




# St. Michael's House

## Organisation Communications Policy 2023

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<p><i>Person Centred • Professional • Honest • Ethical • High Standards of Governance • Innovative</i>  <i>All Policies and Procedures are in line with St. Michael's House Values</i></p>		

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## Versions of Policy

Version	Date	Amendments	Written By / Reviewed by
2023	30 August 2023		Aisling Shanley/Tara Molloy

## **Purpose of communication policy**

This policy statement articulates St. Michael's House commitment to appropriate and effective communication across all the organisations stakeholders both internally and externally. It is to provide a structural framework for planning and delivery and to outline the roles and responsibilities of different parties within this.

St. Michael's House also has a Total Communication Policy that demonstrates how service users give and receive information within our services. This is a different policy. You can find this policy on the St. Michael's House intranet or ask your keyworker for a copy.

## **Organisational definition of communication policy**

Communication is fundamental to the success of the organisation and provides opportunities for individuals to communicate and share the knowledge; skills and attitudes that will enable all stakeholders to achieve agreed individual and organisational objectives. It will allow opportunity to enhance and promote the good work of St. Michael's House to meet the challenges of Intellectual Disability healthcare services.

Communication may encompass a wide range of channels and processes, both formal and informal at an individual and organisational level. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but communication activities are wide and varied and this is intended to outline the responsibilities of all stakeholders in developing and maintaining good communication practice.

The scope of this policy directly mirrors the newly implemented St. Michael's House Communications Strategy 2023. As a healthcare service provider for individuals with disabilities, St. Michael's House is committed to the delivery of good service to the individuals and their families that use our service. We recognise the importance of communication to all our stakeholders. Communication is vital to engage all our stakeholders to ensure we deliver the best services.

## **Communications Strategy**

Both internal and external stakeholders were consulted during the draft of the new Communications Strategy. The Communications committee will continue to consult during the writing of an action plan and for future reviews through our focus groups and workshops with families, staff and service users from our communication subgroups.

This Communications framework has been formulated on the following principles:

- St. Michael's House Communications are underpinned by the principles of respect for difference and cultural diversity, transparency, equity and fairness with all stakeholders having responsibility to develop and maintain good communication practice.
- Have a clear and well-articulated vision and mission that enables all to understand and engage with the strategic direction, goals and priorities of the St. Michael's House
- Provide appropriate information to enable staff to deliver against goals and the agreed strategic direction of St. Michael's House
- Communications on key issues will be considered and relevant.
- Communication will be open and transparent.
- Communication will be made in a timely fashion.

- Most relevant information and issues for dissemination or discussion will be widely available on our website, in newsletters and in published reports.
- Key communications decisions must be considered and approved by Communications Manager/CEO Office.
- Ensure a robust Communication strategy for internal and external communications.

### **Responsibilities for Communication Delivery**

Communication is a responsibility of each member of St. Michael's House. We must therefore be aware of and take full responsibility for, legislative responsibilities, and those outlined in this policy.

As a Health organisation in receipt of public funds we acknowledge and respect the legislative requirements placed upon us (for example, the Freedom of Information Act, Data Protection Act, Immigration, Health and Safety and Equality legislation) and will work at all times to ensure that communications are open, transparent and consistent.

### **Responsibilities of Leadership**

“Leaders” refers not just to the Core Executive, but to leaders of projects, programmes and teams. Leaders include Board members, Shared Service managers, Persons in Charge, Head of Departments, Clinicians, Team leaders, Service Users, Key Workers, Representatives etc. This list is not exclusive.

- Ensure, as individuals and teams, we foster a culture of free discussion and exploration.
- Ensure all stakeholders are kept updated on relevant organisation activities to enable them to be as effective as possible.
- Promote best practice in communication for all stakeholders namely; staff, families and service users and the community.
- Ensure a communications strategy, policy and action plan is in place.
- Manage strategic communication through an identified communication framework and team of communications advocates.
- Ensure that information is made available to all stakeholders in a timely manner and via appropriate channels.
- Ensure that all stakeholders have appropriate skills and relevant information to enable effective communication with all parties.
- Maintain open channels of communication of two-way communication and listen to feedback and comment from all stakeholders.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the communications strategy, policy and infrastructure and ensure the communication action plan evolves to meet the needs of St. Michael's House.

### **Responsibilities of all Staff**

"Staff" are employed by, or aligned to St. Michael's House, its subsidiary companies, agencies and partners.

- Ensure individual execution of good communication practice in accordance with this policy.
- To be informed and have information in order to be as effective as possible in a role and supportive of the strategic direction of St. Michael's House.
- Take responsibility for communicating with stakeholders.
- Adhere to the regulations of the Social Media Policy, implemented in 2023
- Use open channels of two-way communications to keep line managers, colleagues and stakeholders informed.
- Act as advocates and ambassadors of St. Michael's House

### **Responsibilities of Managers**

"Managers" referring to managing of people and/or processes across St. Michael's House

- Communicate the organisation strategic plan to stakeholders including teams and service users.
- Communicate regularly with your teams, ideally face-face, to ensure relevant information is available, communicated and understood.
- Support and encourage teams to communicate about projects, news, updates, expertise.
- Help to ensure all colleagues maintain good communication practice in accordance with this policy.
- Maintain two-way channels of communication to ensure feedback is obtained and to keep senior team and communication department informed.

### **Responsibilities of Communication Subgroups**

"Communication subgroups" referring to operational committee members who represent different channels of communication, e.g., Adult, Children, Shared Services and Easy to Read /Accessible information.

- To provide guidance and support on communication, to ensure members of St. Michael's House can implement best practice and maintain high standards across all channels.
- To build toolkits and templates for advice and guidance on how to use specific tools, tactics and channels.
- Provide advice to project teams to ensure communication opportunities are maximised.
- In conjunction with communication committee to prioritise, agree and coordinate an action plan.
- Implementation Strategy

## **Support and Advice**

St. Michael's House has developed a Five Year Strategy outlining the goals of the department and how they will align to the strategic Plan (2022-2026)

This will be reviewed annually. Guidelines and toolkits will assist the process.

## **Internal Communications Strategy**

It is the responsibility of the Communications department to engage and promote the following:

- Preparation of briefing materials for manager's use when communicating with their teams regarding organisational objectives and developments
- Ensuring that communications and messaging are accessible and effective in language and design
- Working with management to ensure that internal communication across the organisation is done in a timely and consistent manner
- Developing and implementing internal communication vehicles, notice boards, social media, newsletters, memos and the intranet etc. and measuring their effectiveness
- Working with Human Resources Department on employee relations and organisational development initiatives
- Working with Speech and Language Therapy Department on Total Communication Strategies for use within the organisation generally.
- Conducting employee surveys and providing feedback on results
- Ensuring that upward feedback is a key component in all internal communications and employees are given a voice and influence during design and implementation
- Promoting the role of internal communications during Induction.

## **Staff Responsibilities relating to Communications**

Any communication representing St. Michael's House needs to be reviewed by the Communications department. It is the responsibility of all St. Michael's House staff members to engage and ensure the following:

### **Social Media**

All staff must adhere to the new Social Media Policy for staff members, effective 2023. This will be made available on the intranet and circulated to all staff via email.

### **Video production**

All training, educational videos produced by St. Michael's House staff during St. Michael's House working time and representing St. Michael's House should be viewed by the Communications Manager to ensure branding and information are consistent with St. Michael's House Branding Guidelines. Any video material not sighted may not be permitted in circulation.

## Print

All St. Michael's House printed material including leaflets, flyers, t-shirts, banners etc are to be reviewed by the Communications Department prior to print to ensure branding and information are consistent with St. Michael's House Branding Guidelines. A good timeline for review and comment is required in advance of any Print material. Any print material not sighted may not be permitted in circulation.

## Imagery

All imagery in relation to St. Michael's House staff, service users, volunteers, donors, Board members or any other association with St. Michael's House must have permission for use. The permission must be for the purpose the image was taken for or the person(s) need to be informed via email. The St. Michael's House photograph consent form needs to be used for all images to promote, market or advance St. Michael's House services in any way.

Please also refer to the SMH guidelines on consent for photographs for clinical purposes – as this is a separate area and has different consent resources.

All Staff must comply with St. Michael's House GDPR Policy and Procedures with all communication data information. Please consult the St. Michael's House Data Protection Policy.

## Media Queries and St. Michael's House

All media queries are directed to the Communications Manager and/or CEO Office.

All Staff are asked not to comment to any media queries directly or to invite or conduct media queries on behalf of St. Michael's House organisation.

If a staff member wishes to speak publicly on matters in their own right they are asked to make it clear to the audience that they are doing so in their own right and not on behalf of St. Michael's House organisation.

Staff members who do speak on an issue in their own right are requested to inform the Communications Manager and/or CEO Office as media queries may result and advance warning is appreciated and facilitates preparation for such queries.

## Media Risk Management

The Communications strategy will prioritise developing position statements on matters that St. Michael's House considers relevant to the public interest. A **Crisis Communications Plan** will be developed in order to provide a guide to all staff in the event of a crisis situation.

When St. Michael's House is requested to address matters in the public arena, it will respond with due cognisance of the level of risk associated with the particular issue. Any such response will keep in mind the importance of ensuring communication further promotes the aims and objectives of our services. Where this will not be the case, the request for communication should be declined. To assist in dealing with such matters the following hierarchy of issues has been agreed:

1. Category 1 – areas of high/medium risk
2. Category 2 - areas of low risk

Category 1: A National or Priority Issue, a direct threat to St. Michael's House. The response will be managed by the CEO, the Director of Support Services, and the Communications Manager. The support of an external PR Company will also be used. The Board members will be informed.

Category 2: Administrative and lower level pro-active and specialist Issues. These will be managed by the CEO, the Director of Support Services, and the Communications Manager.

### **External Channels of Communications**

St. Michael's House will communicate externally through a range of communication means - website, social media, emails, newsletters, documents, press statements, media interviews, publications, videos and so on. Information is covered in the Communications Strategy, which will be made available on the intranet.

All communication for external media must be cleared by Communications Manager and Director of Support Services.

Any forms of external communication must adhere to brand guidelines, using the visual identity suite- made available to all staff on the intranet. Staff are to ensure they're using up to date communications materials including but not limited to letterhead, email signatures, and PowerPoint presentations.

### **Evaluation**

St. Michael's House is committed to continuous improvement and will continue to monitor the efficiency of this policy with qualitative and quantitative data based on the goals outlined in the Communications Strategy.

This process will ensure that a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy is undertaken, and any problems of implementation or management brought to the attention of the St. Michael's House Communication committee.

Contact: E: [Communications@smh.ie](mailto:Communications@smh.ie)



## St. Michael's House Crisis Communications Plan

### **Preparation:**

*Identify Vulnerabilities:* Assess potential crisis scenarios specific to the disability community, such as funding cuts, service disruptions, negative publicity, or changes in regulations.

*Designate a Crisis Team:* Assemble a dedicated crisis team consisting of representatives from different departments, including Communications, Executive Management, and Board to ensure a coordinated response.

*Media Training:* Provide media training to key spokespersons to ensure they can communicate effectively and empathetically during a crisis.

### **Risk Assessment:**

*Impact Analysis:* Gauge the potential impact of each crisis scenario on SMH's mission, service users, staff, and stakeholders.

*Response Hierarchy:* Develop a tiered response plan based on the severity and potential consequences of each crisis, outlining actions for mild, moderate, and severe situations.

### **Internal Communication:**

*Notification Protocol:* Establish a clear protocol for notifying internal staff about a crisis situation, ensuring accurate and consistent information dissemination.

*Staff Support:* Provide counselling and support resources for staff members who may be personally affected by the crisis, ensuring their well-being.

### **External Communication:**

*Central Spokesperson:* Designate a central spokesperson (CEO, Director of Support Services, or Communications Manager, depending on level of crisis).

*Timely Response:* Ensure that the initial response is issued promptly, acknowledging the situation, expressing empathy, and assuring stakeholders that the charity is taking appropriate actions.

Engage with PR company on drafting a response.

*Transparency:* Provide accurate and transparent information about the crisis, including its impact on the organization's operations and the individuals it serves.

*Regular Updates:* Establish a schedule for updating stakeholders as the situation evolves, showcasing the charity's ongoing efforts to address the crisis.

### **Stakeholder Engagement:**

*Service User Outreach:* Reach out to service users and their families with personalized messages to address concerns, provide support, and keep them informed about the actions taken by SMH.

*Collaboration:* Work with our PR company in order to amplify our efforts and maintain a unified response.

### **Social Media and Online Presence:**

*Monitoring:* Continuously monitor social media platforms and online forums for discussions related to SMH and the crisis. As a rule, do not respond or engage to negative posts, comments, etc... but direct all serious comments to Director of Support Services/PR company in order to draft potential response.

*Content Strategy:* The Communications Manager will develop a content strategy that focuses on sharing positive stories, success stories, and the impact SMH continues to make, even during challenging times.

**Evaluation and Learning:**

*Post-Crisis Analysis:* After the crisis is resolved, conduct a thorough analysis of our response, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

*Adaptation:* Update the crisis communications strategy based on lessons learned to better prepare for future crises and enhance the charity's overall resilience.

Empathy, transparency, and a commitment to SMH's mission are essential throughout the crisis communication process.