

**SPECIAL MEETING OF**  
**WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL**

**ON**

**MONDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2022 AT 2:00 P.M.**

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**Heather Casali**  
**Jen Sinnamon**

CATHAOIRLEACH: Members, thank you very much for joining us for a very month meeting on the Local Property Tax. Can everyone hear me at home? OK. I will ask Rachel to go through the etiquette now.

>> Welcome, everyone. Can I ask everyone's mobile phones are switched off. That all participants attending remotely leave cameras and microphones off and raise hands if they wish to speak or participate. If you have a problem with the connection enter something into the chat. Now I will commence the roll call:

[roll call taken]

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Members, before I start, back in February when the then Cathaoirleach was sick. Cllr Shay Cullen, I stood in for him at the time. And that is when the Ukraine war broke. I didn't think I would be saying this again the terrible tragedy in Donegal, Creeslough, with the terrible, terrible tragedy of ten people lost their lives. I'm lost for words, actually. I'm lost for words. So I would like them kept in our thoughts at this meeting. Deepest sympathies to the families and friends and the whole

communities of Donegal as it is absolute shock and horror. As it was unfolding on Friday and the numbers going up and up. At the moment, it is at 10 that have died but there are seven still in hospital. My prayers and thoughts are with everybody. I know that the council opened up a book of condolences, I would like to thank the council with that but it is terrible to open the meeting saying that but to keep them in our operators and thoughts. To we have condolence, Rachel? Sorry, Shay Cullen? Sorry, Cllr John Snell.

CLLR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And concur with all that you said. In regard to a member of society who passed away and buried today. Influential character, James E Carol from Dalgenny, he was pivotal in the setting up of the Men's Shed at a national level. But he was a local businessman. A man ahead of his time. I suppose, 85 years of age. I know that the elected members in the Greystones Municipal District will be familiar with him and he had lots of connections to the Newtown Kennedy area.

CLLR FORTUNE: I would like to be associated with what Cllr John Snell has said. I knew Jimmy in a previous life. Jimmy was a big player in the transport business throughout his life. I knew him in that sphere many years ago. Also, I had dealings with him around the Men's Shed in recent times. I would like to pass condolences to his family at this very sad occasion.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK. Cllr Stephen Stokes?

CLLR STOKES: Cathaoirleach, I offer condolences on the passing of Liam Hearn who many will know from the Town Hall electorate in Bray. Doing a lot of affordable work for many people over the years, from Bray, Greystones or further afield and the chess community lost a king as Liam was a tremendous stalwart of local clubs, played in the top division of Leinster for several decades, playing with Greystones chess club and when it merged with Bray to play for Bray chess club and then later to Donary [sic] chess club so a big loss to the community of Wicklow and to the chess community across the country. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Members, can I ask you to stand for a minute's silence. Thank you.

May the souls and all the souls of faithfully departed rest in peace. Amen.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Rachel, did you want to roll call?

>> Just for the record I note that Cllr Rory O'Connor is present and Cllr John Mullen is present remotely.

CATHAOIRLEACH: And this is no shock, Cllr Gail Dunne wants to come in, I wonder what he wants to come in about.

CLLR DUNNE: You are right, Chairman, for once! I would like to congratulate St Patrick's club on winning the county football yesterday. There was nothing between the teams. Obviously, as a St Pat's man, I'm proud of the achievement I might also would like to commiserate and congratulate Tinahely in the ladies' football on Saturday. Unfortunately, St Pats' were on the wrong side of that but Tinahely were on the side of that. And to congratulate Gerry Walsh, 25 years since winning the championship and Gerry was a part of the squad. So to congratulate. But a great day in Ochram. In difficult conditions but good, honest football. But obviously, a there is a winner, a loser but to congratulate those involved.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr. Vincent Blake?

CLLR BLAKE: With the [distortion of sound] involvement in sport a great day for all the girls there. Thank you for organising the football championship last weekend and again a great turnout. Congratulations to all the teams involved. And [distortion of sound] [distortion of sound] in terms of performance and the standard of football that they displayed on the day. Well done to everyone.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry Walsh.

>> To pass congratulations to the club in the championship in Ochram on Saturday after noon, a heart-felt victory. [distortion of sound] congratulations to all of players and those associated with the team.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Shay Cullen?

CLLR CULLEN: To concur with the teams that participated in the finals. In terms of St Pat's, a great win against a very, very good Baltinglass team. And congratulations to them and to my own neighbouring club, on a junior success, a very small club, a rural club, great to see them having such a great weekend. Well done to all of them.

CLLR FITZGERALD: To congratulate an Arklow girl, finishing fourth in the world offshore rowing. Failing to get a medal by 2.28 seconds. A trend rower and a tribute to Arklow and to Wicklow. to congratulate her on her excellent performance.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr John Snell?

CLLR SNELL: Indeed it was a good weekend for east Wicklow. Congratulations to St Pat's on the trick in the senior championship and to Lara on the junior victory. And when we are talking about success, to look at what Lara achieved as a small club, we all know that the clubs amalgamate at juvenile level but it was less than a month ago, that Lara struggled to fulfil the fixtures with lads in college and working away, so a marvellous achievement, great to see them on the rise.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I concur with my graduations to all the winners and sympathies to the losers, as being a boxer, you always were second in a boxing match, so that is why I like boxing. We can talk about sports all day long but I notice that the members at the chamber are biting at the bit to get won the meeting but thank you for the contributions to all of the sporting achievements by all, young and old. Well done to everybody. At this stage, can I pass over to, Cllr Gerry O'Neil?

CLLR O'NEIL: I wanted to congratulate St Pat's as well as the senior championship and Arklow at the bottom [distortion of sound] I know we got a bit of a hammering in the west by [distortion of sound] and that is managed by our administrator, Liam Cullen, who got the job. I can see Breege, and I know her own young lad is playing. Well done, Breege, it is an up-and-coming team. [distortion of sound]

CATHAOIRLEACH: Well said and well done to Liam Cullen. I would like to hand over to Rita McCarthy.

RITA MCCARTHY: Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach. [distortion of sound] good afternoon. [distortion of sound] members, colleagues and guests. We are here today to consider the Local Adjustment Factor for the Wicklow County Council property tax for 2023. All members have been forwarded 2023 Local Property Tax [distortion of sound] with the agenda for meeting. And my presentation for the afternoon to go through some of the major points from the report. [distortion of sound] to go through the Budgeter process for the Local Authorities to put in context where the Local Property Tax decision fits in with the other stages of the Budget. Then go through the Local Property Tax process for the Local Adjustment Factor, including the legislative background in slides as there has been new legislation and regulation since the last Local Property Tax Local Adjustment Factor meeting. Under the regulations there are certain matters that the local authority and the county council must regard, I will go through that and to highlight the Local Property Tax revaluation and the change of bands as this was not yet formalised last year. So, then I will give a summary of the key changes of Local Property Tax 2023 and our recommendation.

There are four key stages to the Budget process for each year. And the Local Property Tax is one element of those.

It is driven by section 20 of the finance local property tax act [distortion of sound] the decision on the Local Adjustment Factor to be made before the 15th of October 2022, to advise revenue under the department. The next stage in the process following the meeting is the draft Budgeter plan and the general

administration allocation allocated to each district [distortion of sound] a part of the meetings that take place at district level during October and November. Then to the adoption of the statutory Budget in November and in the beginning of the New Year and following the allocation from the department of roads GANTS, [sic] we send out the schedule of administrative works to the districts. The key legislation governing the Local Property Tax is the finance local property tax 2012, which is amended. To give the members a reserve function and power to vary the Local Property Tax rate.

There are also regulations since 2014. This highlights the process and what is needed for the process of meetings and reports and information to be brought to the members.

New since the Local Property Tax on the 27th of July is the Finance Local Property Tax amendment act to bring about the revaluation and changed the bands and the rate applicable for the valuation and finally regulations on the Local Adjustment Factor. There is a key change to be noted in the regulation, that the local property tax was set in place for a year but it has changed now that the members can choose the period as specified in the resolution.

The matters to which we must have regard when going through a decision on the Local Adjustment Factor has been set in place by regulation, as I said. We must look at the Local Authorities estimation of income and expenditure for 23, to keep in the back of mind at all times to present a balanced Budget to the members. To look at the financial position of the local authority under regulation to look at the financial effect of the local property tax on the individuals who are liable. On our own Budget in Wicklow County Council and on our service, delivery plans and to feed into the process, feedback, from the public consultations.

So the first part of this is the estimate of income and expenditure 2023. You have been shown the 2022 local Budget. As varied for Government grants allocated and this is shown balanced as what we are under obligation to balance our Budget. And for 2023 our current estimate of the income and expenditure for Wicklow County Council for its revenue Budget. You will note we are showing a deficit of £1.7 million, I will go through the key information that makes up that deficit.

So, be factored into the projection for 2023 that thereby increase in Local Property Tax of £753,000 on the basis that new properties came into the mix that revised valuations came into the mix, that the department secured an additional percentage funding of surplus from DEPA from the Local Authorities with a self-funding mechanism in place. That we hoped to retain the 6% that is

in place from last year from the members. The IPB dividend income is advised to increase by £246,000. Which is additional. On the other side we have NPPR is facing out. And in 2023 in April, the 2011 charge will be no longer applicable. Leaving two years of charges that we feel will be a cost of £200,000 to the local authority. Also, as just over the line, the pay increases that have come about it will cost Wicklow County Council about £3.1 million for the back-dated 3% and further increases coming along to the last increase in 2023. The department have said that they will fund this up to 85%, still leaving Wicklow County Council with a cost of £470,000 to cover. Previously it was 80% so grateful to the department to increase the percentage to 85%. We have increasing pension costs and high gratuity costs, there are more staff retiring each year and it is the nature of the sector that we are working in. The key cost we are facing for 2023 is a factor of the current economic climate and the inflationary costs we are having to absorb in 2023 with the key cost of that being the energy cost. We are looking at, we were tied into, luckily, into an energy contract for electricity for the previous 4 years to end at the end of June 2022, isolating us from energy costs but starting a new contract, nationally agreed with the office of Government procurement increasing the energy costs by a factor of 250% from the first of July 2022 and we will have a significant impact in 2023. We are grateful that the department managed to secure some funding that will be split among the members but we will be lucky if it covers 50 to 60% of the inflationary cost increases of our energy, not to talk about the inflation currently at about 8% in 2022 and now heading, unfortunately, towards 7% in 2023. So that impacts us. There are other costs included there, in the more head report we have not had confirmed funding for 22 or 23 there are Director costs and statutory costs to look for funding for. For example, we now have heat pumps in many local authority houses which is the way forward for green energy but the cost of servicing them has to be factored into the estimates. and there are other costs that have come across the Director. Finances roll over October and November is working on eliminating the deficit as we must present a balanced Budget and hopefully to do this with no loss of service to the county's population.

Financial position must be presented as part of regulations. Our revenue deficit the end of year for ASF 2021 was £1.3 million and we are under pressure each year from. NOAK and the local Government audit services to continue to eliminating the deficit. We are not supposed to carry a deficit. To be fair we have good ratio of current assets to current liabilities, running at 3.1 and a good ratio of loans payable to revenue income at 49%. But what must be

borne in mind for 2023 and beyond is the impact of the current economic climate and the in particular the inflation cost increases that will bring to bear on all activities that the Wicklow County Council engages in. Now to go through the revaluation to, as this was not formalised for the last July meeting. The Local Property Tax, the finance Local Property Tax amendment act signed on the 22nd of July, 2021 brought in new valuations and bands to show a change, to spread the bands wider to ensure that, and brought charges lower for people. The new valuation of the relevant residential properties was reset on the 1st of November 2021. That is now in place for 2022 to 2025. It should be noted going forward, that the valuation is determined every four years for the following four years. So, the valuation will take place in November 25, hold in for the years 2026 to 2029 and so on. A welcome change is that new properties will be brought into the system every year. So in the next four years any new properties in the year are based on the valuation as of the 1st of November 2021 and will be brought in, liable in the following year. Subject to the charge. The valuation bands were widened and noted and the rate, in order to ensure that most people did not face a local property tax increase due to higher valuation, the rate reduced from 0.18% down to 0.1029%. To note that the new properties and the valuations would bring in a 60 million uplift from the changes, and it has transpired that it has just generated nationally short of 5 million. For the sector.

So just to go through that. We are looking at if we retain the LPT band of 6%, there will be no increase in the Local Property Tax to any households in 2023 in Wicklow County Council.

As I said, 60% of the properties are valued 350,000 or less. If we didn't retain the 6% local adjustment factor, the maximum saving for the properties valued of the 360,000 is €1.58 a month. So it is not significant considering the amount, the Local Property Tax going to discretionary funds that fund projects in our district. The Municipal District Fund for 2023, based on retaining the rate would be 1.1 million. This provides good works in the area of public realm, foot path repairs and community funding and is very welcome in our districts.

Looking at the revenue in Wicklow County Council, I am just going through the figures, I will go through the figures in the next slide. Just to give you the key factors from the allocation model. 100% of the Local Property Tax will be retained locally in 2023. For Wicklow, because we are lucky enough to have a surplus, this is split between the revenue account and the capital account. The revenue day-to-day funding for Wicklow County Council comprises the baseline and an additional 22.5% of the Local Property Tax that we receive as a county. The equalisation fund is gone. In previous years we would have contributed 20% equalisation to a national fund to ensure other local authorities were no worse off, where their local government fund was higher than the amount they receive under Local Property Tax. This year it's changed and that further funding will come from the Exchequer. However for Wicklow that leads to greater self-funding in the capital account. The capital surplus is made up of the surplus Local Property Tax after you take away the baseline amount we get to keep for the revenue account and the 22.5% surplus we get to keep for revenue.

There is no change in 2023 to the LPT baseline, which was our old local government fund. It was hoped this would be reviewed in 2022, but there was delay in the department in getting figures from the Revenue which led to a delay in this and means it will be next year, local authority, as usual, that increase the basic rate of Local Property Tax can retain 100% of that increase for additional income in 2023. As I said, the baseline review should be undertaken by the Department in early 2023. So to go through the figures, Wicklow County Council Local Property Tax allocation for, provisional for 2023, we get to keep 100% with no equalisation fund, that is 18.5 million, which is up 1.1 million from the previous year which was 17.4 million. The baseline hasn't changed.

That still equates to the local government fund from previous years. So that is our first element that we get to fund the Revenue account. Then we get to keep a surplus, which used to be 20% of the allocation, the 18.5 and through the department engaging strenuously to secure an increase has increased to 22.5% of the LPT. So that is 4.2 million and overall Wicklow County Council, for Revenue funding has a fund of 12.7 million, which is an increase of 386,000 on last year. It should be noted however, because we are one of the local



authorities that has a surplus that the amount of our surplus going to self-fund capital programmes is 5.8 million, which in 2022 was 1.9 million. So that has increased by 3.9 million in total. So the 685,000 is broken down between 223,000 of an increase due to widened bands and new properties, etc and thankfully 463,000 of an increase from the 2.5% extra that the Department secured for us. So that is welcome.

The impact of the rate change on Wicklow County Council revenue budget and service delivery, as seen by the figures below, every 1% of the rate, local adjustment factor for 2023 would generate 185,064 for Wicklow County Council. We understand with the current economic climate that it is difficult for all, not just Wicklow County Council. So 6%, which is retaining the rate from last year, would generate 1.1 million for Wicklow County Council and would give the four MDs, Arklow, Baltinglass, Greystones and Wicklow 208,000 for the discretionary funding and give Bray 278,000 which is welcome in the district, but would mean there would be no increase for the householder in 2023. We also have to engage in a public consultation process which ran from the 24th of August to the 23rd of September. We got 22 submissions via our online consultation hub. 11 of those requested a reduction on the rate, two requests no increase and one requested an increase. 7 of them just made a general comment with no suggested variation. It should be noted that six of them actually made a point on top of their information on the rate, that properties, that all properties should be subject to some type of property charge in their view. We thank all who engaged with the process.

So in summary, just to go through the key points from the previous slides, I know there is a lot of information there. It should be noted that there is a 100% of the Local Property Tax to be retained locally. No equalisation fund. The additional funding of 686,000 is very welcome and is required to balance the budget for Wicklow County Council in a challenging 2023. The self-funding for housing capital increase significantly, as we don't have equalisation, but are self-funding did go up by 3.9 million. The good news is the local authority baselines are to be reviewed by the Department in early 2023 and if we maintain the rate, as of previous years it emphasises as a local authority that we are underfunded and it would assist our case in any department review in looking at the baseline for each local authority. Maintaining the 6% variation rate means no LPT cost increase to householders which is welcome in these difficult, this difficult economic climate. It also gives 1.1 million to Municipal

Districts for important public realm works, foot path repairs and other works and contributions to communities. Just to note the period that specified in the resolution can be more than one year.

So finally, to conclude our recommendation, to the Chief Executive and the officials, rate recommendation for myself, 2023 is to retain the local property adjustment factor at 6%. For your information, 21 local authorities have voted on, at their meetings on the local adjustment factor and all have retained the rate that they had set in place for 2022. There is a suggestion to specify a two- year period for 2023- 24 for householder certainty, but this is a matter for members. The recommendation to retain the rate will give no increase to householders LPT bills in 2022- 23 which is welcome and it does provide 1.1 million for Wicklow County Council for 2023 which is ring- fenced for discretionary funding in the Municipal Districts. That means that Arklow, Greystones, Baltinglass and Wicklow have that secured to carry out worthwhile projects and Bray MD have 278,000. On that note, folk, thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Breda for all of your hard work. I appreciate that. Pat Fitzgerald wants to come in there.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Can I thank Breda for the presentation. I found it easy to understand and I will intend to propose that the property tax remains the same for 23 as it was in 22 and this proposal is for one year only. I want to make that proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Derek Mitchell.

CLLR MITCHELL: Thank you, I would like to second Cllr Pat Fitzgerald's proposal that it stays the same as last year, at 6.6%, which is as last year. In my view Local Property Tax is an appropriate way of funding local services and we certainly see the need for local services. This will give the average Local Property Tax of €360 which is a bit less than the previous average of €365. So it's a very small reduction of the Local Property Tax on previous years. It should be for, as Cllr Fitzgerald said, I think it should be for one year. That would give the 208,000 for each area with 277 for Bray. Based on a population this is a fair way of splitting this. I think this should be for discretionary funding as was outlined, for foot path repairs and also better maintenance of public areas if the local authorities decide it.

I am concerned we are losing a very substantial amount of funding to the Department of the Environment. This should have been revised at this time. We need this money to provide the services to the new houses who are paying the LPT now and yet this figure is based on something which was decided in 2014, or much earlier when the population was much smaller. So I would like, as I say, to second Cllr Fitzgerald's proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: Well, Chairman, no surprises for guessing that I am not going to agree to that. I have a number of reasons for not agreeing to it. The first one is it's a bit of a mirage to say we are maintaining it at the current rate. The current rate is an increased rate. It's a 6% increase at a time when people are suffering a huge drop in their incomes and huge bills facing into the winter to come.

So, I think it's not fair or honest to give the impression that, "*look, nothing to going to change here.*" In fact people's property tax is being put up if councillors vote to accept that proposal, it's being increased over the baseline. That is the important point. The second one is that there is a complete three- card trick being played on the people of Wicklow by the Government and if we vote to accept this proposal by the Council, in that 4,500 new homes are being added to the total list of liable properties in this county this coming year. If you take an average of 300 per year and that is a kind of an underestimate, that should mean that we should be having another 1.35 million additional income but in fact according to the presentation by Breda, we are actually going to get to keep half of that. So having talked for a long time and having talked about the necessity to have new homes brought into the net, in fact half of this money has been taken away from us before we start. The second, even bigger three- card trick in how the Government handles this particular tax is the fact that we are told now that we get to retain all the money that the people pay in property tax. If you recall in previous years a big bone of contention for all of us was that 20% was cut off the top and given to central government to spread out around the country. We all thought that was very unfair on the people of Wicklow. So hurrah, we are now able to keep 100% but the vast majority of that extra 20% is going into capital funding for housing, which in the past came from the Government. It's a complete three- card trick, it's a complete fraud on the people, to be

pretending that we are keeping this money. We are getting money to pay a bill that the Government should be paying. So it's completely misleading the people to pretend that this is somehow, something we should be grateful for.

I completely disagree with the Finance Director's comments here that it's great and it's good news and it's this and that, something to be welcomed. It is not. The people of this county are being asked to pay an additional 6% over the baseline rate, when we most definitely have the money to reduce the property tax and I will be making another proposal on this in a minute. And what are they getting for the service that they are supposed to be paying for? What actual additional services are we getting in this county? We are not getting extra services in my book. We are actually just paying to carry on as we always have. I don't think it's good enough. Okay, you might say, well it's a very small amount of money out of your account every month or whatever the case may be, but there is a principle at stake here and it is do we accept that at a time of huge suffering that has still to come for people, that we are not going to do everything we can as councillors to reduce that burden somewhat.

So what I want to propose, Cathaoirleach, is that we propose a 15% reduction on the existing rate. We are allowed to do that, it's in the legislation, we most definitely have the money for it. There is no question about that. I would ask the members to consider that when we are voting.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Cllr Behan. John Snell.

CLLR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, thank you to Breda for her presentation, as always very comprehensive. I suppose first and foremost, just to say that I fully understand where this is being driven from, at a national level and that the officials are only carrying out their duties in presenting this. But the reality is that the Local Property Tax is a flawed scheme and the Government had an opportunity to bring in a proper Local Property Tax, if that is what they so wished. But we have seen here in this chamber, for over a decade where a large number of new homes built since 2012 paid no property tax whatsoever and now we get a presentation where they are being brought into the scheme now, but yet it's a sleight of hand trick, because the local authority pays the property tax on their own council housing stock. That has increased by 600 units since last year. So effectively the Council is paying the

Local Property Tax on the increase on providing housing for people on our social waiting list.

Then we see 432 are exempt and another 402 are deferred. So that eats into the 3,000 new properties that is being brought in. Therefore we are not getting the designated money that was promised.

Then, as has been outlined in regards to the change of policy in regards to capital projects and money from central government that was being forwarded and now has to come out of the Local Property Tax it's very disappointing and here last Monday, every single councillor in this chamber and people who tuned in from the Zoom calls, every one of them said that they wouldn't support an increase in the recycling centres.

So to bring in a new paying scheme, no matter how much it was. I just see that from our own figures being presented by the Head of Finance here today, that the local authority, the increase on the local authority for energy costs alone is over €1 million. If you break that down into a family home of which each and every one of us are lucky to own or live in, the reality is that the costs are going through the roof, everyone spoke about the cost of living, about a climate biodiversity challenges that are out there. And the truth is that what message would we be sending out to the people of County Wicklow to be rising the Local Property Tax here?

Because it automatically reverts back under the Act. It reverts back to the baseline. So to say you are retaining is not factually true, because it's already reverted back to the natural baseline that it should be. And we have the discretion to increase 15% or reduce 15% or anywhere in between.

I accept the proposals that has been mentioned here by other councillors, but the reality is I don't agree with either of the proposals. Because in my opinion we have to factor in the cost of living on people out there. Such as old age pensioners. The bands that is being mentioned there, Cathaoirleach, and in the

real world, band 1, 2 and 3 didn't exist in 2021. You will not buy a house for 100,000 in county Wicklow and you will not buy a house for 150,000 or less than 200,000. They have changed the bands from 0- 200,000. There is no house in county Wicklow to be bought for less than 200,000 that is habitable. That is the harsh realities.

We are asking senior citizens and people who are unlucky enough to be included in the increases that they are receiving today. I believe Bank of Ireland staff and AIB will get an increase and they are not on the salaries of TDs. So they cannot afford €27.87 a month. Coal has doubled, gas is double, ESB bills are going through the roof, grocery bills are increasing by the day. The reality is we can't be seen and we should do the right thing and set the baseline as it is, stay at the baseline, no increase on the Local Property Tax. It's a reduction of what people paid last year, but I would not support a 15% decrease and I will not support a 6% increase. I am proposing that it's retained at the base rate, as it's set by Government. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr John Snell. Cllr M Kavanagh.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: I would like to second Cllr Snell's proposal there to retain the Local Property Tax at the base rate for this year. Just looking at the figures here in front of me there has been an awful lot of positives between 2022 and 23 in terms of increases in incomes. For example grants and subsidies have gone up by a huge amount. We have an increase of, from 129 million last year to 145 this year, but there is other things that aren't on that list. For example, the fact that the 100%, the equalisation fund is gone and the council gets to retain 100%. That is a big increase, an increase of 20%. The fact that the Government are now going to contribute 85% and not 80% to cover the wage increases and gratuities, that is a big increase there. There are now more houses in the Local Property Tax net, up by 3,000. That is a big increase. They were previously exempt.

Valuations have increased and while they say that a lot of people haven't actually paid an increase, but quite a lot actually have paid an increase. It depends where your house is situated. I imagine that anyone living up around the Greystones and Bray area certainly had an increase in their property tax. There is another couple of things as well. I see down here under 2023 other

expenditure for 2023 is up by 8 million with no explanation as to what that is. That is a huge increase so we need to know what that is.

And the other thing is, let's see if I can find it. There was something else that jumped out. It's a business disingenuous to say there will be a loss of NPPR receipts next year. The fact is that the NPPR was phased out in 2012. So that is ten years ago. That money was never actually going to be on the books. So to put in in there and make it look like it's a loss, is actually a very disingenuous. So there is a few things like that.

So all in all, the accounts for Wicklow County Council in 2023, over 2022 are very positive. There has been a huge boost of income for all kinds of reasons that I have just enumerated there. The base rate is there to be increased at times of extreme hardship and by the same token there also exists the opportunity to reduce it at times of great hardship, sorry to reduce it when times are good and to increase it when the Council looks like it's going to be struggling. I don't think the Council looks like it will be struggling at all. I think the people who will be struggling are the people who are trying to cope with the cost of living increase and the cost of energy prices, hikes and all of those unknowns that face us this winter. Not only energy but general cost of living increases.

So I think to do the, to leave the base rate as it is, is the only thing that appears to be fair. It means that the Council isn't going to take any kind of hit. Because the base rate is the base rate. It's the one that you are supposed to be guided by. I think we could certainly manage this year and I would like to second Cllr Snell's proposal for that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Edward Timmins.

CLLR TIMMINS: Thank you, chairman. Just, first before I talk mainly about the whole system, which is unfortunately out of our control. Just a couple of the earlier speakers said that there the initial proposal by Cllr Fitzgerald was a 6% increase, it's not. The proposal is to leave the property tax the same. To call that a 6% increase is simply untrue and say that it's factually incorrect. It's actually correct. If you got a bill this year and you get another one next year for

the same €200 that is not an increase. So that is back again to the smoke and mirrors tricks that this whole system operates, by going back to the, by having to revert to the baseline each year is misleading. The proposal is to leave the property tax the same and peep shouldn't be led to believe that the proposal is to increase the property tax by 6%, it's not. If you get the same bill this year as last year, not an increase in anyone's understanding. But just on to the main substantial issue, of the way this system is set up. It is a con job, it is smoke and mirrors.

We thought we were making progress this year by the fact that we could retain the 20% that was divvied out to the rest of the country previously and that bringing in the new property was a plus for us as well. But, what they gave with one hand they took away with the other. So practically all of the property, the extra money from the new property tax and the extra 20% we are retaining that is all taken back by saying instead of giving you, taking one million off you for your housing repairs, we are going to take five million off you. So the four million we gain in rough figures, is taken back off us by giving us less money for housing capital projects. So it's a second, how would you say, accounting trick. It's really insulting.

We all have to pay taxes, I have no issue with that, but paying taxes that are unfair and not shown to us in a clear and proper manner is really insulting. It's insulting to this council. As I say, it's out of the control of the 32 members here and the Executive, but we are being treated badly in this county. The simple reason is that there is this magic figure called the baseline, 8.5 million which hasn't changed in decades. That means if you earn more money than that baseline, you are not going to keep it basically. That is it in a nutshell. Giving us a token 2.5% extra, it's not significant. I think it works out 600,000 out of 18 million. If our tax went up by 30% we, would get hardly any extra money, what does that tell you? That the system is completely unfair.

If you are building more houses, surely the cost or the money that should be spent in the community should be increasing. Having those extra houses is hardly give us, it's not giving us the 50%, it's giving us a lot less. The problem here is the baseline. Now we are making submissions about getting the



baseline increased and the department was supposed to deal with it this year and they didn't, they're talking about dealing with it in the spring of next year. Might increase it by a couple of million, we will gain a little bit, but we will still be at an advantage because we will be stuck at that baseline for the next ten years. So while increasing the baseline would be a big plus and that is what the management are trying to do, really the baseline should be scrapped. Baseline is just a level to put you at, to say you cannot earn more than that, we will not give you any more than that, no matter how many properties you have, no matter what tax you earn, we are actually restricting you by this baseline figure. The baseline figure is a joke. It should be scrapped. Increasing it will be a token gain for this county, but, first, it hasn't been increased in ten, 20 years, so we have been treated badly in the past, but it needs to go up, but really it needs to be scrapped.

Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Edward Timmins. Cllr Peir Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: I've been attending meetings for the last few years, not an accountant but involved in my own community. I see the levels in the amount of money to make decisions on within the county. From my point of view I think that the council is not in dire straits but I know that there are people on the ground in dire straits at the moment. I know there is investment needed from the council. We have spoken about the recycling charges and the local recycling centres that no-one wanted to charge, that the service should be free. But throughout the years, gradually, throughout the last 20, 30 years, what was provided by the Government, service, like bin charges, everything across the board, it is slowly privatised so people are paying double. So the money that they would have paid in their tax historically for to go towards services they now have to pay private companies. It is the same across everything. The amount of charities in the town filling in the gaps, the cancer support, the mental health charities filling the gaps of services that should be paid by our taxes that are not and ordinary people are setting up charities to fill the gaps to alleviate stress, ill health and all of that. I do understand where Wicklow County Council have to level the books and I understand that. I'm involved in projects in my town that I want to, you know, I suppose, defer to the community, the community is fragmented. There is no community spaces. So I'm trying to work on that. I realise it takes money as well. So why propose is in support of Cllr John Snell's proposal to keep at the baseline rate. So meeting the council halfway and the public and the community halfway.

Sending the message we are reducing the Local Property Tax, heading in the right direction of trying to alleviate the stress. There is a real fear in the community of people living in their houses, older people living in houses trying to meet energy bills, food bills, everything is impacted by the cost of living crisis. It is ill people. People that own a house, have a mortgage, trying to pay it when they are sick, chronically ill. That is the reality. It is not the nice reality to live in that situation. So, I'm in support of Cllr John Snell's proposal. What I would like to, I would like an amendment to the proposal that we are given the 1.1 million, given with 6% increase for the councillors to decide where it goes within their community and to propose that part of the money is ring-fenced towards community spaces and upgrades of our recycling centres. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Peir Leonard. Cllr Tom Fortune.

CLLR FORTUNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Where do we start with this?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Shall I come back to you. Take your time but hurry up, if you know what I am saying!

CLLR FORTUNE: No. Cllr John Snell hit the nail on the head with his comments. My problem is that fundamentally I don't support the concept of property tax. It is totally constructed unfairly.

The executive, I recognise, it is out of your hands, you basically have to do what you're told and what the department dictates. I understand how it works. The minute you Chair, open up to the floor the Government parties approve what is directed from the finance Director. Interesting. I have talked ed about this at each meeting with regards to the base line. A meeting with the CEO in July 2020, asking and talking about the baseline, that it leaves us fairly under resourced and the response that we are getting from central Government to rectify it is ridiculous. Last year or the year before, the CEO said that we would get it sorted. They are now telling us that they will sort it, perhaps in the first quarter, maybe the second quarter of 2023. That is not acceptable. My attitude, that I think as a collective of public representatives, we should not accept this at all. We are not being fair to the citizens of Wicklow and a massive emphasis put on the 1.1 million we will get to do things in our areas, I think that is just a reverse psychology sales pitch from the executive level, how to get the members to buy into this? Think being the 1.1 million to break it over the districts, it will basically pay for a feasibility study at best in each area. It will not do anything for the people in my district or anyone else's, I suggest. So the whole thing for me is a hell of a con job. The equalisation fund, OK,

arguing about that in every property tax debate in the last few years. This year, it disappeared but where? Into the the capital, to the housing so that the department say that we put it into the housing and reduce what we give to the local authority. I think that the government parties they are sitting around the table must be stand up to be counted. It is a con job on the people of Wicklow. It is not fair. A number of councillors articulated well the pressures on people. My fundamental issue is that I don't support it concept actually. But the worst-case scenario we should be reducing for people. People are suffering, we have energy costs and everything else, another con job, that is a different debate. I could talk about that for two hours as well. I cannot support this. It is so unfair. I appreciate the situation that the executive are in, you have to do what you are told. We don't. I am a public representative represented by the people that elect me and those that don't. My attitude is that it is not fair, it is a con job, I will not be supporting a property tax.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Cllr Tom Fortune. Cllr Gerry Walsh.

>> Each year I make the saying, we are damned if we do, damned if we don't. It is what it is. Last year, we looked at the situation, we wanted to see the hope that with the review that was carried out that we were given undertaken that the new properties post 2013 would be brought into the net. Also the equalisation fund was to be addressed which has happened. But obviously, it has as Cllr Edward Timmins rightly pointed out, giving with one hand and taking away with the other in relation to the self-funding and housing service for the programme. So that is disappointing. The current Chief Executive and the finance director at the time last year pointed out that we were going nowhere until the baseline review was carried out and addressed.

Unfortunately that work, I think it is completed. I have spoken to the minister O'Brien about this, two weeks ago, given the undertaking that the work commenced to be ready for next year, for next year, so, hopefully we will not be in the situation again next year. In relation to the 6% increase, Cllr John Snell pointed out that the example given of the 1.58 a month probably no longer relates to the property prices in County Wicklow as they are. So I suggest that bands 5-7 are appropriate with the 6% increase with the area that I represent. So you are looking at between 27/70, 40/50 a year. So, still less than 1 euro a week. The 6% increase represents 1.1 million. The discretionary fund goes to the district, our district represents 2am 8197 euro which is spent on much needed footpath path repairs and public lighting on a public right of way to connect areas with Greystones and Greystones train station in

particular, running from one area to another, a much needed ... what people have been looking for a long time now, so we are happy that is finally happening as a result of the additional funding. I think that other, a proposal to reduce the property tax by 15% [sic] to have an effect of reducing finances by 21% is not realistic. And the response, considering the figures that were presented to us, from the outset of the meeting, and also other counties have kept their increases, or whatever, they have kept their figures the same as last year according to the report that was received so, again, as I say, I am disappointed that the baseline review has not been addressed and that it is, finally happening and will be in place by next year and hopefully in a far better position but I support Cllr Pat Fitzgerald's proposal to keep the 6% as suggested. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr O'Brien?

CLLR O'BRIEN: Cathaoirleach, it is fascinating to hear the language. Local Property Tax, for me it is a family home tax. Imagine if someone came from the blue and we never heard of it before and stood up to say I propose a family home tax on the homeowners of County Wicklow, I'm not sure how many in the room would put up hands to say, absolutely and tell you, what, bring it up by 6%, 10 or 15 and we will get lots of money and discretionary funds that the councillors can spend and feel good about. But as we sit here, Cathaoirleach, it is zero. That is where it is so the choices are about increasing, decreasing or retaining at zero. But it is at zero now. So, again, the language is important there.

A family home tax in a time of unprecedented pressure on the family ... the family in Ireland across the country, pressure around, as has been mentioned the cost-of-living crisis, energy crisis, climate crisis, rates of suicide, depression, anxiety, all of which is coming to bear on the families of Wicklow County Council. And in the presentation, we are invited to feel for the council because of the increase in inflation and it will be tough times for the council and its Budget. But the family homeowners of County Wicklow are not the reason that inflation will impact on the council and I don't think that they should be the reason or picking up the short fall in that regard. We are getting more as well, so the numbers telling me we are getting more but still asking for more. So that is a message that is proposed to be sent from the Chamber today. I think we have an opportunity to send a more important message to the families of County Wicklow. We can talk about how little it is or how you can percent aisle

it down and not feel so bad about it while sitting here but every family has a threshold and every family, I think, is at that threshold in one way or another so for us to sit here feeling comfortable in minds and hearts, to propose an increase of 6%, there is an ethical dilemma there that I will not support.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Anne Ferris?

CLLR FERRIS: Thank you, firstly to say that I will certainly be supporting Cllr Pat Fitzgerald's proposal to keep it at the rate it is currently.

I'm sure that is no surprise to many people around the Chamber here.

Let's be clear about this, Cathaoirleach, the property tax is a wealth tax. It is designed for people living in large house, who have paid a lot for it. Will pay the higher amount of property tax for the benefit and the pleasure that they get from living in a very expensive house.

I note that we received 2020 submissions on the property tax. 22 submissions from the whole of County Wicklow.

I wonder why? 6 of those, as was pointed out by Breeda, and sorry, I should have thanked Breeda for her presentation, actually said that they preferred to see ALL properties brought into the property tax. Now, as a Labour Party member I don't agree with that. Because as I said it is a wealth tax. I'm sure that the implication that the person, that the six people are making is that people in couple houses should be also liable for a property tax. I don't believe that people either on social welfare or on the lowest rate of income should have to pay property tax.

A couple of things said by the other members. To comment. I think it is ridiculous to think that the council won't increase expenses at all. It will only just be the homeowners. Every business in the country, indeed in Europe, are counting their own costs and everything else. I think Breeda mentioned 250% increase in energy prices. Why know ... I think Cllr Dermot O'Brien said language is important. I agree, that it is better when we are discussing issues like this to be measured in our response, to have empathy for people in the country and from our point of view, particularly in Wicklow County Council for the struggles that they are encountering in their everyday costs of food and gas and electricity and all of the necessary stuff. But I don't think we should be mentioning words like suicide and depression, which, I feel, will only make people worse. They don't want to ... they may know what they are feeling and

the struggles that they are going through but don't need to be told by anyone those kinds of words. It is empathy we should be showing.

I think also, that if anybody in the country was told by the Government or someone else in authority, a higher authority than we are, that the price of their electricity was going to be frozen. The price of gas was to be frozen, food prices were going to be frozen for the next year, they would celebrate that. The fact that they know that they are not going to have increase in costs in the areas for the next year. And Cathaoirleach, that is what we are doing here, what we are proposing here today, that the price a year ago that people were paying for their property tax and it is only the people, the homeowners that are paying for their property tax, if they knew that, you know, that they have that certainty, that they have been paying it for a year and at least to know it will not go up, I would prefer p that we freeze it for two years, rather than the one year. I think we have to be realistic. It would be great for all of us. It would make our lives easier if we were all to sit here and I had to support a 15% reduction as a councillor being said or to go back to the baseline and we all walk out of here as heroes but I think that we are really shirking our responsibility. It is not as if the Chief Executive is asking us to increase this, by any amount. He is just asking us to leave it at the same. I for one, as a member of the Bray Municipal District area, will not vote to deny 270,77 ... [sic] from coming to the Bray stick to spend next year on necessary items, like we did last year on footpaths an on things that we need and on the discretionary money that the members can decide where it is going to go. I know that some of the Municipal District, they may have problems. They may feel that they don't have a say in how that money is spent but it is a matter for them to fight for that. But certainly, we didn't have to fight for it in Bray. We, you know, we were included in where that money would go. So, again, I will not hold up meeting any longer. I believe what we are doing here is fair and reasonable and sensible and grown-up. I think that we all have responsibilities to the people that we represent here n county Wicklow.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Lourda Scott? Cllr Scott thank you, I have will not hold the meeting up long. I have thought about the matter long and hard over the past while. I think that I say it every year that I am unsatisfied with the way that the LPT is set up. I have no issue myself with a property tax perse, I do think it should be like any other tax, it is set and if that is the value of your property, that is what you pay, you are in or you are out. I think it is no sense to go through a charade of voting for increases or decreases when in reality,

the county should be doing the public footpath and the lighting that we are siphoning money to. And disappointed in bringing in the post 2013 new houses to the scheme that in reality we don't see an increase of money on the ground but that is not the executive's fault, it is just the way that things are set up and we can disagree but we can't change that here. However, at the moment, and I hear the talk about the language and the rest and accept that but in reality, the property tax is reverting back to baseline, which is where I would like to see it stay. We are in extremely difficult times I don't think we can appreciate this winter will be for people across the board, including in the property taxes and not excluding the energy and the food increases, and I think it is sending a wrong message to the constituents, and it will be a vote on the increase, I appreciate that you may freeze it at 6% but to vote for an increase, I don't think is fair to people in the current climate that we are facing into this the winter. I have spoken to a number of property owners who would technically be seen as well-off on paper but they are already struggling and even though it is not a huge amount of increase that the property tax adds to the bill it is another piece that they have to pay on top of increases for other services as well and people are struggling, they really are struggling. So, it is where I stand. I support the Cllr John Snell's proposal to leave the property tax remain at the base rate. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

John Mullen please

>> At the end of the day all taxes fund public services, whether it be income tax or VAT. That is how it is done. Property tax is a model that most social democratic countries in Western Europe and beyond use as a standard in revenue raised. So as a councillor said, language is important. It is important to see property tax in context.

The presentation puts it plainly, that we have the opportunity to retain it and keep the funding for projects within our district.

Regardless of the vote today or previous years, that discretionary fund is used by all councillors in this Chamber to promote projects that are of a vital interest to their communities. So last week we all legitimately criticised, in my view, the executive's attempt to try to sneak in a recycling charge as another council has mentioned.

I would like to think that the process that we use every year for the property tax with presentation, discussions and when you have had a chance to think about it, that is the way to discuss these matters as adults in the room.

And I think we have to take as members, our powers seriously.

So, I will be supporting my colleagues today, in retaining the 6%. For one year only. As I do think it is important, we review this every year.

There are a number of exceptions to property tax. but I do think it is an important fundraising matter. I think that local Government matters, that we as councillors have a responsibility to be honest and not play to the gallery every week. So, in that regard, I will be supporting my colleagues today. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Mullen. Cllr Paul O'Brien? Paul thank you, Cathaoirleach, you can hear me. Apologies that I cannot be there in person. And thank you to Breeda for the presentation. It was excellent. We all know we are dealing with a flawed system. We can talk until the cows come home but we cannot fix that today, which is true to say. I like Councillor Anne Ferris, my colleague from the Labour, a true, left-wing Socialist Party are supporting the 6%, to maintain the 6%, as that what it is. As Cllr Edward Timmins said, a bill of 300 this year and a bill of 300 the next year is the same. Those proposing to reduce it or reduce it by 15%, that is their entitlement but at the end of the day they are saying this year it is a cost-of-living crisis, that we are all living through it. But last year it was a different reason and the year before a different reason and I'm sure if we are back to normal next year, there will be a potential of a decrease. Government has the firepower to deal with the cost-of-living crisis. We don't. That is the reality. It was summed up by, Councillor Walsh that the most we can give back is 40 euro a year. That is less than 1 euro a week. You cannot buy milk for that. And what disappoints me most is that the councillors seem intent on keeping their job rather than doing their job. It is disappointing to say this, I do not say it lightly, we are in the middle of a cost of living crisis but to put it in perspective last week we were able to use LPT funds to resurface the footpaths, the first time in my area we were able to do that, because of the LPT. I support that 6%. I hope to be able to get to spend it on worthwhile projects. I can see the councillors proposing a decrease but the first in the door to spend the money. That is not antidemocratic. You get what you vote for. That is democracy. 42 people were elected the people get what they elected. You get what you vote for. This is not Trump world, where you vote for one thing, call labor another. So I support on the 6%. Based on spending that on worthwhile projects within the community and let Government, with the firepower, deal with the cost-of-



living crisis and to stop looking for the headlines and to get down to real work and the real business of the council. Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach.

Thank you, Cllr Paul O'Brien. Cllr Gerry O'Neil?

CLLR O'NEIL: Thank you, briefly, I would be supporting my colleague Cllr John Snell. But I don't want to dwell on the ups and the downs and the ins and the out of it. I think that we should look again. I say it last year and the year before. At the waste money within the council. I think it is that we could be doing a lot more savings than we do. I question the likes of the 1.1 million to the Municipal Districts for the public works I don't know exactly who gets that money? Is it the Town Teams or what is it? Where it goes? But in my area of Blessington we have had 3 town plans. At a cost of big money and then an announcement a few months ago, there was another 100,000 granted to Blessington for another plan. And there will be a number of project projects going into Blessington but it is spent on consultation, after consultation, and it is over 2 million now has been spent on the Greenway consultation. So, a bad plan. The amount of money that we waste on consultations, and I know I will be talking to the wall. I say it every year, and we don't seem to be making savings on the massive amount of money spent on consultation, what do we need a fourth consultations on the town of Blessington for? The local engineers know what they want. But year after year, throwing money after money. There is 60,000 handed out at the moment for a plan on how to get a footpath from the village of Blessington to Deer Park which is about 60 yards away. 60,000 going out on a plan? I mean, my grandchild could do that! It is crazy. A total waste of money. So, I think that we should look at this stuff. And I question there, why, where is this 1.1 million in public real money going to? Where will it go into the Municipal District? When will it go into consultation, into the Town Teams? I know this was discussed at last week's meeting here of Town Teams and the activities but, briefly, Cathaoirleach, I am concerned about the Town Teams and the way that they are working.

Three teams here in West Wicklow and three good councillors and they are not part of the Town Team. But the Town Team in Blessington is a front for Fine Gael. The trustee of Fine Gael is a prominent member...

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, this is an LPT meeting, not a political broadcasting meeting.

CLLR O'NEILL: I just want to make that point.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Point well- made, have you any questions to ask?

CLLR O'NEILL: I am asking a question on the 1.1 million.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, that is a fair question. Thank you very much, Cllr O'Neill. I have two more speakers and then I want to bring in the director of services. Cllr Grace McManus.

CLLR McMANUS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Breda for the presentation. Whether councillors believe it or not, I actually really appreciate listening to different points of view and I have listened intently today to everyone who has spoken and I wasn't going to speak, but there is one point that needs to be made. The idea that we would freeze co- s and that people would be okay because they were able to pay it last year or we assume that they were able to pay it last year, I think is a problematic argument to make. It was only two weeks ago that we had how many thousand people on the streets protesting about the cost of living crisis. My concern is those people were trying to scrape the pennies to pay the Local Property Tax as it was last year and maybe they couldn't make it and we don't know what happened behind closed doors.

That is something that we really need to be, like they are telling us, they told us in the public consultation, they told us on streets they cannot afford all of those increased charges. On their own they are small, but together they make up a big lot and I am concerned about the impact on that.

When we talk about serious things like mental illness and the stress we are under, we do have to face those issues in this chamber because that is the impact that the cost of living crisis is having and that is something we should be considering here and we should be brave enough to face.

I do appreciate when we disagree, that is fine, but we should be looking at all the issues on the table, even if they are uncomfortable, because that is what we are facing here.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Grace McManus. Cllr Patsy Glennon.

CLLR GLENNON: I would like to thank Breda for her presentation. A lot has been said about the Local Property Tax here and I suppose Cllr Scott has blown Cllr Fortune's theory about the Government parties all being in conspiracy together so I can assure him that no one has directed me how to vote and there is no whip in the Fianna Fail group. Retaining the 6% in effect means no increase and it's important to be clear on that. People are talking about reverting to base rates etc, etc. If a bill was such last year it

would be the same next year, so there is no increase in the bill you got last year based on what is being proposed by Cllr Pat Fitzgerald and seconded by Cllr Mitchell. I think it's important to be clear on that.

Finally I would say that perhaps those in Government parties are more responsible and don't play to the gallery to the same extent. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Breda, there is a few questions for you, if you wouldn't mind trying to answer them.

BREDA: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I will go through them pretty much as I can remember them and if anyone wants to bring back anything to my attention that I may have missed please do so.

First point I would really just like to make to Cllr Kavanagh, that there was no attempt or effort to be disingenuous and the figures are as they are shown. The budget you have been shown for 2022, that increased in 2023. That is the Revenue budget and that is what we get to keep in the revenue condition. To be clear in the report you all have that information. Increases have been looked at as part of the process, the commercial rates have seen some decrease because we have a lot of properties that were brought back in as part of evaluation that are derelict and require delisting. Unfortunately with new properties that we are waiting on the evaluation office to bring into the figures and it hasn't happened yet, but we are working hard with the valuation office to get those in place for the budget to assist us in balancing the budget, but it wouldn't be correct to bring them in yet until we are sure of the information. The Local Property Tax yes, there was an increase of 1.1 million, but as we have discussed in the chamber a lot of that went into self- funding. So the increase we are showing of 753,000 is the portion we are getting of the new properties, the valuation base and the surplus percentage of 22.5% that we get to keep because we are one of the lucky local authorities that has Local Property Tax in excess of the baseline.

So the balance, which is the 3.9 million extra that goes towards self- funding, that is actually in the capital account and it's replacing the previous Government grants we would have got for our capital programme. So it's no use or benefit, unfortunately to us in the revenue account. The grants and subsidies have increased, but again there are reasons behind all of that. Included in it is 2.2 million extra from 2022 which was the increase in the Government grant for roads. 2.7 million, or 2.67 million for the 85% of the pay increase. I would note that we are going to get 85% of the current round of pay increases. We are still most

likely and probably stuck at 80% of previous pay increases. We have been advised we can put in some new funded payroll positions, for our energy team, for, I knew it was going to blast on some words, our energy unit, no it's, the biodiversity officer, thank you, Cllr Kavanagh and some other positions such as that. So we have extra income for that.

As I said, the Government are prepared to give us 60%, sorry have secured six million for the sector for inflationary cost increases, but that probably will only match about 60% of our inflationary costs of our inflationary energy costs. Other increases are just extras where we are taking on more availability which is securing extra units for our local authority waiting list for the various approved housing bodies so. That would show as an increase in the expenditure side. You specifically mentioned the NPPR. That, you are quite correct, Cllr Kavanagh, that did cease in 2014, but because it was a self- declaration model that anyone who goes to sell their property has to pay it in order to ensure that the NPPR charge has been discharged on the property. We have a situation where 2011 penalties and interest and all previous years will be gobbled from the 1st of April 2023, so we are only left with 2012 and 2013 penalties and interest. That is why it still is a source of income for the council and that is why, as it phases out we will end up in the situation in 2025 that there will be no NPPR income and that will be something else to deal with to balance the budget then. The other area of cost is other income. That is just stuff like maybe additional rent, the dividend from IPB and stuff like that. That is where the 145 million is increasing from the 22 budget.

Payroll expenses we have put in the cost of pay roll increases, the new cost of funding positions and the income is shown of 85% up above loans, social benefits is new payment and availabilities under CAF scheme and the other expenditure, like that figure was an exercise we engaged with, looking at inflationary cost increases, other costs we have to hit and actually costs from sections where they are looking for statutory and contractual costs that they can't avoid. We have said to members if they are looking for anything else, or officials this they are looking for any other budget increases, they need to come up with some income to fund it or to go against it. So that is what is behind on that. So it really is, we are looking at the Revenue budget.

To that I will go on to say, I can't disagree with members when they say they have an issue of baseline. We are linked to the 2014 Local Government Fund. It is unsatisfactory, we are under- funded as a local authority. If you look at any of the figures for us on a per capita basis, we

are lower than a lot of our other local authorities nationally and we are lower than average across many of our programmes. So we would be putting the Department under pressure when they review the baseline to ensure we get more equitable share of it to bring up our funding. We would also be looking for, with the baseline that the population figures from the CSO, where Wicklow was above average in population increases would be factored into the model as well as the area of the county. So myself and the Chief Executive will be working with the Department on that and if the 6% was retained for next year, not only does it add money for the local communities in the Municipal District, it also assist us in our discussions with the department that we are underfunded as a county and the members have taken the decision to retain the rate to ensure there is money in the communities to be spent.

Just I know there are various figures floating about, but as regard the impact on householders but it is the case that 60% of the households, if the Local Property Tax, 6% wasn't held in place this year, they would only see a saving of up to €1.58 per month. Now, I know that it does impact on various areas of the counties differently, but it is still 60% of our households. Then, finally, as regards the discretionary funds across the various local authorities and everyone should be aware on what is being spent in their local authorities, but even in Baltinglass there was line markings done in Castle Dermot. There was cleaning of heritage monuments in Baltinglass, there were contributions to various associations, a granite seat was put into the Baltinglass graveyards. There was various public realm benefits that we did see. That is across the board in other local authorities.

In Bray the public toilets were refurbished which was completed in July 2019 and also 200,000 was allocated for foot path repairs in my own district, as mentioned by Cllr O'Brien, we had work on foot paths, a number of foot paths in the area as well as seating provided for the community across the board. The last area there in Arklow was bus shelters put into places. There was footpath repairs done. So securing the is.1 million for the Municipal Districts is of benefit to the community and does make a difference and will see no increase to our households from 2022- 2023 and also if, we wouldn't be in a position with the current economic climate we are facing that if 6% wasn't retained for 2023, to be able to give any money towards Municipal District funding, but it is good that if it is maintained it is being ring- fenced for the Municipal Districts.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Breda. Can I bring in the Chief Executive, please. Brian.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I would just like to thank all the members for their views and contributions here today. We have spoken about base rates and variation adjustments, but at the end of the day all the householder wants to know is how it will affect their pocket? Under this proposal they will not have to pay one extra cent in 2023. Also the decision will allow the members to retain 1.1 million for their Municipal District expenditure on important local projects. Finally I would just say I do share very strongly the members' frustration about the baseline and the capital self- funding.

I have been talking about this matter for the last number of years and I have always said that it's not the equalisation that is the issue here, it's the baseline and the self- funding capital element. But rest assured that we will be working hard over the next few months to try and make the best case possible to the department to try and increase that baseline next year as we feel that is the key element of the LPT model. I think it's an important point, Breda made there about the decision that is taken here today hopefully to retain the 6%, will actually support our argument with the department in relation to looking for an improved baseline. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Brian. You must be very happy, Brian, after leaving your job in the capable hands of Breda, I want to say very well done Breda for a great presentation as well. You had a hard act to follow with Brian, but can I bring in the Director of Services now, Lorraine Gallagher.

LORRAINE: Thank you very much. Just to say in terms of the process we have three proposals and Rachel Gillespie, the meeting administrator will go through them. Cllr Leonard you did say in supporting Cllr Snell's proposal you wanted to make an amendment in relation to the 1.1 million and how that is ring- fenced, but that is not a job for today, your reserve function is to vary the property tax either up or down or remain as it is. So, Cathaoirleach, before I bring in Rachel, just to say we are going to take the motion as tabled and you can either vote for or against the motion, depending on which proposal Rachel is putting forward. Thank you.

RACHEL: Thank you, Lorraine. We will now take a vote on Pat Fitzgerald's proposal, seconded by Cllr Derek Mitchell, which was to retain, at the 2022 level, for clarity, that is an upward variation of the basic rate by 6% for 2023.

The next motion was a reduction of 15% proposed by Cllr Behan.

Do we have a seconder? No. Seconded by Cllr Tom Fortune.

The third proposal which was by Cllr Snell was to retain at the baseline that was seconded by Cllr Mary Kavanagh. Just for clarity, that for one year?

CLLR SNELL: That is for one year. To be reviewed as has been for previous years, next year the same. I think that would probably be the most efficient thing to do under the hardship that people are experiencing.

RACHEL: Thank you, Cllr Snell. Now we will take the first proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Cllr Behan, go ahead.

CLLR BEHAN: When Rachel read out the motions she did indicate, despite what other members have said, this is an increase of 6%. This is not the same... this is what was read out. This is what you are voting...

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry the motion has been read out.

LORRAINE: You vote for or against, read it out again for clarity.

CLLR BEHAN: 6%...

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Behan. Okay.

RACHEL: Thank you. So just for clarity the proposal was by

Cllr Pat Fitzgerald, seconded by Derek Mitchell, which was to retain at the 2022 level, which is an upward variation of the basic rate by 6% for 2023. I will now take the vote.

[Vote taken ]

RACHEL: I will just add them now.

That translates to 23 votes in favour, nine against. The motion is therefore passed and we don't proceed to the following, to the other votes. Thank you. CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you very much, members. Chief Executive, that is it then.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Do you want to mention about the Minister arriving On the 28th of October? What time? Just to remind the members.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: It's the 28th. We got confirmation. 2.00pm in the chamber here. Okay. I think, oh, yeah, it will be hybrid. So an email has issued on that to all members, so if you haven't seen it maybe check your emails.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, members, thank you very much, Breda and Brian and officials.



