

Wickford Town Council

General Reserves Policy

Introduction

Wickford Town Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs to the organisation. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Town Council will determine and review the level of reserves.

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 specified minimum level of reserves than an authority should hold and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Finance Officer, based on appropriate guidance from internal and external auditors, to advise the Town Council on the level of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for establishment and use.

Types of Reserves

Reserves can be categorised as General or Earmarked.

General Reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions as to their use. These reserves can be used to smooth the impact of uneven cash flows, offset the budget requirement if necessary or can be held as provision for unexpected events or emergencies, including unplanned expenditure.

Earmarked Reserves can be held for several reasons, including but not limited to:

- Renewals – to enable the Town Council to plan and finance an effective programme of infrastructure replacement and planned property maintenance. These reserves are a mechanism to smooth expenditure so that a sensible replacement programme can be achieved without the need to vary budgets
- Carry forward of underspend – the Town Council may commit expenditure to projects but cannot spend the budget in the year. Earmarked Reserves are used as a mechanism to carry forward these resources
- Insurance reserve – to enable the Town Council to meet the excess to claims
- Other Earmarked Reserves may be set up from time to time to meet known or predicted liabilities

Use of Reserves

Reserves should not be held to fund on-going expenditure. This would be unsustainable as, at some point, the reserves would be exhausted. To the extent that reserves are used to meet short term funding gaps, they may be replenished in the following year. However, Earmarked Reserves that have been used to meet a specific liability would not need to be replenished, having served their original purpose.

Any decision to set up a Reserve must be made by the Town Council.

Expenditure from Reserves and the virement of monies can only be authorised by the Town Council. This authority has been delegated to the Finance and Resources Committee.

Reviewing the Town Council's Financial Risk Assessment is part of the budgeting and year end accounting procedures and identifies planned and unplanned expenditure items, thereby indicating an appropriate level of Reserves.

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General Reserves

The level of Reserves is a matter of judgement and so this policy does not attempt to prescribe a blanket level. The primary means of building general reserves will be through an allocation from the annual budget. This will be in addition to any amounts needed to replenish reserves that have been consumed in the previous year.

Setting the level of General Reserves is one of several related decisions in the formulation of the medium-term financial strategy and the annual budget. The Town Council must build and maintain sufficient working balances to cover the key risks it faces, as expressed in its financial risk assessment.

If in extreme circumstances General Reserves were exhausted due to major unforeseen spending pressures within a particular financial year, the Town Council would be able to draw down from its Earmarked Reserves to provide short term resources.

Even at times when extreme pressure is put on the finances the Town Council must keep a minimum balance sufficient to cover three month's payroll costs to staff in General Reserves at all times.

Earmarked Reserves

These will be established on a 'needs' basis, in line with anticipated requirements.

Current level of financial reserves

The level of financial reserves held by the Town Council will be agreed during the discussion held regarding the setting of the budget for the next financial year.

The Town Council's working level of General Reserves is 6 months.

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Date of last review:	24 November 2025
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Next review:	November 2026