

Continuing engagement of community learning and development in The Highland Council

13 January 2020

for Scotland's learners with Scotland's educators
do luchd-ionnsachaidh na h-Alba le luchd-foghlaim Alba

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1. How good is the strategic leadership of community learning and development?

Senior leaders continue to understand and value community learning and development (CLD) methodologies in meeting Highland Outcome Improvement Plan priorities. Leaders at all levels have a shared commitment to strengthening the nine Community Partnerships. Community planning partners have identified a range of priority actions they need to take to build the role, effectiveness and sustainability of community planning arrangements across Highland. There continues to be a need to strengthen the alignment of local provision with strategic and area plans to ensure a clear shared sense of direction. Organisational change combined with budgetary pressures has impacted on some partners' confidence in regard to the shared direction of travel. Strategic leaders are aware of the need to address communication, cultural and structural issues in order to achieve their aspirations for partnerships where voluntary and community organisations are equal partners. Many individual youth work programmes including a few jointly delivered by partners remain effective. However, the overall lack of cohesion between youth work providers risks reducing the positive impacts of the learning offer on children and young people. There would be benefit in leaders ensuring that funding and reporting arrangements help foster a culture of cooperation and trust between providers of CLD activity. There continues to be a challenge as to how partners deploy CLD resources, including staff time, to best support progress against shared priorities. There is now a need to review strategic aims for CLD and community empowerment to make sure they are achievable and realistic. There are positive examples where the thread between strategic planning and operational delivery is clear. For example, the innovative House of Memories project delivers well against intended outcomes in the Highland Dementia policy. The project supports those caring for people living with dementia across Highland to use a bespoke digital app. This app helps them to feel more confident and equipped to support their family members and clients.

Partners are increasing the opportunities for practitioners to meet, share ideas and learn from each other. The Highland Voluntary Youth Network is building capacity to engage in shared planning and self-evaluation amongst voluntary sector youth organisations. The development of Community Learning, Development and Engagement networks (CLDE) in five of the nine local community partnerships has the potential to enhance capacity to jointly identify the CLD offer and the difference this is making. There is strong buy-in to the local CLDE network in Mid Ross by services and local organisations and this is beginning to improve information sharing and understanding of roles between partners. In a few cases this is supporting joint approaches between partners to addressing needs identified through locality planning such as digital learning projects. There remains a need to clarify how existing and planned partnership structures and networks will provide a clear route-map to inform the provision of CLD. Current structures do not yet enable strategic leaders to best meet their duties in regard to the planning and reporting of CLD provision. There continues to be examples where partners make effective use of evaluation to assess progress for individual projects. For example, the Growing2gether programme which supports young people to mentor children, includes a systematic approach to evaluation. This is supporting its roll out to schools across Highland. There continues to be a need for partners to better identify, share and use key intelligence to create a collective picture of the impacts of CLD in Highland. They also need to develop clear, realistic and ambitious joint targets for CLD.

2. How good is the learning and development in this community?

Across Highland highly effective and ambitious community organisations continue to enhance community life by delivering a wide range of services. The Dingwall Fire Brigade Club's annual gala and the Word on the Street cultural festival bring local people together to participate and learn. In Strathpeffer, community organisations are the driving force behind the community's well-written, five year action plan. Community organisations are taking ownership of buildings and land to develop infrastructure projects which support the social and economic wellbeing of their communities. Cromarty Community Development Trust have successfully raised £450,000 to build a campsite and repair ferry slipways. This is to meet the needs of both local businesses and the increased visitor numbers drawn by the North Coast 500. There continues to be a need to increase the role of communities in community planning decision making at a local level including in locality plan developments. Given the extensive knowledge and expertise that many community organisations and activists have, their greater involvement could increase the effectiveness of community planning. Partners at all levels recognise that the lack of consistent and coordinated community development support can be a barrier to communities becoming full and equal partners with services. In Mid Ross the community partnership is working to engage more local people. This includes seeking funding to increase the staff resource for community capacity building. Across Highland the engagement team funded by Aspiring Communities for one year are enhancing community involvement and delivering 'quick win' community actions. Young people continue to be well supported to participate in decision making processes. This includes producing a Youth Work Strategy for Highland. Partners are aware of the need to build on this broad statement of principles and values by developing a clear and measurable action plan to fulfil the vision in the strategy.

Across Mid Ross well delivered learning opportunities continue to meet identified needs. Highlife Highland's detached youth work project is responding to community need in relation to reducing anti-social behaviour. Although at an early stage, staff are already building positive relationships with young people. Most young people involved in activity agreements continue to move on to positive destinations. The Dingwall employability programme is supporting young people to become ready for work and gain appropriate levels of accreditation. Youth work and adult learning staff work well together in the project to support young people. Interventions are based on individual need and aspirations. Across learning provision there is increasing use of awards to recognise and support achievement. Ongoing development of the Highlife Highland Leadership Programme is enhancing capacity amongst partners including schools, sports bodies and youth work organisations to offer accredited leadership awards linked to volunteering. Over 4000 children and young people have taken part in some aspect of the Leadership programme over the past five years. Volunteer Adult Literacies tutors are gaining Professional Development Awards arranged in response to a shortage of tutors in the Mid Ross area. The training is enhancing participants potential career pathways as well as underpinning the quality of their current work. Adult learning partners have re-established the Highland Adult Learning Partnership. This is beginning to enable adult learning providers to better coordinate the overall adult learning offer and strengthen adult learning pathways. However, this is at an early stage and both adult learning pathways and adult learner participation in decision making processes continue to require strengthening.

3. Does the Highland community have a clear sense of direction?

The direction of CLD provision across CLD in Highland is not yet sufficiently clear and coordinated across partners. Whilst partners are committed to change and are improving aspects such as networking, there remains a need to jointly develop and take forward a realistic, sustainable and shared vision for CLD.

4. What happens next?

Whilst we are confident that aspects of work in local communities remain of good quality, overall there has been insufficient progress made against the four main areas for improvement in the original report. As a result we will return around 12 months from the publication of this report to monitor progress against these areas.

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