

Community Learning and Development in West Lothian Council

12 November 2018

For Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators

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1. Context

Community learning and development (CLD) partners within West Lothian Council and the area of Armadale and Whitburn were inspected by Education Scotland during August and September 2018. 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?

The governance of CLD across West Lothian is improving. Despite a period of considerable change, CLD managers are working well to ensure that staff and partners are engaged in planning for change. Elected members and senior leaders have a good understanding of the role of CLD and how it contributes to the key priorities of the council. Visions, values and aims are well-understood across partners. The recent re-structuring of CLD is enhancing the learning offer to communities and learners. Corporate priorities are now informing the development of the CLD Plan for 2018-21. The council and its partners have a strong focus on addressing poverty and disadvantage. This is evident in work to mitigate the impact of Universal Credit and the introduction of Holiday Lunch and Activity programmes. Reporting on CLD outcomes is clear and senior managers exercise flexibility to ensure that the correct outcomes are being measured and reported on. The West Lothian Assessment Model is well-established and CLD are using data more effectively than in the past. Connections between the CLD Plan, the Education Services Management Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) are improving. However, whilst joint working is improving, partners should continue to review existing structures to ensure there are clear lines of communication and reporting between thematic and locality planning. There is also scope to strengthen community voice at a strategic level. The recent formation of a Development Trust Forum has the potential to enhance the role the development trusts and social enterprises have in decision making. Similarly, youth voice at a strategic level could also be improved. Improving joint self-evaluation in aspects of CLD would better capture the overall impact on learners.

Across partners staff feel well-supported by managers to carry out their roles. Almost all staff have regular access to support, supervision and appraisal. CLD staff continue to seek out practice from elsewhere in Scotland to help them reflect on and improve their practice. Part-time and sessional workers are accessing regular training and development opportunities. Opportunities for leadership are supported well through line management structures, for example, working with dyslexia. Staff are given strategic leads for specific areas of work such as sexual health. West Lothian is the first local authority to achieve the Gold Chartermark for work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender young people. Activity Agreement Steering group partners share practice and develop new approaches as a result. However, there is potential to improve the coordination of training and professional development opportunities. A few CLD staff would benefit from further challenge and support to ensure their practice is up to date and relevant.

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

CLD partners are improving the life chances of learners and the wider community. Analysis of need is improving and features in a range of plans such as the CLD Plan for 2018-21. Challenging targets for CLD are outlined in the LOIP. Reporting against outcomes is helping to target resources more effectively. Economic Development data is starting to drive Locality Planning priorities and there is a strong focus on reducing inequalities and addressing poverty. Small improvements in the numbers of young people completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award are evident. The participation rate for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is also improving. Although some young people are not completing awards within the year, many will complete these at a later date. The participation of young people in Activity Agreements shows a positive trend. This is leading to improving outcomes for young people in Armadale. CLD staff are starting to benchmark with a view to improving performance and this could be furthered through the Regional Improvement Collaborative. The Larder Cook School and the Whitburn Internal Hub both demonstrate positive trends in relation to outcomes for young people. The use of clear, measurable targets in plans would help partners better demonstrate their collective impact. Similarly, young people would benefit from partners collectively tracking their achievements. Increasing numbers of adult learners access support from CLD and more people living with disadvantage are using services. More are progressing into positive destinations as there are slight increases in the achievement of personal goals. However, numbers of adult learners across the area remain relatively low and there is more to do to ensure that learners are aware of programmes on offer.

Almost all community groups and organisations provide a good level of service in Armadale and Whitburn. The Dale Hub offers a varied programme to the local community that helps people to progress their learning. Programmes such as the gardening project at the Dale Hub foster a strong sense of pride amongst local people. Fauldhouse Community Development Trust offer a range of quality programmes driven by community need. They are successfully attracting funding for a range of activity. Groups such as Stoneyburn and Bents Future Vision provide advice regarding benefits and finance whilst engaging local young people in positive activities. Communities across Armadale and Whitburn demonstrate a strong sense of 'place'. Across the area, third sector organisations and partners deliver a good range of community events and celebrations. This is creating a strong sense of social cohesion. Community groups value diversity, providing programmes based on need such as the Whitburn Summer Lunch Club. Similarly, the Whitburn Re-generation Group is engaging local people in the design of local plans and priorities. The Armadale Shed makes a positive difference to the lives of older adults by reducing social isolation and building skills.

Whilst community groups are delivering good quality programmes, there is scope to clarify the support available to small community organisations. In some cases this is limiting the capacity of organisations to plan for the future. The Volunteer Sector Gateway and the council need now to work together to identify needs and jointly plan how these can be addressed. Whilst the Summer School programme had a positive impact on families there is scope to strengthen its contribution to raising attainment with local schools. A partnership approach to supporting volunteering would also strengthen the offer to volunteers across the area.

The learning offer for young people across Armadale and Whitburn is strong. CLD staff deliver high quality programmes to young people in local secondary schools. The offer is well-developed and based on the needs of young people. Increasing numbers of young people are registering to vote as a result of participation in the Democracy Challenge. Fauldhouse Girls Group members help design the activities, giving them access to a wide range of experiences.

Breakfast clubs run in conjunction with Active Schools staff support children in primary schools to better engage with learning. Across partners there is a strong focus on employability and improving outcomes for young people. The learner-based approach at The Larder Cook School fosters a strong sense of ownership amongst young people and their personal achievements are recognised and celebrated. More young people are becoming self-reliant as a result of their involvement in the Whitburn Internal Hub. The needs of participants engaged in Activity Agreements is key to ensuring school leavers move into employment or further learning.

Many adult learners are motivated and engaged in their learning. Most are well-supported to progress their learning goals. Through the Driving Theory programme, adults are gaining skills and improving confidence levels. Effective partnership working between the NHS and adult learning staff results in strong progression rates. Most programmes are designed with learners in mind and offer an appropriate level of pace and challenge. The Lip Reading class provides a life line for adults with hearing loss. All learners have individual learning plans based on their needs. Parents are supported to progress their learning through Bookbug sessions at Whitburn library and the Play Lab programme. However, next steps for a few learners across Armadale and Whitburn are not clear. Going forward, care should be taken to ensure that all adult learners have the opportunity to progress their learning. The learning offer for families and adults could also be clearer. Increasing opportunities for young people and adults to gain accreditation and celebrate their achievements would be beneficial.

This inspection of CLD in West Lothian Council found the following key strengths.

- Positive sense of place and civic pride.
- Improved governance of CLD.
- Well targeted programmes leading to positive outcomes.
- Strong and effective community organisations.

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

- Improve community, youth and learner voice.
- Improve the consistency of support to community organisations and volunteers.
- Further strengthen joined up working to capture and develop CLD outcomes.

4. What happens at the end of the inspection?

The inspection team was able to rely on the high quality self-evaluation provided by the local authority. Partners have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement and communities are achieving well. As a result we have ended the inspection process at this stage.

Sheila Brown
HM Inspector
12 November 2018

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	good
Delivering the learning offer with learners	good
Leadership and direction	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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