



UPLIFT – Urban PoLicy Innovation to address
inequality with and for Future generaTions

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Case study report

Corby Functional Urban Area

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1 Executive Summary

In this report we share the findings of research activity carried out as part of the UPLIFT project in Corby, United Kingdom. The project aimed to outline and understand the factors that impact on young people's experiences of education, employment and housing, in order to determine how young people navigate these domains, make choices and develop strategies within what is available to them. Through understanding the opportunities and strategies that young people employ across these domains, our aim was to consider how young people might engage locally to co-create a reflexive policy agenda.

We carried out desk-based research on housing, employment and education in Corby and interviewed local people and policy makers about their experiences and knowledge of the local context. We reviewed this data and explored key themes and storylines, which we shared at events in Corby. Following this, we further analysed our data in order to understand the strategies employed by young people to navigate the challenges they encountered and to identify change needed in local policy.

Our findings highlight the importance of young people understanding how systems work locally. We suggest that young people, and their families, need support understanding how they can engage with and change systems. There needs to be better, easily accessible guidance developed around the support and opportunities that are available locally.

In this report, we present a series of recommendations regarding creating the factors that would support young people to reach their full potential by means of Reflexive Policy Agenda, a co-creation tool that includes vulnerable young people in policy design, implementation, and monitoring.

It is essential to engage with young people in policy making to develop effective robust policy that works in a real-world context.

2 Introduction

The current document is the result of the research activity carried out in work package 3 (WP3) of the UPLIFT project¹ in Corby, United Kingdom. It aims to understand which micro, mezo and macro level factors influence vulnerable young people's decisions in education, employment and housing, and how these young people create their own strategies and make choices within the possibilities available in the given locality.

The main research questions we explore in this study are:

- What are the different factors in different levels (welfare system, intermediary institutions, family background, individual characteristics) that support vulnerable young individuals to live the life they would like to live or they should be able to live taking into account the possibilities the locality offers for them?
- Which are the factors that can be changed by means of Reflexive Policy Agenda - RPA - (a co-creation tool that includes vulnerable young people into policy design, implementation, and monitoring)?

These two main questions rather serve as guidelines for the analysis, but are too broad to be answered fully, thus we have chosen those sub-topics in this framework that came out to be the most relevant in the local interview process. We aimed to focus on factors that cannot purely be explained by the deficiencies of the welfare systems, rather by the interactions between vulnerable young individuals and institutions as a response to the welfare framework.

The three themes that we found across our data were:

- If individual needs (including additional educational needs, health, and wellbeing) are not met by schools there is a long-lasting impact for young people
- Perceptions of local employment opportunities differ across ages
- The housing sector is complex and hard to navigate

The methods of exploring the factors behind individual decisions are primarily based on interviews with local policy experts and policy implementers and 40 vulnerable young people: 20 young people between the age of 15 and 29 and 20 interviews with people aged 30-43 - who were between 15-29 at the time of the financial crisis of 2008. These interviews naturally revealed many, mostly already well-studied deficiencies of the national and local legislations and the welfare systems. while this case study report does not have the primary goal of

¹ More information on the project can be found at: uplift-youth.eu

formulating criticism about the general welfare policies and other structurally given resources in Corby (this was already shared in another work package of UPLIFT²), it rather aims to understand how these structural resources, policies, programmes, and services are implemented and how they influence the life strategies of young people.

The final aim of this case study report and the analysis of the interactions of the behaviour of individuals and the institutions is to discover and suggest topics for a future Reflexive Policy Agenda for each of our eight localities of WP3 of UPLIFT, including Corby. Reflexive Policy making lies at the centre of the UPLIFT project. It refers to a policy co-creation, refining process, which involves the target group of the policies (in our case vulnerable young people). This process aims to explore young people's narratives on their perceived reality about the locally available policies and services, and empower them to be part of the creation of knowledge on the policy framework. Moreover, this process takes young individuals' feedback on possible changes of policies seriously, and also invites them to monitor the implementation of these policies. By nature, it means a power-balanced cooperation between local decision makers and the target group of local policies, which process relies on both groups' interests and knowledge. Thus, the current research aims to deal less with fundamental systemic deficiencies of welfare policies, as it would exceed the competencies of local actors, but rather aims to discover those topics that can be handled locally.

In this report, we first introduce the framework of the analysis in Chapter 3, then we describe the methodology of the research and the analysis in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 first summarizes the main characteristics of the current life situation of vulnerable young people (40 interviewees) regarding their education, employment and housing conditions. Then we describe the main inequality traps we have discovered in our analysis, and the conversions that lead to the current outcomes (positions) of our interviewees. Finally, Chapter 6 contains the main suggestions for potential topics in education, employment and housing for a Reflexive Policy Agenda.

² More details about the local welfare systems in 16 urban areas of Europe can be found at: <https://uplift-youth.eu/research-policy/official-deliverables>

3 Framework of the analysis

This section contains the theoretical framework for the case study analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative research that has been accomplished in eight UPLIFT locations: Amadora, Amsterdam, Barakaldo, Chemnitz, Corby, Pécs, Sfântu Gheorghe and Tallinn.

The framework of the analysis of this case study report is based on the **Capability Approach**, an attempt for better understanding and interpreting the nature of modern age poverty, social inequalities, human development and well-being, devised in the 1980s by the Nobel prize laureate economist-philosopher Amartya Sen. The Capability Approach understands certain life-pathways as results of a complex interplay of various factors: the nature of the system (e.g. economic, housing, education); individual perception of the system and other micro level, individually driven factors. Moreover, the main goal of the theory is to be able to comprehensively capture the factors that are constraining or enabling an individual to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. Our analytical framework builds on the Capability Approach; however, it implies some adjustments and complements it with the life-course approach and the transgenerational approach.

The starting point for understanding the life strategies of vulnerable individuals is to define the **resource space**, which is a complex socio-economic environment around individuals, consisting of all formal rights (e.g. laws and legislations) and possibilities (e.g. subsidy schemes, programmes against social inequalities), which defines opportunities for all inhabitants in a given location. This environment might be enabling, e.g. providing work places, subsidies, networks, while it might be restricting as well, e.g. providing segregated school system, unaffordable housing. The resource space, as it is, largely depends on the socio-economic context in which people live: constitutional rights, economic development of the place, degree of inequalities, thus it varies from location to location. In addition to this, the accessibility of resources is conditionally determined. For instance, even if there is a subsidy scheme to buy a flat, it is only accessible in case of having savings (wealth), having a certain income level and under certain circumstances (e.g. having children). Based on individual characteristics, thus we define an **individualized resource space**, in which an individual can navigate. This individualized resource space is what we basically interpret as **real freedoms, real opportunities**.

However, young individuals have their own culturally and socially embedded perception of their possibilities that are not necessarily match with the so-called real opportunities: either by having unrealistic view or by not seeing those opportunities that theoretically would be achievable for them. This distinction is a new element compared to the original Capability Approach developed by Sen, as our analytical framework places great emphasis on the distinction between **real and perceived opportunity spaces** to understand the origin and the consequence of the gaps between the space of available possible actions and the perceived

possible actions. The mechanisms that cause the gaps between the two (e.g. blind spots, false perceptions or conditioned to illegal interventions) are those that make it difficult for an individual to choose those positions in life that best suits his or her abilities and remain in the widely accepted legal and socio-cultural environment.

Inside the individualised resource space, based on the perceived and real opportunities, one can take different positions: **functionings** (See in Table 1). In the original theory, functionings are defined as “various things a person may value being or doing”. In empirical terms, this can mean two things: 1) the actual and current achievement/outcome of an individual 2) a desired, valued outcome an individual would prefer doing instead of his or her current life choices. Thus, functionings are practically the achievements in a person’s life, which he/she either achieved in reality, or may value doing or being.

Table 1: Potential functionings (either current or desired) by domains

Education	Employment	Housing
Qualification (completed and on-going education)	Working conditions (legal/illegal, full time/part time, one shift/three shifts)	Tenure type (public rental, private rental, owner occupation)
Quality of qualification (value of qualification depending on the specific school and dropout history) ³	Salary level	Quality of housing (neighbourhood, affordability, density)

The main question of the case study analysis in UPLIFT is the mechanism with which these functionings (outcomes/positions/choices/desires) are chosen in the local resource spaces by vulnerable individuals.

According to the original Capability Approach, individuals ideally choose from real opportunities based on what they value or desire. However, it is not necessarily possible to interpret the decisions made by individuals in a vulnerable life situation as value-based decisions, as they could be based on their everyday life difficulties (compulsion), or also be a consequence of past decisions. Hence, two ideal types of decision chains can be identified: 1) value-based and 2) path dependent – which are not easy to distinguish, as values are born by internalising the circumstances. In case of value-based decisions, the individual can live a meaningful and fulfilling life, while under the notion of path-dependency we understand patterns of past outcomes which, in time, increase the likelihood of a limited number of future choices that are not necessarily advantageous for the individual. Understanding the outcomes from the perspective of a life-course approach is essential to be able to evaluate the agency

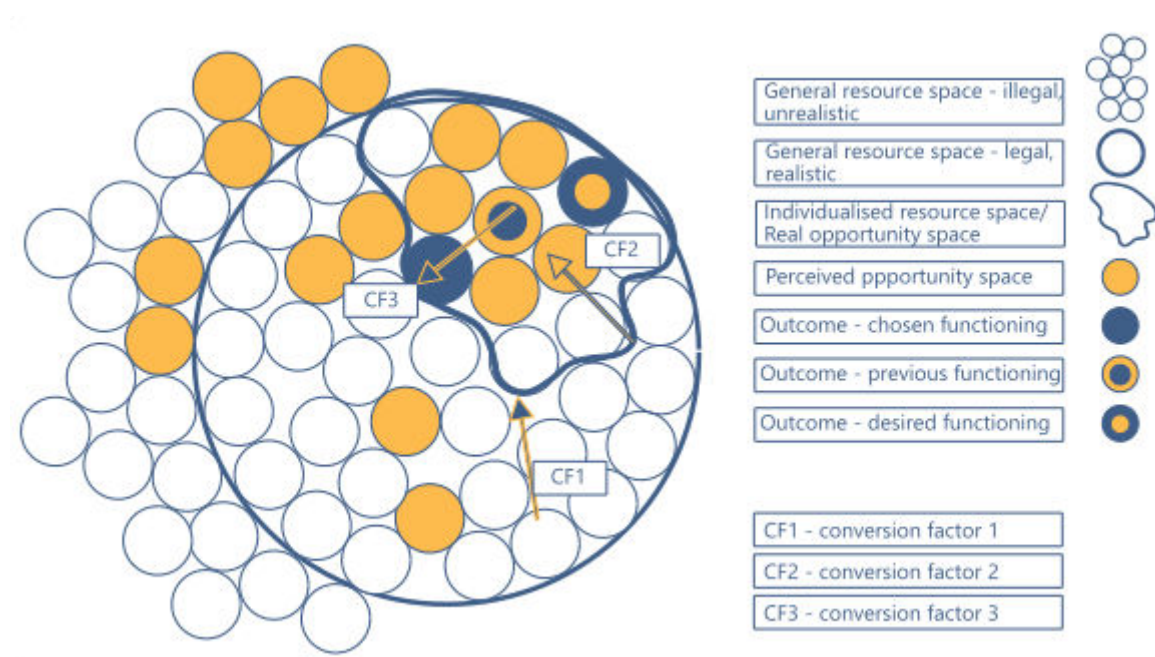
³ The quality of education is interpreted in a wide sense, outside of education, having socialising effects on students (e.g. functions/dysfunctions developed in schools that enable/disable functionings in the labour market or the housing market).

potential and the role of agency in the life-path of an individual. Thus, the **Life-course Approach** is an important additional component to the Capability Approach. Among the past life events and experiences, the behaviour of the family system and the childhood home environment play a key role, which provides a potential to understand what trajectories and possibilities an individual has. The theory of the **Transgenerational Mobility** contributes and valuably complement the capability approach with emphasizing the role of socialization and the parental experiences and behaviour as conversion factors.

The routes (conversions) i) from formal resource space to real opportunities (CF1 on Figure 1), ii) from real opportunity space to perceived opportunities (CF2 on Figure 1), and iii) from perceived opportunity space to chosen or desired functioning (CF3 on Figure 1) are paved by **conversion factors**: the interference of institutional and individual conditions that lead to the creation of individual life-strategies. Conversion factors refers to the fact that different individuals have different capabilities to convert public policies and formal rights into valuable opportunities (Kimhur, 2020: 4, CF1 on Figure 1). Certain conversion factors enable some elements of the opportunity space to be made visible and usable, while other factors have the ability to conceal the real opportunity space, resulting in a gap between the real and perceived opportunity space (CF2 on Figure 1), and a distorted decision about chosen functionings (CF3 on Figure 1).

One may think that the perceived resource space is part of the real resource space, and the conversion from real to perceived necessarily results in the reduction of choices. According to our research however, vulnerable young individuals tend to see options for themselves also outside the social norms and legal framework (real opportunities), thus are able to widen their space of options even if it is not realistic from an external viewpoint or not valued positively by the society.

Figure 1: A modified concept of the Capability Approach



Source: Own elaboration

Our analysis of the interviews was based on four sets of conversion factors:

- **Individual conversion factors** (micro level conversion factors) focus on a person's psycho-social set, domain-specific capabilities, individual character (e.g. sex, intelligence, financial literacy, learning abilities, work ethics), things a person values (e.g. attitude towards education, certain professions) and his/her social network (including the secondary social group where an individual belongs to: neighbourhood, schoolmates, friends, etc.).
- **Family conversion factors** (micro level conversion factor as well) focus on the original family system⁴, where he/she was brought up, family's educational/employment background, values, beliefs and attitudes in the family, psychosocial environment.
- A special focus is given to **institutions** (meso-level conversion factors), where we are interested in how institutions narrow down, or rather correct, the perceived space of possibilities in their interactions with individuals. Institutional conversion factors focus on attitudes and behaviours of an institution⁵. Just as the individual conversion factors,

⁴ Family system includes the position of the individual in the original family dynamics. For instance, whether it's a supporting and functional or a negative, dysfunctional environment.

⁵ Institutionalized norms in our interpretation are the ones that are followed by most members of an institution. One widely known example is institutionalized discrimination, when a large majority of the members of the institutions systematically behave differently (in a negative way) with people belonging to a certain social group e.g. ethnicity or gender.

institutional conversion factors work out differently for (different groups of) people (see exposure to institutional dysfunctions).

- Even being embedded in individual behaviour, institutional response or family event we consider **crucial life events** as independent conversion factors, some of which may have a decisive role in widening or narrowing down the choices one has in certain situations.

4 Methodology

This chapter aims to outline the methodology followed throughout the research process. The overall objectives of the research were:

1. To explore the resource space in Corby, through desk-based research and by interviewing local people and policy makers about their experiences and knowledge of the local context
2. To understand the strategies employed by young people to navigate the challenges they encountered
3. To identify change needed in policy

To meet these objectives, we carried out interviews, using a semi structured interview guide, with policy implementers/experts and young people in Corby. We then analysed interviews and shared initial findings at an event and storytelling workshop in Corby. Our methodology is detailed in the following sections.

4.1 Interviews with policy implementers/experts

After an initial phase of inception and consultation, we scheduled and booked interviews with local policy experts between February and March 2022 before embarking on the interviews with young people.

Seven interviews were carried out with local policy experts representing the areas of education, employment, and housing in Corby. Local policy experts included those directly involved in policy making at the council, as well as representatives and implementors working in organisations directly serving the community. Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and followed a standardised interview template, covering major trends in socio-economic development, general inequalities, and relevant policies. Interviews were recorded as operational notes and comparatively analysed. Further review and analysis occurred after interviews with young people to draw comparisons and identify knowledge gaps.

Three of the expert interviewees were based within relevant council services, the remaining four experts were from organisations serving policy recipients directly, such as the accommodation support services and the leisure centre. Their direct work within the community provides an insight into implementation and how policies work in practice.

It is important to note here that Corby Borough Council no longer exists as a separate entity and has been absorbed into North Northamptonshire Council, which includes other regional towns, some of which are more affluent. Thus, policy implementers within the council, are implementing at a North Northamptonshire level, rather than solely at a Corby level.

Despite an appetite to champion local policy change within the key areas of education, employment and housing, there are limitations due to the national policy model. An example

is the 'pupil premium', which is additional funding provided directly to schools to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England.

Table 2: Summary of expert interview sample

Interview	Field	Role of organization
1	Education/Culture	Council – Public Sector
2	Education	Implementer – Public Sector
3	Housing	Council – Public Sector
4	Housing	Implementer – Public Sector
5	Healthcare	Implementer – Public Sector
6	Healthcare	Implementer – Public Sector
7	Employment	Council - Public Sector

4.2 Interviews with young people

Our second set of interviews were with the potential policy recipients themselves. Here we conducted 40 life course interviews using two interview templates. All our participants for this stage were aged between 15-42 years old. The sample was split in half so that half the participants were aged between 15 and 29 years old and the other half; 30-42 years old and would have been young themselves during the financial crises. Other criteria included (a) a household income of under £16k currently or at a point in their life when they were a young person (the Office of National Statistics report that the UK median household income is £31,400, a household earning less than 60% of this figure is considered a low-income household) and (b) living within Corby itself.

We took a purposeful approach to sampling to ensure that there was balanced representation from gender, ethnicity and learning needs, as well as those with a range of education, employment, and health experiences. We were keen to gain a sample representing a range of lived experiences in Corby.

During the interview process we employed a peer research method, to support a participatory approach. Peer research involves including people with lived experience of the issues being studied in directing and conducting the research. Three peer researchers between the ages of 19 and 24 years old, from Corby were recruited to support research process and carry out life course interviews. Recruiting peer researchers was not simple, mainly due to the positions being unlike other available employment opportunities in the town. To support recruitment we focused on developing relationships with staff at the local job centre. This involved

delivering two training sessions about the UPLIFT project and the role of peer researchers, rewriting the job profile to support local understanding and attending local recruitment fairs.

Once recruited, we created a bespoke on the job training programme to support the three peer researchers. We developed their general skills such as communication, interviewing, event planning and data mapping, as well as general administration and research skills. Not only did this peer research approach support us to access a range of communities and voices, but it was also an empowering experience for the peer researchers themselves. They shared that they had gained a better understanding of their potential impact in their communities and reflected that they had gained confidence and self-esteem.

To recruit interview participants for the life course interview process, we reached out to gatekeeper organisations from the initial inception stage of the study and attended a range of community events such as an Easter family fun day and community group sessions including arts and drama clubs, gardening for wellness and music rehearsals. We also based ourselves in local community cafes. These opportunities became essential places to information share, build deeper local links and recruit participants. We also used media methods, such as local group boards on Facebook and the local radio. After initial recruitment and interviews, we used a snowball approach to recruit remaining participants and reach deeper into communities, this method enabled us to move away from interviewing those known to gatekeeper organisations.

Many of our interviews took place face to face in gatekeeper locations and centres, other locations included public spaces, such as the library and community cafes. Approximately 40% of interviews took place remotely on secure applications such as zoom. This allowed face to face conversations, but participants were able to take part in interviews at a time more convenient for them from home, some late in the evening.

Even though we very much embedded ourselves into the Corby community; working closely with grassroots community organisations and applying a varied, supportive, and flexible recruitment and interview strategy, we did face barriers to recruitment. Our participants were extremely vulnerable, many had caring responsibilities or their own health and/or mental health conditions limited their free time, impacting availability for interview. Those who were in employment, worked mostly in the manufacturing industry on casual and variable hours contracts. Thus, participating in interviews and in particular committing to a prearranged time was often difficult for them. Had the interviews been incentivised participation may have been more appealing.

Recruitment from the over 30 cohort proved more difficult than the younger group. Younger participants were better known to gatekeeper organisations through outreach activities focusing particularly on the age group, such as the job centre kick starter scheme (a nationwide scheme supporting young people to gain work experience). Whereas those over 30 seemed less involved with the community projects that our contacts were engaged with.

4.3 Analysing the interviews

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were reviewed by members of the research team and quotes from the interviews, and notes on their context, were entered into the analytical tool (see appendix A). The research team met regularly to review this process and discuss which data to include as well as identifying and examining emerging insights.

Once this process was complete, the research team reviewed the data in the analytical tool and started to consider the themes arising from the data. We held an analysis session and as a team we discussed the domains of Housing, Education and Employment and focused on the choices, capability and conversion factors identified in the analytical tool. We explored areas of similarity and difference within and across different age groups and discussed how the interviews with policy experts and individuals living in Corby mapped onto one another.

This discussion identified five possible themes to explore further in the data (see appendix B). To do this we used Miro boards (see appendix C). Each potential theme was described in detail and quotes from the data that illustrated the theme itself, how it impacted on people's experiences and then specifically the resource space identified and the conversion factors were added to each board.

Through this exercise we merged several of the themes and developed three main storylines. Each storyline identified the resources that interviewees discussed, i.e. that which they could access, then identified the gap between the resources available and their ambition. In each case we asked ourselves '*what creates this gap?*' and '*what is needed to bridge the gap?*' discussing the data and our conclusions. This allowed us to identify the conversion factors that could or did close the gap. All storylines were reviewed by four research team members drawing on inter-rater reliability to develop robust qualitative analysis.

4.4 Group meetings

4.4.1 Youth Town Hall Meetings

We carried out two Youth Town Hall meetings in Corby. Both were held in community centres on housing estates. The first was a weekday event, the second was held at the weekend. It was important to provide two options, due to the nature of working patterns in Corby, which were mainly manufacturing and shift work. At both events we had provision for children, this included play-based activities, so that those with parental with responsibilities could also attend, as well as coffees, teas, drinks, and snacks for all attendees.

Adverts for the events were shared in the local news; both print and radio. This use of media supported the launch of UPLIFT at a whole community level, whereby, even those that did not attend had some awareness of the project. Both events attracted residents and those interested in community impact programmes. We began with icebreaker activities, these instigated open, dynamic conversations and made those in attendance feel at ease. An

introduction to UPLIFT with questions and then a discussion about the key areas of housing, education, and employment.

The teas, coffees, drinks and snacks and children's activities, created a relaxed, safe, and friendly space. Participants seemed open in sharing their experiences and challenges. Housing seemed to be the biggest challenge for many. Discussion centred the idea that although it was comparably cheap to buy property in Corby, this appeared to attract investors from outside of Corby to buy property, rather than local people. People told us that many properties are being adapted to become multiple residency occupancies and are let on a room-by-room basis. Some people told us that some three-bedroom family homes had up to 11 or 12 occupants living in them. The issue of excess rubbish that this led to was also raised, with the council's refuse collection service criticised for not adapting. Attendees agreed that Corby had a strong sense of community and people looked out for each other in the town. Many of those attended, expressed an interest in being further involved in the UPLIFT project through interview participation.

4.4.2 Storytelling Workshop

The Storytelling Workshop took place in July 2022 at the Corby Rooftop Arts Centre; a town centre community art space. The aim of the workshop was to share and discuss preliminary findings from the WP3 interview process with young people and the community generally. We invited a range of people, from council leaders to community project groups, those involved with interviews, as well as an open invite to the public through advertising on local radio.

Twenty people attended, including some interviewees, those working involved in community projects and members of the general public. The Young Foundation presented some initial findings and storylines from the life course interviews through posters and conversations. Attendees were given the chance to share their views, experiences and any familiarities and opposing views through lively discussions and debates. Attendees were also invited to share personal views anonymously on postcards. The discussions recognised that many had similar experience to those interviewed. Community workers also recognised the experiences being shared from their own practice. Attendees shared suggestions for policy improvements and community activities and pointed to a need for reflexive policy agendas.

5 Findings

5.1 Outcomes: A portrait of the young people we interviewed

To ensure interview participants were representative of the transforming demographics of Corby, specifically due to recent migration, a knowledge seeking and partnership approach was adopted to the process of recruitment. The research team took steps to gain a detailed understanding of the neighbourhoods that made up Corby and the living spaces and communities within these. A zonal map for recruitment was created, highlighting the postcode region and specific areas and estates within the Corby town. Other social variables to guide recruitment included income, periods of unemployment, experiences of barriers to housing and services and health needs.

Our final sample consisted of 17 males and 23 females, 65% of whom were born in Corby. Half the cohort were aged in the younger category of 15-29 years, the latter aged between 30 to 42 years old. 12.5 % were of migrant backgrounds and 30% reported long-term health difficulties.

Table 3: Interviewees educational, housing and employment status

Gender	% Additional learning needs	% with an Undergraduate degree education	% Currently employed	% in rental accommodation	% of Home owners
M- 17	37.5%	15%	42.5%	70%	30%
F- 23					

All participants interviewed reported experience of barriers to accessing services, the most prominent area being that of housing, with the goal being to secure affordable housing. Many interviewees reported reliance upon immediate and extended family and organisations such as charities or community projects for financial aid and temporary accommodation. Seventy percent of respondents reported living in rented accommodation or with family, with 45% of these interviewees living in what can be described as 'insecure' housing, due to high costs, unstable contracts, and overcrowding. Homeowners made up 30% of our participants, they reported that they were able to buy their own properties with family support. Family support generally consisted of financial support, for example an inheritance or having the opportunity to reside rent free with family members which provided the opportunity to save for a mortgage deposit. The older group of participants acknowledged they had received additional housing support from 'buy to let schemes', which enabled buyers at the time to access a discount. Many of these opportunities to enter to the housing ladder are not available any longer so are not accessible for the younger cohort.

Participants generally attended their local school at primary and secondary level, they did not generally report exploring schools beyond their immediate area to compare facilities. Out of our sample, six participants had completed their education to a degree level, to achieve this

they had left the area as there are no institutes offering degree level education in Corby. The capability enhancement was linked to family support in terms of encouragement, as well as financial support. Two participants were currently completing their degree level education as mature students, using the distance learning method, stating that they didn't have the opportunity to do so when they left school, due to the cost of education. Those who left school after completing their compulsory education reported that they felt that they did not have adequate careers guidance whilst at school and lacked guidance from family and friends. Many reported that the bridge between education and the labour market did not seem easy to navigate.

Almost 60% of our sample were unemployed, and of those employed, many described their employment as insecure, for example working on zero-hour contracts (zero-hours contracts are casual contracts and offer no guarantee of work they are usually for 'on call' work) or cash in hand, highly insecure employment. There are some positive stories that are important to note, our sample included two business owners and people working in qualified positions including a print technician and a panel mechanic. When exploring the cases of success, indicators, such as family support and having secure housing stood out as important. These participants reported feeling content with their current life situation. One woman who has her own childcare business working from home, reported that she can choose her own working hours and '*be there for her children*' when they need her, she can also afford to participate in her hobbies. Another woman told us that she has worked in a retail unit in the town centre since she was 16 years old. She was employed as the branch manager; and also a joint homeowner with her partner, she reported that she had good job security and was content. In both these cases, there was a strong family presence to initially aid access to housing and both stated that they would not have known how to access services had they not had family support.

When discussing their hopes and desires, participants described a life of secure and affordable housing, where they can live independently and not rely upon parents. Affordable childcare was mentioned by those with children, as well as secure employment opportunities so that housing, bills, food, and extras, such as a holiday or money for leisure activities could become accessible.

5.2 Resource space: formal freedom of choices for young people

As of mid-2019 Corby had an estimated population size of 72,218, of which 16.8% (12,114 people) were young people aged 15-29 years old (ONS, 2021a). Over the last century, the town has experienced multiple periods of substantial social and economic transition. The opening of its first steel works in 1934 initiated its urbanisation. Throughout the 1930s, the village settlement rapidly grew with an influx of miners and industrial workers, with the town becoming dubbed 'Little Scotland' as a sizeable proportion of these migrated from Scotland. In 1950, Corby was then designated for development under the 1946 New Towns Act to help re-construct Britain's communities. Yet, in 1979 it was announced that Corby's British Steel

plant would close, marking a change in the town's trajectory. Through the 1980s, deindustrialisation led to mass unemployment and economic hardship. Currently, the town's economy revolves around manufacturing and distribution. In 2019, 23.5% of Corby's jobs were in wholesale and retail trade, 20.6% in the manufacturing industry and 14.7% in transportation and storage (MHCLG, 2019b). Over recent years, various packages of funding have been invested to support Corby's regeneration. In particular, investment in the town led to a new train station with rail links to London opening in 2009, as well as the £32m 'Corby Cube' (a civic centre boasting a 450-seat theatre, public library, and a new council chamber) and a £20m Olympic-sized swimming pool opening in 2010. Nevertheless, with an average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score of 25.7, Corby ranked among the most deprived quartile of English local authority district areas in 2019 (76 out of 317) (MHCLG, 2019a). Until recently, local governance in Corby reflected a 'two-tier' council structure whereby local government functions were split between two councils: a larger 'county council' (Northamptonshire), mostly responsible for strategic services such as transport, and people-facing services such as public health, children's services and adult social care; and a smaller 'district council' within this (Corby Borough), often responsible for more place-related services such as housing, planning and licensing. However, in 2018, Northamptonshire County Council effectively declared itself bankrupt. On 1st April 2021 Corby Borough Council merged with three other local district councils to form a new 'unitary council': North Northamptonshire Council.

There have been efforts in national policy-making to reduce inequalities in educational outcomes and to improve overall levels of attainment. One key policy change was the decision to raise the school-leaving age. In 2008, the national legal minimum age to leave education was 16 years old; this has gradually been increased and since 2015 young people must remain in education until they are 18 years old. Schooling is compulsory until age 16 but after this education may take the form of academic or vocational qualifications, or work-based training such as apprenticeships, or a mix of education, work and volunteering. This shift constituted a concerted effort to increase the number of qualifications that young people leave education with across the country.

Policies have also been created to address structural inequalities. One scheme is the 'pupil premium' which was launched in 2011 and gave publicly funded schools extra funding to help increase the attainment levels of their disadvantaged pupils. For the year 2021/22, over 7.6 million children will be eligible for the pupil premium, with over £2.2 billion funding allocated to schools (ESFA, 2021). There is some evidence to suggest that this policy has had a positive impact. In Corby, in 2008, the percentage of young people achieving 5 A* to C GCSEs was 55.5% - almost 10% lower than the national average of 63.9%. This percentage had risen to 73.6% in 2019, only 1% below the 74.9% national average (UK government, 2020).

A local policy that is intended to tackle these issues is the Championing Education Excellence School Improvement Strategy (Northamptonshire County Council, 2016). This was launched in 2015 to try to raise attainment, aspirations and increase opportunities for young adults in Northamptonshire. Some of the key priorities outlined in this strategy are to increase the

percentage of children and young children in Northamptonshire who are attending schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, the school inspectorate; to increase attainment levels; and to close the disadvantage gaps across the county whilst stretching more able pupils' achievements. Measuring the success of this strategy has been difficult as the Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted educational programmes and increased inequalities in many areas. Northamptonshire County Council also offers several programmes that offer wrap around services to support young people's educational, health and future needs. These come under the umbrella of Young Northants, a programme that aims to decrease levels of youth inequality and educational issues in Northamptonshire.

With historically low job opportunities and poor outcomes in working class communities, local stakeholders in Corby report concerns about a trend whereby children who grow up watching older generations work in low-skilled job sectors with few qualifications tend not to aspire to gaining qualifications and skills of their own. In 2020, 32.5% of Corby's working-age population had a NVQ Level 4 qualification or higher, compared to 43.1% across Great Britain, meanwhile, 8.1% had no qualifications, compared to 6.4% nationally (nomis, n.d.). This is a cross-cutting factor in between educational attainment, skills development and employment.

In terms of employment, national policy changes since 2010 largely focussed on incentivising work through a package of welfare reforms. As George Osbourn, Chancellor at the time, explained, these reforms aimed to 'make work pay' as he believed 'defending benefits that trap people in poverty and penalise work is defending the indefensible'. In 2013, the Benefit Cap was introduced: a limit on the benefits most 'work-less' households can receive. Intended to ensure households could not earn more from benefits than they would in work. In 2015, the cap level was reduced and has remained unchanged despite inflation, effectively constituting a freeze on benefits (CPAG, 2020). Of the 170,000 households with their benefits capped (in August 2020), 85% of these include children (DWP, 2020). The cap therefore has significant impacts on the chances of young people.

Shifting towards planning for a post-Brexit context, in the late 2010s, national employment policies focused on increasing productivity and economic growth across the country. A key component of this was The Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2017). In particular, the South East Midland's Local Industrial Strategy (which includes the Corby FUA) focuses on increasing productivity and sustainability by investing in industries related to the UK 'Grand Challenge' of the future of mobility, such as precision engineering, robotics, AI and connected and autonomous vehicles; as well as in green energy and clean growth (SEMLEP, 2019).

Corby was formerly a thriving centre for the English steel industry, however, in the 1980s unemployment and poverty increased dramatically when British Steel closed its steel works in the town, making 6,000 people redundant at once (North Northamptonshire Council, 2019). An employment expert we interviewed described how the "one-industry town" has "never recovered from losing its *raison d'être*", due to issues of structural unemployment where local skills are not fit for the contemporary labour market. Today, Corby's economy centres around

manufacturing and distribution. Many of these jobs perpetuate a “tradition [of] low skills and low pay in Corby” (Employment expert, Northamptonshire); and these low-value jobs also hamper productivity. Reflecting national trends of a shift towards an increasingly precarious labour market, the Employment Expert added that much of the work currently available in Corby is via employment agencies with temporary contracts and/or very few, or no, guaranteed hours. These precarious paradigms of work particularly impact younger workers. For example, the percentage of people in the UK employed on zero hours contracts increased from 0.5% at the end of 2008 to 3.1% at the end of 2020 and, 9.9% of 16-24-year-olds were employed on zero hours contracts (a zero-hours contract offers no guarantee of work, many employers use such contracts to cover situations where work fluctuates) by the end of this period (ONS, 2021f). Although unemployment remains higher than the national average by 0.2%, Corby continues to have a close balance between jobs and workers. This highlights how employment inequalities in Corby are characterised by a skills gap and a lack of good-quality jobs, demonstrating the utility for policies which aim to boost productivity and skills locally. Alongside this, the creation of skilled job opportunities in the area is also important to avoid ‘brain drain’, whereby skilled individuals must move or commute elsewhere to find employment. As suggested in interviews “an increase in new jobs in Corby would help reduce the skills gap and help bring graduates back into the Corby employment market” (Employment Expert, Northamptonshire). The North Northamptonshire Joint Strategy (2011-2031) outlines that to maintain the existing balance between labour force and employment opportunities within North Northamptonshire, it will be necessary to create a minimum of 24,200 net jobs across all sectors of the economy between 2011 and 2031; as part of its planning strategy, it sets a target of 9,700 net job growth in Corby over this time period (North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit, 2016: p. 117). The Corby Economic Development Strategy (2015-2020) echoed these intentions in its vision to build upon the major developments in the town in recent years (Corby Borough Council, 2016). Yet, through talking to local experts, it appears that these strategies have had limited practical impact: “practically, I don’t see any policies working on the ground in Corby” (Charity organisation representative, Corby). More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted job prospects: “Locally the labour market doesn’t have many opportunities” (Youth employment officer, Northamptonshire).

Housing stock in Corby reflects its ‘New Town’ status and much of it has been built over the last 80 years. Housing is a mix of low-rise estates, with terraced or semi-detached houses, and purpose-built flats, including high-rise blocks. With the town’s roots in working class manufacturing and steel works, many of the properties in Corby tend to be small and currently there is an issue with overcrowding. In 2018, Corby Borough Council owned 4,717 residential dwellings of varying sizes and types for rent (Corby Borough Council, 2018a). There were also nine social Housing Association landlords with 1,141 homes for rent locally, in various forms, and 115 homes that come under the banner of ‘Affordable Ownership’, leaving 20,877 which are privately owned. Until unitarisation in April 2021, Corby Borough Council managed its own housing stock. An interviewee from the Local Authority explained that this meant that the council could work with residents and local contractors to deliver suitable, affordable, and

appropriate housing for the local community. Via the responsibilities afforded by the Localism Act, the council created several strategies to manage its housing stock. One of these was Corby Borough Council's Housing Development Strategy (2018) which aimed to establish criteria for the local council to consider when developing new homes to add to its housing stock (Corby Borough Council, 2018b). In recent years, policies affecting housing in Corby have largely echoed this focus on the development of new housing estates across the town, to accommodate the town's growing population. This growth can be attributed to the relatively low housing prices in the town, and the new train link that reaches London in approximately one hour, meaning Corby has become an affordable commuter town for London's workforce. Nonetheless, an interviewee from a charity organisation in Corby mentioned, *"as Corby continues to push its various regeneration schemes in estates such as Kingswood estate, housing has been impacted by issues of affordability, as many local families feel they are being pushed out of their town by newcomers"*. According to another interviewee, this sense of gentrification is creating a visible community divide, between those living in new and old housing. They explain, *"These new developments have brought people up from London"* which in turn has compounded the *"very clear divide between old housing estates vs. new affluent families and the very different communities in Corby"* (Charity Organisation, Corby).

5.3 The challenges young people face

The previous sections explored the lives of young people in Corby and the resources available to them. In this section we focus on the gap between where people are and where they want to be and identify the conversion factors, that support young people, or would support young people to meet their potential.

The storylines discussed below focus on the gaps between the current situation and young people's desired outcomes. In section 6 we then consider what this means in a policy context.

To preserve anonymity names interviewees names are not provided, rather the quotes in the following sections are attributed to the interviewees gender; M (Male) F (Female) or NB (Non-Binary) and age.

5.3.1 Storyline 1: If individual needs are not met by schools there is a long-lasting impact

The importance of individual educational and health needs being recognised and met in school was mentioned across the interviews by interviewees of all ages. This was discussed in reference to physical and mental health as well as specific additional educational needs. The term additional educational needs refers to people who for a variety of reasons may face barriers to education and learning. These barriers makes it more difficult for them to reach their full potential. Examples from our participants included young people with a diagnosis of dyslexia, autism and hearing loss.

Most interviewees with additional needs reported that their individual needs were not well met in their experience within the local education system, this was a similar experience across

different age groups, although a few people in the older group felt that there was probably better understanding and awareness of additional needs now.

One interviewee explained that:

'You were left to your own devices a bit really...I've got friends who are teachers and things like that, you can tell children who have potential and you need to hone them and lead them in the right direction but I don't think back then in schools of that sort of quality, that was happening.' (M 37)

Many interviewees felt they were ignored as their needs were seen as minor or manageable. Teachers were seen to be busy supporting those with more extreme behavioural difficulties in the classroom:

'I feel like they just feel like if you're not really, really severe with alarming difficulty, you're just there.' (M 16).

Some interviewees reflected that there was more support for learning and educational needs as academic achievement was valued, whereas issues around mental health were 'swept under the carpet' and ignored:

'I would say that there was a lot of academic support and teachers that do care about our academic achievement within GCSEs while they have the responsibility over us...but there is somewhat of an ignorance...of mental health issues. Also, they do not have a proper behavioural system in place, it's chaotic. It's quite chaotic.' (M 15)

A lack of recognition and late diagnosis of additional needs and mental health conditions was identified as a particular challenge at school and life beyond for several interviewees. Interviewees felt that there was limited training around additional needs and minimal access to mental health support:

'Obviously, with school, I had absolutely no support or whatsoever with any of that, or with any of the other mental health conditions that I was dealing with...I feel that they didn't have the training. I think it was quite apparent that I was suffering, but I don't think the training was there...I suffered quite a lot of mental health when I was in school, which I didn't know who I could speak to. I wasn't speaking to mum at home, obviously, because she was dealing with so much as well. It wasn't until I was pregnant when I was 28 that a psychologist actually said to me I had ADHD. That was the first time that anyone recognized anything.' (F 30)

Another interviewee explained that his hearing impairment went undiagnosed throughout primary school, into secondary school:

'I wasn't like the best kid, but I'm deaf in one of my ears, and nobody knew that and I didn't know that for some years because everybody wouldn't test it because they thought I was just hyperactive and not listening and stuff. Once they found out and I had helpers with me, that explained stuff to me, because I couldn't hear over other people, I was a lot better.' (M 30)

Others explained that even once they had been diagnosed, their needs were not always acknowledged by teachers, and they experienced little to no differentiation or additional support to access learning. Some felt their needs were poorly understood and this led to a lack of support and understanding of their emotional and behavioural needs:

'The teaching assistants thought that I was just a bad kid when I was having a lot of sensory issues or struggling to emotionally regulate, or a routine threw me off or I was very, very blunt and I just didn't understand what was going on. I used to get punished a lot and I used to get berated...a lot of teachers when they found out that I was autistic would say things like I was never going to amount to anything and that I was useless and I was a waste of space and I'd be living on my parents' sofa for the rest of my life...a lot of these teachers and teaching assistants they used to deny me the accommodations I needed in order to feel safe and be able to work in that environment.' (NB 21)

When asked what support was needed, or would have made a difference, the interviewees prioritised; acknowledgement and acceptance, additional in-class support, differentiation of resources, flexibility within the system and support to access and engage with core lessons:

'Definitely extra support during lessons. One would be having extra English, extra maths lessons. Say I was to drop the GCSE,⁶ and that would give me x amount of lessons free during the week to do extra English, extra maths, extra science.' (M 16)

It is important to recognise that a few interviewees were happy with the support they had received throughout school and this high-quality support and provision was highly valued:

'Yes, there like at my junior school, specifically, there was like a DSP {Designated Specialist Provision} unit. I don't know if that's correct term now, but yes...It was never really a disruption on our education or whatever. There was usually an LSA {Learning Support Assistant Teacher} that would sit with them and stuff like that.' (M 27)

Another particularly positive area of support for one interviewee related to English language support. Schools in Corby have been supported by the council to prepare and cater for the needs of Eastern European migration, mainly from countries such as Poland, through additional funding. The ambitious 2003 Catalyst Corby plan, set out to address the town's structural problems by increasing the towns' population. Hence, the foreign-born population of the town has grown substantially, more than doubling in size since 2004 and making up approximately one-fifth of Corby's total population (ONS 2017a). Schools now offer additional 'English as a foreign language' lessons for children who may need extra language support.

'It was obviously hard when I first came here because I was struggling with English, but after that, it was really good. I really enjoyed going to school in here...yes, I would, even though we had the Polish teacher, which was a lot of support for us, all the English teacher would still

⁶ GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education taken by 15 and 16-year-olds to mark their graduation from the Key Stage 4 phase of secondary education in England, Northern Ireland and Wales

support us. Even in the case that I couldn't speak to her, I could speak with other teachers. There was a lot of support in schoolwork.' (F 23)

Interviewees explained that the way in which their additional needs were met, or often not met, whilst at school had subsequent, lingering long-term consequences across their lives in terms of capabilities for employment and financial security.

Positive experiences of support at school were linked to having a teacher or educational professional advocate on the individual's behalf, or more often, parents having knowledge of the education system and advocating strongly for their child. Parents' knowledge and awareness of a child's support needs and understanding of how the educational, and sometimes health and social care systems work was essential. Understanding the systems, knowing how to navigate them, and more generally having 'social capital' to draw on was clearly a principal factor in experiences of school and life beyond, whether this was further/higher education or employment.

As one interviewee explained:

'{Mum} was really good at finding things that you were entitled to and get in in what you could get because I suppose a lot of people maybe didn't know, you could get a bursary to go there because it was about three or four grand a term and we didn't have to pay any of it. She was just really good at that stuff... I was quite lucky. I got placed at private school for secondary school, which my mum got for me... and I got a bursary for a private school in Northampton...I think my mom just really pushed me to go.' (F 37)

Several interviewees reported similar experiences, noting that they felt they were overlooked (rather than ignored) unless their parents became involved and demanded support:

'They'll help if you really, really have a problem and if your parents are really getting annoyed with the school, they might give you a hand a bit' (M 16)

We found a significant difference between the actual policy landscape in education and the experiences that interviewees reflected on. While there are national and local policies addressing the support of young people with additional needs, and access to mental health support, they are not always met in practice.

In this area, successful conversion factors related to having a mechanism (or often person) to hold people accountable and ensure policy is adhered to. Institutional support was highly variable, often ineffective, without a strong individual who could ensure support was provided. Families needed to have, or in some instances gain, a strong understanding of the system and resource base. This did not seem to link to levels of education or previous experience but rather from an over whelming need to advocate for one's child.

5.3.2 Storyline 2: Perceptions of local employment opportunities differ across ages

Most employment opportunities in Corby were described as low-skilled, including for instance roles in agriculture, manufacturing, and construction, and in service sectors, such as wholesale, retail and restaurants. Many younger interviewees saw these as poor local work opportunities, in terms of money, contracts, and conditions. Zero-hour and precarious contracts, low pay and shift work were discussed as difficult to manage, specifically in relation to the rising cost of living and childcare responsibilities impacting housing and family life.

However, older interviewees had quite different perceptions of local employment opportunities and suggested there was a value in starting out with an employer locally and working your way up within a company, taking advantage of in-work training. Older interviewees reflected that starting in a company and then being inside the system had provided an opportunity to understand their capabilities and to communicate their needs and ambitions to employers as well as receive structural support, mentoring and training. Younger interviewees did not necessarily see this opportunity within the resource base, and their perception of the job market was highly negative.

When asked what employment opportunities were available, one woman (aged 24) told us that: *'Unless you want to work in a warehouse, nothing.'*

Another younger interviewee reflected that:

'I think Corby's got not the best variety of jobs. You work in retail, or you work as like a waitress or something like that...there's not many options I don't think for young people. Most of the work in Corby is factory work. If you can't do factory work, then you're stuck doing waiting and retail. It sucks.' (M 17)

This landscape was well recognised by interviewees of all ages:

'To be honest, it's mostly warehouse and retail work in Corby. There's not much else because the service industry has hit a stalemate, well it's stagnated. There was a point a few years back where we were getting all of these new restaurants and fast-food places and it's kinda stalled really. They've opened up new McDonald's and Pizza Hut but there hasn't been anything new in town in the service industry for a good while' (M 26).

The 2003 urban regeneration plan⁷ did generate new development in Corby, such as the redevelopment of the town centre, including the £40 million Willow Place and civic spaces such as the Corby Cube (Murray & Griffith, 2018) leading to an increase in retail, leisure, and community venues, such as new restaurants. This, as noted by interviewees, did diversify the

⁷ Urban Regeneration Catalyst Corby proposed a key objective to transform local economy and job markets which requires almost £4 billion investment to maximise opportunities through innovative regeneration of space of the Northamptonshire town.

job market. However, insecure work and conditions seemingly to prevail. One interviewee told us:

'There's a lot of agency work with just temporary factory work. It's a lot of industry work, like the steel, a lot of retail. Don't really know to be honest around the rest of it. I guess there's few hotels, I guess, hospitality and that sort of thing.' (M 40)

When asked about their current employment situation some interviewees, particularly younger interviewees, talked about the challenges of zero-hour contracts, unstable employment contracts and the difficulty of constantly looking for new work. Interviewees reported that they had concluded that many jobs were simply not long-term career options or permanent, and they would have to find a way to manage.

In addition to compromising on the type of work they wanted to do, many younger interviewees also talked about the challenges of low pay and having to work several different jobs:

'If I was just with this one job, I probably could not, I would be struggling the whole time...It's probably getting the job that I like, basically, because there are a lot of jobs but it's like you can go there and make money but when you want to progress and do something with yourself, it's hard to find somewhere around Corby, if that makes sense, for people with no experience, let's say.' (M 24)

However, while younger interviewees saw the job market and employment practices as problematic older interviewees were more likely to see the problem as the way in which young people approached work:

'I think it's the competitive rates thing. Just literally just people asking for more money and just hop into another job and then vice-versa' (M 30)

This view was also supported at the story telling workshop in Corby, where one attendee stated, *'make people work, there are a lot of jobs in Corby'* (M 68). He talked about the difficulties of work and housing conditions when his father arrived to work in the steelworks in the 1950s and compared these to the diverse opportunities available now.

A few younger interviewees didn't seem to mind the lack of permanence in the labour market and were happy to move jobs as they viewed low skills factory work as a short-term option or an entry point into the world of work:

'To be honest with you, I don't think factory work's too bad if you're not staying in it your whole life. It's really good pay and you've got-something to keep you on your feet' (M 16)

Indeed, for some, the availability of unskilled or low skilled jobs was attractive and seen as a way of gaining initial employment. Some interviewees who had emigrated to the UK with English as a second language reported that there was a benefit in finding employment opportunities that did not require an initial high level of English:

'Well, first time when I came here, I started working on food factory. I working like warehouse colleagues, just packing on the line. That was easy, simple job. Don't need to speak English, don't need lots of things because the people around always I feel like the people help me. I don't know why, I always feel like everybody supports here.' (F 42)

The interviewee went on to explain that she had the opportunity to develop and build a career:

'I was working like a line operator. I working like a picker packer. There was a lot of experience. After I found my job, now where I am, five years now. Before, I was start from the floor, building the pallet, wrapping the pallet. Step by step, I was start with task leader. After, I was admin on the line and I wish we'll be good position on team leader soon. That means step by step. Here on England, you not have somebody stop you. Even if you not have full education, you can step by step follow the up from the beginning. I think my education has nothing to do here now.' (F 42)

In general, older interviewees talked more about having had good opportunities with local employers to start at an entry level and progress within the organisation. They described being employed on secure contracts and were supported through career progression, training on the job and general positive 'mentoring' from employers/individual managers:

'I started working on that in November, and I was a contractor, so I was paid on day rate, and it was just a stop-gap gig for me. Within a week, I've just adored working for {them} and the people I was working with, and they're fantastic. The opportunity came up with the staff this year to go permanent, so I applied for that and it was obviously successful, which I am ecstatic about. I think it's a fantastic place to work and obviously, it gives me the stability I need to move, which I'm doing now, and to keep a roof over my daughter's head, which is fantastic.' (F 37)

The importance of having key individuals such as an employer, teacher or parent who had the time to understand your needs and advocate and provide guidance was recognised as the key capability factor to career enhancement by several interviewees:

One older interviewee described how her boss had been influential across her life:

'Yes, I do feel appreciated. I've known my boss for about 25 years. She used to run the Youth Club that I used to go to, when I was young.' (F 34)

Strong support from employers was discussed by many older interviewees. Support included gaining experience, career progression and educational support. Examples were provided by two interviewees as detailed below. Both of these interviewees were given the opportunity to complete education funded by their employers.

'I have a couple of project management qualifications. I did Prince2, which is really standard project management qualification in 2015. I did another one called P30 in 2020 or 2019. My learning and development now will all be practice based in what I do, projects and programs, risk management, that kind of thing. They're a bit part of the course for what I do, every five years you're expected to go off and redo it just to make sure you're still keeping up with knowledge. A lot of it on the application within the current place I worked in. If it's not used

where I'm working now and the NHS, obviously funding is a big topic. We do have funding for training and development.' (F 37)

'I always had an interest in advertising and marketing, and so I just set up a route into a good stable company that could provide me with experience that I needed to get where I wanted to be. Then took that year out and then came back and I've dabbled in different industries from electronics, to media publishing, and now in insurance, so really different variety of industries. Luckily, I found the company that I'm in now who are just fantastic at development and really investing in their employees. I would say that I'm happy with where I've got to in my career, whether or not it's something that it will be a lifelong career. If I take a change, I really don't know.' (F 32)

It would obviously be difficult for younger interviewees to reflect on long term support and development opportunities from employers, as most would not yet have received the opportunity to progress and reflect back in this way. However younger interviewees did often identify family support and encouragement as key capability factors to finding appropriate work, one 24-year-old explained that her mother had helped her find work experience and helped her search for jobs:

'This is my sixth year with the department. I started at 19. I did various retail jobs leading up to that. As I left college, before I finished my levels, my mother was very much, you'll get a job or you'll be down to the job centre and we'll force one upon you. {I} basically just kept applying until I found something that was full-time. The job that was full-time that took me on was the Department for Work and Pensions. That's what I do.' (F 24)

Opportunities for higher skilled work were described as limited locally. Interviewees were often employed in positions for which they felt they were overqualified and had accepted lower paid work than they had initially hoped for.

Some interviewees had further and higher educational qualifications, and many of these individuals reported that higher skilled graduate roles were limited in Corby. Younger interviewees talked about moving away for higher education and better employment opportunities and then not returning to Corby.

'I think Corby is pretty much low market. There isn't the higher pays job, there isn't the progression that there are in cities and bigger towns, its more factory production roles, which works for some people I think. I think a lot of people I know that have gone on to get their degrees either have moved away from Corby or have worked outside of Corby since they have that better job.' (M 32)

'No, I would not want to stay in Corby. I don't feel like there's enough availabilities in Corby relating to either education and mainly humanities, if I'm being honest. Well, I don't think so. Obviously, in the future, they could work on getting a university in place with hopefully a good educational that could provide us with good academic development et cetera, but in terms of at

the moment or in the next, let's say, 10 years, I don't believe that there's anything they could do to make me stay here.' (M 15)

Across the interviews with both policy experts and people living in Corby, interviewees discussed the challenges of Corby's geography. Corby is a town in North Northamptonshire, located in the heart of England and its access to good road transport links are strategic assets for its economic development. These have been harnessed by its growing warehousing, distribution, and logistics sectors. Corby can be viewed as a "commuter town". It has strong transport links to many major cities, with access to a range of jobs, including higher paid and higher skilled opportunities. Many interviewees talked about in-migration, people from London are moving to Corby due to its accessibility and lower housing costs than many other parts of the country. This group are likely to commute or work partly from home.

Corby is a rapidly growing town, with a developing economy, the rail service has contributed to its improved connectivity. This has led to more people moving from London due to its attractive lower priced housing. However, the young people we interviewed in Corby did not see the converse, i.e. travel outside of the area for employment, as a possibility, this included those who reflected on the lack of higher skilled jobs locally. There seemed to be a disconnect between the possibilities that connectivity bought and its challenges. For some this was explained by gentrification and changes to the area:

'I found that Corby being slowly but surely gentrified from the working-class town that it was. We have a lot of people moving up from London, buying property and commuting.' (F 24)

'To be honest with you. It's a working-class town. It is what it is, although it's quite good in the sense that, because we've got a main line direct to London, you can get to London in 45 minutes.' (F 37)

Interviewees also talked about how public transportation within Corby does not meet the needs of all residents, particularly those working on the outskirts of the town and people with mobility problems.

'Not everyone can afford taxis or buses all the time. He hasn't got a bus pass, so transport is a big barrier in this town if you ain't got a car.' (F 42)

'I don't agree with what they've just done (the council). They've put the bus fares up, that's ridiculous. People aren't getting the bus.' (M 17)

There appeared to be a gap between the opportunities that exist for employment (both in Corby and through commuting) and the opportunities interviewees were aware of, or considered. Interviewees did not generally identify travelling for work outside of Corby as an option. Those who were seeking skilled work or employment in sectors that were not represented in Corby, did not see commuting as viable, although clearly people moving to Corby did. This disconnect, and the different expectations regarding travel for employment, may be linked to the relatively recent addition of the strong railway link to London in 2009.

While some towns and cities in the UK have strong histories of being commuter areas, and young people see parents and others in their community automatically working, and looking for work, across a large geographical area, this has not been the case in Corby.

New strategies need to be developed to support the changing landscape in Corby. We identified two key successful conversion factors across our data first around guidance and support in navigating employment opportunities and the second related to looking for work across a wider resource base.

Young people seem to need guidance and support to help them understand and navigate local employment opportunities, including introducing the awareness of the possibility (noted by older interviewees) to work one's way up within a company or institution. Very few younger interviewees saw this as part of their resource base, although those who did recognised its value as a conversion factor.

Young people looking for skilled work or careers for which they had trained at university could consider the possibility of living in Corby and commuting. The resource base that young people have to draw on is potentially geographically much larger than they realise or envision. While some interviewees noted the financial cost of commuting, higher salaries may compensate for this. Supporting people to widen their resource space is essential.

5.3.3 Storyline 3: The housing sector is complex and hard to navigate

A recurrent challenge from across the interviews was the complexity of navigating the housing sector, both with regards to finding (and keeping) appropriate accommodation and understanding individual rights as a tenant.

For most interviewees there was a heavy reliance upon family and friends, either for financial support to cover the cost of housing or to simply live with. Several interviewees had experienced homelessness, and many reflected on poor housing conditions and crowded accommodation. Across interviews people were uncertain how they could apply for housing, where they might access schemes and what their rights were in shared privately rented accommodation. Some of this confusion, particularly people being unaware of their rights, had led to people experiencing homelessness and highly insecure or substandard housing.

Interviewees shared individual experiences and circumstances regarding themselves, and where appropriate, experiences of others they knew, becoming homeless due to a breakdown of relationships with family or friends, and not having the financial means to pay a deposit or the weekly or monthly rent payment. In most cases people described having a friend or family member they could stay with in the short term, but some explained that their friends and family lived in small council properties and did not have extra rooms or space for anyone else to live, so were not a suitable long term housing solution.

'I know lots of people that have had to move into the homeless not the homeless shelters, the place where you go in between until you get a house with their families' (F 30)

Talking about what could happen if he couldn't live with his sister, one interviewee explained that:

'Yes. I'd be homeless, probably I could rent a room or something like that but the thing with renting room is you live with different people and they don't live there permanent, so the people keep changing. It's really hard.' (F 23)

Another interviewee described the precarity of his housing situation and having experienced homelessness:

'Before that, I was kicking about on the streets for a while. Before that, I was with my parents. Well, mum and dad have broke up now, so I lived with my mum for a bit after my gran died, and I lived with my dad for a bit after I lived with my mum. Neither of them particularly worked out very well, so yes, ended up where I was. Then yes, I don't know. The HMO- I'll be honest, it's a bit dead, it's not great. I'm like the only English person there, and the only person under the age of 40 as well.' (M 27)

HMOs (house in multiple occupation) were mentioned across interviews. HMOs are dwellings with (1) at least 3 tenants forming more than 1 household and (2) shared toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities with other tenants. For many interviewees HMOs were seen as the only option to secure independent housing, however they were generally not seen as desirable, as noted above. Interviewees explained that they did not want to live in shared accommodation. There were concerns about who one might live with and the quality of the accommodation.

HMOs are regulated but the numbers of such dwellings are rising fast in Corby, thus, impacting local areas and services.⁸ Many young people seemed to be unaware of their rights and were scared of raising complaints in case that led to eviction, as such they were living in what they described as precarious and sub-standard accommodation.

Others were experiencing a hidden type of homelessness, while not living on the streets or in a shelter, they clearly had no secure accommodation and were unsure how to access support:

'Well, I'll be honest, when I was getting in the process of getting the room, I was actually sleeping in the toilet at work. I was lucky the place I was done nightshift, so I could finish my shift at ten o'clock and then go hide in the toilet. That was essentially what I had to do, and then thankfully I managed to get a room.' (M 27)

In general, the high rents, deposits and high house prices were a barrier to long term renting and certainly home ownership for most interviewees:

'Yes, it's house prices. They just seem to have gone up and up and up. It's the situation for being self-employed I guess as well. That's a barrier for us that you need three years books, which he hasn't been doing it again for that long because we weren't here. That's really the barriers.' (F 37)

⁸ See: <https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/people/how-corby-became-the-go-to-destination-for-hmo-landlords-3305192>

Interviewees talked about the need for more council housing and affordable private rental housing. There is chronic shortage of available social housing in Corby with over 1000 households on housing waiting lists and long delays in administration (Whelan, 2019; Local Government Association, 2022). Many interviewees had grown up in council housing and saw it as a desirable option:

'I just grew up on, I think it's class council estate. I'm not too sure. It was good growing up.' (M 16)

Another interviewee explained that: *'I want to get a council house. I don't really want to rent but I'd need a job and then all save up and just hopefully get into a council house at some point.'* (F 27)

Some had actively tried to get council housing and described the challenges:

'I tried to apply for a council house once, but was told that I was so far down the way years and years to get me on there. I gave up on that quite quickly. Then I've never gone back to see. When I left my son's dad, I had a brief discussion, but once again, because my mum was able to put me up for that time, they wouldn't have offered me any council housing.' (F 30)

Looking across the interviews, the most common way in which people were able to find secure housing was through family members. Several interviewees rented from family:

'I actually rent my dad's old house off of him. We used to live in their house, and then when I had my second child, we swapped because I needed a bigger house, they wanted to downsize. I rent off of them.' (F 37)

Another interviewee talked about living with family and not paying rent so that she could save for a deposit for a mortgage:

'I'm trying to save to buy a house, but that's quite difficult given the price of houses these days.' (F 31)

Those who were satisfied with their housing identified key conversion factors related to support either from family or through a government scheme. One interviewee explained that:

'Buying was only made possible really...my dad gave me some money for a deposit. He had a house in Corby that he sold that I was actually renting from him for a short time with a friend and then he gave me a lump sum for deposit and then my husband managed to match his. It was just being lucky with parents really.' (F 37)

Another interviewee explained how she had received family and government support:

'My dad was made redundant. Out of his redundancy package, you've been in that job for over 30 years. With that, he gave me part of the deposit for the house, plus the Help to Buy scheme that was present a few years ago when I got the keys to my house.' (F 24)

Several interviewees had bought houses through government help to buy schemes in this way, and people of all ages reflected that there were fewer government schemes and less support to own a house anymore.

'Without the help of buy scheme, because that covered 40% cost of the house. Without that, it would be very difficult. It's a five-bedroom house that I'm in. To find that somewhere else would be quite difficult, I think. For us, it's not really a seller's market at the moment.' (F 24)

'At that point, they were offering 95% mortgages and stuff like that, which was a real help because just getting that 5% together was a lot better than 10% or 15%. We need a lot more initiatives like that.' (M 37)

Securing appropriate, affordable housing was identified as a clear challenge for people of all ages, interviewees told us that there was limited housing stock generally and that there was specifically very limited access to social housing. To access social housing there are long waits for assessment and during this period many young people explained that they had no alternative accommodation. The local authority received 8212 housing applications in 2021/22 and made property offers to 1,557 applicants. It says there are currently 3033 active applicants and 2207 waiting processing (as of 25 May 2022) (Housing department under strain, 2022)

There are significant challenges in Corby with regards to the housing resource base and it was clear across our data that this was compounded by many young people not understanding how the housing system worked; they were unclear of local schemes and how to access council housing. Many were unclear of their rights, particularly in terms of living in an HMO. Most had not sought advice and were unsure of where advice and guidance around housing could be found.

Conversion factors related to successfully managing the system and finding secure housing, on an individual level this related to family support while on a policy level it was recognised that schemes to support home ownership had been successful in the past but were generally unavailable to those we spoke to. While there are schemes available to support people, they come from a range of different sources and can be difficult to identify and apply for. Young people clearly needed support to understand what support was available and how to access it.

Furthermore, it was clear that the most accessible form of housing for young people in Corby were HMOs which were clearly not desirable to young people. In part this related to poor regulation (or possible illegality) of some HMOs. Understanding individual rights within this and knowing how to complain was confusing and young people were uncertain of how to navigate this. This made HMOs even less desirable.

The older age group that we interviewed reflected on how the successful conversion factors they had employed to access schemes were now much more confusing, there are many different actors within the housing sector and navigating the system was recognised as a huge challenge. Those who had seemingly successfully navigated the challenge either had family

support (in terms of money and advice) or had spent a significant amount of time and energy in understanding their rights and seeking advice from statutory and third sector organisations.

6 Discussion points for (a potential) Reflexive Policy Agenda in Corby

A Reflexive Policy Agenda according to the interpretation of the UPLIFT project, is a co-creation method in which welfare policies are planned, implemented, and evaluated with the active and intense involvement of those social groups to which policies are targeted. In the case of UPLIFT, this social group is vulnerable young people.

In this section we bring together our findings and knowledge of the current policy context in Corby to consider which factors can be changed through a Reflexive Policy Agenda (RPA).

The research presented in this report highlights the gap between young people's ambitions and desired way of living and their current situation and expectations. There is a need for young people to be more involved in policy development so that it meets their needs, reflects how they interact with the resource base and supports them in reaching their full potential.

There are clearly challenging systemic issues that need to be addressed nationally around housing, employment, and education. Negative experiences across these domains are likely to be compounded by the cost-of-living crises in the UK. While we recognise that policy must address these large scale, systems level issues, in this report we are focusing on the local policy agenda in Corby. We are asking how young people in Corby can be supported to achieve better outcomes within the current resource space and how those elements of the resource space that are created locally, can be changed through local policy intervention.

Looking across the storylines detailed in the previous sections it is clearly important to recognise that navigating the resource base successfully generally involved fully understanding the landscape and finding appropriate support and guidance. These were the successful conversion factors that provided young people with the means to move forward and change their circumstances. In the sections below we outline what might be included in a local Reflexive Policy Agenda (RPA).

6.1 Housing

A reflexive policy agenda around housing should work with young people to explore and address two key points:

1. Advice and guidance-there is a clear need for simple easily accessible guidance regarding what the housing rules are locally, as well as where and how to access guidance and support and who to raise concerns with. Guidance and local pathways to support need to be developed with young people to ensure that advice services and complaints processes are transparent and simple.
2. There is a need to work with young people to develop policy specifically around affordable renting and the regulation of HMOs, which our research suggests need tighter local regulation and enforcement. It is important to note that there are already

rules around HMOs in Corby. Any house being converted from a family home to an HMO for more than six people needs planning permission for change of use. However, any house smaller than this does not need planning permission, which is why so many smaller HMOs are able to slip through the net unnoticed (Cronin, 2021). The local authority therefore needs to develop policies with young people on HMOs that reflects the on the ground experience that young people face.

6.2 Education

Our research clearly identifies the importance of addressing the support needs of young people and their families and ensuring that parents' and young people understand the education system and are aware of how to access additional support. There are two key areas of policy which could be developed with young people:

1. Local policy agendas should work with young people and their families to understand the moments of challenge and the support that were successful in their educational experience. Early intervention appears to be key here, as is listening to and treating parents and young people as the experts in their own lives. Local policies should be developed with children and young people as well as parents. This should involve listening to their lived experience to develop policies that explore how support needs can be met in a timely and effective manner.
2. Understanding the education system, knowing how to navigate it, and more generally having 'social capital' to draw on was clearly an important factor in positive experiences of school and further/higher education. Parents and young people need support to understand their rights and access support, local policy should be developed to provide transparent and easily accessible advice and support.

6.3 Employment

Our research in Corby has highlighted the need to support young people to engage with a wider range of different employment opportunities and see the possibilities of in work training and more informal development in order to expand their resource base. We identified three key areas to explore further in a reflexive policy agenda:

1. There is a need to highlight the opportunities available for young people to work their way up in companies locally. These opportunities need to be genuine long-term possibilities with secure contacts and must be paid fairly. Young people need to be involved in developing policy regarding what 'good' employment looks like and the value of in-work mentoring and education.
2. Many of the young people we interviewed (as well as experts) reported a lack of adequate careers guidance in schools. In particular, for those individuals who did not receive support and advice from family and friends about the world of work, access to

employability skills training and careers advice in school was a key factor in successfully moving into and remaining in the world of work. Many reported needing support to bridge the worlds of education and the labour market. Working with young people to develop policy regarding careers guidance and employability training is essential to bridge this gap.

3. Young people seeking graduate employment or high skilled work, need to be engaged in developing policy guidance that supports this ambition. This area should be considered in terms of both housing and employment, and should explore how young people can be supported to move back to Corby post university or supported to stay and commute as they develop their careers.

Finally, it is clearly essential to involve young people in developing policies that support them and future young people to thrive in their education and employment and live in secure appropriate housing. Across these domains we have shared the challenges that young people face and identified ways in which policies could be developed to support young people to expand their resource base.

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8 Appendix

APPENDIX A: CORBY EMERGING THEMES

Uplift Theme	Emerging themes from data
Education	<i>Addressing/meeting support needs.</i> The importance of needs being recognised and met in school was mentioned across the data. This was discussed in reference to physical and mental health as well as additional educational needs.
	<i>Knowledge and awareness of what's out there and how systems work.</i> This relates to the individual and their family/support system. Understanding the education system, knowing how to navigate it and more generally having 'social capital' to draw on was clearly an important factor in experiences of school and further/higher education.
Employment	<i>Quality of employment opportunities.</i> Many interviewees described local work opportunities as poor-in terms of money, contracts, and conditions. Zero-hour contracts and very low pay were discussed as difficult generally, but also specifically in relation to managing housing and families. Several interviewees described a lack of work beyond entry level positions and felt there was a lack of local 'good' work opportunities. <i>Good employers.</i> Older interviewees talked about having had good opportunities with local employers-being taken on and supported, through career progression, educational support and general positive 'mentoring' from employers/individual managers.
Housing	<i>Poor quality housing.</i> Interviewees talked about living with family/friends (not out of choice), moving into HMOs, several experienced homelessness (both vulnerable on streets and more invisible homelessness on sofas etc). Others reflected on poor housing conditions (damp etc) and crowded accommodation if staying with family/friends. <i>Lack of local affordable housing.</i> Some older interviewees had secured housing in private renting or mortgages. Many (across the ages) reported that there is little opportunity to secure housing-schemes (help to buy?) have finished, harder to find financial support and prices have increased dramatically (buying and renting).
Geography	<i>People thinking of relocating to find better opportunities.</i> Accessibility of the nearest major cities and lower housing costs than many other parts of the country. <i>Public transport does not meet the needs of all residents.</i> Particularly those working on the outskirts of the town and people with mobility problems

[illegible]