

Special Meeting in Wicklow County Council

25th February 2020 at 2:00pm

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon members, and just to say this is a special meeting as you know and for a very pleasant occasion, and it's not often I come in here knowing the entire meeting will be really nice and pleasant and no angst or trouble so that's really nice, and just one second ... OK so the first item on the agenda is as a result of the general election where two fellow councillors have been elected to Dail Eireann we have a casual vacancy so it is the filling of a casual vacancy arising from the election of former Cllr Jennifer Whitmore to the Dail Eireann in accordance with section 19 of the Local Government Act.

MS GALLAGHER: We've received a letter from the Social Democrats and they're saying, advised following the prescribed process within the Social Democrats the party proposes Jodie Neary for co-option of the vacancy of Wicklow County Council for the Greystones area.

And we've received a letter from Jodie Neary dated the 25th February 2020, and she has given her

consent for the nomination as a co-optee to take the seat, Cllr Jennifer Whitmore's seat.

CATHAOIRLEACH: If we can have a proposer for Jodie Neary?

CLLR CREAN: I would like, I'm delighted to propose Jodie Neary for the Social Democratic vacancy so Jodie will be taking over from Cllr Jennifer Whitmore now Deputy Whitmore who is moving on to represent people of Wicklow at national political level. Jennifer will be dearly missed; she's been a great local representative and I'm sure everyone will agree hard working and committed and I've no doubt Jodie will continue to do that. Jodie is herself local to Greystones, living with her husband and her twins here to celebrate their Mammy's special day so they're very welcome and Jodie is no stranger to politics, she's worked for many years over eight years in Leinster House in different capacities, as a political adviser, political administrator, I would have known her through work through Deputy Thomas Pringle and he's very welcome, so, she has a broad range of

experience, she's worked on many different political campaigns, and I think from memory chatting to her, there was six general election campaigns, four referenda, two Seanad campaigns so she brings a range of direct political experience here. I think that's going to hit the ground running and great a benefit here to the chamber and council but most importantly, for the Greystones Municipal District it will be important for the people because they're losing such an excellent local representative, it is great to have someone with that political expertise. For Jodie it is a new journey, she's going from behind the scenes to the coalface, and on that note, I'd like to propose Jodie and, on that option, and wish her well on the new political journey.

CLLR FERRIS: Thank you Cathaoirleach, I'd like to normally second the nomination of Jodie Neary in to replace Cllr Jennifer Whitmore, before I do so, I would like to congratulate Deputy Whitmore on her elevation, she was a fantastic member of Wicklow County Council has been here for a number of years and but I'm sure that she will be well replaced by Jodie. Cllr Mags Crean mentioned the various

campaigns and Jodie's experience up to now, I actually knew Jodie quite well during my five years in when I was a TD in Leinster House. When I met Jodie first and got to know her where we went for bites and walks and talks and get a break from all the action, and I know how dedicated that she was. One of her achievements, includes the drafting of architecting the world's first Fossil Fuel Diversity Acts 2018 which made Ireland the first one to take public money out of gas and public investments and that shows her passion for climate action. But also, she's really, really passionate about social inclusion, and gender equality, I suppose areas that I am passionate about myself. So, I'm delighted to second Jodie Neary to replace Jennifer, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Do we take a formal vote?

MS GALLAGHER: We invite Jodie.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Jodie Neary please take your seat.

(APPLAUSE)

CATHAOIRLEACH: And then onto item two, to consider the filling up of casual vacancy arising from the election of former Cllr Matthews to Dail Eireann in accordance of section 19 of the Local Government Act 20001.

MS GALLAGHER: We received a letter from the Green Party and they are advising following internal selection process, Ericka Doyle has been selected as co-optee to replace Cllr Stephen Matthews on Wicklow County Council representing the local electoral area of Bray East, and we have received a letter from Ericka Doyle confirming her consent to the nomination to fill the casual vacancy

CLLR SCOTT: I'd like to formally propose Ericka Doyle to fulfil Cllr Stephen Matthew's vacant seat. Before I speak about Erika, I would pass on congratulations to Deputy Whitmore and particularly to Deputy Matthews, who was a great addition to the chamber here, both for Wicklow County Council and also in Bray, and he was very evident for me for the first time I came in here how well-liked and respected he was by council members and staff in Wicklow as well and personally

thanking him for his guidance since I have been elected, so I'm delighted to propose Erika in his stead, she'll be a great replacement, she has a fantastic understanding how the council works and great range of knowledge on council matters and has covered Bray and Greystones in her role as a journalist, and this means she's hitting the ground running. She has an excellent working relationship with council executive and political parties throughout the county which will be vital to her role going forward and again she's no stranger to managing political campaigns, she's managed several local election campaigns and two general election campaigns and obviously with great success in the last one.

She's from Bray. From Bray East, so she's a good knowledge of local issues there, and current working projects that's been going on that you will need a strong voice on. I'm also particularly delighted to welcome another woman in the council chamber and along with Counsellor Neary we're growing steadily and surely here growing forward so I'm confident Erika will be an excellent addition to the workings to the council here and

I look forward to working alongside her so I'd like to formally propose Ericka Doyle as the opted seat.

CLLR FERRIS: Thank you again, it gives me great pleasure to second the proposal for Ericka Doyle on to Wicklow County Council, I think I've known Erika for longer than I've known Deputy Matthews now and I know she's very involved in her community and in an environmental and climate change issues I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Deputy Matthews on his elevation, I think he will be a great loss and is the current Cathaoirleach or was the Cathaoirleach of Bray Municipal District Council and I know how hard he worked in that position. And what an excellent chair he was. Absolutely excellent and had the respect of all the members and all of all the staff and management team in Bray and I know as he does now, he will be a great loss. But I am delighted that we will have another, as Cllr Scott said, we'll be trail blazing from the days when there was one or three people on it, and as I said before you're the third female Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council in its over hundred years history. I know

Erika will make a great addition, she is very, very good person, she works well with everybody and from every party and I really look forward to working with her for the next four-and-a-half years.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: If I could, I would want to support the nomination of Ericka Doyle as councillor, in fact I know Erika longer than Stephen.

Never mind anybody else, because in fact, Erika was a sixth class pupil of mine many years ago in St Fergal's and I can say a brilliant student, absolutely brilliant student particularly in English, but in many, many ways, a really excellent person who will be an excellent councillor in her work as journalist I always felt she was extremely fair and unbiased and objective in all of the stories she wrote and all the work she did, and she's a magnificent support to Steven in his campaign down through the years and she gave me a bit of help once upon a time too, which I was grateful for again before she met Stephen. In the case of Erika and Jodie, Jodie Neary and Ericka Doyle I want to welcome them and congratulate both

on them on their co-option today, I know they will make a fantastic contribution to this council and to their Municipal District, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate Deputy Matthews and Whitmore in their election, and commiserate with those of us who didn't make it on this occasion. There may be another chance soon though so don't get too comfortable would be my message. Just want to congratulate the two and look forward to working with both of you thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: So, councillor Doyle, if you would like to take your seat.

(APPLAUSE)

CATHAOIRLEACH: And I suppose I would like to welcome both of you to the chamber and officially congratulate you on your position, it is a great honour to represent the electorate. It is also a great responsibility, and I know that both of you will take that role very seriously, and I know from what I have heard and how people have spoken about you, since your names were brought forward to the

council that people are very excited at the addition of both of you to the council and contribution you will both be able to make, if there's anything I can do to assist you in any way, I will give you my contact number and contact me at any time. Now Cllr Shay Cullen.

CLLR CULLEN: Thanks, on behalf of the Fina Gael group I would first of all like to congratulate Jodie and Erika on their election to co-option to Wicklow County Council. I suppose, we I think we've a very good working relationship here in Wicklow County Council, and I'd like both of you to enjoy your time here, and make the best of it, because it is a magnificent opportunity that we have as a group of councillors here to make Wicklow a better place

I suppose, I just want to pay tribute to who is now Deputy Whitmore and Matthews, nice to say that, who join obviously Simon Harris and John Brady and Stephen Donnelly in the 33rd Dail and I think it is the time and effort by both of you to get elected with a huge vote, and I think that is testament to the work you've done, both done here in Wicklow

County Council. I think both of you are extremely hard-working and very dedicated, very competent, I think you've both worked very well on the green agenda, transportation, planning all the issues that are relevant, housing all the issues that are relevant here in Wicklow and that stood to you in your election, and I want to congratulate both of you and wish you both very, all the success in the future as deputies. I want to pay tribute to Cllr Joe Behan, Cllr John Snell and Cllr Paul O'Brien to put themselves forward, anyone who puts themselves forward deserves credit, it is not an easy thing to do, but everything, all three of you performed admirably and I'm sure we haven't seen the last of you on national elections so I want to wish the three of you well and any other person who put their name forward that's not necessarily a councillor. I think as I said earlier, it is an honour to do something like that, and you know, you deserve great plaudits for anyone who did that I want to wish you well.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thank you on behalf of myself and the staff I'd like to welcome and congratulate

Jodie Neary and Ericka Doyle as the Cathaoirleach said it is a great honour to represent your local community and we will do all we can to assist you, especially in the early days, our doors are always open, planning or housing, call to see if you want to see the system operates. I want to congratulate Deputy Whitmore and Matthews and thank them for all their support and encouragement while they were here. Particularly in the area of climate change I think they brought it to the top of the agenda and something that is going to be our priority for the next number of years

So, I'd like to you know, it is not only that, they were involved in everything that happened in their local areas and involved in initiatives we were progressing, so I'd like to wish them both the very best of luck.

CLLR O'BRIEN: Thank you Cathaoirleach, I know my colleague Cllr Anne Ferris seconded the nominations, on behalf of the Labour Party grouping I want to extend a walk well be on Erich a Jodie and welcome them to becoming county councillors and wish them well. I want to pay tribute to deputy Matthews and Whitmore, although I knew them for a

few short months it was clear to me I was in the presentation of a very fine upstanding dedicated public servants and I know they will represent the people in the Wicklow with distinction, don't mind what Cllr Joe Behan says, I hope you do get comfortable because I don't want to go through that again. On hearing the news our two were female, I want to demonstrate my solidarity, purple is associated with spirituality the sacred, higher self and deed, official colour of International Women's Day.

And over the last few weeks what upset me is the abuse public representatives have received and especially our female colleagues, so I stand in solidarity with everyone here today especially female colleagues. I want to wish Deputy Matthews and Whitmore the best, I want to not forget their roots and where they came from and look forward to working with everybody to making the lives and residents of County Wicklow even better again thank you very much.

CLLR FORTUNE: Thanks Cathaoirleach, on behalf of myself and independent group I'd like to first of all congratulate do Deputy Whitmore and Matthews

on their great success and I've no doubt they will make a serious contribution to both Dail Eireann and county of Wicklow and also to deputies Brady Harris and Donnelly on their success. I think it it's very hard task it is a great honour, and I think the situation hasn't bottomed out yet. It is going to be very interesting when we've eventually formed a Government but I wish them well and I hope that they will come back here to us in the council chamber in a regular basis so we can work together to make Wicklow a better place. Can I formally then welcome Jodie and Erika, to the council chamber and wish both of you the very best as county councillors, Cllr Mags Crean has given a fantastic resume of Jodie so I won't try and get into that, but, obviously with the experience you got you'll bring a serious skillset to the chamber and no doubt we'll have some arm-wrestling as well, so we look forward of that, it is all part and parcel of what goes on in local government. I know Erika for a good number of years and I know her dad even for longer number of years, and it is a great honour for Erika, she's been a fantastic journalist for many, many years, I've had many one-to-ones with

her, and phone calls with her on different topics and subjects so she has a very, very good knowledge of how the whole system works, so no doubt she'll make a serious contribution to Wicklow. So, again, can I just formally say well done to both of you and I look forward to working with you, and hopefully we can all co-operate on lots of issues that will help the people of Wicklow.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Much of what I was going to say has been said but on behalf of the Fianna Fail group I want to welcome Erika and Jodie here to the chamber and I have no doubt they will be huge additions to the chamber over the coming years. On another front I just want to congratulate Jennifer Whitmore and Stephen Matthews for and their election to Dail Eireann, I'm delighted actually that Stephen got elected because for the last seven years I've listened to him in my left ear the whole time advising me here and I told him I wouldn't join the Green Party as much as he would have it, but he made huge contributions to this chamber, Jennifer and Stephen, and I have no doubt they will be successful in Dail Eireann and

hopefully we'll have a Government shortly and we'll see where we go from there, so the best of luck to Jodie and Erika and Stephen and Jennifer.

on their new roles thank you.

CLLR MCMANUS: I'm at that point where I will say I won't repeat what has been said and then repeat what has been said on half of Sinn Fein I would say congratulations to the two new deputies, I'm genuinely excited what you guys will do in the new role, you will be missed and as Cllr Tom Fortune said hopefully you won't be too far away and we'll continue to work together. And to our new business, I'm sorry I have my back to you Erika, but welcome to you both, it is exciting to have more women here.

I'm really excited to see what you guys are bringing, your ideas, your passion, and I'm sure we'll have collaboration and debates, and I'm also really excited for that. And just if I can share a very quick story, Jodie you won't remember this, but I actually ,obviously know you from my work in Leinster House and when I started I was so desperately nervous, I ran into you and we had a chat and you asked me how I was getting on, I said

it was chaos, you said it was grand and if you need anything just ask me. Now I want to return this, even though I'm here for a limited time, if I can be of assistance, just let us know, we're happy to welcome you here.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I also add congratulations to Deputy Matthews and Deputy Whitmore, it has been a pleasure to work with you both in the county council and I think you're both very fair, reasonable, constructive people and those are talents that I want you to continue to use in your work with Deputy Harris Donnelly and Brady in bringing forward the issues you know are important to the people of County Wicklow. You know from the SPCs you've sat on here and the work we've tried to achieve as a council, what is important and hopefully in the coming months and in Government formation, and during the term of the next Dail, however long or short that maybe, that the five of you will work together for the good of County Wicklow as I know that you will do, thank you very much indeed

So, I think we can just give all ourselves a round of applause. I'll come back to you in one second

and say well done.

(APPLAUSE)

And also, can I just say to the families, it is a lovely day.

You've no idea how much of your family members' time is about to be consumed and you're all sitting here looking very smiley and happy and I hope in a year's time you're still as smiley and happy about it all. So, just to say to all of the family members, the very best of luck with it, and bear in mind that this is for the greater good when you're gritting your teeth at home saying where are they. Now Cllr Joe Behan has a quick item.

CLLR BEHAN: Just before I do that, could I suggest also we write a letter from this meeting today to thank former Deputy Pat Casey and former Minister Andrew Dodd for their contribution, it is a difficult time for them as well. And I know, Pat Casey is on the Seanad trail, I don't know about former Minister Doyle but to thank them, don't forget about them today. They were both long serving in this authority as well and thank them

for their contribution.

The matter I want to raise Cathaoirleach, is the question of the Kilcoole Secondary School debacle, the fact that we have so many young people in Kilcoole Primary School in sixth class who do not know yet what school they're attending on the last occasion when we us asked this I was proposed and agreed at the time unanimously we would write to the Department of Education and seek a meeting with the department to discuss what is going to happen with regard to those pupils.

And I'm just wondering has there been any response from the department thank you?

CLLR FORTUNE: I just want to obviously support what Councillor Behan has just said and the situation has gone beyond a crisis now at this stage and we're running out of time and there's frustrations on the ground so, there is urgent, urgent action needed on it, so, I would be interested to see if the department has responded to us, and what the response has been.

MS GALLAGHER: We wrote immediately after the council meeting, but we'll follow it up now.

CLLR FERRIS: I remember Cllr Joe Behan raising that and he got the total support of all the members here but I also added in the situation with St Andrew's the children in St Andrew's who can't get spaces in Templecarrig, even though that should be follow on naturally, that the pupils from St Andrew's would go to Templecarrig, they're in the same situation so a meeting with the Department of Education is absolutely urgent at this stage.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK.

And just, before I see there's a couple more lights on, if either Councillor Doyle or Councillor Neary want to say anything on this occasion you're more than welcome, just press the light in front of you, it is up to yourselves.

CLLR MITCHELL: I would like to add my voice to what Cllr Joe Behan said about the Kilcoole School and the need to sort out what is happening urgently thank you.

CLLR SCOTT: Just to sort of reiterate the urgency of the meeting that is needed we have lots of different sources and we're in agreement. We really need to sit down and talk to the decision-makers in the Department of Education and get a solution and road map forward and that needs to happen now, so, appreciate you following up again Lorraine thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK. So, if there's no other business, the meeting is concluded and we'll see you all on Monday, 2nd of March at 2pm.