

Adequacy of Provisions and Reserves and Robustness of Budget

Report of the Treasurer

For further information about this report please contact Keith Dixon, Treasurer, on 01743 260202.

1 Purpose of Report

This report:

- a) Undertakes a full analysis of Reserves and Provisions;
- b) Provides an assurance on the adequacy of reserves and provisions;
and
- c) Gives an assurance on the robustness of the budget.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to recommend to the Fire Authority:

- a) The reserves and provisions as set out in the appendix;
- b) The Treasurer's assurances covering the robustness of the 2010/11 budget and adequacy of the reserves and provisions; and
- c) That it note the material uncertainties from 2011/12 onwards.

3 Background

The Finance Officer is required, under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, to report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves.

This is also linked to the requirement of the Prudential Code that authorities should have full regard to affordability, when making recommendations about future capital programmes.

In our case the issue of the reserves and capital is closely linked because of the intention to maximise the funding of the “Shrewsbury Capital Project” from the Capital Reserve.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) has issued a Guidance Note on Local Authority reserves and balances – (LAAP Bulletin 55) and this is reflected in this report. The Bulletin states that it is contrary to the freedoms of local authorities for an external body to impose general minimum or maximum levels of reserves, as there is a broad range within which authorities might reasonably operate. The Bulletin does say that reserves should be not only adequate but also necessary. It also reminds authorities of the power of Government to set a minimum level of reserves, and that Government has undertaken not to impose such a level, unless an authority does not act prudently, ignores advice, and is heading for serious financial difficulty.

4 Major Risks and Uncertainties

The basic check made each budget round is to ensure that all major risks identified in the risk register are taken into account. These are:

- i- Retained Firefighters’ Pension issues 2000 to 2006
- ii- Firelink / Firecontrol and the implications for current IT and communication services
- iii- Implications of the current financial situation
- iv- Linked to iii above, the risk of being capped.

These risks are addressed in this report together with the overall adequacy of each reserve and the robustness of the budget

5 General Reserve

The General Reserve was the first established by the Authority in 2004, with the purposes of firstly providing a working balance to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows, thereby avoiding unnecessary temporary borrowing, and secondly, cushioning the impact of unexpected events or emergencies.

The balance is expected to be £525,000 at 1 April 2010. The basis for this before inflation proofing, is set out in the appendix to Report 5f to the Strategy and Resources Committee 12 November 2009 – now encompassed in the “Green Book” to the Authority in December 2009.

The balance of the reserve is made up of a number of relatively small risks although it is clear that the probability of the risk of delays to the national Firecontrol / Firelink project has now become an issue. Given that this specific risk is being dealt with as part of the budget process, that the reserve is still needed in aggregate for cash flow and contingency purposes, and that £525,000 would be about 2.5% of budget, it is recommended that the reserve remain at that level, subject to regular review and to repricing.

6 Extreme Weather Reserve

The Extreme Weather Reserve is expected to total £295,000 at 1 April 2010. If it does, then it will not yet have been used to pay for budget overspends arising from demands on the Service from Extreme Weather. These would arise primarily on the Retained Service.

Last year the Fire Authority, decided to maintain the reserve at £295,000, and review the impact of the £100,000 efficiency reduction in call-outs in 2009/10, before taking further action. There has not been any call on the reserve this year, however, given the long-term nature of the risk, it is recommended that the reserve is left unchanged, subject to review when the Accounts are closed.

7 Pensions and other Staff Issues

This reserve is expected to total £784,000 at April 2010, which is made up of:

- i Sickness Retirements
Lump sum contributions are required to the Pensions account and an annual total of 3 is provided for in the revenue account. Any more would have to be met from this reserve. One extra retirement would cost about £130,000.
- ii Other staff costs, such as injury awards, which are not covered by the employee's pension contribution, and therefore not chargeable to the Pensions account.
- iii Retained Firefighter pensions costs for the period between April 2000 and March 2006. Costs could amount to £355,000, based on those already known to be interested in pension scheme membership. The level of uncertainty, both of higher costs, and on the other hand Government assistance is significant, however efforts to quantify the risk continue in conjunction with our Pension Services Provider.
- iv Any net staffing consequences from the Regional Control Centre – currently thought to be unlikely, if passed to the Company
- v Any local implications of developments elsewhere in the Fire Service, such as equality issues
- vi Arrears of pay etc.

Given the high level of uncertainty on a number of these issues, it is recommended that this reserve is left unchanged but repriced annually until the outcome of the Retained Service Pensions negotiations is known.

8 Capital Reserve-Earmarked

This reserve is intended to fund minor and/or recurring capital schemes, thereby avoiding borrowing costs. Where an asset has a defined life and will need replacing, contributions are made over its life from the revenue account. There is a potential funding problem in 2010/11 of £120,000, if the full cost of the fire kit replacement scheme (£500,000) needs funding from the reserve in that year. Subsequent years would however be in balance. Should temporary funding be necessary, then this could be found from underspends at the year end or by transferring any surplus from the Un-earmarked Capital Reserve. A decision could be taken depending on circumstances next June.

9 Capital Reserve-Un-earmarked

This reserve is intended to fund the St Michael's Street capital scheme. Latest estimates have identified £175,000 of revenue expenditure to cover temporary arrangements, such as rent, and it is recommended that this sum is transferred to a revenue reserve to meet these costs over the next two years. The phasing of expenditure on the capital scheme itself has been revised as set out below. Until the tenders have been received no update is possible on the overall cost of the scheme.

	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000	Total £000
Expenditure	107.0	3,368.5	514.5	3,990.0
Funding				
Grant	80.0	691.0		771.0
Reserve				
-Revenue	27.0	103.0	45.0	175.0
-Un-earmarked Capital		1,044.0		1,044.0
Borrowing		1,530.5	469.5	2,000.0
Total Funding	107.0	3,368.5	514.5	3,990.0

The Un-earmarked Capital Reserve is currently expected to total £1.491 million, therefore, if £1.044m is required, then there should be £0.482m (including repricing) remaining that could fund any excess cost revealed when the scheme is underway.

10 Efficiency Reserve

This reserve is earmarked for investing in efficiencies and has been further earmarked for seeking efficiencies from the St Michael's Street project. The balance of £60,000 is currently expected to be used for this purpose.

11 General Fund

The General Fund is not a reserve but the amount by which revenue income exceeds expenditure. The Fire Authority attempts to redistribute any such balance through the budget process rather than hold tax payers' funds unnecessarily.

12 Adequacy of Reserves

The reserves have not been unexpectedly reduced from last year, when an assurance was given of their adequacy. The major uncertainties of last year do, however, continue, except that there is a much clearer picture of the implications of the St Michael's Street capital project and the Firecontrol / Firelink issue is being formally addressed. In light of this and the analysis set out above a continued assurance can be made that every effort has been made to ensure that reserves are adequate. A full statement of reserves is set out in Appendix A.

13 Robustness of Estimates

Given that reserves are adequate, I believe the budget is robust for 2010/11 in respect of the process to minimise errors and omissions, the level set aside for future pay and price increases, and the realism and deliverability of efficiencies. The process for identifying additional spending pressures both through the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) and the budget process is comprehensive.

There is always the chance of a major rethink of public finances after the next election. Given that precepts will have already been set on the basis of the current grant settlement, hopefully any change would affect primarily 2011/12. However one-off contingency reductions have been identified that could be activated during next year in order to keep a balanced budget and preserve, as far as possible, agreed service levels..

The major unknown would be the threat of capping. At an increase of 3.9%, the precept level itself would not be within the Government's previous definition of an excessive increase. The capping rules may change but the only formal elucidation is the letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at CLG attached at Appendix B. The lowest national average increase in Council Tax has been 2.1% 16 years ago. Apart from the increase in Council Tax, other indicators used in the past to determine capping have been the increase in budget requirement (ours is 4.3%) and our relative level of precept compared to our category of Authority, where we are one of the highest. The latest position for budget intentions of other authorities is attached at Appendix C, together with last year's precept increases.

14 Future Years

Although the assurances required under statute are for the coming year only, there must be concern over the next three years' grant settlement from 2011/12 onward; prospects for inflation up or down; Council Tax base; as well as the greater uncertainties of budgets generally over that time.

It will, therefore, be important to use the current lead-in period to monitor such budget issues carefully and to reflect planning in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to ensure service and financial stability.

15 Financial Implications

The financial implications are outlined in the main body of this report.

16 Legal Comment

The Treasurer is obliged to give the assurances set out in this report by the Local Government Act 2003.

17 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

18 Appendix

Appendix A

Schedule of Reserves, Provisions and General Fund

Appendix B

Letter from the Permanent Under Secretary of State 9 December 2009

Appendix C1 and C2

Proposed Increases in Council Tax and Budget for 2010/11 and Previous Years

19 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link	*	Strategic Planning	*
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*

Schedule of Reserves, Provisions and General Fund

**Budget for the
year 2010/11
£ 000**

1. Equipment Replacement Provision

a) Reason / Purpose	1 April	65
To smooth out revenue expenditure each year on the replacement of items of operational equipment.	Additions	36
	Withdrawals	-30
	31 March	<u>71</u>
b) How and When Used		
The provision purchases items of equipment and receives equal annual instalments from the revenue account over the life of that equipment. Interest is also added on balances to ensure inflation proofing.		
c) Procedures for Management and Control		
The expected expenditure and contributions is approved by the Authority as part of the annual budget process and controlled as any other revenue budget.		
d) Process and timescale for Review		
The provision is reviewed each year as part of the budget setting process, again during the closing of the accounts, and in addition if budget variations are required during the year.		

2. General Reserve

a) Reason / Purpose	1 April	525
To provide a cash reserve to avoid unnecessary short-term borrowing. Also to meet known risks which are difficult to quantify or to predict when they will occur.	Additions	16
	Withdrawals	-
	31 March	<u>541</u>
b) How and When Used		
The General Reserve would be used to finance a one-off expenditure occurring during a year on one of the scheduled risks anticipated. The General Reserve is funded from the revenues of the Authority both to meet risks and to cover inflation.		
c) Procedures for Management and Control		
Risk are listed and amended with changes to the Risk Register. Each is quantified and probabilities ascribed to their occurring. The resulting total is then available to meet an individual risk identified (or unknown) occurring, subject to formal approval by the Authority.		
d) Process and Timescale for Review		
Review takes place as part of the annual budget setting process and on closing the accounts. The Risk Management Group also considers changes in		

risk throughout the year and proposes changes to the Authority as necessary.

3. Extreme Weather Reserve

a) Reason / Purpose

The purpose is to average out the revenue implications of hot summers, flooding or other weather events that impact on the retained service costs in particular.

1 April	295
Additions	-
Withdrawals	-
31 March	295

b) How and When Used

The revenue budget provides for an annual average cost. Underspends in any year are added to the reserve, overspends funded by the reserve.

c) Procedures for Management and Control

The Authority will approve additional revenue costs in the normal way on the basis of an assurance that they could be funded by the reserve and after any other funding – e.g. Bellwin claims had been identified.

d) Process and Timescale for Review

The reserve and associated budgets are reviewed as part of the annual budget setting process, and on closing the accounts.

4. Pensions and Other Staff Matters Reserve

a) Reason / Purpose

The reserve is to meet one-off staff related costs such as pension or equal pay/conditions retrospective liabilities, sickness pension costs above the average annual revenue budget provision, injury benefits and payments of arrears.

1 April	784
Additions	23
Withdrawals	-10
31 March	797

b) How and When Used

The Authority would approve any additional budget costs on the assurance they could be met from the reserve. The reserve would receive annual inflation proofing contributions.

c) Procedures for Management and Control

The specific risks covered are regularly monitored and reports taken to the Authority of any variations in the reserve that might be required.

d) Process and Timescale for Review

Review is part of the annual budget setting process, and again on closing the accounts. Risk Management Group also regularly reviews these risks because of their high significance in service and financial terms.

5. Capital Reserve- Earmarked

a) Reason / Purpose

The Capital Reserve meets the cost of small and recurring items of capital and receives contributions from the revenue account to provide for replacement of recurring items. The reserve is also intended to maximise self-funding of the Shrewsbury HQ replacement / refurbishment scheme in order to minimise prudential borrowing.

1 April	330
Additions	344
Withdrawals	-670
31 March	4

b) How and When Used

As part of the annual Capital budget, the Authority decides which schemes are likely to need replacement, and are small enough or of relatively short life to warrant self-funding. If the fund can meet these costs it is then replenished over the life of the asset where replacement is expected. Contributions ensure that replacement provision is inflation proofed. The Shrewsbury HQ Project will be considered specifically during 2009/10.

c) Procedures for Management and Control

The Capital Programme, its funding (including from this reserve) and revenue implications are considered and approved as part of the budget setting process in the context of the Prudential Code and Guidelines.

d) Process and Timescale for Review

The reserve is reviewed during the annual budget process, on closing the accounts and in the light of continuous budget monitoring of the capital programme.

6. Capital Reserve- Un-earmarked

a) Reason / Purpose

The purpose is to fund major capital schemes and minimise borrowing costs.

1 April	1,491
Additions	35
Withdrawals	-1,044
31 March	482

b) How and When Used

The reserve is created from savings and efficiencies that become available from revenue budgets. These funds are used to finance the St. Michael's St. scheme.

c) Procedure for Management and Control

The Authority approves the release of the reserve to match expenditure on the project taking into account grant and other funding sources.

d) Process and Timescale for Review

It is envisaged that the fund will be finished in 2011/12. However this will depend on the cost and phasing of the St. Michael's St. scheme. Any surplus

**Budget for the
year 2010/11
£ 000**

funds would be available to meet the cost of future major projects.

7. Efficiency Reserve

a) Reason / Purpose

The purpose is to invest in one-off initiatives intended to deliver efficiency savings or practices in subsequent years.

1 April	60
Additions	-
Withdrawals	-60
31 March	-

b) How and When Used

The Authority approves in advance contributions from the reserve for specific efficiency proposals. Income from revenues of the Authority is earmarked as part of the review process.

c) Procedures for Management and Control

Proposals require specific Authority approval as part of the budget process.

d) Process and Timescale for Review

Review takes place as part of the annual budget setting process and on closing the accounts.

8. General Fund

a) Reason / Purpose

The General Fund is the balance of income over expenditure required to fund expenditure that has slipped into the following year or is approved to be added to the next year's budget by the Authority.

1 April	-
Additions	-
Withdrawals	-
31 March	-

b) How and When Used

The budgets financed by the General Fund are enhanced in the new year, and the balance at 1 April is therefore wholly used during the year.

c) Procedure for Management and Control

The General Fund can only be used on the specific approval of the Authority.

d) Process and Timescale for Review

Budgets financed from the General Fund are automatically enhanced at the beginning of the year by the Finance Section, and then monitored as part of normal budget monitoring.

Note

- 1 All Provisions and Reserves are specifically monitored by the Policy Group monthly. Outcomes are then reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee and approvals where necessary are sought at the next Fire Authority meeting.
- 2 More detail on Provisions and Reserves is contained in the Authority's annual Statement of Accounts particularly in the "Statement of Accounting Policies"



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Local Authority Leaders (inc. police and fire
authorities)

Directly elected Mayors

Lord Mayor of the Corporation of the City of
London

December 9th 2009

Council Tax Capping 2010-11

As you know, I announced the provisional local government finance settlement for 2010-11 in a written statement to the House of Commons on November 26th this year.

The provisional settlement for 2010-11 is in line with the previously announced three-year local government finance settlement. In the 2010-11 settlement, formula grant - which includes revenue support grant, redistributed business rates and police grant - will total £29 billion. This represents an increase of 2.6 per cent, on a like for like basis, on the 2009-10 settlement. Grant floors in the 2010-11 settlement will remain at the levels indicated last year.

This, I am glad to say, means that every authority will have received a formula grant increase on a like for like basis in every year of this, the first ever, three-year settlement. Total Government funding for local services is £76 billion in 2010-11 and this represents an increase of 4 per cent on the 2009-10 settlement.

As I said in my statement to the House of Commons, I am pleased that the average Band D council tax increase this year was 3 per cent. The Government anticipates this amount to fall further in 2010-11 whilst authorities protect and improve front line services. In fact, we expect the average Band D council tax increase in England to achieve a 16 year low in 2010-11. The Government remains prepared to take capping action against excessive increases by authorities and to require them to rebill households for a lower council tax if necessary.

As I announced in my statement, the Government has instituted capping action against the police authorities of Cheshire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire in advance of the 2010-11 settlement as a result of previous, excessive, increases set by them. No other decisions on capping in 2010-11 have been taken. These will, as in previous years, be taken after authorities have set their 2010-11 budgets. Capping principles have always been determined on a year by year basis to take into account current economic and social circumstances and this will again be the case in relation to 2010-11.

It would, therefore, be a mistake for any authority to assume that previous years' capping principles will apply to 2010-11. I have made it very clear that the Government expects the average Band D council tax percentage increase to reach a 16 year low in this period. I have also indicated that we will take capping action against any excessive increases and I do not propose to send any further written warnings about the risks involved.

I realise that decisions on council tax increases in 2010-11 are a matter for each individual authority, but the Government has clearly set out the context in which these must be taken.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barbara Follett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BARBARA FOLLETT MP

Appendix C1 to report on
Adequacy of Provisions and Reserves and Robustness of Budget
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
22 January 2010

Proposed increases in Council Tax and Budget for 2010-11

Authority	Contact	2010-11 Council Tax inc on Band D %	2010-11 Net Budget Inc %
		N/A	0.13
		N/A	2.5
		N/A	1.99
		N/A	2
		4	2.1
Shropshire		3.9	4.3
		3.85	2.68
		3.5	1.7
		3	1.21
		2.99	2.7
		2.95	3.1
		2.94	3.4
		2.9	2.2
		2.9	2.64
		2.8	2
		2.8	2.5
		2.75	2.4
		2.74	1.5
		2.5	1.7
		2.5	1.57
		2	2.2
		1.7	3.1
		1.5	2.8
		1.5	2
		1	1
		1	0.91
All Fire Average		2.62	2.17

COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITIES

		Average band D Equivalent Council Tax 2004/05 £	Average band D Equivalent Council Tax 2005/06 £	Average band D Equivalent Council Tax 2006/07 £	Average band D Equivalent Council Tax 2007/08 £	Average band D Equivalent Council Tax 2008/09 £	Average band D Equivalent Council Tax 2009/10 £	% increase 2004/05 to 2005/06	% increase 2005/06 to 2006/07	% increase 2006/07 to 2007/08	% increase 2007/08 to 2008/09	% increase 2008/09 to 2009/10
E6101	Avon §‡	46.44	48.73	51.14	53.62	56.01	58.63	4.93%	4.95%	4.85%	4.46%	4.68%
E6102	Bedfordshire	69.75	68.85	72.18	75.6	78.84	81.63	-1.29%	4.84%	4.74%	4.29%	3.54%
E6103	Berkshire	43.97	46.16	47.94	50.09	52.54	55.11	4.98%	3.86%	4.48%	4.89%	4.89%
E6104	Buckinghamshire	44.65	46.87	49.86	52.33	54.95	57.69	4.97%	6.38%	4.95%	5.01%	4.99%
E6105	Cambridgeshire	45.99	48.24	50.4	52.38	54.45	56.34	4.89%	4.48%	3.93%	3.95%	3.47%
E6106	Cheshire	55.6	58.32	60.07	61	62.71	64.53	4.89%	3.00%	1.55%	2.80%	2.90%
E6107	Cleveland #§‡	48.74	51.05	53.55	55.95	58.69	61.57	4.74%	4.90%	4.48%	4.90%	4.91%
E6110	Derbyshire	52.34	55	57.64	60.52	62.97	65.52	5.08%	4.80%	5.00%	4.05%	4.05%
E6111	Devon	55.59	58.35	61.26				4.96%	4.99%			
	Devon & Somerset				63.45	66.58	69.18				4.93%	3.91%
E6112	Dorset	46.53	48.33	50.67	53.19	55.80	58.50	3.87%	4.84%	4.97%	4.91%	4.84%
E6113	Durham ‡	74.25	73.44	77.04	80.28	82.62	85.41	-1.09%	4.90%	4.21%	2.91%	3.38%
E6114	East Sussex	63.8	66.95	70.26	73.7	77.06	80.08	4.94%	4.94%	4.90%	4.56%	3.92%
E6115	Essex ‡	56.43	57.15	58.23	59.94	62.28	64.62	1.28%	1.89%	2.94%	3.90%	3.76%
E6117	Hampshire	51.3	52.11	53.64	56.07	58.23	60.30	1.58%	2.94%	4.53%	3.85%	3.55%
E6118	Hereford & Worcester **	59.05	59.05	61.95	65.01	68.21	71.57		4.91%	4.94%	4.92%	4.93%
E6120	Humberstone	61.23	63.92	67.1	70.44	73.78	76.66	4.39%	4.97%	4.98%	4.74%	3.90%
E6122	Kent	55.35	57.15	59.4	61.65	63.81	66.06	3.25%	3.94%	3.79%	3.50%	3.53%
E6123	Lancashire	49.64	52.1	54.71	57.44	60.16	62.41	4.96%	5.01%	4.99%	4.74%	3.74%
E6124	Leicestershire	41.08	43.11	45.23	47.48	49.83	51.82	4.94%	4.92%	4.97%	4.95%	3.99%
E6127	North Yorkshire #§‡	50.54	52.58	53.94	56.04	58.56	60.89	4.04%	2.59%	3.89%	4.50%	3.98%
E6130	Nottinghamshire	57.08	58.01	60.85	63.53	65.44	67.73	1.63%	4.90%	4.40%	3.01%	3.50%
E6132	Shropshire	66.24	69.48	72.62	75.45	78.39	81.45	4.89%	4.52%	3.90%	3.90%	3.90%
E6134	Staffordshire	52.17	54.7	57.4	60.27	63.24	65.73	4.85%	4.94%	5.00%	4.93%	3.94%
E6139	Wiltshire #§‡	47.92	50.3	52.8	55.39	57.74	60.57	4.97%	4.97%	4.91%	4.24%	4.90%
Mean CFA's								3.77%	4.47%	4.40%	4.28%	4.05%
METROPOLITAN F&CDAs												
E6142	Greater Manchester ‡	42.66	44.73	46.38	48	49.68	51.37	4.85%	3.69%	3.49%	3.50%	3.40%
E6143	Merseyside ‡	52	53.88	55.82	57.75	60.06	62.37	3.62%	3.60%	3.46%	4.00%	3.85%
E6144	South Yorkshire #§‡	46.54	48.84	51.28	53.83	56.36	58.47	4.94%	5.00%	4.97%	4.70%	3.74%
E6145	Tyne and Wear	62.32	65.38	68.29	69.93	71.61	72.50	4.91%	4.45%	2.40%	2.40%	1.24%
E6146	West Midlands	39.32	41.21	43.18	44.43	45.74	46.90	4.81%	4.78%	2.89%	2.95%	2.54%
E6147	West Yorkshire ‡	41.62	43.67	45.84	48.02	49.91	51.38	4.93%	4.97%	4.76%	3.94%	2.95%
Mean Met's								4.68%	4.41%	3.66%	3.58%	2.95%
Mean All Precepting Authorities								3.96%	4.46%	4.25%	4.14%	3.83%