

Policy on Use of Contingency

General Principles

1. As a general principle, directorate budgets should be structured to cover business as usual, investment and efficiency programmes that have been agreed as part of the budget and service planning round and administration priorities. Contingency budgets should not be included in financial planning as part of a service's annual operational revenue budget.
2. Budgets which are "demand led" should be set to deal with the forecast level of activity. For example the predicted client numbers and needs in Adults and Children's social care, the usual level of activity for planning appeals and winter gritting average weather conditions.
3. Income budgets should be set to take into account likely activity levels and any changes in fees and charges.
4. The contingency is there to deal with unforeseen/exceptional items which occur during the financial year.

Appropriate uses

5. It is recommended that the contingency is used for the following purposes:
 - To deal with demographic risk, where the number of clients or cost per client varies from the estimate in Children's or Adults services beyond what has been budgeted for.
 - To deal with unexpected increases in demand for services due to policy changes, for instance an increase in homelessness due to the housing benefit changes beyond what has been budgeted
 - To deal with seasonal risks, such as exceptionally bad weather or a flu pandemic
 - To deal with tonnage risk, where the number of tonnes disposed of via West London Waste Authority varies from the estimate in the Place Directorate
 - To deal with the consequences of a recession
 - To deal with major planning appeals and litigation
 - Cost pressures in relation to the services delivered jointly with Health partners
 - To deal with uncertainty due to consultation and equality impact on proposals
 - To deal with unexpected budget shortfalls due to changes in the external environment or changes in the law/regulations
 - To fund small one-off projects which are high priority and have the approval of the portfolio holder with responsibility for Finance.
 - Any other unforeseen items / pressures

Criteria

6. Clear evidence will be required to support variations from estimated demand agreed as part of the budget review process.

7. Contingency funds will not be used where there has been a failure to deliver planned savings (except where this is due to the outcome of consultation) or properly manage spending.

Approval Process

8. Use of the contingency will be reported to Cabinet as part of the quarterly budget monitoring report by the S151 officer. The S151 officer will liaise with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for finance and make proposals to Cabinet for virements from Contingency as appropriate.

Unspent balances

9. If there is an underspend at the end of the year a contribution to general balances will be considered with regard to the size of the underspend, the underlying strength of the balance sheet and the need to support other priorities.