

**LOCAL PROPERTY TAX MEETING OF WICKLOW**  
**COUNTY COUNCIL HELD VIA ZOOM**

**ON**

**TUESDAY 27 JULY 2021 AT 2:00 P.M.**

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**Andrew Howell (writer)**

SHAY: Hello, members, welcome to our special meeting to discuss the basic rate to the local property tax. I'm going to hand you over to Helen first of all for the meeting etiquette and roll-call.

HELEN PURCELL: I will go through some of the etiquette. I would ask that mobile phones would be switched to supplement. Please do not leave the online meeting without informing the Cathaoirleach to ensure quorum remains. You may use the chat function. Speakers should keep their cameras and microphone on whilst speaking, and members should inform the meeting's administrator or a designated staff member by telephone if they lose connection and in accordance with provisions on the connectivity - and in that regard I circulated my number to all members this morning in case there are any connectivity issues.

VINCENT BLAKE: [Inaudible].

HELEN PURCELL: That is no problem, we can do that.

>> So narrow, only taking ...

HELEN PURCELL: We will start the roll-call. [Roll-call]. Thank you.

SHAY: Before we move on to the agenda, I would like to open it up for votes of sympathy.

HELEN PURCELL: We have two votes of sympathy. One for our former colleague, Tom Larkin, and the second for Kevin Byrne, the author of the book on the Work house and the County Home.

SHAY: Cllr Fitzgerald?

>> I want to pay my condolences to the family of Tom Larkin. Tom was an employee of Wicklow County Council. He is a member of the ... family, so I want to offer my condolences to his wife Gillian, sons Thomas and James, his daughter, brother and sister, and to his father, now. I want to thank the staff of Wicklow County Council for their attendance on the day of the funeral, and previous to that, I know the family were delighted with the support they got from the council.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr.

>> I want to pass on my condolences. Cllr Mary owe Murphy had the pleasure of working with Michelle. ...

CATHAOIRLEACH: Anybody else showing? No. Just before I move on, I would like to be associated with the comments of Cllr Fitzgerald in the sad passing of Thomas Larkin, and so send best wishes to his wife, Gillian, his sons Thomas and James, and his daughter Kate, and his brothers Billy and Seamus, and sister, Greta. P obviously, when you lose a member of staff in such magic circumstances, it certainly takes its toll on everyone. I want to pay tribute to the way that staff of Wicklow County Council have handled the tragic passing of Thomas Larkin, and just wish his family well into the future. Thank you. Okay, before we move on to item number 1 to consider the variation of the basic rate of local property tax and the setting of the Local Adjustment Factor in accordance with the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 as amended to apply for the period of one year to the next local property tax liability date, report to follow. I will hand over to Brian Gleeson.

>> Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and good afternoon, members. I will share the screen. Just to start off, to summarise, the topics that we will be going through, I will outline the budgetary for local authorities, the 2022 estimated income and expenditure of Wicklow County Council and then the financial position of the council, review the financial position, the rates legislation, and the impact of that as well as the new funding model that has been proposed for local property tax. Finally, I will then speak about the financial effect on liability person on the local authority itself and then conclude with the LPT recommendation for the coming year. The process itself is four stages. The first stage is the LPT decision. As you know, this has been brought forward here, for it has been made before the end of September, due to the re-evaluation, it has been brought forward to before August, hence the July meeting. After that, we work on the budget internally here, or introduce a draft budgetary plan, and the general municipal allocation which is issued to the districts in October of the year. Finally, the main part of the budget schedule is the adoption of the budget in November, usually towards the end of the month. And then following that, the following year, usually the end of the first quarter, of the following year, we have the schedule of municipal district works, which breaks down the adopted budget by municipal district. So as part of the guidelines on regulations in relation to local property tax, there are a number of areas that we must look at in conjunction can the decision. The council's estimated income and expenditure for next year, the financial position of the local authority, feedback of local consultations felled, and the effect of the LPT rate on the individual and the WCC budget and our service-delivery plans. To look at the estimate of income and expenditure for 2022, the heading was incorrect there, sorry. 2021, we've a budget of just over 121 million. Next year, we are estimating income of just over 122 million, with expenditure of 123.7 million. That leaves a funding funding gap of 1.6 million. I will explain what the budgetary adjustments are. Our IPD dividend which we receive on an annual basis, some years, we don't get any dividend, it's based on investment performances. Subject to the markets, so our dividend is being reduced by 336,000 euros next year, so that will have an impact on our budget. The NPPR receipts are being reduced by 300,000 next year. As you're well aware, the elimination of the 2009 charge takes place on 1 October and the elimination of the 2010 charge for NPPR comes in from 1 April next year. Our payroll costs we get 80% approximately compensated funding from the Department for Additional Payroll costs associated with any pay agreements, the new pay agreement that was recently agreed, calculates 1.7 million of costs. The net cost to ourselves is 340,000 which we will have to find from our own resources. Also pension costs as an ageing workforce, they do increase year on year. The annual pension increases are estimated about 200,000, while we are also making provision for half a million in additional costs for one-off gratuity payments. The Covid impact has been tough on all organisations, including county councils. We received financial funding last year to assist us and get through the process; as regards this year, we are in discussions with the department, and while there is a ... game, there are discussions in relation to trying to cover some of our income losses in relation to areas such as parking, et cetera. This will continue to have an impact into 2022. We're not sure at this stage, and we're not sure what sort of support there will be, but we will be expecting government support on the matter, and we will continue to engage with the department over the coming months in preparation for the budget in November. As you're well aware, come November, we do require to have a balanced budget, so, any funding gaps will have to be addressed over the coming months in this regard. The financial position of the Council is satisfactory at the moment. Especially given the circumstances we have had to face over the last 12 months. We have a rev deficit of 1.6 million. We reduced that last year by over 400,000, which was a positive development, so every year we've reduced that by an

amount. Our current assets to current liabilities is 3:1 which is positive, and ratio of loans payable to revenue income is 64%. We are conscious of the ongoing impact of COVID-19. In relation to the public consultation process, there were amended LPT regulations that were issued recently and as a temporary measure, the public consultation period was reduced from 30 days down to 14 days. This was to allow local authorities to comply with the requirement to notify the Revenue Commissioners of their variation decision. As we said before, the end of August, instead of the end of September, which was normally the case, but to point out, this is a temporary basis, and will revert back to the end of September next year. So the public consultation process in Wicklow around from 30th June to 14th July, we received only three submissions. Two came through the consultation hub and one by email, two requests of no increase to the rate, one request a reduction, but I suppose given that the submission numbers are so small, they don't really assist us with this particular process. The new rates legislation, I just want to highlight the main impacts in relation to this. It's going through the houses at the moment, and it hopes to be approved before the summer recess. This will see the rate cut for the local property tax and the bands to ensure the majority of home-owners won't see an increase when their properties are revalued in September. The Department of Finance has estimated that 11% will receive a decrease in their charges. The property valuations will be reviewed every four years, so the valuation this coming November will run from 2022 to 2025. Really. New properties will be brought into the system each year, so that is a positive change from the situation heretofore. The income thresholds for local property tax payment deferral have also been increased, so there is thresholds for single people and for married people, and those income thresholds have been increased to take into account I suppose inflation over the last number of years. The variation decision is to be notified to revenue before the end of August rather than the end of September, as I've mentioned earlier, and also, as we've gone through the public consultation period, short two weeks to allow for our earlier LPT meeting dates. Most of the local authorities across the country have gone for July meetings, and are happening - have happened, and are happening, over the next few days. Just to point out the LPT funding model for 2022 will remain unchanged. This means 80 of the LPT will be retained by the local authority and 20% will go to the equalisation fund. As before was the case, any local authority that yields a baseline can shall retain 100% of the additional income for their own use, and Wicklow fall into that, we retain 3.5 million for our own use. The self-funding for housing capital projects will continue to apply next year, and there are no changes to the LPT baselines. Also, the LPT variation decision for 2022 must be based on the existing collection data, is it in this year. We won't have any collection data in relation to 2022 until March or April next year. Local authorities that increased basic rate of LPT shall retain 100% of the additional income that is generated for their own use, so that is an important point to note, that if there is an increase in the rate, the income that is generated is not subject to equalisation or self-funding, or any other reductions. The full 100% amount is retained by the county council for its own use. And just to say that a new funding model will be developed in 2022 by the department for implementation in 2023. That will be a significant piece of work. It could be a six-month piece of work, and we will be making inputs into that throughout next year. Just to go on, we have to base the 2020 two decision on the collection rates for 2021. We've received our provisional allocation based on this from the department, so if we just start at the top of the table there, our 100% intake for LPT is 17.4 million. We have 20% deducted for equalisation, 3.5 million which brings us down to 13.9 million. That figure of 13.9 million is then compared to our baseline which is 8.5 million, and that leaves us with a surplus of 5.3, so an amount of 1.9 million is deducted for self-funding of capital housing schemes, and that leaves us with an amount of 3.5 million to be retained for the council's own use, which is

therefore added on to the baseline amount. That brings us to just over 12 million of discretionary LPT funding for the budget in 2022, with a slight increase on our figure in 2021. We must have regard to the financial effect of the LPT on the reliable person... local authority. I will put up a slide there of a table. You might want to refer to the LPT report circulated to all members in advance of the meeting. Might be able to see it a bit clearer. On page eight of that particular report. The number of valuation bands hasn't changed. It's still 20. It's just the range has changed, so you can see valuation band 1 was zero to 100,000. Now it's 1 to 200,000, so doubled in its range. You can see there is no change. The six across the charge variance shows there is no change in relation to evaluation band for the first 11 bands, it's only when you get to band 12 that there's an increase that starts kicking in, and that would be for houses valued over 1 million, so for any houses valued under 1 million, there is no change to the valuation band charge. So on the far side of the screen, we also have some figures which show - and how it would affect their pocket, so we can see if you take the first example there, band 1, if there was a 5% increase, it would mean householders have to pay an additional EUR 4.50 per annum, and a 10% increase would equate to EUR 9 per annum. To go through as well a few examples of how this works, and shows that most people will remain in the one band regardless of how much of an increase they see in their housing valuation. The first example there is a house value 123,000 in 2013, and now it's currently estimated at 240,000, which is quite a significant increase of 95%. However, in this example, the liability still remains at 225 euros because the house stays in band 2 because band 1 was originally - band 2 was 100 to 150,000. It's now been proposed at 200 to 262,500. So, that stays in the band. ... current estimate 445,000. This equates to a valuation vest of 71%, but similar to the last example, the household here remains in Band 5 with a liability of EUR 495. Just to summarise a few points, in relation to the new valuation system, as stated the number of bands - band 1 has been expanded up to 200,000. The second band range has been widened to 62,500 from the previous 50,000. All the other bands three to 20 have been widened by 75% in order to create bands of 87,000 which is an increase from the current range of 50,000. Based on the Allyson calculation of the department of finance modelling, the majority will remain in 2022. The average in 2021 of 324 euros, based on this average, the increase of an upward variation would be as follows. 5%, the average would be 16 euros per annum, 60% would be 19 euros per annum, and - so that is the average across all valuation bands. Also to note in band 1, a 5% variation increase would only cost 4.50 euros per annum and a 10% rate increase would be an additional cost of €9 per annum. Currently all are in the valuation band 1-5 which are in 300,000. As most properties will remain in the same valuation band, a 10% increase for this would range from EUR 9 from a maximum number of EUR 49.50 per annum, and a 5% increase from 4.50 to a maximum of 24.73 per annum. That is for 90% of all properties and all households across the county. How does this impact on the revenue budget? 5% increase. 5% increase. 6% would be just over a million. 15 per cent would be 2.6 million. That impacts whether it an increase or a decrease. They are the figures that how it impacts on the budget going forward. We said in the report that we want to ring-fence any increase forties cessionary use for administrative districts, ask you're well aware, we distribute the discretionary funding by the number of councillors. Could we split up Bray municipal district would receive 217,000 ... four MDs, 7.5%, 244 for the 4 MDs, and 326,000, and for 10%, 326 for the 4 MDs, and Bray would get 434. Finally, if a decision is made to go for 15%, it would nearly give half a million to the municipal districts to Bray getting 252,000. So, just to conclude my presentation, as you've read in the report that was circulated, last Friday, the recommendation of the management is to increase the local property tax by 10% seeing a minimal increase ... and 32 per annum and however provides an additional 1.7 million to the council for next year, and the budget

and we're proposing that the full - for the municipal districts. As is pointed out, if there is no increase, and we just remain at the same basic rate, then there will be no discretionary funding included in the budget for 2022. This was removed from the budget in 2021 from the decision the previous year to reduce the LPT down by 10%, so that was the consequence of that. If the decision is to keep it at the base rate, there would be no discretionary funding. Any increase at all will be ringfenced for the district. That concludes my presentation, members. Thank you for your time. I will just stop sharing the screen now.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks, Brian, and a comprehensive and extremely easy-to-follow report. I will open it up to the members for their input. Who would like to kick off? Cllr Walsh?

>> Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to Brian for the presentation. Disappointed we are back in this situation again, since I thought last September we wouldn't be faced with this, that the revaluation process would be under way and complete by now but we are where we are. Firstly, looking at the figures there presented, the baseline, the fact that the revenue valuations means the balance has been widened, resulting in the average payment, more or less remaining the same for 19% of payers, but the one problem is that the funding model is not changing until next year which means our baseline figure remains the same, the equalisation fund and the self-funding funds remain in place which is disappointing. A positive note we have is that the new bill since 2030 coming into the net equating to 1.4 million by Brian's estimation. Again, disappointing to see of that figure, we have equalisation, we have self-funding, et cetera, and the report states that 280,000 - sorry, I beg your pardon, 280,000 will be available for discretionary own use, or may be available, so I would certainly hope that 280,000 is available, and that there is no ambiguity around that. But I would like to suggest at this point - if there is an increase of a charge - I would look at that 280,000. I know there is reference to NPPR receipts, et cetera, but I would argue this is no surprise, the NPPR would be something that would be in budget projections already before this announcement. So I would suggest if, and I say if, there is any agreement to increase the LPT rate for 2022, by any amount, that this 280,000 could be added to any such increase, and divided across the districts pro-rata. That is just a proposal I would like to make. It is later in the meeting, if as I say, we [inaudible]. We are where we are. It's disappointing that the baseline figure and the funding remains the same and the funding model will not be addressed until next year. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Walsh. >> Thanks for this presentation as well. I certainly would concur with what Cllr Walsh said there in regards to the future of the whole baseline which is costing us dearly, particularly in regards to the housing projects, but look, based on the manager's and Brian's proposal there of a 10% increase, which would generate 1.7 million, or 32 euros average per household, frequented, there would be used for the discretionary funding in the county. We as councillors are being demanded out there to provide projects for the people in the community basis, or individuals, or anybody else, whether it be foot path repairs, house repairs is a big issue out there. We cover our own houses as well. Fair grounds is an issue. Traffic calming, community grants is something that are down the years has been a major thing that the council be able to do out there with communities. So those grants we've been cut back on the last few years, because of those difficulties, but look, again, at the end of the day, we are councillors out there. We do have to respond to the needs of the people as well, and while I do acknowledge the council does a huge amount of work out there, the discretionary funding is one of the small areas that we have a little bit of input into our service, on behalf of the communities that we do represent. So look at it, while the

changes in the base rates as well, that, you know, the figures that Brian has given us there, the vast majority of the people would not be paying anything extra. Some people will actually benefit from it. So based on that, and based on the needs as well that we have to deliver out there, and can I make an actual proposal at this stage, I don't know if somebody else wanted to come in there if I can? Look I understand the difficulty, the manager's position to - I would ask that maybe the pause we make an increase of 6% in the base rate for the ... persons in the year of 2022 to 2021, and as I said, a lot of people would benefit with regards to it. Anybody up to 200,000, I think 5.4 which is a modest increase enough in regards to it. This would add to the districts having I think about 1.4 million according to Brian's figures there, and that would give Bray 260,000 from my memory, and the other four districts 195,000, or thereabouts. A 6% increase, but look at it, again, having said that, this money I think needs to be spent, and as early as possible if the members do agree with it, for the coming year. Thanks, Chairman.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Kennedy? Did you have your hand up?

>> A question for Brian if you don't mind. In 2021, payroll was 47 248,857. In 2022, it increases by 2.645 million. I'm just wondering, Brian, if that is going up, can we expect something similar next year?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I will bring in one more? Cllr Behan.

>> I won't be supporting that proposal, I will make one of my own, that we reduce the charge next year by the full 15%. Because as far as I'm concerned, this tax is fundamentally wrong, unfair, and, in fact, it's day light robbery of the people of this country, because it is really replacing what we used to get from central it is. We're now putting our hands into the pockets of the people of the county, and we're not getting additional money to provide the service we need. This tax is replacing the rate support grant we got before its introduction in 2014. It's a fraud on the people as far as I'm concerned. I understand the administration, the officials have to administer the systems they're given, but I think we as public representatives have to make a stand, and I try to make it every year. I know I don't get much support for it, but I think it's important to continually remind ourselves that actually it is double it is, and where we get an opportunity to reduce the burden, we should do so. I also object to the fact that this year, and Brian actually referred to the fact there were only three people who made submissions - I will come back to that in a second - in the proposals, in the new proposals for this year, they actually removed the statutory necessity for us to consider the impact on the people of the county. Up to this year, last year, we had to statutorily consider the impacts. Although we didn't refer to it today, that statutory requirement was removed by the government which effectively meant that we don't have to consider the impact on people. Now, Brian did present the impact, and we saw that, and present [inaudible].

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think you've gone, Cllr Behan. Can you hear us? Cllr Behan? Okay, I will come back. Brian, can I bring you back in there to answer any of those questions?

>> In relation to Cllr Kennedy, you were referring to the payroll expenses have gone up, or the estimation has gone up. That includes pension costs as well as payroll, the payroll as we've said we've estimated 1.7 million, which is based on the new pay agreement building momentum as it is called, and that includes a number of pay increases, 1% for 1 October, but 1% in February, and then the following October 2022, 1% increase, so the calculations on that are about 1.7 million. We do

usually receive 80% compensation from the department, which would leave us short about 340,000 on top of that, we have estimated pension costs as people retire each year, their pension costs add on to the payroll bill. So an additional cost because they're usually replaced, so the pay costs are still there but the pension costs are new. ... we made an additional 500,000 for 2022. In relation to Cllr Behan, I don't think he made a question, but it was correct that the requirement for the impact on people was removed on a temporary basis as part of the regulations that issued. However, it said it didn't preclude any discussion, and I took the view that it was important to include that in the report, so while there wasn't a statutory requirement for me to include that section in it, I did include it, and the only thing we're missing from it is the number of houses that will be in the new valuation bands, because we don't know obviously until next year, but, as we've said already, in both cases, we will see people remaining in the same band as was the case here before CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Behan, we will let you back in. We lost connection there.

>> I was talking to myself there! No, I've finished. I got across my point, Cathaoirleach. I do want to propose a 15% reduction. If there is a seconder, I would be happy. If not, it can't be put to the meeting, but I do think we should be trying to have maximum reduction possible and I don't think it will impact on our services.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Fitzgerald, did you have your hand up there? Go ahead.

>> Yes, I just, obviously, I heard Cllr Blake's proposal there, and I would be seconding that proposal. I've gone through the facts and the figures as has been outlined by Brian, and up to band 12, there is no impact, and after band 12, there is an impact. I've gone through everything that the discretionary funding has done for the ... district over the last three years, and there is huge demands on us, in the districts, to do this, that, and the other, and there would be a lot of work left on them if we didn't have the discretionary funding. I will be seconding Cllr Blake's proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Fortune?

>> Can you hear me okay?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

>> I would second Cllr Behan's proposal, surprise, surprise. Can I make \* - I don't want to - I mean, I asked a similar question most years, and we get the same answers. A few general points. My understanding is that, it is part of Fine Gael's election - that we reduce tax. The Taoiseach said it is not right to tax a person's home - Enda Kennedy. What has progressed since last year, in regards to the baseline? We discuss this baseline every year, and it is the kind of big stick affects Wicklow. Last year, I concur with what Cllr Behan said. I fully understand that you guys in the executive are being basically told what you need to do for the department, and I fully understand that. But, I, and as the public representative, I my responsibilities are to the public, and last year, when we discussed this, as we had done in previous years, we were hoping that there would be progress made on the baseline. Now there is not. And we're going to have the same situation roughly we had last year. The question I asked falling out of that is what it projected next year, the following year, for the baseline to get some idea what could happen? Just on some of the commentary, I would love to know where you can purchase 90% of properties in Wicklow for 300,000! I hope that explains it a bit better. I find it annoying we've been asked to give 20% of funding to other counties and in the national media ...



don't raise cash on levies on derelict sites and it lists the counties ... and we are paying 20% of our tax intake into some of these counties. That just reinforces my belief that this tax of all taxes is so fundamentally wrong. That people can live in a big house, yet can hardly survive to put food on the table. The whole thing is grossly, grossly unfair. When you look at page ten of the document we've got, where the baseline is .85, the surface figure is - surplus figure is 5.3, the amount we retain is 3.4 because we have to put 3.9 into self-funded housing capital schemes, that is more money taken from us, from the local government fund. Have the department already taken back that 12 million? In what way did we do that? The no matter what we do and the way the picture is painted, we don't in reality end up with any more money, because even if you look at the tables you gave us, you know, that it is 5%, 163, if it is 6%, 195, I could be told 12 days ago there had been a deal done on the property tax, and the figure going to be agreed at the meeting today was 6%. I actually considered not taking part in the meeting. I absolutely, on behalf of the people that puts me into as a councillor, I totally resent the way the whole process has worked. I totally resent the way we are treated. I think the whole thing is so wrong. The other part I say to this, is that you guys have to understand what to do what to told. I also have to do what I'm told by the people that elect me. I would think that Cllr Behan's proposal to reduce by 15% is a minimum, and I would second his proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr O'Connor?

>> My proposal is to keep the local property tax the same as it is, not a decrease or increase. My logic for that is number one, a decrease, I think would severely hit the biodiversity SPC, which we've great projects coming along there, and I just couldn't do that. And then on the increase, I think people are still on ... in Wicklow, and I couldn't handle increasing it. I want to put that forward, and hope that I can have a seconder. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Kavanagh?

>> I would like to second Cllr O'Connor's proposal to keep the rate at base rate. The local property taxes is a cruel and a very blunt instrument which is highly unfair and inequitable. It takes absolutely no account of the person's ability to pay. We have just had 18 months of a pandemic in which a lot of people were surviving on a payment. Some people have lost their jobs, and it might be a long time before they find jobs again. I am intrigued by the 2.6 million payroll expenses, but when I drill down into it, I realised that it was the National Public Service Pay Agreement, building momentum, which I don't have a problem with. I know that the public sector was waiting two years for increases. They didn't see any movement in their pay, but when I looked at the figures, I realised that there was a 1% increase in October, a - October 2021; a 1% increase in February 2022; and a 1% increase in 2022. That's a compound increase, so it builds year on each previous amount. Now, after a 3% compound increase in a 13-month period, in the last three years, our pensioners haven't had a five euros increase on their weekly pension. And given the amount of tax put on to fuel, those people are far worse off than three years ago. We are asking them to pay 20% shortfall between what the government pays to the council, and what the council has to find themselves, of which a large portion is those pay increases. Not only a pay increase, but 0.2 million of pension costs. I think to ask the poorest at the lowest end of the economic scale to subsidise people's increases, generated increases, I have to say, I think it's grossly unfair. I think that I will take into account, and the council

has a huge problem balancing their books. I won't support a decrease, but I will support a call for to keep the baseline rate at zero.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Mitchell?

>> I'm certainly concerned that in the construction of the local property tax that we're going to lose for 2022, not maybe later, the new houses, there's been a lot of new houses built in various parts of Wicklow, and we need the money for those houses to provide services for those people, so it does concern me that the new houses are not going to contribute, and maybe only 20% of what is raised from them. I've certainly lobbied the Fine Gael party to get that changed. I believe there is a simple change that could be done for one year only, whereby next April, when the amount is raised from the new homes, is known by somebody. That could be distributed to those councils, or maybe just 80% of whatever, but the scheme, and that can be very easily done. It can be stated now this is going to be done, and the exact calculation can be done later, and I would certainly like to see all of the politicians trying to persuade deputies in the Dail that it is an inexpensive thing to do, but I think it's important that we keep the aspect of sees property taxpayers for local services. In the EU and the UK, property taxes are quite low, and the principle of using local property taxes on local services is a reasonable one. I would be prepared to support the 6% of a proposal that has been made earlier. I think that is a reasonable amount, although i would prefer to see the new houses, or the funding for them treated as i said, so i would support that, and I also believe that the basis of giving the money out to the various areas which is five equals, and a bit for more bray, the bigger area, is also fair. So I think that is a reasonable thing to do. I am very concerned that in 2021 budget that the Greystones area has funding behind, and that is completely wrong given the area is expanding massively, a thousand houses under construction in the area. Although I voted for the general annual budget of the council for the last 20 years, I will not be doing so this year, unless the management comes up with a proper proposal to write that, and provide proper facilities. On this particular proposal, I wouldn't be supporting it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I bring Brian back in and then take the remaining members.

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Cllr Fortune, I would have to say I share your frustration in relation to the baseline and the lack of movement on that. It's a frustration across the whole government sector without a doubt. Where it's at, I suppose this whole process, there are two stages to it. The first stage is actually the legislative stage, a responsibility of the Department of Finance, and before they start looking at the funding model, they need to get in the legislation to make the changes, to get the new bills in, to amend the valuation bands. Next year, they know exactly then what is the yield that they're dealing with. They have to take into account the proposed elimination of the equal lies. That is not going to pay for itself, so that has to be factored in. So I suppose that is the rationale behind it. The department have committed to putting resources in to this whole funding model. I think the - they've identified for looked for dedicated resource to work on it full-time, and there will be a lot of input from the local government sector on it, so I know it's frustrating, and we have had promises year on year on year that this is happening, but, look, at least the positive is that the legislation is going to be passed before the end of the summer. We can't do anything until that is done. That was the key change. As I said, that was the responsibility for the Department of Finance. It is a Department of Housing and local government are responsible for the funding model, and the baseline, and they will be working on that throughout 2022, with a view for implementation in 2023,

so, we have to take their word on it, that that will be done, and there seems to be determination to regularise the whole situation of funding model going forward. In relation to the question about the 12 million, have we got it? Basically, we get paid in stages throughout the year from the department, usually for payments throughout the - four payments throughout the year of three million. That's how it works. There's never a case of us getting the 17.4 million and handing back equalisation, that is all stripped out and the self-funding before we receive the payment, so we will be getting four payments of three million throughout the year. The reference to the valuation of 90% of up to 300,000, councillor, that is based on the existing valuation bands, up to Band 5. We don't have the figures of the new properties that will be in the new valuation bands. We can go on the figures we have. That is based on if you refer back to last year's local property tax report, you will see the numbers of households in the different bands. If you top that up, it comes to nearly 90% are in Band 5 which is currently up to 300,000. As you see in the examples we gave in the report, like there's going to be increases, you know, between 50%, 70%, 8%, over 100% in some waives. So, that explains that. I want to clarify a point in relation to a point Cllr Kavanagh made, just to clarify that any increase that is made today for the local property tax will be ring-fenced for discretionary funds for the MDs. It won't be to cover pension costs or additional pay and pension costs. We wanted to clarify that point in case there is any confusion. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. The next speaker is Cllr Leonard.

>> I'm disappointed more people didn't input into the online forum to input into - but I did want to - did run a poll myself yesterday and gave people a few options of the 6%, the 10%, and feedback. I got 65 responses back and not one of them wanted an increase, and a lot of private messages as well outlining financial difficulties that people were having, and that, in fact, they can't actually afford to pay the local property taxes at all, with liens on their houses and it's causes a lot of stress to people. I would like to support Cllr Rory O'Connor's proposal to keep it the same. I have a real problem, and I resent the whole process this year. I don't know whether it is done intentionally, I would hope it's not. I feel like it's a form of emotional blackmail on councillors. It causes divide in the parties, the polarised - everybody wants May to spend in their own community. Everybody wants to have input into how their money is spent. We are voted in, we're their voice. ... I would like to ask Brian what input do we have into how that is spent? Is there a possibility going forward that our discretionary funding can be made for permanent that is not used as a barter option to polarise people and to divide both the council and the councillors? We need to work together, both the council and the councillors, to come up with projects together. Using the voice of local people because what they want. They know what they're not saying as well because of the lack of resource in services, but the basic services don't cost an awful lot on the ground. So I would like maybe an answer on that, what input do we have into that 12 million in the local property tax? And I would like to poll the support but for the discretionary funding to be included in that proposal as well.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Dermot O'Brien?

>> Briefly, like I don't know how people sell this out on the ground, you know? Every year, again, we get the same kind of narrative about the LPT, sure, it's only this amount, it will only be that amount of extra, and if you don't give this, you won't get that, but ultimately, I think if we are in service to people, when we shine a light on the consultation process for this, it's dreadful. It tells us something that is profoundly wrong with the process, and it is almost like a glorified pyramid

scheme full of promises, and threats, and really no return on it. I think it's a very, very hard sell. Someone said to me in the last week that you get more bang for your buck out of a residents association contribution than your local property tax, because you can get a group of houses together, their path need fixing, there's not a hope in hell, because there's no money for that. I think people are cynical about this tax, that I find it impossible to sell this. I think it is important for councillors to take a role and a proactive role in how we do the things for the people of this county. I think this model of it is not how we can do things that will benefit the people. Every time we endorse it, we are saying this is okay, this is grand. I do look forward with interest in how the new model will be presented, but I think we have to scrutinise it, and we have to challenge how it actually serves the actual people that we look in the eye, and knock on the doors, or we're out there in the community.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Flynn Kennedy?

>> Thank you. I would like the opportunity, I mean, obviously, as Cllr O'Brien has said, and don't always agree everything, but I do agree it's one of those situations we come back every year, and we have a discussion around this. It's not an easy decision to make by any means. I'm not surprised about some of the consultations that take place, that have taken place, have looked for no increase, because I certainly have no burning desire to increase the payment I make in relation to the local property tax, but I'm also acutely aware of the requests that are coming in. We get a lot of these, a lot of requests for accessibility works, for different pavements, upgrades to playgrounds, for lots of different stuff. There is not always grants for, and I'm looking back on some of the stuff that has been done with the local property tax, particularly in Bray, we have had the upgrade works to ... area, we have had five-year trigger placement going on in the town, we have had repairs done to the band stand over the years, and I think one of the challenges is that we're probably not very good at outlining to people where this funding is actually going, and the improvements that are actually being made by it. I certainly want to see improvements in the Bray area. It's not an ideal system. It is not necessarily a fair tax. It is not paid by everybody. The local authority itself pays the tax, the social housing, the improved housing bodies pay the approved housing tax for approved housing, landlords pay the tax instead of tenants. Some people are paying local property tax as has been outlined and they're on pensions. It's not a fair system in any way. I think there's general consensus by everybody that it is not fair, but it is also the system that we have currently in place and that is what makes the decision so difficult to make, that we have to make a decision on it. So I certainly will be supporting a 6% increase. The change in bands is going to have a huge impact on people and keep most out of having to pay significant, but I want [inaudible]. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Snell?

>> Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I think this is probably the least most enjoyable meeting on our calendar every year for all councillors, and indeed officials themselves. Everyone is between a rock and a hard place. There is no doubt about that. But you can have it as easy or as hard as you want. The reality is that you have to answer first and foremost to yourself, and to your own conscience, and then to your constituents', and elected members. I think the 32 members, if I'm not mistaken, there were 32 at the AGM, at this local property tax last year, and we left the shoreline united, and everyone was happy. We were in the middle of a pandemic. We still are. Up to a couple of weeks ago, there was 228,000 people still on the pandemic unemployment payment. That will have

reduced but not significantly. There are still people out there on 350 EUR per week. The average wealth and property tax for people, and I know, and I know the narrative of depending on what side of the fence you're on, or if you're sitting in the middle of the fence, but it is a small increase on top of whether an is unachievable to a lot of people. The average is 324 euros to the families out there, paying the local property tax in this county. An increase on top of that, unfortunately, for me, it makes it too much I don't support a 15% decrease, because I have to - I have to look at balancing the books as well. I have to see that we were able to run the local authority the way we should, and I think we can do that, because the reality is that the decision we've made today affects discretionary spend, discretionary spend only. And we've lived in the last 12 months without discretionary spend. I don't think that another 12 months without discretionary spend, I don't think our constituents would hold us to ransom without that, that funding. I think to ... tax for over a million euros for discretionary spend is unacceptable to me in the middle of a pandemic. Whether you consider that we have over four and a half thousand properties in this county that have paid not a penny in local property tax in the last eight years, and we are trying to get services in for the new houses along the east coast, but the reality is they haven't contributed. I know, and I go back to basics all the time, when I have to make a decision like this, to an area where I grew up, and I think of the people around me, and I think of they're an ageing population. Most don't get 324 euros a week because they're pensioners. They have to exist on less than that. And you want take that out the pocket. I won't support an increase of 6%. I won't support a decrease of 15%. I think we should retain the base rate. We all agree this is unfair. We all agree that we can live without it as we did last year, and I think we can live without it this year too. One final point, Cathaoirleach. Some members have alluded to it in regards, and it leaves a not savoury taste in the mouth of democratically elected councillors, and I would ask councillor to have respect regardless of how they vote. It is not a populist decision voting one way or another - it certainly isn't. The reality is we are faced with a decision today, so I know the way I'm voting. I knew the way most people will be voting before this meeting today. But it would be presumptuous to say that I could go on social media and - I won't do it now. I will be supporting this retainer that the base rate, retain the base rate for our constituents.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Last person is Cllr Ferris. I would like to move on after this. Go ahead, Cllr Ferris.

>> A lot has been said about the fairness or otherwise of the property tax. I think it's a fair tax because it depends on the house and which size you're going to pay. The band I would consider myself in, which is the 350,000 to 400,000, that's going up by if we adopt the 6%, by 40.50, while the people who live in a house over one million are only being asked to pay 169.80. So I think the people living in very expensive houses are getting away very lightly with this increase. I agree with what Cllr Snell said, because I know certainly last year, and the year before, there were people named on social media who voted for it, and I think that is, that is a disgrace. We all have a code of conduct for councillors, we are supposed to respect each other, and respect that we can't all be the same, because otherwise it would be very boring. But I do support the 6% increase. Cllr Aoife Flynn Kennedy there outlined a number of items that we've done over the last year or so, and I certainly want to see more of that. For example, just in that band I was talking about, as I said, it will be 45.50 more to me per year. I'm sure I'm going to be able to manage that, and we have to remember that there are people - the people living in social housing don't have to pay. They're not asked to pay for that. It is the local authority that pays. Maybe those living in a large house, where their family have found the nest, finding it tight, they can agree to put it off for when they die and it's taken out of

their estate. I think it's quite fair. I know a lot of elderly people who have done that. I think really, Cllr Snell there said they couldn't envisage another year going without discretionary funding. Neither can I. And I think the fact that going on your figures, Brian, Bray will receive 260,000, yes, 260,875. I know we desperately need foot paths, other things done. I won't go into it now. I will be brief. What what galls me, and I say this with respect, that if people don't support the increase, please don't come cap in hand begging to the officials or your municipal departments or districts looking for this, that, and the other on your shopping list. We're all in this together. We all want to provide the services that our local people want, and we can't do that if we have no money. We can sit here year after year whingeing and complaining about the whole concept of property tax, but it is not something that our council or any local authority came up with. This is a matter for government. It's a matter for our five TDs to go in and fighting as hard as they can. We didn't make the legislation. Let's not waste time giving out of the fact that we have a property tax. People who work pay taxes on their income, paying PAYE and PSI and I don't hear protest marches coming in about that. The last thing I would say is I think it's telling that there were only three submissions on it. If people really were up in arms, as some people might like to think, you would have got a lot more than that, Brian. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. I have six more members looking to come in. Brian, I'm going to come back to you briefly, if there are any questions you want to clarify?

>> Okay, thank you, Cathaoirleach. I will just mention that about the social, or the public consultation. It was mentioned by and Cllr ferries and Cllr Leonard. We repeated the message on the daily basis on Twitter throughout the two-week period, and we only got three responses, so I suppose even if it was at the normal four-week consultation period, it appears we would not have got that many. I suppose in relation to the consultation that Cllr Leonard did about asking people regarding that, I would be wondering if it was put to them that any increase would be ring-fenced for discretionary money in their own local areas. I think that might have changed the view of a few people. I know that was the case two years ago when we reduced it. People would have preferred to know that was the case. In relation to question regarding input into the 12 million local property tax, the local property tax, I suppose, it's part of like commercial rates, and our good services income, and our government grants. It's all part of the annual budget process, so, it is, as regards determining where it goes, that would be part of the annual budget process, and adopting the budget will be I suppose the determination and the approval of what we spent the money on. In relation to discretionary funding and fixing it going forward, I would love to be in a position to fix it going forward, because as a district manager, I want to see more funding in my district, and like every other district manager across their districts to do all those local projects. Unfortunately, by the nature and name of the actual funding, it is discretionary, and we only 10% discretionary funding basically in the council budget, like peeve pay and pensions, we have other expenditure that is government-funded, that is ringfenced, and so forth, so there is a lot of, there is not a lot of scope there in relation to what we have to cut, or what we can increase. Unfortunately last year, there was a 10% cut. Took out 1.7 million out of the budget. I have to look at obviously fixed costs and nondiscretionary costs, so unfortunately in following that decision, we did have to cut the discretionary funding, but I would hope that we have enough funding going forward to keep it in every year, in what is part of the annual budget process on a yearly basis. Regarding what Cllr O'Brien said, I'm glad he raised the point about foot paths, because that is what we are proposing here. We are proposing the additional money to be ring-fenced for discretionary funding, so foot

path repairs can take place within the districts. We do not have a fund at the moment for foot path repairs. That was as a result of the reduction last year on the LPT. We want to reintroduce that. I know in Bray MD, the councillor's own district, the local engineer has identified foot path retar costs up to 300,000. So, I think the proposal today if it does go through with the 6%, that would go some way towards addressing those requirements. I think that's it. Just one more point, I suppose, in relation to points made about low-income households. As I say, I refer to them in my presentation. The exemption thresholds for deferring payments of local property tax have increased as part of this new legislation, so, for a single person with income up to 18,000, or married up to 30,000, they can look to defer local property tax payments. And also there is a part deferral of up to 50% deferral of the local property tax liability, and that would cover people with an income up to 25,000 -sorry, 30,000, 30,000, and 42,000 for married couples. So I think that is a positive adjustment in the proposed legislation as well. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks, Brian. I have six members looking to come in. If you could be as brief as possible because I do want to move on. Cllr Crean.

>> I appreciate it is a challenge in light of Covid balancing the books. Cllr Snell talked about the lived experience on the ground of constituent, for me, I meet on houses they bought, their income is not related to the value of their home. I think the issue with this is based on a deeply dysfunctional housing and property system to inflated land in this country leading to inflated prices. People are paying mortgages that they cannot afford and struggling to afford, at the end of the month, there is no disposable income at the end of the month. So for me, I'm mindful of them today. I hear what people have said, but I really think for low and middle-income mortgage holders, they will be most adversely hit by an increase they're already struggling with their current outgoings, so I have to represent them today. For me, I could not support an increase on that basis because the economic injustice is just too much. I think it's a bit unfair to say for that reason I'm - if I don't support the increase, that my constituents then are disenfranchised, because I can't ask for things on their behalf. I think that's unfair, and we will try to stay away from that divisive language. I represent my constituents and hope the council will support me in doing that. Finally, the consultation piece, I think a lot of people struggle with financial issues privately, they're not going to put in submissions to the LPT, and that is who I'm representing today. I need to represent those people on a weekly basis, and I'm doing it on a weekly basis.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Paul O'Brien?

>> I will keep it brief. This individual's not on the meeting today, but I just, and I won't go that hard at them because of that, but I want to express my dissatisfaction that minister Harris with the front-page spread in the local newspaper. If he was serious about the LPT, he would have (a) fixed it when he was in government, or (b) contacted us before going to the front page of the that up. I want that for the record. I concur with everything that Cllr Ferris has said, because some councillors may feel aggrieved here today because of the process. Some of us have to live in the real world. It means the government is not going to cut the LPT or do away with it. If they do, they have to find the money somewhere else. This talk about what we can or can't do, there's been a serious discussion over the last year about councillors not being taken seriously, yet we are turning up here today saying it should be done away with, when we know we haven't got the powers to do so. We have councillors voted down public landing and public land, now proposing a 15% cut in the LPT, based on Brian's

figures, they're going to give a tax cut to low earners for 13.50 and giving millionaires a 424 euros tax cut. I have to ask sincerely who they are representing here? It is not the working class that I'm representing. So, can I just ask Brian Gleeson a quick yes or no question: if there is a 15% cut in the LPT, would it affect the housing budget, please? I just want to finish off, quickly I live enter Wicklow town and anyone who says the LPT or other funding hasn't improved Wicklow town, hasn't been to visit it. Wicklow town has been reborn with the market square of Fitzwilliam Square and other works. Anyone who says investment doesn't work, they're not being honest here today. I support the 6% increase because my constituents that I represent here want to see an improved town, not to see it go to rack and ruin again. Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Scott?

>> It's been a really respectful discussion here this afternoon. We've all thought about the pros and cons of our various positions. Personally speaking, I've wrestled with this as to what to do over the past several weeks. While I can't support a 10% increase, I think that's too far, I certainly can support 6% increase, partly because I'm glad to see that 2013 houses and the houses built since then, have been finally brought into the loop. That's really important in our district here. There's still plenty of room for reform in the whole system. We leave that in the hand of our five TDs to work on our behalf. In terms of constituents, I've spoken a lot to the constituents recently and mentioned that the LPT is coming up for review. Unanimously, I've been told that if we want more services in our area, they're happy to pay for it. Our district in particular is bursting at the seams with the growth we have here, and there is a lot that needs to be done. I'm inundated with requests on a weekly basis of improvements, basic improvements, a lot of accessibility requests need to be done, and speaking as the the Cathaoirleach of my district, I can't turn down the opportunity to have 196,000 euros to spend on behalf of my constituents with these improvements, so I would be happy to support a 6% increase.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry O'Neill?

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I ask Brian to remind us again how many households in the county are exempt from property tax? And a huge number built by housing agencies, presumably, the tenants will be exempt? Or is there any funding from the landlords? I certainly couldn't support an increase. I thirdly sit here and listen to the two Labour Party people, lecturing of how we - which I can't even think now, we have no opinion whether before or against, we are told be good boys and girls be doing what you are told. It's a fair done deal case here. Anybody can see what is going on here. But, one last issue there, Cathaoirleach. I do agree with the Labour Cllr O'Brien there, that the news that the new Sinn Fein people have voted against social housing on public land. That is a disgrace. That should be the headlines here today. But I just finished there by saying I want to thank Brian and all. I know it is a tough task and the pressure is on. I don't think the property tax is a fair tax, but I won't be lectured by fellow councillors as to what way I should vote. Go raibh maith agat.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Pat Kennedy?

>> My understanding is there are three proposals before us here. One for an increase of 6%, and we know what it is like to have the discretionary funds. I can understand the whole debate, but maybe Brian would explain to us on Cllr Behan's proposal to reduce it by 15%? Because a quick calculation



would be we have 17.3 million and we take out 16. ... maybe you could explain to us what effect that will have going forward if we take out 2.6 million out of the budget?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Final speaker is Cllr Walsh.

>> I share the dissatisfaction of the old system which is basically flawed. As Cllr Snell said, we are between a rock and a hard place, damned if we do, damned if we don't. Looking at the figures, basically, the same figure as we had last year at the meeting in Shoreline. We left that meeting. We were told in no uncertain terms, there would be no discretionary funning for the districts in 2021 which was the case. Most of us know the consequences of that now in terms of the lack of resources and maintenance for repair of foot paths. We did have a different type of funding for new projects, accessibility projects, et cetera. Listen, just finally, I want to Cllr Mitchell made the point about the new bills not being taken into account, but just to follow up on my point earlier, I want firstly to agree with Cllr Blake's proposal for 6% increase provided. It's spread within the, made just as the discretionary fund of the districts, and particular for address the issues such as maintenance and repair. Also, as I said earlier, I would like to amend that proposal to include any monies that are generated from the 4,300 new builds to the council. I know that figure was estimated at 280,000 in Brian's presentation. I would like support for an amendment to that. ... the money from the new builds.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian, I will bring you in, take the questions and that particular point of the 280,000.

>> I don't think we can do it, look, the department has strictly told us that the decision taken today has to be based on the 2021 figures, so they don't have ... unfortunately to base it on the figures provisionally allocated by the department. We will have to look at that. When we get the figures next year, obviously, we will look at what we can spend it on. We're not going to know until next year. I will take Cllr Kennedy and Irvine's questions together. Similar enough. 2.6 million out of the budget would have a substantial impact as stated in previous meetings. 90% of our funding is non-discretionary expenditure. The 10% funding considered discretionary, is made up of public light be, beauty grant scheme, tourism promotion, so they're the areas that would be hit if there was a reduction of 2.6 million in relation to I suppose the percentage, like, 30% of the overall budget is housing. It's the highest percentage of the budget. So, that would take the greatest hit of any reduction. If it was proposed, so the areas of I suppose discretionary funding within the housing budget that are supported by government - are not supported by government grant aid would be housing repairs and maintenance and pre-letting costs. So, I suppose that is the reality of it. It is what it is, I suppose. Dealing with the hand that we are given here, you know? So we just have to I suppose balance the budget as best we can.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, I muted myself. Cllr Behan wants to come in. Be brief. I do want to move on.

>> I know it's a difficult task. Can I just respond by saying there is absolutely no prospect of the housing budget being exchanged because we don't raise the property tax. Or reduce it. Absolutely none, because that is capital funding, and everybody knows that. Brian in fairness said this is just an estimate. There are so many things that you could question in that document in terms of estimate that may or may not arise, money that may or may not actually be greater than what what is actually provided for here, such as the Irish public bodies dividend which in previous years was increased,

such as parking fees would probably be greater next year than this year because things are getting back to normal. Planning fees - all of the other areas that are kind of suppressed last year, or this current year, in a will increase next year. Brian, you know, he's already admitted, this is just an estimate, anyway, and we've seen in previous meetings, and previous occasions, like this, that the figures are very, very flexible. So on that basis, all I'm saying to members is quite obvious there is not a majority in favour of it, but I'm just saying we should be taking a stand to - \*in favour of it. Saying this tax is unfair, for the many reasons you've all stated here today, and that is why I'm continuing to propose that we reduce it, and reduce the burden to the greatest level we can. Thanks,

Cathaoirleach. Brian?

>> Can I come in there, Cathaoirleach. I want to state that the housing budget would be affected by any reduction. The repairs and maintenance is not a capital expenditure, it is a revenue expenditure. It's in the revenue budget every year, repairs and maintenance and also, the - sorry, councillor. The IPB figure is not an estimate, it's confirmed. We've got correspondents from IPB confirming what the dividend will be, so that is a confirmation. As regards the parking income, we've not reduced the parking income in the budget this year, and we don't propose to do it for next year. We've got support from the government this year, and that is what we are basing it on. So the parking doesn't impact on the budget as regard trying to balance the budget.

CATHAOIRLEACH: One question Brian which was not answered with regards to the amount of households that are exempt.

>> I don't have the number. I'm going on the Revenue Commissioner statistics that they publish. The amount, the value of the amount of deferrals equates to 400,000 approximately. I don't have the actual number of properties that relates to, but if we can use the average amount, we should be able to calculate what it comes to.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I think we've given a very good debate to this, so as we have in front of me here is three proposals. The first proposal proposed by Cllr Blake and seconded by Cllr Fitzgerald is a 6% increase to the base rate the second proposed by Cllr Behan and seconded by Cllr Fortune is to reduce the base rate by 15%. And the third proposed is proposed by Cllr O'Connor, and seconded by Cllr Kavanagh, and it's to retain the LPT at the base rate. Okay? So I'm going to hand you over to Helen, and we will take Cllr Blake's proposal sirs.

HELEN PURCELL: I'm going to read you out the complete wording of the proposal with the 6% increase in it and then call for a vote, that in accordance with the provisions of Section 20 of the Finance Local Property Tax Act 2012 (as amended) the basic rate of local property tax should stand varied upwards by 6% for the period 1 November 2021 to 31 October 2022 in respect of relevant residential properties situated in the administrative area of Wicklow County Council quick, proposed by Cllr ... seconded by Cllr Fitzgerald.

[Vote taken].

21 in favour, nine against, and two not present. The motion is passed. Therefore, we don't have votes on the next two motions.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks, members, for that discussion. Moving on to item number 2 on the agenda, to consider the making of an extension to the Wicklow County Council quick development plan review period process under section 9A (2) of the Planning and Development act 200 (as inserted by the planning and development amendment act 2021). We have a motion that I will ask Cllr Mullen to read out.

>> Wicklow County Council quick under section 29A as inserted by the planning and ... having regard to the extraordinary circumstances arising from the risk to public health posed by the spread of COVID-19, and the disruption to the completion of the review of the development plan, and the preparation of a new development plan, caused by restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that a further period of one year, 12 months, is necessary to complete the review, and prepare and make the new development plan, in particular, having regard to the need to ensure adequate time to complete the remaining stages of the plan process. Including providing adequate opportunities and time for the public to engage with the process.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Mullen, would you like to come in? Or are you happy?

>> Yes, thanks, just a brief response. We are all waiting on the response, but basically, and I'm sorry for taking up councillors' time on this, but this has been flagged for quite some time, new powers given by the minister in relation to the county development plan process, and the fact that it has been drastically affected by Covid as regard the public's input into it, you can see from the previous discussion on the public consultation with the property tax, just exactly how the public as more things to do now than engaging with the draft county development plan. The message is getting out there, and I appreciate the officials and the planners working hard to try to get that point of view across on the importance of the county development plan, but we need to learn the lessons, and in fairness to the minister and the department who helped draft this motion on the basis of the powers passed by the legislation, they're listening to councillors, and the councillors have had an issue with elements of this development plan process, particularly in relation to the housing strategy and they're trying to attempt changes in that regard. I think by extending the process, we're not pausing the process, we are spending the process. That is the type of responsible attitude to the council development process we need to bring to this at this stage, and I accept that planners and management's hard work on this issue. In relation to the fact that some people have concerns local area plans, I would like to make the point that while we extend the process by 12 months, we can if satisfied be the process back up again, and I think that's been made clear by the department as well. We can give ourselves the space to get adequate public consultation to see what new circulars emerge from government as regards housing strategies and other strategies, and then if we are satisfied that we've gone to the end of the road on it, we can accelerate the plan. I'm saying, by passing this motion, we are not saying we are definitely using the 12 months, what we are saying is we're using using the maximum, and if - I hope the councillors at this point will pass that motion on the basis of that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I bring in director Kilkenny next.

>> Thank you, to give you information on the Act that Cllr Mullen is talking to, on 20th July last, the planning and development amendment act number 18 of 2021 was commenced with an effective date of the 16th July with the exceptions of section seven. At our last meeting, we were talking about a bill to put to you, that it is now an Act, okay? It amends the planning and development 2000

Act with specific provisions regarding the county development plan. The Act will be known as the Planning and Development Amendment Act 2021 of 2021. It has been put in place in response to disruption caused by, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. That is under that context, the councillor Mullen has put his motion forward. The second part is provision to allow planning authorities to extend the duration of the existing development plan, subject to certain conditions including environmental assessments. Now, that does not apply in Wicklow. We have already got a county development plan that is still in date until the end of 2022, so that aspect of the act does not apply to Wicklow. The third element of the act is provision to allow for the extension of the appropriate period of certain planning permissions, although provisions have not yet commenced on that, but that basic allows permissions that are already at the commencement stage, a significant amount of work done, but it is subject to conditions. With respect to the three main elements of this amendment act, the first one is a relevance of today's notice of motion. And as I said, the second element is not of relevance. It is clear, that it is only when due to Covid disruption and on the part of the planning authorities, and the disruption of the administration of the planning system, on account of the Covid restrictions, that has led to delay in the planning process. These circumstances will allow the planning authority to make a decision to allow for a period of up to one year to complete the making of our new county development plan. The Act provides that this decision can either be made by the planning authority itself, or the elected members by resolution to the Chief Executive of the Planning Authority. I think that has been articulated quite well by Cllr Mullen. Just to make it clear: this legislation does not provide for a pause in the process but allows for an additional period of time to complete the making of the new plan for delays that have been experienced to the Covid pandemic. It is very likely we as the executive would have been coming to you now anyway as the members regardless of the notice of motion has been pointed out previously by our senior forward planner, as the current preparation of the county development plan may be eight months behind schedule, due to the Covid-related delays to date. So, subject to the amendments by you as members, following the public display period and the review by yourselves, it is actually considered that there will be a further period of time required and the earliest date for the adoption of the new county development plan is expected to be July 2022. In accordance with the legislation prior to this amendment, Wicklow County Council would have been expected to have completed the preparation of the new county development plan in November 2021. That is the 99 weeks after the advertisement in the paper for the preparation of the new plan. So the notice of motion before you today is for a period of one year. This would allow the completion of the making of the new county development plan by November 2022, so in effect, if the motion hadn't come today, we would be going for eight months, but the motion does today it provides an additional four months. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, that is very clear in that we will obviously use the time frame that is available to us. Before I bring in the three speakers looking to come in, there is a second part is the consultation period up to the 16th August of the draft plan. I know some members want to speak about that, but we will include that now in the discussion. Cllr Mitchell.

>> Thank you, very. Thank you for that. I just want to say that I'm concerned, I don't agree with the 12 months' delay. I think obviously there has to be a delay. I think it was said that it has to be eight months. I think we should have a minimum delay for Covid. The problem is not so much the county development plan which maybe expires in 2022, I'm not sure, but some of the local area plans, I think the Greystones one, expires in 2019, and I think Blessington and a few other places, the local

plans can't be redone up to whatever, to cope with whatever has happened and is expected to happen. And for the main county plan sets the population targets for those areas. So, I'm concerned that that is really, very bad practice, I think, for the authority to have, to have plans which are so incredibly out of date in spite of the massive growth that is happening in the north and other parts of Wicklow as well. So I don't agree there. I think we need to get it done in the minimum time, and if that is eight months, we have to accept the Covid delays and go for eight months. I feel we should not extend the consultation time, I think people have had enough time to make submissions to this. I don't think another month is going to make much difference. Most full, to have plans which are so rashly out of date is wrong, and while we were told by government that we had to delay making our plans by the eastern, Midland, and regional plan made two years ago, and now Covid reducing it by a significant time, I think it's wrong to have such out of date things. I think the minimum time which would seem to be eight months should be what we should adopt. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Joe Behan?

>> I want to formally second Cllr Mullen's proposal. He spoke very eloquently there about the reasons why we submitted this motion, and I agree with everything that he said, and I would also say that there are signs encouraging signs that this minister is beginning to listen, and Cllr Mullen said about the councillor's development plan process generally, and in particular the provision of housing in the counties. I think what Cllr Mullen has said about awaiting circulars that may influence what we might end up putting in the plan, I think it is very wise statement as well. And finally, I would say that he think we should use some of the time to extend the initial public process that is due to end in two weeks' time or so, because of Covid, and the fact that more and more people now because they're vaccinated, they're venturing outside again, and hopefully the offices will be open again soon for people to physically see the plan at the offices if that is what they want to do, but also because it's in the middle of a holiday period, and ending the public consultation in the middle of August, I think when we could extend it sometime into the end of September would be certainly a wise use of some of that extra time. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Winters.

>> I agree with Cllr Mitchell. I think a minimum amount of time than we can, so if the officials say this they needed eight months because of Covid, then I can go for eight months, but I think that we should be moving on for local area plans. A lot of the local area plans the last time were rolled over, so they're very, very out of date, and I would like us to press on and get the - and if things were to happen that were to have a material effect on the county development plan, we can always go for material contravention, so I don't think we need to delay things in case something might happen. You know, we would never make a decision if we were doing that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Scott?

>> I want to lend my support of what Cllr Mitchell said as well. We desperately need here particularly in our area where there's been so much growth to get the draft development plan made and to move on to updating our local area plans. So, I wouldn't like to see any more delays more than eight months. We need to crack on basically, and get on with it. I also in regards to public consultation, the offices are there. People can go and look at the draft plans at the moment as it stands. I do appreciate the consultation at the moment is in the middle of a holiday season, so I

would support an extension of maybe two weeks until the end of August to allow for that, but certainly not any more than that. I think there's been sufficient time for the public to look at the draft plan and make their comments. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Is that a proposal to extend by two weeks?

>> Yes, does that need to be formally proposed?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, there is disagreement on this, so I would like to proposal. Cllr Walsh?

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. On Cllr ...'s proposal, I take it he's not confining it to the 12 months. He's incorporating an element of flexibility to the overall process. Bearing in mind this is a six-year plan, it's going to be one of the most important documents we work on for the next twelve months or so, so, look, four months in my mind, doesn't make a huge difference, I would like to see if the work can be done on the LAPs, what can we use the core strategy figures in the draft. I don't know, just maybe get some clarity on that, but certainly, I would not like the LAPs to be held up unnecessarily. I would support Cllr Mullen's proposal in allowing that additional flexibility, particularly bearing in mind that the new circulars to be published in the not-too-distant future, of which may or may not impact on the process, the consultation on the extension, maybe four weeks to mid-September there. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Dunne?.

>> We as the executive don't feel there's - not have sufficient consultation until 16th August. We have had no representation or anybody complaining in relation to the consultation. And just to emphasise the point that Cllr Scott made, that the offices are open by appointment, and no-one has called, you know, to ask for anything more than that. And just a very important point, that if you extend the consultation period, you are eating into the four months, if you do approve a 12, or for a full year, you're eating into the four months, given that we are already, we feel we are behind by eight months. Bear that in mind, that that could, just eats into that period, and we still have to allow for further amendments in terms of the public and your own submissions after the display period.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Hello. Cllr Dunne?.

>> I would like to second the proposal of the four-week extension. This is really commanding very quickly. We do have the time with extra holidays and Covid, people only coming out of Covid. I feel that there should be an extension here to allow people to come in. Now, we are talking two weeks or four weeks, I'm not too hung up about it, but I would like to see definitely at some stage after September. September 16th if possible, like. I accept the other members would maybe two weeks, I would be seconding Cllr Behan's proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I will bring in the chief executive in a second. I will clarify that the first part of the motion, I think we're pretty much agreed the 12 months will be there if required. If the plan is done quicker than that, I think that's accepted generally if I'm right. I might get the chief executive to clarify that. First of all. Thank you.

>> Yes, I'm happy with the wording. That is fine. We have flexibility now for 12 months. If we want to bring that back and we can do it quicker in July of next year, in a we're allowed to do the motion, is

worded correctly, so we can do that as well. The only thing I would say is that Cllr Mullen messaged guidance that may come from the department. It comes to head room, whatever builds down, we can build that into the draft. This extension allows to us do that. This is positive from that point of view. In relation to the extension of time, again, as Director of Services said, we don't feel we need it would be but there is not a whole lot you can do in August anyway. We can't go out and have public meetings, et cetera. If it was to be extended, I would keep it at the minimum, maybe go to 1 September and continue on then with doing the plan. Now the submissions are coming in already. People are going to make submissions? No, it is 16th August. If people want an extension, I would be recommending two weeks max, end of the month. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: So, can I take it that we're agreed on Cllr Mullen's proposal of the year if required, and if the plan is done quicker than that, so be it? Are we happy enough with that?

>> Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Mitchell?

>> I'm not happy with that. I think we should keep the pressure on to get the thing done earlier. Maybe I'm in a minority on it, it does sound like it

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think that's what the chief said.

>> I'm not happy about the delay because the subsidiary plans are way out of date, and I'm certainly against the proposal to delay.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Then we will go for a vote on this particular issue. We will leave the extension of the submissions just park that for a moment. This is purely on the Cllr Mullen's motion. I will hand you over to Helen.

HELEN PURCELL: This is the motion as I previously read out proposed by Cllr John Mullen, seconded by Cllr Joe Behan, relating to the further period of one year to complete the review process. Cllr Tom Tom Tom >> For. >> Joe Behan. >> For. >> Blake. >> For. >> Burke. >> Against. >> Corrigan? >> For. >> Mags. >> Against. >> Cronin? >> For. >> Cullen? >> For. >> O'Doyle. >> For. >> Dunne? >> For ... >> Aoife Flynn Kennedy? >> For. >> Cllr Tom Fortune. >> I went into ... >> Cllr Glennon? >> Kavanagh. >> Against. >> Kennedy. >> For. >> Leonard? >> Against. >> Is that against? >> Yes, against. >> Cllr McManus? >> For. >> Direction Mitchell? >> Against. >> John Mullen? >> For. >> Miriam Murphy? >> For. >> ... O'Brien? >> For. Cllr Paul O'Brien? >> For. >> Rory O'Connor has left the meeting. Cllr Gerry O'Neill? >> Against. >> Cllr Scott. >> Against. >> Cllr John Snell? >> Against. >> Edward Timmins. Not present. Cllr Jerry Walsh. >> For. >> Irene winters. >> Against. >> Patsy Glennon? >> Not present. 19 in favour, ten against, three not present. Motion carried.

CATHAOIRLEACH: The second part of the discussion is to decide on the extension or not of the period for submissions. It is currently at the 16th August. So we have a proposal from Cllr Behan for a four-week extension, seconded by Cllr Dunne.

>> I was going to withdraw with based on what the chief executive said, maybe go with a two-week extension.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Are we agreed with two weeks?

>> Agreed.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That is great. Unanimous. Okay, item number three on our agenda is we did discuss this in part last, at our last meeting, but it is a motion in the name of Cllr Lourda Scott, proposer ... I will just read it out. Wicklow County Council acknowledges the need for a new National Maternity Hospital to provide healthcare in the Greater Dublin Area, including County Wicklow. Wicklow County Council quick notes the lack of legal clarity regarding the ownership - work in the hospital, many of whom living within County Wicklow. Wicklow County Council quick will write to the minister ... ton constructed on land owned by the state and that to guarantee its secular ethos, the new facility be passed and owned by the state ... passed to all local authorities. I will ask Cllr Lourda Scott to come in first, please.

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks for agreeing to put this on the agenda today. It is appreciated. In brief, this motion, the state is planning to spend at least 800 million to build a new maternity hospital. Once built, it will be gifted to a private entity, St Vincent Holdings who will run go and govern the hospital. The state despite spending the money will have zero involvement in this company set to own it and zero involvements. It won't even own the land, so the state, the public purse, won't own the land on which this building will be built. So like that is clearly very bad value for money. But it is also very likely that with Catholic bodies running the hospital and also being the landlord, that religious ethos will inform medical decisions. In practice, this means our brand new hospital we've spend 800 million-plus on, will probably not be able to provide IVF, fertility services, abortion healthcare, procedures for contraception, like vasectomies, et cetera, and the state will have no influence on these decisions. We have to ask ourselves the question: does this sound like the best way that a publicly funded hospital should be run? We also have ask ourselves the question, do we believe that our hospital will be the first in the entire world built on church land that will not be subject to Catholic ethos in its medical running? This is the question that this motion is about. I want to stress this is a local issue. The National Maternity Hospital will be the main hospital for women's healthcare for Wicklow women. Decisions taken today about this hospital will directly affect our constituents, our constituents' children with their children's children. This is how long a reach of this arm of this building and governs that this hospital has. The motion has been brought by the - \*this is very important to Wicklow women. Don't mistake this for being a national issue of no concern to us here in the council. It's very important that we say to these women that we are listening, that we hear your concerns, and that we support you. And I just want to note that in the last few weeks, both the Taoiseach, and the ministry for health, have strongly stated it is their preference that the state owns the land on which the hospital is build, and stated it's a red line issue for government. It makes sense. The alternative is we are handing over the build to St Vincent Holdings, crossing our fingers and hoping for the best. That's no way to move forward. South Dublin County Council has taken our motion and it has been passed by their local authority. I hope that we can join them. There is a power in our collective voices in getting behind this. And, look, this needs to be done. This hospital needs to be built. It needs to be fit for purpose, and I hope that we can all agree on that today. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Joe Behan.

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. When this was raised at the last meeting, I indicated that I didn't agree with the motion, and I would like to put forward a few points if I could in response to what Cllr Scott



has said. And I absolutely have full and total support for her integrity in her suggestion, proposal, and ask that she gives me an opportunity to respond to some of the points she made. On the last occasion when we spoke to this, I referred to the fact that the consultants, the people who work in the National Maternity Hospital in Holles Street wrote to the Irish Times expressing concern about any possible delay to this project. I want to quote from that letter because I think it's important that people understand what the 42 consultants who work in the National Maternity Hospital, what they had to say at the end of June, so a couple of weeks ago. What they said was, "We the consultants of the National Maternity Hospital are concerned about the delay to a vital project to create a world-class maternity hospital for the women and babies of Ireland. The misinformation that services at the new maternity hospital will be curtailed by any religious ethos is particularly troubling given its inaccuracy." I want to read all the letter. Coming to the end, it says, "Any further delay in approving this interest ... existing cramped campus at the National Maternity Hospital which is not fit for purpose with buildings that are almost 90 years old. It would be a tragedy if the current impasse further days a colocation project first raised in 1998." We're all concerned, I would hope, and we are all as concerned as Cllr Scott about women's health and welfare and that of their babies. The reality of it is that Holles Street as the staff have indicated is not fit for purpose. The longer this matter is delayed, the longer the damage that is going to be done to women's health in the current particular facility that they have. Now, there's been a major national campaign, and a national discussion about this, I accept that. One of the criticisms that has come forward, and it has been expressed by councillors there, is the fact that in some way, the Sister of Charity are going to have some malign influence or Catholic influence on that particular hospital, or the new hospital. Now, the consultants actually say we as clinicians could not countenance any restriction on our practice based on religion, so they've already nailed their colours to the mast that they don't think they're going to have any restriction on the services. But Dr Peter Boyle, and I want to thank Cllr Scott because she gave us a lot of information on what Dr Peter Boyle, the kind of public figure leading this particular campaign against the provision of the National Maternity Hospital and St Vein sent answer Hospital grounds as far as I can see, this is very, very important, he indicates that the following core values are going to be held by St Vincent's Holding, the agency that will own this hospital. The following core values are what it appears he has a problem with: human dignity, respect the dignity and uniqueness of each person, compassion, accept people as they are, bring empathy and care to all, justice, act with integrity to respect the rights of all, equality, strive for excellence in all aspects of care, advocacy, speak for the voiceless act with and for them to achieve the appropriate quality of care. What he says is that it is identical to the Sisters of Charity core values. I would have thought they are core values we could all share. Because they happened to be shared by the Sisters of Charity, an organisation which is responsible for setting up healthcare right throughout this country and many our countries in the world, which set up Focus Ireland which has done huge work for homeless work people, the Immigrant Council of Ireland which does great work for people coming into this country are the young social innovators. They are three examples. I would appeal to members before they support this motion, (a) look at what the consultants, the people who are working in the hospital are saying, they don't want any more delays. Look at what the values that Peter Boyle seems to have a problem with, because they're shared by a religious order, they should be rejected. I think they're values we would want in every public institution in this country. I would argue not to support this motion.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr McManus.

>> Thank you, I would like to formally second the motion before us today. I appreciate where Cllr Behan is coming from, that he's not questioning the integrity of what we're trying to do and I don't question his, but I disagree with the points that he raised and might try to answer some of them in the spirit of discussion and debate. In terms of the delay, it's not between a bad service and no service. The women of Wicklow and Ireland deserve a clinically independent hospital. The threat of that it is get what you're given or don't get anything at all is not, and I know that is not what Cllr Behan is saying, and I think that is what it is being presented as. I think we have an obligation to push for something clinically independent and accountable to the people. I would have serious concerns even there is, and the core values that you mentioned, whether they're the best core values I agree with or not, they are the core values of a private entity. They're not the core values of a clinically independent run by the state hospital that the women want. So I would question mark if even if they're the best values in the world, how do we know they will be upheld if I don't have a right as a taxpayer funding this hospital? But the people who are run are not accountable to me. I don't think that's the way forward for state services, so I would respectfully disagree. I think the core values are great, but I don't think that someone who holds them should be allowed to enforce them without being accountable to the people who going to pay for it. So I would ask members to consider in the context of accountability and enforce be good clinical independence, it should be a state-owned, state-run hospital for the people of the state who are paying for it. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Neary.

>> I think Cllr McManus elegantly... there. I also wanted to support this motion. I believe as well that any delay in construction, any of those kinds of issues should not compromise women's healthcare at all. Existing hospitals will have to be upgraded to some degree in the meantime, even if this hospital were to be constructed, start construction, it will take years for it to be fully operational and in the meantime, existing hospitals in Dublin and Wicklow have to be, and should be, in my opinion, upgraded to a high modern standard in the meantime. Women should not have to wait for appropriate healthcare in the meantime. So, delaying construction is, should not be the core issue here, and this is what we are proposing for this motion. I also want to talk about the St Vincent Holdings being the company to run the new hospital. The problem is the state will have no role in the board of management of the new hospital, and that is just bad governance. And it is also it prevents the state from holding the hospital to account. It prevents the public from holding its estate to account representing us. I think the women of Wicklow better than that. They deserve better planning, the best in planning, and the best in governance as well, so I would urge councillors here today to support this motion. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Dermot O'Brien?

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Briefly, first say as well, for me, this motion is not about passing judgment on the sisters of charity, or gazing into the past, for me, Sister Stan would be a hero of mine. I've worked with her for a long time. I don't see this as a motion it is Sisters of Charity equals bad or anything else equals good. I do think this is about how we set out a vision for how we do the highest quality healthcare for the women and children of a future Ireland which is diverse, and equal, and inclusive, and I really think that when we put in place the architecture of the best model that will

serve the women and children of the future Ireland that we are creating every day, I think this model of how it is owned and run is the best way to do that. I would support this motion.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Ferris?

>> Thanks for that. I also want to lend my voice to support the motion, and obviously, I co-signed it. I think Cllr Dermot O'Brien said there what the situation is. It's not that we're looking back on our history, and even recent history where so much wrong was done at the hands of the state, and of the religious orders - some of the religious orders to women and their babies, although it is ironic, Cathaoirleach, if you remember the way the agenda was set out at our meeting in early July where Cllr Neary's motion on the mother and babies home was top of the agenda, and this particular motion was the last motion on the agenda. And here we are looking probably from two different sides as to what had happened. I think the other councillors that have spoken are right. We can't leave it to chance to see what will happen. I think, and Cllr Neary said the word the governance in this, it could be state owned, the board of management of the hospital, there should be no religious influence at all, and this is in no way disrespectful to the sisters of charity who currently own the land. I think that we are looking at a diverse nation now. It is not just for Catholic-run institutions that we should be going back to. I think the ethos there is within our education system where the patronage of religious orders, the schools are moving away from that. And I just think that we have a responsibility to all the women in County Wicklow and in the country to get this right from the start, and I would urge the councillors to support the motion. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Gerry Walsh.

>> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just further on from Cllr Scott's statement there, and reference to the ... I agree everybody thinks it is desirable that it is built on state-owned land, but confirmed that all services, legal in the state, would be available, the full range of services would be available in that new unit. Also in this new hospital, he said the planning permission has been, you know, received, millions of euros directly spent on designs, totalling 51 million, and I noted that Cllr Behan's letter from the senior 42 clinicians. I saw that signed, and they expressed their concern that, you know, they mentioned about misinformation, misunderstanding, et cetera, leading to delays in the project, and they also firmly stated that it was their belief that there will be no restriction? In treatment, and no subservience to religious control in the hospital. To add, the Ministry for Health also stated that any move to another location would add several years to the timelines for completion of the project, and would significantly increase costs, so the state ... needs to be safeguarded. Just to add that. I would have come out - based on that, I would have concerns that any, you know, change or CPO processes moved to another location would involve huge additional costs as well as long days in the delivery of this much-needed hospital. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr awareness? >> Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to agree with a lot of what Cllr Behan said. I also believe that the 42 consultants really do believe that they want to provide the best service that they can to both the women of Ireland and to the women of Wicklow; and that any delay by trying to move site if we can to get ownership of the land would be wrong, and I couldn't support it. I also think that, you know, an awful lot as we look back of the wrongs that happened may have happened in some religious orders, but they happened with the full knowledge and backing of the state. Removing the religious ethos won't necessarily remove the ability for wrongs to happen. It wasn't just religious people that carried out wrongs - we as a country did it, and

we as a people did it. I think that sometimes there is a tendency to try and point the blame in just one direction instead of acknowledging the part that everybody in society played in what happened in those times. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Fortune?

CLLR FORTUNE: Yes, I have had a lot of challenges and discussion on this area. It's an area I'm really, really interested in. I in a conversation for over an hour this morning. I read the bits and pieces from Dr Peter Boylan. I'm somewhat kind of critical - "critical" is probably the wrong word, but Peter Boylan, having read through the stuff, he had an opportunity to sort this whole area out over many, many years, and did nothing. I had experience, a personal experience because I have in my family, I've got five children, four of them were born in the National Maternity Hospital, so I have experience of dealing with the system under Mr Boylan, and I would have certain critiques that are not appropriate for the discussion today. Also, when I read through the report, I see right up to June 2020, the Ministry for Health stated that the new hospital would remain in state ownership. From a conversation I had with a person from the legal approach, at the end of the day, what matters here is - and I'm 110% interested in making sure that the women when they go in to have a baby can do so in every way that needs to happen - I have daughters who have babies, and currently had babies. As a ... I'm disappointed there is not enough talk about it, that currently what is going on, if we talk about improving the system and making it better for everybody, and fathers and partners can't go in when their children are being born. I think someone needs to include that, because I don't think you can leave the fathers and partners out of this whole discussion, because I think they have a very important role to play. But my understanding is that this got to a stage in June 2020 where it was ready to be teed off, so I don't understand why we have all these people in the Dail, we elect them in there, and we pay them - and you've heard me say this before and I make no apologies for this - we pay them serious money, what are they doing? What has gone on since 2013 when this started off with Minister Reilly? Why, isn't it? This being sorted? Why isn't there a full proof document in place that covers the concerns that people want to cover? I had experience of the Sisters referred to earlier by the councillors back in the day when I had a customer in the business I was involved with who had a serious problem, and the way - so what they've done is colossal. So I have a problem with the anti-church side of this. People will - but no-one can question, and no-one - I would allow nobody question my position in any of this, and how important it is for mothers having their babies. But I do think what is going on here, there is an element of politics in it, it has been politically driven. I'm surprised that Lourda feels she has to bring this motion to the council when she is the member of a governing party. Why couldn't she go and sit down with the TDs of the Green Party and this this sorted out? I made an offer recently to someone I was talking to, I said I would be prepared to sit down with that person I was talking to with our five TDs, and discuss this, and find out why they haven't sorted this, why they haven't done things that should have been done. What has stopped this happening? Now we end up, and it really is becoming a political football. And I think that is so unfair to women in particular, and I think Cllr Walsh said it: all this is going to do is delay the whole process, and you will be talking about this in five years' time, and there will be people getting writing press releases, and talking to media, and trying to get elected on the back of it, instead of getting it sorted. My answer to that is let's get it sorted. Let's sit down and say okay, why why can't that be done? Who is stopping it being done? We are paying people serious money to do this work.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

CLLR FORTUNE: I'm not finished. I really think this has gone off at a tangent, and it's gone off at a tangent with people on purpose because they're playing politics with it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Gerry O'Neill?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR O'NEILL: Sorry, Cathaoirleach. Again, I would like to agree completely with Cllr Joe Behan and Cllr Winters there. I think this is, we are not really putting the mothers and babies to the fore here. There is a game being played here, it's a culture war now as such. Because it really and I would appeal to the councillors, especially members of the larger parties and even Government parties, that if we go down this road, greenfield sites instead of the co-location, we are heading into billions and billions of money to be spent on new healthcare systems. Absolutely, if you look at this. I personally know why this one, this particular issue is of such great concern. If you look at the great work the likes of Sister Consilio is doing, she has two thirds of residents with drug and alcohol addiction, there is no talk of greenfield sites or dumping her to one side. I agree with Cllr Winters that there is an element of anti-church and blame the church. I know, as a young lad, I spent two years, just two years in the care of the Sisters of Charity and I can tell you I couldn't speak more highly of them. There is another side of the story, on the popular media stuff that is throwing around at the moment. I absolutely agree with Cllr Winters in saying and I know this for a fact from my experience in life, that the State here are, have a lot to answer for. As any minor student of history would bother to look at such things, it's very clear that the State are the main culprits in a lot of this. So I honestly think that even with the issue of St Vincent's, that the consultants, there is no problem with consultants, but there seems to be, the issue there seems to be more based on people who have this concern for... it's abortion that comes into the picture all the time. That is a pity, because really we have to be serious, we have to look at this as I said a moment ago and some other councillors touched on it, the amount of money that is going to go into the healthcare service in Ireland, if we were to carry this through to the letter of the law would be absolutely colossal. It's not really a serious motion in my, it's a well-intended motion maybe, to a certain extent for some people, but it's not really serious.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr O'Neill. Pat Fitzgerald. You are on mute, Pat.

CLLR FITZGERALD: All right now?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Go ahead.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Just this morning I got a phone call asking me to support this motion from a member of the public who told me she was doing this for whoever. I was a bit put out by it and I got a second call and it was a mistake, but I just listened to Cllr Behan there and the other contributors there and I am fully au fait with them hospitals having five children and 11 grandchildren. I just I am not totally au fait with the situation. I take on board what Cllr Behan has said and what the mover of the motion has said, but I am just going to do more, I haven't, I vote every time there is a vote in 22 years I have voted but I am going to abstain on this one, tomorrow I am in a position to find out what is the real situation as I want to know. I will do that tomorrow morning and look it, I understand people have difficulties. The 42 consultants are concerned and I would take their views on board, but it is an important motion, but I don't know whether it's a motion we should have on a

County Council meeting. I don't think that is going to bring the thing any further. I mean if that motion is passed we write to someone else to say motion was passed. I will support the women of this county, the same as I support anyone else. If I am not voting doesn't mean I don't support women and that is my view on it. So tomorrow I will get a good feedback on the matter. I will be meeting some people tomorrow morning and I take my views on it then. So look it, I am sort of agreeing with Cllr O'Neill there as well, but I don't think it's a motion we should have on a council meeting to be quite honest about it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Paul O'Brien.

CLLR P O'BRIEN: Cathaoirleach, I am well aware that this is an emotive subject. I want to keep it respectful. To say that it's anti-church and it's political, that is wrong. It's the wrong tone to set. I have got to know Lourda Scott and other members of that council it's wrong and it's simply wrong. It's a subject I never feel comfortable talking about because as a man who am I to tell the women of Ireland what they can do or can't do with their bodies. The people of this country have already spoken on this subject as far as I am concerned and I respect it. There is a lot of talk here about consultants and of course we will take their opinions and values on board but I am here to listen to the women of Ireland and that is who I will take my lead from on this. But I would ask that this be respectful and I fully support this motion. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Miriam Murphy.

CLLR MURPHY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. There is a lot of toos and froes about it. I am not one for motions, but I would like to ask how strong would a motion from County Councils carry on this? Because I think it's much at a higher level than we as a County Council can carry. I certainly agree with empathy and the meaningful and respect of women and their children going into maternity, I think the high standard needs to be there and the level of care for all women. But I just question what clarity, or what strength can a motion have for this? Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr M Kavanagh.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: Thank you. I also feel that it's very much a political football being played out amongst the parties over the years. It's been going on for a long, long time now. We have got nowhere. A few years ago we had a similar, we had presentation by two parties to the council with regard to the National Children's Hospital about the location of it. I never believed it was in the right location, but the emphasis was put on it that there was so much money to spent that we had to forge ahead, we couldn't turn our backs now and start looking for a new site. But I always believed that it's never the wrong time to do the right thing. I believe that this hospital, if it's going to be the National Maternity Hospital of Ireland should be independent of any group, whether it's religious, or whether it's a privately run thing, the public have to have their say in the National Maternity Hospital. We are now a multi-cultural society. We have people, we are a very diverse country now and we have to recognise and respect the rights and the wishes of everyone. With the highest, I have the highest of respect for Sister Mary Aitkenhead who set up the Sisters of Charity and did wonderful work in bringing those hospitals, St Vincent's and St Michael's and all of those hospitals to the country but I think it's time to move on. I think it's time to put a religious ethos to one side, start living in the real world and I will be supporting Cllr Scott's motion. I think it's time that we parked the religious side of it in what is essentially a national hospital. That is all I want to say.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Snell.

CLLR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I promised myself that I would listen to the debate and I would listen to what the concerns and otherwise of all the speakers and my fellow councillors and that I would bow to their superior knowledge on a lot of this topic. Like other councillors I did receive a phone call this morning from someone with concerns around this and looking for support for Cllr Scott's motion. I have listened to both sides and my question to you the members is the same as I asked that individual this morning. A delay now will surely have an impact on the delivery of good healthcare? We all acknowledge that we need a new National Maternity Hospital. There has been an awful lot of dialogue to get to this stage, there has been an awful lot of dialogue and an awful lot of expense, planning and consultancy. Just like the National Children's Hospital, I didn't agree with where it's being put, but it's gone so far there is no comeback. The reality is that we are being asked to support the motion here that says, the words of the document is: 'To acknowledge the concerns regarding the employment rights of those who will work in the hospital.' I haven't heard any concerns from those who are going to work in the hospital, other than clarification that Cllr Behan has given and they don't have concerns. So who is the people who are concerned about their employment rights? There is not one previous speaker has given any concerns about the people who are going to work in the hospital. Not one speaker. So that part of that motion has that wording in it and yet no one has given any evidence that there is concerns regarding the employment rights. If someone could clarify that to me, otherwise if it can't be clarified, to be honest I don't want any delay for the women and children of Ireland to have a proper healthcare system and I won't be supporting this based on what I have heard so far, but I am hoping, maybe Cllr Scott can clarify what I have asked.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Before I bring back in Cllr Scott for the last word on this I want to add my few words to it. I very much want to support Cllr Scott and I think she has brought this motion forward with the greatest of intention, but I do have major concerns and I have articulated this to Cllr Scott in the delaying of the delivery of a long-awaited maternity hospital and that concerns me greatly. I haven't heard anything to date that will address that problem. We just cannot afford to go into another long delay in not providing a long-awaited hospital that we really desperately need. As I say that concerns me, but I am going to leave the last word to Cllr Scott on this, because I think we have given it a very good airing from both sides, so Cllr Scott would you like to come back in?

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and thank you to everyone for such a good debate. There are a few points I just want to respond to and Cllr Snell I will come in on the employment piece as well. Just remind me if I don't get to it. First of all, this motion, nobody is playing games here. This isn't playing politics, people have referred to it being an inappropriate motion for the County Council. I strongly disagree with this. We have had motions about CETA, about SHDs, motions about schools. To say that because we are bringing a motion about a maternity hospital, which will be servicing all the women and their partners included in Wicklow. To say that that is not an appropriate motion on Wicklow County Council is just mind-boggling. I completely reject that. Why we are bringing it to the council. I alluded to it at the beginning and Cllr Fortune said of course I have discussed this with my party colleagues. But we all know, we are not fools. We know there is a power in a collective voice. South Dublin have passed this motion, that sends a cross-party signal, an all-party signal to the Government from communities around the country. That is the power of bringing motions at this at the County Council level, rather than it just being me speaking to my TDs in this Government or

whoever it is. That is why we are bringing that and I think we all know that. It's not at all an anti-church motion at all. I fully acknowledge the goodness the church has done, but what it is about is taking out a religious influence over the governance of healthcare. There should be no governance, sorry no religious influence over medical decisions and medical governance of a hospital as we move forward. It was different years ago and I understand how traditionally the church came into running hospitals, etc, etc, but this is 2021. We are now looking to the future and moving forward and we need a transparency over investment and most importantly we need full transparent over how those hospitals are run. Just at the point on the consultants, the consultants' letter which I read as well, they speak about the campaign being actively misleading, but they don't back that up by answering the specific concerns that have been raised. This is my issue with this. With all respect to the consultants who are experts in their field, they are not experts in Canon Law. Where there is a hospital built on church land Canon Law prevails. It's been seen around the world and it will not be different in this situation. I do ask again while they might have, these clinicians might respectfully have the best intention of the world in that letter, what happens when they leave? They will be retired in 20 or 30 years' time, what happens then? We are dependent then on the next group that comes in. Again for a State investment in that facility it shouldn't be the case. We should have full transparency. It doesn't mean the State as the councillor refers to is forever going to do the right thing, but it does mean there is transparency and the people have a democratic right to replace people and influence things. Again Cllr Walsh referred to the fact that the Tánaiste referred to the fact that the full range of healthcare services will be available. Unfortunately under this governance structure the Tánaiste cannot guarantee that will be the case. That is the fundamental crux of the problem of the matter here. He cannot say that. We don't have any control, we, the State, do not have any control over the governance structure. There was one other thing, Cllr Snell mentioned the employment rights and you are right that did get slightly overlooked. The concern with the employment rights is that if there is a religious ethos influencing the procedures within a hospital when people are being employed they will have to agree to comply with that ethos. So this has happened, in case you think that sounds unlikely. This is happening already with privately owned hospitals. So privately run hospitals such as the Blackrock Clinic, the Galway Clinic and the Hermitage. They are run with a Catholic ethos. That is okay, they are private, they can be run however they want. There are reports of people and again I can send the documentation where people have been interviewed and it's been made very clear that if they undertake fertility treatment that IVF will not be permitted in those hospitals because it's against Catholic ethos. That is already happening in our country and that is the concern about employment rights, so if you are not a Catholic or willing to subscribe to that ethos, your chances are going to be greatly reduced. There is a discrimination because there is that ethos there. Again, when the State is investing so much money into this new facility, that just simply is unacceptable. Just one final last point, I do want to make the point that unlike a lot of the speakers here, I have personal experience of given birth in Dublin maternity hospitals and nobody can say more than myself or the women that are bringing this motion of the deficiency in the maternity system at the moment. There is drastic improvements needs to be done in all of the maternity hospitals. There will be improvements that will have to be done anyway as we wait for this hospital to be built. So the fact that I can speak to this personally, the fact that so many women on the campaign can speak to this personally, but still are raising these issues should be a massive red flag to everyone here. Nobody wants delays, least of all the women who have experienced the absolute decrepit maternity hospitals. But these women are still waving a



red flag and saying there is a problem. Thank you for the debate, I would like to this to go to a vote, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, I am going to hand you over to Helen now and we will go for a vote.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Annesley has lost connectivity so I am going to get him in for the vote. Bear with me, he is first.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Probably gone to bed...

ADMINISTRATOR: We will come back to him at the end. [ Vote taken ]

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think Gerry O'Neill is there. Did he respond to you?

ADMINISTRATOR: No. Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR WINTERS: You are on mute. Unmute yourself for the vote.

ADMINISTRATOR: Gerry O'Neill. CLLR WINTERS: I think he is texting you! CATHAOIRLEACH: I will ring him.

[ Vote continues to be taken ]

ADMINISTRATOR: Tom Fortune is abstaining. I shall call Gerry O'Neill again. Just putting you on speaker, we are having a vote put forward by Lourda Scott and seconded by Grace McManus. Calling you again, Cllr Annesley. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry O'Neill is against, he is after confirming that. He is against.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr O'Neill, are you against? Okay. I will ring him to confirm it. We have 21 in favour, six against, three not present and two abstaining. Motion is carried.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, members thank you for your participation today. That is the end of the agenda. I just want to say we have no meeting in August and enjoy your holidays if you are going on holidays or your break and thank you again.