KEYNSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT AND RESERVES POLICY

1.0. Introduction

1.1 The Town Council previously used to rely upon a recommendation from its Internal Auditor to maintain general reserves at 50% of expenditure. i.e. approx. £490,700. Other Auditors may recommend alternative figures such as 3-6 months expenditure or 50% of the annual precept.

1.2 The Town Council is ultimately responsible for performing its own financial risk assessment and determining the acceptable level of reserves, so a new Financial Risk and Reserve management policy together with associated calculation was approved last year.

1.3 The calculation, reviewed annually, provides a minimum level at which the General Reserve should be maintained, and forms a necessary part of the budget setting process. Last year the minimum level was set at £490,700.

2.0 Review of Policy/Calculations for 2026-2027

2.1. There are no suggested changes to the policy wording.

2.2. Calculations for level of General Reserves are shown in Section 6 and indicate a General Reserve level of £524,500 will be necessary. (General Reserves at 31st March 2026 stood at £633,683).

(a) Explanation for the cost of Breach of GDPR:

There is a real risk that Councillors or staff may inadvertently release personal details of residents to others through not using blind copy on emails or forwarding without redaction of personal details in the content. Typical fines (as this does not appear to be considered a serious breach by ICO with max penalty of up to Eu10m). As an example: South Glos. Police were fined £80,000 by ICO because someone forgot to use the BCC function in a circulation to 52 people and the email itself gave personal details as part of a case update. The Clerk is already aware of a recent similar breach in Keynsham (thankfully KTC, its staff or Councillors were not responsible).

Mitigation measures include:

(i) Training of all staff and Councillors to reduce risk of occurrence
(ii) Use of Town Council rather than personal email addresses to reduce risk

(iii) Cyber insurance – dependent upon use of Council-owned devices by staff and Councillors alike – this would remove the figure of £100,000 from the Risk Assessment

The Finance Committee has already considered the issue of Cyber insurance as part of the Annual Risk Assessment and as a result SoVision will be presenting to December Town Council before a decision is made.

(b) Explanation of the Breach of Employment Procedures/Withdrawal of Insurance Cover for Employment Legal Costs

The Town Council contracts with Work Nest for all employment matters and receives insurance cover from them against a possible employment tribunal (legal costs and award costs). This cover is conditional on the Council (or its representatives) following EW advice and properly implementing the Council's employment processes and procedures as detailed in the staff Handbook provided by Work Nest. Failure to do so could result in both an employment tribunal and also a lack of insurance cover to defend it. Owing to recent events which cannot currently be disclosed, this is now a perceived risk that needs to be accounted for as part of the Risk Assessment. The average cost of defending a tribunal for Employers was £8,500 and the average award was £26,400 according to 2015 Ministry of justice figures. Obviously, these costs could be considerably higher in discrimination cases.

Mitigation measures could include:

(i) Training of staff and Councillors in implementation of ACAS-compliant Employment processes and procedures to reduce risk

(ii) Training for all Councillors on the role of the Council, Personnel Committee, Councillors and the Clerk in employment matters relating to staff.

FINANCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT & RESERVES POLICY cont.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Town Council needs to maintain adequate financial reserves to protect against risk, ensure contingencies are in place and to support investment in future projects which are beneficial to the town – *detailed within Section 50 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; supported by CIPFA LAAP Bulletin 99 Local Authority Reserves and Balances July 2014.*

1.2 The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will determine and review the level of its Reserves.

1.3 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 future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. The amount that Councils need or choose to hold in their reserves varies according to local circumstance.

1.4 Elected members are responsible for deciding what reserves their Council holds when setting the budget; informed by their longer-term spending plans (LAAP Bulletin 99). There is no set formula for determining the level of reserves that each Council should have, and no consensus on what is appropriate, too low or too high (Audit Commission: Striking a Balance). Consequently, there is no specified minimum or maximum level of reserves that Keynsham Town Council should hold. It is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer to advise the Council about the level of reserves and to ensure there are key protocols for their establishment and use.

2. Risk Management

2.1 The Town Council manages risk by assessing the potential impacts of future events, based on the likelihood that they may occur and the severity of any impact. Mitigating actions are then identified to reduce the exposure and appropriate plans are put in place.

3. Types of Reserves

3.1 Keynsham Town Council maintains two types of reserves;

a) Earmarked Reserves

This provides a means of accumulating funds, for use in a later financial year, to meet known or planned policy initiatives. Earmarked Reserves will increase through decisions of the Council and will decrease as they are spent on their specific intended purposes.

The purpose of an Earmarked Reserve is to set aside amounts for projects that extend beyond one year or as a contingency against a specific situation occurring.

Once an Earmarked Reserve has been established by the Town Council it is the responsibility of the Responsible Finance Officer to ensure funds are spent in line with their purpose.

The purpose of each Earmarked Reserve should be reviewed annually to ensure that it is still relevant.

b) General Reserve

This represents the non-ring fenced (earmarked) balance of Council funds. The main purposes of the General Reserves are firstly to operate as a working balance to help manage the impact of uneven cash flows and secondly, to provide a contingency to cushion the impact of emerging or unforeseen events or genuine emergencies. In general, a robust level of reserve should be maintained and take account of operational and financial issues facing the Town Council.

3.2 A well-run authority with a prudent approach to setting its budget will each year consider its level of general reserves. These general reserves will also need to be supported by earmarked reserves for specific needs, contingencies and commitments. In assessing the level of the Town Council's reserves, account needs to be taken of the risks facing the Council in terms of any significant unforeseen expenditure requirements

3.3 **NOTE:** Keynsham Town Council is aware that setting the general reserve at too high a level may in future years reduce the ability of the Town Council of increasing its precept. Too much money in the bank could be seen as poor budgeting and in contradiction to CIPFA guidelines of 3 – 6 months (25% to 50%) of annual net operating costs. Principle authorities are beginning to take notice of this requirement, as are external auditors who will question why reserve levels are out of sync with budget requirements. Apart from external auditors putting qualifications against a council's accounts/annual return, central government may empower principle authorities to monitor and withhold precept demands where there are excessive general reserves. A robust 3 – 5 year strategic plan together with a medium to long term financial plan are essential tools to enable prudent budgeting and management of appropriate levels of general and ear-marked reserves.

3.4 Further major elements which could impact adversely on future precepts are;

- Capping of Town Council Precept by Central Government
- Possible future transfers of services and assets from B&NES

4. General Fund Reserve

4.1 The purpose of general reserves is to minimise the possible financial impacts to the Council from; emergencies, unforeseen events and ad hoc emerging issues during the year.

4.2 The in-year use of general reserves requires Council approval and must not be used for any level of recurring spending, unless that spending will be included in the Revenue Budget for the following financial year. In all cases the use of reserves should be approved by the Council (or in an emergency under delegated powers - the Responsible Financial Officer in consultation with the Council Chairman and Vice-Chairman).

4.3 There is no prescribed level of general fund reserves but a level of 30% to 50% of annual operating budget ensures adequate provision in the event of any unforeseen occurrence which would affect cash flow.

5. General Fund Reserve – Risk Assessment

5.1 Identifying the risks allows the Council to take account of the circumstances around current structural change due to service provision and economic circumstances.

5.2 Risks can be identified as; risks from potential one-off events; risks which will have general financial consequences and actions that need to be in place to minimise the potential for financial support.

6. Assessment of Potential Risks (*not covered by insurance*)

Risk	Effects/Action	Value of Risk £
Loss of Income owing to Substantial disruption of income streams:	Manor Rd football pitches – inclement weather, vandalism Based upon 2 years figures 2017/19)	£2,500
	Inability to access Cemetery via driveway – assuming a precipitous event that cemetery can't be accessed for 3 months	£10,000
	Inability of B&NES to pay ½ yearly Parish precept on time	£475,000
	Delay in quarterly VAT reclaim	£6,000
Equipment breakdowns Mainly tractor/mowing at Manor Rd but also power barrow and pumps at Cemetery; grounds maintenance vehicles	Hire of equipment fees	£5,000
Non-insured Cemetery and grounds maintenance risks	Driveway subsidence or damage to boundaries that cannot be claimed on third party or Council insurance Cost of immediate repair (Based upon 2 years experience of boundary damage)	£15,000
Staff absence/resignation e.g. additional gravediggers/mowing/grounds maintenance personnel	Agency staff or contracts for services to infill	£11,000
Major Loss of Service through fire/flood/structural damage	Town Council Offices (Lease) B&NES landlord should supply alternative premises. Insurance should cover loss. But allow cash-flow to	£25,000

	reinstate/alternative premises - £25,000 (however may or may not re-cover under insurance depending upon claim circumstances) Cemetery – risk of flooding	 Already included
ICT Security/data corruption	Loss of service/robust security policies and firewalls Responsibility now with IT supplier as all back-up now to the Cloud and IT service provision in place However, if company goes into liquidation, then cost for new system and data recovery with another company could be £15k .	£15,000
Breach of GDPR regulations	For a serious breach 2% of revenue or £10m whichever is higher. However it is unlikely the Council will have a serious breach so typical figures for breaches of e.g. release of personal email data to others are averaging £100,000	£100,000
Legal Costs/Industrial relations	Costs relating to service provision/ employment issues. Council has insurance cover for legal costs relating to service provision – but this is conditional on the Council (including individual staff and Councillors) adhering to the terms and conditions of the insurance company and adhering to employment processes and procedures put in place by the HR consultants. Average cost to Employers to defend a tribunal £8,500. Average	£35,000

	Award £26,400 (Source: Ministry of Justice)	
Legislative requirements	Unscheduled elections/parish polls	Now included in budget and EMR's
	Overall Risk Quantified	**£699,500**
	Less provision already made in ear-marked reserves that could be used to offset (Cemetery, Office move)	(£25,000) (£15,000)
	General Reserve level **Less GDPR and Legal costs risks** **Amended reserve Level**	**£659,500** **(135,000)** **£524,500**

7. Insurance Cover

7.1 The greatest risk facing Keynsham Town Council is not being able to deliver the activity or services expected of it. The Town Council manages many of the underlying risks when it reviews the robustness of insurance providers, insurance and its systems.

7.2 Aviva currently provide tailored insurance cover to suit the needs of the Town Council. Employers Liability (£10,000,000), Public Liability (£10,000,000) and Fidelity Guarantee (£1,000,000) are statutory requirements under The Compulsory Insurance Act (1969) and S114 of the Local Government Act (1972). Other voluntary areas of cover includes all risks (protection of physical assets), money, hirer's liability, libel and slander, personal accident and legal expenses.

8. Assessment of Potential Risks

8.1 In all types of undertaking there is the potential for events and consequences that may either be opportunities for benefits or threats to success. Risk management identifies what can go wrong and how to take proportionate steps to avoid this or successfully manage the consequences. The failure to manage risks effectively can be expensive in terms of litigation and reputation, and the ability to achieve desired targets, and, eventually, on the local community's Council Tax bills.

8.2 In order to assess the adequacy of unallocated general reserves, it is necessary to place an estimated financial value on the key strategic, operational and financial risks facing the authority and set aside a reasonable provision. The value of the risks to Keynsham Town Council have been estimated by:

- considering the probability of each risk
- considering the range, nature, complexity and scale of the risk
- evaluating the financial consequences of each risk by taking into consideration budgeted figures for income and expenditure

- setting aside amounts where applicable to cover contingencies
- having regard to the provisions made by Town Councils of a similar size and operation

9. Financial Responsibility

9.1 Under Keynsham Town Council Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, the Council is responsible for the overall management and control of the Town Council's finances.

9.2 The role of the Council is to review the level of its balances and reserves and make the following decision in respect of general reserves:

□ to consider the level of general reserve to be applied to the precept for each year.

10. Role of Responsible Financial Officer

10.1 It is the responsibility of the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) to advise the Town Council about the level of reserves that it should hold and ensure that it has clear protocols for their establishment and use.

10.2 There is no statutory minimum but there are four significant safeguards in place against the Town Council over committing itself financially;

(a) The balanced budget requirement.

(b) RFO S114 Powers.

(c) The External Auditor's responsibility to review and report on financial standing.

(d) The year-end audit report from the Town Council's Internal Auditor

10.3 Keynsham Town Council, on the advice of their RFO, are required to make their own judgements on the level of reserves, taking into account all relevant local circumstances. Local circumstances vary. A well-managed authority with a prudent approach to budgeting should operate with reserves in the Town Council's current range (25% to 50% of annual operating budget) given its emerging service responsibilities.

10.4 It is the responsibility of the RFO to ensure reserves are spent in line with their purpose. Where expenditure is planned in future accounting periods, it is prudent to build up reserves in advance.

10.5 The RFO has a fiduciary duty to local taxpayers and must be satisfied that the decisions taken on balances and reserves represent responsible stewardship of public funds.

11. Conclusion

11.1 Reviewing the Council's Financial Risk Assessment is part of the budgeting procedure. It helps to identify planned and unplanned expenditure items and thereby indicates an appropriate level of reserves.

11.2 In addition to allowing the Council to manage unforeseen financial pressures and plan for known or predicted liabilities, there is a benefit to holding reserves in terms of the interest earned on funds which are not utilised. This investment income forms part of the budget strategy.

This Policy will be reviewed annually by Finance & Policy Committee for approval by Council, or sooner should circumstances or legislation change.

Amendment History

Paragraph	Detail	Committee or Town Council	Approval date
Original	Review/adoption	Town Council	19th November 2019
	Review	F & P Committee	10th October 2023
	Review	Town Council	17th October 2023
	Review	F&P Committee	8th October 2024
	Review	Town Council	15th October 2024
	Review	F&P Committee	16th October 2025
	Review	Town Council	21st October 2025
	Review	F&P Committee	13th October 2026
	Review	Town Council	20th October 2026
Next review	Review	F&P Committee	October 2027

Signed .....

Date.....201026.....

Chair of Council

Signed.....

Date.....22/10/2026.....

Town Clerk