

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

23 April 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during February 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.

The local authority were subject to a cyber-attack in 2023. As a result, many of their electronic records, including performance information is no longer available. In a few areas of provision, this is having a significant impact in demonstrating progress over time and informing priorities to support continuous improvement. Local authority CLD leaders are working with CLD partners to identify any shared self-evaluation and performance information to help address the issue.

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

The leadership and governance of CLD is improving. A CLD steering group, which has representation from a wide range of public services and community organisations, has a shared vision for improvement. This is helping to ensure that the significant contribution of local organisations to improving communities and increasing learning opportunities is considered in CLD planning. The steering group has data sets in place for the CLD plan 2021-24, which is helping to support monitoring of progress. The CLD steering group report on the progress of the CLD plan to the Education and Children's Services Committee and to the community planning partnership (CPP). These reports also link to the CPP improvement plan. The most recent report shows clear progress towards shared outcomes.

The local authority and its CLD steering group members use self-evaluation arrangements well to inform improvement areas. For example, in 2023, partners agreed to increase their focus on monitoring and tracking of progress. Partners are using previous and more recent community consultation findings to inform the development of a new CLD plan. Findings from an adult learning self-evaluation exercise resulted in clear development actions, which linked well to existing and new areas of work. CLD senior leaders are represented on a range of CPP and local partnerships, such as the local employability partnership. This is helping to avoid duplication of effort and the appropriate targeting of shared resources. For example, the co-location of organisations such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and local authority employability services is helping to improve communication and the planning and delivery of employability support. Partners and community members are actively involved in networking and in the planning and delivery of CLD. For example, the Coman Dualchas Innse Gall, the Outer Hebrides heritage forum, link very well to other networks and partnerships. This is helping members connect to wider opportunities and developments across the Western Isles and nationally.

At a local level, CLD staff have autonomy to lead on areas of CLD. They know their learners and communities well and are increasingly adapting their practice to respond to identified needs. Partners involved in development and delivery of workforce development opportunities

collaborate well to widen access to CLD training. A well-developed workforce development programme is helping to inform more standardised and improved practice in key work areas. This includes trauma informed practice and employability mentoring support. Health promotion staff deliver training on poverty awareness and sensitivity to partners. As a result, partners have deepened their understanding of poverty and disadvantage. All council CLD staff are members or affiliate members of the CLD Standards Council.

Areas for development

The existing CLD plan is not up to date. As a result, it does not fully reflect CLD partners joint efforts in delivering good CLD outcomes for learners and communities. It is important that the wide range of partners continue to be involved in the development of the new CLD plan. This will help to continue to increase awareness of the CLD plan and ensure that local provision is guided by CLD strategic priorities.

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

Areas of positive progress

All CLD strategic partners, including community development trusts, make good use of a range of data sources to inform their priorities and to demonstrate improvements. This includes quantitative and qualitative data such as community intelligence and SDS data hub information. Case studies are used very well to share individual and community impacts. Monitoring and tracking arrangements of most CLD plan priorities are in place. This shows the ownership of actions by partners, and progress towards short, medium and longer term outcomes. This, alongside other performance information, such as available local authority management information, is helping to monitor and report on progress over time. For example, local authority data demonstrates that from April 2022, almost all targets are on track to complete within the set timescales.

CLD partners target their shared resources effectively and work well together to address barriers to participation. For example, a few vulnerable young people attending the Pointers Youth Centre are improving their life chances in relation to their social, economic and personal development. The hotspot intervention programme and co-delivery of Mentors in Violence Prevention training to Nicolson Institute staff and support to S6 new mentors, is beginning to help re-engage disengaged learners. These programmes are helping to combat school bullying, and challenge gender-based violence. The innovative work of McAulay farm was recognised by National Social Enterprise Award for providing essential support to learners with additional support needs. A flexible and sensitive learner centred approach is ensuring that young learners are engaging in meaningful learning activities. As a result, they are developing a sense of belonging, and greater sense of their personal space and freedom. A few learners are progressing to positive destinations. Adult learning staff use individual learning plans well, to regularly review with learners their progress and to address any barriers they face. Highly effective and ambitious community organisations, managed by volunteer leaders, are improving community lives and infrastructure. Harris Development Limited, alongside its partners, are working to redevelop the Scalpay school site for housing, business and leisure provision. They visit every household on the island and hold engagement events that are well attended. As a result of feedback from residents, a climbing wall is now proposed within the project. In Aros an Rubha, the community are delivering projects and services that support community spirit, and inclusion in rural communities. They run a vibrant community hub, which hosts a range of

organisations. The shop, cafe and learning activities provide vital services, especially when the area is cut off from Stornoway by extreme weather.

Almost all young people engaging in youth work provision in North and South Stornoway are improving their social skills, confidence and self-esteem. Almost all young people taking part in CLD youth activity have access to a range of accredited learning and awards, such as Dynamic Youth, Hi-5 and the Duke of Edinburgh's awards to recognise their achievements. A few young people, inspired by the Saltire Award, are volunteering in the community. Young people engaged in the Fire Skills training are making new friends and are learning new skills, such as problem solving and team building. They are also more able to assess and manage risk. A few young people are supported well to develop confidence and to have their opinions heard, including attending a breakfast session with the First Minister. The Forum for Young Islanders is presenting the case for carbon neutral actions to key decision makers. Comunn Na Gàidhlig youth officers provide a range of Gaelic language based activities, through the media of sports, arts and culture. Almost all young people engaged in provision are more confident and their fluency in Gaelic is improved. Dìleab, the Gaelic legacy programme delivered to in excess of 1,000 pupils across all schools in Lewis and Harris, is helping to improve cultural identity and facilitating wider intergenerational discussions about the value of Gaelic culture and language. Adult learning partners, including those involved in employability support, work well together to ensure pathways for adult learners, are clear and appropriate. As a result, learners, including those accessing literacy support, are achieving one or more of their planned outcomes. For example, almost all English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners are increasing their confidence, sense of belonging and capability to engage with services, such as doctors and teachers. Almost all ESOL learners are gaining employment.

Areas for development

CLD partners do not yet have in place fully measurable targets across all areas of current work and do not have an agreed set of data sources to inform priorities. There is a need to improve targeting-setting of shared resources and monitoring and tracking of progress over time. This will support partners to more fully understand the impact of CLD provision across the Western Isles.

CLD partners are not yet systematically providing feedback to learners, communities and other partners on the outcomes from community engagement and consultation. Partners now need to work together to ensure analysis of findings are shared more widely. This will help to inform identified areas of need and help to avoid over-consulting and duplication of work.

3. 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.

Ann Kivlin
HM Inspector
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