Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025 - Consultation Report

Contents

Executive Summary

From 10 October to 7 November 2024, a consultation was held on the proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26.

Every year councils must decide whether to change the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age applicants in the area. The scheme for pension age applicants is set by government and is not affected by any of the options set out in this consultation.

The consultation was different this year to previous years, in that there was only one locally specific proposal, with the other questions in the consultation relating to national compensation schemes. This year, we had five proposals, one that will support the self-employed that have a disability or caring responsibility and not receiving Universal Credit, and four that will support households that may receive or have received certain compensation payments from the UK Government.

There was an online survey on the Council's Civica Involve survey system, and the survey was promoted through a range of channels including the local press, the Council's website, newsletters including One Torbay and Staff News, and social media channels Facebook, NextDoor, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Summary of responses received

Most of the responses to the consultation came via the online survey. The survey was completed by 80 people, of which 26 (33.77%) said they were in receipt of Council Tax Reduction and 51 (66.23%) answered that they were not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

Three respondents did not answer this question.

More than half of respondents supported all the measures though there were also a smaller number of respondents who did not support the proposals. On all the surveys, between 55% and 65% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with individual proposals, with between 25% and 29% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with each proposal.

In addition, there was a separate submission to the consultation emailed to the communications@torbay.gov.uk inbox from the Royal British Legion.

Summary of responses from survey:

The first question related to whether the respondent was in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or not.

The summary below shows the responses to the questions about the five proposals. Other questions in the survey related to demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and are covered later in this report.

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. Do you agree with Proposal One - removing the self-employed minimum income floor calculation for	18 (23.08%)	25 (32.05%)	12 (15.38%)	13 (16.67%)	10 (12.82%)

households that are not receiving Universal Credit and have a disability or caring responsibility?					
3. Do you agree with Proposal Two - disregarding compensation payments from the Post Office when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households.	29 (37.66%)	21 (27.27%)	8 (10.39%)	10 (12.99%)	9 (11.69%)
4. Do you agree with Proposal Three - disregarding civil litigation payments in relation to Grenfell when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households	28 (36.36%)	21 (27.27%)	7 (9.09%)	12 (15.58%)	9 (11.69%)
5. Do you agree with Proposal Four - disregarding compensation payments from the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households.	29 (37.18%)	22 (28.21%)	7 (8.97%)	11 (14.10%)	9 (11.54%)
6. Do you agree with Proposal Five - disregarding compensation payments for Victims of Terrorist Attacks Abroad when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households	25 (32.47%)	25 (32.47%)	6 (7.79%)	10 (12.99%)	11 (14.29%)

Summary of free text responses

In addition to the quantitative responses through the survey, there was a freetext option in the survey where people could add additional comments. Out of the 80 surveys completed, there were 16 freetext responses.

It is difficult to establish overarching themes from these comments, partly because there were only 16 freetext comments, but also because most of the comments were on very individual issues – so only one comment per issue.

Examples of individual comments include:

- Council tax has to be reduced for working population as it is the biggest expense that we can not reduce.
- There should be no council tax reduction for anyone that is of working age whether on benefits or not.

- Seems fair to help those having a difficult time.

The only ‘theme’ that emerged, with a total of five comments in relation to it, was that people found parts of the consultation or some of the proposals confusing. We will take these comments on board and look at how we can improve this on future consultations and wider communications.

Summary of partners/stakeholders responses

Most of the responses came via the online survey, though the Council did receive one written response via email, from the Royal British Legion.

Response from Royal British Legion:

You can access the full detailed response from Royal British Legion in appendix 1.

However the key point they wish to emphasise was:

“RBL recommend that for the avoidance of doubt, the council tax support scheme policy should explicitly disregard all military compensation in full, and operate in line with Universal Credit guidance which considers SIPs and SAPs as compensation, not income.”

Introduction

Every year the Council must decide whether to change the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age applicants in the area. The scheme for pension age applicants is set by government and is not affected by any of the options set out in this consultation.

Council Tax Reduction is a discount for Council Tax. Currently the maximum discount is 75% for working age households and up to 100% for pension age households.

This consultation related to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which would start in April 2025. The only proposed changes would be the ones covered in the consultation. The proposals in this consultation covered the following aspects:

1. More targeted support for the self-employed, that are not receiving Universal Credit and have a disability (in the work group or support group of Employment and Support Allowance) or caring responsibility (caring for a person with severe disabilities). The proposal is to base the Council Tax Reduction on the actual income received.
2. Disregarding, or not counting, any compensation payments made by the Post Office in connection with the failings of the Horizon system, when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households. This change has already been made by Central Government for the pension age Council Tax Support scheme and we wish to align this for working age customers as well.
3. Disregarding, or not counting, any additional settlement payments resulting from the ongoing Grenfell Tower related civil litigation, when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households. This change has already been made by Central Government for the pension age Council Tax Support scheme and we wish to align this for working age customers as well.
4. Disregarding, or not counting, any payments for the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme, when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households. This change has already been made by Central Government for the pension age Council Tax Support scheme and we wish to align this for working age customers as well.

5. Disregarding, or not counting, payments for Victims of Terrorist Attacks Abroad, when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households. This change has already been made by Central Government for the pension age Council Tax Support scheme and we wish to align this for working age customers as well.

How the consultation was carried out (methodology)

The consultation was launched on 10 October and ran until 7 November 2024, with an online survey on the Council's Civica Involve platform. The link to the survey was distributed in a number of different ways including:

- press release sent to all local media and added to the News section of our website,
- survey featured in newsletters including One Torbay and Staff News
- the consultation was added to our Consultations webpage
- information was sent to elected Members
- survey emailed to local stakeholders including all community partnerships.
- Throughout the consultation it was also shared three times on Torbay Council's social media channels Facebook, LinkedIn, NextDoor and Instagram.

Through Facebook posts this generated 77 link clicks to the consultation; 3849 reach, 4080 impressions.

Through our Govdelivery newsletters, the consultation was sent to 11,783 One Torbay subscribers on 10 October and 1,288 Staff News subscribers on 11 October. In total there were 160 unique click throughs to the survey from newsletters – these all came from One Torbay.

Consultation responses

There were 80 responses to the online survey and one written submission emailed to the Council from the Royal British Legion (see Appendix 1).

Responses to individual survey questions

On the next page is a table showing responses to each survey question.

No	Question	Strongly agree	%	Agree	%	Don't Know	%	Disagree	%	Strongly disagree	%
1	Do you agree with Proposal One - removing the self-employed minimum income floor calculation for households that are not receiving Universal Credit and have a disability or caring responsibility?	18	23.08%	25	32.05%	12	15.38 %	13	16.67%	10	12.82%
2	Do you agree with Proposal Two - disregarding compensation payments from the Post Office when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households?	29	37.66%	21	27.27%	8	10.39 %	10	12.99%	9	11.69%
3	Do you agree with Proposal Three – disregarding civil litigation payments in relation to Grenfell when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households?	28	36.36%	21	27.27%	7	9.09%	12	15.58%	9	11.69%

No.	Question	Strongly agree	%	Agree	%	Don't Know	%	Disagree	%	Strongly disagree	%
4	Do you agree with Proposal Four – disregarding compensation payments from the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households?	29	37.18%	22	28.21%	7	8.97%	11	14.10%	9	11.54%
5	Do you agree with Proposal Five – disregarding compensation payments for Victims of Terrorist Attacks Abroad when calculating Council Tax Reduction for working age households?	25	32.47%	25	32.47%	6	7.79%	10	12.99%	11	14.29%

Response to free text questions and boxes

In addition to the qualitative survey responses, we included a freetext box for people to add any additional comments to the survey. We received 16 freetext comments. These included:

There should be no council tax reduction for anyone that is of working age whether on benefits or not.

Too many people expect that their council tax should be reduced for whatever reason. Services have to be paid by someone including them.

It should be easier to apply for. The current rejection of forms makes it very difficult

I didn't understand option 1.

No mention of carers discount or limited capacity members I hope those are continuing.

I think you are in a dilemma . Wishing to honour just causes against a background of ever increasing costs , not least those of Community Care .

I actually do not understand the consultation document

Council tax has to be reduced for working population as it is the biggest expense that we can not reduce.

Seems fair to help those having a difficult time

I do not want to pay the full amount of Council Tax on my Flat. I live alone. I cannot afford this after on my Basic Pension and I have Lost the Winter Fuel allowance.

The details given to provide advice are vague and not helpful. Why is the form split in two? Not everyone has been moved to universal credit who has a disability. Your proposal is unfair.

Once again, Torbay creates a poor document that will have major impact on the disabled and poorest in society. The form doesn't allow you to go back and constantly jams.

Council Tax reduction for seasonal workers, so they pay in the summer months and not the winter months.

I have never seen such a bunch of useless questions that are over qualified to the point of making no sense!!!

I disagree with all the options put forward as they do not include an impact assessment on how existing tax payers and reduction recipients will be impacted. There is no data to indicate how much spending these options require nor how many would benefit from the proposals.

As someone living alone, the single person discount is the only discount or benefit I receive of any kind, against the numerous taxes I pay. There are many people who are similar to me but would struggle to afford any increase in their council tax at a time like this. I believe the council should prioritise making more affordable housing rather than tinkering with minor tax reduction changes. There are much bigger issues affecting the groups who may benefit from these proposals such as the ridiculous rental prices and lack of housing in the bay.

All self employed on low earnings should get a discount.

Individual responses

We also received an individual submission in response to the consultation from the Royal British Legion (see Appendix 1 for their full response).

Demographics of who took part

Below in tables is the breakdown in demographics of those who completed the survey.

Which of the following options best describes how you think of your gender identity? Tick one only

Female	Male	In another way	Prefer not to say
44 (57.14%)	25 (32.47%)	1 (1.30%)	7 (9.09%)

Which of the following age groups applies to you? Tick one only

0-15	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 plus
0	0	3 (4%)	9 (12%)	14 (18.67%)	24 (32%)	18 (24%)	7 (9.33%)

Which of the following best describes your ethnic background? Tick one only

White	Mixed ethnicity	Asian or Asian British	Black or British	Chinese	Other ethnic group
73 (96.05%)	2 (2.63%)	1 (1.32%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Employment Status - Tick one only

Working full-time in Torbay	Working full-time elsewhere in Devon	Working part-time elsewhere in Devon	Self-employed – full - or part-time	Student	Looking after Family/Home
14 (17.95%)	6 (7.69%)	1 (1.28%)	6 (7.69%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.28%)
Temporary Sick	Long-Term Sick	Retired	Unemployed	Other	
0 (0%)	7 (8.9%)	30 (38.46%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.85%)	

Do you consider yourself to be disabled in any way? Tick one only

Yes	No
22 (28.5%)	55 (71.43%)

If you answered "Yes", please tell us how it affects you. Tick as many as apply

It affects my mobility	It affects my vision	It affects my hearing	It affects me in another way
11 (37.93%)	2 (6.90%)	3 (10.34%)	13 (44.83%)

Appendix 1

Appendix 1 is the full response to the consultation from the Royal British Legion – see separate attachment for their full response.

Lesson's Learnt – This will not be included in the final report sent/submitted. This is for ongoing learning for the whole team.

Use this section to share what lessons have been learnt while setting up and running the consultation. This could include:

- What worked – e.g. to reach a certain demographic paper copies and engagement event worked.

In this case we only shared the survey digitally so there was a lower response rate than in previous years. It was more of a general survey this time around due to the nature of the proposals being consulted on (with 4 out of 5 of them just being related to national compensation schemes rather than anything locally specific). This may explain the lower return rate – though the previous year there were some specific proposals that impacted those on Council Tax reduction so there was more at stake for people to respond to.

- Any barrier's– e.g. XXX visited the consultation webpage but only XX took part, why could this be?

We know that 160 people visited the consultation webpage from our Govdelivery newsletters and 77 from our Facebook posts, but that only 80 completed the consultation so this shows there was some drop off rates.

We know from comments in the consultation (five) that some of the respondents found it confusing or difficult to complete (This is partly due to the fact the current survey platform the Council uses, Civica Involve, only allows for short survey questions, and in this case there needed to be some additional explanatory information – this was on the consultation page but some of the questions would need to have been cross-referenced with the consultation project page. At present this is the system we have for surveys, but this is being reviewed).

- Even better if – With this survey we only did an online survey but we know from previous consultations that we can get a larger response rate if we also do paper surveys.
- Themes that came out – there was not really an overarching theme with 16 individual comments, but we did get five comments from people who found the proposals/survey confusing (see above) so we will take this on board for future consultations.