

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Clackmannanshire Council

19 December 2023

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Clackmannanshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during November 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.

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

Overall, the leadership of CLD is strong. Senior leaders value CLD. CLD methodologies are increasingly being used to engage with stakeholders by a range of services. The CLD Partnership has responsibility for the governance of CLD. It includes a wide range of partners including community organisations. Those on the Partnership contribute well to CLD planning and have a shared understanding of the ambitions in the CLD Plan. Progress against the priorities in the 2021-2024 CLD plan are routinely and regularly provided to the Council People Committee and to Clackmannanshire Alliance, the community planning partnership. Partners understand the added value that working together can bring. Partnership working is based on mutual trust and respect and partners work well together to meet changing needs and reduce duplication. Partnership working is increasing opportunities for formal and informal practitioner networking. This enables staff and volunteers to share ideas, knowledge and effective practice. It also supports the increasing sharing of resources and facilities.

CLD leaders and partners have a clear focus on improving outcomes for learners. Staff in the council CLD service work closely with education and links with schools are strong. This is widening achievement opportunities and increasing support for children and young people. CLD staff are a key part of the Family Wellbeing Partnership (FWP). The FWP approach is strengthening partnership collaboration and engagement with communities. The FWP has attracted significant additional funding into Clackmannanshire which is supporting increased support to children, young people and their families. The Alloa South and East Action Plan 2021-2026 supports partners to come together to coordinate action to reduce inequalities. Across partners there is a well-established culture of learning from, building on and sharing successful work. Communities and learners are consulted regularly about their needs and priorities and their feedback influences CLD provision. Partnership work with Columba1400 has engaged a significant number of learners, practitioners and senior leaders in value-based leadership academies. This approach has strengthened relationships across most key partners and is building capacity to respond to change based upon local need.

Areas for development

Senior leaders should complete the CLD service redesign process quickly to bring stability to the team. Completing the redesign will also help to ensure both the team and CLD partnership can fully focus on their priorities. There is a need to increase the capacity of staff in the CLD service to self-evaluate and monitor their work. This will help staff to more fully understand how they are contributing to CLD priorities and to feel more empowered in their roles.

There is now a need to ensure all stakeholders, including learners, are represented and have influence on the CLD Partnership. The work around youth participation may provide an opportunity to extend how young people contribute to CLD planning. There is a need to consider how adult learners can become partners in CLD planning at locality and strategic level. Partners should jointly review their consultation approaches to ensure they are efficient and to reduce any risk of duplication.

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

Areas of positive progress

Overall, senior leaders and partners use data and other information very well to identify existing and changing needs. This supports them to understand and respond to issues such as the cost of the school day and rising levels of mental health concerns. Ochil Youth Community Improvement use data well to target resources where there are gaps in provision, particularly in the foothill villages. Increasingly, partners are gathering and sharing data to help them jointly plan improvements and to identify progress against community planning priorities. The Clacks Mental Health and Wellbeing Transformation Project brings partners together to deliver a comprehensive package of support for children, young people and their families. This shared approach is resulting in positive impacts including a reduction in referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Where trend information is gathered for CLD it mainly shows positive change. Learner participation across most providers is increasing and, in most cases, returning to or exceeding pre-pandemic levels. There is an increasing use of youth awards to accredit learning.

CLD providers and their wider partners have a clear and consistent focus on meeting the needs of those facing additional challenges in their lives. As part of FWP, partners work well together to offer a wide range of person-centred Community Around the School activities. These enable young people and families to feel included, progress and achieve. Participants are developing self-confidence, resilience, leadership and life skills. New Scots are supported well to develop their language skills and participate in groups. Almost all English for speakers of other languages learners value the positive impact that the well-planned learning opportunities have on their lives. These opportunities help them to become part of their communities and progress to accredited learning which, for a few, is leading to employment.

Overall, learners of all ages are supported well to gain skills for learning, life and work. Children who are taking part in Children's Parliament activities at primary school are gaining confidence and communication skills. They are proud that they are contributing to both their local communities and to national policy developments. Young people contribute to their communities well through activities such as Clackmannanshire Youth Forum. Candidates to become Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament highly value the support and development opportunities youth work staff provide. They are more confident and aware of their own skills as a result of taking part in this process. Across community learning opportunities, partnership working is increasing the range of opportunities and supporting effective progression pathways for learners. CLD partners are using targeted approaches well to meet the needs of adult learners. As a result of participating in the adult literacy support and family learning activity in Alloa Academy, learners are gaining accreditation, developing their skills and have larger social networks. A few of these learners are progressing to paid employment or voluntary work.

Committed and ambitious volunteers run community groups and organisations that are meeting the needs of local people. They are supported effectively by partners, including the CLD service and Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface. The well-established Home-Start charity shop is

providing a safe place for volunteers to develop employability skills and gain accreditation. Volunteers are supported well to take on leadership roles within the shop and they gain valuable retail skills. A few are progressing to employment. The Wimpy Park Community Group redeveloped a walled garden that is highly valued and well used by the community. They are continuing to expand provision to make sure it is fully inclusive and meets the needs of all members of the community.

Areas for development

The CLD Service now need to better demonstrate the positive impacts of their work. The service would benefit from a more robust approach to performance monitoring. Partners are working together well to identify progress against some key areas of work. However, the overall picture of change in the CLD sector is less clear. The CLD Partnership need to consider how they can best jointly monitor, evaluate and demonstrate progress. This should include how they most efficiently gather overall trend information from all CLD partners to tell the CLD story.

The work by the FWP to extend into two further localities is at an early stage. Partners should continue to progress this work to ensure they are reaching all those who are disadvantaged or facing additional challenges in their lives.

3. Practice worth sharing more widely

The Wimpy Park Community Group is a strong example of community members delivering a large-scale infrastructure project that is benefiting the wider community. The Wimpy Park Community Group of volunteers have redeveloped a walled garden space for community use under a 25-year lease from the council. They run a popular programme of community activity throughout the year. The project is now embedded in and valued by the community. They have a clear focus on making the garden accessible and inclusive for all community members. The group continue to consult with the community to take forward further developments. It is an interesting example of a council and third sector interface working well to support a local community group to take forward a development. The group have effective communication with Clackmannanshire Council which allows support and decisions to be put in place timeously.

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 an aspect of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further.

Alona Murray
HM Inspector
19 December 2023