



East Sussex Healthcare
NHS Trust

Patient Experience & Engagement Strategy 2026-2031



www.esht.nhs.uk



esh-tr.enquiries@nhs.net



0300 131 4500

I am delighted to introduce our Patient Experience and Engagement Strategy for 2026–2031, a key component of our ambition to deliver our True North: Building Excellence and Sustainability Together.

This strategy reflects our shared commitment to placing patients, families and carers at the heart of everything we do.

“I’ve learnt that people will forget what you said... forget what you did... but never forget how you made them feel” Maya Angelou

By embedding kindness as a fundamental principle across our organisation, we are making it clear that experience and engagement are not functions of a single team, but the responsibility of us all. Listening to and acting on the patient voice is central to improving the quality, safety and outcomes of the care we provide.

In line with the NHS 10-Year Plan, we will strengthen how we gather insight, respond to feedback, and involve people meaningfully in decisions about their care and the services we design. This will support more integrated, patient-centred and sustainable care for our communities. We will embrace opportunities for digital engagement, supporting patients to access information, services and feedback mechanisms through modern, accessible digital channels whilst ensuring inclusion for those who prefer non-digital methods

We also recognise that experience and engagement begins with our colleagues. Many of our staff and their families live in the communities we serve, and their lived experiences are invaluable in helping us understand and improve how care is delivered. Creating a culture where staff feel heard and valued is essential to delivering consistently positive experiences for patients.

At its core, this strategy is about ensuring that every interaction reflects our values of kindness, inclusivity and integrity. It sets out how we will work together with patients, carers, communities and partners to continuously improve.

I encourage every colleague to embrace this strategy and the role they play in bringing it to life. Together, we will strengthen how we listen, learn and act, and in doing so, deliver care that truly meets the needs of those we serve.



Richard Milner, Chief of Staff

INTRODUCTION

Improving the experience of every patient is central to the NHS Constitution. Listening to patients, understanding their views and priorities, and acting on their feedback are essential to delivering high-quality care and driving meaningful improvement.

This strategy builds on our commitment to our values of kindness, inclusivity and integrity. It sets out a clear ambition for our whole organisation: that patient experience and engagement are everyone's responsibility. By working in partnership with patients, families and carers, we will ensure their voices shape the care we provide underpinned by our principle of "no decision about you, without you."

We have established strong foundations through how we listen and respond to feedback, including complaints, PALS and the Friends and Family Test. We will now go further shifting from reactive to proactive engagement, seeking insight earlier and more consistently to drive continuous improvement. Through greater collaboration and participation with our communities, we will strengthen our contribution to delivering better, faster and fairer healthcare for all.

We will place equal importance on experience, quality and safety, recognising that these are inseparable. When patients and those who support them feel listened to, informed and involved, outcomes and experiences improve.

This strategy began by asking patients, carers, staff and external stakeholders what matters most. We have used their vital feedback alongside our commitment to recognising individual and unique experiences, responding to what we hear, and striving to improve every day.

We have identified five key aims that will guide our work. These will ensure that insight from patients, families and carers is actively used to improve services. By consistently seeking, monitoring and acting on feedback including when things go wrong, we will focus improvement on what matters most. We will also draw on learning from partners locally, regionally and nationally.

Ultimately, this strategy represents an opportunity to strengthen a culture that is open, responsive and inclusive one that listens with intent and acts with purpose. By doing so, we will shape services that are more personalised, more compassionate, and truly centred on the needs of the people we serve.

OUR VISION

Our vision is *“to create a culture where every patient, family member and carer feels heard, valued and treated with kindness, and where their experiences shape the care we provide every day”*.

In developing this strategy, we have actively engaged with staff, patients and our diverse communities, including through partnerships with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. We have complemented this with insight from national surveys, the Friends and Family Test, complaints and PALS.

This rich and varied feedback has given us a deeper understanding of what matters most to the people we serve. It has highlighted both areas of strength and opportunities to improve, ensuring our approach reflects the experiences of a broad and representative population.

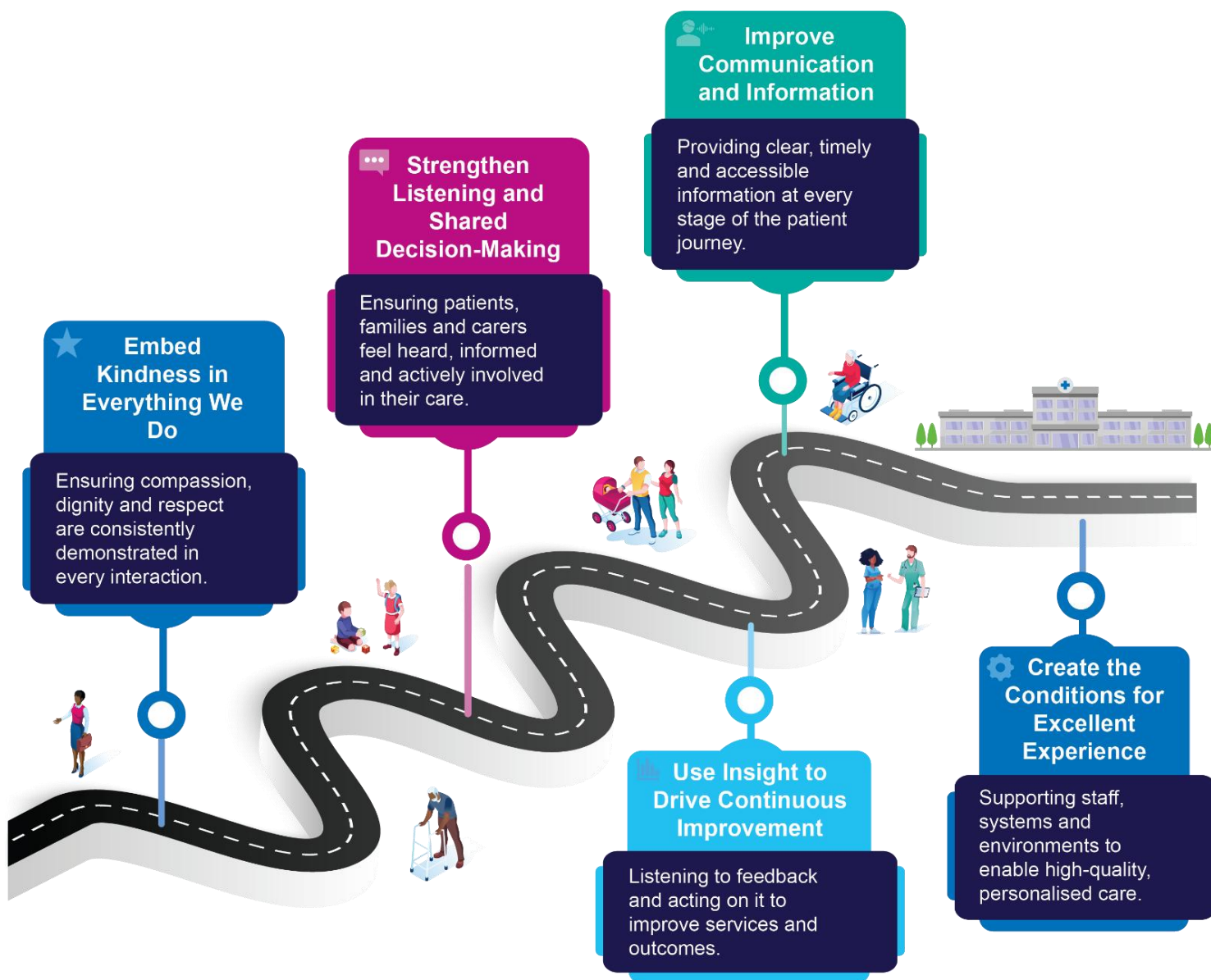
What we heard has directly informed our priorities. We have identified a set of key areas of focus that will guide our work over the next five years. These will form our strategic aims, supported by clear measures, so that we can monitor progress, demonstrate impact and remain accountable to our patients and communities.

We recognise that people with lived experience are experts in their own care and experiences. Their insight will be central to how we improve services, develop priorities and evaluate success. We will seek opportunities to involve patients, carers and communities in meaningful ways, ensuring their voices influence decisions at every level of the organisation.

We will enable patients to engage with services in ways that best meet their needs, including through digital tools that support access, communication, self-management and participation in service improvement.

To deliver our vision, we must prioritise systematically listening, acting on feedback, and supporting staff to consistently translate insight into measurable improvements in patient experience.

AIMS OF THIS STRATEGY



We will:

- Measure success through a set of indicators, reflecting both experience and outcomes
- Include patient feedback (FFT, national surveys, complaints and PALS), alongside measures of staff experience such as engagement, wellbeing and culture
- Assess communication and access to information, and track evidence of improvement through “You said, we did” approaches
- Measures indicators such as waiting times, access and patient flow. Which will provide additional insight into how care is experienced
- Monitor progress quarterly through the Integrated Governance Meeting.

This strategy will remain responsive to the changing needs of our patients, carers and communities.

While our approach evolves, our commitment to improving patient experience and delivering meaningful change will remain constant.

WHAT PATIENTS TOLD US

What we heard was clear and consistent. Patients told us that kindness and compassion make a significant difference to their experience. Many described positive interactions with staff who were attentive, respectful and took time to listen. However, this was not consistent across all services, and some patients reported feeling dismissed or not treated with the same level of care.



20% said feeling listened to was important

Feeling listened to and involved in decisions about care was one of the most important factors shaping experience. While many patients felt included, others described appointments that felt rushed, limited opportunities to ask questions, or a lack of clarity about their treatment options.



19% said communication was an issue for them

Communication was identified as a key area for improvement. Patients told us they value clear, honest and timely information, but reported examples where important information was not shared, or where communication between teams did not feel joined up.



17% said delays and access was an issue for them

Patients highlighted the impact of delays, access and the environment of care on their experience. Issues such as waiting times, being cared for in inappropriate settings, and short notice appointments contributed to stress and uncertainty.



16% said kindness and compassion was important to them



15% said involvement in decisions was important to them



13% said personalised care was important to them

Importantly, patients told us they want to be treated as individuals, with their personal needs, preferences and circumstances understood and respected. This includes feeling able to ask questions without challenge, having choices in their care, and receiving support that reflects their specific needs.

WHAT STAFF TOLD US

Staff told us that kindness is demonstrated through small, everyday actions taking time to listen, showing empathy, and supporting both patients and colleagues. However, they also described the challenges of delivering this consistently in a pressured environment.



23% of staff said time pressures and workload are an issue for them



42% of staff identified the importance of supportive leadership, good communication, and strong teamwork

Time constraints, staffing pressures, and increasing workload were highlighted as key barriers to providing the level of personalised, compassionate care staff aspire to deliver. Staff also identified the importance of supportive leadership, good communication, and strong teamwork in enabling positive patient experiences.



31% of staff said that feeling valued, listened to and supported themselves directly impacts their ability to care for patients.



15% of staff highlighted opportunities to make better use of patient feedback

Staff emphasised that feeling valued, listened to and supported themselves directly impacts their ability to care for patients. Staff highlighted opportunities to make better use of patient feedback ensuring it is shared, reflected on, and used to drive meaningful improvement.

There is strong alignment between this feedback, staff survey results, and patient experience data. Both qualitative and quantitative data highlight that effective communication and teamwork enable positive experiences; however, inconsistency arises where pressures impact the ability to communicate effectively.

To improve patient experience, our strategy must ensure consistent compassionate care by strengthening communication, personalising care, and supporting staff to deliver kindness despite system pressures.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OUR STRATEGY

Through engagement with patients, carers, staff and our communities, we have listened to a wide range of experiences of care. Feedback was gathered through direct conversations, the Friends and Family Test, complaints, PALS, national surveys and partner organisations. These insights reinforce the importance of listening, learning and acting on what we hear. They have directly shaped our priorities and will continue to guide how we improve the experience of care across our services.

Taken together, patient and staff feedback presents a consistent and compelling picture. Patients and staff share the same priorities: kindness, listening, clear communication and personalised care.

However, both groups also highlight the impact of system pressures—including time constraints, workforce challenges and service design—on the ability to consistently deliver these experiences.



This reinforces that improving patient experience is not only about individual behaviours, but about creating the right culture, conditions and systems to enable staff to deliver compassionate, high-quality care.

Our strategy therefore will focus on strengthening both experience and engagement, ensuring that we listen to patients and staff, act on what we hear, and create an environment where kindness and partnership can thrive.

Our strategy must focus on creating the culture, capacity and systems that enable staff to consistently deliver kind, personalised care by actively listening to and acting on patient and staff feedback.

DELIVERING OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

Strategic aim	Alignment to True North			What we will do	How we will measure success
	Integrated	Patient centred	Sustainable		
 Embed kindness in all we do		✓	✓	- Staff to access Civility Awareness and Handling Difficult Situations & Caring for Yourself & Others training - Embed in induction, appraisal & leadership development - Deliver "Kindness in Practice" team sessions - Establish recognition scheme for compassionate care - Require service-level kindness action plans	↓ Complaints /PALS about staff attitude ↑ Quarterly staff PULSE survey results (specific Q tbc)
 Strengthen listening & shared decisions	✓	✓		- Strengthen real-time feedback at point of care - Expand co-production with patients and VCSE partners	↑ National Patient Survey scores - involved in decisions ↑ Patients feeling listened to (new Q for FFT) ↓ Complaints/PALS re: communication - Evidence of co-produced improvements
 Improve communication & information		✓		- Improve accessibility (Easy Read, translation, digital) - Standardise communication at key transition points - Strengthen team-to-team communication - Expand digital communication tools (reminders, messaging)	↓ Communication-related complaints/PALS ↓ DNA rates
 Use insight to drive improvements	✓		✓	- Strengthen feedback collection and triangulation - Embed "You said, we did" across all services - Implement standard dashboards (service to Board) - Use insight in business cases and service redesign	↑ Volume and diversity of feedback ↑ Number of "You said, we did" evidence ↑ Timeliness of complaint/ <u>PALS</u> responses
 Create conditions for excellent experience	✓		✓	- Improve staff wellbeing, support and experience - Ensure capacity, time and tools for compassionate care - Strengthen visible and supportive leadership - Improve care environments (privacy, dignity, comfort) - Align with workforce, operational and system priorities	↑ number of staff completing PULSE survey ↓ Staff sickness absence ↓ Staff turnover ↑ Patient feedback on environment (FFT & survey) ↑ Discharge numbers ↓ ED waiting times



Follow us on

Facebook: @ESHTNHS

Instagram: @ESHTNHS

YouTube: @ESHTNHS



www.esht.nhs.uk



esh-tr.enquiries@nhs.net



0300 131 4500

East Sussex
Community Voice



healthwatch
East Sussex



VCSE
EAST SUSSEX ALLIANCE

SUSSEX VCSE
LEADERS ALLIANCE