

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Aberdeen City Council

9 July 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Aberdeen City 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

Senior leaders understand well the value of CLD. Distributed leadership within the CLD service and many CLD partner organisations is positive and staff feel empowered. CLD is reported regularly to the Community Empowerment Group and Children's Services Board. The alignment of priorities across the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), Health and Social Care Partnership and Children's Services Board, is helping to demonstrate CLD's effective contribution to key priorities in Aberdeen. Thematic and project partnership work is well-developed and based on increasing understanding of each other's roles and expertise. The Associated School Group partnership forums, provide a useful route to share practice and coordinate actions. This is helping staff to better meet the needs of those who require additional support. Successful engagement of community representatives is starting to ensure that their views are included in locality planning and the refresh of the LOIP.

Regular evaluation and continued engagement with learners, by CLD staff and partners is ensuring a clear focus on improving learning programmes. For example, individual learning plans and one to one meetings are supporting adult learners attending the creative writing group to set and manage their goals. This is helping them to progress and be more confident to try new things. CLD service staff are supported well to reflect on and improve their practice. Managers are proactive in seeking out training opportunities that will support staff to meet new and emerging needs. Partners regularly share training opportunities with other organisations and services. This is helping staff to develop skills to meet changing needs. The Community Development Team works effectively with partners to identify and deliver training opportunities to support volunteer development. A few staff are being supported to complete professional development qualifications. CLD staff provide training that supports the knowledge and professional development of staff in other organisations. For example, the Family Learning Team delivers sessions on their work to other organisations across the north of Scotland.

Areas for development

The strategic leadership and governance of CLD requires improvement. There is insufficient collective ownership by partners of the governance and planning for CLD. As a result, senior leaders do not have clear strategic oversight. Staff and partners do not see the 2021-24 CLD plan as being a principal focus of their work. There is not yet sufficient input or influence from community representatives or young people and adult learners in CLD strategic planning. Shared self-evaluation across partners is not yet embedded. Taking a more joined-up approach

could support more efficient use of resources and avoid any duplication of effort. It may also help to develop a fuller understanding of the impact of CLD.

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

Areas of positive progress

CLD partners have a clear understanding of the needs of learners and communities across Aberdeen. Partners share data and local intelligence well to help identify changing needs. Reporting of CLD is underpinned by consistent gathering of data and case studies. Data for 2023-24 shows that the number of activities, participants, learner hours and learner enrolments all exceed the pre-pandemic 2019-20 figures. Robust data gathering is also helping to evidence the impact of third sector partners funded to deliver CLD. For example, almost all children and young people receiving services, funded by the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports and Services grant, report receiving a good service. As a result, participants feel listened to and helped with issues that are important to them.

Those facing additional challenges in their lives such as illness, disability, bereavement and the effects of poverty are supported well by CLD providers. Staff and volunteers offering a wide range of adult learning opportunities are skilled in encouraging local people to participate. This is reducing social isolation and loneliness for many. Adults undertaking community payback orders are supported well by staff to improve their life skills. This is helping many of these learners to be more optimistic about their futures and consider how they can progress in their lives. The partnership with Harlaw Academy is helping learners at Healthy Minds creative writing group to access qualifications. All learners report an increase in their confidence and most have improved their knowledge and skills. Well-supported volunteers are helping displaced Ukrainian refugees to socialise and to maintain important aspects of their culture and language. The Family Learning Team and their partners work well together to provide families facing challenges with the support they need when they need it. The 'Fit Like?' programme is providing early intervention and effective, bespoke whole-family support. This is helping to prevent children from becoming looked after by the local authority. Aberdeen Youth Movement is now approached regularly by the council to represent the views of young people, for example contributing to the Beach Masterplan.

There is a clear focus on alleviating the impacts of poverty through training and employability programmes and money and benefits advice across a range of partners. Across CLD providers, staff support learners effectively to become volunteers and to share their knowledge and experience with others. Enthusiastic and committed community representatives receive valued and effective support from community development staff and partners. Volunteers work well with CLD workers to deliver the Granitehill Gang older peoples group. For many, including those who became isolated during the pandemic, this is renewing their enjoyment in life. English for speakers of other languages learners are successfully using the communication skills they are gaining in other contexts including speaking to school staff, using transport and seeking medical services. Learners of all ages at Station House Media Unit are gaining skills in communication, presenting, planning and working with others. Targeted support to young people on flexible learning pathways by youth workers, delivered in schools and community settings, is highly valued by young people, parents and teachers. Young people are achieving positive health outcomes and achieving accreditation through Dynamic Youth Awards.

Areas for development

Whilst a broad range of learner data is captured and reported, this is not yet analysed in context or against targets. There is a need to set clear, shared measures of success across all CLD partners. Consistent sharing of data from the full range of partners involved in delivering CLD would help to demonstrate further its impact.

3. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required.

- Senior leaders and CLD partners need to work together to improve the strategic governance and decision making in CLD. This should include CLD partners setting and jointly monitoring shared measures of success.

4. Practice worth sharing more widely

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

- The Communities Team has worked successfully with partners and volunteers to establish a Ukrainian Hub based at Rosemount Learning Centre. This is an example of highly effective community development and support to volunteers. The Communities Team helped volunteers to establish the Ukrainian Association and to achieve charitable status. They now offer a wide range of social, cultural and educational activities. This is supporting displaced Ukrainian refugees to connect with their new community whilst maintaining important aspects of their culture and language. The association now has sole responsibility for the centre on Sundays where they provide a variety of activities for children.

5. What happens next?

We recognise that the local authority and their CLD partners are making some progress in a number of areas of their CLD plan, however improvement is required. We will require a report on progress on the agreed areas for improvement within agreed timescales. Taking account of the progress report, we will then decide what further engagement with the local authority and their CLD partners is required.

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