

SPECIAL MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD AT WICKLOW COUNTY BUILDINGS, WICKLOW TOWN

ON MONDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER 2018 AT 2:00 P.M.

Gwen Malone Stenography  
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GWEN MALONE STENOGRAPHY

1           THE MEETING COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER 2018 AS  
2           FOLLOWS:

3  
4           CATHAOIRLEACH: Members, take your seats please. We'll  
5           start the meeting. Two votes of sympathy that we'll do 14:00  
6           today. That will be the only business, other than the  
7           local property tax that we'll deal with today.

8           MS. GALLAGHER: Cathaoirleach, for Mary Mullaney,  
9           mother of Ian our colleague and for Tony Murphy brother  
10          of our colleague Christine Flood. 14:00

11          CATHAOIRLEACH: We'll stand please.

12  
13          [ONE MINUTE'S SILENCE WAS OBSERVED]

14  
15          CATHAOIRLEACH: Members, Chief Executive. 14:01

16          MR. CURRAN: Members, we're in the process, as you  
17          know, of preparing the budget for 2019. There's some  
18          very significant challenges this year. They were there  
19          last year but there's some extra ones this year. The  
20          local property tax, as you know, 20% of that goes into 14:01  
21          the equalisation fund. There's nothing we can do about  
22          that. Even the 80% we keep, 1.7 million of that goes  
23          to self-fund housing. Again, we've made  
24          representations to the Department in relation to that  
25          and we'll continue to do so. 14:02

26  
27          Commercial rates, we can't really because we are in the  
28          middle of a harmonisation process so there's no  
29          flexibility there.

1 we have, coming at us next year, national pay  
2 agreement, pay restoration. We got 80% funding for  
3 that last year. We won't get anymore this year.  
4

5 we have additional pension costs, 200 Council staff 14:02  
6 will be eligible to retire over. The next five years.  
7 In addition to that, new recruits don't contribute to  
8 our pension scheme, they pay into a single public  
9 services pension scheme which hits us pretty hard.  
10 There's a loss of income of 60,000 there. Again, we've 14:02  
11 made our case to the Department.

12  
13 The 700,000 that was allocated for the LPT capital,  
14 that now goes down to 500. We have previously been  
15 able to use the excess income in RES, the housing 14:02  
16 partner, again that is ring-fenced this year which hits  
17 us as well.

18  
19 We have made a lot of applications, or we are at the  
20 moment, under the Urban Regeneration and Development 14:03  
21 Fund. We (inaudible) this morning for Enterprise  
22 Ireland under their regional competitive fund. All of  
23 those, if we are successful, will match money of 25%.  
24 So there's an increase there.

25  
26 Virtually every section has looked for an increased  
27 budget. Some we just have to do, such as the social  
28 housing conditional survey, increase provision for  
29 remedial works, central heating, boiler maintenance,

1                   energy upgrade, additional graveyard maintenance, extra  
2                   library staff, library book fund, playgrounds, public  
3                   lights, LEDs, etcetera.

4

5                   So it's going to be extremely difficult. I think what 14:03  
6                   we'll do at this stage maybe is ask Brian to run  
7                   through that in more detail. You have seen the  
8                   recommendation that was made in the document that was  
9                   sent out.

10                  CATHAOIRLEACH: Just before we do that sorry, 14:04  
11                  Cllr. Timmins, I missed you there. You were looking to  
12                  come in there.

13                  CLLR. TIMMINS: Sorry, I don't mean to cut across you.  
14                  I had my light lit up before the CEO came in. Just  
15                  very briefly with your indulgence, Chairman, a matter 14:04  
16                  has come to my attention which is very serious and  
17                  that's the Regional Planning Guidelines which were  
18                  presented to us in the spring and I believe there's an  
19                  important vote coming up in October at the Regional  
20                  Assembly. I would ask, given the urgency of this  
21                  matter and given the fact that it could have huge  
22                  implications for building in County Wicklow, it may  
23                  lead to massive rezoning, I would ask, with your  
24                  indulgence, if we could put it on the agenda for next  
25                  Monday's meeting. 14:04

26                  CATHAOIRLEACH: Just on that, I've already talked to  
27                  Lorraine about that and there will be an item and a  
28                  presentation by the planning document, Sorcha Walsh  
29                  will be back next Monday, before there's due to be a

1 vote from the Midlands East Regional Assembly on this  
2 plan on the Friday, on 5th October. So I will  
3 certainly facilitate that. I don't want to go round  
4 the table now. Briefly Cllr. Cullen now.

5 CLLR. TOMMY CULLEN: Chairman, yourself and myself and 14:05  
6 other Members of Wicklow have been doing our best  
7 trying to amend or change this and it's a very  
8 concerning situation and I'd like to second  
9 Cllr. Timmons and I appreciate that you are allowing it  
10 on the agenda. Can I ask you, it's the most important 14:05  
11 thing, probably that I have seen on the Council since  
12 I've been a member, this issue, the effects on  
13 County Wicklow, could we invite the five Dáil deputies  
14 from Wicklow to attend this meeting, Chairman?

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Absolutely. 14:05

16 CLLR. TOMMY CULLEN: Is that agreed?

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Absolutely. There is no problem at 14:05  
18 all. I've already been talking to a number of them in  
19 regard to this but certainly you can do that. Okay,  
20 Brian.

21 MR. GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Good  
22 afternoon, Members. First of all, I will summarise the  
23 main areas I plan to cover during the presentation this  
24 afternoon. I will outline the budgetary process for  
25 local authorities, explain the local property tax  
26 calculation in respect of 2019, look at the budget  
27 challenges that we're facing next year and then review  
28 the estimated income and expenditure and service  
29 requirements. I will then address the financial effect 14:06

1 on both an individual and a Local Authority of any  
2 variation in the rate and then finally I'll conclude  
3 with the LPT recommendation for 2019.

4

5 The budget process involves four stages. The first 14:06  
6 stage is the decision on the local property tax rate  
7 variation under Section 120 of the Finance Act. This  
8 is followed by the general municipal allocations, which  
9 involve the allocation of discretionary funding to  
10 Municipal Districts each year. In 2018 over 200,000 14:06  
11 was allocated between the five MDs. The third most  
12 important stage is the adoption of the annual budget at  
13 the end of November, at which we must also determine  
14 the commercial rates base year adjustment and the level  
15 of rates relief on vacant premises. The last stage is 14:07  
16 the schedule of the Municipal District works which  
17 outline the proposed level of works that would be  
18 budgeted and delivered in each District for the coming  
19 year.

20

21 with regard to the local property tax. The Local 14:07  
22 Authority, may, as a reserve function, resolve to vary  
23 the base rate of LPT, within its function layering, by  
24 a maximum of plus or minus 15%. As per the Department  
25 regulations, any decision to vary the basic rate of LPT 14:07  
26 must be taken by September 30th. This decision must  
27 also be notified on or before that same date to both  
28 the Revenue Commissioners and the Department.

1 Next one to explain is how the 2019 LPT allocation is  
2 calculated. If you look at the screen there in front  
3 of you, just take the first figure there of  
4 17.18 million that represents one hundred percent of  
5 the LPT income allocation for Wicklow. This is 14:08  
6 calculated by the Revenue Commissioners based on  
7 declared liabilities for County Wicklow. 20% is then  
8 deducted for equalisation and this is retained  
9 centrally and redistributed to a number of other local  
10 authorities to ensure that they are no worse off than 14:08  
11 the previous funding position. That leaves  
12 13.7 million, but when compared to our baseline amount  
13 of 8.5 million it leaves a surplus figure of  
14 5.2 million. Part of the surplus 3.4 million is  
15 retained by Wicklow County Council for its own use 14:08  
16 while the remainder, 1.7, is allocated to self-fund  
17 housing services and thereby replacing Central  
18 Government funding in this area.  
19

20 So after the self-funding element is deducted it leaves 14:09  
21 approximately 12 million for inclusion in the Revenue  
22 budget. Just another point to note is that the  
23 variation is based on the gross figure of 17.2 million.  
24 So for every 1% variation it equates to 171,809.  
25

26 Before deciding on whether or not to vary the local 14:09  
27 property tax rate the Local Authority must have regard  
28 to the following matters: The estimation of income and  
29 expenditure for 2019; the financial position of the

1 Local Authority as in its ability to service its  
2 browsing and manage its cashflow; feedback from any  
3 public consultations; and the financial effect of the  
4 varied rate of both the individual and the revenue  
5 putting of the Council.

14:10

6

7 As part of the review of income and expenditure for  
8 2019 I wish to highlight some of the challenges that we  
9 face in the coming year. First of all, there's the  
10 restricted sources of funding. The provisional local  
11 property tax is 11.98 million which is only a slight  
12 increase on last year's figure of 11.97. In addition,  
13 commercial rates are in the middle of a rates  
14 harmonisation process and the ARV cannot be altered  
15 during this particular period.

14:10

16

17 with regard to the national pay agreement, like last  
18 we're expecting an 80% compensation the from the  
19 Department on the pay increases assigned under this  
20 agreement. These increases are projected at  
21 approximately 900,000. So 20% equates to 177,000 and  
22 this must be met from our own resources.

14:11

23

24 Increasing pension costs is another concern.  
25 Year-on-year these costs are increasing with more  
26 retirements. In addition, we don't receive pension  
27 contributions from new staff who commenced work from  
28 1st January 2013 and are part of the single public  
29 services pension scheme. The combination of both

1 factors results in nearly 900,000 of additional  
2 costless for 2019.

3

4 The next item is reduced income. As you are aware  
5 under the IPB capital distribution we received 700,000 14:11  
6 in 2018 and that was put towards footpath repairs  
7 across the five MDS. Next year this amount will be  
8 reduced to 500,000. Also, due to market volatility  
9 this year, we are also expecting that the IPB dividend  
10 would be reduced by up to 50%, which will have an 14:11  
11 impact of approximately 120,000 on the 2019 budget.  
12

13 The final point I wish to touch on is the match funding  
14 requirements for Urban and Rural Regeneration Schemes.  
15 Under these schemes each application must have a 14:12  
16 minimum value of two million and half a million  
17 respectively, and the Council must provide 25% matched  
18 funding. As such, we have included a provisional  
19 estimate of half a million for these.

20

21 In relation to the estimation of income and 14:12  
22 expenditure, the table on the screen just outlines the  
23 high level categories. I will go through each one.  
24 Commercial rates 27.9 million, a small increase on  
25 2018. Local property tax, as we've said 11.98, similar  
26 to last year. Grants and subsidies, 29.1 million.  
27 Other income is 31.3 million. That will cover housing  
28 rents, parking income, Irish water contribution and our  
29 pension deductions. On the expenditure side, payroll

1 expenses is 45.8 million. That relates to nearly half  
2 of the total expenditure. Loans 1.7 million. Social  
3 benefits which relate to the provision of social  
4 housing 7.8 million. Capital grants 6 million, which  
5 covers community and LEADER grants. And other  
6 expenditure 47.6 million which would include our roads  
7 programmes.

14:13

8

9 To summarise the income and expenditure position, our  
10 current expenditure is estimated at 109 million. The  
11 current income estimate is 100.4 million. This leaves  
12 a shortfall of 8.6 million. That shortfall would be  
13 increased to 11.2 million if the local property tax was  
14 reduced by 15%, which would obviously have a serious  
15 detrimental impact on our ability to provide services.  
16 However, there is also a requirement to achieve a  
17 balanced budget each year by the Department so this  
18 funding gap must be closed in order to adopt the budget  
19 in November of this year.

14:13

14:14

20

21 I just want to go through the additional cost of  
22 8.6 million in a bit more detail. It's broken down, as  
23 we said, the national pay agreement, the net costs,  
24 after compensation, 177,000; additional pension costs  
25 860,000; reduced income on the IPB and the HAP 525,000;  
26 increased income 300,000 - this relates to commercial  
27 rates income following the valuation of some new  
28 businesses. This year matched funding, as we've said,  
29 500,000 and then a figure of 6.8 million in respect of

14:14

1 service directorate and Municipal District funding  
2 requests. This would also include additional staffing  
3 requests.

4

5 Just in relation to the 6.8 million. That is broken  
6 down as follows. Additional staffing requirements 850.  
7 CLLR. FOX: Sorry, Brian, that's the wrong slide.

8 MR. GLEESON: Of the 6.8 million, additional staffing  
9 requirements 581,000; housing and corporate estate  
10 3.2 million; roads, water and environment services  
11 600,000; planning development and environment  
12 approximately 1 million; community cultural and social  
13 development 760,000; and nearly 400,000 between  
14 enterprise, corporate services and finance. Some of  
15 the proposed new and additional expenditure programmes  
16 included in these submissions are the social housing  
17 conditional survey works, increased provision for new  
18 letting, additional money for central heating and  
19 boiler maintenance, additional funding for graveyard  
20 maintenance, energy upgrade scheme provision, extra  
21 library staff in line with the workforce plan, an  
22 increase to the Library Book Fund and additional  
23 funding for playgrounds and public lighting.

24

25 Other matters that we must have regard to include the  
26 financial position of the Local Authority, the ability  
27 to service its borrowings and manage its cash flows.  
28 The revenue deficit at the end of 2017 was  
29 2.69 million. This was actually reduced by nearly

1           300,000 in 2017 and we are expected by NOAC to continue  
2           to try and reduce this deficit year-on-year. The ratio  
3           current assets to current liabilities is 3:1 which is  
4           quite positive and shows we can comfortably meet our  
5           short-term liabilities. The ratio of loans payable to      14:17  
6           revenue income is 83%. This is also adequate and shows  
7           the level of income available to cover our loans.  
8

9           In relation to feedback from public consultations held,  
10          an advert was placed in the local paper and on social      14:17  
11          media and by text alert. We received 32 missions; 23  
12          were in favour of a reduction of the rate; 3 requested  
13          an increase; 3 requested no change to the rate; and 3  
14          made a general comment on local property tax without  
15          any reference to a variation.      14:18

16  
17          We must also look at the financial effect of the varied  
18          rate on the liable person, on the revenue of the Local  
19          Authority and on the service plans of the Local  
20          Authority. 52,700 properties are registered in      14:18  
21          Wicklow. The LPT base rate is 0.18% of the property  
22          valuation property. The bands are based on the values  
23          as at 1st May 2013. These valuations will not change  
24          until November 2019, which will therefore impact on  
25          budget 2020. Also, 57% of properties are currently  
26          valued at 200,000 or under in County Wicklow.      14:18

27  
28          The next table I just want to go through is the  
29          potential impact on a liable person. This table is

1 also available to look at on page 9 of the report that  
2 was circulated last week. If we start off on the  
3 left-hand side, the first couple of columns there  
4 outlines the valuation bands and the standard rates  
5 that apply to each band. The next set of reports are 14:19  
6 columns there, outline the financial impacts of the  
7 local property tax variation of 1%, 5%, 7.5%, 10% and  
8 15% across all valuation plans. To give an example of  
9 each, a 1% change would from range from 90 cent to  
10 €5.58, whereas a 15% change ranges from €13.50 at the 14:19  
11 lower range to €87.75 at the upper range.  
12

13 The next set of columns there show the impact of a 10%  
14 change and that ranges from 17 cent per week at the  
15 lowest band up to €1.13 per week at the highest. 14:20  
16

17 The final two columns show the houses and the number of  
18 each value bands throughout County Wicklow.  
19

20 We next want to look at the impact on the 2019 revenue 14:20  
21 budget. As I mentioned earlier, the variations is  
22 based on 100% gross allocation of 17.2 million. As  
23 such a 1% variation in the base rate equates to  
24 171,809. A 10% variation on the rate equates to  
25 1.72 million and a maximum adjustment is 2.6 million 14:20  
26 based on the 15% variation. So for the average  
27 householder a 15% reduction would result in a saving of  
28 only 90 cent per week, but would reduce the Council  
29 budget by 2.6 million, which would have a huge

1 detrimental impact on the level of services that we can  
2 provide.

3

4 Finally, we need to look at the potential impact on  
5 existing service delivery. While maintaining the local 14:21  
6 property tax level in 2018 this allowed Wicklow County  
7 Council to maintain some and increase other existing  
8 budgets. For example, housing of the homeless was  
9 increased by 160,000. Social housing conditional  
10 survey provision for 43,000. Central heating was 14:21  
11 increased by 25,000. Provision was made for Creative  
12 Ireland initiatives 35,000. Additional library staff  
13 178,000. New energy saving measures 80,000. DPG  
14 grants were maintained at 750,000 in the budget and it  
15 also allowed us to retain the Community Grant Scheme at 14:21  
16 €200,000 and discretionary funding for Municipal  
17 Districts at €900,000. There was also increased  
18 funding for Arklow, Wicklow and Bray harbours for  
19 154,000 and additional funding was provided for burial  
20 ground extensions in the amount of 80,000. 14:22

21

22 Any reduction to the local property tax rate in 2019  
23 would put at risk the continued funding of these  
24 particular initiatives.

25

26 To conclude: The 2019 funding shortfall currently  
27 stands at 8.6 million, therefore the recommendation to  
28 the Members is to increase the basic rate of LPT by 10%  
29 for 2019. This will generate an extra 1.7 million for

1 the budget and it addresses non-discretionary cost  
2 increases relating to pay, pensions, reduced income and  
3 matched funding requirements. It would also prevent  
4 cuts to essential services and allows for the continued  
5 targeting of investments in local programmes. That  
6 concludes the presentation. Thank you for your time.  
7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. I'll just let it out  
8 to the floor for questions and answers and I'd ask  
9 Councillors to be as brief as possible in regard to  
10 this. Cllr. Behan, you're first up.

14:22

11 CLLR. BEHAN: Cathaoirleach, I don't have a question.  
12 I just want to thank the Chief Executive and Brian and  
13 the staff for preparing the report. I have the same  
14 opinion that I've had on this from day one which people  
15 won't be surprised at. Basically - and I think the  
16 Chief Executive in fairness alludes to it in his report  
17 - this fax is effectively a con job on the people of  
18 this country because people thought when they were  
19 being asked to pay a property tax their money would go  
20 into additional services in the County. As the Chief  
21 Executive rightly points out -in fairness to him he  
22 does point it out - all that happened was the property  
23 tax money was just substituted in for the rates support  
24 grant. So we got nothing from the point of view of the  
25 people of the County as a result of this tax.

14:23

26 Absolutely nothing. In fact it could be argued that  
27 with the abolition of Urban and Town Councils and  
28 reductions in staff at local level, we're actually  
29 worse off as a County Council trying to provide

1 services for the people. That's the first point I'd  
2 make and I would honestly ask people to really reflect  
3 on that. This is something that the people of this  
4 County are absolutely raging about. The fact that  
5 they're paying a property tax and they're not seeing  
6 resultant improvement in services. I could go around a  
7 whole lot of list things that I have been looking to  
8 get done in the Bray Municipal District, some of which  
9 money was actually allocated for three years ago that  
10 hasn't actually been spent yet because of lack of  
11 staffing, too many jobs being required to be done of  
12 too few people, particularly at engineering and outdoor  
13 staff level. So to expect people to pay an additional  
14 10% next year for a property tax, given what I think is  
15 the abysmal level of services I think is just not  
16 acceptable.

17

18 I would also say that as a body Wicklow County Council  
19 has a lot to answer for in terms of how it has  
20 stewarded the public's money up to now and we all know  
21 about specific examples, I won't go into them except to  
22 mention one or two. One is the astronomical bill  
23 that's facing somebody - whether it's the national  
24 taxpayer or the local taxpayer - for the clean-up of  
25 the illegal dumping in West Wicklow, which some  
26 estimates put at €100 million by the time it's  
27 finished.

28

29 We can also look at a decision that was made here to

1 allow an American vulture fund off with half a million  
2 euro for land on the Southern Cross because we  
3 basically caved in and didn't want to negotiate it.  
4 That would amount to one-third, I think, of the  
5 additional increase that Mr. Gleeson has recommended  
6 here today.

14:26

7  
8 So even looking at how we're doing our business I think  
9 many people would be very skeptical, we're even  
10 spending the money that we're getting properly?

14:26

11  
12 I know I'll be told by the officials: well, if you're  
13 not going to not agree to this expenditure increase  
14 we're going to have a reduction in services. I just  
15 don't accept that. Those of us who have been around  
16 this area for a long time know that estimates,  
17 processes are estimates. They're moveable feasts.  
18 Figures changed. It's even accepted in the report.  
19 Figures can change between now and November or  
20 December.

14:26

21  
22 So I think we have an opportunity, the last decision we  
23 will make before we go to the people again to see what  
24 verdict they have on the work of this Council over the  
25 last five years. We have an opportunity to make some  
26 bit of a difference for people in terms of the income  
27 that they are allowed to keep for themselves.

14:26

28  
29 I want to propose, Cathaoirleach, not an increase of

1           10% but a reduction, the maximum reduction possible in  
2           next year's property tax of 15%. Thank you.

3           CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. Walsh.

4           CLLR. WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks Brian  
5           for the comprehensive presentation there. Firstly,  
6           this is the fifth year we find ourselves in this  
7           position looking at the LPT rate and really I think  
8           it's just farcical. I think as Councillors we  
9           shouldn't be expected to make this decision here year  
10          in and year out. We're damned if we do, we're damn the  
11          if we don't. Well find ourselves in the unenviable  
12          position here. We reduce the LPT and then we'll have  
13          an impact on service; we increase it and then we have  
14          an impact on our householders. We have the  
15          equalisation fund which is bad enough and then we have  
16          the effect of, the additional amount gone to our  
17          housing services. So we're left with a net situation  
18          with regard to the general purpose grant. So really I  
19          think to propose a 10% increase on an already hard-hit  
20          taxpayer, I think we have inflation figures on the  
21          rise, we have insurance figures, transport figures,  
22          everything on the rise. We have to consider the  
23          consequences of a hard Brexit that will happen on the  
24          taxpayer. So really I don't think how we can  
25          contemplate increasing the LPT rate at this particular  
26          point in time.

27

28          I would just like to ask the Director, there was a  
29          comprehensive submission submitted by himself to the

1 Department in July I think last in relation to the  
2 equalisation fund and general purpose grant and I'm  
3 just wondering whether there was any response from the  
4 Department in relation to that? But generally I think  
5 this whole situation, we find ourselves year in year  
6 out here making this decision. We shouldn't have to  
7 be -- in the presentation there you spoke about the  
8 national pay agreement, you spoke about the additional  
9 pension costs which really should be addressed by  
10 Central Government. You make that point yourself and  
11 it should be -- that equates to 0.8 I think, that we  
12 have to consider here as a council. So again that's  
13 just not satisfactory. Thank you.

14:28

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. I'll just ask Brian to take a  
15 those and then we can get back after.

14:29

16 Cllr. Nicola Lawless, then Cllr. Gráinne McLoughlin  
17 after that. Cllr. Lawless.

18 CLLR. LAWLESS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I actually  
19 agree with Cllr. Walsh we are all damned if we do and  
20 damned if we don't here in the Council with the local  
21 property tax. It is a large onus on us to make that  
22 decision but I would quite happily second Cllr. Behan's  
23 proposal. That will come as no surprise to anyone in  
24 the Chambers here because we've always supported a  
25 decrease in the local property tax.

14:29

26  
27 Speaking to any member of the public and you say we  
28 have local property tax coming up again, most people  
29 will just roll their eyes to Heaven and say: This is

1                   an unfair tax. Why do I have to keep paying tax on my  
2                   house and property that I own.

3

4                   I know, Brian, your presentation, thank you very much  
5                   for that, it's very comprehensive as well, and I was  
6                   just, you know, doing my figures, as you do, and just  
7                   taking in the bracket of 200,000, 250,000, you know to  
8                   say that, you know, an extra 77 cent per week it  
9                   doesn't an awful lot but it's €40.50 a year. But if  
10                  you look at somebody who is on a pension, invalidity  
11                  pension, disability, that may possibly own their home  
12                  valued at that, most people will go to the post office  
13                  and they pay, I think it works out at €7 a week they  
14                  might pay off it, or they might pay monthly. The post  
15                  office charges €1 for every time you make that  
16                  transaction. So if you pay weekly and we increase it  
17                  by 10%, that's an extra €52 or that household  
18                  or an extra €12 on that household if they pay through  
19                  the post office. I think we have to take that into  
20                  consideration as well.

21

22                  I work in the community sector and you would say sure  
23                  you'd have to have a euro in your pocket; who wouldn't  
24                  have a euro in their pocket? Believe me and you I've  
25                  met many families that wouldn't have a euro in their  
26                  pocket. I just think the cost of living is just  
27                  increasingly rising year-on-year on for people and it's  
28                  just another burden on people. I completely understand  
29                  that we need funding here in Wicklow but I don't think

1 it should be done through the local property tax. This  
2 was supposed to be a temporary stop-gap. This came in  
3 when the recession hit because of funding and we should  
4 be getting proper funding from Central Government.  
5 And, also, we should be getting funding for the  
6 pensions and retirements coming from the Government.  
7 We shouldn't need the local property tax to be  
8 subsidising this as such.

14:31

9  
10 So, as I say, no big surprise. I would definitely,  
11 definitely not support an increase of 10% in the local  
12 property tax. Thank you.

14:32

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. McLoughlin.

14 CLLR. McLOUGHLIN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, thanks for  
15 your presentation, Brian. There was one image up on  
16 the screen there where you give figures up to 100,000,  
17 valuation 2 and 300 and all the way down. What I feel  
18 about it, I would like to know in our different areas  
19 how is that affecting us because I know that in  
20 Greystones, Newcastle, Wicklow, North Wicklow, we are  
21 the ones that are going to have to pay the bulk of that  
22 increase and once again we are the ones that have roads  
23 that are so bad, they need so much attention that none  
24 of this money will come back to us. We know it's going  
25 to be spent everyone else in the County. Now I  
26 disagree with Cllr. Lawless, I completely agree with  
27 the local property tax, as I also believe in a water  
28 tax - and I'll say that out loud as well. But the  
29 situation is it's an unfair balance. If you do want us

14:32

14:32

14:32

1 to go and put up 10%, which would affect most of our  
2 constituents, I think the least you need to do before  
3 you come to us, we need to have a longer discussion,  
4 not something that was spent to us last week. What do  
5 you propose to do with that extra money in the areas so 14:33  
6 when we go back to the people and say to them: We did  
7 agree to the 10% extra and this is what you got for it,  
8 rather than constantly: You will pay extra but  
9 actually somebody else is going to get something out of  
10 it. I find it very difficult to increase and I 14:33  
11 wouldn't decrease it. I do support it but we've got to  
12 be able to say to people what exactly they're going to  
13 get for their increase, not some list that is a bit  
14 random, Brian, to be honest to you and not relevant to  
15 the people in our why itself. 14:33

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: cllr. Mary Kavanagh.

17 CLLR. KAVANAGH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thanks 14:34  
18 to Brian for the presentation. Yeah, I certainly  
19 wouldn't be supporting a 10% increase in property tax  
20 for a number of reasons. Looking at the figures here  
21 and if you go to schedule 1, page 4, there's an item  
22 there called "other expenditure". The 2018 figure was  
23 37 million; the 2019 estimate is 47 million, so there's  
24 a difference there of 10 million for something that we  
25 don't even know what it is. Now, if we don't know what 14:34  
26 it is, we're not being told, we have no idea whether  
27 that figure is just an estimate, a best guess or  
28 whatever and I'm quite sure that if there is a deficit  
29 in income and expenditure, instead of adding on a 10%

1 increase to the very, very hard pressed house owners,  
2 then we could look for some explanation of what that  
3 is, whether it is made up of a number of items or one  
4 item or whatever.

5 14:35

6 The other thing I have a huge problem with is the fact  
7 that there are people in this County potentially going  
8 to be levied an extra 10% to cover pay restoration and  
9 pensions, which really have nothing at all to do with  
10 local property tax. To be honest it's an absolute sham 14:35  
11 and it's a scandal that these increases in pay and  
12 pensions are not being met out of central funding. I  
13 think they've a cheek actually to come looking for 20%  
14 from Councils and then expect hard pressed, you know,  
15 parents of school goers who have to pay voluntary  
16 contributions of up to €1,000 per child to go to school  
17 to pay for iPads for them, the elderly homeowner who  
18 has to face increases in fuel charges, even a bag of  
19 coal now costs over €20 a bag for a 40kg bag. We just  
20 can't keep hitting people. This was supposed to be a  
21 temporary tax back in the day when we were in the  
22 middle of the Celtic Tiger collapse. Those days are  
23 gone. The country is booming compared to then. We  
24 should be looking for reductions in property tax not  
25 increases. Thank you. 14:36

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. Oliver O'Brien.  
27 CLLR. OLIVER O'BRIEN: I'm proposing that when the vote  
28 is taken that the percentage local property tax  
29 variation be calculated on the basis of each

1 Councillor's vote in giving a percentage value. what  
2 this in effect means that if 16 Councillors voted for  
3 keeping it as it is and 16 Councillors voted for a  
4 reduction, the maximum reduction of 15%, that that  
5 would mean that it would reduced by 7.5%. That would 14:36  
6 actually mean that we wouldn't be disenfranchised here.  
7 That's what happens year after year. It's just a  
8 charade. It's a tax system that governs this and  
9 basically my vote means nothing if I'm in the minority,  
10 even if I'm only in a minority of one. It means that 14:37  
11 the people that we are representing are having no input  
12 whatsoever into the property tax. So I am proposing  
13 that that's the way it be done.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: cllr. Fox.

15 CLLR. FOX: Thank you, Chairman. Well certainly we 14:37  
16 have rehashed around this Chamber every September how  
17 unfair a tax this is and it is an unfair tax. It  
18 discriminates against people who live in counties where  
19 house values are high, like County Wicklow. I could be  
20 paying twice as much as somebody down the country in 14:37  
21 the very same house as what I live in. So it is a  
22 discriminatory tax. And look, none of us like paying  
23 tax. It is what the national legislators have handed  
24 us down so we have to get on with it, okay?

25  
26 As cllr. Walsh has said, the equalisation fund of  
27 3.64 million, again it's very unjust. The 3.46 million  
28 of Wicklow taxpayers' money that is going to another  
29 Local Authority area.

1           Can I just ask you, Brian: The self-fund housing of  
2           1.76 million, where exactly does that go to? And also  
3           a question on the revenue deficit of 2.69, you know,  
4           obviously we can't continue to have a deficit every  
5           year. So as a figure, you know, if we annually have a  
6           deficit, what does that figure now stand at, the  
7           overall figure? Because it doesn't seem to make any  
8           sense that Central Government would take 3.46 million  
9           off us and allow us to grow a deficit -- a total figure  
10           and an annual deficit.

14:38

11  
12           I personally would favour leaving tax, property tax at  
13           the standard rate, not increase it 10% and not decrease  
14           it. And the reason for that is cllr. Behan rightly  
15           said we are short of staff. You go to the Bray  
16           Municipal District, the staff are under pressure.  
17           There is not enough outdoor staff. There is not enough  
18           engineering staff. But the way to resolve that is not  
19           by reducing our revenue. It's not by taking  
20           2.5 million out of the budget. That just doesn't make  
21           sense. It just doesn't add up. The way to address  
22           that is by maintaining the property tax at the standard  
23           rate. That additional 2.5 million I think is critical,  
24           absolutely critical because if you see that the  
25           discretionary funding that is given to the Municipal  
26           Districts, if we reduce the property tax that becomes a  
27           laughable figure, that 2.5 million spread across  
28           Municipal Districts and I think something we done in  
29           the last budget, which was we addressed the

14:39

14:39

1           discretionary funding to Municipal Districts was a  
2           success. Now it will take a year or two for those  
3           projects to be on the ground for people to actually see  
4           those on the ground in each of the Municipal Districts.  
5           But certainly I would favour retaining property tax at   14:40  
6           the standard rate.

7  
8           Chairman, I know it's probably an unpopular thing to  
9           propose but I'm happy to propose it to stay at the  
10           standard rate and keep the additional funding, when we   14:40  
11           get around to the budget, particularly for the  
12           Municipal Districts and discretionary funding.

13  
14           One other point I would like to make before I finish.  
15           I would be very concerned in November 2019 about the   14:41  
16           revaluation of houses and how many people will have to  
17           go up to a higher band and the increase that will  
18           befall people next year. Certainly I think that is  
19           something that we should correspond with Government on  
20           and the Department on because house prices since 2013   14:41  
21           have increased dramatically. It will see a huge  
22           increase in some people's property tax if we revalue  
23           the full figure in 2019. Thank you, Chairman.

24           CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr. Mitchell.  
25           CLLR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, yeah, and   14:41  
26           thank you for the presentation there earlier. Just to  
27           say about the property tax, I mean I think every other  
28           country in Europe has a property tax and the concept of  
29           a property tax to tax people who have something to fund

1 services for the whole community is a  
2 worldwide-accepted thing and so when it was  
3 reintroduced here, ten years ago, it was -- part of  
4 it -- the point definitely was stated to reduce the  
5 Central Government deficit which was enormous because  
6 of the financial crash and the crash of the other  
7 revenue which the Government was getting. So that's  
8 what it is doing.

9

10 Having got a property tax it does give people better  
11 services because they are now paying more directly for  
12 them. But I think if we didn't have property tax as  
13 some are suggesting here we would be almost unique in  
14 the world in expecting local services not to be paid  
15 for locally. So that is the concept of a property tax, 14:42  
16 it is a reasonable way to fund local services.

17

18 So I'm also concerned that if we did do what some  
19 people here are proposing, which is to cut it by 15%,  
20 we would severely impact the services, the homeless,  
21 housing, the ones which were illustrated by the Finance  
22 Director and I don't want to do that. 14:43

23

24 In looking at this I'm also conscious that in  
25 Greystones and Bray property values are significantly  
26 higher than the average for the rest of the County, and  
27 therefore the majority of property tax paid in  
28 County Wicklow is paid in Bray and Greystones, because  
29 of this. Unfortunately the figures are not available

1 by Municipal District. But I'm also conscious that  
2 every other district except Greystones gets far more  
3 spend per person. Bray spends about 50% per person  
4 extra. I don't know what Greystones gets. Arklow  
5 spends around 80% more. So in the case of Greystones 14:44  
6 if the property tax was to go up, there would be a lot  
7 more property tax to be paid in the town and in  
8 Kilcoole as well and we're not getting that money spent  
9 on the local services.

10 14:44

11 A significant part of the reason for that is that  
12 property tax is not levied on new houses. There have  
13 been well over a new thousand houses in Greystones and  
14 Kilcoole since this was introduced. But it is  
15 essential that there is a proper -- money comes to the 14:44  
16 area for extra maintenance to deal with a huge increase  
17 in population because otherwise, I'm certainly now of  
18 the view we shouldn't be expanding the area further  
19 because we don't seem to be able to maintain it under  
20 the present budget. That is a significant problem. 14:45

21  
22 what Cllr. Fox said about where the money goes, first  
23 of all, the one that really annoys me is that this  
24 self-funding housing subject, which we lose 1.7 million  
25 on, and then there's the 20% which is at least a more 14:45  
26 open process but the 1.7 million disappears from  
27 Wicklow is disgraceful. Essentially what they're  
28 trying to do on this is they're keeping the funding to  
29 the various Councils at what it was maybe in 2009, but,

1 yet certain counties, Wicklow particularly but also  
2 Meath and I think Kildare, have grown enormously and we  
3 need a larger budget to cope with the people.  
4 Strangely enough, Dublin City where there is a most  
5 talked about housing crisis for Dublin City, but  
6 actually I think the population of Dublin City hasn't  
7 been expanded, or the lowest in the whole region. So  
8 they have failed abysmally to try and do something for  
9 the property shortage.

10 14:45

11 So, in short, I just want to say that I would be in  
12 favour of maintaining the property tax at the same as  
13 last year. I'm not in favour of the 10% expansion and  
14 I believe that's the best way of providing services. I  
15 think that those people who are looking for a decrease  
16 should state which services they want to cut.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. Dermot O'Brien.

18 CLLR. DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I  
19 appreciate the report that was sent out during the week  
20 and the presentation today. I can see that this is a 14:46  
21 hard sell because what I see is a mismatch between what  
22 the constituents on the ground are telling us as their  
23 public reps and how the proposals are sitting within  
24 the Chamber here. So I would support Cllr. Behan, his  
25 proposal to reduce by 15% because that's what my  
26 constituents are telling me that they want, and they're  
27 also telling me that this trap whereby there is a  
28 comfort zone for saying only "it's only". So we have  
29 this "it's only". It's only this amount. And what

1           they said to me is: It's only extra money in my free  
2           education; it's only an extra bob on my premium for my  
3           insurance; it's only an extra cost on transport; it's  
4           only an extra cost for the school tour. It becomes the  
5           it's only generation and I don't have a comfort zone       14:47  
6           for adding -- the money that we get is a gift from the  
7           people who own houses across the County and how we  
8           thank them is by asking for more. I certainly don't  
9           have a comfort zone for that and at the same time  
10          explain to them how money leaves the County that they     14:47  
11          give as a gift. So I support the proposal to reduce.

12          CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. Whitmore.

13          CLLR. WHITMORE: Thanks, very much, Chair. What I  
14          started to realise is that every year there's certain  
15          meetings where the same stuff is repeated as had been     14:48  
16          said the previous year and this is one of them. I  
17          think the reason the same issues come up again and  
18          again and again with the local property tax is that  
19          there is major flaws in the system that has been  
20          designed and unfortunately Wicklow has been  
21          disadvantaged significantly by those flaws.

22  
23          I'm just going to compare Wicklow with Mayo. The two  
24          counties have roughly the same population and yet  
25          whilst we have to give over 3.2 million of our local  
26          property tax that we've collected from people into the  
27          equalisation fund, Mayo is a recipient of funding and  
28          in 2017 received nearly €7 million in local property  
29          tax. Mayo has a much greater staffing level than

1 wicklow County Council so in 2016 we had 611 staff,  
2 Mayo had 923 staff. They get much more -- the gross  
3 expenditure is more for Mayo. It was 964 per capita  
4 compared to wicklow which was 640 per capita. And they  
5 also get a lot more in Government grants and subsidies, 14:49  
6 308 per capita as opposed to 148. Even when you  
7 compare what wicklow receives, say, under the transport  
8 infrastructure fund compared to Mayo, for a three-year  
9 period Mayo got 80 million and wicklow got 8 million.  
10 So wicklow is, when it comes to grants funding, you 14:49  
11 know, from Central Government we are significantly  
12 disadvantaged and I think that this local property tax  
13 emphasises that considerably. I think we cannot ask  
14 people of wicklow to pay an additional 10% when we have  
15 that inherent flaw in this system. I think it's really 14:50  
16 unfair. we have seen cost of living increases that  
17 were published a couple of weeks ago. Every single  
18 element of people's living and the cost of leaving  
19 lives has increased and I don't think that we can add  
20 an additional 10% on to them. we need to stop calling 14:50  
21 this a local property tax because at the moment our  
22 money, 20% of our money goes outside this County so I  
23 think that's something that we do need to raise. I  
24 noticed that the Chief Executive said that the  
25 equalisation tax is something that we can't change but  
26 at this particular point in time, yes, he is correct  
27 but we need to recognise that this is an national issue  
28 and nationally this is something that does need to be  
29 addressed. I would suggest that if we have our five

1 TDs at the meeting next week that we raise this with  
2 them as well because they're the ones who should be  
3 fighting for us when it comes to the unfairness of the  
4 local property tax.

14:51

5  
6 Just interestingly, Mayo have actually voted against  
7 increasing their local property tax this year. Their  
8 Executive asked them for it increase by 15% and they're  
9 leaving it at the baseline. So I think for us to  
10 increase it by 10% to subsidise a county that is  
11 refusing to put that increase on their people I think  
12 is unacceptable.

14:51

13  
14 However, I do recognise the need to fund our services.  
15 I have seen, since I started in the Council, a slight  
16 improvement in things getting done around the County  
17 and I do believe that part of that is, you know, the  
18 funding that comes and that we have allocated through  
19 local property tax. I would be in favour keeping it as  
20 it is. I would not, absolutely not agree to increasing  
21 it by 10%. But I think if we keep the status quo and  
22 at that point we need to start fighting for Wicklow  
23 whilst the reforms and discussions about the reforms  
24 are happening. Thank you.

14:51

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. I'm going to let Brian in now to  
26 answer a few of the questions. Then Cllr. Fortune,  
27 Cllr. Walsh can afterwards just that -- Brian if you'll  
28 address the question, if possible. And then we'll move  
29 on then, okay.

1 MR. GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I'll just take  
2 Cllr. Whitmore's points there while it's fresh in the  
3 memory. In relation to what you said about  
4 equalisation and Mayo, there's a local property tax  
5 review that's currently taking place and we did propose 14:52  
6 the elimination of the equalisation and that the other  
7 local authorities such as Mayo would be funded by  
8 central coffers in order to bring them up to the level  
9 that they previously had, rather than penalising a  
10 County such as ourselves. That review is ongoing. 14:52

11  
12 Also, our expenditure per capita, we have highlighted  
13 the fact that in comparison to the other local  
14 authorities we are at the lower level, we're third or  
15 fourth bottom and that was highlighted in the separate 14:53  
16 funding baseline review that took place a couple of  
17 months ago.

18  
19 I'll just stay on the baseline review, I know,  
20 Cllr. Walsh, you raised that query to see where we were 14:53  
21 in relation to that. A new model, there was a number  
22 of indicators that were highlighted and suggested in  
23 that baseline review. They've been included in a new  
24 modelled and that's being finalised currently and it's  
25 being sent to the Minister for approval, however, I 14:53  
26 suppose a point to note is the model would only be  
27 applicable to any additional funding that would be  
28 required by (inaudible) in the coming years.  
29

1           If I could take the point in relation to  
2           cllr. McLoughlin. Regarding the proposal to increase  
3           the 10% and what it was for, we did have on the table,  
4           like it is specifically for, we had the pay shortfall  
5           that we have in relation to the compensation from the  
6           Department, our pension increases, the reduced income  
7           from IPB and also our matched funding requirements in  
8           relation to the Urban and Rural Regeneration Schemes.  
9

14:54

10          In relation to the point you raised, Councillor,  
11         regarding breakdown by Municipal District I think  
12         cllr. Mitchell referred to it, that we have actually  
13         looked for that already from Revenue and unfortunately  
14         they're not in a position to provide that.

14:54

15

16          cllr. Kavanagh, you made a point about page 4 on the  
17         report and the figure 47 million. Actually on page 7  
18         of the report it outlines a breakdown of what would  
19         make up the bulk of that. If you go to the report  
20         you'll see the breakdown by Service Director at  
21         Municipal District of the additional requests for  
22         funding and it has a few examples of the type of  
23         expenditure that would make that up. It would also  
24         take account of any additional grants that are being  
25         received in relation to roads that would be paid out  
26         under that area but obviously would be covered on the  
27         income side as well.

14:55

28          CLLR. KAVANAGH: What page is that on?  
29          MR. GLEESON: It's on page 7. That covers about seven

1 million of the amount and the remainder would be, I  
2 suppose, contra, you'd see the income is actually  
3 increased in the table you were looking at on page 4  
4 compared to last year, the grants and subsidies. So  
5 that goes up and the expenditure obviously will go up 14:55  
6 as well to offset that. So it's a combination between  
7 those two factors. As I say, the bulk of the items are  
8 outlined on page 7 of the report.

9

10 Cllr. O'Brien's suggestion regarding the vote, I don't 14:56  
11 believe that can be done by splitting a vote. There  
12 either has to be a full vote one way or the other to  
13 increase or decrease or stay the same.

14

15 Cllr. Fox, relating to the self-funding of housing, 14:56  
16 where does that go? It actually goes to our capital  
17 account and it replaces, I suppose it saves the  
18 Government from paying 1.7 million of capital funding  
19 to us and that's hence the reason it's called  
20 self-funding, we're pushing that funding into capital  
21 to pay for the housing element.

22

23 In relation to the deficit, I suppose we would be one  
24 of a number of local authorities that currently carry a  
25 deficit year-on-year, but in the 2018 budget that was 14:56  
26 adopted here last year, we did make provision for a  
27 minimum of 150,000 to further reduce that deficit. As  
28 I say, there's provision in each budget to reduce it  
29 year-on-year.

1 Finally, cllr. Mitchell made the point about  
2 expenditure in Greystones per person. While that may  
3 be the case that it is lower per person I would point  
4 out that the expenditure per size of Municipal  
5 District, Greystones would be a lot higher than other 14:57  
6 districts to I suppose it's a kind of a blend between  
7 the two as regard size and person.  
8 CLLR. McLOUGHLIN: It goes one way.  
9 MR. GLEESON: I think that's most of the points raised.  
10 CATHAOIRLEACH: cllr. Fortune. 14:57  
11 CLLR. FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to  
12 the Chief Executive and Brian for giving us the  
13 overview. But, you know, this whole exercise, and to  
14 be fair to everybody in the Chamber, Executives and  
15 Councillors, it applies to us all, we're basically 14:58  
16 being given a task here that is unfair, unjust, it's  
17 all based on the provision of a lie. And on behalf of  
18 our constituents who we all represent, we can't look at  
19 this in isolation, just take a look at property tax and  
20 let's make a decision. I was reading there recently 14:58  
21 that tax income has gone up over the last ten or twelve  
22 years from something like 11.5 billion to  
23 20-plus billion, so people are being hit left, right  
24 and centre. I understand that from an Executive  
25 perspective the Local Authority has a responsibility to 14:58  
26 do certain things but if you look at the local property  
27 tax, when that was brought in it was brought in and  
28 sold on the basis that it was going to be extra funding  
29 coming into the County to do all kinds of stuff, to do

1 all kinds of developments that we couldn't afford up to  
2 that. But of course that wasn't the case because as  
3 the property tax started to be collected and it's been  
4 well mentioned by lots of Councillors already, they  
5 were taking the local Government fund down so it was 14:59  
6 reducing all the time. The net effect is there is no  
7 extra money and then the 1.7 million that several  
8 Councillors were talking about today, now it's back, we  
9 paid that as well because the Government didn't put it  
10 in. So this whole thing really is, we're thrown into 14:59  
11 this -- it's a bit of a joke and like also there's a --  
12 I have been watching some of the media in the last  
13 while, if you look at what's going on, this was brought  
14 in in 2013 and changed as we speak now, but it has been  
15 put off I think cynically until 2019. If you look at 14:59  
16 the way the price of property has gone up over the last  
17 five or six years, people will be paying 1,600 or 1,700  
18 based on the current rationale. Then, Brian, one of  
19 the figures you threw at us, which I was interested in,  
20 was that 57% of properties in the County are valued at 15:00  
21 200,000 and under. I found that very interesting  
22 because where are they? I know loads of people trying  
23 to buy houses at the moment and if we could find out  
24 where they are that would be very useful. Any kind of  
25 a house that's going up, particularly in North Wicklow  
26 now, is costing the guts of 400,000 plus. So that's a  
27 very high percentage. But I really think, I mean to be  
28 fair to you, we throw a lot of questions up to you and  
29 obviously you have to come back and answer us and your

1 hands are tied and the Chief Executive's hands are tied  
2 because you're told by the Department what you have to  
3 deliver and you have to put in a balanced budget and  
4 everything else. Where if we were running our business  
5 here as a business we'd be taking in 17.18 million in 15:00  
6 property tax and if we were spending that in the County  
7 we wouldn't be having this meeting at all. But see  
8 the problem is, we're taking this money in, we're not  
9 spending it so really what it is, it's a back-handed  
10 tax and people are sick of it. And despite the fact 15:01  
11 that the economy has picked up and lots of things are  
12 going on, people by and large are not better off  
13 because there's more tax being taken from them.  
14

15 So it would be absolutely wrong, I think, for us as 15:01  
16 Members here today, in my opinion, to increase the  
17 property tax. Fundamentally, and I have said this and  
18 I'm on record for this and I've said this before, I  
19 don't agree with property tax because I think it's an  
20 unfair tax. It's not fair equally, in my opinion, to 15:01  
21 compare property tax to what goes on in other countries  
22 because if you're doing that you have to look at all  
23 the taxes that happen in other countries and if you do  
24 an analysis, take a few countries across Europe and do  
25 an analysis versus Ireland. Ireland is far more 15:01  
26 expensive tax wise than most of these countries. So  
27 you can't just look at everything in isolation. I just  
28 think the whole thing is wrong. I mean my heart would  
29 tell me to again vote against the property tax, but my

1 head would tell me that people actually need to be  
2 helped because it's there and for that reason I think  
3 what Cllr. Behan has said in his presentation was on  
4 the button. Again, you guys up there have an  
5 impossible job. You have to do what you have to do,  
6 but we also have to do what we have to do. We're in  
7 for our constituents to fight their corner and make  
8 their case. That's what I'm trying to do here as well.  
9 The whole thing is crazy. I will just finish by  
10 repeating what I said at the beginning. This property 15:02  
11 tax is the biggest con job of all time. It was put in  
12 and some of the people who put it in are now gone off  
13 to Europe and different places and other people are  
14 left to handle it and the Executives here in Wicklow  
15 are trying to convince us to approve something here 15:02  
16 today so as you can have a budget and while the budget  
17 has -- the Local Government Fund has been reduced over  
18 the last 15 years, year-on-year-on-year-on-year, it was  
19 reduced during the boom because there was so much money  
20 coming in from building and then when the recession 15:03  
21 came it was being reduced because there wasn't enough  
22 funding coming that way. So really, as I said, Chair,  
23 I just think this is a whole con job and unfair to us  
24 and unfair to the Executive.  
25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. Walsh and then 15:03  
26 Cllr. Matthews and Cllr. Timmins.  
27 CLLR. WALSH: Just one quick point, Cathaoirleach, I'd  
28 like to make in relation to the proposal to reduce the  
29 rate and that's to do with our Local Authority housing

1 stock. As you know, our tenants are exempt from local  
2 property tax and I'm sure I would expect a reduction in  
3 the tax would impact on the maintenance provision  
4 provided for these houses. Last year we had additional  
5 expenditure of 25,000 for central heating installations 15:04  
6 in some of the housing stock so I would imagine that  
7 situation would be affected and I'm sure our tenants  
8 wouldn't thank us if we agreed to that. Thank you.

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: cllr. Matthews.

10 CLLR. MATTHEWS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Cathaoirleach, 15:04  
11 the Director made a submission to the Department a  
12 couple of months ago which you circulated to us, a very  
13 good submission which made a very good case, outlining  
14 how Wicklow had been underfunded in general from  
15 central funding over the couple of years so I'm just 15:04  
16 wondering has there been any reply to that?

17  
18 Secondly, I would just say that people should bear in  
19 mind that the national groups such as the ESRI and  
20 Social Justice Ireland at the moment are recommending 15:04  
21 or suggesting that taxes not be cut, that it's better  
22 to keep services funded and improve services where  
23 possible. It's very easy and it would be popular, you  
24 would be the best guy in the County for proposing and  
25 supporting the reduction of property tax but it's 15:05  
26 pretty irresponsible because unless you want to see the  
27 reduction of services -- if you reduce the income to  
28 the Council, over the next couple of months people  
29 would be jumping up and down wondering why the Council

1 aren't got money to spend on services. So I think we  
2 need to be responsible. It may be unpopular. We're  
3 talking about the difference here of -- the 10%  
4 increase we're talking about an average, I worked out  
5 the figures properly, of about 65 cent per week per  
6 household. That's what 10% would be, and a 15%  
7 reduction would be a bit more than a euro per week but  
8 what that would result in is a huge drop in services.  
9 I can't sit around here, although it would be popular  
10 an easy to do to look for a reduction, I think we need 15:05  
11 to maintain it as it is. Maintain the services and try  
12 and improve those services. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.  
13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr. Timmons.  
14 CLLR. TIMMINS: Chairman, I'd like to second  
15 Cllr. Fox's proposal to keep the property tax as is. I 15:06  
16 think at this stage we should look at having a vote on  
17 it. I think the arguments have been trashed around and  
18 repeated previous years in all due respect. I don't  
19 think there is much more to say about it.  
20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. I'm going to go for a vote in a 15:06  
21 couple of minutes. I want to give everyone an  
22 opportunity obviously to talk on this as well. People  
23 just be brief and then we can go -- we have two  
24 proposals before us proposed and seconded and then I'll  
25 go for it unless somebody comes in I need to say a  
26 couple of things myself as well. Cllr. Tommy Cullen.  
27 CLLR. TOMMY CULLEN: Chairman, my position is  
28 consistent that I oppose the tax property.  
29

1 (INAUDIBLE DUE TO MICROPHONE NOT BEING SWITCHED ON)

2

3 I don't agree that people who go out and buy their own  
4 houses and provide their own shelter and saving, have  
5 worked hard, pay a mortgage and pay interest on a

15:07

6 mortgage, and pay stamp duty on that property should  
7 then be further taxed, penalised. I don't think that's  
8 fair on people. If you look in the UK there's no stamp  
9 duty on a house unless the house is in excess of two  
10 and a quarter million sterling. Most people who pay

15:07

11 stamp duty on a house will pay a minimum of 15 years'  
12 property tax upfront. And you ask: well what services  
13 are we getting? We're not getting any services for  
14 this money. We're not getting school meals. We're not  
15 getting clothes for children in school. We're not

15:07

16 getting universal school buses. We're not getting  
17 swimming pools in every area. We're not getting  
18 community policing in every area. Huge amount of  
19 services that normally other countries get for paying  
20 property taxes are not here. Simply every hundred

15:08

21 euros that is collected, the Government are cutting our  
22 capital rates funding by 80% and that's going away and  
23 paying off the German bondholders, or whatever, and  
24 then we have to share the remainder with three or four  
25 County Councils up in Leitrim, Roscommon or Mayo or

15:08

26 wherever. That's not fair to the people of Wicklow.  
27 Then we have this review and this review is coming up  
28 and this review was done last February and it was  
29 talking about 400% increases in property tax. That

1 would put an average property tax on each household in  
2 Wicklow, as Cllr. Fortune rightly said, of around 1,600  
3 a year. That's what people are facing. That's the  
4 prospect people are facing in October next year. It  
5 was supposed to be brought in but it was delayed until  
6 next year.

7

8 The other thing that's coming down the line is this  
9 issue of planning that we have on the agenda for next  
10 week. In that proposal from March of next year Wicklow 15:09  
11 is going to be allowed to build something like 3,000  
12 houses in the next eight years and there's about a  
13 thousand of those houses already been granted, so  
14 that's going to produce probably about 2,000 houses in  
15 eight years. (Inaudible) and we're going to have to 15:09  
16 dezone land. Think of the planning levies lost in  
17 those figures, we're talking about maybe 300 million  
18 planning levies lost to this Council over the next  
19 eight years. Nobody is talking about that figure.  
20 That's devastating for this County and, you know, I 15:10  
21 think people have to say: Do you support property tax?  
22 I fundamentally don't support property tax because I  
23 never believe in paying for something that you're not  
24 getting a service for. That's my fundamental objection  
25 to that but there's another issue here again in the 15:10  
26 papers on Saturday. We're now told that there's a  
27 public service increase of 60,000 more public servants.  
28 That's not accounted for in these estimates. That's  
29 going to come in on top of this. So where is the money

1 going to come to pay for this? So we're looking down  
2 the road at huge property tax bills for the people of  
3 Wicklow and I just think that as long as people  
4 acquiesce with it and say to the Government: Keep  
5 rising the property tax and they're talking about Mayo 15:11  
6 there was an issue raised, that they're going to go  
7 away with that equalisation, but all that would simply  
8 mean is that the Government and the Department would  
9 simply cut our rates anyway by the same amount, so  
10 we're still going to be running faster and faster 15:11  
11 standing still and not get anything. I can't see any  
12 benefit for it. I understand this was an emergency  
13 measure brought in at the time when there was an  
14 emergency. That emergency has thankfully passed and it  
15 is like other emergency issues like the restoration of 15:11  
16 the public service pay. That has now been restored. I  
17 welcome that. But equally this emergency measure, I  
18 believe property taxes should be abolished and there is  
19 no need for them now and we are now 30% less funding  
20 than we were in 2007. I think we should be arguing  
21 that our rates support grant money should be restored  
22 like public service wages and pensions have all been  
23 restored.  
24  
25 I will just finish, Chairman. This other issue is this 15:12  
26 land tax review that is coming up in 2019. That's  
27 another issue that we have to be concerned about.  
28  
29 Chairman, I'm being consistent and I'm going to oppose

1 both motions supporting the property tax. I don't  
2 agree with it. Thank you.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: cllr. O'Neill and then cllr. Fitzgerald  
4 and then I'm going to for a vote.

5 CLLR. O'NEILL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, I want to 15:12  
6 support cllr. O'Brien's motion. I think it's about  
7 that time we were held accountable. It's ironic to see  
8 former colleagues of mine here today supporting a  
9 reduction of 15% when only last year they voted to  
10 maintain the charge. I want to acknowledge cllr. Behan 15:12  
11 who has been consistent and I know (inaudible) with the  
12 election next May and that, but I have been consistent  
13 in my five years here that I have voted for this  
14 reduction. I'd like to pay tribute to the 23 people  
15 that put some issues in here and I'll stick with them. 15:13  
16 Go raibh maith agat.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Just in regard to that, I can't  
18 take that proposal for the simple reason that the  
19 reserve function is to vary the rate up our down by 15%  
20 so I can't take that. You are probably aware of that 15:13  
21 as well. cllr. Fitzgerald.

22 CLLR. FITZGERALD: Just, I mean I don't like paying  
23 property tax, I pay it on one property, but the fact is  
24 I do pay it but what I find galling is this  
25 equalisation fund and I see the amount of revenue per  
26 capita in some of the Counties that we're supporting.  
27 Like cllr. Whitmore mentioned there, we have 638 per  
28 capita and the likes of Leitrim 1,114, Mayo 962,  
29 Roscommon 960 and I think it's totally unfair and it

1 has been said there previously that Wicklow is  
2 underfunded. I think it was stated from the Chief  
3 Executive. But certainly I won't be supporting a  
4 reduction in the property tax, especially as we haven't  
5 yet, according to the figures that have come before us, 15:14  
6 there is an 8.6 million deficit in the budget. Then  
7 we're going in with a proposal to reduce the property  
8 tax by 2.5 million, which gives us 11.1 million to  
9 account for. I would be supporting that the status quo  
10 persists. I won't be voting for either. 15:14

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr. Oliver O'Brien. Briefly now.  
12 CLLR. OLIVER O'BRIEN: The word galling was used there  
13 by Cllr. Fitzgerald. What I find galling is something  
14 that will reduce the adversarial nature of what is  
15 going on here today, a proposal I put forward that 15:15  
16 would stop all this, and people talking down to me and  
17 I talking up to people and talking down, give me the  
18 right to have an input of my vote, as I am shocked that  
19 people can't allow true democracy. Everybody is  
20 voting, every 32 councillors should have value and  
21 you're saying basically there's no value. I would like  
22 you to show me where it says you cannot do this. What  
23 Act or law says you can't do it this way? I mean it is  
24 a vary up and down. You can vary anything and that's  
25 what could happen here. I say if 16 vote for and 16  
26 vote against, then you reduce it by 7.5%. That surely  
27 makes sense. Then we'll get something out of it and  
28 there'll be useful functions involved here, instead of  
29 sitting down there for the charade where you might look

1 at the people you (inaudible). This is wrong. This is  
2 not democracy and I want you to produce the Act or the  
3 Government or whatever section it says that this  
4 proposal can't be put forward. It has been put forward  
5 and it has been seconded by Cllr. O'Neill and I don't 15:15  
6 see any reason why it shouldn't go before the floor.  
7 CATHAOI RLEACH: Councillor, I can only do what we're  
8 legally entitled to do. I will read out exactly what  
9 it is, right.

10 15:16

11 The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 section 20,  
12 as amended by Section 5 of the Finance (Local Property  
13 Tax) Act 2013 provides that "a Local Authority may, as  
14 a reserve function, resolve to vary the basic rate of  
15 the local property tax (LPT) within its function and 15:16  
16 area by a maximum of plus or minus 15%."

17

18 That's it, right. So it's not legal and I'm not  
19 talking.

20 MS. GALLAGHER: It's not valid. 15:16

21 CATHAOI RLEACH: I'm not going to let you in anymore.  
22 You've had your point on it now. Councillor, I'm going  
23 for a vote on this now.

24 CLLR. OLIVER O'BRIEN: I read that. I have read it.

25 It doesn't say --

26 CATHAOI RLEACH: Before you start --

27 CLLR. OLIVER O'BRIEN: It doesn't say --

28 CATHAOI RLEACH: -- I'm going to have a say in regard to  
29 this because certainly I have something to say on it as

1 well. In regard to a number of issues.  
2

3 Cllr. Behan, I don't think anyone would disagree with  
4 Cllr. Behan regarding the local property tax and how it  
5 was brought in, because it was brought in, as I  
6 understood it was going to be additional to the finance  
7 that we were getting at the it particular time, not in  
8 place of. And I mean if that was the case we would  
9 certainly be fairly flush with money. And I don't  
10 think anyone, everyone would agree that that's what we  
11 believed at that particular time. I think we have to  
12 deal with what's before us today whether we like it or  
13 not and the fact of the matter is as well that it has  
14 been raised here and I think we should yet again raise  
15 with the Government again in regard to the  
16 equalisation, the 20% equalisation in regard to this.  
17 That is absolutely totally unfair to a county like  
18 Wicklow where 20% of the money raised, that in the  
19 local property tax we were always led to believe at  
20 the time that the local property tax would be spent in  
21 the area where it was raised and it was actually  
22 supposed to be spent in the local area where it was  
23 raised as well because we can understand why it would  
24 be put all over the County as well. But that was what  
25 I understood it as well and 20%, over three million of  
26 the money that's collected in Wicklow is going  
27 elsewhere and I think that is absolutely totally wrong.  
28 I think we should send a letter to the Government in  
29 regard to this.

1 In regard to the other thing that's very vital as well  
2 in this is the fact that the -- it is envisaged that  
3 the property tax will go up with inflation and rising  
4 property prices in 2019. I think really and truly that  
5 is more serious than whether we go up or down 15% here 15:18  
6 today because I can tell you, in certain parts of this  
7 County that is going to make a very significant change  
8 if that goes up in comparison with the valuations that  
9 are in the north of the County and that is something  
10 that I think as well that we should raise with the 15:19  
11 Government in regard to this. Those two issues that I  
12 feel very strongly about as well.

13

14 Also in regard to, whether people like it or not we're 15:19  
15 going to have a budget in November. We're going to  
16 have provide money for services as well. I was on the  
17 Council in the 1980s when Councillors cut all sorts of  
18 budgets and I can tell you now it was the worst  
19 experience that I had as a public representative  
20 because effectively cutting services that I felt I got 15:19  
21 elected to provide extra services, not cutting  
22 services. It was the worst and I think anyone that was  
23 around at that time would tell you exactly the same  
24 thing. It is not a good idea. And for people to say  
25 that it is possible, it is possible to cut the property 15:19  
26 tax by 15% and still have the same type of services out  
27 there, that's a fallacy. It just doesn't happen like  
28 that. I can tell you now if somebody came up with a  
29 figure of what services would be cut for 2.5 million, I

1 mean people would be scurrying around this Chamber in  
2 regard to that because we have one of the best  
3 community grant systems in the country and that would  
4 be one of the first things and it represents all over  
5 the County. That would be one of the areas that would  
6 be hit very significantly in this.

15:20

7

8 when people are voting for this they have to be  
9 concerned that that's what they're voting for as well.  
10 So in regard to that, I'm happy enough that I think  
11 we'd get agreement from most members anyway in that  
12 regard to the equalisation fund and in that regard to  
13 the 2019 property revaluation, if we can send a letter  
14 if that's agreeable I think most people would agree  
15 well that. Cllr. Whitmore, just briefly I'm going for  
16 a vote now.

15:20

15:20

17 CLLR. WHITMORE: Can you also include in that the  
18 building, the 1.7 million as well, the fact that we  
19 have to fund that when other Councils don't. That's an  
20 additional cost incurred.

15:21

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. I'm going for a vote on this.  
22 The first vote I'm going to take it in rotation as they  
23 came in. Cllr. Behan proposed and Cllr. Nicholas  
24 Lawless seconded a reduction of 15% in the local  
25 property tax. I'm going for a vote on that and I'm  
26 going for a vote that was proposed by Cllr. Fox and  
27 seconded by Cllr. Edward Timmins that it would stay  
28 exactly as it is at the moment.

15:21

29 CLLR. BEHAN: Are we doing mine first?

1 CATHAOI RLEACH: cllr. Behan's proposal will be going  
2 first. It will be for or against a reduction of 15%.  
3 All right. [VOTE TAKEN]

4 MS. GALLAGHER: That is ten for; 20 against; and two  
5 not present.

15:23

6

7 I will go on the second motion proposed by  
8 cllr. Christopher Fox, seconded by cllr. E Timmins that  
9 the standard local property tax remain as is.

10 [VOTE TAKEN]

15:23

11 MS. GALLAGHER: That's 22 for; five against; two not  
12 present; three abstaining.

13 CATHAOI RLEACH: Okay. That's it. Thank you very much  
14 indeed.

15 CLLR. FORTUNE: Can I ask a question, at our last  
16 meeting we asked could we get an update of a copy of  
17 the KWETB report my understanding is that that report  
18 is out. Can we get a copy?

15:25

19 CLLR. WHITMORE: I just e-mailed it to cllr. Cullen  
20 there. It is public.

15:25

21 CATHAOI RLEACH: We'll do that. That's no problem.

22

23 THE MEETING THEN CONCLUDED

24

25

26

27

28

29

<b>0</b>	32:8, 41:6, 45:9, 45:19, 47:16, 49:5, 49:26, 50:24, 51:2 <b>150,000 [1]</b> - 35:27	12:1, 30:28 <b>2018</b> [8] - 1:9, 2:1, 6:10, 9:6, 9:25, 14:6, 22:22, 35:25	<b>4</b>	3:13, 9:5 <b>750,000 [1]</b> - 14:14 <b>760,000 [1]</b> - 11:13 <b>77 [1]</b> - 20:8
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		<b>€1</b> [1] - 20:15 <b>€1,000</b> [1] - 23:16 <b>€1.13</b> [1] - 13:15 <b>€100</b> [1] - 16:26 <b>€12</b> [1] - 20:18 <b>€13.50</b> [1] - 13:10 <b>€20</b> [1] - 23:19 <b>€200,000</b> [1] - 14:16 <b>€40.50</b> [1] - 20:9 <b>€5.58</b> [1] - 13:10 <b>€52</b> [1] - 20:17 <b>€7</b> [2] - 20:13, 30:28 <b>€87.75</b> [1] - 13:11 <b>€900,000</b> [1] - 14:17