

Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk

Policy on Earmarked Reserves and General Fund Working Balance

Purpose

Balances and reserves can be held for four main purposes;

- A working balance can cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing
- A working balance and a reserve can act as a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies
- Earmarked reserves can be used to build up funds to meet known or predicted liabilities
- Holding account reserves help in equalizing the impact of operational surpluses and deficits

Working balance is considered to be the balances on the account of the General Fund.

Earmarked reserves are those set aside to meet known or predicted liabilities the main accounts being;

- capital reserves
- renewal and replacement reserves
- insurance reserves
- trading and business units reserves
- other reserves retained for operational service use

Holding account reserves include those that hold year-end balances on operational surpluses and deficits, mainly due to the use of charging percentage overheads on costs to service areas where it is intended that these recharges will produce sufficient income to recover actual expenditure that takes place during the accounting period. Examples include;

- salaries and wages oncost accounts
- support services charges

Adequacy

In order to assess the adequacy of balances and reserves when setting the budget it is necessary to take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the Council and where possible;

- Attempt to keep the level of the balances and reserves within reasonable limits consistent with the associated risks
- To avoid tying up funds unnecessarily

Levels and Movements on Reserves

For each earmarked there will be set minimum/maximum levels to be held. Movements on the reserves will be recorded as part of the monthly Monitoring Report and members will be advised of any action necessary to restore agreed levels. The need for the reserve and levels to be held will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Governance

The power to establish reserves will rest with the Council on recommendation by the Cabinet.

Within the existing statutory and regulatory framework, it is the responsibility of the Section 151 Officer to advise the Council about the level of reserves and balances.

Full details of the conditions involving transfer from reserves by a Portfolio Holder are set out in the Financial Regulations – additional resources from reserves may be made by a Portfolio Holder up to a maximum of £100,000 per Portfolio in any financial year.

Where a reserve exists for a specific purpose, the Deputy Chief Executive may withdraw funds from that reserve, provided that the withdrawals to finance an item or items of expenditure related to the reasons for the existence of the reserve, up to a value of £20,000 per annum.

Level of Working Balance – General Fund

The minimum level of the working balance for the General Fund on 1 April each year will be set in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) recommendations plus an allowance for an amount calculated in accordance with the Bellwin Scheme. The level of balances will be reviewed each year at the setting of the Budget.

Under the Government's arrangements for assistance towards costs generated by civil emergencies (The Bellwin Scheme) there is a requirement that the Council must spend 0.2% of the annual revenue budget on costs for non-insurable items before it can apply for Bellwin money. These costs include the relocation of flooded homes, clearing rubbish and mud and evacuating people from flooded areas.

The CIPFA guidelines are currently set at 5% of the Budget Requirement (net service spend) for the following year plus an allowance set by Government under the Bellwin Scheme.

Earmarked Reserves

The balances on earmarked reserves as at 31 March are part of the annual report to Council in September of each year. The table below provides a note on the purpose for each reserve and the recommended minimum and maximum levels to be held.

Earmarked Reserves Purpose	Minimum Balance £	Maximum Balance £
<p>Amenity Areas</p> <p>The reserve represents past contributions made by developers for the maintenance of land on housing sites. The balances will be drawn down over a period in support of service costs.</p>	0	300,000
<p>Capital Programme Resources</p> <p>This reserve consists of past and annual revenue contributions (RCCO). It will be used to finance capital programmes.</p>	0	£10m
<p>West Norfolk Partnership</p> <p>This reserve holds income from second homes council tax. It is used to support the Partnership on initiatives across the borough.</p>	0	£2m
<p>Insurance Reserve</p> <p>The reserve is held to deal with any loss due to theft (the Council self insures against theft), claims that are below £100 and any other excess on other policies. It is also used to finance risk management initiatives.</p>	50,000	250,000
<p>Restructuring Reserve</p> <p>The reserve is set up to deal with any consequences of changes to the establishment where redundancy and other such costs are involved and cannot be met in the year of account.</p>	150,000	£1m
<p>Renewals and Repairs Reserves</p> <p>These reserves come from annual contributions from service areas to deal with the maintenance and replacement of facilities, vehicles and equipment.</p>	£1m	£2.5m

Earmarked Reserves Purpose	Minimum Balance £	Maximum Balance £
<p>Holding Accounts</p> <p>The Holding Accounts reserves consist of a number of accounts which hold year-end balances on operational surpluses/deficits.</p>	200,000	£2.5m
<p>Ring Fenced Reserves</p> <p>These reserves consist of balances held on operational trading accounts and also include Trust Funds held by the Council. The funds are 'ring-fenced' and are only used for certain purposes.</p>	50,000 (May be subject to amounts of Trust Funds placed with the Council)	£1.5m (May be subject to amounts of Trust Funds placed with the Council)
<p>Planning Reserve</p> <p>The Government provide for grant aid/awards for performance on Planning services. The Council has a policy of drawing sums from the reserve on an annual basis to support the overall cost of the planning service.</p>	0	£1m
<p>Grants Reserves</p> <p>These reserves hold unspent funds received as grants from external bodies for specific schemes/projects.</p>	0	£1m
<p>Collection Fund Adjustments</p> <p>This reserve holds the year end balances of any accounting adjustments necessary for the Council's Business Rates safety Net and Levy payments.</p>	0	£3m
<p>Project reserves</p> <p>These reserves are set up to hold funds earmarked for specific projects that will be delivered in future years.</p>	0	£1m
<p>Other</p> <p>The 'Other' Reserves consists of a number of miscellaneous accounts that are basically operational in nature eg. various system suspense accounts.</p>	0	100,000