

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

East Dunbartonshire Council

5 December 2023

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited East Dunbartonshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during October 2023. 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

Across East Dunbartonshire Council, leadership of CLD is strong. CLD is an essential and key element of the education service and community planning partnership. Senior leaders value the contribution of CLD and recognise the impact of this work on the council's and community planning priorities. This has led to significant investment in resources for youth work and family learning. For example, there is a dedicated youth worker for every secondary school and 12 permanent full-time family learning officers working across the local authority. Staff at all levels are empowered and supported well by line managers. Frontline staff are enthusiastic and provide a good service for learners and communities. Positive working relationships across the local authority departments are enabling integrated ways of working. As a result, CLD is embedded well in council plans.

The CLD partnership is continuing to develop further its role as the governance group for the CLD plan. Partners are improving their understanding of each other's roles and have well-developed information sharing arrangements. This is leading to new projects and effective partnership working. The CLD partnership understands its strengths and areas for improvement well. Partners have undertaken recent self-evaluation and this is supporting them to develop their next CLD plan for 2024-2027.

Partners are beginning to share data more consistently, helping them to identify improvements and deliver their priorities. Regular reporting of the CLD plan to the Community Planning Partnership, Community Planning Executive and the local authority is in place. As a result of regular review of the quarterly monitoring tracker, the partnership now recognises the need to review the outcomes. This will improve the monitoring of the new CLD plan. Qualitative data in the form of case studies are regularly gathered and shared across partners and the local authority, as well as on social media. This is helping to illustrate the positive impact that CLD has on people's lives. The local authority and partners have made progress in developing their engagement arrangements to identify key actions for the recently produced locality plans. This is a positive step towards developing more robust engagement with communities and measurable outcomes relevant to local needs.

Areas for development

There is a need to include more youth and community views in the monitoring of the CLD plan. The CLD partnership should build on arrangements for developing and monitoring the CLD plan, learning from the engagement approach used to develop locality plans, to strengthen

youth and community involvement. The CLD partnership should now continue to strengthen their strategic focus and to develop their shared responsibility as the governance group for the CLD plan. This will help to ensure effective allocation of resources and to avoid duplication.

CLD leaders should continue to work with staff, partners and communities to ensure that CLD priorities are well understood and articulated by all. CLD managers should ensure that priorities in staff work plans are better aligned to the CLD plan.

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

Areas of positive progress

Partners understand their communities well. A rich range of data is available through CLD partners and locality plans to support better understanding of existing and emerging needs. The use of indicators to measure the outcomes of the current CLD plan is beginning to evidence impact in a limited way. These measures include data contributed by partners which are reviewed regularly. For example, East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture reviewed the data from their free gym and swim offer. As a result, they are now working with partners to promote the offer to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation priority areas to improve uptake. Robust tracking by partners in the No One Left Behind employability group is leading to a better understanding of participant needs and more effective information sharing. The shared tracking platform has over one hundred points of entry for individual learners. This is leading to improved outcomes, with participants referred to the most appropriate programmes. As a result, participants are gaining new skills and sustaining employment over time.

East Dunbartonshire's approach to supporting young people into sustainable training and employment destinations is working well. This 'person-centred' approach is giving young people the confidence to achieve a positive outcome. As a result, the council currently has the highest levels of sustained destinations for 16-19-year-olds in Scotland. The Positive Achievements group is successfully engaging learners who have struggled to maintain school attendance. Group members are attaining national and vocational qualifications as well as developing life skills and resilience. As a result, almost all young people are achieving a positive destination. All secondary schools across the local authority now have a youth development worker. This is starting to improve life chances of young people who have struggled to achieve at school. National youth work outcomes aligned to the priorities in school improvement plans are establishing a clear and consistent approach.

CLD partners are committed to improving life chances and ensuring that socio-economic circumstances are not a barrier to participation. A significant number of well supported community groups are delivering valuable services to the most disadvantaged individuals and groups. Through participation in 'Learning Matters' courses, adults facing barriers to learning and employment are accessing appropriate pathways whilst achieving individual goals. Almost all participants are improving their confidence and using this experience to secure employment or progress to further training. Several learners also report that referrals from GPs are an important mechanism for improved wellbeing. East Dunbartonshire's 'Vision for New Scots' outlines its ambition to recognise new Scots as a force for change in communities. As a result, Ukrainian families receive a high-quality service to help them settle within the local authority area. They are supported well to gain access to education, English for speakers of other languages classes, and into employment. Almost all of them had a positive experience with host families who helped them to navigate health and social services.

The Community Grant Scheme and Community Mental Health and Wellbeing (CMHW) funds are making a positive difference to local people and community organisations. For example, substantial investment in the last two years from the CMHW fund is targeted well at vulnerable older people. Bite and Blether groups are attracting increasing numbers of older people to their weekly meetings. The Grant Advisory Committee has refined the application process in response to feedback, ensuring that the fund is well aligned to local need. The fund is a helpful gateway for applicants to access further support from East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action, even if they are not successful. This is increasing the capacity of local organisations to grow and develop.

Areas for development

Currently, not all measures in the CLD plan provide consistent data and evidence of impact. CLD partners would benefit from having clearer and more measurable outcomes, including in individual learning plans. A focus on measurable outcomes for the next plan will help to develop a more robust evidence base.

CLD leaders should continue with their plan to broaden out their effective employability data gathering to other areas of CLD. This will help to add to the understanding of the impact of CLD across a wider range of programmes.

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
5 December 2023