



REPORT TO: East Lothian Integration Joint Board

MEETING DATE: 18th December 2025

BY: Chief Finance Officer/Other

SUBJECT: IJB Reserves Policy

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the IJB with a draft Reserves Policy for consideration and approval.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The IJB is asked to:
- 2.2 Note the contents of this report
- 2.3 Approve and adopt the draft Reserves Policy as laid out in the Appendix to this report

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The IJBs Financial Regulations set out that the IJB may hold reserves and the Chief Finance Officer will prepare a policy to hold and manage any such reserves which will be presented to the IJB for approval.
- 3.2 East Lothian Integration Joint Board (IJB) Reserves Policy was originally approved in March 2016 and has been in place ever since. This policy provides a framework for the purpose, use and governance of reserves to support sound financial management and sustainability.
- 3.3 At the end of 2024/25 financial year the IJB had released all its General Reserves and this triggered a review of the IJBs Reserves Policy to be undertaken by the IJB Chief Financial Officer in this financial year.
- 3.4 Reserves have an important role in enabling the IJB to manage the financial position and respond to unforeseen pressures.

- 3.5 Reserves are generally held for 3 purposes:
- To create a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing – this forms part of the general reserves;
 - To create a contingent fund for unexpected events or emergencies - this too forms part of the general reserve
 - To create a means of building up funds, often referred to as earmarked reserves, to meet known or predicted liabilities.
- 3.6 The current policy identifies a level of 2% of the annual revenue budget as a prudent level of general reserves.
- 3.7 The importance of reserves in public sector financial planning is strongly supported by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). Key points from CIPFA's statement on reserves include:
- Reserves are a vital component of prudent financial management and support of a public body's ability to meet balanced budget requirements.
 - Reserves should be accumulated over time and play a central role in medium term financial planning.
 - Reserves are essential to enabling public bodies to manage the progressive reduction in public expenditure expected in the coming years.
- 3.8 A revised draft reserves policy is attached to this report and provides full detail to support the governance for creating and holding revenue reserves for the IJB.
- 3.9 The review, conducted in collaboration with officers and audit colleagues, concluded that the current policy provides a robust framework in terms of defining the purpose, use, and governance of reserves.
- 3.10 The policy review identifies a prudent level of general reserve to be 2% of the East Lothian IJB revenue budget.
- 3.11 Whilst this level of reserve would allow the IJB a degree of flexibility this must be proportionate and take cognisance of the level of savings required to be delivered within the revenue budget.
- 3.12 It is also important to acknowledge the increasing difficulty of achieving and maintaining a 2% general reserve. Recent years have seen an increasing focus on financial recovery actions and opportunities to generate and retain surplus balances have become more constrained.
- 3.13 The IJB does not in 2025/26 have the resources to fund a 2% general reserve and the projected financial landscape indicates it will find it difficult to do so in the coming years.

- 3.14 In recognition of the current financial challenges it is proposed to adopt a pragmatic stepped approach to rebuilding general reserves over a number of years. This will align with the Medium Term Financial Planning process underway and ensure that the Financial Plan and the revised Strategic Plan are aligned over a similar timeframe.

4 ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 The IJB holds its meetings in public and makes its papers available to the public.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Reserves Policy, if approved, will become one of the IJB's policies.

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

7 DIRECTIONS

- 7.1 This report does not require any new directions or amendments to those directions currently extant

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Financial – discussed above
- 8.2 Personnel – None
- 8.3 Other – None

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1

Appendices: Appendix 1 Draft Reserves Policy

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APPENDIX 1

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1. Background

- 1.1 To assist local authorities (and similar bodies) in developing a framework for reserves, CIPFA have issued guidance in the form of the *Local Authority Accounting Panel (LAAP) Bulletin 55 – Guidance Note on Local Authority Reserves and Balances*. This guidance outlines the framework for reserves, the purpose of reserves and some key issues to be considered when determining the appropriate level of reserves. As the East Lothian Integration Joint Board has the same legal status as a local authority, i.e. a section 106 body under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 Act, and is classified as a local government body for accounts purposes by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), it is able to hold reserves which should be accounted for in the financial accounts and records of the Integration Joint Board.
- 1.2 The purpose of a reserve policy is to:
- outline the legislative and regulatory framework underpinning the creation, use or assessment of the adequacy of reserves;
 - identify the principles to be employed by the Integration Joint Board in assessing the adequacy of the Integration Joint Board's reserves;
 - indicate how frequently the adequacy of the Integration Joint Board's balances and reserves will be reviewed; and
 - set out arrangements relating to the creation, amendment and use of reserves and balances.
- 1.3 In common with local authorities, the Integration Joint Board can have reserves within a usable category.

2. Statutory/Regulatory Framework for Reserves

Usable Reserves

- 2.1 Local Government bodies - which includes the Integration Joint Board for these purposes - may only hold usable reserves for which there is a statutory or regulatory power to do so. In Scotland, the legislative framework includes:

<i>Usable Reserve</i>	<i>Powers</i>
General Fund	Local Government Scotland Act 1973

- 2.2 For each reserve there should be a clear protocol setting out:
- the reason / purpose of the reserve;

- how and when the reserve can be used;
- procedures for the reserves management and control; and
- the review timescale to ensure continuing relevance and adequacy.

3. Operation of Reserves

3.1 Reserves are generally held to do three things:

- create a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing – this forms part of general reserves;
- create a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies – this also forms part of general reserves; and
- create a means of building up funds, often referred to as earmarked reserves, to meet known or predicted liabilities.

3.2 The balance of the reserves normally comprises of three elements:

- funds that are earmarked or set aside for specific purposes. In Scotland, under Local Government rules, the Integration Joint Board cannot have a separate Earmarked Reserve within the Balance Sheet, but can highlight elements of the General Reserve balance required for specific purposes. The identification of such funds can be highlighted from a number of sources:
 - future use of funds for a specific purpose, as agreed by the Integration Joint Board; or
 - commitments made under delegated authority by Chief Officer, which cannot be accrued at specific times (e.g. year end) due to not being in receipt of the service or goods;
- funds which are not earmarked for specific purposes, but are set aside to deal with unexpected events or emergencies; and
- funds held in excess of the target level of reserves and the identified earmarked sums. Reserves of this nature can be spent or earmarked at the discretion of the Integration Joint Board.

4. The Role of the Chief Financial Officer

4.1 The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for advising on the targeted optimum levels of reserves the Integration Joint Board would aim to hold (the prudential target). The Integration Joint Board, based on this advice, should then approve the appropriate reserve strategy as part of the budget process.

5. Adequacy of Reserves

- 5.1 There is no guidance on the minimum level of reserves that should be held. In determining the prudential target, the Chief Financial Officer must take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the Integration Joint Board over the medium term and the Integration Joint Board's overall approach to risk management.
- 5.2 In determining the prudential target, the Chief Financial Officer should consider the Integration Joint Board's Strategic Plan, the medium term financial outlook and the overall financial environment. Guidance also recommends that the Chief Financial Officer reviews any earmarked reserves as part of the annual budget process and development of the Strategic Plan.
- 5.3 In light of the size and scale of the Integration Joint Board's responsibilities, over the medium term it is proposed that a prudent level of general reserves will represent 2% of revenue budget. This value of reserves must be reviewed annually as part of the Integration Joint Board Budget and Strategic Plan, and in light of the financial environment at that time. The level of other earmarked funds will be established as part of the annual financial accounting process.

6. Reporting Framework

- 6.1 The Chief Financial Officer has a fiduciary duty to ensure proper stewardship of public funds.
- 6.2 The level and utilisation of reserves will be formally approved by the Integration Joint Board based on the advice of the Chief Financial Officer. To enable the Integration Joint Board to reach a decision, the Chief Financial Officer should clearly state the factors that influenced this advice.
- 6.3 As part of the budget report the Chief Financial Officer should state:
- the current value of general reserves, the movement proposed during the year and the estimated year-end balance and the extent that balances are being used to fund recurrent expenditure;
 - the adequacy of general reserves in light of the Integration Joint Board's Strategic Plan, the medium term financial outlook and the overall financial environment;
 - an assessment of earmarked reserves and advice on appropriate levels and movements during the year and over the medium term; and

- if the reserves held are under the prudential level, that the Integration Joint Board should be considering actions to meet the level through their budget process.

7. Accounting and Disclosure

- 7.1 Expenditure should not be charged direct to any reserve. Any movement within Revenue Reserves is accounted for as an appropriation and is transparent. Entries within a reserve are specifically restricted to 'contributions to and from the revenue account' with expenditure charged to the service revenue account.