

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

North Ayrshire Council

31 October 2023

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited North Ayrshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during September 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 the 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 practices and principles are embedded within the work of the North Ayrshire Council and the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). CLD is highly valued. Leadership of CLD is effective and supported by well-established reporting structures. The CLD plan reflects both council and local outcome improvement plan priorities. Staff understand their role well in delivering against CLD plan priorities. Shared aims and objectives are evident in partnership groups such as Locality Planning Partnerships (LPPs) and work is driven by council, CPP and local priorities. Senior leaders, the CLD service and partners have a clear commitment to partnership working with the communities they serve. Young people and community representatives are actively involved in a range of forums and meetings and their views are influential in shaping priorities and action plans. Third sector and community representatives are well represented across community planning structures and feel heard and valued. This supports services to understand the needs of communities. LPPs drive the delivery of CLD at area level, ensuring that services are responsive to locally identified need.

Effective evaluation and planning structures are in place. These support a continued focus on improvement at all levels. Council CLD staff review their progress against locality and North Ayrshire priorities. Staff at all levels are trusted and are empowered to make decisions about their work and undertake regular self-evaluation. This supports their capacity to reflect on their practice and work towards strong outcomes for learners and communities. The range of purposeful partnership groups, which include community members, supports the collective capacity to improve outcomes. The strong partnership between CLD and education colleagues is helping to embed the engagement and empowerment of young people in their education. Increasingly, CLD partners are coming together to discuss the impact of their work. This is helping to ensure resources are targeted appropriately on existing and emerging needs. Community organisations value the regular and useful communication they have with, and training provided by, CLD practitioners. CLD partners are effective in supporting the drawdown of significant additional funding by organisations across the local authority. North Ayrshire Council CLD has developed an effective 'grow your own' culture. This supports the service to maintain staffing levels in order to continue improving outcomes.

Areas for development

Community members are well represented on community planning structures. However, there is scope to increase the role of community members in decision making about CLD planning at a strategic level. There is a need for the council and its CLD and education partners to further consider how adult learners can contribute to and influence CLD planning. Continuing to grow and develop approaches to self-evaluation between partners would enable senior leaders to better capture and understand the impact of CLD across North Ayrshire. Senior leaders are aware of the risk of CLD practitioners being viewed as key to the delivery of most work with communities. Senior leaders within the CPP and the council now need to consider how to grow the capacity of all services to work with communities to improve sustainability.

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

Areas of positive progress

Senior leaders, managers and partners use both demographic and performance data effectively to inform the allocation of resources. For example, they identified unmet need in CLD provision for older adults when developing their 2021-24 CLD plan. Since then, they have successfully allocated and attracted funding to enhance this provision. Since the start of 2023, Discovery Award groups have been developed across the local authority. Participants are increasing their skills, contributing to their communities as volunteers, and building social networks. The CLD service has a systematic approach to the gathering of performance data. CLD service staff are supported well to undertake quarterly reviews of their individual work. These reviews help practitioners to ensure their practice is based on what learners and community members need. The high degree of trust between practitioners and organisations means partners are confident to share data. Doing so supports them in deciding which services to take forward.

CLD partners have a clear focus on inclusion and reducing barriers to participation. They work together very effectively to support individuals and families who are experiencing additional challenges, to progress and achieve. The Additional Support Needs youth group helps young people with a range of abilities and neurodiversity to socialise and develop communication and life skills. New Scots enjoy meeting, sharing food, and developing language skills together at the refugee-led Spike Wheat Scots Group. Currently, 14 community-run food larders operate across North Ayrshire. They network with each other well to support innovation and share resources. In addition to helping to address food poverty, they each provide bespoke support to individuals and families to address wider issues in their lives. In many cases this support is life changing for their members, and for some lifesaving. Ambitious community organisations and committed volunteers provide a wide range of services and programmes that support community members very effectively. They are instrumental in taking forward essential, needs-focused provision in many local areas. They support local people well on a wide range of issues including poverty, mental health, and addiction. Garnock Valley men's shed is helping to tackle social isolation and developing the skills of its members.

CLD partners are effective in supporting learners, community activists and volunteers to gain skills that match their aims and ambitions. Young people gain a wide range of skills, develop confidence, and progress towards their career aims through the CLD Modern Apprenticeship programme. Modern Apprentices (MAs) support young people from across North Ayrshire well to be heard, respected and influential, including through Joint Cabinets. At each Joint Cabinet 120 young people from schools across North Ayrshire make sure their voices are heard and their lived experience is taken into account as decisions are made. CLD service staff support

community organisations effectively to engage with local people to design services. ‘Doon The Beach’ community café is a strong example of a local partnership that has enhanced the local environment, creating a local business with employment and volunteering opportunities.

Areas for development

CLD partners should now consider how they can use the data and other information they each gather to better demonstrate their collective impact and progress over time. The CLD service should continue work to create approaches to extend data sharing, analysis, and reporting across all CLD partners. This would help to provide a clearer picture of the difference CLD is making in North Ayrshire for senior leaders, funders, staff, and volunteers. Whilst there are areas of strength within adult learning provision, overall this is less well developed and coordinated across partners than other aspects of CLD. There is now a need for partners to work together to ensure that prospective and current adult learners are clear about the programmes and pathways available to them.

3. Practice worth sharing more widely

The MA programme run by North Ayrshire CLD service has a significant impact on the young people who participate, the learners and communities they support as apprentices, and on the CLD service. Apprentices contribute to and run a wide range of CLD programmes across the local authority. They are key to the development of young people’s empowerment and involvement in influencing decisions. They are instrumental in running the Joint Cabinets between young people and elected members. Young people on the programme gain a wide range of skills and gain confidence. Whilst the staff provide clear leadership and support to the apprentices, the apprentices themselves also influence the CLD service. The input from MAs is helping the service be innovative and remain responsive to learners’ changing needs, especially for children and young people.

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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31 October 2023