

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Angus Council

2 July 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Angus Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during May 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

Overall, the leadership of CLD is strong and provides clear direction. Strategic leaders of CLD are proactive in working together to ensure there is coherence to the CLD offer. Angus Community Planning Partnership (ACPP) regularly review CLD provision and progress against the CLD Plan. CLD annual reports go to both the ACPP and Angus Council full committee. This supports senior leaders to undertake their role overseeing the governance and monitoring of CLD. CLD contributions to wider strategic priorities are planned, monitored, and reported through ACPP subgroups and through a range of strategic plans and partnerships. This is growing the understanding of how CLD is meeting key strategic priorities, such as addressing the effects of poverty. The expertise and work of the council's Vibrant Communities CLD team is highly valued by partners. Increasingly, CLD methodologies are used by wider council services and partners. The Vibrant Communities team, collaborating with Scottish Community Development Centre, developed community development training modules. All council staff and an increasing number of partners undertake the modules. The Vibrant Communities team also supports those undertaking community engagement activities to use the national standards for community engagement. This training, alongside the engagement portal that has been developed, is helping to improve, track and reduce the risk of duplication of community engagements across Angus.

A key aspect of the planning and monitoring of CLD in Angus is the very well-developed culture of working with partners. Partnership working is based on mutual trust and respect. Partners provide both support and challenge to each other across a wide range of strategic and operational groups. This is helping to ensure that duplication is minimised, and resources reach targeted groups. For example, partners work together well to tackle child poverty. The actions developed from a joint approach include the successful establishment of Holiday Food and Fun sessions to help tackle holiday hunger. CLD leaders, staff and partners have a clear focus on improving outcomes for learners and communities. They are proactive in seeking out research and good practice elsewhere to learn from. Partners are very adept at engaging with young people, adult learners and communities to gather their views. They also support volunteers and learners well to build their capacities. Staff use a mixture of feedback from participants, case studies and data well to understand the impact that their work has on learners and communities. Staff are empowered to respond to local circumstances and needs, whilst still meeting strategic objectives. CLD partners provide appropriate workforce development opportunities for almost all CLD staff and volunteers, which is improving their practice.

Areas for development

Learners and community representatives are not yet involved in CLD strategic decision making. There is a need to increase the influence that learners and community representatives have in the strategic planning and monitoring of CLD.

CLD partnership approaches to joint self-evaluation are not consistent across all partnerships. There is more to do to ensure that all partners are involved in joint self-evaluation to ensure their contribution to CLD planning is recorded, recognised, and informs continuous improvement.

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

Areas of positive progress

CLD partners make effective use of data and local intelligence to identify needs. Variations between areas in Angus are understood and work is adapted well to meet the needs and aims of each community. Partners regularly seek out and share feedback from learners to inform their planning. Information from Active Schools annual focus groups and Planet Youth surveys are supporting partners to reach and support more children and young people. Increasing numbers of CLD partners are sharing their performance information, which is helping to build a more complete picture of CLD across Angus. This is supporting partners to make best use of their shared resources to target need. Data shows positive trends in key areas. For example, the number of children, young people and adults engaged in family learning, through CLD, has more than doubled since 2021.

Partners are skilled at reaching those most affected by disadvantage. Across almost all programmes and activities, barriers to participation are identified and removed. Young people at Brechin High School benefit from school and youth work staff working together as one team to better meet their needs. This joint work is supporting young people to gain confidence, develop skills and increase their school attendance. Learners of all ages are being supported well to gain skills relevant to their lives and to support others' learning. Young people taking part in '5 Ways to Wellbeing' national research learning sessions, developed packs which engaged over 200 other young people. Young people identified barriers, such as transport and financial costs, and then successfully developed a safer travel and media campaign to help tackle these issues. CLD partners are pro-active in delivering programmes that support early intervention. For example, young people receive training and support to develop materials and run workshops for children in local primary schools around the risks of vaping. As a result, children have increased their knowledge on the impact of vaping and report that they are less likely to vape in the future. The young people facilitating this work have increased leadership, teamwork, and communication skills and are gaining silver Youth Achievement awards.

Adults are gaining confidence and relevant skills through learning programmes. For example, learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes are successfully gaining the language and life skills they need. The support they get from ESOL and resettlement staff and volunteers is helping them to address the challenges of moving to a new country and settling into their communities. Adults attending the drop-in sessions at the Learning Shop in Arbroath and at the Crickety in Brechin value highly the supportive, non-judgemental approach taken by staff. They are learning at a pace that suits them as individuals and fits to other commitments they have. This is enabling them to progress in their learning and to address challenges in their lives. Digital literacy programmes support people furthest from the job market well. Learners are gaining the skills that help them to apply for work. For many learners,

participation is improving aspects of their health and wellbeing. Adult learners engaging in activities, such as cooking and health walks as part of the Arbroath Healthy Living Initiative, feel more included and involved. The increased self-confidence and self-esteem most adult learners are gaining is life changing.

Active and ambitious community organisations are increasing learning opportunities and, in some cases, delivering substantial infrastructure projects. This includes reaching people at risk of exclusion and social isolation, such as those affected by dementia. Community groups are well supported by CLD partners to reach their aims. The Old Court House development in Arbroath is a large-scale project run by volunteers. The volunteers leading this work are successfully attracting funding to make the building structurally sound and useable for creative, business and community activities. The partnership with volunteer run community resilience groups is improving the capacity of communities across Angus, to deal with emergencies, such as floods very effectively.

Areas for development

Partners cannot yet evidence the full impact of CLD. There is a need for partners to jointly identify what performance information is required and how they can improve how it is collected and used. This should help reduce the risk of CLD partners duplicating effort around data collection.

Young people's achievements are not fully recognised and captured across providers. There is a need for senior leaders to ensure CLD partners and secondary schools share information effectively to ensure every young person is supported to achieve and build their skills. This may also help to inform any roll out of the very effective youth work that is delivered by CLD in a few secondary schools.

3. Practice worth sharing more widely

Community resilience groups are improving responses to emergencies, such as flooding. Public services, including Angus Council, and communities are working together very well, to equip local volunteers to respond to needs. Community resilience plans are informed by local knowledge and experience and co-produced by services and local representatives. As a result, communities have increasing ownership of the actions within the plans. Volunteer run resilience centres provide a vital service during extreme weather conditions that impact on communities. Community resilience group run activities such as Floodmobile roadshows to provide advice and information should a flood occur, and training on first aid and using defibrillators. Such capacity building supported the deployment of public and local resources to the areas and families that needed it the most during recent floods. The community resilience groups also increase knowledge around need in local communities. This is helping to direct the multi-disciplinary interventions required, such as access to food, replacement household goods and insurance advice, after storm events. National organisations are learning from and sharing this successful approach across other areas of Scotland.

4. What happens next?

The local authority and their CLD partners are making sufficient progress with their CLD plan and have the capacity to continue to improve. As a result, HM Inspectors will take no further action in relation to this progress visit. During the inspection, we identified an aspect of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further.

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