

MINEHEAD TOWN COUNCIL GENERAL RESERVES POLICY



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Policy Number	Version	Owner	Date Issued	Review Due	Review Team
	V1	MTC	26 March 24	April 2025	Council
	V2	MTC	6 May 2025	May 2026	Council
	V3	MTC	6 May 2026	May 2027	Council

Distribution:

Internal: Management

External: Councillors/Partners

1. Introduction

Minehead Town Council is required to maintain adequate Financial Reserves to meet the needs of its 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 Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) in its Practitioners' Guide 2025 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. Smaller authorities have no specific right to accumulate funds via the precept. All reserves should be reviewed and justified regularly (i.e. at least annually). It is good practice to transparently publish both the level and rationale of all 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. 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 Town Council about the level of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for their establishment and use.

2. Types of Reserves

These may be categorised as either General or Specific, which are further sub-divided into Earmarked Reserves (EMRs) and Restricted Reserves

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.

The Practitioners' Guide 2025 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 and twelve months net revenue expenditure.” “The smaller the authority, the closer the figure should be to 12 months expenditure, the larger the authority the nearer to 3 months. In practice, any authority with income and expenditure in excess of £200,000 should plan towards 3 months equivalent general reserve.” The Council should determine what is a prudent level of General Reserve based on its own circumstances, risk and uncertainties.

Authorities have no legal powers to hold revenue reserves other than those for reasonable working capital needs, or for specifically earmarked purposes, whenever an authority's year end General Reserve is less than three months or more than twelve months of net revenue expenditure an explanation should be provided to the external auditor.

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 Town Council would be able to draw down from its Earmarked Reserves 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:

- Renewals – to enable the planning and financing of an effective program of equipment replacement and property maintenance/refurbishment. The funds required are built up incrementally over several years when considering asset conditions and asset life. They are a mechanism to smooth expenditure without the need to vary budgets.
- Carry forward of underspend on an uncompleted project – expenditure committed to a project but not spent in the budget year. Reserves can be used as a mechanism to carry forward those resources
- Developers Contributions – proceeds from developers which can only be used for specified purposes.
- Other Earmarked Reserves – these may be set up from time to time to meet known or predicted liabilities.

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 Town 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 Town 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 Town Council as part of the Budget Report and at meetings if required.

The use of Reserves shall be approved by the Town Council.

The level of General Reserves shall be reviewed on an annual basis during the annual budgetary review and agreed by the Town Council. The minimum level of General Reserves shall be recommended to the Town Council by the Responsible Financial Officer.

This will form part of the recommendations for the Annual Budget and Precept request by the Town Council.

The current level of General Reserves to be held by the Council is set at equal to between three and six months of predicted expenditure.

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 Town Council.

This policy is reviewed annually and at legislation changes.