

ORDINARY MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW
TOWN AND VIA TEAMS
ON
MONDAY, 4th MARCH 2024 AT 2:00 PM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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1 PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 4TH MARCH 2024 AT 2:00PM,
2 AS FOLLOWS:

3

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Hello, members. So, Helen.

5 MS PURCELL: I'd just like to welcome everybody who is present in the chamber
6 and remotely, and also the members of the public who have joined us today. If
7 anybody has any issues with their technology, can you please contact myself or
8 Teresa, and we will get you back online as quickly as possible.

9

10 I am now going to go with a rollcall.

11 Councillor Tommy Annesley. (No reply.)

12 Councillor Mark Barry? (No reply.)

13 Councillor Joe Behan?

14 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

15 MS PURCELL: Present? Councillor Vincent Blake?

16 COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Present.

17 MS PURCELL: Present? Councillor Sylvester Bourke? (No reply.)

18 Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

19 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present.

20 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin? (No reply.)

21 Councillor Shay Cullen?

22 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Present.

23 MS PURCELL: Present? Councillor Erika Doyle? (No reply.)

24 Councillor Gail Dunne?

25 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present.

26 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Anne Ferris.

27 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Present.

28 MS PURCELL: Councillor Pat Fitzgerald.

29 COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.

30 MS PURCELL: Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.

32 MS PURCELL: Councillor Tom Fortune.

33 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Present.

34 MS PURCELL: Councillor Patsy Glennon.

- 1 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.
- 2 MS PURCELL: Councillor Mary Kavanagh. (No reply.) Councillor Pat Kennedy.
- 3 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.
- 4 MS PURCELL: Councillor Peir Leonard.
- 5 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present
- 6 MS PURCELL: Councillor Derek Mitchell.
- 7 COUNCILLOR MITCHELL: Present.
- 8 MS PURCELL: Councillor John Mullen.
- 9 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Present.
- 10 MS PURCELL: Councillor Miriam Murphy. (No reply.) Councillor Dermot
- 11 O'Brien.
- 12 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: An seo.
- 13 MS PURCELL: Councillor Paul O'Brien.
- 14 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Present.
- 15 MS PURCELL: Councillor Rory O'Connor.
- 16 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: An seo.
- 17 MS PURCELL: Councillor Gerry O'Neill. (No reply.) Councillor Mick Ryan.
- 18 COUNCILLOR RYAN: An seo.
- 19 MS PURCELL: Councillor Lourda Scott.
- 20 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Present.
- 21 MS PURCELL: Councillor John Snell.
- 22 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Present.
- 23 MS PURCELL: Councillor Stephen Stokes.
- 24 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Present.
- 25 MS PURCELL: Councillor Edward Timmins.
- 26 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Here.
- 27 MS PURCELL: Councillor Gerry Walsh.
- 28 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Present.
- 29 MS PURCELL: Councillor Irene Winters.
- 30 COUNCILLOR WINTERS: Here.
- 31
- 32 We have just had a view us. I am just going to call out the ones that were missing.
- 33 Councillor Tommy Annesley.
- 34 COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Present.

1 MS PURCELL: Councillor Mark Barry. (No reply.) Councillor Avril Cronin.

2 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

3 MS PURCELL: Councillor Silvester Bourke.

4 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Present.

5 MS PURCELL: Councillor Erika Doyle. (No reply.) Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

6 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Here.

7 MS PURCELL: Thank you. Councillor Kavanagh is present. Councillor Miriam
8 Murphy. Councillor Gerry O'Neill. Thank you.

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, members. You are very welcome.

10 And members who are in the public gallery, you are very welcome as well. Do we
11 have any votes of sympathy?

12 Councillor Gerry Walsh?

13 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just, I would like to express
14 condolences to the family of Robyn Archer, who passed away after a short illness on
15 the 17th of February. Condolences to the Archer family in Greystones and McGee
16 family in Arklow. Her husband also, Robyn, and her daughter, Lauren, and son,
17 Karl. Robyn's husband was a long-standing member of Greystones Fire Service,
18 along with his brother, Derek. And his father, Eric, was a founding member of
19 Greystones Rugby Club. So condolences to the family. Thank you.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

21 Councillor Edward Timmins?

22 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Just briefly, I would like to propose a vote of sympathy
23 to the family of Kevin Brown, originally from Baltinglass, former vice principal of
24 the secondary school, and also a former teacher of Carnew Secondary School and in
25 Arklow Secondary School. He passed away after an illness of a couple of years. He
26 was in his late fifties. So I'd like to pass on sympathy. Thank you.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

28 Councillor Pat Kennedy?

29 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Yes, thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to extend my
30 sympathies to the Jones family in Red Cross, to Cora and the family, on the death of
31 her husband, Pat, that's been involved in the public license business up there for a
32 long time. So I'd like to extend my sympathies to that family. Thank you.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

34 I'd like to, myself, propose a vote of sympathy to the family of Maura O'Loughlin, in

1 particular her wife. Maura passed away recently. She's from the Boghall Road in
2 Bray. Maura has a length of service of 30 years in Sunbeam House Services. She
3 was also instrumental in bringing the rights of people with disability to the forefront.
4 Her work was recognised locally, nationally and internationally. So our thoughts
5 with her family. She's originally from Arklow.

6

7 Councillor Paul O'Brien?

8 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I just want to offer
9 my condolences to the family of Patrick Joseph Conroy, who was a retired guard,
10 and gave many years of service to the state. So my condolences to all his family.
11 Thank you.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

13 Okay. Helen?

14 MS PURCELL: We extend our sympathies to the families of Carmel Bourke,
15 mother of our colleague, Nicola Flemming; William (Willie) Redmond, father of our
16 colleague, Bill Redmond, and grandfather of Charlie Redmond; John Gahan, brother
17 of our colleague, Mick Gahan; and Andy Byrne, father of our colleague, Wayne
18 Byrne.

19 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Helen. So we will stand for a moment's silence.
20 (Minute's silence held.)

21 MS PURCELL: May their souls and the souls of all the faithfully departed, through
22 the mercy of God, rest in peace.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Amen.

24 Okay, members. Councillor Gail Dunne?

25 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Thanks for letting me in.
26 I would just like to thank all the members here who attended the AILG conference in
27 Arklow a couple of weeks ago. We had over 310 members from all around the
28 country who attended the conference, and it was a great success. It showed off the
29 county in a great light. I especially would like to thank the Council staff who
30 worked so hard with the AILG to make the conference look so good. We had our
31 Chief Executive down, we had a number of director of services down on different
32 nights. We also had members of staff down. And Lorraine gave a presentation as
33 well. And I think they always know when presentations are good when nobody
34 leaves the room, and nobody left the room that day.

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I would also like to thank the Arklow Bay Hotel for all their help as well. I think, again, it showed what this county can do, and it's generally regarded as one of the best conferences we ever had. So thanks for letting me in, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem. Thank you, Councillor. Congratulations to yourself as well. An excellent event.

Councillor Vincent Blake?

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just, as a -- the LAMA rep from Wicklow County Council, the recent LAMA awards were held in the Convention Centre in Dublin. It's a major event on behalf of councils throughout the country. All 26 councils -- county councils are represented there, and all 31 councils. And it's a -- while Wicklow County Council were nominated for 11 awards on the night, and while it looked to be disappointing at one stage in terms of getting a recognition of it, but the final big award, that of Council of The Year award was finally announced at the end of the night, and Wicklow County Council, for a second time in four years, won the award.

So, congratulations to all the members and to the staff and the CEO. Well done. And it's a great recognition for the Council to have received that award for the second time, as I said, in four years. Thank you, Chair.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Well said. Thank you very much, Councillor.

Okay. Item number 1: To confirm and sign the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Wicklow County Council held on Monday, 12th February 2024. I am looking for a proposer: Councillor Shay Cullen. And someone to second: Councillor Patsy Glennon.

Are they agreed? (Agreed.)

Agreed. Thank you, members.

Item number 2: To consider the disposal of property measuring 0.027 hectares, or thereabouts, in the townland of Corporation Lands, County Wicklow, being the property known as 2 Seafield, Wicklow Town, County Wicklow, by Deed of Conveyance to Ms Patricia Colohan of 2 Seafield, Wicklow Town, County Wicklow, the person entitled to the freehold interest in the property, as per the notice previously circulated.

1 Councillor Paul O'Brien proposed. Councillor Gail Dunne seconded. Is that agreed?
2 (Agreed.)

3 Agreed. Thank you, members.

4

5 Item number 3: To consider the disposal of 0.0034 hectares, or thereabouts, in the
6 townland of Dunlavin Upper Townland, Dunlavin, County Wicklow, comprised in
7 Folio No. WW6103F County Wicklow to Ms Fiona Kinsella, 2 The Green,
8 Dunlavin, County Wicklow, as per the notice previously circulated.

9

10 Proposed by Councillor Avril Cronin. Seconded by Councillor Patsy Glennon. Is
11 that agreed? (Agreed.)

12 That's agreed.

13

14 Item number 4. Councillor Kavanagh, I know you have expressed an interest in
15 stepping out for item --

16 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Number 5.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Oh, 5. Sorry. Apologies.

18 Item number 4: To consider the disposal of property measuring 0.0216 hectares, or
19 thereabouts, in the townland of Sheepphouse, County Wicklow, comprised in Folio
20 No. WW2873L County Wicklow, being the property known as 47 Saint Peters Place,
21 Arklow, County Wicklow, by Transfer Order to Ms Alice Kelly of 47 Saint Peters
22 Place, Arklow, County Wicklow, the person entitled to the freehold interest in the
23 property, as per the notice previously circulated.

24 Proposed by Councillor Pat Fitzgerald. Seconded by Councillor Pat Kennedy.

25

26 Is that agreed by all? (Agreed.)

27 It's agreed.

28 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Yes, I just want to note that I am absenting myself
29 from the room.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Absolutely. Thank you, Councillor Kavanagh.

31 Councillor Kavanagh, do you have your phone with you?

32 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Sorry.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Just take your phone with you, and Helen will ring you as
34 soon as it is dealt with.

1 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Sorry.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: No, you're okay. Thank you, Councillor Kavanagh.

3

4 Okay. Item number 5 is: To consider the disposal of property measuring 0.0322
5 hectares, or thereabouts, in the townland of Corporation Lands, County Wicklow,
6 being the property known 58 Seafield, Wicklow Town, County Wicklow by Transfer
7 Order to Ms Mary Kavanagh of 58 Seafield, Wicklow Town, County Wicklow, the
8 person entitled to the freehold interest in the property, as per the notice previously
9 circulated.

10

11 Proposed by Councillor John Snell. Seconded by Councillor Peir Leonard.

12

13 We will just ring Councillor Kavanagh now to come back in.

14 (Pause in proceedings.)

15 (Councillor Kavanagh returns to the room.)

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Item number 6: To consider the disposal of 0.0158 hectares,
17 or thereabouts, in the townland of Oldcourt Road, County Wicklow, being the
18 property known as 16 Wolfe Tone Square South, Bray, County Wicklow by Transfer
19 Order to Ms Karen Brierton (as LPR of Elizabeth Dundon deceased) of 16 Wolfe
20 Tone Square South, Bray County Wicklow, the person entitled to the freehold
21 interest in the property, as per the notice previously circulated.

22

23 Proposed by Councillor Melanie Corrigan. Seconded by Councillor Rory O'Connor.

24 Is that agreed? (Agreed.)

25 Agreed. Okay.

26

27 Members, I am proposing to move item number 10 up ahead of the Chief Executive's
28 report, if that's in agreement with the members present. So I would like to propose.

29 Looking for someone to second. Councillor Vincent Blake. That's great.

30 Is that agreed by all? (Agreed.)

31 That's great.

32

33 Members, this is to receive a presentation from the Irish Farmers' Association, the
34 IFA, and Tom Byrne will be giving that presentation.

1 So Tom, you are very welcome. If you would like to come forward.

2

3 Members, Tom is going to give a presentation of ten minutes, and then I am going to
4 invite members in. I know this is a subject that a lot of people have views on, so just
5 to allow enough time for questions.

6

7 Tom, you are very welcome. I'll hand it over to you.

8 MR BYRNE: (Speaking in Irish.)

9

10 Cathaoirleach, I am delighted to have this opportunity -- and a little bit nervous -- to
11 represent and talk for the farmers of Wicklow.

12

13 We seriously and deeply appreciate this opportunity. And what I first want to do is
14 make a presentation to the Cathaoirleach. It is not my speech, folks, it's the
15 regulations that we farm under today in agriculture. This is what we have to farm
16 under. So it's something that I am advising the Cathaoirleach to burn, which we
17 are -- we want to do, and we probably will. So we think that it has just got out of
18 hand, and we are not prepared to accept it anymore. Enough is enough. So if
19 someone would take that, please.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Light reading.

21 MR BYRNE: Light reading. A good fire.

22

23 I will be as brief as I can, folks, and if you have questions afterwards, I will answer
24 them as best I can.

25

26 We have a number of our farming colleagues here in the gallery, all wanting to
27 speak, but we know this is not allowed, okay?

28

29 Over the past number of weeks, farmers across mainland Europe have been voicing
30 their anger and frustration at the ever-increasing administrative burden being placed
31 on farmers, which have had a major impact on farm family incomes. These
32 frustrations have broadened into anger with European and national lawmakers over
33 the massive increase in regulation relating to agriculture.

34

1 The EU, the Irish Government, and local government, are devising policies far from
2 the farm gate, with little or no consideration of direct impact on farmers.

3

4 The following are some of the key issues contributing to the growing frustration and
5 anger with the political system. The transformation of CAP away from supporting
6 food production towards actually reducing farm output. CAP funding is being
7 redirected to environmental schemes. The EU is effectively implementing new
8 environmental regulations, such as the eco scheme, on the cheap, by redirecting
9 existing funding instead of allocating additional funding.

10

11 The failure of the EU to properly compensate farmers under CAP. In 2014, Ireland
12 received 1.6 billion in pillar one funding from the EU. That figure is effectively the
13 same today as it was ten years ago. And, despite huge inflation and farmers' costs of
14 production in the interim, farmers are being asked to do much more to receive a lot
15 less funds, in real terms.

16

17 The proposed Mercosur trade deal being pushed by the European Commission has
18 the capacity to devastate and, in particular, the Irish -- in particular, the Irish beef
19 sector. Europe is placing a massive amount of additional regulations on European
20 farmers, but, at the same time, it is seeking to increase food import from South
21 America, produced under much lower environmental rules, with higher carbon
22 footprint. Burn the forests.

23

24 Overcomplicated schemes, which have been poorly implemented by the Irish
25 Department of Agriculture. This has contributed to widespread delays in payments;
26 most notably, the acre scheme. Followed by a meeting between the Minister of IFA
27 and president Francie Gorman last week, on foot of the February 1st protests, the
28 Minister agreed to make an interim payment to all farmers.

29 However, it will only partly resolve the payment mess created by his own
30 department. In addition, there are farmers still waiting to get into the scheme. And
31 remember, this is an environmental scheme. People, farmers want to take part in the
32 environmental scheme.

33

34 There has also been a complete systems failure on farm investment grant aid,

1 otherwise known as TAMs scheme. No approval of note were granted under the
2 scheme in 2023. Farm schemes are now so complicated that agri consultants are
3 threatening to strike action, as feel they can no longer administer these schemes,
4 designed by the Department of Agriculture.

5
6 The reduction of nitrates derogation from 250kgs of organic N to 220 organic N
7 imposed by the European Commission, with absolutely no flexibility offered.

8
9 Furthermore, the Commission continues to threaten to remove it altogether in '26.
10 Luckily, Wicklow is still at 250. And we believe that this is environmentally
11 sustainable.

12
13 The nature restoration law, which places further restrictions on farmers, particularly
14 on designated lands with no compensation. The individual emissions directive and
15 the Commission farcically handing it out, their initial proposal would have seen 50%
16 of Irish dairy farmers requiring an EPA licence just to farm. The current revised
17 proposals excludes bovine, but will see a huge amount of additional for pig and
18 poultry producers, now required an EPA licence.

19
20 The Commission's approach to clarify -- to classify farms under an industrial
21 directive encapsulates the current lack of regard for farming.

22
23 The lack of flexibility being shown to tillage farmers within the new regulations. No
24 flexibility currently being offered to farmers who are struggling to meet the
25 stipulated three-crop rule, due to a very difficult autumn, and now has continued into
26 the spring. Weather conditions, which massively limit autumn planting. Agriculture
27 emissions are now being measured unfairly. There must be accurate measurements
28 of greenhouse gas emissions and carbon removals at farm level.

29
30 It is imperative that any measurement of emissions and removals is based on
31 research that reflects Irish conditions. On-farm (inaudible) and biogenic methane
32 from livestock, along with emissions and removals from Ireland's unique meril and
33 peat soils must be based on peer-reviewed trials in Ireland. On farm measures such
34 as anaerobic digestion and rooftop solar should count towards reducing emissions

1 from agriculture sector.

2

3 Some local government issues. This directly is who we are talking to here today,
4 folks.

5

6 Delays in planning process, which is hindering on-farm investment. Now, I'm
7 talking about farmyards here. I'm not talking about rural development. Farmyards.
8 The implementation of the zoned land tax, a completely unfair tax which has placed
9 penal charge on farmers with land on the outskirts of towns and villages, all
10 genuinely farmland, must be exempt from this tax.

11

12 County Councils will be doing an increasing number of inspections on farm. There
13 needs to be a clear protocol in place regarding how these inspections are conducted.
14 There are huge issues with ash trees suffering from ash die-back on rural roads.
15 Each County Council needs to come with a strategy and funding to remove these
16 trees. Folks, we're talking about peoples' lives and how they're threatened with these
17 ash on the side of the roads. It is really, really a serious problem, and we want to you
18 take note of that very clearly today.

19

20 The lack of dog wardens in many counties to deal with the dog attacks on sheep
21 flocks. The implementation of commercial rates by some County Councils on farm
22 buildings, despite these being specifically exempt, mainly from farm buildings in
23 villages and the horticulture sector. The proposed increase in water charges will
24 place an unfair burden on farmers and, in particular, those with fragmented holdings.

25

26 We are asking Wicklow County Council, utmost, to highlight these issues raised to
27 seek fundamental reset of how farm policy is devised, implemented in the EU and in
28 Ireland. We believe we have a resolution that's going to come before the County
29 Council, for you people to approve.

30

31 I am going to stop reading now, folks, and off -- from the heart, if you like.

32

33 I know that the County Council was worried today that we were going to come in
34 here and create a havoc and a mess, and I apologise for the bit of havoc we did

1 create. And we genuinely, honestly feel that the only way forward is through
2 dialogue. We know that the County Councils are going to carry out a lot more
3 inspections, but we ask for a little bit of respect to the farmers that they're going to
4 inspect. We ask for people to get notice. We ask for them to have identification. It's
5 not fair.

6
7 We have had an instance in Wicklow where three cars from Wicklow County
8 Council arrived on a farm. They had -- there was an inspection ongoing. The farm
9 was leased to another farmer. The woman that was in the house didn't know who the
10 people were, didn't know what they were doing, and she wasn't informed. And you
11 know, in today's climate, you don't know, when a strange car comes into your yard,
12 who they are, what they are, or what they're there for. It's common decent courtesy
13 to have a protocol that we all can work with. And we want to work with the elected
14 representatives. We want to work with the people that are employed by Wicklow
15 County Council. We're not anti this and anti that. We know we have an
16 environmental and climate problem. We accept that. Farmers are probably the first
17 people to recognise that we had a change in our climate. We knew we had such mild
18 winters. And it affects us every day we get up.

19
20 It has rained now more or less constantly since about the 27th day of June. The
21 harvest was basically lost. We haven't been able to plant in the fall. We haven't now
22 managed to plough our fields to get them ready for the next crops. That includes
23 grass. It includes everything right across the gamut. We know we're in trouble, we
24 know we have a climate crisis, and we don't deny it. But we want to work together,
25 folks. We don't want them and us. And clearly, we're saying enough is enough.

26
27 I handed Cathaoirleach the regulations that we farm on. My advice to her is to burn
28 them, because, genuinely, that is a book of regulations. I was going to tell you it was
29 what I was going to say for the day, but I mightn't get that much time. But that is
30 genuinely the amount of regulation. And that doesn't include the vegetable sector.
31 That's not there.

32
33 So the regulations are becoming so burdensome that we just can't -- and enough is
34 enough. And you've seen on Sky News and on Al Jazeera and France on Gat (as

1 said) the disruption that the German and French farmers are causing, and it is
2 spreading right across Europe. We have a little small country here, and we don't
3 want to go that far, folks. But if we have to, we have to.

4

5 So I am appealing to the members of Wicklow County Council to work with us, to
6 see where we can get ahead, to oppose some of the ridiculous, nonsensical laws, and
7 whatever you like to call them; I could use verbal diarrhoea, but maybe I shouldn't.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Maybe not, no.

9 MR BYRNE: So, look it, I've probably said enough. We have handed out a leaflet
10 there to most councillors here of the importance of agriculture to Wicklow. Please
11 read it. Please be aware of it. And we believe, and we absolutely believe, that we
12 can contribute to the entire problem we have. We absolutely believe that. We need
13 recognition for that. And the people that would know me know that I have worked
14 in the Wicklow uplands council on environmental projects, and I will continue to do
15 that.

16

17 So please, please, listen to us, and please, please support and nominate the...

18 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Tom.

19 MR BYRNE: Okay.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Tom, I am going to ask you to stay there for a minute, if that's
21 okay.

22 MR BYRNE: Sure

23 (Applause.)

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: So Tom, just for yourself, the way it works is we take a
25 number of people to speak --

26 MR BYRNE: Yes.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: -- and then I will invite you, maybe, to respond back in, if that
28 is okay.

29 MR BYRNE: Yes.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: So members, I am opening it up to the floor. Councillor Shay
31 Cullen?

32 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

33

34 Firstly, I want to thank Tom for his presentation, and thank the members of IFA for

1 coming here in great numbers today, and showing the passion for protecting,
2 basically, their livelihoods, and I want to commend them all on that.

3

4 I suppose, over the last number of weeks, we've all seen across mainland Europe
5 farmers voicing their anger and frustration at the increasing administrative burdens
6 being placed upon them, and the impacts of their family incomes. And I just want to
7 pose a question:

8

9 Do we want farmers to produce food or do we not? And that's not just in Ireland,
10 that's across the world. We know we have a world shortage of food, and if we
11 continue with the policies that we're putting forward, we're going to have a major
12 catastrophe on our hands in the coming years, if this is not -- if realism doesn't come
13 into this situation.

14

15 Ireland, as a country, can produce food in a sustainable and environmental and a low
16 carbon way, and we certainly should be continuing to do that, to the best of our
17 ability. And we have extremely good quality farmers to produce food, best quality
18 food that we can.

19

20 But unfortunately, all I see in agriculture is more and more bureaucracy,
21 overcomplicated schemes, designed to reduce farming, designed to reduce the
22 amount of food we produce, designed to reduce farmers' livelihoods; and, at the end
23 of the day, the farmers in Ireland are very aware of the challenges of climate change,
24 and farmers, at the end of the day, are the protectors of the land. And, in my view,
25 they protect the land to the best of their ability, and will always continue to do that
26 for the generations to come after.

27

28 All we have to look at is the works that have been done on hedgerows, in terms of
29 improving our water quality, and various other, you know, aspects in terms of
30 protecting what is the most important, I suppose, farming facility that we have, and
31 that is the land.

32

33 We need to show a degree of flexibility. We need to support the likes of solar
34 regeneration on farm buildings, making the planning process more straightforward,

1 introducing payment for energy supplied to the national grid.

2

3 As Tom quite rightly said, the residential zone tax was brought in for a particular
4 reason, but it has become very restrictive, and we shouldn't penalise active farmers
5 that happen to farm on the outskirts of towns and villages with an unfair tax. And at
6 the moment, you know, we're nearly forcing people to develop their land, where
7 there's quite a lot of farmers don't want to develop their land, in terms of
8 development for housing or whatever the case may be; they want to farm the land
9 and do what they do best.

10

11 Another point I want to make is, there needs to be clear protocol with regards to farm
12 inspections. I don't think people generally understand, outside the farming
13 community, that inspections frighten the life out of farmers. It's a concern, it's a
14 worry, and, unfortunately, with regards to inspections, whether it is council or
15 Department of Agriculture, you know, there is a concern there that we want to catch
16 people out, instead of working with farmers. Because, at the end of the day, you
17 know, Tom has quite rightly showed the amount of paperwork that farming has to
18 do, and we need to take an attitude that we need to work with farmers, not penalise
19 them.

20

21 But, unfortunately, to my knowledge, over the years, the likes of the Department of
22 Agriculture, they nearly get pleasure out of penalising farmers, and that shouldn't be
23 the way. There needs to be a change, and a strong change of attitude with regards to
24 that.

25

26 A couple of years ago, we introduced a ban on glyphosate chemicals. And while that
27 maybe was suitable in some regards, I think it has, in some respects, backfired.
28 We're seeing increasing weeds and growth in our towns and villages, and I get
29 constant complaints that, why aren't the Council, you know, keeping the weeds, why
30 aren't they spraying? But the reality is, we can't.

31

32 So some of the decisions we're making need to be, you know, done with a little bit
33 more thought, a little bit more sensitivity, and not just, you know, make these
34 decisions without a sensible approach and maybe discussion with relevant

1 stakeholders. And I think that is important.

2

3 And I know other people want to come in, Chairman --

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, I am just conscious of the time, Councillor Cullen.

5 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: I am just going to finish up now.

6

7 I believe agriculture is being blamed unfairly with regard to greenhouse gas
8 emissions, and the evidence would show that emissions are not being fairly
9 measured. So it is imperative that any measurement of emissions and removals is
10 based on the research that reflects Irish conditions.

11

12 So I am going to finish on that. But I just would like to read, if you don't mind,
13 Cathaoirleach, to propose the following resolution to this Council: That Wicklow
14 County Council recognises the significant contribution that farming and the agri
15 sector makes to the Irish and local economy; the Council acknowledges the income
16 challenge on Irish farmers arising from the significant increases in the cost of doing
17 business, regulatory costs and cuts in basic import or income support for farmers; the
18 Council calls on the Government to introduce no further regulations on farmers or
19 any measures that may increase costs on farms without full negotiation and
20 agreement with the Irish Farmers Association. This Council calls on the European
21 Union and the Irish Government to provide additional standalone funding, separate
22 to the common agricultural policy, to support farmers and to undertake climate and
23 biodiversity measure.

24

25 So I would like to propose that resolution to the members.

26 Thank you.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

28 Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

29 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would like to formally
30 second that motion there proposed by Councillor Cullen, and I would just like to,
31 first of all, say that I am here in solidarity today with my farming brothers and
32 sisters. Farming is my bread and butter, and, hopefully, always will be.

33

34 I believe that everything that -- or the Chairman of IFA has stated today is very

1 accurate, and is very concerning. Society, I believe, has a responsibility to listen to
2 its concerns of its primary food producers, and farmers don't come out willy-nilly to
3 protest; it's always a very, very serious issues. They're at the edge of the cliff when
4 they have to come out to disrupt publicly.

5

6 I was thinking about one of the sparks of the 1798 Insurrection was the price of
7 barley, apparently, was one of the catalysts that drove people out onto the streets to
8 publicly protest. Now, we have a long way to go before we get that -- things are that
9 bad, I hope.

10

11 But, I think that it is important to realise how important food is to us, and, without
12 farmers, there won't be food. We need to have a healthy, vibrant farming
13 community. At the moment, I would be quite concerned at how few young people
14 are engaging in farming as a career. I just look at my own neighbourhood, and there
15 are very, very few sons or daughters taking up the mantel of taking over family
16 farms in comparison to what it was like when I started farming. And that must be a
17 worry for society.

18

19 The big problem we have today is price volatility and inflation. Inflation has
20 destroyed us. While we might have had a couple of good years in '20 and 21 and '22,
21 '23 and '24 look like we're going in the complete opposite direction, as inflation has
22 driven costs way above what is feasible, and, on the other side, the price of outputs is
23 dropping.

24

25 Grain prices are in free fall at the moment. They've halved in comparison to what
26 they were two years ago, and falling every week. Milk prices have dropped
27 enormously. Beef and lamb prices wouldn't be as exciting as farmers would need
28 them to be to cover increased costs. And I can understand why the German farmers
29 and the Spanish and the Italians went out and blocked the motorways; because I was
30 in Germany last month, I couldn't get over the price of diesel. I had to pay 2.70 a
31 litre to fill my vehicle. And I believe that was the catalyst for the farmers to get out
32 there and block the motorways, because the Government was expecting them to pay
33 the same price for their agricultural diesel as road diesel. It's just unfeasible. You
34 might as well just stop producing food, if you had to pay that.

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So you can just imagine, if there wasn't a general strike by farmers, where would we be this time next year?

And to top it all, I mean, bureaucrats and people in offices all over Europe, and in our own government, don't really take farmers' concerns seriously, when they've brought in a load of policies in the last few years that has destroyed us; one, for example, is convergence.

And I argued with Andrew Doyle about this when he was in the Ministry of Agriculture. I was like -- for example, I said to Andrew, you're on a salary of a hundred thousand as a TD. For someone who's a farmer, who is -- or it'd be like taking your hundred thousand, and taking about 20,000 off that, and redistributing it to the county councillors who work just as hard as you do. And this was just anathema to the TDs, that you could countenance such a measure, but, in actual fact, that's what's been brought in on farmers.

You've taken 20%, at least, off the top farmers, and redistributed it to the farmers who have lower in value entitlements. I just think we have lost the run of ourselves, and that is a major concern, because it has destroyed the viability of a great many farmers in Wicklow and Wexford who are on high convergence level -- high entitlement values, because of the hard work they did in the '90s and the early 2000s to actually establish those values. They have been destroyed.

And between inflation, convergence, the Mercusor deal, where your hands are tied behind your back, you can't compete with imports from third countries, because we have so much regulation, that the Chairman has -- of IFA has referred to, that it is becoming very, very difficult.

And I will leave you with one thought that surprised me: That the airport in Dublin is being talked about a lot in the last few weeks, that, economically, the country is going to suffer, because we need to get the CAP on -- up from 32 million to 50 million, which it has planning for, or may or may not have planning for; but it has to go upwards.

1

2 And Michael O'Leary has beaten the drum. And the Chamber of Commerce are
3 supporting him. And there will be a lot of interest groups supporting -- economic
4 interest groups will be supporting the lifting of the CAP on air travel. And that is
5 fine, perhaps, for the country.

6

7 But there is not a mention of the effect that is going to have on climate change. And
8 meanwhile, farmers have been bashed left, right and centre for the last couple of
9 years about methane emissions and too many cows, too much milk being produced.
10 And, you know, it doesn't add up. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.
11 And if the airline industry is allowed --

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: I have to ask you to finish up shortly, sorry, Councillor, just
13 to allow others in, if it's okay.

14 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Well, I rest my case. I think I made the points that I
15 wanted to make. And I would, again, formally second that motion that Councillor
16 Cullen has --

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Appreciate that. Thank you.
18 Councillor Timmins?

19 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Thanks, Chairman. I will just make a few points.

20

21 First of all, thanks very much, Tom, for your presentation. And you know, when
22 someone speaks from the heart, we can see how genuine and authentic you are, and
23 from talking to the guys outside, you know, these are very reasonable people, you
24 know, who have very, very valid issues that we need to take seriously.

25

26 Like, just overall, like, farming is a really important part of our economy. It's been
27 there since, you know, time began, since people first came to this country, and it will
28 be there in the future. Other industries will come and go. Farming will last forever,
29 because people need to eat. So it is going to be part of our future. And we should
30 never lose sight of that. And it is very, very easy for us to take for granted the food
31 that is on our table, but it doesn't just come there by accident.

32

33 Just in relation to farming and all the struggles they have. Red tape adds cost. I have
34 worked with business nearly all my life. Red tape adds cost to doing business.

1 Farming is a business. And the more red tape you add, the bigger the cost, and the
2 less attractive it is for people to enter farming.

3

4 And this is especially true of young people. And Sylvester mentioned it there earlier.
5 There's a real dearth of young people entering farming now, and that's one of the
6 reasons. Like, the guys here, they love farming, it's their life, they have known
7 nothing else, a lot of them, and they do it for that; but it needs to be economically
8 viable, it needs to add up, the numbers need to add up. You can't be just doing it like
9 a charity. So that's a really important thing. And all that red tape, that adds to cost, it
10 adds to time, it adds to frustration, and, ultimately, it adds to your bottom line and
11 wipes out your profit.

12

13 The other two things that I will mention that are relevant to this County Council:
14 One is rural planning. Rural planning, when I started in the Council 20 years ago,
15 we formulated a development plan and we had a say how -- what the rural planning
16 rules were. In our development plan in 2022, we didn't. We were told we are
17 subject to national planning guidelines.

18

19 I made several submissions, and I was told, sorry, that doesn't comply with national
20 guidelines, you cannot put it in your development plan. The planning regulator will
21 take it out. And he did. So that whole centralised bureaucracy is hitting Wicklow.
22 And every part of Wicklow, by the way, except one little townland near Tinahely, is
23 classified as being under urban pressure, and plannings can be refused on that basis,
24 which is absolute madness.

25

26 The last thing I will say is residential zoned land tax was referred to earlier by Tom.
27 That wasn't thought through at all. It was really geared towards land in the cities,
28 close to the cities. It shouldn't have been applied to rural Wicklow, to the small
29 towns and villages. It wasn't thought through. A lot of landowners didn't even know
30 their land was zoned, and they had no intention of ever selling it. And even if some
31 of them did want to sell it, it may not even be economically viable. Okay, thank you.
32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

33

Councillor Vincent Blake?

34

COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And I, too, would like to support

1 the motion here before us today, and to thank Tom, as Chair of the IFA for Wicklow.
2 Thanks for being here with us to put forward your views and your concerns on
3 behalf -- you don't come here lightly, you don't come here too often, other than
4 maybe a sheep thing back here a few years ago with Pat Dunne; but you come here
5 when there's a serious issue out there, and thanks for coming here today as well.

6
7 I know the previous speakers have highlighted, and I don't want to start repeating it,
8 other people want to speak here as well; but look it, there is a world shortage of food
9 out there. If your farmers are not going to be protected and given -- and support to
10 produce that food on behalf of the people who are starving throughout the world.

11
12 Equally so, as Tom has said there, the amount of paperwork. Farmers don't want to
13 be at the kitchen table filling in paperwork. I listened to farmers on numerous
14 occasions, an inch thick of paperwork arriving on a regular basis to them to spend
15 their time going through it rather than being out on the farm. Bearing in mind, you
16 said there, Tom, weather-related is a big issue with farming.

17
18 You have a contractor coming on a certain day to do work for you, you're depending
19 on the weather out there as well, and you're sitting at the table doing paperwork, isn't
20 conducive to good farmers, nor what the farmers want either.

21
22 Finally, I would just like to say that, in Wicklow, we talk about the Garden of Ireland
23 here in Wicklow, and who has protected the Garden of Ireland? Who are the people
24 who are out there on -- all down the years, our fathers and grandfathers and
25 great-grandfathers, they're the people who have made Wicklow the Garden of
26 Ireland.

27
28 So farmers out there never wanted, and have no interest for themselves in the
29 long-term, either to do any damage to the environment, and have proved it by the
30 fact that how they have looked after the countryside down through the years.

31
32 So, Tom, we have you -- you have our full support, and the farming in Wicklow have
33 the full support of myself and my colleagues as well. Thanks very much.

34 MR BYRNE: Thank you very much.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

2

3 Tom, I have a number of other people looking to come in. Are you okay to hold
4 there for a while?

5 MR BYRNE: I am fine, yes.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Patsy Glennon.

7 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Needless to say, I am not
8 going to go back over everything my four colleagues have said. My four colleagues
9 are all Fine Gael councillors, but I'd like to say that farming is an issue that requires
10 all party support, and I approach it from that basis.

11

12 As my colleagues have said, farmers have been the protectors of the environment for
13 many generations; long before we ever heard of the Green Party or Greta Thunberg.
14 Tom has already acknowledged that there is some environment and climate change
15 issues that need to be addressed. Farmers need ongoing support during this
16 transformation that's being sought from them. They should get very significant
17 support during that period.

18

19 The demise of small farm holdings has been happening throughout Ireland for the
20 past 30 years, and it should be regressed. Farmers are an integral and essential part
21 of small communities throughout Ireland, especially small communities that I
22 represent in West Wicklow, and throughout all of rural Ireland; but, in those poorer
23 parts of the country, farmers are very much a centre part of all of the community, and
24 require as much support as possible.

25

26 I will conclude by saying that farmers need maximum support, cross-party support,
27 to continue in their role as the backbone of rural Ireland.

28

29 Thank you.

30 (Applause.)

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

32

33 Councillor Dermot O'Brien?

34 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks, Tom. And

1 fair play for coming out today.

2

3 There was an expression you used in your speech which really caught my attention,
4 when you described policies being developed far from the farm gate. And that really
5 struck me. Because anyone who's involved in policymaking needs to appreciate and
6 understand that the proximity between the people who are impacted by the policy
7 and the people who write the policy is critical, if you want to have good policies.

8

9 And as I listened to you, it was bleak enough, Tom, because the words that were
10 jumping out at me, the overregulation, burdens, overcomplicated, systems failure,
11 can't manage, no compensation, lack of regard, lack of flexibility, delays, and lack
12 of... And all of that wasn't framed in terms of you saying we want no regulation, but
13 it seems to me that you're very conscious, and all the people who are here today are
14 very conscious of this thing called impact on the livelihoods of farmers, and that's at
15 the core of what you're talking about.

16

17 And I think it's a very strong message that you send when you ask for a fundamental
18 reset. So you're not saying scrap all regulations, but you're asking for a fundamental
19 reset, which is about a new set of regulations which are devised and implemented
20 together. And I think that's very powerful.

21

22 And I'd love to ask a question of you, Cathaoirleach, of you, Tom, is that: And
23 other -- other colleagues have mentioned young people. I spend a lot of time with
24 young people. And I would love you to paint a picture of the future if there isn't a
25 reset or if change doesn't happen for young farmers of Wicklow.

26 Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

28 Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

29 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I just want to add my
30 support to the motion and support to Tom and welcome him here, and thank you for
31 coming in, and all the rest of your IFA members.

32

33 I am a proud member of the IFA, myself. And I would have been very involved in
34 the retail side of farming. And over the last 20 years, just seeing the decline in that; I

1 mean, Dublin City markets used to be hopping with farmers coming in with their
2 produce, and over the last couple of years, there's literally only maybe two or three,
3 that we have been priced out, it's no longer viable, no young people carrying on the
4 family farms.

5

6 So we have to support our farmers. We really do. I do a lot of paperwork for the
7 family farm, and to hear agri consultants could be threatening to strike actually fills
8 me with fear, because I rely on them so heavily to fill in the paperwork that I don't
9 understand. And I can only imagine how everybody else would feel as well. You
10 know, you shouldn't have to do that. Your livelihood is you are out on the fields, on
11 the farm, instead of sitting at a desk filling in paperwork.

12

13 We need to encourage our young people. My own farm at home, nobody is
14 interested in taking it on because it is just hard work for low return. And that is not
15 right. That is not right. And I think we need to support our farmers. And thank you
16 for coming in today, Tom. You have my full support

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

18 (Applause.)

19 Councillor Miriam Murphy? Tom, Miriam is coming in remotely.

20 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Tom. I'm
21 sorry I can't be there. Me and Tom often have good banter on the phone.

22 Can I just fully support what everyone has said. You know, I come from a horsey
23 background, but my other family members were generations of farmers, and I
24 suppose I am addicted to looking at political programmes, and every week you see
25 IFA, young farmers or old farmers coming into the likes of (inaudible) programmes,
26 you know, Prime Time, and all those programmes, and you see -- and you say, oh,
27 my god, what is happening here in Ireland?

28

29 Farming is our culture, it is part of our culture. And seeing young farmers being
30 asked, where do you see them in the next five years; recently there was a (inaudible)
31 farmer on one of the programmes, and on that day, the morning of that programme,
32 13 of his friends emigrated. He was the only one that did not get on that plane that
33 day, because of his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather had farmed
34 their farm. And he did not want to let his father down. He loved what he was doing.

1 But he said, where is it going to be in the next five years?

2

3 And we must also make aware - and I know other people have addressed this - of
4 how the policies and the rulings are coming from Europe, and what that is doing to
5 the reality of people's mental health. Farmers have actually (inaudible). Now you
6 know why (inaudible) here today. That's sad. That is sad. And also, how many,
7 many big, large families was reared by (inaudible) to farm the farm. They can't do
8 that anymore. That's not possible. But still they're not entitled to college grants or
9 whatever. But these people are struggling. These people are struggling.

10

11 And as Dermot just said there about, you know, the gate and whatever, my motto is,
12 come and live in my shoes. You come and live in my shoes and see how the reality
13 happens. It is not Europe that's making the reality. You know, they're far, far from
14 it. So my heart actually cries every time I see a young farmer wanting to farm, but
15 not being able.

16

17 And marriage breakups have (inaudible). I see (inaudible) has brought his, you
18 know - first of all, years ago, farmers wives, they come together for years, and they
19 were the strong backbone for farmers as well. But we must remember what the
20 mental health is doing to this, how it is affecting everybody. And my heart bleeds, it
21 really does. And I appreciate you there, you highlight every IFA and to your
22 members sitting in the seats, I applaud you for being there.

23 Thank you.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor John Snell?

25 (Applause.)

26 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to Tom for his
27 presentation there. Thanks a million, Tom. You speak with passion on the subject,
28 because you know it affects so many of your members, but also it affects, not just
29 County Wicklow, but Ireland in general.

30

31 The challenges are vast, and Tom has outlined in regards to the income challenges,
32 the red tape, the paperwork and unworkable policies. And while there is some of
33 what Tom mentioned in his presentation that would be under the remit of this local
34 authority, such as the inspections carried out by the local authority, dog wardens, and

1 the ash trees, the vast majority fall under the EU and also at a national level and our
2 own government.

3

4 That's why, when this -- and I am not being presumptuous, but this will be passed
5 today; this motion will be passed. And I don't think it was mentioned that we would
6 be looking for this to be sent to the President of the EU commission, also to the
7 Taoiseach and to the Minister for Agriculture, just advising that this has been passed
8 by Wicklow County Council, but if I could also ask that a copy of the minutes of this
9 meeting, and certainly Tom's presentation to the chambers be included with that, and
10 sent on to all the aforementioned.

11

12 This campaign "enough is enough" really, you know, it goes far beyond the shores of
13 Ireland. And, if anything, I think Tom and his members have been very conservative
14 in restraining themselves from, you know -- really, there should be an uproar. There
15 really should be an uproar. Because the farming community is in; they are under
16 attack. Farming, as we know it down through the generations, long gone is where a
17 family, a farmer's family, all went into the farming industry, and they tried to make a
18 living off the land.

19

20 We now see where the sons and daughters of farmers are actually going out into
21 other avenues to get employment, away from the farmland. And we know a lot of it
22 has a direct impact from the climate and biodiversity measures that are being
23 implemented at a national level and at a European EU level, without any
24 compensation to the farmers.

25

26 The reality is that Ireland is a small country. We should be self-sufficient; whether
27 our food produce -- produces, whether it's meat, milk, eggs, vegetables. And yet we
28 have a situation where stuff -- you know, some of these food products are coming in
29 from outside of the EU; from South America, from the four corners of the world, to a
30 small, small country. We're more than capable of looking after what the people of
31 this nation need. And I suppose that comes from being a member of the EU.

32

33 So my question is: Who are the people in the suits who are making the decisions in
34 Brussels? What farming did they ever do?

1 MR BYRNE: Hear, hear.

2 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Who are the people who are making the decisions at
3 national level? Because the vast majority of the people sitting in the Dáil, they either
4 came from a farming community, they know farming -- members of the farming
5 community, and yet we still have this tying up of our farming people with like what's
6 been handed to you today.

7
8 And for me, that's just unworkable. And if something is unworkable, it has to be
9 contested. And that's why farmers throughout Europe are up giving out and having
10 their say and saying that they just cannot work under the policies that's been forced
11 on them.

12
13 And unfortunately, Tom, we'll do our bit to support you here at a county, and
14 anything that we can do as a County Council, you have our full support. But I do
15 believe that your campaign needs to be listened to at a national level. And I would
16 call on all, whether you're in government or out of government, you're in opposition,
17 call on all your ministers, call on all your TDs, your senators to get behind the IFA
18 and support them a hundred percent, because I certainly will be.

19 Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

20 (Applause.)

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

22 Councillor John Mullen?

23 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks, Tom. I won't repeat
24 what other colleagues have said, but I suppose what you said, Tom, is dialogue is
25 key, and to have a good dialogue, you have to listen. And sometimes I think the
26 people who are making up policy, both EU and national level, are simply not
27 listening. And that's a huge problem, because you can't have a proper dialogue
28 without listening.

29 And yesterday I saw a tweet from a national journalist where cauliflowers in Kerry
30 were being fed to cattle because our supermarkets were buying foreign cheap
31 imports. Now, that is the consumer and the supermarkets putting our own
32 communities out of business. And, as a local authority, and I know we have a new
33 Chief Executive and new Directors of Services, you know, we have a local economic
34 plan that needs to put farm families and agri business back to the centre.

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There's diverse ways of income now in a family, but we need to promote buying Wicklow food and with Wicklow Naturally and other ways of doing it. If we don't buy Irish-produced food, we won't have Irish farmers. It's as simple as that. And we have to, as a county, and as a society, really promote the fantastic food we make.

As regards the topics that you raised, that we can tackle as a local authority, I would just like to ask you the question, and whichever Director of Service is in charge of the inspection process that we undertake: Surely, it's not without the bounds of possibility that we could work out a protocol whereby there could be notice, and what was expected, and that, you know, identification be provided to allay the worries. And whatever we do, or whoever comes back here after June, whatever SPCs are set up; because I know, Tom, you worked for many years on the Uplands Council, and the purpose of the Uplands Council, for those of you who don't know, was to bring the farming landowning community, the tourism sector, the County Council, and other various interested parties into the same room to work out and agree policies. And it has done a tremendous amount of work, and it has allowed rural tourism in particular to thrive in this county. Because we have got the cooperation of the farming community, because they're what; they're in the room. They're in the room.

When they make their point about dogs attacking sheep, it's listened to. Again, we have more to do on that. But half the battle is being listened to. So I do think we should be able to do something on that and maybe we can work that out maybe and give the farmers some result today from what we do as councillors.

And also, I do agree on the ash die-back situation on our rural roads. And I'm sure someone in the Roads Department could consult with our area engineers, and with the local IFA. Because we had bad weather in north Wicklow on Friday, and it's probably our local farmer who was clearing our roads. It's probably our local farmer who was trying to get a neighbour out of the driveway. And you know, we work with farmers all the time, and I do think we should increase that cooperation. But thank you, Tom, and thank you for the way your conducted yourselves today. Thank you.

1 (Applause.)

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

3 Councillor Gerry O'Neill?

4 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Tom, and people
5 who attended today's protest outside.

6

7 I'd be from West Wicklow, and I see the plight -- I see the pile of stuff that Tom give
8 the Cathaoirleach there, you know, and I am well aware that, in my neck of the
9 woods, where a lot of small farmers, they'd need a secretary, or maybe two
10 secretaries, with the amount of paperwork and whatever, you know? It's absolutely
11 crazy stuff, you know?

12

13 And I know some farmers, and they are just dead lucky that they have maybe the
14 wife or a daughter or whatever that's able to manage all that paperwork. But this is
15 the stuff that we're dealing with. You know, Tom mentioned the environment and
16 the -- you know, our responsibilities, and all the rest of the stuff. But then I don't
17 know whether -- I wonder there a little bit on all this, you know? I really do.
18 Because a farmer can't cut a bit of turf, he can't burn a sod of turf, and yet
19 there's -- last year alone, there was 400,000 ton of peat exported to Germany. There
20 was up to 200,000 ton exported to the Netherlands. And in the Netherlands, they
21 actually use our peat as an ingredient for the fire log that we get back in.

22

23 So I don't know what really -- what way we are moving as regards the environment,
24 the amount of boats that carry this stuff from Ireland to these countries and back
25 again, using the dirtiest diesel they can think of. Even if you look at the port in
26 Dublin, there's up to 20 liners a month go into the ports in Dublin, and they park up
27 there, and they have to tick over all night to keep the engines going; and for one
28 24-hour stint in Dublin, it's the equivalent of a million cars on the road in Ireland.

29

30 So I don't know. I'm very sceptical about a lot of this stuff, you know, and a lot of
31 the stuff that's being pushed down our throat.

32

33 But getting back to the farming end of it, you know, and the problems and the issues
34 and the quotas as regards, in black and white language, it's manure that 4,500

1 farmers, I think it is, actually have to export their manure to Germany when they go
2 over their quota. This is all crazy stuff. This is all being driven by the Greens. And
3 we've heard people here today from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil; and I don't know, it's
4 all -- I really believe, you know, we joined the EU in 1972, and the five treaties since
5 that has destroyed the country.

6

7 Because what's going on here with our so-called -- the environment and our interests
8 and all this, and where we're going; for four and a half thousand farmers to have to
9 export manure to Germany again, and it comes back in bags of nuggets for
10 spreading. In actual fact, in West Wicklow, you cannot spread manure in some
11 parts, right? And yet, when it is treated in Germany, you bring it back and you can
12 spread it away on the same land.

13

14 So I don't know. I take a lot of this stuff with a pinch of salt. But I'll finish on this
15 note. You know, in two months' time, we're going to have EU elections, and we
16 have promises from the main parties, from the lot of them, you know, that there will
17 be changes here and there and whatever; but now, coming up to this election, as I
18 say, in two months' time, I don't see changes happening at all. After every election,
19 it's all the same.

20

21 I was just saying to myself there coming over this morning: For a member -- we
22 have 13, I think it is, 13 MEPs, and for every time they attend a meeting in Brussels,
23 whether they be Sinn Fein, Fine Fail, Fine Gael, whatever they are, to sign in in the
24 morning, they are paid €350.

25

26 So you can imagine the farmer now, Tom, coming down the stairs in the morning
27 and signing a little jotter in the hall, and you get €350 into your hand just for signing
28 in. The whole lot has gone haywire. The £600,000-odd these MEPs would get over
29 the five-year stint, plus their wages. I don't know. I think we're all coddling
30 ourselves.

31 MR BYRNE: I fully agree with you.

32 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Tom, I want to wish you the best of luck. And I know
33 that you're concerned for the environment, you're concerned for a lot of things. But I
34 honest to god think that your interest in the environment and what you're trying to do

1 there, I think there's a little bit more -- the EU is a big -- a big problem, and the
2 legislation and the bureaucrats, as my colleague here, Councillor Snell pointed out,
3 they are big issues. I don't know how it is going to work out in the heel of the hunt,
4 you know.

5

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor O'Neill.

7 Councillor Lourda Scott?

8 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yes. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Tom, for
9 coming in, and thanks for all the rest of the farmers outside for a sort of a really
10 pleasant and peaceful protest, and it's always good to engage and talk with people. I
11 think everything starts with a conversation. And I think there does tend to be a
12 tendency, maybe particularly in media circles of trying to polarise farmers against
13 everybody else, and I really don't have any truck with that.

14

15 Around a sort of biodiversity and climate, it's very much a situation, from my
16 perspective, of -- that we're all in this together. You know, every sector has to do
17 their bit, but also, every sector needs to be supported in doing that as well. And
18 certainly, listening to farmers is something that politicians, you know, from a local
19 level up to European level, needs to be doing.

20

21 Farmers, for sure, need a certainty around their income, and they need certainty
22 around succession as well. It's a very bleak picture, really, I suppose, that you're
23 painting. I understand that. At the same time, I suppose, the picture is going to get
24 bleaker if we don't get on top of climate and biodiversity loss. There is no doubt
25 about that either. And, you know, the nature restoration part is hugely important
26 going forward. But we can't restore nature without active farmer participation. So
27 that goes back to, you know, farmers need to be listened, need their certainty around
28 income, they need more young farmers coming on board as we go forward into the
29 future as well. There needs to be long-term planning as well as the short-term major
30 issues as well.

31

32 And just to say as well, because we were talking about -- I'm sort of on the -- I have
33 my climate and biodiversity hat on a little bit, I suppose; I chair the climate and
34 biodiversity SPC policy committee in the Council, and, just to point out, like, nature

1 restoration or looking after the environment, it's not new to farmers. We have been
2 saying this throughout the day. But there is a lot of great projects that's already been
3 done through the glass scheme. I know there's been a lot of -- thousands of hectares
4 of wild bird cover being planted through the acre scheme as well, although I
5 acknowledge what you are saying about the delay in payments; that's disappointing
6 to hear about. So there is a lot of work already being done, and hopefully we will be
7 able to continue to be carried through.

8

9 Just again back to that stakeholder engagement piece, I think, you know, purely
10 coming from this, a lot of what has been discussed, I don't have the in-depth
11 knowledge of, you know, what's going on, I suppose, at European level in particular;
12 but just looking even here in the Council, we do have our climate and biodiversity
13 policy committee, and, on that, we do have all stakeholders, including a
14 representative from the Farming Association, and that contribution has always been
15 valued in our discussions around what we're doing at that local level, and I hope that
16 will continue with the new reiteration; we would very much welcome a farmer sitting
17 on that SPC again when it reconvenes after the elections in June.

18

19 And I know we were discussing about the Council going forward, maybe creating a
20 biodiversity form with a number of different stakeholders across the county, and,
21 again, farmers will be very much invited to being a part of that as well. And that's
22 where we need to be travelling forward. And this is why I think it is great having
23 you in here talking to the Council. And I'd look forward -- if I am lucky enough to
24 be re-elected in June, I'd look forward to seeing you back on more regular level.

25

26 Because I think at that point where we're talking eyeball to eyeball, out of the media,
27 out of social media, and we're listening to each other, and hearing problems, and
28 there's a huge amount of ground we all have common area on; there'll be some that
29 will disagree and have different opinions on, but there's a huge amount we have
30 common ground on.

31

32 And I think by communicating and working together, you know, both farming and
33 the environment and biodiversity police will be all the better for it. So thank you for
34 your time and coming here.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

2 Tom, I am very conscious that you're standing there a long time.

3 MR BYRNE: I'm okay. I am fine.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: We have five final speakers, and I would ask the speakers to
5 be brief, if they can. I am just conscious that a number of questions have been raised
6 which I would like the officials, we've now six -- Councillor Fortune, six final
7 speakers, if they could be brief, because I do want the officials to respond to some of
8 the questions raised. We have a motion that needs to be voted on as well, and I'm
9 really anxious that Tom has an opportunity to respond.

10

11 Councillor Pat Kennedy?

12

13 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Chair. I will be very brief, because I think
14 everything that needs to be said has already been said. So I just want to thank you,
15 Tom, for coming in here today, and thank the rest of the farming community for
16 coming in here today, and for giving up their time to be here, because farmers want
17 to be on the land, not in here.

18

19 What I want to say, I think my colleague, Councillor Blake, said it and he said it very
20 well, and I think he was very articulate in what he said, so I won't go over what he
21 said, because he said exactly what I wanted to say.

22

23 But farming is the backbone of rural Ireland, and urban Ireland would not survive
24 without farmers and the products that they produce. What I would like to see is a
25 greater link between this Council and the farming community; and by what I mean
26 is, I would like to see the Director of the Environment scheduling at least three
27 meetings a year with the Chair of the IFA to follow on what Councillor Lourda Scott
28 said a minute ago, where they can meet eyeball to eyeball, out of the way of the
29 media, where they can sit down and talk, and to talk about those farm inspections
30 and the things that Tom has brought up earlier on.

31

32 I also think that we have the President of the AILG here with us. He is a member of
33 Wicklow County Council, Councillor Gail Dunne. And I think, if Tom was to
34 prepare a document and -- the IFA executive, where Councillor Dunne could present

1 that at the next AILG meeting, he would be presenting it to councillors from all over
2 the country. And I think that would be well worth doing, if the Chairman and the
3 executive felt it was worthwhile doing.

4

5 But I do think that we should be having a schedule of meetings between the Director
6 of the Environment in Wicklow County Council and the IFA executive.

7 Thank you, Chair.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

9 Councillor Avril Cronin?

10 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thanks very much, and thank you very much for the
11 presentation. I think when you spoke off cuff there towards the end, we could really
12 hear the passion in your voice, and we could see that, you know, these are really
13 serious issues. And thank you to all the farmers that are here today. It just goes to
14 show how fearful you are of the future and how serious these issues are, the fact that
15 you're sitting through this today, and you are willing to take time out of your day to
16 talk to all of us.

17

18 I spoke to a number of you outside, and I could hear the passion in your voice about
19 the concerns that you have. And coming from a rural background, I hear these
20 concerns as well. My grandparents, both sides, ran farms. My parents grew up on
21 farms. So, you know, I do have family members as well that have the same fears as
22 you have. And they are genuine fears about the future of farming.

23

24 And as has already been said here, farming is the backbone of rural Ireland, and we
25 cannot forget that, and we can't forget where we came from, too.

26

27 I think we need to work with farmers. We need to make -- as was discussed earlier,
28 the schemes, many of them are a huge amount of paperwork. The documents, they're
29 not user-friendly, and we need to make them a lot more easier for people to work
30 through and have that support for them.

31

32 We need to engage with the farming community, as politicians, and hear your views.
33 And particularly, when it comes to climate action and environmental issues, we can
34 often hear people complaining about the farming sector and agriculture, but, at the

1 end of the day, farming can be part of the solution, and not just the problem.

2

3 So I certainly fully support you here today, and I know I, for one, will be bringing
4 back the concerns that I heard today. I will be bringing back to my party colleagues
5 at national government, and I will be raising your concerns.

6

7 So I'd like to show my support for you all today, and to also support the motion here
8 proposed by my councillor colleague, Councillor Cullen.

9 Thank you.

10 (Applause.)

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

12 Councillor Irene Winters?

13 COUNCILLOR WINTERS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Tom, for your
14 presentation.

15

16 I, like Councillor Mullen, listened to that farmer who was growing the cauliflowers
17 and feeding them back to his cattle at the weekend, and I was thinking about it, and I
18 thought, like, we're in the EU and we do have free trade and all of that, but when
19 they're looking at climate action and, you know, how we can do things, it shouldn't
20 just be about cost and availability, it should be about cost, availability and the carbon
21 cost, and that maybe something can be done so that, if cauliflowers are available in
22 Ireland for, basically, a fraction of the price, with a much lower carbon footprint than
23 Spanish cauliflowers, there should be some EU regulation, seeing as they have so
24 many regulations, that actually says, you must stock the lowest carbon item rather
25 than just the lowest priced item, and that we need to be, as we're factoring things in,
26 looking at the carbon cost as well.

27

28 If there's farmers growing cauliflowers here, and there's only a couple of pence in it,
29 we should be buying the Irish cauliflowers, and we shouldn't even have to compete
30 with the Spanish ones. They should be using their own carbon print, selling in their
31 own country. That's just something I thought about over the weekend, and I thought
32 there -- I mean, that's a very basic view of it, but there has to be some way that the
33 regulations, seeing as we're overrun with regulations, can be done to ensure that
34 product produced locally can actually make it to the market locally, so that people

1 can make a living in this country from the produce that they're producing.

2

3 Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

4 (Applause.)

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Joe Behan?

6 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And you're welcome, Tom. And

7 it's not the first time I've heard you speak, and you spoke excellently again today.

8 And thank you for giving us the value of your experience and your passion. And

9 welcome to all of your colleagues and their families, and those who are outside, and
10 are possibly watching online.

11

12 I know, having contested a number of general elections, how professional the IFA
13 are when it comes to talking to aspiring politicians before elections, and you will
14 have heard today, I think, right across the chamber, unanimous agreements that we
15 want to support you as members of the local authority, and I have no doubt that we
16 will be agreeing to the motion, and I want to compliment Councillor Cullen and
17 Councillor Bourke for proposing and seconding it.

18

19 But we have a problem, and I think the problem will be evident after all of these
20 motions are passed at all of the County Council chambers throughout the country.

21

22 The councillors are on your side. The local representatives, the people like us who
23 are closest to you, support you. But when people get up to the next level, to the Dáil,
24 and the Seanad, and government, they seem to forget where they came from, they
25 forget their roots, and they forget the commitments when they went to your public
26 meetings before elections.

27

28 And I think the challenge for you and for all of us, in whatever influence we have, is
29 to translate what we are supporting you for, that that is translated into where the
30 decisions are made. I think that is absolutely crucial.

31

32 But the other thing that I think we could do more to support you at a local level, and
33 I am not necessarily talking about the members, but I am certainly talking about the
34 Council officials, is the whole question of rural planning, and assisting rural families

1 to get planning permission for their own sons and daughters, and to allow them to
2 continue to have a living presence on their farms.

3

4 We have tried, and we have worked very, very hard together to have sections of our
5 development plan included to give priority to people in rural areas to allow them to
6 build houses and to have houses for their children. But even when we do that, I am
7 not happy that the executive here in the Council actually follow through on those
8 policies sufficiently to reflect the views that we expressed when we had our
9 development plan meetings, and I think that's a challenge for us, as councillors, to
10 insist that when we pass development plans, we pass motions, that they're
11 implemented. That's the first thing.

12

13 And the second thing I'd say is, way back in the eighties, I think it was, there was
14 actually county committees of agriculture. You probably remember them, Tom.

15 MR BYRNE: I do.

16 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: And some of the people here, certainly, their fathers who
17 were councillors at the time, would have been members of those committees. And
18 those committees gave an opportunity to local farmers and local representatives to
19 discuss the issues of concern to farmers on a really detailed and constructive basis.

20

21 Now, the whole system has been upended since 2014, and we now have things called
22 SPCs, Strategic Policy Committees. And we heard the name of one of them here, the
23 newest one is the Climate and Biodiversity Committee. A very abstract real concept,
24 but an abstract named committee. And I think something we should consider,
25 though any of us who are lucky enough to be re-elected, should consider that, in
26 designing the new SPCs, the word "agriculture" should be included in the title of one
27 of those committees; so that we -- we have enterprise already named, and business, if
28 you like, is catered for under another SPC. But I think the word "agriculture", the
29 term "agriculture" and the issues of agriculture should be front and centre when the
30 new council is elected, and, certainly, if I am elected, that's something that I will be
31 happy to propose when that time comes.

32 Thank you very much.

33 (Applause.)

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

1 Councillor Peir Leonard?

2 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thanks. And thanks, Tom. And I know it takes a lot
3 of courage to get up there. I know you said you were nervous. I don't believe it for
4 one bit. And just thanks to all the farmers for coming up today.

5

6 I am a real towny, but I do have many people that I care about that live in the rural
7 community and work farms, and -- and I know it's an absolute vocation. It's not a
8 job that's a 9 to 5 at all. You're out in all weathers and all hours of -- throughout the
9 night, all year round. But I do think -- I am on the climate SPC, and I think what Joe
10 has said is very important there, that we need to -- I have noticed in some of the
11 committees in the Council, that there's a lot of voices missing, and I think it is really
12 important, if the voice isn't at the table, then nothing happens, you know.

13

14 So I think that's a really important thing that Joe has said there, to have the
15 agriculture as part of it, and I think I would support that, that we could have a climate
16 and agriculture and biodiversity SPC, so we can all sit down and work together.

17

18 What I would like to talk about is the disconnection between the value of food, like,
19 in our day-to-day lives, where everybody in the community -- I think there's a
20 complete disconnect to the value of the people that are producing the food. I think
21 years ago, historically, there was a much closer connection between urban and rural.
22 You know, we traded. They brought the food into the urban areas to sell. There was
23 markets. There was fresh green grocers on the main streets. They've all disappeared,
24 and they have been replaced by shops, big supermarkets, importing most of the food
25 from abroad, wrapped in plastic.

26

27 There's a huge cry-out and need and want in the local community from local cafes,
28 restaurants to buy local, and for the people that are living in local communities to
29 buy and want to buy local produce.

30

31 I was talking to a Spanish lady who'd moved here, and she said she wanted to know
32 where can she buy locally produced food. And I honestly couldn't tell her, because
33 there was nowhere, you know, apart from the big supermarkets, with everything
34 wrapped in plastic.

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But in some of the European countries, they have municipal district markets that are funded by the municipal district, and it's a revenue creator for the municipal district. And I noticed on our revenue, we actually don't have any markets, or facilitate any markets for food producers in our locality, and I think that's something that we could work on as well going forward.

But look it, I completely support your motion, and thank everybody for coming here today, and if it can help at all going along; but I do think it's the higher up the ladder that are making policies, and that it's coming from the top down rather than the ground up. And I think that's right across the board with everything at the moment.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Tom Fortune?

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Tom, thanks for your presentation. The thing, apart from everything that has been said by everybody, which is all very solid, what I picked up from it was is utter frustration in what you delivered and in the way you delivered it, and the same when I spoke to some of your colleagues outside. You can feel it.

And, really, what you are reflecting as well is what a lot of groupings and people are reflecting, and lots of areas that people like ourselves bring to this table sometime.

I can recall myself, a number of years ago, when I was involved with tourism, I was chair of tourism for a number of years, and when we used to meet and talk with the board on different things, the two big things that were going to drive Wicklow was agri and tourism. And we need to cop on and make sure that's not lost.

And just to pick a product, we talk about different products; you go into a supermarket, any supermarket - I could drive from here now and go to any of the supermarkets, and you want to buy tomatoes, they'll be from Morocco, they'll be from Spain, they'll be from Netherlands, and you will struggle to find an Irish one. So there's something -- something really, really crazy going on.

1

2 But I am fully, fully supportive of what you've articulated to us today and your
3 position, and you need to be listened to, and it needs to be acted on. And I think a lot
4 of good stuff has come out of the meeting as well that should be followed up. Well
5 done.

6 MR BYRNE: Thank you, Councillor.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor Fortune.

8

9 Councillor Gail Dunne. Final comment.

10 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And Tom, thanks a million.

11 The second time I've seen you present here, and your passion in what you believe in
12 is unbelievable. I was thinking there, my background in the GAA, I could have done
13 with you in a few dressing rooms over the years, Tom. You might have got the lads
14 going.

15 Just following on from what Councillor Kennedy remarked on. I am President of the
16 AILG, which represents 949 councillors throughout this country. Most of them
17 represent rural communities. And if there was a document or something that you
18 want to give to me, I will make sure that it will go to them, them councillors, because
19 we're a powerful organisation, we represent all parties, independents, and when we're
20 together, we can be very strong, and we can go to the people who are making these
21 decisions and ask them to look at this.

22

23 So if you want to follow up on that and come back to me on it, Tom, I will be happy
24 to meet you and I will be happy to present it to the AILG.

25 Thank you.

26 MR BYRNE: Thank you very much.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

28 Sorry, Tom, I know you're standing there for a long time. I am going to have to ask
29 you to stand there a little bit longer, if that is okay.

30 So we have a motion proposed by Councillor Shay Cullen, seconded by

31 Councillor Sylvester Bourke. And the motion reads as follows:

32 "The Wicklow County Council resolves to write to the President of the EU
33 Commission, the Taoiseach, and the Minister for Agriculture, advising them that the
34 Council has passed the following resolution, that Wicklow County Council support

1 the IFA's "enough is enough" campaign. The Council recognises the significant
2 contribution that farming and the agri sector makes to the Irish and local economy.
3 The Council acknowledges the income challenge on Irish farmers arising from the
4 significant increase in the cost of doing business, regulatory costs and the cuts in
5 basic income support for farmers. The Council calls on the Government to introduce
6 no further regulations on farmers or any measures that may increase costs on farms
7 without full negotiation and agreement with the Irish Farmers Association, the IFA.
8 The Council calls on the European Union and the Irish Government to provide
9 additional standalone funding, separate to the common agricultural policy CAP to
10 support farmers to undertake climate and biodiversity measures."

11

12 So we have a proposer and a seconder for that motion. Do we have any dissent?
13 Okay. So we have no dissent. So that motion is passed.

14 (Applause.)

15

16 We have a number of questions that are raised, that I'm going to get the officials to
17 respond to, and then there's a question for yourself, Tom, as well.

18

19 So just in terms of responses from the officials, we have a question in relation to the
20 inspections and what work could be done to help with those inspections; a question
21 in relation to the ash die-back and what work can be done there; and a question in
22 relation to the establishment of regular meetings with the IFA.

23

24 So I will hand over to the Chief Executive.

25 Thank you.

26

27 MS O'GORMAN: Tom, you're very, very welcome, and all your members are very,
28 very welcome. Thank you for your presentation. It's been heard and listened to.

29

30 Just, I suppose, in relation to protocols, I mean, we have a number of protocols in
31 place. All staff have badges like this, and they should produce them when they
32 arrive on site, and I would say, in the majority of cases, they do. We're very, very
33 happy to sit down with you, and whoever from the Wicklow Executive, to discuss
34 protocols on how we go about our inspections, and the notification to members in

1 advance.

2

3 Again, that ties into, I suppose, regular meetings. I had the pleasure of meeting you
4 myself, previously --

5 MR BYRNE: Yes. Correct. Yes.

6 MS O'GORMAN: -- and more than happy to do that; myself, as Chief Executive,
7 and Breege Kilkenny, as the Director of Environment, very, very happy to meet with
8 you regularly, as often as you want it; once a quarter, if that's what the members
9 want. I don't want to take away from your time. Very happy to do that.

10 Now, I should really pass this to Joe, but I might pass it to Leonora on the die-back,
11 because they have only just swapped directorates since Friday.

12 So I'll pass over to Leonora for that. Thank you.

13 MS EARLS: Thank you, Chief Executive.

14 Just in relation to the ash die-back disease, that's something that is regularly
15 discussed in here. We have monthly meetings with the District engineers, and it
16 would be something that would be constantly discussed. We have raised it
17 nationally in two different arenas; we've raised it with the TII, we've raised it with
18 the local government management agency, to see can we try and get it onto the
19 agenda even further, with a view to how can landowners be supported, because they
20 were encouraged to plant the trees, now we have an issue with a disease on the trees,
21 so there needs to be some assistance given. So it is something that has been
22 continuously pushed here through the different arenas and avenues that we have, and
23 Joe will continue to raise it up.

24 Thank you.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Leonora.

26 Now Tom, it's your opportunity to cut back in. So there was a question raised in
27 relation to young people entering --

28 MR BYRNE: The future.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: -- farming, and what that future will look like. And if you
30 want to make any other comments as well. So I will hand over to yourself.

31 MR BYRNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Well, my first comment is, I am thrilled
32 and humbled at the response here today. I quite honestly didn't expect that. I
33 thought I would get a bit of harassment.

34

1 But, look it, I am absolutely delighted the way the response has come, and thank you
2 very much to Wicklow County Council for affording me, and the Cathaoirleach for
3 affording me this opportunity.

4

5 A few points I'd just like to make, and I will be as brief as I can.

6

7 Ireland is in a unique place to produce food, because we have a thing called grass
8 that produces the food here. It's not like the rest of Europe. We don't house our
9 animals 12 months of the year. They're out every day, grazing on green grass, that
10 produces the best quality food in the world. We have a problem getting this across to
11 the people in Europe, because they don't understand how we farm. That is one point
12 that is very, very important.

13

14 The future: I haven't a crystal ball. I'll tell you a little bit about the past. When we
15 joined the EU back in '72 or '73, there was 470,000 full-time farmers. Today, there's
16 172,000 registered farmers, there are 5 and a half thousand full-time farmers. That's
17 the truth. That's where we're at.

18

19 And if the past is going to dictate the future, well, I think we're heading in a terrible
20 place. And as farmers, we produce food, and we know there's a huge need for food
21 right across the world. Look at the poor Palestinians, where they're suffering for the
22 want of food. But farmers can't rely on what's going to happen on the rest of the
23 world, what happens in Kiev or what happens in Russia. What happens if a world
24 war breaks out. And we are not that far away. Like, farmers might be in a better
25 place, because there will be such a need for food. We don't want to rely on things
26 like that. That's just doomsday scenario.

27

28 But we do need to keep a vibrant productive agriculture system here in Ireland. We
29 need to be allowed to farm. We need to be allowed to protect the environment. We
30 don't want huge, huge industrial farms. They don't serve the rural community. They
31 don't serve agriculture. So we don't want that. At least I don't. And I don't think any
32 member of the farming community wants it either. We want to produce food
33 carefully, environmentally, and safe food; what we produce now. And that is what I
34 want to see as the future.

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I offered my son the other day a partnership on my farm, my one and only son, one and only child, and, honestly, World War III nearly broke out at home, because he didn't want it. And I can't blame him. The chap is well educated, has a good job. What would he want to be dragging his tail around in the muck for, like I did for the last 60 years and more?

So I understand where he's coming from. But I understand the implications that has for agriculture as well. That really, really is serious. There is no future, really, in agriculture. And because there has been such focus on the production of cheap food, the lesser lands, the lands that are not able to produce plentiful amounts, like the uplands; in Wicklow, we have loads of them, the finest stretch of uplands in the country, those are getting abandoned, and the neighbouring lands are getting abandoned.

And I have an absolute belief that when these places are abandoned, it's worse for the environment. Absolutely worse. There is no management. And national parks and wildlife now have come to the belief, at long last, thanks be to god, that the uplands need to be managed.

As John Mullen said, I was part of the uplands -- still am part of the Wicklow uplands council, and we ran environmental projects, and we have proved beyond doubt that farming the uplands is the only way forward to have good environmental practice. And I am not proposing burning the place, but it needs -- needs to be managed. And we have a beautiful, beautiful county here. And we get an influx of holiday-makers and day trippers on the weekend, and they enjoy this beautiful county, and I hope to god that they still continue to enjoy it, and I hope that it will be farmed environmentally friendly.

But for the rest of agriculture, folks, we don't want huge, huge tracks of land devoted to huge dairy outfits, huge beef outfits. We know about them all around the world, in America and Argentina. We don't want that in Ireland. We want the family farm maintained. We want an income for the people who work it. We want to care for the environment. And to that end, we need to work with the people in authority. We

1 need them to work with us, also. We have to have the people in authority working
2 with us.

3

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Well said, Tom. Well said.

5

6 MR BYRNE: And, in conclusion to that, I want to invite Wicklow County Council,
7 all you people, out to a farm some day and show some of the good work that we do,
8 okay? So, please, will you come to the farm and we'll talk to you and show you, and
9 I know that all creeds of our political system are here today; so, please, we want you
10 out.

11

12 And, finally, I want to wish all those poor people that are putting their names
13 forward for the hardship that we are giving you in next June, the very, very best of
14 luck. And I believe we're losing some great councillors in Wicklow, and that's
15 Wicklow's loss. And I can't name them here today.

16

17 But look it, thank you, thank you very much for listening to me and for putting up
18 with me, and for causing the little bit of mayhem outside. So apologies for that.

19

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: No, no, you are absolutely fine, Tom. And, listen, just on
21 behalf of the members here, just to yourself and everybody that's here present, thank
22 you for taking the time to come in today and for working with us. I am glad that you
23 felt the support from the chamber, both from the officials and the elected members,
24 because the support is here. A lot of us have huge connections with farming and our
25 family. So we want the same things that you want. So I am glad that you heard that
26 support.

27

And thank you very much Tom.

28

MR BYRNE: Cathaoirleach, go raibh maith agat.

29

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

30

(Applause.)

31

32 Okay, members, we're now moving on to item number 7, and that is: To consider the
33 Chief Executive's Monthly Management Report, February 2024.

34

So I am going to hand over to the Chief Executive.

1 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I will be very brief, because some of
2 the members have already mentioned some of the things I was going to highlight.
3 Just, firstly, I want to congratulate Councillor Dunne and the AILG on a very
4 successful conference in Arklow Bay. It was lovely to see so many councillors there
5 engaged. I was just sorry I couldn't attend for the two days. So congratulations to all
6 involved in that.

7
8 And then to comment on what Councillor Blake said. Delighted to receive the
9 Council of The Year at the LAMA awards. We were -- as he said, we thought we
10 were going home empty-handed because we had been shortlisted for a number of
11 projects, and we were like a conveyor belt going up and down to get our photographs
12 taken; but it was worth it because we had a fabulous award at the end of it. So just I
13 want to pay tribute to the staff of the organisation. A huge amount of work goes in
14 to, as you know, every day of just keeping the county going. So those 11 that were
15 shortlisted are only, I suppose, an example of the work that we can put forward in
16 terms of the high level of activity in the Council. So I just wanted to congratulate all
17 the staff in the Council, and to show that they are very, very much appreciated.

18
19 And finally, I just want to draw your attention: This is the start of local enterprise
20 week. It runs from today until Friday. I would encourage you to get involved, have
21 a look at the LEO website, and just if there are any events of interest to you, to
22 please participate and support the local businesses.

23 And we're happy to take questions on any other matters that are in the CEO report.
24 Thank you.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Fantastic. Thank you, Chief Executive.

26 Okay. So I'm going to open it up to the floor.

27 Councillor Stephen Stokes.

28 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach.

29
30 Can I congratulate everybody associated with Wicklow County Council on the
31 LAMA awards which are on display here in the chamber. It's very encouraging to
32 see that there is a lot of positive work going on in the county and, you know, it is
33 great to be a part of that in my own way. But a big congratulations to everybody.
34 It's great.

1

2 I just want to touch on the Greystones to Wicklow Greenway. I would like to thank
3 the Chief Executive for a fairly comprehensive update on page 63 of the Chief
4 Executive's report this month. I just want to check. I am presuming the references to
5 most of the meetings in there are from 2023, not 2022? Because there's a lot of
6 reference, like, meetings in June. And I just want to check: Were the February Irish
7 Rail meetings in 2024, were those February Irish Rail meetings with Wicklow
8 County Council or were there other people involved, or other groups? And I am just
9 wondering what the outcomes were from those meetings.

10

11 And also, I am just wondering, in relation to the Greystones to Wicklow Greenway
12 or the East Coast Greenway, as a lot of people refer to it, when will the draft
13 consultation be ready, or expected to be ready? Because I know we're very keen,
14 you know, in the Greystones Municipal District to get the benefit of this as
15 efficiently as possible for local residents and tourists.

16

17 The next item I would just like to raise is just in relation to road markings around the
18 county, you know, and especially in the Greystones Municipal District. And I'd say
19 that this equally applies to the rest of the county, too.

20

21 I mean, just today, I was travelling through Kilcoole and Newcastle, and the poor
22 state of the road markings really is a scandal. I mean, people contact me every week,
23 if not every day, about this particular issue; yet, at district level, unless there is some
24 sort of dedicated scheme, it is almost impossible to get a road or a ramp remarked.

25

26 So I would like to ask if Wicklow County Council would be prepared to put together
27 an action plan to audit and redo the road markings in each Municipal District. I
28 certainly believe that we should start with speed ramps, junctions, and roads outside
29 the schools. I mean, for me, those would be the three top priorities. And I'd like to
30 get that commitment from Wicklow County Council. Because we cannot go on like
31 this, just allowing road markings to just disappear from a lot of our roads. So I
32 would really feel very strongly about that.

33

Go raibh maith again, Cathaoirleach.

34

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

1 Councillor John Mullen?

2 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I will try to be as brief as
3 possible.

4

5 At the previous meeting, in fairness to the CEO, she did agree to meet with some of
6 us in relation to concerns I raised with planning, particularly for short-term lets, to
7 provide an increase in our tourism product, particularly in rural areas. So I hope we
8 can facilitate that meeting wherever we can.

9

10 In a related matter as well, when it comes to rural areas, we had three rural villages
11 last year flooded quite seriously, Tinahely, Shillelagh and Carnew, as a result of the
12 ongoing heavy rainfall that we're getting that's because of climate change. And yet,
13 we didn't receive one cent in climate mitigation funding to facilitate what needs to be
14 improved drainage, essentially. And I am sure I'm not the only councillor who is
15 raising that rural roads also need improved drainage because of the increased rainfall
16 coming off the uplands.

17

18 So I am just wondering how we could access or leverage such funding? Because I
19 know other counties seem to have gotten quite a substantial amount; and yet, we
20 seem to be falling between the two stools on that.

21 Thanks.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

23 Councillor Lourda Scott?

24 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yes. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Chief
25 Executive, for the report. I just want to commend Healthy Wicklow just on their
26 work around period poverty, and I see a lot of sporting clubs signing up to that now,
27 including Eire Óige and Greystones. So it is great -- great to see that initiative
28 getting rolled out, so well done for pushing that through.

29

30 Just a couple of questions. I was wondering if there is any timeframe around the sort
31 of completion or opening of the enterprise centre in Greystones. I note there was an
32 update there, and I was just wondering was there any timeframe around that?

33

34 I, once again, welcome that the periodic 30K traffic signs are finally after being put

1 up. So it is really nice to see those around the area.

2

3 I did raise this at our municipal meetings, but I just want to flag that the times that
4 they flash on and off may not be accurate in all cases. And, certainly, outside one
5 school in Blacklion in Greystones, they are not coming on at school opening and
6 closing times. So I have flagged that in. But I just wonder if a sort of a review needs
7 to be done of all the signs, or sort of a due course, perhaps. But I would ask that that
8 one is addressed quite quickly, because we have been waiting for some time for these
9 to get put up.

10

11 The other question I had was, yes, just as regards the strategy for the development of
12 allotments and community gardens, I know you gave me an update, Chief Executive,
13 in January that you hoped there would be expressions of interests going out to the
14 public in Q1, and, as we're heading into March now, I was just wondering where we
15 are with that. And I will be quite anxious to see that progress, particularly in light of
16 the great support of food production. You can't get any more local that food grown
17 in your own community or in your allotment.

18 Thank you.

19 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Chief Executive, I will
20 just take one more, and then I'll bring you in. Councillor Paul O'Brien?

21 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you to the
22 Chief Executive for another comprehensive report. And my congratulations on the
23 award as well. And I take this opportunity to wish the directors all the best in their
24 new roles.

25

26 I just want to raise two issues. The first one, I want to thank Helena Fallon and
27 Aideen Cleere for their trojan work when it comes to retrofitting. I have been
28 working a lot with them in the last number of weeks and months, in terms of
29 Sycamore Drive in Newtown, and I can say that, quite safely, that the Council are
30 being recognised for this work because it has transformed the road.

31

32 But, sadly, I am being inundated with calls and messages from other tenants in our
33 district that the retrofitting is not coming to them sooner. Because -- to give an
34 example, I got a message only an hour ago to say that someone's electricity and

1 heating bill has gone from €100 in credit to now receiving a bill of €520; so it's just
2 not sustainable. We have an older stock. Obviously, we have a lot of new houses
3 coming on stream, and I welcome them, but we have an older stock at the moment
4 that need to be brought up to code. Because there is a knock-on effect, and people
5 are saying that they're coming to a choice where they either pay their ESB and their
6 gas, or their rent. And we have made great headways in terms of the rent arrears.
7 But unless the retrofitting is progressed even quicker, I am afraid that we will see our
8 rents falling back into arrears.

9

10 So can I just find out how many houses have been retrofitted throughout the county,
11 and what the plans are for future retrofitting? But again, my thanks to Helena and
12 Aideen, who are doing trojan work at the moment.

13

14 The second thing I want to ask today, it's something that I brought up before, and
15 that's, when it comes to one-bed; I'm dealing with people now on the list ten, 15 and
16 in some cases 20 years, and they feel that they are being penalised and punished
17 because they're not being allocated social house.

18

19 And again, I have got the answer back before, but I have to raise it again, because
20 there's people out there in dire need. They're receiving their notices to quit, but,
21 because they're a one-bed need, they're being overlooked. And again, the Council
22 have done trojan work here again in terms of notices to quit. I dealt with a lot of
23 them there in Rathnew and Ashford and Wicklow over the last number of months.
24 Like, literally a week coming up to Christmas, we had 14 of them in Rathnew, and
25 I'm glad to say that every one of them was housed.

26

27 We are building three-bed houses; yet, we could fit four one-beds into that. And I
28 raised here before about two empty buildings, now, one going back four, the other
29 one going back eight years in Wicklow Hills in Newtown, two creches that had to be
30 built as part of the planning, lying idle there, literally within 100 yards of each other,
31 that would fit eight one-bed units.

32

33 But we definitely need to start looking at one-beds. And I know we -- I got the
34 answer back that we will look at case-by-case basis, and if we can't, we will fit them

1 into two-beds. But sadly, that's not been happening. And I don't blame the Housing
2 Department, because their hands are tied. That's the way I see it at the moment.

3

4 Unfortunately, if we keep going down this route, we're going to have people on the
5 housing list 25 plus years without being housed, which is just not good enough. So I
6 appreciate all the work being done, but more needs to be done.

7 Thank you.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

9 Chief Executive?

10 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And just for, I suppose, a bit of clarity
11 and ease of the meeting, the directors will answer questions on their former
12 directorates, because they're still kind of in hand-over mode; they only changed on
13 Friday, so just bear with us, it might be a bit higgledy-piggledy today.

14

15 On the Greenway, I think Leonora might answer on that for Councillor Stokes, and
16 where we're at with the areas.

17

18 I think the idea of looking at and auditing our road markings is a really good idea.
19 I've noticed myself, just as you travel around parts of the county, there are no road
20 markings at all. I don't know whether maybe it's something that will go through the
21 SPC, but we certainly should develop an action plan and audit where we have road
22 markings in place.

23

24 Councillor Mullen, the planning meeting hasn't been convened yet. I defer it, I
25 suppose, to Councillor Timmins, as Chair of the planning SPC, and we will organise
26 a meeting, because I think it was on the agenda of the SPC a day or two after the last
27 Council meeting, so we will do that.

28

29 What I would say, it won't be to discuss individual planning cases, but the policy in
30 the round and how we can maybe work better together to address that and make
31 reasonable accommodations, because it is -- I mean, tourism is so, so important to us,
32 and that short-term letting is hugely important to the rural economy, and our town
33 economy, too. So that's certainly something we are looking at.

34

1 In terms of the flooding and no funding received, yeah, I think you are right, we fell
2 kind of between two stools. They did give funding to areas, the Corks of this world,
3 you know, that are constantly being flooded. But flooding doesn't know county
4 boundaries, and that's the issue, really here. So we have been back to the
5 Department, and we will continue to go and see if we can leverage some money
6 there, or some funding there.

7
8 Councillor Scott, in relation to the enterprise centre for Greystones, Lorraine might
9 come in on that and just give you an update, and Leonora on the road signs as well.

10

11 The retrofitting issues, Councillor O'Brien, yes, it's a real -- it is an issue for us. And,
12 you know, I am very conscious of the inequity that arises. Because if you get a
13 brand-new property, or you are transferred into a brand-new property, you have A
14 rated, you have all of that, and then you have somebody else going into an old
15 council property that needs to be retrofitted and brought up to date.

16

17 I am in discussion with colleagues in the Department around how we might better
18 fund that deep retrofitting, because the normal allocation for repairs and relet doesn't
19 really go near the retrofitting, you know, the deep retrofit that some of our stock
20 requires. So it is something that we are in discussion with, and I am hoping I will
21 have some positive news on it in the next coming weeks.

22

23 In relation to the one-beds, yes, I take your point. We have some areas of the county
24 where there is a large demand for one-beds. We have other areas of the county
25 where it is quite low. I suppose, from a construction point of view, one-beds tend to
26 be apartments, and they are far more costly; that's not to say that we shouldn't be
27 doing it. We'll be certainly happy to look at it, to see what kind of a scheme we can
28 put in place in Wicklow and its environs to deal -- to address the one-bed housing
29 list. Because it is not sustainable. It is not -- again, back to equity; you know, if you
30 are on a list for ten years for a very small housing demand, it's just how do we best
31 address that.

32

33 So I might ask Leonora and then Lorraine to come in with those issues, please.

34 MS EARLS: Thank you. In relation to the Greystones and Wicklow Greenway,

1 those meetings took place in February of this year, so there's ongoing discussions
2 between the Roads Department, the Environment Department, TII, and all that in
3 relation -- with Irish Rail. We do plan to bring to the April meeting a briefing
4 around the public consultation for the Greenway. So that will be at that meeting.

5

6 Just to further on, in relation to the road markings, they're done as part of the annual
7 roads programme, so they are kind of kept reviewed that way. It is a bit of a
8 challenge to get a contractor. There's very few of them in the country. So then,
9 when they're available, it tends to rain, or the snow comes, or something else
10 happens. So, we will certainly bring that back to the district engineer meeting that
11 happens on a monthly basis.

12

13 Councillor Scott, so we got the times for the schools from the principals. So if
14 there's an issue there about that particular Blacklion, we will get back to the principal
15 and get that readjusted. Maybe the discussions are still ongoing in relation to that
16 one. We will follow up on that one.

17

18 And, yes, sorry, just in relation to the flooding on the rural roads. Again, just to say,
19 that is constantly -- that has recently been discussed at the district engineer's meeting
20 as well, so we are trying to find other means and other funding arrangements that
21 might be available to us.

22 Thank you.

23 MS GALLAGHER: Okay. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just in relation to the
24 Greystones enterprise hub. So I did mention at the last meeting that the Council has
25 engaged the service of Cushman & Wakefield. So they're basically a property
26 management space management company. So they're going to undertake a
27 detail -- they have undertaken a detailed review of the space. So they are going to
28 look at how to identify its configuration.

29

30 This will involve design specification, going out to tender, look at the fixtures and
31 fittings, the meeting rooms, the technology, communal space provision, and all of
32 that, IT infrastructure, access control; so there's a lot there to be managed.

33

34 We have made an application to Enterprise Ireland smart innovation fund. So the

1 value of that, that the value of re -- or getting it ready for the target market of the
2 businesses will cost in the region of at least 500,000 to near a million.

3

4 I just mentioned to Leonora there, I think it would be nice if maybe the Greystones
5 members would like to take a tour around the building, and that the team could
6 explain in detail what's proposed, and you get a sense of the space yourselves.

7

8 The market, you know, we're targeting high potential start-ups in the technology area
9 in or around Greystones. So I think that would be a nice idea. Maybe we can
10 arrange that.

11

12 Okay. Thanks. So you're looking at around quarter -- the end of Quarter 2; end of
13 June, beginning of July.

14 Okay. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

15 MS O'GORMAN: Apologies, Cathaoirleach. I forgot to comment on the allotments
16 and the community gardens ahead of Councillor Scott.

17

18 Look, it's been a bit slower than I had anticipated. I actually recently got a
19 correspondence from the Department this morning, looking for us to complete a
20 survey on the Council's response to allotments and community gardens; so it is, I
21 suppose, becoming, I suppose, at a national level more desirable. So we will
22 expedite it. I do apologise for the delay, but we will get expressions out, hopefully,
23 by the end of March. I will come back to you and let you know in advance when it is
24 being published.

25 Thank you.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

27 Councillor Tom Fortune?

28 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Well done on the awards.

29 What I want to do, Cathaoirleach, to the CE,, is I am looking for support in the
30 Council for a ceasefire in Palestine. And I can put into context where I am coming
31 from on it, okay? I will use my time to do that.

32

33 As we're all aware, many, many people are struggling with the situation that's taking
34 place in Palestine. We are constantly watching sad videos of children, women and

1 men in Palestine, suffering under the constant bombing by the IDF. Their homes and
2 possessions and their family members have been destroyed, maimed or murdered by
3 the brutality. Children are denied their education, and are dying currently from
4 malnutrition.

5
6 In less than five months, over 100,000 people have been maimed or are dead, and the
7 majority of these, unfortunately, are children and women. People are fully aware,
8 and disgusted, at the atrocities that took place on the 7th October 2023. This was
9 absolutely barbaric in every sense. All loss of lives are sad. People are shocked and
10 saddened as they watch daily the suffering of the conditions the Palestine people are
11 living under.

12
13 So a group of non-political people have come together in North Wicklow, and
14 calling themselves North Wicklow Against Genocide, and they've had a number of
15 meetings, and many people from different perspectives and persuasions and some
16 from political backgrounds have joined together in their disgust with what's going
17 on.

18
19 So, basically, I've been -- a lot of people have actually been in touch with me about
20 this, and the request is being made that Wicklow County Council support the
21 suffering of Palestine (audio interference) in the following manner --

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: My apologies.

23 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: That's okay.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Councillor Murphy, your sound is coming through
25 there.

26 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: One would be that we display the Palestine flag at
27 Council buildings. And I realise that may involve a lot of discussion and everything
28 else. But the second one, that we seek across party political support to end the
29 suffering of the Palestine people by calling an immediate ceasefire, and to end the
30 genocide that is taking place in Gaza.

31

32 And because of the people that have approached me on it, and there's been lots and
33 lots of talk, as we are all aware about it, I hope that we can support that, but, at the
34 very least, I want to put it on the record of the Council meeting. I think what is

1 happening is extremely sad in every sense of the word, and I think, as human beings,
2 we need to call it out for what it is.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.
4 Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

5 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you, Chief
6 Executive, for the report. And congratulations again on the award.

7
8 There's just a few issues I wanted to raise. The first is, the Enniskerry Part 8 was
9 approved back in June 2021, and we're nearly three years later, and nothing has
10 happened with it; only the deterioration of the village, if anything. The steps of the
11 town clock have been closed off since Christmas, and nothing has happened. So I
12 want to just ask, can that be looked at, urgently? Because we're coming into the
13 tourist season, and we rely very heavily on tourism in the village, and, you know, the
14 community and the Business Association have kind of had to put up with enough,
15 that they need to see this pedestrian area and the renewal scheme completed. I look
16 forward to your visit this week, and look forward to showing you what I am talking
17 about.

18
19 The other item was the Quill Road. I brought this up last month. And again, nothing
20 has actually happened. With the snow last week, the flooding on the road, I was
21 getting videos and lots of representations during the day. The garden of the residents
22 immediately next door is destroyed with the water flooding, so I -- can I have that
23 looked at again, please? Again, it is an urgent thing. There's just so much water
24 seems to be pooling in that area, that's destroying, as I say, properties next door.

25
26 And I just want to put on record the Scalp road scheme, my disappointment that it
27 wasn't considered for one of the NTA funding for the feasibility study. There's a
28 huge tourism potential there. It's the gateway to County Wicklow; the border
29 between County Wicklow and County Dublin. The County Dublin side has a
30 beautiful path. You hit County Wicklow, and it's like you're going into a different
31 country. It's very, very narrow, and the footpath is virtually nonexistent. There had
32 been a previous one. So, look, I think there's just a huge loss in that, and I don't want
33 to keep -- just to flag that. And again, I would welcome your visit to come out and
34 see it.

1 Thank you.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

3 Councillor Pat Kennedy?

4 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Chair. Just two things I would like to bring
5 up. One was, Chief Executive, I was just wondering had you heard anything back
6 from the ESB in relation to the outages in Aughrim? They were out again last
7 Tuesday, and there was some businesses that couldn't open there. Now, I know that
8 was a planned one last Tuesday, but it is continuing, Chief Executive, and it is
9 causing a lot of problems out there.

10

11 And the other question was, in our roads allocation this year, we got 14 and a half
12 million. I think it is somewhere in the same region as last year. But with the
13 increase in costs of macadam and bitumen, I just think that's a reduction this year
14 going forward. Maybe that could be clarified.

15

16 Because the roads that are in the areas that I represent, some of them are in an
17 atrocious state, and I have highlighted it on many occasions. Something needs to be
18 done in South Wicklow in relation to some of the rural roads. And I think we have
19 got a cut this year.

20 Thanks.

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

22 Councillor Gerry Walsh?

23 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to the Chief
24 Executive for the support. Congrats again on the LAMA award. Well deserved.

25

26 Just looking at the housing section here, an issue I raised, I think it was in the
27 January meeting, but I don't think I got a response. It's the HAP figures, and the
28 decrease in the HAP figures which are pretty significant, and the impact that's having
29 on our overall housing stock issue. I know our homeless HAP team do a fantastic
30 job in sourcing properties for families. So I was just wondering what the situation is
31 there on the ground in relation to HAP?

32

33 Councillor O'Brien mentioned about the arrears, and said we were making significant
34 inroads, but, in fact, looking at the figures, the opposite is quite the case. I know this

1 is an issue I raise quite regularly. And we're looking at a figure now north of 3 and a
2 quarter million, which is just staggering.

3

4 I mean, we all have constituents living in challenging situations, conditions, who
5 would -- you know, on our housing list, who would do -- who, if they were to be
6 allocated a social house, it would be akin to winning the lottery for them, and yet we
7 have an arrears figure here of that, which is going in the wrong direction. And we're
8 talking about this now since Covid times, unfortunately. So I would like to know if
9 there's any inroads being made on that.

10

11 And just on the -- we mentioned about the retrofits. I see there's 19 there due,
12 not -- completed, not attempted. I was just wondering if there's a timeframe around
13 the allocations on those. And also, the Part 5s, we have a hundred potential Part 5s;
14 is there any update on that? I know that that is a significant figure.

15

16 On the adaptation grants, the private and social, I know I raised it last month, on the
17 figure -- the allocation is based on 2023. The money spent, I think, on this report, I
18 take it, is the January figure, January to date figure. So if that is correct, that would
19 nearly bring us up to that total fund being totally spent.

20

21 I just want to welcome the announcement there of the healthy age friendly homes
22 coordinator there. That is a fantastic initiative. Home visits for the elderly,
23 providing various supports, and social housing, health, IT and all -- I know Michael
24 covered that at your municipal meeting there recently. I must say, it is welcome.

25

26 And maybe on another point Michael covers the Coastal Blueway project, I know
27 there's online consultation due to take place on that. If there's any update on that or
28 maybe explain as to what type of projects that will be covering.

29

30 And the town regeneration supports there, I note there there's various support
31 schemes there; 10,000 for three towns, 30,000 for one, for the town centre first plan,
32 and 50,000 for two projects in the pipeline. But these all refer to rural towns,
33 obviously, a population under 10,000. So the point being made in the report there
34 that four of the town teams are actually -- or four of our five town teams are actually

1 larger towns, and don't qualify for this support. So I am wondering is there any plan
2 to address this anomaly.

3

4 And I welcome the fact that the dog wardens have increased patrols in Arklow and
5 other parts -- other locations across the county, and it's resulting in an increase in
6 licence renewals.

7

8 So yes, that's it. Thank you.

9

10

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

12 Chief Executive?

13 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Councillor -- or, Cathaoirleach, and thank you
14 members. Councillor Corrigan, I will ask Lorraine to kind of address some of your
15 issues there, and I'll look forward to seeing them on the ground during the week.

16

17 Councillor Kennedy, I haven't had a reply from the ESB. I will go higher and go
18 again, and I will come back to you when I do get a reply.

19

20 I think, in the roads allocations that have been given, they have been given without
21 building in inflation. So, effectively, you are probably correct in that, you know, on
22 the ground, prices have gone way up, but we have gotten the same allocation as we
23 had previously, and we have made that point to the Department, as have colleagues
24 around the country. It's the same everywhere.

25

26 Councillor Walsh, most of your queries, I will get Joe to deal with in relation to
27 housing. Just in relation to the RRDR and the URDF and the funding that's -- the
28 funding that was announced, Heather Humphreys had a big event down in Limerick
29 last week, and that was on the rural regeneration programme, which is obviously part
30 of town centre first.

31

32 The larger towns of 10,000 plus are part of the URDF programme. And I suppose, at
33 the moment -- and that the URDF comes out of the Department of Housing & Local
34 Government, and they have been primarily focused on large-scale projects and large

1 infrastructure pieces, rather than the smaller place-making piece.

2

3 So again, in discussions with the Department around how they might release a fund
4 for those towns that are above 10,000, but not at the 50,000 scale, you know,
5 somewhere in between. So that's kind of a piece of work ongoing with the national
6 town centre first office, because they obviously cover both sides, the RRDF and the
7 URDF, so we will see where that goes; but, hopefully, we'll get some traction on that
8 from the Department of Housing & Local Government.

9

10 So I might just get Lorraine to speak around Councillor Corrigan's queries, and then
11 Joe on Councillor Walsh's queries.

12 Thank you.

13 MS GALLAGHER: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Councillor Corrigan. So I
14 will start with the Quill Road, and there is issues there. So the Council has been
15 working with local residents for the past year to achieve a solution to the draining
16 issues. There are three residents affected, that are amenable to the provision of a
17 drainage pipe through their land, and agreements are expected to be finalised shortly.
18 So costs have to be finalised. The district engineer projects that it will cost in excess
19 of 100,000, so he will prepare a business case for this funding, and I will chase him
20 up on that and get that business case in, and proceed with that work.

21

22 The Scalp, it is part of a wider scheme, and I know Michael Flynn has been talking
23 to you about that. Michael has also been talking to me separately in relation to our
24 challenges in getting engineers, particularly senior executive engineers, to move on
25 NTA projects, and I know Michael has met with the team in Bray to see how we can
26 move on projects, but will involve recruitment of additional staff.

27

28 But, separately to that, the district engineer has advised that verge and hedge cutting
29 and litter picking commenced during the week. It did have to be abandoned because
30 of weather. But we will move on as quickly as we can in relation to the other
31 matters.

32

33 And then in relation to the Enniskerry town clock, yes, you are right, the Part 8 was
34 agreed a number of -- well, nearly two years ago, as you say. There are challenges

1 there with the steps, in terms of conservation, in terms of management. It will
2 involve a conservation engineer. The district engineer has assured me that he was
3 going to go out to the market for advice in relation to that. So separately, he has said
4 to me, just in relation to the lighting, that he will prioritise the redesign of the
5 uplighters at the clock, and that will address the visibility and enable the barriers to
6 be taken down, which were -- which is the source of, I suppose, the issue coming
7 into the tourism season.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you, Lorraine.

9 Joe?

10 MR LANE: Okay. I will start with the Part 5s, because it's easier. There's ongoing
11 negotiations with Part 5s. There's a particular question at any stage, with any
12 councillors, on particular development. But they're ongoing. We deal with the
13 developers on a regular basis, and they're coming in. So -- in feeding into the
14 question regarding HAP.

15

16 So when we have notice to quits, if the tenant in situ isn't -- situation, there are other
17 options available, including relets, Part 5s, our own developments, our cabs,
18 our -- within approved housing bodies. So they're coming in on a regular basis.
19 Even some of the bigger developments, even though they're tied into one, we
20 actually -- the Part 5s are counted in a separate heading.

21

22 So I think we got about 80 to 100 last year. We're anticipating more this year. It is
23 just a timing issue. But there's -- any development, we'd be as keen as you would be,
24 just to check the negotiations in particular. But this is an ongoing basis. There
25 would be anything between -- it depends on developer and the progress, again, but
26 they're coming in regularly, so you could have anything between 50 and 100 coming
27 in on an annual basis.

28

29 Again, come back to us in a particular question, because we would be as keen as you
30 are just to follow up and make sure. But most of those, the developers, the Qs are
31 working on them. And it does feed in on the allocation process. The arrears, yes,
32 we -- it's not the first day we have had a conversation on that. We will be trying to
33 break the arrears between age profiling, again, between the longer-term ones, maybe
34 looking at that and the way we're accounting for those, and the ongoing ones. The

1 ongoing ones, there are challenging cases, but they are being managed.

2

3 The fabric upgrade, really, that's another question to work with that, and there will be
4 a new programme on that. But there's a particular on the 18 again. Will you just ask
5 the question or just talk to me afterwards, and I will get answers on that particular
6 18, because I'm not quite sure where you are getting that figure from. But come back
7 to me on it, because I'll be keen. Because that programme is finishing -- sorry. The
8 three-year programme. There's a new programme will be coming in soon, but that's
9 only the end of the old programme; so you might just have to come back to me, or if
10 there's another councillor who has a particular question about -- about the -- about an
11 area, come back to me.

12 I think they're the three.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much.

14 Before I move on, just in relation to Councillor Fortune's comments that you raised.
15 Councillor Fortune, I will respond to them, if that's okay, and if it is not sufficient,
16 you can let me know.

17 So just, I suppose, for the members to be aware that, at the last Protocol Committee,
18 which was held on the 12th of February, I brought to the Protocol Committee a
19 request that had been received from the Cathaoirleach of Kerry County Council, who
20 was organising for all Cathaoirligh to visit the Palestine Ambassador to sign a letter
21 of support on behalf of the various council chambers. This was brought to the
22 Protocol Committee. It was put forward by myself. It was proposed by Councillor
23 Snell and seconded by Anne Ferris.

24

25 That meeting took place with the Palestine Ambassador. And very good discussion.
26 The letter was signed. I am just very, very conscious, Councillor Fortune, that other
27 members in this chamber have actually brought forward motions in relation to this
28 issue, and have been advised that those motions, because they don't relate to an item
29 on the agenda, should be put in as a motion, and they have agreed to do that and put
30 them in.

31

32 So while I don't want to disrespect what you've requested, I am just conscious that
33 other people have done that as well. I know you are conscious to have your
34 comments on record, and they have been stated here in the chamber, so they will be.

1

2 So I just wanted to update you that a meeting had taken place with the Palestine
3 Ambassador, and also that there are other colleagues here who have similar motions
4 in. That will be heard at the next meeting.

5 Is that okay? Do you want to come back?

6 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: I am not clear.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: You're not clear. Okay.

8 You're putting forward a motion?

9 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yes.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

11 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: I gave you the background to what I was doing.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. So what I am just saying is that motions can be brought
13 forward, if they relate to an item that is on the agenda. Other colleagues in this
14 chamber have brought forward a similar motion. They were asked to -- to -- that that
15 motion would be heard at the next Council meeting, and they have agreed to do so.

16

17 So I suppose what I am suggesting to you is that, as it doesn't relate to an item on the
18 Chief Executive's report, we can put it in for a motion at the next meeting. In
19 addition to that, I am also, I suppose, updating you and letting you know that this
20 matter did come up at the Protocol Committee, in terms of me representing the
21 chamber here and visiting the Palestine Ambassador, and that the issue of flying the
22 Palestine flag would go to the Protocol Committee as well.

23 Is that agreeable to you?

24 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Well, I won't pick on your word --

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Tom. Just hit your button there, and I'll try and turn
26 you on. I actually can't turn you on. Mary, could I ask you for you to turn
27 off -- sorry.

28 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Yes.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: And Tom, if you hit yours?

30 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yes. Yes, no, I hear what you are saying,

31 Cathaoirleach. I did -- there's two specific things I'm asking, so you're telling me
32 that they will be covered under a discussion on notice of motions.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: On notice of motion, yes. There is a very similar notice of
34 motion that's to be heard at next month's meeting.

1 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Well, I would think that it's -- what I would say to you
2 is, and I am looking at this totally from a humanitarian perspective, this is absolutely
3 massive.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. No, I absolutely get that.

5 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: And, you know, I am surprised I'm the -- I am a little
6 surprised that I am the only one that is talking about it in the current vote. Anyway,
7 listen, I hear you. There's no point going on and going on.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: No, I appreciate that, Councillor. It's just you're not the only
9 one. That's, I suppose, what I am trying to say.

10 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: The way I operate -- the way I try to operate as a
11 public rep is, if people approach me on stuff, I try to get back to them. So I do have
12 people to go back and talk to.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: So what I would say to those people is, that motion will go to
14 the next meeting. And I suppose I am just very conscious that another colleague in
15 this chamber brought up a suspension of standing orders, which wasn't allowed to be
16 heard on the same issue.

17

18 So there is a motion at the April meeting, and the issues you have raised, we'll take to
19 that meeting as well for the motion. All right? Thank you very much.

20

21 Okay. Councillor Joe -- sorry.

22 MS PURCELL: Just on that note, if you do wish to send it in as a notice of motion,
23 you need to send it in as a notice of motion. It is still in time to make it onto the
24 April agenda, because it must be submitted a month in advance.

25 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Can you not take it as a notice of motion, the way I've
26 worded it?

27 MS PURCELL: If you just send me an email, say, yeah, it is a notice of motion, and
28 if you have a seconder for it as well. Thank you very much.

29 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: I will second it.

30 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: I have a seconder.

31 MS PURCELL: Perfect.

32 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: So can we take it that it is a notice of motion and it's
33 accepted as a notice of motion?

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: We just need the text so that she can put it --

1 MS PURCELL: Yes, thanks, that's fine.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Thank you, Councillor Fortune. Councillor Joe
3 Behan?

4 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Before I go onto the items, I just
5 want to make one thing clear: I don't want the Protocol Committee making a
6 decision for me about whether a Palestinian flag is flying on every public building in
7 the county. You said through -- I think, through -- you said, Cathaoirleach, it is
8 going before the Protocol --

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: I said it could -- it could go before the Protocol Committee,
10 absolutely.

11 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Okay. I am asking that that issue be included when that
12 notice of motion is being discussed, because we all might have a different -- we all
13 might have different opinions about whether that should happen or not.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. The officials have confirmed that's okay.

15 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: So I ask that that would happen.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

17 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thank you. That's not what I wanted to talk about at all,
18 Cathaoirleach. But, anyway, I got the opportunity to say it. That's great.

19

20 I have four items. Hopefully, they will be quick. But one of them might take a
21 couple of minutes.

22

23 First of all, the Director for Bray is aware, and, certainly, the officials in Bray are
24 aware, and some of the Council officials here are aware that we have a problem at
25 the moment on the Vevay Road in Bray, where the school warden has not been in
26 action or has not been available since Christmas.

27

28 I looked at the figures today for transport in the budget here. I think there's over €35
29 million being spent on transport initiatives in the Council -- by the Council. And one
30 of the big themes is safety for children going to school.

31

32 We have children on that very busy Bray to Greystones road, who have not had the
33 assistance of a school warden since Christmas. The school warden has not been
34 available for personal reasons, but -- that's fine; but the Council has a responsibility,

1 in my book, to do something about this.

2

3 I have been told that advertisements have been placed on the website and the papers,
4 looking for replacements; none has been available. The custom and practice in the
5 past was that a member of the outdoor staff of the Council would be made available
6 on an emergency basis for a half an hour in the morning, a half an hour in the
7 afternoon to assist children getting across the public road. I am asking that that be
8 done, and, if there's a problem, I would like to know what is the problem that it can't
9 be done.

10 That is the first point.

11

12 The second is in relation to the housing report. I know I was in a very significant
13 minority, a very small minority, when the majority of councillors here decided to let
14 Dublin City Council do the running on two of our major sites, one in Bray and one in
15 Greystones; and the one in Bray I want to talk about is called Rehills Land, 9 or 10
16 acres, and we were told it would be far more efficient to let Dublin City Council take
17 it over.

18

19 I now find, when I look through the CE's report, it is actually not even mentioned
20 anymore. We were assured we were going to get updates on this, we were assured
21 we were going to be proactive on it; in fact, it's fallen out of the report completely.
22 What is going on with that particular project, Chief Executive or Director of
23 Housing, I'd certainly like to know?

24

25 Thirdly, there's a very minimal report on the bus priority interim scheme in the CE's
26 report, really saying nothing. As we know, certainly, in the thousands of objections
27 were heard -- were received by this Council, to this crazy proposal to close off a
28 number of main access roads on the N11 in the Bray, Kilmac, Enniskerry area; we
29 got a more detailed report at a transport SPC meeting last month, which I think the
30 members should be made aware of.

31

32 And I would ask that the Director of Transport, and, I assume, Leonora, in fairness,
33 would be the one that would be -- well, I suppose it's up to the Chief Executive who
34 answers this -- could the rest of the members be brought up to date as to what exactly

1 is now the position regarding that particular proposal, which has huge public
2 opposition to it?

3

4 And, finally, I just want to return to something I raised with the Chief Executive
5 before. It's in relation to Whitestown, the illegal dump and the remediation of that
6 particular illegal dump.

7

8 And just to rehearse, from doing a little bit of research on it, I think at this stage we
9 have spent nearly €6 million attempting to remediate that site in the past, and we
10 were effectively ordered by a court six and a half years ago to have that dump
11 cleaned up, cleared out by last January. The six and a half years has expired.
12 Nothing has happened. Absolutely nothing has happened on that site since then.

13

14 There's one and a half lines here in the Chief Executive's report at page 57 saying:
15 "Documents --" What's this? "Tenders are going to be issued to -- for a main
16 contractor." And some kind of engineering advice or whatever.

17

18 Now, Councillor Kavanagh very perceptively, at the last meeting, raised the question
19 of the danger to the water supply as a result of lithium prospecting and possibly
20 mining, okay? This dump -- and the effect on the liver Slaney. This dump is right
21 beside the River Slaney. It has judged to have been so damaged that every single
22 element of it, including soil that we had put in as a Council, has to be removed and
23 relocated.

24

25 And could I ask the Chief Executive to explain to us at this stage, why are we not in
26 contempt of court? If we were told by a judge to have that cleared up in six and a
27 half years, and the six and a half years is up in January, how are we not in contempt
28 of court? And if we are in contempt of court, who is responsible for that? That's the
29 first question.

30

31 The second question is: When does the Chief Executive think this matter is going to
32 be resolved? Because the report is not really giving a sense of urgency as to what
33 exactly the Chief Executive plans to do with it. I think it's something that we should
34 all be very, very concerned about. We were all concerned when

1 Councillor Kavanagh brought up about the lithium. But we have something that we
2 have been judged legally by a High Court that we are responsible for.

3

4 And I asked the previous Chief Executive, and I ask the current Chief Executive the
5 question about Ballinclare and the quarry and the planning application, and the
6 application that was withdrawn, and then the licence application to the EPA and so
7 on.

8

9 And we now know that -- well, we were told -- initially, as councillors, we weren't
10 told anything about the planning application until the second last day before the time
11 was up, but now we find that the application has been withdrawn, a licence
12 application has gone to the EPA, nothing is happening in Whitestown. I specifically
13 asked was Ballinclare in the frame for taking the remediated material from
14 Whitestown? I think I got an assurance that was not the case from this Chief
15 Executive. I certainly didn't get it from the last Chief Executive.

16

17 So my last question to the Chief Executive is: Is there a link between our lack of
18 action on Whitestown and the undetermined fate of the Ballinclare quarry?

19 Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

21 Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

22 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Just a brief question, Cathaoirleach. I do remember
23 about a year ago, the Minister gave an exemption for development charges for new
24 developments until 31st of March, 2024, which is coming up very soon, and I didn't
25 see if there was an update in the manager's report as to whether that's going to be
26 extended, or does that expire on the 31st March?

27

28 Because I was asked today by a person who wants to start a development, and if they
29 start now, I think they won't have it sufficiently completed to avail of the exemption.

30

31 So can you clarify that for me, please?

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

33 Councillor Rory O'Connor?

34 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: Thanks, Chair. Before I get to my points, I actually

1 just want to say, a big shout out to Director Leonora for being very engaging in her
2 new role. She was very good with me, and has been answering many of my
3 questions already, and she just started; so fair play to her.

4

5 First, just about what Councillor Corrigan raised about the Part 8 Quill Road. I have
6 to completely agree with her on what she said there. Especially around the Part 8.
7 Me and Councillor Corrigan met a lot of business owners and local residents there
8 about the Part 8, and, you know, on paper, Part 8 looked absolutely brilliant for
9 Enniskerry, and we were saying to people how good it will be. And we also took
10 flack for it as well. Some people didn't want it, a minority didn't want it, and it's
11 becoming quite embarrassing for us, to be honest, because we have been promising
12 this for such a long time now, and obviously nothing has been happening, and the
13 Council have dropped the ball on it, in my opinion, and, quite frankly, it is getting
14 quite terrible for us.

15

16 I also want to concur with what Councillor Behan said about the traffic warden. I
17 think that's brilliant idea, and it should be looked into. I have been contacted by
18 many parents, worried about their children crossing the road in that area, and
19 something needs to be done very, very fast, before something happens.

20

21 Now, to my question. Recently, Galway County Council introduced a new
22 preplanning inquiry system, an online system, which is very easy to use, and it's free,
23 and it's -- I think it's the future for planning, in many ways. I know I've talked to
24 Leonora about it, how it doesn't cover everything for preplanning, but I think there is
25 something there, and this council needs to look at that. There's only been two
26 councils that have introduced this new online preplanning system, and that's Dublin
27 City and Galway.

28

29 And, from what I've heard, it's been working very, very well. So I think us, as a
30 council, need to look at it, and maybe even contact Galway County Council and see
31 how it works.

32 That's all. Thank you.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

34 Councillor Miriam Murphy?

1 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Thank you for letting me in.
2 Just a few things. First of all, it's great honour to be part of the Wicklow County
3 Council awards, and be members. And just a question I have is just, for no other
4 reason, just to be nosey, was any of the 30 members asked, you know, to be
5 interviewed regarding the Council, and will we see the report on our award? I think
6 it's a great honour. And I think it's just trojan work from inside and outside as well.

7
8 Also, well done to Gail Dunne on his AILG conference. And it just shows you
9 (inaudible) the right time. I brought someone down with my disability (inaudible)
10 booklets, and I got a phone call from one of the directors -- (audio
11 breaks) -- Tommy, for myself and Laura to be invited to the executive in April, to
12 explain our strategy and I think that's a great honour, and we are very interested.
13 They're both making -- they're actually very interested in the executive of the AILG
14 including disability in all their strategies and policies, and I think we can (inaudible).
15 Another hats off to Wicklow County Council for that.

16
17 On the housing, I just have one or two issues. I echo what Councillor O'Brien was
18 saying about the conditions of the roads, which I have always brought up here in the
19 Council chamber. And, you know, to see photographs of tenants, of what they're
20 living in, it's just -- it's just beyond words.

21
22 And my question is, on the HAP payments, which most of the tenants are getting,
23 what is the inspection rate for the HAP housing? How far does it go? Have we
24 enough resources? I don't believe we have. And is there a penalty for landlords not
25 doing proper repair jobs in these situations?

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Miriam Murphy, could I interrupt you just for one
27 second? I'm terribly sorry to do this. I just need to put this in before half 4, and I am
28 also very, very conscious that when I put in for an extension of the meeting, it does
29 have an impact on some of our members who have childcare requirements, so I am
30 only proposing an extension until quarter past five, if that's okay.

31
32 We just have two people here to give a presentation who have travelled from Meath,
33 and I am just conscious that they have the opportunity to do that. So I am just
34 proposing it.

1 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: I will second it.

2 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Can I make a comment?

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. Absolutely.

4 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Very quickly. That impacts me, because I
5 unfortunately have to leave about quarter past five. So that means I am missing the
6 protocol through no fault of my own.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Absolutely. And that is one of the challenges,
8 Councillor Fortune. I mean, you have much longer service than me, so you know
9 how this works. But it is why I try not to, but I am very conscious that those two
10 individuals have travelled quite a distance to present to us today. So -- and,
11 obviously, we have had the IFA, which has delayed the meeting.

12

13 So I am going to stop taking Chief Executive comments at 5, and allow them to
14 come in, if we haven't finished before that, if that is okay. I am terribly sorry,
15 Councillor Murphy. I will let you go ahead now. Thank you.

16 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thank you. I just want to finish off with, in the sense
17 of our tenants being in long-term rental, and the house goes up for sale, and the
18 Council can look at those houses to buy, to purchase, to leave the families in that
19 house. But if the house is not up to the A rating that is required, the Council won't
20 buy it; which means that these people then come back into the system of applying for
21 houses. But it is okay to get -- to be left in it as rental and get allowance. But it is
22 not okay for local County Councils to purchase that. Which I think is just crazy.
23 And maybe I am missing something. That system isn't right.

24

25 There's people who are long-term tenants, for ten, 15 years. Then the landlord
26 decides to put the house up for sale, and Wicklow County Council won't buy it
27 because it's not up to their rating, which they are required to buy second-hand houses
28 from. There's something wrong in the system here. There's something around that to
29 be looked at. Thank you.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Sorry for the interruption.
31 Chief Executive, I will hand over to you.

32 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members.

33 Councillor Behan, I will start with your last issue about Whitestown, Ballinclare.

34 Can I categorically state that we have no interest in Ballinclare. It is not on our radar

1 to be used as a site for remediation or the removal of any waste from Whitestown or
2 anywhere else.

3

4 In relation to Whitestown, we are still before the High Court on it. A party had to be
5 agreed between the owners of the site and ourselves to oversee the remediation of it,
6 and that has been heard and dealt with only in the last week, where the owners have
7 agreed to our nominated -- each party had to nominate two contractors, per se, that
8 would remediate and work on the site. So that is in progress.

9

10 We have been before the court, I would say, nearly weekly at this stage on various
11 matters. So it's not for the want of not wanting to give you information, but there's
12 limited information that we can give because it is before the court still. What I
13 would say is, I'd say it is the matter that is discussed most in my office. So it is not
14 that there's nothing being done; we are under, I suppose, the discretion of the High
15 Court on it, and it is going through a process. We have been instructed, as you
16 know, to remediate the site, the waste has to be removed from there, and that is the
17 process that is being undertaken at the moment. The latest in that was that an
18 independent overseer has to be appointed, and the court and both parties had to agree
19 to that, and we are at the stage where that has just happened.

20

21 So things are moving. I will try and get you a more comprehensive report so you
22 have a bit more detail than the CE report. But just again to state that Ballinclare is a
23 separate matter, and it is not my intention, or anybody in this Council's intention, to
24 move waste from here to there; never has been, and it will not be.

25

26 I will ask Lorraine to comment on the school warden situation in Bray, and I will
27 then ask Joe to talk about the major sites; about Rehills and the other site that you
28 mentioned as well.

29

30 Councillor Bourke, we have had no communication to date on the development
31 charges that are due to expire on the 31st of March. I haven't heard any soundings
32 that they're going to be extended, but I will make a phone call after this meeting and
33 I will come back to you directly on it, just to see on that.

34

1 Councillor O'Connor, in relation to the preplanning online, yes, we're supposed to be
2 digital first. You know, we're supposed to be encouraging online communication.
3 So we will certainly look at it. It is not perfect, as you know. But we are, I suppose,
4 transitioning to a more online customer hub for our clients, and we have already
5 gone to e-planning, so it would make sense to take in a preplanning module. But
6 we're a little bit away from it. We will certainly reach out to our colleagues in
7 Dublin City and in Galway and look at it.

8

9 Councillor Murphy, in relation to the awards, yes, look, we were delighted with
10 them. We did issue a press release. I don't think any of our members have been
11 interviewed on it, but we can certainly see if we can afford them that opportunity
12 through the local media. Yes, it is good to celebrate our successes; they're few and
13 far between.

14

15 I will ask Joe then to speak to you about the inspections and the NTQs, tenant in situ
16 situation, how that is working out.

17 Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

18 MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes, just in relation to the school
19 warden, from a HR perspective, yes, that school warden is absent. We wish her well
20 and we look forward to her returning to work. In the meantime, we have gone out to
21 the market for a substitute school wardens. We have had no applications. We have
22 put it up on our website and all of that. No applications. I met the school wardens at
23 Christmas. They're a great group of people. They do great work. I will ask the
24 district engineer about the GO carrying out the duties. I am not so sure if there are
25 any issues, whether there might be union issues, but we will tease that out. So I will
26 revert to you, Councillor Behan. Thanks.

27 MR LANE: First of all, sorry, it was an oversight there and I will make sure there
28 will be a full update in the next report.

29

30 Both sites are challenging, and both were larger sites, and both from the perspective
31 of the department, have included a mixed tenant for both affordable and social. So
32 the affordable was always -- would never be part of the scheme to develop. As I
33 detailed earlier, one of the advantages of the PPPs is there is a project board, there is
34 governance involved and there's full project management not provided by the local

1 authority and that includes the QS costs. The QS costs will be finalised or are being
2 finalised regarding the consultants in the Rehill case and there will be a report to the
3 project board. The costs, they are high, per unit. And we are currently - Wicklow
4 County Council - looking at these costs, looking at the affordable/social mix, and we
5 will revert regarding the next steps in that regard. I would say you will have a fairly
6 good report in the next month.

7
8 As regards the tenant in situ. First of all, in the next 2024 and 2025 there will be a
9 condition survey started in all our stock. That is a national project. There's a number
10 of steps or a number of other structures, including an IT base to be put in there and a
11 standard approach to the survey. So that will be commenced by Wicklow County
12 Council in '24 or '25. We will be doing some of them, and we will be putting an IT
13 solution to the condition survey that. That create its own challenges regarding what
14 comes out of that, but that will start.

15
16 The inspections, private inspections. We are serving. We are inspecting. There is a
17 target we aren't achieving, and one of the reasons for that is, with staff resources we
18 concentrate a lot on tenant in situ, purchases and other solutions to homeless this
19 year. And again, some of our staff resources, we are moving them around as
20 required and some of the issues brought up today have been dealt with by moving
21 staff to other functions. The tenants in situ, we looked at houses when tenants were
22 served notice to quits. Some of the houses weren't up to standard. All budgets
23 included a refurbishment application. So sometimes we made a decision on value
24 for money, particularly when we had units of our own in the area, that we didn't
25 proceed with the purchase of the units. But again, some of the units we bought
26 would not be BER A. We weren't in a position to do that. I think BER B was the
27 cut-off we used there. Yes, it's just a balance between what units we had and some
28 of the purchases, it wouldn't be possible to get all the units. So it would be a little
29 challenge, a challenge there.

30 MS EARLS: Cathaoirleach, just in relation to Councillor Behan's query on the bus
31 priority. So, as the members will be aware, there was a very significant response to
32 the public consultation that we carried out which is always good to see. So we had
33 over 1,100 submissions, we had over a hundred objections slips and we had two
34 petitions, and it covered a range of between eight or ten different topics. So we

1 will -- there is a report being prepared on that and that will set out exactly the issues
2 raised during the public consultation. As a result of what we have seen -- we have
3 seen in that feedback, we have gone back and we're looking at further environmental
4 reports, we are looking at further traffic analysis and we're looking at what we may
5 need to reconsider and consider further. And this specifically relates to the area
6 between Junction 6 and Junction 8, and that is from Kilmacanogue to Fassaroe,
7 which is where the vast majority of the submissions related to. So we are giving that
8 further consideration. We are trying to move it along in a positive way and trying to
9 look at the scope that we have of works within that particular area, and as soon as we
10 have kind of done a bit more work on it we certainly will come back to the members
11 and give them an update on how it is progressing. We are trying every avenue to try
12 and get a positive response in relation to the works on the N11. Thank you.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Leonora.

14

15 Councillor Gail Dunne.

16 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Two quick things. The first
17 one: In Ashford there's a footpath that that the roadway out there, the Wicklow
18 Municipal District resurfaced it there recently, but there's a footpath just down from
19 Milltown, or around Rosana, it was left -- the Municipal District, they were looking
20 after part of it and TII were looking after the rest of it. The footpath has been just
21 left. It is just water there and people are walking down, having to walk out onto the
22 road and somebody is going to be badly hurt there. Now I was talking to John about
23 this, but I want to bring this to the attention, well, it is not Leonora anymore, but the
24 roads department, because somebody is seriously going to be hurt there and
25 somebody needs to talk to TII and say we need this done as quickly as possible.

26

27 The second thing I want to talk about is dog fouling in Wicklow Town. I don't see
28 any dog wardens around Wicklow Town and I don't hear of anybody being
29 prosecuted, and it is a pandemic in the town at the moment, especially in around the
30 Convent hill Area. Thank you.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Edward
32 Timmins.

33 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Thanks, chairman. Just a couple of things. At last
34 month's meeting I asked on the vacant houses that we get some kind of ageing report,

1 say, over six months, over 12 months, over a year or two; if that could be facilitated,
2 please. Maybe on a separate report altogether for vacant houses rather than the
3 current one that shows, that has different columns but maybe do a separate one on
4 vacant houses in terms of the total and the ageing.

5

6 Secondly, the other thing, just any update on the new fire station in Baltinglass?

7

8 Thirdly, I would just like to welcome the application for further RDF funding in
9 Baltinglass and hope that it will be furthered. Thank you.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Anne Ferris.

11 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: First of all, I want to say to the Chief Executive well
12 done. It was great to win Council of the Year. It shows how great her leadership is
13 but also I suppose much work the individual directors and their teams carry out on
14 behalf of the Council. And I also think that the councillors themselves, because we
15 have been working hard over the past nearly five years now, I suppose supporting
16 positive initiatives for our community and I think all of those things are recognised
17 in that award. So it really is great.

18

19 The second thing I want to say is that I am delighted to see that the arrears in the
20 housing, you know the housing rents, has reduced by almost 500,000. I remember
21 raising this back at my first meeting back in 2019. I was a bit shocked about the
22 amount of ESB arrears. I know that the team of staff that deal with arrears has been
23 working very hard and it is great to see it going downwards by that amount.

24 Hopefully that will continue.

25

26 Cathaoirleach, you will remember last -- at last month's meeting I raised the issue of
27 the blocked drain in Kilmacanogue which had been ignored for many, many months
28 and Leonora said that she would get onto the engineer. Well, I am delighted that I
29 got an email towards the end of the week to say that the drain had been unblocked,
30 but here's the thing: It wasn't the drain I was talking about. It was the drain right
31 across the road which has made no difference to the issues of the water running
32 down the hill which is causing the problems. And you know, call me a conspiracy
33 theorist or whatever, because this particular drain has been ignored either wilfully or
34 unwilfully for so long, it seems to me that it is happening again. But I will bring it

1 up again tomorrow at the Bray MD meeting.

2

3 And finally, Cathaoirleach, I want to say that I was delighted to hear
4 Councillor Fortune bringing up the issue about Palestine. You know, he made a
5 very, very good piece for emotion there and I totally support him. I think it was
6 either last year or the year before I had a motion down with my colleague
7 Councillor Paul O'Brien asking Wicklow County Council to support the
8 boycott -- sorry, (inaudible) and sanctions campaign, and agree not to purchase any
9 goods or services produced or provided in whole or in part in the occupied territories.
10 Now we received skance support at the time for that. But I think things have moved
11 on and not in a good direction. I am not going to repeat what Councillor Fortune
12 said, and indeed what we all know, but I am glad to see that the motion has been put
13 in and Councillor Fortune will also put a motion in. But I just want to say that we
14 just cannot sit back and ignore what's happening to people in Palestine. It's
15 absolutely stomach churning. And also just to say, because I know the issue of the
16 flag was raised, that it was my understanding that the Protocol Committee made
17 those decisions, you know, on a Pride flag every year or on the different coloured
18 flags that we have flown, and there was never a problem with the Protocol
19 Committee making those decisions. So yes, I look forward to the debate next month.
20 Thank you. Cathaoirleach

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor Ferris. Chief Executive I
22 will hand over to you.

23 MS O'GORMAN: Councillor Dunne, in relation to the footpath at Milltown, yes,
24 certainly we will ask, we will engage with TII to get the works completed. Yes, dog
25 fouling is an issue in every urban centre and it's something that's very, very difficult
26 to prosecute. How do you prove...? Anyway, won't get into that. The visibility of
27 dog wardens is a thing. And I think once we have our environmental awareness
28 person in situ we can start promoting and just, you know, being proactive about your
29 own responsibility as a dog owner to enhance the work of dog wardens in the county.

30

31 Councillor Timmins, yes, I did give a commitment on the vacant homes and an age
32 profile of them. We will get them out to you. The age profile, Councillor Timmins,
33 it will be addressed.

34

1 In relation to the new fire station in Baltinglass, Leonora will make a comment on
2 that.

3

4 In relation to the LAMA awards, you're right, it is a reflection of the work as a
5 whole; the staff and members. And I suppose the staff try to react to the requests of
6 members and be proactive in how we go about our business in our towns and villages
7 around the county, so it is good to see that.

8

9 Around the drain, I will certainly ask, I think it is Bray Municipal District, you said
10 you're going to raise it again tomorrow. I will get that looked at. I hope there isn't a
11 conspiracy theory. I doubt it. We will look at it. It seems odd they got the one
12 opposite and not the one you needed. We will get that addressed.

13

14 I don't know we needed to get Joe to comment on the rent arrears again? No, I don't
15 think so.

16

17 Just on the TII, Leonora, thanks.

18 MS EARLS: Yes, in relation to TII, so there's a gas main there which was unmarked
19 which is part of the difficulty there. So it has been raised with Mark who are the
20 contractor for the N11 and TII. So hopefully they will be able to solve it. It is
21 complicated because that gas main is exactly in the location where the drainage
22 exists.

23

24 In relation to the Baltinglass fire station, yes, we are pushing with the department.
25 There was an adjustment required for the fee for the consultants. It went into the
26 department in early February. So we're awaiting them to come back. Hopefully we
27 will move along with it and by the end of this third quarter, some time in the third
28 quarter we will start on the tender process in the station, both it and the Dunlavin
29 one.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you, Leonora. Members we have four more
31 speakers and then obviously we have people here to give presentations who have
32 travelled. So for the four next speakers, if they're agreeable, I will ask you to speak
33 and then we will ask the officials to give a written response back in relation to the
34 queries raised. If that is okay. So we can use the time appropriately. If that is okay

1 with people. Councillor Gerry O'Neill.

2 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just on
3 Councillor Fortune's -- the issue of Gaza there. I would like to point out that I did try
4 and raise that two months ago and my motion was ruled out of order, apart from
5 Councillor O'Brien, Sinn Féin, and Councillor Snell here, they were the only two
6 councillors who support me, when I did try to raise the murderous attack on the
7 people in Gaza by the war criminals on that occasion and I got no support. And I
8 look forward -- I can't really understand why a motion would have to come through
9 protocol.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: No. The motion doesn't have to come through protocol,
11 Councillor O'Neill.

12 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Who is it coming from?

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: The motion -- just to clarify. Members in this chamber have
14 already submitted a motion. They asked for the motion to be heard today. They
15 were told that as it wasn't on the agenda would they put it in as a motion for next
16 month's meeting, which they agreed to, and then subsequently the same motion has
17 been raised. So just out of respect to those members who have already done that we
18 will be discussing this fully in April.

19
20 And then just in relation to the issue of flags, I just sought -- the issue of flags, that
21 does go through protocol, however we are having a discussion in April, dissent has
22 been raised by a member in relation to that, so that item will be discussed in April as
23 well. And I did make reference to your motion as well, Councillor O'Neill, when I
24 referenced that.

25 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: I hope so. At least we could do is fly the flag for the
26 women and children of Gaza.

27
28 Just two other items there. I wanted clarification maybe on the assessments that has
29 been done in Dunlavin for two different centres for refugees. Again can I just point
30 out, I am working with these people all the time. I don't want the people
31 in -- someone in this chamber here, silly people, to make out that I am anti this or
32 anti that. I am not. I am working with these people. And I am just bringing the
33 concerns of people of the area, of West Wicklow, to this chamber for answer. We
34 were informed during the week that there's another lot of refugees going into another

1 building in Dunlavin. I just want an update on the two of those.

2

3 And again, the third and last one I want to -- I am in possession of a letter here, and
4 it's written to an individual who misbehaved in County Clare. And I just want to put
5 on the record here very clear that in Kilbride, where I am working with these people
6 as well, doing what I can for them, for refugees, you know. But this individual
7 misbehaved with a sexual assault on a female member of staff in Clare and Minister
8 O'Gorman as sent him to Kilbride Army Camp. Now this is the second case where
9 we had within the period of four or five weeks --

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Neill, I'm not sure we can discuss individuals.

11 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: I am not discussing the individual, I am not discussing
12 the individual case. I am just discussing where Kilbride Army Camp is being used,
13 is being suggested by the Minister as a place where bold boys go. I want to make it
14 very clear that Kilbride Army Camp, Shankill Army Camp, in Kilbride, just down
15 the road from me, is not run by the Army. The Army are out of there. It was a unit
16 there. It was a firing range, a short-arm firing range for the Army and the emergency
17 response unit and the Gardaí. Since the refugees went into that army camp it's only
18 army -- or it's only the refugees that are being catered for under management
19 companies.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay.

21 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Which have been put in place by the Minister. So I just
22 want to put on the record here that it is very, very misleading for the Minister on
23 these occasions to keep saying that these people are being sent to the Army camp.
24 They are not being sent to the Army camp. The Army have no control whatsoever
25 over these camps. It is Minister O'Gorman's management team that's been put in
26 there. But could I just point out, Cathaoirleach, that there's huge concern in the area
27 with this stuff going on. And again I am working with -- there's 99.9% of these
28 people coming into the country are perfect, but it is wrong for the Minister to be
29 pretending that the Army camp which is the --

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: I appreciate that point, Councillor O'Neill.

31 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: That there's some sort of detention centre of people. It is
32 not.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor O'Neill. Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

34 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Thanks, chair. Just four points. First thing: I just

1 want to congratulate the Council, the councillors and the community groups and
2 volunteers involved in the LAMA awards. There were some great projects put
3 forward and an awful lot of people played a part, so I would just like to recognise
4 everybody.

5
6 Last month I asked for an update on The Morrrough and I was told one would be
7 supplied to me and Marc Devereux would respond to me, but I didn't receive a
8 response. So I would be happy to receive a written response on where we are
9 because we have not moved in three months. So I just want to know what the
10 timeframe is on work to be done by Iarnród Eireann.

11
12 Would anybody be able to tell me, outside of the climate action fund is there any
13 funding scheme available for small biodiversity and climate change projects? I am
14 finding it very hard to get information.

15
16 The fourth point I want to make is in relation to that. Our Council website isn't
17 terribly user-friendly. I compared it to other Council's websites and really I have
18 spent time and time and time again trying to find stuff on this. I don't know how the
19 general public manages it. It's just not something that draws people in and is easily
20 tabulated and easy to follow. By comparison, I have just selected Wexford County
21 Council. On the very first page you're given information on everything. Ours is split
22 into three different categories and when you go into them you have dig deep and
23 when you go in there you have to go to "Advanced" just to get stuff like funding
24 streams and that kind of stuff. So I am just wondering is there any plans to update it
25 at some stage. Thank you.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Stephen
27 Stokes.

28 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach. I just wanted to
29 quickly agree with Councillor Behan about the warden. But I think there is a great
30 opportunity for public reps to help the Council with this; if we can help promote
31 roles in our local districts on social media. I know in my own social media channels
32 I promoted the wardens, librarians, and something else, I can't remember, I think it
33 was an administrative role. But the point is, it pushes it out further and people see it,
34 and what I found is that people actually tag people that they think might be a good fit

1 for it. So we can actually help the Council and I would encourage all public
2 representative to help push out locally local jobs available. Go raibh maith agat,
3 Cathaoirleach.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor. Councillor Avril Cronin.

5 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thanks very much, Cathaoirleach. I just have a few
6 points and I won't delay. I was also just looking for an update on the fire station in
7 Dunlavin and I know that you gave a response there to Councillor Timmins in
8 Baltinglass, so you might include that one as well.

9

10 Grants for new businesses. I have been contacted recently by a number of businesses
11 that are setting up in the West Wicklow area. And while there is a lot of support
12 from LEO in relation to training and mentoring, grant support seems to be something
13 that we are very short on in Wicklow. I know other local authorities have such
14 schemes as shop front window schemes and streetscape schemes that are really
15 helpful for businesses starting up and also to enhance the streets in towns and
16 villages, and I am just wondering is this something that we could look at in Wicklow
17 County Council or maybe see is there some way that we can increase supports for
18 businesses. While many can avail of training, a lot of these businesses are
19 already -- these people that are setting up businesses are already from a business
20 background, so training may not be something that they necessarily need but
21 financial support or grant aid is something that would be hugely beneficial. As you
22 know, the costs of setting up a business is extremely high and I know that last week
23 there was a new scheme announced, I know Brian sent around an email there in
24 relation to rates. So I am just wondering is that something that you could look at,
25 please.

26

27 Also the land at Milltown in Dunlavin, zoned for enterprise, and that's where the fire
28 station is going to go, I am just wondering could the Council look at that land and try
29 and work with local community and maybe local enterprise to get businesses set up
30 in that area? I am asked time and time again about that land and there's nothing
31 happening with it. I am just looking for the council to push from their end to try and
32 get that land moving. I know the council yard were also looking to move down there
33 but I am told that they can't do it until they have services in place for the council yard
34 to move down. But it just seems to be sitting there for a long time and I would be

1 grateful if you could look into that. Thank you

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Peir Leonard.

3 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you. I have just two points -- three really short
4 ones.

5

6 Just in relation to the URDF funding and the two buildings in Arklow. I know that's
7 a kind of train in motion, but it is imperative that the local community have a say in
8 any projects, you know, to kind of feed into the local councillors as part of these
9 projects going forward. I think the local community have a lot of really good ideas.
10 And just in conjunction with that, like, Arklow is at a turning point now where there
11 a lot of development we can see in the pipeline is going in for planning, which is
12 very welcome, we need housing, but we really are deprived of an arts centre and a
13 culture centre down Arklow, and just to be aware that for any applications coming in
14 that this is a huge need to the community. We have a wealth of musicians, artists,
15 community groups, bands and nowhere for any of them to play or practice or to
16 perform other than our local hotel which is great, but you know we really do need
17 that space down there and it's long overdue. So maybe as part of all of these
18 developments that are coming, it could be taken into consideration that part of the
19 recreational fund could go towards that.

20

21 Then just in relation to the Coastal Blueway, just one question: What is the outcome
22 of the Coastal Blueway? I know the public consultation is open at the moment. Will
23 there be funding to go at it for infrastructure or what is the outcome, perceived
24 outcome of that and that consultation? Thank you.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Thank you members for
26 agreeing to get those responses in written form. If we could ask the responses are
27 sent to everybody, because there is a learning for us all when we hear responses to
28 each.

29 MS O'GORMAN: Yes.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Quickly then members, so item number 8: "To note
31 the Wicklow County Council Joint Policing Committee End of Year Report 2023."
32 Helen, do you want to comment on that?

33 MS PURCELL: Yes, just very briefly to say that we are obliged to submit to the
34 Policing Authority by the end of our March our report. It has been agreed and

1 discussed at the JPC at their meeting of the 6th February. And last year the JPC held
2 two meetings in the building, two public meetings, and then there was also a joint
3 meeting that the commissioner Drew Harris attended in December. So they were all
4 very positive. Thanks.

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Helen that item is for noting only.

6

7 Item number 9 is: "To consider the issue of polling information cards pursuant to
8 Article 55 of the Local Elections Regulations 1995, as amended." And we are
9 looking for a proposer and seconder on this. So, Helen, I will hand to you

10 MS PURCELL: So just very briefly, as you all know the local elections are coming.
11 We will more than likely have to issue the polling cards ourselves rather than them
12 going out centrally as they have for the referendum. It is a reserved function of the
13 members to pass the resolution to issue the polling information cards to every elector
14 whose name is on the Register of Electors for the Local Electoral Area and who is
15 not on the Postal or Special Voters List. So if I could have a proposer and a seconder
16 for that please.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Proposed by Councillor Melanie Corrigan and seconded by
18 Councillor Irene Winters. Is that okay with members?

19

20 So item -- sorry, Miriam. Apologies. Do you want to come in?

21 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Yes. Just a quick statement, Cathaoirleach. I just
22 would wonder as well can Wicklow County Council put up a post on our social
23 media so that we can all share it about people with disabilities have a vote from their
24 home. It used to be that it used to be only people in residential but that now has
25 changed. So I would like to see a PR job regarding voting for people with disability
26 at home --

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Excellent idea.

28 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: -- applying for it.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. That will get done. Thank you very
30 much, Miriam.

31

32 So I want to welcome Aoife McGrath and Marian van der Vel - I hope I have
33 pronounced them right - for item number 11, to receive a presentation on the Healthy
34 Age Friendly Home initiative. And I know you are both going around the districts as

1 well. So we have had the opportunity in Bray to have this presentation and have a
2 wider discussion. So just so members do realise, I know we haven't a lot of time
3 here today in the chamber but the two individuals will be actually visiting each
4 Municipal District which will afford you to have more opportunity to kind of discuss
5 it. So you are both very welcome. I am sorry you have had to wait so long. I know
6 you have travelled a long distance. So I will hand it over to yourselves now. Thank
7 you.

8 MS McGRATH: Just to say thank you for your time, Cathaoirleach, Councillors,
9 Chief Executive, colleagues. It's a pleasure to be able to present to you. I appreciate
10 it's been a long meeting and I appreciate it's home time for all of you. So trust me
11 when I say I will keep this short and sweet.

12

13 The purpose of my presentation is to introduction myself. My name is Aoife. I am a
14 regional programme manager with a new programme that Age Friendly Ireland are
15 rolling out. It is called the Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme. It is a new
16 programme, and it is coming to Wicklow. And I am here to introduce you to Marian
17 who is the new local coordinator who is rolling out this new programme in Wicklow.
18 So if you wouldn't mind just scrolling forward to the next presentation slide, please.

19

20 The context of this new programme. What are we doing? Essentially Marian is
21 going to go into the home of older people, 65 years plus, visit them in their home,
22 free of charge, to try and help them out, give them support, advice and guidance with
23 the aim of helping the older person stay living at home. It's a new programme. It's
24 been led out by the local authorities. It's a shared service. Meath County Council
25 are running Age Friendly Ireland. Meath County Council are running this
26 programme on behalf of this local authority. Marian has been appointed by Meath
27 County Council but she's here in Wicklow. She's sitting upstairs, she's based in
28 community and housing section, she's working amongst the staff. So that's the
29 context. Marian is part of the staff here in Wicklow.

30

31 And what's new about this initiative? It's a funding programme that has been jointly
32 funded by not only the local authorities but also by the Department of Health,
33 because the Department of Health see the benefit of taking a proactive approach,
34 giving people advice, guidance and support in their homes to help them age at home.

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Next slide, please.

So essentially the programme has four fundamental principles. We want people to stay living at home, but we want them to do so with a level of independence and autonomy. We want them to make decisions about their future and we want to help them do that. And all of this is essentially to try and avoid long-term residential care. If we can keep people at home we keep them out of nursing homes.

Next slide, please. So you might ask, how do I maybe refer a member of the public who is over 65 to Marian? How do I get their name on the list? Essentially we take referrals from anyone and anywhere. It's an open referral process. We will take referrals from you on behalf of your constituents. If your constituent wants Marian to visit you can fill out a referral form. So long as they have given verbal consent to you we will one hundred percent accept the referral from you. Equally so, we will take referrals from staff within the local authority sector, but equally so, we will take it from the clinical side of the house, GPs, public health nurses, OTs. So we are doing it very much as an as open a referral process as possible. Okay.

Next slide, please.

So this is what the current picture looks like. As part of a pilot phase we were running this programme in nine counties over two years. It was a proof of concept. And thankfully the concept has been proven. The programme has now been scaled up to go national. There are 44 coordinators, 44 Marians, based across Ireland. Essentially there's one coordinator per local authority plus one additional, where needed, primarily in the Dublin areas and in some of the larger geographical counties. But Marian is here, she's in Wicklow, she started her job in January, and you started home visits.

MS VAN DER VEL: Yes.

MS McGRATH: So the key ask I have of you is please spread the word. If you have a constituent in mind who is perhaps living at home, perhaps living alone, is in need of some advice, maybe they need housing adaptation, maybe they need two link in with a GP or a public health nurse, maybe they need some advice around

1 technology, maybe they need some advice around how to get back into the
2 community since Covid. They're the types of support and advice that Marian will
3 do, okay.

4

5 Next slide, please. So what are we asking Marian to do? What are the KPIs? We
6 are asking Marian to do seven home visits per week. It doesn't sound very much.
7 But what we do know is that if we can attend seven home visits we will be able to
8 provide a service that we can stand over. We can go back out to that person
9 irrespective of the time of times this help them out. There is no limit on the number
10 of visits we do. This is a free-of-service charge and we're there to get the best
11 outcomes for the old person.

12

13 Collectively 44 coordinators across the country will be reaching over 10,500 people
14 per annum.

15

16 Next slide, please.

17

18 So just to give you an insight. As I said, we've had two years of this programme in
19 nine counties. Unfortunately the pilot wasn't in Wicklow, but we have a presence
20 now. This lady a Geraldine. She lives in Limerick. And thankfully she was referred
21 into our programme, and she managed to work with her coordinator Gillian. Gillian
22 was able to go out and help Geraldine on a number of fronts. Geraldine was living
23 alone. She had a lot of health complications. She had a lot of mobility issues. And
24 unfortunately because of that she wasn't able to sleep in her own bed upstairs. She
25 couldn't use her bathroom. So when our coordinator visited we were able to do a
26 number of different things.

27

28 Next slide, please.

29

30 Those types of supports -- you won't be able to read that slide, but suffice to say one
31 of the main supports we offered was housing adaptation. Get the stair lift in. Get the
32 level access shower in. Get the lady sleeping in her own bed again. Some of the
33 other supports we were able to offer was around technology in the home. Because
34 Geraldine was living alone she was very vulnerable to falling over and possibly

1 being left alone at night. So we were able to get her a PanPan watch. Essentially it's
2 a personal alarm whereby it would detect a fall and immediately activate an alarm to
3 emergency services. She had no smoke alarms. We were able to link her in with the
4 care and repair team. Her BER rating in her home was very poor, so we linked her
5 in with SAI and she is on the warmer home scheme to get it upgraded free of charge.
6 And equally so, we have linked her back in with some of the community networks
7 she used to have connection with pre-Covid.

8

9 So that is the type of support that our coordinators are offering on the ground. That's
10 the type of thing we can do.

11

12 Next slide please.

13

14 So how do you refer in? It's a two-page editable pdf. We have it in hard copy, you
15 can get it through our office. Essentially send it into us by post, by email or equally
16 so by phone. If an older person wants to lift the phone they can ring us. It's an 046
17 number. It's a Meath County Council-based service. We have a whole admin team
18 based in Navan taking these calls. So they can ring in and they can refer themselves.
19 Once we have the name, once we have it on our list, Marian will schedule a home
20 visit. Marian will go out, spend an hour and a half approximately with them initially,
21 do the home assessment, talk about the six different domains or six different aspects
22 of that person's life that we can offer support, and from there Marian will do the
23 follow-up support. It's not a one and done service. It is not just sign-posting. It's
24 also the hand holding that's really important. And that's what we pride ourselves on.

25

26 So that's enough of me talking, and I appreciate that it's been a long meeting, but if
27 you do have questions I will certainly welcome them.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you both very much. We might show the slide with
29 the contact details with it, if that is okay, just so people can jot them down. I am sure
30 people will have questions and queries. As I said, Marian very kindly attended the
31 Bray Municipal District meeting. I am not sure if you have had a chance to go to any
32 of the other...?

33 MS McGRATH: Greystones is next.

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: And Greystones is next. Okay. So you're making your way

1 around. So there will be plenty of opportunity during those meetings for really
2 in-depth conversations.

3

4 So I know Councillor Miriam Murphy, you had your hand up if you want to...

5 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Yes, thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you to both
6 ladies for the presentation. I actually know Marian and her family very well.

7

8 It is a fantastic project, and it is a fantastic system and it will bring a lot of joy to the
9 older person's lives but - I have a 'but' - the resources of care packaging, the
10 resources, lack of funding for care hours, at this moment in time is just -- it is not
11 worrying, it is actually in a crisis. And I have a fear about it in the sense of resources
12 that is there for people to reach out on. I am a user and I actually applied for extra
13 hours for assistance, and I got three. Three hours. And I can't wait till I get your
14 benefit. So there's a lot of cards there to work with, there's a lot of resources. I
15 welcome it, don't get me wrong, I am very impressed with it, but I have a worry
16 about the resource going forward. I think it's brilliant. I do wish Marian very well.
17 And I just wonder how we promote it even more. You know, (inaudible) people
18 need this as well. Will it be promoted through the website? Will you promote it,
19 will you have social media pages? (Inaudible) local doctors, everywhere, you know.
20 Will we get -- I hope we get the presentation today. I absolutely do welcome it but I
21 would be very worried about the resources at the back of it, is the reality of it. So
22 thank you.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Gerry Walsh
24 and Dermot O'Brien, I have got two minutes. I will give you a minute each.

25 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Aoife, for the
26 presentation and best of look to Marian in her new role. I mentioned this earlier in
27 my response to the Chief Executive's report, so look it, it's very welcome, and
28 anything that can offer support and guidance to vulnerable persons living alone is
29 welcomed and allow them, as you say, to stay within their own homes independently
30 and avoid long-term care.

31

32 One of the things we had on our Joint Policing Committee I'd say in the last two
33 years, we had a presentation on elder abuse and a lot of the stuff that was an
34 eye-opener for many of our members, you know financial abuse, et cetera, and a lot

1 of it involved family members. So as part of your visits, if you do become
2 suspicious of something like that going on in the background is it something you'd
3 bring forward to a relevant agency, such as the banks, the Gardaí, et cetera, if you
4 thought something like that was going on? Thank you.

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: I see a lot of nodding heads, so I assume that is a yes.
6 Finally, Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

7 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks very much
8 for the presentation. This is my third time seeing it now and I have learned
9 something new every time which is brilliant. At the last time I was at a meeting
10 there was a message that landed very strongly with me about don't wait until all the
11 thresholds are crossed and you're in a, you know, doomsday scenario before you
12 make contact. That this is also very much a preventive process. So to be planning
13 for your future is everything, not waiting for the time when all the needs are
14 presenting at one go. So I thought that was a very valuable and important message.
15 Best of luck. Thanks.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor Edward Timmins has
17 come in there. I will give you one minute, Edward because we are actually out of
18 time.

19 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: I will be even less than one minute. One of the things I
20 am interested in is the digital training. A lot of elderly people have no experience or
21 knowledge of that. We are doing a twinning with Blessington and a place in Italy,
22 and they have a place over there, a very good idea: They have people who have IT
23 training on a voluntary basis call out to elderly people's homes, and it works really
24 well. So I am just interested in that aspect of what you do.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Edward Timmins is from
26 Baltinglass, so maybe when you are presenting there you might cover that item there
27 as well. I know we're out of time now. I want to compliment you both for your
28 presentation. Also thank you both that you are going around to the districts because
29 it is a much smaller setting, and we can have more intimate conversations. Thank
30 you both for that. Thank you for your attendance today. Thank you very much.

31

32 Members that concludes our meeting. We will be having our protocol meeting next.
33 So those are involved in protocol...

34

1 Oh, yes, just to remind people of the TidyTowns Awards tonight at six o'clock in
2 Claremont.

3 (Meeting concluded.)

A	adaptation 58:16 86:33 87:31	72:5,7 79:16 83:34	amount 9:19 10:17 12:30 14:22 15:17 21:12 28:17 29:10,24 32:28,29 34:28 46:13 48:19 76:22,23	applying 71:20 84:28 appointed 72:18 85:26 appreciate 8:13 19:17 23:5 25:21 51:6 64:8 80:30 85:9,10 88:26 appreciated 46:17 approach 10:20 15:34 22:10 64:11 74:11 85:33 approached 55:32 appropriately 78:34 approval 10:1 approve 11:29 approved 56:9 61:18 approximately 88:20 are 3:9,10 4:33 5:11,25 8:1,7,17,18 9:1,4,14,30 10:2,24,27 11:3,13,14,26 12:2,12,14,16,33 13:1 14:23,24 16:8 17:8,14,15,25 18:21,25 19:2,22,23 20:13,16 21:9,10,23,24 22:3,9,20,23 23:6,13,19 24:10 25:4,9,31 26:15,20,22,28,33 27:2,9,26 28:13 29:13,23 30:23, 33 areas 37:5 38:22 39:23 48:7,10 51:16 52:2,23,24 57:16 86:27 aren't 15:29,30 74:17 arenas 42:17,22 argued 18:10 arises 52:12 arising 16:16 41:3 arm 80:16 around 4:27 31:15,21,22,27 32:15 44:5,31 47:17 48:26,30,32 49:1 51:19 52:17 53:4 54:5,9,12 58:12 59:24 60:3,10 69:6 71:28 74:19 75:19,28,29 78:7,9 82:23 84:34 86:34 87:1,33 89:1 90:28 arrange 54:10 arrangements 53:20 arrears 50:6,8 57:33 58:7 61:31,33 76:19,22 78:14 arrive 41:32 arrived 12:8 arriving 21:14 articulate 33:20 articulated 40:2 artists 83:14 arts 83:12 ash 11:14,17 26:1 28:27 41:21 42:14 ask 12:3,4 13:20 19:12 23:17,22 26:8 28:8 33:4 40:21,28 47:26 49:7 50:14 52:33 56:12 59:14 62:4 63:26 65:15 66:32 67:25 68:4 72:26,27 73:15,23 77:24 78:9,32,33 83:26 86:10,31	asked 9:14 24:30 63:14 68:4,13,28 70:4 75:34 79:14 81:6 82:30 asking 11:26 23:18 63:31 65:11 66:7 77:7 87:5,6 aspect 90:24 aspects 14:29 88:21 aspiring 36:13 assault 80:7 assessment 88:21 assessments 79:28 assist 66:7 assistance 42:21 65:33 89:13 assisting 36:34 associated 46:30 assume 66:32 90:5 assurance 68:14 assured 61:2 66:20 atrocious 57:17 atrocities 55:8 attack 26:16 79:6 attacking 28:22 attacks 11:20 attempted 58:12 attempting 67:9 attend 30:22 46:5 87:7 attendance 90:30 attended 4:26,28 29:5 84:3 88:30 attention 23:3 46:19 75:23 attitude 15:18,23 attractive 20:2 audio 55:21 70:10 audit 47:27 51:21 auditing 51:18 authentic 19:22 authorities 82:13 85:24,32 authority 25:34 27:32 28:7 36:15 44:34 45:1 74:1 83:34 85:26 86:16,26 autonomy 86:6 autumn 10:25,26 avail 68:29 82:18 availability 35:20 available 35:21 53:9,21 61:17 65:26,34 66:4,5 81:13 82:2 avenue 75:11 avenues 26:21 42:22 avoid 86:7 89:30 awaiting 78:26 award 5:14,16,18 46:12 49:23 56:6 57:24 70:5 76:17 aware 13:11 14:23 25:3 29:8 54:33 55:7,33 62:17 65:23,24 66:30 74:31 83:13 awareness 77:27 away 3:14,25 4:1 9:5 26:21 30:12 42:9 43:24 73:6 awful 81:3 Advanced 81:23 Against 31:12 55:14 Aideen 49:27 50:12 AiLG 4:26,30 33:32 34:1 40:16,24 46:3 70:8,13 Alice 6:21 Also 1:6 3:16,24 4:3,32 5:2 9:34 25:3,6,28 26:1,6,8 28:27 31:17 33:32 35:7 45:1 47:11 48:15 58:13 60:23 63:3,19 69:9,16
abandoned	add 19:10 20:1,8 23:29 addicted 24:24 addition 9:30 63:19 additional 9:9,19 10:17 16:21 41:9 60:26 86:26 address 51:30 52:28,31 59:2,14 61:5 addressed 22:15 25:3 49:8 77:33 78:12 adds 19:33,34 20:9,10 adjustment 78:25 admin 88:17 administer 10:3 administrative 8:30 14:5 81:33 advance 42:1 54:23 64:24 advantages 73:33 advertisements 66:3 advice 12:27 61:3 67:16 85:22,34 86:33,34 87:1,2 advised 60:28 62:28 advising 8:16 26:7 40:33 affected 60:16 affecting 25:20 affects 12:18 25:28 afford 73:11 85:4 affordable 73:31,32 74:4 affording 43:2,3 mentioned 26:10 afraid 50:7 after 3:14,25 14:26 21:30 26:30 28:12 30:18 32:1,17 36:19 48:34 51:26 72:32 75:20 afternoon 66:7 afterwards 8:23 62:5 again 5:3 19:15 28:22 29:25 30:9 32:9,17,21 36:7 42:3 47:33 48:34 50:11,19,21,22 52:29 53:18 56:6,19,23,33 57:6,24 59:18 60:3 61:25,29,33 62:4 72:22 74:19,25 76:34 77:1 78:10,14 79:29 80:3,27 81:18 82:30 87:32 agat 45:28 46:28 81:28 82:2 age 58:21 61:33 77:31,32 84:34 85:14,15,25,34 ageing 75:34 76:4 agency 42:18 90:3 agenda 42:19 51:26 62:29 63:13 64:24 79:15 ago 4:27 9:13 15:26 17:26 20:14 21:4 25:18 33:28 38:21 39:25 49:34 60:34 67:10 68:23 79:4 agree 28:17,27 30:31 48:5 69:6 72:18 77:8 81:29 agreeable 63:23 78:32 agreed 5:25,26 6:1,2,3,11,12,26,2 7 7:24,25,30 9:28 60:34 62:29 63:15	agrees 72:5,7 79:16 83:34 agreeing 36:16 83:26 agreement 7:28 16:20 41:7 agreements 36:14 60:17 agri 10:2 16:14 24:7 27:34 39:28 41:2 agricultural 16:22 17:33 41:9 agriculture 8:15,33 9:25 10:4,26 11:1 13:10 14:20 15:15,22 16:7 18:11 26:7 34:34 37:14,26,28,29 38:15,16 40:33 43:28,31 44:9,10,30 ahead 7:27 13:6 54:16 71:15 aid 9:34 82:21 aim 85:23 air 19:4 airline 19:11 airport 18:30 akin 58:6 alarm 88:2 alarms 88:3 all 4:10,21,26,27 5:2,11,17 6:26 7:30 8:26 9:28 11:9 12:13 14:2,4,20,28 16:31 18:5 19:21,33,34 20:9,27 21:24 22:9,10,22,23 23:12,13,18,31 24:26 25:18 26:10,17 27:16,17 28:32 29:14,16,17,27 30:2,4,8,18,19,29 31:9,16 32:13,28,33 34:1,13,16 35:7,18 36:9,19,2 allay 28:11 allocated 50:17 58:6 allocating 9:9 allocation 52:18 57:11 58:17 59:22 61:31 allocations 58:13 59:20 allotment 49:17 allotments 49:12 54:15,20 allow 8:5 19:13 37:1,5 71:13 89:29 allowance 71:21 allowed 8:27 19:11 28:17 43:29 64:15 allowing 47:31 almost 47:24 76:20 alone 29:19 86:32 87:23,34 88:1 89:28 along 3:18 10:32 39:9 75:8 78:27 already 22:14 32:2,6 33:14 34:24 37:27 46:2 69:3 73:4 79:14,17 82:19 although 32:4 altogether 10:9 76:2 always 4:33 14:25 16:32 17:3 31:10 32:14 70:18 73:32 74:32 amenable 60:16 amended 84:8 amongst 85:28	all 4:10,21,26,27 5:2,11,17 6:26 7:30 8:26 9:28 11:9 12:13 14:2,4,20,28 16:31 18:5 19:21,33,34 20:9,27 21:24 22:9,10,22,23 23:12,13,18,31 24:26 25:18 26:10,17 27:16,17 28:32 29:14,16,17,27 30:2,4,8,18,19,29 31:9,16 32:13,28,33 34:1,13,16 35:7,18 36:9,19,2 allay 28:11 allocated 50:17 58:6 allocating 9:9 allocation 52:18 57:11 58:17 59:22 61:31 allocations 58:13 59:20 allotment 49:17 allotments 49:12 54:15,20 allow 8:5 19:13 37:1,5 71:13 89:29 allowance 71:21 allowed 8:27 19:11 28:17 43:29 64:15 allowing 47:31 almost 47:24 76:20 alone 29:19 86:32 87:23,34 88:1 89:28 along 3:18 10:32 39:9 75:8 78:27 already 22:14 32:2,6 33:14 34:24 37:27 46:2 69:3 73:4 79:14,17 82:19 although 32:4 altogether 10:9 76:2 always 4:33 14:25 16:32 17:3 31:10 32:14 70:18 73:32 74:32 amenable 60:16 amended 84:8 amongst 85:28		

70:8,28 76:13,14 77:13,15 82:6,15,27,32 84:2 85:32 88:24 90:12,28	balance 74:27 ball 43:14 69:13 ban 15:26 bands 83:15 banks 90:3 banter 24:21 barbaric 55:9 barley 17:7 barriers 61:5 base 74:10 based 10:30,33 16:10 58:17 85:27 86:25 88:17,18 bashed 19:8 basic 16:17 35:32 41:5 basically 12:21 14:2 35:22 53:25 55:19 basis 20:23 21:14 22:10 37:19 50:34 53:11 61:13,18,24,27 66:6 90:23 bathroom 87:25 battle 28:23 bear 51:13 beaten 19:2 beautiful 44:25,26 56:30 because 12:28 15:16 17:29,32 18:20,22,26,32 19:29 23:5,9 24:8,14,33 25:28 26:15 27:3,18,27,30 28:13,18,19,29 29:18 30:7 31:32 32:26 33:7,13,16,21 38:32 40:18 42:11,19 43:7,11,25 44:3,10 45:24 46:1,10,12 47:5,13,30 48:12,15,18 49:8,30,33 50:4,17,19,21 51:2 become 15:4 90:1 becoming 12:33 18:28 54:21 69:11 bed 50:15,21,27,31 52:28 87:24,32 beds 50:27,33 51:1 52:23,24,25 beef 9:18 17:27 44:31 been 3:31 8:29 9:24,34 12:21 14:28 18:16,23 19:8,26 20:28 22:12,19 23:33 24:3 26:7,13 27:6,10 32:1,2,3,10,14 33:5,14 34:24 37:17,21 38:24 39:17 41:28 42:21 44:10 46:10 49:8,27 50:10 51:1,24 52:4 53:19 54:18 55:2,6,19,32 56:11,32 59:20,34 60:14,22,23 62:19 before 11:28 17:8 21:1 22:13 36:13,26 50:14,19,28 62:14 65:4,8,9 67:5 68:10,34 69:19 70:27 71:14 72:4,10,12 77:6 90:11 began 19:27	beginning 54:13 behalf 5:10 21:3,10 45:21 62:21 76:14 85:26 86:13 behind 18:26 27:17 being 5:29 6:20 7:6,17 8:30 9:6,14,17 10:23,24,27 11:22 14:6 16:7,8 18:31 19:9 20:23 21:2,15 22:16 23:4 24:29 25:15,22 26:4,22,31 27:30 28:23 29:31 30:2 32:4,6,21 48:34 49:30,32 50:16,17,21 51:5,6 52:3 54:24 55:20 58:9,19,33 62:1 65:12,29 69:1 71:17 72:14 beings 56:1 belief 44:16,18 believe 10:10 11:28 13:11,12 16:7,34 17:1,31 27:15 30:4 38:3 40:11 45:14 47:28 70:24 belt 46:11 beneficial 82:21 benefit 47:14 85:33 89:14 beside 67:21 better 32:33 43:24 51:30 52:17 between 9:26 18:25 23:6 33:25 34:5 38:18,21 48:20 52:2 53:2 56:29 60:5 61:25,26,33 68:17 72:5 73:13 74:27,34 75:6 beyond 26:12 44:22 70:20 big 5:14 17:19 21:16 25:7 31:1,3 38:24,33 39:27 46:33 59:28 65:30 69:1 bigger 20:1 61:19 bill 4:16 50:1 billion 9:12 biodiversity 16:23 26:22 31:15,24,33,34 32:12,20,33 37:23 38:16 41:10 81:13 biogenic 10:31 bird 32:4 bit 8:10 11:34 12:3 15:32,33 27:13 29:17,18 31:1,17,33 38:4 40:29 42:33 43:14 45:18 51:10,13 53:7 54:18 67:8 72:22 73:6 75:10 76:21 bitumen 57:13 black 29:34 blame 44:4 51:1 blamed 16:7 bleak 23:9 31:22 bleaker 31:24 bleeds 25:20 block 17:32 blocked 17:29 76:27 board 31:28 39:11,27 73:33 74:3 boats 29:24 bodies 61:18 bold 80:13 bombing 55:1 book 12:28 66:1	booklets 70:10 border 56:28 both 27:26 32:32 34:20 45:23 60:6 70:13 72:18 73:30,31 78:28 84:34 85:5 88:28 89:5 90:27,28,30 bottom 20:10 bought 74:25 boundaries 52:4 bounds 28:9 bovine 10:17 boycott 77:8 boys 80:13 brand 52:13 bread 16:32 break 61:33 breaks 43:24 70:11 breakups 25:17 brief 8:23 33:5,7,13 43:5 46:1 48:2 68:22 briefing 53:3 briefly 3:22 83:33 84:10 brilliant 69:8,17 89:16 90:9 bring 28:15 30:11 39:23 49:20 53:3,10 57:4 58:19 75:23 76:34 89:8 90:3 bringing 4:3 35:3,4 77:4 79:32 broadened 8:32 broke 44:3 brother 3:18 4:16 brothers 16:31 brought 15:3 18:7,16 25:17 33:30 38:22 50:4,14 52:15 56:19 62:18,21,27 63:12,14 64:15 66:34 68:1 70:9,18 74:20 brutality 55:3 budget 65:28 budgets 74:22 build 37:6 building 50:27 54:5 59:21 65:6 80:1 84:2 buildings 11:22 14:34 50:28 55:27 83:6 built 50:30 burden 8:30 11:24 burdens 14:5 23:10 burdensome 12:33 bureaucracy 14:20 20:21 bureaucrats 18:5 31:2 burn 8:16 9:22 12:27 29:18 burning 44:24 bus 66:25 74:30 business 3:31 16:17 19:34 20:1 27:32,34 37:27 41:4 56:14 60:19,20 69:7 78:6 82:19,22 businesses 46:22 54:2 57:7 82:10,15,18,19,29 busy 65:32 but 5:14 8:27 9:20 10:17 12:3,24,29 13:3,7 14:20 15:4,21,30 16:12 17:11 18:15,33 19:7,31 20:7 21:4,8 22:9,22 23:12,18 24:23 25:1,8,9,14,19,28,	29 26:4,8 27:14,24 28:2,23,32 29:14,16,33 30:14,17,33 31:17,26 32:2,12,29 33:23 34:5,34 35:18,32 36:19,23,32,33 3 butter 16:32 button 63:25 buy 28:4 38:28,29,32 39:32 71:18,20,26,27 buying 27:30 28:2 35:29 Ballinclare 68:5,13,18 71:33,34 72:22 Baltinglass 3:23 76:6,9 78:1,24 82:8 90:26 Barry 1:12 3:1 Bay 5:2 46:4 Bearing 21:15 Behan's 74:30 Behan 1:13,14 36:5,6 37:16 65:3,4,11,15,17 69:16 71:33 73:26 81:29 Best 5:4 8:24 14:16,17,25 15:9 30:32 43:10 45:13 49:23 52:30 87:10 89:26 90:15 BER 74:26 88:4 Blacklion 49:5 53:14 Blake 1:15,16 5:7,8 7:29 20:33,34 33:19 46:8 Blessington 90:21 Blueway 58:26 83:21,22 Boghall 4:1 Bourke 1:17 3:3,4 4:14 16:28,29 19:14 36:17 40:31 68:21,22 72:30 Bray 4:2 7:18,20 60:25 65:23,25,32 66:14,15,28 72:26 77:1 78:9 85:1 88:31 Breege 42:7 Brian 82:23 Brierton 7:19 Brown 3:23 Brussels 26:34 30:22 BYRNE 4:17,18 7:34 8:8,21 13:9,19,22,26,29 21:34 22:5 27:1 30:31 33:3 37:15 40:6,26 42:5,28,31 45:6,28	campaign 26:12 27:15 41:1 77:8 camp 80:25 can't 12:33 15:30 18:26 20:8 23:11 24:21 25:7 27:27 29:18 31:26 34:25 43:22 44:4 45:15 49:16 50:34 63:26 66:8 79:8 81:32 82:33 89:13 can 1:7 5:3 8:23,24 10:3 12:13 13:6 12 14:15,18 17:28 18:2 19:22 20:23 24:9,22 27:14 28:7,24 29:25 30:11,26 33:5,28,29 34:33 35:1,19,21,33,34 36:1 38:16,32 39:9,19,25 40:20 41:21 42:18,19 43:5 46:15,30 48:8 49:29 50:10 51:30 52:5,27 54:9,30 55:33 56:12,22 cannot 20:20 27:10 30:10 34:25 47:30 77:14 capable 26:30 capacity 9:18 car 12:11 carbon 9:21 10:28 14:16 35:20,22,24,26,30 cards 84:7,11,13 89:14 care 38:6 44:33 86:8 88:4 89:9,10,30 career 17:14 carefully 43:33 carried 25:34 32:7 74:32 carry 12:2 29:24 76:13 carrying 24:3 73:24 cars 12:7 29:28 case 15:8 19:14 50:34 57:34 60:19,20 68:14 74:2 80:8,12 cases 41:32 49:4 50:16 51:29 62:1 catalyst 17:31 catalysts 17:7 catastrophe 14:12 catch 15:15 categorically 71:34 categories 81:22 catered 37:28 80:18 cattle 27:30 35:17 caught 23:3 cauliflowers 27:29 35:16,21,23,28,29 causing 13:1 45:18 57:9 76:32 ceasefire 54:30 55:29 celebrate 73:12 cent 48:13 centralised 20:21 centrally 84:12 centre 5:10 19:8 22:23 27:34 37:29 48:31 52:8 58:31 59:30 60:6 77:25 80:31 83:12,13 centres 79:29 certain 21:18 certainly 14:16 26:9 27:18 31:18 35:3 36:33 37:16,30 47:28 49:4 51:21,33 52:27 53:10 65:23
---	---	---	---	--	---

66:23,26 68:15 73:3,6,11 75:10 77:24 78:9 88:27 certainty 31:21,27 cetera 89:34 90:3 chair 5:19 21:1 31:33 33:13,27 34:7 39:26 51:25 57:4 68:34 80:34 chairman 16:3,34 18:27 19:19 34:2 75:33 challenge 16:16 36:28 37:9 41:3 53:8 74:29 challenges 14:23 25:31 60:24,34 71:7 74:13 challenging 58:4 62:1 73:30 chamber 1:5 19:2 36:14 45:23 46:31 62:27,34 63:14,21 64:15 70:19 79:13,31,33 85:3 chambers 26:9 36:20 62:21 chance 88:31 change 12:17 14:23 15:23 19:7 22:14 23:25 48:12 81:13 changed 51:12 84:25 changes 30:17,18 channels 81:31 chap 44:4 charge 11:9 28:8 85:22 87:10 88:5 charges 11:23 68:23 72:31 charity 20:9 chase 60:19 cheap 9:8 27:30 44:10 check 47:4,6 61:24 chemicals 15:26 child 44:3 childcare 70:29 children 37:6 54:34 55:3,7 65:30,32 66:7 69:18 79:26 choice 50:5 churning 77:15 circles 31:12 circulated 5:33 6:8,23 7:9,21 cities 20:27,28 clarification 79:28 clarified 57:14 clarify 10:20 68:31 79:13 clarity 51:10 classified 20:23 classify 10:20 cleaned 67:11 clear 11:13 15:11 63:6,7 65:5 80:5,14 cleared 67:11,26 clearing 28:30 clearly 11:18 12:25 clients 73:4 cliff 17:3 climate 12:11,16,17,24 14:23 16:22 19:7 22:14 26:22 31:15,24,33 32:12 34:33 35:19 37:23 38:9,15 41:10 48:12,13 81:12,13 clinical 86:17 clock 56:11 60:33 61:5 close 20:28 66:27 closed 56:11 closer 38:21 closest 36:23	closing 49:6 clubs 48:26 coddling 30:29 code 50:4 colleague 4:15,16,17 31:2 33:19 35:8 64:14 77:6 colleagues 8:26 21:33 22:8,12 23:23 27:24 35:4 36:9 39:19 52:17 59:23 63:3,13 73:6 85:9 college 25:8 coloured 77:17 columns 76:3 come 7:13 8:1 11:15,28,33 14:12,26 16:3 17:2,4 19:28,31 21:3,4 22:3 24:22 25:12,18 40:4,23 44:18 45:8,22 52:9,33 54:23 55:13 56:33 59:18 61:29 62:6,9,11 63:5,20 71:14,20 72:33 75:10 78:26 79:8,10 84:20 90:17 comes 12:11 26:31 28:12 30:9 34:33 36:13 37:31 48:10 49:27 50:15 53:9 59:33 74:14 coming 14:1,12 21:5,18 23:1,31 24:1,16,19,25 25:4 26:28 30:17,21,26 31:9,28 32:10,34 33:15,16 34:19 38:4 39:8,10 44:8 48:16 49:5,33 50:3,5,24 52:21 54:30 55:24 56:12 61:6,13,18,26 62:8 68:24 79:12 80:28 83:13,18 84:10 85:16 commenced 1:1 60:29 74:11 commend 14:2 48:25 comment 40:9 42:31 46:8 54:15 71:2 72:26 78:1,14 83:32 comments 42:30 62:14,34 71:13 commercial 11:21 commissioner 84:3 commitment 47:30 77:31 commitments 36:25 committees 37:14,17,18,22,27 38:11 common 12:12 16:22 32:28,30 41:9 communal 53:31 communicating 32:32 communication 72:30 73:2 communities 22:21 27:32 38:28 40:17 community 15:13 17:13 22:23 26:15 27:4,5 28:15,19 33:15,25 34:32 38:7,19,27 43:30,32 49:12,17 54:16,20 56:14 76:16 81:1 82:29 83:7,9,14,15 85:28 87:2 88:6 companies 80:19	company 53:26 compared 81:17 comparison 17:16,25 81:20 compensate 9:11 compensation 10:14 23:11 26:24 compete 18:26 35:29 complaining 34:34 complaints 15:29 complete 9:34 17:21 38:20 54:19 completed 56:15 58:12 68:29 77:24 completely 11:8 39:8 66:21 69:6 completion 48:31 complicated 10:2 78:21 complications 87:23 compliment 36:16 90:27 comply 20:19 comprehensive 47:3 49:22 72:21 comprised 6:6,19 concentrate 74:18 concept 37:23 86:23,24 concern 15:13,15 18:20 37:19 80:26 concerned 17:13 30:33 67:34 concerning 17:1 concerns 17:2 18:6 21:2 34:19,20 35:4,5 48:6 79:33 conclude 22:26 concluded 91:3 concludes 90:32 conclusion 45:6 concur 69:16 condition 74:9,13 conditions 10:26,31 16:10 55:10 58:4 70:18 condolences 3:14,15,19 4:9,10 conducive 21:20 conducted 11:13 28:33 conference 4:26,28,30 46:4 70:8 conferences 5:4 configuration 53:28 confirm 5:21 confirmed 65:14 congratulate 46:3,16,30 81:1 congratulations 5:5,17 46:5,33 49:22 56:6 conjunction 83:10 connection 38:21 88:7 connections 45:24 conscious 16:4 23:13,14 33:2,5 52:12 62:26,32,33 64:14 70:28,33 71:9 consent 86:14 conservation 61:1,2 conservative 26:13 consider 5:28 6:5,18 7:4,16 37:24,25 45:32 75:5 84:7 consideration 9:2 75:8 83:18 considered 56:27 conspiracy 76:32 78:11 constant 15:29 55:1	constantly 12:20 42:16 52:3 53:19 54:34 constituent 86:13,32 constituents 58:4 86:13 construction 52:25 constructive 37:19 consult 28:28 consultants 10:2 24:7 74:2 78:25 consultation 47:13 53:4 58:27 74:32 75:2 83:22,24 consumer 27:31 contact 1:7 47:22 69:30 88:29 90:12 contacted 69:17 82:10 contempt 67:26,27,28 contested 27:9 36:12 context 54:30 85:20,29 continue 13:14 14:11,25 22:27 32:7,16 37:2 42:23 44:27 52:5 76:24 continued 10:25 continues 10:9 continuing 14:16 57:8 continuously 42:22 contractor 21:18 53:8 67:16 78:20 contractors 72:7 contribute 13:12 contributed 9:25 contributing 9:4 contribution 16:14 32:14 41:2 control 53:32 80:24 convened 51:24 convergence 18:8,21,25 conversation 31:11 61:32 conversations 89:2 90:29 conveyor 46:11 cooperation 28:19,32 coordinator 58:22 85:17 86:26 87:21,25 coordinators 86:25 87:13 88:9 cop 39:28 copy 26:8 88:14 core 23:15 corners 26:29 correct 42:5 58:18 59:21 correspondence 54:19 cost 16:16 19:33,34 20:1,9 35:20,21,26 41:4 54:2 60:18 costly 52:26 costs 9:13 16:17,19 17:22,28 41:4,6 57:13 60:18 74:1,3,4 82:22 could 13:7 18:15 24:7 26:8 28:10,28 33:7,34 34:11,12,18 36:32 38:15 39:5,31 40:12 41:20 48:18 50:27 54:5 57:14 61:26 63:26 65:9 66:34 67:25 70:26 76:1 79:25 80:26 82:16,24,28 83:1,18,19,26 84:15	couldn't 17:30 38:32 46:5 57:7 87:25 count 10:34 counted 61:20 countenance 18:15 counties 11:20 48:19 86:23,28 87:19 countries 18:26 29:24 39:2 country 4:28 5:10 13:2 14:15 18:31 19:5,27 22:23 26:26,30 30:5 34:2 35:31 36:1,20 40:16 44:13 53:8 56:31 59:24 80:28 87:13 countryside 21:30 couple 3:25 4:27 15:26 17:20 19:8 24:2 35:28 48:30 65:21 75:33 courage 38:3 course 49:7 court 67:10,26,28 68:2 72:4,10,12,15,18 courtesy 12:12 cover 17:28 32:4 60:6 69:24 90:26 covered 58:24 63:32 74:34 covering 58:28 covers 58:26 cows 19:9 crazy 29:11 30:2 39:34 66:27 71:22 create 11:34 12:1 74:13 created 9:29 creating 32:19 creator 39:3 creches 50:29 credit 50:1 creeds 45:9 cries 25:14 criminals 79:7 crisis 12:24 89:11 critical 23:7 crop 10:25 crops 12:22 cross 3:30 22:26 crossed 90:11 crossing 69:18 crucial 36:30 cry 38:27 crystal 43:14 cuff 34:11 culture 24:29 83:13 current 10:16,21 64:6 68:4 76:3 86:22 currently 10:24 55:3 74:3 custom 66:4 customer 73:4 cut 29:18 42:26 57:19 74:27 cuts 16:17 41:4 cutting 60:28 Carmel 4:14 Carnew 3:24 48:11 Cathaoirleach 62:20 CAP 9:5,6,11 18:32 19:4 41:9 CATHAOIRLEACH 1:4,31 3:9,13,20,27,29,3 3 4:8,12,19,23,25 5:4,5,8,20 6:17,30,33 7:2,16 8:10,14,16,20 12:27 13:8,18,20,24,27, 30,32 16:4,13,27,29 19:12,17 20:32,34	22:1,6,7,31,34 23:22,26,27,29 24:17,20 25:24,26 27:19,21,23 29:2,4,8 31:6,8 33:1,4 34:8 35:1,1,1 CE's 66:19,25 CEO 5:17 46:23 48:5 Charlie 4:16 Chief 4:31 7:27 27:33 41:24 42:6,13 45:33,34 46:25 47:3 48:24 49:12,19,22 51:9 56:5 57:5,8,23 59:12 63:18 66:22,33 67:4,14,25,31,33 68:4,14,15,17 71:13,31 76:11 77:21 85:9 89:27 Christmas 50:24 56:11 65:26,33 73:23 City 24:1 66:14,16 69:27 73:7 Clare 80:4,7 Claremont 91:2 Cleere 49:27 Club 3:19 Coast 47:12 Coastal 58:26 83:21,22 Collectively 87:13 Colohan 5:31 Commerce 19:2 Commission's 10:20 Commission 9:17 10:7,9,15 26:6 40:33 Committee 31:34 32:13 37:23,24 62:17,18,22 63:20,22 65:5,9 77:16,19 83:31 89:32 Congrats 57:24 Conroy 4:9 Convent 75:30 Convention 5:9 Conveyance 5:31 Cora 3:30 Corks 52:2 Corporation 5:29 7:5 Corrigan's 60:10 Corrigan 1:18,19 7:23 23:28,29 56:4,5 59:14 60:13 69:5,7 84:17 Council's 54:20 72:23 81:17 Council 4:29 5:9,12,14,15,18,2 2 11:15,26,29,33 12:8,15 13:5,14 15:14,29 16:13,14,15,18,20 20:13,14 26:8 27:14 28:14,16 31:34 32:12,19,23 33:25,33 34:6 36:20,34 37:7,30 38:11 40:32,34 41:1,3,5,8 43:2 44:22 45:6 46:9,16,17,30 47:8,26,30 49:29 50:21 51:27 52 Councillor 1:11,12,13,14,15, 16,17,18,19,20,21 22,23,24,25,26,2 7,28,29,30,32,33, 34
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2:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 10,12,13,14,15,1 6,17,18,19,20,21, 22,23,24,25,26,27 28,29,30,33,34 3:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,1 2,13,20,21,22,27, 28,29,33 4:7,8,12,24,25 5:5,7,8,20,23 6:1,10,14,16, Councillors 13:10 18:14 22:9 28:25 34:1 36:22 37:9,17 40:16,18 45:14 46:4 61:12 66:13 68:9 76:14 79:6 81:1 83:8 85:8 Councils 5:10,11 11:12,21 12:2 69:26 71:22 County 4:29 5:3,9,11,12,15,22, 29,30,31 6:6,7,8,19,20,21,2 2 7:5,6,7,17,18,20 11:12,15,21,26,28 33 12:2,7,15 13:5 16,14 18:14 20:13 25:29 26:8 27:13,14 28:5,15,18 32:20 33:33 34:6 36:20 37:14 40:32,34 43:2 44:25,27 45:6 46:14,30,32 47:8,18,19,26,30 50:10 51 Covid 58:8 87:2 88:7 CRONIN 1:20 3:1,2 6:10 34:9,10 82:4,5 Cullen 1:21,22 5:23 13:31,32 16:4,5,30 19:16 35:8 36:16 40:30 Cushman 53:25 D daily 55:10 dairy 10:16 44:31 damage 21:29 damaged 67:21 danger 67:19 date 52:15 58:18 66:34 72:30 daughter 3:16 29:14 daughters 17:15 26:20 37:1 day 4:34 12:18,20,29 14:23,24 15:16 21:18 24:31,33 32:2 34:15 35:1 38:19 43:9 44:2,26 45:7 46:14 47:23 51:26 56:21 61:32 68:10 days 46:5 dead 29:13 55:6 deal 9:17 11:20 18:25 52:28 59:26 61:12 76:22 dealing 29:15 50:15 dealt 6:34 50:22 72:6 74:20 dearth 20:5 death 3:30 debate 77:19 deceased 7:19 decent 12:12 decided 66:13 decides 71:26 decision 65:6 74:23 decisions 15:32,34 26:33 27:2 36:30	40:21 77:17,19 86:6 decline 23:34 decrease 57:28 dedicated 47:24 deep 52:18,19 81:22 deeply 8:13 defer 51:24 definitely 50:33 degree 14:33 delay 32:5 54:22 82:6 delayed 71:11 delays 9:25 11:6 23:11 delighted 8:10 43:1 46:8 73:9 76:19,28 77:3 delivered 39:18,19 demand 52:24,30 demise 22:19 denied 55:3 deny 12:24 departed 4:21 depending 21:18 depends 61:25 deprived 83:12 depth 32:10 89:2 derogation 10:6 described 23:4 deserved 57:24 design 53:30 designated 10:14 designed 10:4 14:21,22 designing 37:26 desirable 54:21 desk 24:11 despite 9:13 11:22 destroyed 17:20 18:7,20,23 30:5 55:2 56:22 destroying 56:24 detail 53:27 54:6 72:22 detailed 37:19 53:27 66:29 73:33 details 88:29 detect 88:2 detention 80:31 deterioration 56:10 devastate 9:18 develop 15:6,7 51:21 73:32 developed 23:4 developer 61:25 developers 61:13,30 development 11:7 15:8 20:15,16,20 37:5,9,10 49:11 61:12,23 68:23,28 72:30 83:11 developments 61:17,19 68:24 83:18 devised 11:27 23:19 devising 9:1 devoted 44:30 dialogue 12:2 27:24,25,27 diarrhoea 13:7 dictate 43:19 did 11:34 18:22 20:21,31 24:32,34 26:34 44:5 48:5 49:3 52:2 53:24 60:29 63:20,31 73:10 77:31 79:3,6,23 didn't 12:9,10 20:16,29 42:32 44:4 48:13 68:15,24 69:10 74:24 81:7 die 11:14 28:27 41:21 42:10,14 diesel 17:30,33 29:25	difference 76:31 different 4:31 32:20,29 39:27,30 42:17,22 55:15 56:30 65:12,13 74:34 76:3 77:17 79:29 81:22 87:26 88:21 difficult 10:25 18:28 77:25 difficulty 78:19 dig 81:22 digestion 10:34 digital 73:2 90:20 dire 50:20 direct 9:2 26:22 direction 17:21 58:7 77:11 directive 10:14,21 directly 11:3 72:33 directorates 42:11 51:12 directors 27:33 49:23 51:11 70:10 76:13 dirty 29:25 disabilities 84:23 disability 4:3 70:9,14 84:25 disagree 32:29 disappear 47:31 disappeared 38:23 disappointing 5:13 32:5 disappointment 56:26 disconnect 38:20 disconnection 38:18 discretion 72:14 discuss 37:19 41:33 51:29 80:10 85:4 discussed 32:10 34:27 42:15,16 53:19 65:12 72:13 79:22 84:1 discussing 32:19 79:18 80:11,12 discussion 15:34 52:17,20 55:27 62:25 63:32 79:21 85:2 discussions 32:15 53:1,15 60:3 disease 42:14,20 disgust 55:16 disgusted 55:8 display 46:31 55:26 disposal 5:28 6:5,18 7:4,16 disrespect 62:32 disrupt 17:4 disruption 13:1 dissent 41:12,13 79:21 distance 71:10 85:6 90:28 districts 81:31 84:34 90:28 diverse 28:2 doctors 89:19 document 33:34 40:17 does 25:21 31:11 61:31 67:31 68:26 70:23,28 79:21 doesn't 12:30 14:12 19:10,31 20:19 23:25 52:3,18 63:17 69:24 79:10 87:6 dog 11:20 25:34 59:4 75:27,28 77:24,27,29 dogs 28:22 doing 11:12 12:10 16:16 19:34 20:8 21:19 24:34 25:4,20 28:3	31:17,19 32:15 34:2,3 41:4 50:12 52:27 63:11 67:8 70:25 74:12 80:6 85:20 90:6,7 domains 88:21 don't 12:11,24,25 13:2 15:7,12 16:12 17:2 18:6 21:3,7,12 24:8 26:5 28:3,14 29:16,23,30 30:3,14,18,29 31:3,13,24 32:10 38:3 39:4 42:9 43:8,11,25,30,31 44:30,32 51:1,20 56:32 57:27 59:1 62:28,32 65:5 70:24 73:10 75:27,28 78:14 79:30 81:18 89:15 90:10 done 5:17 14:28 15:32 28:17 32:3,6 35:21,33 40:5,12 41:20,21 48:28 49:7 50:22 51:6 53:6 54:28 57:18 62:33 66:8,9 69:19 70:8 72:14 75:10,25 76:12 79:17,29 81:10 84:29 88:23 doomsday 43:26 90:11 door 56:22,24 doubt 31:24 36:15 44:23 78:11 down 4:31,32 21:24,30 24:34 26:16 29:31 30:26 33:29 38:16 39:10 41:33 46:11 51:4 59:28 61:6 70:9 75:18,21 76:32 77:6 80:14 82:32,34 83:13,17 88:29 downwards 76:23 draft 47:12 dragging 44:5 drain 76:27,29,30,33 78:9 drainage 48:14,15 60:17 78:21 draining 60:15 draw 46:19 draws 81:19 dressing 40:13 driven 17:22 30:2 driveway 28:31 dropped 17:26 69:13 dropping 17:23 drove 17:7 drum 19:2 due 10:25 49:7 58:11,27 72:31 dump 67:5,6,10,20 during 22:15,17 56:21 59:15 60:29 75:2 79:34 89:1 duties 73:24 dying 55:3 Dáil 27:3 36:23 December 84:3 Deed 5:30 Department 9:25,30 10:4 15:15,21 28:28 51:2 52:5,17 53:2 54:19 59:23,33 60:3,8 73:31 75:24 78:24,26 85:32,33 Derek 2:6 3:18	Devereux 81:7 DER 84:32 86:30 DERMOT 2:10,12 22:33,34 25:11 89:24 90:6,7 Director 4:31 28:8 33:26 34:5 42:7 65:23 66:22,32 69:1 District 39:2,3 42:15 47:14,18,23,27 49:33 53:10,19 60:18,28 61:2 73:24 75:18,19 78:9 85:4 88:31 Documents 34:28 67:15 Doyle 1:23 3:5 18:10 Drew 84:3 Drive 39:27,31 49:29 Dublin 5:10 18:30 24:1 29:26,28 56:29 66:14,16 69:26 73:7 86:27 Dundon 7:19 Dunlavin 6:6,8 78:28 79:29 80:1 82:7,27 Dunne 1:24,25 4:24,25 6:1 21:4 33:33,34 40:9,10 46:3 70:8 75:15,16 77:23 E each 11:15 32:27 47:27 50:30 72:7 83:28 85:3 89:24 earlier 20:4,26 33:30 34:27 73:33 89:26 early 18:22 78:26 ease 51:11 easier 34:29 61:10 easily 81:19 easy 19:30 69:22 81:20 eat 19:29 echo 70:17 eco 9:8 economic 19:3 27:33 economically 18:31 20:7,31 economy 16:15 19:26 41:2 51:32,33 edge 17:3 edible 88:14 educated 44:4 education 55:3 effect 19:7 50:4 67:20 effectively 9:7,12 59:21 67:10 efficient 66:16 efficiently 47:15 eggs 26:27 eight 50:29,31 74:34 eighties 37:13 either 21:20,29 27:3 31:25 43:32 50:5 76:33 77:6 elder 89:33 elderly 58:22 90:20,23 elected 12:13 32:24 37:25,30 45:23 election 30:17,18 elections 30:15 32:17 36:12,13,26 84:8,10 elector 84:13 electricity 49:34 element 67:22 else 20:7 24:9 31:13 52:14 53:9 55:28 72:2 81:32 email 64:27 76:29 82:23 88:15 embarrassing 69:11	emergency 66:6 80:16 88:3 emigrated 24:32 emissions 10:14,27,28,30,32 34 16:8,9 19:9 emotion 77:5 employed 12:14 employment 26:21 empty 46:10 50:28 enable 61:5 encapsulates 10:21 encourage 24:13 46:20 82:1 encouraged 42:20 encouraging 46:31 73:2 end 5:15 14:22,24 15:16 29:33 34:11 35:1 44:34 46:12 54:12,23 55:28,29 62:9 76:29 78:27 82:31 83:31,34 energy 15:1 engage 31:10 34:32 77:24 engaged 46:5 53:25 engagement 32:9 engaging 17:14 69:1 engineer's 53:19 engineer 53:10 60:18,28 61:2 73:24 76:28 engineering 67:16 engineers 28:28 42:15 60:24 engines 29:27 enhance 77:29 82:15 enjoy 44:26,27 enormously 17:27 enough 8:5,18 12:25,33,34 13:9 23:9 26:12 32:23 37:25 41:1 51:5 56:14 70:24 88:26 ensure 35:33 enter 20:2 entering 20:5 42:27 enterprise 37:27 46:19 48:31 52:8 53:24,34 82:27,29 entire 13:12 entitled 5:32 6:22 7:8,20 25:8 entitlement 18:22 entitlements 18:19 environmental 9:7,8,21,31,32 12:16 13:14 14:15 34:33 44:22,23 75:3 77:27 environmentally 10:10 43:33 44:28 environs 52:28 equally 21:12 47:19 86:15,16 88:6,15 equity 52:29 equivalent 29:28 especially 4:29 20:4 22:21 47:18 69:6 75:29 essential 22:20 establish 18:23 establishment 41:22 even 20:29,30,31 29:25 32:12 35:29 37:6 42:19 50:7 61:19 66:19 69:30 89:17 90:19 event 5:6,10 59:28 events 46:21 ever 5:4 8:30 20:30 22:13 26:34 every 12:18 17:26 20:22 24:24 25:14,21 30:18,22
---	--	---	---	---	--

31:16,17 43:9 46:14 47:22,23 50:25 55:9 56:1 65:6 67:21 75:11 77:17,25 84:13 90:9	ESB 50:5 57:6 59:17 76:22 Europe 8:29 9:19 13:2 14:4 18:5 25:4,13 27:9 43:8,11 European 8:32 9:17,19 10:7 16:20 26:23 31:19 32:11 39:2 41:8 Excellent 5:6 84:27 Executive's 7:27 45:33 47:4 63:18 67:14 89:27 Executive 4:31 27:33 33:34 34:3,6 37:7 41:24,33 42:6,13 45:34 46:25 47:3 48:25 49:12,19,22 51:9 56:6 57:5,8,24 59:12 60:24 66:22,33 67:4,25,31,33 68:4,15,17 70:11,13 71:13,31 76:11 77:21 85:9	13:1 14:5,9,17,22,23,2 4 15:4,7,13,16,18,2 2 16:16,17,18,20,22 17:2,12,27,28,31 18:2,6,16,18,21 19:8 21:9,12,13,20,28 22:12,15,20,23,26 23:14,25 24:1,6,15,23,25,2 9 25:5,18,19 26 farming 8:26 10:21 14:21,30 15:12,17 16:14,31,32 17:12,14,16 19:26,28,33 20:1,2,5,6 21:16,32 22:9 23:34 24:29 26:15,16,17,34 27:4,5 28:15,19 29:33 32:14,32 33:15,23,25 34:22,24,32,34 35:1 41:2 42:29 43:32 44:23 45:24 farmland 11:10 26:21 farms 10:20 16:19 17:16 24:4 34:20,21 37:2 38:7 41:6 43:30 fast 69:19 fate 68:18 father 3:18 4:15,17 24:33,34 fathers 21:24 37:16 fault 71:6 fear 24:8 89:11 fearful 34:14 fears 34:21,22 feasibility 56:27 feasible 17:22 fed 27:30 fee 78:25 feed 61:31 83:8 feedback 75:3 feeding 35:17 61:13 feel 10:3 12:1 24:9 39:20 47:32 50:16 fell 52:1 felt 34:3 45:23 female 80:7 few 17:13,15 18:7,31 19:19 21:4 40:13 43:5 53:8 56:8 70:2 73:12 82:5 fields 12:22 24:10 fifties 3:26 figure 9:12 58:1,7,14,17,18 62:6 figures 57:27,28,34 65:28 fill 17:31 24:8 86:14 filling 21:13 24:11 fills 24:7 finalised 60:17,18 74:1,2 financial 82:21 89:34 find 39:33 50:10 53:20 66:19 68:11 81:18 finding 81:14 fine 19:5 22:5,9 30:3,23 33:3 45:20 65:1,34 finest 44:12 finish 16:5,12 19:12 30:14 71:16 finished 71:14 finishing 62:7	fire 3:17 8:21 29:21 76:6 78:1,24 82:6,27 firing 80:16 first 8:13 12:16 16:31 19:21,27 25:18 36:7 37:11 42:31 49:26 56:8 58:31 59:30 60:6 61:32 65:23 66:10 67:29 69:5 70:2 73:2,27 74:8 75:16 76:11,21 80:34 81:21 firstly 13:34 46:3 fit 50:27,31,34 81:34 fittings 53:31 five 24:30 25:1 30:4,29 33:4 55:6 58:34 70:30 71:5 76:15 80:9 fixtures 53:30 flag 69:10 flag 49:3 55:26 56:33 63:22 65:6 77:16,17 79:25 flagged 49:6 flags 77:18 79:20 flash 49:4 flexibility 10:7,23,24 14:33 23:11 flocks 11:21 flooded 48:11 52:3 flooding 52:1,3 53:18 56:20,22 floor 13:30 46:26 flown 77:18 fly 79:25 flying 21:21 65:6 focus 44:10 focused 59:34 folks 8:14,23 11:4,16,31 12:25 13:3 44:30 follow 33:27 37:7 40:23 53:16 61:30 81:20 88:23 followed 9:26 40:4 following 9:4 16:13 40:15,34 55:21 follows 1:2 40:31 food 9:6,20 14:9,10,15,17,18, 22 17:2,11,12,34 19:30 21:8,10 26:27,28 28:3,4,5 38:18,20,22,24,32 39:5 43:7,8,10,20,22,2 5,32,33 44:10 49:16 foot 9:27 footpath 56:31 75:17,18,20 77:23 footprint 9:22 35:22 for 3:31 4:19,25 5:2,4,12,15,18,22 6:15 7:29 8:5,11 10:17,21 11:29,34 12:3,4,12,22,29 13:13,20,24,34 14:1,26 15:1,3,8 16:17 17:17,31,33 18:7,11,12,33 19:5,8,10,21,30 20:2,7 21:1,2,5,18,28 22:4,12,19 23:1,17,18,25,30 24:6,14,16 25:18,19,22,26 26:6,7 27:8 2 forced 27:10 forcing 15:6 forefront 4:3 foreign 27:30	forests 9:22 forever 19:28 forget 34:25 36:24,25 forgot 54:15 form 32:20 83:26 86:14 formally 16:29 19:15 former 3:23,24 51:11 formulated 20:15 forward 8:1 12:1 14:11 21:2 31:26,28 32:19,22,23,24 39:6 44:23 45:13 46:15 56:16 57:14 59:15 62:22,27 63:8,13,14 73:20 77:19 79:8 81:3 83:9 85:18 89:16 90:3 fouling 75:27 77:25 found 81:34 founding 3:18 four 5:15,19 22:8 26:29 30:8 50:27,28 58:34 65:20 78:30,32 80:9,34 86:4 fourth 81:16 fraction 35:22 fragmented 11:24 frame 68:13 framed 23:12 frankly 69:13 free 17:25 35:18 69:22 85:22 87:10 88:5 freehold 5:32 6:22 7:8,20 fresh 38:23 friends 24:32 frighten 15:13 from 3:23 4:1,5,27 5:8 6:29 7:33 9:1,5,12,20 10:6,32 11:1,10,14,22,31 12:7 16:16 18:26,32 19:22,23 22:10,16 23:4 24:22 25:4,13 26:14,21,22,29,31 27:4,29 28:25 29:7,24 30:3,16 31:15,18 32:10,14 34:1,19,25 36:1,24 38:25,27,33 39:10,17,18,31,32 33 40:15 41:3 front 37:29 82:14 fronts 87:22 frustration 8:30 9:4 14:5 20:10 39:18 frustrations 8:32 full 16:19 21:32,33 24:16 27:14 41:7 43:15,16 73:28,34 fully 24:22 30:31 35:3 40:2 55:7 79:18 function 84:12 functions 74:21 fund 52:18 53:34 58:19 60:3 81:12 83:19 fundamental 11:27 23:17,18 86:4 funded 39:3 85:32 funding 9:6,9,12 11:15 16:21 41:9 48:13,18 52:1,2,6 53:20 56:27 59:27,28 60:19 76:8 81:13,23 83:6,23 85:31 89:10	funds 9:15 further 10:13 16:18 41:6 42:19 53:6 75:3,4,5,8 76:8 81:33 furthered 76:9 future 19:28,29 23:24 31:29 34:14,22 42:28,29 43:14,19,34 44:9 50:11 69:23 86:6 90:13 Fail 30:23 Fallon 49:26 Farmyards 11:7 Fassaroe 75:6 Fáil 30:3 February 3:15 5:22 9:27 45:33 47:6,7 53:1 62:18 78:26 84:1 Fein 30:23 Ferris 1:26,27 62:23 76:10,11 77:21 Féin 79:5 Fianna 30:3 Final 5:14 33:4,6 40:9 Finally 5:14 21:22 45:12 46:19 48:34 67:4 77:3 90:5 Fiona 6:7 Fitzgerald 1:28,29 6:24 Flemming 4:15 Flynn 1:30 60:22 Folio 6:7,19 Fortune's 62:14 79:3 Fortune 1:32,33 33:6 39:15,16 40:7 54:27,28 55:23,26 62:15,26 63:6,9,11,24,30 64:1,5,10,25,30,3 2 65:2 71:2,4,8 77:4,11,13 France 12:34 Francie 9:27 French 13:1 Friday 28:29 42:11 46:20 51:13 Friently 34:29 44:28 58:21 81:17 84:34 85:14,15,25 Furthermore 10:9 G gallery 3:10 8:26 gamut 12:23 gander 19:10 garden 21:22,23,25 56:21 gardens 49:12 54:16,20 gas 10:28 16:7 50:6 78:18,21 gate 9:2 23:4 25:11 gateway 56:28 gave 4:10,32 37:18 49:12 63:11 68:23 82:7 geared 20:27 general 18:2 25:29 36:12 81:19 generally 5:3 15:12 generations 14:26 22:13 24:23 26:16 genocide 55:14,30 genuine 19:22 34:22 genuinely 11:10 12:1,28,30 geographical 86:27 get 1:8 9:30 12:4,18,22,29 13:6 15:22,28 17:8,30,31 18:32 22:16 24:32 26:21 27:17 28:31 29:21
--	--	---	---	--	---

30:27,28 31:23,24 36:23 37:1 38:3 41:16 42:18,33 44:25 46:11,20 47:14,24,30 49:9,16 52:12 53:8,14,15 54:6,22 59:18,26 60:7,10,20 62:5 64:4,11 66:20 68:15,34 71:2 getting 5:13 29:33 43:10 44:13 48:12,28 54:1 56:21 60:24 62:6 66:7 69:13 70:22	granted 10:1 19:30 grass 12:23 43:7,9 grateful 83:1 grazing 43:9 great 4:28,29 5:18 7:29,31 14:1 18:20 21:25 24:33 32:2,22 45:14 46:33,34 48:27 49:16 50:6 65:18 70:2,6,12 73:23 76:12,17,23 81:2,29 83:16 greater 33:25 green 6:7 22:13 38:23 43:9 greenhouse 10:28 16:7 grew 34:20 grid 15:1 grocers 38:23 ground 32:28,30 39:11 57:31 59:15,22 88:9 group 55:13 73:23 groupings 39:22 groups 19:3,4 47:8 81:1 83:15 growing 9:4 35:16,28 grown 49:16 growth 15:28 guard 4:9 guidance 85:22,34 89:28 guidelines 20:17,20 guys 19:23 20:6 Gael 22:9 30:3,23 Gahan 4:16,17 Gail 1:24 4:24 6:1 33:33 40:9 70:8 75:15 Galway 69:21,27,30 73:7 Gardaf 80:17 90:3 Gat 12:34 Gaza 55:30 79:3,7,26 GAA 40:12 GALLAGHER 53:23 60:13 73:18 Geraldine 87:20,22,34 German 13:1 17:28 Germany 17:30 29:19 30:1,9,11 Gerry 2:17,27 3:8,12 29:3 57:22 79:1 89:23 Gillian 87:21 GLENNON 1:34 2:1 5:24 6:10 22:6,7 Gorman 9:27 Government 9:1 11:3 16:18,21 17:32 18:6 26:2 27:16 35:5 36:24 41:5,8 42:18 59:34 60:8 GPs 86:17 Grain 17:25 Grants 25:8 58:16 82:10 Greens 30:2 Greenway 47:2,11,12 51:15 52:34 53:4 Greta 22:13 Greystones 3:15,17,19 47:2,11,14,18 48:27,31 49:5 52:8,34 53:24 54:4,9 65:32 66:15 88:33,34	granted 10:1 19:30 20:15,30 24:33 28:29 37:8 42:3 46:10,12 48:10 49:11 50:24,29 54:18 55:14 56:14,31 57:5 59:17,23,28 61:32 62:19 63:2 65:32 67:22 71:11 72:4,7,18,30 73:21 74:24,27,32,33 76:27,29 77:6 80:9 85:1,5 87:18,2 half 28:23 30:8 43:16 57:11 66:6 76:10,11,14,27 70:27 88:20 hall 30:27 halved 17:25 hand 8:7,18 30:27 41:24 42:30 45:34 51:12 71:27,31 77:22 84:9 85:6 88:24 89:4 handed 12:17 13:9 27:6 46:10 handing 10:15 hands 14:12 18:25 51:2 happen 15:5 23:25 43:22 65:13,15 happened 56:10,11,20 67:12 72:19 happening 22:19 24:27 30:18 51:1 56:1 68:12 69:12 76:34 77:14 82:31 happens 25:13 38:12 43:23 53:10,11 69:19 happy 37:7,31 40:23,24 41:33 42:6,7,9 46:23 52:27 81:8 harassment 42:33 hard 4:30 18:14,22 24:14 37:4 76:15,23 81:14 88:14 hardship 45:13 harvest 12:21 has 1:7 4:2 8:17 9:17,25,34 10:25 11:8 12:20 15:4,17,27 16:34 17:1,19,21 18:7,20,27,33 19:2,16 21:12,23 22:14,19 24:22 25:17,31 26:7,22 27:8 28:17 30:5,28 31:16 32:10,14 33:9,14,30 34:24 35:32 37:21 38:10,14 39:17 40:4,34 42:21 43:1 44:4,8,10 49:30 50:1 5 hasn't 51:24 hat 31:33 hats 70:15 have 1:6 2:32 3:11 5:18 6:14,31 8:4,10,15,23,26,2 9,31,32 9:24 10:15 11:28 12:4,7,13,15,24 13:2,3,9,12,13 14:10,11,17,28,30 17:4,8,12,19,20,2 6 18:19,23,27,33 19:7,8,12,24,33	20:6,28 21:7,18,25,28,29, 30,32 22:3,8,12 23:7,23,33 24:3,6,10,16,21 25:3,5,17 26:1 haven't 12:21 43:14 59:17 71:14 72:31 85:2 having 27:9 32:22 34:5 36:12 57:28 75:21 79:21 90:32 havoc 11:34 haywire 30:28 he's 44:8 heading 43:19 49:14 61:20 heads 90:5 headways 50:6 health 25:5,20 58:23 85:32,33 86:17,34 87:23 hear 24:7 27:1 32:6 34:12,18,19,32,34 63:30 64:7 75:28 77:3 83:27 heard 12:13 30:3 35:4 36:7,14 37:22 41:28 45:25 57:5 63:4,15,34 64:16 66:27 69:29 72:6,31 79:14 hearing 32:27 heart 11:31 19:22 25:14,20 heating 50:1 heavily 24:8 56:13 heavy 48:12 hectares 5:28 6:5,18 7:5,16 32:3 hedge 60:28 hedgerows 14:28 heel 31:3 held 4:20 5:9,22 62:18 84:1 help 5:2 39:9 41:20 81:30 82:1,2 85:22,34 86:6 87:9,22 helpful 82:15 helping 85:23 her 3:16,31 4:1,4,5 12:27 38:32 69:1,3,6 73:19,20 76:12 86:28 87:21,24,25,32 88:1,3,4,6 89:6,26 here's 76:30 here 2:26,30 3:6 4:26 8:26 11:3,7,34 13:2,10 14:1 16:31 20:6 21:1,2,3,4,5,8,23 23:13,30 24:27 25:6 27:13 28:12 30:3,7,17 31:2 32:12,23,34 33:15,16,17,32 34:13,24 35:3,7,28 37:7,16,22 38:31 39:8,31 40:11 42:15,22,32 43:8,28 44:25 49:9,15,21,24 46:31 50:22, higgledy 51:13 high 18:21 46:16 54:8 68:2 72:4,14 74:3 82:22 higher 9:21 39:9 59:17 highlight 11:26 25:21 46:2 highlighted 21:7 57:17	bill 75:30 76:32 him 19:3 23:30 44:4 60:19 77:5 80:8 hindering 11:6 his 3:18,26 4:10 9:29 13:34 24:32,33,34 25:17,26,33 26:13 35:17 44:5 70:8 historically 38:21 hit 56:30 63:25,29 hitting 20:21 hold 22:3 holding 88:24 holdings 11:24 22:19 holiday 44:26 home 24:13 44:3 46:10 58:22 84:24,26,34 85:10,21,23,34 86:5,8,29,32 87:6,7,33 88:4,5,19,21 homeless 57:29 74:18 homes 55:1 58:21 77:31 85:15,34 86:8 89:29 90:23 honest 30:34 69:11 honestly 12:1 38:32 42:32 44:3 honour 70:2,6,12 hope 17:9 32:15 44:27 48:7 55:33 76:9 78:10 79:25 84:32 89:20 hoped 49:13 hoping 52:20 hopping 24:1 horse 24:22 horticulture 11:23 hotel 5:2 83:16 hour 29:28 49:34 66:6 88:20 hours 38:8 89:10,13 house 4:2 12:9 43:8 50:17 58:6 71:17,19,26 86:17 housed 50:25 51:5 houses 37:6 50:2,10,27 71:18,21,27 74:21,22 75:34 76:2,4 housing 15:8 51:1,5 52:28,30 57:26,29 58:5,23 59:27,33 60:8 61:18 66:12,23 70:17,23 76:20 83:12 85:28 86:33 87:31 how 11:13,16,27 17:11,13 19:22 20:15 21:30 24:9 25:4,6,12,20 31:3 34:14 35:19 36:12 41:34 42:19 43:11 48:18 50:10 51:30 52:17,30 53:28 60:3,25 67:27 69:9,24,31 70:23 71:9 73:16 75:11 76:12 77:26 78:6 81:18 86:10,11 87:1 88:14 89:17 however 9:29 79:21 hub 53:24 73:4 huge 9:13 10:17 11:14 27:27 32:28,29 34:28 38:27 43:20,30 44:33 44:30,31 45:24 46:13 56:28,32 67:1 80:26 83:14 hugely 31:25 51:32 82:21 human 56:1 humanitarian 64:2	humbled 42:32 hundred 18:12,13 27:18 58:13 74:33 86:15 hunt 31:3 hurt 75:22,24 husband 3:16,17,31 Harris 84:3 HAP 57:27,28,29,31 61:14 70:22,23 Healthy 17:12 48:25 58:21 84:33 85:15 Heather 59:28 Helen 1:4 4:13,19 6:33 83:32 84:5,9 Helena 49:26 50:11 Hello 1:4 Hills 50:29 Hopefully 16:32 32:6 54:22 60:7 65:20 76:24 78:20,26 Humphreys 59:28 I idea 51:18 54:9 69:17 84:27 90:22 ideas 83:9 identification 12:4 28:11 identify 53:28 idle 50:30 ignore 77:14 ignored 76:27,33 illegal 67:5,6 illness 3:14,25 imagine 18:2 24:9 30:26 immediate 55:29 immediately 56:22 88:2 impact 8:31 9:2 23:14 26:22 57:28 70:29 impacted 23:6 impacts 14:6 71:4 imperative 10:30 16:9 83:7 implementation 11:8,21 implemented 9:24 11:27 23:19 26:23 37:11 implementing 9:7 implications 44:8 import 9:20 16:17 importance 13:10 important 14:30 16:1 17:11 19:26 20:9 31:25 38:10,12,14 43:12 51:31,32 88:24 90:14 importing 38:24 imports 18:26 27:31 imposed 10:7 impossible 47:24 impressed 89:15 improved 48:14,15 improving 14:29 inch 21:14 include 12:30 82:8 included 26:9 37:5,26 65:11 73:31 74:23 includes 12:22,23 74:1 including 32:13 48:27 61:17 67:22 70:14 74:10 income 16:15,17 25:31 28:2 31:21,28 41:3,5 44:33 incomes 8:31 14:6 increase 8:33 9:20 11:23 16:19 28:32 41:4,6 48:7 57:13 59:5 82:17 increased 17:28 48:15 59:4
--	--	--	--	---	---

needed 78:12,14 86:27	67:12 68:12 69:12 72:14 82:30	officials 18:5 officials 33:6,7 36:34 41:16,19 45:23 65:14,23,24 78:33	24:6,13,15,29 26:1,27 27:5,13,14,30,31 28:27,28,30 29:16,21,31 30:7 32:12,15 37:4,8 38:19 39:4,5 41:34 43:8 45:9,24 46:11 47:31 48:7 49:3,32 50:7 51:18,32 52:19 57:11,29 5	57:33 70:17 77:7 79:5 89:24 90:6,7	83:8,17,18 85:29 86:22 90:1
needs 11:13,15 15:11,23 20:7,8 23:5 27:15,34 31:17,19,29 33:8,14 40:3 42:21 44:24 48:13 49:6 51:6 52:15 57:17 69:19,25 75:25 90:13	notice 5:32 6:8,23 7:8,21 12:4 28:10 61:16 63:32,33 64:22,23,25,27,32 .33 65:12 74:22	often 21:3 24:21 34:34 42:8	old 24:25 52:14 62:9 87:11	O'Connor 2:15,16 7:23 68:33,34 71:1 73:1	participate 46:22
negotiation 16:19 41:7	notices 50:20,22	older 50:2,3 85:21,23 88:16 89:9	once 42:8 48:34 77:27 88:19	O'Gorman's 80:25	participation 31:26
negotiations 61:11,24	notification 41:34	ones 2:32 35:30 61:33,34 62:1 83:4	ongoing 12:8 22:15 48:12 53:1,15 60:5 61:10,12,24,34 62:1	O'GORMAN 41:27 42:6 46:1 51:10 54:15 59:13 71:32 77:23 80:8 83:29	particular 4:1 9:18 11:24 15:3 28:18 32:11 47:23 53:14 61:11,12,24,29 62:4,5,10 66:22 67:1,6 75:9 76:33
neighbour 28:31	noting 84:5	online 1:8 36:10 58:27 69:22,26 73:1,2,4	only 9:29 12:1 24:2,9,32 35:28 42:11 44:2,3,23 46:15 48:14 49:34 51:12 56:10 62:9 64:6,8 69:25 70:30 72:6 79:5 80:17,18 84:5,24 85:32	O'Leary 19:2	particularly 10:13 31:12 34:33 48:6,7 49:15 60:24 74:24
neighbourhood 17:14	now 1:10 7:13 10:2,18,25,27 11:6,31 12:20,21 16:5 17:8 20:5 25:5 26:20 27:31 28:2 30:17,26 33:6 37:21 39:31 42:10,20,26 43:33 44:18 45:32 48:26 49:14 50:1,15,28 57:7 58:1,8 66:19 67:1,18 68:9,11,29 69:12,21 71:15 75:22 76:15 77:10 80:8 83:10 84:24 85:6 86	onto 17:7 42:18 64:23 65:4 75:21 76:28	open 46:26 57:7 83:22 86:12,18	O'Loughlin 3:34	parties 28:16 30:16 40:19 72:18
neighbouring 44:13	nowhere 38:33 83:15	opener 89:34	opening 13:30 48:31 49:5	O'Neill 2:17 3:8 79:1,2,11,12,23,2 5 80:10,11,21,30,31 .33	partly 9:29
nervous 8:10 38:3	nuggets 30:9	operate 64:10	opinion 69:13	October 55:8	partnership 44:2
networks 88:6	number 4:31 5:21,28 6:5,14,16,18 7:4,16,27 8:26,29 11:12 13:25 14:4 22:3 32:20 33:5 34:18 36:12 39:25,26 41:16,30 45:32 46:10 49:28 50:23 55:14 60:34 66:28 74:9,10 82:10 83:30 84:7,33 87:9,22,26 88:17	open 46:26 57:7 83:22 86:12,18	opinions 32:29 65:13	Okay 4:13,24 5:21 7:2,4,25 8:27 13:19,21,28 19:13 20:31 22:3 33:3 40:29 41:13 45:8,32 46:26 53:23 54:12,14,31 55:23 61:8,10 62:15 63:5,7 64:21 65:11,14 67:20 70:30 71:14,21,22 78:30,34 80:20 83:30 84:18 86:18 87:3 88:29,34	parts 22:23 30:11 51:19 59:5
never 19:30 21:28 72:24 73:32 77:18	numbers 14:1 20:8 numerous 21:13	opense 89:34	opportunity 8:10,13 33:9 37:18 42:26 43:3 49:23 65:18 70:33 73:11 81:30 85:1,4 89:1	Oldcourt 7:17	pass 3:26 37:10 42:10,12 84:13 passed 3:14,25 4:1 26:4,5,7 36:20 40:34 41:13
new 9:7 10:23 23:19 27:32,33 32:1,16 37:26,30 49:24 50:2 52:13 62:4,8 68:23 69:2,21,26 76:6 78:1 82:10,23 85:14,15,17,20,23 .31 89:26 90:9	nurses 86:17	operating 13:30 48:31 49:5	opposite 17:21 57:34 78:12	One 5:3,13 9:12 17:6,7 18:7,30 20:5,14,22 24:31,32 29:27 35:3 37:22,23,26 38:4 39:33 43:11 44:2 48:13 49:4,8,20,26 50:15,21,25,27,28 .29,31,33 52:23,24,25,28 53:16 55:26,28 56:27,32 57:5,8 58:31 61:19 64:6,9 65:5,20,29 66:14,15,33 67:14 70:10,17,26 71:7 73	party 22:10,13,26 35:4 55:28 72:4,7
news 12:34 52:21	nursing 86:8	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	orders 64:15	OTs 86:17	partly 9:29
news 12:22 18:3 24:30 25:1 34:1 36:23 45:13 47:17 52:21 56:22,24 63:4,15,18,34 64:14 73:28 74:5,6,8 77:19 78:32 79:15 85:18 86:2,10,20 87:5,16,28 88:12,33,34 90:32	N11 66:28 75:12 78:20	ordered 67:10	ordinary 5:21	Ours 81:21	partnership 44:2
night 5:12,15 29:27 38:9 88:1	Naturally 28:3	orders 64:15	organic 10:6	O'Gorman's 80:25	parts 22:23 30:11 51:19 59:5
nights 4:32	Navan 88:18	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	organisation 40:19 46:13	O'GORMAN 41:27 42:6 46:1 51:10 54:15 59:13 71:32 77:23 80:8 83:29	partly 9:29
nilly 17:2	Netherlands 29:20 39:33	ordered 67:10	organise 51:25	October 55:8	partly 9:29
nine 86:23 87:19	Newcastle 47:21	orders 64:15	organising 62:20	Okay 4:13,24 5:21 7:2,4,25 8:27 13:19,21,28 19:13 20:31 22:3 33:3 40:29 41:13 45:8,32 46:26 53:23 54:12,14,31 55:23 61:8,10 62:15 63:5,7 64:21 65:11,14 67:20 70:30 71:14,21,22 78:30,34 80:20 83:30 84:18 86:18 87:3 88:29,34	party 22:10,13,26 35:4 55:28 72:4,7
nitrites 10:6	Newtown 49:29 50:29	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	organism 40:19 46:13	Oldcourt 7:17	pass 3:26 37:10 42:10,12 84:13 passed 3:14,25 4:1 26:4,5,7 36:20 40:34 41:13
nobody 4:33,34 24:13	Nicola 4:15	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	organise 51:25	One 5:3,13 9:12 17:6,7 18:7,30 20:5,14,22 24:31,32 29:27 35:3 37:22,23,26 38:4 39:33 43:11 44:2 48:13 49:4,8,20,26 50:15,21,25,27,28 .29,31,33 52:23,24,25,28 53:16 55:26,28 56:27,32 57:5,8 58:31 61:19 64:6,9 65:5,20,29 66:14,15,33 67:14 70:10,17,26 71:7 73	payment 9:28,29 15:1 payments 9:25 32:5 70:22
nodding 90:5	NTA 56:27 60:25	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	organise 51:25	Oldcourt 7:17	pdf 88:14
nominate 13:17 72:7	NTQs 73:15	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	organising 62:20	Oldcourt 7:17	peace 4:22
nominated 5:12 72:7	O	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	originally 3:23 4:5	One 5:3,13 9:12 17:6,7 18:7,30 20:5,14,22 24:31,32 29:27 35:3 37:22,23,26 38:4 39:33 43:11 44:2 48:13 49:4,8,20,26 50:15,21,25,27,28 .29,31,33 52:23,24,25,28 53:16 55:26,28 56:27,32 57:5,8 58:31 61:19 64:6,9 65:5,20,29 66:14,15,33 67:14 70:10,17,26 71:7 73	peaceful 31:10 peat 10:33 29:19,21
non 55:13	o'clock 91:1	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	other 14:29 16:3 17:22 19:28 20:13 21:3,8 22:3 23:23 24:23 25:3 26:21 27:24 28:3,16 32:27 36:32 42:30 44:2 46:23 47:8 48:19 49:11,32 50:28,30 52:24 53:20 56:19 57:11 59:5 60:30 61:16 62:26,33 63:3,13 70:3 72:27 74:10,18,21 76:6 79:28 81:17 82:13 83:16 87:	OTs 86:17	pedestrian 56:15
none 66:4	objections 66:26 74:33	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	others 19:13	Ours 81:21	peer 10:33
nonexistent 56:31	obliged 83:33	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	otherwise 10:1	O'Gorman's 80:25	penal 11:9
nonsensical 13:6	obviously 50:2 58:33 59:29 60:6 69:12 71:11 78:31	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	our 4:4,14,15,17,30 8:26 12:17,22 14:12,16,29 15:28 18:6 19:26,29,31 20:16 21:24,32	O'GORMAN 41:27 42:6 46:1 51:10 54:15 59:13 71:32 77:23 80:8 83:29	penalise 15:4,18
nor 21:20	occasion 79:7	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	ourselves 18:19 30:30 39:23 72:5 84:11 88:24	October 55:8	penalised 50:16
normal 52:18	occasions 21:14 57:17 80:23	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	out 2:32 6:15 8:17 10:15 12:2 13:9 15:13,16,22 17:2,4,7,29,31 20:11,21 21:5,9,15,19,24,2 8 23:1,10 24:3,10 25:34 26:20 27:9,16,32 28:10,16,24,31 31:2,3,34 32:26,27 33:28 34:15 38:8,27 40:4 43:9,24 44:3 45:7,10 48:28 49:13 50:10,20 53:30 54:22 56:2,33 57:6	Okay 4:13,24 5:21 7:2,4,25 8:27 13:19,21,28 19:13 20:31 22:3 33:3 40:29 41:13 45:8,32 46:26 53:23 54:12,14,31 55:23 61:8,10 62:15 63:5,7 64:21 65:11,14 67:20 70:30 71:14,21,22 78:30,34 80:20 83:30 84:18 86:18 87:3 88:29,34	penalising 15:22
nothing 20:7 38:12 56:9,11,19 66:26	occupied 77:9	order 6:21 7:7,19 79:4	out 2:32 6:15 8:17 10:15 12:2 13:9 15:13,16,22 17:2,4,7,29,31 20:11,21 21:5,9,15,19,24,2 8 23:1,10 24:3,10 25:34 26:20 27:9,16,32 28:10,16,24,31 31:2,3,34 32:26,27 33:28 34:15 38:8,27 40:4 43:9,24 44:3 45:7,10 48:28 49:13 50:10,20 53:30 54:22 56:2,33 57:6	Oldcourt 7:17	penalty 70:24

- reared** 25:7
reason 15:4 70:4
reasonable 19:23
51:31
reasons 20:6 65:34
74:17
recall 39:25
receive 7:33 9:14 46:8
48:13 81:7,8
84:33
received 5:18 9:12
52:1 62:19 66:27
77:10
receiving 50:1,20
recent 5:9
recently 4:1 24:30
53:19 54:18 58:24
69:21 75:18 82:10
recognise 12:17 81:3
recognised 4:4 49:30
76:16
recognises 16:14 41:1
recognition 5:13,18
13:13
reconsider 75:5
reconvenes 32:17
record 55:34 56:26
62:34 80:5,22
recreational 83:19
recruitment 60:26
red 3:30 19:33,34
20:1,9 25:32
redesign 61:4
redirected 9:7
redirecting 9:8
redistributed 18:18
redistributing 18:13
47:27
reduce 14:21,22
reduced 76:20
reducing 9:6 10:34
reduction 10:6 57:13
refer 47:12 58:32
86:10 88:14,18
reference 47:6 79:23
referenced 79:24
references 47:4
referendum 84:12
referral
86:12,14,15,18
referrals 86:12,13,16
referred 18:27 20:26
87:20
reflect 37:8
reflecting 39:22,23
reflection 78:4
reflects 10:31 16:10
refugees 79:29,34
80:6,17,18
refurbishment 74:23
refused 20:23
regard 10:21 16:7
23:11 74:5
regarded 5:3
regarding 11:13
61:14 67:1 70:5
74:2,5,13 84:25
regards
15:11,14,23,27
25:31 28:7
29:23,34 49:11
74:8
regeneration 14:34
58:30 59:29
region 54:2 57:12
regional 85:14
registered 43:16
regressed 22:20
regular 21:14 32:24
41:22 42:3
61:13,18
regularly 42:8,14
58:1 61:26
regulation 8:33 12:30
18:27 23:12 35:23
regulator 20:20
- regulatory** 16:17 41:4
rehearse 67:8
reiteration 32:16
relate 62:28 63:13,17
related 21:16 48:10
75:7
relates 75:5
relating 8:33
relation 19:33
41:19,21,22,30
42:14,27 47:11,17
48:6 52:8,23,34
53:3,6,15,18,23
57:6,18,31
59:26,27
60:23,30,33
61:3,4 62:14,27
66:12 67:5 72:4
73:1,9,18 74:30
75:12 77:23
78:1,4,18,24,33
79:20,22 81:16
82:12,24 83:6,21
release 60:3 73:10
relet 52:18
relets 61:17
relevant 15:34 20:13
90:3
relocated 67:23
rely 24:8 43:22,25
56:13
remarked 40:15
47:24
remediate 67:9
72:8,16
remediated 68:13
remediation 67:5
72:1,5
remember 9:31 25:19
37:14 68:22
76:20,26 81:32
remind 91:1
remit 25:33
remotely 1:6 24:19
removal 72:1
removals 10:28,30,32
16:9
remove 10:9 11:15
removed 67:22 72:16
renewal 56:15
renovations 59:6
rent 50:6 78:14
rental 71:17,21
rents 50:8 76:20
rep 5:8 64:11
repair 70:25 88:4
repairs 52:18
repeat 27:23 77:11
repeating 21:7
replaced 38:24
replacements 66:4
reply
1:11,12,17,20,23
2:2,10,17 3:1,5
59:17,18
report 7:28 45:33
46:23 47:4 48:25
49:22 56:6
58:17,33 63:18
66:12,19,21,25,26
29,67:14,32
68:25 70:5
72:21,22 73:28
74:2,6 75:1,34
76:2 83:31,34
89:27
reports 75:4
represent 8:11 22:22
40:17,19 57:16
representations
56:21
representative 32:14
82:2
representatives 12:14
36:22 37:18
represented 5:11
- representing** 63:20
represents 40:16
reps 81:30
request 55:20 62:19
requested 62:32
requests 78:5
require 22:24
required 10:18
71:19,27 74:20
78:25
requirements 70:29
requires 22:9 52:20
requiring 10:16
research 10:31 16:10
67:8
reserved 84:12
reset 11:27
23:18,19,25
residential 15:3 20:26
84:24 86:7
residents 47:15 56:21
60:15,16 69:7
resolution 11:28
16:13,25 40:34
84:13
resolve 9:29
resolved 67:32
resolves 40:32
resource 89:16
resources 70:24
74:17,19
89:9,10,11,14,21
respect 12:3 79:17
respects 15:27
respond 13:27 33:7,9
41:17 62:15 81:7
response 42:32 43:1
54:20 57:27 74:31
75:12 78:33 80:17
81:8 82:7 89:27
responses 41:19
83:26,27
responsibilities 29:16
responsibility 17:1
65:34 77:29
responsible 67:28
68:2
rest 4:22 19:14 23:31
29:16 31:9 33:15
43:8,22 44:30
47:19 66:34 75:20
restaurants 38:28
restoration 10:13
31:25 32:1
restore 31:26
restraining 26:14
restrictions 10:13
restrictive 15:4
result 28:25 48:11
67:19 75:2
resulting 59:5
resurfaced 75:18
retail 23:34
retired 4:9
retrofit 52:19
retrofits 58:11
retrofitted 50:10
52:15
retrofitting 49:27,33
50:7,11
52:11,18,19
return 24:14 67:4
returning 73:20
returns 7:15
revenue 39:3,4
revert 73:26 74:5
review 49:6 53:27
reviewed 10:33 53:7
revised 10:16
ridiculous 13:6
right 12:23 13:2 19:8
24:15 30:11 36:14
39:11 43:21 52:1
60:33 64:19 67:20
70:9 71:23 76:30
78:4 84:33
- rightly** 15:3,17
rights 4:3
ring 6:33 7:13
88:16,18
road 4:1 7:17 17:33
29:28
47:17,22,24,27,31
49:30 51:18,19,21
52:9 53:6
56:19,20,26 60:14
65:25,32 66:7
69:5,18 75:22
76:31 80:15
roads 11:14,17
28:27,28,30
47:28,31 48:15
53:2,7,18
57:11,16,18 59:20
66:28 70:18 75:24
roadway 75:17
role 22:27 69:2 81:33
89:26
roles 49:24 81:31
rollcall 1:10
rolled 48:28
rolling 85:15,17
rooftop 10:34
room 4:34 6:29 7:15
28:16,19,20
rooms 40:13 53:31
roots 36:25
round 38:9 51:30
route 51:4
rule 10:25
ruled 79:4
rules 9:21 20:16
rulings 25:4
run 18:19 80:15
running 66:14 76:31
85:25 86:23
runs 46:20
rural 11:7,14
20:14,15,28
22:22,27 28:18,27
33:23 34:19,24
36:34 37:5
38:6,21 40:17
43:30 48:7,10,15
51:32 53:18 57:18
58:32 59:29
Rail 47:7 53:3
Rathnew 50:23,24
RDF 76:8
Redmond 4:15,16
Register 84:14
Regulations 8:15
9:8,19 10:23
12:27,28,33 16:18
23:18,19 35:24,33
41:6 84:8
Rehill 74:2
Rehills 66:15 72:27
River 67:21
Robyn's 3:17
Robyn 3:14,16
Rory 2:15 7:23 68:33
Rosana 75:19
RRDF 60:6
RRDR 59:27
Rugby 3:19
Russia 43:23
RYAN 2:17,18
- S**
sad 25:6 54:34 55:9
56:1
saddened 55:10
sadly 49:32 51:1
safe 43:33
safely 49:29
safety 65:30
said 5:19,20 13:1,9
15:3 18:11
21:12,16 22:8,12
24:22 25:1,11
27:24
33:14,19,20,21,28
34:24
38:3,10,14,31
39:17 44:21 45:4
46:8,9 57:33 61:3
65:7,9 69:6,16
76:28 77:12 78:9
87:18 88:30
salary 18:11
sale 71:17,26
salt 30:14
same 9:13,20 17:33
28:16 30:12,19
31:23 34:21 39:19
45:25 57:12
59:22,24 64:16
79:16
sanctions 77:8
sauce 19:10
saw 27:29
say 12:29 16:31
20:15,26 21:22
22:7,9 24:26
27:10 30:18 31:32
33:19,21 37:13
41:32 47:18
49:29,34 50:25
51:29 52:26 53:18
56:24 58:24 60:34
64:1,9,13,27
65:18 69:1
72:10,13 74:5
75:25
76:1,11,19,29
77:3,13,15
83:7,33 85:8,11
87:30 89:29,32
saying 12:25 22:26
23:12,18 27:10
30:21 32:2,5 50:5
63:12,30 66:26
67:14 69:9 70:18
80:23
says 35:24
scale 59:34 60:4
scaled 86:24
scandal 47:22
scenario 43:26 90:11
sceptical 29:30
schedule 34:5 88:19
scheduling 33:26
scheme
9:8,26,30,31,32
10:1,2 32:3,4
47:24 52:27
56:15,26 60:22
66:25 73:32 81:13
82:23 88:5
schemes 9:7,24 10:2,3
14:21 34:28 58:31
82:14
school 3:24,25 49:5
65:25,30,33 72:26
73:18,19,21,22
schools 47:29 53:13
scope 75:9
scrap 23:18
scrolling 85:18
season 56:13 61:7
seats 25:22
second 5:15,19,23
7:29 16:30 19:15
37:13 40:11 50:14
55:28 64:29 66:12
67:31 68:10 70:27
71:1,27 75:27
76:19 80:8
seconded 6:1,10,24
7:11,23 40:30
62:23 84:17
secondar 41:12
64:28,30 84:9,15
seconding 36:17
secretaries 29:10
secretary 29:9
section 57:26 85:28
sections 37:4
- sector** 9:19 11:1,23
12:30 16:15 28:15
31:16,17 34:34
41:2 86:16
see 10:17 13:6 14:20
19:22 24:24,26,30
25:12,14,17 26:20
29:7 30:18
33:24,26 34:12
42:18 43:34
46:4,32 48:26,27
49:1,15 50:7 51:2
52:5,27 56:15,34
58:11 60:7,25
68:25 69:30
70:5,19 72:33
73:11 74:32 75:27
76:19,23 77:12
78:7 81:33 82:17
83:11 84:25 85:33
seeing 15:28 23:34
24:29 32:24
35:23,33 59:15
90:8
seek 11:27 55:28
seeking 9:20
seem 36:24 48:19,20
seems 23:13 56:24
76:34 78:11
82:12,34
seen 10:15 12:34 14:4
40:11 75:2,3
selected 81:20
self 26:26
sell 20:31 38:22
selling 20:30 35:30
senators 27:17
send 23:17
64:22,23,27 88:15
senior 60:24
sense 54:6 55:9 56:1
67:32 71:16 73:5
89:11
sensible 15:34
sensitivity 15:33
sent 26:6,10
80:8,23,24 82:23
83:27
seo 2:12,16,18
separate 16:21 41:9
61:20 72:23
76:2,3
separately 60:23,28
61:3
seriously 11:17 17:3
21:5 34:13,14
44:9
seriously 8:13 18:6
19:24 48:11 75:24
serve 43:30,31
served 74:22
service 3:17 4:2,10
28:8 53:25 71:8
85:24 87:8,10
88:17,23
services 4:2,31 27:33
77:9 82:33 88:3
servicing 74:16
set 23:19 28:13 75:1
82:29
setting 82:11,19,22
90:29
seven 87:6,7
several 20:19
sexual 80:7
share 84:23
shared 85:24
she's 4:1,5 85:27,28
86:28
she 4:2 12:10
38:31,32 48:5
64:34 69:2,3,6
76:28 86:28
87:20,21,23,24,34
88:3,5,7

76:2 83:16 84:11 90:19 thankfully 86:24 87:20 that's 3:31 6:12 7:28,29,31 11:28 12:31 13:20 14:9,10 18:16 20:5,9 22:16 23:14,20 25:6,8,13 26:4 27:8,9,10,27 29:14,31 32:5,21 35:31,32 37:9,11,30 38:8,14 39:5,11,28 42:8,14 43:16,17,26 45:14,21 48:12 50:15 51:1,2,33 52:4,26 54:33 55:23 56:24 57:13,28 5	30:16 34:28,29,30 35:17 37:1,5,14,22 40:16,18,21,33 41:31 44:12,31 45:1,15 49:28,33 50:3,23,24,25 53:8 57:16 58:6 59:15 61:31 62:15,30 64:11 65:20 71:13 73:10,11 74:12 theme 50:34 themes 65:30 themselves 21:28 26:14 55:14 76:14 88:18 then 8:3 13:27 29:16 38:12 41:17 46:8 49:20 52:14,33 53:8 60:10,33 67:12 68:6 71:20,25 72:27 73:15 78:31,33 79:16,20 83:21,30 84:2 theorist 76:33 theory 78:11 there'll 32:28 there's 15:7 20:5 21:5 24:2 28:2 29:19,26 31:1 32:3,28,29 35:28 38:11,19,27 39:34 41:17 43:15,20 47:5 50:20 53:1,8,14,32 55:32 56:8,23,27,32 58:9,11,12,27,30 61:10,11,23 62:4,8,10 63:31 64:7 65:28 66:8,25 67:14 69:25 71:25,28 72:11,14 73:34 74:9 75:17,18 there 3:31 5:11 9:30,34 10:27 11:12,14 12:8,12,31 13:10,20 15:11,15,23 16:30 17:12,14,32 18:2 19:3,7,27,28,31 20:4 21:5,8,9,12,16,19, 24,28 22:4,14 23:3,24 24:21,30 25:11,21,22,27,32 26:14 28:10 29:8,17,19,27 30:16,17,21 31:1,11,24,29 32:2,6 33:2 34:11 35: thereabouts 5:29 6:5,19 7:5,17 these 8:31 10:3 11:13,15,16,22,26 15:33 19:23 25:9 26:28 29:24 30:28 34:12,14,19 36:19 40:20 44:16 49:8 55:7 58:32 70:25 71:20 74:4 79:30,32 80:5,23,25,27 82:18,19 83:8,17 88:18 they'd 29:9 they'll 39:32,33 they've 17:25 18:6 38:23 55:14 thick 21:14	thing 20:9,26 21:4 23:14 36:32 37:11,13 38:14 39:16 43:7 50:14 56:23 65:5 75:27 76:6,19,30 77:27 80:34 88:10 things 17:8 20:13 30:33 33:30 35:19,25 37:21 39:27 43:25 45:25 46:2 57:4 63:31 70:2 72:21 75:16,33 76:16 77:10 87:26 89:32 90:19 think 4:33 5:2 8:17 15:12,27 16:1 17:11 18:19 19:14 23:17,20 24:15 26:5,13 27:25 28:23,32 29:25 30:1,22,29,34 31:1,11 32:9,22,26,32 33:13,19,20,32,33 34:2,5,11,27 36:14,19,28,30,32 37:9,13,24,28 38:9,11,14,15,19, 20 39:5,9,11 40:3 43:19,31 51:15,18,26 52:1 thinking 17:6 35:17 40:12 third 18:26 78:27 80:3 90:8 this 5:3 7:33 8:4,10,13,15,27 9:25,31 10:10 11:3,10 12:15 14:12,13 16:13,20 18:3,10,14 19:27 20:4,13 22:15 23:14 25:3,20,33 26:4,5,6,7,8,12,31 27:5 28:18 29:14,17,24,30 30:2,8,14,17,21 31:16 32:2,10,22 33:25 34:15 36:1 39:23 40:16,21 41:31 42:10 43:3,10 4 those 11:24 18:23 22:22 24:26 28:14 33:29 36:9 37:7,17,18,27 41:20 44:13 45:12 46:14 47:7,9,29 49:1 52:33 53:1 58:13 60:4 61:30,34 62:28 64:13 71:9,18 76:16 77:17,19, 79:17 80:1 83:26 87:30 89:1 90:33 though 37:25 61:19 thought 15:33 18:30 20:27,29 35:18,31 42:33 46:9 90:4,14 thoughts 4:4 thousand 18:12,13 30:8 43:16 thousands 32:3 66:26 threaten 10:9 threatened 11:16 threatening 10:3 24:7 thresholds 90:11 thrilled 42:31 thrive 28:18 throat 29:31 through 4:21 12:1 20:27,29 21:15,30 26:16 32:3,4,7	34:15,30 37:7 42:22 47:21 48:28 51:20 55:24 60:17 65:7 66:19 71:6 72:15 73:12 79:8,10,21 88:15 89:18 throughout 5:10 21:10 22:19,21,22 27:9 32:2 36:20 38:8 40:16 50:10 tick 29:27 tied 18:25 51:2 61:19 ties 42:3 till 89:13 tillage 10:23 time 3:32 5:15,19 8:5 9:20 12:29 16:4 18:3 19:27 20:10 21:15 23:23 24:26 25:14 28:32 30:15,18,22 31:23 32:34 33:2,16 34:15 36:7 37:17,31 40:11,28 42:9 43:15,16 45:22 49:8 54:31 64:23 68:10 69:12 70:9 77:10 78:27,34 79:30 81:18 82:30,34 85:2,8,10 87:9 89:1 timeframe 48:30,32 58:12 81:10 times 49:3,6 53:13 58:8 87:9 timing 61:23 title 37:26 today's 12:11 29:5 today 1:6 8:15 9:13 11:3,18,33 14:1 16:31,34 17:19 21:1,5 23:1,13 24:16 25:6 26:5 27:6 28:25,33 30:3 33:15,16 34:13,15 35:3,4,7 36:7,14 38:4 39:9 40:2 42:32 43:15 45:9,15,22 46:20 47:21 50:14 51:13 65:28 68:28 71:10 74:20 79:14 85:3 89:20 90:30 together 12:24 23:20 25:18 31:16 32:32 37:4 38:16 40:20 47:26 51:30 55:13,16 told 20:16,19 66:3,16 67:26 68:9,10 79:15 81:6 82:33 tomatoes 39:32 tomorrow 77:1 78:10 ton 29:19,20 tonight 91:1 too 19:9 20:34 21:3 34:25 47:19 51:33 took 53:1 55:8 62:25 69:9 top 18:5,18 31:24 39:10 47:29 topics 28:7 74:34 total 58:19 76:4 totally 58:19 64:2 77:5 touch 47:2 55:19 tour 54:5 tourism 28:15,18 39:25,26,28 48:7 51:31 56:13,28 61:7 tourist 56:13 tourists 47:15	towards 9:6 10:34 20:27 34:11 76:29 83:19 town 5:30,31 7:6,7 51:32 56:11 58:30,31,34 59:30 60:6,33 75:27,28,29 townland 5:29 6:6,19 7:5,17 towns 11:9 15:5,28 20:29 58:31,32 59:1,32 60:4 78:6 82:15 townsland 20:22 towny 38:6 tracks 44:30 traction 60:7 trade 9:17 35:18 traded 38:22 traffic 48:34 69:16 75:4 train 83:7 training 82:12,18,20 90:20,23 transferred 52:13 transformation 9:5 22:16 transformed 49:30 transitioning 73:4 translate 36:29 translated 36:29 travel 19:4 51:19 travelled 70:32 71:10 78:32 85:6 travelling 32:22 47:21 treated 30:11 treaties 30:4 trees 11:14,16 26:1 42:20 tremendous 28:17 trials 10:33 tribute 46:13 tried 26:17 37:4 trippers 44:26 trojan 49:27 50:12,22 70:6 trouble 12:23 truck 31:13 true 20:4 trust 85:10 truth 43:17 try 42:18 48:2 63:25 64:10,11 71:9 72:21 75:11 78:5 79:3,6 82:28,31 85:22 86:7 trying 28:31 30:34 31:12 53:20 61:32 64:9 75:8,11 81:18 turf 29:18 turn 63:25,26 turning 83:10 tweet 27:29 twinning 90:21 two 17:26 20:13 24:2 29:9 30:15,18 39:27 42:17 46:5 48:20 49:26 50:28,29 51:1,26 52:2 57:4 58:32 60:34 63:31 66:14 69:25 70:17,32 71:9 72:7 74:33 75:16 76:1 79:4,5,28,29 80:1 83:3,6 84:2 85:3 86:23,33 87:18 88:14 89:24,32 tying 27:5 type 58:28 88:9,10 types 87:2,30 Taoiseach 26:7 40:33 TAMs 10:1	TDS 18:15 27:17 Tenders 67:15 Teresa 1:8 Thank 3:7,8,9,19,20,26,2 7,32,33 4:8,11,12,19,25,2 6,29 5:2,5,19,20,26 6:3,30 7:2 13:18,34 16:26,27,29 19:17 20:31,32 21:1,34 22:1,7,29,31 23:27,29,30 24:15,17,20 25:23,24 27:21 28:33 29:2 31:6 32:33 33:1,14,15 34:7,8,10,13 35:9,11 36:5,8 37:32,34 39:8,12,1 Thanks 3:13,29 4:25 5:4,8 13:32 19:19,21 20:34 21:2,5,33 22:34 23:26 25:26,27 27:19,23 29:4 31:8,9 33:13 34:10 35:13 36:3,6 38:2,4 39:16 40:10 44:18 48:2,21,24 50:11 53:23 54:12,14,28 57:4,20,23 60:13 65:1,4 68:19,34 73:26 75:33 78:17 79:2 80:34 82:5 84:4 They're 11:16 12:3,12 17:3 21:25 25:8,13 28:19,20 34:28 35:19 36:1 37:10 43:9,21 50:5,17,20,21 51:12 53:6,9,25,26 61:12,13,18,19,26 62:12 70:13,19 72:32 73:12,23 78:32 87:2 They 4:33 5:25 10:3 12:8,10,12 14:25 15:8,9,22,30 17:4,26 18:22,23 19:33 20:6,7,30 21:30 22:16 25:7,18 26:15,17,34 27:3,4,10 28:22 29:13,20,25,26,27 30:1,22,23,24 31:3,21,28 33:5,7,24,28,29 34:22 35:23,30 36:24,25 38:22,24 39:2 41:31,32 42:11,19 43:11,30 Thirdly 66:25 76:8 Three 10:25 12:7 24:2 33:26 47:29 48:10 50:27 56:9 58:31 60:16 62:8,12 81:9,22 83:3 89:13 Thunberg 22:13 TidyTowns 91:1 Timmins 2:25,26 3:21,22 19:18,19 51:25 75:32,33 77:31,32 82:7 90:16,19,25 Tinahely 20:22 48:11
---	---	---	--	--	---

TII 42:17 53:2 75:20,25 77:24 78:17,18,20	44:12,18,21,22,23 48:16	vocation 38:7 voice 34:12,18 38:12	waste 72:1,16,24 watch 55:10 88:1	were 2:32 5:9,12 10:1 11:33 12:10 17:26 20:16 23:9 24:23 25:19 27:30 31:32 32:19 37:17 38:3 39:27 42:20 46:9,10,11,14 47:6,7,8,9 57:6,33 58:5 61:6 63:14 66:16,20,21,27 67:10,26,34 68:9 69:9 73:9,30 74:21 75:19,20 79:5,15,34 81:2 82:32 84:3 86:22 87:25,33	51:5 57:28 58:2,7 59:29 61:6 62:18 64:15 66:29 67:1 68:24 69:22 70:18,22 71:11,20,22,27 74:32 75:7 76:27,31,32 78:18,19 79:16 80:21,29 83:11,16 85:4 90:9
Tom's 26:9 Tom 1:32 7:34 8:1,3,7 13:18,20,24,34 15:3,17 19:21 20:26 21:1,12,16,32 22:3,14,34 23:9,22,30 24:16,19,20,21 25:26,27,31,33 26:13 27:13,23,24 28:13,33 29:4,7,15 30:26,32 31:8 33:2,9,15,30,33 35:13 36:6 37:14 38:2 39:15,16 40:10,13,23,28 41:17,27 42:26 45:4	uplighters 61:5 upon 14:6 uproar 26:14,15 ups 54:8 upstairs 85:27 87:24 upwards 18:34 urban 20:23 33:23 38:21,22 77:25 urgency 67:32 urgent 56:23 urgently 56:12 use 13:7 29:21 54:31 69:22 78:34 87:25 used 23:3 24:1 39:26 72:1 74:27 80:12 84:24 88:7 user 34:29 81:17 89:12 using 29:25 35:30 utmost 11:26 utter 39:18 Upper 6:6 URDF 59:27,32,33 60:7 83:6	voices 38:11 voicing 8:29 14:5 volatility 17:19 voluntary 90:23 volunteers 81:2 vote 3:22,34 64:6 84:23 voted 33:8 votes 3:11 voting 84:25 vulnerable 87:34 89:28 VAN 84:32 86:30 Vevay 65:25 VEL 84:32 86:30 Vincent 1:15 5:7 7:29 20:33 Voters 84:15 W wages 30:29 wait 85:5 89:13 90:10 waiting 9:30 49:8 90:13 walk 75:21 walking 75:21 want 4:8 6:28 8:13,17 9:31 11:17 12:13,14,24,25 13:3,34 14:2,6,9 15:7,8,11,15 16:3 20:31 21:7,8,12,20 23:7,12,29 24:34 30:32 33:7,14,16,19 36:15,16 38:27,29 39:32 40:18,23 42:8,9,30 43:22,25,30,31,32 ,34 44:4,5,30,32,33 45:6,9,12,25 46:3,13,19 47:2,4,6 48: wanted 19:15 21:28 33:21 38:31 46:16 56:8 63:2 65:17 79:28 81:28 wanting 8:26 25:14 72:11 wants 43:32 68:28 86:13 88:16 war 43:24 44:3 79:7 warden 65:25,33 69:16 72:26 73:19 81:29 wardens 11:20 25:34 59:4 73:21,22 75:28 77:27,29 81:32 warmer 88:5 was 3:17,18,26 4:3,4,9,28 5:14 9:13 11:33 12:8,9,21,28,29 15:3,27 17:6,7,16,29,31,3 2 18:10,11,14 20:19,26,27,30 23:3,9 24:30,32,34 25:7 26:5 28:11,15,30,31 29:19,20 30:21 33:20,33 34:3,27 35:16,17 37:13 38:21,22,23,31,33 39:18,25,27 40:12,17 42:26 43:15 4 wasn't 12:10 18:2 20:27,29 23:12 56:27 64:15 76:30 79:15 87:19,24	ways 28:2,3 69:23 we'd 61:23 we'll 27:13 45:8 52:27 60:7 64:18 we're 11:16 12:15,23,25 14:11 15:6,28,32 17:21 26:30 29:15 30:8,15,29 31:16 32:15,26,27 35:18,25,33 40:19 41:32 43:17,19 45:14,32 46:23 47:13 48:12 49:14 51:4,16 54:8,33 56:9,12 58:1,7 61:22,34 73:1,2,6 75:3,4 78:26 87:10 90:27 we've 14:4 30:3 33:6 42:17 87:18 wealth 83:14 weather 10:26 21:16,19 28:29 60:30 weathers 38:8 website 46:21 66:3 73:22 81:16 89:18 websites 81:17 weeds 15:28,29 week 9:27 17:26 24:24 46:20 47:22 50:24 56:16,20 59:15,29 60:29 72:6 76:29 79:34 82:22 87:6 weekend 35:17,31 44:26 weekly 72:10 weeks 4:27 8:29 14:4 18:31 49:28 52:21 80:9 welcome 1:5 3:9,10 8:1,7 23:30 32:16 36:6,9 41:27,28 48:34 50:3 56:33 58:21,24 59:4 76:8 83:12 84:32 85:5 88:27 89:15,20,27 welcomed 89:29 well 3:10 4:33 5:2,6,17,20 17:34 19:14 21:5,8,19,33 24:9 25:19 29:8 31:17,22,29,30,32 32:4,21 33:8,20 34:2,20,21 35:26 39:6,22 40:4 41:17 42:30,31 43:19 44:4,9 45:4 48:10,28 49:23 52:9 53:20 54:28 57:24 60:34 62:33 63:22,24 64:1,19,28 66:33 68:9 69:10,29 went 17:29 26:17 36:25 78:25 80:17	weren't 68:9 74:22,26 what's 18:16 19:10 27:5 30:7 32:11 43:22 54:6 55:16 67:15 77:14 85:31 what 5:3 8:13,15 12:10,12,29 14:30 15:9 17:16,22,25 20:15 21:20 23:15 24:22,27,34 25:4,19,33 26:30,34 27:24 28:11,19,25 29:23 30:34 32:5,10,15 33:19,20,21,24,25 ,27 36:29 38:9,18 39:17,18,22 40:2,11,15 41:20,21 42:8,29 43:23,33 44:5 46:8 47:9 48:13 50:11 5 whatever 13:7 15:8 25:9,11 28:12 29:10,14 30:17,23 36:28 67:16 76:33 whatsoever 80:24 when 4:33 12:11 17:3,16 18:6,10 19:21 20:14 21:5 23:4,17 26:4 28:22 30:1,11 32:17 34:11,33 35:18 36:13,23,25 37:6,8,10,29,31 39:19,25,26 40:19 41:31 43:14 44:16 47:12 48:10 49:27 50:15 53:9 54:23 59:18 61:16 65:11 66:13,19 67:31,34 70:28 74:21,24 79:6,23 where 12:7 13:6 15:6 18:2,25 24:30 25:1 26:16,20,28 27:29 29:9 30:8 32:22,26 33:28,29,34 34:25 36:24,29 38:19,32 43:17,21 44:8 49:14 50:5 51:16,21 52:24,25 54:30 60:7 62:6 65:25 72:6,19 75:7 78:21 80:5,8,12,13 81:8 82:27 83:10 86:26 whereby 28:10 88:2 wherever 48:8 whether 15:14 26:26,27 27:16 29:17 30:23 51:20 65:6,13 68:25 73:25 which 8:16,31 9:24 10:13,26 11:6,8 18:33 20:24 23:3,19 33:6 39:17 40:16 46:31	white 29:34 who'd 38:31 who's 18:12 23:5 who 1:5,6 3:10,14 4:9,26,28,29 10:24 11:3 12:9,12 18:12,14,19,21 19:24 21:10,23,24,25 23:6,7,13 26:33 27:2,26 28:14,30,31 29:5 35:16 36:9,22 37:16,25 40:20 44:33 48:14 50:12 58:4,5 62:10,19 63:3 65:32 66:33 67:28 68:28 70:29,32 71:25 78:19,31 79:6,12,17 8 whoever 28:12 41:33 whole 20:21 30:28 36:34 37:21 77:9 78:5 88:17 whose 84:14 why 15:29 17:28 25:6 26:4 27:9 32:22 67:25 71:9 79:8 wider 60:22 85:2 widespread 9:25 wife 4:1 29:14 wild 32:4 wildlife 44:18 wilfully 76:33 will 1:8 4:19 6:33 7:13,34 8:17,23 9:29 10:17 11:12,23 13:14,27 14:25 16:32 18:30 19:3,4,19,27,28 20:13,20,26 22:26 26:4,5 27:18 30:16 32:6,16,21,29,33 33:13 35:3,4,5 36:13,16,19 37:30 39:33 40:18,23,24 41:24 42:23,29,30 43:5,25 44:27 45:8 46:1 47:12 48:2 willing 34:15 willy 17:2 win 76:12 window 82:14 winning 58:6 wipes 20:11 wish 30:32 45:12 49:23 64:22 73:19 89:16 with 1:7,10 3:18 4:3,5,30 6:31,33,34 7:28 8:32 9:2,5,21 10:7,14,32 11:9,14,15,16,20, 24 12:13,14 13:5 14:11 15:5,11,14,16,18, 23,32,34 16:7,20,31 18:10,26,30 19:34

20:19 21:2,4,16	81:10 82:29 87:21	Walsh's 60:11	76:1,12 77:6,17	4:8,11,12,19,25	54:2 55:6
23:23 24:1,8	89:1	Wayne 4:17	83:31 84:1	5:5,19,20,26	58:31,32,33 59:32
25:27 26:9 27:5	worked 4:30 13:13	WALSH 2:27,28	years 3:25 4:2,10	6:3,14,30,31,33	60:4,19 76:20
28:3,28,32	19:34 28:13 37:4	3:12,13 57:22,23	5:15,19 9:13	7:2 8:1,7,23	0034 6:5
29:10,15	working 15:16 32:32	59:26 89:23,25	14:12 15:21,26	11:17,29,31	00PM 1:1
30:7,14,31	45:1,22 49:28	West 22:22 29:7	17:20,26 18:7	12:10,11,28	0158 7:16
31:10,11,13 32:16	60:15 61:31 69:29	30:10 79:33 82:11	19:9 20:14	13:7,18,20,27	0216 6:18
withdrawn 68:6,11	73:16 76:15,23	Wexford 18:21 81:20	21:4,24,30 22:20	14:29	027 5:28
within 10:23 50:30	79:30,32 80:5,27	While 5:12,13 15:26	23:34 24:2,30	15:6,15,16,29,32,	0322 7:4
61:18 75:9 80:9	85:28	17:20 22:4 25:32	25:1,18 28:13	33 16:12,26,27,29	046 88:16
86:16 89:29	works 13:24 14:28	62:32 82:11,18	38:21 39:25,26	17:33,34	100 50:1,30 55:6
without 15:34 16:19	69:31 71:9	Whitestown 67:5	40:13 44:6	18:2,14,15,26,30	60:19 61:22,26
17:11 26:23 27:28	75:9,12 77:24	68:12,14,18 71:33	50:16,29 51:5	19:10,12,17,21,22	74:33
28:9 31:26 33:24	90:23	72:1,4	52:30 56:9 60:34	,23,27	12th 5:22 62:18
41:7 51:5 59:20	world 14:10 21:8,10	Wicklow's 45:15	67:10,11,27 71:25	20:10,11,27 71:25	172 43:16
wives 25:18	26:29 43:10,21,23	Wicklow	76:15 85:21 86:23	76:15 85:21 86:23	1798 17:6
21:9	44:3,31 52:2	5:9,12,15,22,29,3	87:18 89:33	young 17:13 20:4,5	17th 3:15
woman 54:34 55:7	worried 11:33 69:18	0,31	yes 3:29 6:28	23:23,24,25	1972 30:4
79:26	89:21	6:6,7,8,19,20,21,2	13:26,29 16:4	24:3,13,25,29	1995 84:8
won't 17:12 27:23	worries 28:12	2 7:5,6,7,17,18,20	22:5 31:8 42:5	25:14 31:28 42:27	1st 9:27
28:4 33:20 51:29	worry 15:14 17:17	8:11 10:10 11:26	48:24 49:11	your 6:31,33 12:11	200 29:20
63:24 68:29	89:15	12:7,14	52:11,23 53:18	18:13,25,26 19:21	2000s 18:22
71:19,26 77:26	worrying 89:11	13:5,10,14 16:13	59:8 60:33 61:31	20:10,11,20	2014 9:11 37:21
82:6 87:30	worse 44:16,17	18:21 20:21,22,28	63:9,10,12,28,30,	21:2,9 23:3,31	2019 76:21
won 5:16	worth 34:2 46:12	21:1,22,23,25,32	33 64:4	24:10 25:21,28	2021 56:9
wonder 29:17 49:6	worthwhile 34:3	22:22 23:25 25:29	65:1,14,16 71:3	27:15,17 28:33	2022 20:16 47:5
84:22 89:17	would 3:13,22,29	26:8 28:3,29 29:7	73:1,9,12,18,19	30:27,34 32:34	2023 10:2 47:5 55:8
wondering 47:9,11	4:26,29 5:2 7:28	30:10 33:33 34:6	74:27	34:12,15,18,32	58:17 83:31
48:18,30,32 49:14	8:1,19 10:15	39:27 40:32,34	77:19,23,24,31	35:5,13	2024 1:1 5:22 45:33
57:5,30 58:12	13:13	41:33 43:2	78:18,24 83:29,33	36:8,9,22,25	47:7 68:24 74:8
59:1 81:24	16:8,12,25,29,30	44:12,21 45:6,14	84:21 86:30 89:5	39:8,16,19	2025 74:8
82:16,24,28	17:13,27 18:2	46:30 47:2,7,11	90:5 91:1	40:2,11 41:27,28	220 10:6
woods 29:9	19:15 20:34 21:22	William 4:15	yesterday 27:29	42:9,26 46:19	250 10:10
word 37:26,28 56:1	23:24,33 24:9	Willie 4:15	yet 26:27 27:5 29:18	49:17 52:23 55:24	250kgs 10:6
63:24 86:31	25:33 26:5 27:15	Winters 2:29,30	30:11 47:23	56:16,33 58:24	27th 12:20
worded 64:26	28:7 30:28 32:16	12:18 35:12,13	48:12,19 50:27	59:14,26 62:33	30K 48:34
words 23:9 70:20	33:4,6,23,24,26	84:18	51:24 58:6	63:24,25 71:33	310 4:27
work 4:4 12:13,14,24	34:1,2 37:17	Wolfe 7:18,19	you'd 90:2	77:28	31st 68:24,26 72:31
13:5 15:18	38:15,18 41:32	WW2873L 6:20	you're 7:2 18:11	yours 63:29	350 30:24,27
18:14,22 21:18	42:16,33 44:5	WW6103F 6:7	21:18,19	yourself 5:6 13:24	400 29:19
24:14 27:10	46:20	X	23:13,15,18 27:16	41:17 42:30 45:21	470 43:15
28:10,16,17,24,31	47:2,17,26,29,32	Y	30:33,34 31:22	yourselves 28:33 54:6	4TH 1:1
31:3 32:6	49:7,13 50:31	yard 12:11 82:32,33	33:2 34:15 36:6	85:6	500 29:34 54:2 76:20
34:27,29 38:7,16	51:29 54:4	yards 50:30	38:8 40:28 41:27	Z	87:13
39:6 41:20,21	wouldn't 17:27 74:28	yeah 52:1 64:27	54:12 56:30	zone 15:3	520 50:1
44:33,34 45:1,7	85:18	year 5:14 18:3 29:19	63:7,8,31 64:8	zoned 11:8 20:26,30	600 30:28
46:13,15,32 48:26	wrapped 38:25,34	30:29 33:27 38:9	78:4,10 81:21	82:27	6th 84:1
49:27,30 50:12,22	write 23:7 40:32	43:9 46:9 48:11	88:34 90:11	... 13:17 23:12 77:26	7th 55:8
51:6,30 60:5,20	written 78:33 80:4	53:1	you've 12:34 18:18	88:32 89:4 90:33	90s 18:22
62:3 70:6 72:8	81:8 83:26	57:11,12,13,19	40:2 62:32	000 18:13 29:19,20	949 40:16
73:20,23 75:10	wrong 58:7 71:28	60:15 61:22 62:8	you 1:7,8	30:28 43:15,16	
76:13 77:29 78:4	80:28 89:15	68:23 74:19	3:7,8,9,10,19,20,2		
	Wakefield 53:25		6,27,32,33		