

# Inspection of Children's Services Pembrokeshire County Council

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

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## Introduction

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook an inspection of services for children in Pembrokeshire County Council in September 2018.

Our approach to the inspection was underpinned by the eight well-being statements and associated well-being outcomes as outlined in the Welsh Government's *National Outcomes Framework for People who need Care and Support and for Carers who need Support* (March 2016). Our approach builds upon the associated local authority quality standards set out in the *Code of Practice in Relation to Measuring Social Services Performance issued under section 145 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act*. In addition, the inspection considered the local authority's capacity to improve through an analysis of the leadership and governance of its social services functions.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children and their families. The scope of the inspection included:

- the experience and progress of children on the edge of care, children looked after and care leavers including the quality and impact of prevention services, the effectiveness of decision-making, care and support and pathway planning;
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after and children who return home including the use of fostering, residential care and out of local authority area placements;
- adherence to fostering service regulation and national minimum standards;
- the quality of leadership, corporate parenting and governance arrangements in place to determine, develop and support service sufficiency and delivery particularly in relation to looked after children, care leavers and their families.

While the main focus of the inspection was on the progress and experience of children and young people looked after and care leaver's transition into adulthood, the inspection included a focus on children, young people and their family's engagement with:

- Information, advice or assistance (IAA), preventative services;
- Assessment/reassessment of needs for care and support and care and support planning;
- Child protection enquiries, procedures, urgent protective action, care and support protection plans.

Inspectors read case files, interviewed staff and administered a staff survey, interviewed managers, and professionals from partner agencies. Inspectors talked to children and their families wherever possible. Young people and care leavers attended two focus groups.

## Overview of findings

- Pembrokeshire County Council has demonstrated its commitment to modernising the way children's services are commissioned and provided. The local authority is proactive in identifying areas requiring further development and utilises a range of options for driving improvement.
- We found a senior management team who were committed to a culture of openness and transparency and welcomed challenge.
- Safeguarding procedures and processes were understood and followed by staff, ensuring children and young people were protected in a timely and consistent manner.
- The local authority continues to embed the principles of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), ensuring that strength based assessment and positive risk taking underpins practice.
- Early intervention and preventative services for children and families are well established and successful. Managers were seen to work well together across services, and had a common understanding about how they wished to work with families.
- We saw evidence of good preventative work with families through joint working between social workers, Edge of Care, Housing Education and third sector which resulted in good outcomes for young people and their families.
- There is good corporate support for children's services from elected members and the wider council.
- The local authority recognises there is a need to further develop its services for young people who are leaving care and are motivated to do so.
- There is a need to strengthen fostering arrangements to ensure children receive consistent positive experiences and improved outcomes when looked after.
- The quality assurance framework is being developed to drive consistency, improve practice and inform the shaping of services.

## **Areas for development**

### **Assessment**

1. Continue to embed quality assurance systems to monitor the quality of assessments, care and support planning.

### **Care and support and pathway planning**

2. Continue to work with other directorates within the council and partner agencies to develop multi-agency based models. To include wider partners such as housing associations, employment support and community programmes to support looked after children and care leavers.
3. Ensure disruption meetings are carried out following placement breakdown to understand reasons, hear young people's voice, monitor trends and ensure any lessons learnt are implemented.
4. Further develop the fostering service to provide greater choice of appropriate placements for all young people, especially those with complex needs.
5. Further development in the commissioning of placements to ensure they are sufficient to safely meet the needs of young people with complex behaviours.
6. The local authority should satisfy itself that the best possible arrangements are in place to promote positive outcomes for care leavers.
7. Ensure that the Transition policy is understood and fully embedded in practice.

### **Safeguarding**

8. Ensure the policies and procedures of the Emergency Duty Team are understood by all staff and partners.

### **Leadership, management and governance**

9. The appointment of a new Director and Head of Service has provided the opportunity to develop a strong and stable senior management team. It is important to ensure there is sufficient senior management capacity to deliver the programme of change the local authority has identified is required.
10. Review current work force strategy to aid the recruitment of staff to the authority and retain current staff.

**Next steps**

CIW expect Pembrokeshire County Council to consider the areas identified for development and take appropriate actions to address and improve these areas. CIW will monitor progress through its on-going engagement activity with the local authority.

# 1. Access arrangements: Information, Advice and Assistance

## What we expect to see

The authority works with partner organisations to develop, understand, co-ordinate, keep up to date and make best use of statutory, voluntary and private sector information, assistance and advice resources available in their area. All people, including carers, have access to comprehensive information about services and get prompt advice and support, including information about their eligibility and what they can expect by way of response from the service. Arrangements are effective in delaying or preventing the need for care and support. People are aware of and can easily make use of key points of contact. The service listens to people and begins with a focus on what matters to them. Effective signposting and referring provides people with choice about support and services available in their locality, particularly preventative services. Access arrangements to statutory social services provision are understood by partners and the people engaging with the service are operating effectively.

## Summary of findings

- 1.1. We saw a timely response to referrals with prompt and effective action taken by experienced staff who focused on what matters to children and families.
- 1.2. Work has been undertaken by the local authority to meet the requirements of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA). We found referrals received by the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service within the Child Care and Assessment Team are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner. We saw staff in the IAA service using the “what matters” conversation and the five steps to eligibility in line with SSWBA.
- 1.3. Staff have a good knowledge of local resources and actively promote people’s awareness of these to inform choice. We saw evidence of other professionals making appropriate referrals to IAA, in respect of children and young people at risk of abuse, neglect or harm and for those in need of care and support. We saw seamless transfer of child protection cases from IAA to Child Care Assessment Team (CCAT) who undertake child protection investigations.
- 1.4. We were made aware through interviewing local authority staff and partner agencies of how the use of the Signs of Safety model has provided a common framework for use across services, resulting in a means of communicating using plain language and shared practices that are understood by all partners.
- 1.5. Pembrokeshire County Council continues to progress its approach to early intervention and preventative services with partners and the third sector. Offers of early intervention and preventative services by the Team Around the Family (TAF) promotes good outcomes for families. We saw



work being undertaken with multi-agency partners and preventative services such as Flying Start, Families First, Team Around the Family, Youth Services and Education Department to deliver targeted services in a timely way that avoided the need for involvement of statutory services. An example from files audited showed positive outcomes achieved for a child and their family by all parties contributing to the assessment. We saw evidence of signposting to appropriate services such as parenting and anger management programmes. This enabled the stepping down to preventative intervention, supporting the family to manage their own well-being outcomes.

- 1.6. The active offer of Welsh language has been recognised by the local authority with the social services department contributing to the corporate working group on Welsh Language and delivering against the “More Than Just Words” action plan. Staff are encouraged to promote “working Welsh” and we heard from staff who were able to deliver a service bilingually if required.

## 2. Assessment

### What we expect to see

All people entitled to an assessment of their care and support needs receive one in their preferred language. All carers who appear to have support needs are offered a carer's needs assessment, regardless of the type of care provided, their financial means or the level of support that may be needed. People experience a timely assessment of their needs which promotes their independence and ability to exercise choice. Assessments have regard to the personal outcomes and views, wishes and feelings of the person subject of the assessment and that of relevant others including those with parental responsibility. This is in so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with promoting their wellbeing and safety and that of others. Assessments provide a clear understanding of what will happen next and results in a plan relevant to identified needs. Recommended actions, designed to achieve the outcomes that matter to people, are identified and include all those that can be met through community based or preventative services as well as specialist provision.

### Summary of findings

- 2.1 The local authority has adapted its assessment forms following the implementation of SSWBA to ensure a more integrated approach. The quality of assessments was generally good and undertaken in a timely manner. We saw evidence of children being seen as part of their assessment and their views being sought and heard. Within the best examples, assessments were co-produced with children and their families providing clear details of their wishes and feelings. Analysis focused on potential strengths and risk, which were clearly reflected within plans in a way that helped families to understand.
- 2.2 The local authority continues to embed the Signs of Safety model throughout children's service to ensure its approach for assessment and care planning becomes more inclusive and transparent with families' and young people. All senior managers including the Director of Social Services and Head of Service have undertaken training in Sign of Safety showing their commitment to the model. Within files audited we found examples of children expressing their wishes and feelings through the "three houses" model when undertaking direct work with their social worker.
- 2.3 Strengthening of preventative services has developed through the Edge of Care initiative which offers additional intensive support to families to avoid family breakdowns. Welsh Government grant funding has been used to employ two additional workers within the Edge of Care Team which is situated in the Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) to provide intensive support to families experiencing housing difficulties, substance misuse problems and with budgeting and parenting skills to avoid family breakdown or support young people in their return to the care of their families' from foster placement.

2.4 The quality of assessments was generally good with evidence of children being seen as part of their assessment and their voice being heard. In the best examples detailed assessments provided a sound basis for analysis of the issues affecting children and their families. Assessments were co-produced with the families including their views, identifying potential strengths and risks which supported the identification of both eligibility and early help. One family spoken with showed a clear understanding of the roles of each agency and described a good working relationship with their social worker and support worker. This enabled the parents to identify how they could do things themselves and develop skills that enabled them to maintain improved outcomes

2.5 The Children with Disability team are placed within the Inclusion Service under the Education directorate. We only reviewed a small number of assessments but those seen were of good quality. Early Help services are accessible for families who do not meet the criteria for accessing strategy services through Team Around the Family and respite services.

### **3. Care and support and pathway planning**

#### **What we expect to see**

People experience timely and effective multi-agency care, support, help and protection where appropriate. People using services are supported by care and support plans which promote their independence, choice and wellbeing, help keep them safe and reflect the outcomes that are important to them. People are helped to develop their abilities and overcome barriers to social inclusion.

#### **Summary of findings**

- 3.1 Care and support planning is underpinned by the Signs of Safety framework. From case files we audited, a lack of consistency in implementing the model by all social workers was apparent. This is recognised by the authority with training planned with staff to ensure the model is fully embedded into practice. However, many of the care and support plans and pathway plans were detailed, of good quality and many reflected direct work undertaken with children, young people and families. Within files audited we found plans that supported the best possible arrangements for young people and as far as reasonably practicable were consistent with promoting their well-being.
- 3.2 We saw evidence of care and support plans being developed with partner agencies to produce the best outcomes for children and young people. An example being the involvement of the school and youth service in contributing to and delivering aspects of a plan jointly with a young person at point of crisis.
- 3.3 The Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) has over the last 18 months developed a person centred approach to supporting families at the initial child protection conference stage through adopting Pre Conference Brief Interventions (PCBI). This has resulted in families being involved in co-producing their own safety plans. The local authority plan to develop this form of intervention across the service.
- 3.4 Transition planning for young people between children's and adult services has been strengthened to promote continuity, reduce loss of impetus in planning and engagement with young people or delays in the provision of service. The appointment of a new Service Manager in adult services who will lead on this area along with the reviewed transition protocol allows for the process to be more accessible for young people.

#### **Care Leavers**

- 3.5 Further work is needed in respect of ensuring good outcomes for Care Leavers. With a steady decrease in the number of children being looked after since 2011, attention is needed to focus on the projected growth in the number of young people leaving care in the next two years. The appointment of a new service manager and Corporate Parenting team

manager provides an opportunity to look at support being provided for care leavers and develop this in line with the recommendations in the Children's Commissioner's "Hidden Ambitions" report.

- 3.6 In order to provide support to care leavers up to the age of 25 years the local authority has increased the number of Personal Advisors (PAs). Some care leavers spoke of the commitment and support received from their PAs, in ensuring they receive the same opportunities as their peers to access suitable housing, education, work opportunities and preparation for independence. We were told about further development of employment opportunities and an apprenticeship scheme for care leavers within the local authority.
- 3.7 We saw joint work with partners such as housing, education and youth services in supporting care leavers. The local authority has secured a training flat to prepare young people with the skills needed to live independently and access to supported accommodation is available, with plans in place to extend this provision.
- 3.8 At a corporate level the foundations for developing services for care leavers were beginning to be embedded. This will contribute significantly to positive outcomes for care leavers, with a focus on prevention to support good outcomes for care leavers. Housing representatives spoke of developing a preventative approach, wanting to avoid young people being in crisis, and recognised the importance of building good working relationships with social services to achieve this aim. Information sharing between directorates within Pembrokeshire County Council has improved with evidence from files showing contributions from housing within pathway plans and the Tenancy Management Team involvement in child protection conferences.
- 3.9 The local authority is committed to providing the best educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Through a Virtual School model for looked after children the authority is able to track their progress and identify support needs. The virtual school employs three learning coaches to support the learning of looked after children with bespoke educational packages depending on the child's needs and wishes. This support ranges from one to one support in the class room to revision sessions in a foster carers home. For those at the end of their school education, options for further training and work experience are available to improve outcomes for young people and minimise the number of looked after children not in education, employment or training.
- 3.10 We saw considerable involvement with young people by the Youth Service, with high levels of support provided by youth participation workers and substance misuse agencies working with care leavers to ensure positive outcomes are achieved. We saw good evidence of young people contributing to outcome focused plans. Young people spoke of their workers supporting them in accessing a range of appropriate

advisory services, for example sexual health advice and housing support services.

- 3.11 The local authority has embraced the “When I am Ready” scheme aimed at supporting young people in foster placement beyond the age of 18. We heard of instances where this had been administered flexibly and in the young people’s best interest.

### **Long Term Planning**

- 3.12 Within the local authority there is a commitment to promoting permanency for its children who are looked after. Clear processes were in place for decision making around initiating the Public Law Outline (PLO) and court process. Positive working relationships between legal services and children services were evident, with both parties showing genuine respect for each other’s professional roles and constructive challenge to facilitate effective decision making. Informal escalation processes were in place to identify practice issues or non-compliance to court schedules.
- 3.13 Work had been undertaken in developing the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The local authority has ensured that the IRO role is recognised and understood by managers, staff and partners. We saw clear quality assurance functions in place to avoid drift in cases that would have considerable impact on the lives of young people. IRO’s are positively viewed as critical friends working with social workers to ensure positive outcomes for young people who are looked after.
- 3.14 The IRO service was led with clear direction to facilitate improvements. We saw within files audited, clear challenge within reviews, implementation of pre review discussions 10 days prior to review with social workers and implementation of the escalation protocol when needed.

### **Placement choice, stability and wellbeing**

- 3.15 Further development and focus is required to ensure fostering standards are adhered to with improved placement stability and quality support for foster carers. It was disappointing to find that recommendations raised in the fostering inspection undertaken in 2016 had not been achieved.
- 3.16 The local authority fully recognises its deficits in this area of service provision, and how the lack of placement choice, stability and its inability to implement a matching process impacts on children and young people’s well-being. We understand that this is an area of priority for the local authority with the new Service Manager leading on the development of the fostering service.
- 3.17 Some looked after children and care leavers described examples of achieving good outcomes where there had been placement stability. Some

young people were aware of arrangements under “When I am Ready” and inspectors heard of a young person’s plan to remain with their current foster carers and how they had contributed to reviews and plans to reflect this choice.

- 3.18 We heard from young people some of whom had experienced placement breakdowns. One young person had experienced multiple placement breakdowns within a relatively short period of time. Following a placement breakdown meetings should be convened to understand the reasons. When this does not take place it does not allow the local authority to identify or put into place any lessons learnt, that can develop practice to support young people in living in a safe, stable placement that supports their needs. This is an area that needs improvement.
- 3.19 The local authority has identified issues with regards to the assessment process for placements with parents and connected person placements. These issues centre on the timescales permitted for assessments and approval of assessments. Work is being undertaken on new ways of working between the CIN team and Family Placement Team (FPT). This work will look at more ways of collaboration and the pilot of the viability assessment tool which has been endorsed by the Family Rights Group. With the aim that assessments can be produced and approved within timescales.

## **Participation**

- 3.20 The local authority is a signatory to the Mid and West Wales Regional Advocacy contract with Tros Gynnal Plant who provide advocacy and an independent visitor service to looked after children and young people within Pembrokeshire. We spoke with children and young people who confirmed they were aware of the service and had found it helpful and productive. Within case files we saw evidence of advocates supporting children and young people to contribute to the promotion of well-being outcomes, safeguarding and prevention goals. Within Pembrokeshire’s reviewing documentation a question about the “active offer” allows the IRO to monitor the take up of the service. This information is provided to team managers who can audit social workers’ adherence to the expectation that all children and young people are proactively offered an advocacy service.
- 3.21 Pembrokeshire Junior ‘Safeguardians’ provide a voice for young people on local and regional safeguarding matters. The group has been involved in a number of projects, including the running of safeguarding conferences for young people. The conferences support the young people attending to takeback learning and share in their schools by planning a safeguarding activity. The local authority plans to include the Junior Safeguardians in the development of the safeguarding web site.

## 4. Safeguarding

### What we expect to see

Effective local safeguarding strategies combine both preventative and protective elements. Where people are experiencing or are at risk of abuse neglect or harm, they receive urgent, well-coordinated multi-agency responses. Actions arising from risk management or safety plans are successful in reducing actual or potential risk. People are not left in unsafe or dangerous environments. Policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and protection are well understood and embedded and contribute to a timely and proportionate response to presenting concerns. The local authority and its partners sponsor a learning culture where change to and improvement of professional performance and agency behaviours can be explored in an open and constructive manner.

### Summary of findings

- 4.1 There was evidence at a strategic level of a commitment towards greater integration and collaboration between children and adult services in relation to safeguarding. The Local Operational Group has robust mechanisms for the management of child and adult practice reviews, and has developed a combined child and adult safeguarding training module.
- 4.2 We found that children and young people were protected through effective application of safeguarding and child protection thresholds. Child protection enquiries were timely and thorough, informed by decisions made in strategy meetings held in accordance with guidance and good practice.
- 4.3 Partnership working within the local authority and with its external agencies regarding safeguarding and preventative services is well embedded. We heard from staff and partners who were clear about the framework for intervention for safeguarding and child protection and this has resulted in a shared understanding of safeguarding practice.
- 4.4 There was evidence of positive practice in responding to young people who had been reported missing and those at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Within files audited we saw evidence that the authority's Missing Person's policy was being adhered to. We saw some examples of plans where the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment tool (SERAF) had been used with a young person to enable them and agencies working with the young person to understand and manage high risk behaviours.
- 4.5 We saw effective multi-agency core groups held in a timely manner and use of PLO panel meetings to assist in care planning and determining level of risk. We saw evidence that appropriate thresholds are in place for the initiation of Public Law Outline (PLO) arrangements.



- 4.6 Oversight and scrutiny of safety plans and the actions related to them is undertaken every three months through the Multi Agency Child Sexual Exploitation (MACSE) meetings. Minutes from these meetings show that cases highlighted by the police as high risk are in line with those identified by social services which confirms that information is being shared, plans reviewed and any actions related to plans are undertaken within the agreed timescales.
- 4.7 The Out of Hours service has been fully reviewed and now operates as an Emergency Duty team, managed by a senior manager with safeguarding experience and social workers within the team who have backgrounds in adult, children and mental health practice. The local authority acknowledge that further work is needed to ensure that the remit and practice of this service is understood by all staff and partners.

## 5. Leadership, Management and Governance

### What we expect to see

Leadership, management and governance arrangements comply with statutory guidance and together establish an effective strategy for the delivery of good quality services and outcomes for people. Meeting people's needs for quality services are a clear focus for councilors, managers and staff. Services are well-led, direction is clear and the leadership of change is strong. Roles and responsibilities throughout the organisation are clear. The authority works with partners to deliver help, care and support for people and fulfils its corporate parenting responsibilities. Involvement of local people is effective. Leaders, managers and elected members have sufficient knowledge and understanding of practice and performance to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

### Summary of findings

- 5.1 There has been a considerable change of personnel at a senior level within Pembrokeshire County Council during the last four years. Within social services the appointment of a new Director and recent appointment of Head of Children's service has promoted a change in leadership culture within the directorate. All staff and partners spoke of a clear change in leadership and governance emanating from the Chief Executive, and new senior management team. We saw evidence of an open, approachable and visible senior management team who welcomed challenge and were able to identify opportunities to develop practice. Although the culture has improved, focus and further work is required to progress areas the Local Authority has identified as priority areas for development.
- 5.2 The local authority has identified its priorities for children's services and is starting on a journey to deliver outcome focused services and practices. The Programme of Administration 2018 - 2022 sets out the vision with a focus on preventative services, safeguarding, recruitment of foster carers and strong corporate parent role. Having been developed in line with Wellbeing of Future Generation Act the document has been fully endorsed by elected members.
- 5.3 We found the lead member understood their responsibilities and had a comprehensive knowledge of the pressures and challenges of the service. Regular meetings with the Head of Service gave opportunities to monitor and have oversight of the department's position in relation to safeguarding and children who are looked after.
- 5.4 Corporate Parenting arrangements were in place with members, officers and partners understanding their corporate parenting responsibilities and committed to improving the quality of life for looked after children, care leavers and children in need of protection. An example being the exemption from paying council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25 years. There continues to be a strong focus on embedding safeguarding

and corporate parenting responsibilities across all directorates within the council.

- 5.5 We saw evidence of the local authority's quality assurance framework with a planned quality assurance cycle of activity for the year, which included bi monthly compliance audits by team managers with a target of 150 audits being completed over the year, 19 Quality of Practice audits for the year and Permanency plans being reviewed monthly. In order to develop this programme, the post of Quality Assurance Coordinator has been developed to maintain consistency of quality and embed quality assurance into practice.
- 5.6 Through the Integrated Commissioning Model work has been undertaken with partners using the regional population needs assessment to inform future planning. This included work by a sub group of the West Wales Care Partnership on the proposed commissioning of residential services within the region to support children and young people with complex needs.
- 5.7 Children's Services benefitted from a committed, experienced workforce, with a number of staff having worked for the local authority for many years. However, recent vacancies and maternity leave has put pressure on some teams. Recruitment and retention of staff was acknowledged as an issue by the local authority; Geographical location and lower pay scales than neighbouring authorities were identified as some of the difficulties in trying to recruit and retain staff. This is an area that the local authority has identified as needing to address with a plan for staff retention being developed informed from the results of the July 2018 staff survey and exit interviews. We did see positive examples of good support and development opportunities for staff, especially newly qualified workers.
- 5.8 Staff supervision and appraisals had been inconsistent. A new comprehensive supervision policy has been developed with staff reporting they had been involved in its development. It is important the policy is effectively implemented.
- 5.9 The local authority continues to develop its training programme for staff informed by information gained from yearly training needs analysis completed by staff. To deliver more consistent and cost effective training, Pembrokeshire County Council is working with partners across the West Wales region to deliver joint training for social care staff from across the sector including those working for external providers, regional partners and voluntary sector.
- 5.10 A policy and procedure was in place for handling complaints with an easy read complaint procedure having been developed and available on the council's web site. We saw evidence of staff having received on-line training regarding the handling of complaints and the Director and Head of Service having an oversight of the complaints and compliments received. Complaints were dealt with promptly with quality responses in line with

Welsh Government guidance on handling complaints. The majority being dealt with by team managers at stage one and were largely about issues of communication or practice. There was evidence of the local authority learning from complaints through discussion during individual staff supervision and in team meetings.

## **Methodology**

### **Fieldwork**

We undertook 8 days of fieldwork activity.

We selected case files for tracking and review from a sample of cases. In total 50 case files were reviewed; of these 20 were followed up with tracking interviews with social workers and family members and 4 were subject to a tracking focus group which involved multi-agency partners.

We interviewed, children, parents and relatives.

We interviewed a range of local authority employees, members, senior officers, Director of Social Services and the Chief Executive.

We interviewed a range of partner organisations, representing both statutory and third sector.

We reviewed a sample of staff supervision files.

We reviewed supporting documentation sent to CIW for the purpose of the inspection.

We looked at a sample of complaints that were made about children' services.

### **Inspection Team:**

Lead Inspector: Ann Rowling. Supporting Inspectors: Mike Holding, Sharon Eastlake, Tracey Shepherd & Sandra Thomas.

### **Acknowledgements**

CIW would like to thank the following people who gave their time and contributed to this inspection; children and young people, parents and carers, staff, managers and members and partner organisations.