

Continuing engagement of community learning and development in Argyll and Bute Council

29 June 2020

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

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Community learning and development (CLD) partners within Argyll and Bute and the area of Helensburgh and Lomond were inspected by Education Scotland during January and February 2019. The report set out both key strengths and areas for improvement for CLD provision in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. This report is based on a continuing engagement visit carried out in March 2020, which focused on the strategic leadership of CLD and how good is the learning and development in the Helensburgh and Lomond community. During this visit HM Inspectors met with a range of staff, volunteers and partners and focused on progress made on the areas for improvement identified from previous inspection activity. As a result, HM Inspectors were able to establish how well partners across Argyll and Bute are now working together to support learners and communities to improve life chances.

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

CLD services within Argyll and Bute Council continue to experience substantial budget reductions. This is impacting on the resourcing of CLD and the realigning of priorities. The leadership, governance and coordination of the CLD plan 2018-2021 is delivered in partnership with members of the CLD strategic partnership. Representation has increased, with more of a focus on employability. However, the strategic partnership should continue to monitor representation to ensure it reflects all aspects CLD and the wide range of partners who contribute to CLD outcomes in Argyll and Bute and the wider work of CLD such as adult learning. The culture and understanding of the value of partnership working remains strong. A recently produced terms of reference for the strategic group is now in place. The strategic partnership has recently been aligned to the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) priorities. A wide range of partners engaged in self-evaluation activities, however, there are only a few examples of where agreed actions were realised. These include improved approaches to safeguarding arrangements and plans to report quarterly on the progress of the CLD plan. Annual reporting to the council's Community Service Committee and Local Area Community Planning Groups (ACPG) is also proposed. However, there has been no formal reporting by the CLD strategic partnership on progress against the CLD three year plan. The strategic partnership would benefit from developing a measurable improvement action plan, outlining key priorities and lead responsibilities. Similarly, the CLD plan and the community learning service plans remain insufficiently focused on outcomes and lack measurable targets. As a result, it remains unclear how well leaders can ensure the quality and collective impact of CLD. Approaches to mitigating risk are also unclear. Overall, many improvements are at too early a stage to assess their effectiveness. The council and its partners recognise that plans to improve the governance and leadership of CLD now require acceleration.

The Helensburgh and Lomond Youth Forum is now more involved in decision making and CLD strategic planning through representation on the Helensburgh and Lomond ACPG and the CPP. Forum members are influencing decision making such as their contribution to the CPP action plan on climate change. However, the active engagement of adult learners in decision making is more limited. Employment focused partnerships at strategic and area levels continue to be successful in working together to improve outcomes. Hermitage Academy and its partners are improving the arrangements for sharing data and joint planning through the Opportunities for All group. The group continue to work together effectively to plan programmes to meet the needs of those at risk of not achieving a positive destination. There is an increased focus and targeted approach to engage young people who would benefit most from provision.

CLD partners continue to value the role that council CLD staff make in supporting learners and communities across Argyll and Bute. Senior leaders and local staff are using data and feedback from a few partners to help inform their changing work priorities. For example, community development staff are increasingly using place standards surveys, improved grant funding processes and wider intelligence to identify needs and inform operational work. However, there is scope for CLD staff to work better together to deliver the council's vision for CLD provision. CLD staff are adapting well to the move from thematic roles to more generic roles. Opportunities for council staff such as becoming a peer manager, revisiting the CLD competencies and participation in a range of management courses enable officers to retain and build their leadership skills. Staff are supported to be more outward looking and are learning from effective practice in other local authorities. This is beginning to inform improvement areas. The council CLD staff 'let there be highlights' and weekly updates and training is a positive step in

increasing awareness of CLD practice. CLD partners now need to extend approaches to the sharing of information across partners.

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

Across partners, there are a few positive examples of improvements in CLD performance. CLD staff at locality level are more confident and clearer on their roles and local priorities. They are now setting local priorities and targets. A wider set of community development performance measures better captures the impact of their work. As a result, staff have a more informed understanding of their impact. The council should continue with its plans to improve performance management. Hermitage Academy continues to work with partners to improve tracking of learner pathways, including wider achievement. This demonstrates an increasing and sustained number of young people participating in the skills for work college programme. Ministry of Defence (MOD) performance information continues to demonstrate the positive social and educational impacts on young people, families and practitioners. In adult learning, there are a few examples of improving and stable trends over the last three years. The Helensburgh and Lomond ACPG continue to use a wide range of data to identify local actions. The council and its partners recognise that there is more to be done to monitor and report on progress.

There continues to be effective partnership working at a local level through the ACPG. Supported well by community development staff, they have increased levels of participation and are beginning to identify need and develop local responses. Community groups and organisations are valued as equal partners. There is a commitment to identify, engage and listen to 'seldom heard groups'. The consultation and engagement processes undertaken by the Vision for Helensburgh sub-group of the Community Council is a strong example of volunteers providing community leadership. This process is helping to identify key priorities for the town. Ambitious and enthusiastic volunteers continue to contribute well to community life and enhance learning opportunities. The action plan developed by the Welcome In Recovery Café committee is improving their ability to plan and progress actions. Grey Matters Active Ageing impacts positively on the inclusion and wellbeing of older adults, resulting in an increased sense of self-worth and achievement for many. The Helensburgh and Lomond Carers, continues to deliver services to around 700 carers in the area. Carers value the fun learning activities and opportunities to develop relaxation techniques. The recently developed volunteer framework by Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface (TSi) has potential to assist partners in applying best practice in supporting volunteers. Similarly, the TSi and community development training needs analysis is informing a programme of training for community organisations. There is potential to develop a more coordinated and systematic approach to the training and support offer to community groups.

Young people continue to be supported to access volunteering opportunities in and out of school, for example, the Police Scotland Volunteer Programme. The use of Saltire Awards remains in place, with many young people achieving in excess of 200 hours of volunteering. Extending its membership beyond young people from military families is positive in supporting integration within localities. There is scope for the MOD's wider provision to follow this example. Adult and youth services staff have strengthened their approaches to working together. Adults who lack confidence and self-esteem are being referred from the job centre to other community learning programmes. Argyll College and University of Highlands and Islands provides a clear

and flexible learning pathway for learners. A few programmes are informed by learner feedback. A flexible and nurturing learning environment supports learner's progression. A partnership model supports progression for some students through senior phase and into further and higher education. However, there remains scope to explore how limited community learning resources can be better deployed to tackle wider priorities. Many learners are still not sufficiently informed about learning pathways across partners and progression routes remain unclear.

3. Does the Helensburgh and Lomond community have a clear sense of direction?

Argyll and Bute Council does not yet have a clear sense of direction. The council continues to experience a significant period of change. This is impacting on the leadership, governance and direction of CLD and in demonstrating improvements in performance.

4. What happens next?

As a result of our inspection findings we identified areas where further improvements are required. In light of the current circumstances, we will liaise with Argyll and Bute Council to provide you with an update on next steps when appropriate.

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