

Reserves Policy

The recommended reserves policy is as follows:

The first call on any under spend at the end of the year will be to add to reserves. A contribution to general balances will then be considered with regard to the size of the under spend, the underlying strength of the balance sheet and the need to support other priorities.

The rationale for this policy is set out below.

Councils need balances so that they can deal with unforeseen calls on resources without disrupting service delivery. It is the responsibility of each authority to set its level of reserves based on local conditions, but taking into account national factors. Although advice can be sought from the external auditor, it is not their responsibility to prescribe the appropriate level. However, the External Auditor expects the Council to review its reserves on an annual basis.

There is no statutory definition of a minimum level of reserves. The level of reserves is a balance between the risk facing the Authority and the opportunity costs of holding these balances.

The Council should at least be able to cope with a modest overspend in any one year and still be in a stable financial position.

The target level of reserves depends on:

- The degree of risk contained in the budget
- The effectiveness of budget monitoring and control during the year
- The effectiveness of balance sheet management during the year
- The extent to which the Council has earmarked reserves and provisions to deal with specific items.

The Council is continually working to improve financial management and in 2024/25 will continue to focus on accurate, timely and robust management of its revenue budget, capital programme, savings tracker and trading activities.

As at 31 March 2024 the forecast level of General Fund Balances will be £10.008m, which represents 4.9% of the Council's net revenue budget for 2024/25 (£203m), which is the recommended minimum level. In addition, the Authority holds a limited number of earmarked reserves as detailed in Appendix 9.

A decision will be made at year end on the best use of any available capacity in the revenue budget and where this will be transferred to reserve.

The S151 officer has responsibility for the establishment of earmarked reserves. The S151 officer is responsible for ensuring that detailed controls are established for the creation of new reserves and provisions and any disbursements therefrom.

All contributions to, and appropriations from, General Fund reserves must be approved by the S151 Officer and Portfolio Holder with Responsibility for Finance, subject to any limitations set by the Council in the approved budget framework.