



2023-2028

Our Key Findings and Priorities

Sufficiency Strategy

Children Looked After, Care Experienced Young People and Children on the Edge of Care



What is "sufficiency"?

"Sufficiency" means having enough of the right accommodation and services, in the right places, to effectively support Swindon's children, young people and families. This also includes thinking about the quality of those services and whether or not they are meeting the needs of Swindon's families, children and young people.

Why have a sufficiency strategy?

Producing our sufficiency strategy has helped us to better understand:

- the needs of the children we look after and care experienced young people in Swindon, what their and how these might change over time;
- what we have available now to respond to these needs and how this might need to develop in the future; and therefore
- The key things we need to focus on together over the next five years.

Why is sufficiency important?

Swindon Borough Council is legally required to look at sufficiency and the term is defined in the **Children's Act 1989** - the primary legislation in which all Children's services operate. The act requires all local authorities to take steps that secure, as far as reasonably practicable, enough accommodation within the authority's area that meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after.

These responsibilities were **further strengthened in the 2004 Act**, as follows: "Each Local Authority has a duty, under section 10 of the Children Act (2004) to promote co-operation with its relevant partners with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area."

Aside from being a statutory duty however, we also know that working to secure the right homes for children, in the right places and at the right time, makes a massive difference to Swindon's children, and is a key part of how we can enable them to **achieve better outcomes**.



Our vision:

At Swindon Borough Council our aspiration is for every child and young person in Swindon to be safe from harm and abuse, be enabled to reach their full potential and develop skills for life, enjoy healthy lifestyles and be happy and active members of the community.

Swindon's Vision for Children's Social Care and Early Help Services

Safe Practice	Early Intervention	Direct Work	Workforce Development	Children we Look After	Impact and Outcomes
We work together with all our partners to ensure our most vulnerable children and young people are safe from harm.	We will ensure that we will intervene at the earliest opportunity to effect positive change and offer timely and proportionate action to children's needs.	We will ensure that our children, young people and families are supported to fully work with us.	We will ensure that we have competent skilled and stable staff including sufficient numbers of Fostering families, who reflect the diversity of our borough so children receive timely responses to have their needs met.	All the Children we look after will be protected, educated, are healthy and are fully prepared into adulthood.	We will all continue to build an environment where social work practice will thrive and ensure all children and Young People achieve good outcomes.

Our Care for Children Pledge states



We will Respect you



We will Care for you



We will Support you



We will help you Grow

Our aim:

- ✓ Through this strategy, we aim to:
- ✓ Ensure children and young people are living in the right type of home to meet their assessed need/s and support them to become independent, thriving adults.
- ✓ Ensure that there is sufficient choice in the market locally, to increase the chances of a child being offered a home that is right for them, first time, as close to their original home and existing support networks as possible (where this is safe and appropriate). Be a sustainable and socially responsible Council by working with providers to source good quality homes within our budget.

Our Population Data

Population of Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People:

- In 2022/23 957 families received an Early Help Assessment.
- 579 children were being supported through a Child in Need Plan. An additional 379 children were going through the assessment process at this time.
- In total, 480 different children were looked after at some point during the year 2022/23.
- In 2022/23, 154 children had a new episode of care.
- As at the end of March 2023, there were 338 children looked after by SBC. This represents 67 per 10,000 population aged under 18.
- There were 39 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in care at the end of March 2023
- In 2022/23, of the 154 children who have entered care in Swindon, 34 (22%) were UASC.

In terms of the characteristics of the children looked after as at 31 March 2023:

- A decreasing number of the children we look after are recorded as male (58.88% compared with 61.4% in 2022). An increasing number of Cared for Child are recorded as female (41.12% compared with 38.6% in 2022).
- The ages of children that we look after have stayed relatively the same as last year. There has been a slight decrease in the 11-17 year old age range from 58% in 2022 to 55% in 2023.
- The majority of the children we look after (246, or 72.8%) are White British or White Other. However there is still an over representation of ethnic minority children looked after compared to the local population.
- People from minority ethnic group's account for approximately 18% of the Swindon population, but represent 27.2% of the Children Looked After population – however, this is being driven upwards even further by the increasing numbers of UASC in the Cared for Child population.

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of Children Swindon Borough Council Look After	302	305	331	338
Number of children living with an in house fostering family	88	71	62	57
Number of children living with connected carers, foster to adopt, with parents or in unregulated homes	43	59	74	62
Number of children living with a fostering family from an Independent fostering agency	101	119	118	116
Number of children living in a residential children's homes (private)	38	37	38	50
Number of Children (under 18's) living in semi-independent / supported accommodation/ supported lodgings	19	19	35	50
Other accommodation (Secure Residential, Respite, Youth Offending & Other)	13	0	4	3

In 2022/23, 18 children (12.95% of all children who no longer needed to be looked after by Swindon Borough Council) were adopted. This is higher than the national average (10%) and slightly higher than our statistical neighbours (12.75%).

14 children (10.07% of all children who no longer needed to be looked after by Swindon Borough Council in 2022/23) saw their care journey end as a result of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). This is lower than the national average (13.56%) and on par with our statistical neighbours (9.48%).

Key findings

The number of homes out of borough and more than 20 miles away continues to be significantly higher than the national average (15%) and our statistical neighbours (14%) and is linked to a historical lack of local provision, particularly in relation to homes for children with complex behaviours/needs and older children.

In March 2023, 44.91% of the total Cared for Child population were living more than 20 miles from their originating address. In March 2022 this was 28.8% and only 6 of these were placed out of borough because there was no home available to meet their needs within the borough at that time.

Detailed projection work has taken place in Swindon, the overall number of children looked after is expected to increase over the next three years, however, modelling assumes the increase in children looked after numbers will be almost exclusively due to an increase in UASC and that the non-UASC cohort will remain stable.

Forecast suggests there will be 384 by July 2026 and potentially up to 392 by March 2027 (approximately 300 - 315 non-UASC Cared for Child).

The number of children looked that are not UASC have remained stable (and are predicted to continue to remain stable) due to the following factors:

- Fewer children are being voluntarily brought into care
- Plans which support a child having a forever home sooner are being decided earlier
- More children are being adopted more quickly
- Edge of Care service provision and the introduction of the Family Safeguarding Model are helping children stay at home where it is safe to do so
- Practice Improvement is resulting in fewer children needing to come into care

The predictions show that foster care will remain

the primary home type for children looked after. Given the complexity of needs being presented by greater numbers of children (and the lack of suitable foster care homes available) we are expecting to see a potential increase in the proportion of children looked after requiring residential provision at an earlier age.

However, this is predicted to be offset as we aim to move young people aged 16 & 17 out of residential children's homes and into semi-independent provision (including Supported Lodgings) through the implementation of the Preparation for Independence Programme.

For financial analysis, please see the full Sufficiency Strategy document.





What are we doing?

- ✓ We will continue to deliver our foster carer recruitment and retention strategy to increase the number of in-house Fostering families, including Parent & Child homes, emergency/out of hours homes and homes for brothers and sisters and teenagers.
- ✓ We work with external Children's Home and Registered accommodation and support providers to set up new homes in our local area.
- ✓ We will continue to ensure practice models that prevent children entering care are in place and supported by our Early Help service and Edge of Care services.
- ✓ We will continue to use trauma-informed practice that is also strengths and relationship based.
- ✓ We will continue to use frameworks when finding homes for children as local to Swindon as possible and that can meet their needs.
- ✓ We will continue to strengthen the plans for change into adulthood for young people, our Plans for Change Strategy has a clear pathway outlined for cared for children and the care experienced young people and for their social workers and Pathway Advisors to follow.
- ✓ We ensure we consistently utilise evidence-based screening tools when quality assuring homes for children. We ensure that we carefully assess children's needs to ensure they are receiving the right support at the right time and in the right place.



What we will do in the future

- ✓ To improve foster care recruitment, a strategy is being developed by the inhouse fostering service.
- ✓ Improve the proportion of the children we look after living within Swindon through co-production and partnerships by working with providers and supporting them to increase the number of homes local to Swindon and supporting them to prioritise these homes for Swindon children.
- ✓ Continue to engage with the market, we will hold Swindon specific market engagement events for local providers and those seeking to expand into Swindon.
- ✓ We will review the Sufficiency Strategy at least every 12 months to ensure we continue to focus on the right things as our context changes.
- ✓ Continue work with Swindon's Housing Department to increase access to semi-independent and permanent housing options for older young people.
- ✓ We will continue to visit the homes where children live and meet with the providers that look after these homes to make sure they are of high quality for our children.
- ✓ We will continue work collaboratively with our health colleagues and our colleagues in the third sector to deliver services that meet the needs of Swindon children and young people.

