



Swindon Borough Council

# **Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2018-2020**

***Our vision is to ensure that every child is given the support they need to grow and thrive (Swindon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022).***

**June 2018**

## **Contents**

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- 1. Introduction and context**
- 2. The Corporate Parent**
- 3. Strategic Drivers**
- 4. The Needs of Swindon's Looked After Children**
- 5. Our Strategic Priorities**
- 6. Key Service Improvements**
- 7. Placement Sufficiency**
- 8. Workforce Development**
- 9. Oversight and Governance**
- 10. Appendices**

# 1. Introduction

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Swindon is a vibrant, diverse and growing town where we believe everyone should have the opportunity to live a long, healthy, safe, fulfilling and independent life supported by thriving and connected communities. Swindon's Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2017-2022) outlines our ambition for improving health and addressing health inequalities across the borough. The strategy drives and influences the delivery of health and social care. One of the key outcomes is that every child and young person in Swindon has a healthy start in life. All children and young people in Swindon deserve the best start in life and we want them to enjoy life, establish healthy relationships, achieve, stay safe from harm, be healthy and grow up to reach their full potential making a positive contribution to society.

Our Council Plan 2016-2020 sets out vision for Swindon and the priorities we are trying to achieve for our residents and the borough of Swindon. Priority 4 outlines the Council's commitment to ensure that every child is given the support they need to grow and thrive. The quality and responsiveness of children's social care can transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children in Swindon. It can offer every child who has had a difficult start the promise of a brighter future, with every prospect of success. The Council has made specific pledges around increasing the percentage of care leavers going into employment, education and training, and increasing the percentage of looked after children who are placed inside the Borough boundaries or within 20 miles of their home address

Our aim is to improve the life chances of our children and young people in care and care leavers by:

- Intervening early to give them the best start in life and promote wellbeing
- Ensuring children and young people are protected from harm
- Ensuring that they have access to an excellent education and achieve their potential

Children growing up in care and care leavers must have equal life chances to all children growing up in Swindon as set out in Swindon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2017-2022) and the Council Plan (2017-2022).

## 2. The Corporate Parent

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When a child comes into care, Swindon Borough Council becomes the Corporate Parent. This means the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies all have collective responsibility to safeguard and provide the best care for the children who are looked after or have left care. Every member and employee of the Council has statutory responsibility to act for that child or young person in the same way that any good parent would act for their own child.

The statutory responsibilities of councils are set out in the Children Act 1989, including amendments made by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Families Act 2014. The Children and Social Care Work Act 2017 made additional provisions for care leavers, and outlined in law for the first time what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent. Section 27 of the Children's Act 1989 also places a duty on health, housing and education authorities to assist Children's Services in carrying out functions under the Act. This includes assisting in the Corporate Parenting function and providing joined up services that best meet the needs of children and young people.

This strategy is linked and informed by the following documents:

- The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy (in development)
- The Corporate Parenting Pledge to Children and Young People in Care
- SBC's Children's Service Strategic Business Plan( DH )
- SBC's Children's Services Plan (JR)
- CLA Health Improvement Plan
- Virtual School Improvement Plan
- A plan to increase the number of young people aged 16-18 (25 for Learners with an Education Health and Care Plan, Care Leavers) participating in learning, and completing learning to move into employment (2018 – 2020)
- Swindon & Wilshire (LEP) Apprenticeship Growth Strategy 2017-2020

### **3. Strategic Drivers**

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The key drivers informing the priorities of Swindon's Children Looked After and Care Leaver's strategy include:

- Ensuring children looked after and care leavers are aspirant to achieve their full potential and that their outcomes are as good as those of their peers in all aspects of their lives so that they achieve a successful transition to independence as young adults
- Ensuring the voice of children looked after and care leavers is integral to service design and delivery
- Having a shared vision and agreed priority objectives for those working with children looked after and care leavers including partners in health, education and housing services.
- Ensuring services for children looked after and care leavers provide best value in terms of cost, are evidence based and demonstrate a positive and tangible impact on their lives
- Deliver the Children and Young People Looked After Pledge and the Care Leavers Promise

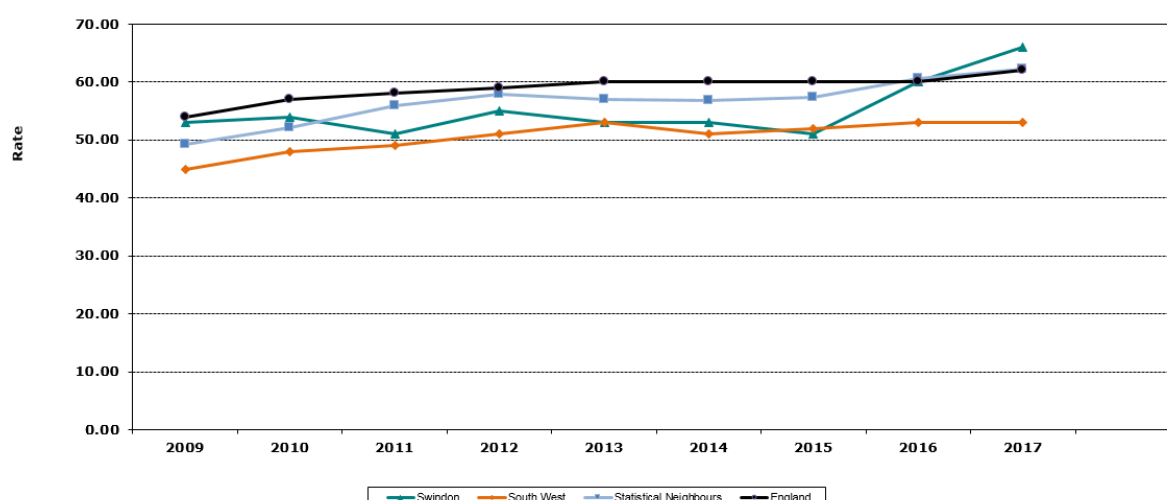
Our looked after children and care leavers play a key role in helping to shape and influence the services that they receive and their views are reflected in our Strategy. Central to this Strategy, and to Swindon Borough Council and our partners' work, is our pledge to children and young people looked after and the care leaver's offer in Swindon. We would like thank the young people in the Children in Care Council for their contribution to this. We will deliver on our pledges to Children and Young People Looked After and Care Leavers as set out in appendix 1.

### **4. The Needs of Swindon Looked After Children**

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In Swindon, there were 359 children looked after at the end of March 2018 (an increase from 292 at the end March 2016). The rate of children looked after per 10,000 is 73.27 which is above both the national average (62) and the average for our statistical neighbours (62.2). As at March 2018, Swindon had accommodated 25 unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

## Children looked after rate per 10,000 children aged under 18



We recognise we need to do more to improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers in Swindon. The council is committed that by 2022 our performance will be in line with or better than the national average across the outcomes measures for looked after children and care leavers.

The council recognises the importance of looked after children being placed in a family environment. 69.1% of children live in foster care; 36.5% with Independent Fostering Agencies and 32.6% with In-house foster carers. Of the remaining 30.9%, 16% live in families with connected persons i.e. relatives or family friends; and only 9% live in residential care or supported living. Swindon has no in-house residential capacity and faces a national shortage of residential placements which impacts on all local authorities. The department is embarking on a recruitment drive to expand its number of In house foster carers. This is part of our emerging Sufficiency Strategy to improve placement choice.

We aim to offer ever increasing stability as the foundation for future life chances. Latest data shows too many of Swindon's looked after children are experiencing placement breakdowns. During 2017/18, 11.7% of children looked after had 3 or more placements (national average 10% and statistical average 10.5%) and 51.85% experienced long term stability placements (national average 68% and statistical average 67.8%). We recognise placement stability impacts on all areas of a young person's life including educational achievement. We need to ensure we are better at meeting their psychological and emotional needs. We recognise we are also placing too many children and young people 20 miles or more away from home. As at March 2018, 23.12% of children were placed 20 or more miles away compared to the national average of 13% and statistical neighbour average of 11.9%. This has implications for the child and family in terms of maintaining contact and for social work practice and oversight. It also means that in our role as a Corporate Parent, we have less control over the support offered to our children and young people including education and Children and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS) provision.

Due to the significant increase in Children Looked After (2016-18) and insufficient local placements, some of our long term looked after children have experienced limited social work contact. Their care and pathway plan reviews have not always been timely, and work is underway to make plans more specific to include clear targets and timescales with greater input from the young people themselves. As at March 2018, 56.26% of children looked after had an up to date assessment, and 89.4% of looked after children reviews were completed on time.

The quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) is also being addressed to ensure they drive good outcomes. Case file recording has been of variable quality but management oversight is supporting improvements so the rationale for decision making and the child's journey is more easily understood. Currently

The recent rise in the number of our children coming into care is in line with national trends, further exacerbated by a legacy of a lack of timely interventions. In addition, Swindon currently lacks an 'alternative offer' to support children and families at times of crisis and this has led to more children coming into care. In conjunction with this, the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers has been insufficient to meet demand and we have had an over-reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies and private providers of children's residential care homes which has resulted in too many young people being placed some distance away.

We know we need to do better to prepare our children in care and care leavers to live independent and fulfilling lives. As at March 2018, 18.52% of pathway plans were in place for 16-18 year olds. We are focussing our efforts on ensuring all our young people have a pathway plan in place by their 16 birthday. Personal advisers (PA) and social workers will keep in touch with young people to monitor their pathway plan, as well as flag any potential risks so they can be addressed.

We will ensure care leavers receive financial support for education, training and employment as well as help with accommodation, food and clothing. Compared to family authorities, we have fewer young people remaining looked after until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or taking up the 'Staying Put' offer' which enables looked after children to continue to live with their foster carer after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We will encourage more the young person and carer to take up the staying put arrangement where appropriate.

## **5. Our Strategic Priorities and actions to be taken**

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This strategy has been informed by national and local policy, views of stakeholders and professionals, and good practice. The strategy proposes the following strategic priorities for 2018-2021 for children looked after and care leavers. They are informed by the service improvements we intend to make over the next 3 years to improve outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. These priorities will have a positive impact on children during their childhood and improve their ability to lead successful and happy lives as adults:

Priority 1- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have suitable and stable placements and accommodation so they are able to make and sustain safe, nurturing and enduring relationships

Priority 2 –To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children and care leavers

Priority 3 – To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between the attainments of looked after children and their peers.

Priority 4 – To improve support and opportunities for care leavers to increase the number and proportion who are in meaningful Education, Employment or Training (EET)

Priority 5 – To listen to looked after children and care leavers to ensure that their voices influence their own care and pathway plans as well as wider service delivery and development.

### **The Priority Actions for 2018/19 to 2019/20**

These priorities will form the basis of our action plan for implementing the strategy. An action plan will be developed and published within 6 months detailing the actions, responsible officers for each action, milestones and timeframe for delivery. The headline actions are set out below.

In order to achieve all these outcomes we will ensure all looked after children up to the age of 18 have an allocated qualified social worker and that all young people over 18 will have an allocated personal advisor (PA). All staff will be supervised and all care and pathway plans reviewed at a multi-agency review meeting by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who will be a qualified social worker.

Priority 1- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have suitable and stable placements and accommodation so they are able to make and sustain safe, nurturing and enduring relationships

All evidence shared by the DFE indicates the best outcomes are achieved by children and young people who are helped to remain in a stable and consistent placement that provides them with the opportunity to have long standing relationship with adults and peers. We will always aim to place children in family based settings so we need a pool of foster carers able to provide a wide range of placement types, from emergency / short-term care through to long-term placements of a number of years.

### Numbers and % of LAC by Placement Type

	Swindon	Stats Neighbour 2017	England 2017
Fostering	79.8%	70.3%	73.5%
Placed for adoption	2.6%	3.9%	3.5%
Placed with own parents	5.6%	6.8%	6.0%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently	5.3%	7.3%	4.3%
Secure Unit	0.0%	8.8%	10.9%
Other Residential Setting	5.6%	2.7%	1.5%
Residential School	1.2%	0.3%	0.2%
Other Placement	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%

### Number and % of children placed more than 20 miles from their home

Number and % of children placed more than 20 miles from their home	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2018
Swindon	22%	23.1% (Provisional)
Stat Neighbour average	12.7%	
England average	14%	

### Stability of placement

	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2018	Statistical Neighbour (2017)	England (2017)
% of Long Term LAC placements stable for at least 2 years (NI063)	70%	51.85%	72.7%	70%
% of LAC who have had 3 or more placements – rolling 12 months	12%		9.5%	10%

We will provide a range of placement options to ensure that the right child is available for the right child through our sufficiency strategy and our placement service. For some children permanence and stability will be found by returning home to their parents or to family members under Special Guardianship arrangements after a short period in care. For others remaining in care with a long term foster family or moving on to adoption will provide the route to permanence.

In 2016, 67% of care leavers in Swindon remained looked after until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday which is lower than England (70%) and statistical neighbours (74.5%). 83% of care leavers in Swindon were in suitable accommodation in 2017 which is a similar level to England and statistical neighbours.

### **Headline priority actions:**

- To develop Sufficiency Strategy and Plan to increase our own placement provision and reduce reliance on independent fostering agencies and residential placements to address the needs of children and young people in relation to race, religion, language, culture, gender, disabilities and emotional/psychological difficulties.
- Implement the Foster Carer recruitment campaign and equip carers with the skills and strategies necessary to manage the myriad challenges that fostering can present by providing regular training, supervision and practical support.
- Work closely with Adoption Thames Valley to ensure children are placed with adoptive families without delay.
- Support children and young people to maintain family, education and community links where that is deemed appropriate in line with the statutory guidance 'securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children'.
- Work with young people, partners and commissioners to expand and enhance the accommodation offer for Care Leaver's ensuring it is flexible, appropriate and affordable.
- Implement Swindon's Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework to ensure the five stages are fully embedded in the young person's pathway plan as they begin their journey to leave care
- Implement and embed the Joint Housing protocol to ensure housing needs for Care Leaver's are jointly assessed by social care and housing and support and the opportunity to secure tenancies is always considered where appropriate.
- To actively promote young people remaining with their foster carer's post 18 years on Staying Put Arrangements, allowing young people to remain in

secure and stable homes until they are ready and able to make the transition to independence.

- Work with partners on the LSCB Missing persons and CSE subcommittee to protect and support vulnerable looked after children and young people.

## **Impact measures 2017**

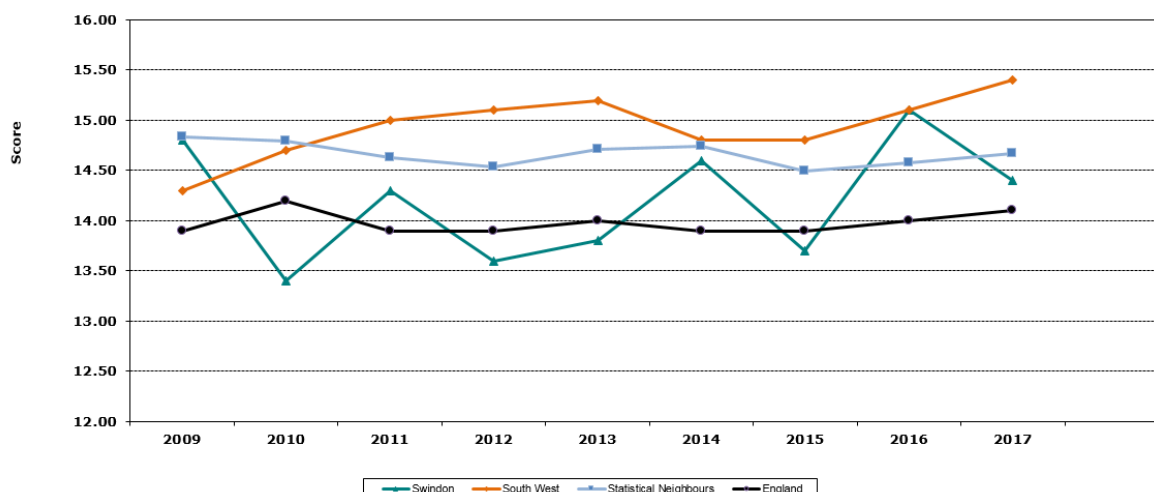
- A. 12% of looked after children had three or more placements compared to 10% nationally and 9.5% for the statistical neighbour
- B. 70% of looked after children were in the same place for at least 2 years compared to 70% nationally and 72.7% for the statistical neighbour
- C. 22% of looked after children were placed more than 20 miles from their home compared to 14% nationally and 12.7% for the statistical neighbour.
- D. there were 225 approved foster carers in Swindon in 2017, a reduction of 45 compared to the previous year
- E. 36.5% of children are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (2017/18)
- F. Percentage of children who more than one LAC episode
- G. 78% of children leaving care over the age of 16 remained looked after until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday compared to 71% nationally and 71% for the statistical neighbour
- H. 83% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation compared to 84% nationally and 82.7% for the statistical neighbour.
- I. 20% of care leavers aged 19 or 20 remained with their former foster carer compared to 25% nationally and 29.5% for the statistical neighbour

Priority 2 -To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children and care leavers
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The Statutory Guidance 'Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children' (DOH 2015) sets out to guide local authorities collaborating with the Clinical Commissioning Group and health providers to reduce the health deficit for children looked after and care leavers.

Just as children looked after and care leavers often have a difficult start in life; they also tend to have higher physical, psychological and emotional ill health than their peers. About 60% of those looked after in England have been reported to have emotional and mental health problems, which is four times the rate for children generally. Many children looked after and care leavers have experienced early trauma including conditions such as foetal alcohol syndrome and attachment disorders, which can lead to behaviour problems and conduct disorders. Delays in identifying and meeting their emotional wellbeing and mental health needs can have far-reaching effects on all aspects of children's lives, including their ability to engage in education. As a result their chances of reaching their full potential as adults are hampered. The emotional and behaviour health of looked after children is tracked through the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire. The graph below shows the score for Swindon has reduced from a score of 15.10 in 2016 to 14.4 for 2017 which brings us more in line with national and statistical benchmarks.

## Emotional and Behavioural Health of Looked After Children



The health and well-being of children looked after and care leavers requires a holistic approach encompassing physical, mental, emotional and sexual health. It also demands respect for their ethnicity, cultural and religious beliefs and should achieve a sense of well-being that is meaningful to them. It is essential to promote healthy lifestyles and use resources creatively to address issues including drug and alcohol misuse, smoking, self-harm, safe relationships and sexual health. Everyone involved in working with children looked after and care leavers has an active role and possesses opportunities in improving their health and well-being. This is supported by the Children Looked After Health Team.

Young people must feel that their cultural beliefs are respected and supported. Young people in care need help to maintain their identity and sense of belonging to one family while making attachments and relationships with another. We will be better at evidencing diversity and equality considerations are taken into account in all decision making and this is reflected in assessments, plans and reviews.

Improved self-esteem, social skills and recognition of healthy and loving relationships are crucial as a young person moves through childhood and adolescence.

### Headline priority actions

- Develop clear pathways to ensure Children Looked After and Care Leavers receive timely and appropriate interventions to address social, emotional, mental health and behaviour health when identified e.g. high scores for Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

- Ensure looked after children and care leavers are supported to access online resources (e.g. courses and mobile apps) to support their mental health and wellbeing
- Health care assessments, health plans and reviews are comprehensive and timely and readily shared with professionals and parents as appropriate
- Diversity and equality considerations are taken into account in all decision making and reflected in assessments, plans and reviews
- Health and wellbeing are key components of Looked After Children and Care Leavers assessments, plans and reviews
- All children leaving care have a health passport
- To establish clear pathways to support effective Transition Planning which enables vulnerable care leavers who don't meet the adult mental health or learning disability criteria to access support

Details of how these actions will be addressed are documented in the Children Looked After Team Service Improvement Plan.

## Impact measures (2017)

- 54% of LAC have had their dental checks on time, compared with national average 57% and statistical neighbour 56.5%*
- 53.5% of LAC have annual health check, compared with national average 62% and statistical neighbour 62%*
- Annual immunisation: x% of SBC LAC have had their annual immunisation on time, compared with national average % and statistical neighbour x%*
- 8% of LAC (approximately 14-16 young people) were identified as having a substance misuse problem compared with national average 4% and statistical neighbour 3.63%*
- Emotional and behavioural health SDQ score (strengths and difficulties questionnaire) is 14.40 compared with national average of 14.10 and statistical neighbour of 14.67*
- Number of Looked After Children accessing the independent advocacy service.*

Priority 3 – To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between the attainments of looked after children and their peers.

The majority of children in care and care leavers start from a position of increased vulnerability and disadvantage that needs additional support to overcome. The educational attainment of Swindon's children looked after against the performance of all pupils nationally, show that gaps in attainment and progress are not closing quickly enough. Poor attainment, in addition to other barriers, makes it more difficult for our children looked after to move successfully into further education, training and work.

Swindon has a Virtual School Head (as set out in the Children & Families Act 2014) to champion the education of children in the authority's care, as if they all attended the same school. Our Virtual School Head tracks and monitors the attainment and progress of our Children Looked After. These children have personal education plan (PEP), and access to one to one support, including personal tuition where appropriate (using the Pupil Premium). Our Virtual Head champions the educational needs of our Children Looked After across Swindon including those children placed out of authority, and maximises the learning opportunities for all care leavers up to 25 years

### **Headline priority actions**

- Ensure all looked after children and previously Looked After children have the highest priority within all mainstream schools admission arrangements
- All looked after children age 3-18 have an up to date personal education plan (PEP) in place and there are robust procedures to monitor the attendance and educational progress of the children
- To ensure pupil premium is targeted appropriately to effective interventions to improve educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers
- To ensure schools and other settings understand the importance of helping identify looked after children's emotional and mental health needs to enable them to receive better educational support
- To encourage and support social workers, carers and personal advisers to have high expectations in helping looked after children and care leavers to achieve their full potential in education (from preschool to post-16 education), employment and training
- Whenever a child moves school, there is a timely and informed discussion about the choice of school that will best meet their needs
- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have the IT they need to learn, have fun and maintain friendships
- Extend reach of VS – early years, post 16. Post 18 and edge of care

### **Impact measures 2017**

- A. *93% of termly Personal Education Plans (PEP) completed within timescale (Jan-March 2018).*
- B. *5.9% absence from school of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months compared to national average of 4.3% and statistical neighbour of 4.33%*
- C. *KS1 outcomes: 50% reached age related expectation in reading compared to 51% nationally; 50% reached age related expectations in writing compared to 39%*

*nationally; 57% reached age related expectations in mathematics compared to 46% nationally*

- D. KS2 outcomes: 40% reached age related expectation in reading compared to 45% nationally; 60% reached age related expectations in writing compared to 47% nationally; 60% reached age related expectations in mathematics compared to 46% nationally; and 40% reached age related expectations in reading, writing and maths compared to 32% nationally.*
- E. KS4 outcomes: 31% achieved grade 4 and above in English and maths compared to 17.4% nationally; 17.1 was attainment 8 score compared to 19.3 nationally; -1.20 was progress 8 score compared to -1.18 nationally; 7% of children achieved grade 5 and above in English and Mathematics*
- F. 4% of looked after children with 1 fixed term exclusion compared to 11.44 nationally*

Priority 4 – To improve support and opportunities for care leavers to increase the number and proportion who are in meaningful Education, Employment or Training (EET)

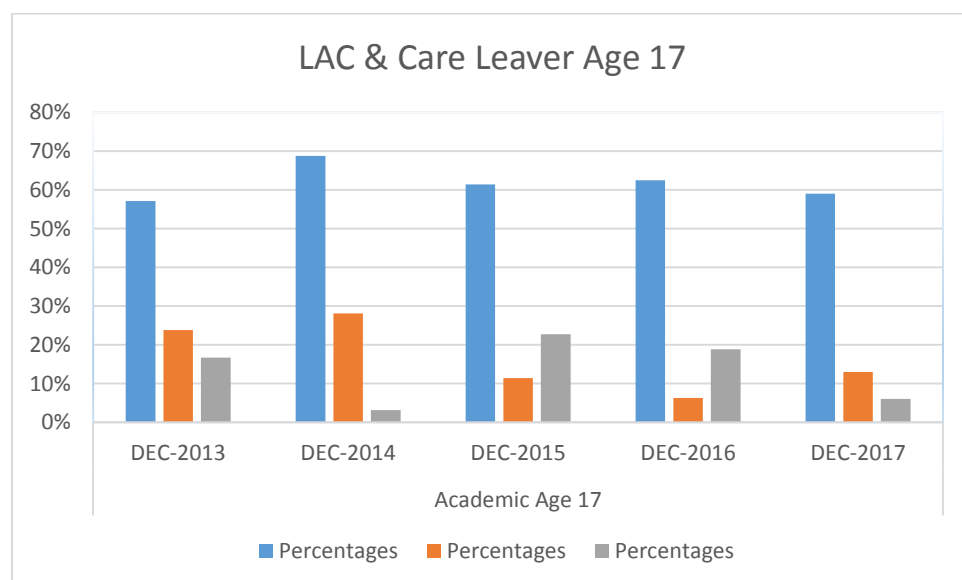
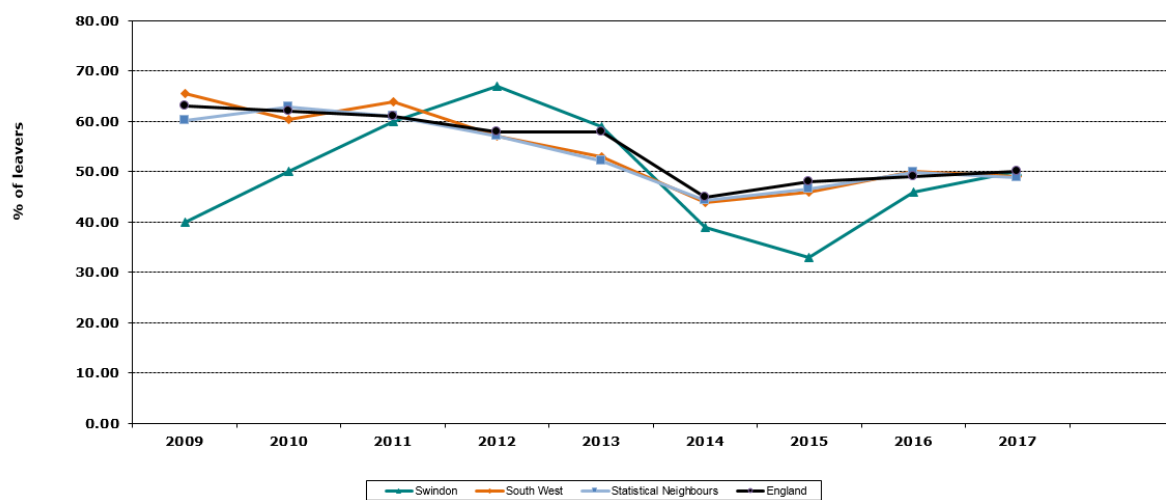
We will provide our care leavers with consistently good support and guidance on their journey into adulthood to ensure they are able to fulfil their aspirations and meet their full potential. Like any good parent, we will assist our young people in acquiring and developing independence skills across all aspects of their life. We will support them to access higher education, employment or training opportunities and ensure that they have somewhere suitable to live once they leave their care placement. We achieve this by:

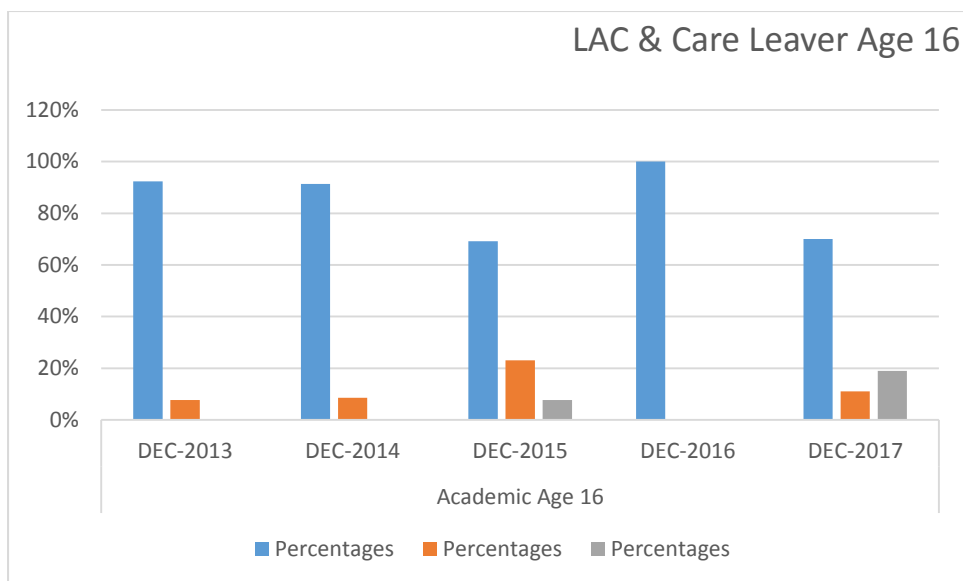
- providing every care leaver with a personal advisor to advise, assist and befriend them
- ensuring every 'eligible' young person has a needs assessment completed before 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and a Pathway Plan, based on that assessment and including the young person's views, completed and reviewed by an IRO within three months of their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday
- working with other agencies to help the young person gain access to wider support services and reduce the risk of social isolation.

We welcome the Government's publication of 'Keep on Caring' in 2016, and endorse the new duties set out within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. In the last year we have seen a decrease in the number of children looked after and care leavers in learning. We have seen an increase in the number of children looked after and care leavers in employment without training. In 2017, the overall "in learning" rate for children looked after/care leavers declined from 84% to 60%. There are currently five care leavers at university and one care leaver completing an Open University Course. In order to increase the number of care leavers entering into learning outcomes, we are developing streamlined processes in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure that outcomes for children looked after and those leaving care have similar targets and aspirations as their peer cohorts. This priority is supported by the Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the Councils

Supported Employment Strategy 2018-2022 which set out our commitment to ensure children in care have the right skills and support to access work.

### Care Leaver- Education, Employment or training (%)





### Headline priority actions

- Develop and implement our Local Offer collaboratively with care leavers
- Expand the care leavers service to ensure the service is extended to all care leavers up to 25 years of age in line with the service improvement plan
- Clear corporate ownership to provide looked after children and care leavers with opportunities for work placements, internships, apprenticeships and employment within the council.
- Increase opportunities across the business community in Swindon to offer employment opportunities for looked after children and care leavers including supported internships, apprenticeships, traineeships and work based learning
- Work collaboratively with Adult Services to develop an effective Transition Planning process so vulnerable care leavers who are eligible for adult services experience a seamless transition
- Implement the plan to increase the number of young people aged 16-18 (25 for Learners with an Education Health and Care Plan, Care Leavers) participating in learning, and completing learning to move into employment (2018 – 2020)
- Implement the Swindon & Wilshire (Local Enterprise Partnership) Apprenticeship Growth Strategy 2017-2020

### Impact measures 2017

- *50% of care leavers are in Education, Employment or training compared to 50% national and 48.8% for statistical neighbours.*

- *48% of care leavers were not in education, training or employment compared to 39% nationally and 39% for statistical neighbours*
- *79.38% of Care Leavers had a contact in April 2018, 94.48% were recorded as having the minimal statutory bi monthly contact.*
- *26 Care Leavers attended work ready programme*
- *3 care leavers in external apprenticeships & 1 internal apprenticeship*

Priority 5 – To listen to looked after children and care leavers to ensure that their voices influence their own care and pathway plans as well as wider service delivery and development

Central to this Strategy, and to Swindon Borough Council and our partners' work, is the pledge to Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Swindon. The work of the Children in Care Council is a good example in terms of designing the Pledge and good account being taken of their views. There is also successful participation of children in care taking part in the recruitment of new staff in Children's Social Care. We also have a participation group for care leavers which meets monthly and encourages open and flexible membership.

Arrangements are in place to actively seek the views of children and their families through surveys for all those who have received services, including those who have attended Child Protection Conferences. The Children in Care Council meets regularly with the Corporate Parenting Board ensuring that members hear their views and experiences of the care system, increasing their ability to influence and improve the services they receive from us as corporate parents. The Council has commissioned Coram Voice to provide advocacy and independent visitors to ensure children in care and care leavers have their voices heard.

It has been recognised that the Children in Care Council is not sufficiently representative of the views of all children and young people in care in Swindon; although these meetings are regular, they are only attended by a small group of those in care about 21%. There are currently 3 participation (children in care councils) groups running in Swindon. One is the JCICC for children between the ages of 7- 12yrs, a SCICC for Children and young people between the ages of 12-18yrs. The final group is The ICE Team (In Care Experienced Team). This group is made up from a selection of the other two groups which contain those children and young people who wish to be more vocal about the issues that they face whilst being in care. They drive forward the issues of the two councils and inform decision makers of their views and how they can help to make their care journey better as well as highlighting good practice.

There is a notable absence of those children with a disability and those from Black or Minority Ethnic groups and unaccompanied asylum seekers, although there has been attendance by young people in these demographics, it is not as well representative as other demographics.

Swindon has a strong commitment to celebrating children's achievements as demonstrated by the annual Children in Care Awards, which has grown year on

year. The awards event now includes all care leavers to celebrate their achievements and this in turn helps with raising the aspirations of those children and young people still in care here in Swindon.

### **Headline priority actions**

- Involve looked after children and care leavers in our recruitment model and the training offer for social workers, foster carers and personal assistants
- Ensure the voice of Children Looked After and Care Leavers from minority groups and children with disabilities are represented
- Merge the IRO challenge group with the children in Care Council and broaden the membership and fully engage the group in service reviews and re-design
- Undertake an annual survey to track performance against Our Children and Young People Looked After Pledge
- Social workers, PAs, foster carers and residential staff will talk to young people about their hobbies, interests, leisure, culture and sporting activities and will positively promote their engagement with the relevant local activities and services.

### **Impact measures**

- **Percentage of LAC satisfied with the service received as judged against the Pledge**
- **Percentage of LAC participating in their reviews**
- **Number of complaints made by children in care**
- **Percentage of children supported by the independent advocacy service**

## **6. Key Service Improvements**

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To achieve our strategic priorities, we need to improve service delivery and standards of practice by focussing on:

- Stability and Consistency in both placements and the workforce
- Compliance and quality of social work practice
- Increased and enhanced management oversight at all levels
- Better co-ordination across internal and external partners
- Better use of performance information and quality assurance processes to ensure outcomes for children are improving.

Progress in these areas will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

## **7. Placement Sufficiency**

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We need to be able to place the right children in our care in the right placements at the right time. This is supported by Swindon's Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2018-2020.

As mentioned previously, we recognise the increasing numbers of Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Swindon. The number of children in care has increased by a third from 252 in March 2014 to 359 at the end of March 2018. These figures put Swindon above the national average and those of comparable Local Authorities.

To meet this demand and provide an range of placement offers, we will be developing our Sufficiency Strategy to develop capacity particularly in family based provision in or close to Swindon whilst ensure we have suitable high quality provision to meet needs young people with highly complex needs. The sufficiency Strategy will link the Demand Management work stream of the Swindon Programme with the Early Help Strategy and LAC/Care Leaver's Strategy.

We aim to ensure we only have the 'right' children in our care and that they are put in the 'right' placements at the 'right' time. To this end we are conducting an independent review of our placement process, structure and commissioning design to ensure we can work quickly and effectively to locate the best and most suitable placement for each child.

## **8. Workforce Development**

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We recognise that developing our workforce is the most effective way of improving service quality across the board. We work closely with the Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Strategy and the Workforce Development strategy to retain our current workforce and increase the number of permanent recruits to the service. We are actively recruiting newly qualified social workers who want to begin their careers in Swindon whilst also recruiting Personal Advisors and Managers. We are reviewing the Training and Development needs of the staff group based on an assessment of the development needs of the social workers and managers. We intend to build a strong culture of excellence based on the professional commitment to provide high quality services for children and young people.

## **9. Oversight and Governance**

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The Management team will develop a detailed action plan alongside this strategy setting out how we will work in partnership with looked after children and young people and our key stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of this strategy. We will also set specific, measurable, and realistic local targets for improving outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The management team will report regularly to the Corporate Parenting Board, Council committees, relevant partnership boards and the Children in Care Council on its effectiveness in meeting its targets.

## **Our Children and Young People Looked After Pledge**

- We promise to do our best for children and young people in care
- We will listen to your views and try to give you choices in all decisions about your life
- We will provide foster carers that treat you kindly, respect you and help you to achieve your goals
- We will make sure you can see your family and friends or tell you why you can't
- We will make sure you have a social worker and know how to contact them. We will try not to change them
- We will try to provide a place at a good school that can meet all your needs, help you if you get excluded and keep your (PEP) plan up to date
- We will help you to take part in activities in your free time that you enjoy
- We will tell you how much pocket money you should get and make sure you get it.
- We will always tell you why you are in care when you want to know
- We will ask you about your health needs and make sure you get the right help. We will recognise your right to privacy about your health
- We will hold regular Reviews; listen to what you tell us about how to make good plans for you. We will try very hard to keep the plan and tell you why if it changes.
- We will make sure that every one of you have someone who is independent to talk to and to help you if you are not happy
- We will tell you what support you can get when you move on from Care and help you with work, college or university
- We will not keep secrets from you