

Shawbury Parish Council

FINANCIAL RESERVES POLICY

Introduction

Shawbury Parish Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet its needs. 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 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 that an authority should hold, and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer to advise the Council about the level and use of reserves.

Types of Reserves

Reserves can be categorised as general or earmarked.

Earmarked reserves can be held for several reasons:

- Renewals – to enable services to plan and finance an effective programme of vehicle, equipment and 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 - 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.

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.

Earmarked Reserves

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

Any decision to set up a reserve must be made by the Council and 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 would not need to be replenished if they have been used to meet the purpose for which they were originally established.

All Earmarked Reserves are recorded on a central schedule held by the Responsible Financial Officer which lists the purpose for which each reserve is held. This is reviewed annually by Full Council. Quarterly budget monitoring identifies all spend from these reserves.

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

General Reserves

The level of General Reserves is a matter of judgement and so this policy is not prescriptive on either the upper or lower level of general reserves that should be held. However the Council will not build an excessive general reserve without purpose. 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. If General Reserves fall below the minimum threshold, the council will agree a replenishment plan within the following financial year, bearing in mind the impact of this action on the parish precept.

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 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 pressures, the Council would be able to draw down from its earmarked reserves to provide short term resources. This would require full council agreement and an understanding of the future impact of spending an earmarked reserve for a purpose for which it was not earmarked.

The minimum level of general reserves to be held by the Council is sufficient to fully cover three months' expenditure. This equates to one quarter of the annual precept - £15,563 for the financial year 2026/27. Even at times when extreme pressure is put on its finances the Council must keep a minimum balance sufficient to pay one month's salaries in General Reserves at all times.

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| Adopted | March 2026 |
| Review Frequency | Annually at Annual Parish Council Meeting |
| Next Review due | May 2026 |