

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Midlothian Council

30 April 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Midlothian Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during March 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

The leadership of CLD at all levels is confident and effective. There is a clear shared vision and ambition for improving the lives of individuals and communities. The CLD Plan is closely aligned to the Single Midlothian Plan, and the two high-level plans complement each other well. The governance of CLD is clear, efficient and integrated well into both council and Community Planning Partnership (CPP) reporting structures and scrutiny arrangements. Regular and detailed reporting is ensuring that the council and strategic partners are clear about the progress they are making. Council internal reporting and governance is used well by senior leaders to analyse and scrutinise achievements against planned actions and targets. Midlothian Voluntary Action (MVA) is a key and vital partner in CLD. MVA contributes effectively to the leadership, governance and delivery of CLD plan priorities. The work and contribution of CLD to council and CPP priorities is valued highly by senior leaders and elected members. There are a range of opportunities for stakeholders, including young people and adults, to inform and influence the CLD Plan. For example, through commissioned research, consultations, focus groups and youth and community forums. There is a well-embedded culture of strong and effective partnership working. Clearly defined roles and high levels of trust between the Communities Lifelong Learning and Employability (CLLE) service, third sector and other partners is helping to ensure a collaborative and collective endeavour to improving lives. This is helping to make effective and efficient use of reducing resources by avoiding duplication and targeting resources to areas of greatest needs.

Council and CLD partners planning for improvement is based on robust evidence and underpinned by the comprehensive Profile of Midlothian. Partners focused on improving health and wellbeing and tackling poverty are improving their coordination of provision. This is helping to improve outcomes for individuals and families. The communication between council departments and the Federation of Community Councils, its sub-groups and local Community Councils is improving. This has strengthened links with the planning and roads departments, resulting in earlier engagement and improved communication with communities. The Shaping Places Programme is building capacity and leading to improvement. The programme has directly influenced decision-making by informing changes to the Single Midlothian Plan. Staff and volunteers know their communities and learners well. Programmes and activities are adapted well to continue to meet ongoing needs. The Local Employability Plus Partnership is a highly-effective group and network of council, CLD partners and third sector organisations. Their open and collaborative approach is helping to ensure that limited funding is distributed well to local groups and organisations.

Staff and volunteers are supported well to increase their skills and knowledge. Staff are actively encouraged and supported to suggest and to lead improvements and new initiatives. Routes into employment from volunteering and career progression in CLD (CLLE) are supported well by the council. For example, from an introduction to youth work through to degree level qualifications for a few staff. The council and CLD partners, including MVA, are effective at sharing training opportunities, which is helping to widen reach and maximise the use of available resources.

Areas for development

There is not yet shared ownership of all CLD priorities or a consistent understanding of how all key stakeholders contribute fully to the CLD Plan. Whilst the close alignment between the CLD Plan and the Single Midlothian Plan is a strength, a few key stakeholders do not fully recognise how they contribute to progressing CLD Plan priorities. Joint self-evaluation is not yet systematic across collaborative work with all relevant partners, such as the health service. Senior leaders should review current self-evaluation arrangements to ensure that collective impacts and information from all key partners helps to more fully inform and influence strategic decision-making.

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

Areas of positive progress

Midlothian Council and community planning partners gather and analyse a rich variety of data and other information well to demonstrate the positive impact they are making. Senior leaders are effective at driving this. They understand the story behind the data and benchmark their performance against similar CLD provision across Scotland. Overall, the council and partners are making positive progress towards achieving almost all of the high-level targets within the Single Midlothian Plan and CLD Plan. Case studies are used very well to exemplify where CLLE and partners are making a difference to the lives of individuals and communities. Overall, the majority of participation and achievements of learners are returning to pre-pandemic levels. A few measures show a significant upward trend over time. In recent years, the numbers of young people achieving a positive post school destination has significantly improved and is now consistently high. CLD partners gather and analyse data systematically to inform and deliver a multi-agency programme of diversionary youth work activity. As a result, they have significantly reduced levels of youth anti-social behaviour.

The local authority and partners are very effective at removing barriers to participation. For example, they deliver many programmes and activities free of charge, cover travel expenses and provide equipment. The online delivery of programmes, such as the mental health and wellbeing course, is making this more accessible to those that work or who have other responsibilities. A few CLD and other partners are working well with schools. This is helping to ensure the most appropriate, timely and effective support is put in place for children, young people and families that need it the most. Adjustments to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award provision is helping to remove barriers to participation, including for young people with additional support needs. As a result, more young people are being recognised for their achievements and have increased confidence to progress to other programmes and activities, such as volunteering. Young carers attending the Croft Street Hub are supported well to study in a safe, quiet and nurturing learning environment. Adult learners are supported well to complete accredited courses based on their needs and interests. Learners value highly the support

provided by CLLE staff, which is helping to maintain their interest in learning during difficult times in their lives.

Committed and well-supported volunteers are helping to improve lives and communities. For example, conversation café volunteers are helping adults learning English and become part of their community. Ageing Well volunteers are helping to reduce social isolation and keep older people physically active. Older adults involved in the Village Voices reminiscence group benefit from the social interaction and support from other group members. A few have developed friendships and now meet out with the group. The allocation of Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery Funds to 'trusted partners' is helping to ensure that resources reach those households on low incomes or impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. As a result, individuals and families are receiving much needed support and advice on financial management, food supplies and money to cover unexpected bills. Local community development trusts (CDT) positively benefit from effective support provided by the local authority and MVA. This is helping CDTs to secure assets, attract funding and develop their capacity to progress. CDT and local organisations network well to share their experience and learn from each other. They use community consultation and engagement well to inform their priorities. As a result, communities across Midlothian are benefiting from access to an increasing range of provision.

Overall, participants across a range of programmes and activities are gaining new knowledge and skills helping them to meet their aspirations and needs. For example, young people who are at risk of not achieving a positive destination are gaining skills through Croft Street Hub and Loanhead Vocational Learning Centre provision. Most of these young people are working towards a Foundation Apprenticeship or other Scottish Qualification Authority qualification. As a result, almost all are more aware of their skills, interests and career aims and are better able to progress to other learning. Adults attending the online mental health and wellbeing course are developing strategies to help them tackle stress and anxiety and learning how to support other members of their family. All of the adults participating in the No One Left Behind employability programme are developing skills, gaining qualifications and progressing to further learning, volunteering or employment. Through their engagement, a few learners have become increasingly self-aware, such as recognising challenges with their mental health. As a result, they are accessing the help and support they need to build their confidence and to progress. Digital learners, English for speakers of other languages students, literacy students and Gaelic learners are gaining skills and progressing to other learning. As a result of gaining new skills and qualifications, learners are better able to secure employment. Across provision, the achievements of young people and adults are regularly recognised and celebrated well.

Areas for development

Across various programmes, a few learners are not aware of having an individual action plan. Key workers should ensure that all learners are clear about the progress they are making and have ownership of their individual action plan.

3. 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.

Simon Ross
HM Inspector
30 April 2024