

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 21st October 2019

Author(s):	Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Corporate Director, Children’s Services (DCS)
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 A key purpose of the Scrutiny function is to hold the Cabinet to account and ensure that Council priorities and performance are being delivered. The Scrutiny Committee partly fulfils this requirement through the use of question and answer sessions with the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Question and Answer session is to ensure that the Cabinet Member provides the Scrutiny Committee with performance information relative to their portfolio responsibilities. It also requires the Cabinet Member to provide budget information for their portfolio responsibilities and provides an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions on the portfolio responsibilities.
- 1.3 Children’s Services early prevention and social care is central to the delivery of the Council’s priority to protect vulnerable children and young people. The service also contributes significantly to the delivery of the Council pledges 20, 21 and 22 which focus on increasing the capacity of local foster provision, safeguarding children and young people and the provision of effective early help intervention including through working within the Troubled Families Programme. Children Services has a clear Service Improvement plan to embed and sustain improvement priorities with clear objectives and outcomes.
- 1.4 This report sets out success, challenges, and future direction of the Portfolio for the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of and scrutinise the report by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services Early Help, Social Care and Community Health Services; to put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and to decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, is Councillor Mary Martin. Overall, Children services has a budget of £46.58m with the largest proportion allocated to statutory social care services. This includes the children looked after

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placement budget which is £13.940m. The Leader of the Council has assigned the following responsibilities to the Cabinet Member:

- 3.2 Children and Families Early Help and support services including: Young Person Substance Misuse team, Targeted Mental Health, Education Welfare, Educational Psychology, Youth Engagement, Services for Disabled Children, SEND and the Troubled Families programme. These services have a net budget of £3.42m.
- 3.3 Children’s Social Work Services including the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), fostering and adoption services and the Corporate Parenting Board, Opal Team (Child sexual exploitation service). This service has a net budget of £35.54m. This includes the placement budget which is the most challenging financial pressure on the services. In 18/19 the service has an overspend of £4.5m relating to external placements. In 19/20 to date the placement budget is forecasted to be within budget.
- 3.4 Community Health Services including Health Visitors, School Nurses and Family Nurse Partnership, Paediatric Therapy Services, Speech and Language and Portage and Public Health services for children. This service has a budget of £7.9 m.
- 3.5 Youth Offending Team. This service has a net budget of £0.283m.
- 3.6 The SEND service within the local authority has a net budget of £0.610m to manage the SEND assessments and plans process. A further £31.437m is funded by the dedicated schools grant (consisting of High needs block £31.085m and DSG reserves £0.352m) for the provision of SEND support for Swindon pupils requiring varying levels of special educational needs support.
- 3.7 Swindon Safeguarding Partnership (shared responsibility with Lead Member for Adult Social Care). The partnership has a budget of £0.053m
- 3.8 The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services is responsible for delivery for the following pledges:
 - 3.8.1 Pledge 20. Increase the number of foster carers in Swindon so that every 'child looked after' who should be, is placed in their home borough.
 - 3.8.2 Pledge 21. Ensure that there is a partnership approach to early prevention and intervention across Swindon so that more children and families are supported early, including through the Troubled Families Programme, to prevent escalation to statutory social care.
 - 3.8.3 Pledge 22: Ensure that Swindon's vulnerable children and young people are safeguarded and protected

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3.9 What have we done well?

Top achievements	Progress to date & Next Steps	Impact/outcomes
Children in Need of Help and Protection judged by OFSTED to be good	<p>Progress: Practice change and process improvements have led to the reduction of the number of children requiring a child protection plan. Child Protection (CP), Children In Need (CIN) and Looked After Children (LAC) visits are timely and quality has improved. Significant improvements from the implementation of the Early Help Hub in MASH.</p> <p>Next Steps: Assessments and planning for CIN/CP are smarter, consistently timely and regularly monitored by manager to prevent undue delay.</p>	Improved Services and better outcomes for Swindon children and families who are in need of help and protection
Leadership and Management judged by OFSTED to be good	<p>Progress: Strong management oversight and good pace to improvement. Improved use of data and quality assurance to performance manage and hold managers and staff to account.</p> <p>Next steps: Embed consistent, high quality management supervision.</p>	Strong and effective leadership of the service to bring about effective service improvement and better outcomes for children and young people and families.
Performance Management Framework embedded	<p>Progress: Effective QAPIB Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Board process in place with Partners well engaged.</p> <p>Next Steps: A comprehensive performance framework across the Children Services Directorate/</p>	Strong managerial oversight of performance and quality of service to deliver an accountability culture where performance management and quality assurance drive improvement.
Improvements in MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub)	<p>Progress: All actions identified in 2018 MASH focussed inspection visit have been addressed to Improve timeliness of response and Increase partnership working</p> <p>Next Steps: Embed the revised Threshold for access to services across the Safeguarding Partnership.</p>	Referrers to MASH receive a timely and effective response in relation to safeguarding children and all children and young people are safeguarded and protected and receive the right help at the right time.
Reduced	Progress: Caseloads reduced from an	Better staff morale

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caseloads for social workers	average of 29 in March 2018 to 18 in July 19 and this has been maintained.	Improved recruitment and retention of experienced social workers. Less change of social worker for Children and Families. Children supported effectively to help improve outcomes
Re-modelling of Early Help Offer	Progress: Implementation of Early Help Hub July 18 Re-design completed with the creation of FISS (Family Intervention Support Service). Edge of Care services and Adolescents at risk service Next steps: Implementation of one single assessment across the service	Improved access to Early Help offer via MASH. Increased cases stepped across to Early Help from Social Care enabling families to get appropriate support post statutory intervention
Troubled Families Programme	Progress: Increase in the number of families achieving successful outcomes Next steps: Ensure that a further 300 families are worked with to meet the target for Swindon by March 2020.	Families are receiving help and support when they need it and outcomes are good.
Family Group Conferencing	Progress: Enhanced model of Family Group Conferencing introduced September 2019 with greater capacity to work with more families Next steps: Family Group Conferencing model is being expanded to support more families earlier to achieve better and sustainable outcomes	Less families requiring escalation to statutory services and are supported early
Reduction in the number of children becoming looked after	Progress: Less Children are needing to become looked after because there are alternative support approaches for young people and more effective and intensive work with families Next steps: further reduce the number of children becoming looked after through alternative support approaches and more effective early support.	More children can remain safely at home in their family and fewer children need to come into the care of the Local Authority.
Supporting Young Parents through the Family Nurse Partnership Programme	Progress: More young parents are being supported and smoking levels reduced through pregnancy. Next Steps: smoking cessation is	Young parents receive a high level of parenting support and targeted Health visiting resources to support them. Smoking in pregnancy has significantly reduced.

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	sustained at 12 months post birth	
Supporting Swindon Young Carers	<p>Progress: Positive experiences for young carers are evident in feedback.</p> <p>Next Steps: Young Carers continue to have opportunities for networking and support with other young carers</p>	Young Carers are supported and have opportunities to have respite and meet other Young Carers for support
Seeking to Reduce CSE	<p>Progress: Effective multi agency working Missing Co-Ordinator ensuring return home interviews are completed. MARAC panel is in place.</p> <p>Next steps: Continue to work with partners to ensure young people at risk of exploitation are identified and supported</p>	Young People in Swindon have awareness of the signs of grooming and are engaged with professionals to reduce risk

Overall Effectiveness of Children’s Social Care Services graded as Good

- 3.10 The overall effectiveness of Children’s Social Care Services in Swindon is judged to be good. OFSTED recognised the effectiveness of elected members, corporate managers and senior leaders in prioritising resource for children’s services, implementing strong Governance arrangements and driving rapid improvement. The Director of Children Services and the Senior Leadership Team have taken systematic, swift and decisive action to implement significant service improvements. The quality of leadership is noted in the OFSTED inspection report as a key strength and includes high visibility, well-targeted actions, an accurate knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement and creating the right conditions for good social work practice to flourish. This has contributed to the rapid pace of improvement both in terms of practice and workforce development.

Children In Need of Help and Protection Judged to be Good

- 3.11 Children In need of help and protection are judged to be good: Children’s Social Care has made good progress in 2018 and 2019 to date. This is reflected in a reduction of the number of children in need, on child protection plans and needing to become looked after. The number of children on a child protection plan has reduced significantly from 448 in August 18 to 246 in August 19. The overall social care referral and assessment rate within service continues to be at a higher level than comparators, but thresholds have been more consistently applied. This has meant that families are stepped across to early help services when they do not need a statutory intervention. In addition, caseloads have been reduced across the service to an average of 18. This has enabled social workers to have more focus on children in need, which in turn leads to more sustainable outcomes for children.

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Leadership and Management Judged to be Good:

- 3.12 The impact of leaders on social work practice is judged to be good and was identified as a key strength. OFSTED noted the strong support of corporate managers and elected members and that leaders and managers know the service’s strengths and areas for improvement and have worked decisively to address weaknesses. Governance and quality assurance arrangements are strong and have ensured the right framework is in place to support the pace of change required and provide managers with the tools to monitor progress. The use of data to manage performance has improved as has the quality and frequency of staff supervision.
- 3.13 The Council’s significant additional financial investment has reduced caseloads which has helped with social worker stability, although it is recognised that the recruitment of permanent social workers still remains a challenge. The investment has enabled good progress to be made quickly and sustained. OFSTED recognised the strength of partnership working and the impact of this on improved outcomes for children and young people. The workforce recruitment and retention strategy sets out a revised set approaches to manage a workforce with a high proportion of agency staff and attract permanent workers to Swindon.

Performance Management Framework

- 3.14 The DCS established the Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Board (QAPIB) in November 2017 to provide monitoring and challenge and to drive improvement through effective performance management. The development of management information, particularly case tracking with live data, has improved the direct oversight and understanding that senior and frontline managers have of performance strengths and areas for improvement. This approach has developed a supportive performance and accountability culture, with Social Workers and Team Managers being accountable for the operational performance in their teams and Service leaders providing support and challenge through monthly team clinics performance clinics and the QAPIB. A most significant improvement has been the implementation of exception reporting where performance is not met with reasons and contingency plans to ensure that children are safe.
- 3.15 Managers have a firm ‘grip’ of operational performance. A supervision toolkit has been implemented and recent audit shows that this is now being consistently used by managers during staff supervision. It provides an oversight of case status and identifies where case workers need additional support and training. We know that staff supervision is taking place because we have undertaken a supervision data capture exercise. At the end of March 2019, the compliance with child protection case supervision was 94%. The analysis indicates that we

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have more work to do both in relation to recording compliance and the quality of supervision in some cases.

- 3.16 A revised Quality Assurance Framework was introduced in March 2018. This included a revised approach to audit which incorporates an external ‘audit the auditors’ approach. Since March 2018 there has been a forward programme of audits and a methodology for sharing learning, including mentoring and coaching for social workers where audits identify weaker practice. The framework includes auditing being done alongside the practitioner, with feedback sought from families. At times it has been a challenge to implement the framework consistently when there have been higher priority operational demands for Service Managers and staffing capacity has fluctuated. Nevertheless, we now have regular quality of practice analysis to inform our self-assessment. Our overall audit profile over the last 6 months finds practice to be assessed as good in over 80% of cases.
- 3.17 Findings from audits are shared throughout the service, used to support learning and practice improvement and commissions quality assurance activity in relation to specific areas of practice that are identified as a Key Line of Enquiry.

Reduced Caseloads for Social Workers

- 3.18 The average number of caseloads for Social Workers was 29 in March 18. Service re-design, greater staffing stability and investment in the service has resulted in a reduction to an average of 18 cases per worker at the end of July 19. The impact of reduced caseloads is significant and means that social workers are able to give a more concentrated focus on direct work with children.
- 3.19 With reduced caseloads there has been a focus on accurate case recording which has been strengthened by the introduction of local compliance measures which track which children have visits, assessments and reviews recorded well. Team trackers for managers have enabled them to performance manage case recording improvement and staff understand which data is reflected in key performance indicators. The improvements during 18/19 have been notable and progress is monitored via monthly team performance clinics.

Re-modelling of Early Help Offer

- 3.20 The Early Help Offer has been re-modelled with the creation of the Family Intervention Support Service (FISS). This includes Edge of Care Services and services for adolescents at risk. The pathways for referral to Early Help have been simplified and there are an increasing number of appropriate families referred to Early Help via the Early Help Hub. Families are referred more quickly and directly from the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The number of referrals to the Early Help hub has been steadily increasing and the service now

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receives an average of 171 referrals per month. Multi agency locality working is being strengthened and a model of Team Around the School Support is being implemented.

Troubled Families

- 3.21 The Government’s Troubled Families Programme launched in 2012 and is now in phase two with recent Government confirmation of extension until 2021. It aims to transform the way that the Local Authority and its partners work with families with complex and debilitating needs to ensure more effective, early intervention and better, sustainable, outcomes.. Swindon has made good progress during 18/19 and 19/20 to date. This was recognised by an external review of performance during September 19. The integration of Troubled Families programme into the overall Early Help offer has helped to make the programme more utilised and sustainable and understood by front line staff which in turn has helped increase the number of eligible families and their engagement.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

- 3.22 A Family Group Conference is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child or children who are at risk. Children and young people are normally involved in their own Family Group Conference, often with support from an advocate. It is a voluntary process and families cannot be forced to have a Family Group Conference. The specialist team are dedicated to empower and enable families to stay together, and to come up with solutions on how to do this, when it is safe and appropriate to do. There has been significant investment in the FGC team as it has grown and developed; staffing has increased from 1.5 Coordinators to 3 Coordinators during 2018/2019. The Service is currently recruiting 3 additional FGC Coordinators which will take the total to 6.

Services for disabled children

- 3.23 The Disabled Children’s team continues to provide responsive and flexible services for Disabled Children living in Swindon, both at a statutory and non-statutory level. The Disabled Children’s Team is supporting 224 children and their families (as at September 2019). The Aiming High Short Break Service is currently supporting 391 children to access social and leisure activities whilst also providing parents and carers with the opportunity to take a break from their caring responsibilities.
- 3.24 The paediatric therapy service (delivered by physiotherapists and occupational therapists) is delivering a range of therapy and care to 1061 children and young people who have complex on-going needs. So far in 2019/20 80.8% of referrals had been seen within 18 weeks which is an improvement from 68.6% in 2018/19. Reducing the waiting time for health occupational therapy remains a key focus

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for the service. Of the 192 completed episodes of care in the service so far in 2019/20, 91.6% had a successful clinical outcome. The social care occupational therapy service has received additional funding this year for staff and specialist equipment. This has resulted in a reduced waiting time. In 2019/20 100% of referrals have been seen within 3 months which is a notable improvement from 50.8% in 2018/19.

- 3.25 The paediatric speech and language therapy service is working with 2082 children and young people (as at August 2019). In 2019/20 to date 67.4% of referrals have been seen within 18 weeks which is an improvement from 61.2% in 2018/19. The service has continued to achieve the 13 week waiting time for children referred for specialist Speech and Language assessment as part of the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Pathway. The focus of reducing waiting times is now within the clinic service and a waiting time initiative has been adopted to reduce the longest waiting times to 18 weeks. Of the 240 completed episodes of care in the service so far in 2019/20, 73% had a successful clinical outcome, no intervention was required in 7.9%, and 4.6% had moved away.
- 3.26 The Swindon Portage and Special Tots service offers effective early intervention for pre-school children with SEND. It delivers a range of services including home teaching by 3 part time Portage teachers on a weekly basis during term time for 15 children who have a significant delay across more than 2 areas of development. It also offers advice and information for parents around benefits and services; and a Special Tots pre-school group for 32 children with Special educational needs/disabilities. Of the current 47 children receiving a service 17% are under statutory assessment for an EHCP and 4% have an EHCP in place.

Reducing the number of children becoming looked after

- 3.27 The number of children becoming looked after has reduced with 131 during 18/19 compared with 187 in 17/18. This reduction has continued in 19/20 to date with 40 starting to be looked after between April and August 2019. If the rate continues approximately 100 will become looked after during 19/20. The overall number of Children Looked After has stabilised as a result. This is due to improved permanency planning for younger children and working differently with adolescents at risk to prevent them needing to be looked after wherever appropriate. The reduction has made limited impact financially, because of the challenges with placement providers and increased costs for complex placements. Budgetary pressure for placements remains a priority focus. It is also important to note that as permanency for children looked after is increased the costs of supporting parents who are adopters or special guardians also increases.

Family Nurse Partnership

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- 3.28 The Public Health ring fenced grant funds over £3.8m of children’s Public Health including Health Visiting, School Nursing, Family Nurse Partnership and Baby Steps to ensure the best start in life for Swindon’s children and young people.
- 3.29 The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) has been established in the UK for 12 years, commencing in Swindon 9 years ago. The programme is available to all young women under 18 with their first babies, care leavers under 25 having first babies and first time pregnant 20 year old and under where vulnerabilities are identified. Between January and December 2018, the local team worked with 159 families and delivered 1637 visits. The service recruited 45 new families onto the FNP programme during the year with only 3 families declining to engage with the programme.
- 3.30 Whilst FNP is a holistic ante natal and infancy programme with intensive home visiting the service is focusing on smoking as a strategic priority for 2019. Smoking at 36 weeks gestation in Swindon FNP is 22.6% (2018). This has decreased from 37.2% (2017). A young parent’s group has been established for any Swindon parent under 25. The group is supported by the FNP Nurses enabling them to support more families and encourage the development of peer support. Attendance at these groups is growing with positive feedback from members. Following discussion at the FNP board, all FNP children are now awarded two year funding for nursery provision.
- 3.31 Smoking at 12 months remains a challenge (59.5%) and is higher than the programme average (39%). A range of actions have been agreed at the FNP Board to reduce this smoking rate, including:
- Work to help clients understand childhood trauma and develop healthier coping strategies other than smoking
 - Expand on Motivational interviewing skills to help clients move from desire to quit to commitment
 - Nurses to expand on reasons to stay smoke free as their child grows.

Baby Steps

- 3.32 The Baby Steps programme has been delivered by Swindon Borough Council since Oct 2014. There is a dedicated team who deliver a targeted programme for vulnerable parents-to-be from their 3rd trimester (6-9 months) of pregnancy through to approximately 3 months following birth: It is an antenatal and postnatal group programme that provides the Universal Partnership Plus (targeted) antenatal intervention within the Swindon Healthy Child Programme 0-5. The service works hard to deal with challenges including engagement with complex and vulnerable parents and supporting them to attend the group programme.

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Swindon data demonstrates increased year on year engagement of parents into the programme (18-19: 62%, 19-20: 77%). The group which completed in quarter 1 of 19/20 demonstrated a completion rate of 72%. This is attributed to the respectful support, in depth knowledge and evidence that facilitators build by regular and close contact over time with parents.

- 3.33 Swindon has a breastfeeding strategy and delivery plan, involving a range of partners. The strategy which aims to increase breastfeeding and improve advice given to all parents on all infant feeding, including developing a loving and caring relationship between parents and their child. A number of initiatives are being implemented to improve the prevalence of breastfeeding including the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative for which Swindon has achieved full accreditation; the “Breast Mates” network of breastfeeding peer support groups; Breastfeeding Welcome signs displayed in 31 venues across Swindon including coffee shops, GP practices, the Great Western hospital (all departments), Early Year’s venues and churches.

Supporting Children at risk of exploitation (CSE) and/or Criminal Exploitation (CEE)

- 3.34 The continued strengthening of the Council and Partner’s response to child exploitation has led to embedded services. There has been a notable increase in the number of referrals where children and young people may be criminally exploited with 106 children being identified in 2018/2019 compared to 23 in 2017/18. This is partly due to the awareness raising both locally and nationally, with more families and professionals are seeking help. The attachment of a police officer in the Opal team has been a great strength. Systems have been implemented to enable child criminal exploitation to be readily reportable for activity monitoring. The new Safeguarding Partnership has a multi-agency plan in place to tackle CSE. The multi-agency risk panel discusses the most high risk children and works to a model that identifies Victims, Offenders, Locations and Themes (VOLT). This information is shared through a newsletter to all agencies.
- 3.35 There has been a revised delivery plan in place for the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership. This includes how we strengthen the approach to adolescents at risk using contextual safeguarding approaches. These approaches respond to children and young people’s experience of harm outside of the family home. In order to work this way social workers identify other professionals who can influence extra-familial contexts and support young people.
- 3.36 There were 70 referrals for children potentially at risk of CSE in 2018/2019, up from 40 in 2017/2018. The service is currently working with 23 children who are identified as being at risk of CSE. The gender split is 91% female and 9% male. Fourteen to fifteen year olds form 71% of the cohort.

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- 3.37 The children’s services Missing Children Co-ordinator has been in post since May 2018. Since this time we have seen a marked improvement in the Council’s response to missing children from both Home and Care. There has been a reduction in missing children. In August 19 the number was 32 of children with a missing episode which is the lowest number since the data scorecard started. A further positive reduction has been the children who have had more than one missing episode this has reduced to 20% (7) in August 2019 compared to 45% (20) in August 18. This improvement is linked to return home interviews being completed and the reasons for the child going missing being identified at an early stage so support can be put in place.
- 3.38 The Councils Child Exploitation Delivery Group is now chaired by the Director of Performance, Organisational Improvement and Communications. The Group monitor progress against the Criminal Exploitation strategy. The ‘Report It Don’t Ignore It’ awareness raising campaign has now come to an end and further activities have taken place or are planned linked to key national days e.g. CSE awareness day March 18 2020 and the recent Save a Friend linked to Knife Crime. The Opal Team continue to provide training and targeted sessions to continue to improve the response to CE.

Young Carers

- 3.39 The Young Carers Service is part of Swindon Carers Centre and offers advice, support and activities to young carers aged 5 – 17 and young adult carers aged 18 – 24 who are transitioning from Children’s to Adult services. 694 young carers have been supported during 18/19. The contract for the Young Carers service requires Swindon Carers Centre to complete a holistic assessment of need for each child referred to the service and has undertaken 142 assessments during 18/19. The assessment explores the impact of the caring role on health and wellbeing and opportunities to access education and leisure activities. At the end of the assessment a support plan is developed. Families may be supported through the Team around the Child process by a member of staff from Swindon Carer Centre who will assume the role of Lead Professional if appropriate. Young Carer Support Practitioners take an active part in Child In Need and Child Protection cases to work as part of the multi-agency professional team to support families. Following consultation with Swindon Carers Centre has developed a specific outcomes framework for young carers. An impact scale is completed during initial assessment, review assessment and/or the start of each intervention to provide a baseline score relating to five outcomes. These scales are completed again at the end of each intervention to demonstrate progress. Analysis of the outcome measurements alongside individual feedback and case studies help to evaluate the effectiveness of the service. The overall outcomes are positive:

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Outcomes for Young Carers	
Voice heard	98%
Be Healthy	96%
Make friends	97%
Be emotionally supported	94%
Enjoy, learn and develop	100%

- 3.40 Young carers held their first AGM in 18/19 and presented to peers, health and social care professionals and parents. Annual reviews for each young carer include feedback from parents and carers which shape how services are delivered. There are currently 68 schools, colleges and education settings across Swindon actively taking part in the Young Carers in School Award. Outcomes of the award include a 100% increase in referrals from schools and colleges to the Young Carers service, an increased number of young carers reporting they know who to go to for advice and support, in the attendance and attainment of young carers identified within their settings. Through surveying the schools, there are now 2000 Young Carers in total being supported by Young Carers Leads in schools.

What will the service be doing differently?

Family Safeguarding

- 3.41 The Local Authority has been successful in the Family Safeguarding bid. It is one of 15 areas nationally to benefit from significant government funding to help tackle challenges when they arise at home, boosting family resilience and creating stable homes where children can thrive. The family safeguarding approach will consist of mental health practitioners, domestic abuse workers who will work with Adults and Children’s social workers to work together improve child protection, working with whole families so that all of their needs are met. The programme offers wrap-around support for families. Evaluation of this project which has been successful in Hertfordshire resulted in a 39% reduction in the number of day children spent in care, a reduction in cases allocated to the safeguarding team, a 53% drop in hospital admissions for adults in the family and a 66% reduction in contact with the police.

Creation of Edge of Care Service

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- 3.42 The Edge of Care team will work intensively with families where there is a risk of the child or young person entering care or custody. The service will also support children currently in care and their families, where there is an identified plan for the child to return home. The specialist team are dedicated to supporting families to stay together when it is safe and appropriate to do so. The Edge of Care service will work with children and young people aged 10-18 years and their families. The service is voluntary and will work hard to engage children, young people and their parents. The Edge of Care Family Intervention workers hold a caseload of children, young people and families alongside their allocated Social Worker. Home visits will be undertaken with families at a frequency their needs. The Family Intervention Workers will work intensively and flexibly with families open to the service over a 3 to 6 month period to co-ordinate and deliver targeted support which will address whole family difficulties, prevent escalation and result in better outcomes for each child and young person. The support plans will be reviewed with the family and multi-agency network on a monthly basis. The team is made up of passionate and dedicated multi-agency practitioners who will practice using a restorative, relational approach, ensuring that families are fully supported to make the changes needed to care for their children and to prevent their entry into the care system.

Delivery of services from Pre-Birth to five years

- 3.43 The Local Government Association (LGA) carried out an Early Years Peer Review in September 2019, funded by the Department for Education. The review focused on four key lines of enquiry:
- Is early years operating in accordance with the vision of ‘One Children’s Service, consistently good every day and onwards to outstanding’
 - Is there the capacity and quality in the workforce and in existing provision to be good or outstanding
 - Maximising the gains from early identification and timely response - to SEND and to early communication difficulties
 - Ensuring the right functionality and expertise is available to make best use of data
- 3.44 The full report to be issued by the LGA is not yet available, but initial feedback highlighted the need for a co-produced, overarching pre-birth to five strategy with a focus towards prevention and universal services and Swindon is progressing this work to provide a more joined up and collaborative approach going forwards.
- 3.45 Follow up work to deliver the recommendations of the report will be supported by the Early Intervention Foundation, with a ‘light touch’ follow up by the LGA within

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12 months to assess how well SBC are doing in making the identified improvements.

Alternative Support solutions to becoming looked after.

- 3.46 The service is proactively working with young people to find alternative solutions to prevent them needing to become looked after. Children’s needs are best served in their own families if this can be safely supported. Adolescent entrants to the system tend to experience a larger number of placements, a more disrupted experience of care and poorer outcomes in education. Working with adolescents differently and with the support of services such as Edge of Care and Family Group Conferencing will provide opportunities for young people to remain supported as Children in Need without the need for becoming looked after.

Children Looked After Local Provision

- 3.47 The Children looked after pillar of the service improvement plan has a key focus on local placement provision for Children Looked After. The aim is to work to procure appropriate accommodation and effectively manage placements, particularly to improve the sufficiency of placements to meet the needs of older children as well as those children with complex needs.
- 3.48 The embedding of a strengthened Placement team will ensure better and timely matches with in house foster carers. A new fostering recruitment portal is in place to enable potential foster carers to apply in a more straightforward way and ensure the service responds quickly to enquiries. The improvement of timely and quality reviews for foster carers will help carers feel valued and develop their skills so their placement offer can be more comprehensive and compatible for a wider range of children requiring placements in future.

Workforce development

- 3.49 The services recognises successful permanent recruitment coupled with a strengthened practice management model and structure is key to driving greater individual ownership, responsibility and accountability. This will provide better staffing stability and effective leadership at a practice level so the foundation for the service will be consistently good. Although the service has been successful in recruiting newly qualified social workers, they are inexperienced and do not have the skill level to deal with the complexities that the children and families present. There are plans to undertake an international recruitment exercise for experienced social workers from those countries with similar practices to us and with a successful history of recruitment.
- 3.50 A renewed focus on practice and development across social care workforce is underway. A new service manager and full time Principal social worker have

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been recruited. This brings additional capacity to focus on recruitment and retention and quality of social work practice. The work will include enhancing the voice of social work and using it to inform service planning. A new professional social work academy will be launched in November 2019 across children and adults. This will enhance the opportunities for professional progression and enhance the offer to social worker staff for professional development. There is a key focus on improving working relationships with open universities and the Local Authority as well as expanding the pathways into social work through work based training and apprenticeships.

Adolescents with Mental Health issues

- 3.51 The single point of access for agencies referring to Mental Health services is operated by the Borough who work with CAMHS and voluntary sector to deliver. The legacy operating model is not as effective as it should be. In order to address this a digitalised process is being introduced for professionals referring. The system will also provide parents with an on line booking system which will be more reliable and efficient as well as improving the user experience of referral to mental health services. The system will enable parents to better track the progress of the referral and self-select an appointment. This will reduce the number of appointments missed.
- 3.52 Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has been selected to implement proposals for new mental health support teams in schools, as set out in the recent Children and Young People Mental Health Green Paper. The CCG has been awarded £2.3 million to deliver on this until 2020/21. Swindon Trailblazer will be expanding access to mental health support for children and young people in 40 schools in Swindon by January 2020. Three teams from Barnardo’s will be working with children and young people who have mild to moderate mental health needs. This means support will be provided earlier before issues become more serious or a crisis occurs. The support provided will include one to one and group work with children and young people, work with parents and carers, and developing peer mentoring and volunteering opportunities. Barnardo’s will work closely with children and young people and their families to make sure that everyone has a voice. Barnardo’s will work in partnership with other mental health providers, education, the voluntary sector, wider Swindon services and the local communities.
- 3.53 Routine information sharing agreements will be developed across mental health service providers to ensure there is an awareness of children accessing mental health services who are also open to social care and key information on this vulnerable group of children.

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What are the challenges facing the portfolio:

Top Priorities	Progress & Next Steps	Impact/outcomes
Stability of Workforce	<p>Progress: Average duration of an agency worker increased from 3 to 8 months between February and June 19. Recruitment and Retention Initiatives are beginning to have impact.</p> <p>Next Steps: further conversion of temporary to permanent staff. More manager posts permanently recruited to. More social worker posts permanently recruited to.</p>	Stable workforce with high retention rates and low turnover helping to make sure children have one social worker during their care.
Further strengthening services and outcomes for Children Looked After	<p>Progress: Improved permanency tracking and increase in adoptions in 19/20.</p> <p>Next Steps: Delivery of actions outlined in the Children Services Improvement plan</p>	Improved permanency tracking and planning and more children are placed with families where they can thrive and achieve potential.
Stability and Permanence for Children Looked After, including placement provision	<p>Progress: Use of Permanency tracker to monitor progress for children looked after and prevent delays in finding permanency solutions Dedicated Commissioner posts recruited to strengthen the local authority position in the commissioning of external placements Placement matching processes strengthened. Placements team has increased specialist capacity.</p> <p>Next steps: Build consistent sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of older children as well as those children with complex needs. Review of in house foster carers, data cleansing exercise, new scorecard developed. Continue work with ATV to provide permanency for Children Looked</p>	<p>More children looked after are placed locally (within 20 miles), placements are more stable and break down less frequently and the number of high cost residential placements are reduced.</p> <p>More children looked after achieving permanency</p>

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Jo Ash, 01793 465849, jash@swindon.gov.uk.

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	After.	
The timeliness and quality of preparation of care leavers for independent living	<p>Progress: Improved pathway planning format and effective engagement of young people in the pathway planning process</p> <p>Next steps: Pathway plans are reviewed consistently and signed off by young person.</p>	Care Leavers receive a good and well supported transition into adulthood
Health histories are routinely available for care leavers in a timely way.	<p>Progress: Health Passport developed as a good practice example, but not routinely provided for care leavers</p> <p>Next Steps: Ensure care leavers have access to health histories are routinely available for care leavers in a timely way.</p>	Care Leavers receive a good and well supported transition into adulthood
Improve the Quality of Planning for Children in receipt of social care services	<p>Progress: Routine audits monitor the progress of quality of plans for children Quality of plans improved but still some inconsistencies.</p> <p>Next Steps: Staff Training and Practice standards embedded to ensure plan are time bound with clear actions and contingency planning, underpinned by strong management oversight</p>	Effective plans improve outcomes for children in a timely way.
Universal Delivery of the Healthy Child Programme	<p>Progress: Focus on new birth visits and 2-2.5 year checks. Other aspects of the programme prioritised based on vulnerability factors.</p> <p>Next Steps: Recruitment and Retention actions to increase Health Visiting capacity.</p>	Every under 5 in Swindon receives all services outlined in the Healthy Child Programme.
Youth Offending	<p>Progress: Positive direction of travel in relation to key performance indicators.</p>	Young people who have offended are supported and rehabilitated within communities and don't re-

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	<p>Next Steps: Quality Assurance processes will be strengthened to Improve quality of case work.</p> <p>Improved use of management information</p>	offend in future.
SEND	<p>Progress: Quality Assurance Framework is operational with a thematic analysis of results and actions in progress.</p> <p>Core Standards are being rolled out across the local area.</p> <p>Next Steps: Focus on Quality Assurance and performance reporting.</p> <p>Actively promote partnership, participation and coproduction.</p> <p>Further develop ways of gaining views on the level of children/young people and families satisfaction with the local area developments and improvements.</p> <p>Review the offer provided by support services across education, health and care to ensure that they deliver on the strategic priorities and support and enhance developments.</p>	Children and Young people receive a timely and high quality Education. Health and Care Plans to meet their needs

Stability of Workforce

- 3.54 The service now has an almost complete establishment of permanent senior managers, who are committed to continue to deliver improvements through strong leadership and partnership working. This marks the end of a significant period of senior management instability and temporary staff.
- 3.55 The service has a current establishment of 123 qualified social worker posts. The agency profile is a significant challenge because it represents just over 60% of our case-holding workforce. It is positive the stability of the agency workforce improves month on month, currently at an average of just over 8 months based on data at the end of June 19. This is partly due to the impact of an improved

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financial offer introduced in late 2018 which includes enhanced pay rates, travel and accommodation payments and access to the full development and training programme. A slight dip has been experienced in the latest data for August in terms of duration of agency worker and this will be monitored monthly to check it is not a consistent trend. Most of the agency workers are experienced social workers and this provides stability for children and families. The service is acutely aware of the impact of the turn-over of staff on changes of social worker for children and managers work to mitigate the impact of this wherever possible.

- 3.56 Led by the Director of HR, the Council’s recruitment and organisational development teams are working with senior staff in children’s services to deliver strategies and incentives that will recruit and retain a permanent workforce. The Council has invested in dedicated children’s service recruitment posts and the whole offer and reward package has been reviewed, including a financial ‘golden hello’, an enhanced relocation package and flexible working. The Council has introduced a new website, with a bespoke social work recruitment site and has implemented an enhanced national recruitment campaign which includes a bespoke advertorial and targeted Email, Face Book, and LinkedIn campaigns.

Further strengthening services and outcomes for children looked after

- 3.57 The service has a clear focus on achieving permanence for children and acknowledges that there are aspects of historical drift and delay. A permanency tracker has been implemented that gives senior managers oversight of the progress of all cases. A full range of permanence options are well considered including special guardianship, return home and adoption. Health outcomes for children looked after are positive and a dedicated children looked after Health service ensures children and young people receive regular health checks and work hard to engage young people in the process of attending appointments. Education is actively promoted for Children Looked After and Swindon Virtual School provides effective support for the progress and attainment of children in care. 93% of children looked after had an updated PEP at the end of the Spring term 2019. This is an improvement from 85% in Autumn 18. Personal education plans (PEPs) have a clear focus on raising achievement.

Stability and Permanence for Children Looked After, including placement provision

- 3.58 Placement stability remains a challenge. There are signs of improvement in short term stability based on the year to date performance in 19/20. Long term stability is impacted by a number of factors which means that shifting performance is linked to the increase of capacity and skills of in house foster carers and preventing placement breakdowns through better oversight of placements and provision of foster carer support. The use of independent foster care placements has reduced but continues to be the highest proportion of placements. The

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market management of providers of both fostering and residential placements is a key priority. This includes two dedicated commissioner posts to support the significant commissioning work needed on placements and accommodation. Enhanced contract management has been put in place for key providers.

- 3.59 The increasing challenges and complexities of Swindon’s CLA population means the service needs to increase the number of in house foster carers. Fourteen percent of CLA have more than 3 placements in a 12 month period and long term stability for children looked after is below national average. Swindon places a third of CLA more than 20 miles from home which is higher than national. Progress in response to these challenges during 2018 has been made with the better management of providers and improved placement searching procedures and processes. The family intervention service (FISS) has been established and this includes Edge of Care services and increased Family Group Conferencing to prevent children from requiring Local Authority care.
- 3.60 The challenges faced reflect the national position in relation to placement supply and demand. The revised sufficiency strategy and a revised Children Looked After and Care Leaver strategy were both endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2018. Swindon is now working to join a consortium to enable access to the market of providers of care. The sufficiency strategy details the key developments to address the volume and type of placement demands. It is recognised that, as an organisation, a higher level of agility is required in order to respond to these challenges going forward. A dedicated LAC commissioner has been recruited and will deliver market engagement and improved provider management.
- 3.61 To improve the long term stability of placements is a priority for Swindon. There has been a small improvement in the last quarter of 2018/19, but too many children experience placement instability and too many children in care are placed more than 20 miles from home with 33.8% of children looked after placed more than 20 miles from Swindon at the end of March 19, compared with 15% nationally. In 2018, a detailed analysis of sufficiency was undertaken to inform the new sufficiency strategy to ensure the needs of children, including children looked after, are fully understood and the Local Authority has the right mix and volume of foster placements to meet needs and reduce the number of children placed out of Borough. New staff have been recruited permanently and a foster carer recruitment campaign was launched in early 2018, the impact of which are reflected in an increase in foster carers. This has resulted in 11 new foster carers with a further 14 in assessment. The fostering service has additional management capacity to drive changes and an improvement plan with corporate project management support. The new digital foster care recruitment process is now live which streamlines the recruitment process and is more engaging for

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potential foster carers. A skills audit was undertaken during May 19 and findings from that are being used to strengthen skills within the existing foster carer pool.

3.62 Short term stability of placements is in line with the national average at 10%. We are increasingly providing foster carers with support to manage complex and challenging needs, rather than change the placement. Actions to improve placement stability overall are fundamental objectives within the improvement plan and include:

- Increase the choice of placement options to meet the individual needs of our children
- Recruit, develop and retain a strong pool of local foster carers who are fully supported to care for our children
- Improve the permanence and resilience of placements for our children

3.63 Swindon transferred Adoption Services to Adopt Thames Valley (ATV) in 2018 in order to maximise adopter capacity and improve matching quality for children placed for adoption. The length of time between a child coming into care and being placed for adoption has significantly reduced in Swindon from 569 days in 2017/18 to 488 in 2018/19. This is a significant improvement - three years ago Swindon was one of the lowest performing authorities for this measure. The length of time from placement order to being matched has decreased from 237 days in 2017/18 to 218 in 2018/19 and is in line with national average (220). We know that length of time from placement order to matching was impacted by the transfer of Adopter services to Adoption Thames Valley in 2018 at the same time as an increase of children were identified as adoption being in their best interest. This raised capacity issues in terms of availability of suitable adopters. In order to address this, Swindon has subsequently increased investment to improve the numbers of children finding permanent homes and accelerate the process. At the end of August 2019, there were 42 children on placement orders, which is a reduction from 48 in March 19 but still high comparatively. These cases have been reviewed with ATV in order to progress with matching these children with adoptive families to achieve permanence. Fifteen were adopted during 2018/19 which represents 10.4% of children ceasing care; slightly below the national average of 13%. There has been an increase in 19/20 with 16.1% of children ceasing care being adopted between April and August 19. The use of Special Guardianships is consistently higher than national average with 15% having this as a permanency route, compared with 11% nationally.

Voice of the Child

3.64 The voices of children and young people are central to the service’s outcome focussed practice model. The Practice Standards, guidance, and workforce

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development make it clear that for every child worked with, the child’s voice should be captured and recorded, whether in records of visits, assessments, reviews or plans. Quality assurance activity demonstrates that over time staff are improving recorded practice in relation to capturing and responding to the child’s perspective and there are examples of very good practice.

- 3.65 Performance data shows that participation of children in their reviews is consistently above 97%. Participation methods include advocacy, texting or conversations with their social worker prior to review. The IRO writes the record of the CLA minutes to the child to ensure it is completely child focussed and meaningful. This has received positive feedback during a recent external review. The reviewing forms are worded to address the child/young person directly to get their input and views and this helps to ensure that their voice is central to plans and decision making. Feedback from CLA reviews reflects that children showed their aspirations and talked about the future and examples of career aspirations were evident with many aspiring to higher education.
- 3.66 Advocacy services are commissioned for children and young people in need of protection, children in care and children with disabilities. This is currently provided by Coram Voice who worked with 129 young people during 2018/19. The annual Coram Voice report included positive feedback from a sample of those children and young people who engaged in the service, but there is work to do on strengthening the referral process to ensure young people can readily access the service and that it is consistently offered. The scope of the service and offer is currently being improved.
- 3.67 During 2018, the independent reviewing officers were successful in implementing a challenge group for children in care. The success of this group led to the service bringing the child in care council within the Borough after previously being commissioned out. Up to forty children, including many from Out of Borough and some with complex needs and disabilities, attend the meetings. A number of their suggested improvements have been implemented.
- 3.68 A Child in Care Council (CICC) meets on a monthly basis, usually attended by up to 12 members. The group is supported by a Participation Officer who is working to broaden the number and representation of children and young people involved in the work of the CICC.
- 3.69 The Participation Officer has been working with local businesses to encourage them to support young people in care in the Swindon area. This led to a local car sales firm applying to set up a charity to support sponsorship of activities for children and young people in the care of Swindon Council. They held their last CICC meeting at a car showroom which meant that the young people were able to sit in high specification cars and have their meeting in the boardroom! Several other businesses in Swindon have made contributions to our events and service

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development, and this has provided an incentive for children and young people to get involved.

- 3.70 The Corporate Parenting Board has recently refreshed their pledges to children in care and care leavers and have sought the views and contributions of the CICC as part of this process. A review of the pledges will be undertaken annually with children and young people.
- 3.71 There is an annual Child in Care Awards ceremony, which as well as being an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of children and young people, is a way of involving them in planning and organising the event. In April this year two events were held; 12-18yr olds were celebrated in an Oscar-themed ceremony at a local hotel; and 4-11yr olds in a soft-play centre. The Children In Care Council and their carers determined the theme, venue, food and award categories for these celebratory events. The occasions were a success with very positive feedback from foster carers and children and young people.
- 3.72 Members of the CICC are regularly consulted on issues that affect them. For example, they have recently advised on or co-created:
- Children Looked after Health Passport, which is being shared nationally by the office of the Children’s Commissioner as an example of good practice. This was also recognised as good practice by Ofsted in the February 2019 focussed visit on care leavers.
- The Internet Safety Strategy
 - Educational assessments
 - A family agreement and what that looks like
- 3.73 A Care Leavers Participation Group (CLPG) is also held on a monthly basis led by the Team Manager of the Leaving Care Team. Feedback was provided by young people at a recent meeting to ascertain what they got out of the group. The collective response was that it is an opportunity to meet with the Care Leavers Team Manager and senior staff, including the DCS, on a regular basis, in order to share views and to have regular updates in terms of service developments and improvements. In addition, the young people are involved fully in any service consultations. They have been actively involved in the design of a new pathway plan format and process and were fully consulted in the development of the care leaver Local Offer.
- 3.74 Children and young people have been involved in decision-making about recruitment to key roles including the Director of Children’s Social Work, IRO and Participation Officer. The service commissions participation and engagement for

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children with special needs and disabilities from STEP. The impact of this work is positive.

- 3.75 Work continues to strengthen the voice and influence of children and young people in our service delivery. A Participation Strategy and a Plan of work have been developed which includes plans to develop a focus group for UASC, many of whom are placed further away from Swindon.
- 3.76 The service is in the process of developing and implementing the role of Young Inspectors; setting up a mentoring scheme where care leavers mentor younger children who are preparing for independence; extending our Customer Survey work to include children and young people; training and learning for foster carers and social workers; and ensuring that participation work with children and young people across the Council and wider system is more strategic and joined up, and have recently appointed a Swindon Care Leaver to a Business Support NVQ Level 3 apprentice. The Apprentice will be working on projects specifically to support children and young people to be involved in the development of services.

The timeliness and quality of preparation of care leavers for independent living

- 3.77 Pathway planning is key to assist care leavers in transition to adulthood. The pathway planning process has been strengthened and a new pathway plan format was introduced in May 2019 which was co-produced with care leavers. Managers are monitoring the quality of care leaver contacts and addressing any performance issues with workers during supervision. The transfer process from the children in care team has also been reviewed and strengthened to ensure that care leavers transition experience is positive. There is a specific project for care leavers to ensure they have opportunities and are actively encouraged to engage in education, employment and training opportunities.
- 3.78 The leaving care service consistently tracks and works with the young people who need suitable accommodation. Improvements are required in relation to consistent processes and assessments in relation to determining the suitability and safety of accommodation. OFSTED (March 19) recommended that Swindon Care Leavers would benefit from a greater range of bespoke housing options and this is being addressed. The Housing and Children Social care and Accommodation Panel now meets fortnightly. This panel provides clear pathways for young people and to makes decisions related to accommodation following case referrals from Children Social Care and Housing teams.

Health Histories for Care Leavers

- 3.79 Health Histories for Care Leavers need to be consistently available for young people leaving care. Health passports are a good example practice of health

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histories, but care leavers need to have access routinely to their comprehensive health histories.

Strengthening the quality of plans for children in receipt of social care services

- 3.80 The service has developed robust quality assurance processes for the auditing of plans for children in receipt of social care services. The findings have shown that quality of plans needs to improve to be consistently good. This was confirmed by OFSTED during the July 2019 ILACS inspection. Actions to address this are outlined in the Quality of Practice Improvement pillar of the Service improvement plan. This includes specific workforce planning on how to develop SMART plans with clear actions with timescales to address need. The auditing of cases is monthly and plans are a key focus in the audit programme. Team managers are regularly case sampling and reviewing plans with workers during supervision. Progress of work around quality of planning is reviewed monthly at the Quality and Performance Improvement Board.

Delivery of the Healthy Child Programme

- 3.81 The Health Visiting Service has seen an increase in delivery of new birth visits from 95% in Q1 18/19 to 97% in Q1 19/20. Breastfeeding data at 6-8 weeks has improved with a rise to 52.1% in Q1 2019/20 compared to the National data 47.3%. Swindon has been reaccruited by UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, and is currently working towards the gold award.
- 3.82 Recruitment and retention of Health Visitors remains a challenge, and the service is prioritising new birth, 6-8 week, and 2-2.5 year contacts and prioritising interventions and support to families who need help the most. A proactive response has been made to recruitment challenges recruiting Early Years Family Practitioners and Staff Nurses to support the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme.
- 3.83 The 0-19 transformation agenda is moving forward with the Health Visitor and School Nursing teams amalgamating across two sites at Reuben George and The Meadow in October 2019.

Youth Offending Service

- 3.84 Swindon has a higher rate of first time entrants with 613.9 per 10,000 population in 2017 compared with 295.1 nationally. The First Time Entrants count has fallen by nearly 350 FTE's/100,000 from its peak of 805 / 100,000 in 2015. Swindon remains above both the national and south west average. The service management structure is being reviewed and quality assurance processes are being strengthened to provide stronger management oversight of operational performance. This includes having the specialist services of On-Trak and U-Turn

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working more closely with services under the Family Intervention Support Service (FISS) umbrella. This will allow young people who do come to the attention of the criminal justice system to draw on a broader range of services. Much of the work currently underway is to provide assurance young people are receiving the best service possible. Essex’s Youth Offending Team (YOT) was deemed to be Outstanding through inspection and they are currently working with the service as partners, to improve the service delivery. The YOT Management Board has asked the service to prioritise a focus on quality. It is anticipated the improvement work currently underway will ensure Swindon is best placed for a positive inspection outcome.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability)

- 3.85 The number of children and young people with identified SEND in Swindon has remained consistently above national figures. 3.9% of Swindon’s school population has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) compared to 3.1% nationally. There has been a 50% increase in children and young people accessing an EHCP since the implementation of the SEND Reforms of 2014. 13.2% of Swindon school population receive SEND support which is 1.3% above the national average. The number of EHCP’s is forecast to increase as the population grows significantly by 2028. A number of activities governed through the Written Statement of Action are seeking to stabilise the percentage for SEND whilst ensuring that outcomes are good for children and young people. The increase in the number of assessments requested has inevitably impacted on performance with Completion of assessments within 20 weeks decreasing to 52.3% over the last 12 month period. Cumulatively there has been 378 requests for statutory needs assessments in the last 12 months and of these, 58 have been refused.
- 3.86 These challenges are being addressed through the implementation of Core Standards whereby early years settings, schools and colleges came together and developed a Swindon wide set of guidance of what is normally available for children and young people for universal and graduated response needs, improvements made to the collection and use of performance data which in turn will strengthen quality and performance monitoring processes. These activities will drive up the quality of EHCP’s and we expect to see the completion within 20 weeks increase over the next 18-24 months to national levels.
- 3.87 The challenges faced in relation to a deficit position of the High Needs Budget reflect the national position of 122 local authorities of 157 being in a deficit position. The pressures on the High Needs Budget are closely related to the growth in demand for Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) since the implementation of the SEND Reforms of 2014.

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3.88 Nationally, the educational outcomes of children and young people with identified SEND are not as good as their non-SEND peers and the situation in Swindon is broadly the same. Persistent absence and exclusions are of particular concern, especially for children and young people with EHCPs. They are above national benchmarks and above for children with no SEND. Swindon SEND Families Voice (SSFV) are our strategic Parent Carer Group and represent the important views of parents/carers who have children and young people with SEND alongside the commissioned service through STEP to facilitate engagement with children and young people with SEND. This partnership supports and enables opportunities for joint working and co-production. Since SSFVs creation in March 2018 their reach has increased by 600%. Both forums have been instrumental in co-producing the newly launched Local Offer.

Priorities for the Next 18 months

- Maintain a Stable Workforce. The service recognises successful permanent recruitment coupled with a strengthened practice management model is key to providing staff stability.
- Develop the in house foster care capacity and skills in order to place children more locally.
- Improve plans for children receiving social care support to include clear, specific and time bound actions as well as contingency arrangements
- Improve the Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of older children, as well as those children with complex needs
- The timeliness and quality of preparation of care leavers for independent living including health histories and ensuring they are routinely available for care leavers
- Replace the legacy case management and document management systems. The implementation of the ICT system is in flight with the infrastructure and testing system now in place. There are currently multiple design and configuration workshops being delivered and a dedicated Practice Lead has been assigned to the project to ensure the solution meets social worker requirements from the frontline perspective.
- Complete activity to respond to the SEND written statement of action

4. Alternative Options

4.1 The Committee can choose not to operate a Cabinet Portfolio Question and Answer session system.

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report. Any expenditure arising as a result of an item on the Committee’s work programme will be met by the Overview and Scrutiny Support budget, subject to the approval of the Committee.
- 5.2 The main financial challenge facing the service is the high level of agency workers. For the Social work based teams there were 59% agency staff to 41% permanent staff as at the end of August. There is a Workforce Taskforce in place to support the permanent recruitment of staff.
- 5.3 The Finance Business Partner for Children Services was consulted in relation to financial information provided within this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.4 There are no legal and human rights implications associated with this report.
- 5.5 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) requires every Local Authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account, undertake policy development and review, monitor, and improve performance.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.6 There are no other direct implications arising from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.7 No Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) is required at this stage as this report proposes no changes to services. Any DIA that is required during review of topics included within the work programme will be identified at the appropriate stage.

Risk Management

- 5.8 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

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6. Consultees

- 6.1 The author has consulted, where appropriate, with Corporate Directors, Directors, Heads of Service, other officers, and relevant partners on the purpose, content, and recommendations of the report.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1: OFSTED Inspection of Children Services.
- 8.2 Appendix 2: Cabinet report Inspection of Children Services.