

**TRUSTED
STANDARD**

LEVEL 2

NCVO

Start360 Limited

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28 July, 6, 7, 12 and

18 August 2025

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The Trusted Charity Standard is
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Table of Contents

1	Assessment details	3
1.1	<i>Next step</i>	3
2	Disclaimer	3
3	About the organisation	4
3.1	<i>Organisational Profile</i>	4
3.2	<i>Recent changes</i>	6
3.3	<i>Future plans</i>	6
4	Strengths	7
5	Meeting the standard	9
6	Suggested Areas for Development	9
7	Quality Areas	10
7.1	<i>Quality Area 1: Governance</i>	10
7.2	<i>Quality Area 2: Planning</i>	12
7.3	<i>Quality Area 3: Leadership and management</i>	13
7.4	<i>Quality Area 4: User-centred service</i>	15
7.5	<i>Quality Area 5: Managing people</i>	16
7.6	<i>Quality Area 6: Learning and development</i>	17
7.7	<i>Quality Area 7: Managing money</i>	19
7.8	<i>Quality Area 8: Managing resources</i>	20
7.9	<i>Quality Area 9: External communication</i>	23
7.10	<i>Quality Area 10: Working with others</i>	24
7.11	<i>Quality Area 11: Assessing outcomes and impacts</i>	25
8	How the organisation was assessed	28

1 Assessment details

Assessment type	Trusted Charity Standard Level 2
Assessment outcome	Met
Assessors	Gill Moss-Waghorn and Kevin Smith
Assessment date(s)	28 July, 6, 7, 12 and 18 August 2025
Verifier	Becky Polito

1.1 Next step

Date agreed	To be confirmed
Type of contact	12-month Continuous Improvement Conversation

2 Disclaimer

This report is based on evidence available and seen at the time of the assessment only, and no assumptions can be made about evidence not made available at that time or about the subsequent effectiveness of the quality system.

3 About the organisation

3.1 Organisational Profile

Start360 Limited was established in 1993 and is registered with the Charity Commission Northern Ireland (No. NIC105848) and Companies House (No. NI033207). It is now a leading provider of support services in the areas of health, justice and employability for people affected by substance misuse, including young people, families and adult offenders across Northern Ireland (NI). The mission statement is 'Change Starts Here' and the vision is 'Every Person Stronger,' and there is an emphasis on holistic support for individuals, families and communities. Twenty-seven services are delivered, including:

Justice:

- AD:EPT – Substance misuse intervention service for individuals across the Prison Estate in Northern Ireland,
- Volunteering Service,
- Engage Women Project – mentoring and support service for female returning citizens on probation,
- RDV - transition service incorporating Throughcare for Veterans leaving custody,
- Mentoring and Advocacy Service – a holistic support service available to every individual within the Hydebank College and Women's Prison,
- THRIVE – support in custody, mental health, drugs and alcohol and self-harm,
- Support Hub – support for ex-offenders who have been in contact with the justice system, working along with Prison Arts Foundation and Community Sports Network.

Health:

- Connections North – Start360's Community Alcohol and Drugs Information and Networking Service in Ballymena, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, Magherafelt, Cookstown, Antrim, Larne, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Newtownabbey,
- Connections South – Start360's Community Alcohol and Drugs Information and Networking Service in Southern Health and Social Care Trust, Dungannon, Portadown, Lurgan, Armagh, Newry,
- DAISY East – Substance misuse service for young people aged 8-25 years. Delivered in partnership with ASCERT across the Belfast and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trusts, with Start360 as lead organisation
- DAISY North – Substance misuse service for young people aged 8-25 years. Delivered in partnership with ASCERT across the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, with ASCERT as the lead organisation,
- DAISY West – Substance misuse service for young people aged 8-25 years. Delivered in partnership with ASCERT across the Western Health and Social Care Trust, with ASCERT as the lead organisation

- VOICES North and West – therapeutic services for children, young people (8 – 17) and families affected by parental substance misuse in Ballymena, Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, Western Health and Social Care Trust, Limavady, Enniskillen, Strabane, Magherafelt, Cookstown, Antrim, Larne, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Newtownabbey,
- Lad2Dads – parenting rights and responsibilities - Support for young fathers in the Belfast Trust area.
- Protect Life – crisis mentoring service – support for vulnerable young people who present with issues around self-harm, suicidal ideation and emotional health and well-being.
- Targeted Life Skills – Delivers age-appropriate life skills and harm reduction programmes to vulnerable young people (11-21) using, or at-risk of using, substances in Ballymena, Southern Health and Social Care Trust, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, Magherafelt, Cookstown, Antrim, Larne, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Newtownabbey, Dungannon, Lurgan, Armagh, Newry,
- YES (Youth Engagement Service) - person-centred support and programmes for young people aged 11-25 in Ballymena and Ballymoney.

Employability:

- BHSCCT Employability Service – intensive employability support for young people leaving care in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. Delivered in partnership with Include Youth’
- Futures Project – personal development programme for young people aged 16 – 24,
- Switch onto Employment – Support for young people aged 16-24 to move into further training, education or employment,
- National Citizenship Service (NCS) – a way for 15–17-year-olds living in Northern Ireland to make extraordinary friendships, build skills for life and work and create unforgettable memories.
- YouthStart,
- 16+ Transition Team.

The Annual report confirmed that in 2023-2024, Start360 collectively supported 16,844 service users and worked collaboratively with them to achieve positive outcomes, despite the challenges they faced individually.

Start360 offices are based across Northern Ireland – in Belfast, Ballymena, Lurgan, Derry/Londonderry and in the three prisons – Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank College.

At the time of the assessment, Start360 was overseen by a Board comprising eight trustees, 86 staff and a number of volunteers.

3.2 Recent changes

Senior leaders have recognised the need to diversify their income streams for the longer term, including the need to explore a move towards an income generation model. An experienced Business Development Director has recently been appointed to work at Senior Leadership Team (SLT) level and is examining potential new income streams.

After problems were identified with the operation of the previous payroll system, which was managed externally, senior leaders decided to manage the payroll in-house from 1 April 2025. With advice from the Chair, who is an expert in this area, the BrightPay system is now used. The process took a lot of implementation, but it is now running smoothly. The organisation is Living Wage accredited.

Financial systems have been upgraded to facilitate improved reporting. This included the implementation of the QuickBooks cloud-based system and the St James Place Flagstone money management platform. The latter provides an overview of real-time investment of reserves in a spread of gilts, bonds, and other sources. Reporting to the Board identifies the total portfolio value, accrued interest across accounts, and other key financial markets.

After a strategic management review in the last two years, the SLT and Operational Leadership Team (OLT) have been restructured. This has allowed Service Managers attending the OLT to have a greater role in leading their service operationally and drive innovation. It also supports their continued professional development. One Service Manager commented: "I feel much more empowered to use my experience to develop the service area I manage." In general, the motivation and commitment of staff is all the more remarkable given the salary freeze that was imposed due to funding challenges last year.

3.3 Future plans

Senior leaders confirmed that work has started on the development of the new three-year strategy for the period from 2026. As before, consultations will be held with staff, volunteers and stakeholders, with the support of an external facilitator, to provide a steer for the organisation's future priorities.

The Board and senior leaders are considering the potential for growth and development of services based on Start360's unique approach and expertise in its sphere of operation. This may include further partnership working with organisations sharing similar values, as well as exploring the potential for working outside Northern Ireland.

With the perceived risk around current funding contracts, the leadership team has recognised the need to continue to diversify income streams to support the long-term sustainability of the organisation. A range of new funding sources is being explored, including trusts and foundations, social value and corporate partners. The recent appointment of a Business Development Director will support this. The implementation of a strategy should provide a focus to concentrate priorities for diversification of funding streams and fundraising, to support the consolidation and growth of services. It is intended to review the website to make more interactive

Regular recruitment to the Board has provided a range of expertise and experience; for instance, a Trustee appointed in 2025 possesses expertise in business development. The Chair confirmed that the Board has recognised the need to continue to update the current composition, in particular, to recruit to the areas of IT, marketing and fundraising. The aim is to strengthen strategic expertise and thus provide further strategic direction in these areas.

With the development of financial management reporting through the QuickBooks accounting software, the Treasurer confirmed that service budgets will be shared with Directors and Service Managers. Further training of managers in understanding and managing the budgets is planned, but it is hoped to eventually devolve budgets to managers, allowing them to take on additional responsibility to manage their areas and monitor spending more closely.

4 Strengths

A number of strengths were identified during assessment. These strengths are listed below and the main indicators affected by each strength are provided in square brackets [].

Strategy and 'living your values'

The Strategy is clearly inspired by and based on Start360's mission, vision, and values. Values were seen to be an important element in the culture of Start360, and these provide a connection for staff to the overall mission, regardless of their role within the organisation, including corporate support services. Everyone involved in delivering services is passionate about the organisation and its aims to improve the quality of life for service users. Leaders inspire, motivate and enthuse staff and volunteers to move the organisation forward. The result is that the whole team, from Board members to volunteers, is committed to supporting the organisation in developing its services, while upholding its values. Staff and volunteers feel valued and well supported. [1.1.7, 2.1.1, 3.1.3, 3.1.5, 1.2.2, 2.2.2, 3.2.1, 3.2.4, 5.2.3]

Diversity of Staff and Volunteers

The diverse lived experience, together with the high level of academic qualifications that Start360 attracts and promotes, including both staff and volunteers, contributes to developing a focused organisation with highly motivated and passionate staff delivering excellent support to people in recovery. “There is a lovely sense of togetherness – we’re all kindred spirits” [2.2.1, 2.2.2, 4.1.2, 11.1.2]

Volunteering

Volunteering is intrinsic to the model of recovery and service delivery across many of the Start projects. There is a route based on structured training for service users to participate in the support of individuals still early in their recovery, with staff support. The addition of a Volunteer Co-ordinator has made the process more seamless, ensuring it is properly managed and risks are mitigated. Some employed staff began their working life as volunteers with Start360. [1.2.2, 2.1.4, 3.1.8, 3.2.2, 5.1.4, 5.1.7, 5.1.8, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 6.1.3, 6.2.2]

Commitment to Learning and Development

A commitment to staff learning and development was strongly evidenced during the assessment. The progression of volunteers is based on their comprehensive training programme, covering 22 topics of relevance to the client group and skills for future employment. Staff members are supported to complete high-level professional and academic training. [6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.2.1, 6.2.2]

Commitment to Equality and Diversity

Start360 goes beyond its statutory duty to ensure equality of participation for all members of the community. As one of the service delivery staff commented, “Drug use cuts across other divisions in Northern Ireland, especially for the working class.” Start360 ensures its services can be accessed where the people who need them are, irrespective of their identity. The organisation has offices in Ballymena, which earlier this year saw civic disturbances over the migrant presence in the town, and Start360 took a stand to support the rights of the Roma people who were subject to intimidation. [3.1.1, 5.2.3]

Planning process and reporting

The organisation has clear plans to achieve its operational targets and indicators, including the Strategy, Balanced Scorecard, and individual project plans such as the Logic Models for a range of services, such as Thrive, Support Hub, and AD:EPT. Reporting on these plans to the Board and at operational meetings is systematic and transparent, so that at all levels, people understand how the organisation is achieving outcomes against targets. [2.1.2, 2.1.5, 2.1.7, 2.2.6]

Management of risk

The Board and the SLT take the management of risk in the organisation extremely seriously. There is a detailed and robust Risk Register, and this is closely reviewed by the Director of Corporate Services and the Audit, Risk and Compliance subgroup at each quarterly meeting. For instance, the Corporate Services Summary March 2025 highlighted the increased risk in the area of cyber-attack incidents and the organisation's response. This included 'achieving the Cyber Essentials Standard and Plus accreditation and implementing MFA on the CRM.' Through proactive risk review and management, this will safeguard the organisation's resources and reputation. [1.1.8, 2.1.8, 3.1.1]

5 Meeting the standard

The organisation has met all the indicators for this assessment.

6 Suggested Areas for Development

Monitoring and Evaluation

Whilst the organisation collects the monitoring and evaluation required by each contract and service level agreement, it appears that each service / project does so in its own way. It is suggested that consideration is given to formalising the way that feedback is collected across the organisation so that, for example, best practice might be adopted for each of the services / projects. [4.1.2, 4.1.8, 4.1.9, 4.2.7, 11.1.5, 11.1.7, 11.2.4, 11.2.5]

Performance Management

The system of performance review in use by Start360 is based on 6 – 8-week formal supervision sessions using an established format sanctioned by Human Resources (HR). According to line managers, this system allows for a more agile process of managing resources to adapt to changing priorities, all the while appraising staff of their ability to contribute to the team effort. An additional point made by managers is that staff can be involved in decisions affecting their role in 'real-time' rather than reviewed at an annual appraisal after the fact. Staff confirm they are supported and receive feedback on their performance, and can express interest in their professional development at any of the formal supervisions. However, HR and the SLT should periodically revisit their system of staff performance review in case an annual system is ever warranted. [5.2.1]

Professional Development policy

The organisation's Training and Development Policy makes clear the importance of training for Start360 and provides for generous resource support for staff. Start360

could produce an annual report for the Board in accordance with the Training Policy evaluation to ensure the aims of the policy are being met and value for money is being provided. As discussed, it is usual for individual investment in significant training to require a commitment to continue in employment for a reasonable period, and this needs to be properly documented. [6.1.6, 6.2.1, 6.2.4]

Implementation of the Communications and Engagement Strategy

The Communications and Engagement Strategy, as it is implemented, is an opportunity to align messaging and choice of media with the priorities for fundraising, under the recently arrived Business Development Director. As Start360 aims to be the 'trusted experts' for recovery in NI, the development of formal protocols for dealing with the media is important. [9.1.2, 9.1.3, 9.2.3, 9.2.5]

Environmental Sustainability Policy

The Environmental Sustainability Policy is due for renewal. When reviewing this policy, it may be beneficial to re-examine the policy in the context of the changing regulatory environment. There may also be scope for considering working practices and making amendments if necessary. [8.1.7, 8.2.7]

7 Quality Areas

In this section the standards for each quality area are provided in bold with the assessment findings described below.

7.1 Quality Area 1: Governance

Level 1 - The Board meets all its legal and regulatory responsibilities and accounts appropriately to stakeholders. Board members have the skills and knowledge to govern the organisation effectively and act in the best interests of the organisation.

The Articles of Association were last reviewed in January 2024. The Board's work is carried out in accordance with this governing document and relevant legal and regulatory requirements, including publishing the Annual Report and Accounts and completing the necessary returns to Companies House and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Annual General Meeting minutes (09.12.24 and 14.11.23) identify that Board members are appointed and resign in accordance with the Articles of Association. They can serve up to three terms of three years and up to four years in a Board role. By ensuring that both the composition and duration of service of Board members are in line with these guidelines, Start360 promotes stability and consistent governance practices.

The Board undertakes an annual skills audit, which identifies any potential gaps in expertise, informing recruitment. This ensures that the Board is composed of members with diverse and complementary skills. Current trustees possess a wealth of experience, with expertise in law, chartered accountancy and finance, HR, business development and senior management experience in prisons, charities and education.

Start360 has an effective Board structure, with three specialist subgroups (Audit, Risk and Compliance, Policies and Remuneration), providing in-depth scrutiny of strategic issues, which then inform Board decision making. For example, policies are reviewed according to an agreed schedule, and it was seen that policies were up to date. External input, where appropriate, is used to ensure policies are in line with current legislation. For instance, the HR company Happy Raspberry was used to check the Health and Safety Policy development in March 2025. Task and Finish Groups are formed on an ad hoc basis if a subject area needs to be discussed in detail.

All Board members interviewed were clearly committed to the values and work undertaken and had complete confidence in the CEO, his experience and expertise, as well as the SLT. Staff are invited to Board meetings to update on their projects, which is seen as useful in developing an understanding of the work. The Chair commented, "Through the SLT presentations, they bring the impact of their work to life." Board members visit departments annually to speak to staff about their work and the issues they face.

Level 2 - The Board takes the lead for developing strategy and holds managers to account for the results achieved. Board members work to protect the financial sustainability organisation to achieve better outcomes for users and longer term impact.

The Board and senior leaders developed Start360's Strategy 2022-2025, with consultation with staff and volunteers. The Strategy has ten strategic aims, including quality service delivery, service development and innovation, and influencing public policy, which are in line with the mission, vision and values. The annual Balanced Scorecard, based on the strategic aims, expands on these using priorities, which identify measures and outcomes. The CEO reports progress against the Balanced Scorecard quarterly, capturing quantitative and qualitative information, using a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating and identifying trends, service pressures and needs.

Senior managers are held to account through the in-depth reporting of progress to the Board. In addition, the performance appraisal system is used to support managers and hold them to account. The Chair confirmed that he was involved in appointing the CEO three years ago and provides quarterly one-to-one performance review in line with Start policy.

The Audit, Risk and Compliance (ARC) subgroup, chaired by the Treasurer, supports the Board in overseeing its financial and risk management role. The Treasurer works closely with the Director of Corporate Services to manage the process for setting annual budgets and scrutinising the quarterly management accounts against these, providing advice to the Board on any action required.

Board members work to protect the longer-term sustainability of the organisation and have approved the diversification of funds from the Santander account to the use of the Flagstone system, which provides a cash platform to spread resources through several bank accounts to protect funds, as the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) only protect accounts up to £85,000.

7.2 Quality Area 2: Planning

Level 1 - The organisation has a clear overall purpose and plans focus on the difference the organisation intends to make. There is a plan for the next year.

In line with its governing document, Start360's vision and mission are clearly articulated in the Strategy, highlighting the commitment to making a positive impact on individuals and communities. The ten aims set out in the Strategy are reflected in the Balanced Scorecard (operational plan), which is more focused on detailed priorities and highlights the achievement measures, outcomes, target date and the operational lead identified to achieve the aim. Annual service budgets are allocated to support this work. Individual service areas will also have plans. For instance, the Volunteer Development Performance Summary Report highlighted the logic model used to demonstrate the relationship between the resources, activities, outputs and outcomes and the summary of progress against this plan.

Start360 uses different methods to document the difference the organisation makes. These include needs assessment of service users and the use of surveys, interviews and focus groups to capture feedback on the difference the service has made. As discussed above, logic models are used in services such as Thrive and AD:EPT to identify the relationship between resources, activities and ensuing outputs and outcomes to evaluate the service. Theory of Change is also employed to document the logical connections between resources, activities and desired outcomes and longer-term change.

A comprehensive Risk Register, including operational, compliance, strategic and financial risks, is reviewed by the SLT monthly, then discussed at the ARC subgroup quarterly. Any matters of concern are brought to the full Board. Individual risk assessments are carried out with service users and for activities.

Level 2 - The organisation develops its longer-term strategy in consultation with key stakeholders. Plans are regularly reviewed and updated.

Start360's current strategy provides a clear overall purpose for all its activities, and includes its vision, mission and ten strategic aims. This provides a framework across the organisation in line with the charitable objectives. The Strategy was the product of an organisation-wide approach and included the re-evaluation of values and priorities. An independent consultant was engaged to facilitate the process, engaging with Trustees, staff and volunteers. A range of stakeholders, including funders, were also involved. The process also involved an evaluation of the external landscape, legislation, political changes across Northern Ireland and best practice. From the Strategy, the Balanced Scorecard is devised each year to refine operational priorities against targets, using a RAG rating system to highlight progress and any issues with achieving the targets. This is reviewed monthly by the SLT, and the CEO attends the OLT meetings and discusses the progress with the Service Managers. The Board reviews the document quarterly.

In-year, progress against plans is reviewed at all levels, including, for example, individual team meetings where cases and progress are discussed. The organisation's performance appraisal system also enables regular monitoring of individual staff members' goals and targets. Monitoring reports to funders, such as the Thrive Internal Evaluation Report, September 2024, review the progress of individual projects both internally and for funders.

The organisation is in the early stages of refreshing its strategy, which comes into operation in 2026. Board and SLT meetings are planned, and an away day with staff and volunteers will allow them to be involved in the planning process. The aim is to use an external facilitator again to provide an objective perspective on the process and critique plans.

7.3 Quality Area 3: Leadership and management

Level 1 - The organisation has good leadership, promoting effective internal communication and a commitment to the organisation's purpose. Managers implement legal and statutory requirements and oversee the organisation's progress and development.

There is a clear, transparent and supportive culture at Start360. The organisation's values are an integral part of the strategy and serve as an essential guiding principle in all areas. At all levels, staff and volunteers thought there was good leadership and direction. They clearly understood the purpose of their work and showed a commitment to the values and ethos of the organisation. Staff consistently believed that their work was making a difference to the lives of service users. Staff felt that the

management was very supportive. Comments included "I couldn't feel more supported. They are always very understanding when I need to take TOIL to sort out childcare arrangements." "Support is a real strength at Start." "Managers treat staff really well as individuals." There is an 'open door' policy, which is appreciated by staff, as they feel there are no barriers to the supportive environment. Managers thought that staff were very committed, one commenting "They overachieve their targets and would go that extra mile for the organisation.."

Internal communications are supported through an effective structure of meetings, including the SLT, OLT and regular team meetings and 'huddles'. OLT members were particularly appreciative that the CEO attended their meetings not only to update them on the Balanced Scorecard progress, but also listened to their viewpoint. "We can make suggestions on services. I feel there is an openness across the organisation and our voice is valuable." There is a newsletter, which gives information on activities across departments.

The Board now visits departments annually and is therefore more visible, as evidenced by the half-day visit to meet prison staff and talk about their work and challenges. Both the Board and senior managers have a range of expertise, and this is used to ensure that Start360 stays current with any changes in legislation and provides updates in policies and procedures that reflect any changes.

Level 2 - Leaders motivate and support people to achieve plans. Managers are involved in strengthening the organisation and responding effectively to the external environment. A range of policies and guidance are in place, strengthening good practice.

Staff and volunteers were clearly motivated by their work and the support they received from their managers. Given the often-intense nature of the work, the open-door policy, as well as providing support with free access to a counselling App and the monthly 'self-care' hour where all staff can take a planned break in work time to decompress, is appreciated by staff. One commented on the support received: "People believed in me when I didn't see it in myself." The Employee Survey is carried out annually, and managers confirmed that this is a good measure of staff morale as well as an understanding of the organisation's purpose. In the 2023-24 survey, 90% of respondents thought they had a clear understanding of Start360's purpose, and 100% understood how their work contributed to the objectives. Regarding motivation, 93.87% thought their manager motivated them to be more effective in their job, and 100% thought their manager is considerate of life outside work. Staff turnover is very low, and many people have been in post for a number of years. Part of the reason for this was the support, the opportunity to develop, and the appreciation of the need for a work-life balance.

Managers are also adept at responding effectively to the external environment and understand the long-term process of recovery from substance misuse. For instance, after the riots in Ballymena, staff were concerned about the Roma population they worked with. They felt supported by managers for their stance and the acceptance of staff's life experiences.

The organisation has an extensive range of policies covering operations, such as The Children and Young People Safeguarding Policy (Aug 2023), organisational, such as Health and Safety (July 2023) and financial, including the Finance Policy (March 2024). The Director of Corporate Services manages the policy database, which has a clear schedule of review, which is discussed at the Policy subgroup prior to approval at the Board. Staff confirmed that they were aware of policies and guidance as a framework for their work.

7.4 Quality Area 4: User-centred service

Level 1 - The organisation understands the needs of its users, avoids unfair discrimination, and makes its services accessible. Information about users is gathered and recorded, and the organisation responds appropriately to user feedback.

The organisation promotes its services and activities, and ensures that they are accessible and inclusive. Referrals into the various projects run by Start360 are through statutory agencies, and sometimes also by self-referral through local networks. The age criteria for projects such as Daisy or Voices are clearly defined, and the terms of engagement in the prison system are explained so that all those eligible can receive support. An increasing minority of service users do not speak English, and staff can access translation services if required. Interventions are usually for a specified period or series of one-to-one meetings.

Start360 has a Data Protection Policy which applies to all the organisation's data and information which is not in the public domain, ensuring that information about users is gathered, recorded and secure. Staff confirmed that they were aware of and understood the policies and that data protection training had been received. Information about service users is recorded on the MPS system with protected access on a need-to-know basis.

User feedback is essential for Start360 to continue to improve the services and allows service users to influence the content of the programme through focus groups and surveys. The frequent team meetings provide an ideal opportunity for teams to come together to talk through issues, identify learning and discuss what improvements they

can make. On an individual basis, the staff are alert to changing patterns of drug use in their community and create personalised plans to tackle either hidden harm (in families) or promote harm reduction if that is appropriate for users.

Level 2 -The organisation has a strategic approach to involving users in service planning and review. Research and evaluation are used to improve outcomes. The organisation works to ensure it reaches marginalised and excluded groups. User feedback and outcomes information are systematically used to assess and improve service delivery.

A strong values base in the organisation motivates staff to put users and other beneficiaries first, through building trusting relationships. Because of these values, there is particular regard to being inclusive and responding to the socio-economic background of service users.

The Smart Recovery therapeutic model has evolved through practice and empirical research, through networking with other providers and attending stakeholder forums (for example, Belfast Mental Health Planning meetings). Managers understand the increasing impact of synthetic substances and prescription medicines on addiction. Start has introduced an integrated hospital discharge team working on a multi-disciplinary basis.

Staff and volunteers praised the support they received from their line managers, referring to an 'open door' policy operating at all levels of the organisation, with safety a paramount concern for users and staff. Staff working in the prisons find that the procedures in place work to enable them to undertake their role safely. The Annual Report 2023-24 includes data regarding the 16,844 supported during the period covered. The report includes statistics showing that in all but 4% of cases, targets are met or exceeded.

7.5 Quality Area 5: Managing people

Level 1 - Legal requirements relating to staff and volunteers are met. Information is shared and staff and volunteers understand their role and are supported.

All employees are issued with a contract of employment, which is signed, and staff confirmed that they had contracts and were aware of their legal rights. The relevant HR policies are updated in line with current legislation and scrutinised by Board sub-committees. The policies are available for all managers and employees to view, and staff confirmed that they were aware of the policies and were kept informed of updates. Recruitment was transparent and based on objective processes, which some

recent joiners compared favourably to what they had experienced elsewhere. Interview panel members receive training from an external provider.

All staff and volunteers confirmed they had received an induction relevant to their role, the latter working with the Volunteer Co-ordinator, appointed to strengthen practice in the area of volunteer management. All volunteers (and staff) undergo a vetting process through AccessNI, which is signed off by the SLT. Volunteers were also seen to have signed a Code of Conduct, which provides a brief summary of their responsibilities and their main point of contact. Staff and volunteers receive documented role or job descriptions, as appropriate. They attend team meetings, and on Mondays, managers will often begin the week with a staff 'huddle' to share information.

Level 2 - Policies and procedures are in place to manage staff and volunteers. People work together, performance is well managed and effective communication is promoted. The contribution of staff and volunteers to the organisation is valued.

The organisation's HR policies are regularly reviewed and accessible to all, and an audit by SLT of line management practice quality assures processes. New starters to the organisation are required to read through the policies as part of their induction; this was confirmed during interviews with new employees. Regular formal supervision meetings are documented using a pro forma, but there are also informal check-ins with staff to ensure that performance is well managed. Line managers maintain a frequency of meetings with all staff, and as relevant, volunteers on their team. Staff said they felt valued by management, referring to the support and approachability of line managers. Many staff have worked for many years at Start, and others return to the organisation after stints working elsewhere.

Volunteers are important to Start360, and this is recognised at all levels of governance and management. The majority of volunteers start as service users and complete programmes with Start to embed their recovery. The Chair of Trustees described volunteers as "instrumental" to the work of Start, even if they cannot be used in sensitive settings such as prisons.

7.6 Quality Area 6: Learning and development

Level 1 - People are informed about and take up opportunities for learning. Information and knowledge is shared and used to make improvements.

Staff members and volunteers confirmed that they are informed of learning opportunities, with some training, such as for data protection and safeguarding, considered mandatory. Volunteers confirmed that they can also access training, and it is an intrinsic part of their preparation for the role. The development aim with

volunteers is to impart the skills they need not only to work for Start360 but to be employable.

Staff are encouraged to share their learning through peer support, which is achieved through the organisational training on a regular basis. Higher level professional development is also supported by Start; for example, one staff member is completing a Masters in counselling. A manager put together a proposal to the SLT to complete their post-graduate studies, and in another example, a colleague is supported to complete a PhD. According to interviewees, this was described as 'typical' of the approach taken by Start360 – "How can we model belief in progress and building lives to clients if we do not do this ourselves?" When holding a degree-level qualification became mandatory for staff involved in youth work, Start360 invested in its staff to ensure they were qualified.

Level 2 - There is a well-established culture of learning and continuous improvement, and learning is shared with other organisations. Learning and development are planned and resourced, based on the needs of the people in the organisation.

There is a strong culture of continuous learning and improvement at Start360, as demonstrated through its training calendar, which covers relevant topics such as autism and domestic abuse. The organisation has a Training Policy with a generous budget aimed at ensuring training provision is based on staff needs. Among the Supporting Aims in the 2022-25 Strategy is a commitment to ensure 'staff are effectively supported, managed, trained and given opportunity to develop'. Interviewees confirmed that there were sufficient opportunities for discussion of training and development in their formal supervision meetings, and that part-time staff are eligible for training opportunities. Programmes such as Smart Recovery have benefitted from reflective learning, and the model has improved through evolution. Team meetings were described as opportunities for peer support, with an excellent opportunity for sharing good practice. SLT is arranging away days with Board members to increase staff involvement in strategy as the organisation grows. The changes to National Insurance contributions meant that Corporate Support staff had to be appraised of the changes affecting their tasks.

Knowledge management is a function of the MPS database. Internal Evaluation reports, such as that for Thrive in September 2024, reviewed the Logic Model for its impact and learning going forward. One of the recommendations was to expand staff training and to enhance stakeholder partnerships.

7.7 Quality Area 7: Managing money

Level 1 - The organisation meets all legal and regulatory requirements in relation to managing money and spends its money on agreed purposes. There is sufficient income to carry out planned activities. Financial procedures and controls are in place.

Processes for financial management and reporting were in place, and financial transactions are recorded on the QuickBooks system, in line with SORP requirements. QuickBooks is used for financial reporting and monitoring. The software allows for the processing of various financial transactions, including sales, purchase invoices, and bank transactions. These transactions are uploaded directly from the online banking system to QuickBooks, ensuring accurate and up-to-date financial records.

The Treasurer confirmed that she works closely with the Director of Corporate Services to produce monthly reports, generated from QuickBooks. These reports are presented to the ARC Subgroup, chaired by the Treasurer, and closely scrutinised before they go to the full Board meeting. Financial reports to the Board demonstrate that the organisation is generating the required levels of income. For instance, the CEO Report January 2025 indicates that Start360 has a forecasted annual budget income of approximately £3,340,245 for the 2024/2025 period. This demonstrates that the organisation is generating the required levels of income to support its operations.

Since April 2025, the payroll has been managed in-house. Start360 ensures compliance with tax authority requirements through regular reviews and audits. Copies of tax and national insurance returns are maintained as required, and payroll reviews are carried out to ensure compliance with HMRC requirements.

The comprehensive Finance Policy and Procedures, reviewed in March 2024, sets out the procedures to be followed and ensures that necessary controls are in place, for example, authorisation levels. The processes for the financial reporting, audit and reserves are outlined. The Cash Reserves Policy is also included in the appendix. Staff and volunteers confirmed that systems exist and were used for claiming out-of-pocket expenses.

Start360's Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31.03.24 are produced following regulations and are filed with Companies House and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Level 2 - There is a planned approach to income generation and investment, linked to the organisation's aims and values. Finances are robustly controlled, and income sources are diversified, increasing financial security. The

organisation accurately forecasts its finances and effectively plans for the longer term.

The Treasurer and managers confirmed that money can only be spent in line with the approved budget. The ARC subgroup scrutinises the management accounts in detail to ensure that the organisation operates within that budget, and the full Board is appraised of progress. The Board has a range of financial expertise, providing scrutiny. As mentioned above, there is a robust Finance Policy to manage financial processes and an Investment Policy. The Board approved the use of the Flagstone platform to manage the cash investment accounts. This allows risks to be spread into a range of bank accounts, providing FSCS protection (accounts up to £85,000).

With wide-ranging coverage of services in the justice, health and employability areas, there is a range of funders engaged, including:

- Northern Ireland Prison Service
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- The Department of Justice
- UK Government
- The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
- The Community Fund
- HSC Public Health Agency
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Hagan Homes

The Board has a planned approach to diversifying income generation. A Business Development Director has been recently appointed with the remit to look at other avenues of funding, including corporate funding, partnerships and social enterprise. Financial reserves can be deployed to pump prime sustainability and provide an analysis of impact to attract funders. One example given was the funding from Hagan Homes to support the growth of volunteer projects at Start360.

7.8 Quality Area 8: Managing resources

Level 1 - The organisation has enough resources to deliver its planned services efficiently, and to meet safety and accessibility requirements. Data protection and other legal requirements are met and some steps are taken to help protect the environment.

The Board and senior managers engage in strategic planning to outline the goals and objectives for the year. This includes identifying the necessary resources for operation, including financial, staffing and material, to achieve the priorities set in the Balanced Scorecard. The annual budget is then agreed to ensure that there are enough

resources to deliver planned services for the financial year. If a shortfall is identified, adjustments will be made to ensure essential services are not disrupted. Staff thought they had enough resources to do their job.

Videos of the head office in Belfast and a sample of offices in Lurgan, Ballymena and Derry/Londonderry demonstrated that they are well-maintained and well-decorated. There is a keypad access and signage outside. The entrance and reception facilities are welcoming, with bright noticeboards and pictures around some of the walls. There is comfortable seating and settees in the rooms where staff meet clients. There are well-maintained kitchens, with appropriate signage, for example, the Health and Safety, fire and first aid posters prominently displayed. There are locked cupboards in offices for hard copies of confidential records. Where facilities are on the first floor, such as the Lurgan office, there is a lift. There are also ramps and accessible toilets. Managers confirmed the organisation makes reasonable adjustments to meet the specific needs of people. Relevant equipment and liability insurance policies are in date until 10.10.25 with Royal and Sun Alliance Limited.

Relevant policies, such as Confidentiality, Health and Safety, GDPR, Privacy and Data Protection, are up to date. There is a comprehensive Retention Schedule that is tracked, maintained, and established within the GDPR and Data Protection Policy. This schedule identifies when specific pieces of information can be destroyed after the correct period. Each service can have a different retention period, determined by the funder of that service. Most personal information at Start360 is stored electronically on secure cloud storage systems with advanced security measures like encryption and Multi-Factor Authentication to prevent unauthorised access. The MPS system is used to store service user data. Access to personal information is controlled and managed by the organisation. There are shredders in the offices, and an external company is contracted to dispose of confidential waste. Nitec, an IT company, is contracted to manage IT provision and cyber security. There is a Retention Schedule. GDPR, and cyber security training is part of induction, and staff confirmed that refresher training is provided.

The organisation has an Environmental and Sustainability Policy which outlines Start360's commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development. The policy includes continual improvement in environmental performance, compliance with laws and regulations, pollution prevention, waste minimisation, responsible use of energy and water, and immediate response to environmental incidents.

Level 2 – Resource needs are planned to meet service requirements and to support the organisation's policy and strategy. The organisation takes action to limit and negative environmental impact.

The Board and senior managers are very stringent in planning resource needs to meet service requirements. There is an emphasis on ensuring strategic aims are mapped against the Balanced Scorecard priorities for the financial year and that contract and grant funding target requirements across the services are addressed. The annual budget is drafted at the same time to resource the organisation's activities for the financial year.

The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that if additional funds are received during the year, they will be added to the budget. For example, after an application to Hagan Homes for funding to strengthen volunteering was successful in July, match funding will be sought for the project, but in the meantime, the project will be part-funded through reserves. Resource needs for equipment are also planned and factored into the budget. For instance, replacement equipment, including twenty-two mobile phones and seventeen laptops, has been purchased after a supplier comparison and tendering exercise.

Resource needs are considered throughout the year. For instance, a Health and Safety group made up of the Health and Safety representatives from across the organisation meets to review workplace arrangements on a quarterly basis and discuss any improvements needed. The representatives carry out weekly Health and Safety checks. A summary Health and Safety report is also presented at the Strategic Leadership Management team meetings every month to track and operationalise any recommendations around several Health and Safety areas, including workplace arrangements.

The organisation has an environmental policy which outlines the management commitment to ensure the protection of health and natural resources and to comply with all applicable legislation and requirements. The policy confirms that everyone should take personal responsibility to protect the environment, minimise environmental impacts, and use resources wisely. They are actively encouraged to be involved in environmentally friendly practices and are asked to report any problems to the Director of Corporate Services. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to recycle and reuse, and turn off lights and equipment when not in use. The technological advancement of the organisation also reduces environmental waste. It has reduced resource consumption, such as the use of paper, by moving to more technologically advanced working practices and cloud-based storage solutions. Other examples given were the investment in new LED lighting for office premises and considerations around ventilation and air conditioning to improve energy efficiency. However, as some of the organisation's offices are rented, Start360 cannot control some issues, such as heating consumption, which are the responsibility of various landlords.

Since Covid, staff have the option to undertake hybrid working, and this cuts down journeys into the offices. The Expenses and Mileage Policy also reflects this commitment and reinforces that journeys, where required, always take the shortest route.

7.9 Quality Area 9: External communication

Level 1 - The organisation knows what it wants to communicate and with whom. It actively fosters two-way communication with users and external stakeholders. Information about the organisation and its activities is shared.

Start360's Strategy 2022-25 includes an aim relating to Communications – 'Ensure Start360 is effectively promoted and communicates appropriately with all its stakeholders'. In addition, the organisation has a more recent Communication and Engagement Strategy 2024-26, which outlines the main stakeholders, the key messages and analyses the rationale behind the need for a Comms Strategy at Start360. Messaging was seen to be consistent across all communication materials, with the Communications Officer relating key messages to the values of the organisation. This post also arises from the Strategy.

The organisation uses social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and X to communicate with the broader public and stakeholders, with an ultimate aim to foster two-way engagement. Posts are regularly updated, and the website is planned to be overhauled again to introduce greater interactivity. Accessibility of information and service can be provided in languages other than English through translation. The website and other materials provide full contact details and show consistent branding.

In addition to social media, Start360 produces videos accessible on YouTube, and external communications are available on the website and in published materials. Social media guidelines and relationship management are among priorities to revise for the Communications Officer. Material was seen to be presented in an accessible format, avoiding the use of jargon and acronyms. Staff confirmed that they have access to interpreter services when needed.

Level 2 – External communication is resourced and planned and is driven by the organisation's strategy. The organisation actively promotes its purpose and shares information about its activities, providing evidence of the difference it makes.

Start360's communications goals are outlined in its Communications and Engagement Strategy, together with the identification of audiences, both internal and external. For example, professionals are reached mostly through the Annual Report, and the general

public through social media. The organisation's external communication budget is covered in budget cost centres and fundraising costs, to which Communication and Engagement contributes. A database of contact details is securely maintained as part of MPS.

The Communications Officer has a clear plan of priorities for enhancing engagement, much of which centres around upgrading the website. There is helpline information for the public (in particular parents) who need urgent help for family members, and this is an aspect which Start360 intends to expand. Start360 is confident in dealing with media enquiries via its SLT, but the formal protocols are subject to development.

Start360 produces a professional-looking Annual Report, available on its website, showing how it is making a difference by highlighting its delivery in each area, providing informative testimonials and listing the partners. Developing this aspect is also part of the plan for Communications and Business Development. Evaluation of Communications is undertaken by monitoring media responses, consulting with service users over how Start360 is promoted, formal registration of interest and the metrics of online 'hits'.

7.10 Quality Area 10: Working with others

Level 1 - The organisation networks with other relevant organisations and works with them to support its own mission and to benefit users.

Start360 networks with a wide range of organisations in the voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as with an increasing number of corporate partners. Decisions over which services to collaborate with are made between the SLT and discussed with the Board. Start360 is keenly aware of its leading role as a specialist provider of recovery services in NI, and seeks partnerships to enhance both its services and reputation with stakeholders.

An example of the collaboration with prison services is the AD:EPT programme that relies on close co-operation with the prison estate in NI, and the Police Service Northern Ireland is another public body with which the organisation collaborates. The work in prisons follows clear boundaries and understanding between prison staff and Start360 professionals. Signposting is part of the methodology of all Start360 staff and based on service user consent. Every recovery service in NI has been mapped by Start360 and uses QR codes to access the signposting information.

Managers attend multi-agency meetings, which is a feature of the strategic approach. One of Start360's strategic aims explicitly depends on joint working: 'Actively pursue collaborative and partnership approaches which put our service users' needs front and centre', and is a recommendation arising from external evaluation projects. Staff

mentioned the strong relationships that exist with other organisations, for example demonstrated by the Support Hub, which has retained long-term funding. Monthly meetings are held between 'champions' from each partnership organisation to improve co-working and share reporting systems for the funder (Big Lottery). There is a shared administration officer to convene collaboration across the Support Hub and the terms of engagement are fully documented. Quarterly meetings review the working of the partnership between managers.

Level 2 - The organisation regularly looks for opportunities to work with others and joint working agreements support its mission and add value for users. Partnerships are developed for strategic benefit, enhancing the sustainability of the organisation and the effectiveness of services for users.

Working with others is a strategic aim for Start360, and managers look for other organisations with which they share an affinity. The Support Hub is a unique service in Belfast, and its longevity proves the success of Start360 in building positive relationships. New tenders for partnership initiatives are acted upon by managers, regardless of whether Start360 will take the lead role. With corporate partners, for example, BT, successful initiatives have led to a 10-week programme to deliver greater employability for service users, a topical issue.

Formal partnerships, such as for the Support Hub, are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and there are processes for withdrawing from the ongoing collaboration if necessary. Staff commented that their relationships with other organisations were excellent, but there is a process to escalate concerns should they arise. Funding for the partnership has been renewed because of its successful delivery. Quarterly reviews identify improvements and revisit delivery plans. For the Support Hub staff records data on Upshot, a different database than the MPS system used elsewhere by the organisation. Targets are shared between the partners involved in delivery.

Part of the planned increased focus on income generation will be a renewed effort to develop strategic and long-term corporate partnerships with aims including enhanced sustainability, especially for services that are not included in the local authority core contracts. Start360 does not subcontract any aspect of its work or use freelancers.

7.11 Quality Area 11: Assessing outcomes and impacts

Level 1 - People understand how and why information is collected and used. The organisation routinely monitors outputs and outcomes. Data collection methods used are effective to assess the difference it makes. Information gathered is used for decision making and planning and to report to stakeholders.

Interviewees were consistent in recognising the value of monitoring and evaluating their work and thought they had been trained to collect and collate relevant information. Comments included: "I feel confident to use the MPF system, it's user-friendly and helps me record appropriate information on service users." They could see the benefit in collecting monitoring and evaluation data to demonstrate "how we can support and develop vulnerable service users." Start360 provides detailed training sessions for its staff to ensure they are well-versed in data collection techniques in relation to the CRM system. This training helps in maintaining accuracy and consistency across all data collection activities. The organisation regularly updates training materials to reflect the latest best practices and technological advancements for the CRM. The Service Manager for Corporate Services confirmed that monthly workshops are run to update anyone who needs assistance.

As well as detailed collection and collation of monitoring and evaluation data, including pre- and post-assessments to assess service user progress on the MPS system, Start360 builds in service user feedback mechanisms into all services, including surveys, feedback forms, and focus groups, to allow service users to evaluate the service provided and suggest developments. One example of the impact a focus group's findings had on services was the need for discharge packs when leaving prison. As a result, Start360 worked with The People's Kitchen (a homeless people's support organisation) to provide 'You Matter Bags' with items such as deodorant and wipes. Negative outcomes, including loss of accommodation for service users or return to prison, are also documented.

The evidence collection process varies from project to project and is managed by the Service Managers in the different areas. The information is discussed at various meetings at all levels of the organisation, aggregated into key performance indicators (KPIs) and reported to the Board, as well as stakeholders, in the quarterly monitoring reports and meetings and annual reports, including the organisation's Annual Report. Monitoring findings are used to identify what is working, and the evidence from these reports is used to inform the organisation's bids for funding.

Level 2 – Monitoring and evaluation are carried out systematically and are integral to the organisation's work. The organisation gathers and analyses a range of information about its activities, its outcomes and longer-term impact. Findings are used for operational and strategic purposes and are shared.

Start360 develops its monitoring and evaluation primarily in relation to funder requirements. Information is seen as integral to inform further strategy, improve service delivery, and develop funding applications. KPIs are agreed with funders and commissioners, and progress on strategic priorities is monitored through the Balanced Scorecard.

Monitoring is integrated into project planning and design. Various models, including theory of change, Play Therapy, Trauma Talks, outcome maps, and logic models, are incorporated. These tools support the identification of planned outcomes and facilitate monitoring. For instance, the RDV – Start360 Delivery/Logic Model highlights KPIs, such as the percentage of veterans improving confidence and gaining employment at 85%. Thus, throughout the intervention, data is collected and evaluated.

Service Managers use statistics from MPS to monitor performance through supervision, for example, if there are interventions that are falling behind. They can analyse case notes to map the geographic profile of need, to inform plans.

The organisation is adept at involving service users in co-production meetings where service delivery is evaluated. Regular service user focus groups are held and include a cross-section of people across services, where they can share honest feedback and insights, which influence outcomes. This intelligence can shape bids, such as the development of transition services for GP and housing services for those leaving prison. In addition, Start360 uses a range of service user-driven assessments (Addiction Severity Index (ASI), Action Plans, Family Assessments) methods, which ensure that the data collected is relevant and reflective of the users' experiences and needs.

The MPS system records baseline assessments, interventions and distance travelled for service users. Outcomes are captured, and information is enhanced by the collection of data from feedback forms, focus groups, and case studies. Although the MPS system is relatively new, it is being developed to assist in the reporting of the strategic priorities.

Results are collated and reported back to funders as required, and published in the Start360 Annual Report. For example, the Progress Monitoring Report Step 2 Youth Treatment Services report to the HSC Public Health Agency was seen. The organisation has been supported by an external consultant to develop impact reporting. For instance, the Internal Evaluation Report September 2024 examines the quantitative and qualitative data on the impacts of the service delivery regarding clients' mental health, reductions in substance use, and community reintegration. It also focuses on the effectiveness of family support interventions in improving emotional well-being. By including updated data in this report, the aim is to present actionable insights to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the THRIVE service.

Qualitative and quantitative information is used to influence other organisations and policymakers. For instance, staff present evaluation findings at local and national conferences and workshops. Start360 regularly publishes comprehensive reports and

detailed case studies. Start360 works closely with policymakers and advocacy groups to shape public policy. An example of academic research collaboration is the Research Proposal with Coventry University to examine the escalating drug crisis in prisons and the need for transitions in provision. The study aims to explore the experiences and perceptions of service users at Start360 and examine the effectiveness of support mechanisms for successful reintegration and rehabilitation within Northern Ireland.

8 How the organisation was assessed

This Trusted Standard quality assessment consisted of the following stages:

- Stage 1- the Desktop Review, which looked at specific documents for Level 1 (including the 22 core indicators) and Level 2
- Stage 2 – the assessment comprising 3.5 days of remote interviews, photos, and videos of premises, plus additional documentary analysis.

For Stage 2, the assessment was organised as follows.

- The Assessors focused on sampling services and selected interviewees across the organisation.
- Interviews included Trustees, managers, staff and volunteers across the organisation's services.
- An evidence library of documents, photographs, and videos of premises was made available to the Assessors.
- Additional evidence was also discussed at the interviews, shared and reviewed by assessors as requested.