

Budget 2021/22 – Consultation Results

10 December 2020

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Introduction

The Cabinet published draft proposals for the Council's revenue and capital budget for 2021/22 in October 2020 and an online survey was created to gather public views.

The survey opened on 21 October 2020 and closed at midnight on 4 December 2020.

As at the time of closing, members of the community had sent in 138 responses.

During the course of the consultation period, we also ran Twitter polls and those results are included within this report.

Summary

Proposal	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Churston Library	101	73.2%	10	7.2%
Paignton Library and Information Centre	105	76.1%	7	5.1%
Paperless Billing	110	79.7%	9	6.5%
Allotments	102	73.9%	14	10.1%
Parking Services	95	68.8%	25	18.1%
Torre Abbey Café	107	77.5%	11	8.0%
Council Tax increase	77	55.8%	57	41.3%

Responses to the Proposals

Churston Library

To increase the community use and/or management of the space at Churston Library with a view to increasing the income received and/or reducing the building maintenance costs. There are no plans to change the provision of library services.

This proposal is expected to generate an income and/or savings of £14,000 in 2021/2022.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	101	73.2%
I disagree with this proposal	10	7.2%
I am a user of Churston Library	16	11.6%
I am not a user of Churston Library	67	48.6%

The comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped into themes and a sample of the responses shown:

General Theme	Sample Extracts
That it is a good idea (5)	<p>“It is a logical and reasonable proposal, which increases revenue.”</p> <p>“In principle this is good, providing that we don’t go into a full lock down again when incomes will be nil.”</p> <p>“In theory this is fine, I wonder with Covid if this would actually be a money saving scheme or would cost due to risk assessments and cleaning required to keep it Covid secure.”</p>
Proposal is too vague and needs more details on costs and impacts (5)	<p>“The impact of the changes need to be reviewed alongside the cost saving.”</p> <p>“This is a vague proposal. What is envisaged? What evidence is there of a demand for such use? Churston library has very limited space.”</p> <p>“This needs to have more detail proposals on how this will be achieved. Will this money be from the community or Libraries Unlimited?”</p>

<p>Proposal agreed with and suggestions made as to groups that might like expanded community space (3)</p>	<p>“Have GPs and physiotherapists been consulted as both would like expanded use of community spaces? Also an opportunity for spaces for community groups related to wellbeing.”</p>
	<p>“I enjoy using Churston library However it’s lacking a quiet area where people can concentrate on reading or using a PC without being disturbed by ... noisy groups. If these groups are given a room to themselves they should be charged for using it.”</p>
	<p>“The possibility of a hot desking office facility for local community groups that benefit wellbeing - at minimal cost.”</p>

Paignton Library and Information Centre

To increase the community use and/or management of the space at Paignton Library and Information Centre with a view to increasing the income received and/or reducing the building maintenance costs. There are no plans to change the provision of library services.

This proposal is expected to generate an income and/or savings of £20,000 in 2021/2022.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	105	76.1%
I disagree with this proposal	7	5.1%
I am a user of Paignton Library and Information Centre	30	21.7%
I am not a user of Paignton Library and Information Centre	53	38.4%

The comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped into themes and a sample of the responses shown:

General Theme	Sample Extracts
That it is a good idea (4)	“Logical and reasonable. It also means library services can be maintained.”
	“In principle I have no problem with this.”
	“Believe the building to be a much underused resource with a potential for community wellbeing.”
Proposal is too vague and needs more details on costs and impact assessments (2)	“Will this work happen through Libraries Unlimited or Torbay Council?”
	“This is a vague proposal. There already is a wider use of this building, which was the intention when it was built.”
Agreed with provided current level of free and other services are not reduced (3)	“As long as current free services aren’t affected.”
	“The building was intended to be a community space (not a Council space) and this has not been used fully. Please do not take away the library space in any way.”
	“Would again be against any reduction in operating hours because of the increased interest in reading by the public.”
Regarding current state of premises (1)	“The hiring of the offices/rooms on the first floor could be better utilised if the lift was reliable. The two meetings I've been to have both excluded sectors of the community due to the lift not working, resulting in lower attendance and manual handling issues.”

Paperless Billing

To introduce an optional paperless billing service for Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates). It has been assumed that up to 20% of customers would opt-into this service.

This proposal is expected to save the Council £25,000 in 2021/2022 as well as have a positive impact on our carbon footprint.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	110	79.7%
I disagree with this proposal	9	6.5%
I would opt-in for paperless billing	58	42.0%
I would not opt-in for paperless billing	27	19.6%

The comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped into themes and a sample of the responses shown:

General Theme	Sample Extracts
Council tax bills to prove identity (9)	“Council tax bills are often required to establish identity re money laundering requirements.”
	“Ensure you state clearly it is voluntary so vulnerable are not scared by change.”
	“Being in the older generation category I would want a paper bill every year.”
	“If someone opts in to paperless billing they must be provided with an option to request a free paper-based version as this may sometimes be necessary as a proof of address, otherwise that would discourage switching to paperless.”
	“Many firms/banks etc. demand a council bill for ID purposes.”
Other companies offer discounts for paperless billing (3)	“Paperless billing discriminates against the elderly and disadvantaged who do not have internet access.”
	“Please consider offering a one off small discount to encourage take up.”
	“To encourage more opt-in, how about a one off discount of say £20.00 off the council tax.”

“What discount do we get for opting to go paperless.”

Expressions of general agreement (6)

Allotments

To work with our allotment holders to maximise the benefits of rain water harvesting and if water is still required, as with our other facilities, we will be asking for our allotment holders to cover these costs.

This proposal is expected to generate a saving of £6,000 in 2021/2022.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	102	73.9%
I disagree with this proposal	14	10.1%
I am an allotment holder	4	2.9%
I am not an allotment holder	80	58.0%

The comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped into themes and a sample of the responses shown:

General Theme	Sample Extracts
Allotment holders should be charged more (9)	“Allotment holders should be charged more much than the current fees.”
	“An allotment is a privilege to have, not everyone can. So yes, but only if it really will make a difference.”
	“If allotment owners use the water they should pay for what they use if they have run out of rain water harvesting.”
	“It seems sensible that allotment holders pay the cost for any facilities that are a cost to the council.”
Difficult to work out who should pay and at what level. Some already save water some use far more than others (5)	“The system for charging may be difficult if the cost is applied to all and some are using far more water than others.”

“Not really fair, as the cost would have to equalled to all allotment holders, regardless of individual use.”

“Normal in other parts of the country that allotment holders either need to harvest rainwater or split the water bill for the site between themselves.”

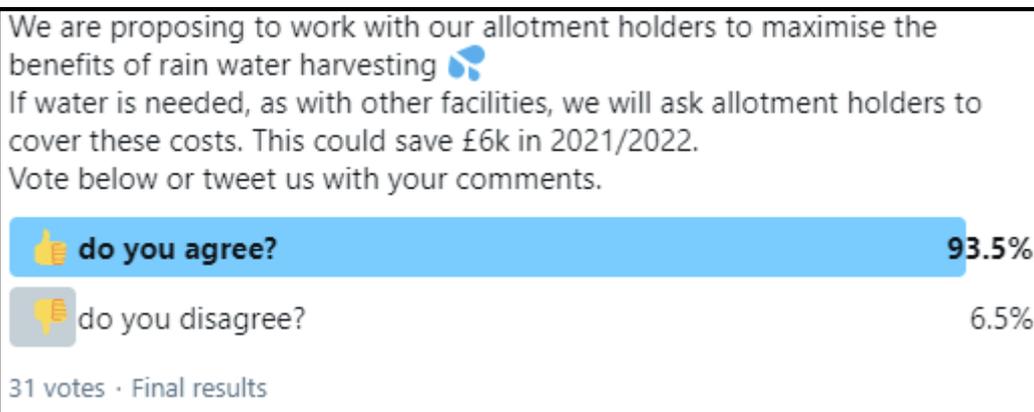
“Charging ... for supplied metered water would be a difficult and possibly divisive policy problematic to enforce. It would probably cost more to manage than could be saved.”

Charging may adversely affect low income groups / mental well-being (5)

“I have an allotment and harvest water but need to have water supplied. If water not supplied then will have to give up allotment.”

“What if people are on low incomes and can't afford the cost. Will this reduce the number of plots used?”

“With the current climate and Covid 19 what impact would this have on the mental health of allotment owners. They might not be able to cover the costs but enjoy the allotment and the positive boots it has to their individual well-being.”



Parking Services

It is proposed to standardise and simplify the processes within Parking Services, as well as have incentive schemes to increase footfall within our town centres and increase the amount of cashless payments across our car parks.

This proposal is expected to generate a saving of £100,000 in 2021/2022.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	95	68.8%
I disagree with this proposal	25	18.1%

The comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped into themes and a sample of the responses shown:

General Theme	Sample Extracts
Still need the option to pay cash (9)	“Many people do not have a smart phone, how can you make it possible for them to park if they cannot pay.”
	“I dislike using cashless parking.”
	“Fearful of going completely cashless, as lots of our elderly do not have the technology to go paperless.”
	“Do not get rid of cash. Simplify your processes is common sense.”
More details needed (8)	“Not enough clarity in the question to answer.”
	“I need more details on this - what is meant by standardising and simplifying processes. What incentive schemes?”
	“Easy to say but HOW will it generate savings of £100,000? Come on facts please.”
	“As drafted, the proposal is pretty meaningless. You need spell this out better.”
Parking fees already too high / discounts for residents (13)	“Decrease the fees, will encourage more people to use the town.”
	“Free parking for locals with a residents card.”
	“Car parking prices should be lower.”



Torre Abbey Café

For the council to operate the café as part of its management of Torre Abbey. During Autumn 2020 this will be trialled as a takeaway service.

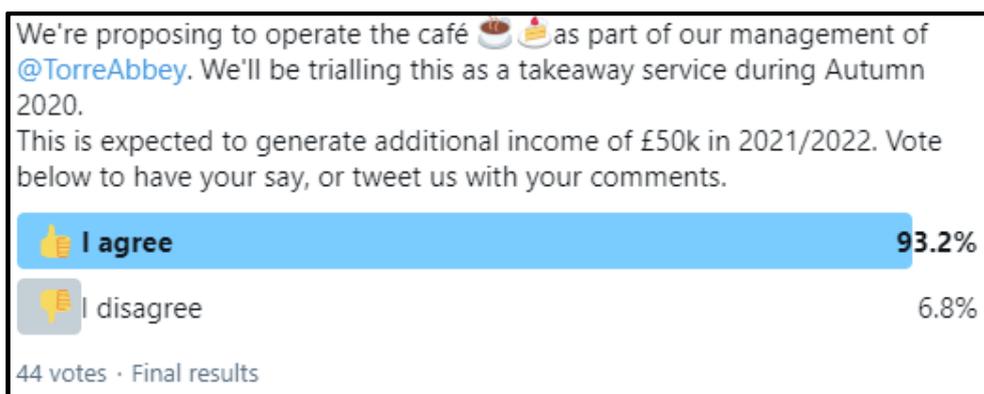
This proposal is expected to generate additional income of £50,000 in 2021/2022.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	107	77.5%
I disagree with this proposal	11	8.0%
I would use the café at Torre Abbey	65	47.1%
I would not use the café at Torre Abbey	25	18.1%

The comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped into themes and a sample of the responses shown:

General Theme	Sample Extracts
Queries on income and savings expected (6)	<p>“£50K for a cafe? That's a PROFIT of £1000 a week after wages and all the other outgoings or haven't these been factored in? Who does your accounts, this is La La land.”</p> <p>“How much did this cost to acquire?”</p> <p>“Is the person who has the lease for the cafe now ok with this? Do you not charge them for the lease and earn as much as if you took it over yourselves?”</p> <p>“Really like this, the council should always look to do this kind of thing if the opportunity is there.”</p>

<p>The café needs better facilities like more seating and wider range of foods (8)</p>	<p>“I would use the cafe if the prices, standards of food and service are all in line with other operators.”</p>
	<p>“Promote local produce, homemade cakes, snacks etc., sell local jams, chutneys, chocolates, cakes etc. to take away too?”</p>
	<p>“Why only as a takeaway? Surely older visitors would appreciate sit in service?”</p>
<p>The café needs to be developed in coordination with the Abbey (5)</p>	<p>“Coordination between the Abbey and the Cafe is much needed.”</p>
	<p>“The potential of the Abbey as a wedding and event venue is great; and the Cafe needs to develop its unique, and possibly themed, character as a destination in itself.”</p>
	<p>“A mystery why it isn't currently run by the site as it is such a popular site which would easily generate income.”</p>
	<p>“Feel it is currently expensive and aimed at the older population.”</p>



Council Tax

To increase the Torbay Council element of Council Tax by 1.99% which equates to £0.60 per week (£31.10 per year) for an average band D property.

	Number	%
I agree with this proposal	77	55.8%
I disagree with this proposal	57	41.3%

A sample of the comments received in respect of this proposal have been grouped are shown below:

Sample Extracts

"... (my) pension increase ... will be wiped out more than two times by this Council Tax increase. It is increasingly difficult to live on a pension without Council Tax increases."

"Council tax is already far too high, bearing in mind what we actually get for it."

"I am unhappy about paying more for less."

"When families and businesses are struggling because of Covid, this is a time to make savings, not introduce council tax rises."

"You can't keep putting council tax up. We are one of the highest in the country with the lowest wages in the country."

"I think this is out of date, and a larger increase will be allowed. However, if your budget assumes 1.99%, then you should stick to 1.99%."

"If Council tax goes up then there should be no changes to our waste and recycling collection."

"You should increase it each year by the max you can so you're not always trying to cut everything. After years of the Mayor refusing to put it up, we're years behind already - get your income back to where it should be."

"We have to pay for our services. I would say charge more."

"You, with the help of our MPs, must fight for a proper settlement for council tax."

Ideas for Savings or Income Generation

Respondents were asked to tell us their ideas for savings or income generation and any views you have on the other proposals within our Draft Budget for 2021/2022 which are not highlighted in this questionnaire.

There were a range of suggestions put forward as well requests for either further information or suggestions which are outside of the Council's control. In the case of these latter points, they will be used to form part of our Consultation and Engagement Plan for the coming year so that residents can be informed of how the Council operates and what the Council can and cannot control.

Ideas for savings or income generation

"Stop providing taxis for getting kids to school."

"Bring in a recycling box at various parts of the bay to encourage re cycle e.g. at Sainsbury's."

"Put a voluntary donation section on your web sites people could donate money to specific causes e.g. Extra wildflower seeds, bird box, children parks etc."

"Bring in a locals discount ticket we could buy and use for going in the Abbey museum as a yearly ticket."

"Fine all the vans, cars that park overnight on grass verges (example Perinville Road) completely ruining verges and grass."

"Incredible waste of money providing care for several or many hours a day or overnights (when client might need only 30 mins or 1 hour a day), often increasing dependency..... Such a Nanny State, need to make people more independent and responsible for themselves."

"Fine dog owners who allow their dogs to foul pavements. Offer inducements, 15% of the fine, to anyone who captures on video a dog owner who does not clean up after their dog."

"Fine anyone who commits an unsocial act e.g. dropping litter, as above offer inducements."

"The top 8 executive directors of Torbay Council collectively earn approx. £90,000 (information taken from Torbay Council Website) If they were to take a 5% pay cut savings of £43,500 approx. could be made. The same for non-executive directors also needs to be considered. There is a massive pay in equality between admin/service/back office staff and top executive with the council."

"Has the council considered moving their services to Edginswell to save costs?"

"Reducing councillor expenses / allowances to a minimum and encourage use of own transport / use of bikes not mayoral cars etc."

“Introduce overnight parking charges in Torbay coastal parking areas / that encourage campervan owners to use the many holiday camp sites available.”

“Stop asking every year if we would want and pay for Garden refuse collection and actually introduce it!”

“The future of Torbay is looking good with the new hotel developments and refurbishments, together with other major schemes under consideration and improvements in the town. What needs to be done is to promote Torbay to draw in the holiday traffic.”

“There seems to be little investment in staff welfare or acknowledgement of commitment and personnel are rarely thanked for going above and beyond. It's time to invest in staff welfare, recognition and thank those that deserve it.”

“Torbay Council should be coming up with green initiatives in line with the Climate emergency that they have declared. How about using our cliffs to generate hydroelectricity. Volunteer as a test site for hydrogen powered central heating to replace gas as in Nottingham. Use the Bay to farm kelp. Let's promote Torbay as an eco-tourist destination.”

“You need to stop spending all of your budget on agency staff and concentrate on permanent staff.”

“Why not create a 'locals' pass to encourage everyone with a Torbay postcode to visit all of the touristy spots at a reduced price when it is not in season.”

“Stop giving ridiculous council tax discounts to Private Residential Care Homes.”

Social Media Posts and Evaluation

Background

The budget consultation was promoted widely across all Torbay Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts, with a few select posts on LinkedIn. The consultation and detailed information about the budget was available on our website and there were briefings with stakeholders, staff and the media. Numerous local media organisations reported on the budget proposals, staff and partners were asked to share information on the consultation and a Facebook Live was held where Cabinet Members answered questions from members of the public. A range of social media posts were created including three polls asking people their thoughts on a number of budget proposals including parking services, allotments and paperless billing.

The aim of the campaign was to ensure that residents, stakeholders and groups were aware of the consultation on the proposed budget for 2021/2022 and the wider financial constraints on Torbay Council. It also encouraged them to provide feedback on proposals which may impact on them.

Members of the public completed 138 online and paper surveys during the consultation which compares with 877 in the previous year. There were also 58 written representations received from individuals and organisations in response to the budget proposals. Additional comments were also posted on the council's social media accounts, mainly on Facebook, and these were incorporated into the consultation feedback.

Evaluation

During the consultation 21 Facebook posts (including a Facebook Live) and 14 tweets relating to the budget consultation were posted on the council's accounts and they reached a potential audience of more than 48,500. Engagement was relatively strong across both platforms, with total engagement recorded as over 3,800. The engagement percentage rates (the percentage of people reached who liked, shared, commented or clicked on our posts) for both Twitter and Facebook was high, achieving an average of 5.14% for Facebook and 3.1% on Twitter. (For comparison, the latest figures show the average engagement rate is 0.1% for Facebook and 0.06% for Twitter.)

The posts successfully drove people to the consultation – there were 265 direct link clicks from our Facebook and Twitter posts to the Budget and Budget Consultation web pages.

The Ask Us about the budget, Facebook Live on 10 December 2020 reached a potential audience of 6,028 as recorded on 11 December. At its peak it had 80 live viewers and there were a total recorded 2,046 views of 3 seconds or more.

The Facebook Live event had the highest reach and one of the highest engagement percentage rates. The Facebook post informing people that only 1% of the adults in the bay shared their views on the budget last year was also a popular post leading to the highest number of link clicks at 84. The most successful post on Twitter was the poll on parking, with a reach of more than 1,500, an engagement rate of 9.8%.

Most of the feedback on Torbay Council's social media channels was posted on Facebook. Torbay Council responded to comments to answer any questions posed, to correct misinformation, to signpost people to the consultation, and to refer comments to relevant departments. In addition, members of the council joined in the conversations and were able to put their views direct to residents.

Feedback

Themes of the comments in response to our social media posts are listed below.

- Concern that the consultation is a waste of time because the council doesn't listen to local views or take action.
- Assets and investment portfolio with particular reference to return on investment and earning more from assets
- Strong agreement that the council should introduce paperless billing for council tax and business rates
- Improvements to our high streets, empty shops and attracting businesses.
- Making Torbay attractive for tourists.
- Parking charges and incentives.
- Strong support for operating the Torre Abbey café in-house
- Seafront lights
- Cost of senior members of staff
- Planning and the need for more social housing
- Council tax rises, but residents don't see the benefit
- Charges for public toilets, cleanliness, accessibility and safety.
- Waste and recycling collections and fly tipping
- The homeless and rehabilitation services
- Anti-social behaviour
- Request for more budget polls on social media

Other Feedback

In addition to the responses received to our consultation questionnaire and social media posts, a letter of representation was received from the Torbay Health and Wellbeing Voluntary Sector Network.

The Network highlighted its belief that it has a substantial contribution to make to increase the quality of life for residents in Torbay and to support the Council to deliver good quality, efficient and effective services. The Network is committed to working with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector to enable the sector to deliver the community support and to increasing the amount of preventative work in Torbay.

The Network offered support in delivering both the proposals in relation to the better utilisation of the libraries in Paignton and Churston and Resource and Waste Management Strategy. Further, the Network pledged to work with the Council on its transformation journey and sought to be involved in the redesign process at the earliest opportunity. It also highlighted the need for the Council to provide multi-year funding to the key VCSE partners.

In relation to the proposals impacting on the libraries, Libraries Unlimited were contacted and discussions are underway about how the building costs of both the libraries could be reduced through a variety of means. This partnership approach is continuing.