

HUCCLECOTE PARISH COUNCIL RESERVES POLICY

Introduction

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

Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires 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 that an authority should hold and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer to advise the Council about the level of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for their establishment and use.

Types of Reserves

Reserves can be categorised as general or earmarked.

General Reserves

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 in case of unexpected events or emergencies. The level of General 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 annual budget.

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

Even at times when extreme pressure is put on the Council's finances the Council must keep a minimum balance sufficient to pay 12 month's salaries to staff in General Reserves at all times.

Earmarked Reserves

Earmarked reserves will be established on a "needs" basis, in line with anticipated requirements.

Earmarked reserves can be held for several reasons:

- Renewals – to enable HPC to plan and finance an effective programme of equipment 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 - some services commit expenditure to projects, but cannot spend the budget in year. Reserves are used as a mechanism to carry forward these resources.
- Insurance reserve – to enable the Council to meet the excesses of claims not covered by insurance.
- Other earmarked reserves may be set up from time to time to meet known or predicted liabilities.
- S106 & CIL payments where restriction is imposed in the agreements.

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

Expenditure from reserves can only be authorised by the Council.

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 must 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 the purpose for which they were originally established.

All Earmarked Reserves are recorded on the parish council accounts and are listed on the monthly payment schedule. Please refer to this for the current reserves held.

Current level of financial reserves

The level of financial reserves held by the council will be agreed by the Parish Council during the discussions held regarding the setting of the budget for the next financial year. The advised level of general reserves to be held by the Council is between 6 and 12 months expenditure.

Policy dated 1st January 2024

Adopted 15th January 2024