

HALSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

RESERVES POLICY

Approved: Finance Committee – October 2025
For Review: Finance Committee – October 2026

1. Introduction

Parish Council's are required to maintain adequate Financial Reserves to meet the needs of operations and to ensure financial security. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of reserves.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide (JPAG) (March 2020 edition) advises:

"As with any financial entity, it is essential that authorities have sufficient reserves (General and Earmarked) to finance both its day-to-day operations and future plans. It is important, however, given that its funds are generated from taxation/public levies, that such reserves are not excessive."

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 specific minimum level of reserves which an authority should hold, and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer to advise the Parish Council about the level of reserves.

2. Types of Reserves

These may be categorised as either General or Specific.

2.1 General Reserves

General Reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions on their use. They cushion the impact of uneven cash flows, offset budget requirements, if necessary, or can be held in case of unexpected events or emergencies. Setting the level of General Reserves is agreed with the annual budget.

JPAG (March 2020 edition) advises:

"The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a Smaller Authority's General Reserve is that this should be maintained at between three (3) and twelve (12) months Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE)."

"The smaller the authority, the closer the figure should be to 12 months NRE, the larger the authority the nearer to 3 months. In practice, any authority with an NRE in excess of £200,000 should plan on 3 months equivalent."

The primary means of building General Reserves will be through a reallocation of funds (underspend on a completed project) and allocation from the annual budget. This will be in

addition to any amounts needed to replenish reserves which have been spent in the previous year. If in extreme circumstances General Reserves were exhausted due to major unforeseen spending pressures within a particular financial year, the Parish Council would be able to draw down from its EMRs to provide short term resources.

2.2 Earmarked Reserves 'EMR's

EMRs must be held for genuine and intended purposes and their level should be subject to annual review and justification. They should be separately identified to prevent query from internal and external auditors.

EMRs are held for several reasons and shall only be used for the purpose for which they were created.

Where the purpose of an Earmarked Reserve becomes obsolete, or where there is an over-provision of funds, the excess may, on the approval of the Parish Council, be transferred to other budget headings within the revenue budget, to General Reserves or to one or more other Earmarked Reserves.

EMRs will be established on a "needs" basis in line with anticipated requirements and these are to be reviewed annually when the budget is agreed.

Any decision to set up an EMR must be approved by the Parish Council. If the EMRs are used to meet short term funding gaps, they must be replenished in the following financial year. However, EMRs which have been used to meet a specific liability would not need to be replenished, after having served the purpose for which they were originally set up.

3. Management and Control of Reserves

Movements in Earmarked Reserves and General Reserves shall be reported to the Parish Council. The use of Reserves shall be approved by the Parish Council or Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The level of General Reserves shall be reviewed on an annual basis during the annual budgetary review by the Finance Committee and agreed by the Parish Council. The minimum level of General Reserves shall be recommended to the Parish Council by the Responsible Financial Officer / Chair of Finance. This will form part of the recommendations for the Annual Budget and Precept request by the Parish Council.

Given the assets that the Parish Council is responsible for the level of General Reserves to be held by the Council will be approximately 6 months of the annual precept.

Earmarked Reserves shall be reviewed on an individual basis. This review will also be undertaken as part of the Annual Budgetary Review. Approval for the creation, amendment, cessation, or continuation of Earmarked Reserves will be given by the Parish Council.