



Visit to community learning and development in Aberdeen City Council

11 January 2022

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1. Background

This report follows a visit by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) to Aberdeen City Council to look at community learning and development (CLD) provision. This follows a previous inspection where it was agreed that further engagement was required. During the visit we met with local authority officers, CLD partners, staff, volunteers, learners and community representatives. Our engagement enabled HM Inspectors to learn more about how learners and communities have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support health and wellbeing, and learning. We also discussed progress in taking forward the recommendations from the original inspection.

This report sets out what we found during our visit.

2. CLD in the current context

CLD, with their partners, responded quickly and effectively to support individuals and communities effected by COVID-19. CLD staff supported community groups to continue to operate and develop throughout the pandemic. They helped to provide digital devices and training on how to use them, and maintained communication through regular online conversations and meetings. CLD, education, social work, and other partners are providing responsive and co-ordinated support to families throughout the pandemic. Hubs for vulnerable children were set up quickly and staffed by a range of CLD partners, working together effectively. An outdoor learning offer provided a range of benefits for the adults and families participating, including improvements to their physical and mental health and reduced levels of stress. Many learners also gained accreditation such as Saltire, John Muir and Adult Achievement Awards.

Adult learners benefited from a swift response from CLD partners. The distribution of digital devices and other equipment helped them stay engaged through periods of facility closures. The Adult Learning Providers Group plays an important role in co-ordinating partnership working. However, the group would benefit from having a clearer oversight of the digital offer across the city. Most CLD facilities are only now beginning to re-open. This is limiting the ability of some groups to meet due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. There remain some ongoing challenges for CLD partners as a result of the pandemic, including an increasing number of people with mental health issues and increased levels of anxiety.

3. Progress with recommendations from previous report

Governance arrangements for CLD have improved considerably since the last inspection. Changes to the structure of CLD are having a positive impact on CLD staff, leading to greater clarity of purpose. CLD staff, including those who moved to new posts, are motivated and

positive about the direction of travel. The CLD Plan (2021-24) for Aberdeen is underpinned by strategic priorities for the city. Partners recognise and support the priorities in the CLD plan and there is a greater focus on securing improvement across CLD provision. Leadership of CLD is improving. There is a clearer shared vision, values and aims amongst both staff and partners. Staff now feel more involved in the development of priorities for CLD. There is stronger alignment between priorities in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, the CLD Plan and locality plans. The use of online platforms was successful in engaging a wider range of partners and local people to inform the direction of the CLD Plan.

Arrangements for the operation of Partnership Forums across Aberdeen are improving. New guidance has been recently issued and partners are now clearer about their role and purpose. Planning through the Partnerships Forums is better informed by data, collated centrally within education and CLD. As a result, families are receiving the support they need more quickly. Barriers that existed in the past have been removed and there is a greater sense of collective ownership. The move to a universal city-wide offer from CLD and their partners is beginning to more effectively target resources and address needs. However, some challenges remain in terms of CLD partners' ability to meet all the demands placed on them as a result of COVID-19.

CLD staff and their partners work together well. Collaboration is improving and there is a greater focus on learning from others through professional learning opportunities. Almost all CLD staff are now confident and competent in using digital platforms. This has increased their ability to engage with learners as the pandemic progressed. Collaboration across youth work, adult learning and community development is more evident, with staff appreciating the opportunity to work outside their areas of expertise. CLD staff are benefitting from professional learning provided through the Northern Alliance and are using this to improve and enhance their practice.

4. What happens next?

Understandably, CLD in Aberdeen City has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of CLD partners, who are implementing plans to support recovery. CLD partners have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, HM Inspectors will make no more visits to Aberdeen City in connection with the original inspection.

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