Acton Parish Council

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Reserves Policy

Reviewed: Annually Last reviewed: July 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 Acton Parish Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs of the organisation. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of 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 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 of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for their establishment and use.

1.3 Reserves can be categorised as general, ringfenced or earmarked. Earmarked reserves can be held for several reasons:

- Renewals – to enable services to plan and finance an effective programme of, equipment and infrastructure replacement. These reserves are a mechanism to smooth expenditure so that a sensible replacement programme can be achieved without the need to vary budgets.
- 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.

1.5 Ringfenced reserves are money or grants allocated for a specific project only. These reserves can be used to carry forward an 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.

1.6 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.

2. Earmarked and Ringfenced Reserves

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

2.2 Any decision to set up a reserve must be made by the Council.

2.3 Expenditure from reserves can only be authorised by the Council.

2.4 Reserves will 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 will be replenished in the following year. However, reserves used to meet a specific liability will not need to be replenished having served the purpose for which they were originally established. All Earmarked and Ringfenced Reserves are recorded on a central schedule held by the Responsible Financial Officer which lists the various reserves and the purpose for which they are held.

2.5 The Parish Council reviews the Council's Risk Management Scheme as part of the budgeting and year end accounting procedures and identifies planned and potential expenditure items which informs the council's decisions on the appropriate level of reserves.

3. General Reserves

3.1 The level of General Reserves is a matter of judgement and so this policy does not attempt to prescribe a blanket level. 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.

3.2 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 Management Scheme.

3.3 If in extreme circumstances General Reserves were exhausted due to major unforeseen spending pressures within a particular financial year, the Council will be able to draw down from its earmarked reserves to provide short term resources. Even at times when extreme pressure is put on the Council's finances the Council will keep a minimum balance sufficient to pay one month's salaries to staff in General Reserves at all times.

4. Current level of financial reserves

4.1 The level of financial reserves held by the council will be agreed by the Parish Council during the discussions held regarding the setting of the budget for the next financial year. The current policy for the level of general reserves to be held by the Council is between 55% and 75% of annual precept (£61,000 in 2026/27) to cover 6 to 9 months running costs.