Review of

The Aston Project

Funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Gloucestershire

Conducted by a research team from the University of Gloucestershire, School of Natural and Social Sciences

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Acknowledgements:

Review team:

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Executive Summary

The Aston Project is a community focused initiative that identifies at-risk young people and links them with resources or activities within their local communities. It is managed by Gloucestershire Constabulary and operates at three sites across Gloucestershire: Cheltenham, Gloucester, and Newent. This review evaluates the impact of the Aston Project, and identifies examples of good practice and areas for potential improvement. It was funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, and conducted by academics and researchers in the School of Natural and Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire.

Between April and December 2016, the University researchers spoke to thirteen members of the Aston Project team, conducted focus groups with participating Young People, and analysed a range of documents, reports and other supporting evidence relating to the Aston Project.

The review concludes that there are a range of clear successes from the Aston Project and that there is evidence of positive impact on the lives of young people and communities across Gloucestershire. There is, however, both the need and opportunity to develop aspects of the Aston Project.

The review offers a number of recommendations for the Aston Project team to consider. In particular, the close association with Great Expectations means there is a lack of clarity in what constitutes 'core' Aston Project work. The review, therefore, recommends that the Aston Project Consider revising their mission statement, aims, and objectives so that they relate specifically to the Aston Project.

The review concludes with some resources that the Aston project team might find of use when considering and implementing change.

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Section 1
Introduction: What is the review trying to achieve?

The Aston Project is a well-established initiative that seeks to identify at-risk young people and link them with a resource or activity within the local community in order to improve their lives. This evaluation aims to explore the impact of this important project in order to provide an evidence base that can identify good practice and areas for improvement, and guide the future direction of the project.

The review was funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, and conducted by academics and researchers in the School of Natural and Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire, FCH Campus, Cheltenham.

1.1 The Aston Project

The Aston Project was set up in 2011 to commemorate the dedicated work of PC Lynn Aston. Lynn was a Neighbourhood Officer in Cheltenham who worked closely with the young people in the area, setting up Saturday activities and becoming established within the community. After Lynn died in 2011, the legacy of her work with young people in the community was formalised into what is now the Aston Project.

The Aston Project addresses two of the key themes from the Police and Crime Commissioner's priority areas for action:

Theme 1: Accessibility and Accountability. Specifically, this evaluation explores how the Aston Project helps to divert young people away from crime and engage them in constructive and rewarding activity.

Theme 3: Young people becoming adults. Specifically, it aims to assess how well the Aston Project is enabling young people to become law-abiding, productive members of society.

The Police & Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire (in 2013-14) and a HMIC Crime inspection (in 2014) both identified a range of good practice within the Aston Project.

In 2014, the Aston project won the police-led Diversion award from the Howard League for Penal Reform.

The Aston Project has a focus on identifying young people between the ages of 9 and 17 at risk of becoming involved in nuisance or criminal behaviour. However, since its inception, the project has developed a wider remit for reducing social exclusion through engaging young people in purposeful activities and a greater focus on direct or indirect benefits to local community capacity. It is important to note that most participants in the Aston Project have not been, and are not currently, engaged in criminal activity. Where a young person is involved in criminal activity, there is the option to refer them to the 'Great Expectations' project.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the review

This review apprises the extent to which the Aston Project meets its key aim and objectives, particularly its ability to reduce community harm, crime and anti-social behaviour involving younger people. In doing so, the review identifies aspects of good practice and areas the team could consider developing. The review comprises three main objectives:

  I.   *Review the appropriateness of the current aims and objectives of the Aston Project in terms of setting valid and effective benchmarks and targets.*

 II.   *Evaluate the impact of the Aston Project against the stated aims and objectives, especially the key aims of reducing community harm, crime and anti-social behaviour involving younger people. It will achieve this through:*
     - *Interviews with key stakeholders and officers involved in the Aston Project*
     - *Interviews and observations with the young people involved in the Aston Project*
     - *Consideration of data relating to community harm*

III.   *Deliver to the PCC and the Aston Project an evaluation in the form of a report on findings that includes a review of good practice in relation to the Project's stated aims, and recommendations for the future direction of the Project. This*

> *process will include the provision of an interim report for Gloucestershire Constabulary for the purpose of comment and discussion.*

1.3 Methods, approach, and data

In order to achieve its objectives this evaluation has engaged in discussion, observation and interviews with stakeholders associated with the Aston Project. This includes: Senior team members; regular and volunteer police officers managing the Project; individuals who have been or are currently members of the scheme; other community groups and activities organised or associated with the Aston Project.

Visits and observations:

The research team made several visits to the central Aston Project offices in Cheltenham to meet and speak to project staff and to observe the day-to day functions of the Project. The teams also made visits to several project activities associated with the Aston Project.

Interviews and discussions:

The research team spent a significant amount of time with members of the Aston Project. This included informal discussions with members of the Aston Project, both past and present, and across the range of roles and responsibilities. Thirteen formal interview sessions took place: twelve interviews were on a one-to-one basis with a participant and a member of the research team, and one interview included two participants at the same time. In total, nearly 8 hours of interview material was collected and analysed. Participant's names are not used in the report, with interviewees given a number. Where relevant, names have also been removed from quotations and steps as far as reasonable taken to remove reference to identifying roles. Despite efforts made to anonymise these data, given the size of the team it may be possible to identify participants based on some responses.

As well as interviews with those managing or working in the Aston Project, two focus groups were undertaken with young people participating in the Aston Project. The young people were selected for participation by Aston Project PCSOs: one group was from the Cheltenham scheme, and the other from the Gloucester scheme. In total

seven young people between the ages of eight and ten years participated in the focus groups. Consent was obtained for participation by the Aston Project team, and the young people will remain anonymous within the research.

Documents, reports and additional information:

The research team was given access to an extensive range of documents, associated materials and past reports relating to the work of the Aston Project. In addition, the research team had access to the Aston Project website.

This report represents an analysis of the material collected. The cooperation between Gloucestershire Constabulary, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the University of Gloucestershire will result in shared materials that will assist in the dissemination of the work of the Aston Project. In addition to this report, the material will be used for academic dissemination including, but not limited to, the publication of academic articles and presentation of material at academic conferences. The University may also make use of material arising from the project for teaching and other academic purposes. As this requires the joint ownership of the intellectual property arising from the evaluation, the University of Gloucestershire has on this occasion contributed to the costs of the evaluation process.

1.4 Structure of the report

Section 2 focuses on the mission statement, aims and objectives of the Aston Project. It explores some of the concerns around these, particularly in relation to the clarity of Aston Projects role and the ways in which it can measure its successes. The section makes recommendations for changes, and suggestions for implementing these.

Section 3 sets out the impact, successes, and areas for development in the work of the Aston Project. It does this through a series of key areas of the Aston Project's work. These are:

- How the Aston Project reaches and manages young people
- How the Aston Project engages young people in the working for reward model
- How the Aston Project is delivered across Gloucestershire
- The role of volunteers in the Aston Project

- How the Aston Project measures and records success
- The governance of the Aston Project
- What a selection of young people involved in the Aston Project think of their experiences.

In each section, a range of material collected through the research process is selected and discussed in order to illustrate the findings. Each substantive section culminates with a guide to best practice and potential areas for improvement. Section 3 ends with a discussion on quantifying the impact of the Aston Project.

Section 4 summarises the report, looking at each of the three key aims and reflecting on the data in each case. It also provides a range of resources and guidance that might be of use for the team in their ongoing discussions.

Section 2
The appropriateness of the current aims and objectives

Section 2 explores the first objective of this review: a consideration of the appropriateness of the aims and objectives of the Aston Project. It does this in two parts:

- The first part discusses the appropriateness of the current mission statement, aims and objectives. In particular, it discusses the close association with Great Expectations.
- The second part reflects on the initial discussion and offers some suggestions on how the Aston Project might revise their current aim and objectives.

Documents, observations and interviews collected and conducted as part of the research are analysed in this section and findings are combined and synthesised. Where relevant, quotes from interviewees illustrate these findings. These quotes have been anonymized

2.1 The mission statement, aims, and objectives of the Aston Project

As it currently stands, the Aston Project is represented through a mission statement, three key aims, and nine supplementary objectives. These are shown in Table 1, overleaf.

Table 1: Mission statement, aims and objectives of the Aston Project	
Mission statement	*Partners and communities working together to reduce harm, crime & anti-social behaviour, by inspiring young people to meet their potential in a positive and rewarding environment.*
Aims:	1. To reduce harm, crime and anti-social behaviour involving young people, through an ethos of positive engagement, prevention and intervention. 2. To increase the involvement of young people aged 16 and 17 in education, employment or vocational training. 3. To achieve long-term sustainability and community ownership.
Objectives	1. To target engagement at young people displaying a vulnerability to actual or future involvement in harm, crime or anti-social behaviour. 2. To equip and inspire young people to make better life decisions. 3. To utilise the skills and attributes of the individual young person and their community as part of the solution. 4. To promote an ethos of 'work for reward' amongst young people. 5. To develop relationships and break down barriers between young people, partners and communities. 6. To support local businesses and communities by developing the future local workforce, using activities and work placement opportunities. 7. Engage & assess identified adults, young people, families & communities, through information sharing with our partners, to determine levels of intervention & support. For Great Expectations this will include monitoring and co-ordinating intervention for gang related activity. 8. To recruit and utilise the knowledge and skills of community volunteers. 9. To robustly evaluate the effectiveness of any prevention and/or intervention undertaken.

Many of those interviewed expressed some concern that the long list meant that it was difficult to articulate a clear and overarching purpose for the Aston Project:

Are we effective? What are we doing? What are our aims and objectives?

(Interviewee 1)

There are a number of reasons for the combination of aims and objectives, most notably this was likely to be a result of the evolution of the project since its inception. For instance:

So the great list of aims and objectives … if you look at the language you'll see that some mirror other organisations.

(Interviewee 2)

There's one set [of aims]...A mission statement, a few aims and then more objectives. They link to the Aston Project and what was the Avenger Task Force, [what] is now called Great Expectations.

(Interviewee 10)

In particular, the Aston Project has become closely associated with Great Expectations. The two Projects share the same aims and objectives, and as Table 2 shows, young people on the Aston Project can move into Great Expectations if their behaviour warrants.

Table 2: Guide for using the tiered structure for the Aston Project and Great expectations

Tier 1 (Pre-offending/arrest)	Tier 2 (Early offending)	Tier 3 (Pre-custodial sentence)	Tier 4 (Serious offen
Prevention	Intervention		Reduction
Great Expectations (custody experience)	Great Expectations (court & prison experience)	Great Expectations (7 week programme)	Enforcement - civil & ci
Aston Project			Offender Management during sentence & post release
	Prisoner mentoring		

(Source: Wood, 2015)

As table 2 shows, the Aston Project focuses primarily on prevention, whilst Great Expectations involves a greater degree of intervention for those with more negative or offending behaviours. Prevention, however, overlaps both projects and consequently drawing a line between the two projects can be difficult. For instance Interviewee 10, who is involved in the management and delivery of Aston, suggests that the Aston Project and Great Expectations are a continuum in terms of crime prevention:

> *I kind of see it as a sister project now to Great Expectations. … They very much sit alongside each other. The Aston Project, if you think of them as scale on, the Aston Project is dealing with the lower end… Great Expectations deals with the higher end and they kind of overlap in the middle…*

(Interviewee 10)

Interviewee 3, also involved in the management and delivery of the Aston Project, makes a similar association between the Aston Project and Great Expectations.

> *They are not that far distantly removed. I mean, they all have the same mission statement aims and objectives, and its different characters in different positions as to how they want to see it run.*

(Interviewee 3)

The Aston Project and Great Expectations are recognised as distinct, separate projects that serve different groups with different needs. However, in sharing the mission statement, aims and objectives, and to some extent operating on a continuum, means it can be difficult for those outside of the organisation to distinguish between the two:

> *We don't want Aston associated with crime. …. So is a parent gonna say, "Well, I'd like my son or daughter to be enrolled in Aston" when, actually, that's then labelling them because their friends know they're in Aston. Well, that's now labelled them along with Great Expectations, so they must've been involved in crime.*

(Interviewee 1)

The confliction of the Aston Project with Great expectations speaks to a wider issues of confusion over what constitutes a 'core mission of purpose of the Aston Project.

Interviewees were asked about their views on the core purpose of the Aston Project and descriptions of the ways in which this support was achieved varied. For some, the focus was on the Aston Project's role either as a supportive body, promoting positive behaviours for individuals at risk of anti-social or criminal behaviour; for others, the Aston Project was a preventative body that was engaged in a more diversionary approach with a wider social remit. These responses can be grouped into three broad approaches, outlined below:

a. The Aston Project supporting positive and constructive behaviour for young people.

Those that identified with this approach described the Aston Project primarily as vehicle for promoting personal change through positive reinforcement and engagement with young people on an individual level. There was a consideration here of the wider social and community impacts of individual behaviour, but the focus is very much on the relationships between the individual and a member of the Aston Project:

> *So the whole philosophy behind Aston was not really a prevent or deter thing, it was more to do with the fact that I just want to create something where we can identify kids that are vulnerable to ASB, we can identify siblings of people that are already involved in ASB and crime, and we can say to them, "Actually, if you do behave, this is what we will provide for you." Or, "This is what you can aspire to."*

(Interviewee 1)

b. The Aston Project preventing anti-social and criminal behaviour through positive social activities

Other interviewee accounts highlighted the preventive elements of the project's work. The Aston Project was described as an 'add-on' to the criminal justice system, catching young people who have been identified by public agencies and charities as being in danger of antisocial or criminal behaviour and working with them on more positive activities. This perspective was more common amongst senior Police officers,

but not limited to that group. Moreover, Great Expectations was viewed as an alternative option should the Aston Project fail in its aim to divert a young person from contact with the criminal justice system. The following quotes illustrate perspectives on the project linked to this approach:

> *Obviously children get referred into us from various organisations and it's for us, the police, to divert them and those causing anti-social behaviour in the local community*

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 3)

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> *There may have been a run of anti-social behaviour that - obviously if we can't stop it there - progresses on. So the aim of Aston is to prevent.*

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 4)

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> *Prevention is better than cure and that's what the Aston Project is all about, prevention not cure. Great Expectations and other projects in Gloucester are trying to cure the ill, something has already gone wrong. We get in there first and that's the important thing.*

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 9)

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c. The Aston Project keeping young people safe and strengthening local communities

The position includes aspects of the previous two but places an emphasis on individual and community safety and strength. There is a focus on keeping young people potentially at risk of harm safe, and therefore contributing in a positive way to community cohesion and wider community safety. There are elements of prevention in this approach, but it also takes a more holistic approach to protecting young people from involvement in crime or being at risk of social exclusion. It considers the wider social environment in which young people live and recognises the impact of external factors. By building stronger and more cohesive communities, the view is that it provides a positive environment in which young people can thrive.

> *I know the argument is, well you might work with five kids and that's just a pebble in the pond. Well actually, that isn't, because if you get those*

> *kids right, they're going to grow up, be positive within the community and hopefully be positive with their family, so those ripples will go out.*

(Interviewee 8)

> *Our goal is healthy, happy, rich communities. That's where we want to get to.*

(Interviewee 9)

> *It's not just the police but its partners and community groups as well … working with young people in a positive way to reduce the likelihood of them coming into future harm.*

(Interviewee 10)

It is clear to see how the Aston Project and Great Expectations have become as closely associated as the two have developed, and there is a continuum of activities between them. However, the association has also led to some confusion over core values and approaches and in particular, the sharing of the mission statement, aim and objectives, makes it very difficult to clearly attribute actions, processes, and successes to each project. Consequently, this review makes the following recommendation in relation to the mission statement, aims, and objectives of the Aston Project:

Figure 1: Consider revising the mission statement, aims, and objectives of the Aston Project so that they relate specifically to the Aston Project

The team should consider revising the mission statement, aim and objectives of the Aston Project to be distinct from that of Great Expectations. There is an opportunity to develop and strengthen the representation of the Aston Project, clearly articulating and communicating its core mission, delivery, and intended outcomes. Such a redefinition should be part of an integrated process that considers the purpose, ethos, management, and delivery strategy of the Aston Project. The research team suggests considering:

- **The overall mission and vision of the Aston Project** – what is the Aston Project is seeking to do? What are the similarities and differences between the Aston Project and Great Expectations?
- **The objectives of the Aston Project** – what are the specific tasks and groups the Aston Project focuses on and what are the intended and measurable outcomes for these groups? How are these objectives distinct from Great Expectations?
- **The strategies and approaches used to achieve these outcomes** – how does the Aston Project achieve its intended outcomes for its target groups?

Section 2.2 makes some detail suggestions on developing a 'core' Aston Project identity, and how the mission statement, aim, and objections can be redefined to reflect this.

2.2 Achieving appropriate aims and objectives for the Aston Project:

The recommendation to redefine and clarify the mission statement, aims, and objectives of the Aston Project does not imply that there is not already a good deal of success and impact: section 3 of this report details a range of these positive aspects. Reworking these core aspects would help to clarify a core mission for the Aston Project, making it easier to:

- Present a clear external message for what the Aston Project does with and for young people and communities.

- Provide a consistent internal message and approach across the different regional deliveries of the Aston Project.

As such, in revising the mission statement, aim and objectives, it is recommended that the Aston Project team consider what constitutes key, public information and what should be internal, procedural guidance. For instance, the central message and goals of the Aston Project could be more simply represented with a mission statement and several key aims. The objectives could be used as internal guidance for the team members on how they should achieve those goals. In place of objectives, the team could provide a list of activities, benefits, and/or impacts of the Aston Project that illustrates its work. Table 3 shows how this approach might work:

Table 3: Revised approach to Mission statement, aims, activates and objectives	
Aspect	**Purpose**
Mission statement	**Front Facing**: strapline or short statement focusing on the defining aspects of the Aston Project
Aims	**Front Facing**: 2 to 4 key aims of the Aston Project
Objectives	**Internally Facing**: guide to the core aspects of the Aston Project
Key areas of work and impact	**Front Facing**: a selection of activates, and/or key impact statistics, that illustrate the benefits of the Aston Project.

Reaffirming a clear vision for the Aston Project would also require revisiting the mission statement, aims, and objects. In particular, it would require reaffirming a clear identity and separation from Great Expectations. Tables 4, 5, and 6 make some reflections and recommendations on each of the mission statement, aims, and objectives.

Table 4: Mission Statement: reflections and recommendations
Mission Statement as it currently stands
Partners and communities working together to reduce harm, crime & anti-social behaviour, by inspiring young people to meet their potential in a positive and rewarding environment.
Reflections and recommendations
The mission statement for the Aston Project should be a clear, well-defined strapline or short statement that outlines a core message for the project. Whilst the current mission statement provides a generally well-defined purpose, conflation with Great Expectations can cause some confusion. A revised mission statement will also help set appropriate benchmarks for the Aston Project In particular: • There needs to be a clear focus on a core Aston Project message. For instance, does the Aston Project seek to offer intervention as well as prevention, or is this a role for Great Expectations? • The focus on work in a positive and rewarding environment is clearly a large part of the Aston Project's work, and could form a much larger part of the project's core. • The Project team could consider incorporating a point on the wider community benefits of the Aston Project. For instance, some mention of young people working in communities, or working for wider community benefit.

Table 5: Aims: reflections and recommendations

Aims as they currently stand

1. To reduce harm, crime and anti-social behaviour involving young people, through an ethos of positive engagement, prevention and intervention.
2. To increase the involvement of young people aged 16 and 17 in education, employment or vocational training.
3. To achieve long term sustainability and community ownership.

Reflections and recommendations

Aim1: The inclusion of 'Crime' in aim 1 might refer more to Great Expectations than to the Aston Project. The teams should consider which aspects are core to each of the two projects when reconsidering this aim.

Aim 2: The extent to which the Aston Project links to increased involvement of young people in education, employment and training in unclear and can be difficult to evidence (although his does not mean it is not happening). However, it is clear that the Aston Project has a positive impact on young people and communities, and there is evidence for engagement in activities that are community-focused and of community benefit. This could be a central aspect of a revised aim.

Aim 3: The concept of community-ownership might be considered confusing as it could refer to ownership of the activities, ownership of the young people, or ownership of the project itself. In the case of the last interpretation, movement to a community owned and run Aston Project might be a desired outcome, but it doesn't need to be reflected in the front facing aims as it might suggest transition and uncertainty. Instead, it might be better to reflect more clearly the community engagement elements of the Aston Project and the work the young people do with and for their local communities.

Other considerations: Given the expansion of the Aston Project, some mention of 'across the county' or similar could be considered. Some mention of wider benefit to the communities in which the young people live could be included, as this is an additional positive impact to the scheme. There could be greater discussion of other key dimensions, such as the working for reward model.

Table 6: Objectives: reflections and recommendations

Objectives as they currently stand

1. To target engagement at young people displaying a vulnerability to actual or future involvement in harm, crime or anti-social behaviour.
2. To equip and inspire young people to make better life decisions.
3. To utilise the skills and attributes of the individual young person and their community as part of the solution.
4. To promote an ethos of 'work for reward' amongst young people.
5. To develop relationships and break down barriers between young people, partners and communities.
6. To support local businesses and communities by developing the future local workforce, using activities and work placement opportunities.
7. Engage & assess identified adults, young people, families & communities, through information sharing with our partners, to determine levels of intervention & support. For Great Expectations this will include monitoring and co-ordinating intervention for gang related activity.
8. To recruit and utilise the knowledge and skills of community volunteers.
9. To robustly evaluate the effectiveness of any prevention and/or intervention undertaken.

Reflections and recommendations

The objectives could form an internally facing guide for those involved in the Aston Project. They could then serve as a way to standardise core aspects of the project as the geographical reach extends. The team could also consider using the key areas identified in section 3 of this report as a structure for those new objectives.

In their place, on the front facing literature the team could include a list of other aspects of the Aston Project that relate to its functions, some of which are already listed on the advertising literature and some of which form part of the new monitoring processes. For instance:

- a list of activities in which the young people participate
- a list of partners with which the Aston Project works
- key data on participation rates and young people in the project
- key information on hours' time-banked by young people, and possibly also volunteers
- key information on hours contributed to community-based projects

Section 3

Impact, successes, and areas for development

Section 3 sets out the impact, successes and areas for potential development in the work of the Aston Project. It does this through examining a series of key areas of the Aston Project's work. These cover:

- How the Aston Project reaches and manages young people
- How the Aston Project engages young people in the working for reward model
- How the Aston Project is delivered across Gloucestershire
- The role of volunteers in the Aston Project
- How the Aston Project measures and records success
- The governance of the Aston Project
- What a selection of young people involved in the Aston Project think of their experiences

These key areas represent important aspects of the project's work and are useful areas in which to focus the analysis. In each case, a range of best practice and opportunities for improvement are identified and the section concludes overall with an outline of how this can then inform an analysis of the Aston Project's impact.

3.1 Reaching and managing young people

Since the Aston Project was established in 2011, approximately 610 young people have participated in the project. At the time the data for this report was collected there were 89 'live' participants. Referrals of young people to the Aston Project are made from a variety of sources, the most common being schools and social services. However, some people are referred by family members and it is also possible for young people to self-refer either through friends or family who are already involved in the project or through the on-line referral process on the Project's website.

Eligibility for the participation in the Aston Project is based on a range of the following criteria:

- Aged 9 to 17

- Is a young carer

- Is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour, which may cause harm to a community

- Is the victim of anti-social or criminal behaviour

- Has an older sibling who is involved in criminality

- Is demonstrating an interest in fire

- Is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence, family conflict, bereavement, and/or sibling criminality

- There are child protection issues

- There are behavioural and/or attendance issues at school

- Is the victim or perpetrator of bullying

- Has a history of going missing from home

- Is vulnerable to gang related activity

- Aged 16 or 17 and Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

- A strategic partner organisation makes a referral

(Wood, 2015)

The Aston Project uses a referral form that records age, ethnicity, religion, language (including if an interpreter is needed), disability, and sex (although the form excludes young people who might identify as transgender). The referral process for the Aston Project and Great Expectations is combined. Once referred, the project aims to make contact with the young person within two weeks and initiates the following process:

- Information gathering from key partners

- Meeting between the youth support team (YST hereafter), the police and a mentor. At this meeting the young person is firstly assessed for eligibility then allocated to one of the tiers (see Table 7)

- PCSO engages with the family to gain the consent of parents/guardians

- Mentor allocated to the young person

Allocation to the various tiers is based on the offending history of the young person and information from key partners. It is emphasised that there is room for professional

discretion when allocating the young person to the most appropriate tier. In addition, the young person may move between tiers – for example, if a young person engages well with Tier 3 and ongoing mentoring, they may then be considered suitable for engagement with the Aston Project. Table 7 is the internal tier description used in the Aston Project.

Table 7: The tiered structure for the Aston Project and Great expectations
Tier 1 – have not yet been arrested, may be involved in anti-social behaviour or low-level crime, and/or are subject of one or more of the additional criteria indicating a future risk of offending. Engagement will be owned entirely by the Aston Project.
Tier 2 – have received an out of court disposal for offending (e.g. Restorative Justice, Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution) or involvement with ASB (e.g. an Acceptable Behaviour Contract), but have not yet been charged and appeared at court. Engagement will be initiated by Great Expectations, but may include engagement with the Aston Project following successful completion of Great Expectations.
Tier 3 – have previously been charged with offences and been dealt with at court, but have not yet received a custodial sentence. Are likely to receive a custodial sentence unless something is done soon. Likely to be subject to a Referral Order Contract or Youth Rehabilitation Order, or may have received a positive requirement as part of a Criminal Behaviour Order or Civil Injunction. Engagement will be owned entirely by Great Expectations.
Tier 4 – are involved in serious offending and would not be suitable for prevention or intervention. Avenger Task Force (ATF – knife crime unit) Intelligence Officer will be a point of contact for Police and partners, particularly when the offending is gang related.
Source: Wood, 2015

One of the considerations in this research is the way in which the Aston Project targets young people for referral or entry. Whilst pains are taken that the project ought not be seen as simply a 'naughty' children's project, there is an aspiration by some for the project to take on larger numbers of young people, which then creates tensions about how resources are allocated.

For some, the Aston Project focuses specifically on a particular group of young people considered to be at risk of engaging in crime or anti-social behaviour:

> *[the Aston Project] was set-up to work with youngsters that are, sort of, showing that they're starting to get tendencies to make the wrong choices and that may be going towards low level crime … So the idea was to divert them from anti-social behaviour.*
>
> *(Interviewee 3)*

> *We're not a crèche for the younger kids. We've got to be threat, risk and harm based. We've got to be engaging with the right kids, always asking 'are we engaging with people who have either caused harm to our communities or are at danger of doing'.*
>
> *(Interviewee 2)*

For others, however, there was a wider remit for the Aston Project that involved supporting young people at risk from other issues, such as social exclusion and bullying:

> *And you know, we've got … the one [young person] who looks after [their] mum. That's a massive responsibility … [they have] got two younger [siblings].*
>
> *(Interviewee 11)*

> *Sometimes we'd pick them up as well, if they were possibly victims of crime or bullying, just to give them a bit of support.*
>
> *(Interviewee 8)*

It is clear that the staff within the Aston Project have a good idea of the difficulties faced by the young people with whom they work, and this reflects on the diverse needs of those within the project. This approach to the work of the Aston Project is nuanced, taking into consideration the socio-economic and personal backgrounds of the young people and drawing in those who might not fit the profile of what might be considered a 'standard' participant. It is, however, important to note that there can often be an overlap between children that need help and children that are at risk of offending:

> *So they start rebelling and that's when they start to get into trouble with the anti-social behaviour. So it is, it's trying to find that happy medium.*
>
> *(Interviewee 11)*

At present, referrals to the Aston Project come from a variety of sources, including a number through word of mouth:

> *I find that it's a lot of word of mouth at the moment, where family members are encouraging others to apply and that might be … maybe they feel that they can't do it themselves and get their school or family worker to make the referral on their behalf. So we are getting a lot of that at the moment.*

(Interviewee 3)

It did seem that there was a need for greater clarity in the target groups for the Aston Project. In part, this might stem from the association with Great Expectations, as detailed in section 2. A lack of clarity in target groups and entrance criteria can make it difficult to effectively identify groups for entry into the project. A reliance on word-of-mouth and/or a lack of concerted and evenly distributed programs for entry can lead to some groups becoming inadvertently excluded, or limited in exposure to the Aston Project. For example, some groups were identified by interviewees as having higher barriers to access to the project:

> *I think probably, disability would be Aston's biggest challenge, because of our resources, what we have. I would say we don't exclude the youngsters ourselves, but very few come forward. And I don't know if that's because we're not set up, we haven't for the links, like the transportation or the know-how, how to look after someone who had perhaps a disability and needed a little bit more care.*

(Interviewee 8)

Ofsted (2013) and Groce & Kett (2014) have argued that there is poor data on the inclusion of disabled young people in youth provision at national and international levels. Both publications reported that there are substantial barriers to these young people accessing youth provision. It appears that this is reflected in the approach taken by the Aston Project and the research here showed little evidence of deliberate strategies to target these often hard-to-reach groups of young people. Young people with impairments will be particularly in need of support as they may face multiple and complex issues, including social barriers, social and economic deprivation and discrimination. It is worth noting that as a conservative estimate, 36% of the current UK prison population are disabled (Cunniffe et al. 2012), highlighting a need for critical

awareness in this area. This will be a challenging issue to tackle, however interpretation of the Equality Act (2010) may require the Project to demonstrate a more inclusive approach at some stage in the future.

Although there needs to be greater clarity in understating the target demographic for the Aston Project, there has been some significant work done recently on improving the referrals process. There is a new form available on the Aston Project website, which aims in part to widen access. However, the research team found the website had some significant operational issues and was not fully functional during the main review period in Summer/autumn 2016. These issues have been remedied, and the website now offers a useful portal into participation in Aston Project:

> *… on our website now we have, well once we've got it up and running again, we have the referral form on there, so all the partner agencies are aware of that. The schools are all aware. They can just go onto the Aston website, make a referral, that form is there, and it then comes directly through to us and through to [another member of the team] who will initially assess it.*

> (*Interviewee 4*)

When applications or referrals are made, there is a well-established process for assessment and then entry into the Aston Project. This quick turn-around of applications is important for those who need the support offered by the project, and the team should be congratulated on the efficiency of this element in the referral process. Table 8 identifies best practice and areas for improvement in reaching and management of young people.

Table 8: Reaching and managing young people – best practice and areas for improvement

Best Practice

1. The recording of demographic data on referral is good, although could use contemporary terminology that better captures the identities of young people.
2. There is a clear and timely process between initial referral and engagement from the Aston Project team.
3. Workers on the ground have an excellent understanding of the lives of the young people with whom they work. This important strength contributes significantly to the overall success of the project.

Areas for Potential Improvement

1. There needs to be greater acknowledgement of diversity. Recording of a participant's sex is only necessary for medical purposes and excludes those who do not identify as either. It is recommended that 'Sex' in the demographic data collection is replaced with 'Gender' and participants are offered the option of identifying as 'Male' 'Female' and 'Trans*'. Ideally, there needs to as option of 'prefer not to say'.
2. There needs to be a greater understanding around accessibility of the Aston Project for those with disabilities, those with mental health issues and for and other hard-to-reach groups. This review recommends that staff working on the Aston Project access training around mental health, learning disabilities, and substance misuse, in particular they might consider disability-awareness training provided by an organisation run by disabled people.
3. It was unclear through the discussions with Aston Team members if there was a defined approach to youth work and engagement being used. Clarity on the nature and type of programmes deployed, the approach to youth work, and the expectations on staff are important for providing structure and distinctiveness.

3.2 Engaging young people in the working for reward model

One of the key pillars of the Aston Project is the 'working for reward model', sometimes referred to as 'time-banking'. Engagement with the young people involved in the project revolves around participation in a range of activities, and for their engagement, the young people earn time-banking credits they can exchange for extra trips and visits. The aim of this approach is to foster an interest that is socially positive and a diversion from crime.

The Aston Project uses a metric for classifying a young person's engagement and some guidance for managing that engagement, as set out in the 2015 report by then PS Tim Wood. This is set out in Table 9:

Table 9: The Tiered structure for the Aston Project and Great expectations	
Actively engaged	The young person has engaged with a credit building activity within the last 6 weeks and is considered to be actively engaging with the project.
Dormant	The young person has not engaged with a credit building activity for over 6 weeks, but has responded to contact and indicated a desire to become actively engaged in the near future.
Sleeping	The young person has indicated that they do not wish to engage with activities in the near future, and/or they have not engaged with a credit building activity for over 12 weeks
The active caseload of the project will be considered to include those in the 'actively engaged' and 'dormant' categories. Those in the 'sleeping' category will not be considered to be part of the active caseload and will enable the allocation of further referrals	
A change in categorisation should initiate a contact from a suitable member of Aston Project staff to ensure there are no underlying issues that require further signposting or referral, as well as feedback to the referrer	
This process enables retention of the core principle of the Aston Project that **no young person is ever 'disowned'** by the project and, upon categorisation as 'sleeping', they will be told that they are able to return back to the project in the future if they wish.	
The categorisations are purely for **internal workload management purposes** and should not be communicated to young people or their families.	
(adapted from Wood, 2015)	

This is clear and concise guidance. This direction on the internal procedures is a valuable tool for assessing and monitoring the engagement of young people within the project. Furthermore, it is important to see the commitment to a core principle of the Aston Project: 'no young person is ever 'disowned' by the project'.

The current data on young people participating in the Project, and categorised by the level of engagement is presented in Table 10. This shows that growth of the new locations has been relatively rapid, with Gloucester almost as significant as the original Cheltenham locations and Newent already almost half the size.   Based on the proportions in each category, the project has a 79% rate of active engagement across the three locations. This rate is slightly higher in Gloucester than it is in Cheltenham.

Table 10 active and Live Participants in the Aston Project at 28th November 2016				
Location	**Active**	**Dormant [6 weeks]**	**Sleeping [12 weeks]**	**Total Live**
Cheltenham	31	3	7	41
Gloucester	27	2	6	35
Newent	13	0	0	13
Total	**71**	**5**	**13**	**89**
				Source: Aston Project, 2016

Active engagement of participants denotes attendance at agreed activities, such as Coding Club, sports training, or in voluntary activity. Each participant banks their hours of constructive engagement and there is an additional weighting for the voluntary work. Table 11 displays the number of hours credited in the time-bank.   Once participants have a certain number of hours banked they can trade them in to earn participation in other activities, such as attendance at events or trips.

Table 11: Number of hours credited in the Time-bank by month (2016)	
MONTH	**HOURS CREDITED IN THE TIMEBANK**
January	480
February	461
March	308.5
April	370
May	201
June	254
July	217
August	1,389.5
September	200.5
October	291
November	83.5
December	123
TOTAL	**4,379**
	Source: Aston Project, 2016

In the interviews, respondents raised concerns that there was a disconnect between the *concept* and *practice* of the working for rewards and time-banking model. In particular, the distinction between an activity for 'credits' and an activity for 'reward' was felt to be unclear at times. For instance, the idea that young people could obtain credit in a time-bank for attending a class such as Taekwondo or Coding Club appeared to blur the distinction between a socially constructive diversion and a reward:

> *… "you're gonna go and spend four hours down at the animal shelter and you're gonna earn four credits for that." One of the boys that we got involved with…[X is] now an apprentice at [anonymised]. So he used to go along on a Saturday morning and just do four hours work experience. He loved doing that, but he'd earned credits for doing it. Obviously, they then would get to spend their credits. To be honest, … that got watered*

> *down a little bit and then they were seen to be getting rewarded for rewards.*

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 1)

</div>

Similarly, there was also the suggestion that providing time-bank credits for regular attendance at diversion activities such as weekly sports or special interest events may obscure the intention of the rewards system:

> *Maybe it's me, but I think some of the work activities were quite spurious things. It was like – I think one of them was – if you went to our Taekwondo that was a work activity, so you'd get a reward and it's like, well, I can see why Taekwondo is absolutely fabulous, because of discipline, health and all of this, but have we got the balance right?*

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 2)

</div>

The confusion over time-baking and rewards illustrates the wider issues in section 2 and the confusion over what constitutes 'core-aston' work, and then ow this is translated into the everyday workings of the project:

> *I just think it's sad that what you're reviewing isn't really the philosophy of what it was supposed to be in the first place. That's what's tragic about it, 'cause I think it could've been unbelievable and I would've thought, by now, it would've been owned largely by the community and it would've been run by volunteers*

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 1)

</div>

Despite the blurred lines between activity and reward, it is important to recognise that the Aston Project does continue to offer significant levels of activity to young people across the county. Defining the nature of available activities and their association with rewards could help with developing both internal working practices and external advertising of the projects benefits, and Table 12 identifies best practice and some areas for potential improvement related to this:

Table 12: The working for reward model - best practice and areas for improvement

Best Practice

1. The tiered structure for engagement is well set out, with a clear set of policies outlines for managing the process. There is also a clear recognition and integration of what is described as a core Aston Project principle: that **no young person should be disowned** by the project.

2. There are a 71 active (and 89 'live') of young people engaged within the Aston project, and the recording of their status helps to plan both activities for those actively engaged, and interventions for those who ae dormant.

3. There are a range of interesting and engaging activities available for the young people participating in the Aston Project.

4. The adoption of the working for reward model and time-banking is a central aspect of the Aston Projects work, and one that provides a wider social benefit.

5. The Aston Project delivers a significant number of time-banked hours a year; this speaks very positively of engagement with the project.

Areas for Potential Improvement

1. The project should seek to review the way it categorises activities that constitute community engagement, activities that are focused around a weekly club and activities that are offered as a reward. Whilst being flexible in attributing credits and rewards can help tailor services to individual young people, there needs to be internal agreement on how this is managed.

2. The use of time-banking could be extended to adult volunteers, for example those who lead weekly clubs. This would help to capture the time that these participants put into beneficial activities in the community.

3. More use could be made of the time-bank data for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Aston Project. The time-bank data shows a positive outcome for the Aston Project, and as such should be an important part of measuring impact.

3.3 Delivery of the Aston Project across Gloucestershire

The Aston Project began in Cheltenham and has since begun work in Gloucester and Newent. There is a clear 'brand' associated with the Aston Project, and a desire for that brand and the work the Aston Project carries out to be expanded into new areas across Gloucestershire. This should be regarded as a measure of success, and as an opportunity to extend the positive work undertaken by the Project.

In each of its locations Across Gloucestershire, the Aston Project takes a different approach to accessing and managing the young people and in organising the activities in which they engage. A number of interviewees expressed this:

> *It feels like a very place based model.*

(Interviewee 7)

> *I can certainly see a difference between Cheltenham, Gloucester and Newent...*

(Interviewee 3)

Nevertheless, there is clearly a great deal of overlap in both the mechanics and the purpose at each delivery point. Interestingly, despite some lack of clarity in the aims and objectives of the Aston Project, there was still a relatively unified idea amongst those interviewed of *what the Aston Project does*:

> *I know, because we work alongside Gloucester, I know Gloucester is exactly the same in regards to…they do 'credit earners' and 'credit standing'.*

(Interviewee 6)

> *They [the branches of the Aston Project] are not that far distantly removed. I mean, they all have the same mission statement aims and objectives …*

(Interviewee 3)

Despite this, there are differences in how the Aston Project is delivered across the county, some of which reflect local contexts and needs, and others are organisational

and approach-based. For instance, in Cheltenham, there was more of a view of the Aston Project as a predominantly police-led initiative:

> *So the Cheltenham staff are the most experienced in the Aston Project; and they would have worked with [a] different brief where they would have, you know, concentrated on their areas and that would have been it and it would only be a police-led initiative.*

> (*Interviewee 3*)

This differs from the perception of how the Aston Project was seen in Newent, which has a much stronger community-driven element:

> *So then, Newent: there was a lot of community interest in Newent as well. That's a little bit different, because there was so much community interest that we were almost obliged to set it up…*

> (*Interviewee 2*)

In Gloucester there is much greater tie in with other services that exist in that location and are provided by other agencies. This approach maximises the impact of a more limited staff team but also helps to integrate the Aston Project as part of a wider suite of community projects. It is also an approach that is viewed favourably by several members of the team:

> *We have to look wider. We have to look to the future. So the Gloucester staff are more on board with that to a certain degree, and have outreached activities within the local community.*

> (*Interviewee 3*)

Although the expansion to multiple sites of delivery across Gloucestershire can be regarded as a success for the Aston Project, there was acknowledgement that the development the project across the county is work in progress:

> *I can't say that either Cheltenham, Gloucester, or Newent are working the way it should; or the best most efficient way, but we are getting there.*

> (*Interviewee 3*)

Associated with this, there was some associated concern around the impact of stretched resources on the ability to deliver the same level of service:

> *…some of the numbers in Cheltenham have dwindled off you know fairly rapidly; they're not dealing with anywhere near the numbers they were dealing with a year ago. […] Because there is a lack of face time. … the kids are still out there but what used to happen is there was a greater follow up because [x] was able to spend a greater amount of time… But the kids won't speak, they won't open up to somebody they don't know.*

(*Interviewee 9*)

Differences in service provision are not necessarily problematic: they can reflect the needs of different communities and the resources available locally. It was very positive that this is clearly identified in some of the feedback from those involved in the Aston Project:

> *…what works as a delivery model in Cheltenham might not be the model that works for a delivery in Gloucester, might not work for delivery in Newent. I think it's acceptable for the delivery model to be different in different places, I don't think it needs to be the same.*

(*Interviewee 7*)

This should be primarily driven by need, though, and there was concern amongst some interviewed that the nature of provision was becoming 'personality driven':

> *… Its different characters in different positions as to how they want to see it run.*

(*Interviewee 3*)

The Aston Project has the potential to continue developing as a flagship project working with young people and communities across Gloucestershire. This service can be flexible and reactive to local needs. To support this, there needs to be a clear consideration of the Aston Projects' core mission and the drivers for differences in service delivery, as discussed in Table 13:

Table 13: Delivery of the Aston Project across Gloucestershire - best practice and areas for improvement

Best Practice
1. The Aston Project has a significant presence across Gloucestershire, with a recognisable brand. This is due in part to the level of involvement from Gloucestershire Constabulary, which is a unique facet of this type of project in Gloucestershire. 2. There is recognition that the delivery of the Aston Project should reflect the needs of different communities. This is important in order to deliver a responsive service that best fits the different local communities across Gloucestershire.

Areas for Potential Improvement
1. Maintaining a core Aston Project identity and function is challenging. Consideration should be given to which aspects are suitable to be delivered on a flexible and locally responsive basis, and which aspects are core to any revisions in the Aston Project's overall aims and objectives. This decision will be informed by the redefining of the aims and objectives of the Aston Project and associated values and approaches central to maintaining the Aston Project' identity. 2. Differences in the regional distribution of provision should be needs-driven rather than resource, personnel or personality driven. Whilst resources and personnel understandably play a significant factor in service delivery, the expansion of the Aston Project to multiple sites should include a consideration of the increase and/or distribution of resources and personnel.

3.4 The Role of Volunteers

The Aston Project makes good use of volunteers. Since volunteering was integrated as part of the project in 2015, a total of 34 volunteers have registered and over 500 hours of volunteer time has been given over to the project. There are currently 23 'active' volunteers, although 9 are in the processes of becoming what the project terms 'full volunteers'. Of the 23 active volunteers, 13 are in Cheltenham, 5 are in Gloucester, and 5 are in the Forest/Newent area. The volunteers participate in a range of activities, including the 'Gaining Ground session', football training, coding club, and Lego club session. Volunteers will typically give between 1.5 and 3 hours per session.

There are a number of examples of schemes and activities established as part of the Aston Project and run by volunteers:

> *We have got a coding club, which has been set up, which runs locally in the Hester Way library. That was set up by volunteers.*

(Interviewee 3)

Using volunteers offers a range of benefits to an organisation such as the Aston Project. Having a mix of Police officers, Police Community Support Officers and adult volunteers provides a range of different support and role models for the Aston Project participants. There have been efforts to develop the role of volunteers, increasing their level of commitment, time and responsibility. In particular, there has been some drive to utilise motivated young people who have participated in the Project as volunteers and role models:

> *I think we've got one or two that are reaching that stage and, you know, efforts are being made to try and make them come, not make them, encourage them to become volunteers, so yeah that's definitely a way that would be you know, prodding wouldn't it.*

(Interviewee 3)

Furthermore, volunteering as part of community-focused time-banking activities means that the Aston Project creates community benefit over and above the value of engaging young people who are at risk of offending. In the period 01 October 2010 to

23 October 2016, young people participating in activities relating to community volunteering earned 2540 time banking credits.

One of the challenges for the Aston Project, with an increased number of delivery sites and pressure on funding is how to best utilise volunteers. There are a series of practical challenges that any project experiences in building a healthy cohort of volunteers. These can include: issues with finding and recruiting suitable community members with the time and willingness to get involved; putting in place adequate training for volunteers so that they have the necessary skills; and, retaining this valuable resource when there are no financial rewards for volunteers continuing their work. This can be particularly challenging when there are also issues of safeguarding that need to be considered, as in the Aston Project.

There was some inconsistency across the scheme in terms of their ability to recruit and retain volunteers. Some locations reported having a healthy cohort of volunteers but some were less clear on whether volunteers had any impact on their service delivery. Plans were reportedly in place, however, for the Aston Project website to be utilised to recruit volunteers:

> *So we recently gone into seeking community volunteers of which we've got about 20 in progress. We use a system called better impact for, for them to reply via our website where they can detail their aspirations of their voluntary experience, their qualifications, when they're available. So it is an effective method to manage our volunteers.*

> *(Interviewee 3)*

It was also apparent that some work is still required to integrate such volunteers into the key working practices of the project. For example, one officer described how volunteer participation is viewed as a bonus but the various activities continue to be police led:

> *We haven't really got volunteers that are organising activities. We've got one … she's set up a coding club, and they attend that coding club.*
> *…*

> *I haven't had any come out with me, we just put it on the website to say what activities and trips that we're going on, and it's up to them whether they choose to come with us or whether they don't.*

(Interviewee 3)

Furthermore, there was a concern expressed around a move to a more volunteer-driven approach. In particular, there was concern that once a particular initiative or activity became volunteer driven and open to the public at large, young people on the Aston Project might find the scheme becomes less relevant to them and/ or that it loses its Aston Project based focus. For example, an observation of the coding club by the research team found no young people associated with the Aston Project in attendance. There was also a concern that volunteers can be unreliable, and because of that there was reluctance on the part of some to expand their use:

> *The kids need some continuity … If it hits the fan in the middle of the week, one of us is always on duty and we can go and deal with that. If you have a volunteer, they may only do two hours a month. What happens to those kids, how can someone who's doing, even if they did two days a month or something, how can those kids build up a bond.*

(Interviewee 8)

There can also be issues with using volunteers effectively. For example, Dhami and Joy (2007) document how professionals such as police can be sceptical about the competence and reliability of volunteers, and may find it difficult to relinquish control of key aspects of a project to community representatives and other non-professional parties. Wood & Shearing (2007) describe how implementing an effective shared model of practice structures can require a fundamental shift in power relations between police and local communities, and in particular an acknowledgement of local 'expertise' and 'problem-solving skills'.

In times of austerity, there is a pressure on government-funded projects to slim down their operations and explore ways to cede functions to willing participants in an effort to cut costs and show value for money in terms of key outputs. This was readily apparent in interviews with the Aston Project. For example, one Officer felt that, for the Aston Project to survive it has to become a community-owned and driven project that made greater use of volunteers in service delivery:

Clearly there has to be a shift from it being police led, I think for the long term. I don't think we're going to get any additional resources and I think the way forward for the Aston Project to become more, even more successful, is to make it more community owned. By that I mean, you know increasing our volunteers and going from there really

(Interviewee 3)

There is a significant question over the ways in which the Aston Project uses its mix of Police Officers, PCSOs and Volunteers. These considerations should, however, be measured against the distinctive nature of the Aston Project as the most significant Police-managed youth project in Gloucestershire. Table 14 discusses best practice in this area, and offers areas for potential improvement:

Table 14: The role of volunteers - best practice and areas for improvement

Best Practice

1. The Aston Project already makes significant use of volunteers, with over 500hours of volunteer time accrued since the opportunity was made available in 2012. This helps to connect the Aston Project within the communities it serves.
2. Volunteering as part of time-baking activities can create wider community benefit over and above the value of engaging young people at risk of offending. The team should consider ways to promote this as an additional benefit of the Aston Project.
3. Using a mix of Police officers, Police Community Support Officers, adult volunteers, and former Aston Project members provides a range of different support and role models for the Aston Project participants.

Areas for Potential Improvement

1. There is scope for greater volunteer involvement in the Project, and this can be achieved without losing the unique Police-led nature of the Project. However, a review of the role of Police, PCSOs and volunteers in the context of the aims and objectives is needed so there is more clarity around the mission and vision.
2. The Aston Project could do more to engage, as volunteers, more of those that have graduated from the scheme. These former participants can be important role models to current participants, taking leadership or mentor roles. Using former participants in this way can also offer a progression route those graduating from the Aston Project, enabling them to maintain positive community roles into their adult lives.
3. Volunteers can be a valuable resource, but there is concern within the Aston Project over the reliability of the current volunteers. Maintaining a cohort of well trained, committed volunteers is often challenging for an organisation, and further consideration should be given to achieving this. A clear strategy is important for recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers. Finding volunteers can be difficult, however, and the team will have to consider ways in which they can engage with local organisations to help facilitate this increase.

3.5 Measuring and recording success

As Table 10 in section 3.2 illustrates, the Aston Project has 89 'active' participants. However, measuring success for the Aston Project is difficult. The complex nature of the Mission statement, aims and objectives mean that there is not a clear-cut benchmark against which to measure the outcomes and impacts. This is not to say, however, that the Aston Project is failing to deliver a service for young people. The research highlighted a range of cases where the Aston Project has offered successful interventions and activities for and with young people. There is a danger, however, of a disconnect emerging between the success achieved and the ways in which this success is measured and articulated. As one interviewee expressed:

> *So how do we know it works? You've asked the team and I'm sure they would put their hand on their heart and say it does work … we know it works, but we can't measure it. So then I was asked the difficult question of how are you going to measure it?*

> *(Interviewee 3)*

Measuring success in a project that attempts to divert young people from crime is generally a difficult thing to do, as by definition the young people have not yet entered into criminal behaviour in a sustained way. The Aston Project team are aware of this issue and the associated problems of benchmarking success:

> *Success with any venture, it's very difficult to measure but especially when you are measuring prevention in terms of human beings. So a lot of the young people haven't offended.*

> *(Interviewee 10)*

> *So you know, I would like to think that those that we do get on the Aston Project, that they won't reoffend whilst we're engaging with them. So that would be a measure*

> *(Interviewee 3)*

A more specific challenge to the Aston Project around quantifying and measuring success is the association with the Great Expectations scheme. Whilst Great Expectations deals with individuals that have some offending history and can therefore measure recidivism rates, the Aston Project deals with young people *potentially* at risk

of becoming involved in crime. There is no reliable way of being sure that these young people *will* become involved in crime if they don't participate in the Aston Project. Further, some of the young people involved in the Aston Project are not considered to be at risk of involvement in crime or antisocial behaviour, but are involved in the project as part of a wider attempt to support their development.

> *You know you can't mix kids that are offenders with kids that are potential offenders, because let's be honest, the Aston Project picks up kids that are potential offenders.*
>
> *Prevention is better than cure and that's what the Aston Project is all about, prevention not cure. Great Expectations are trying to cure the ill, something has already gone wrong. We get in there first and that's the important thing.*

(Interviewee 9)

The affiliation of the two schemes without enough clear distinction runs the risk of disadvantaging the Aston Project. Measures of impact that are difficult for the Aston Project, yet easier for Great Exceptions, become conflated with both projects:

> *So every six months, I produce say a valuation document of both the Great Expectations and the Aston Project. It does lean more towards Great Expectations because I can produce that kind of data around offending.*

(Interviewee 10)

This exacerbates the problem of distinction between the Aston Project and Great Expectations, meaning that there is not enough space to develop individually distinct services as both projects are positioned on the same crime prevention continuum.

The tier system currently used to monitor young people's engagement and the level of cross-over between the teams/projects goes some way to illustrating the depth of association between the Aston Project and Great Expectations (See Table 2, Section 2.1). The conceptual and practical organisation of the two projects on a continuum makes it difficult to monitor and distinguish outcomes, particularly for the Aston Project. For instance, if a young person moved from tier 2 to tier 3 (i.e. from the Aston Project to Great Expectations) this could be regarded as a negative outcome for the Aston Project. Because of this, measuring outcomes for the Aston Project in this way

involves measuring *failures*, rather than *successes,* and, many of the successes may therefore be less visible. This issue with recording success is highlighted by one interviewee, describing that a measurement of success:

> *…would be, you know, whether or not they've been arrested since we've worked with them.*

> *(Interviewee 3)*

Within the Aston Project, there have been several attempts to produce systems of monitoring progress and measuring outcomes. One attempt at a management and reporting tool trialled within the Aston Project was a 'strength and difficulty' questionnaire. This is an aid to organizing recording, monitoring, and outcome reporting of the young people involved in the Aston Project. The tool was subsequently abandoned due to the difficulty it presented in admin and time:

> *It's difficult. We did trial our strength and difficulty questionnaires, which are three sets of questionnaires. One for the young person, one for the parent and one for the teacher or person referring; and that was implemented with a view to conducting them at stage timing places. Then we could chart their progress from there. That became an administrative burden and took the team away from actually engaging, physically engaging with the kids.*

> *(Interviewee 3)*

The system that replaced the 'strength and difficulty' questionnaire, and which is currently used, consists of log-based recording that should provide a qualitative narrative for each young person involved in the Aston Project. These logs consist of a description of each young person's interaction with the Aston Project and their contact with project staff. The logs are also reviewed on a periodic basis to monitor ongoing engagement with the project. Interviewee 4 explains in some detail how these logs function:

> *So now we have contact logs for every child and it's each of the officer's responsibility to log every call, every visit, every activity that they partake in with those youngsters. Those all now go onto the contact logs… But with the system we have now we're able to look through, see when they last engaged, how many times they have refused.*

> *….*

> *Every so many months a set of children are reviewed. Each officer has their own list of kids, they know what's going on. If there's anything that they're aware of, problems that they're experiencing, they're addressed immediately. Nothing now slips by. One child isn't left for three or four months with no contact*

(Interviewee 4)

The logs are an important way to create the main form of assessing the success of the Aston Project', and are used to create 'case-studies' of success. As one interviewee explains:

> *So we have case studies, the staff will always be asked to go out and write up a couple of case studies.*

(Interviewee 10)

This qualitative form of assessment is very useful in documenting effectiveness, and can create some rich examples of individual cases. However, it is both time consuming and case-specific. Case studies can provide a useful guide, but they are often subjective, selected to show a particular instance and run the risk of being anecdotal accounts. They can offer valuable insight into individual cases, but not a wider indication of the success of the Aston Project. Because of this, and because of the wider importance of being able to evidence the successes of the Aston Project, there is a clear awareness of the need to find other ways to measure outcomes.

Effective record keeping is important in two ways. Firstly, it allows those working in the project to keep track of the young people with whom they engage. Secondly, if the recording mechanisms were set up to do so, it would enable the team to generate both activity-specific data to show how well individuals are engaging in particular activities. It would also facilitate the collection of project-wide meta-data useful for exploring outcomes across the different geographical areas in which the Aston Project delivers a service as well as for the project as a whole. Table 15 identifies best practice in the measuring and recording of success, as well as areas for potential improvement.

Table 15: Measuring and recording success - best practice and areas for improvement
Best Practice
1. The Aston Project is clearly making an impact on the lives and outlook of a large number of young people. At the time of reporting, there are 89 engaged in regular attendance at Aston Project events. Over the life of the project, there have been 610 young people participating. 2. The Aston Project has made very strong progress in its development of good record keeping, with engagement logged using the time-bank and a tracking process for individual participants.
Areas for Potential Improvement
1. The Aston Project team should consider revising their monitoring and recording processes. In particular, a simple and clear method for recording key information and statistics on an ongoing basis would help to provide evidence of success and impact. Section 4 makes several suggestions on this. 2. Greater use could be made of qualitative data, for instance case studies and 'story telling' examples of young people that are in or who have 'graduated' from the project. This information should be regarded as a measurable outcome for the Aston Project. 3. The Aston Project team could explore different methods of monitoring and evaluating successes by engaging with youth work professionals and other services that offer similar provision.

3.6 Governance of the Aston Project

The Aston Project is managed by Gloucestershire Constabulary, who set the strategic plan and provide the necessary funds and resources for its deployment. They are supplemented by a host of professional bodies from health, social care, education, housing and social services who provide information, signposting and support where appropriate. They are complimented by a 'Stakeholder group' comprising local community leaders and high-profile individuals. This group also includes Lynn Aston's widower, Eamonn Aston, who retains a strong presence in the project in order to help

maintain his wife's legacy. This body acts primarily in an advisory capacity and have little direct influence or control over the Project.

The diverse range of those involved in delivering and managing the Aston Project is a significant strength. The wealth of experience, perspectives and opportunities that these people offer is a valuable resource for the young people involved and by extension for the communities in which young people live.   The involvement of Gloucestershire Constabulary in the Aston Project helps to elevate its status in the county, and there are few if any other schemes with this level of police input in the county.

Although the current structure of the Aston project offers a range of opportunities, there are also considerations that need to be made around the ongoing governance and management of the project. For instance, there is a lack of clarity on the role of the stakeholder, or steering group. The group is also intermittently referred to a 'steering group' or 'trustees', or 'stakeholder group':

> *The governance format of the Aston Project is woolly. … They have no authority to decide anything or to act... I think the steering group isn't clear about what its role is… It ought to be about a vision and a path for getting there …*

(Interviewee 7)

Although some members of the stakeholder group engage in activities with young people, for the most part they remain at an operational distance from the day-to-day activities of the Aston Project. In some ways, this constitutes a lost opportunity for this group that could contribute more of their knowledge, experience and connections.

As well as some confusion over the role of the steering group, there are some tensions (sometimes manifesting as conflicts) around the governance of the Aston Project. These can be broadly sorted into the following issues:

- How the Aston Project is run
- How the Aston Project is delivered
- Who the Aston Project needs to focus on
- What should be the reach of the Aston Project

Opinions on these issues varied between the different levels of the Aston Project. These issues have, at times, resulted in disagreement over operational issues and job functions. For instance, there were concerns from the Stakeholder group around continuity in the delivery of the project:

> *There has been a constant stream of Sergeants and Chief Inspectors looking after the project. No continuity.*

> *(Interviewee 9)*

> *The other thing is that the police personnel change so I think we're now probably in my fifth leadership incarnation of somebody from the police leading it.*

> *(Interviewee 7)*

Another issue identified in the research was the way in which conflation of the Aston Project and Great Expectations creates discomfort, both for members of the stakeholder group and those delivering on the ground:

> *Then came forth the idea of merging it with one or two schemes in Gloucester that dealt with a different cohort of young people who had already offended much more significantly. There was quite a bun-fight about not doing that. The whole point is we're trying to stop these young people heading down that route.*

> *(Interviewee 7)*

The conflation of the two projects is the focus of section 2.

One potential solution to issues of continuity and involvement could be to re-imagine the role, function and composition of a stakeholder group. There is a level of support for this reimaging of the stakeholder group to include those who deliver the services and representatives from the young people accessing the services:

> *The stakeholders ought to be young people. They ought to be included and involved in a way... it is entirely paternalistic at the moment and it's just not the right model going forward. … You form a board from people who have a real stake in it, not just a bit of history, but a future in it.*

> *(Interviewee 7)*

> *… they're the people that are dealing with the kids. They're the ones with the knowledge and experience. And the fact that [X has] never been at a Stakeholder meeting because [X has] never been invited, is a massive own goal.*

(Interviewee 9)

Table 16, following, identifies best practice in governance of the Aston Project, as well as some areas for potential improvement:

Table 16: Governance of the Aston Project- best practice and areas for improvement
Best Practice
1. The Aston Group has access to large group of passionate individuals who combine great beneficial influence, managerial and business skills, knowledge and understanding of crime prevention, local knowledge and excellent 'soft' interpersonal skills that have been successfully used to engage a large number of young people and divert them from crime and anti-social activity.
Areas for Potential Improvement
1. The Aston Project should consider reconstituting the stakeholder group so that it has a more defined role within the project and a wider membership. For instance, PCSOs and volunteers who work directly with the young people could also be represented on the stakeholder group and have the freedom to make their voices heard. Similarly, the senior police management of the Aston Project could report more directly to a stakeholder group. More guidance on this is provided in section 4. 2. It is recommended that participants from the Aston Group project also have a voice on the stakeholder group, either through nominated peers, former participants who have 'grown out' of the project or PCSOs/volunteers who have been nominated by participants to advocate on their behalf.

3.7 What the young people think about the Aston Project

As part of the research process, a member of the research team conducted two focus group sessions with a selection of young people involved in the Aston Project. The young people were selected for participation by Aston Project PCSOs: one group was from the Cheltenham scheme, and the other from the Gloucester scheme. The two sessions differed in terms of their format, venue and age of the participants. A more detailed description of the approach used to gather information from the young people can be found at the back of this report

The following analysis of the focus groups sets out some of the key issues expressed by the young people. In both cases, quotes from the young people are in orange.

Key Findings from the focus groups:

This section sets out some of the key findings of the sessions including some analysis of the responses of the young people, set against the aims and objectives of this research.

When asked to describe what they felt the Aston Project was and what it is supposed to achieve, the young people provided a range of views. In the first session, the three young people quickly engaged in a debate with each other:

> *It's for people that are naughty.*

> *It's not just for that, it's for people that need help, or to help the parents of children, especially if they have a disability or something.*

> *It is to help people that are getting into trouble but.*

> *Most people on it are in trouble or were in the past.*

> *It is about changing your behaviour, about stopping from being naughty.*

Certainly, the young people in both sessions were aware that there appeared to be a link between their behaviour and their invitation to join the project with the emphasis on promoting behaviour that is more positive:

> *Yeah that was me, I used to put windows through, and then they showed me the good things you can get out of the community.*

> *Also it gets you out of school which is great. We do stuff like village patrol where we lift litter and help people. We even got to help out at the disability Olympics.*

> *I get in trouble sometimes, I was excluded from school, it's because people wind me up!*

When asked how their families felt when they heard they were going on the project, some noted that it had not been well received to begin with as it appeared that they had been misbehaving:

> *They were not happy we had been referred, but then that changed when we kept going and they realised that they were getting a little break from us.*

> *Yeah, but when [The PCSO] came round to the house and explained what it was all about they were happier.*

When the opportunity came to ask the PCSOs about this after the session, they noted that in some cases, the main reason that the parents tend to be unhappy is because they do not always view the police in a positive light and may have bad experiences of the police themselves. From such a perspective, the PCSOs find that there is a risk that some of the good work carried out with the young people is being undone once the young people return home.

When asked what they get out of the session there were some similarities in the answers of both groups of young people. For example, young people in the first session described how:

It keeps me out of trouble.

The best thing about it is that it gets me away from my family – my angry brothers and sisters.

You get to learn about the community.

It is nice not to have to get your own transport in order to go somewhere.

They are very supportive if you have something going on at home they will help you with it.

If you behave you get points. Then you get to choose rewards.

I improved my behaviour and got to help a disabled kid. I was given an award, a £20 voucher and we all got to go skiing.

Similarly, the younger group in the second session spoke about how the Aston Project improved their lives:

It gets me out of the house. I'm always on the IPad and I get really bored.

I enjoy the activities. Like baking cakes!

It gets you out. I'm fed up playing the PS 4.

It was evident from both the sessions that the Aston Project does place a strong emphasis on getting young people out into the community to engage with partner organisations and members of the public:

It is mostly just the Aston Project but we do work with the County Community Project.

> *Yeah we did that work with the Midland Air Ambulance.*

> *We are always doing stuff with lots of different parties.*

The young people in both sessions were full of ideas when asked what they liked most about the Aston Project:

> *The activities and sharing them with others*

> *Meeting new people was nice*

> *The trips are amazing*

> *I like doing stuff for the community*

> *Yeah choosing the rewards is great fun.*

> *I got to drive a Ferrari.*

> *I got to go to 'Cattle Country' which was amazing.*

> *The staff. They are not strict with us, they do not tell you that you must do this!*

It was much more difficult to get the young people to relate things that they did not like about the project. In this respect, complaints rarely went beyond the superficial:

> *Sometimes you have to travel for ages*

> *The long walks!*

> *I would like to be out a little longer sometimes. The sessions always seem to be over too soon.*

> *Not allowed to go paintballing as its taboo. We can go laser tagging but.*

> *I like all the tasks. Even if we have to get up early in the morning to do them.*

Although one young person in the first session described frustration at the financial limits that the project must operate under:

> *One bad thing is that we have to do fund raising in order to do really expensive stuff like rock climbing. They don't have enough money to do everything so they have to try to get more money from somewhere.*

When asked about what happens when the rules are broken the young people described how the disciplinary process was fair:

> *You get benched but it only happens very rarely.*

> *Yeah it was their fault.*

> *People act selfishly sometimes*

> *Yeah and those people can get you into bad habits so that you get into trouble too. You have to watch out for that.*

Moreover, the young people in both sessions professed their satisfaction at the amount of tasks that they need to complete before receiving reward activities.

> *Yes I think so. We get a point for each hour we spend doing tasks.*

> *We are getting double points for doing this tonight. We always get double points for work that we do with the community.*

> *And once when it was really raining we got triple points.*

> *Yes the tasks can be fun as well. Tomorrow a couple of us are going to ASDA and we are going to ask for donations to make food hampers for Christmas.*

Overall, it was evident from both sessions that the young people had come to depend on their weekly visits to the Aston Project and wanted it to endure:

> *Yes! It's great - You get away from the family – it's fun.*

> *They help you sort your family out.*

> *They help you if you are worried about something at school. [The PCSO] gave me her phone number and said I could ring any time I have a problem or something is upsetting me.*

> *I want it to stay.*

> *I want to carry on with the project for quite a while. It makes me feel better and I will get my head down more in school.*

> *I've got 5 years left on the project! It feels nice that I have the project there.*

It is clear that the young people met a part of the evaluation had a great deal of positive experience related to the Aston Project. For these young people, the Aston Project is having a significant impact on their lives, providing support and, in some cases, a measure of stability in their lives. Table17, following, identifies best practice and positive reflections for the young people, as well as some suggested areas for improvement:

Table 17: What the young people think about the Aston Project - best practice and areas for improvement
Best Practice
• There is clearly a strong bond between the PCSOs and the young people involved in the Aston Project, and in some cases, this extends to the home lives of young people, as PCSO would visit the young people where they live in order to speak with families. This is further positive aspect for engagement linked to the project's work.
• There was an indication that the project was having positive impact on the behaviour of the young people. This extends to home and school live, creating wider community benefit from their engagement.
• The young people expressed their satisfaction with how activates were run and the opportunities available to them through their participation.
Areas for Potential Improvement
• As with other areas of the Aston Project's work, there could be more clarity on the purpose of the Aston Project. Young people were at times confused as to the function of the project, in particular if the project was for those who had 'been in trouble' or were 'naughty'.
• There is a great deal of positive feeling from the young people towards the Aston Project. This could be harnessed is a more developed way, for instance making greater uses of 'graduates' as mentors or for speaking with the young people who are still involved in the project.

3.8 Summary: quantifying the impact of the Aston Project

It is difficult to quantify the impact of projects designed to engage and divert from crime, in no small part because it is hard to establish if those involved would have gone onto manifest criminal behaviours. This is true of the Aston Project, which focuses primarily on young people who are not involved in crime and in many cases may not even be at risk of criminal behaviour. There are also difficulties in measuring successes and

impact for the Aston Project which has not always collected the range of data it might have done. That having been said, it is important to understand that measuring the impact of the Aston project should not just be a quantitative exercise: there is plenty of qualitative data that can demonstrate success. This section of the report has highlighted a range of ways in which the Aston Project is making an impact on the lives of young people and their wider communities. These can be distilled into three areas:

i. Engaging young people:

The Aston Project is successful at engaging young people in its work.

- Over 610 young people have been involved in the project since its inception in 2011, and present statistics show a high level of active engagement within this.
- At the end of 2016 there were 89 'live' participants in the project. From this data, it would be possible to work out spend per participant in the project.
- A total of 4379 hours have been time-banked by those participating in the project.

This is clearly a significant achievement, and it represents a quantifiable figure for the work of the Aston project. As suggested, however, more comprehensive recording of these key statistics, and better signposting of these successes would help to illustrate these impacts. Furthermore, detailed collection of data would help further illustrate the successes of the project. For example, it would be particularly useful to have details on the number of on young people 'graduating' successfully from the Aston project, and some detailed evidence of past community based projects where community benefit can be shown.

ii. Creating positive role models:

The Aston Project provides a strong link between the young people and the PCSOs and others involved in running activities, including volunteers who have contributed 500 hours of their time to the project so far. There is clearly a strong relationship between the young people and these groups, particularly the project PCSOs and these relationships are valuable. There are a lot of important life-lessons and positive behaviours that strong role models can impart, and these lessons are likely to impact not only on the young people and their behaviour and goals, but also on their wider

communities as they become agents of those attitudes. There is clear evidence of this in the very positive experiences communicated by the young people met as part of this research. It is clear that the project means a great deal to these young people and the positive behaviours that this engenders in them have a wider impact in their personal and school lives.

iii.   A visible presence and positive contributions to communities:

The Aston Project is the most significant police-run scheme of its type in the county. It has broad brand recognition, and because of this occupies a unique space in the provision of services in the county. Furthermore, the Aston Project benefits not only young people but also the communities in which these young people live. For instance, in the period 01 October 2010, to 23 October 2016, young people participating in activities relating to community volunteering earned 2,540 time-banking credits.

Additionally, the PCSOs involved in the scheme will often visit young people at home to collect them for actives or to speak to parents. This provides and important opportunity for developing wider community relationships. The nature of the Aston Project means that these officers represent a positive and visible presence in local communities, often with families that may be struggling or at risk of social exclusion and antisocial behaviour.

Section 4
Reflections and Resources

This final section of the report summarises the key findings under each of the main objectives, in the case of the final objective reflecting on what the results means for the delivery of the Aston Project in the future. The section finishes with a range of resources the team might find of use in their discussion and planning.

4.1 Review of the Research report aims

There were three key objectives for this research, each of which forms part of one of the key sections in this research. The findings for these are summarised below, with links to the relevant section of this report:

Review the appropriateness of the current aims and objectives of the Aston Project in terms of setting valid and effective benchmarks and targets.

Although the current mission statement, aims and objectives of the Aston Project provide a useful guide to how the project works, it is the recommendation of this report that the team revisit these essential tools in order to provide greater clarity to the role and purpose of the Aston Project.

Section 2 of this report has set out some of the concerns over the current mission statement, aims and objectives. In particular, it discusses how the conflation with Great Expectations makes it difficult to set and then benchmark Aston Project outcomes. Tables 4-6 make some specific suggestions for approaching revisions to the mission statement, aims, and objectives. Table 3 suggests how to divide these elements between those that focus externally, communicating mission and purpose, and those that focus internally as a guide to function and structure.

One further suggestion is to consider using the key aspects identified in Section 3 as a guide when rewriting the objectives. These are key areas of the Aston Projects work, and many of them are areas in which output and impact are measurable.

Evaluate the impact of the Aston Project against the stated aims and objectives, especially the key aims of reducing community harm, crime and anti-social behaviour involving younger people.

Section 3 of this report evaluates the impact of the Aston Project and its ability to reduce community harm, crime and anti-social behaviour. It dos this through an exploration of some of the key areas of the Aston Projects work, using a range of key data on the Aston Project's work as well as evidence from the interviews, observations and discussions conducted with those involved in the project.

Measuring community harm reduction is difficult, particularly so in a project that focuses on young people who have not yet entered into the criminal justice system. However, there are some clear metrics against which to measure the impact of the Aston Project and it is important to be clear that impact can be gauged through both quantitative and qualitative measures. Section 3.8 summarises much of this data, and Table 15 on measuring and recording success, and section 4.2 following, details some ways to develop and improve the ongoing measuring of success and impact.

Deliver to the PCC and the Aston Project an evaluation in the form of a Report on Findings that includes a review of good practice in relation to the Project's stated aims, and recommendations for the future direction of the project.

Making recommendations for the future of the Aston Project is difficult as these decisions rely on a range of wider issues. However, this report has highlighted a number of ways in which the Aston Project can develop its work and reflect on the ongoing service it provides. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to reflect on past change, particularly as the Aston project has undergone several revisions since its inception, most notably with the accretion of other schemes such as Great Expectations into its approach. One of the key recommendations of this research, as highlighted in section 2, is that as the Aston Project continues to develop, it re-visits its mission stamen, aims and objectives in order to identify those core elements that give it its distinct identity.

Outside of a reimaging of the aims and objectives of the Aston Project, one of the most significant concerns is the role and input that Gloucestershire Constabulary continue to have in the Aston Project. There was an opinion expressed by some that the future

of the project is dependent on moving away from the existing police-led model to a more community-orientated framework:

> *It shouldn't really be a police project … the aim should be that it becomes a community project. The police are part of it, but volunteers taking it on and taking it to the next level…. I personally don't see a big issue with it; you know nobody should own it. It should be a community that owns it.*
>
> *(Interviewee 9)*

> *I don't think we're going to get any additional resources and I think the way forward for the Aston Project to become more, even more, successful, is to make it more community owned. By that I mean, you know increasing our volunteers and going from there really.*
>
> *(Interviewee 3)*

> *The ambition with the Aston Project that's written into our aims or objectives is around trying to determine what is best for it in terms of long-term sustainability. So we have five PCSO's invested in the Aston project, doing the operational delivery. So that probably isn't…if you're thinking in terms of 10 years, that probably isn't long-term sustainable. That probably isn't something we can guarantee that as the police, we are going to have five PCSO's in the Aston.*
>
> *(Interviewee 10)*

The feeling is that this would secure the future of the Aston Project, which would make greater use of community resources and volunteers, encouraging these groups to take 'ownership' of the project.

There is some danger in a transition away from the management of Gloucestershire Constabulary. The hard work and contributions of officers who have worked to build the Aston Project have been vital to its effective operation. Furthermore, ceding control of the project to community volunteers would need to be a carefully managed process in order for the project to maintaining its current levels of impact. This highlights the nature of a challenge in moving away from a police-led model. The level of skill and expertise as well as reliability provided by a team of five PCSOs would be something that is very difficult to replace. Such a move would certainly need to be gradual with

the PCSOs maintaining a yet to be determined role in assisting the Aston Project as part of their normal local policing role.

Most significantly, there is a concern that loss of significant involvement from Gloucestershire Constabulary would reduce the distinctive nature of the Aston Project in an already crowded landscape of youth provision. One of the key distinguishing features of the Aston Project is that is managed by a police force. To lose this identity could seriously affect the Aston Projects identity.

Debates around the role of the police and other state agencies in social schemes such as the Aston Project are common. For example, Braithwaite (2000) distinguishes between two conventional approaches to the role of the police in society: 'rowing' (where like rowers in a boat, the state does the principal work assisted by community members) and 'steering' (where like a coxswain, the state provides direction, but the rowing is done by others). The second of these could be a good option for the Aston Project, allowing Gloucestershire Constabulary to maintain input and identify within the project, but more of the work could take place by and in local communities.

4.2 Resources for Change

The following material is offered as a guide to a selection of resources that might be of use in some of the areas identified for potential development:

The working for reward model: A Key feature of the Aston Project (see section 3.2)

One of the key pillars of the Aston Project is the 'working for reward model'. Young people involved in the project are encouraged to participate in community activities or special interest sessions on a regular basis. This is socially positive and has a strong focus on diverting young people from crime. However, in the interviews respondents reported a disconnection between the ethos of the project and the philosophy of 'work for reward' particularly around what constitutes 'reward' and how the time-banking worked in relation to engaging the young people.

The system of working for reward is based on the Gloucestershire Fairshares Model using time-banking, where a certain amount of engagement in Aston Project activities and events earns the participants credit which is recorded in a timebank. The participants can cash in the credits against a range of trips and special activities organised by the Aston Project that are attractive to the participants.

Making the most proficient use of the 'working for reward model' is central aspect of the Aston Project's approach. This approach serves as a major mechanism for achieving some of the key aims and objectives of the project, in particular:

- the ability to reduce community harm;
- helping to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour associated with younger people;
- involving young people in socially constructive activities;
- and potentially making the project more sustainable by forging stronger links with the community that it serves.

There is evidence in the academic literature that engaging young people in time-banking as both contributors and receivers have wider benefits. For example, Marks (2012) reporting research in the USA, reported that engaging young people even as involuntary participants - as a result of community service - can result in enhanced social benefits. In his research the young people participated in time-banking and similar initiatives.

> *These interventions often involved group activities designed to improve local communities, including building capacities of local non-profit programs. For these youth, intimate social groups formed, comprised of a combination of peers, trusted staff, family members of youth and select community members, often friends or colleagues of staff members. This social group provided youth with a sense of safety and a trusting environment in which to experiment with newly identified interests and assets. Some group members stayed connected to the youth post discharge from the child welfare and juvenile justice system.*
>
> Marks (2012: 1234)

The result, according to Marks, is that young people in effect develop the capacity to perform restorative work and in so doing earn credits to meet service needs they or their family members have. Marks (2012) argues that the research evidence suggests that participation can involve young people in improving their self and public image,

building trust, meeting new positive adult and peer role models, while building skills, which is a significant aspect of the Project's work. However, Marks (2012) cautions that capacity building is crucial to the success of such initiatives in order to get the conditions 'right' – not least there are challenges involved in ensuring that the agencies provide the context for successful participation.

Marks (2012), describes this as 'new social support' where time-banks are used to build social capital of a kind that young people can contribute to and benefit from. He outlines another project established for current and former foster children to provide mutual aid and support. A similar programme could be established in Gloucestershire where Aston 'Seniors' (older children or those who have been in the scheme for longer) or 'Graduates' (those who might have left the system successfully) could provide support in specific ways to help young people make the transition out of the programme. The 'seniors', in turn, benefit by taking on a socially responsible role, and could timebank this as part of their own activity. For example:

- Activities could be extended widely to members of the community.
- Aston 'Seniors' and/or 'Graduates' could be offered time-banking credits as part of a process of mentoring younger members, thus increasing the visibility of successful Aston Project outcomes and building on their preparation for responsible adulthood through developing their ability to respond to the responsibility of a mentor role.
- Contributes to efforts to ensure a clear differentiation between those activities that contribute to time-banking and the reward activities.

It is of course recognised that this approach would require careful consideration of the time-banking system and the roles of the participants, as well as safeguarding and ethical engagement of the participants. However, there are models which could be explored with the Gloucester Fareshares team that could assist in the development and enhancement of the scheme as it works within the Aston Project. Marks (2012) and Drakeford & Gregory (2010) demonstrate that time-banking is not a homogenous tool that is applied uniformly within youth justice setting, or exclusively as a diversionary tactic.

The role of networks: enhanced use of volunteers and other networks (see section 3.4and 3.1)

Devising an effective strategy for recruiting, training, supporting and retaining volunteers across the different areas of service provision could bring a range of benefits in terms of making the project more sustainable and increasing capacity in local communities. Particular strategies might include finding and recruiting young people who live in the same communities that the project operates in with 'Seniors' or 'Graduates' in the Aston Project who understand its ethos and objectives being a very attractive prospect.

This would include making use of existing volunteering networks to attract volunteers with an interest in tackling community harm and helping young people. For example, the Aston Project could make use of the following:

- The University of Gloucestershire is actively seeking placement opportunities for student volunteers, in particular courses such as Sports Coaching, Social and Youth Work, and Social Sciences. Useful contacts for this include:
    - University of Gloucestershire internship program in Natural and Social Sciences (includes Criminology, Sociology, Geography, Biology)**:** James Derounian - jderoubnian@glos.ac.uk;
    - University of Gloucestershire Youth work degree team (with a number of youth workers under training). Steve Bullock, Academic course Leader sbullock@glos.ac.uk
    - University of Gloucestershire FuturePlan scheme, which includes voluntary opportunities across the whole university - https://futureplan.glos.ac.uk/employers/
- Volunteer Gloucestershire – county networks supporting voluntary organisations and assisting in sourcing volunteers. http://www.volunteerglos.org.uk
- Involve Gloucestershire – corporate volunteer sourcing network. - http://involvegloucestershire.org.uk
- YCB Cymru *(Welsh Government/Youth Justice Board) Joint strategy to improve services for young people from Wales at risk of becoming involved in, or in, the youth justice system.* This includes reviews of approaches to youth justice

work, including a tiered system and references to restorative – non criminal justice - approaches to young people at risk of offending.

There should also be a clearly defined role for volunteers. Rather than their presence being viewed as a bonus, volunteers can form a vital role in the effective function of the project once adequate cover for unexpected absences and other eventualities is in place. Finally, there could be a concerted effort to identify and empower those volunteers interested in taking on further responsibility. This can include, but not be limited to, day-to-day management of key project functions, as well as leadership and guidance roles. This would serve to share ownership of the Aston Project and the initiatives that it supports between the police and the communities that it serves, giving those communities a meaningful sense of investment.

There are a wide range of organisations across Gloucestershire that work with, and are run by people with disabilities. These organisation can be a good sources of information and connections into otherwise hard to reach groups of young people. The Aston Project may already have good contacts with regional organisations, but as a resources we suggest the following for investigation (note: this is not an exhaustive list):

- Inclusion-Glos (formerly Gloucestershire Voices) might offer a useful starting point for this discussion. Website: http://www.glosvoices.org/what-we-do/ ; email: info@inclusion-glos.org)
- There is free (but it heavy demand) training designed for youth work organisations through 'Inclusion Needs You', delivered by Active Impact: Website https://www.activeimpact.org.uk/inclusion-needs-you-training/
- The University of Gloucestershire supports a level 3 in youth work undertaken by youth and community services. Website: http://www.youthandcommunity.org.uk/training/
- South Gloucestershire and Stroud offers apprenticeship in youth work. Website: http://www.sgscol.ac.uk/CourseDetail.aspx?Campus=filton&Department=filton childcare&Course=Youth-Work-Apprenticeship-Intermediatee

Measuring and recording successes: approaches and templates (See section 3.5)

The research found that to capture the impacts – both direct individual impact on the lives of the young participants and the indirect and wider community impacts - of the Aston Project are not always clearly recorded as they could be. The outcomes are clear, as the behaviour and rewards need to be logged in order that the rewards were allocated. It is important that the Aston Project consider carefully developing a method of capturing the impacts that is appropriate. A simple, interim solution that could be enacted quickly is to identify both engagement and outcomes by introducing a system of RAG (Red / Amber / Green) rating to each file, where Red signifies significant problems; Amber signifies some concerns; Green signifies engaging well. A measuring and recording system might look like the following:

- Devise a system of RAG rating to measure the experiences of young people participating in the Aston Project
- Compile a list of outcomes and invite all project participants in a particular young person's case to RAG rate the perceived success of that intervention
- Longer-term evaluation of monitoring interaction and outcome: there are a number of different methods used within social and youth work for monitoring engagement and outcomes.

At the back of this report is a mocked-up example of how this might look when making use of data gathered and collated for this report into a Self-Evaluation Document. This 'dashboard document' is an adaption of a model used in self-evaluation by school leadership and governors in a number of local schools. It is intended to focus on enabling the management and governance of the Project to evaluate progress against the Project aims. Therefore, in developing an actual Aston Project Self Evaluation Document, the rows should focus on areas of strategic interest and could for example focus on the numbered sub-sections of Section 3. This ensures that the self-evaluation is focused on areas that are important to the Project intentions and based on dimensions that can be assessed using evidence that is already available or easily gathered.

The governance of the Aston Project: Redefining a stakeholder group (see section 3.6)

One of the recommendations in the report is to establish a clear mission and purpose for the Aston Project supported by a broader group of 'stake holders' that oversee the project. A wider range of groups participating in the oversight, management and running of a project is often a good way to give participants at every level a stake in the project. It also provides some capacity when it comes to managing change within a project or scheme as it offers a valuable mechanism for gathering information on what works at different levels of management and delivery. In particular, it would be worth considering a role for young people participating in the Aston Project on a re-constituted stakeholder group. For example, several young people participating in the Aston Project could be nominated by their peers as representatives on the stakeholder group. This would offer both a valuable insight into participants' perceptions of the project as well as an opportunity for young people to gain some valuable experience. A revised and expanded stakeholder group might include:

- *The current stakeholder group, as members of the community and patrons of the Aston Project.* This group should provide a strategic and longer-term overview of the Aston Project, being likely to be more permanent in their membership. As local community members and those with contacts across Gloucestershire, this group would also be able to further the visibility of the Aston Project as well as help to facilitate opportunities for the young people participating in the project.
- *A member of Gloucestershire Police with oversight responsibility for the Aston Project.* As a police-funded and managed project, it is important that a senior officer with responsibility for the Aston Project is involved in the stakeholder group. They can offer oversight of the project's functions as well as strategic direction from the perspective of the Aston Projects position within the ongoing services provided by Gloucestershire Police.
- *A member of Gloucestershire Police with day-to-day responsibility for the running of the Aston Project.* This would likely be the Sergeant in change of the day to day management of the Aston Project, who will be able to keep the stakeholder group informed on the operational aspect of the projects ongoing work.

- *A PCSO representative, engaged in the day-today activities of the Aston Project.* This important perspective allows the stakeholder group to collectively appreciate some of the ways in which the Aston Project is putting its aims and objectives into action, as well as for communicating difficulties and successes.

- *One or two young people to act as representatives and advocates for the participants.* The inclusion of young people on the stakeholder group is an important way to communicate the experiences of young people within the Aston Project and in the wider context of the issues they may be facing in local communities.

An expanded stakeholder group would give top-to-bottom organisational participation and input, ensuring that every role within the project has a shared ability to influence policy and practice including reporting on how the work of the Aston Project is progressing and offer insight and suggestions for developing the work based on their particular perspective.

4.3 Closing comments

The Aston Project provides a range of benefits and opportunities to the young people it engages and the communities in which they live. The staff are dedicated and there is a clear bond between many of the front-line workers and the young people. There is, however, both the need and opportunity to develop the Aston Project. In particular, the close association with Great Expectations means there some lack of clarity in what constitutes 'core' Aston Project work.

As part of a re-alignment of the Aston Project along a set of core values and approaches, there is the chance to re-visit the 'working for reward' model and develop the link between positive and community focused action, and subsequent rewards. A redesign of aspects of the Aston Project should also take into account some of the methods and metrics used for measuring success. A significant issue for the Aston Project is the difficulty of evidencing success on more than an individual level. The Aston Project appears to have a range of successes and does provide a valuable community service – it is important to be able to demonstrate this to funders, supporters, young people and communities alike.

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Focus group data collection with the Young People:

Focus Group 1: Young People from Gloucester (Monday 12 December, 2016, 4pm-5pm):*

The first focus group involved three young people from the Gloucester area, two boys and one girl aged 10, 12, and 14 years old respectively. They were offered 'double points' to encourage their participation, although this might not have been necessary such was their enthusiasm. All three had been involved with the Aston Project for over a year and a half. The PSCO collected the young people from their homes after school as they would for other activities, and transported them by car to the University of Gloucestershire where the focus group took place.

The session took place in the informal environment of the University Refectory. The young people were provided with refreshments and seated in a booth along with the researcher. The PCSOs were in the next booth, a short distance away so that they were out of view of the young people but could still monitor proceedings. Occasionally, the young people would climb up on the seats to direct a question to the PCSOs in the next booth to clarify a point or remember a trip they had attended. This was in keeping with the warm and light-hearted relationship evident between young people and the PCSOs.

The young people were then encouraged to express their views on a number of questions, which were discussed previously with the PCSOs. Hand written notes of the proceedings were taken by the researcher. The young people were very engaged and seemed to enjoy the University setting, which added to their eagerness to talk, producing some very interesting responses.

Focus Group 2: Young People from Cheltenham *(Tuesday 13 December, 2016, 4.30pm-5.30pm):*

The second focus group involved four young people from Cheltenham aged between 8-10 years old: two girls and two boys. As the participants were younger than the first session, the traditional focus group structure of questions and answers was deemed inappropriate, and with agreement from the supervising PCSO, the researcher sat in

on a planned session at Hester's Way Police Station at which the young people decorated Christmas cakes they had made in a previous session. PCSOs collected the young people from their homes and transported them by car to the police station. The session took place in a purpose-built room converted from garages, and painted with bright colours to provide a welcoming space for the young people.

The young people engaged in decorating their cakes with considerable enthusiasm. It was striking to observe the warm and easy-going manner that the PCSOs had with the young people and evident that they had formed highly positive relationships based on lots of encouragement and self-esteem building. The PCSOs also used the session to find out how things were at home for the young people. As the session progressed, it was possible to ask the occasional question to the young people although their preoccupation with the cake and their shyness towards the researcher ensured that answers were often quite short and did not lead to the same spontaneous bursts of conversation as in the previous session. Nevertheless, this was a worthwhile exercise, particularly the opportunity it afforded to get an insight into the views and experiences of the very youngest participants in the Aston project and what they get out of it.

Aston project self-evaluation summary sheet mock-up

	SECTIONS	SUMMARY EVALUATION		
1	**INTRODUCTION**	Participants progress from agency and Police referencing through engagement in a range of socially positive activities. Progress is therefore measured with participants through timebanking using agreed and clear criteria. Double weighting of voluntary work. Engagement is monitored. Non-engagement is logged as 'dormant' or 'sleeping'. Key to note:		
2	**AREAS FOR PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**	• Aston now operating in three locations, Cheltenham, Gloucester and Forest of Dean, with slightly different management and operation in each.		
		• Police leadership is onerous, but key. More community volunteers are needed to ensure longer term sustainability.		
		• Review oversight and governance of the project.		
3	**PROGRESS MADE BY THE PROJECT ON AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT IDENTIFIED.**	**Key Issue**	**Progress made**	
		• 4,256 hours of engagement in 2016 [1st Jan – 28 Nov].	• Approx. 60 hours per participant.	
		• X hours of participant community volunteering representing x% of total hours.	•	
		• Establishment of Forest of Dean as new location and development of Gloucester.	• 13 participants in Newent all 'active', 27 'active' participants in Gloucester - almost as many as Cheltenham.	
4	**OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS** Engagement and level of participation	**Strengths**	**Areas for Development**	**x/3**
		• Police-led involvement, including PCSOs	• Raise engagement of community volunteers	
		• 610 participants have been involved in the Project over its lifetime.	• Improve engagement of 'graduates' of project.	
		• 89 'live' participants of which 79% are 'active'.	• Drive to increase 'active' participants as a percentage.	
5	**VOLUNTEERING** Engagement.	**Strengths**	**Areas for Development**	**x/3**
		• 34 adult volunteers over project lifetime; 23 'active' adult volunteers. Total: 500 hours of volunteering, 14 hours in December 2016. Note: 9 recent applications going through registration process.	• This could be increased, particularly in areas of management and governance of the project.	
		• Clear and robust process of engagement, including safeguarding.	• Recruitment of volunteers and clarification of range of roles.	

		• Participant community volunteer hours total 2,540 hours in year 2015/16.	• Seek measure of community volunteer hours as percentage of overall banked hours for next year's report.	
6	**LEADERSHIP/-MANAGEMENT** How well leaders demonstrate ambition for participants, improve engagement, develop staff, and sustain improvement.	**Strengths**	**Areas for Development**	**x/3**
		• Strong and robust leadership from police.	• Integrate volunteers and participants into leadership and governance.	
		• Good data available on participants and volunteers from database and Timebank.	• Reflect on how the data gathered can be used to monitor and evaluate the Project against aims.	
8	**OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**	**Overall Effectiveness Judgement**	**Good**	**2**