

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 14:03
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 14:04
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
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. 14:05

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 14:06
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

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 14:07
21 With regard to the local property tax. The Local
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.
29

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 14:10
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 14:11
21 approximately 900,000. So 20% equates to 177,000 and
22 this must be met from our own resources.

23
24 Increasing pension costs is another concern.
25 Year-on-year these costs are increasing with more 14:11
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 14:12
21 In relation to the estimation of income and
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 14:12
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

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 14:15
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 14:16
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 14:16
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 14:16
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 14:17
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 14:18
26 valued at 200,000 or under in County Wicklow.

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 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 14:22
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. 14:23

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 14:23
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 14:23
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 14:24
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 14:24
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 14:25
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 14:25
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 14:25
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, 14:26
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, 14:27

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 14:27
11 if we don't. We'll 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 14:27

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 14:28
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 14:28

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 14:28
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 14:29
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 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 14:29
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 role 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 14:30
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 14:30
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 14:30
16 transaction. So if you pay weekly and we increase it
17 by 10%, that's an examine 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. 14:31

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 14:31
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 14:31
6 pensions and retirements coming from the Government.
7 we shouldn't need the local property tax to be
8 subsidising this as such.

9
10 So, as I say, no big surprise. I would definitely, 14:32
11 definitely not support an increase of 10% in the local
12 property tax. Thank you.

13 CATHAoir LEACH: Okay. Cllr. McLoughlin.

14 CLLR. McLOUGHLIN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, thanks for
15 your presentation, Brian. There was one image up on 14:32
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 14:32
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 14:32
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

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
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 14:34
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
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 14:35
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 14:36
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 CATHAOL RLEACH: 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 be 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 CATHAOLRLEACH: 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 14:37

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 14:38
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 14:39
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 14:39
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 14:39
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

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 14:42
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 14:42
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, 14:43
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, 14:43
21 housing, the ones which were illustrated by the Finance
22 Director and I don't want to do that.

23
24 In looking at this I'm also conscious that in
25 Greystones and Bray property values are significantly 14:43
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
11 A significant part of the reason for that is that 14:44
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 14:45
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
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 14:46
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 14:47
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 14:48
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 14:48
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 14:50
26 at this particular point in time, yes, he is correct
27 but we need to recognise that this is a 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.

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.

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.

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 14:54
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
10 In relation to the point you raised, Councillor, 14:54
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.

15 14:54
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 14:55
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 14:55
26 under that area but obviously would be covered on the
27 income side as well.

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 14:56
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 15:00
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 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, 15:02
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 15:03
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 15:05
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 15:06
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 15:09
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 15:11
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 or 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 15:13
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 15:15
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 15:15
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 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor, I can only do what we're
8 legally entitled to do. I will read out exactly what
9 it is, right.

10
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 CATHAOIRLEACH: 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 -- 15:16

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Before you start --

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

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: -- 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 15:17
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 15:17
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 15:17
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 be believe at
20 the time that the local property tax would be spent in 15:18
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 15:18
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 going to have a budget in November. We're going to 15:19
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 15:20
6 be hit very significantly in this.

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 15:20
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 15:20
16 a vote now.

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 15:21
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.

29 CLLR. BEHAN: Are we doing mine first?

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: 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 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. That's it. Thank you very much
14 indeed.
15 CLLR. FORTUNE: Can I ask a question, at our last 15:25
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?
19 CLLR. WHITMORE: I just e-mailed it to Cllr. Cullen
20 there. It is public. 15:25
21 CATHAOIRLEACH: we'll do that. That's no problem.
22
23 THE MEETING THEN CONCLUDED
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