

# Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

**Falkirk Council**

20 February 2024

## 1. Context

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

Across Falkirk, the leadership and governance of CLD at all levels is strong and effective. This is underpinned by a shared understanding by CLD partners of Falkirk Council's priorities, set out in the Falkirk Plan 2021-2032. The Falkirk Community Planning Partnership (CPP) oversee the delivery and governance of the Falkirk Plan and associated plans such as the CLD plan. CLD leaders are well represented within the CPP structure, which helps to inform effective governance of CLD. In 2023, Falkirk's CLD partners agreed to establish Falkirk's CLD Collaborative as a subgroup of the CPP. CLD collaborative subgroups, such as Falkirk Youth Services Network and Adult Services Network, are increasing the focus on key priorities. They are reducing the risk of duplication, removing barriers to participation and are targeting shared resources very well to areas of greatest need.

The CLD Collaborative meets regularly to share and monitor progress of the CLD plan. CLD partners share a common purpose to improve outcomes for those most in need and are working well together to co-produce and co-deliver services. High-quality annual reporting on the progress of the CLD plan to the CPP is underpinned by regular self-evaluation processes at all levels within the council CLD provision. A few CLD partners also contribute to this process. The most recent annual report demonstrates very good progress in a few priority areas, including those contained within other plans such as Falkirk's Integrated Children's Services Plan and Falkirk Council's Closer to Communities Plan. This information supports planning for continuous improvement. Working agreements with schools and other key partners ensure there are clear objectives to support children, young people, adults and community groups. As a result, CLD is increasingly being valued as a key contributor to improving life chances and empowering communities.

Council staff and volunteers are supported well, with access to a wide range of relevant professional learning and development opportunities. This includes participation in peer learning, and accredited and non-accredited programmes. This is helping to build a skilled and confident workforce that have increasing capacity to respond to learner and community needs.

#### Areas for development

The CLD Collaborative membership is not fully representative of all CLD stakeholders. Its ambition to establish a communities network and subgroups has not been fully realised. The CLD Collaborative now need to progress with these actions to help ensure that all CLD priority areas are given focused attention. CLD senior leaders do not have appropriate and relevant

data measures and data sharing protocols in place. This area requires improvement to ensure CLD leaders can confidently demonstrate continued progress and inform improvement areas.

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

### Areas of positive progress

The CLD Collaborative are increasingly sharing data to help identify improvement areas and deliver on their priorities. For example, the Falkirk Needs Assessment supports a better understanding of existing and emerging community needs. The CLD delivery plan sets out priority actions, lead partners responsibility and timescales well. An increasing number of CLD partners are using the national CLD key performance indicators (KPIs) to report on progress locally and nationally. Data gathered over the last two years shows increasing trends across almost all national CLD KPIs. Service level agreements, joint working agreements and action plans associated with external funding, such as Multiply, support this process.

CLD partners are improving their understanding of each other's roles and have well-developed, positive working relationships, which are based upon mutual trust and respect. They work well together to target collective resources to deliver a wide range of high-quality services. This is helping to reduce inequity and the impact of poverty on those most disadvantaged. Very good work is being undertaken to support young people to have their voices heard. For example, young people have been instrumental in the design of the Youth Charter which has been adopted across Forth Valley and West Lothian area. This work is helping to increase young people's influence in the design of council services. Similarly, there is increasing engagement of communities in local decision-making processes. As a result, more CLD resources are reaching those communities and groups that would benefit the most. Community groups such as Denny Community Support Group and Denny and District YMCA have used a campus approach to make best use of physical assets to address isolation, poverty and health inequalities. Partners have secured funding to improve community amenities, establishing a food pantry and delivering projects to meet identified community needs.

Learners and communities benefit from engagement in high quality CLD services, which is helping them to achieve and progress towards their goals. Strong partnership working is resulting in new projects emerging and learner pathways and progression routes are improving. Well attended universal youth clubs and established joint work with schools is increasing young people's engagement with learning and access to accreditation opportunities. Local employability partners provide targeted and person-centred support to learners to access appropriate learning pathways such as training, education and employment. For example, young parents and adults facing barriers to learning and employment are well supported by Multiply and Falkirk Support Service. Almost all participants have gained new knowledge and skills and a few learners have secured employment or progressed to further learning. CLD partners work effectively to support volunteers, learners and community activists to gain new skills and knowledge to meet their needs. This is increasing the capacity of local organisations to grow and develop. For example, the Scottish Seniors Computer Club are tackling social isolation and digital exclusion in the community. The Growing, Eating and Meeting project is tackling social isolation, food insecurity and cost of living issues. Similarly, improved partnership working in Bowhouse is increasing local capacity to tackle mental health and wellbeing issues.

## Areas for development

CLD partners are not making consistent use of Adult Achievement Awards and other awards to recognise learner and volunteer involvement. An increased use of awards will ensure learner and volunteer successes are recognised and celebrated. CLD senior leaders have not considered how they will continue to resource and sustain support to community organisations and networks. A focus on sustainability in this area will help ensure that local priorities and ambitions set out in locality plans are achievable and deliverable.

### 3. Practice worth sharing more widely

Well embedded joint working agreements between the CLD service and schools are highly valued. The joint self-evaluation of these agreements, including effective use of the national youth work outcomes and skills framework supports this process. CLD practitioners have strengthened their approach to moderation, assessment and tracking. CLD practitioners routinely use multi-award approaches to recognise and accredit young people's achievement. This is significantly increasing the number of young people progressing from Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework levels two to five. As a result, young people most at risk of not achieving are increasing their attainment and developing skills for learning, life and work.

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) sessions are supported very well by skilled tutors and volunteers. As a result, ESOL learners are increasing in confidence in speaking and listening to English in everyday settings which helps to remove practical barriers to their integration into local life. In addition, an increasing number of ESOL learners are working towards an Adult Achievement Award, level two and three. This is preparing learners very well for progression routes to college, volunteering or employment.

### 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 aspects of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further.

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