



RESERVES POLICY

WRITTEN BY:

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Biddulph Town Council is required by statute to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the organisation.

The council's Internal and External Auditors review the council's reserves and their justification annually.

The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of reserves and is separate to the Council's Investment Strategy.

There is no specified minimum (or maximum) level of reserves that an authority should hold. It is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer and the Members of the Council to determine the level of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for their establishment and use.

1.2 The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires local precepting authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement.

All councils should continue to ensure that their reserves remain adequate for planned future needs and contingencies without placing undue constraints on current expenditure.

Councils with very high levels of reserves relative to their spending should review the purposes for which these are held to ensure they are still required. This document forms part of this review process, which is reviewed, and risk assessed annually.

PROVISIONS

2.1 Reserves can be categorised as '**General**' or '**Earmarked**'.

2.2 The main purposes of the **General Reserves** are firstly to operate as a working balance to help manage the impact of uneven cash flows and secondly, to provide a contingency to cushion the impact of emerging or unforeseen events or genuine emergencies. The General Reserve is not ringfenced (earmarked) for any specific expenditure. In general, a robust level of reserves should be maintained and consider operational and financial issues facing the Town Council.

The Council must at all times keep a minimum balance sufficient to pay salaries to staff and associated expenses e.g. National Insurance, tax contributions and pensions. In addition, any contractual arrangements should be maintained for a period of time.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioners' Guide, which sets out the 'proper practices' for how the council must maintain its accounts, recommends that local councils should hold an amount in reserves to meet unexpected expenditure, typically between three and twelve months of net revenue expenditure. In 2025-26, Biddulph Town Council approved an unusual level of expenditure as a result of a large capital project. In 2026-27, the precept requirement is £548,785. The value of general reserves is £320,000, equating to around 7-months of the precept figure. Any funds held in addition to this figure will be held as earmarked reserves.

The level of the General Reserve is presented to the Finance Strategy and Management Committee and Full Town Council as part of the Budget Setting and Year End Accounting reports.

The General Reserve will be replenished as part of the budget process in any year where it has been utilised for unexpected/emergency expenditure.

2.3 **Earmarked or 'specific' Reserves** can be held for several reasons. As the name suggests these represent amounts which are 'earmarked' for specific items of expenditure to meet known or predicted liabilities or projects.

Earmarked Reserves (EMR) can be used to "smooth" the effects of certain expenditure commitments over a period of time, thereby reducing the impact of significant expenditure in any one year.

Earmarked Reserves are typically held for:

- Renewals - used to plan and finance an effective programme of equipment replacement, planned property repair and maintenance or grounds maintenance. These reserves are a mechanism to smooth expenditure so that a sensible replacement programme can be achieved without the need to vary budgets.
- Medium to long-term projects - in this instance, the Council will make provision over a number of years for large-scale projects such as the purchase of burial land or public realm and infrastructure projects.
- Carry forward of under-spend - some expenditure budgeted for projects in a given financial year cannot be spent in that year. Reserves are used as a mechanism to carry forward these resources.
- Insurance reserve - to enable the Council to meet the excesses not covered by insurance.

The Town Council has responsibility to ensure funds are spent in line with their purpose. The purpose of each earmarked reserve should be reviewed annually to ensure that it is still relevant.

2.4 The Council will be required to identify the following when making recommendations for each reserve:

1. The reason/purpose of the Reserve.
2. How and when the Reserve can be used.
3. Any procedures for the Reserve's management and control.
4. A process and timescales for review of the Reserve to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.

2.5 In order to **assess the adequacy** of Reserves when setting the budget, both the Responsible Financial Officer and the Committees should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the Committee/Council.

The financial risks should be assessed in the context of the Council's overall approach to risk management.

The Responsible Financial Officer should ensure that the Council has put in place effective arrangements for internal audit of the control environment and systems of internal control.

2.6 The Town Council has committed to the development of a new Garden of Remembrance at the Woodhouse Burial Ground. This is the priority for 2026-27 earmarked reserves. Beyond this, the priorities for the Town Council are:

- Allotment developments (all sites), e.g. accessible plot, new site development, enhancements to existing provision.
- Provisional sum towards by-election costs
- Heritage and restoration (including cenotaph)
- Biddulph Grange Country Park Visitor Centre enhancements
- Additional Christmas lights and event
- Activities required as a result of asset transfer (following local government re-organisation).

These priorities will be reviewed annually.