



Reserves and Investment Policy

September 2025

Approved by	Date	Review Schedule	Date of next review
Trust Board	24/09/25	Every year	Sept 2026

Saint Paul teaches, 'the body is not made up of one part but of many.'
Chester Diocesan Learning Trust recognises and nurtures the unique gifts, skills and talents within our whole community.

We will empower adults and children to grow in character and mind, shaping a better future.

Shaping better futures; one body, many parts.

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1. Introduction

Chester Diocesan Learning Trust (CDLT) has developed this policy to protect its operations by creating financial support against an unpredictable environment and to ensure there is sufficient provision for future procurement and cash flow requirements. This policy also aids the framework for future strategic planning and decision-making.

The policy and the establishment of financial ranges are based on an annual risk assessment of internal and external operations, as well as the kinds of activities the trust undertakes. The risk to the trust can be summarised as a risk to future funding due to falling pupil rolls, reforms to funding, emergencies, and early teacher retirement or redundancies.

This policy has due regard to legislation and statutory guidance, including the Academies Trust Handbook (ATH).

2. Roles and responsibilities

The board of Directors is responsible for:

- Ensuring the trust's reserves are maintained and used only as described in this policy.
 - Identifying when reserves need to be drawn on, so that they understand the reasons for this and can identify any corrective actions that need to be taken.
 - Identifying any broader, long-term financial problems that mean the reserves are frequently used or are below the minimum level.
 - Acquiring approval from the DfE for novel, contentious and/or repercussive investments.
 - Authorising the transfer of investment funds to an interest-bearing deposit account.
 - Ensure value for money when deciding to invest funds.
 - Ensuring that exposure to investment products is tightly controlled so that the security of funds takes precedence over revenue maximisation.
 - Ensuring that investment decisions are made in the best interests of the trust.
- The finance committee is responsible for:
- Making financial recommendations to the board of trustees.
 - Carrying out any other responsibilities in line with the approved terms of reference.
 - Adhering to and implementing this policy.

The Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO) is responsible for:

- Regularly monitoring the trust's reserves and reporting to the Board of Directors or the Finance and Operations (F&O) committee accordingly.
- Reporting the explanations for any shortfall or excess in reserves.
- Comparing the amount of reserves held with the minimum and maximum limits set out in this policy.
- Reporting any actions being taken or planned to bring reserves in line with the minimum and maximum limits.
- Transferring investment funds to an interest-bearing deposit account, with the authorisation of the board of trustees.

3. The purpose of reserves

Reserves will have a specific purpose relating to future spending or covering current and future risks. The purposes for holding reserves will be kept transparent.

Reserves will be held to ensure that unexpected financial events do not cause problems in the current year or cash flow issues or generate a deficit.

The purposes for holding reserves may include:

- Covering unforeseen emergencies or unexpected expenditure, e.g. a large repair bill.
- Covering unforeseen day-to-day operational costs, e.g. employing temporary staff to cover long-term absence.
- Covering a failure in a source of income, e.g. a grant not being renewed
- Preparing for planned commitments that cannot be met by future income alone, e.g. plans for a major asset purchase

- Needing to fund short-term deficits in budget, e.g. funds that may need to be spent before a grant is received

4. Types of reserves

Unrestricted reserves

Unrestricted reserves, which include income funds, grants and donations, will be spent at the discretion of the board of trustees in furtherance of the trust's objectives.

Restricted reserves

Restricted reserves, which may include restricted income funds, grants or donations, will be spent or invested in furtherance of the trust's objectives or assets, or spent where the donor has expressed the nature of expenditure.

Restricted reserves may be endowment funds, where the funds or assets are required to be invested or retained for actual use, rather than spent.

Designated reserves

A sum of unrestricted or restricted reserves may be separated and designated a particular purpose, therefore becoming a 'designated reserve', e.g. to purchase a new asset.

Designated reserves are labelled this way for administrative purposes only and can still be spent at the discretion of the Trust Board.

Where a designated reserve has been created, the Trust Board will provide a purpose and a timeframe for spending it.

In line with the ATH, the delegated financial powers are written within the scheme of delegation. The trust therefore monitors individual academy reserves and funds held centrally as well as the consolidated financial position.

Pension reserves

The risks surrounding pension liabilities will be considered when calculating the minimum and maximum levels of reserves stated in this policy.

The Trust Board will assess the required pension contributions from projected future income without significantly impacting its planned level of activity.

The trust aims to calculate its reserves without the need to set aside a designated reserve to cover pension liability.

5. Managing reserves

The Trust Board will identify why the trust should hold reserves and having identified its needs, will decide how much should be held to meet them. The Trust Board is clear in its position that as much funding as possible should be within schools and directly impacting on the quality of education for young people.

The financial risk to the trust will be balanced alongside the vision to maintain the highest standards of education.

The central Trust will continually review the maximum limit for centrally held reserves and monitor accordingly. All reserves will be utilised as part of the long-term vision for school improvement and sustainability.

Individual academies reserves will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to meet with school improvement plans at each academy. The consolidated trust fund balance shall be positive at any one time, subject to future agreed commitments. The target balance is 5% - 10% of total income, which will be reviewed annually.

Reserves will be reviewed and monitored by the Trust Board on a termly basis to identify any trends in spending and to rectify issues where they arise.

A clear plan for reinvestment in schools will be developed and agreed by the Trust Board. The movement of funds to and from the reserve budget will be at the discretion of the Trust Board, or the F&O committee where delegated authority has been provided.

6. Investment

The trust will aim to manage its cash balances to provide for day-to-day financial management. Where there are sufficient funds to meet all of the trust's financial commitments, and surplus funds of £50,000 exist, the trust will seek to optimise returns by investing.

Where the trust decides to invest, the investment risk will be properly managed.

The trust will manage conflicts of interest in relation to investment in line with the Conflicts of Interest Policy.

When considering an investment, the Trust Board will:

- Act within its powers to invest as set out in its articles.
- Manage and track its financial exposure and ensure value for money.
- Exercise care and skill in investment decisions, taking advice as appropriate from a professional adviser.
- Ensure that exposure to investment products is tightly controlled so that the security of funds takes precedence over revenue maximisation.
- Ensure that investment decisions are in the best interests of the trust

The trust will adhere to the Charity Commission's guidance for trustees about investments, and seek prior approval from the DfE for investments of any value that are novel, contentious or repercussive.

Where the Trust Board has agreed on an amount to be invested, the CFOO will be authorised to transfer the funds to an interest-bearing deposit account.

Invested funds will be reported to the F&O committee at the next available meeting, outlining the maturity date and interest rate achieved.

On maturity, the CFOO will review the position and re-invest in line with this policy, where required. To minimise and limit the risk of investment, the trust will:

- Invest in markets where financial services are closely regulated.
- Adopt a suitably diversified portfolio.
- Avoid speculative forms of investment.
- Take account of environmental, social and governance issues in investment decisions.

The trust will not invest in:

- Any organisation that is directly involved in indiscriminate weaponry.
- Any organisation that produces pornography.
- Any organisation where their principal business activity or focus is tobacco, alcoholic drink or gambling.

7. Reporting

The Trust Board will disclose in its annual report its policy for building and maintaining reserves and investments, and the following information:

- Why reserves are held
- The amount or range of reserves that are held at the end of the year
- How the trust aims to achieve its desired amount of reserves
- How the trust plans to raise the amount of reserves held, where they are below the minimum level

- How the trust plans to better utilise the amount of reserves in the future, where they are in excess of the maximum level
- Details of the circumstances giving rise to any deficit and the steps being taken to eliminate it.
- An explanation of the investment policy
- A statement about the performance of the trust's investments

8. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Trust Board and any changes made to the policy will be communicated to all staff.

The next scheduled review of this policy will be in the Autumn Term 2026.