

Communications and Marketing Strategic Plan (DRAFT)

2026 - 2031

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At Food Standards Scotland We have a unique role, working independently of Ministers and industry to provide advice which is impartial, and based on robust science and data.

Our remit covers all aspects of the food chain which can impact on public health – aiming to protect consumers from food safety risks and promote healthy eating

1. Executive Summary

Effective communications (including marketing) are essential to achieving FSS's ambition of delivering a food environment in Scotland that is safe, authentic, healthier and trusted. This communication strategy sets out a clear, future-focused approach that strengthens our visibility, authority and resilience in the face of a rapidly changing information landscape.

The plan aligns directly with the FSS Strategy 2026–2031 and reflects significant organisational and external developments - the SAFER regulatory reform programme, SPS-related engagement, Public Health Nutrition priorities, and the growing relevance of generative AI and misinformation. It establishes communications and marketing as strategic enablers of trust, awareness, transparency and consistent, evidence-based communication across the food system.

This updated strategy prioritises authoritative evidence-led communication, varied content delivery, formalised partnership working for amplification, and strengthened governance through the Strategic Engagement Committee. It also reinforces FSS's commitment to accessible, inclusive and impartial communication that maintains public confidence and supports Scotland's long-term public health objectives.

2. Strategic Purpose

The Communications & Marketing function supports FSS's vision by:

- Providing clear, authoritative food safety and standards information that protects consumers and maintains confidence in Scotland's food system.
- Strengthening trust in FSS as an independent, evidence-based public body
- Ensuring consumers receive clear, accessible, authoritative information
- Supporting regulatory reform (including SPS and SAFER)
- Supporting Public Health Nutrition priorities
- Enabling strong partnerships across government, local authorities, industry and public health bodies
- Enhancing organisational resilience to misinformation and emerging risks
- Ensuring FSS remains visible and credible across the evolving digital and AI-driven landscape

3. Strategic Context

3.1 A Changing Information Landscape

Generative AI is transforming how people access information. Traditional website traffic and search patterns are expected to decline as AI-generated answers dominate search behaviour. FSS must adapt proactively by ensuring our content is authoritative, widely distributed and easily surfaced by AI tools.

3.2 Rising Misinformation

Food safety, regulation and dietary health are increasingly exposed to inaccurate, politicised or misleading narratives. Communications must support organisational resilience by identifying, correcting and preventing the spread of misinformation using a risk based and proportionate model.

Over recent years, the rise of inaccurate or misleading information - particularly on social media - has created a growing risk to consumers and to wider public health. False claims about food safety, nutrition, regulatory requirements or scientific evidence can spread rapidly, eroding trust and influencing consumer decisions in ways that may undermine health and safety.

A key role for FSS during this strategy period is to provide clear, authoritative information that consumers can rely on. While we take a risk-based and proportionate approach to challenging inaccurate content, our aim is to ensure that consumers, stakeholders and influencers have access to trusted, evidence-based advice from FSS rather than relying on misleading narratives.

3.3 System-wide Reform

Programmes such as SAFER and developments related to SPS arrangements require clear, consistent communication to consumers, FBOs and delivery partners. Communications must support clarity, confidence and understanding.

3.4 Expectations for Transparency and Independence

As a non-ministerial office, the public, stakeholders and political audiences expect impartial, evidence-driven communication that is transparent and accessible.

3.5 Budget and Operating Constraints

Communications activity will continue to operate within tight financial constraints and the Scottish Government's restrictions on marketing and campaign activity. FSS will prioritise low-cost, high-impact channels, focusing on organic reach, partnerships, media engagement and stakeholder communication. This ensures the approach remains proportionate, efficient and aligned with expectations.

4. Priority Audiences

- **Consumers**, with targeted focus on vulnerable groups
- **Food business operators and industry bodies**, particularly those impacted by SAFER
- **Local authorities**, who deliver enforcement and regulatory activity
- **Government and political stakeholders**, coordinated through the Strategic Engagement Committee
- **Public health partners**, including PH bodies, NHS and third sector organisations
- **Internal colleagues**, ensuring alignment, understanding and confidence

5. Strategic Priorities

5.1 Authority, Trust and Transparency

FSS will continue to communicate impartially, clearly and accessibly, reinforcing our role as Scotland's trusted, independent food body. We will adopt formats optimised for AI retrieval to maintain visibility despite changing digital behaviours. We will also challenge communications that are inaccurate especially where public health may be put at risk.

5.2 Content Strategy

To mitigate declining web-based traffic, FSS will continue to vary content and increase reach beyond owned channels. Key routes will include:

- Proactive media and expert commentary
- Strategic blogs, explainers and thought leadership
- Partnerships and stakeholder channels
- Webinars and transparent data sharing
- AI-readable structured summaries and FAQs

This approach ensures consumers and stakeholders access FSS information wherever they seek it.

5.3 Partnerships and Message Amplification

Partnerships will be formalised as a core strategic delivery mechanism. A new Partnership Framework will:

- Prioritise organisations aligned with FSS strategic goals
- Amplify public health, food safety and regulatory reform messages
- Support local authorities, industry bodies and public health partners
- Ensure cross-system consistency and reduce mixed messaging
- Provide shared assets, expert content and coordinated communications opportunities

This work is supported by the key work streams, relevant cross office groups and the Engagement committee.

5.4 Proactive Press, Media, Public Affairs and Webinars

FSS will continue to use proactive, evidence-led communication across press, media, webinars and public affairs to strengthen visibility and understanding of our work. These channels play a distinct strategic role in reinforcing FSS's independence, promoting clarity on complex issues, and increasing awareness of Board-approved recommendations.

Activity will be selective, proportionate and aligned with organisational priorities, with a focus on:

- Raising understanding of food safety, PHN and regulatory reform
- Increasing visibility of evidence behind Board recommendations
- Providing authoritative context on SAFER, SPS and system reform
- Enabling transparent, two-way engagement through webinars on technical or high-interest topics
- Ensuring political and policy stakeholders understand FSS evidence through targeted public affairs activity, governed by the Strategic Engagement Committee

This approach supports trust and informed decision-making while remaining within resource constraints and SG requirements.

5.5 Supporting Regulatory Reform (SAFER and SPS)

Communications will:

- Support clarity and understanding of regulatory reform
- Reinforce trust and compliance among FBOs
- Provide clear information for LAs and delivery partners
- Support reassurance around SPS-related changes
- Link directly to programme governance through a defined SAFER communications sub group

5.6 Public Health Nutrition

Communications will support Scotland's dietary improvement and public health goals by promoting affordable, healthier choices and targeting vulnerable groups. All PHN communications will remain impartial and evidence-driven.

FSS communications will help bridge the gap between the Board approval of PHN recommendations and Government consideration by increasing awareness, understanding and visibility of the evidence among public health stakeholders, industry, and other relevant audiences. This raises informed expectations of progress, reinforces the strength of the evidence and supports wider system understanding of the public health benefits involved.

5.7 Misinformation and Disinformation Resilience

FSS will take a risk-based, proportionate approach to misinformation, recognising that not all narratives require intervention and that responses must be evidence-led and aligned to our statutory role. We will focus our activity where inaccurate information has the potential to undermine consumer safety, trust, or regulatory understanding.

FSS will implement a structured approach that includes:

- Horizon scanning and social listening
- Proportionate response only where warranted

- Coordination with partners to maintain alignment
- Accessible myth-busting and evidence explainers for high-risk topics
- Prepared lines and content where appropriate
- Staff and spokesperson training

5.8 Digital, Social and Web

Digital channels will continue to play a central role in public engagement. FSS will:

- Use the new website as the authoritative and accessible FSS shop window
- Maintain WCAG compliance, BSL translation and inclusive design
- Increase knowledge and understanding of AI-friendly formats and implement where possible
- Deliver digital activity guided by the FSS Social Media Strategy
- Evaluate digital engagement using the comms quarterly metrics against agreed KPIs

5.9 Internal Engagement

Internal communications will support cultural alignment, organisational confidence and consistent external messaging, guided by the Internal Communications Framework.

6. Evaluation and KPIs

Evaluation of communications activity will feed into the FSS Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs) for the 2026–2031 organisational strategy.

Communications metrics will continue to be monitored quarterly and reported, with twice-yearly updates incorporated into Finance and Business Committee reporting. This ensures transparency, alignment to corporate performance, and a clear understanding of the contribution of communications to strategic outcomes.

Evaluation will focus on meaningful strategic impact, including:

- Consumer trust, advocacy, understanding and brand indicators
- Partner amplification and influence reach
- Visibility within AI-generated outputs
- Clarity and confidence indicators for SAFER and PHN
- Media profile, sentiment and expert visibility
- Success of misinformation response and narrative correction
- Digital accessibility compliance
- Internal alignment and confidence
- Strategic Engagement Committee oversight outcomes

Digital metrics (e.g., engagement rates, impressions) will continue to be monitored but will not be the primary measure of effectiveness.

7. Conclusion

This strategy provides a forward-looking, resilient and authoritative approach to communications and marketing for 2026–2031. It supports organisational priorities, responds to emerging risks, ensures consistent system-wide messaging and strengthens FSS’s position as a trusted, independent voice in Scotland’s food environment. By embedding partnership-led delivery, AI-aware content strategy, and structured mis/disinformation resilience, FSS will remain visible, influential and credible in a rapidly changing landscape.