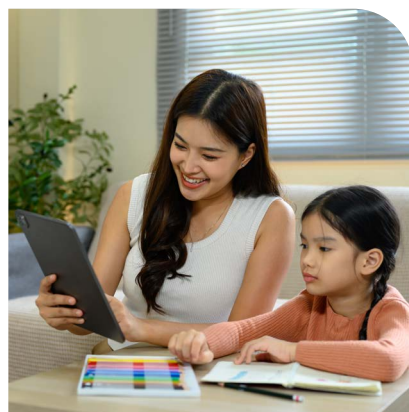




Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2029

We See.
We Hear.
We Care.
We Act.
We Learn.



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1. Foreword

As corporate parents, we want the children we care for and the young people who have left our care to experience the love, stability, support and opportunity that any good parent would want for their own child. Our sufficiency duty is a critical part of fulfilling that commitment, ensuring that every child in Swindon who requires our support can access a home that meets their needs, is safe, and is as close as possible to their community and to the people who matter to them.

“Children at the Heart of Everything we do”

is the vision statement that our Children and Social Care colleagues have chosen to guide all we do in the service, including this Sufficiency Strategy.

We believe that putting children at the heart of organisations and services, and recognising each one as a unique individual, has the power to bring lasting, positive change to the lives of children and our wider community. This strategy is therefore also informed by our Child First Manifesto which was co-produced Swindon’s Young Changemakers, a diverse group of children and young people aged 12–25 with a range of experiences, passions and skillsets who seek to drive lasting change in our communities.

This strategy sets out how Swindon Borough Council will meet its statutory requirement to secure sufficient, high-quality homes for children looked after and care experienced young people. It considers the complex landscape we are operating in, including rising residential costs, national foster carer shortages, increased emotional and behavioural need, and significant growth in the numbers of separated migrant children (SMC).

Despite these challenges, under the last Sufficiency Strategy some progress has been made, for example the local residential provision has expanded from a single specialist home in 2019 to eight Ofsted registered homes in 2026 delivering increased capacity, with more forecasted. However, too many of our children are still placed out-of-borough, with multiple children being placed in unregulated provision due to gaps in our sufficiency.

This strategy brings refreshes our understanding of the new and residual challenges into a clear plan for the next three years, ensuring that children move into the right home, at the right time, supported by the right services. Our priority is ensuring that Children are at the heart of our Sufficiency planning, and the voice of children has therefore been a key influence in this strategy.

“If we’re children or young people, we would have the best idea of what it’s actually like to be a young person in swindon, Right?”

“It starts with listening to us. It’s not about deciding what you think is best for us but about working with us to understand our needs.”

2. Introduction – What is Sufficiency?

2.1 Our Legal Duty

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to:

Ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the local authority's area to meet the needs of children that the authority is looking after.

This includes ensuring a range of high-quality homes for children looked after (CLA), and suitable, supported accommodation for care experienced young people up to the age of 25.

Sufficiency should be understood as more than the availability of homes. For children looked after and care experienced young people, a sufficient placement must also enable access to suitable education, health, SEND and therapeutic support. This includes the local authority's responsibilities to promote the educational achievement of children looked after, secure the special educational provision specified in Education, Health and Care Plans, and ensure that placement decisions minimise disruption to education wherever possible.

This duty is complemented by:

- DfE Sufficiency: *Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (2010)*
- Children and Families Act 2014 (Staying Put)
- Children & Social Work Act 2017 (Corporate Parenting Principles)
- Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023, regulating provision for 16–17 year olds from October 2023.
- Children and Families Act 2014, section 42, which places a duty on the local authority to secure the special educational provision set out in an EHCP.

2.2 What “Good Sufficiency” Means in Swindon

For Swindon, good sufficiency means:

- Children can live as close as possible to their home community, where it is safe and appropriate.
- Children are able to maintain education stability wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so, including remaining in their existing school or education setting when this is in their best interests.
- Children with SEND have placements that can support their EHCP outcomes, communication needs, sensory needs, learning needs and preparation for adulthood.
- Placement commissioning considers the availability, quality and sustainability of education provision from the outset, rather than after a care placement has been identified.
- Children placed outside Swindon have clear arrangements for education oversight, EHCP delivery, Virtual School support, SEND review and timely return to local provision where appropriate.
- There is a range of homes available – kinship care, foster care, residential children's homes, semi-independent and specialist placements – to meet different levels and types of need.
- Children experience placement stability and long-term security, with as few moves as possible.
- Homes are high quality, regulated, and provide value for money, with clear evidence of impact on outcomes.
- Services wrap around placements to ensure holistic support, including health, education, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and youth support.
- Care and Support provided is grounded in trauma informed relational approaches, recognising the impact of adversity and instability on children's lives.
- Providers act as partners, aligned with our ambition for children and our corporate parenting responsibilities.

2.3 Purpose of this Strategy

This strategy:

- Provides a detailed needs analysis of children we care for and care experienced young people, using Swindon's data.
- Identifies gaps and pressures in the local and regional markets for homes.
- Sets out a clear Market Position Statement describing what we need from the market.
- Establishes strategic priorities for 2026–2029 and a clear action plan.
- Sets out governance arrangements and a performance framework for monitoring delivery.
- This strategy should be read alongside the:
 - South West Sufficiency Strategy: <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/static/aa98cc3fae27f145634006453130f39f/South-West-Regional-Sufficiency-Strategy.pdf>
 - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment: www.swindonjsna.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Swindon-JSNA-post-2021-census-update-2024.pdf
 - SEND strategy www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/10128/send_inclusion_and_alternative_provision_strategy_2023-28
 - Preparing for Adulthood: www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20202/bridge_to_adulthood/1430/preparing_for_adulthood_protocol_2025-2029
 - Early Intervention Youth and Community Strategy 2023–2027: https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1385/early_intervention_youth_and_community_strategy_2023-2027
 - Swindon Borough Council's Fostering Service Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023–26



3. National and Local Context

3.1 National Pressures

Local authorities across the country face a combination of sufficiency challenges:

Foster care shortages

National recruitment and retention challenges have intensified, with fewer suitable applicants and more carers leaving due to cost of living pressures, reduced spare bedroom capacity and increasing expectations.

Residential market fragility and cost escalation

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and other national studies highlight high levels of profit in parts of the residential sector, high levels of debt among some providers, and a shortage of provision for children with complex needs. Residential placement costs have risen sharply, increasing pressure on local authority budgets.

Rise in separated migrant children (SMC)

Many areas have seen increased numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, predominantly 16–17 year old males, allocated through the National Transfer Scheme. These young people often require specialist support. For context, a third of our care leavers are SMC.

Regulation of supported accommodation

The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 introduced mandatory Ofsted registration and inspection for providers of supported accommodation for 16–17 year olds. This has strengthened oversight and safeguarding arrangements across the sector.

The introduction of the regulatory framework has resulted in a significant increase in registration applications, with Ofsted receiving higher volumes than anticipated. This has created transitional pressures within the system, including delays in registration processing and inspection rollout.

Nationally, evidence suggests that the transition to regulation is impacting the supported accommodation market, with providers adapting to new compliance requirements. This includes reported increases in operating costs and potential changes to capacity, although the overall impact on supply varies across regions and continues to evolve.

Growing mental health need

The Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath have been associated with increased emotional and mental health needs among children and young people, including anxiety, self-harm and suicidal ideation. CAMHS services face growing demand and lengthening waits in many parts of the country.

3.2 Swindon's Local Context

Swindon's sufficiency landscape reflects many of these national issues, with additional local dynamics:

- CLA numbers are currently at 335 (May 2026), equivalent to 67 per 10,000 under-18s, in line with the national average.
- There is increasing complexity within the SEND and Disabled Children's Team cohorts, with more children presenting with autism, communication difficulties and complex disabilities requiring tailored support.
- Older adolescents are presenting with greater emotional distress, challenging behaviour and contextual safeguarding risks, requiring highly specialist provision.
- Swindon is experiencing homelessness presentations among 16–17 year olds, including care experienced young people, placing pressure on children's services and housing.
- The local market has expanded significantly, with eight children's homes and nine supported accommodation providers now operating in the town, providing roughly 110 beds of semi-independent accommodation.
- Swindon is also experiencing increasing demand and complexity across the SEND system. The SEND JSNA 2025 identifies that the number and proportion of children and young people with SEND in Swindon is increasing, driven particularly by growth in EHC plans. It also identifies autism as the most common primary need for pupils with an EHC plan, at 34.6%, with speech, language and communication needs and social, emotional and mental health needs also significant areas of demand.

These factors underscore the need for a strategic, whole system approach to sufficiency. The previous Sufficiency Strategy has been in place for approximately two to three years. While it supported an expansion of local provision, particularly in residential and supported accommodation, its impact was limited by the absence of clear, measurable targets and a consistent performance framework.

As a result, it is not possible to objectively demonstrate delivery against all intended outcomes. This strategy responds directly to that learning by embedding measurable success criteria and clearer governance.

Swindon is also operating within a wider improvement context. As practice improves and early intervention becomes more effective, demand patterns are expected to change over time. Evidence from other improving local authorities suggests this can:

- Increase opportunities for family-based care and fostering
- Reduce reliance on high-cost residential provision for some cohorts
- Shift demand towards earlier, preventative sufficiency interventions

This strategy therefore remains dynamic and will be reviewed annually to reflect changes in demand, complexity and system maturity.

4. Needs Analysis – Children and Young People

4.1 CLA Population Overview

In 2025/26:

- 447 children were looked after at some point during the year.
- 335 children were looked after in May 2026, up from 310 the previous year. This equates to 67 per 10,000 under-18s, matching the national average
- 144 children started an episode of care during the year; 26 of these (18%) were SMC.

The age profile at 31 March 2026 was:

1. 0–4 years: 50 children
 2. 5–10 years: 70 children
 3. 11–15 years: 115 children
 4. 16+ years: 112 children
- The gender split was approximately 58% male and 42% female.
 - The majority of children looked after (250, or 72.05%) were White British or White Other. However, there is an over representation of ethnic minority children when compared to Swindon's overall population, driven in part by the SMC cohort.

4.2 Primary Reason for Entering Care

The primary reasons children entered care in 2025/26 were:

- Abuse or neglect: 55.6%
- Absent parenting: 20.1% (predominantly SMC)
- Family dysfunction: 3.5%
- Socially unacceptable behaviour: 1.4% (higher than national averages)
- Other categories (parental illness/disability, family in acute stress) made up the remainder.

Abuse and neglect remain the dominant reasons for care, but the high levels of absent parenting and socially unacceptable behaviour have important implications for the types of homes and support required.

4.3 SEND and Disabilities

As at 31 March 2026:

- 33 of the 338 children looked after were recorded as having a disability.
- 21 of these were diagnosed with autism.
- 78 CLA supported by the Virtual School had identified SEND.
- 103 CLA had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and 16 care leavers supported by the Virtual School also had EHCPs.

These figures highlight the need for specialist educational support and tailored placement options, including foster homes and residential settings equipped to meet complex learning, behavioural, communication and physical needs. The data indicates particular demand for placements that can support autism, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), disability, trauma and complex adolescent risk.

The profile of need also has significant implications for transition planning into adulthood. A proportion of young people with SEND and disabilities will require ongoing support beyond the age of 18, including specialist accommodation, adult social care provision, supported living, and continued education or training pathways. Effective sufficiency planning therefore requires a whole-system approach across Children's and Adult Services to ensure timely transitions, minimise placement disruption, and support continuity of care. Particular consideration is required for young people in residential settings, those with complex disabilities and autism, and those who may benefit from dual-registration or transitional placements that bridge children's and adult services, reducing the risk of delayed discharges, out-of-area placements and poor outcomes during transition to adulthood.

4.4 Emotional and Mental Health Needs

Swindon recognises that many children in care have experienced trauma and may present with emotional and mental health needs:

- The Children Looked After Health Team coordinates Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) screening, and SDQ panel discussions for children with high scores.
- The CRIES-8 screening tool is used to identify potential post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a multi agency panel agreeing actions for children with high scores.
- Audit work on children with high SDQ scores indicates that, for most, scores reduced over time following panel discussion and targeted support, suggesting that the joint approach is having a positive impact

4.5 Care Experienced Young People

On 31 March 2026: Swindon's Positive Futures Leaving Care Team was supporting 254 young people aged 16–25.

- 219 of these were aged 16–21.
- Participation in education, employment or training (EET):
- 51.79% of 17–18 year olds were in EET (above national and statistical neighbour averages).
- 53.17% of 19–20 year olds were in EET (above national and statistical neighbour averages).

However, there are challenges:

- 8 care experienced young people aged 17–21 were in custody at one point in time – higher than statistical neighbours and regional averages.

As of late 2025/early 2026, the national benchmark for 16–24 year olds NEET in the UK is 12.8%, representing 957,000 young people. For 16–17 year olds, the NEET rate is lower, estimated at 4.0%, while the 18–24 age group NEET rate is higher at 14.8%. NEET rates for Care Leavers is nationally 40–50%. This underscores the need for strong preparation for adulthood, robust housing and support pathways, and targeted interventions for those at risk of offending or exclusion.

For care experienced young people with SEND, preparation for adulthood should be planned jointly across social care, education, SEND, health, housing and employment support. This should include consideration of EHCP outcomes, supported internships, further education pathways, independence skills, travel training, supported accommodation and transition into adult services where appropriate.



5. Current Provision and Sufficiency – “Where We Are Now”

Sufficiency in Swindon cannot be understood solely through volumes of children requiring care or fixed numbers of placement types.

Demand is increasingly shaped by complexity of need, including:

- The proportion of children subject to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)
- High levels of emotional and mental health need
- Neurodiversity and disability
- Risks associated with adolescence, exploitation and offending

These factors directly influence the type, cost and availability of provision required, and limit the substitutability between fostering, residential and supported accommodation.

This strategy therefore focuses on ensuring the right mix of provision, rather than solely increasing capacity. poor outcomes during transition to adulthood.

5.1 Placement Mix (January 2026)

As at 31 January 2026:

- 343 children were in care.
- 198 (58%) lived in foster care (both in-house and with Independent Fostering Associations (IFAs)).
- 67 (19.5%) lived in residential children's homes.
- 57 (16.6%) lived in semi-independent or supported accommodation.

The relatively high proportion of children in residential and semi-independent provision reflects the complexity of need, the impact of SMC on demand patterns and a lack of sufficiency in foster care.

5.2 In-House Fostering

The capacity of Swindon's in-house fostering service has been under pressure:

- 45 fostering households were lost in the 12 months up to March 2023 due to retirement, deregistration and other factors
- Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were 241 enquiries about fostering, but only 18 applications progressed to approval.

Swindon faces particular difficulty in securing foster carers for:

- Sibling groups
- Teenagers
- Parent and child placements
- Children with disabilities or complex behaviours
- Emergency placements (including PACE1 and remand beds).

This shortfall affects placement choice and contributes to greater reliance on IFAs and residential provision. Swindon are part of the South West regional Fostering Hub with the aim to increase the number of people who enquire about fostering to convert to become foster carers. The council has also put itself forwards for the new 'end to end' fostering hub.

See separate Fostering Service Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023-26.



5.3 Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

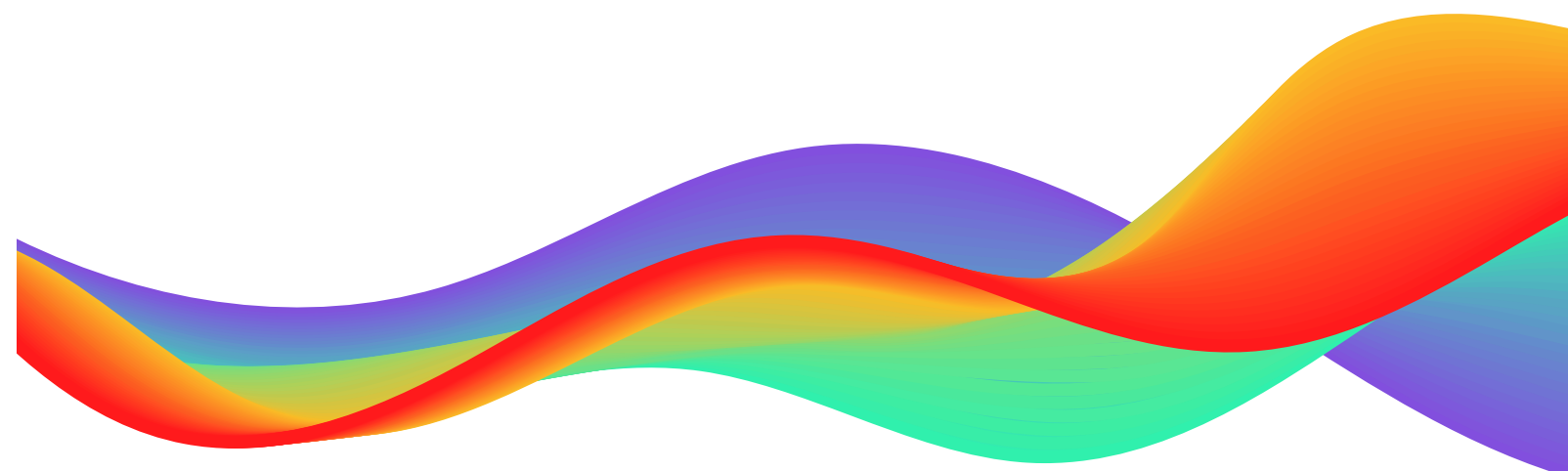
Swindon is part of the South Central IFA Framework, enabling access to a range of independent fostering providers under contractual terms.

Relationships with local IFAs are generally positive, but providers report similar recruitment challenges and increasing costs. Vacancy notification is variable, and some providers struggle to maintain regular communication about capacity. As a result, access to the right home, at the right time, can still be difficult.

5.4 Residential Children's Homes

Swindon's local residential market has significantly expanded:

- In 2019, there was only one children's home in the borough, catering for a small number of children with disabilities.
- Now in 2026, there are eight registered children's homes providing 26 bedrooms within those homes, with at least three more properties purchased by providers aiming to register and become operational in 2026/2027. We are striving to increase capacity by working alongside providers to open homes within Swindon, for Swindon children the aim is to increase availability for an additional 25 children in Swindon by 2029. We are also working to increase our utilisation of existing local children's homes, as despite the expansion our utilisation of the beds is low at just 19% in April 2026.
- Swindon Borough Council is also in the process of purchasing a property which it will go out to competitive tender for a provider to run, recognising the need for a mixed economy of provision that includes some provision the local authority has direct control of and therefore guaranteed usage of.



5.5 Education and SEND sufficiency within placement planning

For children with SEND, the right home must be matched with the right education offer. Placement decisions should therefore consider education availability at the point of matching, including whether the child can remain in their current school, whether their EHCP can be delivered locally, whether specialist provision is available, and whether transport arrangements are sustainable.

5.6 Semi-Independent / Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation plays a critical role in supporting older teenagers and care leavers (16+), particularly SMC:

- Swindon has grown from 2 supported accommodation providers to 9, offering around 110 beds.
- Provision ranges from staff supported shared houses to self-contained units with visiting support.
- A block contract arrangement provides a 6-bed high needs home for 16+ young people, able to flex staffing to need.
- The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 apply to all providers, who must be Ofsted registered. Swindon is working with providers to ensure compliance and to maintain and improve quality.

Despite the growth, matching and risk factors mean some young people still need to live outside Swindon. Ongoing commissioning and market development are in place to improve local choice and capacity, including a recommissioned supported accommodation framework and supported lodgings offer.



5.7 Kinship Care and Family-Based Sufficiency

Kinship care is a core component of the local authority's sufficiency duty. It provides children with stable, family-based care that supports identity, belonging and continuity of relationships, and can reduce reliance on foster and residential provision where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Swindon recognises that kinship care has not historically been developed as a strategic sufficiency lever. While family network exploration is undertaken within social work practice, there has been no dedicated analysis of kinship capacity, outcomes or support arrangements within previous sufficiency planning. This strategy addresses that gap.

Over the life of this strategy, Swindon will strengthen kinship care as a central element of its sufficiency approach by:

- Prioritising early and effective family network exploration for all children at risk of coming into care.
- Ensuring kinship carers receive timely assessment, practical support and training.
- Reducing avoidable use of foster and residential placements where kinship care is viable.
- Working with all kinship care providers under a coproduced Kinship Charter which outlines the commitment to work openly and to support kinship care arrangements fairly and sets out how we can support them to access the right help at the right time to increase stability and children in the heart of their families care being central in our corporate priorities
- Develop a kinship local offer which means that kinship carers will have the opportunity to seek help and family based decision making when supporting to care for children in their family or friendship network

Key Actions

- Develop a kinship care needs analysis, including demand, placement stability and support requirements.
- Establish clear commissioning intentions for kinship support services, including financial, therapeutic and practical support.
- Embed kinship care performance measures within the sufficiency performance framework.
- Strengthen joint working between social work, legal services and commissioning to ensure kinship options are explored at the earliest point.
- Ensure there is a Kinship Local Offer is produced with clear roots in the community of Swindon so that there is trust and genuine value placed in the kinship community; their need for support is an essential part of the sufficiency of loving family homes for the children and young people of Swindon irrespective of the legal status of a child.

5.8 Unregulated Placements

Swindon recognises the risks associated with the use of unregulated or unregistered placements, particularly for vulnerable children and young people. While such arrangements have had to be used in exceptional circumstances, their persistent and ongoing use reflects underlying sufficiency gaps and carries increased safeguarding, quality and financial risk.

Actions to reduce reliance include:

- Strengthening monitoring and reporting of all unregulated placements
- Clear senior oversight and time limited approval
- Targeted commissioning of regulated alternatives
- Regional collaboration to increase access to compliant provision

Reducing the use of unregulated placements is a core measure of success for this strategy.

5.9 Distance from Home

Swindon is committed to keeping children close to home wherever it is safe:

- In March 2023, 44.9% of CLA were placed more than 20 miles from their originating address.
- This briefly improved to 37.19% in March 2024 and 36.45% in March 2025; however, in March 2026 there were 47.43% of children more than 20 miles from home.

Although the trend was positive, there has been a decline and the proportion remains significantly higher than national average (22%) and reflects the historic lack of local provision for complex adolescents and specialist needs.

5.10 Placement Costs

Placement costs have risen significantly:

- Average weekly IFA costs increased from £817 in 2018 to £1,135.10 in 2026.
- Average weekly residential children's home costs rose from £3,254 in 2018 to £7,579.26 in 2026. Targeted action and partnership working has since April 2026 enabled local provision to be secured for Swindon children for c.£5,000.
- Semi-independent costs have also increased reflecting both market conditions and regulatory changes. The average Semi-independent cost in April 2026 were £1577.06.

Budget pressures are driven by increasing use of residential care, high demand for complex placements, rising SMC numbers, and external inflationary forces.

5.11 Market Sustainability and Diversity

Swindon will actively shape a mixed economy of provision to reduce risk, increase resilience and improve long term sustainability.

This includes:

- Private providers
- Not for profit and social value led organisations
- Council owned assets operated by external providers

Overreliance on any single market segment increases fragility and cost. A diverse market is better able to respond to demand, workforce pressures and regulatory change.

Key actions include:

- Targeted engagement with not-for-profit providers and social enterprises
Use of council owned assets to influence supply and pricing where appropriate
- Clear expectations on quality, outcomes and financial transparency

6. Voice of Children

6.1 Child's Voice, Lived Experience and Co-Production

Embedding the voice of children and young people is central to Swindon's sufficiency approach. Sufficiency is not solely about securing enough placements; it is about ensuring that children live in homes where they feel safe, supported, listened to and able to thrive.

Children and young people consistently prioritise:

Feeling Safe and Listened To

Children want to feel safe in their homes and confident that adults listen to them, take their views seriously, and act on their concerns.

Educational Stability

Children emphasise the importance of staying in the same school, maintaining routines, and receiving consistent educational support.

Access to Activities and Friendships

Children value being able to take part in hobbies, see friends and feel part of their community.

Emotional Wellbeing

Children report challenges with anxiety, trauma and inconsistent access to support. They emphasise the need for relational and therapeutic care.

Stability of Trusted Relationships

Children want consistent, trusted adults who understand them and remain in their lives over time.

These themes form the foundation of how sufficiency will be defined, measured and improved.

6.2 Co-Production and Participation

Swindon will strengthen co-production as a core element of sufficiency planning by:

- working with Children in Care Councils, care leavers, SEND groups and partners
- developing accessible versions of the Sufficiency Strategy
- involving children and young people in service design, commissioning and evaluation
- facilitating regular engagement opportunities, including focus groups and peer-led discussion
- Work with STEP Swindon, Swindon SEND Families Voice and children looked after with SEND to understand what makes a placement and education setting feel safe, inclusive and supportive.

6.3 How Lived Experience Will Be Measured

To ensure meaningful impact, children's experiences will be incorporated into the sufficiency performance framework. In addition to home based measures, we will track outcomes directly linked to children's lived experience.

These outcomes will be gathered through:

- regular conversations with trusted adults or independent advocates
- focused engagement activity (e.g. workshops, surveys)
- qualitative feedback integrated into performance reporting

6.4 Implications for Commissioning and Delivery

Embedding the child's voice will directly inform commissioning and market development.

This will include:

- prioritising providers who can evidence strong relational and trauma-informed practice
- ensuring homes are capable of meeting emotional, communication and sensory needs
- incorporating lived experience measures into contract monitoring and provider evaluation
- strengthening expectations around stability, consistency and local connections

By embedding children's lived experience at the centre of sufficiency planning, Swindon will ensure that the strategy is not only delivering the right number of placements, but the right quality of care.

7. Market Position Statement (2026–2029)

7.1 Assessment of the Current Market

Swindon's market has responded to sufficiency challenges by increasing the number of local children's homes and supported accommodation providers. Engagement with providers through regional frameworks, market engagement events and one-to-one meetings has helped attract investment into Swindon.

However, gaps remain:

- Local in-house fostering capacity is growing, but remains under pressure
- Kinship carers can be involved at a range of legal stages and there is a need to have a clear Kinship Local Offer to support them
- There is limited residential provision with the right skills to support adolescents with complex needs.
- The SMC cohort requires more culturally responsive semi-independent placements.
- Supported lodgings and step-down foster care are not yet at the scale required.

7.2 Market Needs

Over the life of this strategy, Swindon will need:

- The ability to use 10 additional local residential homes by 2029 equating to a minimum of 25 children, including a mix of solo and small group homes.
- SBC's first collaborative residential home to be operational and fully utilised.
- Expanded in-house fostering capacity, particularly for teenagers, siblings, children with disabilities and parent and child placements.
- Increased specialist provision for SMC, including culturally appropriate semi-independent settings with targeted support.
- Increased Supported Lodgings capacity, especially for care leavers stepping down from foster or residential placements.
- Provision that can meet both care and education needs for children with autism, communication needs, SEMH, trauma, disability and complex adolescent risk.
- Residential and fostering provision that can work effectively with the Virtual School, SEND Service, schools, specialist settings and health partners to support EHCP outcomes.
- Local provision that reduces the need for children with complex SEND to be placed out of borough solely because integrated care and education support is unavailable locally.

7.3 What Providers Can Expect from Swindon

Swindon Borough Council will:

- Provide transparent information about demand and commissioning intentions.
- Offer regular market engagement events and one-to-one discussions.
- Set clear expectations regarding quality, outcomes and pricing.
- Support providers to prepare for and maintain Ofsted registration, including under the supported accommodation regulations.
- Work collaboratively on innovation, step down pathways and Staying Close/Supported Lodgings models.
- Clear information about education and SEND expectations at the point of referral and matching.
- Joint working with the Virtual School and SEND Service where children have EHCPs or identified SEND.

7.4 Health and Mental Health Sufficiency

A significant constraint on sufficiency is the limited availability of health funded support, particularly for children with mental health needs, neurodiversity and/or specialist packages. This places additional pressure on placement provision and can drive demand towards higher cost settings.

The Council will:

- Explicitly identify where gaps in health funding mean need is not being met
- Use commissioning intelligence to inform joint discussions with health partners

While the Council cannot resolve these pressures in isolation, making them visible and tracked is essential to effective sufficiency planning.

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

The following strategic priorities will direct Swindon's sufficiency work over the next three years.

Priority 1: Strengthen Early Intervention and Prevention to Reduce Demand

Aim: To reduce the number of children entering care by strengthening early intervention, family support and edge-of-care services.

Why this matters: Demand for placements is not fixed. Without effective early help and targeted intervention, more children will enter care unnecessarily, placing additional pressure on sufficiency, increasing costs and reducing the council's ability to secure the right homes for those children who most need them. Strengthening prevention improves outcomes by enabling children to remain safely within their families and communities wherever possible.

Strategic intent: Swindon will reduce demand on the care system by embedding a whole-system approach to early intervention, ensuring that families receive the right support at the right time to prevent escalation into care. Swindon will align its early intervention and edge-of-care offer with the principles of the national Families First Partnership (FFP) reform programme. This will include strengthening multi-agency working to ensure families receive coordinated, timely and evidence-based support that reduces escalation into statutory intervention.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Reduction in the number of children entering care
- Increased proportion of children supported to remain safely within their family networks
- Reduced demand for high-cost and crisis placements
- Improved outcomes for children on the edge of care

Delivery focus:

- Strengthening early help and edge-of-care services to intervene earlier
- Embedding a consistent approach to family network identification and support – Kinship care is a key component of both early intervention and sufficiency, enabling children to remain safely within their family networks and reducing demand for formal care placements.
- Alignment between prevention, safeguarding and sufficiency planning
- Developing integrated multi-disciplinary teams that bring together children's social care, early help, health, education and community services
- Increasing access to intensive, whole-family support models that address the root causes of risk, including parental mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse
- Use SEND, attendance, exclusions, alternative provision and social care data to identify children at risk of care escalation and target earlier multi-agency support.
- Use of shared data to identify emerging risk and target intervention effectively

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Priority 2: Increase the Availability of Local, High-Quality and Regulated Provision

Aim: To reduce reliance on distant, unregulated and high-risk placements and ensure more children can live safely, sustainably and successfully in or close to Swindon, in provision that delivers positive experiences and outcomes.

Why this matters: Children placed far from home, or in provision that is not appropriately regulated or matched to their needs, experience poorer outcomes, higher placement instability and increased risk. They are more likely to feel disconnected from their families, communities and support networks, and less likely to achieve stability and positive life outcomes. Swindon currently places a higher proportion of children outside the local area than is desirable, reflecting historic under supply of local provision and wider market constraints. The use of unregulated placements further increases safeguarding, quality and financial risk and can undermine children's sense of safety, belonging and wellbeing. Sufficiency is not only about the availability of placements, but about ensuring that children live in homes where they feel safe, listened to and supported to thrive.

Strategic intent: Swindon will increase the supply of high-quality, regulated local provision across fostering, residential and supported accommodation, aligned to assessed need and complexity, while eliminating reliance on unregulated placements. This will be delivered alongside a strengthened focus on children's lived experience, ensuring that sufficiency planning is driven not only by capacity and cost, but by the quality of care, stability and outcomes achieved for children.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Reduction in the proportion of children placed more than 20 miles from Swindon, moving towards national comparators
- Net increase in local regulated residential and supported accommodation capacity
- Year on year reduction in the number and duration of unregulated placements, moving to elimination
- Improved placement stability and reduced unplanned moves
- Improved feedback from children and young people on their sense of safety, stability, belonging and wellbeing in their placements
- Increased availability of regulated provision capable of meeting high complexity need

Delivery focus:

- Targeted development of council owned assets operated by high-quality providers
- Strategic use of commissioning to influence the location, quality, experience and cost of provision
- Embedding clear expectations on providers regarding children's outcomes, voice and lived experience
- Alignment with planning, property and regeneration activity to support local provision growth
- Targeted commissioning for adolescents with complex needs, including those subject to DoLS
- Develop local placements that can sustain both care and education for children with complex SEND, reducing the need for out of area arrangements.
- Regional collaboration to increase access to specialist regulated provision
- Strengthened monitoring, quality assurance and reporting through sufficiency governance, including systematic use of children's feedback

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Priority 3: Build a Diverse, Sustainable and Resilient Market

Aim:

To develop a mixed economy of provision that is resilient e.g. to workforce pressures and regulatory change.

Why this matters:

Overreliance on a narrow segment of the market increases cost, fragility and risk. A diverse market is better able to respond to changing demand and maintain quality.

Strategic intent:

Swindon will actively shape a balanced market comprising private, not-for-profit and council enabled provision.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Increased diversity of providers across placement types
- Reduced volatility in placement availability and cost
- Improved financial sustainability of commissioned provision

Delivery focus:

- Engagement with not-for-profit and social value led providers
- Use of council owned assets to influence supply and pricing
- Clear commissioning expectations on quality, outcomes and transparency



8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Priority 4: Improve Sufficiency planning through greater data and insights into complexity and changing demand

Aim:

To ensure sufficiency planning reflects not just volumes of children, but the complexity of need, informed by robust data, intelligence and eventually predictive analysis.

Why this matters:

Demand is increasingly shaped by mental health need, neurodiversity, trauma and legal status (including DoL), which directly influences the type, quality and cost of provision required.

Without a strong understanding of both current and emerging demand, there is a risk that provision will not align to children's needs, leading to poor matching, placement instability and increased cost.

Effective use of data and intelligence enables a more proactive approach to sufficiency, allowing the council to anticipate demand, target investment and ensure that children receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Strategic intent:

Swindon will embed a data-led approach to sufficiency planning, using demand, complexity and market intelligence to inform commissioning decisions, shape the provider market and improve outcomes for children.

Sufficiency planning will move beyond retrospective analysis to include forward-looking demand modelling, enabling earlier intervention and more effective alignment between need, placement type and support models.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Improved match between need, placement type and support model
- Reduced placement breakdown linked to unmet complexity
- Improved timeliness of placement matching
- More accurate forecasting of future sufficiency pressures
- Increased use of data to evidence commissioning decisions and investment priorities
- Specialist residential and overnight respite provision for children and young people with disabilities

Delivery focus:

- Embedding a consistent, intelligence-led approach to analysing demand, complexity and system flow
- Development and use of predictive modelling to identify future sufficiency pressures
- Integration of data from across children's services, housing and health to provide a whole-system view
- Regular review of placement mix assumptions informed by data and trend analysis
- Strengthening the use of performance data, including children's outcomes and lived experience, to inform commissioning and service design
- Alignment with practice improvement and early intervention strategies to ensure data drives both demand reduction and sufficiency planning

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Priority 5: Strengthen Joint Working with Health and Regional Partners

Aim:

To mitigate the limits of Swindon's market influence by working collaboratively with health partners and neighbouring authorities.

Why this matters:

Swindon is a relatively small local authority. Operating in isolation limits leverage with providers and constrains access to specialist provision, particularly where health funding is required.

Strategic intent:

Swindon will embed regional and partnership working as a core component of sufficiency delivery.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Increased joint commissioning activity with health partners
- Improved access to health funded support packages
- Greater alignment with regional sufficiency initiatives

Delivery focus:

- Leaning into Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) arrangements and informal regional partnerships
- Clearer articulation of health-related sufficiency gaps
- Alignment with the remit of new commissioning capacity
- Use joint commissioning arrangements to identify children whose needs sit across care, education and health, particularly those requiring therapeutic, SEMH, autism or complex disability support.

Priority 6: Improve placement and accommodation pathways

Aim:

To ensure children and young people experience clear, stable and appropriate pathways through care, including effective step-down from residential provision and sustainable routes into independence for care leavers.

Why this matters:

Weak or poorly defined pathways increase the risk of placement instability, homelessness and escalation into higher cost or more restrictive provision.

Children can remain in residential care for longer than necessary where alternative options, such as fostering or supported placements, are not available or effectively planned. This can limit opportunities for children to experience family-based care and stable relationships.

Similarly, for care leavers, a lack of suitable and planned accommodation options increases the risk of crisis placements, repeated moves and poor outcomes.

A well-functioning system supports children to move to the least restrictive, most appropriate setting at the right time, improving outcomes, stability and long-term independence.

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Strategic intent:

Swindon will strengthen whole-system sufficiency planning to ensure that children and young people can move through the right placements at the right time, supported by clear step-down pathways and aligned accommodation options.

This will include a strong focus on enabling children to step down from residential care into fostering or other family-based settings wherever appropriate, alongside delivering sustainable accommodation pathways for care leavers in partnership with Housing.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Increased proportion of children stepping down from residential care into fostering or family-based placements where appropriate
- Reduced length of stay in residential care where a lower level of provision is suitable
- Reduced use of emergency and unsuitable accommodation for care leavers
- Improved timeliness, stability and sustainability of accommodation pathways for care leavers
- Reduced placement breakdown associated with poor transition planning

Delivery focus:

- Developing clear step-down pathways from residential care to fostering, supported accommodation and other community-based provision
- Strengthening placement planning and review processes to identify step-down opportunities at the earliest point
- Ensure step-down planning from residential care includes an education stability plan, EHCP review where required, and consideration of transport, attendance and reintegration support.
- Aligning fostering, residential and supported accommodation sufficiency to enable movement across the system
- Joint commissioning and performance monitoring with Housing to support care leaver pathways
- Defining and embedding consistent accommodation pathways, including supported housing and supported lodgings
- Shared governance arrangements to oversee transitions, flow and accommodation outcomes across services

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Priority 7: Strengthen the sufficiency and sustainability of the care workforce

Aim:

To ensure there is a sufficient, skilled and stable workforce across fostering, residential and supported accommodation to meet the current and future needs of children and young people.

Why this matters:

Sufficiency is not only determined by the availability of physical placements, but by the capacity, capability and stability of the workforce that delivers care. Workforce pressures, including challenges in recruiting and retaining foster carers and skilled staff, directly constrain the availability, quality and sustainability of provision.

Without a stable and well-supported workforce, placements are less likely to be available locally, more likely to experience disruption, and less able to meet the complexity of children's needs. This impacts children's experience of care, relationships and long-term outcomes.

Strengthening the workforce is therefore essential to delivering safe, stable and high-quality provision, and to reducing reliance on high-cost and distant placements.

Strategic intent:

Swindon will strengthen and sustain the care workforce by increasing the number of foster carers, supporting the stability of the residential and supported accommodation workforce, and improving the quality of support, training and retention across the system.

This will align with national fostering reforms and local sufficiency priorities, ensuring that workforce capacity supports the delivery of the right placements, in the right place, at the right time.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Net growth in in-house foster carers
- Improved conversion rate from enquiry to approval
- Reduced reliance on independent fostering agencies
- Improved retention and stability of foster carers and care staff
- Increased availability of placements able to meet complex needs
- Improved feedback from children and young people on the consistency and quality of relationships with carers and staff

Delivery focus:

- Strengthening recruitment, assessment and support pathways for foster carers, aligned to fostering hub developments
- Enhancing support, supervision and training to improve retention and stability of foster carers
- Working with providers to ensure a stable, skilled residential and supported accommodation workforce
- Embedding clear expectations on workforce quality, stability and training within commissioning arrangements
- Improving understanding of workforce capacity and risk through data and market intelligence
- Aligning workforce planning with sufficiency, demand and complexity modelling

8. Strategic Priorities (2026–2029) 2029)

Priority 8: Strengthen Governance, Assurance and Accountability and the Voice of Children

Aim:

To provide clear assurance that this strategy is deliverable, actively managed, and shaped by the voices of children and young people.

Why this matters:

Effective sufficiency requires ongoing oversight, not static planning. Strong governance ensures delivery, while embedding the voice of children ensures that services are shaped by lived experience, improving quality, relevance and outcomes.

Strategic intent:

Swindon will embed robust governance, performance oversight and annual review, ensuring that the strategy remains responsive, evidence-led and informed by children and young people.

Children's voices will not only be heard, but will actively shape commissioning decisions, service design, placement quality and provider performance.

Key outcomes and measures:

- Clear ownership and delivery of all strategic actions, with high rates of completion
- Transparent reporting of performance, risks and market pressures through governance structures
- Annual refresh of the strategy informed by data, demand, market intelligence and children's feedback
- Children and young people's feedback systematically captured, analysed and used to inform decision-making
- Evidence that children and young people's voice directly influences:
- Commissioning decisions
- Design of new services and provision models
- Contract management and provider performance
- Increased visibility of children's lived experience within performance reporting and governance

Delivery focus:

- Deicated Sufficiency Board providing oversight of strategy delivery, performance, quality and risk
- Monthly performance reporting against agreed KPIs, including children's feedback and lived experience every quarter
- Systematic integration of children and young people's voice into:
- Commissioning activity
- Service design and development
- Provider selection and contract management (where appropriate)
- Use of children's feedback to inform quality assurance processes and continuous improvement of provision
- Annual formal strategy review, co-produced with children we care for and care leavers
- Clear "you said, we did" approach demonstrating how children's feedback has influenced change

9. Governance of the Sufficiency Strategy

9.1 Purpose of Governance

Effective governance is critical to ensuring this Sufficiency Strategy is delivered, monitored and adapted in response to changing demand, market conditions and system pressures.

This governance framework is designed to:

- Provide clear accountability for delivery of the strategy
- Enable early identification and management of risk
- Ensure decisions are informed by performance, demand and market intelligence

Delivery of the Sufficiency Strategy is a whole service responsibility. Clear governance arrangements are essential to ensure leadership grip, accountability and effective risk management.

- Overall accountability for the strategy sits with the Director of Commissioning – People, working in partnership with Children’s Services leadership team (CSLT).
- Progress against the strategy will be monitored via a monthly Sufficiency Board, which will have a series of delivery and detail-focused sub-groups.
- Elected Members will receive regular updates on sufficiency performance, risks and market stability.

The Council will work closely with health, housing, education and provider partners to address shared sufficiency challenges, particularly where placement availability is affected by workforce, health or housing constraints.



9.2 Sufficiency Board

Delivery of this strategy will be overseen through a new and dedicated Sufficiency Board, reporting into the Council’s existing Children’s Services governance arrangements.

The Sufficiency Board will have responsibility for the whole sufficiency system, not solely placement numbers or costs.

Core responsibilities include:

- Monitoring delivery against the strategic priorities and associated performance measures, including progress on specific sufficiency projects (e.g. council-enabled residential home)
- Oversight of demand, market capacity, quality, cost and sustainability
- Managing strategic risks, including market failure and reliance on unregulated provision
- Horizon scanning – future threats and opportunities
- Agreeing corrective action where performance or delivery is off-track
- Providing assurance to senior leadership and Members

Updates on Sufficiency progress will be reported at least annually to the Children’s Improvement Board. Escalations will be made as appropriate, at any time, to any of the following; CSLT, Corporate Management Team, Children’s Improvement Board or Corporate Parenting Board.

The Board will maintain a regular interface with the Local Area SEND Partnership to ensure alignment between children’s placement sufficiency, SEND sufficiency, alternative provision, high needs pressures and preparation for adulthood.

Education and SEND risks should be included in the sufficiency risk register, including lack of local specialist provision, delayed education access following placement moves, reliance on out of area education, and failure to deliver EHCP provision due to placement instability.

There is a dedicated Fostering Recruitment and Retention Board which will oversee the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy and associated action plan.

9.3 Performance and Reporting

Progress against the strategy will be tracked through a defined performance framework, aligned to the strategic priorities and focused on outcomes rather than activity alone.

Performance reporting will include:

- Placement sufficiency measures (location, type, stability and cost)
- Use of unregulated and high-risk placements
- Market capacity and provider diversity
- Financial performance and value for money
- Key risks and mitigations

Performance reports will be considered by the Sufficiency Board every month and escalated through existing governance routes where required.

9.4 Managing Risk and Market Volatility

The governance framework recognises that sufficiency operates within a volatile and constrained national market, and that risks cannot be eliminated but must be actively managed. The Sufficiency Board will hold a risk register, with risks being escalated to the corporate risk register as appropriate. The risk register will enable a structured approach to identifying, managing and mitigating the strategic and operational risks that could prevent the Council from securing enough of the right homes for children and young people in care and care leavers.

Key risks expected to be monitored via the Sufficiency Board include:

- Provider failure or withdrawal
- Workforce shortages impacting capacity across foster care, residential and supported accommodation
- Increased complexity of need (including DoLS and mental health pressures)
- Continued loss of foster carers and insufficient recruitment
- Cost escalation beyond planned assumptions
- Insufficient health funded support impacting placement stability

Risk management will focus on early warning indicators, contingency planning and regional collaboration to mitigate impact.

Risk Management

For each identified risk, the register will set out:

- risk owner;
- likelihood and impact rating;
- mitigation actions;
- escalation thresholds and contingency arrangements.

The strategic risks will be reviewed and updated quarterly with operational risks to sufficiency being monitored monthly.

9.5 Partnership and Regional Governance

Given Swindon's scale and market influence, governance arrangements will explicitly support regional and partnership working.

This includes:

- Alignment with Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) activity
- Participation in informal regional sufficiency networks
- Use of shared intelligence to inform commissioning and risk management
- Joint governance where provision is jointly commissioned or regionally developed

Regional working will be treated as a core delivery mechanism rather than an optional enhancement.

9.6 Annual Review and Strategy Refresh

This strategy will be subject to a formal annual review, led through the Sufficiency Board.

The annual review will:

- Assess progress against strategic priorities and performance measures
- Consider changes in demand, complexity and market conditions
- Reflect learning from inspection, audit and improvement activity
- Inform any necessary revisions to actions, targets or assumptions
- Be co-produced with children we care for and/or care leavers, including a "you said, we did" section demonstrating how children's feedback has influenced change

Where material changes are required, an updated version of the strategy will be produced to ensure it remains current, relevant and deliverable. The annual review will be taken to the Children's and Education Scrutiny committee.



10. Performance Framework

10.1 Introduction to performance framework

This performance framework translates the strategy's ambitions into a clear, measurable set of outcomes aligned to the strategic priorities.

It enables leaders to:

- Evidence progress against sufficiency objectives
- Identify emerging risks and pressures early
- Demonstrate impact on children and young people's lived experience
- Inform commissioning decisions, investment priorities and corrective action

The sufficiency performance framework will:

Focus on children's outcomes and lived experience, not just capacity and activity

- Include clear baselines, targets and timescales where available
- Be dynamic, refined annually based on demand, performance and market intelligence
- Integrate cost, quality, Ofsted outcomes and feedback from children and young people
- Support a data-led approach to commissioning and sufficiency planning

Performance will be monitored monthly through the Sufficiency Board, with escalation where required. Children and young people's feedback will be systematically captured and reported alongside performance data each quarter, to inform Sufficiency Board oversight and decision-making.



10.2 Performance framework

- The measures are grouped into the most relevant strategic priority, although many are cross-cutting.

Strategic priority	KPI	2026 Baseline	2029 Target
1. Strengthen Early Intervention and Prevention to Reduce Demand	Increase in Kinship households	14	25
	Improved timeliness of family network exploration	28 days	14 days
	Improved stability of kinship placements	8%	5%
	Number of Family Network Support Packages (FSNPs)	2	5
2. Increase the Availability of Local, High-Quality and Regulated Provision	Reduction in Children placed more than 20miles from home (OOB = out of borough)	48.45% OOB	25% OOB
	Increased number of residential beds in Swindon	26 Beds	50 beds
	Increase proportion of available spaces in residential children's homes in Swindon occupied by Swindon children	19% (April 2026)	60%
	Eliminating the use of unregulated residential placements (total times children were placed in an unregulated placement per year)	10+ unregulated	0 unregulated
	Number and percentage of children looked after with SEND placed more than 20 miles from home	13 out of 15 children (86.6%)	25%
3. Build a Diverse, Sustainable and Resilient Market	Increased number of residential homes offered by not-for-profits or social enterprises	0 homes	2 homes
	Maintain position of zero unplanned provider exits	1	0
	Increase % of providers rated 'Good' or above by Ofsted where we have children placed	71% (March 2026)	100%
4. Improve Sufficiency planning through greater data and insights into complexity and changing demand	Increased placement stability (instability defined as 3+ moves in 12 months) by reducing % breakdowns	5.49%	3%
	Reduction in average weekly cost of a residential placement	£7, 579, 26	£6,200 (includes inflation assumption)
	Reduction in matching time	81 days	<30 days
	Number of children looked after experiencing a school move as a result of a care placement move	38.6%	25%

Strategic priority	KPI	2026 Baseline	2029 Target
5. Strengthen Joint Working with Health and Regional Partners	Number of jointly commissioned services with health partners	0	1 jointly funded residential home for meeting equivalent to tier 3.5 needs
	% of children with identified health needs receiving appropriate funded support	10%	90%
	Formalised partnership and/or contract arrangement with regional partners e.g. inclusion in Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) or regional joint contracting initiatives	3 regional contracts (IFA, Resi, Mediation)	5 regional contracts and/or membership of an RCC
	Increased utilisation of regional frameworks and/or blocks	68.5% - IFA framework 6.5% - Resi Framework	80% - IFA framework 20% - Resi Framework
6. Improve Placement and Accommodation Pathways	Reduce number of care leavers presenting as homeless	39 (total in 25/26)	20
	Increased number of children stepping down from residential to fostering	0	6
7. Strengthen the Sufficiency and Sustainability of the Care Workforce	Increase number of in-house fostering households	64	84
	Improved conversion rate from enquiry to approval for in-house fostering	8%	10%
	% of commissioned providers with stable leadership (Registered Manager in post 12+ months)	60%	90%
8. Strengthen Governance, Assurance and Accountability	Annual Reviews completed to assess Sufficiency progress (net total across strategy lifetime)	0	3
	Children and young people's feedback is systematically captured and reported alongside performance data	N/A - previous strategy didn't take this approach	Each quarter the Sufficiency Board to review feedback from children and young people about sufficiency priorities, progress and remaining challenges
	Annual reviews to be co-produced with children we care for and/or care leavers, including a "you said, we did" section demonstrating how children's feedback has influenced change	0	100%

11. Financial Strategy and Affordability

11.1 Purpose and Principles

This financial strategy sets out how Swindon Borough Council will ensure that sufficiency ambitions are affordable, sustainable and deliver value for money, while improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

The financial approach is underpinned by the following principles:

- Invest to reduce long-term cost and instability, particularly by growing local, family-based and in-house provision
- Shift spend from high-cost, reactive placements to planned, preventative and local solutions
- Align commissioning, capital investment and workforce planning to maximise return on investment
- Maintain strong financial grip, with clear monitoring, risk management and accountability

11.2 Current Financial Context

Swindon faces significant and sustained financial pressure across children's placements, driven by:

- Rising numbers of children with complex needs
- Continued reliance on external residential and IFA provision
- Use of out-of-area and unregulated placements, which attract the highest unit costs
- Market fragility and inflationary pressures within the independent sector

While the strategy recognises these pressures, this financial plan strengthens the link between sufficiency actions and financial impact, ensuring that investment decisions are evidence-led and affordable over the medium term.

Financial planning should consider whole-system costs, including care placement cost, education placement cost, EHCP provision, therapy, transport, alternative provision, EOTAS and health-funded support. Where children are placed out of area, financial reporting should identify associated education and transport costs so that the Council can understand the full cost of external provision and the potential benefit of local integrated care and education solutions.

11.3 Investment Priorities (2023–2028)

The Council will prioritise investment in areas that deliver both improved outcomes and cost avoidance or savings. This strategy outlines the top 3 priority areas where investment should be considered. This strategy makes no formal commitment to investment; individual business cases will be worked up where funding is required.

11.3.1 Kinship Care

Explore potential for investment in a Kinship Local offer including

- Dedicated kinship assessment and support capacity
- Training, financial allowances and early support packages

Financial rationale:

- Kinship placements are significantly lower cost than residential care
- Improved stability reduces placement breakdowns and future demand

11.3.2 In-house Fostering

Explore potential for investment in targeted investment in:

- Recruitment and marketing
- Retention packages and enhanced support
- Workforce capacity and supervision

Financial rationale:

- In-house fostering is materially cheaper than IFA provision and residential provision
- Net growth delivers recurring savings year on year

11.3.3 Local Residential Provision

Explore potential for investment in targeted investment in:

- Capital investment in council-owned or commissioned local homes
- Reduced dependency on spot-purchased external placements through use of block contracts and frameworks
- Phased expansion aligned to demand forecasts

Financial rationale:

- Lower average weekly placement costs
- Reduced transport, education and health costs linked to distance
- Improved placement stability and oversight

11.4 Ensuring financial grip

The Council will strengthen financial grip through:

- Clear unit cost benchmarks by placement type
- Regular review of:
 - High-cost placements
 - Length of stay
 - Placement outcomes versus cost
- Commissioning decisions informed by cost-benefit analysis, not availability alone

Sufficiency related savings will be explored as part of Medium-Term Financial Planning (MTFP) and will be explicitly linked to sufficiency actions, particularly:

- Reduction in unregulated placements
- Reduced out-of-area use
- Increased local and in-house capacity

Key financial risks include:

- Failure to grow local provision at pace
- Market instability or provider failure
- Workforce shortages impacting in-house expansion
- Demand exceeding forecast assumptions

Mitigation actions include:

- Phased investment and gateway approvals
- Contingency planning within commissioning arrangements
- Regular review through the sufficiency governance framework
- Inclusion of sufficiency risks within the corporate risk register

Financial performance against the sufficiency strategy will be monitored through:

- Key financial indicators, including average placement costs and spend by placement type
- Tracking progress against Sufficiency related savings in the MTFP

12. What This Strategy Will Mean for Children and Young People

Delivering this strategy will mean that:

- More children will be able to live close to their families, friends and schools, and fewer will need to live far from Swindon.
- More children will live in local, loving foster homes that can meet their needs, including for long-term permanence.
- Adolescents with complex needs will have access to high quality therapeutic residential care and supported accommodation in Swindon.
- Children with SEND and disabilities will have specialist, stable homes that enable them to thrive.
- Care experienced young people will have safe, stable housing and pathways into work, training and further education, and fewer will experience homelessness or custody.
- Children will experience greater placement stability, fewer moves and more timely permanence.

Ultimately, this strategy is about improving the lives and life chances of Swindon's children and young people, ensuring they are safe, supported and able to achieve their full potential.



13. A three-year plan

A detailed action plan will be maintained to ensure the delivery of this strategy, this will be refreshed at least annually as part of the annual review of the sufficiency strategy. The below gives an overview of how we will approach the delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy, over the 3-year period.

Year 1 (2026/27): Building the Foundations for Sufficiency

The first year of this strategy is focused on establishing the foundations required to deliver sustainable sufficiency over the longer term. This includes strengthening governance, improving commissioning intelligence, developing a robust performance framework and implementing the key building blocks required to reshape the local care market.

This work will be delivered within the context of Swindon's wider improvement journey and the national Families First Partnership (FFP) reforms. The development of integrated multi-agency working, whole-family approaches, earlier intervention and strengthened family network support are expected to contribute directly to future sufficiency outcomes by reducing escalation into care, supporting children to remain safely within their families wherever possible and increasing opportunities for kinship and family-based care. This strategy therefore aligns sufficiency planning with wider service improvement activity, recognising that long-term sufficiency is influenced not only by the availability of placements but also by the effectiveness of prevention, family help and early intervention services.

Year 2 (2027/28): Embedding and Expanding Sufficiency

Year 2 will focus on embedding the governance, commissioning and market development foundations established in Year 1. Building on improved oversight, strengthened data and refreshed commissioning arrangements, activity will centre on increasing local capacity, implementing findings from reviews and needs assessments, and improving pathways through care.

Key areas of focus will include:

- Expanding the availability of local residential, fostering and supported accommodation provision.
- Implementing recommendations from the housing and care needs assessment to strengthen accommodation pathways for older adolescents and care leavers.
- Introducing block contract arrangements to improve access to local, high-quality provision at sustainable costs.
- Reducing reliance on unregulated and emergency placements through targeted commissioning activity.
- Further strengthening joint working with health, housing, education and regional partners to improve integrated care, education and therapeutic support.
- Completing the first annual review of the strategy and using learning, performance data and children's feedback to refresh priorities and actions.

By the end of Year 2, the Council expects to have improved local market capacity, strengthened placement pathways and increased confidence in its ability to forecast and respond to changing demand.

13. A three-year plan

Year 3 (2028/29): Sustainability and Long-Term Sufficiency

Year 3 will focus on consolidating gains made during the strategy period and ensuring that sufficiency improvements are sustainable beyond 2029. The emphasis will shift from establishing provision to ensuring long-term stability, quality and value for money.

Key areas of focus will include:

- Delivering further growth in local provision where gaps remain.
- Embedding predictive demand modelling to support commissioning and investment decisions.
- Increasing market diversity through the development of not-for-profit and social enterprise provision.
- Demonstrating measurable reductions in out-of-area placements, unregulated placements and placement instability.
- Embedding children's lived experience and outcome data within commissioning and performance management arrangements.
- Undertaking a comprehensive review of achievements, learning and remaining challenges to inform the next Sufficiency Strategy.

By 2029, Swindon aims to have a more resilient, diverse and sustainable local care market, with improved outcomes for children and young people and reduced reliance on high-cost external provision.



We See.
We Hear.
We Care.
We Act.
We Learn.

