

BLOC Annual Report 2023/2024

Message from the Chair

BLOC is a collective and would not continue without the support of all parents. Thank you for pulling together to support this enterprise. My particular thanks go to those who have volunteered their time to serve on the committee this year: Rita, Mathilde, Marianne and Jamie. Without their hard work, between their own jobs and families, none of this would be possible.

Last year Bus 3 and Bus 4 were at capacity with waiting lists, and a handful of part time users lost their seats when new full time registrations were received. The committee made the following changes to help make it easier for parents to plan school transport for the year:

1. BLOC's Ts and Cs have been updated so that Full Time and Part Time seats are confirmed for the full year (full time applications are prioritised in the initial assignment of seats)
2. BLOC has increased capacity in Abingdon with a double decker bus adding 21 more seats (see the Registrar's report).

Last year was an unusually challenging year for BLOC as we faced an extended period of uncertainty over the future of our main provider, Charlton Services. During this period, we sought quotes from other providers and were able to obtain one that was competitive. Most providers contacted could not cover all 6 routes or were quoting up to 3x the price.

Charlton Services decided to continue operating with new management. The new management raised prices by ~25% to £250 per day for single deck buses and £300 per day for the double decker. This is competitive with the rest of the market. Charlton Service's new management have downsized their operation to focus on BLOC's school run. They have indicated that the increased fees will be used to invest in the fleet and enable them to drop other contracts (previously the source of late arriving buses). After discussion, the committee decided to stay with Charlton Services for 2024/2025.

The committee invested £10,000 of the management reserve to offset the rise in prices in 2024/2025 and reduce the fees in the September term. This includes reimbursements from cancelled services in Summer Term 2024.

At the start of this school year, parents have faced some serious disruption to service, with one bus line not running as Charlton Services were unable to provide full staffing at the start of term. Overall, however, the BLOC committee, the school and parents have worked hard to solve problems together, including a mechanism for users to sign up for other services so the school can move children between buses with written confirmation from parents. Currently we are using an alternative provider for Route 14. Using two bus companies clearly raises the level of complexity for BLOC.

We have not historically had a written agreement or contract with Charlton Services. Over the summer we have been working with Charlton Services to rectify this, and codify how we will work together.

Looking ahead, there are a couple of challenges which are worth parents' attention:

- Has BLOC reached a scale and complexity that is difficult for parent volunteers to handle?
- What is the fee level parents are willing to pay for a reliable service?

These questions are for a future committee to resolve.

Treasurer's Report

BLOC Income and Expense			
£	Year Ended 31 August 2022	Year Ended 31 August 2023	Year Ended 31 August 2024
Contributions	194,559	229,266	225,079
Bus Costs	-190,300	-211,905	-220,170
Vouchers	-180		
Trackers	-122	-462	-627
AGM	-50	-64	
School TA supervision	-426		
Accounting	-258	-144	-144
IT	-82	-64	-29
Interest income	4		42
Surplus / (deficit)	3,145	16,628	4,152
Reserves as at 1 September	24,255	27,400	44,028
Reserves as at 31 August	27,400	44,028	48,180

BLOC Financial Position			
	Year Ended 31 August 2022	Year Ended 31 August 2023	Year Ended 31 August 2024
Cash at bank	53,356	93,065	84,664
Accounts Receivable	478	-642	86
Accrued Contributions	-426	-288	-55
Deferred Contributions	-26,009	-48,106	-36,515
Net Assets	27,399	44,029	48,180
Reserves	27,399	44,029	48,180

- The surplus for 2023-24 was £4,152 (2022-23: £16,628 and 2021-22: £3,145)
- As of 31st August 2024 BLOC held a total of £48,180 in reserves from which £35,028 is being kept in the reserve account for bus fees, non-payments and emergency situations.
- £10,000 from the management reserve has been deducted from the 2024-25 costs to reduce usage fees which were expected to increase by ~25%.
As a result the cost of FT seats came to £390 (2022: £325).
- Other costs relate to the accounting system, website, trackers and room hire for the AGM.

Registrar's Report

The current bus usage is shown below.

Bus #		Mon -AM-	Mon -PM-	Tues -AM-	Tues -PM-	Wed -AM-	Wed -PM-	Thur -AM-	Thur -PM-	Fri -AM-	Fri -PM-	Max
1		45	49	45	49	45	49	45	48	44	48	53
2		45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	53
3		50	54	51	54	50	54	50	55	51	56	57
4		70	71	70	71	70	71	70	71	70	71	71*
11		41	48	41	48	41	48	41	48	41	48	53
14		32	30	31	30	32	30	32	30	32	29	53
Total		283	297	283	297	283	297	283	297	283	297	339

* Bus 4 has 78 seats, but we will have to pay more to use these additional seats (currently under consideration)

In 2023/2024 we had waiting lists for Bus 4 (Abingdon) and Bus 3 (Botley, Cumnor, Wootton), and on multiple occasions part time users lost seats when new full time registrations were received. There is limited scope to change the Bus 3 route while the Botley Road remains closed.

To increase capacity on these routes, for September 2024 we have switched Bus 4 to a couple decker (adding an additional 21 seats) and added new stops to Bus 4 that some previous Bus 3 users can use.

Bus 3 is still at capacity this year and Bus 4 (West Oxford, Cumnor, Abingdon) is almost at capacity. However, we have lots of spare capacity on the rest of the lines (particularly East Oxford). Over the last couple of years we have seen increasing demand in Abingdon and reduced

demand in East Oxford. If this continues, we will need to revise the routes to move capacity to where it is needed (proposals on how to do this are welcome).

Over the last year, we have also made other minor changes to routes based on user feedback and proposals, including changing the stops along the Abingdon Road in Oxford.

Proposals to change stops are welcomed by the committee: these are successful when the proposal includes detailed plans for where the stops should be, information on any changes to the route that may be required and agreement from multiple users for the change. As a reminder:

- New bus stops can be added to existing routes where there are enough users wanting the stop, the stop is on the existing route and the stop is a proper bus stop.
- Changes to stops and routes are possible with a consultation and vote by affected users.