

**ORDINARY MEETING OF**  
**WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL**

**ON**

**MONDAY, 08<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2023 AT 2:00 P.M.**

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**C Kollhof**

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon, members, thank you very much for attending the meeting this afternoon. Before I start, can I congratulate a young lady on my right-hand side ... she has been a rock to me for the last 3-4 months. She went off and done a great deed and got married. So, congratulations to you, Caroline and best of luck in the future and much happiness. I'm sure it comes from all of the chamber. Thank you.

(Applause)

It's the first time I can see your face and she is blushing a little bit! The second lady to hand over to is to Helen to go through the protocol.

HELEN PURCELL: To welcome everybody to the chamber, to the public who are remote, and those members present to. Have mobile phones switched to silent there are issues with

connectivity, contact myself or Teresa and we will get you back in. Thank you very much. I will start with the roll call.

[Register Roll Call ]

HELEN PURCELL: Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Helen. OK.

We have two suspension of Standing Orders.

HELEN PURCELL: Submitted by Cllr Patsy Glennon, seconded by Cllr Edward Timmins, that the council condemns the failure of AIB to reinstate cash handling services to the Blessington branch...

[TECHNICAL ISSUE HERE LOSS OF APPROXIMATELY 1 MINUTE]

CHAIR: OK, do we have a segment for that?

HELEN PURCELL: We do.

CHAIR: Would the members be in agreement to take this at 4:30? The second suspension of standing orders?

HELEN PURCELL: Submitted by Cllr Pat Fitzgerald, seconded by Cllr Pat Kennedy to discuss the cancellation of the 133 bus service from Arklow to Wicklow, 133 from Wicklow town to... I can't read your writing, Cllr Fitzgerald, sorry. A 143 departure each way every week.

CHAIR: No service, OK, is it agreed to take that after the first suspension? OK, thank you, members. Votes of sympathy now, deceased, please, Helen.

HELEN PURCELL: We extend our sympathies to the families of Peter Doyle, father of our colleague Margaret Doyle, and Jim Byrne, father of our colleague Caroline Doyle.

CHAIR: Cllr Paul O'Brien?

CLLR O'BRIEN: I want to offer my condolences to the family of Declan Power. He will be missed by all the family, may he rest in peace after a short illness.

CHAIR: Council, Cllr Gerry O'Neill?

CLLR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to include a man who died yesterday, Seán Keane, who lived down the road and he was a lovely man, a lovely individual, and a genius, of course, of a fiddle player. So it is a big shock to the area that Seán, who was only - he was

down in Mayo a couple of weeks ago there at the Biden gathering and it was very sudden to hear yesterday Seán had passed away. Thanks.

CHAIR: Thank you. Cllr Stephen Stokes?

CLLR STOKES: Good morning, Cathaoirleach, I want to be associated with the condolences for Declan Power, he will be sadly missed by the people in the Greystones area. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

>> May I come in with one please? I was at a funeral yesterday and Arklow has seen a number of funerals over the last few months, but this has to be one of the biggest funerals I've witnessed and that was for a man, Seán Killoran, he was a great horse man and a personal friend of mine. He used to supply the pigs for the Arklow Festival and I always got on very well with Sean and his extended family, he has three sons and two daughters and they are a big extended family and I would like to pay my respects, thank you. Can we stand for a minute's silence, please?

[Minute's Silence held]

HELEN PURCELL: May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace.

CHAIR: Thank you, Helen.

Number one on the agenda, to confirm and sign the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Wicklow County Council held on Monday 3 April, 2023. Do I have a proposer? Cllr Paul O'Brien and Cllr John Snell, thank you.

Number two on the agenda, to consider the disposal of 0.0086 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Blackditch, Co. Wicklow being land adjoining property 28 Seamount Drive, Newcastle, Co. Wicklow comprised in Folio No. WW28577F to Alan and Michelle Colgan of 28 Seamount Drive, Newcastle, Co. Wicklow. Do I have a proposer? Thank you. Cllr Stephen Stokes and Cllr Gerry Walsh, thank you. All in agreement to that? Thank you.

Number three on the agenda is to consider the disposal of 0.0321 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Powerscourt Demesne, Co. Wicklow comprised in Folio No. WW4484 Co. Wicklow being the property known as 66 Kilgarron Park, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow by Transfer Order to Ms Kathleen Keogh and Mr Leo Keogh of 66 Kilgarron Park, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, the persons entitled to the freehold interest in the property. Do I have a proposer? Cllr Melanie Corrigan. And? Sorry, seconded by Cllr Rory O'Connor, thank you. All agreed? Thank you.

Number four on the agenda: To consider the disposal of 0.0700 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Blessington, Co. Wicklow comprised in Folio No. WW726F Co. Wicklow by Transfer Order to Ms Bridie Kavanagh, the person entitled to the freehold interest being the property known as 10 Troopersfield, Blessington, Co. Wicklow. Do I have a proposer? Thank you, Cllr O'Neill. Seconded, Cllr Patsy Glennon, thank you. All agreed? OK.

Number five on the agenda is to consider the disposal of 0.230 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Humphreystown, Co. Wicklow being the property known as Hampton Wood, Humphreystown, Blessington, Co. Wicklow to Mr Damien Reynor who is now disposing of the property. Do I have a proposer? Cllr Gerry O'Neill and Cllr John Snell. Thank you. Number six on the agenda is to note all - sorry the last one, all agreed? I'm going to lose my good job now!

Number six on the agenda: To note the Annual Financial Statement 2022 and to approve by resolution additional net expenditure in excess of budget in accordance with section 104(7) of the Local Government Act 2001 and (ii) additional transfers to and from capital in excess of budget. Brian Gleeson? Thank you.

BRIAN GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I will just give an overview of the AFS to start with and then we can take the formal resolution in respect of the net expenditure and the capital transfers after that. The financial accounts for Wicklow County Council for 2022 have been prepared in accordance with the Local Authority Accounting in Ireland Code of Practice accounting regulations and the directions of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The council faced a number of economic challenges and uncertainties during 2022, including the ongoing war in Ukraine, high inflation and energy costs, and increasing interest rates. However, I am pleased to report that, despite these significant challenges, the council's overall financial position remained quite strong at the end of 2022. The total expenditure incurred in the revenue account after transfers was 134 million, which generated a surplus of 3349,000 and reduced our overall general reserve deficit to 939,000 at year end. It's important we continue to reduce our revenue deficit year on year, and we estimate that in approximately three years' time we will have eliminated it entirely, which is good news. The capital account expenditure increased from 98 million in 2021 to over 155 million in 2022. This large increase in spend follows the lifting of COVID restrictions placed on construction works, especially in the high-spend area of housing. I'm also pleased to note

that the commercial rates collection has returned to pre-COVID levels increasing to 88% from 83% in 2021. By early 2022, most COVID restrictions were lifted, but a targeted rates waiver scheme remained in place for the first quarter of the year to compensate for certain categories of ratepayers, mainly those in the entertainment and hospitality sectors whose businesses continued to be affected by COVID. These waiver payments amounted to 1.175 million.

The war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022 and resulted in a number of challenges, including supply chain disruption, and unprecedented inflationary increases, especially in relation to energy prices. In addition, Wicklow County Council implemented a number of measures in response to the arrival to Ireland of Ukrainian families fleeing the war including the provision of emergency hotel accommodation, the Offer a Home programme and the refurbishment and allocation of vacant properties. During 2022 a total of 1.4 million was given by the council on these measures which in turn was reimbursed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The capital debt at the end of 2022 amounted to 62 million, a reduction of 10 million on the 2021 figure due to the redemption of a number of HFA land acquisition loans.

With a significant amount of expenditure incurred, a lot was achieved in 2022 and some of the key actions and deliverables are outlined on pages 6 and 7 of the financial review. While the AFS itself is just for noting purposes, under section 104(7) of the Local Government Act approval of the members is sought for the initial expenditure in excess of budget in the revenue account and from transfers to and from the capital account.

In relation to the net expenditure in excess of budget these amounts are outlined by division on page 4 of the AFS as well as in note 16 on page 26 and these are: Housing and building, 623,641. Roads, transportation and safety, 459,825. Water services, 144,094. Developed management 381,065. Environmental services 92,341 and recreation and amenity 641,394. These excesses were offset by underspends in other areas and explanations for expenditure are outlined in the financial review on pages and 4 of the document.

Approval by the members for transfers to and from capital is also requested. The amounts by division are outlined on page 5 of the financial review and are also in notes 14 and 16 on page 25 and 26. The total transfers to capital are 8,339,453 and from capital 2,479,292.

Transfers to capital are in respect of past expenditure which has resulted in deficits in the capital account as well as the provision of specific reserves for future expenditure and

commitments. An example would be for our dredging in the harbours. Some of the most significant transfers in 2022 included an ongoing provision to cover future appeals to the Valuation Tribunal in relation to revaluation, 1.8 million, carry forward of unspent discretionary funding 1.5 million, provision from match funding requirements for capital projects, 1.1 million, ICT infrastructure provision, 600,000, energy saving measures 395,000, harbour works 290,000. The most significant transfers from capital are the rates revaluation that peels provision to fund rate income reductions, 1.2 million and internal capital receipts to fund pre-letting expenditure of approximately 700,000 under the housing division.

So members, if I can get a proposer and seconder for both the net expenditure and excess of budget and for the transfers to and from capital in excess of budget, please?

CHAIR: Cllr Vincent Blake. Cllr Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

CLLR BLAKE: Only for noting in regards to it, but nevertheless I've got a lot of phone calls - and probably other members as well - in relation to the vacant properties and the derating of properties as well. Are you in a position to make a comment on either positions in that regard? Thanks, Chairman.

CHAIR: Sorry, can we just get the proposer and seconder, is that clear?

>> Yes, Cllr Kennedy is next and then Cllr Gerry Walsh.

>> There are two separate proposals, so two separate proposers and seconders.

BRIAN GLEESON: We can take them all in one - sorry, we can take a proposer and seconder to cover both.

CHAIR: OK, Cllr Gerry Walsh. OK, thank you. Cllr Kennedy? You're OK, thank you. Cllr Joe Behan?

CLLR BEHAN: Yes, thanks, Cathaoirleach. I think maybe we should have time for the questions before we decide on proposing and seconding things?

CHAIR: OK.

CLLR BEHAN: With respect, but this is probably not going to affect the decision, but do we have a figure for uncollected local authority rents? COVID was mentioned as having an impact on our finances and there's no doubt that deficits, if you like, in the housing rents situation has been a problem and from talking to tenants myself, I think one of the issues has been that certainly in some parts of the county we've abandoned the idea of rent collectors calling to people's houses. I don't know whether that happened before COVID or whether it was because of COVID, but certainly some people would say to me that they far

prefer to have somebody calling because, I suppose it's a reminder, they also know that they're getting into arrears if they are getting in arrears and they are able to set up a payment method quicker. Perhaps we can bring it up now at the next item under the CE's report but I'm just wondering, is there a figure for what actually has not been collected to date in these particular figures? Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Behan. Brian, would you like to answer that?

BRIAN GLEESON: OK, I can get an exact figure but it's about 3 million, Cllr, would be outstanding arrears, just over that. Just in relation to the vacant properties, I'm not sure what exactly Cllr you were asking in relation to that? We do have a vacant property scheme whereby write-offs are provided in relation to vacant properties, so I'm not sure what the question was?

CLLR BLAKE: Down the years we always had any vacant properties, you could write off the rates, and in the last couple of years we brought back in a system where is it 40% you have to pay?

BRIAN GLEESON: That's correct, yes, 60% relief is provided.

CLLR BLAKE: So that's 40% on vacant properties, and I know a lot of people because of that are looking at derating their properties and in some cases it has been refused. So I presume it has to go through the commissioners to have it derated as well. So where are we with that aspect of it? Are people having them derated or are we still up there in no-man's land?

BRIAN GLEESON: Delisting would be a process that happens all the time if a property hasn't been in commercial use for a number of years, if it has gone derelict, if it has been repurposed for domestic use, then an application has to go to the Valuation Office to actually have it delisted. So there is kind of a process in place. But as regards people looking to delist it because they don't want to pay the 40%, I'm not sure whether that's a major issue, Cllr. I can look into it, though, but it hasn't been brought to my attention that there's a big influx of requests for delistings because of that.

CLLR BLAKE: It is out there and it is happening and particularly properties who are in the centre of towns and villages there is a reluctance, I believe, on the department to - the Valuation Office to delist them, that's my experience of it anyway.

BRIAN: Well, the problem is, if you delist a property, it might take - because there's a lot of backlogs within the Valuation Office, if it is delisted and then someone purchases it and wants to have a commercial business in that property it could take a couple of years to

actually get it back on the list. So in the meantime we'd be losing out on money. So I suppose it's something that there would want to be a good reason if someone was looking to sell the property and I suppose the reason and rationale behind introducing the vacant relief from 100% down to 60% was trying to encourage people to move on the vacant properties - either sell them or make a better effort to get a business in there, rather than just sitting on them.

CHAIR: Thank you. Cllr Mary Kavanagh?

CLLR KAVANAGH: Just very quickly, I just want to concur with Cllr Blake there. I heard recently of an example of a property that is engaged in farming but, unknown to them at the time, part of the farm is zoned residential and if they have to pay this tax it's just going to make their business completely unviable and I read in the paper yesterday there was a farmer somewhere in the country who has been farming for generations but, like that, wasn't aware of the different zoning on the land. So just to kind of keep that in mind and I know this first instance they're trying to delist, but it just would be totally unfeasible for them to go ahead and continue their business if they have to pay this kind of money.

Thanks.

BRIAN GLEESON: Sorry, I'll just take that, I suppose. That is a different issue, that is the residential property tax which is separate to the commercial rates and agricultural land wouldn't be charged commercial rates anyway, so it is a different matter that's being discussed anyway. OK? Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. Cllr Peir Leonard?

CLLR LEONARD: Yes, I had kind of raised this a few meetings ago and I think Brian was looking into getting figures on how many delisted properties we have throughout the county because I think this is a real issue, because some of the properties that are delisted have a zero value, so there's no rates being collected on them, but they're in a bad state but they can't be - they can't be designated as a derelict building. So essentially somebody sitting on a derelict building is not paying anything at all, no fine for the state of the building, and I know in Arklow we have a moratorium on development because of the sewage treatment plant, but this is a county-wide programme and I think it's something we need to capture the figures and look at and start rewarding the people that are making the effort, the small businesses that are paying the rates and keeping their properties upkept and essentially the ones sitting on properties for whatever reason and letting them fall into



disrepair and having really a negative impact on our town centres are being rewarded by not being charged or having any kind of fees attached to them at all. Thanks.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Leonard.

BRIAN GLEESON: Thanks, Cllr Leonard, and as I said we're getting the information from the Valuation Office in relation to that. We might pick a point in time like the last five years because this is kind of a continuous process that we're looking at. Otherwise, you know, we would have reams and reams of information, so we'll pick something like maybe the last five years of delistings to get a better understanding and picture of that. But as I say, the information from - we'll have to kind of, I suppose, go through that for a bit because the information we get from the Valuation Office doesn't decipher between delistings that were done for - say, turned into a domestic property versus derelict so we'll have to do a piece of work on that. But we'll have that in due course. Just in relation to specific figures in relation to rents, Cllr Behan, it's actually on page 42 of the AFS and it's just under 3.3 million. The rent arrears at the end of 2022. And just in relation to, I suppose, our collectors are actually going door-to-door, we are actually looking to try and get people moved on to electronic payment as much as possible, but there is a - still a door-to-door collection once a week in certain particular areas. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. Cllr Edward Timmins?

CLLR TIMMINS: Thanks, Chairman. I had my hand up there for the last ten minutes just to offer to propose both of those resolutions.

CHAIR: OK, thank you. I apologise, I didn't bring you in there, because your name didn't come up, believe it or not, on the screen. But I won't call your name what came up on the screen, but we didn't know who it was, that's why we didn't bring you in, I do apologise about that.

CLLR TIMMINS: That's no problem.

CHAIR: Thank you. Has anyone else any questions? All agreed? OK. I'll take that as a "Yes" then. Thank you very much.

Number seven then is to consider the Chief Executive's monthly management report for April 2023. Chief Executive?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I take the report as read and members of the team are able to ask any questions you have on it. Wicklow has been successful in securing 100,000 in funding for heritage and local community projects for really around wildlife and

local economies and tourism. So the recipients of that funding are the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Rathnew Heritage Group, the Arklow Town Team and the Avoca Parish Finance Committee, Rewild Wicklow, and Roundwood and District Historical Archaeological and Folklore Society. We were delighted to attend the LAMA Awards earlier on in the month of April and our Arklow based micro start-up Aqualicence won the national prize for the Best Micro Start-up and it was great to see a very entrepreneurial business in Arklow receive this award, doing great work in the kind of whole aqua science part of the world. Kate Dempsey has gone from strength to strength and I think she has three companies now in the Arklow area and we're delighted with that success. Coláiste Bhríde has won an award in the Film Festival and I was there present when the Cathaoirleach made a presentation to the school there recently on their rubbish film, which is about obviously an environment-themed project and schools from Wicklow have participated in the project. So to do that and for them to win the award for the county was great so that was a lovely occasion to mark that. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Executive. Can I call in Cllr Gail Dunne?

CLLR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Chief Executive for the report. Just a couple of things. A few things that have been worrying me lately - parks and open spaces, there is a lot in Wicklow town especially where passive open space opened about 18 months ago, also playgrounds and different things like that. The upkeep on them around our area isn't great and I'm not getting on to the - our municipal district on this, but I feel that we should have a parks and open space crew to go around the county and look at this because there's a lot of work to be done on this and our guys don't always have the opportunity to go and do it and I'm exciting the Chief Executive to maybe look at - I know in Dublin they do have them but I think now with so much open space, with so much playgrounds, I think it's something that really needs to be looked at.

Can I just thank the Chief Executive for the updates we're getting on Wicklow Harbour.

We're nearing the end hopefully and we will be able to put in an application and hopefully that will follow through.

The next point from me, we talked about footpaths and funding for footpaths into the different districts and what they are going to get and I'm wondering if there's any update on that?

Finally, the Wicklow and Rathnew local area plan, I think my colleague here beside me, the Greystones local area plan, when is that going to start? We've a year left now as councillors and will that be finished in that period of time? Because if it's not then we need to know as councillors because it will be going to whoever gets elected the next time, thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Dunne. Cllr Gerry Walsh?

CLLR WALSH: Thanks, cochlear, and thanks to the Chief Executive of the report. Just on the housing section a bit of clarification around the relets figure of 166 and the work in progress. I think it's 47, so I take it there's still a lot of work to be carried out on that 120-odd units to get them back into use? I don't know whether there is a timeframe available around when that work will be completed? Also just on the relets figure, I don't know if you take the round last year into account, I think it was 100 and just looking at the figures here, we are on 166 at the moment. There was a significant amount last year in Greystones and Bray. Is that included in our total tenancies figure or is it separate? I know they are managed by approved AHPs, et cetera. The other thing around those relets and stuff, people are obviously - are they looking at the Homeless HAPS section and I see 127 properties sourced from the Homeless HAPS section here in Wicklow. Is there a movement around HAP properties, you know, resulting from people being accommodated in these new, shall we say, accommodations? So I just wondered is there more HAP properties coming on as a result of this? As we all know there is a significant demand for HAP properties out there. Just also on to the community recognition fund for 2023, there is a significant amount there. I think after the public consultation process there has been six projects proposed across the county. I was wondering if there was any more information on what type of projects have been approved and I know there are community parks and centres, et cetera. So if there was a bit more around that, thank you. Sorry and just quickly on the national news over the weekend we saw a reference to 74 social housing projects being stalled due to inflationary cost factors and these are AHP projects so a lot of uncertainty around there. I wonder if any of our pipeline projects are affected by that? Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Welsh. Cllr Paul O'Brien?

CLLR O'BRIEN: Thank you Cathaoirleach and to the Chief Executive for the comprehensive report again. Two points, I just want to support my colleague, Cllr Dunne, on the footpath funding. We're living in a county town here and some of the footpaths not just along the main street and secondary streets but some of the estates leave a lot to be desired so I

would support my colleague on that. Just my two points, one in relation to housing again, we're getting to a stage in the Wicklow municipal area where our housing lists are coming down, thank God, but what we're doing now is we seem to be penalising couples or single people because I'm dealing with a number of them now where they are on the housing list since maybe 2009 or 2010 but because we don't have any one-beds around they are being overlooked. I'm not looking for any of them to be jumped up the queue but when you are languishing on a housing list from 2009 and you can't get a house because there's no one-beds around I think it's very unfair on them. Plus there is there is a knock-on effect of these people living in two or three-bed HAP or RAS houses. So I would be asking if they would be considered for one-beds at the moment. And those living in HAP houses with one child but they are only considered for two beds rather than three beds so they're having to stall their families until they're allocated. So all I'm asking for is we give the housing team, who again, I will be consistent on this, are doing a fantastic job, I can't praise them enough and I have been consistent on this since I have been here but at the same time I think they need a bit of scope and freedom when it comes to allocating houses for people who have been on the housing list ten or plus years. My second point is a number of years ago I raised it here about the IDA visits and how many we have. I would like to get an update on how many IDA visits have been here. I would never begrudge another county getting a news story but last week in County Galway Dexcom announced 1,000 new jobs and a 300 million manufacturing facility. Down here in the county town again on the Murrough, there was a hub of activity down there, and we have a site that has been sold, then it hasn't been sold, there is confusion over it; it is a hotel, it's apartments, it's nothing. It is lying idle there for far too long and I know some of my colleagues today - they brought up in the past about the M11 and the infrastructure and how long it takes to get to Dublin. I don't want to see people from the south of the county having to travel to Dublin to get jobs. I want the jobs here. Some of the reasons given out last week was the proximity to Dublin and I would just like to remind the IDA we are closer to Dublin and we have the infrastructure here and I know there's hard work being done at national level to bring the DART to Wicklow and improved buses coming to Wicklow so it isn't that we don't have the infrastructure. Other parts said last week was there was an educated workforce. Again I would like to remind them that we live south of Dublin where we have Trinity and many other fine colleges and we would like to have people from our towns working in our towns. So maybe if we can invite the IDA

down or at least correspond with them, but we definitely need to be pushing the south of Wicklow more in terms of job creation. So that's my points and thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr O'Brien. Cllr Rory O'Connor?

CLLR O'CONNOR: Thanks very much, Chair. I want to raise three things quickly. First about the new rent-a-room scheme with the council tenants. I wanted to kind of get a lowdown on how that exactly works. What is the council's involvement? Obviously those houses are our houses in a sense, so I want to know, do we do inspections before people can rent them out? And just kind of get the general role of the council around that. Also going forward, if we could have a section within the housing section about the uptake of that scheme, the rent a room, for the council tenants that would be great.

Number two is about the gas and boiler inspection. I saw within the Chief Executive's report that there's only a 60% access rate, which is very, very low, and in my opinion there's going to be an environmental disaster within these houses if they don't allow people to go in and inspect, you know, oil and gas boilers. I was wondering, what do the council have as a strategy to bring this up? I would be very interested to hear. Finally just about the Kilomac(?) and M11 service road. I saw there's some progress in March around that area and I was wondering about the next step with that and how soon we will see that happen?

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr O'Connor. Cllr?

>> Thank you, Cathaoirleach, a couple of questions in relation to housing. I want to commend Joe there and the work he is doing on the housing corporation, but he proposed 75 houses in Arklow which is great; is that in addition to the 100 houses under the PPP he was speaking about last month? If you could just clarify that. Naturally, the more, the merrier, but I would just like that clarified. Then in relation to development levies, the Chief Executive didn't actually mention anything in her report about the development levies and the big change that has occurred in the last month with the deferring of the waiving of levies for the next year? I would just like some clarity on it because the one person who was building a number of houses at the moment has a commencement notice in and has built a number of houses in a small scheme but is asking me will he be able to get some kind of a refund or will he still have to pay for the rest of the houses that haven't commenced yet? There's a few things that need to be clarified like that and if we could get those clarifications it would be appreciated. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Chief Executive?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thanks, I will answer those. I hear what you are saying on that and you mentioned Dublin having dedicated parks and spaces, what they don't have. We will look and see what resourcing needs financing, but that is the difficulty I have. But we will certainly look at it. We'll come in on the LAP process on those properties. In terms of footpath funding, Cllr O'Brien, yes, we're certainly looking at it, and will discuss it in management team. I know we have discussed here in the last date and something that we think is important for the county and looking for a mechanism to find funding and yes, to the IDA to write to them in terms of the skills and the workforce, we are in the process of starting a skills strategy for the county to look at future needs of businesses that are locating within the county and those already in the county and what the pipelined the talent we have, so, obviously we want to do all we can to live in Wicklow and work in Wicklow where possible.

On the development levies, and to the changes of the scheme we got notification on that recently. So anyone who has submitted a commencement notice is will know it is out of the development levies, so to send in the details of the case to look to give a detailed reply of that but the understanding of the letter from the department is that the date of the Cabinet announcement, I think it was commenced in the month before and noting for residential, the properties must be completed by then up to 2024/25. And there will be clarity on that. Breege come in on the LEP, please.

The LAPs, unfortunately, you know, we have been hit by lots of other things, that the forward planning team have had to deal with, the first is the RZLT, we finished that, and now Government is planning to completely amend the planning bill and with that indicating that they may do away with LAPs so we have been looking for clarity in relation to that but all aside, it has not stopped us progressing with the work that we are doing. There were a number of studies required with the LAP, the transport plans and we have to have regard for the URDF or RDF and the LACP and the town centre first initiatives all of which facilitates us to get something in place before we start the consultation process. All of that aside, the team are hoping to start consultations before the summer. So, that is as much as I can say on this. Government and the department keep hitting us with lots of extra stuff to be

delivered, that is why the LAPs have been, you know, we frustrated as well, that we cannot get to them as fast as we would like.

CATHAOIRLEACH:

>> I may ask Michael to come in on the community recognition fund.

MICHAEL: We have 40 playgrounds in the county with the ambition to have one wherever you are in the area, that you are never more than 30 minutes from a playground. We are welcome there. But then we have to maintain them, we are given 5,000 Euros per playground to maintain, it is not enough, we would like more. It is important for insurance properties, and with the smaller places, the MDs do it, there is a small capital replacement fund, it will cover some of the major items if it arises. We appreciate that more money is always needed and maybe to look at that again for the Budget for next year. In the community recognition fund we have applications on the 16th of March. We expected word by now, with considered 6 applications, they are for the community type facilities based on the towns, and the villages that have taken in refugees, and the applications based on the discussions with the MDs. The decisions have been made and that this has not been yet announced so, I will let the members know as soon as I know. So hopefully a good response for the applications and hopefully to hear word this week.

>> It is sheer volume. We are managing in the areas that we are managing in and assisting. It is a matter of moving them on as quickly as we can with the available resources that we have.

The inspections, some are more comprehensive than we would like. A few come back but there is a quick turnover but not always the exception. Relets to the Local Authority units that must be reallocated, the question may have been lost there ... turn keys, relets, turn keys relets, and it is allocated off the scheme of priorities. Does that answer your question? Turn keys coming in, they are allocated, the ones that we are talking about in Greystones are allocated ... sorry, now I understand the confusion ... we allocate, we nominate through bodies, we nominate them, they go through a process, sometimes we would give me, depend on the interview process beforehand to see that the unit is suitable and all of that. So, the relets, as to relet's, yes, currently, we have an allocation for the year, that we will be sending back. It is quite an awkward form to fill in. Again because of the amount of

money involved but we are sending it back to look for significantly extra money that is the case, the money that we have, with the money that the members give together with the ICCs are sufficient for the units on hand, bear in mind that the County Wicklow is looking for further units this year, and we are allocating those and expecting another 80 to 100 relets from the allocations thankfully we would not then have sufficient money so we will be asking for more on that one and filling in the forms for the ones that we are received and asking for more for these ones, an extra 2-3 million on top of what we have already to get the units we will be allocated between the end of the year, circa 100. Bray has the opposite, it has a big supply of 1 and 2 bedrooms and the 3 bedrooms is a problem. So it is the supply that is coming in. [inaudible] with homelessness in there ... and again the transfer, we are cognizant of certain cases, and we, the housing allocation team are aware, and we regard that. There are regular meeting, and there are anomalies as the supply is coming in. Bray has the exact difficulty ... it has, not, it has the limited 3 beds, and we are the exact opposite, we are aware of that but the own units, we are only bringing them in it is 100, so we augment the supply from the private market. Again, that particular case in ... no, it will not work. I will leave that one to go. Again, if there are people with difficulty hardship to make sure we are aware of it, it is important in that regard. The 75, that we have on top of the PPP, it is a Local Authority moving in that case because of in Arklow in the last couple of years ... [inaudible] we have no involvement and information on rent a room scheme we have no involvement with guidelines on that record as all. We have no strategy regarding up ending the inspection rates of 66%, sometimes we found people don't want us in there to look at them. So, we are cajoling if the elected members want to help, we appreciate it. So, on this, we expect more funding [sic].

>> Cllr Rory O'Connor, the service that was completed in 2021, is it a noise mitigation measures, the noise mitigation measures are designed up at the moment, engaging with the residents on the different design options as there are different boundary treatments on the properties. So, one will not fit all, we need a design for each. That is ongoing, we engage with the residents.

We don't, because we have to follow the process asset out by TII, so we are engaging with the residents and doing the design piece and getting the work sorted out.

>> [inaudible]



CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Cllr Lourda Scott in.

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and to the Chief Executive for the report. I wanted to comment on the Morrison's kids' event in Arklow. It was an incredible amount of organisation. And fair play to them, it was brilliant. I note there on page 21, the councillors received 10,000 Euros from the Department of Health for Poverty Project. That was welcome and great to see. Obviously, the council is leading in that to provide free period products in the libraries since 2020, I think or 2021. So, I was wondering if we can have an update on the Chief Executive's report as the money is spend through the communities as across the county, that is welcome to see. A question on the town teams for the generation officer, if the newly appointed officer has had a chance to meet with the town teams across the county to go through the town team's review report done there recently and what the plans are in respect to that. and my final question, it may have been answer, Joe, if it was, you may have to repeat it as I didn't understand the answer. But in relation specifically to allocations in Hawk's Wood and Archer's Wood in Greystones that I sent in a query, it seems to be a delay in allocation, I'm not sure if it is between the approved housing bodies or the council end regarding nominations but it has been flagged there is a delay in the allocations of properties of over 8 months if you can provide clarity on where that delay is, if possible. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Lourda Scott, Cllr Shay Cullen?

CLLR CULLEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

Yes, ... (interruption from the floor.)

CATHAOIRLEACH: Somebody has a mic on, can you please mute it, please.

Sorry, we have to mute this person.

OK.

Now, sorry,

CLLR CULLEN:

Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I wanted to briefly speak on the recent correspondence that my councillor colleague, Cllr Sylvester Bourke spoke to in terms of development levies, waived

April 23 to April 24 and Indies the Irish Waters Connection charges made there. Are questions to be answered around this. In terms of a one-off rural houses, I really welcome this as it is up to about 12,500 in terms of savings for a young couple wanting to or trying to build a house. It is a massive amount of money. We have spoken about this lots of times in the chamber in terms of the exorbitant fees that are the development levies. And indeed, what a rural home actually gets out of paying those fees. So, I very much welcome this. But the questions that I have are around, is this just for rural houses, is it for housing development in terms of the Irish Water Connection charges, where are with that? What is it for, exactly in terms of who is eligible? And indeed, from our own planning department, I think there needs to be a full update when possibly to make people completely aware of exactly what is happening. I have just thought of this for the last hour. I mean somebody was granted planning permission prior to rain 23, in other words February or March who does not have a commencement notice, aren't they entitled to come back in for planning permission and obviously waive the charge in terms of the development contributions as it would be a significant amount of money that would be possibly saved? There are lots of anomalies that may occur in this, I think there needs to be a full explanation in terms of our planning department to know what is the forward planning on this? I think that we are going to have lots of questions from the public going forward.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Shay Cullen. Cllr Stephen Stokes?

CLLR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, in relation to Good Friday opening hours. I had somebody who had lived abroad, and they drove down and the offices from closed. Now, maybe it is standard for Government or County Council buildings, but it was not advertised anywhere, so hopefully a commitment that next year it will be advertised. I looked it up on social media, the website, I called in, there was nothing on there. It may be standard but just so ... and the person didn't mind they had known ... you know, the staff work very hard, so they deserve as much down time as possible. The second thing is, I believe there was an announcement in February of 2023, to be a quarter of a million allocated to the East Coast Green Way between Greystones and County Wicklow Town. So, to see if there is an update from the council in relation to where we are with that particular project.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Stephen Stokes, Cllr Joe Behan?

CLLR BEHAN: To be as brief as I can but an important point made for us by Breege Kilkenny the Director to the planning and the development act, from the point of view of the representation, representative organisations of the association of Irish Local Government they are concerned that the executive has met and discussed the implications for the act, particularly for the members of the public and the public representatives as there are whole scale changes planned to how planning is done in the country in the future. It was a dull committee set up under the Chairmanship of Stephen Matthews, and the bill has landed last Thursday. Among the serious elements of the plan, apart for the implications for the staff, the implications for the members and the public are, to propose that the development plans go from a 6-year cycle to a 10-year cycle so it means once in every ten years to have input into the development of the local area, so a councillor elected for one term of five years may never have a say in what happens in a development plan within their area if it is out of cycle. Another important aspect, as was said, that they are proposing to get rid of local area plans to have strategic plans in certain places in certain counties but not throughout counties nor all of the towns, it has implications for the local people and the landowners and people with an interest in the planning in the areas and the implications for the public representatives which concerns the AILG and other aspects to be mentioned in the future. And it is very, very important. That we are informed about what are the implication, I propose a presentation from Breege or someone from the office to highlight the main, I think there are 800 pages in the Bill, it is a mammoth co-ordination of all previous planning legislation, so it is important for us to be aware of it and important that the public are aware of what is coming down the tracks. We have... [inaudible] at the last number of development plans processes here, about the planning regulator coming in to tell us to change things that we democratically adopted. And the scenarios where the minister is writing letters telling us to change things that we have decided.

What is in this Bill it becomes an Act, is that the minister will be more or less telling us from the beginning what we are aloud put in the plan and what we are not allowed to put in the plan. There will be a planning statement issued by the planning regulator, that with will have to follow and we will not have a choice in the matter. So, the picture is being laid out for us and we have to play on the pitch they give us, rather than we as the public

representatives may want to decide in terms of how our area is planned in the future. It has a huge importance for the people of this county. If possible, I think we should have a detailed presentation and the TDs and the Senators voting on this, no doubt to be rushed through the door before the summer with the excuse that all of the development planning problems are holding up the building of housing, which is rubbish. In fact what has happened is that we try to zone more land for housing and we are pulled back by the department officials, using the shortage of housing to remove powers from the councillors and by extension that the people of the county, it is important that the TDs are aware that we as the public reps and the community at large are concerned about this.

And to go on to a couple of quick points, the N11 to put on record the thanks to the Senior Engineer who has done lots of work. In fairness I would be demanding about the issue. He has done lots of work in working with the local residents. I respect the fact he made a great contribution to this and looking forward to getting on with this. With the N and M11 the minister has put a full stop on letting us upgrade. We had agreed to seek a meeting with the Chief Executive of the TII to bring the case not only for the M/N11 and the M81. And I have yet to hear when we are having the meeting, who is going, so perhaps an indication when that meeting will happen, as to my mind it must happen sooner, rather than later. The final point to make in relation to as mentioned the number of vacancies, there are 119 vacant houses in the county. There are 4,444 people on the housing list. I think it is a disgrace that Government minister, after Government minister is telling us that we are supposed to be filling vacant houses to get them relet when in fact last year they didn't give us the money. In Bray we stopped the work of getting the houses ready for occupation in the middle of the year as in Bray they were so successful at doing that. That is why we have so many. Up to 63 in Bray at the moment.

Like, it is incredible that government speaks out of both sides of the mouth to tell us, get the houses relet but will not give the money to do it. We should insist and support the director in seeking additional funding for the work to be done. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Joe Behan, Cllr Grace McManus?

CLLR MCMANUS: Thank you, for the report. I am looking for update on the housing adaptation grants. I brought it up at the last meeting. I understand there are lots of

applications to get through when we are focusing on priority one. I understand that. But working with the constituents, if they are priority 2 or 3, they are priority 1 for them, I guess, it would make a huge difference. I am struck as it does not seem to be a funding issue as we have not dawn down the funding so I wonder is it a staff issue, that we don't have the tech staff or the volume of the applications, and the backlog, so do we need to look at temporary staffing to deal with that, to deal with the backlog so that we, I would love to see us in a position where we need additional funding and we have dealt with all of the applications that are there.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

Cllr Grace McManus. Chief Executive? CHIEF EXECUTIVE: I think it is great to get kids active in sport. Sorry I could not see you on the day. Regarding to the housing officer, yes, she is in situ due and progressing where there is funding in place. So, meeting with the various town teams around the county. There is lots of work to do, a lot of work and lots of funding opportunities through the various calls for the RDF, one out at the moment for to address vacancy in the town centres and a full roll call to apply for. To clarify on the development levies, there is no time limitation on planning applications. So, anyone that has made or has a planning permission, when they commence or serves a commencement notice from the 25th of April when the announcement was made onwards for a fuel year can levy the waiver. The waiver is on the development contributions and Ishkirin wastewater connections there is no clarity from the department as to how one-off housing relates to the development of 100 residential houses, they are treated the same as we can see from the information that we have. Anyone that receives per in addition in the last year to 18 months, when lodging their commencement in notice so on the 28th of March, onwards this they are eligible for the waiver scheme. The planning team are to meet to look at the circular and to issue a briefing note on the members to give clarity. We had heard something was coming but not sure what, it is not clear how it is intended to function going into the future. But again, it is for a full year, and then all of the buildings to be completed by the 31st of December. In relation to Good Friday opening hours, we are traditionally closed. We can look at notices for the future. We had published a notice at Christmas time like the Christmas hours, so we can look at that, but it is a standard public holiday, not a bank holiday but the offices always closed to my knowledge on that date. Cllr Joe Behan on

the presentation from the planning team, we can do that. There is a lot to get through on the planning bill. It is a huge document, but we can ask the team to do that.

>> The only thing to see, it is a massive amount. We are not in a position to have assimilating it all at this stage. I believe there is training offered to Local Authorities as in the executive over the next Friday, maybe through the OPR and also through the training for the councillors to the AILG, so coming back to you on that. I don't want to promise that we can do that, it is an enormous amount of change. It is what we have done through our RSPC and outlining the information we have been drip-fed. I can organise to get it down and I do believe that at the committee report out last Friday, when we get that information, I will ensure that they circulate it to the councillors, but I would be reluctant to have the team to go through and to make sense of all that is coming down. I know there is a lot of input from the solicitors and the barristers in relation to the changes that may be proposed. It has to go back to the minister and to the Attorney General first, so, I think that even before it goes before the DOR, so lots at play. But as much as the information that we can, we will try to assimilate as quickly as possible I put it in that context, is that OK?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Greenway?

>> Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Cllr Stephen Stokes, with regards to the environmental reports and engaging with the Irish Rail and the NWPS so that is ongoing. And Cllr Joe Behan we are engaging with the regional manager of TII to arrange times for the Wicklow County Council to go to the. TII and pull together the agenda members for the N and M11 and M81, as soon as we have representation to go through. Thank you.

JOE LANE: Aware of the correspondence, a reply is to come on that. But the dates of August, the body was not in possession of the contract issue with that regards. There are nominations, there was not ideal communication and liaison between us and the housing bodies which has now improved. So, we are working together with the regarding of nominations in that particular case. The housing adoption grants, I assume this is the private grants. There should not be so many delays on the public once but the private ones, the main ones are the contractors, we will keep an eye on that. It is something had affects but it is not a systematic fix, it is a whole lot, it is a hard, a slow process, which is subject to suggestions and when we allocate the budgets, we hold on to the budgets. And this can

take time. We have upped the standard price recently which prevents some [inaudible] at least that the schemes will be forwarded and that is a disincentive, but it is all that we can do at the moment. Anything else, come back to us, we will look at where the blocking is at? [sic]

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Peir Leonard? Receive a presentation on the Implementation of the planning. Thank you, Cathaoirleach, thank you for the report from the Chief Executive. A couple of things, the RDF for Arklow, will the local councillors have a chance to input to the allocations that are going into that? If you could, it will be fantastic as we have local knowledge to feed into that and to the relation of the Chief Executive's report, the, I suppose the Wicklow sports partnership are doing great work rolling out skills on the ground to get everyone active but the art stuff, it could be distributed, more geographically. And maybe to roll out a similar scheme to roll out something similar along the lines of arts and crafts it will be fantastic. The skills Task Force, there is lots going on with the Wicklow craft strategy steering group maybe a good idea for them to link in with the skills Task Force as it is closely related and the Wicklow craft strategy to be on Chief Executive's report going forward as we are making great pathways forward and that it will be great to update all on what is happening there. And in relation to the harbour and the port section on page 55. We don't seem to have information on developments for Arklow harbour, the fishermen's huts and the pontoon, there was a maritime development committee that I sat on at the start of my term that seems to have vanished so can a form of that be re-established for our local harbour in Arklow on a more local measure? And there was URDF funding for the harbour originally applied for, can we get an update on that, is it still live? And update on the progress of the fishermen's huts and when they are to come in.

Thank you, Cllr Peir Leonard, Cllr Tom Fortune?

CLLR FORTUNE: Thank you, and, Chief Executive, thank you for the report. A couple of observations and what we have been discussing. The housing adaptation grants we have been allocated recently 1 the 9 million. Maybe it has not hit the system yet, but it has been granted. If we can get a break down of what is outstanding and what we have left to spend, if it can cover the demands that we have? I've been listening to the minister and various ministers, and in the media over recent times, and they are saying that, or minister of housing says that there are plans in place nationwide regarding people made homeless

following the recent changes to the addiction lift. He, he inferred or said, that every county was up to speed, nobody would be left. So, can I get a picture of what the position is here in Wicklow County Council? Are we comfortable that we can deal with that? Or will people fall between the cracks? I think it is important. And if I can make a couple of observations, there is that someone proposed that the IDA come down. I strongly advise that, or propose, that the IDA coming down, that we, as an executive of members and we put together a paper to send the paper to the IDA of exactly what we want to discuss and why we want to discuss it and what we are looking for. If they come down in 2 or 3 times in my time sitting here and it has been a waste of time, a chat, PR, they are gone and then we hear nothing after. So if they come down on that basis, I would not be interested in participating on it. On the LAP, and the councillor Cllr Joe Behan has covered it well. I had comments but he made them better than I can. To make an observation, what Breege said was very important, the things at play, what is going on here, and one of the things at play is that they are perhaps considering getting rid of LAP, as we know it. Maybe it is 10 years, as in the proposal or maybe to get rid of it all together. But what it is doing, in my opinion, it is another attack on local representatives. I think that we as a group here, the 32 of us in the Chamber and those of you participating online, we need to stand up to this. It is getting close to the time when councillors really will be a non-entity, we will have nothing to do. It is happening. I know it is an 800-page document, it will take a long time to do various things with it, but I think it is important that a special team should be put on it here, so we get a 1 or 2 pager to highlight the issues so that we can understand it as it lands. If we don't do that, it will race through the system and we will be told about it, it will be too late. I think that is what needs to be done. If it means allocating others who are not so busy from elsewhere, to do that but to come up with a report to look at it in a simple way to understand what is going on as there is a lot going on and we have not been told about it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Tom Fortune, Cllr John Snell?

CLLR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. To the Chief Executive, thank you for your report and to all of the directors for the input into that report. I have one issue to raise, it is firstly to get update in regard to the CCTV community scheme for Wicklow County Council, it has been discussed here for many years, seeing that I have raised over the last 5-6 years. It is to see where we are at. The reality is that we were promised here at previous meetings over



the years, that each Municipal District and one town will be selected and each of the Municipal Districts to roll out the community scheme. and Bray has had a CCTV scheme up since 2005, and indeed, minister Michael McDowell at the time, launched over 18 years ago, Blessington, thankfully has launched their scheme here only two months ago.

Arklow, again, great for the people of Arklow, that they were able to have their scheme up and running since 2020 and we know there is a lot of planning that goes into this, that is why I raised it here today, to get a full update on where we are at on the scheme in Wicklow town, the Greystones scheme is approved for funding and hopefully Wicklow town is as well. We know that the times have changed significantly in regard to night life in particular, particularly in the county town of County Wicklow, we no longer know everyone that lives in that community. Our towns and our villages have grown at a fast rate. We have lots of new people into the areas.

And the reality is that people want to feel safe.

People want to feel safe in the towns and the villages and Wicklow town is to county town of Wicklow, I believe it should have been one of the first places earmarked for the scheme but for whatever reason it was delayed. So, I would like an update here today. The reality is that some of the constituents feel safer going out at night in Dublin, as opposed to their own local town ... which is not an easy thing to say. And in regard to our elderly people, you know, the fact is that they want to feel safe in the town, they want to be able to go about their business in a county town.

And the reality is that the CCTV will not reduce incidents or antisocial behaviour, but it will not eradicate it, but it will reduce it significantly.

We all know that the Gardai, they need every assistance that they can get, and we have the joint police on board and numerous boards to help up, to help, to assist, to help make the communities feel safer, this is something that we were able to do for our constituents. This Local Authority was able to apply for and I believe to wait after 20 years after Bray have had delivery of theirs, that there is something wrong, so I would like to see Wicklow town addressed as quickly as possible.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Mary Kavanagh?

CLLR KAVANAGH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you to the Chief Executive for her report. And this is more by a way of asking or requesting Wicklow County Council to work hand in hand with Irish Water to address quite a serious problem ... one of the most important things in any harbour town, is the quality of the water.

Last Sunday we had a terrible sewage leak into our local river and a terrible incident. The videos have been going around and photographs and everything. It is really disturbing, the amount of pollutant and sewage that went into the harbour to the point that the harbour was closed for 3 days.

Now, we are lucky we are not in the middle of the summer, in the middle of the tourist season. I understand from having investigated and contacting a number of people about it, that the wastewater is the responsibility of Irish Water. And the surface water is the responsibility of the Wicklow County Council. But really appealing to the Wicklow County Council to make sure that they are trying to keep on top of this by liaising with Irish Water. Because, there is a number of things that have been suggested as a causal factor, one is the pipe work with the large pipes feeding into the smaller pipes and holding tanks that have breached capacity, storm tanks and lack of maintenance at the pumping station whereby screens are not adequately cleaned when they are blocked, which means that everything back-flows into the river. We are lucky in the town to have a sewage treatment plant, Arklow are still waiting for theirs after decades of having a sterile river, one of the nicest in the country, it is sterile, so, there is also Marin life that suffers as well as tourism. As well as leisure activities, such as row, swimming and sailing and all of those other kinds of things.

So, I am really appealing to the Wicklow County Council to liaise with Irish Water to ensure that what needs to be done to locate the causal factor and to treat it, to find the solutions and to try to do it as quickly and as efficiently as possible so the problem is not continuing into the future. Yes, we had a number of issues with this over the last few years.

You know, we really can't afford to have our harbour close down for a number of days. So, it is all that I wanted to say.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Gerry O'Neil?

CLLR O'NEIL: It is on the housing again, Chief Executive, thank you for the report. This is no criticism of the housing staff, I have said these the last 9 years. They work mad hard, they are under ferocious pressure. I wanted to say that. But, this problem, people are trying to contact the housing section, last week it took three days to get through to the housing section. It is not a criticism of the staff, if they cannot answer 2, 3, 5 phone calls at the one time, they can only talk to one person at a time. At the moment, in west Wicklow, thank God we have houses on the way and there are allocation but my phone does not stop ringing with people. But I as an elected rep, and like other elected reps here, we don't know what is going on.

I would ask, maybe, ... I know that we can never be in a position we don't want to be of allocation of houses, but we should be better informed. I can tell you before I was elected 9 years ago, and I knew a lot more of what was going on in County Wicklow with regards housing than I do now! A lot more! In the past, councillors were given a list of the people who were lining up for housing, who were getting houses, and the councillors were asked, asked their opinion on it. That was well worthwhile. There are plenty of issues there that, if the councillor, as I say, it is not up to us to allocate as such but to be informed, where you may have a number 5 or number 6, and where there are neighbours allocated where it is not right. And informed if there is an issue, we had two petrol bombings, that feel would not have happened had we not been consulted. So there is consultation that we need. There are lots of housing goes going up, not only in the Blessington area but in Wicklow County Council in general. I ask again, when I was elected, we would get a monthly report of what the situation was with regards housing in Wicklow County Council, vacant properties, whatever, the whole process, we don't get that now, none whatsoever. I would ask for the housing officer to be appointed for Wicklow County Council with the support. And to help the council and to help us in Wicklow County Council, so, I, again, it is, with regards housing for me, I work well with everyone, when I can, I know that they are under ferocious pressure, let alone the issue with the Ukraine housing and we get lots of direct provision and Ukrainian people in the area, it is a massive amount of work for a small crew. If we can be of help, and through consultation, I really urge that the housing officer should be appointed for west Wicklow. And at the very least we go back, revert back to a monthly report.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Gerry O'Neil. Chief Executive?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

In relation to the RDF for Arklow, Cllr Peir Leonard, it was not successful the last time, so we will look to resubmit it when the call comes again. Any of the big, strategic plans to engage with the councillors of the local area to look where we can get the best from the plans so, certainly to engage with the local members. In relation to the craft strategy, yes, the skills strategy piece of work that is ongoing, it will be engaging with the broader skills forces beyond the craft sector, obviously it is a hugely important sector of employment in the county so we look forward to engaging with the members of that grouping into the future to allow the colleagues to come in on the other questions. The IDA paper, Cllr Tom Fortune, it is a good idea to look at that and see if we can put together a position paper for the IDA. Wicklow is a great, strategic location, so to paint that picture for them. And the benefit of being on the fringe of Dublin but also it is a negative, sometimes, as well as they tend to go further west. Somebody said earlier that they were seeing some areas easier to reach Dublin by. And Brian may come in on the CCTV. The water quality issue and Wicklow town and the harbour, we can raise at that and see what we can do on that. And Cllr Gerry O'Neil, I don't know the level of reporting you had before but the notion of giving lists, or discussing individuals we can't do unless there is a rep made by a councillor, we are not at liberty to discuss individual allocations anymore. What but I will look at the level of reporting that you are getting in the west Wicklow and the other Municipal Districts to see where we can augment what you are seeing at the moment. So, to the arts section and then to Brian on the harbour.

>> The arts officers on all groups in the county are working hard on all areas of social media and certainly to talk to Jenny and put Jenny in touch to try to develop more money for the area. If that is what you are looking for.

>> In relation to the CCTV scheme. You are aware of the way that the scheme operates ... it was not possible for each Municipal District to apply at the one time. It was a staggered process. As you know, Arklow was the first town to get the CCTV, followed by Blessington, then Greystones is in progress. But I'm pleased to inform you that the Wicklow Municipal District has engaged an expert security firm to identify the optimal locations for the

CCTV in the town and the discussions to take place with the council and with the local Chamber as a part of that process. So, we have kicked off, that is the way that it worked. Wicklow was fourth on the list, but the process has kicked off, so, we will keep you informed on that at the Wicklow Municipal District meetings.

>> To come in to answer the question from Cllr Peir Leonard on the fishermen's huts. That tender is in, councillor but the amounts that we are getting are higher than the Budget allowed so we have to do some September on it, so, in relation to the question on Irish Water, when we immediately found out about the contamination, let's say, that was happening in the harbour, from our environmental section, we sent somebody immediately with regards testing to confirm it was Irish Water, we were liaising with them, they have said that they are looking into the systems and that liaising is consistently there.

Thank you.

I think the question is the reconciliation between some of the information that's there and the budgets, I'll have that in the next report and I was just giving some extra information on those and disability grants and others might be better. So we'll just tweak that and do a reconciliation which is, I think, the question you asked.

As regards the homeless question, I'm not going to go into - I'll just give a quick update on where we were because the minutes have a lot of the reporting from last week. I just remembered, of the 101, we received 101 notice to quits and 51 resolutions already sourced, and some of these 101s are spanning up to next October. So the urgency in some cases has already been dealt with. It's a fairly big - it's a multi-team approach, it's not just one solution, so the homeless team are dealing with some elements with the HAP team allocations and the RAS short-term and the new HAPs are kicking in too with the undertaking on that. We've moved ahead with more since and we have a target of 30, we have 13 agreed to today. We have 22 more in progress and we've inquired over another 23. We have a number that aren't progressing but there are solution there is. So again, if the minutes with that information should be updated - if there's anything I can update with, but I think I've given those reports from the minutes. There's nothing new bar there is the value - the value is increasing but on the purchases as the year progresses and on the HAPs we're dealing with the solution. But there are very few where there is no solution in the long-

term, there is no people, there's no extra issues out there. I think that's particularly the nub of the question.

CHAIR: Thank you, director. Cllr Dermot O'Brien.

CLLR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to the Chief Executive for the report. Three things in the report stood out for me, Cathaoirleach, in how they relate to the importance of us being in a position to be responsive to emerging issues. So we see and we get announcements about funding that was applied for that's landed and it's doing great stuff and then when I read the report we get to reflect on the outdoor performance space in Bray which has now been discontinued and that €250,000 which is floating and I don't know where it might land. Then I look at the parking income and I see that Bray - and I'm sure everyone is grateful that Bray sends down 240,000, which is more than all the other MDs combined and a little bit extra on top of that and that is a huge amount of money that's channelling into the council. Then the last thing I see is that there's no - and hasn't since I got elected, there's no town team in Bray. What that relates to for me is an emerging issue in Bray which our colleagues would know, which is the rowing club in Bray, which has been in the town for 88 years and in a building we're custodians of for 22 years and which we have recently condemned. So we have an institution of the town which is in our DNA as a seaside town and it's just really important for me that if we notice and recognise emerging issues, that, fair enough, I can understand why the landlord might give them a deadline and they have to get out of the building because there's liabilities and risk factors there and it is a process we're very quick to formalise some of the procedures and processes but it would be really important for me, Cathaoirleach, to know that we're also quick to be supportive and that we're quick to scan what's available so that an institution like a rowing club in a town doesn't have to feel like now it's in jeopardy and that it will have to scramble before the summer season comes in and have to downgrade what it offers, which is tremendous, between the rowing and the competing, the charity work that the rowing club in Bray does is absolutely off the charts. So it just struck me how important it is for us to be able to be responsive in how we support some of the really institutional organisations in our towns. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr O'Brien. Cllr Patsy Glennon.

CLLR GLENNON: Thank you, I will be brief. I want to follow on from what was said in respect of a meeting with TII. I think it's imperative that that needs to be considered in that meeting

and that meeting shouldn't happen without representation from West Wicklow on the same. I believe it's more acute that the M11 even and I think that was acknowledged today in the chamber so I think it's very important that we're included in same. Finally then I would just like to thank to the people in bridge well for the playground funded with the help of Director Nicholson under the chair of Cllr Pat Kennedy. There are one or two others badly needed in West Wicklow which I will talk to Director Nicholls as well.

CHAIR: Thank you. Cllr Edward Timmins, are you on a train or in-situ in Ireland?

CLLR TIMMINS: Thanks, Chairman, I'm in the car at the moment. Just three points, please. One is the vacant houses that have been referred to there earlier. I asked for this to be included in the manager's report back in December and January and the figure in February was 116 vacant houses and it has now gone up to 166. So that is very concerning. I would have hoped once we started to focus on it that the numbers would drop. Perhaps there's good explanations, but it is concerning that it's up to 166.

Second point, page 45, under the archaeology summary, it refers to a Lidar survey and a presentation done and there was one done on 13 April in Baltinglass and this referred to, and I won't go into it in detail, but it is a massive project and a massive opportunity for tourism all over West Wicklow and it is to do with the hillforts in the Baltinglass vicinity. There is eleven hillforts, and the highest density anywhere else in Ireland is three hillforts, and on top of those eleven hillforts this presentation was extraordinary, there's four or five other measures that it's the number one in Ireland and possibly in Western Europe as regards ancient history in the area and our presentation was helped by [Inaudible] Bronze and it was an extraordinary presentation and it is up on YouTube if people want to view it. I think it is a gem and it is an opportunity, it's in its infancy, there has been archaeological digs there but it's in its infancy to develop a unique tourism product in West Wicklow and the surrounding area.

Thirdly, just the thing I bring up every month for Baltinglass, RDF. Glad to see things are moving along there but can I urge that once we agree the final spec which should happen in the next couple of days that the tender goes out ASAP and we try and get shovels in the ground by late summer? Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Timmins. Chief Executive?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. In relation to, I suppose, the rowing club, I'll get Ms Gallagher to come in there in a moment. Really, we're solution-focused here and I

suppose Lorraine will probably come in with a bit more detail on that for you but just to be assured of that, we are solutions focused on it. The TLI meeting, yes, certainly. West Wicklow, we want representation from West Wicklow, absolutely, it's equally important for me, as Cllr Behan said. The two roads are the arteries of this county, they are the only way in and out of the county and particularly for the people in West Wicklow there's no train service, there's no bus - you know, the bus service is sporadic at the best of times so it's a huge piece of infrastructure that's massively important. The RRDF project, Cllr Timmins, yes, I suppose I'm of the same urgency of yourself, I want to see the tenders out and back and get the team on the ground, whoever is appointed to start the work as soon as possible, because as soon as we start the work, it's a bit of a, "If we build it they will come" scenario and it opens the door back into the department about conversations for further funding for that project. I will ask Lorraine to come in there, please.

LORRAINE: Thanks, Chief Executive. Just in relation to the Bray rowing club we are just as concerned as you are, Cllr O'Brien and the other members here, but I go back to the email we received from the Bray rowing club at that time and we did thank them for bringing it to our attention as landlord of the building. The email said, "As a committee we would like to bring to your attention safety concerns we have in relation to this building," so the rowing club have the concerns as well, "The roof of our clubhouse has severe erosion and is currently a safety risk to us and our members. Last weekend we had an incident where pieces of the roof fell to the ground when members are in the club. Luckily no-one was injured. It is likely that more will fall in the coming months if this issue is not addressed". So obviously when we receive an email like that, we don't ignore it so after that time - and I know you're aware of this - the roof was propped up, there was netting put up, but we did put a timeframe on it of 31 March, to allow for winter training to continue. But as the Chief Executive says, we are looking - we did ask them to confirm that they were no longer using the building so I suppose that prompted another course of action. But we are solution focused. I know they have their strategic plan in terms of going for a new building and we're working with the elected members, who extended their lease for a period of time, so we are committed and I know our team in Bray have a meeting scheduled with them on Wednesday morning. So we'll continue to work with them. But safety is paramount. OK, thanks, thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CHAIR: Thank you.



>> Again, just to go back to this, we are actively managing it with municipals, in the particular cases. But we are and we will be over the next six months watching those. It's not a figure we're quite comfortable with. We want more of them and we will be looking for money for more units. There are a number of capacity issues and timing, just to get the amount of work done, and again, the areas would have limited capacity relative to other functions but we are aware of it. Again, as we're allocating, there will be more units, but that's just a product of our own success. But we don't want those numbers creeping up.

CHAIR: OK, members, thank you very much for that. And just in case someone didn't want to come in there, you can email your questions if you've any questions you've thought of afterwards, OK, and we'll get them answered.

Number eight on the agenda is to receive a presentation from the Mermaid Arts Centre, for its 21st birthday. Julie Kelleher? I don't see the birthday cake, Julie, by the way!

Thank you, Julie.

JULIE KELLEHER: Thank you, good afternoon, everybody, thank you for your time this afternoon. My name is Julie Kelleher, I'm the Artistic Director and CEO of Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray. Mermaid is County Wicklow's creative powerhouse. We're based in Bray, but we have a county-wide outlook. This year we're celebrating 21 years of bringing arts and culture to Wicklow. Our building in Bray houses a 242-seater auditorium, a gallery, a multi-purpose workspace, a cafe and our administrative offices. I think if you set that to play it should roll as we go. That is our auditorium. I might get you to pause at a certain point. Are you going to do them manually. Do you want me to let you know when to do that? Super, OK. You can go to the next slide. That's our auditorium. This is an audience member looking at one of the shows in our gallery earlier this year by Emma Roche and you can take the next one as well, please. And this is an installation last year by Wicklow-based artist Laura Kelly. And one more. Our cafe, and one more again? That's just another view of our front of house space for anybody not already familiar with it. You can hold it there for one sec and I will give you a shout in a sec.

Since 2002, our building has been a celebratory stage for artists and communities locally. Our work connects artists and communities across county Wicklow in exchanging artistic experiences that spark curiosity, delight and debate while fostering pride, pleasure and wellbeing. So what is it that we actually do? You can take the next slide there, please.

We power creativity in Wicklow. So I'd like you to imagine if you can an electric circuit and if you think about artists being one little bit on the circuit and audiences being another, and those energies being funnelled through us, we're sort of the bit that switches on the light, or at least that's how we think about the work that we do. So we create connection by completing the circuit. So we shine a light on exceptional Irish and international artistic talent. That means that we present a diverse programme of cultural events for the public, including visual arts, music, theatre, dance, opera, cinema and the annual YARN Storytelling Festival. These events happen at our building in Bray and around the county so in the last 18 months or so we've had a virtual reality dance performance in Baltinglass, we've had storytelling from celebrated Choctaw Nation elder in Ballywaltrim library, we've had live music and poetry performances from the back of a van at the Abbey grounds in Wicklow and a nursing home and live music and storytelling in nursing homes in Bray and the YARN Festival has presented in pubs in Glenmalure and Lara and Blessington library. Next slide, please.

This is some of those storytelling events I was telling you about and on the bottom left you can see there's some virtual reality performances that happened. And the next one, please? We nurture the development of artistic talent and we work at Mermaid, so we take a programming approach that gets in at the ground level. We offer commissions, bursaries and residencies, so what we mean by that is a combination of offering time, space to work and financial resources to artists year-round through our Mermaid Space programme. Work recently made through that programme has been nominated for national and international awards, and/or is going on to national or international touring opportunities. We champion artists through unique and nationally influential programmes such as our TRANSFORM programme in which professional artists draw a part-time salary as associate members of staff at Mermaid and Gap Day you can see on the slide here which is a national resource programme connecting artists with venues nationwide and paying for them time to dream, think and create. Next slide, please.

So some of this is the work that has been created through the Mermaid Space programme. You can see Wicklow-based artist Fiona Cronin(?) and Michael Murphy(?) on the left there and Annika(?), who is a wonderful musician based in Wicklow as well, who is coming to do research and development with us on the slide above that's Naylor's Cove, a specially commissioned work by Lisa Freeman, and on the bottom is Lost Lear, which is made through

commissioning support from us and will be on tour nationally this year and also touring internationally. Next slide, please, thank you.

Again some of these are more examples of work that was made in the last 12-18 months. Again, national touring and international touring and accolades for each of these, there's three theatre pieces there and a stunning visual arts piece called Mergeemerge. So the third major priority is what Mermaid does is we're a home for local communities to celebrate and spotlight their creativity. We provide facilities for professional groups such as Fighting Words Wicklow and local arts groups from the community such as Wicklow School of Dance among many others. So those groups stage their own events and members of the community take centre stage. So it's kind of the big pitch in the county for some of these events and some of these communities' members. We curate a creative learning programme that offers workshops to encourage people of all ages and abilities to connect with their own creativity, so that might be drawing, it could be dance, it could be creative writing or it could be animation of LEGO bricks, which will be happening in June. Those things happen in-house and they also happen in other community settings such as nursing homes, men's sheds, libraries, churches, community halls and schools and for us this is a major area we're planning to grow over the next number of years for the reason that we feel that that community participation element is really strong or there's real growth there for us. So you can see in some of these pictures here, top left is Tim Tingle, the Choctaw elder I mentioned earlier on. That is in the library. We have young people in the slide on the bottom right doing a movement workshop. On the left is a new dance work being made for children with complex needs by Bray-based artist Jess and up at the top we've got the Earned Wisdom happened that part of the YARN in our multi-purpose space that happened last year. Next slide, please.

So this is just a small example of the many, many young people who come and perform a show and it's kind of high season for that at Mermaid at the moment. We have Bray School of Dance and Action Arts in and many others, so that is an encapsulation.

So a little bit of about how we do all of that. You have an example or a graph there to let you know how our income stream is kind of divided up, so you can see that Wicklow County Council represents - our grant from Wicklow County Council represents about 26% of our income and this year that's €352,000 for which huge thanks. The Arts Council brings about 22% of the income to the overall pie there, that's €300,000, and then the rest of the income

in terms of our projections for this year the remainder is 52% so that's about €720,000 and we're projecting a kind of overall income of €1.3 million this year which is significantly up, I suppose, on recent years because, as most of you will know, we've weathered the most extraordinary period in our history through the pandemic and we are still in recovery mode, though the picture is much, much brighter than it has been in recent years. We'll say that in particular we're working hard to rebuild that earned income stream. So that's box office, ticket sales, rentals and the signs are good - the signs are that that will recover and continue to grow so we're very pleased about that. Next slide, please.

In terms of how we sort of achieve all of those things, we have a dedicated and an exceptionally hard-working team at Mermaid. They're really caring, they really care about what they do, they're very passionate about the mission of the company. We've got six full-time staff and six part-time staff that span the creative and administrative roles and we have a much bigger team of casual workers at box office and front of house and in our technical department as well. The building is programmed, by which we mean we decide what happens about 9-12 months out and that is a combination of shows that we think are brilliant and that we really want to put on and show to the public, it's shows also that have a really wide audience or that might be more commercial in nature that will help us kind of meet our income goals, as well as shows that have more community-faced remit where you see young people having the opportunity to sort of play on the big pitch, as it were. So right now we're focusing on plans for April and May next year as well as in the shorter term working on a bit of a celebration for Mermaid's 21st birthday, which is upcoming. Next slide, please.

This is a question we get asked a lot and I'm sure it's something that people think about a little bit in this chamber as well. We did some research in 2021 and we appointed a consultant to carry out extensive market research with us to learn a little bit more about the answer to this question. So we completed an analysis of our audience database, we did focus groups and we did a survey as well that was typically answered by people who do regularly attend Mermaid. So you can go to the next slide, please, thank you.

So in terms of the data that we saw from our own box office, that was about 16,000 unique households. So we made sure our data was clean and we got a really clear picture of that. What we did was map the postal addresses on our box office system against census data, with the only caveat being that the census data we had available at the time was 2016, so

we are hoping to update that later this year once the new data from last year comes through. So what that told us was in the period 2017 to 2020, 19% of Wicklow households have bought tickets at Mermaid. So that's 9,500 unique households out of nearly 50,000. Next slide, please.

So we'll give you a zoomed in version of this, but basically the darker green the area is, you can see there's 70 or more households from that area coming. So those are small electoral areas in the map. So ten years ago, you can see that's actually stretching all the way down to Arklow, so 10 years ago the green on this map only really went past Greystones. So we can see that the impact of housing and population shift south towards Wicklow Arklow and even Gorey is having a difference in terms of where our audiences are coming from. So you can see in the slightly closer detail there and the next one, please. This is a map of the drive times. So the red is 15 minutes' drive time and it goes out to up to an hour. So you can see part of the county falls outside an hour's drive time and if we map that against that, you can see basically that most of our audiences are coming from within a 30-minute drive time, basically, which, you know, we sort of have a sense, but it's useful for us to kind of get a bit more clarity about that and as I say we hope to update that with more current data from the new census. But the majority of our audience do come from within that 30-minute kind of catchment which, you know, I hear you talking about roads this afternoon, but it's a real artery to us in terms of people getting access to the work we put on as well in the centre. You can also see obviously that, you know, with the mountains in the centre of the county and the road network that has an impact on the drive time as well and that for people living in West Wicklow those things are real impediments. So from our point of view, impediments to getting to us, so one of the things we try to do is put work out in the other direction, so it means programming events in libraries and schools where we can.

So next slide, please, thank you. Why do we do all of this? Our purpose is driven by a fundamental belief in the power of shared experience and connection to guard against isolation and loneliness and the belief in the right to freedom of artistic expression and creation for all. Mermaid was established, built and funded by Wicklow County Council to deliver on this purpose and we will continue to do so, but only with your ongoing support. As a person who's not from Wicklow at all I consider Mermaid to be a jewel in the crown of Wicklow's public resources and it is an exemplary organisation in the context of arts centres

working nationally and funded by the Arts Council. So I really hope that this chamber can take great pride in its support for our work in this special birthday year for us.

In summary, what we think makes us special is that we see ourselves as a safe channel for artists making new work and for audiences who want to seek out that magic moment of shared experiences. So in their own words, they say - the artists whose work we make have been telling us that initiative likes Gap Day and TRANSFORM have been a real spark in reigniting my creative energy or a profound experience for my creative spirit. Next slide, please. Audiences who wish to experience new and exciting contemporary art tell us that having a local arts centre with rich, varied and affordable programming near to them improves their overall sense of wellbeing and reinforces their sense of local pride. It tells them that they live in a great community. Next slide, please.

Much of the work we do focuses on young people, children with complex needs, older people and others who can't come to the venue to access their creativity. This is a picture from the venue, but we work very closely with the Bray-based artist called Anna Newell who specifically makes work for tiny babies, young people and for young children with complex needs up to teen years. I want to tell you just a tiny bit about a show called GROOVE, which was developed with the students at St Catherine's Special School in Greystones with students, the students who have complex needs who attend that school and it went on to tour nationally but it comes back to Wicklow frequently and here is what the principal of the Marino Community Special School had to say about that experience. She said, "Thank you all so much for bringing your magical GROOVE performance to Marino School and for allowing us to join in a unique experience of music, light, movement and music. We enjoyed the soft dances and calm music in a colourful and calming environment. Your combination of stimuli encouraged meaningful engagement from our students as a form of self-expression and contentment. The GROOVE performances were very exciting, inclusive, dramatic experiences, which enabled participation from all students at their own ability level. Thank you for enabling our students to access theatre and drama in a meaningful way. The true success of the GROOVE project is how you as artists made theatre accessible and enjoyable for our cohort of students with complex needs. Keep up your fantastic work, you're all amazing and bring so much awareness and enjoyment into our lives". So that is a very powerful testimonial we think to the power of making sure that everybody can have access

to that creativity and those artistic experiences and that, above all, is the thing that we're focused on.

In this birthday year we're hoping to make a weekend of free programming available to the community so that people can come and have a good time on us, as it were. We certainly are seeking some additional support around that and I know Michael has been listening to us around the board table talk about that as well. One of the other things that we'd really like to do is investigate ways to make some of our ticketing a little bit more affordable, so that we can really make sure that we're reaching everybody in the community and that everybody in the community has an opportunity to have experiences that kind of brighten up your day, like we can see this little lad here in the picture. Thank you so much for your time today.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Julie. I'm going to open up the floor, if anybody has any questions? Cllr Melanie Corrigan?

>> I am well aware as I sit on the board you came in before COVID hit, an extremely challenging time. Congratulations to you and to the team, working through it, turning it around, to use the space to be creative and to think outside of the box. It must have been a stressful time for you as it has been for everybody but you worked so hard on it. The work you are doing is amazing to reach out to the communities, the work with the Lakers, I know they are busy getting ready for the show, next month, it is a highlight of the year for them and with the children and the other programmes you have done with St Catherine's and it is really thinking outside of the box. I know with the Nature Festival in Glen Cree and the work in the community, county-wide, well done. It has been a pleasure to work with you. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr D O'Brien?

CLLR O'BRIEN: It is remiss of me not to mention councillor, Anne Ferris who, is a huge supporter of the Mermaid Arts Centre, I would like to wish you every success and happy birthday.

CLLR CRONIN: Thank you very much for the presentation. It is great to hear of the work you are doing. Just a point I would like to raise ... just looking at the statistics of the communities you reach out to, and to the people that visit Mermaid Arts Centre from

around the county, I am from Dunlavin in West Wicklow, a distance to Bray but I think there is an opportunity to open doors or to start communications with the schools in the west Wicklow area. I know that Melanie has spoken to me many times about the work you do, in particular in relation to the group that you mentioned there earlier, the Lakers! I think there is an opportunity to open up to other areas of the county. Have you plans to reach out to maybe the more rural areas? Or indeed, other school, maybe the area or those with additional needs? I know that we have a number of schools in West Wicklow that have classes for people with additional need, maybe nice to get them involved. It is a counterparty wide agenda but maybe an opportunity to reach into the wider area, if it is something that you will be looking into, if there are plans there for the future, if not, if it is something to consider?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. There are a couple more people that is OK, Julie. Cllr Aoife Flynn-Kennedy.

CLLR KENNEDY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and thank you, I have had the presentation of being in the Mermaid, many, many time, I know that you have been doing amazing work, not just with the arts but with the community and the opportunity to do other stuff, the question is for more Wicklow County Council and yourself, I know a number of years ago we looked to the option of making a gender neutral accessible toilet in the premises, there are accessible toilets within the male and the female but better if it is gender neutral and accessible. Delighted to see outlined the funding, as obviously when it comes to Budgeting, people are always to look at different funding options and with the presentation you can see it is bread across the county. I acknowledge the points that Cllr Avril Cronin has made but you can see the growth, it is spreading out and you are active in the schools across the county. Which is fantastic to see. So if there is an option to look at physical, capital work, to support the work that you are doing already. Thank you for that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Aoife Flynn-Kennedy, Cllr Lourda Scott?

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you for the lovely presentation, it is brilliant to see. And somebody said great to see positive news in here for a change! I had a question, similar to my colleague in the west of Wicklow, I am a little surprised, as I'm from the Greystones district, and only that there are 25% of the statistics, that with the good transport links to Bray. So wondering what are your thoughts on that? We have often had the discussion at district level about what an artistic community we do have locally and the need to develop our own



presentation, the facility, if we can better link in with the Mermaid Arts Centre, it has surprised me with the statistics being so low.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Peir Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: Hi Julie, lovely to connect with you, I'm in Arklow, we have a HUGE creative community here. Again, I don't want to detract from any of your finances up there, I want to double it! We need platforms like the Mermaid Arts Centre for the artists that are coming up along the ladder, the platforms to get them into the wider world. So it is really important to sustain the new and to keep the money there to support you and to try to get more from Government as well. I would like to connect with you a little more to see how we can bridge the gap out into the wider communities of how we can learn from you, you mentioned a share knowledge, it is one of the biggest things that I gained experience of, is that shared artist knowledge and how to support one another when applying for funding, simple things that don't cost a lot but by connecting everybody we can connect the pieces of the jigsaw to make us a bigger powerhouse. I would love to connect with you later on. Thank you to Michael. I know, for all of the good work his department does in sustaining the arts. And when you see the money going into the roads across the county and the concrete, I think if we had more of a proportion of that into the arts, we would have a fantastic county. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Peir Leonard. Cllr Erica Doyle?

CLLR DOYLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Thank you, Julie for that, as Cathaoirleach and the as a Board member of the Mermaid, a big happy birthday. Julie came into the job as a particularly difficult time. The impact of COVID on us all and on the artistic community was intense. Their whole livelihood was wiped away overnight and Julie with the staff had to are build, almost, and she has done immense work and continues to do so.

Just to point out on the positioning, I suppose, the geographical position of the Mermaid Arts Centre, it is a Wicklow art centre, it has to go somewhere. But from being at the Board meetings from listening to the discussions there is a lot of talk about how to reach out to the other areas of the county. The Mermaid wants more contact with the other areas of the county. Crying out for it. So anyone with ideas or suggestions that I think that Julie and the team will be delighted to hear them, to work on anything that people are saying, it is absolutely something that the Mermaid wants and needs.

Just to say as well, I think steams people see the theatre space and the Mermaid and Julie outlined it beautifully, it is so much more than that, I live in Bray so I have the privilege to walk to the Mermaid, to a show and to walk home. It is a huge advantage, it is why the bigger figures from people of Bray but it is a part of our community. I would love to see it extended. As Cllr Aoife Flynn-Kennedy has said, as her children have been on the stage, as have mine and I've had the privilege of opening exhibitions for artists who are friends of mine in the upstairs gallery. The downstairs can be a band one night, a film the next, or a workshop for children the next. The visits from the school, the children come from Bray but I see no reason why others can't jump on the Dart. I know maybe that the infrastructure has to catch up a little bit but that is something that they are working on. So to reiterate the full support that is needed. Sometimes when things are tough, there is the human instinct to side-line things or to make a hierarchy of things that are more or less important but things can coexist and the arts is definitely something that does and should coexist for all of our sake, as it is encompassing a wide range of different things and the human experience. So, thank you to Julie.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Erica Doyle, Cllr D O'Brien?

CLLR O'BRIEN: Quickly again, a brilliant presentation. I think, as Cllr Erica Doyle said we should never underestimate how important the arts is, to hear that even though that little one-liner - to create, what is it, a shared experience a connection, the basic human need, to fulfil a basic human need in creative way, it is magical. I was there in the cafe and I bumped into an artist there for a gap day, I thought maybe we could swing a gap day there, and get heads together. So, I would love to hear more about that. It is unbelievable to hear that an artist can take a day and get paid to be there and a little on that would be amazing and the yarn, that is one of my favourite life goals is to tell a story at the Yarn Festival. And at this stage, if not European, or world-renown for the quality of what it is, and what it does. Thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr D O'Brien, Cllr Grace McManus?

CLLR MCMANUS: To ask a couple of questions to add to that, I am struck by the amount of stuff that happens ... hats off to you for managing all of that.

And as the councillors were saying that was making me think, am I right in says that you offer the residencies to the artists to develop a practice? The impact of that can be measured in terms of going a show. An artist that I listen to, and I listen to her as I travel, so

we don't know the full impact of the venue if you are offering residencies and where the art travels to, so that is really important also to remember.

I am curious about have you been impacted by the increasing costs of heating and the electricity? Is it a challenge that you face at moment? Somehow that picture looking for you. And certainly, I will leave here feeling inspired by your presentation and I appreciate you taking the time, as clearly a lot of time went into it. Thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Grace McManus. Cllr John Mullen?

CLLR MULLEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and thank you for a fantastic presentation.

I suppose, again, like my colleagues who have spoken from the West, I am from Tinahely, and I wonder on a question basis, do you collaborate at all with Tinahely? That may help improve the statistics, I know that you have proved the statistics to help the funding to help to secure more funding, I know from the point of view of Tinahely and Carnew and other places, that there are huge art activities within the area, that we would love to collaborate with you in the future. So hopefully we can do that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Julie, a number of questions there, if you can take a stab at it.

JULIE: To say with regards to west Wicklow and done Lavon we trying to expand the capacity to have the conversations and to improve the ling, the same for Arklow and for Tinahely. We are limited by the manpower. Some of it is having that conversation. So I would be excited to put people in touch and to build on that. It is not really that difficult as all, actually. We really want to do that bit of turning the switch on. So, we will follow-up, certainly with Cllr Avril Cronin and with Cllr Peir Leonard in relation to Arklow and to say on Tinahely, we do collaborate on occasion in particular with R&D with artists, and Ali Clarke is one and a dance artist and so, maybe I need to pick up with the new successor there and I will do that for sure. In relation to the percentage of people coming from Greystones, the figures are based on 2017 to 2020, I not entirely sure what the picture is looking like now and the persons have gone a little wonky, frankly, post pandemic and we are seeing them re-established, so the arthouse cinema took a while to stabilise there. I am conscious that The Whale is operating there, there is a strong cultural community at work in Greystones, we have a good working relationship with The Whale and we try hard not to duplicate the programming so that if there is a commuting of people coming to us, that people don't double up if you understand what I mean so there is a good working relationship. So that is

an emerging level that will evolve so it will be interesting to see what the data comes back with when we do that exercise again later this year.

In terms of gap days ... Gap Day it was a reason I wanted to come to work at the Mermaid Arts Centre because of what it says about the value of artists taking the time to think. Most artists are not arriving with a full-time income from their work. From their art work. They are typically doing a bunch of other things to make ends meet. They are teaching classes or they are doing other service industry jobs, which is why as we know during the pandemic it was challenging for people to make a living.

What Gap Day does is to say to the artist ... it is OK to stop for a day, to come in and to focus and to get paid to focus on your planning for your art work.

We think that is a politically important thing to say. In terms of what it means, the value of the labour that artists do.

That programme has been existence since 2015, there have been seven iterations in eight years and we are gearing up for the next iteration in the autumn. But it has, from, it has had influence, right across the sector in terms of building relationships with independent artists around the country and in saying to artist, particularly who are new on the scene that A you don't have to work for free, B your labour is value and we do it by practicing it. So the funds coming from the Arts Council. We spend about 40,000 Euros a year on the programme.

This, the most recent iteration we supported 42 artists to take about 120 gap days around the country. So the vast amount of resources go to the artists pockets but beyond the financial bit, what it does is to endorse what they do, and the value of their labour. That is the real impact that we see that is having. And you are right, in terms of the R&D work we do, it is really hard to measure it. So, we do, we can only do lots of talking about it.

And we are trying to get a little better at trying to tell that story. And let people see that work happening. So typically in July and August much of the Mermaid time in the auditorium is given over to the research and the development work that may take 18-24 months to come to a fruition but one of the things that art can really do well is investing in that time. It is slower, it is a different tack to other kind of daily life but we feel it is important to ensure there is a space for that. In terms of declaration of ambitions for the Yarn storytelling I will be speaking to the art curator soon to flag that with her. It is really important to make the space for the members of the community to contribute to that.

Thank you. Did I miss anyone out? Thank you for the request for the extra capital resource,

we would absolutely ... yeah ... the building is 21 years old. It is getting a little tired. We could do with that additional support and in relation to utility increases it hit with the increase of funds this year from the Wicklow County Council we were protected against that, as with some of the department schemes that are coming through, so we are stewarding it ... stewarding the resources and that Budget accordingly, it means we may not stretch out to do new things as paying attention to that but in the schemes of the crises in terms of what we have been doing in the last few years, the increase in the heating bills does not feel the worst thing that has happened to us.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Julie thank you very much for the presentation and for the question, best of luck for the next 21 years but I am sure we will be seeing you shortly. Thank you very much. Members, to receive a presentation, Personal Safety for Elected Members from Sergeant John Fitzpatrick.

JOHN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I am conscious that I am one of the last people to attend today. You have had a large body of work. I ask for your attention as my presentation will hopefully, maybe one day, make a difference to your safety, or indeed your life.

Being conscious of the afternoon you have had, I will start with a quick ice breaker by a way of a question to the council. The question is: What happens when a member of the Garda goes to bed? They become an undercover cop! But I do have similarity to the Mermaid, that is that I am based in Bray but, like the Mermaid, I do have a Wicklow-wide remit.

I, is somebody going to do the slides, thank you? Thank you, so to the first slide. So, my position is known as the CPO and the Gardai love acronyms, so, you never hear Crime Prevention Officer, so it is CPO, so, it is the crime prevention officer and I'm in the Wicklow Garda Division, here to provide home security advice to people and to groups, to buildings and to businesses. The reason that I say that to you is that you can advise your constituents, that I am available and I am happy to engage with people and talk to people and give advice whether in person or over the phone. I am here to help.

I am here to talk to any group.

I should say, that after the last meeting, my name was reported as Sergeant John Gill who retired a number of years ago but I am Sergeant John Fitzpatrick, to clarify.

So, there will be overlap from the last time I was here but tried to limit that as much as possible. Something to draw attention to, the AILG report of 21, you should have a look at

that if you are not already familiar. It was a report that spoke to councillors about their own experiences as councillors around their own safety.

So, it was councillors who were interviewed and the councillors who gave the feedback.

And the statistics are quite frightening. So they got 60% of them experienced abuse over social media in particular.

33% of them had face-to-face abuse.

36% had threats of violence to them.

That is from a total of 223 responses from councillors across the county. So an interesting report. I have it and I can send it on to anyone who would like to look at that or to send it to the down here but I do advise you to flick through it, it is sobering reading. So, moving on, that was the report in 21, that is the report in 2023. So what is happening here? In 2023 we have seen, you could call it a threat but seen a different league of activities to give rise to any councillor here, that is where people of all political persuasions are targeted to have summer form of protest or type of direction action taken against them, recently Paul Murphy, from the TV, they are protesting outside of his house. At the time they were protesting his wife had shortly returned from the hospital with a young child. They were trying to bathe the child at the time, he could not understand why they were out outside of his house and it has happened in the county, where people have chosen to directly target elected representatives within the county, so it is happening to be aware of it and to consider what to do if it happens to you people choose to protest outside of your house? And don't forget, at present people do have a lawful right, a constitutional right to engage in protest, there is a discussion in changing laws in relation to representative's homes but at present there is no law being broken if people do that, so to bear that in mind as well.

This is a councillor, Laois Fine Gael after tweeting about council house tents, so to be mindful what you put on social media can lead to action against you and to death threats. She made a comment in relation to some people who were in council housing having never worked in their live, that type of thing and then received a number of threats. Indeed our own Cathaoirleach here at the last meeting re-counted a story to councillor Ainsley he had gotten a smack in the jaw. And if I recollect it was over a one-way road, I think that I am in correct in that?

CATHAOIRLEACH: It is Ansley to clear that up. It was a planning matter. Is what it was. Yes, there was abuse about the system. But I wanted to clarify that.

>> Councillor Ansley, I do stand corrected. So the reason I put the picture there is to illustrate to council members it can be anything, any matter, something minor or major that will cause a reaction, OK. That is what you must be mindful of, you don't know what exactly it is that causes the reaction, so to be mindful. I suppose that I want you to be particularly mindful if your party or you as the individual are engaged in something that is controversial within your locality, within the district or within the county that you may be targeted for that reason.

So, one thing to remind you, I did say this the last time. That bad behaviour is not acceptable. Doing nothing about behaviour is not acceptable either as councillors. So, you should report it. At the very least report it to somebody, particularly a member that somebody has come in and done something that causes a threat to you and make it clear to whoever it is to the client or to the constituent that the behaviour is not acceptable, and it will not be tolerated whatever it is but to do something. And to learn to read people's body languages, you as councillors are good to read a person's body language, that comes with the territory, so to look out for a combination of signs that go to maybe heightening your awareness and to thinking that there may be something off, OK? Do not forget, you can always ring 999 or 112 in any emergency, wherever you are in the county.

So, things to look for, exaggerated hand and arm movements, if somebody is coming into the office, to the home, and giving it loads, staring you in the face intensely, the 1,000-mile stare, moving into your personal space. They will not move back, they are standing close, if they are saying things out of context from the meeting you are in, things that don't make sense to you or anyone in the room or repeating it over and over again, they are warning signs that there is something more going on here, that you must think about your safety, maybe to think about ringing somebody for assistance, either ourselves or another agency and in these circumstances, there may be a threat. That normally a people, councillors are really good at body language, so to be careful of these signs and be prepared to do something about it. It could be something like having a look around the room. Thinking to yourself, if things go wrong here, how to get out of this predicament, how to extract myself from the room safely, what to do? Is there an obstacle in the way? Where is the closest door? That type of thing, nothing dramatic but to be conscious about your safety and the environment you are in.

Home visits. I would recommend against home visits.

I know that it may not be possible for you as councillor but I strongly recommend against it. We see from the meeting today we have people online and people are now used to having meetings online, a meeting can be carried out over a telephone, what's yap, Zoom, and email, do you have to go to someone else's house? I would say no. Can you go somewhere public, you will have the safety there. So that is things to consider. If you think there is something controversial about the meeting or you are not sure about the person or have a bad feeling about this person, to ensure that somebody knows where you are. Particularly late at night, where you are, when you will be home, that sort of thing. It is common sense but are you doing these things? Letting people know where you are, letting somebody in the office or at the home, to let them know when you are back, I would say probably not but they are things to consider. And as alluded to, to carry out a mini risk assessment of a property or a room that you are in, to look where are the fire escapes, the exit, where to go to get out of trouble. It can be a glance around the room to note the quickest way to the exit. It is something that with practice, you will get used to it. The other party in the room may not be aware you are doing and should not be aware that you are doing it.

So, advise against having callers in the home.

Again, it's something with a little bit of practice you get used to it and the other party in the room may not even be aware you're doing it and should not be aware you're doing it.

Again, I would advise against having callers to your home and again that's up to your personal preference as councillors. Obviously if somebody is very, very well known to you that is a different manner of thing. But again, I would advise - you should be advising people to contact you by telephone, email or through your clinics or whatever outreach you have in your constituency, OK? Most people are familiar with making appointments to see people in an office or their place of work, they don't necessarily go to your home to see people and that shouldn't cause any offence to people, OK? I would especially be warned against unexpected callers or people who cold call to your house or unexpected visitors, OK, and they should be encouraged to make appointments to see you, OK. But again you are the best judges of that but again, I would advise against not letting, as I said, cold callers, unexpected callers, into your house, particularly late at night.

So home security. Look, do think about your home security and particularly if you're going to let people into your house you should be thinking about upping your security a bit OK and carrying out a formal risk assessment of your house. I said it before, the Garda website is a



good place to start and have a look at the security checklist challenge, I can supply that to anyone who wants it, it is a good guide for anyone and goes through step by step what you should be looking at in your house and for any constituents it is a good place to start as well. As a bare minimum, OK, as a bare minimum as councillors, you should be saying for your office or your home you should be looking at a monitored alarm and by a monitored alarm I mean if the alarm goes off somebody knows it's going off and they are going to do something about it. So they are going to ring you or ring somebody. A freestanding alarm that just rings is not good enough - you should be having a monitored alarm where if something happens there is a response at the office, OK? Think about lights and CCTV and particularly for an office you should have some type of audio CCTV system at your door so you can see who's there and communicate with them. I can give you more advice, a call to your office if you want to, and I'm happy to do that, call to your office or house and have a look around and give you advice and there is talk about a grant coming on scheme or whatever but as I said at the bare minimum a monitored alarm, good lighting and good CCTV, OK?

OK, for your office, if you have an office in any of the different towns around the county, you should be thinking about these things. What are you going to do if you get a bomb threat? What if you get threatening phone calls or emails? What do you do if a suspect package arrives at your office? What if somebody comes in and they are aggressive in the office and they are threatening staff in your office, what are you going to do? These are things you need to think about, because these are the types of things that are happening and have happened and have happened in this county, and these are things you need to be thinking about, as employers you need to be taking action on them as well.

OK, so this is another example again. This is a councillor, she is in Duleek, she had her office firebombed, OK? She had her office firebombed because she spoke out about drug dealing in the county. So you don't know what's going to happen and again you do not know what it is that you may be saying that's going to cause an issue. But I just wanted to highlight here that these things are happening around the county, OK, or around the country, I should say. So office security, OK, so do you have a plan in your constituency office outlining what you're going to do in the event of an emergency? Have you reviewed the plan and do you test it? Have you done fire drills, escape drills, that type of thing? Do staff know how to use CCTV in the office, do they know how to record it, activate, are they aware of the escape

procedures, OK, for those types of things? Are staff aware of safety protocols and again, as I said, if you're gone longer than expected is somebody going to check on you just to find out where you are, OK? And sometimes there's no harm to have a safety phrase where it could be where you might be under some type of duress where you want to tell somebody else that you are in trouble but you don't want to alert the people in the room with you or whatever. So you can agree that yourselves and, importantly, do you have a risk register for your office, OK? And this is something maybe you could use at your house as well, depending how much work you do in your house or if you have a home office. What are you going to do if a protester arrives at your office or at a meeting you're at? What are you going to do if there's an unannounced protest or people actually let you know they are going to be there, what are you going to do? If you get bomb threats, abusive phone calls, if you get suspect mail in the post? Have you thought about those things, what are you going to do? Is there somebody working for you, if any of those things happen to them what are they going to do and do you have a register of procedures you can follow? I can advise you on that if you want to go down that road but there are things you definitely should be thinking about, particularly about protesters, unannounced protesters, somebody who has a sit-down protest in your house, in your driveway, in your home office around the back of the house, whatever it is, in the constituency clinic in the parish hall, somebody comes in unannounced and decides to have a sit-down protest with a group of other people, what are you going to do in those circumstances? Somebody sends you a suspect letter, you think there's something unusual about it, do your staff know what to do? They are things you need to think about.

I will spend a bit of time talking about social media because in that ALLG report there is a feedback around people on social media and the type of abuse they're receiving, OK? I said this before and you should familiarise yourselves with platforms and social media has become very important in relation to politics in particular, and I suppose getting your message out there, OK, so you should be confident, you should know how to use Twitter and TikTok, even if you're not on it, and get familiar with it, have a look at it, see what it's like. Do you know how to turn it on and off, do you know how to switch on privacy controls, Instagram, Facebook, all of those things, you should be up-to-date with them OK, and it is a bit of work but you should know how to block people and report people and you should know the privacy settings on each of those platforms, OK. Do you know how to record or

screenshot abusive messages? How are you going to record abusive messages so you can show them to someone like me? Do you know how to do that or do you have somebody that can do that stuff for you? You should report online abuse and you should be aware of social media sentiments, OK, and again, I'll go back to what I said - if your party or you as an individual councillor are involved in particularly controversial things you should be aware that there may be a backlash, you may get threats, whatever, and you should be recording them, you know, or you should know how to record them if there's somebody particularly vitriolic you should know how to block them so that they can't issue threats to you, whatever, yes.

OK, the other thing you should realise is that online abuse is traumatising and it does have quite a devastating effect on people, OK, and it can be very emotional and people take it personally. The other thing is, if you're getting a lot of trolling or negative commentary on social media, it's actually counter-intuitively, it's very hard to stop looking at it. So even if people are getting a lot of abuse or negative feedback, they will keep looking at it and that obviously spirals into their mental health and affects them. So if you know people in those circumstances or you experience it yourself, do seek support from either friends or colleagues, and take a break from social media. If you're on it in your political paths, take a break from it, OK. You should document any online abuse, that might help you just realise patterns or you should also document the personal impact that it's having on you, that might be useful for us. Again, don't forget if you block users that's going to stop them from seeing your posts, and if you encourage other people that you know, whether it be friends, family, supporters, to report people that are being abusive or threatening towards you online, normally what happens is the more reports that a social media platform receives the quicker they are to react and take it down. So if you can get buy-in from family and friends to report it, particularly if it's a vitriolic poster, normally that's how it works and it gets taken down. There is a very good charity in the UK called the Glitch charity, I recommend you have a look for them. They do give very good advice in relation to dealing with social media issues and social media abuse and that type of thing.

The other thing I want to really emphasise to you, OK, is that abuse on social media is one thing but abuse on social media does seep into real life and it can cross that boundary from the internet into real life and this is social demonstrate accurately TD Holly Cairns and she has said a number of times she would not have run for office if she realised the amount of

social media abuse she would get on a daily basis and people have turned up at her house starting off abusing her online and then turning up at her house abusing her face-to-face. So do just be cautious that if somebody's abusing you online it can escalate into an offline exchange.

So as I said, it can be linked to offline abuse, OK. Do think about your safety with online abuse, OK, particularly if somebody's mentioning specific locations where you are going to be or specific times and dates. If they seem to have an unusual interest in you or an unusual amount of personal information about you, well then you should be concerned and you should be thinking about contacting ourselves at the Garda Síochána, OK? If the abuse is escalating from a certain person online again you should be thinking about contacting ourselves because that's normally an indication that there might be a crossover from internet into the real world, OK? What I would say, as much as possible, and I know this might be difficult for councillors, but try and avoid sharing your location in any posts while you're actually there at the time, OK? You can obviously report it and you may want to report it afterwards, but when you're actually there, be careful and please don't ever take photos that reveal any home details or any specifics about your home and post them online, OK? What happened with Holly Cairns at TUD she was getting abuse from a particular person online and that person persistently started turning up at her house and began stalking her, OK, so there is a crossover. We also know that Jennifer Carroll TD, she had a similar type of issue again not that long ago. So these things do translate so you do need to be aware of them.

So that's my presentation. I will take any questions that you have. Look at Garda, it is a great resource for your safety. You can contact me at my email and I'll supply my phone number and details to the council officials for anyone who wants it. As I said I'm happy to talk to any of your constituents, people across the county, and advise, and I would ask you, please, as councillors, you know, you are subject to more threats, more abuse than ever before unfortunately. I don't know what's happening in our society but there definitely seems to be people targeting councillors and elected officials and that type of thing so please take your personal safety seriously. Think about the things I said - simple steps, just be alert, be aware of your environment, let somebody know where you are and when you will be back. As I said, consider the basics at home or at the office if you have one, a monitored alarm, good lighting and good CCTV. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Sergeant. Cllr Paul O'Brien.

CLLR O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you Sergeant John Fitzpatrick for that presentation. It's eye-opening and something I never thought I would have to sit there to be quite honest with you and I think it is a sad indictment that we've got to this stage in our society that presentations I would say the first in the history of this council, maybe I'm wrong, I'm only here four years, but that we've had to sit through it. In my former career I was a referee, I refereed for 25 years and we never had to have a presentation like that. So I do take it very serious. I've spoken on this issue on a number of occasions, not just in this chamber but outside it and on the radio as well and it comes as no surprise to me that 60% of abuse is on social media, because I'll put it on the record here and I don't like to be negative but they are cowards. It's easy to sit behind a keyboard and say what they want about you and when I've brought it up before, myself and Cllr Mullen here, brought in a charter for us to regulate our own social media accounts, because I believe in accountability and this all had to stem from somewhere, you know. We can blame America, we can blame Trump, we can blame everyone but ourselves, but the thought lies with some politicians in themselves for riling it up. If you look at my own social media I've always tried to be constructive and positive. That hasn't always been reciprocated and my colleagues here will testify that I don't always agree with them, but at least I'll say to their face here and not go onto social media and rile my supporters up to go after them. So I condemn wholeheartedly hate speech. I've been - I don't want to say the victim of it because I am not a victim but I've certainly been slandered and I have been down - you know, when your social life, your sexual orientation, your colour, your weight, whatever, your gender, everything is thrown at you - everything is thrown at you and we've had meetings here earlier on this morning where we're trying to encourage people, especially females, into politics. Who in their right mind would come into politics at the moment with the abuse we are getting? We got a pay rise there about a year and a half ago and I was actually asked what our basic salary is, they couldn't believe the salary we are on for the abuse we get and most of us here are doing it full-time at the moment because it is a full-time role. We're about to enter silly season now in the next year and we have a local election on the way and I can guarantee that no matter what presentation is here today, we're going to get abuse left, right and centre by people who think they're doing the right thing because they're abusing us to promote their own candidates. So I would ask for a bit of civility and 99.9% of politicians do engage in civility -

it's the ones that rile it up I think I have an issue with because they're putting us all in danger and people feel they have to retaliate and it's not the way it should be done. I'm a democrat first and foremost and I believe in free speech because there comes a time where we have to distinguish between free speech and hate speech and there has been that line crossed and I just think that's wrong. I've been told that if I'm not able for the heat get out of the kitchen. I'm well able for the heat but I'm not going to be ran out of the kitchen because I want to serve my constituents, my county, my municipal area and I want to do it in a respectful way. I am not going to be - and I mean this in a respectful way, if people come to my home I'm going to let them in. I understand what you're saying and I will take precautions but I'm not going to close myself off to my constituents and the people who were good enough to put me here and hopefully they will put me back here next year. But I will not cower from them because that's what they want and I'm not going to blame the right wing, the left wing or any other bloody wings at this stage because we're getting into name-calling and that's when you sink into the gutter.

I think it was once said that those that win will only win when you hate them back and I will not hate them back. They might hate me but I won't hate them back. But I'm just appalled that we have had to have this presentation here today about our safety for carrying out public service and that's what it is and I know the reputation of politicians in general isn't good, and we have to accept it, and it's up to us to improve that. But at the end of the day, I think it's incumbent on us to treat our own colleagues with respect and that's where it starts and I'll finish by saying, you brought up about social media and red flags and that. Some of these social media companies leave a lot to be desired. I've reported the abuse, I've reported the abuse I've seen from other national politicians about their sexual orientation, again, their gender, their size, and the response I get back from the social media companies is, they didn't infringe on their standards. Well, by God, have they got low standards. Again, thank you for the presentation. And here's to a successful future for everyone, thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr O'Brien. I will bring you in Cllr Gail Dunne now, please.

CLLR DUNNE: First of all, thanks, John, for your presentation. It will be hard to follow what Cllr O'Brien has said. He is someone who has looked into this for a long time and he has always been to the point so I would like to congratulate him for his contribution. I'm on the AILG and we had Peter McConnon give a presentation to us - I think he is the crime prevention officer in Kilkenny and he was harrowing. But what was more harrowing, Cllr

Behan was there I think and maybe Cllr Cullen was there, was when you heard the other members talking about their experiences of being a councillor, some of the intimidation that they've got and people - it was frightening, it really was. I've heard of - like, I've never experienced it but it was frightening and I think it goes to the point, too, that we are here for the people and we're trying to represent the people. How are people going to get involved in politics when this is going on? How are young people going to get involved? Young female people going to get involved and be in politics when they're nearly afraid to get involved because of what's going on? It's horrible. I think it's really horrible and you're out there doing your best, you don't always get it right, I accept that. Everybody in this room has different political opinions that I always respect. Might not agree with them, but respect them. But some of their supporters, they can go over the top, some of my supporters can go over the top and we cannot and should not encourage it in any way. John, I think your presentation, I think maybe give us a better chance to look at it in the cold light of day because some of your suggestions should be took on board and, again, I just think it's a terrible situation that councillors in this room and who are not in this room had to listen to this presentation and I actually think it's going to get worse. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Dunne. Cllr Erika Doyle?

CLLR DOYLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, I have been on this council three years now and I could write a book on this subject and maybe one day I will. It's extremely damaging and I think what a lot of people don't realise as well is that it's cumulative. So if you were to take maybe one incident, maybe it doesn't - maybe it's upsetting but it doesn't seem bad enough to maybe go to somebody like John about, but then you take another one and another one and another one and the effect it has on you is cumulative and some of them can be the big stuff, you know, the physical threats, the following, the stalking, the appearing places, and then a lot of what we would view as smaller stuff, which usually takes place on social media - now I block now. I block at the first sign of anything and I don't care, I really just don't care what reaction there is. People think they have some God-given right to access your social media, they don't and I block left, right and centre and it has gotten a bit easier. But it still happens and it happens in the most sneaky ingenious ways, as well, you know, it's incredible. There are some of us here who work for TDs and, you know, we probably get a double dose of it as well. I've had situations in the past where I seriously feared for my children's safety and that's not acceptable. That's just not OK. It's not OK to be looking

around and to be - and I don't want to get upset now, but it's just - that's not OK. But it's meant to silence you. This dehumanising of politicians is meant to silence you, that's what's wanted. You know, those of us - and I think all of us here are working for good, we're working for the people in our communities, we're doing it for the right reasons and I don't think many of us around this chamber would be silenced. But there are moments where you feel maybe, maybe should you, you know? What is the impact this is having on your family, on you, on your mental health? And that shouldn't be part of any job, at all. But thanks, John, for the suggestions and actually I think your presentation here was more than the sum of its parts, because I think what it's doing is it's saying, yes, this is a serious issue. It's serious enough that you are here making this presentation, you know, and we need to take it seriously.

Just one or two small - sort of on a practical note. We all have our municipal district meetings and I wonder would there be any place for maybe making the local Garda station aware of the times and dates of those meetings? I'm not suggesting they are on standby or anything but maybe if they know where the meetings are, they make drive past and pop their head in but it might give an extra feeling of security for the members because the door is open. I know at our chamber in Bray the door is open, so really, you know, we're at the mercy of people going civil, which largely they have been, at the meetings. But it just might be an idea. And just then finally just to back up with Cllr O'Brien said, you know, sometimes it can be easy to say that the people who are doing this are - that they're crazy or that they're part of some kind of movement or something and often actually they're not. Often actually supporters of other politicians who think in some kind of weird way that they're doing them a favour by silencing you or making you out to be the bad guy or whatever it is. So I, too, would appeal to politicians from across the board to, you know, if they see that happening on their social media, own it, take responsibility for it, talk to them, say it out loud, risk that vote or two, because really we are all in this job together and we should all be looking out for each other across the party boundaries. But anyway, thanks for the presentation, John, thank you.

CHAIR: Sorry, I have two more speakers but we have to finish at 5:00. We just need a proposer and a seconder?

HELEN PURCELL: Sorry, it is too late to extend the meeting at this stage. We can discuss the suspensions of standing orders, we just can't make any decisions if there's a vote or



anything like that required because the meeting will be over. But we can finish this presentation and then discuss them. Unless you want to - yes, you have five minutes left if you want to propose and second both before 5:00, you can actually make a decision before 5:00. So if you don't mind I'll read them out. We'll leave you on the podium there.

So the first one was submitted by Cllr Patsy Glennon, seconded by Edward Timmins. This council condemns the failures of AIB to reinstate cash handling services at the branch having rested their policies in respect of cashless branches, 70 branches throughout Ireland in July 2022. The Blessington branch went cashless in December 2021 as a pilot of the cashless branch policy then being pursued by AIB and a thankfully now abandoned by senior management. The situation in Blessington is now particularly serious as there is no banking service or cash handling services available since the closure of Ulster Bank on 21 April 2023. This council now calls on the minister of finance to encourage AIB's senior management to restore cash handling services at the Blessington AIB branch as a matter of urgency. So if we have a proposer and a seconder and all in favour?

CHAIR: Thank you, Cllr Glennon and seconded by Edward Timmins but he is not here.

Seconded by Cllr Joe Behan there.

HELEN PURCELL: Is everybody agreed that we send a letter to the minister?

CHAIR: Yes, absolutely, yes.

>> And the board management.

HELEN PURCELL: And the board management, thank you. So the second suspension of standing orders is sent in by Cllr Pat Fitzgerald, seconded by Cllr Pat Kennedy to discuss the cancellation of the 133 bus service from Arklow to Wicklow. The 133 service from Wicklow town has been enhanced with 143 departures each way every week. Was there a letter you wanted to issue? Into your mic, sorry, the people remote can't hear you. No, it's not on. Thank you.

>> Just to write to Bus Ireland about the fact that the 133 service from Arklow, people were shocked this morning when they learnt that the service has been discontinued without any notice whatsoever and I think it's very - it's a disgrace what happened to the people there this morning. So I'm asking that that service be reinstated as quickly as possible.

HELEN PURCELL: And are you seconding that, Cllr Kennedy?

CLLR KENNEDY: Yes, I am, yes.

HELEN PURCELL: Is everybody in favour?

CHAIR: Right, thank you. So two more speakers I'll bring in here really quickly and thank you very much for your time. Cllr John Mullen?

CLLR MULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and I don't want to repeat what Cllr O'Brien said but I do want to concur with all the powerful speakers that have said what has to be called out and that's why we introduced a social media charter and maybe on a practical level I know I've had to do this myself, there are ways to kind of filter your social media profiles to filter out kind of abusive language and you can do that in the background so that you can kind of just remove as much of it as possible and as somebody said, we're entering into an election season so this is going to just take off. But at the end of the day, we're only custodians of democracy as local representatives, like we're here for a period of time and we hope that when we leave we leave democracy in a better place and I don't know if I can honestly say that because the discourse out there particularly on social media and the abuse that people get is quite simply unsustainable and it will have consequences and we make decisions as adults to enter public life and to go for election, but our partners didn't, our kids didn't, and you know, I can't, you know, 100% guarantee that I can continue in public life if people's families can't go shopping or might have something said to them at the playground - it's not on and, you know, parties and independents, they're finding it difficult to find candidates who are interested in running for local election because of this abuse and some of it's organised and let's call it out - some of it is organised. So just thanks for the presentation and I know the Garda are always very helpful but the online stuff and the social media companies themselves have an awful lot to answer for and we in this chamber and I know all 32 of us we try and treat each other with respect even though we disagree passionately sometimes with different views but we have to learn to disagree agreeably, because otherwise our democracy and our democratic institutions are going to be undermined completely and maybe that's what's on the agenda there as well. So that's all I wanted to say on that, thanks.

CHAIR: Cllr Dermot O'Brien.

CLLR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, I will be brief. Two things, again, thank you for the presentation. I think it is important to recognise when we talk about safety, it is not only physical safety, psychological safety is as important. As Cllr Erica Doyle referenced, there is a cost to, when you are on the receiving end of abuse and it is accumulative and affects how your brain operates, there are biological impact, you are

hypersensitive and hypervigilant and a cost to the body if it is always on alert. As was said by Cllr Shay Cullen, to reconcile on the decisions about what you make of the environments and the positions you put yourself in and for what and why and the gain. And the thing to say about that, there is a skill set that I think is required on some level for a councillor or a prospective councillor about how to manage dysregulated people as we live in a society where lots of people are dis-regulated, by that I mean that they are quick to anger, they may be using substances, they are not safely regulated, calm, collected, especially as they re-engaging with politicians, they may be heightened already themselves. So a skill set that is required if we like it or not. The last thing to say is that I think whoever is campaigning for the next year as mentioned a few times, whether it comes to the local elections if they are the next ones to experience, I think there is a huge spotlight on that. Probably unlike in any previous election campaign about how it is done, by those who are standing and those engaging. It may determine, as Cllr John Mullen has said how our democracy evolves but an important presentation. Thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr D O'Brien. Sergeant, would you like to respond?

JOHN: To respond as best as I can, briefly, I am conscious of the time. I agree with you Cllr D O'Brien I tried to touch on that in the presentation. There is a cost to a person's health in a number of ways so I recommend you get support, to take a break. To emphasise two things to be conscious that, if we take away anything that online abuse can translate into the real world. Do be conscious if something is an offence or something that is said to you as an offence offline in the real world but it is said online and is also an offence, and it may be followed up to refer to the AILG report in 2021, 36.3% of councillors did not report the amount of abuse that they were receiving so that is something to take home to think about, if you think that a threshold has been reached to report it to us we will do what we can to support you and to end it and to echo Cllr Erica Doyle's sentiment, going into the school, and talking about the cyber-bullying and the by-stander effect, it is where children stand by on a group or on a social media platform to let another child to be victimised and to be bullied, as councillors then you should be conscious of by-standers and to call it out. So you can support one another online as well as offline, I suppose.

In relation to the presentation, I do have a specific information lead with four elected officials that I will have to be circulated. Thank you for your time. Unfortunately, I don't have an ice breaker for the end of the meeting.

HELEN PURCELL: The presentation was circulated it is on the website [sic].

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Sergeant, thank you very much.

Members, I have to apologise again, I have run out of time. It gets away from me. I have not gotten to notes of motions or to the correspondents, so we will have to wait for the next meeting. Protocol members, please, stay be hyped. You will be giving out to me then for talking too much! Thank you very much.