



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

2 February 2023

Report of the Interim Director of Finance & ICT

Reserves Position and Reserves Policy
(Corporate Services and Budget)

1. Divisions Affected

1.1 County-wide.

2. Key Decision

2.1 This is not a Key Decision.

3. Purpose of the Report

3.1 To note the current and forecast positions for both General and Earmarked Reserves and to approve the Reserves Policy. This report should be read alongside the following reports to this meeting: the Budget Consultation Results Report for 2023-24, the Revenue Budget Report 2023-24 and the Capital Programme Approvals, Treasury Management and Capital Strategies for 2023-24 Report.

4. Information and Analysis

Reserves Policy

- 4.1 Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require precepting authorities in England and Wales to assess the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement.
- 4.2 A range of safeguards are in place to prevent local authorities over-committing themselves financially. These include:
- The requirement to set a balanced budget as detailed in Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
 - The Chief Finance Officer's (S151 Officer) duty to report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves when the Council is considering its budget requirement as set out in Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.
 - Legislative requirement for each local authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and that the Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer) has responsibility for the administration of those affairs as set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 4.3 These requirements are reinforced by Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which requires the Chief Finance Officer to report to Council if there is, or is likely to be, unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget.
- 4.4 The Council has in place a Reserves Policy which ensures the Council meets its statutory obligations and sets out the framework within which decisions are made regarding the level of reserves.
- 4.5 In line with this framework the balance and level of Earmarked and General Reserves are regularly monitored to ensure they reflect a level adequate to manage the risks of the Council.
- 4.6 The Reserves Policy was last approved by Cabinet on 24 January 2022. The following minor amendment is proposed in this report:
- Requires the analysis of Earmarked Reserves to include the Public Health grant as a separate category.
- 4.7 A copy of the updated Reserves Policy has been included at Appendix Five for approval by Cabinet.

General Reserve

- 4.8 The Council's General Reserve position was last reported to Cabinet on 28 July 2022, as part of the Revenue Outturn Report 2021-22. General Reserve projections have been updated as part of the updated Five Year Financial Plan 2023-24 to 2027-28, which is included in the Revenue Budget Report 2023-24, also for consideration at this Cabinet meeting. As at 31 December 2022, the balance on the General Reserve is £31m. The General Reserve balance is forecast to be between £13m and £20m over the medium term.
- 4.9 It is recognised that the forecast General Reserve balance over the medium term is lower than would be preferred. If funding allows, restorative measures will be utilised over the period of the Five Year Financial Plan to build back up the balance of the General Reserve.

Earmarked Reserves

- 4.10 Earmarked Reserves are a means of smoothing expenditure to meet known or predicted liabilities. Funds should be used for the item for which they have been set aside. Any funds no longer required should be transferred to the General Reserve.
- 4.11 Earmarked Reserves totalling £283.335m were held at 1 April 2022. Of this total, £79.545m (28%) is available to support future spending. Details of the balances, categorised in accordance with the Reserves Policy, are detailed in Appendix Two.
- 4.12 Other than Schools Reserves, the following Earmarked Reserves have a balance that is in excess of £5m:
- 4.13 **Loan Modification Gains/Losses** (£24.231m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Contractual Commitments) – to meet the cost of higher interest charges arising on restructured loans which were remeasured when International Financial Reporting Standard 9 was adopted.
- 4.14 **Covid-19 Recovery Fund** (£11.063m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Planned Revenue Spend) – to support the Council's and wider County recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 4.15 **Covid-19 Local Authority Emergency Grant** (£15.370m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Covid Grants) – non-ringfenced emergency grant to support local authorities with the cost pressures experienced through the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.16 **Post Covid-19 Funding Risks** (£14.000m held at 1 April 2022; £0.000m held at 22 December 2022 (transferred to Inflation Risks and Cyber Security reserves); Corporate Services and Budget; Budget Stabilisation) – contingency against potential funding losses during the Covid-19 recovery period.
- 4.17 **Inflation Risks** (£0.000m held at 1 April 2022; £10.000m held at 22 December 2022 (Created from transfer of Post Covid-19 Funding Risks reserve); Corporate Services and Budget; Budget Stabilisation) – to support the Council in the short-term to meet the cost of temporary inflationary increases.
- 4.18 **Business Rates Risks** (£0.000m held at 1 April 2022; £5.251m held at 22 December 2022 (Created from 2021-22 underspends); Corporate Services and Budget; Specific Risks) – to help mitigate future volatility the Council may experience in respect of business rates receipts.
- 4.19 **Revenue Contributions to Capital Expenditure** (£50.835m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Specific Risks) – £13.650m is held to fund future capital expenditure. The balance of £37.185m has arisen as a consequence of the Council's strategic decision to fund its capital expenditure in financial years 2018-19 to 2021-22 from additional borrowing rather than its revenue budget and is held to mitigate risks and support the management of revenue budgets over the medium term. Further contributions to this Earmarked Reserve, in the region of £6m, should be possible in 2023-24.
- 4.20 **Place Department: Prior Year Underspends** (£10.329m held at 1 April 2022; Highways Assets and Transport; Planned Revenue Spend) – held to finance anticipated overspends in the Place departmental budget because of a lag in the delivery of budget savings. These are expected to arise whilst delivering change in a managed way, to ensure that front line services are not unduly disrupted. It is forecast that this balance will be used by 31 March 2023.
- 4.21 **Public Health** (£8.092m held at 1 April 2022; Health and Communities; Public Health Grant) – the balance carried forward of the ring-fenced Public Health Grant.

- 4.22 **Business Rates Pool** (£8.395m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Other) – contains gains to the Council from participating in a business rates pool along with other authorities in Derby and Derbyshire since 2015-16. £4.000m of this funding has since been transferred to an earmarked reserve to support the Council’s commitments to transition to a greener operating model in line with its Climate Change Policy. The balance on this reserve is held to smooth variations in estimated and actual distributions of income from the pool.
- 4.23 **Budget Management** (£15.635m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Budget Stabilisation) - to support the management of revenue budgets over the medium term. Subsequently, £21.003m has been used for one-off revenue support, as approved in the Revenue Budget Report 2022-23; £5.368m has been transferred to the reserve from the General Reserve to fund the balance of one-off expenditure required by the Revenue Budget 2022-23; £10m has been added to the reserve from underspends as approved in the Revenue Outturn Report 2021-22 and £9.734m has been drawn to meet the additional cost of the 2022-23 Pay Award which exceeded the contingency funding set aside in the Revenue Budget 2022-23. The use of further one-off amounts has been forecast in the Five Year Financial Plan 2023-24 to 2027-28.
- 4.24 **Planned Building Maintenance** (£5.622m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget, Planned Capital Spend) – there are a number of building projects that are funded from this budget. Cabinet agrees a schedule to be funded from this budget.
- 4.25 **Older People’s Housing Strategy Reserve** (£16.103m held at 1 April 2022; Adult Care; Planned Capital Spend) – revenue contributions to capital expenditure, held to fund capital investment in Older People’s housing. If required, this capital investment could alternatively be funded from additional borrowing and the money utilised instead to ensure that the Council’s General Reserve position remains at a reasonable, risk-assessed level.

- 4.26 **Insurance and Risk Management** (£16.0358m held at 1 April 2022; Corporate Services and Budget; Specific Risks) – the Council keeps its payments to external insurance companies to a minimum by self-insuring much of its insurable risk. To cover self-insured risk, a contribution in lieu of premium is paid into an insurance fund, which comprises this reserve to cover expected liabilities and an insurance provision to cover incurred liabilities. Every five years an actuary performs an independent evaluation of the fund balance and the level of contributions. An interim review is carried out mid-term. The last actuarial evaluation, completed in October 2020, confirmed that the total of this reserve and the insurance provision was adequate to meet current and anticipated liabilities.
- 4.27 The Council's Earmarked Reserve balances were reviewed during Autumn 2022. Departments have agreed to release £11.913m from balances, which will be utilised to support the Council in achieving a balanced budget over the medium term. This amount will initially be held in the Budget Management Earmarked Reserve. The balance of that reserve, including this transferred balance, is expected to be fully used in supporting one off expenditure detailed in the Revenue Budget Report 2023-24. Details of the balances to be released are shown in Appendix Three.
- 4.28 The table below summarises the forecast movement in Earmarked Reserves for the year ending 31 March 2023.

Portfolio	Reserves Brought Forward at 01.04.2022	Planned Net Contribution / (Use) 2022-23	Amounts to be Released to General Reserve	Forecast Reserves Carried Forward at 31.03.2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m
AC	16.929	(5.826)	0.000	11.103
CGR	5.109	0.738	0.000	5.847
CSB	180.045	(56.852)	(11.517)	111.676
CSSGE	5.497	0.022	0.000	5.519
HAT	16.777	(10.794)	0.000	5.983
HC	14.521	(0.317)	(0.021)	14.183
IE	1.228	(0.666)	0.000	0.562
SLCTCC	4.573	2.621	(0.375)	6.819
Total	244.679	(71.074)	(11.913)	161.692
Schools	38.656	(0.121)	0.000	38.535
Total	283.335	(71.195)	(11.913)	200.227

Key

AC	Adult Care
CGR	Clean Growth and Regeneration
CSB	Corporate Services and Budget
CSSG	Children's Services and Safeguarding and Education
HAT	Highways Assets and Transport
HC	Health and Communities
IE	Infrastructure and Environment
SLCTCC	Strategic Leadership Culture and Tourism and Climate Change

4.29 The table at Appendix Four categorises projected Earmarked Reserves balances at 31 March for the next five years, in accordance with the Reserves Policy. Schools balances have been excluded from this analysis.

5. Consultation

5.1 No consultation is required.

6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 N/A – the Council is required to monitor and review the level of its reserves to ensure they are adequate to manage the risks of the Council. This is in accordance with the Council's Reserves Policy which ensures that the Council meets its statutory obligations regarding its level of reserves.

7. Implications

7.1 Appendix One sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

8. Background Papers

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix One – Implications.

9.2 Appendix Two – Categorisation of Earmarked Reserves at 1 April 2022 in accordance with the Reserves Policy.

- 9.3 Appendix Three – Amounts to be released from Earmarked Reserves.
- 9.4 Appendix Four – Projected Earmarked Reserves balances at 31 March for the next five years.
- 9.5 Appendix Five – Updated Reserves Policy.

10. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 10.1 Notes the current position on Earmarked Reserves.
- 10.2 Notes the details of the amounts to be released from Earmarked Reserves balances.
- 10.3 Notes the allocation of £11.913m Earmarked Reserves released to the Budget Management Earmarked Reserve.
- 10.4 Approves the updated Reserves Policy at Appendix Five to this report.

11. Reasons for Recommendations

- 11.1 The balance of both the General and Earmarked Reserves supports good financial planning.
- 11.2 Any funds in Earmarked Reserves which are no longer required for the item for which they have been set aside should be transferred to the General Reserve to ensure that the balance and level of Earmarked and General Reserves reflect a level adequate to manage the risks of the Council.
- 11.3 The allocation of additional funding to the Budget Management Earmarked Reserve will support the Council in setting a balanced budget in future years, through the use of one-off funding to support services.
- 11.4 A Reserves Policy ensures that the Council meets its statutory obligations and sets out the framework within which decisions are made regarding the level of reserves.

12. Is it necessary to waive the call in period?

12.1 No.

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Implications

Financial

- 1.1 As at 31 December 2022, the balance on the General Reserve is £31m. The General Reserve balance is forecast to be between £13m and £20m over the medium term. Earmarked Reserves totalling £283.335m were held at 1 April 2022. Of this total, £79.545m (28%) is available to support future spending. Departments have agreed to release £11.913m from earmarked reserve balances, which will be utilised to support the Council in achieving a balanced budget over the medium term. Excluding schools balances, Earmarked Reserves balances are forecast to reduce from £245m at 31 March 2022 to £91m by 31 March 2026. It is proposed to amend the Reserves Policy to require the analysis of Earmarked Reserves to include the Public Health grant as a separate category.

Legal

- 2.1 Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires precepting authorities in England to assess the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement.
- 2.2 A range of safeguards are in place to prevent local authorities over-committing themselves financially. These include:
- The requirement to set a balanced budget as detailed in Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
 - The Chief Finance Officer's (S151 Officer) duty to report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves when the Council is considering its budget requirement as set out in Sections 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.
 - Legislative requirement for each local authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and that the Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer) has responsibility for the administration of those affairs as set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

- 2.3 These requirements are reinforced by Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which requires the Chief Finance Officer to report to Council if there is, or is likely to be, unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget.
- 2.4 The Financial Regulations included in Appendix 8(a) to the Constitution sets out the key controls in relation to the use of reserves and requires that the Council's Reserves Policy is reviewed on an annual basis.

Human Resources

- 3.1 None.

Information Technology

- 4.1 None.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 None.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 6.1 The Council is committed to ensuring good financial management and compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

- 7.1 None.

Appendix Two

Earmarked Reserves Position at 1 April 2022

Portfolio	Contractual Commitments	Covid Grants	Grants	Planned Revenue Spend	Planned Capital Spend	Specific Risks	Budget Stabilisation	Other	Public Health Grant	DSG	Schools Balances	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
AC	0.000	0.000	0.019	0.807	16.103	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	16.929
CGR	2.560	0.000	0.087	2.348	0.114	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	5.109
CSB	29.280	15.370	0.253	16.180	6.221	69.374	29.635	13.732	0.000	0.000	0.000	180.045
CSSGE	0.000	0.153	4.126	0.970	0.240	0.000	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.000	5.497
HAT	2.244	0.000	0.405	12.746	0.147	1.235	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	16.777
HC	0.162	4.539	1.563	0.122	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.043	8.092	0.000	0.000	14.521
IE	0.080	0.000	0.127	1.021	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.228
SLCTCC	2.153	0.000	0.487	1.273	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.660	0.000	0.000	0.000	4.573
Total	36.479	20.062	7.067	35.467	22.825	70.609	29.635	14.443	8.092	0.000	0.000	244.679
Schools	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	38.656	38.656
Total	36.479	20.062	7.067	35.467	22.825	70.609	29.635	14.443	8.092	0.000	38.656	283.335

AC	Adult Care
CGR	Clean Growth and Regeneration
CSB	Corporate Services and Budget
CSSG	Children's Services and Safeguarding and Education
HAT	Highways Assets and Transport
HC	Health and Communities
IE	Infrastructure and Environment
SLCTCC	Strategic Leadership Culture and Tourism and Climate Change

Appendix Three

Details of Earmarked Reserves where an amount is to be released:

Portfolio	Reserve	AC £m	CGR £m	CSB £m	CSSG E £m	HAT £m	HC £m	IE £m	SLCT CC £m	Total £m
CSB	EU Exit Preparation Grants			0.253						0.253
CSB	GDPR			0.018						0.018
CSB	Covid-19 Recovery Fund			3.465						3.465
CSB	Covid LA Emergency Grant			4.000						4.000
CSB	Local Audit Fees Grant			0.060						0.060
CSB	Business Rates Pool			3.395						3.395
CSB	Early Intervention QT Training			0.058						0.058
CSB	Property Feasibility Studies			0.268						0.268
HC	Digital Exclusion						0.021			0.021
SLCTCC	Policy and Research								0.329	0.329
SLCTCC	Made in Derbyshire Campaign								0.046	0.046
Total		0.000	0.000	11.517	0.000	0.000	0.021	0.000	0.375	11.913

Appendix Four

Projected Earmarked Reserves balances at 31 March for the next five years: (Schools balances have been excluded from this analysis)

	Contractual Commitments	Covid Grants	Grants	Planned Revenue Spend	Planned Capital Spend	Specific Risks	Budget Stabilisation	Other	Public Health Grant	DSG	Schools Balances	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
31.03.2022	36.479	20.062	7.067	35.467	22.825	70.609	29.635	14.443	8.092	0.000	0.000	244.679
31.03.2023	31.566	3.991	5.456	24.411	13.664	70.953	0.000	3.560	8.092	0.000	0.000	161.693
31.03.2024	28.235	0.767	4.201	15.326	4.342	61.260	0.000	1.881	6.117	0.000	0.000	122.129
31.03.2025	24.346	0.767	4.873	13.161	0.164	55.260	0.000	0.874	4.142	0.000	0.000	103.587
31.03.2026	21.678	0.767	4.848	11.864	0.000	49.260	0.000	0.209	2.167	0.000	0.000	90.793



Reserves Policy

Paul Stone MBA FCPFA

Interim Director of Finance & ICT

Approval and Authentication

Name	Job Title	Signature	Date
Paul Stone	Interim Director of Finance & ICT		December 2022
Cabinet			2 February 2023

RESERVES POLICY

Introduction

This policy establishes a framework within which decisions will be made regarding the level of reserves held by the Council and the purposes for which they will be used and maintained.

Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require local authorities to have regard to the level of resources needed to meet estimated future expenditure when calculating the annual budget requirement.

Definitions

Reserves are sums of money held by the Council to meet future expenditure. There are two principal types of reserves:

- (a) General - non-specific reserves which are kept to meet short term, unforeseeable expenditure and to enable significant changes in resources or expenditure to be properly managed over the period of the Council's Five Year Financial Plan (FYFP). The Council's general revenue reserves are held in the General Reserve Balance.
- (b) Earmarked Reserves which are held for specific purposes and which are established either by statute or at the discretion of the Council.

A summary of all reserves, including in year movements and year-end balances are contained in the Council's Statement of Accounts.

General Reserve Balance

The Council will maintain an adequate level of General Reserve Balance to:

- Provide a working balance to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary short term borrowing.
- Provide a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies.
- Plan for potential major items of expenditure.

The appropriate level of reserves for this purpose will be determined by the Council's FYFP, which will be reviewed annually and will be subject to approval by a meeting of the Council's Cabinet. However, the Council will not maintain levels of General Reserve balances that are excessive compared with appropriate minimum levels. In this context, "excessive" will be assessed and reviewed annually in the FYFP with regard to:

- The projected level of General Reserve balance at the end of the FYFP, less the appropriate minimum level.

- The annual planned use of reserves in each year of the FYFP.
- The impact of sudden large changes in annual use of balances on services or Council Tax levels.

The adequacy of the General Reserve Balance will be determined by assessing the financial risks associated with meeting continuing obligations to provide services. The risk assessment will be reviewed annually.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has issued guidance about the factors which should be taken into account in determining the overall level of reserves and balances. These are:

- Assumptions regarding inflation.
- Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts.
- Treatment of demand-led pressures.
- Treatment of savings.
- Risks inherent in any new partnerships.
- Financial standing of the Authority (i.e. level of borrowing, debt outstanding, etc.).
- The Authority's track record in budget management.
- The Authority's capacity to manage in year budget pressures.
- The Authority's virements and year-end procedures in relation to under and over-spends.
- The adequacy of insurance arrangements.
- An assessment of external risks.
- Impact of major unforeseen events.
- Likely level of Government support following major unforeseen events.

The General Reserve Balance will be reviewed and projections on future balances will be made at key points during the financial year, namely as part of the budget setting process and update of the FYFP. In exceptional circumstances, the actual level of the Council's balance may fall below the level which is considered appropriate. This is consistent with the need to provide to meet short-term unforeseen expenditure. However, the actual level will be monitored against balances outlined in the FYFP. The plan will set out the level of planned balances, as well as confirming acceptable thresholds above or below the balance. If the balance falls outside of the planned tolerance levels, a plan will be agreed by the Council to restore balances to the appropriate level.

Earmarked Reserves

Departments may establish Earmarked Reserves from within their cash-limited budgets to properly reflect on-going financial commitments, fund future service developments or expenditure of an uneven nature. Earmarked Reserves are not available to the Council for use in setting its ongoing base budget. They are required for specific purposes and are a means of building up funds to meet known or predicted liabilities. These reserves have no upper threshold on them; however, individually their limit and purpose must be approved before they are created using the following approval limits:

- Up to £100,000 – Executive Director in consultation with Director of Finance & ICT.
- Between £100,000 and £500,000 – Cabinet Member.
- Above £500,000 – Cabinet.

Transfers between reserves shall be in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations, namely:

- Up to £100,000 – Executive Director
- Between £100,000 and £500,000 – Cabinet Member
- Above £500,000 – Cabinet

Transfers up to £100,000 between departments requires the authorisation of both relevant Executive Directors.

Balances carried forward from previous year's underspend will be allocated to a departmental reserve and proposals for their use will be subject to final approval by the Cabinet Member.

Balances should be reasonable for the purpose held and must be used for the item for which they have been set aside, if circumstances arise to which the reserve is no longer required for its original purpose, they should be transferred to the General Reserve. In order to establish that they are fit for purpose, there will be a review of balances on an annual basis, the outcome of which will be reported to Cabinet.

Earmarked Reserves will be analysed into the following categories:

- **Contractual Commitments** - Genuine liabilities that are known and current to the Council (this does not include holding a balance to cover possible future liabilities), such as PFI scheme obligations. It will also include money held on behalf of partnerships and other Councils.

- **Grants** – Any reserve that was created through the receipt of a grant (excluding Public Health and Dedicated Schools Grants). This could be due to the timing of the payment of the grant.
- **Planned future Revenue Spend** – Funding intended to meet the cost of Revenue expenditure which has yet to be incurred.
- **Planned future Capital Spend** – Amounts held to meet funding required by the capital programme.
- **Specific Risks** – Any reserve held for specific risks which can be named (this does not include balances held as general contingency or to stabilise the budget against a reduction in funding).
- **Budget Stabilisation** – Balances held to stabilise the budget against a reduction in funding.
- **Schools Reserves** – Balances which a scheme, made under Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, provides must be carried forward to be used for the purpose of schools. These amounts represent the amount of unspent schools' budgets.
- **Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)** – The aggregate of these reserves should be consistent with the Council's return to the Department for Education (DfE) made under Section 251 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. This is the balance of ring-fenced specific government grant paid in support of the Council's schools' budgets which is as yet unspent.
- **Public Health Grant** – The balance of ring-fenced specific government grant. Any future spend from these reserves have to be used for public health, and in line with the conditions on the grant.
- **Other** – All other earmarked reserve balances.

School Reserves

School balances are held for two main reasons; as a contingency against financial risks and to meet planned commitments in future years.

Schools are encouraged to retain, where possible, a modest balance towards future liabilities and potential need for replacement of equipment. In order to allow the local authority to monitor schools' financial positions, governing bodies will be asked to report to the local authority on the use which the schools intend to make of surplus balances. The local authority will focus particularly on those schools which have built up significant excessive uncommitted balances and/or where some level of redistribution would support improved provision across a local area.