

9 January 2024

**INCREASE IN COUNCIL TAX GUIDED BY COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS**

In 2024/25, residents living in Totnes will see their Council Tax payments to Totnes Town Council increase by 6.54%. For an average band D property, this means the weekly charge for the services provided by Totnes Town Council will increase by 26p per week from £3.95 to £4.21 (up £13.42 a year to £218.65). Please note the increase will vary by property band. The remainder of your Council Tax bill covers services from other agencies, including the Police, the Fire Service, Devon County Council and South Hams District Council.

The increase will mean the Town Council can continue to carry out its statutory duties and deliver a package of support for local people and businesses, with a focus on helping residents through the cost of living crisis and keeping the town looking its best. With inflation expected to average 7.5% in 2023 and the Town Council continuing to experience spiralling costs to deliver services, councillors have also agreed areas for improved efficiency and savings. This has enabled them to keep the precept (the amount of money residents pay to the Town Council through Council Tax) as low as possible this year.

**Cllr Emily Price, Mayor of Totnes, said:** “The scale of the financial challenge facing us means we have had to review all our activities and prioritise where our limited resources are deployed. To protect many of the services our communities value, we’ve reluctantly had to increase our element of the Council Tax bill. It’s been a tough decision. We know that many local people are struggling and that any increase in Council Tax will hit them hard. But we also know that residents value what we do and that it’s likely the Town Council may have to do even more in the future to counteract less support coming from Devon County Council.

“Town Councillors looked at a variety of evidence when considering whether to increase its element of the Council Tax bill. This included using the results of our Community Conversation consultation as our guide. This showed that the majority of the 420 local respondents supported a rise of 5-10%. We considered the fact that financial support with paying Council Tax is available from South Hams District Council for those with a low income, with discounts of up to 85% available. Finally, we also took on board recent comments by Devon County Council, which has urged local towns and parishes to increase their precept this year. This is because it is likely that the County Council will be providing less services in the future as they also grapple with ever mounting bills.”

The Town Council uses its portion of Council Tax money to deliver a range of services and initiatives which are designed to improve the wellbeing of the local community or are statutory requirements. These include:

* Working with local community groups to coordinate the local response to the cost of living crisis to ensure residents have access to warm spaces and practical support at this difficult time.
* Managing the cemetery at Follaton.
* Awarding grants for a wide range of community initiatives - most recently focussing on activities which help people directly during the cost of living crisis.
* Pursuing climate emergency projects and encouraging green travel initiatives.
* Maintaining and operating a number of locations and venues in town, including, maintaining St Mary's churchyard and Castle Meadow as well as the Civic Hall and the historic Guildhall, which are used as venues by the community.
* Improving the look of the town. For example, by commissioning artworks created by local artists and children, and providing improved seating, flower planters and signage.
* Organising community events like the Christmas Light Switch On.
* Supporting local businesses to thrive, including by promoting tourism via Visit Totnes and organising events like the Totnes Christmas Markets.

Areas where cost savings will be found in 2024 include reducing the annual staffing costs by around £95,000. For example, councillors have agreed not to recruit into the currently vacant roles of Sustainability Officer and Seasonal Tourist Information Assistant, who manned the face-to-face Tourist Information Centre in the Market Square.  Instead, alternative ways of resourcing these services will now be reviewed by councillors as they set the Council’s strategic priorities. Further information on what these changes will look like will be shared as soon as possible.

The opinions of 420 local residents and business owners were gathered through Totnes Town Council’s Community Conversation survey in the Summer of 2023. The environment and town appearance were identified as the most important issues for respondents alongside the importance of supporting vulnerable local people. When asked what increase in the precept (the amount of Council Tax that is passed on to Totnes Town Council), 54% either agreed or strongly agreed that a small increase of 5-10% was acceptable to maintain local services. For more details on the results of the Community Conversation, which outlined local people’s priorities and indicated how much people would be willing to pay, go to: <https://www.totnestowncouncil.gov.uk/totnes-community-conversation-survey-what-you-told-us/>

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