

What are the main challenges facing young people in coastal communities?

Latest findings from the Coastal Youth Life Chances project

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Aims of this project

In what ways does growing up in a coastal community impact on young people's experiences, aspirations and life chances?

In light of these experiences, what are the solutions young people propose to improve their coastal communities?



Mixed method study: Data we draw on



Quantitative data

Longitudinal cohort studies (Understanding Society and Next Steps) enable us to look at long-term impact



Qualitative case studies in five areas

East of England (Great Yarmouth & Lowestoft); Torbay (Paignton & Torquay); Barrow-in-Furness; Blackpool (and Fleetwood); and East Sussex (Newhaven, Peacehaven & Seaford)



So far engaged with...

197 young people aged 15-24, using in-depth interviews, mapping workshops and creative co-production



Also...

50 local policymakers and practitioners from around England

Main areas of interest

Education

Employment

Housing

Mental health

Youth-friendly spaces and youth services

Place-attachment and belonging

Outward migration

Youth inclusion in local decision-making

Youth mental health

- Our research shows that young adults residing in the most deprived coastal areas of England face a double whammy of poor mental health.
- They are both more likely to rate their mental health lower and more likely to live with an undiagnosed mental health condition, than if they had lived inland.
- The primary explanation (so far) lies in the economic and social challenges that people in deprived coastal communities face. Household incomes and private renting are key factors.
- Further enquiry is needed to identify reasons for the remaining mental health gap.

Educational outcomes

Longitudinal survey data
(2006 – 2022)

- Coastal youth are less likely to go on to a get a degree-level qualification when compared with young people from inland areas.
 - And individuals living in the 20% most deprived coastal areas face greater hurdles.
- This coastal disadvantage was found even after controlling for individual-level and family background characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status).
- Do area-level characteristics also influence the outcome? Yes, partly explained by growing up in neighbourhoods that are income deprived and “education deprived” (% with low qualifications, poor school attendance, etc).
- But again, these only partly explain the coastal association. Further research required.

Youth spaces: nothing to do and nowhere to go

- Common theme, from young people and policymakers and practitioners
- Lack of youth clubs and social infrastructure where they feel welcome.
- But also a lack of commercial spaces that are youth-friendly due to the decline of the high street.
- Affordability and seasonality – key issues
- Surprising lack of use of beaches and other coastal amenities.
 - Reports that some young people have *never* been to the seaside, and some haven't been for years.
 - Why? The beaches are not clean or safe, or they feel the beaches are for tourists, not for locals.

Lack of youth-friendly spaces is important because it contributes to...



Young people feel marginalised from their communities



Sense of disconnection from the place where they live



Anti-social behaviour



Desire to move away from their communities



May also contribute to lower mental health and wellbeing



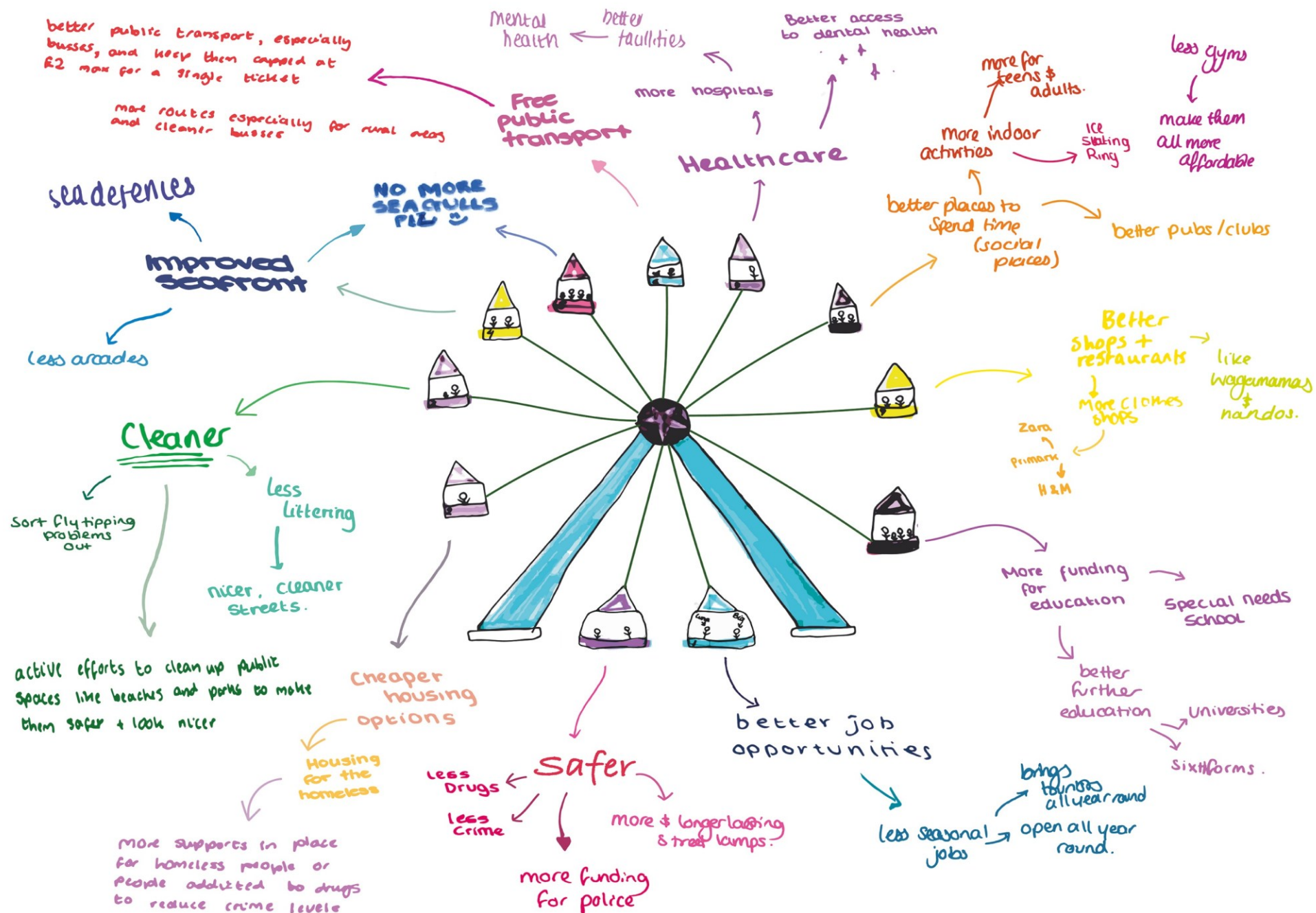
Recommendations for the APPG (so far)

- **Include young people** aged 15-25 in local planning and in local decision-making.
- **Lobby for funding to (re)open youth clubs and create youth-friendly infrastructure** in public spaces: won't solve everything, but it's a start and a comparatively easy.
- Prioritize **prevention and diagnosis of mental health** for young adults living in the most deprived coastal communities of England.
- Reduce high concentrations of poverty in coastal areas, particularly for children.

My town in 2030

What young people in the East of England told us they want for their towns

This visual was co-produced with students from East Norfolk Sixth Form College, LivingMaps Network and UCL)



Forthcoming findings in 2026

Employment

- Are coastal youth less likely to get “good” jobs?
- How are coastal communities preparing young people for Green Jobs? What are the barriers, challenges and opportunities?

Housing

- What are young people’s experiences of finding independent housing in coastal communities? (quantity, quality, and experience of insecure accommodation and being unhoused).

Youth inclusion in local decision-making

- To what extent are young people included in place-based policy initiatives? A case study of Barrow-in-Furness

Research team

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Publications to date

- Keating, A., Clark, E., Whewall, S., Yue, Z., Cameron, C., Murray, E., & Jivraj, S. (2025). [*Young people & coastal communities: Local policymaker and practitioner perspectives: Interim report from the UCL Coastal Youth Life Chances project*](#). London: UK.
- Murray, E.T., Keating, A., Booker, C., Cameron, C., Whewall, S., & Jivraj, S. (2025). Is it the place or the people in the places? Exploration of why young people in deprived coastal communities of England have worse mental health than their peers inland. *Wellbeing, Space and Society*, 100307. Doi: [10.1016/j.wss.2025.100307](#).
- Keating, A., & Whewall, S. (2025). [*Not settling for the lacklustre life? The role of local employment opportunities in youth mobility aspirations in coastal towns in England*](#). Presentation at the seminar series organised by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.
- Murray, E. T., Keating, A., Cameron, C., Benchekroun, R., Whewall, S., Booker, C., & Jivraj, S. (2024). Residence in coastal communities in adolescence and health in young adulthood: An 11-year follow-up of English UKHLS youth questionnaire respondents. *Health & Place*, 87. doi:[10.1016/j.healthplace.2024.103239](#)
- Keating, A., Benchekroun, R., Cameron, C., & Whewall, S. (2024). Movers, returners and stayers: the role of place in shaping the (im)mobility aspirations of young people in coastal towns. *Journal of Youth Studies*. doi:[10.1080/13676261.2024.2337932](#)

Publications in progress

- Keating, A., Yue, Z., Jivraj, S. & Murray, ET. **Exploring spatial inequalities in educational outcomes: Are young people in coastal communities less likely to get a degree-level qualification?** Under review with *British Journal of Sociology*.
- Whewall, S., Keating, A., Cameron, C. & Clark, E. **Youth belonging and social exclusion in English coastal communities: Experiences from the East of England.** *Journal of Youth Studies*
- Cameron, C., Clark, E., Jivraj, S., Keating, A., Murray, ET & Whewall, S. **Coastal places and children's leisure time: Social infrastructure and children's wellbeing.**
- Keating, A., Clark, E., Whewall, S., Yue, Z., Cameron, C., Murray, E., & Jivraj, S. (2026). **Coastal youth and housing: A short report.**