

Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

Scottish Borders Council

23 July 2024

1. Context

HM Inspectors visited Scottish Borders Council (SBC) to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during June 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

Senior leaders value the difference CLD makes to individuals and communities. The refreshed CLD partnership includes a broad range of enthusiastic and committed partners and a newly appointed chairperson. Following a review of CLD by the council the focus is now on the creation of a one-year interim CLD Plan. The CLD partnership has also recently reviewed its membership and terms of reference. Arrangements are now in place for CLD to report to the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). These recent changes provide an opportunity to strengthen strategic leadership for CLD. The alignment of the CLD Service (CLDS) within Resilient Communities has the potential to ensure that CLD staff make an important contribution to the community planning priorities. There are examples of effective leadership, in thematic groups and at a local level, working in partnership with CLD to meet the needs of communities, adults and young people. For example, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) staff and partners are leading effectively joint planning, delivery, reporting and progression pathways for ESOL learners.

Effective partnership working across the CLD partnership is helping to ensure improving outcomes for communities and learners. The increased sharing of resources and well-established relationships between partners are helping to strengthen collaboration and reduce duplication. Learners at the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) centre in Galashiels benefit from access to a wide range of qualifications. CLD staff have been trained as SQA assessors. This has resulted in an increased number of accredited courses being offered in most years, and this is helping to build learners' capacity further. Multiply funding has also enabled organisations such as Big Wild Life and Brothers of Charity to deliver SQA enterprise and numeracy units. YouthBorders are supporting third sector youth organisations through effective networking, training and support. For example, they distributed £90,000 to eligible member groups on behalf of SBC to keep young people warm and well over the winter of 2022-23.

Areas for development

The CLD Partnership is not yet providing sufficient governance of the delivery of the CLD plan. Reporting arrangements to the CPP have only recently been re-established. The CPP and the CLD Partnership now need to develop clear areas of responsibility and accountability to strengthen the overall governance of CLD. The CLD partnership does not yet have a strategic overview of the delivery of the CLD plan. While the newly agreed terms of reference make the governance arrangements clearer, this now needs to be embedded in the development of the new CLD plan. The CLD partnership does not yet have consistent input from community representatives, young people and adult learners. Partners should now explore options to

meaningfully include them in the development and delivery of the CLD plan. This will help to ensure that future priorities are based on the needs of learners.

There is a need to include the totality of CLD in planning, including community engagement and community development. Including all areas of CLD and a broader range of partners will help to strengthen the understanding of CLD and its impact. Following the refresh of the CLD Partnership, there is now an opportunity for partners to agree how they will monitor CLD provision and collectively capture outcomes and support improvement. This should include the contributions that CLD is making to other strategies and priorities.

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

Areas of positive progress

CLDS has arrangements in place to gather learner data, case studies and to evaluate learning programmes. This is helping to capture learner views and to evidence the impact of the work, including trends over time. Participation levels are almost back to pre-pandemic levels and in a few cases the number of learners engaged with exceeds the targets set. Positive destinations for school leavers show a year-on-year increase over the last four years. Staff are rightly proud of this improving picture. In 2022-23 positive destinations for learners in the 20% highest areas of deprivation outperformed learners in the 20% areas of least deprivation.

A mix of effective informal and formal communication between partners is helping to ensure that young people and adults can progress with their learning. ESOL learners are gaining confidence through CLD community-based provision and progressing to certificated courses. Partners work effectively together to deliver the Inspiring Young Minds programme, which benefits young people at risk of not progressing to a positive post school destination. Almost all young people who have participated in this year's programme have quickly secured positive next steps as a result. To date, around 1,000 young people have influenced how youth engagement will take place in the future. This has been achieved through the work of the Youth Engagement Listening to Learn youth participation group, which is co-producing the future youth engagement strategy. The Whole System Approach to Community Led Diabetes in Eyemouth has led to an increase in the number of physical activity opportunities and the development of community members' aspirations and confidence. They are now more able to raise concerns and take action to protect green spaces. Stow Community Trust led the creation of the Community Action Plan with a variety of partners, resulting in 71 actions which are being progressed. They have secured significant external funding to create a high-quality modern facility, providing the community with a social gathering space and signposting point for other services.

CLD staff and partners are providing tailored support to meet individuals' aspirations. This is supporting learners to progress and increase their skills for learning, life and work. Adult literacies learners are gaining confidence, increased self-esteem and motivation from their participation in a range of qualifications. Almost all learners are progressing to further learning, which is supporting them to volunteer, lead activities, support their child's learning or to seek employment. Borders Community Action effectively supports individual volunteers and community organisations. Training programmes are based on engagement with members and designed according to identified needs. The R-Evolve metal fabrication and welding programme is highly successful at engaging young people to develop their practical skills. Young people are motivated to learn, gaining confidence and considering their next steps and career aspirations. Effective partnership working in Burnfoot between education, CLD and the police is providing comprehensive family

support. As a result, children are more ready to learn and parents have access to support, if they need it.

Areas for development

Overall, the existing data for CLD is not used effectively to analyse trends or to plan the use of resources. There is currently no reporting against the CLD plan priorities and partners are not providing data against an agreed data set. The refreshed CLD Partnership should now continue with plans to establish reporting to the CPP. This will help to evidence the impact of CLD and to ensure that services can be targeted where they are needed most. There is currently insufficient use of accredited awards to recognise all learners' achievements. It would be helpful for CLD partners to review the current collective offer and to explore how this could be extended further to complement and enhance the range of formal qualifications offered. Learners do not have sufficient opportunity to recognise and celebrate their achievements. Joint celebrations across a range of CLD related learning settings could increase the recognition of the skills learners are developing for learning life and work. This could also showcase life changing impacts, whilst demonstrating the improved outcomes for communities.

3. Main points for action

The following main points for action are required.

- SBC should strengthen and embed the governance arrangements for CLD planning with clear roles and responsibilities and reporting arrangements between the CLD partnership and the CPP. This should include the full range of CLD partners, community representatives, adult learners and young people.
- The CLD Partnership should develop robust self-evaluation and data gathering across all partners to evidence collective impact.

4. What happens next?

The local authority and their CLD partners are not making sufficient progress with their CLD plan and HM Inspectors have identified important areas requiring improvement. As a result, we will visit the local authority again approximately one year following the publication of this report to evaluate progress made by the local authority and their CLD partners in addressing these.

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