

SEEND COMMUNITY BUS

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SEEND COMMUNITY BUS REPORT 2019 TO 2020

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

The mission of the charity is to provide transport in the rural areas of Seend and Bromham for those who have limited or no access to public transport. This service relies entirely on volunteers, not only to drive the vehicle but to keep it clean, monitor maintenance, keep proper records of usage, income and expenditure and liaise with service users and hirers. It also benefits from a good relationship with The MOT Centre at Bowerhill where Class 5 MOTs, regular safety inspections and general maintenance are carried out, sometimes at short notice.

The charity also benefits from a good relationship with Wiltshire Council and Community First who support all Wiltshire Community Transport Groups. As a member of the Wiltshire & Swindon Community Transport Association we are part of a broad, supportive group of organisations. We are also grateful to Seend Parish Council, not only for their financial support but also for keeping us informed of roadworks in the parish which may affect service routes.

I reported last year that we were erroneously served with penalty notices for failure to submit a Corporation Tax Return when asked to do so, even though we had never been asked to submit one. These notices were withdrawn but this year we were asked to submit a return for Corporation Tax. This was a complicated process which involved registering for access to the HMRC online service and, submitting accounts and entering data online. It was a time-consuming process but was eventually completed to the satisfaction of the Inspectors. Unsurprisingly, bearing in mind the small scale of our operation, we were not required to pay any Corporation Tax. We are hoping this was a one-off random request.

Another problem arose during the year when we applied to renew the Section 22 Permit which entitles us to take members of the paying public. Although we have been operating

on a Section 22 Permit for about 30 years, renewing every 5 years, the Traffic Commissioner could find no record of our services on their system. The Permit was refused until we registered our services. This involved a fee and submission of detailed timetables and route maps. We are indebted to Phil Grocock at Wiltshire Council Transport Department, without whose learned guidance and assistance fast-tracking the registration we would have been in a very difficult position. There would have been a several week-long interruption of services.

Like all other Community Transport Groups throughout the country we are waiting to discover the implications of the Government's review of what constitutes Commerciality following a challenge from Commercial Operators concerning perceived unfair competition. If legislation is brought in to make CTGs comply with the same rulings as Commercial Companies it is hard to envisage many CTGs surviving financially or being able to maintain the goodwill of their base of volunteer drivers. This is going to be a long process. As far as we are concerned, we have never been in competition with Commercial Operators. Indeed, we are at pains to ensure that the services we provide fill in where Commercial Operators do not provide a service. That is why CTGs were set up in the first place.

In spite of the administrative difficulties described above, we have had a successful year. We are an entirely voluntary organisation delivering a valuable service to the community.

SERVICES

The services we run are very much appreciated by the passengers who use them. For many the Shuttle has become an important part of their lives. This is particularly true for residents of Angell House in Bromham and pupils of Seend School who benefit from the term-time morning service. All services operate under a Section 22 permit except for the Salisbury runs which operate under a Section 19 permit and are pre-bookable.

The service runs, including 11 to Salisbury, totalled 2671 passenger trips compared to 2791 in the previous year. These runs covered a total of 5184 miles. The school run, which operates every morning during term time carried fewer passengers than the previous year: 4030 compared to last year's 4436. However, the value of this service is immense and numbers may increase as the school population changes. The team of drivers on the rota are commended for their early morning dedication in all weathers.

FUNDING

Seend Community Bus is supported by an annual grant from Wiltshire Council. The grant for the year 2016/17 was £5,360 as it had been for many years. Because of Council cuts, however, the grant was reduced to £4,290 two years ago and to £3430 last year. To qualify for the Wiltshire Council grant The Trustees have to provide annual accounts and demonstrate that the service provided meets their criteria. To this end, a record is kept of

the mileage for every trip made by the bus and the number of passengers it carries. The Charity also traditionally receives an annual donation of £400 from Seend Parish Council. The regular service runs are also covered by the bus pass scheme. A monthly spreadsheet is sent to Wiltshire Council via their appointed agent showing how many bus pass trips were made and the Charity is reimbursed.

The bus is also used by many local groups and organisations who are invoiced by the Charity for the miles recorded for each journey.

Other income is from small donations occasionally made by individuals and organisations, notably by rounding-up of the total of their invoice.

MAINTENANCE

Weekly inspections of the bus are made by our in-house mechanic.

The MOT centre at Bowerhill carries out regular ten-weekly full safety inspections of the vehicle in compliance with the Section 19 and 22 Permit requirements and also undertakes any repairs needed.

There was a problem during the spring with the bus Turbo, resulting in a severe loss of power. The vehicle was off the road for several days while it was repaired by the Mercedes specialists at Rygor in Westbury.

CLEANING

A number of local groups and individuals undertake monthly cleaning on a rota basis.

HIRINGS

The bus is still very popular with numerous clubs, groups, societies and schools, although there were 76 hires in the year compared to 91 in the previous year. There were a number of cancellations for a variety of reasons. Hire is charged at 75p per mile plus VAT. We do not, as a rule, provide a driver and hirers are asked to provide their own. All drivers must have D1 entitlement on their licence and undergo a familiarisation with the vehicle.

ACCOUNTING

A meticulous record of accounts is kept using a system of spreadsheets. This system was examined and approved by HMRC shortly after we voluntarily registered for VAT. All the following figures are given excluding VAT. The accounting system automatically totals VAT on hirings and VAT relating to expenditure and these are recorded separately on the balance sheet. Quarterly VAT returns are submitted online via the HMRC website.

Full accounts are prepared annually and submitted to Wiltshire Council to support the Annual Grant Application and also for the Charity Commission. Accounts are also forwarded to Seend Parish Council as a courtesy in return for their annual donation.

EXPENDITURE

Total expenditure for the year was £6470.67 compared to £4789.67 for the previous year.

1. Office Expenses were £121.52 compared to £118.75 last year.
2. Drivers/Officers Expenses were £40.00 compared to £9.60 last year.
3. Insurance/Licences increased from £1442.60 to £1758.87. Part of this increase relates to renewal of the Section 22 permit and registration of services.
4. Maintenance costs were £1898.50 compared to £617.33 last year. £775.90 of this increase was major work carried out when the turbo failed. The fire extinguishers were also replaced and a new battery fitted.
5. Fuel costs were £2344.56 compared to £2555.37 last year.
6. Medical tests for drivers who reach age 70 are paid for by the Charity and these vary in price depending on which surgery the test is carried out at but average £100. During the year one driver required a medical at a cost of £115. There were none last year.
7. We hired vehicles from other CTA's on two occasions. Holt bus was used when our vehicle was being repaired and Calne bus to cover a double booking.
8. Other costs were £10, which was the annual subscription to W&SCTA.

INCOME

Total income for the year was £12720.86, a slight reduction compared to last year's £13135.53.

1. Hirings were £3267.20 compared to £3994.24 last year.
2. Bus Fares for the "School" Run were £1138.70 compared to £1119.80 last year.
3. For the Other Service Runs income was £532.00 compared to £456.00 last year.

4. Bus Pass Reclaims totalled £3668.63 compared to £3557.24 last year. Concessionary Fares repayments are made proportionately according to a complex formula. The average payment is £270 per month but quarterly reconciliation payments are made.

5. Donations are made up primarily of a £400 annual grant by the Parish Council. The rest is from hirers topping up the amount on their invoice. The total for the year was £452.03 compared to £564.20 for the previous year.

6. The Wiltshire Council Grant was £3430 as it was last year.

SUMMARY

Although income is slightly down on the previous year, we are in a very healthy position financially. We have an excellent team of volunteers who keep the service running smoothly. Our main concern, looking to the future, apart from the ongoing uncertainty over Permit regulations, is trying to encourage younger volunteers to join the team. This is a perennial problem for many charitable organisations but particularly crucial concerning drivers. Many drivers serving community transport are older generation who have D1 on their licence. We need to see younger drivers coming forward although anyone who passed their driving test after 1996 will not have D1 entitlement and will have to take a separate test before they can drive for us. This will inevitably have a financial impact for us.

We are grateful to all those volunteers who drive, maintain and clean the vehicle and to those who provide financial support, however small, and to those who liaise with user groups and individuals, carry out administration tasks and generally work together to provide what is a highly valued service to the rural communities of Seend and Bromham in the light of declining commercial bus services.

Looking ahead it is clear that the year 2020 to 2021 will be hugely impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Income will be considerably reduced but we are grateful to Wiltshire Council in particular for their ongoing financial support for Community Transport. While any major change to Permit legislation may have a devastating long-term effect on the sector, we believe Seend Community Bus is in a strong position to ride out the short-term effect that the pandemic will have on our finances. We will continue to provide whatever services we can within any regulations and restrictions which are put in place. We are confident that we will survive well into the future for those who rely on our services.

This concludes the annual report of Seend Community Bus.