



PUBLIC BOARD MEETING

30 September 2026

Item No 09

THIS PAPER IS FOR APPROVAL

PATIENT EXPERIENCE ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26

Lead Director	Emma Stirling, Director of Care Quality and Professional Development
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Action required	The Board is asked to approve the draft Patient Experience Annual Report 2025/26.
Key points	This is an annual publication providing an update of our patient experience activity over the last year. The paper highlights our data on compliments, our Involving People work as well as complaints, their themes and actions to address them. The report was presented to the Clinical Governance Committee in August 2026, with any feedback from members reflected in the version presented to the Board for approval. Following Board approval and prior to publication the presentation of the report will be refreshed to include a front page and graphics and will also reflect any changes requested by Board members at the meeting. .
Associated Risk Identification	—
Timing	Annually
Link to Corporate Ambitions	We will: • We will work collaboratively with citizens and our partners to create healthier and safer communities. • We will innovate to continuously improve our care and enhance the resilience and sustainability of our services • We will improve population health and tackle the impact of inequalities

	We will provide the people of Scotland with compassionate, safe and effective care when and where they need it
Benefit to Patients	Patient and carer feedback involvement in service development helps ensure services meet patient needs. Feedback helps drive continuous improvements to services and evidence that service developments are driving anticipated improvements.

Updated Front Cover to be added

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1. Introduction

The Scottish Ambulance Service Patient Experience Annual Report 2025/26 provides an overview of feedback received between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026. It highlights the key themes raised by patients, carers and families, as well as outlining improvements made in response to the learning we have identified from this feedback. The data contained in this report is a compilation of the information reported within the 'Patient-Centred Care Update' which is provided to the Scottish Ambulance Service Board throughout the year.

2. Encouraging and Gathering Feedback

We actively promote a range of methods by which members of the public can feedback their experiences of the Scottish Ambulance Service. Email and telephone continue to be the primary methods of contacting us, but the public continue to use online channels such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, the Scottish Ambulance Service website and Care Opinion. We also encourage feedback through the Citizens Advice Scotland 'Patient Advice and Support Service'.

The vast majority of our feedback is positive and any comments from patients, their families, carers or members of the public are fed back directly to the staff involved and their manager.

Where negative feedback is involved, a thorough investigation is undertaken where we will talk to people who made complaints, listen to their concerns, explain what may have happened, apologise where appropriate and outline where any lessons have been learned/where improvements will be made. In certain cases, formal face-to-face meetings are offered.

CARE OPINION



We continue to promote Care Opinion as a valuable channel for feedback from patients, families and carers who would rather express their views anonymously or indirectly to the Service. The website allows their voice to be heard on a national forum and gives us a great opportunity to engage with them about the care they received or assist them with any ongoing issues.

About Care Opinion

Care Opinion is a place where you can share your experience of health or care services, and help make them better for everyone.

At Care Opinion we make it safe and simple to share your story online and see other people's stories too. You can see how stories are leading to change.

We think that by sharing honest experiences of care, we learn to see the world differently. Working together, we can all help make care better.

The Service is dedicated to reviewing and responding to posts to support patients and their families and this year we responded to 96% of stories within 5 days. The Service is also keen to identify learning from the feedback we receive.

Between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, 386 stories were posted on Care Opinion relating to the Service. These have been viewed 66,021 times.

Of the 386 posts, 75% were positive in tone, 16% were minimally critical, 7% moderately critical and 2% strongly critical. It should be noted that whilst some posts will have some form of criticality, this is not necessarily directed towards the Scottish Ambulance Service, with the feedback often involving multiple NHS boards.

COMPLIMENTS

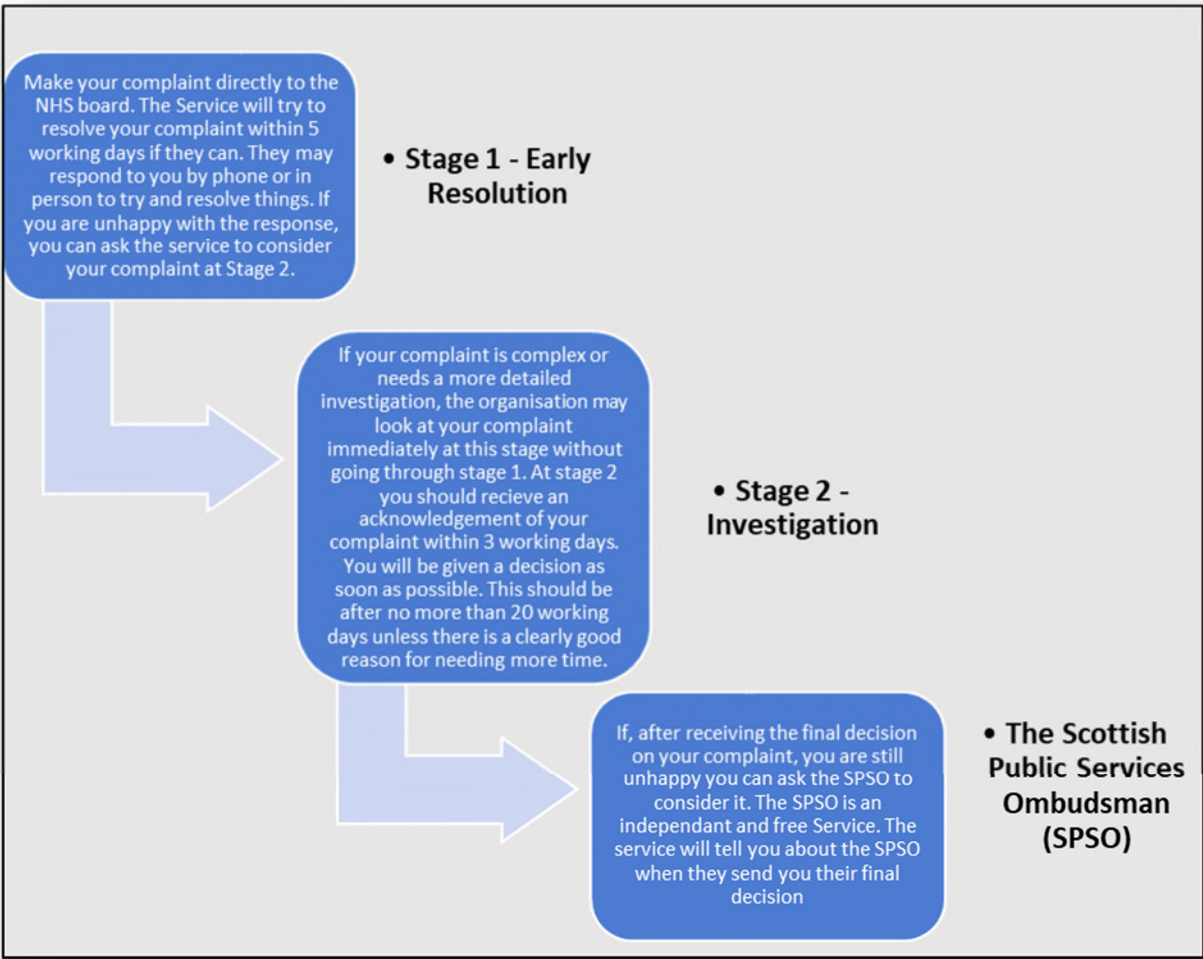
Compliments received from sources other than social media are logged and actioned on our feedback system InPhase. Public support for the work of our staff continues to be strong. Between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, a total of 1162 compliments were received, a 12 per cent increase on last year.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

In addition to these formally recorded compliments, many more compliments are received via our digital media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X and our own public website. This positive feedback continues to grow, with a large number of compliments being received through these channels over the course of the year.

3. Encouraging and Handling Complaints

On the 1st of April 2017, NHS Scotland implemented a new NHS Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP). This was put in place to improve and standardise how all NHS Boards handle complaints. There is now a two-stage process in place. If at the end of this process, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they are sign posted to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).



COMPLAINTS DATA

Between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, a total of 1,221 complaints were received. This represents a 7% increase on the previous year. Of these complaints, 587 were 'Stage 1' complaints and 634 were 'Stage 2' complaints.

While every complaint is important and represents an opportunity to learn, complaints accounted for approximately 0.1% of all requests for assistance received by the Service during 2025/26.

While complaints handling is co-ordinated and quality assured by the Patient Experience Team, complaints are investigated in each region by local staff who will contact the complainant and any staff members involved to look into the issues raised and resolve the situation.

Early conversations with the complainant help to put in place a proportionate review or investigation into the circumstances that led to the complaint. Local managers have access to report functions in order to understand what is working well and to identify areas for improvement. The Patient Experience Team reviews feedback data at a national level to identify any emerging trends that might relate to systemic issues.

There are a number of assurance groups within the Service to ensure that we take the learning from all complaints and use this valuable feedback to improve our services further. We also work closely with other health boards and ambulance services across the UK.

4. Accountability and Governance

We ensure patients and carers continue to have access to a range of feedback options for providing feedback to the Service.

Complaints handling is co-ordinated by the Patient Experience Team, with each complaint looked into at a local level to drive improvement, while identifying any issues that require national consideration.

Complaints trends and themes are shared in a patient experience paper that is a standing item at our Clinical Governance Committee meetings and our Public Board meetings. This helps our Clinical Governance Committee and Board track feedback and complaints, making sure the right staff take action to improve and share good practice.

COMPLAINTS COMPLIANCE

Guidance states that all NHS Boards in Scotland should aim to respond to 70% of 'Stage 1' complaints within five working days and 70% of 'Stage 2' complaints within 20 working days.

The Scottish Ambulance Service again finished the year well over the Government Target for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.

Our compliance rate for Stage 1 complaints was 93% and our compliance rate for Stage 2 complaints was 89%.

There is no doubt that this strong performance is down to the hard work, dedication and professionalism shown by the staff who are all involved in the Service's complaints handling.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

The Scottish Ambulance Service continues to have a positive co-operative relationship with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

In 2025/26 there were 24 cases investigated by the SPSO. Of the 24 cases, 21 cases were not upheld by the SPSO, 2 cases have been dealt with through early resolution and 1 case has been upheld. When a complaint is upheld or partially upheld, the Scottish Ambulance Service often begins making improvements before the SPSO's findings are formally issued. If further action is needed, a plan is put in place to complete the recommendations. These outcomes provide assurance that the Service's complaint investigations are generally robust and proportionate, while continuing to identify opportunities for learning and improvement.

5. Learning from Feedback- Involving People

Feedback, whether positive, negative or constructive is something we value deeply within the Scottish Ambulance Service as it is a great opportunity for us to learn, improve and shape our Services. In addition to traditional feedback processes such as compliments and complaints, we actively work in partnership with patients, their families, the public and Third Sector organisations across the country to co-design and improve the services we provide to communities. We have a wide-ranging 'Involving People' network who work in partnership with our staff throughout the year. This year, we've continued to strengthen how we support and involve volunteers, young people, and communities across Scotland. Examples of ongoing work over the last year are provided below.

Patient representation

We continue to strengthen recruitment and engagement of Patient Representatives, to both expand representation across our governance committees within the Scottish Ambulance Service and increase the influence of lived experience in service development and decision-making. We have also received increased interest from young people seeking work experience opportunities, helping to address a significant gap in current service provision and enabling new voices to contribute to improvement work. We continue to work with Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) to ensure our recruitment, training, and support processes align with national participation standards and go further to establish strong, consistent approaches to representation across the Service.

British Sign Language (BSL) Communication and Accessible Communication

Work is progressing to strengthen communication and accessibility for British Sign Language (BSL) users and patients who are unable to communicate verbally by identifying and evaluating best practice from across Scotland. An initial programme of engagement has been undertaken with NHS Boards, Police Scotland and the Scottish Government to understand the communication tools, interpreter arrangements, operational approaches and policies currently in use, with the aim of informing a more consistent and evidence-based approach

within the Scottish Ambulance Service. Engagement with NHS Boards has focused on understanding existing communication pathways, interpreter services, visual communication tools and local guidance, while discussions with Police Scotland are exploring the implementation and operational use of its recently introduced 24/7 BSL Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) application. Early engagement with the Scottish Government has also identified opportunities to align this work with the recently launched Foundation Inclusive Communication Toolkit and wider national policy on communication inclusion. The scoping work has identified significant innovation across individual organisations but also highlighted an opportunity for greater collaboration across the public sector. Consideration is therefore being given to establishing a cross-sector network to support the sharing of learning, reduce duplication and promote a more coordinated approach to communication inclusion across health and public services. The findings will inform future recommendations on communication technologies, operational guidance and accessibility improvements, ensuring any future developments are informed by evidence, partnership working and the lived experience of Deaf BSL users and other patients with communication needs. This work has been informed by feedback from patients and stakeholders about the challenges some people experience when accessing services and communicating their needs.

Enhancing empathy-driven practice in Ambulance Control Centres

We are working with Ambulance Control Centre training teams to provide specialist expertise and guidance to further enhance empathy-driven communication for Accident & Emergency call handlers. This work will build on the principles of the training we delivered in a previous pilot to scheduled care staff, but will be more tailored, more operationally focused and more deeply embedded in the unique challenges of emergency call handling. This collaboration will support a consistently compassionate, person-centred response at the earliest point of contact with the Service, aligning with NHS Scotland values and expectations, and supporting relevant legislative and policy duties around equality, dignity, and accessible communication. The aim is to further improve patient experience when the public call 999 for assistance. Patient feedback consistently highlights the importance of compassionate communication during times of distress and uncertainty.

Youth Engagement, Employability and Development Pathways

Work is progressing to strengthen opportunities for young people to engage with the Scottish Ambulance Service through the development of structured employability, work experience and volunteering pathways. Early discussions have identified opportunities to build on the existing Young Minds Save Lives programme by creating clearer progression routes for young people who wish to remain engaged with the Service but are not yet eligible for employment.

Collaborative work is planned with Community Action colleagues to scope a future youth development scheme, alongside links with wider NHS employability initiatives and programmes delivered in partnership with the King's Trust. Consideration is also being given to expanding internship and work experience opportunities, enabling young people to gain meaningful experience across a range of Service functions while supporting future workforce development.

This work will be developed through a cross-service working group to ensure alignment with existing community engagement, education and employability programmes, avoiding duplication while creating a coordinated approach to youth engagement across the organisation.

NHS 24 / Scottish Ambulance Service Interface

Work has commenced to explore the patient experience at the interface between NHS 24 and the Scottish Ambulance Service, recognising this as an important opportunity to improve how people experience care across organisational boundaries. The initial phase of work is focused on analysing existing NHS 24 and Scottish Ambulance Service data to identify the key issues experienced by patients before determining where patient and public involvement will add the greatest value. This reflects the Service's commitment to meaningful involvement, ensuring people are engaged with a clear purpose and are able to influence service improvement rather than being involved without a defined role. Preparatory work is also underway to identify relevant patient experience evidence, including complaints, compliments and other feedback relating to the NHS 24 and Scottish Ambulance Service interface. This evidence will help identify priority themes and inform the development of a targeted co-design approach with patients, the public and frontline staff.

Feedback and complaints relating to the patient journey between organisations have helped identify this as an area for further exploration and improvement.

StayWise Partnership

Discussions are underway to explore a partnership with the StayWise educational platform, in collaboration with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, to strengthen the Scottish Ambulance Service's engagement with children and young people through a nationally coordinated programme of health and safety education. Initial discussions have identified a significant opportunity to adapt existing ambulance-related educational resources for a Scottish audience, providing schools with consistent, curriculum-linked learning materials that promote health literacy, emergency care awareness, CPR, community resilience and the appropriate use of ambulance services. The work will build on established partnerships and utilise existing resources, reducing duplication while enabling a coordinated national approach to educational engagement. The proposal also provides an opportunity to strengthen collaboration with blue-light partners and support delivery of the Service's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ensuring children and young people have access to high-quality information that supports their health, safety and wellbeing.

6. Next Steps / Areas for Improvement

While the report highlights strong progress in many areas, there are opportunities to build on this work further. The following suggestions are offered for consideration and future development:

1. **Proactive Engagement:** There is already good work underway to engage the public, but more targeted outreach to underrepresented and equalities groups could be beneficial. One idea is to develop a feedback engagement plan specifically aimed at reaching these communities.
2. **Learning from feedback;** to improve transparency and demonstrate how feedback leads to change, the Service could explore creating a public-facing “Feedback in Action” dashboard on the SAS website. This might include

clearer links between feedback and outcomes, such as a “You Said, We Did” feature.

These suggestions are intended to support ongoing improvement and help strengthen the connection between public feedback and service development.

7. Conclusion

We are proud to see continued high levels of positive feedback across all our channels, reflecting the dedication and professionalism of our staff and volunteers. We are especially grateful to everyone who has taken the time to share their experiences. This feedback is vital in helping us shape and improve our services for communities across Scotland.

We also extend our sincere thanks to the many individuals, families, volunteers, and third sector partners who have worked alongside us to co-design and enhance our services. Their contributions have been instrumental in driving innovation and ensuring our care remains person-centred and inclusive.

We hope this report demonstrates how the feedback we receive is being used to make meaningful improvements and we remain committed to listening, learning, and evolving to meet the needs of those we serve.

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