

# Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

**Shetland Islands Council**

26 March 2024

## 1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Shetland Islands Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during February 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

Overall, the leadership of CLD ensures that partners are pro-active and collaborative in responding to meeting needs. The CLD plan aligns closely to Shetland's Partnership Plan (Local Outcome Improvement Plan) and vision. Governance of the CLD Plan is clear. The CLD Partnership routinely report progress, usually on an annual basis, to the Shetland Partnership Management and Leadership Team. CLD service outcomes are reported regularly through the council reporting structures. Senior leaders recognise the value of CLD. Most actions in the CLD plan are measurable and the CLD Partnership is making positive progress with their current plan. Voluntary Action Shetland (VAS) understand well the views, experiences and challenges faced by a diverse range of community-led organisations and use this knowledge to help inform CLD planning.

Partnership working is embedded within many aspects of Shetland's service delivery. Partners communicate and network effectively and trust and respect each other's roles and expertise. As a result, referrals and signposting between partners works well, ensuring that learners receive timely support. Close partnership working at a strategic level is helping to avoid duplication and ensure that resources are well targeted. The youth and employability service is now embedded well within all Shetland secondary schools. Young people are effective in advocating for change that will support their communities and peers. For example, #ShetlandCrew, a well-supported proactive group of care experienced young people, are helping to inform and shape improvements to policy and practice. They are confident and empowered to challenge senior leaders to ensure that their voices are heard, actively listened to and acted upon.

Planning for improvement is evidence-based. Partners are solution-focused with a strong 'can do' approach. They are ambitious and aspirational about tackling inequality and inequity across Shetland. CLD practitioners have autonomy to take on a range of leadership roles. On the job learning, and opportunities to undertake qualifications, is building capacity and enabling staff to progress. CLD staff have a very good understanding of the barriers to participation that learners face, including poor connectivity, poverty, additional support needs, and transport issues. Staff use this information well to plan and adapt person-centred services to meet the needs of local people. Passionate, motivated and resilient leaders of well supported community organisations are helping to drive forward a range of ambitious local initiatives to improve and enhance people's lives. They are helping to build capacity, sustain communities and secure additional investment to support local improvements.

## Areas for development

Community organisations are not fully engaged in CLD planning. Strategic partners need to consider how to strengthen further their ongoing engagement with community organisations and how to include them in decision-making. The role of volunteers, adult learners and young people in strategic decision-making within CLD planning should also be developed further.

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

### Areas of positive progress

The work of CLD and partners is promoted well on the Shetland Partnership website. Impact case studies are shared online and in the media. Strategic partners have a clear understanding of what demographic data tells them about current and changing needs across Shetland. CLD staff and partners have a good understanding of locality profiles and other data. This, alongside community conversations and intelligence, is helping them to identify gaps in provision and to strengthen further partnership working. Employability focused partners share and jointly use data and other intelligence well to identify changing needs and monitor progress against strategic aims. Trend information for the council's CLD teams shows a mixed picture in regard to participation numbers. A decline in participation is often due to an increasing focus on targeted work to support those with greater or more complex needs. Over the last few years there are increasing numbers of adults participating in CLD activity.

CLD partners have a strong and clear focus on working with individuals and groups who experience disadvantage and inequality. A wide range of approaches, learning and development opportunities and prevention work is helping to remove barriers to participation and support inclusion. Partners delivering employment focused projects are supporting young people and adults effectively to identify their skills, set personal aims and progress. This includes those furthest from the workforce and young people at risk of leaving school with few or no qualifications. Participants feel valued and are increasingly clear about how they can progress in their lives and learning. They are gaining skills and qualifications, and progressing to apprenticeships, employment and further study. Adult learners who face additional challenges in their lives are supported well to achieve. They value highly the bespoke and holistic support that staff and volunteers provide. As a result, they are confident to try new activities, share their needs and progress at a pace that works for them. For many adults this is life changing. Partners are delivering a range of effective initiatives aimed at tackling poverty. For example, the Anchor for Families team provides effective practical help and support to families, such as food parcels and clothing and signposting to other services, including financial support. A series of 'pop-ins' across Shetland during the winter months provide warm spaces for families to engage in fun learning activities and access to support from a range of partners.

There is a long-established culture of community volunteering in Shetland, and a wide range of ambitious community organisations. Large numbers of dedicated and skilled community volunteers provide an extensive range of opportunities and services across the islands. Many of these support inclusion and help to bring communities together. Activities range from small local interventions such as those tackling loneliness and isolation with older people, to large scale inclusive community events such as Pride Shetland. Volunteers, with the support of partners, run a popular Food for the Way lunch club at Lerwick Methodist Church. This is reducing isolation by creating a social network for those that attend. Bigton Collective volunteers are working together to transform an old Kirk into an ambitious community facility with a focus on wellbeing, sustainability and the arts. Whilst the transformation is a longer-term goal, they are currently

meeting the needs of the community by providing craft and lunch groups, a second-hand shop and a community polycrhub. These initiatives bring a range of people across all age groups together, which is helping to reduce isolation and introduce local people to the expressive arts.

Across CLD provision, including work led by community organisations, learners and volunteers are gaining a wide range of skills that they are using in their lives. Junior Up Helly Aa participants are working together to plan, prepare and perform a large-scale community event. All young people involved in the project are developing a broad range of skills including practical carpentry for galley building, communication, team building and leadership. They are using these skills in other contexts, such as in school. Youth workers work effectively with school staff and other partners to deliver a clear and adaptable youth work in schools offer. Their person-centred approach is helping young people to achieve, reduce exclusion and is encouraging improvements in attendance. Young people gain confidence and new skills through participating in a range of youth and community groups. For example, those taking part in the Police Scotland and Fire and Rescue Young Volunteers are gaining self-esteem, a range of practical skills, and enhancing their team working and communication skills. Adult learning workers run a range of groups and one-to-one activities which is supporting adults to gain key skills such using digital technology and cooking. Participants are gaining confidence, feel involved and valued and for many this is leading to further learning and volunteering.

### Areas for development

The CLD partnership is not yet able to demonstrate fully how CLD is contributing to a wide range of strategic priorities. Whilst partners are committed to using their own data to inform discussions, it is not clear how well this approach enables them to understand and report on the collective impact of CLD. The CLD Plan and action plan does not currently set out specific strategic targets. As a result, partners are not able to demonstrate clearly what success should look like across all measures. In developing the next CLD plan, partners should set themselves appropriate targets to help them better recognise shared success.

### 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.

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**HM Inspector**  
26 March 2024