



POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR DEVON AND CORNWALL

RESERVES STRATEGY 2024/25 to 2027/28

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) maintains guidance on the establishment and maintenance of local authority reserves and balances, which is a foundation for good financial management, and is followed by Police and Crime Commissioners. The guidance identifies that reserves can be held for 3 main purposes:

- As a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing – this forms part of the general reserves.
- As a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies - this also forms part of the general reserves.
- As a means of building up funds to meet known or predicted requirements; these specific reserves are known as earmarked reserves and remain legally part of the total “General Fund”.

1.2 Police and Crime Commissioners may hold a Capital Receipts Reserve. This reserve holds the proceeds from the sale of assets and can only be used for capital purposes (as specified in the capital finance and accounting regulations).

1.3 In addition, the Home Office issued specific **Police finance reserves guidance** on 31 January 2018, which is provided in full below.

Each Police and Crime Commissioner should publish their reserves strategy on their website, either as part of their medium-term financial strategy or in a separate reserves strategy document. The reserves strategy should include details of current and future planned reserve levels, setting out a total amount of reserves and the amount of each specific reserve held for each year. The reserves strategy should cover revenue and capital reserves and provide information for the period of the medium-term financial plan (and at least two years ahead).

Sufficient information should be provided to enable understanding of the purpose(s) for which each reserve is held and how holding each reserve supports the Police and Crime Commissioner’s medium term financial plan.

The strategy should be set out in a way that is clear and understandable for members of the public, and should include:

- *how the level of the general reserve has been set;*
- *justification for holding a general reserve larger than five percent of budget;*
- *details of the activities or items to be funded from each earmarked reserve, and how these support the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable’s strategy to deliver a good quality service to the public. Where an earmarked reserve is intended to fund a number of projects or programmes*

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(for example, a change or transformation reserve), details of each programme or project to be funded should be set out.

The information on each reserve should make clear how much of the funding falls into the following three categories:

- *Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the period of the current medium term financial strategy.*
- *Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period.*
- *As a general contingency or resource to meet other expenditure needs held in accordance with sound principles of good financial management (e.g. insurance).*

2.0 Reserves Strategy

2.1 The Police and Crime Commissioner's Reserve Strategy has the following key principles: -

- The reserves policy for Devon and Cornwall will be looking to maintain general balances at no more than 5% and no less than 3% of overall funding levels each year.
- The requirement for the reserves will be reviewed at least annually. Those reserves no longer required for their intended purpose will be identified and made available for other defined priorities.
- Reserves will be assessed annually to ensure adequacy.
- Risk assumptions used when assessing reserves will be reviewed annually.
- A long-term view will be used when assessing the use of reserves to ensure all assets that support policing are maintained.
- General balances cover the general financial risks. This will include unexpected or unavoidable additional costs, such as a major operations, uninsured liabilities, or treasury management risks.

2.2 The total general and earmarked reserves are estimated to be £38.008mn as at 31 March 2024. The level of general balances will sit at £15.013mn which equates to 3.91% of the overall revenue funding. This level of general balances is within the overall parameters set within the strategy.

2.3 A significant element of the reserves will go towards the funding of the capital programme.

3.0 Planned Use of Reserves

3.1 The reserves position is shown in Table 1 below and indicates that overall level of reserves will reduce from £38.008mn as at 31 March 2024 to £25.148mn as at 31 March 2028.

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Table 1: Projected Reserve Levels to 31 March 2028

	Forecast Balance 31/03/2024 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2025 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2026 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2027 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2028 £mn
Earmarked Reserves					
Capital Financing Reserve	5.479	1.948	1.078	1.828	1.390
Airwave/ESN Capital Reserve	4.786	3.815	3.615	3.415	3.000
Vision Zero South West (Ringfenced)	3.849	0.886	0.813	0.969	1.182
Improvement Reserve	0.300	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Budget Management Fund	7.291	4.626	4.303	3.252	3.273
Police and Crime Plan Reserve	1.290	1.290	1.290	1.290	1.290
Total Earmarked Reserves	22.995	12.565	11.099	10.754	10.135
Capital Reserves					
Capital Grant	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Capital Receipts	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total Capital Reserves	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
General Balances	15.013	15.013	15.013	15.013	15.013
Total Reserves and Balances	38.008	27.578	26.112	25.767	25.148

3.2 Earmarked reserves relate to specific projects or liabilities, where the anticipated extent of the liability, and the timescales involved, are estimated. Reserves have been set aside for significant areas and items of expenditure, and if required will be brought into revenue in the year in which expenditure is incurred.

The earmarked reserves in the table above are held for the following reasons: -

- The **Capital Financing Reserve** is used to fund the capital programme.
- The **Airwave/Emergency Services Network (ESN) Capital Reserve** is used to enable work and the acquisition of new national communication systems and hardware.
- The **Vision Zero South West Reserve** is the ring-fenced pooled balance of the Vision Zero South West Road Safety Partnership.
- The **Improvement Reserve** is used to fund specific business improvement projects.
- The **Budget Management Fund** allows the transfer of carry-forward requests to the following year.

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- The **Police and Crime Plan Reserve** is used to fund innovation projects in support of the Police and Crime Plan objectives and local Police and Crime Commissioner’s priorities.
- The **Capital Reserves** relate to setting aside unused capital finances that have been received, but not applied, in any year. It is currently expected that this will relate to unused capital grant and capital receipts. These reserves may only be used for capital purposes.
- **General Balances** are used to mitigate against unknown or unexpected events that occur and that cannot be accommodated within the revenue or capital budgets. These balances are maintained at no more than 5% and not less than 3% of the annual revenue budget.

3.3 The key risks and liabilities covered by reserves and provisions are shown in Table 3. In each case, the timing and amount cannot be exactly predicted, but the figures shown reflect the latest assessment of potential cost.

4.0 Home Office Classifications

4.1 The Home Office have set clear guidance on publishing the reserves strategy. This included information on each of the reserves and how they fall within the classifications shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Home Office Classifications

	Forecast Balance 31/03/2024 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2025 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2026 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2027 £mn	Estimate Balance 31/03/2028 £mn
Planned Programme and Projects within the current MTFS period	22.995	12.565	11.099	10.754	10.135
Specific Projects and Programmes beyond the current MTFS period	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
General Contingency	15.013	15.013	15.013	15.013	15.013
Total	38.008	27.578	26.112	25.767	25.148

5.0 Review of Reserves and Risk Assumptions

5.1 The main financial risks contained on the Force risk register and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner risk register are shown below and inform the reserves policy:

- Agreed pay awards exceed the budget assumptions.
- The high level of inflation and energy costs.

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- Demand increases above the levels that are affordable within the set budget.
- The council tax base does not increase as assumed.
- The council tax surplus is not generated to the levels assumed.

5.2 In addition to these wider risks the following areas are kept under review:

- Increased funding is required for the Force change programme.
- Revenue savings are not delivered on time.
- Increases in short and long term interest rates.
- Over reliance on internal borrowing to temporarily fund the capital programme.
- The review of the Home Office formula grant funding introduces annual losses of grant.
- The top-slice funding in future years depletes resources without reciprocal benefit to the revenue budget.
- Budget uncertainty through assumption changes.
- Major incident cost overrun.
- Further cost transfers from the centre (e.g. ESN and IT company costs).
- Reductions in local authority funding placing pressure on the police service.

5.3 Assessing Adequacy

5.3.1 The current expected use of earmarked reserves shows a significant reduction in the balance available by the end of 2024/25. This assumes that the capital programme is delivered on time and within budget. A target to increase the revenue contribution to capital over the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) has been included in 2024/25.

5.3.2 In addition to the risks covered by earmarked reserves, there are further, unquantified risks and liabilities. The main source of funding for these risks is General Balances.

5.3.3 The key financial risks are summarised in Table 3 below. For each, an assessment of potential risk is shown, but clearly, in each case the actual risk could be significantly different, and an assessment of these risks will need to be reviewed regularly.

Table 3: Key Financial Risks

Identified Risk	£mn
Future capital funding	1.0
Inflation and cost of living	3.0
Increased pay award above assumptions	3.0
Major Operations	1.5
Uninsured Liabilities and claims	2.5
Other Unexpected Expenditure / Working Capital	2.0
Total Financial Liability	13.0

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- 5.3.4 The financial risks shown in the table above would be temporary one-off funding. For those items that have an impact annually the funding would be used to allow time to deliver permanent savings.
- 5.3.5 The actual limit of general risks, such as major operations or uninsured losses, could of course be significantly more than the assessment shown. Risks around significant major operations are increasing, with increased reliance on more costly resourcing options such as overtime or mutual aid. If such a significant risk were realised, further funding would be sought in the first instance by re-prioritising the use of earmarked reserves.
- 5.3.6 The above risks can be mitigated by the funding allocation on General Balances. General Balances exists to cover the general financial risks faced by the Force, such as major operations, uninsured liabilities, or treasury management risks.
- 5.3.7 The total funding available on General Balances fully meets the assessed risks and liabilities. The level of General Balances is forecast to be £15.013mn as at 31 March 2025.
- 5.3.8 On the basis of the above and given that risk calculation is not an exact science, the reserves and balances generally cover known liabilities and commitments and provide adequate cover for unknown liabilities at the assessed level for 2024/25.
- 5.3.9 Reserves will continue to be monitored and reviewed regularly throughout the year.
- 5.3.10 The Treasurer as statutory Section 151 officer confirms that these reserves provide an adequate level given the identified financial risks in the budget.