

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

West Dunbartonshire Council

4 June 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited West Dunbartonshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during April 2024. 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

There are effective arrangements in place to oversee the leadership of CLD services within the council. CLD is primarily delivered by two services, Working4U and the Communities Team. The recent restructure of the Communities Team has more fully embedded CLD within Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) arrangements within the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Regular reporting of CLD services is helping to strengthen the understanding of CLD across the council and CPP. The Working4U priorities focus on supporting learners and communities with work, learning and money. These link well with council priorities and ensures that resources are targeted effectively to meet local need. The Adult Learning Partnership (ALP) is a strong collaboration of a wide range of service providers and an adult learners' voice group. They have a strong understanding of shared priorities and are jointly planning to raise the profile of and campaign for adult learning nationally and across West Dunbartonshire. There are arrangements in place to ensure that the voices of young people and adult learners can influence service design and delivery. The progress of the CLD service is reported through the LOIP themed Delivery Improvement Groups (DIGs) and through annual reports by individual service areas.

Planning for improvement is evidence based and embedded across a range of strategic groups including the Local Employability Partnership. This is helping to inform service improvement and ensure there is a consistent focus on targeting resources and services to those most in need. Strong working relationships between partners are helping to support improvement in a few areas. The ALP demonstrates a robust collaboration between local service providers ensuring responses are appropriate within reducing resources. Practitioners work flexibly to respond and adapt to learner needs. Council CLD staff benefit from a good range of workforce development opportunities. Staff at all levels feel well-supported by managers to access training and other opportunities, which is helping to increase knowledge and develop skills.

Areas for development

There are currently no strategic partnership arrangements in place to oversee the overall governance of CLD. As a result, the current CLD plan is not well understood by learners or partners, and they are not clear about how progress is measured. Strategic leaders should build on the successful work of the ALP and progress with plans to work with partners to strengthen governance arrangements for CLD. The CLD plan is not yet fully measurable. This limits the ability of partners to report on their collective progress towards meeting the legislative duties set out in The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013. There is a need for CLD partners to work together to set clear outcomes and measures of

success which are embedded within their new CLD plan. The voice of learners and community members is not yet fully influencing CLD planning. Strengthening the role of learners and community members in decision-making processes will help to ensure that the priorities in the new CLD plan better reflect their needs.

Partners do not yet have a shared understanding of the ambitions of the CLD plan. They do not consistently report their contribution to progress against indicators set out in the plan. This is limiting partners ability to report the collective impact of CLD. Senior leaders and CLD partners now need to progress at pace their plans to review the current CLD plan. This will help with preparation of a new CLD plan in line with the legislative requirement to publish the plan on 1 September 2024.

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

Areas of positive progress

The CLD service are using a wide range of data to plan and track their outcomes. Annual progress reports and the delivery of CLD at a local level link clearly with the ambitions in WDC Strategic Plan 2022-27. CLD leaders use multiple performance indicators well to review priorities across a range of partnerships including the themed DIGs to support improvement. Analysis of performance information shows strong performance against most indicators. For example, the number of young people participating in the Thrive employability programme increased from 58 in 2022-23 to 82 in 2023-24. Despite a reduction in adult learning staff, the Adult Learning and Literacies Team remain impactful. They are using more targeted approaches to support vulnerable learners to achieve accredited qualifications. Socio-economic profiles are providing useful data across West Dunbartonshire Council to assist with funding applications and identifying need. As a result, the council have been successful in securing additional funds including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This is helping to shape local plans with partners that respond to local needs. The Family Opportunity Hubs use a trusted partner approach to distribute funds to families experiencing hardship using a cash first model. Partners have revised the criteria to ensure that families receive emergency support when they need it most. During 2022-23, partners distributed £39,600 to help 198 families, a further £57,200 was distributed to help 286 families in 2023-24.

CLD teams are making effective use of targeted approaches to ensure that socio-economic circumstances are not a barrier to participation. This is helping to reduce negative impacts on individuals and communities. Families involved in the Family Opportunities Hub value highly the support they receive from partners. This is helping to maximise household resources and income and supporting learning at home. The tailored design of adult learning, English for speakers of other languages and youth learning provision is helping to address learners' individual needs. Most learners describe how they benefit from support to overcome challenges such as mental health and wellbeing. There are a few positive examples of local community organisations proactively reducing barriers and inequalities. For example, The Corra Foundation supports Castlehill residents to provide low or no cost access to a range of community activities and groups. The West Dunbartonshire Community Transport group provides a valuable service to vulnerable residents to ensure important hospital appointments are attended on time. This is helping to reduce isolation and prevent further exclusion to vital services.

Adult learners benefit from strong partnership arrangements. This enables adult learners to participate in accredited community-based adult learning opportunities and gain valuable skills for learning, life and work. Learners are better socially connected and have improved mental

health. Most learners are improving aspirations for their future and are making progress with their learning. A few learners describe the support as life changing. A positive feature of the adult literacy and numeracy programme is its emphasis on personalised learning pathways. Each learner has personal goals which helps them to take ownership of their learning. The strong partnership between career advisers, Working4U and schools is leading to positive outcomes for an increasing number of young people. As a result, young people benefit from well-developed pathways, which is helping them gain new knowledge and skills to meet their learning needs and progress beyond school. For example, the Thrive employability programme helps develop confidence and essential skills and the Apprenticeship Pathway supports young people to develop skills and progress to employment. Across West Dunbartonshire, school leaver positive destinations are improving with the highest ever recorded in the current year.

Areas for development

CLD partners do not yet make use of shared performance data to drive improvement. This is resulting in under-reporting of the full impact of CLD. Further work is required to develop a framework to inform planning, monitoring and reporting of collective progress against the CLD plan. CLD service targets are not yet sufficiently ambitious, there is an opportunity to work with a wider range of partners to review targets and ensure they reflect the work of all CLD partners.

The Thrive programme is oversubscribed and not able to meet demand from referrals. The council and their partners should consider ways to address this.

3. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required.

- As a matter of priority, the local authority and its partners should strengthen the leadership and governance of CLD in line with legislative requirements. This includes continuing with plans to work with partners to improve the governance of the CLD plan.
- Partnership priorities at a strategic level require development. CLD partners should agree and set clear outcomes and measures of success. Leaders with responsibility for CLD should ensure arrangements are in place to improve reporting across partners and support joint planning for improvement.

4. Practice worth sharing more widely

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

- The Adult Learning Partnership (ALP) is a strong collaboration of a wide range of service providers and an adult learners' voice group. They are jointly planning to maximise their impact on adult learners across West Dunbartonshire. The ALP undertakes its own self-evaluation at the end of each academic session, most recently July 2023, and updates its action plan at that stage. Learners have a strong voice that is valued highly and contributes to strategic planning of adult learning. As a result, the ALP have created clear and flexible learning pathways to ensure progression.

5. What happens next?

HM Inspectors found that the local authority and their CLD partners are not making sufficient progress with their CLD plan and have identified important areas requiring improvement. As a result, we will visit the local authority again approximately one year following the publication of this report to evaluate progress made by the local authority and their CLD partners in addressing these.

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HM Inspector
4 June 2024