



Wells City Council



# DEVOLUTION FAQS



## DEVOLUTION CONSULTATION

Following the consultation via Wells Voice, and the Council's website, as well as the Public Meeting held on 26th September 2024, the Council wishes to ensure that all residents have access to the information gathered, and specifically, the answers provided to questions that have arisen from the engagement.

The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) below, will be updated at regular intervals and posted to the Council's website.

Wells City Council encourages further questions, and should you have anything that you wish for us to consider, please email [reception@wells.gov.uk](mailto:reception@wells.gov.uk) or send it to us at, Wells City Council, Town Hall, Market Place, Wells, Somerset. BA5 2RB.

# Frequently Asked Questions



## **1. What is a precept?**

A precept is the amount of tax raised to deliver local services. It is collected in one payment called Council Tax, but is then distributed to several places.

Within your Council Tax bill, you will see a breakdown which will reference your Parish Precept, this element is paid to Wells City Council, there will then be an element which you pay to Somerset Council, blue light services and sometimes specific values for closed churchyards.

Somerset is responsible for collecting the Council Tax and then distributing the funds. They normally pay the Parish element to Wells City Council in two payments, one before 1st April and another later in the year, normally around October.

## **2. What services are looking to be devolved from Somerset Council?**

The services potentially being devolved to the City Council are, Playgrounds, litter bins, dog waste bins, dead animal removal, fly tipping, flyposting, litter picking, grass cutting, tree management, markets, public toilets, CCTV and graffiti removal.

## **3. Why are Somerset Council looking to devolve services to parish Councils?**

The current service provider ID Verde's contract ends on 31st May 2025, as such, Somerset have considered it an opportunity to consider the future of services within the old Mendip area that are delivered via this mechanism.



#### **4. Is Wells City Council a Parish Council?**

Yes it is.

#### **5. What is the difference between a Parish Council and Wells City Council?**

There is no difference, Wells City Council is defined as a Parish and has a boundary like every other Parish in the Country.

The key difference for Wells, is our status as a City, as in many other instance, a City Council would sit at a higher level within the tiers of Government. If you would like to understand more about the tiers of government and how they interact with each other and the powers they hold, then you can find further information at <https://www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works>

#### **6. Do Wells City Council have to take the services being offered by Somerset?**

No, we do not have to take the services, however, the City Council feels that it is in the interest of the public and the city for us to consider all aspects.

#### **7. What will happen to the services if Wells don't take them on?**

We are not certain in some instances. However, there is a likelihood that due to financial constraints Somerset would need to make decisions on how they continue to run the services, or if they are able to continue to provide them.

#### **8. I thought that the purpose of Somerset Council joining forces and absorbing the old District Councils (Mendip in this area) was to make efficiencies, am I wrong?**

That was the detail provided as part of the One Somerset proposal at the time of Unitary consideration.



**9. How will the devolution of services to Wells City Council benefit the citizens and wells and the over life of those in and visiting the City?**

Wells City Council strongly believes that devolving services to a local level will result in greater control and management of those services.

**10. Why is Somerset not devolving their financial budget to support the services being passed (potentially) to the City Council? Surely, residents have already paid for these services in the for of our Council Tax precept for Somerset Council, why cant this be passed on in support of the change?**

This is a question to ask of Somerset Council directly and as such, we have asked them to provide a written response to include in future additions of this document.

**11. Can one assume that if Somerset aren't delivering these services any longer, and Wells needs to increase its precept to support them, that Somerset wont look to increase their precept, as they will in effect be making a saving through not delivering them?**

This is a question to ask of Somerset Council directly and as such, we have asked them to provide a written response to include in future additions of this document.

**12. What are the timescales for services to be transferred?**

The ultimate date is 31st May 2025 which is when the contract with ID Verde comes to an end with Somerset Council, however some services may be devolved sooner than this date.



### **13. What progress is being made to maintain and improve our playparks including facilities for children with disabilities?**

Play parks is one area of devolution. We already have facilities within the Recreation Ground which is already under Wells City Council control. If others are inherited through Devolution, it will be necessary to create a play strategy, which will look at the needs of the community and how we are best able to provide them.

### **14. What is the additional cost of taking over the markets?**

We are in the process of determining costs from Somerset Council, and the impacts to Wells City Council if we were to take on the service. In addition to costs, there may be an income opportunity, but at this time, negotiations are ongoing and financial details are not finalised.

### **15. Will there be a referendum?**

No, there will be no referendum. This public consultation and a questionnaire issued via Wells Voice and the Councils website offers the opportunity for the public to have their say. Wells City Council is working to a very short timeline and as such, whilst we are committed to regular communication, there will not be the opportunity for further consultation.

### **16. Will Wells take over highways services, and pavements and the cobbles within the market place?**

It is not the intention for Wells City Council to take responsibility for any services currently within the Highways service of Somerset Council. However, it will continue to hold its powers through delegation from Somerset for emergency small repairs and we are in discussion about taking direct control of the for the raised area



in the Market Square, together with the Conduit (fountain at the entrance of the market square), but this remains subject to discussion and forms part of the decision regarding markets.

**17. Can the elected Councillors provide a majority view on their recommended way forward?**

it will be the responsibility of Wells CC Full Council, which consists of all elected members of the Council, to form a majority view of the way forward and which services we may or may not take responsibility for. As part of this decision making process, Councillors will be provided with a number of areas of information, including the budgetary impacts, the consultation feedback and preferences, from both this event as well as written correspondence, and service information.

**18. What reassurance can be given that the precept will not be wiped out if Somerset Council do not maintain services before they are transferred?**

As part of the negotiations and the due diligence being completed, it will be ensured any outstanding work is carried out before they are inherited and that any services of premises inherited are in a satisfactory position before Wells takes over the liability.

**19. Do any of these services have a statutory duty (legal requirement) linked to them which Somerset Council have a responsibility for?**

Any services where there is a statutory requirement have been identified and the level of service, and legal compliance is being considered as part of the ongoing due diligence and negotiations with Somerset Council.



**20. What happens to the services/facilities that are not transferred?**

Discussion with Somerset Council is ongoing as to how they may manage these services if Wells CC does not take responsibility for them.

**21. Has Wells City Council looked at the opportunities on taking on services. For example: local sponsors for play parks, sponsors for marquees on the markets, dog food companies to sponsor dog waste bins, charging for public toilets, asking Avon & Somerset Police to contribute to CCTV?**

Having local control will enable these opportunities to be fully investigated to cover cost and increase income and this will form part of the income generation for the Council moving forward, to reduce the impacts to the precept, however, the timescales of delivery being what they area, there will likely need to be a longer term strategy for this from 2025-26 onwards.

**22. Will Wells City Council consider quality of life and environment when making decisions?**

Wells City Council already consider a multitude of impacts to our residents and visitors when making decision. This will be no different for Devolution decision making.

**23. Does Wells Cathedral and Bishop's Palace make any contribution to the precept?**

The Council Tax precept is not levied to local businesses, it is a tax attributed to households. National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) is the element applied to businesses. As such, the two business



referenced don't pay directly to Wells CC for services via Council Tax. However, Wells CC work closely with Visit Wells, for which The Bishops Palace and Wells Cathedral are partners, and Visit Wells looks to maximise the visitor offering to the City. If you would like further information regarding NNDR then you can find it at <https://www.gov.uk/government/NNDR>

#### **24. Does NNDR come back to Wells?**

Payments of NNDR are received directly to the Treasury, and then redistributed in the form of Government Grants to local authorities.

#### **25. When will the Council make a decision on the impacts to the Wells community?**

Wells City Council need to be able to inform their budget impacts and precept requests for 2025-26, which means that a decision will need to be reached ahead of 19th December 2024, which is the date that Full Council will look to agree the final budget settlement figure. It is in the interest of all, for decisions to be made earlier than that wherever possible, but that is very much dependant on the information being provided by Somerset Council. Officers and members are working diligently to ensure that we have as much information as possible to make informed decisions.

#### **26. How do the Council and its members make the decision regarding future services?**

Any decisions will ultimately be made by Wells Full City Council, which consists of all elected members. Full City Council meeting dates are published on the Councils website and are public meetings, in which you are able to attend and listen to the debate. Should you wish to ask a question or make a representation at Full City Council, you asked to register to speak in advance by





contacting the Council.

**27. When will the community have another consultation event with more detail, specifically about the financial implications?**

Unfortunately, due to the timescales involved, it will not be possible to hold a further community engagement session as we did on Thursday 25th September, however, Wells City Council are committed to ensuring our residents are involved of the progress of devolution and as such, have planned for key messages to be distributed as readily and quickly as we are able to.

**18. Can I ask additional questions to these and if so, will they then be published for all?**

Yes. If you have questions regarding Devolution, please send them to [reception@wells.gov.uk](mailto:reception@wells.gov.uk) and these will be added to this FAQ document and published regularly.

