



Mayoral Referendum Consultation Report August 2015

Method of response	Number of questionnaires
Total on-line	340
Total returned via post	129
Total from Brixham event	27
Total from Paignton library event	27
Total from Torquay event	79
Total from Paignton Asda event	24
Total from library and Connections boxes	278
Total responses	904

This consultation was open between Monday 3rd August and Monday 31st August 2015.

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1. Introduction

The Council intends to hold a referendum in May 2016 on how the Council is run from 2019 onwards. The referendum will ask whether the Council should continue to be run as it is now by a Mayor who is elected by Torbay's voters or by one of two alternatives:

- A Leader and Cabinet System
- A Committee system

While the wording on the ballot paper for a referendum is set by law, the Council wanted to hear from local residents on which alternative option should be included for the referendum. The options are:

Option 1	Option 2
<p>How would you like Torbay Council to be run?</p> <p>By a mayor who is elected by voters. This is how the council is run now.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>By a leader who is an elected councillor chosen by a vote of the other elected councillors. This would be a change from how the council is run now.</p>	<p>How would you like Torbay Council to be run?</p> <p>By a mayor who is elected by voters. This is how the council is run now.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>By one or more committees made up of elected councillors. This would be a change from how the council is run now.</p>

2. Methodology

This consultation was open between Monday 3rd August and Monday 31st August 2015. An on-line survey was published on the Torbay Council website, and paper versions were made available in all four Torbay Libraries and the three Connections Offices.

The survey was also posted or e-mailed to 600 Torbay residents who are members of the Viewpoint Panel.

Four consultation events were held to raise awareness of the survey and answer any of the public's questions regarding a Mayoral referendum. There were three daytime events at Brixham Library, Paignton Library and Torquay's Union Street, as well as one evening event at Paignton Asda.

The consultation, its survey and events, were publicised in the local press and on social media sites.

3. Summary of results

- 675 respondents (74.7%) answered **no** to question 1: Do you want to keep the current system (Directly Elected Mayor) without holding a referendum? Compared with 197 (21.8%) who answered **yes**.
- In answer to question 2, just over half of respondents chose **Option 2** - Committee System, as their preferred option, 486 (53.8). Almost a quarter of respondents chose **Option 1** - Leader / cabinet System at 213 (23.6%).
- The vast majority of respondents 878 (97.1%) **live in Torbay**
- Just over half 477 (52.8%) of respondents **work in Torbay**. 384 (42.5%) ticked no or stated that they were retired.
- Question 5 allowed respondents to make **written comments**. There were 307 comments made. These have been categorised into popular themes for this report. The numbers in brackets within the tables indicate the number of responses in that theme. Individual comments may be classified under more than one theme.

4. Results

1. Do you want to keep the current system (Directly Elected Mayor) without holding a referendum?

	Number	Percent
Yes*	197	21.8%
No	675	74.7%
No response	32	3.5%
Total	904	100%

*If respondents answered yes to question 1, they were asked to go to question 3.

2. What would be your preferred option for what should be included on a referendum ballot paper?

	Number	Percent
Option 1 - Leader / cabinet System: Voters elect councillors to their ward and a leader would be chosen by the 36 elected councillors, the leader would have the same powers as the Mayor, but can be replaced at any time with another councillor.	213	23.6%
Option 2 - Committee System: Voters elect councillors to their ward. No decision making powers would be given to any one councillor and all decisions would be made at Council or committees or sub committees where Council agrees to this.	486	53.8%
No response	205	22.7%
Total	904	100%

21 respondents (2.3%) answered yes to question 1, but also answered question 2. Of these respondents, 16 (1.8%) chose option 1 and five (0.6%) chose option 2.

22 respondents (2.4%) answered no to question 1 but did not provide an answer to question 2.

Seven respondents did not provide an answer to both question 1 and question 2.

3. Do you currently live in Torbay?

	Number	Percent
Yes	878	97.1
No	10	1.1
No response	16	1.8
Total	904	100%

4. Do you work in Torbay?

	Number	Percent
Yes	477	52.8
No*	384	42.5
No response	43	4.8
Total	904	100%

* 'No' figure includes respondents who indicated they are retired.

4 respondents (0.4%) did not provide an answer to both question 3 and question 4.

5. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

This question allowed respondents to make written comments. These comments have been categorised into popular themes. The numbers in brackets indicate the number of responses in that theme. Individual comments may be classified under more than one theme.

Category	Comments made by respondents
Mayor / Mayoral System (85)	<p><i>"Elected Mayor system more democratic as they are voted in by the public."</i></p> <p><i>"Find the mayoral system confusing for voters."</i></p> <p><i>"Hundreds of towns and boroughs manage to do without a Mayoral System and they manage extremely well. Torbay doesn't need a Mayor and the money saved from that could be spent where it is really needed in the area."</i></p> <p><i>"I believe an elected mayor provides greater public accountability."</i></p> <p><i>"I have not been happy with the elected mayor system, but will option 2 cost more money?"</i></p>

	<p><i>“Mayor brings long term stability. Before we had councillors kicking out their leader every few months so nobody knew who was in charge.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think the current system works perfectly well and should not be tampered with just to appease certain members of the council who disagree with some of the decisions made by our Mayor.”</i></p> <p><i>“The committee system will save ratepayers money by reducing red tape and staffing costs by removing the mayor and all of his staff. In these times of financial restriction placed on Local Councils by central government, the money saved will enable more staff to be employed where they are really needed.”</i></p> <p><i>“The existing system is not beyond redemption but if it should be retained it is important that the person holding the office genuinely works for the whole bay, and works with all of his council to deliver programmes following meaningful consultation with the electorate affected.”</i></p> <p><i>“Torbay is too small to have an elected mayor system.”</i></p>
<p>Decisions (51)</p>	<p><i>“A committee system to make the decisions in a fairer way.”</i></p> <p><i>“Committee system - Time Consuming, expensive, decisions take too long to get made.”</i></p> <p><i>“Decisions should be made by multi-party councillors or similar so that there is a broader view over decisions made where all people in the bay are considered.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ultimately there needs to be a decision maker. In my experience committees do not make quick decisions and procrastinate. Committees also suffer from group think. Committees are good for fact finding and putting forward suggested ways forward, but ultimately an elected person needs to make a decision, based on the best interests of the bay, now and in the future. That person is accountable and can be elected out.”</i></p> <p><i>“The previous system failed Torbay because political infighting interfered with the decision making process”</i></p> <p><i>“Any contentious decisions, ideas made public before it becomes a fait accompli.”</i></p> <p><i>“Decisions should not be taken on council affairs by any one person. All council decisions should be taken by elected councillors put in place by Torbay residents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hadn't realised the amount of power the Mayor has to make decisions. Committee system would be fairer.”</i></p> <p><i>“.....I would not trust councillors collectively making a decision (they would never agree and nothing would get done) and I certainly wouldn't trust the councillors deciding who the leader should be.....”</i></p>

	<p><i>"I believe that a committee system, with NO leader to be the most democratic way to run the council. That way everything will be decided on a majority basis with no-one having a decisive or casting vote."</i></p>
<p>Other (39)</p>	<p><i>"A simple yes or no to an elected mayor would seem simpler."</i></p> <p><i>"Option 2 is untried and without further information on how it would be envisaged to work, it is not possible to determine who would ultimately take charge. Rather reminds me of the concept of designing a camel by committee!"</i></p> <p><i>"I do not work because I am retired."</i></p> <p><i>"Vote by local's system only"</i></p> <p><i>"Council is a multi-million pound business, needs to be run by people who have the expertise - with forward thinking ideas."</i></p> <p><i>"Hold election along with referendum"</i></p> <p><i>"I do not understand the full implications of options 1 and 2"</i></p> <p><i>"If a referendum is to be held, my preferred option is for option 1 - leader/cabinet system."</i></p>
<p>Cost / Finances / Savings (36)</p>	<p><i>"Are there many financial benefits to the local council tax payer? Can money be saved using a system without an elected Mayor?"</i></p> <p><i>"Debate also needs to consider what Torbay Council will look like by 2019 given £33m cuts. Also consideration should be given to the number of councillors needed in a modern world."</i></p> <p><i>"I do not believe one person should be able to make major decisions which affect so many residents' lives and also waste valuable funding."</i></p> <p><i>"I think the Mayoral system has been a very expensive mistake and I believe voters have been apathetic and not interested in voting in a Mayor. I wonder how much a Mayor, his office and staff have cost us?"</i></p> <p><i>"The cheapest option would probably make sense."</i></p> <p><i>"While I was never in favour of having a directly elected Mayor, I'm prepared to put up with the current system simply to avoid ANOTHER referendum. They are so costly for an already cash strapped Local Authority."</i></p> <p><i>"I presume any leader would not get paid a Mayoral salary."</i></p>
<p>Councillors (35)</p>	<p><i>"All Councillors should be independent and party politics should play no part in local government"</i></p> <p><i>"Bring back the civic Mayor. We need younger councillors, too many over 65 councillors on Torbay Council. We need Councillors who work and live in the real world!!!"</i></p>

	<p><i>“Decisions should not be taken on council affairs by any one person. All council decisions should be taken by elected councillors put in place by Torbay residents”.</i></p> <p><i>“No need to waste funds on voting for a mayor, then being stuck with him/her for a set time. Much better to discuss in groups/committees and have full council voting, so more councillors can be properly involved.”</i></p> <p><i>“Councillors used to chop and change leader all the time in the past so we never moved forward under strong leadership. I prefer the public deciding who should lead them not a few people secretly doing it behind closed doors.”</i></p> <p><i>“Reduce the number of councillors by 50% allowing those left to do a more productive job.”</i></p> <p><i>“Option 1 only perpetuates the current system and furthermore it takes the power of electing the mayor out of the hands of the public and gives it to councillors.”</i></p>
<p>Power (27)</p>	<p><i>“An "all powerful" Mayor) or like person can be manipulated by an individual resident for personal gain - as has happened against the opposition of other residents, causing resentment. Such a powerful individual may make decisions against Council Policy. How are they held to account?”</i></p> <p><i>“I think under the current system the mayor has too much power and of course is the cost of his/her post public purse, and maybe some things pushed through would seem a bit odd to say the least. The public should be more involved in what is best for Torbay not just a few people who think they know best. Conflict of interest comes to mind.”</i></p> <p><i>“The council needs a leader with powers who can make decisions otherwise we will return to the past where nothing is done as the civil servants clog everything up in eternal surveys and the only thing that goes up is their salaries.....”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that the reason for introducing a Mayoral System has been overlooked. That reason was to move on from the constant inter-party bickering and lack of action from the previous system. Better to have a Mayor with decision making powers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mayor system of one man holding all the power is totally wrong, democracy is dead in the bay while this system is in operation.”</i></p>
<p>Democratic (23)</p>	<p><i>“Committee system more democratic & responsive. More responsive to rapidly changing Torbay demography, with better ethnicity and culture, less sudden shocks & changes of direction makes less conflict, better cross party relations, agreement before hitting press.”</i></p>

	<p><i>“Decisions adopted on behalf of voters should not be capable of being taken up by one person's opinion only, this is not democratic. Important decisions should only be made by appointed committees, this should lead to a better chance of correct decisions being made & by a group of dedicated local people, living in the bay, and who should be aware of the facts first hand.”</i></p> <p><i>“In my opinion, Option 1 is too similar to the current system. Option 2 provides a clearer alternative which, I feel, is also more democratic in its processes.”</i></p> <p><i>“I believe in a greater democratic system than we now have”</i></p>
<p>Unitary (20)</p>	<p><i>“Have a referendum on abolishing Torbay unitary status, go back to Devon County Council. Abolish Torbay unitary in the referendum in May 2016”</i></p> <p><i>“As a unitary authority Torbay is too small to attract the necessary calibre in staff and councillors, it should unite with Devon. It is the worst authority I have ever worked or lived in!”</i></p> <p><i>“Torbay is too small to be a successful Unitary Authority. The Local Government reorganisation of 1976 resulted in Torquay having a disproportionate influence on the social, cultural, economic activities of Torbay. Torbay Councillors do not have the skills or integrity to ensure equal distribution of resources throughout all sections of the Borough. Far better for Torbay to be subsumed into Devon County Council and so avoid some of the inequalities and duplication of functions that hinder the development and prosperity of Torbay area.”</i></p> <p><i>“We should give up unitary status as we are too small an area to govern ourselves and it has been disastrous for the area. Residents were dissatisfied with the way the council was run after becoming unitary so the elected mayoral system was brought in, it has also proved disastrous so we should now reunite with Devon County Council.”</i></p>
<p>Listen to the people of Torbay (17)</p>	<p><i>“I feel very strongly a lot of decisions are made personally at present - without a listening ear to either fellow councillors or their electorate. The other system could be more advantageous. Thank you for this opportunity to voice my opinion.”</i></p> <p><i>“The committee system would only work well if councillors didn't waste time on irrelevant discussion or get caught up in political arguments. Concentrating on genuine debates that lead to well thought out decisions actually being made and truly representing voters interests will be key. Good luck!!”</i></p> <p><i>“The existing system is not beyond redemption but if it should be retained it is important that the person holding the office genuinely works for the whole bay, and works with all of his council to deliver programmes following meaningful consultation with the electorate affected.”</i></p>

<p>This Consultation (17)</p>	<p><i>"I am disappointed how little publicity has been given to this on line consultation - it does suggest the council have a hidden agenda already. Let's hope enough people see it"</i></p> <p><i>"Why can't we choose between mayor, leader and committee systems?"</i></p> <p><i>"You have forced me to vote yes to question one when, in fact, I would like a referendum in which I would vote in favour of keeping the current system. Your questionnaire is clearly flawed"</i></p>
<p>Change (15)</p>	<p><i>"Changing the system will not give us stronger candidates. We have had behind closed door council decisions and didn't like it so moved to a Mayor, We didn't like the politicising and perceived lack of accountability that that brought and now we seek to change it all again"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel that if we revert to option 2 it will be a retrograde step."</i></p> <p><i>"We need to change the system urgently!"</i></p>
<p>Figurehead / leadership (13)</p>	<p><i>"A Mayor is directly elected by the people, I prefer this method because a leader can be a favourite of the councillors. Having a Head is important for discussion making."</i></p> <p><i>"It seems obvious that a leader elected by the councillors themselves would co-operate better"</i></p>
<p>Brixham (12)</p>	<p><i>"I would like to see Brixham under the control of Brixham Council, with Torbay Council having no authority over Brixham."</i></p> <p><i>"Brixham Council should be included in ballot - whether they stay or go."</i></p>
<p>Accountability (10)</p>	<p><i>"I believe an elected mayor provides greater public accountability."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel Torbay Council lacks credibility, transparency and clarity. Decisions by the few effect Torbay and Torbay needs to be brave, develop and grow. Torbay needs decent jobs to attract people of working age. Torbay Council needs to modernise and be fully accountable for its actions."</i></p>

5. Conclusion

Most respondents do not want to keep the current system of a Directly Elected Mayor

Option 2 – Committee System is the preferred option to be included on a referendum ballot paper by the majority of respondents.

For further information please contact the Policy Performance and Review team on 01803 207227 or email consultation@torbay.gov.uk

The information used to collate this report has been collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998.