

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL



Wicklow County Council
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE CHILL MHANTAIN

Transcript of the County Council Special Meeting Held on 22 September 2014 In the County Council Chamber, Wicklow



Text streamed live to the web on www.seewritenow.ie



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7 Wicklow County Council Special Meeting, 22nd of September 2014:

8
9 CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon members we might as well start it properly, good
10 afternoon everyone. There is a couple of things just to be said before we get into the actual
11 agenda.

12
13 First of all I'd like agreement to switch around, do item number 2 before item number 1 if that's
14 agreeable? Just to allow some officials to go, to leave the meeting, agreed?

15
16 Vote of sympathy, Mr Robert Minogue, former councillor, in Bray Town Council.

17 Cllr FORTUNE: That's not correct Chair. Robert Minogue was a father of a former councillor.
18 He's my father-in-law and that notice shouldn't have come out that way, so that's the correct
19 situation.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay apologies for that. Is there any other votes of sympathy? Cllr
21 O'Neill?

22 Cllr O'NEILL: Just the tragic death out our way of Patsy O'Brien on Saturday evening. Patsy
23 was, he worked in ESB for many a year and he was a great footballer. He died tragically on
24 Saturday night.

25 Cllr BOURKE: I'd just like to extend sympathy to the Bracken family in Ballycogue, his son
26 works as one of our outdoor staff, so I'd like to extend our sympathies to the Bracken family too.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Anyone else? Stand for a moment.

28
29 (Minute's silence)

30
31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, there's a couple of items I just want to say before we start. It was
32 remiss of me the last time to, I forgot to mention that Powerscourt Estate won a very prestigious
33 title, they were voted by the National Geographic to be the third best garden in the world, a
34 fantastic achievement for Sarah and all the team up in Powerscourt and there was a wonderful

1 evening up there, I know a number of the councillors and officials were in attendance. So
2 congratulations to Sarah and all the team in Powerscourt.

3
4 We also had a fantastic occasion last Thursday in Woodenbridge, opening the new memorial to
5 all the fallen from World War 1, and again it was a magnificent occasion.

6
7 And also on Friday night the people of the year awards were given to volunteers from around the
8 county, and it was great to see people who have dedicated themselves to volunteering through
9 different organisations to be honoured in such a way, and congratulations to all the winners on
10 Friday night.

11
12 I also just want to let in the chair of the housing SPC before we start, we did have a meeting with
13 Minister Harris in relation to some of the issues that were raised at a previous housing meeting
14 and I just want a quick update from Cllr Snell.

15 Cllr SNELL: Thanks Cathaoirleach, as you're aware we were instructed by all the members here
16 to make contact with our five TDs, and to date we've met Minister Harris, you yourself attended
17 the meeting with me, and also chair of the Municipal District in Arklow, Cllr Fitzgerald, because
18 there was a number of specific issues in relation to south Wicklow.

19
20 And as Chair, he was, he came along. Briefly, what we'll do is we'll just outline the issues that
21 we brought to the Minister's attention. And when we get a reply, I think it would be only right
22 and proper that we would forward a copy to every member in the chamber.

23
24 Issues that we tipped on, was the building policy within the county, on housing, or the lack of,
25 and everyone in the chamber's more than familiar with the rent limits which is affecting all our
26 constituents, and that was raised and the Ministers promised to come back to us fairly promptly
27 with answers to these.

28
29 The tenant purchase scheme as you all know has ceased and we're still waiting on information
30 for the new tenant purchase scheme to come out. And there is a lot of people out there who are
31 anxious to purchase their own homes, and hopefully we've been assured that the scheme will
32 start early 2015, which is only a matter of a couple of months, but we'll be looking for a better
33 system than the last one, which I have to say was quite good with a 45% reduction to most
34 tenants, based on 3% for every year that they were in their local authority house.

1
2 We did discuss the NAMA properties, which affect a lot of other counties, but not so much our
3 county, and therefore it was an issue that we raised, the lack of NAMA properties available to us
4 as a local authority.

5
6 And also the land banks that we have and the potential to bring them to fruition in regard to
7 building local authority housing on these land banks, so as I say, I won't hold up the meeting. As
8 soon as we get a reply to all of these queries we'll certainly forward it out every single member
9 in the chamber, I think it's only common courtesy, thanks Cathaoirleach.

10
11 Just before you go, we do have a meeting lined up with the other four TDs and that is coming as
12 well, so it's not that we specifically just ear marked Minister Harris, the other four TDs, it wasn't
13 possible to meet them to date, but we are meeting them in the near future as well. Thanks.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you councillor. Okay we'll move on, I'll take item number
15 2 first. The proposed extinguishment of the public rights-of-way, this was previously deferred
16 from the previous meeting, so.

17 DIRECTOR NICHOLS: This was deferred from the meeting of the 8th of September in order
18 that the members of the Municipal District could consider it, this is the extinguishment of two
19 rights-of-way at Johnstown north and south in Arklow, so the Municipal District members from
20 Arklow considered it on the 10th of the 9th and have recommended that it be passed, and we
21 would recommend that to you also.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr Annesley -- no, Fitzgerald.

23 Cllr FITZGERALD: That's myself there. Less of the Annesley it's Anne-sley, big difference.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: I have to practice my Arklow accent!

25 Cllr FITZGERALD: China, we used to make that in Arklow! Just I have to point to a difficulty
26 last day, we wanted clarification on some issues, I contacted some residents and the new
27 proposals won't come into being until the bypass -- or it's opened; I have no difficulty proposing
28 the extinguishment of the rights-of-way, both rights-of-way. Thank you.

29 Cllr BOURKE: I'll second that Cathaoirleach

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Both rights-of-way?

31 Cllr BOURKE: Both rights-of-way.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay Cllr McDonald?

33 Cllr McDONALD: I agree with both Cllr Bourke and Fitzgerald, I had a query from one of the
34 residents in the area this morning, he wanted to know can they be kept up to date from the actual

1 department in the Council, as to what and when and how things are going to progress? But I've
2 got no problem with the actual passing of the motion.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Have we agreement?

4 Cllr CULLEN: Chairman I'd like to abstain, I don't know anything about it.

5 Cllr VANCE: Take a vote.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Take a vote, roll call.

7

8 (Vote taken)

9

10 MS GALLAGHER: That's 28 for, one not present and three abstaining.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Okay we'll move on to item number 1, to consider the
12 variation of the basic rate of the local property tax and the setting of the local adjustment factor
13 in accordance with the Finance Act 2012.

14

15 This will only apply for one year. After 12 months we go back to the basic rate and adjust it
16 again, or not. Okay? We had a very worthwhile workshop this morning, thanks to Lorraine.
17 And a lot of information was given. So look, we'll go, do you want to talk before hand? Okay
18 Lorraine?

19 DIRECTOR LYNCH: What I've done is just prepared a short presentation just to highlight the
20 particular parts in the report that went out last week.

21

22 As the Cathaoirleach said, we have under the local government regulations, the local property
23 tax, local adjustment factor, the powers devolved to the local authority to vary the basic rate and
24 set a local adjustment factor, that would apply for a period of one year, so any adjustment made
25 today will apply for a period of one year, the option is not to vary the rate it has to be decided at
26 a meeting such as today's meeting or any adjournment there of.

27

28 The reason behind it is because of the change in local government funding, and I suppose it is a
29 significant transfer of power from central to local government, the advantages of it is that it
30 improves autonomy, gives greater transparency, provides a fairer basis for funding of local
31 authorities, also strengthens accountability to the citizens of Wicklow in that they are paying the
32 tax into their local authority and should see a return from it. And it improves decision-making.

33

34 It transfers with it as well as the power to set a local adjustment factor and vary the basic rate, it

1 transfers a level of responsibility in making sure we have sufficient funding for the local
2 authority to provide the services required in 2015 and future years.

3
4 This is just an extract of the circular which was issued to all, as part of the report, but you will
5 also have received it at the first September meeting, I suppose it's details of provisional occasion
6 for Wicklow County Council for 2015. 100% of the LPT is 17.6 million, 20% of that goes back
7 into the national equalisation fund, which is 3.522 million and we get to retain 80% locally,
8 which is 14 million. Compared to last year's general purpose grant, the local property tax is
9 replacing the general purpose grant as such, that then taken, last year's general purpose grant
10 from the LPT gives a surplus of 7.2 million.

11
12 Of that 7.2 million we have to use 3.7 million of it to self fund housing and road grants, so where
13 we would have gotten grants in housing and roads 3.7 million of those grants will now come via
14 property tax rather than directly from grant funding from the central government.

15
16 The balance then, so take that 3.7 million from the surplus of 7.2 million and that gives 3.3 of a
17 surplus that we can retain for discretionary purposes.

18
19 So the decision that's here before Council today is to vary the basic rates of LPT by a maximum
20 of plus 15% to minus 15 or not vary the LPT.

21
22 In making that decision there's four factors which have to be considered and which would have
23 been contained in the report that was sent out to you. These factors are outlined in the
24 regulations of 2014. And the four factors are the estimation of the income we'll receive and
25 expenditure we'll incur for the period, the rate has to have effect, that's 2015.

26
27 The current financial position of the local authority, the financial effect of the varied rate, both
28 on the individual household and on Wicklow County Council as the local authority, and
29 obviously the feedback from the consultation process that we held.

30
31 The first part of that is the estimation of income and expenditure, that table there shows the
32 current local year financial budget which is 2014, that's the combined budgets for the
33 amalgamated four local authorities and the next column gives the financial information, the draft
34 budget as we are at the moment for 2015.

1
2 Obviously there's a drop in both income and expenditure, the main reason for that reduction is
3 Irish Water for 2014, we were covering both costs of payroll and goods and services for Irish
4 Water and recouping those costs from Irish Water, for 2015 we'll be covering payroll costs, we'll
5 no longer cover good and services cost, and we'll recoup payroll costs, so that's a reduction of
6 about 10 million in that.

7
8 On top of that there is the higher education grants, we're phasing out higher education grants we
9 pay, any new ones are going to SUSI, that's a reduction of nearly a million, again it affects both
10 income and expenditure. Other reductions would include the remediation of Whitestown, which
11 would be finished this year, and then the other reductions would be the inter local authority
12 agency services, we would -- Wicklow County Council would have done some work for the
13 Town Councils, the Town Councils would have done some work for Wicklow County Council
14 and we would have a budgeted income and expenditure on both sides, because we are a unified
15 body they are stripped out on both income and expenditure.

16
17 Commercial rates are budgeted on the same level as 2014 because even with the harmonised rate
18 everybody in 2015 will be paying the same level of rates as they did in 2014. Local property tax
19 is included there at the full 80%, so full 14 million is included, no provision in that for any
20 reduction in the basic rate. The grants and subsidies you'll see have dropped from 19 to 14
21 million, part of that is a 3.7 million that we have to use from local property tax to fund housing,
22 either housing or road grants, so just a movement of funding from grants and subsidies to local
23 property tax. And the other income is down for the reasons I have outlined.

24
25 Expenditure payroll expenses are up for the most part because of pension lump sums, our
26 increase in lump sums that we budgeted for next year there's an increase of 475,000 over what
27 we had to pay out in 2014. In addition we are lucky to get sanction for additional staff in the
28 library service, which is a provision there of 160,000 to cover that staff to try and redress some
29 of the reductions through retirements and so on.

30
31 The social benefits, what that -- sorry I skipped one, loan interest and principal repaid, this is in
32 relation to non-mortgage loans for which we have to, which are maturing off a 7-year term next
33 year and we have to start repaying them over the next 20 years, so it's a provision towards that.

1 The social benefits concern mostly the rental allowance scheme, and there's an increase in
2 activity in that, it also covers payments in terms of homelessness and so on.

3
4 Capital grants paid is an increase in there due to the amalgamation of County Enterprise Boards
5 into the County Council, so that's the new local enterprise office and we now budget in full, but
6 again for both increase in social benefits and capital grants it's increase in expenditure but a
7 contra, so increase in income, so zero net effect.

8
9 Again the other expenditure is down because of Irish Water, inter agency, higher education
10 grants and so on.

11
12 This is a lot of what I said already, the figures that are included in that table are based on the best
13 information we have at the moment. We are preparing this information in advance of the full
14 budget process and the full budget will be considered at the November meeting, but it's based on
15 the full information that we have available to us at this particular point in time.

16
17 Obviously it's based on LPT income as per the circular that we have, the income from
18 commercial rates I already outlined that's included in there, and the grant and subsidies, they are
19 estimated at the same level of what we received for 2014, or expect to receive for 2014 adjusted
20 for that 3.7 million coming from local property tax. We've included the water services budget as
21 we know it at the moment, that's still under discussion with Irish Water and will be subject to
22 change before the November meeting, but that's the best information we have in there at the
23 moment.

24
25 Critical note, the figures that are there, the 97 million we have in for next year's draft budget,
26 includes the full amount of the LPT, it's balanced on the basis that the LPT basic rate remaining
27 as it is without any variation, the question is obviously there's additional income from the LPT
28 gone in there so where has it been spent? There have been increases, which we have to meet in
29 housing maintenance, in terms of we have to service boilers every year, we wouldn't have been
30 doing for every year, health and safety we have to do that, that's an extra 100,000, increase for
31 providing for loans and borrowing requirements we have on that, those repayments. Increase for
32 pensions, they are a commitment that we have to meet of 475,000 over and above last year,
33 there's also increases in there to counteract for the loss of income from Greystones Town
34 Council and the joint burial board, the charges that we can't charge in 2015, we have to make

1 that income up somehow.

2
3 On top of that I suppose there is extra for economic development, community, cultural and social
4 development, for the arts office, there's extra for the library, between the library staff of 160,000
5 and an extra 120,000 for the library book fund at the moment. There's provision of over 200,000
6 -- 226,000 for Arklow covering the harbour, the flood scheme and marsh development and also
7 included we have to take into account any savings we would have, so savings from the members
8 remuneration, we've gone from 63 to 32 councillors so there's savings of 140,000 in there.

9
10 And also I suppose other areas where we have to -- we have extras in would include burial
11 ground maintenance provision and the provision for extensions, that's also increased, we have a
12 list of those which we'll circulate, just so members can see where the 3.5 million has been
13 allocated.

14
15 One of the key areas I suppose, where it's been allocated -- that's the list -- I forgot I put it on! I
16 do apologise. That's the list of where the 3.5 in, it might be hard to see from where you are now,
17 but we have a hand-out of it as well.

18
19 On top of that I suppose one of the things that's in that is a provision towards reducing our
20 revenue deficit and that would be considered and the second element that has to be considered
21 when we think about adjusting local property tax, and that's the financial position of the local
22 authority.

23
24 We have to look at the capacity of the local authority to balance the budget, to collect income
25 that is due to the local authority, to meet the cost of servicing borrowings, to address the issue of
26 revenue deficit, to look at our loan book as compared to revenue income and ratio of assets to
27 liabilities. That is schedule 2 in the report and it shows I suppose that ratio of loans payable to
28 revenue income at 92% is actually quite healthy, it's a low risk, ratio of current assets to current
29 liabilities two to one is a good indicator as well, the difficulty we have is in terms of general
30 revenue reserve, which at the end of June was 3.9 million.

31
32 The revenue reserve moved, dropped, deteriorated whatever you want to call it, from the 1st of
33 January 2012 it was 1.4 million for combined local authorities, at the 1st of January 2014 it was
34 3.4, so that's an increase in the deficit by 140 percent or 2 million in two years, that's an issue we

1 have to address under the general government balance, we need to address any revenue deficit or
2 not have a revenue deficit, that's what I was told to mention there.

3
4 There I'm running ahead of myself. Okay. The financial effect of the variation, the impact on --
5 there elements of this we have to consider. The impact on the liable person, so that's the
6 individual household, or the individual, the impact on the revenue for the local authority for the
7 forthcoming financial year and the impact on the service delivery plans for the local authority.

8
9 When considering the impact on liable person the effect of varying the base rate for the lowest
10 band is 90 cent per annum, for every one percent change it's 90 cent, for the highest band it's
11 €17.55. Of the property in Wicklow it's estimating 51300, 57% of them fall in the valuation
12 bands of 0 to 100 so the majority of properties do fall in the lower bands. If the property tax was
13 reduced by 15% the maximum -- the majority of property owners will receive 47.25 per annum
14 or less than a euro per week in terms of savings, for the majority of the property owners in the
15 county.

16
17 That table, and it's contained in the report, just gives a bit more detail in terms of the difference,
18 if LPT was adjusted by 5, 10, 15% and impact on the four lower bands, so it would range from,
19 take the bottom band which would be a difference of 5% and that would be €20 per year and a
20 difference of 15% would be 60.75 a year, so the majority of, 57% of the properties fall in the
21 first three bands for Wicklow County.

22
23 The impact on LPT revenue for local authority, for every 1% change in the LPT, in the basic rate
24 of LPT, it will result in a change in income of 176,133. So the table then just outlines the 80%
25 that we have to retain is 14 million, of that we have 3.5 million for discretionary purposes and if
26 we adjusted LPT by 5% it's 880,000, by 10% 1.761 million, by 15% it's an adjustment of 2.642
27 million.

28
29 The impact on the service delivery plans of the local authority. Any change in the LPT, any
30 reduction in the LPT will obviously have an impact on maintaining services and on the
31 additional requirements I'm sure all members would like to see in the budget.

32
33 As I said, at the moment we have the budget balanced with a full LPT included in the figures,
34 what's included is what was on the list there -- last year when we were trying to balance the

1 budget we took about 907,000 out across all different areas, in preparing the draft figures for this
2 year we tried to address most of those reductions, so we would address some of the housing
3 maintenance reductions, we would address the book fund for the library, put money back in
4 there, extra money into playgrounds and we had three lists gone out to you, one is 3.5 where it's
5 been spent, and I suppose what we've done in preparing the draft budget is try to reverse those
6 cuts and in addition there's extras gone in.

7
8 Extras gone in for as I said playgrounds, for Arklow, to meet the pensions costs which are a
9 requirement we have to do this year. So any reduction in LPT will require taking out some of
10 those provisions that have already been included in the draft. Any reduction in LPT and a desire
11 on behalf of the members to change priorities or lose products will mean other expenditure will
12 have to be cut, taken out of specific projects or reduce services across the divisions and that's the
13 decision that's in front of us today.

14
15 Any reduction in LPT, it goes back to the conversation we were having this morning as part of
16 the budget workshop, the general municipal allocation is the discretionary income that's left once
17 we've met every other commitment and nondiscretionary and fixed cost that we have to meet, so
18 any reduction in LPT will mean a reduction in general municipal allocation as well.

19
20 The second sheet that's gone out there is the minimum requirement that we believe we need, we
21 know we need for 2015 and that's about 2 million, over and above what we spent in 2014, it's
22 about 2 million and they are detailed, the main ones being pension cost, additional staff for
23 libraries, we need to provide extra for rates, provision for the Arklow Harbour dredging and
24 development they are commitments that we have to meet before we address any other priorities
25 that ourselves may want or desire.

26
27 The third page there when we have been talking about LPT before we had said we'd prepare a
28 wish list and that is the wish list, but obviously there are priorities that the members would have
29 as well which aren't included on that. But in preparing the budget for November if there is a
30 reduction in LPT that has to be taken into account, if there are priorities the members want that
31 has to be taken into account and anything that's already in there will need to be reduced to take
32 account of any reduction in LPT or other priorities the members choose.

33
34 That's the 2 million, as I said, which is on the second of the sheets that was in the hand-out we

1 just gave out. The key Rathdrum/Wicklow joint burial boards and Greystones Town
2 Commission, that's 99,000 income we've lost, gone, we won't get back, that was included in
3 2014, so we have to meet that commitment first before we move on to do anything extra.

4
5 The third sheet is the projects which could be funded in lieu of those, that's the wish list, some of
6 it has already been included in the Arklow Harbour dredging and protection, but there are
7 obviously other priorities I'm sure the members would like to see, if they need to be included
8 other expenditure will have to be cut to compensate.

9
10 Just in terms, in general again the budget workshop I talked about this, this morning. Same with
11 all public sector, all local authorities, Wicklow County Council has suffered a huge amount of
12 cuts over the last six years and those cuts have been cuts in income for the most part and cuts in
13 funding our own income and funding from the government, it reduced our capacity to deliver
14 services and maintain services.

15
16 Obviously we have our own cuts over the same time in terms of costs, inflation was reduced, we
17 should get better costs on goods and services we procure, payroll costs have reduced as well, but
18 that has also limited our ability to maintain the service levels that we have.

19
20 An indication is in 2009 our local government funded general purpose grant was 18.5 million, by
21 2013 that had dropped to 14.4 million, so we had to reduce -- that's just for Wicklow County
22 Council, it doesn't include the Town Councils in that, we had to reduce our costs to match that,
23 that's I think an under resourcing, now here in the local authority and we need to start addressing
24 that on resources.

25
26 If we look at the figures there for 2014 budgets, comparison of the local authority, Wicklow
27 County Council spends less than the national average per capita across all divisions except
28 environmental services. I believe we're higher than average in environmental services, we take
29 in landfill levy for Ballynagran and pay it over, which inflates our figures, that's the only reason I
30 believe we're higher than the national average there, I believe we're less than the national
31 average across all divisions. Which is something we need to address in terms of improving
32 services and delivering improvements to services that we have on offer.

33
34 The final part of the puzzle is the feedback from the consultation on the 23rd of July, the -- we

1 commenced the consultation with publication in the local media and on the Wicklow County
2 Council website, we received 98 submissions in total. 94 were received from individuals and
3 one each from the chambers of Arklow, Bray and Wicklow and one from Irish Farmers
4 Association. Of the 98 submissions we received 96 looked to reduce the LPT and two requested
5 to receive it unchanged and I suppose I would like to thank everybody for taking the time to
6 make submissions and that has to form part of the decision on matters that have to be considered
7 here by the members in making decisions. And that's it.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thanks Lorraine. Cllr Casey?

9 Cllr CASEY: Thank you Chairman, I will be proposing, on behalf of the Fianna Fail group, a
10 15% reduction in the local property tax and we do this on the basis, as identified in the finance
11 circular 14/214, that Wicklow has the ability to offer a 15% reduction in the local property tax
12 out of the 20% local discretionary fund.

13
14 The circular indicates that the LPT take in Wicklow is 17.6 million, after the 20% national
15 equalisation fund process of 3.52 million, Wicklow is still left with 14.09 million. Then taking
16 the 20% local discretionary fund, another 3.52 million into account, out of which we must pay
17 the local property tax reduction of 15%, Wicklow is still left with 10.57 million.

18
19 The Local Government Fund for Wicklow last year was 6.9 million. Significantly less than the
20 10.57 million. And therefore Wicklow has a surplus of 2015 over last year's income of 3.72
21 million. But the circular also indicates that this surplus fund of 3.7 million will be required to be
22 used to self fund some services in housing and roads to this value.

23
24 But what this does is ensure that even by providing for a 15 percent Local Property Tax
25 discount, the funding available last year is still in place, as a minimum, no change. It has been
26 said that it's only a €0 reduction or 1 euro a week, but it's not about the euro a week or the €50,
27 it's about the original bill of €400 to €500 which people are struggling to pay and some can't pay.

28
29 So on this occasion, any relief that we can provide we'll give back to the people of Wicklow.

30
31 It's also my belief that this 15% reduction to the value of 2.64 million will be better spent by the
32 people of Wicklow in the local economy, bringing direct benefits to this county. For ten years I
33 have sat through ten painful budget processes, and the statement we keep hearing, no we cannot
34 do it and the next one is non-discretionary. And the chief executive in the report gives us a

1 reminder of that word, non-discretionary.

2
3 At the end of each of those budgetary processes the management put up a fight on each and
4 every occasion on any changes that we suggest. This indeed is a very demoralising process that
5 we go through as public representatives, that you have no power to decide where any of the
6 finances are spent. At best in the Celtic era, thanks to a motion from Cllr Doran, we got a fund
7 of 100,000 or 0.1% of the budget to be divided between the five local areas given each 20,000,
8 that was spent on road safety issues.

9
10 In the last six years this has even become worse and we are now not even getting the crumbs
11 from the table and after a whole day we end up arguing over €20,000, less than 0.02 percent of
12 the budget, how demoralising is that as a public representative?

13
14 And the previous members know every single year we walk out of here and we say what a waste
15 of time and what was that all about, and indeed other things I can't mention here.

16
17 It is now I believe critical that we nail our position and it stops here today. And from here on,
18 we take control of this significant responsibility and this discretionary fund of 20% of the local
19 property tax while it is available to us.

20
21 We have been presented today by the Head of Finance, with a balanced budget which uses this
22 discretionary fund of 20%, the 3.52 million, which we propose to reduce the property tax. In
23 preparing the budget, the Council has once again taken a hugely negative narrative.

24
25 In preparing the budget with no growth, with no cost savings, in fact all it mentions is a decrease
26 in income and an increase in costs. Negative, negative, negative.

27
28 The following examples I have taken from the Department's local authority budgets and are
29 available to anybody and I have copies here today. For example the commercial rate base, this
30 has been proposed no change this year, remaining at 28.76 million, but year on year over the
31 average of the last 7 years in the worst economic crisis we have experienced in decades, the
32 commercial rate base has grown by average of 3.25% on a yearly basis, almost 1 million per
33 annum.

1 Our goods and service income has equally increased over the same period by 3.6%, or about
2 1.52 million, and I am excluding the Irish Water figure from that. It is clearly easy to state that
3 our income, as a minimum, will increase by 2.52 million, our economy is now in a much more
4 bouyant position than it has been for a number of years, and one would expect that the above
5 figures are conservative, as they were achieved in the most severe economic downturn.

6
7 It's quite clear also that the purpose of putting people first was to gain efficiencies by the
8 merging of Town Councils into one local authority and while I haven't had direct access to the
9 operational cost figures yet, one can deduce from the basis of information available that the cost
10 of the public reps will be reduced alone, my figure was higher than the one of the Head of
11 Finance, but it is significant. But we also expect the amount of refund on vacant property and
12 bad debts provision will also be reduced.

13
14 And this morning we got the good news that the Corporate Policy Group, we took in over 2
15 million in the NPPR receipts just over a month ago. No account has been taken in growth, or
16 savings in this budgetary process. This provides a net additional income of 3 million before
17 NPPR, more than adequate to cover non-discretionary items and restore vital services.

18
19 In relation to services cut over the last number of years we should make a case to the Department
20 to use additional surplus generated through LPT of 3.72 million to reinstate these services. In
21 conclusion, we of the group have clearly presented an alternative that can stand up to scrutiny
22 and is based on strong factual information and evidence. Our position is now to assert local
23 democracy and that starts here today. We'll continue to support the people of Wicklow, who
24 suffered enough during the recent period of austerity.

25
26 Our motion Chairman will read as follows: "In accordance with Section 20 of the Finance Local
27 Property Tax Act 2012, we the elected members of Wicklow County Council formally resolve to
28 vary the basic rate of Local Property Tax in respect of residential property situated in Wicklow
29 County Council administration, we propose a local adjustment factor of minus 15% for the year
30 2015, we call on the chief executive and Minister for the Environment to put in place all the
31 necessary arrangements which will allow this Council to notify the Revenue Commissioners of
32 our intention prior to the September 2014 deadline. Signed by the members of Fianna Fail
33 party." Thank you.

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you councillor. Can I have a seconder for that?

1 Cllr VANCE: I'll second it.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Could you forward it to the meeting administrator please. Okay Cllr
3 Ryan?

4 Cllr RYAN: Cathaoirleach thank you, I suppose if they would have taken out "by the Fianna
5 Fail members" I might have seconded that myself on behalf of the Fine Gael group. But Fine
6 Gael group do believe that it is fair and justified at this point in time to reduce the local property
7 tax by 15%.

8

9 I think it's clear that the level of property tax being paid in Wicklow is one of the highest outside
10 of Dublin, and we don't believe that's necessarily justified. The fear is that there is a sort of
11 expectation now that people are paying property tax that we'll be able to deliver more services
12 and better services and I actually think that we can actually do that, even though we're constantly
13 being told from the senior management of this organisation that it's all about money and if we
14 don't get that we won't be able to deliver the services, but I think we've got to be a lot smart they
15 are how we do business and we've got to focus on efficiency and effectiveness on how we
16 deliver and transact our business and deliver to the communities and citizens all over this county.

17

18 We're lucky enough in the Fine Gael group to have two qualified accountants, so that, we've
19 benefited from that from the point of view that we have been able to undertake a full and detailed
20 review of the information that's been provided both from the Council to us and also from a range
21 of other sources, and carried out some comparative analysis of other local authorities, and we
22 feel that by our figures that Wicklow County Council is fully funded, and can deliver the same
23 level of services as last year with some increases in certain areas based on a 15% reduction.

24

25 And again as Cllr Casey said, critical to this assessment, now that we know there is an additional
26 income stream into the Council coffers of €2 million that's been received from the Non-Principal
27 Private Residence, NPPR charge, in terms of outstanding charges and penalties, which by the
28 way we actually think is quite exorbitant and that's a completely different issue we need to
29 discuss and debate, but the reality is that that money has actually come in, in cash terms, €
30 million, I'm disappointed that in the documentation that came forward from the Council that
31 there was no mention of that or it wasn't really updated to us, that it just came out at the last
32 minute.

33

34 Because as you can imagine, in terms of the deficit of 3 odd million that the Council has, that

1 makes a huge impact on that, and it's also I'd like to believe it's up to us as to where that 2
2 million should actually be channelled into, whether or not we should reduce the deficit or
3 whether some of that money can be used for the expansion of services here.
4

5 We also believe that the general improvement in the economy, reduced unemployment and
6 increased economic activity will lead to a much stronger financial position for this Council and I
7 think even Cllr Casey was sort of saying that the economic buoyancy and improved finances,
8 thanks to the present government, mind you I don't know if you added that bit!

9 Cllr VANCE: He didn't say that!

10 Cllr RYAN: Okay I'll add that bit! But anyway,

11 Cllr VANCE: From a low base...

12 Cllr RYAN: Oh don't be starting!
13

14 But the reality is when we were just talking honestly, when we were going through the process
15 of trying to pinpoint where what monies are available, what monies are spent, it has been really,
16 really challenging and I know there are certain aspects to, handed down from on high as to how
17 you should actually put these into the different formats that you do, but it's really difficult to get
18 clear transparency as to what we take in and what we spend, where we get our knocks from and
19 exactly what we're spending every penny on. I think in the area of transparency, the public out
20 there want this body to be hugely transparent and they want us to be here to really find out that
21 every penny that's been taken in is accounted for and every penny that's spent is actually spent on
22 worthwhile things that's to the benefit of people in the county.
23

24 I just propose that, as an aside to the 15% reduction, I propose, I think it would be smart if each
25 grouping here, including the party groupings and independents, had a cross-party group and
26 independents set up to work much, much closer with the officials in the finance department,
27 ahead of the estimates, so we're going in with greater clarity as to how that whole process works.
28

29 I do also believe that what's critically important here is that once we get that clarity on the
30 money that there is more devolvement because at the moment there is a sense of frustration
31 around this Council that we actually don't have much power. I have know there's the
32 discretionary and non-discretionary piece, particularly at municipal level, it's really the case we
33 want the power to go back to the people and at the end of the day, we are the representatives of
34 people, we need to be the ones makes those choices about where money is spent and what

1 projects it is spent on. There's a sense at the moment that that simply isn't there.

2
3 We also believe that there is an opportunity to contain costs in a greater manner. So overall,
4 based on fairness and equity we believe that 15% reduction in the property tax to the people of
5 Wicklow is the right thing to do.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr Brady?

7 Cllr BRADY: Thanks Cathaoirleach. Sinn Fein will be supporting a 15% reduction in the
8 property tax, we have been trying to introduce this motion going back to the very first council
9 meeting of this newly elected Council, unfortunately that process was stopped, we were told we
10 had to wait until today to present that motion, so Sinn Fein have been calling all along for a 15%
11 reduction, we went to the electorate in the elections in May and we received a mandate from the
12 electorate to use the legislation to seek a 15% reduction.

13
14 Now having said that, 15% is not enough in my mind. I think this is an unjust tax and to quote
15 our Taoiseach, he says it's morally unjust to tax the family home. And he said that just prior to
16 the last election. He got elected, and he introduced this property tax. I stand over that statement,
17 I still believe it is morally unjust to tax someone's home, Enda Kenny believed it then, he
18 obviously doesn't believe it now.

19
20 Unfortunately the legislation ties our hands as elected representatives. I would like to see that
21 tax scrapped altogether, I think it is morally unjust. And Sinn Fein have committed to abolishing
22 it if after entering government after the next election.

23
24 I see this process here today as the first step in that process to abolishing it. And any vote on the
25 matter here isn't in my mind or Sinn Fein's mind an endorsement of the property tax, I'm
26 fundamentally opposed to it, as are Sinn Fein, but this is set in stone to its overall abolishment.
27 Let's call a spade a spade, when we were told the LPT, Local Property Tax was going to go to
28 fund local services, that myth has been exposed and blown out of the water. Last year when it
29 was first introduced we know all the money collected here in Wicklow didn't fund one iota in
30 terms of public services in Wicklow, the only thing it did fund was the installation of water
31 meters by Irish Water across Wicklow, that process which started in the county last week.

32
33 And that continues right up until today where we're being told that we don't have discretionary
34 spend over all of the money collected here, that 40% of it has been allocated before we even get

1 to spend one penny, or we have a say in what way it is going to be spent.

2
3 The bottom line here is people cannot afford to pay this morally unjust tax. This coupled with
4 the grossly unfair water charges will see households paying up to a thousand euro come January,
5 when the first bills from Irish Water land on our doors. A €50 saving some would argue isn't
6 going to make a big difference.

7
8 Some from the top table would say sure it's less than 1 euro a week if we impose this 15%
9 saving, I think it's going to effect 57% of all households, 53,000 households in the county, 57%
10 of those will see a saving of €50 per annum, that's one euro a week, as someone said earlier on
11 that's a sliced pan every week. That's the difference for a family, that's what it boils down to for
12 an awful lot of people in this county of ours, who are struggling, not just to pay mortgages, not
13 just to pay the property tax, but to put the food on the table and feed the children.

14
15 So it is going to make a saving, it's going to be money going back into the local economy here,
16 but it's not enough. There's going to be still up to a thousand euro being taken out of their
17 pockets and Sinn Fein want to see all of those unjust taxes being done away with.

18
19 I want to touch on the public consultation farce, which was rolled out by this Council. It's
20 shambolic to see less than 100 people from across Wicklow engaged in the consultation process,
21 that's not because they don't want a reduction, it's not because they want a reduction either, it's
22 because this process wasn't sold to the people of Wicklow. Sticking an ad in a local newspaper
23 and hoping people will read it and engage in the process doesn't wash, I think we as a Council
24 should have been more proactive, there should have been at least one public meeting organised
25 by this Council in each of the Municipal Districts to engage directly with the constituents that we
26 all represent, and I hope that will be taken on board and rolled out next year, because 98 people
27 engaging in this and the Chamber of Commerce isn't proper consultation.

28
29 In relation to the monies, what we are going to be left with after and hopefully the motion is
30 passed here, we're going to be left with a so-called discretionary spend of 8,828,669 left after it,
31 if it is supported. I want to know how it will be allocated to the Municipal Districts, is it going
32 to be shared out based on the size of each of the districts, or what way it is going to be done?
33 Because that needs to be fair, it needs to be equitable, I think people need to see clarity here, they
34 need to see openness and transparency, that's what this whole process is drastically lacking, is

1 openess and transparency.

2
3 As I started off by saying, people were sold a pup in terms of the implementation of this, they
4 were told it was going to fund local services, it's not. The only services it funded last year was
5 the installation of water meters and other stealth taxes.

6
7 So again just to conclude, Sinn Fein will be supporting the 15% reduction, not because we're in
8 favour of the property tax, but because we see this as the beginning of the end of this unjust tax
9 and we'll ultimately, when we get into power, abolish the property tax.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay thank you. Next up is Cllr Timmins?

11 Cllr TIMMINS: Thank you Chairman, just a few brief points. First of all outside of Dublin,
12 Wicklow has the highest tax per house in the whole country, the source of this is the Revenue
13 Commissioners, the average house tax in Wicklow is higher than anywhere outside of Dublin
14 city, in fact it's higher than one part of Dublin, Dublin South as well, okay?

15
16 So the same house in Wicklow pays higher than anywhere else in the country outside of Dublin.
17 This higher tax in Wicklow residents is totally unfair, why should Wicklow people pay double
18 what people in some other counties pay? Why should they pay double for what essentially is the
19 same services as other counties are getting?

20
21 We as councillors have a chance for the first time to have a say in the tax of households in this
22 county, and our say, even though it's quite limited, just 15%, nevertheless it has a real as well as
23 symbolic significance, I think we should take the opportunity and exercise our right to do that.

24
25 We can argue about what services were cut in 2014, I've read through in detail the figures given
26 to us, but the document received lists this out, but in my view this is a very one-sided document,
27 it doesn't give the full picture, it does not refer to savings that could be made in our budget, for
28 example we spend 2 or 3 million in overtime, there's no mention of how we could reduce that or
29 make savings. All the document does is set out how the increased costs are going to happen and
30 essentially it's built up, a bit like our annual budget meeting here, what happens is we start it by
31 saying the rates are going to increase by X percent, up to a few years ago they did, the rates will
32 be X amount and then we work back the figures, so we'll spend all that money we'll get from
33 rates.

1 The same has been done with property tax, the starting point is we're not going to reduce the tax
2 at all, then we come up with figures that will fit with the spend of that extra 3.2 million, and we'll
3 use figures that, where we can make cutbacks in 2014, where we have less income net deficit in
4 our income of maybe 3.4 million, so we'll spread that over 10 years 250,000 a year, so we've
5 come up with ways, accounting ways of getting rid of essentially 3.5 million.

6
7 The problem is if we had full belief that the extra money that we get, the extra 3.5 million, if we
8 had full belief that that would see that on the ground, we would see it in our communities and
9 towns and villages and countryside, then we could have a proper argument, that really is the crux
10 of the problem here. That most of the councillors don't have enough confidence in the fact that if
11 that is even retained, and it's an unfair tax as I said earlier, because Wicklow is penalised more
12 than any other county outside of Dublin, even if it was being retained, we don't have the
13 confidence that that money would be seen on the ground, that's really the crux of the problem.
14 That's an issue that we as councillors and the executive have to come to terms with and have to
15 deal with.

16
17 I like Cllr Casey sat through ten budgets here, it is a really frustrating and time wasting exercise,
18 we end up arguing over 3,000 here, 5,000 there and the budget is 100 million, so we're not
19 dealing with real figures. I would also argue that among the non-discretionary figures referred to
20 I would argue that some of them can be discretionary and we can have arguments and talks
21 around them.

22
23 But it's up to us as councillors, to query more, find out more and it's up to the management to
24 engage with us realistically in whatever grouping that Cllr Ryan sensibly came up with, that
25 might be a way of working it out, we won't work it out today with 32 of us around the table, we
26 might get certain ideas but not a realistic solution.

27
28 The other thing is if we reduce by 15% we still have excess of 880,000 over what we would have
29 last year, okay the management will come back and say well you really need one and a half
30 million, I would query that, there are savings that we don't know about, you might ask what
31 savings are you going to come up with? I don't know, because I don't know enough information
32 about where the savings could come from. The executive would know where there are savings
33 and could work at doing that, I just refer to overtime as a random example, one that I am aware
34 of, that's quite a high bill.

1
2 And also remember when we're deciding here today that houses will be revalued for the purpose
3 of property tax in the next couple of years, they are only going one way, so that actually 3.2
4 million will go higher, so we reduce by 15%, we have an 800,000 surplus, property will revalue
5 in the next year or two and the figure will go up again and there is going to be quite a surplus, so
6 I think it would be completely premature to leave it as it is.

7
8 For those reasons I have outlined I will certainly support without any shadow of a doubt the
9 reduction of 15%.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay thank you councillor. Cllr Winters?

11 Cllr WINTERS: Thanks Cathaoirleach. As many of the fellow councillors mentioned the local
12 property tax was introduced to provide services to the residents and businesses of their area, in
13 our case County Wicklow. The workshop this morning and the detail provided this afternoon by
14 the finance director, it was basically all doom and gloom. If we maintain the status quo, we don't
15 vary the rate, we'll have an additional 3 and a half million, which the officials have already
16 spent, one and a half million of it will go just to maintain the current service level of 2014, we
17 are told the budget is a reserve function and yet today for the first time we learn that the officials
18 decided to reduce the 2014 housing repairs budget by 200 grand without any recourse to any of
19 us, they took 150,000 off the library services, in fact the officials took €907,000 of expenditure
20 from categories of their choosing.

21
22 Now what I don't know today is was that reduction because our budget income was reduced or
23 did the officials just move the money to another category? If this is a reserve function, I believe
24 we should be consulted if there are significant budgetary changes. And I don't know why we as
25 elected representatives were not consulted. And we, maybe we would have chosen different
26 services to reduce by 907,000.

27
28 Now Cllr Timmins mentioned an overtime figure of between 2 and 3 million, I would actually
29 like a breakdown of that figure by department, if it's all weekend road maintenance or winter
30 road maintenance due to flooding or snow or whatever, maybe it's acceptable, but we need to
31 know which department is spending the money and why is the overtime allocated, who is it --
32 not by person, but by department, who is spending it. I have a proposal, I'd like to put, and I
33 would say, we as the Fine Gael group, and I certainly want to see 15% reduction in the property
34 tax and we also want to see the setting up of a Council subcommittee made up of all political

1 groupings to work with Council officials to bring greater transparency to the budgetary process,
2 in an effort to achieve efficiencies and deliver greater value for money for the people of County
3 Wicklow.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Have I a seconder for that?

5 Cllr McLOUGHLIN: I'll second that.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr Cullen?

7 Cllr CULLEN: Yes Chairman, it's amazing to be here today listening that all three political
8 parties are now supporting the property tax, I never thought I'd live to see this, it's amazing that
9 this is happening. But what the figure nobody is talking about here today is the 85%, there are
10 two figures on the table here today.

11
12 There's 85% and there's 15%. By voting for 15% reduction you're leaving 85% property tax on
13 family homes. I'm not aware of any councillor here who went around a few months ago looking
14 for a mandate to leave 85% tax, maybe it's just as an independent I'm being consistent, I opposed
15 property tax of the family home because I have always posed the question how many times does
16 a family or person have to pay for their home? People have to pay stamp duty when they bought
17 their home, have to pay income tax on every pound or euro they borrow to pay their mortgage,
18 so there was already up to 60 or 70% tax on it, they had to pay huge interest rates on their
19 mortgage, so how many times do a family have to pay for the roof over their head?

20
21 And saying to people well we're taking 15% off, big deal, that's crumbs from the table. Given
22 that next year property tax in this county will rise by 17%. So big deal, and from January it's
23 going to be 350 to 700 on water charges on a family, so taking 15% and crow about it here, big
24 deal. Nobody should be proud of that. I believe that there should be no property tax on the
25 family home.

26
27 I hear people saying, giving out about commercial rates being increased by 3 and a half percent
28 the last few years, the same people giving out about it are the same people who voted for it and
29 in some instances proposed it. So give me a break.

30
31 Chairman, what we should be talking about here today is not this Mickey Mouse cut of 15% and
32 leaving 85% on the family home, what we should be talking about here today is resources and
33 the fact that Dublin, that Irish Water are going to be taking over 2 billion -- €2,000 million a year
34 of resources out of this county through the reservoirs of this county and there is not a word about

1 putting rates on those, on those reservoirs, not a word in these estimates, I brought it up with the
2 County Manager several months ago, I brought it up at the Council that we should put a rateable
3 valuation on those two reservoirs, because they are not natural reservoirs they are man-made,
4 man constructed, Blessington was constructed in the 1930s and the Roundwood reservoir was
5 constructed in the 1860s, so therefore they should have a rateable valuation and given that they
6 are generating an income of over 2 billion a year and now we are going to supply 43% of
7 national public water supply from this county and not one red cent is being charged or levied on
8 a rate which would bring up in tens of millions of euro income into this Council, make this one
9 of the richest counties in Ireland, not a word about that in the estimates. That's real change.
10 That's real positive change. Not this Mickey Mouse stuff that we're on about here today.

11
12 Chairman I just look here at what we're being told about property taxes, and where's the
13 community gain in all of this? There's no community gain in Wicklow. Millions of funds that
14 are going to be gathered in Wicklow over the next few years are going to be transferred by
15 central government to Roscommon to fill pot holes and put footpaths in Roscommon, Donegal,
16 Leitrim, Cavan, not spent here in this county. And yet there's no-one kicking up about that.
17 There's no-one saying why is revenue raised in Wicklow not kept in Wicklow? The same as the
18 motor tax budget, a huge amount of that money is in central government and dispersed around
19 the rest of the country.

20
21 It seems to me that Wicklow is becoming the famous milk cow for the rest of the country, we are
22 being milked for everything we've got, taxed for everything we've got, we're left there.
23 Everybody says go down to Wicklow and take whatever tax you can get out of the people of
24 Wicklow because the public representatives are quiet they lie down, like an auld dog, roll over
25 for anything.

26
27 I won't agree to put any property tax on a family home, whether it's 85% or nothing, I'm not
28 going to support that. Once you vote for property tax today you're committed to voting for
29 property tax. You can't come out next year and say I was for property tax last September, but
30 against it today. You're either for a thing or against it, you can't be half in and half out. That's just
31 hypocrisy and I won't tolerate it.

32
33 Chairman, if somebody tells me that you're against property tax and then votes for 85% property
34 tax that's hypocrisy and I won't support it. I'm independent, I was elected as independent and I'm

1 not going to simply roll around with the three parties and say yeah, we've no choice. I would
2 like all the parties and the independents to come together and demand that we'll bring in rateable
3 charges on Irish Water for the two reservoirs and that would mean that we would have no
4 property tax whatsoever in this county that we could reduce commercial rates to virtually 0 in
5 this county. Instead of that we have this Irish Water, which is a retirement home for County
6 Managers and other officials, just wasting and drawing big salaries, do nothing at the expense of
7 this county, it's about time someone stood up for the people of this county and started speaking.
8 It's about time the TDs of this county started standing up, instead of that when the Water Bill
9 went through in 2007 there wasn't one Wicklow TD turned up in the Dáil for the vote. And then
10 people are saying we're serious, now Chairman I would like you and you're up there near the
11 reservoir in Roundwood, as Chairman to go and look about having a rateable valuation put on
12 the two reservoirs. And I won't listen to Cllr Casey shouting in the background here.

13 Cllr CASEY: They are paying commercial rates already.

14 Cllr CULLEN: You voted for the rates you are giving out about now.

15 Cllr CASEY: I never mentioned commercial rates.

16 Cllr CULLEN: I would like to see some policy brought forward here about charging Irish Water
17 a rate for the €2 billion of income they are going to make from the two reservoirs in Wicklow, as
18 a matter of urgency, then we can abolish all property charges.

19 Cllr BRADY: It's not in our power, you know that. That's national legislation.

20 Cllr CULLEN: I didn't interrupt you.

21 Cllr BRADY: It's national legislation, not within our power.

22 Cllr CULLEN: Anyway Chairman, I ask you to come up with some document as Chairman.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Are you making a proposal? Will you put it in writing like Fine Gael and
24 Fianna Fail?

25 Cllr CULLEN: I'm proposing here, I don't have to put it in writing, I'm proposing from the floor
26 that the County Manager would prepare a rateable document, a rateable valuation on the two
27 reservoirs and if I have a seconder for that, for the estimates. Now Chairman, other councillors
28 are unhappy they never thought about it.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, it's been seconded by Cllr Fortune. We'll come back to the
30 proposals at the end. Okay Cllr Fortune.

31 Cllr FORTUNE: Before I start can I ask Cllr Casey to stop interrupting, no-one...

32 Cllr CASEY: I didn't interrupt you yet.

33 Cllr FORTUNE: Nobody interrupted Cllr Casey when he made his prepared speech, we are all
34 democratically elected, you might inform him of that.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, proceed councillor, come on.

2 Cllr FORTUNE: Okay. I will. Chairman, the first point I'd like to make is that obviously in our
3 group we haven't forced any whips, all members are entitled to have their say, I don't agree with
4 property tax at all, I said that consistently in this chamber. This has been forced on top of us.
5 And obviously at the end of the day people, something forced on them they want to pay the least
6 possible, I think that's right.

7
8 But I know what the Council are up to as well, listening this morning and reading the documents,
9 I'll get into that. The councillors in the chamber just need to, I think they should look out for
10 themselves, that's what I'm going to do.

11
12 Because we are being set up here, we are going to be told that if the property tax is cut or in my
13 case I don't agree with it at all, it shouldn't be there, we're going to be told and the public will be
14 told, the TDs will say the same thing, so Cllr Cullen's point about the TDs is very important, that
15 needs to be on the table and discussed. And the numbers that are being thrashed around, even if
16 it is a 15% cut here today they are still going to be somewhere between 0.8 and 1.2 million more
17 than what we got as we look at this year's budget. You made some reference yourself chair on
18 the radio, so there is some background to that.

19
20 Someone already said making their speeches earlier on, that we should basically go back to
21 central government, I would agree with that, and look for, to get our funding.

22
23 Now putting people first has been mentioned and is mentioned here regularly in the last number
24 of months, and we all know that was taken out of a textbook, just snapped out, but in that same
25 textbook it talks about hard line shift and what's needed in the current environment and the
26 so-called, is a massive paradigm shift, basically what we're given this morning and
27 correspondence with, is the same old same old, and the world has dramatically changed.

28
29 For example in the circular 14/2014 it talks about the latest projections to the revenue is 500
30 million, I'd like to know what is Wicklow's collected percentage of this, how much are we
31 paying as a county? Wicklow homeowners are paying a higher property tax than the majority of
32 other counties everyone stated that already. Why is that not used as equalisation across the
33 county rather than having someone in Wicklow paying 6 or 700 or a thousand versus a house
34 similar or bigger in other parts of the country paying quarter of that? It's just ridiculous.

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Now I'd like to deal with the report that will come out from Mr Sheehy. And just before I do, also the 2 million that came in from NPPR, where that's that in all the discussions we're having and all the numbers? As a general point I'd say that the information that's put before us is not detailed enough, it's not proper communication whatsoever. You really couldn't make decisions on it, I think it's impossible for members here today to make any decisions on any part of this.

So what I would like to see is I'd like to see an exact breakdown of all our income and expenditure, I don't believe we've been given that. I think this document is actually, kind of threatening, I made that in the opening comment, in other words if we drop by 15% all hell will come and nothing will be done in the county and it will be the members' fault, I think members should be careful about buying into that kind of stuff.

How are we going to meet all the expectations put in this? Can we not have a three-year plan like any business would do? Give us a three-year plan, put it out before us, show us different things, there is nothing in this document about income. We're an organisation and recently we've had a CEO put into the organisation, that title, normally in an organisation run like that, you look at the way you run things, you look where income is going to come from, why don't you put stuff before us that will bring in other income streams, some kind of lateral thinking, we're talking about think tanks and various things, why aren't we getting that as part of the budget process to see what's going on?

Also on page 3 of that particular document, at the bottom, it lists four items, I need more detail on this, feedback on any consultation held, as some councillors said already, it was a sham of consultation, even the consultation that was held, it was unanimous, 98 percent of people want reductions.

On page 4 of it, when you look at the estimated income and expenditure, grants and subsidies, we have 19 million and in next year it will be 14 million, other expenditures you look at the expenditure 63 million in current year and 48 million in the year coming, so we need to get more definitive breakdown, we need to get into every single category of expenditure and look at the headings that money is spent on, it may be possible that money is spent on activities and items where we can make a serious contribution to looking after our constituents, which is what we are elected to do and also being fair to the local authority. So I think that needs urgent, urgent

1 attention.

2
3 And when you look at the balance sheet, we're talking of assets of 99 million, and we look at
4 current liabilities of 43 million, I'd like to see a breakdown of all that, what the detail is, how it's
5 made up, how it comes together, are we sitting on properties, lands, buildings, that in actual fact
6 we shouldn't be sitting on? Whereby maybe we can realise some income from those, that would
7 contribute to us not having to screw the people of County Wicklow. So I'd like breakdowns on
8 that.

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay.

10 Cllr FORTUNE: I'm not finished yet Chair. I'm trying not to repeat what has been said by some
11 other people.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much.

13 Cllr FORTUNE: At the bottom of page 8, the impact on service delivery, I don't like veiled
14 threats when I'm asked to look at something in a proper professional manner, I would say the
15 comment I would make at the bottom of that page under item C, it's equally the responsibility of
16 the executive of this local authority to come up with solutions, not just the members, the
17 members will be asked to vote on all these things and then hung out to dry depending on how it
18 goes, so the executive have a serious role and we need to come and look at -- if we are going to
19 give away 2.6 million, look at ways to get it back in. I'd like to see proposals put before me as a
20 member to see how that could be done, then we can discuss it.

21
22 It has been advocated earlier that maybe somebody from each grouping could come together,
23 that's not a bad idea at all, and my attitude to this is, it's got to stop going forward, that here we
24 are, this is probably the most serious meeting we'll have in this local authority, and we're
25 meeting here today, expected to come up with a vote and result and then so we meet a deadline
26 of the 30th of September, that's not on, if we have to have two more meetings you have them,
27 this is too bloody serious.

28
29 Then look at page 9 where there's a table thrown in of 1.5 million that we cut back last year and
30 the innuendo is that maybe we can do that, I'm not interested in could be or maybe and all that
31 stuff, I want to know what we're proposing, how we're going to make it happen, where it's all
32 going to come from, not playing these kind of games. I think there is a game being played with
33 this.

1 On page 10, having read the document, I don't see what is detailed that makes sense. I think the
2 executive needs to explain and breakdown much better, and needs to stop blackmailing us.

3
4 At the bottom of the page "we say below is a sample of projects which could be funded or part
5 funded if there was no reduction", the same trend, there's a wish list here at the back of this, of
6 4.6 million and really I don't know how this was put together, but I could be very cynical, I think
7 I'll hold it for now.

8
9 The other question I would ask on page 10, where we say could be funded or part funded if there
10 was no reduction, I don't like the word could. But I'll ask a question, because we talk about all
11 these things we have to find some solutions, I wonder would a solution be that perhaps the cash
12 that is probably sitting in the Wicklow Enterprise Park company, could that be taken into the
13 discretionary funding of the local authority and we've a lot of Council people involved in that
14 organisation, from Mr Sheehy to past managers to councillors and past councillors, why don't we
15 look at something like that? Why don't we examine that and see if funding is in there, we need a
16 paradigm shift in all this. If we think we're going to solve this by acting and behaving the way
17 we acted for the last ten years it just won't work. And we'll be silly, I'd be silly as a member to
18 buy into that kind of logic.

19
20 We need massive more information, we need it spelled out in very simple terms, not hidden
21 under accountancy terms, okay give me if there is one or two or three accountants here, but a lot
22 of the rest of us can read numbers and figures, without getting into technical side of it, that's
23 where the expertise is from, but let's give it to us in a proper manner. But let's look at something
24 like I suggested, is there a bunch of funding we can get that, are we spending money on activities
25 that could be looked and say okay we shouldn't spend money on that, what are we doing that for?
26 You'd be surprised, maybe you'll end up with 2 million, 2 and a half million, yippee the problem
27 is solved.

28
29 So I think we need a lot, lot more information than what was put before us.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay.

31 Cllr FORTUNE: I'm not finished yet. You allowed Cllr Casey make a speech.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: 12 minutes, Cllr Casey spoke on behalf of a Fianna Fail group. You are
33 at 12 minutes now at this stage. Wrap it up.

34 Cllr FORTUNE: Just one more minute and I'll wrap it up.

1
2 Okay the final comment I'll make is, the impression I take from this process, I felt it for a while,
3 I've articulated it at previous sessions, is that it ties back to something I said earlier, what are we,
4 are we just a kind of a spending organisation like some large committee that runs a certain way?
5 If we're a business and if we're Wicklow Inc, will be run as a business and we hear about think
6 tanks and this carry on, never see anything coming out of it, if that's the way to go about this, we
7 have to come up with innovative ways that don't screw the citizens of County Wicklow to bring
8 in income, I would love to sit down with a bunch of interested people and see can we crack that,
9 instead of screwing the residents of the county all the time.

10
11 As I said at the outset, I think the property tax is an unfair tax, I don't support it in any shape or
12 form.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay thank you councillor. Cllr Matthews?

14 Cllr MATTHEWS: Thank you Chairman, Chairman I'll support this proposal today as well, but
15 I just want to state my objections to the whole local property tax process. I think one of the most
16 cynical moves ever at the time it was brought in by the government. That you introduce a tax
17 based on house valuations, at a time the house values are at their lowest, and they are only going
18 to go one direction, and they brought it in at a time where it was brought in at what seemed to be
19 a relatively reasonable rate, that's just going to climb and increase over time. We're already
20 seeing it in the property sections in the paper, monthly increases, that's only going to drive it one
21 way.

22
23 The other objection I have and I'm cynical about, is the percentage that's used to work out the
24 property tax, the 0.18 percent, that's well below European averages and that's only going to go
25 one direction as well. And that's going to be up.

26
27 So we're talking about €50 per household on average, that's pittance compared to what we're
28 going to look at in property tax in future, we're going to be up around a thousand mark before we
29 know it, this 15% reduction, this 50 per household is a very small amount.

30
31 As regards the budget process, I have a bit of cynicism about that as well in that we don't know
32 exactly what our expenditure will be, we don't know exactly what the central government
33 funding will be, yet it's handed over to us that we can cut property tax by 15%, that process is
34 wrong as well, there's a lack of transparency, we're pitched here against each other over this €50,

1 it's the bigger money that we're not sure of. I'm not happy about that either.

2
3 The money is sucked in by Revenue and then portioned out to the local authorities, we've no
4 breakdown of figures for areas, I don't know what the money taken in by Bray electoral area is,
5 I'd like to see that, I know I spoke with Lorraine about it already, I don't know where we get
6 those figures, but we should write to Revenue and look for a breakdown of the figures if we can't
7 do it ourselves.

8
9 What a lot of people are afraid to say is that if you want good local services you have to charge
10 local tax. And it has to be implemented and has to be run by local government. But that's not
11 what we're getting here. This is still centrally controlled and it's been apportioned out to us,
12 we're fighting amongst each other for small amounts of money and I'm cynical about that whole
13 process.

14
15 Now some people made recommendations about making suggestions to government, I think we
16 should look at the whole property tax system and suggest that they seriously look at site
17 valuation tax rather than a property tax. Now I'm not going into the pros and cons of it here, but
18 if we are going to write collectively as a Council to say we're cutting our property tax by 15%,
19 we want central government to make up that funding, we also want them to consider site
20 valuation tax as well, because I think this was rushed in by a government, I don't think it was
21 thought through and we're going to suffer for it and people won't get better services.

22
23 I spoke to a lot of people and they are willing to pay a tax locally, but they want to see
24 something for it. They want to see something back. They don't want to see less service, they
25 don't want to pay property tax and won't get the grass cut next year, people are hearing that out
26 there and it's not right. We are paying a lot every year and we need to be fair. But that's why I'm
27 going to support it today thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you councillor. Cllr Ruttle?

29 Cllr RUTTLE: Yes Chairman, I've been here a long time, the many budgets we've had since
30 1980s we were only ever concentrating on commercial rates, what would you do with
31 commercial rate and indeed for many years the commercial rate payers have been whipping boys
32 in the situation and it has been difficult, but all the time the Council sought to have this power
33 and that power. Now whatever way you look at it we can only deal with what's presented to us
34 by the system, no-one in this chamber is capable of changing the system.

1
2 So here we have an opportunity to vary something up or down by 15%, so I think we must go in
3 that direction and reduce it. The public have been hammered for 7 years now and all of the time
4 this is coming at them from property taxes and variety of things. This is the first opportunity that
5 in a small and maybe symbolic way, we have an opportunity to pull something back. And it's
6 the first outer sign of anything like that happening, because as I say the people have been, their
7 income has been reduced, at the very time their income has been reduced other charges are
8 coming against them to take more money out of what's left. So redress must start somewhere.
9

10 We are told things are moving forward in the country, if that's the case and hopefully it is, I
11 never want to be a pessimist or negative, receipts, etcetera will rise and we have already seen
12 indications of that in the Exchequer and if and when we get more money into the system, I
13 couldn't agree more with previous speakers who said there must be a visibility in the community
14 and our area for the money.
15

16 Because I remember speaking to councillors who are here many, many years ago, some of whom
17 would have been a relative of my own, about the ability to raise money locally and to spend
18 money locally way back, and that was a big item, I remember people would go into an area and
19 say we need X number of rural cottages, Y number of people need them and we'll build them and
20 do something. That was hugely important and appreciated, but people do need visibility for the
21 spending of money locally.
22

23 Now as regards property tax, a suggestion being made here that somehow or other people came
24 into the chamber and voted for property tax, this chamber had no competency or power in
25 property tax. Property tax came from above and we in Wicklow or Carlow or anywhere else are
26 not Republics, it came from above. My own property with the property tax situation was the
27 way it was structured, as a very blunt instrument, that it never took account of people's ability to
28 pay, you could be beneath the level for income tax, you could be on social welfare, but because
29 you might happen to live in a house, for a certain value you were stuck with it, it wasn't fair in
30 that sense, everybody got hit and some of whom were very vulnerable.
31

32 NPPR receipts were very hopeful and that's 2 million available and we have to work on that, but
33 certainly given the choice today of what we're to do, I think that we must go with the 15%
34 reduction and I think I am speaking on behalf of Cllr Nolan and myself and in that regard, that's

1 what we'll be voting.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you councillor. Cllr Kavanagh.

3 Cllr KAVANAGH: First of all I'd like to say I'm totally oppose to the concept of property tax
4 and I concur with Cllr Cullen, how many times does a person need to pay for their own home?

5
6 Also I'd like to say the local property tax is effectively replacing the General Allocation Fund,
7 which heretofore was the main source of income for local authorities, and I don't think the
8 occasion can pass today without recognising that withholding of the General Allocation Fund to
9 all local authorities across the country is a saving to the government who in turn will continue to
10 use that money to bail out European banks and bond holders.

11
12 Local property tax and water rates is something dreamed up by the Troika, which has been
13 imposed on us by this government and the only people that stand to gain is the Troika and the
14 European banks, it's of no benefit to the people of this country. I would like to call on the
15 government to stop being the nodding dog to Europe and quit the imposition of these taxes,
16 thank you.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you councillor. Last speaker, Cllr Whitmore.

18 Cllr WHITMORE: Thanks chair, I will be supporting the 15% reduction in the local property
19 tax, and in making that decision there was a few stats that were incredibly important. The first is
20 that people of Wicklow pay the fourth highest local property tax in the country, that's 18 percent
21 higher than the national average. We have 25% less money spent on us by our local authority
22 and that's due to under funding by government.

23
24 And people of Wicklow also have a disposable income that's less than the national average, so
25 contrary to popular belief Wicklow is not a wealthy county. It is the only county in Ireland with
26 a lower than average disposable income that's being asked to pay a higher than average local
27 property tax. So in light of that, I will be voting to reduce local property tax by 15%.

28
29 Now I'm new to this Council, I'm not sure how previous budget discussions went on, but the
30 sense I get from this Council is that we're taking a very passive approach to this, we're being told
31 this is how much money we're getting from central government and we're fighting amongst
32 ourselves to divvy it up and say who is going to pay what and there's a lot of finger pointing
33 going on. I think what I would like to see is us turning the question back and actually going
34 back to government and saying, we have some tough questions here to ask you, why is it that the

1 people of Wicklow are paying the property tax and yet local government funding is way below
2 that of other counties? I think we need to change the tone of our discussions and start putting the
3 questions to the TDs, Department of Finance and Department of Local Government.

4
5 In light of that I would like to see us stand together as a Council, I don't think anybody in this
6 Council wouldn't like to see more money coming into the Wicklow budget from central
7 government and if we stood together and actually put a submission to the Department, at least
8 we would be representing the people of this county. I know that it is difficult, as Cllr Ruttle said,
9 no-one is capable of changing the system, I think that we can. But what we can certainly do is
10 we can try. And we can represent the people of this county by actually voicing their concerns,
11 saying it is not fair that they pay more than the national average, it is not fair.

12
13 I have some stats here, Wicklow pays 52% higher local property tax than Michael Noonan's
14 constituency, that's not fair. We get 25% less spent on us than Michael Noonan's constituency
15 by local government. And we also have 6% less disposable income, these are the sort of
16 questions we should put back to central government and try to get as much money as possible
17 into our Council, so we can then get discussions about how to spend it going on.

18
19 So I will propose, I agree with Cllr Winters' proposal to get a subcommittee looking at these
20 budgetary matters, I would also like to see that subcommittee writing a -- putting a submission to
21 the Department, requesting an increase in our budget to reflect the higher tax that people of
22 Wicklow pay, also to argue against the 20% being redistributed across counties that don't pay the
23 same level of local property tax, that don't pay the same price for houses, that don't have the
24 same mortgage repayments and that have higher disposable income than people of Wicklow
25 have.

26
27 I think we should establish a subcommittee as soon as possible and I think it would also be a
28 good idea to bring in a representative from the Department of Local Government or Finance to
29 come in and go through those figures with us and justify the funding they are giving us. Thank
30 you.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you councillor. Cllr Behan?

32 Cllr BEHAN: Well Cathaoirleach I thoroughly agree with what Cllr Whitmore suggested. I ask
33 she make it a formal proposal, I would certainly second it, I think it's a very, very worthwhile
34 initiative and one I definitely think we should engage in. And a lot of things have been said

1 here, but a lot I could agree with on all sides of the debate, and Cllr Cullen -- it's probably easy
2 to support on one level, but the reality is what Cllr Ruttle has said, we're being given an
3 opportunity, we might not like the ground rules, we might not agree with the concept, but I don't
4 honestly think, given an opportunity to reduce the burden on people who have had burden upon
5 burden upon burden for the last eight years, if we're given an opportunity to reduce it even by a
6 small amount, I just don't think it's tenable to vote against that opportunity. And that's the basis
7 on which I will support the various proposals, to reduce the property tax by what we can, which
8 in this case is by 15%.

9
10 But one would also have to question the government approach to this whole issue at this stage.
11 Because on one level they are saying we need to introduce these new taxes, the water charges
12 and need to introduce the property tax, yet we have the same Minister for Finance who is
13 introducing both of those charges crowing on the media during the week that the problems are all
14 solved, the economy is on the way back, growth has been achieved and in fact we won't need
15 additional money in the future, in fact we are going to have extra money to spend. And I think
16 many people, the silent majority not only in this county, but around the country, look at that
17 performance during the week will be sickened at the arrogance of a man who says we, the
18 government, have solved your problem, it's been solved on the backs of ordinary people
19 throughout this country. Yet the government and their representatives in Dáil Eireann, including
20 four of them in this constituency, have actually supported and continue to support the imposition
21 of water charges and property tax.

22
23 We're stuck with a situation where we can vary, one element of it, by 15% and I think it's right
24 that we should vary it. But the TDs from Fine Gael and Labour are the people who are imposing
25 these charges, not anybody else. They are the people who went into the Dáil and supported
26 those charges. And they are the people eventually who will have to answer for this. Because it's
27 quite clear this money is not needed by central government, they are reducing our allocation, I
28 don't know what they are going to do with the balance, we are left fighting over the spoils, but in
29 fact it's not actually necessary.

30
31 However that's another day's work I suppose. Eventually it will be decided by the people in this
32 constituency and throughout the country. But I would support the proposal to reduce by 15%. I
33 will just make one other point, perhaps there might be answers to some of the questions, I am a
34 bit intrigued that we are in -- Cllr Casey mentioned at the start, any possible increase in the

1 income from commercial rates next year as a result of the buoyancy that the Minister for Finance
2 tells us is in the economy, it's not realistic I think to state that the commercial rates won't realise
3 more money than you have said, Lorraine, on this presentation. I would ask you perhaps to
4 defend why you haven't allowed for increase in that figure, because I think an additional amount
5 coming in from commercial rates would certainly help the Council achieve some of the
6 worthwhile objectives.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you councillor. Were you making a formal proposal, Cllr
8 Whitmore, do you want to read it out?

9 Cllr WHITMORE: So I propose that the Council write a submission to central government
10 outlining our concerns and giving -- outlining our concerns and details of our funding with other
11 counties and request an increase in the budget reflecting higher tax the people of Wicklow pay.
12 And that we request also a representative of local government and finance come and go through
13 the figures.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's seconded by Cllr Behan? Okay we'll let in Lorraine before we take
15 the proposals.

16 DIRECTOR LYNCH: I hope I hit everything, if not I'm sure you'll let me know. In preparing
17 the figures for this, something I said at the workshop this morning, we're preparing in advance of
18 the actual budget process, and it is a changed process and a changed process for the executive
19 and councillors here. We're preparing the information on the best available knowledge that we
20 have.

21
22 And you're right, a lot of information is not confirmed as yet in terms of government funding and
23 Irish Water budget, etcetera, but based on the figures we have at the moment. The figures
24 presented are draft figures, we are not saying that this is exactly where it should be spent or not,
25 but it is a proposal that we put together, things can be changed, priorities can be changed and
26 that's at the discretion of the Council.

27
28 In terms of specifics I suppose just to address a couple of things, the commercial rates, I take
29 Cllr Casey's points that they have increased in terms of the accrual over the last number of years,
30 what also has increased is the amount of rates write-off which increased from 3 million in 2009
31 to over 6 million in 2013. In addition I suppose what we have to take into account is the rates
32 collection, the percentage we have collected because of that has actually dropped, all of that has
33 to be factored in, not just the rates accrual, it's strike-offs and percentage collection and what we
34 have budgeted towards that strike-off as well.

1
2 In terms of the buoyancy and why I left out 28.7, part of that reason is the income that we get
3 from Rathdrum and Wicklow -- the additional charges is included in the 28.7, I haven't stripped
4 that out, that amounts to 99,000, so in effect there's 99,000 in there.

5
6 In preparing the budget figures, when we have any new valuation certificates or adjusted
7 valuation certificates for the budget, when it comes to November we'll have the full accrual, but
8 we'll also have to provide adequately for any strike-offs for 2015 as well.

9
10 In terms of overtime, obviously it's something I mentioned this morning, we'll have breakdown
11 of overtime, we can get it broken down by department. We stopped all overtime for internal
12 staff back in 2008 I would think, the overtime that we're incurring is for outdoor staff, we'll get a
13 breakdown, for the most part it is road maintenance or water maintenance crews and people
14 going out at weekends or night and doing winter maintenance and so on, that's where it accrues
15 from. We went through a process in 2008 to reduce and eliminate any unnecessary overtime,
16 there is obviously some overtime that will have to be incurred.

17
18 In terms of the 907,000, that's possibly a misinterpretation, we didn't cut the 907,000 from the
19 2014 budget. In preparing the 2014 budget there were extras looked for by directorates, they are
20 formed part of the consultation with each directorate with the CPG and so on, that was what was
21 required over and above what was agreed in the budget, it was never put back in, never taken
22 out, that's probably -- I just want to clear up the confusion, it's not that we've cut 907,000 out of
23 the agreed 2014 budget agreed by the members, that's not the case.

24
25 In terms of the NPPR, we have in the last couple of months, in August and more so than
26 anything, we have taken in year to date 2 million in NPPR, that's going to form part of our
27 accounts and returns for the end of the year. Obviously there is over expenditure in some areas,
28 the manager or executive this morning mentioned in terms of some Town Councils were very
29 efficient in spending their budgets, so some over expenditure we have to address, so all of that
30 will be combined and taken in as a totality at the end of the year.

31
32 Also the non-discretionary, if we look even at payroll, that's 41% of our budget, that's
33 non-discretionary, 30% is the contras, that's what I was explaining in the budget workshop this
34 morning. Things like landfill levy for Green Star, 11 million of that 97 million is a contra, in

1 and out, we get it, pay it over, so that all reduces down in terms of stripping back the 97 million,
2 what we actually have that we can, that you can, as a Council, prioritise on where it is to go.

3
4 In terms of other income generating ideas, I will welcome any suggestion that any councillor has
5 to generate more income for the local authorities, we have considered, some councillors might
6 remember, looking at imposing charges or introducing charges for recycling centres and
7 libraries, any and all options we can consider we'll be more than welcome to discuss it.

8
9 The breakdown of where expenditure has been spent is also provided for in, we do provide the
10 annual financial statement in a breakdown over -- where categories of money has been spent is
11 included, that would have been presented earlier this year and will be presented again following
12 the close of this year's accounts. I think I got most of it.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you Lorraine. So we've a number of proposals on the table,
14 I'm going to start with the first one, which was Cllr Casey's proposal. So I'll get Lorraine to read
15 out the proposal.

16 MS GALLAGHER: Proposed by Cllr Casey, seconded by Cllr Vance, on behalf of Fianna Fail
17 group. "In accordance with Section 20 of the Finance Local Property Tax Act 2012, we the
18 elected members of Wicklow County Council formally resolve to vary the basic rate of local
19 property tax in respect of residential properties situated in Wicklow County Council
20 administrative area, we propose a local adjustment factor of minus 15% for the year 2015, we
21 call on the chief executive and Minister for the Environment to put in place all necessary
22 arrangements which will allow this Council to notify the Revenue Commissioners of our
23 intention prior to the September 2014 deadline."

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay we'll take a roll call.

25 Cllr BRADY: Sorry Cathaoirleach, I propose an amendment to that, just on the very last line
26 after the last sentence there, that we include that "Wicklow County Council disagrees and objects
27 to the property tax and sees the reduction as the beginning of a process, which will ultimately see
28 the property tax being abolished."

29 Cllr CASEY: This is a formal proposal that has to be sent to the Revenue structured in that way,
30 that's the way the motion has been set out, in the legal framework, I won't accept a motion
31 attached to it, because it would jeopardise it.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. We'll go with the original and if Cllr Brady wants to put in a
33 second motion.

34 Cllr CASEY: This is written as required...

1 Cllr BRADY: Okay I'll put that forward as a separate motion.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Will you put it in writing? We'll go with a roll call on Cllr Casey's
3 proposal, okay?

4 Cllr RYAN: Just because the motions are quite alike, I am just wondering could Cllr Winters'
5 motion, as the start of it is the same, but the second part is slightly different, but I don't think it
6 will be inconsistent with that motion, if we can merge those both together?

7 MS GALLAGHER: This is to do with setting of the subcommittee, it's practically the same -- it
8 isn't too far off.

9 Cllr CASEY: I've no problem with that motion but again...

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: We'll take them separately, we're going with a roll call.

11

12 (Vote taken)

13

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Could you just clarify your vote there Cllr Cullen, against was it?

15 Cllr CULLEN: Sorry, I said I'm against 85% property tax on family homes that this resolution
16 in fact incurs upon people. That's the reality of it.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: But on this specific proposal are you for or against?

18 Cllr CULLEN: On which?

19 CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Casey's.

20 Cllr CULLEN: My position is I do not support this proposal in effect -- that this proposal of Cllr
21 Casey's confirms a property charge on the family home and I'm against it, I'm proud to stand
22 against it.

23 MS GALLAGHER: 31 for and 1 against.

24 Cllr CULLEN: I'm consistent at least, you can rant and rave, but I'm consistent. I'm not going to
25 change my vote, you know what I mean? I'm glad to see Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein and Fine Gael
26 are together...

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay that's 31 -- excuse me. Through the Chair, come on, that's 31 for
28 and 1 against. Okay we're moving on to Cllr Winters' proposal.

29 MS GALLAGHER: Proposed by Cllr Winters and seconded by Cllr McLoughlin. "Apart from
30 what we voted on, we also want to see the setting up of a councillor subcommittee made up of
31 all political groupings to work with Council officials to bring greater transparency to the
32 budgetary process in an effort to achieve efficiencies and deliver greater value for money for the
33 people of County Wicklow."

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, roll call.

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(Vote taken)

MS GALLAGHER: 30 for and 2 abstaining.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, we'll take Cllr Cullen's proposal.

MS GALLAGHER: Proposed by Cllr Cullen seconded by Cllr Fortune, that this Council will make a commercial rate charge on all reservoirs at Blessington and Roundwood.

Cllr CASEY: Just a point of clarification, are they not paying commercial rates already?

DIRECTOR LYNCH: Yes they are.

Cllr CASEY: So they're already paying commercial rates.

DIRECTOR LYNCH: The water network in Wicklow County Council was valued a number of years back and there are commercial rates being paid on it.

Cllr BEHAN: Through the chair, can I ask the question, the fact that now there's a third party company taking over ownership that have assets, would that not change the situation and at the very least I think Cllr Cullen makes a really good point that it should be examined now in the light of that new development.

DIRECTOR LYNCH: Sorry just to clarify, Irish Water, as they became water authority in January, they have taken over the payment of commercial rates on the valuation, so commercial rates to Wicklow County Council, we are receiving from Irish Water on the valuation in place, the waste water network.

Cllr CULLEN: If you read the resolution, what Irish Water are paying for is a couple of buildings, a couple of outhouses, that's not very much. What this resolution says is all the reservoirs, that means the entire acreage of the reservoirs and previously we said we couldn't put rates on all the reservoirs, but the fact is both reservoirs at Roundwood and Blessington are man-made therefore the entire reservoir, not just the couple of out buildings, but the entire capacity of the reservoir, which contains hundreds of millions of cubic metres of water, can now be rated. Now remember Irish Water will be selling this asset, this renewable asset, somewhere in the region of €2 billion a year, we're probably going to get, the way it's presently structured, a couple of thousand a year from rates. Whereas Dublin -- Irish Water isn't going to get hundreds of millions of euro. I'm not talking here about putting rates on a couple of out buildings in Blessington or in Roundwood, I'm talking about the entire capacity of both reservoirs, which were man-made and the man-made is the key thing. Because if it's man-made it's rateable. If it's natural it's not rateable. But both these reservoirs were hugely, physically dug out and made. So therefore every square inch, every square yard of these several miles in Blessington's case can be

1 -- because if you look at Irish Water's figures they are basing their valuation on the cubic
2 capacity of the reservoir and putting up their valuation based on what it is, now I know the
3 officials won't want this, but because this is basically -- that's their look out, some people might
4 be looking for jobs in retirement there, but I'm here to represent the public of Wicklow and you
5 have ordinary businesses, and factory owners in this county, if you have a factory in this county,
6 or you have a business, every square foot of your shop, your business, your factory is rateable.
7 Your carpark, your yard is, therefore it's not unreasonable now to say to Irish Water, your entire
8 reservoirs which were man-made should also be rateable.

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10 Now Chairman I would like this -- I'm happy enough if the Council agree it will be considered
11 for the estimates that we'll have, that this subcommittee can look at bringing in the rates, if that's
12 agreed I'm happy enough with that, but Chairman I want to see Dublin -- Irish Water start paying
13 for once, for what they are taking out. For instance I am long enough here on the Council, with
14 Cllr Behan, I remember we were paying water charges here in Wicklow, there was never a water
15 charge brought in on the people of Dublin, why, because they were getting water from Wicklow,
16 because Dublin Corporation were funding it by the huge corporation rates they were getting,
17 hundreds of millions of the last year of Dublin Corporation the commercial rates they got from
18 water was 700 million, if you are going to put another million and a half householders taking out
19 from the reservoir on top of that it's going to make property taxes dwarfed in comparison, so I
20 think we have a responsibility for the people of our county, whether in Roundwood or
21 Blessington to stand up for the people and say this is a resource we should get something, not a
22 couple of euro for a couple of sheds on it, as is currently the case. I would propose that we
23 would have that.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Hold on. Everybody in the room here wants to maximise income,
25 including officials, nobody wants to turn their back on possible income. So Cllr Cullen
26 suggested that he was happy for, that this subcommittee review the whole area of what's been
27 paid, what potentially could be looked into, are you happy?

28 Cllr CULLEN: I would like that this would be a priority item and that a report would be brought
29 back to this Council before the estimates, not with some throwing this off, because this is going
30 to happen, when we are all gone from this Council in years to come, the Irish Water or whoever
31 is privatised will still take money and water out of this Council and people will look back and
32 say were the people or councillors of Wicklow, a crowd of idiots that they didn't stand up and do
33 something, because I'll tell you what, two or three years ago when it was proposed they were
34 going to take water from Shannon and transfer to Westmeath and Dublin Corporation,

1 immediately the County Councils in Meath and Clare all got up and said no you won't, you'll pay
2 for it first. They have been taking water from this county since 1867 and we've never got a
3 shilling from it, they have been taking billions of tonnes of water from Blessington and we
4 haven't got a penny for it.

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6 If we were a bit clever we'd be, we wouldn't have to have commercial rates in this county, we
7 could cut commercial rates by 50%, we could abolish property tax and water charges in this
8 county, but all we get is negativity, no, no, no. But I tell you something, if you were a private
9 business and had to pay bills you would be doing this, looking at this and say no I'm sorry, you
10 are not going to get 2 billion a year renewable money from this county and the people of this
11 county can't get nothing for it. We have people in Roundwood, in Blessington can't get planning
12 permission because of the reservoir. So time to get feedback from it.

13 DIRECTOR LYNCH: Water and waste water network in Wicklow County Council was valued
14 using a national database to value the length of pipework, the reservoirs, the buildings, that was
15 valued back in 2003, out of that with additions on since, we would have a rates bill now for Irish
16 Water of about 1.6 million, we've billed for that this year, we're getting income for it, it would
17 have been included in the 2014 budget. We are also currently reviewing what we have valued
18 and what we haven't, if there are any of the newer properties, reservoirs, waste treatment plants
19 that aren't valued we are sending them to the valuation office for them to put a value on them to
20 ensure we are maximising the income that we can possibly get from commercial rates on the
21 water and waste water network. And anything we get will be included in the overall revenue
22 budget.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Hold on, other people indicated. There's nine or ten people indicated to
24 speak on this. Are we happy to let a subcommittee review this? Because otherwise it's going to
25 go around the houses.

26 Cllr CULLEN: Chairman, I'm serious about this.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: I know you are.

28 Cllr CULLEN: I don't want this fobbed off, this is too serious for the people of Wicklow, we are
29 here arguing and messing around for the last couple of hours about property tax, we're giving out
30 2,000 million taken out next year out of this county by Irish Water and sold commercially, all
31 around. And we have -- you have laughing Hyenas behind me trying to knock down a good
32 idea. Will you ever for once be positive and go for a good idea.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: I'm trying to move it on constructively. Are you happy for a
34 subcommittee to look into this?

1 Cllr O'NEILL: I'll second that. I'm delighted that we have Tommy Cullen on board now.

2 Cllr CULLEN: Gerry, in 1992 I brought a proposal to this Council, but Cllr O'Neill wants to
3 support me I'll welcome his support.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: I'm asking can a subcommittee look at all aspects of this?

5 Cllr SNELL: He abstained against a subcommittee only 15 minutes ago.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Are you happy?

7 Cllr CULLEN: Chairman, we're here today talking about taxation in this Council, either we're
8 going to be serious or we're not going to be serious, I put forward a resolution that I want to
9 move that all of the reservoir assets would be considered for rates with commercial value.

10 DIRECTOR LYNCH: They're already valued. Just to be clear.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Hold on, they're taking the resolution.

12 Cllr VANCE: Hold on, I want to find out is it legal for us to be able to do this? I just want to
13 know that? Are we voting on something that may be illegal? Can somebody call for something
14 like this at a meeting like this?

15 COUNTY MANAGER: Firstly to say, the valuation office values any properties in the county
16 that are liable for rates, the valuation office is totally independent of Wicklow County Council,
17 it's a government agency, we send lists to them asking to have a various things valued and they
18 value them. What happens is they apply the AVR, commercial rate to those properties and
19 collect rates on them.

20
21 In relation to the water service infrastructure, as Ms Lynch has said, these were valued more than
22 a decade ago, traditionally Dublin City Council have been paying rates on those, but the transfer
23 to Irish Water, the burden of those rates has transferred to Irish Water. Figures of 2 billion and
24 that we could abolish commercial rates and do away with property tax, look, it's up to a member
25 to propose anything which he thinks is reasonable and sensible, and it's up to other members that
26 if they consider it's reasonable and sensible to decide whether or not to support it, but the reality
27 is that that the water services infrastructure in this Council, this county which was previously
28 owned by Dublin City Council has already been valued and rates are being paid on it.

29
30 There may be some small schemes in villages or whatever that may need to be valued, obviously
31 they will be sent to the valuation office and will be valued and when valuations are received
32 they'll feed into the income that will be generated. But to suggest that there's a pot of money of
33 €2 billion which would solve all our problems, indeed €2 billion is 20 times the sort of annual
34 budget that we're talking about, I think the members are in a position to decide for themselves

1 whether that suggestion is reasonable and realistic and whether it has any prospect of success if
2 it's passed by the members.

3
4 But regardless of what it has, it's obviously open to the members to propose something, second it
5 and agree it, should they choose to do so, whether or not it's realistic or sensible or might make
6 us a laughing stock of the rest of the country, but it's a matter for the members to take a decision
7 on it Chairman.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Vance?

9 Cllr CULLEN: Can I respond to the manager Chairman?

10 Cllr VANCE: Chairman, it's the easiest thing in the world to do, to throw out figures like 2
11 billion and various things like that and nothing to back them up with. In regard to valuations, I
12 am one of the few members around that, of this that actually paid rates in this Council, of the
13 members around here. Valuations are totally different from one property to the next, when they
14 were valued and square footage and everything else, there's total discrepancies in regard to one
15 property and the property next door in regard to the valuation of rates and what they pay.
16 Various variation in regard to them. What we've got here -- I couldn't vote really on what's up
17 there, for the simple reasons I haven't got figures to back that up, I haven't got anything to back
18 that up.

19
20 In regard to valuation, you can call for a revaluation, it's nothing to do with this County Council,
21 which has already been stated, it's the valuation office that does this. The valuations a number of
22 years ago, the valuation of a number of major rate payers in the county and were valued
23 downwards and we lost quite a bit of money on it, so really and truly to my mind anyway that's
24 unreal that type of proposal, it's not backed up by any type of figures whatsoever. And how
25 anyone could vote to go ahead and do that. We would be the laughing stock in the country in
26 regard to this, really and truly, with a proposal like that we would be. No thought whatsoever
27 gone into it.

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29 It is sensible to say that if the subcommittee is going to be set up that subcommittee would look
30 at it, I don't have a problem with that, if they look at all the ins and outs and bring back a
31 recommendation, but let's have a bit of work before something comes off the back of somebody
32 throwing figures in the sky that nobody knows whether they are true or not, and I suspect they
33 are way off, with that type of billions that you have just taken them out of the sky, as if they are
34 the right figure, they are not backed up by anything whatsoever.

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So I would be happy enough to let the subcommittee have a look at that, I think it's really, they bring back a proposal to us on that. But what's there at the moment, I think it's pie in the sky and we couldn't vote on it, I don't think I could anyway. CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr Kavanagh?

Cllr KAVANAGH: I'd like to thank Cllr Cullen for raising this issue, it's a very important issue and something that's well worth looking at. The Manager just said that it was valued more than a decade ago, now a decade ago water wasn't a private commercial commodity, which it is now. And it's highly valuable now, which makes a difference. I am concerned about sending things back to the valuation office because I think we'll be waiting for years for commercial rates to be re-evaluated and this could take years to re-evaluate the reservoirs, so I wouldn't like to delay it for too long, I wouldn't put it back to the hands of the valuation office, who haven't got their finger on it in a while regarding commercial rates.

So I think as I say, Cllr Cullen has a very worthwhile suggestion and proposal that we need to look at.

Cllr CULLEN: Chairman, Mr Sheehy's close friend Cllr Vance speaking there and agreeing with Mr Sheehy, I wouldn't expect anything else from his close friend. But...

Cllr VANCE: I wouldn't expect anything else only bull that you're going on with either, it's consistent with you.

Cllr CULLEN: What could be said his very close friend, but Chairman, we have a situation now, as Cllr Kavanagh said, the whole game has changed. Irish Water is now a commercial company, it's now selling water that it raises in this county, which is our jurisdiction, and is selling it to counties of Louth, a million and a quarter people in Dublin, most of -- a lot of north Kildare, most of the people of Wicklow, we are now people of Greystones, Bray, everywhere, we are now even large areas of Blessington, we are all now paying for this water. The people of Wicklow are paying for this water. So constituents we are representing are paying for this water and Irish Water are extracting it free from our reservoirs and selling it back to us.

There's also selling to several other County Councils and other commercial, every business in north Kildare and all that area, Intel and all that are getting Irish Water. So Chairman, the only thing Wicklow really has going for us is our resources, and the two reservoirs, the manager said, made some derogatory remark about the reservoirs -- the Blessington reservoir is the largest man-made reservoir...

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: You've made that point.

2 Cllr CULLEN: Sorry, it's the largest man-made reservoir in Western Europe, not just in the
3 British Isles, in Western Europe.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Are you prepared to go with a subcommittee to review all aspects of what
5 you've raised and you've raised issues of merit, or are you pressing ahead with your resolution?

6 Cllr CULLEN: Can I just say this Chairman, trying to be helpful with you now, that some
7 people said, I have wrote two reports, my first report I presented to this Council was in 1992
8 about raising water, Cllr Vance voted against that then. I brought it up again in this Council in
9 2004, so I have wrote two reports, I am the only councillor on this Council that wrote reports, I
10 studied this and done two reports on this matter. I am satisfied that the people of this county are
11 entitled and not just me, we'll be all gone here and there will be other people, I think the onus is
12 on our generation of councillors to start now getting, Wicklow County Council, in getting some
13 remuneration, not just some as Lorraine is saying, a million euro out of a budget of 2 billion,
14 remember according to what's proposed now in Irish Water, their revenue stream from the
15 Wicklow reservoirs will be increasing at a rate of about 140 million a year, so they're going to
16 get 2,000 million and it will increase up to 140 million forever going on. I think we need to get a
17 piece of that. Chairman I will be happy, if Cllr Behan agrees that we do that and we'll have a
18 report back say within three months.

19 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay is that agreed? Okay. Moving on to Cllr Whitmore's proposal.

20 MS GALLAGHER: Proposed by Cllr Whitmore seconded by Cllr Behan. That the Council
21 write a submission to government outlining our concerns regarding local budget finance and
22 giving details of Wicklow County Council's funding compared to other local authorities and to
23 request an increase in our budget to reflect the higher taxes the people of Wicklow pay and that a
24 representative of the Department of Local Government and Finance be invited to our meeting to
25 discuss central government funding.

26 Cllr CASEY: Just a point of clarification, we spoke about this at the corporate policy meeting
27 this morning, to put a delegation to meet the Minister, we're trying to keep the property tax,
28 currently the way it's structured now, the government is taking 3.7 million off us, and if we can
29 keep that 3.7 million here and hold, the point that was made at corporate policy is we should put
30 a delegation to go, exactly what you were saying, go and try and keep that here, just reversed
31 around from what it used to be, they used to fund us, now we have the property tax and they are
32 taking the surplus back off us, I've no problem with it, it's just a reverse way around.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Well then is it agreed? Agreed. Okay. Cllr Brady did you wish
34 to make a proposal?

1 Cllr BRADY: Yeah, I handed it up to Lorraine.

2 MS GALLAGHER: Proposed by Cllr Brady, seconded by?

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Lawless.

4 MS GALLAGHER: That the members of Wicklow County Council are totally opposed to the
5 local property tax and see the 15% reduction in the rate, which was passed in Wicklow, as the
6 start of the process of abolishing the local property tax, we call on the government to abolish this
7 unjust tax.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: We'll take a roll call.

9

10 (Vote taken)

11

12 MS GALLAGHER: 19 for, 11 against, one not present and one abstaining.

13 Cllr BRADY: Cathaoirleach, can I ask that that motion would be circulated to the Minister for
14 Finance and to the five TDs as well, that Wicklow supported that motion? Thank you.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. We have a question here?

16 MS GALLAGHER: Question submitted by Cllr Tommy Cullen re private investigations. What
17 are the names of the private investigators employed by the County Manager as outlined by him
18 at our last meeting and what were the fees paid to same for their services? Please answer by
19 written reply.

20

21 The response is: A written response will issue to Cllr Cullen and will be copied to all
22 councillors.

23 Cllr CULLEN: With those details I assume? Is that correct Chairman? With those details
24 requested? Is that correct Chairman?

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: I presume so.

26 Cllr CULLEN: Would you ask the manager on the record?

27 COUNTY MANAGER: Well Chair the councillor asked for a written reply.

28 Cllr CULLEN: I put in written reply just for the convenience, but Chairman will you -- Manager
29 will you supply the details as requested in the question, because they are quite legitimate
30 questions.

31 COUNTY MANAGER: Chairman, I have to find out the details first and consider the response.

32 Cllr CULLEN: I know you know already. I know a lot.

33 COUNTY MANAGER: I'll issue the response and you can deal with it when you get it.

34 Cllr CULLEN: Chairman, I'll expect those details, because I know you have them and

1 Ms Lynch has them, despite five letters she is refusing to divulge them.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, just before we go we're provisionally talking about the 24th of
3 November for the budget meeting, possible start at 11 o'clock.

4 Cllr RUTTLE: What time?

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: 11am, that people would put that in their diaries, is that okay? Thank you
6 members.

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8 Meeting concluded at 4.25pm

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A	adjustment	always 22:15	argument 20:9	balance 5:16 8:24 9:1,34 27:3 34:28	bill 12:27 20:34 24:8 41:15
ability 11:18 12:11 31:17,27	4:12,23,24,34 9:26 14:29 37:20	amalgamated 5:33	arguments 20:20	balanced 7:26 9:33 13:21	billed 41:16
able 15:11,14,19 42:12	administration 14:29	amalgamation 7:4	around 1:13 2:7 16:31	band 9:10,19	billion 22:33 23:6 24:17 39:28 41:10 42:23,33 43:11 45:13
abolish 19:9 24:18 41:7 42:24 46:6	administrative 37:20	amazing 22:7,8	20:21,25 22:13 23:18 24:1 25:15 29:28 34:16 41:25,29,31 43:12,13 45:31,32	bands 9:12,18,21	bills 18:5 41:9 43:11 45:13
abolished 37:28	administrator 15:2	among 20:19	arrangements 14:31 37:22	banks 3:6,7 32:10,14	billions 41:3 43:33
abolishing 17:21,24 46:6	advance 7:13 35:17	amongst 30:12 32:31	arrogance 34:17	base 9:9 13:29,32 16:11 14:22 15:23 17:4 18:32 29:17 35:23 40:2	bit 9:17 16:8,10 19:30 29:31 34:34 41:6 43:23,31
abolishment 17:26	advantages 4:29	amount 7:26 11:11 14:11 19:32 23:18 29:29 34:6 35:4,30	articulated 29:3	based 2:34 7:12,14,17 14:22 15:23 17:4 18:32 29:17 35:23 40:2	blackmailing 28:2
about 4:4 6:6 8:21 10:1,21,22,27 11:10 12:26,27 13:15 14:1 15:13 16:34 19:25 20:30,32	advocated 27:22	amounts 30:12 36:4	arts 8:4	basically 21:14 25:20,26 40:3	bloody 27:27
22:9,23,27,28,31,32 23:34,9,10,12,16 24:7,8,11,14,16,28 25:14,25,29	affect 3:2	analysis 15:21	aside 16:24	basic 4:12,15,23,34 5:19 6:20 7:26 9:23 14:28 37:18	blown 17:28
26:12,16,20 28:10 29:5,6,23,27,31 30:1,5,12,15 31:17 33:17 39:30,31 41:16,26,29 42:7,34 44:9,33 45:8,	affecting 2:25	and 1:2,3,4,5,18,23,34 2:1,2,5,7,8,9,14,16,17 ,20,21,22,25,26,29,30 ,31 3:3,6,11,19,20,26,33 4:1,10,12,15,17,23,28 ,32,34 5:2,7,12,13,16,22,24, 28,31,33 6:2,3,4,5,10,11,14,15, 20,22,23,28,29,31,33 7:1,2,5,6,10,14,18,21, 30,31,32,34 8:3,5,6,10,11,20,21,2 6,27 9:7	ask 20:30 24:22,31 28:9,10 32:34 33:32 35:3 39:13 46:13,26	basing 40:1	blunt 31:27
above 7:32 10:21 14:4 31:25,26 36:21	after 4:15 12:14 13:11 17:22 18:29,30 26:33 37:26	annual 19:30 37:10 42:33	asked 27:14,17 32:26 46:27	basis 4:30 7:26 12:10 13:32 14:9 34:6	board 7:34 18:26 42:1
abstain 4:4	afternoon 1:9,10 21:13	annum 9:10,13 13:33 18:10	asking 42:4,17	became 39:17	boards 7:4 11:1
abstained 42:5	again 2:5 4:16 6:9 7:6,9 11:10 13:23 15:25 19:7 21:5 23:30 37:11 38:9 45:8	another 12:16 21:23 34:31 40:18	aspects 16:16 42:4 45:4	because 2:17 4:28 6:14,17,25 7:9 15:34 16:30 18:21,22,26,33 19:7,8 20:11,31 21:22 22:15 23:24,25 12:12 28:10 30:20 31:6,16,28 34:11,26 35:4,32 37:31 38:4 39:32	body 6:15 16:20
abstaining 4:10 39:4 46:12	agenda 1:11	answer 34:26 46:18	assert 14:22	become 39:17	boilers 7:29
accent 3:24	ago 14:15 19:31 22:13 23:2 31:16 40:33 42:5,22 43:22 44:8	answers 2:27 34:33	assessment 15:25	been 2:31 5:23 7:28,29 8:12,15 10:5,10,27 11:6,12 12:25 13:21,30 14:4,15 15:19,20,26 16:15,21 17:8,10,28,34 18:24 20:1 24:29 25:4,23 26:9 27:10,22 30:11,29,31,32 31:3,6,7,17 32:12 33:34 34:14,18 37:9,10,11,30 40:26 41:2,3,17 42:22,28 43:21	boils 18:11
accept 37:30	agree 3:33 23:27 25:3,13,21 31:13 33:19,32 34:1,3 40:10 43:5	anxious 2:31	asset 39:27	both 3:28,30,33 5:27 6:2,3,9,14,15 7:6 15:20 34:13 38:6 39:24,31,33	bond 32:10
acceptable 21:30	agreeable 1:14	any 1:20 4:24,26 6:9,19 7:27 8:7 9:1,29 10:9,10,15,18,24,32 12:29 13:4,5 17:24 20:12 21:8,18 22:13 23:27 25:3 26:6,15,24 29:11 34:34 36:6,8,15 37:4,7 41:18 42:15 43:1,24	assets 8:26,28 27:3 39:14 42:9	book 8:5,26 10:3	
access 14:8	agreeing 44:17	anybody 13:29 33:5 34:25	assume 46:23	borrow 22:17	
accessibility 1:2	agrees 45:17	anyone 1:27 43:25	assured 2:31	borrowing 7:31	
accordance 4:13 14:26 37:17	ahead 9:4 16:27 43:25 45:5	anything 4:4 10:31 11:3 23:25 29:6 31:6 36:26 41:21 42:25 43:17,34 44:18,19	attached 37:31	borrowings 8:25	
according 45:14	alike 38:4	anyway 16:10 24:22 43:23 44:4	attendance 2:1	both 3:28,30,33 5:27 6:2,3,9,14,15 7:6 15:20 34:13 38:6 39:24,31,33	
account 8:7 10:30,31,32 12:16 14:15 31:27 35:31	all 1:13,34 2:2,5,9,15,25,29 3:8 5:4 9:31 10:1 11:11,27,31 13:15,25 14:30 15:13,16 17:10,29,34 18:9,17,26 19:11,29,32 20:2 21:14,29,34 22:7 23:13 24:2,18,33 25:3,4,13,24 26:3,4,8,10,14 27:4,17,23,30,31 28:10,16 29:9 30:32 31:3 32:3,9 34:1,13 35:32 36:11,2	apologies 1:20	attended 2:16	both 3:28,30,33 5:27 6:2,3,9,14,15 7:6 15:20 34:13 38:6 39:24,31,33	
accountability 4:31	allocated 8:13,15 17:34 18:31 21:31	apologise 8:16	attention 2:21 27:1	bottom 9:19 18:3 26:23 27:13,15 28:4	
accountancy 28:21	allocation 10:16,18 32:6,8 34:27	apply 4:15,24,25 42:18	attitude 27:23	bought 22:16	
accountants 15:18 28:21	allow 1:14 14:31 37:22	apportioned 30:11	audit 23:24	bouyant 14:4	
accounted 16:21	allowance 7:1	appreciated 31:20	austerity 14:24	boys 30:31	
accounting 20:5	allowed 28:31 35:4	approach 32:30 34:10 1:2,3 2:30 3:13 4:1,31 5:23,24,34 6:9,14,15,17,25,27,32 7:12,13,18,25,32 8:16 10:8,22,24,28,30 11:6 12:27 13:6,10,28 14:5 15:11,15 16:15,16,33 17:26 18:12,29 19:19,29,31 20:30,31,32 21:3,17,24 22:8,9,28,33 23:3,6,14,21,24 24:10,13,14,17,23,28, 33 25:3, 30:4 31:14,18 37:20 40:26 44:31	authorities 4:31 5:33 8:33 11:11 15:21 30:3 32:7,9 37:5 45:22	break 22:29	
accounts 36:27 37:12	almost 13:32	are 4:1,31 5:23,24,34 6:9,14,15,17,25,27,32 7:12,13,18,25,32 8:16 10:8,22,24,28,30 11:6 12:27 13:6,10,28 14:5 15:11,15 16:15,16,33 17:26 18:12,29 19:19,29,31 20:30,31,32 21:3,17,24 22:8,9,28,33 23:3,6,14,21,24 24:10,13,14,17,23,28, 33 25:3, 30:4 31:14,18 37:20 40:26 44:31	authority 2:34 3:4,7 4:23,32 5:2,27,28 6:11 8:22,24,25 9:6,7,23,29 11:23,26 13:28 14:8 26:34 27:16,24 28:13 32:21 39:17	breakdown 21:29 26:8,31 27:4 28:2 30:4,6 36:10,13 37:9,10	
accrual 35:29,33 36:7	alone 14:10	areas 8:10,15 10:1 13:7 15:23 30:4 36:27 44:26	autonomy 4:30	breakdown 21:29 26:8,31 27:4 28:2 30:4,6 36:10,13 37:9,10	
accrues 36:14	along 2:20 17:10	aren't 10:29 26:20 41:19	available 3:3 7:15 12:25 13:19,29 14:9 16:15 31:32 35:19	brief 19:11	
accurate 1:5	already 7:12,18 10:10,31 11:6 21:15 22:18 24:13 25:20,32 26:24 29:19 30:5 31:11 39:8,10 42:10,28 43:21 46:32	argue 18:5 19:25 20:19,20 33:22	average 11:27,28,30,31 13:31,32 19:13 29:27 32:21,24,26 33:11	bring 3:6 22:1 23:8 24:2 26:19 29:7 33:28 38:31 43:30 44:3	
achieve 22:2 35:5 38:32	also 2:4,7,12,17 3:6,21 4:31 5:5 7:2,33 8:6,10,11 11:18 12:21,31 14:7,11,12 15:20 16:1,5,29 17:3 20:19 21:2,34 26:3,23,34 30:19 32:6,24 33:15,20,22,27 34:10 35:12,30 36:8,32 37:9 38:30 40:8 41:17 44:30	arguing 13:11 20:18 41:29	awards 2:7	bringing 12:32 40:11	
achieved 14:5 34:14	although 17:21		aware 2:15 20:33 22:13	broken 36:11	
achievement 1:34			away 18:17 27:19 42:24	brought 2:21 23:1,2 24:16 29:16,18 40:15,28 42:2 45:8	
acreage 39:23			awful 18:12	budget 5:32,34 7:5,14,20,25 8:24 9:31,33 10:1,5,16,29 11:10 12:33 13:7,12,21,23,25 19:27,30 20:18 21:17,18,22 23:18 25:17 26:20 29:31 32:29 33:6,21 35:11,18,23 36:6,7,19,21,23,32,33 41:17,22 42:34 45:13,21,23 47:3	
across 10:1,12 11:27,31 17:31 18:20 25:32 32:9 33:22			Act 4:13 14:27 37:17	budgetary 13:3 14:16 21:24 22:1 33:20 38:32	
acted 28:17			Agreed 1:14 36:21,23 40:12 45:19,33	budgeted 6:14,17,26 35:34	
acting 28:16			Anne 3:23	budgets 5:32 11:26 13:28 20:17 30:29 36:29	
activities 26:32 28:24			Annesley 3:22,23	build 31:19	
activity 7:2 16:6			Apartment 38:29	building 2:24 3:7	
actual 1:10 4:34,2 27:5 35:18			Arklow 2:17 3:19,20,24,25 8:6 10:8,23 11:6 12:3	buildings 27:5 39:22,25,30 41:14	
actually 8:28 15:12,28,29 16:2,17,21,31 21:3,28 26:9 32:33 33:7,10 34:20,29 35:32 37:2 43:12			Association 12:4	built 19:30	
add 16:10			August 36:25	bull 44:19	
added 16:8			AVR 42:18	bunch 28:24 29:8	
addition 6:27 10:6 35:31				buoyancy 16:7 35:1 36:2 burden 34:4,5 42:23	
additional 6:27 7:27 9:31 10:22 14:16,20 15:25 21:15 34:15 35:4 36:3				burial 7:34 8:10 11:1 business 15:15,16 26:15 29:5 40:6 41:9 44:30	
additions 41:15				businesses 21:12 40:5	
address 8:25 9:1 10:2,3,24 11:31 35:28 36:29				but 2:32 3:2,13 4:1 5:4 7:5,6,14,22 8:17 10:28,29 11:6,17 12:21,24,26 13:30 14:11 15:5,14,29 16:10,14,17 17:26	
addressing 11:23					
adequate 14:17					
adequately 36:8					
adjournment 4:26					
adjust 4:15					
adjusted 7:19 9:18,26 36:6					
adjusting 8:21					

18:13,16 19:8,26
 20:23,26 21:30,32
 22:9 23:29 25:8,24
 28:6,10,21,23 29:14
 30:6,10,17,23,26,32
 31:20,28,32 32:29
 33:9
 34:1,2,3,10,16,24,28,
 32 35:
buy 28:18
buying 26:12
bypass 3:27
Ballycogue 1:25
Ballynagran 11:29
Behan 33:31,32 35:14
 39:13 40:14 45:17,20
Blessington's 39:34
Blessington 23:4
 39:7,24,31 40:21
 41:3,11 44:26,33
Bourke 1:25 3:29,31,33
Bracken 1:25,26
Bray 1:16 12:3 30:4
 44:25
Briefly 2:20
British 45:3
BRADY 17:6,7 24:19,21
 37:25,32 38:1 45:33
 46:1,2,13
C
call 4:6 8:32 14:30 17:27
 32:14 37:21,24
 38:2,10,34 42:13
 43:20 46:6,8
called 18:30 25:26
calling 17:10
came 2:20 15:30,31
 20:24 26:2,3
 31:23,25,26
can't 7:34 12:27 13:15
 23:29,30 30:6 41:11
can 3:34 5:17 8:12 12:29
 14:9,21,34
 15:12,22,34 16:3
 19:25 20:3,20 23:23
 24:18,31 26:14,33
 27:6,20,30 28:22,24
 29:8,33 30:33 32:8
 33:9,10,17 34:7,23
 35:25 36:11 37:2,7
 38:6,24 39:13,26,34
 40:11 41:20 42:4,13
 43:9,20 45:6,28
 46:13,33
cannot 12:33 18:3
capable 30:34 33:9
capacity 8:24 11:13
 39:26,31 40:2
capita 11:27
capital 7:4,6
care 1:4
careful 26:12
carpark 40:7
carried 15:21
carry 29:6
case 14:19 16:32 21:13
 25:13 31:10 34:8
 36:23 39:34 40:22
cash 15:29 28:11
categories 21:20 37:10
category 21:23 26:31
ceased 2:29
cent 9:10 23:7
central 4:29 5:14
 23:15,18 25:21 29:32
 30:19 32:31 33:6,16
 34:27 35:9 45:25
centrally 30:11
centres 37:6
certain 15:23 16:16
 20:26 29:4 31:29
certainly 3:8 21:8,33
 31:33 33:9,33 35:5
certificates 36:6,7
challenging 16:16
chamber's 2:25
chamber 2:22 3:9 18:27
 25:4,9 30:34 31:24

chambers 12:3
chance 19:21
change 4:28 7:22
 9:10,23,24,29 10:11
 12:25 13:30 23:9,10
 33:2 38:25 39:14
changed 25:27 35:18,25
 44:22
changes 13:4 21:24
changing 30:34 33:9
channelled 16:2
charge 7:34 15:27 30:9
 38:21 39:7 40:15
charged 23:7
charges 7:34 15:27 18:4
 22:23 24:3,18 31:7
 34:11,13,21,25,26
 36:3 37:6 40:14 41:7
charging 24:16
chief 12:34 14:30 37:21
children 18:13
choice 24:1 31:33
choices 16:34
choose 10:32 43:5
choosing 21:20
chosen 21:25
circular 5:4 7:17
 12:11,14,21 25:29
circulate 8:12
circulated 46:13
citizens 4:31 15:16 29:7
clarification 3:26 39:8
 45:26
clarify 38:14 39:17
clarity 16:27,29 18:33
clear 14:7 15:9 16:18
 34:27 36:22 42:10
clearly 14:2,21
clever 41:6
climb 29:19
close 37:12 44:17,18,21
closer 16:26
coffers 15:26
collect 8:24 42:19
collected 17:29,34 25:30
 35:32
collection 35:32,33
collectively 30:18
column 5:33
combined 5:32 8:33
 36:30
come 1:18 2:26,30 3:27
 5:13 15:29 18:4
 20:2,5,14,29,31,32
 23:29 24:2,22,29 25:1
 26:11,18
 27:16,18,22,25,32
 29:7 33:29 35:12
 38:27 40:30
comes 27:5 36:7 43:31
coming 3:11 7:20 26:30
 29:6 31:4,8 33:6 35:5
comment 26:10 27:15
 29:2
commercial 6:17 7:18
 13:29,32 22:27
 24:4,13,15 30:30,31
 35:1,2,5,28
 39:7,8,10,12,18 40:17
 41:6,7,20 42:9,18,24
 44:8,10,13,22,30
commercially 41:30
commitment 7:32 10:17
 11:3
commitments 10:24
committed 17:21 23:28
committee 29:4
commodity 44:8
common 3:9
communication 26:5
communities 15:16 20:8
community 8:3 23:13
 31:13
company 28:12 39:14
 44:23
comparative 15:21

compared 5:8 8:26 29:27
 45:22
comparison 11:26 40:19
compensate 11:8
competency 31:24
completely 15:28 21:6
concentrating 30:30
concept 32:3 34:3
concern 7:1
concerned 44:9
concerns 33:10 35:10
 45:21
conclude 19:7
concluded 47:8
conclusion 14:21
concur 32:4
confidence 20:10,13
confirmed 35:22
confirms 38:21
confusion 36:22
congratulations 2:2,9
cons 30:17
conservative 14:5
consider 3:18 4:11 9:5
 30:19 37:7 42:26
 46:31
considered 3:20 5:22
 7:14 8:20 12:6 37:5
 40:10 42:9
considering 9:9
consistent 22:14 38:24
 44:20
consistently 25:4
constantly 15:12
constituency 33:14
 34:20,32
constituents 2:26 18:25
 26:33 44:27
constructed 23:4,5
constructively 41:33
consultation 5:29 11:34
 12:1 18:19,20,27
 26:24,25 36:20
consulted 21:24,25
contact 2:16
contacted 3:26
contain 17:3
contained 5:23 9:17
contains 39:26
continue 14:23 32:9
 34:20
continues 17:33
contra 7:7 36:34
contrary 32:25
contras 36:33
contribute 27:7
contribution 26:33
control 13:18
controlled 30:11
convenience 46:28
conversation 10:15
copied 46:21
copies 13:29
copy 2:22
corporate 14:14
 45:26,29
correct 1:17,18 46:23,24
correspondence 25:27
cost 6:5 8:25 10:17,22
 13:25 14:9
costs 6:3,4,5 10:8
 11:16,17,22 13:26
 17:3 19:29
cottages 31:19
could 3:18 11:5 15:2
 19:27,28 20:9,32,33
 24:4 27:20,22,30
 28:4,6,9,10,12,25
 31:28 34:1 38:4,14
 40:27 41:7 42:24
 43:25 44:4,11,21
couldn't 26:5 31:13
 39:23 43:16 44:4
councillor 1:16,17 3:14
 14:34 21:10 22:13
 25:1 29:13 30:28
 32:2,17 33:31 35:7

37:4 38:30 45:9
 46:27
councillors 2:1 8:8 19:21
 20:10,14,23 21:11
 24:27 25:9 26:24
 28:14 31:16 35:19
 37:5 40:32 45:12
 46:22
counteract 7:33
counties 3:2 19:18,19
 23:9 25:32 33:2,22
 35:11 44:24
country 19:12,16
 23:19,21 25:34 31:10
 32:9,14,20
 34:16,19,32 43:6,25
counttryside 20:9
couple 1:10,31 2:32 21:3
 35:28 36:25
 39:21,22,25,29,30
 40:22 41:29
coupled 18:3
courtesy 3:9
courtesy 6:5,28 14:17
covering 6:3,4 8:6
covers 7:2
cow 23:21
crack 29:8
crews 36:13
crisis 13:31
critical 7:25 13:17 15:25
critically 16:29
cross 16:25
crow 22:23
crowd 40:32
crowding 34:13
crumbs 13:10 22:21
crux 20:9,13
cubic 39:26 40:1
cultural 8:3
current 5:27,32 8:28
 21:16 25:25 26:30
 27:4
currently 40:22 41:17
 45:28
cut 10:12 11:8 14:19
 19:25 22:31 25:12,16
 27:29 29:33 30:25
 36:18,22 41:7
cutbacks 20:3
cuts 10:6 11:12,16
cutting 30:18
cynical 28:6 29:16,23
 30:12
cynicism 29:31
Carlow 31:25
Casey's 35:29 37:14
 38:2,19,21
Cavan 23:16
CASEY 12:8,9 15:25
 16:7 20:17
 24:12,13,15,31,32,33
 28:31,32 34:34
 37:16,29,34 38:9
 39:8,10 45:26
CATHAOIRLEACH
 1:9,20,27,31 2:15
 3:9,14,22,24,29,30,32
 4:3,6,11,22 12:8
 14:34 15:2,4 17:6,7
 19:10 21:10,11 22:4,6
 24:23,29 25:1 27:9,12
 28:30,32 29:13 30:28
 32:2,17 33:31,32
 35:7,14
 37:13,24,25,32
 38:2,10,14,17,19,27,3
 4 39:5 40:24
 41:23,27,33 42:4,6,11
 43:
Celtic 13:6
CEO 26:17
Chair 1:17 2:12,17,20
 25:17 27:10 32:18
 38:27 39:13 46:27
Chairman 4:4 12:9
 14:26 19:11 22:7,31
 23:12,33

24:10,11,22,27 25:2
 29:14 30:29 40:10,12
 41:26 42:7 43:7,9,10
 44:17,21,31 45:6,17
 46:23,24,28,31,34
China 3:25
City 19:14 42:22,28
Clare 41:1
Cllr 1:17,20,22,25
 2:14,15,17
 3:22,23,25,29,31,32,3
 3 4:4,5 12:8,9 13:6
 15:1,2,4,25
 16:7,9,10,11,12
 17:6,7 19:10,11
 20:17,24 21:10,11,28
 22:5,6,7
 24:12,13,14,15,16,19,
 20,21,22,25,29,30,31,
 32,33 25:2,14
 27:10,13 28:31,32,34
 29:13,14 30:28,29
 31:34 32:2,3,4,
Commerce 18:27
Commission 11:2
Commissioners 14:31
 19:13 37:22
Corporation 40:16,17,34
Council's 45:22
Council 1:3,7,16 4:1
 5:6,19,28 6:12,13
 12:2 13:23
 14:27,29,31
 15:20,22,26,30,34
 16:6,31 17:8,9
 18:19,23,25 21:34
 22:1 23:2,8 25:8
 28:13 30:18,32
 32:29,30 33:5,6,17
 35:5,9,26
 37:2,18,19,22,26
 38:31 39:6,11,19
 40:10,13,29,30,31
 41:13 42:2
Councils 6:13 11:22 14:8
 36:28 41:1 44:30
COUNTY 1:3,7 2:8,24
 3:3 5:6,28 6:12,13
 7:4,5 9:15,21
 11:11,21,27 12:1,32
 14:27,29 15:16,22
 16:22 17:31 18:9,12
 19:22 20:12 21:13
 22:2,22,34 23:2,7,16
 24:4,5,7,8,26
 25:31,33 26:11 27:7
 29:7,9 32:25 33:8,10
 34:16 37:18,19,26
 38:33 39:11,19
 40:5,20 41:1,2,6,
CPG 36:20
Cullen's 25:14 39:5
CULLEN 4:4 22:6,7
 24:14,16,20,22,25
 32:4 34:1
 38:14,15,18,20,24
 39:6,15,21 40:25,28
 41:26,28 42:1,2,7
 43:9 44:6,15,17,21
 45:2,6
 46:16,21,23,26,28,32,
 34
D
database 41:14
date 2:16 3:13,34 36:26
day's 34:31
day 3:26 13:11 16:33
 25:5
deadline 14:32 27:25
 37:23
deal 20:15 22:21,22,24
 26:2 30:33 46:33
dealing 20:19
death 1:22
debate 15:29 34:1
debts 14:12
decade 42:22 44:8

decades 13:31
decide 13:5 42:26,34
decided 4:25 21:18 34:31
deciding 21:2
decision 4:32 5:19,22
 10:13 12:6 32:19
 43:6
decisions 12:7 26:5,6
decrease 13:25
dedicated 2:8
deduce 14:9
defend 35:4
deferred 3:15,17
deficit 8:20,26,34 9:1,2
 15:34 16:2 20:3
definitely 33:34
definitive 26:31
delay 44:11
delegation 45:27,30
delighted 42:1
deliver 11:13
 15:11,14,16,22 22:2
 38:32
delivering 11:32
delivery 9:7,29 27:13
demand 24:2
democracy 14:23
democratically 24:34
demoralising 13:4,12
depending 27:17
derogatory 44:33
desire 10:10,25
despite 47:1
detail 9:17 19:25 21:13
 26:23 27:4
detailed 10:22 15:19
 26:5 28:1
details 5:5 35:10 45:22
 46:23,29,31,34
deteriorated 8:32
development 8:3,4,6
 10:24 39:16
devolved 4:23
devolvement 16:30
diaries 47:5
did 2:12 3:2 6:18 17:30
 19:31 21:23 45:33
didn't 16:9 17:29
 24:20,32 36:18 40:32
died 1:23
difference 3:23
 9:17,19,20 18:6,11
 44:9
different 2:9 10:1 15:28
 16:17 21:25 26:15
 38:5 43:13
difficult 16:17 30:32
 33:8
difficulty 3:25,27 8:29
direct 12:32 14:8
direction 29:18,25 31:3
directly 5:14 18:25
director 36:20
directorates 36:19
disagrees 37:26
disappointed 15:30
discount 12:25
discrepancies 43:14
discretion 35:26
discretionary 5:17 9:25
 10:16 12:12,16,34
 13:1,18,22 14:17
 16:32 17:33 18:30
 20:19,20 28:13
 36:32,33
discuss 3:2 15:29 27:20
 37:7 45:25
discussed 25:15
discussion 7:21
discussions 26:3 32:29
 33:2,17
dispersed 23:18
disposable 32:24,26
 33:15,24
districts 18:25,31,32
divided 13:7
divisions 10:12 11:27,31
divulge 47:1

divvy 32:32
document 19:26,29
 24:22,26 26:9,16,23
 28:1
documentation 15:30
documents 25:8
does 12:24 19:27,29
 22:15 32:4 43:21
doesn't 11:22 17:18
 18:23 19:27
dog 23:24 32:15
doing 7:30 20:33 28:25
 36:14 41:9
don't 4:4 15:10,14
 16:8,12,31 17:33
 18:21 20:10,12,30,31
 21:14,22,24 24:25
 25:3,13 26:9,18 27:13
 28:1,6,10,14,15
 29:7,11,31,32
 30:4,5,20,24,25 32:7
 33:5,22,23 34:3,6,28
 38:5 41:28 43:30
 44:4
done 4:19 6:12,13 10:5
 18:17,32 20:1 26:11
 27:20 45:10
doom 21:14
door 43:15
doors 18:5
double 19:17,18
doubt 21:8
down 6:23 7:9 16:16
 18:11 23:23,24 29:8
 31:2 36:11 37:1
 41:31
downturn 14:5
downwards 43:23
draft 5:33 7:25 10:1,5,10
 35:24
dramatically 25:27
drastically 18:34
drawing 24:6
dreamed 32:12
dredging 10:23 11:6
drive 29:20
drop 6:2 26:10
dropped 6:20 8:32 11:21
 35:32
dry 27:17
due 7:4 8:25 21:30 32:22
dug 39:33
during 1:1 14:24
 34:13,17
duty 22:16
dwarfed 40:19
Dáil 24:9 34:19,25
Department's 13:28
Department 4:1 14:19
 16:26 21:29,31,32
 33:3,7,21,28 36:11
 45:24
Disclaimer 1:1
District 2:17 3:18,19
DIRECTOR 3:17 4:19
 21:14 35:16
 39:9,11,17 41:13
 42:10
Donegal 23:15
Doran 13:6
Dublin 15:10
 19:11,13,14,16 20:12
 22:33 39:29
 40:12,15,16,17,34
 42:22,28 44:24
E
each 12:3 13:3,7 16:24
 18:25,32 27:22 29:34
 30:12 36:20
ear 3:12
earlier 18:10 20:11 25:20
 27:22 29:3 37:11
early 2:32
easiest 43:10
easy 14:2 34:1
economic 8:3 13:31 14:5
 16:6,7
economy 12:32 14:3 16:5
 18:15 34:14 35:2
education 6:8 7:9
effect 5:25,27 7:7 9:4,9
 18:9 36:4 38:20
effectively 32:6
effectiveness 15:15
efficiencies 14:7 22:2
 38:32
efficiency 15:15
efficient 36:29
effort 22:2 38:32
eight 34:5
either 6:22 18:21 23:30
 30:1 42:7 44:19
elected 14:27 17:9,16,20
 21:25 23:34 24:34
 26:34 37:18
election 17:16,22
elections 17:11
electoral 30:4
electorate 17:11,12
element 8:20 34:23
elements 9:5
eliminate 36:15
else 1:27 19:16 31:25
 34:25 43:14 44:18,19
employed 46:17
end 8:30 13:3,11 16:33
 19:8 20:18 24:30
 25:5 28:26 36:27,30
endorsement 17:25
engage 18:23,25 20:24
 33:34
engaged 18:20
engaging 18:27
enough 14:24 15:18
 17:14 18:16 20:10,31
 26:5 40:10,12,13 44:2
ensure 1:4 12:24 41:20
entering 17:22
entire 39:23,25,31 40:7
entitled 25:3 45:11
environmental 11:28
equalisation 5:7 12:15
 25:32
equally 14:1 27:15
equitable 18:33
equity 17:4
era 13:6
errors 1:5
essentially 19:18,30 20:5
establish 33:27
estimated 7:19 26:28
estimates 16:27 23:1,9
 24:27 40:11,29
estimating 9:11
estimation 5:24,31
etcetera 31:11 35:23
euro 9:14 12:26
 18:4,8,10,16 22:17
 23:8 39:30 40:22
 45:13
evaluate 44:11
evaluated 44:11
even 6:17 12:24 13:10
 15:12 16:7 17:34
 19:22 20:11,12 25:15
 26:25 34:5 36:32
 44:26
evening 1:22 2:1
ever 29:16 30:30 41:32
every 2:22,34 3:8 7:29,30
 9:10,23 10:17 13:4,14
 16:19,21 18:11 22:17
 26:31 30:26 39:34
 40:6 44:30
everyone 1:10 2:25 25:32
everything 23:22 35:16
 43:14
everywhere 44:25
evidence 14:22
exact 26:8
exactly 16:19 29:32
 35:24 45:30
examine 28:15
examined 39:15
example 13:29 19:28
 20:33 25:29
examples 13:28
except 11:27
excess 20:28
excluding 14:2
excuse 38:27
executive 12:34 14:30
 20:14,32 27:16,18
 28:2 35:18 36:28
 37:21
exercise 19:23 20:17
exorbitant 15:28
expansion 16:3
expand 7:19 14:4,11
 44:18,19 46:34
expectation 15:11
expectations 26:14
expected 27:25
expenditure 5:25,31
 6:2,10,14,15,25 7:6,9
 10:11 11:8 21:19
 26:9,28,30,31 29:32
 36:27,29 37:9
expenditures 26:29
expense 24:6
expenses 6:25
experienced 13:31
expertise 28:23
explain 28:2
explaining 36:33
exposed 17:28
extend 1:25,26
extensions 8:11
extinguishment 3:15,18,28
extra 7:30 8:3,4,5
 10:4,23 11:3 20:2,7
 34:15
extract 5:4
extracting 44:28
extracts 8:10 10:6,8 36:19
Eireann 34:19
Enda 17:17
Enterprise 7:4,5 28:12
Environment 14:30
 25:25 37:21
Estate 1:32
ESB 1:23
Europe 32:15 45:2,3
European 29:24
 32:10,14
Eventually 34:26,31
Everybody 6:18 12:5
 23:23 31:30 40:24
Exchequer 31:12
F
fact 13:25 19:14 20:10
 21:19 22:33 27:5
 34:14,15,29 38:16
 39:13,24
factor 4:12,23,24,34
 14:29 37:20
factored 35:33
factors 5:22,23,24
factory 40:5,6
factual 14:22
fair 15:6 18:33 26:34
 30:26 31:29 33:11,14
fairer 4:30
fairly 2:26
fairness 17:4
fall 9:11,12,20
fallen 2:5
familiar 2:25
family 1:25,26 17:15
 18:11
 22:13,15,16,19,23,25,
 32 23:27 38:15,21
famous 23:21
fantastic 1:34 2:4
far 38:8
farce 18:19
father 1:17,18
fault 26:11
favour 19:8
fear 15:10
feed 18:13 42:32
feedback 5:29 11:34
 26:24 41:12
feel 15:22
fees 46:18
fellow 21:11
felt 29:2
few 19:11,31 22:13,28
 23:14 32:19 43:12
fight 13:3
fighting 30:12 32:31
 34:28
figure 14:2,10 21:5,28,29
 22:9 35:4 43:34
figures 7:12,25 9:33 10:1
 11:26,29 14:5,9 15:22
 19:25,32 20:2,3,19
 22:10 28:22 30:4,6
 33:29 35:13,17,23,24
 36:6 40:1 42:23
 43:10 17:24,32
fill 23:15
final 11:34 29:2
finances 13:6 16:7
financial 5:27,32,33 8:21
 9:4,7 16:6 37:10
find 16:20 20:23 28:11
 42:12 46:31
finger 32:32 44:13
finished 6:11 27:10
 28:31
first 1:13 3:15 5:5,31
 9:21 11:3 14:7
 17:8,24,29 18:5
 19:11,21 21:17
 25:2,23 31:4,6
 32:3,19 37:14 41:2
 45:7 46:31
fit 20:2
five 2:16 13:7 46:14 47:1
fixed 10:17
flood 8:6
flooding 21:30
floor 24:25
fobbed 41:28
focus 15:15
following 1:1 13:28
 37:11
follows 14:26
food 18:13
foot 40:6
footage 43:14
footballer 1:23
footpaths 23:15
for 1:2,20,23,27,34
 2:30,32,34
 4:10,15,24,25,30
 5:1,6,17,25,32,34
 6:2,3,4,12,13,19,23,2
 5,26,27,32
 7:6,19,20,25,30,31,33
 8:3,4,5,6,11,33
 9:6,7,9,10,14,21,23,2
 5
 10:1,3,8,21,22,23,29
 11:12,21,26,29
 12:5,19,24,32 13:29
 14:4,29,30,34
 16:3,6,17 21:10 18:11
 19:1
forced 25:3,4,5
forever 45:16
forgot 1:32 8:15
form 12:6 29:12 36:26
formal 33:33 35:7 37:29
formally 14:27 37:18
formats 16:17
formed 36:20
former 1:16,17
forthcoming 9:7
forward 2:22 3:8 15:2,30
 24:16 27:23 31:10
 38:1 42:8
four 3:11,12 5:22,24,33
 9:18 26:23 34:20
fourth 32:20
framework 37:30
free 44:28
friend 44:17,18,21
from 2:5,7,14
 3:16,17,19,33,34
 4:29,32 5:10,14,16,29
 6:4,20,21,22
 7:17,20,27,33
 8:7,8,16,32 9:18
 11:13,34 12:2,3
 13:6,11,17,28 14:2,9
 15:13,19,20,26,30
 16:11,16,18 17:11
 18:5,8,20 19:32 20:32
 21:20 22:21,22 23:7
 24:17,25 26:2,3,18
 27:6,22,32 28:14,23
 29:2
front 10:13
fruiting 3:6
frustrating 20:17
frustration 16:30
full 6:19 7:5,13,14,15,26
 9:33 15:19 19:27
 20:7,8 36:7
fully 15:22
function 21:17,23
fund 5:7,12 6:21 8:5 10:3
 12:12,15,16,19,21,22
 13:6,18,22
 17:28,29,30 19:4
 32:6,8 45:31
fundamentally 17:26
funded 11:5,20 15:22
 19:4 28:4,5,9
funding 4:28,30 5:1,14
 6:22 11:13 12:25
 25:21 28:13,15,24
 29:33 30:19 32:22
 33:1,29 35:10,22
 40:16 45:22,25
funds 23:13
future 3:13 5:2 29:28
 34:15
Fail 12:9 14:32 15:5
 24:24 28:32 37:16
 38:25
Farmers 12:3
Fein's 17:25
Fein 17:7,10,21,26 18:17
 19:7 38:25
Fianna 12:9 14:32 15:4
 24:24 28:32 37:16
 38:25
Finance 4:13 12:10
 13:21 14:11,26 16:26
 21:14 33:3,28 34:12
 35:1,12 37:17
 45:21,24 46:14
Fine 15:5,18 21:33 24:23
 34:24 38:25
Firstly 42:15
Fitzgerald 2:17
 3:22,23,25,33
Fortune 1:17
 24:29,30,31,33 25:2
 27:10,13 28:31,34
 39:6
Friday 2:7,10
G
gain 14:7 23:13 32:13
game 27:32 44:22
games 27:32
garden 1:33
gathered 23:14
gave 11:1
generate 37:5
generated 14:20 42:32
generating 23:6 37:4
generation 45:12
get 1:10 2:21 3:8 5:7 6:27
 11:2,17 15:14
 16:17,18,29 18:34
 19:9,32 20:7,26 23:23
 25:9,21 26:30,31
 27:19 28:24
 30:5,21,25 31:12
 32:30 33:14,16,17,19
 36:2,11,12 37:1,14
 39:28,29 40:21
 41:8,10,11,12,20,21
 45:16 46:33
getting 13:10 19:19 20:5
 26:20 28:22 30:11
 32:31 40:15,16 41:16
 44:31 45:12
give 12:29 19:27 22:29
 26:15 27:19 28:21,23
given 2:7 4:17 13:7 19:25
 22:21 23:5 25:26
 26:9 31:33 34:2,4,5
gives 4:30 5:10,16,33
 9:17 12:34
giving 22:27,28 24:14
 33:29 35:10 41:29
 45:22
glad 38:25
gloom 21:14
goes 5:6 10:15 27:18
going 4:1 6:9 16:14,27
 17:8,27
 18:1,6,9,15,16,29,30,
 31,32 19:4,29,31
 20:1,31 21:3,5
 22:23,33 23:6,14,28
 24:1,17
 25:10,12,13,16
 26:14,18,21
 27:18,23,31,32 28:16
 29:17,19,20,24,25,28
 30:17,18,21,27
 32:32,33 33:17
 34:15,28 36:14,26
 37:14 38:10,24
 39:28,29 40
gone 7:28 8:8 10:4,6,8,20
 11:2 40:30 43:27
 45:11
good 1:9 2:33 6:5 8:29
 14:14 30:9 33:28
 39:15 41:31,32
goods 6:3 11:17 14:1
got 4:2 13:6 14:14
 15:14,15 17:16 23:22
 25:17 27:23 31:30
 37:12 40:17 41:1,2,4
 43:16,17 44:12
gotten 5:13
government 4:22,28,29
 5:14 9:1 11:13,20
 12:19 16:8 17:22
 23:15,18 25:21
 29:16,32
 30:10,15,19,20
 32:9,13,15,22,31,34
 33:1,3,7,15,16,28
 34:10,18,19,27
 35:9,12,22 42:17
 45:21,24,25,28 46:6
grand 21:18
grant 5:8,9,14 7:18 11:20
grants 5:12,13 6:8,20,22
 7:4,6,10 26:28
grass 30:25
great 1:23 2:8
greater 4:30 16:27 17:3
 22:1,2 38:31,32
grossly 18:4
ground 8:11 20:8,13 34:3
group 12:9 14:14,21
 15:5,6,18 16:25 21:33
 25:3 28:32 37:17
grouping 16:25 20:24
 27:22
groupings 16:25 22:1
 38:31
grown 13:32
growth 13:25 14:15
 34:14
Gael 15:5,6,18 21:33
 24:23 34:24 38:25
GALLAGHER 4:10
 37:16 38:7,23,29
 39:4,6 45:20
 46:2,4,12,16
General 5:8,9 8:29 9:1
 10:16,18 11:10,20
 16:5 26:4 32:6,8

Geographic 1:33
Gerry 42:2
Green 36:34
Greystones 7:33 11:1
 44:25

H
had 2:4 3:33 4:16 6:27
 10:4,27 11:21,22 14:8
 16:25 17:10 20:7,8
 22:18 26:17 30:29
 31:24 34:4 41:9
half 20:29 21:15,16
 22:27 23:30 28:26
 40:18
hammered 31:3
hand 4:17 8:17 10:34
handed 16:16 29:33 46:1
hands 17:20 44:12
happen 19:29 27:31
 31:29 40:30
happening 22:9 31:6
happens 19:30 42:18
happy 30:1
 40:10,12,26,27
 41:24,33 42:6 44:2
 45:17
hard 8:16 25:25
harmonised 6:17
has 2:29 4:25 5:25 7:28
 8:12,20 10:30,31
 11:6,11,18
 12:6,11,20,25
 13:10,23,30,32
 14:1,4,15 15:29,34
 16:15 17:28,34
 19:12,22 20:1
 25:4,23,27 27:10,22
 30:10,32 31:7 32:12
 34:2,14 35:30,32
 37:4,9,10,29,30
 42:21,23,28 43:1,4,21
 44:15,22,32 47:1
have 1:18 2:8,12,33
 3:6,11,20,24,25,27
 4:3,22
 5:1,5,12,13,22,25
 6:12,13,14,20,21,23,3
 2,33
 7:13,15,17,22,25,28,2
 9,30,31,32,34
 8:7,10,11,17,24,29
 9:1,2,5,25,30,33
 10:9,10,12,17,24,27,2
 8
 11:3,8,12,16,17,18,32
 12:6,33
 13:5,21,28,29,31
 14:21,34 15:4,5,18,19
 16
haven't 14:8 25:3 35:4
 36:3 41:4,18 43:17
 44:12
having 10:15 17:14
 24:11 25:33 26:3
 27:7 28:1
head 13:21 14:10 22:19
headings 26:32
health 7:30
healthy 8:28
hear 22:27 29:5
hearing 12:33 30:25
held 5:29 26:24,25
hell 26:10
help 35:5
helpful 45:6
here 2:15 5:19 11:23
 12:7 13:14,15,17,29
 14:23 16:3,20,25,29
 17:24,25,29,34
 18:3,15,30,33 19:30
 20:10,17,18 21:2
 22:7,9,10,13,23,31,32
 23:10,12,16
 24:12,16,25
 25:12,16,23 26:6
 27:23,25 28:5,21
 29:34 30:11,17,29
 31:2,16,23 32:34

33:13 34:1 35:19
 39:30 40:4
heretofore 32:7
hidden 28:20
high 16:16 20:34
higher 6:8 7:9 11:28,30
 14:10 19:13,14,16,17
 21:4 25:31 32:21,26
 33:13,21,24 35:11
 45:23
highest 9:10 15:9 19:12
 32:20
highlight 4:19
highly 44:9
him 24:34 46:17
his 1:25 24:33 42:3
 44:18,21
hit 31:30 35:16
hold 3:7 28:7 40:24
 41:23 42:11,12 45:29
holders 32:10
holes 23:15
home 17:15,17
 22:15,16,17,25,32
 23:27 24:5 32:4
 38:21
homelessness 7:2
homeowners 25:31
homes 2:31 22:13 38:15
honestly 16:14 34:4
honoured 2:9
hope 18:26 35:16
hopeful 31:32
hopefully 2:31 18:29
 31:10
hoping 18:23
hours 41:29
house 2:34 19:12,13,16
 25:33 29:17 31:29
household 5:28 9:6
 29:27,29
householders 40:18
households 18:4,9 19:21
houses 21:2 33:23 41:25
housing 2:12,13,24 3:7
 5:12,13 6:21,22 7:29
 10:2 12:22 21:18
how 4:1 13:12 15:15
 16:16,27 18:31
 19:28,29 22:15,19
 25:30 26:14
 27:4,5,17,20,31 28:6
 32:4,29,31 33:17
 43:24
huge 11:11 16:1 22:18
 23:18 40:16
hugely 13:23 16:20 31:20
 39:33
hundreds 39:26,29 40:17
hung 27:17
hypocrisy 23:31,34
Harbour 8:6 10:23 11:6
Harris 2:13,16 3:12
He's 1:18
However 34:31
Hyanas 41:31

I
idea 27:23 33:28 41:32
ideas 20:26 37:4
identified 12:10
idiots 40:32
illegal 42:13
imagine 15:34
immediately 41:1
impact
 9:4,5,6,7,9,18,23,29,3
 0 16:1 27:13
implementation 19:3
implemented 30:10
important 16:29 25:14
 31:20 32:19 44:6
impose 18:8
imposed 32:13
imposing 34:24 37:6
imposition 32:15 34:20
impossible 26:6
impression 29:2
improved 16:7

improvement 16:5
improvements 11:32
improves 4:30,32
improving 11:31
inch 39:34
include 6:10 8:10 11:22
 37:26
included 6:19 7:12,18,20
 8:7 9:33,34 10:10,29
 11:2,6,7 36:3 37:11
 41:17,21
includes 7:26
including 16:25 34:19
 40:25
income 5:24,31
 6:2,10,14,15,23
 7:7,17,27,33
 8:1,24,26,28 9:24
 10:16 11:2,12,13
 12:20 13:26 14:1,3,16
 15:26 20:3,4 21:22
 22:17 23:6,8 24:17
 26:8,16,18,19,28 27:6
 29:8 31:7,28
 32:7,24,26 33:15,24
 35:1 36:2 37:4,5
 40:24,25 41:16,20
 42:32
inconsistent 38:6
increase 6:26
 7:1,4,6,7,30,31 8:34
 13:26 14:3 19:31
 29:19 33:21 34:34
 35:4,11 45:16,23
increased 8:11 14:1 16:6
 19:29 22:27 35:29,30
increases 7:28,33 15:23
 29:20
increasing 45:15
incredibly 32:19
incur 5:25
incurred 36:16
incurring 36:12
incurs 38:16
indeed 13:4,15 30:31
 42:33
independent 22:14 23:34
 42:16
independents 16:25,26
 24:2
indicated 41:23
indicates 12:14,21
indication 11:20
indications 31:12
indicator 8:29
individual 5:28 9:6
individuals 12:2
inflates 11:29
inflation 11:16
inform 24:34
information 2:29 4:17
 5:33 7:13,15,22
 14:9,22 15:20 20:31
 26:4 28:20,29
 35:19,22
infrastructure 42:21,27
initiative 33:34
innovative 29:7
innuendo 27:30
ins 43:30
installation 17:30 19:5
instance 40:13
instances 22:29
instead 24:5,8 29:9
instructed 2:15
instrument 31:27
intended 1:3
intention 14:32 37:23
inter 6:11 7:9
interest 6:31 22:18
interested 27:30 29:8
internal 36:11
interrupt 24:20,32
interrupted 24:33
interrupting 24:31
into 1:10 3:27 4:32 5:7
 7:5 8:7 10:4,30,31
 12:16 14:8 15:26

16:2,17 18:15 19:9
 23:8 25:9 26:12,17,31
 28:12,18,22 30:17
 31:12,18,24 33:6,17
 34:25 35:31 40:27
 41:34 42:32 43:27
intrigued 34:34
introduce 17:8 29:16
 34:11,12
introduced 17:16,29
 21:12
introducing 34:13 37:6
investigations 46:16
investigators 46:17
invited 45:24
involved 28:13
iota 17:29
isn't 17:1,25 18:5,27 38:8
 39:29
issue 3:3 8:25,34 15:28
 20:14 34:10 44:6
 46:21,33
issued 5:4
issues 2:13,18,20,24 3:26
 13:8 45:5
it's 3:9,12,23,27 5:5 6:33
 7:6,14,17,26 8:15,28
 9:10,11,17,26 10:4,21
 12:26,27,31 14:7
 15:9,13 16:1,17,32
 17:15
 18:8,9,15,16,19,21
 19:4,14,22,30
 20:11,23 21:29,30
 22:7,8,14,22 23:27
 24:7,8,19,21,29 25:34
 26:5,6 27:4,15,23,31
 29:33 30:1,11,26 31:5
 32:14 33
item 1:13 3:14 4:11
 27:15 31:18 40:28
items 1:31 14:17
 26:23,32
its 17:26
I'd 1:13,25,26 4:4 16:1
 21:32 22:8 25:2,30
 26:2,4,8 27:4,19
 28:17 30:5 32:3,6
 44:6
I'll 3:14,29 15:1 16:10
 22:5 25:9 28:7,10,34
 29:2,14 37:14 38:1
 40:33 42:1,3 46:33,34
I'm 9:4,31 11:7 15:30
 17:25 22:13,14
 23:27,34 24:34,25
 25:10 27:10,14,30
 28:31 29:23
 30:1,12,17,26 32:3,29
 35:16 37:14
 38:15,21,24,25
 39:30,31 40:4,10,12
 41:9,26,33 42:1,4
I've 4:1,19 19:25 29:3
 30:29 38:9 45:32

Inc 29:5
Intel 44:31
Ireland 23:9 32:25
Irish 6:3,4 7:9,21 12:3
 14:2 17:31 18:5
 22:33 24:3,5,16 35:23
 39:17,19,21,27,29
 40:1,7,12,30 41:15,30
 42:23 44:22,28,31
 45:14
Isles 45:3

J
jeopardise 37:31
jobs 40:4
joint 7:34 11:1
jurisdiction 44:23
just 1:10,14,22,25,31
 2:12,14,20 3:11,12,25
 4:19 5:4 6:22 8:12
 9:17,24 11:1,10,21
 14:15 15:31 16:14,24
 17:15 18:12,13
 19:7,11,22 20:33

21:16,23 22:14
 23:12,30 24:6
 25:9,24,34 26:2 27:16
 28:17,34 29:4,15,19
 34:6,33 35:28,33
 36:22 37:25 38:4,14
 39:8,17,25 4
justified 15:6,10
justify 33:29
January 8:33 18:4 22:22
 39:18
Johnstown 3:19
July 11:34
June 8:30

K
keep 12:33 45:27,29,30
kept 3:34 23:17
key 8:15 11:1 39:32
kicking 23:16
kind 26:9,12,19 27:32
 28:18 29:4
knock 41:31
knocks 16:18
know 2:1,29 3:34 4:4
 7:21 10:21 13:14
 15:25 16:8,16,31
 17:29 18:31
 20:30,31,32
 21:22,24,31 24:19
 25:8,24,30 27:31 28:6
 29:29,31,32 30:4,5
 33:8 34:28 35:16
 38:25 40:2 41:27
 42:13 46:32,34
knowledge 35:19
knows 43:32
Kavanagh 32:2,3
 44:5,6,22
Kenny 17:17
Kildare 44:25,31

L
lack 2:24 3:3 29:34
lacking 18:34
land 3:6,7 18:5
landfill 11:29 36:34
lands 27:5
large 29:4 44:26
largest 44:33 45:2
last 1:32 2:4,33 3:26 4:20
 5:8,9 7:32 9:34 11:12
 12:19,20,25 13:10,31
 14:19 15:23,31
 17:16,28,31 19:4
 20:29 22:28 23:29
 25:23 27:29 28:17
 32:17 34:5 35:29
 36:25 37:25,26 40:17
 41:29 46:18
lateral 26:19
latest 25:29
laughing 41:31 43:6,25
law 1:18
lead 16:6
learn 21:17
least 18:24 25:5 33:7
 38:24 39:15
leave 1:14 2:16 22:14
leaving 22:12,32
left 10:16 12:15,17
 18:29,30 23:22 31:8
 34:28 36:2
legal 37:30 42:12
legislation 17:12,20
 24:19,21
legitimate 46:29
length 41:14
less 3:23 9:14 11:27,30
 12:19 13:11 18:8,20
 20:3 30:24 32:21,24
 33:14,15
let's 17:27 28:23 43:31
let 2:12 35:14,16 41:24
 44:2
letters 47:1
level 5:1 6:17,18 7:19
 15:9,23 16:32 21:16
 31:28 33:23 34:2,11

levels 11:18
levied 23:7
levy 11:29 36:34
liabilities 8:27,29 27:4
liable 9:5,9 42:16
libraries 10:23 37:7
library 6:28 8:4,5 10:3
 21:19
lie 23:24
lieu 11:5
light 32:27 33:5 39:16
like 1:13,25,26 4:4 9:31
 11:7 12:5 16:1 17:20
 19:30 20:17 21:29,32
 23:24 24:2,10,16,23
 25:2,30 26:2,8,15,17
 27:4,7,13,19
 28:10,15,24 29:4 30:5
 31:6 32:3,6,14,33
 33:5,6,20 34:3 36:34
 40:10,28 42:14
 43:10,11,26 44:6,11

limited 11:18 19:22
limits 2:25
line 18:3 25:25 37:25
lined 3:11
list 8:12,15,16 9:34 10:28
 11:5 28:5
listen 24:12
listening 22:7 25:8
lists 10:4 19:26 26:23
 42:17
live 22:8 31:29
loan 6:31 8:26
loans 6:32 7:31 8:27
local 2:34 3:4,7
 4:12,22,23,24,28,29,3
 0,32,34
 5:1,8,27,28,32,33
 6:11,18,21,22 7:5,20
 8:21,24,25,33
 9:6,7,23,29
 11:11,20,23,26
 12:1,10,11,12,16,17,1
 9,24,32 13:7,18,28
 14:8,22,26,28,29
 15:6,21 17:27,28
 18:15,22 19:4 21:11
 26:34 27:16,24 28:13
 29:15 30:3,9,1

locally 5:7 30:23
 31:17,18,21
logic 28:18
long 30:29 40:13 44:12
longer 6:5
look 4:17 8:24,26 11:26
 23:12 24:11
 25:9,17,21
 26:17,18,28,29,31
 27:3,14,18,19,29
 28:15,23 29:28
 30:6,16,33 34:16
 36:32 40:1,3,11,31
 41:34 42:4,24
 43:29,30 44:2,16
looked 12:4 28:25 36:19
 40:27
looking 2:32 22:13 26:33
 33:19 37:6 40:4 41:9
 44:7
lose 10:11
loss 7:33
lost 11:2 43:23
lot 2:30 3:2 4:17 7:12
 15:14 18:12
 28:13,21,29
 30:9,23,26 32:32
 33:34 34:1 35:22
 44:24 46:32
love 29:8
low 8:28 16:11
lower 9:12,18 32:26
lowest 9:9 29:17
lucky 6:27 15:18
lump 6:25,26
Labour 34:24
Lawless 46:3
Leitrim 23:16

Lorraine 4:16,18 12:8
30:5 35:3,14 37:13,14
45:13 46:1
Louth 44:24
LPT 5:6,10,19,20
7:17,26,27
9:18,23,24,26,29,30,3
3
10:9,10,15,18,27,30,3
2 12:4,14 14:20 17:27
Lynch 4:19 35:16
39:9,11,17 41:13
42:10,21 47:1

M
made 4:24 19:27 21:34
23:3 24:33 25:17
26:10 27:5 30:15
31:23 38:30
39:25,32,33 40:8
44:33,34 45:1,2,29
magnificent 2:5
main 6:2 10:22 32:7
maintain 11:14,18
21:14,16
maintaining 9:30
maintenance 7:29 8:11
10:3 21:29,30
36:13,14
major 43:22
majority 9:12,13,14,20
25:31 34:16
make 2:16 3:25 8:34 12:6
14:19 18:6,15 19:29
20:3 23:8 24:17 25:2
26:5,6,33 27:15,31
28:31 29:2 30:19
33:33 34:33 39:7
40:19 43:5 45:34
makes 16:1,34 28:1
39:15 44:9
making 4:32 5:1,22 12:7
24:23 25:20 30:15
32:19 35:7
man 23:3,4 34:17
39:25,32 40:8 44:34
45:2
management 13:3 15:13
20:23,29
managers 24:6 28:14
mandate 17:11 22:14
manner 17:3 27:14 28:23
many 1:23 21:11
22:15,19 30:29,31
31:16 32:4 34:16
mark 29:28
marked 3:12
marsh 8:6
massive 25:26 28:20
match 11:22
matter 2:32 17:25 24:18
43:6 45:10
matters 12:6 33:20
maturing 6:32
maximise 40:24
maximising 41:20
maximum 5:19 9:13
may 1:5 10:25 17:11
26:32 42:13,30
maybe 20:4 21:25,30
22:14 27:6,22,30
28:26 31:5
mean 10:11,18 24:3
38:25
means 39:23
media 12:1 34:13
meet 3:13 7:28,32 8:25
10:8,17,24 11:3 26:14
27:25 45:27
meetings 1:3,4 27:26
member 2:22 3:8 27:20
28:17 42:24
members 1:9 2:15
3:18,19 8:7,12 9:31
10:11,28,30,32 11:7
12:7 13:14 14:27,32
15:5 25:3 26:6,11
27:16,17 36:23 37:18
42:25,34

43:2,4,6,12,13 46:4
47:6
memorial 2:4
mention 1:32 9:2 13:15
15:31 19:28
mentioned 21:11,28
24:15 25:23 34:34
36:10,28
mentions 13:25
merge 38:6
merging 14:8
merit 45:5
messing 41:29
met 2:16 10:17
meters 17:31 19:5
metres 39:26
might 1:9 8:16 15:5
20:25,26,30 24:34
31:29 34:3,33 37:5
40:3 43:5
miles 39:34
milk 23:21
milked 23:22
million
5:6,7,8,10,12,13,16
6:6,9,19,21 7:20,25
8:12,30,33,34
9:25,26,27
10:21,22,34 11:20,21
12:14,15,16,17,19,20,
21,31 13:22,30,32
14:2,3,15,16,20
15:26,30,34 16:2
19:28
20:2,4,5,7,18,30
21:4,15,16,28 22:33
25:16,30 26:3,29,30
27:3,4,19,29 28:6,26
31:32
millions 23:8,13 39:26,30
40:17
mind 16:8 17:14,25
43:23
minimum 10:20 12:25
14:3
minus 5:20 14:29 37:20
minute 15:32 28:34
minutes 1:4 28:32,33
42:5
misinterpretation 36:18
moment 1:27 5:34
7:13,21,23 8:5 9:33
16:30 17:1 35:23
44:3
money 10:3,4 15:13,29
16:3,30,34 17:29,34
18:15 19:32 20:7,13
21:23,31 22:2 23:18
26:32 28:24,25
30:1,3,4,12
31:8,12,14,17,18,21
32:10,21,31 33:6,16
34:15,27 35:3 37:10
38:32 40:31 41:10
42:32 43:23
monies 16:15 18:29
month 14:15
monthly 29:20
months 2:32 4:15 22:13
23:2 25:24 36:25
45:18
morally 17:15,17,21 18:3
more 2:25 9:17 14:3,17
15:11 16:30 18:24
20:11,23 25:16
26:23,30 27:26
28:20,29,34
31:8,12,13 33:6,11
35:3 36:25 37:5,7
42:21 44:7
morning 3:34 4:16 10:15
11:10 14:14 21:13
25:8,26 35:17
36:10,28,34 45:27
mortgage 6:32 22:17,19
33:24
mortgages 18:12

most 2:33 6:25 10:2
11:12 14:5 20:10
27:24 29:15 36:13
37:12 44:24,25
mostly 7:1
motion 4:2 13:6 14:26
17:8,10 18:29
37:30,33 38:1,5,6,9
46:13,14
motions 38:4
motor 23:18
move 3:14 4:11 11:3
21:23 41:33 42:9
moved 8:32
movement 6:22
moves 29:16
much 3:2 14:3
16:6,26,31 25:30
27:12 28:2 32:31
33:16 39:22
must 12:16 31:2,8,13,33
myself 3:23 9:4 15:5
31:34
myth 17:28
MANAGER 23:2 24:26
36:28 42:15 43:9
44:7,32
46:17,26,27,28,31,33
MATTHEWS 29:13,14
McDONALD 3:32,33
McLoughlin 22:5 38:29
Meath 41:1
Meeting 1:1,7,14
2:12,13,17
3:7,11,13,16,17 4:26
5:5 7:14,22 15:2 17:9
18:24 19:30 27:24,25
42:14 45:24,26 46:18
47:3,8
Michael 33:13,14
Mickey 22:31 23:10
Minister's 2:21
Minister 2:13,16 3:12
14:30 34:12 35:1
37:21 45:27 46:13
Ministers 2:26
Minogue 1:16,17
Minute's 1:29
Mouse 22:31 23:10
Moving 31:10 38:28
45:19
Municipal 2:17 3:18,19
10:16,18 16:32
18:25,31

N
nail 13:17
names 46:17
narrative 13:23
national 1:33 5:7
11:27,30 12:14 23:7
24:19,21 32:21,24
33:11 41:14
natural 23:3 39:33
near 3:13 24:10
nearly 6:9
necessarily 15:10
necessary 14:31 34:29
37:21
need 9:1 10:20,21,23,31
11:7,23,31 15:28
16:34 18:33,34 20:29
21:30 25:9
26:23,30,31 27:18
28:15,20,29 30:26
31:19,20 32:4 33:2
34:11,12,14 42:30
44:15 45:16
needed 25:25 34:27
needs 18:33 25:15 26:34
28:2
negative 13:23,26 31:11
negativity 41:8
net 7:7 14:16 20:3
network 39:11,20
41:13,21
never 22:8 24:15,28 29:6
31:11,27 36:21 40:14
41:2

nevertheless 19:22
new 2:4,30 3:26 6:9 7:5
32:29 34:11 36:6
39:16
newer 41:18
newly 17:9
news 14:14
newspaper 18:22
next 5:33 6:26,32,33 7:25
12:34 17:22 18:26
19:10 21:3,5 22:22
23:14,29 26:29 30:25
35:1 41:30 43:13,15
night 1:24 2:7,10 36:14
nine 41:23
nobody 22:9,24 24:33
40:25 43:32
nodding 32:15
non 6:32 12:34 13:1
14:17 15:26 16:32
20:19 36:32,33
nondiscretionary 10:17
normally 26:17
north 3:19 44:24,31
not 1:3,17 3:2,12
4:10,16,25 5:20 9:2
12:26 13:10 16:2
17:14 18:12,16,21
19:4,7,27 20:1,18,26
21:25,32 22:13,31,34
23:1,3,7,9,10,16,17,2
7 24:1,19,21 25:32
26:4,5,14
27:7,10,16,23,26,30,3
2 28:20,31
30:1,10,17,26 31:26
32:25,29 33:11,14
34:3,16,25,27,29 35:
note 1:4 7:25
nothing 23:27 24:6
26:11,16 41:11
43:11,20
notice 1:18
notify 14:31 37:22
now 5:13 7:5 8:16 11:23
13:10,17 14:3,22
15:11,25 17:14,18
21:22,28 22:8 23:6
24:10,14,27 25:23
26:2 28:7,33
30:15,17,33 31:3,23
32:29 39:13,15,26,27
40:2,7,10 41:15 42:1
44:8,9,22,23,25,26
45:6,12,14,28,31
number 1:13 2:1,18 3:14
4:11 14:4,19 25:23
31:19 35:29 37:13
39:11 43:21,22
numbers 25:15 26:4
28:22
NAMA 3:2,3
NICHOLS 3:17
Nolan 31:34
Noonan's 33:13,14
November 7:14,22 10:29
36:7 47:3
NPPR 14:15,17 15:27
26:3 31:32 36:25,26

O
o'clock 47:3
objection 29:23
objections 29:15
objectives 35:6
objects 37:26
obviously 5:29 6:2
7:17,27 9:30 10:28
11:7,16 17:18 25:2,5
36:10,16,27 42:30
43:4
occasion 2:4,5 5:5 12:29
13:4 32:8
occur 1:5
odd 15:34
off 6:32 19:3 21:19 22:21
35:30,34 38:8 40:29
41:28 43:31,33
45:28,32

offer 11:32 12:11
office 7:5 8:4 41:19
42:15,16,31 43:21
44:10,12
official 1:3
officials 1:14 2:1 16:26
21:15,17,19,23 22:1
24:6 38:31 40:3,25
offs 35:33 36:8
okay 1:20,27,31
3:14,22,32
4:3,11,16,17 9:4 12:8
15:2 16:10 17:6
19:10,14 20:29 21:10
22:6 24:29,30 25:1,2
27:9 28:21,25,30
29:2,13 35:14
37:13,24,32
38:1,3,27,28,34 39:5
40:24 44:4 45:19,33
46:15 47:2,5
old 25:27
once 10:16 13:23 16:29
23:28 40:13 41:32
one 1:26 2:33 3:33
4:10,15,24,25 6:31
8:15,19 29:9 10:10 4
12:3,34 14:4,8,9,10
15:9 17:29 18:1,10,24
19:14,26 20:29,33
21:3,16 23:7,8,16,17
24:9,31 28:21,34
29:15,18,20,25 30:34
33:9,34
34:2,10,11,23,33
37:14 43:12,13,14
46:12
ones 6:9 10:22 16:34
only 2:21,32 3:9 4:15
11:29 12:26 17:30
19:4 21:3 29:17,20,24
30:30,33 32:13,25
34:16 42:5 44:19,31
45:9
onus 45:11
open 43:4
opened 3:27
opening 2:4 26:10
openness 18:34 19:1
operational 14:9
opportunity 17:3 19:23
31:2,4,5 34:3,4,5,6
oppose 32:3
opposed 17:26 22:14
46:4
option 4:25
options 37:7
order 3:17
ordinary 34:18 40:5
organisation 15:13
26:16,17 28:14 29:4
organisations 2:9
organised 18:24
original 12:27 37:32
other 1:20 3:2,11,12
6:10,11,23 7:9 8:10
10:11,17,24,32 11:7,8
13:15 15:21
19:5,18,19 20:12,28
24:6,27 25:32,34
26:10,19,29 27:11
28:9 29:23,34 30:12
31:7,23 33:2 34:33
35:10 37:4 41:23
42:25 44:30 45:11,22
otherwise 41:24
our 1:22,26 2:16,25 3:2
6:25 8:19,26
11:13,16,18,20,22,29
13:17 14:1,3,22,26,32
15:16,22 16:18
17:15,20 18:5
19:22,23,27,30 20:4,8
21:13,22 24:19,21
25:2,21 26:8,33 29:32
30:18 31:14 32:21
33:2,17,21 34:27
35:10 36:26,32 37:22

40:20 42:33
44:23,28,32 45:1
ours 18:12
ourselves 10:25 30:7
32:32
out 1:18,22 2:30 3:8 4:20
5:23 6:8,15,27 8:17
10:1,4,9,12,20,34
11:1 12:12,16 13:14
15:4,21,31 16:19,20
17:28 18:16,19,26,32
19:26,29 20:23,25
22:27,28,34
23:23,29,30 24:14
25:9,24 26:2,15 27:17
28:20 29:6,23
30:3,11,25 31:8 32:10
35:8 36:2,4,14,22
37:1,1
outdoor 1:26 36:12
outer 31:6
outhouses 39:22
outline 2:20
outlined 5:23 6:23 7:18
21:8 46:17
outlines 9:24
outlining 35:10 45:21
outs 43:30
outset 29:11
outside 15:9 19:11,13,16
20:12
outstanding 15:27
over 6:26,33 7:32 8:5
10:21 11:12,16,29
12:20 13:11,30
14:1,14,15,19 15:16
17:16,34 20:4,18,28
22:19,33 23:6,14,24
29:19,33,34 34:28
35:29,31 36:21,27,29
37:1,10 39:14,18
overall 17:3,26 41:21
overtime 19:28 20:33
21:28,31
36:10,11,12,15,16
own 2:31 11:13,16
31:17,26 32:4
owned 42:28
owners 9:13,14 40:5
ownership 39:14
O'Brien 1:22
O'Neill 1:21,22 42:1,2

P
page 10:27 26:23,28
27:13,15,29 28:1,4,9
paid 7:4 15:9 39:12
40:27 42:28 43:12
46:18
painful 12:33
pan 18:11
paper 29:20
paradigm 25:26 28:16
part 5:4,31 6:21,25 10:15
11:12,34 12:6 19:14
26:6,20 28:4,9
36:2,13,20,26 38:5
particular 4:20 7:15
26:23
particularly 16:32
parties 22:8 24:1,2
parts 4:20 25:34
party 14:33 16:25 39:13
pass 32:8
passed 3:20 18:30 43:2
46:5
passing 4:2
passive 32:30
past 28:14
pay 6:9,27 11:29
12:16,27 18:3,12,13
19:17,18
22:16,17,18,19 25:5
30:23,25 31:28
32:4,20,26,32
33:11,22,23 35:11
37:1 41:1,9 43:15
45:23
payable 8:27

payers 30:31 43:22
 paying 4:31 6:18 15:11
 18:4 24:13
 25:31,33,34 30:26
 33:1 39:8,10,21
 40:12,14 42:22
 44:26,27
 payment 39:18
 payments 7:2
 payroll 6:3,4,5,25 11:17
 36:32
 pays 19:16 33:13
 penalised 20:11
 penalties 15:27
 penny 16:19,21 18:1 41:4
 pension 6:25 10:22
 pensions 7:32 10:8
 people's 31:27
 people 2:7,8,30
 12:27,29,32 14:7,23
 15:11 16:22,33,34
 17:4
 18:3,12,20,22,23,26,3
 3 19:3,17,18
 22:2,16,21,27,28
 23:23 24:7,10 25:5,23
 26:25 27:7,11 28:13
 29:8 30:9,15,21,23,25
 31:6,18,19,20,23
 32:13,14,20,24
 33:1,8,10,21,24
 34:4,16,18,24,25,26,3
 1 35:11 36:1
 per 7:17 9:10,13,14,19
 11:27 13:32 18:10
 19:12 29:27,29
 percent 8:34 9:10 12:24
 13:11 19:31 22:27
 26:25 29:24 32:20
 percentage 25:30 29:23
 35:32,33
 performance 34:17
 perhaps 28:11 34:33
 35:3
 period 4:24,25 5:25
 14:1,24
 permission 41:12
 person 9:5,9 21:32 22:16
 32:4
 pessimist 31:11
 phasing 6:8
 physically 39:33
 picture 19:27
 pie 44:3
 piece 16:32 45:17
 pinpoint 16:15
 pipework 41:14
 pitched 29:34
 pittance 29:27
 place 12:25 14:30 37:21
 39:19
 plan 26:14,15
 planning 41:11
 plans 9:7,29
 plants 41:18
 played 27:32
 playgrounds 10:4,8
 playing 27:32
 plus 5:20
 pockets 18:17
 point 3:25 7:15 15:6,19
 20:1 25:2,14 26:4
 34:33 39:8,15
 45:1,26,29
 pointing 32:32
 points 19:11 35:29
 policy 2:24 14:14 24:16
 45:26,29
 political 22:34,7 38:31
 popular 32:25
 portioned 30:3
 portrayed 1:3
 posed 22:15
 position 5:27 8:21 13:17
 14:4,22 16:6 38:20
 42:34
 positive 23:10 41:32

possible 1:5 3:13 25:6
 26:32 33:16,27 34:34
 40:25 47:3
 possibly 36:18 41:20
 pot 23:15 42:32
 potential 3:6
 potentially 40:27
 pound 22:17
 power 4:29,34 13:5
 16:31,33 19:9
 24:19,21 30:32,33
 31:24
 powers 4:23
 practically 38:7
 practice 3:24
 premature 21:6
 prepare 10:27 24:26
 prepared 4:19 24:33
 45:4
 preparing 7:13 10:15,29
 13:23,25 35:16,17,19
 36:6,19
 present 4:10 16:8 17:10
 46:12
 presentation 4:19 35:3
 presented 13:21 14:21
 30:33 35:24 37:11
 45:7
 presently 39:28
 pressing 45:5
 prestigious 1:32
 presume 46:25
 previous 2:13 3:16 13:14
 29:3 31:13 32:29
 previously 3:15 39:23
 42:27
 price 33:23
 prior 14:32 17:15 37:23
 priorities
 10:11,24,28,30,32
 11:7 35:25
 prioritise 37:2
 priority 40:28
 private 15:27 41:8 44:8
 46:16,17
 privatised 40:31
 proactive 18:24
 probably 27:24 28:12
 34:1 36:22 39:28
 problem 4:2 20:7,10,13
 28:26 34:18 38:9
 43:30 45:32
 problems 34:13 42:33
 proceed 25:1
 process 5:29 7:14 12:15
 13:4 14:16 16:14,27
 17:9,24,31
 18:20,22,23,34 22:1
 26:20 29:2,15,31,33
 30:13 35:18 36:15
 37:27 38:32 46:6
 processes 12:33 13:3
 procure 11:17
 products 10:11
 professional 27:14
 progress 4:1
 projections 25:29
 projects 10:12 11:5 17:1
 28:4
 promised 2:26
 promptly 2:26
 proper 2:22 18:27 20:9
 26:5 27:14 28:23
 properly 1:9
 properties 3:2,3 9:12,20
 27:5 37:19 41:18
 42:15,18
 property 4:12,22 5:8,14
 6:18,21,23 7:20 8:21
 9:1,12,13,14
 12:10,11,17,24
 13:19,22 14:11,27,28
 15:6,9,11
 17:4,8,16,25,27 18:13
 19:8,9 20:1
 21:3,4,12,33
 22:8,12,15,22,24
 23:12,27,28,29,33

24:4,18 25:4,12,31
 29:11,15,20,24,28,33
 30:16,17,18,25
 31:4,23,24,25
 proposal 21:32 24:23
 29:14 33:19,33 34:32
 35:7,25 37:14,15,29
 38:3,17,20,28 39:5
 42:2 43:24,26 44:3,15
 45:19,34
 proposals 3:27 24:30
 27:19 34:7 35:15
 37:13
 propose 13:22 14:29
 16:24 33:19 35:9
 37:20,25 40:22 42:25
 43:4
 proposing 3:27 12:9
 24:25 27:31
 pros 30:17
 prospect 43:1
 protection 11:6
 proud 22:24 38:21
 provide 5:2 10:23 12:29
 21:12 36:8 37:9
 provided 15:20 21:13
 37:9
 provides 4:30 14:16
 providing 7:31 12:24
 provision 6:19,28,33
 8:5,11,19 10:23 14:12
 provisional 5:5
 provisionally 47:2
 provisions 10:10
 public 1:3 3:15 11:11
 13:5,12 14:10 16:19
 17:30 18:19,24
 23:7,24 25:13 31:3
 40:4
 publication 12:1
 pull 31:5
 pup 19:3
 purchase 2:29,30,31
 purpose 5:8,9 11:20 14:7
 21:2
 purposes 1:2 5:17 9:25
 put 8:15 10:3 13:3 14:30
 16:17 18:13 21:32
 23:2,15,27
 24:11,23,25
 26:4,14,15,17,18
 27:19 28:6,29 33:7,16
 35:25 36:21 37:21,32
 38:1,2 39:23 40:18
 41:19 42:8 44:12
 45:27,29 46:28 47:5
 putting 14:7 23:1 25:23
 33:2,20 39:30 40:2
 puzzle 11:34
 Park 28:12
 Patsy 1:22
 Please 15:2 46:18
 Powerscourt 1:32,34 2:2
 Principal 6:31 15:26
 Proposed 3:15 13:30
 22:29 37:16 38:29
 39:6 40:33 45:14,20
 46:2
Q
 qualified 15:18
 quarter 25:34 44:24
 queries 3:8
 query 3:33 20:23,30
 question 7:27 22:15
 28:9,10 32:33 34:10
 39:13 46:15,16,29
 questions 32:34 33:3,16
 34:33 46:30
 quick 2:14
 quiet 23:24
 quit 32:15
 quite 2:33 8:28 14:7
 15:28 19:22 20:34
 21:5 34:27 38:4
 43:23 46:29
 quo 21:14
 quote 17:14

R
 radio 25:18
 raise 31:17
 raised 2:13,26 3:3 23:17
 45:5
 raises 44:23
 raising 44:6 45:8
 random 20:33
 range 9:18 15:20
 rant 38:24
 rate 4:12,15,23,25,34
 5:25,27 6:17,20 7:26
 9:9,23 13:29,32 14:28
 21:15 23:8 24:17
 29:19 30:31 37:18
 39:7 42:18 43:22
 45:15 46:5
 rateable 23:2,5
 24:2,11,26 39:32,33
 40:6,8
 rated 39:27
 rates 5:19 6:17,18 7:18
 10:23 19:31,33
 22:18,27 23:1
 24:4,13,14,15 30:30
 32:12
 35:1,2,5,28,30,31,33
 39:8,10,12,18,19,24,2
 9,30 40:11,16,17
 41:6,7,15,20
 42:9,16,19,22,23,24,2
 8 43:12,15 44:10,13
 rather 5:14 25:33 30:17
 ratio 8:26,27,28
 rave 38:24
 read 14:26 18:23 19:25
 28:1,22 35:8 37:14
 39:21
 reading 25:8
 real 19:22 20:19 23:9,10
 realise 27:6 35:2
 realistic 20:26 35:2
 43:1,5
 realistically 20:24
 reality 15:29 16:14 34:2
 38:16 42:26
 really 15:31
 16:15,16,17,20,32
 20:9,13,17,29 26:5
 28:6 39:15
 43:16,23,26 44:2,32
 realtime 1:1,2
 reason 4:28 6:2 11:29
 36:2
 reasonable 29:19
 42:25,26 43:1
 reasons 6:23 21:8 43:17
 receipts 14:15 31:11,32
 receive 5:24 7:19 9:13
 12:5
 received 5:5 7:19 12:2,4
 15:26 17:11 19:26
 42:31
 receiving 39:19
 recent 14:24
 recently 26:16
 recognising 32:8
 recommend 3:21
 recommendation 43:31
 recommendations 30:15
 recommended 3:20
 record 46:26
 recoup 6:5
 recouping 6:4
 recourse 21:18
 recycling 37:6
 red 23:7
 redistributed 33:22
 redress 6:28 31:8
 reduce 10:12 11:21,22
 12:4 13:22 15:6 16:2
 19:28 20:1,28
 21:4,18,26 24:4 31:3
 32:27 34:4,5,7,32
 36:15
 reduced 9:13 10:31
 11:13,16,17 14:10,12
 16:5 21:22 31:7

reduces 37:1
 reducing 8:19 34:27
 reduction 2:33 6:2,5,9,20
 9:30
 10:9,10,15,18,30,32
 12:10,11,17,26,31
 15:23 16:24
 17:4,7,11,12 18:21
 19:7 21:9,22,33 22:12
 28:5,10 29:29 31:34
 32:18 37:27 46:5
 reductions 6:10,11,29
 10:2,3 26:26
 refer 19:27 20:33
 reference 25:17
 referred 20:19
 reflect 33:21 45:23
 reflecting 35:11
 refund 14:11
 refusing 47:1
 regard 3:6 31:34
 43:11,14,15,16,20,26
 regarding 44:13 45:21
 regardless 43:4
 regards 29:31 31:23
 region 39:28
 regularly 25:23
 regulations 4:22 5:24
 reinstate 14:20
 relation 2:13,18 6:32
 14:19 18:29 42:21
 relative 31:17
 relatively 29:19
 relief 12:29
 remaining 7:26 13:30
 remark 44:33
 remediation 6:10
 remember 21:2 31:16,18
 37:6 39:27 40:14
 45:14
 reminder 13:1
 remiss 1:32
 remuneration 8:8 45:13
 renewable 39:27 41:10
 rent 2:25
 rental 7:1
 repaid 6:31
 repairs 21:18
 repaying 6:33
 repayments 7:31 33:24
 repeat 27:10
 replacing 5:9 32:6
 reply 2:21 3:8
 46:19,27,38
 report 4:20 5:4,23 8:27
 9:17 12:34 26:2
 40:28 45:7,18
 reports 45:7,9,10
 represent 18:26 33:10
 40:4
 representative 13:12
 33:28 35:12 45:24
 representatives 13:5
 16:33 17:20 21:25
 23:24 34:19
 representing 33:8 44:27
 reps 14:10
 request 35:11,12 45:23
 requested 12:4 46:24,29
 requesting 33:21
 require 10:9
 required 5:2 12:21 36:21
 37:34
 requirement 10:9,20
 requirements 7:31 9:31
 reserve 8:30,32 21:17,23
 reservoir 23:4 24:11
 39:25,26 40:2,19
 41:12 42:9 44:33,34
 45:2
 reservoirs 22:34 23:1,3
 24:3,12,17,27
 39:7,23,24,31,33 40:8
 41:14,18
 44:11,28,32,33 45:15
 residential 14:28 37:19
 residents 3:26,34 19:17
 21:12 29:9

resolution 38:15
 39:21,22 42:8,11 45:5
 resolve 14:27 37:18
 resource 40:21
 resources 11:24 22:32,34
 44:32
 resourcing 11:23
 respect 14:28 37:19
 respond 43:9
 response 46:21,31,33
 responsibility 5:1 13:18
 27:15 40:20
 rest 23:19,21 28:22 43:6
 restore 14:17
 result 9:24 27:25 35:1
 retain 5:7,17 9:25
 retained 20:11,12
 retirement 24:5 40:4
 retirements 6:29
 return 4:32
 returns 36:27
 revaluation 43:20
 revalue 21:4
 revalued 21:2
 revenue 8:20,26,28,30,32
 9:1,2,6,23 14:31
 19:12 23:17 25:29
 30:3,6 37:22,29 41:21
 45:14
 reverse 10:5 45:32
 reversed 45:30
 review 15:20 40:26 41:24
 45:4
 reviewing 41:17
 richest 23:9
 rid 20:5
 ridiculous 25:34
 right 2:21 17:5,33 19:23
 25:6 30:26 34:23
 35:22 43:34
 rights 3:15,19,28,30,31
 rise 22:22 31:11
 risk 8:28
 road 5:12 6:22 13:8
 21:29,30 36:13
 roads 5:13 12:22
 role 27:18
 roll 4:6 23:24 24:1 37:24
 38:2,10,34 46:8
 rolled 18:19,26
 roof 22:19
 room 40:24
 rules 34:3
 run 26:17,18 29:5 30:10
 running 9:4
 runs 29:4
 rural 31:19
 rushed 30:20
 Rathdrum 11:1 36:3
 Republics 31:26
 Residence 15:27
 Robert 1:16,17
 Roscommon 23:15
 Roundwood 23:4 24:11
 39:7,24,31 40:20
 41:11
 RUTTLE 30:28,29 33:8
 34:2 47:4
 RYAN 15:3,4 16:10,12
 20:24 38:4
S
 safety 7:30 13:8
 said 1:10 4:22 7:12 9:33
 10:8,27,34 12:26
 15:25 17:14,15 18:10
 20:11 25:4,20 26:24
 27:10 29:3,11 31:13
 33:8 34:34,2 35:3,17
 38:15 39:23 41:1
 42:21 44:7,21,22,32
 45:7
 salaries 24:6
 same 6:17,18 7:19
 11:10,16 14:1 15:22
 19:16,19 20:1 22:28
 23:17 25:14,24,27
 28:5 33:23,24 34:12
 38:5,7 46:18

<p>sample 28:4 sanction 6:27 sat 12:33 20:17 satisfied 45:10 saving 18:5,9,10,15 32:9 savings 8:7,8 9:14 13:25 14:16 19:27,29 20:30,31,32 say 1:31 2:33 3:7 13:14 16:9 18:1,8 19:21,22 20:29 21:33 23:29 24:1 25:3,14 26:4 27:14 28:4,9,25 30:9,18 31:6,19 32:3,6,32 40:7,21,32 41:9 42:15 43:29 44:15 45:6,18 saying 16:7 19:3,31 22:21,27 23:17 24:10 32:34 33:11 34:11 35:24 45:13,30 says 17:15 23:23 34:17 39:22 schedule 8:27 scheme 2:29,30,31 7:1 8:6 schemes 42:30 scrapped 17:21 screw 27:7 29:7 screwing 29:9 scrutiny 14:21 second 3:29 8:20 10:20,34 15:1 22:5 33:33 37:33 38:5 42:1 43:4 seconded 15:5 24:29 35:14 37:16 38:29 39:6 45:20 46:2 secondar 14:34 22:4 24:27 sections 29:20 sector 11:11 see 2:8 4:32 6:20 8:12,16 9:31 11:7 17:20,24 18:4,10,17,20,33,34 19:8 20:8 21:33,34 22:8 24:16 26:8,21 27:4,19,20 28:1,15 29:6,8 30:5,23,24 32:33 33:5,6,20 37:27 38:25,30 40:12 46:5 seeing 29:20 seek 17:12 seeded 29:18 seems 23:21 seen 20:13 31:11 sees 37:27 self 5:12 12:22 selling 39:27 44:23,24,28,30 send 42:17 sending 41:19 44:9 senior 15:13 sense 16:30 17:1 28:1 31:30 32:30 sensible 42:25,26 43:5,29 sensibly 20:24 sent 5:23 37:29 42:31 sentence 37:26 separate 38:1 separately 38:10 serious 24:10 26:33 27:18,24,27 41:26,28 42:8 seriously 30:16 service 1:2,4 6:28 7:29 9:7,29 11:18 14:1 21:16 27:13 30:24 42:21 services 5:2 6:3,5,12 7:20 9:30 10:12 11:14,17,28,32 12:22 14:17,19,20 15:11,12,14,23 16:3 17:28,30 19:4,19,25 21:12,19,26 30:9,21 42:27 46:18 servicing 8:25</p>	<p>sessions 29:3 set 4:24,34 16:26 17:26 19:29 25:12 37:30 43:29 setting 4:12 21:34 38:7,30 several 23:2 39:34 44:30 severe 14:5 shadow 21:8 sham 26:24 shambolic 18:20 shape 29:11 shared 18:32 she 33:33 47:1 sheds 40:22 sheet 10:20 11:5 27:3 sheets 10:34 shift 25:25,26 28:16 shilling 41:3 short 40:6 short 4:19 should 4:32 11:17 14:19 16:2,17 18:24 19:17,18,23 21:24 22:24,31,32 23:2,5 25:9,20 26:12 30:6,16 33:16,27,34 34:24 35:24 39:15 40:8,21 43:5 45:29 shouldn't 1:18 25:13 27:6 28:25 shouting 24:12 show 26:15 shows 5:31 8:27 sickened 34:17 side 28:22 sided 19:26 sides 6:14 34:1 sign 31:6 significance 19:23 significant 4:29 13:18 14:11 21:24 silence 1:29 silent 34:16 silly 28:17 similar 25:34 simple 28:20 43:17 simply 17:1 24:1 since 30:29 41:2,15 single 3:8 13:14 26:31 sit 29:8 site 30:16,19 sitting 27:5,6 28:12 situated 14:28 37:19 situation 1:19 30:32 31:26 34:23 39:14 44:21 six 11:12 13:10 size 18:32 skipped 6:31 sky 43:32,33 44:3 sley 3:23 sliced 18:11 slightly 38:5 small 29:29 30:12 31:5 34:6 42:30 smart 15:14 16:24 snapped 25:24 snow 21:30 social 6:31 7:1,6 8:3 31:28 sold 18:22 19:3 41:30 solution 20:26 28:11 solutions 27:16 28:11 solve 28:16 42:33 solved 28:27 34:14,18 some 1:5,14 2:13 3:26 6:12,13,28 10:2,9 11:5 12:22,27 15:21,23 16:3 18:5,8 19:18 20:20 22:29 24:16,22 25:17,18 26:19,24 27:6,10 28:11 29:4 30:15 31:16,30 32:34 33:13 34:33 35:5 36:16,27,28,29 37:5</p>	<p>40:3,29 42:30 44:33 45:6,12,13 somebody 23:33 27:22 42:13 43:31 somehow 8:1 31:23 someone's 17:17 someone 18:10 24:7 25:20,33 something 11:31 25:5 27:14 28:15,23 29:3 30:24 31:2,5,20 32:12 35:17 36:10 40:21,33 41:8 42:13 43:4,31 44:7 somewhere 25:16 31:8 39:27 son 1:25 soon 3:8 33:27 sort 15:10 16:7 33:15 42:33 sought 30:32 source 19:12 32:7 sources 15:21 spade 17:27 speak 41:24 speaker 32:17 speakers 31:13 speaking 24:7 31:16,34 44:17 specific 2:18 10:12 38:17 specifically 3:12 specifics 35:28 speech 24:33 28:31 speeches 25:20 spelled 28:20 spend 16:18 17:34 18:1,30 19:28,32 20:2 28:25 31:17 33:17 34:15 spending 16:19 21:31,32 28:24 29:4 31:21 36:29 spends 11:27 spent 7:28 10:5,21 12:31 13:6,8 16:15,21,34 17:1 18:1 21:16 23:16 26:32 32:21 33:14 35:24 37:9,10 spoils 34:28 spoke 28:32 30:5,23 45:26 spread 20:4 square 39:34 40:6 43:14 staff 1:26 6:27,28 8:4 10:22 36:12 stage 28:33 34:10 stamp 22:16 stand 1:27 14:21 17:16 32:13 33:5 38:21 40:21,32 standing 24:8 start 1:9,31 2:12,32 6:33 11:23 19:30 24:31 31:8 33:2 34:34 37:14 38:5 40:12 45:12 46:6 47:3 started 17:31 19:3 24:7,8 starting 16:12 20:1 starts 14:23 state 14:2 29:15 35:2 stated 25:32 43:21 statement 12:33 17:16 37:10 stats 32:19 33:13 status 21:14 stealth 19:5 step 17:24 still 2:29 7:21 12:15,17,25 17:17 18:16 20:28 25:16 30:11 40:31 stock 43:6,25 stone 17:26 stood 24:7 33:7 stop 24:31 27:23 28:2 32:15 stopped 17:9 36:11 stops 13:17</p>	<p>stream 15:26 45:14 streams 26:19 strengthens 4:31 strike 35:33,34 36:8 stripped 6:15 36:3 stripping 37:1 strong 14:22 stronger 16:6 structured 31:27 37:29 39:28 45:28 struggling 12:27 18:12 stuck 31:29 34:23 studied 45:10 stuff 23:10 26:12,18 27:31 subcommittee 21:34 33:19,20,27 38:7,30 40:11,26 41:24,34 42:4,5 43:29 44:2 45:4 subject 7:21 submission 33:7,20 35:9 45:21 submissions 12:2,4,6 submitted 46:16 subsequent 1:2 subsidies 6:20,22 7:18 26:28 success 43:1 such 2:9 4:26 5:9 sucked 30:3 suffer 30:21 suffered 11:11 14:24 sufficient 5:1 suggest 13:4 30:16 42:32 suggested 28:24 33:32 40:26 suggestion 31:23 37:4 43:1 44:15 suggestions 30:15 sums 6:25,26 supply 23:6,7 46:29 support 14:23 21:8 23:28,34 29:11,14 30:27 34:2,7,20,32 38:20 42:3,26 supported 18:31 34:20,25 46:14 supporting 17:7 19:7 22:8 32:18 suppose 4:28 5:5 8:3,10,15,19,27 10:5 12:5 15:4 34:31 35:28,31 sure 5:1 9:31 11:7 18:8 30:1 32:29 35:16 surplus 5:10,16,17 12:20,21 14:20 21:4,5 45:32 surprised 28:26 suspect 43:32 switch 1:13 symbolic 19:23 31:5 sympathies 1:26 sympathy 1:16,20,25 system 2:33 30:16,34 31:12 33:9 Sarah 1:34 2:2 Saturday 1:22,24 Section 14:26 37:17 September 1:7 3:17 5:5 14:32 23:29 27:26 37:23 Shannon 40:34 Sheehy's 44:17 Sheehy 26:2 28:14 44:18 Signed 14:32 Significantly 12:19 Sinn 17:7,10,21,25,26 18:17 19:7 38:25 SNELL 2:14,15 42:5 Sorry 6:31 37:25 38:15 39:17 41:9 45:2 South 2:18 3:19 19:14 Special 1:7 SPC 2:12 Star 36:34 Sticking 18:22</p>	<p>SUSI 6:9 T table 5:31 7:12 9:17,24 13:11 18:8,13 20:25 22:10,21 25:15 27:29 37:13 take 1:4 3:14 4:5,6 5:16 8:7 9:19 10:31 11:28 12:14 13:18 16:18 19:23 23:23 29:2 31:8 35:14,28,31 37:24 38:10 39:5 40:31,34 43:6 44:11 46:8 taken 4:8 5:9 10:12,30,31 13:23,28 14:15 15:4 16:21 18:16,26 25:24 28:12 30:4 36:21,26,30 38:12 39:2,18 41:30 43:33 46:10 taking 10:9 12:5,15 22:21,23,33 32:30 39:14 40:13,18 41:2,3 42:11 45:28,32 talk 4:17 28:10 talked 11:10 talking 10:27 16:14 22:9,31,32 26:19 27:3 29:27 39:30,31 42:7,34 47:2 talks 20:20 25:25,29 tanks 29:6 tax 4:12,23,32 5:8,14 6:18,21,23 7:20 8:21 9:12 12:10,11,17,24 13:19,22 14:27,28 15:7,9,11 17:4,8,14,15,16,17,21 ,25,27 18:3,13 19:8,9,12,13,17,21 20:1,11 21:3,12,34 22:8,12,14,15,17,18,2 ,2,24 23:18,23,27,28,29,33, 34 24:4 25:4,12,31 29:11,15,16,24,28,33 30: taxation 42:7 taxed 33:22 taxes 18:17 19:5 23:12 31:4 32:15 34:11 40:19 45:23 team 1:34 2:2 technical 28:22 tell 40:33 41:8 tells 23:33 35:2 ten 12:32,33 20:17 28:17 41:23 tenable 34:6 tenant 2:29,30 tenants 2:34 tens 23:8 term 6:32 terms 7:2,29 8:29 9:14,17 11:10,16,31 15:27,29,34 17:30 19:3 20:14 28:20,21 35:22,28,29 36:2,10,18,25,28 37:1,4 text 1:1,2 textbook 25:24,25 than 2:25,33 5:14 9:14 11:27,28,30 12:19 13:11 14:4,10,17 18:8,20 19:13,14,16 20:12 25:17,31,33 28:29 30:17 32:21,24,26 33:11,13,14,24 35:3 36:25 37:7 42:21 44:7 that's 1:13,17,18 3:23 4:10 5:19,25,32 6:5,9 7:5,18,21,22,30 8:11,15,16,19,21,34 9:2,5</p>	<p>10:12,13,16,20,21,31, 34 11:2,5,21,23,29 12:7 15:10,20,26,28 16:21,22 18:10,11,21,34 20:13,14,34 22:21 23:9,10,30,34 24:19 25:6,10 26:3,4 27:23,26 28:22 29:6,19,20,23,24 that 1:18,20,32 2:13,20,22,24,26,31,3 4 3:3,6,11,12,18,20,21, 25,29 4:20,24,29,31 5:6,9,12,16,17,22,23, 29,31 6:2,6,8,19,21,26,28,3 1,33 7:2,12,15,17,20,25,26 ,30,31,32,34 8:1,3,19,20,25,27 9:17,19,25 10:10,17,20,24,25,28, 29,30,34 11:2,3,18,21,22,24,32 12:6,11 the 1:1,2,3,4,10,14,18,22, 25,26,32,33,34 2:1,2,4,5,7,9,12,13,15 ,17,20,21,22,24,25,26 ,29,30,31,33 3:2,3,6,7,9,11,12,13,1 5,16,17,18,19,20,23,2 6,27,28,33,34 4:1,2,11,12,13,15,19, 20,22,23,25,28,29,31, 34 5:1,2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,1 4,16,19,20,23,24,25,2 7,28,29,31,32 their 2:31,34 4:32 18:16 21:12,20 22:16,17,18,19 25:3,20 29:17 31:6,7 32:4 33:10 34:19 36:29 40:1,2,3,25 44:12 45:14 46:18 47:5 them 3:6,13 6:33 9:11 20:20,21 25:5 27:26 30:19 31:4,8,19 34:20 38:10 41:19 42:17,18,19 43:11,16,33 46:34 47:1 themselves 2:8 25:10 43:34 then 5:9,16 6:11 9:24 12:15 17:17 19:32 20:2,9 23:33 24:9,18 27:17,20,25,29 30:3 33:17 45:8,33 there 1:10,20,34 2:1,18,30 3:23 4:26 5:31 6:8,19,28 7:4,18,22,25,28,33 8:3,8 9:2,4,5,34 10:4,20,27,28,29,30,3 1 11:6,26,30 15:10,25,31 16:16,20,30 17:1,3 18:24 20:18,30,32 21:5,24 22:9,18,24,34 23:22 24:9,10 25:13,18 26:16 27:32 28:5,9,15,21,24 30:26 31:13 therefore 3:12 12:20 23:5 39:25,34 40:7 these 2:27 3:7,8 5:23 14:20 16:17 23:1 27:17,32 28:11 32:15 33:15,19 34:11,25 39:33,34 42:21 they'll 42:32</p>
---	--	---	---	---	--

they're 39:10 42:10,11 45:15
they 1:33 2:34 3:34 4:31 6:15,18 7:18,32 10:22,24 11:7 14:5 15:4,14 16:20 18:21,33 19:3,18,31 21:3,19 22:16,17,18 23:3,5,24 24:13,17,28 25:5,9,16 29:17,18 30:16,23,24 33:11,29 34:11,25,26,27,28 35:29 36:19 39:8,9,17,18 40:1,13,15,16,17,32,3 41:2,3 42:17
thing 17:5,30 20:28 23:30 25:14 26:20 39:32 43:10 44:32
things 1:10 4:1 8:19 13:15 16:22 26:16,18 27:17 28:11 31:4,10 33:34 35:25,28 36:34 42:17 43:11 44:9
think 2:21 3:9 8:21 11:23 15:9,12,14,28 16:7,19,24 17:14,21 18:9,23,33 19:23 21:6 25:6,9 26:6,9,11,20,34 27:32 28:1,6,16,29 29:5,11,15 30:15,20 31:2,33,34 32:7,33 33:2,5,9,27,33,34 34:4,6,15,23 35:2,4 36:12 37:12 38:5 39:15 40:20 42:34 44:2,3,4,10,15 45:1
thinking 26:19
thinks 42:25
third 1:33 10:27 11:5 39:13
this 3:15,17,18,34 4:15,16 5:4 6:11,31 7:12,13,15 9:5 10:1,9,15 11:10 12:10,21,22,24,29,31, 32 13:4,10,18,21,29,30 14:14,16,31 15:6,13,16,25 16:6,20,31 17:8,9,14,16,24,26 18:3,8,12,19,22,25,27 ,34 19:3,8,12,17,21,26 21:13,23 22:8,9,22,31,34 23:7,8,10,13,16
thoroughly 33:32
those 5:13 6:4 7:31 8:12 10:2,5,10 11:5,12 13:3 16:34 18:10,17 21:8 23:1,3 27:6 30:6 33:29 34:13,26 38:6 42:18,22,23 46:23,34
though 15:12 19:22
thought 22:8 24:28 30:21 43:26
thousand 18:4,16 25:33 29:28 39:29
thrashed 25:15
threatening 26:10
threats 27:14
three 4:10 9:21 10:4 22:7 24:1 26:14,15 28:21 40:33 45:18
throughout 34:19,32
throw 43:10
throwing 40:29 43:32
thrown 27:29
ties 17:20 29:3
time 1:32 7:15 11:16 12:5 13:15 15:6 19:21 20:17 21:17 24:7,8 29:9,16,17,18,19 30:29,32 31:3,7 41:12 47:4
times 22:15,19 32:4 42:33
tipped 2:24
title 1:33 26:17
today's 4:26
today 4:25 5:19 10:13 13:17,21,29 14:23 17:10,24,33 20:25 21:2,17,22 22:7,9,10,31,32 23:10,28,30 25:16 26:6 27:25 29:14 30:27 31:33 32:8 42:7
together 24:2 27:5,22 28:6 33:5,7 35:25 38:6,26
told 9:2 15:13 17:9,27,33 19:4 21:17 23:12 25:12,13,14 31:10 32:30
tolerate 23:31
tone 33:2
tonnes 41:3
too 1:26 27:27 38:8 41:28 44:12
took 10:1 14:14 21:19 31:27
top 6:8 8:3,19 18:8 25:4 40:19
total 12:2 43:14
totality 36:30
totally 19:17 32:3 42:16 43:13 46:4
touch 18:19
tough 32:34
towards 6:33 8:19 35:34
towns 20:9
traditionally 42:22
tragic 1:22
tragically 1:23
transact 15:16
transcribed 1:1
transcript 1:1,2
transfer 4:29 40:34 42:22
transferred 23:14 42:23
transfers 4:34 5:1
transparency 4:30 16:18,19 18:34 19:1 22:1 29:34 38:31
transparent 16:20
treatment 41:18
trend 28:5
tried 10:2
true 43:32
truly 43:23,26
try 6:28 10:5 33:10,16 45:30
trying 9:34 16:15 17:8 27:10 41:31,33 45:6,27
turn 32:9 40:25
turned 24:9
turning 32:33
two 3:18 8:29,34 12:4 15:18 21:5 22:10 23:3 24:3,12,17,26 27:26 28:21 40:33 44:32 45:7,9,10
type 43:24,33
Taoiseach 17:15
TDs 2:16 3:11,12 24:8 25:14 33:3 34:24 46:14
Thank 1:27 3:14,28 4:11 12:5,9 14:33,34 15:4 19:10,11 21:10 27:12 29:13,14 30:27,28 32:2,16,17 33:29,31 35:7 37:13 44:6 46:14 47:5
Thanks 2:15 3:9,13 4:16 12:8 13:6 16:8 17:7 21:11 26:20 32:18
There's 1:31 5:22 6:2,26 7:1,27,33 8:4,5,8 10:6 16:31 17:1 18:16 19:28 22:12 23:13,16,17 27:29 28:5 29:34 32:32 36:4 39:13 41:23 42:32 43:14 44:30
Through 2:8 6:29 12:33 13:5 14:20 16:14 19:25 20:17 22:34 24:9 30:21 33:29 35:12 36:15 38:27 39:13
Thursday 2:4
Timmins 19:10,11 21:28
Tommy 4:21 46:16
Town 1:16 6:13 7:33 11:1,22 14:8 36:28
Troika 32:12,13
U
ultimately 19:9 37:27
unanimous 26:25
unchanged 12:5
under 4:22 7:21 9:1 11:23 27:15 28:21 32:22
undertake 15:19
unemployment 16:5
unfair 18:4 19:17 20:11 29:11
unhappy 24:28
unified 6:14
unjust 17:14,15,17,21 18:3,17 19:8 46:7
unnecessary 36:15
unreal 43:24
unreasonable 40:7
until 3:27 17:10,33
update 2:14
updated 15:31
upon 34:4,5 38:16
urgency 24:18
urgent 26:34 27:34
use 5:12 6:21 14:20 17:12 20:3 32:10
used 3:25 12:22 16:3 25:32 29:23 45:31
uses 13:21
using 41:14
Unfortunately 17:9,20
V
vacant 14:11
valuable 44:9
valuation 9:11 23:3,5 24:11,26 30:17,20 36:6,7 39:18,19 40:1,2 41:19 42:15,16,31 43:15,20,21,22 44:10,12
valuations 29:17 42:31 43:11,13,21
value 12:22,31 22:2 31:29 38:32 41:14,19 42:9,18
valued 39:11 41:13,15,17,19 42:10,17,21,28,30,31 43:14,22 44:7
values 29:17 42:15
variation 4:12 7:27 9:4 43:16
varied 5:27
variety 31:4
vary 4:23,25,34 5:19,20 14:28 21:15 31:2 34:23,24 37:18
varying 9:9
veiled 27:13
verbatim 1:4
versus 25:33
very 1:32 4:16 13:4 17:8 19:26 25:14 27:12 28:6,20 29:29 31:7,27,30,32 32:30 33:33 36:28 37:25 39:15,22 44:6,15,21
via 5:13
view 15:19 19:26
villages 20:9 42:30
virtually 24:4
visibility 31:13,20
vital 14:17
voicing 33:10
volunteering 2:8
volunteers 2:7
voted 1:33 22:28 24:14 31:24 38:30 45:8
votes 1:20 23:33
voting 22:12 23:28 32:1,27 42:13
vulnerable 31:30
Vance 4:5 15:1 16:9,11 37:16 42:12 43:8,10 44:17,19 45:8
Various 26:20 34:7 42:17 43:11,16
Vote 1:16 4:5,6,8 17:24 23:28 24:9 27:17,25 34:6 38:12,14,25 39:2 43:16,25 44:4 46:10
W
wait 17:10
waiting 2:29 44:10
walk 13:14
want 1:31 2:12,14 4:17 8:32 10:25,30 16:20,33 18:17,19,21,31 21:33,34 25:5 26:25 27:31 29:15 30:9,19,23,24,25 31:11 35:8 36:22 38:30 40:3,12 41:28 42:8,12
wanted 3:26,34
wants 37:32 40:24,25 42:2
was 1:17,23,31,34 2:5,8,18,20,24,26,33 3:3,15,17 4:17 5:4,23 8:30,33 9:2,12,18,34 10:34 11:2,16,20 12:19 13:8,15 14:7,10 15:31 16:7 17:9,27,29,30 18:19 19:4 20:12 21:12,14,22 22:18 23:4,29,34 25:24 26:24,25 28:5,6,10,29 29:16,18 30:20 31:18,20,26,27 32:7, 18:23
wasn't 3:12 15:31 18:22 24:9 31:29 44:8
waste 13:14 39:20 41:13,18,21
wasting 20:17 24:6
way 1:18,22 2:9 3:15,19,28,30,31 15:28 18:1,32 20:25 21:3 26:18 28:16 29:4,6,21 30:33 31:5,18,27 33:1 34:14 37:29,30 39:28 43:33 45:28,32
ways 20:5 27:19 29:7
we'd 10:27 41:6
we're 2:29 6:8 11:28,30 15:12,18 16:19,27 17:33 18:30 19:7 20:1,18 21:2 22:21 23:10,12,22 24:10 25:13,26 26:3,16,19 27:3,24,31 28:16 29:5,19,27,28,34 30:1,11,12,18,21 31:33 32:30,31 34:2,5,23 35:17,19 36:12 38:10,28 39:28 41:16,29 42:7,8,34 45:27 47:2
we've 2:16,31 7:20 8:8 10:5,17 11:2 15:14,15,18 20:4 23:22 24:1 26:9,16 28:13 30:3,29 36:22 37:13 41:2,16 43:16
wealthy 32:25
website 12:2
week 4:20 9:14 12:26 17:31 18:8,10,11 34:13,17
weekend 21:29
weekends 36:14
welcome 37:4,7 42:3
welfare 31:28
went 4:20 17:11 22:13 24:9 32:29 34:25 36:15
were 1:33 2:1,7,13,15,34 6:3 9:34 10:15 12:2 14:5 16:14 17:9,27 19:3,4,25 21:25 30:30 31:29,30,32 32:19 35:7 36:19,28 39:32,33 40:8,14,15,16,32,33 41:6,8 42:21 43:14,22 45:30 46:18
what's 9:34 16:29 25:25 26:21 30:33 31:8 40:26 43:16 44:3 45:14
whatever 8:32 20:24 21:30 23:23 30:33 42:30
whatsoever 24:4 26:5 43:24,26,34
when 2:21 4:1 8:21 9:9,34 10:27 16:14 17:27,28 18:5 19:9 21:2 22:16 24:8,33 26:28 27:3,14 31:12 36:6,7 40:30,33 42:31 43:13 46:33
where's 23:12
where 5:12 7:28 8:10,12,15,16 10:4 13:5 16:1,15,18,34 17:33 20:3,32 26:3,18,33 27:29,31 28:9,23 29:18 30:5 34:23 35:24 36:14 37:2,9,10
whether 16:2,3 23:27 40:20 42:26 43:1,5,32
which 2:25,32,33 3:2 5:4,7,8,22,32 6:10,28,32 7:28 8:12,30 9:19 10:8,29,34 11:5,29,31 12:16,27 13:21,22 14:31 15:27 17:31 18:19 21:15,31 23:8 24:5 26:33 28:4 32:7,12 34:7 35:30 37:14,22,27 38:18 39:26,31 40:8 42:25,27,33 43:21 44:8,9,23 46:5
while 1:4 13:19 14:8 29:2 44:13
whipping 30:31
whips 25:3
who 2:8,30 14:23 18:12 21:31,32 22:13,28 31:13,16 32:9,32 34:4,12,17,24,25,26 44:12
whoever 40:30
whole 13:11 16:27 18:34 19:12 29:15 30:12,16 34:10 40:26 44:22
whom 31:16,30
why 19:17,18 21:24,31 23:17 25:32 26:18,20 28:14,15 30:26 32:34 35:4 36:2 40:15
will 2:31 4:15,25 5:4,13 6:18 7:14,21 9:13,24,30 10:9,11,18,31 11:8 12:9,21,31 14:3,10,12,26,31 16:6 17:7 18:4,10,23,26,31 19:7,31 20:2,29 21:2,4,5,8,16 22:22 24:23 25:2,13,14 26:2,10,11,19,29 27:17 29:5,32,33 31:11 32:9,18,27 33:19 34:7,17,26,31,33 36:16
willing 30:23
winners 2:9
winter 21:29 36:14
wish 10:28 11:5 28:5 45:33
with 2:12,16,17,25,27,33 3:11,33 4:2,13,34 6:17 7:21 9:33 11:10 12:1,15,17 13:21,25 14:26 15:23 16:26,27 18:3,17,25,29,30 20:1,2,5,14,15,19,24, 25,31 22:1 23:1 24:1,22 25:3,13,21,27 26:2 27:16,25,32 28:26 29:7,8 30:5,30,33 31:13,26,29,33 32:4,25 33:19,29,3
withholding 32:8
within 2:24 24:21 45:18
without 7:27 21:8,18 28:22 32:8
won't 3:7,27 11:2 15:14 20:25 23:27,31,34 24:12 28:17 30:21,25 34:14 35:2 37:30 40:3 41:1
won 1:32
wonder 28:11
wonderful 2:34
wondering 38:4
word 13:1 22:34 23:1,9 28:10
words 26:10
work 6:12,13 16:26 19:32 20:25,33 22:1 28:17 29:23 31:32 34:31 38:31 43:31
worked 1:23
working 20:25
works 1:26 16:27
workshop 4:16 10:16 11:10 21:13 35:17 36:33
world 1:33 2:5 25:27 43:10
worse 13:10
worst 13:31
worth 44:7
worthwhile 4:16 16:22 33:33 35:6 44:15
would 2:21,22 3:21 4:24 5:13,22 6:10,11,12,13,14 8:7,10,20 9:18,19,20,31 10:2,3,28 11:7 12:5 14:4 15:4 16:24 17:20 18:5,8 20:8,13,19,20,28,30,3 21:6,25,28,33 23:8 24:1,3,10,16,26 25:21 26:8,15 27:6,14,15 28:9,11 29:8 30:30 31:17,18 32:14,33 33:5,8,20,27,6 41:6 44:11,12,18,19
wrap 28:33,34
write 30:6,18 35:9,30 45:21

writing 24:23,25 33:20 38:2	29:14,24,25,31,34 30:20 33:32 35:34 36:8 44:7 45:33 46:14,27	19:12,13,16,17 20:11 21:13 22:3 23:13,14,17,21,23,24 24:9,17 25:31,33 27:7 28:12 29:5,7 31:25 32:20,24,25 33:1,6,13,22,2	34:5 35:29 39:12 40:30,33 43:22 44:10,11	... 16:11 24:31 37:34 38:9,26 44:18,34 000 6:26,28 7:30,32 8:4,5,6,8 9:26 10:1 11:2 13:7,11 18:9 20:4,18,28 21:4,19,26 22:33 36:4,18,22 41:30 45:16 100 5:6 7:30 9:12 13:7 18:20 20:18	8:33 10:21 11:3,26 14:32 19:25 20:3 21:16,18 25:29 36:19,23 37:23 41:17 2015 2:32 5:2,6,25,34 6:4,18 7:34 10:21 12:20 14:30 36:8 37:20 214 12:11 226 8:6 22nd 1:7 23rd 11:34 24th 47:2 250 20:4 25pm 47:8 30th 27:26 350 22:23 400 12:27 475 6:26 7:32 500 12:27 25:29 51300 9:11 522 5:7 642 9:26 669 18:30 700 22:23 25:33 40:18 761 9:26 800 21:4 828 18:30 880 9:26 20:28 8th 3:17 907 10:1 21:19,26 36:18,22 9th 3:20
written 37:34 46:19,21,27,28	Western 45:2,3 Westmeath 40:34 What 2:20 4:1,19 6:26,31 7:12,19 9:2,34 10:5,21 12:24 13:14,15 16:15,18,19 17:34 18:1,11,29,32,34 19:18,25,30 20:28,30 21:22 22:9,31,32 23:12 25:8,10,17,26,30 26:8,33 27:4,10,31 28:1,25,29 29:3,18,27,32 30:4,9,11,30 31:33 32:1,32,33 33:9,32 34:2,7,28 35:3	Winters 21:10,11 33:19 38:4,28,29 Woodenbridge 2:4 X Y yard 39:34 40:7 year's 5:8,9 7:25 12:20 25:17 37:12 year 1:23 2:7,34 4:15,24,25 5:32 6:11,26,32,33 7:29,30,32 9:7,19,20,34 10:2,9 12:19,25 13:14,30 14:29 15:23 17:28 18:26 19:4 20:4,29 21:5 22:22,33 23:6,29 26:14,15,29,30 27:29 30:25,26 35:1 36:26,27,30 37:11,20 39:28,29 40:17 41:10,16,30 45:15 yearly 13:32 years 5:2 6:33 8:34 11:12 12:32 13:10,31 14:4,19 19:31 20:4 21:3 22:28 23:14 28:17 30:31 31:3,16	yet 14:9 21:17 23:16 24:32 27:10 28:31 29:33 33:1 34:12,19 35:22 yippee 28:26 you'll 6:20 28:26 35:16 41:1 you're 2:15 22:12 23:28,30,33 24:10 35:22 44:19 you've 45:1,5 you 1:27 2:16,29 3:11,14,21,28 4:11,17 5:4,23 8:16,32 10:4 12:9 13:5 14:33,34 15:2,4,34 16:8,17 19:10,11 20:29,30,31 21:10 23:23,28,29,30 24:10,14,19,20,22,23, 32,34 25:17 26:5,17,18,28,29 27:3,12,26 28:31,32 29:13,14,16 30:9,27,28,30,33 31:28,29 32:2,16,1 your 34:18 38:14 40:6,7 45:5 yourself 2:16 25:17 Yeah 24:1 46:1 Yes 22:7 30:29 39:9 You'd 28:26 Z zero 7:7	000 6:26,28 7:30,32 8:4,5,6,8 9:26 10:1 11:2 13:7,11 18:9 20:4,18,28 21:4,19,26 22:33 36:4,18,22 41:30 45:16 100 5:6 7:30 9:12 13:7 18:20 20:18 10th 3:20 11am 47:5 120 8:5 133 9:24 140 8:8,34 45:15,16 150 21:19 160 6:28 8:4 176 9:24 1860s 23:5 1867 41:2 1930s 23:4 1980s 30:30 1992 42:2 45:7 1st 8:32,33 200 8:5 21:18 2003 41:15 2004 45:9 2007 24:9 2008 36:12,15 2009 11:20 35:30 2012 4:13 8:33 14:27 37:17 2013 11:21 35:31 2014 1:7 5:24,32 6:3,17,18,27 7:19	
Water 6:3,4 7:9,20,21 14:2 17:28,30,31 18:4,5 19:5 22:23,33 23:7 24:3,5,8,16 32:12 34:11,21 35:23 36:13 39:11,17,19,20,21,26, 27,29 40:7,12,14,15,18,30,3 1,34 41:2,3,7,13,16,21,30 42:21,23,27 44:8,22,23,26,27,28,3 1 45:8,14	Whereas 39:29 Whereby 27:6 Whitestown 6:10 Whitmore's 45:19 Whitmore 32:17,18 33:32 35:8,9 45:20 Wicklow's 25:30 Wicklow 1:3,7 2:18 4:31 5:6,28 6:12,13 9:11,21 11:1,11,21,26 12:1,3,11,14,15,17,19 20,29,32 14:23,27,28 15:9,22 17:5,29,30,31 18:20,22	Winters 21:10,11 33:19 38:4,28,29 Woodenbridge 2:4 X Y yard 39:34 40:7 year's 5:8,9 7:25 12:20 25:17 37:12 year 1:23 2:7,34 4:15,24,25 5:32 6:11,26,32,33 7:29,30,32 9:7,19,20,34 10:2,9 12:19,25 13:14,30 14:29 15:23 17:28 18:26 19:4 20:4,29 21:5 22:22,33 23:6,29 26:14,15,29,30 27:29 30:25,26 35:1 36:26,27,30 37:11,20 39:28,29 40:17 41:10,16,30 45:15 yearly 13:32 years 5:2 6:33 8:34 11:12 12:32 13:10,31 14:4,19 19:31 20:4 21:3 22:28 23:14 28:17 30:31 31:3,16	you'll 6:20 28:26 35:16 41:1 you're 2:15 22:12 23:28,30,33 24:10 35:22 44:19 you've 45:1,5 you 1:27 2:16,29 3:11,14,21,28 4:11,17 5:4,23 8:16,32 10:4 12:9 13:5 14:33,34 15:2,4,34 16:8,17 19:10,11 20:29,30,31 21:10 23:23,28,29,30 24:10,14,19,20,22,23, 32,34 25:17 26:5,17,18,28,29 27:3,12,26 28:31,32 29:13,14,16 30:9,27,28,30,33 31:28,29 32:2,16,1 your 34:18 38:14 40:6,7 45:5 yourself 2:16 25:17 Yeah 24:1 46:1 Yes 22:7 30:29 39:9 You'd 28:26 Z zero 7:7	100 5:6 7:30 9:12 13:7 18:20 20:18 10th 3:20 11am 47:5 120 8:5 133 9:24 140 8:8,34 45:15,16 150 21:19 160 6:28 8:4 176 9:24 1860s 23:5 1867 41:2 1930s 23:4 1980s 30:30 1992 42:2 45:7 1st 8:32,33 200 8:5 21:18 2003 41:15 2004 45:9 2007 24:9 2008 36:12,15 2009 11:20 35:30 2012 4:13 8:33 14:27 37:17 2013 11:21 35:31 2014 1:7 5:24,32 6:3,17,18,27 7:19	
Water's 40:1 Water 6:3,4 7:9,20,21 14:2 17:28,30,31 18:4,5 19:5 22:23,33 23:7 24:3,5,8,16 32:12 34:11,21 35:23 36:13 39:11,17,19,20,21,26, 27,29 40:7,12,14,15,18,30,3 1,34 41:2,3,7,13,16,21,30 42:21,23,27 44:8,22,23,26,27,28,3 1 45:8,14	Whereas 39:29 Whereby 27:6 Whitestown 6:10 Whitmore's 45:19 Whitmore 32:17,18 33:32 35:8,9 45:20 Wicklow's 25:30 Wicklow 1:3,7 2:18 4:31 5:6,28 6:12,13 9:11,21 11:1,11,21,26 12:1,3,11,14,15,17,19 20,29,32 14:23,27,28 15:9,22 17:5,29,30,31 18:20,22	Winters 21:10,11 33:19 38:4,28,29 Woodenbridge 2:4 X Y yard 39:34 40:7 year's 5:8,9 7:25 12:20 25:17 37:12 year 1:23 2:7,34 4:15,24,25 5:32 6:11,26,32,33 7:29,30,32 9:7,19,20,34 10:2,9 12:19,25 13:14,30 14:29 15:23 17:28 18:26 19:4 20:4,29 21:5 22:22,33 23:6,29 26:14,15,29,30 27:29 30:25,26 35:1 36:26,27,30 37:11,20 39:28,29 40:17 41:10,16,30 45:15 yearly 13:32 years 5:2 6:33 8:34 11:12 12:32 13:10,31 14:4,19 19:31 20:4 21:3 22:28 23:14 28:17 30:31 31:3,16	you'll 6:20 28:26 35:16 41:1 you're 2:15 22:12 23:28,30,33 24:10 35:22 44:19 you've 45:1,5 you 1:27 2:16,29 3:11,14,21,28 4:11,17 5:4,23 8:16,32 10:4 12:9 13:5 14:33,34 15:2,4,34 16:8,17 19:10,11 20:29,30,31 21:10 23:23,28,29,30 24:10,14,19,20,22,23, 32,34 25:17 26:5,17,18,28,29 27:3,12,26 28:31,32 29:13,14,16 30:9,27,28,30,33 31:28,29 32:2,16,1 your 34:18 38:14 40:6,7 45:5 yourself 2:16 25:17 Yeah 24:1 46:1 Yes 22:7 30:29 39:9 You'd 28:26 Z zero 7:7	100 5:6 7:30 9:12 13:7 18:20 20:18 10th 3:20 11am 47:5 120 8:5 133 9:24 140 8:8,34 45:15,16 150 21:19 160 6:28 8:4 176 9:24 1860s 23:5 1867 41:2 1930s 23:4 1980s 30:30 1992 42:2 45:7 1st 8:32,33 200 8:5 21:18 2003 41:15 2004 45:9 2007 24:9 2008 36:12,15 2009 11:20 35:30 2012 4:13 8:33 14:27 37:17 2013 11:21 35:31 2014 1:7 5:24,32 6:3,17,18,27 7:19	
Well 1:9 3:12,13 4:34 8:17,29 10:18,29 11:17 19:14,22 20:29 22:21 25:8	Whereas 39:29 Whereby 27:6 Whitestown 6:10 Whitmore's 45:19 Whitmore 32:17,18 33:32 35:8,9 45:20 Wicklow's 25:30 Wicklow 1:3,7 2:18 4:31 5:6,28 6:12,13 9:11,21 11:1,11,21,26 12:1,3,11,14,15,17,19 20,29,32 14:23,27,28 15:9,22 17:5,29,30,31 18:20,22	Winters 21:10,11 33:19 38:4,28,29 Woodenbridge 2:4 X Y yard 39:34 40:7 year's 5:8,9 7:25 12:20 25:17 37:12 year 1:23 2:7,34 4:15,24,25 5:32 6:11,26,32,33 7:29,30,32 9:7,19,20,34 10:2,9 12:19,25 13:14,30 14:29 15:23 17:28 18:26 19:4 20:4,29 21:5 22:22,33 23:6,29 26:14,15,29,30 27:29 30:25,26 35:1 36:26,27,30 37:11,20 39:28,29 40:17 41:10,16,30 45:15 yearly 13:32 years 5:2 6:33 8:34 11:12 12:32 13:10,31 14:4,19 19:31 20:4 21:3 22:28 23:14 28:17 30:31 31:3,16	you'll 6:20 28:26 35:16 41:1 you're 2:15 22:12 23:28,30,33 24:10 35:22 44:19 you've 45:1,5 you 1:27 2:16,29 3:11,14,21,28 4:11,17 5:4,23 8:16,32 10:4 12:9 13:5 14:33,34 15:2,4,34 16:8,17 19:10,11 20:29,30,31 21:10 23:23,28,29,30 24:10,14,19,20,22,23, 32,34 25:17 26:5,17,18,28,29 27:3,12,26 28:31,32 29:13,14,16 30:9,27,28,30,33 31:28,29 32:2,16,1 your 34:18 38:14 40:6,7 45:5 yourself 2:16 25:17 Yeah 24:1 46:1 Yes 22:7 30:29 39:9 You'd 28:26 Z zero 7:7	100 5:6 7:30 9:12 13:7 18:20 20:18 10th 3:20 11am 47:5 120 8:5 133 9:24 140 8:8,34 45:15,16 150 21:19 160 6:28 8:4 176 9:24 1860s 23:5 1867 41:2 1930s 23:4 1980s 30:30 1992 42:2 45:7 1st 8:32,33 200 8:5 21:18 2003 41:15 2004 45:9 2007 24:9 2008 36:12,15 2009 11:20 35:30 2012 4:13 8:33 14:27 37:17 2013 11:21 35:31 2014 1:7 5:24,32 6:3,17,18,27 7:19	