



Wells City Council



NEWSLETTER

WHAT IS DEVOLUTION?

Somerset Council as part of its budget management challenges has stated its priorities and declared that it is required to cease a number of the tasks previously carried out by the Somerset County Council and the four District Councils. It has suggested that various of these might be offered to the City, Town and Parish Councils as an alternative method of delivering those services. There would be no funds devolved with those services which would have to be paid for by an increase in local tax also known as the parish precept which is levied by each Parish and you will see referenced as part of your council tax bill. Somerset's position is that if City, Town or Parish Councils do not agree to take on these services then in most cases they will cease to be delivered.

Each parish has an identified part of the Council Tax demand each year. The amount of increase will depend on which services are actually transferred to the City Council and their condition. Negotiations are proceeding with individual Councils, and as yet it is not clear what is on offer but Wells City Council is having to consider plans so that any services can be smoothly transitioned so that there is minimal disruption. This means having the right staffing levels, and personnel to carry out these additional functions as well as the equipment and back up facilities within the City.



What does the City Council already do and what might be being devolved?

It may surprise people that Wells City Council already serves its community in many ways.

It offers facilities of the Town Hall and Portway Annexe for a great number of community organisations and public services, some of which can be seen below:

The Town Hall, accommodates the Coroner's court, markets, meetings, concerts, conferences, weddings and many other events, as well as regular classes, clubs and other community groups.

The Portway Annexe, accommodates a vast array of community groups, music, wellbeing and support services as well as regular classes and clubs.

The City Council is responsible for the management, upkeep and use of the Recreation Ground and Bishop's Barn as well as the management and upkeep of the Cemetery, its burials and interments, public toilets and allotments throughout the City.

We have a dedicated team managing our open spaces, including grass cutting, hedge cutting, weeding, and street cleansing as well as managing the waterways down the south side of the High Street.

We also deliver the Christmas lights, have oversight of the Wells in Bloom programme, Tourist Information Centre, CCTV, Skate Park and the funfairs which operate in May and November.

Alongside the operational roles, we also play a significant part in the scrutiny of planning and licensing applications affecting the City, grants and financial support to local clubs and organisations and partnerships which support the wider running or future of the City.





What are the financial impacts to me?

Currently the budget of the City Council for the year 2024-25 is £1.2 Million, and that is raised by income from the use of facilities and by the local tax (precept) which is collected as part of your Council Tax payment. For 2024-25 the average Band D property has seen a precept charge of £ 269.05 per year (£5.17 per week).

The council is having to plan for different levels of service provision, as negotiations are still ongoing with Somerset Council and likely will not be completed for a few weeks. As such, there may be different levels of impact which could be expected. For illustrative purposes:

A 30% increase in the parish precept would equate to an additional £80.71 per year, a 50% increase would be £134.53 per year, and a 100% increase would consist of £269.05 per year. This could be as little as £1.55 per week (based on 30% increase).

The increase would only be applied if services are to be maintained, and the level of finances needing to be raised will be dependent upon the volume of services, as well as their current condition and the timing of their transfer.

The City Council is very well aware that the financial climate we find ourselves in is challenging for everyone and that is why we are seeking your views. For some, the level of services able to be continued is justified for the increase of £1.55 per week (less than a cup of coffee!), for others, the services being discussed may not hold the value to justify the increased cost.





So what are we being asked to take on from Somerset Council which may result in additional precept being sought?

As was mentioned before, the list of services is still under discussion, but so far we have been asked to consider:

- Management and health/safety of play grounds.
- Grass Cutting for all green spaces (this would be areas on housing estates and open spaces, not highways verges which will remain with Somerset Council).
- Litter Bin and Dog Bin Emptying and Cleaning.
- Dead Animal Removals.
- Fly Tipping and Flyposting.
- Graffiti Removal.
- Litter Picking.
- Markets - the set up and pack down of stalls on a Wednesday and Saturday.
- Management of trees on the areas that we are cutting grass for.

The City Council will have to make decisions as they move forward as to what services they can take on and maintain or even improve, for the benefits of the residents of Wells as well as promoting the city as a focus for the surrounding villages, area and tourists.

There will be a public meeting during which we will invite your views as to the services you most value, understanding that there will be a cost to us all.

The proforma on the right can be completed and returned to us, should you not be able to attend the meeting to give your views.

There is an imperative in time, as Somerset Council will be making decisions in the coming weeks, and we will need to be ready both to react and respond and plan for all the people of Wells.

The deadline for any comments or feedback is 1st October 2024. The public meeting will be held at the Town Hall, Market Place, Wells on 26th September 2024 at 19:00.

Proforma for response

Which services do you value (please tick as many as you wish):

Play Grounds

Grass Cutting

Litter Bins

Tree Management

Dog Waste Bins

Markets

Dead Animal Removal

Public Toilets

Fly Tipping/Fly Posting

CCTV

Litter Picking

Graffiti Removal

If you have any other thoughts that you would like us to consider, please provide them here:

Thank you for taking the time to provide your response, please return to Wells City Council

Get In Touch



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