

# Permanence Strategy



**Permanence Strategy February 2024**

**Version 2 updated July 2024 to include Reunification update**

**Review Date: July 2026**

This strategy sets out Swindon Borough Council's commitment to achieving permanence for children and young people. The strategy defines how we will achieve permanence for children, and their families, to ensure that they have the best possible outcomes and a home that provides them with security, stability, and love through their childhood and beyond.

This strategy should be considered in conjunction with Swindon Borough Council's, **Sufficiency Strategy and Corporate Parenting Strategy** and will be updated bi annually or where there are changes in government legislation.

## Contents

1. What is Permanence? .....	3
2. Aims of the Permanence Strategy .....	5
3. Our Priorities: .....	5
• Ensure all children we work with are able to achieve permanence within the shortest possible timescale.....	5
• Ensure children’s permanence arrangements are stable, and sustainable .....	5
• Promote Achievement and Aspirations for children who are looked after.....	5
• Maintaining family and friends’ relationships and lifelong links.....	5
• Sufficiency and Workforce development. ....	6
These priorities will ensure we are continually working to achieve permanence with the children we work with in Children’s Social Care. ....	6
Ensure all children are supported to achieve permanence within the shortest possible timescale. ....	6
Where appropriate permanency should be secured with family or connected people without the need for children/young people to become looked after by the local authority. We will aim to provide assistance to families to help them to maintain the care of their children wherever it is in their child’s best interests.....	6
Ensure children’s permanence arrangements are stable, and sustainable.....	8
When deciding the most appropriate homes for our children we will think about the whole of their childhood, rather than short term solutions that may not be appropriate as the child gets older. This means ensuring that carers are able to care for them when they are teenagers as well when they are young children.....	8
When children are unable to stay with their birth parents we will look to them achieving permanence within their wider friends and family network, through special guardianship or other legal orders. If this is not possible we will identify if they can be matched with foster carers within the community in which they live. ....	8
We will ensure that where a child is able to be reunified with their parents then we will undertake a good quality assessment and care planning to ensure the most appropriate support networks are accessible to the family to allow the child to remain at home and feel safe, secure and stable. ....	8
Where children are in foster or kinship care we will ensure children can remain living with their carers for the entirety of their childhood we need to make sure their needs continue to be met as they grow and develop on their way to independence and into adulthood. ....	8
We will ensure that our children’s cultural, religious and identity needs are met where they live, and that they are able to understand their cultural heritage and family background through attending events and activities, and learning about their specific cultures and religion.....	8
In line with our sufficiency strategy we will ensure that we will recruit foster carers that live locally, and that they are equipped and supported to care for children who have been subjected to trauma and loss. ....	8

Where children are in long term foster care, we will give foster carers supervision, resources and training to enable them to provide loving supportive homes. We will develop, assess and review foster carers every year to ensure they are still able to do this. ....	8
As Corporate Parents we will ensure where children are placed outside Swindon they will still be able to access good quality and effective health and education services that meet their needs. ....	9
Where achievable we will support permanence through promoting the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) To achieve the best for our children with SGO carers we will offer access to resources, fellow SGO carers and advice and support through our newly formed SGO support team and Special Guardianship Offer. Children who were looked after prior to an SGO being made will be eligible to access .....	9
seek to secure SGOs or the discharge of care orders in favour of SGOs for children who are living in settled homes with kinship or recruited foster carers. ....	9
Where children have plans for adoption or are already placed for adoption we will work with Adoption Thames Valley to provide good quality reports, child permanence records and other information which will assist their adoptive parents and adoption succeed.....	9
Reunification, relationships and developing lifelong links. ....	9
Where children are unable to live with birth families and local communities we will support them to maintain close links with people who are important to them. ....	10
Promoting the Aspirations and Achievements for our Looked After Children. ....	10
We will ensure that all children in our care can maintain good physical and mental health, and will assess their needs regularly as they grow and develop. Through our virtual school we will encourage and support children to enjoy and benefit from education. ....	10
We will also expect their carers to be involved with their learning, and ensure that they have sufficient space and resources where they are living to undertake homework, have hobbies or interests and participate in other learning opportunities. ....	10
We will ensure that all children in the care of Swindon are able to build and maintain relationships with their peers and supportive adults in their family and social networks. ....	10
We will encourage children in their aspirations through developing plans which identify their skills, listen to their voices and enable access to services which promote this.....	10
We will support the children in our care to learn the skills they need to achieve in independence and move into adulthood. Once they have left care we will provide them with a Pathway Advisor who will assist them on their journey.....	10
<b>4. Workforce Development .....</b>	<b>8</b>

## 1. What is Permanence?

Permanence is the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. The desired outcome for work on permanence is therefore: "To ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security." The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Vol. II: care planning, placement, and case review (June 2015).

**We pledge that we will hear and respect the views of children and young people and work with them towards them achieving their ideal stable home life.**

The legal and statutory guidance which underpins this strategy includes:

- The Children Act 1989
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- Care Planning and Review Regulations 2010
- Kinship Strategy 2023
- Stable Homes Built on Love Statutory Guidance 2023

Permanence for children has three aspects as outlined in Care Planning guidance:

- a. Relational permanence** - refers to emotional permanency and the experience of having positive, loving, trusting, and nurturing relationships with people important to the child or young person. These relationships ensure a sense of belonging for them. These relationships are usually provided by significant family attachments but also include friendships and community relationships. Where children are not able to live with their family of origin, the identification and strengthening of connections that a child has with family and people of significance will be important. (Life Long Links)
- b. Physical or environmental permanence** - a stable home environment within a familiar neighbourhood and community. Children's living arrangements should meet the child's developmental, educational, emotional, health, intellectual and physical needs. Physical permanence supports continuity of relationships with family, friends and community and enhances safety, belonging and wellbeing. There are clear plans in place to maintain stability and continuity to reduce the risk of changes for children and young people.

- c. Legal permanency** refers to legal arrangements for a child that provides a sense of permanence and long-term stability through the making of a court order.

The first option will always be for a child to be cared for by their family. This can be achieved by supporting the child's family as much as possible. If it is in the child's best interests to be removed from their family, support must be given to mitigate the risks to the child, so they can return to their family as soon as possible.

The second option is for the child to be cared under a Legal Order with a member of the child's family or network. This includes Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and Child Arrangements Orders (CAO).

If the best option is for the child is to be cared for by the local authority, then early permanence needs to be achieved within the child's timescales. For some children this will mean Foster to Adopt, or foster carers may want to make a commitment to the child under an SGO or Placement Order.

## **2. Aims of the Permanence Strategy**

As a Corporate Parent we will ensure that we understand the needs of our children and young people and the types of care and support they need. The central principle of corporate parenting is that the local authority should, through the efforts of its members and staff, seek the same outcomes for the children in its care as every good parent would want for their own child or children. This covers their education, health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements.

This strategy sits alongside our Sufficiency Strategy, SGO offer, Reunification Framework and Service Plans to ensure we are providing stable homes built on love for children and young people who need our care. These strategies and plans will also provide a benchmark for social workers, multi-agency partners and the community about our processes and expectations for good social work practice and how children, young people and their families will be supported.

## **3. Our Priorities:**

- **Ensure all children we work with are able to achieve permanence within the shortest possible timescale**
- **Ensure children's permanence arrangements are stable, and sustainable**
- **Promote Achievement and Aspirations for children who are looked after.**
- **Maintaining family and friends' relationships and lifelong links.**

- **Sufficiency and Workforce development.**

These priorities will ensure we are continually working to achieve permanence with the children we work with in Children's Social Care.

**Ensure all children are supported to achieve permanence within the shortest possible timescale.**

Where appropriate permanency should be secured with family or connected people without the need for children/young people to become looked after by the local authority. We will aim to provide assistance to families to help them to maintain the care of their children wherever it is in their child's best interests

We want to ensure that all children and young people within Swindon whatever their ability, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, culture or financial circumstance have a stable home environment where they are protected from harm.

All the children we work with will have their permanence needs considered and addressed at all points of contact with services to ensure they are receiving the very best of support and services available as they need them. This may be staying with, or returning to, their family; living with extended family, friends or connected persons through a SGO or CAO; long term foster care; Adoption; or residential care if this is necessary to meet the child's needs.

We are committed to ensuring that social workers, practitioners, carers, independent reviewing officers (IROs) supervising social workers, and other professionals work together to find stable, safe, caring, and sustainable permanent home for our children in timely manner.

Our practice model in Swindon is Family Safeguarding. Family Safeguarding aims to enable children to live safely in their families in line with the vision of the Children Act 1989 and the recent children's social care guidance: Stable Homes Built on Love 2023<sup>1</sup>. The model is a strength based whole family approach to working with children and their families that empowers parents to create sustained change for themselves and for their family.

Family Safeguarding takes a multi-disciplinary approach to working with families, which includes social workers, family practitioners, working alongside adult specialist workers to provide help and support in relation to issues associated with parental domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental ill-health. The teams work with children pre-birth to 18 where the issues relate to abuse and neglect of the children by their families.

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<sup>1</sup> [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love consultation response \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Swindon Family Safeguarding will support their workforce to become skilled at creating change in families, rather than experts in operating processes. They provide the help and support that families need to improve the health and development of their children at the earliest opportunity to effect positive change.

Family Safeguarding is built on core foundations of social work practice with shared values across the partnership workforce including:

- Supporting the development of stable relationships
- Having a shared model of practice across agencies
- A focus on strengths and balance with need
- Promoting purposeful intervention and interactions

We will continue to listen, learn, and grow our approach to permanence for children in Swindon to improve and refine the way we work with and for our children and young people.

Throughout the child's care journey, we will maintain an ambition and aspiration for each child and young person as an individual, whether this is about the quality of their relationships, care and living arrangements, or their vision and ideas about what they want to achieve in the future.

Everybody who works with children will have the best knowledge, skills, and resources to ensure that permanence planning is relationship based, child centred, considers the child's developing needs, listens to and acts upon their wishes, feelings and aspirations.

Every child in the care of Swindon Borough Council will have a defined route to permanence within four months of coming into care.

We will recognise the importance to them of their experiences, their family history, their culture, background and anything else that is important to them when undertaking assessments, planning and decision making.

Social workers allocated to children will complete at the minimum an annual assessment of need for all children and young people which includes all these aspects of their identity and their journey through services and care to ensure their living arrangements continue to be right for them.

This strategy recognises that permanence for children is best achieved by remaining with or returning back to birth parents' care where it is safe to do so, and offers the best chance of stability for them.

We will strive to ensure that children and young people will be matched with their long-term foster carers within six months of them going to live with them.

Where an unborn baby or a very young child cannot live with their parents or wider family we will look to securing Early Permanence carers to reduce the risks of further moves.



For some children the only route to permanence is through adoption outside of the family. We will ensure parallel planning is in place at the earliest opportunity.

We will reduce drift and delay in securing permanence and ensuring senior management scrutiny and robust decision making for children and young people through the monthly Permanence Panel.

We will track the progress of permanence planning through data tracking and audit activity.

### **Ensure children's permanence arrangements are stable, and sustainable.**

When deciding the most appropriate homes for our children we will think about the whole of their childhood, rather than short term solutions that may not be appropriate as the child gets older. This means ensuring that carers are able to care for them when they are teenagers as well when they are young children.

When children are unable to stay with their birth parents we will look to them achieving permanence within their wider friends and family network, through special guardianship or other legal orders. If this is not possible we will identify if they can be matched with foster carers within the community in which they live.

We will ensure that where a child is able to be reunified with their parents then we will undertake a good quality assessment and care planning to ensure the most appropriate support networks are accessible to the family to allow the child to remain at home and feel safe, secure and stable.

Where children are in foster or kinship care we will ensure children can remain living with their carers for the entirety of their childhood we need to make sure their needs continue to be met as they grow and develop on their way to independence and into adulthood.

We will ensure that our children's cultural, religious and identity needs are met where they live, and that they are able to understand their cultural heritage and family background through attending events and activities, and learning about their specific cultures and religion.

In line with our sufficiency strategy we will ensure that we will recruit foster carers that live locally, and that they are equipped and supported to care for children who have been subjected to trauma and loss.

Where children are in long term foster care, we will give foster carers supervision, resources and training to enable them to provide loving supportive homes. We will

develop, assess and review foster carers every year to ensure they are still able to do this.

As Corporate Parents we will ensure where children are placed outside Swindon they will still be able to access good quality and effective health and education services that meet their needs.

Where achievable we will support permanence through promoting the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) To achieve the best for our children with SGO carers we will offer access to resources, fellow SGO carers and advice and support through our newly formed SGO support team and Special Guardianship Offer. Children who were looked after prior to an SGO being made will be eligible to access

seek to secure SGOs or the discharge of care orders in favour of SGOs for children who are living in settled homes with kinship or recruited foster carers.

Where children have plans for adoption or are already placed for adoption we will work with Adoption Thames Valley to provide good quality reports, child permanence records and other information which will assist their adoptive parents and adoption succeed.

### **Reunification, relationships and developing lifelong links.**

We have developed a reunification framework and training programme and are committed to ensuring that reunification to the birth family should be considered at every stage of decision making for a child in care as part of their care plan. We recognise that for many children permanence will be achieved through a successful return home to their family.

We are committed to ensuring that children and young people will be identified at the earliest opportunity where it may be appropriate for them to return home. Social workers together with others involved with the child, will assess, support and progress, reunification including family group conference where there has been evidence of change within families and the work to consider reunification.

We will support children through Family Time to keep in contact with members of their family. We will also aim to build a network of Family Links so children do not lose contact with friends and family when they become looked after.

Where we are unable to place children within their local community we will ensure most children live within 20 miles of their home, through strategically working with our in house foster carers and building relationships with other local providers to ensure children and young people stay close to home, and enjoy being part of two

families. Where appropriate and possible we will bring them back to live in Swindon at the earliest opportunity, near their friends and families where it is safe to do so.

Where children are unable to live with birth families and local communities we will support them to maintain close links with people who are important to them.

### **Promoting the Aspirations and Achievements for our Looked After Children.**

All children and young people should know their journey through care by having clear records of decisions, photographs, memory boxes and life story work, including a family tree that helps them to understand and maintain a sense of who they are, their family links and identity.

We will ensure that all children in our care can maintain good physical and mental health, and will assess their needs regularly as they grow and develop. Through our virtual school we will encourage and support children to enjoy and benefit from education.

We will also expect their carers to be involved with their learning, and ensure that they have sufficient space and resources where they are living to undertake homework, have hobbies or interests and participate in other learning opportunities.

We will ensure that all children in the care of Swindon are able to build and maintain relationships with their peers and supportive adults in their family and social networks.

We will encourage children in their aspirations through developing plans which identify their skills, listen to their voices and enable access to services which promote this.

We will support the children in our care to learn the skills they need to achieve in independence and move into adulthood. Once they have left care we will provide them with a Pathway Advisor who will assist them on their journey.

### **Sufficiency and Workforce Development**

As a Corporate Parent we will regularly review our offer to our cared for and care experienced children and young people and analyse the data we hold around children and young people's needs, to identify where there are gaps in provision, as part of our duties and responsibilities in enabling access to health, education and having stable homes (sufficiency) for children in our care.

In order to achieve our ambitions, we will continue to recruit and retain a permanent skilled workforce with the knowledge and ambition to achieve the very best outcomes for our children, young people and their families.

We will work hard to ensure everybody who works with children and their families will have access to the best knowledge, skills, and resources to ensure that permanence planning is relationship based, child centred, considers the child's developing needs, is outcomes focused, listens to and acts upon their wishes, feelings and aspirations.

We will value and recognise the importance for the individuals we work with of their experiences, their family history, their culture, background and anything else that is important to them.

Senior managers are committed to ensuring every social worker and practitioner in Swindon has access to excellent training, development and reflective supervision, in order to ensure permanence practice is of the highest possible standard.

We have developed a programme of specific training and a package of resources for permanence that focuses on child focused outcomes in planning for children we work with, whether they are in care, or subject to a child in need or child protection plan.