

Budget 2024/2025 - Consultation Report

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Executive Summary

The Cabinet published draft proposals for the Council’s revenue and capital budget for 2024/25 in January 2024 and an online survey was created to gather public views. The consultation opened on 10 January 2024 and closed at midnight on 7 February 2024.

There were 198 responses to the consultation survey – 186 completed online, 12 completed at the Residents Engagement Event and one on paper. All percentages shown within this report use the number of people that completed the survey as the denominator. All comments within this report are shown as written by the respondent. No written representations were received.

During the course of the consultation, residents and stakeholders were encouraged to take part with posts on our Facebook, X/Twitter, LinkedIn and Nextdoor pages as well as articles in One Torbay and Staff News. A Residents Engagement Event was held on Saturday 27 January 2024 to share information about the proposals for the council’s 2024/25 budget and answer questions.

A summary of responses to the survey are shown in the table below.

Question	Yes Actual	Yes %	No Actual	No %
Do you agree with the principle for providing early help, support and	146	76.44%	28	14.66%

prevention through Family Hubs to children and their families?				
Do you agree with the proposal to review transport arrangements for children and young people?	152	79.58%	29	15.18%
Do you agree with the proposal to invest £300,000 per year to bring the three town up to a standard we can all be proud of?	183	95.30%	5	2.60%
Do you agree with the proposal to invest £300,000 per year to tackle anti-social behaviour in all our town centres, to help make them safer and more welcoming?	163	85.79%	18	9.47%
Do you agree with the proposals to increase Fixed Penalty Notice Charges for dog fouling, littering, graffiti and fly posting	165	85.90%	19	9.90%
Do you agree with the proposals to invest £250,000 a year for the next four years to ensure we can deliver events?	135	70.68%	45	23.56%
Do you agree with the proposal to invest £1mill to put in place preventative measures to avoid further deterioration of Oldway?	129	67.19%	50	26.04%
Do you agree with the proposal to change venues and purchase our own equipment to run live-streaming of the Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee, deliver these at a lower cost?	127	66.50%	46	24.08%
Do you agree with the proposal to increase council tax to 4.75%	100	50.51%	82	41.41%

Alongside the consultation on the proposed budget, the Council also undertook consultation to vary the licence fees in relation to hackney carriages and private hire vehicles. The details of this consultation are included at Appendix 1.

Introduction

The Cabinet published their draft proposals for the Council's revenue and capital budget for 2024/25 in January 2024. An online survey was created to gather the views of the public as well as a face-to-face engagement event. Paper surveys were available on request.

The consultation opened on 10 January 2024 and closed at midnight on 7 February 2024.

The audience for this consultation was all those that live or run a business in one of the three towns of Torbay – Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

An online consultation was launched, with paper copies available on request.

The consultation was promoted in a number of ways. This included:

- Media briefing
- Members briefing
- The Council's e-Newsletter One Torbay
- Through regular staff news updates (as the majority of our employees are also Torbay residents)
- Press releases
- Social media
- On the Consultation webpage on the Councils website
- Also on Have Your Say Torbay – the Council's Engagement platform

The face-to-face engagement event took place on Saturday 27 January in St. Marychurch precinct. This was the regular Residents Engagement event, and the theme was around the budget proposals.

Two press releases were sent out, one at the beginning and another later on in January, encouraging people to take part and to attend the engagement event in St. Marychurch.

24 social media posts were scheduled in total. This was across Facebook, X (Twitter), LinkedIn and Nextdoor. Across all the social media channels the posts made 16,667 impressions. There 172 clicks on the links to view the budget consultation, compared to last year there were 280 link clicks. 24 comments were left on the posts (68 last year), 22 reactions (123 last year) and 18 shares (26 last year).

Eight articles were shared through either the One Torbay or Staff News e-Newsletters. In total these articles encouraged 1,104 subscribers to click on the links to the consultation 1,790 times. In comparison to the Budget Consultation that took place in 2023, there were 251 unique clicks from the e-newsletter articles.

At the face to face engagement event in St. Marychurch, 128 visitors were logged as attending and speaking to Councillors and Officers. Approximately a further 30 people stopped to read the boards and take flyers. 12 visitors took the opportunity to look at and answer the budget questions on the Boards. These 12 visitors did not necessarily answer all the questions.

Consultation responses

The total number of responses received overall was 198.

Of these, 186 were completed online, in comparison, 67 were completed the same way last year. Also last year, 127 people voted using the social media polls.

One was from a paper survey, and 12 from the resident's engagement event.

The results below show all the responses together but the totals are different due to those taking part at the engagement event not answering all the questions.

Responses to individual survey questions

Question 1

We are proposing to increase the Children's Services budget by £1.9 million as this is necessary to meet existing demand. However, we want to continue to focus on providing early help, support and prevention through Family Hubs so children can receive the right support at the right time to meet need. This will enable more children and young people to live within their families and communities, reducing the need for statutory intervention. Do you agree with the principle for providing early help, support and prevention through Family Hubs to children and their families?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	146	76.44%
No	28	14.66%
Prefer not to answer	17	8.90%
Total	191	100%

Question 2

Do you currently use the Family Hubs across Torbay, including the virtual Family Hub website?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	6	3.14%
No	156	81.68%
Did not know of its existence	29	15.18%
Total	191	100%

Question 3

We want to work further with children and young people and their parents/carers to promote safe independent travel to school. By reviewing our transport arrangements for children and young people on an individual basis we can support children to become more independent when the time is right for them to safely travel around their local area. This will reduce the need for unnecessary transport on minibuses and taxis. Do you agree with this proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	152	79.58%
No	29	15.18%
Prefer not to answer	10	5.24%
Total	191	100%

Question 4

Do you have children or young people in your family who currently use home-to-school transport?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	6	3.16%
No	178	93.68%
Prefer not to answer	6	3.16%
Total	190	100

Question 5

We want to invest £300,000 per year to bring the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham up to a standard we can all be proud of. This will include increases in grass cutting, keeping kerbsides weed free, improving road markings, cleaning of town centres and repairing of potholes in our residential areas as well as in our high-profile tourist areas. Do you agree with this investment proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	183	95.30%
No	5	2.60%
Prefer not to answer	4	2.10%
Total	192	100%

Question 6

We want to invest £300,000 per year to tackle anti-social behaviour in all our town centres, to help make them safer and more welcoming. This will provide additional enforcement officers and support and welfare staff to address the root cause behind the anti-social behaviour. Do you agree with this investment proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	163	85.79%
No	18	9.47%
Prefer not to answer	9	4.74%
Total	190	100%

Question 7

We know that improving public spaces really matters – it is where we live, work and play. We know that litter, fly posting, graffiti and dog poo can blight our streets, parks and beaches. As well as increasing investment through Operation Brighter Bay, we

are proposing an increase in the Fixed Penalty Notice Charges for dog fouling, littering, graffiti and fly posting from £80 to £100 for dog fouling (the maximum set by our Public Spaces Protection Order) and £150 for littering, graffiti and fly posting littering. The aim is to ensure that there is a suitable and significant deterrent. Do you agree with the proposal to increase such charges?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	165	85.90%
No	19	9.90%
Prefer not to answer	8	4.20%
Total	192	100%

Question 8

The English Riviera has a strong history of being a premier coastal resort, with a tourism sector that supports local and regional businesses, creates local jobs and contributes to the sense of pride in place and quality of life for our residents. However, in recent times we have struggled to keep pace with changing market needs. We have developed a Destination Management Plan, which sets out priority actions and delivery tasks that can help the destination succeed, but financial investment is needed to deliver against this. We want to invest £250,000 a year for the next four years to ensure we can deliver events, for our residents as well as encouraging people to visit, stay and spend in the Bay. Do you agree with this investment proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	135	70.68%
No	45	23.56%
Prefer not to answer	11	5.76%
Total	191	100%

Question 9

In December 2023 the Cabinet received a report which provides the basis to address the conservation challenges at Oldway, renewing it as an important asset. The report identified an urgent need for approximately £1 million to be identified to put in place preventative measures to avoid further deterioration of the structure of the building. We have identified funds that can deliver this first stage of repairs and maintenance at Oldway Mansion. Do you agree with this investment proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	129	67.19%
No	50	26.04%
Prefer not to answer	13	6.77%
Total	192	100%

Question 10

Over the past year we have run a trial live-streaming meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee. Through changing the venue of these meetings

and purchasing our own equipment we can continue to live stream meetings at a lower cost. However, the quality of the live streaming is unlikely to be of the same quality as is currently provided through the trial. Do you agree with this proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	127	66.50%
No	46	24.08%
Prefer not to answer	18	9.42%
Total	191	100%

Question 11

Reflecting on the ongoing cost increases in providing adult social care, as well as the ongoing cost of providing the services you value we are proposing an increase in Council Tax. The Government assumes that local authorities with social care responsibilities will raise Council Tax by 4.99%. We are proposing to increase the Torbay Council element of Council Tax by 2.75% plus 2% for adult social care which means the total increase is proposed to be 4.75%. For more information on this please read our Budget Overview. The increase is £1.62 per week (£84.33 per year) for an average Band D property. Do you agree with this proposal?

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	100	50.51%
No	82	41.41%
Prefer not to answer	16	8.08%
Total	198	100%

Response to free text questions and boxes

In this consultation there was only one free text question which asked if there were any more comments those that took part would like to leave.. The majority of the comments did cover a number of different themes. In total there were 112 comments left.

Listed below is a summary of the themes mentioned in these comments:

- Anti-social behaviour – mentioned 17 times
 - Covering things like more enforcement, feeling safe in town centres and parks
- Oldway – mentioned 15 times
 - Invest in (mentioned 10 times)
 - Don't invest in (mentioned five times)
- Council Tax – mentioned 16 times
 - Don't increase (mentioned nine times)
 - Increase (mentioned seven times)

- Topics linked to dogs (mentioned 16 times)
 - Too much dog fouling (mentioned seven times)
 - Need a dog warden/enforcement (mentioned eight times)
 - More dog bins (mentioned once)
- Pavilion – agreeing with doing something with (mentioned four times)
- Parks to be safe / clean / rewilding / plant more green areas (mentioned four times)
- Improve roads i.e. potholes and road markings (mentioned four times)
- Four comments that budget was well rounded / clear strategy
- Reduce litter (mentioned three times)
- Improve towns / jobs and homes (mentioned twice)
- No mention of affordable housing (mentioned twice)
- Cut grass verges (mentioned twice)
- Invest in youth activities (mentioned twice)
- Don't fund the airshow (mentioned twice)

Demographics of who took part

Which town do you live in? Select only one

Torquay	Paignton	Brixham	Responding as a business
99 (54.7%)	68 (37.57%)	13 (7.18%)	1 (0.55%)

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

Female	Male	Prefer not to say
80 (43.96%)	92 (50.55%)	10 (5.49%)

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
1 (0.55%)	2 (1.10%)	8 (4.40%)	11 (6.04%)	34 (18.68%)	58 (31.8%)	52 (28.57%)	16 (8.79%)

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

White	Mixed ethnicity	Asian or Asian British	Black or British	Chinese
170 (97.14%)	2 (1.14%)	1 (0.57%)	2 (1.14%)	0 (0%)

Employment Status - Tick one only

Working full-time in Torbay	Working full-time elsewhere in Devon	Working part-time in Torbay	Working part-time elsewhere in Devon	Self-employed – full - or part-time	Student
40 (22.6%)	11 (6.21%)	16 (9.04%)	2 (1.13%)	16 (9.04%)	0 (0%)
Looking after Family/Home	Temporary Sick	Long-Term Sick	Retired	Unemployed	
3 (1.69%)	0 (0%)	5 (2.82%)	82 (46.33%)	2 (1.13%)	

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

Yes	No
28 (15.38%)	154 (84.62%)

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
13 (72.22%)	2 (11.11%)	3 (16.67%)

Appendix 1 – Consultation on licencing fees (hackney carriages and private hire vehicles)

1. Background Information

- 1.1 Torbay Council regulates the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire industry through the licensing framework set out in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.
- 1.2 Fees for licences should be set at a figure that will recover the cost of the licensing administration including enforcement, in so far as is consistent with the particular provisions which allow licence fees to be charged. The budgets for taxi licensing are separated into the four different licence types, licensed driver, hackney carriage vehicle licence, private hire vehicle licence and private hire operator licences.
- 1.3 The majority of the licence fees were increased by 4%, however the vehicle licence for both private hire and hackney carriage vehicle fees were increased by 24% and 25% respectively to ensure the cost of full costs were covered.
- 1.4 Annex 1 contains the proposed fee increases.

2. Legal Framework

2.1 Drivers Licences

The Council may make a charge for the grant of the licences for drivers of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire vehicles by virtue of Section 53 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. The fees must be considered reasonable with a view to recovering the costs of issue and administration (including compliance) of the licence.

2.2 Vehicle Licences

The Council may make a charge for the issue of a vehicle licence for a Hackney Carriage or a Private Hire vehicle by virtue of sections 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

These fees can include the:

- Reasonable costs of inspection of vehicles
- Reasonable cost of providing ranks for Hackney Carriage vehicles, and;
- Any reasonable or other costs connected with the administration and compliance of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicle licensing.

2.3 Operators Licences

The Council may make a charge for the issue of Private Hire Operators licences by virtue of section 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. The Operators fee should relate to the costs for grant, renewal and of administering the licensing scheme and should be reasonable.

3 Process to vary fees

- 3.1 To be able to vary the fee structure there is a statutory process required under s.70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.
- 3.2 The fees were advertised on 10 January 2024 in the Herald Express, allowing the trade and member of the public to raise objections for 28 days. A copy of the advert can be found in Annex 2.
- 3.3 Three objections were received and these can be found in Annex 3.
- 3.4 The local authority must consider these objections and decide whether in light of the objections, to modify the fees or approve the originally proposed fees. These fees must come into effect no later than two months of the original date.

4 Objections

- 4.1 The objections are concerned about the increase to the vehicle licence renewal fees.
- 4.2 The vehicle licence fees have not increased since 2020 and the vehicle fees were reduced each year from 2020 to 2022. Please see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Taxi Licensing Fees from 2019 - 2024

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Proposed 2024
Both Trades						
Licensed Driver (New) - 3 years	£323	£348	£348	£348	£358	£375
Driver (renewal) – 3 years	£228	£250	£250	£250	£257	£270
Drivers badge replacement	£27.50	£30	£30	£30	£30	£32
Plate	£66	£70	£70	£70	£70	£73
Replacement Bracket	£24	£25	£25	£25	£25	£35
Knowledge Test	£70	£70	£72	£72	£74	£77
Hackney Carriage						
Vehicle licence annual – New	£275	£350	£262	£244	£244	£255
Vehicle Licence - Renewal	£185	£185	£167	£149	£149	£185
Vehicle Transfer	£82	£82	£74	£70	£70	£73

Private Hire						
Vehicle licence – annual	£244	£244	£235	£225	£225	£235
Vehicle Licence – renewal	£154	£154	£140	£130	£130	£165
Operator 1 year	£67	£67	£67	£67	£67	£70
Operator 5 years	N/A	N/A	£95	£95	£110	£114

4.3 The majority of the fees were increased by between 4- 6%, however the private hire vehicle licence renewal fees were increased by 25% and the hackney carriage vehicle licence renewal fee was increased by 24%. This equates to an increase of £36 and £35 respectively. Table 2 below outlines the extra cost to the vehicle proprietor per day, week and month as a result of the proposed increase. It amounts to an increase of 10p per day.

Table 2: Recommended vehicle renewal fees (as published) with the % increases

Vehicle renewal fees	Current fee	Proposed fee	Proposed increase	% increase	Extra cost per day	Extra cost per week	Extra cost per month	Extra cost per year
Hackney Carriage Vehicle licence (1 year)	£130	£165	£35	27%	£0.10	£0.67	£2.92	£35
Private Hire Vehicle Licence (1 year)	£149	£185	£36	24%	£0.10	£0.69	£3.00	£36

4.4 It is appreciated that these increases are an additional cost, however, the income from the fees must cover the expenditure required to run the service. Any expenses incurred as part of running a business may be claimed as an allowable deduction for tax purposes.

4.5 The taxi fees must be set to ensure that all costs are recovered for each licence type as they should not be subsidised from the Council's general funds. The fees have been kept as low as possible and the majority of the taxi fees have been increased by approximately 4%. However, when reviewing the fees, it was found that the renewal fee for the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licences did not cover the costs incurred. The costs of materials for the producing of the taxi and private hire plates and the postage and package have increased since 2020. The staffing and overhead costs have also increased as there have been a number of wage increases over the last few years. There has also been a rise in other support costs such as office accommodation

(including heating and lighting) and other supplies and services connected to the taxi licensing function.

- 4.6 The cost of a vehicle licence renewal is very similar to a new issue and many local authorities charge the same fee for new issues as renewal. The main difference is that a new issue requires a new bracket and holder and there is a small amount of additional administration.
- 4.7 The fees have not increased since 2020 and they were reduced from £185 in 2020 to £167 in 2021 and £149 in 2022. However, the cost of materials, staffing, office costs, printers, postage etc. have increased. The hackney carriage vehicle licence fees also include the cost of the unmet demand survey which is required every three years and cost over £17k this year.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Members need to consider the objections and the reasons for the increases as outlined within the report. The fees need to be increased to ensure full cost recovery and to prevent the account going into deficit.

Annex 1

	Existing Fees	Proposed Fees
Type of Registration/Licence/Fee	2023/24	2024/25
	£	£
Hackney Carriage		
Vehicle Annual – New (includes plate and bracket)	244.00	255.00
Vehicle Annual Renewal	149.00	185.00
Vehicle Annual Renewal [0g/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Horse drawn Annual Renewal	100.00	Withdrawn
Meter test	50.00	Withdrawn
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle	70.00	73.00
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle [0g/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Replacement Plate	70.00	73.00
Replacement bracket and holder	25.00	35.00
Private Hire		
Vehicle Annual New (Includes plate and bracket)	225.00	£235.00
Vehicle Annual New (Includes plate and bracket) [0g/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Vehicle Annual Renewal	130.00	165.00
Vehicle Annual Renewal [0g/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle	70.00	73.00
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle [0g/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Replacement Plate	70.00	73.00
Replacement bracket and holder	25.00	35.00
Private Hire Operators Licence		
Operator (per vehicle) – 1-year licence (only in exceptional circumstances)	67.00	70.00
Operator (per vehicle) 5-year licence	110.00	114.00
Licensed Drivers		
Driver (New)	358.00	375.00
Driver (Renewal)	257.00	270.00

Drivers badge (replacement)	30.00	32.00
Knowledge test	74.00	77.00
Knowledge re-test	37.00	Withdrawn
Other Charges		
Handbook & replacements	27.00	28.00
Assistance/advice appointment	55.00	70.00

Annex 2

TORBAY COUNCIL		TORBAY COUNCIL
PUBLIC NOTICE		
Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Fees 2024-25		
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976		
<p>In accordance with the provisions of Section 70 (3) of the above Act, Torbay Council gives Notice that it proposes to vary its fees in respect of Hackney Carriage, Private Hire and Operator's Licences as set out below, with such variations taking place on 1st April 2024. Any objection to the proposed variation of fees should be made in writing and addressed to the undersigned, to be received not later than 28 days from the date of this Notice.</p> <p>Dated this 10th day of January 2024</p> <p>Rachael Hind Regulatory Services Manager (Commercial) Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay TQ1 3DR Email: licensing@torbay.gov.uk</p>		
Type of Registration/Licence/Fee	EXISTING FEES 2023/24 £	PROPOSED FEES 2024/25 £
Hackney Carriage		
Vehicle Annual - New (Includes plate and bracket)	244.00	255.00
Vehicle Annual Renewal	149.00	185.00
Vehicle Annual Renewal [Dg/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Horse drawn Annual Renewal	100.00	Withdrawn
Meter test	50.00	Withdrawn
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle	70.00	73.00
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle [Dg/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Replacement Plate	70.00	73.00
Replacement bracket and holder	25.00	35.00
Private Hire		
Vehicle Annual New (Includes plate and bracket)	225.00	235.00
Vehicle Annual New (Includes plate and bracket) [Dg/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Vehicle Annual Renewal	130.00	165.00
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Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle	70.00	73.00
Transfer (permanent or temporary)/change of vehicle [Dg/km CO2 emission vehicles (electric)]	0.00	Withdrawn
Replacement Plate	70.00	73.00
Replacement bracket and holder	25.00	35.00
Private Hire Operators Licence		
Operator (per vehicle) - 1-year licence (only in exceptional circumstances)	67.00	70.00
Operator (per vehicle) 5-year licence	110.00	114.00
Licensed Drivers		
Driver (New)	358.00	375.00
Driver (Renewal)	257.00	270.00
Drivers badge (replacement)	30.00	32.00
Knowledge test	74.00	77.00
Knowledge re-test	37.00	Withdrawn
Other Charges		
Handbook & replacements	27.00	28.00
Assistance/advice appointment	55.00	70.00

Annex 3: Taxi Licensing Fees Consultation responses 2024

Response No.	Response received	Response by Email	Further response
1	<p>Having just read the proposed Licensing fees for Hackney carriages in 2024, please could you explain to me why a vehicle license renewal is to be increased by £36. This is approximately a 25% increase, and what justifies this?</p> <p>This comes on the back of rank spaces being lost in Torquay Harbourside, 8 spaces on the Cary rank, and 3 / 4 spaces on the short rank. This loss of 11 or 12 spaces has been replaced by a temporary rank opposite the pavilion for 4 cars, with no hardstanding for the public, just a sand covered area.</p> <p>It feels very much at the moment as though we are getting a bit of a rough deal? I look forward to hearing your comments.</p>	<p>Thank you for your email. I am very sorry for not replying sooner. We have been collating any responses received as we normally respond to any objections as part of the full consultation response after the consultation has ended.</p> <p>The fees for the four licence types, Licensed Driver, Hackney Carriage vehicle, Private Hire Vehicle and Private Hire Operator, are set at a level to recover the total costs of all control, supervision, administration and/or compliance associated with the licence type.</p> <p>The taxi fees must be set to ensure that all costs are recovered for each licence type as they should not be subsidised from the Council's general funds.</p> <p>We have kept the fees as low as possible and the majority of the taxi fees have been increased by approximately 4%. However, when reviewing the fees, it was found that the renewal fee for the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licences no longer covers the costs incurred. The costs of materials for the producing of the taxi and private hire plates and the postage and package have increased since 2020. The staffing and</p>	

overhead costs have also increased as there have been a number of wage increases over the last few years. There has also been a rise in other support costs such as office accommodation (including heating and lighting) and other supplies and services connected to the taxi licensing function.

We have reviewed the fees and the cost of a vehicle licence renewal is very similar to a new issue and many local authorities charge the same fee for new issues as renewal. The main difference is that a new issue requires a new bracket and holder and there is a small amount of additional administration.

The Hackney Carriage Vehicle Renewal fee has not increased since 2020 and it was reduced from £185 in 2020 to £167 in 2021 and £149 in 2022. The private hire vehicle renewal fee has also not increased since 2020 and it was reduced from £154 in 2020 to £140 in 2021 and £130 in 2022. However, the cost of materials, staffing, office costs, printers, postage etc. have increased. The hackney carriage vehicle licence fees also include the cost of the unmet demand survey which is required every three years and cost over £17k this year.

The hackney carriage table of fares were increased by the Council in 2019 and 2022 to ensure the taxi tariffs reflect the costs of the

		<p>trade. These are due to be reviewed again this year.</p> <p>The licence fee is also an expense incurred as part of running a business and may be claimed as an allowable deduction for tax purposes.</p> <p>We appreciate that the rank situation in Torquay is not ideal at the moment and we have raised our concerns with the TDA (Torbay Economic Development Company Limited) and the Parking Department to ensure that the situation is urgently reviewed in the short term and we are exploring longer term solutions for the final scheme. We work closely with our planning and transport teams on new developments to ensure taxi provision and private hire drop areas are considered. We will be emailing the trade as soon as we have any updates with regards to the rank provision.</p> <p>Please can you confirm if, following this explanation, you would like to withdraw your objection or if you would like me to include it within the consultation responses.</p> <p>I look forward to hearing from you.</p> <p>Kind Regards, Rachael</p>	
<p>Replies to No. 1 continued</p>	<p>Thank you for your in-depth reply to my email. I will try to respond to the points that you made in chronological order, and one or two other points that have come to mind.</p>	<p>Thank you for your email.</p> <p>I will include your emails within the consultation, and a response will be</p>	<p>Response from Taxi Licensing to details raised within the response email (this has not been emailed to the person and has only been included within this report)</p>

I fully understand the points that you made with regards to how the fees are set, and they are not subsidised by the council's general funds. Whilst I also appreciate that the cost of materials, postage and packing, staffing, overhead cost and wage increases, and other support cost such as office accommodation, there is one thing that you have not mentioned that has come to my attention. I am told that certain legal procedures carried out by your office, involved the use of barristers. Surely this is a very expensive way of taking legal advice, when maybe a lesser qualified legal person would have sufficed, if indeed was needed at all?

You go on to say that the Hackney carriage vehicle renewal fee has not increased since 2020 and indeed was reduced in 2021 and 2022. This comes as no surprise to me, for two reasons. Firstly, in the post Covid years you needed to keep funding levels down, so as not to exceed the amount of revenue that you are allowed to carry over from one financial year to the next. My understanding is that if you exceed this level, refunds have to be made to the Licensing trade via reduced renewal fees. Secondly, I would suggest that this was also done to try and protect the Hackney carriage and private hire trades, as those of us that are self-employed did not receive the level of financial support during Covid that employed people received via the furlough payment scheme. I believe that there is also the possibility of your department releasing more Hackney carriage plates? I

provided within the Cabinet and Full Council reports.

I have forwarded your concerns about the ranks to Mr Richard Salter, Lead Engineer – Urban Design, Torbay Development Agency and the Parking team so that they can respond directly to you regarding these matters. We raised the issues about the parking by contractors on the ranks at a meeting last week and they were going to speak with the contractors to stop this from happening.

Kind Regards, Rachael

The fees are set by reviewing the expenditure and income for each licence type every year. The fees for vehicle licence renewals need to increase to ensure they cover the full costs incurred. If we do not increase the costs, then there will be a deficit to the private hire and hackney carriage vehicle accounts by the end of 2024/25.

On occasion, we do, like all other Councils, use Barristers or Specialist Solicitors for advice on certain aspects of legislation and policy. On occasions we may also need to appoint barristers if there is a crown court appeal as this can only be dealt with by a barrister or solicitor with higher rights of audience. Barristers and specialist solicitors are experts in their specialist area of taxi licensing law and can provide clear guidance to assist us in making sound decisions that will affect both the taxi trade and the Council's reputation. The expense of these out ways the risk of paying expensive court costs if our decisions are not correct.

This department is currently considering the unmet demand survey report regarding the limit on the number of Hackney Carriage

feel that if this happens, it will only further dilute the amount of trade that we currently have. Our license fees over the 17 years that I've been a Hackney carriage proprietor driver have always included the cost of the unmet demand survey.

Although Hackney carriage fares were increased in 2019 and 2022, these increases do not even fall in line with the cost of inflation. If I am not mistaken, the last increase I believe was 11% which was spread over two years. When you bear in mind the cost of fuel has gone up, the cost of Hackney carriage insurance has gone up, the cost of vehicle servicing and spare parts has gone up, in real terms this last increase did not even scratch the surface. This means, along with the cost of living crisis that we are in the middle of, I am having to work longer hours to earn the same sort of money that I was taking prior to the pandemic. My turnover during 2023 was approximately 30% down year and year as a consequence. I have also not renewed my rail taxi rank permit which I held for about 10 years, as I could not justify the £440 annual fee. I know this rank is not covered by Torbay Council, but it is included in the unmet demand survey.

Moving onto the rank situation in Torquay, it appears that there was a distinct lack of planning for this prior to the extensive works commencing down on the harbourside. The Cary rank has already gone, the short rank is due to go imminently, and the temporary rank

Vehicles and this will be consulted on in due course.

The taxi fares will be reviewed this year to ensure they are set to enable a sustainable income for drivers and encourage future investment in vehicles.

outside the pavilion is a problem. The public have to walk across the grass to get to the sand covered waiting area. The taxis, spaces for only 4, park on a busy access road to the car park and businesses in that area, making it potentially unsafe for customers getting in and out of vehicles. I am led to believe that there might be a rank outside Taco Bell, the Torwood Street rank might become permanent, and the long rank on Victoria Parade might be made bigger. Surely all of this should've been planned and agreed long before the contractors started work? It also appears that since the works started in November 2023, parking services seem to have deserted the harbourside. Delivery vehicles and cars are using what taxi ranks are available as parking bays, even the contractors are parking on the temporary pavilion rank! The feeder/loading bay opposite Jacks on Victoria Parade is used as a parking bay, as too is the hatched out area on Victoria Parade near the Harvester.

As I said before, it feels very much at the moment as though we're getting a bit of a rough deal!

In conclusion, it probably will come as no surprise to you that I will not withdraw my objection, and I would like you to include it within the consultation responses.

<p>2.</p>	<p>An increase of 24% is too much, especially when everything is now done on line.</p> <p>I object to the proposed increase</p>	<p>Thank you for your email.</p> <p>The fees for the four licence types, Licensed Driver, Hackney Carriage vehicle, Private Hire Vehicle and Private Hire Operator, are set at a level to recover the total costs of all control, supervision, administration and/or compliance associated with the licence type.</p> <p>The taxi fees must be set to ensure that all costs are recovered for each licence type as they should not be subsidised from the Council's general funds.</p> <p>We have kept the fees as low as possible and the majority of the taxi fees have been increased by approximately 4%. However, when reviewing the fees, it was found that the renewal fee for the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licences no longer covers the costs incurred. The costs of materials for the producing of the taxi and private hire plates and the postage and package have increased since 2020. The staffing and overhead costs have also increased as there have been a number of wage increases over the last few years. There has also been a rise in other support costs such as office accommodation (including heating and lighting) and other supplies and services connected to the taxi licensing function.</p>	<p>Please include my objections</p>
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We have reviewed the fees and the cost of a vehicle licence renewal is very similar to a new issue and many local authorities charge the same fee for new issues as renewal. The main difference is that a new issue requires a new bracket and holder and there is a small amount of additional administration.

The private hire vehicle renewal fee has not increased since 2020 and it was reduced from £154 in 2020 to £140 in 2021 and £130 in 2022. The Hackney Carriage Vehicle Renewal fee has also not increased since 2020 and it was reduced from £185 in 2020 to £167 in 2021 and £149 in 2022. However, the cost of materials, staffing, office costs, printers, postage etc. have increased. The hackney carriage vehicle licence fees also include the cost of the unmet demand survey which is required every three years and cost over £17k this year.

The licence fee is also an expense incurred as part of running a business and may be claimed as an allowable deduction for tax purposes.

Please can you confirm if, following this explanation, you would like to withdraw your objection or if you would like me to include it within the consultation responses.

I look forward to hearing from you.

		Kind Regards, Rachael	
3.	<p>Torbay United Drivers Association (TULDA) members have instructed me to raise an objection to the proposed extortionate increase to our licensing fees for 2024.</p> <p>Our argument is the current redevelopment of key sites disrupting traffic flow with major road closures around the harbour set to continue throughout the summer season and relocation of ranks is seriously impacting financially on Hackney and Private Hire drivers. The Hackneys rely on footfall around popular ranks like the ones round the Harbour the GPO roundabout and the Halden Centre the disruption to traffic flow will make it harder to move around the area and the general upheaval will not help to attract tourists or locals to linger in this key site they are more likely to migrate to other tourist's spots outside of the town. Private Hire will also be impacted by reduced footfall and frustrated passengers due to extended journey times and a lack of appropriate places to set down or pick up with single lane traffic around the harbour. While we have been told they can use loading bays and Bus stops unless anyone objects, but unless this is confirmed in writing they will still be at risk of cautions and fines for doing so. The entire trade will be severely affected when the Strand is shut in both directions for several weeks at what is such a very</p>	<p>Thank you for your email. I will include the objection within the consultation, and a response will be provided within the Cabinet and Full Council reports.</p> <p>We have raised the concerns regarding the taxi ranks and the redevelopment of the strand. Representatives from the Council and the TDA are considering a number of options to improve the situation. These will be communicated with the trade as soon as these are finalised.</p> <p>Kind Regards, Rachael</p>	<p>Response from Taxi Licensing to details raised within the response email (this has not been emailed to the person and has only been included within this report)</p> <p>Thank you for your objection. Whilst we are working closely with the departments involved with the redevelopment works and the taxi provision, this is out of our direct control and cannot be considered as part of the fee consultation process.</p> <p>We appreciate that drivers are recovering from the loss of trade during covid, however the cost of the taxi licensing administration including enforcement must be recovered from the fees.</p> <p>The discounts that were given to the electric vehicles and the lower application fees to encourage new drivers was not funded from the taxi licensing budget.</p> <p>This rumour is not correct. There is a Hackney Carriage vehicle licence waiting list and if vehicle proprietor licences become available, they are</p>

important time of year for the trade. Easter and summer seasons are traditionally when drivers can realistically expect to earn enough money to be able to survive the quieter months. Further regeneration projects are planned soon due to £21.9 million of Town Deal funding secured to deliver the Torquay Town Investment plan so we anticipate the trade to be impacted by road closures diversions and road works etc for a considerable time.

Drivers are still trying to recover from loss of trade due to COVID and the escalating rise in cost of living. Shevaun Haviland Director General of the UK Chamber of Commerce said in a recent TV interview on Sky News that 2024 will be a very difficult year with continued workforce shortages, energy prices set to increase again as support packages for businesses are reduced and the importing of goods and services are about to become more difficult as the full impact of the Brexit transition looms. These financial pressures are likely to be past on to the public through price rises and shortages of goods. This is predicted to have a negative impact on the trade as everyone will have less disposable income impacting on leisure footfall.

The Licensing department can recover costs and like everyone, needs to balance its books. However, licensing gave discounts for electric vehicles and introduced £50 application fees for 50 new drivers and there can be no cross subsidy between fees for different licenses.

distributed through that set criteria. This has been in place for a number of years.

A separate letter has been sent to vehicle licence proprietors to explain the legal requirements surrounding this issue.

As advised above, the increase in the fees are to ensure the costs are recovered for each separate licence type.

Most existing drivers did not benefit from these initiatives but now appear to be disadvantaged as it will have impacted the departments revenue and contributed to the increased fees this year. However, our members still feel a rise more than inflation is disproportionate and will overburden drivers: Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 -sections 53 and 70; on what is set to be a very difficult time due to the economic climate and the impact of the Council plans to redevelop the Strand. Can I please ask if the department could please confirm or deny if the rumour of the department having two plates that are waiting to be assigned should someone have fully electric vehicle that fits the vehicle specifications is true? There is a little confusion amongst drivers on this point. The realignment of the V5 having to be in the same name as the one on the Hackney plate is also causing concern amongst some as historically some plates have been rented to individuals with full knowledge of the Licensing department. We do not want to see more experienced drivers leave the trade in Torbay.

Instead of imposing such a big rise in fees in order to recover previous discounts to a few perhaps we could have a more equitable approach ensuring fair distribution of costs against reduced profitability to foster a supportive environment for all licensed drivers during this difficult transitional phase.