

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

North Lanarkshire Council

6 February 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited North Lanarkshire 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 North Lanarkshire, leadership of CLD is strong, with a clear vision for improvement. CLD is also aligned very well to the council's Programme of Work. The priorities in the CLD Plan (2021-24) reflect the council's ambitions for its people and communities. For example, reducing barriers to participation, engaging children, young people and their families in reaching their potential, and improving health and wellbeing. This is ensuring that CLD priorities are at the centre of North Lanarkshire's plans to improve the life chances of its citizens.

Most staff and CLD partners have a good understanding of the priorities in the CLD plan. Staff can demonstrate how their work contributes to these priorities in relation to reducing poverty and addressing barriers to learning. Significant investment in CLD is ensuring that willing and enthusiastic staff can access the additional training they need to fulfil their roles effectively. The 'grow your own' culture within the CLD service is leading to very effective personal and professional development for staff and volunteers. Almost all staff are well supported by managers to develop and progress their learning. As a result, staff are well equipped and confident to meet the needs of learners.

Effective partnership working is leading to improved coordination of services and reduced duplication. In partnership with Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire and the Health and Social Care Partnership, community approaches are helping to gather intelligence and identify gaps and concerns in local areas. Activists involved in community boards are making more connections with other groups. This is helping them to lead and respond to community issues and make improvements in the local area. For example, in Airdrie, breastfeeding rates have risen from 16.7% to 40.5%.

Areas for development

The views of local people are not yet sufficiently embedded in plans. Partners should continue to increase awareness of and embed, the views of the local people through the community boards. The CLD Plan (2021-24) predates the council's new Programme of Work and is therefore no longer fully in alignment. Senior leaders should ensure that the new CLD plan remains well aligned to existing plans whilst being clear about CLD priorities and outcomes.

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

Areas of positive progress

Strong use of data is enabling the CLD Service to set clear targets, understand performance, and drive improvement. CLD staff and managers use information efficiently to identify existing and emerging needs and to regularly set and review priorities and targets. Feedback from learners is routinely sought and analysed to inform future programmes. Performance data shows improved participation and outcomes for most learners and the achievement of accredited awards. For example, in 2022-23, 7,710 learners engaged with the CLD service, a 40% increase from the previous year. Over 1,000 young people gained an accredited award. As a result, CLD is demonstrating that it is exceeding the targets set to engage learners from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles one and two, with 44% of all CLD participants coming from these data zones.

Impactful programmes and activities are enhancing the life chances of the most disadvantaged people in North Lanarkshire. The Menspace programme supports men of varied ages to achieve their personal goals and ambitions. Almost all group members are learning new skills and improving their mental health and wellbeing. Almost all participants involved in well-designed parenting support are improving their social and emotional wellbeing and benefit from positive relationships with staff. Parents are finding it easier to de-escalate challenging behaviour and this is leading to an improvement in their child's engagement and behaviour in school. The well-established network of youth engagement groups is ensuring that young people have a say in the issues and services that are important to them. For example, young volunteers have led the development of a befriending café. Young people for whom English is not their first language are very well supported to integrate into the community, socialise with each other and learn new skills. This is helping young people to improve mental health and wellbeing and to gain accredited awards such as the John Muir Award and Saltire Award.

CLD partners are offering clear pathways to volunteering, achievement and employment. For example, learners can train as volunteer walk leaders. This builds sustainability for the walking programme and provides learners with a valued accredited award. The Sum it Up programme is offering a timely focus on numeracy skills and financial literacy. Clear referral pathways are in place and learners also receive a benefits check. Learners are now better able to manage their finances and are more confident to seek support. All learners in the Young Adult Programme are reaching positive destinations, including 14 who have secured employment and four of whom are now attending university to study Community Education. The Focus Youth Group offers a good range of employability awards that supports young people to achieve a positive outcome. A few young people benefit from Barista training which is helping them gain part time employment. Home School Partnership Officers ensure that young people's learning is accredited both in and outside of school. As a result, young people are able to articulate all their achievements and plan for their future, with the support of the CLD and Education staff.

Areas for development

Whilst data is gathered by partners individually, there is not yet a coordinated, shared data set that evidences the impact of CLD consistently. Consideration should be given to developing a shared data set with CLD Partners. This will ensure a more meaningful analysis of the impact of CLD across communities in North Lanarkshire and identify any gaps or overlap in provision.

3. Practice worth sharing more widely.

Close working relationships between the CLD team and social work is leading to improved safeguarding outcomes for children and young people. The safeguarding approach ensures that all aspects of a young person's life, including locations of concern, are considered, and builds the young person's capacity to keep themselves safe. Innovatively, the local authority is working with Who Cares Scotland and young people to co-design a contextualised safeguarding session for peer education.

North Lanarkshire CLD's well-embedded approach to accreditation and to 'growing your own' ensures that barriers to learners accessing training and employment are removed. A range of learning pathways is helping almost all learners achieve their goals. As a result, learners are progressing to other learning opportunities or employment. Young people and adults benefit from access to a wide range of awards including Scottish Qualifications Authority modules and youth awards.

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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6 February 2024