

# Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

**Aberdeenshire Council**

23 January 2024

## 1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Aberdeenshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during December 2023. During the visit, we talked to learners and community representatives, CLD leaders, managers, staff, and volunteers, and other key stakeholders. HM Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of local authority CLD partnerships' approach to self-evaluation and planning for improvement, and considered progress made against identified priorities in their CLD plans.

## 2. Findings from the progress visit

### How effective is the leadership of the local authority and their CLD partners in improving outcomes?

#### Areas of positive progress

CLD is valued by senior leaders and elected members and by other council services. Senior leaders are managing change within the CLD service well and have a clear vision for improvement. Reports on the work of the CLD service, including examples of partnership working, feature regularly at a range of council committees. The Aberdeenshire Learning Community Partnership (ALCP) meet quarterly to consider CLD provision across Aberdeenshire. The terms of reference for the ALCP have been recently reviewed and this should help direct their work more effectively. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) views and comments are reported to the Policy Committee of the council. They feel listened to and respected.

A range of partners work together well to identify needs and plan provision at a local and area level. Partners on the Local Learning Community Partnerships (LLCPs) are positive about the recent changes to CLD planning structures. The change from 16 to six LLCPs in spring 2023 is reducing the number of meetings and helping to avoid duplication. Partners appreciate the opportunities for networking they provide. In response to recent winter storms, CLD partners collaborated in the development of a Community Resilience Strategy. As a result, several communities are taking more responsibility for local action and are less reliant on council officers. Senior leaders in the CLD service support staff effectively to improve their capacity to reflect and self-evaluate. Although at an early stage, the CLD service are working with partners to improve self-evaluation. Participation in a range of high-quality training and professional development opportunities is enabling CLD staff to gain relevant skills and knowledge. This supports them to undertake new ways of working and to be more innovative and creative in their approaches. Aberdeenshire Council has achieved a CLD Standards Council standard mark for their professional learning.

#### Areas for development

The role of ALCP and CLD Partnership activity requires strengthening. Developing clearer links between the local outcome improvement plan (LOIP) for Aberdeenshire and the work of CLD providers should support staff and partners to understand how they contribute to Aberdeenshire priorities. A review of the membership of ALCP may provide an opportunity to do this. Learners and community activists are not yet active participants in CLD decision making at strategic and area level or in the recently formed LLCPs. Continued support to LLCPs to take on responsibility for the planning of CLD in each of the six areas would help to avoid duplication and respond to need. The CLD Plan for Aberdeenshire is not sufficiently outcome-focused and does not support

CLD partners to understand and demonstrate where outcomes for learners and communities are improving. Joint self-evaluation between CLD partners needs to be strengthened. Whilst plans are in place to address some aspects around shared self-evaluation, the ALCP needs to ensure this work is further developed and progressed. This will enable them to better understand the overall CLD capacity for improvement.

## How well does the performance of the local authority and their CLD partners demonstrate positive impact?

### Areas of positive progress

The CLD service and most partners are responsive to changing needs identified through the use of data and other information. There are clear examples of emerging needs being identified and strategies put in place to address them. The CLD service is improving its use of management information systems to gather and report on performance information. A few partners are improving their use of data alongside feedback from learners to identify local learning and community needs. For example, the police alert CLD partners to changes in anti-social behaviour by young people. In most areas, anti-social behaviour is reducing with 282 fewer calls across Aberdeenshire in 2022 compared to 2021. LLCs are using comprehensive needs assessments effectively to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for individuals and communities. The CLD service use national key performance indicators developed by Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS) to monitor their performance. Trend information is beginning to enable them to track change, including recovery following the pandemic. This data shows positive trends in work with young people. Whilst adult learning is not as positive, trends are starting to improve.

Members of the Adult Learners' Forum for Aberdeenshire (ALFA) are passionate about the benefits of adult learning informed by their own positive experience and success. They are clear about the skills they are developing. Forum members are gaining in confidence and improving self-esteem. For a few learners, their achievements have been life changing. Partners work together well to provide opportunities for adults who want to learn English. North East Scotland College, Workers Educational Association, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council co-ordinate their provision to reach learners well. This joint approach supports learners to access classes best suited to their needs and progress across provision as their skills develop. Aberchirder Men's Shed is having a very positive impact on its local community. It is addressing social isolation and providing opportunities for learning. The Steps programme delivered in HMP Grampian is helping prisoners set personal goals and work towards achieving them. This is leading to positive changes in behaviour and attitudes.

Young people enjoy participating in a wide range of youth work opportunities. They are gaining skills in communication and team working as a result of participation in local youth forums, diversionary projects and achievement opportunities. CLD staff work well with Fraserburgh Academy to engage a group of S4 young people identified as being at risk of leaving school with low levels of achievement. The project is helping to sustain their attendance and improve engagement in learning. Young people are also gaining additional accreditation, such as Dynamic Youth Awards. Secondary school partners in the north of Aberdeenshire work well with CLD staff to identify young people requiring support. As a result, teachers and CLD staff are co-delivering a range of person-centred programmes. These are helping young people to develop a range of skills, gain accreditation and progress to their next steps in learning.

## Areas for development

The tracking and monitoring of performance information and reporting on progress by partners is not sufficiently well developed. This is resulting in an under-reporting of the full impact of CLD. Young people do not yet benefit from sufficient tracking of their achievements by partners. There is an opportunity for the ALCP to develop a joint approach to tracking and sharing young peoples' achievements.

### 3. Main points for action

The following main point for action is required.

- The ALCP need to take responsibility for improving the governance of CLD. This will help to create a greater sense of collective ownership and ensure that CLD is driven by a strengthened partnership approach.

### 4. Practice worth sharing more widely

During the inspection, we identified an aspect of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further.

- Aberchirder Men's Shed is helping local people to develop new skills whilst improving their own health and wellbeing. Close partnership working with the CLD worker resulted in the Men's Shed being used for wider learning opportunities. A few adults can now access digital learning in their own area without the need to travel. Volunteers support learning programmes and a few learners are achieving Scottish Qualification Awards. Social isolation is reducing and several new activities such as knitting, and model-making are attracting new learners.

### 5. What happens next?

We recognise that the local authority and their CLD partners are making sufficient progress in some areas of their CLD plan, however some improvement is required. We will ask for a report on progress on the main point for action within one year of publication of this report. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the local authority and their CLD partners is required.

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23 January 2024