

Reserves Policy

Swindon is a very ambitious Council with plans to continue transforming services and improve the local area at a time when national austerity measures are putting the finances of local Councils under tremendous strain. The pace of change at the Council and the scale of savings being delivered bring with them risks in relation to the Council's capacity to deliver the planned stepped changes. These risks are both in relation to the complexity of some of the transformational changes required to deliver the ongoing budget savings and secondly in respect of the potential need for funds to pump-prime work on future changes. The Council is managing these risks using a number of means:

Risk Assessment

Each of the savings proposals put forward as part of the Budget setting cycle has been individually risk assessed against a number of factors, namely:

- Impact on service
- Complexity of implementation
- Impact on equalities
- Contribution to strategic plans

Contingencies

The Council has a budget risk contingency fund of £3.5m to support its 2019/20 Budget.

Reserves

It is recommended that the minimum level of General Reserves the Council needs to hold to support the 2019/20 Budget is £6m. The Council's S151 officer advises that this is adequate in the context of the earmarked reserves held, specific contingencies and the proposed budget risk contingency of £3.5m.

Alongside the General Reserve, the Council is holding a number of specific reserves to support key risks and future commitments. These have been established following a thorough review of risks and needs.

By the start of 2019/20, the Council expects to be holding around £49m of reserves, of which £31.6m support the General Fund. By holding these reserves, the Council is accruing investment interest of around £237k per annum (assuming investment returns of around 0.75%). Should the Council decide to hold lower levels of reserves in future, for every £1m brought back into the revenue budget as a funding source to help balance the budget, the Council Tax increase for that financial year could be reduced by 1%. However, funding on-going revenue expenditure from reserves other than on a transitional basis would increase the level of risk within the annual budget and make future years' Budgets increasingly unsustainable. The Council has incorporated the planned use of significant levels of reserves in each of its last two budgets to support both the overall budget and targeted support for Children's Services. In the light of this the Director of Finance would not recommend any further allocation of specific reserves to support the annual budget.

The £49m reserves expected to be held in 2019/20 is summarised below. Full details will be brought back to Cabinet early in the next Financial Year as normal for consideration and approval:

General Fund (£31.6m)

- **£2.7m** relates to the PFI equalisation reserve. This reserve fluctuates depending on the yearly cash flows of the PFI and will be fully depleted by the end of the project's life.
- **£1.4m** relates to infrastructure and regeneration funding, which has been sourced mainly from the Planning Delivery Grant and New Homes Bonus issued by the Government. £50k has been earmarked to support economic growth initiatives.
- **£1.3m** relates to the Superfast Broadband project.
- **£13.9m** of general 'cash flowing' reserves to fund programmes of work to deliver future years' budgets. This includes funding for severance costs (£2.4m), Recreation and Golf asset transfers reserve (£0.8m), the Transformation Fund (£1.8m), Swindon Challenge (£0.1m) and the IT service reshaping funding (£0.4m).
- **£12.3m** of service specific reserves set out below:

Insurance Fund	£3m	This fund is set at an industry standard level of covering twice the aggregate excess liability in any financial year. It was increased in 2013 to reflect the increased liabilities associated with bringing SCS back in-house and higher levels of self-funding which was offset by a significant reduction in premiums
Children Services transitional Funding	£2.5m	Balance of the reserve to provide additional investment in 2019-20 to address the short-term pressures while the plans to enable the service to be financially sustainable in the longer term continue to be implemented.
Other	£6.8m	A number of smaller service-specific reserves often financed from external funding or earmarked for committed projects

Other Funds (£17.4m)

- **£6.3m** of Schools balances representing the combined total of all individual schools' rolled-forward balances (£5.7m) and the non-schools retained DSG reserve (£0.6m).

£11.1m of HRA Balances comprising the HRA minimum working balance (£4m), the general reserve (£6.3m) and specific reserves (£0.8m).