Spending on mayoral cars

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TaxPayers' Alliance

Introduction

Across the UK, local authorities have spent nearly £2.7 million on buying, leasing and maintaining cars for mayoral use over the last three financial years.

Mayors (and equivalents such as chairmen and provosts) fulfil some ceremonial duties within their local authorities and serve as the 'first citizen'. However, these relatively minor politicians should not need to purchase or lease luxury vehicles, with taxpayers' money, to better perform their limited tasks and attend functions.

Key findings

Between April 2019 and March 2022:

- **162** local authorities spent **£2,689,959** on vehicles for mayors, lord mayors, lord provosts and chairmen and women. This includes fuel, maintenance, tax and other associated costs. The average spending for those councils providing cars was **£16,605**.
- At least **182** cars are owned or leased by local authorities across the UK for the use of their mayor (or equivalent figure). **20** local authorities ran more than one mayoral car. Coventry City, for example, paid for both Jaguar F-Pace and Jaguar I-Pace vehicles.
- Of the 162 local authorities providing mayoral cars, only 35 per cent were using environmentally friendly electric or hybrid electric vehicles.
- Three local authorities (Hammersmith and Fulham, Southampton and Falkirk) own **Tesla models**. Birmingham city council and St Helens metropolitan borough council own **Range Rovers**. The city of Glasgow ran a **Rolls Royce Ghost**.
- Other luxury vehicles used by UK councils' mayors included the **Audi A8, BMW 7 series, Jaguar XJ, Mercedes S class** and **Lexus RX**.
- The local authority that spent the most was Birmingham city council, spending **£59,884** on leasing, maintenance and fuel for **two** luxury cars in the last three years (a **Range Rover** and a **Jaguar F-Pace Saloon** with a personalised number plate). Birmingham Council features in the **top 20 most deprived neighbourhoods** in England. Burnley, Blackpool, Knowsley and Rochdale also share this distinction.[1]
- Edinburgh spent the **most money on mayoral cars** in Scotland at **£48,847** and they are the third highest spending authority in the UK according to our data. The city of Edinburgh has been reported to have one of the **lowest numbers of car commuters** in the UK and has made significant efforts to increase the proportion of ultra-low emissions vehicles.[2] However, the council ran **two luxury BMW 730D SE diesel models** in the years reviewed.
- **Bolton metropolitan borough council, Charnwood council, North East Lincolnshire council** and **Peterborough council** all spent taxpayers' money on transferring **personalised number plates**.

[1] Anderson, J., 19 of the 20 most deprived areas with England's most deprived neighbourhoods are in the north, *i news*, 27 September 2019.
[2] Mitchell, J., The ten greenest cities in the UK, *The Week*, 2 November 2021.

Mayoral cars

Of the 400 local authorities who were sent a freedom of information request, 320 responded. Of these, 162 confirmed that they spent money on mayoral cars, or 51 per cent. Of those local authorities who sent a response, 152 did not own or lease any cars for the use of the mayor or equivalent. This is equal to 48 per cent of the UK councils that responded to the FOI request.

Local authorities should ensure that civic leaders use their own method of transport and sell off surplus vehicles. This is especially true in authorities that engage in green initiatives and coerce residents to use other modes of transport.

Table 1: local authorities with the highest mayoral cars spending, by region

Region	Local authority	Vehicle	Total spend (£)
East of England	Ipswich borough council	Hyundai Ioniq	29,947
East Midlands	Erewash borough council	Seat Alhambra	36,267
London	London borough of Brent	Hyundai Ioniq	44,250
North East	Sunderland city council	2x Volvo S90	39,843
North West	Rochdale metropolitan borough	Kia Nero EV	39,938
Northern Ireland	Antrim and Newtownabbey borough council	Audi A8	45,965
Scotland	City of Edinburgh	2x BMW 730D	48,847
South East	Southampton city council	Tesla & Hyundai Ioniq	43,589
South West	Cheltenham borough council	Hyundai Ioniq	15,518
Wales	Swansea city and borough council	Volvo S90	50,700
West Midlands	Birmingham city council	Jaguar F-Pace & Range Rover	59,884
Yorkshire and the Humber	Leeds city council	Volvo S90	40,731

Click here to see how much your council spent on mayoral cars

Sources and methodology

- A request for information was sent to 400 tier 1, tier 2 and unitary local authorities. It asked how many cars the authority has for use of their mayor (or equivalent, such as chairman in county councils and provost in some Scottish authorities).
- The cost of the following was asked for in the FOI request for financial years 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22: purchase; leasing; fuel; personalised number plates; and maintenance.
- Any FOI responses received after the deadline of 15 August 2022 were not included in the dataset.