

# Community learning and development in The Highland Council

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# 1. Context

Community learning and development (CLD) partners within The Highland Council and the area of Mid Ross were inspected by Education Scotland during October and November 2018. During the visit Education Scotland staff talked to children, young people, adults and community organisations. We worked closely with local CLD managers, CLD providers, partners, paid staff and volunteers. We wanted to find out the quality of the strategic leadership of CLD and the quality of CLD provision in the area. We also looked at how well paid staff and volunteers are developing their own practices and building capacity. We looked at how partners are contributing to current and evolving national policy objectives such as closing the poverty-related attainment gap; prevention; reducing social isolation; tackling health inequalities; and empowering communities.

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

Senior leaders understand and value CLD methodologies. The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan has a strong focus on community engagement and partners are committed to applying CLD methods to support their development work with communities. Community planning partners are making progress with the implementation of nine Community Partnership groups which are intended to be responsive to the varying needs across Highland. There is now a need to strengthen the alignment of local provision with strategic, thematic and area priorities and plans to ensure a clear shared sense of direction. This should include a review of how resources including staff time are allocated to best support progress against priorities. It is not yet sufficiently clear how the planned roll out of locality planning and community partnerships provide a route map to inform the provision of CLD. Too often partnership groups and staff deployment do not align well with new structures, resulting in some confusion amongst partners operating at local level. However, partners have a clear commitment to change the way services are prioritised and delivered.

Overall, there is a positive culture around partnership working. Lead roles including the chairs of Community Partnerships are shared amongst partner organisations. This deliberate approach to strengthening partnership working between services is increasing officers' understanding of each other's roles and expertise and their capacity to work together to address existing and emerging community issues. Partners are committed to strengthening youth and community voice. As a result young people are influential at strategic and area level. The care experienced young people on the Champs Board have had a positive impact on corporate parenting strategies and provision. Young people on the Mid Ross Youth Forum influenced the area Children's Plan ensuring a greater focus being placed on mental health and wellbeing. Partners now need to consider how they can move beyond consultation and enable community organisations and activists to contribute to CLD strategic planning.

Partners are working to improve self-evaluation at local and project level. For example, the guides for locality planning includes elements of self-evaluation. High Life Highland staff use a management information system consistently to support them in recording their work. This enables managers to see the progress each team member is making and increasingly supports colleagues to understand and learn from each other's work. There is now a need to further improve how partners jointly understand, capture, evaluate and report the difference CLD is

making across Highland. Professional development opportunities are increasing staff skills, confidence and capacity to take on leadership roles. Partners regularly open up their training events to others. The majority of staff regularly attend relevant training which supports them to be effective. However, there is need to ensure all staff and volunteers, including those in community organisations, are able to access relevant training and development opportunities.

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

Partners increasingly make use of demographic information alongside expressed needs from community members to inform community planning. Mid Ross Community Partnership have a strong understanding of what such data is telling them about the needs of the communities they serve. Partners are aware of the need to identify and make use of key data to benchmark and create a collective picture of the impacts of CLD in Mid Ross. There is also a need to develop clear, realistic and ambitious joint targets for CLD. This will enable partners to better identify progress against priorities and report this to stakeholders, including community members. Across Mid Ross there are a range of positive upward trends and examples of strong levels of performance in individual programmes and organisations. Almost all young people gain a positive destination on leaving the two secondary schools in Mid Ross, 95.5% from Dingwall Academy and 97.2% from Fortrose Academy in 2016-17. In High Life Highland provision learning hours by registered participants have risen steadily. The number of young people gaining Saltire Awards in Ross-shire has doubled over three years. Large numbers of people participate in activities run by community organisations. The Muir of Ord Hub opening day attracted 800 residents. In Cromarty over a quarter of the population has joined the rowing club. The wide age range of the club's membership and the intergenerational nature of its activities has helped to bring people together within the local community. There are significant health and wellbeing benefits for both adults and young people arising from the Club's activities.

Across Mid Ross ambitious third sector community organisations are improving local infrastructure and delivering a wide range of services and programmes which enhance community life. These organisations are led by creative and capable volunteers. The Hub run by Muir of Ord Hall and Facilities Company is an attractive, well used and centrally located community venue. The events and services run from both this building and the trust run Village Hall contribute to community pride. Mid Ross has a rich landscape of vibrant, self-starting community organisations and groups who are increasing a positive sense of place and reducing isolation. Dingwall Men's Shed members are making a significant difference in their community through grounds maintenance projects for older people, building play equipment for children's nurseries and fundraising for other groups. Being part of the group has led to members learning new skills, making friends, reducing isolation and achieving health benefits. Enthusiastic and skilled volunteers extend learning opportunities across a range of activities. Volunteer led Strathpeffer Community Association deliver an extensive programme of social and educational activities for the community. Dingwall Youth Forum members work with staff to deliver very popular monthly fusion events for other young people. The role that community organisations play in area and locality planning requires to be significantly strengthened. Partners now need to develop a robust process to enable community organisations to engage as equal partners. This would strengthen both planning processes and the capacity of partners to understand and respond to community need.

Effective informal local partnerships and networks increase the impact community groups have. Joint projects such as a community fridge in Muir Of Ord enable community organisations, residents and business to contribute to each other's lives. Many community organisations and volunteers are positive about the high quality of support they receive from officers. However, communities would benefit from strategic and local partners working together to explore how they can provide community development, community capacity building and networking support to community groups. The lack of consistent and coordinated support is often a barrier to communities becoming full and equal partners with services.

Across Mid Ross well planned and delivered programmes are enabling learners to achieve and learn. Children in Tarradale Primary School are increasing their understanding of their local environment, gaining skills in investigation, literacy and mindfulness through taking part in a Food Education project jointly developed and delivered by a local organisation MOO Food. Young people with additional support needs are gaining skills and qualifications through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Youth Philanthropy Initiatives at St Clement's School. These young people, their parents and partners work together to choose activities with an appropriate level of pace and challenge. There are examples of well targeted learning opportunities improving wellbeing and supporting learners to address issues in their lives. These opportunities often include learners sharing their skills and expertise to extend each other's knowledge including through intergenerational programmes. The Choose Life initiative offers targeted support to young people in Fortrose. Young people involved in the project are increasing their mental wellbeing through engagement in activities such as volunteering in the 'Getting to know your techno' intergenerational project. Young people would benefit from partners working with schools to improve the joint tracking of young people's wider achievement and skills.

There are a range of high quality opportunities for young people to develop skills in leadership and celebrate their learning. Young Leaders in the High Life Highland Leadership Programme progress well through the stages of this bespoke programme, achieving a range of awards. Partners use cultural and environmental opportunities effectively to enrich the lives of families and individuals. Fèis Rois activities have clear lesson plans which identify outcomes. Members of the Workers Education Association Women in the Highlands Choir gain skills, pride and increased wellbeing from their participation and are actively involved in designing the learning programme. Delivery of English as a significant other language programme to the Dingwall based Syrian Refugees is of a high quality. Individual learning plans track progress and help staff to provide individual as well as group support. Learners are heavily involved in running celebratory that introduce Syrian culture to the wider community. There is now a need for partners to come together to review the learning offer across Mid Ross to ensure it meets the needs of both existing and potential learners in line with planning priorities for Highland and Mid Ross. Partners also need to consider how they can collectively strengthen both the offer to and the progression pathways for adult learners. The Highland Adult Learning Partnership is currently being re-established and this may provide a route to building a more comprehensive and coordinated adult learning offer.

### **What is the capacity of the local authority and CLD partners to further improve?**

This inspection of CLD in The Highland Council found the following key strengths.

- Increased value placed on CLD and partnership working.
- Community organisations improving local infrastructure and increasing learning opportunities.
- Rich landscape of vibrant, self-starting community groups increasing sense of place and reducing isolation.

- Staff and volunteers are delivering quality services and learning opportunities which improve lives.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Strengthen the alignment of local provision with strategic and area priorities and plans to ensure a clear shared sense of direction.
- Improve joint evaluation and performance monitoring to better capture and report CLD impact.
- Strengthen the role of communities in local planning and decision making.
- Develop clear learning pathways for adults.

## 4. What happens at the end of the inspection?

There are significant improvements needed and partners do not yet have a full understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement. Our officers, along with the education authority, will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will revisit the local authority to check on progress within one year of publication of the report.

Alona Murray  
**HM Inspector**  
14 January 2019

Quality indicators help CLD providers, partners and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved. You can find these quality indicators in the publication [How good is the learning and development in our community?](#)

Education Scotland evaluates four important quality indicators to help monitor the quality of CLD across Scotland. Here are the results for this inspection.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>
<b>Impact on the local community</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Delivering the learning offer with learners</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Leadership and direction</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>

**This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgments made by inspectors.**

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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