



the  
**wheels**  
project

**Planning a sustainable future**

# The Wheels Project – our background and context

## Over 40 years of service...

The Wheels Project Limited\* is a registered Charity based in Bristol and since 1979 has been delivering education programmes in motor vehicle studies to disadvantaged and disaffected teenagers who live in Avon. Since then, we have developed, adapted and changed a range of services to suit the changing needs of these young people and their communities. We work primarily with young people who are failing in mainstream education, show low aspirations, low motivation and challenging behaviours.

The Wheels Project seeks to unlock the potential of these young people by creating opportunities for them to channel their energy and build their confidence to promote their social inclusion for the public's benefit.

We have a small dedicated and highly skilled team of Staff and Trustees who are committed to making a difference to the lives of these young people through the delivery of practical programmes which meet their needs and that of their communities. Young people are at the heart of our work and what we do.

We work in collaboration with a wide range of organisations with which we share common values and goals in equality, diversity and inclusivity.

We aim to:-

- **Engage** with and motivate disaffected and at risk young people to help them feel they have the capacity to achieve their potential.
- **Educate** young people in vehicle use, repair and maintenance to enable them to make a positive contribution during and complete educational courses, leading to positive outcomes.
- **Encourage a behaviour change** in young people, building upon their increased sense of achievement and self-esteem so that they reduce previous risky behaviour and contribute positively to society.

\* The project was originally known as 'The Youth and Community Health Trust', becoming 'The Avon Motor Project' in 1984 and then 'The Wheels Project' in 1992/93.

## Our context...

We work with individuals and groups from across the Avon area, taking referrals from mainstream schools, alternative learning providers, and other youth agencies.

During our over 40-year history we have adapted our service offering to keep pace with the changing needs and demands of our referrers.

The last decade has seen us adapt and flex as our partners and referrers have grappled with the challenges of financial austerity, a period of stagnation, and in some cases decline, in the numbers of young people, as well as the challenges we all encountered with the global COVID-19 pandemic.

We offer a range of programmes, including our karting programme, our servicing programme and our community vehicle programme. We also support groups through the British Schools Karting Championship.

We are funded through contributions received from our referrers, as well as from the generous support of a number of Trusts, many of whom we have long and continuing associations with.



In 2020 we were awarded the Queen's award for voluntary service in recognition of our work in our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. This award was a tremendous testament to the hard work of our students, staff, trustees and partners as well as the ongoing support of our funders.

As an organisation we have benefitted hugely from the continuity of service and association with a number of key staff, especially our General Manager who has been with us since the creation of the project. The next few years will present us with both opportunities and risks, as we look to appoint the next generation of staff through whom we will continue to support young people across Avon.



# The Wheels Project – contextual facts and figures

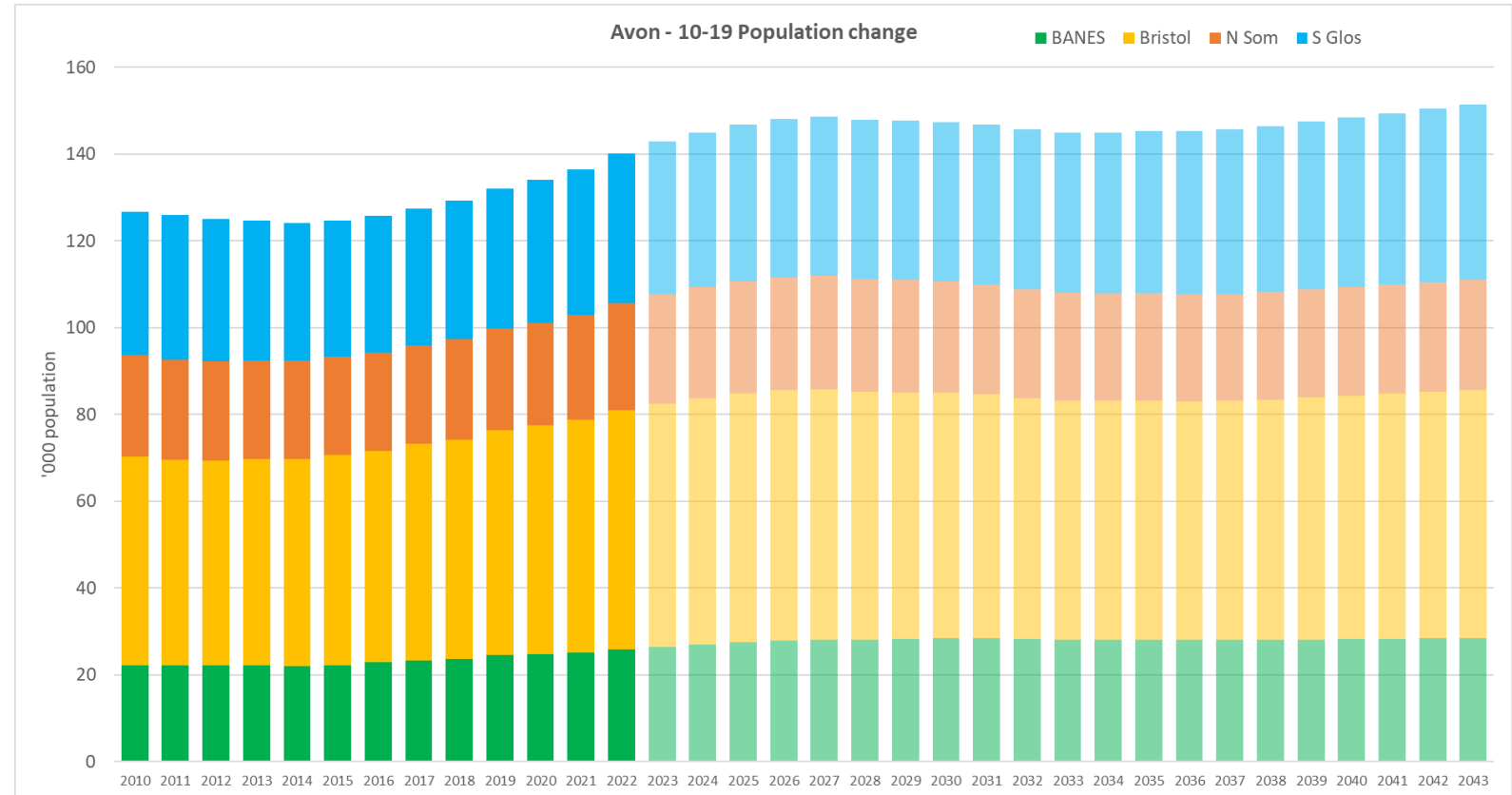
## A growing demographic

After a period of stagnation, and even a small decline in the overall population aged 10-19 during the middle of the last decade, we have seen significant growth across Avon.

The population of those in the 10-19 age bracket is 140,100 at 2022 – having grown by 13% since 2014. This growth is forecast to continue, with a further rise of 6% forecast by 2027.

All of our local authority areas have seen growth in this age group, and are forecast to see further growth over the next 5 years:-

- BANES +8.6%
- Bristol +4.7%
- North Somerset +5.6%
- South Gloucestershire +7.0%

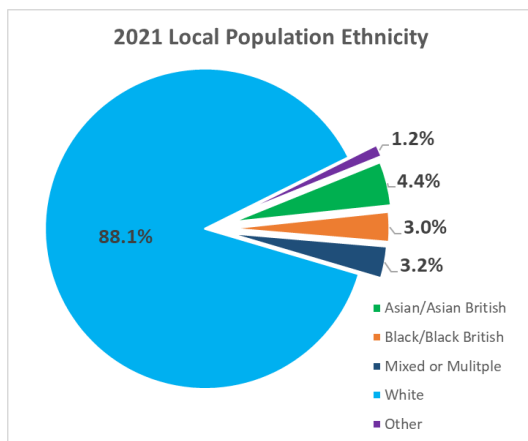
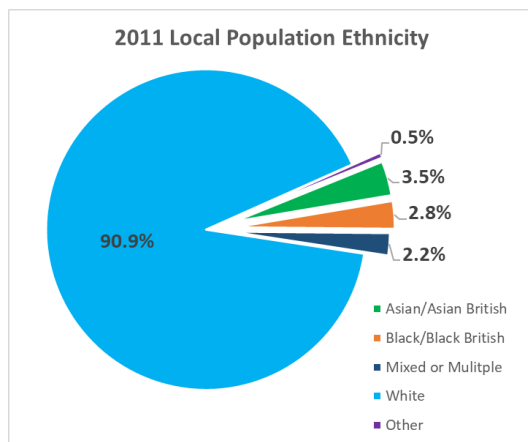


Whilst population growth alone does not translate to a growth in demand for the services Wheels provides, it is a good indicator that demand for our services is unlikely to diminish any time soon.

# The Wheels Project – contextual facts and figures

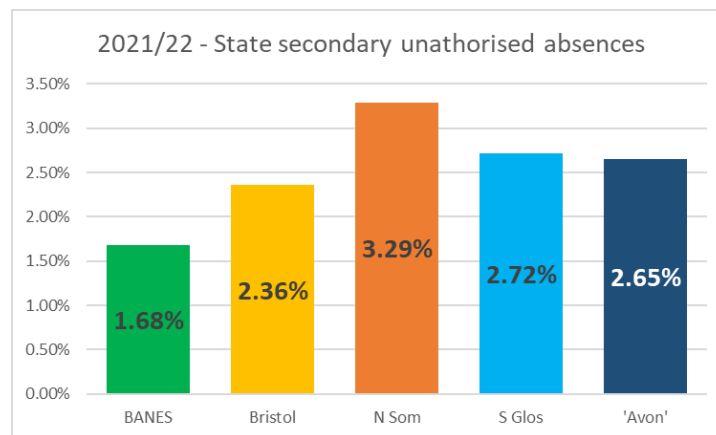
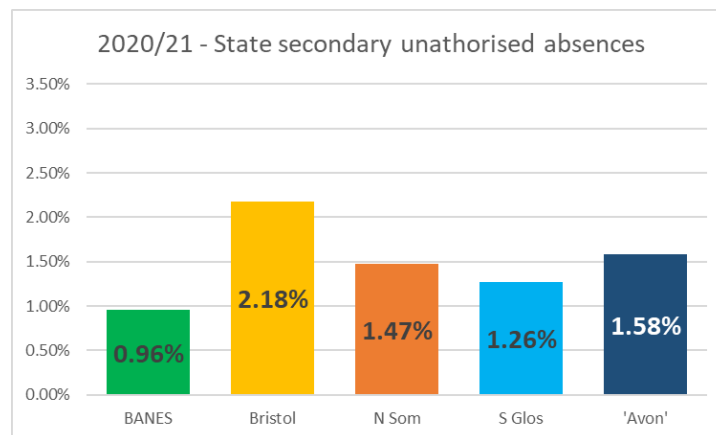
## A more diverse population

Not only is our local population growing, but we also know that this is becoming more and more diverse, requiring us to continue to consider the extent to which the offer provided by Wheels is meeting the needs of all our communities.



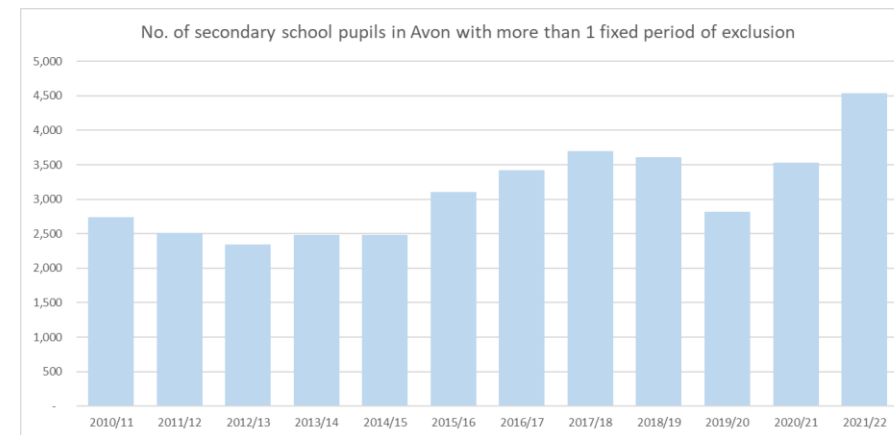
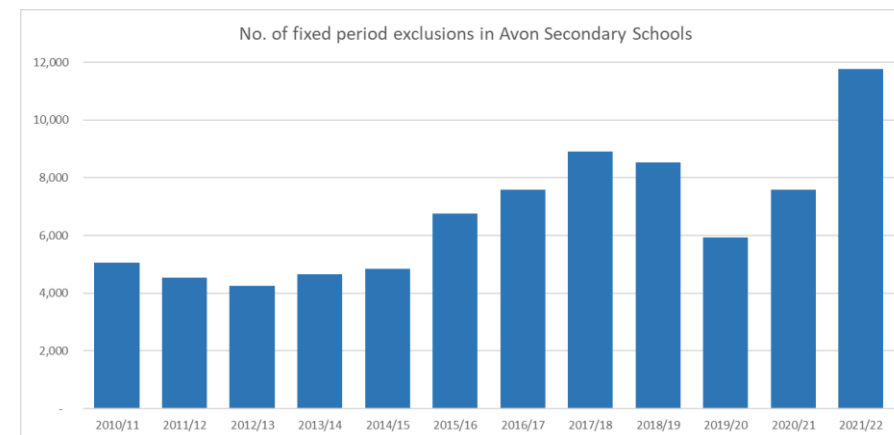
## School unauthorised absences

Post pandemic there are growing signs of an increase in the volume of unauthorised absences being recorded by our local schools.



## School exclusions

Post pandemic there are growing signs of a continued increase in the volume of exclusions across our secondary schools



## The Wheels Project – contextual facts and figures

Prior to the pandemic there were signs of a growing trend in a deterioration in the **mental health of young people**, a trend which the pandemic has potentially accelerated. In October 2021, the NHS published the results of their survey into the Mental Health of Children and Young people in England. The key findings from this work were:

Rates of probable mental disorders have increased since 2017; in 6-to-16-year-olds from one in nine (11.6%) to one in six (17.4%), and in 17-to-19-year-olds from one in ten (10.1%) to one in six (17.4%).

39.2% of those aged 6 to 16 years in 2021 had experienced deterioration in mental health since 2017, and 21.8% experienced improvement. Among those aged 17 to 23 years in 2021, 52.5% experienced deterioration, and 5.2% experienced improvement.

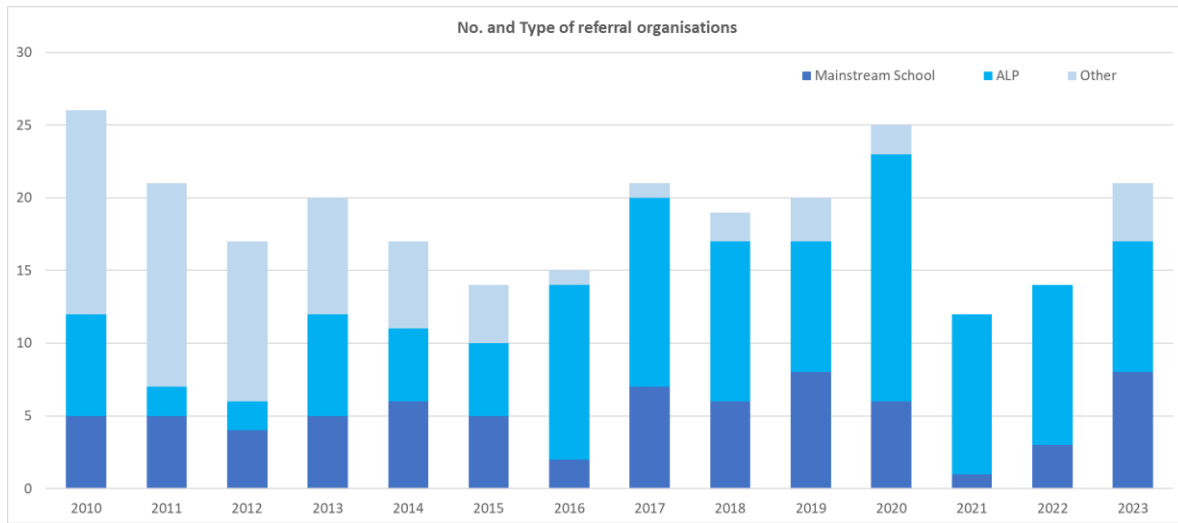
The proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems increased between 2017 and 2021, from 6.7% to 13.0% in 11-to-16-year-olds and from 44.6% to 58.2% in 17-to-19-year-olds.

In 2021, problems with sleep on three or more nights of the previous seven affected over a quarter (28.7%) of 6-to-10-year-olds, over a third (38.4%) of 11- to-16-year-olds, and over half (57.1%) of 17-to-23-year-olds. Across all age groups figures were much higher in those with a probable mental disorder (59.5%, 74.2%, 86.7% respectively).

Overall, 10.6% of 6-to-16-year-olds missed more than 15 days of school during the 2020 Autumn term. Children with a probable mental disorder were twice as likely to have missed this much school (18.2%) as those unlikely to have a mental disorder (8.8%).

At the Wheels we are engaging with those pupils at real risk of becoming disengaged, working with them to channel their energy and rebuild their confidence. The prevalence and growth of mental health issues these young people are experiencing is therefore a significant feature of our work.

# The Wheels Project – operational facts and figures



## Referral organisations

We have seen the number and profile of our referral organisations change over the last decade. There has been a reduction in referrals from ‘other’ organisations (youth offending teams, social services, probation) which is perhaps reflective of the wider changes which have impacted on these types of organisation, although we are encouraged by recent return of referrals from these organisations.

Our referrals from schools has stayed relatively static during the period, reflecting the fact that we have maintained strong working relationships with a good cohort of our local schools despite the changes and challenges they have been through during this time.

Referrals from ALP’s has been more volatile, but currently they account for the largest number of referral bodies we work with – reflective of the fact that our service offer is meeting the needs of these agencies who are under less pressure than mainstream schools to retain individuals within a school setting.

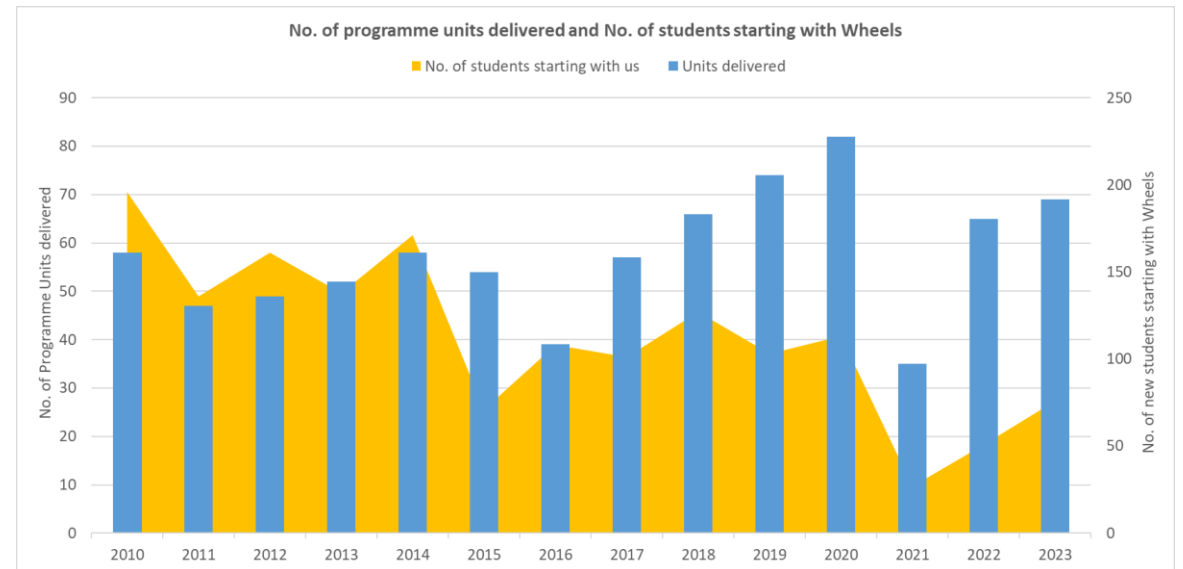
## Students and Programme Units

During the past decade we have seen a decline in the number of new students starting with Wheels, whilst at the same we’ve been able to sustain and grow the number of programme units being delivered.

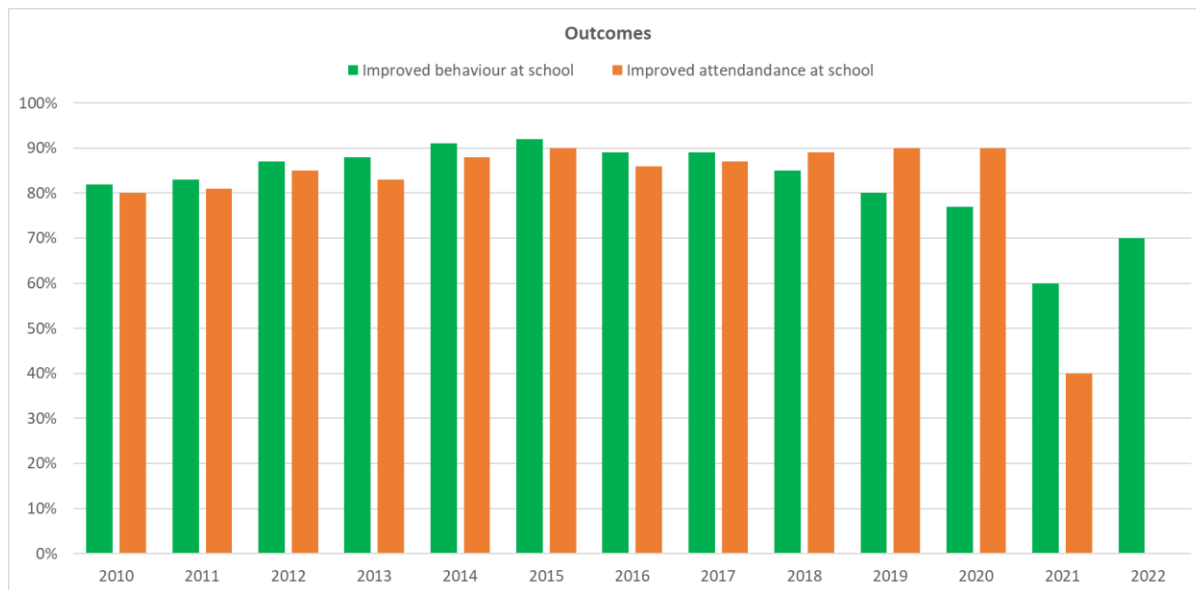
In 2019/20 we delivered 178 individual programme units, the highest delivered at any point during this period. During the same year we had 113 students starting with us – one of the lowest numbers at any point during this period.

This reflects the increasing trend in students completing multiple programmes with us. In 2010/11 a student would complete an average of 2.5 units with us. In 2019/20 this figure stood at 3.9 units.

The pandemic in 2020 and 2021 had an impact on both units and student numbers, however we have been encouraged by the rate at which we have recovered from this and are seeing our numbers begin to return towards our pre-pandemic position.



# The Wheels Project – operational facts and figures



## Delivering outcomes

Through feedback received from our referrers we know that we continue to meet both their needs and the needs of our students. We measure stats for both of these and neither has dropped below 90% since 2007/08, with satisfaction in 2022/23 at 99% for referral organisations and 97% for students.

The outcomes of our students have remained high throughout the last decade, with improvements in behaviour and attendance at school being reported for the vast majority of our students, as well as an encouraging number going into further education once they have left school. The pandemic has impacted on these outcomes, both in terms of our impact and the receipt of this information from referrers – this is something we will be looking to better understand in future.

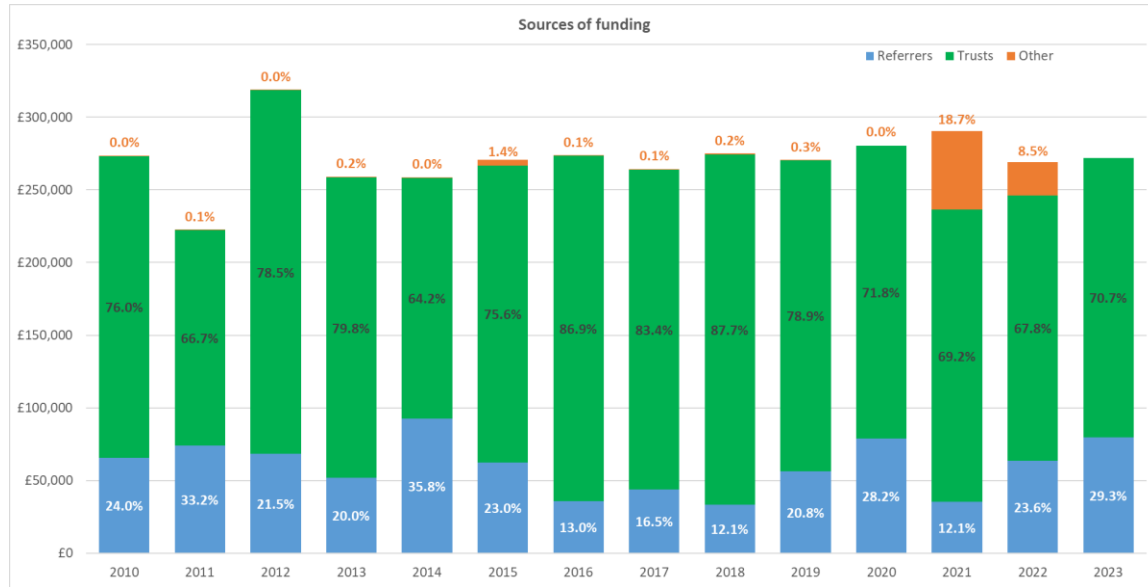
In 2018/19 92% of our students showed improved behaviour at school, 90% saw improved attendance at school, and of those who left school 88% went into further education.

## Community impact

Since 2007/08 we have gifted **50** community vehicles that have been repaired and put through their MOT by our students. We have supported a large range of different community organisations through this programme...



# The Wheels Project – financial facts and figures



## Funding

The sources of our funding have continued to evolve over the last decade. Over time we have become more reliant on funding from trusts, with variable contributions from referral organisations. This shift reflects the challenging financial constraints which we know our referral organisations have had to manage as public spending austerity has impacted on budgets.

Like many other organisations we relied upon the receipt of job retention scheme and other COVID related grant funding during the pandemic. However, as the graph demonstrates there has been a more recent trend, either side of the pandemic, seeing an increase in the funding from referral organisations. This coincides with a review and increase of our charges, which has been implemented without impacting on the demand and number of referrals we're receiving.

The average funding received from referral organisations for each student has therefore increased over the past decade. In 2010/11 we received from referral bodies an average of £334 for each student. In 2022/23 we averaged £1,050 per student.

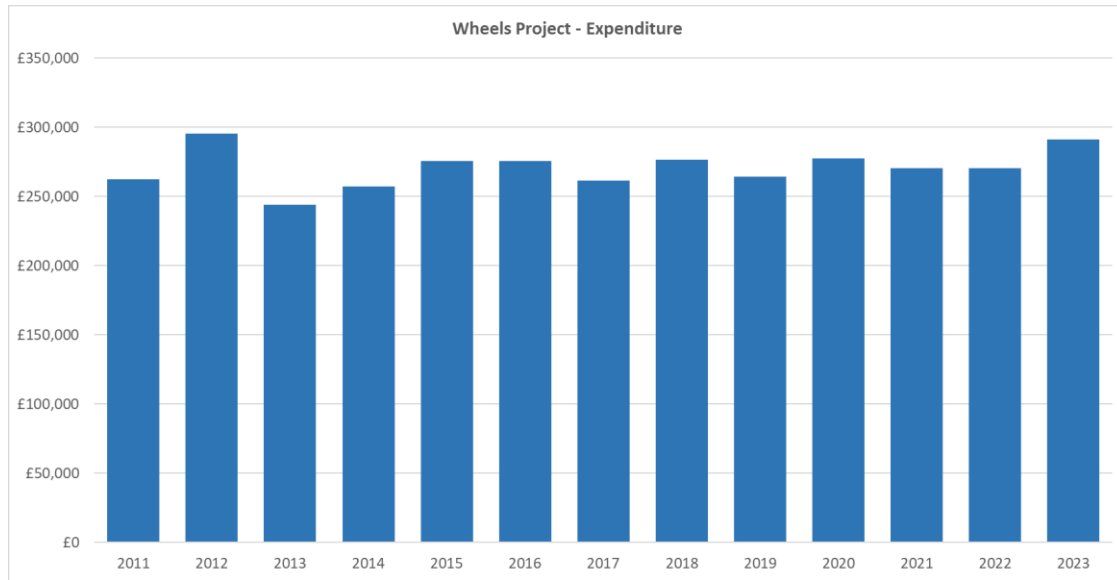
Despite the increased levels of funding from referrers over the last 6 years, we remain reliant on the support from a wide range of Charitable Trusts and Foundations to make up the 70% of funding required to meet our annual expenditure. Since 2010/11 we have been supported by a large number different trusts from whom we have received an average of £205k p.a.

In 2022-23 we received funding from 21 'Trusts' all of whom have supported Wheels before for at least 3 years and some for many more than that.





# The Wheels Project – Financial facts and figures



## Controlling Costs

Our shifting funding, against a backdrop of austerity, has required us to maintain tight cost control over the past decade. During this period our most expensive year was in 2012, where our expenditure was just under £296k.

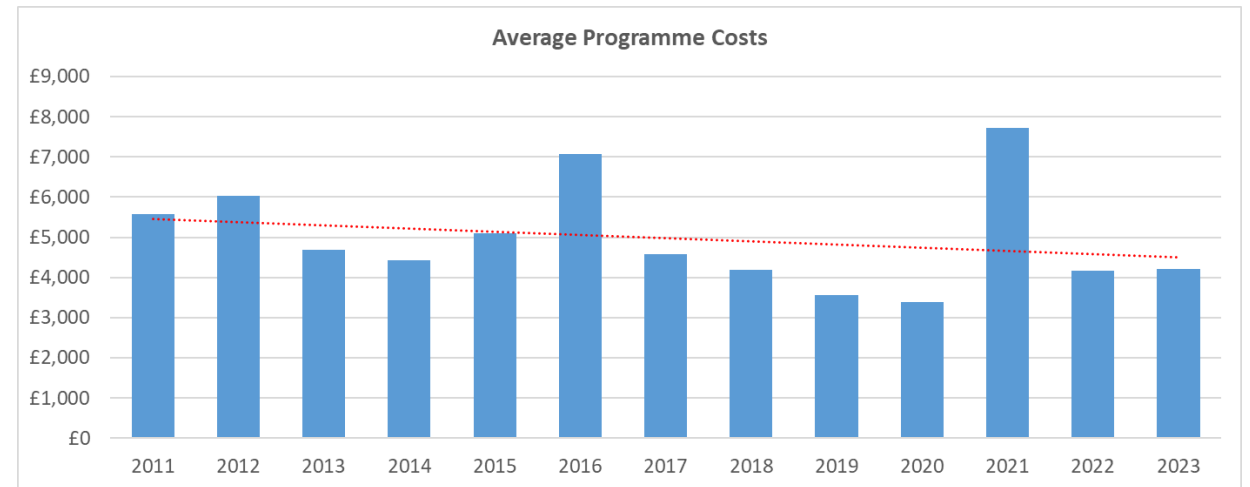
Our costs in 2022/23 were just under £291k, reflecting the continuation of strong financial management and cost control.

Staffing accounts for our biggest cost at approximately 57% of our spend, with premises costs our next biggest at 22.5%. Both of these cost areas have been kept under tight control over the past decades. However, the more recently the inflationary challenges all organisations are encountering are impacting on our costs at a rate which good financial control alone cannot fully constrain. Continuing to monitor and manage our costs as effectively as we can will continue to be a focus over the coming years.

## Average Programme Costs

During the period in which we have maintained tight cost control, we have also seen an increase in the number of programme units being delivered. This has resulted in a reduction in the average cost per programme unit over the past decade. In 2010/11 the average cost was £5,585, whereas in 2022/23 the average cost was £4,217 – a reduction of 24%.

Despite this tight control over our costs, we have not always been able to balance our budgets. In 6 of the last 13 years, we have recorded a financial loss, and in 7 we have recorded a surplus. Overall, across these 11 years we have achieved a small surplus of £2.2k – enabling us to retain reserves at the end of March 2023 at £156k ensuring we are able to sustain ourselves against some of the financial uncertainty we face.



# The Wheels Project – looking ahead – A SWOT analysis

## Strengths

- Established and stable organisation with consistent track record of success, as recognised through receipt of the Queens Award for Voluntary Service in 2020
- Local Authority approved Alternative Learning Provider
- Good policies and procedures in place
- Fit for purpose premises, well located for our wider catchment area
- Committed, and dedicated staff and trustees driven by desire to fulfil our mission, and supported by an enduring partnership with Avon and Somerset Police
- Adaptability and progressive nature of our offer has meant we have stayed relevant to referrers and students
- Good contacts maintained with local repeat referrers
- Good relationships maintained with repeat funders
- Good financial resilience – c. 50% annual budget held in reserve
- Good cost control – 10.8% increase since 2010/11
- Grown capacity beyond premises – karting programme delivered off-site

## Weaknesses

- Hand to mouth existence - 6 of last 13 years in deficit
- Referrers not great at identifying alternative funding – onus on us to do this
- Turnover of funders creates pressure to replace with existing/new funders
- Provision of services during term-time – funding statutory provision?
- Perception of high costs per unit driven by low group sizes
- Unable to offer formal accreditation, reflecting the contact time and attainment levels of our students
- Disproportionality of those students referred to us not fully reflective of wider demographics of our catchment area

## Opportunities

- Population growth of 10-19 year olds within the local area
- Increasing numbers of exclusions from school might increase demand
- Serious violence focus from government could lead to opportunity where Wheels able to be seen as a diversionary, early intervention option
- Advent of electric vehicles offers chance to develop new programmes
- Development of programmes focussed on attracting a more diverse range of student referrals
- Recruitment of new team members may bring forward new opportunities
- Establish closer relationships with FE and other partners and youth organisations – providing path for future development
- Development of new, more diverse, funding opportunities (e.g. direct public donations)

## Threats

- Key staff nearing retirement – loss of contacts with referrer organisations
- Key staff nearing retirement – loss of support from funders concerned
- Demand into funders means timeframes for decisions can take longer and potentially means there will be less funding available from this source
- Failure to attract new staff - stability/prolonged handover etc...
- Failure to attract more diverse students may risk funders requirements and lead to loss of funding
- Relevance of an offer based on the internal combustion engine to the changing interests of young people
- Funding pressures into schools may lead to less support for funding alternative learning provision
- Affordability of transition – do we have the funding to see us through

# The Wheels Project – looking ahead

## A pivotal point...

The Trustees of the Wheels Project recognise that we face a pivotal period over the coming years. The next five years in particular will see:-

- The **retirement of key staff** from the Project;
- The continued **shift in the wider automotive industry** towards new technologies (electric vehicles, autonomous driving);
- The continued **pressure on schools**, both in terms of financial control and educational attainment;
- The expected **growth in the 10-19 year old population**, suggesting continued strong demand for the services of Wheels and other such organisations.
- The **long-tail of the COVID-19 pandemic**, and the impact this is having and will continue to have on our young people.

Whilst much of our success to date has been in our ability to be responsive to changing shifts in our operating context, we recognise that the next few years in particular will require careful management and planning to ensure we make the right decisions to achieve a sustainable future.



## The Wheels Project – Planning for the future

We have therefore developed a forward plan which we believe will help us navigate through the next three years sustainably. Details of this plan are set out below:-

Strategic Objective	Outcome	Milestone	Due Date	Responsible Lead	
Sustain demand for the services of The Wheels Project	<b>Introduce new referral organisations</b> - Develop relationships with referral organisations resulting in 6 new organisations referring pupils to us over the next three years, whilst maintaining strong relationships with existing referral organisations.	Introduction of 2 new referral organisations	Dec 2024	General Manager	
		Introduction of a further 2 (4 in total) new referral organisations	Dec 2025	General Manager	
		Introduction of a further 2 (6 in total) new referral organisations	Dec 2026	General Manager	
Develop course and programme options to ensure these remain relevant to referrer and student needs	<b>New programme</b> – Develop a plan for the introduction of a new programme focussed on attracting more students from more diverse backgrounds.	Plan to be presented to Board (further milestones may be agreed following board decision)	Jul 2024	General Manager	
		Introduction of 1 holiday activity	Summer 2024	General Manager	
	<b>Out of term time</b> – Introduce course to run outside of term time, thereby maximising our use of the facilities and staff during the holiday period.	Introduction of a further 1 (2 in total) holiday activity	Summer 2025	General Manager	
		<b>Collaboration</b> – Identify potential collaborative opportunities with other ALPs and/or charitable organisations to enhance our collective offer and attraction to referrers and students.	Identification of local organisations to approach	Summer 2024	GM and Trustees
			Approach to local organisations made	Autumn 2024	Chair of Trustees
Ensure The Wheels Project continues to demonstrably deliver effective outcomes	<b>Review our ‘Theory of Change’</b> – Undertake review in conjunction with referrers, to ensure our outcome measures demonstrate individuals progress, meet referrer objectives, and evidence the value that the Wheels Project offers.	Outcome of review to be presented to the board (further milestones may be agreed following board decision)	Jan 2025	General Manager	
Ensure The Wheels Project secures the right people with the right skills to deliver and develop the services it offers	<b>Staff skills</b> – Introduce an annual report to Board detailing the current skills compliance of all staff within the project, and planned activity over the next 12 months to ensure that this is maintained and developed.	Introduction of annual skills and training report to Board	Jul 2024	General Manager	
		<b>Staff succession planning</b> – Recruit and on-board new staff in good time to ensure effective handovers and continuity of offer to referrers and students throughout the transition.	Regular reporting on staff succession to the board	Ongoing	General Manager

## The Wheels Project – Planning for the future (continued)

We have therefore developed a forward plan which we believe will help us navigate through the next three years sustainably. Details of this plan are set out below:-

Strategic Objective	Outcome	Milestone	Due Date	Responsible Lead
Ensure The Wheels Project secures the right people with the right skills to deliver and develop the services it offers	<b>Board skills</b> – Maintain and enhance the annual review of Board skills and competencies, and develop training plan and/or recruitment plan to close any gaps identified.	Annual review of Board skills and planning report to board	Mar 2024	Chair of Trustees
Ensure The Wheels Project maintains an effective and sustainable financial position	<b>Increase income</b> – Target an increase in income of 15% over the next three years, enabling a surplus to be generated which can be used to increase reserves and/or support investment in areas of development.	24/25 – Target +5% - Review total funding	Mar 2025	General Manager
		25/26 – Target +10% - Review total funding	Mar 2026	General Manager
		26/27 – Target +15% - Review total funding	Mar 2027	General Manager
	<b>Referrer fees</b> – Achieve sustained level of income from referrers at 25% of total income over the next three years.	24/25 – Review level of referral fees achieved	Mar 2025	General Manager
		25/26 – Review level of referral fees achieved	Mar 2026	General Manager
		26/27 – Review level of referral fees achieved	Mar 2027	General Manager
	<b>Trust funding</b> – Identify and secure the support of new charitable funders, with target of introducing 2 new multi-year funders over the next three years.	Introduction of 2 new multi-year funders	Mar 2026	General Manager
	<b>Maintain effective cost control</b> – Manage core costs (i.e. excluding planned approved investments) to see increases no greater than CPI (as measured at September each year).	23/24 – Review actual core costs compared to prior year	Jul 2024	General Manager
		24/25 – Review actual core costs compared to prior year	Jul 2025	General Manager
		25/26 – Review actual core costs compared to prior year	Jul 2026	General Manager
	<b>Corporate Sponsorship</b> – Develop opportunities to introduce corporate sponsorship into the Wheels, particularly in support of our Community Vehicle Programme.	Secure 1 Corporate Sponsor for our Community Vehicle Programme	Mar 2025	General Manager All Trustees