

Community learning and development in East Ayrshire Council

30 September 2019

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1. Context

Community learning and development (CLD) partners within East Ayrshire Council and the area of Cumnock were inspected by Education Scotland during May and June 2019. 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 highly value CLD. Community development methodologies underpin the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Plan. Leaders at all levels have a strong, shared vision in regard to empowering communities. There are aspects of very strong practice in the strategic approach partners take to engaging with and building the capacity of communities to deliver services. Local planning is driven by community-led action plans. Community development approaches are used well to address infrastructure decisions. They inform the council's approach to community asset transfer resulting in over 50 successful asset transfers completed across East Ayrshire. The strategic approach of making community engagement everyone's role is changing the lives of local people through improved signposting and identification of those at risk. Community and youth voice is very well developed at strategic level. The Children and Young People's Cabinet (CYPC) mirrors the council's cabinet structure. The CYPC are respected and have regular meetings with CPP and council members. Their advice influences strategic decisions. Members recently presented a paper to full council cabinet recommending five policy priorities for youth work in East Ayrshire Council which included, growing volunteering opportunities; celebrating young people; embedding youth voice; recognising wider achievement and improving the health and wellbeing of young people. Their recommendations were approved and will build on existing work in these areas. Community representatives sit on the CPP as equal partners.

CLD partners have a strong understanding of the public service reform agenda, are well aware of budgetary challenges and are successfully transforming the way services are delivered. The CLD Framework document is fully integrated with the community plan and the thematic delivery plans which address CPP priorities. Lifelong learning is a guiding principle within the Community Plan. However, there remains scope to strengthen the strategic direction for the CLD contribution to lifelong learning so that it mirrors the highly effective vision, planning and delivery of community development. Undertaking a joint strategic assessment of all the elements of CLD across East Ayrshire could support this. Partnership working is well developed and based on mutual respect and a shared focus on improving communities and lives. Purposeful and clear partnerships are addressing strategic priorities. For example, tackling food poverty is a major cross cutting priority for partners. The Dignified Food Project engages CLD partners well in a range of work which is improving access to food for people living in poverty. Partners share training opportunities which enables staff and volunteers to access relevant programmes. Staff benefit from professional learning which supports their practice and enables them to progress in their careers. Staff and volunteers at all levels are highly motivated, enthusiastic and trusted. They are empowered to be

creative and take managed risks. Partners use a range of self-evaluation tools to assess impact, inform planning and report progress of programmes of work. Strategic CLD partners should now consider developing a systematic cycle of shared self-evaluation at strategic and area level. This would support a joint focus on the overall impacts of community learning activities against intended outcomes and further identify any unmet needs. A few partners would benefit from further support to enhance their confidence and capacity to undertake self-evaluation.

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

Partners make effective use of data and local knowledge to identify and respond to strategic and local priorities. Community safety partners share intelligence well to inform the provision of outreach and diversionary youth work. This is contributing to reductions in youth related crime and disorder in the area. The widely-shared Southern Locality Profile identifies several negative trends in regard to economic, social and health issues. Partners are pro-active in developing provision to try to address these. For example, introducing Babychat programmes to improve breastfeeding rates. Feedback from participants indicates that most are more confident in feeding and caring for their baby as a result of taking part. However, this programme is still at too early a stage to show any improvements in health trend data. Partners are aware of the need to ensure the full impacts of key programmes are evaluated and used to inform the future allocation of CLD resources. A majority of the indicators for Vibrant Communities CLD funded activities across East Ayrshire and the Cumnock area show an upwards trend. Where the trends are mixed, this is often due to resource challenges. Over the last three years the main youth provider in the area, Yipworld, more than doubled participation at its junior transition and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) provision. However, reductions in core funding mean participation in their youth work activities overall has dropped since 2016. Partners now need to consider how they can further strengthen their sharing of data and collective understanding of community learning performance at the place based level.

The approach to community development, inclusion and participation is embedded and highly effective in empowering communities. Community representatives are equal partners and demonstrate a very strong ability to influence and shape services and decide local priorities. Community engagement is used consistently and well to inform local community planning. This results in residents having a clear sense of ownership of local plans and actions. Targets set for community consultation are very ambitious and are achieved. The basis for Community Action Plans are consultations with a minimum of 40% of households in the area. In Cumnock an exceptional rate of over 60% was achieved. Community organisations are delivering highly-valued services and improving the environment across the area. In New Cumnock partnership working is delivering substantial infrastructure improvements and building a more sustainable economic future for the village. Confident, skilled and empowered volunteers in Netherthird have established a high quality, attractive community garden. This is used as both a community space and as a learning resource for schools. The vibrancy of active community groups and organisations in the area contributes to a strong and growing sense of place. Community organisations are well supported. East Ayrshire-wide thematic partnerships support many local community groups to network with each other. Activists would benefit from more opportunities to network at area level.

Partners, including volunteer-led organisations, provide a rich range of CLD activities across the area. Cumnock Juniors Community Enterprise delivers popular and well-run activities for children, young people and adults. Their pro-active and responsive approach to inclusion means that groups that might not normally participate are encouraged and able to take up available

opportunities. Young volunteers, supported by Active Schools, extend the range of opportunities children and young people have to engage in sport and fitness activities. Partners now need to implement plans to widen young people's access to and awareness of volunteering opportunities. Young people would benefit from secondary schools developing more volunteering and learning opportunities with local community organisations. This could result in a broader range of senior phase learning pathways and work experience opportunities. Very positively, the overall number of awards gained by children and young people have risen over the last three years. However, there are downward trends in regard to some awards. Currently not all young people in the Cumnock area are supported to understand and then undertake those awards which would best recognise and celebrate their achievements and support their career aspirations. The recent training of Active Schools staff in Youth Achievement and Dynamic Youth Awards is a helpful step in this direction. The joint work with schools provides one route to develop more accreditation of children and young people's achievements. Children and young people would also benefit from partners working together with local schools to jointly track their achievements and skills and further build on learning across providers. Cumnock Academy are at the early stages of working with partners to track achievements more fully.

A key feature of the approach to learning provision in the area is that staff and volunteers have a clear focus on inclusion and take a learner-centred approach. Learners are supported well to understand and build on their strengths. Programmes delivered by home school link workers in secondary school clusters are reducing the risk of young people disengaging from learning. Logan Team Around the Community (TACO) use family learning and literacies approaches effectively to support parents and their children to learn together at a pace that recognises individual capacity. The learner-centred, flexible TACO programmes are helping to tackle the effects of poverty and social isolation within both the school and the wider community. Partners recognise the need to continue to develop and evaluate the CLD contribution to reducing the poverty-related attainment gap and improving levels of attainment. Adults, who have additional support needs, are supported very effectively at the Things Tae Dae group to build both their own and each other's skills. Several members are now volunteering in their communities. A range of well-run initiatives, such as lunch clubs and tea dances, reduce social isolation and loneliness within the area. Partners are making effective progress on improving employability. Learners in the ME2U programme are less isolated, have improved wellbeing, gain qualifications and progress onto training and employment. The programme has received several awards and is now being rolled out across East Ayrshire schools. There is scope for partners to strengthen progression opportunities for adult learners. Whilst local people benefit from the wide learning offer, learning pathways in more informal learning settings are not always clear to participants.

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

This inspection of CLD in East Ayrshire Council found the following key strengths.

- A shared community development vision empowering communities.
- Effective leadership of cultural change within services resulting in positive relationships with communities.
- Confident community and youth representatives who are equal partners in community planning.
- Ambitious and highly skilled community organisations delivering services and improving infrastructure.
- An inclusive and learner centred approach to community learning.

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

- Develop a systematic approach to shared self-evaluation and performance monitoring amongst CLD partners.
- Improve volunteering and accreditation opportunities for young people.
- Further strengthen the CLD contribution to lifelong learning.

4. What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the local authority's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified an aspect of interesting practice which we would like to explore further. As a result we will work with the local community and education authority in order to record and share more widely the interesting practice.

Alona Murray
HM Inspector
30 September 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.

Improvements in performance	good
Impact on the local community	excellent
Delivering the learning offer with learners	good
Leadership and direction	very good

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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