

MEETING ON LOCAL PROPERTY TAX
AT SHORELINE LEISURE CENTRE,
GREYSTONES, CO WICKLOW
ON
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Elaine McCarthy

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon members can you all hear me? You're very welcome here this afternoon, before I get into the agenda proper, I'd like to call on Cllr Edward Timmins.

Table number 6.

CLLR TIMMINS: Thanks Chairman just briefly, I'd like to congratulate teams all from the Municipal District who won the county finals, Baltinglass who won the senior and congratulations to Tinahely team, Dinard who won the intermediate final on Saturday and commiserations to Kill and Vallymount to win the Junior A and Saint Nicholas who won the minors, commiserations to Blessington.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Edward Timmins.
Cllr Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR O'NEILL: Yeah again I'd like to echo what Cllr Edward Timmins said there, it has been a huge weekend for the west as regards Gaelic games and I would like to say well done to Kilmantin and the management on how they organise the last two weeks of championship football. It was a huge

undertaking with the Covid-19 and they've done an excellent job on the county. But I'd like to add congratulations to Baltinglass who are now senior champions, Donard, a team I played with a few years ago, winning the intermediate, a good few years ago but Vallemount from the junior A and St Nicolas for the minor, Blessington under 14 girls our champions and Knocknamana, so I'd like to say well done it was a clean sweep for the west. I'm delighted for every one of them. And can I add congratulations to Tipperary man Sam Bennett on the green Jersey in the Tour de France, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR MULLEN: Thank you Chairman. Again just like to echo my councillors' words there, and congratulate all involved in the Gaelic games this weekend, congratulations to Baltinglass, it was a good sporting game and Tinahely a young team will come again, and to Knockananna, congratulations and county board for organising the games in difficult circumstances. Particularly to broadcast them live on streaming TV, was a fantastic achievement and the quality was fantastic, so fair play to all.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. OK, thank you very much everybody. That seems to be it. Cllr Avril Cronin.

CLLR CRONIN: I would also like to echo the congratulations to the clubs in the west, there's no doubt the west was awake this weekend with GAA, my own club Saint Nicholas won the minor and ladies won the under 14s and there was great excitement and in my own parish, Dinard winning the intermediate championship and Baltinglass winning the seniors, it has been a huge weekend in west Wicklow.

A tough weekend as well for the losing teams but you know, Dunlavin have been there many a time so I have no doubt that we'll see them in the final again in the future.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I'd like to congratulate them all the time and my own team was losing on Sunday, Carnew beat us in the junior camogie final. We'll get on with the meeting proper and we have one item on the agenda to consider the varying of the basic rate of the LPT and setting of the new adjustment

factor in accordance with the finance Local Property Tax act 2012 as amended to apply for the one year for the next Local Property Tax liability date, first of November, 2020. So, I'm going to go straight to Brian head of finance who has a presentation to us. So, I hand over to you. Thank you.

MR GLEESON: I summarise the areas we'll go through in the presentation this afternoon.

First of all, I'll outline budgetary process for local authorities, and then discuss the Local Property Tax calculation for 2021, and we'll review the financial position of Wicklow County Council and the estimated income and expenditure for next year, and then exam the financial effect the LPT has on an individual and impact it has on the local authority finances itself.

I'll also highlight the LPT rates across other areas in the local authority sector and then finally we'll finish off with the recommendation, of the Chief Executive in relation to 2021.

The budgetary process this, is the first stage of the budgetary process the Local Property Tax

decision under section 20 of the finance act. It must be made and reported to the revenue commissioners by the 30th of September. And in order for them to do their calculations and issue bills in the November. The next stage of the budget process is in October.

Finance action will issue a draft budgetary plan which will include a general municipal allocation for each district, that goes out in October for approval.

The main stage of the process is in November. And it is the adoption of the budget that we put forward showing all our income and expenditure across all service lines. Finally, the last stage is the schedule of Municipal District works, they're issued usually around March of the following year once we have received notification from the Department of Our roads allocation for the year. The expenditure that's been adopted in the budget along with the roads allocation is split by Municipal District and circulated to all parties. Just to go through the Local Property Tax allocation and the way it is calculated: I won't go through this in detail, did I this at the last

council meeting, going through how the baseline works and the surplus but suffice to say as was outlined at the last meeting I'll reiterate the equalisation and the self-funding element are still in place for 2020. Equalisation, 3,500 self-funding, 1.8 million self-funding, legislative changes are required for new builds and new housing valuations and additional funding is required to compensate for the removal of equalisation and the baseline increases.

The bottom line is if the Local Property Tax rate is maintained at the existing 2020 level, we will have 13.7 million LPT for budget for next year, if it is not maintained, at the 2020 level, this reduces by 1.7 million down to 12 million.

Just on the next slide matters which we must have regard to, as part of the regulations before deciding on it, we must look at the financial position of the local authority, exam the estimation of income expenditure for 2020 and as I said already the financial effect of the rate on the individual and the local county council budget and the service delivery plans stemming out of that budget.

Just to go through first financial position of Wicklow County Council.

At the end of last year we had a revenue deficit of approximately 2 million as you're aware we've been generating surpluses year-on-year to reduce the deficit, we reduced it by 300,000 in 2019 the ratio of current assets to liability is three to one this is a positive ratio and shows in the short-term, we can meet our liabilities, the ratio of loans payable to revenue income is 70% and shows we can support the level of debt we currently have. The last point there is future impact of Covid-19 and obviously there's huge unknowns in relation to this but already the knowns we have which I'll be going through later on in the presentation will already have a massive impact and previous presentations have outlined the impact it's had on income such as parking, planning fees, housing rents, commercial rates, it is likely to impact that again next year, if there's another lockdown next year, obviously that will impact all those areas.

Based on the reduced income this year, and the additional expenditure we've had to incur on

Covid-19 without any commitment to date for any reimbursement, it is likely our deficit of 2 million will increase at the end of 2020, as I said we've been reducing the deficit year-on-year and given the circumstances of this year it is likely that two million will increase unless Government funding is brought in.

Furthermore, it's crucial I pose the point we're make something to maintain the existing income that we have, because of the unknown and uncertainties and impact of Covid-19. One thing people may not be aware of other income impacted by Covid-19, planning, fees, parking fees, housing rents, commercial rates, Local Property Tax respect is the one source of funding that is not, guaranteed income, it is not impacted by Covid-19.

We get our allocation, and we get our four-stage payments during the year. So if you do maintain the rate at the current 2020 level, as I pointed out there's 13.7 million will be in the budget, that is guaranteed income and will not be impacted by Covid-19 so that's an important point people should take on board.

Just in relation to I suppose known budget

adjustments at this stage, start off with a positive, our IPP dividend, we're planning on receiving a payment of 450,000 next year, as you are well aware we receive no dividend this year due to investments performance, but, based on approval of performance on 2019 we've received notification it is in the area of 450. The water rates compensation, we received one-off payment you might recall just before the budget day last year, to compensate us for loss of income from the department come compensation, following the change of Irish Water or the inclusion of Irish Water in the rating system so that was a one-off payment. That was made to Wicklow County Council only one of two local authorities that received such funding.

That won't be in 2020, so, it is a reduced income, that was used to supplement the Municipal District discretionary funds in 2020.

Additional pay costs, the national pay agreement, the last increase is 2% increase at the start of October for all grades, that obviously has to be extrapolated across a twelve month period across 2021, the normal compensation that we get from the

department is 80% so it still leaves us with 20% of our own resources to cover the balance.

Additional pension costs, we do have an ageing workforce and based on increased retirements, next year as well as bigger gratuities, which have been calculated based on the individuals that can retire next year who have longer service or who would be of a higher gratuity payment will be slightly higher than last year, there's 800,000 of additional gratuity costs and further 200,000 in relation to annual pension costs, arising from them retirements.

Public lighting, the national project for the replacement of the lights with LEDs, hoped to commence towards the end of the second quarter next year, however it takes at least 15 months for savings to materialise from this project. In addition, there's a huge demand for the ongoing maintenance of existing lights, we're running over budget at the moment and if we're to keep the same level of works on that we could between the loan charges and the maintenance costs we're looking at up to three quarters of a million of costs required in the budget in November.

There's match funding of 200,000 on top of the ring-fenced 452,000 that we provided for in the budget last year, through LPT that's another 200,000 of match funding that's required. You will be aware that turning of the sod took place out in Clare month in relation to the content creation hub so we received a grant of 1.5 million for that project but we still have 2 million of match funding to provide, so that's 200,000 over ten year of year period of a pay back. Covid-19 impact, 2.2 million, we have that's broken into commercial rates, approximately one million, there's no doubt, unfortunately based on the impact of Covid-19 that a number of businesses unfortunately won't be returning. And we've had to factor in increase in vacancy also the rents housing rents will be impacted continuously, we're making adjustments at the moment. Also, there's we're putting in provision for ongoing expenditure costs will require PPE next year and still require additional accommodations costs and so forth. And also, we've 200,000 for the leisure centres in Wicklow and Arklow, that will require additional support going forward in order to stay open.

Finally there's a figure of 1.7 million for directorate costs at the outset we did say it to the directors that we would only take on board increase costs that relate to statutory requirements or where there's contractual equipment in place so bearing that in mind this certainly is not a wish list 1.7, one area is pre-letting, we've huge demands in pre-letting cost, we increased in the budget last year capital transfer provision from 700 to 2 million, recognising that the demands on pre-letting at the moment we're looking at spending over 3 million this year, and that likely demand will be the same if not more next year.

So, we need to make provision for that increase, or else we'll have to I suppose roll back on the actual number of units that we actually do works on, one or the other. Additional homeless, cost 300, E-planning statutory requirement that project needs to be rolled out and costs will be 200,000, five service has training course they've been brought in, so that's 100,000, and increase in IT licenses and implementation of our digital strategy, comes to about 100,000.

So, all in all the current expenditure estimate for next year is 124.6 million. Current income estimate is 118.5 million which leaves a shortfall of 6.1, if the Local Property Tax is not retained at the existing 2020 rate, then this budget shortfall increases to 7.8 million.

We'll now talk about the financial effect of the Local Property Tax has on a liable person.

On the revenue of the local authority and of the service plans of the local authority.

There's a table, it is actually in on page nine of the report, that was issued from the Chief Executive last week, you might be able to see it better in that, but basically outlines the different valuation bands.

The standard rate for each valuation band and the current rate that's paid by householders in Wicklow so you see in the first band standard rate is 90 where the Wicklow householders is paying 99 so the different of 9 Euro for the whole year. All in all 53,400 properties are registered, property bands are based on the values as of May 1, 2013, as mentioned already, these valuations have been to be updated and that requires new legislation,

however, 60% of the properties that are valued at 200,000 or under, the maximum impact of those of a 10% variation of LPT is only 61 cent per week. As I say 60% of properties in Wicklow are valued at 200,000 or under. To revert to the standard rate from the 2020 rate would benefit the vast majority of household, 87%, by only 17 cents, to 95 cent a week depending on the valuation band that they're in.

So, the first valuation band, the benefit to a household would only be 17 cent a week, if we did not maintain the 2020 rate and revert it back to the baseline.

The retention of the 2020 rate will actually see no increase in Local Property Tax payments made by householders in 2021 and I suppose that's the point we have been trying to get through and make to everyone. There's no increase in the pocket of householders next year.

And there's no extra money that will be coming into Wicklow County Council by retaining that amount. It just means us to retain the 1.7 million that was ring-fenced last year but also means there's no increase to the householder payments in 2021. To

go through the impact on the revenue budget in more detail, table there just shows the variations and what the impact is. If we change from 2020 by 10%, we lose 1.7 million, 15, we lose 2.6 million. Result and implications of it - if we take 1.7 million out by not retaining the LPT rate at the 2020 level, it means we have 1.7 million less of income.

We require to have a balanced budget, so that means we have to reduce our expenditure by 1.7 million so. That will mean, that there will be a number of budget cuts that will have to be brought forward, as part of the budgetary process in November and we'll have to be voted on by the members in order to balance the budget.

In relation to impact on the existing service delivery: The additional 1.7 million brought into the budget based on the Local Property Tax decision last year ring-fenced for a specific areas of spend, nearly half a million for match funding, for national development projects, under URDF town and village, as I pointed out not all projects can be used, can use development levies as match funding. We require 9 million for match funding for current

ongoing projects, and of that 9 million, 2.3 million is not covered by development levies. Hence the reason last year we set up this provision format funding in the budget.

List of schemes and funding is outlined on page 6 of the Chief Executive report for more detail.

There was also small element of community grant scheme of a top-up, that was included and I suppose, the big item on the 1.7 was the discretionary expenditure across the Municipal District of nearly a million Euro used by project put forward by the local councillors. We had a new line item of expenditure in 2020, climate action and energy initiatives, 260,000 to cover a couple of new appointments and also a number of initiatives stemming out of the climate adaptation plan.

Just to inform people I suppose how the voting is going across the country really in relation to Local Property Tax, 19 local authorities increased their Local Property Tax rates in 2020.

That's including Wicklow County Council.

This was done in recognition of the need to provide match funding for these National Development Plan projects. There's a number of councils I'm aware

of had to take out loans for the match funding element and the provision they've made in their budget is to cover the loan repayments going forward.

So, this isn't new news to Wicklow this is across the board and the information that I've received to date, all of these local authorities that increase their Local Property Tax last year have retained it for 2021 so they've retained it at the 2020 levels.

If Wicklow County Council does not maintain it, at the 2020 level, it will reduce the budget by 1.7 and as I said will result in budget cuts in November.

And I suppose another important point I wish to make is that it also undermines our own case to increase the baseline, I've made a presentation a couple of weeks ago on the baseline and how we need to get increase on this.

in order to generate more bottom-lying income for Wicklow. By taking out 1.7 million, voting to take that out of our budget next year it totally undermines the argument when we go to the department and go to department looking for money,

our argument is Wicklow is underfunded we should be getting more money, yet if we go and make a decision here this afternoon, to reduce our own income, and take 1.7 out of the budget, it will have serious implications and as I say, totally undermines our argument going forward in that regard.

So, in conclusion, the recommendation, for Local Property Tax is to maintain the existing 2020 level. It provides a same level of funding for 2021, as is currently the case now. It will retain 1.7 million of ring-fenced money for local projects, such as those under discretionary expenditure and match funding project.

And it avoids having to implement budget cuts to these local projects and also for go the opportunity for Government grant aid. As we've said throughout the week, if we don't have match funding, for particular projects, if we're successful, we'll, we won't be able to draw down the money, we'll have to forego that and we'll have to put a stop on applications that we're putting in under some of these schemes.

I suppose the real as far as I'm concerned this is

a win/win situation by maintaining the rate at the 2020 level, there's no change to the householder Local Property Tax bills for 20, no increase to their payments. And yet it allows Wicklow County Council to continue the good work it's done and approve on the local services and local projects throughout the county, I think for years and everyone here will admit to it, for years, there was complaints about we didn't apply for enough grants, we didn't get enough grants. I think we've a very successful in the last number of years, as is outlined in the figures in the report of the number of projects that we've been next, and the number of projects we're applying for again. Unfortunately, to reduce the funding which would impact on our match funding will have huge detrimental impact and I hope the members take that on board when they take their decision here this afternoon. Thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Brian. I'd like to bring in the Chief Executive.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thanks and the key points have been made there, but I want to people to remember any increase in the LPT is ring-fenced, I think Brian outlined that, it is ring-fenced for local projects, climate action spend and community grant scheme, we've put it through UDF, community CCTV, outdoor recreation, sports capital, Failte Ireland and we have a list of projects that we're ready to apply for the next round of funding and people can see it on the ground, you have the library in Wicklow Town, Arklow historic town centre, I was down there looking at the courthouse how to refurbish and if you see it, it is fantastic, the RRD F in Baltinglass is starting up and we have very exciting schemes, the Arklow a yeast regeneration project, we have that in with URDF and sports facilities including the swimming pool, Bray Harbour, cycle ways, throughout the county and there's more. But the key message I think is, if we increase the Local Property Tax here, we have the money ring-fence today that, so we get it back five-fold and usually 20% contribution we have to make and similarly with the climate action, because a lot of schemes coming down, three policy, solar

policies, EV charge and whole range of produce coming down in climate action that is ring-fenced that's the key point, irrespective what is happening in the budget, to make a right decision here today that money is ring-fenced.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Chief Executive. I know Cllr Gerry Walsh has your hand up, before I bring in anybody, I want to have everybody to have time to make their contribution.

There is a one item agenda so everybody would have plenty time to come in and I'm planning to give everybody time. What I don't want, I'm not going to take any proposals from the floor until we've had a good discussion on this, so I'll take the proposals later, but I would like to people to engage in the discussion. Is that all right? So, I'm going to go to Cllr Gerry Walsh first.

CLLR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, thanks to the Finance Director for the presentation. Like each year care lack at this meeting I've expressed my dissatisfaction with the process in whereby councillors are asked to prop up what is a lawed system through what they call the Local Adjustment

Factor. It is acknowledged Wicklows baseline figure is 23rd lowest in the country. It is outdated and badly needs to be adjusted. RLPT allocation is bare minimum is not adequate to support our financial requirements of the local authority. We have equalisation fund, we have a self-funding housing allocation, we're told this needs legislation to be amended. We have a revaluation process first proposed back in November 16, for November 19 again, and now we're told by the Finance Minister it is pushed out to November 21.

And really, these delays, I think they say present to the long-term sustainability of the LPT itself. What's required are structural changes, to address the unevenness of the LPT levy graphically in a fair, easily understandable, and affordable manner.

And March 19 the LPT review group proposed the equalisation fund be discontinued and all local authorities retain the LPT collected in the areas and that new dwellings since 2013 be brought into the net and Wicklow have 53,000 houses paying LPT at the moment and I suggest we have at least 4,000-5,000 properties not in the net and that

represent a figure of approximately 1.5 million the local authority are losing out on. So year-on-year Cathaoirleach, councils are asks to subsidise departments inaction, last year we threw a life Tyne Lyon 10% increase to restore the services to our communities, discretionary funds and et cetera, in my view it was the correct decision at the time.

But it is disappointing that we're back in this same position again this year and I acknowledge thins since then and mindful we've had an election, it took time to form a Government and of course we're in the middle of a pandemic Covid-19, which I think we've yet to see the full impact of on our economy and on individual household. So, with that, I'll hand you back, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you,

CLLR MULLEN: Table 25 thanks to the staff for their presentation and engagement with us over the last few weeks. I agree with what Cllr Gerry Walsh said there. What I disagree with here today is that what undermines our argument with the department should we not increase the property tax

I don't think is valid. What undermines our argument is that this tax is not being paid by any property that has been built since 2013.

It is now 2020.

What undermines our argument is that there's been successive failure by the department and by Government to address this inequality. Tax should be paid on properties by the owners of all those properties.

But undermines our argument is when we came to make this decision last year, a Government minister took to his Twitter page to criticise us.

When we promised we would raise this tax for one year, and one year only.

What undermines local democracy and local representative is in here today trying to secure funding for local projects and we will still have to argue funding for local projects at budgetary stage. I understand your position and your statutory requirement to balance the budget but what undermines local democracy, or any democracy, is when representatives can come in here and say in private and in a public meeting that we will raise a tax for one year only to secure funding and

we're back here one year later, and being asked to do the same thing again.

I think that's what undermines our position.

And I will not be voting for any increase in the property tax this year on that basis.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR FORTUNE: Cathaoirleach, thanks very much.

I'd like to start by saying that I just think this is a totally disingenuous exercise.

Property tax was brought in not as an income stream, it was product in to put added value into our local districts. Now, I wrote to you Brian on the 7th of July and talking to you about the baseline and asking for our five TDs to meet with us. Now we had our meeting but only one TD, Councillor Matthews turned up, I think that is also disingenuous and this meeting should be rightly to those who didn't think it was worth their while to discuss such an important item.

I just find I'm disgusted in fact on behalf of the residents of this county for what is going on here.

I'm not supported the Local Property Tax because

I think as grossly unfair tax. This year what I will be looking for and I'm not finished, I will be looking for 15% degree due to the difficulty people find themselves in. The baseline concept is actually so grossly unfair to the people of County Wicklow that I don't see how any public representative could accept it.

We've got a big number of people who do not pay for all kinds of reasons, that could bring in most of the deficit, Brian that you talked about.

The stature question would mean cementing the so% put on last year, that we were told last year was a must and wouldn't happen this year. Now I've got pensioners in my area as other reps in their areas who have having to pay for homes they bought many, many years ago and raised their families in them, and in some cases they can't afford to heat them and afford basic maintenance on them and for them alone this is grossly unfair.

Now, I don't believe it is justifiable or fair, for us to be increasing and if we end up at the end of the day with 12 million or 12.5 million you were saying in the numbers Brian you put to us the last day there's three about 56 million made up of

pensions and Covid-19 impact, we shouldn't take that out of our spending as a local authority. Directors cost 1.7 million. I think it is come to the stage now and I know when we met, we get the veiled threat, if we don't agree to what we've been asked that a commissioner will be brought in. I just think that's not acceptable and I don't think any member in this room should accept that kind of dialogue. It is just, it is just way over the top as far as I'm concerned.

The situation should be as far as going forward should be if we today decide in certain way and we have a shortfall I think a working group should be put together from the body of the meeting here, there's some very intelligent people here in this room who understand numbers and budgeting and how things should work and sit down with some of the executives and go through this, and not have something imposed on us, in November, depending on the outcome of today saying you did this members, you did this, therefore you only got this, here is how you're going to have to spend it. If that's the case let us how to spend it. This disingenuous exercise has got to stop. I finish, I know 110%

this is not the fault of the CEO or the Finance Director. I fully accept that. This has been imposed on us from national Government. And it based on a premise of a lie where we were told to bring in a property tax and it was going to do the devil and all and put in all kinds of developments in our areas, and all that happened was the tax was taken away then from the local government fund and property tax collected was put in. But the thing that strangling us, is the baseline.

And I don't accept at all that trying to argue with the department about the baseline is anything about negotiation. I don't think they want to negotiate.

But I think you got to stand up and be counted here today. So, I will be looking for a 15% decrease.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Tom Fortune.

CLLR MITCHELL: Thank you Cathaoirleach. Yeah, I want to say I support the principle of property tax to fund local services, this is a tax on people to fund the services for the areas which those houses are in.

And I think it is a reasonable, Ireland's property

tax is relatively low compared to countries on either side of it, the US and the UK and I think most European countries. However, as people have mentioned, it is ridiculous that houses built since 2013 don't have to pay any.

And the baseline also seems to freeze the expenditure at some figure to do with the subsidy which was paid out in about the year 2000. And that, penalises counties such as Wicklow which are growing at a fast rate and also particularly penalises areas which are growing within those counties.

Because the money is not being collected and not being paid and we badly need that and the baseline both sorted out.

As quickly as possible by national Government. I don't agree with the management's proposal to have the 10% over the baseline, which was there last year.

And the reason I don't agree with that is the money is not being allocated fairly in my view. The people of Greystones are paying the most property tax, basically paying Dublin levels of property tax here and yet the services we're getting are nowhere

near that. Every other area has three times as many staff. And an awful lot of the stuff is spent in other areas.

And people are fed up here, and the pace of development in Greystones is huge and people are concerned about that, about the various things, stress that puts on it and the stress on the staff and the council who are having to deal with all sorts of three to five special An Bord Pleanála hearings and HSDs and various matters with roads joining this and footpaths to various estates which are all new. And which don't seem to have funded the footpath to the town to the estate so it is not good enough the money is being raised here mostly, the biggest amount, and it is not being spent here and for that I'm not prepared to go with what the management was wanting.

And the management had a number of years to try and deal with this and has not done so and spun yarns as to why this is the case, saying that it is swings and round bees which is isn't, because I checked it every year for the past five years and telling us it was to do the number of council-owned properties which when you struck out the council

house maintenance is shown to be a false explanation.

So, I'm not prepared to go with that thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Derek Mitchell.

CLLR FLYNN KENNEDY: Thank you Cathaoirleach and thank you for giving people the opportunity to speak because I think it is a really important issue.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the officials. I've worked in a number of local authorities, and I know how challenging it is to be able to put forward a budget like this. And I understand fully the impact of a decision not to keep the property tax at the 2020 rate will have on the officials.

For me, I represent people in the Bray, Enniskerry and Kilmac area and although 60% of properties are below 200,000, you wouldn't buy a property in those areas at that rate.

So, the figures that were outlined earlier on which explain the increase and what that increase equated to are not reflective of the people that I represent.

I agree Cllr Gerry Walsh I don't feel we have seen the full impact of the pandemic. I've spent the last number of weeks speaking to people in the town and villages that I represent and when running for election, I committed to being their voice. And they are really struggling. They are really, really struggling.

People are out of work. They have additional expenses, and mental health is a huge issue for people. I don't accept that the property tax should be reduced by 15% either, the system is flawed, and we all are aware of that.

But the impact of a reduction of 15% from the baseline on the services and the people in our communities would be really, really severe.

And the chances are that it would impact those that are most vulnerable. And we will have a decision to make here in November, regardless of the outcome on potential cuts to services and I think we need to be responsible and consider the impact of cuts like that.

But like some of my colleagues here with the pandemic that we faced I think there is a real feel from the communities that we need to return to

basics.

And we need to look at the basic services that are provided and for the next year focus on them.

And with that in mind I won't be supporting any increase in the Local Property Tax.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

CLLR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks a million.

It feels at this stage like the Local Property Tax is almost like flogging a dead horse, you know that I imagine if a minister came in today Cathaoirleach with and pitched this tax as is to this group of people, I don't think there would be any appetite for it, genuinely because it doesn't serve the whole county equally. I think the way today can Payout is possibly only two ways is that, we can stand by the people of Wicklow and again, when we say the people, it is some of the people, some of the people have to cough up for the LPT and others don't. But we're targeting them like it or not. If they were to say why me and then the 5,000 that don't have to pay, they're happy enough to be under

the radar, that's not fair.

And for us to increase the LPT we're kind of doubling down on people who are suffering, people who are struggling and who are being impacted by Covid-19. And I don't know how we can stand over something like that. Especially with such a flawed model, which has been said by colleagues already.

And it is almost like we're going this year to kind of squeeze the last bit of blood out of that dead horse. And it is hard to justify that. I think you know, what the ultimate insult would be is to say that we know better than the people of Wicklow. We asked them for their views, and it is pretty conclusive for me in the recommendations from submissions there's 67% of people asked for a reduction, 31% for no change and 2% for increase. So surely with the greatest respect, we can't serve the 2%. And stand over that.

So, you know, I know that people made decisions last year, and are coming back this year, kind of reluctant to support an increase because of how it was articulated last year. And I've no doubt that again in this council, we have 18 councillors who

are in Government parties, we've three TDs and one senator in Government parties and I don't imagine they will be bystanders to the struggles ahead in terms of how Wicklow will manage the Covid-19 impact. But I certainly can't, stand over increase and in fact I'd be looking for a decrease to show that we stand with the people who have been targeted by this tax. And send a signal to them and at the same time send a signal to dot Government that we won't be passive about the impact on Wicklow for this tax. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Shay Cullen.

CLLR CULLEN: Thanks. I suppose like other members here I suppose every year we seem to find ourselves having to vote on a the property tax and I suppose the word that seems to be spoken a lot is "flawed" obviously the system is flawed there's no doubt with that. There are over 4,000 houses as has been said earlier that don't pay property tax that have been built since 2013.

But unfortunately, the rest of us are expected to pay for those people who don't, who are not in the

net.

I suppose, it goes without saying it is a totally unfair tax, but the problem is that we can't change that.

And unfortunately, the people who can change it are not choosing to change it and are taking the easy way out. I would say you know; the department and the Government are lacking leadership on this issue because if there was leadership it would be solved, and we wouldn't be in this position.

I have to mention the equalisation fund, almost 3.5 million leaving this county to go to other counties to make up their shortfall that's totally, totally unfair in any walk of life.

But on the other side, there is a onus on us as members of Wicklow County Council to ensure that we have a budget that is not going to be cutting services, that it, can continue to provide facilities to the people of Wicklow, that can continues to put forward project all across our county that can have the match funding to make sure these projects are completed.

I think the discretionary fund has been a massive success all across the county. It's been an

invaluable source of revenue to get projects done, royalty across the county and that's efficient no matter where you go from the smallest village in Wicklow to the biggest towns, we are seeing a difference. And my concern is that we may lose that, we may lose the credibility, we may lose our impetus in making sure these projects continue to happen. So, for that reason, I mean, I think we need to look at maximising our LPT for 2021.

Obviously, I'm reluctant to increase but, I think we have to seriously look at trying to retain as much as possible.

For 2021, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR KAVANAGH: Thanks Chair.

Just a couple of things - we're all probably going to say similar kind of things so, basically my take on it is that it is an inequitable tax people who own a house pay for services that are enjoyed for everybody, how is that fair?

We give away 20% of what is collected, how is that fair?

It takes no account of people's ability to pay. Whether you can pay or not, you have to, there are no exemptions for this charge, there's a deferral but in order to qualify for deferral you have to really be earning a very low income, such as 15,000 for single person and 25,000 for a couple. These people are barely keeping their heads above water and yet they're expect to pay a property tax if they own a property, so how is that fair?

Where income tax is concerned, we have a tax credit system designed to be fair, which takes account of a person's ability to pay. This tax doesn't. There's a 4% interest charge per annum on anybody who can't afford to pay and who qualifies for a deferral. So, they end up paying more at the end of the day.

How is that fair? The Local Property Tax was designed and introduced to fund services, it was never designed to go towards propping up pay, salaries, pensions, and gratuity duties of staff. That is the role of central Government. That's what people pay their taxes for.

And I think that it is unfair that that is the position that councils find themselves in, having

to fund so much of their own expenditure, but that's because central Government is being let off the hook.

I was recently speaking to somebody who told me that they are quite close to the Children's Hospital Project and they mentioned to me that the cost of that particular project will never be known.

So, there is money being squandered left right and centre in this country.

And yet councils can't even afford to pay their staff.

unless they get funding from other sources.

We have no area of the impact Covid-19 will have on ordinary families, there's been jobs lost, there have been people living on pandemic unemployment payments, there have been employers who can't afford to top-up wages under the wage subsidy schemes, so there are people whose incomes have absolutely nose-dived this year.

As Cllr Paul O'Brien referred to the public consultation showed quite clearly that nobody was in favour of Ian Capon crease. A very small percentage, 2% and finally I want to say that last year, I take note of the budget a lot because I work

in the area of payroll and tax and I noticed that there was no increase given to the old age pensioners in last year's budget. Normally they get a derisory figure of around a fiver a week, that didn't happen last year, yet fuel went up and Local Property Tax in this area went up. So that was a double whammy for those people.

And I think that it's time that we looked at working for the people that represented us and did what we can in terms of reducing the tax thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR O'BRIEN: Thank you Cathaoirleach. I want to incur with what everything has been said in terms of equalisation fund and Government's inaction on this topic, but Cathaoirleach, as I look around this hall, I can honestly say I treated every councillor with represent they deserve. I don't look at party or non-party I see colleagues. However, it is clear to me by now that some of our colleagues don't feel or act in the same manner as I do. I was not here for the vote last year, but I did come out in favour of the decision that was made by my fellow councillors. What I was not

prepared for was the onslaught of abuse that was engineered by some of my colleagues here, and some elective representatives from a higher house. One TD went and put our names on social media that voted in favour of this. Colleagues the politics of negativity and division are alive and well but I remind those that engage in this type of politics that you will never awe island if you divide the people, we now need to break our word to the people or place the council in a difficult position when it comes to the budget. The majority of councillors last year took the difficult decision and increased the LPT for one year.

For what never ceases to amaze me, is that how come councillors speak out of both sides of their mouth at the same time. We know that there are those who just want to make the headlines and fair play to them and play to the gallery, it is a win/win for them. And why?

Because difficult questions are never asked of them. So I say to our friends in the media, don't go for the easy or the populous headline, look beyond the blister and empty rhetoric and ask those who are against everything, where they will make

the cuts or where they will find the money. Saying we should abolish the LPT and replace it with progressive tax system is simply not credible. The money has to be found to provide the services to the people they richly deserve. It is all time some colleagues started to be honest with the people of Wicklow. Last year when we raise the LPT by 10% Dublin City Council decreased their by 15% so when councillors were vilified for taking the difficult decision, some councillors were lauded as heroes, but what happened next?

It took two attempts for Dublin City Council to pass their budget and while billionaires like Dermot Desmond got a reduction of 1,100 in LPT the shopkeeper saw the increase and ordinary people of Dublin saw parking charges and toll fees increased and then what happened. The Dublin City Council letters were vilified, to me there are some people person perpetrating a fraud on the people of Wicklow by saying the LPT is unfair, we all know it is unfair, but stop playing to the gallery and using the LPT to enhance your own political career. They were telling the people that they should not have to pay this tax while at the same time they

were the very people up looking first in line for the discretionary fund. They did not tell the people that 1.8 million of the LPT went on housing, and yet they loved to see themselves plastered all over social media, claiming credit for people to forever homes, the fact is those kind can afford to pay for mansions can afford to pay LPT every lengths leaning party backs this idea, those who have more should pay for. Cathairleach, I have sympathy for the council officials trying to draft a budget this year but the reality is we made a deal with the people of Wicklow that it was for one year and one year only and I find it very hard to go back on that deal.

I say this, honestly and openly and not to cause any rows. But I also say to the Government, do your job and do it right and stop passing the buck on to us.

Finally I would urge the council officials not to take the easy decision and punish those councillors that stood by you last year and scrapped the distortionary fund, we kept our word, and all we ask is for you to keep your

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR BLAKE: Thanks.

And thanks for the presentation. I never met anybody yet that didn't want to reduce the taxes whether it is income tax property tax, car tax, I never met anybody yet. No doubt about it, last year was a once-off promise of a 10% increase, unfortunately, circumstances have changed and changed dramatically. One of the big things in terms of the people out there who are not paying the property tax on houses since 2013, you must remember the argument of that particular point in time was the fact they had paid substantial development levies but however the issue should be resolved in the period since 2013.

In regards to the projects that we see there in front of us, particularly on page 6, in terms of expenditure, the you are began developments, of 4 million and regional 1 million, in areas of small spending as well which I'm concerned about, I'm concerned about the CCTV in the Blessington, of 150,000, concerns about the Blessington Greenway of half a million and impact will be in regards to all those.

I see in fact in the urban areas Arklow is almost

three quarters of the way, 750 million, Wicklow, 1.5 million and Bray 1 million I'm wondering what the implications for all those expenditures will be for the coming year in that regard.

I certainly, from my point of view, would see the monies as being spent and spent well in terms of the community grants in terms of what we have in discretionary spending as well has meant a lot particularly in rural towns and villages throughout west Wicklow and I want to continue to see that Wicklow County Council being seen to do the things we promised people in that regard.

It is difficult and undoubtedly on people to increase taxes of any description but certainly to talk about reduction in it, as I said at the outset, very populist and I never met anybody who didn't see a reduction of taxes in any description but nevertheless we have a responsibility to provide the services for the people that we actually represent in this council. Thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. As there's no more hands up, at this stage.

CLLR BEHAN: Thank you Cathaoirleach.

First of all can I say I regret the fact last year

I wasn't able to attend the meeting because of a family bereavement, and obviously then, you know, I didn't get an opportunity for that reason to comment on that occasion.

But what I admire today is that a number of members from Government parties have indicated they're not willing to go with the council officials recommendation on this occasion.

And to me that's a very welcome development.

That finally members of this council are beginning to realise that we do have the powers to make these decisions and we can make our, should be making our own decisions.

I understand that the Chief Executive and a number of senior officials were hitting the phones fairly heavily in the last few days, I'd like the Chief Executive to explain what that was all about, was it an attempt to some way put pressure on individual councillors to go along with what he wanted?

Because I think that would be absolutely wrong if that's what he was trying to do. But I would ask that he explain what was the purpose of those phone calls?

Because at the end of the day, colleagues, it is

our decision to make. And I have salt through so many estimate meetings over many years where we're always presented with the doomsday scenario, that if we don't increase what was once and upon a time was water rates, if we don't increase service charges, or commercial rates, now if we don't increase the property tax the whole place is going to collapse around us.

Yet every year, we seem to manage.

And on occasions such as last year we had farcical situation that money that we were told on the morning of the estimates wasn't going to come to us by that afternoon, it actually did.

So, I would certainly welcome the fact that there are a number of members now who are beginning to question the line we're getting from the top table. Not only on finance, but on a lot of other issues as well so this could be a turning point on the life of this council. And I certainly welcome it.

I would also make the point that you know the Government that is now in office, comprises three parties, Fianna Fail, Fina Gael and the Green Party.

And a number of the members of Fianna Fail and Fina

Gael have expressed concerns about the inequality, inequity of the property tax and yet this Government is insisting that I think if one of the members point out, insisting on just letting this go forward for another year, without addressing the inequities and I think that's very disappointing. That having a new Government in place we had the opportunity see things change and that's not what is happening. The presentation last week opened a lot of people's eyes and particularly members of the public that no matter how much you increase this tax we don't do any better out of it anyway. The more money we take from the people the more we have to give to other parts of the country. So that's inequity why a capital I and for once we have an opportunity to say no, do what we can to halt this exorable rise in demands of people. The other point I'd make, and I appreciate you giving me the time because Covid-19 is on all our minds there's no doubt about that, and apart from the whole issue of whether people get Covid-19 or they don't get Covid-19 and so on there are long-term, looks like long-term medical impacts as well as long-term economic impacts. From this disease and

I'm thinking of people who have lost their jobs, gone on short time working, people who own small businesses who are absolutely in desperation because they don't know from week to week whether they still will have a business, a lot of the people pay their property tax as well. And I think, we should, this year, take the opportunity to reduce that burden even somewhat for them in this coming year and I have no doubt the officials will be all trying to find the money that we don't allocate here today. Cathaoirleach thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR O'NEILL: It is the issue probably of Covid-19 that is more in mind on the challenge to the people of Ireland and people of Wicklow. And I absolutely am serious here, I think we should grab the bull by the horns here. We should put the people of Wicklow first here. And you know, to listen to colleagues here today, talk about chastising us house we voted in the past and how we vote in the future. I like to point out that maybe we worked together, not only at council level but at Dail

level and to think that the 160 TDs in there, which are costing the state 250,000 a year, a wage of one and expenses the waste of money we have in the country, the huge waste we have at local level I believe here. I believe we can make huge changes, if we lead the way here and I'd like to see you, not even striking a rate today, there is a signal to the people that we are with us, we're not with the powers that be, and whatever, and you know, issues like I heard CEO mention the swimming pool in Blessington might be at the bottom of the list if this - I mean, I don't accept that at all. We have politics and playing politics, we have it from Simon Harris here that we have a swimming pool in Blessington by the end of this year, and I take really seriously, what we should do here today is maybe send a signal out there we're a caring county council that we want - I know the issue of discretionary funding, people still throw that out and you have to be pop already if you mention anything else. I think we're heading into the unknown here.

And I think that to ask the ordinary people of Wicklow and Ireland to dig deeper into their

pocket, while as I say you look at Dáil Eireann with 160 TDs, very well paid people with advisers to beat the band, huge amount of money, there's hundreds of councils in the world, dozens of countries in the world who have taken reductions in salaries, in Government salaries, public representative salaries. I'm talking about, you know, we're talking about County Council at a level and poor money we're on, 17,500 a year, you know I can understand where the likes we would be looking for that extra few pound but at the same time, maybe it would be a good idea that with our SPCs at the moment which are costing maybe over 350,000 a term, that they will be abolished for the next five years, that's a way of saving some money. They're not that effective at the moment and that's a way of saving it.

so that's why, I urge you before we cast a vote and play politics, and before we slag off people, I think we should really think in deep, maybe this is a way of showing the people of Wicklow, that we're more caring than that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR GLENNON: Thank you Cathaoirleach.

I'm not going to say very much.

Just like to say that I think there's a lot of politics played with this and it is quite a serious issue. At the corporate policy group, I was the first one I think that asked Brian about the fact that we were going back on our word to the people last year that it was for one year and one year only. Having heard his explanation I have to say that he answered a lot of my concerns. That was it wasn't their fault that 3,500 houses were brought in, that was a commitment that was given at that time and I accept the views he expressed and backed up by the Chief Executive on that occasion.

Cllr Derek Mitchell mentions about Greystones, I'd have to say for most people from west Wicklow driving through Greystones it is like driving through a town where the streets are dripping in gold, visa see the towns out our side of the county where there's destitute and no money spent on them. Cllr Paul O'Brien, constantly, Dermot O'Brien spoke about the increase in LPT my understanding is that the director of finance was looking to keep

it at the 2020 figure, not the looking for an increase in that. Cllr Tom Fortune looked for 15% decrease, but I don't know whether it is on last year's figure or on the baseline, I don't know whether he clarified it or maybe I missed it. Cllr Vincent Blake mentions how well the discretionary funds are spent in rural Wicklow. Which is otherwise left behind and that discretionary funds are an important part of the infrastructure going into that part of the county and poorer parts of the county.

And I think Cllr Joe Behan is somewhat patronising when he suggests people in parties are not independent-minded and capable of thinking from themselves, I am certainly capable of thinking for myself and I don't need him as former party men to come along to speak to me as condescending tone as that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR MIRIAM MURPHY: Hello. I've lots of things that probably won't get it in the right way that it will come out because I sit here today very emotional. I'm sure everybody knows from last year maybe not

the new people that I was personally bullied, verbally, online, and it wasn't nice.

I had it for a whole month, probably two months and to the stage that I actually was at the point of going to resign.

I felt that I left my people down which I was told face-to-face. But that people that I respected actually people that surprised me, that stopped me I was surprised how they felt about me voting for the tax. And yes, we were promised for a one year only. I would not like to go through that again. For nobody. For nobody should have to go through what I went through last year.

And I am getting emotional and I have to say, only for the colleagues that sit in this room and outside it I would not be here today.

And the points are very valid what is being said, yes, we want our community work, yes we want the grants, yes we want the UCD funding, yes we want the best for everybody, but at what cost is this tell me what cost?

I appreciate Brian ringing me last Friday week, unfortunately I wasn't able to stay long on to talk to Brian, Brian I apologise for not getting back

to you. Apologies, Frank rang me, I didn't return his call that's the only call I get from the executive, that's fine, I'll swim my own sea but, again, the chair rang me at 10pm, and this morning. And I'm still sitting here sick with of what I'm going to decide.

Am I deciding for to be blackened when it comes to budget for things, I'm passionate about, about disability, mental health issues, about housing, getting the people that trust me to come to lobby on their behalf?

Will I be probably not ignored intentionally but because I didn't vote for the way we were asked to vote will I be left aside?

I don't want to be a sideline. I'm a player.

But not under this pressure. So, I would just like to say, please this is a hard day, it is a hard day to be here. And it is not nice.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks. Cllr Peir Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: Thanks. I think Miriam's relayed everybody's relayed a lot of stuff. I'd like to

think I'm progressive and balanced, I'd like to think I can see from a young age I've been able to see, under people's different reasons and I can see the perspective of the Wicklow County Council and what they're trying to achieve. I see the perspective of the people I represent and their reality on the ground. I live in Arklow, Arklow has suffered a lot throughout the years, from lack of investment and for different reasons, it need investment, and I realise a lot of people are struggling with paying on a day to day basis, on a week to week basis, €20 may not be a lot when playing with monopoly money, looking at accounts in the Wicklow County Council over the last year, there's some days I've been completely shocked at the money that is available and the lack of the best value that is got for that money and how it is spent. I'd like to meet halfway, and I'd like to not increase the tax on local people nor would I do I want to decrease it on Wicklow County Council. I trust the Chief Executive and Brian, I would like to see more effort put into coming up with more creative ways to create revenue for Wicklow County Council, within our communities.

I suppose, the LPT is a double tax. Going back into when I was growing up everybody paid out of their income tax and the tax, they pay on products for the services they get. But throughout the last few years I've seen the Tidy Towns picking up the pieces of the resources that aren't there, residents associations having to pay to cut their own grass, and these are the things that I hear on the ground I suppose in my municipal and what people, their main concerns. I've seen projects and areas that are neglected that could easily be solved and for the people and amenities and stuff like that. So I suppose, I could go on and on but I just want to meet half way and say look let's not increase it, we've got Covid-19, on our doorstep, we also need things to look forward, project to create jobs for people, we have the harbour RDF funding for Arklow and I don't want to be seen as being promoting nimbyism but Arklow does need investment, we don't have a TD, we're not on the doorstep of Dublin. So, we need to strike a balance and keeping the baseline and LPT but also ensuring that every Penny LPT and councillors have a say and doesn't prop up what is national Government.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

Cllr Avril Cronin.

CLLR CRONIN: Thanks very much Chair and thank you very much Frank and Brian for all your efforts and the presentation that you have given. I understand the struggles that you face in the coming year are going to be difficult and I appreciate all the efforts that you're making to date.

Last year when I came in as a councillor, the property tax was one of the first major things we had to vote on and I was told it was, if we increase it, it would be for one year and one year only and that was a commitment I gave, I was told it was the right thing to do for the people, I can't turn around to those people who put their trust in me and tell them sorry we have to increase it again this year.

They have put faith in me, and they have asked me to represent them and that's exactly what I'm going to do. I can't go back to west Wicklow and ask people to support increase in the property tax, we have grass growing in the mid-of our roads, I know

my colleagues on the east side of the county feel that they are underdevelopment but try and get out of west Wicklow to travel to Dublin, there's no bus, we have one route that doesn't travel through half of the villages, many of us don't have a bus service, we've no train, we've no motorway, we really have huge lack of services in west Wicklow. One thing that was mentioned today during the presentation was that the Covid-19, that the property tax isn't effected by Covid-19 and that was meant to be a good thing. But the families that pay the property tax are the ones that are affected by this. They're already struggling financially, and mentally and I'm not willing to add any extra pressures to people and for that reason, I will not be supporting an increase in the property tax.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks. Cllr Mags Crean.

CLLR CREAN: Thank you Cathaoirleach.

I won't labour points that have already been made and I think previous speaker made a very valid point I was going to make the same point LPT not impact by Covid-19 whereas it is for the people paying it.

And for me, just to put an added point rather than repeating what I have here that's been said, I think it is important not to separate what we're doing here today locally and local politics level from national Government. Because for me, this response is about how, going forward we are responding to the second economic crisis to hit our country. Because pandemic, the previous crisis burden was put on ordinary households and vulnerable group, they carry that burden and from 2009 onwards punished the most vulnerable in our communities. If we set a precedent here today by increasing the LPT, we basically saying at local level yes people are struggling locally but we're going to add a little bit more to that struggle because like last crisis, ordinary people will carry that burden so I don't think it is good enough there's no commitment for reimbursement for the Covid-19 expense.

That we're facing now and, in the future, because it is so uncertain.

And I think this whole process is flawed, the fact we come here yearly and for me as new councillor this is what people feels so cynical of local

politics you come and presented with one set of facts, one set of figures if there's no other alternative, if we don't vote for the increase these are the cuts and has been said by other councillors it is hard to vote against increase when then you're targeted at someone who is willing to allow our community suffer and that's the complete opposite. But there's a serious underfunding of local government and it was reassuring the other input because I'm hoping the Government parties represented here today their members can bring the strong message back that we at local and council level can't keep propping up a completely grossly underfunded local government system.

And then, a third point I know one of the councillors commented on the paths here paved of gold, a lot of the work done locally, even though we have great staff, we have a tiny number of outdoor staff, value tears keep this town looking so good in-in-addition to council staff and we certainly don't get, as Cllr Derek Mitchell said the value for the increase in property tax last year.

And finally, then, I suppose it is the overall point is tax is unfair we can't use this to penalise people when it is grossly unfairly designed. And on a very final point because it does concern me, I've a man date here, I walked the length and breadth of this district to get elected but I find it alarming that other councillors received phone calls for the Chief Executive and head of finance, I received no phone calls so I would have a question as to why, I'm here on equal merit to every other councillor, was there a reason I wasn't phoned or what do I take that as

CLLR SNELL: I find it disheartening listening to some of the speeches today. It is very tough, irrespective of what way members vote. You know, some members are coming in here and they have no choice, their party will dictate to them what they'll have to do. Irrespective what the people told them on the doorsteps, no matter what their gut feeling is or whatever is in their heart they're told what to do.

Is and it is an very unfortunate situation. And I think no public representative should be criticised. For what way they vote.

No public representative should have to go through what Cllr Miriam Murphy outlined there earlier.

In regard to last year.

And I think there has to be common courtesy here, within the democratically elected 32 councillors, will has to be a mutual respect whether you're from a party or non-party we all understand how it works, and we should give that common respect to each other and that goes hand-in-hand with the officials.

And irrespective of what officials made or whether they made contact with members, it is irrelevant, it is their job, they're doing their job and I wouldn't criticise anybody for doing their job.

Cathaoirleach, I would never criticise the Wicklow County Council for doing their job.

Everyone has a role and we all know how to plays out. And the bigger picture here is that central Government is drip-feeding local government.

They're drip-feeding us down to a trickle of funding, which is not being raised at a national level which it should be. And it would be very easy to sit here and criticise five TDs and it would be very wrong. The reality is this is all over the country.

And it is not going to change. It is not going to change this year, it isn't change last year and when it comes down to a vote like this, I always try to listen to the people who I believe have a background, a knowledge professionalism in what is going on. And that's why, last year, we had two members of the Audit Committee who actually voted against that 10% increase. Two people who had an accountancy background, who felt that the money could be found without the 10% increase last year. It's not our role as individuals to decide that we're going to stop another public representative from having a say in discretionary spend or otherwise, we should never stoop to that type of politics.

We should never think we're bigger or better than anyone else.

We're all elected, we all knocked the doors, we all went out and got the vote. I would just, I would just issue caution to members to respect one another because you're getting into gutter politics, which is unnecessary, irrespective what votes what way today, there's no need for it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Anne Ferris.

CLLR FERRIS: Cathaoirleach, thanks very much for letting me in here. There's just a couple of things I want to say, and I don't want to repeat what everybody else has said. But, you know there's been a lot of discussion by phone and other ways about this meeting today and what's the right thing to do and I would like to thank Frank and Brian for contacting me, I believe they're only doing their job by doing that, and I would feel that if they're not doing it that they weren't doing their job. My issue is that I feel very let down by central Government. I think successive governments have taken the cowardly route out with regard to the LPT not to tackle inadequacies of it, and not to bring the 3 or 4,000 houses that have been built here in Wicklow into the net. This tax, obviously people who are quite wealthy can afford the tax, but it was outlined early yes, a lot of people living in large houses who have raised their families are now probably the most vulnerable trying to keep things going. We understand that people living in council housing don't have to pay so they don't have this extra worry. But, because of the Covid-19 situation, an awful lot of people

have lost their jobs, or still waiting for premises to reopen. If he this can reopen. There are a lot of mental issues, mental health issues out there. And I think it is very, very important for us to make the decision here today by looking into our own hearts. We did decide last year to raise the rate by but for one year only. We went out there and gave our word to the people. And I think that in my view I don't think we can break our word to the people. Now, the fact that through no fault of their own the officials are asking us to increase a rate, I think without being critical I think they're breaking their word to us. So, I want to say thank you to councillor Miriam to her contribution to the meeting I understand she had a terrible time last year and she did mention that she would hate to think that come the budget time and after the budget in the next year when she goes looking for something, that she would be blackened but I'd like to reassure her she won't be the only one because there's a number of us singing off the same hymn sheet. As the Cathaoirleach of the Bray Municipal District council this is a hard decision for me to pack because I know how important we need

the funding for our district.

So, I've never voted against a budget. I've never voted against Local Property Tax but unfortunately today I will be voting against it. I think that we have to and I know that the five TDs were invited here and that's deputy Matthews arrived and I know that deputy Whitmore had a valid reason why she couldn't be here because I know she would have been here, I think we need to be putting pressure on our own five TDs and senator to do something about this, because them year we're going to be sitting here and listening the Government will be saying no they put it back for another year.

And I really don't think that's acceptable.

I think that's all Cathaoirleach but as I say it is with regret, I have to take this decision. But I think really, it will be easier for the members of the Bray district council to explain to people why they perhaps won't be able to get the services for the next year they would like to see and we would all like to see rather than telling them that we broke our word to them and voted for another increase. Thank you Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Councillor.

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you Cathaoirleach. I'm kind of torn as I'm sat here and torn the last few weeks as I'm deciding how to vote today and as I listened to the argument there's one thing that's clear there's a lot of agreement in the room between councillors, party or non-party and officials and the LPT is not fit for purpose and I have sympathy with the officials, they're not in an easy position and I appreciate the time they've given during the week and today to talk with us and to put forward their argument.

Having said that there's an awful sense of Deja vu, last year at this meeting we were told we were in a unique set of circumstances and a perfect storm of events had required an increase.

Yet here we are again today having the same discussion and I have no doubt that unless this tax is reformed, we will have the exact same discussion next September. I won't repeat the points that have been made about how much reform of the LPT is needed. We're again all in agreement on that. I do refer to particular Cllr Patsy Glennon I love the comment about the streets of Greystones being

paved with gold and in fairness if you were to take a spin down the new harbour development you would be reasonable in thinking that. This is my big issues with the property tax we have new houses in my district a lot of new houses and developments since 2013, some of these properties on sale for up to a million euros and they're ex-settlement from the Local Property Tax it beggars belief. And I have to ask myself is it fair to ask the same certain number of property owners to continuously shoulder this burden and thoroughly, it is not fair.

And to be honest with you, I'm pretty disgusted by the fact that there is zero political appetite in central Government to bring these new properties in our tax net by now. It kicked down the road, year after year, and I want our newly elected TDs, its mentioned several times we have two ministers and senator and I want them to come and tell us when they're going to stand up and take action on this for Wicklow? It is not enough to turn up to meetings, it is not enough to say whatever on social media, come and tell us, tell the other elected representatives here, come and tell the people that

elected you when we're going to take action on this. So, I'm torn. Of course like everyone else I want my community groups to get funding, on the other hand I've had people contacting me during the pandemic lilt rally at the end of their tether, struggling financially and mentally, and it is by no means over. So, where do we go?

For me, taking all of this into account I have to come back to core values and the fact that I represent my community and I listen to our community. And last year, as a newly elected politician I gave my word to the community that our raise was for one year only. And I believe in keeping my word to the people I represent. So, in a sense although I have been torn, my decision is clear-cut and because of my word I gave last year I can't support a rise this year. On a separate note I just want to commend Cllr Miriam Murphy for her very honest speech she gave today, and I'm appalled to hear of what she went through last year. I have no idea and I want to say to her or anybody regardless of party or non-party to reach out for support in your fellow councillors, if needed that there's absolutely no cause for that to happen and

I will always be there to support anyone that is subject to bullying. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Sylvester Bourke.

CLLR BOURKE: Thank you Cathaoirleach. I have to agree with some of the things that Cllr John Snell mentioned there how disgraceful it is that there is a drip-feed of funding from central Government. And I do agree with many of the statements from others as well about how scandalous it is the way we're treated. On the one hand drip-feed in terms of finance, and other hand the digitalised stimulus money, threw money at it for projects that we wouldn't have dreamt it out of discretionary funding, footpaths all over the place for example. Which may or may not be absolutely necessary. But I disagree with Cllr John Snell's assertion that as a member of a party I'm told what to do. Nobody from the party has told me what to do. I have a mind of my own and make up my own mind and that's outrageous statement to make.

I before this meeting I was considering that we should like many other speakers have said we should

keep this at zero rate that we promised to everybody last year. And that was my line but having met with Brian and manager last week, they did indicate that councils who decreased or failed to increase the property tax and decreased them last year, were penalised by central Government when it came to sum member of parliamentary funding during the year. And on that basis if we are going to qualify for supplementary funding for project throughout, at certain times during the coming year, I would hate to think that by not passing on the small increase that we're going to fail ourselves and we'll be penalised and we'll not get extra funding.

Perhaps, Brian might like to clarify that point but that's a big point for me, in swinging my decision to supporting a small increase this year.

And on that basis only would I be prepared to do it. And I am a taxpayer, I'm paying property tax and also income taxpayer and I do believe that broadening the tax base is important and keeping in the tax base as broad as possible is important because otherwise my income tax is going to rise. The money has to come from somewhere, it doesn't grow on trees, there's a certain amount of a pot

nationally that has to be deified out and the raising of the money is important. Just more important than spending of it, but, if my property tax goes down, probably my income tax is going to go up, I'm going to get caught one way or the other. So, I believe that we should all pay our fair share in what we can afford to do.

CLLR WINTERS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to thank Brian and Frank for their presentation, and I do understand the need to provide services within the county. But I also feel that when we gave the undertaking last year to provide the match funding and increase the property tax that we did so on the understanding it was a one-year only. I think it is wrong that there's still 4,000 plus houses in the county that don't pay property tax and in order to provide services for a growing population we would be expected to charge additional money to the people who do pay property tax to subsidise the people who are outside of the net due to a lack of responsibility I suppose on behalf of the Government since 2013.

I did give a commitment last year to my constituents

that I would do this for one year, and one year only and that's the way I'll be voting today. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

Brian I'll bring you back in if there's some of the questions you would like to take. Thank you.

BRIAN: Thanks Cathaoirleach, this was general statements rather than specific questions and Cllr Sylvester Bourke specifically asked me to go through the issue of whether we will be penalised and I know a few other councillors questioned the suggestion that by not maintaining the Local Property Tax at our existing rate that it wouldn't undermine our argument on the baseline. Well I suppose the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It was already mentioned earlier about the situation that arose last year with Dublin City Council, who refused to approve their budget on the basis that there was a funding gap of I think it was up to 8 million as a result of Irish Water being rated and loss of compensation funding from the department.

They met with the minister, and were told to go back approve their budget because they were getting no more money and the reason for that was because they made the decision to reduce Local Property Tax by 15%. And the argument was that they controlled their own funding, whether that's right or wrong that's the way the system is.

And what they had to do is go back and increase parking charges, across the city, increase toll charges and so forth.

In contrast, Wicklow County Council and Waterford council also applied for additional funding for this very same reason and we both got funding, we were the two local authorities in this particular situation that got funding in that regard.

And the reason was and it was clearly stated it was at the time that we increased our Local Property Tax by 10%, that we recognised the I suppose the funding issues that we had and we did something ourselves to improve on that.

So, that's one example, one specific example, whereby a county council was punished in relation to the LPT decision because just being straightforward about it, it is very hard if you

reduce your income by 1.7 million due to a decision to go cap in hand looking for additional money from Government.

And I don't think anyone can dispute that. We can get in the nuances and grey areas about baselines and self-funding options but the bottom line is and with a deeper level they'll see Wicklow County Council voted to remove 1.7 million out of their budget, reduce their income and now they're moaning and groaning looking for more money from us.

Now people can disagree with me on that, that's the way it is.

Just a few other points - it is also, and number of general points made by council councillors by unfairness of system, not fit for purpose, LPT whether it is or isn't that's the system we have. There are amendments brought in, hopefully next year, as we say bringing in the new bills, revaluations, but that's the system we have. To say it shouldn't be in place we don't recognise it, or we should be funded by central Government, to be honest, it's just head in the sand stuff. If it were abolished in the morning, it would be replaced by another funding scheme.

And another taxation, Cllr Sylvester Bourke made references to that. Another couple of things - there was a proposal put forward by a few people mentioning a 15% increase or decrease, I'm assuming that's from the baseline. That would mean we would have to reduce budget by 4.3 million just to people are aware of that, that's the implications.

4.3 million out of our budget.

So that would be an interesting budget meeting in November. Now trying to find 3.4 million.

And like that, Cllr Joe Behan made the point about being entitled to make decisions and councillors you are entitle today make decisions it is a democratic right here. But, every councillor here must own that decision and come November time when there are budget cuts to be made and the budget has to be balanced, which is a statutory requirement, the decisions here today have to be owned so when the requirement is to vote in the budget in November with these budget cuts, people have to take responsibility for that.

The I suppose just one thing everyone keeps mentioning about increasing and impact on people

if I suppose if an alien walked in the door, they would think that we're actually going to cause people to pay more money next year.

I think it is just important to get it, make that statement, we are not looking for people in Wicklow to make one cent extra, in 2021, all we're doing is asking to maintain the Local Property Tax rate at the existing level.

So, there will not be one cent extra paid by the householder in 2021 and protects the funding, that was ring-fenced last year the 1.7 million for discretionary funding for match funding and projects. Which are crucial I suppose for the development of our local areas.

It was also mentioned about, last year, it was a one-year only, due to unique set of circumstances, broken promises the transport states it was an option of a one-year decision.

On the expectation that additional money would be forthcoming following the implementation of the LPT review recommendations.

So that is what the actual transcript states, unfortunately as we know, that legislation wasn't brought forward for all various reasons, we're very

well aware of, and hopefully that will change over the next while. What is apart from that it was a unique set of circumstances last year; we couldn't raise our commercial rates.

Due to the rates revaluation process, this year we can.

So that is an option from a member now in November, if they want to fill that funding gap, they can increase commercial rates. In the current environment, that will be very difficult but that is an option.

And I think that's probably most of the issues that were raised Cathaoirleach. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Brian. At this stage I'm going to ask the Chief Executive if he can come back in.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Just remember, as Brian said there, one year would be fine if the LPT legislation had changed, if equalisation, baseline, inclusion of new towns et cetera but that didn't happen. And this is why we had zoom meetings during the week and conversations with councillors it is important to understand that that didn't happen so there's no change there. We also have Covid-19. So,

we've a big hit now in rates write-off Covid-19 direct expenditure, public lighting, pay mention pensions all outside of our control that is on top of despite the usual constraints we have, so it is important to remember that. And, we want you know, we have an opportunity here to get funding to ring-fence it without anybody in the county without anybody in the county paying anything extra, we have ring-fenced for a range of projects, increase for discretionary spend which has been useful for climate action and for the community grant scheme. So, I think that's what people need to understand, we have an opportunity now to ring-fence that money despite the hits we got and the legislation not changing. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I know Cllr Tom Fortune has indicated he wants to come back in, so I'll let him back in.

CLLR FORTUNE: I won't be long. I just want to take Brian up on a one or two things he said. I don't think it is fair and right to say that there's no point moaning and groaning. I don't think there's nobody in this room moaning and groaning, we're here to represent the people who

elected us. I mean, I pay my property tax because I get charged it every year but there's loads and loads of people in my area who cannot afford to pay property tax and increases, and I think making a comment, no point moaning and groaning, it is like the recent trampoline remark at national level. You're saying we will have an interest meeting in November, if we increase, decreased it by 15%, but Brian what I say to you is, we're not children. We're all grown adult here. And you know, we live in changed times and there's going to be changes as we go forward so we can't be doing meetings like we always did it. So perhaps the meeting on the 19th of November is whatever we have, whatever the figure is, if it is 10 million, 11 million, 13 million whatever the figure is, let us get involved in it and decide how it will be spent rather than being dictated to how it will be spent and stick waved at us and threats made that Mrs Commissioners coming in and all that rubbish. We got to stop all that carry on and treat us with respect. There is a, I've said this at two previous council meetings, in my opinion, I don't know whether I have support or not, but in my opinion, the respect for public

representatives is at an all-time low as regard councillors and from my perspective it has to stop. It is just ridiculous. And making remarks to us as if we're children is not acceptable to me anyway.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you Cllr Tom Fortune.

CLLR FORTUNE: I hope I will be still treated equally and don't get mistreated because I speak out on certain things. And I'm not looking for the publicity of it, as one councillor remembered Ed referred to earlier.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Shay Cullen table 14.

CLLR CULLEN: Yeah Chairman I will be brief. I suppose, listening to the arguments my concern is we can't have this both ways. If we reduce our budget by 1.7 million, there is going to have to be cuts to services discretionary fund, projects match funding, whether is that going to come from as if there's an appropriate piety from people here to say yes, we're going to reduce our property tax

but there's consequences to this and my concerns around this is where are the cuts going to come from?

We have to be realistic about it. You know I don't like paying property tax no more than anybody and I would love to continue to reduce T but the fact is we have an obligation as county council letters to do what is right by the council and the residents of County Wicklow.

It is not to take the easy approach out of this, but I firmly want to know if we're going to cut by 1.7 million where is that money, where is the cuts going to come from, in terms of our budget in November?

I know it is possibly difficult for Brian to answer at the moment, but we all have to be realistic to that, that is what is going to happen, cuts to 1.7 million in the budget and that's not easy to do.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Sylvester Bourke, 13.

CLLR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach I forgot to ask Brian in relation to the July stimulus money which was

over 3.5 million, it was a nice windfall could some of that be used to displace next year's expenditure on certain project to help us balance books?

MR GLEESON: July stimulus package included capital works and have to be spent before a certain period before October and that was commercial rates levy also, that was a six-month waiver for commercial rates for this year only.

So, as far as I'm aware all the inclusions in stimulus package is for this year only so it wouldn't have any benefit for next year.

Obviously, we're still working with the department in relation to next year, as a sector to try and get as much support as we can, but we're still waiting on commitment in that regard. With regard to Cllr Shay Cullen's point about where the cuts are going to happen, I suppose that will be decided in November. However, if we just look at the fact that the 1.7 million did pay for a specific items of match funding half-a-million community grant scheme, millions of discretionary expenditure and climate action initiatives, they would be the obvious places to look.

If the members don't agree with those areas and we

should retain those areas, then we have to find 1.7 million somewhere else, whether it is housing repairs or local roads maintenance, that will be decided in November. Or it is a case of increasing our commercial rates, increase commercial rates by 5.5% that will cover the 1.7 million are councils willing to increase parking charges, introduce charging for recycling centres, we have a myriad of options, put forward. Ultimately it will be the councillors who decide.

We'll put forward suggestions if they're not happy with it, they can make changes themselves.

But we're few and far between areas of discretionary expenditure within our budget. A lot of our budget is paying pensions, probably 50%, at the will of the other expenditure and income is Contra, as we call it, because it is basically in and out.

We get grants for specific items and we have to spend it in specific items.

If we don't spend it, we don't get the money in so we can't cut those areas so, there's a very limit pot that we can tap into in order to fill the funding gap unfortunately. And I suppose, the

discretionary fund by its name and by its nature, it's future projects that we have to actually pick so it would be the obvious choice obviously the match funding, they're for future projects that we are to apply for that we haven't drawn down so there's no considerable actual commitment in place so that's why they're the obvious areas that will be vulnerable for reductions and cuts unfortunately and coming as a district manager of Municipal District that would sadden me because I see the benefit of RDF funding in Wicklow Town the library, Fitzwilliam Square and the benefit that will have to the town itself and there's a number of projects set up and funded through the discretionary expenditure that will be coming on stream before the end of the year as well. So, as I say from just the district manager, hat on my head I would be very disappointed having to cut that expenditure but as I say there aren't too many options available to us.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Paul O'Brien.

CLLR O'BRIEN: Yeah thank you. I'm not going to

apologise for what I had to say but I hope councillors didn't take offence what I had to say, it certainly wasn't personal. It is only how I feel, and I'm entitled to my opinion.

This has been a lively debate and it is very passionate and you can see the passion around the room here and I think we all have one common goal - that's what is in the best interests of the people of Wicklow. Before you conclude this meeting care lack can I remind councillors what Cllr Miriam Murphy, myself, Councillor Matthews and Whitmore and a lot more of us went through last year because of some councillors in this room and some TDs, all I'm asking for this year is a little billet of respect please, myself and Cllr John Mullen had a motion in for some months now in terms of social media how councillors' behaviour on social media, including their supporters. So, before we leave here today, I would like to ask I'm actually begging because some of my family members were attacked last year and I wasn't even here for the vote. So, I'm asking for a little bit of respect this year. I'm asking councillors to leave here and respect we have differences of

opinion. But don't run out of here this evening and go on social media and run down some of us for our beliefs we're entitled to them. So, I'll leave it at that thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: Thanks point of information, would it be correct in assuming that the Department of the Environment have indicated that we are one of the councils who have enough finances within our budget to reduce the property tax by 15% if we so decided? And secondly, are we within our rights if we do make a decision to reduce it by 15% which I certainly hope we will, are we within our right Cathaoirleach to set up a budget committee, not an Audit Committee, but budget committee where members of this council would be nominated to work through the proposed budget, line by line as has already been suggested and there are a number of highly competent members from all sides of the House, in this room today, who could assist in that process and help us to find the figures that we need to find when we come to make our decisions in November? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I suppose there's two questions there, maybe Brian you would take the first one in relation to the department.

MR GLEESON: I didn't follow the question for the department.

CLLR BEHAN: Every year the department produced a list of councils within their budgetary system they are entitled if they wish to reduce the property tax by up to the maximum of 15%.

And every year Wicklow has been on that list. Some councils aren't on the list.

Are we on that list this year?

MR GLEESON: Every council is entitled to reduce their property tax by 15%.

CLLR BEHAN: With respect, every year the department indicates a number of councils whose basic finances I can like who are not sufficient, to enable them to go for the maximum decrease I thought.

MR GLEESON: No. I'm not aware of any list.

OK. That you're speaking about,

CATHAOIRLEACH: Second point was, is it possible to put a group together to work with management I suppose to look at the budget when it comes, that

was your second point wasn't that right?

I didn't see any difficulty with a group coming together and with the director in relation to finance coming up to the budget. There would be no problem with that.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: CPG, obviously there's a lot of work in preparing the thing, we can have workshops with councillors and similarly the full budget meeting is the decision.

CLLR BEHAN: There was in the past, in local government legislation provision for a committee called estimates committee it is now called the budget. It used to be the estimates and members of the council were statutorily entitled to be part of the process of preparing the shipments now the budget. Is the Chief Executive saying that that is no longer legally permissible?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: No I'm not saying that, I'm saying the process we have used here for the last number of years is we prepare the budget, we can have a committee or group or working group or whatever to work through it. But ultimately comes back to the council here to make adopt the budget

in November.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK thank you. Cllr Erika Doyle.

CLLR ERIKA DOYLE: Thank you just one small point and it's too late for this year I think, but, I would like to suggest some kind of public information attempts by the council next year in advance of the vote, a lot of people are speaking here about representing their constituents, so, almost anybody I spoke to over the last few weeks I mentioned the Local Property Tax and very few people had any real idea as to what it is, what it is spent on, what the implications are for a reduction or increase and actually, quite a few of them when I explained the figures and the thinking behind it changed their approach to it. So I think to truly represent our constituency we need to empower them with a full knowledge of exactly what this is it is easy if you ask anybody to reduce a tax of course everybody is going to say yes, very few people are in a position of choosing to spend more. However, I think maybe we need to put more attempts into making sure that people are fully informed before giving their opinion to their local representative. That's all, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

Members, we started the meeting at 2.00. I have sat here in the chair, listening to all of the heartfelt contributions from the floor.

And I know each and every one of you spoke from the heart here today.

You would hear a pin drop, we will all remember back to June when we had our AGM it was noisy in here but today you could hear a pin drop so what I'm going to do, I'm going to take a fifteen minute break and we'll come back, it is now, just quarter past four so come back at half past four, and we'll take proposals from the floor. I just want to thank each and every for their contributions.

CATHAOIRLEACH OK members thank you.

We'll come back to our meeting. So, just before I kick-off I want to thank you everybody for taking part in this meeting today. I hope I've given everybody enough time to make their contributions, and as I said in the beginning, I want to thank everybody who spoke from the heart here today we all know where you're coming from. But so, I'm going to come now and look for proposals from the

floor and we'll take it from there. So, table number one.

CLLR FITZGERALD: It was interesting today to listen to you will a the contributions and I am fully aware of the difficulties that Wicklow County Council will experience in the next year but what I'm going to propose but that's it, so I'm proposing that we reduce the LPT basic rate by 10%. So, bringing it back to what we started, bring it back to the 100% it was last year. So, I'm asking the members to support that?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry Walsh.

CLLR WALSH: I want to come in with Cllr's proposal. Is the proposal we go back to base rate? Yeah.

CATHAOIRLEACH:

CLLR FITZGERALD: You're proposing that we go back to hold it at the base rate for the coming year is that right?

>>: Yeah.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Do I have a seconder for that? Cllr Shay Cullen. Just one second. So that proposal

is proposed by Cllr Pat Fitzgerald. Seconded by Cllr Shay Cullen,

>>: Just for the purpose of clarification, today we are voting on raising our lowering the base rate. We're not voting on raising or lowering the 2020 rate. We're back, every year we go back to the base rate, we either raise it lower or leave it to the same. Is Cllr Pat Fitzgerald proposing that we neither raise nor lower.

CLLR FITZGERALD: We're preparing to lower the base rate by 10%. The basic rate.

CATHAOIRLEACH: The director here for clarification.

MR GLEESON: What Cllr Pat Fitzgerald is references is he is reducing 10% from the level it is currently in 2020, which was 10% increase. My understanding is that the proposal now is to keep it at the basic rate for 2021.

Is that correct?

CLLR FITZGERALD: That's correct.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That's proposed a seconded. Cllr Shay Cullen I need to find, table 14.

CLLR CULLEN: Yeah, Chairman I would like to formally second Cllr Pat Fitzgerald' proposal to go back to the base rate, which is a reduction of 10% on the 2020 rate.

I suppose this reduction will benefit the householders of Wicklow up to about 60 Euro per annum depending on the price of your property. It is a difficult decision and I'm conscious that the council is losing out by about 1.7 million which will obviously have to be found to try and make sure that we have the services that are required into the future of 2021. But I think listening to all the arguments here and there was a lot of compelling arguments I think it is the right thing to do on this particular occasion.

CATHAOIRLEACH: So, we have a proposer and seconder, Cllr Tom Fortune.

CLLR FORTUNE: I would propose that we reduce it by a further 5%, on top of the ten, 15%.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK. I'm going to bring in, so do you have a seconder there for Cllr Tom Fortune.

Cllr Joe Behan seconds that. So, we have two proposals, two seconders, I'm going to bring in Lorraine.

MS GALLAGHER: To be clear the proposal has been proposed by Cllr Pat Fitzgerald and seconded by Cllr Shay Cullen, is in essence is that the council not vary the basic rate for 2021, that's in essence what you say which is represents reduction of 10% for the householder last year, so, what you're saying is that you're reducing, you can't reduce his 10%, by a further 5%, are you ...

CLLR FORTUNE: What I'm saying, reducing the last year's rate by 15%.

MS GALLAGHER: By 15%.

By 5% yeah, so base rate by 5% and that's seconded by Cllr Joe Behan.

Any other proposals?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Excuse me, Cllr Dermot O'Brien.

CLLR O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, I propose we reduce by 15%. Below the base rate.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK do you have a seconder for that?
Seconded by Cllr Grace McManus.

MS GALLAGHER: OK.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We have three proposals; Cllr Pat Fitzgerald's proposal was first so that's what I'm going to take first. Cllr John Snell.

CLLR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach it is not a proposal it is just to get clarification; we know the monetary loss of a reduction of 15%. From the budget, could I have clarification on a 5% reduction on the base rate?

MR GLEESON: Three proposals put forward the first one we're aware of is 1.7 loss, the second one which was 5% reduction from the base, that's a 2.6 million loss in total. And the last proposal put forward would result in a loss of income of 4.3 million. to the budget next year.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Does that answer your question Cllr John Snell. No problem. So, I'm going to go for a vote on Cllr Pat Fitzgerald's proposal.

MS GALLAGHER: Propose by Cllr Pat Fitzgerald and seconded by Cllr Shay Cullen.

(Votes counted)

So that's 24 for, 7 against and one abstaining.

Motion carried.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Motion carried.

MS GALLAGHER: Sorry one not present.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Joe Behan wants to come in there, table 15.

CLLR BEHAN: Could I just propose that we go ahead now with the setting up of a budget committee, of the members of this council to ascertain where the savings can be made and present a new budget for the members in November?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Joe Behan just as a point of clarification, we have one item on the agenda today which is the variation of the property tax and all I'm taking for this meeting, thank that's all I've been taking today and I have been fair to every member to say what they needed I'm only dealing what is on the agenda, that's what I'm doing. Cllr Tom Fortune you wanted to come in.

CLLR FORTUNE: A proposal on today's meeting

coming from Cllr Joe Behan which I'll second.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I'm not taking that today I'm dealing with the variation. I'm only dealing with the variation of what we were dealing with on the agenda. I'm sorry, I'm not taking that now at the moment.

CLLR FORTUNE: It is part of the meeting.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I'm not taking it now. Has anybody else got thinking to bring in with. With the vote taken, I now conclude the meeting so thank you very much for being here.

MS GALLAGHER: Just before you go, remind elected members we're not having a statutory October meeting we're going to meet the elected members of 32 with online platform and e-mail will circulate.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Thanks everybody.