendation

The board's process for approval of communications should be recorded, and followed in practice.

Management Action

Grade 2
(Operation)

All internal protocols have been updated and arrangements are in place for sign off of weekly bulletins by an Executive Director in the absence of the CEO, if required.

Action owner: NHS Orkney, Communications Team

Due date: Complete

3.3 OIC/NHS O - Internal communication content

The content for the likes of the NHS and council bulletins is collated individually by the council and NHS. The opportunity is given to the Chief Office of IJB to feed into these and for those receiving the bulletins to submit content.

However, the process for the collation of internal communications content is not clearly documented by OIC and the NHS board.

Risk

Some areas or relevant topics for inclusion in internal communication may not be fully engaged/included in board communications, adversely impacting the reach and comprehensiveness of the output and potentially impairing staff engagement.

Recommendation

The process for ensuring all weekly updates to staff includes information from a range of sources as applicable each week should be clearly documented by both OIC and NHS Orkney.

Management Action – NHS Orkney

Grade 2
(Operation)

NHS Orkney's Internal protocol advises that communications for internal release in bulletins must be signed off by a Head of Service or equivalent. NHS Orkney already have a process in place whereby the Corporate Communications email address is detailed weekly as a reminder for any content to be sent through for inclusion.

Action owner: NHS Orkney, Communications Team

Due date: Complete

Management Action – OIC

Internal communications forms part of the Communications and Engagement Strategy coming to Policy and Resources on 26 November 2024 and will include reference to the potential future development of protocols and templates with those protocols and templates to be developed in the first half of 2025

Action owner: Kirsty Groundwater, OIC Communications Team Leader

Due date: 31 March 2025

Control Objective 4: There is a clear governance structure and monitoring arrangements for internal communications including collection of feedback and escalation routes.



4.1 OIC/NHS O - Feedback mechanisms

Whilst some ad-hoc feedback is received (e.g. via social media channels) and positive elements such as the evidence of commitment to proactive communication from the NHS board Chief Executive and engagement sessions on the NHS Board Strategy, we could not confirm appropriate, recent mechanisms in place for obtaining feedback from staff in relation to internal communications across key partners. There is no documented process for the requesting, collation and analysis of feedback.

Risk

There is a risk that internal communications are not meeting staff needs and opportunities for continuous improvement and optimised employee engagement are not taken.

Recommendation

OIC and NHS Orkney should determine the best way to seek feedback from staff regarding internal communications.

Actions plans should track feedback received and actions taken, with key improvements shared back with employees.

Management Action – NHS Orkney

There are many mechanisms in place within NHS Orkney to obtain feedback on specific topics. Mainly these would be through MS forms survey or via Staff Briefings with the CEO. There have been many examples of how feedback has been obtained from staff but this would all depend on the specific topic at the time. Some examples include the recent iMatter survey, (following which action plans are mandatory), iMatter follow up feedback form, Team Orkney Awards feedback, NHSO Bright Ideas scheme (via MS forms survey) and Corporate Strategy engagement sessions. We will also be launching our new staff experience programme which will allow staff avenues for feeding back.

Action owner: NHS Orkney, Communications Team

Due date: 31 December 2024

Management Action - OIC

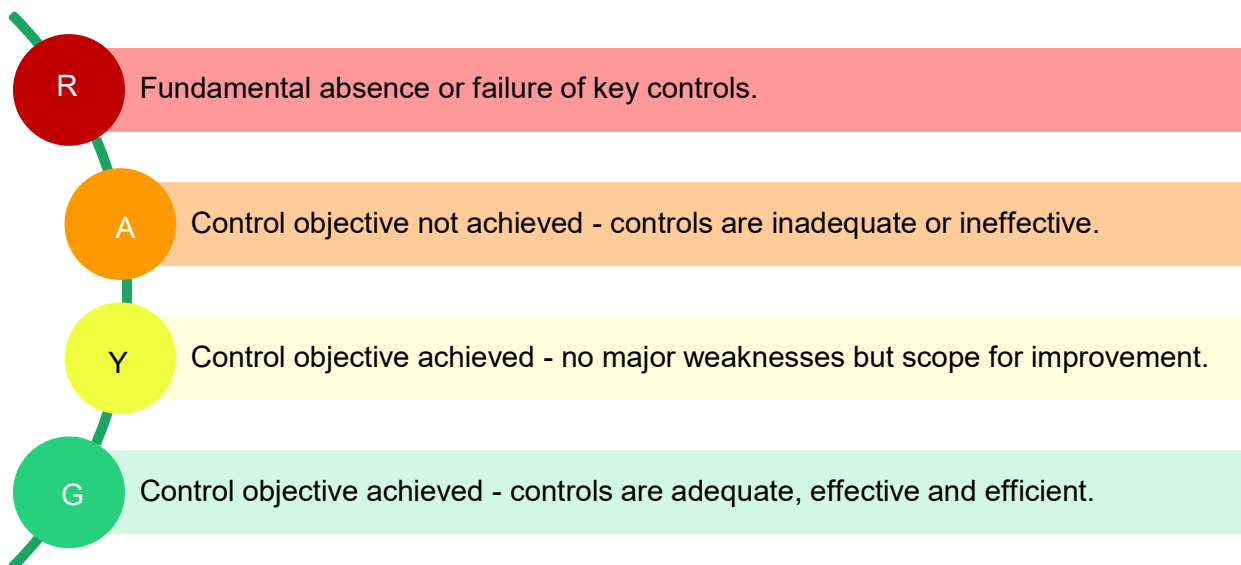
Internal communications forms part of the Communications and Engagement Strategy coming to Policy and Resources on 26 November 2024 and will include reference to the potential future development of feedback mechanisms with those mechanisms to be developed in the first half of 2025.

Action owner: Kirsty Groundwater, OIC Communications Team Leader

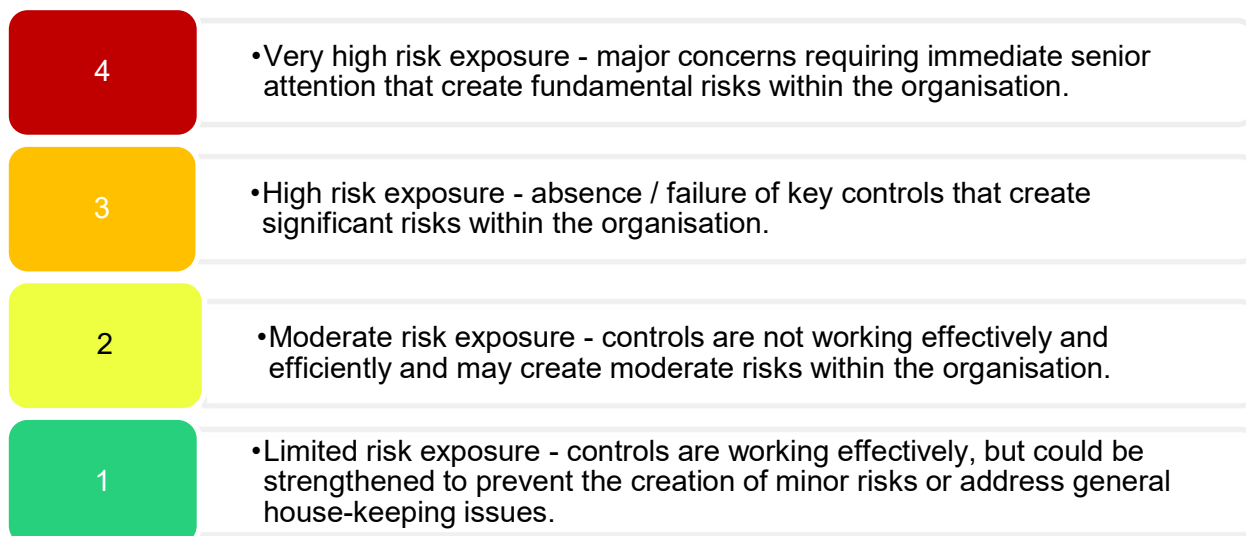
Due date: 31 March 2025

Appendix A – Definitions

Control assessments



Management action grades



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