

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

East Renfrewshire Council

28 November 2023

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited East Renfrewshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during October 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.

East Renfrewshire lies to the south of Glasgow and stretches from rural Uplawmoor to Eaglesham and Waterfoot. It covers an area of 67 square miles, 85% of which is rural land with the remaining area comprising mainly residential suburbs. Within East Renfrewshire Council, CLD delivery is comprised of youth work, community capacity building and adult learning. Youth work and community capacity building are delivered by a team within the Business Operations and Partnerships (BOP) department, Adult Learning Services is located within the Education department.

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 East Renfrewshire, the leadership of CLD at all levels is strong. The well-established CLD Partnership, with a recently increased membership, are responsible for delivering the CLD Plan 2021-24. The CLD Plan aligns well with local and national strategic priorities. The partnership meets regularly to develop and monitor actions and performance towards the priorities and outcomes. Reports on progress to East Renfrewshire Community Planning Partnership are comprehensive, measurable and demonstrate good progress in almost all areas. Self-evaluation arrangements are well embedded strategically and locally. They inform and enable the CLD partnerships to continue to target resources to those areas with the greatest need. CLD leaders make very good use of analysis of external, internal and local intelligence to inform high-level priorities and drive improvements in performance. For example, findings from the Pandemic Impact Social Research report has informed the approach and support given to communities around participatory budgeting. A few community members have a good understanding of CLD priorities and local community plans. They are actively involved in influencing priorities and encouraging community engagement through their participatory budgeting (PB) processes.

The CLD partnership share a common ambition to improve outcomes for those most in need and are working well together, using person centred approaches, to reduce barriers to participation. Relationships across partners are based upon mutual trust and respect. The use of a range of self-evaluation arrangements at all levels helps to inform continuous improvement. Staff and volunteers at all levels have benefited well from professional learning and development. As a result, there is increased confidence and capacity to respond to changing needs, including mental health issues and the use of digital technology. Council CLD staff at all levels are trusted and have autonomy to plan and make decisions about their work. This enables them to be agile and help to secure the best possible outcomes for learners and communities. For example, the Linking Communities approach set up to oversee PB across East Renfrewshire resulted in an increase in the number of local residents engaged in issues and priorities in locality planning.

Areas for development

The CLD partnership should continue with their plans to revisit their vision to help ensure a shared understanding of the aspirations and responsibilities of all partners. The CLD partnerships approach to gathering data could be strengthened to better demonstrate impact and outcomes against planned priorities more efficiently. This will also help to deepen partners' understanding of the breadth of CLD work taking place across the local authority. There is also scope to develop additional professional learning pathways to help increase capacity and tackle recruitment issues, particularly in adult learning.

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

Areas of positive progress

The CLD partnership and local partners use data very well to demonstrate progress and inform the targeting or redirecting of resources to areas of greatest need. The CLD plan sets out clear and measurable targets which are linked very well to localised and strategic plans. This helps ensure the contribution of CLD is reported and recorded at all levels. Data showing trends over time demonstrate an increase in the number of learners engaging in CLD opportunities. Self-evaluation is routinely used to engage with partners, learners and communities and to gather feedback. This includes more effective use of the youth work outcomes to measure progress, track skills and inform future planning.

CLD services and partners target their resources well to deliver a wide range of high quality, universal and targeted services. Many partners have effective arrangements in place to identify and remove barriers to participation. This includes youth work programmes which are free of charge, include transport to activities and provide food. A few community organisations offer free or subsidised lets to start up groups or where the charging of a fee would negatively impact on provision. This is helping to improve the life chances of learners and communities. For example, young people engaged in diversionary work now recognise a change in their behaviour and are making better choices. Young people attending the Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex Youth Group in Barrhead are increasing their confidence and removing barriers to participation. Similarly, English for Speakers of other Languages learners are developing their language skills which helps to remove practical barriers to their integration into local life in East Renfrewshire. The targeting of shared resources by the newly established Anti-Social Behaviour Partnership is impacting positively on behaviour in the Barrhead area. Collaboration across Better Barrhead is enabling local people to participate, develop their skills, improve mental health and provide more opportunities to reduce isolation.

CLD partners work effectively to support learners and community activists to gain skills and knowledge to meet their needs. Almost all learners are supported well to transition between well-developed pathways to access opportunities to best suit their aspirations. A few learners describe these co-designed and person-centred approaches as positive and, at times, life changing. A range of very well-planned, school-based youth work interventions are jointly developed and delivered, which are improving life skills, particularly for those with specific needs and barriers to learning. For example, very good work is being undertaken to support young people to have their voices heard in East Renfrewshire, closely aligned to developments around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is increasing the skills and confidence of the young people involved and providing pathways into wider opportunities such as training, education and employment.

Adult Learning Services staff are delivering tailored provision to learners, supported by individual

learning plans. Links to further community-based learning, volunteering and employment is evident, and learners recognise the positive impact that learning is making to their lives.

Areas for development

The CLD Partnership should continue with their plans to develop a more systematic approach to the gathering of performance information to further improve their reporting on progress. Further updating of, and use of terms of reference within key partnerships, would help ensure there is clarity amongst partners on the added value of partnership working. The Linking Communities partnership should continue to share their community-based approaches to youth engagement with school-based colleagues. This includes a discussion on the use of community and school PB to ensure the appropriate targeting of each resource. There is potential for the further use of accreditation and awards for adults, for example, through further joint adult accreditation with colleges and exploring opportunities for further direct delivery of awards by the local authority and its partners.

3. Practice worth sharing more widely

Youth work in partnership with Barrhead High School is planned very well. Agreed priorities between the CLD service and the school feature in the school's improvement plan. Expected outcomes are clear and measurable. As a result, the school and the CLD service are clear on the progress made by each young person. This includes reduced risk-taking behaviour, improved attendance and engagement in a wider range of curriculum areas, including Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Data shows increased engagement of young people from deprived areas in CLD programmes and an increase in the number of youth awards achieved. The school values the role of youth work and recognises its contribution to strong and sustained school leaver destination figures. As a result, the school has appointed their own youth worker and intends to recruit another.

The Linking Communities approach set up to oversee PB processes across East Renfrewshire is working very well. Effective capacity building opportunities delivered by the council CLD services support community led PB in local planning areas. Highly skilled volunteers take responsibility for leading the process and supporting change in their communities. They are actively involved in influencing priorities and encouraging community engagement in PB. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of local residents engaged in local issues and planning priorities. The number of groups and activities provided by local people is also increasing. East Renfrewshire are almost halfway to meeting the target of allocating one percent of their overall budget to PB.

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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HM Inspector
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