

# Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 Consultation Report

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## Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Why the consultation was needed.....	2
Number of responses received.....	2
Summary table of responses for Council Tax Support Scheme.....	3
Summary of Free text responses.....	4
Methodology.....	5
Consultation responses.....	6
Respondent demographics.....	6

## Executive Summary

From 3 October to 20 November 2023 a consultation was held on the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25.

The consultation sought to determine whether people agreed with the proposed changes to the scheme, which has been largely the same since 2013.

The consultation was promoted via postal surveys, an online survey, press, social media, through e-newsletters such as One Torbay, emails to stakeholder groups, local events, and paper copies in libraries.

In total there were 420 survey responses to the consultation, with more respondents supporting the proposals than not.

A final decision will be made at Full Council on 7 December about the proposed scheme which, if approved, would be implemented from April 2024.

## Why the consultation was needed

The Council Tax Support Scheme helps people on low incomes to pay their council tax and is funded by the council.

There were a number of significant changes proposed in the scheme for 2024– in particular a new income banded scheme for working age households - so a full public consultation was necessary.

## Number of responses received

In total there were 420 survey responses, with 348 of these coming from the 6,000 postal surveys that were sent out, 70 from the online survey, and two from paper surveys left in libraries. There were 24 Free text comments added to some of the surveys.

## Summary Table of results for Council Tax Support Scheme

Below is a summary of the responses to the ten proposals in the consultation with the numbers for each answer and percentages in brackets.

Q No.	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	Do you agree with introducing a new income banded discount scheme and retaining the elements listed above in the new scheme? 414 responded to this	61 (15%)	221 (53%)	99 (24%)	13 (3%)	20 (5%)
3	Do you agree with removing the restriction to a Property Band D, for households that occupy a property in band E, F, G or H? 415 responded to this	64 (15%)	162 (39%)	125 (30%)	35 (8%)	29 (7%)

4	Do you agree with removing non-dependant deductions from the calculation of the award? 388 responded to this	54 (14%)	160 (41%)	111 (29%)	42 (11%)	21 (5%)
5	Do you agree with Proposal 4 - lowering the number of hours used for calculating the self-employed minimum income floor for lone parents from 35 to 25 hours? 416 responded to this	66 (16%)	173 (42%)	116 (28%)	31 (7%)	30 (7%)
6	Do you agree with Proposal 5 - Keeping the number of hours used for calculating the self-employed minimum income floor for single people, couples and couples with children at 35 hours? 414 responded to this	44 (11%)	190 (46%)	126 (30%)	37 (9%)	17 (4%)
7	Do you agree with Proposal 6 - removing the extended payment provision? 416 responded to this	42 (10%)	166 (40%)	115 (28%)	63 (15%)	30 (7%)
8	Do you agree with Proposal 7 - removing the additional earnings disregard? 415 responded to this	41 (10%)	148 (36%)	130 (31%)	68 (16%)	28 (7%)
9	Do you agree with Proposal 8 - disregarding Carer's Allowance income from the calculation? 411 responded to this	91 (22%)	176 (43%)	96 (23%)	29 (7%)	19 (5%)
10	Do you agree with Proposal 9 - disregarding the support related and work-related component income from the calculation? 414 responded to this	46 (11%)	174 (42%)	149 (36%)	22 (5%)	23 (6%)

11	Do you agree with Proposal 10 - providing a further £50 per week income disregard where the applicant, partner, or dependant is receiving a disability benefit? 414 responded to this	102 (25%)	168 (41%)	91 (22%)	29 (7%)	24 (6%)
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## Summary of Free text responses

Question 12 was a free text box for respondents to the survey to leave any other feedback or comments. The majority of respondents did not put anything on this section, with just 24 out of the 420 respondents adding comments.

Of the 348 completed postal surveys, 18 respondents added comments into the free text box, and of the 70 completed surveys on the online survey, six people added comments into the free text box.

There were a number of different comments, the most common one with six related comments were that people doing the survey found some of the language in the survey and draft Council Tax Support Scheme confusing – we appreciate that this was a complex scheme and on reflection some of the wording in the survey could have been simplified further. However, it was necessary to explain the ten proposals to enable people to respond to the questions on each one, so questions and background were considerably more complex than the majority of our surveys.

The second most common theme in the Freetext box was some comments around people who work having to pay to help people on benefits – there were five comments related to this issue. Examples include:

“This is another scheme supporting people with benefits - what about people that work?”

“As a single parent working part time this system has always been complicated but also penalises those of us trying to make ends meet without living off the state.”

“From what I can gather those on benefits are the ones set to gain more whereas they should be made to work.”

## Methodology

The consultation was launched on Tuesday 3 October with an online survey on the Council's Your Say Torbay website and this was promoted initially via a range of channels including a Members Briefing e-newsletter for all Councillors, press release to all local media and our wider PR distribution list which includes Community Partnerships, key partners such as the NHS and police and many more.

An email was also sent to a comprehensive list of key contacts in areas such as housing, voluntary and charitable sector, local businesses, and public sector with a request for them to share the survey on their channels.

Postal surveys were sent to 6,000 households, with 3,000 distributed to a random sample of people receiving Council Tax Support and a further 3,000 sent to a random sample of residents who are not currently receiving Council Tax Support.

Three information/outreach events were held to promote the Council Tax Support Survey and consultation at local libraries. Members of the Council Tax team held 'drop in' sessions at Torquay and Brixham Libraries to enable people to speak to them face to face. They also attended the Carers Rights Day event at Paignton Library and Community Hub. Paper copies of the surveys and postboxes were also left in Torquay, Brixham and Paignton Libraries for those who wanted to complete paper surveys. Paper copies were also available in the waiting area of Torquay Town Hall reception.

There was extensive publicity throughout the consultation with three press releases, 13 Facebook posts, six articles in One Torbay, our weekly residents e-newsletter, two articles in Staff News, nine posts on our NextDoor channel, ten posts on Twitter and on LinkedIn.

There were a total of 1235 unique visits to the Your Say Torbay webpage for the Council Tax Support Consultation.

Of these overall online visits, the most effective means of communication were the e-newsletters (One Torbay and Staff News) which between them generated 360 unique visits to the survey page. One Torbay has 11,229 subscribers on the most recent edition to feature Council Tax Support Scheme consultation, and across all the e-newsletters which featured the consultation there were 33,480 unique opens. The website generated 105 visits to the survey page and Facebook generated 46 visits. The total reach on Facebook across the 13 posts was 5429 and the posts were shared 13 times, with other Facebook pages sharing the consultation including Brixham Town Council and Torbay Community Development Trust.

Out of those who visited the online survey page, 289 viewed the Council Tax Support Scheme document and 98 downloaded it.

## Consultation responses

In total, taking into account online and paper surveys, there were 420 responses to the consultation.

Of these 420 surveys, 348 completed paper surveys came from the 6,000 that were sent out to households (so just over 5% of the sample), 70 came from the online survey, and, despite the fact three events were held at the libraries and paper copies were left there as well, only two completed paper surveys were returned as a result of that.

## Respondent demographics

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
221	161	0	6

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	3	11	31	72	145	82	62

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
391	5	2	0	0	3

Employment Status - Tick one only

The breakdown of the 420 shows that the largest group of respondents to the survey (130) were retired – many of these would be from the random sample. Then the next largest group, 103, was temporary sick, then roughly a quarter (100) of respondents were in some sort of work, whether full time, part time or self-employed

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
27	10	33	8	22	1
Temporary Sick	Long-Term Sick	Retired	Unemployed	Other	
1	103	130	25	25	

Question 17: Do you consider yourself to be disabled in any way? Tick one only

Yes	No
188	212

Question 18: 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
137	32	40	116