



Swindon Council Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy

2018-2020

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 All Local authorities have a duty to ensure sufficient accommodation for its Looked after children and young people. This is referred to as the 'Sufficiency Duty' as laid down in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. This duty of 'sufficiency' requires Local Authorities to ensure that there is sufficient placements which meet the needs of children and young people in care, and to take steps to develop and shape service provision to meet the needs of all children and young people in care at a local level, as far as is reasonably possible.
- 1.2 This interim strategy has been prepared to respond to the duty by formalising the approach in which Swindon Borough Council will commission children in care placements. An interim strategy has been developed in recognition that SBC is in the process of undertaking detailed work around demand management and financial modelling to improve the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection as well as manage cost pressures. A new director of children's services (DCS) has recently been appointed and he is starting to recruit a new management team. The council has committed an additional £7.5m to support improvements. An improvement plan is being developed. This strategy covers the period from September 2018 to March 2020. The strategy will be then be refreshed and developed further once a full needs analysis has been completed. Our refreshed Sufficiency Strategy will support Swindon Council's Demand Management Programme and our improvement journey to secure better outcomes for children and families across universal, early help and statutory services.
- 1.3 This strategy is informed by a high level analysis of need of children and young people in care (see appendix 1). A more detailed needs assessment of children and young people is planned for early 2019 which will consider the likely changes in the overall care population as we model future services to support the delivery of our demand management and service improvement programmes. The strategy takes into account the ambition to improve preventative and early help services, increase the number of children for whom permanency is secured, and ensure children are matched to the right placement to meet their needs. Young people leaving care are some of the most vulnerable young people in our Society. Care Leavers generally face having to be independent much younger than their peers. They need a support network and safety net as they move to independent living which most of their peers will automatically get from their family. The sufficiency of the support and accommodation provided for them will also be considered.
- 1.4 Securing sufficient, high-quality accommodation to meet the needs of children and young people looked after by the local authority is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Where commissioning for these children and young people is already working well elsewhere in the country, we see examples of choice of placement options, reduced placement breakdown,

better links with universal and specialist services, lower numbers of children coming into care and reduced costs.

- 1.5 Securing sufficient accommodation requires a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and prevention services to support children in their families as well as better services for children if they do become looked after.
- 1.6 The strategy 2018-2020 sets out our approach to ensuring we have a sufficient number and range of accommodation providers in the area to meet a variety of needs. Our ambitions in respect of sufficiency is based upon best practice.

2. Background

- 2.1 Swindon is a fast-growing population which is forecast to rise to around 250,000 by 2030. The current population is 217, 905 (2016) of which approximately 49,924 are under the age of 18 which is 22.7% of the total population. As with any predominantly urban area, Swindon faces challenges around inequality and disadvantage. There are extremes of high and low levels of deprivation. Eight of Swindon's Local Super Output Areas (LSOA) score in the bottom 10% in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Walcott East north west, Pinehurst west, Penhill north and Penhill Central have more than 40% of their children living in poverty. The most deprived LSOA in Swindon is Penhill north in Penhill and Upper Stratton Ward. Approximately 14% of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low income families. Swindon has a diverse and growing population of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families. School census figures show an increase of BAME pupils of 20% in January 2014. 18.8% of children in primary schools and 14.4% of children in secondary schools speak English as an additional language. Swindon has been a dispersal area for asylum seekers for several years. Domestic abuse, alcohol and substance misuse alongside socio-economic factors all impact on the volume and complexity of needs presented by children and young people. The rate of children looked after in Swindon is higher than the averages for both national and statistical neighbours.
- 2.2 One of the greatest challenges for Swindon is improving the outcomes for the small cohort of the most highly complex children and young people. 62.6% of looked after children have special educational needs/disabilities (SEND), of which 28.1% have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). These children often have multiple needs and display highly challenging behaviours.
- 2.3 This sufficiency strategy details our key developments to address the volume and type of placement demands. It is recognised that, as an organisation, we need to be more agile in responding to these challenges going forward. We need to improve our market engagement and management, develop more effective provider relationships and implement robust contracting and quality assurance processes if we are to be able to meet the needs of our children locally.

3. Vision

3.1 In line with Swindon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2017-2022) and Swindon's Council Plan, the over-arching ambition of this strategy is to ensure that every child and young person in Swindon is given the support they need to grow and thrive, and that wherever possible, this support should be within the Swindon area. Children growing up in care and care leavers must have equal life chances to all children growing up in Swindon. Our aim is to work better together across the Children, Families and Community Health Service to become One Children's Service which is consistently good everyday by:

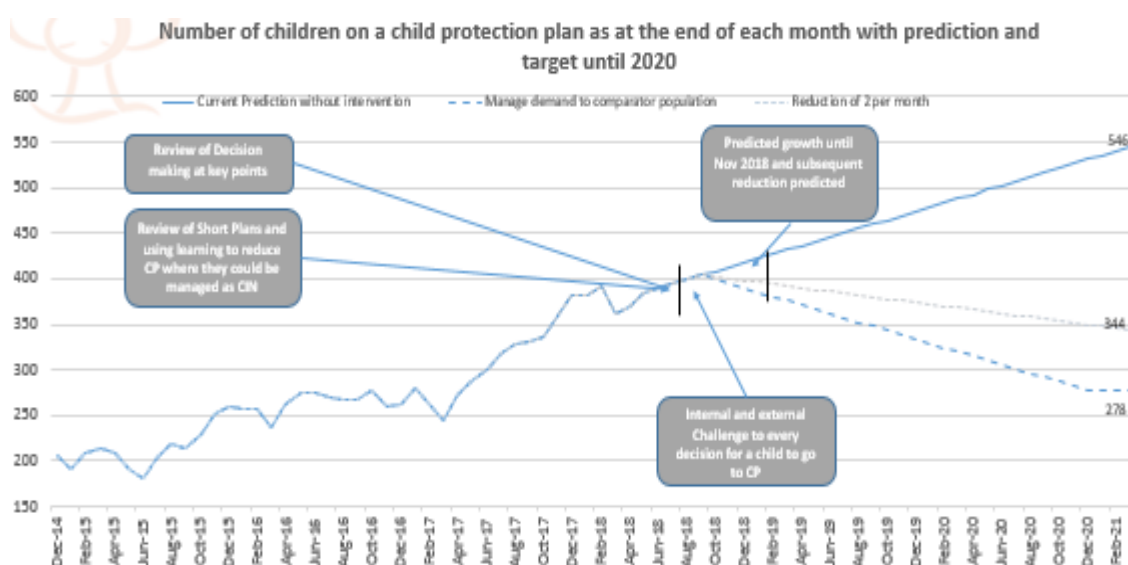
3.1.1 Ensuring Swindon children are protected from harm and their welfare protected

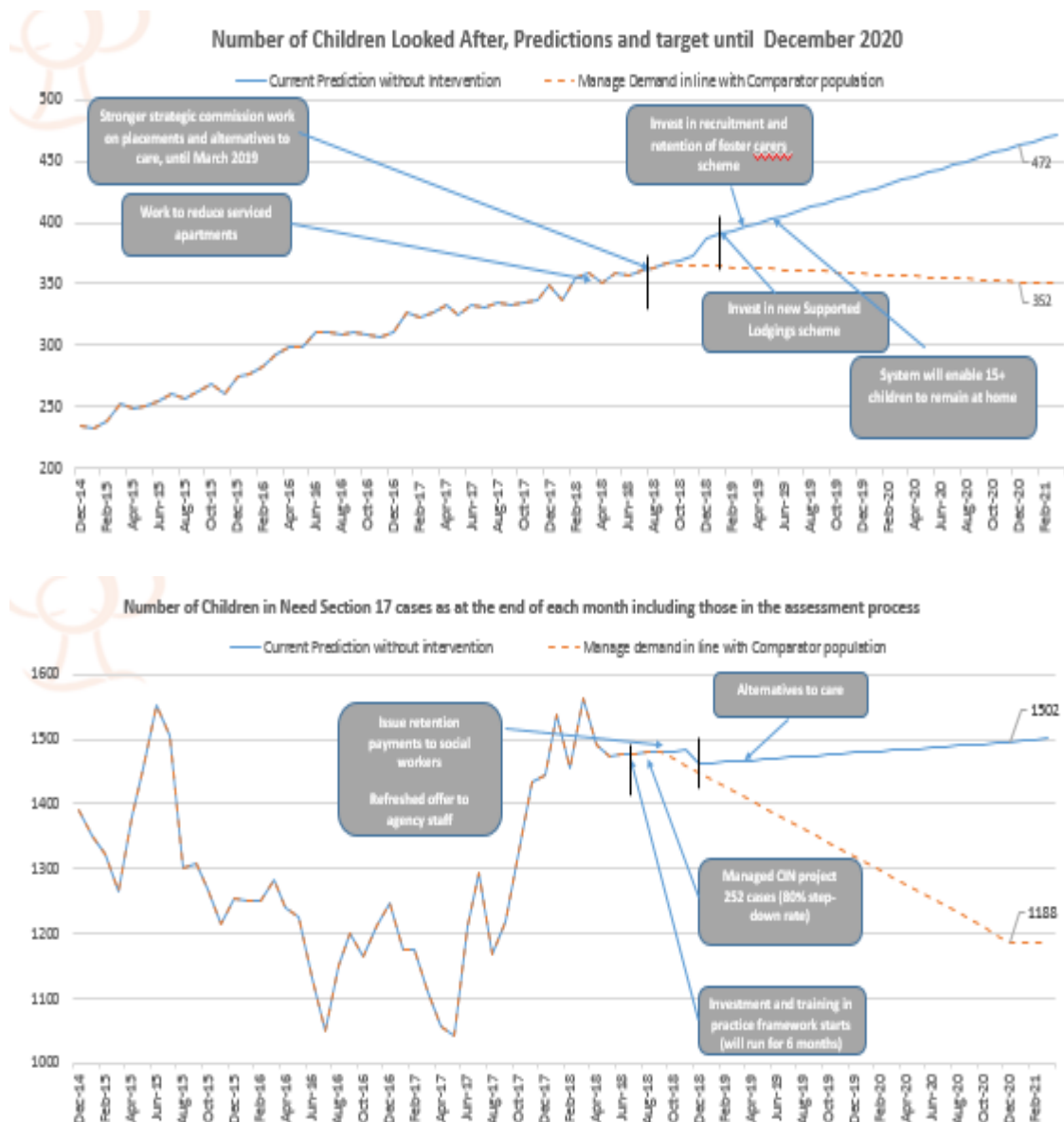
3.1.2 Remaining child centred with a whole family approach

3.1.3 Working quickly and effectively towards reunification or permanency for those children who become looked after

3.1.4 Helping all vulnerable young people develop personal and social skills to live successfully and independently and be happy

3.2 The detailed analysis of need in appendix 1, alongside a number of independent diagnostics and service reviews, have identified several key challenges that we face in achieving sufficiency (see graphs below). We recognise there are too many looked after children in the care of Swindon council. Inconsistency in decision making and not identifying the right intervention at the right time, alongside more complex need, has impacted led to more children becoming looked after. There is a need to ensure that the local authority has provision that enables children's needs to be met, and that prevention and early help are in place to support children where appropriate to remain within their family





3.3 Too many children in care are placed out of the council area. We need to offer more local accommodation, preferably in a family setting, so children and young people in care and care leavers are able to continue to live within or close to the Borough. For young people leaving care, we need to actively encourage them to remain looked after until they are 18 where it is appropriate. For those in foster placements, we will help them to 'stay put' in their placement after they are 18. Where this is not possible or appropriate, we will ensure that we have sufficient accommodation locally to meet their needs including support to enable smooth transition to independent living. We need to work with key providers of specialist provision, and, in doing so, it is essential we achieve much better value in terms of quality, price, unit costs and outcomes across all provision.

3.4 The key areas we have identified to address our sufficiency needs include:

- Adopt a more holistic approach to commissioning and procurement across universal and specialist services to provide a greater scope for innovation,

improve placement choice when a child needs to be looked after, and reduce costs.

- Actively managing the external market to increase placement choice and provide the opportunity to negotiate costs and effectively target placements to meet assessed needs
- Using soft block placement contracts with fostering and residential providers as well as local and regional frameworks to support more creative and efficient commissioning arrangements
- Developing comprehensive and robust quality assurance and contract monitoring processes to ensure placements are good quality and focussed on delivering outcomes.
- Developing more robust financial management processes to scrutinise value for money and budget management ensuring true costs of placements are tracked
- Adopting a personal budget approach to fund more creative placement solutions for the most complex placement requirements
- Increasing local placement capacity by growing the internal foster care resource and improve the support and offer to foster carers in Swindon
- Strengthening children's role in influencing placements and commissioning decisions.
- Strengthening and support practice, so the right children at the right time are in our care
- Further integrating commissioning arrangements across Health, Education and Social Care
- Providing edge of care support for families as an alternative to care including overnight crisis accommodation to prevent the child/children becoming looked after
- Providing more placements locally for children and young people who present with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and challenging behaviour, children who are at risk of exploitation, and children who repeatedly go missing from care
- Providing more placements locally for unaccompanied asylum- seeking children
- Providing placements that can access and support the young people to move successfully to independent settings post 18.

3.5 To respond to the challenges we face, we have identified the following five priorities which will inform our commissioning intentions going forward:

3.5.1 **Families will be supported to enable them to care for their own children including enabling children to return home from care where this is in the child's best interest** – we will be better at targeting effective and timely early help to support children and young people to stay with their parents or extended family so they only come into care where it is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child or young person.

- 3.5.2 **To Increase the capacity and range of local placement options so that more children who need to be looked after, do so within or close to the Swindon** – this will require the recruitment of more in-house foster carers as well as providing and commissioning more local placements
- 3.5.3 **Improve the quality and consistency of practice and support to meet the needs of children looked after, to achieve permanence and improve their care experiences and outcomes**– we will ensure decisions are timely and appropriate and secure permanence at the earliest opportunity. Our practice will be outcome focussed and consistently good everyday
- 3.5.4 **Improve market engagement and management of placements and secure value for money in relation to quality, price and outcomes** – we will review all our commissioning arrangements and ensure that all placements comply with legal duties and responsibilities, meet regulations and national minimum standards/quality standards as they relate to fostering, adoption and residential placements.
- 3.5.5 **Improve transition planning so children looked after who are eligible for adult services experience a seamless transition** – we will focus on the development of more creative packages of support to meet the needs of those children who are looked after and will be eligible for adult services to successfully prepare them for adulthood.

Our Sufficiency strategy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Wishes, feelings and meaningful participation of children will be sought and children and young people will be involved in placement decisions
- There is a diverse range of universal, targeted and specialist services which work together to better meet the needs of looked after children including the provision of preventative and early help services to support children to remain living with their families
- Children are placed within the local authority area where it is reasonably practical and where this is consistent with a child's needs and welfare
- Mechanisms are in place to ensure that professionals involved in placement decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about supply and quality of placements and availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services in the area
- Continuously reviewing our commissioning approach to meet the most complex needs including health and therapeutic needs.
- Work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities through regional and sub-regional arrangements to plan the market and commission placements with independent providers to drive best value in terms of cost and outcomes.

- Promote permanence planning for all children from the start of the child's journey.
- Offer a range of accommodation options to care leavers who do not remain in 'staying put' arrangements including supported lodgings, support housing, semi-independent and independent living arrangements whilst ensuring young people have the right skills to manage the transition to adulthood successfully
- Support the market to deliver adequate quantities and more appropriate placement provision locally to respond to current and predicted demand
- Review the sufficiency strategy on an annual basis to ensure its adequacy and effectiveness to meet current and projected demand and how effectively children are being supported to return home when this is in the child's best interest.

4. Corporate Parenting Pledge

Swindon's corporate parenting pledge sets out its commitment and responsibilities as a corporate parent, which is to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people in care. Every member and employee of the council has a duty to act for that child or young person in the same way that any good parent would act for their own child. This includes enhancing the quality of life of our children in care as well as simply keeping them safe.

5 Commissioning Direction

5.1 Approach

Swindon Borough Council (SBC) will adopt a whole systems approach to the commissioning and procurement of placements. To ensure choice and diversity, SBC will operate within a mixed economy of internal and external provision, commissioned through frameworks, spot and block purchasing arrangements. Regional and national framework tenders will be sought. All commissioning will be strategic and needs led with robust procurement and contract management processes embedded.

Placements will be made according to what placement can best meet the needs of the child or young person. The priority will be to drive up quality as well as ensure we intervene early to maximise the opportunity to de-escalate levels of need and provide greater stability and better outcomes for our children and young people.

We will work with independent reviewing officers and social workers to understand the individual needs, wishes and feelings of children and young people for each individual placement search. We will work directly with the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Group when undertaking commissioning or development activity to ensure their views inform decision making.

5.2 National and Regional Collaboration

SBC will build strategic relationships with other local authorities to identify opportunities for tactical based commissioning using frameworks and block contracts to drive efficiencies. SBC will maximise the use of regional forums to share best practice and seek creative solutions to meet placement needs and improve outcomes for children and young looked after who have complex needs and are difficult to place.

5.3 Local Placements for Local Children

The priority is for children and young people to remain living locally so they can maintain contact with family, friends, school, as well as health and social care professionals. The ambition is for at least 90% of all children looked after to be placed within 20 miles of Swindon. The current proportion is 75%. Swindon will work collaboratively with the provider market and with regional authorities to ensure that the use of local placements for local children is maximised. There are currently 73 in-house registered households in Swindon and there is a recruitment drive to increase the numbers. We will also look at the opportunity for small scale block contracts to increase local placement capacity as well as undertake broader market development to improve co-ordination and placement planning locally.

6. Market Position and Sufficiency

6.1 Market Development Approach

To effectively shape the market, SBC will maintain a strong visible presence and consult directly with the market, providing a clear direction for what is required internally and externally to best meet the needs of our children and young people.

The market must be:

- Composed of a range of providers from across the sectors to achieve variety, sustainability and encourage competition
- Dynamic, flexible, creative and responsive – proactively adapting to changing demand and need
- Child-centred and outcome-focussed
- Efficient, effective and provide value for money

Swindon Borough Council will support the care market development through:

- Adopting an outcome-based approach to commissioning services and working with providers to develop and deliver person centred services
- Working with providers to ensure that they offer continuously improving, high-quality and innovative service provision supported by a highly-trained workforce
- Ensuring that local commissioning practices and services delivered comply with the legislative requirements

- Working with providers and wider stakeholders to develop a sustainable market for care and support
- Encouraging a diversity of providers and different types of services to meet a range of needs and to deliver a range of outcomes
- Having due regard to the sufficiency of provision, in terms of capacity and capability, to meet anticipated needs for children and young people requiring care and support
- Understanding the market through an increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of providers' businesses.

The provision of high quality care and support is a key outcome. It is important, particularly at a time when financial pressures are increasing, that the issue of quality is not overlooked. We recognise that the financial climate is a challenge too for providers and therefore we are committed to working collaboratively with providers to build relationships and trust in which honest and open support and challenge can take place. We will actively work with providers through our commissioning arrangements to strive for the highest standards of services. We will engage with provider forums to promote and develop quality and standards. Our approach to quality monitoring will be to openly challenge as well as offer support and solutions.

6.2 Targeted Early Intervention

Greater targeted and skilled intervention and support for parents who are struggling is required as there are increasing numbers of children coming into care in the last twelve months, many of whom would have benefitted from an edge of care service. Our aim in Swindon is to ensure that only those children come into care for whom this is the right decision, and this decision is made in a timely manner. When appropriate, other children will be supported at home through the provision of a step-up/ step down service to prevent family breakdown.

Although most councils have designed this to take place in the family home, short programmes of intensive help outside of the family home also provide good results. Academic and professional studies have shown that the maximum amount of time for edge of care to take place is 60 days. During this period, professionals working with the family can provide the necessary skills and structure to ensure a young person is able to remain at home or for those in care there is a focus on re-unification through building relationships and increasing parenting capacity. As part of stepping down from care services, the council has recently commissioned floating support for young people using the councils supported housing provision. This is proving to be a useful supplemental service for social workers and uptake is being promoted.

Swindon Family Service

The Family Service in Swindon supports families with children aged 0-19 years (or up to 25 for young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). It brings together the work of family centres, Early Help Hubs (including Youth Support

Services) and the Supporting Troubled Families Programme to provide a joined-up, whole-family service to those who are most in need, but who do not meet the threshold for statutory social care. Work is underway to further develop our use of Family Group Conferencing to better engage with families at the earliest opportunity to build resilience. Work is also underway to ensure processes are in place to support earlier identification of children on the edge of care.

Butterflies Family Centre

Butterflies Family Centre is commissioned by SBC to provide targeted support to Swindon families. The aim is to engage with families at the earliest possible identification of a problem to prevent escalation to more intrusive and costly statutory services. Butterflies undertakes extensive outreach work across Swindon to help children, young people and families build resilience and self-reliance and ensure the right help is given at the right time and the right place. It provides a range of services including one to one family support, groups for both parents and children and a range of parenting courses.

Edge of Care

SBC is considering a number of options for working with third parties to enhance our edge of care offer. This service will be key in helping to support children to remain at home. The edge of care service aims to build resilience within the family where it is possible and appropriate / safe to do so, thus preventing family breakdown.

6.3 SBC Placement Provision

Swindon Council is committed to maximising the effectiveness of internal provision and securing the best possible placement for every child and young person. Application of processes and standards will be consistently applied across internal and external provision.

Fostering

At 31 March 2018, 32.6% (117) of children looked after were placed with Swindon council foster carers. SBC has set a target to increase the number of foster households by 100 over the next 5 years. It is anticipated that this will enable more children to be placed locally. This will make it easier for the child to maintain contact with family and peers where appropriate, enable the child to access to local health and support services, and make management oversight and practice for both social workers and the virtual school less resource intensive. It is acknowledged that achieving the target will be challenging and take time. Interim external commissioning arrangements will therefore be progressed to secure local foster placements. SBC has a foster care improvement plan that outlines our approach to deliver our ambition. We recognise 'word of mouth' is one of the most effective recruitment strategies, so in Swindon we are promoting foster carer advocates, just as many local authorities, regularly involving existing carers in recruiting other carers. The Swindon offer to foster carers includes:

- Competitive remuneration and training
- Personal development through progression through 4 levels

- Peer support
- Foster carer caravan facility

In 2018/19, SBC is developing The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) to support the development and retention of quality foster carers and to increase placement stability. This model is made up of six to ten homes in a constellation that are built around a hub home, which contains an experienced caregiver who can offer respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. The constellation provides a community of support and friendship for both the young people and the foster carers. Each constellation has its own supervising social worker, known as the liaison worker, who is the hub carers' main source of support, but they also act as the supervising social worker for everyone in that constellation. Simple issues such as respite are managed within the constellation and are referred to as "sleep overs", thus normalising the support being more like a family or friendship group.

Residential provision

SBC has only one residential home, which provides placements for severely disabled children. Swindon's demand for this type of service has meant that the provider enjoys full occupancy most of the time, with 1 place available from time to time. There are no other residential units within the borough. Consideration is being given to establishing a number of small group homes to offer short-term and long-term care to support children and young people with complex needs as well as enabling them to remain within their local area.

Transitions

The transition from a child to adult can take up to 9 years (according to associated legislation) and there is a need to start planning early to ensure a smooth transition to adult life. A more systematic joint approach needs to be taken.

Swindon Borough Council Adult Services, Health and Children's Services are working together on a 14+ Transitions Project, led by Adult Services. The focus is on identifying the needs of the cohort of young people likely to transition to a service in Adult Social Care at age 18 over the next 5 years to inform commissioning requirements to meet those needs. A Transitions Commissioning Strategy and Commissioning Outcomes Framework will be developed, with the purpose of commissioning services and placements that don't 'end' when a young person turns 18, and which could be jointly commissioned, and potentially jointly registered with CQC and Ofsted. Placements and services for young people age 14+ should include a clear focus on Preparing for Adulthood outcomes and where appropriate offer opportunities for preparing for work, employment and training. The work of the 14+ Transitions Project is focused on the development of an operational model or range of models of provision for transitions, so that young people can aspire to fulfilled lives, contribute to society and have reduced placement moves and disruption to their lives.

Analysis is being undertaken of placements of young people who transfer to Adult Social Care at 18. From this analysis, we are able to focus on the development of

more creative packages of support in order to meet their needs and prepare them successfully for adult life. This is supported by the introduction of Planning Live, a strength based 'discovery conversation' that captures the young person's voice, informs planning for the young person, and is being introduced incrementally across Swindon.

Adult Social Care have developed a Goal Planning Document to enable providers to set out the steps for a person's progression in a service, which can then be monitored and developed through the review process. This could be adapted to reflect Preparing for Adulthood outcomes for young people age under 18 in receipt of services.

Adult Services Commissioning are commissioning outcome based Supported Living Framework for people with Learning Disabilities, and are managing the price being paid for these services, whilst also attracting higher quality and a broader range of service provision. As part of the Framework, providers will be required to harness community assets and develop stronger networks in communities for people in receipt of those services. There is an opportunity that these services could be used for young people age 16+ who would not be transitioning to a service from Adult Social Care but who would benefit from this approach.

Staying Put for those leaving Care

In response to the duties within the Children and Families Act 2014, Swindon's Children's Services enable care leavers aged 18 to remain living with their former foster carer under 'staying put' arrangements. Care leavers have the opportunity to 'stay put' under these arrangements until their 21st birthday as 'former relevant' care leavers. Foster carers become former foster carers under these voluntary arrangements and the local authorities promote and support arrangements between the parties. There are no conditions that the young person must be in education, training or employment to access supported lodgings, however if they are completing an education or training course, the arrangement may continue until the completion of the course.. All young people will receive support in entering meaningful activities preparing them for education, training and employment. Swindon currently has 10 staying put arrangements in place.

The Swindon Leaving Care Team currently works with 170 care leavers and provides support to a further 93 young people aged 16 -18. Our Leaving Care Service is working to improve pathway planning and partnership working,

Fee paid foster carers do not receive a skills fee once the young person is 18 years old. For those placements within independent fostering agencies, there is negotiation around funding post 18 as current contracts do not define arrangements. In both cases, if the young person is eligible to claim housing benefit they are expected to do so in order to contribute towards the cost of the staying put arrangement. The impact of changes in legislation for young people means that Staying Put is an attractive option as they are supported financially for a longer period of time. National research has identified that care leavers often take longer to achieve successful independent living and will often return to education and training as they get older (*"Staying Put " Arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18*

and above to stay on with their former foster carers. Ref: DFE-00061-2013)

6.4 External Placement Provision

The external market meets a significant proportion of Swindon's placement needs. The local authority does not have any block contracts except for Key2 so the majority of placements are purchased through spot purchasing arrangements. The Placement Service is responsible for procuring and quality assuring placements as well as managing the contracts. A greater focus is needed on engaging and managing the external market, building relationships with providers, better targeting and monitoring of placements, and feedback mechanisms to enable children to voice their views on their placements.

South West Sub Regional Consortium

Swindon is a member of the North Region of the South West Fostering consortium which procured a framework contract for standard, complex (primarily disability and health issues), and parent and child placements. This framework does not cover short breaks for disabled children. Bristol is the lead authority and has led on the commissioning and procurement for this contract. Swindon has not been an active partner and needs to participate more actively with the consortium to benefit from the lower prices on the framework.

Swindon is also a member of the South West Regional Residential Care consortium. This is a dynamic purchasing system for the procurement of independent residential child care. It does not include residential provision linked to schools. Swindon Council is required to sign its own framework agreement contract with each provider and is responsible for managing and monitoring the providers we use directly. Information from monitoring is shared with the consortium. The DPS opens at 6 monthly intervals to allow new entrants to the market place.

Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG)

Swindon is a partner of the CCRAG hosted by Hertfordshire County Council. Members commit to working together to develop and implement effective and consistent working practices. The partnership maintains the CCRAG Provider's Database, which supports the sourcing, contracting, monitoring and annual fee negotiations for children's placements. The database provides a facilitated market place for residential childcare, IFAs and residential schools with registered children's homes as their means of providing accommodation. The database holds information about providers such as prices, vacancies, Ofsted registration and grade, quality assurance information, insurance and maps and distance ratings to support local authorities to find provision local to their area/region. Local Authorities use the database to undertake a search for a placement and then spot purchase directly from the provider. It provides a platform to support placement decisions and get best outcomes for children and young people. SBC needs to make better use of this resource going forward.

Semi Independent provision

Children's services have a block contract with Key2 which provides 10 semi-independent Placements. Additional placements are also available from the block

contracts commissioned by Adult services for Supported Housing. Adult services also commission floating support for young people and young person's outreach. These services provide support to young people in their own homes to either sustain independent living or move to more appropriate housing in a sustained way. As at March 2018, there were 45 care leavers receiving support from these services. SBC is also planning to further expand the Shared Lives/ Supported Lodging Carer Model. In order for young people to be successful in this type of provision, it is important that planning and gaining skills and capabilities to live independently are gained as teenagers and this becomes a focus of earlier in care placements.

7. Contract Management

An Individual Placement Agreement (IPA) is issued for all commissioned placements and this forms a contractual agreement between the local authority and the provider. The IPA provides details on specific aspects of the placement, the expected outcomes, fees and consenting signatures from the local authority and the provider.

Meetings should be held with all providers of commissioned placements at least every six months and consider the following areas: contract and compliance monitoring, performance management, business development, individual placements, feedback from social care, health and education, young people, opportunities for improvement/increased value for money and negotiations on the level of support being provided. The children's placements team has not been monitoring placements due to a lack of capacity and expertise. This is being rectified by senior leaders.

8. Quality Assurance

Through robust commissioning and quality assurance processes, SBC will ensure that all children looked after are accessing well matched, high quality and value for money care placements. Quality assurance visits will be proportionate to risk and informed by performance, business viability, inspection judgements, history, complexity of current placements and cost. Placement feedback will also be gathered from social workers, independent reviewing officers, and children and young people to support the quality assurance processes. Clear improvement plans will be required by the provider when quality concerns are identified.

It is Swindon Borough Council's ambition to only place with Ofsted judged 'Good' and 'Outstanding' providers. Service specifications will detail the standards for what constitutes good practice as set out in Ofsted inspection schedules for quality placement. Providers who wish to apply to care for Swindon's children and young people will be required to meet these standards.

9. Adoption

In June 2015, the Government set out provision for the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to deliver adoption services across multiple local authority. The RAAs would provide for the recruitment, matching and supporting of adopters with

local authorities preparing the way for the children to be adopted. Swindon chose Adopt Thames Valley (ATV) as its shared service partnership and joined Bracknell Forest, Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham and Reading) and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) PACT and Barnardo's. The service is hosted by Oxfordshire CSD and Swindon is served by their North team Oxfordshire. The team maintains a presence at the Lyndhurst Centre. The Permanence team provides post adoption (and in future SGO) support to adoption families. The service is overseen by the partnership board currently chaired by the DCS West Berkshire.

In previous years adoptions were fairly low but last year 2016/17 43 children were allocated with ATV social workers for adoption and family finding. This year 4 children have been adopted, 14 have been matched and placed, 11 children are unlikely to be adopted for various reasons and 19 are in various stages of family finding. It would be reasonable to assume that Swindon is likely to have 20+ children in various stages of family finding for the foreseeable future. ATV have resourced the family finding from amongst their teams and progress will be monitored at quarterly monitoring. The cost of this level of family finding and placement is subject to scrutiny by ATV and Council representatives. An internal analysis of children with placement orders indicates 11 children can be withdrawn from ATV's family finding caseload; they are predominantly placed with foster families and the orders can be revoked.

10. Key Priorities and Actions

We intend to increase the percentage of children currently in care for whom coming into care is the right decision at the right time. This means investing in the right support at the right time for children and families across early help and on the edge of care. It is our intention to develop and commission a range of preventative and support services/interventions to deliver on our four strategic priorities set out below. These priorities have been informed by national and local policy, views of stakeholders and professionals, evidence of good practice and the local needs analysis.

Priority 1 - Families will be supported to enable them to care for their own children including enabling children to return home from care where this is in the child's best interest.

Priority 2 - To Increase the capacity and range of local placement options so that more children who need to be looked after, do so within or close to the Swindon

Priority 3 - Improve the quality and consistency of practice and support to meet the needs of children looked after, to achieve permanence and improve their care experiences and outcomes

Priority 4 – Improve market engagement and management of placements and secure value for money in relation to quality, price and outcomes.

Priority 5 - Improve transition planning so children looked after who are eligible for adult services experience a seamless transition

The priority Actions for 2018/20

The actions for implementing our sufficiency strategy are provided in the Children's Improvement Plan, known locally as the Pillar Plan. The Pillar Plan provides the detailed activities, timeline and leads alongside measurable and realistic targets to track the impact of our improvements. The Pillar Plan is monitored and progress regularly reported to relevant management boards as well as council committee meetings.

Appendix 1

The Profile of Children Looked After in Swindon

Understanding the profile of Swindon's children looked after population and forecasting future demand is integral to ensuring we provide appropriate services to meet the needs of children in care. The following analysis has been prepared to inform market development, re-shape our in-house provision, develop effective commissioning arrangements with external market (frameworks, block contracting and spot purchasing), and establish robust contract management and Quality Assurance arrangements (IPAs, IPCs, performance, business viability, inspection judgements, history, complexity of current placements, visits). Using the profile of needs of Swindon's children looked after will help us to consistently get the best placement, at the right time, in the right place.

Children in Care Rate per 10,000

Number of CLA per 10,000 under 18 population

	31 st March 2016	31 st March 2017	31 st March 2018
Swindon	60.0	66.0	73.27
Stat Neighbour average	60.6	62.2	-
England average	60.0	62.0	-

The number of looked after children per 10,000 under 18 population in Swindon is high when compared to statistical neighbours and England averages.

Age Distribution

Number of Children Looked After in Swindon by age group

	2015/16				2016/17				2017/18			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
U1	7	53.85%	6	46.15%	8	44.44%	10	55.56%	13	61.90%	8	38.10%
1 to 4	23	52.27%	21	47.73%	22	44.00%	28	56.00%	29	47.54%	32	52.46%
5 to 9	24	50.00%	24	50.00%	35	50.72%	34	49.28%	35	46.05%	41	53.95%
10 to 15	59	51.75%	55	48.25%	75	60.48%	49	39.52%	74	61.16%	47	38.84%
16+	42	57.53%	31	42.47%	39	59.09%	27	40.91%	44	54.32%	37	45.68%
TOTAL	155	53.08%	137	46.92%	179	54.74%	148	45.26%	195	54.17%	165	45.83%

Percentage of Children Looked After in Swindon by age group

	Under 1	1-4	5 - 9	10 -15	16 & over
Swindon (2018)	5.5%	17.2%	21.6%	33.6%	22.1%
Stat Neighbour average (2017)	5.0%	12.4%	17.5%	39.6%	25.4%
England average (2017)	5.3%	12.6%	19.4%	39.3%	23.4%

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of children aged 1- 4 years and 5 to 9 years looked after since 2016. The percentages of looked after children in the 1-4 age group is above the averages for statistical neighbour and England overall. The likelihood of returning children in these age groups to their birth families or achieving permanency through adoption or special guardianship is greater than for the older children.

Ethnicity

Ethnic profile of children looked after

	31 March 2016	31 March 2017	31 March 2018	Stat N 2017	Eng 2017
White	82.2% (240)	78.6% (257)	77.0% (281)	77.7%	74.7%
Mixed	6.2% (18)	6.1% (20)	5.2% (19)	6.2%	9.1%
Asian	6.8% (20)	6.4% (21)	7.7% (28)	3.4%	4.7%
Black	3.4% (10)	2.8% (9)	6.0%(22)	5.5%	7.2%
Other Ethnic Minority	0.7% (2)	1.5% (5)	4.1% (15)	5.9%	3.4%
Other / Not Recorded	0.7% (2)	4.6% (15)	0.0% (0)	1.3%	0.9%
Total	100.0% (292)	100.0% (327)	100.0% (365)	100.0%	100.0%

There is an over representation of ethnic minority looked after children compared to the local population. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for 14% of all children living in the area, 23% of children looked after are from different ethnic minority groupings. The highest percentage of children are Asian, and 2018 has seen a rise in the number of children from the black ethnic grouping.

Legal status

Children looked after by Legal status

	31 March 2016	31 March 2017	31 March 2018	Stat N 2017	Eng 2017
Interim Care Order	14.7% (43)	16.2% (53)	11.5% (42)	12.7%	13.3%
Full care Order	33.9% (99)	39.8% (130)	39.9% (146)	47.2%	52.1%
Placement Order	6.5% (19)	10.7% (35)	10.9% (40)	7.7%	7.0%
Section 20	43.5% (127)	32.7% (107)	35.5% (130)	21.7%	21.3%
Child Protection Grounds	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.2% (8)	0.0%	0.1%
Youth justice Legal Status	1.4% (4)	0.6% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.2%	0.3%
Total	100% (292)	100% (327)	100% (366)	100.0%	100.0%

There is a larger proportion of children subject to Section 20 compared to the statistical neighbour and England averages. Under section 20 the parent has no access to legal advice, the child does not have a guardian, and the attachment between the parent and child is likely to be compromised over this period. There are also a high number of children on placement orders and the length of time these children have been subject to a placement order is too long.

Children looked after with a legal status of S20

Length of S20	S20's as at 31/03/2018							
	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	N8	Grand Total
Less than 6 months	37.7%	22.2%	50.0%	27.3%	33.3%	40.0%	41.7%	36.2%
6 to 12 months	29.5%	11.1%	50.0%	18.2%	22.2%	40.0%	16.7%	24.6%
12 to 18 months	13.1%	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	11.1%	20.0%	4.2%	10.8%
18 months +	19.7%	66.7%	0.0%	36.4%	33.3%	0.0%	37.5%	28.5%

Category of Need	Description
N1	Abuse or neglect – children in need as a result of, or at risk of, abuse or neglect
N2	Child's Disability – children and their families whose main need for services arises out of the child's disabilities, illness or intrinsic condition
N3	Parental illness or disability
N4	Family in acute stress – children whose needs arise from living in a family going through a temporary crisis such that parenting capacity is diminished and some of the children's needs are not being adequately met
N5	Family dysfunction – children whose needs arise mainly out of their living with families where the parenting capacity is chronically inadequate
N6	Socially unacceptable behaviour – children and families whose need for services arises primarily out of their children's behaviour impacting detrimentally on the community
N8	Absent parenting – children whose need for services arises mainly from having no parents available to provide for them. Children whose parents decide it is in the best interest for the child to be adopted would be included in this category

The majority of children who have had a section 20 for 18+ months fall under the need category of child's disability (N2).

Admissions

Number and % of Children becoming Looked After in Swindon by age group

Age Group	31 March 2016	31 March 2017	31 March 2018	SN 2017	England 2017
U1	25 (14.0%)	29 (16.2%)	31(17.1%)	18.1%	18.2%
1-4	36 (20.1%)	40 (22.3%)	41 (22.7%)	18.7%	18.3%
5-9	30 (16.8%)	38 (21.2%)	34 (18.8%)	15.6%	17.7%
10-15	69 (38.5%)	54 (30.2%)	48 (26.5%)	27.7%	28.6%
16+	19 (10.6%)	18 (10.1%)	27 (14.9%)	19.9%	17.2%
TOTAL	179 (100%)	179 (100%)	181 (100%)	100%	100%

Between March 2016 and 2018, there has been an increase in the proportion of babies and young children becoming looked after between birth and 4 years. An increasing proportion of 16 and over year olds have also become looked after rising from 10.6% (19 young people) to 14.9% (27 young people). Early permanence planning is key for securing permanent alternative care for babies and young children. Although all age groups would benefit from an edge of care service, the older age groups are often targeted for edge of care support. By providing 'edge of care support', professionals can work collaboratively with the families to develop the necessary skills and structure to secure re-unification into the family home.

Returning children to their birth or extended families is a good outcome when it is safe to do so. Following a decline in 2017, more children in 2018 have been discharged to their parents or Special Guardianships. Permanency arrangements through adoption have improved since 2016 but remains lower than the average for statistical neighbours and England overall.

Length of time in care (by age group)

Length of time in care	Age range										Grand Total	
	U1		1 to 4		5 to 9		10 to 15		16+			
Under 1 month	2	9.5%	1	1.6%	1	1.3%	3	2.5%	3	3.7%	10	2.8%
1 to 3 months	8	38.1%	7	11.5%	12	15.8%	11	9.1%	7	8.6%	45	12.5%
4 to 6 months	6	28.6%	10	16.4%	4	5.3%	6	5.0%	4	4.9%	30	8.3%
7 to 12 months	5	23.8%	10	16.4%	15	19.7%	13	10.7%	6	7.4%	49	13.6%
13 to 18 months	0	0.0%	13	21.3%	4	5.3%	8	6.6%	10	12.3%	35	9.7%
19 to 24 months	0	0.0%	5	8.2%	14	18.4%	14	11.6%	7	8.6%	40	11.1%
2 to 3 years	0	0.0%	12	19.7%	15	19.7%	22	18.2%	13	16.0%	62	17.2%
3 to 5 years	0	0.0%	3	4.9%	6	7.9%	17	14.0%	15	18.5%	41	11.4%
5+ years	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	6.6%	27	22.3%	16	19.8%	48	13.3%

Reasons for children coming into care

Measure	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		National Indicator 2016/17
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	%
Abuse or neglect (N1)	159	54.5%	195	59.6%	223	61.9%	62%
Child's Disability (N2)	18	6.2%	13	4.0%	16	4.4%	3%
Parental illness or disability (N3)	13	4.5%	13	4.0%	19	5.3%	3%
Family in acute stress (N4)	36	12.3%	37	11.3%	31	8.6%	8%
Family dysfunction (N5)	46	15.8%	42	12.8%	38	10.6%	15%
Socially unacceptable behaviour (N6)	5	1.7%	6	1.8%	6	1.7%	2%
Absent Parenting (N8)	15	5.1%	21	6.4%	27	7.5%	7%
Grand Total	292	100.0%	327	100.0%	360	100.0%	100%

The main reasons for children being in care in 2017/18 was due to abuse or neglect (62%). There are 64 more children in care due to abuse or neglect compared to 3 years ago.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC)

Swindon has been a dispersal area for UASCs for several years. The number of unaccompanied asylum seekers accommodated has increased from 13 in March 2016 to 25 in March 2018.

Child Exploitation

Swindon has 9 young people in care or care leavers who have been assessed as being at risk of or have been subject to child sexual exploitation (CSE). The ages of this cohort are 14 years (1), 16 years (4) and 17 years (4). Five of these young people are in placements outside Swindon.

Swindon has 7 young people in care or care leavers who have been assessed as being at risk or have been subject to criminal exploitation (CE). Five of these children are 16 years old and two are 17 years old. All these children are in placements in Swindon.

Placements profile

Children looked after by placement type

Placement Type	31 March 2016	31 March 2017	31 March 2018
Connected persons fostering	12.67% (37)	12.84% (42)	15.88% (57)
In-house fostering	51.4% (150)	44.9% (147)	32.6% (117)
IFA	19.5% (57)	24.2% (79)	36.5% (131)
Residential	7.2% (21)	7.9% (26)	8.9% (32)
Placed with parents	3.1% (9)	5.5% (18)	2.8% (10)
Independent Living	3.4% (10)	2.5% (8)	2.8% (10)
Placed for adoption	2.0% (6)	1.5% (5)	0.3% (1)
Secure	0.7% (2)	0.6% (2)	0.3% (1)
Total	100% (292)	100% (327)	100% (359)

The breakdown of placements by type indicate the vast majority of children looked after are placed in foster care (85%) which is consistent with SBC's commitment to place children in family-based arrangements. Of the 85%, 32.6% are in-house placements (including connected people, relatives or friends) and 36.5% with independent fostering agencies. 9% of children are placed in externally commissioned residential placements. A higher number of placements are with external providers than within the council's internal provision. Placements with external providers are significantly more expensive and therefore we are focussing on ways to broaden internal services to meet demand for placements. There are currently 76 in-house registered in-house foster carers and there is a recruitment drive to increase the number to reduce dependency on commissioned placements.

Children with disabilities by placement type

Placement Type	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018 to date	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Connected Person Fostering	2	6.90%	3	9.68%	5	11.9%	4	9.52%
In-house fostering	13	44.83%	9	29.03%	13	30.95%	10	23.81%
Independent fostering Agency	7	24.14%	9	29.03%	11	26.19%	10	23.81%
Residential	7	24.14%	10	32.26%	9	21.43%	12	28.57%
Placed with parents	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	7.14%	5	11.90%
Independent living	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	2.38%	1	2.38%
Placed for adoption)	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Secure	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Grand Total	29	100.0%	31	100.0%	42	100.0%	42	100.0%

Location and distance from home

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 st March 2016 [31 st March 2017	31 st March 2018
Swindon	19%	22%	23.1%
Stat Neighbour average	13.2%	12.7%	-
England average	14%	14%	-

When compared with statistical neighbours and the rest of the country, too many looked after children are placed more than 20 miles away from their home. This has implications for the child and family in terms of maintaining contact, accessing health and support services, as well as impacting on oversight and practice for both social workers and the virtual school.



Age breakdown of children placed more than 20 miles from their home	31 st March 2018 Count	31 st March 2018 %
Under 1	7	8.4%
1 to 4	9	10.8%
5 to 9	14	16.9%
10 to 15	35	42.2%
16+	18	21.7%

Gender breakdown of children placed more than 20 miles from their home	31 st March 2018 Count	31st March 2018 %
Female	31	37.3%
Male	52	62.7%

Duration of CLA breakdown of children placed more than 20 miles from their home	31 st March 2018 Count	31st March 2018 %
Less than 1 month	2	2.4%
1 to 3 months	9	10.8%
4 to 6 months	5	6.0%
7 to 12 months	8	9.6%
1 to 2 years	18	21.7%
2+ years	41	49.4%

Placement Stability

Stability of Placements

	31 st March 2016	31 st March 2017	31 st March 2018 (provisional)	Statistical Neighbour (2017)	England (2017)
% of Long Term CLA placements stable for at least 2 years	61%	70%	51.85%	72.7%	70%
% of CLA who have had 3 or more placements – rolling 12 months	11%	12%	10.5%	9.5%	10%

The best outcomes are achieved for those children and young people who remain in a stable and consistent placements. This provides them with the opportunity to have long standing relationship with adults and peers. Although children who have experienced three or more placements is in line with national and statistical neighbour averages, long term stability continues to show signs of decrease. Capacity issues within the social work service, lack of in-house foster care provision, and a lack of locally commissioned external care for children with challenging behaviour has affected long term stability.

Episodes of Care

There were 519 young people who became looked after between April 2015 and March 2018, of which 34 had more than one episode of being in care over the three year period (6.5%). 64.7% of those who have had more than one episode of being in care are males (22 out of the 34).

The health of Children Looked After for more than a year

Data	Year ending 31/3/16		Year ending 31/3/17		Year ending 31/3/18
	Swindon data	National %	Swindon data	National %	Swindon data
Number of children looked after for more than a year on 31 st March	169	N/A	202	N/A	229
% of children who had a review health assessment completed	89% (150)	90%	87% (177)	89%	79.4% (182)
% of children who had a dental check completed	90% (152)	84%	90% (182)	83%	82% (188)
% who have immunisations up to date	87% (148)	87%	79.5% (161)	84%	87.3% (200)
% of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) completed for eligible children	85%	68%	82%	76%	81%
Average SDQ score	14.6	13.9	14.3	14.1	15

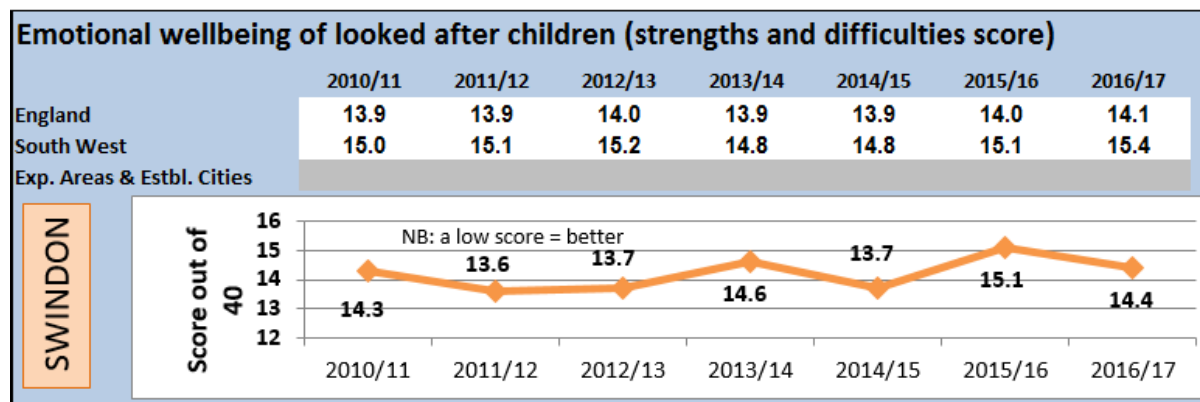
The percentage of children with completed health reviews and dental checks has declined but uptake of immunisation has increased since 2016.

Delays in identifying and meeting the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of looked after children 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 can be hampered. The emotional and behaviour health of looked after children in Swindon continues to have a higher average SDQ score than England. The new contract with Oxford Health for Child and Adolescent Services should address the mental health needs of looked after children going forward. The commissioning by Swindon CCG of Kooth (an online resource) to support the emotional well-being of children should also have a positive impact.

Every child is expected to have an initial health assessment within 20 working days of coming into care. This ensures a child's health needs are known as soon as possible so that a health care plan can be put in place to address these needs. There has been a significant improvement in children having timely assessments with 83% of health assessments being offered within 20 working days of health being informed, and 83% completed within 20 working days. Performance is affected by late notification from social workers that a child has become looked after, and carers not bringing the child for their appointment.

Mental Health

Mental health difficulties for children in care aged 4 -17 years, are monitored nationally using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to screen for mental health and emotional wellbeing levels. (The lower the score the less likely that the child is suffering from mental health or emotional problems. Score 0 -13 low need, 14 -16 borderline, and 17 – 40 high need.)



STEP Therapeutic Service

This service provides support and life skills development / learning opportunities for children & young people who have considerable vulnerabilities, including; sufferers of physical / emotional abuse and / or neglect, primary family carers, self-harmers, those in care, with mental health issues, experiencing poverty and deprivation, as well as isolation and exclusion due to either circumstances or behaviour. During 2017/18, the service supported eight looked after children and following intervention their SDQ scores lowered to an average of 12%.

TaMHS

Number of TaMHS involvements opening in the financial year where the CYP was LAC or became LAC during the TaMHS involvement

Year	Involvements
2016/17	82
2017/18	62
2018/19 (01/04/2018 to 04/09/2018)	31
Total 01/04/2016 to 04/09/2018	175

Number of TaMHS involvements opening where the CYP was LAC or became LAC during the TaMHS involvement by Primary Involvement Reason, 01/04/2016 to 04/09/2018

Reason	Involvements
Aggression	27
Anxiety	25
Attachment	24
Autistic Spectrum Presentation	8
Behaviour	21
Bereavement / Loss	4
Deliberate Self Harm	18
Development	4
Domestic Abuse/Violence	7
Eating	1
Family Breakdown	10
Hyperkinetic	1
Learning Needs in School/SPLD	1
Low Mood	3
Low Self Esteem	3
Parenting	2
Sleep	1
Traumatic Life Event	15
Total	175

Number of TaMHS involvements opening where the CYP was LAC or became LAC during the TaMHS involvement by Age, 01/04/2016 to 04/09/2018

Age at involvement open date	Involvements
1	3
2	1
3	2
4	8
5	4
6	9
7	7
8	6
9	18
10	10
11	14
12	22
13	18
14	21
15	14
16	9
17	9
Total	175

Swindon CAMHS LAC data (Jan 16 to June 18)

Referrals with LAC alert Jan 2016 to June 2018 by year

Year	Referrals
2016	80
2017	63
2018 to 30 June	41
Grand Total	184

Referrals with LAC alert by "referral reason", Jan 2016 to June 2018

Reason*	Referrals
Anxiety	1
Assessment	94
Eating Disorder	1
Gender Discomfort Issues	1
In Crisis	71
Neuro Developmental conditions	3
Relationship difficulties	2
Self harm behaviours	5
Treatment	6
Grand Total	184

*Referral reason is added by administration staff and not frequently amended later by clinicians.

The current caseload for Swindon CAMHS as at 1 July 2018 with a LAC alert is 53

Discharges from Care

Reason for care ceased	31 March 2016	31 March 2017	31 March 2018	Stat N 2017	Eng 2017
Placed with parent	44.9% (62)	29.7% (44)	33.6% (51)	22.8%	29.1%
Child Arrangement Order	3.6% (5)	6.8% (10)	5.3% (8)	3.0%	4.1%
Special guardianship	8.7% (12)	12.8% (19)	15.8% (24)	11.6%	12.6%
Adopted	4.3% (6)	12.8% (19)	10.5% (16)	15.7%	14.9%
Independent Living	3.6% (5)	1.4% (2)	2.6% (4)	26.0%	15.6%
Residential	2.9% (4)	4.1% (6)	7.2% (11)	2.7%	1.9%
Custody	2.2% (3)	0.7% (1)	2.0% (3)	1.1%	1.4%
Other	29.7% (41)	31.8% (47)	23.4% (35)	17.1%	20.4%
Total	100% (138)	100% (148)	100% (152)	100.0%	100.0%

Returning children to their birth or extended families is a good outcome when it is safe to do so. Following a decline in 2017, more children in 2018 have been discharged to their parents

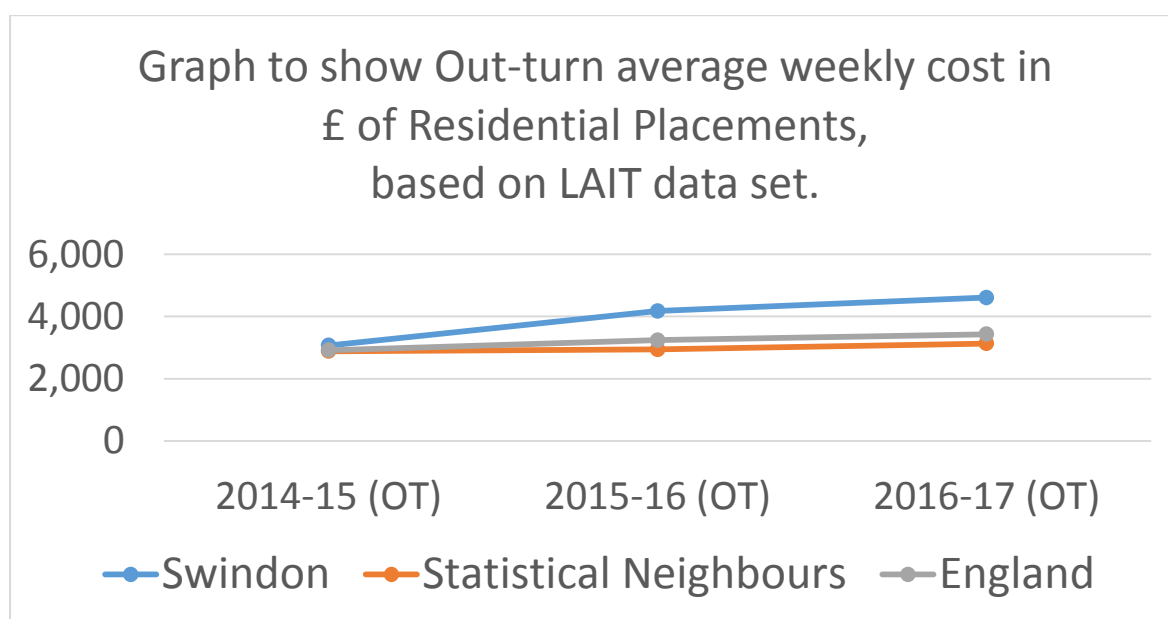
or special guardians. Permanency arrangements through adoption has improved since 2016 but remains lower than the average for statistical neighbours and England overall. However, timeliness of adoption has improved with an average of 569 days between a child coming into care and being placed for adoption.

Care Leavers

The Leaving Care Service is currently working with 170 Care Leavers and providing support to a further 93 young people aged 16 -18.

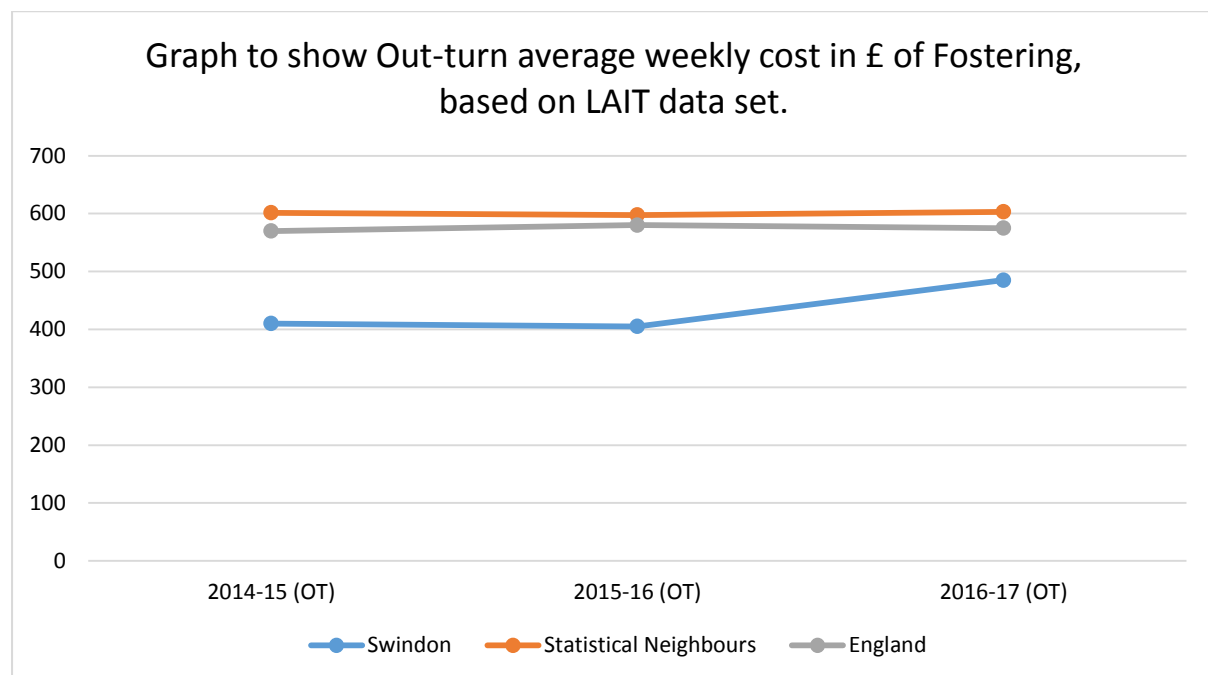
Financial Benchmarking

Residential Costs



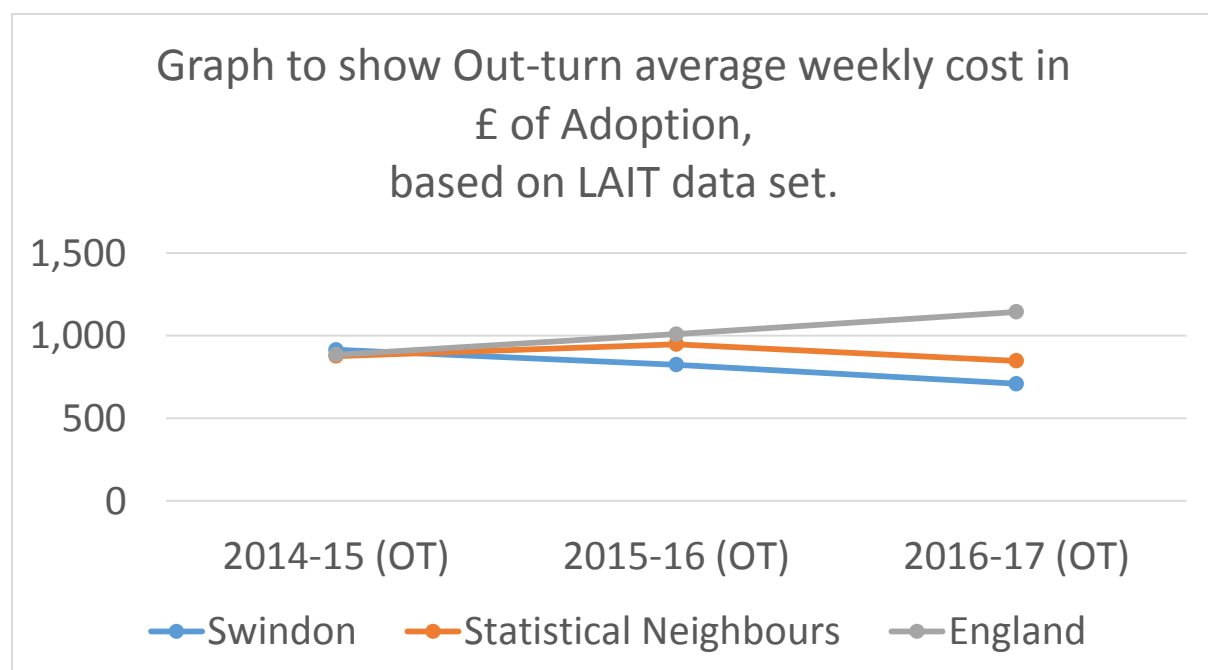
Swindon is an outlier for residential care weekly unit costs compared to both England average and statistical neighbours. For 2016/17, Swindon's costs were 12th highest compared to all authorities at £4,610 per week, England average was £3,430 and South West average was £3,685.

Fostering costs



Swindon is one of the lowest in the South West and is lower than the average for England for weekly unit cost for fostering (includes in-house and external fostering).

Adoption Costs



Swindon is at the lower end for adoption weekly unit cost when compared to the average for England and statistical neighbour.