Easton Parish Council

General Reserves Policy 2026-27

1 Purpose

1.1 Easton Parish Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the Council. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of those reserves.

1.2 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. The Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England, A Practitioners Guide (2026), sections 5.28, advise that these should be considered as part of the annual budgeting process. 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 of reserves and to ensure that there are plans for their establishment and use.

2 Types of Reserves

2.1 Reserves can be categorised as either ‘earmarked’ or ‘general’.

2.2 Earmarked reserves can be held for several reasons:

> Renewals – to plan and finance an effective programme of new facilities and services, equipment replacement and planned property/land maintenance. These reserves are a mechanism to smooth expenditure so that a sensible programme can be achieved without the need to vary budgets.
>
> Carry forward of underspend – where some expenditure to projects cannot be spent in the budget year, reserves are used as a mechanism to carry forward these resources.
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> Monies received by the Council under CIL and Section 106 agreements.
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> Other earmarked reserves may be set up from time to time to meet known or predicted liabilities.

2.3 General reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions as to their use. They are 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.

3 Earmarked Reserves

3.1 Earmarked reserves will be established on an as needed basis in line with anticipated requirements.

3.2 Any decision to set up earmarked reserves must be approved by the Council.

3.3 Expenditure from earmarked reserves must be approved by the Council.

3.4 Reserves should not be held to fund ongoing 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 as soon as possible provided that the purpose for which the reserve was set up continues to exist. However, earmarked reserves that have been used to meet a specific liability would not need to be replenished, having served the purpose for which they were originally established.

3.5 Records confirming existing earmarked reserves are held by the Responsible Financial Officer which identify the various earmarked reserves and the purposes for which they are held.

3.6 Reviewing the Council's Risk Assessment prepares the budgeting and year end accounting processes and identifies planned and unplanned expenditure items and thereby indicates an appropriate level of reserves.

4 General Reserves

4.1 The level of general reserves is a matter of judgement and so this policy does not attempt to describe a blanket level. The primary means of building general reserves will be through the annual budgeting process. This will be in addition to any amounts needed to replenish reserves that have been consumed in the previous year.

4.2 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 risk assessment.

4.3 If in extreme circumstances, general reserves were to be exhausted due to major unforeseen spending pressures within a particular financial year, the Council would be able to draw down from its earmarked reserves to provide short term resources.

5 Current Level of Reserves

5.1 The level of reserves held by the Council will be agreed by the Council during the discussions held regarding the setting of the budget for the next financial year and year end accounting processes.

5.2 The level of general reserves held by the Council will be budgeted based up a percentage of precept and/or percentage of average annual expenditure.

5.3 "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 and twelve months of net revenue expenditure." (Practitioner's Guide (2026) paragraph 5.34). "The smaller the authority, the closer the figure may be to 12 months expenditure" (5.35).

5.4 There is no upper limit for earmarked reserves, but they should be held for genuine and intended purposes and their level subject to regular review and justification (at least annually).

This policy was approved by Easton Parish Council at the meeting on 20th July 2026. It will be next reviewed at the 2027-2028 Annual Meeting in May 2027.