



# **Children looked after (CLA), Edge of Care & Care experienced young people**

Sufficiency Strategy

2023-2028

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## 1.0 Foreword

The vision at Swindon Borough Council (SBC) is to ensure that all of the children and young people we look after and that are care experienced receive the very best care and support and achieve the best outcomes. In Swindon, we work very closely with our children and young people and engage with them to ensure they are listened to, that they are safe, healthy and happy and that they achieve the very best at their school and in later life.

As corporate parents to the children and young people we look after, we want the very best for them. It is our responsibility to make sure they receive a standard of care that we would consider to be good enough for our own children. We all take this responsibility extremely seriously.

We are investing heavily in better helping families to stay together wherever possible. We are further committed to returning children home where it is safe to do so and it is in the child's best interests.

This strategy sets out what we as a council are doing for children and young people that need extra care and support, whilst ensuring looked after children have a safe place to live, are cared for appropriately and that where appropriate these children and young people live as close to home as possible by building local provision.

## 2.0 Introduction

This *Sufficiency Needs Assessment 2023-2028* outlines what we know about Swindon's children looked after and care experienced young people, and how we as a local authority (along with our community partners and other local authorities within the region) plan to provide high quality, local, care and accommodation now and into the future.

### Vision for Children Looked After in Swindon

At Swindon Borough Council (SBC) 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.

For children looked after (CLA) and care experienced young people, this also means ensuring that they have a safe place to live, where they are well cared for and supported to achieve their goals. We are committed to finding homes for children in Swindon or as close to Swindon as possible. We are required (by central government and Ofsted) to do everything we can to make sure we have enough accommodation and carers available within our local area to be able to meet your needs. This is referred to as our "Sufficiency Duty".

This Children Looked After Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028 talks about what we know about our children we look after and care experienced young people and what we as a local authority are doing over the coming years to make sure that we can offer the right homes (e.g., foster care, a children's home or supported accommodation).

### Vision for Children's Social Care and Early Help 2023/25

Our vision is built upon a belief that the best place for children and young people to grow is within their families where it is safe to do so. Our job is to support families to maintain children safely in their care, and where this is not possible, to provide children with a secure and permanent home in which they can recover from harm and flourish.

Success is dependent on a Borough wide approach with strong and effective working relationships across a wide range of Partners, as well as support from the administration Council and practice which is informed by children's voices and critical reflection from ourselves.

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 foster carers, 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

### 3.0 Policy Context

This document seeks to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people by providing guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 1989. Section 22G requires local authorities to take steps that secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after ('the sufficiency duty'). Section 27 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on other local authorities, local authority housing services and health bodies to assist the Children and Young People's Service in carrying out its functions under the Act. This includes assisting in the Corporate Parenting function and to provide joined up services that best meet the needs of the child.

In 2010, the Government published statutory guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 'General Duty of Local Authority

to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children'. Since May 2014 there is a duty in the Children and Families Act (2014) for local authorities to have staying put arrangements in place to enable young adults to remain in their foster homes until they are 21 years old.

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 extended the duties on all local authorities to incorporate a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and care experience young people up to the age of 25.

This strategy is linked to and informed by the following:

- The Joint Strategic Needs Analysis
- The Swindon Borough Council Offer to Care Experienced Young People.

### 4.0 Our Priorities

#### Through this strategy, we aim to:

1. 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.
2. 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).
3. Work with families and their networks to allow a child to safely remain at home or return home quickly after a period in care. Where this is not possible, we aim to secure permanent arrangements through the use of adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) or long-term fostering arrangements.
4. Be a sustainable and socially responsible Council through implementing robust commissioning and/or service delivery arrangements which consistently secure best value for money (achieving good quality provision within our budget envelope).

### 5.0 CLA and Care Experienced Young People Population – an overview

Please refer to APPENDIX 1- The Children Looked After and Care experienced Young People Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028 Placement Sufficiency Needs Assessment 2023 for an overview of the CLA and Care experienced young people Population. The Needs Assessment provides a snap shot in time as at the 31st March 2023, describing what we know about our CLA and Care experienced young people Population, for example: their ages, reasons for entering care, their health needs and levels of participation in education, employment and training.

### 6.0 Homes for Children Cared for by Swindon Borough Council

#### Provision of Placements

The majority of Swindon's CLA are placed in foster care (204 or 60.54%) however this number is much lower than anticipated and the number of young people living in children's homes and semi-independent accommodation is rising (54 or 16% in children's homes and 44 or 13% in semi-independent/ supported accommodation). Most of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). young people arriving are males aged 16 and 17. These young people are most often placed in specialist semi-independent provision located outside of Swindon – impacting on the overall numbers of young people in this kind of placement and also impacting Swindon's rate of CLA located greater than 20 miles.

Of those CLA living in a foster care arrangement, 89 were living with general foster carers or connected

(family or friends) carers, registered with the SBC Fostering Service. 118 were living with foster carers registered with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). 64 of all foster placements were at that time confirmed as being permanent/long term placements for the children.

The Children's Home Finding Team monitors the quality of provision by keeping a close eye on Ofsted ratings. Children are only placed in regulated provision which is Ofsted rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. Where it is identified that a child is being cared for in provision that changes to less than Good while the child is in placement, a clear process is followed to ensure that the child is not at risk of immediate or potential harm, regular and robust management oversight of the placement is implemented, and the provider's progress against their Improvement Plan is monitored.



## Children Looked After by Type of Placement, incl UASC

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Number of children in care</b>	359	352	302	305	331	338
<b>Number of children placed in house fostering</b>	117	83	88	71	62	57
<b>Number of children placed with connected carers, foster to adopt, with parents or in unregulated placements</b>	57	54	43	59	74	62
<b>Number of children placed with Independent fostering agencies (IFAs)</b>	131	126	101	119	118	116
<b>Number of children placed in residential children's homes (private)</b>	32	45	38	37	38	50
<b>Number of Children (under 18's) placed in semi-independent / supported accommodation / supported lodgings</b>	n/a	24	19	19	35	50
<b>Other accommodation (Secure Residential, Respite, Youth Offending &amp; Other)</b>	22	20	13	0	4	3

## Location of Placements

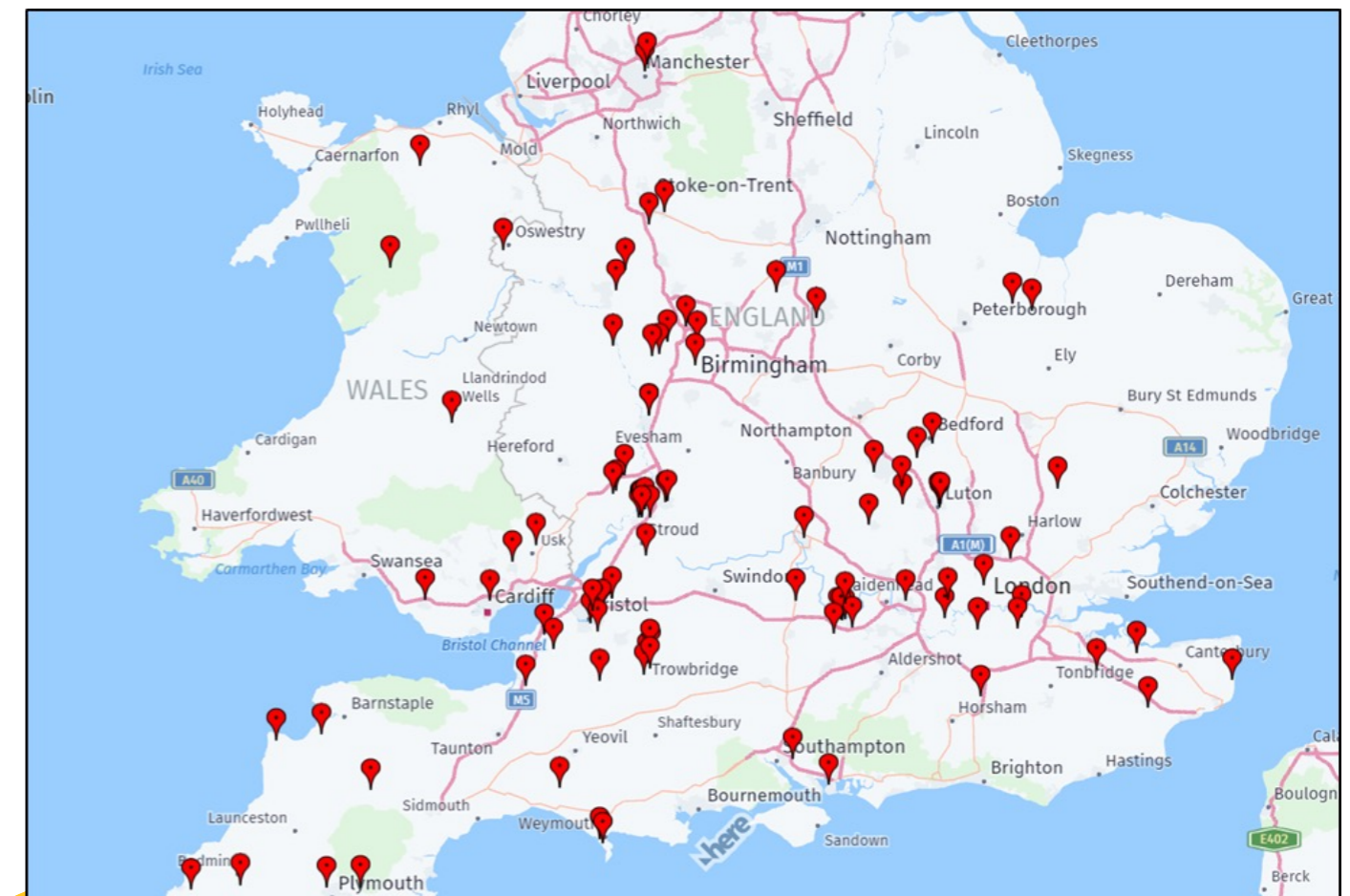
The number of placements out of borough and more than 20 miles away continues to be significantly higher than the national average (15%) and our statistical neighbours (14%) and is linked to a historical lack of local provision, particularly in relation to placements for children with complex behaviours/needs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

In March 2023, 44.91% of the total CLA 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 placement available to meet their needs within the borough at that time.

Unfortunately, due to the impact of the pandemic on fostering placements, growing issues within the placements market nationally (as described in section 4.5), and the rapid increase in UASC requiring specialist accommodation and support, the proportion of children and young people needing to be placed outside of Swindon has increased significantly.

Although too many of our CLA are placed out of borough, Figure 12 (the map below) shows that a large number of children are placed in neighbouring authorities or on the M4 / M5 corridors, meaning that access to these children (by their social workers and other professionals) is easier than it is for children placed further afield.

## Location of Children's Placements - Out of Borough, as at March 2023



## Placement Sufficiency by Type

### Foster Care

There is a national shortage of foster placements. In Swindon we continue to have challenges with foster placements locally (and nationally) for:

- Sibling groups
- Teenagers
- Parent and child placements
- UASC
- Children with additional needs/ disabilities
- Emergency/ out of hours foster placements (including PACE / Remand beds)

We continuously work to identify children currently in residential placements who may be ready or nearing readiness for step down to foster placements. These 'step down' plans also form part of our planning to reduce the budget pressure in relation to placements. There is a challenge however to find available placements for these young people and for a number of young people in the past 12 months we have made new residential placements in the absence of an available foster placement.

### In House Fostering

Although the Fostering Service and the Communications Team are working hard to recruit, the conversion rate from enquiries to approval of suitable foster carers is still very low. 45 foster care households have been lost during the last 12 months for a range of reasons including retirement and de-registration.

Between the 1st April 2022 and the 31st March 2023, the Fostering Service received 241 enquiries and 18 applications and the following fostering household were approved by ADM having received a positive recommendation from Foster Panel.

Not permanent (all applicants are assessed as non- permanent initially)	2
Family and Friends	6

### The current capacity in-house as at 31st March 2023 was as follows:

Permanent	10
Not permanent	28
Family and Friends	15
Short breaks- for children who are also looked after	8
Short breaks - for children who are not otherwise looked after	2

There is close working between the Home Finding Team and the Fostering Team and the Home Finding Team Manager attends weekly Fostering Managers meetings and the fostering duty worker attend 2 weekly placement search review meetings each week. This approach encourages forward planning and maximum and creative use of our in-house fostering resource.

Wherever possible children are placed within their families. Often family members are local and the majority of our children placed with connected carers are within Swindon. Work has been undertaken to strengthen the assessment process for 'connected carers' and where possible the Fostering Team are supporting and advising social workers completing viability assessments.

### Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

In terms of placements with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), SBC has joined the consortium responsible for the South Central IFA Framework. The most recent version of the contract went live in April 2022. The South Central IFA Framework and Consortium is supported by a Contract Management / Framework Coordination team, jointly funded by all local authorities but located within Bournemouth, Christchurch and Pool (BCP) local authority.

We are meeting with our top IFA's on a quarterly basis and IFA's are sharing their challenges in recruiting and retaining foster carers. The Home Finding Team request that providers send updated vacancy lists on a weekly basis to ensure we continue to access local homes as often as possible.

### Children's Residential Homes

SBC does not own or manage any regulated Children's Homes. SBC's Strategic Commissioner for CLA and Permanence has been working hard to build relationships with children's home providers

and there is now growing interest in delivering provision within Swindon. In 2019 there was only one children's home in the borough, and it was a highly specialist provision for a small number of children with disabilities. There are now six (6) registered children's homes, with a total of 21 beds and at least another 3 properties purchased by external providers, with the aim to be registered with Ofsted and fully operational in 2023.

### Semi-Independent Accommodation

Supported accommodation provides accommodation with support for 16- and 17-year-old looked after and care experienced young people, to enable them to live semi-independently.

As children grow up and approach adulthood, they gradually gain more independence from their parents. The care system seeks to replicate this transition to independence for children. While most children in the care system will be best placed in foster care or a children's home, from the age of 16, a looked after child can leave care (becoming a 'care experienced young person') and/or move to supported accommodation if they are ready for it.

This provision can be appropriate for some older children where it is what they want and it can meet their needs and keep them safe as part of a carefully managed transition to independence. The aim of supported accommodation is to support young people to develop their independence in preparation for adult living while keeping them safe in a homely and nurturing environment.

In July 2022, the government laid the first set of regulations required to introduce reforms to supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-old looked after children and care experienced young people. This first set of regulations defined supported accommodation and set out some

exclusions as to what would be considered supported accommodation and extended powers to the Secretary of State to make further regulations in respect of supported accommodation.

The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 will apply to all Support Accommodation Providers. Ofsted began registering providers from 28 April 2023. The Regulations and guidance must be complied with for the purposes of registration and as soon as providers and managers are registered with Ofsted. If a complete application for registration with Ofsted has not been made before 28 October 2023, it will be an offence to carry on or manage a supported accommodation service on or after that date.

Swindon has also moved from having 2 providers of semi-independent accommodation to 7 providers offering placements to young people. There are in the region of 70 beds available across the 7 providers within Swindon. We have been actively meeting with existing and new providers to communicate our need for this type of placement option for Swindon young people and will continue to do so.

Despite the increase in accommodation providers we continue to place some young people in semi-independent accommodation outside Swindon due to matching and availability of placements. Work is currently underway to further increase the availability of semi-independent accommodation options in Swindon.

## Cost of Children's Placements

In 2022/23 around 80% of the council's budget was allocated to be spent on social care services for adults and children in Swindon.

Unfortunately, the costs associated with accommodating children continue to rise, resulting in significant pressure on local authority budgets. Pressure on the SBC Placements budget has specifically been as a result of:

- Increase in the number of children and young people being placed in residential placements where no suitable foster families can be found
- High demand and limited availability of placements to support young people with complex needs
- The number of in-house foster placements has continued to decrease despite all the fostering campaign work, which has resulted in the increase use of external independent fostering agencies and children's homes
- Increase in demand for high cost Parent & Child placements
- The increased cost of living and Cost of living Crisis faced by foster carers and providers alike
- Regulation of 16+ Semi- Independent/ Supported Accommodation provision

## Average Weekly Cost per Placement 2018 – 2023 (as at 31 March)

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Independent Fostering Agencies</b>	£817	£850	£873	£884	£866	£903
<b>Residential Children's Homes</b>	£3,254	£3,924	£4,295	£4,664	£4,969	£5,478
<b>Semi-Independent Accommodation</b>	£899	£1,240	£734	£1,104	£877	£1,750

## Spend on Swindon CLA Placements 2018 - 2023

	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023
<b>Independent Fostering Agencies</b>	£5,087,839	£4,146,761	£4,759,171	£5,056,899	£5,350,471
<b>Residential Children's Homes</b>	£7,348,149	£7,711,049	£7,356,391	£8,458,862	£12,048,560
<b>Semi-Independent Accommodation</b> <i>This is the total for semi-independent and supported Lodgings.</i>	£1,777,390	£1,090,538	£1,105,106	£1,940,955	£1,631,166
<b>Total</b>	<b>£14,213,378</b>	<b>£12,948,348</b>	<b>£13,220,668</b>	<b>£15,456,716</b>	<b>£19,030,197</b>





## 7.0 Projections on Demand for Provision

Detailed projection work has taken place in Swindon, led by the Corporate Finance Team. The overall number of children looked after is expected to increase over the next three years, however, modelling assumes the increase in CLA numbers will be almost exclusively due to an increase in UASC and that the non-UASC cohort will remain stable. It is forecasted that the total number of CLA will be up to 384 by July 2026 and potentially up to 392 by March 2027 (approximately 300 - 315 non-UASC CLA).

Non-UASC CLA numbers have remained stable (and are predicted to continue to remain stable) due to the following factors:

- Fewer children are being voluntarily brought into care
- Permanency Plans for Children's futures 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

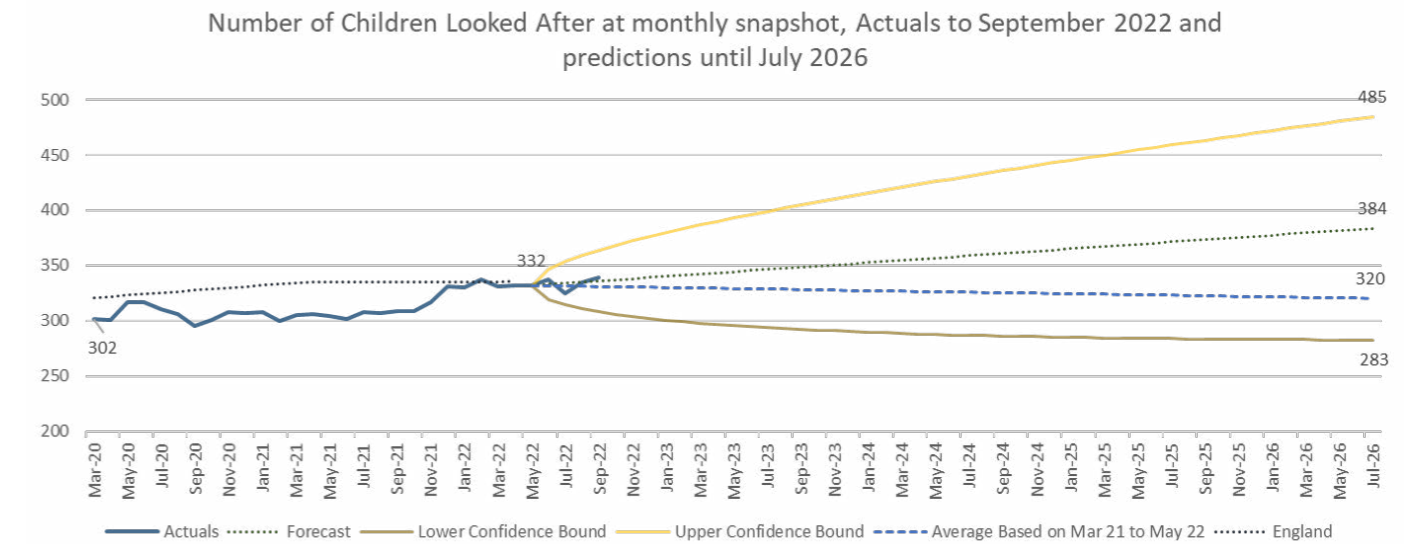
The predictions show that foster care will remain the primary placement type for children looked after. Given the complexity of needs being presented by greater numbers of children (and the lack of suitable foster care placements available) we are expecting

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.

There is forecasted to be significant pressure put on Children's Services budgets over the next three years due to the following factors:

- **Rapidly increasing inflation and the cost of living crisis is expected to drive the average cost of IFA and Semi-Independent placements up by at least 5% and residential children's home placements up by 10%.**
- As the number of UASC increase this will impact on the number of placements available in the country and could drive up costs due to demand.
- Semi-independent provision currently are not regulated, the Government have confirmed this type of provision will become regulated which will:
  - Increase cost of placements to meet regulatory need
  - Reduce the number of providers if they decide to pull out of this market due to increased regulation, which would then further drive up the cost of this provision type due to demand outstripping supply.

## Estimated CLA Numbers 2022 - 2026



## The Challenges

### National Context

In the last two years there has been increasing national and regional concern about the state of the markets for children's social care and education, resulting in a number of important reviews:

- The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England (Final report published May 2022)
- The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) market study into children's social care provision (published March 2022)
- SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time (published March 2022)
- South West Market Position Statement (an outcome of the South West Sufficiency Project, published September 2022, updated November 2022)
- National safeguarding practice review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex needs in residential settings, (This review sets out recommendations and findings for national government and local safeguarding partners to protect children at risk of serious harm).
- Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation which concluded in May 2023.

The findings of the Competition and Markets Authority study (paragraph 4, page 5) are particularly relevant:

*"Overall, our view is that there are significant problems in how the placements market is functioning, particularly in England and Wales. We found that:*

- **a lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places, means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs;**
- **the largest private providers of placements are making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices, than we would expect if this market were functioning effectively; and**

- **some of the largest private providers are carrying very high levels of debt, creating a risk that disorderly failure of highly-leveraged firms could disrupt the placements of children in care"**

As the South West Market Position Statement outlines (page 5):

*"In addition to these major reviews wider changes in the policy and public services landscape are expected. These include a new registration and inspection regime for 'unregulated' independent accommodation, to be implemented in 2023, which could affect the availability of accommodation for young people as they move toward independence, and major changes in the way local health services are commissioned and delivered, with Integrated Care Systems replacing Clinical Commissioning Groups.*

The Covid-19 pandemic is another important contextual factor to consider. Although the long term consequences of the pandemic for children and young people are not yet known, early evidence suggests that measures to prevent the spread of the virus had a very significant impact on children, particularly through disrupted education and increased mental health problems. Referrals of children to mental health services between April and September 2021 were 81% higher than in the same period in 2019, which compares with an increase of 11% for adults. This surge in demand led to longer waiting times for already stretched child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

Foster carers, providers and schools have been also severely impacted and the pandemic has exacerbated recruitment and retention challenges across social care and education."

The Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP) consults regularly with its IFA members on activity in the foster care sector and provides regular briefings to local authorities across England. In a briefing date October 2022, in relation to sufficiency, NAFP state that their members have reported that over the last year recruitment and retention of foster carers has become more and more difficult. They cite the following reasons for these challenges:

- A very low number of people are applying to foster who have the necessary attributes, skills, experience and understanding to foster children who need specialist, trauma informed care
- The cost of housing is reducing the number of families with spare bedrooms
- With the cost of living crisis, applicants are expressing concern about the affordability of fostering, and increasing numbers of existing foster carers are making plans to exit the sector because of financial constraints
- There is, in general, a poor image of foster care in both social and national media, dissuading those with potential from applying

### Changes in Regulations / Legislation

Currently, Semi-Independent Accommodation (otherwise known as Supported Accommodation) is not regulated by Ofsted (or any other body). Very high numbers of 16 & 17 year old CLA are living in Supported Accommodation provision across the country. The quality of this provision is hugely varied and, too often, it is discovered that quality is not only poor, but young people living in this provision are subject to exploitation (criminal and sexual) and not provided with the level of care and/or support that they should be receiving by certain 'providers'.

As a result of some high-profile cases, the Department for Education has committed to regulating this sector and has asked Ofsted to create and deliver a formal registration and inspection regime for Supported Accommodation providers.

Starting in October 2023, supported accommodation businesses which provide for 16-17 year olds leaving care will need to be registered with Ofsted, just like a children's home. From October 2023, it will become illegal to operate supported accommodation for 16-17 year olds without Ofsted regulation, and inspections will commence in April 2024.

The enforcement powers given to Ofsted to regulate this sector also provide right of entry powers to inspectors and police, increasing transparency by

preventing unsafe and unregistered provisions from concealing poor practice.

Providers will be able to register with Ofsted from April 2023, and are advised to engage with their local authorities and Ofsted at the earliest possible opportunity. This is intended to allow providers as much time as possible to review their policies, procedures and training arrangements to meet the new standards.

All providers currently delivering Semi-Independent / Supported Accommodation for SBC have been told that they will need to be registered with Ofsted within the timeframes detailed above and meet the requirements set by Ofsted, in order to continue providing a service to SBC young people. The majority of providers have welcomed this change however some have warned that the price of services is likely to increase given the additional requirements and expectations (such as recruitment/registration of a Registered Manager and increased workload/reporting) that will result.



## Local Challenges

Our biggest challenge moving forward will be to recruit enough local, skilled foster carers to meet the demand.

SBC is working closely with providers to create, and secure the use of, enough children's residential placements within the borough and/or within a 20 mile radius. Particularly, children's home placements for children with complex or multiple needs (often as a result of the trauma(s) they have experienced) which may not quite meet the threshold for official diagnosis but still result in challenging behaviours, the need for therapeutic interventions and additional educational support. Often these young people are at significant risk of exploitation (criminal and/or sexual) and therefore need to be appropriately safeguarded.

For some children and young people, their behaviours are so extreme that they represent a danger to themselves and others and require accommodation and support only found in secure residential provision. This kind of provision is in high demand across the country and demand continues to outstrip supply by a significant margin.

In Swindon, we are also seeing a high number of sibling groups entering care who should be placed together in a foster placement, but this is not always possible.

Emergency placements (same day and/or out of hours, including PACE or Remand beds) for all age groups continue to be a challenge.

At this point in time, SBC has no plans to establish its own children's homes due to the costs and risks involved. Numerous studies nationally have shown that local authority-run children's homes are not necessarily cheaper to run, they carry enormous reputational and safeguarding risk for the local authority and do not necessarily guarantee a higher quality service. We also know that the demand for foster carers will continue to outstrip our in-house capacity (even with a strong and continuing focus on recruitment and retention).

Therefore we will maintain a 'mixed economy' and work closely with external providers of children's homes, semi-independent provision and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to meet our sufficiency duty for many years to come.

## 8.0 Stability and Permanence

### Stability of placements

Although still lower than the National Average (71%) and Statistical Neighbours (73.5%) there is strong evidence of continued improvement in the long term stability for children looked after with an increase to 69.57% in March 2023. The measure for this is children (looked after for more than 2.5 years) remaining in the same placement for more than 2 years. This has been a steadily growing figure (up from 45% in March 2020).

The percentage of children who have had 3 or more placements during the financial year has increased. In March 2023, 8.8% of children had three or more placements during the year, compared with 3.32% in 2022 and 4.26% in 2021.

Swindon continue to strive for placement stability for all children and are actively working to strengthen matching, provide increased support to placements and through the use of permanency planning. Monthly permanency tracking meetings take place and stability meetings are increasingly attended by the Home Finding Team to support challenge to providers and ensure consideration of all options to help stabilise placements. Regular audits and meetings with providers also ensure that any concerns about placements are identified and addressed early.

### Achieving Permanency for Children

A Permanency Tracking Meeting is held once a fortnight. The Service Manager for Children Looked After and Permanence chairs the meeting. The panel is made up of the Independent Reviewing Officers Team Manager, Home Finding Team Manager, Fostering Team ASW (lead for Fostering Family

Finding), and Finance Manager. Individual time slots are given to the Team Managers of the Children Looked After Team, the Disabled Children's Team, and the Positive Futures Leaving Care Team.

The meeting considers:

- children whose care plan is long term foster care (established through legal proceedings or if section 20 through second CLA review);
- children who are long term placed with connected carers to keep the option of SGO alive;
- children on care orders placed with parents;
- older children whose post 18 plan needs to be agreed;
- children on a placement order where the plan has changed to long term fostering; and
- children in residential placements to consider other options

The Business Support Officer for the meeting also supports the Legal Tracking meeting and ensures information from the Legal Tracker is transferred onto the Permanency Tracker so that there is overview and forward planning for those children in a legal process. Children looked after in proceedings and PLO as well as children on placement orders where adoption is the plan are tracked actively through Legal Tracking.

A new SBC Permanency Strategy is currently being drafted and is due for completion in 2023.

## Long Term Matching

Matching children long term creates a greater sense of stability and permanence for children. This has been an area of focus for SBC for the last 3 years. At the end of November 2020, only 44 children looked after were long term matched with their carers. By March 2023, 64 children had been long term matched.

The processes for matching are now embedded and guidance is available to support learning and understanding. For children under 14 years, matching happens through Foster Panel recommendation and ADM Fostering approval. For children over 14 years, the match is agreed by Director of Children's Social Work acting as the ADM for Fostering. To inform the match there is a Statutory Assessment, a Matching Report, and the foster carers' most recent Annual Review, alongside evidence supporting the carers' long-term approval.

Confirmation letters are sent by the ADM to the children and carers, along with a book token and flowers respectively.

An Advanced Social Worker has been appointed in the Fostering Team and part of her role is to lead on Family Finding. She has produced a proposal for SBC Family Finding principles, processes and procedures based on learning from adoption family finding. The focus has been to achieve a long-term match within 121 days of a Care Order being made.

## SGOs, Adoption & Return to Parent's Care

SBC is part of the regional adoption agency Adopt Thames Valley (ATV). The Director of Children's Social Work (DCSW) sits on the Board and is the ADM for adoption. The Service Manager for CLA and Permanence sits on the ATV leads group.

Adoption is tracked through the Legal Tracking meetings chaired by a Service Manager Safeguarding and attended by our legal team, Adopt Thames Valley and the team managers. Revocations are also tracked through Permanency Tracking. Our adoption work is now timely and papers are described by the adoption agency as of particularly good standard.

In 2018 it was identified that large numbers of children with Placement Orders had not had their plan to adopt progress. The majority were older and/or part of large sibling groups. As a result of this finding, intensive work was completed to either have these children adopted, placed for adoption or have the placement order revoked.

In 2021/22, 100 children ceased to be looked after. As at the end of 2022/23 142 children ceased to be looked after.

In 2022/23, 18 children (12.95% of all children who ceased to be looked after) 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 ceased to be looked after in 2022/23) saw their care episode 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%).

With the implementation and embedding of the Edge of Care service (under the newly created Integrated Adolescent Service) in Swindon, the rate of children returned appropriately and safely into their parent's care has increased significantly on previous years.



## Children Leaving Care Through Planned Permanence Arrangements

Year	Reason	Number	Percentage	National Average	Statistical Neighbours
2021/2022	Adoption	15	15%	10%	12.75%
	SGO	9	9%	13.56%	9.48%
	Returned to Parents	28	28%	25%	29%
2022/2023	Adoption	18	12.95%	10%	12.75%
	SGO	14	10.07%	13.56%	9.48%
	Returned to Parents	50	35.97%	25%	29%

## Staying Put

Swindon's 'Staying Put' policy is due to be finalised in Summer 2023 to include guidance on Staying Put arrangements through an Independent Fostering Agency. Staying Put offers Care experienced young people the opportunity to remain with their foster carer whilst continuing in education/training and moving into adulthood. Through permanency tracking and the Care Panel there is a focus on identifying and confirming a Staying Put arrangement at the earliest opportunity, to provide reassurance to both the young person and the carer/s.

As at 31 March 2023, 17 young people aged 18+ were still living with their former foster carer.

## Staying Close

'Staying Close' is similar to 'Staying Put' but for young people who leave residential children's homes at the age of 18. The idea is that that young people are supported to live near their former children's home, are able to visit regularly and retain links with people who have cared for them, including accessing the support of a key worker from the home – while they transition towards greater levels of independence.

As Swindon Borough Council works with providers to increase children's home provision within the borough, opportunities for Staying Close will also be developed (in partnership with Semi-Independent providers and our Housing department) to ensure even better outcomes for our care experienced young people.

## Swindon Transition to Adulthood Strategy

Swindon Children, Families and Community Health Service and Adult Social Care working in partnership with our Health colleagues within the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB are strongly committed to improve the outcomes for all children and young people transitioning into adulthood.

Our mission is to ensure that the pathways into adulthood for young people are understood, robust and are supported by partners across the whole sector including our education providers and settings. Our Transitions Strategy sets out to ensure that everyone involved in Transitions is clear about the specific roles and responsibilities of all the key agencies so that we can work together in partnership with parents and carers to support the young person at the centre of this process. It is intended to be the driving force for improving Young People's experience of transition in Swindon.

The Swindon Transition to Adulthood Strategy (known as The Transitions Strategy) applies to the following Young People:

- **Young People with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or a disability (learning disability, physical or sensory impairment and/or mental health issues) and Young People with a complex long term health condition.**
- **Children who have been or are currently 'looked after' by Swindon Borough Council as defined in the Childrens Act 1989**
- **Care experienced young people of Swindon Borough Council**
- **Young people accessing Health Services**

The Transitions Strategy 2020-2024 has a clear pathway outlined for Children in Care and Care experienced young people for their social workers and Pathway Advisors (PAs) to follow. The young person's social worker is responsible for coordinating and completing an Initial Needs Assessment when the young person is 15 ¾ years old (or within the 3 months following the young person's 16th birthday, at the latest). A Planning Live event should be offered to the young people to support them to think about what a good life might look like as they approach adulthood. The Planning Live process is focused on the young person's strengths and abilities, and explores housing, health, independence and social life and activities, thinking about their options and the support they might need to support their ambitions.

The Needs Assessment and Planning Live will inform the development of a Pathway Plan and if the young person has additional needs (i.e. if Care Act Eligibility criteria is likely to be met) the social worker will also make a referral to the Adult Social Care Transitions Team.

All Care experienced young people can access ongoing support and guidance from a Pathway Advisor (PA) until they are 25 years old. The PA will ensure that care experienced young people young people are accessing appropriate support and housing options from within the Council and across our extensive network of partners.



## Accommodation for Care Experienced Young People

Strong links with the in-house Fostering Service, Swindon's Housing Department and external placement providers has continued to provide a positive transition to independent living and housing options for our care experienced young people, however there is still a way to go. Unfortunately, there were 11 care experienced young people aged 17-21 in custody at that time – much higher than our neighbours (statistical and in the South West) and compared with the National figures.

SBC Children's Services currently commission an organisation that provide two types of accommodation for care experienced young people within the borough, Supported Lodgings for 16-25 year olds and Emergency Beds.

Most young people needing supported lodgings will have been in foster care and will either need to move on because their carers are unable to offer a Staying Put placement or will choose to move on for another reason.

Some young people will be leaving residential care, while others may never have been in care before, but may become known to the Local Authority as a vulnerable young person at risk of homelessness. Occasionally, a Care experienced young people aged 18 – 25 will require accommodation and support.

All of these young people will be offered supported lodgings because they are not yet ready to live completely independently and cannot safely return to live with their family network.

The emergency beds are available for young people who are in crisis or who require accommodation with very short notice and/or during an out of hours search.

These beds are provided in separate households by experienced supported lodging hosts, who have a track record of supporting the most complex young people, or hosts with extensive experience working with hard to engage young people.

The supported lodgings service has supported 33 young people in the past year (1st April 2022- 31st March 2023). The emergency beds were utilised by 15 individual young people between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

Swindon Borough Council Adult services also commission accommodation-based support (ABS) for young people aged 16+, which includes CLA, Care experienced young people and 16&17-year-old that are homeless, alongside other vulnerable young people aged 18+.

Swindon Borough Council has a Local Offer for Care Experienced Young People which details support available to young people leaving care.



## 9.0 Swindon's way of working

### Swindon's Early Help and 'Edge of Care' Offer

#### Early Help: Where we want to be

Our ambition is to collectively achieve the very best outcomes for children and their families by using our joint resources as efficiently as possible to equip our combined workforce to deliver outstanding relational and compassionate services, which are based on what we know works.

We believe that Early Help is a 'system' rather than one service – a community of services that is a way of working – and we want to develop and invest in this system to achieve the very best for our children in Swindon.

#### Family Safeguarding Model

Swindon have adopted the Family Safeguarding Model to support Swindon families, a whole-systems and whole-family reform, bringing together all of the professionals working with the family into one-multi-disciplinary team. Originally developed in Hertfordshire, Family Safeguarding is a model of system change where specialist adult practitioners are embedded within Family Safeguarding teams of social workers. The intervention supported a whole-system change to the local authority's child protection approach for children up to adolescence, focusing on supporting the needs of children and adults in order that children can safely remain within their families.

#### Family Group Conference

A family group conference (FGC) is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child or children who are at risk. Children and young people are normally involved in their own family group conference, although often with support from

an advocate. It is a voluntary process and families cannot be forced to have a family group conference. The specialist FCG team in Swindon are dedicated to empowering families to stay together, and to come up with their own solutions on how to do this, when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Family group conferences can be used in any situation where a plan and decision needs to be made about a vulnerable child, particularly when a child is at risk of going into care. Evidence and experience shows that FCGs are effective in making safe plans for children, enabling many to stay within their family network as an alternative to going into care and are cost effective. In addition, some of our FGC coordinators have been trained in Life Long Links – to help children and young people identify trusted adults within their broader network who they can have regular contact with as an ongoing source of support and friendship.

#### The Edge of Care Service

The Edge of Care team work intensively with families where there is an imminent risk of the child or young person (aged 10-18) entering local authority care. The service will also support children currently looked after and their families, where there is an identified plan for the child to return home.

The SBC Edge of Care team are utilising the Graded Care Profile as their initial assessment tool.

Between 1st April 2022 and the 31st March 2023, the Edge of Care service have supported 198 children (7 children have 2 EoC involvements in the time period). During this period, 117 of these children's cases were closed. As at the 31st March 2023, 81 children's cases were still open to the edge of care service, 6 of these children were already children looked after, 9 became looked after during the edge of care involvement and 66 did not become looked after.

### Trauma Informed Practice

A trauma can be defined as a physical or emotional experience that has had an adverse impact on an adult, child or young person's wellbeing. It can be assumed that almost all children who come into care have experienced trauma (simply the act of coming into care can be traumatic for many). The effects of trauma may not always be significant or long-lasting, however, for some the impact stays with them throughout the life course. Within Swindon Borough Council, there is a real focus on trauma-informed practice that is also strengths and relationship based. A range of training has been implemented across Children's Service to embed this approach to practice.



## 10.0 Commissioning and Sufficiency, Where Are We Now?

### Commissioning Arrangements

#### Working collaboratively

Where possible, Swindon Borough Council purchases services through existing contracts and regional commissioning arrangements. We are active members of the South West Commissioning Group and the South Central IFA Consortia and have contracts in place for the purchasing of both Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and Children's Homes placements.

These contracts are jointly developed in partnership with other local authorities, providers and young people, and are backed by a partnership agreement between the 'lead purchasing authority' and each of the participating authorities or partners.

The regional contracts contain clear guidance on what is expected from providers to deliver high quality services for our children. The robust contract agreement documents include:

- **Default and suspension clauses to deal with non-compliance**
- **Clear & detailed service specification**
- **Pricing Schedules – with fixed prices for a period of time, and opportunity for providers to offer a range of discounts, incl. volume discounts**
- **A comprehensive Outcomes Framework**
- **Performance Monitoring Schedule – with quarterly and annual monitoring of providers. Monitoring is completed via both electronic returns and face to face meetings where required.**

In addition to the above, Swindon Borough Council is collaborating on the South West Sufficiency Project. The project was funded by the Department for Education to strengthen the capacity of local authorities to address their common challenges in ensuring sufficient high quality local provision for children. The South West Sufficiency Project is a partnership of 14 local authorities covering the

whole region from Land's End to Swindon, which together serve a population of over 5 million people. This is a large and diverse region but there are many similarities in the issues faced by commissioners and providers across the region and significant synergies in tackling them together. A comprehensive Market Position Statement was published by this group in November 2022.

#### Market Engagement

Engaging the market and developing strong relationships with providers is important when striving for continual improvement. Through the regional contracts, regular market engagement events take place throughout the year. Market Position Statements for each local authority are updated and presented at these market engagement events. This provides the opportunity for local authorities to specify what their needs are, what is expected in terms of quality and quantity of provision, and then work with providers on making it a reality within the local area. The Strategic Commissioning Manager also attends quarterly meetings hosted by the National Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP).

In addition to these larger market engagement events, the Strategic Commissioning Manager and Home Finding Team Manager regularly meet with providers on a "one to one" basis. These one to one meetings have resulted in a much better relationship with local providers, positive feedback, and more providers starting to deliver more provision within the local area.

In January 2020 a letter was sent to all good and outstanding children's home providers, communicating the urgent need for more registered/regulated provision and inviting providers to make contact to discuss the option

of expanding their services into the Swindon area. There are now six regulated children's homes in Swindon. A new home in Swindon was granted OFSTED registration in July 2023, bringing the total number of children's home beds in the borough up to 21 (up from only 4 in 2019). A further two properties have been purchased in Swindon by providers who have a proven track record of running high quality children's homes. A Placements and Fostering workshop was held in May 2022, attended by Senior Officers across the Council to broaden understanding of the challenges and to identify potential solutions to increase the number of in house foster carers. The corporate support for placement sufficiency challenges continues with the establishment of a Placement Sufficiency Group which includes regular review of placements.

Young people are only placed in semi-independent provision where it clearly meets the needs of the young person and where the provider has complied with all quality assurance and due diligence checks. A three-year contract (with the option to extend for up to a further two years) has been put in place with Step by Step Ltd, for supported lodgings provision within Swindon. As at the end of March 2023, there were 10 young people in standard supported lodgings beds and 1 young person in an emergency supported lodgings bed. At that time, 7 of these young people were aged 18+ and all had been in placement prior to their 18th birthday. The 'emergency beds' scheme has been well utilised in the past two years – allowing time; up to 15 days, for the social workers and other professionals to work with the young person to identify needs and either return the young person home or refer to the most appropriate placement.

Work is underway to further increase the availability of semi-independent accommodation options in Swindon, particularly for the UASC cohort. SBC have a block contract arrangement which provides accommodation and support to young people over 16, including UASC. The current arrangement provides high-quality, cost-effective support and accommodation for vulnerable over 16's, within Swindon in the form a 6 bedded home which is able to flex the staffing levels to suit the needs of the young people in the home at any time. This service

has been utilised well since it was commenced and the council wish to continue with the arrangement to meet the ongoing needs of this cohort of young people.

#### Quality Assurance and Contract Monitoring

Swindon Borough Council's Children's Services has been improving the way that it quality assures and monitors the placements we make for our children looked after. It is crucial that we ensure that children's placements are high quality, provide value for money and are delivering good outcomes for our children looked after and care experienced young people.

A comprehensive internal document (Children's Placements Quality Assurance and Contract Management) outlines the various activities we undertake throughout the commissioning process – from a strategic commissioning perspective before a placement is even needed, through the placement finding and matching process, all the way through to when a placement ends.

#### Young People's Involvement in Commissioning and Quality Assurance

It is acknowledged that more could be done to involve care-experienced young people in commissioning and contract management processes. Care experienced young people who are interested in making a difference in the lives of other young people would be ideal.

Recently, the care experienced young people apprentice within the Positive Futures Leaving Care Team has visited new local provision (16+ accommodation and a children's home), with the Home Finding Team Social Worker, to assist in the pre-placement quality assurance checks and provide feedback to the provider about how the provision could be made even more welcoming and suitable for young people. Providers have fed back that they have really appreciated this input.

Staff within the children's commissioning and home finding teams will be encouraged to work closely with the challenge and participation team to explore ways to include more CLA and Care experienced young people in all of the various activities relating to commissioning and contract management.



## 11.0 Aspirations to increase local sufficiency

### Action Plan- Homes and Housing

The action plan will be included in the Commissioning Strategy. Please refer to this document for the strategic action plan.

#### Areas within the action plan include:

- ✔ Foster carer recruitment, a strategy is being developed by the inhouse fostering service to increase the number of foster carers in Swindon.
- ✔ Ways to improve the proportion of children in care living within Swindon to provide more local homes for local children
- ✔ Engage with the market via market engagement events for local providers and those seeking to expand into Swindon
- ✔ Work with Swindon's Housing Department to increase access to semi-independent and permanent housing options for older young people
- ✔ An outline of the way in which we will quality assure all commissioned services



# APPENDIX 1

## Placement Sufficiency Needs Assessment 2023



## 1.0 Introductions

The Swindon Sufficiency Strategy Needs Assessment provides an overview of the current Children Looked After and Care Leaver Population. It is an appendix of the overarching Swindon Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy and should be read in conjunction with this.

## 2.0 CLA and Care Leavers Population – an overview

### Population of Children Looked After (CLA)

In 2022/23 957 families received an Early Help Assessment compared to 546 families last year. These families were given support from our Early Help services, which include health visiting, youth engagement, family support, parenting groups and mental health support.

On the 31st March 2023, 579 children were being supported through a Child in Need Plan. An additional 379 children were going through the assessment process at this time too.

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 is an increase from 331 reported in March 2022. This represents 67 per 10,000 population aged under 18 and is in line with the national average (67).

The increase is directly linked to the local authority accommodating a number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) from the national allocation scheme and the asylum hotels that have been established in Swindon. There were 39 UASC in care at the end of March 2023, compared with only 13 at the end of March 2021. In 2022/23, of the 154 children who have entered care in Swindon, 34 (22%) were UASC. Before 2021 Swindon had never seen this number of UASC and the ability to accommodate and support these young people (predominately aged 16 & 17) in Swindon, at short notice, has been a challenge.

The majority of these young people are placed with a specialist provider in a semi-independent living (also known as Supported Accommodation) provision based in Berkshire and Gloucester. SBC have been working closely with a number of providers to establish placement options for UASC locally in Swindon. The availability of these placements has increased but not yet to the level that is needed to meet the ongoing need.

Figure 1: Children Looked After Population in Swindon, as at 31 March 2018 – 2023

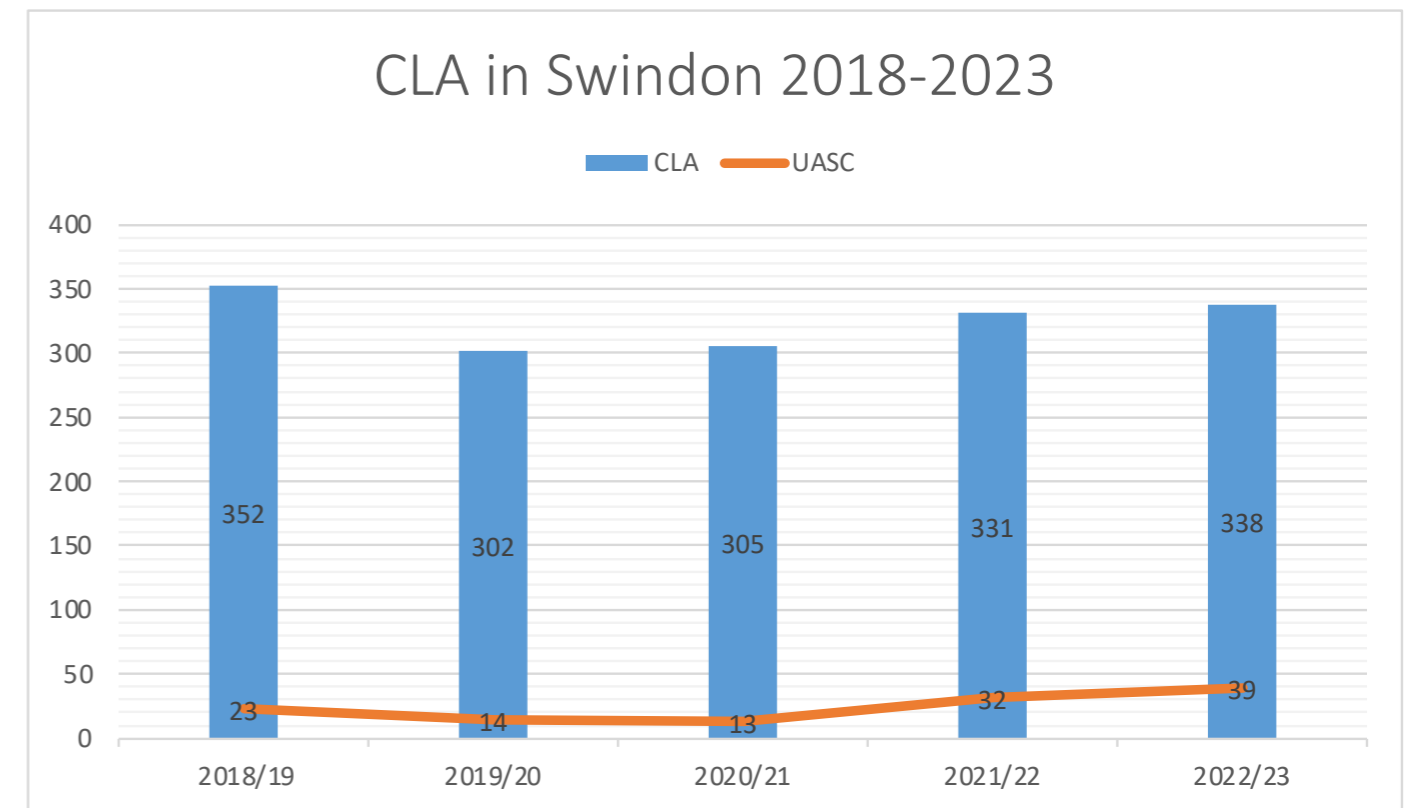


Figure 2: Children starting an episode of care in 2022/23

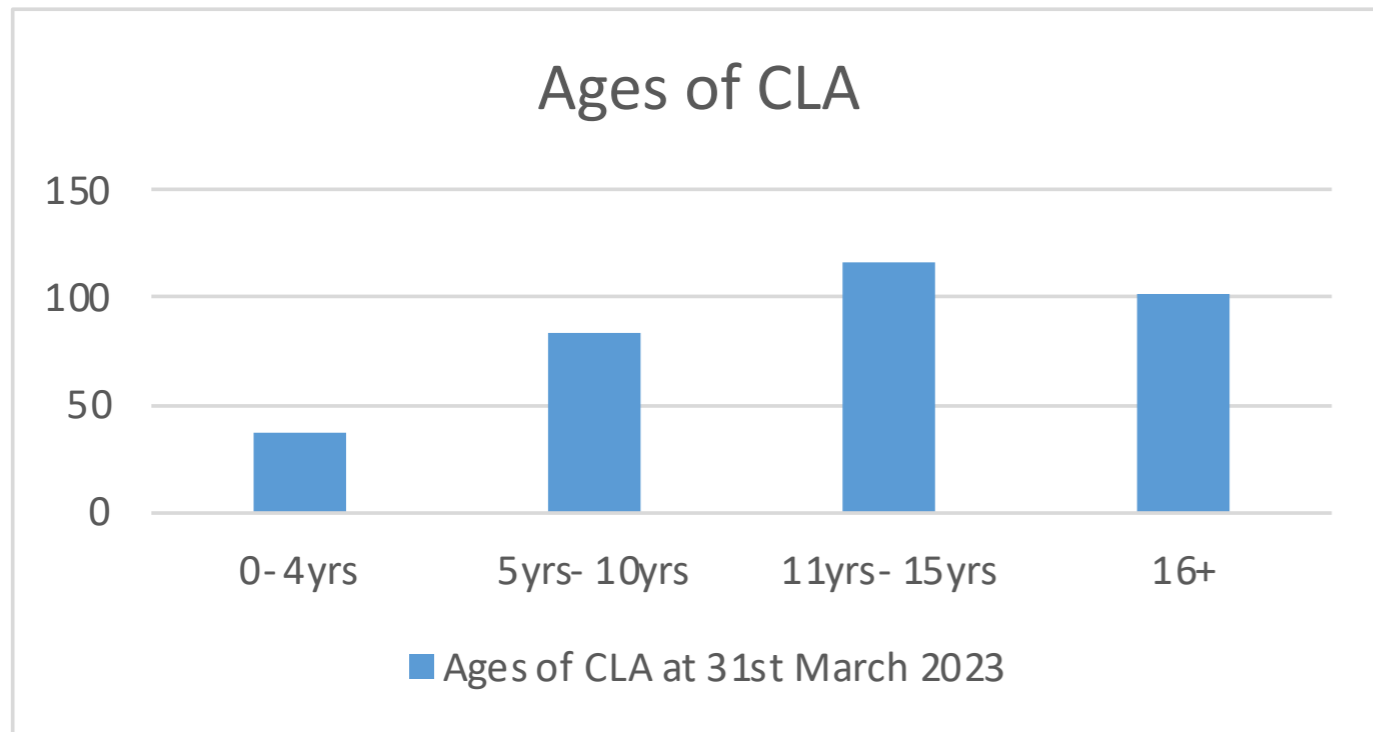
Age	Non- UASC	UASC	TOTAL
0-4	39	0	39
5-10	31	0	31
11-15	32	4	36
16-17	18	30	4
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>154</b>

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

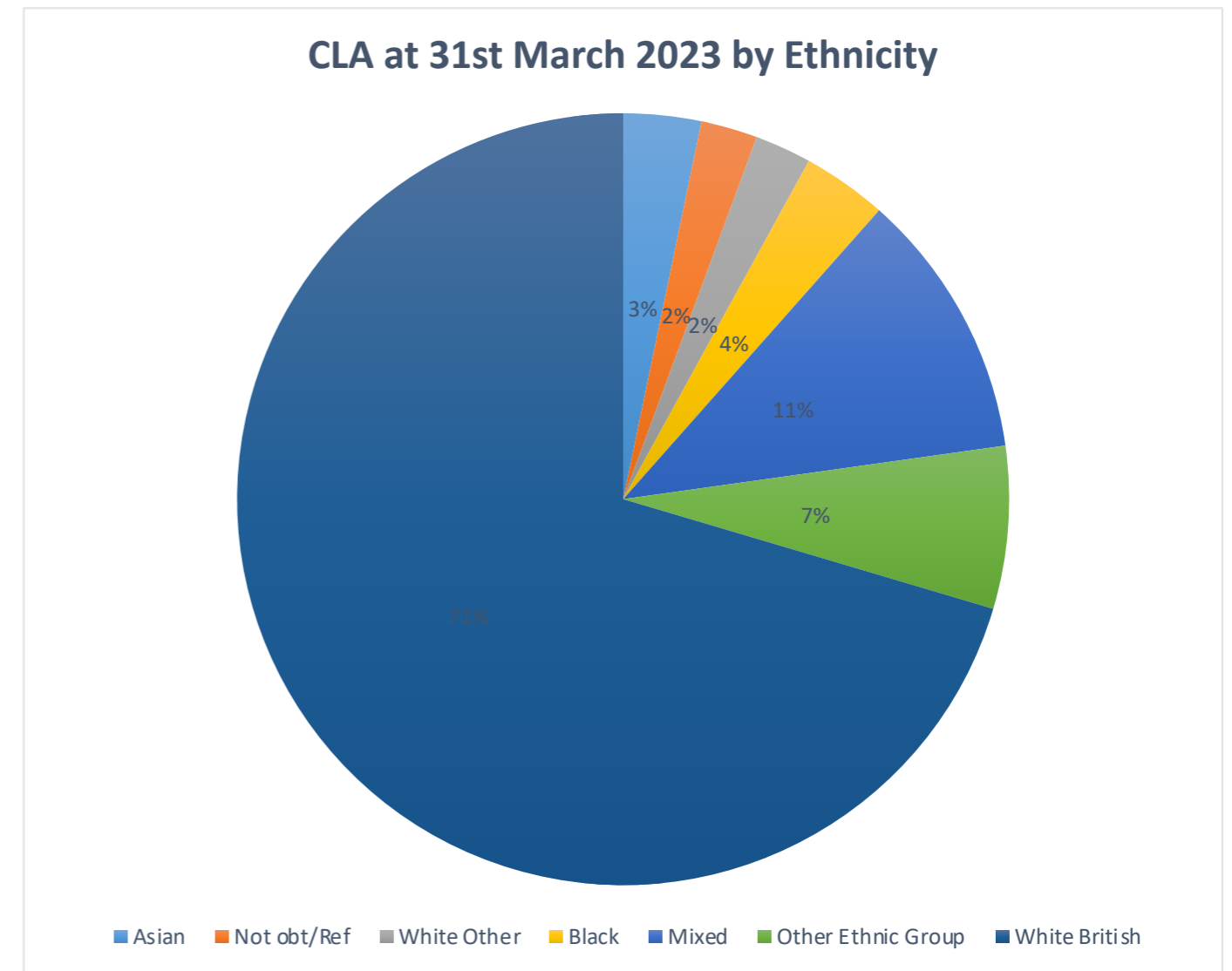
- A decreasing number of CLA are recorded as male (58.88% compared with 61.4% in 2022). An increasing number of CLA are recorded as female (41.12% compared with 38.6% in 2022).
- The ages of children that are CLA have stayed relatively the same as last year. There has been a slight decrease in the 11-17 year old age range from 58% in 2022 to 55% in 2023.

The majority of CLA (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 CLA population – however, this is being driven upwards even further by the increasing numbers of UASC in the CLA population.

**Figure 3. CLA by age group, 31st March 2023**



**Figure 4. CLA at 31 March 2023 by Ethnic Background**



## 3.0 Needs of Children Looked After

### Primary Need

The primary reason for children becoming looked after in Swindon in 2022-23 was due to abuse or neglect. 55% of children who started an episode of care this year have been abused or neglected – up from 51% in 2022. This is, however, lower than our statistical neighbours (62%), the South West of England as a whole (63%) and the England average (62%).

More children came into care due to socially unacceptable behaviours (7.14% in 2022/23 compared with 5.9% in 2021/22) which is higher than the national average. There was a slight reduction in absent parenting (22.08% in 2023 compared with 23.5% in 2021/22) was noted. The absent parenting rate correlates with the high number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children becoming looked after.

**Figure 5. Children who started to be looked after during 2022/23, and 2021/22 data for England and Statistical Neighbours and the South West by primary need category**

Category	Swindon	England	SNs	South West
Abuse or neglect	54.55%	58%	55%	59%
Child's disability	1.30%	2%	2%	2%
Parent's illness or disability	2.60%	2%	3%	2%
Family in acute stress	5.19%	7%	7%	10%
Family dysfunction	7.14%	11%	15%	12%
Socially unacceptable behaviour	7.14%	2%	3%	2%
Absent parenting	22.08%	18%	20%	14%

### General Health and Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of our children looked after is of upmost importance. Health outcomes for children looked after continue to be good and the focus during the pandemic has been to ensure that Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People have had support to access health services despite the challenges and impact of COVID 19. This has included health advice and support to their social workers, carers and the wider multidisciplinary team.

Swindon has a dedicated Children Looked after Health Team (CLA Health Team) who facilitate and coordinate important Key Health Performance Indicators; ensuring that the children in our care are receiving optimal and timely health services.

In 2022-2023 93% of children who had been in care for a year or more had up-to-date immunisations, 93% had their teeth checked by a dentist, and 96% had an annual health assessment. These healthcare statistics are higher than our statistical neighbours, the England average and compare favourably with our neighbouring authorities in Wiltshire and BANES.

The CLA Health Team ensure continuity by each child in care being allocated a lead nurse within in the Team. This provides oversight of their health needs and liaison with their social worker around navigating health services.

Alongside our CLA Nursing Team, a Clinical Mental Health Practitioner has been appointed to provide support directly to children 5-18 years old. This role also provides consultation support for social workers and supervising social workers and facilitates high quality referrals to 'fast track' children and young people into Child and Adolescent Mental Health services where required.

### Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

As at March 31st 2023, 27 of the 338 Children Looked After were recorded as having a disability. 14 of these children were diagnosed with Autism.

21 Children Looked After were under the care of the Disabled Children's Team, of these 9 have been diagnosed with Autism.

Of the 338 Children Looked After supported by the Virtual School 160 had some form of Special Educational Need. Of these, 81 children and young people have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The Virtual School also support CLA and 25 Care Leavers (16 of which are UASC), of these 5 have an EHCP. Care leavers are supported by the Virtual School until they complete year 13 of secondary education.

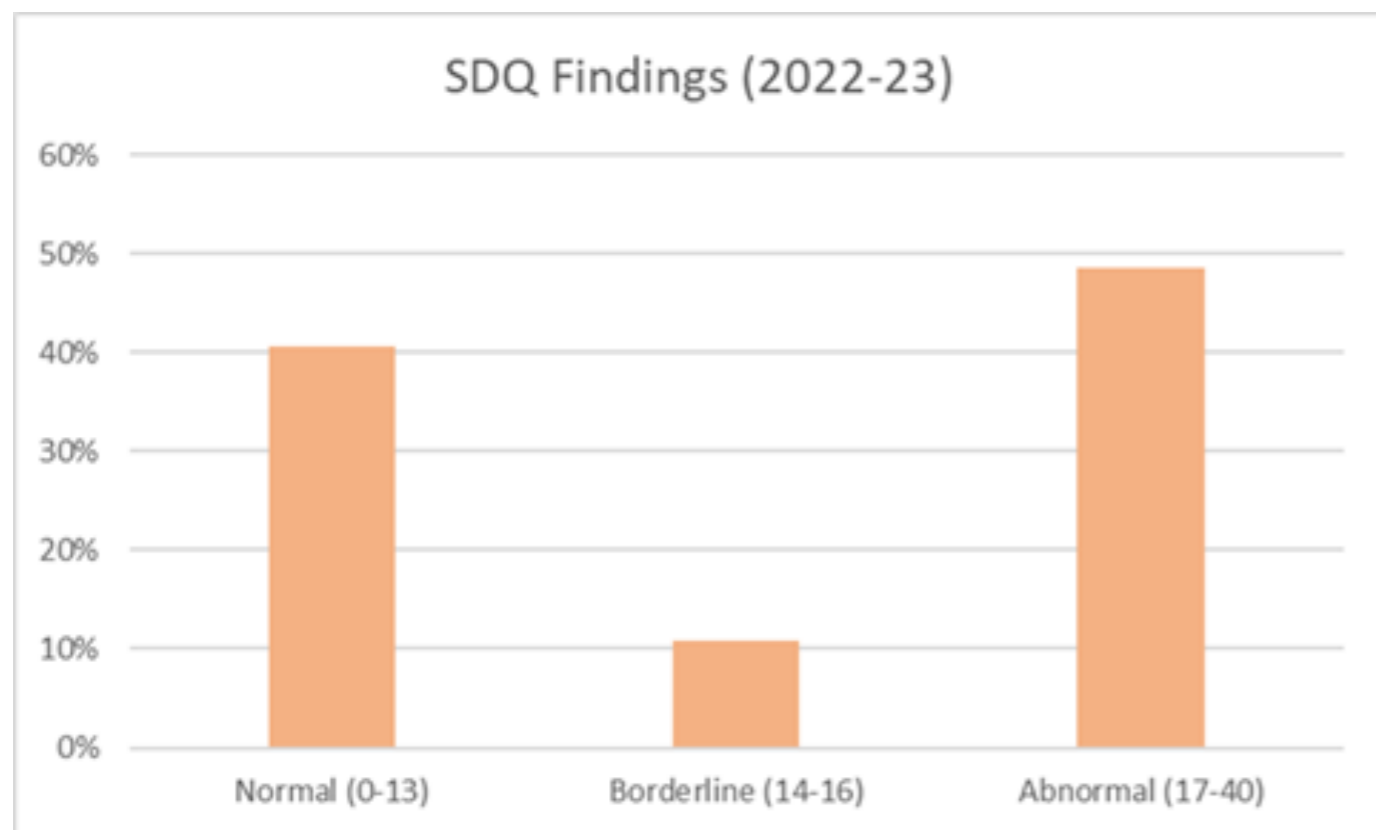
### Emotional and Behavioural Health Needs

Evidence has shown Children Looked after suffer a high incidence of emotional and mental health issues. This is based around exposure to early years trauma or/and abuse prior to coming into care alongside attachment disorder and issues relating to coming into care itself.

Since April 2008 all local authorities in England have been required to provide information on the emotional & behavioural health of children and young people in their care (age 4-16), as part of their reporting data. The data is collected by local authorities through the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and a summary figure for each child (the total difficulties score) is submitted to the Department of Education and is a Key Performance Indicator.

The SDQ is a screening tool that highlights children between the ages of 4-16 years who may have emotional or mental health difficulties which may put their placement under pressure. A score below 13 is normal; 14-16 is borderline and above 17 is high (or cause for concern). The total score is broken down into 4 areas emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer issues and gives an indication of which areas may be causing a problem.

**Figure 6. Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire Scores (percentage of CLA population), 2022-2023**



The CLA Health Team coordinates the Strength and Difficulties and Emotional Health Panel which was launched in 2019. This is a forum for high and very high SDQ scores to be triangulated and discussed in a multi-agency approach where professionals can plan SMART actions which support timely mental health provision, support to carers and collaboration with Education.

A recent audit in June 2023 reviewed 12 Children Looked After that had high SDQ Scores in 2021 and in 2022. These children were discussed in the SDQ Panel to review the impact of the panel discussion and provide an update from the previous audit in August 2022. 50% of the sample were children

that were placed outside of Swindon to reflect the current challenges of finding placements closer to home. In June 23 of the 12 children and young people in the sample;

- 58.3% had a lower score
- 25% remained the same
- 16.6% (2) had higher scores but 1 had moved placement in the time and the other was diagnosed with Autism which could have impacted on the scores.

The CLA Health Team use the screening tool, CRIES 8 that screens for symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A monthly CRIES 8 Panel is held to discuss

children with high CRIES 8 Scores. This is a multi-agency panel including Named Nurse for Children Looked after, Clinical Mental Health Practitioner for CLA Health Team, Allocated Social worker of Child being discussed and Clinical Psychologist from Swindon CAMHS Team. This Panel commenced in March 2021 after a research study was completed with Dr Hiller from Bath University highlighting the benefits of CRIES 8 Screening to identify Children Looked after who may be demonstrating symptoms indicative of PTSD. The introduction of this tool has enhanced our ability to improve the identification of trauma symptoms and the quality of emotional and mental health referrals.

According to the Swindon JSNA (published in June 2022), evidence suggests the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Differences have been observed in impact on sleep, behaviour, attention, mood/anxiety, eating habits and loneliness. Girls and young women, older young people (16 to 24 year olds), disadvantaged children and young people as well as those with special education needs and disability (SEND) were more likely to report difficulties at various points during the pandemic including during periods of national lockdown restrictions.

Schools continued to open for vulnerable children throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as the country was coming out of lockdown, Swindon saw

an increase in the number of children (and adults) presenting with mental health difficulties and self-harm as well as suicidal ideation and attempts. A Swindon-wide training package is being delivered (commissioned by the local authority Public Health team) focussing on suicide prevention. The aim is to have a community of professionals in Swindon who can speak with any young person who is experiencing suicidal thoughts, with a widespread support package for children and also adults who are coping with the death of a child who died by suicide.

### Substance Misuse

Less than 1% of children looked after assessed via the Health Team were identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year 2022-2023.

### Youth Offending Service

On the 31st March 2023, 8 looked after children were being supported by the Youth Offending Service, 3 of these young people were remanded into custody, all 8 were male and over the age of 16.



## 4.0 Care Experienced Young People

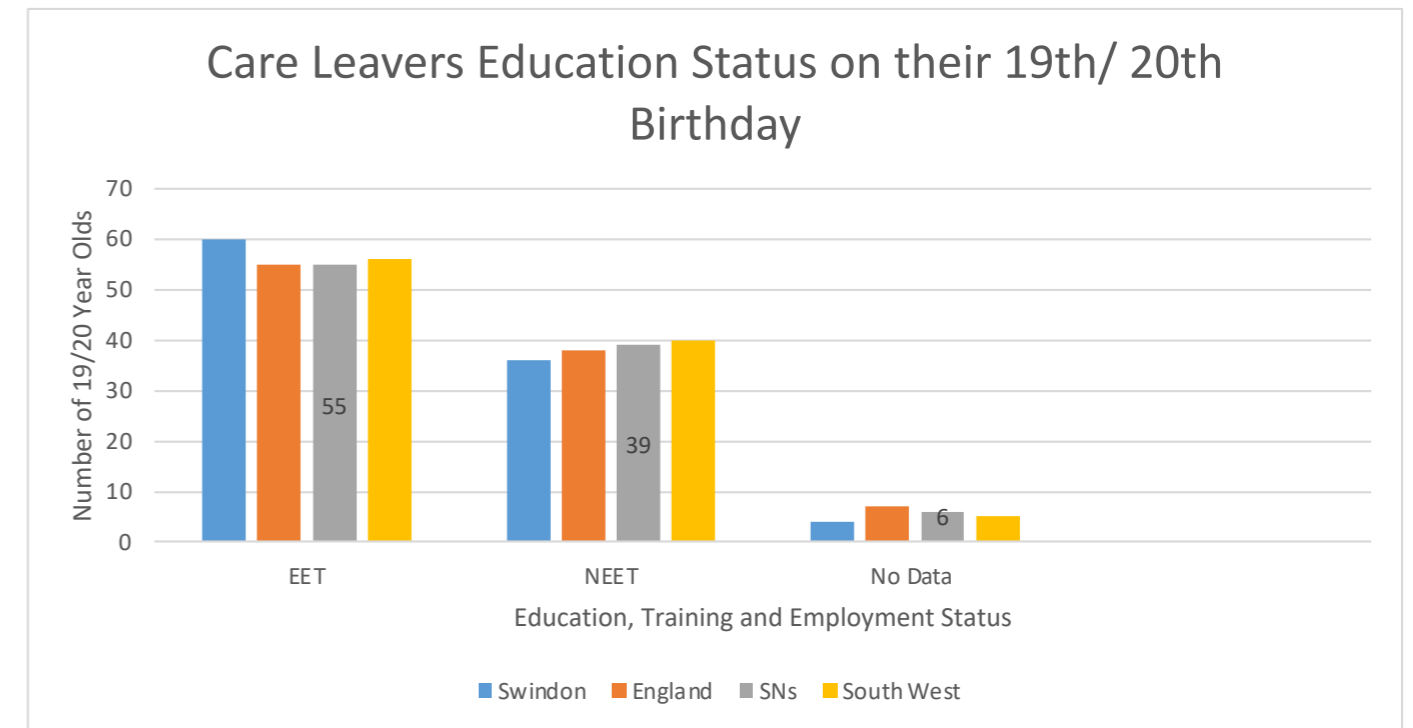
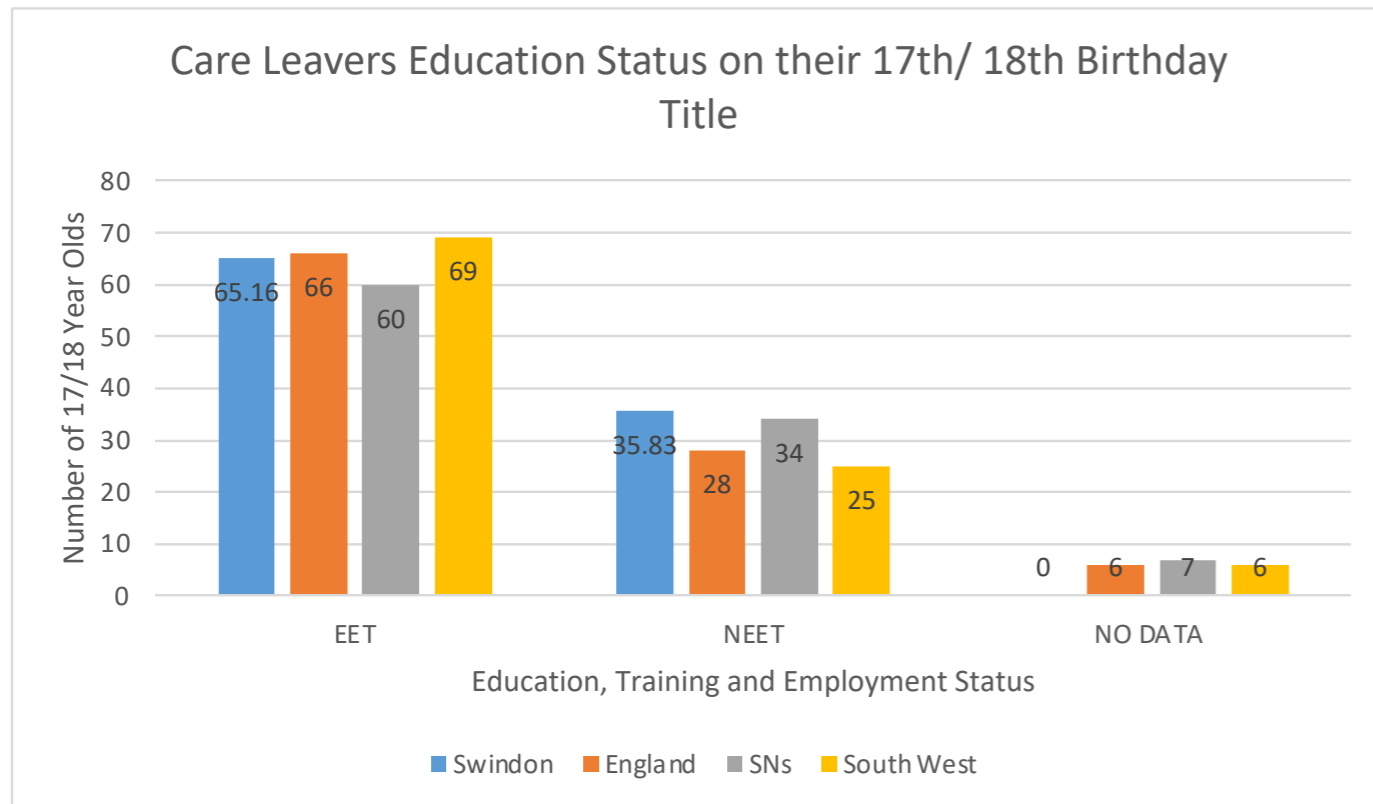
As at 31 March 2023, Swindon's Positive Futures Leaving Care Team who support children looked after from age 16, to prepare them for their transition to adulthood were supporting 224 young people aged 16-25 years. 178 of the young people supported were aged 16-21 on the 31st March.

Swindon makes significant efforts to stay in contact with its Care Leavers and keeping in touch is well managed and monitored. In March 2023, the Positive Futures Team were in touch with 68, 17-year olds and 54, 18 year olds a total of 122 care leavers in the 17-18 year old cohort.

### Participation in Education, Employment and/or Training (EET)

Swindon's rate of care leavers participating in education, employment or training (EET) is higher than the national average and our statistical neighbours at 65.16% for 17 & 18 year olds and 60.1% for 19-20 year olds. The percentage of care leavers who are "NEET" (not in education, employment or training) is slightly higher in the 17-18 age category at 35.83% the national average is 34%.

**Figure 7: Swindon Care Leavers Participation in Education, Employment or Training**



\*Please note, the national average data is for 19-21-year olds whereas the data for Swindon is for care leavers aged 19- 20 years old.

July 2023

Reviewed Annually





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