

Finance and Resources Committee Meeting – 20th November 2007

Reserves Policy Review

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

Decision

The Committee is requested to review the attached document and approve the continuation of the Reserves Policy, as appropriate.

Background information

HPC commenced operations on 1st April 2002 inheriting the net assets, general funds and revaluation reserves of the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM). A private meeting of the Council in October 2004 ratified the September 2004 proposed policy that sufficient Reserves should be held to cover three months overheads. The three months rationale was that in the advent of a major problem e.g. natural disaster, economic shock etc, this would allow HPC in the short term to continue its activities in a solvent position, until further arrangements could be made. The HPC Reserves policy was last approved by the Finance and Resources Committee in November 2005 – refer minutes, item 11.05/129.

Can HPC at least meet its three months average reserves target in future years? Future investment fund values are unknown. However, if a 10% cumulative return on the Aug 07 investment value for £1.836M is assumed, and projected cash movements (see latest Five Year Plan assumptions) are added to the 07/08 year end budgeted working capital, compliance with the 3 mths Operating Expense target should be achievable.

Should HPC build its financial reserves up in anticipation of the introduction of Government policy changes e.g. Bichard, White Paper changes? In the latest Five Year Plan, White paper costs such as Revalidation have been ignored. The planning assumption is that future fee levels would be adjusted to reflect Revalidation costs, if and when Revalidation is likely to occur. Other White Paper costs would need to be funded via a combination of fee income, start up funding (DOH?) and/or use of reserves. The advantages of building HPC's financial reserves are to increase HPC's investment income (interest and dividends) to help support its activities and provide greater financial flexibility to handle external changes (manage risk). The disadvantages are that

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2007-10-30	a	F&R	PPR	Reserves Policy Review	Draft	Public
					DD: None	RD: None

some stakeholders may believe that if reserves increase significantly, current fees are therefore set at an excessive level.

Should the HPC set up a specific asset replacement fund?

Because not enough information is known about the specific replacement details, setting up a specific fund might prematurely commit the HPC to spending those funds for that purpose. Capital spending identified for the forthcoming Budget year is routinely captured during the Budget process (after project prioritisation). Capital spending is also identified at a high level when the Five Year Plan is updated.

In some cases, rather than replacement, the prevailing asset life may be extended via technical updates, enhancements etc. With IT assets, due to rapid technology changes and the desire to improve system integration, identifying specific replacement costs can in any case be problematic.

Resource implications

Nil

Financial implications

Nil

Appendices

Appendix One - Reserves Policy

Date of paper

8th November 2007

APPENDIX ONE

HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL (HPC)

RESERVES POLICY

INTRODUCTION

HPC commenced operations on 1st April 2002 inheriting the net assets, general funds and revaluation reserves of the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM). A private meeting of the Council in October 2004 ratified the September 2004 proposed policy that sufficient Reserves should be held to cover three months overheads. The Reserves policy was last approved by the Finance and Resources Committee in November 2005.

1.0 Reserves definitions

Reserves have been defined as accumulated profits (surpluses) that have been retained by a company (the organisation), plus any surplus from the revaluation of assets, plus any share premium. Reserves belong to shareholders (stakeholders) and are part of shareholder's funds.

In s92 (c) of the Company's Act 2006, reserves are referred to indirectly as follows; the amount of the company's net assets is not less than the aggregate of its called up share capital and undistributable reserves. s831 (4) defines undistributable reserves as the share premium account plus the capital redemption reserve plus the amount by which accumulated unrealised profits exceed its accumulated unrealised losses plus any other reserve that the company is prohibited from distributing.

A useful guide for HPC would be to define reserves as the sum of Investments and Working Capital, as this is readily convertible to cash in the short term.

2 RESERVES POLICY

2.1 **That HPC maintain a Reserves level that is a MINIMUM of three average months budgeted operating expenses.**

2.2 **That HPC maintain sufficient Reserves to fund the replacement of assets (purchased or leased) that are used in the business for ongoing operations.**

By definition, assets have a useful economic life greater than one year. They are depreciated over their useful life e.g. four years for most computer assets. If HPC needs to replace those assets at the end of their economic life to at least maintain existing services and service levels, sufficient reserves must be built up to do so. As HPC grows in size, the investment in assets increases, so the level of Reserves must increase to ensure the assets can be replaced.

2.3 **That sufficient Reserves be held to preserve operating flexibility within the business to handle external "shocks".**

HPC develops annual and Five Year Plans based on the most likely and agreed targets for the business. However, some external events may arise with rapid and significant impacts on HPC operating activities that are outside the plans. Examples include; lost legal cases, legislative penalties and costs

imposed on HPC by central government agencies, the unanticipated withdrawal of a profession and/or sector-restructuring.

If HPC has a significant level of Reserves built up, these will in the short term provide “bridging finance” to handle such “shocks”. A significant level of Reserves also generates income (interest income etc) to help “smooth out” and delay Registrant fee price increases.

2.4 **That the Reserves Policy be viewed in the context of the Five Year Financial Plan “bottom line” surpluses/deficits and the Investments Policy.**

Arguably, the Reserves policy both influences and is influenced by the Five Year Financial Plan. To elaborate, if high Reserves levels are to be built up or maintained, this will drive the need to increase fee income (find more fee-paying Registrants and/or raise fee prices). Similarly, if a Five Year Plan is agreed, Reserves levels will be an output of this. If those levels conflict with the prevailing Reserves policy, the policies will need to change, to produce an alignment.

Reserves levels will also be a function of volatility in the value of the things comprising those reserves. Regarding relative volatility (uncertainty) over the next 12 months, share, bond and property market values are considerably more volatile than fee income, especially fee income relating to the existing professions that HPC regulates.

Regarding the relationship between the Reserves Policy and the Investments Policy, in the medium term, if fees are not able to rise to offset cost increases, but ongoing compliance with the agreed Reserves policy is maintained, then investment returns need to rise. However, higher investment returns will typically involve incurring increased investment risk (more value volatility and/or greater potential for losses).

Finally, it is worth noting that if HPC’s underlying cash-flows become highly volatile, then either HPC needs an overdraft (indicative interest rates are about 2 percentage points about the Bank of England base rate), or the Reserves “buffer” in the absence of a bank overdraft, needs to be correspondingly higher.