



Item No on Agenda

**Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel
5th February 2024**

Reserves Strategy Update

Report of the Staffordshire Commissioner

Introduction

Statutory provision is made within the Local Government Finance Act 1992 that requires precepting authorities in England and Wales to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure. The Director of Finance / S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office has a duty to report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves (under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003) when the authority is considering its annual budget requirement.

This paper gives due consideration to the overall level of reserves held as at 31 March 2023 and the forecast position as at 31 March 2024. The Panel are asked to note the overall impact on Reserves as incorporated within the approved Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MFTS).

The Reserves Strategy was last approved in January 2023 as part of the budget setting process for the current year and has now been updated to incorporate and reflect:

- The updated MFTS for 2024/25 to 2027/28
- The actual Reserves position as per the unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2022/23, and a forecast for 2023/24
- The impact of approved reserve utilisation as per the current and updated strategy

A number of different reserves are held by the Staffordshire Commissioner (both usable and unusable) in line with the CIPFA guidance, however this paper focuses on the two key areas of reserves that impact on the future financial strategy:

- **General Reserve**, to allow for unexpected / emergency events – balance as at 31 March 2024 is forecast to be £9.631m (see **Appendix 1**),
- **Earmarked Reserves** – to meet future known or predicted requirements – balance as at 31 March 2024 is forecast to be £32.088m (See **Appendix 1**)

Overall the level of Usable Reserves at 31 March 2023 was £45.921m (includes capital grants unapplied of £0.331m) and forecast to reduce by £3.874m in year to £42.047m by March 2024 (assumes use of £2.276m capital receipts reserve to finance capital programme). The general reserve will be maintained at £9.631m (assumes that the current forecast underspend from 2023/24 is transferred here) across the MTFS period while the earmarked reserves (including capital reserves) are forecast at £17.921m by March 2028. These reserves are in line with sector standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Police Fire and Crime Panel note:

1. the overall reserves position for both General and Earmarked Reserves as contained within this report,
2. to consider the adequacy and proposed earmarking of the reserve that will be incorporated into the budget setting exercise for 2024/25, and utilisation of reserves as incorporated within the updated MTFS.
3. the updated Reserves Strategy

Ben Adams
Staffordshire Commissioner

Contact Officers:

Katharine Ross

Director of Finance / S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office

Telephone: 07890 988177

John Bloomer

Assistant Chief Officer – Director of Resources / S151 Officer for Staffordshire Police

Telephone: 07974 204774

1. Prudential Code and Capital Spend

- 1.1. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code requires Chief Finance Officers in local authorities to have full regard to affordability when making recommendations about the local authority's future capital programme. Such consideration includes the level of long-term revenue commitments. Indeed, in considering the affordability of its capital plans, the Staffordshire Commissioner is required to consider all of the resources available, together with the totality of its capital plans and revenue forecasts for the forthcoming year and into the medium term.
- 1.2. The statutory reporting regime discussed within this paper and effective financial management underpin the need for clear, transparent reporting arrangements for reserves and CIPFA recommend that there should be clear protocol setting out the following:
 - the reason for / purpose of the reserve;
 - how and when the reserve can be used;
 - procedures for the reserve's management and control; and
 - timescale for review of the reserve to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.
- 1.3. Whilst it is primarily the responsibility of the Staffordshire Commissioner and its S151 Officer to maintain a sound financial position, our external auditors Ernst & Young annually review for any material uncertainties and test to ensure that Staffordshire Police remain a going concern. Even where as part of their wider role Ernst & Young report on the organisation's financial position, it is not however, their responsibility to prescribe the optimum or minimum level of reserves for authorities in general. A separate Going Concern report is submitted annually to the external auditor and is also reviewed by the Ethics Transparency and Audit panel.

2. Types of Reserve

- 2.1. When considering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and preparing annual budgets the Staffordshire Commissioner should consider the establishment and maintenance of reserves. Reserves can be held for these main purposes:
 - a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing – this forms part of general reserves;
 - a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies – this also forms part of general reserves;
 - a means of building up specific funds, often referred to as earmarked reserves, to meet known or predicted requirements; and
 - A capital receipts reserve generated from the sale of surplus assets, which in line with legislation can only be re-invested back into capital goods (or whilst specific legislation allows transformation spend).

3. Reporting of Reserves

- 3.1. The IFRS-based Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code) introduced the Movement in Reserves Statement to local authority financial statements in the 2010/11 financial year. This Statement presents the movement in the year of the reserves of the Authority analysed into **usable** reserves, (e.g. General and earmarked reserves) and unusable reserves.

3.2. The total usable reserves as per the unaudited statement of accounts is £45.921m as at 31 March 2023, being the general fund £9.489m, earmarked reserves £33.825m, capital receipts reserve £2.276m and capital grants unapplied £0.331m.

The Movement in Useable Reserves Statement can be found within the statutory accounts for 2022/23, and is shown below:

	Balance at 31 March 2022 £'000	Balance at 31 March 2023 £'000
General Fund	8,509	9,489
Capital receipt reserve	1,449	2,276
Capital grants unapplied	514	331
Reshaping the Future	2,332	2,329
IT Transformation Reserve	2,580	2,384
Insurance Reserve	981	699
Pension Reserve	4,499	6,021
Collaboration Reserve	292	213
Capital Reserve	2,216	2,477
ESN Reserve	1,784	1,784
Major Events Policing Reserve	923	674
Operational Reserves	12,076	17,244
Total Earmarked Reserves	27,683	33,825
Total Usable Reserves	38,155	45,921

3.3. Unusable reserves arise out of the interaction of legislation and proper accounting practice either to store revaluation gains or as adjustment accounts to reconcile accounting requirements (i.e. reconciliation of reporting standards to statutory requirements)

3.4. Section 26 of the Local Government Act 2003 gives ministers in England and Wales a general power to set a minimum level of reserves for local authorities. However, the government has undertaken to apply this only to individual authorities in the circumstances where an authority does not act prudently, disregards the advice of its Chief Finance Officer and is heading for serious financial difficulty.

3.5. Whilst it remains the responsibility of the Director of Finance/S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner to advise on the overall level of reserves that are held; the Staffordshire Commissioner should assist by providing clear protocols for the establishment and use of reserves, as reserves should not be held without a clear purpose.

3.6. The Staffordshire Commissioner has indicated that the level of general reserves be set at a minimum level of 3% of the annual revenue budget. The Panel should note that the level of general reserves is currently £9.489m or 3.91% of the 2023/24 net revenue budget. The reserves forecast currently shows the forecast underspend for the financial year as going to the general fund. It should be noted that consideration will be given to transferring the underspend at the end of the financial year to the budget support reserve.

4. Reserves Strategy and Future Outlook

4.1. This paper gives due consideration to the overall level of reserves held as at 31 March 2023 and the forecast position for 31 March 2024, and the panel are asked to note the overall position as scheduled in **Appendix 1**.

4.2. General Reserve

4.3. The Commissioner's policy for the general reserve fund is for it to hold as a minimum a balance of 3% of the net revenue budget of the combined budgets of the Commissioner and Staffordshire Police. This is currently considered to be a minimal safe level which would afford two incidents of maximum exposure to loss in any one year.

4.4. The maximum exposure to loss for a particular event is understood to be 1% of net budget in the light of the guidance which is issued by the Home Office relating to the police special grant. This guidance establishes that in the event that a force can prove it has proportionately policed a major incident which has created an unaffordable cost in one year, and that is independently reviewed by HMICFRS, the force can claim for costs exceeding 1% of the net budget for each incident. This guidance was updated in May 2021 and we expect it to continue to be in place during the period of the MTFS.

4.5. At the end of March 2023, the general reserve was £9.489m; this represents 3.91% of the annual revenue budget for 2023/24. It is assumed that the forecast underspend in 2023/24 goes to the general reserve.

4.6. Earmarked reserves

4.7. The earmarked reserve provision is required not only to fund future projects and investments but also to provide funding –

- To cover specific risk items that are excluded from the MTFS but may present as financial pressures over the life of the MTFS such as the current age discrimination changes to public sector pensions;
- To cover areas of the budget subject to fluctuations in spend based on risk such as self-insured Insurance claims;
- Reserves earmarked to support transformation. Whilst current legislation allows for the use of capital receipts to fund transformation this means these receipts would be used on revenue spend as opposed to re-investing back into assets (which would increase long term debt). The Commissioner is re-investing all receipts back into the acquisition of new assets;
- To provide for future contingent liabilities that have been identified within the statutory accounts;
- A reserve established to provide budgetary support. This reserve is earmarked to support the budget on a one-off basis whilst efficiency savings are phased in with a view to implementing these savings in the most sustainable manner possible;
- Reserves held for specific operational requirements.

4.8. The balance on these reserves as at 31 March 2023 was £33.825m and is forecast to reduce in year by £1.738m to close the year at £32.087m. This increase in the main is driven by the use of the capital reserve to support the capital programme, use of the Uplift reserve to support various estates projects, use of the major policing reserve for the policing of the King's Coronation and use of the pensions reserve to fund Pensions Remedy costs.

5. Reserve Forecast

5.1. The following table represent the forecast use of reserves as stated in the MTF5, with other known adjustments.

	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000
General Fund	9,631	9,631	9,631	9,631
Capital Receipts Reserve	0	0	0	0
Capital Grants Unapplied	331	331	0	0
Budget Support Reserve	3,645	0	0	0
Capital Reserve	484	741	998	1,212
Collaboration Reserve	199	199	199	199
ESN Reserve	1,784	1,784	0	0
Insurance Reserve	699	699	699	699
IT Transformation Reserve	1,890	1,490	1,090	690
Major Events Policing Reserve	473	473	473	473
Operational Reserves	6,331	4,170	3,455	3,442
Pension Reserve	5,696	5,696	5,696	5,696
Reshaping the Future Reserve	2,149	2,149	2,149	2,149
Uplift Reserve	3,361	3,361	3,361	3,361
Total Earmarked Reserves	26,711	20,762	18,120	17,921
Total Usable Reserves	36,674	30,725	27,751	27,552

5.2. The levels of reserves held is under constant review in order to ensure that any identified risks and issues are adequately provided for. It may be necessary to transfer monies between reserves in future periods in order to meet need, or where it is no longer felt necessary to hold a reserve for the originally intended purpose.

Usable Reserves Forecast 31 March 2024

Actual 31/03/2023 £000		Transfer In £000	Transfer Out £000	Forecast 31/03/2024 £000
9,489	General Fund	142	0	9,631
2,276	Capital Receipts Reserve	0	(2,276)	0
331	Capital Grants Unapplied	0	0	331
4,877	Budget Support Reserve	750	(361)	5,266
2,478	Capital Reserve	549	(1,727)	1,299
214	Collaboration Reserve	0	(15)	199
1,784	ESN Reserve	0	0	1,784
699	Insurance Reserve	0	0	699
2,385	IT Transformation Reserve	0	(95)	2,290
673	Major Events Policing Reserve	0	(200)	473
7,190	Operational Reserves	3,731	(2,878)	8,043
6,020	Pension Reserve	0	(324)	5,696
2,329	Reshaping the Future Reserve	0	(180)	2,149
5,177	Uplift Reserve	0	(987)	4,189
33,825	Total Earmarked Reserves	5,030	(6,767)	32,087
45,921	Total Usable Reserves	5,172	(9,043)	42,049

The following earmarked reserves have been established (or aggregated as shown above) for the following purposes:

Budget Support Reserve – this reserve was included within the previous MTFs and additional balances have been transferred during the year. This use of this reserve has been included within the updated MTFs and will be fully exhausted by March 2026.

Capital Reserve – to fund future capital projects on assets with a short asset life, as well as to support any urgent H&S works of a capital nature.

Collaboration Reserve – to support the one-off costs associated with local public sector collaboration. This reserve is used to either support projects aimed at generating a financial return on the one-off investment or improving partnership working and outcomes.

Emergency Services Network (ESN) Reserve – the ESN programme will see the current Airwave based communications system replaced with a new 4G based service. Funding will be required for the replacement of devices.

Insurance Reserve – provides for the self-funding of certain uninsurable risks and also to cover the excess (£100,000) for any unknown claims before the insurance cover is applied.

Major Events Policing Reserve – this reserve holds funds to contribute towards the costs of policing major events should the need arise. This has been repurposed and was previously the Covid-19 reserve.

Pension Reserve – provides provision around future unknown costs relating to the public sector pensions age discrimination case (McCloud) as well as for flexibility in the payment of ill health pension payments to the pension fund.

Transformation – these reserves are held to support transformation activity, and are divided between a general transformation reserve and an IT/Digital specific transformation reserve.

Uplift Reserve – to support the further training and development of the force as it brings in new officers.

Operational Budget Reserves – this includes a number of specific earmarked reserves.