

# Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

**The Highland Council**

16 July 2024

## 1. Context

HM Inspectors visited The Highland Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during June 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

Leadership of CLD is improving. The CLD Strategic Group and the CLD Operational Group work together well to oversee most CLD activity. There are clear links between the work of these two groups, the CLD plan and the sub-group of the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP). CLD sits within the CPP structure and is delivered in line with the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan. Senior leaders on the CPP have a good level of understanding about the role that CLD plays in empowering communities. Annual updates on CLD activity are reported to both the CPP and Education Committee. The inclusion of new actions in years two and three of the CLD planning cycle ensures that new needs or required areas for development are being progressed. The recent restructure within Highland Council CPP team is supporting the alignment of strategic and local priorities. As a result, capacity building is now delivered more effectively across Highland, albeit with time limited resources. Young people, including the Youth Convener, members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and youth forum members contribute well to the strategic understanding of young people's needs. Young people are members of the steering group for a new Children and Young People Participation Strategy. Feedback from consultation with over 800 young people is informing the development of the strategy.

Partners have a strong focus on improving outcomes for learners. Planning for improvement is ambitious and is starting to drive improvement. Most partners share information and resources to deliver positive outcomes for learners. A wide range of third sector and community organisations across Highland work closely with their communities to identify needs and address the challenges local people face. They use a variety of methods to gather feedback to help them evaluate their progress. Highlife Highland and Highland Council are embedding systematic approaches to reporting and monitoring across youth and adult services. This is leading to improvements in the delivery of learning programmes. Senior CLD staff across Highlife Highland and Highland Council support staff and volunteers effectively to take on leadership roles at all levels. Resilience and building capacity is increasing as a result. Staff and volunteers benefit from a wide range of training to support their practice. A few staff are supported to gain CLD professional qualifications. Through a locally developed module on community work, Youth Highland are supporting participants to reflect on and better understand CLD practice.

#### Areas for development

The planning structures in Highland are complex and at times, is restricting how well CLD is reported on and understood. There is also a risk that not all partners, especially community

representatives and organisations, are able to fully contribute to CLD planning and reporting. Young people and adult learners are not yet equal partners in CLD planning at a strategic level. There is a need to ensure learners' expertise is as influential as it could be, around strategic CLD planning.

Relationships between a few youth work providers are challenging and this can impact on effective partnership working. There is no established network for Youth Work providers to exchange ideas and jointly plan the use of shared resources. The plan to establish a group similar to the Adult Learning Development Group should enable all partners to work together better.

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

### Areas of positive progress

Most CLD partners demonstrate a good understanding of the needs of local communities through their effective use of data and local intelligence. Performance data is gathered via the CLD plan and reported to both the Education Committee and the CPP. Progress is reported against key CLD priorities, which in turn reflect the priorities of Highland Council. CLD's contribution to mitigate the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis and mental health is highlighted well? through a range of case studies that demonstrate impact. Youth work and adult learning staff in Highlife Highland use both qualitative and quantitative data well to inform planning and reporting. Based on feedback from learners, this is leading to programmes being improved and developed. Highlife Highland gather routinely adult learner and young people attendance figures. As a result, adult learner engagement increased significantly over the past three years. Participation in youth work programmes also improved. There has been a 72% increase in achievement awards gained by young people over the past three years. My Future My Success (MFMS) programmes gather performance data systematically, using it well to improve services for young people. CLD partners are beginning to work together to identify trends to reduce risk factors for young people. Although an early stage, the Planet Youth Icelandic Prevention Model is identifying clear trends to inform future action.

CLD partners work effectively to address barriers to participation, particularly for those facing disadvantage. MFMS programmes support young people to achieve and attain successfully. The programme is leading to 10% of all school leavers across Highland being referred to MFMS, with almost all young people achieving their goals. Young people in the Highland Youth Parliament are proactive in promoting the rights of children and young people, and supporting their peers to access services. They created successfully a working rights poster to provide information on services, training and the rights of young people. Refugees and other new Scots are supported well by partners. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners are gaining language skills that support them to adapt to life in Scotland. Many adult learners, including older adults, are less isolated as a result of participating in community-based adult learning activities. Learners are now able to use digital technologies to keep in touch with family and apply for jobs. Partners work together well to identify and address barriers. For example, considering how well programmes align with bus timetables to enable targeted groups to participate. CLD partners work well together well to provide inclusive and accessible opportunities at Brora Learning Centre. This is encouraging creativity, producing resources for local libraries and supporting the viability of a social enterprise.

Almost all young people and adults participating in CLD programmes are gaining skills that meet their needs and ambitions. Young people are gaining skills and confidence through their

involvement in youth participation groups and forums. They value highly the opportunity to take responsibility and contribute to Highland life. Through a range of leadership opportunities, young people in Dingwall Youth Forum are gaining new skills and experiences. Almost all youth forum members report raised levels of confidence through organising fundraising and community events. Youth Highland provides a range of support for youth organisations across the Highlands. Local youth groups appreciate the practical support that helps them to deliver programmes to improve the lives of young people. Young people are increasing confidence levels and building skills through the Highland Youth Leadership programme. A minority gain Chose to Lead awards. Effective partnership working between Active Schools, Police Scotland and a few secondary schools is leading to increased engagement and positive outcomes for a few young people. Pathways for most adult learners are improving. Learners are increasingly supported to understand and progress onto other opportunities including volunteering and college. Well established pathways for ESOL learners helps them move from Highlife Highland provision to college. Across Highland a wide range of local community groups and volunteer-led organisations are increasing opportunities for learning. Their work is helping to reduce social isolation and meet changing needs.

### Areas for development

Not all CLD partners are analysing and reporting on outcomes for learners and communities systematically. The CLD Strategic Group and CLD Operational Group would benefit from further sharing and joint collection of data over time. Gathering this collectively will help ensure that priorities and targets are informed fully by the data available. The CLD Strategic Partnership is not fully capturing the breadth of impact across CLD in Highland, including the work of community organisations such as development trusts. CLD partners should consider how they can work with these community organisations to address this.

Only a few local democratic and community groups receive timely support from CLD partners. Awareness of what is on offer is often based on informal networks and contacts. As the council and other CLD partners further develop their community development approaches there is a need to ensure all local groups can access support as they need it. Across partners, there is limited understanding of the value of tracking young people's achievements, both in and out of school. Education and CLD partners should consider working more collaboratively to improve tracking of young people's achievements to ensure these are fully recognised. Not all adult learners have clear guidance and support to progress across CLD providers. There is a need to continue to grow partnership approaches to ensure clear pathways for all learners.

### 3. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required.

- Relationships between a few youth work providers should be developed and improved to address current issues and support the planned Youth Work Providers Network.
- Joint self-evaluation across CLD partners should be further developed to include opportunities to involve partner agencies in the development of the new CLD Plan.

### 4. 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 expect a report

on progress on the agreed areas for improvement within one year of publication. 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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