



Policy Brief

Youth Policy Making in Corby





Introduction

This policy brief builds on the work of a pan-European study on youth inequality called the UPLIFT project. It addresses some of the key findings from local UPLIFT research in Corby, focusing on the study's implications for North Northamptonshire Council, community groups and other organisations engaged in the local policy agenda.

Information, guidance and decent local employment opportunities are more available than many young people living in Corby imagine.

They often do not know what information or support is at hand, nor how to navigate the complex local housing sector and pathways from education into employment. Young people need to be involved in discussions about how information relating to these areas can be better articulated and how existing provision can be strengthened. Having a voice in the development of other policies, too, would benefit the local community, the local economy and – of course – young people themselves. The brief concludes with case studies on participatory policy making from elsewhere in Europe.

We recognise that schools, services and local authorities currently operate within an extremely challenging environment, with pressures on time, budgets and other resources. Our experience suggests that practically and meaningfully engaging young people in the local policy agenda can be achieved with modest resource inputs – and yet this process can have a substantial impact on their lives and prospects, with positive effects on the local economy too.



The UPLIFT project

How do young people experience and adapt to inequality? The UPLIFT project aims to understand related patterns and trends, with a focus on housing, education and employment in 16 urban areas across Europe. The project's partners, with young people and their communities, are also co-designing a tool that involves young people in the creation, implementation and monitoring of policies seeking to reduce inequalities (piloted in four out of the 16 urban locations (Amsterdam, Barakaldo, Sfântu Gheorghe and Tallinn). Through the reflexive policy making agenda, UPLIFT's objective is a new, sustainable, participatory policy process, where young people are actively contributing to policies that directly influence their life chances.

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Key findings in Corby

There is a lasting impact on vulnerable young people if their needs are not met while still at school. Some have additional needs or mental health conditions requiring early diagnosis and support. Young people benefit when they have parents, teachers or other professionals who can advocate on their behalf. Parents are better able to do this when they understand the system.

“ *[Mum] was really good at finding things that you were entitled to... I was quite lucky.* ”

There is a gap between young people's current situations and their aspirations. Without access to comprehensive, accessible advice and guidance, many young people do not fully understand their rights, nor the opportunities available to them. Frequently, young people and their families are unaware of the many services and sources of advice that exist. Successful navigation from education into local employment means understanding fully their options and the help available to support different choices. Young people and their families also need support to understand how they can engage with and influence systems.

The attractiveness of local employment opportunities increases with age. Younger participants in our research tended to view local jobs as being low skilled and poorly paid, whereas older participants saw the value of starting out with a local employer and working their way up. In-work training and mentoring are seen as valuable parts of these local opportunities for career development and progression.



I was a contractor, so I was paid on day rate, and it was just a stop-gap gig for me... The opportunity came up with the staff this year to go permanent... 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.

The local housing sector is complex, and young people find it challenging to navigate. The young people who spoke to us were uncertain how they could apply for housing, where they might access schemes and what their rights were in shared, privately rented accommodation. They find the housing sector easier to navigate when they have spent significant time understanding their rights and seeking advice. Local information, advice and guidance services may be able to support them more fully in doing so.



Probably I could rent a room or something like that, but the thing with renting room(s) is you live with different people and they don't live there [permanently], so the people keep changing. It's really hard.

Young people in Corby want security and affordability. When they can cover housing and childcare costs, and when they have access to secure housing and employment, young people can be independent from their families and live richer, more fulfilled lives.



Recommendations

Strengthened information, advice and guidance through the involvement of young people

Young people are better able to navigate the gap between their current situations and their ambitions when they have a good understanding of what is available to them, according to our research. Advice and guidance services can be strengthened, as a first step, by involving young people in conversations about what is needed to make these services simple, accessible, and transparent:

- **Housing** - Young people can help services to articulate better the local housing rules, where and how they can access support, and how best to raise concerns if they are facing difficulties.
- **Education and careers advice** - In-school and post-school services can be supported through the involvement of young people, with a particular focus on understanding the education system, how to access employability skills training and how to navigate the pathway between education and employment.

Crucially, too, young people and families need better information about the provision and opportunities that already exist. There is already much in the way of high-quality support and advice, as well as secure local employment opportunities – but young people often do not know what is available or how to access it. We identified several areas where young people would benefit from greater awareness, including the progression opportunities available in local companies, the viability of commuting from Corby to highly skilled jobs elsewhere, the schemes available to help young people access housing, and the rights of tenants living in privately rented accommodation.

It is only through the involvement of young people that clarity on how to access existing services and support – as well as clear articulation of opportunities – can be achieved. Young people also benefit when their parents or carers have a good understanding of local systems and services, suggesting that families should be involved in discussions about local information, advice and guidance too.

Our research identified several priority policy areas for young people, including:

- **Increasing the provision of programmes that support local companies to offer young people secure, fairly paid employment**, with access to both training and progression opportunities across a range of sectors (and especially those sectors most likely to lead to skilled, stable employment).
- **Supporting graduates to return to Corby** once they have completed their studies, and enabling highly skilled young people to remain in the area through appropriate housing and employment policies.
- **Prioritising early intervention** to help young people who are experiencing challenges with education, housing or employment, and working out how to build this early intervention into existing guidance services. This policy focus would have the added benefit of likely significant cost savings for the local authority.



Collaborative formation of other local policies

There is a real, pressing need for young people in Corby to voice their needs and to influence the policies that might help these needs to be met. While these policy areas are far reaching, the specifics of involving young people in conversations about policy development – and the interventions that may arise from these – are not, as the following section demonstrates.

The benefits for the local authority of a participatory policy agenda are significant:

- **Responsive, targeted policies.** Such an agenda means that policy responses are tailored to the needs of local young people, reflecting their lived experiences and priorities.
- **Greater legitimacy of policies and the policy-making process.** Direct involvement of young people in policy creation increases transparency and has a positive impact on the perceived legitimacy of the both the processes and the resulting policy agenda.
- **Greater community knowledge, service use and impact.** This participatory agenda entails a more deeply embedded understanding of local policies among young people, families and the groups and services that support them, leading to greater potential take-up of services and improved pathways for young people.
- **Economic effects.** Importantly, this agenda is likely to bring medium-term cost savings through enabling early intervention for those experiencing education, employment or housing challenges – thereby avoiding the greater costs implied by supporting young people who have slipped out of the system. There are also potential long-term economic gains seen through a more highly skilled workforce, a higher youth employment rate and stronger pathways from education into local jobs.

Watch “Voices and stories of young people in Corby” on YouTube:





How to involve young people in policy formation

Participatory policy making takes as its starting point the position that policy can only be responsive to the needs of individuals, households or communities if it is transparently developed, implemented and monitored in cooperation with its intended beneficiaries.

The UPLIFT project extends this to a process of “Reflexive Policy Making”, which becomes embedded on an ongoing basis. RPM aims to change the approach of policy designers and increase the capabilities of young people in order that they can generate changes together.

During the process young people are empowered to be able to enter into policy discussion with policy makers and implementers. The process is supported by facilitators who help build trust and common understanding among both young people and institutional stakeholders.

The UPLIFT project has produced a range of materials to help local groups undertake Reflexive Policy Making processes. You can find out more about the process in our additional [policy brief](#), and on each of the key stages in our [Guidebook](#), along with training materials and videos [on our website](#).



Stages in the participatory policy creation process



A mindset and commitment - Policy co-creation is a deep process which requires commitment from all stakeholders and a willingness to challenge traditional power dynamics.



Preparation - Planning with stakeholders about objectives, roles, resources and capacity.



Creating a youth board - In collaboration with a range of organisations, using supportive and inclusive methods, a diverse Youth Board is recruited.



Narrowing the focus and scope - Young people and institutional stakeholders identify the policy areas for action. The decision about the scope has implications for the way in which the co-creation process is organized and the expected outcomes.



The co-creation process - Capacity building, trust building and creative activities underpin successful co-creation. Involving a specific youth facilitator is key to an equal, safe and empowering process for all participants.



Towards a policy agenda - The stage at which the institutional and systemic realities must be navigated to identify what can be achieved in practical terms.



Policy implementation - Highly dependent on the local context, communication and engagement is essential to achieve uptake of the policy recommendations.



Reflection & evaluation - Throughout the process it is essential to engage in reflexive practice – continually learning and evaluating to inform next steps.





Participatory policy making in action

A local Youth Board collaborated with the Municipality, housing association De Key, resident organization !WOON and Delft University of Technology in order to shed light on the current housing problems of young people and formulate shared policy approaches and tools to tackle the most urgent problems.

Over two years, the Youth Board: developed a range of ideas for tackling the housing shortage, including a virtual platform for young house seekers which is being explored for development, and produced a manifesto for the municipality of Amsterdam which was presented to the Municipal councillor responsible for housing in the city.

The Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AYEC) collaborated with the University of Tartu to improve services benefiting NEET youth and, in particular, improve their educational attainment and outcomes and access to the labour market. 40 young people in vulnerable life situations were involved in the process in order to shed light on the current education, employment and housing problems facing young people and the solutions that young people see feasible to tackle their problems.

In the co-creation with young people, a new service model has been produced: The "Cross-sectoral NEET-status youth support and cooperation model of services for local governments. Description of the future model". Young people and representatives of different city institutions jointly designed a range of possible support paths (services).



A participatory policy making process brought together young people living in the Municipality, policy makers from the Barakaldo City Council and researchers from Orkestra- Basque Institute of Competitiveness, who collaborated over nine months to improve urban housing policies for young people.

As a result, the stakeholders involved have developed a reflexive policy agenda including four proposals oriented to adapt these policies to the real needs of the youth. Moreover, the process has been oriented towards the empowerment of the young people involved, allowing them to improve their personal skills, such as their knowledge on the topic, their attitudes and behaviours towards civic participation, their general socio-political skills and interest in urban development planning.

Two groups of stakeholders - a Youth Board (group of vulnerable young people) and institutional representatives - worked on identifying the causes that hinder the access to education for vulnerable young people and how to tackle these. They worked in parallel at first, then in joint groups within the framework of a co-creation process.

During the joint sessions they identified public policy proposals and created an action plan that can be implemented at the local level and can offer solutions to some of the problems identified. Besides these proposals that had been embedded in the Reflexive Policy Agenda, the biggest gains of the activity in Sfantu Gheorghe was that vulnerable young people were empowered to have their voice heard and that the institutional representatives developed a greater understanding of the benefits of cooperation and co-creation.

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