

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Orkney Islands Council

23 April 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Orkney Islands 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, 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

Across Orkney, the leadership and governance of CLD is strong and effective. It is supported by regular monitoring of progress and high-quality reporting. Senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to CLD. They understand the progress that CLD partners are making and where this contributes to strategic priorities. Most CLD practitioners and partners have a strong understanding of CLD priorities and can articulate where this contributes to the Orkney Community Plan 2023-30. CLD partners, represented on the CLD Partnership, demonstrate robust governance and oversight of the CLD plan and have shared ownership of the improvement priorities. They work collaboratively to reduce duplication, secure improvement and provide inclusive opportunities to meet local need. There are a few positive examples of learner and community voices influencing CLD and associated plans. These include the Jedi Council, Youth Forum and Orkney Matters.

Planning for improvement across partners represented on the CLD partnership is based on robust evidence. Partners have strong and effective arrangements in place to measure progress against the annual CLD partners' plan. CLD partners monitor their plan on a quarterly basis using a tracker system and self-evaluation. This helps demonstrate the impact of the CLD partnership and is supporting improvement. The CLD and Employability (CLDE) service use a systematic approach to planning, monitoring and data analysis to help inform improvement. A self-evaluation and quality assurance calendar ensures there is a continued focus on securing improvement. As a result, CLDE staff, at all levels, take responsibility for leading change. They have a clear understanding of shared priorities which is helping to inform their practice.

Council staff, partners and volunteers are very well supported with professional learning opportunities at all levels. This is increasing their ability to respond and adapt well to meet local needs. Volunteering across Orkney is strong and Voluntary Action Orkney's (VAO) support is helping to embed a strong culture of giving back to communities. Community associations value highly the support they receive from the CLDE service and VAO. Similarly, support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise is increasing collaboration across Orkney's development trusts. This is helping to increase access to social activities and mitigate against the rising cost of living.

Areas for development

Learners and community groups are not yet full partners in CLD strategic planning and decision making. Currently, development trusts are not directly involved in the CLD Partnership or

Orkney-wide CLD decision making. The CLD Partnership should consider how best to increase the role of development trusts and other community organisations in CLD planning.

Partners are not yet clear how strategic plans all link together. Streamlining plans would help to reduce duplication and improve reporting and monitoring. This may also reduce the need for members to be represented across multiple partnerships.

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

Areas of positive progress

The CLDE service is using a wide range of data to plan and track their outcomes. The CLDE Annual Report 2022-23 shows strong performance in most areas. Staff routinely seek feedback from learners to help plan future delivery. The CLD Partnership is starting to use data more effectively and is targeting joint resources well to drive improvement. All partners on the CLD Partnership have agreed to focus on four key areas. Although at an early stage, this approach should support partners to more effectively measure and track progress across the key areas of focus. National key performance indicators gathered for CLD Managers Scotland show strong performance in most areas. This data shows significant increases in the number of young people and adults engaged in CLD activity since 2020-21. The number of learners accessing classes at The Learning Link is almost matching pre-pandemic levels. Almost all learners are achieving one or more of their individual learning goals. CLDE staff and partners actively promote youth awards to accredit young people's learning. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of young people gaining Dynamic Youth awards in the past two years.

CLD partners work well together to provide inclusive opportunities, which is helping to remove barriers to participation. The Orkney Blide Trust works to co-design services with adults experiencing mental wellbeing challenges. As a result, services are accessible, suit member's needs, and are helping to reduce disadvantage. Parents value the support that children and young people receive through the Pupil Engagement Team at Kirkwall Grammar School. This is helping to increase attendance at school and engagement in learning. The targeted approach to develop Friday afternoon activity in Stromness and Kirkwall town centre is increasing access to a wide range of activities. Close partnership working between Police Scotland, the Pickaquoy Centre, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, Action for Children, CLDE and the Youth Café is leading to better engagement with a wider range of young people. This is helping to reduce anti-social behaviour. Development trusts and community associations are increasingly delivering projects to support those most in need. Programmes are targeted well, support cohesion and are increasing learning opportunities. This is helping to strengthen communities and reduce social isolation. English for speakers of other language (ESOL) learners are gaining skills and confidence in using English through classes, one to one support and the Language Café. This is supporting them to become part of the Orkney community. The majority of ESOL learners are progressing into volunteering, further learning and employment.

Across the wide range of CLD activity, learners are gaining confidence, knowledge and developing key skills which are helping to improve life chances. Strong partnerships with schools are contributing to positive outcomes for young people. Local employability partners work effectively to support learners to transition between well-developed pathways to best suit their learning needs and respond to labour market demands. Participants have increasing self-belief, confidence. They are better able to communicate and work in a team. Adult learners are supported well to progress towards their aims. The individual support and small group work

at The Learning Link is well planned, delivered and evaluated. Learners are overcoming challenges in their lives and a majority progress into further learning, employment, self-employment or volunteering. This is life changing for the majority of participants. Across Orkney, ambitious and effective development trusts, led well by volunteer boards, are improving their communities. They are delivering a wide range of projects that address local needs. These include large scale infrastructure projects such as North Ronaldsay Development Trust's Pund Project at Trebb to develop a large community hub. As a result, they are building community cohesion, making community life more sustainable and progressing well with their ambitious plans.

Areas for development

The CLD Partnership do not have a clear picture of the overall impact of CLD across Orkney. This includes work delivered by community organisations, such as development trusts with CLD aspects to their work. CLD strategic partners should consider how they can work with community organisations to identify ways to efficiently capture the full picture of CLD. This would more fully inform CLD planning, monitoring and reporting.

The opportunities for adults to gain accreditation are not sufficiently well developed. The CLD Partnership should consider ways to address this identified unmet need in the development of their new CLD plan. CLD partners and secondary schools need to track better the achievements of young people. This would support partners to ensure they can build on young people's skills across their provision. It would also support young people to fully recognise their own progress and skills.

3. Practice worth sharing more widely

The leadership and governance of CLD across Orkney is strong and effective at all levels. The Chief Executive of the council and other senior leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the role and function of CLD and where this aligns with strategic priorities. They value how CLD is leading to improved outcomes for learners and communities. The role and recognition of CLD has been strengthened, including additional investment in growing the CLDE team. Senior leaders are now considering the sustainability of short-term funded work and mitigating potential negative impacts. The establishment of proactive subgroups is helping to drive improvement across the CLD partners' plan.

4. 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. During the inspection, we identified aspects of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further.

Robert Hynd
HM Inspector
23 April 2024