

LOCAL PROPERTY TAX MEETING HELD AT WICKLOW COUNTY

BUILDINGS, WICKLOW TOWN

ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23rd 2019 AT 2:00PM

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**NON-VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY,
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CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, I am just going to say that there is a problem with the microphones, so I will be asking you all to project your voices and they are hopefully going to get it sorted. Apparently I do, but the rest of you won't, okay. So, there are a couple of votes of sympathy that we would like to cover before we start the meeting proper and, Cllr Fortune wasn't at the last meeting, so I would like to propose a vote of sympathy to Cllr Fortune on the death of his mother-in-law during the summer and I think then, Cllr Fortune wants to come in himself.

CLLR FORTUNE: Cllr Behan won't be in today, his father-in-law has died. So in the circumstances, I would like to pass condolences on to Agnes and the family and, it's a very sad occasion at this time.

ADMINISTRATOR: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and for Teresa McCarthy mother-in-law of breed McCarthy and for Sheila Dempsey mother of Aidan Dempsey.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We will stand for a moment. Okay, can I just say that the mics are working, but the names that are going to come up beside them are completely different so I am going to have to start washing the flashing lights around the room, because this isn't making any sense, so if I make a mistake, so just someone, Jennifer, would you mind requesting there so we can see. Okay, so I will try and watch the mics in front of you. Good afternoon. No, I think this is where I am. Hello. Yes. Cllr Matthews, on the mics, will you see if yours is on? So, can we get the agenda. Okay it's a single item agenda and I am going to ask the Director of Services, Brian Gleeson so start his presentation and we will take questions at the end of it. So, Brian.

CLLR GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would just start off, I will summarise the main topics I wish to discuss, during the presentation this afternoon. I will first outline budgetary process for the local authorities and how the Local Property Tax is calculated, highlight the budget challenges we face next year and look at the income and expenditure and additional service requirements for 2020 and examine the financial effect on both an individual and also on the local authority itself and then we will finish up looking at the Local Property Tax recommendation as being put forward.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I don't think any of you can hear you so you are going to have to speak up.

CLLR FORTUNE: Chair, is it possible to take a ten minute break and get it fixed?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think that is what we should do.

CLLR FORTUNE: In an important meeting like this.

CATHAOIRLEACH: With no microphones.

CLLR GLEESON: Will I go down the front.

No, I think we should try and fix the system.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Give us ten minutes and see if we can fix it. Get someone down.

SHORT BREAK

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, we will go back to Brian, hopefully it will work this time.

CLLR GLEESON: Can you hear me now? No. Okay, we will start back again, apologies for that. Just, I suppose I will use this as an opportunity for the new members to go through the budgetary process that we have. The first stage of the process is what we are doing today, looking at the Local Property Tax and deciding whether or not to make a late variation. The next stage is the draft budget plan and draft budgetary plan and the general Municipal allocation. That was issued in October. It's not the finalised budget, but there will still probably be a deficit at that stage, but it will show the areas we are looking at filing the money from. We also issued an municipal allocation, which is a smaller level of discretionary funding we will be allocating to districts which will cover the Tidy Towns or money for festivals and Christmas light, but the main pot of discretionary funding is allocated later at the budget date.

The most important stage of the budgetary process is in November, the 25th of November we meet here, have our budget meeting all day and then adopt the budget for 2020. The final stage of the process relates to the schedule of Municipal District works that. Doesn't happen until the following year, usually around March, when we get our roads allocations from the Department and we know what the budget is going to be and where it's going and then the budget which has been adopted is then split up by the Municipal Districts and the schedule outlines the direct and indirect works that are going to take place in the different districts and also central funding, that would be identified as well. The Local Property Tax decision, it's a reserve function and allows you to increase or decrease the rate up to a maximum of 15%. The decision has to be taken by the 30th of September in order to notify the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of that decision. So, it can be implemented in time for the bills to go out for 2020. Just to give you an idea, I suppose this is also for the new member, how the Local Property Tax is calculated based on the declares prototypes we have in Wicklow which is about 58,800. 100% Local Property Tax allocation is 7.2 million.

We are all aware of the equalisation, 20% is taken off and given to an equalisation fund, that bring us down to 13.8 million. That is compared against a baseline figure of 8.5 million. To explain what a baseline is, it's basically the level of funding that was provided to the local authorities under the previous general grant schemes. So Wicklow used to receive 8.5 million under that scheme, now the Local Property Tax is coming in at 13.8 million. That gives us a surplus of 13.5 million, because there is a surplus, there is another calculation done by the Department and it takes a further 1.8 million out of the equation which goes towards self-funding housing projects on the capital side. When all of that is done we are left with just under 12 million. It should be voted that any variation in the Local Property Tax, based on the

gross figure of the 17.2, rather than the net figure of 11,995.

So, if you decide to increase it by 1% it will be 172,000 that it increases by, because it's based on the gross figure. A part of the Local Property Tax, the regulations that issue, there are a number of items we must have regard to, it's first one is the financial position of the local authority. This is basically looking at the ratio of current assets to liabilities that stands at up to the end of June this year 3:1 which is quite positive and it shows we have no problem meeting our short-term liabilities.

We also have to take into account the fact that we have an ongoing deficit of 2.3 million for Wicklow County Council and as you are aware we have tried to reduce that amount, by approximately 300,000 year on year to bring it down. Also, take into account feedback from any consultations held. The public consultation process, included putting ads in local papers and social media and we set up a dedicated email address and the consultation online, on the website, we received 51 submissions on the topic, 25 looked for no change and 20 for a decrease and one for an increase and five made just a general comment in this regard.

The two main areas that I want to concentrate on, for this presentation, are the next two. The Local Property Tax estimation of income expenditure for 2020 and then the financial effect on both the individual and the local authority funding.

The budget challenges we face in 2020, 2020 is, unfortunately it's a unique year due to a number of circumstances I will go through now. The key issue, I feel is reduced income, we have income our budget this year that we are not going to have next year. The first one, it comes to 1.3 million and includes such items as IPD dividend which we receive each year, we have been informed by them that there won't be a dividend paid out until 2020. NPPR receipts we are receiving year on year, they are diminishing. To give you an example we received 1.1 million in NPPR, just up until the end of August we received 300,000. It's a massive drop. Our budget this year is 700,000 for NPPR and we are going to have to reduce that further to approximately 300,000. So, that is a reduction of 400,000 of money we had for this year we won't have next year.

The other thing is there a footpath scheme which paid out money in the last number of years from capital fund for special development levies. Those have now been exhausted so that fund is finished, so that is 300,000 that we would have had that is no longer there. Another issue is the rating of Irish Water, before Irish Water was never rated and we have received compensation from the Department on this matter, in the amount of 2.1 million, the expected, the valuation office has now valued Irish Water it's estimated that it's a valuation split across the country and it's estimated that the Wicklow allocation will be 1.5 million, that is a shortfall of 600,000. The Department are in negotiations on the matter as part of the budget process, however they are not expected to get more than 50% compensation which would still leave us down 300,000.

Small items of income that we are losing out on will accrue the abolishment of library fines, 70,000 and also a reduction in recycling materials, income that we are expecting for 2020. To coincide with this, as I said, it's a bit like a perfect storm. With very restricted sources of funding, a decision made by the Government to defer the Local Property Tax review and renewal allocations means that the buoyancy we would have got from the new valuations, along with, there is a number of properties that have been built around the county since 2013 that currently aren't paying Local Property Tax, they would have been brought into the net, but because of that decision to defer the new valuations and the Local Property Tax review by 12 months, that buoyancy will not hit our accounts this year, we will be looking at 2021 unfortunately.

So, I suppose to give you an idea, I think there is about 4,000 properties that have been built since 2013, even if we used the midpoint of €305 as the annual payment, it's 1.2 million that we could get that we should get that we are not having this year. So, unfortunately that is one of the restrictions we have. Another is the evaluation process that is currently happening as you are well aware. Because of the Rates Limitation Order, we cannot increase our funding next year, while the rates of individual rate papers will increase and decrease by the valuation office. The bottom line to Wicklow County Council will not change.

Another new item, which we are flagging is match funding requirements. I suppose we have been here for the last number of years and we have been criticised and properly and correctly by councillors for not applying for enough funding or securing enough funding. We are happy to say that is changing at the moment with secured funding in the last 12 months, for projects, we are talking about 26 million. That will require match funding of 5.7 million. We have further 29 million worth of projects that we have applied funding for. That will require another 7.5 million of match funding, so, while it's great to get this additional funding from all of the different schemes like the RDF and the rural scheme.

On the flip side, we have to find the money to match fund it. In most cases we will be using development levies, however there is a number of project, smaller projects that wouldn't be eligible for use of development levy, so we have to do that from the fund. It's last thing we want to do is having secured the funding and go back to the Department and say we don't have the match funds to draw down this money and we lose out on crucial projects all around the county.

Next item as well is the Climate Action Energy Saving Initiative. In the September meeting earlier this month, we had the Climate Adaptation Plan, which was approved, I think by everyone here. There is a number of actions coming out of that plan, including the appointment of a Climate Action Officer. In order to do that, that is new expenditure we need funding for that. Likewise, we have a number of energy savings initiatives that we put forward, we have received funding from the SEAI towards that, in order to

meet our energy targets of 33% reduction. This would also include the replacement of all of our public lighting and LED lighting. For that particular project we have to take out a loan of approximately eight million which will be paid back over a number of years.

While the savings for these energy initiatives will be forthcoming and will offset the costs of these energy project, it usually takes 12-15 month, up to two years for the savings to materialise. For the first couple of years we have to take the hit on those costs, so that will obviously impact on the budget next year. Another point really to touch on as well is just the Consumer Prices Index, inflation over the last few years has gone up by 3% in the last five years. In that time we haven't increased our Local Property Tax, we haven't increased any of our rates, so for all intents and purposes we are going backwards, we are not getting as much done with the same amount of money, so with very to factor in that particular issue as well. Currently, based on submissions received from the different directorates and information we have, we are looking at additional costs of 5.7 million.

Now, just to point out at this stage, some of these are, I wouldn't go as far as to say wish lists but they are requests which has been put in by directors, nothing has been committed, but we are flagging these issues at this point in time. Obviously if it increases we have no choice over it, we only get 80% increase from the Department under what was agreed under the National Pay Agreement. Each year we have more people retiring so there are additional pension costs, we have estimated that to be half a million. Additional staffing costs of just under a million, that would include outdoor staff and indoor staff, mainly outdoor staff. Reduced income of 1.3 million which I have already gone through and the climate action, the matching funds, I have already flagged those through, we are looking at 400,000 for energy and half a million requirement for match funding. That is only out of the 5.7 million in total, we need match funding of another 7.5 if we are successful with the other schemes, but that is only a fraction of what we need, we will be using development, but we need to build up the fund for the other projects that are going to qualify for levies. We also are looking to introduce a new business rates incentive scheme, that would be for new businesses to set up and move into vacant premises and giving them relief on rates for a number of years on a sliding scale.

Finally, there is an item there, 1.6 million for directorate Municipal District costs. That would be additional requirements that the directors have sent in that they are looking for and it would be from, I suppose existing, in most cases existing expenditure lines they are looking to increase. I will give you, I will point out a few examples. The central heating installation is an increase of 90,000 from the current budget, fabric upgrade provision 120,000. Housing maintenance, we are looking at increasing that by 75,000. The LECP review, North Wicklow Sports Campus and the Greystones Greenway and Wicklow Free Wi-Fi Plan, 30,000.

So, that just gives you a flavour of the type of requests that were put in by the different directors. So, to summarise the overall picture, 109 million has

been predicted as the estimated expenditure at the moment. Income of 100.4 million which is a shortfall of 5.7 million.

In order to pass the revenue budget in November we have to achieve a balanced budget, so basically we have two choice, we either increase our income or we reduce our expenditure, in order to bring it back. I want to touch on the matters in relation to the financial effect of the varied rate. We will talk about on the individual taxpayer and on the revenue of the local authority and the service plans of the local authority. First of all, if we look at the impact on the individual, just go through this table, I think it's on page ten of the report that would have been issued last Wednesday, it might make it easier to look through the figures. We have the different valuation bands down by the left-hand with the standard rate, that is currently being paid, the table there, column shows what the increase would be across the board for a 1%, 5%, 7.5% and 10% and 15%. The impact of the 15% change would vary, depending on the band per annum, at the lowest band it would be 13.5, or 13.50 cent, up to 87.55. It should be noted that 60% of houses in Wicklow are within that first three bands, so the maximum that will be paid would be 47.25 a week. That would be the maximum amount.

So, to summarise that with 52,800 properties registered in Wicklow, the property bands are valued as at the assist of May 2013. So, obviously they are a lot lower than they are now. 60% of properties were valued at that figure of 2,000 or under, the first three bands, so the maximum impact of a 15% increase on the Local Property Tax for 60% of rate payers would be 91 cent a week, for 19% it would only be 65 cent a week and for 14% it would only be 20 cent a week. Also, in case you are not aware, any people in social housing they don't pay it, Wicklow County Council pay an increase and pay the Local Property Tax on their behalf. So how would an increase impact on the revenue budget of Wicklow County Council? A 1% variation equates to 172,436. 7.5 is 1.3 million and the maximum amount brings you up to 2.6 million. Also you are not limited to those percentages. 9% would be 1.55 million, so it's any variation to a maximum of 15%.

Just to go back to the position in relation to the loss of income from this year to next year. I have already gone through the individual items, you can see them on the left-hand side. They total 1.3 million. So everything being equal we have 1.3 million of funding we have this year that we won't have next year. So if we are not getting any new income from Local Property Tax, we are not getting any additional income from commercial rates, we have to cut services. Unfortunately a lot of our expenditure is nondiscretionary in the form of pay and pensions, a lot of the money is ring fenced for Government grants in the area of housing roads, that you have to spend it on specific areas you have been allocated money for.

So, that doesn't leave us with much option but to identify the discretionary funding areas which would be a discretionary fund that is allocated in the Municipal Districts, the Footpath Renewal Scheme, I have already spoke about, the 300,000 that is exhausted and then the Community Grant Scheme, which is currently 2800,000 per annum and we are looking at

reducing that by 48,000. So that is what the proposal is basically if we don't have an increase in Local Property Tax to offset these costs, we will have to make budget cuts to these particular areas in 2020. Unfortunately we have no choice in the matter, it's just simple maths in that case.

Just to give a picture of how this looks for the overall discretionary funding, you will be well aware last year it was over 2 million was allocated out, there was four different elements of discretionary funding we have the General Municipal District allocation, which is for Tidy Towns and festivals, etc. Local foot path renewal scheme, 300,000. That fund has been exhausted now. The Public Realm Discretionary Funding is 964,000, so that is what we are proposing will be taken out as well as the 300,000. The IPB Capital Redistribution Payment for repair of footpaths that will carry on for the next couple of years, but in the overall sense what we are looking at is reducing from a figure of 2 million down to a figure of 738,500, which is a substantial decrease of 63% and obviously this will have a significant impact at local level. Just to give you an idea of what it's like around the country, because all of these issues, reduced income on NPPR, non-payment of dividend, this is happening in every local authority, the requirements for match funding is the requirement in every local authority and there is a trend that is happening at the moment across local authorities to increase Local Property Tax and ring fence it for specific issues such as the match funding requirements or for discretionary funding for Municipal Districts, which you can see Sligo, Monaghan, Offaly and Kilkenny and Longford have increased by 15%. Wexford, Laois, Tipperary 10% and Limerick 7.5%.

So, I suppose, to wrap up, we are recommending an increase on the base rate of 15%. This will generate an extra 2.6 million for the revenue budget in 2020 and what we are saying is and, as it's outlined in the report, we want to ring fence that money, so you know exactly what it's going to be used for, so the member of the public know what it's going to be used for and the benefit they are going to get from that. Ring fencing it to protect the discretionary funds, identify the fund for match funding requirements, a number of climate action energy projects, increasing housing and new rates incentive scheme and to bring up the Community Grant Scheme back up to 200,000.

So, it protects the discretionary funding, and the Community Grants Scheme and it also helps to avoid having to forego any Government Grant Aid.

It would be criminal if we are successful getting Grant Aid and then we don't have the match funding to draw it down. In most cases the match funding is 25%, so you are getting a huge bang for your buck out of the schemes and they are not going to be there forever, I think we really have to grab it with both hands and avail of this opportunity that we have at the moment, while there is funding around, we don't know the impact of Brexit down the line, in two or three years' time, that funding could dry up, I think we have to take advantage of it while it's there and we can draw down the funds.

I suppose, another point before I finish up is that because of the expected

buoyancy, I have already said to you about the new developments that will be brought into the net the following year, we are saying approximately 4,000 new buildings, that could bring over 1 million on top of any other buoyancy associated with a change in valuation rates for the Local Property Tax. So, this is a one-year only decision, the decision to be made, if it goes up to 15%, it goes back automatically the following year to the base rate and have you to make a decision again the following year whether to keep it the same or increase it again. We would hope and it would be our expectation that the additional money that we get in from the Local Property Tax Review, the following year will compensate this and allow us to revert back to the base rate for 2020. We say the option is for a one-year increase, but that would be our plan, as I say this year, unfortunately is between a number of issues out of our control, it's a bit of a perfect storm, so rather than standing still and missing out on important funding and halting essential projects, I think it's crucial that we make, I suppose I would consider it a responsible decision to keep things moving on and ensuring we get the essential projects implemented. So, that concludes my presentation and I am happy to take any questions on it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think we have the mics back working, if you want to come back up. They are meant to be working, they are not working in the correct order, so I am not sure I will call you the right names but I will do my best. Okay, seat 13.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, just a few observations, first of all I want to say I would be against an increase. I think, as representatives of the people of this county we have a duty to do, to abide by their wishes and their wishes are most definitely not for an increase. One of the, yes, it looks like it's a once-off year, with a lot of problems on the agenda, but Wicklow has been lucky in relation to all of the other councils that are in existence. I have a spreadsheet here, there is 31 councils and out of that Wicklow has traditionally done very well. We are one of the ten counties who have always been in surplus, the other 21 councils are in deficit, so they benefit from the equalisation fund. But, out of the ten who have been in surplus four have chosen, in the last year, to drop their Local Property Tax by, sorry, three have chosen to drop it by 15% and one has chosen to drop it by 10%. Now, Director Gleeson there mentioned there was a trend to increase them, but I would suggest if the breakdown of increase has been by the councils who have traditionally always been in deficit? Because Wicklow has done very well, we are in surplus and we have never reduced the property tax over the last couple of years, so I think to suddenly come along and hit on people, who are going to be hit by presumably a carbon tax in the next budget, a lot of people will see an increase in their rates because of the rates equalisation fund, we are having to deal with increases in insurances, increases in other taxes and some of our temporary taxes have never been removed, such as the USC, which was introduced in 2013, or sorry, 2009. The Local Property Tax, when I researched it, I just looked up to see what exactly it's supposed to represent and it's supposed to pay for public parks, libraries, open spaces, leisure amenities, maintenance of streets, street lighting and town planning. At no stage is it supposed to cover things like gratuities, pension deficits, holes in the pension funds, extra staffing, retirements, retirement gratuities, I am not even sure what

they are, or who is entitled to them. I just think that we need to be more mindful of the people that we are representing, we need to make sure that the Local Property Tax is spent on local property issues and not being side tracked into things that it was never designed to be for, which would be things like match funding, or any new kind of initiatives that have come on stream.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Two minutes.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat number 10.

CLLR O'CONNOR: I just have a quick question about the extend future. On behalf the member of the public. Just wondering about other public expenditure, how much of that is by legal fees from previous cases with the council, if I could get that that would be great, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat number 3, which I think is Cllr Snell.

CLLR SNELL: It's an unfortunate situation we find ourselves with regard to public representatives, because the reality is once again it's the constituents who are putting their shoulder to the wheel and unfortunately in this case, like the last seven years, it's only a proportion of the constituents. It's been mentioned in the preparation into all of the housing units that were built since 2013 and not one of them pay any, not one red cent of Local Property Tax and won't pay until November 2020. The people who have been shouldering the large proportion of funding that comes into this local authority, 17.2 million, unfortunately, over the last number of years, the 20% that goes to the equalisation fund, for local authorities such as Leitrim, over that period of time the constituents of Wicklow have contributed over 20 million to be distributed throughout the county, or throughout the country. I think that is very unfair and I think it's unfair that you as officials and we as public representatives have to sit here and be told that we will make a decision on setting the Local Property Tax because the reality is that you are starved of funding and we are put in a position where, as public representatives, we went out and we knocked thousands of doors. I know I did anyway in May of this year and not one person asked me to increase the Local Property Tax. Not one person and yet we are sitting here today and it's stark the figures being presented to us and I understand and I will hear surely later on in regard to the match funding and I commend the council on achieving a lot of these town and village renewal schemes and the like. It's very important, but I would question where our five TDs sit on this. We have representation at national level and that is where a lot of this should be done, at national level.

The National Pay Agreement, the additional pension costs, the gratuity payments are all stuff that should have been sorted out at national level. We hear today that Irish Water are reducing what should have been 2.1 million down to 1.5 million and yet Wicklow provides the water base for the capital city of the country, 600,000 reduction based on population and not a word in the Dáil about this. We have TDs and I include all, I include all in, whether they be sitting in opposition or sitting in Government, who are not trusting their councillors to do a councillor's job and for the last ten weeks while they were on holidays they were getting their faces into photographs, whether it be promoting greenways or perhaps looking at situations where there was

bonfires or the like and I think that is a councillor's work and I feel that, unfortunately today, the pressure is being put on the public representatives here to support this and you must bear in mind that today is only about the Local Property Tax, it's not about the budget. The budget meeting will come up in a number of weeks' time.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Time.

CLLR SNELL: I feel that discuss in regard to discretionary spend, match funding or otherwise, this is not the time or the date to be discussing that. Today is about the Local Property Tax and I will be supporting the people who supported me and that is my constituents and, as I say, not one asked me to increase the Local Property Tax. Unfortunately I understand the position that all members are in and I certainly won't have a press release criticising anyone for what they do today, but I am sure...

CATHAOIRLEACH: You are out of time.

CLLR SNELL: Just on that, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: You are 40 seconds over, so I gave you lots of leeway.

CLLR SNELL: Just on that, I am finished speaking but I do think this is one item agenda and as a one item agenda that you should give the courtesy of a few moments more to people, as I say I am finished but unfortunately others will want to speak and I think it's only fair on a one item agenda that they do get the time to express their wishes because.

CATHAOIRLEACH: They can come back in.

CLLR SNELL: We will be finished by 4.00pm, if every member speaks, including officials. I don't know what the rush is. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat 11.

CLLR FORTUNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I actually think this whole charade we are at here today is ridiculous. It's ridiculous for us as members and for us as the Executive. I understand the Executive's position and I understand how the diktats that come from the Department and we are being asked to make a decision today with one hand tied behind our backs. We are treated as if we don't have any intelligence. We are not allowed to think for ourselves.

There are solutions to this, in my opinion. To use an emotional term, I think we are just being dumped on. I took the liberty in my capacity as Cathaoirleach of the District I chair, I wrote to all of the TDs, invited them down here today. I got a response from three of them, but as we can see there is none of them here. Sorry, I apologise, Deputy Casey. I think they have to be involved, I think this is a crisis. This is the biggest crisis I am experiencing since I became a public representative. My job, irrespective of what I think myself about lot of issue, my job is to talk on behalf of the people out there and I know for a fact they don't want, they can't afford a 15% increase in their property tax. It's very simple, we have a black hole of 5 odd million. We give 20% away to the equalisation, we are told by Brian, it's a one-year problem and maybe next year we will have miracle, well time will tell.

We should be allowed make decisions, we should be allowed, I will make five suggestions. We either are allowed for the next year or ten months to keep the 20% equalisation this year that would cover the situation and get rid of

all of this artificial rubbish that is going on, we either look at all of the projects that we say will run away if he have to look at them. We may need to look at them. If this was a business, if we run any kind of business, a sweet shop, it doesn't matter and we were faced with this particular problem, we wouldn't be racing ahead as if the world is not changing irrespective. We could borrow the money, Brian has told us he is going to borrow 8 million to do the LED project, why can't we make it 10.5 million for the 12 months and that covers us there.

We also, I think need to look and consider a root and branch review of the cost centres, through all of the Directorates, what are they doing and what are they spending it on, is there any money can be saved that way? What money is due to us on rates that we haven't collected? And then we have pensions and everything else, which is very important, as Cllr Kavanagh said earlier. That shouldn't be coming out of our day-to-day budgets, that should be coming from national Government. I think TDs, and I appreciate Deputy Casey coming here today, I think they should be hands-on on this process, they can't just stand back and let us, folk in here make this quick decision and get it out of the way and then we will start campaigning for a General Election, just give me one minute, we start campaigning for a General Election and everything is hunky dorey, it just is wrong. For, I mean, I will be flabbergasted if we increase property tax here today.

Now, the other important chairman, I will wrap up with this, our budget day is on the 25th of November. So we have eight weeks, roughly eight weeks between now and then. Traditionally what happens in here is we come down here today, we have this dog and pony show and we start racing around going on about property tax, we run back and, depending on what we approve and disapprove, Brian has to come back and churn out the numbers, there will be a focus on certain emotional areas and we are all put behind a cue ball and in a cute way like when we were told in previous times, if you don't approve this we will bring in a commissioner.

We have eight weeks to sort this out and I am proposing to this meeting today, to cut to the chase and we set up a scenario where these eight weeks are used to come up with a savings, so we can put, as members, put a proposal to the executive that we can properly vote on on the 19th and we stop the games. If necessary, we will be provided with accountancy back up to help us come up and look at all of these numbers. We really need to have a root and branch examination of every single cost in this local authority, because I believe if we do it properly and approach it in a coherent manner, there is a bunch of intelligent people in this room, who have all kinds of abilities and I believe we can sort this out, but we shouldn't run this down to the wire and allow a game be played with us, because there is a game being played with us, we are being dumped on by the national situation. That is what is going on there.

CATHAOIRLEACH: You had five minutes. Seat 31. I think that is Shay Cullen.

CLLR S CULLEN: Thank you, Chair. I don't want to go over all of the points that were made, but I suppose, first of all I don't think there is anyone in this chamber that want to put up property tax, but unfortunately as the

figures have been put in front of us, it certainly is something we have to consider. I suppose a couple of points, one is it is brutally unfair that 20% of the Local Property Tax that is collected in Wicklow, being 3.4 million leave this is county and I know we have said this over the last number of years and I will continue to say it, I think any money that is collected within this county should stay within this county. I suppose the other point is, the deferral of the Local Property Tax review has left us in a very compromised position in that since 2013 there is almost 4,500 houses that are not included in the Local Property Tax net and I think Brian had suggested, it's probably in the region of 1.2 million that we don't have coming into our budget, that in my opinion, if the TDs of the country were to do their job we wouldn't be having this conversation. So, I do feel we have been let down on these things, but unfortunately, as councillor, we don't seem to be able to effect either the equalisation fund or the local property fund, so we are where we are unfortunately.

I suppose, on the positive side, since I became a councillor in 2014 we were shouting about not getting projects into this county and I have to pay tribute to the CEO in the last number of years, there has been a massive increase in the projects and the funding that has come into our county. As you can see on page 7, there is 55 million, almost 56 million of projects being grant aided or in the process of being grand aided and I think that is hugely significant. Like other members I knocked on a lot of doors over the last four months, local elections and the one thing that kept coming back to me was that Wicklow County Council seemed to be getting their act together with regard to making sure our county is not forgotten and projects are happening across the county. So we can't underestimate the importance of that. With regard to the discretionary funding we had two million divided out through the Municipal District last year. I think that is one of the small, I suppose main points we would have as councillors in that, at least we get to pick out projects that will benefit us and our areas and so on and I think, I don't want that to be jeopardised because I think the discretionary funding for each district is making a massive difference. As I say, the grant schemes I have been talking about are making a difference and I think, unfortunately we are in a situation where we have to look at the figures and certainly what has been put in front of us today is suggesting that we certainly have to be looking at increasing our property tax.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat 22. Cllr Mitchell.

CLLR MITCHELL: Yes, I think of all of the unfairness in the property tax as far as the county is concerned, the self-servicing, 1.2 million is the most annoying part of it and most disturbing because it ties Wicklow's expenditure to what happened in what we were given in grants in 2012 or 2013 when this was a very much smaller population. Most of the money is actually taken from us over and above that amount and I think that is wrong to tie it to that. In addition the 20% is unfair as well for an expanding county as we are. I also feel that we should be receiving far more consider for the supplying 90% of Dublin's water, which is a significant cost in keeping the lakes and things here and I feel that should be pushed harder by the management and I wrote a paper on it. In terms of what is facing us here, I am unhappy that the area which I represent will have the highest property

tax in the county and Bray will be fairly similar, but yet the money is not being spent in my area and, for instance, in Bray, an urban area, it spends 72% more per person not including house maintenance, so that is quite disturbing to me. And, also, I don't think there are that many projects listed for the Greystones and the Bray area compared to other areas of county. However I do see that there is a need to increase the property tax, to reflect the inflation which there has been since it happened last time, I think that would be reasonable, I also want to see that we do the LED street lights. Some of the climate change, the CCTV and some of those projects that are essential and make great sense. I am not supporting the 15%, which the management wants, but I would accept an amount to reflect the inflation that there has been, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat number 19, Cllr Dermot O'Brien.

CLLR D O'BRIEN:

CLLR WHITMORE: Mine has switched off.

CATHAOIRLEACH: If you move.

CLLR D O'BRIEN:

CLLR WHITMORE: Thank you very much, Chair. I think everyone, regardless of where people are coming in today on whether to increase or decrease, I think probably we can all agree that the Local Property Tax system that we have at the moment is just not fit for purpose. And unfortunately, Wicklow, falls foul of that. The baseline 8 million allocated for Wicklow, that is based on data from 2001 and we have seen a 24% population increase since that figure was estimated and calculated, so obviously Wicklow is really disadvantaged by the current system and when you look at the actual facts and figures, Wicklow is the third lowest expenditure per capita by local authority. We are one of the lowest when it comes to council staff per thousand and also one of the lowest council, we also get one of the lowest amounts of Government council grants per capita. So Wicklow is really falling way behind and we spend our whole time trying to catch up to the other counties on this and yet we still have to give 20% of our money to other counties that get much more money from the Government than we do. This is a complete failure of the LPT system, but I also believe it's a failure of the TDs in Wicklow. We need TDs that will be fighting for this council and for the people of Wicklow and I can't ever remember any of our TDs talking about Local Property Tax, or calling for the minister to review it, or the fact we have 4,500 houses here that aren't contributing, whilst everyone else has to carry that burden. It's not acceptable and it's a real, I suppose it was a lack of political bravery I think that saw that deferral happening until next year. We all know it's because of General Election is coming up and people did not want to tackle the LPT system before that General Election. I don't think that is acceptable, we need politicians who are prepared to do the right thing and not just have their eye on the next election. So I would ask our TDs at what stage will Wicklow get a fair share? Because, at the moment, it's not happening. Now, saying that, this is a conversation we have every year, we say the same things every year. The reality we are in at the moment is that we have the budget, we can see all of the things that will be, that won't happen, if we don't increase the Local Property Tax because there mass been such reductions of state funding and I think people do actually want to see services, I know people, no one likes paying tax, but people do

want to see services and the positive projects that can actually improve their town and their county and the projects that we are, we could potentially be jeopardising, at the moment are ones that people can see and feel and enjoy with their families and I think they are really important projects that we get done and the fact we will, if we invest however many million or thousands in this, it will unlock multitudes of that from Government funding and I think that is something we can't ignore. When I was looking through the figures there are some things that did strike me, I think the projects that we have identified for funding or that have been identified for funding, I think there has to be a transparency on how they are picked and where they are coming from and what they are about. I think we need to get the message out to the people that these are the projects being paid by your LPT. That is what people want to know. They don't know at the moment what they get for their money. It's the one thing that people always mention to me, we don't get the message across. We need to be efficient in our spend, so when I looked at the figures and I saw 200,000 for a feasibility study here and 200,000 for a feasibility study here, I personally believe that those feasibility studies should be coming back, when there is such large expenditures they should be coming back to the full council for approval before we go ahead on them.

I just have a few proposals, some motions, I think any feasibility study above 100,000 should come to the chamber for discussion and approval. I like to see Wicklow County Council write to the Minister and ask they abolish the 4% fee which applies to people who have had their LPT deferred. If you get it deferred you are unable to pay it, it's based on your income or it's a hardship case. If we believe that we should not be charging them 4% for that. I would like them to write to the minister and request that that happens. I believe there should be transparency in the programme and everything comes to the Municipal District, so that the councillors are involved what projects and what they involve and how they are prioritised. CATHAOIRLEACH: In relation to the motions you need to hand them up. Seat 25, which is Gerry Walsh.

CLLR WALSH: Can I first start by saying to the Director, the whole process is unsatisfactory, the budgetary process as you outlined, being in four stages. I know with have this every year, this farcical situation here, we have the LPT process, our local Municipal District project and our annual budget in November and we have to wait for the schedule of Municipal District Works in March or April before we know where we stand in our district. I want to make that point.

Again, secondly this process, we have this every year and as councillors, I think we are put in an unenviable situation, basically we are damned if we do and if we don't. The point, the Government saw in its wisdom last year, put in place an interdepartmental group to establish a review into the LPT and part of their remit and challenge was to ensure the sustainability of the tax in a manner that was fair, easily understood and affordable, while maintaining the link to the market value. The recommendations of this group, which were published back in March, some of the recommendations, if I can go through them briefly, were that any further delay, firstly that they

recommended that the revaluation process take place on the 1st of November 2019. It also stated that any further delay, may present risks to the long-term sustainability of the tax. It suggested that there is a review every four years to capture changes in property markets and facilitate regular additions of new properties. It also suggested, Cathaoirleach, that the equalisation fund be discontinued and that all local authorities retain 100% of the Local Property Tax collected in their areas and any shortfalls be offset by a departmental programme that will increase funding. Also it recommends that the local adjustment factor which we are doing today be amended upward only and that LPT revenues remain broadly, I pointed out that the LPT revenues have remained constant since 2014, I think it's 0.18, there were a number of recommendations, what I am saying is this review has been kicked down the road again until next November for whatever political reasons. I take the point of the Director, that the situation that this council find ourselves in, which have over 4,000 properties not included, 1.2 million, the match funding that is required for the number of projects we have 36 million there and again, as Cllr Cullen stated earlier, this is a plus for the, we have been years trying to get some much-needed funding. We have been successful in town and village renewal and urban regeneration funds. In Greystones, we have community CCTV project at the moment, we are undergoing a Public Realm Project, these will, this will all obviously need much-needed match-funding, so the Climate Adaptation Plan which is due to be adopted at the end of this month, again much-needed expenses associated with that, so overall, I would also like to make the point that Cllr Mitchell made in relation to the area, again I represent, we would be affected, if there is a decision to increase today, the area I represent would be affected disproportionately due to the value of their properties and the point that Cllr Mitchell made that the monies that have been generated by the property values in Greystones does not come back into the area. So that is a bug bear for us in the district for some time and I wanted to repeat that. CATHAOIRLEACH: Time.

CLLR S CULLEN: Overall I think this is a once off situation, I take the point made by the director, hopefully whatever Government is in place next year will take the recommendations of this review board on board and address the issues and, which should result in buoyancy for counties such as ourselves. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat 14, Miriam Murphy.

CLLR MURPHY: Just a lot of issues there have been raised already, but just one or two things I would like to raise. As Cllr Snell said we have been to the doors and we sweated and our hearts were poured out and like most houses asked what are we getting, what is going to happen in our communities? What improvements is there?

I like to ask is each district, or how many projects in our districts will we be applying for? Also, because under some of those projects, it's under population related, some areas never really get projects that can be benefit to our district, also, most districts now in the last year, which has taken a long time, new houses coming on board, new, so there is going to be an increase of people, these people need facilities, they need amenities, whatever, what guarantee can we have, in our district to say, that our

amenities will be upgraded, improved, also ongoing footpath schemes. I mean, every town and village in our district is crying out for upgrades of footpaths. Also, every year, as councillors we take pride in giving out community grants. We cannot lose that. There are community grants who are waiting for €150 once a year to survive. Those grants are so beneficial and we also rely on the work that those community grants committees are doing for us. Work that we probably should be doing ourselves, in all honesty and realistically, so I mean we cannot get rid of that and also what is the, is there room for other expenditure to come on board, like new staffing, for example, I feel that there should be an application for a disability officer, that is a question that I like to ask also.

CATHAOIRLEACH: So, Cllr Dermot O'Brien.

CLLR D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Three things I am going to say about the LPT and maybe and I will qualify it first by saying there is a quote where you only see the world from where you are standing and I appreciate that the Executive, from where they are standing made a presentation and have done their calculations but there is a mismatch from where the executive is standing and where us as councillors are standing and that presents a challenge to us all. For me the LPT is a failed policy, it's a dud and it's out of date, it's out of sync and out of touch and I think when we really look at it as a policy which see the baselines, the valuations dinosaur, they are out of date, they are not connected. It's out the sync, because the review, they wouldn't implement the review, they couldn't implement it because the backlash, people can imagine what would have happened, it's an austerity tax that was carried over. The equalisation, again it's a mess. It's out of touch because people don't want it. I don't know of any councillor that, on all of the doors that were knocked, found someone. So that is a hard sell. So if people don't want it and don't believe in it and the review isn't glowing when it is reviewed it becomes a failed policy. For the Government to hold us to ransom when we gather to decide to go up or down, you can keep a little bit of this, but you have to spend it on that, or we will punish you if you don't get up to your baseline. Again that is national policy that is insulting the autonomy of local Government. So as Cllr Whitmore said it's not fit for purpose.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Stephen Matthews.

CLLR MATTHEWS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Cathaoirleach, I think there is a lot of agreement in the room here today. None of us want to raise taxes and I don't think there has ever been a politician, whether local or national has ever entered that decision lightly. But sometimes difficult decisions have to be made and you have to be responsible. It's very easy to make popular decisions and to run away from unpopular decision on the other hand you have top of the queue demanding more money to be spent on services. We are in a situation where we don't have the money to provide the services and if you look across the national spend per person across counties in Ireland, Wicklow fares pretty poorly.

I am looking across the spend on housing in Wicklow per person, it's 164 euro per person, the national average is 351. There is a big list and Wicklow fares badly in most of them. That is about national policy. A very small percentage of the public monies is given back to the local authorities to do

the good work they do and allow councillors to do the work they do and represent their constituents that Cllr Snell referred to. None of us want to raise taxes but we have to be responsible. We have been let down by national Government, but we have been talking about this for a long time, so this is national policy and it's been an ongoing national policy and in fairness to the director and the Chief Executive, they did make a reasoned appeal, an application last year for increase in funding and pointed out why Wicklow was not doing well and not getting its fair proportion, I don't know what the response was that to that application but you would like to hear the response to that. Cllr Kavanagh referred to the issues and items that property tax should be spent on and that is exactly what we are itemising today. The Municipal District Public Spaces Improvement Fund will be gone if we don't take a hard decision today. Repairs to footpaths to make it ease area for children and elderly people to walk around our town, raising the economic benefit to our towns to have people happily shopping in those areas we can't do that. The community grants that mean so much to the voluntary community, sporting groups throughout our town that put in such hard work all year around, we won't be able to fund them and give them those small figures of €2,000 or €5,000 a year that make a big difference to them. That is gone if we don't make this decision. Not having match funding there is €2 million in urban regeneration fund, if we miss out on that because we can't match fund we are doing a massive disservice to the people in Wicklow.

That is a point that people need to think about, that is vitally important and we have a good track record and good staff to put in the applications. The climate action plan standing at 150,000, there is if we can take that and use it as 20% or 25%, we can turn that into maybe 650, 700,000 for climate mitigation measures. That is what people marched for and a lot of people took to the streets and want to see action on. It's a difficult decision, it's a decision we are in, it's for 12 months only but I think we have to take this difficult decision today and the director has outlined why and it's clear to anyone who takes responsibility for the decision here that that is a tough decision we are going to have to take today. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Blake.

CLLR BLAKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First of all, can I thank Brian for his presentation here today and certainly the comprehensive documentation and the presentation he made as well. Particularly in relation to the fact that all of the project this is he have applied to over the last number of year, those documentation has been very helpful.

I would compliment the staff in the community sector that have put a lot of work in over the last number of years and probably have a lot of work ahead of them in that regard. As has been referred to here, the cuts, even the smallest thing we do here with the community grants. I remember back years ago we were talking about cutting those, at the end of the day they were the one thing that the community out here on a year-to-year basis gave credit to the council, even if it was €100 or €5,000 they were getting out there, they were hugely appreciated by the community in that regard.

Cllr Whitmore is right, the baseline is where we are being hammered over the last number of years. The local Government would call it years ago time and time again we were one of the counties that was hammered every year in relation to it. It's my understanding that the local Government fund initially came in based on the population of the county, a county of Wicklow at that time had a population of probably 60,000-65,000 and that is what it was based on. Today we have double that population and it's not been reflected with regard to the baseline that should be far higher than that. I don't know what the baseline should be based on population of Wicklow, but at eight million it should be at least another four million on that. That would result in the fact that we wouldn't be having to contribute the 1.7 million to the housing section and the 3.5 million we are giving to the equalisation fund as well.

So, I think if we are to ask our TDs to do something on our behalf, it's to address the baseline figure that is in there at eight million. Thank you. Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr O'Neill.

CLLR O'NEILL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you, Brian, for the presentation. I can see where you are coming from and the anxiety there, but the deep down I could not go back to the people of West Wicklow and tell them that I have approved the 15% increase when we have, particularly in areas like Blessington we have a quarter of the town in Kildare, we have 225 houses already in the town that are part of Kildare, their levies and their property tax go to Kildare County Council.

We have 350 in March and every penny of that will go to Kildare and every penny of the property tax. Then on stream we have another 600 in Kildare which is a part of Blessington. So I will be going back to the ordinary people of the why are to approve of a 15% increase for that situation. That is not on and I could never do that, as Cllr Snell pointed out, I wasn't asked by anyone at the doors to increase this. I just want to, we are talking about that 20% equalisation fund for a long time, none of us are doing nothing about it, there doesn't seem to be anything happening there, on the, I would like to agree with Cllr Whitmore there, where she pointed out with consultancy funding or feasibility studies over €100,000 should be brought back to the council for approval. I don't know exactly what has been out there in the last 12 months but it's frightening when you hear of 300 and 400, up to a half a million per feasibility study on a lot of stuff that doesn't add up in my book.

The crux of that is that you can see it a mile away, that the amount of money coming from central Government is being put, local Government grants are cut from central Government. That is to do with the bagsie they are making a lot of things. They can make a mess, completely of the likes of The Children's Hospital, there, overrunning by a couple of billion and get away with it because they know well, because this is Ireland, Ireland will go back, go back out to the county, will you get the money in one way or another, we can make as many mistakes as we like and we can get away with it. It's continuous stuff day in day out, month in month out, year in,

year out where they can make a bagsie of things, but they know in the Ireland we have and the mindset of the Irish, that they will go out and they will get the money in one way or another.

This is another one of those issues, I would urge every councillor in here, we had the whinging and bawling here of the opposition, or so called opposition, of Fianna Fail and Simon Donnelly talk about the scandal on things being spent on a hospital that is not going to work, they continue, Simon Harris continues to say it will, he keeps pushing it, we Stephen Donnelly whinging about it and it comes back to people like brain at the top of the table to try and square the circle.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Crean.

CLLR CREAN: I have six points, some of have been made already. The first is to follow on from Cllr O'Neill's point. I want that local and national link to be made. You do have The Children's Hospital, the 11 million on consultants' fees. I would like to see more of a breakdown of the percentage paid to consultants at our local budget level. Then you have this stuff this week about Apple and it's those returning to those we can force to pay tax and not those that should, so our 12.5% at a national level we are picking up on a local level to those who can be forced to pay.

So that national mismanagement needs to be recognised that we are managing this as a local level. We have had a 20% cut since austerity, never replaced and it was pointed out that the Local Property Tax was never supposed to replace, that, it's supposed to be added value, it's not. At a European average we are 8% of public spending on local Government compared to 23%, we need to be challenging that, I agree our TD ministers should be challenging that, we need to have a national Task Force on local Government, but they are the bigger issues which are separate to what we are being told to manage.

For me, as a new councillor looking at this, I am not willing to spend the next five years mismanaging at a local and national level, so I won't be supporting an increase because I think it feeds into this and allows this to continue. My second point is I disagree with Cllr Matthews, I don't think this is the easy decision to support the increase, I think it's a harder decision, like Cllr Fortune I am saying let's go back and see what the alternatives are. Are there other cuts, could we look at other ways to get that, could we look at our budget, with millions coming in for social inclusion, the LCDC monies that we can start to look at for community grant and start to look at where that is spent, so the way we raise money and spend it, we can between now and the budget look at that.

So I disagree on some of the points that Cllr Matthews made as regard to the rights of people with disabilities, they are rights to walk around the town, they are not reliant on Local Property Tax, we have a convention on the rights of people with disabilities. I won't be saying to anyone in my constituency, that the public realm, because they are not increasing Local Property Tax, that will be compromised we have rights as citizens and they pay indirect taxes disproportionately those on lower incomes so certainly the

Local Property Tax is not the only way that people pay for local services, I disagree with that point. The third point, the climate change piece, it's a new policy area, it should not be reliant on Local Property Tax, it's like housing it's now a distinct discreet policy area. It has an SPC and shouldn't be tied to Local Property Tax reliance. On the submissions piece we held a consultation process, 90% of the submissions were against an increase, only 2% was an increase, one submission.

There is no point ever holding a public consultation if it's ignored in the decision made at a chamber level, so that to me, flies in the face of local democracy and my final two points. It is unaffordable, you can say it's only 90 cent a week, we have over 1,000 households in this country that are in arrears of their mortgages so that is a no-go already.

We have other families that supplement their income with Social Welfare payments or loans from the Credit Union, so they can't afford the current property tax and someone needs to voice for them. It's easier to go in here because I am pragmatic, because we need to be creative and we can't turn to those who can be forced to pay. My final point is the inequity of it, the fact there are thousands of households that aren't in the bracket or the net. I feel, for all of those reason, I can't support an increase in this. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Cronin.

CLLR CRONIN: I don't think any of us wants to make a decision today. We are expecting homeowners, again, to pick up the shortfall year on year and it's a difficult decision to make. It's hard for me to go back to my constituents in West Wicklow and ask them to pay for a shortfall here.

We are lacking services in West Wicklow, we have a very poor bus service, we have one bus route that goes through the entire area, it goes twice in the morning and comes back home twice in the evening. We need to drive to get to that bus stop and then to get petrol for the car we also have to drive, because in some parts we don't even have petrol stations. The N81 has been shelved, the water in Dunlavin is at full capacity and the bus stop at Hollywood we are still waiting on that, we have applied for funding two years ago and there is still no moving on it.

Last year, at our Municipal District, we requested someone from the housing section to come in and talk to our councillors, unfortunately no one turned up. We had new social housing schemes going ahead in Stratford and Dunlavin, no one seems to know what is going on. We asked for someone to come in and speak about policy, about allocations in the future and unfortunately we had nobody there to answer our questions. That is very disheartening and it's very disappointing for us to have to go back now and tell people, sorry, I don't know the information about these houses because I had nobody to ask, or nobody turned up to our meetings. I think it's a very difficult situation to be in today to say that if we don't vote for this increase we won't have our discretionary funding, so we are now put in a position where we say to homeowners in the county, that you either pay more or you tell our volunteers of the community that you are not going to get the money, that you have been working towards.

I do think there needs to be a review, it's unfair there is 4,500 homes that are excluded at the moment and we also need assurance that if we go ahead with this is it just found one year only.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Grace McManus.

CLLR McMANUS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and thank you to the officials and my councillors for their inputs I, it's been great to see where everyone is standing on this. I think that is important. But for me, this isn't about raising taxes or whether we should raise taxes, this is about a specific tax that doesn't seem to be, as others have said, fit for purpose.

What I see, it's the same stretched middle we keep hearing about that we keep lumping things on and it's a little bit unfair to use emotive topics like climate action, if we are saying to the stretched middle have you to pay for this so we can do climate action, but you will have to pay for retrofitting your home and invest in new e-cars and whatever else we are going to ask them to do, surely there is a more dynamic and creative and fair way that we can deal with what the officials are facing and I empathise with you, that you have to balance the books and it's, I want to work with you for a solution, but as Cllr Fortune said, surely there is a better way. It's not just taking brave decisions about tax in general, it's looking at the fairness or otherwise of this particular tax.

I would urge councillors, if they are critiquing this and they think it's unfair, to say what you mean and show and don't tell. For me, supporting an increase in this tax is endorsing the tax as a model and that is something that I can't do.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Ferris.

CLLR FERRIS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes, it has been interesting I think to hear the contributions around the table in relation to this Local Property Tax. I think it's very, it has to be made very clear that we are bound by legislation to make a decision on this by the 30th of September, so that it can't be put off until later to make any decision or to have a look at figures again, or programmes.

As it has been said, no one likes to increase taxation, no one likes taxation, there is not a person who likes paying tax. I broadly agree with everything that Cllr Matthews said, we have to remember that there are hardship cases out there who can apply for waivers or whatever, also we have to remember that people living in social housing don't have to pay the Local Property Tax because Wicklow County Council pays it.

I have to say that I think the people in Bray actually do worse by the money that comes out, because I think a lot of the rural areas and the smaller towns and villages get more from the council, we certainly don't get anything like that in Bray and there are a number of things that we need extra staff on the council in brave for example. I think it's not easy, but it's easier enough to talk up the case for not supporting this increase, but I think as Cllr Cullen said at the very beginning, we are where we are and the figures that are set out and the presentation given by Brian earlier, you

know, they are there, they are black and white, there is nothing we can do about it. I certainly wouldn't, I wouldn't support a 15% increase, I think that really goes too far, but there is no way I could vote not to increase the property tax and have to go around and talk to people and answer people for the next, after, or during next year to say well this can't be done because.

I would support a lesser increase in the budget, but I think it's important to note and I think Brian mentioned it earlier, that in the three lowest bands of the valuation rate, just under 60% of households in Bray are paying those lower bands. So that leads about 40% paying the three higher bands and if and even on the figures of the 15% change, which I am not agreeing to 50%, but the people on the lowest bracket will be paying 26 cents extra per week and on the third band, which is the higher band of that three, they will be paying an extra 91 cent.

While, on the other side, people paying more will be paying between 1.17 cent and 1.69 cent a week. That is, on the 1.17 cent that is just over €5 per month extra. It's between €5, just above €5 and €7. Not a huge amount to spend. The increase for the people on the lower valuation rates and probably on the lower incomes is not huge.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Time.

CLLR FERRIS: It's not huge. I didn't interrupt you, Councillor, have a bit of respect. When you look at the figures, when you look at what we won't be able to spend next week, what every single part of the community in county Wicklow are going to lose out on we have to take this tough decision today and bite the bullet. It's easy to talk up why it shouldn't be paid, but I think we have to be responsible here to the people that we voted for, or that voted for us and again, I agree with what people have said about our TDs, there should be more done in the Dáil about it, but I think we have to bite the bullet and accept an increase, but not the 15%. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Seat 26, which is Patsy Glennon. Is it?

CLLR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, I would like to thank Brian for the presentation. It's unfortunate that the current Government have put us all in this difficult situation. As Brian has said, no properties have been brought into the net since 2013. 4,000 properties have been built and a possible gain of 1.2 million has been misplaced or lost because of inaction. I empathise with what Gerry and Avril have said in west Wicklow, we are very much on the hind always. I notice that we were 66% decrease which was in Brian's figures.

However, it is left to the responsible members in the chamber to do the right thing for County Wicklow and to support a modest adjustment of the property tax. Overall, it is very, it is a very unfair position for us all to have been put in. Of course those that shout loudest will, within this chamber will still accept the benefits that flow from this decision while continuing to shout about a modest increase. I would like to take this opportunity and perhaps it's not my opportunity to do it, to complement the Green Party, the Social Democrats and Labour for taking the brave decision and doing the right

thing here and I wouldn't be supporting 15%, but I certainly think I could support 10%. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Pat Kennedy.

CLLR P KENNEDY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I think it's fair to say that no one in this chamber wants an increase in property tax because none of us want it. But what I would like to see is I would like to see the Government and the TDs doing something about the equalisation fund, that the counties that benefit from that 20% equalisation fund can't reduce their property tax, because that is making a laugh of every other county that is paying into that equalisation fund. I do not want to support a property tax increase here today, but when I look at my own area of Arklow, we have projects totalling 11.5 million applied for. We have received in grants over 4.5 million and a commitment of 2 million to match that. And I can't let that be put at risk, but I won't support a 15% increase, but I also understand that we do have to increase something in order to safeguard those projects.

There is 50 million in projects in total in the county. A year ago here we were getting on to the Chief Executive that he wasn't applying for funding and that we weren't getting our fair share of funding. Now, we are getting it and we don't want to take the responsibility that comes with it. So, I will support an increase slightly, I will not support a 15% increase and I am supporting it on the basis that it's for one year only. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Normally you don't come in twice, but you spoke for a short time.

CLLR O'CONNOR: I want to make it, that the Local Property Tax is a dated tax overall and that the system has been rigged in a way that leaves local authority exposed and over reliant on it in general which is a terrible way to put us and to do this on the kind of working class people of Wicklow in general to put this tax on them is a terrible thing and it shouldn't exist anymore, but I think the only way we can carry on doing this is by playing with the system for a bit longer and get, when the General Election comes up to tell people to talk to their TDs about the Local Property Tax and how it should be adapted for the future to make sure that it doesn't come down to this like this and we need to Government that can communicate with us and make sure that we don't have to do this again. That is all. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: And Cllr Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: This has been difficult for me in this situation to manage and to think, what am I here for? Who am I supposed to represent? Am I supposed to go along with the civil servants and prop up this dysfunction on a national level, because that is what I think this is. I have done polls and nobody wants this increase in Local Property Tax and it's not that they don't want to contribute to a functional council that used their money well, I think what people see is a lot of squandering of their money. When I grew up I looked, we had our bins paid for from our taxes we had our water paid from our taxes.

The people that paying rates on the main streets were paying rates for services. They can't see any of that anymore, it's all disappeared, slowly it's gazumped and disappeared and now they are asked to increase what they've

pay every year, year on year and next year it will probably be another crisis, when do we say no? We have to say no because until we stop facilitating this nothing is going to change. Nothing is going to change and people will be paying more taxes and more taxes and I don't think this country is in a good state and I think things need to change and we, every one of us here need to step up to the mark and represent the people of Ireland and not prop up this Government anymore.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Lourda Scott.

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you, chair. Whatever way we vote I suppose there is an awful lot of agreement in the chamber, it's clear that the LPT isn't fit for purpose. And really, I am asking for the 15% increase, it's further deepening the policy of the national Government stripping the income and resources from local Government and it's taking that resources from local Government means we are taking, really we are robbing our local communities of their voice and their ability to make decisions at local level and implement what they need through us. I suppose the question has been raised a few times here, who are we representing? I am representing my community, specifically the community in Greystones District that elected me and a lot of councillors referred to the fact no one has asked for an increase in LPT on the doors, but they have asked me a lot for funding and projects in their area that will benefit the entire community.

They are looking to improvements for their footpaths and action on climate. Is it fair that we are therefore being asked here for a 15% increase in LPT to help fund this, no it's not, but that is the situation we are in. I couldn't support the 15% increase, I think it's too much, but I would support a modest increase. Fundamentally I would concur with what Cllr O'Connor said, this is a political football every year, we are left throwing it around in the chamber, the whole thing has been kicked down the review purely for political purposes with not a thought of the people or the communities.

As Cllr O'Connor said, let's bring this to national level, let's bring this to our five TDs and bring it up at election time and let's start saying there is alternatives. We need review and reform and in the meantime we are left, really as I see it, with no choice but to have to increase this tax this year in order to fund our communities and represent truly the communities that have elected us here today. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr John Mullen.

CLLR MULLEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I am back. Thank you for the presentation. As a new councillor, I suppose this is very difficult introduction to the Wicklow County Council budgetary process. It's definitely not what I was expecting. The economy has been doing well, Brexit uncertainty, but we now know why we are here, I think everyone is in agreement that the government should have reintroduced the buoyancy levels and therefore we would, all property taxpayers would be paying an equal amount and we wouldn't be in this position. But we are.

In one sense, as a new councillor, I understand those councillors who have voting against today and I understand those councillors who have voting for an increase. As councillors we have to be responsible and as councillors, if

we are seeking for improvements to the local Government process, with very to be willing, sometimes, to make very difficult decisions. As some councillors said and in fairness to the officials who gave the report, this is envisaged as a one-year stop gap introduction on the basis of the figures, rebalancing themselves next year.

And, on the basis of that, I think there is an argument for a small temporary increase. Having said that, I do any there is a stronger argument that the entire budgetary process, whereby the officials and the councillors are engaged in, is less than transparent and we need a lot of work, a lot of work for councillors to go back to the public and be able to say that this is the type of budgetary process that can be, we could all be basically thankful for. I think there is a lot of questions to be asked still in the coming weeks and we will be asking then. But I appreciate the officials have to present the figures as they are and they have to ask us to make a decision before the 30th of September on the LPT and on the basis of they are the facts, we have to make a decision today. But I think this is a learning curve for all of us and I think we need to try and improve this situation going forward, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Pat Fitzgerald.

CLLR FITZGERALD: I have listened to this LPT for a long time and before I came out this morning I was warned by family members that I shouldn't agree to put it up. My wife telling me don't put it up and my political head telling me it should go up. There was a comment about that, was there? Just, if I look at what is proposed for the Arklow Municipal District, I think there is 11.5 million of work to go ahead and I am not going to put that at risk by not supporting a rise in the property tax.

I have every confidence in how the accounts of this council are dealt with, there might have been some comment earlier on, but we don't need outside interference. Look it, I believe this should be the last year that we entertain putting up the base rate to be honest about it. I think when the re-evaluations are done and they should have been done and when the house that have paid no property tax and have been built since 2013, there should be no reason for this council to put up the base rate, that this should be the last time on which we have to raise, by whatever, it hasn't been agreed the figure yet, 5% or 10% or whatever. But really, I don't like paying extra taxes as do other people, but I feel we have no option in the circumstances we find ourselves in, but to agree to put up the property tax today.

CATHAOIRLEACH: And Cllr Corrigan.

CLLR CORRIGAN: As a new councillor, I think it's a very difficult situation we have find ourselves in, trying to come to terms with understanding it all and then, obviously nobody wants to put up an increase. We are all being contacted daily to look for support for people looking for local projects and don't want to have to go back to them to say we can't support that, we don't have the money.

It's, there a lot of project, when you read through that, there is a huge amount of projects that are coming on stream and it's fantastic and I personally can't support the 15%, but I would support 10% and for one year

only, I think we just have to be responsible about it. We do need to look at it in the future, it's been a huge learning curve and I feel you are damned if you do and you are damned if don't, but I don't want to go back to people and say no, sorry, we can't give the money to that, 10% for one year would be what I would support. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Brian. Would you like to come in.

CLLR FORTUNE: Can I make a quick comment? I want to put on record from my own perspective. That it isn't an easy decision here today, to vote against the property tax and it isn't the populace decision. It's a very difficult decision because it has implications. I don't have any problem in answering to any constituent out there on the basis of how I vote and the rationale I am use logic. I am not going to accept being told it's populace. It's easy, it's easy to say let's pop it on.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian Gleeson.

CLLR GLEESON: Thank you. Back working, great? Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

At the outset I would like to thank all of the members for their contribution, their comments. Even in the last week the engagement has been fantastic on this issue, like compared to previous years, I don't think I have discussed it with as many people as we have this year and that shows you the interest and the passion that everyone has which is great. A number of points people made in relation to the system itself and whether it's fit for purpose. I would have to agree 100% with you all, I have had a conversation with an official from the Department only last week, about the whole not just the LPT, but the whole Local Property Tax funding system, in that we are ham strung, no matter what way we go, we shouldn't have the situation we are facing here today.

It's not an easy decision and I know we are not asking you to make an easy decision here today, but, as we have said in the presentation, the alternative is I would feel a harder decision in November, because I would be asking you to cut services, crucial local services and there is no benefit from that. I think there is a benefit in making the decision here that we can ring-fence funding for specific projects. Now I will try and go through, I took as much notes as I could, there was a lot of comments and questions so I will try and go through them as best as I can.

Just in relation to Cllr Kavanagh made the point about Local Property Tax should be used locally. The proposal we did put forward was to ring fence the money from any increase for specific areas, so it will be local, I suppose Local Property Tax, the one thing about it is, it is only one tax you can ring fence and you know it's going to go into local projects. At least any decision we make here today it would be ring fenced for specific projects in area around the county. Also, a point was made about Wicklow is doing well, it has a surplus, that is only in the Local Property Tax, I think Cllr Matthews made the point about our spend per capita, it is in the bottom three compared to other counties.

That is what we are trying to do, we don't want to go down into the bottom, so that is why we are asking you to make this decision. Unfortunately, the

system is flawed, but it's not going to change for next year. That is the facts. It's not going to change for the budget next year, so we have to help ourselves and that is what I am asking you here today is that we help ourselves. Cllr O'Connor, you asked for a figure on legal fees, I don't have that with me, but I can get it and send it on to you. In relation to the points made by Cllr Fortune, we can't keep the 20% equalisation because we don't get it in the first place. The amount we are given is the is it million. The Government and the Department take off the equalisation amount, the self-funding amount and we get the net amount, so unfortunately that is not possible.

In relation to the directors reviewing that is done every year as part of the budget process. We have a gap, we always have a gap and we always have to go back and go through every line and say to directors, you can't do that this year, you are going to have to leave that or cut that there. So that is a constant process that we undertake on an annual basis. In relation to borrowing more, we can't borrow, we are not allowed to borrow to offset the deficit or close the funding gap. It's not allowed under the Department regulations. In relation to our collection rates for rates, it should be pointed out as mentioned in the Chief Executive report that we have increased our collection rates for commercial rates year on year over the last three years and there was a recent publication came out from the CCMA, made the point that in the last 12 months Wicklow is in the top five for improvement on collection rates, so we are actually trying to do what we can in a lot of areas. In relation to pensions, should be covered nationally, I would agree with you on that, councillor. I suppose that is why they have moved to the new single public service pension scheme.

Ultimately, all of the pensions going forward will be paid out from a central fund by DEBRA [as heard], unfortunately we are in a situation where we have people under the old pension scheme that will continue to be paid out locally from the revenue budget, where as the new members who have signed up from the beginning of 2013 will be on the new single public service pension scheme.

So, ultimately that will happen in time, but it's 40 years down the road, so it doesn't help us in this situation. I would agree with the whole dissatisfaction with the whole budget process and why we have to come here and make a decision. I suppose our hands are tied on this point as well. I suppose it will be and the suggestion I think someone made to wait until the budget, it's too late, I think it would be irresponsible of us not to outline the issues we are facing here today and wait until the budget meeting in November, because it's too late. We don't want a situation where we bring these issues to you in November and then you say to me, well, if I had of known that, I would have increased the Local Property Tax.

So that is another flaw in the whole process, so we are trying to be as upfront and honest as we can and to bring these issues to allow you to make informed decisions. In relation to, I suppose a general point that has been made by a lot of people in relation to equalisation and the Local Property Tax

review and so forth, I think it's been mentioned, we made a submission ourselves on the Local Property Tax review, we made a submission on the baseline, I think Cllr Blake made reference to the baseline in our submission on the baseline we calculate that it was based on the increase in population, as at the census in 2016, our baseline would increase to 10.6 million which would eliminate the self-funding that goes to housing. I would agree with Cllr Mitchell, the unfairness in that.

I have more of an issue with that than equalisation, I understand the process behind the equalisation, but the self-funding element for housing I find that nonsensical and it is totally unfair. Obviously, if the baseline and the situation, just to give an update on that, I suppose it's the same place, the Government, by deferring the decision on the property evaluations they have also deferred the decision on the baseline review and the Local Property Tax review as Cllr Walsh mentioned makes reference to a number of recommendations. So, the deferral has all been packaged up together and there is three different elements that have been deferred by the Government in that regard.

Cllr Murphy was asking about the number of projects in each district. An email would have gone out, I think we did a bit of work this morning trying to break up the projects by Municipal District, so we have sent out the list, given a total amount of projects and another report showing it by Municipal District and hopefully that will be beneficial.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Just on the project, with the town and village we go out at the start of the year to look at the projects that are out there and talk them through it. We are generally allowed to submit about ten and that is as much as we get back in. As the projects come in, we send them off. As regard to Town Teams in 2020, as more get up and running more projects will come through and we will talk the community groups through the application process. With the likes of RDDF, Glendalough was ready to go, members agreeing here and Baltinglass was in place and the Blessington greenway, planning was in place for that.

But we also have the Arklow to Woodenbridge coming through and as soon as that comes through we will have it ready as an application, similarly the Greystones to Wicklow, we have done a lot of work on that in ecology and looking at the Coastal Protection Scheme. As it's ready we will submit it. Similarly with the sports capital ones, so it's kind of a first come first serve, the projects that are shuffle ready and the best chance to get funding for, that is the procedure we use to send them in. Thank you.

CLLR GLEESON: I think I have covered most of the points, so unless anyone else has any further questions?

CLLR BOURKE: Can you ask a question. I just want to ask the Director of Finance, is there any potential you have forgotten any income stream, that you have overlooked anything? It did happen here a few years ago, we didn't realise we are going to get 2 million of NPPR until midway through the year, which was a big bonus. So is there a possibility of a scenario like that evolving? You mentioned earlier that we had 40 million on deposit in our capital account for levies and 17 in the bond account. Do we earn any

interest on that and if we do is that transferred in our revenue account?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Before you answer that I will take...

CLLR BOURKE: The last one, I didn't finish, Cathaoirleach. There was a commitment by the Chief Executive to do a traffic study in Arklow, that seems to have disappeared, but I haven't heard mention of that in the discussions we have had in the last week about it being secured. It is a huge issue for Arklow, traffic.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Crean.

CLLR CREAN: There no option to look at other ways the money can be saved. Save, for example, our unclaimed development levies, so is there any income sources we are we chasing up on the unpaid levies. Like I said in my comment earlier, but you didn't reply. The choice to look at community grants being cut and the Municipal monies being cut. Was there no other way, like is there an option to look at other alternatives before we forced to vote on one option here today?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: I would like to ask, maybe if the derelict property levies could be looked at as well, I don't think there is many in Arklow on the list, but when you look at the main street there a lot in real life, so maybe that is something that a could be looked at as well.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Shay Cullen.

CLLR S CULLEN: Thank you, Chair. Just two points. Cllr Mitchell touched on this earlier. First of all, Irish Water spending 220 million on the upgrade of the Varray Reservoir for the Dublin area. I notice we have a reduction in the payments from Irish Water, I think it's something we made to look at, whether it's sending a letter to the Department or contacting Irish Water, but for us to be supplying, when I say us, I am talking about county Wicklow to be supplying the water supply for the greater Dublin area and getting very little financial reward out of it, it's worth certainly exploring that situation.

And, I suppose my second point is, I have obviously listened to the discussion intently and I want to make a proposal that we increase the Local Property Tax by 10% on the basis that the revenue is used for the match funding of the projects across the county for the 2020 and also that the 2 million discretionary fund is kept in place, as was last year, and that the period of time would be for one year only. So that is my proposal. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR: Do you have it written down, Cllr Cullen.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Kavanagh.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: I wanted to propose that we, it's not really a most, but just to consider deferring some items which wouldn't actually be actioned in the next year anyway, but may have funding put aside for it, because I know, in particular, in our own Municipal District, we have had various funds put aside over the years for projects which never actually materialised and which are still in train, so I just think that, we have to be realistic and say, yes, it's okay, we are going to put X amount of funding aside for this project or that project, but if it's not going to be delivered on, it should be deferred until the next budget because there is an increase in, or a revaluation on property, or a relook at property valuations coming in November 2020.

It was supposed to be done this year, which would have been very helpful, but it wasn't, therefore it is coming down the line. There are also those 4,000 houses going to be coming on board, which have been excluded for the last five years, six years at this stage. Just one thing that struck me, that Brian referred to, he referred to the NPPR and how the funding for that won't materialise this year. That particular tax was phased out in 2014. The only thing that was left was people who hadn't paid were going to be followed up on and that has just fizzled out, so it should never have been mentioned, it should never have been considered part of the budgetary process, it's long gone, so I think that is just a little bit superfluous to be honest. Just to deliver on projects in the next 12 months and in 12 months' time we will have a completely different scenario.

CATHAOIRLEACH: If you are, is that a proposal.

ADMINISTRATOR: Is that a proposal or a comment in relation to how we do things?

CLLR M KAVANAGH: It's a comment in relation to the upcoming budget.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, just in relation to the proposals that have been handed. Just, if I can just say, I am going to need, I have to wait until he has handed it up, don't I? Okay, so in relation to the proposals that came up from Cllr Tom Fortune and Cllr Whitmore. Some of the things you have mentioned in these, Brian Gleeson has come back to say that aspects of it, even though we can propose and vote on it, do you want to amend that?

CLLR FORTUNE: No, I think we can leave the proposal as I make it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: So Cllr Fortune's proposal. Following options to be reviewed and discussed over the next eight weeks prior to our budget meeting on the 25th of November 2019.

One, we keep our 20% equalisation fund for the next 12 months, two, review and consider delay of some projects for the next 12 months. Borrow the funding for the next 12 months, the director says he can borrow 8 million for LED project, add 2.5 million on to this figure. Root and branch something overview cost overview across all directors' areas and pension fund has to be national cost. Expertise be provided to members to this vital review carried out across all of these areas.

This requires full focus over the next eight weeks. Now, before I look for a seconder, can I just say that judging on what was said in terms of the equalisation, we are not allowed to do that by the Department. And then, the pension fund, the system has changed, but the existing staff, or the staff who were employed prior to the change has to be done on the old system, I think I have raised that every year for about five years myself. So, do I have a seconder? Cllr Mary Kavanagh.

ADMINISTRATOR: All of these proposals can be considered and left with us, because they are not relevant to what is on the motion today in terms of the rate, the local adjustment factor rate. Do you understand?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, but if people do want to vote on it, I think it would be hard to.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Cathaoirleach, the first thing on keeping the 20%, we can't do that, we are given the 80%, we don't hold on to the 20%, so we

can't do that. In terms of the holding back on the projects, when we get the grants, the grants usually last for a year, if we hold back on the project we lose the grant. In terms of borrowing we can't borrow for the revenue account. It's not allowed. As Brian said, the pensions will come from the national fund, but at the moment and we can certainly raise it and we agree for it, but at the moment we have to pay for pensions from our own resources.

In terms of the root and branch cost overview that will be done in detail by ourselves over the next number of weeks. We will be meeting with CPG and meeting various individuals but that process starts now in terms of preparing for the budget.

CLLR FORTUNE: I hear what you have said. I hear what the Chief Executive is saying. I raised these points with the Chief Executive when I met him during the week and while, all I am saying is that a menu of items in my opinion that needs to be reviewed. It can be any one of them. The objective, as far as I am concerned is that we save 2.5 million, so we as collective members have a discretionary budget when we come in on the 25th of November and we don't arrive in the 25th of November with our fingers in our ear being told and we are being put behind a pressure ball.

Let's use the time to do that and if some of them can't be done, they can't be done, but that is why I invited the TDs, because they need to get involved. This is a crisis as far as I am concerned. It's the worst crisis I have experienced since I became a public representative and what has happened is, over the last ten, 12, whatever, 13 years, the local Government fund has been cut, when we had the book it was cut, when we had the crash, it was cut, cut, property tax has been well-covered by people, it was brought in on a false pretence, we were supposed to get all kinds of stuff, but it's used for revenue.

And we have hit a wall as far as I am concerned so we have need to use the eight weeks in professional manner. There are people in this chamber have oodles of ability and we need to examine it. I know the executive have to be told by the Department this is how the rules work, we need to challenge that, we need the likes of Deputy Casey to support us on this and we need to be vocal and make noise about it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We have a proposal and a seconder.

ADMINISTRATOR: I think what Cllr Fortune is saying these are a menu of items to consider between this and that and you are going to leave that with us.

CLLR FORTUNE: Exactly. Involve the members in it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. Is everyone in agreement with that? Okay. Cllr Whitmore's that Wicklow County Council, I have to request to allow myself to speak. So, that Wicklow County Council write to the minister and ask that he abolish the 4% interest rate that applies to people that have deferred their payments. Are people happy we do that? That all feasibility studies above €100,000 have to come before the chamber prior to sign-off and that all projects selected for funding come to Municipal Districts for discussion.

ADMINISTRATOR: I am wondering about item 2, is that practical considering

the County Council only meets once a month and if the Executive are trying to get the projects off the ground. I am wonder is it practical.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: If we are doing feasibility studies, generally it will be in the capital plan which was submitted to the members each year, what is coming down the trying in terms of feasibility. Some of the ones here are just for funding for feasibility, the like was the Blessington Swimming Pool, which will be the design, we are just applying for funding for that, we are not necessarily doing it. As I say, it will, the feasibility of that nature will be in the capital plan in any case.

CATHAOIRLEACH:

CLLR WHITMORE: I was surprised at the amount of money set aside for feasibility studies. We are talking 200, it was 400 for the Blessington one, which at the same time we had minister Harris saying it was a bureaucratic exercise that he would get the money in a couple of years anyway. At the same time we are here arguing over chunks of money, we are saying 150,000 for the incentive, the new business rates incentive scheme, that is incredibly important and it's less than what we are going to be paying out on any of the feasibility studies mentioned. So, I think they are significant amount was money, that my feeling is that there has been feasibility studies that have been done, have costed money and are lying there.

So, it's important we make sure when the feasibility studies are done we are aligned that this is what is going to happen and we agree that the amount of money set aside is what it should cost and we are all comfortable with it, because we will essentially pay for it out of the budget and we will have to pay the LPT increases on the basis of them.

>>: It might be simpler to bring it to the districts rather than bring everyone back to the council, bring to the districts might be more practical.

CLLR WHITMORE: They are large chunks of money. We can take it up.

CLLR FORTUNE: We are in a desperate situation, so we have to make difficult decisions over the next 12 months so we need to think about this differently than we normally do.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, so how about if they were put into the Chief Executive's report every month, you know the way we get a monthly update and then at least if there was something people wanted to discuss it could be brought up under that? Okay. Now.

ADMINISTRATOR: Just for the record, proposed by Cllr Whitmore that they abolish the 4%. Can I have a seconder for that. Cllr Fortune. It's agreed that the feasibility studies will be included in the Chief Executive's report and all projects selected for underfunding come before the MDs for discussion. Seconded by Cllr Leonard. That is all agreed. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, can I just say that I would like to thank all of members for their contribution this afternoon. I will be with you in one second. I know that the Department say to us that the LPT and the budget are two separate issues, but they are not, because you can't actually do one without the other, if you are considering the Local Property Tax you have to consider what you are going to do with the money and if you don't have enough money when you get to the budget stage you can't do the things so I would like to thank Brian and the Chief Executive for conjoining them as much as possible.

And for giving us an outlook, a broad outlook of what is and isn't possible. No decision is ever taken in isolation, so facts can't be taken in isolation either. It is hard to vote for an increase, but it is equally hard to vote for very valid reasons not to increase funding, because everyone wants to have funding available, so either way it's a very difficult thing, it's extremely difficult to say to your Municipal District and to the people who come to you looking for funding saying we have nothing and it's equally difficult to go back to your voters and say well, you wanted money and in order to have money you actually, we are now in a position where we don't want to, but we have to increase your taxes for a limited period of time. I would like to thank Cllr Cullen for his proposal and I am happy to second his proposal for a 10% increase. Sorry I will come to you after that, Cllr Snell.

CLLR GLEESON: Could I ask Cllr Cullen would he mind amending his proposal, you had it would be increased back to 2 million, to 1.7 million as we stated in the presentation that there is 300,000 that was from a capital account which has now been exhausted, so that 300,000 is gone, it's not available, but to reintroduce the discretionary public realm element that will bring it up to 1.7 million, not 2 million.

CLLR S CULLEN: Okay, is that the footpath.

CLLR GLEESON: We are retaining the footpath, this was a special fund from special development levies but it's been fully used so we don't have, so it would be 1.7 million.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay I am going to switch off these and see who is left. Cllr Snell.

CLLR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I appreciate the part that all 28 councillors that spoke took part in this debate and obviously it is a divisive issue, as I say, I know where the blame should rest, but that has been said. Just in regard to the proposals, do you have a proposal there, but I would like to make a proposal that the Local Property Tax remain at the current 2019 baseline, that Wicklow County Council do not increase it for 2020 and I like to hand that up to yourself if I could.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Do we have a seconder for that? Cllr Mary Kavanagh. Do we have any more proposals before we take the vote?

ADMINISTRATOR: I will read out Cllr Cullen's proposal. Proposal this council increase the Local Property Tax by 10% on the basis that the increase revenue be used as matched funding for projects across the county and that the discretionary fund be kept at 1.7 million for 2020. This should be for a period of one year, proposed by Cllr Cullen and seconded by Cllr Winters. The proposal by John Snell is that the Local Property Tax remain at the current 2019 baseline, that Wicklow County Council do not increase the LPT for 2020 and that is seconded by Cllr Kavanagh. So, that is an amendment to the proposal. So, we will take the amendment.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, so if you are voting, okay, if we are taking the amendment first, if you are voting now you are voting not to increase the property tax and for everything, if you say for you are voting for it to remain at the baseline that it is now, that there will be no increase and against is that you don't want to stay as it is at the moment.

ADMINISTRATOR: Proposed by Cllr Snell and seconded by Cllr Kavanagh.

VOTE TAKEN

ADMINISTRATOR: So, that is eight for, 21 against, two not present and one abstaining.

CLLR FORTUNE: I didn't abstain, chair. I want that recorded I didn't abstain. I voted.

ADMINISTRATOR: Okay, so the proposal then from Cllr Shay Cullen, seconded by Cllr. I Winters, Cathaoirleach - Proposal this council increase the local property tax by 10% on the basis that the increased revenue be used as match funding for projects across the County and that the discretionary fund be kept at €1.7m for 2020. This should be for a period of one year.

CLLR SNELL: Did you say 8 for, 24 against, one not present and one against.

ADMINISTRATOR: 8, 21 and 2. So propose that the council increase the Local Property Tax by 10% on the basis that the increased revenue be used as match funding for projects across the county and that the discretionary funding be for a period of one year.

VOTE TAKEN

ADMINISTRATOR: So it's 21 for, 8 against, two not present and one abstaining. Cllr Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: I would like to clarify that I do support match funding for the projects, but that I would like it to come from inhouse, within the council, to be looked for that funding to come from that rather than the LPT.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Listen, thank you very much, everyone and thank you for the, your patience with me over the microphone issue and we will see you on the 1st Monday of October.