

Reserves Policy

Introduction

Moretonhampstead Parish Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet its statutory and operational 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.

There is no specified minimum level of reserves that a local council must hold; it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) to advise the Council on the level of reserves and to ensure there are sound procedures for their establishment and use.

Types of Reserves

Reserves are categorised as general or earmarked.

Earmarked reserves are held for specific purposes, such as:

- Renewals: To fund replacement of vehicles, equipment, infrastructure, and planned property maintenance, ensuring stable budgeting.
- Carry-forward of underspend: To hold funds allocated for projects that could not be completed within the financial year.
- Insurance reserve: To cover excesses for claims not fully insured.
- Other earmarked reserves: For anticipated or known future liabilities.

General Reserves are funds without specific restrictions. They may be used to:

- Manage uneven cash flows;
- Offset budget shortfalls if necessary; or
- Provide a contingency in case of unexpected events or emergencies.

Earmarked Reserves - Management

- Earmarked reserves are established on a needs basis, in line with anticipated requirements.
- Any decision to create or use a reserve must be made by formal resolution of the Council.
- The purpose of each earmarked reserve must be clearly documented.
- Reserves should **not** be used to fund ongoing operational expenditure, as this would be unsustainable.
- If earmarked reserves are used to cover short-term funding gaps, they must **be** replenished in the following financial year.
- Once an earmarked reserve has served its purpose, it does not need to be replenished.
- All earmarked reserves are recorded on a central schedule held by the RFO, listing the reserve name, purpose, and balance.

Reviewing the Council's Risk Assessment forms part of the budgeting and year-end accounting process and helps determine the appropriate level of reserves.

General Reserves

The level of General Reserves is a matter of judgement and risk management. This policy therefore does not prescribe a fixed sum.

- The primary means of building General Reserves is through annual budget allocation, in addition to any replenishment required for reserves used in the previous year.
- When setting the budget and medium-term financial plan, the Council must maintain sufficient working balances to cover key risks, as identified in its financial risk assessment.
- In exceptional circumstances, where General Reserves are depleted due to unforeseen expenditure, the Council may draw on earmarked reserves to provide temporary support.
- The Council must, at all times, maintain a minimum General Reserve equivalent to at least one month's staff salaries.
- In addition, the Council adopts a target General Reserve of four twelfths (one-third) of the annual precept, providing stability and covering approximately four months of operational costs. Using the precept figure rather than actual expenditure ensures a consistent and predictable reserve target.

Current level of financial reserves

The level of financial reserves will be agreed annually by the Parish Council during the budget-setting process.

Reserve Category	Purpose / Notes	Amount (£)
General Reserve	4 months' running costs (based on precept £88,143 for FY 2027/28)	29,381
Office Equipment Replacement	IT/equipment upgrades	1,000
Cemetery	Future maintenance / improvements	5,000
Open Spaces Repairs	Urgent works or damage repair	1,000
Play Equipment Repairs	Maintenance and safety upgrades	5,000
Election Costs	£400 allocated annually	400
Emergency Staffing Costs	Cover for unexpected absences	1,000
War Memorial Maintenance	Repairs and cleaning	2,000
Discretionary Small Grants	To support local groups	700
Churchyard Restoration	Reserved for specific works	5,780
Allotments	Maintenance covered by unspent rents	676.50
Public Toilets	Purchase / Running Costs	7,500
Highways (VAS)	Purchase	2,500
Training	Clerk's Community Governance course	2,500

Review and Approval

The policy and the associated reserve levels were agreed and adopted by the Parish Council at its meeting on the 1st of December 2026 and will be reviewed again during the budget setting process for the financial year 2028/29.

Chairman *Cllr Fileman-Wright* Date 01/12/2026 Minute number