

West Buckland Parish Council

General Reserves Policy

Adopted: 22nd February 2022. Review date: February 2024

Introduction

West Buckland Parish Council is required to maintain adequate Financial Reserves to meet the needs of its operations and to ensure financial security. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of reserves.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide (JPAG) (March 2021 edition) advises:

“As with any financial entity, it is essential that authorities have sufficient reserves (General and Earmarked) to finance both its day-to-day operations and future plans. It is important, however, given that its funds are generated from taxation/public levies, that such reserves are not excessive.”

Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require local authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. However, there is no specific minimum level of reserves which an authority should hold, and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer (Clerk) to advise the Parish Council about the level of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for their establishment and use.

2. Types of Reserves

These may be categorised as either General or Earmarked.

2.1 General Reserves

General Reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions on their use. They cushion the impact of uneven cash flows, offset budget requirements, if necessary, or can be held in case of unexpected events or emergencies. Setting the level of General Reserves is agreed with the Annual Budget.

JPAG (March 2021 edition) advises: *“The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a Smaller Authority’s General Reserve is that this should be maintained at between three (3) and twelve (12) months Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE). NRE (subject to any planned surplus or deficit) is effectively Precept\Levy less any Loan Repayment and/or amounts included in Precept\Levy for Capital Projects and transfers to Earmarked Reserves. The reason for the wide range (3 to 12 months) is to cater for the large variation in sizes of individual authorities. The smaller the authority the closer the figure should be to 12 months NRE, the larger the authority the nearer to 3 months.”*

The primary means of building General Reserves will be through a reallocation of funds (underspend on a completed project) and allocation from the annual budget. This will be in addition to any amounts needed to replenish reserves which have been spent in the previous year.

2.2 Earmarked Reserves 'EMR's

EMRs must be held for genuine and intended purposes and their level should be subject to annual review and justification. They should be separately identified to prevent query from the internal auditor and, if income or expenditure is above £25,000, the external auditor.

EMRs are held for several reasons and shall only be used for the purpose for which they were created:

- Renewals – to enable the planning and financing of an effective program of equipment replacement and property maintenance/refurbishment. The funds required are built up incrementally over several years when taking into account asset conditions and asset life. They are a mechanism to smooth expenditure without the need to vary budgets.
- Carry forward of underspend on an uncompleted project – expenditure committed to a project but not spent in the budget year. Reserves can be used as a mechanism to carry forward those resources.
- S106 Contributions – proceeds from developers which can only be used for specified purposes.
- Other Earmarked Reserves – these may be set up from time to time to meet known or predicted liabilities.

Where the purpose of an Earmarked Reserve becomes obsolete, or where there is an over-provision of funds, the excess may, on the approval of the Parish Council, be transferred to other budget headings within the revenue budget, to General Reserves or to one or more other Earmarked Reserves.

EMRs will be established on a “needs” basis in line with anticipated requirements and these are to be reviewed annually when the budget is agreed.

Any decision to set up an EMR must be approved by Parish Council.

3. Management and Control of Reserves

Movements in Earmarked Reserves and General Reserves shall be reported to the Parish Council as part of the regular Budget to Actual Report. The use of Reserves shall be approved by the Parish Council.

The level of General Reserves shall be reviewed on an annual basis during the annual budgetary review and agreed by the Parish Council. The minimum level of General Reserves shall be recommended to the Parish Council by the Responsible Financial Officer/Clerk. This will form part of the recommendations for the Annual Budget and Precept request by the Parish Council.

The current level of General Reserves held by the Council is between six and nine months of predicted expenditure.