

Swindon's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2025–2028



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2025–2028

Our vision

All children, young people, and their supporting families in Swindon are empowered to have their voices heard and acted upon at every level. This includes both the individual support they receive and the strategic decisions that shape how services and organisations operate.

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Foreword

The participation and engagement of children and young people are central to how we meet their needs and aspirations, as well as how we develop and deliver our services in Swindon. We are dedicated to engaging meaningfully with children and young people to understand their needs and interests and to learn from their experiences. Our diverse range of participation and engagement activities seeks to capture the views and experiences of children and young people representative of our population in Swindon. We are committed to shaping and delivering services based on their feedback, providing them with every opportunity to influence decision-making. It is crucial to us that we remain accountable to them, and we have established processes to regularly communicate the actions we have taken in response to their feedback.

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

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 2025–2028 to you and look forward to your contribution to help achieve the outcomes that we are ambitious to achieve.



Clare Deards
Corporate Director:
People



Cllr. Paul Dixon
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:

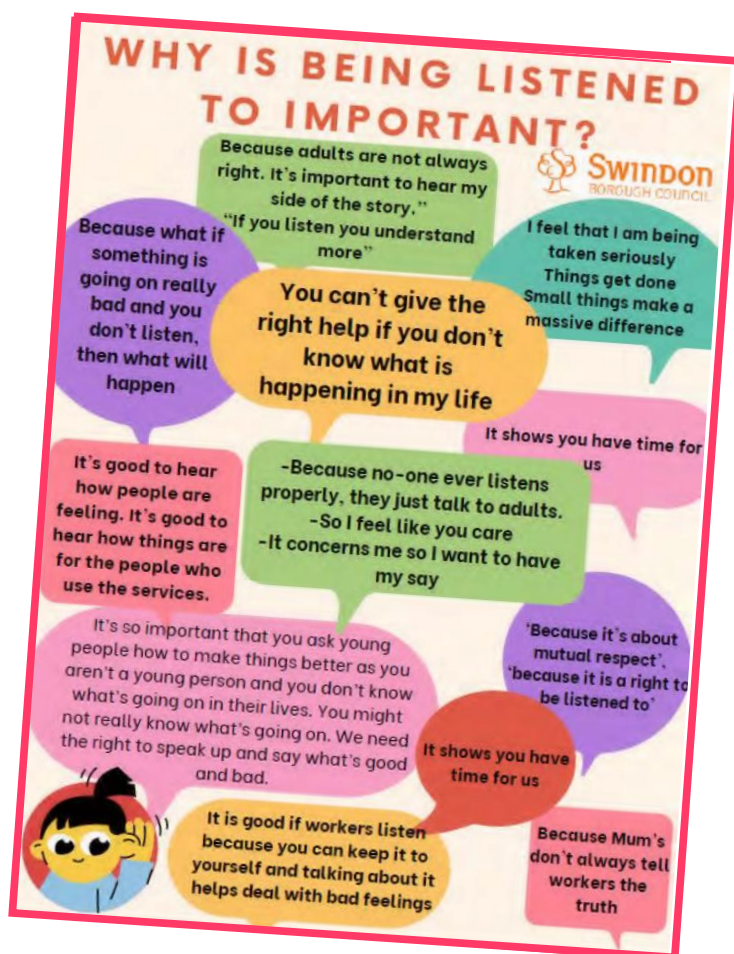
- identifying the values that underpin our approach to participation;
- suggesting what to include to make it meaningful and to make a difference;
- advising on the language to use;
- developing accessible materials so children, young people and families are aware of what they can expect from the successful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

The following agencies have actively participated in developing this strategy:

- Children in Care Council
- Care Experienced Forum
- Swindon SEND Families Voice
- '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 considered and on any follow up process after they have been assisted by participation, 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:	For children, young people and families:	For the wider community:
Services are designed, delivered and evaluated based on the needs and experiences of 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.	Breaks down barriers and improves intergenerational relationships. Ensures services build on the experience and needs of the community.
Increases access to, use of, and satisfaction with services delivered.	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.	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.
Increases cost effectiveness.	Gives a voice and influence to those using services who know best what they need.	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.

Strengthening Diversity and Inclusion in Participation

We recognise that participation must reflect the full diversity of Swindon's children and young people. It is not enough to hear from the most confident or well-represented groups – we must work actively to include those whose voices are too often under-represented, including children and young people from global majority communities.

To achieve this, we will:

- **Make diversity a priority:** Ensure that participation activities are designed to reach and engage children from all racial, cultural, and faith backgrounds. This includes actively monitoring representation and setting targets to increase the number of children contributing.
- **Remove barriers:** Adapt our engagement methods to meet cultural, language, and accessibility needs, including providing translation, community-based sessions, and trusted facilitators.
- **Build partnerships:** Work closely with schools, community groups, and faith organisations that support diverse communities to create safe, trusted spaces where children feel comfortable to share their views.
- **Representation in leadership:** Ensure children and young people from diverse backgrounds are supported and encouraged to take up ambassador, representative, and advisory roles in decision-making forums.
- **Celebrate and learn from difference:** Recognise the richness of diverse lived experiences, ensuring these directly shape service design, delivery, and evaluation. Celebrate these at events, promote in on social media platforms and incorporate into training for colleagues.
- **Accountability:** Regularly report on the diversity of children and young people engaged in participation, demonstrating progress in amplifying voices that have been less heard, particularly at Corporate Parenting Board.

How are they reflected in the priorities?

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.

- **Diversity commitment:** Recruitment panels will actively include children and young people from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds to ensure decision-making reflects Swindon's diversity.

Priority 2 – Training

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

- **Diversity commitment:** Training content will highlight the importance of hearing and acting on the voices of children from global majority backgrounds and other under-represented groups.

Priority 3 – Consultation

Children, young people and families will be regularly consulted on new services and changes to services.

- Diversity commitment: We will set clear targets to increase participation from non-white children and young people, working in partnership with community, charity and faith groups to reach those less likely to engage.

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.

- Diversity commitment: Monitoring processes will track whose voices are being heard, ensuring that feedback from children and young people of all ethnicities is captured, reported, and acted upon.

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.

- Diversity commitment: Representation at governance boards will reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of Swindon. Dedicated support will be offered to ensure that children from global majority backgrounds can fully participate and lead.

Priority 6 – Communication

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

- Diversity commitment: Communications will be culturally inclusive, translated where necessary, and designed to reach children and families from all backgrounds so no group is excluded from participation.

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 We Care For Pledge, Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Participation Pledge, SEND Participation and Co-production Charter and Care Conference Pledge.

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-localoffer/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:

- '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.
- Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a group of children who are cared for by SBC who come together to share their experiences of being in care and to be a voice for all of Swindon's Children We Care For.
- Voice and Influence Panel (VIP) is 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.
- Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Participation Network is 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.
- Participation Champions is 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.
- 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.

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

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. We aim to have young people panels at all recruitment for permanent staff. Young people have also been involved in developing questions for interviews, as well as the responses they would want to hear.

Impact? Those recruited to roles have demonstrated their ability to interact with children, young people and families leading to more successful recruitment. Young people have felt listened to and like they are contributing to the network of people who will be supporting them.

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. Moving forward they will be represented by Voice Ambassadors who are employed care-experienced young people who will attend Corporate Parenting Board and other strategic panels to share insight and feedback. 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 in the ‘Experts by Experience’ report. The SEND Young People Champions provide feedback to schools and services to identify good practice and make recommendations for improvements. The Family Advisory Board is working on projects such as training for colleagues on best practice, based on experience to improve service delivery.

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? Recruitment is taking place to onboard our Voice Ambassadors who will become representatives of Children we care for at boards including Corporate Parenting. Young people will be provided with the agendas ahead of time to contribute their opinions, and they will be encouraged to present their own matters for discussion within a shadow board led by our Voice Ambassadors.

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. The Participation Network are working closely to ensure communication happens across the service regarding outreach and youth voice work that is being completed in the organisation, to ensure it is consistent and utilised effectively.

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. This will continue to happen through training of staff and communication through Participation Champions to advocate for young people's voice within their service area.
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. This is reviewed regularly and actions established from feedback

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 C) 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 2025–2028 Action Plan](#)
- B. [Swindon's Models of Participation](#)
- C. [Self-assessment tool](#)

Participation Strategy

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