



Swindon's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2021–2024



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Swindon's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2021–2024

Our vision

All children, young people and the families who support them living in Swindon are enabled to have their voices heard and acted upon at all levels, i.e. in the individual support they receive and also strategically as to how services/organisations operate.

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Foreword

The participation and engagement of children and young people is at the heart of how we meet their needs and aspirations and how we develop and deliver our services in Swindon. We are committed to engage meaningfully with children and young people so that we know their needs and interests and learn from their experiences. Our wide range of participation and engagement activities seek the views and experiences of children and young people that are representative of our population in Swindon. We are committed to shape and deliver services based on what children and young people tell us and provide them with every opportunity to influence decision-making. It is important to us that we are accountable to them and we have processes in place to regularly feedback what we have done as a result of the feedback provided.

We use a model of 'You Said – We Did' and work very hard to 'close the loop' to children and young people.

A wide range of partners and agencies are part of our Participation Network in Swindon. This Network promotes participation and engagement across Swindon and is instrumental in delivering this Strategy. The Network provides a framework for our work and ensures that at every opportunity it is joined up and agencies learn from each other and share information and learning. The Network is supported by a number of Participation Champions who are frontline practitioners or managers who champion participation within their areas of responsibility.

We have worked with children, young people and families to identify six priorities which will enable Swindon to develop, deliver and embed improved services as part of our continuous improvement plan:

Priority 1 – Recruitment

Children, young people and families are involved in all recruitment of roles and posts of those with whom they will have contact.

Priority 2 – Training

Children, young people and families regularly deliver training to the staff who work with them.

Priority 3 – Consultation

Children, young people and families will be regularly consulted on new services and changes to services including: understanding need; planning and design; service delivery; and feedback.

Priority 4 – Quality assurance

Children, young people and families have regular opportunities to tell us how well we're doing and what we need to do to improve.

Priority 5 – Strategic governance and decision-making

Children, young people and families are regularly involved through representation at boards and meetings in strategic governance and decision-making.

Priority 6 – Communication

Participation messaging is timely and consistent across all services and organisations working with children, young people and families.

The six priorities provide the ambition and direction of the Strategy to continuously improve and embed meaningful participation at a strategic, operational and individual level. A set of principles and a three-year action plan are in place to deliver and implement this Strategy and this will be monitored by children and young people.

We commend Swindon's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2021–2024 to you and look forward to your contribution to help achieve the outcomes that we are ambitious to achieve.



David Haley
Corporate Director:
Children's Services



Cllr. Mary Martin
Lead Member:
Children's Services

Introduction

This Participation Strategy outlines our ambition to work in partnership with children, young people and families to design and deliver responsive and impactful services across Swindon.

Children, young people and families have worked with us to develop this strategy by:

- identifying the values that underpin our approach to participation;
- suggesting what to include to make it meaningful and to make a difference;
- advising on the language to use;
- developing accessible materials so children, young people and families are aware of what they can expect from the successful implementation of the strategy.

The following agencies have actively participated in developing this strategy:

- Children in Care Council
- Swindon SEND Families Voice
- Swindon Carers Centre including Young Carer's Forum
- STEP SEND Young People's Forum (Thought Tank)
- Young People working with the Edge of Care Service
- Young People working with the Disabled Children's Team
- Participation Champions
- Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Participation Network
- Wiltshire Police and Office of Police and Crime Commissioner
- Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group

What is participation?

Participation is about having influence and impact over decisions and actions, it is not just about "taking part" or "being present". It is about children, young people and families being at the heart of services and being involved with planning and decision-making from the very beginning through to completion. It is about service providers working in a person-centred way with those using their services.



Why is participation important?

We want our children, young people and families to be listened to and heard so that they are able to influence and impact decisions about their lives and the services they work with. This strategy exists to support our participation and engagement work in Swindon and aims to increase the influence our children, young people and families have over shaping the services that support them. In some instances, organisations have a statutory duty to protect young people and the community from harm. Positive interaction and building trust is a key priority for constructive and mutual participation between services and children, young people and families.

Children, young people and families have a key role in ensuring the delivery of inclusive and responsive services, which are accessible, appropriate, cost effective and meet the needs of users and carers. We will involve children, young people and families in assessing our services by identifying what we do well and what we need to improve. Appendix B describes the two models Swindon will be adopting (the Lundy Model and Slay and Penny's Model) to embed good participation and engagement practice.

What are our principles for ensuring meaningful participation?

- **Transparency and honesty**

Clear and age appropriate information with nothing hidden and a genuine opportunity to influence decision-making but clear about the limits of their influence and given feedback once decisions are reached;

- **Voluntary involvement**

Participation should be voluntary and children, young people and families should be allowed to leave or stop participating at any stage during the process;

- **Relevance**

Children, young people and families should participate on issues that are relevant to them and that draws on their knowledge and competencies;

- **Safety**

Methods and techniques used as well as the environment in which children, young people and families are enabled to participate should be friendly, safe and encouraging to participation;

- **Inclusive**

All children, young people and families should be provided with an equal opportunity to participate and not be left out;

- **Early Involvement**

Children and young people should be involved from the earliest stage of any initiatives so they have the opportunity to shape or influence both the process and the outcomes;

- **Accountable**

Children and young people should receive feedback on the extent to which their views have been taken into account and on any follow up process after they have assisted by participating, known as 'closing the loop'.

What are the benefits of Participation?

There are many benefits to participation but we have outlined some key benefits below:

For councils and other organisations:

Services are designed, delivered and evaluated based on the needs and experiences of children, young people and families.

Increases access to, use of, and satisfaction with services delivered.

Increases cost effectiveness.

For children, young people and families:

Increases confidence, self-belief and life chances by developing skills such as: problem solving and decision-making, creative and critical thinking, negotiation, flexibility and adaptability.

Ensures services will meet their needs well.

Provides a better understanding of how organisations work and how to influence them in the future.

Provides better access and satisfaction with services that meet need.

Gives a voice and influence to those using services who know best what they need.

For the wider community:

Breaks down barriers and improves intergenerational relationships.

Ensures services build on the experience and needs of the community.

An empowering environment raises aspirations in the wider family and community.

A wide range of services are available within the community to give better and more targeted support.

Fosters community cohesion through the inclusion of children and families in local decision-making.

Ensures resources are directed to where they will make the most difference.

National and local context

National Context

Active participation of children, young people and families is supported by:

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), including protection of rights for the views of the child and Freedom of Expression.
- Children Act 2014 (and subsequent guidance). Legal and policy framework to promote the active involvement of children and young people in planning and commissioning, including development with the Children's Commissioner.
- Mental Capacity, Equality and Care Acts
- The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced major reforms to the way in which Local Authorities and their partners help and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families. The Act supports a vision for all children and young people. The reforms specifically require:
 - A cultural change in the way in which we listen to and engage with children, young people and families.
 - A responsibility on local authorities and its partners to integrate services, to deliver support from 0-25 years, to offer this support as early as possible and make decisions with the full involvement of children, young people and families.
 - Improved quality and range of information available for children, young people and families enabling them to make informed choices.
- Early years, schools, colleges, health and social care partners to work together with the Local Authority on developing and shaping the Local Offer through joint assessment, planning and commissioning of services.
- Better commissioning of new provision to ensure needs are met early, in a timely way and within local schools, post- 16 settings and by local community services.
- Positive transitions at all key stages within a 0-25 age range; successful preparation for adult life is the overarching goal for all children and young people with SEND.
- A skilled workforce that can meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and those who are disabled.
- Services that support families to meet their children's needs and help children to remain in their local community.

Under the Equality Act 2010 schools and post-16 settings have statutory duties to ensure that they do not discriminate against children and young people with SEND. They should ensure that pupils with SEND can be involved in every aspect of school life. This may involve changing the way educational settings teach pupils.

Local Context

Empowering children, young people and families to participate in decision-making about their own lives and influence the development of services is a key objective of Swindon Borough Council and partners through the Participation Team. This is a value embedded within our pledges: The Children Looked After Pledge, Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Participation Pledge, SEND Participation and Co-production Charter and Care Conference Pledge (see appendices G–K).

What you can expect from us:

- You should be involved in decisions that affect you and you will be supported and encouraged to make improvements in your life.
- You will be supported and encouraged to say when you're not happy and to ask for something to be done about it. If we can't do what you've asked, we will tell you why and offer you alternative options.
- You will be supported and encouraged to tell us when things are going well or something good happens. This helps us understand what you find most helpful.
- Your voice will make a difference and we will tell you what difference your voice has made. We will take your views seriously.
- You should be able to give your feedback and suggestions about the adults who help you and the people they work for. This is important to us and you will be supported and encouraged to do this.

If children, young people and families need support to have their voice heard, struggle to do this independently, or feel they are not being listened to, then they can:

- Ask someone supporting them to help, if they feel able to;
- Ask another professional they know or someone they trust;
- Find out who their Participation Champion is or the member of the Participation Network in their organisation and talk to them;
- Look at Swindon's Local Offer page: <https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk/content/send-local-offer/landing-pages/swindon-send-local-offer/>;
- Look at Swindon Safeguarding Partnership's website: <https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/>;
- Follow the complaints procedure for the organisation.

Swindon participation groups that meet regularly:

Swindon Young Carers Forum

A group of Young Carers aged 13 to 17 who meet monthly to discuss ways to raise awareness of Young Carers in Swindon and nationally and are the voice of Young Carers in Swindon.

Children in Care Council (CiCC)

A group of children who are "looked after" who come together to share their experiences of being in care and to be a voice for all of Swindon's Children Looked After.

Voice and Influence Panel (VIP)

A group of young people who are "care leavers" who come together to share their experiences of being in care and to be a voice for all of Swindon's Care Leavers.

STEP SEND Young People's Participation Group (Thought Tank)

Deliver and facilitate participation and co-production work with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is delivered by working with a core group of children and young people (Thought Tank Advisory Group), and outreach work across the statutory and voluntary sector, contributing to strategic and operational work streams and ensuring the voice of children is heard throughout the design and delivery of services.

Youth Council

A group of young people from across Swindon who meet regularly to discuss issues affecting the local community and work with councillors to improve services. They work alongside our school councils.

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Participation Network

A group of professionals from different organisations such as the Council, the Police, schools, colleges and charities, etc. who work with children, young people and families in Swindon who come together to share what our community is telling us to help us improve the services we provide.

Out of the Can

An LGBTQ+ Youth Action Group for young people aged 13-19, providing a space where young people feel free to be and express themselves, have opportunities to explore and take action on current LGBT+ issues and socialise in a safe, supportive environment.

Participation Champions

A group of frontline professionals internal to the Council who come together to share best practice and what children, young people and families with whom they work are telling them to help improve services.

Alongside these groups, we have our local parish councils and services within the council who work to support the inclusion and participation of children, young people and families in the design and delivery of our services as well as in their individual care and support plans.

Swindon SEND Families Voice (SSFV)

We are a parent carer forum for Swindon, run by parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) from 0-25 years. We encourage participation through surveys and focus groups. We collate the views of families and work collaboratively with our local authority, health providers and other services, to help make improvements to services. We offer signposting and host events, we have an online peer to peer support group and a dedicated phone line. SSFV is a not for profit Community Interest Company and receives funding from the Local Authority, Department for Education and Clinical Commissioning Group.

Family Advisory Board (FAB)

Parents/carers who have experienced social care intervention trained as advocates to support parents/carers currently experiencing intervention. Parents also advise social care on recruitment, policies and procedures and service design and delivery.

Mapping Tool

We have developed a mapping tool, which provides a directory of organisations within Swindon who work with our children, young people and families to complement those listed above.

Our priorities

The six priority areas outlined below provide the direction of the strategy to increase and embed meaningful participation at a strategic, operational and at an individual level to ensure services across Swindon are shaped and improved by the local community. These priorities will form the basis of our action plan for implementing the strategy.

Priority 1 – Recruitment

Children, young people and families are involved in all recruitment of roles and posts of those with whom they will have contact.

Where are we now? Children, young people and families are involved in some recruitment and some have received training for this.

Impact? Those recruited to roles have demonstrated their ability to interact with children, young people and families leading to more successful recruitment.

Priority 2 – Training

Children, young people and families regularly deliver training to the staff who work with them.

Where are we now? Children, young people and families are involved in training for foster carers but their involvement in training professionals who work with them is inconsistent across the Borough. A Participation Toolkit for professionals has been jointly developed with children, young people and families. A parent is involved in co-delivering the Cygnet training programme alongside an Educational Psychologist for parents and carers of children with ASC. The “Reshaping Conversations” training module, booklet and video have been developed by parents for professionals. A parent has been involved in the co-delivery of participation workshops for professionals. Young people contributed to the SEND workforce development plan.

Impact? Training provided will have the insight from those with whom staff are working providing a better-informed workforce.

Priority 3 – Consultation

Children, young people and families will be regularly consulted on new services and changes to services including: understanding need; planning and design; service delivery; and feedback.

Where are we now? Children, young people and families are consulted on aspects of service design and delivery. For example, young people are involved in inspecting prospective placements, such as, semi-independent living placements, they are involved in writing their social care plans and are able to chair their own reviews. Children, young people and families participate across all levels of commissioning for SEND services. The Annual SEND Survey captures views from children, young people and families with regards to the SEND provision they receive. The annual summary report includes a “you said, we did” action plan.

Impact? Services are more timely and responsive reducing escalation of care and support needs. Less children are on protection plans and have entered care because their families have been empowered to develop successful plans to keep them safe within their own home. Children consistently chair their own reviews/meetings when they feel able to. Children, young people and families have increased confidence in services designed by and for them.

Priority 4 – Quality assurance

Children, young people and families have regular opportunities to tell us how well we’re doing and what we need to do to improve.

Where are we now? The Children in Care Council and Voice and Influence Panel consistently give feedback to the Corporate Parenting Board on reports and The Swindon Care Pledge. Social Care audits include surveys for children, young people and families to provide feedback on services received. Findings from these surveys are regularly reported to Senior Leadership within Swindon Borough Council. The SEND Young Inspectors provide feedback to schools and services to identify good practice and make recommendations for improvements. The Multi-agency Quality Assurance (MAQA) Group includes parents and meets regularly to improve the standard of Education, Health and Care Plans.

Impact? Insight into how professionals have made a difference for those children, young people and families they have supported will help improve practice and outcomes.

Priority 5 – Strategic governance and decision-making

Children, young people and families are regularly involved through representation at boards and meetings in strategic governance and decision-making.

Where are we now? Children, young people and families have some involvement in strategic decision-making but this practice is inconsistent. A Shadow Board of young people exists that feeds directly into the SEND Strategic Board and provides feedback for the Board from their perspective to inform decision-making and help drive change. Parents attend a wide variety of strategic decision-making boards and regularly meet with senior leaders. Children and young people are supported to provide feedback to the Council's Education, Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which holds decision makers to account. Children in Care Council and the Voice and Influence Panel provide feedback on The Pledge and reports to the Corporate Parenting Board with some young people attending those meetings.

Impact? Those with lived experience inform strategic decision-making. Children, young people and families taking part in decision-making ensures those decisions are well informed and work for the community to provide better and more bespoke support.

Priority 6 – Communication

Participation messaging is timely and consistent across all services and organisations working with children, young people and families.

Where are we now? Information is shared between different services and organisations and with children, young people and families. The Local Offer website is now accessible and informative. Co-production of the webpages with children, young people and families is embedded. Feedback for children, young people and families in the form of "you said, we did" reports, films and storyboards are routinely communicated through a range of channels. Good practice examples of participation are celebrated (e.g. through the Participation Film Library on the Local Offer website).

Impact? Increased consistency of communication will mean the right groups with lived experience are consulted on services that affect them to improve service design and delivery. 'Closing the loop' on communication will ensure our children, young people and families continue to participate as they are able to see the difference their feedback has made.

How will we deliver on these priorities?

We have created a three-year action plan to ensure we deliver on these priorities based on the following principles:

1

Awareness raising and shared understanding of children and young people's rights to participate amongst families, communities and public officials e.g. promote this throughout organisations and services across the Borough.

2

Capacity building at all levels – policies, skills, infrastructure and mechanisms will be developed and put in place to ensure the system hears and responds to children, young people and families' ideas and priorities, and will work with them to bring positive change.

3

Guidelines and standards – organisations across Swindon will utilise the principles for meaningful participation detailed in this strategy alongside the models we have adopted as standards for participation work and to rate themselves and set objectives using the self-assessment tool.

4

Resources – a "Participation Hub" will be created on the Local Offer to facilitate meaningful participation of children, young people and families and support services/organisations to deliver this.

5

Research and learning – we will have a monitoring and evaluation process in place to learn from and enhance children, young people and families' participation processes and practices.

These will be delivered through and monitored by the Participation Champions and Participation Network.

Self-assessment tool

We have developed a self-assessment tool (appendix E) for organisations/services in Swindon who work with children, young people and families to assess their participation work to see where they are on Slay and Penny's "ladder" and to set objectives to reach higher levels of participation. **We have a minimum expectation that all organisations will work from "engagement" level.**

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that this strategy is regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure the participation of our children, young people and families is improving. We will do this in several ways:

- Organisations completing the self-assessment tool and reviewing this annually;
- Completing the “You Said, We Did” form attached to show the difference the voice of our children, young people and families has made;
- The governance of this strategy will be through Participation Network into the Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Delivery Group; they will review self-assessment returns and shape actions for the next year by consulting with the children, young people and families with whom they work;
- An annual conference will be held to celebrate participation work across Swindon and to hear the priorities over the coming year. This will be organised by professionals, children, young people and families.

References

Lundy, L. (2007) ‘Voice is not enough: Conceptualizing Article 12 of the UNCRC’, British Educational Research Journal, Vol. 33, No. 6, pp. 927-42

Slay and Penny (2014) Commissioning for outcomes and co-production: A practical guide for local authorities. London, New Economics Foundation.

Appendices

- A.** Swindon’s Children and Young People’s Strategy 2021–2024 Action Plan
- B.** Swindon’s Models of Participation
- C.** Swindon’s Children and Young People’s Strategy 2021–2024 Poster
- D.** Swindon’s Children and Young People’s Strategy 2021–2024 Video
- E.** Self-assessment tool
- F.** You said, we did template
- G.** Swindon Care Pledge
- H.** The Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Participation Pledge
- I.** SEND Participation and Co-Production Charter
- J.** Care Experienced Conference Pledge

Participation Strategy

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