

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

East Lothian Council

16 July 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited East Lothian Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during May 2024. 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

East Lothian Council has experienced several changes in the leadership of CLD over the last six months. The new strategic leaders for CLD are in the early stages of reviewing governance arrangements across strategic groups. Staff at all levels are confident that the new management team can provide strong and effective leadership for CLD. These changes have the potential to strengthen the governance of CLD. Annual reporting of the Connected Communities service is helping to strengthen the understanding of how CLD contributes to council and community planning priorities. Partners across East Lothian use place-based approaches to identifying and addressing need. Six well-established area partnerships ensure that elected members and community members make a valued contribution to the co-production of local plans and delivery. Area partnerships use a range of participatory budgeting (PB) approaches to ensure that local people have a say in allocating devolved funding of around £2.6 million. As a result, East Lothian Council are exceeding their target of allocating 1% of their overall budget to PB.

Across East Lothian, area partnerships support the delivery of CLD activity to address issues of poverty and inequality. The targeting of funding is aligned to local priorities. Partners know each other well and respond well to changing community needs. A few strategic partners are using national and local intelligence to inform targeting of their resources. Young people and families are benefiting from targeted support, which is leading to increased attendance and engagement in school. A few Connected Communities staff and partners use self-evaluation frameworks to inform their work plans. Partners use case studies well to demonstrate learner progress. Stakeholders, including members of the Young People's Advisory Group, are influencing the development of the Youth Vision 2024-27. This plan has potential to provide a clearer sense of direction for those delivering universal and targeted youth work. CLD partners share their training and development programmes with others, including volunteers. This includes access to the online learning platform used by council staff. The Connected Communities training calendar is well established and is open to community organisations and other partners. This is increasing their skill set and confidence to respond to changing needs.

Areas for development

The recent changes to the leadership of CLD are not yet fully embedded, and do not yet fully support the governance of CLD. As a result, the local authority is currently at risk of not meeting its legislative duties set out in The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013. As a matter of urgency, CLD strategic leaders need progress plans to ensure that effective reporting and governance arrangements are established. This will

help to better inform, influence and target resources to areas of greatest need, whilst also learning from what is working well and where improvement is required. The current CLD plan is not yet well understood by learners, community members or partners, and they are not clear how progress is measured. Partners are not yet clear how strategic plans relating to CLD connect. Streamlining CLD related plans would help to reduce duplication and improve reporting and monitoring of progress. This will help stakeholders to develop their understanding of the CLD plan priorities, across area partnerships and locality forums. The voice of learners and community members is not yet fully influencing CLD strategic planning. Strengthening their role in decision-making processes will help to ensure that the priorities in the new CLD plan reflect the needs of learners and communities.

Partners do not consistently report their contribution on progress against actions set out in the plan. This is limiting partners ability to report the collective impact of CLD. Senior leaders and CLD partners now need to put appropriate arrangements in place to support planning for improvement. They should also take a strategic approach to the development of partnership priorities for CLD, which link to the work of area partnerships. This will help with the preparation of a new CLD plan. The quality assurance arrangements of CLD are not sufficient. They do not support senior leaders' and their partners' ability to consider their overall capacity to improve. Given the increase in partners using CLD methodologies, appropriate and rigorous quality assurance arrangements should be developed to support planning for improvement.

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

Areas of positive progress

There are a few positive examples of CLD partners and council services gathering and using data to inform how they target resources and demonstrate positive impacts. Successful work of partners engaged in the Preston Seton Gosford Area Partnership has resulted in a consistent reduction in antisocial behaviour related calls. East Lothian Local Employability Partnership (LEP) gathers and analyses data well through a range of key performance indicators (KPIs). This shows improvements in the annual participation measure for young people aged 16-19 to 94.6%, which is higher than the Scottish average. Similarly, the numbers of young people whose destination is unknown continues to reduce. The 2023 Council Plan Annual Performance Report shows progress towards their target to increase community and individual resilience. It also shows positive trends in the number of young people engaged in Connected Communities activity and the number of volunteering hours recorded. Data gathered using CLD Managers Scotland KPIs show a few positive trends. For example, the number of individuals receiving community capacity building support continues to increase.

Across the majority of learning programmes, staff and volunteers work hard to remove barriers to participation in CLD activity. Inclusive approaches are improving accessibility, programmes are provided at no cost, and a few are delivered online. Specialist youth workers provide support to young people who are most disengaged from school. This is helping young people to improve their wellbeing and increase the number of awards achieved. East Lothian Works (ELW) engages effectively with partners to ensure learners are directed to the most appropriate programme. For example, in partnership with Lead Scotland, a few adult learners are supported well through delivery of learning in their homes. Successful work with MyBank is helping local people to maximise their income and families are benefitting from greater access to affordable childcare. As a result, a few families can secure work without impacting on their benefit income. Families Together East Lothian is starting to transform services across the most deprived areas of East Lothian. This approach is contributing to appropriate referrals, which is leading to

statutory measures being at its lowest for 10 years. Effective intergenerational work at Dunbar Dinners is supporting young people and older adults to gain new skills and form friendships. The majority of participants report life changing impacts, including raised levels of confidence and improved mental health.

Partners involved with ELW effectively collaborate to ensure there are processes in place to support seamless transitions for learners. Key workers support learners to achieve their goals. The LEP provides access to grant funding to deliver programmes across the council area. As a result, partners can target those most in need and provide well-tailored learning programmes, including bespoke support to help young people into employment. Almost all young people participating have gained an apprenticeship. There are clearer learning pathways for English speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision. As a result, an increasing number of learners are successfully gaining language, life and employability skills. The learners are more confident and feel more included in their communities. Skilled volunteers from Pennypit Trust are providing support to families to reduce the impact of holiday hunger. An increasing number of volunteers are supported well to gain accreditation in food hygiene and first aid. As a result, more volunteers are progressing to paid employment. Young people engaged in youth work activity through North Berwick Youth Project are gaining important life skills including awareness of risk-taking behaviour. A few participants are developing their leadership skills and becoming volunteers.

Areas for development

Strategic and local partners, including area partnerships, cannot demonstrate progress effectively in all areas. As a result, CLD outcomes are under-reported. There is also a high risk of duplication of effort around data collection and analysis to inform continuous improvement. Strategic leaders and their partners now need to agree on what data will be gathered to demonstrate progress over time. This should include establishing robust arrangements to inform planning, monitoring, and reporting of the CLD plan. Whilst area partnerships report progress annually, too many performance reports include limited trends over time data. This has implications for the development of the new CLD plan and the delivery of CLD in line with the needs of learners and communities. The Youth Vision 2024-27 lacks measurable outcomes and targets. This may impact negatively on reporting on progress towards strategic goals and priorities. Strategic partners now need to work collaboratively to identify and set ambitious but realistic targets.

The attainment and achievement of young people engaging in CLD activity through specialist youth workers is not yet consistent or fully embedded in school improvement planning. Senior leaders should continue with plans to strengthen this. Progression pathways for young people and adult learners are not yet sufficiently well developed. A few adult literacy learners have engaged with provision for several years and should be supported, where appropriate, to progress to other activities. ESOL learners would benefit from individual learning plans to help them record, monitor and track their progress.

3. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required.

- As a matter of urgency, the local authority and its partners should strengthen the leadership and governance of CLD in line with legislative requirements. This includes agreeing clear outcomes and measures of success, and strengthening of approaches to the tracking, monitoring, and reporting of progress against CLD priorities. Local authority and its partners should also ensure that there are effective arrangements in place to improve the quality assurance of CLD.

4. Practice worth sharing more widely

During the inspection, we identified an aspect of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further.

- Young people and older adults attending the weekly “Dinner at DGS” (Dunbar Grammar School) are learning new skills and forming friendships. Young people report an increasing sense of worth through their service to their local community. Most young people are learning to cook nutritious low-cost meals, a few are progressing to other volunteering, and in a few cases to paid employment. Older people appreciate the social contact with younger people and there are many examples of cross generational relationships being formed. This is helping to reduce social isolation. Funded by the Dunbar and East Linton Area Partnership, a small group of older adults and young people went to Barra in summer 2023 for an Intergenerational Island Adventure. Dinner at DGS is life changing for the majority of participants. This includes them having raised levels of confidence and improved mental health.

5. What happens next?

The local authority and their CLD partners are not making sufficient progress with their CLD plan and HM Inspectors have identified important areas requiring improvement. As a result, we will visit the local authority again approximately one year following the publication of this report to evaluate progress made by the local authority and their CLD partners in addressing these.

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HM Inspector
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