

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022 Swindon

Levelling Up – improving Swindon’s health and wellbeing through tackling inequalities



Foreword by Director of Public Health, Professor Steve Maddern

As Director of Public Health, I am required under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to produce an annual report. Welcome to my second report which I have themed around ‘Levelling Up’.

What is Levelling Up? In its broadest sense, Levelling Up is a commitment to redressing regional inequalities, which should result in material improvements to local people’s lives. The Levelling Up White Paper¹ was published in February 2022 and is a national strategy based around a number of key missions which aims to reduce disparities between regions within the United Kingdom, and to build strong local economies.

As Director of Public Health for Swindon I am responsible for ensuring that public health is at the heart of the Council’s agenda. I have a duty to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of Swindon residents and to reduce inequalities. With this in mind, it is important to remember that the things that affect the health of Swindon residents are much bigger and broader than just health services. Levelling Up has the potential to address some of the inequalities that are driven by the ‘wider determinants of health’, that is the range of social, economic and environmental factors which impact on people’s health. This includes housing, jobs, education, social connections and digital connectivity.

In my report this year I am taking a public health lens to the Levelling Up agenda to explain how the Public Health team and the wider Council is

approaching the Levelling Up missions in Swindon. Delivering the missions involves working closely with partners across the health and voluntary and community sectors who make a massive contribution to reducing inequalities. This report is not a comprehensive description of Swindon’s response to the Levelling Up agenda and it does not seek to include everything the Council and its partners are doing nor does it include recommendations. Rather it seeks to be informative, to reflect and to give a public health viewpoint. It takes a look at how the Levelling Up missions link to health and wellbeing and describes how Swindon’s Public Health team and wider Council workforce is involved, directly and indirectly, in delivering those missions to improve life for Swindon’s residents and reduce inequalities. As this report is looking at Levelling Up from a public health viewpoint, where the term ‘we’ is used in this report, it refers to the Public Health team rather than the wider Council or partners.

The preparation of this report is a team effort and I would like to thank those who contributed to its drafting and content this year, particularly Public Health Principal Rachel Clark and Public Health Consultant Penny Marno.

I hope you find the report informative.

Professor Steve Maddern
Director of Public Health,
Swindon Borough Council
December 2022



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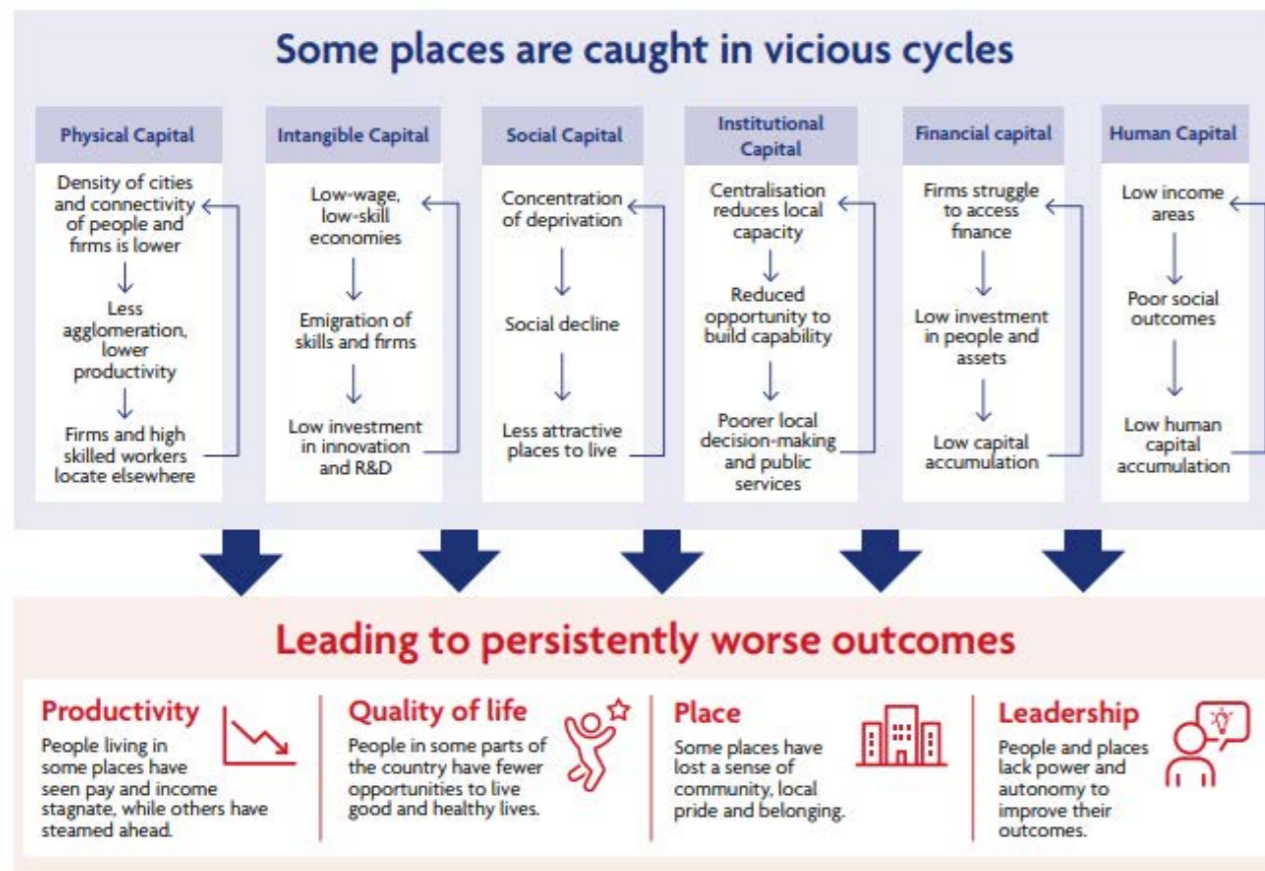
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¹ [Levelling Up the United Kingdom- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom)

Introduction: Why is ‘Levelling Up’ relevant to public health and to Swindon?

Nationally Levelling Up is about giving people the same opportunities in all parts of the UK. It recognises that the UK has larger geographical differences than many other developed countries on a range of measures, including productivity, pay, educational attainment and health² and that to make things fairer we need to make sure that everyone has the chance to get a good job and education, that the UK’s towns and cities are great places to live and work and that strong communities are built. These issues have the potential to hugely impact on people’s health and to reduce health inequalities which are defined as the “avoidable, unfair and systematic differences in health between different groups of people”³. The diagram below illustrates the key drivers of different types of regional disparities in the UK which can lead to worse outcomes.

Figure 1: Levelling Up Capitals Framework⁴



The Levelling Up agenda is relevant to Swindon as this report aims to show. Swindon is relatively prosperous compared to other parts of the UK and the Borough has a strong and buoyant economy. However, this prosperity is not enjoyed equally by all our residents and there are a number of challenges in educational attainment, in skills, and in feeling pride in our town.

Table 1 outlines the 12 missions of Levelling Up. This report is structured around each of these missions (with the exception of local leadership which is a mission specifically about political devolution and therefore not directly relevant to the health of the population in Swindon) and uses the lens of public health and our commitment to reducing inequalities to look at how the Council is addressing these issues.

Table 1: The 12 Levelling Up missions

Focus Area	Mission
	Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
Living standards	By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
Research & development	By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.
Transport Infrastructure	By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.
Digital Connectivity	By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.

² [Levelling Up in the United Kingdom- Executive Summary](#)

³ [What are health inequalities? | The King’s Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ [Levelling Up in the United Kingdom: missions and metrics – Technical Annex](#)

Table 1 (Continued): The 12 Levelling Up missions

Focus Area	Mission
Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest	
Education	By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.
Skills	By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas
Health	By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years
Well-being	By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost	
Pride in Place	By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
Housing	By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government’s ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.

Table 1 (Continued): The 12 Levelling Up missions

Crime	By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst affected areas.
Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency	
Local Leadership	By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

Swindon Borough Council’s vision for its residents is that “By 2030, Swindon will have all of the positive characteristics of a British city with one of the UK’s most successful economies; a low-carbon environment with compelling cultural, retail and leisure opportunities and excellent infrastructure. It will be a model of well managed housing growth which supports and improves new and existing communities. Swindon will be physically transformed with existing heritage and landmarks complemented by new ones that people who live, work and visit here will recognise and admire. It will remain, at heart, a place of fairness and opportunity where people can aspire to and achieve prosperity, supported by strong civic and community leadership”.

The Council has developed a series of performance measures for each Levelling Up mission and will continually monitor performance in delivering them. Like all Councils, Swindon has also been allocated funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund⁵, which is a central pillar for delivering the Levelling Up Agenda. Focussing on communities and place, the Council has developed an investment plan for the Shared Prosperity Fund which will be closely monitored.

⁵ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: [prospectus- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/prospectus)

Chapter 1 – Employment, Economy and Skills

Levelling Up Missions: “By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing” and “By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.”

These two missions have been combined into one chapter as pay, productivity and skills are inextricably linked.

Background and why this links to health

Achieving these two missions is vital to public health. The economic wellbeing of an area and the health of its local population are closely linked. The relationship between health, work and income is long established. Work is good for health and reduces the risk of significant harmful effects of long-term unemployment or sickness absence. Good work offers job security, provides a decent income, widens social networks and gives people a purpose which contributes to improving physical and mental wellbeing. The health benefits of good work extend beyond working-age adults to their children, wider social network and communities⁶. Conversely, lack of well-paid work and unemployment are associated with very poor health outcomes and most health outcomes are worst for the poorest in society.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identified four main ways income affects people’s wellbeing⁷:

- **Material:** Money buys goods and services that improve health. The more money families have, the better the goods they can buy.
- **Psychosocial:** Managing on a low income is stressful. Comparing oneself to others and feeling at the bottom of the social ladder can be distressing, which can lead to biochemical changes in the body, eventually causing ill health.
- **Behavioural:** For various reasons, people on low incomes are more likely to adopt unhealthy behaviours – smoking and drinking, for example – while those on higher incomes are more able to afford healthier lifestyles.
- **Reverse causation (poor health leads to low income):** Health may affect income by preventing people from taking paid employment. Childhood health may also affect educational outcomes, limiting job opportunities and potential earnings.

Skills enable people to get better paid and more secure work which in turns offers security, provides a decent income, widens social networks and gives people a purpose. A skilled workforce in Swindon will support the health and wellbeing of our residents.

⁶ [What is ‘good’ work and what makes ‘good’ work- Healthy Working Lives](#)

⁷ [How does money influence health? | JRF](#)

How does this affect Swindon’s residents?

Overall Swindon has a very diverse economy with many small businesses operating alongside a number of world leading companies, many of which are early adopters of new technologies. Swindon has a relatively high level of economic prosperity, with the economy supporting 123,000 jobs in 2021, and an annual average earnings of £30,420 for our residents working full time, as well as house prices that are one amongst the lowest in the South West. Prior to the pandemic, employment rates in Swindon were generally at higher levels than the South West and nationally with average weekly workplace earnings being £528 compared to £498 for other cities in the South West and £505 in UK cities⁸.

Around 75% of the working age population (16-64 years) in Swindon is in employment. Swindon has fairly high employment levels in Professional occupations (18%), Associate Professional and Technical occupations (15%) and Elementary occupations (12%). The employment rate hit a low of 73% in 2011, but has been rising since then, only to drop to 75% in 2021, likely reflecting the impact of the pandemic. Although the pandemic reduced employment rates across Great Britain, Swindon suffered a sharper fall in rates than the South West and nationally. However employment rates in Swindon remain above the national rate. Unemployment levels have more than halved since the last recession and for the most part have been at lower levels than those for Great Britain.

Although Swindon has high employment levels, many residents are in low-skilled jobs and whilst the total number of jobs provided by businesses has been increasing in recent years, there has also been a loss of skilled jobs. For example global changes in the car industry resulted in Honda ending its 35 years of operation in Swindon in 2021 with the associated job losses that followed.

Local businesses identify a shortage of a workforce with higher level skills as a barrier to growth. This ‘skills gap’ is partly due to low progression to higher education and below-average attainment in Swindon. Swindon also has a low uptake of higher and degree-level apprenticeships with the national average for students with an A level or level 3 qualification moving into higher education being 58% whereas in Swindon it is 35%. Retaining talent is also a challenge with a higher than average proportion of learners leaving the area and not returning. Swindon and Wiltshire currently experience a net loss of graduate talent (57.1% leave for study and do not return versus the UK average of 33.1%)⁹

⁸ [Centre For Cities: Outlook Data Tool](#)

⁹ <https://swlep.co.uk/docs/default-source/strategy/economic-priorities/economic-assessment-2018/chapter-4-people-and-communities-may-2018.pdf>

What are we doing in Swindon?

Bringing skilled jobs to Swindon and supporting our residents to obtain skills are top priorities for the Council. The Council has a number of regeneration activities in the town centre which will generate highly skilled jobs in Swindon. For example it has engaged in the redevelopment of historic buildings for business space, invested in the Science Museum site at Wroughton Airfield, and supported Amazon in opening its high tech distribution facility in 2021. It has created a 'knowledge cluster' in central Swindon along an area stretching from the Carriage Works to the Rail Station and extending out to Kimmerfields, with opportunities being created for 'knowledge economy' businesses to work closely with nearby Research and Development institutions.

There is now a range of major technical educational and training opportunities in Swindon town centre:

- Institutes of Technology are a national initiative which specialise in delivering higher technical education with the aim of helping employers get the skilled workforce they need and offer local people rewarding and higher paid careers. They are employer led and so can react quickly to the current and evolving technical skills needs of an area. The Swindon and Wiltshire Institute of Technology opened in 2021 and provides technical qualifications, higher apprenticeships, and training for key technical and digital roles.
- University Technical College (UTC) Swindon is an innovative, employer-focused, high-tech school, specialising in Engineering and Digital Technology. Students between the ages of 14-19 follow technical qualifications in addition to core academic subjects. This allows them to

develop and apply their understanding in a range of contexts that are linked to the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) sector and which make them highly successful in securing apprenticeships, employment or further studies (including university). Students completing Post-16 studies are among the highest nationally in gaining STEM-related apprenticeships, with over 45% being successful, compared to 7% nationally.

- Oxford Brookes University has a Swindon Campus located in the Delta Business Park. The campus opened in February 2017 and features brand new facilities to enhance student learning, collaboration and research, including state-of-the-art clinical skills labs.
- The Royal Agricultural University has recently opened its Cultural Heritage Institute¹⁰ in Swindon's Railway Heritage Quarter, offering postgraduate courses in archaeological practice, cultural heritage leadership, historic environment management, and the conservation and management of historic buildings.
- Other projects to provide skills to our residents include: pilot participation in the government's In Work Skills digital upskilling programme and working closely with the local Chambers of Commerce (Business West) and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) to understand skills shortages in the area
- There are a number of programmes in place within the Council to help support staff shortages in the care sector in particular including working with Great Western Hospital. The Council also works with a number of educational charities such as Villiers Park and Study Higher to support more young people into higher education, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

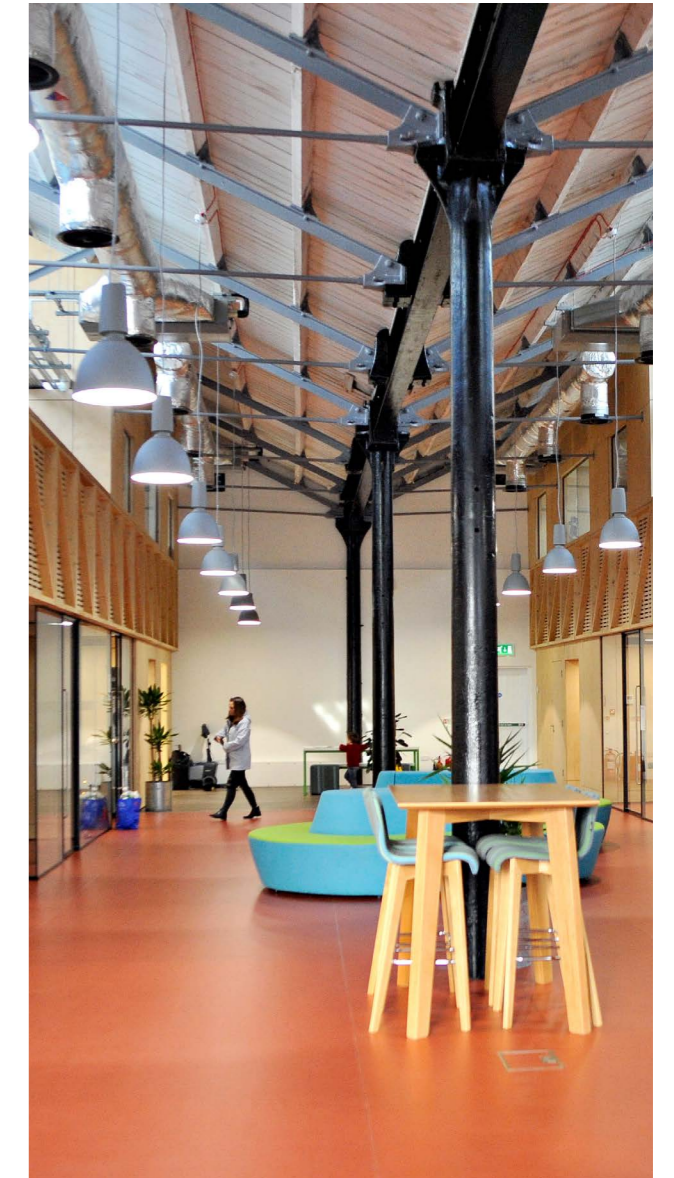
Example - the Carriage Works ¹¹

The Carriage Works development is a phased regeneration programme aiming to attract digital, creative, educational and innovative companies to the site all within easy walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs.

Phase 1 saw the build of The Workshed- a space which provides an open and inviting location for companies to co-locate. Space is available to individuals for hot desking, as well as for consultants, small and medium sized enterprises or larger organisations looking for a central location to work on an ad-hoc or more permanent basis. The Workshed has flexible offers that suit a variety of needs, ideally suited to digital, technological and creative organisations.

Phase 2 included the build of the Cultural Heritage Institute- part of the Royal Agricultural University, offering Masters level courses in Heritage related subjects. The Institute opened in 2020 and enables students to learn about heritage regeneration on a live and actively developing industrial heritage site. iCAST, the University of Bath's innovation Centre for Applied Sustainable Technologies and Create studios will be moving into larger purpose-built units in the adjoining spaces in phase 2 of the delivery programme. This is currently under construction and also includes the street frontage units which, due to major structural issues have been out of use for decades. The aim of this phase is to open up and enliven street access to the site.

Phase 3 is being developed as part of the town's funded heritage regeneration of a number of sites in The Works area. The development will provide a high quality modern space and great connectivity in a central location.



¹⁰ [Cultural Heritage | Royal Agricultural University \(rau.ac.uk\)](https://www.rau.ac.uk/cultural-heritage)

¹¹ [The Carriage Works | The Swindon heritage action zone | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Chapter 2 – Investment in Research and Development

Levelling Up Mission: “By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.”

Background and why this links to health

Research and development (R&D) is key to business innovation and improving productivity, and is a key driver of prosperity which in turn influence the health of our residents. Research is also a key to public health. Health research is beneficial to people and patients, with breakthroughs enabling earlier diagnosis, more effective treatments, prevention of ill health and better health outcomes.

How does this affect Swindon’s residents and what are we doing?

Swindon has a proud tradition of innovation and re-invention. The town is already a hub of world class research and development, hosting many R&D organisations, for example UK Research and Innovation. There are also a number of pharmaceutical companies based in Swindon.

The Council also works in partnership with a range of R&D organisations. The £17m iCAST¹² is a research and development and collaboration for companies working on clean growth technologies and is a collaboration a number of organisations including the University of Bath, Oxford University and the SWLEP.

Swindon Public Health Team have a number of links to the Universities of Bristol and Bath. The

team is currently working on an obesity prevention research programme with the University of Bristol called NAPSAC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care) in early years settings. This will be implemented in Swindon, Somerset, Sandwell and Ayrshire and Arran starting in the autumn of 2022. We are also working as a partners with the University of Bristol on two research bids related to obesity. We have a long standing relationship with the University of Bath, through which we were able to establish the evidence base for obesity programmes. From this work we started the ‘Football Fans in Training’ programme¹³ - the first place in England to do so. We also work closely on the evaluation of other programmes such as the pilot Schools Nutrition and Activity Programme (SNAPS) aimed at increasing activity and promoting healthy weight in schools.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

UKRI is based in Swindon. Launched in April 2018, UKRI is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The organisation brings together the seven disciplinary research councils, Research England, which is responsible for supporting research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England, and the UK’s innovation agency, Innovate UK. UKRI provides funding to:

- researchers
- businesses
- Universities, NHS bodies, charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other institutions.

¹² [Home- iCAST](#)

¹³ [Football Fans in Training | Swindon Town FC Community Foundation \(stfcfoundation.com\)](#)

Chapter 3 – Transport Infrastructure

Levelling Up Mission: “By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing”.

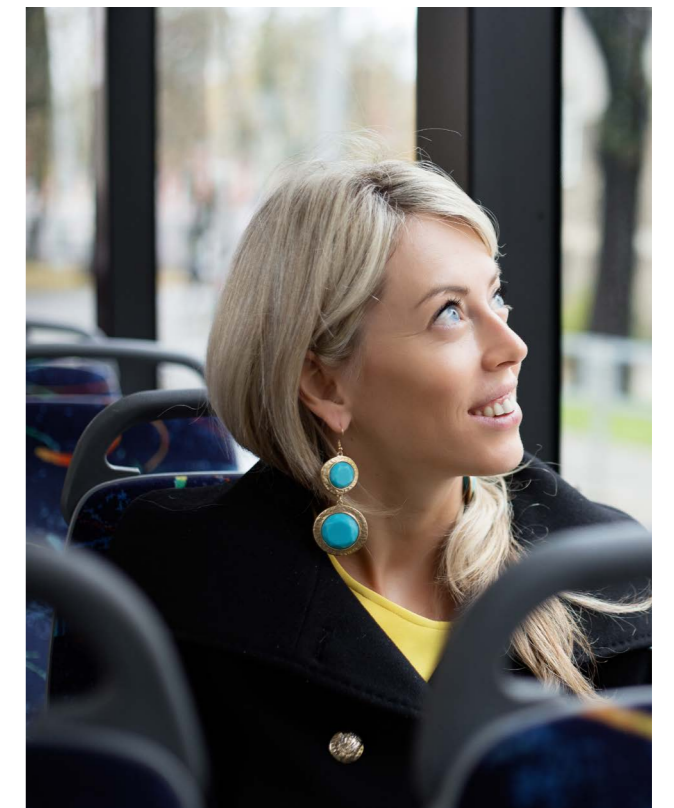
Background and why this links to health

Good public transport and connectivity plays a key role in improving health and wellbeing. Good transport can:

- Support safe and community-friendly spaces: a transport system that makes it safer and easier for people to get to shops, schools and access other amenities can help improve the health of our residents by reducing social isolation, which is harmful for physical and mental health.
- Enable active travel: active travel and public transport are a key part of any healthy transport system. More people walking and cycling for short journeys can help reduce road congestion and air pollution, save money in commuting and improve people’s physical and mental health. Active travel has been associated with lower rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and being overweight and it is estimated that switching short journeys to active travel could save £17 billion for the NHS over a 20 year period¹⁴. It has also been associated with improved environmental benefits including reduced traffic and less noise and air pollution.
- Ensure accessibility; if a transport system is

not accessible and efficient for everyone, it can widen inequalities by limiting some people’s ability to access good jobs and travel to health appointments, for example, as well as impacting on how often they are able to see friends and family.

- Minimising harm- a healthy transport system seeks to minimise emissions. Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, producing more than a quarter of all greenhouse gases emitted in 2016. Air pollution directly effects on people’s cardiovascular and respiratory health. In the UK outdoor air pollution is estimated to contribute to 40,000 deaths a year¹⁵.



¹⁴ [Active travel: a briefing for local authorities- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ [The Health Foundation: Transport and Health](#)

How does this affect Swindon's residents?

Swindon's population has grown at a rate of twice the UK average. New development has provided new quality infrastructure, but the transport infrastructure has some missing links and is substandard in the older parts of town. Swindon's town centre, built up around the railway and supporting the car, is particularly lacking in safe, useable routes for cycling and walking¹⁶.

In Swindon, the number of annual miles completed in motor vehicles has increased year on year for the last two decades; since 1999, annual miles travelled has increased by over 350 million to 1.4 billion miles. During 2020 and the COVID-19 lockdowns, annual miles travelled decreased to levels last seen in the early 2000s. Overall, active travel in Swindon has been declining in recent years and is generally lower than England and the South West. The decline of active travel to school that is seen in the national picture is reflected in Swindon data: active travel to school has declined by 6% overall between 2014 and 2022. More specifically, a 7% decline was seen in walking, and replaced by car travel¹⁷.

The importance of having good public transport connectivity is highlighted by the fact that just under one quarter of Swindon's households have no access to a car or van, which is slightly lower than the average for England. There are large pockets of particularly low car ownership, for example in and around the town centre, and in several peripheral communities including Penhill and Eldene¹⁸.

What are we doing in Swindon?

The Council is committed to improving public transport connectivity. Although it was not successful in attracting national funding which accompanies the new National Bus Strategy, the Council continues to work closely with the two bus providers who serve the main built up areas of the town very well. However, some key facilities and employment on the edge of the town, many of which are rapidly developing and sited near high-speed highways, have poor bus connectivity and ensuring there is a comprehensive bus services across all of Swindon Borough is a key aim.

However, whilst the Council focuses on developing a sustainable bus network, it is also working to promote active travel. The Public Health team have a major role in encouraging active travel as well as influencing future plans for public transport. For example the team is a lead partner in the 'Get Swindon Active' partnership, a multi-agency group which aims to promote physical activity and active travel in Swindon. The partnership has recently developed a new Get Swindon Active strategy 2022-2025¹⁹ which aims to ensure that doing physical activity becomes a normal part of how people live. The Public Health team also work with planning colleagues to ensure that new housing estates provide opportunities for active travel and have sufficient public transport infrastructure.

The Council has also recently adopted a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for the Borough. LCWIPs represent a strategic approach by government to identify improvements for cycling and walking networks that are needed in a specified area over a long-term period, typically ten years. The Swindon LCWIP sets out an initial pool of twenty-three high quality infrastructure schemes to improve and increase usage of the strategic cycling and walking network in the Borough. This includes identifying corridors for improving the provision across Swindon town centre, links to the expansion areas such as Wichelstowe and the New Eastern Villages as well as communities in the rural-urban-periphery, principally Highworth and Wroughton. There are also cross-boundary connections to settlements in neighbouring local authorities. The Council is also aiming to encourage residents to be more active through the 'Active Swindon Challenge 2022'. In this challenge players are rewarded with points and prizes for leaving the car at home in favour of walking, running, cycling or taking public transport to get around the Borough.



¹⁶ [Swindon Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure plan](#)

¹⁷ [Swindon JSNA](#)

¹⁸ [Office for National Statistics: official census and labour market statistics, census 2011](#)

¹⁹ [Health and Wellbeing Strategies \(swindonjsna.co.uk\)](#)

Chapter 4 – Digital Connectivity

Levelling Up Mission: “By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.”

Background and why this links to health

Nationally this mission refers to digital connectivity in terms of infrastructure. Digital connectivity is one element of the wider concept of digital inclusion. Digital inclusion is about ensuring people are able to use the internet and online technologies to meet their needs²⁰. It includes:

- **Infrastructure** – being able to afford or have access to a device (whether a mobile phone, tablet or computer), as well as being able to afford or have access to the internet through broadband, Wi-Fi or mobile data.
- **Skills** – having the ability, confidence and digital skills to use digital devices and the internet.
- **Accessibility** – having access to services that are designed to meet users’ needs, including for individuals with disabilities that require assistive technology to get online.

There are a number of ways that digital inclusion is linked to health:

- Access to services is increasingly moving towards online methods, so those who do not have access to inexpensive and reliable connectivity are disadvantaged.
- Information and public education programmes increasingly rely upon websites where they would have previously used paper based or broadcast media.

- There are a range of economic advantages that come from access to the internet
- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of communication for mental wellbeing, and online services can make this possible even when mobility is compromised.
- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, people without access to the internet were already at a significant disadvantage in terms of seeking job opportunities, accessing financial support, and connecting with organisations. The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated this situation.²¹

Not being digitally included (‘digital exclusion’) can therefore exacerbate inequalities and have a particular impact on inequalities in health.

Data from a number of sources including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has consistently identified a clear link between digital exclusion and social exclusion. While age remains the strongest single predictor of internet access and use among adults, poverty (and related disadvantages such as low literacy and low educational attainment) is also closely linked to digital exclusion in all age groups. Among working-age adults, those in the lowest socio-economic groups are more than three times as likely as those in the highest socio-economic groups to not use the internet or to be ‘limited users’ who use the internet for only a few tasks.²²

How does this affect Swindon’s residents?

Whilst it is difficult to get data on digital exclusion locally, data from a 2022 survey of more than 200 residents indicates that there are pockets of digital

exclusion throughout the Borough. The survey, which was carried out by the Council’s Live Well team, included questions about access to the internet and digital equipment and alternatives to using the internet, as well as confidence using technology.

The survey found that whilst the majority of respondents had their own equipment and access to the internet, one in five had no access to the internet. Of the respondents who stated they were not online, the reasons given were:

- Lack of confidence (21% of respondents)
- Financial reasons (20%)
- Security concerns (20%)
- Lack of interest in being online (26%)

The majority of respondents who gave an age were over 65 (46.5%). For those who accessed the internet outside their homes, libraries were the main source.

These findings indicate that there is a significant minority of people who are being left behind digitally due to lack of confidence, training and access.

What are we doing in Swindon?

In relation to improving digital connectivity for our residents, the Council plays both a funding role and also provides support for and information about digital projects. The Superfast programme was part funded by Swindon Borough Council and part by the Department for Culture Media and Sport. The programme was completed earlier in 2022 and has allowed the early deployment of Superfast Broadband (defined as download speeds in excess of 24 Mb/s) to much of the Borough including rural areas which have traditionally had worse connectivity. The superfast programme now covers 98.47% of premises (including residential and business premises) in the Borough²³.

The Council is also facilitating the roll out of ‘Gigabit capable infrastructure’. This infrastructure supports access to Gigabit Capable mobile services (for example 5G) which are often more relevant to low income households because the hardware needed is cheaper and also because they are less likely to need a long term contract.

Currently 88.5% of premises have access to Gigabit capable broadband²⁴. There is currently 4G coverage throughout Swindon and there is projected to be 5G coverage across Swindon by the end of 2024.

In relation to digital accessibility, the Council provides free Wi-Fi in Council buildings including libraries and STEAM as well as in the majority of Council run care homes and sheltered accommodation.

Like many other councils Swindon Borough Council is changing many customer processes to digital to make them easy for people to use, and to avoid people having to make journeys to come into Council offices. Many residents value the ease of digital processes but it’s important to ensure that by doing this people are not excluded and that the Council supports people who are not able to access services digitally. To address this for example, touch screens have been introduced in a number of libraries to help people who need extra support.

The Public Health team also supports people with digital skills. We have employed a Digital Inclusion Officer whose role is to improve access to support services for those experiencing digital exclusion. The role is initially focusing on gathering insight and data to help understand the scale of digital exclusion in Swindon and what potential solutions might be. The role will then support communities directly where appropriate, with initiatives to increase digital inclusion.

²⁰ How has COVID-19 changed the landscape of digital inclusion? | Centre for Ageing Better (ageing-better.org.uk)

²¹ COVID-19 and the digital divide: Supporting digital inclusion and skills during the pandemic and beyond | Centre for Ageing Better (ageing-better.org.uk)

²² Digital exclusion and health inequalities (goodthingsfoundation.org)

²³ Broadband Coverage and Speed Test Statistics for Swindon (thinkbroadband.com)

²⁴ Broadband Coverage and Speed Test Statistics for Swindon (thinkbroadband.com)

Chapter 5 – Education

Levelling Up Mission: "By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third."

Background and why this links to health

There is a strong link between education attainment and positive health outcomes throughout life. The Health Foundation (an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK) considers teachers and all who work in schools part of the 'hidden public health workforce'²⁵. They describe the role of education as the single most important social factor impacting on health that can be influenced. A good education provides the building blocks for developing social connections, for opportunities to find good work, and for feeling valued. These in turn increase our chances of developing lifelong healthy habits, afford a good quality of life, manage life's challenges (and indeed reduce the risk of challenging events), and live and work in safe and healthy environments.

Educational attainment is also closely linked to the health of children and young people. Children and young people in the UK face challenges to their health and wellbeing such as low levels of physical activity, anxiety disorders and depression. Health and wellbeing issues in childhood and adolescence

commonly extend into adulthood and can lead to increased levels of disease and high healthcare costs in later life. These can impair life chances and increase the risk of other serious conditions. Good health and wellbeing in young people is therefore critical to educational success. Promoting the importance of health and wellbeing from an early age within all education settings has the potential to improve both educational and health and wellbeing outcomes²⁶

How does this affect Swindon's residents?

At the end of Key Stage 2 (when pupils are aged 7 – 11), Swindon is below the national average for reading and maths (for Key Stage 2 2019 is the last year for which data is available due to the COVID-19 pandemic). For example 70% of Swindon pupils met the expected standard for reading compared to 73% for England and 76% met the expected standard for maths compared to 79% for England²⁷. There is also an issue with a drop off in attainment at Key Stage 2 when compared with Key Stage 1.

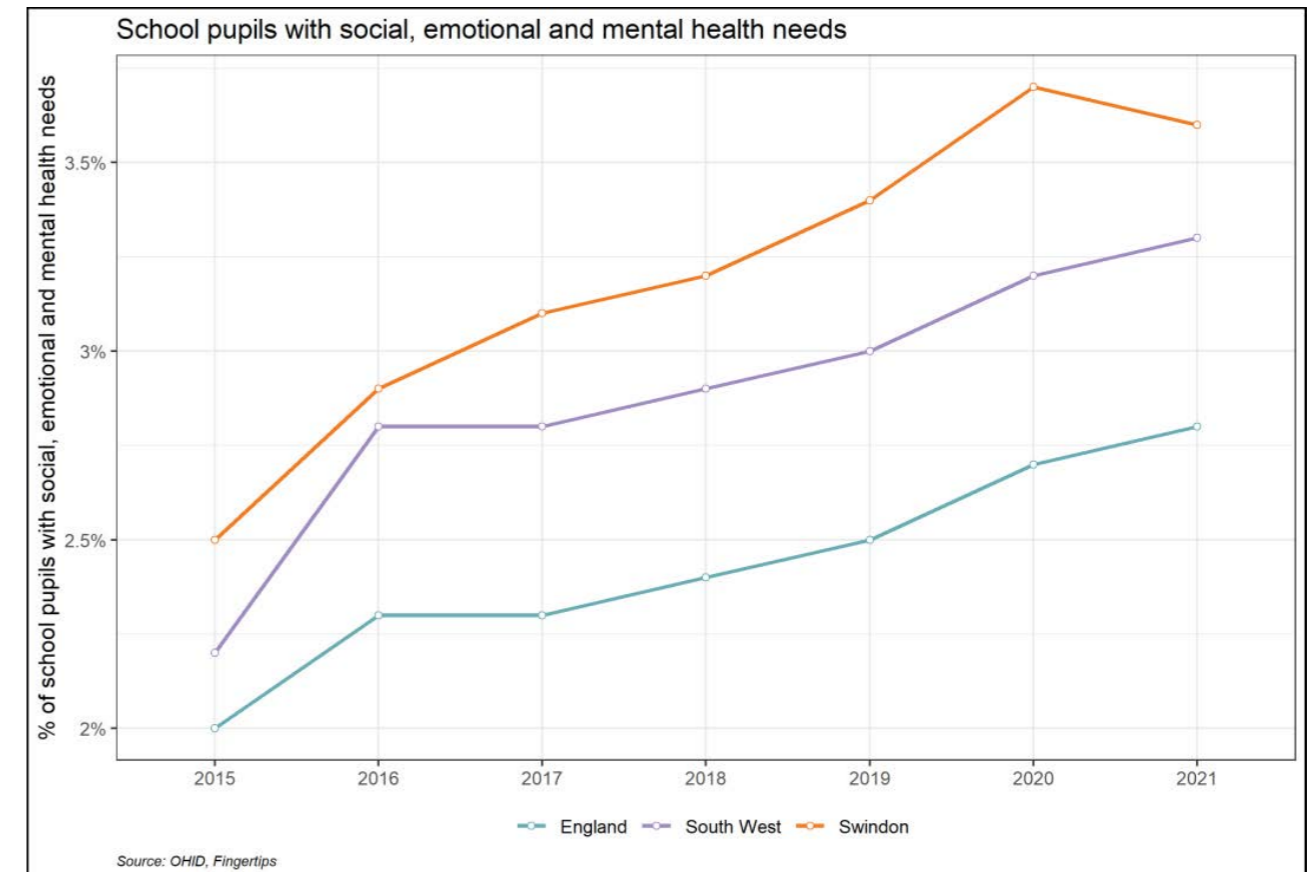
An increasing percentage of pupils in Swindon have special educational needs and disabilities and/or an education health and care plan (a plan for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support) and this is much higher than the comparable values for the South West and England. Similarly, the percentage of school pupils in Swindon registered with social, emotional and mental health needs is much higher than the regional and national average, although Swindon saw a slight fall in 2021 (figure 2).

²⁵ [How do our education and skills influence our health?](#)

²⁶ [School Wellbeing, Children's Health | Nuffield Health](#)

²⁷ Swindon School Effectiveness Delivery Plan

Figure 2 – School pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs 2015 - 2021²⁸



Progress 8 is an measure which was introduced in 2016 and aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. It is a type of value added measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with similar prior attainment. Overall, Swindon is slightly below England and the South West in terms of Progress 8 attainment²⁸.

A further measure is Attainment 8 which measures the achievement of a pupil across eight qualifications. There are significant inequalities in attainment between different groups of children and young people. For example children looked after (that is children in public care) have considerably worse attainment than the overall pupil population. The Attainment 8 scores for children looked after by Swindon has been on an upward trend since 2017/18, in line with the South West and England. However, the average Attainment

²⁸ [Swindon JSNA](#)

8 scores in 2020/21 for children looked after by Swindon were less than half that of the overall pupil population across all areas and were slightly lower than the South West and much lower than the England average²⁹.

In 2019-20, an estimated 32.9% of 15 year old pupils from state-funded schools in Swindon had entered higher education by age 19. This figure was lower than the South West (38%) and England (43.1%)²⁹

What are we doing in Swindon?

Improving educational attainment and promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people are key priorities for Swindon. This is reflected in the council's Strategic Priority that "We will equip all our young people with the education and skills they need: through additional and enhanced skills and higher education opportunities"³⁰ This priority is reinforced by the Council's pledges that:

- Every child and young person in Swindon will have a place at a good or better Early Years provider, school and/or education placement.
- Together with early years, schools and education partners, we will ensure every child and young person is able to access their learning every day.
- We will continue to work in partnership to provide opportunities which support our children and young people to have the skills for life and our citizens have access to lifelong learning.
- We will work with partners to unlock the talents of children and young people and strengthen families through positive activities

There are a range of strategies and initiatives in Swindon aiming to improve educational attainment and children's health and wellbeing reflecting the importance given to this priority:

- The Council's Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Strategy³¹ outlines the vision and plans to ensure that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in Swindon are happy and successful in their early years, at school and at college, achieve the best they can, find employment and go on to live happy and fulfilled lives and have great choice, control and confidence over their support.
- The Council has an educational improvement plan which outlines the key priorities and programmes in place for improving educational attainment at all stages.
- The Swindon Virtual School aims to improve outcomes for children who are looked after through ensuring all children on entry into care benefit through an enhanced one-to-one tuition offer to enable them to catch up on significant gaps in learning as well as supporting education settings to provide direct intervention in schools linked to the Education Endowment Fund, and personal education plan that all care experienced children have. Ofsted has recognised the good progress that care experienced children make from entry into care.

²⁹ [Swindon JSNA](#)

³⁰ [Our vision, priorities and pledges | Swindon Borough Council](#)

³¹ [Swindon Local Offer- Swindon Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Strategy 2020-23](#)

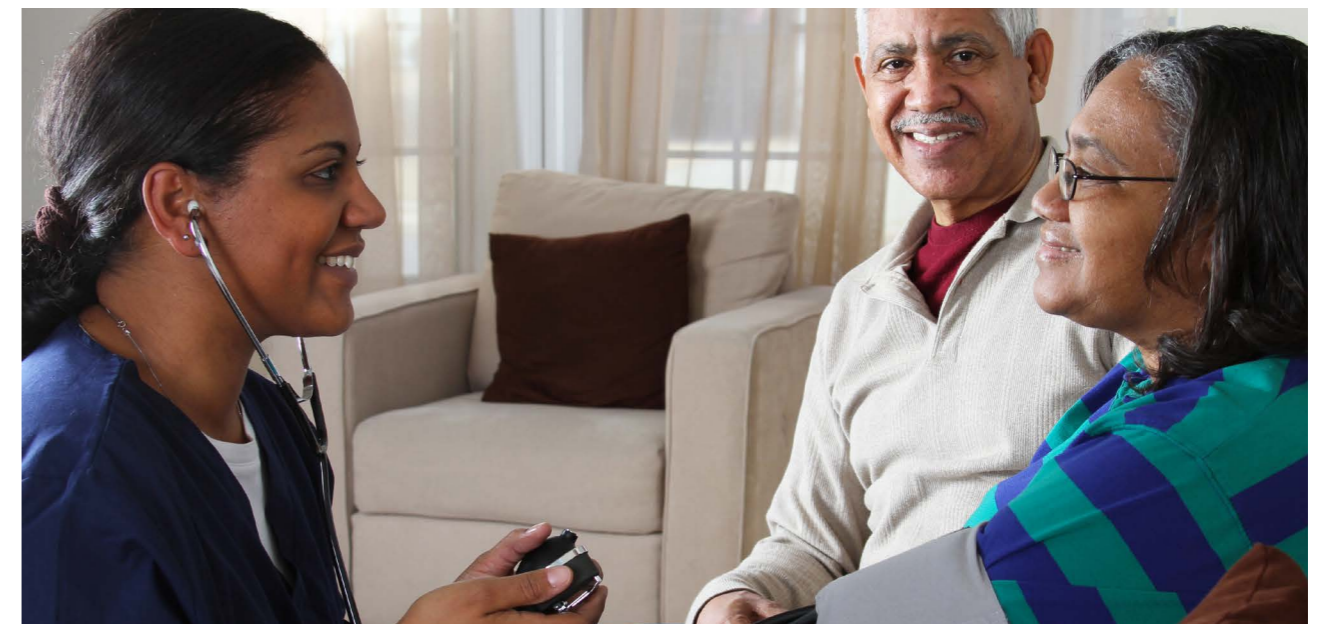
- Public Health commissions a 0-19 Public Health Nursing service which includes Health Visiting, the Family Nurse Partnership and School Nursing. The Health Visiting is the only universal service that offers contacts to every family in Swindon, playing an important role in early identification of need and support to families including referral on to specialist services where needed.
- The Swindon Healthy Schools Programme supports children and young people in developing healthy behaviours, helps raise achievement of children and young people, helps reduce health inequalities, and helps promote social inclusion

Case study - The Family Nurse Partnership

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is an intensive nursing programme, offered to all young parents, whose children are less likely to achieve good outcomes. It offers intensive and structured home visiting, delivered by specialist nurses, from early pregnancy until their child reaches two years old. It is designed to help parents have a healthy pregnancy, improve their child's health and development, plan their own futures and achieve their aspirations.

The FNP has three aims: to improve pregnancy outcomes, improve child health and development and improve parents' economic self-sufficiency.

The Swindon FNP Partnership is nationally recognised for its excellent performance and over the past year the service has developed the offer to ensure that children who move out of the service continue to have their development tracked through Early Years providers



³² [Home : Swindon Healthy Schools](#)

Case study: Swindon Healthy Schools programme

The Healthy Schools programme³² was introduced several years ago as a national health and wellbeing programme for school aged pupils. The Swindon Public Health team have adopted the programme and offer it to schools as a free funded service. A recent survey highlighted that Swindon has the best uptake of the programme across the South West: 96% of the Swindon Schools have registered on to the programme. 80% have achieved healthy school status. The Programme aims to support children and young people in developing healthy behaviours, help raise achievement of children and young people, help reduce health inequalities, and help promote social inclusion. Working with early years settings, special, primary and secondary schools, the programme focuses on four key themes:

- Personal, Social and Health Education (including Sex and Relationship and Drug Education),
- Healthy Eating,
- Physical Activity and

- Emotional Health and Well-being (including bullying)

The Healthy Schools Programme enables the Public Health team to work with educational settings to support and improve behaviour choices and improve lifelong learning. We carry out an annual survey with young people to understand their views and perceptions of their peers' health and wellbeing and behaviour choices. The survey covers all aspects of wellbeing including; safety, crime, gang culture, safeguarding, relationships, career aspirations and any topical issues impacting locally and nationally.

The survey findings help tailor the support we provide to school leaders to train their staff to plan and deliver the persona, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum in accordance to the needs identified by their students. The support focuses on topics such as strategies to support mental health (including stress and anxiety), understanding sexuality, LGBTQ+, finance and budgeting.



Chapter 6 – Health and Wellbeing

Levelling Up Mission: "By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years" and that "By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing"

When referring to health, this report uses the definition provided by the World Health Organization that health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." When talking about wellbeing, this refers to the emotional and psychological state as well as the ability to function socially, cope well with difficulties, develop potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to the community³³.

Background and why this links to health

This mission is at the very heart of public health. Following significant increases in life expectancy throughout the 20th century, mostly driven by improvements in nutrition, hygiene, housing, sanitation, control of infectious diseases and other public health measures that resulted in reduced mortality rates, the rate of increase in life expectancy has slowed in the UK in the last decade. Some areas of the UK have even seen a decrease in life expectancy, mostly in more deprived areas, resulting in widening health inequalities, leading to much debate about the causes. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a further fall in life expectancy³⁴.

Whereas life expectancy is the average number of years that an individual is expected to live based on current mortality rates, healthy life expectancy is the average number of years that a person is expected to live in a state of self-assessed good or very good health. Both are important measures of the health status of the population. Healthy life expectancy measure adds a 'quality of life' aspect to life expectancy including time spent in different states of health. The number of years spent in poor health is also important as it relates to the demand for health and social care and the associated costs³⁵.

Achieving this mission of the Levelling Up agenda will be a challenge as a range of risk factors drive the UK's high level of preventable ill health and premature mortality.



³³ [Mental capital and wellbeing: making the most of ourselves in the 21st century- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

³⁴ [What is happening to life expectancy in England? | The King's Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk)

³⁵ [Chapter 1: life expectancy and healthy life expectancy- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

How does this affect Swindon's residents?

Healthy Life Expectancy at birth for men is 61.4 in Swindon (compared to 63.1 in England as a whole). For women in Swindon it is 62.2 compared to 63.9 in England.³⁶

Whilst data on healthy life expectancy is not available at ward level for Swindon, data on life expectancy shows some marked differences between wards. For example females are likely to live 8 years longer in St Andrews than in Priory Vale, and males 5 years longer in Chiseldon and Lawn compared to Central ward. There is no clear link between female life expectancy and deprivation, although there is more of a link for men³⁷. Overall females in Swindon have a life expectancy of 83.6 years and males 79.8 years which is similar to the South West and England.

There are an estimated 34,100 people in Swindon aged 16 to 74 years old with a common mental disorder, defined as any type of anxiety or depression, with a reduction in depression diagnoses in the last two years. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have affected wellbeing locally as well – in both positive (the opportunity to spend more time at home with family) and negative (feeling more lonely and isolated and concerned about own and others health) ways.

What are we doing in Swindon?

Reducing inequalities and promoting healthy life expectancy are key priorities as demonstrated through the Council's corporate priority that 'We will make Swindon safer, fairer and healthier: by helping people to help themselves while always protecting

our children and adults, increasing health and wellbeing facilities and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour' and the pledges that

- We will work with partners to promote healthy lifestyles for the population of Swindon to reduce obesity among children and adults.
- We will work with partners to promote healthy lifestyles for the population of Swindon to reduce the prevalence of smoking

The Council works closely with partners and other authorities across the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) combined area to deliver a joint inequalities strategy across the footprint, overseen by an Inequalities Strategy group with representation from the NHS, primary care, local authorities and the voluntary and community sector. There is also a Swindon Inequalities Group which includes a range of organisations with the aim of identifying the specific priorities for Swindon in reducing inequalities and taking action to reduce these. Local priorities for Swindon include reducing obesity in children in young people, supporting more of our residents to quit smoking and tackling the inequalities faced by Swindon's diverse communities.

In public health, improving the factors that influence health and wellbeing (often known as the 'wider determinants of health') so that people can live longer, healthier lives is a core part of what we do. The Public Health team deliver a wider variety of programmes and services, all designed to prevent ill health and premature mortality and to improve quality of life and wellbeing. These include weight management programmes, for example the

successful Football Fans in Training programme delivered with Swindon Town FC Community Foundation is open to everyone aged 35 to 65 years with a waist measurement of 38 inches and above. Each cohort of 30 people has, on average, lost a collective 32 stone.

Public Health also commission other health and social care organisations to provide services that improve life expectancy and reduce inequalities. For example we fund GPs and Pharmacists to provide Stop Smoking Services and to deliver NHS Health Checks.

The Swindon Live Well Hub³⁸ offers information, signposting and support to help our residents make the most of their health and wellbeing. As well as being a point of contact, the Hub also delivers a range of activities and programmes designed to inspire, motivate and assist people to live well and benefit from a healthy lifestyle. The Live Well Hub offers a universal service, open to anyone although a significant proportion of the work is focused on those who are facing the greatest inequality.

Services offered by Live Well Swindon include:

- Stop Smoking Advice
- Be Active – support to achieve better physical and/or mental health through the promotion of physical activity and healthy living
- Falls prevention
- Weight Management
- Connecting to communities and volunteering opportunities

- Support to manage long terms conditions and stay independent

Case study – Community Navigators

The Community Navigator service offers one-to-one support to individuals who have been diagnosed with one or more long term health condition. The Navigators work with clients for up to 8 sessions, encouraging them to self-manage their condition and improve their quality of life by introducing healthy habits to improve wellbeing and by encouraging wider participation in community life. They use a person centred, social prescribing approach to promote, encourage and support better self-management and self-care for individuals. By developing a deep understanding of each person they work with, they can draw out their aspirations and goals, building manageable, healthy habits and connections along the way to ensure people stay healthier and happier for longer.



³⁶ [Public health profiles- OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://publichealthprofiles.org.uk/)

³⁷ [Swindon JSNA](#)

³⁸ [Live Well Swindon Hub | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Chapter 7 – Pride in Place

Levelling Up Mission: “By 2030, pride in place, such as people’s satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing”.

Background and why this links to health

In public health, it has long been observed that “place” (specifically, where we live) affects health. The place where we are born, live and work will impact our health and wellbeing throughout our lives. Our health and wellbeing can be impacted by the physical elements of a place (for example its buildings, green spaces, and transport links) as well as the social aspects (for example whether people feel they have a say in decision making and social and community connections).

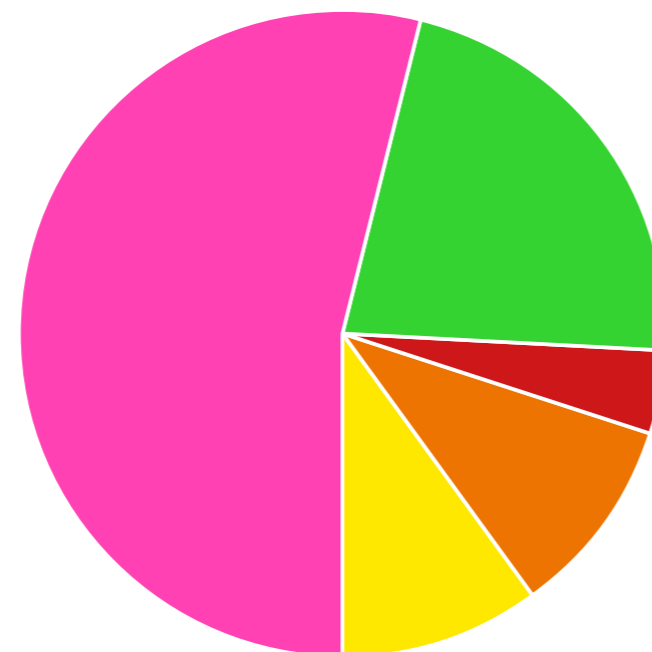
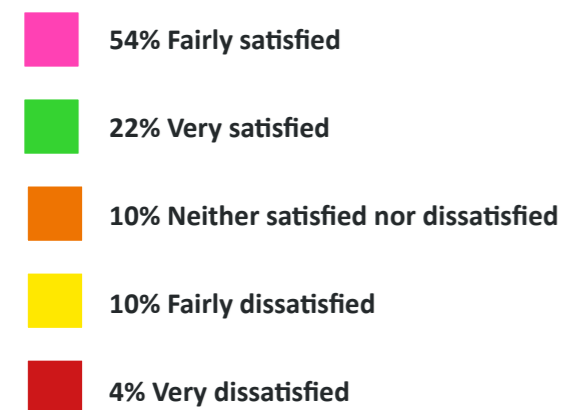
How does this affect Swindon’s residents?

Swindon has a proud history and a strong sense of identity. It is a railway town that arose from Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s vision for the Great Western Railway. The town’s railway heritage is at the core of Swindon’s identity and a huge source of civic pride. Swindon also has some wonderful community assets such as Lydiard Park and Coate Water Park.

The Swindon annual residents’ survey for 2021 showed that the majority of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with Swindon as a place to live³⁹ (Figure 3)

Figure 3 – Swindon residents survey 2021

Overall on behalf of your household, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?



³⁹ Swindon residents survey 2021 – a random sample of 5,000 households were sent a letter inviting them to participate. The sample were selected to ensure each ward was proportionately represented. 778 responses were received (response rate 16%)

There are things that residents value about living in Swindon and also areas they feel need to be improved. The residents’ survey found that the top things residents value about living in Swindon are the parks and open spaces, the low levels of crime and health services. The things residents feel most need improving are road and pavement repairs, levels of traffic congestion and the town centre.

What are we doing in Swindon?

The Council is addressing the town’s challenges with over £100m of investment over the next three years. An integrated programme of initiatives, including the Towns Fund⁴⁰, Future High Streets Fund⁴¹, the Getting Building Fund⁴² and Swindon Heritage Action Zone⁴³ are all focusing on making Swindon Centre a great place to live, work and visit. The Swindon Heritage Action Zone was launched in June 2019, an ambitious five year plan to revitalise the town’s unique heritage and unlock its economic potential. The Heritage Action Zone will breathe new life into the town’s Railway Village, an area rich in heritage and full of promise, to make it a more attractive place to residents, businesses, tourists and investors.

Through the Heritage Action Zone, the Council is progressing a plan to revitalise Swindon’s Railway Heritage Area. The Railway Village at the heart of the area is home to a resident population in the bottom 30% of national indices for social deprivation⁴⁴. Investment in the area of the Railway Village will provide new employment and voluntary opportunities, addressing structural challenges and improving health outcomes for the community.

Pride in place is also about our communities and our connections to each other and to our town. Swindon has also always been a town of strong communities

which was demonstrated so well during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council has a vibrant and active Community Connections forum which grew out of Swindon’s diverse communities’ desire to share information during the pandemic. The forum continues to meet and provide information and support. The forum is now much more than a way for the council to disseminate information, it also provides insight and connections for the council and a way of solving problems with communities. A recent example has been the practical support that the forum provided for refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan such as clothing and support accessing health services.

Swindon’s sense of community is also demonstrated through the active network of volunteers. The Council’s Live Well Hub has a network of over 400 active volunteers. The network is organised through Swindon Circles, a befriending scheme which is designed to alleviate loneliness and improve the wellbeing of our most isolated residents⁴⁵. The volunteers played a major role in the pandemic, supporting vulnerable people and helping out at the vaccination centres, a role they continue to deliver.

Swindon has a well-established Warm Welcome Team, set up in 2021 to support the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan. The team has extended its offer to welcome refugees arriving from Ukraine and provide a comprehensive support service. The team works with partners across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assist individuals and families arriving in Swindon to navigate through services and systems, offering information, advice and practical/emotional support.

⁴⁰ [Swindon Town Deal | Swindon Borough Council](#)

⁴¹ [Contractor appointed for major Swindon regeneration scheme | Swindon Borough Council](#)

⁴² [Getting Building Fund delivers in Swindon & Wiltshire \(openaccessgovernment.org\)](#)

⁴³ [The Swindon heritage action zone | Swindon Borough Council](#)

⁴⁴ [English indices of deprivation 2019- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴⁵ [Connecting to communities and volunteering | Swindon Borough Council](#)

The council also works with the Integrated Care Alliance (ICA) for Swindon to deliver 'Swindon Communities Together', a three year programme working with residents in communities facing the greatest inequality. The programme arose from a 'strength-based' approach to delivering adult social care services closer to the community and a 'place-based' approach to the delivery of children's services through the launch of a number of community family hubs. At the same time, national policy has moved towards the creation of integrated care systems and place based partnerships, placing new obligations on the NHS to move away from primarily 'treating illness' to prevention and addressing health inequalities. This means that the Council and its partners- which includes our residents and communities themselves- are in a strong position to lead a community asset based approach to improving health outcomes through strengthening local and neighbourhood services, particularly in areas where inequalities are the most widespread. The Swindon Communities Together programme offers a vehicle to deliver these changes to core services, in a way that is co-produced with the community.

Case studies – Swindon's Warm Welcome team

The Council's Warm Welcome team has supported a number of families from Afghanistan to move into permanent accommodation. One family have two children who, with the help of the education department, have started to attend schools close to their home. The team also assisted the family to access universal credit and to set up their council tax, rent and bill payments. The team also

helped the family identify their closest shops, GP surgery and routes into town to attend their local mosque. The father of the family was very grateful to access accommodation in Swindon so that he could continue his studies at a nearby military base. The mother of the family is now pursuing an apprenticeship in beauty as she has always had an interest in this and is working with the Council's supported employment team to achieve this. The family continue to receive support from the Warm Welcome Team whenever needed and provide the team with regular updates on how they are getting on.

The Warm Welcome team has also supported Ukrainian families to find permanent accommodation in Swindon. A family who arrived through the Family Visa Scheme got in touch with the Warm Welcome Team to help them look for suitable accommodation, as they had arrived to stay with their parents but there was very little room for them in the house. With the help of the communications team, the Council identified a landlord who had a suitable and affordable property. The family were very happy and secured the property very soon after the viewing. Having found their own accommodation and secured more space for their family, they were able to bring their grandparents over from Ukraine. Their grandparents required immediate medical attention after their arrival due to a very difficult journey. With guidance from the Warm Welcome Team and a quick response from their local GP surgery, the family were quickly able to access the health care they needed.



Chapter 8 – Housing

Levelling Up Mission: “By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government’s ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas”

Background and why this links to health

Housing is one of the major determinants of health. Having a secure and decent home is fundamental to health and well-being and good quality housing is needed to create thriving neighbourhoods and communities. The conditions in which our residents live has a significant impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing. The home environment is also important in enabling access to employment and learning, social connections, services and green spaces and opportunities for physical activity.

Poor quality and overcrowded housing is also known to have detrimental effects on occupiers’ physical and mental wellbeing. A review of the impact of COVID-19 on people from ethnic minority backgrounds identified poor housing conditions and housing composition as contributors to increased COVID-19 transmission within these groups⁴⁶.

Unsafe housing is associated with increased falls, leading to otherwise avoidable hospital admissions. Poorly insulated houses pose a challenge to carbon-reducing environmental commitments and combined with fuel poverty can also contribute to poorer health.

How does this affect Swindon’s residents?

In March 2019 there were just under 100,000 homes in Swindon, with one in ten of these owned by Swindon Borough Council. Many people own their own home with house prices considered more reasonable than many areas of the southwest with an average cost in 2021 of between £263,000 and £268,000.

In 2020/21 there were 1,140 households assessed under the Homelessness Reduction Act with 62.5% of the main applicants aged 16-34. Over the last two years, Swindon has had a higher rate of households assessed as homeless when compared to England and the South West. When it comes to finding longer term accommodation for homeless households, Swindon helps a much higher percentage of homeless households than England or the South West⁴⁷.

Over recent years the Council waiting list for a home has increased by 50% and this looks to increase further with the cost of living challenges. Fuel poverty is lower in Swindon than nationally but levels are higher in central areas of town and just over one in ten houses have an efficiency rating at the lower end of the scale.

What are we doing in Swindon?

The creation of new affordable and additional housing is a key challenge to addressing housing issues in the borough. The Council works alongside developers to ensure quality new homes are being built and that they deliver a range of affordable housing products that include home ownership at affordable rates. Queens Drive is the Council’s largest ever housing regeneration project to help achieve its pledge to build new affordable homes and develop brownfield sites. The Queens Drive development commenced in 2021 with the delivery of the first of 149 homes in April 2022.

In 1952, Swindon was designated as an Expansion Town which led to a major increase in house building and population. Due to this 40% of the council’s own housing stock (which consists of approximately 10,400 dwellings and 665 blocks) are of non-traditional construction. The Council aims to have a well maintained, sustainable housing stock that meets the needs of local residents, provides the type of homes that tenants value, in the environments in which people would like to live. Due to this aim the Council is in the process of procuring a 100% stock condition survey which will offer clarity and an overview of the current condition of housing stock, confirming future investment requirements. The stock condition survey will also collate SAP (standard assessment procedure) ratings for all the Council’s housing stock which is the measure of environmental/carbon emission efficiency. This will allow the Council to design targeted work schedules to improve the thermal efficiency of homes.

A Housing Health and Rating System assessment will be conducted as part of the stock condition survey. This will ensure that any homes that are deemed to have hazards can be rectified in a timely manner

and it will also indicate how many houses are non-decent. The Council has also used the Green Homes Grant to install solar panels at 70 properties within Council stock with another 38 installations set to complete. From the 70 completed installations average Energy Performance Certificate scores have gone from an E to a C. These tenants have seen a real difference in their energy usage and some have commented on how it already has affected their daily routine, for example not needing to wait until off-peak rates to use washing machines.

The Council is also in the process of commencing a pilot scheme which will see secondary glazing installed at the railway village. Due to the heritage listing of the properties located within the village there are constraints on the works which can be undertaken but if the pilot is successful the roll out of the secondary glazing throughout the village should be a real benefit to tenants.

More widely, the Public Health team play a key role in ensuring that public health considerations are taken into account with planning applications. Public Health is consulted on planning applications for larger developments, significant changes to road infrastructure or where the Planning team consider there could be the potential for negative impact on population health and wellbeing. This means that the Public Health team is engaged in planning proposals from an early point and are able to make recommendations on how to positively incorporate health and wellbeing into proposals. We are currently looking at how we can introduce Health Impact Assessments (HIA) which would help developers to judge health effects of a development/project on a population, particularly on vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. This links with our aims of tackling health inequalities within Swindon.

⁴⁶ COVID-19: understanding the impact on BAME communities- GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁴⁷ Swindon’s JSNA | Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (swindonjsna.co.uk)

Public Health has been involved in the development of the Local Plan for Swindon. The plan is the principal planning policy document for the Borough, and includes public health considerations such as encouraging physical exercise and green spaces, air quality, transport links, adaptable living and limiting concentrations of hot food takeaways, particularly near schools. We also work with key health partners to exchange information on new planning and developments in Swindon. This also allows time to consider the impact of these in relation to health needs of the population and how we can work together to address these.

Swindon's Environmental Health Officers are a core part of the Public Health Team and play a significant role in ensuring that rented housing stock is maintained to a decent standard. Swindon has a thriving private rental market which has seen improving quality in the last 15 years. In the absence of a requirement for private rented properties to meet the decent homes standard; the Housing Act 2004 enforcement provisions and Housing Health and Safety Rating System have been the principle means of driving those improvements to date where the market has not. The Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Mandatory Licensing scheme has also played a role in standards in the sector.

The Council's Environmental Health Officers respond to complaints of poor housing, identify poor housing in the course of other work, and ensure the safety and standards of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) in Swindon which are subject to regular proactive inspections. Civil Penalties are imposed and prosecutions undertaken for the most serious housing offences.

The Environmental Health team investigates approximately 200 complaints about poor housing every year and conduct 100-150 inspections of HMOs. Most of the team's work arises in the most deprived wards. Disrepair issues most often coincide with overcrowding and multi-generational or multi-family households in these areas.

The Council's Live Well Team also provide a service to support people with hoarding behaviour (which can be a major health hazard). The services works in a compassionate and person centred way to change behaviour and help people deal with the trauma that may have caused the hoarding behaviour. Swindon is one of the only councils to have a therapeutic specialists who support people in this way and the Council has shared its experience with other councils.



Case study – Queens Drive

Queens Drive is a £34 million regeneration scheme. Phase 1A, a £11.5m tender to construct 15 houses and 32 flats, was completed in May 2021. Phase 1B is the next part of Queens Drive redevelopment with 68 new apartments and 34 houses. The houses on Queen's Drive replace a sheltered housing scheme and poor-quality housing that was not fit for purpose and has been demolished. The Queens Drive redevelopment houses have been modelled to show Swindon's distinctive heritage and attempts have been made to include the town's railway history into the designs. The prominent gables of the estates, for example, are based on the widths of the previous engine sheds. They were used to repair, maintain and house the trains, whilst the building mass makes sure dual aspect living to ensure they will be light and airy to live in once built. Along with the housing, the Council has taken steps to ensure that the houses are very climate friendly by using solar panels and triple glazing, and also taking steps to make sure the local wildlife continues to thrive with the use of new bat boxes. The importance of investing in the local communities and building good quality, affordable housing in Swindon is a top priority for the Council.



Chapter 9 – Crime

Levelling Up Mission: “By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas”

Background and why this links to health

Crime is a public health issue. It shares common causes with ill health, particularly poverty, and fear of violent crime is itself a major cause of anxiety. Crime also erodes social capital, deters investment and job creation, entrenches poverty and undermines prospects for young people⁴⁸.

Violence has long been recognised as a significant concern for public health because of the ill-health and suffering that it causes. Violence has sometimes been compared to a disease – a complex preventable problem that can be understood and addressed by using some of the techniques more usually applied to disease control (WHO, 2002). The World Health Organisation advocates adopting a public health approach to violence and crime which it defines as one “that seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence”⁴⁹.

It is also the case that those groups of people most likely to suffer violence are also people who are very likely to be affected by other factors that cause illness or poor health. For example:

- The risk of experiencing violence as a victim or as a perpetrator is much greater in people who are living in deprivation

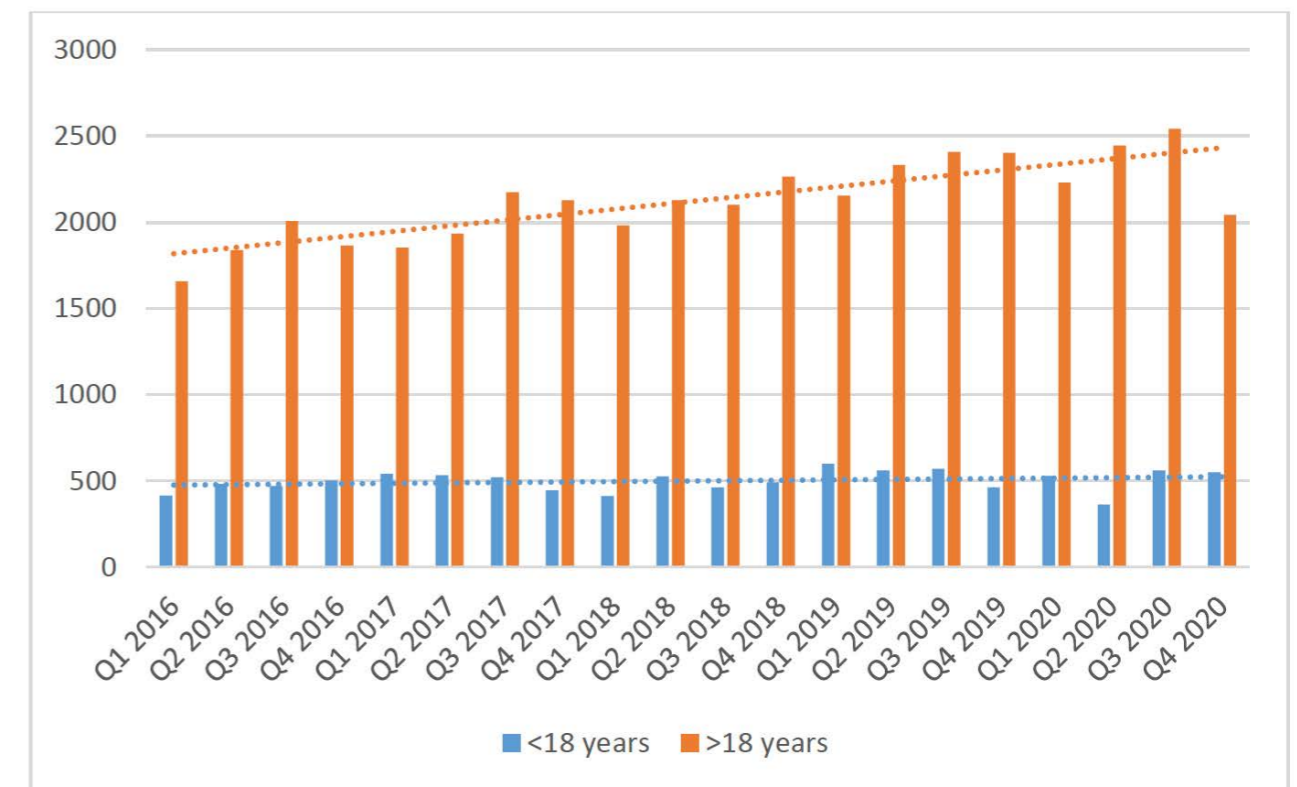
- The effects of violence is strongly related to inequalities, with the poorest fifth of society suffering rates of hospital admissions for violence five times higher than those of the most affluent fifth

Adopting a public health approach to crime provides a useful framework for investigating and understanding the causes and consequences of violence and crime. It involves stakeholders working together to address the wider causes of crime, identify risk factors and then take action to reduce crime.

How does this affect Swindon’s residents?

In 2020/21, the rate of violent offences in Swindon was 27.5 per 1,000 population, compared to 23.4 for the South West and 29.5 for England. The number of violent crimes reported in Swindon has remained stable over the last 5 years and the rate of the violence offence per 1,000 population for Swindon in 2019/20 is lower than the overall England average. In England, homicides and crimes involving knives/ sharp instruments have risen since 2014. Nationally data indicate greater increases in the number of victims/perpetrators of violent crime aged under 18 years than those aged over. However, the same trend was not replicated in Swindon and the number of perpetrator of violent crime aged under 18 years remains similar in the last 5 years (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Perpetrators of violence crime in Swindon 2016 - 2020



Domestic abuse is a particularly unique type of crime. Whilst it is common, it is often hidden and therefore difficult to quantify. It is defined as a range of abusive behaviours which can exist between people who are personally connected to each other who are aged 16 and over and includes physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic or financial abuse, as well as psychological, emotional or other abuse. Furthermore, it is also a risk factor for future violence as exposure to violence as a child makes individuals more likely to be involved in violence in later life.

According to data from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (formerly Public Health England), Wiltshire Police (which covers both

Swindon and Wiltshire) had the highest domestic abuse related incidents and crimes records in the South West in 2018/19 at 22.0 case per 1,000 population. It is estimated that a population of Swindon would have an annual prevalence of 5.5% for domestic abuse, with 8,828 people aged 16 to 74 years experiencing domestic abuse within one year. Similar to England, the rate of domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in Swindon shows an upward trend⁵⁰. In 2020/21 it was at 24.5 per 1,000 in Swindon compared to 24.3 and 30.3 per 1,000 in the South West and England respectively. This upward trend may be in part due to better identification and increased reporting of domestic abuse incidents to support services and the police.

⁴⁸ [Levelling Up the United Kingdom - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

⁴⁹ [Violence Prevention Alliance \(who.int\)](http://who.int)

⁵⁰ [Public health profiles - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](http://phe.org.uk)

Analysis of local data has identified a number of individual and environmental factors such as negative experience at home, school exclusion and deprivation that are risk factors that make a person more likely to be involved in violence. Early interventions that address these local risk and protective factors could reduce the number of people involved in violence in Swindon.

What are we doing in Swindon?

Addressing violent crime and its causes remains a high priority due to its serious nature and potential life-changing consequences for those involved. This is reflected in the council's Strategic Priority that "We will make Swindon safer, fairer and healthier: by helping people to help themselves while always protecting our children and adults, increasing health and wellbeing facilities and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour"⁵¹. This priority is reinforced by the Council's pledges that:

- We will work in partnership to reduce violence and crime to make Swindon safer.
- We will work in partnership with local organisations to provide support, and where required, accommodation to anyone experiencing domestic abuse.

There are a range of strategies, partnerships and initiatives in Swindon aiming to tackle crime and its causes, reflecting the importance given to this priority.

- Swindon **Community Safety Partnership** is a local alliance of organisations that has a statutory responsibility to reduce crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and

reoffending. The Council undertook a review of local Community Safety Partnership (CSP) arrangements in 2021. As a result of this review, 3 priorities were established by the CSP: 'Protect vulnerable people from harm', 'Tackle violence' and 'Prevent crime and keep people safe'. A number of thematic multi-agency sub-groups have been set up to address these priorities. The purpose of these thematic groups is to support a life course system approach which also addresses root causes to make Swindon a safer place to live in, work in, and visit.

- The Swindon **Multi Agency Domestic Abuse Strategy** outlines strategic objectives to address the health, economic and social consequences of domestic abuse.
- In 2021 Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire Police and partners (Children's Social Care, Health, Education, Youth Justice and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)) committed to tackling violence affecting children and young people through the development and implementation of a Youth Safety Strategy, which sets out the foundations for a four year ambitious action plan. The strategy is the first of its type for Swindon. It is developed by the partnership and communities, strengthened and informed by the voices of children across Wiltshire, the work of Swindon's Public Health team and the evidence base to identify 'what works' to make communities safer.

- The **Swindon Early Intervention and Violence Reduction Strategic Action Plan** adopts a public health approach to violence prevention and seeks to utilise the life course approach to identify risk and protective factors, starting before birth and identifying points along the child's development where they may be more vulnerable and there may be opportunities to intervene to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors. The plan aims to deliver and support the outcomes from the Swindon Youth Safety Strategy.



⁵¹ [Our vision, priorities and pledges | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Case study - Swindon Early Intervention and Violence Reduction Strategic Action Plan

The Swindon Early Intervention and Violence Reduction Strategic Action Plan aims to address the health and wellbeing of Swindon residents and communities through a adopting a 'life course approach' to crime which has positive implications for society as a whole.

The plan has been structured around a preventative approach:

Primary prevention – to tackle the conditions which allow violence to develop and breed. This first stage is the key stage to long-term prevention. The aim is to prevent serious violence by providing children, young people, parents and professionals with information, which raises their awareness of the issues and helps them keep themselves safe, make positive choices about their behaviour and build their resilience.

Secondary prevention – early intervention to stop things getting worse if prevention has not been possible. Ensuring we identify and support those at most risk from violence, and enable communities and not traditional partnerships to find solutions to the root causes of violence. We recognise that children and young people can experience harm from those within their home and outside of their home, which is known as extra-familiar harm. Early identification and support of these children and young people is paramount as they are vulnerable to being affected by youth violence and exploitation.

Evidence shows that if we can target resources at the communities and children most in need of help, wider outcomes will be achieved for the residents of Swindon as a whole. We want to enable communities and foster non-traditional partnerships to find new and innovative solutions to violence and exploitation

Tertiary prevention – responding to violence once it has occurred, treating its effects and rehabilitating the people/areas affected. This is the most expensive option so the earlier the intervention the better for individuals, communities and wider society.

We will focus on disruption and enforcement where we know this will ensure the wider population in Swindon will not be effected by violence in their communities.

We recognise that disrupting the patterns of youth violence, interrupting the activities of perpetrators and inhibiting the grooming and targeting process will make Swindon a Safer place.

The Safeguarding thematic sub-group "Early Intervention & Reducing Violence" are responsible for prioritising actions within this plan and will be tracking progress of actions in this forum to effectively address serious violence through a multi-disciplinary partnership approach.

Conclusion

The Levelling Up agenda has provided an interesting lens through which to look at some of the challenges facing Swindon with regard to inequalities. This report has highlighted both the scale of some of the inequalities faced in Swindon and the range of programmes the Council has in place to try to address these and improve the health and wellbeing of its residents.

As stated in the introduction, this report is a look at Levelling Up through a public health lens rather than a comprehensive report on everything that the Council is doing in relation to Levelling Up. The report does not make specific recommendations for action. However, it does provide an opportunity to make a 'call for action' to continue to address the unacceptable and avoidable inequalities which still persist.

As this report demonstrates, the health and wellbeing of our residents is closely linked to the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age. These conditions include the work environment, levels of education and skills, housing conditions and social and community networks. This is why the Levelling Up missions are so relevant to public health with their focus on the wider issues

that impact health such as housing, education, crime transport and digital connectivity.

This report has shown that Swindon is a place of energy, of potential, of wonderful communities, dedicated volunteers and a workforce who are passionate about improving the lives of our residents and facing challenges head on, always working with local communities. However it also demonstrates some of the unfair and avoidable inequalities which still persist, impacting on the health and wellbeing of our residents and resulting in unacceptable differences in healthy life expectancy within our Borough.

Levelling Up presents a real opportunity to reduce inequalities in Swindon and improve the quality of life for all our residents. It is now up to us all to grasp this opportunity and enable the Council to achieve its pledge 'to make Swindon safer, fairer and healthier'.

